ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the members of my dissertation committee, Professors Arindam Chakrabarti, Eliot Deutsch, Ron Bontekoe, Steve Odin, Ramdas Lamb, and Sai Bhatawadekar. Each of them has provided thoughtful advice and helpful assistance. I hold them in the highest regard for having exhibited great patience, generosity, and care in helping me to develop my dissertation. I am especially grateful to my dissertation advisor, Professor Arindam Chakrabarti, for sustaining my motivation throughout my studies, showing dedication to my project, and mentoring me as an aspiring philosopher.

I would also like to acknowledge the advising, support, and friendship of Ray Woo, Jasper Blystone, Chris Chapple, Robin Wang, and Ron Marasco, among others. Without their guidance and encouragement, I might never have found the courage and resolve to complete, let alone pursue in the first place, doctoral studies in Philosophy. And I also wish to thank my fellow doctoral students, in particular, Nick Brasovan, Sarah Mattice, and Amy Donahue, all of whom were generous in reading over chapter drafts and helping me to organize and arrange the conceptual framework of the project.

Finally, I cannot offer enough thanks to my parents, who taught me from a young age not only how to scrutinize and defend my own views, but to respect and take an active interest in those of others. Their investment in my education and development as a person, in addition to their unwavering support for my pursuits, has given me the foundation to accomplish my goals thus far. My gratitude to my parents runs deeper than I am able to express in words. This dissertation is dedicated to them.
ABSTRACT

This dissertation develops a philosophy of creative ethical agency by critically engaging and drawing insights from classical Indian and contemporary Western approaches to the aesthetics of morals. The dissertation argues that both the Indian and the Western tradition identify an incongruity between the person as a unique “myself” and the person as a bearer of social roles. Moreover, trends within both traditions tend to distort our understanding of personal agency, ethical agency, and the interrelation between the life of feeling and that of the social-moral role, by trying to overcome this conflict between particularized feeling and the role-bound norm. However, the Indian and the Western tradition also present approaches that do not seek to overcome this tension, but instead aim to play between these poles. This dissertation argues for the importance of such a play-centered approach and advocates the need to develop a certain emotional athleticism by means of which the agent can skillfully negotiate the tensions both internal to and between personal identity and ethical identity. Furthermore, it holds that classical Indian aesthetics (or rasa theory) not only accommodates such an approach. It exceeds Western approaches by simultaneously deepening ethical agency through recovery of the metaphysical meaning of aesthetic experience and broadening our access to alternative ways of being in the world. Various conceptual tools and innovations from both the Indian and the Western tradition will be examined in anticipation of exploring the aesthetic virtues associated with the Kashmir Śaiva dictum, “The Self is the Actor” (“Nartaka ātmā”), a tenet that harmonizes soteriological and social-moral pursuits.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.................................................................ii

ABSTRACT..................................................................................iii

INTRODUCTION.............................................................................1

CHAPTER 1. THE ETHICS AND AESTHETICS OF PERFORMANCE IN THE
BHAVAGAD GĪṬĀ: ETHICAL LIFE AS THE THEATER OF AGENCY..........14
1.1. Introduction.............................................................................14
1.2. Reading the Bhagavad Gīṭā Historically: Worldly Engagement vs World-
Renouncing Contemplation in Orthodox Indian Thought....................17
   1.2.a. Worldly Involvement vs World-Transcendence in Orthodox Indian
   Thought: the Soteriological Problem of Action..................................17
   1.2.b. Reconciling Worldly Involvement and World-Transcendence in the Gīṭā:
   the Ideal of Nīśkāma-karma (or Desireless Action).............................20
1.3. Towards a Philosophical Interpretation of the Bhagavad Gīṭā: from the Problem of
Ethical Action to the Problem of the Ethical Person..............................23
   1.3.a. Freedom To Act in the Gīṭā’s Ethics: a Utilitarian Interpretation.......23
   1.3.b. Freedom From Action in the Gīṭā’s Ethics: a Deontological
   Interpretation..................................................................................26
   1.3.c. From the Problem of Action to the Problem of the Person: the Turn towards
   Virtue Ethics in the Gīṭā................................................................28
1.4. From Virtue Ethics to Virtue Aesthetics: Becoming an Athlete of Emotion in
Bharata’s Theatre...........................................................................30
   1.4.a. Bharata’s Theory of Art Emotion (Rasa)......................................30
   1.4.b. Becoming an Athlete of Emotion through the Rasabox Exercise......33
1.5. From Virtue Aesthetics to the Development of the Person in the Bhagavad Gīṭā:
Playing with the Dialectic of Personal Identity.....................................35
   1.5.a. The Opposition of What I Am and Who I Am in Orthodox Hindu Action-
   Centered Models of the Person.......................................................35
1.5.b. From the Problem of Action to the Problem of the Person: Fostering the Desire for Playing with Identity in the Bhagavad Gītā

1.5.c. Knowing How to Manage the Dialectic of Personal Identity: Yoga as Aesthetic Virtue

1.6. The Dialectic of Personal Identity and Ethical Identity: Yoga and the Development of Ethical Virtue through Emotional Athleticism

1.6.a. Yoga and the Negotiation of Ethical Identity

1.6.b. Response to the First Objection: Yoga and Moral Artistry in the Dialectic of Personal Identity and Ethical Identity

1.6.c. Response to the Second Objection: From Virtue Aesthetics to Virtue Ethics: Ajuna as Athlete of the Emotions

1.7. Conclusion: the Problem of the Horizontal Extension of Ethical Agency in the Gītā

CHAPTER 2: Western Ideals of the Self and Negotiating Moral Agency through Play: Imaginative Variation and the Horizontal Play of Agency

2.1. Introduction

2.2. Overcoming the Ambiguity of Identity through the Ideal of Sincerity: Moral Sincerity in Hume’s Moral Sentiment Theory and the Problem with the Desire To Be the Role

2.2.a. The Problem of Imaginative Resistance in Hume’s Aesthetics: Securing the Integrity of the Self against the Immoral Other

2.2.b. The Humean Ideal as One of Moral Sincerity: Acting Moral, Being Moral

2.2.c. Moral Sentiment Theory and the Struggle to Avoid Falsity in the Encounter with the Sensible Knave

2.2.d. Overcoming the Ambiguity of Identity through the Desire to Be the Role

2.3. Overcoming the Ambiguity of Identity through the Ideal of Authenticity: Heideggerian Authenticity and the Problem with Disjoining Selfhood from its Base in the Role
2.3.a. The Sentiment of Being Authentic: Heideggerian Freedom and a Critique of Cartesian and Empiricist Paradigms of the Self………………………………..102
2.3.b. The Devaluation of Creative Agency in Heideggerian Authenticity……113
2.4. Ethical Normativity in Ricoeur’s Hermeneutical Ethics: the Importance of Imaginative Role-Play in the Encounter with the Other………………………………………126
2.4.a. Ethical Normativity in a Fusion of Horizons………………………………128
2.4.b. Ethics and the Development of Moral Imagination through Narrative: Literature as a Laboratory for Thought Experiments……………………………………131
2.4.c. Harmonizing Narrative and Ethical Identities through Hermeneutics of the Self: Literature as a Microscope for Deepening Ethical Agency………………141
2.5. Conclusion: Negotiating Power and Realizing Self through Being with Others…..159

CHAPTER 3: A Kashmir Śāiva Theory of Agency: Completing the Dialectic of Personal Identity through the Play of Śiva-Śakti……………………………………………………………172
3.1. Introduction………………………………………………………………….……..172
3.2. The Play of Divine Self-Recognition: From the Myth of Śiva-Śakti to Śāiva Ontology and Epistemology of Play………………………………………………………..176
3.2.a. Spanda and the Alternation of Śiva Between Prakāśa and Vimarśa…….178
3.2.b. The Thirty-six Stages of the Involution and Evolution of Śiva Consciousness………………………………………………………………………..181
3.2.c. Freedom of the Play of Consciousness in Śaivism vs Freedom-from in Vedānta and Sāṃkhya………………………………………………………………………186
3.3. Viśrānti and the Expression of Agency through the Cognition Śakti: from the Appropriation of our Social-Historical Influences to the Deep Appropriation of Becoming………………………………………………………………………195
3.3.a. Openness as a Hermeneutic Ideal in the Śāiva Appropriation of Cognitive Role-Models……………………………………………………………………197
3.3.b. Composure as a Hermeneutic Ideal in the Śāiva Appropriation of Cognitive Role-Models…………………………………………………………………200
3.3.c. From the What to the How of Appropriation: Mastering the Alternation of Consciousness through the Deep Appropriation of Becoming..........................203

3.4. Viśrānti and the Expression of Agency through Role-Empowerment: from the Deep Appropriation of Becoming to the Appropriation of Social-Historical Inheritance......204

3.4.a. Freedom through Subordination of Agency to the Problem of Action in Orthodox Hinduism.................................................................205

3.4.b. Freedom and the Priority of the Agent in Śaiva Theory: the Problem of the Imagination.................................................................210

3.4.c. Freedom and the Priority of the Agent in Śaiva Practice: Role-Appropriation as Soteriological Goal...............................................212

3.5. Viśrānti and the Expression of Agency through the Action Śakti: from the Appropriation of our Social-Historical Influences to the Encompassment of Relations with Other Beings.................................................................216

3.5.a. Śiva’s Enslavement to the Other through Involution in Śaiva Narrative Ontology.................................................................217

3.5.b. Śiva’s Self-Realization through Recovery of the Betweenness of Self and Other in Śaiva Agential Ontology.........................................223

3.5.c. Creatively Authoring the Narrative of Śiva-Śakti through Seeing-As: from the How to the What of the Other........................................227

3.5.d. Creatively Authoring the Narrative of Śiva-Śakti through Being-Seen-As: from the How to the What of the Self........................................234

3.6. Conclusion: Surpassing the Play-Centered Models of the Gitā and Ricoeur......241

CHAPTER 4: The Devaluation of Creative Ethical Agency in the Orthodox Hindu Experience of Art Emotion: Rasa and the Subordination of the Self to the Role........247

4.1. Introduction.....................................................................................247

4.2. Art for Art’s Sake in Orthodox Indian Aesthetics: from Life to Art through the Realization of Rasa.........................................................251

4.2.a. Bharata’s Theory of Rasa as Practical Science of the Emotions.........251
4.2.b. Ānandavardhana’s Theory of Rasa-Dhvani: Art Emotion and the Power of Suggestion………………………………………………………………………………….259

4.2.c. Bhaṭṭanāyaka’s Theory of Śādhāraṇīkaraṇa: Rasa and Self-Transcendence……………………………………………………………………………………………………263

4.3. Ethicism in Classical Rasa Aesthetics: from Art to Life through Rasa as Moral-Mimetic Power………………………………………………………………………………………272

4.3.a. Reading about Rāma, not Yudhiṣṭhira, because of an Aesthetic Criterion: the Aesthetics of Bhaṭṭanāyaka's Śādhāraṇīkaraṇa………………………………………………273

4.3.b. Reading about Rāma, not Yudhiṣṭhira, because of a Moral Criterion: Orthodox Ethicism and Bhaṭṭanāyaka's Śādhāraṇīkaraṇa…………………………………………………………280

4.3.c. Emotional Athleticism for Ritual-Moral Agents: Return to the World through the Orthodox Rasa Experience…………………………………………………………291

4.4. Conclusion: from Moral Irresponsibility to the Devaluation of Creative Agency...305

CHAPTER 5: Abhinavagupta’s Theory of Rasa: the Aesthetics of Simulated Role-Play in the Theater of Agency.................................................................310

5.1. Introduction..........................................................................................310

5.2. The Other: Three Theories of Rasa in the Abhinavabharati..........................314

5.3. From Life to Art through Playing with Becoming: Rasa, Role-Play, and the Appropriation of the Person, Śiva.................................................................319

5.3.a. The What of Art Emotion: Rasa as Sentiment of Play..........................319

5.3.b. The How of Art Emotion: from Creative Role-Play to the Deep Appropriation of Becoming.................................................................333

5.3.c. The Where of Art Emotion: Recovering Śakti in the Heart Universal……345

5.4. Conclusion: Concretizing Intersubjective Openness: Rasa, Role-Play, and Encompassing Relations with Other Beings.........................................................361

CONCLUSION: from Art to Life through Role-Play and the Ethics of Interest: the Self as Moral Artist.................................................................373

BIBLIOGRAPHY.........................................................................................385
Introduction

“Ūrdhvordhvamāruhya yadarthatattvam dhīḥ paśyati śrāntimavedayantī / phalaṃ tadādyaṁḥ parikalpitāṁ vivekasopānaparamparāṇām // citraṃ nirālambanameva manye prameyasiddhau prathamāvatāram / sanmārgalābhe iti setubandhapurapratiṣṭādi na vismayā / tasmātsatāmatra na dūṣitāni matāni tānyeva tu śodhitāni / …”

—From Abhinavagupta’s Commentary on Bharatamuni’s Nāṭyaśāstra, 6.33, in the Abhinavabharati

“As social individuals we play a variety of roles, each of which contributes to our own particular self-understanding. I am able to identify myself because I play the role of, among other things, a son to a mother, a student to a teacher, a friend to a friend, and a citizen of a country. These roles, moreover, have a moral dimension. They attune us to our environment, enable us to pursue community-building ends, and indeed, they even induce us (indirectly) to care for our environment by molding our emotions, passions, and sensitivities in terms of our role-based commitments to others. But what is to serve as our moral compass when our role-duties are rendered silent in the face of undecidable conflicts of conscience? And what happens to our sense of self when we, as a result, suffer an utter loss of initiative?
One response is to sever the life of feeling from the obligation to our roles. In so doing, I now become aware of my body, my emotions, my thoughts, my choices, indeed, my very being in the world, as uniquely *my own*. Further, this move helps me to dig down under the level of obligation to social norms and to discover an ethical sense that is free from the projected aims of our roles. But we can never escape the influence of our roles, nor ought we to do so—for our roles enable us to locate ourselves in relation to others and thereby participate in social reality at all. Thus, in order to develop ethical agency so that we can live through the moral contradictions in social life and yet have the power to perform in full awareness of those contradictions, how are we to reconcile this conflict between the obligation to role-bound norms and the integrity of moral feeling?

Any account of mature moral agency, I argue, must respond to the above question. The first step in doing so, moreover, involves recognizing the importance of creativity—in order to effectively intervene in the seemingly inexorable flow of social and political events, we must be capable of creatively appropriating our role-models and applying them in imaginative yet responsible ways. But as alluded to just now, this latent conflict between social role and moral feeling supervenes upon a certain incongruity between two aspects of the self—namely, the self as a one-among-many social individual and the self as a unique “myself,” respectively. One can respond to this ambiguity of personal identity by attempting to eliminate it—e.g., by wholly subordinating one’s sense of self to a given role, to the one extreme, or divorcing selfhood from its inherited role-models, to the other. But these strategies of overcoming the tension between the two aspects of the person diminish the agent’s capacity to creatively appropriate his role-
models. Thus, the ambiguity of identity is not to be overcome, per se, but negotiated through play.

The form of play that I take to be exemplary in this dissertation is role-play. To truly be oneself or to exemplify creative agency is to play oneself. And this involves not emptily taking on roles, nor merely “acting out” one’s private desires. Rather, playing oneself entails performing the conscious tension between the two aspects of the self as an expression of one’s agential freedom. What’s more, this is suitable for ethical agency. Playing one’s own part is not just artistic (by virtue of the fact that it is a genuine \textit{performance} of one’s roles), but socially grounded (and hence attuned to the conditions of social-moral life) and imaginative (i.e., free from the projected desires of one’s roles).

Completing our response to the problem of creative ethical agency, however, requires one further consideration. Insofar as ethical life requires not just theoretical knowledge concerning the structure of personal or ethical identity, but also practical wisdom, the agent must develop the \textit{knowing-how} that is necessary for creatively playing one’s social-moral roles. Accordingly, this dissertation turns to the question of the ethical dimension of art. Contemporary Western debates on this topic are marked by, on the one hand, ethicism, which stresses the authority of social norms over the life of feeling, and on the other hand, aestheticism, which secures the autonomy of the art experience (and the person qua a unique “myself”) from moral considerations (i.e., the person qua his objectified, role-bound otherness). But ethicism enslaves the agent to his roles and limits his awareness of what takes place, while aestheticism undercuts the agent’s very desire to take up his roles at all in lieu of securing the autonomy of feeling. A play-centered
approach, however, inscribes this conflict in the dialectic of personal identity, provokes the agent to imaginatively perform various roles, and develops a certain emotional agility that is requisite for playing social roles in full awareness of their possible incongruity with the order of the sentiments.

With these interrelating issues in view, Chapter One turns to the Bhagavad Gītā as a case study. I begin with the Gītā because this text not only exposes the hidden break between the moral norm and personal feeling. The Gītā, I argue, looks to develop creative ethical agency by cultivating aesthetic virtues that are typically reserved for expert role-performers. Accordingly, Chapter One begins by noting a shift in the Gītā from an action-based approach to the problem of moral agency to a person-based one. Both Indian and Western interpretations of the Gītā as an ethical treatise have tended to privilege the category of action. In so doing, however, they eliminate the ambiguity of personal identity and effectively disempower the person as a creative ethical agent. A person-centered interpretation, in contrast, suspends the question of adherence to the norm, on the one hand, and the imperative of personalized feeling, on the other, in order to discover an ethical sense that can be invoked even in cases of genuine moral ambiguity. Thus, after taking up and defeating various action-based approaches, I argue that we must center our interpretation around the question of virtue. But the virtues that the Gītā holds to be indispensable to developing mature moral agency are not simply ethical in nature. They are, in fact, aesthetic virtues. And by turning to the Nātyaśāstra, the ancient Indian manual on dramatic acting, as a critical methodology for interpreting the Gītā, Chapter One marks that important shift from the category of action to that of the
person, and finally, to the issue of emotional athleticism. Only by making ourselves into “athletes of emotion” can we encompass the “vertical extension” of the person between worldly engagement and world-transcendence, or the imperative of the social role and the life of feeling, respectively, and thereby transform the domain of ethical action into a theater of creative agency.

But the Gītā’s vision of ethical agency is vulnerable to at least one major criticism—while it indeed empowers the agent with respect to how he performs his socially prescribed role, its social conservatism nonetheless limits what roles are available to him. With a view to this shortcoming, Chapter Two examines Western debates concerning the discord between society and the individual, the nature of selfhood, and the function of art in negotiating the incongruities between personal and ethical identities. It begins by undertaking an historical-philosophical analysis of two competing models of the self—moral sincerity and authenticity—and the art institutions that develop around them. Fleshing out these two ideals in terms of Humean moral sentiment theory and Heideggerian phenomenology, and relating them to the respective aesthetic theories of these two figures, I argue that these two models successfully draw our attention to the category of the person and the aesthetic dimension of virtue. However, both approaches devalue the power of the agent to imaginatively negotiate relations with others because they employ strategies of overcoming the ambiguity of personal identity—moral sentiment theory with its excessive emphasis upon commitment to the social norm,

1 While Hume and Heidegger disagree concerning the nature of virtue, both acknowledge that it has an aesthetic dimension. Moreover, they both recognize that the role of sentiment (what I will term “the sentiment of being”) is to strengthen identity by bringing us into communion with virtuous others and juxtaposing us against non-virtuous others.
Heideggerian phenomenology with its imperative to authenticate one’s “true self” apart from the expectations of others. Accordingly, the second half of Chapter Two turns to the hermeneutic ethics of Paul Ricoeur. This approach inscribes the opposition between the moral norm and aesthetic authenticity within the dialectic of personal identity as a hermeneutic interplay between the self as a one-among-many social individual and the self as a unique “myself.” In doing so, Ricoeur enables us to seize upon the power of artistic imagination for exploring alternative ways of being in the world—thereby facilitating a “horizontal extension” of the person. Furthermore, he discloses and empowers the agent to creatively negotiate the intersubjective structure of the self with a view to responsibly intervening in social reality.

Having laid some groundwork in Chapters One and Two for a model of creative moral agency, Chapters Three through Five return to the Indian tradition in order to sophisticate our understanding of creative ethical agency and its aesthetic dimension. Chapter Three prepares us for this investigation by demonstrating how a Kashmir Śaiva theory of agency conceptually harmonizes the (vertically) deep soteriology of the person in the Gītā with the breadth of imaginative role-play and its importance for social intervention, as noted by Ricoeur. Not unlike the Gītā, Śaivism looks to encompass the order of action (karma) within the freedom of the person. And it does so by not only sharpening the adept’s attention to what takes place through the recognition that he is the agent of the alternation of consciousness between involvement in and detachment from the phenomenal world. It grounds the adept in a sophisticated phenomenology of the imagination and a theory of primordial creativity that empower him to perform his roles
in full awareness of those tensions between involvement and withdrawal, other and self, and the self as a socially projected role and the self as a self-reflective subject. But Śaivism goes beyond the soteriology of the Gītā, and we can draw upon Ricoeur’s insights for articulating this advance. In accordance with what can be termed a “narrative ontology,” the Śaiva agent extends horizontally, not just vertically, by imaginatively performing the being of all entities. Furthermore, the Śaiva adept, not unlike Ricoeur’s hermeneutic self, seizes upon the freedom of the imagination in order to creatively negotiate what transpires in the world (as opposed to deferring to the always already given narrative of the Hindu orthodoxy). But the narrative ontology of Śaivism surpasses Ricoeur’s theory of narrative identity by becoming an “agential ontology.” Out of a desire for constantly separating off from and rediscovering his ontic identity with the Ultimate Super-Agent, Śiva, the Śaiva yogin does not simply imagine himself as the other. He recognizes that he is the other and was all along simply pretending to be separate from the other, who is both his consort and his source of power in this play of hide and seek.

Chapters Four and Five investigate two theories of aesthetic emotion (rasa) with a view to drawing out their implications for ethical agency. Chapter Four traces the development of rasa theory and argues that the orthodox Indian experience of art emotion is structurally similar to the experience of mokṣa as formulated by Advaita Vedānta. I highlight this through analysis of Bhaṭṭanāyaka’s theory of aesthetic generalization, which as both the method and conclusion of the rasa experience, cleanses the aesthete of his karmic past and his personalized connection to the world. But this
strong interpretation of the depersonalized dimension of the *rasa* experience can also be seen as positively orienting the aesthete to social life by recovering the metaphysical meaning of emotional experience and motivating him to selflessly take up his prescribed role-duties (*dharma*) out of passionate concern for others. However, in spite of this harmonization of soteriological and social pursuits (i.e., *mokṣa* and *dharma*), respectively), the orthodox experience of *rasa*, I argue, nonetheless diminishes creative ethical agency by subordinating the self as a unique “myself” to the social norm—both in terms of what actions he performs and how he performs them.

With this shortcoming in view, and in light of the model of agential freedom presented in Chapter Three, Chapter Five turns to Abhinavagupta’s theory of *rasa*. Whereas the orthodox Indian art experience was constrained by its abiding concern with the question of *karma* and the role ethics of *Mīmāṃsā*, Abhinava liberates the experience of *rasa* from both the soteriological and ethicist presuppositions of the orthodoxy. In keeping with his Kashmir Śaiva orientation, he subordinates the order of action to the freedom of artistic imagination with a view to evoking an experience of our identity with the play of consciousness itself. The imagination is ordinarily central in many (if not most) art experiences, as it provokes the imagination to play the part of this or that “thing.” The contribution of Abhinava’s approach is that it demonstrates how art trains the imagination to elicit consciousness’s own self-recognition in the object, an object whose power and otherness gets recovered in an absolute oneness. Further, I argue that the *rasa* experience, according to Abhinava’s formulation, develops an emotional athleticism that is indispensable to realizing that culminating mystical truth of Śaivism,
namely, that the Self (ātman) is the actor (nartaka) who is a creative artist on both the
world and dramatic stage. Through gaining power over those karmically embodied,
socially projected roles that locate us in the world, the relishing of art emotion enables us
to perform not just our roles, but indeed, ourselves. Moreover, it makes it possible for us
to do so in the face of others by bringing about the greatest decrease of psychical distance
between self and concrete other without allowing its disappearance. This gets exemplified
in the aesthetics of the dramatic theater. Here the rasa experience develops the emotional
agility that is requisite for the aesthete to re-enact his identity with the Person, Śiva, in the
myth of Śiva-Śakti. Facing the stage actor in full awareness of his raw, corporeal,
indomitable otherness, the aesthete imaginatively performs the role of Śiva playing the
part of the agent who has lost creative power through worldly involvement. But when the
art experience is framed by the agential ontology of Śaivism, the aesthete interprets this
concealment of his power in the other as an expression of his own desire for play.

The Conclusion Chapter briefly draws out the implications of this vision of
creative agency for moral life. Having mastered the aesthetic virtues of the cosmic Actor
Himself, Śiva, and having assumed the relational middle between self (as spectator) and
other (as dramatic actor), the aesthete encounters social reality as a theater of agential
freedom. He takes on role-duties in life in a way that is both imaginative and bears a
certain creative artistry. At the same time, his participation in the world is socially
grounded and motivated by an ethics of interest in others—which is not opposed to an
ethics of tolerance, but in fact supersedes it. For Abhinava’s aesthete has become a lover
of all things, caring for all beings as if they were appendages of his own self and constantly seeking out new ways of expressing that care.

As a final point, I want to briefly address some methodological considerations. I have two main goals in this dissertation. First, I want to contribute to Indian philosophy by reconstructing classical Indian approaches to the aesthetics of morals from materials that, I argue, only implicitly make this connection between the aesthetic and the ethical domains. Second, I want to make a contribution to comparative philosophy. I bring Indian conceptions of art, morality, and the interrelation between the two, into dialogue with Western approaches to these issues.

However, the methodological approach of elucidating Indian concepts in Western terms has serious shortcomings—in large part because a number of Indian categories and conceptual innovations altogether surpass Western frameworks. How, then, are we to bring out the subtle nuances of Indian theories, and thereby make them available in a way that exhibits both hermeneutic openness (i.e., an accurate disclosure of these theories on their own terms) and the self-possession that is necessary for conveying them in a way that is philosophically compelling to a broader audience?

I argue that we must supplement this comparative approach with a closer investigation of how Indian theories of the aesthetics of morals might have been influenced by particular philosophical orientations in India (the less interesting historical claim), and in the least can be better understood by explicating them in terms of these orientations (the more interesting philosophical claim). In this way, historical analysis of Indian philosophical texts is neither a mere obstacle to nor a handmaid of comparative
philosophy. Rather, we can identify a new methodology for practicing comparative philosophy. And Abhinava provides a model for this approach. As comparative philosophers, we take an interest in the other not because we want to colonize our object of study with our own preconceived conclusions (as in the case of Orientalist approaches to Indian philosophical texts), nor because we are concerned to simply disclose the object in its historical particularity (recent intellectual history of South Asia). Rather, we seek out the other out of a desire for effecting a hermeneutic play between the universal and the particular, the self and the other. And we do so with a view to assuming the relational middle between philosopher and text, the lover and the beloved, or better yet, Śiva and Śakti. In so doing, we indeed create new ground for creative philosophical thought, but not in a mode that is reducible to the Western eros-driven model—which asserts the priority of the self over the object of study. Rather, in employing a uniquely Kashmir Śaiva hermeneutic model, we supplement this movement of standing over a text by making ourselves genuinely vulnerable to the other. In this way, comparative philosophy becomes more inclusive and genuinely interested in other, i.e., non-Western, exercises in comparative philosophy. This helps us to not only more effectively enter into the interiority of the other. It also enables us to become spectators unto ourselves from without, and thereby rediscover common Western philosophical problems and projects through othering them from the perspective of the other, i.e., the non-Western comparative philosopher. In short, comparative philosophy becomes more interesting for us because it provokes a dialectical interplay of self and other that does not privilege either pole and culminates in a self-recognition that is intersubjectively open.
This dissertation reverses the order of analysis commonly employed by comparative philosophers in order to argue that Indian theories of the aesthetics of morals can make important contributions to Western debates concerning the nature of the art experience, its relationship to moral life, and the way in which ethical identity itself can be seen as compatible with aesthetic ideals (e.g., authenticity). Of course, these contributions are not easily accessible in the Indian philosophical texts themselves, largely because many Indian philosophers (Abhinava, for one) did not view art and the moral domain as being counter-posed. The task of this dissertation, then, is to demonstrate how and why it is important to bring into conversation the thinkers and texts that I have chosen from Western and Indian traditions. In brief, I have chosen these thinkers and texts because each of them provide some insight into the nature of creative agency, its importance for social-moral life, and the role of art in negotiating the tensions between the self as a unique “myself” and the self as a one-among-many social individual.

Indeed, some of these insights, I argue, are misguided or limited. But the intellectual tools and conceptual advances that they offer concerning some dimension of the problem of creative ethical agency and the aesthetics of morals are, in my view, useful for developing a philosophy of creative ethical agency. Among other things, a philosophy of creative ethical agency must include disciplined attention to what takes place (or what can be termed “the vertical extension of agency”), an interest in and concern for taking on new roles and encountering new situations (i.e., “the horizontal extension of agency”), a theory of emotional athleticism, and above all, a hermeneutically
and ethically responsible theory of role-play. I have therefore employed these tools and innovations in formulating a response to the problem of creative ethical agency, and have argued that Abhinavagupta’s theory of *rasa* harmonizes these necessary (though perhaps not sufficient) conditions for a philosophy of creative ethical agency.
Chapter 1: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Performance in the Bhagavad Gītā: Ethical Life as the Theater of Agency

1.1. Introduction

Limbs failing, mouth dried out, hair standing on end, eyes filled with tears, body trembling, skin burning all over, unable to stand, mind reeling—this is the description of Arjuna that we are given at the beginning of the Bhagavad Gītā. But Arjuna is no slouch. Throughout the Mahābhārata, of which the Gītā constitutes part of the 5th Book (Bhīṣma Parva), the epithets by which Arjuna is addressed and spoken of include, “the mighty-armed one,” “the scorcher of foes,” “the sinless one,” “the winner of wealth,” and “the best of men.” In short, Arjuna represents the achievement of the ideal kṣatriya (warrior)—brave, single-minded, resolute, master archer, and exuding power. And yet here we find Arjuna utterly dis-empowered, attempting quite literally to disrobe himself of his kṣatriya identity upon the realization that his varṇa dharma (caste duty) threatens to violate his personal integrity in the most damaging way. For upon seeing “fathers, grandfathers, teachers, maternal uncles, brothers, sons, grandsons and companions, fathers-in-law and the dear ones in both armies,” he suddenly realizes that his role as the champion of dharma now enjoins him to destroy all that he had sought to protect.

Realizing this, he casts aside his bow and arrow, falls to his knees, and helplessly

---

2 “Nothing equals power, but bravery delights me,” Arjuna proclaims. “What use is a baron [kṣatriya] born in a heroic lineage who does not show his prowess? A baron’s living is always conquest… All virtues indeed have their being in power, To be sure, determination is the cause of victory” (The Mahābhārata, Volume 2: Book 2: The Book of Assembly; Book 3: The Book of the Forest, J. A. B. van Buitenen, University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL, 1981, p. 62).

declares: “I desire neither victory, nor kingdom, nor even any pleasures, O Kṛṣṇa. Of what use is the kingdom to us... of what use are pleasures and even life itself?”

Up until the opening of the Gītā, Arjuna has embodied a harmonization of the order of sentiment, where we often naively locate our so-called “true selves,” and the dharmic order, which is chiefly concerned with social action. By and large, Arjuna's awareness of himself as a subject has accorded with the awareness of himself as an objectified, socially projected, role-occupying other. This harmony of inner and outer, moreover, has a moral dimension. The fulfillment of his kṣatriya dharma has generally upheld the dharmic order, been beneficial for others, and in turn deepened Arjuna’s sense of loyalty to his socially prescribed role. But the Gītā, not unlike the Mahābhārata, is marked by a “poetics of dilemma,” wherein sharp contrasts (e.g., Arjuna as exemplary kṣatriya at one moment, impotent warrior the next) play a key literary, philosophical, and ethical role in pointing out ruptures in the social-moral fabric of ancient Hindu India.

This gets highlighted, I argue, in what is for Arjuna a truly moral dilemma. Arjuna's crisis results not from a mere incompatibility between personal desire and moral obligation, for example, or moral sentiments and a corrupt social hierarchy, but from a clash between equally (or nearly equally) legitimate duties—the dharma to act as a kṣatriya (which requires him to initiate a civil war that pits him against cousins, teachers, and friends) and the kula dharma to protect these loved ones.

Underlying Arjuna’s clash of obligations is a conflict between sentiment and role. However, my interpretation takes an oblique approach to debates concerning the ethics of the Gītā by arguing, first of all, that the moral dimension of Arjuna's dilemma is genuine.

---

Secondly, while this chapter aims to disclose the Gītā’s understanding of the ethical dimensions of agency, it does not seek to overcome Arjuna’s dilemma, per se, but to preserve the ambiguity of ethical identity. This is important for a few reasons. First, as I will demonstrate, the Gītā responds to the paradox of moral responsibility by first addressing the problem of the person, not that of moral action. Second, by inscribing the conflict between Arjuna’s dharmas within the dialectic of personal identity—which the Gītā envisions as constituted by the two movements of worldly involvement and world-transcendence—the Gītā is not just concerned with protecting a certain measure of agency in spite of the demands of moral life. Having demonstrated how the seeming opposition between inner feeling and outward expression, and ultimately the authenticity of moral sentiments and the authority of ethical action, is actually a fruitful tension, we can demonstrate how ethical life actually provokes Arjuna to complete the dialectic of personal identity.

To the end of completing this argument, the chapter is arranged as follows. It begins with a brief historical analysis of the soteriological problem of agency in orthodox Indian thought. This examination identifies the emergence of two rival theories of agency, one emphasizing the continuity and the other stressing the discontinuity of the self and its objectified manifestation to others. I then explore a philosophical interpretation of the Gītā by bringing to bear three Western ethical interpretive frameworks. In moving from an action-based approach to Arjuna’s crisis to a person-based one, I then explore the importance of certain aesthetic virtues in the context of classical Indian theater for negotiating the tensions between the inner life of feeling and
the outer life of the projected role. Taking this as a basis for interpreting the problem of personal identity in the Gītā, the chapter next considers how Kṛṣṇa fosters Arjuna’s desire for self-realization through renunciatory role-play and trains him to perform his kṣatriya role as a kind of theatrical actor who performs in full awareness of the opposition of what he is (i.e., his role) and who he is (i.e., a detached subjectivity). Finally, I examine the moral relevance of this kind of artful role-play and the way in which the Gītā reconciles the seeming opposition of personal identity and ethical identity. Through mastery of the art of performance, as qualitatively distinct from mere action, Arjuna can declare himself to be simultaneously involved and liberated, deeply concerned for the affairs of the world and yet maintaining his own initiative to contradict that concern when necessary. Moreover, it is only through interpreting Arjuna’s dilemma and self-realization in this way that we can see ethical identity as not an obstacle to creative agency, but an occasion for developing it. Rather than seeking to overcome the heightened sense of the way things ought to be in conscious tension with the way things are, then, his freedom involves play between withdrawal and engagement, self and role, sentiment and duty. And the ethical domain is the theater for performing this play.

1.2. Reading the Bhagavad Gītā Historically: Worldly Engagement vs World-Renouncing Contemplation in Orthodox Indian Thought

1.2.a. Worldly Involvement vs World-Transcendence in Orthodox Indian Thought: the Soteriological Problem of Action

The tension between worldly engagement and world-renouncing contemplation has a long history in traditional Indian thought. Early Vedic culture was centered around
an understanding of the power of action (*pravṛtti*) for perpetuating social and cosmic order (*ṛta*). Through ritual action, it was believed that the unity of nature and the orderliness of the universe could be upheld. This, in turn, led not only to the maintenance of the community. For those virtuous men who actively conformed to the eternal cosmic law (*ṛta*) in both ritual and social space, it also won personal immortality in heaven. At the tail-end of the *Vedic* period arose the *Upaniṣads*, which were very different in character than the earlier *Vedic* texts. Whereas the Vedas were largely concerned with enjoining proper ritual and social practices, the *Upaniṣads* established the foundations for the rich and varied mystical traditions of South Asia by recommending that the individual binds himself to the true, eternal, pure Self (*ātman*), which is ultimately identical with Absolute Reality. In order to do so, it advocated strategies of purifying oneself of all traces of the phenomenal world that have become superimposed upon one’s identity through action (*karma*). In short, according to the *Upaniṣads* it is not the path of action that we are to observe, but that of inaction (*nivṛtti*) or world-renouncing contemplation.

The traditional Hindu conception of the ideal life was deeply influenced by these two seemingly contrary paths of *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti*. Of the four *puruṣārthas* (“goals of man”), *dharma* and *mokṣa* are the highest in order and correspond to the *Vedic* and *Upaniṣadic* ideals of engagement and renunciation, respectively. The conflict between *dharma* and *mokṣa* (as soteriological ideals) is implicit in the terms themselves. Dharma

---

5 The earliest of the *Vedas*, the *Ṛg Veda*, consists of a number of hymns devoted to various nature gods. These hymns were often recited in a ritual context and expressed a sense of indebtedness to the gods for their support in sustaining the equilibrium of the universe. This maintenance of order would, in turn, help to secure the continuity of the human community and immortality in heaven for the individual participant or patron of the ritual.
derives from the root verb, “/dhṛ/,” which means “(to) bind or hold together,” while the
verbal root of mokṣa is “/muc/,” which means “(to) release from.” The tension between
the two ideals is further revealed in their explicit theorization by the dominant orthodox
schools of Hindu India, which try to overcome this conflict through strategies of
purification. Foremost among these was Pūrva Mīmāṃsa, or the school of “Ritual
Hermeneutics.” The Mīmāṃsāka ritualists were concerned primarily with carrying out
an epistemologically, morally, and socially conservative interpretation of the ritual
practices of the Vedas. This project had both religious and social-moral importance. Not
unlike their Vedic forefathers, the Mīmāṃsākas defined dharma as that which leads one
to heaven. But dharma not only bound the individual to act in ritual space. It also obliged
him to his ritual-based norms of action in the social domain—for it was in this way alone
that the individual could properly exercise his freedom to secure social equilibrium and
thereby make possible the individual pursuit of heaven. The school most committed to
the interpretation of Upaniṣadic scripture and theory, meanwhile, was Uttara Mīmāṃsa.7
In keeping with the major tenets of the Upaniṣads, Śaṅkara, generally recognized as the
leading figure of Vedānta, or Uttara Mīmāṃsa, rejects Mīmāṃsāka soteriology on
account of both its peculiar process of exegesis and its emphasis upon the performance of

---

6 Engaged in close textual study of the Vedas, these “early” (Pūrva can be translated as “early”) Mīmāṃsā
ermeneutes sought to secure an understanding of dharma by developing principles of interpretation for the
sources of our knowledge of dharma. Six Darśanas, or schools of orthodox Hindu philosophy, are
recognized, with each school sharing a certain historical and philosophical kinship with its accompanying
school: Pūrva and Uttara Mīmāṃsa, Sāṅkhya and Yoga, and Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika.
7 Just as Pūrva Mīmāṃsa was devoted to the interpretation of the early part of the Vedas, namely, those
texts having to do with ritual practice, so too was the Uttara Mīmāṃsa school (literally, “Later
Hermeneutics”) committed to the interpretation of Upaniṣadic theory, which came at the end of the Vedic
corpus. This school of thought holds that ultimate salvation results not from participation in the world, but
from overcoming one's karmic residues altogether and obtaining the liberating knowledge of one's own Self
as identical with Brahman.
ritual action as leading to liberation. It is not pravṛtti and ritual purity, but nivṛtti and the purification of a metaphysical essence (ātman) that is to secure for the agent a meaningful freedom, specifically, the freedom of transcendence from binding involvement in the empirical world.

1.2.b. Reconciling Worldly Involvement and World-Transcendence in the Gītā: the Ideal of Niṣkāma-karma (or Desireless Action)

The Bhagavad Gītā is often interpreted (and rightly so) as suggesting a synthesis of the paths of action (pravṛtti) and contemplation (nivṛtti). The influence of these orthodox pursuits upon the Gītā is undeniable. With respect to the former, Krṣṇa (who is an incarnation of the god Viṣṇu) explains to Arjuna the necessity of action for maintaining social and cosmic order:

[N]o one can exist, even for a moment, without doing some action... If I did not engage tirelessly in action, O Pārtha, men everywhere would follow my lead. If I should cease to work, these worlds should perish and I should be the cause of cosmic confusion and would destroy all these creatures.⁸

According to the Gītā, activity is not simply an inescapable feature of the human condition; the mark of freedom itself is exercising power with a view to sustaining social, political, and natural harmony. Dharma, for its part, was to ensure that the exercise of power was properly regulated by ethical laws so that order could be maintained in the micro- and macro-cosmos.⁹ However, the Gītā calls into question the efficacy of mere

---

⁹ That Krṣṇa appeals to Arjuna's desire for heaven reflects the influence of Vedic ritual culture upon his moral psychology. “Whence has come to you such faintheartedness in this hour of peril?” Krṣṇa declares to Arjuna. “It is unworthy of an Aryan, it is dishonorable, it does not lead to heaven, O Arjuna” (Gītā, 2.2). Krṣṇa aims to stir Arjuna to perform his dharma elsewhere by engaging his interest in the ultimate soteriological goal of Vedic ritualism: heaven. “[A]fter considering your own duty, you should not waver.
action, diagnoses Arjuna’s problem as one of mis-identification, and advocates detachment from the world of action and change. Here we find clear evidence of the influence of the *Upaniṣads*. Close textual analysis reveals that the philosophical life-blood of the *Gītā* was infused by the ideal of *nivṛtti*. Accordingly, Kṛṣṇa explains to Arjuna in undeniably *Upaniṣadic* fashion that he should not grieve over the act that he must perform, for his True Self desires release from the phenomenal world through a contemplative detachment (*mokṣa*). “He who understands that this Self is a slayer, and he who understands that It is slain,” Kṛṣṇa declares, “neither of them have wisdom. The Self neither slays nor is slain.”

But how does the *Gītā* resolve the conflict between these two movements of involvement in and withdrawal from the world? Are they not mutually exclusive, opposed movements? Not so, says the *Gītā*. In the ideal of *niṣkāma-karma*, or “action without desire for the fruits of that action,” the *Gītā* defines *mokṣa* in terms of the performance of *dharma* with the proper renunciatory attitude. Taken literally, the ideal of *niṣkāma-karma* runs into the problem of how to account for purposive action at all—for given that it is desire that projects our goals and infuses our actions with meaning, one simply could not act in the sheer absence of desire. The *Gītā* responds to this concern by urging the agent to develop renunciation *in* action, not renunciation *of* action. “To action alone you have a right and never to its fruits,” Kṛṣṇa declares to Arjuna. “Let not your

---

10 *Gītā*, 2.19. This is a clear reference to the *Katha Upanisad*, 1.2.19, which reads, “the Self slays not, nor can It be slain.”
motive be the fruits of action; nor let there be in you any attachment to inaction.”

Renunciation is made compatible with desire and action by investing desire in the action itself, not in its results. We still have a desire to act, but the motivation to act is not obsessively wedded to its outcomes.

The metaphysics of *saṃskāra* provides the theoretical basis for this kind of liberating performance. According to the law of *karma*, actions motivated by attachment to its results (*phala*) cause a potency or habit-forming tendency (*saṃskāra*) in the form of a disposition. Our actions in the past converge in the present and shape our future life. Bad actions bring about negative potency, while good actions yield positive potency. But both lead to *saṃsāra*, or re-birth in the domain of compulsive action (i.e., the empirical world), so long as they involve attachment to their results and, by necessity, lead to the accumulation of *saṃskāra*. *Mokṣa*, meanwhile, can be taken in the broader, secular sense, as having to do with the capacity to respond freely to one's environment; responsibility entails the ability to respond. But in order to attain *mokṣa*, this causal chain—i.e., the desire for fruits (*kāma*) leading to gain-seeking action (*karma*), this itself resulting in a recurrent tendency to desire fruits (*saṃskāra*), in turn leading to re-birth (*saṃsāra*), etc.—must be broken. And of course, some links in the chain are weaker than others. Where in this chain, then, is this naturalistic determinism the “softest”? According to the *Gītā*, the connection between desire and action is necessary, and hence cannot be broken. But the relation between an act and its corresponding *saṃskāra*, while a causal one, is relatively weak or contingent, for while an act requires a preceding desire, it need not presuppose desire for the fruits of action. For this reason, one concerned with reconciling

---

11 *Gītā*, 2.47.
the pursuits of dharma and mokṣa should endeavor to sever the link between an act and its potential for inducing habituated, compulsive behavior by renouncing or giving up attachment to the results of action.

In light of this very brief analysis of niṣkāma-karma, then, we can see how the Gītā both problematizes the paths of worldly engagement and world-renouncing contemplation and yet recovers the legitimacy of these two pursuits for traditional Hinduism by demonstrating how they are not incompatible with each other.

1.3. Towards a Philosophical Interpretation of the Bhagavad Gītā: from the Problem of Ethical Action to the Problem of the Ethical Person

1.3.a. Freedom To Act in the Gītā’s Ethics: a Utilitarian Interpretation

Of course, the aim of this chapter is not simply to accurately interpret the Gītā as an historical text, but to demonstrate how its central problem is one in which philosophical ethics has been and should continue to be deeply interested, namely, how to reconcile the tension between the injunction to maintain the world through action and the imperative to transcend the world through a letting-go of one’s attachments to it. This conflict has often been interpreted as one between ethical and religious imperatives. And indeed, the Sanskrit terms “dharma” and “mokṣa” are often translated as pertaining to ethical and religious domains, respectively. But these terms are not perfectly congruous with the English categories of “ethics” and “religion,” respectively. This bears noting here for two reasons. For one, the traditional Hindu ideal of dharma has inherited a religious lineage all its own (which Mīmāṃsākās trace back to Vedic ritualism), and hence stands juxtaposed to the ideal of mokṣa from a soteriological standpoint. This point alone,
however, does not bring this conflict between world-engaging and world-transcending imperatives fully into the domain of ethics, but keeps it as a problem to be resolved *between* ethics and religion. This leads to the second reason for distinguishing between the Sanskrit categories of “dharma” and “mokṣa” and the English terms “ethics” and “religion.” Contrary to the ethical position of the orthodoxy, the dilemma with which the *Gītā* opens problematizes the *dharmic* order from within by highlighting the conflict between the *dharma* to protect his family (his *kula dharma*) and the duty to his *kṣatriya* role (his *varṇa dharma*). Thus, in order to draw out the philosophical ingenuity of the *Gītā* with respect to this problem (which the orthodox schools either overlook or downplay in order to protect the authority of the social norm) let us focus upon three Western ethical frameworks for interpreting the ethics of the *Gītā*.

At the start of the *Gītā*, Arjuna is torn between two moralities—one which emphasizes the freedom *to* act towards the maintenance of the human community, another which values freedom *from* involvement in the world through assent to a transcendent principle. Important dimensions of the first of these can brought out through a utilitarian approach. Arjuna’s initial resistance to taking up his *kṣatriya dharma* is moved by a basic moral commitment to protect his family and loved ones. By taking into consideration the destructive consequences of his actions for those dear to him, as well as the very possibility of a meaningful life with others in the aftermath of such actions, he protests to Kṛṣṇa: “In the destruction of family, the eternal *dharma* of family perishes; when *dharma* perishes, its absence also conquers the whole family… when the absence

---

12 While the *Pārva* and *Uttara Mīmāṃsā* schools indeed quarrel over the nature of and means to ultimate salvation, Śaṅkara accepts the *Mīmāṃsāka* model of ritual action as a template for social life.
of dharma has conquered, the women of the family are defiled, and caste-confusion is born in the corruption of women.”13 By employing a kind of utility calculus, Arjuna points out a major inconsistency in the underlying dharmic framework, namely, that his varṇa dharma contradicts the dharma to protect his family and society at large. Blindly conforming to his kṣatriya dharma, then, will have disastrous results for the continued equilibrium of the community and all that is desirable in life.

As an interpretation of the Gītā’s philosophy of worldly engagement, however, a utilitarian model has clear shortcomings. As noted above, Krṣṇa explicitly advises Arjuna to not perform action for the sake of its results; his action must be desireless. Ironically, however, we may be able to look to utilitarianism in order to formulate a philosophy of world-renunciation that in some ways mirrors that of the Gītā, and that can in turn help to rescue this approach as an interpretative model for the Gītā’s ethics. As noted already, Krṣṇa explains to Arjuna that “good” action will bring him final release from the world. Insofar as Arjuna ought to perform his duty for the sake of salvation—that is, he ought to perform his duty for the sake of some end-in-view—with that action being in some sense causally good for mokṣa, it would appear that Krṣṇa is operating within a utilitarian framework. Thus, while Arjuna cannot prevent through his own action the destructive consequences that the war will bring upon his family, it would seem that he can obtain through action the ultimate end of the ideal Hindu life—mokṣa.

But consider that for the consequentialist, the goal is something that one does not yet possess. Moksa, however, is not a thing or a what at all. Moreover, mokṣa cannot be reduced to being an “end” as the utilitarians have conceived of it. We cannot fit mokṣa

13 Gītā, 1.40.
within or even at the end of a series of actions that form a continuum in our life, with
their being smaller cross-sections that merge together through a larger process—e.g., I go
to college in order to do x, y, and z, and eventually become a teacher.\textsuperscript{14} This is because
mokṣa is only an “end” in the sense of its being a non-causal, non-temporal terminus.
Thus, mokṣa does not result from explicit actions; we do not get rewarded with the
ultimate happiness or bliss that is mokṣa by virtue of what actions we perform. Rather,
the Gītā’s concern with mokṣa has more to do with how, or the way in which, an action is
performed, and precisely not with obtaining a reward. The non-attached agent does not
act for the sake of mokṣa. He simply gets it, or rather, “it comes to him, as it were,
unsolicited… [or] naturally unsought for.”\textsuperscript{15} And mokṣa must present itself unsolicited
because even pure non-attachment is not a means to mokṣa; it is itself mokṣa. Contrary to
the utilitarian orientation, then, mokṣa is, causally speaking, “good for nothing.”\textsuperscript{16}

1.3.b. Freedom From Action in the Gītā’s Ethics: a Deontological Interpretation

Where a utilitarian interpretation fails, a Kantian take appears to succeed. In keeping
with Krṣṇa’s notion of dharma, Kantian morality not only holds that the consequences of
an action are irrelevant to its moral worth; the measure of the ethical action is intrinsic to
the act itself (or to the law for the sake of which it is done). Thus, not only does one fail
to become ethical by wholly renouncing action altogether (for quietism is decidedly un-

\textsuperscript{14} Arindam Chakrabarti, “The End of Life: A Nyāya-Kantian Approach to the Bhagavadgītā,” Journal of

\textsuperscript{15} “The End of Life,” pp. 332-3. My comment: the utilitarian framing of the problem, however, derails the
“pursuit” (of mokṣa) before it even begins, for it reifies the dualism of the one who desires and the object
desired, when in fact the realization of mokṣa involves the dissolution of this very orientation.

\textsuperscript{16} “The End of Life,” p. 333. And in fact, a utilitarian approach to mokṣa would be counter-productive.
ethical according to both deontology and the Gītā, as evidenced by Krṣṇa’s initial scolding of Arjuna); one’s actions cannot be motivated by personal gain or ambition.

“The person who casts away all desires, who moves away from clinging, who has no idea of ‘mine,’ and who has no idea of ‘I,’ that one comes to peace,” explains Krṣṇa.¹⁷

Seemingly having little to do with benefiting either oneself or the community to which goal-seeking agents are ordinarily bound, dharmic action here asserts the priority of a kind of transcendent, depersonalized imperative that is indifferent to worldly affairs. Not unlike the Gītā’s concern for detachment in action, Kantian morality secures the autonomy of the individual from involvement in the world of compulsive action; liberation from taking on those goals projected by desire, e.g., the desire to protect one’s family, now has a decidedly ethical grounding, not just a soteriological one. And yet, this deontological imperative that appears to be implied by the Gītā simultaneously secures positively moral involvement in the world by enjoining the agent (Arjuna) to act, albeit simply for duty’s sake.

But while the Gītā can in some sense accommodate this interpretation, the question is whether deontology captures all the nuances of the ethics of the Gītā. As alluded to already, the Gītā, contrary to Kant’s understanding, holds that dharma is to be performed in order to maintain society and the order of the cosmos, not for the sake of an abstract moral law. And Kant misses this largely because he has reversed the priority of the social norm and the rational autonomy of the agent. Kant’s duty projects a pure rational self and subordinates personal relations and inherited social roles to an a priori categorical imperative. According to the Gītā, however, one’s dharma is not disclosed by

¹⁷Gītā, 2.71.
means of reason, but by śāstra—scripturally embedded social norms. This is because the
moral agent is not an abstract category, but a thick, locatable, socially embedded agent,
whose ethical identity is intricately woven together with the caste system. According to
Kant, then, my duty is your duty by virtue of our sharing essentially the same rational
nature and desire to fulfill our highest vocation (i.e., the moral law), whereas for the Gītā,
my duty may or may not be your duty, depending upon the given circumstance.
Furthermore, the Gītā’s dharma is not an abstract principle, but an attitude that ultimately
defers to the authority of role-based principles of action that orient us towards others
from our social hierarchical location. In short, Kantian deontology looks to overcome our
felt involvements in the world by emphasizing the autonomy of the moral agent, whereas
the Gītā appears to simultaneously problematize and yet endorse moralities of both the
freedom to participate in the world and freedom from worldly involvement.

1.3.c. From the Problem of Action to the Problem of the Person: the Turn towards Virtue
Ethics in the Gītā

Bringing to bear utilitarian and deontological models as interpretive frameworks
of the Gītā’s ethics indeed helps to disclose some of the underlying tensions in the text,
including some which mere historical analysis would likely miss (largely owing to the
limitations of interpreting the Gītā solely in terms of orthodox Hindu thought). But while
this approach clarifies, for example, the genuinely moral dimension of Arjuna’s dilemma,

---

A Hindu’s dharma acknowledges distinct (and sometimes even conflicting) duties. The duties of a
kṣatriya, for example, are different from those of a brahmin. Furthermore, the duties within a caste, e.g., the
dharma of a student in comparison with that of a householder, vary as well. But Kantian deontology
effectively ignores these classifications, taking the categorical imperative to be binding in any and all
circumstances.
utilitarian and deontological frameworks nonetheless fail to make available the Gītā’s understanding of ethical identity. I suggest a move away from these two models towards a virtue ethics interpretation for two reasons. For one, Arjuna is reduced to moral arrest not because he lacks confidence in his abilities to achieve given ends (the utilitarian model), nor because he is concerned to protect the integrity of the dharmic order (the deontological model). Rather, his hesitation results from the recognition that achieving victory or “the good life” is not an option at all.\textsuperscript{19} Whether he performs his family or warrior duty, destruction will result. Turning to a virtue ethics model, then, helps us to appreciate that Arjuna’s dilemma is motivated by an encompassing concern for “the good life,” not mere utility or duty.

In order to draw out the second reason for making this shift to virtue ethics, consider that the Gītā, rather oddly, calls Arjuna to perform his dharma even after having disclosed its inconsistencies. But why problematize the authority of the tradition only to call the individual to conform to it? In responding to this question, consider that Arjuna is haunted by the possible implications of his actions for who he is as a person. He is haunted by the contradictions in the question, “Who am I, what kind of person am I, who would consciously perform actions that would undermine the pursuit of ‘the good life’?”

In fact, the Gītā can be seen as deliberately sharpening contrasts—e.g., Arjuna as the proud warrior at one moment, but the conscientious renouncer at the next moment—in order to create a rupture in Arjuna’s self-understanding and thereby problematize the orthodox understanding of ethical identity. Not unlike “virtue ethics,” the Gītā shifts

\textsuperscript{19} This is not to say that Arjuna is not concerned at all with principles and consequences. But his organizing concern is with “the good life,” and only derivatively with utility or the integrity of dharma.
from the question “Why is an action done?” to the question “What kind of human being should one be? What kind of character should one develop?” In this way, then, the Gītā’s ethical philosophy goes beyond both deontological and utilitarian models (on the Western side) and orthodox Indian ritualism and Upaniṣadic renunciation, all of which prioritize the problem of action (or more specifically in the case of the Indian schools, karma). This is not to say that the Gītā is not concerned with the problem of action (as indicated in the concept of niṣkāma-karma). But it subordinates the problem of karma to the problem of identity or character. And it does so by first digging beneath the level of obligation to moral norms and then setting up a kind of opposition between the question that perhaps most strongly motivates the Upaniṣads, “Who am I?,” and the response emphasized by the ritualists, “I am Arjuna, warrior-prince.”

In order to reveal the subtle dimensions of how the Gītā responds to this opposition, let us step away from the field of ethics and make a perhaps unexpected turn towards an Indian aesthetic theory that is historically and philosophically related to that of the Gītā—Bharata’s theory of the dramatic actor (naṭa).

1.4. From Virtue Ethics to Virtue Aesthetics: Becoming an Athlete of Emotion in Bharata’s Theatre

1.4.a. Bharata’s Theory of Art Emotion (Rasa)

Bharata is the author of the ancient Sanskrit text known as the Nāṭyaśāstra, or “Science or Acting.” Unlike Aristotle’s Poetics, which provides us with strategies of

---

20 Bharata’s Nāṭyaśāstra (literally, “Science of Dance/Drama”) is “a hybrid of myth and down-to-earth performance knowledge.” Its date of composition is questionable, ranging anywhere from the 6th century B.C.E. to the 2nd century C.E. These dates roughly parallel those of the Gītā, which is generally thought to
“gazing” at the spectacle (to which Aristotle had reduced the theatrical production), the *Nātyaśāstra* presents strategies of psycho-physically experiencing and outwardly performing emotions. The aesthetics of classical Indian theater recognizes that the emotions (*rasas*) are shared by virtue of their being based in our human make-up and socially constructed, while feelings (raw life emotions or *bhāvas*) are private and individually experienced. Accordingly, while the practical concern of *rasa* aesthetics is to produce for the audience an experience of *rasa*, or art emotion, the *rasa* that gets evoked is not owned by the actor himself nor does its objectified form belong solely to the audience that observes it. Rather, it occurs in the shared space of the theater, simultaneously embracing performer and audience while excluding private claims of ownership to this emotion.

The actual conveying of art emotion in this context is a very complex process. Here I will only briefly touch upon how the actor himself contributes to the production of *rasa* by encompassing the shared space of the theater. In order to properly express that feeling or emotion that is suitable to his role-character’s place in the larger dramatic performance, the actor must be sensitive to the aesthetic sensibilities and expectations of the audience members as well as the other constitutive conditions of the theater, e.g., the lighting, the arrangement of the physical objects on the stage, the resonance of his voice have been composed between the 3rd century B.C.E. and the 3rd century C.E. Exact details concerning its author are likewise mysterious, as it is uncertain whether Bharatamuni is a single author or a pseudonym for a collective oral tradition. But the influence of Bharata and his *Nātyaśāstra* upon Indian performance theory is undeniable, as this text continues to be actively interpreted and debated by, among others, theoreticians and practitioners of theatrical performance alike. Also, the *Nātyaśāstra* is an influential text in the history of Indian aesthetics. I will make reference to its importance for the development of the theory of *rasa*, or aesthetic emotion, later in the dissertation.
in the theater, etc. In short, the success of the actor’s performance rests upon his not simply communicating his own feelings and psychological states (as one does in a confession, for example), but also recognizing that the production of art emotion is a physical process that requires him to actively defer to a particular shared language of objectified expression.

But the actor must also infuse his performance with emotions that are in some sense his own. How does he balance this with the awareness of his being seen by the audience? This requires him to negotiate in his own self-understanding the ambiguity of his identity as performer. This ambiguity is constituted by, on the one hand, the awareness of himself as outwardly identical with the theatrical character and its inner states, and on the other hand, the awareness of himself as a self-reflective subject who is distinct from the character. Regardless of the potential resonances of the role with his own personal feelings, the actor must maintain a certain distance from the role; for if the actor merely “acts out” a personal emotion, he is likely to overwhelm the audience members and prevent them from recognizing the theatrical performance as fictional. Conversely, the actor cannot simply go through the motions of imitating the role, for this will not give vitality to the character; the audience will have no emotional response to the performance. The actor's imaginatively occupying the shared space of the theater, then, and in turn skillfully performing his role entails presencing the incongruity or contradiction between the awareness of himself as a role-objectified other and the

---

21 Bharata's claim may in fact be much stronger. The emotions, according to Bharata, have a kind of universal validity by virtue of their being part of our innate make-up (and not just being contingent upon social constructs – though their attendant expressions may be socially contingent).
awareness of himself as a subjective self, and then performing in full awareness of this tension.

Bharata's model of the *nāṭa*, however, presents certain challenges for the individual who in day-to-day situations insists upon asserting his so-called “true self,” that is, accurately conveying his own inward states to others. And even in the case of socialized adults, who candidly show their inward feelings less readily, these individuals often refrain from disclosing their so-called “true” feelings only half-heartedly, compulsively, and at the expense of compromising what they take to be their true sense of self—for such persons often believe that exercising freedom requires an outward movement wherein one’s avowals conform to one’s personal feelings. How, then, is it possible to develop the self-understanding and skillfulness of expression required for performing in Bharata's theater in such a way that does not lead to a loss of self?

1.4.b. Becoming an Athlete of Emotion through the Rasabox Exercise

Drawing heavily upon Bharata's writings concerning the theory and practice of Indian performance, the contemporary American performance theorist Richard Schechner has developed a training exercise called “the Rasabox exercise.” For both Bharata and Schechner, a basic challenge of the actor involves having the emotional agility to change from one feeling-movement to another in a timely manner. Training in the Rasabox exercise addresses this issue in the following manner. First, a square space is designated for each *rasa*. The participant then steps into each *rasa* box, one at a time, and creates a
fixed pose that suitably conveys that *rasa*. After completing the cycle of fixed poses, the trainee takes to performing that pose dynamically in terms of the *rasa*. He does so for each *rasa* box. The participant continues stepping in and out of the various *rasa* boxes until eventually there is almost no pause in the period of transition between spontaneously yet consciously expressing emotions in the different *rasa* boxes.

Schechner elaborates upon the fruits of this sort of training: “This develops an emotional/physical agility the actor can use to transform instantly from expressing rage to love to sadness to disgust, etc… [The Rasaboxes] free performers to experience ranges of physical and emotional expression that might otherwise [have] seemed unavailable to them.” By creating a safe space wherein the concerns of the everyday are kept at bay and emotions can be safely explored, participation in the Rasabox exercise suspends the question of sincerity or truthfulness to one’s inner states in lieu of cultivating greater range of expressiveness. Moreover, the gradual process by which the exercise guides the participant from the felt need for control and self-consistency to progressively greater degrees of risk does not violate the emotional integrity of the individual. It rather trains the participant to proactively negotiate habits of emotional responsiveness and expression. Accordingly, one recognizes that emotion is both an “internal” psychological process as well as an “external” physical one. Moreover, in contrast with other forms of

---

22 Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* does not simply discuss the theory of *rasa*. He also gives detailed accounts of how to train the *nata* (with a view evoking *rasa*), in particular, how to develop the emotional athleticism required for performing in the Indian theater.

23 Breath, movement, and sound are here integrated into the mode of expression.

24 In the early stages, the actor-trainee expresses emotion in the form of a statue. He later arrives at the level of expressing emotion through dynamic movement. Finally, he moves to fluidly moving in and out of different *rasa* boxes, and ultimately even doing so in full interaction with other participants (Richard Schechner, “Rasaesthetics”).

25 Ibid.
actor training—in which the actor might be encouraged to lose himself in the role or give way to inspiration—this method emphasizes the art of acting as “a conscious, body-oriented process to which [the actor] holds the keys and the tools for his own development.” As a result, the actor who preserves and successfully negotiates the ambiguity of identity (i.e., the self qua personal feeling and the self qua objectified role) becomes a kind of “observing ego” or “a body that knows itself,” simultaneously creating, experiencing and observing the process. And indispensable to playing with and transitioning between inward emotional states and their objectified forms with a view to negotiating what transpires in the space between self (as actor) and other (as audience member) are certain aesthetic virtues. In short, the performer becomes “an athlete of the emotions,” which in turn leads to an expansion of agency through deepening “[the] ability to find authentic emotional connections” with others in the midst of having to perform roles that may outwardly transgress these connections.

1.5. From Virtue Aesthetics to the Development of the Person in the Bhagavad Gītā: Playing with the Dialectic of Personal Identity

1.5.a. The Opposition of What I Am and Who I Am in Orthodox Hindu Action-Centered Models of the Person

In order to help contextualize how the aesthetic virtues of the nāṭa are related to our analysis of the Gītā, let us first consider how the action-centered soteriologies of the

---

26 Ibid.
27 Ibid. That is, the Rasabox participant encompasses the interplay between inner feeling and outward movement so that his performing the contradictions between the two (e.g., “I as the character of Rāma do not really love the actress playing the role of Sītā, even though my actions would seem to attest to this”) can be a source of power over personal feeling and prescribed role, rather than leading to self-effacement.
two orthodox Indian schools discussed above are problematic with respect to negotiating the incongruity of the self qua subjectivity and the self qua the role.

As noted above, the Mīmāmsāka ritualists held that dharma bound the individual to his role in both ritual as well as social space. Rather than entertaining metaphysical speculations concerning the Upaniṣadic question “Who am I?,” this school emphasized maintaining continuity of identity with respect to what one was by promoting a conception of personhood modeled after the self-representation of the traditional brahmin as a Veda-abiding dharma-performer. While this model of agency secured one kind of freedom for the individual, even the set of motivating desires was rigidly controlled by socially prescribed rules. And insofar as (1) the motivations of the agent were effectively not to be his own, but those generated by the ritual itself, and (2) the person was psychologically bound to ritual action as the vehicle of empowerment for his attaining heaven, the agent became depersonalized in a way that severely limited his capacities for creatively taking up his role.

Regarding this point, Alexis Sanderson explains:

This contradiction, that of the “solipsistic conformist,” was his self-representation as ritual agent. The notion of autonomous agency individualized the person, but his determination by a world of revealed duties, his wish to conform to the Brahminical ideal, depersonalized this individual, purging him of all independent motivations.  

---

28 “Rasaesthetics.” The term “athlete of emotions” appears in Schechner’s writings on the Rasabox exercise, and he himself appears to take this term from Antonin Artaud, the French playwright, poet, actor, and theater director.

This model devoured the individual’s sense of agency from within by requiring that all personalizing motivation be completely renounced—for it was motivated action that bound the eternal “I” to samsāra, or karmic rebirth. The Mīmāṃsā ideal of the person, then, became one of inert being to be achieved by means of “a long but finite series of lives passed in unmotivated conformity to dharma.”\(^{30}\) But in subordinating the question of agency to that of karma, or action, Pūrva Mīmāṃsā wholly subordinated the individual’s self-awareness qua self-reflection to his understanding himself, both inwardly and outwardly, in terms of his ritual-based role. Far from being made into a conscious, willing role-player, then, the Mīmāṃsāka aspired to simply exemplify the model of the ritual participant. He was, in short, nothing more than a being-played.\(^{31}\)

Advaita Vedānta, in contrast, looks to disjoin the agent from the illusoriness of his identity as a what by means of a contemplative withdrawal (mokṣa) into the openness of the question “Who am I?”. Śaṅkara explains as follows:

This is what one who knows Brahman realizes: “I am Brahman, which is completely different from that [limited self] known previously as agent and enjoyer; and is neither agent nor enjoyer in any of the three times [i.e., past, present, and future]. Thus previously I was neither agent nor enjoyer. Nor am I now. Nor will I be at a future time.” Only thus is liberation possible. For otherwise, if there were no destruction of the karmas which have been proceeding for beginningless time, there would be no liberation.\(^{32}\)

Ritual action cannot be the source of freedom precisely because it compels us to identify ourselves in terms of what we are for others. Accordingly, we are to dissociate from those

\(^{30}\) Ibid.

\(^{31}\) According to this reductive view, the individual does not so much play his role as he is played by it.

roles that locate us in the world and seek the freedom of transcendence in the realization that we are a pure subjective Self (ātman) that is other than the world of change, multiplicity, and objectification.

But while this model of the person recognizes that a naïve identification with our roles is a hindrance to self-realization, it is in some ways even more problematic (than the model put forth by Pūrva Mīmāṃsā) for developing the aesthetic virtues and, ultimately, the person as creative role-player. Not only does Advaita Vedānta accept the Mīmāṃsāka model of ritual action as a template for social life, the problems of which have already been demonstrated. It promotes a gnosis of non-agency that effectively divorces the individual from creative world-engagement altogether. Śaṅkara explains:

We maintain [as opposed to the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā] that the knowledge of the Self does not pertain to something which is to be done. [This knowledge] is not for the purpose of avoiding or pursuing [anything]. Our excellence is [maintaining that] when there is the realization of the Self as Brahma there is the abandonment of everything which has to be done, and the completion of what has to be done.\(^{33}\)

In acknowledging the a-historical authority of the social, political, and moral philosophy of Pūrva Mīmāṃsā, on the one hand, and systematically devaluing action as a path of freedom, on the other hand, Śaṅkara is caught in the curious contradiction of defending a model of worldly involvement of which he is simultaneously dismissive. Thus, while Advaita Vedānta endorses conformity to one's social-moral roles, these roles (indeed, all forms of worldly participation) are ultimately rejected as illusory.\(^{34}\) They are taken to be obstacles to the realization of freedom, and thereby get stripped of their usefulness in

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 1.1.4, 1:130.

\(^{34}\) Advaita Vedānta does in fact recognize various levels of “reality,” holding that the mundane world is “real” for the unenlightened. However, their soteriology nonetheless moves the adept to obtain further insight into the deeper dimensions of reality, ultimately leading to union with Brahman.
facilitating creative agency at all. In this way, the Advaita Vedāntic felt need to overcome the influence of the role undermines the agent even more than Mīmāṃsā ritualism. For not only does it attempt to escape from the domain of action; in subordinating agency to the question of action (karma), it conceals the problem of agency even further.

1.5.b. From the Problem of Action to the Problem of the Person: Fostering the Desire for Playing with Identity in the Bhagavad Gītā

According to his initial response to Arjuna’s lamentations at the start of the Gītā, Kṛṣṇa appears intent upon Arjuna’s acting as a kṣatriya, even if it requires him to perform actions that thoroughly efface his sense of self in lieu of his role-based involvements. Consider Kṛṣṇa's early justifications for why Arjuna should abandon his despair and perform his dharma. The first argument asserts that nobody in fact dies because the self does not die. “He is never born, nor does he die at any time, nor having once come to be does he again cease to be,” Kṛṣṇa states. Kṛṣṇa then explains: “Just as a person casts off worn-out garments and puts on others that are new, even so does the embodied soul cast off worn-out bodies and take on others that are new.” In other words, everybody is going to die anyway. And finally, Kṛṣṇa argues that “if thou doest not this lawful battle, then thou wilt fail thy duty and glory and will incur sin.” Of course, these arguments are decidedly incomplete as motivating assertions to one who has deep reservations concerning his assigned role. The first argument, for example, seems to condone any and all killings, while the second makes no distinction between dharmic and a-dharmic

35 Gītā, 2.20.
36 Ibid., 2.22.
37 Ibid., 2.33.
killings. And as for the third argument, which emphasizes Arjuna’s sheer obligation to participate in the war, it fails to address a specific concern that Arjuna had raised, namely, how to perform his duty without undermining the foundations of society. Nonetheless, Kṛṣṇa seems to be principally concerned with motivating Arjuna to that dharmic action which is uniquely his, regardless of its implications for the person that he will become as a result. Not unlike the Mīmāṃsāka ritualist, he enjoins Arjuna to abandon his self-reflective speculations and defer to the fact of what he is, namely, a proud and dutiful kṣatriya.

Of course, Arjuna duly rejects these motivational explanations. But in light of the fact that (a) these early arguments do nonetheless contain a germ of truth, and (b) close consideration of Kṛṣṇa's responses later in the Gītā reveals striking similarities to these initial assertions, we see that these rather weak arguments are in fact precursors to more compelling ones to be given later. This raises the following question—if we concede that Kṛṣṇa, by virtue of his divine powers, is not only capable of providing Arjuna with more adequate justification for why he should fight, but also aware that his initial assertions might be unconvincing, then why does he not simply give these answers to Arjuna in the first place?

In order to determine what method Kṛṣṇa is employing here, consider that the dialogic approach that he applies is in fact a rhetorical device of a number of Upaniṣadic parables recounting the pursuit for liberating knowledge on the part of aspiring renunciates. Take for example the story of Indra and Prajāpati from the Chāndogya Upaniṣad. In brief, Prajāpati, the teacher, does not take on Indra as his student until Indra
has demonstrated the virtue of his doubt concerning the satisfactoriness of mundane truths for liberating knowledge. This dialogue demonstrates that doubt is not merely something to be allayed. Rather, it serves an important pedagogical function, as Prajāpati locates Indra in his desire for renunciation by assessing the virtue of his reasoning.\footnote{The proper use of reason in the orthodox Indian context is not the elimination of uncertainty, but rather making the individual epistemically more virtuous. But the technical discussions of speculative philosophy (i.e., the Classical Darśanas) do not engage in systematic elaboration of a fundamental aspect of the Upaniṣadic notion of darśana, that is, the desire for mokṣa. The sutras, however, were to be studied only by those deemed ready by the guru, with an indispensable qualification in this decision resting upon the student's preparedness to pursue (the study of) liberation as a plausible, desirable ideal. The desire for mokṣa, then, was the key link between the technical discussions found in the sutra literature and the belief motivating these discussions.} The process of knowing that he guides his student along is a process of going inwards, gradually stripping out the layers of empirical consciousness, eventually leaving only the essence of the self that lies within. The two key elements in this introspection are doubt and desire; it is Indra's desire that pushes his dissatisfaction with Prajāpati's answers, thereby giving rise to doubt. The fostering of Indra's doubt by Prajāpati is important, furthermore, because it allows him to assess the seriousness of Indra's desire for liberating knowledge—is it motivated by mere desire for critical inquiry (i.e., taking the felt need of reason as an end in itself), or is it motivated by a virtuous desire, that is, the desire for mokṣa? The latter holds in this example, and for this reason Indra is invited to return for further teaching. It also evinces the fact that in the Upaniṣadic understanding of darśana (lit. “a seeing,” though often translated as “philosophy”), critical inquiry is not a sufficient condition for philosophical inquiry, for in and of itself it does not guarantee the desire (for direct, intuitive experience of mokṣa) that will sustain the student during his discipleship.
Not unlike Prajāpati in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, Kṛṣṇa has deliberately presented his initial arguments to Arjuna as incomplete. Their function is not simply to move Arjuna to take up his *kṣatriya* role. They also serve to test the character of Arjuna's crisis and, in the event that they arouse a virtuous desire for renunciation, to prefigure the explanations to come later concerning the nature of true, liberating knowledge. Kṛṣṇa is in fact evaluating the nature and profundity of his student's agitation as a qualification for further teaching. By assessing the character of Arjuna's desire—that is, whether his dissatisfaction is moved by a genuine desire for renunciation or a desire for mere inquiry itself—Kṛṣṇa can in turn measure the epistemic virtue of Arjuna's doubt. If his doubt is motivated by a mere desire for speculation, then it will not prove reasonable with respect to the suitable end, namely, attaining *mokṣa*. For while a casual inquirer might doubt that he is ultimately identical with his socially projected role-duty, he would inevitably turn back at the moment of final self-surrender in lieu of protecting what he naively identified to be his “true” self—e.g., Arjuna’s personal feelings for his family, friends, etc. But if the desire for renunciation obtains, then Arjuna's doubt will prove itself to be virtuous (and hence worthy of further teaching) due to its sufficiently motivating Arjuna to put himself at risk in order to obtain an experience of *mokṣa*. This is an important moment for Kṛṣṇa, meanwhile, for he now begins to take on Arjuna as a student. His immediate concern to motivate Arjuna to perform *dharmic* action gives way to a deeper interest, namely, awakening and developing Arjuna’s desire for *mokṣa* by cultivating the seed that originally stimulated his doubt.  

---

39 Accordingly, it is at this point that Kṛṣṇa begins to disclose the more profound meaning of *dharma* and its connection to *mokṣa* through the explanation of *niṣkāma-karma* and *yoga*, both of which force Arjuna to
But while the Gītā can be traced to the Upaniṣads both in terms of its structure and its message, namely, educating the desire for liberation (mokṣa), its primary focus is not upon the problem of action (karma), as it was for Advaita Vedānta (which as noted already, is primarily concerned with interpreting the Upaniṣads). Moreover, its theorization of freedom implies a model of agency that is distinct from that of the orthodoxy. Rather than teaching renunciation of action in order to sever the self as ātman apart from the self as social role, Kṛṣṇa advocates and aims to foster within Arjuna a desire and capacity for renunciation in action with a view to realizing his true nature. Mokṣa is indeed indispensable to this end. However, going beyond the explanation given above in the discussion of niṣkāma-karma, mokṣa is to be made positively compatible with dharma. That is, the ideal of desireless action is to not simply facilitate an understanding of how one can be free in spite of one’s worldly engagements—for even here we are still within the domain of the problem of karma, which presupposes the alienation of the agent from the world of action and multiplicity. Rather, I argue that the Gītā provides a model for how freedom can be realized because of and through our participation in the world.

In demonstrating this, consider that Kṛṣṇa abstracts apart from the problem of action the opposition between Mīmāṃsāka and Advaita Vedāntic soteriological conceptions of the self and re-inscribes this conflict in the realm of the person as a dialectical interplay. According to Kṛṣṇa, the person is neither his role (by means of which he is involved in the world) nor is he reducible to his feelings to be other than the role (by means of which he withdraws from the world). And yet in some sense he is both venture beyond the limits of conventional good and evil.
identical with his role and dissociated from his role. Indeed, Kṛṣṇa does clearly explain to Arjuna that the true Self is ātman. But practically speaking, his concern is quite distinct from that of Śaṅkara. Not unlike Bharata with respect to the naṭa, Kṛṣṇa looks to develop within Arjuna—albeit here as a person, not an emotion-educing actor—the realization that he encompasses the dialectical alternation between the two extremes of self as detached, self-reflective subjectivity and self as outwardly identical with the role (i.e., self as fully engaged, unreflective kṣatriya). As the soteriological exemplar of the Gītā, Arjuna is to realize that he is no longer subject to the conflict between reluctant and over-zealous role-conformism. Rather, he is to recognize this conflict as occurring within his own person, and hence within the scope of his own will, and to transform it into a dialectical interplay. The reply of the Gītā to the paradox of identity, then, contrary to that of the orthodoxy, presences this incongruity between world-renouncing and world-engaging ideals (nivṛtti and pravṛtti, mokṣa and dharma) with a view to encompassing the problem of action within that of the person.

The manner in which Kṛṣṇa has drawn out Arjuna's desire for renunciation in the midst of the imperative to action testifies to this. He does not coerce Arjuna into acting by subordinating his sense of self as an autonomous agent to his kṣatriya role-duty. Rather, he centers Arjuna in his desire for renunciation in action and then develops that desire so that Arjuna can (a) clarify the structure of agency as an interplay between the desire for being a limited what and the desire for negating one’s identification with one’s objectified role in lieu of being a detached who, and (b) exercise his agency by creatively

40 As examined earlier, these positions of reluctant and over-zealous role-conformism are argued by Śaṅkara (who advocates withdrawal from worldly engagements) and the Māṁśākās (whose enthusiasm
applying himself in and through his kṣatriya role. Implicit in this conversation, moreover, is a shift from acting as a doer of actions to acting as an aesthetically virtuous performer of roles. Arjuna is to find freedom not simply through renunciation in action, but through renunciation in role-play. By alternating between, on the one hand, questions and incomplete explanations (as examined above) that provoke self-reflection on Arjuna’s part, and on the other hand, explicit injunctions that command Arjuna to stand up and declare what he is, namely, a proud and powerful kṣatriya, Kṛṣṇa enables Arjuna to repeatedly explore the dialectical structure of agency that (according to this interpretation of the Gītā) is only implicit in the orthodox Hindu problem of action. Moreover, in so doing he transforms the desire implicit in Arjuna’s initial questions into a liberating desire for playing between these poles of personal identity, namely, personal feeling and depersonalized socially prescribed role. In this way, Arjuna is not simply to act out his personal feelings for his family, e.g., by distancing himself from the situation, nor is he to mimetically take on the enthusiasm of his kṣatriya role for killing. Rather, genuinely self-affirming freedom consists in his making precise the contradiction between the two poles that constitute the person and performing in full awareness of it as an expression of his desire for liberating, creative role-play.

---

41 This alternation between thought-provoking, world-withdrawing questions and action-directed, world-engaging injunctions occurs throughout the Gītā. After obliterating Arjuna’s self-understanding as a limited self (who is identical with either his personal feelings or his projected role), Kṛṣṇa projects Arjuna beyond the nakedness of the question “Who am I?” that is implicit in this realization and commands him as follows—“So stand up, and gain honour! After conquering enemies, enjoy an abundant reign. I’ve already destroyed them. You who sling arrows from the left and the right, be an instrument, and nothing more” (11.33).
1.5.c. Knowing How to Manage the Dialectic of Personal Identity: Yoga as Aesthetic Virtue

But while Kṛṣṇa has clarified the structure of agency and fostered Arjuna’s desire to encompass the dialectic of identity that is inscribed within his own person, the question remains—how is Arjuna to obtain the practical (as well as potentially liberating) wisdom to effectively negotiate this dialectic?

In responding to this issue, recall that the performance art of the nāṭa requires him to establish psychical distance between himself and the other through his own judgments and actions. That is, the actor must avoid either “under-distancing” or “over-distancing,” as this would infuse the space between himself and the other with either intensely personalized feeling or no feeling at all, respectively. Accordingly, the actor must negotiate this distance by becoming emotionally agile with respect to how he both presences others in the theater and engages those others through his own role-bound actions.\(^{42}\) In order to effectively play his role, the nāṭa must be capable of positively recognizing the world and others in it through his own thoughts, feelings, memories, etc., but still display a certain measure of detachment from those inner states—for he must still perform actions of the role that are disconnected from, and perhaps contrary to, the projected goals of those personalized thoughts, etc.

In order to illustrate this point and relate it to our examination of Arjuna’s crisis of personal identity, consider the example of an actor who is to take up a role whose projected feelings and goals violate his own personal feelings and inclinations. The actor performing the role of Rāma, for example, may have to express affection towards the
actress performing the role of Sītā, when in fact the actress herself is the object of the actor’s personal feelings of disrepute. Through under-distancing, that is, by personalizing his identification of the other as simply the actress and not the fictional character, Sītā, the actor indeed validates his own feelings and takes note of details that would likely pass by unnoticed by the audience. In the process of doing so, however, he would wholly dissociate himself from his role and thereby lose the power to participate in the theatrical production at all. For by encountering the world as personally his own, performing the contradiction between his feelings (as one who dislikes the actress playing the part of Sītā) and his role (as Rāma, the lover of Sītā) would entail a mere transgression of what he believes to be his own true self, and he would therefore resist taking up the assigned actions of the role. To the other extreme, if he over-distances from the other by abandoning his personalized interpretation and simply identifying her as the fictional, literally unreal character Sītā, then he indeed gains entry into the theater through taking on his role. But this “taking on” is no more than an empty, wholly dispassionate “pretending to be” the role. Consequently, the actor may lessen the seriousness of this violation of his personal feelings by making of himself an unwilling participant in the events of the performance. But he also disempowers himself by reducing himself to the status of a victim and in turn depriving the role of any vitality. The nāṭa, then, must establish proper psychical distance with respect to the other so that he can positively yet artfully play his role, rather than allowing the other to dominate his attention and compel

42 These two issues have been examined above in the discussion of Bharata’s nāṭya as strategies of psychophysically experiencing emotion and outwardly performing emotions, respectively.
him to seek escape from the ambiguous space between self and other by means of under- or over-distancing.  

This leads us back to the question posed above—how does the nāṭa master this kind of role-play in the face of the other? According to Bharata, the artistry of the nāṭa requires developing a certain emotional agility whereby the actor skillfully manages tensions and transitions between the personal, psycho-physical experience of emotion and the depersonalized outward expression of emotion with a view to performing in full awareness of the incongruity between the two.

But while the nāṭa can engage in practices such as the Rasabox exercise in order to develop such emotional agility, in what way can Kṛṣṇa educate Arjuna in the art of performing contradictions? For one (and as alluded to already), Arjuna must recognize that freedom is to be had not through an outward movement (i.e., by discerning alternative paths of action to pursue, e.g., protesting the war), but through doing the work of attention that occurs in the space between explicit choices. That is, he is to cultivate an attitude of renunciation in role-play by means of which he can properly establish psychical distance between self and other, and in turn, self qua subjectivity and self qua objectified role, in order to ultimately perform his role with creative power. In order to realize the desireless, but voluntary, action, then, through which Arjuna can effectively

43 Conversely, the actor can under-distance with respect to the role and in turn under-distance with respect to the other (i.e., the actress playing Sītā). But this would also undermine his artistry because he would simply be “acting out” his role in a highly personalized manner, rather than performing that contradiction between personal feeling and outwardly projected role. Also, the actor could over-distance with respect to his role by identifying with his personal feelings, which in turn would render him a reluctant participant in the theatrical performance, if he was able to motivate himself to act at all.  

On another note, I am borrowing the terms “under-distancing” and “over-distancing” from Edward Bullough’s “‘Psychical Distance’ as a Factor in Art and as an Aesthetic Principle,” British Journal of Psychology, Vol. 5 (1912), pp. 87-117.
do so, Kṛṣṇa elaborates a four-fold classification of action, with each of the following categories successively approaching the ideal of renunciation in role-play: quietism (akarma), “bad” action (vikarma), “good” action (kuśala karma), and yogic action. The first, quietism, is moved by the desire for resignation. But because it is impossible to stop acting altogether, quietism as a category of action is a misnomer. The standards for “bad” and “good” action are made clear by svadharma, or “one’s own societal duties”: violating one's svadharma represents “bad” (i.e., norm-transgressing) action; conforming to one’s svadharma represents “good” (i.e., norm-affirming) action. But even actions compelled by good habits bind one to samsāra and, in effect, diminish mokṣa (by virtue of the fact that such actions, rather than cultivate responsive-ness, bind one to patterns of reaction). It is out of concern for this problem that the Gītā introduces a fourth category: yoga.

The Gītā uses this term, yoga, in several different, though not unrelated, ways. I will here focus upon only three of them. Derived from the root verb “/yuj,” which means “to join, unite, attach, connect,” “yoga” can be translated as “union, junction, contact,

---

44 As Kṛṣṇa explains, one who pretends to inaction is to be seen as succumbing to the negative temptation “involved in outer control or lethargy of body—performing inner deeds of negative volition any way” (Gītā, Ch 4).
45 Vrinda Dalmiya has offered the following analysis of the Gītā’s concept of yoga. She suggests that we consider the following philosophical analogue of Arjuna’s dilemma:

P1: If one does bad acts, then bad saṃskāras are produced.
P2: If one does good acts, then good saṃskāras are produced.
P3: Saṃskāras (whether bad or good) lead to saṃsāra.
P4: One must either do good or bad acts.
C1: No matter what, re-birth results from acts.

Owing to its commitment to nīkāma-karma, the Gītā rejects the fourth premise—“One must either do good or bad acts.” And yet, it avoids having to resort to the quietist position by positing a fourth option. This is the effective import of yoga, and it lies at the heart of the ethical philosophy communicated in the Gītā. In contrast with the performer of merely “good” action, one who performs skilled action is not “doomed” (i.e., tethered to saṃsāra), for the action has been performed in a completely different way.
connection,” or “a yoke.” The Śāṅkhya-Yoga school, which deeply influenced the Gītā, developed methods of meditation and concentration of the mind by which one could unite with the Supreme Spirit. The various yogas, or methods of self-realization—among them, karma yoga (the path of action), jñāna yoga (the path of knowledge), and bhakti yoga (the path of devotion)—that Kṛṣṇa makes available to Arjuna involve a certain transcendence of the phenomenal world. Kṛṣṇa explains: “The wise who have united their intelligence [with the Divine], renouncing the fruits which their action yields and freed from the bonds of birth, reach the sorrowless state.” But while Arjuna is yoked to the divine, he does not depart from the manifest world. Rather, he re-connects with it in a way that is now desireless in the midst of engagement, for his actions are still directly infused with sensitivities to others and motivations to act, albeit ones that are not contingent upon particular outcomes.

The second and third meanings of the term “yoga” clarify that the yogic actor’s involvement in the world is qualitatively distinct from the merely dharmic agent, whose single-minded commitment to the social norm weakens the depth and precision of his attunement to what takes place. Thus, the second meaning of yoga is equanimity in the midst of extreme opposites. Fully attuned to his environment (by virtue of his being “yoked” to the world through divine intelligence), the yogic actor remains fully aware of the extremities characterizing given drastic situations but maintains a posture of detachment through his having established distance with respect to the world. Thus Kṛṣṇa says to Arjuna: “Fixed in yoga, do thy work, O winner of wealth (Arjuna), abandoning

---

“Treating alike pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat, then get ready for battle,” Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna. “Thus thou shalt not incur sin” (Gītā, 2.38).
attachment, with an even mind in success and failure, for evenness of mind is called "yoga."  

Skillfulness in action (kauśalam) is the third meaning of yoga: “One who has yoked his intelligence [with the Divine] (or is established in his intelligence) casts away even here both good and evil. Therefore strive for yoga; yoga is skill in action.” Not unlike the emotional athleticism that gets developed through the Rasabox exercise, yogic skillfulness consists in having mastered the how of worldly engagement, namely, knowing how to act in the world with heightened attention to what takes place without allowing psychical distance to collapse between self and other. What action the yogic actor performs may or may not be identical with what is ordinarily expected of him, for in fact the question of which action the yogic actor takes up is irrelevant. But how he performs this action is qualitatively distinct. And this how of yogic action involves not just renunciation in role-play, as demonstrated above. It also requires developing the emotional maturity necessary for encompassing the vertical extension of agency.

In clarifying what I mean by this phrase, “the vertical extension of agency,” and the relevance of emotional athleticism for encompassing this extension, consider that Arjuna (not unlike the example of the Rāma-bound actor who, as noted above, under-distances with respect to the actress) indeed sharpens his attention to his situation at the start of the Gītā by liberating his feelings from his kṣatriya role. But this near complete dissociation from his role comes at the expense of losing his power to act at all.

Moreover, while this depth of attention has an emotional component—namely, despair,

---

46 Gītā, 2.51.
47 Ibid., 2.48.
sorrow, and pity (karuna)—it is gained through under-distancing with respect to the other persons present. In other words, by personalizing his involvement in the world he allows the other to dominate his attention and thereby create a rupture between himself and his role. The feeling of pity indeed provides him with depth and a strong connection to the world. But it buries him and strips him of his power to willfully and creatively engage the world, quite literally bringing Arjuna to his knees, pulling him down to the earth, and preventing him from extending upwards both in terms of his attention (i.e., by preventing him from psychically distancing from the world) and in terms of his physical powers (i.e., he is unable to stand up). In order to extend upwards or vertically, then, he must first achieve a certain depersonalization with respect to his feelings (not just depersonalization with respect to his kṣatriya role) so that he can disinterestedly witness the world and enter into his role with creative power.

I have already demonstrated how Kṛṣṇa achieves this by instructing Arjuna that his True Self is not the empirical, worldly self (jīva), but the ātman. But this movement away from the world is not to affect a mere turning away from those others who are the object of his affection; it does not have in view merely assuming the role of kṣatriya and in turn overcoming his personal feelings altogether. Rather, by inscribing the felt opposition of self and other in the dialectic of withdrawal and involvement, this detachment from the other can be seen as a dialectical movement that has in view mastery over one’s feelings and, ultimately, one’s role. This mastery, moreover, has an emotive dimension, as it involves fostering the very desire for renunciation in role-play, as examined above. And the emotional richness of this performance results from the fact

48 Ibid., 2.50. The first half of this reference is not a repeat of the previous quote from Gītā, 2.51.
that the agent does not perform his role in a vacuum. Rather, he is to find himself in a theater, if you will, that is now constituted by the intentionality of ownerless (not personalized) emotions and that invites him (indeed, commands him) to encompass the vertical extension of agency, rather than simply bringing about over-distancing with respect to the world (whereby Arjuna would wholly abandon his personal feelings in lieu of taking on as his own the projected ends of his role). Thus, Kṛṣṇa looks to transform Arjuna into an athlete of emotion so that he can traverse this gap between worldly engagement and world-transcendence with ease and thereby strengthen his skill as a yogic actor who is perpetually engaged in renunciation in role-play.

It is important to emphasize, though, that Arjuna does not overcome the contradictions involved in exercising this form of creative agency. In fact, his deep attunement to “what is”—namely, his sense of being embedded in a world and attuned to the needs, desires, and misfortunes of others—while at the same time having a heightened awareness of “what he ought to do” (i.e., according to the expectations of his role) seems to merely accentuate this opposition between worldly engagement and world-contemplation. Yoga as skillfulness, however, does not develop the stance of a mere witness to this dialectical interplay. Rather, it empowers the agent to go beyond the authority of social-moral norms, on the one hand, and the dictates of personal feelings, on the other, by developing the posture of the nāṭa whose success as a performer rests upon his being fully aware of and capable of negotiating through role-play the incongruities between the claims of the two upon the person. Thus, yoga enables for the agent a certain skillfulness of performance that is marked by a radical openness to the world (which must
begin with a recognition of the autonomy of feeling apart from the norm) and the poise of equanimity that is necessary for gaining power over one’s inherited roles. But indispensable to this is the obtainment of those aesthetic virtues that are requisite for establishing proper psychical distance with respect to others and, in turn, performing one’s socially prescribed role as an expression of one’s own desire for role-play, rather than participating in the world out of attachment to the projected desires of the role itself (or resisting participation altogether).

1.6. The Dialectic of Personal Identity and Ethical Identity: Yoga and the Development of Ethical Virtue through Emotional Athleticism

1.6.a. Yoga and the Negotiation of Ethical Identity

But while yoga helps the agent to reconcile the dialectic of personal identity and obtain freedom of feeling and outward action through role-performance, what relevance does this have for ethical life? In fact, are not personal identity and ethical identity opposed by virtue of the latter’s excessive emphasis upon depersonalized conformity to the role at the expense of developing the life of feeling?

In responding to these questions, note that traditional Hindu (i.e., Mīmāmsā) ethics recognizes four necessary conditions for moral action: (1) positive action (as opposed to resignation, inaction, or withdrawal); (2) action that conforms to social-moral norms; (3) action that is performed without attachment to the fruits of action (i.e., niṣkāma-karma), and (4) action that expresses empathic concern for others. That the Gītā conforms to this understanding has only been hinted at thus far (in the discussion of
the Western interpretations of the *Gītā*’s ethics). Not only does the *Gītā* explicitly enjoin action that positively accords with one’s socially prescribed *dharma* in a way that is disinterested, the *Gītā* implicitly recognizes the irreducibly ethical value of concern for others. This is significant because it enables us to transition from the problem of personal identity to that of ethical identity in the *Gītā*. Arjuna’s crisis of identity is not simply an existential one involving a rupture between personalized feeling from within and depersonalized, role-bound expectation from without. This crisis is one of ethical identity that occurs between equally legitimate role-duties—namely, Arjuna’s *kula* and *kṣatriya dharmas*. How, then, can Arjuna harmonize these two distinctly moral yet contradictory imperatives? Moreover, how can the *Gītā* protect the moral agent against the criticisms of moral hypocrisy and disregard for the alterity of the other?

Responding to these questions requires interpreting the conflict between *dharmas* dialectically. Moreover, by inscribing the dialectic of ethical identity (sentiment-based *kula dharma* and role-based *kṣatriya dharma*) within that of personal identity (self and role) we can discern the importance of *yoga* for encompassing these oppositions and developing the person as a mature moral agent.

Above I examined how the ideal of *niskāma-karma* reconciles this issue by securing action that is positive, consistent with *dharma*, and desireless with respect to the fruits of the action. But thus far we have said nothing about how it maintains the agent’s concern for others. According to Karl Potter, *dharmic* action in the *Gītā*, unlike Kantian

---

duty and more orthodox Indian conceptions, must exemplify “an ethic of passionate concern for others.” Potter explains:

It is customary to render “dharma” as “duty” in English translations of Sanskrit works dealing with the “aims of life.” This rendering has the merit that it suggests, following Kant's use of the word “duty,” the crucial aspect of respect for the habits and wishes of others. It has the drawback, however, that it suggests to many people a rather stiff, perhaps even harsh, attitude, from which one tends to withdraw to something halfway between possessive love and “righteous” minimal concern. As a result, there is a supposed irreconcilability between an ethic of passionate concern for others and an ethic of duty which operates independently of concern for others. But we need not wish this difficulty upon Indian thought; “dharma” does not mean “duty” in any sense of lack of concern for others—quite the opposite. The attitude of dharma is an attitude of concern for others as a fundamental extension of oneself.50

The Gītā holds that desireless action (insofar as it is moral) must involve genuine concern for others. Moreover, this is moved by the Gītā’s concern for the emotional (not just rational) integrity of persons, both the other person and the agent himself who is to make some kind of felt connection with the other. In contrast with the action-centered models examined above, then, the Gītā is concerned not just with the problem of karma or moral action, but more fundamentally with that of the ethical person. Moreover, it acknowledges that the agent not only does extend into others through passionate concern, but ought to do so according to the mandate of dharma itself.

But of course, this extension into the world and other persons must be managed. For indeed, our concern for others and our commitment to our socially prescribed norms may come into conflict, and the one may overwhelm the other, as in the case of Arjuna at the start of the Gītā. But having situated the dialectic of ethical identity in that of personal identity, the moral agent (Arjuna) who has gained power over the dialectic of

---

50 Presuppositions of India's Philosophies, p. 8.
personal identity can now negotiate distance between himself and the other not by overcoming this gap—for this would preclude Arjuna from affirming both his obligation to the norm and his concern for the other. Rather, establishing distance must observe what Potter terms “maximum concern, minimal involvement.” That is, Arjuna must acknowledge his concern for others while keeping enough distance from the world so that he is still able to perform his kṣatriya dharma. Accordingly, the Gītā sophisticates the orthodox understanding of the conceptual problem of action in order to empower the agent to encompass the vertical extension of agency that alternates between the two movements discussed above—namely, worldly engagement and world-transcendence. It does so, moreover, not simply in order to develop personal identity, but ethical identity as well.

In order to clarify the deeper dimensions of desireless action (niṣkāma-karma) so that it not only fulfills moral action but also develops ethical identity, let us again consider the relevance of the doctrine of yoga. As demonstrated previously, yogic action supersedes conventional judgments of “good” and “bad.” But such skilled action is only a necessary condition for moral action, not a sufficient one. That is, in addressing the attitudinal issue of application, i.e., how to perform desireless action, yoga effectively brackets off the question of what posture one is to assume in a given situation, thereby opening the door to amoralism. Moreover, the attainment of yogic-like detachment likewise suspends one's investment in the subjectively felt realities of others. That is, one still recognizes one’s (possibly concernful) feelings for others, but is no longer compelled (in a deterministic sense) to secure their projected goals. Theoretically at least, then,

---

51 Presuppositions of India's Philosophies.
actions that (a) do not conform to svadharma or (b) bear no concern for others, can still be performed in a skilled, equanimous manner. But such actions would not constitute ethical action in the moral framework of the Gītā.

This leads to the following question: if yoga is at bottom morally neutral, then what value does it have for moral life? Yoga is integral to moral life because when it is performed in combination with the three other requirements noted above, it enables the agent to encompass the often-times competing claims of sentiment and the status quo, and empowers him to perform the conscious tension between these imperatives without eliminating it. In developing us as skillful players of our roles, yoga thereby enables us to effectively perform our moral roles. Meanwhile, rather than denigrating the claim of one’s feelings for the world, to the one extreme, or the authority of our socially prescribed role-duties, to the other, yoga gives us the practical wisdom requisite for negotiating the incongruities between the two so that we can exemplify the ideal of maximum concern for others, minimal attachment. In short, the Gītā inscribes the dialectic of ethical identity in that of personal identity and seizes upon the creative freedom of yoga in order to develop us not just as persons, but as ethical persons.

1.6.b. Response to the First Objection: Yoga and Moral Artistry in the Dialectic of Personal Identity and Ethical Identity

But let us consider two objections to the Gītā’s vision of the ethical person. The first objection to be taken up is that of moral hypocrisy. If we extend the meaning of hypocrisy to include not just pretending to have beliefs that one does not really have (e.g., failing to adhere to beliefs, virtues, etc., that one has advocated in word), but allowing
any inconsistency to stand between one’s values and one’s actions, then Arjuna is guilty of a certain moral hypocrisy that his tradition finds to be vicious. Consider, for example, that the *Mahābhārata* and orthodox Hinduism generally recognize the moral obligation to truth-telling out of regard for the integrity of both the social-moral hierarchy and the individual moral agent.\(^{52}\) If we include expressions of bodily language as a form of truth-telling, then falsely presenting oneself should constitute a violation of truth. And if truth-telling is moral, then hypocrisy is immoral by virtue of its degradation of truth and all that it implies, namely, regard for the continued authority of the social norm and the emotional integrity of moral agents. With respect to the former, truth-telling helps to perpetuate those conditions that undergird social harmony, such as establishing the habitual conformity of the individual’s patterns of emotional responsiveness to his socially prescribed roles, thereby deepening his concern for promoting social equilibrium in the future.\(^{53}\) Moreover, the education of the sentiments is a process that requires sensitivity to the emerging moral agent's felt need to be true to himself in the midst of taking on various social-moral roles; in order to sincerely conform to his role, the individual agent must first find an authentic connection with his role. The development of moral maturity, then, which involves the agent’s performing his prescribed roles voluntarily and out of a genuine desire, ought to tend towards a certain constancy of character and, upon the refinement of moral character, the avoidance of discontinuities.

\(^{52}\) “In Sanskrit, promise-keeping is sometimes classed as ‘protecting the truth’ (*satya-rakṣa*),” explains B.K. Matilal. “[B]oth in India and the West, the two obligations are invariably connected” (*Moral Dilemmas in the Mahābhārata*, ed. Bimal Kṛṣṇa Matilal, Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Delhi, India, 1989, p. 9).

\(^{53}\) Examples abound in the *Mahābhārata* where this regard for education of the moral sentiments finds expression. *See Moral Dilemmas in the Mahābhārata.*
between one’s values and one’s actions. But the hypocrisy of not only concealing, but transgressing one's real emotional state in performing one's duty is morally dangerous because it violates the spirit of social codes and betrays the agent’s emotional integrity. With respect to Arjuna’s yogic actions, then, while they may indeed lead to mokṣa and outwardly conform to dharma, they are nonetheless morally vicious because they indirectly promote hypocrisy and thereby enable a gap to stand between the values that he holds (e.g., love for family, friends) and the actions that he performs (e.g., destroying familial relations and friendships).

In answering this objection, let us first examine some of the problems internal to this understanding of moral hypocrisy. If we regard truth-telling as a universal ethical virtue and the incongruity between the self's socially projected appearance and subjectively felt reality as a vice to be overcome, then how can we explain those voluntary performances of hypocritical acts that, upon closer look, nonetheless appear to be suitable or even expected in given situations? In fact, hypocrisy is in some sense necessary for moral life. For one, “a certain amount of hypocrisy is needed for moral life to start,” notes Chakrabarti, “and there is nothing paradoxical about [this] because not all hypocrisy is immoral.”

We learn to be moral by putting aside our self-centered inclinations and molding our inner desires in accordance with publicly sanctioned forms of behavior. But properly managing one's inner desires is not constituted by subordinating “unruly” passions to social norms. Rather, success should be measured by

54 Chakrabarti, “Hypocrisy,” p. 50 (further details unavailable at this time). Most of us would likely disagree with Kant—for example, when he rigidly insists that we have a moral obligation to reveal to a would-be murderer (upon his interrogating us) the hiding place of a person who has been chased by that pursuer into our house. See Moral Dilemmas in the Mahābhārata, p. 14.
one’s internalizing the postures of depersonalized social roles through gradual practice, ideally to the point where concealment of one’s inner desires becomes increasingly less self-sacrificing and, ultimately, the individual takes up his roles in the future with greater measures of composure. Furthermore, such development is not simply a means to an end, namely, indoctrinating the agent in the customs of a socialized polite audience, for it is inevitable that our sentiments will on occasion continue to clash with our roles, and we must therefore continue to practice moral hypocrisy. Thus, even for properly socialized individuals, civility requires at least the occasional suspension or concealment of our private, inner desires in lieu of taking on the postures and practices that are appropriate to given interactions. In short, hypocrisy in the moral domain is necessary for the development of the person as a norm-abiding citizen and is in fact unavoidable as long as one continues to engage others.

The Gītā recognizes these dimensions of hypocrisy as relevant for mature moral agency. The Gītā holds that, in order to harmonize sentiment and duty and thereby develop ethical identity, one must progress from baser purusārthas, or “goals of man,” towards that of moral responsibility (dharma). In demonstrating this, however, and in keeping with our interest in the ethics of the Gītā as person-centered, as opposed to action-centered, let us take the purusārthas of traditional Hinduism not as “goals” of man in the ordinary sense, but as attitudes insofar as they represent “capacities for taking

---

56 Most of us are well aware that we practice insincerity in our day-to-day interactions for characteristically moral reasons. Whether it be out of respect for the moral sentiments of others in rather mundane situations (e.g., telling our mothers that their cooking is delicious, when in fact it is not) or in more extreme circumstances out of concern for the very survival of human life (e.g., lying to the murderer who has chased his pursuer into our house), moral hypocrisy is a common and important feature of moral life.
things in a certain way." Not unlike kāma (pleasure) and artha (material wealth), dharma is an attitude that we take towards certain objects in the world. Contrary to these other two attitudes, however, the dharmic attitude is exemplified in those relations between persons—in particular, familial, clan, caste, and class relations—wherein reciprocity replaces the relative self-centeredness that predominates in the kāma and artha attitudes. According to the classical Indian tradition, it is in and through dharmic relations that one is most likely to identify with others and, in turn, experience an enlarging of self that cannot be attained through relations with inanimate objects or persons that are encountered as mere objects of desire in the absence of genuine respect. Seen in this light, the moral orientation of the Gītā involves not an overcoming of one's passions or sentiments (which are the means by which we enter into the interiority of other persons), per se; for dharma itself entails a movement from lack of concern to concern. However, such moral excellence in the Gītā involves not a mere growth or intensification of passion, but also a gradual loss or letting-go of self so that our concern for others exemplifies what Potter terms “maximum concern for others with minimal attachment.” In the moral imagination of the Gītā, then, the development and refinement of ethical identity involves a certain measure of moral hypocrisy.

Further in keeping with the observations made above concerning the necessity of hypocrisy for ethical life, the Gītā recognizes not just the importance of hypocrisy for

---

57 Presuppositions of India's Philosophies, p. 10. The puruṣārthas are commonly translated as “goals of man.” But the term artha, like many Sanskrit terms, is multi-faceted, and Potter is here providing an interesting gloss on the term.
58 Ibid.
59 Potter explains: “The route to superior control... lies in the mastery of of attitudes of greater and greater concern coupled with less and less attachment or possessiveness” (Ibid.).
gradually coordinating our inner passions and role-duties. It also acknowledges that moral life is contextual—the unity of feeling and avowal depends upon the given situation, and ruptures between the two orders will inevitably arise. The often-times ambiguous nature of dharma, then, requires ethical persons to continue to exercise a certain measure of moral hypocrisy.

But the Gītā goes further than making the realistic assessment that we cannot insist upon the uninterrupted continuity of the orders of feeling and passion, nor does it hold that hypocrisy is simply a necessary evil to be tolerated in the development and continued conduct of the ethical person. Going much further than this, it suggests that moral hypocrisy actually occasions the person’s self-realization as a liberated yet creative role-player. Recall that the dialectic of personal identity is marked by the two poles of personal feeling and depersonalized self-presentation, while mastery over this interplay requires the agent to perform the conscious tension between the two. In dramatizing the struggle for moral truthfulness in terms of an opposition between maximum concern for the other and minimum involvement in the affairs of the world through the depersonalized conformity to one’s socially prescribed dharma, the Gītā not only mirrors the dialectical interplay of personal identity. It stimulates the dialectical movement between the two poles of inner feeling and outward role and enjoins their resolution through the performance of the contradiction between the two.

Of course, acts of hypocrisy can indeed be immoral, largely because they threaten to dissolve the network of trust that holds a community together and/or undermine the emotional integrity of the person. But according to the Gītā, hypocrisy is positively
virtuous when it is performed by particular persons, namely, yogic actors, in observance of certain conditions (i.e., the four conditions for moral action noted above). As for Arjuna’s action in the Gītā, it has the character of a virtuous moral hypocrisy. In contrast with the man of resignation, whose minimal concern places him “at the mercy of a large part of his environment,” the Gītā’s exemplary man of renunciation in role-play has disciplined his concern for others so that he is “more confident of his ability to realize himself in those moments when his self identifies with others... [by] finding a proper balance between the extremes of passionate identification on the one hand and non-concern on the other.” In order to make this progression from the merely dharmic attitude, wherein the individual has not resolved the dialectical interplay of worldly engagement and world-withdrawal, towards the attitude of mokṣa, the Gītā looks to demonstrate that the dialectic of personal identity and that of ethical identity do not only marginally intersect. Rather, they share a deep kinship. As noted above, the art of application involved in exercising agency is a basic, necessary feature of moral responsibility, for it empowers the individual to consciously perform the incongruity between definitively moral imperatives. Conversely, insofar as it is in the moral domain where we encounter situations of heightened tension between feeling and role, sentiment and duty, and yet we must act with skillful equanimity nonetheless, ethical life is equally essential to the development of personal identity. The form of hypocrisy implicitly

---

60 Ibid., p. 14.
61 At the cognitive level, he must exercise his agency by presencing the tension between the freedom from attachment to the objects of his desires and the freedom to anticipate and control the objects of his desires, objects that have been disclosed to him by virtue of his growing concern. At the level of action, meanwhile, the dharmic attitude alone does not guarantee the freedom required for such a performance, particularly when the social-moral norms of the dharmic order do not cohere with the order of our concern for others.
promoted in the mature dharmic attitude of the Gītā, then, is not only not damaging of community or person. When performed under the proper conditions by a yogic actor, moments of ethical impasse become transformed into occasions for realizing our true nature as creative moral role-players. Empowering us to perform the contradiction between a personal feeling and our role-based action so that we neither suppress authentic emotional connections to the world nor get lost in the question “Who am I?” so that we fail to take up our roles, yogically-based acts of moral hypocrisy are not vicious but in fact ethically virtuous and lead to the development of the person. Far from transgressing the authority of social norms or denigrating the integrity of the person, in short, ethical life actually completes the dialectic of personal identity.

1.6.c. Response to the Second Objection: From Virtue Aesthetics to Virtue Ethics: Ajuna as Athlete of the Emotions

Having answered the charge of moral hypocrisy, let us take up the second objection—Krṣṇa indeed makes Arjuna a skillful performer of his kṣatriya role-duty, but only at the expense of dismissing the alterity of the other. In drawing out this objection, consider the following episode from the Gītā. After explicating to Arjuna the doctrine of desireless action, recovering Arjuna’s desire to creatively resume his warrior role, and instructing him in the doctrine of yoga, Krṣṇa reveals to Arjuna his divine form. But this revelation is anything but comforting. Arjuna describes at length this terrifying vision:

Seeing You touching the sky and blazing with many colors, with mouths wide open and large glowing eyes, my heart trembles in fear and I find neither courage nor tranquility, O Vishnu! When I see your mouths with terrible tusks, resembling the fires of universal destruction, I lose my sense of direction and find no peace. Have mercy, O Lord of gods, Refuge of the world! All the sons of Dṛṛtarāṣṭra,
along with the hosts of kinds and Bhismā, Droṇa, and Karna, together with the chief warriors on our side, are quickly entering into Your fearful mouths with spiky tusks. Some are seen with their heads crushed, caught between Your teeth. As the many torrents or rivers rush toward the ocean, so do these men of the world enter into Your flaming mouths. As moths fly swiftly into a burning fire and perish there, so also do men swiftly enter into Your mouths to their own destruction.⁶²

Kṛṣṇa has brought to life all of Arjuna’s initial misgivings about taking up his role. Not surprisingly, Arjuna is again stricken with the intensely personalized emotions (bhāvas) of grief (śoka) and fear (bhaya), as he begs Kṛṣṇa to have mercy on the world. This moves the question—if Kṛṣṇa is indeed concerned to recover Arjuna’s desire to take up his ksatriya dharma, then what purpose could this revelation serve? Certainly it is not to give him secret clues as to how victory can be secured, for Kṛṣṇa’s self-disclosure is in fact an accurate foretelling of the destruction of the world that is to come through the war.

Interestingly, while Arjuna initially experiences a “momentary inhibition [of the] vital forces” not unlike at the beginning of the Gītā, here he undergoes a certain self-transformation. Instead of raw despair and fear, here he is seized by an experience of awe that approximates the experience of the Kantian sublime.⁶³ Indeed, Arjuna is still trembling at the terrifying sight of Kṛṣṇa's divinity.⁶⁴ And indeed, Arjuna recovers from this experience by persevering through the double movement of the will and the felt repulsion from the world by centering himself in the moral will. But closer examination

⁶² Gītā, 11.24 – 11.29.
⁶³ The Gītā explains: “Then Arjuna, winner of wealth, was seized by awe; his hair stood on end. Bowing, with folded hands, with his head bent, towards the god, he said: ... ‘Tell me who you are in your terrible form. May you be honoured, Chosen of the Gods. Show compassion!’” Gītā, 11.14, 11.31.
⁶⁴ The Gītā reads: “When he [Arjuna] heard the words of the lovely-haired god, Arjuna, trembling despite his kingly crown, his hands folded, fearful, and bowing down, spoke to Kṛṣṇa again” (11.35).
of the text suggests that the Gītā surpasses a Kantian interpretation, which looks beyond the alterity of the other towards the mere fulfillment of the moral law.\textsuperscript{65} This response centers around the importance of yoga for developing Arjuna’s emotional agility so that he can become a kind of moral artist. Having learned the skillfulness and equanimity of yoga, Arjuna's fear is simultaneously attended by a certain tranquility; he has experienced an attitudinal shift that is marked by a transformation from self-pity and impotence to a feeling of reverential wonder and a recovery of power. But this power is not Kantian in nature; it is not a power that involves an overcoming of the world, per se. The psychical distance that gets established with respect to the world does not entail an outright loss of affection for the world and a turning away from sensibility. Rather, Kṛṣṇa uproots within Arjuna the very illusion that the world stands opposed to him and, in turn, merits an overcoming at all.

In disclosing his divine nature, then, Kṛṣṇa presents himself as identical with the Supreme Spirit that is immanent in the world. In turn, he directs Arjuna to encounter the phenomenal world out of loving devotion for Kṛṣṇa himself. The Gītā explains: “If a thousand suns had risen in the sky all at once, such brilliance would be the brilliance of that great self. There, Arjuna, the son of Pāṇḍu, saw in the body of the God of gods the whole world, standing as one, and yet divided up in many ways.”\textsuperscript{66} The glory and brilliance that is Kṛṣṇa is the glory of the world, for Kṛṣṇa is manifest in all phenomena.

\textsuperscript{65}For Kant, we are to extend considerability to others only indirectly out of respect for the moral law, not directly on account of their well-being. Kant distinguishes between two types of love: practical love, which is moved by respect for the moral law, and pathological love, which is directed towards human persons by the power of the sentiments. Kant explains: “[L]ove, as an affection, cannot be commanded, but beneficence for duty’s sake may… This is practical love, and not pathological—a love which is seated in the will, and not in the propensions of sense—in principles of action and not of tender sympathy; and it is this love alone which can be commanded” (see Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals).
Far from looking beyond the alterity of other persons, then, with a view to fulfilling some solipsistic quest for the moral law, Arjuna becomes acutely aware of the presence of other persons and acts in full awareness of his concern for these others. Accordingly, Arjuna's devotion to Kṛṣṇa is to express itself in his devotion to the world of action and multiplicity. Thus, Kṛṣṇa explains to Arjuna:

But, Son of Pritha, those whose selves are great, abiding in divine nature, they honour me with a single mind, knowing me as the imperishable one, the beginning of all beings... [T]hrough the sacrifice of wisdom, worship me as the oneness which is multiple, placed in many ways, facing all sides... I am the same in all beings.  

Kṛṣṇa affects within Arjuna a shift whereby he is to become a lover of all things. And this devotion does not simply distance Arjuna from the world, it also deepens his sense of being embedded in the world and in the midst of others. Why, then, does Kṛṣṇa disclose his divine form to Arjuna? He does so in order to instill within Arjuna those aesthetic virtues that are necessary for establishing distance with respect to others and, in turn, embodying the moral ideal of maximum concern, minimal attachment. And he accomplishes this, moreover, by bringing about the maximum decrease of distance (through his heightening Arjuna’s concern for the world) without allowing its collapse (through his having instructed Arjuna in the doctrine of yoga, which secures for him equanimity).

But this love for the other displayed by Arjuna as an expression of his devotion to Kṛṣṇa takes on a different dimension in light of the soteriological nature of this realization. Insofar as (a) Arjuna transcends his limited condition and identifies with his

---

ātman, (b) his ātman is Krṣṇa himself (as the Supreme Spirit), and (c) Krṣṇa has now made himself manifest as the world of multiplicity, then it follows that (d) Arjuna himself realizes his identity with Krṣṇa and becomes one with all beings in the world. And this realization comes to him as he obtains embodied knowledge of his True Self. The True Self with which Arjuna is identical is neither a merely transcendent, other-worldly witness, nor a limited being or jīva. He is rather a play between oneness and the many, consciousness and Becoming, detachment and involvement. The other, meanwhile, is presenced as neither an illusion to be transcended, nor a limited entity divorced from transcendent consciousness. Rather, Arjuna encounters the other as both other and self.

And just as earlier he mastered the double movement of the will between involvement in and transcendence of the world of multiplicity that underwrites his own psychology, Arjuna now encompasses this alternation as the very alternation of Being itself. The deepening of agency that he experiences now has a rich ontological dimension. Arjuna is not made aware of the world as an object existing out there and hence as mere other to be attended to from a distance, but as encompassed within the sphere of his own consciousness. Accordingly, rather than suppressing one movement in favor of the other by, for example, abiding by the will of duty for duty’s sake alone and over-distancing from the other in the process, Arjuna looks to play between these movements as an expression of his True Self.

In this way, the world gets disclosed to Arjuna as the theater of agency. And he realizes himself as the creative artist who disinterestedly witnesses this theater, performs within it, and indeed is so deeply embedded in all its objects that he is the world of
multiplicity. And what is it that has enabled Arjuna to master this interplay? I argue that an indispensable aspect of this mastery is emotional athleticism. And as demonstrated above, this has been enabled through his instruction in yoga, and it enables him to perform those contradictions that are necessary for realizing his identity with the Supreme Spirit that extends vertically from transcendent, pure consciousness and the manifest world of action and multiplicity.

The rupture between feeling and role dramatized at the beginning of the Gītā, then, has exposed that hidden break in the heart of Arjuna’s commitment to the world. Through the doctrine of desireless action (niṣkāma-karma) and the art of yogic action, meanwhile, Krṣṇa provides Arjuna with a model for not only recovering his capacity to act, but the awareness of his freedom to play his role as an expression of his True Self. Through the aesthetic virtues of emotional athleticism, moreover, Arjuna simultaneously recovers an authentic emotional connection with the world that at the same time empowers him to creatively perform his role as an expression of his power and freedom to author the play of the world itself. But this mastery is not for his own selfish purposes. In mastering the ethical virtues of positive concern for others and respect for the authority of social-moral norms, he acts not on behalf of his limited self, but the True Self that is identical with all things. It is in the ethical domain, then, that we bring the dialectic of personal identity to its completion. And this occurs not by its subordinating our personal feelings to the authority of the moral norm (as Kant endorses) and realizing the priority of the other. Rather, ethical life leads to self-realization by its provoking and training us to encompass the double movement of the will and, ultimately, realize the deep vertical
extension of the person that discloses itself not in a world dominated by causal laws and connections, but one that has been transformed into the theater of agency. In making Arjuna an athlete of moral emotion, then, Krṣṇa transforms him into a kind of moral artist who creates a space for realizing his freedom as a true person.

1.7. Conclusion: the Problem of the Horizontal Extension of Ethical Agency in the Gītā

In closing this chapter, consider that we are not just act-ors who do actions, but act-ors who perform roles. Indeed, as the Gītā recognizes, our past actions come to bear upon the present moment and influence our future lives. But the Gītā aims to go beyond the orthodox Indian framing of the opposition between ethical involvement in and salvific transcendence of the world by focusing upon how we can better mediate this seeming conflict through creative role-play. Our experience of the world is largely framed by our roles, then, but we must do the work of attention between those goals projected by our roles so that we can uproot those secret breaks in our commitment to the world, secrets that only manifest when our roles deeply transgress the order of sentiment. The work of gaining power over our roles, however, and thereby deepening our commitment to the world, requires us to cultivate certain aesthetic virtues. Krṣṇa aims to do so within Arjuna, first by instructing him in the doctrines of desireless action (for the fruits) and yoga. He then makes this knowledge embodied by creating a safe space wherein Arjuna can explore and experiment with the incongruity between inner feeling and role-duty, involvement in and transcendence of the world. This exploration culminates in his revelation to Arjuna, a revelation that brings this incongruity to its highest point of
tension without allowing it to collapse, thereby enabling Arjuna to master the double movement of the will between active engagement and contemplative withdrawal. Furthermore, the success of Krṣṇa’s instruction hinges upon his transforming the ethical domain from a world that looms over the person and suffocates his freedom into a theater of agency wherein he can complete the dialectic of personal identity through a kind of moral artistry.

But while the Gītā successfully reconciles some of the tensions underlying orthodox Hindu conceptions of the person, its theorization of personal and ethical identities nonetheless suffers from some significant shortcomings. Let us consider some of these in anticipation of the central problem of the next chapter. And just as we looked to Bharata’s theory of the nāṭa for clues to the Gītā’s conceptual innovations, so too do we turn to the classical Indian aesthetic theory of the actor in search of clues to the limitations of the Gītā’s response to the problem of creative moral agency.

This consideration involves first noting that there exist a number of performance-enhancing techniques for actors, many of which are concerned with the problem of application (i.e., objectifying, representing, or playing roles in a theatrical context). What distinguishes those methods derived from Bharata’s Nāṭyaśāstra is their emphasis upon skillfulness in knowing how to perform roles. That is, Bharata’s theory of performance focuses upon developing facility with respect to the emotional challenges of playing roles, namely, how one is to play a given role with which he may not necessarily identify. Schechner notes how his own Rasabox approach has appropriated the performance theory propounded by the Nāṭyaśāstra with a slight modification:
What makes our use of *rasa* “Western” is that rather than codifying the expression of emotion through particular gestures and facial expressions that are always performed in the same way (as in classical Indian dance), we use space to delineate each *rasa*, and allow the individual performer to find her own expression of the emotion/s contained within it.\(^{68}\)

Schechner emphasizes improvisation in his adaptation of Bharata’s theory because he believes that this change compensates to some degree for a certain restriction of the *nāṭa*’s freedom of application, namely, that only certain gestures or objectified forms of behavior are suitable in playing a given role or evoking a given emotion. Schechner explains how this limitation characterizes even his own Rasabox technique:\(^{69}\)

The Rasaboxes are not meant to supplant other forms of actor training. Objectives, through-lines, creative improvisations, and other widely used Western approaches can still be used to answer the “what” questions of acting, while the Rasaboxes can be used, in combination with them, to answer the “how” questions. Qualitative changes can be made by applying the idea of *rasa* to a character, a scene, even an entire play. At times it is useful to think of *rasa* as a kind of tonality, or rhythm of performance, which can be modulated as the pitch/key or the tempo/rhythm of a piece of music can be modulated.\(^{70}\)

Bharata’s *rasa*-based theory of performance speaks to the “how” or qualitative question of applying roles. But while this indeed secures for the actor the skillfulness necessary to perform the conscious tension between inner desire and outward expression, its emphasis upon a pre-determined codification of the expression of emotion places unnecessary limits upon exploring the “what” dimension of expressive possibilities, i.e., what gestures are deemed appropriate to the expression of a given role or emotion.

In returning to our discussion of virtue in the *Gītā*, we have already seen how this same conceptual innovation concerning the “how” of application is introduced in the

\(^{68}\) “Rasaesthetics”.

\(^{69}\) This is not to suggest that any single theory of performance training could or should be complete in and of itself.
moral thinking of orthodox Hindu culture by Kṛṣṇa’s discussion of yoga as skillful action. But not unlike Bharata, Kṛṣṇa limits the freedom of the agent to express himself—in terms of “what” roles or gestures are suitable in a given situation—by emphasizing conformity to an ethical codificatory scheme over the creative improvisational capacities of the individual in playing moral roles. In demonstrating this, consider the following statement made by Kṛṣṇa in the final chapter of the Gītā. Having just opened Arjuna to a radically new and liberating way of understanding himself in relation to the world, Kṛṣṇa explicitly devalues his freedom to experiment with what identity he is to take on in the social-moral domain. Kṛṣṇa explains:

Man attains true perfection by devoting himself to his own duty... Better is one's own duty though imperfectly done than the duty of another carried out perfectly. By performing actions in accordance with one's own nature, one does not incur sin. One should not abandon the work suited to his nature, even though it may be deficient.

The space that Kṛṣṇa creates for Arjuna to explore the interrelation between self qua subjectively felt reality and self qua outwardly objectified, socially prescribed role does not invite the free exploration of alternative ways of being in the world. To the contrary, he details those actions that are fitting (in an exclusive sense) with respect to his role-duty, which has been strictly determined by his socially-determined located-ness in the dharmic order. In short, while Kṛṣṇa presents a compelling theory of how we are to

---

70 “Rasaesthetics.”
71 Gītā, 18.45 – 18.48.
72 Kṛṣṇa explains: “The duties assigned to brahmins, ksatriyas, vaisyas and śūdras are distributed according to the modes born of their innate nature, O scorcher of the foe. Serenity, self-control, penance, purity, patience, uprightness, wisdom, knowledge, and religious faith are the duties of a brahmin, born of his own nature. Heroism, splendor, firmness, resourcefulness, refusal to flee from battle, generosity and leadership are the duties of a ksatriya, born of his own nature. Agriculture, cow-herding and trade are the duties of a vaishya, born of his innate nature, while work which consists of service is the duty of a sudra, born of his own nature” (Gītā, 18.41 – 18.44).
perform our roles, his response to the question of what roles we are to play is highly unsophisticated and morally questionable, particularly for a post-Kantian audience. Thus, the Gītā only partly liberates the individual as an agent from the orthodox conservatism of Pūrva Mīmāṃsā and Advaita Vedānta, failing to develop a sense of creative social agency whereby one can intelligently intervene and interrupt the seemingly inevitable consequences of broader social and political trends.73

In light of the Gītā’s failure to theorize and develop the horizontal extension of agency (largely as a consequence of its emphasis upon the vertical extension of agency), let us now turn to debates in Western philosophy concerning the interrelation between the individual and society and the opposition of subject and role, feeling and role-duty, self and other. Not unlike in this chapter, this examination will culminate in a theory of play that attempts to expand the agent’s sense of self and powers of creative role-play. However, the contrasts between this theory of play and that of the Gītā will help to disclose new dimensions of the nature of creative moral agency.

73 But note that while the Gītā does not escape ethicist criticisms, this is not to say that it falls into aestheticism—whereby any and all immoral behaviors can be condoned without damaging its integrity as a work of literature. For as demonstrated above, the Gītā does present a moral philosophy to supplement its theory of freedom; it does specify conditions whereby any and all acts, so long as they are performed disinterestedly, are NOT endorsable from a moral point of view. They must also, according to the Gītā, express concern for others and conform to the conventional standards of fit-ness as determined by one’s role in the orthodox Hindu social hierarchy. Thus, while I am arguing that the creative intentionality of the Gītā cannot be captured by ethicist interpretations, and that we can provide new insights into the Gītā by using the Nātyaśāstra as a critical methodology for interpreting the Gītā, I am not arguing that the Gītā is “aestheticist” or “autonomist” with respect to ethical considerations.
Chapter 2: Western Ideals of the Self and Negotiating Moral Agency through Play: Imaginative Variation and the Horizontal Play of Agency

2.1. Introduction

As demonstrated in the analysis of the ethics of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, moral life is always in the process of revising itself. This gets highlighted, moreover, in situations of moral dilemma (such as that of the *Gītā*) wherein the social-moral norms available to us lose their practical traction because of their inapplicability. The problem of the applicability of social-moral norms also arises in a Western context. Furthermore, some of these Western debates, not unlike the *Gītā*, focus on the problem of personal identity. In both contexts this problem gets interpreted as resting upon a rupture between two aspects of the self—(a) the self as a unique “myself” (which is disclosed by personal feeling) and (b) the self as a one-among-many social individual (which is disclosed by the awareness of oneself as a depersonalized role). By turning to the aesthetic domain for a response to this problem (or to put it more strongly, as Paul Ricoeur does, this paradox), this chapter aims to draw out the nuances and subtle differences between the ethical positions of the *Gītā* and Ricoeur, whose play-centered orientation, I argue, presents a compelling response to the problem of moral agency in a Western context.

This chapter examines Ricoeur’s theory of ethical agency in relation to two models of the self that were introduced into the history of Western moral life at least as early as the Renaissance and Romanticism. These models are sincerity and authenticity, respectively, and they call our attention to the imperative to be true to oneself by eliminating the discrepancy between feeling, avowal, and practice. Moreover, they also point to the emergence of two developments in the orientation of the individual to other
persons: the concept of the individual as an autonomous self and that of society. Prior to her becoming “an individual,” the person did not have an awareness of internal space nor a felt need for privacy. This is related to the birth of the idea of society. As society came to have a life of its own, “it forced itself upon the very senses,” thereby making the person immanently aware that she was being watched by actual human others.\textsuperscript{74} The ideals of sincerity and authenticity arise in this context. The individual stands in juxtaposition to an audience (i.e., society). As a result of her new-found autonomy, she requires a private space in which to care for the interior landscape. But ever aware of her being seen, she must also somehow account for the gap between self and society. She must somehow negotiate the conflict between the awareness of herself as an autonomous, self-reflective subject (i.e., a unique “myself”) and the awareness of herself as an objectified, socially-conditioned other (i.e., a one-among-many social individual).

Accordingly, I first examine how the ideals of sincerity and authenticity seek to overcome this opposition of society and the individual by asserting the primacy of the other-regarding moral norm and the self-originating aesthetic imperative, respectively. I begin by arguing that David Hume’s “just person” exemplifies the ideal of sincerity. After demonstrating how the decline of the concept of sincerity is reflected in Hume’s failure to adequately theorize the influence of society upon the individual, I examine the rise of the ideal of authenticity, which is the centerpiece of Martin Heidegger’s phenomenology. But while Heideggerian authenticity in some sense frees the individual from the expectations of others, its hostility towards society not only undermines moral

\textsuperscript{74} As Lionel Trilling tells us, an individual must have an audience, and his audience was the public that had been created by society. See Lionel Trilling, \textit{Sincerity and Authenticity}, Cambridge, Massachusetts:
life. This model undercuts the creative power of the agent himself because, not unlike the ideal of sincerity, it insists upon preserving the pure continuity of feeling and avowal.

The latter part of this chapter is committed to demonstrating how a hermeneutic theory of agency can effectively negotiate tensions underlying ethical life. This involves demonstrating how the dialectic of personal identity—namely, identity as socially projected role and identity as self-reflective subject—is implied by Ricoeur’s theory of the self as a kind of hermeneutic interplay between two conceptions of identity—idem and ipse. Moreover, this involves examining how this hermeneutic model of agency can serve as a basis for reconsidering the interrelation of the aesthetic and moral domains. By inscribing the opposition between the moral norm and aesthetic authenticity within the dialectic of idem and ipse, Ricoeur enables us to seize upon the power of artistic imagination for structuring the intersubjective self towards mature ethical agency. Through an aesthetic turn, Ricoeur, not unlike the Gitā, transforms the conflict between self and society into a creative tension, and develops the knowing how that is requisite for properly negotiating the interplay between the self as a unique “myself” and the self as a one-among-many social individual. And yet, this model goes beyond the Gitā’s vision of moral agency by facilitating not just a vertical extension of the person but also a horizontal one.

2.2. Overcoming the Ambiguity of Identity through the Ideal of Sincerity: Moral Sincerity in Hume’s Moral Sentiment Theory and the Problem with the Desire To Be the Role

Historically speaking, the sincere man initially committed to revealing himself in all his truth regardless of its consequences for others. In eighteenth century Britain, however, sincerity took on a decisively moral character. To be true to oneself in terms of British sincerity was not simply to affirm oneself as an autonomous individual, but to recognize one's place in society and the moral responsibilities that accord with that situatedness in the social hierarchy. Lionel Trilling confirms this attitude as a general feature of British moral sensibilities when he explains that one must be “honest” with respect to one’s private feelings; that is, one must recognize that they are accidental and subordinate to those generalizable feelings that accord favorably with the motives deemed suitable for one’s role-duties. This accommodation made by the sincere man in the face of his newly discovered “society,” however, reduces the very mission of “being true to oneself” to “avoiding falsity in the face of the other.” Trilling notes: “If one is true to one’s own self for the purpose of avoiding falsehood to others, is one being truly true to one’s own self? The moral end in view implies a public end in view, with all that this suggests of the esteem and fair repute that follow upon the correct fulfillment of a public role.”\footnote{Sincerity and Authenticity, p. 9.} A concern for the uninterrupted continuity of our socially projected roles and our being recognized by others as the same person across time wins out in the conceptual construction of the person envisaged by moral sincerity. But in order not to misrepresent himself, the morally sincere individual so thoroughly identifies with his socially prescribed role and its power to gain the esteem of others that he reifies the life of his role and takes on its projected desires, motivations, and feelings as his own.
In this section I use Trilling’s analysis of moral sincerity as a critical methodology for drawing out the problematic implications of Hume’s understanding of ethical identity. In order to frame this examination and thereby prepare the reader for the argument that Hume’s moral exemplar lacks creative imagination, I begin by investigating the phenomenon of imaginative resistance in Hume’s aesthetic theory of taste. I then argue that Hume’s moral sentiment theory can be read as an articulation of the ideal of moral sincerity, while his “just person” exemplifies this ideal. Next, I demonstrate how the sincerity of the just person, not unlike that of the morally sincere Englishman, boils down to a mere commitment to avoid deception. And finally, I analyze the ethical problems resulting from superimposing the ends of one’s socially projected role upon one’s own personal feelings. From the brief examination of the phenomenon of imaginative resistance in Hume’s aesthetic theory, then, to the clarification of how the desire to be the role underlies the self-understanding of Hume’s ethical exemplar, I argue that Humean moral sentiment theory devalues the capacity of the agent to creatively appropriate his social-moral inheritance and imaginatively encounter the other.

2.2.a. The Problem of Imaginative Resistance in Hume’s Aesthetics: Securing the Integrity of the Self against the Immoral Other

Hume's philosophical aesthetics acknowledges that we can suspend our commitment to our socially prescribed roles and enter into the interiority of fictional others (even immoral ones) in the context of the art experience. However, he tells us that we ought not to when the suspension of our prejudices could create psychological distance between ourselves as self-reflective subjects and our socially prescribed role-
models. Here I demonstrate that, according to Hume, sentiment is to protect the integral unity of the self and the role against the intrusions of immoral others.

In the encounter with the artwork, Hume explains that we are to wholly suspend our prejudices. Prejudices are seen to be contrary to good taste, and holding to them will only undermine our receiving aesthetic pleasure from the art experience. Thus, it is not only possible but desirable to suspend one's sense of self by temporarily deferring one's preconceptions. However, this suspension of prejudices does not have in view engaging in a kind of hermeneutic play with the artwork; aesthetic experience is not to put the self at risk in any considerable way. It is rather to enhance the status quo, produce characteristically satisfying feelings already familiar to a social elite, and re-affirm the spectator in his "wholeness of self, in the directness and consistency of his relation to things, and in his submission to a traditional morality."  

This leads to the next point. For Hume, standards of taste have an inescapable moral dimension. That which threatens the celebration of the norms undergirding the status quo are to be rejected accordingly. Hume explains:

[W]here the ideas of morality and decency alter from one age to another, and where vicious manners are described, without being marked with the proper characters of blame and disapprobation, this must be allowed to disfigure the poem, and to be a real deformity. I cannot, nor is it proper I should, enter into such sentiments; and however I may excuse the poet, on account of the manners of his age, I can never relish the composition.

The portrayal of immoral attitudes and events in the absence of explicit denunciation of those attitudes and events constitutes for Hume an aesthetic flaw; for if the aesthete is to

---

76 This is actually a quote from Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, p. 39. But it is in keeping with the thrust of Hume's “Of the Standard of Taste.”
give himself over to the artist by suspending his prejudices, he must feel comfortable that
the artist will not betray his trust by challenging him to reconsider the nature of his
commitment to these prejudices. This strong ethicism by which Hume denounces such
“immoral artworks” also extends to the proper judgment of displeasing fictional
characters. Again, Hume writes:

We are not interested in the fortunes and sentiments of such rough heroes; we are
displeased to find the limits of vice and virtue so much confounded; and whatever
indulgence we may give to the writer on account of his prejudices, we cannot
prevail on ourselves to enter into his sentiments, or bear an affection to characters
which we plainly discover to be blamable.78

We are to suspend our prejudices only in the encounter with relishable works of art and
characters, for these alone promise to ratify the social-moral order by means of which we
identify ourselves.

But while Hume tells us that we ordinarily do not and ought not to give ourselves
over to immoral artworks and characters, what is unclear is the possibility of doing so.
Note that in the quotation referred to just now Hume claims that “we cannot prevail on
ourselves to enter into his [the writer's] sentiments.” But this “cannot” is ambiguous. In
light of the capacity of Hume's aesthete to suspend his prejudices in the encounter with
the artwork, in addition to the simple fact (one to which Hume does not pay due
attention) that we often do identify with and enjoy immoral artworks and fictional
characters, I argue that the meaning of “cannot” here is more normative than descriptive.
And if in fact we are able but simply ought not to open ourselves to immoral works of art
and identify with immoral characters, then against what is Hume so guarded here? As

77 David Hume, Of the Standard of Taste and Other Essays, ed. John W. Lenz, Englewood Cliffs, NJ:
Hume explains, we generally do and ought to resist this because it would bring violence upon us in a fundamental way. “[A] very violent effort is requisite to change our judgment of manners,” Hume explains, “and excite sentiments of approbation or blame, love or hatred, different from those to which the mind, from long custom, has been familiarized.” Our judgments are determined largely by affective-cognitive habits of mind. To go against the inertia of these habits would not only require great effort, this effort would do violence upon us by damaging the integrity of the matrix of habits, roles and relations that constitute us as individuals. A function of taste, then, or at least good taste, is the enhancement of the felt awareness of ourselves as identifiable, morally upstanding persons through the unification of aesthetic and moral categories, which can occur either positively (e.g., celebrating our cultural heroes with a view to re-committing us to our socially prescribed roles) or negatively (e.g., juxtaposing us against socially transgressive others).

Thus, in spite of his license to disinterestedly bear witness to fictional events that bear no consequence upon social reality, in the face of disagreeable (fictional) others the aesthete ought to cling to his prejudices by an act of imaginative resistance. Moreover, he is to do so out of concern for heightening that conscious certitude of himself as a refined judge of proper standards of taste. He is to guard against any effort that threatens to create a “violent” rupture in his own self-awareness as an integral, unitary, and above all, social norm-abiding individual.

---

78 Ibid., pp. 21-2.
79 Ibid., p. 22.
80 Hume’s aesthete is presumably a morally refined judge by virtue of his capacity to recognize proper standards of taste.
2.2.b. The Humean Ideal as One of Moral Sincerity: Acting Moral, Being Moral

Having demonstrated how the agent’s freedom to imaginatively identify with the other is to be subordinated to the authority of the social norm in the safe space of the theater, I now examine how this same phenomenon occurs in the “theater” of social-moral life and the problematic implications of this for ethical identity. In doing so, let us first consider that it is plausible to attribute the ideal of moral sincerity (of the British kind) to Hume’s moral sentiment theory. Hume does not use this terminology. However, his emphasis on the importance of not misrepresenting oneself to others, generating practical power for moral ends, and developing constancy of good moral character in order to maintain trustworthiness within the community, provide sufficient grounds for demonstrating a philosophical connection between Hume’s ethical theory and the emergence of sincerity as a moral ideal in eighteenth-century England.

According to Hume, morality arises out of our instinctual make-up. The instincts help to secure our survival by enabling, among other things, basic bodily actions and cognitive operations that are necessary for exercising some measure of control over our environment. The instincts also implant within us the passions, which motivate us to secure basic biological needs. But not all passions are purely self-interested. Hume accounts for this with the natural virtues—e.g., benevolence, generosity, love of one’s children, etc.—which prompt us to protect the well-being of others.81

---

81 As passions, the natural virtues are characteristics embedded as fundamental propensities of human nature. Hume gives the example of the devoted mother as exemplifying the natural virtues: “What interest can a fond mother have in view, who loses her health by assiduous attendance on her sick child, and afterwards languishes and dies of grief, when freed, by its death, from the slavery of that attendance?...
The instincts secure moral agency by means of sympathetic identification. This mechanism operates as follows. The spectator forms an idea of the other person’s motive by inferring the existence of a passion from the other’s action. The spectator’s idea of the actor’s passion then becomes enlivened by the “idea, or rather impression,” of himself.\footnote{Hume divides perception into two types: impressions and ideas. While the passion identified as motivating the action of the actor is inferred by the spectator, and hence is in this sense known as an idea, the mechanism of sympathy makes that passion its own, transforming the idea into an impression by perceiving immediately the reflection of the passion (via the idea) now as an impression.} This enables one to share in the pleasures and pains of the other, which in turn accords with the finding of a trait that is experienced as agreeable or disagreeable. This encounter finally results in a moral judgment of the actor’s character. But sentiment does not simply generate an epistemic process. It also manifests concern for states of affairs purposively, thereby facilitating continuity between our feelings and our actions with a view to actively cultivating relationships with others. As Hume explains, “What is honourable, what is fair, what is becoming, what is noble, what is generous, takes possession of the heart, and animates us to embrace and maintain it.”\footnote{An Enquiry, p. 75.} In short, sentiment and sympathy undergird moral life by attuning us to our fellow beings and defining the ends that we are to actively pursue out of concern for them.

To this end, reason plays an instrumental role. Itself void of passion, reason is incapable of motivating us to action.\footnote{“Reason, being cool and disengaged, is no motive to action,” Hume tells us (Ibid., p. 163).} But it is morally indispensable insofar as it illuminates those conditions that promise to either frustrate or facilitate the satisfaction of human desires. As for guarding against purely self-interested inclinations, Hume holds

\footnote{These and a thousand other instances are marks of a general benevolence in human nature, where no real interest binds us to the object” (David Hume, An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, ed. by Tom L. Beauchamp, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 168).}
that moral conflict results from a conflict of passions, not one of reason and passion. But while reason is ultimately a “slave to the passions,” as Hume tells us, it can nonetheless inform judgments of the phenomena relevant to the promotion of shared communal interest in a given situation, and thereby prompt the appropriate passion(s). On a much broader socio-historical scale, meanwhile, reason and the passions collaborate in the creation of artificial virtues, which incline us to abide by those social conventions that secure communal harmony. But these socially-contingent artificial virtues are not directly guaranteed by our instinctual make-up. Consider, for example, the artificial virtue of justice. “[P]ublic utility is the sole origin of justice,” Hume writes, “[and] reflections on the beneficial consequences of this virtue are the sole foundation of its merit.”

Justice has as its primary goal social utility. It promotes this by means of a process of enculturation into the projected norms of various social roles, which in turn motivates us to cooperatively protect the rights and property of the members of the community.

But the fundamental structure of the individual's moral motivation, being shaped by the instincts, is for the most part non-negotiable. And since the passions have irreducible moral value, alterations in the social-moral code are to not only respond to the manifest situations of communal life, they must be attuned to this underlying framework. Hume, however, readily acknowledges that institutions are not perfect and that social agreements bear an inevitable incompleteness; artificial virtues cannot

85 Ibid., p. 83.
86 “[N]o action can be virtuous, or morally good,” Hume writes, “unless there be in human nature some motive to produce it, distinct from the sense of its morality” (David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, ed. by David Fate Norton, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 3.2.1).
perfectly harmonize the orders of inner feeling (sentiment) and outward action (utility).

Hume reconciles these disjunctions by calling attention to the achievement of a particular kind of moral character. “If any action be either virtuous or vicious,” he writes, “‘tis only as a sign of some quality or character. It must depend upon durable principles of the mind, which extend over the whole conduct, and enter into the personal character.” Our actions point to “durable principles of mind,” not singular, isolated, contingent intentions. Character serves as the basis of these principles, and in turn personal identity, for two reasons. First of all, character is rooted in those passions that manifest through our actions. And secondly, character brings unity to those seemingly discrete acts that express these passions. The moral dimension of character consists in the following. For one, it is character that brings the imperatives of sentiment and utility into accordance and thereby helps to ensure that those actions that appear to be other-regarding actually are other-regarding. And second of all, this accordance not only establishes a harmony internal to the given individual; it also produces social consensus both directly by committing us to the promotion of utility and indirectly by strengthening social bonds through the act’s meriting esteem of some kind.

Insofar as moral character occupies a central place in Hume’s ethics, and this entails a subordination of personalized feelings to one’s socially prescribed avowals, it is plausible to attribute moral sincerity to Hume’s ethics. For according to Hume, we must

---

87 Ibid., 3.3.1.
88 The indispensability of character for the formation of ethical relationships and community in general becomes more clear when we consider the diachronic dimension of how character holds together the person. The maintenance of (relative) sameness of identity across time enables us to identify patterns of regularity in other persons, and thereby feel more confident in trusting in others, which is necessary for making reliable evaluations concerning how others might act in the future.
not only achieve moral maturity at the level of feeling by fashioning our habits of emotional responsiveness according to the rules of justice; we must also sincerely express this in our engagements with others so that our goodness might resonate in the hearts of other moral evaluators. Our actions, conversely, in order to properly exemplify the predominant social mores, must not only be good for society, but embody the very concerns for society that characterize the natural virtues. In this way, one must not only conform to the rules of justice with a view to utility. One must also voluntarily embrace from a place of passionate concern for others what is expected of one by the social agreement. This, in short, is the imperative of what I will now term “Humean sincerity”—that the moral exemplar not only acts morally, he is moral in feeling consistently moral passions.

2.2.c. Moral Sentiment Theory and the Struggle to Avoid Falsity in the Encounter with the Sensible Knave

While the Humean emphasis upon constancy of character secures for the morally sincere individual a practical power for producing social utility, it nonetheless leaves him vulnerable to a certain loss of initiative in the face of insincere law-abiding others. Consider, for example, the encounter of the just person with the sensible knave. The clever knave flouts justice (in its more refined details) even as he remains law-abiding in order to secure his own immediate interests. But his opportunism does not escape the

---

89 Hume explains: [A]ccording to the imperfect way in which human affairs are conducted, a sensible knave, in particular incidents, may think, that an act of iniquity or infidelity will make a considerable addition to his fortune, without causing any considerable breach in the social union and confederacy... And he, it may, perhaps, be thought, conducts himself with most wisdom, who observes the general rule, and takes advantage of all the exceptions” (An Enquiry, p. 155).
notice of the just person. And as Hume notes, when the artificial virtues are not shared equally, then oftentimes “the strict laws of justice are (to be) suspended... and give place to the stronger motives of necessity and self-preservation.” But this is not a situation of “extreme misery” or “pressing conflict.” Thus, while Hume’s just person is obliged by the rules of justice to exercise tolerance of the knave and decidedly not “act out” his disapproval, he can rest content by withdrawing sympathy from the knave.

But this would seem to problematize the importance of continuity between a feeling and its avowal noted earlier. A properly moral act must not simply lead to pragmatic success (or at least not fail to violate a social arrangement), it must actually be other-regarding in precisely the manner that it presents itself. Here, however, the just person’s gesture of tolerance towards the knave comes from a morally empty, second-order motive, not a genuine concern for the other. This, then, ought to force a dilemma between two apparently mutually exclusive alternatives—passionately performing in terms of the rules of justice (e.g., out of regard for the knave), on the one hand, or acting in terms of his disapproval of the knave, on the other. Hume, however, sees this dilemma as resulting from (at least in large part) the inevitable incompleteness of moral life, and envisages a necessary compromise of the outward movement of one’s passions as the only way to preserve both the integrity of the sentiments and the rules of justice.

90 Ibid., p. 85.
91 Annette Baier explains: “The presence of flourishing sensible knaves is a risk that has to be accepted by the equally sensible full cooperators... Hume’s convenors need not be unduly perturbed by the fact that the unjust are not reliably ‘brought to justice’... So long as they (the just persons) too are also flourishing... Hume’s just persons do not have to be obsessed with the problem of how the less just can be made to suffer” (Annette Baier, A Progress of Sentiments: Reflections on Hume’s Treatise, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991, pp. 253-4).
Interestingly, Hume’s theory of sentiment offers us the resources for overcoming this gap between a feeling and its avowal while enabling us to both maintain constancy of character and increase our practical power in increasing social utility. Recall the earlier discussion of the role that reason plays in helping us to mediate conflicts between passions. In the case of the just person’s encounter with the sensible knave, reason can indirectly induce specific passions that themselves can provide more genuine motivation for his justice-abiding actions. More specifically, he can suspend his judgment of disapprobation towards the knave and act from a concern for the other just persons of society who will benefit from his conformity with the rules of justice. In this way, the just person can tolerate the knave without either betraying his own passions or approving of the knave.

This suggestion is related to a second, in some ways more ambitious response that Hume himself does not suggest but which need not be inconsistent with his framework. In demonstrating this, consider the important role played by affect in Hume’s epistemology. Actively taking an interest in others (rather than simply tolerating them) by, for example, entering into the interiority of others through the mechanism of sympathetic identification is indispensable for making others intelligible to us. As noted above, this occurs by first recognizing another person’s similarity to oneself in some way, and then identifying with that individual’s feelings. Sympathetic identification helps to maintain the recognition that the other and myself are in some meaningful way similar and (now going slightly beyond Hume’s approach) thereby aids in producing an understanding of the other that is fuller and more attuned to the other’s own situation.
Meanwhile, the withdrawal of sympathy would lead to not just a retracting of feeling, but a greater likelihood of one’s being either less capable of or less willing to faithfully live through the experience of the other. Indeed, there is an important distinction between sympathy and empathy that was not available to Hume.\textsuperscript{92} But while one can in some sense appeal to cold theory in order to locate others in their motives, thoughts and feelings, sympathetic identification nonetheless helps to make this process more efficacious by heightening our attention to the other in her uniqueness. Moreover, this shift from (a) tolerating the other from whom I have effectively turned away (the absence of sympathy for the other), to (b) taking an active interest in and positively facing the other (genuine interest in the other owing to an investment of sympathy), enables us to more successfully encompass, gain information about, and creatively negotiate our relations with others.

This observation is important for drawing out the shortcomings of Hume’s conception of ethical identity. For one, insofar as Hume is concerned to protect the integrity of sentiment—e.g., the just person’s feeling of disapproval for the knave—the motivation for sympathizing with the feelings of the knave can originate from the passion to benefit the community of just persons (as discussed above) without entailing a violation of the just person’s disapproval of the knave. Secondly, the just person’s sympathetically identifying with the knave need not undermine his trustworthiness for others, for he can still perform his dutiful actions without compromising his character, albeit now in full awareness of a certain incongruity between inner states that he has

\textsuperscript{92} The term sympathy has its roots in the late 16\textsuperscript{th} century, whereas the term empathy did not arise in the English language until the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century (see Oxford English Dictionary).
identified (i.e., his sympathies for the knave) and actions that he must perform (i.e., his acting as a just person). And thirdly, insofar as (our revised version of) Hume not only (a) looks to the passions for producing practical power for increasing social utility, but (b) takes understanding of the sensible knave to be instrumental to the end of better managing relationships with the knave, then (c) Hume’s ethical paragon is morally obliged to imagine as if the feelings, desires, and other subjective states of the knave were in some sense his own, though of course in full awareness of the fact that they are not. By no means is this to suggest that Hume’s just person ought to condone the knave’s trickery. But as demonstrated in the previous chapter’s discussion of yoga, moral maturity entails a posture of creative responsiveness to situations, not one of habituated reactive-ness. And this requires the just person to perform in full awareness of the incongruity between feeling (sympathy for the knave) and avowal (non-approval and possibly even denunciation of the knave).

However, instead of taking up this approach, Hume’s just person withdraws from the interiority of the knave and places primacy upon the avoidance of falsehood—namely, the falsehood of sympathizing with an other towards whom his role-bound actions ought not to express approval. But if Hume’s morality is indeed concerned with the practical moral power to more effectively negotiate relational contexts with a view to increasing utility and social consensus, and he can increase that power simply through an act of imaginative identification with the knave, then why does he resist imagining
himself as the other? If it is not utility that the just person’s aversion has in view, then what is he really protecting?

2.2.d. Overcoming the Ambiguity of Identity through the Desire to Be the Role

Hume’s just person is indeed oriented towards others out of genuine concern. But his privileging of the imperative to avoid deception over the increase of social utility is centered not so much around a moral imperative, per se, but an existential one, namely, to overcome the ambiguity of identity by superimposing one’s socially prescribed role upon the subject. By keeping in view the way in which Hume’s ideal aesthete is to imaginatively turn away from immoral fictional others (as examined above), we can further clarify how the just person’s imaginative resistance to the knave is driven by the felt need to realize the desire to be his role.

Consider that persons are neither pure individuals nor wholly identical with any given role or roles. Rather, persons are what Rene Girard calls “interviduals.” Girard’s neologism refers to our inter-subjective make-up, by virtue of which we mimetically pick up various roles or models from others, all of which become integrated in the individual person. The relationship between the self and the role is generally marked by agreement. This agreement occurs by virtue of the model's facilitating the attainment of two desires. The first is mimetic desire. In unconsciously imitating others we

---

93 Indeed, persons have more value in Humean moral sentiment theory than does utility. But insofar as utility stands to improve peoples’ lives, then utility is a primary concern of Humean ethics.
94 “[A]s human beings we are not the other or model,” James G. Williams writes in explaining Girard’s theory. He continues: “but on the other hand, we are constituted by the other or model, and so the self is a set of mimetic relationships operative in the individual, both in the present and from the past” (Rene Girard, The Girard Reader, ed. by James G. Williams, New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996, p. 291).
unknowingly take up their roles and, to a significant degree, become these roles. Insofar as we become identified with our roles, we seek to obtain the objects that our models desire. Mimesis, then, implies mimetic desire. But the model asserts its influence over us by penetrating our motivational structures and organizing our desires in a more profound manner. Deeper than the desire for the things or objects of the model is a second desire: metaphysical desire, or the desire to be. The subject wants the being of the role-model not simply because it has utilitarian benefits; the individual desires the being of the role because this is the doorway to existence itself.

In returning to consideration of the just person’s resentment towards the knave, one might argue that it is motivated by a concern for utility that is projected mimetically by the desire of the “just person” model. But the conclusions arrived at in the previous section suggest the opposite, namely, that if the individual subject qua the just person is indeed concerned to promote social utility, then he should psychologically distance himself from the “just person” role-model so that he can more adequately enter into the interiority of the sensible knave. If it is not a concern for utility that binds the individual qua the just person to his role, or rather, if this concern is in some sense epiphenomenal to some other intention, then what is it? The insincerity of the knave, I argue, pinches a different nerve than the one concerned with the pursuit of any particular object. The sensible knave threatens the just person's metaphysical desire to be by offending the very meaning of the role with, through, and by which he identifies himself.

---

95 Ibid., p. 290.
96 Ibid.
Indeed, this claim that there is a place for metaphysical desire in Hume’s ethics may seem rather controversial, particularly given his empirical approach. But I am not arguing that Hume intends for metaphysical desire to occupy a central place in his morality. Rather, I hold that we can enrich our understanding of his ethics, particularly some of its limitations, by noting how his writings lend themselves to this interpretation.

In order to illustrate this point, let us take further the analysis of Hume’s just person as exemplifying a kind of moral sincerity. Historically speaking, sincerity arises out of concern for the individual’s experience of his own existence. As Rousseau terms it, sincerity is a “sentiment of being,” or “[the hardest basic fact and only entrance to all facts].”

Sincerity discloses our world to us and makes it intelligible, but only by producing for us conscious certitude of our own personal selfhood. However, there is a major difference between Rousseau’s “sincere man” and the model of sincerity prevalent in eighteenth century British society. For Rousseau, the influence of social norms was an obstacle to be overcome in realizing the metaphysical desire to be; we were to sever ourselves from our socially projected roles as the base of personal identity. The British, however, moralized sincerity, and in so doing emphasized the priority of the norm over the subject while still holding to the felt need to overcome the gap between a feeling and its avowal. As a result, the individual was indeed to come to an enhanced awareness of his existence as a discrete, integral, unitary individual. But he was to do so only insofar as

---

97 I will use the phrase “the ‘just person’ role-model” in order to refer to the form of the just person in general. I will use the phrase “the individual qua the just person” in order to refer to the individual, actual person who is indeed a just person.

98 Sincerity and Authenticity, p. 92. Trilling explains further: “The facts to which this fact [i.e., the sentiment of being aware of one’s existence] is entrance are those of the social and political life—it is through our conscious certitude of our personal selfhood that we reach our knowledge of others” (Ibid.).
he could articulate his desire to be in and through his prescribed role. Deference to the norm simultaneously reconciled moral and existential imperatives because it enabled the morally sincere man to both fulfill the expectations of others and obtain that response from properly enculturated others that would affirm his self-awareness as a veritable just person. Not unlike Rousseau’s sincere man, then, the morally sincere person of British society deepened the awareness of his personal identity through his interactions with others. However, the “selfhood” of which he sought to obtain conscious certitude did not liberate itself from the initiative of others, but instead became dependent upon it through a kind of overlapping of the self qua the inward subject by the self qua her objectified, socially-prescribed “just person” role-model.

In demonstrating the applicability of Trilling’s analysis to our concerns here, consider that sentiment is integral not just to locating others and nurturing social relationships, but to becoming more aware of one’s own existence as a discrete, identifiable person. The importance of constancy of character in Hume’s framework can be given greater importance in light of this observation. Trustworthiness in the eyes of others does not simply have in view the increase of utility and the fulfillment of the projected desires of our roles (through which we at least initially identify ourselves and our own desires). It has in view the individual’s realization of the metaphysical desire to be her role through the awareness of others’ recognition of her as a mother, a lawyer, a friend, or a just person, among other things. But the knave undermines this interplay of recognition and mutual affirmation. In facing the knave, the just person cannot obtain conscious certitude of her identity as a just person because the knave does not defer to the
authority of social-moral norms for negotiating personal identity and interpersonal relations; he only recognizes their jurisdiction in the economy of utility, not that of sentiment. This bears out in Trilling’s analysis of how English sincerity depends upon the maintenance of the English class structure. While indeed the concern to suppress deceitful characters (such as the sensible knave) from rapidly rising up the social hierarchy was not indifferent to its consequences for social utility, the deeper concern was existential in character. The defenders of the British social hierarchy—e.g., just persons—suppressed the upward rise in social mobility of deceitful characters because this disturbed the fabric of personal authenticity. Manifesting an excess of ambition and an utter abandonment of original class position, sensible knaves, for example, were seen as violating the contract of trustworthiness (i.e., that they truly were as they presented themselves to be) that made it possible for morally sincere individuals to affirm themselves through their interactions with others. In other words, the morally sincere individual of British society depended upon a certain recognition by others of not only his status as a gentleman, but the internal criterion of sincerely presenting oneself according to one’s socially prescribed role. The sensible knave, however, while not necessarily undermining social utility, nonetheless incites ruptures within the network of trust that sustains not only interpersonal relationships but the unity of subject and role-model underlying the person’s “intervinduality.”

Of course, as demonstrated above, it is psychologically possible for Hume’s just person to recognize her autonomy as a subjectively felt reality apart from her socially projected role. In fact, as Girard points out, situations of crisis are especially capable of
producing this recognition. According to Girard, a crisis situation arises when the individual becomes entrapped in what he calls a “model-obstacle relationship.” “The model-obstacle is someone or something over whom the subject cannot win,” James G. Williams explains on behalf of Girard. As noted already, the subject ordinarily identifies with the role-model by virtue of the freedoms that it provides. Nonetheless, the encounter with an insurmountable other presents an occasion whereby the agent may recognize that his heretofore unquestioning identification with the role may in fact limit his freedom in significant ways, for the obstacle is only insurmountable insofar as one identifies with the model. “[I]n some cases it would be accurate to say that the subject [i.e., the individual] will not allow himself to defeat the model-obstacle,” writes Williams, “for to achieve that would be to lose the model.” In situations of crisis, the individual is in fact capable of overcoming the obstacle. But the obstacle cannot simultaneously be overcome while still providing an affirmation of one’s identity with the role-model. In this way, then, the metaphysical desire to be one’s role actually undermines the individual’s freedom, for it compels him to resist overcoming the obstacle in lieu of obtaining conscious awareness of his identity with the role-model.

Girard’s analysis helps to clarify the nature of the just person’s entrapment in the face of the knave. The just person-knave relationship exemplifies Girard’s model-obstacle relationship. It is indeed possible (and morally desirable, as demonstrated above) for the individual qua just person (the model) to overcome the knave (as obstacle). He need simply act as if he were a just person while simultaneously feeling in some way as if he were the sensible knave. But while Hume’s exemplary individual is capable of doing

---

99 Girard, p. 291.
so, he is ultimately unwilling to sympathetically identify with the knave and thereby overcome the obstacle because his commitment to moral sincerity prohibits him from disjoining from the model of the just person. And this prohibition masks an underlying existential insecurity, namely, the fear of losing the being that the role secures. Thus, while the commitment of Hume’s ethical exemplar to producing utility and caring for (cooperative) others is indeed genuine and admirable, his single-mindedness in the face of the more existentially agile knave unnecessarily curtails the realization of these goals. For not unlike Hume’s ideal aesthete in the face of the immoral fictional other, the just person cannot allow this rupture between subject and role to occur, not even in his imagination.

In short, according to Hume, the individual qua just person should resist sympathizing with the knave not so much out of concern for actual utilitarian consequences. Rather, he is to turn away from the knave because the knave offends those standards of social-moral propriety by virtue of which just persons are able to identify and esteem others and themselves. The function of the just person’s resentment, then, motivated and condoned by the sentiment of being morally sincere, is to protect the individual from any effort that, by virtue of its violent nature, threatens to create rupture in his interpersonal relationships (i.e., between himself and other cooperative members of society) and in his own intra-personal relationships (i.e., his self-awareness as an integral, unitary, and above all, social norm-abiding individual who is loyal to his role). 100

100 Recall that Hume’s aesthetics similarly advocates the avoidance of change in “our judgment of manners” because of the violence that it involves. I here repeat a reference made earlier: “[A] very violent effort is requisite to change our judgment of manners,” Hume explains, “and excite sentiments of approbation or
sympathetic judgment, I have earlier demonstrated how it is to be negotiated economically in the context of the art experience out of concern for ratifying given social-moral norms and producing the feeling of being consciously aware of our locatedness in the social hierarchical system. We now find that it serves a similar function in moral life. While the Humean sentiments are indeed other-directed—and rightly so, for otherwise we could not effectively identify the needs of others—they nonetheless subordinate the life of feeling, and in turn the individual, to the authority of the social-moral norm. For encoded within Hume’s harmonization of aesthetic and moral life is the drowning of the subject (or selfhood) by the socially prescribed role; Humean ethicism makes the sentiments and the imagination subservient to moral considerations in both art and life in order to hold together the person—both interpersonally and intervidually. And by burying the individual under the weight of the norm in this way, Humean moral sentiment theory not only weakens the imagination of the agent. It diminishes the power of Hume’s moral exemplar to creatively intervene in social reality.

With an expanded appreciation of the powers of aesthetic judgment, however, we can more effectively negotiate the influences that intersect at the site of the person so that we do not lose initiative in the face of others with whom we do not have a reciprocity of concern. Furthermore, we can also obtain a conscious certitude of selfhood that, having severed from its base in one’s inherited, socially projected role(s), is not contingent upon the affirmation of others. In light of the importance of securing the freedom of sentiment from the influence of social roles, norms, and others, then—to which our critical analysis

blame, love or hatred, different from those to which the mind, from long custom, has been familiarized” (Of the Standard of Taste, p. 22).
of Hume’s moral sentiment theory has alerted us—let us now consider how the question of authenticity reverses the priority of the role and the subject by theorizing the sentiment of being free from the obligation to the moral norm.

2.3. Overcoming the Ambiguity of Identity through the Ideal of Authenticity: Heideggerian Authenticity and the Problem with Disjoining Selfhood from its Base in the Role

The decline of the concept of sincerity historically coincides with the ascendancy of the ideal of authenticity. In brief, authenticity was seen as holding the promise of fulfilling the ideal that sincerity could not, namely, adequately securing the imperative to be true to one’s true self that had been wrested away from the individual by society. By gaining power for the individual over and against the intrusive influence of the moral ideals of society, the model of freedom presented by the ideal of authenticity provided a new and compelling vision for not only knowing, but actually being true to oneself. It did so by asserting the priority of aesthetic life over that of ethical norms and insisting upon the accordance of our actions with our own true feelings. But while this freedom-from model rightly criticizes the model of freedom promoted by sincerity, it suffers from serious shortcomings of its own in providing a mature strategy for negotiating the opposition of the individual and society, and art and morality. For insofar as we always and already find ourselves in the presence of social others, we not only do draw upon our accumulated social-moral inheritance; we ought to do so in order to achieve those ends that we have identified as authentically our own. And insofar as we ought to recognize our interpenetratedness with others, we should exhibit genuine openness towards others
rather than strive to realize the metaphysical desire to be purged of our socially
prescribed roles and the expectations of others.

Just now I looked to Hume’s moral sentiment theory in order to investigate the
freedoms and restraints associated with the ideal of moral sincerity. Now I will examine
how situating Heidegger’s conception of authenticity in the larger historical context of
this ideal can provide clues to the deeper dimensions of the freedom it pursues. In so
doing, I demonstrate how Heidegger criticizes the inauthentic individual on account of
his commitment to ideals that subordinate the agent to the imperatives of the social
group. In the end, however, I argue that Heidegger's interpretation of authenticity, not
unlike the ideal of authenticity in general, is incoherent and counter-productive. His
obsessive quest to authenticate a pure self is not only morally problematic. Heidegger’s
failure to develop a mature theory of the influence of social-moral inheritance and his
theorization of freedom in terms of the sentiment of being authentic devalue the role of
the aesthetic domain for attaining the very thing that his authenticity pretends to achieve:
freedom in the midst of our being with others.

2.3.a. The Sentiment of Being Authentic: Heideggerian Freedom and a Critique of
Cartesian and Empiricist Paradigms of the Self

Not unlike Hume, Heidegger recognizes that we know ourselves as embedded in
the phenomenal world and standing in relation to others. However, while much of what
we do know about ourselves comes from and through our interactions with others,
Heidegger argues that it ought to come from within through an aesthetic imperative. That
is, the understanding of ourselves as distinct entities should be autonomous of the influence of other persons and social norms because the latter obscures the awareness of who we truly are. In this section I explore Heidegger’s formulation of freedom as authenticity by examining how he paves a kind of middle path between two dominant visions of the self from traditional Western philosophy: the Cartesian cogito and the empiricist self (a lineage to which Hume’s theory is closely aligned). Following Michael Gelven’s analysis, I argue that both of these models are sources of inauthenticity, as they weaken the agent’s awareness of himself as a unique self. \(^{102}\) Authenticity, in contrast, empowers the agent through juxtaposition with others and attentiveness to the call of Being.

In order to disclose the conceptual advance of Heidegger's notion of authenticity, let us first consider Heidegger's critique of the Cartesian and empiricist paradigms of the self. Descartes' rational discovery of the self with his “cogito ergo sum” argument reveals the self as a subjective agent; the self is simply that entity which thinks, and we discover it through introspection. The empiricists, meanwhile, approach the problem of the self from the other side of the subject-object dualism. Basing the individual’s self-awareness upon purely empirically verified evidence, the empiricist position implies that the self is essentially identical with one’s own physical body. To be, in other words, is to be encounterable from without. According to Heidegger, the respective modes of self-awareness provided by these models are inadequate because they fail to reveal both one's

\(^{101}\) My treatment of Heidegger is primarily focused upon Being and Time. I draw upon other sources only insofar as they are consistent with his explanation in Being and Time.

own unique self as a self and the self “in the full poignancy of its 'mineness.'”

Descartes' self, for example, is merely a subject, not a self, that is, not a self that has existential significance for a given individual. The empiricist self, meanwhile, is for all intents and purposes not a self either, but is only an object or objectified “person.”

Heidegger's phenomenological understanding of the self aims to secure the existential significance of the self by reconciling the excessive abstract-ness or universality of Descartes' cogito with the excessive emphasis upon particularity and located-ness of the empiricist model. Heidegger uses the term “Dasein” in referring to the self. “We are ourselves the entities to be analyzed. The Being of any such entity is in each case mine,” Heidegger writes. “The 'essence' [Wesen] of this entity lies in its 'to be' [Zu-sein]... The essence of Dasein lies in its existence.”

Dasein is unique by virtue of its capacity to reflect upon its existence. It is a way or mode of self-reflectively existing; to say that Dasein exists is to say that it exists always with some measure of awareness of what it means to be. And insofar as a given individual or I can know this, it follows that I (as a self) am Dasein. Contrary to Descartes, then, the self is not a disembodied self-aware being. Rather, more basic to Dasein's being a “thinking thing” is its being a “being thing” that is placed in the world. In contrast with the empiricists, meanwhile, Heidegger looks to distinguish between entities that merely exist or occur in the world and beings that are aware of their thing-hood. This can be clarified through consideration of Heidegger’s project as an inquiry into the nature of human Being, not human beings as mere objects of study. Heidegger takes the specific empirical details of human nature to

---

103 Ibid., p. 161. My explanation here has been aided by Gelven, pp. 159 – 172.
be incidental and emphasizes the privileged relationship that humans have with Being itself. Accordingly, Heidegger differentiates between *existentia* and *existentz*. The former applies to the existence of things “present-at-hand,” which exist solely by virtue of their being encountered, while the latter is relevant to Dasein alone by virtue of its awareness that it is absorbed in a world. This he makes clear as he introduces the first in a series of *existentiales*: Being-in-the-world. “‘Being-in' is thus the formal existential expression for the Being of Dasein,” Heidegger writes, “which has Being-in-the-world as its essential state.”

The self always finds itself in a situation or a world; Being-in-the-world is its most basic mode of existence or awareness that it is. The world is not to be found “out there,” ultimately cut off from a disembodied mind. Rather, world is the most general concept about existence, and it frames the awareness of self-reflective consciousness. The self, in short, is neither a worldless subject nor an object that is simply located in a world, but a self-aware subject already in a world.

But Heidegger’s existential analytic is not merely a descriptive project. It also has a normative dimension, namely, attaining for the self an authentic awareness of its Being-in-the-world as a distinct entity. In order to demonstrate what authenticity is, it may be best to first explain what it is not. Consider a key expression for Heidegger’s existential analytic. Dasein “finds itself in its thrownness,” which is to say that the individual Dasein always finds itself thrown into a situation or world alongside entities and with other Daseins. “‘With' and 'too' are to be understood *existentially*, not categorically,” Heidegger explains. “By reason of this *with-like* [mithaften] Being-in-the-world, the world is always

---

the one that I share with Others. The world of Dasein is a with-world [Mitwelt]. Being-in is Being-with Others.”

Being-with-others (mitsein) is an existentiale; insofar as other persons are given as part of this world, it follows that the self is likewise always and already involved with others. However, Dasein’s thrownness is characterized by a sense of Unheimlichkeit, or a feeling of not-being-at-home. And its awareness that it must act and assume responsibility for its choices in the midst of circumstances not of its own volition induces anxiety. The constant temptation to escape from the burden of this responsibility finds relief in the company of others, whom, contrary to the term “Others,” Dasein recognizes to be essentially like oneself. “By ‘Others’ we do not mean everyone else but me—those over against whom the ‘I’ stands out,” Heidegger explains. “They are rather those from whom, for the most part, one does not distinguish oneself—those among whom one is too.”

Humans have a natural desire to belong, and Dasein becomes imminently aware of this desire the more that it becomes aware of its thrownness.

Inauthentic Dasein turns towards others in order to flee from its thrownness; it abandons that awareness of itself as a unique entity in the world in lieu of the felt need for belonging. Heidegger explains:

This Being-with-one-another dissolves one’s own Dasein completely into the kind of Being of “the Others,” in such a way, indeed, that the Others, as distinguishable and explicit, vanish more and more. In this inconspicuousness and unascertainability, the real dictatorship of the “they” is unfolded… The “they,” which is nothing definite, and which we all are… prescribes the kind of Being of everydayness.

105 Ibid., p. 80.  
106 Ibid., pp. 154 – 5.  
107 Ibid., p. 154.  
108 Ibid., p. 164.
Dasien naively tries to become like “them” in all respects, both inwardly and outwardly, in order to avoid the challenges involved in taking responsibility for one’s own existenz. And in becoming like them in this way, Dasein effectively becomes “one of them…submerging its own identity and its own responsibility in the average everyday mode of Being which they endorse.”¹⁰⁹ As a result of its submission to the they-mind, the inauthentic self fails to individuate. By the same means, Dasein also obscures the original insight into human Being and denigrates exceptional achievement.¹¹⁰ Through the mutual reassurance that occurs through socializing with others, the pronouncements declared through mere “idle talk” “take on an authoritative character,” discourage genuine inquiry into the nature of human Being, and reduce Being to the status of “Reality,” whereby the objective properties of things are given ontological primacy over their primordial “Being-alongside.”¹¹¹ Having given itself over to empty curiosity as a form of escape from its anxiety-inducing thrownness, inauthentic Dasein loses sight of its own uniqueness through its involvement with others.

But it is important to note that Heideggerian authenticity does not entail an utter denial of others, for Being-with-others positively turns all selves towards others through openness. Moreover, since the condition of not-being-at-home (Unheimlichkeit) is ever-

---

¹¹⁰ Heidegger writes: “In this averageness with which [the “they”] prescribes what can and may be ventured, it keeps watch over everything exceptional that thrusts itself to the fore. Every kind of priority gets noiselessly suppressed. Overnight, everything that is primordial gets glossed over as something that has long been well known. Everything gained by a struggle becomes just something to be manipulated. Every secret loses its force” (Being and Time, p. 165).
¹¹¹ “Idle talk” is a major theme in Heidegger’s existential analytic. Idle talk is “the possibility of understanding everything” based upon the authority of the they-mind (Being and Time, p. 213). “Reality,” meanwhile, is understood as “the totality of things in their presence-at-hand” (Dimensions, p. 71). But in
present, we can never escape once and for all the average, everyday, i.e., inauthentic way of understanding things. But there is nonetheless a qualitative difference between how authentic and inauthentic Daseins face others, and it has to do with choice. The choice that underlies authenticity has many dimensions, all of which are centered around the desire to clarify one’s own situation. Above all, this requires making explicit through conscious effort that tacit understanding of Being (e.g., one’s Being-in-the-world) which Dasein already possesses. Moreover, this choice involves realizing that what or who or the mere fact that one exists is not necessary owing to various other possibilities. In fact, one can all too easily lose this awareness in going about one’s daily tasks by taking for granted one’s particular, actual mode, and trivializing the other possibilities of being and non-existence. Heidegger explains how one can lose this awareness by forgetting oneself in the “they-mind:” “The Self of everyday Dasein is the they-self, which we distinguish from the authentic Self—that is, from the Self which has been taken hold of in its own way [eigens ergriffenen]. As they-self, the particular Dasein has been dispersed into the 'they,' and must first find itself.” In contrast with inauthentic Dasein, authentic Dasein struggles with the influence of the “they” with a view to embracing its responsibility “to

Heidegger’s phenomenology, the truth of Reality and things encountered in the context of Reality is derivative of interpretations that are carried out primordially.

112 Quite literally, Dasein means “there-being”; it essentially has to do with clearing a space within which phenomena can disclose themselves. Heidegger explains: “[Dasein] is in such a way as to be its ‘there.’ To say that it is ‘illuminated’ means that as Being-in-the-world it is cleared in itself, not through any other entity, but in such a way that it is itself the clearing… By its very nature, Dasein brings its ‘there’ along with it… Dasein is its disclosedness” (Ibid., p. 171).

113 Being and Time, p. 167. It bears reminding that the 'they-mind' is not to be confused with actual social others. Our own inauthenticity is never the result of what others have directly done. It is the result of our abandoning ourselves to this mode of Dasein, this a priori possibility of encountering world.
itself and for the consequences of its Being-in-the-world.”114 Dasein that successfully perseveres in this agonal struggle wins the awareness of itself as a self existing in its uniqueness. Furthermore, this authentic self-awareness involves becoming aware of others as primordially penetrating one's sphere of being and yet still retaining distinction from one's own self, whereas the inauthentic self falls into a kind of immature (dis-)identification with the other, e.g., by either under-determining or over-determining its situated-ness in relation to others, as have Cartesian and empiricist paradigms of the self, respectively.

Contrasting Heidegger’s understanding of the mechanism by which we obtain knowledge of the self with that of Descartes and the empiricists helps to further clarify the normative dimension of his existential analytic. The Cartesian model of the self “as having a meaning or essence that is prior to and hence 'other' than one's existence” distorts the individual’s understanding of the structure of Dasein and thereby conceals the awareness of the possibility of being owned or determined by some other(s), which as demonstrated above is necessary for Dasein’s authenticating the awareness of its existence as its own.115 From a Heideggerian standpoint, this error is largely due to Descartes’ excessive reliance upon reason as the means to truth and the methodological foundation of the cogito, while for Heidegger “the hardest basic fact and only entrance to all facts” is the sentiment of being, the proper refinement of which is the sentiment of

---

114 Dimensions, p. 76. Recognizing itself as thrown into a world alongside other entities and Daseins, authentic Dasein shoulders the burden of its anxiety and seizes upon its potentiality-for-Being as its own responsibility, not that of the “they.”

115 A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, p. 47.
being authentic.¹¹⁶ Not unlike Hume, Heidegger never uses the term “sentiment of being.” I argue, however, that we can plausibly attribute to Heidegger an understanding of authenticity as a sentiment of being. As in the case of the sentiment of being sincere, being authentic involves a self-awareness that is invariably attended by the awareness of other persons (e.g., our Being-in-the-world-with-others, etc.). But of course, sentiment discloses this in varying degrees. Accordingly, Heidegger prioritizes the sentiment of being authentic as normatively superior to sentiments of inauthentically being in the world, such as the sentiment of being morally sincere. As demonstrated earlier in the discussion of Hume’s ethics, empiricism can be made compatible with a model that recognizes the basic role of sentiment in disclosing the world, other persons, etc.

However, according to Heidegger, empiricist models of the self (Hume’s, for example) promote inauthenticity. And this occurs not by subordinating Dasein to the awareness of its being-seen, and hence the awareness of its being owned, by others. Thus, while all Daseins have in some basic, trivial sense the sentiment of being, the ideal of authenticity is superior to that of sincerity, among others, precisely because it liberates the sentiment of being from the influence of the they-mind. In short, society now becomes an enemy of human Being; society now becomes a source of inauthenticity. And the aim of Heidegger’s project is to ground the individual in an aesthetic imperative, namely, the sentiment of being authentic, by means of which he can re-connect with the source of Being and become strong and powerful in the face of a civilization that has corrupted his essential nature.

¹¹⁶ I am here repeating a reference that I made to Rousseau above in the discussion of the sentiment of being sincere. See Sincerity and Authenticity, p. 92.
Guilt helps to develop the sentiment of being authentic. As Gelven explains, guilt is that which makes you “aware of yourself as someone capable of being held responsible.”\footnote{A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, p. 162.} Rather than compelling one to deny involvement in a given state of affairs or seek out external circumstances that one can point to as determining one's actions and thereby excusing oneself from any real responsibility, guilt involves making the decision to acknowledge one's past actions as freely chosen; it involves confronting the responsibility that comes from having been and acted in a world. Accordingly, Dasein’s guilt-induced awareness of itself as responsible for its world is distinct from Descartes’ “cogito ergo sum,” which involves “the merely logical demand that all acts of knowing must have a subject” and, as such, portrays a picture of a self that wholly lacks existential significance.\footnote{Ibid.} And furthermore, Heideggerian guilt is prior to and more universal than is the guilt of moral considerations or the shame that often results from transgressing social norms. But while the authentic self exists in the absence of God and the rejection of society as ultimate authorities for determining her self-understanding, Heideggerian guilt still grounds the individual in the world, namely, by producing the experience of a kind of “weightiness” through which the individual knows himself to be “authentic in being really here and now.”\footnote{Ibid.} Paradoxically, the manner in which guilt affirms the self—i.e., grounds the self in the world while also bringing into focus its uniqueness as a self—occurs by means of a negation. Dasein is “the basis of a nullity,” Heidegger writes. The capacity of Dasein to be rests upon its power to exclude its own projected possibilities; it locates itself in an existentially meaningful way by
acknowledging the “not” of its finitude. By means of guilt, then, we fall into an awareness of ourselves as we truly are by taking ownership of those choices that have resulted in the manner of our being located in the here and now, as opposed to our being elsewhere and otherwise.

Thus, the guilt-inducing, aesthetic imperative to be authentic enhances the feeling of not-being-at-home by dislodging the individual from the they-mind, arousing a certain anxiety in the face of his freedom, and forcing a decision between either (a) taking refuge in the they-mind, or (b) turning towards a serious recognition of his own potential for individuation. Inauthentic persons turn away from their guilt and flee “to the relief which comes with the supposed freedom of the they-self.”

Guilt, meanwhile, pursues Dasein only in order to rescue it from “the lostness in which it has forgotten itself.” Heidegger emphasizes the importance of wanting to feel guilty when the appropriate conditions arise in his discussion of the call conscience. The call of conscience originates from the self, it calls out to the self, the call concerns the self, and it calls the self to the (authentic) self. Gelven explains further:

> All of these dimensions, of course, reflect different aspects of the self. The self that does the calling is in dread (Angst) and is “uncanny” (unheimlich: “not at home”)... (it) has lost the comfortable feeling of belonging with the crowd... [T]he self that is called, on the other hand, is precisely the self that has been lost in the they-self—and the calling is an attempt to bring the self to leave the company of the they-self. The calling is about the self in the sense that conscience awakens an awareness of the mode of existence in which the self finds itself—authentic or inauthentic. The call is to the self in that it is an appeal to the self to be authentic.

---

119 *Sincerity and Authenticity*, p. 139.
120 *Being and Time*, p. 321.
121 Ibid., p. 322.
We can hear the call of conscience because we are capable of being guilty, which facilitates a recognition of ourselves as we truly are. The role of others with respect to hearing the call of conscience, meanwhile, is generally detrimental, as the presence of inauthentic others stimulates the endless prattle of the they-mind, thereby tempting us towards inauthenticity and frustrating the reticence that is necessary for hearing the call of conscience. Conscience and guilt, therefore, which not coincidentally are absent in Cartesian and empiricist formulations of the self, are the necessary existentiales for facilitating the individuation that is to reveal the authentic self. Producing an awareness of what it truly means to be, meanwhile, requires purifying the self of the influence of others through development of the sentiment of being authentic.

2.3.b. The Devaluation of Creative Agency in Heideggerian Authenticity

Heidegger is right to problematize the lack of distance between the inauthentic self and the they-mind. But his model of authenticity nonetheless breeds a dangerous antagonism towards others. I now look to how art, according to Heidegger, has special power in helping us to go beyond conventional social-moral norms and hear the call of conscience. In the final analysis, however, Heidegger’s aesthetics of authenticity is problematic not only for moral agency, but agency itself, as it devalues the freedom and power of the agent to creatively engage the other.

Derived from the root verb “/phas,” which means “to show, to glow, to radiate, to light up,” the Greek term “phainomenon” (Engl., “phenomenon”) is taken up by Heidegger in order to refer to Being as an event of ontological disclosure. But this event
does not occur of its own accord. In “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger presents his understanding of the work that art does in clarifying the event-structure of Being. Central to this account is his use of the correlative concepts, “world” and “earth.” “[I]n the revelation [provided by the artwork],” Heidegger writes, “that which is as a whole—world and earth in their counterplay—attains to unconcealedness.” The terms “world” and “earth” are closely related to the concepts of disclosedness and primordial concealedness, respectively. In brief, the artwork discloses and simulates the experience of authentically dwelling in a world. “‘World,’” Bontekoe explains, “is Heidegger’s term for all that a work of art has to show us about where we are and about the things that are there to be found alongside of us.” The earth, meanwhile, is that which simultaneously comes into the open clearing and yet preserves in its very materiality the hiddenness of its essence. Moreover, world and earth are engaged in a primordial struggle. Heidegger explains:

Earth juts through the world and world grounds itself on the earth only so far as truth happens as the primal conflict between clearing and concealing… Setting up a world and setting forth the earth, the work is the fighting of the battle in which the unconcealedness of beings as a whole, or truth, is won.

Art is fundamentally concerned with showing truth. And this involves not simply disclosing a particular thing or overriding all distinction. Rather, it “opens up in its own way the Being of beings.” And at the heart of this opening up is the artwork’s

---

124 Dimensions, p. 86.
125 Poetry, p. 55.
126 Ibid., p. 39.
clarification of the primordial conflict between showing and concealing, world and earth, which structures Dasein’s own experience of Being-in-the-world.

But as Heidegger makes clear, the success of this work that art performs depends equally upon the proper comportment of the audience. Consider, first of all, that the disclosure of truth requires us to allow Being to show or reveal itself (phainesthai) through the mode of “letting-be”; we must comport ourselves towards phenomena by giving ourselves over to the radical openness of authentically Being-in-the-world. In so doing, the object is allowed to presence itself as an event of disclosure “in which the concealedness of the thing in its completeness is not lost sight of even as we recognize the thing in its unconcealedness.” Art, meanwhile, is to awaken us from the calculative thinking that reifies our disconnect from the world (i.e., “Reality”) in the midst of day-to-day affairs, and in turn induce a kind of meditative thinking that discloses the primordial dimension of truth. Moreover, it does so by transforming mundane entities into events of manifesting or bringing-forth Being. And furthermore, this does not involve exciting the audience by, for example, stimulating a kind of kinetic energy, nor is art to edify its audience in order to re-integrate them into the given social-moral order (as in the Humean scheme). For in order for the object to occasion an experience of Being, art must sever us from the they-mind so that the light of Being and that conflict of disclosure and concealedness can shine from within the phenomena. But in order for the artwork to perform this function, we must displace ourselves “out of the realm of the ordinary [and]… into the openness of beings.”

---

127 Dimensions, p. 85.
128 Poetry, p. 66.
But proper comportment towards the artwork, not unlike one’s stance towards phenomena generally, requires not mere openness, but also a certain composure or centeredness. Heidegger addresses this in his concept of resoluteness. “Resoluteness constitutes the loyalty of existence to its own Self,” Heidegger writes. “As resoluteness which is ready for anxiety, this loyalty is at the same time a possible way of revering the sole authority which a free existing can have—of revering the repeatable possibilities of existence.” Resoluteness involves the determination to override the temptation to level down one’s own possibilities in terms of the average understanding of the they-mind, and in turn seize upon the opportunity to realize one’s own potentiality-for-Being and have a genuine encounter with phenomena.

The importance of resoluteness for Heideggerian authenticity can be further brought out by taking note of authenticity’s philosophical and historical relation to the sublime. The late eighteenth century subdivision of the aesthetic realm into two realms, the sublime and the beautiful, led to a gradual demotion of the beautiful in favor of the aesthetics of the sublime. This development is linked to a political critique of the beautiful. In brief, this critique alleges that the beautiful object disempowers the agent insofar as it strips him of control over his own judgment and in turn implicates him in the morally damaging consequences of a certain “lateral disregard.” The sublime, for its part, gets celebrated in the midst of this social-political milieu because it represents an

---

129 Being and Time, p. 443.
130 The charge of “lateral disregard” asserts that the beautiful object preoccupies the agent’s attention and distracts him from wrong social arrangements by making him inattentive and eventually indifferent to bringing about more just arrangements. The beautiful was demoted in favor of the sublime “on the grounds that it is diminutive, dismissible, not powerful enough” (Elaine Scarry, On Beauty and Being Just, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 83).
aesthetic of power. Unlike the beautiful, the sublime has a connection with masculinity, it bears a capacity to develop composure in the face of terror, it effects a shift of reference to one's own self in direct relation to transcendent Being, and it cultivates a power of spiritual sustenance by means of which one can overcome the influence of society and find a new center in the individual himself. In short, the sublime, not unlike the resoluteness of authenticity, asserts the power of the subject over the object and calls attention to the subject’s autonomy and responsibility to encounter other objects and persons with a higher degree of regard.

But while the sublime and authenticity share a certain kinship, important differences must be brought out in order to clarify exactly what it means to be authentic. For one, authenticity is supposed to recover metaphysical truth, whereas the sublime cuts the agent off from “things-as-they-really-are.”¹³¹ Insofar as authentic Dasein successfully comes to understand its own situation, it recognizes itself in relation to a thing that has presenced itself simply as it is. Conversely, while Heidegger recovers the metaphysical meaning of aesthetic experience, he fails to seize upon its important implications for moral life. Heideggerian authenticity is a call to Being, not to beings, and it is grounded in an aesthetic imperative that, in contrast with the Kantian sublime, has completed its escape from the moral obligation to others. Others are to be encountered first and foremost with a view to enhancing one's own sentiment of being authentic. Those who disturb this sentiment get stripped of moral considerability because they have distracted the authentic self's quest for true being. This is not to say that Heidegger's theory of
authenticity is wholly devoid of an ethics; for he arguably subscribes to a kind of Aristotelian virtue-based ethics that centers around the realization or fulfillment of the *telos* of the individual. But while Heidegger’s approach does acknowledge the fact of our Being-with-others, his understanding of virtue is relational in only an incidental sense, as it promotes suspicion towards others because of their potential for undermining the realization of true being. This non-relational teleology, then, while it indeed frees the individual from the mediocrity of society, denigrates moral agency because it positively promotes a certain resistance to accommodating inauthentic others.

However, Heidegger’s failure to adequately theorize the connection between the self-originating imperative of authenticity and our obligation to others weakens not only moral agency but the freedom of the agent himself. In order to draw this out, let us again situate Heidegger’s treatment of authenticity in the broader historical context of this ideal. With the rise of authenticity as an aesthetic ideal, art is seen as a powerful medium for producing an awareness of one’s true self as a self-contained whole. The art experience is to refine one’s sensitivity to those forces that either increase or diminish this self-awareness. Though ultimately gratifying, this experience is irreducible to mere pleasure. And while it grounds the individual in an awareness of his Being-with-others, it is certainly not a means of strengthening bonds to the social body, as in the case of Hume’s conception of the art experience. Rather, authentic art aims to cultivate a marvelous generative force by means of which to overcome that deep conflict between individual and society. However, as Trilling explains, authenticity is a thoroughly

---

131 According to Kant, pure aesthetic experience is non-cognitive, having to do only with the subjective feeling of beauty or sublimity, not some objective feature in the thing-in-itself (*das Ding an sich*). The
polemical concept, “fulfilling its nature by dealing aggressively with received and habitual opinion, aesthetic opinion in the first instance, social and political opinion in the next.” This antagonism, moreover, is self-defeating, as it denies the very thing upon which it depends—society. As much as the sentiment of being authentic prides itself upon overcoming the influence of others, it simultaneously depends upon other people.

In drawing out the problematic implications of this hostility for the freedom of the authentic self, I borrow a term from Harold Bloom’s study of the problem of influence in Romantic poetry—“creative misprision.” I argue that the authentic self is a kind of young (Romantic) poet, if you will, who finds himself in a psychological struggle with his precursor (i.e., society), which has power over him because it precedes him and has penetrated his own desires and thought-patterns. Moreover, the authentic self, not unlike the strong poet, creates a space in which to refashion himself by means of a deliberate falsification, namely, that freedom can be exercised only through a movement away from the other. And finally, the authentic self looks to clarify his own voice—i.e., to declare his independence from the prescriptions of the mainstream—in this space by way of juxtaposition with inauthentic others. This is made evident through consideration of the preference of the aesthetics of authenticity for “dark” themes, such as disorder, violence, madness, and unreason. Turning away from the desire for peace and social harmony (aims of the Humean art experience), the authentic self strives to achieve a rupture with

---

132 Sincerity and Authenticity, p. 94.
society. However, this masks what Trilling calls “an appetite for demonstrative self-abasement; his [the authentic self’s] ego, betraying its proper function, turns on itself and finds expression in a compulsive buffoonery, at once inviting shame and achieving shamelessness.”

Authenticity is founded upon the view that the socially engaged individual no longer possesses himself, having alienated himself through his social participation. Society, for its part, becomes the manifestation of our cosmic alienation. But the irony of this alienation is lost to the authentic individual, for he hypostasizes the otherness of society and thereby obscures the contradiction that society is simultaneously to be preserved and overcome, not for its own sake, but as “the field on which man runs his spiritual course.” Society, in other words, becomes not only the root and ground of the authenticated self’s alienation; it also makes possible his freedom by occasioning his alienation. As for the domain of art, while it indeed “authenticates” us by attuning us to the call of conscience, it reminds us of our fallen condition and other reasons “why we should be ashamed of our lives.”

In reifying the juxtaposition of self and society, then, the ideal of authenticity condemns the individual to a life-sentence of imprisonment by the felt sense of estrangement from the other.

Heideggerian authenticity falls within this lineage. It involves purifying the self of the corrupting influence of the inauthentic other and centering it in a self-awareness that is attuned to the call of Being. Art, meanwhile, enables the individual to successfully

---
134 Trilling explains that “much that culture traditionally condemned and sought to exclude is accorded a considerable moral authority by reason of the authenticity claimed for it, for example, disorder, violence, unreason… it figures as the dark source of art” (Sincerity and Authenticity, p. 97).
135 Ibid., p. 29.
136 Ibid., p. 30.
137 Ibid., p. 105.
transcend the moral norms of society by means of a violent rending apart from the they-
mind. Consider how the “dark” themes noted just now underwrite Heidegger's treatment of authenticity. “The laying-bare of Dasein's primordial Being must rather be wrested from Dasein,” writes Heidegger. “Existential analysis, therefore, constantly has the character of doing violence [Gewaltsamkeit].” For Heidegger, aesthetic experience is indeed to recover the ordinary. But in order to prevent us from conflating “Reality” and “Being,” art must, not unlike the tradition of romantic poetry that Heidegger adores, sever us from the perspective of ordinary involvement. Furthermore, in situating the individual in direct relation to Being, art is to recover for him a raw power by means of which he can stand with resoluteness in the face of inauthentic others. And finally, Heideggerian authenticity involves the same kind of creative misprision noted just now—it creates a space for the individual to authenticate himself, but only at the expense of falsifying the otherness of society. In short, while Heideggerian authenticity rightly problematizes the influence of society upon the self, it assumes a polemical stance in relation to society that in fact disempowers him. For consider that it is the inauthentic other who has power over Heidegger’s authentic self insofar as the other throws the self back upon himself (seemingly against his own will), occludes the authentic individual’s judgment of the inauthentic other so that he cannot recognize the other in his uniqueness, and ultimately renders him incapable of creatively intervening in and re-negotiating the state of affairs that estranges him in the first place. As for the art experience, while it clears imaginative space for the individual’s finding his own voice, it nurtures a deep sense of alienation

138 Being and Time, p. 359. Elsewhere Heidegger writes: “Truth (uncoveredness) is something that must always first be wrested from entities” (Ibid., p. 265).
from society. Consequently, the sentiment of being authentic enslaves the freedom of aesthetic judgment to the felt need to secure the freedom of the individual from the influence of social-moral norms.

But if freedom and power are the expressed goals of Heidegger’s aesthetics of authenticity, and yet the sentiment of being authentic debilitates us in the face of the other, then how does Heidegger allow this inconsistency to arise? Why is his ideal self so susceptible to a break in his commitment to authentically being with others? I will note two issues to deepen this worry.

For one, Heidegger envisages an essentially disengaged, subjective self. One’s “true self,” according to Heidegger, is not an objectified, role-playing agent seen from without, but a world-contemplating selfhood that, while indeed embedded in the world and in the midst of others, has achieved a certain distance from entanglement in the affairs of the social reality so that phenomena can clearly present themselves. Accordingly, Heidegger emphasizes the phenomenology of seeing in his existential analytic. As demonstrated above, the self (Dasein) is essentially disclosedness; it is primarily concerned with clearing a space so that phenomena can reveal themselves simply as they are. Of course, Heidegger does not reduce the self to being a passive witness to the world, for one must recover the Being of the object through re-negotiating the fore-structures of understanding and establishing a new starting point for his interpretation of what the object is. But while the agent has transformed from a passive spectating to a receptive spectating, he is nonetheless essentially a spectator. And this
approach becomes particularly problematic in the face of other persons. Other persons are themselves self-willing, world-creating Daseins, not mere objects. Letting the other person disclose himself as he truly is, then, may require on our part more than the mere posture of “letting-be.” Accordingly, rather than compulsively turning away from inauthentic others, we should positively face the other in his otherness in full awareness of his possible inauthenticity. Furthermore, we should become actively involved in negotiating our relation with the other in order to author a different relational context, e.g., by attending to those conditions obstructing the other from realizing his own “true self” so that a more authentic emotional connection can eventually be made. The posture of Heideggerian authenticity, however, with its emphasis upon securing the purity of the disengaged subject, prevents both the movement of sentiment and that of the outwardly active self into a genuinely engaged relation with the inauthentic other. Consequently, the inauthentic other all too easily throws the authentic individual back upon himself, for the authentic self-complicitly abides in this disengagement from the inauthentic other and actually experiences a kind of self-affirmation in the midst of this withdrawal from and juxtaposition with the other.

But while this encounter spotlights authenticity’s privileging of the movement away from the world, Heideggerian authenticity is still concerned with outward action. This leads to the second response to the above question. The sentiment of being authentic is to provoke an outward movement wherein one’s actions give expression to one’s own true feelings, not the projected desires or goals of one’s socially prescribed role. As noted

---

139 Poetry gets taken as the art form par excellence because of its capacity to establish distance from the object, enable us to contemplatively enjoy the disclosure of Being, and in turn develop the individual’s
above, authenticity historically arises as a model for self-understanding that aims to bring about an accord of man's activity with his true being. This manifests in Heidegger’s emphasis upon how the authentic self is to resist acting on behalf of inauthentic others because, for one, this would entail condoning their inauthenticity. Moreover, this would endanger the authentic individual’s hard-earned self-realization. To reiterate a point made earlier, insofar as we act like them, we risk “tak(-ing) pleasure and enjoy(-ing) ourselves as they take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as they see and judge; likewise we shrink back from the ‘great mass’ as they shrink back; we find ‘shocking’ what they find shocking.” Heidegger believes that by acting like them, we effectively become one of them, and thereby become deaf to the call of conscience and blind to the truths that resoluteness alone can give to us. Pretending to be inauthentic, then, entails misrepresenting one’s true self; it constitutes actually being inauthentic. However, contrary to the openness that Heidegger advocates for disclosing other objects, here he advocates closing ourselves off and making ourselves invulnerable to being exploited by other persons. In the midst of other Daseins, authenticity not only disengages us, it hardens us. But this defensive posturing is precisely what is not needed for encompassing and creatively applying ourselves through our relations with others. As noted just above, in order to effectively manage interpersonal relations to the end of finding authentic connections with others, we must not only enter into the interiority of the other, but presence the incongruity between our own feelings and the awareness of that role or action which is suitable to a given situation. Heideggerian authenticity,

\[140\] \textit{Being and Time}, p. 164.
however, has nothing to do with affirming the expectations of others or creatively appropriating new roles so that we can more effectively negotiate relational contexts. Quite the contrary, it is committed to preserving the pure continuity between feeling and avowal with a view to securing the integrality of a unitary self that has been severed from its base in the socially prescribed role.

Entering into the interiority of others and relaxing the grip of our feelings upon our actions, then, are indispensable to creatively responding to situations and intelligently encompassing relational contexts. The Heideggerian sentiment of being authentic, however, actually constrains our freedom to creatively negotiate interpersonal relations because it clears imaginative space for the self only at the expense of reifying its own alienation from society and inability to recover the initiative required for renegotiating social conventions. Authenticity resists that play with identity whereby the negation that initially moved the authentic self to seek freedom from the they-mind can complete itself in a disintegration of the individual’s own felt need for dwelling in the dark spaces of the self. Interestingly, the authentic individual’s sense of disempowerment in the face of the inauthentic other is in some sense a consequence of his unwillingness to involve himself in others’ affairs. But again, while the authentic individual is indeed free to open himself to the inauthentic other and experiment with different identities in order to explore alternative solutions for practical problems, the complacency that he demonstrates in conceding his expulsion from the social reality and his rigidity in seriously taking on alternative ways of being in the world ultimately testifies not to his freedom from society but his enslavement to it. And why does Heidegger’s exemplary individual choose mere
freedom from the world over the power to creatively encounter it? According to Heidegger, he does so because “The ownmost possibility (of Dasein) is non-relational... Dasein can be authentically itself only if it makes this possible for itself of its own accord.”[^141] Heidegger's authentic self is engaged in a quest for personal realization, a quest to attain his “uttermost possibility,” a quest to achieve a wholeness by means of which to clarify Being and individualize his own self in juxtaposition to the they-mind. Accordingly, he cannot suffer the disintegration of his achieved integrity, as this will imperil the grounded-ness and purity of his true being—both in terms of how he finds himself in relational contexts (i.e., as categorically alienated) and what he finds himself as (e.g., a German ought never to find himself as a Frenchman). In sum, Heidegger fails to attain an adequate freedom for the self because his conception of authenticity centers around a sentiment of being that, in depending upon the very thing that it denies, namely, the influence of society, implicitly exaggerates the dualism of self and other in a way that is morally and aesthetically problematic.

In light of the failures of Hume and Heidegger to creatively negotiate the tensions between subject and role, aesthetics and morality, self and other, let us now turn to an approach that provides a more sophisticated theory of the person and its relevance for developing the interplay of aesthetic life and ethical agency.

2.4. Ethical Normativity in Ricoeur’s Hermeneutical Ethics: the Importance of Imaginative Role-Play in the Encounter with the Other

[^141]: Ibid., p. 308.
In order to reconcile Hume’s relational understanding of moral virtue with Heidegger’s teleological theory of aesthetic virtue, let us turn to the hermeneutical ethics of Paul Ricoeur. Deeply influenced by Hans-Georg Gadamer’s theory of play as underwriting a fusion of horizons with the other, Ricoeur acknowledges that what we choose to understand is largely up to us. But for Ricoeur, a fusion of horizons is not as casual an affair as Gadamer may lead us to believe, for circumstance demands it. Accordingly, I begin my discussion of Ricoeur’s philosophical ethics by examining how the normativity involved in fusing horizons with the other is to be driven by an ethical imperative, not the optional pursuit of self-knowledge (as it is for Gadamer). Following this, I then look to how Ricoeur harmonizes ethical and aesthetic pursuits in a way that both Hume and Heidegger could not precisely because their respective theories of the sentiment of being curtail the imaginative interplay with the other. Again looking to how Ricoeur draws upon Gadamer’s insights into play—this time as a clue to the ontological priority of relationality over the subject—I will demonstrate how Ricoeur sees art (specifically, narrative) as providing the ethical agent with a unique form of *phrónēsis*. This practical wisdom, however, which Ricoeur takes beyond that of Aristotle, will hinge upon the agent’s not overcoming the paradox of personal identity and the conflict between ethical and aesthetic imperatives, as Hume and Heidegger advocate. Rather, the agent must preserve the *aporia* of identity and encounter the opposition between ethical and aesthetic domains as a fruitful one with a view to mastering what Martha Nussbaum calls the “horizontal” and “vertical” extensions of ethical life.
2.4.a. Ethical Normativity in a Fusion of Horizons

Here I explore Ricoeur’s assertion that we must make a universal moral commitment to the other, albeit in the context of living well “with and for others, in just institutions.”¹⁴² Not coincidentally, Ricoeur turns to Kant, against whom Gadamer levels strong criticisms, in order to articulate his theory of an ethical fusion of horizons. This move is motivated largely by a concern to articulate the importance of just institutions. One of Kant’s formulations of the categorical imperative enjoins that we always treat other persons as ends in themselves and never simply as means to ends. This involves not simply respecting the other person, but also recognizing their goals and actively attending to them. Kant notes: “the ends of a subject who is an end in itself must as far as possible be also my ends, if that representation is to have its full effect in me.”¹⁴³ Kant’s other-oriented formulation of the moral law helps Ricoeur to articulate how our living together must be characterized by connections with “power-in-common” and not relations of domination. Power must correspond, Ricoeur tells us, “to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert… [which can occur] only so long as the group keeps together.”¹⁴⁴ Accordingly, Ricoeur emphasizes the importance of just institutions for realizing equality. Equality is “the ethical content of the sense of justice,” and institutions serve as “the point of application of justice.”¹⁴⁵ In order to achieve this, however, we must extend “interhuman relations to all those who are left outside of the face-to-face encounter of an

¹⁴⁴ Oneself as Another, p. 194-5. Ricoeur here references Hannah Arendt. Elsewhere Ricoeur writes that our conceptions of the good life must “pass through the sieve of the norm” (Oneself as Another, p. 170).
‘I’ and a ‘you’ and remain third parties.” That is, insofar as our institutions are just, they must leave a space open for those who are absent from the immediate situation or one’s community of sentimental interest. Accordingly, Ricoeur grounds his idea of justice neither in Aristotelian teleology (which is not egalitarian enough) nor in English-language utilitarianisms, but in Kantian deontology. Justice must bear a positively universal concern for others that is to manifest in the creation of institutions that can contribute to the realization of persons’ goals.

But while Kantian deontology highlights the importance of just institutions, it nonetheless fails to appreciate the specificity of other persons that is requisite for “living well with and for others.” Consider another formulation made by Kant of the moral law. As Kant makes clear in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, humans are objects of moral respect by virtue of their rationality. And insofar as the subject is the locus of pure practical reason, he is to “act only on that maxim that [he] can will to see universalized.” Thus, we are to act on behalf of others because they too are capable of giving themselves the moral law, and we, when we act only on universalizable maxims, have respect for reason. But this formulation of the moral law is incongruous with the one noted above. Bontekoe explains:

> To what extent... can one treat a given person as an end in himself without coming to appreciate his specificity and, most particularly, his otherness from oneself? If I am genuinely concerned, for example, to treat you as an end in yourself, surely I must make a serious effort to come to know who you really are—which is to say, how you understand and think of yourself, what your values and interests are. And just as surely, it would seem, I cannot genuinely treat you

145 Ibid., p. 194.
146 Ibid., p. 195.
147 See Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. 

129
as an end in yourself if I insist on imposing my own entirely rational expectations on you—on the grounds that you are, after all, just as I am, a rational being.\footnote{Dignity, p. 96. Please note that my analysis here of Kantian deontology is again guided by Bontekoe’s line of reasoning.}

In order to create institutions that can effectively care for other persons, we must come to know other persons as the unique individuals that they are. But a strong commitment to Kantian universalization—namely, one that insists upon the purity of the categorical imperative and the priority of reason for discerning the requirements of morality—cannot accommodate this, for it overrides any personal knowledge that we might obtain concerning others as irrelevant.

Accordingly, Ricoeur aims to harmonize Kantian universalization with Aristotelian phrónēsis, or practical wisdom. Insofar as the ultimate aim of ethics is to ascertain how persons can live well together, justice is indeed relevant; our conception of the good must be suitable to our demand for justice. But while Ricoeur’s ethical vision has in view both justice and the good life, the concern for justice is in some sense secondary to that for the good. Bontekoe addresses this point. Prior to securing equality for all persons, “we must appeal to some particular conception of the good life, a version of the good life that this form of equality (which defines justice) helps to promote in order to determine what it is precisely that needs to be equalized.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 99.} The Kantian approach, however, fails to recognize the necessity or even possibility of such an appeal to the good life. Ricoeur’s ideal of ethical responsibility, then, requires us not to simply transcend our own selfish desires and anticipate the needs of those who have yet to arrive. We must also fuse horizons with other persons by vicariously taking on their pains as our
own as a necessary condition for positively and directly caring for their needs, desires, etc. Only in this way—namely, by empathizing with others, carefully attending to their needs and desires, ameliorating conditions of injustice, and in turn progressively determining and revising our notion of what constitutes “the good life”—can we live well with and for others in just institutions.

But how are we to obtain that practical wisdom (*phrónēsis*) by which we can properly negotiate this interplay between “the good” and “the just” towards the proper realization of the accomplished life? According to Ricoeur, responding to this question requires us to inquire into the connection between ethics and art.

2.4.b. Ethics and the Development of Moral Imagination through Narrative: Literature as a Laboratory for Thought Experiments

Ricoeur emphasizes the role of fictional narratives for empowering us in realizing “the good life.” They offer us rich possibilities of understanding and self-discovery in two ways. The first is by creating space for the imaginative exploration of identities. And insofar as these thought experiments can be appropriated for ethically fusing horizons with others, they can help us to intervene in social reality and more deliberately author what Ricoeur calls the “narrative unity” of our own lives towards “the achieved life.”

According to Ricoeur, we are naturally inclined to understand ourselves and our actions, our lives and its events, in terms of narratives. A given person’s actions are not isolated events. Rather, they are contextualized in narrative accounts. The intermediary

---

150 Ricoeur discusses at length the role of a variety of forms of narratives, including historical ones, for realizing “the good life.” I will here focus only upon fictional narratives.
between a person’s actions and his story, meanwhile, is that role which locates him in the
story. Bontekoe explains on behalf of Ricoeur:

> [E]ven to understand oneself or others in what appear to be static terms—to think
of oneself as a doctor, say, or a father—requires that one know what sort of stories
doctors and fathers typically figure in. For unless one knows what a doctor or a father does (and again, this cannot be grasped in terms of isolated actions), one
does not really know what a doctor or a father is.\(^\text{151}\)

Narratives frame what we tell ourselves and in turn live out by describing and prescribing
roles for various situations. They select and emphasize particular details at the expense of
others in order to provide a structure for what would otherwise be nothing but a
blooming, buzzing confusion. Moreover, this process of selection is never-ending, for we
must adapt our interpretations of events in light of emerging, often-times unforeseen,
situations. Our lives do not unfold, then, as uninterpreted chronicles of events. Rather, we
imbue them with meaning through a certain narrative orientation.

But not only do we tell ourselves stories and interpret the events of our lives in a
narrative context. We should do so in order to make our own lives more intelligible,
meaningful, and ultimately, more manageable. Accordingly, Ricoeur turns to literature as
a useful source of practical wisdom. As Ricoeur explains, literature provides us with “a
vast laboratory for thought experiments.”\(^\text{152}\) In unpacking the relevance of this point,
consider that for Ricoeur all possible objects of interpretation can reveal to us something
about ourselves. Introspection yields only “vain truth[s],” Ricoeur tells us, “so long as the
ego of the ego cogito has not been recaptured in the mirror of its objects, of its works,

\(^{151}\) \textit{Dignity}, p. 107.
\(^{152}\) \textit{Oneself as Another}, p. 148.
and, finally, of its acts." The individual who is intent upon self-discovery, then, “must both lose [himself] and find [himself]... in these objects,” works, and acts with a view to recognizing those various possibilities of being human. Heidegger’s influence here is clear. The self cannot realize its own possibilities \textit{a priori}; these can only be realized in the “laboratory” of practical experience. Moreover, Ricoeur agrees with Heidegger that self-understanding can result from the examination of other objects and others’ actions only if this is attended by the recognition that our objects of interpretation are framed by our own shifting horizons. And this is not an obstacle to self-understanding, but in fact a necessary condition for successful appropriation, that is, the discovery of those possibilities that are specifically \textit{one’s own} (versus those possibilities which are not serious options for oneself). Finally, Ricoeur holds that literature has a unique advantage in facilitating this task of defining oneself. The proposed world of the artwork that is to be explicated and appropriated by the reader, Ricoeur explains, “is not \textit{behind} the text, as a hidden intention would be, but \textit{in front of} it, as that which the work unfolds, discovers, reveals.” Interpretation, accordingly, involves not a recovery of the author’s intention, but the reader’s “flesh[-ing] out” in his imagination or “concretiz[-ing]” the “schematic view” of the text with a view to understanding himself in front of the text.

---


154 Ibid., p. 17, p. 327.


But while Ricoeur borrows typically Heideggerian terminology—e.g., opening up, exploring, and appropriating a world—he emphasizes the literary genre of fiction, not poetry. This divergence points to deeper differences between the two thinkers. As explained above, Heidegger celebrates (Romantic) poetry by virtue of its capability to authenticate Dasein. Ricoeur, on the other hand, turns to fiction, not poetry, as the quintessential literary genre because it is especially suited to enable the reader to imaginatively project himself into various characters. Ricoeur’s turn to fiction, not poetry, can be seen as corresponding to his preference for a Gadamerian fusion of horizons over a Heideggerian self-authentication. For one, fiction involves a more genuine openness to possible ways of being with others than does Romantic poetry. Ricoeur explains how this requires the reader to put himself at risk in front of the text with a view to entertaining the identities of (fictional) others as his own:

To understand is… to expose oneself to [the text]; it is to receive a self enlarged by the appropriation of the proposed worlds which interpretation unfolds… [I]n reading, I “unrealize myself.” Reading introduces me to imaginative variations of the ego. The metamorphosis of the world by play is also the playful metamorphosis of the ego.157

In keeping with Gadamer, Ricoeur highlights the importance of involving oneself in the proposed world of the text and exposing oneself to the otherness of the other (character). This radical openness, of course, requires a dissolution of the self that Heidegger ultimately resists in lieu of realizing the essence of Dasein. This leads to the next point of correspondence between Ricoeur’s turn to fiction and a fusion of horizons over poetry and self-authentication, respectively. Fictional narratives invite imaginative variation with a wide array of (fictional) persons in the midst of a great variety of situations that
are not available to us in day-to-day life. This exhibits the structure of play qua a
Gadamerian fusion of horizons, because it is only through openness of understanding that
one is able to temporarily and hypothetically de-center oneself and in turn seriously
explore one’s possibilities.

But of course, Ricoeur’s project goes beyond those of both Heidegger and
Gadamer insofar as the self-knowledge to be attained through a fusion of horizons is
explicitly driven by an ethical imperative, not an epistemological one. The ethical
implications of Ricoeur’s bringing to bear a play-centered orientation to the experience of
literature are significant. Ricoeur further elaborates upon the notion of literature as a
laboratory for thought experiments: “literature is a vast laboratory in which we
experiment with estimations, evaluations, and judgments of approval and condemnation
through which narrativity serves as a propaedeutic to ethics.”\textsuperscript{158} The play of identity
produced by narrative enables us to experiment with \textit{ethical} values and identities. This
play of structuring and re-structuring identity, in turn, increases the flexibility of our
ethical outlook by broadening our appreciation of others’ values and expanding our
repertoire of roles ready at hand.

But how can Ricoeur’s theory of narrative respond to criticisms similar to those
leveled against the Gadamerian conception of a fusion of horizons, in particular, the
contention that mere openness to the insights of one’s tradition imposes a conformity of
values upon the social body and actually reinforces structures of power and injustice?\textsuperscript{159}

\textsuperscript{157} \textit{Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences}, p. 94.
\textsuperscript{158} \textit{Oneself as Another}, p. 115.
\textsuperscript{159} The criticisms that I am referring to here are those of Jurgen Habermas in “A Review of Gadamer’s
\textit{Truth and Method}.”
In responding to this, it bears noting that Ricoeur recognizes that engagement with literature does not always liberalize our values; literary narratives often entrench our commitment to values that we already hold in unacknowledged allegiance to an “influence.” But Ricoeur emphasizes how the reader must be careful not “to adopt the other’s point of view while forgetting one’s own… [N]othing is more disastrous than this fallacious assimilation.” The hermeneutic engagement with literature is a deeply personal process that enjoins the reader to demonstrate not only openness but composure or self-possession in making her “commitments to institutions and practices already in place… more thoughtful and more carefully qualified.” The reader is not to unthinkingly give herself over to that play of ethical values and identities affected through literature. Rather, this play has a seriousness to it that commands the reader to simultaneously be open to the other while also exercising a healthy measure of ethical suspicion.

Ricoeur explains at length how the concern for ethical normativity underlies the reader’s encountering the text through openness and composure:

Reading appears by turns as an interruption in the course of action and as a new impetus to action. These two perspectives on reading result directly from its functions of confrontation and connection between the imaginary world of the text and the actual world of readers. To the extent that readers subordinate their expectations to those developed by the text, they themselves become unreal to a degree comparable to the unreality of the fictive world toward which they emigrate. Reading then becomes a place, itself unreal, where reflection takes a pause. On the other hand, inasmuch as readers incorporate… into their vision of the world the lessons of their readings, in order to increase the prior readability of this vision, then reading is for them something other than a place where they come to rest; it is a medium they cross through.

---

160 *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p. 75.
161 *Dimensions*, p. 171.
This twofold status of reading makes the confrontation between the world of the text and the world of the reader at once a stasis and an impetus. The ideal type of reading… unites these two moments of refiguration in the fragile unity of stasis and impetus. This fragile union can be expressed in the following paradox: the more readers become unreal in their reading, the more profound and far reaching will be the work’s influence on social reality.\textsuperscript{162}

For Ricoeur, we read in order to experience a certain transformation through the encounter between the text’s proposed world and our own actual world. But the fusion of horizons involved in this encounter does not involve the subordination of one to the other, but a dynamic struggle that requires the reader both to surrender herself to the narrative in order to entertain its proposed world \textit{as the text shows it} (i.e., not simply in terms of her own prior experience), but to do so only insofar as she is willing to allow the text to transform her.\textsuperscript{163} That is, Ricoeur’s hermeneutic approach enjoins the reader to obtain the maximum possible openness to the text as it presents itself in its alterity while still keeping in view the imperative to appropriate it to her own situation. Going beyond Gadamer’s position, however, “one’s own situation” has ethical priority in governing this hermeneutic encounter. Thus, it is an ethical concern for actively affecting “profound and far-reaching” changes in the reader’s social reality that drives this dialectical movement towards its highest point of tension without allowing it to collapse.

But narratives do not simply diversify those roles, values, etc., by means of which one can enter into and intervene in situations. They also bring a sense of wholeness or completion to one’s life. Drawing upon Aristotelian teleology and Alasdair MacIntyre’s notion of “the narrative unity of life,” Ricoeur holds that narrative is indispensable to the

\textsuperscript{162} \textit{Time and Narrative} 3, p. 179.
\textsuperscript{163} My analysis here has been aided by Bontekoe’s analysis of how the transformation of the self through reading exhibits the structure of the hermeneutic circle. \textit{See Dimensions}, p. 172.
realization of “the good life” insofar as it helps one to grasp one’s life “as a singular totality.” This involves recognizing those stories that play out in one’s own life. This in turn helps one to recognize the trajectory of the story of one’s own life, which is necessary for making the very notion of living a “good life” meaningful at all. Furthermore, it helps to assimilate those seemingly arbitrary and contingent aspects of experience that threaten to frustrate the realization of one’s life story. In short, the reading of narratives acquaints us with and in some sense empowers us in negotiating the play of double determination that underlies narrative configuration and is not different than that of the hermeneutic encounter, namely, the exchange between the part and the whole, diversity and unity, composure and openness.

But consider that in fiction “neither the beginning nor the end are necessarily those of the events recounted, but those of the narrative form itself,” whereas the beginnings and endings of our lives elude us. This problematizes the transition from art to life because identifying the beginning and ending of a life would seem to be necessary for projecting the “good life.” Ricoeur responds to this objection by pointing out that it assumes a naïve conception of *mimesis*. Accordingly, he stresses the importance of

---

164 *Oneself as Another*, p. 157. Ricoeur’s notion of “the narrative unity of life” is somewhat indebted to the work of MacIntyre. Ricoeur sees MacIntyre’s notion of “the narrative unity of life” as “giving a narrative coloration to the Diltheyan expression ‘the connectedness of life.’” “[I]f one’s life cannot be grasped as a singular totality,” writes Ricoeur, “[then one] could never hope it to be successful [or] complete” (*Oneself as Another*, p. 160).

165 *Oneself as Another*, p. 160.

166 Ricoeur writes: “Life must be gathered together if it is to be placed within the intention of genuine life. If my life cannot be grasped as a singular totality, I could never hope it to be successful, complete. Now there is nothing in real life that serves as a narrative beginning; memory is lost in the hazes of early childhood… As for my death… I am always moving toward my death, and this prevents me from ever grasping it as a narrative end” (Ibid., p. 173).
incorporating *mimesis* in “a more subtle, dialectical comprehension of appropriation.”¹⁶⁷

This shift enables us to resituate the objection within the framework of the conflict between the reader and the text, which as discussed above recognizes that the discontinuities (largely on the temporal plane) between text and reader are what make the appropriation of the text both possible and useful. Ricoeur notes that the narrative unity of life “must be seen as an unstable mixture of fabulation and actual experience.”¹⁶⁸ Upon doing so, we can then see fiction as helping us “to fix the outline of [our] provisional ends” in life. Ricoeur continues:

> It is precisely because of the elusive character of real life that we need the help of fiction to organize life retrospectively, after the fact, prepared to take as provisional and open to revision any figure of emplotment borrowed from fiction… In this way, with the help of the narrative beginnings which our reading has made familiar to us, straining this feature somewhat, we stabilize the real beginnings formed by the initiatives… we take. And we also have the experience, however incomplete, of what is meant by ending a course of action.¹⁶⁹

Insofar as our concern is to return to life “along the multiple paths of appropriation” (i.e., through our imaginative explorations), the incongruities between art and life are not only unavoidable but valuable.¹⁷⁰ Fiction is of value precisely because it highlights these tensions; that is, it is valuable for properly orienting us to our own lives not only because of its continuities but also its contrasts.

Before moving to the next section, let us raise one additional objection. According to Aristotle, the tie between practical wisdom (*phrónēsis*) and the wise individual

---

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 161-62. Fiction is not to be taken as a template for real life, but an occasion for creative appropriation. Ricoeur draws our attention to two works of fiction, the first *Don Quixote* and *Madame Bovary*, as “spotlighting” a naïve conception of *mimesis*.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 162.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 163.
(phrónimos) “becomes meaningful only if the man of wise judgment determines at the same time the rule and the case, by grasping the situation in its singularity.”

I have demonstrated how, according to Ricoeur, ethics involves taking seriously our choices at the moment of application with a view to achieving equal distribution on a broad scale. Literature, meanwhile, is especially suited to this because it expands the scope of our understanding of rules and cases, and thereby empowers us as ethical agents to grasp a greater number of situations. But how are we to apply ourselves in unusual singular situations, such as that of Arjuna at the start of the Gītā, where moral norms are effectively inapplicable? Iris Murdoch speaks to this concern for respecting moral choice when she writes:

I can only choose within the world I can see, in the moral sense of “see” which implies that clear vision is a result of moral imagination and moral effort… One is often compelled almost automatically by what one can see. If we ignore the prior work of attention and notice only the emptiness of the moment of choice we are likely to identify freedom with the outward movement since there is nothing else to identify it with. But if we consider what the work of attention is like, how continuously it goes on, and how imperceptibly it builds up structures of value around us, we shall not be surprised that at crucial moments of choice most of the business of choosing is already over. This does not imply that we are not free, certainly not. But it does imply that the exercise of our freedom is a small piecemeal business. The moral life, on this view, is something that goes on continually, not something that is switched off in between the occurrence of explicit moral choices. What happens in between such choices is indeed what is crucial.

Genuine moral decision-making involves more than choosing between equally available alternatives, even if we have a wealth of options from which to choose. Merely familiarizing ourselves with an array of possible responses to events will not prevent us from being thrown back upon ourselves by the force of what we see; it will not protect us

\[171\] Ibid., p. 175.
from compulsively clinging to or seeking escape from our roles, as in the case of Humean sincerity and Heideggerian authenticity, respectively. In such a case we “ignore the prior work of attention” so that our actions do not get freely chosen, but rather become compulsive and false expressions of our so-called “true selves.” As a result, we effectively reduce freedom to “the outward movement since there is nothing else to identify it with.” In order to realize the “good life,” then, we must take responsibility for what Murdoch calls “the work of attention.” But how are we to do so?

2.4.c. Harmonizing Narrative and Ethical Identities through Hermeneutics of the Self: Literature as a Microscope for Deepening Ethical Agency

Ricoeur’s response to this issue brings us back once again to a consideration of the ethical significance of literature. Besides serving as a “laboratory” for exploring and assimilating ethical values and identities, literature also does what Murdoch has termed “the work of attention” by its functioning as a “microscope” for sharpening our ethical perceptions. Not unlike a “microscope,” literature sharpens the imagination and enables us, as Bontekoe notes, “to feel more deeply even about familiar situations and thus to learn lessons which may have been kept from us by the comparative dullness of our everyday responses.”¹⁷³ The special importance of this for Ricoeur’s narrative ethics comes out when we contrast his view with that of Aristotle. Even though Ricoeur operates within a kind of Aristotelian framework, his emphasis upon the personal dimension of the search for “the good life” and the uniqueness of others requires his

¹⁷³ *Dimensions*, p. 178. I am again borrowing from Bontekoe’s notion of literature as a microscope, which he has put forth in order to clarify Ricoeur’s narrative ethics.
version of the wise individual (phrónimos) to not just acknowledge that there is no universal telos defining human nature, but to exhibit considerable sensitivity to the significance of particularities. But in order to realize this kind of ethical agency, the ethically mature agent must “dig down under the level of obligation and… discover an ethical sense not so completely buried under norms that it cannot be invoked when these norms themselves are silent, in the case of undecidable matters of conscience.”\textsuperscript{174} With a view to how literature develops ethical agency through a deepening, then, I will now explore Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the self and his “poetic reply” to the paradox of personal identity. I will then demonstrate how he inscribes the dialectic of art and morality within the dialectic of selfhood and sameness in order to transform the opposition between the aesthetic and the ethical into a fruitful tension that deepens ethical sense.

In \textit{Oneself as Another} Ricoeur examines two uses of the concept of identity, both of which derive from Latin: \textit{idem} and \textit{ipse}. These come into a confrontation with each other in the problem of personal identity. Ricoeur takes the first of these two concepts to mean “sameness,” and contrasts two kinds of identity in order to articulate the concept of identity-as-sameness: numerical identity and qualitative identity.\textsuperscript{175} These forms of identity involve re-identification of the same across time and the interchangeability of two spatially separate things, respectively. However, perfect sameness never obtains; \textit{idem}-identity actually rests upon similitude. In order to reconcile the weakness of this criterion and maintain sameness for the individual in question (particularly with respect

\textsuperscript{174} \textit{Oneself as Another}, p. 190.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., p. 116.
to change in time), *idem*-identity takes uninterrupted continuity to be its criterion; it posits a principle of permanence in time in order to hold *idem*-identity together in the face of the threat of time and the discrete event. But what relevance does this have for the individual’s self-reflective question, “Who am I?” While *idem*-identity recognizes that the self “unfolds an entire hierarchy of significations,” it finds a relational, transcendental invariant in the principle of permanence in time and holds this to be of the highest order. Its contrary, meanwhile, becomes that which is “other,” “contrary,” “diverse,” “distinct,” “unequal,” and “inverse.” The second meaning of identity, meanwhile, is “ipse.” While *ipse* is somewhat more difficult to define than *idem*, Ricoeur does tell us that it is in some sense opposed to *idem*. Though it adds its own unique modalities of identity, *ipse* “implies no assertion concerning some unchanging core of the personality.” In fact, whereas *idem*-identity involves adding self-identity to identity of the same, here something “allows self-identity to betray itself and so prevents assigning the identity of [the person] purely and simply to that of the same.” The term that Ricoeur most often uses to refer to *ipse*-identity is “selfhood.”

In light of the incongruity between these two conceptions of identity, how are we to reconcile the tension between them? In addressing this issue, Ricoeur looks to two examples of how we use different models of permanence in time when we identify ourselves as persons: character and keeping one’s word. Ricoeur defines “character” as

---

176 “The demonstration of this continuity functions as a supplementary or a substitutive criterion to similitude,” explains Ricoeur. “[T]he demonstration rests upon the ordered series of small changes which, taken one by one, threaten resemblance without destroying it. This is how we see photos of ourselves at successive ages of our life. As we see, time is here a factor of dissemblance, of divergence, of difference” (Ibid., p. 117).
177 Ibid., p. 2.
178 Ibid.
“the set of distinctive marks which permit the identification of a human individual as being the same.”

In the permanence of character there occurs an “almost complete mutual overlapping of the problematic of idem and of ipse” with a view to emblematically designating the sameness of the person. Ricoeur thematizes character as having to do with those acquired, lasting dispositions by virtue of which we are recognizable. Relevant to his examination of the temporal dimension of disposition are two related notions: habit and the set of acquired identifications. Habit gives to character a history “in which sedimentation tends to cover over the innovation which preceded it, even to the point of abolishing the latter.” What does this have to do with the overlap of idem and ipse? As Ricoeur explains, sameness overcomes selfhood through the sedimentation of habit, conferring on character “the sort of permanence in time that I am interpreting here as the overlapping of ipse by idem.”

Ricoeur continues:

This overlapping, however, does not abolish the difference separating the two problematics: precisely as second nature, my character is me, myself, ipse; but this ipse announces itself as idem. Each habit formed in this way, acquired and become a lasting disposition, constitutes a trait—a character trait, a distinctive sign by which a person is recognized, reidentified as the same—character being nothing other than the set of these distinctive signs.

The set of acquired identifications, meanwhile, serves as the means by which “the other enters into the composition of the same.” We naturally tend to not only identify

---

179 Ibid., p. 119.
180 Ibid., p. 118-9. Above I have discussed the central importance of character in Hume’s ethics.
181 Ibid. We can think of character as constituted by and representing those objectified, socially projected, karmic sedimentations that we embody as a result of our having identified-with others. Those descriptive features by virtue of which we are identified as distinct persons bring together numerical and qualitative identities, uninterrupted continuity, and permanence in time.
182 Ibid., p. 121.
183 Ibid.
184 Ibid.
185 Ibid., p. 121.
ourselves with and in the values, norms, ideals, and models of our community. We also recognize ourselves by these forms and types. This involves mimetically assuming the otherness of the other as our own through a display of loyalty and with a view to self-preservation. Through a process of internalization—that is, incorporating character traits, including aspects of evaluative preference, and acquiring identifications—we overcome the alterity of the other and in turn stabilize identity. And character represents the model for securing that which defines sameness. As the objectified “what” of the (subjective) “who,” it stabilizes our objectified, socially projected identity by its constituting “the limit point where the problematic of ipse becomes indiscernible from that of idem, and where one is inclined not to discern them from one another.”

Whereas the example of character resolves the paradox of personal identity by privileging idem, the model of keeping one’s word “marks the extreme gap between the permanence of the self and that of the same and so attests fully to the irreducibility of the two problematics one to the other.” This model not only distinguishes between the identity of the self and the identity of the same, it conveys how the self aims to entirely sever from its base in sameness. In demonstrating this, Ricoeur notes that faithfulness to one’s word expresses “a self-constancy which cannot be inscribed, as character was, within the dimension of something in general but solely within the dimension of ‘who?’” Here the question “Who am I?” takes priority over the question “What am I?” This is echoed in Ricoeur’s turning to the Heideggerian distinction between the

---

186 Ibid., p. 119. In other words, character stabilizes identity by subordinating ipse to idem. Also, as noted above, that which maintains idem-identity includes numerical identity, qualitative identity, uninterrupted continuity across time, and permanence in time.

187 Ibid., p. 118.
permanence of substance (the “what” of identity) and that of self-subsistence, which is unique to Dasein or selfhood (the “who” of identity). Keeping one’s word highlights the disjunction of the self and the same while staking a claim to permanence in time by denying change. “Even if my desire were to change,” declares Ricoeur’s promise-keeper, “even if I were to change my opinion or my inclination, ‘I will hold firm.’”\(^{189}\) Thus, Ricoeur sees in promise-keeping “a modality of permanence in time capable of standing as the polar opposite to the permanence of character,” and whereby *ipse* can accordingly pose “the question of its identity without the aid and support of the *idem.*”\(^{190}\)

As for fictional narratives, these can be seen as intervening in the conceptual construction of personal identity according to the two models just presented. With respect to the first model, fictional plots often assimilate that which is contrary to sameness-identity—namely, diversity, variability, discontinuity, and instability—with permanence in time. This requires a discussion of the category of character as a narrative category. Traditionally (i.e., according to Aristotle), the narrative identity of the character has as its primary office the unification of the disparate components of the action of the plot into a sequence that guards against those admissions of discordance that threaten the identity of the plot. As Ricoeur explains, “the identity of the character is comprehensible through the transfer to the character of the operation of emplotment, first applied to the action recounted; characters, we will say, are themselves plots.”\(^{191}\) In other words, narrative structures of this sort bind together the plot and the character.

\(^{188}\) Ibid., p. 123.  
\(^{189}\) Ibid., p. 124.  
\(^{190}\) Ibid.  
\(^{191}\) Ibid., p. 140.
But what does this have to do with the discussion of personal identity? For one, narrative compositions affect the reader’s identification with the identity of the character. Next, narrative identity (specifically, its dialectic of concordance and discordance) gets placed back within the sphere of the interrelation of sameness and selfhood. As pointed to just now, the protagonist is an instrument of the plot insofar as he establishes concordance in the narrative and thereby brings the plot to its completion by synthesizing the heterogenous or discordant elements of the narrative (e.g., reversals of fortune). But this dialectic of concordance and discordance that underwrites the plot is not simply external to the character. It gets internalized as a corresponding dialectic between identity-as-singularity (idem) and identity-as-diversity (ipse), or those unforeseeable events that threaten the identity of the character emploted. Ricoeur explains:

The person, understood as a character in a story, is not an entity distinct from his or her ‘experiences.’ Quite the opposite: the person shares the condition of dynamic identity peculiar to the story recounted. The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character.

Insofar as the character gets subordinated to fulfilling the plot through his actions, then, he not only functions to preserve the story, but also stabilize narrative identity (and in turn personal identity) by forcing selfhood to accord with the identity of sameness. According to Ricoeur, this trend is best exemplified in the tradition of the totally identifiable hero, wherein the character’s involvement in the plot through action dominates his identity from without. But it is key to note that this not only subordinates

---

192 Ibid., p. 147. Elsewhere, Ricoeur explains that the identity of the character can be described on the level of emplotment “by the competition between a demand for concordance and the admission of discordance which, up to the close of the story, threaten this identity” (Ibid., p. 141).
the imaginary “who” of the character to the mediating function of narrative identity. It also compels the reader—who recognizes himself in, through, and by means of the hero—to undergo the superimposition of sameness upon selfhood.

But narrative identity can negotiate the dialectic of *ipse* and *idem* to the other extreme, thereby securing the autonomy of selfhood from sameness. It does so by creating space between the two through a disjunction of the two polar models of permanence in time, namely, the perseverance of character and the constancy of the self in promising. Just as the self, according to the example of promise-keeping noted above, is not reducible to character-as-sameness, so too narrative identity need not be a slave to an emplotment scheme that functions to preserve the identity of the same. Rather, fictional narratives can invert the relationship between plot and character discussed above. In contrast with the Aristotelian scheme, here the identity of the character breaks free from the control of the plot and its ordering principle, leading to “the extreme pole of variation where the character in the story ceases to have a definite character.”¹⁹³ The character’s loss of identity, in turn, corresponds to the disintegration of the arrangement of the narrative and, in particular, “a crisis of the closure of the narrative.”¹⁹⁴ The primary mechanism by means of which narrative facilitates its own self-disintegration is imaginative variation. In fact, according to Ricoeur the classic novel, the stream-of-consciousness novel, and “fiction of the loss of identity” do not simply tolerate such

---

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 148-9. Of the authors whose works exemplify this trend, Ricoeur here refers to Dostoyevsky, among others.
¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 149. “The nonidentifiable becomes the unnamable,” Ricoeur explains. “To see more clearly the philosophical issues in this eclipse of the identity of the character, it is important to note that, as the narrative approaches the point of annihilation of the character, the novel also loses its own properly narrative qualities” (Ibid.).
variations. They seek them out with a view to bringing about the dissolution of idem-
identity, a development that affects both the tradition of the plot carried to its ending (i.e.,
one that obtains closure) and the tradition of the identifiable hero.\textsuperscript{195} But what exactly is
meant here by “loss of identity”? Specifically, what modality of identity is at issue here?
As Ricoeur explains, the narrative takes away the support of sameness; it facilitates the
imagined nothingness of the self as identical with the same, thereby exposing selfhood as
autonomous of idem-identity.

The experience of identity in and through narrative, then, has yet another unique
advantage over its experience in and through everyday life (i.e., in addition to expanding
the possibilities for being in the world). In everyday experience “the meanings [of
permanence in time] tend to overlap and to merge with one another,” Ricoeur writes,
“[for in everyday life] counting on someone is both relying on the stability of a character
and expecting that the other will keep his or her word, regardless of the changes that may
affect the lasting dispositions by which that person is recognized.”\textsuperscript{196} Fiction, however, is
not bound by this felt need for the coincidence of ipse and idem. As a result, it can relax
those connections between the self and the same that we tend to over-determine in
ordinary life. And in so doing, fiction can establish a kind of psychical distance that is
necessary for moving us away from sameness and approaching the opposite pole of an
authentic selfhood. However, in stripping us bare of that by virtue of which we get

\textsuperscript{195} Ricoeur explains: “[T]hese unsettling cases of narrativity can be reinterpreted as exposing selfhood by
taking away the support of sameness. In this sense they constitute the opposite pole to that of the totally
identifiable hero, formed by the superimposition of selfhood upon sameness. What is now lost, under the
title of ‘property,’ is what allowed us to equate the character in the story with lasting dispositions or
character” (Ibid.).
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid., p. 148.
identified and re-identified, namely, character-as-sameness, the narrative imagination that Ricoeur exalts has become engulfed by the question “Who am I?” Consequently, narrative has exposed “the secret break at the very heart of [our] commitment” to being in the world.\textsuperscript{197} Overwhelmed by the hypothesis of the loss of self, in short, the reader finds herself reluctant and seemingly disempowered to make the return from art to life.

This problem becomes particularly evident in the light of Ricoeur’s ethically driven concern for fusing horizons. As noted earlier, situations oblige us to proactively take an interest and participate in the world. This gets echoed in Ricoeur’s discussion of the “fate” of ethical identity and its seeming incongruity with that of narrative identity. Ethical life, he tells us, appears to oppose the experience of fiction and, in fact, to exacerbate that loss of power attending narrative identity’s preoccupation with the question, “Who am I?” Consider again the phenomenon of “promise-keeping,” which represents the person through the essentially ethical notion of self-constancy. For each person, self-constancy is “that manner of conducting himself or herself so that others can count on that person. Because someone is counting on me, I am accountable for my actions before another. The term ‘responsibility’ unites both meanings: ‘counting on’ and ‘being accountable for.’”\textsuperscript{198} Ricoeur carries this analysis of how responsibility unites both meanings to the problem brought on by the question, “Where are you?,” asked by the other who needs me. The self of promise-keeping, owing to the ethical nature of this responsibility, responds with a statement that asserts self-constancy—“Here I am!” However, insofar as the reader of narratives hesitates to attend to self-constancy, the

\textsuperscript{197} Ibid., p. 167.
\textsuperscript{198} Ibid., p. 165.
implicit imperative of this declaration accentuates the gap separating the self qua *ipse* and the world. Through the impasse of the self-originating question of the narrative imagination (“Who am I?”) and the other-regarding answer of the moral subject (“Here I am!”), aesthetic and ethical domains effectively become divorced and thereby heighten the individual’s sense of being estranged from the world.\(^{199}\) Thus, while indeed narrative is ethically useful in certain ways (as demonstrated above), its failure to properly harmonize the dialectic of the self and the same nonetheless leaves us at a loss in terms of its positively orienting us towards responsible engagement in the world. Conversely, the ethical dimension of selfhood highlights the polar opposition between character and self-constancy by its calling *ipse* to halt (seemingly against its will) its imaginary wanderings and yield to the injunction to make the passage from “Who am I?” to “What am I?” That is, in curtailing the imaginative explorations of narrative imagination in lieu of observing moral norms and fulfilling the expectations of others, ethical identity threatens to undermine the self’s pursuit of wholeness by its heightening the dualism of feeling and expression, selfhood and sameness, which is implicit in the aesthetic attitude.

In responding to these objections, let us first note that the initial solutions offered to the *aporia* of personal identity presented above—namely, character (as a non-literary concept) and promise-keeping—fail because they do not consider the full implications of the narrative dimension of identity. Where, then, Ricoeur asks, “are we to locate narrative identity along this spectrum of variations extending from the pole of selfhood as

\(^{199}\) “[F]ar from underpinning the ethical identity expressed in self-constancy,” Ricoeur explains, “narrative identity seems instead to rob it of all support… How, then, are we to maintain on the ethical level a self which, on the narrative level, seems to be fading away? How can one say at one and the same time ‘Who am I?’ and ‘Here I am!’” (Ibid., p. 166-67).
sameness belonging to character to the pole of the pure selfhood of self-constancy?200

His response requires us to first note that the imagined nothingness of the self refers to a self that has been deprived of the help of sameness alone, not selfhood. Accordingly, Ricoeur states that “‘nothing’ would mean nothing at all if ‘nothing’ were not in fact attributed to an ‘I.’ But who is I when the subject says that it is nothing?… In these moments of extreme destitution, the empty response to the question ‘Who am I?’ refers not to nullity but to the nakedness of the question itself.”201 Ricoeur urges that the sentence “I am nothing” must keep its paradoxical form as a response to the question “Who am I?,” not “What am I?” If the “nothing” does not get encountered in this way, he warns, then it could polarize sameness and selfhood and prevent the individual from achieving “the most dramatic transformations of personal identity[, which must] pass through the crucible of this nothingness of identity.”202 The condition for the possibility of realizing such a transformation, namely, experiencing the nothingness of identity and an enlargement of identity, leads to a more direct response to the question “where are we to locate narrative identity?” “[N]arrative identity stands between the two [poles],” Ricoeur explains. He continues:

[I]n narrativizing character, the narrative returns to it the movement abolished in acquired dispositions, in the sediment of identifications-with. In narrativizing the aim of the true life, narrative identity gives it the recognizable features of characters loved or respected. Narrative identity makes the two ends of the chain link up with one another: the permanence in time of character and that of self-constancy.203

---

200 Ibid., p. 165.
201 Ibid., pp. 166-7.
202 Ibid., p. 166.
203 Ibid., pp. 165-6.
Implicitly contained in the notion of narrative identity is the dialectical play of selfhood and sameness. Accordingly, the freedom that the narrative recovers for ipse-identity is not mere freedom from sameness and its constitutive dispositions, etc., but the freedom to play between the two poles of permanence in time.

Having clarified the structure of identity as one of dialectical play, what can be said concerning the resources that narrativity offers us in effectively intervening in the conceptual construction of personal identity? For one, the very clarification of the structure of identity transforms the opposition between the two versions of identity into a fruitful tension. This involves, first and foremost, situating the mediation between idem and ipse in the sphere of temporality. Ricoeur explains:

This new manner of opposing the sameness of character to the constancy of the self in promising opens an interval of sense which remains to be filled in. This interval is opened by the polarity, in temporal terms, between two models of permanence in time… Having thus situated it [narrative identity] in this interval, we… see narrative identity oscillate between two limits: a lower limit, where permanence in time expresses the confusion of idem and ipse; and an upper limit, where the ipse poses the question of its identity without the aid and support of the idem.”

As demonstrated above, the distinction between the two concepts of ipse and idem cannot arise as a problem until after the question of endurance in time has been raised. The relevance of this for the formation of personal identity becomes more clear through consideration of how this distinction is characterized by a dialectic of sedimentation and innovation that also plays out in the temporal domain and corresponds to the dialectic of the same and the self. Ricoeur explains: “The dialectic of innovation and sedimentation, underlying the acquisition of a habit, and the equally rich dialectic of otherness and

[^204]: Ibid., p. 124.
internalization, underlying the process of identification, are there to remind us that
color character has a history which it has contracted." Underwriting the formation of identity
are various dialectical movements that in some sense overlap with each other. The
dialectical “opposition” between innovation and sedimentation, for example, corresponds
to the dialectical “opposition” between ipse and idem. The “interval of sense” (which has
a temporal dimension) between these movements, moreover, “remains to be filled in” by
the individual’s own assertion of agency. That is, the individual’s recognition of this gap
is indeed integral to realizing his own freedom, but only insofar as he encounters it as an
invitation to exercise his freedom to be in the world by re-establishing the stability of
color character.

Narration, for its part, can help us to redeploy “what sedimentation has
contracted.” That is, by situating disposition in the interval between these two poles of
permanence in time, one can set character “back upon the path of the narrativization of
personal identity.” This is possible, as just demonstrated, because the ipse-idem
dialectic is implicitly contained in the notion of narrative identity. And this gets attested
to, furthermore, primarily by the imaginative variations to which the narrative submits
this identity. Inscribing the selfhood-sameness dialectic within the dialectic of discordant
concordance belonging to character, the narrative opens up the space within which
imaginative variations can be explored. But again, these variations are not to indulge the
fantasies and wish-fulfillments of a self that simply aims to sever itself from the same.

---

205 Ibid., p. 122.
206 Ibid., p. 119.
Ricoeur emphasizes the importance of anchoring ourselves in the world in his discussion of the Earth as metaphor:

Literary fictions... remain imaginative variations on an invariant, our corporeal condition experienced as the existential mediation between the self and the world... [these] imaginative variations around the corporeal condition are variations on the self and its selfhood. Furthermore... the feature of selfhood belonging to corporeality is extended to that of the world as it is inhabited corporeally. This feature defines the terrestrial condition as such and gives to the Earth the existential significance... [as] something different, and something more, than a planet: it is the mythical name of our corporeal anchoring in the world.  

The psychical distance between ipse and idem that imaginative variation establishes does not involve a mere overcoming of the influence of the other (which has become sedimented in the body through habits). Rather, it explores “the intermediary space of variations, where, through transformations of the character, the identification of the same decreases without disappearing entirely.” And this occurs, as alluded to already, in order to enable us to clarify and effectively mediate the dialectical interplay of idem and ipse with a view to the creative yet responsible negotiation of our acquired habits.

Attending to this interplay of the self and the same in “the interval of sense” opened up by the narrative in fact represents a poetic reply to the objection leveled above by Murdoch. The reading of narratives does “the work of attention... in between the occurrence of explicit moral choices” (as Murdoch puts it) by enabling us to gain power over those influences (roles, ideals, values, vocations, etc.) that have become sedimented in the body. Ricoeur notes the importance of this when he writes, “Once it is chosen, a vocation confers upon the deeds that set it in motion this very character of an ‘end in

---

207 Ibid., p. 150.
208 Ibid., p. 148.
itself,’ and yet we never stop rectifying our initial choices.’” For insofar as (a) we are responsible for our actions, (b) these actions result largely from our intentions, and (c) these intentions are projected by our role-models (or “vocations”), then it follows that (d) we are responsible for gaining critical distance with respect to our roles by recovering that freedom or innovation that we initially exercised in the very choosing of those roles.

Ricoeur explains:

The epistemological status of this horizon [i.e., the “good life”] or limiting idea turns on the tie… between phrónēsis and phrónimos. In more modern terms, we would say that it is in unending work of interpretation applied to action and to oneself that we pursue the search for adequation between what seems to be best with regard to our life as a whole and the preferential choices that govern our practices.

Indeed, narrative helps us to clarify our life plan, identify those decisions, actions, etc., that will lead to or frustrate its realization, and coordinate our practices and purposes accordingly. But equally important to what we choose is how we choose, that is, developing sensitivity and attention to the influence that our dispositions, roles, etc., exert upon the very recognition that “x” or “y” ought to be pursued in the first place. In this respect, then, literature serves as not simply a “laboratory” for exploring options, but a “microscope” for magnifying and sharpening our perceptions and ultimately deepening ethical awareness so that we know how to deliberately apply our models. And this involves, above all, gaining power over the influence of our roles so that we can creatively appropriate them, rather than being mere instruments of their projected ends.

In light of the ambiguity of nothingness and its situatedness in the dialectic of idem-ipse, what role can ethical identity now be made to occupy in its response to the

---

209 Ibid., p. 178.
question, “Who am I?” For one, we must situate the seeming opposition of narrative and ethical identities within the dialectic of selfhood and sameness. In doing so, we can see ethics as exposing not the fact that “nothing” refers to the sheer absence of the agent and, consequently, his powerless-ness, but the nakedness of the question “who?” and the responsibility of the agent to will himself to being a “what.” In order to live well with and for others, we must not only put primacy upon the other (exhibited through hermeneutic openness) or advocate just causes from the sidelines, so to speak. We must participate in life and positively engage others, which requires that we take ownership of how and what we present ourselves as. There thus remains a plea for selfhood that literature has yet to satisfy, namely, a plea for involvement and participation. This is not to say that the literary narrative loses its ethical determinations in lieu of purely aesthetic ones; for as demonstrated earlier, while indeed we suspend real moral judgment and action in the midst of the literary experience, the pleasure involved therein also entails “exploring new ways of evaluating actions and characters… in the realm of good and evil.” But more than its serving as the intermediary between description and evaluation, the narrative component of self-understanding calls for “as its completion, ethical determinations characteristic of the moral imputation of action to its agent.” That is, the declaration of ethical identity “Here I am!”, which enjoins self-constancy out of recognition of the priority of the other, develops narrative identity and, in turn, personal identity, precisely because it commands the person to go beyond “this crucible of the nothingness of

---

210 Ibid., p. 179.
211 This quotation continues as follows: “Transvaluing, even devaluing, is still evaluating. Moral judgment has not been abolished; it is rather itself subjected to the imaginative variations proper to fiction” (Ibid., p. 164).
identity” and become attuned to the dialectical interplay of sameness and selfhood. The ethical responds to literature’s plea for worldly engagement by forcing us to maintain (or at least present) a self that seems to be fading away on the narrative level. As for the halt that the ethical (through the act of promise giving) brings to the wandering of ipse, this is not a violation of the freedom of the self, but a condition for the possibility of its growth and self-realization, namely, the realization of the achieved life. Meanwhile, the self is not reducible to character or the question of sameness, for the narrative experience that invites the ethical response and thereby preserves the paradox of personal identity develops a self-constancy that is genuinely modest, not rigid and prideful, as in the case of Heideggerian authenticity or even Humean sincerity. For here the self has experienced a dissolution and, in the context of the dialectic of ipse-idem, made a return to social reality, though now having fully recognized that “the relation of ownership (or belonging) between the person and his or her thoughts, actions, and passions—in short, ‘experiences’—is not without ambiguity on the ethical plane.” Ethics, then, enjoins us to move beyond the mere realization of nothingness and encompass the play of sameness and selfhood. Moreover, by situating this injunction in the context of a literary experience that itself occasions such a play, ethics can now be seen as maintaining both the freedom of ipse and the assertive character of the statement “Here I am!” on the level of moral commitment.

The seemingly irreconcilable opposition between ethics and aesthetics, then, hinges upon the paradox of personal identity. The reply of narrative to this paradox is

---

212 Ibid., p. 163.
213 Ibid., p. 168.
unique insofar as it has the power to clarify the structure of agency as a play between sameness and selfhood, as well as empower us to negotiate this play both in terms of its “horizontal” and “vertical” extensions. Ricoeur’s understanding of how literature enables this is echoed in Martha Nussbaum’s insistence upon investigating ethical conceptions through narrative:

[N]ovels do not function… as pieces of “raw” life: they are a close and careful interpretative description… The point is that in the activity of literary imagining we are led to imagine and describe with greater precision, focusing our attention on each word, feeling each event more keenly—whereas much of actual life goes by without that heightened awareness, and is thus, in a certain sense, not fully or thoroughly lived… [T]oo much of it is obtuse, routinized, incompletely sentient. So literature is an extension of life not only horizontally, bringing the reader into contact with events or locations or persons or problems he or she has not otherwise met, but also, so to speak, vertically, giving the reader experience that is deeper, sharper, and more precise than much of what takes place in life.214

The horizontal extension of moral agency that gets brought about through imaginative variation now gets supplemented by its vertical counterpart. Narrative attends to “the work of attention” that Murdoch calls us to do in the interval “between the occurrence of explicit moral choices” by heightening our sensitivity to the uniqueness of situations and mobilizing us to apply those lessons in phrónēsis that literature (as a “laboratory”) has taught us. As for the ethical imperative to present ourselves, Ricoeur’s narrative ethics demonstrates how this stimulates the hermeneutic interplay of selfhood and sameness, thereby bringing narrative identity to its completion.

2.5. Conclusion: Negotiating Power and Realizing Self through Being with Others

In closing this chapter, let us reconsider the problem of disempowerment in the midst of asymmetrical relations that Hume and Heidegger fail to adequately resolve and which has yet to be addressed in our examination of Ricoeur’s hermeneutical ethics.

Ricoeur poses the following objection concerning the validity of the transition from narrative to life experience:

Along the known path of my life, I can trace out a number of itineraries, weave several plots; in short, I can recount several stories… [I]n our experience the life history of each of us is caught up in the histories of others… of my parents, my friends, my companions in work and in leisure… It is precisely by reason of this entanglement, as much as by being open-ended on both sides, that life histories differ from literary ones… Can one then still speak of the narrative unity of life?²¹⁵

The presence of narrative unity in life is problematic because our life stories lack clear boundaries with respect to our involvements with others, which is not the case in fiction. This objection gets highlighted when we recall that our living well with and for others hinges upon relations of reciprocity, which of course ensnare us in “entanglements” with others. Ricoeur looks to Emmanuel Levinas’s treatment of otherness and intersubjectivity in order to demonstrate how ethical life presupposes the interpenetration of life histories. According to Ricoeur’s interpretation of Levinas, the self bears a fundamentally intersubjective constitution, and the other has priority insofar as it is his initiative that establishes the relation between self and other; in some sense, we get encountered by the other before he even becomes a part of our own life history. Insofar as this relation has a moral component, we are obliged by the injunction of the other to not only stand before him (in response to the question “Where are you?”), but to observe at least basic norms of behavior. In short, the other summons us to responsibility, a responsibility that, contrary
to Heidegger’s understanding of the term, is not just existential but thoroughly moral.\textsuperscript{216} But this facet of moral life would seem to heighten the problem of how to transition from narrative to life experience.

As an initial response to this objection, we can note that the moral dimension of literature consists in its allowing the other to “break through the enclosure of the same [\textit{idem}]”; the experience of literature enhances our openness in understanding the other and in turn edifies us insofar as we are made able to receive instruction from the other as the “master of justice.”\textsuperscript{217} But an ethical fusion of horizons must involve reciprocity between the persons related. And in the encounter of the narrative-oriented self with the master of justice, the relation effectively begins and ends with dissymmetry. For not only is the relation initially marked by imbalance. Since the narrative self lacks the initiative to bring about reciprocity through a deliberate act of self-presentation, he continues to dwell in the shadow of the other. Ricoeur explains:

\begin{quote}
To be sure, the self is “summoned to responsibility” by the other. But as the initiative of the injunction comes from the other, it is in the accusative mode alone that the self is enjoined. And the summons to responsibility has opposite it simply the passivity of an “I” who has been called upon.\textsuperscript{218}
\end{quote}

The self is indebted by the gift (i.e., the injunction) of the other. The response that would establish reciprocity and thereby maintain and cultivate the relationship, would be one that “compensates for the dissymmetry of the face-to-face encounter.”\textsuperscript{219} But since the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid., p. 161.
\item Accordingly, this face of the other “is that of a master of justice, of a master who instructs and who does so only in the ethical mode: this face forbids murder and commands justice” (Ibid., p. 189). We both do and ought to face others out of a concern for instruction, specifically, ethical instruction, and more broadly, achieving reciprocity.
\item Ibid., p. 168.
\item Ibid., p. 189.
\item Ibid.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
self lacks the power to initiate the proper response (by virtue of his being reduced to a passive recipient of the master’s instruction), this reciprocity cannot be achieved. Narrative, meanwhile, accentuates this problem. For in simply opening the self to the influence of the other without grounding him in a capacity (let alone a desire) for developing identity (not just selfhood) in the midst of the other, literature reifies our sense of being a mere witness to (but not a participant in) our relations with others. As a result of leaving this dissymmetry uncompensated, the exchange of giving and receiving eventually gets broken off, and the relation itself inevitably dies out.

I have already demonstrated how Humean and Heideggerian frameworks recognize the interpenetratedenss of self and other but are fundamentally concerned with overcoming tensions between self and other in order to secure the integrity of a unitary self. Moreover, they look to eliminate the opposition between aesthetic and moral domains accordingly. Hume, driven by a concern to secure sameness of identity across time (through constancy of character), looks to do so by overlapping aesthetic experience with the moral norm, thereby producing the sentiment of being morally sincere. Heidegger, in contrast, emphasizes the freedom of selfhood apart from sameness, and disjoins the aesthetic attitude apart from social-moral considerations with a view to evoking the sentiment of being authentic. But both strategies of overcoming in fact disempower the self in the face of the other precisely because they eliminate the ambiguity of personal identity, and in turn render their respective exemplary individuals unable to creatively negotiate relational contexts in the absence of symmetry.
Ricoeur, however, can redress this problem by again drawing upon the resources that narrative has to offer and linking it to his hermeneutic theory of the self. He notes the common literary practice of framing one narrative within another. This is important for a few reasons. For one, it serves as an example of how narrative inscribes the seeming opposition of selfhood and otherness within the dialectical interplay of selfhood and sameness, and thereby provides a clue to the intersubjective structure of agency. Moreover, it develops skillfulness in negotiating the interpenetratedness of self and other by providing a model for making intelligible the intertwining of life histories—thereby discounting the argument that narrative ignores the entanglement of life histories. As Ricoeur notes, this model clarifies the competition of narrative programs between persons in life by depicting “the diverse fates belonging to different protagonists.” And finally, this power that the individual gains in managing the dialectic of selfhood and otherness has a moral dimension. Earlier I alluded to how narrative theory mediates between “what is” (description) and “what ought to be” (prescription). Here we see that it can do so effectively only if we recognize that implied within the very structure of the act of narrating is a certain ethical normativity to fuse horizons with other objects and persons and through this appropriation to broaden our own possibilities of intervening in the world. Indeed, then, narrative is not to be instrumentalized as a form of social-moral indoctrination, as in the Humean scheme; it is to retain its freedom from social norms so that the agent can come to an awareness of his own autonomy as an agent. Contrary to Heidegger’s view, meanwhile, this distance from the ordinary is to be taken as an

---

220 Ibid., p. 162.
occasion for gaining that space necessary for more creatively re-entering into the fray of interpersonal relations and creatively re-negotiating them.

In light of the intersubjective structure of agency and the fruitful opposition between aesthetic and ethical spheres that have been exemplified in literature, the completion that ethics brings to narrative identity can be seen in its transforming the question “Who am I?” into “Who am I, so inconstant, that notwithstanding you count on me?”

In other words, the expectations of others can be interpreted as stimulating a hermeneutic interplay between selfhood (represented by the self-directed question, “Who am I?”) and otherness (represented by the other-directed answer, “Here I am!”), not just selfhood and sameness. The structure of agency is not simply “intervidual,” that is, the agent is not simply constituted by a variety of intersecting roles over which we struggle to gain power. Underlying the agent is an interplay of subjectivities. And while indeed narrative experience develops an orientation to the other that has in view reciprocity of exchange, it nonetheless requires the ethical encounter for actually realizing such reciprocity with the other and, ultimately, accomplishing one’s telos. In responding to the above objection from the side of ethics, then, consider that the juxtaposition of ethics and aesthetics rests upon a misunderstanding of the relationship between self and other that is implicit in morality. As Ricoeur notes, “the vocabulary of summons and injunction is perhaps already too ‘moral.’”

The above objection has been framed in the sphere of the norm, as it holds that “the other represents absolute exteriority with respect to an ego

---

221 Ibid., p. 189.
222 Ibid.
defined by the condition of separation.”

In order to develop an ethical sense that can encompass the interplay of self and other, then, we must move beyond this strictly moral framework and inscribe ethical identity and the interplay of self and other in the self-same dialectic.

How, then, are we to move beyond the implicit dualisms (i.e., self/same, aesthetics/ethics, self/other) of morality and achieve an ethical fusion of horizons? Ricoeur finds the core of such an ethical sense in the notion of solicitude, which he sees as having “a more fundamental status than obedience to duty.” As “benevolent spontaneity,” solicitude is intimately related to self-esteem; it incorporates the goal of morality (i.e., self-respect) within the framework of the aim of “the good life.” Ethical life, as noted above, is primarily concerned with the pursuit of “goodness” as that quality of one’s actions and one’s general orientation that exhibits regard for others. Solicitude makes this pursuit authentic or conducive to self-esteem because it establishes equality between self and other only after having disclosed the “self” as not “myself,” but the mineness of being with others. In those relationships that occur within “the network of solicitude,” Ricoeur tells us, “the reflexivity of oneself is not abolished but is, as it were, split into two by mutuality, under control of the predicate ‘good.’” But Ricoeur is keen to point out that this equality is not only a task (i.e., it is not given), but is within the individual person’s control, independent of the actions and orientation of the other.

Indeed, solicitude is largely concerned with that openness in understanding theorized by Gadamer and now taken up in Ricoeur’s ethical fusion of horizons. However, while

---

223 Ibid., pp. 188-9.
224 Ibid., p. 190.
solicitude gives consideration to the other, it also recognizes as indispensable the
development of self-esteem as that power of initiative that we initially gave to the other
(e.g., the master of justice). Not unlike Heidegger’s conception, then, here solicitude is
bound up with fully realizing the uniqueness of oneself as a self. Contrary to Heidegger,
however, solicitude is not a solitary virtue. Rather, it involves a reflexivity in the other
that is integral to positively opening oneself to the horizon of others, including
inauthentic others. Moreover, it leads to the creative yet responsible negotiation of this
living dialectic through the development of ethical power or self-esteem.

This harmonization of aesthetics and ethics, selfhood and sameness, self and
other, is exemplified in the relationship of friendship. Here there occurs a movement
towards self-effacement and a genuine opening up to the other that does not lead to a loss
of self, but a strengthening of self-affirmation. This occurs in place of a violation of self-
integrity, furthermore, because solicitude gets taken as the dialogic component of self-
estee. Accordingly, the individual is able to genuinely take the other (i.e., the friend) as
a self, while conversely making himself vulnerable to the friend by consciously
presenting himself as an other. But in what way does friendship belong to ethics? For one
thing, on the ethical plane this self-interpretation through reflection, by means of which
self-esteem extends to the other, has irreducible ethical value. We hold the friend to be
“‘another self,” and we value their esteem as a self, which is indispensable to an “ethics
of reciprocity, of sharing, of living together.”226 Not unlike in Aristotle’s understanding,

225 Oneself as Another, p. 183-4. The phrase “network of solicitude” comes from Bontekoe in Dignity.
226 As Ricoeur writes, “the esteem of the other as a oneself and the esteem of oneself as an other…
[become] fundamentally equivalent… All the ethical feelings mentioned above belong to this
phenomenology of ‘you too’ and ‘as myself’” (Oneself as Another, p. 193-4). As for friendship, it makes a
then, friendship is taken to be an ethical virtue because of its capturing the ethical component of being with others. It belongs to ethics “as being the first unfolding of the wish to live well,” which involves a certain mutuality or reciprocity wherein “each loves the other as being the man he is.”  And yet, Ricoeur goes beyond Aristotle with his relational understanding of virtue. As Ricoeur writes, “there is no place for a straightforward concept of otherness in Aristotle.” The relevance of this is that through solicitude the other can be taken in his alterity, not just as a projection of oneself. As a result, friendship can now appear “as a midpoint where the self and the other share equally the same wish to live together.” In the midst of friendship, then, self-esteem encompasses the need for self-respect and develops solicitude, which is the core of ethical sense. The opposition between ethics and aesthetics, meanwhile, now gets harmonized in the unfolding growth of self-hood and the care that the ethically mature self exercises in relation to the friend.

But while this response to the above objection demonstrates how the ethical imperative of solicitude and the aesthetic imperative of feeling are not incompatible in

---

227 Ibid., p. 183. The latter quote is made by Ricoeur to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, 8.3.1156a18-19.
228 Ibid., p. 187.
229 Ibid., p. 192.
230 It is worthwhile to note that solicitude also connects up with justice. But going beyond Aristotle’s understanding, Ricoeur holds that friendship does not simply have in view equality amongst a small number of partners of equal rank (who already presuppose equality). The self-esteem that gets strengthened through friendship requires that we attain completion “at the end of the itinerary of meaning traced out by the three components of the ethical aim,” namely, living well with and for others in just institutions (Ibid., p. 172). Through friendship we make the transition from the realization of the good life through interpersonal relationships to the creation of just institutions. This originates from friendship because friendship is founded upon mutuality, and it adds equality to our interactions with others. Equality, Ricoeur writes, “places friendship on the path of justice, where the life together shared by a few people gives way to the distribution of shares in a plurality on the scale of a historical, political community” (Aristotle. 1999. *Nicomachean Ethics* (Terrence Irwin, Trans.). Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., p.
the case of friendship, it still does not instruct us in an ethical sense by means of which we can recover that power of initiative that is necessary for establishing mutuality in the midst of dissymmetrical relationships. As demonstrated above, authentic ethical sense cannot emerge in the relationship with the master of justice because in the absence of reciprocity there can be no instruction within the field of solicitude, only in terms of receiving imperatives. Seeking out this resolution, then, requires that we note, first of all, that friendship exists at the mid-point between two extremes: on the one hand, the summons to responsibility enjoined by the master of justice, and on the other hand, sympathy for the suffering other. Secondly, we must recognize that our ethical attitudes get deployed not just in the midst of friendships, but between these two extremes. And thirdly, compensating for the imagined loss of self that we suffer in the face of the master of justice requires not just instruction in the norm but also a certain education in feeling. Clues to this instruction in feeling are to be found at the opposite extreme, namely, the relationship with the suffering other. In this situation, the other has experienced a violation of self-integrity as a consequence of having lost the capacity for acting. As for the self, he is the seat of initiative (in terms of “being-able-to-act”) insofar as he gives his compassion. This suffering-with situation is the opposite of the assignment of responsibility by the summons of the master of justice because the other is now reduced to the mere condition of receiving. But the encounter with the suffering other can nonetheless be instructive. Even the suffering other can be a “claimer” (if not a “master”) of justice insofar as the individual self, “whose power of acting is at the start greater than

188). Friendship, then, is indispensable to the health of both interpersonal relations and institutions, which as noted above, are to help the members of a society to live well with and for each other on a broader scale.
that of its other, finds itself affected [in true sympathy] by all that the suffering other offers to it in return."²³¹ The suffering other has something to give, but this gift is drawn from weakness itself, not the power of acting. The self can indeed seize upon this imbalance of power as an occasion for solidifying his power over the other. But this would not lead to instruction in solicitude (and in turn “the good life”) because it would not produce a reciprocity of exchange. Rather, the individual must here emphasize the role played by feelings in realizing equality. Contrary to a concern for power of domination, on the one hand, and mere pity—“in which the self is secretly pleased to know it has been spared”²³²—on the other hand, what Ricoeur calls “true sympathy” involves remembering one’s primordial vulnerability to the other so that one can “receive from the friend’s weakness more than he or she can give in return by drawing from his or her own reserves of strength.”²³³ Through openness to the feelings of the suffering other, conjoined with the moral injunction coming from the master of justice (namely, the ideals of justice, etc.), our feelings of benevolence can be spontaneously directed toward others. The initiative of these “moral feelings,” moreover, come from what Ricoeur calls “the loving self,” and reestablish equality in originally unequal relationships, but “only through the shared admission of fragility and, finally, of mortality.”²³⁴

In returning to the relationship with the master of justice, recall that in order for the injunction of the master of justice to occasion instruction within the field of

²³¹ Nicomachean Ethics, p. 191.
²³² Ibid.
²³³ Ibid., p. 191. Ricoeur continues, “Here magnanimity—another Greek virtue, one celebrated by Descartes as well—must lower its flag” (Oneself as Another, p. 191). I would add that Heidegger also celebrates this virtue in his ideal of authenticity.
²³⁴ Ibid., p. 192.
solicitude, the individual’s response must somehow compensate for the relationship’s initial dissymmetry. This dissymmetry cannot be compensated for by the substitution of self-hatred for self-esteem. Rather, this must meet with complicity in self-effacement, “by which the self makes itself available to others.”235 What does addressing the relationship with the suffering other have to do with this? As Ricoeur notes, the compensation needed in the situation with the master of justice must come through the reverse movement of recognition. At the other end of the spectrum, wherein the situation of the instruction by the other gets inverted, the individual self encompasses the dialectic of giving and receiving that underwrites the dialectical interplay of self and other. In the process of doing so, he develops the maturity of feeling (he becomes an “athlete of emotion,” as demonstrated in the previous chapter) that is requisite for attending to those circumstances (e.g., living through the situation of the other in a forward direction) that distinguish how an ethical fusion of horizons is to occur, rather than mechanically showing deference to the norm in the face of the master of justice or simple pity to the suffering other. More specific to this situation, he recovers his initiative in the face of the master of justice by recognizing his capacity for giving in return as made available by the dialectic of giving and receiving, and reestablishes equality “through the recognition by the self of the superiority of the other’s authority.”236 Thus, Ricoeur’s ethical exemplar masters the intersubjective play of giving and receiving so that his encounters with others are not simply moral, but bring to completion the desire for “the good life.” Moreover, the solicitude that is requisite for establishing the priority of ethical selfhood and self-

235 Ibid., p. 168.
236 Ibid., p. 192.
esteem over regard for duty and moral self-respect require both a vertical and horizontal extension of agency.

Having now laid some groundwork for a model of the fully integrated ethical person, let us return to consideration of classical Indian conceptions of personal and moral agency. In making this transition, however, it bears noting that, while Ricoeur’s emphasis upon greater breadth of imaginative role-play marks a significant conceptual advance over the social conservatism of the Gītā, his model of the person nonetheless lacks the deep soteriological dimension underscored by the concept of yoga. With these contrasts in view, let us now examine a model of creative role-play that can in some sense be seen as harmonizing these two views.
Chapter 3: A Kashmir Śaiva Theory of Agency: Completing the Dialectic of Personal Identity through the Play of Śiva-Śakti

3.1. Introduction

Human beings are world-makers. Through our actions we create, sustain, and destroy common and uncommon, practical and spiritual, emotional and relational realities. We not only find ourselves in contexts, we create the contexts we find, just as we re-create the texts that we read and interpret. The manner in which we participate in this cycle of finding, making, and remaking depends both upon what roles we play and how we play them. Chapters One and Two focused upon the models of role-play suggested by the Bhagavad Gītā and Paul Ricoeur, respectively. Both models take the creative appropriation of our social roles to be an integral feature of moral agency. In addition, both approaches recover creative moral power for the agent by first inscribing the paradox of ethical identity in that of personal identity, and then responding to that paradox with a poetic reply. But these two models are in some sense counter-posed to each other. What I have reconstructed as the Gītā’s implicit theory of aesthetic virtue is largely concerned to reinvigorate the soteriology of orthodox Hinduism. But while it secures creativity for the agent with respect to how he is to play his role, the manner in which the Gītā grounds him in the social domain curtails his freedom in choosing what role he is to perform. Ricoeur’s narrative ethics, in contrast, both grounds the individual in the social reality and enables him to experiment with different roles with a view to re-fashioning what that reality looks like. However, while Ricoeur frees the agent to explore the vertical and horizontal extensions of moral life, his hermeneutical ethics lacks the soteriological dimension undergirding the Gītā’s approach, which provides the impetus
for the text’s examination of the deeper ontological implications of the paradox of personal identity.

This chapter revisits the problem of the person (i.e., the self or ātman) in an Indian context by focusing upon the school of thought known as Kashmir Śaivism. For Śaivas, as for other Hindu schools of thought, agency is a problem of the utmost soteriological and social importance. But whereas orthodox Hinduism subordinates the person to the problem of karma (as discussed in Chapter One), Śaivas include the question of karma within the scope of the problem of agency, grounding the self in a primordial psychology of creativity. This brings us to a consideration of the ontological and epistemological frameworks of Śaivism, as these serve as the groundwork for a theory of creative agency. The underlying problematic of Śaivism is “the possibility or utility of any finite human behavior, whether linguistic, aesthetic, theological, devotional, ritual, etc., for expressing, affecting, or attaining a religious Ultimate Reality.” This human-Ultimate structural issue has two aspects that concern us here. The first has to do with divine grace or will, which underwrites the metaphysics of play of Śaivism. The second aspect concerns the value of human choices and actions in the midst of this encompassing play. More specifically, this second aspect has to do with those dimensions of role-play emphasized by the Gītā and Ricoeur—namely, the respective issues of how we apply ourselves (e.g., through an Upaniṣadic-like recovery of primordial union with

---

237 I will henceforth refer to Kashmir Śaivism by the term Śaivism, though in full awareness that the Kashmirī school is only one of a number of Śaiva philosophical traditions. In keeping with the classical darśanas of traditional Hindu India, (Kashmir) Śaivism holds the self to be an issue of the utmost concern.

238 Though operating in very different philosophical context, it bears noting that Ricoeur also theorizes the shift from action theory to that of the person (see Oneself as Another). While this shift is explicit in Ricoeur’s work, it is only implicit in the Gītā, as I have argued in Chapter One.
the cosmos) and what we apply ourselves as (e.g., through imaginative exploration of the interindividuality of the person), though now qualified by the uniquely Śaiva concern with re-discovering our ontic identity with the Universal Super Agent (i.e., the Person, Śiva).

But this gives rise to a number of questions, namely, “Who is the ‘Ultimate Super-Agent’?,” “What does it mean to identify with this Agent?,” and “In what way does this empower the agent qua limited individuality?” Responses to these questions structure this chapter. In the first section of this chapter I respond to the first two questions by relating them to the first of the two aspects noted above (i.e., how divine will underwrites Śaiva metaphysics). Having examined the metaphysics of Śaivism in terms of the play of Śiva-Śakti, I then discuss how salvific freedom, or repose (viśrānti) in Śiva, depends not only on divine grace, but also human response (the second aspect noted above). Thus, the remaining three sections investigate how the philosophical, visualization and ritual practices of Śaivism lead to the realization of one’s identity with Śiva and the obtainment of those powers (śaktis) that attend this self-realization. Moreover, these sections demonstrate how creative role-play is the intermediary step between traversing the gap between limited self-awareness and the deep personal appropriation of Śiva as Becoming (or the vertical extension of agency), and then returning back to the world of multiplicity by engaging others as an expression of our identity with Śiva and His play with Śakti (or the horizontal extension of agency).

The liberating realization of oneself as the Ultimate Super-Agent, I argue, involves bringing into accord our telos and the cosmos. And this harmonization has the

quality of a certain restfulness in the play of divine consciousness. But this rest is not the authentication of some transcendent self that stands over and against others, for the sociability of the agent is a necessary condition for the individual’s expressing his true nature. Contrary to the socially conservative vision of the Gītā, however, the poise of liberating play involves creatively attending to what roles we perform. For given that the manifestations of the Ultimate Super-Agent are ever-changing, so too must the agent be free to perceive and perform beyond the expectations of others so that his actions are soteriologically efficacious. Furthermore, while such expression involves the agent’s recognizing that all along he had simply been pretending to be himself, taking rest in the vibrant free play of the imagination does not privilege the subjective side of experience, as Ricoeur does. Rather, in keeping with its peculiar interpretation of the structure of experience in terms of the play of Śiva-Śakti (a narrative to which Ricoeur does not adhere), the Śaiva doctrine of the imagination is not merely epistemological, but deeply committed to the ontological side of the agent. Expressing one’s true identity as Śiva, then, involves not simply imagining oneself as an other, but seizing upon the role of the imagination in re-discovering that one is both an other and the other. Integrating in this way some of the insights into play offered by the Gītā and Ricoeur, Śaivism does not aim to overcome the tension between the One and the many, the subject and the role-model, the self and the other. Rather, it presences the ambiguity between these binaries and cares for the space between them as an occasion for expressing the creative play of Śiva-Śakti.
3.2. The Play of Divine Self-Recognition: From the Myth of Śiva-Śakti to Śaiva Ontology and Epistemology of Play

In Śaivism, as well as many other theistic traditions, salvation depends upon a favorable relationship between the human and the divine. Understanding the nature of this salvation in a Śaiva context rests upon answering two questions: “Who is Śiva?,” and “What is His essential nature?” First of all, Śiva is one of three principal deities in Hindu mythology (Brahmā and Viṣṇu being the other two) and is held by Śaivism to be the Supreme Lord. But the portrayal of Śiva that Hindu myth gives us is of an almost schizophrenic personality. In one version, Śiva is introverted and at peace, sitting atop a snow-clad mountain wholly frozen in samādhi. Having transcended all desires in search of truth, He has achieved indifference towards the delights of the world in lieu of ānanda, or tranquil bliss. Elsewhere, however, Śiva is a raging extrovert, creating distinction through active, sometimes violent dancing. This over-activity, meanwhile, has been aroused by the Goddess Śakti, who is the personification of generative energy and the embodiment of charming delusions. And while in the first account She represents the world from which Śiva seeks seclusion, here She causes His eyes to open to the world by stirring restlessness within His heart. But how are we to reconcile these two visions of Śiva as the ascetic turning away from the world and the wild man in rapturous dalliance with a soul-agitating other? This would seem necessary not only in order to give coherence to Śiva Himself, but also to reconcile Śiva in relation with other beings.

\[^{240}\] Please note that by using the term “myth” instead of, for example, “symbol,” I do not mean the falsity or illusoriness of the play of Śiva-Śakti with respect to “reality.” Quite the contrary, according to Śaivism, the myth of Śiva-Śakti underwrites the very creation and continual disclosure of the world. The term symbol, in contrast, implies something stagnant, whereas myth has a narrative dimension, the importance of which will unfold in the course of this chapter.
Moreover, if bliss consists in the awareness of there not being an other separate from the self, then by what means does Śiva intend to recover His sense of wholeness—for Śakti is really the other half of Śiva?²⁴¹

This problem of negotiating the marriage of Śiva and Śakti, or consciousness and Becoming, lies not only at the heart of the myth of Śiva. It also frames the ontology and epistemology of Kashmir śaivism, the lineage that has provided the most sophisticated philosophical articulation of śaiva theism. In this section I examine these carefully crafted articulations of the myth of Śiva with a view to clarifying the nature of the Person, Śiva as a kind of super-Agent. In short, the One wished to become Many out of a desire for playing a game of cosmic hide and seek. And this provides a crucial clue to answering the two questions that began this section. Who Śiva is is necessarily ambiguous from a limited perspective, for Śiva's essential nature is an endless hermeneutic play of separation from and recovery of the Goddess Śakti, who is the universe. In this section I focus upon the vertical (i.e., with respect to Becoming, as opposed to beings to be found along the horizontal) dimension of this play by relating the philosophical concepts of vimarśa and prakāśa to the myth of Śiva at play with His consort, Śakti. This play of consciousness is defined by a double-movement between two phases: emanation (vimarśa) and return (prakāśa). Śiva exercises His creative intentionality by playing between these two aspects in order to encompass His seemingly bi-polar wholeness through the liberating knowledge that is divine self-recognition.

²⁴¹ The symbol of ardhanārtśvara, which depicts Śiva as half-male, half-female, expresses the śaiva view of the divine and the universe, consciousness and the material world, the masculine and feminine, as primordially united. Through the supreme Person, Śiva, who is represented in this composite androgynous form, Śaivas exalt this harmonization of Śiva and Śakti as the root of all creation and the end of all pursuits.
3.2.a. Spanda and the Alternation of Śiva Between Prakāśa and Vimarśa

According to Śaivas, the entire universe is nothing but pure conscious energy. This divine consciousness (caitanya) has been given the name “Śiva.” Śiva is “pure subjectivity [that] abides beyond the realms of Time and Space”; He is anuttara, or unsurpassed, ultimate reality. Beyond ordinary description, Śiva's essential nature is commonly explained as “sat, cit, ānanda,” or Being (sat) that is conscious (cit) and bliss (ānanda) as such (as opposed to Being that is a consciousness of bliss). Accordingly, Śiva is eternal and infinite, encompassing the boundless space in which the universe is born, grows, and dies; He is transcendent, unchanging, and undivided, and hence undiminished by what appear to be limitations of form (i.e., phenomenal events, singular things, etc.); and He is all-knowing and all-powerful. The term prakāśa is often used to characterize Śiva in this state. Literally meaning “light,” in the context of Monistic Śaivism, prakāśa means the light of transcendental consciousness that illuminates all phenomena and can never be separated from the seer (prakāśaka) and the seen (prakāśya). Prakāśa represents the power of self-revelation by which supreme consciousness (Śiva) shines by itself and all things eventually become manifest as identical with Him. But as both the “supreme perceiver” and the essence and substratum of all that exists, prakāśa designates the unity of Śiva (as Parameśvara) and Śakti (as

---


243 This term derives from the verb, “prakāś,” which means “to shine, gleam, look brilliant; to become visible or manifest, to come to light,” or taken in its causative sense, “to disclose, unfold, reveal.” As I will demonstrate below, prakāśa is illuminating in an unintentional sense; unlike vimarśa, it is not involved in world-making.
Parā, or Goddess Supreme). With respect to the latter (i.e., Śakti) as the eventual world of multiplicity, then, prakāśa is a phase of potentiality and its eventual reabsorption (pralaya). With respect to the former (i.e., Śiva), meanwhile, prakāśa is sva-prakāśa, or self-aware luminosity; for in this state Śiva is always aware of Himself as the Supreme Lord through a kind of immediate, a priori intuition. 244 A common method employed by Śaivas for explaining the passive alertness of Śiva as pure subjectivity is by means of analogy. Just as the characteristics of a mango tree lie dormant in a mango seed, so too is the prakāśa aspect of consciousness a period of latency (pralaya) wherein all the universal forms (or seeds, if you will) of the manifest universe are dissolved and their essences reabsorbed by Śiva as the universal, undivided consciousness. 245

While the first aspect of Śiva consciousness transcends the universe, the second operates through it. Śaivas explain this through the term vimarśa, which can be translated as, among other things, “diversity,” “reflexivity,” “reflective awareness,” or “self-awareness.” 246 Śaivas use this term to articulate how the Supreme Lord emanates a real world of multiplicity through His power and consort, Śakti. Having phenomenal experience as its domain, vimarśa represents the self-consciousness that is integral to bringing about the world process. The manner in which vimarśa produces diversity through reflective awareness can be explained as follows. Vimarśa uses the light of self-revelation (prakāśa) in order to survey itself and, in so doing, give rise to the self-

---

245 This analogy was commonly referred to by Professor Kāmlesh Jhā during my conversations with him at the Jñāna Pravāha Institute, Varanasi, India, 2008.
246 The Doctrine of Vibration, p59, p73.
consciousness of phenomena as particular entities that is a necessary condition for their differentiating and teleologically developing themselves in accordance with their specific forms or seeds. In order to illustrate this, let us return to the analogy of the mango tree. Just as a mango seed awakens and develops in the form of a mango tree, so too does consciousness enter into its active phase (i.e., vimarśa) as the universal seeds begin to germinate. This germination of the particular seed, moreover, is made possible by a kind of reflection upon its own nature whereby it actively seizes upon its own particular potentiality (e.g., as a mango seed, not some other seed [e.g., a pumpkin seed]). And finally, just as the flowering of a mango tree produces mangoes and, in turn, mango seeds of its own that will facilitate the growth of other mango trees, so too does each phase of action, or vimarśa, generate further forms or seeds of potentiality that germinate during the period of rest (i.e., the prakāśa phase) in order to later bring about the next phase of action. That is, the active aspect of Śiva consciousness that seizes upon the light of self-revelation (prakāśa) in order to manifest in diverse forms in turn produces the non-relational, immediate awareness of “I” that is requisite for later affecting the manifestation, maintenance, and ultimately, the reabsorption of the universe. In this way, the manifestation of diversity that attends the active self-reflecting that is vimarśa not only uses the potentiality latent in the prakāśa phase; it also feeds into and gives rise to the passive aspect of Śiva consciousness.

The alternation of Śiva between these complementary aspects (vimarśa and prakāśa) is driven by a vibrating, pulsating energy, or spanda. Literally, spanda means throbbing, pulsation, or vibration. In the soteriological context of Śaivism, spanda is the
dynamic aspect or the unobjectified desire of transcendental reality that compels Śiva (as Parameśvara) to divide Himself from His Śakti, and out of a kind of play, emanate and later recover the universe through Her. Accordingly, *spanda* in its *vimāraśa* aspect is Śiva's will to creation; it is the initial motion of impetus or the first moment of the will to existence out of which all existent things ceaselessly arise. Moreover, it continues to embody all manifestations and infuses them with life (where they would otherwise appear inert or not appear at all) until their return to the universal, undivided consciousness that is transcendent light (*prakāśa*).\(^{247}\)

### 3.2.b. The Thirty-six Stages of the Involution and Evolution of Śiva Consciousness

This vibrating, energetic alternation (*spanda*) between *vimāraśa* and *prakāśa* aspects underwrites the involution and evolution of Śiva consciousness, respectively. The Śaiva theory of involution runs as follows. From the point of view of ultimate reality, consciousness becomes more and more limited through its involvement or unfoldment towards objectification. The *Pratyabhijñā Hṛdayam* explains: “Citi Herself [i.e., consciousness], descending from the plane of Pure Consciousness, becomes *citta* or the [intentional] mind by contracting in accordance with the object perceived.”\(^{248}\) As consciousness descends towards the level of physical creation, more and more *tattvas* (principles of emanation or phenomenological categories [literally, “that-nesses”])

---

\(^{247}\) *Spanda* infuses entities with life both from the side of the active unfolding of objectified form, as well as from the side of the limited consciousness that presences objectified forms (e.g., the seeing eye, the hearing ear, the thinking mind, etc.). These two sides will be addressed later in this chapter’s discussion of the *Ontology and Cognition Śaktis*, respectively.

\(^{248}\) *Pratyabhijñā Hṛdayam.*
unfold. As they unfold, the *tattvas* interact with each other. As this interaction intensifies, the relative unity of consciousness gives way to greater and greater multiplicity.²⁴⁹

In keeping with the myth of Śiva, Śaiva epistemology and ontology explain involution as a process whose very occasion requires an awakening of the creative will of Śiva (*spanda*) by His consort, Śakti. Prior to the initial vibration (*spanda*) that stirs consciousness to become entangled in the process of creation, consciousness exists in a condition of waveless, undisturbed, self-contained equilibrium; only the Śiva *Tattva*, or “the Principle of the pure Experiencer by itself,” obtains, while the other aspects of consciousness are “no doubt *there*, but held as it were in suppression or suspense.”²⁵⁰ But this balance is inevitably upset, giving way to a second *tattva*: the Śakti *Tattva*. At this stage in the involution of consciousness we have two *tattvas*, both of which are eternal and mutually inseparable, representing the subject and object relata, respectively, in the dual relationship of universal manifestation.²⁵¹ The first category (the Śiva *Tattva*) represents the static or passive aspect of consciousness in the manifest world. But consciousness (*cit*) here is merely the subject, knower, or experiencer that can never be seen. And of course, any manifestation requires not only a subject, but an object as well. Moreover, if Śiva is to recover any semblance of equilibrium for consciousness, then He must have some means by which He can become aware of Himself. In other words, He

²⁴⁹ This bifurcation of Śiva consciousness occurs according to Śiva’s own power of differentiation or separation (*apohana-śakti*), of which there are three.
²⁵⁰ J.C. Chatterji, Kashmir Shaivism, SUNY Press: Albany, New York, 1986, p. 22. All that obtains here is “the principle of pure ‘I,’ without the experience of even an ‘am’ as formulated in the experience ‘I am’” (Ibid., p. 13). In this state Śiva is Paramēśvara (pure subjectivity or supreme perceiver), as discussed above. The other aspects of consciousness, or śakti, that are only implicitly present will be discussed below.
²⁵¹ Chatterji refers to this *tattva* as “the Principle of Negation and Potentialisation, namely, of the Universal experience, i.e., the experience of and as the Universe—technically the *Shakti* *Tattva*, i.e., the Power-Principle” (Ibid., pp. 12-13).
needs an other, for He can only be (made) known (even to Himself) from His effects (i.e., the object). Thus, in order to go beyond this condition of existing in a certain aloneness, wherein He is imminently aware of a lack, and thereby account for the object of the dual relationship of universal manifestation, Śiva brings into operation the second factor in the process of cosmic involution: the Śakti Tattva. As the “Mother of the Universe,” Śakti brings things into being by an act of force. Derived from the root verb, “śak,” or “to be capable of,” Śakti represents the active, dynamic power that produces a strain or stress upon pure consciousness (in its state of equilibrium) that, in effect, polarizes undivided consciousness into two, namely, consciousness (i.e., the subject side of any dual relationship, or the Śiva Tattva) and the power of consciousness (i.e., the object side of any dual relationship, or the Śakti Tattva). In this way, Śakti represents both (a) the object that brings Śiva consciousness out of its self-contained isolation and into relationship with an other, and (b) the power of consciousness that is necessary for causing a rupture within universal consciousness, manifesting an object, and finally, bringing consciousness into the world.

It is important to note, that this second stage (the Śakti Tattva) in the composition of the manifest universe in fact arises simultaneously as with the Śiva Tattva. Chatterji explains: “Indeed, it may be safely said that it is by the operation of the Shakti Tattva that the manifestation of the Shiva Tattva becomes at all possible. And it is on account of this fact perhaps, that the separate mention of the Shakti Tattva is sometimes omitted from the list of Tattvas, it being counted as one with and included in the Shiva Tattva” (Ibid., p. 24). Only Śiva as Paramaśiva, or Universal Consciousness or Ultimate Reality, encompasses all three terms, “sat, cit, ānanda.” Upon the involution of consciousness, though, the two tattvas are separable insofar as the Śakti Tattva represents “the other as the realization of the feeling of only the profoundest Bliss and Peace passing all understanding—as that ānanda which is to be the core of all things to come” (Ibid., p. 25). As Paramaśiva descends into these first two tattvas, consciousness splits into Śiva—who here is cit or Life (prāṇa) as the first “flutter” or “vibratory movement” towards a Universal manifestation (Tattva-Sand., 1, from Ibid., p. 25)—and Śakti—who here is ānanda, or bliss, and “is what checks, controls and regulates that movement of Life and acts as the Principle of Restraint” (Ibid., p. 25). When Śakti predominates, beings (sat) are brought into the world, and the involution and, ultimately, evolution of consciousness towards reabsorption (which occurs at the end of each cycle of time) can now occur.
As this vibrant play between Śiva and Śakti continues through each stage (tattva) of unfolding, Śiva (as subject or consciousness) becomes further estranged from His Śakti (as object and power of the subject). And this is problematic not only because Śiva loses His self-containment. Insofar as Śakti is not only Śiva’s consort in play, but also His free power, He becomes weakened by this divorce from His Śakti (Śakti as power of the subject). Śakti first develops according to the following three fundamental psychological steps that precede every action or phenomenal manifestation: the power of knowledge (jñāna), the power of will (icchā), and the power of action (kriyā). Each of these steps or evolutes accords with a tattva that, from this point forward in the unfolding of consciousness, is not eternal, but is produced in the process of creation.253 These steps begin to articulate more clearly the relationship between subject and object. The first of these emphasizes consciousness as the “I” in the dual relationship of “I am this,” and is characterized by “the absolute hush and stillness of the divine wonder of the Sadā Śiva stage.”254 At the next tattva, the object gains prominence in our attention, and consciousness undergoes “that steady and immovable ‘gaze’ at the glory of the Divine

253 Chatterji refers to these three tatvas as the principles of Being (the Sadā Śiva Tattva), Identification “in the universal experience between what are thus correlated” (the Ishvāra Tattva), and Correlation “in the universal experience, i.e., in feeling and consciousness, between the experiencer and the experienced” (the Śuddha Tattva). These three evolutes will also be subsequently dissolved in the process of universal reabsorption. The Sadā Śiva, Iśvara, and Śuddha tattvas, as principal forms of Śakti, correspond to the powers of universal desire or will (icchā śakti), universal knowledge (jñāna śakti), and universal action (kriyā śakti). The first two tattvas (the Śiva tattva and the Śakti tattva), as noted above, are eternal and therefore are neither produced nor do they become dissolved in the universal reabsorption.

254 Kashmir Shaivism, p. 34. In the Sadā Śiva Tattva, the third stage in the process of cosmic evolution, the subject becomes aware of itself in relation to an indistinct object or “this” “just stirring in the depth of one’s consciousness” (Ibid., p. 26, with reference to Ish. Prat., III. i. 3). But it is important to note that the entire experience is subjective; there is no inner and outer, as in the phenomenal world. Śakti here manifests as “a movement, as it were, of an unformulated thought, or an undefined feeling, of a something in one’s innermost being as yet eluding a clear grasp in experience” (Ibid., p. 26). However, action is lost in the ecstasy of divine wonder while recollecting one’s true nature.
State which there is in the Īśvara Tattva.\textsuperscript{255} At the next stage (the Śuddha Tattva), motionless gazing gives way to movement and action and a condition of complete recognition of the unity of subject and object (i.e., Śiva and Śakti), or diversity-in-unity-and-identity (Bhedābheda), in the dual relationship of “I am this.”\textsuperscript{256}

From this point forward, however, the subject and object become perceived as separate, no longer related as a single, pure unit. Śakti again serves as the dividing force, and She is henceforth known as “Māyā Śakti.” As the power of consciousness to both divide and perceive difference, Māyā Śakti also acts as the cause of the limiting awareness (experienced by the subject) that there exists some other that stands juxtaposed against it.\textsuperscript{257} Accordingly, the first tattva of the next group of categories (known as the “Śuddhāśuddha Tattvas,” or the “Pure-Impure Tattvas”), is called the “Māyā Tattva.” The next five tattvas of this group are evolutes of Māyā (categories 7 – 11), each involving a contraction of the five universal forms of consciousness into their corresponding limited form.\textsuperscript{258} At this point, the stage is set for a complete severing of

\textsuperscript{255} Ibid., p. 34. At the Īśvara Tattva, the subject recognizes the object as the dominant element, bringing it into full view as clear and well-defined. The “I,” meanwhile, is thrown into the background, and consciousness becomes overcome by exaltation while gazing at itself as the object. This is represented in the shift from the thought “I am this” to “This am I.”

\textsuperscript{256} In the next tattva, the Śuddha Tattva, movement is finally born, as consciousness alternates between looking first at the subject and then at the object. Here there arises an equalization in prominence or reciprocity of the two sides of the relation of identity, namely, “I” and the “this.” In short, the attention of the experiencer is no longer one-sided, as there occurs the realization of the one as belonging to the other, and also of diversity-in-unity-and-identity (Bhedābheda).

\textsuperscript{257} In keeping with the Vedānta understanding of the term, “Māya” means not only illusion, but ignorance, for in veiling or obscuring the unity of Paramaśiva (universal consciousness) through its creating a sense of differentiation, Māyā causes ignorance to arise on the part of the subject concerning the true nature of reality. More will be said below concerning the similarities and dissimilarities of the Vedāntic and Śaiva conceptions of Māya.

\textsuperscript{258} These five universal forms of consciousness are omnipotence, omniscience, completeness, eternal existence, and omnipresence. They contract into the limited agency of the individual soul (kalā), limited knowledge (vidya), love for particular objects (raga), temporality or mortality (kāla), and spatio-causal limitation (niyati), respectively. See Kashmir Shaivism.
subject and object in the creation of *Puruṣa* (mind) and *Prakṛti* (matter) (the 12th and 13th tattvas, respectively) as mutually exclusive. The dualism of mind and matter is now permanently established, as Śiva exercises His freedom (from the side of the object, i.e., Śakti) in dressing Himself in *Māyā* and Her five cloaks, (thereby from the side of the subject) forgetting His true nature by way of a concealing, limiting His powers, and finally, reducing Himself to an individual self or *Puruṣa*. Over the remaining 24 tattvas, the relationship between Śiva and Śakti, or the subjective and objective manifestations of the “I am this” experience (e.g., *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti*, respectively), becomes increasingly characterized by the ignorance resulting from the perception of the illusion of separation introduced by *Māyā*. The omnipresent consciousness that is Paramaśiva gets crumpled up or contracted (*saṃkucita*), limits itself, and thereby conceals its own true nature as pure (i.e., undivided, undiminished) conscious energy.

Śiva now becomes an other to Himself, as the manifest objects (which are really nothing but His own self-fragmented emanations) become differentiated from each other and sympathetically cut off from the subject, as if veiled in an aura of alienating foreignness.

### 3.2.c. Freedom of the Play of Consciousness in Śaivism vs Freedom-from in Vedānta and Sāṃkhya

*Śaivism* holds that *Puruṣa* is simply the power that experiences; it is merely the purely subjective aspect of the individual. However, *Śaivism* holds that the *Puruṣa* is also the retainer of past *samskāras*, contrary to the *Sāṃkhya* doctrine. Also, that consciousness perceives the illusion of separation with *Prakṛti*, not the unity of pure consciousness, is not to say that the *Puruṣa* cannot identify himself with *Prakṛti* (e.g., his own body, other chosen beings or objects). But he cannot identify with everything in the universe at once, let alone encompass the relation of “I” and “this” as a unified awareness.

*Śaivism*, this *Puruṣa* need not indicate a human being. It could also refer to any other sentient being, or according to some *Śaiva* interpretations, anything limited (e.g., an atom, a point, etc., by virtue of its limited condition).

259 In keeping with the *Sāṃkhya* doctrine, *Śaivas* also hold that *Puruṣa* is simply the power that experiences; it is merely the purely subjective aspect of the individual. However, *Śaivism* holds that the *Puruṣa* is also the retainer of past *samskāras*, contrary to the *Sāṃkhya* doctrine. Also, that consciousness perceives the illusion of separation with *Prakṛti*, not the unity of pure consciousness, is not to say that the *Puruṣa* cannot identify himself with *Prakṛti* (e.g., his own body, other chosen beings or objects). But he cannot identify with everything in the universe at once, let alone encompass the relation of “I” and “this” as a unified awareness.

260 On the *Parvan Rites*, p. 50.
This analysis of the metaphysics of Śiva consciousness, in light of its soteriological goal of freedom with respect to the manifest world, leads to the following question: if Śiva suffers through His emanatory self-fragmentation, and if indeed He is omnipotent and creates the world through an act of will, then why would He engage Śakti at all if it would simply lead to a painful loss of the primal unity of pure I-awareness? In taking up this issue, let us first briefly examine two orthodox Hindu conceptions of freedom that influenced Śaivism, but were eventually discarded because they denigrate the creative will of Śiva. The first comes from Advaita Vedānta. This school posits the existence of a single, ultimate Reality (Brahman) that underlies and yet stands juxtaposed against Māyā, the phenomenal world that is illusory and identical with ignorance. This apparent dualism, though, gives way a non-dualism that looks to discard the infinite variety of the manifest world (Māyā) and ultimately affirms only the reality of the transcendent Brahman. The underlying concern of this system, then, is to recover the true essence of reality as pure consciousness (i.e., the realization of Brahman as “sat, cit, ānanda”) by purifying subjectivity of any objectification or involvement in Māyā.

Śaivism, for its part, also holds to the doctrine of Māyā and the tenet of subjectivity— the bondage of subjectivity, in short, results from the failure to place oneself in right relation to phenomenal experience. However, Śaivism posits a very different interpretation of the relationship between transcendent reality (or pure

---

262 Kashmir Śaivism was influenced mostly by Vedānta of the Advaita school. My critique of Vedānta here is directed mostly towards the Advaita school and, in particular, Śaṅkara’s position, which Advaita Vedānta widely recognizes as its most sophisticated articulation.

263 It is true that Advaita Vedānta recognizes that consciousness is not one-dimensional, but has many levels, many of which recognize the reality of the ordinary world to varying degrees. Nonetheless, it does
consciousness) and the manifest world of objective experience. The latter is not qualitatively inferior to (in the sense of its being less “real” than) the former, nor is it even fundamentally different. Rather, just as the effect (e.g., Māyā as Śakti) cannot be different from its cause (e.g., Śiva as subject in the subject-object relation), so too is the manifest world of diverse form (vimarṣa) not different from the prakāśa aspect of Śiva consciousness that is pure subjectivity. Māyā, then, is not something other than infinite consciousness. Rather, it is a gross (i.e., dualism-projecting) power of consciousness that, in the period of pralaya (potentiality or reabsorption) is merely dormant, and in the period of emanation (beginning with the Māyā Tattva) is active as a power of consciousness’s own volition. Accordingly, consciousness’s involvement in the manifest universe is not simply an obstacle to freedom, but a doorway that facilitates the divine self-recognition of Śiva's true essence as supreme consciousness, which perpetually alternates between the two phases of rest and action, illumination and emanation. Māyā, for its part, is not to be overcome, per se (i.e., sublated), nor submitted to (i.e., merely entered into), but presented and participated in out of the liberating knowledge that “I am that, [that is Śiva, and therefore] I am Śiva.”

Another orthodox school that has influenced Śaivism on this issue is Sāmkhya, whose teleological doctrine, contrary to that of Vedānta, recognizes the soteriological value of the manifest world. Sāmkhya claims the existence of two fundamentally

---

not positively acknowledge the soteriological value of the phenomenal world and ultimately looks beyond it towards the transcendent consciousness that is Brahman.

Śaivas hold to the theory of satkāryavāda, or that the effect is implicitly pre-existent in its cause prior to its production.

Śaivism was actually strongly influenced by the Sāmkhya school, which was still hugely influential in India at the time of Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta. For this reason, the Sāmkhya school commonly made into a target of their criticisms.
different realities: puruṣa and prakṛti. Puruṣa is pure consciousness or the unseen witness. As such, it is the true self that lies beyond all predication and change and is not diminished in any way by developments in the material world. Prakṛti, on the other hand, is the realm of unending flux wherein particularities are delineated, desires are fulfilled, and mundane life proceeds. Creation emerges from the association of these basic realities in the form of 25 tattvas. The first two stages are, in order, puruṣa and prakṛti. The unfolding of the following 23 tattvas from prakṛti, however, which itself is unconscious, requires the enlivening power of puruṣa. Otherwise, prakṛti will remain in an unmanifest state; no objects and no mind, and hence no awareness of the world, will be produced without the coming together (samyoga) of puruṣa and prakṛti. But as this co-mingling spins out its creation, the authentic nature of the self (puruṣa) becomes hidden in and through its involvement in the changes inherent in experience, and prakṛti in turn suffers in its ignorance, specifically, the mistaken awareness that an aspect of herself is consciousness. Accordingly, the telos of the Sāṃkhya system is to gain freedom, specifically, the freedom of indifference towards the process of creation that necessarily attends the authentication of puruṣa as distinct from prakṛti. This purpose, moreover, inheres within prakṛti (in contrast with Vedānta's Māyā)—it is the office of the intellect.

266 Sāṃkhya provides a descriptive phenomenology of both the perceptual process and the arising of the material world through the relationship of the senses and the world with pure consciousness. Gerald Larson has called this the “humanization” of the world. See Chris Chapple, Karma and Creativity, SUNY Press: Albany, New York, 1986, pp. 29-30.

267 Chapple explains: “Without referencing all phenomena to the sense of self, freedom is gained. The witness loses interest in the dance of prakṛti and is no longer lost in misidentification” (p. 28). Īśvara-κṛṣṇa, author of the Sāṃkhya Kārikā, describes the experience of liberation as emphasizing this withdrawal from the manifest world: “Thus, from the analysis of the constituents [of prakṛti], arises the knowledge I am not, nothing is mine, I do not exist. [This knowledge] is all-encompassing, free from error, pure, and final.” Sāṃkhya Kārikā, v. 67. taken from Ibid., p. 29. Puruṣa, in short, is to remain untouched, passively witnessing the emerging changes of prakṛti (i.e., the 23 tattvas pertaining to prakṛti),
(buddhi, the first manifestation or tattva of prakṛti) to purify itself of the contaminating influence of karma, establish itself in true knowledge concerning the nature of things, and finally, gain access to pure consciousness.

Śaivism also claims that consciousness enters into the world out of the association of pure conscious energy and the material world. Moreover, it further holds that a process of evolution towards the freedom of self-realization is the driving force behind the process of creation. And finally, the process of creation whereby consciousness unfolds itself and develops from one state of manifestation to another involves the same 24 tattvas identified by the Sāṃkhya system as comprising prakṛti. But Sāṃkhya and Śaivism bear some strong dissimilarities that are deeply relevant to understanding the manifestation of multiplicity as an expression of Śiva's creative will. For one, transcendental consciousness and the phenomenal world are not two separate realities, but alternating aspects of the same underlying reality or consciousness. Consciousness, then, is not fundamentally other than the objectified world; it merely appears to be so as Śakti stimulates Śiva to increasingly bifurcate Himself in His descent towards Prthvī (Earth), the final tattva. Secondly, the Sāṃkhya system struggles to explain how or why it is that puruṣa, which as a pure witness is itself devoid of will, even gets entangled with prakṛti in the first place. Śaivas, however, explain clearly that it is the will of Śiva consciousness itself that unfolds in the form of the universe. Not unlike Vedānta, then, Sāṃkhya also subscribes to a freedom-from model that indirectly diminishes the creative while the ultimate end of Sāṃkhya is the overcoming of worldly involvement and a final resting in transcendence of the world.
agency of Śiva.\textsuperscript{268} Śaivism, in contrast, holds that consciousness is immanent in the world; consciousness and the material world are not other, but inextricably linked. In seeking its freedom, then, consciousness does not seek to arrest the creative world-process, but strives towards the recognition that its involvement in the unfolding of the phenomenal universe has been an act of its own volition. And thirdly, the expanded account of the involution and evolution of consciousness given by Śaivism, specifically, its explanation of the 11 tattvas that precede the arising of a complete separation of subject and object in the creation of puruṣa and prakṛti, is intended precisely to account for how self and world, subject and object, are primordially interconnected.

The Śaiva understanding of worldly involvement as consonant with the freedom of creative agency comes full circle in the theorization of the process of evolution. Once the involution of consciousness has been completed in its descent into the final tattva (Prthvī), consciousness then reverses its trend and begins to reunite the manifold of differentiation, or that which has previously been “involved” in Māyā. One by one the unity of the tattvas becomes recovered by means of direct realization, whereby the diversity of phenomena becomes reabsorbed into consciousness through the all-encompassing light of pure consciousness. Mark Dyczowski explains how Śiva in His prakāśa aspect here enacts a recovery of primal unity through the recognition that all things are not different from Himself:

It is common in these works [i.e., the Pratyabhijñā literature] for the author to express the notion that an object is manifest, appears, is visible, or just simply exists, by saying that ‘it shines.’ Thus, typically, the Pratyabhijñā establishes that all things participate in the one reality by arguing that nothing 'shines' (i.e.,

\textsuperscript{268} It bears noting here that while indeed, Sāṁkhya recognizes some value and purpose in the world, it nonetheless reduces worldly involvement to being an instrument to achieving transcendence.
appears, manifests or exists in its apparent form) if it is not illuminated by the light of consciousness. If phenomena were to be anything but 'light,' they could not 'shine,' that is, exist.269

The analogies with the properties of light are regularly used in the *Pratyabhijñā* literature of Śaivism in order to explain the nature of manifestation as necessarily sharing in the divine consciousness that is Śiva. The period of creation (*unmeṣa*), then, as the actual manifestation of the universe, is itself likewise a shining forth (*ābhāsa*, from the root, “/bhās,” “to appear or shine”) of Śiva Himself, not something that is ultimately alien to the subject.270 In this way, the *prakāśa* aspect is not merely a phase of potentiality, but also one of return through the assimilation of the world of division and multiplicity into the universal, undivided, transcendent consciousness that is Paramāśiva.

Through this evolution, however, it is important to note that consciousness does not expand physically; the material world does not literally dissolve into a homogenous soup. Rather, this is a recovery that presences the world as an undiluted whole through the growth of recognitive awareness (its essence as *cit* or pure subjectivity) by way of the liberating recognition that the other (Śakti) is essentially not separate from the subject (Śiva). This, in fact, is the most characteristic feature of Śiva consciousness as creative intentionality: not merely disclosing the other as objectified other, but disclosing the other in a way that gives birth to self-awareness. The theory of Śiva’s autonomous self-objectification (wherein consciousness projects an objectified other through its Śakti as separate from subjectivity) is a phenomenological doctrine, not a metaphysical one—for

---

270 The Sanskrit root verb “/bhās” is etymologically linked to the Greek root verb “/phas,” which as examined in Chapter Two’s examination of Heidegger’s phenomenology, means “to show, to glow, to radiate, to light up,” and serves as the base of the Greek term “phainomenon.”
all objects ultimately come to rest or find repose (viśrānti) in the self-awareness of the “supreme perceiver” (i.e., Paramaśiva). Phennomenal objects, then, are not actually external or alien to consciousness, nor are they mere figments of the imagination of a limited subject. Rather, they are other objects (phenomenologically speaking) that are simultaneously endowed with a consciousness that is not different than one’s own essential nature. In and through a kind of hermeneutic retrieval of vimarśa, consciousness “bends back” upon itself, thus giving way to (reflective) self-awareness, or the recognition that the object is meant-for-the-subject or is a being-in-consciousness.

In light of this examination of key Śaīva terminology, let us re-visit the question stated above: if the objectified world is not fundamentally alien to consciousness, then why would Śiva other Himself at all? The homologous structures of the interrelation between Śiva and Śakti in the myth of Śiva, on the one hand, and the epistemological and ontological frameworks of Śaivism, on the other hand, provide some clues to this question. As has been clarified above, the material world, which is ultimately inseparable from supreme subjectivity, arises out of the marriage of Śiva and His consort and power, Śakti. Unlike its standing in the Sāṃkhya conception, then, dynamic objective nature is not innately devoid of consciousness. Rather, it is the very play of consciousness itself. In this way, neither Śiva nor Śakti, neither consciousness nor Becoming, has ontological

---

271 Ibid., pp. 66-7. This is not a correspondence theory of truth, but a phenomenological one. Vimarśa, accordingly, is not just an ontological category, but an epistemological one as well. In the midst of distinction, Śiva need only reflect upon Himself in order to affect the return of phenomena through their reabsorption in the prakāśa aspect. The metaphor of the mirror is often used by Śaivas in order to demonstrate how manifest phenomena serve as a kind of mirror for consciousness. Abhinavagupta writes: “He [Śiva], who has the essential nature of consciousness is like a mirror. [In this way] there is the possibility of a diversity of appearances without contradicting His unity… [T]he Essential Nature of things, though unitary through the force of recognition [pratyabhijñā], accommodates within Himself contrary divisions of His essential nature” (Īśvarapratyabhijñāvimarsinī, 2.1.1, 2:9).
priority over the other. Distinction, meanwhile, is not a function of Māyā as mere illusion that stands counter-posed to consciousness, as Vedānta argues. Rather, consciousness enjoys its own proliferation through distinction and time because the actual unfolding of consciousness that is Māyā is a mode or phase of consciousness itself (i.e., the vimarṣa aspect). Moreover, the distance that is created between self and other, subject and object, Śiva and Śakti, has deep soteriological value, for Śiva undergoes this separation in order to create a space for an on-going play of unfoldment and return. Abhinavagupta explains:

The Supreme Lord, who has the nature of awareness, makes His own Self into an object of cognition, even though it is not an object of cognition, because the Cognizer is unitary... As He recognitively apprehends [parāṃśu] His Self, so, because everything is contained within Him, He appears as blue, etc. 272

In this way, Śiva is not some wholly depersonalized, desireless, mechanical Being. Rather, He is to be understood as having desires all His own, His movements exhibiting a deep intentionality that, as noted above, can be understood in terms of the union of Śiva and Śakti. The deep intentionality that exhibits this double movement, for its part, has in view a play of consciousness. But this play is not the līlā envisaged by Advaita Vedānta, implicit within which is a felt alienation from the manifest world and a desire to assume the posture of a merely detached, uninvolved witness. Rather, the play of Śiva consciousness is driven by the ever-renewed desire for self-consciousness. 273

Accordingly, the Śaiva who visualizes this play looks to intimately experience the universe as an expression of his own creative will. The central myth of Śiva unfolding the

---

272 Ibid., 1.5.15, 1:267-68.
273 One can here take a look to Christian theology for a clue. According to the Christian philosophical theology of logos, if creation is to be new, then there must exist “a certain incompleteness in God without creation; creation of the world must be a sort of self-revelation for God himself” (see Rediscovering God, p. 90).
universe through Śakti is explained as a process of self-recognition. All phenomena lie dormant in the power of Śiva; the universe is hidden there. And just as Śiva has one Śakti, or power, so too do all things have the same one power (or Śakti). Śiva’s desire for self-fragmentation, meanwhile, arises out of the desire for “the inner blissful vibration” that moves the “compact mass of I-consciousness” towards a recognition of itself in the other. And it is Śakti, which is the power of synthesis of all experiences, who not only initiates Śiva’s involution, but ultimately redresses the self-fragmentation of Śiva, recovers His inner blissful vibration, and thereby connects the divine inside with the divine outside through the obtainment of self-recognition.

3.3. Viśrānti and the Expression of Agency through the Cognition Śakti: from the Appropriation of our Social-Historical Influences to the Deep Appropriation of Becoming

Having clarified above the nature of the Person, Śiva, as both the protagonist in the play of consciousness and the play itself, let us now examine the central theoretical and practical problem of Śaiva soteriology—agency. But we must first understand what exactly is the nature of this “I,” or the individual ego, in relation to the all-encompassing “I” that is Śiva. According to Śaivism, there exists a homology of ordinary agency and the macrocosmic agency of Śiva; the individual “I” exhibits the same double movement of contraction and expansion, reflection and illumination, vimarśa and prakāśa, that is encompassed within the play of Śiva consciousness. I now turn to how the individual is to realize the agency of Śiva as his own, and in turn express this identification through

---

274 *The Doctrine of Vibration*, p. 84.
cognitive life so that objects shine in the light of divine self-recognition. But before doing so, it bears noting that of the four avenues, or upāyas, that Śaivism prescribes for liberation, the path most directly concerned with the empowerment of our cognitive faculties (i.e., the Cognition Śakti) is known as the Śākta Upāya. The efficacy of the Śākta Upāya methods, moreover, hinges on a certain understanding of the interrelatedness of consciousness and Becoming, or the cognitive and the objective. Śiva’s emanation is to be understood not simply ontically (i.e., in terms of existent, seemingly independent entities), but also epistemologically (i.e., in terms of the characteristic features of cognition)—for objects (and their apparent “separateness”) are created through the will of consciousness itself. The individual adept’s own obtainment of the Cognition Śakti, meanwhile, amounts to affecting a phenomenologico-expressive turn whereby these objects are perceived (and therefore exist) as expressions of the Supreme Lord’s self-recognition (as opposed to being interpreted from one’s own limitedness as mere others). The individual agent, for her part, finds repose (viśrānti) in the emanatory field as a result of this transfiguration.

---

275 While the individual subject depends upon the Being of Śiva, both descriptively (the very fact that we exist is contingent upon Śiva) and prescriptively (we attain liberation because the Lord Śiva bestows upon us His divine grace, which is not caused by any human action), the qualitative value of human choices and actions, namely, that they express not our limited being but our identity with Śiva, has to be developed. 276 Śaktipat is the power that unites, as opposed to Śakti as Maya, which is a divisive and limiting power. The aim of the Śākta Upāya is to realize ultimate union in the midst of multiplicity through psychological practices of transformation, including philosophy, visualization exercises, meditation, and the contemplation of ideas. 277 This is echoed in Abhinavagupta’s definition of the Cognition Śakti: “Thus it is established: The multitude of objects are merged within His essential nature. He, comprehending a particular object as having a differentiated form, manifests it as having emerged from His essential nature. That which has the essential nature of Consciousness, but is differentiated from the object which has emerged, is explained to be cognition, which is always new. Because [that cognition] is directed outwards, it is affected by [the object’s] reflection.” Tīvarapratyabhijñāvimarsīnt, 1.3.7, 1:140-41. 278 The terms vimarsa (emanation, reflection) and viśrānti (repose) bear a strong kinship, and Abhinavagupta himself makes great use of the notion of viśrānti as an important metaphor for the
For Śaivas, the liberating repose (viśrānti) to be gained through accepting dependence upon Śiva does not entail the utter submission of one’s own sense of agency. Rather, such repose depends upon Śaivas’ exercising a mature hermeneutic of appropriation with respect to what roles they apply in cognitive life. Accordingly, I now look to investigate how this involves first submitting their soteriological vision to the academic regimen of orthodox Hinduism, and then creatively appropriating this academy’s conceptual innovations in their own Tantric overcoded terms. For this attentiveness to the horizontal extension of agency, Śaivas note, is indispensable for accomplishing the deep appropriation of Becoming whereby the limited agent encompasses the complementary alternation of prakāśa and vīmarśa and, in turn, expresses her identity with Śiva.

3.3.a. Openness as a Hermeneutic Ideal in the Śaiva Appropriation of Cognitive Role-Models

In order to demonstrate how the Cognition Śakti, specifically, the method of philosophy, enables the deep appropriation of the Person, Śiva, consider how it exhibits the first of two principles of appropriation examined in the previous chapter’s treatment of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics: openness. The Pratyabhijñā school of philosophy, widely recognized as the most sophisticated school of thought within Śaivism, aimed to

---

metaphysical and epistemic structure-foundation. At the root of the polymorphic term viśrānti is the verb viśrāma, or “to rest.” The repose that is involved in viśrāma is itself intimately related to the vīmarśa, or self-reflection, that is central to the Śaiva philosophy of recognition. Fully immersing oneself in the relentless play of hermeneutic recovery (i.e., Śiva consciousness in its prakāśa phase) involves the individual subject’s taking repose in Śiva. See Arindam Chakrabarti, “The Heart of Repose, the Repose of the Heart: A Phenomenological Analysis of the Concept of Viśrānti,” Sāmarasya: Studies in Indian Arts, Philosophy and Interreligious Dialogue, edited by Sadananda Das and Ernst Furlinger, D.K. Printworld, 2005, p. 27.
formulate a critical epistemology and ontology that could be suitably intelligible as a kind of “denaturalized discourse.” To this end, the Pratyabhijñā thinkers put their own theological presuppositions at risk and selectively and symbolically internalized some of the concerns of the Hindu orthodoxy with the iconographic symbolism and social-ritual action that predominated in Śaivas’ own esoteric tantric tradition. Two darśanas with which the Pratyabhijñā thinkers were particularly interested with respect to this hermeneutic project were Vedānta and Nyāya. The Śaiva interest in Advaita Vedānta derives from this school’s utilization of philosophy as a spiritual exercise for securing the freedom of the self from Māyā. In keeping with Advaita Vedānta, Śaivism holds that our true self is not limited to that specific location wherefrom we face a world of entities that are distinct from the subject and each other. Moreover, the proper office of thinking is not to reify the world of multiplicity and identify ourselves with it. Rather, the individual’s essential nature is found through an overcoming of his sense of individuality by means of a taking repose (viśrānti) in a cosmic subject (i.e., Brahman or Śiva) that transcends the world of differentiation. This involves positively denying the existence of objects external to subjectivity, attaining the awareness that is pure “I”-consciousness (svapprakāśa), and maintaining this awareness of the universe as nothing but cit, or consciousness. This tenet of self-consciousness to which both schools adhere,

---

279 On domesticizing radical tantric practices, see Rediscovering God, p. 29. On denaturalized discourse, see Ibid., p. 13.
280 In order to attain this repose, the individual agent must first forgo his limited claim to agency and the desire for securing the being of his ordinary self by realizing that it is not the jīva (as limited self) who is the real agent or cause of his actions, but Paramaśiva Himself (or Śiva in His absolute aspect).
281 This self-contained, alert passivity recovers the self-awareness that individual subjectivity is neither dull nor inert, but sensitive and sentient, free in a spontaneous movement that is in essence free from all constraint and limitation by virtue of its being other than mere objects or phenomena. The existence of
furthermore, also underwrites their respective understandings of the soteriological efficacy of philosophical inquiry. Philosophy is to elicit the realization of the metaphysical fact that, as Utpaladeva states, “The agent is one who is free [from all constraint and limitation by virtue of his being other than mere objects and participating in supreme subjectivity].” Furthermore, this is to be achieved negatively, that is, by removing “the false conception that one is not aware of His identity.”

While the Pratyabhijñā thinkers turned to the Vedāntic model of philosophy as spiritual exercise in order to clarify the prakāśa aspect of Śiva consciousness, they looked to the Nyāya realist doctrine and its corresponding standards of argumentation in order to positively articulate the nature of vimarśa. “There is correctness only of the method of the Naiyāyikas in the condition of Māyā,” Abhinavagupta explains. “When the sixteen categories are articulated [nirūpyamāṇeṣu], another is made to understand completely that which is to be understood.”

Taken in their proper intellectual historical context, Śaiva arguments utilizing the term vimarśa aim to distinguish the idealism of Śaivism (as a phenomenological doctrine) apart from that of the idealistic skepticism of the Vijñānavāda/Yogācāra Buddhists, who collapse all existence to a merely self-aware subjectivity. The Pratyabhijñā thinkers of Śaivism turn to Nyāya not only because it elucidates the existence of differentiated objects in the world, but also because the Śākta

objects external to awareness, meanwhile, is positively denied; for as both schools contend, an object when properly interpreted is nothing but the awareness of it.

282 See Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikāvyṛtti, v. 2.
283 As a result of this realization the individual subject no longer interprets experience as constituted by a multiplicity that stands over and against the agent as confined to a particular locus, but as pervaded by pure conscious energy. Lawrence, p. 47.
284 Īśvarapratyabhijñāvimarsinī, 2.3.17, 2:140.
285 The Yogācāra Buddhists actually had a deep influence on Kashmir Śaivism. However, Śaivism does not prioritize consciousness (prakāśa) over Becoming (vimarśa).
Upāya consists in the yoga of good reasoning (*sat-tarka*). The powers of our cognitive faculties in disclosing the features of the phenomenal world, in short, are fully acknowledged and developed accordingly through philosophical practice.286

3.3.b. Composure as a Hermeneutic Ideal in the Śaiva Appropriation of Cognitive Role-Models

But Śaivism exhibits not mere openness towards the cognitive role-models of the South Asian academy, but also the composure or self-possession that is requisite for their creative appropriation. Lawrence explains how the *Pratyabhijñā* system was to be practiced as a kind of mythico-ritual re-enactment of Śiva’s emanation into a multiplicity and a return to oneness. “As a conceptually internalized form of tantric praxis analogous to the more concrete forms,” he writes, “it [Śaiva philosophy] recapitulates—is identical with—the myth. In this way the ostensibly detached intellectual dialogue is transfigured through the resources of the soteriology.”287 In taking up the theoretical and methodological advances of *Vedānta* and *Nyāya*, Śaivas simultaneously overcode their respective cognitive models in their own tantric terms with a view to obtaining the *Cognition Śakti* that will enable the deep appropriation of the Person, Śiva. Consider first how this is reflected in the Śaiva concept of *prakāśa*, which as demonstrated above has been influenced by *Vedānta*. The Śaiva doctrine of *prakāśa* is phenomenological in character, not world-denying. Perceived entities are not illusory and, hence, to be sublated. Rather, they are reduced to the fact of awareness itself, which is necessarily

286 Recognition is now understood to be integral to all kinds of cognitive experience. The *Mānasollāsa*, a post-*Pratyabhijñā* commentary on the *Dakṣināmartistotra*, states: “Recognition [*pratyabhijñā*] is the means of establishing [*sādhana*] all the means of cognition [*pramana*].” Taken from *Rediscovering God*, p.89.
recognition of real existent objects. Utpaladeva explains: “If the object did not have the nature of awareness [prakāśa], it would be without illumination [aprakāśa], as it was before [its appearance]. Awareness [prakāśa] cannot be different [than the object]. Awareness [prakāśatā] is the essential nature of the object.”288 Prakāśa, or the luminosity of self-consciousness (svasaṃvedana), is a hermeneutic strategy for first aligning the ebb and flow of the adept’s consciousness with the interplay of Śiva-Śakti, and then developing the power of the individual’s subjectivity to go beyond the mere contemplation of the phenomenal world (ultimately with a view to eliciting divine self-recognition).

This same normative concern for hermeneutic self-possession manifests in the Śaiva encompassment of the Nyāya cognitive model and its clarification of “what is” (vimarsa). In order for philosophy to develop the Cognition Śakti, it must induce a shift from the lowest, most common communication of knowledge (the epistemological modality) to the manifestation of identity with Śiva (the soteriological modality).289 The Pratyabhijñā thinkers adopted the classic Nyāya inference to this end. This form has five steps: Thesis (pratijñā), Reason (hetu), General principle with exemplification (udāharaṇa), Application (upanaya), and Conclusion (nigamana).290 Abhinavagupta draws correspondences between these five inferential steps and parts of the

287 Ibid., p. 21.
288 Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā, 1.5.2, 1:198.
289 In the epistemological modality, all knowledge arises in the context of the phenomenological separation of subject and object. In the soteriological modality, however, the true knowledge is obtained that cognitive episodes are created through the play of divine consciousness as self-identical manifestations of separate objects.
290 This is not the occasion for giving a full explanation of the details of the classic Nyāya inference. I will here only relate those features that are relevant to demonstrating my argument. For a fuller explanation of
Iśvarapratyabhijñākārikā, which is one of the primary texts of the Pratyabhijñā system. The thesis that the Pratyabhijñā inference aims to demonstrate is that the individual person is identical with Lord Śiva. Just as in the common Indian example of the inference of fire from smoke (e.g., “There is fire on the hill”), wherein the subject (pakṣa) of the thesis is the hill, and what is to be established (sādhyā) is the fire, in the case of the Pratyabhijñā thesis the subject is the individual person, while that which is to be established is its identity with the Lord. Practically speaking, however, it is the reason step (hetu) that is the most important. The hetu establishes the connection between the subject (the individual person as inferential subject) and what is to be established (Lord Śiva) by demonstrating that a particular quality (hetu can also be translated as “cause” or “because”) that inheres in the pakṣa (here: the person) is invariably concomitant with the sādhyā (here: Lord Śiva). This quality is the Śakti (power) of recognition itself, or the Cognition Śakti. Just as Śiva is the emanator of the universe through His power and consort, Śakti, so too does the individual subject emanate the universe through those very cognitive powers that Śaiva philosophical training is to develop. Śakti Herself, then, is the reason, cause, and quality of universal concomitance that serves as the component term for the hetu step. And in revealing this Cognition Śakti to himself simply by performing the reason step of the inference, the individual student comes to realize that he already possesses this power, and need simply perform it in order to express his identity with Śiva. Through the adept’s performing the reason step of the inference, in short, the Cognition Śakti becomes revealed as his own.

the inferential form developed by the Naiyāyikas (taking as its example the inference of fire from smoke, as is common in Indian philosophy) and its relevance for this discussion, see Rediscovering God, pp. 51–57.
3.3.c. From the “What” to the “How” of Appropriation: Mastering the Alternation of Consciousness through the Deep Appropriation of Becoming

In becoming the actor in the cosmogonic myth of emanation through his successful performance of the reason step in the Pratyabhijñā inference, then, the adept expresses his own identification with Śiva by cognitively performing the same playful separation of subject and object, self and other, that underwrites the involution and evolution of Śiva at play with His power and consort, Śakti. Abhinavagupta describes how the power of recognitive judgment (the Cognition Śakti), which is not different from the power of creation (by virtue of the epistemological-ontological structure of emanation) and has the character of a playful alternation between oneness and self-fragmentation, is contained within the Person, Śiva, as super-Agent:

The Śakti of being Creator, which has the nature of Lordship, contains all the Śaktis. That [Śakti of being Creator] has the nature of recognitive judgment [vimarśa]. Therefore it is proper that only it is predominant…. The Supreme Lord, who has the nature of awareness [prakāśa], makes His own Self into an object of cognition, because the cognizer is unitary. This is deduced [sambhāvyate] by means of a firm inference for the proposition [sambhāvana], which includes the demonstration of the impossibility of another cause. “Therefore” means that this is so by reason of [His] creator-hood [kārtṛtvat], characterized as the Śakti which is recognitive judgment [vimarśa]. As He recognitively apprehends [parāmyśati] His Self, so, because everything is contained within Him, He appears as [objects such as] blue, etc.²⁹¹

This power, of course, is to be seized upon by the adept as his own with a view to realizing his ultimate identity with Śiva—for the Pratyabhijñā system simultaneously

²⁹¹ Īśvarapratyabhijñāvimarsinā, 1.5.15, 1:267-68.
implements argumentative and ritual agendas.\textsuperscript{292} This is successful, meanwhile, because the \textit{Pratyabhijñā} thinkers observe the two hermeneutic principles of openness and composure in creatively applying the cognitive models of the South Asian academy. Accordingly, the \textit{Vedāntic} and \textit{Naiyāyika} cognitive models become taken up not simply as world-illuminating and world-discriminating strategies, respectively, whereby the alternating movements of consciousness are somehow to be overcome. Rather, they are appropriated as hermeneutic strategies that are instrumental in shaping philosophy as an effective method for deepening and sharpening our attention to the world. Moreover, going beyond Ricoeur’s use of literature as a microscope for affecting a vertical extension of agency, the deep appropriation with which the \textit{Pratyabhijña} system is concerned clarifies the true nature of the individual agent as the Person, Śiva, Who is Himself identical with the world.

3.4. \textit{Viśrānti} and the Expression of Agency through Role-Empowerment: from the Deep Appropriation of Becoming to the Appropriation of Social-Historical Inheritance

Having demonstrated how attention to what roles we play is relevant to the \textit{how} of application, I will now demonstrate how gaining power over our roles is not only the means to spiritual realization but the goal itself. In order to demonstrate this, let us more deeply investigate the inter-relation between the themes of power and agency. In keeping with its critique of the Hindu orthodoxy discussed above, Šaivism re-theorizes the problem of bondage not as one of action, but of creative imagining. The liberating

\textsuperscript{292} This is Abhinavagupta’s claim. The \textit{Pratyabhijña} system has as its nature the gnostic internalization of other, more concrete forms of tantric practices (which is based upon the understanding of the body as the
identification with Śiva results not in the cleansing of the agent with respect to *karma* and the raw overcoming of the influence of one’s inherited role-models. Rather, it involves the obtainment of a power that, in the framework of the Śaiva phenomenology of the imagination, is to provide the individual with the ways (*upāyas*) and means to effectively appropriate the influence of his *karmically* embodied models. Thus, I will now demonstrate how the repose of viśrānti is not a passive resting in Lord Śiva. Rather, it is synonymous with the power of playing with the incongruity between agent qua subject and agent qua embodied role-model with a view to the creative appropriation of one’s social-historical influences.

3.4.a. Freedom through Subordination of Agency to the Problem of Action in Orthodox Hinduism

As noted at the start of this chapter, human beings are world-makers. Through our actions we create, sustain, destroy, and again create new worlds. We are not simply actors who perform actions, but actors who perform roles. This bears noting here because the manner in which we participate in this cycle of world-making and world-undoing depends upon our socially projected roles. Our roles provide us with an opening to the world. And because our roles generally encounter us before we encounter them, our actions tend to conform to these roles through the repetition of their performance. This fusing of inner spontaneity and outward expressions that suit our roles secures both our locatedness in the world and, insofar as our roles are attuned to maintaining social order, the continuity of the status quo. But the force of habit from within and the influence of microcosm of the macro universe). See *Rediscovering God*, p. 61.
our roles from without—i.e., the awareness of our being seen as objectified role-players by others—tend to reify our sense of limitedness in our roles and thereby become a source of bondage.

The mainstream of orthodox Indian philosophy widely recognizes this in some version or other of the doctrines of karma and Māyā. The worlds that we create are born of ignorance because we ourselves are immersed in cosmic illusion, or Māyā. And we find ourselves trapped in Māyā because we are born of karma, or those past actions whose residual effects have determined our place in the world. This “place” in the world that we occupy, meanwhile, is not simply spatio-temporal, but psycho-physical and socio-historical; we inhabit bodies whose genetic make-up, locatedness in the social-moral order, and even situatedness in a specific spatio-temporal locus, have been determined according to our karmic inheritance. Moreover, this placing is not simply an opening to the world, but simultaneously a closing off of other possibilities of being in the world that becomes sedimented in the body through regular conformity to our roles. As a result of our active involvement in the world, then, we become more and more chained in our inner and outer lives to a sense of identity, i.e., an awareness of self-limitation, that accords with our socially prescribed roles and breeds an enervating and naïve sense of dependence upon our karmic and social inheritance.

A basic concern of orthodox Hindu soteriologies, of course, is to clarify the nature of the self with a view to securing its freedom. In order to do so they aim to reconcile in some way this seeming incompatibility between the freedom to act and freedom from action. But the soteriological methods of self-clarification employed by the orthodoxy
effectively amount to strategies of eliminating the ambiguity of self, namely, as involved in the world and distanced from it. Consequently, they underplay the creative agency of the individual. Since I have already addressed this issue in Chapter One, I will here briefly remind the readers of the soteriologies of *Pūrva* and *Uttara Mīmāṃsā*. In disambiguating or clarifying the self in relation to this conflict between worldly involvement and world-transcendence, the paths of purification of these two schools severely restrict the individual’s freedom to creatively express himself in and through his roles.\(^{293}\) With respect to the issue of *how* to apply oneself, *Pūrva* and *Uttara Mīmāṃsā* denigrate creative agency by utterly reducing the subject to her objectification in the role and weakening the agent’s desire for role-play, respectively. These soteriological reductions, in turn, limit the agent with respect to *what* action he can perform by emphasizing the a-historical authority of traditional Vedic role-models for negotiating social-moral life. The *Mīmāṃsāka* conception of social personhood, for example, is modeled after the self-representation of the traditional *brahmin* as ritual agent; the role-based actions that one is to perform in ritual space are always already determined and are binding not only for the role that one is to play in the ritual, but also in society. The distancing movement away from the phenomenal world advocated by *Uttara Mīmāṃsā*,

\(^{293}\) *Pūrva Mīmāṃsā* holds the exact performance of the individual’s role-specific injunctions, which are based upon the individual’s locatedness in the social-moral order, to be crucial to the success of the ritual as well as one’s own salvation. Moreover, the ritual is to be performed free from all independent motivations, purifying the individual participant internally in accordance with his objectified otherness. Depersonalizing the individual by giving primacy to the role-based action in this way, the *Mīmāṃsāka* ritualists overcome the felt need of the individual to take flight from the world by employing a strategy of eliminating the incongruity between subject and role-model with a view to mobilizing the agent to participate in the world in strict conformity with his place-prescribed role. *Uttara Mīmāṃsā*, meanwhile, is also concerned to secure the purity of the agent. But its notion of purity is not ritual-based or mimetic, but metaphysical. This school endorses a kind of turning away from the world and our place in it in order to cleanse us of our *karma* through the liberating knowledge of our True Self as identical with an otherworldly Brahman.
meanwhile, opens the possibility for a sophisticated social critique of the ritualists’
reduction of the agent to her socially prescribed role. But this is in fact merely a
transcendental strategy that has in view an escape from action altogether through an
eventual severing of the connectedness of one’s so-called True Self (or ātman) and the
roles that bind us to the world of Māyā.294 Orthodox soteriologies, then, essentialize the
fit between individual and socially projected role by undercutting the soteriological
importance of bringing the authority of our social roles into the realm of serious critical
interrogation. And this concealment of the individual’s power to creatively interpret the
appropriateness of her own role-projections into a world, which is tantamount to a
suppression or melting away of agency itself, results precisely from the felt need to
overcome the ambiguity of the agent as somehow both involved in the world and
detached from it.

That these strategies of purification are driven by a felt need to cure the agent of
this ambiguity can be linked to their subordination of the agent to the problem of action
(karma). Consider, first of all, how this subordination of agency to action underlies the
syntax of agency that is presupposed by orthodox Hindu soteriologies. In his study of
orthodox Hindu models of the self, Edwin Gerow points out that Sanskritic (i.e., Hindu
and Buddhist) linguistic speculation historically demonstrates a subordination of the
agent to action. Sanskritic grammatical theory generally recognizes six kārakās, or cases,
each of which describes various logical relationships of the referents of declined nouns to

294 Thus, while Vedānta eliminates the ambiguity of the self to the opposite extreme, in refraining from
problematizing what role we ought to play in negotiating practical life, it effectively endorses the
Mīmāṃsāka social ideology that closes off other role-playing possibilities of being in the world for the
the main action expressed by the verb (kriyā). The term “kārakā,” derived from the same verb root “/kr/” (act) as the word for action (kriyā), has the causal significance of “actor, maker, factor”; the kārakā is the “establisher” (sādhanā) that is to accomplish the action (sādhya, or “that which is to be established”) expressed by the verb. The action’s agent, or kārṭṛ, however, is not only subordinated in relation to the action, or karman, in the same manner as are all of the other kārakās; orthodox Indian grammatical theory shows a growing tendency towards identifying the action-based verbal process of the Sanskrit sentence with the result, which is usually expressed in the accusative case (also referred to as karman). In short, the unity of process and result, and in turn the subordination of the agent to the action and its objects and results, came to be understood as an increasingly dominant feature of orthodox Sanskrit linguistic speculation.

Moreover, the subordination of the grammatical agent to action is not an isolated development in the orthodox Indian imagination, for as Gerow later points out, there exists an important homology between grammatical and religio-philosophical understandings in traditional India. The mainstream Indian religious conception understands karma to be a chain of process and result that extends across lives. The individual agent is reduced to being a mere adjunct bound within this nexus. Of course, Gerow is not arguing that the Sanskrit language has caused Indians to take on a passive character in the face of their karmic inheritance. But the Hindu orthodoxy nonetheless saw the actual agent (not just the

agent. As noted in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, Śaṅkara himself in fact is a strong proponent of the orthodox Hindu social order, albeit not for its soteriological efficacy.

grammatical kārtṛ) as a slave to the syntactic nexus of action and its objects and results, and this devaluation of the agent in the face of the inexorable flow of karma became increasingly realized in the linguistic and philosophical speculation of the orthodoxy.

3.4.b. Freedom and the Priority of the Agent in Śaiva Theory: the Problem of the Imagination

According to Śaivism, in contrast, the basic soteriological concern for liberation is not centered around the problem of action, but the will of creative imagination. In keeping with the myth of Śiva-Śakti, the limitation of the individual agent results from the self-forgetfulness of his own perfection as Śiva. It is by virtue of our innate ignorance, not the primacy of karma, that our actions are fundamentally misguided, and hence “merely divide this totality [i.e., divine consciousness], obscuring or veiling the perfect omnipresent light.” The most damaging division that actions born of ignorance bring about is that between the individual subject (jīva) and the all-encompassing stream of universal consciousness (Śakti). These divisions (between objects, and between self and object[s]), however, can be recovered through the experience of viśrānti, which as demonstrated above involves the individual agent’s taking repose in the awareness of himself as identical with Śiva. And this requires a mere shift in imagining oneself in relation to experience (vimarśa), as is evident in the Śākta Upāya practice of contemplating ideas such as “Śivoham,” or “I am Śiva.” Through an act of the imagination that can be performed in the here and now independently of past deeds, the adept realizes ultimate union with Śiva in the midst of a world of differentiated entities.

296 “On the Parvan Rites,” p. 50.
Bondage, then, is not to be understood as a process of act and outcome extending across lives as an inexorable consequence of *karma*. Rather, it is simply one of three illusory taints, or *malas* (the taint of *karma*, or *karma mala*), that are fully within our control as omnipotent agents. *Karma mala* is understood as only an incomplete realization of one’s omnipotent identity with Śiva-Śakti through action.\(^{297}\)

Accordingly, Śaivism ascribes priority to agency, not to the working out of action. Reversing the direction of thinking in orthodox Indian grammar, Śaivism emphasizes the role of the *kārtṛ*, or agent, in its syntax. In the commonly used example, “Devadatta cooks rice in the pan with wood,” the agent (Devadatta) is not reduced to a mere factor like the pan and the firewood in accomplishing the overall action expressed by the verb. The actor is a class above other factors. For one, this occurs by his becoming the initiator (*prayojaka*) of the action and its constitutive subordinate processes through his own desire (*icchā*) and effort (*yatna*). This includes his making arrangements for the lighting and managing of the fire, deciding what to cook, etc., while the direct object, in turn, becomes understood as that which is most desired by the agent (*īpsitatama*). The *kārtṛ*, in short, is the measure of meaning for the other *kārakās*. Secondly, the agent becomes the locus of the overall process (*vyāpārāśraya*) wherein the subordinate processes (i.e., the

\(^{297}\) The awareness of imperfection causes the awareness of self-limitation, which in turn is the cause of the limitation of subjectivity and, ultimately, the arising of egoism. With respect to the *malas*, meanwhile, Śaivism identifies three *malas*, or impurities or taints that cause the limitation of the individual subject. The first *mala* is the *Āṇava Mala*. In causing the individual to imagine himself as imperfect and thereby reduce the universal consciousness to a limited aspect, this *mala* is the primal or innate ignorance of the *jīva*. In limiting the freedom of action and affecting a loss of true knowledge for the subject, this *mala* gives rise to the notion of individuality. These two limitations of action and knowledge develop further owing to the *Karma* and *Māyā Mala*, respectively. The *Karma Mala* originates in the lack of awareness that the only real agent is Śiva (not the *jīva*), and results in the reduction of the universal power of action to a finite power. The *Māyā Mala*, meanwhile, appears when the individual’s power of knowledge becomes limited through its coming into contact with the impure *tatvas*, and results in the apprehension of all objects as
other kārakās) are synthesized into the larger one (e.g., the pan holds the rice [locative case], the wood feeds the fire [instrumental case], etc.). Contrary to orthodox syntax, then, the action rests (āśritam) in the agent, not the object. And finally, the kārtr alone is self-determined or free (svatantra) with respect to the influence of the other kārakās, which themselves are dependent upon the agent (paratantra). Thus, while the agent indeed finds himself in the midst of the overall action, he exercises power over the action by virtue of his initiating it, his encompassing the action (as its locus), and his having a unique freedom from the overall action.

3.4.c. Freedom and the Priority of the Agent in Śaiva Practice: Role-Appropriation as Soteriological Goal

For Śaivas as well as for Sanskritic theological and philosophical discourse in general, kriyā has the important meaning of ritual action. Moreover, Śaivism extrapolates to all states of affairs the Brahminical interpretation of the Vedas as expressing injunctions for ritual behavior; spiritual means and goal are identical in the performance of kriyā as a kind of ritualistic performance. But there is a fundamental difference between Śaiva and orthodox Hindu understandings of the efficacy of ritual practice. Proper ritual performance does not involve eliminating the individual’s felt need for world-transcendence and, in turn, aligning oneself with one’s socially prescribed role as one’s own. This is made clear by the manner in which Śaiva ritual draws heavily upon characteristic Tantric patterns. As opposed to rigidly controlling the external behavior of the participants with ritual considerations of purity (as in the case of Pūrva Mīmāṃsā different and the reduction of universal knowledge to knowledge of particulars. See Ibid.
ritual practice), Śaiva ritual transgresses caste distinctions by, among other things, having male and female partners of different castes perform the sexual reintegration of Śiva and Śakti, and involving forbidden “impure” substances (e.g., sexual fluids, corpses in cremation grounds, etc.). Indeed, such ritualistic pursuit of salvation (mukti) is often not incompatible with enjoyment (bhoga). But this is by no means a hedonistic practice that aims to indulge our limited sense of self, nor is it a strategy for binding us to the norms of the status quo. And yet, the aim here is not to merely assert the noumenal freedom of the agent over and against the phenomenal world, for Śaiva ritual does not have in view the authentication of the agent as a subject purified apart from its locatedness in the world (e.g., its karmic inheritance). How, then, does Śaiva ritual participation aim to reconcile this conflict between the awareness of ourselves as karmically embodied role-players and the awareness of ourselves as self-reflective, world-encompassing subjects?

Contrary to the Pūrva and Uttara Mīmāṃsā schools, Śaivism does not seek to overcome the conflict between the self qua role-model and the self qua transcendental subjectivity. Rather, Śaiva ritual purposefully heightens in a controlled space the felt tension between the two with a view to gaining power over our outwardly performative roles. First the ritual intensifies the awareness of being arrested in one’s role by enjoining the participant to perform a role that violates his ordinary self-understanding (e.g., performing ritually impure acts that create a rupture between role-model and subject). This is then counter-balanced by the agent’s being de-centered or depersonalized from his limited awareness as identical with his socially projected role, as he transcends space and time through identification with “the perfect Consciousness [which] prevails in its

---

298 See Rediscovering God, p. 134.
fullness.” But the adept is not simply to distance himself from the world and the karmic body, for this would not lead to his obtaining power over his outward role-projections (i.e., the Action Śakti). Rather, this de-centering from his ordinary role and subsequent identification with the perfect omniscient light is to be inscribed within the alternation of involution and evolution of Śiva consciousness with a view to enabling the participant to carry this awareness (of omnipotence) into the everyday world.

The ritual, then, not unlike the dialectic that Ricoeur sees narrative as stimulating, exposes the emptiness of the question “Who am I?” Going beyond Ricoeur’s analysis, however, the ideal ritual participant does not simply experiment with and master the play of identity through imaginative exploration (e.g., imagining oneself as a transgressor of one’s socially prescribed duties) and self-objectification. He encompasses the bi-polar wholeness of Śiva consciousness (in its movement in and out of the phenomenal domain, including the individual’s karmic body) by means of which he sharpens his awareness of the movements of consciousness between the role-model and the subject. In this respect, the strategy of the Śaiva ritual for negotiating identity is closer to Krṣṇa’s question, answer, and self-disclosure method of instructing Arjuna than it is to Ricoeur’s theory of narrative as a means to practical wisdom. Not unlike Arjuna, the Śaiva adept masters the art of role-appropriation, but only through drawing upon the power of Becoming itself.

More so than literature, ritual is a vertical extension of agency that deepens our attunement to the alternation of vimarṣa and prakāśa, Śakti and Śiva. As a result, the daily performance of one’s socially projected roles can become joyful and creative, for the agent is no longer in the grip of the role. But in this context, worldly life is liberating

---

299 “On the Parvan Rites,” pp. 49 – 50. This is Śiva in His aspect as supreme subjectivity (Paramaśiva).
in that uniquely Śaiva way, namely, by its involving the individual’s exercising power over his role as an expression of his identity with Śiva. His role-bound karma, meanwhile, is not overcome per se (e.g., through an orthodox technique of purification). Rather, it gets encompassed within the agent’s creative imagination; the liberated agent now sees (in the case of its cognitive roles) or acts (in the case of its outwardly performative roles) through his karma, rather than being its instrument.

As we have stated earlier, the soteriological strategies advocated by Śaivism situate the actions of the agent in the dialectical interplay of Śiva-Śakti, and thereby interpret bondage as a condition for play, as our cue, if you will, to awaken to the occasion to positively perform our roles as an expression of our identity with Śiva. In demonstrating this, note that these methods do not operate from the understanding that action (karma) and cognition are independent of each other, nor do they relegate action to an inferior status as a possible path to liberation. Rather, Śaivism takes action and cognition to be modalities that are present in its soteriological practices, and attempts to synthesize these paths so that the proper negotiation of subject and model will bear itself out through the individual’s actions. Accordingly, the aim of ritual practice is a power (Action Śakti) that is both role-positive and role-transcending. A phenomenological turn with respect to the agent’s own self-interpretation (i.e., recognizing Śiva within himself) leads to an expressive turn, that is, performing in full awareness of this incongruity as a necessary condition for expressing his identity with Śiva. The orthodox strategies of imagining agency as purified of its ambivalence towards the world of action (vimarśa), in contrast, victimize the agent not simply by reducing him to his role (insofar as he is a
participant in the world). They also conceal the choice of the agent in imagining how he stands in relation to the world. Emulating Śiva in the Śaiva way, moreover, unlocks a power that is seen to be essential to developing a mature hermeneutic attitude for creatively appropriating the karmic influences of those roles that project us into the world. Means and goal, in turn, intersect in the ceaseless play of interpretation of the experience of being in the world in and through our roles. Viśrānti, in sum, involves not simply appropriating the influence of our role-models as a means to the end of encompassing the bi-polar alternation of Śiva-Śakti. It also entails appropriating the Person, Śiva, in order to develop our capabilities in applying ourselves in the world through the self-conscious, deliberate, and creative performance of our roles as qualitatively distinct from their mere “acting out” or the sheer resistance to identifying ourselves with them.

3.5. Viśrānti and the Expression of Agency through the Action Śakti: from the Appropriation of our Social-Historical Influences to the Encompassment of Relations with Other Beings

Just now I argued that action is ordinarily limiting because the influence of our roles entraps us from within through the binding force of karma. I will now consider the phenomenon of arrest in our roles from without by examining the awareness of our being seen as objectified role-players by others. I will investigate this phenomenon by situating it in the dialectic of self and other that is embedded in the narrative of Śiva-Śakti. Śaivas recognize that our involvement in the world is problematic not simply because it binds us vertically in relation to Becoming (via karma), but also because it binds us horizontally in
relation to other beings. But in keeping with the general Śaiva orientation, our relatedness to others is not simply a problem to be eliminated, but an opportunity for realizing our true nature as identical with Śiva. Moreover, the means to recognizing ourselves as not simply reducible to the subject side of any given relation, but as encompassing and expressing relational contexts, centers around the role of the imagination in recognitively expanding into and actively negotiating the world of multiplicity as resting (viśrānti) in Śiva. To this end of encountering others in terms of divine self-recognition, then, the deep personal appropriation of Becoming is to play a key role. But the intermediary step between Being (or Becoming) and beings, that is, between encompassing the vertical extension of consciousness and assuming the relational middle between self and other, is appropriation of our social-historical inheritance. Insofar as we have realized our identity with Śiva, we are simultaneously players in the narrative of Śiva-Śakti and the authors of that play. Accordingly, in this section I will reconsider the soteriological efficacy of the methods of the Cognition and Action Śaktis, this time with a view to how they facilitate the intelligent and creative negotiation of relational contexts by not simply enabling us to enter into the interiority of others (imagining them from within) or othering ourselves (imagining ourselves from without). More than this, Śaiva soteriology empowers us to perform in full awareness of the ambiguity of agency as a subjective seeing as and an objectified other being seen as with a view to assuming the relational middle between beings.

3.5.a. Śiva’s Voluntary Enslavement to the Other through Involution in Śaiva Narrative Ontology
In order to more fully understand the efficacy of Śaiva spiritual technologies, in particular, that of the Kriyā Śakti, we must first look to the Śaiva understanding of ontology of action as vimarṣa, or the emanatory field of “what is.” The link between ontology and action, first of all, is implicit in the term “Kriyā Śakti.” “Kriyā” derives from the Sanskrit verbal root “/kṛ,” which itself is a cognate of the English verb “create” and can also be translated as the verb “act.” “Kriyā” itself, then, means both “creation” and “action.” With respect to the former, the Kriyā Śakti has to do with what exists and the nature and structure of what exists. Because Śaivas understand the disclosure of Becoming in accordance with the myth of Śiva’s play with His Śakti, the Śaiva approach to ontology can be described as a narrative ontology. Not unlike Ricoeur, Śaivas hold that experience has an intrinsically narrative-poetic character. Unique to the Śaiva orientation, however, this narrative centers around the mythic creation or emanatory action of the universe as Śiva-Śakti, which has a thoroughly ontic dimension.

Accordingly, Kriyā Śakti can also be translated as “Action Śakti,” for it is Śiva's action-production that constitutes what exists, while the abstract structure of action (as emanating from unity to unity-in-multiplicity) underwrites Becoming itself. While noting the ultimate identity of vimarṣa and prakāśa, Abhinavagupta heuristically identifies these two categories with the Śaktis of Action and Cognition, respectively. Furthermore, he even at times argues for the primacy of the Action Śakti over the Cognition Śakti.301

---

300 I am drawing upon Lawrence’s insights here. See Rediscovering God, p. 133.
301 Abhinava explains at length: “The nature of this [Self] as the Great Lord consists in His recognitively judging [virmṛṣad], His having uninterrupted recognitive judgment [vimarṣa], His not being dependent on anything else, and His being a mass of pure bliss. That recognitive judgment [vimarṣa] having the nature “I,” is the pure and ultimately unitary Cognition and Action [Śaktis] of God [deva], who is involved in play,
Becoming, in short, is an action to be accomplished, while everything is the action-production of Śiva-Śakti.

As ordinary agents, we are immersed in this narrative. We are actors in this drama, unaware of the fact that it is a drama. Key to our having a place in this narrative, though, is the category of relation, which secures the unity of individuals through time. Śaivas conceive of relation in terms of the monistic action of Lord Śiva in His descent from unity to unity-in-multiplicity. In order to illustrate this, Abhinavagupta uses the example of a hand. A hand is recognized as having essentially the same nature across moments even though there appears a diversity of forms. Abhinavagupta explains this paradoxical unity-in-multiplicity of the hand: “[B]ecause of their contrariety, [these different grips and postures] cannot exist in the same essential form [i.e., the hand at one particular time]. This [diversity of the unitary] is explained to be action.”

The Śaiva conceptions of action and relation overlap. Just as action is explained in terms of the descent from unity to unity-in-multiplicity, so too is relation defined as unity-in-multiplicity. Relation is the most basic ontological category generated by the Action Śakti, as it simultaneously cuts apart (across temporal moments) and binds together those individual entities that participate in and constitute the narrative of Śiva’s action-production. It comprehends diversity according to differences in time, place, and the constitutive forms of the relata, while the unity of differentiated entities is obtained “as

---

etc. Cognition has the nature of awareness [prakāśa]. Action is recognitive judgment [vimarśa], which has the nature of the freedom characteristic of an agent [svātāntarya]. Furthermore, recognitive judgment [vimarśa] has awareness [prakāśa] within it. Thus Cognition and Action are, on the Supreme level, nothing but recognitive judgment [vimarśa]... However, cognition is in every way nothing but recognitive judgment [vimarśa]. For it has been said that without that there would be insentience. And that very [recognitive judgment] is Action” (Īśvarapratyabhijñāvimarśa, 1.8.11, 1:423-24).

Ibid., 2.1.5, 2:17.
reciprocal connection,” writes Utpaladeva. Abhinavagupta explains further the fundamental importance of relation for the unfolding of Becoming by virtue of its securing the continuity of those beings emanated through the involution of consciousness:

This is the manner in which consciousness descends [to the level of ordinary experience]: Every movement/manifestation [visphāra] here results solely from the Action Śakti. In this the root is nothing but relation [sambandha]... However, sometimes this relation [sambandha] is entangled by other designations... If this entanglement by other designations is ended, it is correct only to speak of relation [sambandha]... Thus the diverse affairs of the world are completely dependent upon relation [sambandha].

Unlike those monists or idealists who have refuted the reality of relations or distinctions, Śaivas are concerned to establish the objectivity, omnipresence, and metaphysical necessity of relations by virtue of their making possible the action-production narrative of Becoming through connecting words with their objects and unifying individual entities (including individual agents) across time.

But relations not only secure the existence of individual agents by connecting them internally, that is, by linking their differentiated manifestations across time. They also do so from without by connecting them with other beings. As explained earlier in this chapter, all things (physical or mental, living or non-living) depend upon the light of consciousness. Nothing exists unless it is given to an awareness. And there is no awareness unless there is a synthesizing consciousness or subject. To exist, then, is to be

---

303 “This is the basis of the conception of relation [sambandha]” (Īśvarapratyabhijñākārika, 2.2.4, 2:49).
304 Īśvarapratyabhijñāvimarsinī, 2.2.4, 2:46-49.
305 Śaivism is often classified as a “Monism” or “Idealism.”
Action, which Śaivas understand as “a unity apprehended in an enduring substratum-object, occurring in a temporal sequence,” is itself noted as an example of relation (Rediscovering God, p. 136). This is Lawrence's comment, p. 136.
recognized “as mutually awaiting or ‘tending towards each other’ by a recognizing awareness.”307 And insofar as this awareness is to be performed by a unifying, conscious subject, individual entities depend for their existence upon relations that link them to other beings. In short, to exist is to be related to others, for only in this way can entities be recognized.

Consider, for example, the existence of a pot. A pot does not exist in itself. According to Šaivas, it merely pretends to rest complete in itself, i.e., as limited and self-terminated. But in fact, “it is nothing until it is related to other things, synthesized with its other time-slices and with what many people can see from many sides, with all its parts, phases, and glimpses.”308 And this “synthesis or putting together of discreet, self-terminated, self-contained objects or cognitions” requires a judgment that will connect it to either other things or (in the least) to a conscious subject who can make the determination that, for example, “There is a pot here on the fire, in front of the cook, for the purpose of heating the milk.” That entities depend for their existence upon relations with conscious, intentionally aware others holds true not only for non-living entities (e.g., a stone or pot), but also for living ones. Recalling the order of the involution of Śiva consciousness, the descent of consciousness from primal unity to multiplicity is marked by a gradual loss of self-containment and a proliferation of beings. As embodied expressions of this descent, we as ordinary agents are dependent upon the other not only for recovering our sense of wholeness, but simply for becoming aware of our being in the

306 This also holds true for judgments of an absence. As Arindam Chakrabarti notes, “Nothing is noted as absent except as absent to an awareness.” See “The Heart of Repose,” p. 29.
307 Ibid., pp. 29-30.
308 Ibid., p. 30.
world as limited agents. Indeed, we as ordinary agents in some sense shine (/bhās) for ourselves by our own power as experience-synthesizing consciousnesses. But insofar as we have lost our primal self-containment (i.e., as Parameśvara) in and through involvement in the world, we too are incomplete in our self-terminated, limited being in the world, and hence dependent upon others’ recognizing us for identifying our own locatedness in the world. That we do fail to rest in ourselves, then, also hinges upon our relatedness to and recognition by other (mostly ordinary) agents.

But while the subject (Śiva or the individual agent) in the narrative ontology of Siva-Sakti becomes more aware of himself as a distinct, existent being in the world through embroilment in his relations with others, he consequently becomes intensely aware of his locatedness and, in turn, his limitedness as a creative agent precisely as a result of his relations with others. The agent becomes limited here (at the grossest tattva, the Prthvī [Earth] tattva) with respect to how he is present in the world by virtue of his imagining separation between himself as an individuated subject (jīva) and other entities.309 This reification of the otherness of phenomenal objects in turn compels him to imaginatively renounce his power (Śakti) to creatively negotiate not only the otherness of those objects, but also the what-ness of both the object and his own identity as a person across time. In naively misplacing his Śakti in the other (instead of in himself), the agent becomes divorced from the power to interpret what transpires in the domain of action.

309 In keeping with the analysis above in the discussion of the involution of Śiva consciousness, the individual's consciousness becomes limited through its coming into contact with, ultimately, the five gross elements of the Earth tattva (i.e., the final tattva in the involution of consciousness), and this results in the apprehension of all objects as different and the reduction of universal knowledge to knowledge of particulars. This awareness of imperfection, in turn, causes the awareness of self-limitation, which in turn causes the limitation of subjectivity and, ultimately, the arising of egoism.
Furthermore, the individual’s sense of being thrown back upon his socially prescribed role by his relations with others becomes even more enervating by virtue of his being seen by others. Indeed, his being recognized by others provides him with an entry into the world. But when the agent has resigned himself from his Śakti, he gives power over to the other in determining both the how and the what of his own being in the world. Through his own act of volition, then, the agent enters into relations with others as others. This being-with-others, in turn, reifies the spatio-temporal, socio-cultural locatedness of the agent, breeds a sense of dependence upon his (karmically-embodied) social-historical inheritance for securing his being in the world, and limits the power of the agent to creatively express himself in terms of both how he is present in the world and what he presents himself as.

3.5.b. Śiva’s Self-Realization through Recovery of the Betweenness of Self and Other in Śaiva Agential Ontology

Both descriptively and prescriptively the agent-centered syntax of Śaivism discussed in the previous section is consistent with what can be termed an “agential ontology.” Just as the individual agent who has realized his identity with Śiva self-consciously acts as the instigator of the subordinate operations of the (grammatical) kārkās and the substratum of the overarching verbal process that contains these operations, so too does the agent as Śiva instigate and synthesize the different moments through time what is typically considered the cause with the effect in the object. Consider, for example, that it is ultimately not the potter qua limited individual who

310 I am borrowing this term from Lawrence. See Rediscovering God, p. 150.
makes the pot, but Śiva Himself; for the end result that is the pot requires not only the potter, but also the manifestation of the tools, materials, and activities necessary for making the pot.\textsuperscript{311} Accordingly, Utpaladeva writes, “Being is the condition of one who becomes, that is, the agency of the act of becoming.”\textsuperscript{312} In keeping with the myth of Śiva-Śakti, that which constitutes the existence of anything is the eternal agency of its creation. With respect to the “pot” example just given, Abhinavagupta further explains: “[The expression] ‘The pot exists’ has this meaning: The Great Lord, who is awareness [prakāśa], desires to exist as the pot and assumes that existence through His [agential] freedom [svātantrya].”\textsuperscript{313} Śiva is primarily a kartā, a doer. He alone performs all actions in the universe. Just as the agent as Śiva initiates and underlies the construction of linguistic meaning, then, so too does He act as the real or essential cause of that which exists.

In the same way that the limited individual is privileged in a grammatical context, then, so too do the synthesis and instigation of the different moments of the action of transformation center around a conscious agent. This leads to a consideration of the agent’s power over relational contexts. The limited agent is indeed a world- or relation-maker; he brings worlds into being by virtue of actions that give birth to greater diversity, and yet holds together the multitude of entities across time and space through his power as a synthesizing (i.e., relation-making) subjectivity. But his power as the final unifier is

\textsuperscript{311} In keeping with the Sāṃkhya and Advaita Vedānta doctrines of satkāryavāda (i.e., the effect pre-exists in the cause), Śāivism acknowledges the continuity between cause and effect. However, it rejects the Sāṃkhya notion that the material cause is insentient matter, for all Being is pervaded by the agency that is Śiva consciousness. Contrary to Vedānta, meanwhile, the unity of the multiplistic universe is not to be overcome by explaining it away as a mere illusion or false supposition, for this would denigrate the effect, which according to Śāivism is a self-identical expression of agency.

\textsuperscript{312} Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikāvṛtti, 1.5.14, 19.
still limited by virtue of the self-imposed impotence resulting from his ignorance, namely, his having imagined himself as wholly identical with his role-constituted locatedness. By virtue of his autonomy from the phenomenal world, however, he is not necessarily bound by any external power, i.e., the other who as other exercises the power of recognition over him. Rather, the agent has the privileged ability to encompass his relations with others with a view to imaginatively re-ordering them in more effective ways. But in order to realize this power, the unifying consciousness that brings objects into being by way of cognitive awareness must “take the form of a self-ascription which feels itself to be a single ‘I,’ not just one objectifiable artificial knower-ego (māyā-pramātā) among other possible ego’s, but an all encompassing I-awareness, in the light of which everything else is illuminated.” Ordinary agents already mimic divine consciousness by establishing a knower-known relation with objects. This occurs by terming a given object a “this” at one moment, and then a “this” at another moment, in an imposed temporal sequence. But this process of othering (in the vimarsa phase) gives way to one of recovery (in the prakāsa phase) when the object turns towards or comes to rest (abhimukhyena viśrantiṃ bhajante) in the agent who has realized his identity with Śiva as “that great unifying ocean of sentience or self-awareness [saṃvit-mahāsamudra]… where all these beings… merge like so many rushing rivers meeting in an ocean.” Recognizing the incompleteness of the object (as a seeming thing in itself) and his own condition as the metaphysical end-point or ontological foundation of physical phenomena, the separation-tinged relation between self and other melts into or

313 Īśvarapratyabhijñāvimśatā, 2.4.21, 2:207.
finds repose (viśrānti) in the all-encompassing “I”-consciousness that is Śiva. Each cognitive act of othering now becomes imagined as an act of perfect conjoining in the “I”-consciousness as final unifier.316

Meanwhile, all of the characteristics mentioned above in the Śaiva philosophy of grammar that distinguish the individual kārtr from the other kārakās—i.e., the agent as initiator, substratum and autonomous with respect to the overall action—can now be interpreted in terms related to Śiva’s self-recognition in order to demonstrate the analogy of ordinary agent and Śiva as the narrator of creation.317 The agent’s role as instigator of the action is interpreted as Śiva’s initial will to emanate (spanda). His role as the substratum of the action and its subordinate processes, meanwhile, is seen in terms of the synthetic function of recognition (vimarśa) by means of which the seeming otherness of the multiplicity is recovered in the discernment of a unifying oneness.

Of course, this analogy of limited agent and Śiva as supreme agent made available through the Śaiva theory of the syntax of agency does not simply serve as a useful

---

315 Taken from Ibid., in reference to Iśvarapratyabhijñavivrtivimarsinī, vol 1, pp. 350-56.
316 “The Heart of Repose” explains: “[A]ll that exists and happens in the world is interrelated because they are all related eventually to an observer’s consciousness which registers these relations and is ready to carve them up into these semantic verb-centered categories: ‘This variegated conduct of common life is surely ruled by relation.’” (saṃbandhadhadhina eva citra iyam lokayātṛā, taken from Iśvarapratyabhijñavivrtivimarsinī, vol. II, p. 49). See “The Heart of Repose,” p. 31.
317 Abhinavagupta uses the analogy of ordinary agency in order to demonstrate the nature of Śiva as the narrator of creation. Here [according to this system], action is really nothing but the Supreme Lord’s [agential] intention [icchā]. [This agential intention] consists of uninterrupted self-recognition [svātmāparāmarśa] which has the nature of unobstructed [agential] freedom [svātantrya], and is not dependent on another… For [limited individuals such as] Cāitra or Māitra, etc., the inner intention [icchā] [expressed] “I cook” is the action. Thus, even though there is the relation [saṃbandha] of [the one who is cooking] with numerous movements such as putting something on the fire, etc., the [intention] “I cook” is uninterrupted. It is nothing but the intention [icchā] “I cook” which appears as such movements. However there is really no sequence in this [intention]. Thus is that recognitive judgment [vimarśa] of the Lord, which has the nature of intention [icchā, which may be expressed] “I Lord,” “I appear,” “I manifest in cosmogonic vibration [sphurāmi],” “I create through agitation [Ghūrnel]” and “I recognize” [pratyavamṛśāmi].” The essential nature [of such recognitive judgment] is nothing but “I,” and it has no sequence. Iśvarapratyabhijñāvimarsinī, 2.1.8, 2:24-25.
didactic tool for disclosing the nature of Śiva. It also helps to demonstrate the freedom of the agent over the action-production of Śiva-Śakti and those relations that ground us in it. Moreover, recovering the power and understanding of ourselves as the authors of this narrative and its constitutive relations is to occur through our coming to rest (viśrānti) in Śiva. That is, viśrānti involves not simply achieving the deep personal appropriation of Śiva, nor just obtaining power over our roles. More than this, repose entails assuming the relational middle in the play between self and other. How, then, are we to obtain the knowing-how and knowing-what that is necessary for giving full expression to our identity with Śiva in and through our relation with others?

3.5.c. Creatively Authoring the Narrative of Śiva-Śakti through Seeing-As: from the “How” to the “What” of the Other

This concern for viśrānti as encompassing relations is reflected throughout Śaiva soteriological practices, many of which link the role of the imagination in interpreting the otherness of objects to the power to creatively reenact the play of Śiva-Śakti.

Having discussed previously some of the details concerning the Śākta Upāya of philosophy as a technology for developing our seeing as capabilities, I briefly return to the Śaiva notion of a “purification of conceptualization” that is associated with this method as a kind of training in knowing how to properly recognize the action-production of Śiva. But how are we to make sense of this Śaiva “purification” of conceptualization, particularly in light of the problems associated with the orthodox Hindu valuation of purity? First of all, the Śaiva notion of purification entails a redefinition of purity and
impurity.\textsuperscript{318} Purity, or that which is to be pursued, is described as the condition of the subject wherein knowledge “reflects the actual state of affairs of objects as the emanation of monistic Consciousness.”\textsuperscript{319} This is Pure Wisdom, which is neither a wholesale elimination of thought patterns and conceptual constructions (the Vedānta cognitive model) nor a mere affirmation of them and their respective objects (the Nyāya model). Rather, it involves the obtaining of power (the Cognition Śakti) over them through the liberating recognition that they are to be determined not by the object, but negotiated by the subject in whom the object has been absorbed.\textsuperscript{320} Abhinavagupta explains:

[There is also conceptual construction] having the nature of Pure Wisdom, which comprehends the Self as containing all objects [as is expressed]: ‘I am this.’ This conceptual construction has the nature of Pure Wisdom and is clearly manifest; it destroys the māyic conceptual construction which causes differentiation.\textsuperscript{321}

In the absence of Pure Wisdom, objects assume the appearance of resting in themselves. But as demonstrated above, the real object in fact hankers after something other than itself, namely, its relatedness and recognition in the intentional awareness of a conscious subject. But mere recognition alone does not guarantee the object-purification that is necessary for divine self-recognition, for as Abhinavagupta explains, “Impurity is nothing but the state when even though immersed [in a conscious subject], they [externalized

\textsuperscript{318} That the Śaiva appropriation of orthodox role-models is not accidental, but in fact self-conscious and deliberate, is evidenced in Abhinavagupta’s formulation of a transgressive, Tantric criticism of orthodox Hindu notions of purity (śuddhi) and impurity (aśuddhi). “One should not be troubled with the discrimination of that which is to be eaten and that which is not to be eaten, purity and impurity, etc., which does not describe reality and is essentially mere mental fabrication,” he explains. “For purity is not a form of the real thing, as is blueness” (Tantrasāra, 4.31).

\textsuperscript{319} Rediscovering God, p. 63. In this condition, self-recognition has been attained and objects are viewed as one’s own limbs accordingly.

\textsuperscript{320} Repose in this context involves not purifying our karma, but simply imagining “what it would feel like if the object were seen and then fails to find that feeling (of its otherness)” (“The Heart of Repose,” p. 31).

\textsuperscript{321} Tantraloka, 4.111-14, 3:731-33.
objects] do not bring repose to the heart.”

Rather than collapsing the gap between subject and object to the side of the agent qua limited “I,” then, Pure Wisdom involves taking and immersing not only the externalized other, but also one’s self-awareness as a limited self, into “one’s own innermost I-ness.” As explained in the previous section, expressing our identity with Śiva in this way involves appropriating the influence of our models. Here we find that this power over the thought patterns and conceptual constructions determined by our cognitive models is not for the sake of reigning over the object, but for intellectually recovering the emanation-knowing structure of Pure Wisdom. In other words, in order for this phenomenological shift (with respect to the action-production of Śiva) to be expressive of our identity with Śiva, the agent must also de-center or purify himself of his own limitedness with a view to re-centering himself in the relational middle between (limited) cognizing subject and cognized object. “Repose becomes freedom in every sense,” Chakrabarti explains, “when the heart witnesses its own great power of creating and effacing differences and relishes the egoless ‘middle’ of that process of tasting any sensation or experience without getting fettered to either the taster or the tasted.”

In this way, Pure Wisdom is the Śakti of Cognition that equips us with the knowing how requisite for liberating seeing as, specifically, seeing the object as merely pretending to be distinct in its otherness, and then rediscovering it as not only related to the subject qua limited consciousness, but as fulfilled in the “repose in the reflective ‘I’-consciousness” (ahaṁ-paramārśa-viśrānti).

In short, it counterbalances

---

322 Taken from “The Heart of Repose,” p. 34, in reference to Paryanta Pañcāśikā, v. 9 – 10.
323 “The Heart of Repose,” p. 35.
324 Ibid., p. 33.
the binding effects of the Māyā Śakti, and thereby brings to completion the agential narrative ontology of Śiva-Śakti.

In addition to the methods grouped under the Śākta Upāya (e.g., philosophical argumentation), Śaivism also advocates a number of spiritual technologies that are grouped under what is called the Āṇava Upāya or the Kriyā Upāya, the Path of Action. At a superficial level, many of the practices included in this category of spiritual means resemble those of orthodox Hindu traditions. But just as the central symbolic and practical Śaiva theme of the valuation of power over purity sharply differentiates the practices of the Śākta Upāya from their counterparts in the Hindu orthodoxy, so too do the methods of the Kriyā Upāya have in view the empowerment of agency through purification in the repose in Śiva consciousness. I focus briefly upon the visualization exercise of imagery worship and its usefulness for further developing the adept's cognitive powers in seeing as, specifically, seeing the unfolding of becoming as an act of divine self-recognition.325 But whereas philosophy cultivates power in knowing-how to narrate the action-production of Śiva-Śakti (i.e., by purifying the world of its gross-ness), the visualization exercises of the Kriyā Upāya help us to creatively fashion what the entities of the world are by developing skillfulness in knowing-what transpires in the course of this narrative. Through intense visual meditation upon imagery, the adept plays with a variety of possibilities for disclosing the object and, ultimately, identifying invariant structural features that manifest accordingly. Thus, rather than overcoming the ambiguity of the identity of the object—as the orthodox Hindu schools do—this is a kind

325 Its methods of self-realization include the regulation of prāṇa or vital air, the repetition of mantras, the worship of images, and ritual participation.
of phenomenological inquiry that presences the ambiguous what-ness of the object. Consequently, not only does the object no longer stand over and above the agent as stripped of his power (Śakti) to negotiate this relationship. Recognizing that the object is incomplete with respect to what it is transforms the adept’s attitude from one of literal mindedness to one of polymorphic mindedness, and thereby awakens a ceaseless desire for the play of hermeneutic imagination in covering and uncovering the object.\footnote{In contrast with the theory and practice of orthodox (i.e., \textit{Mīmāṃsā}) soteriologies, which take the identity of the other to be a given/pre-determined, here we enter into the interiority of the other and creatively negotiate “what” the other is by embracing all its dimensions (transformation to polyminded attitude). It also bears noting that this freedom is not motivated by “fidgety restlessness, now choosing one thing and then choosing something else, and a certain cultivated sense of dissatisfaction and discontent [that] seems essential to this kind of freedom of choice” (see “The Heart of Repose,” p. 35). This is not some form of aestheticist freedom that is concerned merely with removing constraints to one’s independence from the mundane, rule-bound world. To the contrary, the adept-perceiver here has in view the identification of structural variations made available by the object itself.} The adept now positively revels in the endeavor to disclose every nook and cranny of the domain of action, taking great delight in the proliferation of meaning that arises out of phenomenal objects through the agent’s exploring the varieties of fit through distinction and time.

Entering into the interiority of the other in this way, then, the agent not only recovers his power (Śakti) to imaginatively negotiate the other-ness of the object, but to also play with its particularity as a phenomenologically distinct entity. But of course, this is not a mere experiment for phenomenological research or simply educating our visual capacities. Such creative engagement of the other has deep spiritual meaning insofar as the power of vitality that it arouses in disclosing and re-disclosing objects is entailed by \textit{viśrānti}.\footnote{“This [viśrānti] is that power of vitality which stirs up all inner initiatives with desire,” Abhinavagupta writes, “and it is known alternatively as ‘Śpanḍa’ (vibration), ‘Sphuratta’ (exuberant self-manifestation),} Repose in Śiva is a state of being from which all tiredness has vanished in
“exploring the unending contentment of self-discovery.” Transforming *vimarśa* into divine self-recognition in this way involves actively discriminating objects with a view to expressing our identity with Śiva more fully. Chakrabarti explains: “So the Śiva-consciousness also has its power of creating distinctions by contracting itself and then expanding itself, by denials and affirmations, by exclusions and inclusions, by reveling in entertaining options and imaginary possibilities.”

Appreciating this point, however, requires a brief digression. The Śiva-Śakti myth that underwrites the Śaiva narrative ontology is not to be understood as a quality of experience produced by the imagination as some faculty that lies within the individual interpreter and stands apart from existence. Rather, that which exists itself affirms the narrative of Śiva's action-production of the world as other and the relentless play of hermeneutic imagination in recovering it as His power and consort, Śakti. Seizing upon this power of the imagination in constructing reality leads to the realization that, as Utpaladeva writes, “Being is the agency of the act of becoming, that is, the freedom characteristic of an agent regarding all actions.” Rather than causing separation between ordinary agent and a world of qualitatively other objects, through a kind of deep personal appropriation of the play of Śiva consciousness Becoming itself gets understood

---

‘Viśrānti’ (repose), ‘Jīva’ (life/or soul), ‘Hṛd’ (heart), and ‘Pratībha’ (the light of creative intuition or omniscience).” Quote cited in “The Heart of Repose,” p. 28.


329 Ibid., p. 35. In the midst of a dualistic interpretation of the world (i.e., wherein the subject is overwhelmed by Māya), objects are seen to be inert, “devoid of the freedom to conjoin and disjoin” (*The Doctrine of Vibration*, pp. 73-4). Through the power of recognition, however, which is understood as “allowing him [i.e., the individual subject] to couple the concept with the experience which lies behind it,” Śaiva philosophy becomes a kind of Śaktipat of its own by virtue of its stimulating the freedom of consciousness to unite, separate, and hold things together (Ibid., p. 69). Self-realization follows from this through the recognition that we participate in the pure “I-ness,” or Śiva consciousness, that is imminent in the world by virtue of the oneness (or pure “I-ness”) of all objects with the Absolute.
as not only the eternal unfolding of consciousness, but as identical with one’s own agency.

Moreover, Śaiva visualization exercises arouse not only our sympathetic identification with Becoming, but empathetic association with all beings. Accordingly, the recognition of one’s priority as self-achieved agent over the domain of action and all actors in it now becomes empowering not only in terms of controlling one’s own particular karmic body as the locus of one’s social-historical inheritance (as demonstrated in the previous section), nor simply in cognitively recognizing divinity in the other, thereby overcoming one’s felt estrangement from the other. Insofar as the whole universe becomes identified as the agent’s body, harmonizing the agent with the alternating movements of consciousness underlying its involution and evolution and gaining power over the action of our cognitive role-models in turn affects the hermeneutic retrieval of the wholeness of consciousness that makes immersion in a world of multiplicity not only liberating, but rapturous (camatkāra). The syntax of power and agent-centered ontology developed by Śaivism correspond to its epistemological theory of recognition. Thus, taking ownership of one's power as a relation-maker does not simply present the object in its unhiddenness out of a concern for mere wonder. It reveals to the adept his

---

330 Īśvarapratyabhijñāvimarsinī, 1.5.14, 1:258-59.
331 The Sanskrit term “camatkāra” can be translated as “wonder” or “astonishment.” But in the context of Śaiva aesthetics, this sense of wonder is not that of a merely detached spectator, but of one who has realized the fullness of Becoming as his own, and is moved thereby to hermeneutically recover all beings accordingly as identical with Śiva. Concerning the practical value of such soteriological recognition, which is essentially not different than the experience of camatkāra, Abhinavagupta writes: “Here the practical value [arthakṛtya] is the Lordliness [vibhūti] of liberation while living, which is characterized by the higher and lower powers [siddhi], and is essentially the wonder [camatkāra] that ‘I am the Great Lord.’” (Īśvarapratyabhijñāvimarsinī, 4.1.17, 2:313). This mystical-aesthetic wonder is not merely contemplative, but is to move the agent to take action with a view to creating occasions for the play of Śiva-Śakti in all.
power in authoring the narrative play of Śiva-Śakti, both in terms of what is there and how it is there. Thinking, feeling, and willing here intersect, as the fully realized agent is now able to wager control over the world and all beings in it as if they were appendages to his own body. The object is no longer mere object, for the agent feels it from within, penetrating the inner subjectivity of the other.

3.5.d. Creatively Authoring the Narrative of Śiva-Śakti through Being-Seen-As: from the “How” to the “What” of the Self

But while Śaiva visualization exercises move the adept from the how of cognitively presencing others to the what of constituting other beings, what are we to make of our own place in this creation narrative—for even though we are relation-making authors of the narrative, we are still immersed in the domain of action? Specifically, how are we to resolve the problem of limitation due to our being seen by others and reduced to our socially projected roles accordingly? In order to clarify the Śaiva response to these questions and in turn bring the Śaiva process of self-realization to its completion, let us return to a consideration of the Kriyā Upāya method, ritual participation.

Above I demonstrated that encompassing the alternation of Śiva consciousness develops our capacities in knowing-how to perform our roles as expressions of our freedom. But this performance involves not only a vertical extension of agency but a

---

situations. This will be taken up in greater detail in the fifth chapter, in particular, its discussion of the link between aesthetic and moral imaginations.

332 This is evident in Utpaladeva’s brief linguistic definition of Pure Wisdom: “The apposition of the notions of I and this is Pure Wisdom [sadvidyā]” (Īśvaraprayatabhijñākarikā, 3.1.3, 2:221). Accordingly,
horizontal one as well. Just as the repose of viśrānti presences the ambiguity of the other as an occasion for taking delight in the play of imagining the various aspects made available through the object, so too does such repose uncover the possibilities that underlie our own condition as located, objectified entities. Chakrabarti explains this facet of repose:

> This playful unfinishedness within any particular state of oneself has nothing to do with discontent or unrest. It is a perfectly tranquil will to divide and unite, to explore one’s own infinite possibilities without waiting for anything external, a resting in freedom without any arresting of self-renewal.333

Our being in the world is incomplete not only by virtue of our dependence upon other conscious entities for recognizing us. We are also incomplete insofar as our teIos is to play between personal identities out of a spirit of endless self-exploration. This leads to a striking but important difference between Śaiva phenomenology and much of Continental European phenomenology (particularly that of Heidegger). Śaivism takes seriously the otherness or embodied-ness of the individual, embracing its positive soteriological importance rather than seeking escape from the domain of action.334 In emphasizing the play of consciousness between poles (consciousness and Becoming, subject and role, self and other), it does not privilege the subjective side of consciousness over the ontological. This is reflected even in the term “Kriyā Śakti,” which as noted earlier emphasizes the importance of the ontological dimension of the self. Both descriptively and prescriptively, the self is not simply an inwardly cognizing subject that disinterestedly

---

333 “The Heart of Repose,” p. 35.
334 This certainly is the case for Husserl and Heidegger. Merleau-Ponty, however, represents a step away from the subjectivism of this tradition and in many ways approximates the position of Śaivism.
witnesses the world. It is also an outwardly performing actor (in the normative sense explained earlier in the discussion of performance) that revels in its being embedded in a world, and hence being seen as an objectified other.

Accordingly, the site for expressing our identity with Śiva lies not only in the construction of the identity of the other (through a kind of sympathetic identification with the object), but also in the creation of our own identities as active, and hence objectified others. Already I have pointed to how the Śaiva ritual participant, not unlike Arjuna in the Gītā, develops skillfulness in knowing-how to perform his socially projected role by means of a deep appropriation of Becoming. This comparison gets strengthened by recalling that the efficacy of Arjuna’s role-performance in the Gītā rests upon his presenting himself much like the classical nāṭa does in Bharata’s theatre. The relevance of this for our discussion here bears out when we note the explicitly soteriological value of the actor in Śaivism. In what has become one of the most influential aphorisms for Śaivas, the Śiva Sūtras use the dramatic performer as a metaphor for the self-realized yogin—“The Self is an actor.”

But the “Self” that gets referred to here is not the particular self, i.e., that agent qua limited individuality who decides to take up a career as a stage performer. Rather, the term used is “ātmā” (“Nartaka ātmā”) in reference to the Self, while also making a more general claim concerning the performative dimension of becoming a fully self-realized agent. Contrary to Vedānta, meanwhile, Śaivism holds that liberation occurs through the recognition of one’s identity with Śiva in the form of dance-like movements that are not merely external movements. Much more than this, they are “based on his being established in his innermost hidden essential nature.
(antarvīgūhitāsvarasvarūpāvastambhamālam)... these actions are “playful by their own inner vibration” (svaparispandalīlāya).336 In keeping with Kṛṣṇa’s injunction to Arjuna as well as Ricoeur’s theorization of the interrelation of narrative and ethical identities, the individual agent is located and bound to participate in the world. Moreover, this obligation to present oneself in and through the role comes from the other.

Going beyond the Gitā, however, the actor who realizes his identity as the Person, Śiva, does not simply perform his own socially prescribed role, but all roles, if only through acts of imaginative interpretation. The Śiva Sūtras explain: “The place where the self takes delight with the intention of exhibiting the play of the world drama is the stage, i.e., the place where the Self adopts the various roles.”337 Not only does the self-realized agent encompass the vertical extension of agency, or what Ricoeur calls the dialectic of selfhood and sameness. Because he is not internally unitary or reducible to his socially projected role, but in fact incomplete and polymorphous by virtue of his being constantly subjected to the play of identity, he is to attend to the dialectic of self and other by enthusiastically embracing the variability of the what-ness of his otherness as an occasion for expressing his identity with Śiva, who Himself is incomplete and perpetually in the process of renewing Himself in and through play with His Śakti.

But this obtainment of power over our outwardly performative roles is not a solipsistic quest for Being, nor does the power gained over our roles simply have in view mere self-mastery. Rather, it is the power to encompass our relations with others and

335 Śiva Sūtras, III.9.
336 References taken from Kṣemarāja’s commentary upon Abhinavagupta’s sutra, “Naṭaka ātmā,” in the Śiva Sūtras.
337 Śiva Sūtras, III.10.
assume the relational middle between self and other. And this is to occur not only from the side of the phenomenal object (which is to return to us as our Śakti), but also from our own side as phenomenal agents by presencing the ambiguity of ourselves as both an inner subjectivity that is actively engaged in acts of “seeing (or recognizing) as,” and an outward, socially projected otherness by virtue of which we are aware of our “being seen (or recognized) as.” Insofar as we make a phenomenological turn in presencing this incongruity between our inwardness and outwardness in the context of divine self-recognition, we are able to express not only our power over the role, but also that which is appropriate to the given situation. Accordingly, action is no longer limiting for either self (by virtue of our being subordinated to *karma*) or other (by our actions creating separateness or a sense of rivalry between self and other). Rather, it takes on the character of unity-in-action. Having encompassed the ambiguity of the object, on the one hand, and ourselves, on the other, and then performing in full awareness of these tensions with a view to what is appropriate to the situation, our actions no longer divide the perfect omnipresent light of consciousness, but recover a unity and fullness that is apparent to both self and other. 

Padoux explains on behalf of Abhinavagupta:

[\textit{P}arvans] are ritual occasions and actions which give fullness to consciousness: 
\textit{svasamvīptūrṇa talabhasamayāḥ parva bhanyate} (28.16b), a fullness obtained, he [Abhinavagupta] explains, because during the ritual, those who take part in the wheels of power (\textit{cakracārīnīyah}) formed by the ritual assembly (\textit{melaka} or

\footnote{It is interesting to note that the \textit{Kriyā Upāya}, also appropriately called the \textit{Bheda Upāya} (or the “Difference Path”), is intended precisely for those who live in an enhanced awareness of duality (i.e., impurity or impotence). Ritual participation can be understood as occurring in a space where the tensions between self and other, agent qua subject and agent qua role, transcendence and place, have been enhanced, and the adept-participant invited to perform in full awareness of with a view to mastering these tensions as occasions for creative expression.}
melana) of siddhas and yoginīs (that is, of male and female participants) collectively transcend time… [W]hen, on parvan days, siddhas and yoginīs take part in such a Tantric assembly (melaka) as the cakrayāga/mārtiyāga, this common consciousness shines and expands (vikasvara), because the consciousness of all the participants mutually unite and reflect each other (anyonyasamghatapaṛatibimba vikasvāra – 28.374a): the flow of vibrating rays (ucchalaniṃjaraśmyogah) of consciousness of all the individual participants (all resting, in fact, in divine Consciousness), are mutually reflected as in so many mirrors and attain without effort (ayatnataḥ), a state of universalization, thus creating a condition akin to that of the divine omnipresent consciousness. 339

Indeed, the identifications of each other that attend our actions bring us to life by giving us an opening to the world. But insofar as these recognitions exaggerate the divisions and contractions of consciousness, they bury us in our locations as limited beings. Śaiva ritual, however, creates a space wherein our actions (both inwardly cognitive and outwardly performative) and recognitions of each other transform our locatedness into a veritable source of power.340 This source of power, meanwhile, indeed draws upon those role-models that have become inscribed upon the karmic body, recognizing their importance for attuning us to particular situations and intelligently coordinating the efforts of those beings involved. But having appropriated these models in the context of Śaiva soteriology, the true agent draws his power not so much from the status quo, but from his having encompassed the alternation of vimarśa and prakāśa, Śakti and Śiva, with the appropriation of his roles serving as the intermediary step between Being and beings. The appropriation of our social-historical inheritance, in other words, is key to affecting this transition between vertical and horizontal extensions of agency—for mere

340 Padoux explains that “So powerful is the identification reached on these occasions, says TĀ [Tantrāloka, 28.19b-20a], that if an uninitiated person happened to enter the circle of siddhas and yoginīs while they were performing their ritual worship, he would immediately identify with (tanmayābhavet) the transcending state of mind of the initiated participants” (“On the Parvan Rites”, p. 50).
conforming to our roles does not connect the agent to the Person, Śiva, nor does it attune us to the divine power that runs through other beings. And to this end, the mastery of our being recognized by the other is crucial. The ritual serves as a technology for moving us from merely having power over our roles to assuming the egoless middle of which Abhinavagupta writes in his definition of the yogin: “What is special about the yogin is attention to the relation.”341 The power to creatively apply our roles, then, is not just an end in itself. Going beyond this, such power serves as an intermediary step between appropriating the deep alternation of Becoming and encompassing relational contexts with beings.

Thus, deeds of expression, that is, actions that express the unity of Śiva in and between all beings, do not arise out of some private, egoistic purpose of the individual. Moreover, such acts do not guarantee that the agent will be brought into being, for our existence is not complete in itself, but contingent upon our relatedness with other beings. True acts of expression, rather, require and acknowledge the existence of others as well as the tensions between others, and between self and other(s), for otherwise we could not complete the action-production narrative of Śiva-Śakti. The telos of the Śaiva agent, in other words, is deeply relational, as it involves caring for the space between beings. And in order to properly give expression to this telos, we must not only master the how-ness and the what-ness of both others and ourselves as creative, i.e., Śiva-expressive, performers of our roles. We must do so with a view to the situation and its constitutive relations as the basic unit, with the gross distinction between self and other being understood as an abstraction that arises upon reflection (vimarśa). In this way, the

341 Taken from “The Heart of Repose,” p. 35.
achieved agent (i.e., one who has realized his identity with Śiva) realizes himself not as a mere object body that can be pinned down to a particular space and time and a given network of karmic influences (i.e., our social-historical inheritance). Rather, the true agent is a spreading out that operates on a kind of intentional arc that encircles self and other. The body, meanwhile, incarnates the situation and, as such, is simultaneously the subject (the karmic body imaginatively experienced from within) and the object (the karmic body imaginatively experienced from without). In short, the body is now the “chiasm,” or the intertwining of self and other. And the soteriological exercises of Śaivism (e.g., philosophy, visualization exercises, ritual participation) develop skillfulness in assuming and negotiating this relational middle by drawing out the phenomenon of one’s own body as simultaneously an objectified other (or a being seen as) and an inward subjectivity (or a seeing as), and in turn maturing the agent’s power to express this situation appropriately as itself the incarnation of the narrative of Śiva’s very action-production.

3.6. Conclusion: Surpassing the Play-Centered Models of the Gītā and Ricoeur

The central premise of Śaivism is that we as ordinary agents both do and ought to mimic Śiva at play with His consort and power, Śakti. The myth of Śiva relates how the perilously schizophrenic condition of Śiva can be both destructive (by its bringing

342 I am borrowing this notion of the “chiasm” from Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Regarding the chiasm, he writes: “[M]y body simultaneously sees and is seen. That which looks at all things can also look at itself and recognize, in what it sees, the ‘the other side’ of its power of looking. It sees itself seeing; it touches itself touching; it is visible and sensitive for itself. It is a self, not by transparency, like thought, which never thinks anything except by assimilating it, constituting it, transforming it into thought—but a self by confusion, narcissism, inheritance of the see-er in the seen, the toucher in the touched, the feeler in the felt—a self, then, that is caught up in things, having a front and a back, a past and a future” (“Eye and Mind [L’œil et l’esprit],” Maurice Merleau-Ponty, p. 124.)
multiplicity into existence) and constitutive and unitive. But while framing our
interpretation of experience in terms of this narrative, the epistemological and ontological
frameworks of Śaivism, in addition to its soteriological practices, do not try to overcome
this play of union and separation that is reflected in the consciousness of the individual
adept; there is no attempt to cure agency of its bi-polar condition or to prevent this
narrative from playing out. To the contrary, these technologies embrace the conflict of
wills that underwrites the narrative of Becoming. In fact, Šaiva spirituality at times even
heightens the adept’s sense of anxiety in being immersed in this conflict, though of
course with a view to bringing the narrative to its completion. And this completion
involves rediscovering the world as bliss itself, or “Lokānanda,” through an act of repose
(viśrānti).343 This is confirmed by Abhinavagupta’s remark in the Mālinīvijayavārttika:
“What is called the bliss of this Lord is his repose [viśrānti] in himself.”344 In mimicking
Śiva in the eventual recovery of His Śakti through this narrative, we as ordinary agents
come to encompass our own bi-polar wholeness, thereby transforming our ambivalence
towards worldly involvement into a source of power and enjoyment. Our involvement in
the world, then, is not to be rejected or even taken up with reservation, but affirmed as
integral to our highest purpose. In short, telos and cosmos, or “what ought to be” (i.e., the

343 The term “Lokānanda” means “bliss of the world.” Another term commonly used here is
“Jagadānanda,” which also means “bliss of the world.” In contrast with the schemes of Vedānta and
Sāmkhya, the final liberation that consists of self-realization, moreover, does not involve the metaphysical
release of the individual’s true self from phenomenal existence. Rather, it is attended by a bliss wherein the
whole world appears to the liberated soul as the embodiment of Śiva. The agent is embedded in the
landscape, and the realization of one’s true nature is to occur through the recognition of manifest creation
accordingly.

344 The Sanskrit reads: svātmaviśrāntir eva asya devasya ānanda ucyate. Translation of this passage from
the Mālinīvijayavārttika, given by Chakrabarti in “The Heart of Repose,” p. 33.
all-pervasiveness of Śiva consciousness) and “what is” (i.e., the manifest world of distinction), intersect.  

Individual beings, meanwhile, are not experienced as merely illusory or unreal, or as something other to be rejected or held in suspicion. Rather, through the simulation of the Person, Śiva, others are experienced as part of oneself, or one’s own true self, which is the self of all, namely, Śiva. Śaivism facilitates this by theorizing power as driven by the desire for playing between poles—prakāśa (consciousness) and vimarśa (Becoming), subject and role, self and other—and provides Śaivas with the means to doing so with its technologies of creative role-play.

Appreciating how Śaiva soteriology is uniquely powerful in this regard, however, requires a brief aside. The schools involved in the intra-tradition debates in the medieval Sanskritic academy were in constant dialogue with each other, and it was not uncommon for one school to creatively seize upon the theoretical and methodological advances of another school in order to suit its own soteriological program. This, of course, holds true for Kashmir Śaivism as well. As demonstrated above, the soteriological efficacy of Śaiva transcendental inquiry (the Pratyabhijñā system) rests upon its employing the two hermeneutic principles of openness and composure in its adoption of the cognitive and performative models of other schools. But the Śaiva commitment to developing and

---

345 As Chakrabarti notes, “one finally comes home, the heart of all repose is recognized to be in the infinite sky in the middle of one’s own heart. One’s egoless ‘I’ can joyfully embrace all pleasures and sorrows, all victories and defeats, all things and beings without craving for anything at all. Such perfect rest is also the source of unlimited variations of joyful play of will and unconstrained love” (“The Heart of Repose,” p. 36)

346 In order to both properly communicate one’s position to the other, as well as properly understand the other’s position and make use of it in turn, one must demonstrate openness by putting one’s own presuppositions at risk. That Śaivas practice such an attitude is evident in its appealing to the Nyāya category known as “the schema for argument” (avayava), which in presenting the steps of what is called
practicing a creative hermeneutic of appropriation of its historical influences, and in turn negotiating relational contexts, goes beyond that of the orthodoxy, for this creative yet responsible hermeneutic approach is written into the very structure of Śaiva self-realization. For one, in suspending the self-containment of Lord Śiva (as Parameśvara) through its descent to the Earth tattva, consciousness puts at risk the wholeness of being identical with itself and assumes a place as its center juxtaposed against a seemingly external other. The individual agent mimics this movement in the act of recognizing distinction between self and other by claiming the place where he stands as his center, taking ownership of those role-based thought patterns, outward expressions, prejudices, etc., that differentiate this place from others, and from this location taking seriously the alterity of the other. But of course, this differentiation between self and other is not to be made as a metaphysical claim, but a phenomenological one. This phenomenological shift occurs in the prakāśa phase, wherein Śiva (as consciousness) weathers His estrangement from His consort in play, Śakti, and hermeneutically recovers the power that He had naively placed in His Śakti in the midst of recognizing Her as a distinct entity. Analogously, the individual agent who reclaims his own power in imagining himself in relation to the object purifies the object of its otherness, and as a result no longer stands juxtaposed against the world of multiplicity, though all the while maintaining the ground upon which he stands.

the “inference for the sake of others” (parārthānumana), helps to provide a “demonstration of truth on the basis of ostensibly universal criteria of experience and rationality” (see Lawrence, p. 50). With respect to the composure necessary for hermeneutic appropriation, meanwhile, Śaivas overcode the conceptual and practical innovations of other schools (e.g., Vedānta, Nyāya, Sāṃkhya) with a view to positively appropriating the influence of other models to their own ends.
The locatedness of either self or other, then, has not been utterly sublated (as in the \textit{Vedānta} scheme), nor has it been exaggerated (as in the \textit{Pārva Mīmāṃsā} and \textit{Nyāya} frameworks). It has simply been presenced in terms of the agent’s role-influenced prejudices, though encompassed (i.e., purified) within his power as a self-realized agent. In this way, the ordinary hermeneut becomes de-centered from the strong identification with his locatedness. But he does not wholly eradicate or abandon those roles and presuppositions that define his centeredness, for otherwise he would not be able to identify and enter into a relation with the object, and thereby express his identity with Śiva through a reenactment of the play of Śiva-Śakti. That the responsible, creative appropriation of the influence of our models, then, is integral to the full realization of agency in the transition between Becoming and beings, is not only given theoretical explication by Śaivas; it is confirmed in practice.

In closing, I note that the Śaiva commitment to role-play takes us beyond the socially conservative vision of agency put forth by the \textit{Bhagavad Gītā}—for in transitioning from Being to beings, we must also creatively attend to what roles we play, not just how we play them. The sentiments of being sincere and authentic, meanwhile, limit the power of agency by over-emphasizing the integral unity of the agent with respect to beings and Becoming, respectively. Where Hume and Heidegger fail to provide a mature theory of the influence of our social-historical inheritance, Ricoeur makes great strides. As argued in Chapter Two, Ricoeur rightly aims to recover the fullness of the play of agency by seizing upon the role of the imagination in facilitating the creative appropriation of our role-models (e.g., through thought experiments in literature).
Moreover, Ricoeur addresses the ethically driven imperative to deepen our sensitivity to the world while also calling attention to the imperative of positively presenting ourselves to the other (who depends upon us). But even Ricoeur privileges the subjective side of experience. The soteriological practices of Śaivism, in contrast, not only emphasize the play between seeing and being seen (i.e., the subjective and ontical dimensions of agency), but create a space for cultivating power in performing in full awareness of the tensions within the play of consciousness.

Having demonstrated how the Śaiva model of agency both harmonizes and surpasses those of the Gītā and Ricoeur, I now turn to classical Indian philosophical aesthetics in order to investigate how the self-realized agent is an athlete of emotion. But first, I examine the orthodox interpretation of the dominant category in Indian aesthetics—*rasa*. In so doing, I look to demonstrate how this theorization of aesthetic life cuts off the creative play of agency by subordinating the agent to the already given authority of the social-moral norm.
Chapter 4: The Devaluation of Creative Ethical Agency in the Orthodox Hindu Experience of Art Emotion: Rasa and the Subordination of the Self to the Role

4.1. Introduction

Having demonstrated the conceptual advance made by Śaivism over previous positions (i.e., orthodox Hindu thought, Hume, Heidegger, Ricoeur) in response to the problem of creative ethical agency, this project now turns to investigate the implications of orthodox Indian and Śaiva theories of aesthetic experience for ethical identity. This chapter takes up the response to this issue from orthodox Indian aesthetic theory.

In preparation for this examination, let us briefly note one of the major obstacles faced by the Indian aesthetic tradition in the early stages of its development—namely, how to develop a study of the art object independently of the predominating religious concerns of the Hindu orthodoxy. Some of the core concepts of classical Indian aesthetics (e.g., hṛd [heart], rasa [art emotion]) derive from the Vedas and Upaniṣads. But the orthodox schools whose interpretations of these texts predominated in traditional India were decidedly un-aesthetic in their orientations, subordinating art (including poetry) to religious concerns. Pūrva Mīmāṃsā, for example, privileged piety over poetry in its quest to preserve the inter-connection between word (śabda), meaning (artha), and the traditional life-goals (puruṣārthas). As for Advaita Vedānta, this school's taking the

---

347 The exquisite poetry found in the Vedas, for example, recognizes that vāk (language) has an emotional component that is to undergo a process of clarification in the heart (hṛd) of the reader. The Upaniṣads, meanwhile, associate rasa with a certain bliss that permeates the universe and the heart's tasting Brahman. The Upaniṣadic rṣis declare, “For He [Brahman] is rasa, having obtained which, one attains bliss” (“raso'vai saḥ / rasam hyevāṃ labdhvā ānandā bhavati.” Taittiriya Upaniṣad, 2.7).

348 Mīmāṃsā held that artha is synonymous with puruṣārtha, and that understanding the meaning of an assertion would naturally lead one to act towards the fulfillment of the four life-goals, in particular, dharma. The question of beauty, meanwhile, was ignored, taken to be irrelevant to disclosing the meaning of Vedic sentences. For according to Mīmāṃsā, the meaning of a sentence (or at least Vedic sentences) is the bhāvanā of the sentence, or that which provided the efficient force compelling the individual to bring
realization of nirguna Brahman to be of paramount importance had problematic implications for both the art object (which was ultimately divested of real value) and the aesthete (who was reduced to being a passive witness to the world).\textsuperscript{349}

With a view to these issues, the first half of this chapter examines how the Indian aesthetic tradition secured the autonomy of aesthetic life from the orthodox religious domain.\textsuperscript{350} But while indeed the orthodox rasa experience occurs primarily for aesthetic, largely secular appreciation, the content of its culminating experience and the manner in which it overcomes the gap between mundane and art realities evinces its debt to orthodox Hinduism. Accordingly, the first half of this chapter concludes by demonstrating how the refined pleasure-seeking of the rasika can be seen as framed by an Advaita Vedāntic valuation of the highest felicity of life as non-dualistic and involved a certain overcoming of one’s karmic condition and personalized connection to the world.

But while there were certain “aestheticist” strands in the tradition of Indian aesthetic theory, rasa theorists and poets were not autonomists who were hostile to worldly participation. To the contrary, they had in view the maintenance of the social order and theorized both the artist's construction and the aesthete's experience of the rasa

\textsuperscript{349} Interestingly, Advaita Vedānta gave provisional credence to the objective world, held that knowledge is experiential and requires an epistemological shift on the part of the agent, and took language to be both an expression and an epistemological tool of Ultimate Reality. But the sharp break between knowledge of phenomenal objects (which is ultimately illusory) and that of Brahman (which is the source of true knowledge) ultimately divested perceptible objects of real value and left the objectivity of the art object, which must meet certain criteria, undefined and open. Sabda, meanwhile, was not theorized as an aesthetic tool, but as an impediment to absolute knowledge. We can look to Abhinavagupta and even earlier to Bhartrhari's sphota-vāda for Indian criticisms of the un-aesthetic orientation of Advaita Vedānta.

\textsuperscript{350} The development of an aesthetic tradition in the literary and performance arts of premodern India was a unique achievement, for not all art traditions in India did obtain their autonomy from the religious domain. For more on how the visual arts were long subordinated to religious concerns, see Dehejia's discussion of
artwork accordingly. That is, rather than seeking a radical departure from those commonly agreed upon life-goals (*puruṣārthas*) organizing the ideal Hindu life, classical Indian aesthetics sought to positively re-orient the aesthete to the social reality with a certain disinterested conduct that simultaneously re-affirms the *dharmic* order.

But in order to better contextualize our discussion of how the orthodox *rasa* artwork negotiated ethical identity, recall the four necessary conditions for moral action according to orthodox Hinduism—(1) positive action (as opposed to resignation or inaction), (2) action that conforms to social-moral norms enshrined in the scriptures, (3) action that is performed without attachment to the fruits of action (i.e., *niṣkāma-karma*), and (4) action that expresses empathic concern for others. As pointed to in Chapter One, *Pūrva Mīmāṃsā* and *Advaita Vedānta* account for conditions one through three by depersonalizing the agent—*Mīmāṃsā* through ritual practice, *Advaita Vedānta* through exercises of world-contemplation—and enjoining him to take up his ritually prescribed role-duty in the social-moral domain. This may seem like an odd claim to make on behalf of *Advaita Vedānta*. But recall that Śaṅkara not only concedes the authority of ritualized behavior for social life. The gnosis of non-agency advocated by *Advaita Vedānta* can in some sense be seen as positively conducive to social personhood as formulated by *Mīmāṃsā* insofar as its affecting the individual’s self-transcendence weakens those egoistic, personalized feelings that threaten to create a possible rupture between the individual and his *dharmic* role-duty. The conception of moral agency implicit in orthodox *rasa* theory can be seen as going beyond and yet still operating within this

conception of social-moral agency. In terms of its advance beyond the orthodox notion of the agent, the ideal ethical self that I argue is implied by orthodox rasa theory emphasizes the importance of the heart for not only recovering the metaphysical meaning of emotional experience (i.e., rasa as akin to tasting Brahman), but also firmly grounding the agent in social life. The orthodox aesthete, as I demonstrate below, takes up his dharma with passionate concern for others. Accordingly, this model of ethical identity fulfills all four conditions for moral action in the orthodox Hindu imagination by developing the life of feeling, whereas the orthodox vision only guarantees the first three criteria.

But while this model of ethical identity surpasses that of the orthodoxy in significant ways, it does not escape all of its shortcomings. The rasika of this tradition, not unlike Hume's culturally refined aesthete, approaches the art experience with a view to undergoing an education of the emotions that will make him more sincere in his engagements with others. But also not unlike Hume’s exemplary aesthete, the art experience subordinates him to his socially prescribed role in terms of both what actions he is to take up in the social reality and how he is to take them up. Thus, while the classical Indian aesthetic tradition indeed secures the autonomy of art experience from orthodox religious concerns, melts the ego in a blissful, non-dualistic experience, and develops a certain emotional athleticism that has moral relevance, it nonetheless devalues individual creative agency. Far from its approaching the Śaiva ideal of agential freedom or even opening a space for Ricoeur-like thought experiments, the classical Indian artwork fails to develop the self-consciousness that is integral to gaining power over our
karmic inheritance and the roles that we play. As a result, it positively enables the ethics of social conformism that is explicitly proclaimed by the Hindu orthodoxy.

4.2. Art for Art's Sake in Orthodox Indian Aesthetics: from Life to Art through the Realization of Rasa

Classical rasa poets (kavis) and theorists secure the freedom of aesthetic life from the gross concerns of the everyday as well as traditional Hindu religious concerns. However, it nonetheless appeals to the predominant valuation of self-knowledge as established by Advaita Vedānta. Tracing the development of rasa theory through three key moments, this part of the chapter demonstrates how rasa (art emotion) gets evoked through the proper employment of suggestive language and a process of depersonalization. This leads, in turn, to an expansion of meaning that culminates in the joyful transcendence of the ego, with rasa itself getting theorized as akin to the bliss that comes with the tasting of Brahman (brahmāsvādasahodarah).

4.2.a. Bharata’s Theory of Rasa as Practical Science of the Emotions

The first major conceptual advance in the development of Indian aesthetics was the theorization of rasa, or art emotion, by Bharatamuni in his landmark work, the Nāṭyaśāstra. Unlike Aristotle’s Poetics, which provides us with strategies of “gazing” at the spectacle (to which Aristotle had reduced the theatrical production), Bharata’s Nāṭyaśāstra provides strategies for not only witnessing the artwork as a “spectator” or outwardly performing emotion as a naṭa (actor), but negotiating the interplay between

351 I introduced this text in Chapter One.
these two, namely, the psycho-physiological and the expressive. This is brought out in his theory of rasa, the basics of which are explained in the following aphorism: “From the combination of excitant determinants (vibhāva), expressive consequents (anubhāva) and transient feelings (vyabhicāribhāva), the relishable juice (rasa) is realized (rasa-niṣpattih).”\textsuperscript{352} This rather obscure definition of rasa as a kind of performance experience came to serve as the foundation of a practical science of emotion that straddles both the inner realm wherein the drama gets taken into one’s heart through a unique form of awareness and the outer domain of its artful expression.

Rasa, for one, is a theory of aesthetic perception or emotional response. This theory is founded upon an understanding of the human emotional make-up as constituted by forty-nine bhāvas, or emotions. These bhāvas can be categorized into three types: basic emotion (sthāyibhāva), transitory emotion (saṅcāribhāva), and inbuilt bodily response (sāttvikabhāva). The sthāyibhāvas are eight in number: love (rati), laughing mirth (hāsa), sorrow (śoka), wrath (krodha), valor (utsāha), fear (bhaya), disgust (jugupsā), and astonishment (vismaya). These emotions are basic, enduring, and irreducible. The saṅcāribhāvas or transitory emotions (e.g., indifference [nirveda], debility [glāni], etc.), meanwhile, are thirty-three in number. And in contrast with the stable emotions, the saṅcāribhāvas are fleeting, incapable of existing by themselves, and have no fixed identity. Moreover, they are subordinate to or dependent upon the sthāyibhāvas. V. K. Chari explains:

The transient states, however, cannot find a resting point in their own nature or establish an independent context for themselves... they move about with many different basic emotions [sthāyibhāvas], appearing and disappearing like bubbles

\textsuperscript{352} Bharata, \textit{Nātyaśāstra}, Chapter 6, between verses 31 and 32, ed. \textit{cit.}, Vol. 1, p. 231.
and taking on the form and hue of the emotions they associate themselves with... Any given transient emotion is common to more than one state of mind. Thus, the [transient] feeling of agitation can appear in [basic emotions such as] love, laughter, anger, revulsion, or wonder [etc.].

The sāttvikabhāvas, finally, are bodily states (e.g., paralysis [stambha], perspiration [sveda], shedding tears, etc.) that get caused by some natural emotion. They hold a middle place between the basic and transitory emotions. Of the three kinds of emotion (bhāva), then, the sthāyībhāvas are the most important, as they have causal priority in organizing the life of feeling. Furthermore, even though they very often lie in a dormant state in our everyday affairs, the enduring emotions are always present in some sense, awaiting some stimulus that will awaken them. Moreover, they can be linked to our human biology. The sthāyībhāvas motivate us, much like Hume theorized, to take actions by addressing worldly pragmatic concerns. To this end, they develop the individual's sense of identity by personalizing events and inter-relations, and organizing one's world accordingly.

However, when the emotions are manifested in art (contrary to ordinary life) by the proper combination of various situational factors, the basic emotions get developed into relishable aesthetic feelings or rasas. Bharata lists eight rasas, each of which corresponds to one of the sthāyībhāvas: the Erotic (śṛṅgāra), the Comic (hāsyā), the Pathetic (karuṇā), the Furious (raudra), the Heroic (vīra), the Terrible (bhayānaka), the Hideous (bībhatsa), and the Wondrous (adbhūta). Through a certain churning of the

---

353 V.K. Chari, The Logic of the Emotions, p. 60. There are thirty-three sancarībhavas. For a complete list of these, see “Literary Experience as Object of Knowledge,” p. 105.

354 There are eight sāttvikabhāvas: stambha (paralysis), sveda (perspiration), romaṇca (horripilation), svarabhaṅga (change of voice), veṇpathu (trembling), vaivarṇya (change of color), aśru (weeping), and pralaya (loss of consciousness).
heart, a dominant emotional state emerges (*sthāyibhāva*). But the experience of this enduring emotion is not to be confused with that relishable savoring of art emotion (*rasāsvādana*). In fact, Bharata's definition of *rasa* deliberately does not mention the *sthāyibhāvas* in order to avoid making this error. What remains, then, is for the given basic emotion to transmute itself into its corresponding *rasa* in the aesthetic judgment of the spectator, or *rasika*. But in order for the intuitive experience of the stable sentiment to re-emerge out of the art experience, this emotion must be disjoined from those egoistic, everyday concerns to which it ordinarily binds us. *Rasa*, then, indeed involves the relishable savoring of emotion. Moreover, the *sthāyibhāvas* occupy a central place in both life and art experience, for only the enduring emotions can be developed into *rasas*. But *rasa* is not emotion as such or any other worldly (*laukika*) state; it is distinct from *bhāva*, or life emotion. Rather, *rasa* is aestheticized or art emotion. It is emotion that has been tamed, cultivated and sentimentalized in view of its other-worldliness (*alaukika*), not experienced in its ordinariness (*bhāva*) or with a view to a cathartic cleansing (as in Aristotelian aesthetics), as this would undermine one’s relishing art emotion altogether.

But of course, this shift from experiencing emotion as *bhāva* to that of *rasa* does not occur spontaneously, nor does it merely involve an aesthete (however skilled one may be in aesthetic perception). Accordingly, Bharata's theory of *rasa* is also a theory of the artwork itself. As Bharata indicates in his definition of *rasa*, the primary constituents of the artwork are the excitant determinants (*vibhāvas*), expressive consequents (*anubhāvas*) and transient feelings (*vyabhicāribhāvas*). Concerning the *vibhāvas* (or the “objective correlatives” of the artwork), T. S. Eliot aptly writes the following:
The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an “objective correlative,” in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.\footnote{355}{T. S. Eliot, \textit{Selected Essays}, Faber and Faber Ltd., London, 1953, p. 145.}

The \textit{vibhāvas} are precisely those directly graspable, objective determinants or stimuli of the theatrical performance (e.g., words, physical gestures, involuntary psychic symptoms, such as sweating, trembling, etc.) that point to, register, and arouse the emotions (\textit{bhāvas}) that are suitable to the particular performance.\footnote{356}{Concerning the evoking of \textit{bhayānaka rasa} (the rasa of fear), for example, Bharata includes the following \textit{vibhāvas}: “… ghastly noises, seeing of supernatural beings, fear or panic due to the cry of owls, jackals, going to an empty house or the forest” (\textit{Aesthetic Rapture, Vol. I}, p. 54). The \textit{vibhāvas} are of two kinds: \textit{alambana-vibhāva} and \textit{uddīpana-vibhāva}. The first is the primary cause or object of the emotion. Concerning their status as causes, V. K. Chari explains that “Emotions are invariably object directed, and, although they may lie dormant in our natures as potential forces or predispositions, it is only in the presence of their appropriate objects that they manifest themselves” (“The Logic of the Emotions,” p. 55). This is not to say, though, that there is a necessary connection between emotion-objects and emotion-expressions, for Bharata was attuned to this dimension of the subtlety of artistic expression. In order for the “causality” of the emotion-object to take effect, then, it must be “intended” by the spectator as an object of his feeling. This leads to consideration of the second \textit{vibhāva}, the “exciting cause” (\textit{uddīpana-vibhāva}). These \textit{vibhāvas} are causal in a secondary sense in that they help the emotion to exhibit itself by creating a particular mood or ambience wherein the primary \textit{vibhāva} (\textit{alambana-vibhāva}) will more readily take hold upon the spectator's imagination in the intended way. Examples of \textit{uddīpana-vibhāvas} are, as Chari points out, the images of sterility, dryness, agony, and death in T. S. Eliot's \textit{The Wasteeland}.} The \textit{anubhāvas} (literally, “that which follows or ensues from the feeling as its effect”) are the on-stage consequences of the \textit{vibhāvas}. They follow upon or are the results of the antecedent \textit{vibhāvas} and take the form of the outwardly manifested, involuntary reactions of the dramatic character in response to the goings-on internal to the theatrical play. As the subject matter of \textit{abhinaya} (acting or enactment), moreover, these behavioral expressions are the only means to indicating (through physical action or objectified form) the character’s inward emotional states (\textit{sthāyīvibhāvas}).\footnote{357}{With respect to the relation between \textit{rasa} and the \textit{bhāvas}, one can think of the \textit{bhāvas} (e.g., love, sorrow) as what the dramatic characters experience and \textit{rasa} (e.g., the Erotic, the Pathetic, respectively) as what the art-relisher experiences. Bharata tells us that the following are the appropriate outward signs or...} Lastly, the \textit{vyabhícāribhāvas} are the transitory states
or accessory emotions (both emotional and physical manifestation) voluntarily
dramatized by the actor in order to complement the principal mood or emotional state of
the theatrical production. These inward and outward states of the sthāyībhāvas are thirty-
three in number, and they themselves are not intended to leave a lasting impression.358

The artistic power of the vibhāvas, etc., however, is not guaranteed merely by
their being presented on the theatrical stage. In order to transmute one or more of the
enduring emotions (sthāyībhāvas) into their corresponding rasas, they must be presented
in such a way that they effectively negotiate aesthetic distance. This requires making use
of the unique ontological status of art objects and expressions. The power of the
vibhāvas, etc., in evoking rasa hinges, on the one hand, upon their making use of aspects
of ordinary experience that will register with the audience's emotions, thereby making the
meaning of the drama intelligible and positively enjoyable. On the other hand, art objects
and expressions are to have a negative or inhibitory aspect, which disengages or cuts the
spectators off, as it were, from their practical concerns. In short, the primary function of
the vibhāvas, anubhāvas, and vyabhicāribhāvas, is to negotiate distance. Edward
Bullough aptly relates Bharata's view when he writes that “the working of Distance... has
a negative, inhibitory aspect, the cutting-out of the practical sides of things and of our
practical attitude to them—and a positive side—the elaboration of the experience on the

358 The Nāṭyaśāstra lists the following vyabhicāribhāvas as appropriate to the production of bhayānaka
rasa (the aesthetic emotion of fear): “… paralysis, sweating, stuttering, horripilation, trembling, a break in
voice, change of colour, anxiety, confusion, depression, panic, rashness, lifelessness, fright, apoplexy,
new basis created by the inhibitory action of Distance." Art objects, while indeed bearing a certain resemblance to their counter-parts in the ordinary world, must not be confused with them; for insofar as poetic emotion is to be contrasted with ordinary emotion, so too are art appearances to announce their autonomy from the mundane world. But art objects must not over-distance, for this will be equally detrimental to the development of rasa. Distanciation, then, is not a pure mental (or psychological) function, as it is in Kantian subjectivism. Rather, Bharata holds it to be a basic function of the “objective correlatives” of the artwork itself.

But the mere management of distance is not enough, for the objective features of the represented world of the artwork must also be arranged with a view to intermixing the emotions. Chari refers to this as establishing “the logic of the emotions” through careful organization of various feeling tones. These feeling tones are not to be brought together indiscriminately, but according to a logic of congruity and propriety. The governing emotional expression, for example, is to be sustained throughout the artwork by its repeated manifestation. Meanwhile, the basic emotion of the artwork can take transient and even other durable emotions as its accessories. However, in order to nourish it as the major theme, these weaker tones and other sthāyibhāvas are invariably

---

359 Edward Bullough, “Psychical Distance as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle,” pp. 759-760.  
360 In explaining this, Bharata draws upon the metaphor of eating that is implicit in the very definition of the term, rasa: “Just as (flavour) comes from a combination of many spices, herbs and other substances, so rasa… arises from a combination of vibhāvas, anubhāvas and vyabhicāribhāvas” (Aesthetic Rapture, Vol. I., p. 46). Schechner elaborates further on the metaphor of food tasting for the tasting of theatre-rasa: “[J]ust as when various condiments and sauces and herbs and other materials are mixed, a taste is experienced, or when the mixing of materials like molasses with other materials produces six kinds of taste, so also along with the different bhāvas (emotions) the sthāyibhāva (permanent emotions experienced 'inside') becomes a rasa” (Richard Schechner, “Rasaesthetics”).

---

257
subordinated to the dominant mood of the artwork, giving clarity to the prime emotion through intensification or contrast. “Rasa-manifestation,” Bharata explains, “is effected through the conjunction of many different emotions... There is no poem that consists of one emotion only. A poem gains in intensity through the clash of interacting emotions.”362 Juxtapositions of feeling tones, then, are vital to developing the sthāyibhāvas into their respective art emotions. But again, the rasa chosen to be the dominant sentiment must pervade all parts of the drama. “Aesthetic unity,” Chari writes, “can be described only as the functional cooperation of all parts in the interest of a unified whole.”363 This pervasiveness, of course, gets realized by means of the functional operation of the various inputs (vibhāvas), outputs (anubhāvas), and transient accessories in-between (vyabhicāribhāvas). That is, these objective features of the represented art-world must also become arranged in accordance with the single dominant tone or focalized emotion (sthāyin) of the artwork that corresponds with the expressed content of the artwork (rasa). It is not by means of a single condition, then, that rasa emerges as the realized intentionality of the artwork. Rather, this requires that a number of conditions hold in conjunction according to the logic governing emotional expression.

Bharata’s foundational theory of rasa, in sum, puts forth a sophisticated theory of emotional response that helps to explain the qualitative distinction between ordinary aesthetic perception and its extra-ordinary or other-worldly (alaukika) counter-part. But

361 Casey aptly relates Bharata’s theory of rasa when he writes, “Emotions too have their logic, and are subject to objective tests” (Casey quoted in “The Logic of the Emotions,” p. 49).
362 Bharata quoted in Ibid., p. 62. For a fuller, more detailed classification of concordant and discordant emotions and their psychological validity in Bharata’s theory of rasa, as well as guidelines for properly combining the emotions within a single composition, see Ibid., pp. 63-74.
going beyond subjectivist theories of aesthetic experience, it supplements this with an analytical treatment of how the artwork itself mirrors the structure of the reader's response. By including in one term ("rasa") what is often in the English language signified by the two words “artistic” (which refers primarily to an act of production) and “aesthetic” (an act of perception and enjoyment), Bharata encompasses both the outer/objective and inner/subjective dimensions of the (art) emotions. Furthermore, the intelligible vocabulary that he provides for describing and analyzing art structures clarifies that emotional life is not mere action, nor mere awareness, but a unique performance experience that occurs only in the between-ness of a sensitive art-relisher and an artwork that effectively mirrors the reader's response.

4.2.b. Ānandavardhana’s Theory of Rasa-Dhvani: Art Emotion and the Power of Suggestion

The second major advance made in the development of Indian aesthetic theory is Ānandavardhana's theory of poetic suggestion, or rasa-dhvani. While Bharata's Nāṭyaśāstra is primarily concerned with the performing arts, Ānanda's Dhvanyāloka focuses upon the medium of language and the question of “what is poetry?” But while Ānanda's project explores the nature and power of language, not the theater, he nonetheless combines these two strains of Sanskrit poetics—alaṃkāra-śāstra (“The Science of Ornamentation,” which is typically focused upon literature) and rasa theory, which as demonstrated above was originally concerned with the aesthetics of theater—

---

364 Ānandavardhana's Dhvanyāloka was composed in the 9th - 10th century, Kashmir. I shall henceforth refer to him as Ānanda.
into a unified theory of poetry and aesthetic response. His central thesis is that suggestive language is the defining modality for the production of meaning in literature.

Ānanda’s work represents both a culmination and synthesis of Indian debates on language in *alāṃkāra-śāstra*. While the *alāṃkāra* tradition analyzed and categorized a wide range of poetic devices and rhetorical figures, one of Ānanda's primary aims in the *Dhvanyāloka* was to firmly establish the operation of suggestion (*dhvani*) as a distinct semantic power. Accordingly, he recognizes three general powers of language—denotation (*abhidhā*), figurative or secondary speech (*lakṣaṇa*), and suggestion (*vyāñjakatva*). Denotation is concerned with literal meaning, while *lakṣaṇa* is language that makes use of figures of speech in order to produce secondary meaning. With respect to figurative language, the assertion, “This flower is a red rose,” would be rather uninteresting compared to a statement such as, “My love is a red, red rose.” According to the *abhidhā* (denotative) function, this assertion merely amounts to a falsehood; for literally speaking, one's love cannot be identical with a rose, and neither can it be red. But of course, figurative statements such as this do not intend to represent facts. Rather, they give rise to a peculiar delight or charm (*camatkāra*) that results from the poet's skillful exploitation of the ornamental quality of *lakṣaṇa*, or secondary meaning, a quality that is

---

365 Ānanda’s turn to the aesthetics of literature need not discount the mutual relevance of his and Bharata's theories, as is evident in the fact that the theory of aesthetic suggestion is applicable to the theater, while Ānanda himself treats various concepts put forth by Bharata, not the least of which is his very concern with how the proliferation of meaning that occurs through *dhvani* ultimately resides in an emotional content (*rasa*). Furthermore, Ānanda devotes serious attention to Bharata's observation that there is no necessary connection between emotion-objects and emotion-expressions, seizing upon this as not simply an obstacle, but a clue to the deeper dimensions of artistic expression (e.g., *dhvani* proper) and the structure of aesthetic experience.

366 *Vyāñjakatva* is suggestion in general. *Dhvani*, in contrast, represents the power of suggestion in its purest form. That is, it is suggestion when used as a means of evoking relishable savor.
wholly lacking with declarative assertions. But the charm of the statement, “My love is a red, red rose,” is not only due to the aural pleasure of the alliteration. Even more so, poetical charm arises from the disclosure of new meanings in the implicit suggestion that the speaker's love is as delicate or fragrant (or perhaps, as thorny) as a fresh rose. For Ānanda, this hints at a third function of language—suggestion. An essential element of the metaphor in the example under consideration is unspoken. This expressive mechanism of language, furthermore, is not simply a denotative or figurative mode, but a suggestive one. Like a lamp that reveals the objects upon which it casts its light, suggestive language opens up new worlds through the expansion of word meaning.

But dhvani is not just a third level of non-literal meaning. It makes possible the purest tasting of relishable savor. In order to establish dhvani as essential to poetry, Ānanda develops a sophisticated typology of suggestion, the details of which need not be gone into here. What bears noting, however, is simply that language that represents the power of suggestive speech in its purest form does not make the reader consciously aware of the succession from the denoted meaning to “something further,” i.e., rasa. That is, suggestion in general (vyañjakatva) does not produce rasa in and of itself, nor does mere dhvani that predominates over the other semantic powers in a given sentence. Rather,

---

367 The assertion, “This flower is a red rose,” facilitates a determinate judgment, namely, that the flower to which I am pointing is a rose, and that it is red. But in the statement, “My love is a red, red rose,” we have not only a stronger case of alliteration (the semi-vowel “r” is repeated three times in “red, red rose,” as opposed to two in the previous statement), but metaphor as well—the speaker's love is implicitly compared to a very red rose. Also, it bears noting that the Sanskrit term for “poetical charm” is camatkāra, a term that onomatopoetically suggests the smacking of the lips upon a savoring of some kind.

368 The comparison of light (often of a lamp) and poetic suggestion is suggested in the very title of Ānanda's major work, the Dhvanyāloka, which is a compound consisting of two terms: dhvani (suggestion) and āloka (light) = Light on (the Doctrine of) Suggestion.

369 For more on this, see Dhvanyāloka, pp. 131-135.

370 Ibid., p. 130.
only suggestive language that bears the technical superiority of what Ānanda classifies as the *asaṃlakṣītakrama* variety of *vivakṣītānyaparavācya* is capable of evoking the *rasa* experience.\(^{371}\) *Dhvani* proper, in short, is *rasa-dhvani*.

Patrick Hogan helps to clarify the reasoning behind Ānanda’s typology. Hogan argues that *dhvani* proper is not an idiom, metaphor or implicature, but a “non-paraphrasable suggestion.”\(^{372}\) He lists three reasons why *dhvani* is (uniquely) non-paraphrasable, with each successive reason being more important to disclosing the unique importance of *dhvani* for *rasa*. First, *dhvani* is infinitely ramified, for as Hogan explains, “We can never enumerate all the suggestions, even all the relevant suggestions, of a given text.”\(^{373}\) In short, aesthetic suggestion produces endless meaning. But this property is not completely distinctive of *dhvani*, for many metaphors and even some relations between literal meanings in larger texts are not fully paraphraseable. The second reason is that *dhvani* is not even partially paraphraseable, for the *dhvani* of a text cannot be substituted without suffering a loss of truth value. Hogan cites the standard Indian example, “Varanasi is on the Ganges.” This statement, of course, does not mean that Varanasi is literally on the Ganges. Rather, it idiomatically means that Varanasi is a city located on the bank of the Ganges river. Moreover, this phrase suggests, as Sanskrit commentators

\(^{371}\) In the case of the *vivakṣītānyaparavācya*, type of suggestion, “the literal sense is intended but only as leading on to something further” (Ibid., p. 135, 173). What distinguishes the two varieties of this type from each other is whether or not the reader is consciously aware of the interval between denotated and suggested meanings. The second variety (*asaṃlakṣītakrama*) is the superior one by virtue of the fact that the reader is not made conscious of the succession from the denotated meaning to “something further,” i.e., *rasa* (Ibid., p. 130).

\(^{372}\) Patrick Com Hogan, “Toward a Cognitive Science of Poetics: Ānandavardhana, Abhinavagupta, and the Theory of Literature,” *College Literature*, 23.1 (February 1996), p. 171. It is important to point out that, as Hogan points out, the non-paraphrasability of *dhvani* does not mean that nothing can be said about it; for as Ānanda himself emphasizes, many things can be said about suggestive language.

\(^{373}\) Ibid., p. 171.
themselves point out, the holiness of Varanasi due its being situated along the sacred river Ganges. But a loss (rather than a gain) of meaning would result if one were to substitute the word “holiness” for any part of the phrase. Moreover, this phrase is not asserting that Varanasi is in fact holy (though of course, they are not asserting the opposite). This leads to the most important reason why dhvani is not paraphraseable. Dhvani is not purely semantic, but affective. In addition to the more narrowly semantic suggestion (e.g., Varanasi is located on the bank of the river Ganges), the unique and non-paraphraseable “meaningfulness” of properly suggestive language is the feeling that it evokes in the heart of the reader, e.g., of holiness, tranquility (śānta), or sacred peace as such. Dhvani proper, then, is not the intellectual implication of sentiment (i.e., sthāyībhāva), and it certainly is not the experience of emotion as worldly (in keeping with Bharata’s theory). Rather, it is the technically skillful suggestion of a rasa as that uniquely intuitive experience of affect as transmuted, distilled, and relished accordingly.

Ānanda’s innovative theory of rasa-dhvani, then, is based upon two basic insights: (1) suggestion is an elemental function of language all its own (i.e., irreducible to denotative and figurative usages), and (2) rasa can only be evoked through dhvani proper, and never through mere denotation or secondary meaning. In linking together these two observations, he made a monumental insight into the nature and power of expressive language, namely, that a kāvya embodies the essence of poetry only when rasa and dhvani are properly integrated.

4.2.c. Bhaṭṭanāyaka’s Theory of Sādhāranākaraṇa: Rasa and Self-Transcendence
Having demonstrated how art emotion, while rooted in individual awareness, exists only in suggestion as a unique epistemic arrangement, let us consider the third key moment in the development of *rasa* theory—Bhaṭṭanāyaka's theory of depersonalized enjoyment. According to Bhaṭṭanāyaka, *rasa* consists of three factors: depersonalization, universalization (*bhāvaka*), and expansion (*bhojakatva*). Emphasizing the importance of *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* as that process of generalization which, by means of these three factors together, make the tasting of *rasa* possible, Bhaṭṭanāyaka demonstrates that self-transcendence is both the effective means to and the end of the *rasa* experience. This theorization transformed the very concept of *rasa* in two important ways. For one, *rasa* became a phenomenon less of the text itself than of the reader's response to the text, which shifted the emphasis from the textual process of meaning production (i.e., how literature makes emotion perceptible) to the modes of our depersonalized experience. Secondly, this theorization of art emotion enabled him to elaborate upon that certain “other-worldly” (*alaukika*) dimension of the art experience first noted by Bharata. But going beyond Bharata and Ānanda, Bhaṭṭanāyaka clarified this supramundane state in association with new theological concerns that were more consistent with the orthodox Hindu orientation. Thus, with a view to how *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* underlies the qualitative transformation to be undergone by the aesthete, let us consider how *rasa* came to approximate the highest felicity sanctioned by the Hindu orthodoxy.

Bhaṭṭanāyaka explains the aesthete’s experience of *rasa* as the joint outcome of three processes, the first two of which are *bhāvakatva* (universalization) and *bhojakatva* (expansion). Universalization can in some sense be understood as the means to
expansion, and it is closely related to sādhāraṇīkarana (generalization). In contrast with ordinary emotion, aesthetic emotion has the character of being depersonalized and, in turn, universalized. Consider the example of the strangling of Desdemona at the end of Shakespeare’s Othello. We do not ordinarily enjoy seeing others suffer, particularly those with whom we have come to sympathetically identify (as we do with Desdemona). Certainly we would be utterly terrified at seeing a family member, friend, or even just an acquaintance endure Desdemona’s suffering. The reason for the lack of our taking pleasure in this, according to Bhaṭṭanāyaka, is that our reaction to this event would be personal or particularized, and hence could not attain to universalization. In undergoing bhāvakatva (universalization), however, the ideal aesthete recognizes that the characters of the drama are not the actual historical Rāma or (in this case) Desdemona, existing in an actual historical place and time, nor are they divine entities incarnate in human form. Rather, they are presenced as idealized personalities. Gerow explains: “Success cancels individual awareness… [A]ny irruption of real [i.e., ordinary] emotion, which is by its nature grounded in individual awareness, would terminate the process of suggestion and therefore terminate the drama as well.”374 People have applauded the tragic events of Othello for centuries because, while Desdemona experiences the life emotion of sorrow (the sthāyībhāva of śoka), the (ideal) spectators experience not śoka (grief), but karunā (the rasa of Compassion or the Pathetic). And the enjoyment that arises from witnessing this scene results not simply from depersonalization with respect to the theatrical appearance, but also the mechanism of universalization. We experience the stage performance as a kind of detached witness, having been freed from the burden of having

374 Edward C. Dimock, Jr., et al., The Literatures of India: An Introduction (Chicago, 1974), 117, 133.
a personal relationship with the theatrical situation. The emotion experienced, in turn, becomes generalized or universalized.\textsuperscript{375}

Here there are strong parallels with Kantian aesthetics. Not unlike the Kantian judgment of the beautiful, in order for the rasa artwork to be enjoyable in the proper way, it must be approached with an attitude of disinterestedness.\textsuperscript{376} In contrast with Kant, however, Bhaṭṭanāyaka holds that the chief purpose of art is not mere depersonalization, as in the mandates of Vedic ritual literature, but depersonalized enjoyment. Thus, while life emotion indeed is not the aim of the rasa artwork, the performance is still to be made available to a direct, i.e., emotional, apprehension. Thampi explains:

The Indian theory makes a clear distinction between the ordinary life-emotion (bhāva) and the emotional content of aesthetic experience. An emotion is a disturbance, an agitation in the consciousness which tends to result in action… In poetic experience emotions do stir and agitate our mind; but they do not move out in the form of action. Further, in poetic experience the emotional states are not simply undergone or suffered; they are perceived and tasted… (by way of) the reader's imaginative reconstruction of the meanings and the identity of the poem and to his active enjoyment of the emotions even while they reverberate in his heart.\textsuperscript{377}

If the rasika were to experience śoka instead of karunā, then he would experience pain, not pleasure, and would likely act in terms of the “interests” projected by that sorrow, e.g., crying out or walking onto the stage in order to help Desdemona. But through the

\textsuperscript{375} But then let us consider the following objection: what are we to make of those occasions where pleasure is taken in watching another person suffer (e.g., a rival or enemy, which is actually condoned in Hume’s moral sentiment theory)? According to Bhaṭṭanāyaka, such pleasure is also distinct from that of rasa because it involves worldly (laukika) reactions rooted in personal emotions (i.e., not a personal fondness for the other, but here a personal dislike), and hence likewise does not attain universalization.

\textsuperscript{376} Otfried Holle explains the Kantian “fourfold specification of beauty”: “With respect to quality, it is disinterested, and thus free, enjoyment… the pure judgment of taste, the question of whether a work is beautiful, cannot involve any admixture of interest in the existence of the object. In order to be binding, an aesthetic judgment must be completely unpartisan. But to one who judges on the criteria of ownership and use, the object is not important for its own sake but for the sake of certain desires. His judgment is bound
process of sādhāranīkaraṇa, the emotion coloring one’s experience of the play becomes depersonalized, universalized, and thereby made available to disinterested aesthetic contemplation as “grief-in-general.” What distinguishes the sahṛdaya, then, is not so much his reasoning skills as his capacity to appropriately identify with the stage characters and, in turn, emotionally apprehend the drama as a whole.

*Bhojakatva*, or expansion, follows from depersonalization and universalization. By way of the depersonalization inherent in the performance and recognized by the spectator, the personal desires, prejudices, and karmic residues that limit the audience (by making them reactive to phenomena, rather than responsive) give way to universalized emotions that, in turn, lead to an expansion into the space of the theatrical artworld. Here we begin to see the influence of orthodox Hindu schools of thought—most likely, *Sāṃkhya* and *Advaita Vedānta*—upon Bhaṭṭanāyaka’s theory of rasa. Having transcended the ego-self, the aesthete experiences complete identification with the art object. This process is called tanmayībhāva, which signifies that the heart of the sahṛdaya has abandoned all sense of confinement to a particular perspective (and its egoistic afflictions), renounced any personal involvement with the art object, and in turn achieved total immersion in the aesthetic situation. *Tanmayībhāva* implies “a saturating immersion” or a “becoming drenched in that [object].” As S. Pandit explains, *tanmayībhāva* is “an urge for a ‘withness’ with the object, for becoming one with it; this urge is in the form of a drive which seeks constantly to transcend the [karmic] self to a plane of existence, where the unhampered consciousness can dilate on and enjoy an up with interests and no longer purely aesthetic” (Otfried Hoffe, *Immanuel Kant*. Translated by Marshall Farrier. Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1994, p. 218).
uninterrupted delight.” Not unlike the experience of the yogi who finds oneness with the object of concentration, the sahrdaya experiences a melting—hence losing—of his personality in the art experience.

This reference to Sāṃkhya-Yoga in fact has an historical basis, for Bhaṭṭanāyaka’s conception of bhojakatva (expansion) is indebted in part to this school. By eliminating or subduing the spectator’s baser passions, the performance experience transforms the art-relisher through what Sāṃkhya would describe as an increase of the sāttva guṇa (characterized by lightness and clarity) and a decrease of the rajas and tamas guṇas. As Arindam Chakrabarti notes, Bhaṭṭanāyaka understood the enjoyment of rasas in terms of their expressing “modifications of that common nature where the first strand of delight dominates and… the pain of restless appetite of dynamicity heightens the thrill of finding restful fulfillment in the self-tasting of an art-emotion.” Indeed, the ordinary pramāṇas of perception, inference, etc., contribute to the experience of rasa. But the unique sort of relishable awareness that is rasa is distinguished by the depersonalization of the spectator’s experience, the universalization of the permanent emotion of the character (which comes to include the viewer), and a feeling of expansion (bhojakatva) that consists of “repose in the bliss which is the true nature of one’s own self… [and which]

377 G. B. Thampi, “‘rasa’ as Aesthetic Experience,” Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Fall, 1965: 77.
approximates the bliss that comes from realizing [one’s identity] with the highest Brahman.”

This last reference, of course, suggests that Bhaṭṭanāyaka’s theory was not only influenced by Sāṃkhya, but may have also been influenced by Advaita Vedānta. The first to compare rasa to the experience of Brahman, Bhaṭṭanāyaka holds that the culmination of art emotion is not simply a transformed emotional experience, but a total transformation of our being in the world. According to Bhaṭṭanāyaka, sādhāraṇīkaraṇa is not simply a means to an end (i.e., rasa); it is constitutive of the experience itself. Consider his interpretation of bhojakatva. The root verb of this term is “/bhuj” (to enjoy). He creatively adapts this term to his aesthetic theory in order to mean the aesthetic pleasure resulting from the felt experience of release from individuality and specificity. Robert Gnoli echoes Bhaṭṭanāyaka’s view when he writes: “the task of generalization carried out by the poetic expression breaks the barrier of the limited ‘I’ and eliminates in this way the interests, demands and aims associated with it.”

The expansion (bhojakatva) that results from universalization (bhāvakatva) brings a kind of blissful joy precisely because the agent has attained to a supramundane state marked by the removal of the duality of subject-object experience. Accordingly, Bhaṭṭanāyaka holds that the tasting of rasa is the “twin” of the tasting of Brahman. Concerning this view, Gnoli further explains that “aesthetic experience is a modality of this unbounded consciousness,

---

380 Abhinavabhāratt, I., p. 277. A similar reference can be found in Abhinava’s Locana to the Dhvanyāloka, Uddyota II, v. 4.
381 Kṛṣṇa S. Arjunwadkar claims that Bhaṭṭanāyaka was the first to point out a kinship between the rasa experience and the supreme bliss of Brahman. See “Rasa Theory and the Darśanas.”
characterized by the immersion of the subject in the aesthetic object to the exclusion of everything else.” In keeping with the idealism of Advaita Vedānta, Bhaṭṭanāyaka articulates the tanmayaḥbāva experience of immersion in the art object as corresponding to nirvikalpa samādhi, which entails the total absence of conceptual thought and the complete transcendence of the ego-self. Not unlike Śaṅkara's interpretation of the experience of mokṣa, then, here rasa has its culmination in an ineffable rapture and sense of wonder (adbhūta). Bringing the agent into contact with the essential nature of ātman, rasa is ultimately a form of self-knowledge that dawns upon the agent in a sudden flash of insight (pratibhā) and obliterates the karmic self. The intuitive knowledge to which rasa leads, in short, concerns our true nature as purified of involvement in worldly (laukika) affairs. N. Ray aptly conveys this point when he writes that “the language of art is not the language of intellectual but of intuitive knowledge, knowledge gained through feeling and experience… [A]rt experience is an experience of being, not of knowing.”

The “knowing” attending the rasa experience is not ordinary. Rather, it is an awareness that authenticates the true nature of our being in a world of bliss and non-duality.

In sum, the dominant aesthetic tradition, following Bhaṭṭanāyaka’s theory of sādhāraṇīkaraṇa, indeed secured the enjoyment of art for its own sake apart from mundane concerns. But this tradition ultimately came to interpret the rasa experience in accordance with the highest felicity envisaged by the orthodox tradition. Bhaṭṭanāyaka

383 Ibid., p. 62.
384 Note that this is not the savikalpa samādhi emphasized by Bhartrhari's adherence to saguna Brahman. This is indicative of trends in rasa aesthetics that would demonstrate the ideological hold of Advaita Vedānta upon the theorization and practice of rasa.
was largely responsible for this. He disclosed the theological implications in the concept of *rasa*, thereby linking the *rasa* tradition to the *Upaniṣads* through a seemingly Advaita Vedāntic lens. That this interpretation of the *rasa* experience achieved great influence in the classical tradition is evidenced in the following verse of Viśvanātha, the great Sanskrit literary theorist who post-dates Bhaṭṭanāyaka:

*Rasa* is tasted by qualified persons. It is tasted by virtue of the emergence of *sattva*. It is made up of full intelligence, beatitude and self-luminosity. It is void of contact with any other knowable thing, twin brother to the tasting of Brahman. It is animated by a *camatkāra* of a non-ordinary nature. It is tasted as if it were our very being, in indivisibility.\footnote{Viśvanātha, *Sāhityadarpana*, quoted in R. Gnoli, *The Aesthetic Experience according to Abhinavagupta*, p. 47. Also consider how the same standards for the *brahmajijñāsu*, or the initiate who is desirous of knowing Brahman, also now apply to the aspiring *rasika*. Śaṅkara explains: “Therefore something should be stated after which alone an inquiry into Brahman can be undertaken. It is stated: (that the essential requirements are) discrimination between the eternal and the non-eternal objects, detachment to the enjoyments of objects of this and that world, equipment such as control of senses and mind and desire for *mokṣa*” (*Śaṅkarābhināsya*, 1.1.1). Each of these requirements has been touched upon in the above examination of some of the key doctrines in classical Indian aesthetic theory.}

Not unlike the Advaita Vedāntic experience of *mokṣa*, wherein the agent realizes that the phenomenal world is the stage for the divine, self-luminous play of *līlā*, *rasa* art now becomes understood as evoking an experience that approximates connectedness with Brahman, binding the aesthete to his true self, recovering the metaphysical meaning of aesthetic life, and producing a sense of detachment and equanimity in the face of what may be otherwise harrowing circumstances (e.g., disinterestedly witnessing the strangling of Desdemona). **Advaita Vedāntic** in both method and conclusion, *rasa* is not the creation of a new state from *bhāva*, but an uncovering or revelation of that which already exists and simply needs to be revealed through an *Upaniṣadic*-like removal of ignorance.

\footnote{As Gnoli again notes, this elevated state of consciousness is a state of “pure contemplation… According to Indian thought the whole realm of intuitive knowledge wherein the aesthetic also partakes, belongs to the highest order of human consciousness” (*Aesthetic Experience According to Abhinavagupta*, p. 47).}
Accordingly, it is not cognition so much as it is recognition of our true nature as ātman. Moreover, the depersonalized enjoyment that is rasa is not simply a qualitative change of our ordinary emotional state, but an Advaita Vedāntic transcendence of our worldly, karmic state.

4.3. Ethicism in Classical Rasa Aesthetics: from Art to Life through Rasa as Moral-Mimetic Power

Having demonstrated how the ultimate rasa experience secures for the rasika a certain freedom from the phenomenal world by way of a transcendence of his karmic condition, the second half of this chapter explores how rasa poets and theorists assured the aesthete's freedom to participate in social-moral life by re-centering him in his socially prescribed role. This section examines how the educated, urban elite (nāgarika) that constituted the audience of the classical rasa artwork were not mere pleasure-seekers, neither did the classical tradition theorize rasa as just being a contemplative experience. Rather, the classical Hindu artworld also understood rasa to have an active dimension that was to be managed with a view to maintaining social harmony. Moreover, the classical kāvyā can be seen as developing a certain emotional athleticism whereby moral agents can satisfy all four conditions for moral action noted at the start of this chapter. Surpassing the Mīmāṃsā model of social personhood, the ethical self now carries out his role-based engagements with others in a way that is not just detached, but marked by authentic emotional connections as well. In order to complete this argument, however, this section goes beyond an historical analysis of Sanskrit literary culture and makes a philosophical argument. It argues for a conceptual link between the seemingly
value-neutral aesthetics of depersonalization of the classical kāvya and the morally edifying function of this genre. The self-transcendence or generalization required for the orthodox art experience, not unlike the liberating knowledge pursued by Advaita Vedānta, not only enables an overcoming of personal feeling in lieu of taking on the projected desires and goals of one’s social role. Sādhāraṇīkaraṇa can in this literary culture be seen as positively subordinating the personal identity of the relishing reader to the overarching ethicist concern of Mīmāṃsā for action (karma).

4.3.a. Reading about Rāma, not Yudhiṣṭhira, because of an Aesthetic Criterion: the Aesthetics of Bhaṭṭanāyaka’s Sādhāraṇīkaraṇa

In demonstrating how the rasa experience is to facilitate the ideal aesthete’s return to mundane reality, let us first consider how kavis conceived of and used their literary past. A cursory reading of the two great epics of ancient India—the Rāmāyāṇa and the Mahābhārata—reveals strong resemblances between their narrative structures. Moreover, both convey visions of tragedy. And finally, these epics feature dharma-rājas, or “Kings of Moral Righteousness,” as their principal heroes. But the similarities between the Rāmāyāṇa and the Mahābhārata are superficial. Whereas the former employs suggestive language, depersonalizes its characters, and clarifies the dramatic functions of protagonist, antagonist, etc., the latter relies upon the language of description (abhidhā), personalizes its heroes, and blurs the literary form of its characters. With this in view, let us now examine how classical Sanskrit literary culture held the Rāmāyāṇa and the Mahābhārata, and the respective protagonists of these two epics, Rāma and Yudhiṣṭhira, to be aesthetically exemplary and artistically suspect, respectively.
Sanskrit *kavis* and literary theorists unanimously agree that Sanskrit literature began with Valimiki’s *Rāmāyāṇa*. The power of Vālmīkī's *Rāmāyāṇa* derives not only from the fact that it was likely one of the first major texts to be preserved in written form in India. Its status as the first poem (ādi-kāvya) also derives from “the poem's own assertion of primacy, and the manner in which it is made.”\(^{388}\) That is, Vālmīkī's *Rāmāyāṇa* differentiated itself from other genres in the literary-cultural history of India on the basis of its mode of expression, not so much its subject matter. In contrast with the *Vedas* (whose essence lies in its wording), *itihāsa* (lit., “the way things were,” or historiography) and the *purāṇas* (ancient lore that gave primacy to the meaning of reference), Vālmīkī's epic seized upon the aesthetic power of expression itself, namely, *rasa-dhvani*.\(^{389}\) *Rasikas* recognized the *Rāmāyāṇa* as the prototypical *kāvya* accordingly, while *kavis* (Sanskrit poets) strove to emulate the story of Rāma in their own works of literature.

Of the other genres that *kāvya* commonly drew upon for material, *itihāsa* was regarded as highly problematic and, consequently, was held to be necessarily adaptable.\(^{390}\) In keeping with the analysis above of the key features of classical Indian

---

\(^{388}\) One less significant source of the *Rāmāyāṇa*’s innovativeness lies in its employing a range of “complex meters and other techniques of prosody and trope, less common in earlier forms of textuality” (“Sanskrit Literary Culture,” pp. 81-3).

\(^{389}\) The essence of the *Vedas* lies in its wording insofar as they are concerned with guarding against breaches between what is said and what is really meant with a view to the listener's fulfilling injunction.

\(^{390}\) Ibid., 57-59. Ānandavardhana drew upon the *Mahābhārata* (which is considered a work of *itihāsa*) for some of the most important examples illustrating his theory of *rasa-dhvani*, while numerous *kāvyas* were composed based upon the events of the epic itself. But as I demonstrate below, the epic did present some challenges for the orthodox tradition.
aesthetic theory, historical narratives were to be altered insofar as they “conflicted with the emotional impact [that] they [kavis] sought to achieve.” ANANDA elaborates further:

Another means by which a work as a whole may become suggestive of rasa is the abandoning of a state of affairs imposed by historical reality [itiṣṭvātāt maṃgala vaśāt sthitiḥ] if it fails in any way to harmonize with the rasa; and the introduction, by invention if need be, of narrative appropriate to that rasa... No purpose is served by a poet’s providing merely the historical facts [itiṣṭvamātra]. That is a task accomplished by historiography itself [itiḥasa eva].

In contrast with the works of historians, the aim of which is to provide a straight-forward and accurate chronicle of events (by employing denotative language, or abhidhā), poetic compositions are to employ dhvani in order to achieve their aesthetic objective.

Underlying this concern for the proper arrangement of the objective features of the artwork, however, is a more basic ontological criterion, one which is the focus of Bhaṭṭanāyaka’s theory of sādharaṇṭkarana. Since the emotions conveyed through the rasa-based artwork are to be liberated from the personal prejudices and value judgments that color ordinary life emotions, the development of rasa requires a process of purifying its objective features (vibhāvas, etc.) of all that might arouse an all too personal identification, such as things of historical importance. Edwin Gerow explains:

The feelings of an individual man are based on personal, accidental, incommunicable experience. Only when they are ordered, depersonalized, and rendered communicable by prescriptions do they participate in rasa, which is created by them and in turn suffuses them. By this ordering, one’s own history is

391 Ibid., p. 58.
393 Gerow explains: “In this transmutation the feelings are purged of their original historical and personal meanings. They live and move in the poetic world of which they have become a part, which they make up, participate in, create and are created by” (The Literatures of India, 117).
reactivated in an impersonal context. Rasa is a depersonalized condition of the self, an imaginative system of relations.\textsuperscript{394}

Rasa occurs as a wholly impersonal experience. Those objective features of the represented world of the artwork that bring about its apprehension, therefore, must be ahistorical and impersonal in character as well. That is, they must undergo a process of generalization, or sādhāraṇīkaraṇa.\textsuperscript{395}

One work of itihāsa that was particularly popular as a source of inspiration for the kavis of this era was the Mahābhārata. However, in keeping with analysis of Indian aesthetic theory above, classical kāvyas enacted a certain violence upon this epic by writing out of the Mahābhārata situations of moral failure and confusion on the part of its heroes. By way of careful, calculated act of (mis-)interpretation, Sanskrit poets transformed the morally ambiguous heroes of the Mahābhārata into idealized figures. That the co-arising of this trend along with the elevation of the Rāmāyāna is expressive of an internal connection involving not just dhvani but also sādhāraṇīkaraṇa is further indicated by the ever-intensifying suppression of “the poetry of personal expression that had been one of the luminous achievements of Sanskrit literature.”\textsuperscript{396}

Like the Mahābhārata, the personal narrative was in and of itself unsuitable for aesthetic compositions because it too threatened to undermine the conveying of an emotional

\textsuperscript{394} Ibid., p. 128.

\textsuperscript{395} Here the orthodox Indian aesthetic tradition is close to the universalist stance of Aristotle, who writes in the ninth chapter of the Poetics: “Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular. By the universal I mean how a person of a certain type will on occasion speak or act, according to the law of probability or necessity” (S. H. Butcher, ed. and trans., Aristotle’s Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, 4th ed., New York: Dover Publications, 1951, p. 35).

\textsuperscript{396} “Sanskrit Literary Culture,” p. 57.
experience that was not simply suggestive, but generalizable in the manner theorized by Bhaṭṭanāyaka.

This abiding concern for the subordination of the particular to the universal that we find in both the theory and practice of the classical Sanskrit literature is even more apparent in the conditions prescribed for the construal of character. We must reiterate, though, that kāvya was not read primarily for the plot, identification with character, or any discursive content, but for rasa. Accordingly, character is figured as ancillary to the central subject matter of the classical kāvya, i.e., its rasa. The literary character is identified not by the particularity of any of his human qualities, but in terms of his dramatic function as an idealized personality that has been cured of personal peculiarities. This is key, for it is the literary character's dramatic function that enables him to transcend the understanding of the audience in the form of an emotional apprehension. “Irrelevancy, contradiction, all the qualities of the actual human condition that do not serve this purpose (i.e., direct apprehension),” notes Gerow, “are rejected.” Not unlike in the tradition of the identifiable hero examined by Ricoeur, then, constancy of character is the central subject matter of the poetic composition. The “vocabulary,” accordingly, lies in the actions and reactions of the characters, while the “consequent” factors (anubhāvas, vyabhicāribhāvas, etc.) are seen as expressing (but not determining) the always already-given mode of being of the character.

Of the two principal moral exemplars from the epic tradition, Rāma came to exemplify the dominant aesthetic for the hero, while Yudhiṣṭhira was almost entirely written out of classical poetry. And in keeping with the analysis carried out just now,
constancy of character can be seen as a key distinguishing feature between these two literary figures. But in drawing this out, we must note that during the classical period of Sanskrit literature, the aesthetic form of the character became qualified in accord with a moral standard, namely, unhesitating adherence to dharma from within, and juxtaposition with an enemy in violation of the dharmic order from without.

With respect to the first criterion, Rāma's subservience to dharma is unwavering and unqualified, as there exists a relative absence of inner conflict in this literary character. But the success of Rāma as a model for the classical protagonist also hinges upon the portrayal of the “other” (Rāvana) that was related to him by way of conflict. Given that denotative statements cannot yield rasa, essential contrasts juxtaposing the primary generalized character against another generalized, though subordinate, character helps to accentuate the main character. This, in fact, constitutes part of the novelty of Vālmīki’s narrative for the Sanskrit literary imagination. Moral action in the Rāmāyaṇa helps to define the identity of the hero through contact with another different, hostile, threatening entity (i.e., Rāvana). Conflict as such, then, was not wholly inconsonant with the aesthetic project of kāvya. On the contrary, the representation of the theme of struggle

---

397 The Literatures of India, 131.
398 Regarding the moral failings of Rāma, there are three episodes in particular that have garnered a great amount of attention, mainly for their potential to subvert the status of Rāma as the moral exemplar in traditional and even contemporary Indian society. These are the repudiation of Sītā, the slaying of Tātaka, and the slaying of Vālin. The nature of the Rāmāyaṇa tradition itself has made possible a plurality of characterizations and plot-developments for the story of Rāma, with the moral ambiguities of these incidents generating a whole array of renditions and commentaries. However, the fact that the classical rasa tradition looked to Vālmīki’s Rāmāyaṇa (which celebrates Rāma as the ideal moral paragon) lends further support to my thesis.
was deemed essential to the enhancement of the pre-eminence of the hero (as self) over against the other.\footnote{399}

Yudhiṣṭhira’s character, in contrast, fails to obtain generalized emotional being because he is deprived of clarification of his dramatic form from both within and without. With respect to the former, his repeated hesitancy and confusion concerning the performance of dharmic imperatives undermines the reader’s apprehension of who he is. In fact, of all the characters in the Mahābhārata, Yudhiṣṭhira best exemplifies what David Shulman has termed the “poetics of dilemma,” so much so that his absence from classical Sanskrit literature would appear to suggest that he was held to be decidedly un-adaptable.\footnote{400} Yudhiṣṭhira’s lack of constancy (or in terms of Ricoeur’s analysis, idem-identity) is strengthened by his lack of an “other” against which to define himself. In contrast with the “othering” phenomenon portrayed in the Rāmāyāṇa, wherein the other (e.g., Rāvana) and the self (e.g., Rāma) are presented as two distinct, inherently different identities, the Mahābhārata portrays a process of “brothering,” whereby the other and the self are constructed as shared identities, parts of a larger whole. Yudhiṣṭhira, in particular, becomes torn over the distinction between adversary and brother.\footnote{401}

\footnote{399} This is formally captured in Bhoja’s “adherence to the two ways” (mārgadvayānuvartanam). According to Bhoja, the valorization of the anti-hero serves to in fact demonstrate “the pre-eminence of a virtuous man and the destruction of a flawed man… (whose) flaws are described as the grounds for his destruction, and his virtues in order to magnify the hero’s pre-eminence.” Sheldon Pollock, “The Social Aesthetic and Sanskrit Literary Theory,” Journal of Indian Philosophy, Vol. 29, 2002, pp. 221-2. The cause for the destruction of “flawed men,” consequently, becomes his violation of the moral order, while the grounds for the heroism of the “virtuous man” is his upholding of dharma.

\footnote{400} Shulman has characterized the Mahābhārata as exemplifying the “poetics of dilemma” in David Shulman, The Wisdom of the Poets: Studies in Tamil, Telugu, and Sanskrit, New Dehli, 2001.

\footnote{401} Consider, for example, Yudhiṣṭhira’s lamentations over the death of Karna, the most valiant warrior of the Kauravas (enemies of the Pandava heroes). Having hated Karna throughout the epic and obsessed over his power in battle during the war, Yudhiṣṭhira suddenly grieves upon learning of the true identity of Karna as his own brother. Victory now becomes meaningless and Yudhiṣṭhira longs to retreat to the forest; for he now understands that his triumph is not absolute but stained with the blood of his own older brother. This
4.3.b. Reading about Rāma, not Yudhiṣṭhira, because of a Moral Criterion: Orthodox Ethicism and Bhaṭṭanāyaka’s Sādhāraṇīkaraṇa

Not all good literary works of art require their characters to be depersonalized. Works of literature produced during and after the period of Romanticism, for example, regarded the individualization (not the depersonalization) of its characters to be a source of artistic value. This suggests that a character such as Yudhiṣṭhira perhaps is not as aesthetically incapable as classical kavis made him out to be. One might object that not all aesthetic sensibilities are equal, and that the refined taste of the sahṛdaya requires the literary character to undergo aesthetic generalization. But in fact, rasa theory is host to different interpretations of the process of sādhāraṇīkaraṇa. And some of these, such as that of Abhinavagupta, acknowledge the positive value of individuality in literary characters. The fact that Abhinava is recognized as perhaps the most influential aesthetic philosopher of pre-modern India suggests that the acceptance of the strong universalist stance of Bhaṭṭanāyaka belies other criteria in the construction of literary character. For what other reasons, then, might classical Sanskrit literature have been compelled to require such strict constraints in the development of character? Briefly taking up for consideration the encompassing worldview and, more specifically, the personality of the art institution influencing the theory and practice of kāvya, I argue that a version of ethicism underwrites orthodox Indian literary culture. The classical kāvya must not only possess a moral dimension, but should be evaluated in terms of its success in promoting

episode not only draws out Yudhiṣṭhira’s lack of definition from within. Insofar as “Yudhiṣṭhira realizes that this was not a battle between binary opposites,” explains Aditya Adarkar, it also dramatizes the
the orthodox Hindu vision of the moral life. Situated in this context, Bhaṭṭanāyaka’s theory of sādhāranākaraṇa can be seen as implicitly promoting the reader (if not the poet) to efface his sense of individuality in lieu of disinterestedly taking on his dharmic role.

Indian aesthetic theory gave relatively little attention to what kāvya means as a form of moral deliberation. Rather, this was something given in some sense, and hence was rarely an object of sustained scrutiny. With this limitation in view, let us draw our attention to the worldview underlying classical Sanskrit literary culture. This involves consideration of the importance of balance and order in the Vedic period. As noted in Chapter One, the Vedic worldview emphasizes continuity and inter-connection between the individual, society and the cosmos. It also values the maintenance of balance and order, both within these systems and between them, with cosmic order being supreme. In order to secure balance in the cosmos the individual must realize inner equipoise and strive to maintain social harmony in turn. Moreover, individual humans do not enjoy special status, for all things are equally subordinate to the harmony of the whole. Human action, accordingly, whether it be ritual, moral, or otherwise, is to be directed towards restoration of this balance in the midst of disturbances to cosmic, social, and/or inner order.⁴⁰²

During the “Age of the Systems,” Pṛṣva Mīmāṁsā emerged as a project concerned with carrying out an epistemologically, morally, and socially conservative

interpretation of the ritual practices of the Vedas. This is evident in how the Mīmāṃsākas defined dharma and the person. Dharma, for one, was understood as that which leads one to heaven by virtue of its maintaining or recovering balance in the world. Owing to the soteriological importance of dharma, the Mīmāṃsā school developed principles of interpretation for the sources of our knowledge of dharma. This involved the elaboration of a sophisticated epistemology and philosophy of language that sought to demonstrate that śabda pramāṇa, and particularly the special kind of language of the Vedas, could yield knowledge of dharma. The reason for taking the rules of dharma to be encoded in the Vedas runs as follows: dharma is that transcendent entity constituting the good in human existence (i.e., heaven); that good is made known by means of the performance of enjoined actions; the performance of enjoined actions is contained in the Vedas; Vedic injunction, therefore, being understood and then carried out, is the source of our knowledge of dharma.

---

402 The concept of rta expresses this concern as well. More than projecting a vision of the unity of nature and the orderliness of the universe, rta enjoins orderly and consistent behavior as the essential feature of the good life.

403 Jaimini defines dharma in the Mīmāṃsāsūtras as follows: “Dharma is that which is indicated by means of the Veda as conducive to the highest good” (Mīmāṃsā-sūtra, I.i.2). Precisely by virtue of its very capacity for bringing man into contact with the highest good (or happiness) for human existence—that is, heaven—dharma became the underlying concern of Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā.

404 The sentences of the Vedas, being structured around verbs given in the imperative mood, point to actions yet to be performed. This use of language was given a unique status with respect to dharma, which by its very nature is a transcendent, non-experiential entity not cognizable by sources of knowledge that were not themselves transcendent. Śabda is that source of knowledge not concerned with things actually present, but rather with things yet to come into existence, or bhaviṣyatī. Language, it was believed, was a reliable means of knowing owing to its capacity for causing something to be made known; simply by virtue of its having produced some cognition—which itself was not falsifiable by sense-perception, being that this cognition could always occur at some indeterminate point in the future—language is entitled to truth-claim status. With respect to the special status of the Vedas, meanwhile, they are believed by the Mīmāṃsākas to be authorless and yet eternal, and therefore, transcendent. This argument is complicated and need not be gone into in any great detail here, except to note that the Vedas alone are the source of our knowledge of dharma because, while linguistic utterances are subject to later cognitions that could subsequently falsify the initial claim, the Vedas have not been composed by an author. Hence, by virtue of the fact that dharma is a
This understanding of dharma had considerable implications for social personhood. In short, one was also bound to one's ritual-based role in the social domain, for here as well the individual was obliged to perpetuate the continuity and identity of the social-moral hierarchy that secured not only the individual pursuit of heaven or social equilibrium, but cosmic order as well. And insofar as dharma was held to be transcendent, so too was its authority for negotiating social-moral life always already given. This gave rise to a conception of personhood modeled after the self-representation of the traditional brahmin as ritual agent. But while the Brahminical ideal individualized the person in order to emphasize his responsibility for maintaining the world, it simultaneously depersonalized the individual, emptying him of all motivations independent of his ritually determined, socially projected role. This strong depersonalization of the individual, of course, had an inwardly soteriological dimension. Since it was motivated action that bound the eternal “I” to samsāra, the ideal of the Mīmāṃsāka ritualists was one of inert being to be achieved by means of “a long but finite series of lives passed in unmotivated conformity to dharma.” But this personal pursuit was subordinate to an outwardly social-cosmological imperative. That is, self-submission to one's role was necessary because deviation from one's dharma threatened to disturb the balance of the cosmos. Grounding the self-understanding of the individual in this way,

transcendent entity capable of being cognized only by a transcendent source of knowledge—the truth-claims of which are unfalsifiable—it follows that the assertions of the Vedas are uniquely authoritative. Mīmāṃsā envisioned an ontologically and epistemologically autonomous agent confronting an a priori objective world. As the purpose of the sacrifice was to obtain for the ritual agent greater dharma-merit in order to determine for him a greater position in the hierarchy of nature, the authority of the Vedas (according to Pūrva Mīmāṃsā, of course, for other orthodoxies would disagree) also rested upon the ritual participant’s holding to the notion of an eternal and omnipresent self bound to an endless series of rebirths. See Alexis Sanderson, "Purity and Power among the Brahmans of Kashmir" in The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History, Michael Carrithers et al eds. (Cambridge, UK, 1986), 190-216.
then, the model of the person endorsed by Pūrva Mīmāṃsā effectively transposed a ritual orientation for social life, emphasizing continuity, constancy and conformity to one's socially prescribed role.

More than one interpretation of the meaning of Vedic ritual was available during the “Age of the Systems.” However, largely owing to its success in both guarding against ruptures in the social-political fabric of the community and harmonizing social and religious domains in a way that appealed to its Vedic inheritance, Pūrva Mīmāṃsā not only established the Hindu understanding of dharma. This most orthodox interpretation of the Vedas also became the most dominant discourse of traditional India. Through a process of “vedicization,” a phenomenon which Pollock has described as the “ritualization of the social world,” the Mīmāṃsākas gained great institutional power during this period.407

That Mīmāṃsā held sway over Sanskrit literary culture is evident through consideration of the historical development of kāvya in conjunction with the most important political institution of traditional Hindu India: the royal court. The practice of kāvya (to say nothing of its continued existence) was made possible largely by virtue of its close alignment with the courts of Hindu royalty.408 Linking rasa literary art to the

---

408 According to Pollock, a new kind of Sanskrit culture abruptly emerged in the second century, as Sanskrit supplanted Prakrit as the language of literacy in South Asia. Pollock explains how for the first time language came to be used for a variety of public texts, including “the quite remarkable kāvya-like poems in praise of kingly lineages” (“Sanskrit Literary Culture,” p. 84). Other public texts involved issuing royal proclamation, glorifying martial deeds, commemorating Vedic sacrifices, or granting land to Brahman communities. From this arose new cultural productions, such as that of kāvya proper. But this new form of literature and its attendant model of literary-cultural refinement became inextricably linked to the social
court is relevant because kāvya was produced and theorized in such a way as to make sense for a particular sociality and polity. Standards of taste developed accordingly. For while poetry (as well as drama) had indeed won its freedom from the liturgical domain, and rulers themselves became influenced by literature, the artworld of classical India was nonetheless indebted to the political, social, and moral concerns of the orthodoxy. 409 The Sanskrit language itself, of which kāvya represented the highest achievement, had already begun to develop “a concomitance with Brahmanism far more invariable than it had had for the previous thousand years.” 410 To choose to write literature in Sanskrit, accordingly, was not simply to evoke art emotion (rasa), but to choose a cosmopolitan, elite readership whose taste was shaped by the social aesthetic and moral code determined by Mīmāṃsā.

The influence of Mīmāṃsā upon rasa aesthetics is also detectable when we consider how rasa aesthetic theory itself, not just the outward cultural practice of kāvya, makes possible the peculiar social-moral concerns of Pūrva Mīmāṃsā. For one, Mīmāṃsā had a definitive influence upon the early theorization of kāvya. Based upon
their analysis of Vedic texts, Mīmāṃsā scholars were the first to identify a number of themes that would become central to the study of kāvya, e.g., the distinction between direct and figurative language (abhidhā and laksāṇa), metaphor, metonymy, etc.\(^{411}\)

Moreover, by situating Bhaṭṭanāyaka’s theory of sādhāraṇīkarana in the light of Pollock’s historical argument, we can present the philosophical argument that the orthodox experience of rasa itself might accommodate Mīmāṃsā’s project of social-political persuasion. As I demonstrated earlier, Bhaṭṭanāyaka's theorization of sādhāraṇīkarana as a process of purifying the agent of his karmic inheritance might have been influenced by the Advaita Vedāntic concern for a kind of quasi-liberating union with Brahman. And indeed, identification with Brahman is not a Mīmāṃsāka ideal, while Advaita Vedānta in fact refutes Mīmāṃsā’s understanding of the soteriological efficacy of ritual action. However, as noted in Chapter One, Advaita Vedānta subscribes to the Mīmāṃsā model of social personhood. Analogously, the kind of transcendence believed to be required for the rasa experience and which was largely determined by Bhaṭṭanāyaka (prior to acceptance of Abhinavagupta’s position, at least) can be seen as an enabling mechanism for the peculiarly Mīmāṃsā concern to purge the individual of all personalizing motivations and bind him to his dharma through unmotivated conformity. I have already demonstrated how this concern for subordinating one’s particularity to the

\(^{410}\) Ibid., p. 74.

\(^{411}\) The Mīmāṃsā scholars that I have in mind here are Śabara and Kumārila. Pollock explains: “[I]mportant intellectual ties link the tradition of Vedic interpretation and the analysis of kāvya. Little is known about the early history of this interaction, but by the end of the first millennium the analysis of literature had become thoroughly permeated by the concepts, principles, and procedures of Mīmāṃsā, the 'discipline of discourse' (vākyasāstra), or scriptural hermeneutics” (Ibid., p. 53). Of course, by no means is Pollock claiming that kāvya was ever read in the same way that one encountered mantra and the other genres of the Vedas, for these were to be performed in very different ways than literature. But nonetheless, Mīmāṃsā exerted great influence upon the analysis of classical Sanskrit poetry.
universal “law” coincided with the suppression of the once popular genre of poetry of personal expression. While I do not here argue that the *Mīmāṃsāka* formulation of the problem of moral will and its overriding concern with the construction of social subjectivity occupied a central place in Bhaṭṭanāyaka’s theorization of the *rasa* experience, I nonetheless hold that Bhaṭṭanāyaka’s strong version of *sādhāraṇākaraṇa* would have furthered the moralizing concerns of the Hindu orthodoxy for overlapping the personal identity of the reader with the social-moral norms exemplified by the Rāma-like heroes of the classical *kāvya*.

This observation sheds new light upon the issue of the construction of character in the *kāvya*, which can now be seen as harmonizing aesthetic and moral concerns. In demonstrating this, let us take up the issue of the construction of action (*karma*) in the classical *kāvya*—for here as well, the development of character gets subordinated to the imperative to fulfill the plot through action. I have already demonstrated that the *Mīmāṃsāka* interpretation of the *Vedic* narrative was one involving an initial discontinuity or rupture within the social-metaphysical fabric that was to be overcome through action, specifically, the *dharmic* action of the exemplary individual. Furthermore, the hero of the *kāvya* was to recover this equilibrium by way of a sustained commitment to his ritually determined, socially projected role. The expressive powers of the artist were restricted to the re-creation and celebration of this narrative, with the action of the *dharmic* hero functioning to recover order and balance in the literary plot, and in turn producing deep tranquility in the heart of the reader. The author of “Literary Experience as Object of Knowledge” explains:
The action begins with, is occasioned by, some element of disturbance in the given equipoise. Disturbance in the equipoise gives birth to action. The action that follows is an effort to overcome the disturbance and the action ceases, comes to an end, when a new harmonious order, a new equipoise is achieved.\textsuperscript{412}

In this traditional narrative, which spans from \textit{Vedic} literature to the classical \textit{kāvya}, there are no single or individual personalities; there is no self-expression or free choice for the main character, only constant renewal and rebirth. The character becomes depersonalized, moreover, not simply in order to attain generalized emotional being, but to exemplify a specific moral vision that also has soteriological implications, namely, purification of personalized motivation and overcoming elements of discordance in order to hold \textit{idem}-identity (or constancy of character) together across time.

In keeping with the orthodox conception of the self and its concern to harmonize religious and moral ideals, then, and as implied in Bhaṭṭanāyaka's theory of \textit{sādhāraṇīkaraṇa}, the individual character (and in turn the relishing reader) is made subservient to the problem of \textit{karma}, or action, specifically, \textit{dharmic} action. This subordination of character development to action further evinces itself by the manner in which the structure of the plot is to be determined. The function of the plot of the \textit{rasa}-centered \textit{kāvya} is in some sense non-dramatic. That is, not unlike the re-enactment of the \textit{Vedic} ritual, the chief interest of the plot of the classical Sanskrit poem or drama, being organized around the testing of the main character, is not so much in \textit{what} happens, but \textit{how} it happens. The success of the character in this context is a foregone conclusion. What is of importance here is how the character survives. Change, then, is in some sense illusory in the theory of plot assumed in orthodox Sanskrit literary discourse, as the plot

\footnote{Kapoor, Kapil. 1998. \textquotedblleft Literary Experience as Object of Knowledge.	extquotedblright\ In \textit{Literary Theory: Indian}}
functions in order to fulfill and re-affirm the character for the reader. The literary character, then, not unlike the Vedic ritual agent facing the cosmos, exists in a kind of transcendent realm figured in advance, for his actions have been predetermined by his place in the literary narrative (or the ritual), and his place in the narrative has itself already been established by the orthodox Hindu interpretation of Vedic ritual event and agency.

This abiding concern with securing the integrity of dharma should help to further reveal the motive behind the dominant tradition's very different reception of the two epics. While both the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyāna deal with similar ethical issues from an ancient Indian context, and in the end both epics celebrate the deeds of their respective dharma-rājas, they communicate very different responses to the epistemic hope in balance and orderliness characterizing the orthodox memory of the Vedic tradition. The Mahābhārata, for its part, communicates a muddied picture of Indian life and continually entertains situations of moral ambiguity on the part of its heroes. This has the effect of unveiling the incompleteness and inconsistency of the dharmic order.

The Mahābhārata expresses pointed criticisms of the dharmic order and questions the


413 The tragedy of the Mahābhārata, in short, is one of dilemma and imperfection. Not only are its heroes flawed—polygamous (all five brothers share a single woman, Draupadi, as their wife), complex, troubled, ambiguous in relation to their values. The inconsistency of the Indian moral system is exposed time and again. Also, whereas the heroism of Rāma is cast in direct contrast to animal “shadow characters” of the forest, the characters in the Mahābhārata, particularly the Pāndavas, are themselves often portrayed as animals; they are their own demons. The author(s) of the Mahābhārata, then, demonstrate(s) a strong fascination with situations of moral ambiguity.

414 If even moral paragons cannot fulfill their dharma, then perhaps dharmic righteousness is in some sense dependent upon moral luck. Nonetheless, even though the aim of the epic is to stimulate thoughtful deliberation concerning "the inherently problematic and self-destructive nature of social institutions," it is precisely this gesture towards re-evaluating social reality that the orthodoxy finds so problematic. See David Gitomer, “King Duryodhana: the Mahābhārata Discourse of Sinning and Virtue in Epic and Drama,” Journal of the American Oriental Society, 1992, Vol. 111, Issue 2, p. 223.
epistemic and moral foundations of the Vedic worldview. Furthermore, this moral position is best exemplified in the character of Yudhiṣṭhira, who constantly brings dharma into the realm of interrogation and is often tempted by his personal affections for others to move beyond the strict confinements of his role (e.g., the “brothering” attitude that characterizes his relationship with Karna). That the classical kāvyā held the Mahābhārata and its central hero to be inappropriate in and of themselves for artistic expression, then, rests not so much upon some aesthetic criterion that exists “for art's sake” alone. And it also does not simply involve their transgressing the norms of the given art institution (e.g., inadequate use of suggestive language, etc.). Rather, the Mahābhārata and Yudhiṣṭhira in particular are problematic because they have transgressed a thoroughly moralized aesthetic and a narrative that holds the proper presentation of ethical themes to be a central feature of the artwork.

The ethicism of the orthodox theory and experience of rasa are equally apparent in how the classical Sanskrit literary tradition appropriated the Rāmāyaṇa. In contrast with the Mahābhārata, the Rāmāyaṇa presents a single moral vision that “makes absolute claims for regulating the moral order” and accordingly persuades its audience to abandon all equivocalities concerning the authority of dharma.415 Moreover, while both epics depict a tragedy, the Rāmāyaṇa's is one of ideal and perfection, conservatively affirming the Mīmāṃsā interpretation of the Vedic worldview by presenting dharma as that

415 The epic celebrates dharma as an ideal of moral perfection through its portrayal of clear-cut distinctions between right (obedience to dharma) and wrong (non-conformity to dharma), good (Rāma) and evil (Rāvana). On this note, Pollock writes that “The Vālmīktī Rāmāyaṇa... was for many premodern readers a work that simultaneously narrates what truly happened exactly as it happened and makes absolute claims for regulating the moral order; that is, it is both an itihāsa and a dharmaśāstra” (“Sanskrit Literary Culture,” p. 60).
necessary element in recovering social, political, and cosmic harmony in the face of dharma-transgressing others (e.g., Rāvana).\(^{416}\) In short, the manner in which this tragedy is communicated through the poem preserves the orderliness and integrity of dharma as an ethical system. Rāma, for his part, achieves the status of prototypical literary hero in this milieu not so much because his character has generalized emotional being, but because he is a paragon of moral excellence in the orthodox imagination. Not only is he unwavering in his performance of dharma; the aesthetic representation of the “self” over against the “other” expresses the inhibition and extrinsicism sanctified by the orthodox Brahminical notion of ritual agency.\(^{417}\)

4.3.c. Emotional Athleticism for Ritual-Moral Agents: Return to the World through the Orthodox Rasa Experience

---

\(^{416}\) Vālmīki’s telling, in particular, has a clear didactic function: to secure a place for moral injunctions at the center of social and political life. Vālmīki inculcated “a powerful new mode of conduct: hierarchically ordered, unqualified submission… a new and hopeful humanism in the realm of political behavior (constituting) the first literary attempt in ‘India’ to ‘moralize’ the exercise of power” (Sheldon Pollock, The Rāmāyāna of Vālmīki: An Epic of Ancient India Volume II: Ayodhyākāṇḍa Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986, p. 16). Furthermore, Rāma represents a comprehensive model of behavior that is open to all four social orders and centers around the ideal of obedience to the will of one’s master, entailng relations of dependency and loyalty in social and political organizations. This is highlighted when Rāma himself states that “It is not within my power to defy my father’s bidding. I cannot disobey my father’s injunction” (quoted by Pollock in Ibid., p. 21). Moral perfection, then, envisioned through a single character, becomes the grounds for political and social success.

\(^{417}\) This manner of portraying the moral self against the unethical other is echoed in how both the successful acts of the hero and the unsuccessful acts of the dharma-transgressing villain are to be sources of pleasure for the aesthete. Bhoja explicitly notes that the moral hero in the kāvyā is to be properly awarded, while the dharmic transgressor was to be properly punished. Bhoja explains: “If one were to compose a literary work on the basis of a story just as it is found to exist in narratives of the way things were [itiḥāsa], it could come about that one character, though acting with all due propriety, might not only fail to attain the desired result but might attain precisely the result he does not desire; whereas another character, though acting improperly, might attain the result he does desire. In these cases, emendation must be made in such a way that the character acting properly is not denied the result he seeks, whereas the other not only should fail to attain his desire but should also attain what he does not want” (Śṛṅgāraprakāśa, p. 746, quoted in Ibid., p. 58).
The classical kāvya involves a strong version of depersonalization, then, due to a concern for worldly participation in accordance with a decidedly moral order. But the “educative function” of the kāvya, as Bhoja refers to it, goes beyond the mere communication of a message. The aesthetic experience itself is to bring about for the aesthete a vertical extension of agency whereby our attention to the world sharpens and the moral message of the kāvya gets embodied, written into the habits of emotional responsiveness of an agent whose self-understanding has completely harmonized with his socially projected role. Indeed, then, the kāvya produces a pleasure that approximates the highest sanctified felicity of the orthodoxy. At the same time, however, “the experience of art,” as Eliot Deutsch explains and which we can now apply to the savoring of rasa, “must be seen in its own terms as a kind of pramāṇa, a way of acquiring knowledge of a special kind.” Accordingly, I shall explore and inter-link the metaphysical, affective and ethical dimensions of the knowledge made available by the rasa experience. By its unique way of communicating moral knowledge through the refined experience of emotion, rasa brings us back into the world by fulfilling the four necessary conditions for moral action recognized by the Hindu orthodoxy—namely, positive action, action that conforms to one’s dharma, action that expresses concern for others, and action that is performed without attachment to the fruits of action (i.e., niṣkāma-karma). In making us emotionally agile, heart-sharing, other-regarding agents through sincere adherence to our dharmic roles, rasa becomes a kind of moral-mimetic power that deepens our commitment to the Mitāṃsāka ideal of ritual-moral agency.

418 Ibid., p. 50.
One manner in which the kāvya edifies, and in turn facilitates a return to the ordinary world, is by making theoretical knowledge of dharma “palatable and easy to grasp.” Concerning the moral dimension of kāvyānanda, Mammaṭa explains: “the Vedas issue commands like masters and the itihāsas give us good counsel after the manner of friends; but poetry differs from them and is unique in its capacity to instruct one delightfully like one's sweetheart.” But this instruction does not come in the form of teaching and learning about human experience. The kāvya was neither read for nor taken to be instructive by virtue of some discursive content, as in the case of Ancient Greek rhetoric, for example. For while it has a referential function, the tranquil pleasure of kāvya is not constituted like the reasoning mode of śāstra or itihāsa. Rather, as noted earlier in this chapter, the language of art is the language of intuitive knowledge, not intellectual. But while it goes beyond merely theoretical knowledge, it nonetheless clarifies and makes more tasteful the representational content of “some insight like 'act like Rāma, and not like Rāvana,’’ and all that it implies, namely, those codes of conduct

420 Mammaṭa writes in the Kāvyaprakāśa, 1.2, that “kāvya makes the knowledge of śāstras palatable and easy to grasp.” Taken from “Literary Experience as Object of Knowledge,” p. 101.
421 Ibid., 1.2 gloss.
422 But in no way does this denigrate the ethical meaningfulness of rasa. And in fact, many Indian aestheticians argue that kāvya is in some sense superior in its edifying function by virtue of the unique alaukika state (rasa) that it induces, and even make almost pejorative reference to mere scholarly learning for moral education. Bhaṭṭānāyaka, for example, writes that “rasa is poured forth spontaneously by the word which is like a cow, for love of her children; for this reason it is different from that which is (laboriously) milked by the yogins” (R. Gnoli, The Aesthetic Experience According to Abhinavagupta, p. 48). Abhinavagupta himself echoes this common understanding when he writes that “A statement (such as the śāstras make) is said to be worldly (or mundane) because it is directed towards the performance of a duty” (Locana, 1.18, p. 70). While I will demonstrate below how Abhinava's theory of the moral development of the artwork goes far beyond this view, I call attention to Abhinava here simply in order to demonstrate how widespread this understanding of the moral function of the artwork was.
outlined in the śāstras and itihāsas that specify the particular facets of each social participant's dharma.⁴²³

But if the kāvya does not instruct by means of theoretical knowledge, then by what means does it edify? What is that unique pramāṇa by means of which the artwork bequeaths to its audience “knowledge of a special kind”? In light of the experiential quality of the rasa experience (as opposed to its yielding a kind of second-hand knowledge about experience), let us consider how the blissful culmination of the rasa experience responds to the four-fold orthodox criteria of moral action by developing first-hand a certain “knowing-how” to perform dharma. For one, this involves de-centering oneself from one's karmic self and the felt need to compulsively take action. This is expressed in the concepts of bhāvanā (or sādhāranīkaraṇa, i.e., generalization) and vyañjana-vyāpāra (the power or function of suggestion), which together remove the delusion of mind (moha) or ignorance (ajñāna) that envelop the ego. These two aesthetic processes re-orient the individual towards the domain of action in terms of an attitude of disinterestedness. Not unlike Kant, Indian aesthetics recognizes that a posture of disinterested delight is necessary for not only aesthetic enjoyment. It has a very real moral dimension. Just as one comes to understand what moral law requires of the rational agent by way of an overcoming of selfish motivation, so too does one become “ennobled” through the experience of the classical kāvya only after having achieved a certain sense of internal propriety, i.e., disinterestedness. The rasa artwork, then, both requires and cultivates disinterestedness as a moral virtue; the properly oriented aesthete is predisposed towards the experience of disinterested delight, while the experience of the

⁴²³ This is a reference to Bhoja by Pollock in “The Social Aesthetic,” p. 218.
properly arranged artwork results in “the spectator's mind being ennobled through its
experience of the beautiful.”

As for the requirement to positively conform to one’s role, recall how dharma,
owing to its status as a transcendent entity, can only be made known by sources of
knowledge that themselves are transcendent, namely, śabda pramāṇa or language in the
imperative mood that enjoins agents to the performance of dharma (i.e., the Vedas). The
imperative mood, of course, does not have primacy in kāvyā; kāvyā was never performed
in the same way as were the Vedas, for the aesthete was not to read kāvyā (or witness the
drama) and in turn “act out” his own life emotions. But as noted earlier, the language of
kāvyā has a clear moral message, and this language calls its audience members to
perform their dharma accordingly. In Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa, for example, that one should
emulate Rāma's unqualified subservience to dharma is not merely suggested but
explicitly proclaimed. “As I myself have shown you,” says Rāma to the people of
Āyodhya, “you must obey your master’s order.” Thus, while indeed the classical kāvyā
(modeled after Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa) clearly recognizes the line between art and life, in
some sense its creative intentionality bleeds over into the everyday with its strong

424 “[T]he beautiful is the symbol of the morally good,” Kant writes, “the mind is made conscious of a
certain ennoblement and elevation above the mere sensibility to pleasure received through sense” (Critique
of Judgement, p59). Of course, as demonstrated earlier, the experience of the beautiful is subordinated to
that of rasa, for all elements of the artwork are to contribute to the organizing aesthetic mood. This is also
evident in how rasa theory encompasses the alamkāra (“ornamentation”) tradition, not the reverse. But in
spite of this difference between Kantian and rasa aesthetics, there is a strong analogy with respect to the
importance of disinterestedness, largely owing to its moral dimension. Moreover, both Kant and the rasa
tradition hold that this sense of ennoblement is to lead to the individual's acting in accordance with a moral
imperative whose authority is transcendental, i.e., the moral law (for Kant) or dharma (for orthodox
Hindus).

425 That is, kāvyā was not read as merely enjoining its audience to take action, nor were the Vedas read with
a view to tasting art emotion. Regarding this point, Pollock notes that “Abhinava and every other reader of
kāvyā in South Asia before colonialism would have been mystified to see the West turn the Rg Veda into
literature [i.e., poetry]” (“Sanskrit Literary Culture,” p. 55).
concern for role-positive dharmic performance. In this respect, the meaningfulness of the rasa artwork is, not unlike that of the Vedas, bhavisyati, or having to do with things yet to come into existence (namely, acting in accordance with one's dharma). Moreover, kāvya as well as nātya came to be recognized as the fifth Veda at least in part because it too has a transcendent dimension to it, both in terms of the experience that it produces (kāvyānanda as akin to transcendental bliss) and the language that it employs, i.e., dhvani proper. As noted already, dhvani has a special power to persuade us to undergo the process of sādhārānīkaraṇa and, in turn, experience tranquil bliss. But dhvani does not purge us of our personal idiosyncracies merely for the sake of pleasure. Rather, it does so in order to remove impediments to the proper (re-)cognizing of our dharma in the form of its very performance. Through a kind of śabda pramāṇa, then (i.e., dhvani proper), albeit one different from that of the Vedas, the classical kāvya leads to practical knowledge of dharma by first purifying the aesthete of personalized motivations and then re-orienting him to those pursuits that accord with his dharma.

But even disinterested action in accordance with one’s dharma is not sufficient for guaranteeing moral success in the orthodox Hindu imagination, for the agent must be positively concerned with the well-being of others (the fourth condition). In order to demonstrate how the rasa experience imbues the aesthete’s actions with this sympathetic concern for others, first note how the rasa experience recovers the metaphysical meaning of our being in the world through its development of the heart (hrdaya). While Abhinava's aesthetic theory takes us beyond that of the orthodoxy, the following...

426 Quoted by Pollock in The Rāmāyāna of Valmīkī, p. 21.
definition that he gives of the sahrdaya aptly relates the view of classical Sanskrit literary culture. He defines sahrdayas as

those people who are capable of identifying with the subject-matter since the mirror of their heart has been polished, through constant recitation and study of poetry and who sympathetically respond in their own hearts; he [the sahrdaya] is one whose heart melts and whose heart is not hardened by the readings of dry texts on metaphysics.  

The purification of the self that occurs through kāvyānanda does not induce a mere sense of obligation to others, as in the case of the Kantian self-overcoming through the beautiful or the sublime (which attunes us to our “highest vocation”). Moreover, it does not presuppose the dualism of self and other, subject and object; in contrast with Kant's aesthete, the rasika has not been cut off from the world. Rather, the experience of art emotion involves a certain heart-sharing. The Indian tradition has long recognized the heart to be the core of the integral individual. The “heart” does not simply denote the physiological or anatomical organ, nor does it merely refer to the seat of raw emotions or a psychological entity. Rather, “the heart is the only seat of consciousness,” as the ancient Indian physician, Caraka, notes.  

That the classical Indian aesthetic tradition concurs with this view is evident in its theorization of rasa as not simply an intensified emotion, but as emotion that has been purified, refined and transmuted. The link between this state and the successful integration of the different dimensions of the heart, or consciousness, is implicit in the rasa tradition's understanding of the heart as “a focal point of emotional,

---


428 See The Advaita of Art, p. 60. The central importance of the heart is evident in Vedic and Upaniṣadic literature. A. Coomaraswamy interprets the Upaniṣadic term, “antar-hṛdaya-ākāśa,” to mean “the immanent space of the heart... at which place the only possible experience of reality takes place.” Chāndogya Upanisad, 8.1.13 quoted in A. Coomaraswamy, The Transformation of Nature in Art, New York: Dover Publications, 1956, p. 174.
intellectual and intuitive integration, a point of refined emotional realization and one that can lead the individual to a transcendent state.\textsuperscript{429} In attaining this transcendent state during the \textit{tanmayibhāva} stage of the \textit{rasa} experience (explained above), the \textit{sahṛdaya} does not become a distanced witness to the object of beauty, as in the case of Plato's wandering aesthete and much of Western aesthetic theory. Rather, he becomes fully immersed in the situation, attaining a kind of sympathetic identification with Being or a certain like-heartedness with Brahman. In short, \textit{rasa} recovers the metaphysical ground of emotion and our being in the world by integrating self and world through the maturation of the heart.

Through this maturation of the heart, the \textit{sahṛdaya} in turn becomes what I have termed “an athlete of the emotions.” That is, the individual no longer finds himself in the grip of the emotions that he experiences, e.g., by being compelled to “act out” raw life emotions. For having purified himself of his \textit{karma} (at least temporarily), the aesthete experiences emotion as a detached witness who is no longer bound to the domain of action.\textsuperscript{430} But the \textit{sahṛdaya} equally does not become purified of emotion altogether, for indeed, he sympathizes with the inner states of the other in a deeply passionate way. Thus, rather than seeking the mere freedom to experience passion or freedom from the felt power of the emotions, the \textit{sahṛdaya} approaches the \textit{rasa} artwork with a view to freely but responsibly experiencing ranges of emotion that might otherwise have seemed unavailable to him. Moreover, his encounter with the \textit{rasa} artwork cultivates greater

\textsuperscript{429} \textit{The Advaita of Art}, p. 47.
\textsuperscript{430} Thampi explains that the \textit{rasa} experience enables one to gain a kind of mastery over the emotions, to “know their nature, potentialities, internal constituents and differentiations... (to) free (oneself) from being
range of expressiveness by creating a safe space in which to explore emotions and proactively negotiate habits of emotional responsiveness. Connecting with Brahman in this way, that is, as not just the object of “dry texts on metaphysics” (as Abhinava tells us) but “a deep well—a kind of universal emotional source,” old habits (karma) of emotional responsiveness are overcome and new ones are brought to light.431

But further departing from Kantian aesthetics and its relevance for moral life, the orthodox experience of rasa is not a heightened, solipsistic state of being. Rather, the emotional agility that distinguishes the sahṛdaya positively orients him towards others by deepening his ability to find authentic emotional connections with others, enabling him to clarify human situations and experiences with enhanced efficiency, and moving him to action accordingly.432 For one, the transformation that occurs in the heart of the sahṛdaya affects a certain heart-sharing with those others who are also skillful in art relishing. The ideal orthodox aesthete brings to bear all his higher faculties on the art experience with a view to emotionally communing with other aesthetes who have successfully authenticated their true selves in the transcendental joy of Brahman and attained the inner equipoise that, according to Mīmāṁsākas, attunes us to the cosmos. Recovering the metaphysical basis of affective life is key to moral life, then, because it enables that self-transcendence that is integral to both performing one's dharma in the right frame of detachment and positively engaging others out of genuine concern.

---

431 The first quote is one from Abhinava, which I have just referenced above. The second is from Schechner, “Rasaesthetics.”
432 This, of course, is in contrast with the Kantian scheme, which devalues the role of sentiment in identifying the feelings of others and disallows (or at least devalues) pragmatic concerns—relegating these
But this harmonization of individual and world, self and other, that occurs in the heart of the *sahṛdaya* does not simply make us skillful bearers of heart-sharing emotion. It also projects us out into the world in terms of this deeply rooted concern for others. The *rasa* experience as a kind of special training in the experiencing of emotion was to bring one to the core of emotional life that was believed to underlie moral motivation and responsiveness. Bhoja emphasizes the motivational power of *rasa* when he writes, “‘Passion alone is *rasa*, [and] the sole means of fulfilling the four life-goals [*puruṣārthas*].’” Pollock continues by explaining that *rasa* is “identical with the kind of moral consciousness (pratibhā) that… emerges out of penultimate literary meaning (and)… is shown to be understood fundamentally according to a moral typology.” Not only the source of all affective states, *rasa* was also believed to be the underlying condition making possible moral virtue as such by reason of its capacity to enable people to properly register social-moral phenomena and experience and produce “meaningfulness” in the world. Moral virtue and passion are not diametrically opposed principles, as in the Platonic-Christian conceptual scheme. And passion is not categorically denied, as in the Kantian framework. Rather, the virtues and the passions were inescapably conjoined in the premodern Indian imagination, with emotion having a basic moral import, as it empowers one towards the fulfillment of those *puruṣārthas* by means of which balance is sustained in the social-cosmic order. The classical *kāvyā*, meanwhile, was seen as the vehicle par excellence for developing the emotional athleticism required for realizing this kinship of passion (as grounded in *kāvyānanda*) and

to hypothetical imperatives. The *rasa* experience, in contrast, infuses the individual's actions with a certain instrumental quality out of concern for others.
virtue (as fulfilling the *Mīmāṃsāka* interpretation of *dharma*) and properly orienting us towards others.

But there is one final aspect concerning the moral dimension of *rasa* that has yet to be touched upon, and it is particularly relevant to demonstrating how the *rasa* experience properly harmonizes the four criteria of the orthodox moral exemplar. Again I reference Hogan's explication and development of *rasadhvani* theory in terms of contemporary cognitive science. According to Hogan, *dhvani* can be understood as “lexical networks [including meanings of words, general facts about things, and propositional and procedural memories of individual history] primed and stored temporarily in the memory buffer.” Leaving aside the more intricate details concerning how “priming” operates in this framework, let us focus upon Hogan's observation that *dhvani* involves not just the relations between lexical entries, but their “internal structures” as well. Hogan lists three types of sub-structure within a lexical item (e.g., “human being”): schema, prototype, and exemplum. “Schema” refers to a hierarchy of principles defining a lexical item, with “the most central or definitive properties... at the top of the hierarchy, [and] with increasingly peripheral properties listed in descending order.” With respect to the lexical item of “human being,” for example, being organic would have a higher position than “default” properties that we assume but can do without, such as having two arms. The second sub-structure is “prototype,” which

---

434 And as Hogan further explains, “these networks may 'decay' rapidly, which is to say, drop quickly out of the buffer if they are not repeatedly primed... However, when repeatedly primed, they would yield a pattern of unstated suggestions of precisely the sort we discussed above as defining *dhvani*” (“Toward,” p. 175).
435 Ibid., p. 175.
436 As Hogan explains, “a person with one arm would count as a human being, but a statue with two arms would not” (Ibid., p. 175).
Hogan defines as “a sort of concretization of the schema with all default values in place, including those which are relatively unimportant in our schematic hierarchy.” While our prototypes to a certain degree depend upon the individual person, most people likely have a prototype of “man” as at least having two arms, two legs, etc., in addition to moral qualities that are likely to be found. “Exemplum,” meanwhile, is the third sub-structure. It means “any specific instance of a category—for example, any man I know is an 'exemplum' of man.”

Hogan's analysis helps to understand how we do not merely interpret or respond to the world and to other people in terms of abstract schemas, for reference to prototypes and especially salient exempla also play a key role. Suggestion, meanwhile, is a basic cognitive mechanism by virtue of its priming or placing “the schemas, prototypes, and exempla... in a buffer between long-term memory and rehearsal memory.” Moreover, these sub-structures also organize emotional life. As Hogan explains, “it appears to be the case that exempla—which are regularly primed and accessed along with schemas and prototypes—often have considerable affective force.” For example, when one consciously recollects the memory of a close friend's death (exemplum), he will likely experience strong emotion. This model also helps to explain literary understanding and response. As just noted, exempla have not only representational content, but affective force. Hogan elaborates upon this as follows:

When an exemplum is sustained in the buffer, its affective force should... bleed into consciousness without our being aware of its associated representational content, which is to say, the perceptual or propositional aspect of the exemplum...

---

437 Ibid.
438 Ibid.
439 Ibid.
[W]e have every reason to expect this when a set of affectively and representationally related exempla (e.g., sorrowful exempla of love in separation) are maintained in the buffer through repeated priming due to the patterned dhvani of a text.\textsuperscript{440}

As Hogan himself explicitly states, exempla, such as memories, are brought to bear upon a given art experience by having their emotional power drawn out through dhvani and presenced in that buffer space between long-term memory and rehearsal memory with a view to producing a kind of aesthetic enjoyment.

But while this appeal to cognitive science makes available a richer understanding of the cognitive mechanism of suggestive language, the point of issue here concerns the moral didactic role of rasa-dhvani. In order to flesh this out, note that one thing which Hogan's theory does not emphasize is the role of sādārāṇīkaraṇa. Indeed, his theory clarifies how the artwork arouses emotion by drawing upon particular experiences that get stored in the individual's memory. Moreover, it demonstrates how dhvani helps one to transition from life to art experience. But Hogan does not clearly differentiate between ordinary and art emotions. Furthermore, we can use his theory in conjunction with a proper understanding of the orthodox valuation of depersonalization in order to demonstrate how the orthodox experience of rasa-dhvani facilitates a return to the ordinary. For one, note that the aim of the Mīmāṃsā discourse of dharma, which gets theoretically articulated in the śāstras and itihāsas, is very much an effort to clarify those “default” properties that, while they may not be essential to being human, in some sense ought to be. That is, it represents an endeavor to concretize the schema by defining the prototypical human as properly dharmic, thereby securing those default values that, while

\textsuperscript{440} Ibid., p. 176.
being “relatively unimportant in our schematic hierarchy,” are nonetheless essential for those of good taste (i.e., sahṛdayas). The classical kāvya, meanwhile, is integral to this project. I have already demonstrated how both the theory and practice of classical Sanskrit literary culture were shaped by the Mīmāṃsā interpretation of dharma. But it now becomes clear how the kāvya fulfills that project. In giving more concrete (at least visually) form to the Mīmāṃsā theory of the person (i.e., the prototype, who is Rāma), and in seducing the audience into conceding the authority of that model for social-moral life by appealing to the highest felicity of its audience (i.e., ānanda), the literary character of Rāma not only produces pleasure, nor does he simply motivate others to perform their dharma by making the message of the šāstras and itihāsas palatable. He stokes the reader's mimetic desire to be Rāma.

The classical kāvya, then, is the domain of the visualized prototype, and that prototype is Rāma. But the artistic function of the prototype is not simply to produce inner pleasure, nor is it merely to shape one's outward-ness, as the Vedic injunctions do. Rather, it is to harmonize these two, the inner and the outer, in the form of a powerful new strategy of instruction that overlaps the individual's feelings and outward self-presentation with his socially projected role. In this way, dhvani performs that unique function of language not available to itihāsa and ordinarily reserved for Vedic injunction alone, namely, direct performance of one’s dharma. But rasavādins argue that, with respect to the power of language to produce practical moral knowledge, dhvani is in fact superior to the language of the Vedas because it doesn't simply move us to action, but purifies us of our worldly attachments by de-centering the individual from his personal
feelings and re-centering him in his dharmic role-duty through a deep emotional bond.

And the kāvya facilitates this because imagery has affective power over us, as Hogan tells us and which the orthodox aesthetic tradition was well aware of in its deliberate selection of Rāma over Yudhiṣṭhira as its aesthetic-moral paragon. The classical kāvya was a kind of verbal icon, and it won over an audience that knew precisely what was expected of it not by means of rhetorical persuasion, but by affecting a certain sense of nostalgia for the Vedic tradition and one's place in that tradition. Through both its explicit and suggestive persuasion to perform one’s dharma, then, the classical kāvya not only stripped the aesthete of his “false,” i.e., karmically determined, motives to action, but reconstituted him in accordance with his socio-cultural ideals. In this way, art and life were understood to shape each other in reciprocal relationship. Furthermore, the kāvya occurred not only in the royal court, nor simply throughout the geographical space of South Asia and beyond.  

It also became performed in the hearts of orthodox readers by first removing self-interest from the experience of affect, and then reconstructing the aesthete's self-understanding wholly in terms of his place in the encompassing social-cosmic order.

4.4. Conclusion: from Moral Irresponsibility to the Devaluation of Creative Agency

In closing, recall that the rasa experience is meant to have a certain universal appeal. This is evident in its theorization of emotion—rasa theory is founded upon what

---

441 Pollock has examined how this occurred in the cosmopolitan world of Sanskrit literary culture. See “Sanskrit Literary Culture.” The royal court was undoubtedly the primary site for the production and consumption of Sanskrit literature, for the court was “the main source of patronage and of the glory (yāsa) conferred by the approbation of the learned” (“Sanskrit Literary Culture,” p. 118). But the court was not its exclusive social space. Moreover, that geographical sites (even outside of South Asia), and even the names of human persons, have been taken from works of Sanskrit literature demonstrates the widespread influence of art upon life.
is claimed to be an exhaustive theory of the emotions, i.e., there are eight basic emotions, etc. And also in practice, it has the Kantian quality of universality, that is, universal appeal to ideal aesthetes—one whose taste is refined and has a sensitive heart ought to experience rasa when encountering a kāvya. Moreover, the rasa experience is open to all aspiring aesthetes insofar as they are willing and capable of undergoing that process of generalization (sādhāranṭkarāṇa) whereby one temporarily suspends one's individual karmic self. But from a mere consideration of the first section of this chapter, such an interpretation of the rasa experience is dangerously open to aestheticism or autonomism. The tradition allays this potential problem with its abidingly moralistic concern for how rasa motivates us to pursue not just individualistic goals (e.g., kāma [emotional fulfillment], mokṣa), but community building (i.e., dharmic) pursuits as well. And here too, it is plausible to argue that self-transcendence could have played a key role in facilitating the aesthete's return to the everyday. In this way, the dominant aesthetic tradition accounts for both the appreciation of art emotion for its own sake (i.e., apart from the religious sphere), on the one hand, and its relevance for proper worldly participation, on the other.

But the dominant aesthetic tradition of premodern India was nonetheless indebted to the Hindu orthodoxy. And this is perhaps no more evident than in how it theorizes the exemplariness of the rasa experience and aesthetic generalization (sādhāranṭkarāṇa) in consideration of that most central soteriological problem of the Indian orthodoxy: karma. In short, the problem of karma is taken to be the central concern in negotiating the transition between life and art, for the purification of our karma is integral to both the
culminating enjoyment of art emotion and properly seizing upon rasa as moral force. Moreover, insofar as the rasa experience is capable of simultaneously securing our freedom from the empirical world through kāvyānanda and our freedom to actively maintain the world through dharmic action, in the orthodox imagination the rasa experience is exemplary of experience generally.

But it is precisely due to its commitment to karma that the rasa tradition's models of moral responsibility and soteriological freedom are problematic. With respect to the former, it bears noting again the contrasts between Kantian and orthodox Indian moral philosophies, though this time with a view to the shortcomings of the model endorsed by the dominant Indian aesthetic tradition. For one, in subordinating the agent to the status quo and its narrative, the orthodox rasa experience deprives the agent of his autonomy from the influence of external sources, a freedom that is necessary for intelligently undergoing a mature process of moral deliberation and at times intervening in the seemingly inexorable flow of socio-political events. Secondly, the rasika’s heart-sharing concern for others comes at the expense of excluding from the circle of moral considerations those others who either transgress the authority of social norms or whose own voice is absent from the present situation (e.g., social outcasts), thereby violating the right of all persons to be given their due respect. This leads to the third shortcoming of this elitist model of ethical responsibility. The compassion that the rasa experience educes comes with strings attached, for sympathetic identification with others occurs only when the other has upheld the harmony of the status quo and submitted to the local
economy of sentiment through conformity with his already-given socially prescribed role.\textsuperscript{443}

But the \textit{karma}-based, orthodox model of the person to which the dominant aesthetic tradition subscribes is problematic for not only moral responsibility, but agential freedom itself. In disclosing the true nature of the self as \textit{ātman}, and yet subordinating the reader (insofar as he is a social participant) to the being of his socially prescribed role, this experience of \textit{rasa} divests the agent of real creative power in exercising his freedom with respect to both \textit{how} and \textit{what} roles he plays in his encounters with others. That is, the orthodox experience of \textit{rasa} does not develop the power of the agent to negotiate the dialectic of the self qua self-reflective subjectivity and the self qua objectified role, which as I have demonstrated earlier, is indispensable to creatively negotiating the relational middle between self and other, and ultimately completing the dialectic of personal identity. Consequently, the individual is still alienated from the empirical world and disempowered in the face of others.

In short, the artwork moves us away from the phenomenal world towards an authenticating self-awareness of not-playing our roles at all, and then back again into the world by making us morally sincere in our role-play, which effectively subordinates us to being-played by our roles rather than creatively applying them. Moreover, this cutting off of creative role-play occurs not only with respect to \textit{how} the aesthete performs his role

\textsuperscript{442} In short, others are reduced to their socially prescribed role. In Chapter Two I examined how Ricoeur seizes upon Kantian morality in order to ensure that the pursuit of “the good life” occurs within the framework of just institutions, and thereby has in view to the rights of those who are absent.

\textsuperscript{443} The issue is one of upholding the economy of sentiment that is thought to mirror cosmic harmony. Disturbing one will disturb the other. Thus, in transgressing the order of sentiment, we are thought to be transgressing the order of ethics.
(since he has subordinated his own personality to the generalized form of the ideal), but also with respect to what role he performs, i.e., he is only to perform *his dharma*, and not that of any other. Accordingly, the orthodox *rasa* tradition's model of agency suffers in the same way as do *Advaita Vedānta* and *Pūrva Mīmāṃsā* models of the agent. For the authenticating and morally sincere-making movements of consciousness are not strategies of creative play, but ones of purification of the ego that effectively weaken the desire and capability of the agent to creatively manage his being in the world in the midst of others. Bound to a highly conservative social-moral project that subordinates the problem of agency to that of *karma* in this way, the orthodox theory of *rasa*, while indeed having recovered the metaphysical meaning of affect and grounded the agent in social life, nonetheless devalues creative agency.

In light of how the ethicism of the orthodox interpretation of *rasa* diminishes the creative power of the agent largely because of its central concern with the problem of *karma*, let us now take up for consideration a different valuation of the *rasa* experience, specifically, one that is centered around the category of the imagination and has in view the realization of one’s freedom and power to encompass the interplay of selfhood and the role, self and other, through the pure tasting of art emotion.
Chapter 5: Abhinavagupta’s Theory of Rasa: the Aesthetics of Simulated Role-Play in the Theater of Agency

5.1. Introduction

Having demonstrated in the previous chapter how an aesthetic tradition develops in India that harmonizes the domains of aesthetics, mysticism, and social-moral life according to the concerns of the Hindu orthodoxy, this chapter investigates how the 11th century philosopher, Abhinavagupta, re-orients Indian aesthetics in the direction of Kashmir Śaiva ideals. As Śaivism became the most influential school of thought for aesthetics, Tantric aestheticians such as Abhinava further legitimized aesthetic experience as a form of higher realization. But it is important to note that Abhinava, not unlike many of his predecessors, simultaneously liberated aesthetic life from strict subservience to the liturgical domain. Going beyond them, however, he also secured the autonomy of the aesthetic domain from the ethicism of orthodox Hinduism in order to develop characteristically Śaiva persons. In keeping with Śaiva soteriology, this involved shifting the focus of his aesthetic theory away from the question of karma and towards that of the imagination. Recall that for Śaivas, consciousness (Śiva) is the creative universe (Śakti) that unfolds as seemingly differentiated and other than the subject out of a primal desire for continuous renewal of being. To be, however, is in essence to perform the act of existing. Rather than subordinating the person to acting out her socially prescribed role or reducing her to being a passive witness to the play of the manifest world as līlā, a Śaiva agent is moved by a desire for playing the part of this or that “thing,” which in turn elicits consciousness’s own self-recognition in the object, an object whose power (śakti) and otherness now gets recovered in an absolute oneness.
Individual agents can experience the freedom (svātantrya) of this self-recognition through mental life, and the faculty par excellence for doing so is the imagination. Through the imagination we mimic the creative activity of cosmic consciousness by, for example, playfully seeing things as what they ordinarily are not or even conjuring up things that have never been perceived at all.\(^{444}\) This, of course, is not to say that the imagination is always engaged in this sort of spontaneous activity; for indeed, the Pratyabhijñā philosophers acknowledge that much of the activity of mental life is karmically bound, with the imagination itself quite regularly borrowing from past perceptions in its determinations (adhyavasāya).\(^{445}\) However, the imagination is not reducible to being a mere mechanism of residual traces; for even when it is not toying with the identities of mundane entities, it is creating each singular imaginary object anew at each moment through its power of synthesis (yojanā).\(^{446}\)

But the activity of the imagination is privileged not only because it is free, spontaneous, and powerful in what worlds it makes. By virtue of its bringing about the self-recognition that represents the culmination of consciousness's primal desire for play,

\(^{444}\) One example commonly given in Śaiva texts is that of “a five-trunked, four-tusked elephant running in the sky” (see IPV, vol. II, pp. 264-5). It also bears noting here that Abhinava is careful to distinguish between purely imaginary constructions (Manorāyasyasamkalpa), which create their own object, and those imaginary leaps that still depend on actual objects of perception with which they play.

\(^{445}\) Utpaladeva distinguishes between two types of mental constructions: perception (pratyakṣa), wherein the perceiver is immediately aware of something’s presence, and mental constructions (vikalpa), wherein the mind goes beyond simply being aware of the object’s presence and constructs its own object.

\(^{446}\) Perception itself is not a passive reception, but an imaginative construction that creatively combines various elements formerly perceived and thus creates genuinely new objects out of free activity. Utpaladeva distinguishes between two types of mental constructions: perception (pratyakṣa), wherein the perceiver is immediately aware of something’s presence, and mental constructions (vikalpa), wherein the mind goes beyond simply being aware of the object’s presence and constructs its own object. Indeed, then, the freedom of the imagining subject has its limit in the past perceptions that it draws upon. It does not create ex nihilo, for it relies upon the elementary phenomena (ābhāsa) of which any singular entity is constituted. As for the Buddhists, Nyāya, and Mīmāṃsā, these schools held that imaginary constructions are nothing but the product of a mechanism of residual traces.
the imagination is also exemplary with respect to how it negotiates identities. And this leads us back to the metaphysical foundation of the Pratyabhijñā theory of the imagination. That consciousness freely creates the world by imaginatively taking its form involves the reality of the world itself. The Pratyabhijñā thinkers emphasize the freedom of the imagination at the core of their metaphysics because through its activity the individual person recognizes that the manifestation of some object as existing seemingly outside of consciousness is really an expression of his own creative intentionality. That is, the otherness of the object in fact results from a deep primordial desire for play through which the agent ultimately achieves a recognition of his self as identical with the single, omnipresent consciousness. And to this end, even the most ordinary experience of imagination can bring about the recognition that one already possesses the powers of action (kriyā-śakti) and cognition (jñāna-śakti) ascribed to Śiva Himself.

But of course, the imagination can also produce this awareness through art experiences whereby the imagination is invited to not just experience, but master this playful activity of manifesting itself as whatever object it pleases without ceasing to be an imagining consciousness. “Perfection consists in being full of the objects of the universe,” Abhinava states, with the imagination playing that key role in transforming determinate knowledge into a yoga, that is, knowledge of our union with divine consciousness.447 Abhinava's “yoga of art” reflects this concern accordingly, advocating not a “yoga of alienation” (as in the case of Sāmkhya and Advaita Vedānta) but one of integration. That is, according to Abhinava, the experience of rasa does not just create an occasion for taking delight in līlā, or that self-luminous play of consciousness. Much
more than this, it has in view the development of the powers of the imagination so that
the aesthete can at will recognize his own creative intentionality in the other, recover the
śaktis, and encompass relational contexts both in art and in life through the creative yet
responsible application of given roles as expressions of his identity with the play of Śiva-
Śakti.

Keeping in view this most important shift of focus from karma to the imagination,
this chapter explores in more detail how Abhinava's theory of rasa departs from that of
his predecessors in order to secure for the person the creative agency that I analyzed in
Chapter Three. After briefly examining two theories that, in addition to that of
Bhaṭṭanāyaka, Abhinava has given special attention to in the Abhinavabhāratī, the
chapter responds to the questions of “What is rasa?,” and “How” and “Where does rasa
occur?” This involves exploring how Abhinava's interpretation of the rasa experience
accords with the Śaiva realization of self-recognition, how the method of aesthetic
generalization (sādhāraṇṭkaraṇa) that enables this experience is to be explained in terms
of the two-way play of Śiva-Śakti, and how rasa occurs in a space wherein the person
gains the śaktis (powers) necessary for negotiating the dialectic of self qua self-reflective
subject and self qua objectified role. Furthermore, it demonstrates how Abhinava’s
aesthete develops an emotional athleticism that, unlike the social conformist rasika of the
orthodoxy, leads to both a vertical and horizontal extension of agency. From this, finally,
the chapter argues that the rasa experience, when encountered in the framework of the
mythico-ritual drama of Śiva-Śakti, discloses the intersubjective openness of
consciousness in its concreteness and empowers the aesthete to bring the Śaiva dialectic

\footnote{Advaita of Art, p. 132.}
of personal identity to completion through creative negotiation of the relational middle between self and other.

5.2. The Other: Three Theories of Rasa in the Abhinavabhāratī

In typical Indian scholastic fashion, Abhinava’s formulation of his aesthetic philosophy in the Abhinavabhāratī is preceded by a critical examination of various prima facie views (pūrva-pakṣas). This primarily involves consideration of three theories: the “Theory of Intensification through Superimposition” of Lollaṭa, the “Theory of Inference from Mimesis” of Śrī Śaṅkuka, and the “Theory of Depersonalized Enjoyment” of Bhaṭṭanāyaka. This section briefly presents these views and points to some of their more salient shortcomings with a view to anticipating Abhinava's own theory of rasa.

According to Lollaṭa, permanent feelings (sthāyībhāvas) get enhanced and appear as rasa through a process of intensification. This occurs in the following manner. The sthāyībhāva, which is believed to exist primarily in the dramatic character (e.g., Rāma), gets re-produced by the determinants (vibhāvas) and consequents (anubhāvas) of the actor; through his own concentration and outward bodily movement, the actor re-enacts the character’s emotion by means of imitation. This then stimulates the audience to imagine appropriate intermediate transient feelings (vyabhicāribhāvas) that, in unison with the other objective features of the stage performance and the audience’s own capacity for empathy, enhance the stable emotion. The result is rasa, which in some sense is already there in the undeveloped emotion of the character and simply awaits to be
“squeezed out” by the performer and transferred to an audience that, according to Lollaṭa, has successfully mis-attributed the emotion to the actor.

But Lollaṭa’s theory can be dismissed for a number of reasons. For one, it does not explain why Bharata never mentions the sthāyibhāvas in his aphorism on rasa-production (rasa-nispattih).448 Second, rasa cannot arise through a process of intensification, for the difference between a stable emotion and an art-emotion is not simply one of degree, but of quality.449 This leads to the next problem in Lollaṭa’s theory. The actor cannot (secondarily) be the seat of rasa because the experience of such intense emotion would undermine his ability to artfully perform his role. Abhinava clarifies on more than one occasion that the actor, unlike the devotee, cannot completely give himself over to the role, for his aim is not a frenzy or a spirit-possession. Rather, he is to serve as a means for the art-relisher’s enjoyment, which requires him to maintain the awareness that in some sense he is not the dramatic character so that he can effectively follow dramatic conventions (e.g., keeping pace with the complex tempo [laya] of the percussion and music, etc.).450 But a fourth and perhaps most damaging criticism of

---

448 As noted in Chapter Four, Bharata’s definition of rasa is as follows: “From the combination of excitant determinants (vibhāva), expressive consequents (anubhāva) and transient feelings (vyabhicāribhāva), the relishable juice (rasa) is realized (rasa-nispattih)” (Bharata, Nāṭyaśāstra, Chapter Six, between verses 31 and 32, ed. cit., Vol. 1, p. 231).

449 Enhancement of the durable sentiment is neither sufficient nor necessary for the aesthetic enjoyment that is rasa. If it were, then this would lead to an absurd implication, namely, that whenever one experienced an intensely emotional state (the transformation of simple annoyance into rage), or whenever an audience erroneously attributed anger to somebody else, then this would constitute the relishable savoring of that anger as an art-emotion.

450 Abhinava writes in the Locana that: “… the actor cannot experience the rasa…” Abhinava also notes that the actor cannot (or at least ought not) experience the rasa in the Rasagaṅgādāhara I, p. 36: “The logical reason, that there is absence of sāma (i.e., sāma is not possible in an actor) does not stand to reason, because we do not accept that the revelation (i.e., aesthetic pleasure or relish or enjoyment) of rasa ever takes place in an actor (i.e., the actor is never the location of rasa)” (taken from “rasa and its Āśraya,” p. 87). Regarding the actor as a means to the spectator’s experience of rasa, meanwhile, in Abhinavabhāratt, Vol. I., pp. 290-1, Abhinava compares the actor to a patra (1. vessel, glass; 2. character in a drama), which
Lollaṭa's theory is that it fails to adequately provide a role for the spectator in realizing rasa in the performance experience.

Śaṅkuka’s “Theory of Inference from Mimesis” responds to some of the problems underlying Lollaṭa’s theory by clarifying the nature of the cognitive attitude of the art-relisher. The aesthete is not to hold the true belief that the performer (acting out the character of Rāma) is sincerely angry with Rāvana, nor should the audience hold the false belief that he (the performer) is the angry Rāma. Going beyond this, the ideal spectator neither doubts whether the actor really is Rāma or not, nor does he take the actor’s appearance as the character to be an illusion that later gets corrected through exposure to the fact that the actor is not Rāma. Art-identifications, such as those of the actor as the dramatic character, are not characterized by knowledge, error, doubt, or a judgment of (dis-)similarity (e.g., “This actor does [not] resemble Rāma”). And this is because art appearances are qualitatively distinct from appearances in “reality”; for what art presents is neither real, false, nor something somewhere in between the two. Accordingly, performance phenomena are self-consciously presented as being artificial or merely seeming to be real. In this way, theatrical appearances and their appropriate judgments are entirely unique. Mermaids, for example, are perceived as being neither real (for they do not exist in the world), unreal (for the mermaid has been presented, and there does not exist contrary experience to render the judgment false), doubtful (for the fictional

---

451 Underlying Śaṅkuka’s “Theory of Inference from Mimesis” is an understanding of appearance as being of four kinds. A “real appearance” corresponds to an actually existing thing, whereas “false appearance” does not, nor does it pretend to do so. However, Śaṅkuka distinguishes merely false appearances from those that appear to have an actual referent (e.g., a mirage), though in fact the referent does not exist. The fourth
mermaid does not pretend to be “just like” an actual mermaid, for nobody knows what a mermaid is really like), nor false in the sense that a mirage is false (for the mermaid does not pretend to be anything that it is not).

From this Śaṅkuka concludes that rasa gets produced from the side of the actor by his simulating or mimetically taking on the “being” of the character. The vibhāvas, etc., constitute not the performer’s imitation of the character. Rather, the objective determinants, etc., are artificial constructions employed as such by the actor in order to bring the character to life. The art-relisher, meanwhile, takes the actor’s vibhāvas, etc., as inferential signs of the character’s stable emotion. The spectator, then, perceives emotions as in some sense existing in the performer. But he is at the same time fully aware that the sthāyibhāva of love (rati), for example, has been artificially performed, and so is not truly (i.e., sincerely) present in the actor. Inference, then, here does not yield understanding of actual states of affairs. To the contrary, it is precisely through the indirectness of the inference that the uniquely aesthetic enjoyment of the art experience (and the suspension of truth-claims concerning reality) can arise. In short, rasa is a kind of mimetic emotion that arises in the art-relisher from his inferring the presence of stable emotions in the character through the skill of the performer. Furthermore, the spectator ought not even try to know the real emotion of the performer, for supposed knowledge of the actor’s inner psychological states actually cheapens one's aesthetic enjoyment.⁴⁵²

⁴⁵² Insofar as rasa (not actual knowledge of the actor’s inner psychological states) is the aim of the artwork, and rasa is not produced out of the actor’s own personal emotions (the sthāyibhāvas do not “turn into” rasa, with their possession getting inexplicably passed from performer to audience, as in Lollāta’s view), it follows that the spectator is to simply observe the appearances presented by the performance (and infer the character’s emotion) without making truth-claims concerning actual states of affairs.
Abhinava’s refutation of Śaṅkuka’s view is complicated, but at least one damaging criticism can be summarized here. This objection centers around the question, “What is the actor supposed to imitate?” If he is to imitate Rāma’s bodily states, then this is impossible because the actor has never encountered Rāma (since Rāma has either been long deceased or never even existed). But if the actor is to imitate Rāma’s own emotions, then this too is impossible, for bodily signs of emotional unrest (e.g., trembling as a sign of fear) do not resemble inner states. This in turn problematizes Śaṅkuka’s theory of inference as the mechanism by which the audience experiences rasa. If it cannot be that the actor is imitating Rāma (for the character is not the re-creation of an actual historical person), then how can the audience infer Rāma’s pain, pleasure, etc.? Moreover, inference is a purely intellectual process that does not capture the highly complex emotional dimension of the rasa experience. Rasa, then, cannot be explained simply as something inferred by the audience.

453 Abhinava’s refutation of Śaṅkuka’s argument is two-fold. First, as Śaṅkuka himself admits, the spectator is aware that what he is witnessing is, in some sense, an artificial acting out of given psychological states (e.g., Rāma’s love for Sītā, Rāvana’s anger, etc.). But in order for the spectator to infer the existence of psychological states on the part of the actor, the spectator must at least believe that the performer is imitating those states based upon an original character (or that the performer actually feels those states as his own, though this view has already been rejected by Śaṅkuka). However, the spectator is in fact fully aware that the performer is not imitating, nor is he capable of imitating, the psychological states of the mythical Rāma (e.g., his love for Sītā), for only Rāma has felt the Rāma’s love for Sītā, and the performer does not deceive himself into believing that the performer playing the part of Sītā is his own love, Sītā. Moreover, as again Śaṅkuka himself acknowledges, the real emotion of Rāma can never be truly known, for Rāma is not, nor has he ever been, present to the performer of Rāma. Imitation, then, as the means to dramatic representation, is absurd, for the performer of Rāma can never feel love for Sītā (or anger at Rāvana) as Rāma himself did. And since there is nothing for the spectator to infer—for psychological states are beyond imitation, particularly those of unreal persons, and inference can only occur through exposure to actual states of affairs—and since the performer is well aware of this, then it follows that inference cannot be the means by which the spectator experiences rasa. Second, Abhinavagupta argues that the spectator does not experience rasa through inferring psychological states because, since the source of the inference is the spectator himself, then the spectator would become filled with the very same feelings that he infers within the performer of, say, Rāma in his love for Sītā. In keeping with Hume’s theory of sentiment, Rāma’s love for Sītā, for example, would arouse within the spectator true love for Sītā during the course of
The third view is Bhaṭṭanāyaka’s “Theory of Depersonalized Enjoyment.” Having already explained his theory at length in the previous chapter, I will here simply reiterate that a strong version of sādhāraṇīkaranā, or aesthetic generalization, lies at the heart of his theory, both in terms of its method and its conclusion (namely, rasa). Both actor and aesthete are to undergo this process of purifying oneself of one's karmic inheritance with a view to experiencing a quasi-mystical tasting of Brahman. Abhinavagupta's exposition of rasa in the Abhinavabhāratī recognizes that Bhaṭṭanāyaka's theory came to represent a significant advance over the theories of Lollaṭa and Śaṅkuka, largely owing to its innovative conception of depersonalization, universalization, and expansion as being the essential powers of the artwork itself that together convey rasa. But as the next section demonstrates, Abhinava, while indeed strongly influenced by Bhaṭṭanāyaka’s view, would nonetheless make significant amendments to the “Theory of Depersonalized Enjoyment” in the course of addressing the questions of, “What is rasa?”, “How is it that meaning comes from the performance to the art-relisher?”, and “Where is it that the rasa occurs?”

5.3. From Life to Art through Playing with Becoming: Rasa, Role-Play, and the Appropriation of the Person, Śiva

5.3.a. The “What” of Art Emotion: Rasa as Sentiment of Play

Having examined theories of rasa prior to Abhinava, we now come to Abhinava’s own theory, which creatively draws upon those of his predecessors. In keeping with his predecessors, Abhinava recognizes the commonly accepted metaphysical meaning of art the performance. But since this does not actually occur in the course of the performance—or at least, this
emotion as a kind of transcendental joy. Moreover, he holds that aesthetic experience exemplifies experience generally. However, Abhinava’s theory is bolstered by a sophisticated psychological approach. Furthermore, he takes the metaphysics of Kashmir Śaivism, not Advaita Vedānta, as his frame of reference in interpreting the ultimate rasa experience. With these basic differences in mind, let us consider how Abhinava not only links the aesthetic domain to widely agreed upon Indian psychological notions, but also interconnects the metaphysical and psychological dimensions of aesthetic life.

Reinterpreting the metaphysical meaning of aesthetic experience in this way, I argue that rasa is a sentiment of imaginatively playing with those two movements that structure experience, namely, vimarśa (proliferation) and prakāśa (recovery).

In demonstrating the close link between the structure of aesthetic experience and that of experience generally, consider how Abhinava relates commonly accepted Indian psychological concepts to the broad domain of aesthetic life. One such concept is vāsanā, or the latent impression of a memory, which is closely linked to the order of emotion. In Chapter Three I discussed how Śaivism recognizes that our being in the world is a configuration of the saṃskāras (karmic residues, impressions): our memory traces (vāsanās) are shaped by past experiences (reaching back even into previous lives) and constitute our present being in the world by shaping our current thoughts, actions, and experiences. But for Abhinava, the vāsanās are neither devoid of affective force nor are they randomly associated. For one, memories have both representational (which can be does not occur for the ideal spectator, i.e., the rasika—then inference cannot be the means to rasa.  

454 The vāsanās are deeply embedded prejudices. One other translation is “memory traces,” though in light of Abhinava’s conception of memory and how all memories have an affective dimension, this would lend
perceptual or propositional) and emotive components. When one recalls a particular experience (e.g., the funeral of a close friend), one does not simply experience certain visual and other impressions or facts (e.g., the pale color of the friend’s corpse or that people were quiet), but also the feelings associated with those facts (e.g., sadness). The content of experience, in short, cannot be purified of its felt dimension, for recollection involves a certain re-experiencing of particular emotions (rather than simply recollecting that one had an emotion).

But going even further, the emotions serve as the organizing principles of experience. This is confirmed through etymological analysis of the Sanskrit term for emotion, “bhāva.” Derived from the root verb, “/bhū,” “bhāva” (when its causative inflection is added to it) literally means “a manner of making it be.” Unlike the term “emotion” or “passion” in English, bhāva has a quasi-causative connotation in the sense that it connotes an active bringing about, rather than a passive undergoing. The emotions (bhāvas) do not just supervene or get superimposed upon experience (as if they could be removed from the deep structure of experience). Rather, they are constitutive of it in terms of both how the world gets presented (its aroma, if you will) and what gets presented in the world (the bhāvas are instruments of being that direct our attention to

The representational component may be either perceptual (for example, visual imagery) or propositional (e.g., certain facts). In the previous chapter I discussed how the power of dhvani rests largely upon its drawing out this affective power and binding us to imagery (e.g., of Rāma). See Patrick Com Hogan, “Toward a Cognitive Science of Poetics: Anandavardhana, Abhinavagupta, and the Theory of Literature,” College Literature, 23.1 (February 1996): 164 – 179.

I am here appealing to Chakrbarti’s gloss on this term (“Ownerless Emotions,” p. 189). “Bhāva” is formed from the verbal root, “/bhīt” (“to be”). Its causative form is “bhāvayati”). “Literary Experience as Object of Knowledge,” examines how a variety of canonical Indian texts (the Amarkoṣa and the Bhagavad

support to my translation of vāsanās as “deeply embedded prejudices” and how the artwork calls upon these affect-laden traces.

321
particular objects). In identifying the basic categories of emotion, then, we simultaneously decipher those basic states of bringing to be (bhāvas) that perfume the structure of experience. Conversely, the intentionality of the bhāvas is influenced by the vāsanās insofar as our memory traces give shape to the posture that we take up in projecting ourselves into the world. Thus, just as we cannot attain an experience of emotion that is utterly void of phenomena (for the intentional character of the bhāvas inextricably binds emotion to the manifest world), so too is our current being in the world necessarily influenced by our particular karmic past (via memory traces).457

The interrelation of memory, emotion, and the structure of experience can be made more clear by way of example. Imagine the experience of peeking in through your neighbor’s window and seeing the following objects: a dull colored rug, two chairs, a white lamp, a red clock, a woman lying down on a couch and looking up at a man, and lastly, that same man with his hands wrapped around the woman’s neck. Now ask yourself: which of these objects do you find to be most striking? And if indeed it is the woman and the man that most focus your attention, then we can now ask: why is it that in the midst of this situation you (the peeping on-looker) do not focus upon the dull-ness of the rug, the number of chairs, the color of the lamp, or the shape of the clock, but instead draw your attention to the look of desperation on the face of the woman and the tightening grip of the man’s hands? The reason is that emotion has directive power over

---

457 In more Heideggerian terms, one could say that one’s particular interpretation of experience, while categorically structured by the bhāvas (the emotions open us up to the world as such), is ontically constituted in the likeness of past experiences (the vāsanās open us to a world in its particularity). Our being in the world, in other words, is categorically linked to past states of being by virtue of the bhāvas.
our intentional states. There appears to exist a certain concentration of power (śakti) in
the space between the man and the woman that cannot be found (or at least, not in the
same degree) between any other two objects in the room. That power has now become
reflected in your heart in the form of bhaya, or what Sanskrit aestheticians call the
sthāyibhāva of fear. The other objects in the room, meanwhile, play a subsidiary role to
the interaction between the two persons, and will accordingly bear the markings of your
fear—e.g., the dull color of the rug echoes the powerlessness and desperation of the
woman, the two chairs are as the pair of the man and the woman, the whiteness of the
lamp reflects the woman’s face (now turning pale), and the red clock ticks as does the
burning jealousy of the man. In short, the various objects in the room get saturated with
the emotion of fear, and meaningfulness (fear for the woman) gets generated in terms of
this fear. Your memory traces (vāsanās), meanwhile, have indeed been brought to bear
upon this situation in order to identify the objects in this room—you are able to identify
the rug, chairs, etc., because of previous experiences with like objects. But again, these
vāsanās have here been organized around the basic emotion of fear. In this case, those
emotion-feeding memory impressions concern the beauty, innocence, and friendliness of
your neighbor (the woman being strangled), on the one hand, and the jealousy and
disappointment of the man whose efforts at winning the woman’s heart have consistently
been met with resistance, on the other hand. In this way, then, the vāsanās attune you to
those phenomena that have been designated as not simply present, but meaningful,

while the continuity of particular identities is determined by the uniqueness of our particular memory
traces.
having been selectively brought to your attention (bhāvayati, or caused to come into being) by virtue of their appealing to your emotional make-up.⁴⁵⁸

But just as Abhinava takes the vāsanās to be soteriologically problematic—insofar as the saṃskāras compel us to imagine ourselves as bound by our karmic past—so too are the bhāvas problematic by virtue of their compelling us to imagine the domain of action (kriyā) in terms of our limitedness. In the example just given, the fear that you feel in watching the strangling of your neighbor has power over you insofar as it produces a feeling of repulsion that throws you back upon yourself, and in turn compels you to prevent this event from continuing, if not in act, then at least in awareness (e.g., by moving you to suppress the re-playing of the image). Isolating the aesthetic component of this experience, the agent feels pain and a sense of being unsettled in the face of a world that should be otherwise. But the experience of fear (bhaya) as an ordinary sentiment or kind of raw emotion not only heightens the duality of pleasure and pain. It reifies the otherness of the world, exaggerates the agent’s sense of confinement to his particular locatedness in that world, and in turn weakens the power of the agent to creatively participate in that world. Accordingly, V. M. Kulkarni explains that life emotions bind us to the ignorance (māyā) concerning the true nature of the agent, namely, that he is identical with the limitless Self. “[H]appiness consists in complete rest or full repose,” he writes concerning Abhinava’s aesthetic theory. “Pain, on the contrary, is nothing but the

⁴⁵⁸ Those phenomena not deemed relevant to the fear-inducing strangling, meanwhile, are effectively not brought into being. Being seen (if they are really seen at all), but not noticed, by virtue of their failure to resonate with the prevailing feeling of fear, these un-recognized objects are a-bhāva, or non-existent. This is in keeping with the Śāiva phenomenological doctrine of self-recognition, and how something must be recognized in order to exist.
absence of complete rest or full repose." Like most of the bhāvas, the bhāva of fear (bhaya) not only moves the agent to secure the survival of himself and his world; because the vāsanās frame the agent’s understanding of his being in the world (i.e., in terms of his karmic past), the bhāvas stoke the agent’s metaphysical desire to secure his being in the world as that limited self. The end-result of this interaction of the order of emotive being (the bhāvas) and lived experience (the vāsanās), then, is a dualistic interpretation of experience that dis-empowers the agent with respect to his being in the world.

Obtaining power with respect to our being in the world, though, is possible in and through affective life. However, this requires obtaining a certain mastery of the emotions; we must become “athletes of emotion.” As just noted, Abhinava recognizes that ordinary fear (just to pick one of the sthāyibhāvas) holds a certain power over the agent, and that this rests largely in its compelling the agent to interpret experience as a natural and necessary consequence of past events. But just as Śaivas place priority upon the imagination over the order of karma with a view to divine self-recognition, so too does Abhinava’s aesthetic theory recognize the power of the imagination as superior to that of the bhāvas (and the domain of action) with respect to the individual’s determining his own being in the world. This can be demonstrated by contrasting bhāva with rasa through the following example. You are witnessing an event that is almost exactly the

---

459 V. M. Kulkarni, “Rasa and its Pleasurable Nature,” p. 73. This claim is confirmed by Abhinava, who comments in the Abhinavabhāratī, “it is restlessness alone which is suffering.” (translated by Arindam Chakrabarti, “Heart of Repose,” p. 34)

460 Recall the discussion in Chapter Two of the metaphysical desire to be as one’s role.

461 As demonstrated in the previous chapter, for Saivas this amounts to unnecessarily limiting the knowledge and power of the individual to properly interpret experience in terms of the play of Śiva-Śakti. Also, the “location” that the agent gets bound to is spatio-temporal, karmic, socio-cultural, etc., all dimensions of which Abhinava shows some clue to being attuned to (according to my analysis of Abhinava’s position in Chapter Three).
same as the strangling described above, but with one important difference. Here the event takes place not in your neighbor’s home, but on the stage of the theater, for you are now observing the final scene from Shakespeare’s *Othello*—the suffocation of Desdemona. In this context as well, the *bhāvas* are hugely important to bringing into being the meaningfulness of the (theatrical) event by their appealing to our emotion-structured psyche. This is reflected in the fact that the term “*bhāva*” serves as the base of many of the most important terms in Indian aesthetic theory—e.g., *vi-bhāva, anu-bhāva, sthāyi-bhāva, sāttvika-bhāva, sañcāri-bhāva, vyabhicāri-bhāva*, etc. In the context of the drama, these subdivided *bhāvas*, with the *sthāyībhāvas* having causal-dispositional priority, play a pivotal role in objectifying those patterns of experience resulting from the interactions of the various states of the human psyche. That is, they are the basic stuff of both life and the theater, for they mirror the emotional make-up that structures our being in the world.

But in keeping with the classical tradition, Abhinava holds that the purpose of these “objective correlates” (the *vibhāvas*), etc., is not to exaggerate our sense of being bound to our place in the world, and hence limited in our capacity to negotiate the power that lies in the space between self and other. For contrary to the hypothetical example of witnessing the strangling of one’s neighbor, here the objects of the spectator’s attention relax the claims to the world exercised by the agent qua limited agency by purifying the phenomenal world of its gross particularity (i.e., its foreignness, to the one extreme, or its excessively personalized character, to the other). That is, the artwork generalizes experience, freeing the viewer from his *karmic* past (the *vāsanās*) and the excessive claim to “mine-ness” that the *bhāvas* ordinarily force upon the world. Liberated in this way
from the projected concerns of our *karmic* past and the economy of ordinary life emotion (i.e., the question of the survival of particular beings as in some way *mine*, e.g., *my neighbor*, a claim that the ideal spectator does not make concerning Desdemona), one’s awareness of being in the world becomes depersonalized. And yet, because this non-dualistic, other-worldly (*alaukika*) experience of being in the world does not overcome the richly emotional character of the world—it is at once enjoyable and tinged with suffering—the consciousness of the spectator expands into the phenomenal domain in a way that is characteristic of ordinary sentiment or *bhāva* (as constitutive of the world), but is qualitatively distinct by virtue of its extra-ordinary (*alaukika*) going beyond the limits prescribed by our memory traces (*vāsanās*). That is, what the spectator experiences when watching the strangling of Desdemona is not the ordinary (*laukika*) emotion of fear (*bhaya*), which restricts the freedom of our being in the world. Rather, the spectator relishes the art-emotion known as *bhayānaka*, or the *rasa* of terror, wherein the phenomenal world is encountered as simultaneously filled with individual entities and yet purified of its grossness.

Ordinary life emotions, then, bind us to the world insofar as the states of being to which they give rise are rooted in self-interest and compel us to secure the integral unity of the self-as-self-reflective subjectivity and the self-as-conditioned body. But in the encounter with art objects, our feelings do not struggle for an outlet because the direct link with any particular (egoistic) memory trace (*vāsanā*) has been relaxed. Moreover, in immersing our feelings in the object in this way, we not only take repose in the generalized other as encompassed within the space of consciousness (which has been
purified of our limited self-interest), but are now able to experience pleasure and pain as purified of their grossness. That is, art-emotions (rasas) simultaneously produce a pleasurable calm, even in the midst of suffering, and affect a transformation of one’s being in the world. In this respect, art emotion is somewhat like an ephemeral version of the religious experience of mokṣa; rasa, according to Abhinava, extinguishes self-interest and gives way to a sense of tranquility that simulates the taste of supreme Brahman. Abhinava is here closely aligned with the prevailing view of rasa as a quasi-soteriological experience: having within them a single active principle, namely, the self-manifesting ātman—which is not different than the being, consciousness, and bliss that is Brahman—the rasas merge out of and inevitably resolve themselves into a temporary and partial version of the endless and perfect peace that is mokṣa. In this respect, Abhinava echoes Bhaṭṭanāyaka's claim that the relishing of art emotion is akin to enjoying one's union with Brahman. Abhinava writes: "We admit with him [Bhaṭṭanāyaka] that aesthetic enjoyment (rasāsvāda) is similar to the relish or enjoyment of bliss of the Highest Brahman." With an eye to the basic aesthetic problem of the intermixture of pleasure and pain, on the one hand, and the quasi-soteriological dimension of art-emotion as securing peace in the midst of anger, pain, disgust, or sorrow, Abhinava posits the existence of a ninth rasa: śānta rasa. While indeed present in all the eight rasas, śānta rasa is nonetheless separate from them. Śānta connotes tranquility, serenity and repose. In keeping with Abhinava’s analysis of spiritual freedom, the gross feeling of pain or

462 See Abhinava's commentary on the Dhvanyāloka, Uddyota II, Locana, under v. 4.
463 Locana, p. 183.
suffering results from the individual’s mind being directed to something not in consciousness, to there existing something foreign in its otherness. Śānta most closely approximates the realization of soteriological freedom and exemplifies art emotion as a depersonalized experience of being in the world by its immersing our feelings in the object in a way that does not compel the spectator to turn away from its otherness. Rather, it so thoroughly de-centers the agent from his limited self-awareness and transcends the particularity of other beings in such a way that he comes to identify himself with transcendent subjectivity itself. In short, Abhinava holds that Śānta, through this purification of dualisms—e.g., self and other, pleasure and pain—and its helping one to positively enjoy all art emotions (including the rasas of terror, disgust, etc.) in the midst of this purification, is akin to the experience of mokṣa, with this movement away from the manifest world towards transcendence of one's karmic condition being understood as crucial to the development of proper aesthetic poise.

But while Abhinava theorizes the rasa experience as involving a transcendent joy and sense of wonder (camatkāra-rasasampārṇatā) that transcends all classifications, in order to properly flesh out his contribution to the tradition's understanding of what rasa is, we must pay close attention to the peculiarities of his re-valuation of the exalted state of wonderment that attends the relishing of art emotion. The rasa experience, according to Abhinava, does not conclude with an overcoming of our limited, karmically influenced personality in lieu of an experience that approximates the tasting of Brahman. Rather, it leads to a disclosure of experience as structured by a play that interlinks the outflowing dynamism (vimarśa) and inward rest (viṣrānti) of consciousness. In Chapter Three I
examined in detail the Kashmir Śaiva notion of viśrānti as a resting in the play of divine consciousness. This resting, moreover, is described as svapraṅga, which hints at not only the two complementary powers structuring this play—namely, prakāśa (illumination or light) and viṁśa (proliferation or delight). It also indicates that through the rasa experience the aesthete recognizes this play as an expression of his own agency, for he has now come to identify with the Universal Super-Agent, Śiva. Sāṃsārika (personalized) or laukika (worldly) experiences lack the all-important quality of viśrānti because they place the agent in the grip of the raw emotions (bhāva). But the mere identification with Brahman through self-transcendence also lacks this quality because consciousness, after illuminating the world, neither recognizes outward objects as an expression of its own intentionality nor turns inwards upon itself after having done so. K. C. Pandey explains how its grounding experience in viśrānti as a restful, though dynamic and self-conscious play, distinguishes Śaivism from other schools, in particular Advaita Vedānta:

[A]dmision of viṁśa or self-consciousness in the Absolute by the Śaiva is the point of distinction between the Śaiva and the [Advaita] Vedāntic conception of ultimate Reality. The latter holds that the Brahman is sānta... [that] it is self-shining and not self-conscious... The Śaiva maintains that the Absolute is not only self-shining but also self-conscious.64

This basic frame of reference is necessary here because Abhinava articulates his theory of the ultimate rasa experience from within the tradition of Kashmir Śaivism. It comes as no surprise, then, that his aesthetic phenomenology is likewise distinct from those theories of rasa that would appear to ground the agent in the metaphysics of Advaita Vedānta and thereby curtail the play of consciousness. This gets brought out
through consideration of Abhinava's postulation of the two basic steps that define the culminating *rasa* experience. The first is *tanmayībhāva*, which as demonstrated in the previous chapter means the total identification of the aesthete with the artistic situation. Abhinava describes this as the stage at which “the universal mental state is apprehended... (having been) awakened from the subconscious (*saṃskāra*)” by the artistic event.\(^{465}\) But while those *rasikas* operating within a framework that is compatible with *Advaita Vedānta* (e.g., Bhaṭṭanāyaka) stop at this step, Abhinava proceeds further. For given that the Ultimate Super-Agent is here taken to be a single reality with two basic aspects (i.e., the Śiva *tattva* and the Śakti *tattva*) and corresponding movements (*prakāśa* and *vimarśa*) that operate inseparably at all stages of experience, the relishing of *rasa*, insofar as it is exemplary of experience, must also move beyond the experience of absolute eradication of difference. Accordingly, Abhinava posits a second step wherein “the universalized basic mental state sinks back as it were, to open up the Śiva and the Śakti aspects, as they operate in the aesthete, and hold these two in a tension free state of rest or dynamic harmony, which is nothing other than *ānanda*.”\(^{466}\) The Super-Agent with whom the aesthete is identical, then, is not only self-luminous, but reflexively self-aware of His luminosity (*prakāśatha*) because He beholds within Himself Śiva and Śakti and their endless play of cosmic hide and seek, separation and return.\(^{467}\) The *rasa* experience as theorized by Abhinava, for its part, accords with this model. Far from being a mere pretext for explaining the inexplicable (as in *Advaita Vedānta*), the play of Śiva-Śakti is a

---

\(^{464}\) Quoted in *Advaita of Art*, p. 52.
\(^{465}\) Quoted in Ibid.
\(^{466}\) Ibid., p. 59.
real play that manifests in aesthetic life because the mystical and the aesthetic domains share the same metaphysical and epistemic structure-foundation relation.

The particular psychology of the agent, meanwhile, does not get left behind or sublated in the artistic situation through the authentication of an other-worldly ātman. And of course, the rasa experience does not validate the person’s interpretation of experience from the standpoint of his limitedness. Rather, the agent realizes himself as implicated in the play of self and other. This, of course, requires an affirmation of the phenomenal world, our objective locatedness in it, and the role of the senses in bringing this to our awareness. But this affirmation occurs in the context of a process of integration of sense-experience. This process is addressed in the Śiva Sūtras. Here the senses are likened to the spectators of the universal drama that gets reflected in the inner self of the yogin. Kṣemarāja elaborates: “The senses, like eyes, etc., of the yogi witness inwardly their inmost Self full of the delight in exhibiting the world drama. By the development of the performance of the drama, they provide the yogi fullness of aesthetic rapture in which the sense of difference has disappeared.” The aesthetic delight taken in this inward witnessing is an absolutely integral condition for recognizing the play of multiplicity and oneness as liberating, that is, for uprooting any sense of actually being separate from this play (vīgalita vibhāgan).

---

467 As noted in Chapter Three, the androgynous image of ardhanarīśvara expresses precisely this play of self-recognition. Śiva and Śakti are not counter-posed, but complementary; they are sāmarasya.
468 Śiva Sūtras III.11 writes, “prekṣakanindriyani.”
470 It bears reiterating a point that I made in Chapter Three. The Śaiva understanding of the definition of Śiva as “sat, cit, ānanda,” is not that one becomes conscious of bliss, but that one recognizes that consciousness is bliss.
The first step of tanmayībhāva is necessary, of course, for the individual must first submit to the dynamic equilibrium of the grasper (grāhaka) and the grasped (grāhya) aspects of consciousness. But in contrast with the non-dualistic model of rasa advocated by Bhaṭṭanāyaka, among others, aesthetic pleasure and its corresponding sense of wonder result not from the mere release from one's limited individuality and an immersion in the empty object. For in the second stage the agent gets recovered in the full awareness that this play is an expression of his own creative agency. Art emotion, then, becomes much more than a self-transcending, ultimately contentless aesthetic ecstasy. The aesthetic rapture in which rasa culminates does not involve the termination of the alternating movement of consciousness between the ordinary world of dualities and that of utter non-distinction. Rather, it involves a restful but vibrant, free play of imagination and self-savoring of consciousness. Rasa, in short, involves not an authentication of the self apart from a world of action and manifest proliferation. It is rather a sentiment of play that carries with it the realization of oneself as identical with the Ultimate Super-Agent, who plays between the poles of Oneness (prakāśa) and Manyness (vīmarśa).

5.3.b. The “How” of Art Emotion: from Creative Role-Play to the Deep Appropriation of Becoming

This section explores Abhinava’s understanding of how rasa arises. Abhinava recognizes the process of sādhārantkarāṇa, or aesthetic generalization, to be instrumental in evoking the rasa experience, both from the side of the artwork and the aesthete. In explicating his theory of generalization, it bears reiterating that, while he acknowledges that the raw emotions tend to reify the influence of our karmic inheritance, Abhinava’s
theory, in keeping with Śaiva soteriology, is centered around the freedom of the imagination, not karma. Accordingly, Abhinava re-formulates sādhāraṇīkaraṇa as a two-way process that, not unlike the soteriological strategies of Śaivism, is best understood as mimicking the play of Śiva consciousness. Interpreting Abhinava's theory of generalization in this way, we can see how the rasa experience does not simply require the actor or the aesthete to transcend the ego in encountering the artistic situation. Going beyond this, both Abhinava's actor and rasika are to seize upon the creative freedom of the imagination in negotiating the de-centering and re-centering of the individual's “egocentric map” in the simulation of the dramatic character.

From the side of the artwork, rasa gets produced negatively by the removal of various obstacles. Abhinava holds that just as the realization of our true identity as other than the grossly manifest world occurs through the purification of the ignorance (māyā) that conceals divine self-recognition, so too does the artwork remove those obstacles that impede us from relishing emotion in its purity (i.e., as devoid of dualities). With this in view, he lists seven obstacles to the unworldly, selfless enjoyment of art emotion. Since each of these factors has already been discussed in this dissertation, I will simply list them as those features of the successful artwork that help to prevent obstacles to aesthetic relishing from arising. They include: (1) proper intermixture of aesthetic moods, (2) dhvani or vyañjana (suggestion), (3) depersonalization (which I will return to shortly), (4) repose (viśrānti), (5) camatkāra (marveling thrill), (6) vimarśa (self-mirroring), and (7) the loosening of pragmatic, egotistic, and intellectual concerns.\footnote{The first factor has to do with the proper intermixture or blending of various rasas; no good artwork is born of a single rasa. The second involves literal omission or suggestion (dhvani or vyañjana). The}
But of course, the *rasa* experience requires more than just an artwork that gets set in motion and comes to completion of its own design. And it also requires more than any ordinary observer. Echoing Bhāṭṭanāyaka (here in opposition to Lollaṭa), Abhinava’s theory of *rasa* emphasizes the central role of the art-relisher in constructing the art-work. Phenomena (including theatrical appearances) are constructed through the agent’s interpretation of experience; appearances are largely what we make them to be, regardless of their ontological status as “real” (*laukika*), false, doubtful, or fictional (*alaukika*). This is brought out in Abhinava’s understanding of how the *vāsanās* come to bear upon one’s interpretation of the artwork. For one, Abhinava holds that insofar as (a) the *bhāvas* that are necessary for bringing to life the drama exist in the spectator in the form of *vāsanās*, and (b) the orders of feeling and being are intertwined, then (c) our predispositions will permeate not only our own being in the world, but also our interpretation of the artwork.\(^{472}\)

\(^{472}\) Jha explains in support of Abhinava’s critique of Bhāṭṭanāyaka: “The propriety of this explanation [of Abhinava] is further strengthened by the fact that the spectator whose mind is free from such predisposition..."
But contrary to Bhaṭṭanāyaka, Abhinava holds that our memory traces not unavoidable deterrents to our fully relishing art emotion in its purity. To the contrary, just as the Śaīva adept does not seek to utterly cleanse himself of his karmic inheritance, so too does the rasika not aim to eliminate the influence of the vāsanās upon his experience of the drama. That is, not only is complete self-transcendence of the empirical ego impossible; it ought not to occur. For one, wholly emptying oneself of one’s thought-patterns and embodied patterns of self-identification would hinder the very awareness that one is watching a play (let alone watching anything at all), and in turn block the proper recognition of the vibhāvas, etc. Or even worse, one might act in a completely random way that would be detrimental to the performance experience overall. But the spectator is to bring to bear the traces of past emotional experiences upon the drama because it is by virtue of his affect-rich past experiences that he is able to positively find the artwork meaningful. For one, the vāsanās attune us to the subtleties of the place-specific language (including body language) employed by the artwork; without them, the appearances of the performance (e.g., abhinaya, or the gestures of the actor) and their inter-relations would simply not be intelligible, and rasa in turn could not arise.473 But these deeply embedded prejudices also enable the art-relisher in a different way. Insofar as rasa involves a recollection of soteriological truths that, according to Śaivas, we have merely forgotten (e.g., that one is identical with divine consciousness), those past perceptions acquired over many previous lifetimes and developed from one’s childhood does not feel the passion [rasa]” (Jha, 1925, p. 54. Taken from “Literary Experience as Object of Knowledge,” p. 114).

473 This becomes particularly evident once one recalls that dhvani (poetic suggestion) hinges upon one’s being enculturated in the customs, forms of expression, etc., that hold a community together.
are integral to equipping the spectator with that aesthetic sensitivity that is requisite for appreciating rasa as such.

Abhinava’s recognition of the positive value of not just the bhāvas, but also the vāsanās for the production of rasa, however, leads to what appears to be an apparent inconsistency in his conception of sādhāranīkaraṇa—on the one hand, particularity is to give way to generalization, while on the other hand, personal prejudices are to bring to life the work of art. In order to resolve this issue, note that this concept can be interpreted in two ways. The first has been explained already, and it pertains to Bhaṭṭanāyaka's conception. In brief, this notion of sādhāranīkaraṇa subsumes the individual under the universal in a one-way process. But Abhinava holds that there can be reciprocity in this interrelation between the particular and the general. That is, aesthetic generalization can also be understood as a two-way process involving first the movement from the particular to the universal, and then a return movement back to particularity, with the second particular not being the same as the first.474

With respect to the watching of the drama, this explains, first of all, how the individual spectator can understand the meaning of the experiences presented on the stage, namely, that they are universally sharable because of the common ground of all particular humans (i.e., the universal of humanity). But if we stop here by taking sādhāranīkaraṇa as a one-way process, then the character presented on the stage (or literary page) becomes reduced to an abstraction, while the aesthete likewise becomes

474 R. B. Patankar has observed this in “Does the Rasa Theory have any Modern Relevance?,” p. 294.
stripped of all personal peculiarities. As a result of this mere sublation of the ego, the aesthetic experience would culminate in the tanmayībhāva stage (immersion in the artistic situation) and not progress to that self-savoring of consciousness that attends the positive recognition of oneself as the agent of the alternating play of illumination (prakāśa) and self-fragmentation (vimarṣa). Contrary to the orthodox interpretation of the art experience, then, characters can still be artistically effective (even in educing rasa) while also being individualized. The aesthetic experience of the individual spectator, meanwhile, can still be fulfilling without its involving total transcendence of the ego. To the other extreme, however, we cannot fall to “the Crocean particularist position that the function of art is to reveal the individual physiognomy of things.” Rather than holding that art is to either subordinate the individual to the universal or do the opposite, then, Abhinava holds that rasa art is to harmonize the two by means of a playful alternation, and maintain this balance in varying degrees—obtaining universalization at one moment and particularization at another—though always in view of this play.

In keeping with Bharata’s rasa theory as both a practical science of the emotions and a theory of aesthetic perception, Abhinava’s interpretation of the process of universalization (sādhāraṇīkaraṇa) applies to the work of both the vibhāvas (e.g., the theatrical character) and the spectator. Let us first focus upon how this understanding of sādhāraṇīkaraṇa determines the development of character from the side of the actor. As discussed by Lollaṭa and Śaṅkuka, the actor’s primary role is to develop character. But for Abhinava, the actor does not communicate the rasa from within himself and out onto

\[475\] Note how Aristotle also does this, both with his logic and his aesthetics. Indeed, he does go further than Plato in recognizing the individuality of the person. But he still privileges the universal.
the spectator (Lollaṭa’s position), for rasa will not be educed if the audience merely perceives an ordinary person acting out some private emotion. Contrary to Śaṅkuka’s theory, meanwhile, the actor does not convey the rasa to the audience by way of a kind of imitation that is to be inferred, for as noted above, there is no original target character to imitate. The role itself is a pure abstraction or model that is to frame the actor’s performance, but it is not to serve as a template by which the actor is to strictly regulate his actions (for very often, there is no template at all!). Both of these models, then, are problematic with respect to the actor’s presentation of the character as generalized. For in Lollaṭa’s model, the actor’s particularity reigns over his generality in his own experience of emotion; that is, emotion in this context is overly personalized, and hence what gets conveyed is not generalized emotion. With respect to Śaṅkuka’s imitation theory, meanwhile, the individuality of the actor gets subordinated to the universal, i.e., the ideal role-model of the character. But in reducing the character to an abstraction, this lack of self-involvement on the part of the actor (i.e., his not bringing to bear his own past experiences in re-creating the character) also fails to achieve the proper balance between particular and universal.

Abhinava attempts to reconcile the problems in these two views by way of his own conception of how the actor is to balance the play between particularity and universality in his explanation of vyañjana (suggestion):

[I]t is by the vyañjana power that we are able to comprehend them [the psychological states of performance] as belonging neither to ourselves nor to our enemy nor to persons whom we are indifferent to, but as pertaining to no particular person. This is why when we witness a love scene, for instance, we do

---

476 “Does the Rasa Theory have any Modern Relevance?,” p. 296.
not become touched by the physical emotions of love, which would make us feel ashamed or apprehensive in the presence of others.\textsuperscript{477}

Contrary to ordinary judgments of sentiment, \textit{rasa} involves not mere identification with the theatrical character. Rather, \textit{rasa} bears a certain “other-worldly” (\textit{alaukika}) quality that enables that free, unfettered judgment, “what it is like to be (the [fictional] person feeling that feeling on the stage).” But in order to educe this unique judgment on the part of the aesthete, the actor must obtain this judgment (of the character’s feeling) for himself by means of his own interpretation of the self-role relation and subsequent self-projection in and through the role. This involves the actor's negotiating the incongruity between two judgments—on the one hand, the awareness of himself as a particular being determined from within by \textit{karma}, and on the other hand, the awareness of himself as the role whose objectified, generalized form he is to embody as determined from without. But in keeping with the two-way process of \textit{sādhāranīkaraṇa} that underlies the actor’s performance art, this negotiation must preserve the ambiguity of theatrical identity (or to use Ricoeur’s term, “narrative identity’’).\textsuperscript{478} The actor, then, can neither simply detach from his limited self in order to wholly identify with the dramatic scene nor simply encounter it as egoistically owned—for both of these approaches would fail to lead to the proper generalization of character. Aside from preserving the ambiguity of identity, then, how is the actor to positively negotiate this incongruity between self-as-individual and self-as-role?

\textsuperscript{477} \textit{Abhinavabhāratī}.
\textsuperscript{478} The actor's awareness of himself as a particular being is necessary in order for the him to effectively infuse the character with life, while the actor’s self-awareness as a depersonalized role amounts to his drawing upon those theatrical conventions for performing psychological states in such a way that they are made intelligible to the audience.
Abhinava's response to this issue can be understood according to the model of simulation. Simulation theorists argue that individuals (here: the actor) gain access to the mental states of others (here: the theatrical character) by assuming the roles that those others play. The primary means to this role-play is not the intellect or the senses (though they can aid in this), but the imagination. And the two movements that the imagination performs involve a de-centering from one's own limited condition and a re-centering of the individual's “egocentric map” onto the target other (i.e., the dramatic character). This second step is key, for the individual can only live through or imaginatively become the other by becoming an “I,” which itself requires him to bring to bear his own personal history, etc. To this end, self-transcendence alone is clearly inadequate, for the individual cannot merely abandon his ego. But mere introspection is equally problematic, for this involves an excessive privileging of one's own mental states. Rather, properly affecting an egocentric shift involves a kind of modification of “regular stock mental states” with artificially induced “pretend states,” which can only be achieved through simulation.

The actor who generalizes the character through simulation can be seen as harmonizing particularity and universality without overcoming its interplay. In order to evoke art emotion—which in this context is to simultaneously reflect the actor’s own past experiences and the abstract design of the role—the actor suspends his karmic inheritance

---


480 See “Simulation Without Introspection.”
in lieu of immersing himself in the target (i.e., the universal form of the role). This is followed by a return to his own self as transformed—that is, an appropriation of the role-model as simultaneously his own, and hence imbued with passion, and not his own, for he maintains a certain psychological distance from the role that he takes up through simulation.

As for the rasika, his heart is like “dry wood charged by latent fire”; it only needs to be kindled by the artwork. As noted above, the spectator must also bring with him a certain energy. Through his imagination, the aesthete is to actively participate in the unfolding of the artwork as an expression of his own creative intentionality. Consider how the ideal aesthete, insofar as he is a veritable sahṛdaya, or “one who is of like mind,” is to (re-)create the drama in his own heart, not only in terms of what it aims to convey (i.e., a particular rasa), but how it brings the rasa into being. Commenting on Abhinava's assertion that “the poet's experience is the same as the spectator's,” M. Hiriyanna notes that “the appreciation of poetry is essentially the same as the creation of it.” In light of the analysis above, I argue that we can equally substitute “actor” for “poet.” Not unlike the actor, the ideal aesthete manages his involvement in the artwork, specifically, his relationship with the dramatic character, in terms of the play-centered strategy of simulation. The rasika plays between the two polar movements of de-centering and re-centering his “egocentric map” with respect to the theatrical character.

As for the seeming contradiction between Bhaṭṭanāyaka’s universalism and Crocean particularism, this is only problematic within a karma-centered framework,

---

481 This reference is common in the Indian tradition. One source (among others) is “Rasa: Delight of the Reason,” p. 26.
which projects an either/or interpretation of this problem—namely, either the spectator interprets the artwork in terms of his own karmic history, or the spectator becomes a blank slate so that he can perfectly mirror the artwork. But this conflict is not problematic in the context of Abhinava's aesthetic phenomenology, for the question of karma gets encompassed within the freedom of the imagination. In fact, in order to move beyond the mere experience of self-transcendence at the tanmayaḥbhāva stage, the aesthete must find a certain reflection of himself (qua individual agency) in the artistic situation and abide by the will of the imagination to engage in role-play, rather than merely abandoning himself to the artwork and renouncing his involvement in its imagined world. The priority of the imagination, then, is not only descriptively true; it also has normative power. That is, neither the vāsanās as such nor the bhāvas as such limit the aesthete’s interpretation of the drama. Rather, what is at issue is the attitude that he takes up in imagining a fit between his own personal, karmic self and the projected self of the dramatic role with whom he empathetically identifies.

This conception of sādhāraṇīkaraṇa discloses new dimensions of the rasa experience itself, particularly its exemplariness for ordinary experience. That unique judgment, “what it is like to be,” which is brought on by simulated role-play, is not simply the means to “producing” rasa (by both actor and spectator). Rasa itself is that very judgment. Through its inducing simulated role-play, the art participant (i.e., either actor or spectator) no longer interprets the drama strictly in terms of his karmic past, nor does he wholly dissociate from that past through a strong version of depersonalization.

Rather, he encompasses the interplay between the two with a view to taking the character (and the other elements of the drama) into his heart.

We can further demonstrate how the *rasa* experience is paradigmatic of experience generally by noting that the structure of Abhinava’s model of *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* is homologous to that of the play of Śiva-Śakti. Accordingly, the individual participant in art and ritual contexts, for example, does not passively witness the play of consciousness as *līlā*. Rather, he participates in it by first suspending or decentering from the being of his own *karmic* self and then entering into or recentering himself (even if only in his imagination) in his prescribed dramatic or ritual role. Moreover, by doing so according to the two-way play of generalization theorized by Abhinava, the individual does not seek to realize his true identity with the Ultimate Super-Agent, Śiva. Rather, the participant appropriates the Person, Śiva, and thereby completes the dialectic of personal identity theorized by Śaivism, through the very performance of the act of existing as the given role. In short, means and end coalesce simply by seizing upon the freedom of the imagination to play the part of one’s prescribed role as an expression of one’s identity with the play of Śiva-Śakti.

The role of the *vāsanās*, accordingly, is central in accomplishing this vertical extension of agency through *rasa*. In light of the inter-connection between the *bhāvas* and the *vāsanās*, the *sthāyibhāvas* (stable emotions) inhere in the individual as predispositions, and become manifest and generalized through contact with the *vibhāvas*, etc., of the artwork. The participant’s ego weakens as a result and merges with absolute consciousness. That is, *rasa* occurs, and it is attended by the experience of a kind of
transcendent bliss. But this simulation of Brahman that occurs in and through rasa is not a final end in itself. Rather, this enlightened bliss in the self (prakāśamaya ātmānanda) facilitates the recognition of the bhāvas, or a return to one's limited self, though now in full awareness of one's true nature as Śiva, the True Agent.\[^{483}\]

5.3.c. The “Where” of Art Emotion: Recovering Śakti in the Heart Universal

This leads to the third question by means of which Abhinava responds to his predecessors: “Where does rasa occur?” Art emotion carves out a space wherein the agent not only clarifies the structure of Becoming as one of play, but also realizes his true freedom through the deep appropriation of the Person, Śiva. The term that I shall use in reconstructing the concept of the seat of rasa is “the Heart Universal.” The Heart Universal is the space of intersubjective openness; it is the domain where the interpretation of “first-person perceptual experience is essentially intersubjectively open.”\[^{484}\] The relishing of art emotion highlights this experience, for what takes place in the Heart Universal is qualitatively distinct from what occurs in the dualistic space imagined by the heart of the limited agent. But while Abhinava's understanding of the development of the heart, not unlike in the orthodox framework, involves an integration of the individual with the metaphysical order, unlike the orthodoxy, Abhinava holds that this carries with it that peculiarly Śaiva realization of the person as identical with the

\[^{483}\] The author of “Literary Experience as Object of Knowledge” explains: “[W]e become aware of our own self in the acute emotional experience... because this experience of ānanda is an enrichment of our being/sensibility as at that moment and in that moment we are endowed with the ability to feel the suffering, etc., of the other, of someone else, as our own. For the moment, we are transformed and are nobler than our real self” (p. 115).
creative power of consciousness (śakti) that unfolds as the world itself. And with this power, the aesthete gains power over not only inner emotional life, but those karmically embodied role-models by means of which he exercises his freedom at all.

Let us begin by drawing out the implications of the previous section’s discussion of the interplay of spectator and the constitutive elements of the artwork (vibhāvas such as the dramatic character, etc.). For Abhinava, the artwork itself is an event of hermeneutic play. In keeping with Śaiva epistemology, the role of the spectator is central to Abhinava’s epistemology of aesthetic experience. But it is important to distinguish Abhinava’s position from that of subjectivism, which devalues the work in the artwork as a thing in itself by over-emphasizing the priority of the subject and her experience. Rasa cannot occur without the artwork itself, for it is the power of the artwork to provoke an experience for the aesthete that is not only depersonalized (through its removal of obstacles that ordinarily personalize experience), but is also positively universalizable and characterized by the feeling of expansion (through its mirroring our emotional make-up, a function that largely falls upon the “objective corollaries” of the artwork). This runs quite contrary to the position of those who have celebrated Duchamp’s Fountain, for example, which many consider a fine work of art. But while this clever presentation of something ordinary (a toilet) as extra-ordinary (a work of art) in the setting of a museum invites the spectator to give keen attention to an otherwise crude object, the Fountain merely makes an interesting point concerning the sometimes seemingly arbitrary line between the mundane and the artistic. It does not, however, itself have expressive power in terms of its conveying anything close to art-emotion as properly understood in this
context. The relishable savoring that is *rasa*, however, requires a particular kind of object, namely, an object whose work as art carries not only a peculiar ontological status, but also the capacity to present before our eyes the essence of distilled emotion. But of course, the work of art that “produces” aesthetic emotion cannot be understood in a purely objective manner, namely, as some *thing* that stands before us and does or even ought to affect all spectators in the same way. Rather, in this context art is to be understood as event, specifically, an event of hermeneutic play that entails a phenomenological shift from the appearance of the object as a seemingly static other whose power stands over, above, and apart from the spectator into an event that includes the spectator’s recognition.

In light of this understanding of the artwork, let us examine Abhinava's answer to the question of where *rasa* occurs. Concerning this issue, Abhinava curiously argues that *rasa* has no owner. The actor, first of all, cannot be the seat of *rasa* because his primary function is to facilitate the audience’s enjoyment, and his experiencing the aesthetic rapture that is *rasa* would undermine his capacity to skillfully perform his role. The dramatic character also does not experience the *rasa*, for the character only experiences *bhāva*, or ordinary life emotion. As for the poet-playwright, the *rasa* cannot exist in him either, for *rasa* is not based on any kind of personal feeling that suddenly gets realized by the poet-playwright and then transferred to the art-relisher through the

---

485 Recall that Śaṅkuka held the actor to be the primary seat of *rasa*. According to Abhinava, however, the actor is like a “*patra,*” a term that means both a vessel or glass and a character in a drama. Just like a wineglass, for example, which is only a means to someone else’s drinking the wine and hence cannot taste the wine that it holds, so too does the actor serve merely to facilitate the spectator’s tasting of *rasa*, but cannot himself experience the *rasa* (at least not while performing his role).
artwork. Similarly, rasa does not belong to the sahrdaya, and it certainly does not belong to the untrained or insensitive spectator, for all that any given individual can claim as his own are the bhāvas, or his own personal emotions.

But rasa certainly does exist somewhere. In order to bring clarity to this seeming paradox, consider a term that has been put forth by K. C. Bhattacarya—“the Heart Universal.” It may be easiest to first clarify what the Heart Universal is not. It is not some a-historical form that transcends the world (e.g., Plato’s “Forms” or Hegel’s “Reason”). Rather than privileging universality, the Heart Universal embraces the constant inter-play of manifestation (vimarśa) and return to oneness (prakāśa) that characterizes the movement of divine consciousness. Accordingly, it is also not reducible to any given, place-specific economy of (worldly) sentiments; for as is implied in the term itself, this Heart is “Universal,” and hence does not bind individuals together by means of processes of exclusion. Rather, the Heart Universal is the omnipresent space of the free play of Śiva consciousness with His consort and power, Śakti. But what does the Heart Universal have to do with rasa? Bhattacarya explains how rasa involves consciousness’s taking restful repose in the Heart Universal:

Every feeling that is depicted in art is contemplated as reflected in or sympathized with by this Heart Universal [,] and the person who contemplates the feeling merges his personal or private heart in this ubiquity. Artistic enjoyment is not a

487 The character, of course, is fictional and does not really experience any bhāva, because he does not really exist. It is worthwhile to point this out because other rasa theorists, in particular Lollatā, have argued that rasa exists in the character.

488 Abhinava explains: “The dramatic representation of the actor which is based on the (dramatic) poem is ultimately based on the generalized (or universalized or idealized) samvīt (emotion or feeling)—not on the poet’s personal emotion or feeling as it actually was” (Abhinavabhārat, Vol 1/VI 38, p. 294).

488 In keeping with Bharata’s stance, Abhinava tells us that this somewhere is in the drama (and in poetry as well when it is mentally dramatized). In fact, the only place that Abhinava unambiguously states that rasa does not exist is in everyday life. But this still does not resolve the paradox, for how can rasa exist in the drama but not in the actor, the dramatic character, the playwright, or the spectator?
feeling of the enjoyer on his own account; it involves a dropping of self-consciousness, while the feeling that is enjoyed… is freed from its reference to an individual subject and eternalized in the Heart Universal.\(^\text{489}\)

Bhattacarya’s term is applicable here because, as noted above, Abhinava holds *rasa* to have a deeply metaphysical meaning. Moreover, he takes emotion and consciousness generally to be heart-centered. And finally, emotion ultimately has its ground not in the heart (*hrdaya*) of the agent qua limited individuality but the agent qua identification with divine, omnipresent consciousness.

Abhinava incorporates a similar understanding of the heart, with its deep rootedness in the ontological, in order to adapt to his own aesthetic theory key concepts from the classical Sanskrit poetic tradition, namely, its notions of the heart (*hrdaya*) and the ideal aesthete (the *sahrdaya* or *rasika*). The *sahrdaya* indeed takes the world of the artwork into his heart; it is there that he experiences the *rasa*. But this is not a self-centered experience of emotion; the emotion that gets presented in the aesthete's heart is not owned, for the tie with the ego has been sufficiently relaxed in order to prevent the *rasika* from claiming ownership of the emotion-saturated world of the artwork for his limited self. Thus, while it is the heart of the agent qua limited individuality that bears ordinary life emotions (*bhāvas*), it is in the Heart Universal, which in the art experience is accessible only by *sahrdayas*, where art-emotions get displayed. But in keeping with the analysis above concerning the realization of *rasa*, the *rasika* does not utterly lose the awareness of himself as a located individual; he does not utterly cut off the tie with the limited self. Thus, rather than experiencing art from within his limited individuality, to

the one extreme, or merely transcending the ego, to the other, the art-relisher sees

through the ego without being blinkered by its prejudices, with his self-awareness
expanding beyond its normal boundaries and pervading the space of the Heart Universal
as a result. Moreover, even frightening feelings are not turned away from, for in the Heart
Universal there effectively are no personalized fears or thoughts, only fear-in-general,
which is relishable precisely because of its unbelongingness.

This puzzle of belonging provides a clue to the problem of locating rasa. Insofar
as the rasas do not get beheld in any particular person’s heart, they do not belong to
anybody. But contrary to the orthodoxy, Abhinava does not secure the metaphysical
meaning of rasa at the expense of overcoming the aesthete's particularity, per se, for the
two-way process of sadāraṇātkaraṇa involves and leads to the development of particular
human persons, not just idealized ones who have been purified of their karmic
inheritance. Those involved in the realization of rasa, accordingly, are to be seen as
sharing in a subjectivity “that does not entail unsharable individuality or privacy.”

In this way, we can include the art-relisher, the poet-playwright, and even the actor. Much
attention has already been devoted to the art-experience of the former. Rasa gets realized
by cultured men (sahādayas or rasikas), but only upon their undergoing a certain
transformation of the heart. As for the poet-playwright, Abhinava explains that the poet is
only able to create rasa-educing dramas because he has overcome his sorrow or personal
joy before creating; he recognizes that art emotion is not his own insofar as he identifies

490 “Ownerless Emotions,” p. 188.
himself as a limited individual. With respect to the actor, finally, it can be argued that Abhinava, in spite of less optimistic comments he makes elsewhere, at least opens the door to the possibility of the actor’s experiencing rasa. Commenting on Lollaṭa’s view, Abhinava states that “aesthetic experience is possible in the actor, through his vāsanās (for he has himself experienced such feelings in his previous existences); and through concentrated attention he can continue to follow the laya (tempo) and other dramatic conventions [while still acting].” Having mastered abhinaya to such an exceptional degree that even the tasting of rasa cannot distract him, the most skilled of actors can experience rasa in the midst of practicing his performance art. But again, rasa does not belong to the actor in any exclusive sense, for it can only be realized in the Heart.

---
491 Having assimilated, contemplated, and thereby generalized that feeling, the poet is now able to communicate something that he has realized by way of poetic sensibility and creative imagination. “[T]he rasa existing in the poet is like the seed which is the root-cause of the tree,” writes Abhinava [Abhinavabhārata, Vol 1/VI 38, p. 294 (taken from “Rasa and its Āśraya”, p. 84-5)]. As an example of how the kavi does and must experience the rasa, the tradition commonly refers to Vālmīki's composition of the Rāmāyāna. Dehejia notes in The Advaita of Art: “The classical example given in the texts is that of the poet Vālmīki, who when he was grieved with the poignant death of the krauñca couple, did not write of his personal sorrow, but converted this deeply emotional experience into the epic of Rāmāyāna” (p. 50).

492 Abhinavabhārata, Vol. 1, Ch. 6. 10, p 264 (taken from “Outline of Abhinavagupta’s Aesthetics,” p. 86). Regarding the actor's experiencing rasa in the midst of his performance, it appears that his main concern is that this experience of rapture will overwhelm him, though he does not categorically deny the possibility of both occurring at the same time. Concerning this, B. N. Goswamy makes the following interesting observation: “To the natural question whether the actor or the artist also experiences rasa, several writers including Viśvanātha maintain that he 'may obtain aesthetic experience from the spectacle of his own performance.' The actor is understood quite naturally not to be unmoved by 'the passions he depicts.' Likewise the musician, the dancer, the maker of an image would be involved in the emotion that he brings to his performance or work, but the experiencing of emotion before or during the act of making or performing, it is stated, is of an order different from the rasa experience, which has that illuminating, suffusing character, is that lightning flash of delight, and can be experienced by the maker or the performer only when and if he puts himself in the position of a viewer of himself and his work” (Taken from “Rasa: Delight of the Reason,” p. 25). Elsewhere, Indian responses to the question of the actor's experiencing rasa leave open this possibility. Rāmacandra and Guṇacandra, the authors of the Nāṭyadarpana, for example, make an interesting comparison between the prostitute who sometimes enjoys her work and the actor who experiences the bliss of rasa when he simultaneously identifies with the role (e.g., Rāma) and yet witnesses himself performing the role. Generally, they say, an actor does not experience rasa, but there is no inviolable rule that he cannot do so. A prostitute displays sexual pleasure in order to arouse her customer's sexual excitement (only) out of greed for money. But it can happen that sometimes she too will experience profound sexual pleasure. (Taken from Aesthetic Rapture, Vol. II: Notes, f. n. 351).
Universal, which requires the actor’s self-achieved submission to the play of divine consciousness, which itself positively encompasses all claims to ownership.

But the transformation that *rasa* effects in the Heart Universal is not just an inward emotional one. As pointed to just above, it also has an ontological dimension. Understanding this dimension of the *rasa* experience is key to disclosing how art emotion can evoke for the agent a full realization of his freedom. But this requires considering how the enjoyment of emotion in the Heart Universal, not unlike its production, accords with the Śaiva model of self-realization. As demonstrated in Chapter Three, the experience of self-realization is marked by a play of self-recognition wherein the agent recognizes the other as an expression of his identity with Śiva consciousness. This recognition is often characterized in terms of a process of reflection, or *pratibimba*. In the context of the four *upāyas* (ways) of Śaiva soteriological practice, the theory of *pratibimba* is applicable to the highest *upaya* (*śāmbhavopāya*), wherein one attains the full recognition that all things are related to, and every act in turn leads to, participation in divine consciousness. In order to stimulate the cognitive side of such mystical realization, Abhinava commonly uses the example of a reflection in the mirror, wherein the reflection is the entire world and the mirror is pure consciousness. Another example that Abhinava gives is that of an echo (*pratiśrutka*) resounding in space. This phenomenon involves more than the original sound; the sound must be heard back by the one who produced it. Moreover, the individual not only hears his own voice; he hears his own voice *as if it were the voice of somebody else.*

493 Śaivism cannot even be said to privilege visual experience, as does the Platonic-Christian tradition on account of the amenability of visual experience to detached contemplation or abstract thought. In addition
an event, but re-cognizes it as simultaneously other and yet not other than himself. That is, just as the non-difference of the original (bimba) and the reflection (pratibimba) is realized, so too does the knowing subject recognize that the objectified other is an expression of his own consciousness. And from the yogin’s recognition that (a) he is both the cognizer and the cognized, and (b) he is neither simply the cognizer nor the cognized, it follows that he must be the play of consciousness between the two, which is Śiva Himself.

Similarly, the artwork creates a space wherein we experience objects in terms of the play of divine self-recognition. Chakrabarti explains how the art-relisher, upon merging with the Heart Universal, “loses herself in an ownerless emotion and then marvels at this impersonal subjectivity: ‘How could I consciously, from inside, get outside of my individuality, time and space and get inside the world of fiction or play or painting?’” In the midst of this play of reflection, rasa is experienced as the thrill of self-marveling, not a mere enhancement of emotion. And this is made possible because Abhinava’s art-relisher, contrary to Plato’s wandering aesthete, does not rest in himself as a distanced subject standing apart from the object, nor does he identify with some first cause that has set the world in motion and is now absent (the Christian model). Rather, insofar as he becomes aware of his repose (viśrānti) in “the locus of the revelation of Consciousness,” i.e., the Heart Universal, he becomes identical with the play of reflection that both vibrates with expansive energy and yet merges or comes to rest (viśrānti) in all

to the example given above of the echo as providing an aural experience of reflection, Abhinava demonstrates how each of the senses can disclose a realization of our true identity with the play of Śiva consciousness. For more on this, see “Aesthetics of Mysticism.”

494 “Ownerless Emotions,” p. 196.
things. To this end, the ambiguous location of the emotions presented in the space of the theater is crucial. It is of the utmost importance that there occurs the judgment, “‘These (feelings) are mine for sure,’ ‘They are only my enemy’s,’ ‘They are of an indifferent stranger’s,’ ‘They are not mine,’ ‘They are not of my enemy’s,’ ‘They are not of a neutral person’s.’” The space of the Heart Universal is qualitatively distinct from mundane reality (the space of the individual heart) because here the experience of the emotions is marked by a certain intersubjective openness. Moreover, the artwork does not force this openness “from the outside,” as it were, for the sahrdaya directly experiences the artwork (by way of a kind of mirroring or self-recognition) as an expression of his own creative intentionality. Holding open the ambiguity of emotions in the Heart Universal in this way, then, the artwork clarifies the structure of agency as “founded upon an a priori reference to the Other.” And it does so through a simulation of “what it is like to be” that discloses not the limited self of the poet-playwright, the actor, the character, or the spectator. Rather, it manifests the Absolute Self still clothed in the vestiges of its emotional life. Not unlike the yogin’s self-recognition in soteriological practice, the rasa experience, likewise presuming the self-revelatory character of the Self, affects a play of reflection (pratibimba) by means of which the art-relisher imitates the creative act of divine consciousness, namely, “I am that.”

495 This is a reference to Mammaṭa's famous summary of Abhinava's theory of ownerless or transpersonal emotions (rasa). Reference taken from “Ownerless Emotions,” p.197.
496 “Empathy and Consciousness”, p. 15.
497 Here the structural similarity of the practical method of Abhinava's aesthetic phenomenology to that of the Pratyabhijñā system becomes perfectly clear: the aim is not to secure the agent by overcoming the ambiguity of experience (vimarśa), but to transform it by clarifying the two-way alternation of Śiva-Śakti as an expression of one's own primordial desire for play.
Here the structural similarity of the practical method of Abhinava's aesthetic phenomenology to that of the Pratyabhijñā system becomes clear. The aim of both is not to secure agency by overcoming the ambiguity of self-conscious experience (vimarśa). Rather, it is to affect an expansion of agency by stimulating the alternating movement of Śiva-Śakti and disclosing it as an expression of one's own primordial desire for play. For the Śaiva adept, this involves gaining certain powers (śaktis) for authoring experience through philosophical activity. Abhinava’s ideal aesthete, for his part, obtains similar powers through his engagement with the artwork. This is implicit in the term camatkāra.498 “Camatkāra” refers to the wonder of overwhelming joy or delight, and it attends both the mystical rapture of the yogin and the rasa experience of the art-relisher.

Lilian Silburn notes the kinship of aesthetic and mystical domains in terms of camatkāra:

[Camatkāra is] the rapture proper to the sahṛdaya who appreciates the drama and to the mystic who, at a much higher degree, enjoys divine bliss. But in both cases the impression is spontaneous, it does not depend on any effort. The guru in the case of the second or the actor in the case of the first do nothing but lifting the veil and removing the obstacle, so that the inner ecstasy wells up immediately.499

Attended by the sudden flash of intuition that is pratībhā, the arising of camatkāra, whether in the context of mystical or aesthetic experience, occurs beyond strictly causal avenues. But while it is spontaneous, camatkṛti (as well as pratībhā) rarely occurs by complete accident, which would require either an event of astonishing beauty and grace or an agent of unusually heightened sensitivity. But conditions can be created by either artistic expression or sustained spiritual practice for a quasi-causal “production” of camatkāra.

498 In Chapter Three I examined how the orthodox conception of rasa interlinks aesthetic and mystical experience through this term.
Above I discussed those obstacles to *rasa* that the artwork is to remove. Just as the removal of obstacles in the domain of mysticism yields aesthetic delight, so too does the lifting of the veil of ignorance in the aesthetic domain lead not only to *rasa*, but to spiritual realization as well. Abhinava alludes to this in a passage in the *Tantrāloka*:

In the measure in which the uncreated reality exceeds, to the same degree the wonder of delight (*camatkāra*) increases… Those who rest in the intuitive consciousness (*pratibhā*) consisting in the fullness of the first letters, certainly attain poetic and rhetoric gifts. But he who rests in pure Consciousness in its highest form, devoid of any limitations of conventions, what is it that he does not know? What is it that he is not able to do? 500

Abhinava again points to the intimate relationship between *pratibhā* (the illuminating power of pure consciousness) and *camatkāra*, but here he does so with a view to the continuity of aesthetic and spiritual excellence. On the one hand, mystical realization leads to enhanced powers of artistic expression (e.g., “poetic and rhetoric gifts”), presumably by virtue of empowering the individual to encompass the vertical alternation of agency and thereby go beyond or creatively appropriate the conventions of the given medium, rather than being contained by them. Poetic creation, meanwhile, leads not only to *rasa*. By virtue of its sharing in the wonder of mystical delight (*camatkāra*), it also gives rise to the agential freedom that otherwise results from divine self-recognition.

This understanding of the *rasa* experience is further elucidated in the *Parātrīśikā Vivaraṇa*, wherein Abhinava identifies *camatkāra* with the supreme Śakti (power): “The Supreme Power, who is Bhairavī, whose characteristic is wondrous delight issuing from

500 *Tantrāloka*, XI. 76-80 (Taken from “Aesthetics of Mysticism,” p342)
her unique autonomy, shines externally by Herself."⁵⁰¹ Whether experienced in an aesthetic or mystical context, *camatkāra* leads to participation in Śakti. That is, in re-enacting the symbolic play of Śiva-Śakti, the art-relisher not only clarifies the intersubjective structure of the agent (by re-acquainting himself with the other through merging with the Heart Universal). In identifying with absolute consciousness, the *rasika* recovers the creative power of Śakti that had hitherto been misplaced in the other (Śakti)—for Śakti is now understood as “being immersed (āveśa) in the one *rasa* of absolute freedom (*svātantra*).”⁵⁰²

Having appropriated the vertical extension of the Person, Śiva, through the recognition of the hermeneutic play of the artwork, the agent can now exercise greater freedom over the emotions and their corresponding objects. In demonstrating this, recall the earlier comparison of the two “strangling” situations, the former pertaining to a real life situation (watching one’s neighbor being strangled), the latter to an art situation (watching a theater production of the famous scene from Othello). In both instances, the meaningfulness of the situation does not involve simply noticing that a woman is being choked. Comprehending these events also involves making the experience of the woman (*bhaya* or fear) in some sense one’s own. But of course, the meaning is qualitatively different between the former and the latter, for the experience of fear in the first case ties us down to our limitedness and compels us to interpret the world accordingly, i.e., as other and a source of power over us. The latter event, however, is marked by a simulation of fear-in-general in the context of the play of Śiva consciousness. Its meaningfulness, in

---

turn, does not culminate in the spectator’s acting out his desperation with a view to preventing the attacker from strangling the woman. Rather, the spectator of Othello experiences this grounding or self-contraction as a hermeneutic strategy for acquainting himself with the power underwriting the two-way play of Śiva consciousness (i.e., between involvement and detachment), and ultimately giving expression to his identification with that process. What results is the growth of a certain power and skillfulness over the emotions regulating experience. Now even the experience of “dark” emotions (e.g., sorrow, wrath, fear, disgust), which ordinarily heighten the dualism of self and other, can be taken into the heart (i.e., the Heart Universal) as mixed with pleasure and seized upon in order to sharpen our attention to what takes place. Moreover, in recognizing Śakti as immersed (āveśa) in this experience of rasa, emotion does not become an obstacle to freedom, but an integral dimension of the expression of our true identity.⁵⁰³ Recovery of the śaktis through the rasa experience, in short, develops emotional athleticism.

But going beyond this, the emotional agility made available through the rasa experience yields power over our karmically embodied, socially inherited roles. As demonstrated in the previous chapter's discussion of the orthodox use of rasa for maintaining the social hierarchy, the emotions have affective force in binding us to our prescribed roles. And in this chapter as well we have seen how life emotion reifies the influence of the vāsanās upon ordinary experience and compels us to secure the integrity

---

⁵⁰² Ibid.
⁵⁰³ This is particularly important in the case of feeling “dark” emotions (e.g., sorrow [soka], anger [krodha], fear [bhaya], and disgust [jugupsā]), as they are more prone to compel us to imagine ourselves as standing
of the self-role relation. The deep appropriation of Becoming attending the *rasa*
experience, however, does not involve purifying the agent of his *karmic* inheritance, but
centering him in the will of the imagination with a view to recovering that primordial
power (*śakti*) to project himself into the world through creative role-play. Rather than
subordinating him to his roles or estranging him from them, the emotional athleticism
developed by this *Śaiva*-based experience of *rasa* leads to role-empowerment.

Returning to the question of where *rasa* occurs helps to clarify this point. As
noted above, *rasa* has no primary seat or resting place. And this is for two reasons. For
one, no limited agent can experience *rasa* while maintaining the integral unity of any
particular self-role relation; for in assuming the hermeneutic posture that is suitable to
relishing emotion in the Heart Universal, the individual puts at risk his ordinary self-
understanding in lieu of encompassing the unceasing play of identity that is Śiva-Śakti.
*Rasa* has no locus, in other words, because only role-players can be found, not role-
owners. This is no cause for despair, meanwhile, for *rasa* involves not a loss of agential
power (as in the orthodox framework), but its increase. This leads to the second reason.
*Rasa* has no locus or resting place because it pervades the whole space of the artwork,
occurring not only in the intersubjective space between sensitive art-relisher and the
imagined world of the artwork (e.g., the dramatic characters, etc.), but also in the
intrapersonal between-ness of the self as a unique “myself” and the self as a one-among-
many social individual.\(^{504}\) Thus, just as simulated role-play is the means to the production

---

\(^{504}\) To the end of producing *rasa* as this play, the poet-playwright, actor, and spectator all take part, and experience *rasa* in their respective capacities. “*A* dramatic poem is like a tree [the seed of which has been
of rasa, so too does it become the end of rasa, as the ideal aesthete develops skillfulness in performing the act of existing as not only the dramatic character, but also himself.

Bhattacarya explains how rasa fills this internal space in the art-relisher’s awareness with creative power:

There is a difference between imagining an object as actual and imagining it as imaginary. Now the character in a drama (or story) is not imagined by me as an actual person: I imagine someone imagining the character as an actual person and I sympathize with this imaginary someone… The imaginary second person is not one particular person but someone or any one person. He has the value of a concept of a person in general: only here we have in the concept an efflux of feeling and not of the intellect… This felt person in general may be semi-mythologically called the Heart Universal.505

In short, the Heart Universal is the Ultimate Super-Agent Himself, Śiva, who is omnipresent. Accordingly, rasa involves the dialectical play of identity that occurs in the space between shifting poles, e.g., self as self-reflective subject and self as objectified other, prakāśa (illumination or light) and vimarśa (proliferation or delight). It has no seat, accordingly, because it simply cannot be pinned down, always traversing the gap between these poles as a consequence of the creative intentionality of Śiva consciousness at play with His consort and power, Śakti. But the experience of art emotion does not in any way subordinate us to this play. Rather, in light of the homologous structuration of aesthetic experience and Śaiva mystical realization, rasa is power in the midst of the play of consciousness. Through the deep appropriation of Becoming that occurs in the midst of

---

planted by the poet],” Abhinava notes. “The dramatic representation by the actor is like the flower, etc. The spectator’s aesthetic enjoyment is like the fruit. Consequently everything is full of rasa.” Abh., Vol 1, p294 (translation from “Āśraya of rasa,” p. 85.)

one’s merging with the Heart Universal, *rasa* is power over not just the order of emotion, but those socially projected roles that we have *karmically* inherited as our own.

### 5.4. Conclusion: Concretizing Intersubjective Openness: *Rasa*, Role-Play, and Encompassing Relations with Other Beings

This final section examines how the *rasa* experience brings completion to the Śaiva dialectic of personal identity by developing the agent’s abilities to engage in role-play with concrete others, not just generalized forms of the Super-Agent that have become crystallized in the collective imaginaire. This requires the agent to not just passively interpret experience as intersubjectively open from the standpoint of a detached witness (as in the Advaita Vedānta model). Rather, he must seize upon those *śaktis* provided by the *rasa* experience with a view to encompassing the relational middle between self and other. These *śaktis* include the *Cognition Śakti*, which enables the aesthete to recognize the alterity of the other and creatively negotiate this otherness, and the *Action Śakti*, which empowers the aesthete to master skillfulness in being-seen-as.

According to Abhinava, our being with others in the art experience is not a hindrance to self-realization but a condition for its full realization. In demonstrating this, consider how Abhinava’s aesthetic theory creatively draws upon orthodox Hindu thought. At least as early as the Vedic period, Indian philosophers and poets have held manifest phenomena to be alive with breath (*prāṇa*) and capable of subjective feelings (*cinmaya*). Among the classical *darśanas*, Sāṃkhya elaborated perhaps the most sophisticated theory of the inter-relation of emotion and the metaphysical. According to

---

Sāṃkhya metaphysics, all phenomena undergo transformation in terms of three gunas—sattva (delight), rajas (dynamicity), and tamas (heaviness). Mixed together in varying proportions, these strands of pleasure, pain, and torpor not only string together entities through time, but also interconnect them spatially with other entities. Relationality, in short, is an integral dimension of existence. But the gunas are also to be taken to mean basic emotive or feelable strands. Concerning this view, Chakrabarti tells us that “To be is to feel or be felt.” That is, affective character was held to be an integral feature of intentional awareness, with this sense of being with others having directive force in negotiating our very being in the world.

Abhinava not only recovers the original meaning of the word for emotion (i.e., “bhāva” as “basic mode of bringing into being”), he also incorporates the Sāṃkhya theory of the gunas in order to explain how one comes to rest in unifying consciousness through the proper experience of the basic emotions. Each of the eight sthāyībhāvas (stable emotions) are explained in terms of distinct patterns of interaction and predominance between pleasure and pain. In brief, the predominance of rajas leads to the quickening (druti) of consciousness, the interplay of tamas and sattva gives rise to its

507 This has already been confirmed through consideration of how the term “bhāva” links together the orders of affect and experience (or Becoming). Recall that “bhāva” means both “emotion” and (in its literal meaning) “a manner of making it be.” See Ibid.

508 Note that, for reasons not unrelated to those noted in the previous chapter, Sāṃkhya’s feeling-driven ontology was rejected by many later philosophers. Abhinava’s incorporation of Sāṃkhya aesthetic theory is consistent with his appropriation of its ontological scheme. As for Bhaṭṭāṇāyaka’s theory of the enjoyment of rasa, earlier I alluded to how the rasas get “expressed through modifications of that common nature where the first strand of delight dominates and how the pain of restless appetite of dynamicity heightens the thrill of finding restful fulfillment in the self-tasting of an art-emotion.” Abhinava simplifies Bhaṭṭāṇāyaka’s theory of the gunas into “a pleasure-pain dynamic” (See Ibid.). It also bears noting that in Sāṃkhya, these gunas are unconscious, and consciousness is entirely unconnected to them (a tenet that Abhinava rejects).
spreading (vistara), and luminous opening up occurs from the predominance of sattva.\textsuperscript{509} In the experience of rasa, meanwhile, consciousness attains a fluid equilibrium between these three emotion-transmuting operations. Awareness “attains its nature of quickening, spreading, and luminous opening up,” Chakrabarti explains, “through a variety of intertwining of rajas and tamas with the sentience of delightful sattva.”\textsuperscript{510} But what relevance does this explanation of rasa have for managing our relations with others? In keeping with Śaiva soteriology, Abhinava holds that all beings depend upon “the constantly spontaneously independently effulgent Self-Consciousness… by mimicking… as it were, the agentive aspect of ‘making’ or ‘creating’ present in that Self.”\textsuperscript{511} That is, no entity is complete in itself, for all beings tend towards each other with a view to resting in that metaphysical end-point which is Śiva consciousness. Accordingly, limited judgments (e.g., “There is a stone here on the ground which needs to be to the left of that other stone.”) look for support from more foundational awarenesses, such as, “It appears as if or feels like that is a stone here which I saw elsewhere earlier.” But even these simulations in the form of “what it is like to feel as if there is a stone out there” need a more secure foundation, namely, an “I-consciousness” to which it has to feel in some way and in which it can “get a grounding in unquestionable existence.”\textsuperscript{512} According to Abhinava, the experience of rasa responds to precisely this problematic. Through its quickening, spreading out, and luminous opening up of limited consciousness to other

\textsuperscript{509} In referencing Abhinavagupta’s commentary on the Nāṭyaśāstra, Chakrabarti explains how Abhinava “brings back the function of delight, dynamicity, and laxity in his mature theory of the fluid equilibrium of the three emotion-transmuting operations: ‘quickening (druti) due to predominance of rajas, spreading (vistara), due to an interplay of tamas and sattva, and luminous opening up (vikāśa), due to sattva.’”

\textsuperscript{510} “Ownerless Emotions,” p. 190.

\textsuperscript{511} “Heart of Repose,” p. 30.

\textsuperscript{512} I am following Chakrabarti’s argument here in “Heart of Repose,” p. 30.
entities, *rasa* refines those *gunas* by means of which we connect (through feeling and being felt) with others, leading ultimately to repose in unifying consciousness and the recognition that one has simply been pretending to be self-terminated.

Linking the aesthetic and metaphysical meanings of feeling in this way, Abhinava demonstrates how *rasa* as a kind of culminating experience of being with others is enabled by the same repose through which the *yogin* encompasses relations with other beings. Through *viśrānti*, or repose in the play of Śiva-Śakti, both the *rasika* and the *yogin* indeed experience a “dropping of ego-consciousness” in the ubiquitous space of the Heart Universal that now includes all individual entities. As explained in Chapter Three, *viśrānti* is the deep-seated, playful, self-reflexive aspect of consciousness by which the individual agent realizes the epistemic-ontological structure of Śiva consciousness as his own. But the self-realized agent does not look beyond others by reducing them to abstractions or mere instruments in some solipsistic quest for self-realization. Rather, the Heart Universal embraces all things particular as expressions of the achieved person’s own creative intentionality. Divine self-recognition is characterized by an overflowing fullness that embraces and fully participates in the play of Śiva consciousness between actual, concrete others. Abhinava explains in the *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvimārsinī*:

> The free vibrant reflexive *vimārśa* can take up all tasks. It makes the other oneself, turns oneself into another, unifies both into one, rejects this unified mix of the two. Such is its nature. It is that spontaneous inner dialogue that imbues our consciousness with the Word and with a self-marveling [*camatkāra*] at its own overflowing fullness.\(^{513}\)

Through merging with the Heart Universal, aesthetic experience brings others fully into view and, having clarified one’s identity with the endless play of Śiva-Śakti, interprets one’s relations with others in terms of this play of consciousness. The other is neither sublimated, as in the Vedānta scheme, nor is the possible marveling at her beauty preceded by a turning away from her indomitable corporeality, as occurs for the aesthetic sensibility of Plato. Rather, the play of rasa provokes and refines the individual’s desire for engaging live others by finding power in and through the engagement itself as an expression of one’s own true identity.

In demonstrating how the rasa artwork re-enacts the Śaiva myth of self-recognition through our interactions with others, consider two relations that concretize the intersubjective structure of Śiva-Śakti in the space of the theater. The first relationship is that between spectators. The experience of being seen by others in public ordinarily heightens our self-awareness as identical with our objectified, socially prescribed roles. This sense of being felt by an other does not disappear in the space of the theatre, nor is it to be negated. But rather than limiting our freedom, it in fact makes possible the experience of rasa and, in turn, the realization of our freedom. For one, our awareness of others, and in turn our awareness of being seen by others, pressures us to refrain from disturbing others—chit-chatting at the theatre, for example, is generally an obstacle to the production of rasa. Proper comportment in the theater requires a kind of imaginative transposal, through which we inquire into or live through the other spectators' experience and act accordingly so that we do not obstruct their experiencing rasa.
But rather than being something that we must simply tolerate, the presence of other spectators can in fact positively enhance the realization of rasa. Moreover, the judgment, “what it is like to be the actual other person (sitting next to me),” is not just a means to rasa. The experience of art emotion in fact leads to an increase in empathic resonance with others. Concerning the experience of watching the famous scene from Kalidāsa’s Śakuntalā of a deer running for its life from a hunting king, Abhinava writes:

Such a relishing of egoless fear-in-general [i.e., bhayānaka rasa] is enjoyably expansive, without spatio-temporal limits and is better enjoyed together with fellow-relishers because it tends to spill over from one heart to another in that unpredictable moment of charm that effaces all boundaries.514

The effect of psychological states, determinants, and consequents on a group of people at the same time can be incredibly powerful. For one, the experience of coming together with others in the liminal space of the theater can aid spectators in transcending their spatio-temporal limitedness and merging with the encompassing Self (i.e., Śiva). Secondly, rasa can emerge more readily in such an environment because one’s heightened attention to how other spectators adopt that unique hermeneutic posture that is suitable for theatre-going aides oneself in temporarily leaving behind the ordinary world (laukika) in lieu of the performance world (alaukika). Each spectator’s consciousness is underwritten by the same eight stable emotions (sthāyibhāvas). When these states can be experienced without any individual imposition—recall Abhinava’s list of obstacles to rasa—then the spectator will experience rasa. But when multiple spectators experience this purification of the stable emotions in the same time and place, a consonance of experience centered around that sthāyibhāva results. This, in turn, serves to enhance the

514 Abhinavabharatī, in NS, ed. cit., p. 278.
quality of each individual spectator’s own aesthetic experience. Our being with others in the Heart Universal leads to a fuller expression of identity with the play of Śiva-Śakti, then, by virtue of the art experience’s transforming actual relations with others in terms of the play of divine self-recognition. For here the aesthete recognizes that the recovery of her freedom as identical with the interplay between individuals is not simply an abstract, empty truth, nor a merely imaginary one that excludes concrete others. Rather, it becomes understood as alive and ever-present in the midst of our being with others.

But the relationship in the theater that best exemplifies the myth of Śiva-Śakti is that had between the spectator and the actor. As noted in Chapter One’s discussion of Bharata’s nāṭa, the performance art of the actor requires him to preserve and creatively negotiate the ambiguity of personal identity (i.e., self as self-reflective subject and self as objectified role). The ideal spectator, meanwhile, recognizes that the actor is consciously playing between these poles of identity in order to develop the dramatic character and, ultimately, evoke rasa—for otherwise the aesthete would lose the awareness that the actor is only playing the role of Rāma. In so doing, the spectator simulates in his own imagination not only the dramatic form presented by the actor, but the actor himself. And this involves encountering the actor as simultaneously a concrete other that stands apart from him and a self with whom he identifies and through whose experience (as a role-playing performer) he lives.

In contrast with the conditions of other art media, the conditions of the theater are uniquely suited to evoking this more intimate experience of simulating an actual other (rather than just an abstract character). In demonstrating this, recall Edward Bullough’s
observations concerning psychical distance. As noted in Chapter Four’s discussion of Bharata’s theory of rasa, the success of the rasa experience hinges upon the establishment of distance between the aesthete and the artwork. In developing his thesis, Bullough further notes that the “most desirable” art experience involves establishing “the utmost decrease of Distance without its disappearance.” In Bullough’s view, all works of art play with psychical distance, while the most superior artworks bring about for the aesthete as much of a personal relation with the art situation as possible without allowing him to lose complete distance from its events. The variability of distance between under- and over-distancing, moreover, is not only a general feature of the artwork; it also has to do with differences between the arts. For example, certain forms of music—e.g., classical music and “‘pure’ music”—“appear for many people over-distanced,” largely owing to the abstract nature of music itself. Theatrical performances, on the other hand, “run a special risk of a loss of Distance owing to the material presentment of its subject-matter. The physical presence of living human beings as vehicles of dramatic art is a difficulty which no art has to face in the same way.”

The relevance of this observation for our discussion of Abhinava’s theory of rasa has a few dimensions. For one, the negotiation of distance at play in Abhinava’s aesthetics of theater both requires and develops certain powers of negotiating the interplay of self and other. I argue that these powers are the śaktis of cognition and...

---

515 “‘Psychical Distance’ as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle,” p. 763.
516 Ibid., p. 767. This is not to say that all music or even most music tends to be over-distanced. As Bullough explains, music shows “a remarkable degree of fluctuation” in distance (Ibid.). In fact, music “possesses a sensuous, frequently sensual, character… in spite of its strange abstractness… [T]he undoubted physiological and muscular stimulus of its melodies and harmonies, no less than its rhythmic aspects, would seem to account for the occasional disappearance of Distance” (Ibid.).
517 Ibid., p. 766.
action, which I examined in Chapter Three. The *Cognition Śakti*, for example, is necessary for the theater-goer to skillfully see the actor as simultaneously other and self, and in turn experience *rasa*. It enables him to enter into the interiority of the actor and thereby negotiate his otherness so that he is not just an abstract, visually distanced image of the dramatic character, as in the aesthetics of film, or a crudely physical entity or mere other, as often occurs in ordinary life. With respect to our being seen by the actor, meanwhile, we (as spectators) must exercise the *Action Śakti* so that we can encompass the interplay of self and other from our own side as active, embodied, objectified others. This entails maintaining our composure in the midst of even the most harrowing or arousing of art situations—i.e., not seeking escape from our relation with the actor by becoming a purely detached witnesses or “acting out” our emotions from our seats. By exercising the śaktis, then, the spectator becomes aware that, in some sense not unlike the actor, he is involved in the reality of the theatrical production, both ideally (the spectator recognizes the drama as a reflection of universal human situations) and actually—the spectator must comport himself in full awareness of the ambiguity of his being in the theater as both a subject seeing the actor and an objectified other being-seen by the actor. Moreover, as demonstrated earlier, the *rasa* experience itself leads to the development of the śaktis, namely, the *Cognition* and *Action Śaktis*.

But the powers that Abhinava’s *sahṛdaya* acquires through the aesthetic experience of the theater are not merely capacities for relishing art emotion. They also enable the aesthete to bring to completion the Śaiva dialectic of personal identity, which culminates in the realization of divine self-recognition through occupying the relational
middle between self and other. Recall that in the unfurling of Śiva consciousness at play with His consort and power, Śakti, the final stage of descent is the Earth (Prthvī) tattva, which is characterized by the bifurcation of consciousness into a multitude of entities and the agent’s heightened experience of estrangement from the other. The theater simulates this experience for the aesthete by juxtaposing him against an art situation that, as noted above, runs the risk of under-distancing the spectator due to “the material presentment of its subject-matter.” But as explained in Chapter Three, Śaiva narrative ontology is in fact an agential ontology that involves the aesthete’s obtaining the śaktis and recognizing that the raw physicality or otherness facing him (at the Earth tattva) is in fact an expression of his own desire for the play of self-recognition. That is, he realizes that the physical presence before him has been separated off from him by his own act of will so that he can realize his agential freedom to play with an other. The experience of rasa in the theater is especially suited to re-enacting this play of Śiva and Śakti (or self and other) in its entirety through its heightening the aesthete’s sense of being alienated from the other, and then responding to this separation though a return to oneness (i.e., the prakāśa phase).

Thus, through its establishing “the utmost decrease of Distance without its disappearance” (as Bullough puts it) in the face of an actual, concrete other, the experience of rasa in the theater enables the aesthete to mimic the Person, Śiva, which itself constitutes self-realization.\footnote{“Psychical Distance’ as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle,” p. 763. I have just referenced this quote earlier.}

By concretizing the \textit{a priori} structure of intersubjectivity and developing the posture of role-play in the face of actual others, then, the spectator attains a self-
awareness that goes beyond the recognition of his freedom as a passive cognizer or a compulsive actor. He also becomes aware of his agential freedom as a kind of cosmic actor who (even if only through acts of cognition from his chair in the audience) performs the act of existing as this or that “thing” in full awareness of his being objectified by others. Abhinava’s commentator, Kṣemarāja, brings this out in his commentary on the aphorism from the Śiva Sūtras—“The Self is an actor.”519 The “Self” that Kṣemarāja is referring to here is not the particular self, e.g., that agent qua limited individuality who decides to take up a career as a stage performer. Rather, Kṣemarāja uses the term “ātmā” (“Nartaka ātmā”) in reference to the achieved Self, while also making a more general claim concerning the performative dimension of being a true person.

Not unlike Vedānta, then, Śaivism holds that liberation can occur through the realization that one’s true identity is not as a limited phenomenal self, but as “ātmā,” which is identical with “sat, cit, ānanda.” But just as Śaivas take divine consciousness to be Śiva, not Brahman, so too does the yogin who recognizes his identity with the Lord express himself through dance-like movements that are not merely external movements. Much more than this, they are “based on his being established in his innermost hidden essential nature (antarvigūhitāsva-svarūpāvastambhamūlam)”; these actions are “playful by their own inner vibration (svaparispandallāya).”520 Accordingly, Kṣemarāja relates various elements of the drama (e.g., the parts played by an actor, and other techinal

519 Śiva Sūtras, commentary on v. III.9.
520 I have explained this distinction between Brahman and Śiva in Chapter Three, focusing upon the notion of spanda (inner vibration) as crucial to understanding how this distinction manifests in, for example, the involution of Śiva consciousness. References taken from Kṣemarāja’s commentary upon the aphorism, “Nartaka ātmā,” in the Śiva Sūtras.
terms) in terms of stages of consciousness leading to *yogic* self-realization (e.g., waking, dream, etc.):

O Śiva, you have produced the drama of the three worlds containing the real seed of all creation and the germ within it. Having performed its prelude, is there any other artist but you who is capable of bringing it to its conclusion?\(^{521}\)

Kṣemarāja here reflects Abhinava’s view that Śiva, and in turn the self-realized *yogin*, is not simply a detached witness (as in the *Vedāntic* scheme), nor is He a mere actor who is so subservient to his role (as in the *Pūrva Mīmāṃsā* understanding) that He does not recognize the creative aspect of the Self (*ātmā*) in the role. Rather, He is the creative artist who is simultaneously the author or stage-director of the cosmic drama, the actor who manifests the creative intentionality of the drama, and the spectator who bears witness to the drama. Meanwhile, the spectator of the theatrical drama who successfully negotiates distance with respect to the actor, and in turn brings to completion the dialectical interplay of self and other, realizes that the performance and all of its constituent parts are an expression of his true identity both in their general form and in their concreteness—for he has performed them “in his innermost hidden essential nature.”

---

\(^{521}\) Kṣemarāja is here quoting Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇa’s *Stavacintamāṇi*, verse 59, as noted in “Aesthetics of Mysticism,” p. 339.
Conclusion: from Art to Life through Role-Play and the Ethics of Interest: the Self as Moral Artist

Contrary to the moral sincerity and authenticity models of the self, then, creative role-play is liberating because “the Self of the viewer is neither utterly hidden away, nor is it specially highlighted,” Chakrabarti explains, “and this is true of even any Other.”\footnote{“Ownerless Emotions,” p. 195.} The realization of agential freedom through viśrānti involves a process of selfing the other and othering one’s own self with a view to occupying the space between through play. And in this respect we come full circle in demonstrating how the rasa experience of the sahṛdaya, who through a process of integration of sense-experience becomes a spectator unto himself, is continuous with the mystical realization of the yogin. Through the rasa experience, the sahṛdaya, in properly taking the actor (nāṭa) as his Other, realizes his identity with Śiva as the emanating subject in the cosmic drama of Śiva-Śakti. But the thrilling tranquility of this rasa-induced repose (viśrānti), while indeed having a deeply contemplative dimension, is not indifferent to action, as is the “aesthetic attitude” theorized by Kant. The aesthete qua Śiva consciousness is not a mere observer of the other, Śakti, who appears to be the acting, driving force behind the narrative ontology of Śaivism. By bringing to completion the Śaiva dialectic of personal identity, the aesthete realizes that all along he was the agent of this interplay of self and other. Accordingly, he enters into the interiority of the other, imaginatively performs the act of existing as that other, and then objectifies himself from without, ultimately with a view to focusing his attention upon the relational middle between self and other. The sahṛdaya becomes aware of his true existence not simply by acting, but by performing his roles in full awareness of...
his being recognized as an objectified, located other (“an Other for you,” as Evan Thompson writes).

But while Abhinava broadens our understanding of how the *rasa* experience produces an experience of agential freedom in the art experience, we are still left with the problem of traversing the chasm between art and life. Kṣemarāja helps to fill out our understanding of the metaphor of the Sanskrit drama as the world-drama, linking terms that are loaded with metaphysical meaning (e.g., *bīja*, *māyā* [illusion, ignorance, manifestation], *prakṛti* [phenomenal world], etc.) to their correlatives in Sanskrit theater:

[Bīja, the “seed,” is in drama the source of the plot contained in some allusion, while in the world the seed is māyā, the source of manifestation. *Garbha*, “germ” or “womb,” is the schema of the dramatic action, while in the created world *garbha* corresponds to *prakṛti*, the womb of all existence. *Prastāva* is the introductory part of the play corresponding to creation, and *samhāra* its completion, corresponding to the reabsorption or dissolution of the universe.]

According to Abhinava, the universe is like a theater play (*nāṭya*). The self-realized *yogin*—and now we can also include the *sahṛdaya*—take ownership of the world drama and its play of involution (i.e., Śiva as worldly actor who plays different roles in the world drama) and evolution (i.e., Śiva as abiding in his nature as “above” the drama) by identifying the cosmic drama as contained within themselves. Furthermore, the *yogin* and the *sahṛdaya* encounter this drama as an expression of their identity with divine consciousness. The *Śiva Sūtras* explain: “The place where the self takes delight with the intention of exhibiting the play of the world drama is the stage, i.e., the place where the

---

523 This is Kṣemarāja’*a* commentary on *Śiva Sūtras*, v. 3.9. Trans. By Bettina Baumer in “Aesthetics of Mysticism,” pp. 339-40. Many of these terms have been elaborated more fully in their proper metaphysical context in Chapter Three.
Self adopts the various roles. The social world gets transformed into a theater of agency because in the heart of the self-realized agent are contained and now revealed the integration of the three levels of meaning: the universal stage of the world-drama, the external theater stage, and the yogic stage of the inner Self.

But consider the following objection. While Abhinava’s theory of art emotion indeed develops creative agency in a way that surpasses even other play-centered approaches to the aesthetics of self-realization, the powers of cognition, action, etc., that it obtains for the agent do not guarantee moral responsibility. In fact, they can be marshaled in order to gain power over others, as opposed to exercising power with others. Indeed, Tantric practitioners often flaunted social-moral norms in their own ritual activities, as discussed in Chapter Three. As for Abhinava’s theory of rasa, insofar as it frees artistic imagination to explore beyond social-moral conventions and encourages identification with all others, including immoral ones, it too can be seen as showing disregard for moral role-duties and even enabling morally questionable attitudes. But art that opens us to unethical others is immoral at best, and cannot even be considered art, at worst—for "where the moral character of a work is aesthetically relevant… a moral virtue necessarily constitutes an aesthetic virtue… [and] a moral defect necessarily constitutes an aesthetic defect."525

In response, let us first note that this objection comes from the position of ethicism, an influential view in contemporary Western debates on the topic of art and morality. Many recent advocates of ethical criticism have looked to Hume’s moral

524 Śiva Śūtras, III.10.
sentiment theory as grounds for their evaluation of artworks. As examined in Chapter Two, Hume argued that the art critic is obligated to condemn a work that endorses immoral principles or bad moral judgments because the effort required to make the leap of imagination from disapprobation to enjoyment is violent. In short, not only do we resist imagining in fiction what we find to be morally repugnant in real life, but we ought to resist doing so. But ethicism subordinates artistic imagination to the moral norm; it diminishes the creative freedom of artist and aesthete alike to engage in acts of imaginative variation. And in so doing, it undermines what I have argued is creative ethical agency.

Furthermore, the opposing position addressed by ethicism in the Western art and morality debate—the stance known as “aestheticism”—should not be attributed to Abhinava. Aestheticism argues for the radical autonomy of art and aesthetic life generally from morality. Furthermore, aestheticists such as Michael Tanner suggest that the problem of contemporary social life can be characterized by "a constant incipient conflict between the obligation to be truthful and the obligation to be a tolerable member of a social group."526 In contrast with the “moral man,” the “aesthetic man” is bound primarily to the demands of first-hand experience and an honest report of what that first-hand experience evokes. In short, he is committed to a life of uncompromising authenticity (much like Heidegger’s exemplary individual) over and against the obligation to tolerate others. Leaving aside the internal problems of aestheticism—e.g., it draws a sharp

---


526 Michael Tanner, “Ethics and aesthetics are—?,” *Art and Morality*, p. 24. While Tanner states that he is only entertaining this view of aestheticism, he still ends up on the side of aestheticism.
distinction between morality as principle-based and aesthetics as acquaintance-based, and
tries to divorce good art from moral content—we need simply note that Abhinava’s
theory of *rasa*, in keeping with classical Indian aesthetics in general, does not recognize a
strong conflict between the individual and society, nor does it look to the art experience
for simply liberating the individual from his socially projected roles. In fact, as Jaidev
Singh notes in his exposition of Kṣemaraja’s commentary on the *Śiva Śūtras*, the Śaiva
adept who has obtained the *śaktis*

accepts his role in the cosmic drama and carries on the duties of life. Just as an
actor in a drama plays the part of a certain character but is neither affected nor
deluded by the assumption of a particular role, so the Self on the world-stage is
not affected by the events in which he participates in life. Inwardly, he is always
detached.  

This reference to the link between the Self as a creative performance artist and
moral responsibility enables us to further differentiate Abhinava’s stance apart from that
of aestheticism. In articulating the aestheticist position, Tanner contends that cases of
creativity in day-to-day moral life are exceptional, if they ever occur at all. However, as I
have argued throughout this dissertation, one can push creativity much further to
occupying a central place in both the perception of moral phenomena and moral action
itself. In Chapter One, for example, I argued that the self-realized agent of the *Gītā* is a

---

527 The moral properties of an artwork often are in fact relevant to their formal evaluation. Accordingly, artists simply cannot wholly dismiss moral accountability, whether by way of negligence in their own artworks or when engaging others in the social-moral sphere. In a tragedy, for example, the audience’s identifying with the protagonist occurs only if he or she is found to be worthy of respect, that is, if found to have morally admirable qualities that could, in turn, elicit pity and sympathy upon his or her demise. In general, the ethical features of artworks play into aesthetic evaluation insofar as they contribute to or undermine the form of the artwork (such as rendering the work formally incoherent, as it would if it inadvertently endorsed inconsistent moral views). Hence, the moral properties of artworks are at least sometimes relevant to their formal (i.e., aesthetic) evaluation.
kind of creative moral performance artist. The reference made to Singh just now points to at least this much with respect to the ideal social participant of Śaivism. But Abhinava’s self-realized rasika can in fact be seen as going much further in exemplifying creative moral imagination. And he is able to do so precisely because of his willingness and ability to engage in imaginative variation with a wide variety of fictional characters and art situations, even seemingly immoral ones.

In demonstrating how Abhinava’s play-centered theory of rasa is wholly compatible with moral creativity, and how the rasa artwork can develop creative ethical agency precisely because it has secured the freedom of artistic imagination from the social norm, let us consider Matthew Kieran’s notion of “cognitive immoralism.” I will first address the definition of “immoralism” with respect to art: “Immoralism is the claim that a work’s value as art can be enhanced in virtue of its immoral character.”529 In drawing out the immoralism claim, Kieran raises the example of works of art that require us to suspend our moral judgments in order to imaginatively engage characters who are morally depraved. He gives the example of the Mafiosos from the film, Good Fellas. In viewing the movie, he argues, the spectator sympathetically identifies with characters who are morally depraved. This is an interesting counter-example to the ethicist's thesis, because not only does the film require one “to imagine certain propositions and commitments as holding, though one in fact believes they do not hold and are immoral in

some respect.” The aesthetic intelligibility and reward of the film hinges upon one's identifying the defectiveness of its protagonist's moral perspective and yet imaginatively engaging with him in full awareness of it.

But while Kieran appeals to this notion of cognitive immoralism in order to demonstrate that (at least some) “immoral art” merits evaluation as art, we can push the stronger claim—namely, that immoral art, precisely by virtue of its freedom as art, can be deeply instructive for moral life. Kieran further defines cognitive immoralism as follows: “Cognitive immoralism claims that [a work's value as art can be enhanced in virtue of its immoral character] because imaginatively experiencing morally defective cognitive-affective responses and attitudes in ways that are morally problematic can deepen one's understanding and appreciation.” Seen in this light, art's autonomy is not exclusive of social responsibility. On the contrary, it becomes the source of its power. This is especially true of immoral art, which can be said to have a uniquely powerful moral function that rests upon two interrelated capacities. The first has to do with empathy. Engaging immoral art trains us to empathize with persons whose views we may not necessarily endorse. But what of the danger of sympathizing with morally questionable others to the point that we take actually come to endorse their immoral views?

---

530 "[T]he ethicist can claim that although we sometimes can and do respond with sympathy and admiration for characters who do not deserve it," Kieran explains, “nonetheless we should not” because those sympathetic responses are not merited on moral grounds. Ibid., pp. 60-1.

531 Ibid., p. 72.

532 Viewers of Leni Riefenstahl’s Triumph of the Will, for example, are especially susceptible to this sort of moral coercion. However, in keeping with Kieran, I recognize that the autonomy of immoral art can be secured if we consider a basic difference between genuine art and pseudo-art. Works that aspire to fulfill a genuinely artistic intentionality purify their subject matter by transforming it into aesthetic content (vs mere historical documentation of life or the mere magnification of life emotions). “Pseudo-art,” in contrast, includes propaganda and has as its primary intention the mere arousal of bhāvas, or life emotions, that properly accord with the didactic concerns of the given social or political ideology motivating the work.
leads to the second way in which immoral art empowers us. Insofar as the aesthetic intelligibility of the artwork involves our identifying with immoral characters in full awareness of their moral flaws, immoral art trains us to have composure in the face of moral inconsistencies by stimulating the power of the imagination to play the part of this or that character in full awareness of the possible tension between what is (e.g., “The Mafiosos are irreducibly human, and hence are worthy of sympathetic identification.”) and what ought to be (e.g., “Because the Mafiosos are morally depraved, they ought to receive disapprobation.”).

In demonstrating the parallels between the moral implications of what Kieran terms “cognitive immoralism” and the way in which the rasa experience (according to Abhinava’s interpretation) orients the aesthete towards other persons in social reality, recall that, according to our analysis in Chapter Three, Kashmir Śaivas exemplify the two hermeneutic principles of openness and composure in their creative appropriation of orthodox Hindu role-models (e.g., the Pratyabhijñā appropriation of Vedāntic and Naiyāyika cognitive models). These same principles can be seen as available to Abhinava’s rasika as he engages in imaginative variation in the art experience—even when he identifies with immoral fictional characters—accomplishes the vertical and horizontal extensions of agency, and then returns to social-moral life.

This distinction between authentic art and pseudo-art can help to distinguish between immoral art that is genuine and that which is nothing more than pornography masquerading as art. So long as it bears an authentically creative artistic intentionality, immoral art deserves to be evaluated and appreciated as art. As Kieran explains at length: “What matters is not so much a question of whether the moral perspective of a work is what we take to be the right one but, rather, whether it is conveyed in such a way that we find it intelligible or psychologically credible. If this is achieved then what matters is whether an artist can get us to see, feel and respond to the world as represented as he intends us to and how, in so doing, we come to more fully understand and appreciate things we might not otherwise have done—and sometimes this means we must traffic in, and take up, immoral responses and attitudes” (Ibid.)
Going beyond the hermeneutic ethics of Ricoeur, meanwhile, the implications of the recovery of the metaphysical meaning of aesthetic experience that occurs through relishing *rasa* are profound. Having revealed within his own heart his ontic identity with Śiva, obtained those powers (*śaktis*) integral to skillfulness in the art of role-play, and encompassed those relational contexts constituting his being in the world of the artwork, the art relisher undergoes an expansion of conscious feeling into social reality and carries with him the power to creatively apply those role-models that he has appropriated from the art experience. For one, the sense of wonder and delight (*camatkṛti*) produced from the *rasa* experience flows over into the everyday, enabling the *sahṛdaya* to recognize “‘the body of pure Consciousness in all things[,] which implies a state of merging or rest (*viśrānti*).’”  

But this experience of radical openness to all beings does not cause the feeler to lose his sense of place, for example, by being wholly subsumed by some kind of a-perspectival consciousness (as in *Vedānta*), nor does he lose power over the will of the imagination in lieu of being subordinated to his socially projected role (as in *Pūrva Mimāṃsā*). Rather, the self-marveling thrill (*vibhūta*) of *rasa* affirms the world in all its particularity and moves the *rasika* to seize upon the power of consciousness to illuminate all things as his own. Utpaladeva expresses this view in the following devotional-like verse in praise of divine Śiva consciousness:

Being self-luminous  
You cause everything to shine;  
Delighting in your form  
You fill the universe with delight;  
Reeling with your own bliss  
You make the whole world dance with joy.  

533 This is Baumer quoting Kṣemarāja—“*cinmayam svarūpam.*” See “Aesthetics of Mysticism,” p. 346.  
534 Śivastotravali, XIII.15.
By means of expansive empathic feeling, the *rasika* comes to realize that the other is not something merely “out there,” but is an expression of himself insofar as he has realized his identity with Śiva consciousness. And in realizing that the power of manifestation is his own, he thereby realizes that he has filled the world with ecstasy and wonder as an expression of his own creative will. Having mastered his ambivalence towards worldly involvement, the Śaiva mystic-aesthete neither turns away from the world nor hastily claims it as exclusively his own. Instead, his every action (inner and outer) testifies that he is a lover of all things ordinary, regardless of their raw materiality or their possible lack of fit with the norms of the status quo—for he experiences them in the Heart Universal, that shared emotional space wherein one conducts mimetic experiments such as “what it is like to be afraid, what it is like to be in love, what it is like to be disgusted by something seductively beautiful or to adore something ugly.”

Moreover, he is able to skillfully mediate his relations with others because, having entered into the interiority of even morally depraved fictional others, he gains valuable epistemic access to ordinary situations. And given that he has a moral duty to be informed about his world such that emerging problems can be negotiated as they present themselves, then by virtue of the cognitive awards made available by imaginative identification with others, experiencing even so-called “immoral art” in the manner of Abhinava’s hermeneutic play of identity is especially privileged in enabling us to fulfill our social-moral responsibilities. Thus, rather than stimulating moral misunderstanding—as the ethicist argues—relishing *rasa* in the face of “immoral art” deepens our

---

understanding of the world, ourselves, and the interrelations of states of affairs, attitudes, 
and values that shape us and our world. Moreover, at least some immoral art—when 
encountered in the framework of Abhinava’s epistemology of aesthetic experience—
empowers us to fulfill this social responsibility by developing both openness and 
composure in the face of moral aversions and contradictions.

In sum, Abhinava holds that the rasa experience not only stimulates an interest in 
feeling the other from within. It also gives rise to that even more unique awareness of 
ourselves as being seen from without by the other. That is, it induces an experience of not 
only standing outside of our own limited individuality looking back in; we become 
conscious of our being beheld by an actual other. Continuous with the self-realization of 
the yogin who performs inner and outer at once (in his simultaneously encompassing the 
role of the artist and the audience-spectator by taking the three levels of meaning into his 
heart), so too does the sahrdaya who enters into the Heart Universal see himself from 
within and from without. Taking repose in the endless hermeneutic play of Śiva-Śakti, he 
becomes feeler and felt all at once, a spectator unto himself. In this way, rasa becomes 
not merely tasting of emotion or even just a play with transcendent Being. More than this, 
it is relishing of consciousness itself in a play with other beings. Returning to a reference 
made to Chakrabarti earlier concerning the metaphysical grounding of the Indian notion 
of bhāva—i.e., “To be is to feel or be felt”—here we can take Abhinava as implicitly 
adapting this disjunctive assertion into a conjunction—“To [truly] be [that is, to be as the 
True Person, Siva] is to feel and be felt.” In order to express our true nature as the play of 
Śiva consciousness (analogous to the artwork), the witness of this play (the aesthete), and
the player who is beheld by the audience (the actor), we must perform this conscious
tension between inner and outer in our relations with actual other beings. And this is
available even to those who do not engage in rigorous soteriological training, but simply
have an eye (or rather, a heart) for rasa. And above all, the rasa artwork facilitates this by
creating a space for re-enacting the mythico-ritual drama of Śiva-Śakti through
imaginative role-play. Through active, unending joy in the play of self-recognition, we in
turn take great interest in others in their uniqueness. And in having realized agential
freedom through the activity of the imagination itself, we not only realize the world as the
theater of agency. We return to the world with the powers of a kind of moral performance
artist who is imaginative and socially grounded, unceasing in his own nature as he plays
this or that role with a view to creative yet responsible intervention in social reality.
Bringing worlds into being through our own imaginative power, our outward
performances echo the artful conduct of the actor who has realized the Śaiva truism,
“Nartaka ātmā,” or “The Self is the Actor.”536

536 Śiva Sūtras, III.9.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


_______. “Hypocrisy.”


