THE KINGDOM WITHIN THE HUT:
ETHICAL EDUCATION AND STORY-TELLING
IN THE YOGAVĀSIṢṬHA

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores a difficulty haunting Advaita (non-dualist) philosophy as developed in the Yogavāsiṣṭha: the significance assigned to morality in a world considered to be an illusion, specifically a dream. If the world is a dream and sentient beings just figures in a dream, why is there such a demand for goodness and decency? Anything goes in a dream. One can lie, steal, and kill with impunity. There is no substantial 'I', no substantial 'thou' to harm and be harmed. And yet, virtue in conduct and character is not just prized but demanded by ancient Indian philosophers. In this dissertation, I explore the conceptual connections between an illusory world, storytelling, and the virtuous activities of the liberated sage. My main contentions are that Vasiṣṭha’s concept of the world-as-illusion has significant similarities with fictional stories and that the world-as-story analogy provides the link between morality and illusion.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It sounds incredible but this kingdom appears to be only in the hut of the holy man on account of his desire for a kingdom. The memory of the past is hidden, and you two have risen again. Death is but waking from a dream. Birth which arises from a wish is no more real than the wish, like waves in a mirage. (The Story of Līlā, III:19, 20)

The Yogavāsiṣṭha¹ is the story of the sage Vasiṣṭha and a young Rāma, the hero of the great epic Rāmāyana. The date of composition and the author of the text are subjects of much controversy. B. L. Ātreya² notes that although modern scholars date the Yogavāsiṣṭha as late as the 13th or 14th century AD, he considers it to be composed after Kālidāsa (5th century AD) and before Bhāṛṭ-hari (7th century AD), on the grounds that there are similarities between the philosophical doctrines present in the Yogavāsiṣṭha and the works of Kālidāsa and Bhāṛṭ-hari. Ātreya also disagrees with the orthodox view that Vālmīki, the author of the Rāmāyana, is also the author of the Yogavāsiṣṭha. He claims instead that an analysis of the first chapter of the Yogavāsiṣṭha and an account of a megarādhūta (cloud messenger) in the text so reminiscent of Kālidāsa’s famous poem reveal that even an original treatise, the possible source of the current version of the Yogavāsiṣṭha, would have been written much later than Vālmīki’s compositions.³

The structure of the Yogavāsiṣṭha is interesting. Although the author uses a blend of philosophical inquiry and science fiction-like story, the text is shaped as a story within

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¹ All quotations are taken from Swami Venkatesananda, Vasiṣṭha’s Yoga (State University of New York Press, Albany, 1993) unless otherwise stated.
² Ātreya, B. L. The Philosophy of the Yoga-Vasiṣṭha (Adyar, Madras, India: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1936), chapter 2.
³ The Yogavāsiṣṭha is not an obscure Sanskrit text, far removed from everyday life. It has been translated into many languages, Hindi, Urdu, English, and widely read in the vernacular throughout India. There is
a story within a story, just like the nesting of Russian dolls. With the Russian dolls, at first glance, there appears to be just one, plump, self-satisfied doll. It twists open in the middle and inside, instead of the expected hollow cavity, there is a smaller doll and that one opens up to reveal another one and so on. In the Yogavāsiṣṭha, Sūrīṅga, a holy sage, asks a question to Agastya, another sage who responds by telling the story of a Brahmin, Kāruṇya, and his father, Agnivesya. Within that story, Agnivesya narrates the tale of the celestial, Suruci, and a messenger of Indra. This messenger tells Suruci the story of Vālmīki who is questioned on the ways to rid oneself of birth and death. Vālmīki’s response takes the shape of yet another story, that of Vasiṣṭha and Rāma. The Story of Vasiṣṭha and Rāma is the one before the last story and when that is ‘opened,’ roughly fifty four other stories drop out. These are Vasiṣṭha’s stories to Rāma that propel Rāma towards enlightenment. Thus, Vasiṣṭha’s discourse with Rāma is the final frame of a series of narratives set within fictional world within fictional world within fictional world.

The main theme of the Yogavāsiṣṭha is Rāma’s transformation from angst-ridden seeker of liberation to enlightened sage. Rāma is the eldest son of King Daśaratha. He has everything that most fifteen year-olds encounter only in dreams; vast palaces, pleasure gardens, a great fortune, girls. Unfortunately, rather than providing security and enjoyment, this measure of wealth and prosperity plunges Rāma into the depths of despair. Alarmed at his son’s mental and physical deterioration, King Daśaratha requests

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even a Persian translation of the Laghu-Yogavāsiṣṭha (the abridged version translated by Darah Shikoh, elder brother of Aurangzeb).
his attendance at court and an explanation. In a long discourse, Rāma laments over the

trials and tribulations of life.

All beings in this world are tainted with evil; all relationships are bondage; all enjoyments
are great diseases; and desire for happiness is only a mirage. One’s own senses are one’s
enemies; the reality has become unreal (unknown); one’s own mind has become one’s
worst enemy ....

There is no way out of this suffering. The realization of truth is not to be seen in anyone.
No one is happy at the prosperity and happiness of others, nor is compassion to be found
in anyone’s heart. People are getting baser and baser by the day. Weakness has overcome
strength, cowardice has overpowered courage. Evil company is easily had, good company
is hard to come by. I wonder whither Time is driving humanity. (I.25, 26)

The response of the court is applause. Rāma is not searching for the necessities of life,
such as food, shelter, companionship, nor is he hankering after further enjoyment of
pleasures. Unlike Arjuna, in the Mahābhārata, who is propelled into crisis by a war
against his own kinsmen, Rāma is not facing a moral dilemma. It is the dreariness and
emptiness of life itself, however luxurious, that turns out to be his greatest challenge.
Outwardly Rāma has everything that body and mind could desire and yet life has lost all
color, all flavor. The sages of the court look to Vasiṣṭha for a response. All ends happily
with Rāma lifted from the depths of existential angst to enlightenment and back to living
in a world that he knows full well to be illusion.

Much of the Yogavāsiṣṭha is devoted to Vasiṣṭha’s teachings to Rāma. Vasiṣṭha’s
insightful stories and the framework within which they are narrated have interesting
implications for a paradox facing non-dualist traditions, such as that exemplified in the
Yogavāsiṣṭha: the difficulty of adequately explaining the importance of moral behavior in

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4 As the author is unknown, for the sake of convenience I will use the name of her (or his) protagonist,
Vasiṣṭha.
a world that is considered to be pure illusion. Broadly speaking, proponents of Advaita Vedānta, the major system of non-dualism in Indian Philosophy, distinguish three ontic levels of being: reality, appearance, and unreality. These distinctions are made on the basis of ‘sublatability’ (or ‘subratability’) - ‘the mental process whereby one disvalues some previously appraised object or content of consciousness because of its being contradicted by a new experience.’

The experience of reality is described as unsublatable because it can never be replaced or revised by any other experience, appearance can be so sublated whereas unreality is that which neither can nor cannot be sublated by other experiences. Ultimate reality is Brahman, saccidānanda: sat (being), cit (consciousness), ānanda (bliss). At the ‘appearance’ level, Advaitins, such as Śaṅkara, recognize ontological differences between the phenomenal world and what they call ‘illusion’ in which they include hallucinations, dreams, erroneous sense perceptions, and fantasies. According to these philosophers, the world is granted a practical reality, vyāvahārika, because it lends itself to relative knowledge and truth. Hallucinations, dream experiences, etc., at the prātibhāsika level, are sublated by the experiences of the empirical world and thus, assigned a lower level of being. Finally, at the level of unreality are placed objects that are logically non-existent, for example, the son of a barren woman, or physically non-existent such as the horns of a hare. Such entities cannot even appear.

The first horn of the paradox is that for Vasiṣṭha the world is ‘appearance’ only, but he greatly complicates matters by collapsing the distinction between the practical world at the vyāvahārika level and illusion at the prātibhāsika level.⁶

Where was there any matter or mold, where from this material world was molded and formed; (as we make our houses from the pre-existing mud and clay of the earth), whatever we see in the sphere of waking minds in the day light, is similar to the baseless dreams, which we see in the empty space of our sleeping minds, in the darkness of the night.

There is no difference between the waking and sleeping dreams, as there is none between the empty air and the sky; whatever is pictured in the sphere of the intellect, the same is represented as the aerial castle in the dream.⁷

Vasiṣṭha argues that there are no crucial differences between the awaking, phenomenal world around us and the ‘sleeping’ worlds inhabited in dreams. We are simply mistaken in placing greater weight on the solidity and substantiality of the phenomenal world, and a careful examination of the so-called dissimilarities between the waking and dreaming worlds and the corresponding waking and dreaming experiences reveals this blunder. The illusion especially extends over all properties of the individual that are part of the phenomenal world. The body and the mind, the presentation of individuality itself, are illusion. For Vasiṣṭha, the world is nothing but a mere dream.

The second horn of the paradox is Vasiṣṭha’s emphasis on the importance of moral conduct.⁸ Vasiṣṭha identifies three types of human beings in their different stages

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⁶ Gaudapāda in his kārikā of the Māndūkya Upaniṣad makes a similar move in conflating the dreaming and waking states of consciousness. Most peculiarly, Śaṅkara, in his commentary to this text, retains the merger, but in his other writings he keeps the distinction intact.


⁸ Bernard Williams distinguishes between the term ‘moral,’ used to refer to duties and obligations, and ‘ethics,’ a broader term that encompasses a variety of considerations, including but not restricted to duties and obligations. For the sake of ease, I shall be using the term ‘moral’ without limiting its scope to just duty or obligation.
of spiritual and moral development: the fool, the seeker, and the sage. The fool is one who is completely taken over by the world-appearance and pursues the pleasures of the senses in the mistaken belief that this is happiness. For Vasiṣṭha, moral rules and codes of conduct are necessary in order to keep the fool’s unbridled desires in check and to promote harmony in society. If the fool is not governed by such rules of conduct, she will fan the flames of disorder in her community. Then, according to Vasiṣṭha, ‘the big fish will eat the small fish’ and much chaos will ensue (VI.1:69).

For Vasiṣṭha, the seeker is also bound by moral injunctions and prohibitions. Rāma, for example, is the Kṣatriya prince who shoulders the moral responsibilities of his station and yet, the dreariness and monotony of his luxurious life turns out to be his greatest challenge. He has reflectively seen the problems of sense experiences and the mind for himself and this knowledge spawns ‘dispassion,’ vairāgya, a ‘loss of taste’ for the world. Once Rāma has realized the emptiness and dangers of worldly possessions and pleasures, he must discover a different mode of living that also embraces the ethical life. Vasiṣṭha is adamant that one cannot be a seeker without the requisite moral behavior. He mentions the virtuous character of almost every seeker of liberation. King Padma is described as ‘perfect in every respect,’ ‘the abode of virtue’ (III:15). King Lavaṇa is called ‘righteous, noble, chivalrous, charitable, and in every way a worthy king’ (III:103, 104). Janaka is extolled as ‘a great monarch, a cornucopia to all who seek his aid, sun-like to friends and a great benefactor to all good people’ (V:8). Even the hungry vampire ‘would not kill anyone unless the victim deserved such treatment’ (VI.1:70-71). And so on.
Seekers, such as Rāma, are also not interested in renouncing the world after enlightenment, in living in a cave or in any kind of bliss state that removes them from the activities of the world. Rāma asks:

Hence, pray tell me: what is that condition or state in which one does not experience any grief? How can one who is involved in the world and its activities, as I am, reach the supreme state of peace and bliss? What is that attitude that enables one not to be influenced by various kinds of activities and experiences? Pray tell me: how do people who are enlightened live in this world? (I:30, 31)

Rāma wishes to know, not only the path to enlightenment, but how the enlightened being continues to live in the world, performing all the duties of his or her station. The sage has realized Brahman and attained a complete understanding of the world as appearance. Yet, according to Vasiṣṭha, she or he lives in the world and, even while seemingly going beyond notions of dharma and adharma, is the embodiment of virtue.

For Vasiṣṭha, the sage is the mahākārtā (the great doer of actions), the mahābhoktā (the great enjoyer), and the mahātyāgī (the great renunciate). She or he actualizes the sattva character and described by Vasiṣṭha as ‘naturally good,’ ‘devoted to good deeds,’ and ‘full of the quality of purity and light’ (III:94). Moreover, Vasiṣṭha notes, ‘the holy man’s nature is cool and peaceful; his behavior and actions are pure. Therefore, his company promotes peace and goodness in every one who seeks it’ (VI.2:47). Even for the sage, Vasiṣṭha considers the moral life to be of paramount importance. The sage goes beyond the perfunctory performance of moral duties to a state of abiding goodness in which she or he also promotes virtue in others.

Thus, the Yogavāsiṣṭha is not just a set of spiritual instructions for Rāma’s liberation, but also an exposition on appropriate moral behavior for all individuals,
whether fool, seeker or sage. And this gives rise to the paradox. If the world is a dream, as Vasiṣṭha notes, why should we be moral? Anything goes in a dream. Murder, torture, theft, kindness, generosity are all equally permissible behavior. There is no ‘I,’ no ‘Thou,’ no such thing as ‘friend,’ no ‘foe.’ Nothing seems to matter. In a dream, ultimately, there is no real individual towards whom another individual can develop duties and obligations, and yet moral obligations are embedded in the Yogavāśiṣṭha in such a way as to require the presence of real people and real situations. Without such ‘reality,’ surely Vasiṣṭha can at best advocate an indifference to moral questions, at worst moral anarchy.

My main contention in this dissertation is that Vasiṣṭha does have a superior explanation in terms of an analogy based on the world-as-story rather than the world-as-dream. Vasiṣṭha’s concept of the phenomenal world as illusion has significant similarities with the world of fiction and story. Story-telling is an effective method of pedagogy, particularly in teaching about moral matters. Literary works suggest moral truths and the literary imagination plays a role in enhancing the reader’s sympathy and empathetic identification with the characters in the story, even though the reader knows that these characters are fictitious. Similarly, Vasiṣṭha is adamant that egolessness (the dissolving of the ‘I’ sense in the individual) is the key to developing and establishing the completely moral being who has dissolved the boundaries between herself and others. For Vasiṣṭha, just as fiction has a morally pertinent pedagogical function, so does the world-appearance.
In exploring the world-as-story analogy, I unravel the conceptual connections between Vasiṣṭha's views on dream and fiction, story-telling as an effective pedagogical tool and the activities of the liberated sage. In chapter two, the paradox concerning the place of morality in a world that is illusion is developed in greater detail. Vasiṣṭha's response to the paradox is investigated in chapter three. In particular, the world-as-dream analogy is examined and the problems highlighted. The alternative analogy, the world-as-story, is presented in chapter four. In chapter five, the suitability of the fiction analogy as a response to the paradox is clarified by exploring the connections between the dualistic world and a unified Brahman. The merits and demerits of both analogies, dream and fiction, are discussed in chapter six by analyzing the functioning of vāsanā, the mental modifications of the mind, which may advance or thwart the journey from fool to seeker to sage. In this dissertation, I hope to show that, in the Yogavāsiṣṭha, the world-appearance is not just a prop in an elaborate game of make-believe, but a supporting 'arrangement' of Brahman that plays a crucial ethical role in the human mode of life.
CHAPTER 2: MORALITY AND ILLUSION

THE PARADOX

Vasistha’s Dilemma

Vasistha proposes the view that the perceptible universe, seemingly occupied by innumerable sentient beings and insentient objects, is an illusion, specifically a dream. All people and other sentient beings are just characters in the dream. In reality, there is no individuality and no multiplicity. In reality, there is just pure undivided consciousness, designated as Brahman. This produces the difficulty of adequately explaining the importance of morality in the Yogavasishtha. As far as Vasistha is concerned, one must behave with the utmost respect and decency towards other beings. Goodness of character is a crucial component in living a satisfactory life. Why should this be the case? If, as Vasistha maintains, people and other sentient beings in the world are just figures in a dream, there is no urgency to behave well towards others. After all, anything goes in a dream. One can lie, steal, and even kill with impunity. Such dream behavior is not considered problematic. This paradox can be formulated as follows:

(1) A system of rules that embodies moral considerations relies on the specific nature of morality, and this specificity requires the existence of the individualized agent and the differentiated ‘other’ in order to lend substance to the agent’s regard for the other.
(2) Vasiṣṭha’s concept of dharma embraces this specific nature of morality, and also requires the existence of the individualized agent and the differentiated ‘other’ in order to lend substance to the agent’s regard for the other.

(3) Vasiṣṭha considers the transactional, phenomenal universe to be just an illusion.

(4) For Vasiṣṭha, ‘I’ and ‘Other’ exist separately only in the phenomenal universe. In reality there is no such distinction between individuals.

(5) As individuality and multiplicity exist only in the phenomenal world and not in reality (premise 4), and as the phenomenal universe is just an illusion (premise 3), for Vasiṣṭha, there is no individualized agent or patient and there is no moral agency.

Conjoining these postulates gives rise to a logical contradiction. Moral considerations are of paramount importance for Vasiṣṭha, and yet, his view is that the phenomenal world is an illusion and ultimately, there is no ‘self’ towards whom another ‘self’ can develop moral duties and obligations. In fact, Vasiṣṭha makes this very point. ‘Brahman is the form of my enemy who displeases me who am Brahman: when such is the case, who does what to another?’ (VI.I:11). If the world-appearance of individuality and diversity is indeed an illusion, Vasiṣṭha’s emphasis on moral conduct is, seemingly, inexplicable.

Each of these steps is described in detail below. In order to give a flavor of Vasiṣṭha’s ingenious and imaginative tales, much of the exposition in this chapter will
take the form of his stories. His epistemological and ontological claims are explored in later chapters.

**Premise 1**

A system of rules that embodies moral considerations relies on the specific nature of morality, and this specificity requires the existence of the individualized agent and the differentiated ‘other’ in order to lend substance to the agent’s regard for the other.

Some of our every-day judgments involve matters that are said to be of moral concern. We regard some actions as right or wrong, states of affairs as good or bad and judge others as morally admirable or despicable according to certain standards of virtue or vice. These judgments, we are told, differ from prudential or aesthetic concerns. For example, whether to paint the exterior of one’s house white or purple is said to reveal aesthetic rather than moral interests whereas the decision to return a neighbor’s lawn mower in good condition is considered to have moral flavor. However, although some issues are unambiguous, at least within societal and cultural boundaries, and such examples uncontroversial, things are not that clear-cut. Is the problem of diverting funds to the war effort at the expense of much needed reconstruction of schools and hospitals a moral issue? Is the option of taking care of one’s elderly parent at the expense of one’s own dreams a moral decision? Such grey areas stress the need for clarification of the nature and scope of morality. What constitutes a *moral* rather than a non-moral concern?
Traditionally, philosophers have argued that the features of inescapability, prescriptivity, universalizability and/or the situational content of beliefs operate in such a way as to lend moral texture to the demands made upon the agent. Philosophers, such as Immanuel Kant, have located the peculiar nature of morality on the feature of inescapability. There is no escaping the obligatory demands of a moral situation in the way that one may over-turn the claims of aesthetic or prudential concerns. For Kant, there is a ‘must-do’ quality to moral obligations that has the agent in its grasp.¹ R. M. Hare defines prescriptivity as ‘an action to which we can commit ourselves’ and universalizability as ‘an action which we are at the same time prepared to accept as exemplifying a principle of action to be prescribed for others in like circumstances.’² Philippa Foot points out that the assumption that an individual may count just any belief as evidence for a morality claim is faulty. The circumstances surrounding the claim must also be investigated in order to ensure that no ‘special background’ is surreptitiously introduced in order to muddy the waters between moral and non-moral matters.³ Each of these criteria will be discussed in turn.⁴

The notion that moral action is inescapable and that this inescapability is peculiar to the domain of morality is the view advanced by Immanuel Kant. Kant adopts the stance that the nature of the moral imperative is such that it over-rides all other claims.

² Hare, R. M. ‘A Moral Argument’ in 20th Century Ethical Theory by S. Cahn and J. Harber, p. 388.
³ Foot, Philippa. ‘Moral Beliefs,’ in 20th Century Ethical Theory by S. Cahn and J. Harber.
⁴ I am indebted to Father Gerard Hughes, formerly of Heythrop College, University of London, for this particular expansion of the scope of morality.
based on inclination or self-interest. He argues that we can have no respect for objects of inclinations or even inclinations as such because they lead to actions that are contingent upon the object or the desire/aversion for a particular object. The corresponding imperatives are merely hypothetical because they derive their force from the presence of inclinations or desires and are conditional upon them. We will perform the action only as long as the object or inclination lasts and we are easily diverted from the action, particularly when it no longer suits our purpose. Given the ephemeral nature of desires and personal inclinations, hypothetical imperatives can change at will and cannot therefore account for the binding force of morality.

According to Kant, for an action to be considered morally good and obligatory, it must be done simply for the sake of duty, irrespective of any desire or inclination for particular consequences. And duty is the ‘necessity to act out of reverence for the law.’ Kant describes reverence as a feeling that is ‘self-produced’ when the agent is faced with the possibility of subordinating her will to a law that is not generated by selfish desires, inclinations or self-interest. ‘Reverence is properly awareness of a value that demolishes my self-love’ and any moral interest consists only in this feeling of reverence for the law.

Kant argues that these laws, based solely upon duty, bind with ‘absolute necessity’ in that they are laws that a fully rational agent, one endowed with a ‘holy will’ untainted by self-centered influences, would necessarily act upon when faced with

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certain circumstances. We cannot escape the claims of morality because we are, by
nature, rational beings. The principles of action are objective in the sense that a perfectly
rational agent would necessarily act on these principles if reason had full control over the
passions. To act contrary to these principles is to act contrary to reason itself and this
would be inconsistent because we are contravening rules of reason even though we value
rationality in ourselves. In addition, Kant argues that an imperfectly rational agent is also
bound by necessitation in that he or she ought to follow these laws even when tempted to
act otherwise. So, as far as Kant is concerned, the force of morality just is the force of
rationality itself. Given the dictates of reason, moral rules are categorical commands,
universally valid and binding upon every agent, whether she wishes to be thus bound or
not. They are inescapable.

R. M. Hare argues for four necessary ingredients in moral reasoning: the facts of
the case, the logical framework ensuing from the word 'ought' (prescriptivity, and
universalizability), inclinations, and imagination. For Hare, ethical theory determines the
'rules' of the moral 'game,' the meanings and functions of the moral words used within a
particular conceptual framework in which the moral reasoning takes place. According to
Hare, the rules of moral reasoning governing the logical character of the word 'ought' are
basically two: prescriptivity and universalizability. Hare writes that in deciding on a
course of action regarding what we ought to do, we are 'looking for an action to which
we can commit ourselves (prescriptivity), but which we are, at the same time, prepared to

accept as exemplifying a principle of action to be prescribed for others in like circumstances (universalizability).  

Hare proposes a Golden Rule type argument and explores the question: ‘What do you say now about a hypothetical case in which you are in your victim’s position?’ Using the example, A owes B money and B owes C money, he argues that B cannot sincerely assent to the singular prescription, ‘Let me put A in prison’ and the ensuing moral judgment, ‘I ought to put A in prison if he will not pay me what he owes,’ if he cannot assent to the universalizability, ‘Anyone who is in my position ought to put his debtor into prison if he does not pay.’ However, assenting to the universal proposition leads to the moral judgment ‘C ought to put me, B, in prison as I have not paid what I owe.’ This would commit B to accepting the singular prescription, ‘Let C put me in prison.’ C will have to put B in prison. Given certain inclinations and interests, for example, an aversion to being put in prison himself, Hare argues that B cannot sincerely accede to being sent to prison. Thus, according to Hare, B cannot subscribe to the universal principle that all defaulters should be packed off to prison and so B cannot, without logical inconsistency, assent to sending A to prison. It is the universalizability that gives the prescription moral justification.

With this emphasis on the sincerity of the agent’s beliefs, Hare’s view is that there are no standards external to the agent that guide his conduct. The agent has a choice of principles and as long as he adheres to prescriptivity and universalizability and his

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well-deliberated decision results in action, his principle can be called a moral principle. Hare agrees that a man may, for example, sincerely hold the moral view that all Jews ought to be sent to the gas chamber and seek no exemption if it were subsequently discovered that he himself was Jewish. This situation, Hare believes, is unlikely given the value we place on reason. However, it may occur and this, he states, ‘is the price we pay for our freedom.’

Philippa Foot objects to the suggestion that the individual has such freedom to decide on what does or does not constitute a moral matter, and emphasizes the situational framework surrounding the agent. She suggests that although moral matters are considered matters of value rather than matters of fact, the assumption that an agent can, without logical error, ground her moral beliefs on utterly spurious claims is faulty. Moral beliefs work within a special background of circumstances that is not unique to an individual alone. An agent may be wholeheartedly committed to clasping her hands three times, but no matter how sincerely she believes that this action constitutes ‘goodness,’ she has to provide some evidence to illustrate the point to such behavior particularly if it is not already a part of the background meaning and values. Foot notes that it is as crazy to provide just any justification without evidence to contest its frivolity. The clasper of hands may suggest that she clasps her hands because it makes a sucking sound, but there is no connection between that assertion and the so-called moral use of ‘good.’ Such a connection may be shown via some impact on human welfare, but it must be shown.

Thus, for Foot, the situational content of the beliefs, i.e., the circumstances surrounding the beliefs, is also influential in distinguishing a moral from a non-moral matter.\(^{12}\)

All the four features of morality described above, inescapability, prescriptivity, universalizability, and the content of beliefs, affirm the existence of the moral agent and her patient. Kant argues that only actions done from reverence for the moral law, and hence from the motive of duty, have moral content because they alone bind with 'absolute necessity' and are not over-ridden by other considerations based on inclinations, desires or self-interest. Such necessity, seen in the workings of the 'holy will' and the necessitation restraining those of weaker character and less-than-faultless rationality, exhibit a must-do factor that emphasizes the reality of the agent and the patient. If either the agent or patient is just a dream-figure, any choice, any decision, any action is equally acceptable. The dreamer dreams out of inclination and self-interest. She is not constrained by any law external to her own deep-seated desires. On the other hand, imperatives that bind categorically assume the 'reality' of the individuals whom they shackle and oblige.

This 'depth' of moral considerations is seen, albeit to a lesser extent, in the criteria of prescriptivity and universalizability as well. Hare insists that morality is not about people's beliefs about what ought to be done but about their actions. It is not what people say that is important but what people do. And what they do will depend upon how they themselves wish to be treated. For Kant, our inclinations and desires could lead us astray and we may not act upon moral principles which we hold dear. For Hare, non-

action would mean that we did not genuinely assent to the moral principle in the first place. It is not enough to talk the talk. It is walking the walk that provides the force for the moral ‘ought.’

If prescriptivity is described as applying to an action to which we commit ourselves to the point of undertaking that action regardless of distractions, the strength of this commitment, the shift from merely holding certain beliefs to acting in accordance with those beliefs, signifies the gravity of the situation to the agent and the substantiality of the agent herself. Similarly, Hare’s inclusion of universalizability reveals the urgency of the moral demand on all agents. For Hare, prescriptivity is a personal commitment that generates particular actions, but if a singular prescription, such as ‘Let me, B, put A in prison’ cannot be universalized, it cannot become an ‘ought.’ Such universalization extends the force of a moral judgment to all agents, including B. As Hare points out, B, in the debtor example described above, need not be a debtor himself, but must have the sympathetic imagination to give weight to A’s inclinations as if they were his own. This ‘weightiness’ emphasizes the reality of the agent and the patient.

Philippa Foot’s considerations relating to the content of beliefs that are termed ‘moral’ also reveal the substantive nature of the other and the community in which the agent is situated. If everything is illusion, one can make any claim, spurious or otherwise, in identifying human good or harm. However, this does not wash. Hare’s Jewish Nazi is viewed as a fanatic exhibiting psychotic rather than moral tendencies. The situational content, i.e., the network of background facts, beliefs, and values, has worth to the extent that it is independent of the agent’s own wishes. Even if she is unable to step out of her
cultural baggage, the agent cannot act as she pleases in the moral domain. She has to consider the beliefs of her society as a whole, which gives credence to the physical individuality and multiplicity inherent in that society.

This need for the objective reality of moral agents and patients is well illustrated by the 1938 radio broadcast of ‘War of the Worlds.’ Many latecomers to the program were convinced that the narrator, Orson Welles, was an anchorman reading the news and that earth was being invaded by extra-terrestrial beings. The radio station was inundated with frantic ‘what must I do’ telephone calls. It took some time for the station to convince its callers that this was merely a narration of a well-known novel. Once placated, the callers’ urge to action simply dissipated. This incident may reflect the survival instinct rather than any aspiration towards learned moral behavior, but my point is that the nature of morality is such that the existence of real people and real situations is, at the very least, important. If the moral agent’s background beliefs about reality are undercut to the extent that her belief in the existence of individuality is dislodged, her thought that ‘she ought to do something’ immediately disappears and she is left feeling more than just a little foolish.

Thus, we may conclude that these criteria emphasize the understanding that there is a ‘must-do’ factor in morality, a ‘must’ that is unconditional and ‘goes all the way down.’ If the demand of morality goes ‘all the way down’ for the agent and advises, persuades and even commands a particular action, if the agent willingly commits herself

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to this behavior and involves others in such an undertaking, the sheer weight of this enterprise only makes sense if there is a 'real' person who shoulders the burden. These four features also ensure the reality of the patient, the 'other.' The agent is required to be impartial in her deliberations and reflect upon her own interests in the light of her interaction with others. Directly or indirectly, she must acknowledge that the 'other,' in whatever shape or form, has a presence and significance as weighty as her own. The 'other' impacts her behavior. This would be pointless if the 'other' turned out to be just an illusion, a dream character. The agent and the objects of her agency are linked together in a manner that 'fixes' their substantiality and reality.

It must be pointed out that there is no uncontroversial delineation of what constitutes the 'peculiar nature of morality' and my use of criteria such as inescapability, prescriptivity, etc., is not without its problems. Bernard Williams criticizes the entire Kantian idea of moral obligation that, he says, permeates a range of ethical outlooks. This, according to Williams, is a development of modern Western culture and we would be better off without it. Williams maintains that the morality system, which he describes as just 'one particular variety of ethical thought,'14 emphasizes a specific view of obligation and makes every moral consideration into an obligation, leading to the unsavory conclusion that only an obligation can beat an obligation. Further, he points out that the morality system encourages the notion that the practical necessity embedded in the 'I must do this' decision is peculiar to the moral obligation and without it, there is

14 Ibid., p. 174.
only inclination and caprice. For Williams, these ideas are mistakes. He argues that obligations can be broken by ethical considerations other than a further obligation, and that practical necessity can operate in areas, such as prudence, self-protection, aesthetic or artistic concern, as well.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 184-188.} Other philosophers also object to the inclusion of specific criteria in distinguishing the moral from the non-moral. Jonathan Dancy, for example, criticizes the criterion of universalizability, by arguing that the particularities of the situation make the formulation and adherence to general principles problematic.\footnote{Dancy, Jonathan. \textit{Moral Reasons} (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993).}

However, such dissension does not constitute a problem for the formulation of this premise. My purpose in arguing that the four features of inescapability, prescriptivity, universalizability and the content of beliefs require the existence of `real' people and `real' situations is to set the scene for the next premise, that these four features are also vital for Vasiṣṭha's concept of \textit{dharma} and that their situatedness in \textit{dharma} secures the existence of the individualized agent and the differentiated `other' in a definitive way for Vasiṣṭha. Even if it were argued that these four criteria are present in non-moral matters or that there are problems with one of them, these criticisms do not diminish Vasiṣṭha's need for objectivity and reality. It merely extends the discussion to include issues pertaining to other considerations, such as the aesthetic or the prudential. In such instances, morality is not jettisoned in favor of other considerations, but forms part of the family of issues that `goes all the way down' and requires `real' people and situations in order to make sense of the weightiness accorded to such matters.
Premise 2

Vasiṣṭha’s concept of dharma embraces this specific nature of moral considerations, and also requires the existence of the individualized agent and the differentiated ‘other’ in order to lend substance to the agent’s regard for the other.

What is the force of dharma in the Yogavasiṣṭha? Does dharma require the presence of real people and real situations or is it some other concern that would sit comfortably within the framework of the illusoriness view? Prior to exploring the applicability of features such as inescapability, prescriptivity, etc., to Vasiṣṭha’s concept of dharma, we must first see how well the Kantian notions of duty and obligation map on to ideas about dharma. In the previous section, we saw that Kant located the force underlying moral actions in the agent’s reverence for the moral law and her motive of duty. Hare, investigating the logical framework provided by the meaning of the word ‘ought,’ concludes that both prescriptivity and universalizability are necessary to give muscle to the reasoning surrounding moral decisions and to the subsequent obligation incurred by the agent. Where does ‘dharma’ stand in relation to such notions of duty and obligation?

The term ‘dharma’ is etymologically derived from the Sanskrit verb root, dhr, literally meaning ‘what holds together,’ but also meaning ‘to uphold,’ ‘to establish,’ and ‘to support.’ Writers\(^\text{17}\) have noted that the notion of dharma as moral law arose out of the Vedic concept of rta. Beneath the surface chaos of the universe, the rta of the Vedas runs

as a deep, metaphysical structure, imposing regularity and symmetry to the workings of
the natural world. Features such as the seasonal cycles, the alternation of day and night,
are managed by the power of rta. According to commentators, this cosmic order, initially
governing aspects of the physical universe, evolved into a grand-daddy of a Law
encompassing all aspects of life including the religious and the moral. Dharma is seen as
a later development of that aspect of rta responsible for governing and directing the
interactions between social beings in a community, their environment and their gods.

Dharma has been variously described as ‘righteousness,’ ‘merit,’ ‘religious duty,’
‘religion,’ ‘law,’ ‘duty,’ ‘justice,’ ‘order,’ ‘truth.’ The Latin ‘obligare’ means ‘to bind
together,’ ‘to tie,’ ‘to fasten,’ in a manner that indicates the strength of a contractual
obligation. Although there is little sense of a contract in the etymology of dharma, there
is a resonance between the two terms in that dharma upholds and sustains the structures
of the world. Whether one’s lived experience occurs in Western Europe or India, certain
injunctions and prohibitions act as constraints upon behavior, constraints that secure the
connections between agent and patient. The question is whether the notion of ‘support’
inherent in dharma binds the agent as strongly as the notion of ‘owe’ in duty.

Broadly speaking, Hindu ethics divides itself into what S. K. Maitra calls social
ethics and psychological ethics. The social norms are the basic injunctions and
prohibitions codified in the Dharmaśāstras, the most authoritative text being the Laws of
Manu. These norms are divided into the varnāšramadharmanas, duties relative to one’s

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social class and stage of spiritual life, and the sādhāraṇadharmas, the universal duties shared by every man and woman. These dharmas are the ‘external’ actions directed towards the good of home, society, and humankind. Maitra points out that these two kinds of duties encapsulate the indebtedness of the agent to the community as well as to mankind in general. The agent owes a debt to her community for the advantages and opportunities granted to her by virtue of her membership of the community. She also owes mankind in general as she lives in a culture built brick by brick by all of her ancestors and predecessors. Their experiences and efforts influence the manner in which she now lives and she has a debt of gratitude and a mandate to further the well being of not just her community, but humanity as well. Thus, it may be argued that the notion of ‘support’ inherent in dharma includes the understanding that something is owed to one’s community and to humanity. Both varnāśramadharmas and sādhāraṇadharmas impose obligatory duties on the individual in terms of a debt.

With the emergence of the ‘darśana’ period and the advent of different schools of thought, philosophers and sages recognized that such prescriptions were inadequate without the presence of a certain state of mind. The commands of the so-called psychological ethics, the cittaśuddhi, apply to those who are already disciplined in the performance of the social duties and refer to the cleansing and purification of the mind. The applicable prescriptions are considered ‘internal’ in that this purification involves both a proper understanding of one’s own nature, including the workings of the will, as well as the disciplines directed at fostering equanimity of the mind.

19 Ibid., p. 2.
Indian philosophers see these psychological requirements as reasonable ethical demands made upon the agent. A necessary pre-requisite to acting morally is to cultivate a certain sense of impartiality and discernment. Prior to acting, the agent needs to be able to assess the situation as calmly as possible, distinguish relevant from irrelevant data and determine precisely the extent of her responsibilities. Someone who is mentally challenged is not blamed if her appraisal of the circumstances falls short of the demands of rationality, but it is customary to have higher expectations of a ‘normal’ person. A teacher, for example, would be considered morally remiss if she based her action on furthering her own ends regardless of the harm it caused to others. Even ‘ignorance of the situation’ would not be considered a valid justification if she should have known better.

In many Indian schools of thought, moral duties include certain duties to one's self, although whether or not the agent is required to shoulder the strenuous disciplines necessary for the purification of the mind depends on the moral status of the individual.

How does this ‘burden’ of dharma unravel itself in the Yogavāsiṣṭha? Vāsiṣṭha’s dharma is variously translated as ‘right’ (VI.1:115), ‘virtue’ (VI.2:143, 206), and ‘righteous conduct’ (VI.2:71). I will explore dharma in its broad sense of ‘righteous conduct.’ This terminology will render an accurate reading of the ethical position of all rational beings, regardless of any differences in an individual’s spiritual stage of life that may impact Vāsiṣṭha’s delineation of duties. Does dharma, as righteous conduct, exhibit the features of inescapability, universalizability, prescriptivity, and situational content, in such a manner as to require ‘real’ people and situations? We turn to the story of Karkaṭī for a response.
Karkatī, according to Vasiṣṭha, is a terrible demoness. She is perpetually hungry and no ordinary measures can appease her hunger. She falls upon a solution; to eat all the people of Jambūdvīpa continent in a single meal. Not wanting to appear too greedy, she rationalizes that this action would not be considered inappropriate as it is legitimate to take action to preserve one’s own life. Brahmā, pleased with her rigorous penances, grants her the boon of becoming Sūcikā, ‘a living steel pin,’ with the added advantage of being accompanied by cholera (Viṣucikā). Unfortunately, Karkatī, embroiled in her ambition, fails to discern all the ramifications of her boon. Being a small pin, she cannot fulfill her wish of one big meal and has to roam the earth for many years in the guise of Sūcikā and Viṣucikā. In addition, cholera does not live in a wholesome environment. Sūcikā finds herself inhabiting dust and dirt on the ground, unclean fingers, dirty skin, and grimy furrows on the palms of the hands and other parts of the body. She finds herself in places of decay, in places of deforestation, in places devoid of healthy trees, in polluted water, and open sewers. Her companions are rats, fleas, and other vermin.

After a while, Sūcikā, sick and tired of her dreadful existence, begins to notice the suffering of others and the cause-effect pattern of her life.

Even so, Sūcikā saw the endless thread that had passed through her in the cloth (her own karma) in front of her. This worried her. She fancied that this dark cloth, which had been woven by her (as Sūcikā or sewing needle) was covering her face and that she was blindfolded. She (the needle) passed through soft cloth (good people) as also hard cloth (the wicked ones), for what fool or wicked person discriminates between what is good and what is not? (III.70)

Sūcikā repents after seeing her adverse impact on the lives of good people and the stupidity of wishing she was something other than she was. She begins penances again and the intensity and severity of these austerities burn up all sinful tendencies and purify
her whole being. In answer to Brahmā’s offer to grant a boon, she replies in the negative. After all, what use are boons for those who have realized the Absolute? However, Brahmā responds that ‘the eternal world-order cannot be set aside.’ Karkaṭī must continue to ‘live an enlightened life, afflicting only the wicked and the sinful, and causing the least harm - that too only to appease natural hunger’ (III:75).

This story reveals the four aspects of the nature of morality. Firstly, Karkaṭī’s failure to appreciate the natural and moral consequences of her boon illustrates the sensible operation of niyati in fixing the feature of inescapability. Vasiṣṭha’s concept of niyati bears a strong resemblance to the Vedic R̄ta. According to Vasiṣṭha, Brahmā, exploiting the power of Brahman, conceives the form of the initial characteristics of the world and this form becomes the cosmic order, the niyati of the worlds in this epoch (III:54). Niyati operates as the natural laws, such as those determining the human life-span, as well as the laws governing the activity of human beings. Vasiṣṭha is adamant that everyone in this world, with the exception of a corpse, is active (II:7, 8). Action cannot be avoided, whether it is bathing, speaking or giving, and each action yields an appropriate result. In addition, actions and their results do not occur in isolation. Vasiṣṭha notes the link between the activity of humans and the laws of the universe. Even a mundane matter as the human life-span is dependent on the purity or impurity of such factors as country, time-period, as well as human activity. Vasiṣṭha states that ntyati ‘ensures that every effort is blessed with appropriate fruition’ (II:10). The emphasis is on the word ‘appropriate.’ Vasiṣṭha elaborates as follows:
In childhood this deluded consciousness is totally dependent on others, in youth it runs after wealth and is filled with worry, in old age it is sunk in sorrow and in death it is led by its own karma. In accordance with that karma, it is born in heaven or in hell, in the netherworld or on earth as human, subhuman or inanimate being...

Behold the power of ignorance and inertia. Merely by the forgetfulness of one's own true state, the consciousness undergoes great troubles and sorrows and experiences pitiable downfall. (VI:1.30)

_Niyati_ as this law of cause and effect is inescapable in the sense that no one is free from its computations and the day of reckoning. Kant argues that morality is inescapable because we are naturally rational beings and we necessarily value that human characteristic in ourselves. Vasiṣṭha points out that the natural workings of the universe are intimately connected with human activity and those foolhardy souls who wish to reject the system all together and live outside of it have to suffer the consequences. Kant is concerned with rational inescapability and Vasiṣṭha with natural inescapability in terms of reward or punishment, but this poses no problem. In whatever manner inescapability exerts itself, the moral command is still inescapable. The intensity of its force upon the agent is still the same even though the content of the force differs. It is only this power that is required to lend credibility to the need for the existence of real human beings. In addition, these laws cannot be overridden by personal inclinations and desires. _Niyati_'s enforcement of karmic consequences is the big stick that knocks Karkaṭi off her perch of self-centered greed and towards a deepening sense of identification with others. Initially, Karkaṭi is resistant to such empathy and the corresponding acknowledgment of obligation, but the discovery that it is no fun inhabiting dirty skin, filthy habitats accompanied by fleas, rats, and other vermin sways her towards thoughts of redemption.
And yet, Vasiṣṭha is adamant that it is not just her own physical predicament that renders Karkatī susceptible to the operation of niyati, and this unselfish component emphasizes her commitment to the prescriptive nature of the rules. It is now no longer just a matter of pain or pleasure, the two factors that initially governed her compliance with the laws of nature. Given that she is indeed a demoness, she may prefer the demon abode to the virus habitat on the grounds that the former is more agreeable to her needs, but her motives are not limited to such personal considerations. Vasiṣṭha notes that even as ‘wicked and cruel people are sometimes moved to pity when they see others who have been poverty-stricken and miserable for a long time,’ Karkatī undergoes a similar change of heart (III:70). She sees that her ‘cloth’ of karma, the cloth she weaves, is dark and covers her face, blinding her. She can no longer distinguish right from wrong. She can no longer reasonably view her actions as ‘appropriate.’ She causes suffering not only to the wicked, but also to the good and this worries her.

Thus, Karkatī demonstrates not only guilt and remorse, emotions that are classically considered ‘moral’ feelings, but also fear and shame over her growing incapacity to render an accurate reading of the situation and act appropriately. There is no doubt that she has a bout of intense self-pity at her miserable existence and becomes wiser as a result, but she also displays anxiety over her own shortcomings and her adverse impact on the welfare of other beings. She resolves to do better, but not knowing how to do better, she takes action in the only way she knows. She undertakes penances as atonement for her sins as well as procuring an improvement in her physical and mental condition. Her commitment to the prescriptive aspect of the rules is confirmed by her
adherence to the practice of the severe and lengthy penances that were necessary for her change back to demoness. Standing on one foot, forgoing all food and water for seven thousand years, she is purified. Her self-imposed responsibility towards the moral life no longer originates from her desires for personal gratification. Even when Brahmā bids her to request a boon as reward for her penances, she refuses in the knowledge that her worldly desires are petty and inconsequential.

As far as the issue of universalizability is concerned, the distinction between varnāśramadharmanas, duties relative to one’s social class and stage of spiritual life, and the sādhāraṇadharmanas, the universal duties shared by every man and woman, is also seen in the Yogavāsiṣṭha. Only some duties (the sādhāraṇadharmanas) apply across the board to all individuals. Prior to commencing his teachings, Vasiṣṭha takes into account Rāma’s character, intellectual capacity and the point at which he stands on his spiritual journey. Rāma is more advanced in his spiritual practice than the run-of-the-mill courtier. He has already cultivated the basic scriptural virtues and attempts to behave in the manner appropriate for a Kṣatriya prince. He is leaning towards a greater understanding of the nature of human life and on the way to observing the problems related to the mind, including its illusory nature. Vasiṣṭha declares that Rāma has the qualities required to listen well and benefit from his instruction (II:17).

Given that Rāma’s duties and responsibilities are very different from those of someone from a different caste and spiritual state of life, the universalizability aspect of dharma in the Yogavāsiṣṭha is not as pronounced as in the Western counterpart of duty or obligation. Even so, the restrictions are not problematic. The specialized
varnāśramadharmanas are obligatory to all those who fall with that social class and spiritual stage. Rāma, and anyone else of the Kṣatriya caste, is not exempt from the duties imposed upon a Kṣatriya. In addition, as S. K. Maitra points out, the sādhāraṇadharmanas (the universal duties shared by every man and woman) constitute the foundation of the varnāśramadharmanas. The former duties are the limits within which the latter are to be observed and obeyed. For example, Maitra notes that the Brahmin in performing his religious sacrifice must not appropriate another’s property for this purpose, non-appropriation being one of the common and universal duties.\(^{20}\) The supremacy of the universal duties over the specific duties emphasizes the universalizable aspect of dharma.

Finally, Karkaṭī’s personal inclinations and desires have no impact on deciding how she ought to act. Although Vasiṣṭha does not specifically elaborate on the content of the dharmas, he does emphasize the significance of dharmas for the seeker of liberation. The Laws of Manu, the most authoritative of the Dharmaśāstras, states that the authority for duties lies first in the Vedas or the śruti (‘that which is heard’ or revelations), then in the smṛti (the recollections of those who adhere to the precepts of the Vedas), in the practice of good men and finally, in one’s own conscience. Vasiṣṭha also endorses the importance of scriptures in many statements, such as ‘He who disregards holy scriptures and holy men does not attain self-knowledge’ (II:12, 13).

The Vedas may be the text for humans, but Karkaṭī too is bound by her own ‘demon’ code of conduct. In response to her refusal to ask for boons, Brahmā states,

\(^{20}\) Ibid., p. 3.
The eternal world order cannot be set aside, O ascetic. And it is decreed that you regain your previous body, live happily for a long time and then attain liberation. You will live an enlightened life, afflicting only the wicked and the sinful, and causing the least harm - and that too only to appease your natural hunger. (III:75)

Karkatī’s code of conduct is that she cannot eat whomsoever she likes in order to ease her hunger. She has to discriminate between good and bad people. She is permitted to eat only bad people on the grounds that she cannot oppose her natural dietary requirements, and that her role as executioner is part of the system of niyati, the consequences of karma and retributive justice. So, Vasīṣṭha promotes a system in which the individual cannot devise her own rules even if she turns out to be the counterpart of Hare’s sincere fanatic. The content of her ethical beliefs is objectified to the extent that the injunctions and prohibitions that govern her life lie outside of her own narrow perspective.

I have argued above that the operation of niyati embodies the considerations of inescapability and prescriptivity by (a) ensuring that no one escapes its clutches (the agent is dogged by her karma), and (b) persuading the agent to consider the consequences of her actions on others and to commit herself to a different course of action in a manner that does not loop back to her own welfare. Niyati is the universe’s mechanism of evoking responsibility, albeit passionlessly. It rewards the well-behaved and punishes the transgressors. Some may simply be enticed or frightened into submission, but in others niyati awakens a sense of shame and the acknowledgment that some actions are simply wrong. In addition, agents are bound by very particular codes of conduct. These may not apply across the board to all rational beings, but there is enough of the universalizable aspect that prevents exclusion of an action from the moral domain on purely arbitrary grounds. Thus, these four features, inescapability, prescriptivity, universalizability, and

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the situational content, are present in dharma, the righteous conduct, of the Yogavasiṣṭha.

In that case, just as in the Western counterparts of duty and obligation, Vasīṣṭha's dharma requires the existence of objectively 'real' people and 'real' situations in order to lend credence to his emphasis on moral behavior.

**Premise 3**

**Vasīṣṭha considers the transactional, phenomenal universe to be just an illusion.**

As noted in chapter one, proponents of Advaita Vedānta distinguish three ontic levels of being: reality, appearance, and unreality, on the basis of 'sublatability' (or 'subratability') - 'the mental process whereby one disvalues some previously appraised object or content of consciousness because of its being contradicted by a new experience.'\(^{21}\) The experience of reality is unsublatable because it can never be replaced or revised by other experiences. Appearance can be so sublated whereas unreality cannot even appear. Within this 'appearance' level, traditional Advaita recognizes ontological differences between the contents of the practical experiences of the world (the vyāvahārīka level), and those of illusions (the prātibhāsīka level) such as hallucinations, dreams, erroneous sense perceptions, fantasies, and so on. Vasiṣṭha, on the other hand, collapses the distinction between the vyāvahārīka level and the prātibhāsīka level. He insists that the world is just a dream.

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For Vasiṣṭha, Brahman, designated as saccidānanda (being, consciousness, bliss), is ultimate reality and the test of this reality is eternal, changeless existence.

That which was not in the beginning and which will cease to be after a time, how can that be regarded as truth? That alone can be regarded as the truth which has always been and which will always be. (V:5)

That which was non-existent in the beginning and that which shall cease to be in the end is not real in the middle (in the present) either. That which exists in the beginning [of the manifestation of the world-appearance], and in the end, is the reality in the present too. (IV:46)

As B. L. Ātreya points out, Vasiṣṭha has the tendency to combine ‘truth’ (satya) with reality (sat ‘that which is’), the root of the word, satya.\textsuperscript{22} For Vasiṣṭha, only that which is not subject to birth, death or change is true, and only that which exists without change is real. There are no relative notions of truth, no degrees of reality. That which is true is also that which is, i.e., that which is simply and unqualifiedly real. Thus, for Vasiṣṭha, the world-appearance acquires the mantle of falsity (mithyā) in that it is not genuine but mere counterfeit. The world-appearance is not ‘real’ and not ‘true.’

Vasiṣṭha does state that the world-appearance is both real and unreal. The world-appearance is real in that it is the content of experience. However, this content is given reality only via the reality of the pure consciousness underlying it. Without Brahman, the world-appearance simply evaporates. It ceases to be. For Vasiṣṭha, the world-appearance is unreal because it does not have continued permanent existence as a universe, independent of consciousness (III:14). Vasiṣṭha also declares that the world-appearance is neither real nor unreal absolutely, just as the snake-appearing-as-rope is neither real nor

\textsuperscript{22} Ātreya, B. L. \textit{The Philosophy of the Yoga-Vasiṣṭha} (Adyar, Madras, India: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1936), p. 350.
unreal. It is experienced and thus, is not unreal. On the other hand, it is not real as it is just a reflection in pure consciousness (III:44). Thus, for Vasiṣṭha, the world-appearance also acquires the status of mere illusion (bhrānti-mātram), yet another way in which he emphasizes its bogus nature.

As far as Vasiṣṭha is concerned, the world is not created as a separate entity, but ‘arises’ out of the activities of the power inherent in Brahman, i.e., māyā.

There does exist, O Rāma, the power or energy of infinite consciousness, which is in motion all the time; that alone is the reality of all inevitable futuristc events, for it penetrates all the epochs in time. It is by that power that the nature of every object in the universe is ordained... It is this power that endows everything with its characteristic quality. But this power is not different from or independent of the absolute Brahman... Sages make a verbal distinction between Brahman and the power, and declare that the creation is the work of that power...

The distinction is verbal, even as one speaks of the body (as a whole and its parts). (III:62)

According to Vasiṣṭha, it is this power, known as ignorance or māyā, that is responsible for the cosmic illusion, the ‘dreadful poison known as world-appearance’ (V:13). In reality, there is nothing but pure consciousness that is Brahman. Out of māyā, arises the seed of doubt as to the true nature of Brahman. Notions such as ‘I’ and ‘world’ arise and create the ‘objects’ that in turn sustain the notions. For Vasiṣṭha, the world seems to exist, but it is a mere vibration of consciousness. ‘All this is but māyā: for there is no contradiction between the infinite consciousness and the apparent existence of the universe. It is like a marvelous dream of a person who is awake’ (III:60). This māyā, the cosmic illusion presented as world-appearance, will continue as long as knowledge of Brahman is obscured. Māyā functions only because of the arising of the individualized ego-sense. As soon as the truth is realized, māyā vanishes in the reality of infinite consciousness (VI.2:14).
Vasiṣṭha does not pause here. Instead of recognizing differences between the various types of illusory experiences, hallucinations, delusions, abnormal vision due to eye disease etc., he likens the empirical reality of the world to every kind of illusion. Vasiṣṭha describes the perceived individuality and multiplicity of the world-appearance as experienced, 'like a day-dream,' 'like a painting on void like the colors of a rainbow,' 'like a widespread fog; when you try to grasp it, it is nothing' (IV:1). It is 'like the aerial city built and present in your mind,' 'like the false sea in the mirage,' 'like the romantic realms with their picturesque scenes in the fancies of poets,' 'like the rotation of black spots in the eyes of a purblind man.'

"The world is an illusion, like the delusion of moving banks and trees to a passenger in a vessel on water, or a rapid vehicle on land; or as the trembling of a mountain or quaking of the earth to one affected by a convulsive disease,' like the decapitation of one's own head in a dream."

The Story of Lavaṇa aptly illustrates the manner in which Vasiṣṭha weaves in the notions of cosmic illusion (māyā), delusion (moha), and optical illusion (bhrama). A juggler enters the court of King Lavaṇa. As he waves a bunch of peacock feathers in front of the king, a cavalier walks in leading a beautiful horse. The juggler requests that the king ride the horse and roam freely throughout the world. Lavaṇa sees the horse, closes his eyes and remains motionless. The courtiers sit in silence. After a while, Lavaṇa looks around and trembles with fear. His ministers attempt to calm him. The distraught king

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25 This story, as well as others in the Yogavāsiṣṭha, is a convoluted and complex tale, interpretable on many levels. Summaries of these stories highlight only those aspects that are relevant to the discussion on hand.
regains some composure and relates his experiences while he was seemingly seated in his palace.

According to the king, as the juggler waves the peacock feathers, he, the king, falls into believing that he beholds a horse and rides away alone on a hunting expedition. After riding through cold and arid deserts, he rests awhile under a tree. The horse runs away. The next day, hungry and frightened, the king sees a girl clad in black clothes carrying a plate of food. She is a Caṇḍāla, an untouchable. She agrees to share the food, but only if he would marry her. Lavaṇa consents to the marriage. Anything is better than a long drawn-out death from starvation. He is then taken to a primitive village where the marriage ceremony is performed. He fathers three children and spends many long years in poverty and hardship, providing for his family. Eventually, a drought falls upon the land, causing many to die of starvation. The demented people even mistake pebbles for balls of meat and chase after mirages in their desperate search for water. They eat corpses and chew on their own fingers to alleviate their hunger. Lavaṇa cannot bear the cries of his own children. He builds a pyre and saying, ‘eat my flesh,’ walks into the flames and awakens in his own palace.

As the king ends his tale, the juggler vanishes. The courtiers claim that this juggler cannot be any ordinary magician. He must have been sent by some divine entity to erase the mental delusion (moha) of a material world. The king is not satisfied to rest on this explanation. The wasteland has too great a hold on his mind. The next day he sets out with his retinue to find the Caṇḍāla village. After a long search, he arrives at a familiar forest where he recognizes many of the outcaste hunters, the orphaned children,
the parched land and withered trees. Eventually, the king sees an old woman whom he recognizes as his mother-in-law. He questions the woman closely and acknowledges that her tale of her daughter’s marriage and life thereafter are his own life experiences with the tribe. Lavanā consoles her and gives the beleaguered villagers enough wealth to meet their needs. He then returns to his own city and continues his rule as king.

Vasiṣṭha utilizes this story to illustrate the various types of deceptions that operate in the world. At the very basic level, the exhausted tribesmen mistake a mirage for water and pebbles for meat. Lavanā recognizes that they are defeated by the simple optical illusions at the prātiḥśāsika level. However, Lavanā is still in his box, convinced that he operates at the vyāvahārika, empirical level of being. With the assurances of his courtiers that he had never left the palace ringing in his ears, Lavanā begins his narrative with the commonsensical declaration that he suffered the delusion of seeing the horse and riding away. It was all just a mental aberration with no basis in worldly reality. In his commentary to Rāma, Vasiṣṭha confirms this assumption that King Lavanā was in a hypnotic state and ‘saw reflected in his own consciousness the marriage of a king with the tribal woman, etc., and he experienced it as if it happened to him’ (III.120, 121).

Vasiṣṭha suggests that such lapses in memory are not unusual. A man may forget an action on which he had expended much time and energy in the past, and he may sincerely believe that he had done something that he had not done.

Vasiṣṭha then takes the second step in his story. The powerful images of the wasteland and all the tribes-people sow seeds of doubt in Lavanā and he reasons that, perhaps, these impressions are not just imaginings of a disturbed mind but the images of
a region actually in existence somewhere out in the world. Lavaṇa rides out with his courtiers and discovers the devastated village still populated by some of his kinsmen and women. The courtiers also see the village and its people. Lavaṇa recognizes and questions his elderly mother-in-law and has his tribesman existence confirmed by her. Vasiṣṭha explains to Rāma that the visions reflected in Lavaṇa’s consciousness also appear in the consciousness of the villagers. The experiences of the villagers are also shared by Lavaṇa. For Vasiṣṭha, even though each individual is caught in the grip of his or her own private delusion of physical reality, experiences can be mutually presented in more than one individualized consciousness. This ‘sharing’ of experiences by many people further bestows credibility on something that is nothing more than a mass hallucination. The ‘normalcy’ of the hallucination is advanced by the mother-in-law who confirms the existence of her son-in-law, but does not recognize Lavaṇa in his kingly regalia.

Vasiṣṭha then takes the third step. The delusion or the self-deception is not so much captured by the falling into a trance-like state in which arises the tribesman’s life, but the weightier problem of Lavaṇa believing that the king who goes into the trance, he himself, is real. In his commentary to Rāma, Vasiṣṭha points out that it is the unruly mind that veils the omnipresent, pure, infinite consciousness and confuses it with the inert, physical body. The mind begets the senses that project sense experiences on to a seemingly external canvas. In reality, there is no mind of Lavaṇa, no body of Lavaṇa, no senses of Lavaṇa, no ‘I’ or ‘mine’ so cherished by Lavaṇa. According to Vasiṣṭha, that is Lavaṇa’s delusion, that he believes himself to be a man, to be more than a dream-figure.
Finally, outside of the framework of this story, Vasiṣṭha makes his most controversial move. Rāma confronts the problem as to how the king’s life experiences as a tribesman, now shifted to the status of dream or hallucination, are also experienced in the reality of the waking state (III:120, 121). Physically, Lavaṇa could not be in the palace and in the village simultaneously. In addition, a few hours in the palace turned out to be many years in the village. These reversals of space and time had been explained via the notion of a day-dream or mass hallucination. However, Rāma is still puzzled as to how the village and the villagers could have shown up as part of the reality of the king’s waking experiences. What forms the basis of such materialization and what precipitates such a departure from commonplace experience?

At this stage, Vasiṣṭha introduces māyā, the grand cosmic illusion that presents the world-appearance and dupes individuals into believing in a physical reality that has ultimate significance and import. It is not merely a question of whether Lavaṇa’s visions of the tribal village were images of reality or merely imaginary. Instead, Vasiṣṭha urges Rāma to extend the field of play from doubting the reality of Lavaṇa’s kingdom to questioning his, Rāma’s, own palatial environment. In reality, there is nothing but Brahman, pure undivided consciousness. However, in the play of māyā, the cosmic illusion, consciousness is individualized, egotism rises and delusions of physicality, of beginnings, middles and ends, take root and flourish. Rāma’s own deluded mind continues to spin the web of falsity and deception. He does not see the links between Lavaṇa and himself. Vasiṣṭha observes that ‘in all the experiences of happiness and unhappiness as also in all the hallucinations and imaginations, it is mind that does
everything and it is mind that experiences all: mind is man' (III:115). However, Vasiṣṭha continues that these ideas are doubly foolish because the mind itself is non-existent. He concludes to Rāma: 'He who is ruled by the mind which is totally non-existent is indeed insane and feels that a thunderbolt is descending from the moon' (III:121).

Thus, Vasiṣṭha dissolves the distinctions between the vyāvahāra level of empirical reality and the prātiśhāśika level of illusion. Experiences at the latter level may be sublated (shown up to be illusion) by further worldly experiences whereas the world-appearance is only exposed by realization of Brahman, but this distinction is irrelevant to Vasiṣṭha's contention that, just like optical illusions, delusions, and hallucinations, the perceptions of individuality and multiplicity are also the workings of a disordered mind. Perceptions of the universe, normally considered to be real, externally located and publicly accessible, are as illusory as optical illusions, as dreams, as delusions, as hallucinations, in that these perceptions are also unreal, internally located and essentially, privately accessible. They are public only in the sense of being reflected images, 'shining' from the field that is Brahman. They are cross currents running simultaneously through many minds, but the reflections have no basis in reality. The transactional, phenomenal universe is just an illusion, as are Vasiṣṭha and Rāma themselves.26

26 From now on, to save confusion, I will the call the world-appearance [cosmic] 'illusion' (māyā), and an individual's self-deception regarding physical existence, 'delusion' (moha).
Premise 4

For Vasiṣṭha, ‘I’ and ‘Other’ exist separately only in the phenomenal universe. In reality there is no such distinction between individuals.

It must be noted that a Cartesian type dualistic universe is not explicitly portrayed in the Yogavāsiṣṭha ontology. The Story of the Hundred Rudras (VI:1.62), for example, charts the progress of one sage’s wish fulfillment from meditative mendicant to the tribesman, Jīvaṭa, to brāhmaṇa, king, nymph, deer, creeper, bee, elephant, back to bee, creeper, and swan. At the point of becoming a swan, the mendicant dies and his consciousness is embodied in the swan. The swan dies to become Rudra. For Vasiṣṭha, the mind and the body are intricately connected. However, what is interesting in this story is that each character attains a life of his/her/its own and keeps it going even after the instigator-mendicant decides he doesn’t want to live that particular life any more and transforms himself to something else. ‘The one form had become many as it were’ (VI.1:63), thus raising the question, ‘Who am I really?’

It is the question, ‘Who am I?’ that forms the bedrock of Rāma’s angst and reveals the dualistic tendencies arising out of Rāma’s own views regarding the separation of body and mind, of ‘I’ and ‘thou,’ in the phenomenal universe. Not only does Rāma explicitly ask, ‘What is this world? What comes into being, grows and dies? How does this suffering come to an end?’ (I:11, 12), but he is very much concerned with the troubles of the ‘I.’

This world and its delights appear bitter to me. I am not fond of wandering in the pleasure-gardens. I do not relish the company of girls. I do not value the acquisition of wealth. I wish to remain at peace within myself. I am constantly enquiring: ‘How can I wean my heart completely away from even thinking of this ever-changing phantasm called
I do not long for death, nor do I long to live; I remain as I am, free from the fever of lust. What shall I do with the kingdom, pleasure or wealth, all of which are the playthings of egotism which is absent in me? (I:28, 29)

Vasiṣṭha responds to this excessive self-absorption (eleven I’s, two me’s and a myself in that paragraph alone) by elaborating on the four gate-keepers to liberation, one of which is vicāra, rational inquiry. The content of true inquiry, he states, includes the investigation of questions such as, ‘Who am I? How has this evil of saṁsāra (repetitive history) come into being?’ (II:14). In emphasizing that the world is appearance only, Vasiṣṭha expands on the various beliefs that are proposed in response to the question, ‘Who am I?’ Philosophers may recommend the view that the true self is to be identified with the material body, the phenomenal appearance of embodiment devoid of any spiritual element. Secondly, they may include the presence of an immaterial soul. Thirdly, they may identify themselves with the universal soul of the world, and finally, a fourth class realizes the underlying unreality of the phenomenal world (V.17). Of the four theories, Vasiṣṭha asserts that the first leads to bondage, whereas the remainder, increasingly cultivating the pureness of thought, lead to liberation. Vasiṣṭha illustrates the grip of the concrete form of the phenomenal universe on the mind and the subsequent dissolution of these false views by the Story of Līlā.

Queen Līlā is happily married to Padma, a righteous and exemplary king. Desirous that this blissful state of affairs should continue forever, she prays to Goddess Sarasvatī and asks for two boons; first, that after the death of her husband, King Padma, his jīva (his embodied soul) remains in the palace (this seems a bizarre wish but the sages had advised her that no amount of austerities will bestow physical immortality), and
second, that Sarasvatī must appear whenever Līlā prays to her. In due course Padma dies in battle. The grief-stricken Līlā asks Sarasvatī for the whereabouts of her husband. Sarasvatī reveals the truth by taking Līlā on a journey to another world and time-period, where Līlā, to her amazement, encounters another Līlā and another Padma. Sarasvatī provides this explanation.

The holy man, Vasiṣṭha, says Sarasvatī, dissatisfied with his meager hut and austere, unadorned life, wishes to be a king ruling over a mighty empire. His endless longing for this opulent and celebrated life-style arrests his journey towards liberation. In his next life, he is stranded within the hut which takes the form of a kingdom. He is King Padma. Vasiṣṭha’s wife Arundhatī, on account of her wish that her husband never leaves her, is re-united with Padma as his Queen Līlā. Padma is killed in battle but still caught up in his wish for the royal life, gives birth to his next life as King Vidūratha. The momentum of Arundhatī’s wish continues unabated in Līlā and Vidūratha is accompanied by a replica of Līlā, let’s call her Līlā 2. At this point it is important to note that this is not a straightforward story of rebirth because the first Līlā (Līlā1) is still alive as Padma’s widow in one world, while Padma’s wish to be Vidūratha gives birth to another world which also houses another Līlā.27

27 The Story of Līlā has many levels of interpretation. I have taken the meeting between Līlā1 and Līlā2 to be straightforwardly a matter of time travel through different dimensions existing in space because of Vasiṣṭha’s three conceptions of space: cidākāśa, the space of pure consciousness, citākāśa, the psychological space of individual minds and bhūtākāśa, the physical space (all three are described later in this chapter). The relationships among these three spatial divisions allow for the twisting and bending of the conventional rules governing time and space. However, it could be argued that this story merely illustrates Līlā’s vivid dreams or her imaginative enactment of latent desires dealing with her inability to cope with Padma’s death.
This is not all. To her utter astonishment, Līlā observes, in her visit to the realm of Līlā, that she recognizes not just Vidūratha and Līlā, but also the same colorful medley of princes, courtiers, ministers, learned men, the entire retinue and inhabitants of her former kingdom. The unliberated Līlā is initially puzzled by her sojourn to the world of Līlā where she sees, not just the figure of her dead husband reincarnated, but also all her ministers and other retinue of court. Her initial wonderment is, 'Are they all dead too?' Individuality and multiplicity still reign tenaciously in her mind and she is trying to make sense of seeing two worlds inhabited by the same people. She attempts to rationalize the apparent inconsistency through existing thought structures, much in the same manner as we would attempt an explanation of seeing a friend in London if we had telephoned and talked to her moments before in California. Sarasvatī asks, 'What do you consider real and what unreal?' ‘That I am here and you are in front of me - this I consider real. That region in which my husband is now - that I consider unreal,’ responds Līlā (III: 18).

For Līlā, 'I' and 'Other' do exist separately, but only in her undeveloped consciousness. She soon realizes that this duality has only a pseudo-existence. It can only be said to 'exist' or 'appear' for people trapped in the machinations of the world. After questioning Sarasvatī, she discovers that life is merely wish fulfillment (the intense desires of one life produce the material for the next birth) and that worlds can be joint hallucinations or joint dreams of two or more sentient beings, created by mutual wishful thinking. Thus, Vasiṣṭha introduces a common thread which winds its way through all the worlds in the present evolution. If all these wishes are traced back in time, the birth of the
first universe is the fancy, the creation of the cosmic mind, Brahmā, who in turn
originates from the pure, infinite consciousness that is Brahman.

Sarasvatī notes that the way out of bondage is to recognize this entire
individualized, variegated world as illusion and to realize the true nature of ultimate
reality, i.e., Brahman as pure, undifferentiated consciousness. In order to advance Līlā’s
knowledge and understanding of Brahman, she explains the workings behind the splitting
and coalescing of individual personalities and pure consciousness. This is possible, she
says, only because of the three conceptions of space: cidākāṣa, the space of pure
consciousness, cittākāṣa, the psychological space of individual minds, and bhūtākāṣa, the
physical space.

It is in the bhūtākāṣa that the phenomenal world and all its paraphernalia are
manifested. It is the space or plane in which air, water, earth, and other physical elements
can emerge, combine and separate. It is a suitable location for matter with all its
properties of being localized in a particular place and time. Individuality and multiplicity
exist only in the bhūtākāṣa of physicality. This bhūtākāṣa is possible because of the
activities of Brahmā and the jīvas, the mental gyrations that occur in their cittākāṣa. The
cittākāṣa is the divided consciousness that allows the drama of division and isolation to
take place. Demarcations of time and space, as well as those operations concerned with
the welfare of beings, are creations of the individualized cittākāṣa. Ultimately, there is
nothing but cidākāṣa, the infinite, homogeneous, undivided consciousness, Brahman, that
is utterly devoid of any objectivity (III:17, 97).
To put it another way, in the Story of Līlā, the sage Vasiṣṭha sits in the bhūtākāśa (the physical space) of his hut. This bhūtākāśa was created in the cittākāśa (the psychological space) of a previous incarnation of Vasiṣṭha. In his current cittākāśa, Vasiṣṭha’s craving for comfort and power creates another bhūtākāśa, the kingdom of Padma and Līlā with all its trappings. The characters in this world take on lives of their own, indulge in their own wishes and create parallel worlds or even ‘co-wish’ the same world. Padma and Līlā project the kingdom of Vidūratha and Līlā through their respective desires. And so on. The complexities of the desires of every player manifest physical universes, all within the hut. These bhūtākāśa, including the hut and other previous physical manifestations, are within the individualized cittākāśa which are, in turn, within the collective cittākāśa of Brahmā, the first creator. This, in turn is within the cidākāśa, the pure space of consciousness, that is the field for the entire play.

The main point is that the two spaces of bhūtākāśa and cittākāśa have very special relationships with cidākāśa that is Brahman. Vasiṣṭha emphasizes that these two planes are not just dependent on cidākāśa for their presence, but in fact the two do not even exist. They are just mirage-like projections of cidākāśa. The three divisions are created simply for ease of pedagogy (III:97). Only cidākāśa, the infinite space of undivided consciousness, is real and existent. All concepts and notions of individuality and multiplicity exist as possibilities within the cidākāśa, and are illumined by the movement of energy within consciousness, just as objects are reflected in crystal. In reality, there is no duality. It is only consciousness reflected in consciousness, but given forms and names by the ignorance pervading the cittākāśa.

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The world is nothing but a mere vibration of consciousness in space. It seems to exist even as a goblin seems to exist in the eyes of the ignorant. It is like a marvelous dream of a person who is awake. (III:60)

Thus, according to Vasiṣṭha, if there is a seeming duality, a world of individuality and multiplicity, it is only the apparent duality that is experienced in dreams. In reality, there is no 'I,' no 'other,' only pure undivided consciousness, Brahman (IV:36).

**Premise 5**

As individuality and multiplicity exist only in the phenomenal world and not in reality (premise 4), and as the phenomenal universe is just an illusion (premise 3), for Vasiṣṭha, there is no individualized agent or patient and there is no moral agency.

If the phenomenal world is just an illusion as discussed in premise (3) and individuality and multiplicity exist only in the phenomenal world, as supported by premise (4), then we are sorely mistaken in pointing to someone as an 'individual being,' much less an 'individual moral being.' There is simply no such thing. No 'I' no 'we,' no 'someone.' Vasiṣṭha, quite happily, acknowledges this over and over again.

What is known as liberation, O Rāma, is indeed the absolute self, which alone is. That which is perceived here as 'I,' 'you' etc., only seems to be, for it has never been created. (III:8, 9)

Any 'reality' accorded to the world comes from its relationship to infinite consciousness. Even 'I'-ness is not genuine reality. The jīva sees it as real 'like the blueness of the sky,' but simply seeing something as real does not confer reality.
Vasiṣṭha views the very perception of objects as a psychological illness which has to be cured (IV:4, 5, 6). In modern terms, we may see this as akin to a man suffering from schizophrenia who cowers in a corner, overwhelmed and defeated by the voices in his mind. His house may be in flames but he, obeying the voices, remains in the ‘safety’ of his room and ends up being burned. We may pity him. We may wonder at his foolishness, but we don’t chastise or punish him. Similarly, for Vasiṣṭha, individuality and multiplicity are disturbances of our minds. In that case, attempts to be moral are also worthy of pity and sympathy. Why be moral when there is no individual being ‘I’ who is the benefactor and no individual being ‘thou’ who is the beneficiary? Vasiṣṭha himself emphasizes this absence of agency.

Whatever there is and whatever appears to be the world-jugglery, is but pure Brahman or the absolute consciousness and nothing else. Consciousness is Brahman, the world is Brahman, all the elements are Brahman, I am Brahman, my enemy is Brahman, my friends and relatives are Brahman. Brahman is the three periods of time, for all these are rooted in Brahman. Even as the ocean appears to be expanded on account of the waves, Brahman seems to be expanded on account of the infinite variety of substances. Brahman apprehends Brahman, Brahman experiences or enjoys Brahman, Brahman is made manifest in Brahman by the power of Brahman himself. Brahman is the form of my enemy who displeases me who am Brahman: when such is the case, who does what to another? (VI.1:11)

The liberated person realizes that not only is she Brahman but that there are ramifications to the utterance, tat tvam asi, that you are. If thou art Brahman, Vasiṣṭha notes, “All this is ‘I’ and all this is ‘mine.’ But I am not and I am not ‘other than I’” (VI.1:11). So, who does what to whom? In presenting the great saying, tat tvam asi, Vasiṣṭha, in one stroke, dissolves the distinctions between ‘I’ and ‘thou’ and simultaneously, obliterates the ‘I’ as well.
This is also nicely illustrated by the Story of the Great Forest. In the great forest of millions of square miles lives a man, with a thousand arms and limbs, and a mace which he uses to continually beat himself. He beats himself, weeps, and then runs away in panic, terrified of another beating. He would then beat himself up again and cry. Whether he runs into the deepest pit or a beautiful banana grove, the effects are the same; fear, anxiety, and suspicion. The forest is so vast that it is as though he is the only inhabitant, but this makes no difference to his frenzied state of mind. He continues to batter himself. Vasiṣṭha finally meets up with him and attempts to instruct him, but the man runs away in terror, intent on holding on to his fear. Eventually, Vasiṣṭha succeeds and the man abandons his body limb by limb and disappears. Then another person appears and it is the same old story all over again.

Vasiṣṭha explains that the forest is the world. The man with many arms is just one delusional mind with its countless manifestations. Whether it is in heaven (the banana grove) or hell (the pit), the mind continues to punish itself. It lives in a state of perpetual terror even though there is nothing to fear. If this mind listens to Vasiṣṭha and wises up, it eliminates its latent tendencies (abandons his limbs one by one) and vanishes, ‘giving way’ to another deluded mind. The ‘progression’ of one mind after another is just Vasiṣṭha’s resourceful way of portraying the individual mind and its delusions, multiplied countless times in the phenomenal world. There is no friend, no foe, nothing that ‘ought to be done.’ Notions of agency arise only from an over-inflated ego. The knowledge of the true nature of the forest and its inhabitant brings about the Cheshire cat-like lingering
disappearance of the ego-centric 'I' and all misconceptions about agency, moral or otherwise.

The End Result - The Paradox

This is Vasiṣṭha’s paradox:

(1) A system of rules that embodies moral considerations relies on the specific nature of morality, and this specificity requires the existence of the individualized agent and the differentiated 'other' in order to lend substance to the agent's regard for the other.

(2) Vasiṣṭha’s concept of dharma embraces this specific nature of moral considerations, and also requires the existence of the individualized agent and the differentiated 'other' in order to lend substance to the agent’s regard for the other.

(3) Vasiṣṭha considers the transactional, phenomenal universe to be just an illusion.

(4) For Vasiṣṭha, 'I' and 'Other' exist separately only in the phenomenal universe. In reality there is no such distinction between individuals.

(5) As individuality and multiplicity exist only in the phenomenal world and not in reality (premise 4), and as the phenomenal universe is just an illusion (premise 3), for Vasiṣṭha, there is no individualized agent or patient and there is no moral agency.
Conjoining these postulates gives rise to the paradox. Premises (3), (4), and (5) proclaim that there is no individuality or multiplicity in Vasiṣṭha’s world to which can be attributed moral agency, be it in terms of benefactor or beneficiary, and yet premises (1) and (2) assert that the concept of dharma in the Yogavāsiṣṭha, the bedrock of virtue and righteous conduct, is weighty enough to require the existence of individualized, differentiated selves and a certain objectivity to worldly phenomena in which moral actions are situated. There is a contradiction. On the one hand, morality is highly valued; on the other hand, morality is impossible. So, Vasiṣṭha has to present an explanation for his emphasis on morality in a world he considers to be illusion. He responds in the traditional manner by utilizing an argument based on an analogy with dream. This is explored in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3: THE DREAM ANALOGY

LIFE IS BUT A DREAM

The Dream

Western philosophers from Descartes to Ayer have puzzled over the skepticism generated by the phenomenological similarities between dream and waking experiences. Even if there are criteria that allow us to distinguish waking experiences from dream experiences, these criteria only appear to give us a high probability that we are not dreaming when we consider ourselves to be awake. There is no conclusive evidence that, at any particular moment in time, one is not merely dreaming that the conditions of wakefulness are currently satisfied. One cannot know that one is not now dreaming.

Vasiṣṭha, on the other hand, is not interested in these skeptical claims. As far as he is concerned, the parallel between dream and world is positive because it offers necessary resources to the seeker in pursuit of liberation. Vasiṣṭha pursues the Platonic point of view (illustrated by the simile of the Cave) that the individual mind is muddled and not being used to its highest capabilities. Although realization of Brahman is available to rational sentient beings, after all we are Brahman, the undisciplined mind runs riot, pursues sensory pleasures as the only reality and wreaks havoc around whatever it targets. Thus, the initial purpose of Vasiṣṭha’s discourse to Rāma is to lead Rāma away from the foolishness of placing any reliance on a world that is ultimately illusion and towards the ultimate reality that is Brahman.
Nonetheless, Vasiṣṭha faces a problem. His teachings that the world is just a dream brings Rāma closer to the truth of Brahman and thereby, most puzzlingly for us, closer to a socially committed, virtuous life of good action. As outlined in chapter two, Vasiṣṭha has to explain how morality can be given any significance in a world considered to be an illusion. As portrayed in the Story of Karkaṭi, Vasiṣṭha is adamant that morality is no empty requirement that can be circumvented when contrary desires arise. Niyati, the cosmic order, includes the universal law of moral causality, and ensures the content and compliance of moral laws. For Vasiṣṭha, moral considerations embody the features of inescapability, prescriptivity, universalizability, and situational content. The force of the moral demand on an individual and her commitment to action ‘goes all the way down’ and require the substantiality of moral agents, patients, and communities.

And yet, Vasiṣṭha is also certain that the seemingly legitimate perceptions of individuality and multiplicity are illusory. After all, if the one Brahman alone pervades all, there is nothing really that can be called a living person, entity or thing. Vasiṣṭha’s forceful utterance, ‘Brahman is the form of my enemy who displeases me who am Brahman: when such is the case who does what to another?’ (VI:1:11), reveals the tension inherent in the Yogavāsiṣṭha. I and thou, who is my enemy, are both Brahman, pure, undifferentiated consciousness. If such is the case, Vasiṣṭha asks, who is the transgressor, who is the victim? Thus, an explanation is required as to how a non-dual metaphysics can contain an ethical viewpoint that presupposes duality. Following the views of non-dualists philosophers before him, Vasiṣṭha provides an account in terms of dream and dreaming.
The Dream Analogy

Vasiṣṭha utilizes an argument based on analogy. His rationale is that the world is a dream, that it has all the essential features of a dream and that these features in turn explain the need for morality.¹ This argument takes the following form.

(I) The world is nothing but a long dream, a mere idea in the mind of the ‘dreamer.’

(II) Just as in the dream, the dreamer is caught up in the dream and sincerely believes that her experiences of dream-objects and dream-events are real, the awoken individual is so entangled in the machinations of the world that she regards her sense experiences as constituents of reality.

(III) Given the psychological impact of this phenomenological snare, particularly in the generation of pain or pleasure, it makes sense for individuals to introduce rules of conduct that reduce suffering and increase happiness.

Each of these steps is explored below. It must be noted that apart from this main argument based on analogy, Vasiṣṭha also presents subsidiary arguments in presenting his case. What I have termed ‘the dream analogy’ is Vasiṣṭha’s primary argument described above. This primary dream analogy is problematic and the difficulties are investigated in the final section of this chapter.

¹ It must be noted at this point that Vasiṣṭha’s main goal is to reveal the illusory nature of the world to Rāma. As such, descriptions and arguments establishing the world as dream are abundant and repetitive to the point of obscuring his views on the importance of morality. His ethical expositions are ample, but are so inter-woven with his teachings on liberation that they appear fragmentary and obscure. In spite of the
Step I: The World as Dream

Vasiṣṭha’s first premise is that the world is nothing but a long dream, a mere idea in the mind of the ‘dreamer.’ He presents his case in two ways: by utilizing (1) a metaphysical explanation and (2) a metaphysical argument.

(1) Vasiṣṭha’s Metaphysical Explanation for the Identity of World and Dream

For Vasiṣṭha, there is no reality but pure, undivided consciousness, Brahman. This consciousness is never without the movement of energy, a dynamic power called māyā. Consciousness knows itself and normally rests in itself as pure existence, utterly devoid of any objectivity that creates the split between the knower and the known. However, occasionally there is a breach in this process. From the movement of energy arises the thought ‘I know’ and the ego-sense of ‘I’, thus creating an artificial rupture between the knower, knowing, and known. Knowledge that was formally inherent and undivided in consciousness is now separated as the subject and the object of consciousness. The persistence of this notion of ‘I,’ the constant affirmation of the separation of ‘I’ from pure consciousness, freezes the imagined existence of the ego-sense into a distinct entity, and promotes other ideas, such as time, space, and body. Soon, the ‘world’ is born.

And yet, according to Vasiṣṭha, nothing has changed. All of this worldly creation is just a ‘manifestation’ of the energy of pure infinite consciousness, Brahman, but even to say it is a ‘manifestation’ is misleading. It is merely a network of thought-forms that

scattered nature of these texts, my aim in this chapter is to reconstruct Vasiṣṭha’s assessment of the need for rules of conduct and his justification for morality in the world-dream.
have gained credence through the persistence of the ego-sense. By entertaining notions such as ‘I am this or that,’ what was pure, undivided consciousness ‘yields’ the ego, which then becomes firmly established as the experiencer of events and the doer of actions. This ‘I’-sense gives birth to more thought-forms that further sanction and feed the notions of individuality and multiplicity. Pure consciousness is bound by an ignorant imagination that experiences objects and affirms reality where there is, in fact, none. ‘Thus what was accidental coincidence to begin with soon becomes established fact,’ says Vasiṣṭha (VI:1:33).

If we use the Aristotelian notion of the four aitiai, using the term ‘aitia’ as ‘explanation’ rather than ‘cause,’ the relationship between Brahman and the universe is clarified. Brahman may be considered to be the formal explanation if form is taken to be what the item is essentially (to ti ἐν εἶναι) rather than shape or definition (which are accidental characteristics for Vasiṣṭha). The universe is essentially none other than Brahman. Its ‘formula’ is inherent in the infinite consciousness just as the uncarved image is in the block and the waves are in the waters of a calm ocean (III:10). Brahman can also be the material explanation, whether that is considered to be matter (hulē) or substratum (hypekeimenon). Brahman, being indescribable (nameless and formless), is

2 Translators such as J. L. Ackrill and William Charlton do use the word ‘cause’ rather than ‘explanation.’ However, they are quick to point out that although they are following the traditional translation, Aristotle’s usage of ‘aitia’ does not carry the sense of causal efficiency and connection tied to the English word. Of Aristotle’s four ‘causes,’ only one, usually translated as the efficient cause, comes at all close to the English term. Ackrill notes that the four causes are ‘types of explanatory factor’ and it is this notion that I hope to convey in using the word ‘explanation’ rather than ‘cause.’ See Ackrill, J. L., trans. Aristotle the Philosopher (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 36. Also Charlton, William, trans. Aristotle Physics Books I and II, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 98.

3 Although the Aristotelian notion of aitia clarifies the relationship between Brahman and the world, there are major differences between Aristotle and Vasiṣṭha.
not a definable material substance (IV:18), but pure consciousness and thus, so is the world, regardless of its external appearance. Just as the ornament is non-different from the gold, the creation is non-different from Brahman (III:4). In accordance with the material explanation, Brahman is also the substratum of the universe. It is not just that without Brahman, the universe ceases to be the universe. Without Brahman, the field of play for materiality and mind-stuff, the universe simply ceases to be. Brahman is also the final explanation, the end or goal of the universe. Not only does the material universe dissolve back into Brahman, but its very materiality and bodily attributes are also the means by which the ignorant individual attains liberation.

It is in the notion of Brahman as efficient explanation that Vasiṣṭha’s views diverge from Aristotle’s and most emphasizes the illusory aspect of the universe. For Aristotle, the efficient explanation, or what he calls the ‘source of change or staying unchanged,’ is generally ‘that which makes something of that which is made and that which changes something of that which is changed.’ This ‘source of change’ is traditionally translated as efficient cause and has close connections with the acts of creation and production.

However, according to Vasiṣṭha’s ‘efficient explanation,’ the world is not created by Brahman as the potter creates a pot. Although Brahman is the source from which the universe emanates, the world arises out of pure chance. Vasiṣṭha states:

It [this creation] arises in the consciousness without any reason or cause whatsoever (it is a coincidence like the ripe coconut falling when a crow alights on it); dreaming, conceptualization etc., follow later. Once this creation has arisen without any cause in the

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infinite consciousness, its ‘existence’ follows later. Therefore, even though this creation seems to have been created, it has not been created; when thus it has not been created at all, surely it does not exist. (VI.2:168)

The crow’s feet did not knock the coconut off its moorings, it just so happened that the crow landed and the coconut fell. This is also the relationship between Brahman and the universe. The creation of the universe is causeless (III:4, 9) in that Brahman does not transform into the universe or will the universe into existence. According to Vasiṣṭha, the notion of a ‘cause’ projects misleading ideas about ‘intention,’ ‘production,’ and ‘effect’ to which are attached false impressions of reality and substantiality. For Vasiṣṭha, just as water has no motivation to throw up ripples, Brahman has no motive in ‘creating’ the world and so creation has not taken place (VI.2:9, 10). Instead, ‘when the infinite vibrates, the worlds appear to emerge; when it does not vibrate, the worlds appear to submerge: even as when a firebrand is whirled fast a fiery circle appears; and when it is held steady the circle vanishes. Vibrating or not vibrating it is the same everywhere’ (III:9).

Thus, Brahman is not the creator of the world in the sense of being its efficient cause, but is just an explanation of how the universe comes into ‘being.’ This explanation does not involve causation in terms of active production, change, and movement. For Vasiṣṭha, an efficient cause must have the deliberate intention of creating in order to be considered a ‘genuine’ cause. In Brahman’s case, there is no intention to create, no active willing of birth and growth and thus, no ‘thing’ is produced.5 Any objection along the

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5 Vasiṣṭha subscribes to the satkārya theory of causation (that the effect is pre-existent in its cause) in mundane matters. A piece of cloth cannot be produced out of a pot because there is nothing in the pot that even remotely corresponds to the cloth (VI.2:190). However, as far as the creation of the world is
lines that explanations need to answer the question ‘why?’ and spell out why things are
necessarily the way they are works in Vasiṣṭha’s favor. The material, formal, and final
explanatory factors support (or, at least, do not militate against) Vasiṣṭha’s claim that the
world-appearance is just accidental coincidence. Stripping the efficient explanation to the
bare bones of just how the universe comes into being and omitting any involvement with
a causal ‘why’ removes the taint of necessity from the emergence of the world and leaves
the feature of chance intact.

Vasiṣṭha advances this notion of the insubstantial, accidental ‘manifestation’ of the
world-appearance to set up his claim that the world is just a dream. He utilizes the
three states of consciousness, waking, dream, and deep sleep, which are said to arise out
of the camouflaging of the pure, undifferentiated consciousness that is Brahman. 6

Vasiṣṭha introduces what are customarily considered important differences between the
three states and then proceeds to dissolve these barriers. He describes these states as
follows. In the waking state, the life principle, responsible for keeping the body alive,

6 Andrew Fort defines consciousness as ‘the unconditioned basis of awareness or mental activity (sensing,
feeling, thinking etc.)… the animating substratum or source of the contents of the individual mind.’ He
defines state of consciousness as a ‘physiologically and psychologically distinct (and transient) condition of
awareness. Waking, dream and sleep … are states in this sense. Thus a state is not a mood change or a
single thought or feeling.’ Fort, Andrew. The Self and its States: States of Consciousness Doctrine in
Advaita Vedanta (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1990), p.9. Conventionally a fourth state of
consciousness, turiya, is introduced to denote the pure state of consciousness where Brahman is realized.
Vasiṣṭha complicates matters by advancing the notion that the turiya state is also a stage in meditation,
superseded by the turiyāṭṭa (beyond turiya) stage, but these distinctions are not relevant here.
moves throughout the body and activates awareness in each part of the body. As it moves through the sense-organs, mind, etc., this awareness or consciousness is directed outwards, projecting the realistic form of the 'external' world that is shared by all individuals. An 'objective' world is thus born (IV:19). In the deep sleep state, the life principle lies dormant, the sense organs and senses are inactive, and the sleeper rests in pure undifferentiated self-awareness, temporarily devoid of any conditioned limitations of individuality and multiplicity (IV:19). In the dream state, the life principle is again active, but the external sense-organs do not function. The senses and the imaginative mind direct their activities 'inward' as it were, and perception occurs within the dreamer. The dreamer experiences this internal world with great clarity (IV:19).

For Vāsiṣṭha, the underlying substratum of the dream and the waking states, the field of dream and awakened life, is nothing but Brahman, pure consciousness. Neither state can be said to exist as distinct and separate. What is called the 'waking' state or the 'dreaming state' is only a manifestation of Brahman. In actuality, there are no differences between the two states. 'Waking' and 'dreaming' are simply two words used to denote two ripples in the ocean of pure consciousness (VI.2:143). According to Vāsiṣṭha,

The consciousness that exists in the waking state enters the dream state and becomes dream. The dream-consciousness being awake in the dream attains the status of wakefulness in dream. The dream state enters the waking state, and the waking state abandons the dream and wakes up. When the waking state enters into the dream state, the dreamer wakes up as it were. The dreamer regards the waking state as a dream; to him the consciousness of the dream is the real waking state. Surely to the dreamer the true waking state is the dream, not the other waking state. In relation to the waking state, the dream seems short-lived. Even so the dreamer regards the waking state to be brief. There is no difference whatsoever between the two, and neither of them is real. (VI.2:164/5)

7 This also applies to the deep sleep state, but this is not relevant to the argument here.
When an individual is dreaming, her senses are turned inward and her individual consciousness, which is non-different from pure consciousness, enters into the dream state. The dream takes on all the characteristics of the waking state. It appears real to the dreamer and the dreamer regards herself as having ‘woken up,’ as it were, from the waking state. Vasiṣṭha is emphatic about this devaluation of the waking state while within the dream. To the dreamer, the dream is the waking state and her previous worldly existence simply disappears.

Thus, Vasiṣṭha notes, ‘the waking state itself is two-fold’: the waking state in the dream and the waking state in wakefulness (VI.2:137). If such is the case, why is one given greater significance than the other? For Vasiṣṭha, the apparent divisions between dreaming and waking states arise only in the unenlightened mind that conjures up the world of multiplicity and believes it to be real. To the sage who has awoken to the truth of the pure, undivided consciousness that is Brahman, these divisions of dream, sleep, and awaking cease to exist. The dream takes on the characteristics of the ‘real’ world and the world takes on the appearance of a dream. There is no other explanation because it is pure consciousness that clothes itself as ‘dream state,’ ‘waking state,’ and so on. In actuality, there are no differences between the dream state and the waking state of consciousness and no differences between the dream-appearance and the world-appearance, dream experiences and worldly experiences. All are just unhealthy projections of the mind, camouflaging the reality that is Brahman.
Vasiṣṭha's Metaphysical Argument for the Identity of World and Dream

Vasiṣṭha also utilizes an argument in establishing his claim that the world is nothing but a dream. According to Vasiṣṭha:

One who wakes up from a dream thinks, 'it is like this and not like that which I saw in a dream'; after death too, one thinks, 'It is like this and not like that which I saw before death.' The dream may be brief and the life may be long, but the experience of the moment is the same in both. Just as in one lifetime one experiences hundred of dreams, till one attains nirvāṇa one experiences hundreds of waking states. Just as some people remember their dreams some people remember their past experiences. (VI.2:161)

Just as there is no definite sequence or order or causal connection in dreams, in this world appearance there is no definite causal connection or sequence though it appears to have one. There is no division in dream; nor is there division in objects of perception. It is the same Brahman or infinite consciousness that appears in front of you as this universe or creation. In dream there is no recognition of the objects seen in the dream nor is there samskāra (mental impressions) nor even memory, because the dreamer does not think, 'I have seen this before.' Similarly in the waking state too, when these three considerations are removed, there is infinite consciousness alone which the ignorant man identifies with memory. (VI.2:175)

In passages such as these, Vasiṣṭha identifies the following features of the dream as those characteristics considered to be important signifiers of illusion.

- (a) The short-lived evanescence of the dream and instability of dream objects.
- (b) The incoherence and internal contradictions of dream objects and dream events.
- (c) The sublation (shown to be illusion) of the dream upon awaking.
- (d) The lack of a subject-object distinction as only the dreamer exists in a dream.

Vasiṣṭha compares these 'distinguishing' marks of the dream to aspects of the world-appearance, and then argues that as these features are also present in the so-called 'real' world, the world-appearance is also just a dream.
It is important to note that Vasiṣṭha does not delve into the issue of whether this list of four features is a comprehensive one. I am going to assume that it is inclusive of all the major criteria. The aim of this dissertation is to provide an account of the importance of morality in a world considered to be an illusion, and so I will concentrate on the problems associated with this specific issue. If another major criterion does emerge, I am convinced that Vasiṣṭha’s ingenious tales would provide the necessary correspondence with the world-appearance. In this section, I will focus on Vasiṣṭha’s explanations and arguments for the identity of dream and world-appearance via the four features of evanescence, incoherence, sublation, and subject-object unity.

• (a) The Short-Lived Evanescence of the Dream and Instability of Dream Objects

Vasiṣṭha notes that dreams are short in duration. In contrast, the waking life is drawn out to a much greater extent and the experiencing of this prolongation of time conveys notions of solidity and permanence. Vasiṣṭha undercuts these ideas by providing an explanation for the seemingly ‘vast difference’ in length between dreams and waking. In the Story of Līlā (described in chapter two), Vasiṣṭha’s view of the creation of the world is that it is the dream of Brahmā. Brahmā creates the world in that he dreams up the world. Vasiṣṭha and Arundhatī are characters in Brahmā’s dream, who then take on a life of their own and conjure up their own worlds in rebirth after rebirth. All their lives in the form of Padma and Līlā1, Vidūratha and Līlā2, etc., are set within the life (dream) of Brahmā. Brahmā has a prolonged life span of many thousands of years and Vasiṣṭha states, ‘the objects born in the Creator’s dream migrate from dream to dream, from
embodiment to embodiment - thus generating the illusory solidity of this world-
appearance’ (IV:18). The objects in Brahmā’s dream are experienced as the objects in the
wakeful state by unenlightened individuals. Mountains, oceans, and rivers are as short-
lived as mountains, oceans, and rivers in any dream-world, but the ‘worldly’ ones are
given physical substantiality by Brahmā’s extensive life-span. As they endure from
worldly life to worldly life, from one generation to another through centuries, these
entities are given the appearance of solidity and permanence.

Nonetheless, the blame cannot be placed purely in Brahmā’s hands. The
reification of the world-idea is an affliction brought on by the individual herself. ‘One
should not revel in the filth known as sense pleasures as a worm revels in pus,’ scolds
Vasiṣṭha. The fool who pursues the pleasures of the senses in the mistaken belief that this
is happiness is doubly damned (II:4, 5). First, the fool is unaware that the cravings and
aversions for pleasures and pains are to be treated with the greatest of suspicion as they
are most prone to divert her from her true path. Second, just as the dreamer goes from
dream to dream each night, the individual jīva (the embodied self) travels from life to life
and each life lived in ignorance of her true nature intensifies the reification of the world-
idea in the next life (VI.1:52). According to Vasiṣṭha, the very cravings that plague the
fool from lifetime to lifetime multiply and exacerbate the mental modifications of the
mind that influence beliefs such as ‘I am here in this manner.’ As each life passes by, she
catapults herself further into ignorance and delusion. Vasiṣṭha notes, ‘When this
experience is sustained for some time and it takes deep root, it takes on the quality of
reality’ (VI.2:143).
For Vasiṣṭha, this robustness of the waking experience and solidity of waking objects are as illusory as the seeming notions of duration and stability generated in dreams.

The dream may be brief and the life may be long, but the experience of the moment is the same in both. Just as in one lifetime one experiences hundred of dreams, till one attains nirvāṇa, one experiences hundred of waking states. Just as some people remember their dreams, some people also remember their past experiences. (VI.2:161)

Vasiṣṭha notes that world and dream events are experienced alike when taken from the point of view of the particular experience alone. Notions about the brevity of the dream and prolongation of the waking life experience do not arise while dreaming the dream within the dream state. It is only from outside of the context of the dream state and within the context of the waking state that one comes to the conclusion that the dream is short, insubstantial, and illusory, and the waking life long and substantial. According to Vasiṣṭha, if the waking life is also seen outside of the context of the waking state, then there would be no doubt as to its evanescent and insubstantial nature.

Vasiṣṭha approaches this debate in different ways. He observes that in a dream a single moment and an epoch are not viewed differently. In dreams, events may pass in an instant or seem interminably long. Time collapses into itself in a manner that makes any reference to span and duration meaningless. Vasiṣṭha notes that this leveling of time is also seen in real life. Time does not operate independently of the mind’s tendencies. The activities of the individual mind add many twists and turns to the perceived length of a waking experience. A night may seem an age to a suffering person, but to a party-goer the very same night of revelry rushes by in an instant (III:59, 60). And yet, time is given greater credence in the waking state of consciousness than in the dream state. “Even as in
a dream, there is birth, death and relationship all in a very short time, and even as a lover feels that a single night without his beloved is an epoch, the jīva thinks of experienced and non-experienced objects in the twinkling of an eye. And immediately thereafter, he imagines those things (the world) to be real’ (III:20, 21). However, argues Vasiṣṭha, if this manipulation of time is taken into account in both dream and waking life, then there is no basis for the assertion that dream objects and events are the only items that are illusory.

In addition, Vasiṣṭha notes that the experience of a life time can also be seen as momentary when viewed with an overarching perspective that takes into account the jīva’s entire journey from first birth to final liberation. He points out that just as the dreamer may dream that she dies but wakes up and continues on with her waking life, in that very same manner, the living jīva eventually dies, discards this body, and ‘wakes up’ to experience another world in a different body until the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth is halted by enlightenment. Just as while dreaming, some dreamers do and some do not remember previous dreams, some people do but others do not recall past lives and consider this life alone to be real (VI.2:104, 105).

Vasiṣṭha observes that if these lifetimes are viewed as a whole, they capture the sense of brevity of dreams. In his stories, Jīvata travels through 100 lives. Līlā remembers 800 births; nymph, vicious human-woman, serpent, forest tribal-woman, creeper, sage’s daughter, king, mosquito, bee, deer, bird, fish, celestial, tortoise, swan, mosquito again... In the Story of Vipaścit, Bhāsa not only recounts his past lives, but gives the duration of each life-time as well; a thousand years as a tree, fifty years as a sarabha (an eight-footed
animal), a swan for fifteen hundred years, and so on. Such a numeric tally and chronicle of past lives is reminiscent of the reports of nightly dreams and allows Rāma to fracture the illusion of length and semblance of solidity. Rāma can then view the waking life as being as transient as his dreams. According to Vasiṣṭha, all that is required is a shift in perspective. If lifetimes are seen in 'fast-forward' mode, they acquire the brevity and evanescence of dreams. Thus, Vasiṣṭha concludes that the 'distinction between dreaming and waking is purely arbitrary and academic' (VI.2:104, 105).

- (b) The Incoherence and Internal Contradictions of Dream Objects and Dream Events.

The customary solution to the problem of distinguishing the waking experience from the dream experience is to maintain that events in the waking world have a greater consistency and regularity than events in the dream state. The waking world is coherent and ordered. The sleeper, upon awakening, successfully pick ups the threads of her life that were suspended when she fell asleep. Her memory operates unabated from day to day. Utilizing her knowledge of past behavior as well as the regular operation of certain universal laws, she anticipates the occurrence of future states of affairs and responds accordingly. In contrast, there is no such connection between phenomena in a dream and the dreamer has no such control over her dreams. There are no restrictions of time and space. No physical or logical limitations. One can be convinced that one squares the circle, dives to the depths of the ocean without equipment, and runs a mile under ten
seconds. In addition, the events in dreams are not only disconnected within a single
dream but are unconnected from dream to dream to dream.

It must be noted at the outset that some of Vasiṣṭha’s ingenious justifications for
the claim that the world exhibits the incoherence of dream and thus cannot be
distinguished from dream, may appear outlandish and the target of easy criticism.
Śaṅkara, one of the foremost exponents of Advaita, distinguishes worldly
experiences from dream experiences by pointing out that the nature of the dream is such
that it does not fulfill the conditions of place, time, cause, etc., which make up the
empirical world. In dreams, not only is there no space within the limited confines of the
body for chariots and things, not only does one live through several years in a dream
occupying one night, not only do chariots and things get manufactured in the twinkling of
an eye but the dream itself is refuted by its creations. What at first is considered to be a
chariot, turns in a moment, into a man, and what was conceived to be a man has all at
once become a tree and so on. Undaunted by this commonsensical position, Vasiṣṭha
seeks to undermine the coherence principle in two ways.

Vasiṣṭha’s first method is to illustrate that the coherence principle can operate
even in a dream. Norman Malcolm, in his monograph ‘Dreaming,’ notes that many
philosophers from Descartes to Ayer have utilized this principle of coherence in one way
or another to affirm greater probability, if not certainty, of the reality of the waking state.
However, he has an objection.

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The objection that should occur to anyone is that it is possible that a person should dream that the right connections hold, dream that he connects his present perceptions with 'the whole course of his life.' The coherence principle tells us that we are awake if we can make these connections and asleep in a dream if we cannot; but how does the principle tell us whether we are noting and making connections or dreaming that we are? It seems to me that it obviously cannot and therefore the principle is worthless.  

Malcolm's point is that the coherence principle cannot be used to distinguish the waking state from dream because the dreamer can just as easily dream that these orderly connections are being made. The individual is unable to distinguish the actual making of connections from just dreaming that she is doing so. In fact, while dreaming, the question of coherence or incoherence rarely arises. Neither the dreamer nor the character in the dream representing the dreamer has quibbles about any craziness in the composition of dream objects or the progression of dream events. In the world of dream, things appear to evolve quite naturally and in an orderly fashion. It is coherent as coherence is understood within the system of dreaming.

Bert O. States argues further that although dream thoughts assemble things exploiting odd laws of association, odd, at least, in comparison to the organization of waking thoughts, we must be aware of the in-built biases in applying words like 'coherence' to dream. As far as States is concerned, the criteria for coherence reflect the presuppositions operating in waking reality and waking thoughts about reality. He points out that this kind of coherence can be tested in a laboratory and this is crucial for the verification procedures of the waking world. 'But supposing there are other orders of

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10 Ibid., p. 108
coherence that have to do with different kinds of mental activity.\textsuperscript{12} States utilizes the work of Ernest Hartmann who finds strong similarities between dreaming and psychotherapy. According to Hartmann, the dreamer is able to employ an enormous network of memory patterns in order to access the troublesome spots in her life in a unique but protected manner. In the dream, just as on the psychiatrist’s couch, an individual has the opportunity of making even distressing connections in a safe place. If such were the case, dreams may be operating under dream rules. States concludes that coherence can only be determined ‘inside out’ from within the system itself.\textsuperscript{13}

Vasiṣṭha advances these claims of coherence in dream by suggesting that although many dreams do not adhere to the rules of coherence as laid out in the waking state, the massive memory nets available to the dreamer contain all the bits and pieces of the waking world and theoretically, at least, dream objects and events can be put together in exactly the same way as waking-life objects and events. In the Story of the Hunter and the Deer (VI.2:149), a sage driven by curiosity concerning another man’s dreams, enters that man’s dream and beholds a fully furnished world. Forgetting his previous life and existence, he takes up residence in the dream-world, marries, has a family, friends, community, and settles into the day-to-day normality of mundane life. He lives there for a hundred years until urged into recollection by another sage. He returns to his previous life to discover that he had been gone only a moment. Thus, Vasiṣṭha portrays a dream in which the main criteria of waking life, the customary, regular ordering of experiences,

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p. 26.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 31.
the ordinary connections between events that do not puzzle or bewilder the reasoning mind, are represented in minute detail. It is not so much that the sage dreams that these connections are present even though they are not (for example, ‘squaring’ the circle and dreaming that this is perfectly reasonable), but that the sage is caught in a dream that is an exact representation of what occurs in real life. As far as Vasiṣṭha is concerned, in a dream, not only can coherence be imagined when absent or even be present, albeit in an unorthodox manner, but as all the paraphernalia of waking life are available, the dream experience has the option of evolving as consistently as anything relating to the waking experience.

Vasiṣṭha’s second method for undermining the incoherence of dreaming in contrast to waking experiences is to attempt the contrary perspective. Of course, anything goes in a dream. One can travel from world to world in an instant, regardless of distance (VI.2:132), and flood-waters suddenly transform into a mass of mud (VI.2:140). This type of leap-frogging from event to unrelated event is absent in waking life. Or is it? For Vasiṣṭha, not only can a dream exhibit all the signs of coherence, but waking life can portray all the contradictions and inconsistencies of a dream.

Just as there is no definite sequence or order or causal connection in dreams, in this world-appearance there is no definite causal connection or sequence, though it appears to have one. (VI.2:175)

According to Vasiṣṭha, this lack of causal connection also arises in the extraordinary worldly phenomena that subvert the universal laws of nature. Even in this world, he notes, ‘fire burns in the middle of water, water remains suspended in the sky, living
beings are found in the heart of a rock, insentient machines function in sentient ways’ (VI.1.61). 14

Vasiṣṭha attempts to boost this assertion, that world-events are as incoherent as dream-events, in yet another way. An individual experiences objects and events according to her inner attitude, her state of mind. ‘When the mind is in a demented or confused state, there is nothing in the world that the mind cannot experience’ (VI.1:61). This may happen in three ways. First, the individual’s mind may be altered by drugs or medication. A drunken man may see empty space where a wall stands (III:60). Second, the compulsive wants and desires of the individual color the situation. Friends become enemies, enemies into friends, nectar transforms to poison, and a non-existent goblin kills the deluded person (III:60). Finally, and most disturbingly for Vasiṣṭha, the unreal world takes on the persona of reality for the confused mind. ‘In dream, the barren woman seems to have a son; in the waking state the impossible seems to have happened. The unreal appears to be real. Something which has not really been experienced appears to be a real experience, even as one experiences one’s own funeral in a dream’ (VI.2:104, 105). According to Vasiṣṭha, there is no end to the possibilities and impossibilities that the mind can envision in the waking state. Just as in the dream all manner of absurdity is taken for granted, in the ‘real’ world too the mind can play tricks and conjure up craziness and idiocy that it then believes to be genuine and rational. Vasiṣṭha again

14 This may not be as bizarre as it sounds. A news report (ABC, January 2003) claimed that in Brainerd, Minnesota, at temperatures of -40 degrees, the North Long Lake was frozen solid except for a half-mile area that persistently remained liquid. Even given the nature of the currents in that region, some scientists claim to be baffled by this phenomenon.
concludes that the distinction between dreaming and waking cannot be upheld on the grounds of incoherence.

- (c) The Sublation of the Dream upon Waking

Vāsiṣṭha also revises the notion of ‘sublatability’ (or ‘subratability’) - ‘the mental process whereby one disvalues some previously appraised object or content of consciousness because of its being contradicted by a new experience’\(^{15}\) - in supporting the view of identity between dream and world appearance. He accepts that the world of dreams is daily ‘sublated’ by the waking reality in that dream-object and dream-event experiences are disvalued upon awakening. Previous ‘dream’ judgments regarding the reality of dream objects and dream experiences are revealed to be mistaken upon awakening. However, Vāsiṣṭha also adds to this conventional and commonsensical view.

As far as Vāsiṣṭha is concerned, the dreamer does wake up from the dream and confirm that what she considered to be real was in fact unreal. She may have dreamed that she was in the midst of war and suffered a terrible defeat, but once awake, she realizes that none of these events actually occurred. The non-existence of the dream-war is revealed and established by the waking state. ‘In dream, the dream-body appears to be real; but when there is an awakening to the fact of dream, the reality of that body vanishes’ (III:22, 23). However, Vāsiṣṭha goes one step further. Utilizing the distinctions between the dream state and the waking state of consciousness, he argues that not only is

\[^{15}\text{Deutsch, Eliot.} \text{Advaita Vedanta: A Philosophical Reconstruction (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1973). p. 15}\]
the dream state sublated by the waking state of consciousness, but the reality of the waking state is also shown to be illusion by the dream state. He presents two explanations for this thesis.

Vasiṣṭha’s first consideration is the phenomenology of the entry and exit experiences in both the dream and waking states of consciousness. The dream ‘emerges’ from the waking state just as the experience of waking ‘emerges’ from the dream state. There is a falling into dream from the waking state just as there is a falling into wakefulness from the dream state. This does not display just a temporal sequence in that dream follows waking and waking follows dream, but also two-way causal connections that account for perceptual similarity in both states of consciousness.

Dreams, for Vasiṣṭha, arise without any cause (VI.2:141, 142), but the contents of the dreams are influenced by saṃskāra (latent impressions of past experiences and actions) of the waking state or arise out of an imagination that uses ‘waking’ attributes as building blocks (VI.2:144). Dreams do not produce saṃskāra of their own that in turn impact the waking life, but Vasiṣṭha acknowledges the existence of prophetic dreams. The dreamer can experience future events, such as her own death (VI.2:144), thus providing a link with the waking world. This is not a causal link in that the dream of death is not the causal ground for the death, but it provides a phenomenological segue from the dream state into the waking state, from dream to awakening. What is seen, felt, tasted in the dream recurs in waking life and vice versa. Vasiṣṭha’s way of thinking introduces a

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16 I am grateful to Arindam Chakrabarti for this terminology and elaboration of this proposition.
bridge or a continuum between the two states of waking and dreaming, a gradual shift from one to another, rather than the sharp divide that is required for the sublation of the dream state by the waking state.

Vasiṣṭha's second claim in support of the dismantling of boundaries between dream and waking states is that there is further mutual interaction between the two states in that dreams impinge on waking life just as waking moments encroach upon dreams. According to Vasiṣṭha, the conventional view that only dream experiences occur in the dream state and only waking experiences occur in the waking state is just wrong.

Short-lived dreams happen all the time in waking life. Conversely, short spells of wakefulness are happening all the time in dreams. (VI.2:165, verse 6)¹⁷

Vasiṣṭha's point is that the sequence of waking and dream states (ignoring the deep sleep state) is usually depicted in the following manner:

```
dddddddddddWWWWWWdiddiddiddidWWWWWWdiddiddiddid ....
(dream state)(waking state)(dream state)(waking state)(dream state)...
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In this conventional picture, dreaming experiences (d) occur only in the dream state and waking experiences (W) occur only in the waking state. However, Vasiṣṭha proposes the following critical perspective in which waking experiences occur in the so-called dream state and dreams arise in the so-called waking state.

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ddddWddddWWdWWdWWdWWdWWdWWdWWdWWdWWdWWdWWdWWdW ....
(dream state)(waking state)(dream state)(waking state)(dream state)...
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The world-dream impinges on the dream-world and the dream-world impinges on the world-dream. If that is the case, Vasiṣṭha asks, why not the following scenario?

¹⁷ Translation by Arindam Chakrabarti.
Dreaming experiences invade the waking state of consciousness just as waking experiences permeate the dream state of consciousness. Thus, argues Vasiṣṭha, there is no sharp divide between the dream state and waking state.

Vasiṣṭha emphasizes this claim of no-divide by observing that certain epistemological mistakes that individuals make in waking life also occur in the dream state and vice versa. According to Vasiṣṭha, the state of self-knowledge is masked by seven levels of ignorance that he distinguishes as seed state of wakefulness, wakefulness, great-wakefulness, wakeful-dream, dream, dream-wakefulness, and sleep. The states of wakeful-dream and dream-wakefulness blur the divide between the waking state and the dream state. For Vasiṣṭha, perceptual mistakes such as the seeing of two moons in the halo, of silver in shells, of water in a mirage, as well as castle-building day-dreams occur during waking life, but these are instances of the waking-dream where the taken-for-granted ‘realities’ of the waking state are submerged. In dream-wakefulness, the awakened dreamer confuses dream-events with waking life and places the same reliance on dream events as she does on the incidents of waking life. These two additional gradations accentuate the dissolving of the boundaries between the waking state and the dream state.

Vasiṣṭha’s view, that the dream and waking states are woven into each other in such a way that it produces difficulties in differentiating the two states, is not as problematic as may appear at first glance. Adults may not mistake dream events for
occurrences in waking life, but sometimes the intensity of the dream event is such that it does give some pause for thought. Dreamers do wake up with residual feelings of emotions arisen in their dreams. These impressions may be carried through the waking day and actually taint thought, speech, and behavior. A dream of being struck by a neighbor may induce or aggravate negative attitudes towards the individual even though no such event occurred in the waking world. Vasiṣṭha may also support his case by the occurrence of prophetic dreams. The dreamer dreams of future events, such as her own death from fire, which eventually occur (VI.2:144).

Does the waking life impinge on dreaming in a similar manner? Perhaps, one can build a case for this view by exploring the way in which we fall into reverie or become absorbed in a book in a manner that shuts out the external physical world. The day-dreamer or the reader lives only within her own imagination, just as the dreamer lives within her dream. Occurrences in the sleeper's external world also impinge on the dream. If the sleeper's partner turns over, pulling the coverlet away, the sleeper may have a fleeting waking moment in which she pulls back the sheet. The sharp report of a car backfiring outside the sleeper's bedroom may be incorporated into the dream as the crack of a gun. So, a mutual interaction between experiences in the dream and waking states may be acknowledged. These cases are few and far between and are by no means substantive justification for the blending of the two states. Nonetheless, Vasiṣṭha has sufficient evidence to produce cracks in the wall between the dream and waking states. The two states are not as distinct as we would like them to be.
Vasiṣṭha supports this mutual subsumption of dream and waking states by another shared peculiarity. Both states have clearly demarcated exit experiences, not in terms of the phenomenology, but in terms of the psychological and epistemological impact upon the individual. Upon realizing Brahman, Vasiṣṭha notes, we also ‘wake up’ from the waking state. Once enlightened, we come to the knowledge that the waking state is also just a dream.

The state which endures is known as the waking state; and that which is transient is the dream state. During the period of even the dream, it takes on the characteristic of the waking state; and when the waking state is realized to be of a fleeting nature, it gets the characteristic of dream. Otherwise the two are the same. (IV: 19).

To the one who has realized the truth, the fourteen worlds are his own limbs. In his vision, the division between the dream state and wakeful state ceases to exist. When this world appearance is seen to be pure consciousness, it becomes similar to a dream. Just as all that is thrown into the fire becomes one (ash), all the states and the world-appearance are reduced to oneness by the fire of wisdom. (VI.2:51)

For Vasiṣṭha, all is pure consciousness. When the individual falls asleep, the consciousness moves from the waking state to the dream state. When consciousness returns to the waking state, according to Vasiṣṭha, the awakened dreamer acknowledges her error in her beliefs about the reality of the dream. Similarly, when consciousness is freed from the waking state and enters nirvāṇa, the identity of the individual and Brahman is realized. Once the knowledge of ‘tat tvam asi,’ the individual as pure undivided consciousness, has arisen in the awakened ‘dreamer,’ she realizes her mistake in reifying the world-idea. She perceives her waking state of consciousness in its true guise, and sees that it is as evanescent and unreal as the dream state and dreams. Prior to enlightenment, she may be temporarily fooled by the length and durability of the waking
state. Once enlightened, the reality of the waking state is sublated by the reality of Brahman.¹⁸

- (d) The Lack of a Subject-Object Distinction

For Vāsishtha, the duality experienced in dreams, the otherness of sentient and insentient objects, is illusory. In this very same manner, the duality and multiplicity experienced in the world are also illusory.

In dream the objects are really immaterial and subtle, yet they are seen to be substantial. Even so, the objects in this creation are truly subtle and unseen, yet they appear to be solid and perceptible. This is true even of the body: it is delusion and non-existent as such, but like a ghost it is conjured up as reality. (VI.2:161)

The diversity of dream-objects is a dream, not diversity. Even so the diversity that is seen during the waking state in the infinite space is the infinite space (consciousness) and there is no diversity. It is the indivisible consciousness that has the appearance of diversity. (VI.2:162)

In dreams, only the sleeper is present. She is the transcendent subject, the ‘creator’ of the dream, but she is also the experiencing subject, a character, within the dream. All of her five senses operate in the dream, perhaps not in the full-fledged way in which they function in the real world, but at least with enough competencies to generate a sense of reality and permanency. Many other characters and objects appear in the dream and

¹⁸ This development regarding Brahman serves as a possible expansion of those philosophers, such as A J Ayer and Bertrand Russell, who argue for the coherence principle outlined earlier, by pointing out that veridical perceptions pass the test of fitting in with the bulk of other perceptions whereas dream perceptions do not satisfy this criterion. According to Ayer, waking experiences chug along from moment to moment, applying ordinary rules of connection and sequential ordering. In contrast, dream experiences do not form this coherent whole. Of course, we may dream that the coherence principle applies and be fooled for the moment, but eventually we do wake up. However, Ayer and others acknowledge that the coherence test is not conclusive because only further experiences can confirm or refute the current experience and there is always room for more experience. [See A J Ayer, ‘Malcolm on Dreams’ in Charles E M Dunlop, ed., Philosophical Essays on Dreaming (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1977)]. It is this loophole that Vāsishtha utilizes in invoking Brahman. The experience of Brahman has the final say. It cannot be refuted, shown up as error, sublated by any other future experience.
conduct themselves independently of the dreamer's own desires and feelings. And yet, the mountains, rivers, and people seen in a dream only appear to exist in time and space and only seem to have solidity. They do not actually occupy any space or take time to enlarge or deteriorate (VI.1:30).

According to Vasiṣṭha, this is also the case with the world, the people, and other entities (VI.1:42). Mind is non-different from Brahman, but arises just as a wave arises when a calm ocean is disturbed. The objective world and all its constituents, potentially inherent in Brahman, arise as thoughts and are then ascribed reality. The faculty of objective perception exists in the perceiver just as oil exists in sesame seeds, aroma in flowers, etc., (III:1) and 'perception of other objects in the waking world is possible though they are unreal' (VI.1:143). This perception is simply the work of an overactive imagination laboring under māyā, the cosmic illusion that projects the world-appearance. For Vasiṣṭha, everything is just an idea or an image in the mind.

The non-dual aspect of the world-appearance was described in detail in chapter two (premises 3 and 4), and so I will not elaborate further on this feature of dreams. Suffice it to say that, for Vasiṣṭha, just as there is no distinction between the dreaming subject and the experienced object in dreams, there is also no duality, no multiplicity and no individuality in the world-appearance. 'Even as the dream objects are experienced only by the dreamer, the objects of perception are experienced by the perceiver. Just as from a seed the sprout arises in due time, this potentiality becomes manifest as the notion of creation' (III:1).
Vasiṣṭha wraps up his metaphysical argument in the following manner:

(i) The dream has the features of evanescence, incoherence, sublation, and subject-object unity.
(ii) Evanescence, incoherence, sublation, and subject-object unity are the major criteria commonly used to distinguish dream from world-appearance.
(iii) The world-appearance has the features of evanescence, incoherence, sublation, and subject-object unity.

Thus, the world-appearance is nothing but a dream.

Vasiṣṭha concludes that as the features of evanescence, incoherence, sublatability, and subject-object unity, which are customarily used to demarcate dream experiences in the dream state from the experiences in the waking state of consciousness, are also manifested by waking experiences in the waking state, the world is just a dream.

To summarize this section, Vasiṣṭha presents both a metaphysical explanation and a metaphysical argument as the groundwork for the first step that the world is just a dream. His metaphysical explanation for the identity of world and dream is that the universe is a ‘manifestation’ of Brahman, but the manifestation is not produced or created in a manner that would give it any more reality than a dream. It arises without any reason or cause. The world-appearance, the world-dream, simply shines out of Brahman and is ascribed existence. It is unlike the figure lying dormant in the uncarved
tree. The sculptor's eye can behold numerous shapes and forms in the tree and the
carving produces a figure and gives it 'life.' There is no such carving in Brahman. And
yet, as Brahman is consciousness, it is replete with potencies and powers. Anything and
everything shines within itself, even the world-appearance (VI.2:168).

In supporting his metaphysical argument, Vasiṣṭha provides various accounts that
trade on the ontological and epistemological similarities between the dreaming and
waking experiences and the consequences for the dreaming and waking states of
consciousness. For Vasiṣṭha, there are no significant differences in each momentary
experience whether in the dreaming or the waking state. Both dreaming and waking
experiences are limited, basically muddled and disjointed, merge into one another and
yet, have unmistakable beginnings and ends. These similarities blur the sharp divide
customarily placed between the dream and waking states of consciousness. Thus,
according to Vasiṣṭha, any distinction between dreaming and waking experiences, dream
states and waking states collapse into insignificance. To those who have realized the
truth, the world as pure consciousness, there is no difference between the states of
dreaming and waking consciousness, and no difference between the world-appearance
and the worlds emerging in dreams.

**Step II: The Dreamer Caught in Dream**

Vasiṣṭha's second step is that just as in the dream, the dreamer is caught up in the
dream and sincerely believes that her experiences of dream-objects and dream-events are
real, the awoken individual is so entangled in the machinations of the world that she
regards her sense experiences as constituents of reality. In presenting his justification for the significance of morality in a world considered to be an illusion, Vasiṣṭha develops the metaphysical explanation and argument outlined in the previous section. He submits a case for the similarities between the phenomenological impact of the dream and world on the individual. His argument takes the following form:

(i) The world is just a dream (see previous section).

(ii) When absorbed in the dream, the dreamer believes that the dream-objects and dream-events are real.

Thus, when absorbed in the world, the individual also believes that the world-objects and world-events are real.

Vasiṣṭha’s contention is that the ontological claim that world is a dream has a phenomenological fall-out. Just as the dreamer is entangled in the dream and considers the dream to be real, the awakened ‘dreamer’ is also caught up in the projection of the world-appearance and is so embroiled in its machinations that she is unable to free herself from its tantalizing grip.

Just as one who is immersed in the dream sees the dream as utterly real, one who is immersed in this creation thinks that it is utterly real. Just as one goes from one dream to another, one goes from one delusion to another and thus experiences this world as utterly real. (VI.1.61)

For Vasiṣṭha, just as in the dream, the dreamer is unaware of the illusory aspect of the dream, the fool’s ignorance of the true nature of the world promotes her ascription of
reality to sense experiences and the objects of sense experiences. ‘Just as one experiences warfare in one’s dream, even so do people experience the events in this creation as if they were real’ (VI.2:62). The fool’s cravings for sensory pleasures (of touch, taste, sight, sound, and smell), as well as the privileges of society such as wealth, honor, and prosperity, serve to conceal and distort the highest good, the identity with Brahman. In the ‘darkness of ignorance,’ the fool is entranced. While her need for these pleasures increases, she does not see the poisonous nature of these experiences and the ease with which they plunge the ignorant deeper and deeper into the sorrows of life (VI.1:6) and away from Brahman. She is deluded into thinking that the world alone is reality.

The Creator, Brahmā, the Cosmic Mind, aids the fantasy. Brahmā’s imagination gives birth to mountains, oceans, and other objects, which have the long life-span of his dream. As noted in the previous section, these items ‘migrate’ from individual to individual, from embodiment to embodiment across generations, radiating the appearance of solidity and permanence. Vasiṣṭha uses the argument from illusion in reverse. It is not so much that the inability to distinguish between waking and dreaming sense perceptions promotes skepticism regarding the reality of the world, but that such symmetry has the dubious pay-off of certainty. The seemingly striking contrast between the dream and waking states portray worldly experiences as representing veridical reality even when they are unquestionably illusory.

Such a deception on this vast scale may seem impossible but, responds Vasiṣṭha, one can have seemingly real effects from unreal causes.
That consciousness reflected in itself appears to be creation. Even as an unreal nightmare produces real results, this world seems to give rise to a sense of reality in a state of ignorance. When true wisdom rises, this unreality vanishes. (III:13)

Vasiṣṭha emphasizes the mind-creates-havoc thesis over and over again. Even in the waking state, the wayward workings of the mind and senses promote certain beliefs which may result in risky behavior. ‘A drunken man sees empty space where a wall stands; and a non-existent goblin kills a deluded person’ (III:59, 60). And so, it is no surprise that ‘to an immature and childish person who is confirmed in his conviction that this world is real, it continues to be real - even as a child who believes in a ghost is haunted by it throughout his life’ (III:42). As far as Vasiṣṭha is concerned, it is the mind that is responsible for deciding what is real and what is illusory, and whether active in the dream or waking states, the mind is easily deluded in believing the illusory to be real. Just as the dreamer considers the dream to be real while caught in the dream, the individual in the waking state is embroiled in the seeming reality of ‘external’ objects.

**Step III: Morality Justified**

Vasiṣṭha concludes that the psychological impact of these phenomenological snares, in both dreaming and waking lives, generates pains and pleasures. When a dreamer is immersed in her dream of, say, warfare, she is fully convinced of its reality to the extent that she exhibits all the psychological symptoms of actually being plunged into battle. A dream of slurping soup does not register such effects as pounding heart and sweaty palms, while a dream of being killed in battle is likely to exhibit these signs of terror. The impact of nightmares on the dreamer may even be verified by an impartial
observer who witnesses the physical signs of distress, panic or combative demeanor in the sleeping dreamer. In just the same manner, notes Vasiṣṭha, the illusory phenomena of the waking state take on a similar reality and adversely (or pleasurably, depending on the circumstances) impact the unenlightened mind. 'So long as there is the body, so long shall pain be painful and pleasure pleasant' (IV:15).

Vasiṣṭha argues that just as when the dreamer dreams of an unhappy event and there is unhappiness until there is realization of the dream as a dream once awakened from sleep, the individual is also caught up in the world and undergoes many trials and tribulations until enlightened (VI.2:171). 'If the truth is not seen, then sorrow becomes firmly and solidly established. The wicked and the ignorant do not see this truth' (VI.2:178). For Vasiṣṭha, suffering is not simply the province of the wicked. All those ignorant of their true nature are bound by the world-appearance and wind up in crisis. Even the gain of so-called pleasures is predisposed to pain. A false sense of ego arises and this notion of ‘I’ generates divisions that promote greed, acquisitiveness, and inevitable ruin.

Thus, according to Vasiṣṭha, it is advisable to introduce the rules of conduct that serve to reduce the pains and increase the pleasures. Even though such rules, along with notions of individuality and multiplicity, are also mere figments of the imagination, they promote order and harmony in a society that may otherwise fall into chaos.

[Rules and codes of conduct] are invented by ignorant people. Yet, since the mind of the ignorant is heavily conditioned, if they are not governed by such rules of conduct, there will then arise disorder in which the big fish will eat the small fish. (VI.1:69)
If dream we must, we should still hasten to lessen nightmares and enhance happy dreams. Without rules of conduct, rewards and sanctions, 'the big fish will eat the small fish' and much 'suffering' can ensue.

In the Story of Dāma, Vyāla, and Kaṭa, Vasiṣṭha explains how the ego-sense is responsible for the mind-sets that experience pleasure and pain. Saṃbara, the mighty demon king, conjures up the three demons, Dāma, Vyāla, and Kaṭa, to fight for him in his battle against the gods. These freshly created demons, having had no previous contact with the world, are free of the ego-sense, the notions of 'I,' 'mine.' It is this egotism, according to Vasiṣṭha, that ends in the cravings and aversions that promote suffering. Having no egotism and none of the desires that distort the emotions and judgments of ordinary mortals, the demons are highly efficient killing machines. They are invincible. The gods as usual run to Brahmā for deliverance. Brahmā responds that only time can defeat the demons. In time, the world will cast its spell on the demons resulting in the emergence of the ego-sense, the 'I'-sense. Vasiṣṭha describes the effects on Dāma, Vyāla, and Kaṭa:

Once this [the ego-sense] arose, there quickly followed the desire for the prolongation of life in the body, acquisition of wealth, health, pleasure etc. These desires greatly debilitated their personalities. Then there arose confusion in their minds, which in turn gave rise to feelings of 'This is mine' and 'This is my body.' All these inevitably resulted in inefficiency and inability to do their own work. They were greatly attached to eating and drinking. Objects gave them feelings of pleasure and thus robbed them of their freedom. With the loss of freedom, their courage also went and they experienced fear. They were terribly worried at the very thought, 'We shall die in this war. (IV:28, 29, 30)

Vasiṣṭha thus draws a clear connection between the impact of the senses, egotism, and suffering. With the incessant functioning of their senses, the notion of 'I' arise in the demons. They begin carving up the world into 'I,' 'you,' 'what I have,' 'what you have,'
'what I would like of what you have,' 'what I hate,' and so on. This rupture between 'I' and 'thou' promotes further immoderate desires, emotions, ambitions, and hopes in the demons, which, in turn, aggravate their ingrained biases and prejudices. With their capacities for clear judgment severely impaired, the demons' decisions end in immoral behavior, resulting in more pain and suffering.

To summarize, Vasiṣṭha's over-arching argument based on analogy rests on the claim that the world is a dream. This ontological claim has the phenomenological outcome that just as in the dream, the dreamer considers dream-objects and dream-events to be real, the unenlightened individual considers the phenomena of the world-appearance to be real. As a result, she is engrossed in the pursuit of worldly pleasures and the avoidance of worldly pains. This only leads to suffering. Vasiṣṭha points out that notions of 'happiness' and 'suffering' are just empty words with nothing to support them. However, given the adverse psychological impact of the world-appearance on individuals, he sees no alternative but to introduce rules of conduct, injunctions and prohibitions, in order to promote stability and harmony in the society. Thus, the concept of 'morality' is born and given substance in the world-appearance.

**A Major Problem with the Dream Analogy**

All three steps explicated above are problematic. However, as the aim of this chapter is to explore the success or otherwise of the dream analogy in providing an explanation for the relevance of morality in the world-dream, I will focus exclusively on the ramifications of this analogy for morality. For Vasiṣṭha, just as the dream generates
emotions such as fear and love, and the desire to limit suffering and increase happiness, the entanglement with the world gives rise to these very emotions and desires and lends credence to the development and implementation of moral standards and rules. According to Vasiṣṭha, although a viable notion of ethics must pre-suppose duality and duality is nullified by the over-arching infusion of Brahman as pure, undivided consciousness, the dream analogy presents an acceptable response for this paradox. After all, if a non-real dream can trigger actual 'real-life' symptoms, surely the non-real world can trigger the appearance of diseased symptoms that have to be alleviated.

How well does this solution based on an analogy with dream resolve Vasiṣṭha's dilemma? It cannot be forgotten that anything goes in a dream. The dreamer, as well as the experienced dream-characters, may lie, steal, murder with impunity and suffer no consequences. In fact, Vasiṣṭha makes this very point.

When a dream-object perishes nothing is lost: when the 'world' or the 'I' is lost, nothing is lost. There is no sense even in condemning this world and the ego sense. Who will extol or condemn a hallucination? (VI.2:31)

The question is this: does Vasiṣṭha's psychological-impact story, occurring in both dreaming and waking lives, give credence to the rigorous codes of conduct, the mores of behavior, that plague Rāma in his journey from fool to unenlightened seeker to enlightened sage or is the notion of morality just another case of the delusional activity emerging out of the machinations of diseased minds?

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19 Vasiṣṭha, with his one-two-one correspondence between the world and dream, is unable to utilize Śaṅkara's ingenious device of varying degrees of reality. For Śaṅkara, the world has a practical empirical reality which makes it more genuine than a dream. Vasiṣṭha's dream/world identity appears to serve no other function than to make the world-appearance as hollow as the dream.

20 As mentioned in chapter one, Vasiṣṭha distinguishes between the fool, the seeker, and the sage. The fool is embedded in the world and considers her sense experiences to be her only reality. The seeker is beginning to
A well-known response to the paradox that a viable notion of ethics must presuppose duality but duality is nullified in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* comes not from the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* but from Śaṅkara’s Advaita. Commentators utilize the *puruṣārtha* (human pursuits) point of view. According to the tradition, man has a four-fold aim in life: the pursuit of *artha* (wealth), *kāma* (sexual and aesthetic pleasures), *dharma* (righteousness), and *mokṣa* (freedom). 21 *Mokṣa* is the *paramapurūṣārtha*, the ultimate goal and *summum bonum* of life. All other codes and doctrines are directed towards attaining this goal, including *dharma*. The whole point of righteous conduct, virtue, and other aspects of *dharma* is to further the process of enlightenment. In that case, the argument goes, there is no problem reconciling morality with the world-dream.

It should be noted immediately that if morality is thought of as just an instrumental concern necessary for liberation and there is no extra weight placed on it by virtue of being *morality*, then there is no paradox. What if we are dream characters? We can continue to act, thinking we are under *moral* obligation, even though in reality everything is just a mirage. Nothing truly matters. Morality per se is irrelevant. Acting out of obligation is just a way out of the cage of bondage. If liberation was assisted by standing on one foot and hopping in a circle, then that is what we would do. So, if Vasiṣṭha and others are just saying, ‘Morality is the way to self-realization and happiness. It has only instrumental value. If you wish liberation, just go along with the existing set-

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up, however ridiculous it is,’ then there is no problem. We may be able to dismiss the individuality/multiplicity perceptions as nonsense, but we want liberation. Let us just play the game.

A cursory reading of the Yogavāsiṣṭha seems to confirm Vasiṣṭha’s instrumentalist leanings. In his response to Rāma’s angst, Vasiṣṭha points out that the Creator, seeing the suffering of living beings, established ‘noble virtues like austerity, charity, truthfulness and righteous conduct, but these were inadequate. They could only bestow temporary relief from suffering and not final liberation from sorrow’ (II:10). Moreover, in almost every story in which kings and queens are facing the question of liberation, Vasiṣṭha mentions their virtuous characters. In the Story of Līlā, Padma is described as ‘perfect in every respect,’ ‘the abode of virtue’ (III:15). Lavaṇa is called ‘righteous, noble, chivalrous, charitable and in every way a worthy king’ (III:103, 104). Janaka is extolled as a great monarch, a cornucopia to all who seek his aid, sun-like to friends and a great benefactor to all good people (V:8). Even the hungry vampire ‘would not kill anyone unless the victim deserved such treatment’ (VI:70-71). These references to noble virtues and goodness, fleeting as they are, emphasize the effectiveness of morality in promoting liberation. Vasiṣṭha states:

Such a one, who is full of all the noble qualities, seeks and follows an enlightened master who directs him along the path of self-knowledge. He then realizes the self which is the one cosmic being. (V:6,7)

Vasiṣṭha emphasizes that virtuous qualities are increasingly found in those who are about to break the cycle of death and birth, implying that it is the presence of these qualities that enables and propels the aspirant to locate a suitable teacher.
However, it must be noted that Vasiṣṭha makes these claims **only** in the context of the fool and the seeker. He distinguishes the *jīva* (the embodied living self) from the *ātman* (the true Self non-different from Brahman). Vasiṣṭha’s fool is the embodied *jīva* who is thoroughly embroiled in the world-appearance. She is born, she is active, she grows old, she hopes, suffers, enjoys, and dies. Worldly experiences, such as a cut on the body or the lack of accolades, are very real to the fool just as the dream of being cut and burned seems very real to the dreamer. Even when the dreamer awakens from a nightmare, it takes a while for the pounding heart to settle down. Moral injunctions and prohibitions are important because they force the fool to act in ways that avoid pain and promote pleasures for herself and others.

Vasiṣṭha’s seeker is more sophisticated in her dealings with the world-appearance in that she recognizes pleasure as also pain. The seeker also requires moral rules and regulations, but for a different purpose. She begins to realize that the following of these rules and regulations to the letter, so necessary for the well-being of the fool, provides little comfort to her. Even when society’s excesses are restrained and order prevails, life brings no happiness. Rāma’s lament captures this feeling of hopelessness. “The world and its delights appear bitter to me. I am not fond of wandering in the pleasure gardens, I do not relish the company of girls, I do not value the acquisition of wealth. I wish to remain at peace with myself” (1:28, 29). There has to be something more to life than the life of a fool. The seeker embarks on her search for this different mode of life. She shifts from a rigid adherence to the injunctions and prohibitions of the Vedas and the cycle of reward and punishment. Instead, she acts simply for the sake of duty, for the sake of her
responsibilities, given her caste and spiritual state of life. For the seeker, codes of conduct encourage a harmonious society and provide a safe place for the important work of liberation.

It is in the moral psyche of the sage that Vasiṣṭha’s instrumental leanings between morality and liberation disappear. Vasiṣṭha describes the sage as the mahākartā (the great doer of actions), who is ‘freed of doubts and performs appropriate actions in natural situations whether they are regarded as dharma or adharma,’ as the mahābhoktā (the great enjoyer), and the mahātyāgī (the great renunciate), who has ‘banished from his mind concepts like dharma and adharma’ (VI.1:115). However, this does not mean that once the dictates of mundane morality have served their purpose in leading to liberation, the sage is no longer concerned about dharma per se. The knowledge of one’s true nature and unity with Brahman results in the dissolution of all distinctions, including the fundamental ethical dimensions of right and wrong, good and bad, and so on. The sage is no longer bound by the restraints of society encapsulated in mundane notions of dharma and adharma, but she does act in accordance with the ‘dictates’ of Brahman.

Having realized Brahman and living in the world-appearance with that knowledge of Brahman, the sage’s embodiment of dharma reveals itself as the absolute goodness of her sattva character. For Vasiṣṭha, the sattva nature is the egoless mind, ‘the purest form of mind’ (VI.2:157), that appears in Brahman. The enlightened sage who embodies this sattva mind has the ultimate virtuous character. Vasiṣṭha notes that those who are ‘sattva’ are naturally good’ (III:94) and describes the sage, who is the mahākartā, mahābhoktā, and mahātyāgī, as one ‘who has completely abandoned from his heart the
notion of world appearance’ and is ‘without swaying by likes and dislikes, by success and failure, without ego sense or jealousy,... whose very nature is at peace and equilibrium or equanimity which is sustained in all situations.’ He is one ‘who does not hate anything nor long for anything but enjoys all natural experiences, who does not cling to or renounce anything even while engaged in actions, who does not experience though experiencing, who witnesses the world-play unaffected by it.’ He is one ‘whose very nature is non-violent and virtuous’ (VI.1:115). Thus, even after liberation and seeing the world-appearance as world-appearance, goodness itself is not worthless to Vasiṣṭha’s sage but intrinsic to her nature.22

Purnanand Shaw,23 in his exploration of Śaṅkara’s Advaita, points out that morality has meaning even if it is not regarded as ultimate. Morality is not ultimate in that it has to be ‘outgrown’ and ‘transcended,’ but for Shaw, to transcend morality does not mean to negate it but to perfect it. There is an immense gulf between those caught in the differences and distinctions of ignorance and those who have realized the oneness of Brahman. Shaw emphasizes the notion that ethics is the discipline regarding the difference between ‘what is’ and ‘what ought to be,’ and this is part of the empirical, practical reality of the world. Moral considerations in the mundane world emphasize the question, ‘what ought I to do?’ Shaw notes that once dualistic notions such as ‘I’ and ‘thou’ have ceased, the sage’s actions are a discharge of duties without any conflict

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22 I am very grateful to Jim Tiles for this pivotal observation and to Vrinda Dalmiya and Eliot Deutsch for their views on the intrinsically moral nature of the sage.
between 'is' and 'ought.' There is no gut-wrenching decision to be made regarding the correct response to a situation. Instead, the enlightened sage acts instinctively in the most virtuous manner, collapsing the divide between 'is' and 'ought.'

For Shaw, morality is transcended because the moral actions of the enlightened sage become as spontaneous as breathing. He notes that just as breathing is so commonplace that a person is not usually aware or conscious of breathing unless he suffers from a disease which makes breathing difficult, similarly 'the perfect man who transcends the sphere of conflict and dualism is not aware of what morality is, not because his behavior is immoral or because his actions are bound to deviate from the accepted norms of conduct, but because it has been perfected into a natural, free, and spontaneous habit of thinking and doing and it is for this reason that morality is said to have no meaning for him.'

This is all very well and good but, according to Shaw, as morality is transcended, it cannot be its own end. Instead, it has to be the instrumental means to the higher end of liberation. However, if we continue his metaphor of breathing, even if the person is unaware that she breathes, she has not ceased breathing but continues to breathe, albeit effortlessly and unconsciously. Similarly, as far as moral conduct is concerned the enlightened one has not ceased to be moral, but acts in a spontaneously smooth and unconstrained way that is automatically moral. According to Vasiṣṭha, the enlightened being, who has attained self-realization, is free from the biases and prejudices injected by

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her ego and so psychologically cannot but act morally. She has perfected morality and, perhaps, transcended morality in that she is unconstrained by it (she has no struggles over deciding how to act), but morality is not just an instrumental means to liberation. As Vasiṣṭha makes clear, the liberated one epitomizes the highly moral being. Goodness of character is intrinsic to her nature. At this living liberated stage, words such as 'good,' 'bad' are redundant because they have no counterparts to make them meaningful. However, morality is a constituent of the liberated state just as eggs, flour, and sugar are the constituents of a cake. The idea that morality is just an instrumental means to liberation is not what Vasiṣṭha has in mind. The liberated one acts morally because it is second nature to her. She may have left behind the world, but she has not left behind morality.

This point is also emphasized by a comparison between the retrospective responses of the jīvanmukta and the dreamer to their respective actions and the consequences of such actions. The awakened dreamer of the holocaust would probably experience feelings of relief that she did not shepherd people into gas chambers. Comforted, she would dismiss the entire episode as just a dream. The liberated one, shrugging off the mantle of māyā, may not be similarly nonchalant. She was responsible for the pain and terror of another being, albeit caught in māyā. It would not do to dismiss these events by remarking, 'Oh, that was just an illusion. Get over it.' Her response, given that she is mahākarta, etc., would have to be a certain attitude of compassion, not only towards her victim, but also towards herself for the depth of ignorance which allowed her to perpetrate such 'acts' of cruelty. Given the choice of making amends in a
dream or the waking life, she does not even consider the possibility of re-entering the
dream and helping her dream characters. As Vasiṣṭha notes, ‘Though I was surrounded
by that terrible fire there, I was not unhappy at all. When you know while dreaming that
it is dream only, you are freed from even fire’ (VI.2:141). However, the jīvanmukta
retains memories of what it is to be in the dark cave of the world-appearance and remains
to assist in the liberation of the other ‘prisoners.’ She is active in her waking life in a
manner that is not seen in her dreaming. Thus, her intrinsically moral character cannot be
just instrumental to liberation.

One other observation comes to mind regarding this matter. For Vasiṣṭha, there is
no sharp divide between the dream state and the waking state. Since he embraces the
view that an individual can be liberated while living, he may acknowledge that the
waking state and the turīya state of consciousness also seep into one another, albeit in a
different fashion, via emotions such as compassion. The Story of Śikhidvaja and Cūḍālā
aptly illustrates this point. The enlightened Cūḍālā does not leave her foolish husband to
his unpleasant fate, but attempts to help him and even feels sorry for her pranks designed
to test his spiritual wisdom. This residue of emotions in the liberated state exposes the
difference in the relationship between dream and world-appearance, and the relationship
between world-appearance and Brahman. Once the sage knows of the dream and the
world as illusions, her responses differ because there are differences in the relationships
between ‘I’ and ‘thou’ occurring in the dream and waking states. Although as Vasiṣṭha
argues, there is some seeping between the waking state and the dream state, the waking
state provides the ground for a full realization of the ‘other’ as ‘other’ and ‘I’. In the waking state, being moral does matter in a way that is not adequately resolved by the dream analogy.

This elaboration of the jīvanmukta’s character greatly undermines the ‘psychological impact’ story told by Vasiṣṭha in explaining the need for morality. Vasiṣṭha’s liberated sage not only knows that the world is a dream and that all duality an illusion, but she has not discarded morality. When she wakes up from a dream, the dream vanishes, it is left behind and leaves little residue. When she ‘awakens’ to the world-appearance, the world has no hold upon her and morality (even perfected morality) should have been dissolved away with all other worldly matters. Yet, she retains morality. The sage has not ‘gotten over’ morality as she has ‘gotten over’ the psychological impact of the world-appearance. In fact, morality has been enhanced. It is an integral part of her temperament. She may not call herself ‘moral’ because dualistic notions have been destroyed in her, but the world views her as a deeply moral being. Vasiṣṭha’s dream analogy does not explain the presence of this spontaneously appropriate conduct when, by its very nature, it should have crumbled away with the elimination of the ‘I/Thou’ distinction.

Vasiṣṭha makes an unsatisfactory attempt to resolve the problems occurring in the dream analogy by elaborating on the inadequacies of analogies. Vasiṣṭha’s thesis is that analogies serve to explain the hidden meaning or point of what is inexplicable, in this

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25 This observation may be undermined by the occurrence of lucid dreams in which the dreamer knows she is dreaming. These lucid dreams may provide opportunities for cultivating compassion for the other, but the sporadic nature of such dreams makes such a task more than a little difficult.
case the nature of Brahman. However, he notes that similes and analogies 'are to be taken in their partial (and not general) sense' and 'the partial similitude... is unhesitatingly acknowledged by the learned in all their illustrations.' For example, the objects (such as ocean and wave) used in the simile explaining the relationship between Brahman and the world, are links in a chain of cause and effect, but this particular causal characteristic is not applicable to Brahman. Causality may be an attribute of the simile, but it is disregarded with regard to Brahman, just as the stand, stick, oil, and wick of the lamp is disregarded when its brightness is the locus of comparison. The simile is thus applied to reveal a particular attribute and does not cover all the attributes.

Vasiṣṭha does have a point in that many attributes may be inapplicable or simply irrelevant, as, for example, stating that the world is like a dream because they both occur in techni-color. However, the problem, for Vasiṣṭha, is that his stance is not so much that the world is like a dream but that the world is a dream. His shift from analogy to identity makes the dilemma quite acute. Vasiṣṭha notes,

Those who find fault with instances of an imperfect or contradictory nature, cannot blame our comparison of the appearance of the world to a vision in a dream. A prior and posterior non-entity is considered as existent at the present moment (as is the visible world which was not, nor will be afterwards). So the waking and dreaming states are known to be alike from our boyhood. The simile of the existence of the world with the dreaming state is exact in all instances, as our desires, thoughts, our pleasures and displeasures, and all other acts are alike in both states.

Vasiṣṭha’s thesis here is that regardless of the inadequacies regarding similes (or analogies) and deficiencies in the elements of comparison between the waking and the

dream worlds, in the moment of experiencing the experience, the thoughts, feelings, emotions, and desires are exactly alike in both worlds. Certainly, thoughts, feelings, etc., are at the heart of both dream-world and world-appearance, but they are also the very fabric of the moral temperament. In fact, the only aspect of the dream analogy that is used by Vasiṣṭha as an explanation for morality is that we have similar desires and feelings in dreams as well as out of them. According to Vasiṣṭha, even in the world, we respond to situations, not with thought and consideration but with knee-jerk reactions to the on-the-spot dilemma. Rules and regulations are necessary guides to behavior and the construction of a well-ordered society.

By reiterating the identity of world and dream in this manner and emphasizing the connections with morality, Vasiṣṭha cannot retreat into the ‘inadequacies of similes’ when faced with difficulties in his explanation. In dreams, the dreamer is tossed around by her emotions and desires. In dreams, complex judgments are not made and memory, if it can be called so, is a skimpy databank with meager resources. There is no careful evaluation of alternatives based on prior experience, no precautions taken against error, no drawing of reasoned inferences, no well-assessed conclusion put into action. Similarly, for Vasiṣṭha, the awakened ‘dreamer’ (just like the sleeping dreamer) is driven helter-skelter by her emotions and desires. She may think that she is in control, but she is the slave, and not the mistress, of her ego-sense. Attempts to carefully evaluate options are tainted by her own cravings and desires. Although similes and analogies are deficient in providing a complete explanation of the relationship between Brahman and the world, in claiming identity of world and dream, particularly in desires, thoughts, feelings, etc.,
Vasiṣṭha throws away morality along with all the other dualistic conceptions about the world-appearance, at least as far as the jīvanmukta is concerned.

**The End Result - The Dream Analogy in Difficulties**

I began this chapter by asking for an explanation for the paradox regarding the emphasis on morality in a world considered to be illusion, and ended by exploring whether Vasiṣṭha’s psychological-impact justification, in both dream and waking lives, imparts credibility to the development and implementation of rigorous rules of conduct. Alternatively, is such emphasis on morality simply another case of delusional activity emerging out of the machinations of diseased minds? Of course, the dream analogy has some credibility. If a man in delirium tremens is convinced that he is overrun by rats, the doctor may consider him too far gone for tactics of persuasion and instead prescribe medication. Moral rules can be viewed as the ‘medication’ by which dis-eased minds are kept in order. However, this view has serious limitations in that its response to the question, ‘Why be moral in a world considered illusion?’ is ‘Morality is a drug that takes away some of the pain of life.’ Regardless of Vasiṣṭha’s ‘big fish eating little fish,’ this pragmatic view of morality is not what the Yogavāsiṣṭha is all about.

Vasiṣṭha seeks to ensure that his teachings not only dispel illusion but bring Rāma to the realization that ‘ordinary life itself is the supreme state’ of liberation (VI.2:175). He wishes that the liberated Rāma returns to ruling his kingdom wisely and well. The dream analogy does not provide an adequate response to the dynamic evolution of Rāma from an immature adolescent bound by hypothetical imperatives to an enlightened being.
with the *sattva* personality. The very nature of Vasiṣṭha’s claim, that the waking state shares the crucial features of dream state, serves to undermine the force of morality that transforms the seeker into a morally enlightened being. The superimposition of Brahman-consciousness on the world generates vast responsibilities for the world, dream though it is, and the dream analogy does not do the necessary work in explaining the enlightened Rāma’s concern for the world-appearance and all its inhabitants. In the next two chapters, I will explore another analogy - the world as a story - and determine whether this provides a place for the *jīvanmukta* in a world that she knows to be an illusion.
CHAPTER 4: THE FICTION ANALOGY

LIFE AS NARRATIVE

The Story

Vasiṣṭha's dream analogy does considerable work in setting Rāma on the right track as far as his relationship with Brahman is concerned. It moves the prince away from the notion that he is, in reality, an individualized being separated from all the other sentient and non-sentient beings in the universe. It succeeds in inclining Rāma towards the realization that Rāma is none other than Brahman, pure, contentless, all encompassing consciousness. However, as explained in chapter three, the dream analogy has limitations when it comes to justifying the undeniable presence of goodness in the jīvanmukta. Even in Vasiṣṭha's illusory world, the moral rectitude and responsibilities of the jīvanmukta are no pretence. Vasiṣṭha's enlightened being is the mahākarta (the great doer), the mahātyāgī (the great renunciate), and the mahābhoktā (the great enjoyer). She knows that the world is mere dream and yet, she embodies righteous and virtuous conduct. This requires another explanation: the fiction analogy.

An analogy with a tissue of stories, the metaphor of a mere fable, or even the equation of the world with a set of tales, is very much compatible with the Yogavāsiṣṭha, which is organized as a nesting of stories, just like the nesting of Russian dolls. The Story of Rāma and Vasiṣṭha is an inner 'doll' and when that is 'opened,' 55 other stories drop out. These are Vasiṣṭha's stories to Rāma and they, in turn, move Rāma towards
enlightenment. Vasiṣṭha goes so far as to claim that a thorough investigation of the
content of certain stories leads one to enlightenment.

Thus, I have narrated to you, O Rāma, the auspicious story of Prahlāda, which is capable
of destroying all the impurities of one’s heart. They who contemplate this narrative will
soon attain a higher state of consciousness, even if they have been very wicked and sinful.
Even a simple investigation of this narrative will destroy all sins; but if the investigation is
of a yogic nature, surely it will lead to supreme realization. (V: 42)

The reader of the Yogavāsishṭha is not exempt from the jolting impact of the stories. By
persuading the reader to journey into this Russian doll style nesting of fictional world
within fictional world within fictional world, the author creates a breach in the taken-for-
granted reality of the reader’s own world. As the reader steps out of story after story after
story and back into her own world, she is driven to questioning her own mundane reality.
Is she the author of her life story, a character in someone else’s story, both or neither?

Vasiṣṭha also sets the scene for a fiction analogy in other ways. It was pointed out
in chapter two that although traditional Advaita recognizes ontological differences
between the practical experiences of the world (the vyāvahārika level) and those of
illusions (the prātibhāsika level),¹ Vasiṣṭha collapses the distinction between the
empirical and the illusory levels and asserts that the world is just illusion too. Further,
again as noted in chapter two, instead of recognizing differences between the various
types of illusory experiences, hallucinations, delusions, abnormal vision due to eye

¹ As noted in the previous chapters, Advaita Vedānta distinguishes three ontic levels of being (reality,
appearance and unreality) on the basis of ‘sublatability’ (or ‘subratability’) - ‘the mental process whereby
one disvalues some previously appraised object or content of consciousness because of its being
contradicted by a new experience.’ The experience of reality is unsublatable because it can never be replaced
or revised by other experiences, appearance can be so sublated whereas unreality, for example, the barren
woman’s son, cannot even appear. (Deutsch, Eliot. Advaita Vedanta: A Philosophical Reconstruction,
disease, mirages, etc., Vasiṣṭha likens the empirical reality of the world to *every* kind of illusion.\(^2\) Thus, it is not surprising to discover that he identifies the ontological status of empirical reality, albeit fleetingly, with that of a story as well. For example, in the Story of the Three Non-existent Princes, he asserts, ‘What is known as the creation of the world is no more real than this story of the young boy. This world is nothing but pure hallucination. It is nothing more than an idea’ (III:101).

Even more interestingly, in stories such as the Story of Līlā, Vasiṣṭha bestows the name ‘Vasiṣṭha’ to the mendicant in the hut who desires to be king. This mirroring of author and character prompts the reader to wonder whether Līlā’s story is also the story of the narrator, Vasiṣṭha. This in turn gives birth to the idea that stories are universal. Any story is also the reader’s story. Even if the reader’s life style is far removed from the lives portrayed in the narrative, Vasiṣṭha implies that the universality of the human condition offers commonalities that bridge the seemingly trenchant differences. Given all of these leanings towards the story, we may conclude that an analogy utilizing story, or even the identity of world and story, sits well with the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*.

**The Fiction Analogy**

The aim of this chapter is to provide an explanation for the *jīvanmukta*’s *sattva* character in a world known to be illusion. Following the pattern of argument set out in chapter three for the dream analogy, Vasiṣṭha’s stories present the seeds for the following thesis:

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(I) Vasiṣṭha’s world-appearance is no more real than the world projected in a story. It is just an idea in the mind of the ‘author.’

(II) Just as the functioning of the literary imagination in stories enhances the moral capabilities of the reader, the creative imagination in Vasiṣṭha’s world-appearance also enables and enriches the development of the ideal moral character.

(III) Given the special function of the creative imagination, it makes sense for the īvanmukta, who knows the world is illusion, to evolve into Vasiṣṭha’s ideal moral being.

In his stories and philosophical discussions, Vasiṣṭha has the material to establish this analogy in a definitive way. Each of these steps, explored below, weaves together those aspects of fiction and Vasiṣṭha’s world-appearance in such a manner as to situate and establish the great saying, tat tvam asi (that thou art), from the ethical perspective of the īvanmukta.

**Step I: The World as Story**

Vasiṣṭha’s first step may well have been that the world-appearance is no more real than the world projected in a story. It is just an idea in the mind of the ‘author.’ There is no better place to unpack this assertion than with Vasiṣṭha’s descriptions of the creation of the world. Just as in the dream analogy, Vasiṣṭha may establish the claim that the world

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3 In using the words ‘story’ and ‘fiction,’ I will be restricting myself to literary works that are full-length novels rather than short stories, theatre, film, and opera. Although make-believe plays a significant role in all of these arts, the literary novel is best suited to developing a different analogy for the Yogavāsiṣṭha. I also will not be exploring distinctions such as those between literary and non-literary works, full length novels and short stories. These are not relevant in applying the analogy to the Yogavāsiṣṭha.
is just a story in two ways: by utilizing (1) a metaphysical explanation and (2) a metaphysical argument.⁴

(1) Vasistha’s Possible Metaphysical Explanation for the Identity of World and Story

In the beginning of a cycle of emergence/creation, according to Vasiṣṭha, there is nothing but Brahman, pure, undivided, infinite consciousness. However, Brahman is not inert and empty, even though the term ‘śūnya’ (emptiness) is used about It. In Brahman resides every conceivable world. All powers, possibilities and potentialities are inherent in its nature. The creative latencies of trees, birds, animals, the movement of wind, the solidity of stone, the heat in fire, the liquidity of water, the powers of joy in the cheerful and sorrow in the afflicted, as well as the potencies for decline, stagnation, and destruction are all concealed in Brahman (III:100). Even the bizarre and the peculiar are not excluded. In some universes, moonlight is hot, sunlight cool, sight functions in darkness and blindness in daylight, good is destructive whereas evil is constructive, poison promotes health and nectar kills (VI.2:60/61). To permit the somewhat discredited metaphor of the last chapter, nothing is undreamed of in this storehouse of would-be’s and could-be’s. Whatever notions that arise in the individual consciousness and whatever objects toward which the mind flows inhere in Brahman and are available for materialization. Unfortunately, so is the individualized needy and self-serving ego. As

⁴ As noted in chapter three, subsidiary arguments available to Vasiṣṭha must not be confused with the primary analogy. What I have termed ‘the fiction analogy’ is Vasiṣṭha’s primary argument described above in three steps.
Vasiṣṭha states, ‘Just as there is an image in a marble slab, even if it has not been carved, even so this notion of ‘I’ and ‘the world’ exists in the infinite consciousness’ (III:61).

This is where the trouble begins. According to Vasiṣṭha, the creative power of Brahman (spanda-śakti) induces, as it were, a ‘hiccup,’ a spontaneous vibration in consciousness, which results in the beginnings of the breach between the knower, Brahman, and the knowable. This rupture is the emergence of ‘an idea concerning its form and with an inquiry concerning itself’ (III:12). This initial idea, ‘Who am I?’ resulting in the positing of a counterpart inquiry, ‘What is that over there?’ condenses into the knower and the knowable. The knowable gradually matures and identifies itself with further forms of that-which-could-be. The creative thoughts of space, sound, and the ego are added. Once the ego gets going, there is no stopping it. The faculty of discrimination and the rationalizing intellect appear, and discursive thoughts radiate in all directions. The mind thinks ‘I am atomic in nature and stature’ and becomes so. Each arising thought is accompanied by desire. The desires to see, hear, touch, taste, and smell generate the eyes and other sense organs (III:13). The desires multiply and eventually, in Vasiṣṭha’s universe, elements combine to produce an apparent materiality. The composite of thoughts is given reality as the cosmic jīva (the embodied soul). It calls itself ‘Brahmā.’

Vasiṣṭha’s metaphysical explanation for the origins of the world begins with an account of the emergence of Brahmā, the great creator of this universe and the father of all creatures (Prajāpati). However, Brahmā’s activities have no resemblance to the ‘activities’ surrounding Brahman. Brahmā is a mental individual, omniscient,
omnipotent, and divine. Brahman is pure being, consciousness, bliss; impersonal, beyond mentality or materiality. There is neither desire nor memory in Brahman. According to Vasiṣṭha, Brahmā emerges out of Brahman as a pure coincidence, as when one perceives the crow alighting on a palm tree and the coconut falling. Although the mind may mistakenly conjure up a causal explanation, there is no perceivable connection between the two events of settling crow and dropping coconut. Thought-forms reify in Brahman and someone, in this case, someone calling himself Brahmā, visualizes himself and assumes the role of the creator (III:20, 21).

Brahmā, although he has no memory of his previous existence, has the desire for creation. With the dissolution of the previous epoch, the Brahmā of that antecedent universe is liberated and merges into Brahman. At that point, that Brahmā loses all memories of his previous existence, for to recall is to remain in bondage to his previous incarnation. From the perspective of the Brahmā of this universe, he simply wakes up from this ‘long cosmic night’ of Brahman consciousness and wonders what to do. ‘I offered my morning prayers and looked around, wishing to create the universe. I beheld the infinite void which was neither illumined nor dark. In my mind was the intention to create and in my heart, I began to see subtle visions’ (III:85). These visions of innumerable worlds furnished with mountains, rivers, oceans, a vast array of beings, scriptures, etc., offer the building blocks for Brahmā’s imaginative blueprint of his new creation, his new ‘story.’

Thus, Vasiṣṭha may point out that not only is the individualized Brahmā developed and nurtured by a ‘story’ that is made up of the ideas emerging from the field
of play that is Brahman, but also, most importantly, Brahmā can be viewed as the first 'story-teller' (III:93). The universe flows into existence from the creative process of Brahmā in a manner similar to the production of a story by an author. However, Brahmā is not the sole creator; he is not the only 'story-teller.' Brahmā 'designs' this universe and the original individual beings who will eventually propagate his world, but even after his work is done, the creative process continues in the imaginative activities of his created sentient beings.

In the Story of Līlā, a highly convoluted narrative with layers upon layers of interpretation, Vasiṣṭha makes it clear that fervent, incessant thoughts materialize, even for the created beings of Brahmā. Regardless of whether lives are shaped by the intercession of gods and goddesses granting boons or an individual’s own efforts, it is the individual’s imagination that is the primary culprit in propelling her from one distinctive life style to another to another. The imaginer is the lead ‘character’ in her imaginings and it is the intensity of her cravings and aversions that are transformed into the next life, the next ‘narrative.’

In Līlā’s Story, described in chapter two, it is the holy man’s dissatisfaction with his austere life and his desire for the opulence of a kingdom that propel him headlong into the turbulent wheel of saṃsāra, the repetitive history of birth after birth after birth. After death, the holy man is reborn as King Padma. The holy man’s wife, Arundhāfi, on account of her wish that she and her husband are never parted, is born and re-united with Padma as Queen Līlā. Padma is killed in battle, but he is still caught in the snare of the luxurious life of royalty. He is reborn as Vidūratha who is also crowned as king. The
momentum of Arundhati’s wish continues unabated in Līlā. Līlā is distraught at Padma’s death. With the aid of the goddess Sarasvatī, she enters into the ‘other’ physical space in which Vidūratha resides (equally a mental projection upon the same infinite space of consciousness) and sees, to her astonishment, that Vidūratha is accompanied by a replica of herself, Līlā2.

However, this is not a straightforward story of incarnation after incarnation. What must be remembered here is that, for Vasiṣṭha, actual life is wish fulfillment and fervent desires in one life materialize in the next birth. The intense desire of the holy man results in his rebirth as Padma and then Vidūratha. After Vidūratha’s death, his jīva re-enters Padma’s body and reigns again as king. The intense desire of Līlā1, to be bound to her husband, generates her double Līlā2, who marries Vidūratha. In one sense, Līlā1 and Līlā2 are the same person. As Sarasvatī notes, ‘The other youthful Līlā was indeed yourself’ (III:51, 52). Līlā2 is a bodily replica of Līlā1. Līlā2 has all the memories and experiences of being born in Vidūratha’s kingdom and living with Vidūratha, but it must be remembered that Vidūratha’s kingdom is an exact replica of Padma’s kingdom. It is not too farfetched to assume that Līlā1 and Līlā2 share some or most experiences and memories in childhood and youth.

Nonetheless, at some point the experiences and the memories begin to diverge because Līlā2 is not Līlā1 and develops different needs and desires. While Līlā2 is still

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5 Of course wish fulfillment is also a strong factor in dreams. Dreams can be incredibly self-serving and the product of deep-seated cravings. However, the convoluted workings of Vasiṣṭha’s imagination, which conjure up an entire kingdom furnished with well-known individuals and familiar events, make this venture into wish fulfillment more compatible with the unfolding of a story than a dream. It is a story, rather than a dream, that is in the making when Vasiṣṭha gives free reign to his imagination.
caught up in her desire to be with her husband, the first Lilā moves towards liberation. 
Lilā’s first entry into Vidūratha’s world is made possible only by the intervention of Sarasvatī, but as this Lilā’s understanding grows, she is able to traverse time and space on her own. She realizes that she and her husband had been living ordinary, unenlightened lives. Her desire turns to liberation. She proceeds towards enlightenment while Lilā2 is still caught up in the snares of the world. Lilā2’s desire is to be reunited with her husband, Vidūratha. When Vidūratha dies and, by the grace of Sarasvatī, his ethereal form enters into Padma’s body, Lilā2 follows him to Padma’s kingdom and is reunited with him as Padma’s wife. The fact that the two Lilās resemble each other may be explained by another wish of Padma to marry an exact replica of his wife in future lives.

Derek Parfit’s work on personal identity clarifies the relationship between the two Lilās. Parfit distinguishes between questions of survival (‘Do I survive?’) and questions of identity (‘Is there someone alive who is identical with me?’). He explores the idea that one may survive as two people without being identical to either or both of them. If each half of one brain is transplanted into two different people, both donees start new lives having exactly similar memories, personality, and character as the original donor. Parfit argues that not only does it seem implausible to say that the donor does not survive or that he survives as just one of the two recipients, to state that the donor survives as both is also problematic. In common parlance, identity implies a one-to-one relationship (X is either identical with Y or not) and ‘survive as both’ simply does not

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make sense here. Nevertheless, the donor does survive in some sense as both recipients, although none of the three have another identical to them. For Parfit, the question of identity just stops making sense at this point.

Parfit introduces the notion of psychological connectedness between mental states and argues that this is more important for understanding survival than the ubiquitous psychological continuity. Using the concept of q-memories and q-intentions, and viewing the relation between a q-memory and the experience of q-remembered as a 'direct' relation, Parfit asserts that psychological connectedness requires the holding of these direct relations. He also notes that the relations of connectedness are not transitive. ‘If X q-remembers most of Y’s life and Y q-remembers most of Z’s life, it does not follow that X q-remembers most of Z’s life.’ For Parfit, psychological continuity requires only overlapping chains of direct psychological relations and is thus transitive. So, an individual can be psychologically continuous, but not psychologically connected other than in a matter of degree. Q-memories deteriorate with the passage of time.

For Parfit, connectedness rather than continuity is the more important element in survival because it allows for relations of degree. He takes the case of imagined beings who reproduce by division. He notes that A, the original being, is as psychologically

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7 According to Parfit, ‘I am q-remembering an experience if (1) I have a belief about a past experience which seems in itself like a memory belief, (2) someone did have such an experience and (3) my belief is dependent on this experience in the same way (whatever that is) in which a memory of an experience is dependent upon it.’ For Parfit, such a definition makes every memory a q-memory, our memories being q-memories of our own experiences. He then drops the concept of ‘memory’ in favor of ‘q-memory’ and notes that one can also talk about q-action, q-intend etc. Ibid., pp. 196-197.

8 As is the relation between q-intention and the q-intended action etc., ibid., p. 201.

9 Ibid., p. 201.
close to B+1 and B+2 (its immediate division) as Parfit today is to himself tomorrow, but
A is as distant from B+30 (a division many times removed) as he is to his great grand-
son. According to Parfit, the further one gets from the original person in terms of
connectedness of mental states, the less one wants to say that he survived. 'What matters
in the continued existence of a person are, for the most part, relations of degree,' cashed
out in terms of psychological connectedness. Initially, after the surgery, the two people
will be psychologically closely connected to one another in that they would have similar
memories, desires, and hopes, but later on each person will have very little memory of his
origins and may develop along very different paths.

Parfit continues that with psychological continuity, A can consider any individual
on his 'tree' as on a single path and speak of 'an ancestral self' or 'descendant self,'
without the making of distinctions. However, for psychological connectedness, he
suggests the phrase 'one of my future selves' and 'one of my past selves.' Parfit writes,

Since psychological connectedness is not transitive, and is a matter of degree, the relations
'being a past self of' and 'being a future self of' should themselves be treated as relations
of degree. We allow for this series of descriptions: 'my most recent self,' 'one of my
earlier selves,' 'one of my distant selves,' 'hardly one of my past selves - I can only q-
remember a few of his experiences,' and finally, 'not in any way one of my past selves -
just an ancestral self.'

Parfit explains that, in a sense, we have this form of relationship with ourselves. The
sense of psychological kinship or otherwise, of being closer to past or future selves, is in

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11 Ibid., p. 206. In a postscript to this paper, Parfit regrets claiming that psychological connectedness is more
important than psychological continuity. However, he points out that there does seem to be something more
to the issues surrounding personal identity and survival than just bodily and psychological continuity and that
something more is captured by the degrees of relation available in the notion of connectedness. Identity is a
one-to-one relation and an all-or-nothing affair (X is either identical with Y or not). The notion of survival
permits connections to a greater or lesser degree.
all our lives, and we recognize the fact that we are made up of former selves. Moreover, we see that certain selves trace a continuous line whereas other selves are discontinued and renewed (as in childhood to adulthood).

This idea of ancestral, past, and future selves comes close to what Vasiṣṭha could be proposing, if he likened his world-appearance to a story rather than a dream. Līlā is both the ancestral and past self of Līlā2. Līlā is not only the ‘creator’ of Līlā2 through the intensity of her desire, but is also the blueprint for Līlā2. She ‘survives’ as Līlā2 and Līlā2 has similar memories up to a point (she recalls playing with her favorite deer), but then Līlā2 continues her evolution on her own. She is the ‘creator’ of the packaging for her next life. If she desires to be with Padma/Vidūratha, then that is what will occur. If her intense desire is for liberation, then she will follow the path of Līlā. In addition, there are innumerable worlds contained within the illusion. Līlā and Padma are the ancestral and descendent selves of many other Līḷās and Padmas. As are the holy man and Arundhati. As are Vidūratha and Līlā2.

Although Līlā and Padma are the ancestral selves of Līlā2 and Padma2 (in this case, Vidūratha), and say, Līḷā+30 and Padma+30, they may bear very little psychological connectedness to Līḷā+30 and Padma+30 respectively. Each of the latter individuals may have developed life-styles that are poles apart from their originators. Questions of identity no longer apply here. Dreams do not capture this rupture of personal identity quite as well as the story. Having a mirror image or a double, even for a brief moment, cancels the uniqueness of the image producer and thus evaporates any sense of personal identity, but there is a sense of survival which wanes with the passage of time.
(2) Vasiśṭha’s Possible Metaphysical Argument for the Identity of World and Story

Just as in the dream analogy, Vasiśṭha may also use a metaphysical argument in establishing his claim that the world is nothing but a story. In the dream analogy explored in chapter three, Vasiśṭha argues that as the properties of the dream commonly used to distinguish the dream from the world-appearance, incoherence, evanescence, the lack of subject-object distinction, and sublatability, are also the features of the so-called real world, the world in reality is just a dream. However, another reading of the Yogavāsiṣṭha is also possible. Vasiśṭha may construct a metaphysical argument that follows a similar pattern to the dream analogy and view it as an analogy with story. Such an argument would take the following form:

(i) The story has the features of evanescence, sublatability, and subject-object unity

(ii) These features of evanescence, sublatability, and subject-object unity are commonly used to distinguish the story from the world-appearance.

(iii) The world-appearance has the features of evanescence, sublatability, and subject-object unity.

Thus, the world-appearance is just a story

Vasiśṭha’s ontological claim that the world is illusion remains undisturbed. Story does have similarities with dream. Three of the four criteria that Vasiśṭha uses to establish his
claim that the world is a dream (evanescence, the lack of subject-object distinction, and
sublatability) are also seen in the presentation of the world as a story. Stories are short.
Even full-length novels of hundreds of densely printed pages can be read in a week.
There is no distinction between the subject (the author) and the object (the narrative).
The characters are make-believe, the products of the author’s imagination. Moreover, the
reality of the story-world is negated by events in the waking world. Stories have a similar
psychological impact on the reader as dreams have on the dreamer. The reader may be
absorbed in a story, and yet is ‘awakened’ to its fictionality when she puts aside the
novel.

Nevertheless, story has some advantage over dream. Vasiṣṭha’s fourth criterion of
dreams, incoherence, does not apply as well to fiction as it does to dreams. Stories tend
to have a beginning, middle, and end. Even the most convoluted of narratives follow a
structured pattern of events running in sequence. This works to Vasiṣṭha’s benefit. He
does not have to adopt the torturous route of providing an explanation for the
incoherence of the world when common sense dictates otherwise. Worldly events do not
just happen, even if they present such an appearance. They are preceded and influenced
by other events. These events may be viewed as a tangled web of inter-relationships that
defy easy explanation, but there is some underlying order imposed by the structures of
the universe. So, it is not difficult to substantiate the claim that story-telling is adopted by
Vasiṣṭha just because he considers his world to be a story-world anyway, and the
unfolding of life to be as incorporeal and insubstantial as the developing activities of the
characters in the story.
Thus far, there isn’t much of a difference between the analogy based on dream and the analogy based on story. However, and most importantly, had Vasiṣṭha utilized the analogy with story, his justification for the ‘fictional’ nature of the world-appearance may be reinforced by two additional criteria:

• (a) The creative origins of the world-appearance and story.

• (b) The inter-dependence of author, reader, and character.

These two features are explored below. As in chapter three, I am assuming that this list of features is comprehensive and inclusive of all the major criteria used to distinguish stories from Vasiṣṭha’s world-appearance. If another criterion crops up, I am convinced that Vasiṣṭha’s ingenious tales would provide the necessary correspondence with the world-appearance.

• (a) The creative origins of the world-appearance and story

Vasiṣṭha’s explanation for the birth of the universe and the lives lived in it bear a strong resemblance to the creation of a novel in that the universe and the novel are both products of an imagination, in this case the imagination of a creator in the shape of an author. As far as literary works are concerned, the centrality of imagination of the author and the propulsion of her desires are not controversial matters. The author wishes to bring some truths to light and develops a plot and characters to reveal these ideas in an intelligent and stimulating manner. The intensity of her imagination may take the shape of some strife between characters, conflicts within the personality of a character or both. Story book characters are not portrayed as mere victims of external forces beyond their
control, but as vibrant, dynamic agents, sometimes struggling against great odds in order to bring about some desired goal. The skilled author has the power to depict the poignancy of a situation in which even strengths of character may unknowingly contribute to destruction, just as tragedies in ‘real’ life may erupt from the need to do good.

Brahmā’s creation of the world follows a similar pattern with the added complication that his people create further ‘lives’ of their own. Brahmā is the chief ‘story-teller,’ whose imagination produces ‘characters’ who, in turn, through the exercise of their desires and imaginations, concoct other ‘narratives’ and other ‘characters.’

Brahmā, let us say, creates the king, Daśaratha. Brahmā’s intense thoughts of the king ‘materialize’ as flesh-and-blood Daśaratha and Daśaratha’s unwavering desire for a son ‘materializes’ as Rāma. The intensity of Rāma’s own thoughts ‘completes’ itself by attracting all the characteristics of time and space, such as variability and solidity. The impenetrable thought ‘I am Rāma’ reveals attachment to the body. The name ‘Rāma’ is attached to the body and Rāma acquires all the physical characteristics of a body and other paraphernalia of what we consider to be the material world. And so on. The universe is born.

Brahmā’s creation of his world, populated with Daśaratha, Rāma and others, parallels Vasiṣṭha’s creation of Līlā’s Story, in which Vasiṣṭha’s thoughts project the character Arundhatī and her thoughts materialize as Līlā. But, of course, in his metaphysical account, Vasiṣṭha throws a spanner into the works in that the ultimate wish-
maker, Brahmā, is as non-real as the world and its people. Vasiṣṭha emphasizes again and again that ‘all this [the world as we know it] is mere imagination or thought’ (III:13).

Even the creator Brahmā is a mere thought-form in this cosmic consciousness: consciousness reflecting its own thought-forms within itself is all this apparent seer and seen, all of which are mere imaginations. All of them however exist in name only and multiply in name only. Even as the cosmic being arose in the cosmic consciousness as a cosmic thought-form, others arose from the thoughts of that cosmic being - just as one lamp is kindled from another. But all of them are non-different from that one cosmic being on account of whose thought-vibration they arose. (III: 14)

Brahmā is a thought-form and so are his creations and his creations’ creations. His imagination and his thoughts ‘fire’ the existence of others, clothed in matter and form, but he, himself, arises as an idea sprouting out of the breach between Brahman as knower and Brahma as knowable. However, this self-knowledge, which is the final step in the path of liberation, does not muddy the assertion that it is via the authorial imagination that both the story-universe and Vasiṣṭha’s universe are brought into play.

• (b) The inter-dependence of author, reader, and character.

There is a topsy-turvy inter-dependence of imagination that gives elbow room for the development of a three-way alliance between author, reader, and character. Given the relationship between author and reader, it is not just the author who is responsible for the development of a story. As William Carlos Williams notes, the author and reader are ‘locked in a fraternal embrace.’¹³ The author builds a universe and peoples it with credible, ‘tangible’ characters by the use of her imagination. The reader actively

participates in the imaginative world-making activity of the author by willingly and attentively allowing herself to be drawn into the fantasy. David Novitz writes,

Authors do not just create fictional worlds and populate them with characters. They also use language in ways which are carefully designed to have special effects: to breed insights, to encourage emotional responses, to highlight certain values and disabuse us of others. To this end metaphors are coined, symbols are invented and strategically deployed, and a wealth of images and figures is devised with the aim of fostering certain associative and emotional responses. Readers, in their turn, try to comprehend the fiction, and this frequently requires them to interpret certain works. They become 'caught up in' the fiction, they 'identify' with its characters, they laugh with them and weep for them.¹⁴

The narration is necessarily through the medium of words. The author’s inner ‘picturings’ are translated into words and, in the reader, the words are transformed back into rich imagery. From the reader’s perspective, the reading of the story is not a sterile repetition of the words, but an invitation for the reader’s mind to re-play the narrative in its full dramatic form. The reader is drawn into what Samuel Coleridge calls ‘the willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.’ She no longer views the novel as representing an illusion, but is fully immersed in it to the point of identifying with the characters and sharing their emotions. In effect, she cooperates with the author’s vision, participates in the illusion and, simultaneously, re-creates it.

In the relationship between author and character, characters acquire a life of their own, independently of their creator, and even end up converting the author to different ideas. A literary novel presents a series of connected events that unfold in a coherent fashion, albeit with many twists and turns along the way. The author does not have the finished product in mind when beginning a story. She has the desire to write a particular kind of novel and to convey this story-line to the readers. During her period of research

prior to writing, the author has some notion of who the characters will be, their roles in
the narrative and the evolution of their dramatic lives through the story, but these
characters rarely appear as fully fleshed out personalities with all the idiosyncrasies of
style and temperament firmly in place. The author attempts to reach into the character’s
psyche. If she is successful, this inner ‘voice’ of the character comes to life and takes on
a will of its own. Then, not only does the plot develop in unknown and unforeseen
directions, but so do the characters. Even when the author has a deep sense of the
characters’ psyche and a feel for the depth of their personalities, she makes new
discoveries as these characters mature and evolve throughout the writing process. In a
way, the author appears to be controlled by the fictional process as much as she is in
charge of it.

As for the relationship between reader and character, the reader, while fully
understanding the fictional nature of the story, is drawn into the experiences and
lifestyles of the characters. The skillful author may describe a character but more often
than not, allows the character to gradually reveal herself in the development of the story
and in the interactions with the other characters in the story. The characters in good
literature are not two-dimensional, ‘cardboard’ figures, but are three-dimensional fully
fleshed out individuals who take on lives of their own. The reader’s task is not just to be
open to the workings of the author’s imagination, but also to uncover the voices of the
characters, to step into their lives in a manner that understands their hopes, fears, and
joys. In so ‘communicating’ with the characters, in understanding and exploring their
development, their freedom to mature, the reader may also further understand the
message of the author and the importance or otherwise of what is written and not written.

This interplay between author, character, and reader is aptly seen in Toni
Morrison’s brilliant exploration of Willa Cather’s novel, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*.
Morrison illustrates how, in an attempt to represent the efforts of the troubled and
defeated white slave owner (Sapphira) to construct her ‘self,’ the African (slave)
characters are muzzled and manipulated at every turn in the story. And yet, ‘things go
awry.’ Morrison writes,

As often happens, characters make claims, impose demands of imaginative accountability
over and above the author’s will to contain them. Just as Rachel’s intervention foils
Sapphira’s plot, so Cather’s urgent need to know and understand this Africanist mother
and daughter requires her to give them center stage. The child Cather listens to Till’s
stories, and the slave, silenced in the narrative, has the final words of the epilogue. 15

The characters go their own way. At the last moment, according to Morrison, the author
attempts to regain control and the words spoken by Till affirm the slaveholders’ ideology.
However, Morrison notes that ‘Till’s voluntary genuflection is as ecstatic as it is
suspicious’ in that it upsets the very framework of the novel, the complete ownership and
domination of Till and her daughter, Nancy (the slave girl), in body, mind, and spirit.
Morrison’s claim is that Cather’s efforts, to salvage her diminishing power over her
characters, is constrained by the violence done to the novel itself. According to Morrison,

Till’s impotency still shines through her placatory words regarding the benevolence of the institution of slavery, and Morrison supposes that Cather is aware of this distortion.\(^\text{16}\)

By illustrating how the characters struggle to find authentic voices of their own, Morrison reveals her place as the reader of the novel and sheds light on her interactions with the author and the characters. As the reader, Morrison does not heedlessly buy into Cather’s portrayal of the relationships between the slave owner, Sapphira, and Till, her slave. In following Till’s voice in the novel, Morrison exposes Till’s defeated position in the latter’s response to the planned rape and eventual flight of her daughter, her seeming lack of interest in her daughter’s well being that is inexplicable outside of the agony of four hundred years of slave parent-child relationships. Morrison notes that Cather eventually has Till murmur a brief inquiry about her daughter, not to render Till a more sympathetic character (Till’s concern about her daughter is attributed to her need to look good in the eyes of the darker-skinned, lower-status field slaves), but because Till’s silence ‘became an unbearable violence even in a work full of violence and evasion.’\(^\text{17}\) In such interactions with the author and characters, Morrison, as the astute reader, sees beyond Till’s submission to her mistress and empty acquiescence of slavery to the

\(^{16}\) Other modern authors are also surprised at the precise and yet distinct ways in which a character unfolds and matures. The perspective of the authorial voice or even of one character changes the interests and perspectives of the others. In interviews with Olga Kenyon, Maya Angelou expresses this dynamic ambiguity in the creative process in this manner. ‘I love to write because it is a puzzle. It offers me the enigma of life. How can I take a few nouns, a few pronouns, a few adverbs and verbs and an adjective and bond them together, make them stick so that I can fling them against a far wall and see them bounce. How? How?’ Anita Desai affirms this tension between bonding and bouncing, control and relinquishment. ‘I wanted to imagine how the world seemed from a man’s point of view,’ she says of her novel *In Custody*. ‘Interestingly, the women become far more shrill than I had originally intended them to be.’ Kenyon, Olga. *The Writer’s Imagination*, (Bradford: University of Bradford Print Unit, 1992), pp. 1, 39.

struggles of an author caught between the moral conventions of the day and the integrity of Till's voice in her novel.

It is in such author-reader-character relationships that the evolution of individual lives in Brahmā's world begins to look remarkably like the ripening of a story. Brahmā is the first story-teller. However, not only are Vasiṣṭha and Daśaratha created by Brahmā and are thus his 'characters' and Rāma, the son and 'character' created by Daśaratha, but Daśaratha is also the reader and co-author of Brahmā's and Rāma's stories. Rāma is the reader and co-author of Daśaratha's story. As readers, Daśaratha and Rāma 'read' and interpret their own and other narrative lives in order to communicate with each other and develop their lives in various ways. It is not only Brahmā's thoughts that end in embodiment, but also do the thoughts of his creation, Daśaratha, and his creation's (Daśaratha's) creation, Rāma. Their thoughts are not controlled by Brahmā's reign. However, the interactions with other lives, including Brahmā's, preclude Daśaratha and Rāma functioning in the world-appearance as isolated, autonomous beings. They are not only authors of their own stories but co-authors of each other's stories. The name 'Daśaratha' is attached to the body not just by Brahmā, but also by Daśaratha, Rāma, and their milieu.

To put it in another way, there are particular ties and bonds among the imaginations of Brahmā, Daśaratha, and Rāma. The imagination of Brahmā creates the original blueprint, Daśaratha. Daśaratha is the character, as well as reader, of Brahmā's world, attempting to deal with all the ramifications as best he can. Daśaratha is also simultaneously the author in that he imposes his own imaginative desires into Brahmā's
story-line (life is wish-fulfillment for him too), and thus is responsible for catapulting the narrative in different directions. His ‘creation’ is Rāma. Rāma follows the same pattern of being simultaneously character, reader, and author of his own path. Rāma’s imagination takes the ‘mind-stuff’ of Brahmā and Daśaratha and constructs his own story. Rāma’s world is influenced by Brahmā’s and Daśaratha’s desires and aversions very much in the way that an author’s intentions are portrayed in a novel, but, simultaneously, Rāma’s own needs and wishes shape and propel his life, impacting his creators’ creations in unforeseen ways.¹⁸

Step II: Literary Imagination and Moral Development

Vasiṣṭha’s second step may well be that just as the functioning of the literary imagination in stories enhances the moral capabilities of the reader, the creative imagination in Vasiṣṭha’s world-appearance also enables and enriches the development of the ideal moral character. Stories are read for enjoyment and amusement, but they are also viewed as the vehicles by which we expand our moral knowledge and learn about customary, as well as unexpected, moral dilemmas, conflicts, and resolutions. As Martha Nussbaum notes, we have never lived enough. Our life experiences are too limited and parochial. Good literature expands our knowledge and concerns to lands and people who might otherwise be ignored and forgotten. In addition, many cultures, such as the Indian

¹⁸ This inter-dependence is beautifully illustrated by Luigi Pirandello’s play, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, where the characters, in their pursuit of an author to provide some direction to their lives (‘any author would do’), intrude on real actors rehearsing an earlier Pirandello play, ‘Mixing It Up’, thus reconstructing and advancing the play along very different lines.
tradition, use stories to impart messages that are considered valuable to the development of a moral being. Characters in stories are used as role models, even if they do not aspire to the high standards set by the society. They exemplify a different way of living, disclosing ways to behave as well as ways not to behave. Joseph Conrad’s Lord Jim is one example. Other authors, such as Charles Dickens, also use stories to challenge the status quo. Through the reading of such stories, we develop self-awareness, gain insights into our own characters, and recognize the complications that may arise not just from our weaknesses but also from our strengths.

How do these literary works enrich the moral personality? How does Vasiṣṭha’s world-appearance enhance the moral personality of the fool and the seeker? The function of the imagination in both story and Vasiṣṭha’s world-appearance is central to answering these questions. The term ‘imagination’ is rather broad and captures very many different modes by which the mind functions. Anthony Kenny\(^\text{19}\) differentiates the natural ability to ‘call up mental images’ from the creative ability to ‘imagine the world different in significant ways; the ability to conjecture, hypothesize, invent.’\(^\text{20}\) He maintains that the first sense of the term is just the ‘ability to talk to oneself’ by using the memory and the intellect in a particular manner. Kenny gives the example of Macaulay reciting to himself the first five books of *Paradise Lost* during a crossing of the Irish Sea. This of course involves a prodigious feat of memory, an exercise of the intellect in the understanding

\(^{20}\) Kenny calls the first sense of the imagination ‘fancy’ and the latter sense ‘imagination,’ but as Martha Nussbaum uses ‘fancy’ to describe the creative, literary imagination and much of this chapter is devoted to her work, I will do the same.
of the language, and the application of imagination in the under-the-breath recitation of a text not of Macaulay's own composition. For Kenny, the imagination of poets and scientists is not just this ability to master a language and reproduce past impressions in exquisite detail, but the ability 'to use language creatively, to form new thoughts, to discover new truths and build new worlds.' It is this poetic productive imagination, the creative imagination, which is the subject matter of this chapter.

The creative, 'literary' imagination involved in the act of reading advances the pedagogical function in two ways. Firstly, the sheer enjoyment of imaginatively engaging with good fiction disrupts the unremittent flow of ingrained thought patterns and encourages the initial open-minded tolerance that draws the reader into mundane as well as strange and startling worlds. It invites the reader's eye to shifting perspectives, to different ways of looking at the world, the reader's mind to different modes of thinking. Secondly, the creative imagination promotes compassion and empathetic identification with the life of the 'other' in such a manner as to enhance the moral personality of the reader, whether she is the reader of a novel or the 'reader' of Vasiṣṭha's world-appearance. Each of these features will be discussed in turn.

(1) Shifting Perspectives

In Poetic Justice, Martha Nussbaum describes the allure and the instructive spirit of the novel as follows:

This novel [Hard Times] tells a story. In so doing, it gets its readers involved with the characters, caring about their projects, their hopes and fears, participating in their attempts

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to unravel the mysteries and perplexities of their lives. The participation of the reader is made explicit at many points of the narration. And it is brought home to readers that the story is in certain ways their own story, showing possibilities for human life and choice that are in certain respects their own to seize, though their concrete circumstances may differ greatly.22

Nussbaum’s concern is to move away from the notion of human beings as ‘abstract, undistinguishable units,’ as ‘dream and dots’ devoid of history and character. She wishes to reveal human beings in all their richness and individuality, arguing that in this literary presentation of the uniquely individual human being lies the seeds of sympathetic identification of the reader with the character. The reader realizes that the character’s story in many ways is her own story. This in turn, argues Nussbaum, leads to the perception of all human beings as not just means but ends in themselves, and the furtherance of accurate ethical judgments.

Nussbaum argues that the literary novel enhances the moral being of the reader. The literary novel introduces the reader to the various possibilities of life, possibilities that the reader may not have experienced and may never experience. The novel is disturbing in that it brings the reader face to face with herself, her beliefs and prejudices; it is a dynamic ‘living form’ actively engaged in today’s culture; it is concrete in that it describes the particular circumstances in which particular characters grapple with certain hopes, fears, and aspirations that the reader may or may not be familiar, thus invoking ‘bonds of identification and sympathy’ or critical inquiry in to ‘how the mutable features of society and circumstance bear on the realization of shared hopes and desires.’23 Most,

23 Ibid., p. 6.
importantly, literary novels 'embrace the ordinary.' Nussbaum, notes that in the novel, *Hard Times*, 'we visit a schoolroom, a middle-class home, a circus, a working-class home, the office of a manager, the factory in which working people toil, an abandoned mineshaft in which many working people have met their death.' These incursions, according to Nussbaum, make the ordinary 'the object of our keenest interest and sympathy.' 'We visit these places as involved friends, concerned about what is happening in them.'

Nussbaum sees the fiction-making imagination, or fancy as she calls it, as the 'ability to see one thing as another, to see one thing in another.'

We might therefore also call it the metaphorical imagination. It begins simply as an almost instinctual reflex of mind (only Bizer and Mrs. Gradgrind lack it totally). Even Louisa forbidden its cultivation, sees shapes in fires, endows perceived patterns with a significance that is not present in bare sense perception itself. Things look like other things, or more precisely, the other things are seen in the immediate things... Seeing a perception then as pointing to something beyond itself, seeing in the things that are perceptible and at hand other things that are not before one's eyes - this is fancy.

For Nussbaum, this fancy is not just a useless frill, but a morally crucial ability that allows the reader to go beyond the bare facts of the situation and see human beings in all their richness and individuality. According to her, this does not diminish neutrality of judgment, but enhances it by allowing the moral agent greater access to the subtle intricacies and associations between the people involved. For Nussbaum, such interconnections are salient features in the 'reading' of any situation. The novel, through the literary imagination, allows the first slipping on of the shoes of others. The shoes may

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24 Ibid., p. 9.  
25 Ibid., p. 9.  
26 Ibid., p. 36.
pinch a great deal, but if the reader is so inclined, they will broaden her ability to imagine the situation of someone in very different circumstances. This imaginative openness, according to Nussbaum, serves to illuminate the situation and works in breaking the comfortable but rigid thought patterns that restrict the moral personality.

How does this relate to Vasiṣṭha’s world-appearance? At first glance, there does seem to be some discord between Nussbaum’s and Vasiṣṭha’s views on the role of imagination. For Vasiṣṭha, Brahmā himself is the cosmic mind, manifesting out of the pure consciousness that is Brahman and unnaturally given form and matter by imaginative activities (III:33, 34, 35). The world-illusion arises out of Brahmā’s intense and persistent thoughts born out of the imagination and this illusion is perceived as real by his creations. By obstinately clinging to their own fantasies, his creations continue to spin the wheel of delusion. The constituents of the mind, according to Vasiṣṭha, are conception, imagination, thought, and memory. It is by their removal that the mind is dissolved (V:91). ‘Conceptualization or [in other words] imagination is productive of error or sorrow,’ states Vasiṣṭha, ‘and it can be so easily got rid of by self-knowledge - and when it is got rid of there is great peace. Why does one find it so difficult?’ (III:111). By equating imagination with the power of conceptualization, Vasiṣṭha emphasizes the destructive power of the mind.

In spite of such derogatory speech against the workings of the imaginative mind, Vasiṣṭha’s own teachings to Rāma interweave philosophical discourse with incredible tales of imagination and fantasy. His justification for this departure from academically oriented treatises to poetic literature is that melodious words are required to strike and
take possession of the heart. Anything else is ‘thrown away for nothing, like butter poured upon the burnt ashes of an oblation, and has no power to kindle the flame.’ For Vasiṣṭha, serious words of scholastic erudition may engage the mind in mental gymnastics, but they do not encourage a spiritual transformation unless they also speak to the heart. So, even while berating the work of the imagination as the obstinate fantasy that abandons the inquiry into self-nature and promotes the perverted perception of the world-illusion, Vasiṣṭha’s methodology in setting the discourses within the framework of stories, the narrative format, his literary style, and the content of the stories themselves are attempts to awaken the deluded ones to different perspectives on life.

There has to be something more to Vasiṣṭha’s initial abhorrence of the imagination. As far as he is concerned, ultimate reality is Brahman, pure, undivided, consciousness and our task in this world is to come to the realization that the world of multiplicity and individuality that we see around us is just illusion. We are Brahman, tat tvam asi. Given this background, Vasiṣṭha classifies the personalities of human beings as the fool, the seeker, and the enlightened sage, the jīvanmukta (III:54). Each ‘type’ is used by or uses the imagination in obstructive or helpful ways. Vasiṣṭha labels as ‘fool’ the one who single-mindedly pursues bodily and worldly pleasures in the belief that these activities lead to or constitute the good life. The seeker is one such as Rāma who has all the sensory pleasures that a sixteen-year old prince may desire and is yet, deeply dissatisfied. The dreariness and emptiness of the luxurious life is his greatest challenge.

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and he seeks a way of living in the world without being overwhelmed and conquered by it. The \textit{jīvanmukta} is, of course, the enlightened being who has realized Brahman and lives in the world with that knowledge.\textsuperscript{28}

It is in the fool that the imagination runs wild. For Vasiṣṭha, with his thesis that there is only Brahman and nothing else, the fool’s problem stems from ascribing reality to the objects of sense experiences. Vasiṣṭha views the very perception of objects as a psychological illness that has to be cured (IV:4, 5, 6). In addition, the fool’s imagination drives her desires. In the ‘darkness of her ignorance,’ she is entranced by the world-appearance and her cravings and aversions gather momentum. The fool’s pursuit of sensory pleasures (of touch, taste, sight, sound, and smell), as well as wealth, honor, and prosperity, serves to further conceal and distort the highest good, the identity with Brahman. ‘One should not revel in the filth known as sense pleasures as a worm revels in pus,’ scolds Vasiṣṭha (II:4, 5).\textsuperscript{29}

For Vasiṣṭha, the fool is in a deluded state of happiness, unaware that the craving for these pleasures is to be treated with great suspicion as it is most prone to divert her from her true path. Immersed in her imaginative activities, she does not see the poisonous nature of these experiences and the ease with which they plunge her deeper and deeper

\textsuperscript{28} Much of what Vasiṣṭha has to say regarding the characters of the fool, seeker, and sage is comparable to Aristotle’s views on this matter.

\textsuperscript{29} As far as Vasiṣṭha is concerned, for the enlightened sage the body is a ‘source of infinite delight.’ It transports her around the world and so is considered a ‘vehicle of wisdom.’ It makes available the different sense experiences, as well as the friendships and affections of others and so is considered a ‘source of gain.’ Thus, Vasiṣṭha’s message is not an unqualified dismissal of pleasures but the contention that these sensual temptations are the most likely to lead the novitiate astray and so an initial avoidance would be the better tactic in promoting the appropriate attitude towards the world. As far as the fool is concerned, sensory pleasures are not pleasures and there is no right or wrong way of enjoyment or even degrees of reveling in them. (IV: 23)
into the sorrows of life (VI.1:6) and away from Brahman. According to Vasiṣṭha, the imagination has a strong impact in that life itself is wish-fulfillment. Whatever she desires intensely, the fool secures in this life or the next. Her imaginings drive her cycle of birth after birth. She accelerates on her treadmill of pain and suffering.

Whatever remedy Vasiṣṭha has in mind must deflect the fool from indulging further in this sorry state of affairs. As it is the imaginative mind that is responsible for deciding what is enjoyable and what is distasteful, it is through the workings of the mind that the fool begins her inner transformation. Vasiṣṭha states,

The yogi knows that it is one’s own mentality that turns sweet things into bitter things and vice versa, and friends into enemies and vice versa. In the same way, changing the angle of vision and by persistent practice one can develop a taste for the study of scriptures and for japa, etc., which were uninteresting earlier. For these qualities are not in the objects but only in one’s own thinking; just as a sea-sick man sees the world go round, the ignorant man thinks that these qualities abide in the objects. A drunken man sees empty space where a wall stands, and a non-existent goblin kills a deluded person. (III 59, 60)

Vasiṣṭha, with his mind-creating havoc thesis, wishes to break the mind-sets that are responsible for the fool’s dreadful situation. The fool must come to see the workings of the senses as poisonous and turn the light of enquiry inward towards gaining knowledge of her true nature. For Vasiṣṭha, this effortful practice of controlling the mind and the senses is not to be confused with great exertion, which suggests much gritting of teeth and an internal struggle to subjugate the mind in a forceful manner. Instead, it is a gentle and gradual process that promotes a radical shift in the way in which the individual views not just the phenomenal world around her but also herself. The fool is required to change her ‘angle of vision’ by curtailing or re-directing the deluded imagination away from sense pleasures and towards Brahman.
In Vasiṣṭha’s world-appearance, Vasiṣṭha also utilizes stories to initiate this transformation in the fool and the seeker. In the Story of the Three Non-existent Princes Vasiṣṭha remarks explicitly, ‘what is known as the creation of the world is no more real than this story of the young boy’ (III: 101). In this story, related by a nanny to her young charge, the three princes, two unborn and the other unconceived, lived in a non-existent city. In their travels, they come across three rivers, two dry and the other waterless. Nevertheless, they have refreshing baths and quench their thirst. They reach a huge city still to be constructed, where they discover three palaces of unimaginable beauty, two of which were still unbuilt and the third with no walls. There they cook ninety nine minus one hundred grams of rice and serve the food on pulverized plates to three holy men, two of whom had no body and the third no mouth. And so on.

With such a story, Vasiṣṭha does not simply portray the world as illusion, but also as a logical impossibility that should not even appear. Vasiṣṭha uses both the rope-snake metaphor and the metaphor of the barren woman’s son to promote the view of the world as illusion, but the metaphors do different work. The rope-snake metaphor is normally used to signify the error in our sense perceptions of the world and the manner in which the erroneous picture can be sublated by the knowledge acquired by other means.

Vasiṣṭha follows a similar line of thinking. ‘As when the truth that a rope is a rope is seen and the fear generated by the misunderstanding that it is a snake disappears, the study of

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30 To recap, Vasiṣṭha distinguishes three ontic levels of being: reality, appearance, and unreality. In this story of the Three Princes, Vasiṣṭha is not simply using the content of the story to place the world at the appearance level, but attempts to bridge the gap between the levels of appearance and unreality. The world is as unreal as logical and physical impossibilities, such as the barren woman’s son or the horns of a hare. It should not even appear.
this scripture frees one from sorrow, born of saṃsāra’ (II:17). With the Story of the
Three Non-Existent Princes, Vasiṣṭha expands on the idea of logical impossibility
initiated by the metaphor of the barren woman’s son. It is not so much that our senses
have led us astray in mistaking one object of the world (the rope) for another (the snake),
but the perception of the world as solid and real (the rope as rope) is nonsensical to the
point of absurdity.

Such strange tales indicate that, just as Martha Nussbaum and others see the work
of literary novels as producing cracks in the rigid sensibilities of the reader, Vasiṣṭha uses
the content of his stories to hatch the metaphysical point that the world is illusion. In so
doing, he severs the world’s hold on Rāma’s mind and senses, fracturing deep-rooted
ideas of individuality and multiplicity, separation and discord. The authorial enterprise
becomes a fully creative process in the author’s ability to inject novelty into the story. It
is this fresh and unique construction out of imagination that saves the work from being
mere second-hand imitation and aids in the task of transforming the reader. Similarly,
Vasiṣṭha’s stories break the fool’s asinine grip on the world by radically transforming her
imaginative activities. Who would believe that disembodied sages ate minus-one gram of
rice from plates broken to bits? Who would believe that this world is solid and material?
Who would believe that the ‘I’ is disconnected from the ‘Thou’? Rāma and the fool are
stopped in their well-worn tracks. Jump-starting an inner metamorphosis of imagination
gives birth to the creative process that saves both the reader and the fool from
themselves.
Empathetic Identification and Compassion

Secondly, and much more importantly, the literary imagination is said to enhance empathetic identification and compassion for the other, thus encouraging moral sensitivities towards the needs of the other. In a very similar way, I will argue that Vasiṣṭha’s road to liberation dissolves the I/Thou duality and promotes a compassionate identification with the other. In exploring the functioning of the literary imagination in this capacity, I will again be utilizing the work of Martha Nussbaum.

‘How exactly is fancy connected with charity and generosity,’ asks Nussbaum, ‘with general human sympathy and a beneficent use of reason?’

Consider, now, what it is to see a human being. Perception represents a physical object, possibly in motion. It has a certain shape, rather like the one we ascribe to ourselves. Well, how do we really know what sort of physical object this is and how to behave towards it? Do we ever have unimpeachable evidence that it is not a sophisticated robot or automaton? That it does indeed have an inner world of the sort that novels depict?... Where could such evidence ever be obtained? In this sense Dickens suggests that all of human life is a going beyond the facts, an acceptance of generous fancies, a projection of our own sentiments and inner activities onto the forms we perceive about us (and a reception from this interaction of images of ourselves, our own inner world).

The whole point of this lengthy paragraph is that by disengaging ourselves from the bare ‘presentations’ of sense perception, by permitting the free reign of imagination in such a manner as to place ourselves in the shoes of others, Nussbaum argues that there is a willingness ‘to go beyond the evidence and ‘a great charity of heart’ that attempts to understand the situation, not just in terms of abstract principles but also in terms of the specific features of the circumstances and history that led to the calamity or joy.

According to Nussbaum, even the ‘fact school,’ in its very act of denying ‘subjective

experience to cows and horses, humanity to workers,' is involved in fiction-making but it is a fiction-making that is parsimonious in its selection of the relevant details that make up a situation. ‘We never know for sure the contents of this perceived shapes’ heart; we have a choice only between a generous construction and a mean-spirited one. Seeing-in, or fancy, the great charity in the heart, nourishes the generous construal of the world.’33

How does this enhance the moral being? For Nussbaum, fancy is linked with the emotions that are generated by great literature.

Nussbaum argues that the literary imagination is what allows the reader to tap into certain emotions, such as fear, gratitude, pity or compassion, and that these emotions propel the reader to care deeply about the trials and tribulations faced by the characters.

For Nussbaum, emotions have a cognitive dimension in that ‘they enable the agent to perceive a sort of worth or value’ in having a particular kind of life invested with certain objects and persons, free of tragedies such as the loss of children.35 Given this understanding of value, the reader’s beliefs that a character suffers greatly through no fault of her own, that the reader herself is not immune to the vagaries of fate and may suffer equally under similar circumstances, the recognition of the universal need for

certain external goods, such as food, clothing, shelter, a nurturing environment, justice, and fairness, promote sympathy and identification with the characters and enable the reader to enter fully into their lives, fictional though they are.

And, for Nussbaum, it is via this imaginative tap into certain emotions and beliefs that sympathy and empathetic identification are projected to people distant in space and circumstance in the ‘real’ world. The middle-class 21st century American reader, immersed in juggling job and family, office meetings, car-pooling, and tennis lessons, requires a vivid imagination to thoroughly understand what it is to live the life of someone in the situation of the physically and mentally exhausted ‘Hands’ in the Coketown factory of ‘Hard Times,’ or of the poverty-stricken, fear-ridden refugee attempting to keep her family together while fleeing war-torn Rwanda. It is the vividness of imagination that allows the individual to strip away the trappings of her comfortable life and go beyond her own immediate concerns and sorrows to enter fully and compassionately into the sufferings of others. For Nussbaum, the deficiency of such emotions for the ‘other’ restricts rather than broadens the ethical vision in that such a lack impedes a comprehensive reading of the situation and may even prevent the moral agent from much needed action.

In Vasiṣṭha’s world-appearance, Vasiṣṭha approaches this perspective, that the redirected imagination enhances empathetic identification, along a similar but enriched route. For Vasiṣṭha, ‘man is non-different from the mind!’ (II:9). It is the mind that creates the thought of ‘I,’ the ego-sense that splits asunder the non-differentiation between ‘I’ and ‘thou.’ In the Story of Dāma, Vyāla, and Kaṭa, outlined in the previous
chapter, Vasiṣṭha explains how the ego-sense is responsible for the emotional mind-sets that result in evil thoughts and actions. He draws a clear connection between the ability to do one's job effectively and the impact of the senses. With the incessant functioning of the senses and the deluded imagination that considers sense experiences to be the only reality, dualistic notions, such as 'I' and 'other,' arose in the demons. They began carving up the world into 'I,' 'you,' 'what I have,' 'what you have,' 'what I would like of what you have,' 'what I would hate,' which then interfered with the proper performance of their duties. The demons, once caught in this vicious cycle, became susceptible to pain and suffering, death and destruction.

Rāma, as seeker after liberation, is in a similar predicament. He operates as a human being and cannot step outside of the human perspective. His sense experiences aggravate and promote the deluded imagination in terms of immoderate desires, emotions, ambitions, and hopes. These in turn serve to encourage the biases and prejudices injected by him into his network of beliefs and severely impair his judgments. He is impeded in the completion of his 'job' of becoming a liberated sage, the mahākarta (the great doer of actions), the mahābhokta (the great enjoyer), and the mahātyāgī (the great renunciate). These obstacles can only be eliminated by the dissolution of the ego which requires the control of the mind. Vasiṣṭha recommends practices, such as meditation and yogic control of life breath (prāṇa), to assist in the restraint of the mind (In the Story of Ikṣvāku, for example, Manu teaches such self-realization techniques to Ikṣvāku).
The goal is a complete transformation of the human mind. According to Vasiṣṭha, this is accomplished by habituation. It is by the persistent practice of meditation and the appropriate redirection of the imagination that egotism is quietened (III:22, 23). Through right effort comes the settling into one’s true nature, Brahman, pure consciousness.

Vasiṣṭha uses an analogy of the relative who moves away (VI.2:66, 67). The bonds of friendship and love are loosened or strengthened by subsequent events. In the 21st century, the relationship can be kept alive by telephone calls, e-mails, and visits, but it may also stagnate and allowed to die through disuse or kept barely alive with birthday cards. In addition, Vasiṣṭha’s emphasis is on the right effort. If the relative moves house, calling the previous telephone number and writing to the old address will not yield the proper results. If the relative eases the burden of his journey by clearing out your bank account and stealing your car, it may be appropriate to take measures for the recovery of your belongings but not the relative, except to put him in prison.

Similarly, according to Vasiṣṭha, through our imagination, we forge certain attachments to worldly pleasures. These shackles are strengthened by our proximity to them and our continuous interaction with them. Gradually, through persistent effort of redirected imagination and action, the seeker must loosen the ties that create false relationships with the world. Just as by repetitious performance of certain actions, the seeker develops a physical and mental distance between herself and the thieving relative, in this very same manner, because she shoulders the burden of certain mental and physical activities, she cultivates a distance between her mind’s imaginative activities and worldly pleasures. In persistently exerting this right effort over her deluded
imagination and nurturing the creative imagination that influences her towards Brahman, the seeker winds up with her wayward mind under control and the requisite attitude towards herself and her relationship with the world.

How does this restraint of the ego-sense relate to empathy and compassion? The restrained mind has great advantages. Vasiṣṭha is adamant that virtues do not leave the body when the ego-sense is dissolved but are enhanced.

The very nature of the mind is stupidity. Hence, when it dies purity and noble qualities arise. Some wise men refer to 'the pure mind' as that state of utter purity that prevails in a liberated sage in whom the mind is dead. Such a mind of the liberated sage is, therefore, full of noble qualities like friendliness etc. The existence (sattā) of such natural goodness in a liberated sage is known as sattva, purity etc. Hence, this is called 'death of the mind where form remains. (V:90)

One of the most entrenched dualities is between 'I' and 'Thou.' In the seeker with an over-active ego, the virtues, such as compassion, and a fully-fleshed discernment of the 'other' as 'I' cannot be fully functional because the vices that are generated by the 'Me and Mine' factor compete for prominence. When the ego-sense dissolves, according to Vasiṣṭha, the deluded imagination that feeds such thoughts is cut off at the root. The mind 'dies.' Personal cravings and aversions disappear. What was once fertile ground for the flourishing of the vices has been cleared away.

For Vasiṣṭha, when this freedom from the 'instincts of acquisition and rejection' becomes an integral part of the agent's nature, it allows for the unconstrained, spontaneous emergence of virtuous qualities, such as desirelessness, peace, friendliness, and compassion (V:13, VI.2:44). In shifting his thinking beyond the dualities of the world, Rāma has come to an understanding of tat tvam asi, That Thou Art. Thou art Brahman. Of course, Rāma still has desires, but by no longer thinking, 'I,' 'mine,' his
behavior is not influenced, motivated or distorted by such appetites as improper anger, fear, lust, and greed. This 'mental distancing' from his own needs and desires feeds his ability to see the other as himself.

This is where Vasiṣṭha's emphasis on morality has such resonance with stories and the fiction analogy. Just as the reading of good literary novels transforms the reader's imagination in such a way as to enrich her relationship with the characters and enhance empathetic identification and compassion, in Vasiṣṭha's world, certain practices such as meditation, right action, right feeling, and prāṇāyāma encourage the continued workings of the creative imagination that assist in the breakdown of those debilitating mind-sets that are produced by the ego-sense and act as barriers to an expansive reaching out to the 'other.' The disintegration of these entrenched patterns of thought, the notions of 'I,' 'mine' that solidify the ego-sense, generates a change of perception towards the 'other.' It promotes the empathetic identification with the other.

Thus, we see that just as an active engagement with stories enhances the moral capabilities of the reader, Vasiṣṭha's world-appearance also has a similar pedagogical function. In reading the story, the literary imagination comes into play in influencing the reader towards an open and sympathetic mind and promoting empathetic identification with characters far removed from the reader's own milieu. This creative imagination is also central to Vasiṣṭha's world-appearance. The journey from fool to seeker to sage is all about transforming the fool's deluded imagination that is entangled with the world-appearance into the creative imagination that sees the world as just a story and Brahman as the only reality. Once the barriers between 'I' and 'Thou' are dissolved, the virtues of
empathy and compassion are allowed free reign. Just as the reader is not prevented from entering into the lives of the characters occupying a fictional world, as long as the mental constraints such as ‘I’ and ‘thou’ are removed, the physical boundaries of skin, the barriers of flesh and bone, do not prevent Rāma from ‘stepping’ into the cittākāśa, the mental space, of the ‘other,’ and seeing the other as Brahman, as non-different from himself. He has taken the most important step on his path towards the realization of Brahman.

**Step III: Morality Justified**

Vasiṣṭha may then conclude that given the special function of the creative imagination, it makes sense for the jīvanmukta, who knows the world is illusion, to evolve into Vasiṣṭha’s ideal moral being. How does this work? As argued above, for Nussbaum, the realist novel is committed to inducing emotions, such as compassion and gratitude, in the reader and these emotions are vital ingredients in the stepping into the shoes of others, in generating concern over what happens to others and the willingness to stick one’s neck out for the sake of others in the ‘real’ world. However, according to Nussbaum, empathetic identification alone, the ability to understand the troubles of the characters from their perspective, does not adequately capture the full extent of the responsibilities of the reader. Emotions can play one false. The reader may be drawn towards one character rather than another simply because she delights in one character more than another or has suffered certain experiences that allow her to place herself more easily in the shoes of one rather than another. Such a stance impairs the impartiality
also necessary for accurate moral judgments. Thus, according to Nussbaum, a filtering device is required to isolate the trustworthy emotions from the untrustworthy ones and enhance the alliance between reader and character. She uses Adam Smith's conception of the judicious spectator.

With this notion of the 'judicious spectator,' Nussbaum links the reader to the moral agent. The judicious spectator is a spectator in that, although she is connected empathically to the other players via her power of imagination, she is also simultaneously detached from the situation and is able to recognize the salient features without being encumbered by the intensity of personal emotions and desires. She may of course use information from her own experiences to further clarify the situation, but her emotions are not colored by personal likes and dislikes. The judicious spectator is judicious in that she has the rational capabilities for determining the salient features of a situation, accurately assessing the import of various plans of action and coming to a decision.36

Nussbaum is emphatic that abstract theoretical reasoning and technical ways of modeling behavior are not thrown out of the window. As far as she is concerned, rule-governed, moral reasoning skills and empathetic imagination work hand in hand in producing the moral being. The primary concern is not that certain abstract principles are followed, but that obedience to such rules and principles takes into account the specific situational position of the individuals concerned, as well as the circumstances surrounding their predicament. This, she argues, is a particularistic, not a relativistic

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position. It recognizes the universality of certain human needs and human flourishing, but at the same time, acknowledges the impact of qualitative differences, of historical, societal, and personal contingencies on choices and decisions, which in turn can be a universal ideal in the quest of cultivating the ‘humanity’ within us.\(^{37}\)

Nussbaum concludes that the reader is in a privileged position: on the one hand, the reader’s literary imagination, when properly exercised, generates an empathetic identification with the plight of the character, on the other hand, such identification is ‘a more external sort of sympathy’ that allows the reader to stand apart from the character’s life and make ‘a spectatorial judgment’ that indeed a calamity has arisen through no fault of the character, a calamity that must be faced and acted upon, even if not resolved to everyone’s satisfaction. This mental distancing allows a fair determination of the depth of compassion and empathy that is rationally appropriate to the situation.\(^{38}\)

How does this special relationship between reader and character assist in providing an explanation for the supremely moral character of Vasiṣṭha’s sage who knows the world to be illusion? Nussbaum’s judicious spectator/reader parallels Vasiṣṭha’s sage in that the sage is also removed witness and involved participant in Vasiṣṭha’s world-story. For Vasiṣṭha, the liberated sage is the mahākartā (the great doer of actions),

who is freed of doubts and performs appropriate actions in natural situations whether they be regarded as dharma (right) or adharma (wrong), without being swayed by likes and dislikes, by success and failure, without ego-sense or jealousy, remaining with his mind in a state of silence and purity. He is unattached to anything but remains as a witness of everything, without selfish desires or motives, without excitement or exultation but with a

\(^{37}\) Op. cit., p. 45
mind at peace, without sorrow or grief, indifferent to action or inaction, whose very nature is peace and equilibrium or equanimity, which is sustained in all situations (in the birth, existence or annihilation of all things). (VI.1:115)

He is the mahābhoktā (the great enjoyer),

who does not hate anything nor long for anything but enjoys all natural experiences, who does not cling to or renounce anything even while engaged in actions, who does not experience though experiencing, who witnesses the world-play unaffected by it. His heart is not affected by pleasure and pain that arises in the course of life and the changes that cause confusion, and he regards with delight old age and death, sovereignty and poverty and even great calamities and fortunes. His very nature is non-violent and virtuous, and he enjoys what is sweet and what is bitter with equal relish, without making an arbitrary distinction 'This is enjoyable' and 'This is not.' (VI.1:115)

He is also the mahātyāgī (the great renunciate),

who has banished from his mind concepts like dharma and adharma, pain and pleasure, birth and death, all desires, all doubts, all convictions, who sees the falsity in the experience of pain by his body, mind, etc., who has realized ‘I have no body, no birth, no right and no wrong,’ who has completely abandoned from his heart the notion of world-appearance. (VI.1:115)

For Vasiṣṭha, it is the fashioning of this intact and integrated personality of witness and participant that is of profound importance to the development of the sage’s ideal moral nature, her embodiment as mahākarta, mahābhoktā, and mahātyāgī. The sage, as mahākarta, mahābhoktā, and mahātyāgī, understands the world as illusion and ‘remains as witness of everything,’ without being swayed by dualities such as success and failure, pain and pleasure. She is free of the ego-sense that generates unbridled emotions and passions. Her senses function on an even keel. She is no longer caught up in her web of thoughts and swayed by the emotions and preferences that seek her own advantage. In ‘effortlessly and naturally wearing the body’ (VI.1:116,117), nothing goes against the grain of her desires. Her body may be subject to pleasures and pains but no notions of seeking happiness or warding off unhappiness arise in her mind. Her heart rests in equanimity.
It is important to note that this ‘desireless’ state is not indifference to the condition of the world or the elimination of all desires. Whether secluded in a cave or ruling a kingdom, Vasiṣṭha’s sage lives and acts in the world, but she is no longer troubled, consciously or sub-consciously, by conflicting emotions and desires. Roy W. Perrett\textsuperscript{39} provides an elegant explanation of this theme in his exploration of the \textit{Bhagavadgītā}. Using Harry Frankfurt’s work, he distinguishes between first-order and second-order desires. First-order desires, such as the desire to eat this lemon-meringue pie, have actions as their objects. Second-order desires, such as the desire not to desire more pie given a weight problem, have first-order desires as their objects. Perrett notes that disinterested action is action ‘that is free from attached desire.’ An attached desire involves ‘both a first-order desire and a second-order desire for that first-order desire.’\textsuperscript{40}

According to Perrett, the appropriate content of the disinterested agent’s first-order desires is dictated by her \textit{svadharma} (her own natural duties arising from her spiritual state in life). She is spontaneously able to fulfill these responsibilities without the intrusive presence of her ego that distort first-order desires. Although she retains the capacity to form second-order desires and volitions, she simply ceases to do so. Thus, unattached to the fruits of her action, she lives a ‘life of response’ to every situation rather than a ‘life of reaction.’\textsuperscript{41} Vasiṣṭha’s ‘desireless’ sage is in the same position.

Vasiṣṭha notes that ‘the desire that arises in the course of one’s natural functions devoid

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\textsuperscript{39} Perrett, Roy W. \textit{Hindu Ethics: A Philosophical Study} (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1998).
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., pp. 23-25.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., p. 21. Perrett writes that he borrows this terminology from Robert Nozick who in turn cites Vimala Thakar.
\end{flushleft}
of craving is that of a liberated sage' (V:17). Of course, she still has desires, but it is a non-volitional desire in that she is not beset by her own aversions and cravings and thus, views her surroundings with equanimity. Vasiṣṭha speaks of this desire as the desire that existed even before contact with objects began. It is the natural attention given by the sage who is no longer afflicted by the ego-sense and thoughts of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ (V:17).\(^{42}\)

The sage is also the involved participant, the great doer of actions and the great enjoyer, performing ‘appropriate actions in natural situations’ and ‘enjoying all natural experiences,’ natural in that these situations and experiences are unaffected by her ego-sense, likes and dislikes. Vasiṣṭha’s own involvement can be seen in his interactions with Rāma. With an effortful seeker such as Rāma, Vasiṣṭha’s task is to direct him towards intelligent action which is simultaneously non-action. Vasiṣṭha is also concerned with the dispositions that generate the appropriate emotions. It is a matter of shaping a steadfast character. Unfortunately the seeker is not in the best position to design and follow a training course for himself. Given the imprecise nature of ethics, the application of universal principles and rules is problematic. They cannot be applied unconditionally to every situation.

Without proper guidance, Rāma may well end up in a worse situation than his current predicament. He is in need of instruction. Vasiṣṭha states,

> O Rāma, until such time as this wisdom arises directly in you, take recourse to the knowledge transmitted by the great teachers. When you receive such knowledge from the great teachers, your behavior will mirror theirs; and when thus you grow in their virtuous qualities, your wisdom will unfold within you. Wisdom and emulation of the noble behavior of holy ones thrive on each other! (II:19, 20)

\(^{42}\) There is still the question as to why the sage is desireless in the morally appropriate way rather than apathetic and indifferent to the world’s turmoil. This issue will be dealt with in the next chapter.
The sage provides assistance in two ways. First, she teaches and stabilizes in the seeker the knowledge that is required for appropriate action and realization of Brahman. Lectures and discussions internalize and fix the knowledge so that it is not so easily dislodged by wayward impulses. If one is 'this,' Brahman, one cannot live like 'that,' the fool. The fool ‘asks irrelevant questions irreverently’ and ‘spurns the sage’s wisdom’ (II:11). In the seeker, the knowledge becomes an ‘integral part of one’s being’ (II:11).

Second, as Vasiṣṭha emphasizes appropriate action (be it physical, mental or verbal), the mere following of scriptural instructions, even to the letter, does not guarantee that Rāma acquires the correct mental habits. According to Vasiṣṭha, the ‘mind is a field’ that ‘is ploughed by right action’ and ‘watered day and night by right feeling’ (VI.2:44). The meaning of scriptural declarations is exemplified in the manner in which the sage acts. Equanimity, understanding, knowledge, amongst other things, give the sage the ability to render an accurate reading of the situation and effortlessly respond to it as needed. She is the standard by which appropriate behavior and good character are judged. The seeker has to develop the emotional responses and the deliberative skills of the sage and can do no better than to follow in the footsteps of such a person. The sage is the exemplar whom the seeker imitates. Mirroring the exemplar’s behavior augments the habits that create a stable and honorable character.

However, it must be understood that Vasiṣṭha’s sage has no mandate to return to the hustle and bustle of city life and earnestly busy herself in the ‘saving’ of other beings. After liberation she may end up as teacher to many seekers, but equally she may choose to stay isolated in a forest or she may return to her life and duties as a member of a
family and community. Whatever she decides, she is still the exemplar for the sentient beings that surround her. The nature of the sage is that outwardly she appears very energetic and lively, engaging in righteous conduct, but inwardly she is no longer bound by her own aspirations, needs, and desires. Inwardly she is ‘swimming in the bliss of the self’ (VI.2:29), ever at equilibrium, her heart and mind at peace (V:75).43

Thus, the analogy with fiction allows an explanation for the ātman’s sattva character, even in a world she knows is illusion. Nussbaum’s reader is the judicious spectator, engaged in the lives of the characters of the novel, and yet, simultaneously, removed from the work of fiction in that she knows that the characters are just ‘fictional.’ Vasiṣṭha’s ātman is in a similar position. She is the mahākārtā, mahābhoktā, and mahātyāgī who is both witness in a world she know to be illusion, and simultaneously involved participant in the machinations and entanglements of the world-appearance.

Some Possible Objections

There are problems associated with this analogy based on fiction. As far as the identity of Vasiṣṭha’s world-appearance with story is concerned, it may be argued that the stance that there are similarities between an individual’s life and the lives of author, reader, and character, is completely ridiculous, particularly in the notion that life is wish-fulfillment. If life is indeed the consummation of desires, the critic notes, why are there so many trials and tribulations? If desires are satisfied, everyone should be living happy and

43 This manner of being in the world is elaborated in chapter four through the stories of Vasiṣṭha and Rāma, Dāśūra and Cūḍālā.
contented lives. Vasiṣṭha’s neat response is that in the fervor and intensity of the desire, people do not take account of all the ramifications of its actualization. In the Story of Karkatī, Vasiṣṭha reveals the unpleasant consequences awaiting the unprepared mind.

Karkatī is the terrible demoness who is always hungry. To alleviate her hunger, she hits upon a plan to eat all the people of Jambūdvīpa continent in a single meal. She performs severe austerities. The Creator God, Brahmā, appears before her and grants her wish of becoming Śucikā, a tiny ‘living steel pin,’ a needle, that has the added advantage of being accompanied by cholera (Viśucikā). As a cholera-infected needle, she is able to ‘consume,’ i.e., inflict pain and death, on those who indulge in unhealthy living. Karkatī, in the midst of her ambition, fails to discern all the ramifications of her boon. As a needle, she is unable to travel and has to wait for the people to come to her. This puts a limit on the number of people she can consume in a single meal. In addition, cholera also does not live in a wholesome environment. ‘Śucikā’ is trapped in places of dirt and decay. Rats, fleas, and other vermin are her constant companions. As Vasiṣṭha comments, ‘How strange, the deluded ones do not have foresight. The selfish person’s violent efforts to gain his selfish ends often leads to other results, even as a person is unable to see his face when he runs to the mirror puffing and panting - his own breath mists the mirror’ (III:70).

Another response to the problem of life as wish-fulfillment is to utilize Vasiṣṭha’s view of ‘karmic’ consequence that only targets the harmful impact of the mind. For Vasiṣṭha, seeing and interpreting are not distinct activities, but go hand in hand. There is an inventive aspect to the mind, which breaks down the dichotomy between the
structures of the mind that create ‘facts’ and the discovery of ‘factual’ data embedded in the world. Moreover, Vasiṣṭha blurs the distinction between the sort of perception that is unintentionally mediated by a certain framework of reference (past experience, knowledge, conventional discourse, etc.,) and the art of fiction-writing that intentionally creates a world of make-believe. For Vasiṣṭha, the qualities may or may not be in the object, but if the mind is at unrest or in turmoil, there is no end to the fabrications that it can produce unaided by alcohol or drugs.

This is a plausible view. Even in the duration of just one life, the mind can create havoc. One may concede that there are essential qualities to objects and events, but given the shenanigans of the mind, there is no neutral eye with which to see things and situations exactly as they are. One’s own mental imaginings and frustrations influence perceptions of the world and manufactures the difference between heaven and hell. As Vasiṣṭha notes, it is one’s own mentality that transforms ‘sweet things into bitter things and ‘friends into enemies’ (III:59, 60). Vasiṣṭha may argue confidently that the notion of life as wish-fulfillment is not that far-fetched in that we have the tendency to stubbornly see only what we want to see.

Another objection that can be raised is whether, as Vasiṣṭha argues, egolessness spontaneously promotes virtuous qualities, such as friendliness and compassion. The Story of the Three Demons, Dāma, Vyāla, and Kaṭa, does not have a happy ending in so far as their ego-filled selves are defeated by the gods and they flee to the netherworlds to escape the wrath of their creator, the demon king Saṃbarā. However, Saṃbarā, having learned from his mistakes, creates three other demons, Bhīma, Bhāsa, and Drīḍha, now
equipped with ‘self-knowledge and wisdom’ so that they do not succumb to the pitfalls of the ego-sense. Vasiṣṭha describes these demons as ‘devoted to appropriate action in the present, free from all attachment, devoid of the feeling “I did this”, intent on doing the work allotted to them by their master, free from desire and from aversion, and endowed with equal vision’ (IV:34). These demons succeed in defeating the gods and it is only through the intervention of Lord Vishnu himself that they themselves are slain.

According to Vasiṣṭha, as soon as their bodies fell, they were enlightened as they were devoid of ego-sense. The three demons are described as ‘endowed with self-knowledge, full of dispassion and sinless’ (IV:34), even attaining liberation at death, but they are seemingly fighting for the wrong side.

This may not be such a problem in that Saṃbarā is not described as an evil despot. In fact, he is much more of a celebrated sorcerer who creates magical cities with beautiful gardens and temples. The jealous gods do feel threatened and terrorized by him. They wage war against the demons at every opportune moment as when Saṃbarā is asleep (demons sleep for millennia) or out of the city. Saṃbarā then takes revenge and finally ends up being killed by Viṣṇu. However, it is important to note that Vasiṣṭha is adamant that egolessness, the freedom from personal cravings and aversions, results in the spontaneous emergence of all the virtuous qualities. This requires further clarification as the demons possess the egolessness so necessary for liberation and yet, are killing machines.
Nussbaum faces a similar criticism from Richard Posner. According to Posner, empathetic identification with the characters of a novel may encourage a better understanding of the needs and problems of everyday people, but this does not make the reader 'better or more just.' The reader may develop the ability to step into the inner lives of others in such a manner as to understand their personal, social, and political histories that influenced and shaped attitudes, emotions, beliefs, and so on, but her reaction to the fictional (and any real-life) dilemma will depend on the kind of person she is already, the kind of character she has already cultivated. For Posner, more knowledge doesn’t mean that the knowledge will be put to good use. The reader may identify with the egomaniacs and use the information presented in the book to improve her abilities in deception and manipulation. If she has the mind of a sadist, then she will use her knowledge to further her sadistic rather than her compassionate tendencies. In short, for Posner, empathy is insufficient to promote the right emotions or good behavior.

Nussbaum replies that she is ‘fully in agreement’ with Posner’s declaration of the disconnection between empathy and moral betterment, but emphasizes that good early education would teach children concern and care rather than indifference or hate towards other sentient beings. She concludes that more people than not have this sort of childhood training and, in spite of some inability to recognize the humanity in all

46 Ibid., p. 20.
humans, they do not develop a general appetite for sadistic behavior.\textsuperscript{48} Nussbaum also
uses Aristotle’s definition of compassion in such a manner as to preclude the reader using
her increased understanding of specific human vulnerabilities in unsavory ways.

According to Nussbaum, compassion includes an evaluative judgment that the events
befalling the other person are ‘seriously bad’ and the belief that such incidents can
conceivably occur to oneself or to those one loves. For Nussbaum, such an interpretation
eliminates the possibility of a compassionate torturer. One could not have compassion for
another human being in this manner and still wish harm upon that person. Such harm
would loop back to wishing hurt and injury to oneself or those one loves.

Vasiṣṭha follows Nussbaum’s efforts and responds with the necessity of
childhood training and the presence of the exemplar. According to Vasiṣṭha,

\textit{The holy ones emphasize persistently treading the path that leads to the eternal good... Hence, right from one’s childhood one should endeavor to promote one’s true good (salvation) by keen intelligent study of the scriptures, by having the company of the holy ones and by right self-effort. (II: 7, 8)}

Vasiṣṭha emphasizes the importance of good childhood education in various ways. Rāma,
for example, is described as ‘not yet sixteen years old’ (I:7, 8, 9) by his anxious father
who does not wish him to lead the army in a war against the demons. And yet, by this age
he had lived in the hermitage of his preceptor and, of his own accord, visited the holy
places of pilgrimage (I:3), illustrating the proper care bestowed on his training. In
addition, in almost every story in which kings and queens are facing personal liberation,
Vasiṣṭha first mentions their virtuosity and then goes on to outline their path to liberation.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., p. 352.
Lavaṇa is called 'righteous, noble, chivalrous, charitable, and in every way a worthy king' (III:103, 104). Janaka is extolled as a great monarch, a cornucopia to all who seek his aid, sun-like to friends, and a great benefactor to all good people (V:8). Bhāgiratha is 'devoted to dharma' (VI:1:74). Even the hungry vampire ‘would not kill anyone unless the victim deserved such treatment’ (VI:1:70-71).

These stories indicate that the seeker must have integrity of character prior to embarking on the arduous journey of liberation, an integrity that is cultivated by proper schooling during childhood. Rāma, in fact, asks, ‘How is it possible for an ignorant person born in a wicked family and who does not enjoy the company of holy ones to cross this ocean of samsāra?’ (VI:1:126) Vasiṣṭha’s immediate reply is ‘accidental coincidence.’ This is not very informative as an example of ‘accidental coincidence’ is given as the fruit of a coconut-palm appearing to have been dislodged by a crow that just happened to alight on the tree at that very moment (V:9). It just so happened that the bad man became good. However, Vasiṣṭha’s claim is that what appears to be inexplicable and put down to fate is ‘none other than self-effort of a past incarnation’ (II:4, 5). Good actions in past lives or in the present result in future benefits. Vasiṣṭha also asserts that the very desire to undertake the inquiry into the nature of the self can bring about a change for the better (III:102). It must necessarily be an extremely slow process, but Vasiṣṭha is helped by his fool having several lifetimes to perfect this task. A good upbringing improves the chances of producing a seeker rather than a fool.

Vasiṣṭha’s second response to the problem, of whether egolessness produces the sattva character, is to introduce the exemplar. Vasiṣṭha’s process of habituation has a
wide application in that the content of the practice differs substantially from its end. Just as the practice or routine of brushing teeth a few times a day is not to perfect the art of teeth-brushing per se but to promote dental health, the imitation of the exemplar in the actions, speech, and thoughts that dissolve the ego promotes the seeker’s quest of becoming *mahākarta, mahābhokta,* and *mahātyāgī.* The sage, particularly her state of mind and attitude towards the world, embodies egolessness in its finest form. Right action *must* be accompanied by right feeling and right thought. The training given by imitating the sage is crucial in generating right actions, right emotions, and right thoughts in the seeker, including all the virtues that befit the *sattva* nature. In *Vasiṣṭha’s* world-appearance, the initial gulf between seeker and teacher, the entrenched separation of ‘I’ and ‘thou’ that presents the opportunities for imitation, is used as a tool for the teaching of compassionate union with other sentient beings. Without the exemplar-teacher, the seeker may be in danger of being engulfed by her more self-serving character traits and cultivating expertise in displaying a facade of goodness rather than goodness itself.\(^49\)

Thus, we can conclude that it is not an impossible task to see *Vasiṣṭha’s* world-appearance as a story evolving out of the cravings and aversions of authors, readers, and characters. Neither does such a claim work against the analogy of the world as dream in that *Vasiṣṭha’s* ontological assertions of the evanescence and sublatability of the worldly appearance and the lack of subject-object distinctions remain undisturbed. And yet, there are vital differences between story and dream. In particular, there are elements in the

\(^{49}\) Although rare in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha,* there are seemingly exceptions to this rule. King Janaka, for example, attains liberation solely through his own efforts. *Vasiṣṭha’s* response is that Janaka met with sages in
development and telling of a story, such as shifting perspectives and empathetic identification, which lend themselves to the pedagogical function in a manner that far exceeds their place in a dream.

**The End Result - What the Dream Analogy Cannot, the Story Analogy Can**

This interpretation of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* using the fiction analogy does dissolve the problem of explaining the sage’s intrinsic moral nature in a world she knows to be illusion. The sage is simultaneously the involved participant as well as the removed witness. The criteria used to delineate the specific nature of morality, inescapability, universalizability, prescriptivity, and the situational content, still apply to the sage albeit in different ways. Kant’s view of inescapability as the binding force of rationality is still relevant to the sage to some extent. Vasiṣṭha’s sage has moved away from notions of obligation tied to duty, but at all times is involved in actions befitting her *sattva* nature. She is back on the right rails, as it were, effortlessly ethical in a world she knows to be illusory. As Vasiṣṭha notes,

> In the spiritually awakened and enlightened state the sage rests in the self; all his desires reach their fulfillment.... He [lives] performing spontaneous and appropriate actions (*pravāhapatitam kāryam*: inevitable action, lit.; the action of one fallen in a stream. (VI.2:26)

The sage’s knowledgeable action of choice, ‘inevitable action,’ ‘the action of one fallen in a stream,’ emanates from a firm and unchangeable character. Vasiṣṭha’s sage is the *mahākartā* (great doer of actions), *mahābhoktā* (great enjoyer), *mahātyāgī* (the great

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previous lifetimes. His liberation in this life is the culmination of his efforts through these previous encounters.
renunciate), who is 'freed of doubts and performs appropriate actions in natural situations without being swayed by likes and dislikes, by success and failure, without ego sense or jealousy, remaining with his [or her] mind in a state of silence and purity' (VI.1:115). She 'does not hate anything nor long for anything, but enjoys all natural experiences, who does not cling to or renounce anything even while engaged in actions'(VI.1:115). The necessity involved in the claims of morality upon the sage are, in part, how a perfectly rational agent would necessarily act if reason had full control over the passions. As the ego, the 'I’ factor of the sage has been eliminated, her behavior is not influenced by considerations based on inclinations, base desires or self-interest, but on the rational dictates of the situation. With the dissolving of the ego, the sage has removed the springs of the unruly passions that taint behavior. She loves all and looks upon all with ‘equal vision’ (IV:60, 61).

And yet, for Vasiṣṭha, the sage is also devoted to the protection of the good and the community as a whole (VI.2:170). As far as the sage is concerned, nothing and no one is outside the pale and excluded from her blessings and company. This aspect of the necessity factor is best illustrated by Kant's views that locate the feature of inescapability in the moral agent herself. According to Kant, ‘rational nature exists as an end in itself.’ One of his formulations of the Categorical Imperative states: ‘Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any another, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.’ This statement (called the

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51 Ibid., G429.
Formula of the End in Itself (situated the inescapable force of morality in the moral significance granted to the human being just because of his or her rational nature. Human beings, simply by virtue of rationality, are moral agents and all moral agents, whether human or not, are intrinsically valuable. They have to be regarded, not merely as means to some self-serving end, but as important ends in themselves, worthy of the utmost care and consideration. For Kant, any action, in order to be judged morally correct, cannot ignore or subsume this absolute value assigned to the moral agent.

Vasisṭha’s sage exemplifies this spontaneous bestowal of value, but for all beings, not just those individuals endowed with reasoning capabilities. Those who have such faculties are capable of attaining liberation and thus, exhibit an urgent need for the sage’s immediate concern and assistance. However, the beneficent influence of the liberated sage extends to everything that constitutes the world-appearance. ‘To such a liberated one, even the rocks become friends and the trees in the forest are relatives; even when he lives in the middle of a forest the very animals become his kith and kin’ (V.2:102). Such significance placed on others necessarily emanates from the sage’s sattva nature. The inescapability of her obligation lies in her responsibilities (response-ability) to the world-appearance, not in duty. In realizing Brahman and recognizing the ‘other,’ any ‘other,’ as Brahman, non-different from ‘I,’ the sage does not wipe out individuality in favor of Brahman, but rejoices in it. She is the mahābhoktā who ‘enjoys all natural experiences.’

Vasisṭha’s four gatekeepers of liberation include an indefatigable commitment to ‘inquiry,’ vicāra. The seeker’s intellect that has been purified by the meticulous study of the scriptures turns towards an inquiry into the nature of the self and the world. Even after liberation, the authoritative gatekeepers are not ‘fired’ but are still in the employ of the sage in the form of ‘friends.’ The liberated sage, in whom the light of
In this enjoyment, she also acknowledges the existence of others as they see themselves, individual and solitary, and hears their words. This attitude of acknowledging, listening, and hearing displays a respect, even deep reverence, for the world-appearance. The sage sees every scrap of the world-appearance as intrinsically valuable in itself.

R. M. Hare writes that in deciding on a course of action regarding what we ought to do, we are ‘looking for an action to which we can commit ourselves (prescriptivity) but which we are, at the same time, prepared to accept as exemplifying a principle of action to be prescribed for others in like circumstances (universalizability). These notions of prescriptivity and universalizability apply to Vasiṣṭha’s sage. According to Vasiṣṭha, Brahmā’s efforts to end the suffering of the world succeed only after he conceals Vasiṣṭha’s knowledge of his own identity with Brahman, thus giving Vasiṣṭha a taste of the miseries of life. Once this ‘veil of ignorance’ is removed, Vasiṣṭha vows to live in the world and relieve suffering until the end of creation (II:10). The sage commits herself to promoting the welfare of those still trapped in saṃsāra, the repetitive history of the world. As for the universalizability aspect, such universalizability is not embodied in principles of action so much as the character of the sage. Her virtue is revealed by her actions, physical, verbal, and mental. All enlightened beings share this sattva character of purity and are the exemplars whom others follow. The sage does not impose this character on others, but she understands that the very nature of the enlightened being is such that it exemplifies the sattva personality.

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inquiry is fully active, lives and functions in the world in a manner that spurns nothing and accepts everything (II:14).

Finally, Philippa Foot makes the point that not any behavior constitutes goodness.54 The moral agent must provide evidence to illustrate the point to her behavior, particularly if it is not already part of the background meaning and values. The sage's primary motive is to direct the seeker towards liberation and the particular moral lifestyle embodied by enlightenment. The sage's behavior acquires justification through her concern for the welfare of all sentient and non-sentient beings, a concern that is not sullied by selfish motives of her own. She does not have to provide evidence in terms of arguing her point. Her character is revealed in the manner in which she interacts with the world-appearance.

Thus, Vasiṣṭha is able to claim that just as the analogy based on dream explains his emphasis on morality for the fool and the seeker, an analogy based on fiction renders an adequate justification for the transformation of the fool to a seeker and ultimately, to a sage who is the ideal moral being. The dream analogy astutely explains the moral behavior of the fool and the seeker by pointing out that even in the topsy-turvy world of dreams, the dreamer is pursued and captured by pains and pleasures. The dreamer would much prefer to be immersed in happy, fulfilling dreams rather than suffer the ordeal of nightmares. Much of the badness of dreams stems from the nasty behavior of the dream characters, much of the goodness of dreams from the humanity of the dream characters. Thus, for Vasiṣṭha, and other philosophers like him, even if the world is a dream, moral injunctions and prohibitions are necessary for the furtherance of happy and pleasurable

54 Foot, Philippa. 'Moral Beliefs,' in 20th Century Ethical Theory by S. Cahn and J. Harber, p. 370.
lives for those caught up in the dream. Of course, this does not work for the enlightened sage who realizes that the world is a dream. How can she exemplify the ideal moral being, when she knows full well that the world is just a dream? Hence, the analogy with story.

The fiction analogy has many levels. First, the Russian doll type set-up of the Yogavāsiṣṭha exposes the utterly fictional nature of the story-world (in which the reader is initially ensnared) and allows her to wonder about the reality of her own world. Second, the character development seen in stories is reflected in Vasiṣṭha’s world, in the development from fool to seeker to sage, and reveals to the seeker some of the steps that she has to undertake in her road to liberation. The content of stories breaks the hold of the deluded imagination and brings the creative imagination into play. Third, the workings of the literary imagination mirror the workings of Vasiṣṭha’s creative imagination, which, through egolessness, generates the virtues of compassion and empathy. Finally, the compassionate identification of the reader with the fictional character, in the form of the judicious spectator, provides the explanation as to why the enlightened being continues her work, even though she knows that the world-appearance and all its occupants are illusion. The sage is both witness to the world-appearance and participant in the world-appearance.

However, an explanation of the jīvanmukta's moral character cannot just rest on the needs of the fool and the seeker or in an explanation of her involvement with the world-appearance. According to Vasiṣṭha, when the sage acts, the action proceeds from within, in a particular way.
In the spiritually awakened and enlightened state the sage rests in the self; all his desires
reach their fulfillment.... He [lives] performing spontaneous and appropriate actions
(pravāhapatim kāryam: inevitable action, lit.; the action of one fallen in a stream). VI.
2:26

Why should the jīvanmukta’s moral character proceed along these lines? Why should she
live the life of compassionate action, of ‘one fallen in a stream’? The fiction analogy
provides an explanation of the development of jīvanmukta’s sattva nature within the
world-appearance and her commitment to the world-appearance that she knows to be
illusion, but it does not explain why such a development and commitment takes the form
of removed witness and involved participant. In order to substantiate the claim that
Vasiṣṭha’s ideal moral being is not just an accidental but necessary feature of the world,
the connections between the world-appearance and Brahman must be explored. This will
be accomplished in the next chapter.55

55 I am very grateful to Vrinda Dalmiya and Arindam Chakrabarti for their invaluable assistance on this
chapter. The details are just too numerous to mention.
The Residual Paradox

The fiction analogy, via the twin notions of judicious spectator and witness participant, makes sense of Rāma as jīvanmukta and provides an explanation as to why Rāma cares for the fictional ‘other.’ It is not just that the content of the stories brings about a shift in Rāma’s perspective. Rāma’s understanding of Vasiṣṭha’s world-appearance as interconnected fictional narratives rather than isolated dreams sets the stage for an explanation of morality that revolves around the interaction between individuals and the collapse of the boundaries constructed by the ego. Just as stories have the pedagogical function of promoting empathetic identification with characters that the reader knows to be fictional, Vasiṣṭha’s world-appearance of individuality and multiplicity supports the cultivation of egolessness and the expansion of the personality to include the ‘other.’ Thus, Rāma’s relationship with the illusory ‘other’ is better revealed by casting the world as story rather than dream.

As noted in chapter four, the dissolving of the mind-sets that build up notions of ‘I’ and ‘thou’ promotes knowledge of Brahman and simultaneously enhances the development of the ideal moral character. The unconditioned Rāma discards feelings of alienation from the other and sees the ‘other’ as himself. His ego is no longer concerned with protecting its own private ‘space,’ and instead welcomes the inclusion of others. According to Vasiṣṭha, in this expansion of empathetic identification with the other, the
virtues are enhanced. The ‘death’ of the craving mind allows for the unconstrained, spontaneous emergence of virtuous qualities, such as equanimity, peace, friendliness, and compassion. Rāma, the enlightened prince, has recognized the world-appearance as appearance. Yet, he integrates this knowledge with a compassionate attitude towards the characters occupying the world-appearance. As far as Rāma is concerned, he cannot abandon his subjects to their fate. As enlightened sage, he returns to his responsibilities as king.

Nonetheless, the paradox outlined in chapter two still remains. Why should there be any concern for morality if the world-appearance is illusion? The dream analogy explains the need for morality for the fool and the seeker. The fiction analogy explains the sage’s empathy for characters she knows to be illusory. However, the question still lingers: why should the jīvanmukta be the mahākartā (great agent), mahābhoktā (great enjoyer), mahātyāgī (great renouncer), ‘devoted to the happiness and joy of all’ (VI.2:37), rather than just distant and indifferent to their sorrows and pains? The Story of Saṃbara and his demons illustrates that egolessness may reduce negative emotions, such as fears and hatreds that stand in the way of an efficient performance of a task, but it does not automatically enhance the virtues such as compassion and friendliness. The demons did end up as highly efficient killers. Vasiṣṭha is convinced that egolessness (the dissolving of the ‘I’ sense) is the key to promoting the virtues, but why?

In chapter four, an attempt was made to resolve this issue via the presence of an exemplar who embodies all the virtuous qualities that befits the sattva nature, but the problem still remains in terms of King Janaka who attains liberation without the presence
of a guru and exemplar. In addition, such a response utilizing an exemplar only results in the re-statement of the question in terms of the exemplar herself. Why does egolessness in the exemplar promote the virtues? Thus, in order to make the case that morality is somehow vindicated and upheld in the world-illusion, the relationship between Brahman and the world must be articulated in a way that clarifies the drive towards developing the ideal moral character. What indeed, if any, are the connections between the diverse world-appearance and pure, undifferentiated Brahman?

The etymology of the term māyā gives some clues as to possible avenues of exploration. Vasiṣṭha sees ‘māyā’ as being synonymous with ‘cosmic illusion’ and ‘world-appearance,’ but this usage is a relatively later development in the ancient Indian tradition. Jan Gonda writes that although the verbal root mā- is translatable as ‘to measure’ in the Rg Veda, it could also be expressed by the processes of ‘fashioning, building, constructing, creating.’ However, he does doubt that ‘fashioning’ is a better translation than just ‘realizing in the phenomenal world... by applying a special technique such as “measuring,” what was mentally conceived.’¹ Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty observes that even if there are no epistemological connections between these two notions of (a) making in the sense of measuring what is already there and (b) making in the sense of creation ex nihilo, there are certainly conceptual connections. She writes, ‘In the Rg Veda, “to measure out” the universe is to create it, to divide it into its constituent parts, to find it by bringing it out of chaos.’²

Gonda points out that, in the Vedic period, there is no basis to connect māyā to any conception of the unreality of the phenomenal world. He notes that the term ‘māyā’ has encompassed a variety of meanings such as ‘power, wisdom, subtle device,’ and defined variously as ‘incomprehensible insight, wisdom, judgment, and power enabling its possessor to create something or to do something ascribed to mighty beings.’ Gonda observes that māyā, as ‘creative power,’ has mostly very positive connotations in the Vedic literature. For example, the term is often used in describing the ‘power, ability or capacity’ to bring forth the marvels of nature. Gonda concludes that it is not uncommon that a word for ‘skill’ or ‘ability’ assumes the sense of ‘trick’ or ‘artifice,’ and it is this concept of māyā, as creative power and creative ability, that ended in the Vedantic context as ‘illusion’ and ‘deceit.’

The idea of māyā as having positive connotations, that it is also viewed as ‘wisdom’ and ‘subtle device,’ provides an insight into the relationship between Brahman and the world-appearance. Doniger writes,

Māyā first meant making something that was not there before; then it came to mean making something that was there into something that was not really there. The first describes the universe as the Vedic world view; the second, the universe in the Vedantic world view. The first is sāṃśāric; the second, mokṣic. In both cases, māyā can often be best translated as ‘transformation.’

Vasiṣṭha takes this notion of transformation one step further and turns māyā on itself. As examined in chapter four, the deluded imagination enmeshed in māyā is negated by the creative imagination that is simultaneously within māyā and yet serves to punch a hole in

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the web of make-believe reality. Vasiṣṭha himself notes that there is no contradiction in this stance. Just as weapons destroy other weapons, dirt cleans dirt, poison cures poison, and enemies destroy other enemies, even so māyā or the great ignorance of the infinite consciousness, intensified by the use of words and repeated conceptualization, is destroyed by words and descriptions. Vasiṣṭha states, ‘This ignorance seeks to destroy itself and hence seeks the light of true knowledge….. Māyā rejoices when it is destroyed!’ (IV:41).

Vasiṣṭha views māyā as not just the vessel of concealment and alienation from Brahman, but as containing within itself the seeds of its own destruction and subsequent unification of the world-appearance with Brahman. This idea suggests that there may be conceptual connections between Brahman and the universe. If Brahman is described as non-dual saccidananda, the ‘essence’ of sat, cit, and ānanda may permeate the world-appearance in such a manner as to clarify the function of the world-appearance and perhaps even explain the need for certain moral attitudes and behavior. My thesis is that Brahman ‘leaks’ into the world-appearance, in particular into the very nature of the jīvanmukta who most closely resembles Brahman in the world-appearance. In this chapter, I will explore two such connections: (1) between Brahman as undifferentiated consciousness and the jīvanmukta as egoless being, and (2) between Brahman as ānanda and the jīvanmukta’s sattva character that embodies compassion and friendliness towards all. By articulating these interconnecting links between Brahman and the world-appearance, the world-appearance that is māyā, the cosmic illusion that is cast as a story,
is also portrayed as the ‘subtle device’ by which Brahman is realized and moral attitudes justified.

**Brahman as Undifferentiated Consciousness**

*and the Jīvanmukta as Egoless Being*

I will not say much about this first connection between Brahman as undifferentiated consciousness and the jīvanmukta as egoless being. The overturning of notions of duality was elaborated in chapter four. Briefly, Brahman is described as infinite, all pervading, homogeneous, and undifferentiated. Vasiṣṭha is emphatic that Brahman is neither an object of observation nor is it different from the observer (VI.1:53). This pure consciousness ‘thinks’ of itself as the jīva, as the mind, as the body. The prolongation of this dream-fantasy promotes the feel of reality (III:91). The ‘I’ notion arises and the unchanging, undivided infinite appears to be divided. In reality, the infinite self has never abandoned its infinity. Vasiṣṭha states, ‘Just as sugar becomes diverse sweetmeats without ever losing its natural sweetness, this infinite consciousness or Brahman visualizes itself as all this infinite diversity without ever divesting itself of its essential nature’ (IV:18). In truth, there is no creator, no creation, no worlds, no heaven, no humans, no elements, no time, no existence and no destruction, no self, no truth, no falsehood, no notion of diversity, no contemplation and no enjoyment (III:19).

As Brahman is pure, undifferentiated consciousness, it makes sense that the process of transformation from seeker to jīvanmukta emphasizes the dissolution of the ego that promotes divisiveness. In Brahman, there is nothing that can be called ‘I,’
nothing that can be called 'thou.' There is no ego sense and thus, Vasiṣṭha notes, questions such as, ‘Who am I, What am I made of, What is my form, What shall I acquire and What shall I reject?’ are just bizarre (V:53). After all, if there is no ego-sense, there is no relationship, nor is there any agency. Vasiṣṭha asks, ‘Who would like to hang on to this ‘I’? Why not cling to the infinite consciousness, which alone appears as all this by its own mysterious energy’ (VI.1:53). The pure consciousness that is Brahman has no experience of pleasure or pain. It does not entertain notions such as fear, hatred, prosperity or courage (VI.2:11,12). It is the deluded mind, enmeshed in cravings and aversions for pieces of the world, which thrives on desires, hatreds, and fears. Rāma has to give up the divisions between the seer and seen, and recognize the two as Brahman. Thus, the cultivation of egolessness, the amalgamation of ‘I’ and ‘thou,’ is understandable in the light of the indivisibility of Brahman.

The view of Brahman as saccidananda does generate difficulties. According to Vasiṣṭha and others, the experience of Brahman is described as unsublatable in that it can never be replaced or revised by any other experience. In his examination of the contradictions that arise in postulating Brahman as the sole Reality, Frederic Fost\(^6\) mentions John D. White’s argument that any experience, including the experience of undifferentiated Brahman, can be sublated (shown up as error) and disvalued. For example, an individual’s experience of oneness may be the result of a device implanted in the brain. White notes that once the device is removed, the individual would dismiss

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that unifying experience as not being a genuine encounter with the infinite. If critics were
to point out that all this example shows is that Brahman has not really been experienced,
White responds that it still leaves the problem of distinguishing the genuine experience
of Brahman from a bogus one.⁷

Fost writes that according to Advaitins, ‘the only experience that is in principle
unsublatable [unsublatable, uncontradictable] is the experience of Reality as pure
spiritual identity (nirvikalpa samādhi).’⁸ Thus, White’s concerns may be addressed by the
fact that experiences, such as the brain-implant one, are open to the possibility of
repudiation sometime in the future. Of course, there is this epistemological problem of
having no immediate method of telling the genuine from the counterfeit experience, but
the individual still has the opportunity of discovering that certain experiences are
counterfeit and thus discarding them. Fost’s claim is substantiated by noting that the
brain-implant experience is comparable to the seeing of a mirage in the desert. In both
cases, certain external factors, a device in the first instance and light rays in the second,
serve to distort the experience. The brain-implant experience can be properly classed,
with the seeing of a mirage, as occurring at the prāṭibhāsika level. The error in these
experiences is, at the very least, open to exposure by some experience at the vyāvahārīka
(the empirical) level.

The genuine experience of unity of Brahman is in a different category all
together. Fost notes the comments of Eliot Deutsch. ‘What kind of experience,’ writes

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⁷ White, John D. “God and the World from the Viewpoint of Advaita Vedanta - A Critical Assessment,”
Deutsch, 'could conceivably subrate [sublate] unqualified identity - the experience of absolute value wherein the unique oneness of being stands forth as the sole content of consciousness?Fost points out that the three pre-conditions for sublation - an agent who sublates, the judgment that is sublated and the sublating judgment - are only available in a pluralistic context. Once the subject-object distinction is obliterated, there is no basis for any other sublating experience to occur. He writes, 'This experience is not just one that is uncontradicted (abādhita) by some higher experience; it is uncontradictable (abādhyā).''

Such a view is plausible. Brahman-apprehension as pure undivided consciousness has to be the ultimate experience. After all, as Fost observes, if there is no subject, no object, there is no likelihood of a 'subject' having a further sublating 'experience' and elevating another 'object' to the status of ultimate reality. However, there still remains a problem. Brahman is 'described' as saccidananda (being + consciousness + bliss). The question needs to be asked, why ānanda? Why bliss? Why not dejection, depression, gloom, despondency? For example, according to the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, initially there was only the Self (ātman) alone in the form of a Person. He, looking around and seeing nothing other than himself, was afraid. The Upaniṣad continues that once this Self realized the futility of being afraid, after all there was nothing but himself, his fear disappeared but then he had no delight and desired the presence of another.

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Of course Vasiṣṭha does not personalize Brahman in this way. Although Vasiṣṭha speaks of the Self as the eternal, omnipotent supreme ‘Lord’ and addresses it as Viṣṇu, Śiva or Brahmā, there is no doubt that in his descriptions of the ‘Lord’ that he rejects an anthropomorphic, ‘saguna’ conception of the Self. The ‘Lord’ or ‘God’ is undivided and without form. In ‘him’ all subject-object relationships cease. According to Vasiṣṭha, it is only if one is unable to worship the ‘Lord’ as pure consciousness that one resorts to the form of Śiva, Viṣṇu or Brahmā (III:5, 6, VI.1:29). However, Vasiṣṭha also notes that, although Brahman is formless, it contains within itself aspects, powers, and potencies including moods that range from joy and compassion to anger and hatred (VI.1:37). In that case, why should bliss be given predominance and described as its nature? This issue is explored by examining the concept of bliss.

Brahman as Ānanda and the Jīvanmukta’s Sattva Character

The second and more interesting connection between Brahman and the world is the link between Brahman as Ānanda and the Jīvanmukta’s sattva character. As mentioned before, the self, which is consciousness, exists as the supreme self of all, everywhere in all bodies at all times. There is nothing that can be called an ‘I’ which undergoes change. There is no ego sense. When the very root of the ego-sense is abandoned, all false notions of duality vanish and the sage realizes that there is no such thing as ‘relationship’ at all. For Vasiṣṭha, it is these notions generated by the ego-sense that are productive of great sorrow, restlessness, and anxiety. When the ego-sense ceases, then the illusory world-appearance does not germinate again and all desires and cravings come to an end. When
freed from dependency on the habits of thought that range over even pleasure-seeking
tendencies and revelry, the mind ceases to be agitated and rests in a state of utter
quiescence. At this stage, according to Vasiṣṭha, the self shines by its own light and
reveals itself as the pure experience of bliss (ānanda) (VI.1:128), where the seer (the
experiencer) comes into contact with the object (the experience), without any division or
conceptualization at all (V:8).

It may help to unravel the meaning of ānanda by looking at the manner in which
it has been used in the Vedic literature. G. Gispert-Sauch traces the etymology of the
term ānanda to the root nand- (to rejoice, to be delighted) and the prefix ā. He writes that
this prefix is often added to words of motion and has a dynamic meaning, suggesting
horizontal, quasi-mechanical, spontaneous motion: usually a forward but sometimes a
backward movement (cf. ā-gam, ā-da).11 Gispert-Sauch notes J Gonda’s suggestion that
the root nand- may also mean ‘to be refreshed, to be strengthened, especially by blessing
or praising.’12 However, J. A. B. van Buitenen disputes the view that ānanda is derived
from the root nand- with the preverb ā. Instead, he points out that it is more akin to the
verbal noun nanda with the prefix ā, which indicates the place where the verbal action
occurs, as in āśrama, where one toils, ārāmā, where one enjoys oneself, ākāra, where
things are scattered, ālaya, where things lie. Thus, van Buitenen argues that ‘ānanda
implies a locus: that in which one finds bliss, be it a son, the fulfillment of a wish, the

11 ā also means ‘all around.’ Thus, light (kāśa) acquires the sense of ‘all around’ in ākāśa (space). (As noted
by Arindam Chakrabarti).
12 Gispert-Sauch, G. Bliss in the Upanishads: An analytical study of the origin and growth of the Vedic
knowledge of Brahman.' He writes, 'Ānanda then is not just a free-floating unfocused bliss, a state of beatitude, it has an implied object. '¹³ He points out that in the Taittirīya Upaniṣad, for example, Brahman is described as bliss and bestower of bliss (Taitt Up. 2.7.1).

The intriguing thing about the Yogavāsiṣṭha is that even though in Brahman resides every conceivable world replete with both positive and negative potencies, even such unfavorable possibilities as decline, stagnation, and destruction, Vasiṣṭha is not content with Brahman as just saccidānanda. He also emphasizes the notion of Brahman as the repository of all that is good and benevolent.

That consciousness is the nature of being and non-being and the resting place of all that is good and divine. It plays the roles of all beings and it is the source of affection and peace, though it is forever united and liberated. It is the life of all living beings, the uncreated nectar that cannot be stolen by anyone, the ever-existent reality. The consciousness which is reflected in sense experiences is yet devoid of them and cannot be experienced by them. In it all beings rejoice even though it itself is pure bliss beyond all joy: like the space but beyond space, glorious yet devoid of all expansions and glory. Though seemingly it does all, it does nothing. (VI.1:11)

According to Vasiṣṭha, even though Brahman is of the nature of deep sleep, it is the ultimate source of all happiness and delight. It is the ‘resting place of all that is good and divine,’ it is the ‘source of affection and peace’ (VI.1:11). Although only infinitesimally experienced in the worldly joys and pleasures, this delight is available to sentient beings via the experiences of the world (VI.1:11). Even in his stories, such as the Story of the Rock, Vasiṣṭha’s rock, standing as a metaphor for the cosmic consciousness, is a rock that is ‘full of tenderness and affection’ in which ‘countless lotuses bloom’ (VI.1:46).

However, Vasiṣṭha himself views Brahman sometimes as *anirvacanīya*, ineffable, inexpressible, (VI.1.44), but mostly, minimally, as *saccidānanda*. His characterization of Brahman as the ‘bestower’ of tenderness, affection, etc., requires further examination.

For Vasiṣṭha, Brahman is pure bliss, beyond all joy (VI.1:11), but he is adamant that such a statement is neither a description of Brahman nor is it an experience of bliss by the sage in the *turīya* state of consciousness. It is not a description because, according to Vasiṣṭha, to describe something as ‘bliss’ is to limit Brahman in some fashion. It does not matter how positive the characterization, the very act of applying predicates, such as ‘bliss,’ constructs unacceptable boundaries around an infinite, unconstrained Brahman. So, Vasiṣṭha states, Brahman as bliss encompasses both the ‘is’ and the ‘is not,’ in that it is both something and not something. It is non-consciousness and objectless consciousness. It can only be suggested, hinted at, indicated by negation (not this, not this) (V:88).

In addition, Vasiṣṭha notes that in the realization of the Self, the sage ‘enjoys’ great bliss, but this is merely a way of speaking about bliss. Brahman as bliss is not an ‘experience’ to be enjoyed as sense pleasures are relished in the waking state of the world-appearance. Bliss is the very nature of Brahman, of pure consciousness, and is not an aspect or property of it. It is thus not an object and does not create any disturbance in the mind as do subject-object experiences of pleasure and happiness. According to Vasiṣṭha, Brahman-bliss is integrated into the consciousness of the sage and is free of all experiences (V:91). Vasiṣṭha describes Uddālaka, in his progression of spiritual life, as first ‘enjoying the supreme bliss that gods like Brahmā enjoy,’ second as being ‘one with
the ocean of bliss,' and then finally as being 'completely transmuted into bliss itself,'
going beyond the experience of bliss or non-bliss, going beyond the realm of bliss (V:54).

Vasiṣṭha compares Brahman-bliss to the bliss of the sleep state. In delineating the steps towards realization, he describes the fifth stage as the 'bliss that is derived from pure awareness,' in which 'the liberated sage lives as if in half-sleep,' and the sixth stage as Self-knowledge in which 'the sage is immersed in a mass of bliss and lives as if in deep sleep' (VI.1:118, 119, 120).14 The deep sleep state, in particular, is a restful one in which all notions of division cease. It is devoid of thoughts, excitements, and hates. It is free of ego-sense, the accompanying desires and fears. It is peaceful and pure, and thus has some resemblance to Brahman (VI.1.11).

However, Vasiṣṭha is insistent that the liberated state of bliss is unlike deep sleep in that liberation is not 'existence as an immobile creature' (VI.1:10). It is not 'characterized by inertia and ignorance' (VI.1:124, 125). In deep sleep, even if a state of tranquility is briefly experienced by the sleeper, psychological limitations still remain as latent 'seeds' of mental conditioning, vāsanā. These erupt and flourish when the sleeper dreams or awakens and give rise to rebirth after rebirth. When all (negative) vāsanās are destroyed and do not exist even as remote possibilities, the sage resides in the blissful state of Brahman-consciousness and is freed from sorrow (VI.1:10). Vasiṣṭha acknowledges that some conditioning of purity, expansiveness, and self-knowledge

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14 The first step according to Vasiṣṭha is study of the scriptures and the company of the holy ones. The second is reflection or inquiry into the true nature of the Self. The third is non-attachment or psychological freedom from the machinations of the mind, particularly in the reifying of the 'I' concept. The fourth step is the snapping of the bonds of mental conditioning, the vāsanā. Vasiṣṭha describes the seventh stage as the
remains in the sage and accounts for the present embodiment, but this has only positive repercussions for the sage.

Rāma argues that there is sorrow when the world-appearance is seen as illusion. After all, what was once prized and valued is now lost. Vasiṣṭha’s reply is that sorrow cannot arise over an imaginary object. So what if something is deemed lost, it was non-existent in the first place! (VI.2:190) It is just as there is no sorrow when one dreams of being robbed and awakens to discover that this was not the case (VI.2:177). This reply appears unsatisfactory. After all, there may be no sorrow in awakening from a nightmare, just relief, but there is an ‘only if it were real’ residue in awakening from a happy dream.

Vasiṣṭha’s response is that the sage in the turīya state of consciousness is immersed in a state of bliss. In comparison to such bliss, Vasiṣṭha declares that all the pleasures and joys of the world fade into insignificance. In this state of bliss, the sage regards even the delight of a beloved’s company, even the joy of the king of heaven as worthless (V:74, V:55). For Vasiṣṭha, no delight in the world is comparable to the delight that fills the heart when all desires and hopes centered on the world-appearance are discarded.

Immersed in Brahman, the sage enjoys great peace and supreme satisfaction within herself. There is no residue of deprivation or loss.

These descriptions of bliss may go some way in explaining the ‘why bliss?’ question. Vasiṣṭha writes,

All that is, is but the expansion of the relationship between pure experiencing and its experience. That experience is truly the delight of self-bliss. It is pure experiencing itself. Hence it is known as Brahman the absolute. That delight which arises in the contact of this turīya stage where there is perfect equanimity and purity, and beyond that is the turīyālāta which is indescribable.
pure experiencing with experience is the highest: to the ignorant it is worldliness, and to the wise it is liberation. This pure experiencing itself is the infinite self: when it is bent towards objects, it is bondage, but when it is free it is liberation. When such experience is free from decay or curiosity, it is liberation. When such experiencing is freed from even this contact (the subject-object relationship), then the world-appearance ceases entirely. Then arises the turiya consciousness or ‘deep sleep in wakefulness.’ (V:72)

For Vasiṣṭha, it is the craving and desire for ‘this,’ ‘that,’ and the ‘other,’ which puts the mind into turmoil. When all desires are abandoned, the mind that is unattached to anything and devoted to Brahman is open to delight.

Vasiṣṭha is of the opinion that this delight is the natural product of the dissolving of the subject and the object in the subject-object relationship. What remains is pure experiencing. In the world-appearance, this pure form of experiencing arises when one is absorbed, for example, in music. Initially, there is only the joy of music, but the force of this engagement ‘decays’ in that it cannot be sustained. The mind is just too powerful. Eventually, the ‘curiosity’ or concern for something else breaks through the experiencing and the subject-object relationship is established once again. For Vasiṣṭha, this is not the case with the meditative experience with Brahman because the mind has abandoned its attachments, the roots of curiosity and decay. Then the sage, established in Brahman-consciousness, is immersed in supreme bliss. As Brahman is the fullness of being (VI.1:49,50), the sage rests in this ultimate state of plenitude (V:18). This bliss is incomparable to anything available in worldly pleasures. It cannot be added to or taken away. The sage enjoys all-embracing contentment within herself.

As noted above, the sage in the turiya state of consciousness is not just immersed in a state of bliss, she is bliss itself. It must be emphasized yet again that, for Vasiṣṭha, the sage (as well as everyone and everything else) is that homogeneous, undivided,
indivisible Brahman. *Tat tvam asi*, Thou art that. This is the whole point of Vasiṣṭha’s teachings to Rāma. The sage realizes that she is the unborn, infinite, consciousness that is bliss, and this realization is not simply an intellectual assent to the truth of her self-nature. Vasiṣṭha notes that just as a woman goes about her housework with her heart absorbed in the contemplation of her lover, the sage goes about the world with her consciousness firmly established in Brahman (V:74, V:93) and she is not distracted by what she experiences in the world. Even while outwardly engaged in appropriate conduct, heart and mind at peace, her ‘gaze is turned inward, swimming in the bliss of the self’ (VI.2:29).

According to Vasiṣṭha, for the sage immersed in the bliss of Brahman that is her essential nature, ‘the very world becomes an abode of bliss’ (II:13). Resting in this light of self-knowledge, all her actions are full of bliss (V:64). She engages in appropriate activity by a little movement of thought in consciousness, but such movement of thought and the experiencing of the contact of the observer with the object produce great joy in her (VI.1:48). For Vasiṣṭha, the wise man’s action is his friend and brings him every type of delight. Like a father, it encourages and fills him with enthusiasm for life; like a wife, it checks, restrains, and guides him. It saves him from evil, turning anger and hatred upon themselves. It is devoted to the protection of the good and the community as a whole. (VI.2:170). The wise man’s action has a wife, equanimity, who effortlessly showers happiness on all. Their sons are cleanliness, charity, austerity, and meditation, also involved in promoting the welfare and happiness of all beings. For Vasiṣṭha, the enlightened sage is not just the mahākārtā (the great doer) or the mahātyāgī (the great
renunciate). She is also the mahābhoktā (the great enjayer who not only enjoys all natural experiences, regarding her own calamities and fortunes with equal delight, but whose joy of life embraces care and concern for everything.

Why should this be the case? Why is there this spontaneous care for others when the sage understands that there is no subject-object distinction, no ‘I,’ no ‘other’? This problem is heightened by Vasiṣṭha’s claim that ‘the sage [firmly established in the turīya state of consciousness] perceives the universe as if it is a cosmic playground and life in it is a cosmic dance’ (V:69, 70). The sage ‘functions in the world as if playfully’ (V:39), her unconditioned consciousness ‘blissfully performing its role in this world appearance as if in a play’ (IV.38). Life is fun for the sage who has no struggles over the instincts of acquisition or abandonment (V:28, 29). She is disinterested in the events of the past, present, and future. She looks at the state of the world with amusement (V:18).

For Vasiṣṭha, the sage understands that subject-object distinctions are ‘fictional’ and her involvement in the world-appearance is playful. She participates happily in the ‘entertainment’ of the world-appearance by freely accepting her roles of author, reader, and character. This raises the question as to why this bliss cannot exhibit itself as an unholy joy. After all, if the world-appearance is the stage upon which the sage playfully acts out her part, and since the sage’s non-volitional behavior is sometimes likened to that of a child (IV.38) and some children are wont to pull the wings off butterflies, why does the sage not take pleasure in the suffering of other sentient beings? The sage engages in actions thinking them to be mere cosmic movements to be undertaken without
any personal desire (V:6) and these actions produce the greatest of joy in her, but why do they necessarily promote the welfare and happiness of all beings?

One way of resolving this issue is to note that Vasiṣṭha describes the jīvanmukta’s bliss-consciousness in terms of peace. Bhuvunḍa, for example, advises the Celestial that once the impurity that is the world-appearance is cleansed from consciousness, what remains is eternal and peaceful (VI.2:15, 16). Bharadvāja rejoices that he is the supreme Brahman, ‘eternal, omnipresent, pure, peaceful, indivisible, and free from motion, which is devoid of gathering and scattering...’ (VI.1:128). According to Vasiṣṭha, the jīvanmukta’s ego-sense is cut off at the root. Devoid of notions of desirable and undesirable, her mind in the state of equilibrium, the sage rests in the self which is the nature of peace. As her mind does not arise in thoughts of ‘this,’ ‘that,’ and ‘other,’ there is supreme peace (V:53, V:91, VI.1:78). Vasiṣṭha is adamant that when one moves away from one’s real nature, there is great sorrow, but when one rests in the self, there is great peace and self-control (VI.2:39). According to Vasiṣṭha, when that peace is firmly grounded, there is liberation (V:40). The jīvanmukta is immersed in ‘the ocean of nectar that is full of peace’ (VI.1:128).

Vasiṣṭha also links the notions of bliss and peace together by observing that the peace that flows from the unconditioned mind is either followed or accompanied by the pure bliss of the self. That mind which is unattached to anything, which is established in the peace of infinite expansion, is conducive to delight (V:68). One should enjoy the delight that flows from peace (V:9). The man whose mind is well controlled is thus established in peace. There arises the pure bliss of the self without delay. In blending the
experiences of peace and bliss, Vasiṣṭha remarks that the mind devoid of pairs of opposites is free of restlessness, fear, and delusion. It rests in a state of peace and bliss (IV:34, 35). Lord Śiva advises Vasiṣṭha, ‘with the help of the fire of wisdom…. vaporize the waters of your beliefs and become peaceful, supremely blissful. Behold the one infinite consciousness’ (VI.1:33).

However, this peaceful bliss is not quiescent and passive. Rāma is not allowed to remain submerged in the meditative trance. ‘Get up and bring joy to the world!’ urges Vasiṣṭha, ‘When people are still in bondage it is not proper for the yogi to merge in the self’ (VI.1:128). Vasiṣṭha analyzes the notion of action in his bid to promote active engagement in the world. The root of action, for Vasiṣṭha, is the body, which in turn is rooted in the ego-sense. The whole point of his teaching is for Rāma to see the ego-sense for what it is and to abandon its mischief-making capability of crystallizing the ‘I do,’ ‘I experience’ part of the action. According to Vasiṣṭha, freed of dualistic notions such as ‘I’ and ‘other,’ the sage acts spontaneously and appropriately as befitting the situation. This is non-action in that the mind is free of the conditioning ego-sense that sees everything in relation to the ‘I.’ This liberated action does not incur further conditioning (vāsanā) and does not propel the sage deeper into the world-appearance. Other actions that proceed from such weakened vāsanā or conditioning are also non-action in that their ‘seeds’ do not germinate. ‘For there is no harvest where there is no sowing’ (V:40). So even though the enlightened being is constantly engaged in activity, in effect she does not act, she does nothing. (VI.2:3)
This is not to be confused with inaction, the physical abandonment of action. In
the first instance, Vasiṣṭha notes that action cannot be abandoned in this manner. For
Vasiṣṭha, even when the ego-sense is destroyed, the body, which is the root of action, still
functions. It is still involved with movement. Vasiṣṭha is adamant that everything in this
world, with the exception of a corpse, is active (II.7, 8). Action cannot be avoided by
immersion in meditative practices. Whether the embodied person is enlightened or
ignorant, as long as the body lives, the mind also continues to exist. Thus, jīvahood or
physical individuality cannot be abandoned until death and whether one is submerged in
a meditative trance or active in the marketplace, the body still functions and one is still
engaged in activity (VI.2:2).

In the second instance, Vasiṣṭha argues that any attempt to abandon action
altogether is simply futile. He states:

Abandonment of action is inappropriate as long as the body lives. Such abandonment gives
action a value: that which is valued cannot be abandoned. (VI.2:2)

By this I take him to mean that the body still functions and it is the basis of action in a
way that it is inseparable from action. Any attempt to divest the body of action invests
that action with a certain value, and the grasping, clinging force of that decision makes
impossible the ‘abandonment’ of action in the manner of the liberated sage. The sage
neither values action nor disvalues it. For Vasiṣṭha, the enlightened individual, whose
heart rests in equanimity, ‘effortlessly and naturally wears the body’ (VI.1:116, 117).
Whether she is engaged in the activities of the world or lives in isolation in a forest, in
enlightenment there is no distinction. She is still actively engaged with the world, be it
forest or city. Vasiṣṭha remarks, 'To the peaceful a house is like a forest and to the restless even a forest is like a crowded city' (VI.2:3).

Thus, Vasiṣṭha’s sage must act in the world-appearance and this action is not one of indifference, but involves a sympathetic response to the trials of other sentient beings in the world. Vasiṣṭha explains that when the mind is totally absorbed in Brahman, where only the pure vāsanās or latent tendencies remain, all mental conflicts cease and there is only harmony (VI.1:32). When the one infinite light of consciousness exists as sole reality, not only does the sage attain inner peace and tranquility but she finds peace and tranquility everywhere in the world. She sees no occasion for self-protection. In such a state of tranquility, she sees clearly the acute suffering of those still caught up in the world-appearance, even when they appear happy, reveling in great wealth and power. This clarity of vision generates the sympathetic concern and care for those still in trouble (V:58).

According to Vasiṣṭha, when the sage, unencumbered by the mind’s fragmented functioning and free of inner restlessness and outer disturbance, understands that there is no division at all between the self and the other, her consciousness expands to include all sentient beings. She cannot be indifferent to their suffering. Instead, the sage views all beings as her own family, deserving of her sympathy and protection (IV:22). Vasiṣṭha concludes that when the sage rests in the bliss of Brahman even while wandering in the world-appearance, her own petty worries and anxieties have evaporated and she no longer falls into doubt and error. Instead, there is the peace and purity of heart that promote the happiness of all (V:83).
Three Stories

Vasiṣṭha’s sage acts in the world, devoted to the good and protection of all beings, but she is under no compulsion to return to the market-place and ‘save’ all other beings from their own delusion and folly. After liberation, she is portrayed as returning to her original way of life but of course living it in a very different manner. She may embrace the life of teacher and guru to the many aspirants that she encounters, but equally, her lifestyle may be to stay isolated in a forest or assume the duties of her family and community. Under any circumstance, she is engaged outwardly in righteous conduct, in diverse and intense activity, although inwardly she ‘does nothing’ (VI.2:169). The following three stories of Vasiṣṭha illustrate the very different ways in which the liberated sage may joyfully and sympathetically act in the world.

The Story of Vasiṣṭha and Rāma

Rāma’s task is to see himself as the indivisible self that is the supreme self, Brahman. It is the acquisition of this self-knowledge that opens the door to liberation. Vasiṣṭha is emphatic that this alone is one’s duty and likens the ignorance or neglect of this responsibility to a man asleep in a burning house (II:12, 13). Not only is this man in the greatest of peril, but he is also in utter ignorance of his dreadful plight. He faces lifetime after lifetime of repeated sorrow and has no care. Rāma’s deluded mind, caught up in saṃsāra, projects an ego-centered world of make-believe that, in turn, feeds the mind by reinforcing the habitual thought patterns of ‘I’ and ‘mine.’ These false notions of duality must be eradicated in the light of the oneness of Brahman. The enlightened being,
via her annihilation of the 'I'/thou' distinction, expands her personality to include the other. With that identification comes a profound understanding of the other's suffering. The compassionate sage then has no choice but to act for the benefit of this heedless man and others, even while knowing that the whole process is illusory.

Vasiṣṭha makes this very point to Rāma about his involvement in the world. According to Vasiṣṭha, the Creator Brahmā saw the sufferings of all the living beings of the universe, and introduced centers of pilgrimage and noble virtues, such as charity and righteous conduct. This strategy did not work and so Brahmā gave Vasiṣṭha life, but ‘drew the veil of ignorance over his heart’ (II:10). All knowledge of Vasiṣṭha’s identity with Brahman was erased and he had to live as an unenlightened human being entrenched in the miseries of the world. In response to Vasiṣṭha’s prayers, Brahmā ends the charade and says,

> I veiled the knowledge and revealed it to you so that you may experience its glory: for only then you will be able to understand the travail of ignorant beings and to help them. (II:10)

Vasiṣṭha vows to stay and relieve suffering until the end of creation.

Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty notes the connection between suffering and illusion. She writes,

> Suffering is what alerts us to the insubstantiality of samsāra, in part because it makes us want to believe that our pain is unreal, and in part because pain is a useful shock mechanism to awaken someone from a dream.¹⁵

The initial response to tragedy is disbelief - ‘this cannot be happening, it is just a dream from which I will wake up’ - and subsequent questioning about any meaning that can be

given to life. As Doniger notes, if the world-appearance is considered a dream, it does ameliorate somewhat the immediacy and acuity of the pain. Even if this is initially just a useful coping mechanism, there is the likelihood of breaking customary thought patterns and delving into the seemingly absurd world-as-dream point of view. And as Doniger says, pain (more likely than the pleasant) breaks the barrier between the dreaming and the awakening. Dreamers can be pinched into wakefulness, but are also startled out of their dreams by a clap of thunder or slamming of the door. These latter examples do not reflect suffering as such, but do introduce a discordant note into the dream, whether the dream is pleasant or otherwise.

In addition, as Doniger observes, pain also serves the function of equalizing those entrenched societal, economic, and political differences that keep individuals isolated and disconnected from one another. In the story of Lavaṇa for example, the king is exposed to the hardships and miseries faced by the untouchable villagers. In his return to the village as king, he is moved by pity to reduce the villagers' ordeal by giving them the wealth necessary to meet their everyday needs. The king may have not undertaken this journey back to the village had he not been through the same experiences. As king, his response in any disaster situation may have been to provide some funds for the alleviation of misery, but not go so far as to visit the destitute people (unless there was some kind of 'photo' opportunity involved). The actual visit saves Lavaṇa from seeing himself as different from the multitude and immune from suffering similar tragedies.

However, it is important to mention that this 'pity' is not the compassion of the sage to the suffering of other beings. Aaron Ben-Ze'ev notes that 'compassion involves
far greater commitment to substantial help... a willingness to become personally involved, while pity usually does not. Pity is more spectator-like than compassion; we can pity people while maintaining a safe emotional distance from them. While pity involves the belief in the inferiority of the object, compassion assumes equality in common humanity.¹⁶ In Lavaṇa’s pity, there still lies the condescension of the king to his subject, of the superiority of bestowing assistance over the indignities of accepting help. Lavaṇa’s life as the beleaguered tribesman may have come to an end, but as king, he is still vulnerable to suffering until he attains enlightenment. He will act as king and assuage his conscience by offering money.

Vasiṣṭha notes that the enlightened sage is ‘a very dear friend to all... free from pity for others, but full of compassion’ (VI.2:102). In the sage, it is no longer pity with its negative connotations but concern and compassion that spurs her to action. Although in the previous chapter, the sage is described as a witness, a spectator, this is not a distancing from the suffering of others, but a distancing from the involvement of one’s own ego, the selfish concerns that diminish a complete reaching out to the other. Vasiṣṭha, as teacher of Rāma, is no longer in Lavaṇa’s precarious position and he is no longer beset by dualities such as superior and inferior. His attitude towards the villagers rests solely on their interests and welfare.

Even if Vasiṣṭha is no longer subject to the vulnerabilities of life, it is only through his own experience of pain and suffering that he is fully able to understand the

pain and misery of the fool and seeker. It is not that Vasiṣṭha experiences the fool’s suffering as his own, because then it will be his suffering and not the fool’s. Vasiṣṭha’s own suffering in the world reveals to him the pains of all other sentient beings, but since he is no longer controlled by the world-appearance, he understands that the fool’s suffering belongs to the fool. Thus, it may have been Vasiṣṭha’s suffering that brought him to enlightenment and an acknowledgment of the suffering of others, but his reasons for acting now lie solely in the needs of the other.

It is important to note at this stage that Vasiṣṭha is not interested in instructing people who do not themselves make the effort towards liberation. Vasiṣṭha is adamant that self-effort is the key to liberation. Nothing, he says, is gained in this world, other than through self-effort, which is ‘the mental, verbal, and physical action in accordance with the instructions of a holy person well versed in the scriptures’ (II:4, 5). Vasiṣṭha calls the lazy man who does not put in this effort for liberation, ‘donkey,’ and the man who wails about his misfortunes and blames fate, ‘brainless’ (II:3). He leaves them alone to their disagreeable lives. Vasiṣṭha even goes so far as to warn Rāma against consorting with the fool.

It is better to be a snake in a dark cave; it is better to be a worm in a rock; it is better to be a lame deer in a desert than to remain in the company of ignorant people. Their company gives rise to momentary pleasure but is destructive of self. It is poisonous. (VI.2:23)

Thus, Rāma also has responsibilities in his search for liberation. One of his tasks is to associate with other seekers on the path of liberation and the sages who are able to teach him. It is thus important for him to cultivate the necessary discriminatory powers that enable him to recognize the defects in others as well as the good (VI.2:98). Vasiṣṭha
gives a long list of characteristics that one looks for in a sage (VI.2:98) and acknowledges that such a paragon of virtue may be difficult to find. However, the seeker should not give up in despair. Vasiṣṭha notes that even if one good quality is found, he should serve this person as a role model and emulate this quality, while ignoring the evil tendencies.

However, if the sage is an enlightened being, the seeker is most fortunate. Vasiṣṭha writes,

The blessings that flow from the company of holy men are incomparable to any other blessings. The holy man’s nature is cool and peaceful; his behavior and actions are pure. Therefore, his company promotes peace and goodness in every one who seeks it. In his company one loses fear. Sinfulness comes to an end and one grows in purity. Even the love and affection that the gods and the angels possess are nothing compared to the limitless love that flows from the holy ones. … The wise man radiates wisdom and goodness. Seeking to free himself from the cage of ignorance, he flies away from pleasure towards the unconditioned bliss. (VI.2:47)

For Vasiṣṭha the very presence of the liberated sage has a profound impact on his immediate environment, particularly on those who are avid seekers of liberation themselves. Vasiṣṭha, the sage may ‘fly away from worldly pleasures’ (VI.2:47), but this does not mean that he rejects them out of hand or even that he discards the world as poison. The sage’s involvement in the world is not just an existence as a passive ‘radiator’ of goodness and decency, unconsciously influencing other beings towards better behavior. The company of the sage enhances the virtues and neutralizes the vices of the seeker in such a manner as to reveal his active involvement with the workings of the world.

Once the seeker and sage meet and the sage assumes the role of teacher, the sage has grave responsibilities towards the seeker. As mentioned in chapter four, Vasiṣṭha not only instructs Rāma about the true nature of the self and other spiritual doctrines, but
Vasiṣṭha’s presence, his manner of being in the world, provides Rāma with an exemplar whose footsteps Rāma can follow. Such a relationship is a lifelong commitment to a particular way of life, by the seeker as well as the sage. The sympathetic aspect of ānanda is illustrated here in the compassionate response of Vasiṣṭha to Rāma’s depression. Vasiṣṭha does not reject Rāma’s troubled speech about the evils of the world as just another angry outburst of an angst-ridden teenager. Instead he recognizes Rāma’s spiritual need, Rāma’s ability to tread the difficult path to liberation and embraces him as his student. Sooner, or most likely much later, with Vasiṣṭha’s aid, Rāma is in the position to walk alone.

The Story of Dāśūra

Vasiṣṭha is adamant that the liberated sage may be one who has formally renounced the world or living the householder’s life (VI.1:120). Many of Vasiṣṭha’s stories involve sages who prefer to leave the hustle and bustle of community life for the relative peace and quiet of caves and forests. In the Story of Dāśūra, an ascetic named Dāśūra lives in a country called Magadha renowned for its pleasure-gardens. Dāśūra’s parents die early and he begins a rigorous religious life in the pursuit of liberation. The more he immerses himself in the rituals, chock-full of prohibitions and injunctions, the more he views the world with disgust, seeing it as a receptacle of impurities, fraught with perils on every side. Dāśūra seeks to escape from this claustrophobic life by retreating to the top of a huge Kadamba tree. Here, he commences mental austerities and in time attains self-knowledge. After liberation he continues to live in the tree.
Such sages are not free of all distractions. Vasiṣṭha makes it clear that living in an isolated and lonely spot does not always promote physical isolation. Atop the Kadamba tree, Dāśūra encounters a nymph, a deity of the forest, and grants her, through magical means, her wish for a child. In twelve years, his ‘son’ returns to him for instruction. Vasiṣṭha also wanders by and climbs the tree for edifying conversation. In other stories, the sage Uddālaka alternates between living in the caves of the mountains and in engaging in the activities of ordinary life. Even the sage who built his hermitage in outer space to get away from the distractions of earthly life has to contend with the presence of the perfected beings inhabiting that world. How does this story connect with the notions of ānanda and sympathy in the Yogavāsiṣṭha?

One thing is clear. Human beings do not occupy a privileged position in Vasiṣṭha’s world. They are certainly not at the top of the food chain as they can be eaten by the demons and eaten in a very different sense to being eaten by a tiger. Vasiṣṭha’s demons are thinking, rationalizing beings and have no choice but to eat humans if they wish to survive. Their digestive tracts cannot handle any other kind of food but human flesh. In the Story of Karkaṭi, Karkaṭi is willing to simply stop eating, either spending the rest of her natural life deep in meditation or continuing her daily life without eating. Either way she would die. This is rejected by Brahmā. He responds:

> The eternal world-order cannot be set aside, O ascetic. And it is decreed that you should regain your previous body, live happily for a long time and then attain liberation. You will live an enlightened life, afflicting only the wicked and sinful, and causing the least harm - and that too only to appease your natural hunger. (III.75)

Brahmā makes the distinction between lawful food and unlawful food. There is no alternative source of food for Karkaṭi. Physical necessity dictates that she should kill.
Brahmā notes her consternation and remarks that as her natural diet is human flesh and since there is no objection to the taking of animal life under proper bounds, there should be no problem in such slaughter (III: 75). In addition, human beings are not considered to be at the top of the hierarchy of sentient beings for any other reason. Human beings are moral beings, they have rationality, their goal in life is the pursuit of liberation, but they are nothing special. Demons are moral beings, have rationality and pursue liberation. Moreover, demons have the physical advantage. They are much bigger. Vasiṣṭha notes that Karkaṭī grasps 1000 men in the palm of her hand and carries them off to her mountain retreat in order to feast undisturbed.

Vasiṣṭha is also adamant that the activities of human beings are intimately connected with the environment. Actions and their results do not occur in isolation. There is a connection between human welfare and the well-being of the environment. Karkaṭī as needle and cholera finds herself inhabiting dust and dirt on the ground, unclean fingers, dirty skin. She finds herself in places of decaying leaves, in places of deforestation, in places devoid of healthy trees, in puddles of stagnant water, in polluted water, in open sewers, and so on (III:70). Thus, for Vasiṣṭha, humans have to be responsible not only for the cleanliness of their bodies, but also for the healthful state of the environment, if they wish to enjoy lives relatively free of disease.

This concern for other sentient beings and the environment is not to make them merely instrumental to the happiness and liberation of human beings. The beneficent

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17 Of course, eventually this plays out in the form of capital punishment, the killing and eating of only the criminals of the land.
influence of the liberated sages is not confined to the advancing of the well-being of human beings alone. According to Vasiṣṭha,

To such a [liberated] one, even the rocks become friends and the trees in the forest are relatives; even when he lives in the middle of a forest the very animals become his kith and kin. (V:2:102)

The sage’s attitude that everyone and everything is a relative extends her care and protection over all sentient and non-sentient beings. As far as she is concerned, nothing and no one is outside the pale and excluded from her blessings and company. For Vasiṣṭha, all beings are relatives. Given the underlying substratum that is Brahman, Vasiṣṭha notes, ‘there does not exist absolute unrelatedness’ (V:18).

Vasiṣṭha shows his regard for other animals and birds by the content of his stories as well. Bhuṣṇḍa is a crow, inhabiting the wish-fulfilling tree known as the Cūta. This tree is also occupied by the other birds, swans and peacocks, some of them the ‘vehicles’ of the gods. Vasiṣṭha makes a special journey to meet this crow, an ‘enlightened and liberated person,’ and describes him as beautiful, radiant, and peaceful, free from I-ness and mine-ness and a friend and relation of all (VI. 1: 15). Given the general tone of the Yogavāsiṣṭha, it is not too far-fetched to say that this anthropomorphic characterization is not just a literary device to enhance the appeal of the stories. Before embarking on his discourse on Brahman, Bhuṣṇḍa remarks that even though the Creator has amply provided for the survival of the crow, being born a crow has its pitfalls, particularly in the contempt shown by people. Vasiṣṭha praises him as wise and brave and a great yogi whom people are blessed to meet (VI.1:21, 27).
The sympathetic aspect of ananda in this story is illustrated by the benevolent attitude of the sage to her environment. Whether living in the forest or in the city, the sage is outwardly engaged in activity, even though inwardly she has renounced everything. She is not an activist in that she doesn’t seek out the destitute and the diseased in order to alleviate their suffering. As Vasiṣṭha notes about the sage who resides in his hermitage in outer space, one should live in one’s own environment (VI.2:94). However, the sage does not reject anyone who seeks her aid. Each sage must go her own way, but wherever she chooses to be, her influence extends to all those who occupy her realm. It is not a stretch to say that, for Vasiṣṭha, if human beings are special, they are special only in the sense that every species is special and the environment is special. The sage extends her care and concern over every minute creature and object in the universe. The world-appearance, in whatever shape or form, is vested with the utmost value.

The Story of Śikhidvaja and Cūḍālā

Vasiṣṭha makes it clear that his teachings are not compatible with those who extol the delights of sexual pleasures and material wealth. He is also uncompromising in his rejection of the rituals and practices that promise sensual rewards (V:18). ‘Wealth is the mother of evil. Sense pleasure is the source of pain. Rejection by all is victory’ (IV:32). ‘One should not revel in the filth known as sense pleasures as a worm revels in pus,’ scolds Vasiṣṭha (II:4, 5). However, this line of thinking is only for the fool. In his descriptions of the behavior of the sage, Vasiṣṭha states:
Established in this realization of the truth, the great sages lived forever in peace and equanimity. They were free from psychological predisposition and hence they did not seek nor reject either life or death. They remained unshaken in their direct experience like another Meru-mountain. Yet, they roamed the forests, islands and cities, they traveled to the heavens as if they were angels or gods; they conquered their enemies and they ruled as emperors - they engaged themselves in diverse activities in accordance with scriptural injunctions as they realized that such was appropriate conduct. They enjoyed the pleasures of life: they visited pleasure gardens and were entertained by celestial damsels. They duly fulfilled the duties of household life. They even engaged themselves in great wars.

(VI.1:12)

Even while Vasiṣṭha’s sage sees the body for the sham that it is and is not trapped by temptations such as lust, greed, ignorance, and fear, she does find her body a ‘source of infinite delight.’ It transports her around the world and so is considered a ‘vehicle of wisdom.’ It makes available the different sense experiences, as well as the friendships and affections of others and so is considered a ‘source of gain’ (IV.23).

This partaking in the householder life, even enjoyment of sensual pleasures, is well illustrated by the Story of Śikhidvaja and Cūḍālā. King Śikhidvaja marries Queen Cūḍālā and enjoys a life of conjugal bliss. After many years of happy married life, the couple, weary of the sorrows of life and even finding the pleasures cloying, turn their attention to the study of spiritual texts. Cūḍālā attains liberation first and when her husband, suspicious of her radiant countenance, questions her, she attempts to instruct him. Not the brightest of men, Śikhidvaja tells her to stop her foolish prattling and simply enjoy the pleasures of the palace. They continue this way for some years until Śikhidvaja decides that retiring to the forest, away from the distractions of the palace, may be just the thing to speed his enlightenment. Cūḍālā tries to persuade him that this isn’t the appropriate way to behave, but Śikhidvaja dismisses her advice with the reprimand that
he is gone already. And as she is just a child, she would not be able to withstand the hard life of the forest, and thus, she should stay behind and rule the kingdom in his place.

Śikhidvaja and Cūḍālā remain separated for a number of years and then Cūḍālā discovers that he is now ready for further instruction. She decides to go to the forest. On her way Cūḍālā discovers how excited she is and how agitated her mind at the thought of meeting him again. She is even concerned that her husband had forgotten all about her and the kingdom. She decides then to restore her husband to equilibrium in such a way that he will return to the kingdom and live happily with her. Cūḍālā, worried that her husband may still see her as an ignorant girl and spurn her teachings, transforms herself into a young ascetic brähmana. Śikhidvaja is delighted to meet the ascetic whom Cūḍālā introduces as Kuṁbhaka, and the two engage in much discussion and instruction.

After spending many days with Śikhidvaja as the male Kuṁbhaka, Cūḍālā wishes to resume conjugal relations with her husband. ‘She whose passions are not aroused in the proximity of her noble and strong husband when they dwell surrounded by the garden of flowers is as good as dead! What does the knower of the truth or the sage of self-knowledge gain by abandoning what is obtained without effort? I should make it possible for my husband to enjoy conjugal pleasures with me’ (VI.1:104). She concocts a story of the sage Durvāsa’s curse which turns Kuṁbhaka into a woman every night. Cūḍālā then lives as Kuṁbhaka during the day and the woman, Madanikā, at night. In due course Cūḍālā marries Śikhidvaja as Madanikā and spends much time with him. After many

18 In Indian mythology and literature, Durvāsa is well known for his quick temper and grumpy irritability.
twists and turns to the story, where Cūḍālā as Madanikā tests her husband’s lack of jealousy and anger by conjuring another lover for herself, Cūḍālā reveals herself as Cūḍālā to Śikhidvaja. Śikhidvaja is overjoyed to see the queen. They return to the palace and rule the kingdom together, enjoying further pleasures with each other.

Vasiṣṭha is of course not equating ānanda with orgasmic rapture. He specifically notes that the bliss of Brahman far exceeds any experiences in the company of one’s lover. However, the liberated sage does not abstain from the natural functions of the body and welcomes the body as a source of pleasure. In this Story of Cūḍālā and Śikhidvaja, Vasiṣṭha cleverly interweaves the behavior of Cūḍālā the guru with the behavior of Cūḍālā the wife. The sexual joys of life are not discarded by the enlightened sage nor pursued with abandon, but if her lifestyle included a husband, Vasiṣṭha would consider it thoroughly unnatural for someone like Cūḍālā to dismiss this pleasurable side of the world-appearance. Such a sensual relationship can only be enhanced by the equality of spiritual stature between the king and queen. However delightful the relationship between the unenlightened king and queen, matters were not that comfortable when the king looked upon his queen as an immature girl.

In contrast to the Cūḍālā-Śikhidvaja relationship, Vasiṣṭha narrates the story of the celestial born in solid rock who had the misfortune to marry a brāhmaṇa too involved

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19 J. A. B. van Buitenen argues that in the Vedic literature ānanda has been variously described as the high joy of drinking the soma and of offering it, the climax of the ritual building of the universe, the unhindered happiness of gods, the orgasm that begets a son in one’s image as a metaphor for one’s self-renewal as one of the gods, the joyous knowledge of oneself and the eldest Brahman, and the bliss that is the Brahman and the ātmā (Rocher, p. 330). However, Patrick Olivelle sees a clear and unmistakable connection between ānanda as orgasmic rapture and ānanda as the experience of Brahman. “Orgasmic Rapture and Divine Ecstasy: The Semantic History of Ananda,” Journal of Indian Philosophy 25 (1997): 153-180.
in meditation and religious rituals to consummate his marriage. The celestial vividly describes her loss and terrible grief at this state of affairs. 'If the husband and wife are fond of each other, then neither diseases of the body nor those of the mind, neither calamities nor natural disasters, afflict their minds. To the woman whose husband is of bad character or who does not have a husband, the pleasure gardens of the world are burning sands' (VI.2:65). Although this story turns out to be a metaphor illustrating the destruction of mental conditioning, it aptly depicts the desolation of a wife whose husband is not interested in her.

The sympathetic aspect of ānanda is illustrated here not only in the concern that Cūḍālā shows to her husband in his foolish endeavors in pursuit of liberation, but also in the most intimate arena of the husband-wife relationship, sexual intimacy where both partners are loved and cherished by one other. Sympathy here is expressed as tenderness and joy at another’s pleasures. Thus, for Vasiṣṭha, ānanda informs and influences even family relationships, as that between wife and husband.

**The End Result - Vasistha’s Sage Engaged**

Vasiṣṭha has this to say about the action (in speech, thought, and deed) of the liberated sage.²⁰

The sage whose mind is freed in his life-time conducts himself unconcerned in this world; he smiles secure at its occurrences, and is regardless of the first (birth), last (death) and middle stages of his life. (V:18, verse 2)

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²⁰ These quotations are taken from *The Yoga-Vasiṣṭha-Mahārāmasya of Vālmiki*, trans. Vihari Lala Mitra (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1988), unless otherwise stated.
He rests in the transcendental bliss, with prospects as bright as the cooling beams of the full moon, who is neither anxious nor complacent in any state of life, and he does not languish in the world. (V:18, verse 5)

Whose generosity and manliness do not forsake him, even when he is beset by his bitterest enemies; and who is observant of his duties to his superiors, such a man is not crest-fallen in this world. (V:18, verse 6)

Follow all your duties in life with a noble pliability of your disposition: but preserve the philosophic renunciation of everything in your mind, and live playfully in this world. (V:18, verse 19)

Conduct yourself, Rāma, with your inward indifference and want of all desire: but show your outward desire for whatever is good and great. Be cold-blooded within yourself but full of ardor in your external demeanor. (V:18, verse 21)

Conduct yourself among men, O Rāma! with feigned activity in your outward appearance, but with real inaction in your mind; show yourself as the doer of deeds, but know in your mind to be no actor at all. (V:18, verse 22)

Rāma, in the beginning of the Yogavāśiṣṭha, is filled with anxieties and depression over the state of the world. The sage, on the other hand, is definitely not tired of the world, exhausted or jaded. She roams around happily, lightly shouldering the duties of her station (verses 2, 5, 18). She has prospects (verse 5) and as the ‘doer of deeds’ takes up new initiatives (verse 22). Inwardly she remains ‘cool’ (rather than cold-hearted, her heart is cool, undisturbed by hot tempers), but outwardly she ‘pursues’ all that is ‘good and great’ (verse 21). In other words, the sage is content, resting in the bliss of Brahman, but she is not complacent. When she is at peace within herself, she does not abandon this peace even in the worst of calamities. Instead, she loves all and looks upon all with equal vision (IV:60, 61).

21 Translated by Arindam Chakrabarti.
22 Swami Venkatesananda translates this verse: ‘In all hostilities he is in a neutral position: yet endowed with compassion and consideration for all, he remains unaffected by the world-appearance.’
23 Translated by Arindam Chakrabarti. ‘Vihara’ imperative of Vi + hr, ‘to roam around playfully.’ According to Swami Venkatesananda, ‘the sage is not afflicted by the world.’
The bliss of the sage is clarified by understanding ananda as sympathetic joy. Vasiṣṭha’s thesis is that the liberated sage, when all subject-object distinctions are dissolved, is immersed in bliss and there is just the expansion of ‘pure experiencing.’ This is not an unholy bliss because this bliss is accompanied by immense peace. This peace and bliss stays with the sage when she moves around the world, but it is not an inert, passive state of quietude. Vasiṣṭha distinguishes between inaction and non-action. Embodiment does not allow the kind of attitude that yearns for inaction, the suppression of physical, mental, and verbal behavior. Instead, the liberated sage has an attitude of non-action, in which she acts spontaneously without any bias or prejudice towards her own welfare. As far as the liberated sage is concerned, she has everything already and there is nothing further to gain or lose. Having no thoughts of personal advantage or disadvantage, seeing the world as an abode of bliss and peace, her consciousness infinitely expanded to include all beings, having still to act in the world, the sage’s actions are spontaneously geared towards a sympathetic response towards those around her. According to Vasiṣṭha, when the mind ceases to be, ‘all the good and noble qualities blossom. There is peace and purity of heart. People do not fall into doubt and error. There is friendship which promotes the happiness of all’ (V:83).

Another way to explore the distinction between physical inaction and non-action is to look at Vasiṣṭha’s three-fold division of space: bhūtākāśa (the physical space), cittākāśa (the finite space of divided consciousness, and cidākāśa (the infinite space of undivided consciousness). The jīvanmukta is the sage who is liberated while living. She has a body and still dwells in the bhūtākāśa, the physical space in which individuality
and multiplicity still abound. In this space, materiality is cast as individual and plural.

The jīvanmukta perceives the body as ‘fiction,’ but because it still functions, even though it is a ‘fictional’ functioning, the jīvanmukta works (or plays) within these physical boundaries until the death of her body. Within the ‘fiction’ of the physical space and the existence of her body, she cannot avoid physical action and fall into physical inaction. This can only be accomplished with the physical death of the body. However, the jīvanmukta’s cīttākāśa (her space of individualized consciousness) is no longer fragmented, but has united with the cosmic mind of Brahmā and the cidākāśa, the field of play of Brahman-consciousness. Her previously ego-filled cīttākāśa has broken the boundaries of individuality and multiplicity embedded in the world-appearance, and has merged with the pure, undivided consciousness that is Brahman.

Delineating the connections between Brahman as non-dual saccidānanda and the jīvanmukta’s sattva character is not to say that Brahman exercises a contributing influence or a causally necessary condition for the presence of egolessness and sympathy in the sage in every possible world. If such were the case, we would expect egolessness and sympathy to automatically lead to, or at least, slant the dice towards realizing Brahman. However, according to the Yogavāsiṣṭha, not only do worlds manifest ‘accidentally,’ but in Brahman, all kinds of worlds are possible. Vasiṣṭha notes that in some worlds moonlight is hot and sunlight cool, there is sight in darkness and blindness in daylight, good is destructive and evil constructive, poison promotes health and nectar kills’ (VI.2:60). Thus, the presence of egolessness and sympathy may not necessarily lead
to the well-being of seekers in terms of liberation. In fact, in some worlds, such ‘virtues’ may actively hinder such a quest.

In addition, Vasiṣṭha has nothing to say about human inclinations being naturally good or bad. It just so happens that in this universe the I/thou fracture leads to the entrenched ego, which in turn promotes the feelings of fear and hatred at the expense of peace and harmony. It must also be noted that the experience of Brahman does not in itself counteract selfish tendencies and encourage positive moral attitudes and conduct. The seeker of liberation cultivates the virtues on the path of liberation and there are several steps to liberation. The snapping of the bonds of vāsanā is only the fourth step. It is only in the seventh stage that the seeker enters the turīya state of consciousness and merges with Brahman (VI.1:118-120). Brahman-consciousness does not produce the sattva nature, but only serves to establish its thoroughly moral character to the point of no return.

Still, there is a sense in which Brahman as saccidānanda acts as a logically necessary condition in that egolessness and sympathy are constituents of the world-appearance, regardless of what type of world is manifested. Even if the world-appearance is illusion, the roots of egolessness and sympathy inhere in Brahman as ānanda, sympathetic joy, and provide an explanation as to why the jīvanmukta is involved in morally appropriate behavior, at least according to the conventions and dictates of Vasiṣṭha’s world.
CHAPTER 6: DREAMS AND FICTIONS

THE QUEST FOR MORAL IMPROVEMENT

Dreams and Fictions

This dissertation explores the resolution of a paradox: we must exert ourselves morally in order to perfect social roles and enjoy life, all of this in a world and society that is ontologically hollow and illusory. It was argued in chapter three that the dream analogy used by Vasiṣṭha provides a justification for the moral rules applicable to the unenlightened beings caught in the material snares of the world, but it does not adequately explain the moral nature of the jīvanmukta, the one who has woken up from the dream and yet, choosing to continue the dream. The dream analogy portrays an instrumentalist and consequentialist view of morality. It construes the world’s function as providing a conducive although concocted setting for individuals to get on with the serious business of enlightenment. However, such a rule based morality is transcended by the liberated sage. The enlightened sage knows that the world-appearance is just a dream and yet, she is the mahākarta (the great doer), the mahātyāgī (the great renunciate), and the mahābhoktā (the great enjoyer). In the context of dreams, such spontaneously appropriate moral conduct would not only be considered strange and irrelevant, but also inapplicable in the dreaming mode.

In chapter four, I argued that just as good fiction enhances the reader’s empathetic identification and compassion towards fictional characters, Vasiṣṭha’s world-appearance also contributes to the individual’s empathetic identification and compassion towards the
other inhabitants of this world-appearance. The fiction analogy serves the task of justifying the \textit{jīvanmukta}'s thoroughly moral character, given her understanding of the illusory nature of the world. This analogy provides an explanation as to how the seeker develops into a \textit{jīvanmukta} who sees beyond dualistic differences to the unifying character of Brahman. In chapter five, the idea of Brahman as \textit{ānanda}, viewed as sympathetic joy, links the \textit{jīvanmukta}'s compassionate and joyous response to the world with Brahman, and clarifies the presence of her \textit{sattva} nature. Dream does not, or cannot, provide a similar account. My purpose, in this chapter, is to further investigate the inadequacies of dream in providing an explanation for the \textit{sattva} character of the \textit{jīvanmukta}. This will be accomplished by exploring the source material for the origination of fiction and dream, the \textit{vāsanās}, the mental modifications that bind individuals to the world. I will end by describing some problems faced by the fiction analogy and possible solutions.

\textbf{Vāsanā and Fiction}

The aim of Vasiṣṭha's teachings to Rāma is liberation and for Vasiṣṭha, this is achieved by bringing the mind under control. According to Vasiṣṭha, the two 'seeds' that are responsible for the undisciplined mind are the movement of \textit{prāṇa} (life force) and 'obstinate fancy,' the tenacious clinging to thoughts that eventually give rise to the world-appearance (V:91). The two are intimately connected to one another: if one is curtailed or restrained, the other just disappears (V:93). Vasiṣṭha recommends meditative practices
for the mastery of praṇa, but the removal of ‘fancy,’ the deluded imagination, requires the abandonment of all the negative vāsanās or mental conditioning without reserve.

'Vāsanā' (or saṃskāra) is usually translated as ‘latent impressions of past experiences and actions,’ ‘psychological conditioning,’ ‘memory store,’ ‘past impressions,’ and also ‘predisposition’ (VI.1:69, V.2:144). Vasiṣṭha notes,

The finite mind generates countless ideas within itself which weaken and veil it leading to sorrow - which the mind greatly magnifies. These ideas and these experiences leave their mark on the mind, forming the impressions or conditioning tendencies which are for the most part latent or dormant. But when the mind is rid of these, the veil vanishes in a moment like mist at sunrise, and with it the greatest sorrow also vanishes. Till then the mind plays with all, even as little children play with fledglings and tease them. (III:110)

According to Vasiṣṭha, via the operation of the sense organs and the impact of sense experiences, the mind produces numerous ideas within itself. The repetition of sense activities and the vain imaginings of the mind, even regarding events that never occurred in the waking state, project a particular wave of thinking that leaves its ‘mark’ on the mind in the form of vāsanā or conditioning tendency. It is not just the world-appearance in terms of time, space, and solidity that is generated and sustained by the unruly imagination. The primary trigger of vāsanā is desire. The cravings and aversions of the individual shape the world-appearance in particular ways. Influenced by its desires, the mind magnifies some ideas to such an extent that it generates additional vāsanās or mental modifications that serve to bind it even further (III:110, VI.2:137, VI.2:144).

These vāsanās may be active or even dormant for much of the time, but inevitably, they establish and fix the path for particular actions in the present or the future. The entrenched conditioning more or less determines the actions and the actions then influence the workings of the mind and the vāsanās.
In the mind of man are numerous latent tendencies and these tendencies give rise to various actions - physical, verbal, and mental. Surely one’s actions are in strict accordance with these tendencies, it cannot be otherwise. Such is the course of action; action is non-different from the most potent among latent tendencies, and these tendencies are non-different from the mind! (II:9)

These vāsanās or latent tendencies are brought over to this life by actions in past incarnations or created afresh by actions in this life. They can be pure or impure. The right activities activate the pure dispositions and diminish the impure ones, which in turn encourage the right activities which further strengthen the pure dispositions, and so on.

According to Vasiṣṭha, even psychologically based appetites and pleasures can be tempered or even modified by the proper training. This makes sense. Even in mundane matters as being on time for appointments, there are those who arrive fifteen minutes early, those who turn up on the dot, those who arrive fifteen minutes late, and those who do not show up at all. According to Vasiṣṭha, this boils down to positive or negative vāsanās, the tendencies brought about by habitual patterns of behavior. If the late-comers exert some effort, accurate time-keeping becomes progressively easier, and eventually it could be called the ‘spontaneous’ behavioral habit that promotes her punctuality.

Given the inevitable operation and inescapable force of these tendencies, the agent being acted upon rather than acting, it is not surprising that Vasiṣṭha is concerned about voluntary action. As Rāma asks: ‘If latent tendencies brought forward from the previous birth impel me to act in the present, where is freedom of action?’ (II: 9).

Vasiṣṭha replies:

You are consciousness itself, not inert physical matter. You are not impelled to action by anything other than yourself. Hence, you are free to strengthen the pure latent tendencies in preference to the impure ones. The impure ones have to be abandoned gradually and the mind turned away from them little by little, lest there should be violent reaction. By encouraging the good tendencies to act repeatedly, strengthen them. The impure ones will
weaken by disuse. You will soon become absorbed in the expression of the good
tendencies, in good actions. When thus you have overcome the force of the evil tendencies
then you will have to abandon even the good ones. You will then experience the supreme
truth with the intelligence that rises from the good tendencies. (II:9)

As far as Vasiṣṭha is concerned, Rāma, being pure consciousness and not inert physical
matter, is free to strengthen the pure tendencies and abandon the impure ones. As it is the
exercise of particular activities that cultivate some habits of character rather than others
and man is free to choose his actions, Rāma is responsible for the shape of his character
and responsible for the actions that emanate from his 'condition.' Such conditioning is
not a happy state of affairs. Vasiṣṭha describes the conditioned individual graphically as
‘the donkey that is led by the master’s rope and, afraid, it carries a heavy burden,’ ‘the
hungry bird that rests on the branch of a tree, fearful of predators,’ ‘the tame deer that
peacefully goes about grazing and falls prey to the hunter’s shot,’ and so on (V:68). This
deplorable situation must be overcome by the cultivation of the pure vāsanās that
promote the sattva character.

How is the functioning of vāsanās in the waking state relevant to fiction? For
Vasiṣṭha, it is of paramount importance that the working of the deluded imagination that
binds the fool and the seeker to the world-appearance is brought under control. As argued
in chapter four, the reading of fiction and the ‘reading’ of Vasiṣṭha’s world allow the
deluded, conditioned imagination to be replaced by the creative imagination that
encourages shifting perspectives of looking at the world and empathetic identification
with the life of the ‘other.’ The cultivation of the creative imagination reduces the impure
vāsanās and nurtures the pure ones. It influences the emergence of different thought-
patterns and the dissolving of I/thou barriers. For Vasiṣṭha, the self-control of the mind
and senses is all about the change in \textit{vāsanās}. However, the requisite self-effort is not to be confused with repression of impure tendencies or forcible enhancement of the pure ones. The latter ways suggest much gritting of teeth and an internal struggle that is not in keeping with the modification process. Instead, it is a gradual development through the habituation described in chapter four. This encourages a radical shift in the way in which the individual views herself and the phenomenal universe. The \textit{vāsanās} operating in dream do not work in quite the same way. In the following section, I explore the problems relating to the functioning of \textit{vāsanās} in dream.

\textbf{Vāsaṇā and Dream}

Much was written in chapter four as to how good fiction serves to break the barriers of entrenched beliefs and prejudices, and propels the fool into the seeker stage and the seeker towards liberation. How well does dream perform this task? As far as Vasiṣṭha is concerned, the source of dreams, the material out of which dreams are constructed, is \textit{vāsanās} arising in the waking state. Dreams evolve out of the latent impressions of experiences and actions of the waking state. Unlike in the waking state, \textit{vāsanās} are not created anew in the dream state (VI.2:144). Vasiṣṭha notes that in dream, the dreamer has no dream-memory and no recognition of objects seen in the dream. There is no recall of dream-objects from a dream dreamed the previous night. The dreamer does not think, ‘Ah, I have seen this before in my dream last night’ (VI.2:144, 174, 175). For Vasiṣṭha, the dreamer has only the experience of the objects dreamed about right at that moment
and this prevents the production of additional vāsanās, pure or impure. Any creation anew requires the persistency of action, whether the action is physical, verbal or mental.

Vasiṣṭha’s view about memory in dreams may not be strictly accurate. A dreamer may dream similar dreams night after night and recall that she does so within the dream itself. Nonetheless, Vasiṣṭha has a point in that it is more likely that the dreamer shifts from dream to dream with no acknowledged or conscious recollection of the previous dream. Vasiṣṭha’s claim that no new vāsanās are created in the dream state precludes the kind of creative, innovative transformation that occurs in the reader. If dreams are generated out of the vāsanās of the waking life and do not produce vāsanās of their own, there is no opportunity in dreams for the kind of radical break-through that occurs with fiction. However, there may be the possibility in the dream of reducing the negative vāsanās and augmenting the pure ones. Vasiṣṭha makes a distinction between two levels of dream; the dreaming process itself from which he extrapolates the identity of the world and dream, and the dream within the dream from which he draws the analogy of the individual who is a dream character, living in the dream-world of another sleeper, and who generates his own dreams while asleep in this dream-world (VI.2:63). Each of these levels is considered in turn.

**The Dreaming Process**

Would the act of dreaming itself and the process of dreaming help Vasiṣṭha’s drive to alter the vāsanās that discourage/encourage empathetic identification and jīvanmukta-hood, without recourse to further activity in the waking state? Vasiṣṭha notes
that the mind may be refined by the following methods: realizing its unreality through thinking, the negation of negative imagination or willing, cultivating a distaste for the objects of enjoyment through thinking, renunciation of desires, eradication of the egoistic tendency and so on.¹ All of these methods employ vicāra, rational enquiry into the true nature of oneself.

Vasiṣṭha sees vicāra as one of the four gate-keepers of liberation. ‘What is enquiry?’ he asks. ‘To enquire thus: “Who am I? How is this evil of samsāra (repetitive history) come into being?” is true enquiry. Knowledge of truth arises from such enquiry’ (II:14). Given the necessity of vicāra, rational enquiry, there are two reasons for a response in the negative to the issue of whether the dreaming process itself can reduce the impure vāsanās; (1) complex judgments regarding one’s own nature cannot be made in the dreaming process, itself and (2) the lack of memory makes difficult any education, ethical or otherwise, within the dreaming process.

(1) Complex Judgments in the Dreaming Process

The first issue, as to whether complex judgments can be made in dreams, is answered by investigating the following three questions: (a) Is there consciousness in the dreaming process? (b) Is the dreamer capable of making rational judgments while dreaming? (c) Is the dreamer capable of exercising her will in dreams?

(a) Is there consciousness in the dreaming process?

Norman Malcolm\(^2\) argues that dreaming is *not* a conscious experience. To dream is not to be mentally active and he refutes the claim that one can have experiences and make judgments while dreaming. He does not deny that dreaming is an experience in that people do dream, only that it is not identical with the conscious mental phenomena, thoughts, feelings, images, etc., that one has in waking life. Malcolm's argument is that there is no criterion for the truth of the statement that a sleeper made assertions and judgments while asleep. The sleeper cannot observe himself asleep *and* making judgments. Anything that counts in favor of verifying the making of judgments by the sleeper, would count against the sleeper being asleep. Furthermore, a sleeper lacks the faculties necessary for making assertions and judgments about being asleep. Such assertions and judgments require that the sleeper be aware that he is doing so and this awareness is incompatible with sleep.

Unlike Malcolm, Vasiṣṭha distinguishes between the dream and the deep sleep state and considers the dream state to be a state of *conscious experience*. For Vasiṣṭha, a person is nothing but pure consciousness and it is this pure consciousness that is present in all the four states of existence; waking, dreaming, deep sleep, and *turīya*. Words, such as 'waking' and 'dreaming' are used by the uninitiated who think that these states are substantially different, but such words are just movements and signify movements in pure consciousness. These movements bring about awareness whether awake or dreaming.

As far as Vasiṣṭha is concerned, when the senses of hearing, touch, sight, smell, and taste operate in the external world, consciousness is externalized and the jīva (the embodied self) is in the waking state of consciousness. In dream, the ‘jīva turns its gaze upon itself’ (VI.2:137), consciousness and the senses are directed inward and the dreamer ‘experiences the world within himself with the greatest of clarity’ (VI.2:144). For Vasiṣṭha, there is consciousness in dreaming.

• (b) Is the dreamer capable of making rational judgments while dreaming?

From his initial step that dreaming is not a conscious experience, Malcolm concludes that no judgments can be made while asleep. Moreover, as there are no behavioral criteria that establish the contents of a dream and the only criterion is the subsequent testimony of the dreamer, which Malcolm rejects as unacceptable, no thoughts or judgments can be said to occur in a dream. A dreamer’s subsequent descriptions of dream experiences cannot be descriptions of experiences because the dream occurs while he is asleep. Dreams while sleeping cannot be conscious experiences enjoyed by the dreamer. The obvious exception is a nightmare where behavioral criteria are available, but Malcolm dismisses the nightmare. It is not a dream of sound sleep. For Malcolm, one is conscious only during one’s waking life and one is unconscious while properly asleep. In addition, he argues that there is no independent verification of the dreamer having conscious experiences while dreaming. An independent observer may verify that the person is asleep by noticing that the sleeper has his eyes closed, is in a supine position, and so on,
but there is no way that this spectator can travel into the dream and witness the thoughts and judgments of the dreamer while dreaming.

Malcolm’s arguments generated a great deal of criticism from other philosophers, but an analysis of their views is beyond the scope of this paper. The question is whether Vasiṣṭha’s opposing viewpoint allows for the making of judgments. Vasiṣṭha may or may not dispute the impossibility of asserting ‘I am asleep’ while asleep, but he would certainly dismiss the segue from the impossibility of asserting this particular statement to the impossibility of all assertions and judgments. Vasiṣṭha’s dreamer does have the faculties necessary for the making of judgments and assertions in the dream because the dream is simply consciousness and the external senses turned inward. Vasiṣṭha is quite adamant that ‘there is no distinction between consciousness and awareness of objects seen either in the waking state or in a dream, just as there is no distinction between wind and movement’ (VI.2:143). He emphasizes this claim in the Story of the Hunter and the Deer in which a sage enters another man’s dream, is fooled into thinking that the dream world is his waking world and lives there for numerous years.

However, Vasiṣṭha runs into problems. There is no doubt that, for Vasiṣṭha, the dreamer’s mind is not a passive recipient of images which flit from frame to frame with no impact on the dreamer. The dreamer does enjoy some sort of experience which produces emotional reactions that are backed up by physiological data. She has genuine feelings and desires which can be verified. When a dreamer dreams of seeing a tiger at

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3 As Vasiṣṭha distinguishes between the dream state and the deep sleep state and accepts the presence of yogic powers, he may well conclude that the sage’s assertion ‘I am asleep’ is possible in the dream state, but not in the deep sleep state.
close quarters, hears its roar and catches the stench of its slavering jaws, the dreamer actually sees, hears, and smells in the very same manner in which she sees, hears, and smells in the waking life. According to Vasiṣṭha, she feels fear and makes the decision to run away. Nevertheless, more important than the knee-jerk reaction of fear is the making of more complex judgments, even perhaps value-embedded insightful judgments. Vasiṣṭha is clear that no new vāsanās are produced in the dreaming process and so there is no way that positive vāsanās can be generated in any shape or form. And yet, complex judgments, the product of careful deliberation and reasoning skills, may trigger the enhancement of pre-existing positive vāsanās or the destruction of the pre-existing negative ones, by dismantling the barriers surrounding entrenched biases and prejudices. Does Vasiṣṭha’s dreaming process allow for such judgments to take place?

Vasiṣṭha very cleverly argues for the coherence of dreams as well as the incoherence of world events, but his arguments are centered on individuals with yogic powers. The sage, in the Story of the Hunter and the Deer, and Līlā are endowed with great yogic skills that enabled them to act in ways impossible for the ordinary man or woman. These stories suggest that every component of the waking world is present as a possibility in the dream world and a sage with supernatural powers can inhabit and live well in another man’s dream-world because it has all the trappings of the waking world.

However, the ordinary dreamer does not have this option. There may be all the elements of the waking world in the dream, which would possibly allow for a coherent and well-formed dream to emerge during sleep, and the dreamer may ‘make use’ of all these components to fashion a world that is extraordinarily like her waking world, but
this is an inadvertent and fortuitous use of these life-like components. The most likely scenario is that dreams are simply weird and bizarre, jumping from event to event with no or little correlation between successive experiences. This places serious judgment at great jeopardy. If the ordinary rules of time and space do not apply and there are no familiar patterns of connection between events, any complex judgment regarding ‘what ought I to do?’ has no launching pad whatsoever. So, the responses to the first two questions outlined above are that, for Vasiṣṭha, dreaming is a conscious experience, but rational judgments are not possible for the average dreamer.

• (c) Is the dreamer capable of exercising her will in dreams?

The third question involves the operation of the dreamer’s will while dreaming. For Vasiṣṭha, even if rational judgments are possible in dreams, the dreamer cannot transform the vāsanās by engaging her will and altering her actions in the dream. Vasiṣṭha is adamant that in the waking state, even if the body is bound by the physical laws of the universe, through self-effort, the mind is free to break from such restraints and set the individual on a different path (II:8, 10). This option of exercising one’s will, through self-effort, and freely choosing between different courses of action is not available to the dreamer in the dream state. For Vasiṣṭha, the dreamer, more often than not, is carried away by the dream. There is a helplessness in dream that is not present in the waking state (VI.2:132).

Certainly, according to Vasiṣṭha, there is also incoherence in worldly events. An individual’s waking world may unexpectedly turn upside down, from safety to
catastrophe, where she has to act without delay and without careful consideration of the consequences (VI.2:175). However, Vasiṣṭha acknowledges that in the waking state, an individual exhibits shocked surprise at such an upheaval, a response that is not generally available in the dreaming mode (VI.2:131). Vasiṣṭha also notes that even in such unexpected worldly situations, an individual has the ability to transform her mind’s activities and have some control over the different options of thought and action (II:5-10). In dreams, not only is the dreamer’s control over patterns and connections fractured to the point that she is unable to be resourceful in inventing creative solutions and guarding against catastrophic mistakes in judgment, she may not be even aware of such a breakdown. So, the destruction of the negative vāsanās or the enhancement of the positive vāsanās is again thwarted.⁴

(2) The Lack of Memory in the Dreaming Process.

Vasiṣṭha’s second issue that there is no memory in dream also militates against the destruction of the impure vāsanās and the enhancement of the pure vāsanās so necessary for Rāma’s ethical progress. Memory is of fundamental importance to ethical education. Becoming a moral person is a learned process. Children are usually taught to tell the truth by being punished for telling lies or praised for speaking the truth under difficult circumstances. The memories of these rewards and punishments and their

⁴ Lucid dreams (where the dreamer knows that it is a dream while she is dreaming) also do not present a problem for the view that dreams arising out of waking state vāsanās do not generate ground-breaking thought activity. Vasiṣṭha does acknowledge the existence of dreams in which one knows one is dreaming (VI.2:141,142), but such dreams are few and far-between the run of the mill uncontrolled type of dream described by Vasiṣṭha, and do not pose a threat to the incoherence factor.

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repetitive nature go a long way in influencing a future course of action. Such a consequential view may continue through adulthood or the agent may acquire a different framework of morality, such as it being her duty to do the right thing. Whatever the case, the memory of past actions serves as the foundation for present action.

Daniel Dennett,⁵ in reviewing the claim that remembering is a necessary and sufficient condition for experiencing, points out,

"the idea of a subject, an 'I,' experiencing each successive state in a stream of consciousness with no recollection of its predecessors is a hopelessly impoverished model of experience and experiences. The familiarity and continuity in the world of current experiences is a necessary background for recognition and discrimination and only short-term memory can provide this. Items that come and go so fast or so inconspicuously as to leave no reverberations behind in memory are plausibly viewed as simply not experienced."⁶

The question is again, how much familiarity and continuity is there in a dream? Although Dennett is of the view that dreams do have a certain narrative order, Vasiṣṭha's notion of incoherence back-fires on him when memory is brought into the picture. For memory to be of any use in moral matters, the moral agent must be able to extrapolate and predict the occurrence of certain future experiences from past experiences. If past worldly experiences are a jumbled bag of every oddity under the sun, memory of these peculiarities, even if that were possible, would serve no purpose. Vasiṣṭha does argue for the coherence of dreams as well as the incoherence of worldly matters, but the coherence of dreams is of no help because if dreams are made coherent, they are made coherent accidentally. The dreamer has a storehouse of items to furnish her dreams, but what is

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⁶ Ibid., p. 244.
actually used is normally beyond her control. She is generally dragged helter-skelter through a variety of ‘experiences’ in her dreams and even if each experience is intelligently connected to one another, she may or may not recall the previous experiences. This haphazard use of memory cannot be of much use in promoting moral education.

Thus, we must conclude that the inability to make complex judgments while dreaming and the lack of memory in dreams adversely impact the utilization of the dreaming process in providing an explanation for the journey from seeker to jīvanmukta.

**The Dream Within the Dream**

Vasiṣṭha’s second attempt in enhancing the dream analogy is to look at the relationship between the world-appearance and the dream: the individual lives in a dream-world that in turn generates subsidiary dreams when the individual is asleep. This raises the question as to whether the dreams that the dreamer has while asleep help in promoting the relationship with Brahman while awake and living in the ‘world-dream.’ Does the content of dreams create new vāsanās in the waking state? Again, memory, or the lack thereof, raises problems. Malcolm, using Wittgenstein, makes the point that “the concept of dreaming is derived, not from dreaming but descriptions of dream…. we do not question whether he really had a dream or if it merely seems to him that he did.” For Malcolm, all we require to assent to a dream is that someone says that he dreamed. The

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fact that this question of veracity is not raised, Malcolm says, is essential to our concept of dreaming. To ask the question would imply that the questioner has some other criterion of verifying that the dreamer did have certain images while dreaming and did not simply imagine that he did so upon awakening. But there are no such external criteria.

Malcolm goes so far as to state that even though there is no misuse of the language in speaking of 'remembering a dream,' the 'remembering' does not have the same sense of remembering an occurrence that happened yesterday. The latter can be verified by the behavior of the agent, witnesses, plausibility of the account, etc., but in dreams, such criteria serve only to indicate that the dreamer is dreaming. Upon awakening, he has the impression that such and such a thing occurred, but these criteria disclose nothing about the veracity of the description of the dream. Behavior only points to dreaming. There are no witnesses to the content of the dream. 'Since nothing counts as determining that my memory of my dream is right or wrong, what sense can the word 'memory' have here?' According to Malcolm, we simply 'accept the narrative without proof, not because we assume it will be true, but because the concept of truth that applies here has nothing to do with proof.... One tells the dream under the influence of an impression - as if one was faithfully recalling events that one witnessed.'

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8 The exception to the rule are nightmares, but Malcolm doubts as to whether they can be counted as occurring in sleep.
In contrast, Frederick Siegler\textsuperscript{11} argues that there are ways to verify the accuracy of describing a dream. According to Siegler, the recounting of a dream is very much like the recounting of one’s thoughts. For Siegler, learning to report a dream is not the learning and application of new procedures, but merely the application of previously learned procedures to different circumstances. He writes, ‘if a man has mastered the technique of telling what he has experienced in the past, and he makes such a report, and there is no reason to suspect that he has been deceived or is lying, or has lost his powers of memory, then his report is good grounds for the truth of what he says. The reporting of dreams is similar. If a man has mastered the technique of reporting what he has experienced, and he reports that he has dreamed something, and there is no reason to doubt his sincerity, or the truth of what he says, then what he reports is good grounds for its truth.’\textsuperscript{12}

Vere C Chappell\textsuperscript{13} also explores Malcolm’s contention that one cannot mis-remember a dream in the same manner in which one can mis-remember yesterday’s events. True, dreaming is a private phenomenon for which no objective test of memory, such as the testimony of other witnesses, is available to verify the accuracy of the dream report. However, Chappell argues that this does not preclude the use of subjective tests, such as the fit of the original memory of the particular event with the events immediately preceding and following it or the fit of specific details of the original memory.

Malcolm’s rebuttal (stated in footnote 8 of Chappell’s article) is that dreams are often

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p. 275.
disordered and muddled and so one cannot infer, for example, that the California Zephir left from Union Station in the dream simply because that is what happens in reality. In dreams, the train might have left from a filling station. However, Chappell’s response suggests, as Dunlop states, that he was recommending the use of mnemonic techniques to refine a mis-remembered memory rather than advocating a compatibility with reality.¹⁴

Vasiṣṭha also counters this problem of memory by noting that there are discrepancies of memory in the waking state as well. A man may expend a lot of energy on a particular undertaking which he may forget a few years later (III:120, 121). It is also the case that people, particularly when terrified or drunk, have great difficulties in remembering events of that very day. Witnesses to a crime also often give divergent accounts of the same incident. Memory does have its problems even in the waking state. Vasiṣṭha would like to abandon memory altogether because it is part of mental conditioning (vāsanā) and it encompasses that which has been experienced as well as that which has not been experienced. The mind projects into the future all its past fears, joys, and desires and has great difficulty in perceiving the situation, untainted by the biases and prejudices injected in previous occasions.

Be that as it may, Vasiṣṭha and others underestimate the difficulties associated with the dream memory. These difficulties far surpass anything present in the waking state and require attention. Most importantly, the reasons why we do not question the veracity of dream reports differ from the reasons why we do not question the same

individual giving an account of yesterday’s events. Malcolm argues that the ordinary concept of ‘remembering’ does not apply in the reporting of one’s dreams. There is something in this line of thought despite the claims to the contrary. A person may remember her dream clearly, but just as easily remember only parts of it or she may forget its contents entirely even while she knows she dreamed something or, the worse case scenario, she may not even recollect that she dreamed even though she did. Certainly there are techniques available to jog the memory and future events may act as catalysts to trigger the memories of dreams, but research suggests that there are as many dreams (if not more) that are irrevocably lost or misremembered as there are dreams that are accurately recalled upon awakening. Dream recollection is more of a hit or miss affair than Siegler’s wife reporting that she baked a cake that morning. It is this looseness of memory in dream recollection, a looseness that occurs even with the mnemonic techniques suggested by Chappell, which makes the questioning of the veracity of a dream report inappropriate and even incongruous. Of course, we do question the veracity of a dream, but always with the idea that there may be difficulties in recollection that have nothing to do with the integrity of the dreamer, her abilities in the techniques of reporting, and so on.

The impossibility of verification of the content of a dream as an occurrence in its own right, independent of the telling, and the rift between dreaming and waking impressions have unfortunate implications for the use of the dream analogy in reducing the negative vāsanās and establishing the pure ones. If there are no criteria, except subsequent testimony, for assessing the accuracy of the remembered contents of the
dream upon awaking and if there is no sense in asking whether the dreamer’s memory is accurate, then if dreams help, they appear to help only at an unconscious level. Dreams may point to sensitive areas in the dreamer’s life that require attention, but they can also be enormously self-serving. The dreamer is oblivious to the form of assistance given by the dream. It may reduce the negative vāsanās in the waking state or may intensify them. It may enhance the positive vāsanās or reduce them. The dreamer just cannot be certain one way or another.

The point I wish to make here is that memory works in very odd ways as far as dreams are concerned, while within the dream or in recollection of the dream upon awakening. Now, of course there is a whole body of literature in the field of dream interpretation that would totally reject this point of view and argue for the acceptance of accuracy of dream reporting. For these psychologists, dreams can be correctly described on awakening and have great informational content because they reflect subconscious thoughts and wishes that are suppressed during the waking state. For such writers, dreams have moral worth because they are loaded with symbolism and accurate interpretation produces great insights into the character of the dreamer. However, the difficulties here are not just in the realm of memory but also in the accuracy of interpretation. I will not be delving into matters regarding the interpretation of dreams. This is a minefield and will serve no useful purpose here.

On the other hand, there is a problem-solving capacity of dreams that cannot be so readily dismissed. Consider the Kekulé type phenomenon, where the scientist’s discovery of the benzene ring was aided by a dream of a twisted snake biting its own tail.
Deidre Barrett\textsuperscript{15} describes many events in which useful practical technology, from the ancient armored warships of China to computer laser circuits, has found its beginnings or been improved by information derived in dreams. Some of this information is presented in a rather circuitous, haphazard fashion, requiring much interpretation by the wakened scientist. For example, Barrett describes William Watts, a British plumber, who revolutionized the making of buckshot after his dream of being drenched with spherical raindrops. Watts discovered that dropping the molten lead from a great height would cool the small pellets into neat spherical shapes before they hit the water necessary for solidity. Elias Howe designed the needle of his sewing machine invention after dreaming of cannibals who threatened to kill him with their warrior spears if he didn’t finish the sewing machine immediately. Their spears had eye-shaped holes at the end. However, Barrett also provides other examples that are problem-specific. The physicist Paul Horowitz not only had dreams that presented the obstacle or difficulty with great accuracy but also a dream narrator who described the problem verbally and a voice that presented the solution.

The only rebuttal here is that scientists are working with the materials already present in the world. They may have seemingly innovative ideas in dreams that break the mold of conventional thought, but these ideas arise, according to Vasiśtha, from the vāsanās of the waking state. It is not only that the initial building blocks of these inventions are already present in the dream, but the scientist or inventor immersed in his

or her project thinks of nothing else. She has intensified the related vāsanās to the point that it is of no surprise that they crop up as contents of a dream, even in the problem solving mode. On the other hand, the shift from seeing the world as solid and material, embedded with individuality and multiplicity, to unified, homogeneous Brahman is more revolutionary than any invention that scientists may produce. It is also far from the mind of the fool. Even with the seeker of liberation, Vasiṣṭha insists that the removal of entrenched impure vāsanās is a gradual process, which entails a radical shift in the way in which the individual and the phenomenal universe are viewed. Dreams are derived in a somewhat ‘second-hand’ manner from the material of the waking state. This rules out the uniquely creative activity that allows the mind to break free of its current psychological conditioning relating to concepts of individuality and multiplicity. Thus, we must conclude that even the interpretation of the dream analogy that emphasizes the aspect of the dream within the dream does not function in a manner that increases the positive vāsanās and decreases the negative ones. It does not provide an explanation for the intrinsically moral character of the jīvanmuktā.

To summarize, Vasiṣṭha makes a distinction between two levels of dream; (a) the dreaming process itself from which he extrapolates the identity of the world and dream, and (b) the dream within the dream from which he draws the analogy of the individual who is a dream character, living in the dream-world of another sleeper, and who generates her own dreams while asleep in this dream-world. Vasiṣṭha is adamant that no new vāsanās are created in the dream state. The issue explored in this section is whether either of these accounts provides the latitude necessary for explanations regarding the
decrease of the impure vāsanās and increase of the pure vāsanās in a manner that would enhance empathetic identification and jīvanmukta-hood, without recourse to further activity in the waking state. The response in both cases is, no. As far as the dreaming process itself is concerned, the dreamer’s inability to make complex judgments and her lack of memory in dreams impede the journey from seeker to jīvanmukta. Similar concerns impact the dream within the dream scenario. In this respect, the fiction analogy does have remarkable advantages over the dream analogy. However, the fiction analogy is not without its own problems. These difficulties are explored in the next final section.

Problems with the Fiction Analogy

My aim in chapter four was to deal with the function of the literary imagination in advancing the moral character. We saw that an individual in Vasiṣṭha’s world acts as author, reader, and character of her life. As author, she is responsible for the creation of a particular form of life. She is also the reader in that she is not the only creator of her world. She is a co-author in that others are also involved in the creative act. Thus, she must also take on the role of reader of their stories and interact accordingly. In addition, she is also a character in all of the stories, including her own. The question is this: for the fiction analogy to work, fiction, particularly in the reading and writing aspects, must bring about some positive change in the moral psyche. How well does fiction perform this task? Does the attentive and receptive reading of the classics teach the reader about life, strengthen her character and make her a better person? Does the act of reading go so far as to persuade the reader to shoulder the twin burdens of personal change and social
action or is it a matter of enjoyment for the moment, the call to change (if there is such an event) quickly lost once the book is laid aside? Does the act of writing, of creating and populating new worlds, of shaping characters, reveal the responsibilities, moral or otherwise, of the author?

Richard Posner\textsuperscript{16} distinguishes between two questions: ‘How can we be good?’ and ‘How should we live?’ As an answer to the latter question, he sees no difficulty in the notion that literature can provide moral guidance. He even accepts that the ‘bookish’ may immerse themselves in literature and identify with the values of the implied author to the point of being inspired to a change in outlook or behavior. However, he is adamant that this is neither identical with nor a prelude to moral betterment. There are just too many books portraying very different moral values and too many readers who are geared towards the simple pleasures of reading. For Posner, even active engagement with literature does not automatically generate better citizens or better people.

There are two general issues arising from Posner’s concerns: the obtuse, blinkered reader who declines to read any novel that may upset her pre-conceived ideas and the intelligent, well-meaning author who, unbeknownst to her, is blinded by the structures of the society in which she lives and succeeds in misleading her readers as well. These points have to be discussed in greater detail because they do suggest problems for the task of pedagogy bestowed upon literature.

The Obtuse and Blinkered Reader

If a reader is already filled with prejudice and hatred, what good can the literary imagination do in reducing the negative and promoting the positive vāsanās? The reader may simply refuse to pick up such a book, under the pretext that it is trash. This is just the kind of reader who would dismiss the adversities faced by the characters as 'just fiction.' The whole point of Martha Nussbaum's thesis used in chapter four is that the literary imagination allows the reader to place herself in the shoes of others in radically different positions to her own, to 'enter imaginatively' into their lives, witness how they grapple with dire circumstances that may or may not be of their own fault and empathize enough to care and participate in what happens to the characters, to applaud, to be relieved, to rebuke or be dismayed by the decisions made and the actions taken. The literary imagination is the window through which care and concern for others, imaginary or otherwise, are displayed. It enables the recognition of the other, however strange and distant, as a human being, with similar capacities for joys and sorrows, similar needs, hopes, and ambitions. Nonetheless, the reader, however well-meaning, may be so entrenched in her preconceived ideas and opinions that this window may be shuttered and bolted.

Would a literary masterpiece encourage such a reader to step into those very danger zones that she fears? Nussbaum accepts this dilemma and responds as follows:

On the other hand, what we see in human refusals is not a defect in the type of 'fancy' but a defect in human beings who do not exercise that type of fancy well, who cultivate their human sympathies unequally and narrowly. The remedy for that defect seems to be, not the repudiation of fancy, but its more consistent and humane cultivation; not the substitution of impersonal institutional structures for the imagination, but the construction of institutions and institutional actors, who more perfectly embody, and by institutional
firmness protect, the insights of the compassionate imagination. We need not and should not rely on the fancy of individuals alone. Institutions themselves should also be informed by 'fancy's' insight.\textsuperscript{17}

As Nussbaum argues, defects in the \textit{use} of imagination must not be exploited to censure and nullify imagination itself. This would be tantamount to throwing out the baby with the bath water. However, there are difficulties as to how exactly this task could be carried out by institutions. Philosophers, such as Aristotle, propose the implementation of laws to ensure the right nurture and training from childhood. In the absence of such laws, it becomes a parental duty to inculcate children in right habits. Although a father as teacher has some advantages, the filial connection and one-to-one instruction, patriarchal commands do not have the mandatory force of laws and so it is preferable, for Aristotle and others, that the legislator takes action.

Yet one wonders how practical such a stance would be in the case of fancy. Can the compassionate application of the literary imagination be legislated or promoted by institutions, such as schools? Many laws have been passed since the civil rights movements of the 1960's, and yet the Ku Klux clan is still active today. The cultivation of humanity, compassion, and care for the marginalized and estranged other appears to be as much a family matter as anything else. Eventually, Nussbaum too concedes that at the end of the day perhaps all we can do is to 'create the record' of human valuing and cherishing of others, even if it does nothing more than stand beside 'crudeness and obtuseness.'\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. xviii.
There may be an escape for the blinkered reader in Wayne Booth’s notion of coduction. ‘Coduction’ is a term that Booth has devised to describe the process by which a reader’s initial evaluation of a novel is gradually subjected to change via discussion and interaction with other readers of the novel. He writes,

... *coduction*, from *co* ("together") and *ducere* ("to lead, draw out, bring, bring out"). Coduction will be whatever we do whenever we say to the world (or prepare ourselves to say): 'Of the works of this general kind that I have experienced, comparing my experience with more or less qualified observers, this one seems to me among the better (or weaker) ones, or the best (or worst). Here are my reasons.' Every such statement implicitly calls for continuing conversation: 'How does my coduction compare with yours?'\(^{19}\)

For Booth, the initial response to a novel reflects the reader’s own in-built values and standards. As the reader does not approach the novel as a new-born babe but brings along her own rich experiences, beliefs, principles, emotions, and attitudes, her evaluation may bear the taint of subjective opinion rather than (although he is loath to use the term) knowledge. However, according to Booth, this response is open to re-evaluation when she engages in conversation with others about their responses to the novel. By sharing her thoughts and ideas about the novel, by attempting a thorough justification of her own position as well as criticizing opposing points of view, the reader engages in a dialogue that serves to challenge entrenched positions, to the extent of refining and, perhaps, even transforming her thoughts and subsequently her very life-style. This revision could occur in a moment or take years, but Booth appears confident that such alteration will eventually take place.

Booth describes a case in point. As a professor of Humanities at the University of Chicago in 1962, he and his colleagues were discussing the reading list to be assigned to the incoming freshmen. Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* had been included as part of the reading material for years and it was generally assumed that it would be included again. Instead, on this occasion, it provoked an outburst by the one African-American member of the staff, who simply refused to teach the novel on the grounds that Twain’s portrayal of Jim was extremely offensive to the point of endangering the education of the students.

It was not just the constant usage of derogatory terms that offended Paul Moses, but also the ‘whole range of assumptions about slavery and its consequences, and about how whites should deal with liberated slaves, and how liberated slaves should behave or will behave towards whites, good ones and bad ones.’

This depth of ‘ignorance’ stunned Booth as well as his other colleagues. Writes Booth, ‘I can remember lamenting the shoddy education that had left poor Paul Moses unable to recognize a great classic when he met one. Had he not even noticed that Jim is of all characters closest to the moral center? Moses obviously could neither read properly nor think properly about what questions might be relevant to judging a novel’s worth.’

However, Booth’s gradual realization of the inadequacy of this response to Moses culminated in the writing of *The Company We keep*, which he dedicated to the memory of Paul Moses (‘Teacher and Critic’) who died in 1966. In the final section of *The Company We Keep*, Booth describes the coduction process at work in his reappraisal of

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20 Ibid., p. 3.

21 Ibid., p. 3.
four novels, including *Huckleberry Finn*. He explores the point of view that Jim is a father-figure and protector of Huck as well as the opposing view, that Jim is a buffoon, naive and child-like in his simplicity, pathetically grateful for Huck’s friendship, even after stupid and cruel jokes are played on him. Booth ends that section in a melancholy dilemma.

Having made my case against the book as honestly as possible, I now find a distressing disparity between the force of my objections (along with the relative weakness in the various defenses), and the strength of my continuing love for the book. My ethical criticism has disturbed a surface that was once serene. But instead of making the work and its creator look at least as great as before (Austen), or renovating a wrongly denigrated author (Lawrence), I have somewhat tarnished my hero, and since I cannot wipe from my mind the readings that black critics have imposed, I cannot by a sheer act of will, restore Twain’s former glow. Still, though much of *Huck Finn* amuses me somewhat less when I read it now than it did in times irrecoverable, the achievement still seems to me quite miraculous. On the other hand . . .

Thus, one response to the obtuse reader is the idea that such a reader does not live in isolation. She is engaged in activities that involve her family and community. The provocative ideas presented in the novel may seep into her through such interactions with other members of her society. Other human beings and other modes of communication, such as newspapers, television, and film, are much more intrusive and not so easily dismissed. The reader may eventually have to open her eyes, realize the limitations of her personal experiences and, however reluctantly, select novels that may broaden her understanding.

Richard Posner\(^2\)\(^3\) notes that if discussion of moral dilemmas would make the discussants more moral, then literary critics would have an increased awareness of the

\(^2\) Ibid., p. 477.
choices necessary for the resolution of ethical issues and some standing in the community as guides in this arena, but they 'have rarely achieved the status of moral leaders.' True, but then again, the content of the discussions is important and who knows what small gains are made by the sometimes vociferous altercations that erupt from time to time amongst these critics. There is progress in this clashing of viewpoints. Of course, it must be initiated by an open mind that is willing to give up certainty and entertain the prospect of fallibility in one's most cherished and resolutely held beliefs. There may be something in the ancient idea of smoothing out the edges of rocks by putting them all in a bag and whirling the bag around at high speed. The battering and smashing of the rock-like belief systems against each another succeed, perhaps very painfully, in fashioning a more ethical being. Yet, one must concede that, in spite of his misgivings, Wayne Booth did not stop teaching *Huckleberry Finn* in his classes and considers the book to be an American classic.

Another response to this problem of the blinkered reader is to say that this does not present a difficulty for *Vasiṣṭha*. The obtuse, irrational, even well-meaning reader is analogous to the fool in *Vasiṣṭha*'s world and *Vasiṣṭha* is not interested in teaching the fool who is caught in the grip of sense experiences and has no wish to understand the poisonous nature of sense experiences, much less give them up (V:18). *Vasiṣṭha* will only instruct individuals such as Rāma, who have the unquestionable desire for liberation. In addition, Rāma has had the good upbringing necessary for the cultivation of the ideal moral self. By the time Rāma is sixteen years old, he has lived in the hermitage of his preceptor and, of his own accord, visited the holy places of pilgrimage. He has an
understanding of the dangers of sense pleasures, he has knowledge of the noble deeds befitting a prince, and he has certain unique and particular responsibilities arising out of his caste and spiritual stage in life. He is aware of his responsibilities, trained to preserve the welfare of his people, and thus somewhat immune to the prejudices and hatreds of the fool (I:3).

One final objection that may be raised in this blinkered-reader section is the applicability of Booth’s coduction to Vasiṣṭha’s world, given the controversy surrounding Vasiṣṭha’s views on idealism. In utilizing the dream analogy, Vasiṣṭha addresses the parallels between dream and waking life in different ways. According to Vasiṣṭha, ‘just as people sleeping in one house have different dreams in which they experience life in different worlds, even so, the people have different worlds in the same space, while some may not have’ (VI.2:144). B. L. Ātreya\textsuperscript{24} makes the point that Vasiṣṭha’s idealism can take three forms: subjective idealism, objective idealism, and absolute idealism.

In the first case, Ātreya suggests that Vasiṣṭha may be advocating the solipsistic view of subjective idealism that an individual is closed up in her own private world, a world that is object-filled but not shared by any other. Just as dreaming soldiers are situated within their own individual battle fields, every individual lives in the space of his or her own mind with no access to others (III:40, IV:17). Ātreya also notes that, on the other hand, many references are made to Brahmā, the creator of the cosmos, which promotes Vasiṣṭha’s objective idealism. Brahmā dreams up a fully furnished world and

\textsuperscript{24} Op. cit., pp. 169-175
certain objects in his dream, such as mountains, acquire a kind of solidity and permanency due to his dream lasting many thousands of years. The characters in Brahmā’s dream embrace solitary lives of their own, but unaware of their dream-existence, view their public perceptions as a communal waking world that is substantial and collectively real (III:21,55 etc.). If either of these views is correct, Booth’s coduction would be inapplicable as coduction requires the presence of more than one mind.

Ātreya, however, opts for the third synthesized view, absolute idealism, where Vasiṣṭha utilizes the cosmic consciousness that is the essence and source of everything. Vasiṣṭha notes that just as individuals can share the same hallucination, the individual in the world, although confined to his or her own world, knows another by mutual representation in each other’s consciousness, a representation that is helped by the permanency given to the cosmic dream (III:55, etc.). I would agree with Ātreya that it is the third view that best fits Vasiṣṭha’s idealism. If it were the case that Vasiṣṭha’s world-view was best represented by what Ātreya terms ‘subjective’ or ‘objective’ idealism, the work of the sage after enlightenment would not make sense. The liberated sage sees the world-appearance as it is (an illusion) and has dissolved all I/Thou distinctions. If Vasiṣṭha’s world-appearance is a solipsistic world or a world populated by just one mind and Brahmā, this reality would have been revealed to the sage at enlightenment. She would then simply merge with Brahman, as there are no ‘other’ minds to assist. In enlightenment, all previous illusions including the illusion of ‘other’ minds would be removed leaving only Brahman. Only in a world represented by absolute idealism and
other minds does the notion of a compassionate sage liberated and continuing to live in the world-appearance make sense.

To put it another way, it was pointed out, in chapter four, that there are particular ties and bonds between the imaginations of the individuals populating Vasiṣṭha’s world. Take for example, Brahmā, the Creator, Daśaratha, Rāma’s father, and Rāma. Brahmā’s imagination produces Daśaratha. Daśaratha is not only the character of Brahmā’s world but also the reader in that he ‘reads,’ examines and interprets Brahmā’s story-world in order to interact with it as best he can. In the interactions, Daśaratha is also simultaneously an author. He imposes his own intentions and desires into the story-world. His ‘creation’ is Rāma. Rāma follows the same pattern of being simultaneously character, reader, and author of his own path.

The co-creative activities of Brahmā, Vasiṣṭha, Rāma, etc., militate against both the objective and subjective idealism points of view that each individual is a lone, private constructor of her or his own world, which she or he then takes to be objective and public. It is via the mutual representation in each other’s consciousness, made possible by Brahmā’s own cosmic story-line, that each person is simultaneously not only author, reader, and character of his or her own narrative, but also author, reader, character of other people’s stories. In addition, if individuals know each other by mutual representation and interact with each other, these interactions prevent enlightened beings, such as Vasiṣṭha from simply imagining and conjuring up a better, happier world where everyone is enlightened or firmly on the path to liberation, thereby claiming to have discharged their duties of relieving the suffering of others. Enlightened sages cannot
over-ride the free movement of the other functioning minds and force individuals on the path of liberation. Physical bodies may be subject to fate, destiny, *niyati*, the cosmic order underlying the universe, but minds are free of such constraints and it is through self-effort that individuals live their own stories and even gain enlightenment (III:92). The sage, the seeker, and the fool are co-creators, but each is able to go his or her own way: towards Brahman or towards the world-appearance.

**The Intelligent, Well-Meaning but Blinded Author**

There is the second and deeper problem. Toni Morrison, in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, while exploring the links between 'literary blackness' and 'literary whiteness,' also examines a blind spot, 'the places where imagination sabotages itself, locks its own gate, pollutes its vision.' In particular, she considers the tacit agreement prevalent in American literary circles traditionally under the dominance of white male views, genius and power, that the African presence plays little or no role in informing and shaping the American novel. She writes that this agreement, often cashed out as 'knowledge,' is so embedded in the culture that those literary critics, who are proud to get by without reading any texts by black authors, manage to keep the blinkers on even while reading 'deserving' works of literature that are replete with black characters. For such critics, the characters are merely window

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26 'Literary blackness' and 'literary whiteness' being not just the manner in which characters are portrayed in literature, but also the ways in which writers use their imagination to set up a particular field of play and position the readers' perspectives. See Morrison p. xi.
dressing, adding superficial color to the narrative without impinging on the story in any meaningful way.

Reading as a reader, Morrison bought into this perspective, but reading as a writer, she reports that her eyes were opened to a different possibility. According to Morrison, 'the subject of the dream is the dreamer,' the fashioning of black characters 'a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the writerly consciousness,' 'an astonishing revelation of longing, of terror, of perplexity, of shame, of magnanimity.' She writes, 'It takes hard work not to see this.' Morrison concludes thus:

It was as if I was looking at a fishbowl - the glide and flick of the golden scales, the green tip, the bolt of white careening back from the gills: the castles at the bottom, surrounded by pebbles and tiny intricate fronds of green: the barely disturbed water, the flecks of waste and food, the tranquil bubbles traveling to the surface - and suddenly I saw the bowl, the structure that transparently (and invisibly) permits the ordered life it contains to exist in the larger world. In other words, I began to rely on my knowledge of how books get written, how language arrives, my sense of how and why writers abandon or take on certain aspects of their project... What became transparent were the self-evident ways that Americans choose to talk about themselves through and within a sometimes allegorical, sometime metaphorical, but always choked representation of an Africanist presence.

Morrison is concerned with not just how the initially African and then African-American character is portrayed in the novel, but how the very act of positioning such characters, as mere props and window-dressing for the trials and tribulations of the main (white) characters, betrays, albeit unknowingly, the underlying anxiety and disquietude of the author, and his or her own painful relationship and grappling with the African presence in America. 'The scholarships that looks into the mind, imagination, and behavior of slaves is valuable,' she writes, 'but equally valuable is a serious intellectual effort to see what

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27 Ibid., p. 15.  
28 Ibid., p. 15.
racial ideology does to the mind, imagination, and behavior of the masters. Underlying Morrison's struggle to understand the dismissive marginalization of the African-American in traditional American literature is the presence of a much deeper problem than blinkered readers rejecting attempts to broaden their minds.

According to Morrison (and Nussbaum as well), novels may be pervaded by prejudice, bigotry, and hatred and the members of a society may not know it simply because of the dominant framework of power and authority within which some beliefs flourish and others wither away and die. Even the author may be unaware of the entrenched immorality; even the enlightened reader may unwittingly accept the authorial framework of beliefs. In such a case, it is not so much that the window is bolted but there is no window through which the light of literary imagination can shine. The society itself is so steeped in an intolerant, one-sided picture of the world that it does not recognize the prejudice. If the novel is the fresh air that impels the reader to confront her fears, the problem of the undiscerning reader outlined above can be overcome to a certain extent. There is always the hope that through institutional and/or other means, the windows can be unbarred, unshuttered and thrown open. However, without any kind of aperture already in place, the task is that much more difficult.

I am not presenting the strong skeptical argument that whole societies may be morally bankrupt and simply do not have access to the 'knowledge' that would put matters right. I am making the point that majority sections of whole societies may,

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29 Ibid., p. 11.
intentionally or unintentionally, be morally blind to certain issues. They may either deliberately blindfold themselves in pursuit of their goals or simply fail to realize the moral repercussions of a particular network of beliefs. It is not that they are incapable of discovering the massive error. The information is there, the capacity for acquiring this information is also present, but there is an influence or force operating within the society that precludes noticing gross injustices.

For example, Morrison notes that in a 1936 investigation into the Negro ‘dialect’ of the works of Edgar Allan Poe, the scholar begins the article by writing thus: ‘Despite the fact that he grew up largely in the south and spent most of his fruitful years in Richmond and Baltimore, Poe has little to say about the darky.’ Morrison accepts that this was the polite term of reference in those days but writes, ‘the grimace I made upon reading it was followed by an alarmed distrust of the scholar’s abilities.’ It may be protested that this type of speech, although acceptable in the 1936, is certainly abjured today, and that this reveals the progress made to mend fences, at least, in literary circles. Nevertheless, the point has to made that this kind of careless ignorance can hide and result in millennia of blinkered prejudice and hatred.

How does this impact the Yogavasiṣṭha? The existence of the caste system and the comprehensive disregard of its entrenched immorality by the implicated community is a dilemma that impacts Rāma. Although Vasiṣṭha briefly mentions that even animals and primitive men can reach the highest state of consciousness (III:118) and he does assert

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30 Ibid., pp. 10-11.
that those who have attained self-knowledge go beyond the divisions of caste (VI.1:120,121,122), he does not attempt to undermine the caste system in any way and make inroads into the arena of social justice. He describes the stage of dissolution of the universe as a time of ‘indiscriminate mixing’ between men and women and the breakdown of the social order (VI.2:71). The liberated sage transcends the divisions of caste, the regulations governing the orders of life, the scriptural injunctions and prohibitions (‘even as the lion breaks out of his cage’), but only because she goes beyond all dualities in her identity with Brahman, and the hierarchy of caste is thrown out along with everything else. In fact, the enlightened one is enjoined to live in harmony with the rules and standards of the culture while maintaining her own integrity (VI.2:29).

Even in his stories, Vasiṣṭha portrays the liberation of animals and birds, Bhuṣuṇḍa the crow and the vampire to name just a few, but not the enlightenment of the men and women of the ‘untouchable’ caste. The transformation of a king into a low-caste tribesman, as in the Story of Lavaṇa, and graphic descriptions of the desperate state of the villagers do not promote the necessary changes to an unjust and repressive system. Lavaṇa simply gives them enough wealth to meet their immediate needs and returns to his kingdom. He does not take his tribal wife and children with him. Even in the inner frame of the Story of Gādhi, where Gādhi is cast as a lowly tribal man, he is, in fact, a brāhmaṇa. Vasiṣṭha uses such stories of metamorphosis to emphasize the illusory character of the world. Even respectable kings and brāhmaṇas may end up as tribal men; see into the absurdity of the world!

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It appears that Vasiśṭha, even while placing the burden of liberation squarely on the shoulders of the individual, retains the prevalent social order in which some individuals do not have ready access to the tools of liberation. Rāma asks, how does the ignorant person born in a wicked family, who does not have access to the company of holy ones, overcome samsāra, the repetitive history of birth and death? Vasiśṭha’s response is accidental coincidence. ‘After very many lives, the ignorant man is awakened by accidental coincidence’ (VI.1:126), just as it is accidental that the coconut falls to the ground when the crow alights on the tree. There is no causal relationship between the falling coconut and the alighting crow, just as there is no cause for the unlearned man or woman gaining a foothold on the path of liberation. Thus, Vasiśṭha himself, the teacher of Rāma, by not publicly acknowledging such inequities, forecloses the debate that may have inspired Rāma to make the necessary changes to his kingdom.31

The presence of the obtuse, irrational, even well-meaning reader may not create problems for the fiction analogy, as she is analogous to the fool in the Yogavāsiśṭha, whom Vasiśṭha would leave well alone. However, Morrison’s undiscerning community of authors and readers is Vasiśṭha’s own milieu of highly intelligent, well-educated sages and members of the royal family. The fiction analogy does not adequately deal with the

31 In spite of advances in modern Hindu society, the caste system still raises its head today. Swami Agnivesh, a leading religious reformer and social activist, writes and speaks of the great difficulties in engaging Hindu religious leaders in conversation about the supposed buttressing of the hierarchical caste system by ancient Hindu Scriptures, such as the Vedas. His work also includes anti-slavery issues, such as the abolishment of forced and bonded child labor, as well as the eradication of abuses targeted against women, widow immolation, dowry deaths and female feticide. He has no problem, he says, in engaging in conversation with spiritual leaders about these issues, but few wish to enter into any hermeneutical debate that would open the possibility of a different and more equitable interpretation of caste. (From the talk ‘Social Justice and Human Rights in India Today’, presented by Swami Agnivesh at the University of Hawaii in November 2000.)
deeper problem of entire societies refusing to enter the danger zones that they have succeeded in barricading so well.

**The End Result - Dreaming and Story-Telling**

Vasiṣṭha’s views regarding incoherence, sublatability, evanescence, and the lack of subject-object distinctions in dreams are appropriate characteristics in comparing the world-appearance to a dream. These features are considered by Vasiṣṭha to be sufficient grounds for likening the world-appearance to a dream because these are the very features that are conventionally used to drive a wedge between world and dream. Vasiṣṭha turns conventional thinking on its head and portray these characteristics as also present in the world. Unfortunately, these very same qualities inhibit the transformation of the vāsanās, the mental modifications that form the ground for the breakthrough to Brahman. This serves to shove a well-rounded morality out of the picture.

In Vasiṣṭha’s dream analogy, the dreamer is the creator, perceiver, and participant in the dream-world, but dreams do not function well in the arena of interaction. Each dreamer plays the star role in his or her dream and the other characters are just two-dimensional figures. These characters do speak, move, and act, sometimes in detrimental and fearful ways, but there is a lack of identification with them. It is not so much that in a dream there appears to be contact with other beings, parents, siblings, friends, enemies, although only the dreamer is present. The key point here is that although other beings appear to exist and function in a dream, we do not ‘bond’ (for want of a better word) with
the characters in a dream in the manner in which we bond with characters in stories and with parents, husbands, wives, etc., in the waking world.

This lack of attachment and concern is displayed in the very incoherence and evanescence of dreams. The dreamer may be in dire straits, attempting to rescue her child from the jaws of a tiger. Then, at the very next moment, she may be sipping champagne on the Orient Express, child and tiger forgotten. They are not merely forgotten. They simply drop away and cease to exist. The problem for Vasiṣṭha as far as morality is concerned is that, in dreams, there is simply no relationship between ‘I’ and ‘other’ to bind and strengthen. This facet of dreams that Vasiṣṭha exploits so successfully in obliterating the I/Thou distinction serves only to bury him in a swamp of problems when morality is brought into the picture. There is little opportunity to transform the vāsanās in such a manner as to see the ‘other’ as ‘I’, as non-different from Brahman.

The advantage of the fiction analogy lies in the avenues for transformation of the vāsanās available through the interactions and dialogic possibilities between the author, the readers, and the characters. It emphasizes the development of virtue in the embryonic seeker of liberation, the seeker still thinking of herself as material and real. It highlights the progressive nature of her conversion into an egoless and empathetic sage, who knows that the world is illusion but still continues to act with sympathy and compassion. Both these aspects emphasize a revolutionary shift from the deluded imagination to the creative one, the impure vāsanās to the pure ones. The fiction analogy lays bare the moral connections between the world and Brahman as saccidānanda in a way that the dream analogy does not do.
However, although Vasiṣṭha's world can be plausibly regarded as a story-world and the lives of its inhabitants as the unfolding narratives of different stories, the above discussions have revealed that stories do not enhance the moral personality of every reader. Sometimes the cultural prejudices are so deep that entire societies may be blind to the injustice and cruelty of the systems in place. It is only in the presence of a talented, deeply insightful author, a powerful, more-than-less progressive novel and an attentive, responsive reader that the vital connections between 'I' and 'Thou,' indifference and empathy, may be made. The hope for Vasiṣṭha is that the intelligent author or reader will look beyond the content of his stories to the 'moral' of the story, the metaphysical perspective of tat tvam asi (that thou art) so well illustrated by the stories. She will then see for herself the contradictions inherent in his position and make the ultimate breakthrough from moral blindness to moral knowledge.
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

Summary

Vasiṣṭha faces a dilemma in his attempt to lead Rāma on the path of liberation: his emphasis on morality when the world-appearance is an illusion. This paradox was formulated as follows:

(1) A system of rules that embodies moral considerations relies on the specific nature of morality, and this specificity requires the existence of the individualized agent and the differentiated ‘other’ in order to lend substance to the agent’s regard for the other.

(2) Vasiṣṭha’s concept of dharma embraces this specific nature of morality, and also requires the existence of the individualized agent and the differentiated ‘other’ in order to lend substance to the agent’s regard for the other.

(3) Vasiṣṭha considers the transactional, phenomenal universe to be just an illusion.

(4) For Vasiṣṭha, ‘I’ and ‘Other’ exist separately only in the phenomenal universe. In reality there is no such distinction between individuals.

(5) As individuality and multiplicity exist only in the phenomenal world and not in reality (premise 4), and as the phenomenal universe is just an illusion (premise 3), for Vasiṣṭha, there is no individualized agent or patient and there is no moral agency.

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The conjoining of these postulates gives rise to a contradiction. For Vasiṣṭha, moral considerations are of paramount importance (premises 1 and 2) and yet, his view that the phenomenal world is just a dream undercuts and makes irrelevant the moral imperative (premise 5). If literally the world-appearance is a dream, there is little one can do about it, since any doing would also be dreaming that one is doing. In any case, there is little one needs to do because nothing really wrong is happening and nothing better could really happen.

Vasiṣṭha’s response to this dilemma is to present an argument based on an analogy with dream.

(I) The world is nothing but a long dream, a mere idea in the mind of the ‘dreamer.’

(II) Just as in the dream, the dreamer is caught up in the dream and sincerely believes that her experiences of dream-objects and dream-events are real, the awoken individual is so entangled in the machinations of the world that she regards her sense experiences as constituents of reality.

(III) Given the psychological impact of this phenomenological snare, particularly in the generation of pain or pleasure, it makes sense for individuals to introduce rules of conduct that reduce suffering and increase happiness.

As far as Vasiṣṭha is concerned, an individual in the waking state is just as constrained by the world-appearance as the sleeper by her dream in the dream state. In fact, for Vasiṣṭha,
there is no difference between the two states of consciousness. The dreamer is absorbed by the dream and has no awareness that she is dreaming. She is at the mercy of dream sufferings and dream pleasures. The awakened ‘dreamer’ is in a similar predicament. She is also immersed in the world-appearance and cast adrift in an ocean of desires, aversions, and cravings. Thus, even in a world that is illusion, it makes sense to impose rules of conduct in order to encourage the formation of a calm and harmonious society that aids the process of liberation. Otherwise, as Vasiṣṭha notes, the big fish will simply eat the little fish and chaos will ensue.

In offering such a response, Vasiṣṭha does not reject any of the propositions that give rise to the paradox. All the postulates are still plausible and remain intact. Vasiṣṭha’s solution plays on the assumptions underlying the first and second propositions of the paradox, that the differentiation between agent and patient is necessary to lend substance to the agent’s regard for the other. The supposition here is that one requires the existence of real individuals, real agents and patients, in order for morality to make sense. However, Vasiṣṭha argues that the psychological impact of just believing the world-appearance is real, that there is individuality and multiplicity, that sense experiences generate pleasures and pains, is sufficient to lend substance to the reality of individuality and multiplicity, and justifies the construction and implementation of the rules and regulations governing moral behavior.

Unfortunately, this solution does not resolve all the quirks of the paradox. Vasiṣṭha categorizes the people of the world-appearance as fool, seeker or sage. As far as the fool is concerned, the dream analogy works. She is mesmerized by the world-
appearance and considers herself (and everyone else) to be ‘real.’ However, the seeker is beginning to understand that the world-appearance is illusion and the sage knows without a shadow of doubt that the world is just illusion. Once this realization is awakened in the sage, the paradox springs alive again. Vasiṣṭha describes the sage as the mahākarta (the great doer), the mahābhokta (the great enjoyer), and the mahātyāgī (the great renunciate). She has developed the sattva character of utmost purity. The sage is the embodiment of the ideal moral being. And yet, she knows that the world-appearance is just a dream. Vasiṣṭha’s dream analogy does not have an explanation for this in-depth transformation of character in an illusory world.

This dissertation provides such an explanation via the analogy with fiction. Vasiṣṭha may indeed use the following argument:

(I) Vasiṣṭha’s world-appearance is no more real than the world projected in a story. It is just an idea in the mind of the ‘author.’

(II) Just as the functioning of the literary imagination in stories enhances the moral capabilities of the reader, the creative imagination in Vasiṣṭha’s world-appearance also enables and enriches the development of the ideal moral character.

(III) Given the special function of the creative imagination, it makes sense for the jīvanmukta, who knows the world is illusion, to evolve into Vasiṣṭha’s ideal moral being.
The fiction analogy unravels the conceptual connections between the illusionism of the *Yogavasiṣṭha* world, story-telling as an act of creativity and Vasiṣṭha’s ideal ethical person within the framework of a virtue-based morality. Just as the story enhances the moral personality, Vasiṣṭha’s world-appearance succeeds in producing the enlightened sage whose character is goodness itself. The author or reader of stories knows that the stories are fictional, and yet is drawn into these fictional worlds via her creative imagination and the development of empathetic identification with the characters of the story. Vasiṣṭha’s seeker, beginning to understand that the world is illusion, a fictional story, recognizes that the *tat tvam asi* (thou art that) claim is not just intellectual knowledge of the mind, but also an understanding of the heart that generates empathy with the inhabitants of the world-appearance. The sage is a witness of the unfolding narratives and also a participant, sympathetically involved with those other ‘characters’ immersed in the world-story.

However, it is important to note that the *jīvanmukta*’s moral character in Vasiṣṭha’s world is not justified solely by these connections between stories and the world-appearance. It can be pointed out that the compassionate response of the reader to the characters of a story rests on the reader’s entrenched view that she, herself, is real. As far as the reader or author is concerned, her ego is real. The characters are fictional, but she is pulled into their world through the significance granted to the sufferings of herself and others in the ‘real’ world. Vasiṣṭha’s seeker, on the other hand, goes one step further in that she herself catches this ‘contagion’ of fictionality. She begins to question the reality of her own ego and her own needs and desires. The enlightened sage, who
experiences Brahman in every moment, has completed this process of realization. She understands that she is as much ‘illusional,’ ‘fictional,’ ‘dream-like,’ as other characters in her life-story.

Thus, an explanation of the sage’s deeply moral character is required in a manner that does not just rest on an explanation of her relationships with the fool and the seeker. Such an account concentrates on answering the question, ‘how is it possible for the sage to connect with the unreal characters of a world-story and promote their realization of Brahman?’ The fiction analogy provides a response to this question in terms of the sage as witness/participant, but does not adequately situate the intrinsically loving nature of the sage in the world-appearance. It only goes so far as to present the sage’s virtuous character as promoting the realization of others, in which case just a pretence of concern for others would suffice in Vasiṣṭha’s ‘fictional’ world-appearance.

Of course, Vasiṣṭha’s sage is not presenting a face, a facade to manipulate the inner transformation of others. She embodies the sattva nature. Thus, in order to substantiate the claim that the presence of the ideal moral being is not just accidental or bogus but intrinsic and essential in Vasiṣṭha’s world-appearance, the connections between the world and Brahman are also explored in this dissertation. Brahman is saccidānanda (being, consciousness, bliss). The sage exemplifies Brahman in the world-appearance. She lives her understanding of tat tvam asi revealed as ananda. This is not mindless bliss, but a sympathetic and joyous response to the world and all its inhabitants.
What was Accomplished in the Arena of Morality and Spirituality

This dissertation extends the discussions concerning morality and spirituality within the non-dual metaphysical structure. The dream analogy is predominantly a description of the malady. ¹ In likening the world-appearance to a dream, Vasiṣṭha unveils the human condition in all its transient pleasures and underlying sorrows. The dreamer is the creator as well as the participant in her dream-world, but the dreamer does not know that she is the originator of the dream. She is powerless and hurled around in the dream. This sense of helplessness and the undetectably false impression of objectivity epitomize the predicament of the fool. The world-appearance ‘forces itself’ on the fool just as the dream captures the dreamer. The fool is as much a casualty of her unbridled appetite for the world’s pleasures and aversion for its pains as the dreamer is the victim of the dream.

The fiction analogy is the remedy. It details the steps necessary to enhance the humanity of the human condition. If the illusionism of the Yogavāsiṣṭha world is viewed as a story, then each one of us can be seen as a story-teller, who is simultaneously the author, reader, and the character of the narrative. The insight of the fiction analogy, its aspect as remedy, is that the heroic transformation of the moral psyche is possible in fiction but not so much in dream. The sage’s sattva mind of purified vāsanā is made more credible by a world-appearance viewed as fiction rather than dream. Authors and readers do become the victims of their own stories as well. They are drawn into their stories as much as the dreamer is pulled into the dream. However, in fiction, at least in

¹ I am grateful to Arindam Chakrabarti for this view of ‘malady’ and ‘remedy’ and for pointing out the ways in which dream and fiction seep into one another.

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good fiction, one has the option of stepping back, of being the judicious spectator, the impartial witness. One has also the opportunity of participating in life’s sorrows and joys. As author or reader or even as a character of a story, the capacity for self-effort gives the elbow-room necessary for moral improvement.

What is Still to be Accomplished

And yet, it is a mistake to read this dissertation as rejecting the dream analogy and adopting the fiction analogy or as a sharp division between the two; the dream analogy for the fool and fiction analogy for the āțvanmukta. It must be emphasized and accepted that neither analogy is complete in itself. Dream and fiction seep into one another. This unfinished aspect is a blessing because it leaves open further avenues of exploration, particularly in the different ways in which dream and fiction mesh together and the impact of such a ‘seeping’ on the journey from fool to seeker to sage. There are no sharp divisions between the fool and the seeker, the seeker and the sage. One gradually moves from being a fool to seeker to sage. The moral consequences of such a gradual shift on the individual may be clarified by a greater understanding of the ‘weaving together’ of dream and fiction.

One way to explore these connections would be to view the āțvanmukta’s good life as a good dream and the unfree fool’s life as bad fiction. In the good dream, even though the āțvanmukta is still trapped in the dream, the dream characters may exhibit care and concern for one another. On the other hand, in bad fiction, all of the biases and
prejudices of Vasiṣṭha’s fool arise in full force. She is ensnared by her own stories, creating even more negative vāsanās. Opportunities for transformation may be available to the fool, but she is entrenched in her own perspective so deeply that it leaves no room to maneuver. This turn-around of dream and fiction may provide greater clarification of the seeker’s behavior, sometimes more of a fool than a sage and vice versa.

Another possibility for utilizing the similarities and dissimilarities between dream and fiction is to explore the moral underlying the stories of Vasiṣṭha. Vasiṣṭha uses stories to illustrate that the world is a story. For example, the Story of the Three Non-existent Princes is a tale of princes who are not yet born and live in houses that have not been built. However, Vasiṣṭha also uses stories to illustrate that the world is a dream as in the Story of Lavaṇa. Here a king enters a dream-like trance while being entertained by a magician, undergoes many trials and tribulations spanning several years, then awakens to discover that only a few minutes had passed in his court. Thus, Vasiṣṭha uses fiction to deepen the dream analogy as well as to set the foundations for the fiction analogy. In this dissertation I have argued that Vasiṣṭha subsumes dreams and fictions under the broad umbrella of ‘illusion,’ without distinguishing between them. However, an analysis of the stories, particularly highlighting the differences between the content of ‘dream-stories’ and ‘fiction-stories’ may provide further clarification of the idiosyncrasies unique to dream on the one hand, and fiction on the other, in such a manner as to cast light on how exactly the world-appearance is appearance and the positioning of the fool, seeker, and sage within it.
There are other insights arising from this dissertation that promote further research. The transformation from seeker to sage is understandable given that the burden of virtuous self-effort is willingly shouldered by the seeker. However, the reasons for the shift from fool to seeker are less apparent. The disconsolate Rāma thinks that the hard realities of the sorry world around him made a life of action pointless. He resigns himself to the force of the causal laws embedded in a purely physicalist world. As far as Rāma the fool is concerned, the natural order of things cannot be changed and it is only luck that situates anyone at the ‘right’ place at the ‘right’ time. Vasiṣṭha, on the other hand, insists that there are no hard realities, and thus Rāma’s weary reflections on the futility of life are themselves futile. Paradoxically, for Vasiṣṭha, Rāma’s angst is based on the latter’s realist views of the world and inevitably lead to moral resignation. However, Rāma’s rejection of the world as real makes the moral world possible and alive again. According to Vasiṣṭha, the undercutting of reality by the world-illusion does not dissipate the need for a virtuous life but enhances it. ²

For Vasiṣṭha, the illusory world is a necessary condition for the clarion call, not just to interpret and submit to the world but also to change it. And it does not seem to be the case that such a necessity arises solely because of Brahman. Certainly liberation is the ultimate goal in this text, but, as Vasiṣṭha notes, the path to liberation need not take the shape that it did in the Yogavāsiṣṭha. Brahman is the repository of every possibility, good and bad. Thus, a world can be envisioned in which liberation does not involve Brahman

² I am grateful to Arindam Chakrabarti for this observation.
at all. In such a world too Brahman is the ultimate reality, but remains in the background for ever. Then the issue is whether without Brahman, without the influence of ānanda, would the fool, be he Rāma or the tribesman, hear the call for change or would he be sunk in lethargy for the rest of his life? As Vasiṣṭha asserts, the mind creates a particular world and thus, the mind has the power to ‘uncreate’ it. What if anything would be the impetus for the fool to take on such a task? Is it possible for the non-dualist tradition to find value in a world in which every possibility is available, no restraints and no Brahman in the forefront? This requires further investigation.

**And Finally**

Having succeeded in assisting Rāma towards enlightenment, Vasiṣṭha speaks these final words, emphasizing Rāma’s continued participation in the world.

The world, representing the long some dark and dreary winter night, presents the pure light of knowledge, shining with the serene and cooling beams of the autumnal lunar disk; now, O Rāma, as you edified by your pure intelligence, shake off the dross of dull ignorance from you and continue in the discharge of your duties, as they are lineally descended to you and to your royal race.

Do you remain released from your attachment, to all things of this temporal world; and relying solely in the One supreme and universal soul, whose pure nature is perceptible throughout all nature; then be as lucid as the pellucid sky, with the peace of your mind and transport of your soul, and learn to rule your realm with justice and equanimity.³

The world-as-story analogy, that each of us is a world-maker, a story-teller in the space of the mind, assists Vasiṣṭha in strengthening his ethical message. The method of storytelling is particularly appropriate for activity of the jīvanmukta in the Yogavāsiṣṭha because it forms the springboard by which māyā is turned on its head. Rāma is trapped by

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māyā, the cosmic illusion, but the trapping is of his making and he is free to transform
the activities of the mind. Just as stories remake the mind and remake perspectives of the
world, Rāma’s mind co-creates the egocentric world-appearance, but is given many
opportunities to re-create it. In fictional making-believe, one can do anything, but one
can also exert effort and walk down a different path. If Rāma chooses to act morally over
anything else, with no thought of reward or punishment, he is on the road to becoming
the spontaneously ethical being that reflects Brahman. Ultimately, he is not being
coerced in any way because in a world that is illusion, the retributive laws of nīyati do
not make sense, even liberation does not make sense. It is just Rāma’s individual choice
and effort that puts him on the path of virtue and liberation.

The Yogavāsiṣṭha is not just a poetically beautiful text, but also philosophically
ingenious in that it is self-referential, a feedback loop that begins with story and ends in
story. The text is framed as a story within a story within a story. The story of Vāsiṣṭha
and Rāma is the penultimate frame in which Vāsiṣṭha tells stories to invigorate and
liberate Rāma from his despondency to the extent that Rāma joyously returns to his
moral responsibilities in the governing of his kingdom. These stories in turn introduce the
reader of the Yogavāsiṣṭha to the realization that her own world may be just story too,
that the I/thou distinctions so painstakingly guarded by her ego are as ‘fictional’ as the ‘I’
of the storybook character.

At the end of the day, we are the readers and this turning back and inward into our
own lives is captured by the image of the ouroboros, the serpent devouring its own tail.
The snake is the ego that is nourished by life ‘stories’ and simultaneously destroyed,
allowing us, the fools and the seekers, to emerge individually as the liberated sage, the
mahākarta, mahābhoktā, and mahātyāgī, who embodies Brahman in the world-
appearance. At the end of the day, Brahman is the world-appearance and the world-
appearance is Brahman. As Vasiṣṭha notes in his concluding teachings to Rāma, ‘the
ordinary life itself is the supreme state’ (VI.2:175).
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