LIBERATION WITHOUT ANNIHILATION: PĀRTHASĀRATHI MIŚRA ON *JÑĀNAŚAKTI*

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The problem is simply put, for all that it concerns the ultimate end, and therefore the intellectual focus and religious goal of classical Indian thought. If there is liberation for the self (*ātman*), and it consists in freedom from all the conditions of bondage starting with body, then since awareness - occurrent through the sensory apparatus of the body - is part of that bondage, it too must go; but then, how is liberation different from the annihilation of that self?

This is the particular problem that the 11th-century Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsaka, Pārthasārathi Miśra, attempts to tackle in his interpretation of Kumārila Bhaṭṭa's original, austere view of liberation in the *Ślokavārttika*. I want in these few pages to focus sharply on his suggestion as to how the self's state in liberation must be understood without according any awareness to it.

1. Kumārila and the non-cognitive conception of liberation

Kumārila introduces a systematic conception of liberation quite absent in Jaimini's original Mīmāṃsāsūtra and even in Śabara's 5th-century Bhāṣya. Liberation is the absence of the causes of embodiment. The causes are actions directed at the world and the consequences of those actions that must be met eventually. If there were no actions that led to worldly consequences, there would be no ties to this world and the cycle of lives. Liberation cannot be anything other - or more - than this cessation of ties. So liberation is understood by Kumārila to mean the end of all consequences (to the agent) of action. Liberation is strictly the absence of the action-consequence nexus (*karma*) which is the mark of the unliberated self.

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

Kumārila here calls upon a metaphysical principle - nothing that is caused, nothing that is an effect or product, can be eternal - to argue for his negative conception of liberation. Liberation is not an effect brought about or caused by anything, for if it were, it would be a product and therefore perishable. Liberation merely is the logically equivalent term for the cessation of bondage. The cessation of bondage is not metaphysically problematic, for it is simply the end of productive action.

This is a severe and minimalist position, and the metaphysical principle involved could be the subject of analysis. My aim here, however, is not to explore the reasoning behind this Mīmāṃsā conception of liberation but to grant its coherence and examine Pārthasārathi's attempt to cope with its implications.

Pārthasārathi's reasoning in support of the austere and non-cognitive conception of liberation utilises the Mīmāṃsā view of the necessary role of the psychophysical apparatus in experience.

> The world binds the man in three ways: through the body which is the home of enjoyment, [through] the senses which are the means of enjoyment and [through] the objects - like sound and so on - which are enjoyed. Enjoyment is that which has happiness and suffering as its objects, and it is said to be immediate experience. Thus, liberation is the permanent dissolution of these three bonds. What is this permanent dissolution? It is the destruction of the already existing body, senses and objects, and the non-origination of that which has not already arisen. How does this permanent non-origination come about? Through the utter extinction of virtue and vice that are the originators [of bondage]. Thus, bondage is being bound to the world and liberation is liberation from it. (*ŚD*, p. 265)[2]

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1 *na hi kāraṇavat kiṃcidakṣayitvena gamyate; tasmāt karmakṣayādeva hetvabhāve na mucyate. na hy abhāvātmakaṃ muktvā mokṣanityatvakāraṇam...*

2 *tredhā hi prapañcaḥ puruṣaḥ badhnāti bhogāyatanaṃ śarīraṃ bhogasādhanānīndriyāṇi bhogyāḥ śabdādayo viṣayāḥ. bhogeti ca sukhaduḥkaviṣayo 'parokṣānubhavocyate. tad asya*

Liberation is from the conditions of embodiment, and cognition is possible only when embodied, so liberation cannot include any cognition. Pārthasārathi is motivated by the defence of this claim in his tight and sustained argument against the Advaitic notion that the content of liberation is given by blissful awareness. He concludes that the proper interpretation of Mīmāṃsā liberation is an absential one.

> His [Kumārila's] doctrine is in the statement of [the] absential nature [of liberation] alone ... It is not possible for the freed one to experience bliss, for there are no organs. Could it be said that the mind exists? No, as the sacred text says of mindlessness, 'Without mind, without speech.' (*ŚD*, 268)[3]

Incidentally, it must be noted that later Mīmāṃsakas, perhaps influenced by the general drift towards Vedāntically inspired systematisation of *bhakti* or devotional religion, utterly re-interpret Kumārila. They assert without much ado, when they do deal with liberation, that it is a state of bliss. Thus, the composite 16th-century work attributed to Nārāyaṇa has this to say of liberation.

> The followers of Kumārila hold that freedom is the enjoyment, through the mind, of the bliss that abides in the self, when suffering has been utterly removed. (*Māna-meyodaya*, p. 212)[4]

Nārāyaṇa insists thereafter that the reason why this natural bliss is not experienced in life is that it requires the mind to exist without the body, the senses, etc. Clearly, some considerable distance has opened between this work and Kumārila's of a thousand years before.

To return to Pārthasārathi: he unwaveringly denies all cognitive content to liberation, arguing that it is precisely the removal of all the conditions under which there can be bliss, or any other state of awareness, that constitutes liberation. Now, I will not examine one other worry for the Mīmāṃsā conception of liberation in detail because

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trividhasyāpi bandhasyātyantiko vilayo mokṣaḥ. kim idam ātyantikatvaṃ. pūrvotpannānāṃ śarīr-endriyaviṣayāṇāṃ vināśaḥ anutpannānāṃ cātyantiko 'nutpādaḥ. katham atyantānutpattiḥ. utpādakayor dharmādharmayor niḥśeṣayoḥ parikṣayāt. so 'yaṃ prapañcasambandho bandhas tadvimokṣaś ca mokṣaḥ.

3 *abhāvātmakatvavacanam eva svamatam ... na hi muktasyānandānubhavaḥ saṃbhavati karaṇābhāvāt. manaḥ syād iti cet. nāmanaskatvaśruteramano 'vāk iti.*

4 *duḥkhātyantasamucchede sati prāgātmavartinaḥ sukhasya manasā bhuktir muktir uktā kumārilaiḥ.*

it is about the psychology of motivation and not about the issue on hand. It is objected that liberation could not provide motivation as a human goal if it did not consist in some such state as bliss or exalted happiness (*ānanda*). The strictly absential notion of liberation would utterly fail to move humans to seek it. Parthasārathi attempts to meet this worry by analysing the nature of human motivation, and argues that happiness in fact is not the prime motivator that his opponent takes it to be. The main issue for Pārthasārathi, then, is to meet the worry that liberation, as he understands it, would be no different from annihilation.

In brief, Pārthasārathi's solution is to claim that, while the self is not conscious in liberation, it has cognitive potency (*jñānaśakti*); this potency could not be there if the self were not, and therefore, the self in the non-cognitive state of liberation is not itself non-existent.

2. The idea of newly-created potential for future consequences

Pārthasārathi's development of the idea of cognitive potency in fact derives from the well-established and crucial Mīmāṃsā idea that ritual action creates and stores up the potential for eventual consequences for the agent of action. In order to situate Pārthasārathi's innovative use of potency in the context of non-cognitive liberation, I will examine as briefly as possible, the original and well-known Mīmāṃsā idea of '*apūrva*', from which he explicitly derives '*jñānaśakti*'.

The question the Mīmāṃsaka asks himself is what the mechanism is that guarantees the relationship between ritual-moral actions like sacrifices and their consequences like heaven. He asks himself this question because he wants to defend his claim that the injunctions of the Vedas to ritual action must be followed; and they must be followed because they extract conformity between action and consequence, i.e., they guarantee that actions have consequences.

Śabara and, after him, Kumārila, take recourse at this stage in the notion of *apūrva*. This literally means 'unprecedented'. In Jaimini's original use of it, it is nothing more than that which is new at the

commencement of a ritual action. Śabara proceeds to develop on this bare notion.[5]

> [Sūtra:] '[There is] injunctive power, because there is recommencement' (2.1.5) [Commentory:] We call injunctive power itself the extraordinary potential. Extraordinary potential is that which comes into existence anew. Such commencement is taught in [such texts as] 'if desirous of heaven, one should perform sacrifice'. Otherwise (if there were no such thing as extraordinary potential), such an instruction would be meaningless. The sacrifice itself decays, so that if the sacrifice were to perish without bringing about something else, then with the determinate cause not existing, the result [like heaven] too could never exist. From this it follows that something is brought into existence [by the sacrifice]. It may be thought that on the strength of the declaration of a certain result following from a certain sacrificer, the act of sacrifice itself does not perish (but persists until the result). But this [thought] is useless. We never get at the act in any other form (than the perishable, temporal one). (*ŚaB*, 2.1.5, p. 366)[6]

Typically, the aphorism is enigmatic. Śabara draws his favoured meaning out of it. Recommencement, he understands as the new and specific re-starting, upon the performance of particular acts, of the potential for consequences. While an agent may have accrued the potential for ill consequences through indulging in acts prohibited by the sacred text, a proper act thereafter will carry its own potential for good consequences. These latter will counter or even cancel the consequences of the former act. The potential for any specific act is newly created upon the performance of that act. That is what Śabara takes 'recommencement' to mean.

The more complex interpretation is of 'injunctive power' as implying the unprecedented or the 'extraordinary potential'. The unprecedented is that which is created when there is a ritual or moral

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5 For a rigorous and intricate study of Śabara's and Kumārila's development of Jaimini's originally simple use of the term, see Clooney, F. X. *Thinking Ritually: Rediscovering the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā of Jaimini*, De Nobili Research Library, Gerold and Co., Vienna, chapter VII.

6 *codanā punarārambhaḥ* (II.1.5). *codanetyapūrvaṃ brūmaḥ. apūrvaṃ punarasti. yat ārambhaḥ śiṣyate svargakāmo yajeteti. itarathā hi vidhānam anarthakaṃ syāt. bhaṅgitvād yāgasya. yadyadanutpādya yāgo vinaśyet phalam asati nimitte na syāt. tasmād utpādayatīti. yadi punaḥ phalavacanasamarthyāt tad eva na vinaśyatīti kalpyate. naivaṃ śakyam na hi karmaṇo 'nyad rūpam upalabhāmahe.*

action. Śabara identifies the potential for consequences with the power of the texts to enjoin actions with guaranteed results. The performance of a ritual leads to a desirable consequence after life. The potential for specific consequences of that act must be brought into existence because, while consequences for the agent do not follow immediately from these acts, nonetheless they must follow at some time, since the Vedas assert that they do. And where the Vedas do not specify the consequence, surely it cannot be the ashes of the sacrifice that alone provide the perceptible result of the ritual. This is what sustains the necessary relationship between a ritual act and the consequence the Vedas say follow from that act, even when there is an intervening time in which the consequence is not realised. This is neither idle speculation, according to the Mīmāṃsaka, nor an expression of a hope. This is a nomological statement, though, sadly, we must conclude, one based on faith alone.[7]

The consequence simply - and eventually - follows when an agent performs the ritual action. In this, the ritual connection parallels physical laws, like 'bruising happens to the body if it falls' (note that I am not wandering into the issue of whether these laws embody necessary or contingent truths; that does not seem to have been a distinction of much concern to the classical Indian philosophers). It is intrinsic to the nature of ritual action that, upon its performance, this extraordinary potential comes into being. As Kumārila puts it in his development of Śabara's idea:

> We call it 'extraordinary potential' that fitness in the principal action or the person which comes of a prior action, a fitness duly derived from sacred teachings. (*TV*, II.1. 5, vol. II, p. 345)[8]

The proper functioning of the principal action in a ritual manifests itself in the potential for eventual fructification of the consequences of that action. The proper endowment of the agent of that action is the potential for meeting those consequences.

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7 Clooney points out that the idea of potency, despite the claim that it is established by presumptive testimony and therefore validly established, is really based on faith; ultimately, presumption from the sacred text depends on nothing but commitment to the truth of the Vedas; p. 227.

8 *karmabhyaḥ prāg ayogyasya karmaṇaḥ puruṣasya vā, yogyatā śāstragamyā yā parā sā 'pūrvam iṣyate.*

There must be recourse to extraordinary potential: this alone can explain the difference between merely physical consequences and the ritual-moral consequences of sacrifices. If there is a sacrificial fire, then the smoke from it occurs at that time; in contrast, the purificatory consequence, which the agent is Vedically guaranteed to enjoy, could happen after this life. As Śabara points out, the sacrifice itself cannot persist until its ritual-moral consequences are realised. Extraordinary potential is what makes 'action at a distance' possible.

The Mīmāṃsaka combines a sceptical modesty about knowledge of the physical world ('we never get at the act in any other form') which rejects anything that is not available to the senses, with a bold acceptance of suprasensory forces so long as that acceptance seems to be inferrable from the requirements of the sacred text. But perhaps this is not so indefensible. The Mīmāṃsaka argues that only appeal to an unseen force could fit the theory that the Vedas are guarantors of appropriate consequences. I will return to this in a moment, when I deal with Pārthasārathi's postulation of *śakti*. But then, he also argues that the authority of the Vedas is itself available to our examination. His explicit claim as regards the veracity of Vedic statements is this:

> Here, as always, nothing is asked for which is not directly seen ...(*ŚV*, II.99)[9]

The working of the Vedas presents itself to our scrutiny; that is simply a matter for investigation. Actually, bold though this is, Kumārila cannot help himself to it, for on the crucial matter of what the Vedic injunctions guarantee, he himself has said that the extraordinary potential which ritual actions create is unseen. Still, this is, as it were, rock bottom for the Mīmāṃsaka; at this point, there is no more philosophy, only a simple appeal to what actually happens (or, his opponents will say, what he claims happens).

Kumārila, incidentally, emphasises that the distinction between the immediate physical consequence of the sacrifice - the smoke or the ash - and the eventually realised potential of the sacrifice does not capture a more general difference. It is this latter difference which is really relevant to his conception of sacred and authoritative guarantee of consequences.

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9 *idānīm iva sarvatra dṛṣṭānnā 'dhikam iṣyate ...*

> Even in the ordinary world, the results of actions such as farming, drinking clarified butter or studying come forth only after a while. Inasmuch as it is not possible for them to persist in that manner, it must be thought that they persist through some subtle influence. However, as these [actions] are not Vedic, the subtle influence [that they generate] is not considered to be extraordinary potential. (*TV*, II.1.5, vol. II, p. 346)[10]

(Drinking clarified butter was supposed to be performed by a certain class of sages, for purificatory purposes.) After all, even studying takes a while for its results to show (one hopes); in that sense, the act of studying too might be thought to have the potential to make the student learned. And the seeds have the potential to ripen into corn. Kumārila therefore restricts the boundary of extraordinary potential. It is not the fact of its occurring only in non-immediate connections, which marks it out. It is the fact of its occurring only in Vedically relevant actions that makes it special.

Pārthasārathi, however, wants exactly to generalise the claim to potency; he wants it to be a feature of reality. In the course of his defence of the Mīmāṃsā claim that 'presumption' (*arthāpatti*) is an independent means of knowledge, he claims that it is possible to establish the causal connection between a seed and the sprout only through the presumption that the seed has a potency - *śakti* - to produce the sprout. He then feels it necessary to argue for the existence of such a potency.

> When the seeds exist, it is seen that the sprouts come up, when not, they are seen not to; so, we arrive at the conclusion that the seeds are the cause of the sprouts. Even if they exist, if the seeds are smelt by rats, they cease to cause sprouting (literally: become non-causes of sprouting). The concept of potency settles the issue of this incompatibility between the [seeds] being the cause and not being the cause. So, the idea is that there is a supra-sensory feature; the sprouts come up if it is present, and if it is

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10 *yāny api ca laukikāni kṛṣighṛtapānādhyayanaprabhṛtīni karmāṇi kālāntaraphalatve neṣyante teṣām api svarūpāvasthānāsaṃ bhavāt saṃskārair eva tiṣṭhadbhir vyavahārasiddhiḥ. te tv avaidikatvāt saṃskārā nāpūrvaśabdābhidheyatvena prasiddhāḥ.*

> destroyed through rats smelling it, they do not come up. (*ŚD*, p. 151)[11]

In effect, Pārthasārathi provides what is called, in Western philosophy since Kant, a transcendental argument: only if things were a certain way would there be such experiences as we have. That is to say, in order to provide a satisfactory account of what is available in our experience, we have to take recourse in things that lie beyond that experience. This is probably the best way of understanding the nature of presumption: as a having to go beyond the senses in order to know something about what is within their grasp; and thereby grasp them. (The Naiyāyikas, against whom these arguments are directed, were reluctant to accept this shifting of the borders of the graspable.) Pārthasārathi, then, claims that only if there were potency, which is admittedly beyond our senses, could there be the sprouting of plants from seeds, which process is within our sensory grasp. This is based on the argument that nothing within the grasp of out senses could explain sprouting.

Of course, the example is a bad one, utterly hostage to the discoveries of biology. If, on the other hand, it is said in his defence that the actual biological process merely describes what happens physically and chemically, but does not explain why that process has that effect (rather than some other), postulating potency does not help either. But the core philosophical notion still seems worthwhile: it may be required to accept within any explanation of what is available to the senses some factor that is beyond it.

Pārthasārathi then explicitly links this idea of potency with the traditional Māmāṃsā doctrine of the unprecedented, the extraordinary potential.

> The concept of potency in oblation, the extraordinary potential for securing heaven and the like, must be granted ... It resides in the self ... And the potency, [otherwise] called extraordinary potential, being located [initially] in the oblation, does not, upon the oblation perishing, secure the consummation of heaven; so it must be presumed to be

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11 *bījādiṣu satsv aṅkurādyutpattidarśanāt asatsu cādarśanād bījādīnām aṅkurādikāraṇatvam avagamyate. satsv api bījeṣu mūṣikāghrāteṣv aṅkurānutpatter akāraṇatvaṃ pratibhāsate. so 'yaṃ kāraṇatvākāraṇatvayor virodhaḥ śaktikalpanayā samādhīyate. nūnamasty atīndriyam api rūpaṃ yadbhāvāt kadacid aṅkurotpattiḥ yasya ca mūṣikāghrāṇena nāśāt kadācid anutpattir iti kalpyate.*

> located in the agent ... This [understanding] is generally accepted. Even after some time has elapsed since the oil has been drunk, it is normal for people to say, 'I have become strong and healthy'. (*ŚD*, pp. 252-3)[12]

Again, the example utterly fails to conceptualise the situation as being one amenable to a reductive study as of how oil does (if it does) have these physiological effects. But again, we may grant that perhaps Pārthasārathi is only concerned with the metaphysical nature of oil to produce the effect of health, a concern that the modern, biological explanation will not effect. If that is plausible, then, his more specific point is that the realisation of this potency can occur mediately.

He here identifies the older, sacred and impersonal concept of extraordinary potential as the power of the ritual (to have a law-like connection with a result), with the profane and metaphysical notion of potency in general. Having identified them, he locates the power thus defined in the human being who is the ritual agent. The stage is set for the next extension of the concept of potency, to another quality than ritual consequentiality: namely, the consciousness of the self of action. It is with that that he offers a defence against the threat of annihilation.

3. Non-cognition, cognitive potential and defusing the threat of annihilation

Kumārila is content to leave liberation merely negatively characterised as the ending of all conditions of cognition. But Pārthasārathi is also interested in taking on the Advaitins, who in the centuries after Kumārila became powerful opponents of Mīmāṃsā, in the exegesis of the Upaniṣads. The particular problem for the Mīmāṃsaka is that certain passages seem to indicate that liberation is a supremely cognitive matter, in which consciousness of self is all. How can this be squared with the extinction of cognition, which the Mīmāṃsaka says is the very nature of liberation? Exegesis, then, provides the interpretive context for Pārthasārathi's attempt to distinguish Mīmāṃsā liberation from annihilation.

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12 *yāgāder apūrvasvargādisādhanaśaktikalpanam ūhanīyam ... ātmādhāratvāt ... sā ceyam apūrvākhyāśaktir yāgāśrayā satī yāgavināśān na svarganiṣpattaye paryāpnuyādityātmāśrayā kalpyate ... loke 'pi prasiddham etat tailapānasāmarthyāc ciravṛtte 'pi tasmin balapuṣṭyādikamadya me jātam iti laukikā vyavaharanti.*

Pārthasārathi's basic defence is that in liberation the cessation of cognition is not the loss of the capacity for cognition. Annihilation would mean that there could never be anything left that could cognise again. But in Mīmāṃsā liberation, the self persists (it is what is liberated, after all), and its persistence means that there is something left which could cognise again.

> The import of the text, 'No destruction of the cognition of the cogniser is known', is that there is cognitive potency; or else, it will have to be said that cognition continues even in deep sleep. It has been said that that just goes against all understanding. The import of cognitive potency is very clear: for it is taught, 'When it does not see, even while seeing it does not see'. There is no destruction of the sight of the seer, for it is not annihilated; 'Apart from it, there is no second that, being other and distinct from it, it could see' (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, IV.3.23). (*ŚD*, p. 269)[13]

The defence is supposed to work through the introduction of the idea of potency. The Advaitin[14] admits that the assertion that the self does not see in liberation means that there is nothing - no thing - for the self to see without the operation of the senses. But, he argues, this only means that, since they are absent, there is no specific (i.e., objectual) seeing.[15] That is to say, there is no cognition as there is of and in the world, during embodied existence before liberation. That is not to say that there is no consciousness as such. It is this contention that the Mīmāṃsaka finds baffling, because he cannot think of consciousness as anything other than intentional, as having specific objects. If they are not there, there is no objectless (or pure) consciousness. Having denied objectless consciousness as the appropriate description of the state reported as being both a seeing and a non-seeing in this Upaniṣad, Pārthasārathi has to postulate potency in order to secure the seeing. The seeing is a capacity to see, while the not seeing is the simple absence of consciousness in the post-embodied state. The Advaitin, in contrast,

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13 *yat tu na hi vijñātur vijñāter viparilopo vidyate iti tajjñānaśaktyābhiprāyam anyathā hi suṣuptāv api jñānānuvṛttir uktā syāt. sā ca saṃvidviruddhety uktam. vispaṣṭaṃ cāsya śaktyabhiprāyatvam. evaṃ hi śrūyate yadvai tan na paśyati paśyan vai tan na paśyati. na hi draṣṭur dṛṣṭer viparilopo vidyate 'vināśitvāt na tu taddvitīyam asti tato 'nyadvibhaktaṃ yat paśyet.*

14 *Śaṅkara Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣadbhāṣya*, Anandashrama Sanksrit Series, Poona, 1902, pp. 617-20.

15 *tadabhāvād viśeṣadarśanaṃ nāsti*, p 620.

takes seeing to be the intrinsic persistence of consciousness, the not seeing as the end of merely intentional consciousness.

Pārthasārathi then makes a sophisticated argument. The relationship of consciousness to the self is simply the corollary of the relationship between world and self.

> If here [in sacred texts on the matter] the self does not see in sleep and freedom, [this means that] though seeing - although having the capacity to see - it does not see. There is never any loss of the cognitive potential of the seeing self; that is indestructible. In that state [sleep or freedom], there is no second thing apart from the seer to be the means of seeing; there is no perceived object upon whose form the eye could function, [and] whose existence could have secured [any such] seeing. Even though perceived objects, forms, etc., remain existent by themselves (in their own right), it is said that, nevertheless, in that state, the visibility (the fitness to be seen) of the visible [objects] is not possible, so that there is no seeing of forms. Thus, the absence [of any seeing of objects] is figuratively spoken of as the non-existence of the visible object. Hence, because of the deprivation of a distinct means [of seeing], it [the self] does not see in that state, but it is not deprived of its potency; the potency is never lost. (*ŚD*, pp. 271-2)[16]

First he reasserts the self's cognitive potency, its unmanifested capacity to cognise. Then he moves on to his argument. There is no world in the sense that there is no cognition of the world, in sleep and in liberation. That is because the senses, the instruments of cognition of the world, do not operate in sleep and do not exist in the post-embodied state of freedom. But if there is an absence of perception of objects, what other perception could there be? If there is seeing, there is seeing of objects; if there is no seeing of objects, there is no seeing per se. This, he implies, can be generalised about any other form of cognition (say, of intellection about abstract entities; there would be no body, thus no mind, therefore no reasoning). So, if there is no cognition of the world,

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16 *tad etat suṣuptau muktau vātmā na paśyati paśyann eva draṣṭuṃ śaknuvann eva na paśyati. na hi draṣṭur ātmano yā darśanaśaktis tasyāḥ kadācid api lopo vidyate. sā hy avināśinīti na draṣṭur dvitīyam ānyaddarśanasādhanaṃ cakṣurvyāpārarūpaṃ dṛśyaṃ vā tasyām avasthāyām asti yato darśanaṃ syāt. yady api dṛśyaṃ rūpādikaṃ svarūpatas tasyām avasthāyām asti tathāpi dṛśyatā darśanayogyatā tasyām avasthāyāṃ nāstīti tena rūpeṇābhāvād dṛśyaṃ nāstīty ucyate. tasmāt sādhanāntaravaikalyāt tasyām avasthāyāṃ na paśyati na śaktivaikalyāt. śaktis tu na kadācid api lupyateti.*

there is no cognition. There is just a cessation of the connection between the world and the cognising subject.

Pārthasārathi seems to think that the same can apply to the self. The world, after all, survives uncognised; that is central to Mīmāṃsā realist metaphysics. There are things - most generally, the world of natural objects - that are the way they are even without there being any cognitive operation on them. Pārthasārathi argues that, equally, the self too persists cognitively inoperatively. That is to say, the self itself has an existence independent of cognitive operation. It is not its existence that ends when the condition for its operation - embodiment - ceases, but its operation. Its persistence in the inoperative state is what is meant by potency. It can become operative - conscious - again, if there is reestablishment of the condition of its operation.

Pārthasārathi vigorously defends the consistency of this view with the teachings of the Upaniṣads. In a typically ingenious reading of a famous passage on the self, he proposes the Mīmāṃsā view as the best explanation on offer. In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (II.4.13), Maitreyi says that it is confusing of Yājñavalkya to say that 'sentience is absent in it' (*na cāsti saṃjñeti*) when it is dead and freed. He has, after all, earlier said of the self that it is 'nothing but sentience' (*vijñānaghana*). Pārthasārathi states and interpets Yājñavalkya's response thus:

> 'Oh, but I do not say anything that confuses through contradiction. It is indeed able to cognise.' This means that the truth about the self is that, in all its states, it has the capacity to cognise. It is, then, the case that the explanation that the self is nothing but sentience is intended to point out such capacity ... All such sacred texts on sentience intend to point out potency. (*ŚD*, pp. 272-3)[17]

Pārthasārathi's reading of Yājñavalkya's assertion, that the self is nothing but sentience even while not being sentient in liberation, is that the self has the potency for sentience. Its having the potency for sentience means that the sentience is not actual, not operative; that accords with the denial of sentience. But its having the potency means that it is defined by that quality, which accords with the rigid

17 *na vā 're 'haṃ mohaṃ parasparaviruddhaṃ bravīmi. alaṃ vā 're idaṃ vijñānāya. atrātmatattvaṃ sarvāsvavasthāsu vijñānāyasāmartham ity arthaḥ tena vijñānaghanatvābhidhānaṃ sāmarthyābhiprāyām iti vyākhyātaṃ bhavati ... sarvavijñānaśrutayaḥ śaktyabhiprāyā vyākhyātāḥ.*

designation of it as nothing but sentience. Again, the contrast is with Śaṅkara's well-known Advaitic interpretation.[18] He says that the absence of sentience is the absence of specific cognitions individuated by objects and grasped through the senses. The self being nothing but sentience is the self in its intrinsic state (for the Advaitin allows consciousness to be reflexively manifest without the apparatus of the body). When Yājñavalkya talks of the free self being 'able to cognise', this is precisely to indicate that the end of embodiment in no way means the end of sentience, for the self is always sentient.

The contrast can be put thus: for the Advaitin, the ability to cognise implies an actual, i.e., manifested, quality; anything less would not count. Ability is understood through either episodes or continuous occurrence of the quality concerned. For the Mīmāṃsaka, the ability to cognise implies the potential to manifest a quality as opposed to actually manifesting it. Ability is understood by a disposition, even when it is not occurrent. What is it to say that a person is able to sing? The Advaitic interpretation would emphasise the fact that the person is a singer, and is always such a person (i.e., is not tone-deaf or gravel-voiced at times and a singer at others). The Mīmāṃsā interpretation would emphasise that the person has the potential to give voice (i.e., does not sing all the time). This difference of interpretation is heavy with other conceptual commitments on both sides. I have described it in brief here, not to explore the comparative dimension but to indicate how specific to his theory is Pārthasārathi's reading of the sacred passage.

It is astute of Pārthasārathi to use that particular example; it lends itself to his way of resolving the tension which Maitreyi had pointed out between the two characterisations. Pārthsārathi concludes that the sacred texts themselves make clear the validity of his argument for non-cognitivity.

4. Non-cognitivity, potency and the self as object

The conception of liberation as the attainment by the self of a state without cognitive activity but with cognitive potency is tied up with various Mīmāṃsā ideas of the self. I will end my presentation of

18 *Śaṅkara Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣadbhāṣya,* Anandashrama Sanksrit Series, Poona, 1902, pp 358-9.

Pārthasārathi's theory of potency with a consideration of the way a central Mīmāṃsā idea of the self, namely that the self is the object of its own consciousness, relates to the issue of potency.

The relevant Mīmāṃsā claim, then, is that consciousness of the self takes the form of 'I'-thoughts. The 'I' denotes the self. As Kumārila says of the 'I'-thought (as that type of state of consciousness that has the self as its object):

> Its nature is not to have as an object anything other than the cogniser, for we always find the cogniser to be the cognised object of the 'I'-thought. (*ŚV*, V.18. 126)[19]

Pārthasārathi echoes this view:

> It is indisputable that the cognising subject (the cogniser) is the object of the 'I'-notion; one who apprehends, apprehends his own self as the 'I' and another as 'this'. Thus, it is beyond doubt that it has the cogniser as its perceptible object. (*ŚD*, p. 251)[20]

This is the Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsaka's core reason for taking the self to be the object of that particular species of conscious states. We could not go here into either a defence or a critique of this theory of self. Suffice it to say that it has been one of the great debates of Indian philosophy and parallels one in Western thought. Both the Buddhist, who denies that there is a self, and the Advaitin, who denies that the self is ever an object, will argue that 'I' is merely the form of states of consciousness contingently given identity by a psychophysical complex called the person. To the extent that a person uses the first person in a reflexively unique way, that person is denoted by the 'I'. Everyone is agreed on that. But surely, they will argue, this cannot by itself mean that there is therefore a particular abstract or immaterial entity that is denoted by the 'I'. In other words, they will contend that the Mīmāṃsaka invents an object that can be picked out by 'I'-states of consciousness. He is misled into thinking that it is there because he finds that there is an uncontroversial object - the psychophysical complex - that can

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19 *jñāturnyaś ca viṣayas tasya na syāt svabhāvataḥ, ahaṃpratyayavijñeyo jñātā naḥsarvadaiva hi.*

20 *jñātṛviṣayas tāvad ahaṃpratyaya ity avivādam. yo hi parāmṛśati sa svātmānam aham iti parāmṛśati parānidam iti. tena niḥsaṃśayam asya jñātṛgocaratvam ...*

conventionally stand for what is picked out by 'I'-thoughts that are uniquely limited to the parameters set by that complex.

However, the Mīmāṃsaka can argue that it has not been proven that such an object has merely been invented by him. His is still the best explanation for why there is the persistence of those uniquely reflexive 'I'-thoughts. He knows perfectly well that the psychophysical complex is what is normally picked out as the 'I'; Parthasārathi explicitly states, in the course of his presentation of a theory of self, that the intimacy between self and body leads to this mistake. But upon giving up the notion that that psychophysical complex (the body) is the self - a renunciation his opponents share with him - it is they who swing to the other extreme of denying that anything at all is picked correctly by the 'I' thought. The candidate for what is picked up by the 'I'-thought is evident: that which has those thoughts, that which possess the quality of having thoughts at all. As Kumārila prefaces his contention that the self is the object of the 'I'-thought,

> ... The 'I'-thought is not a wounding illusion, removed by an overriding cognition. (*ŚV*, V.18.125)[21]

He is convinced by the persistence of the sense of an 'I' that it cannot be without an object. This is his protest against the radical revision of the understanding of the nature of consciousness that the Yogācārin of his time seems to be calling for through a rejection of the objective existence of the self.

Pārthasārathi concludes his sub-section on cognitive potency with the claim that a key teaching of the Upaniṣads should be understood in terms of his theory of potency.

> Due to the non-existence of the means [of cognition], the cognition of objects other than the self is ruled out. But there is yet the doubt as to why it is not admitted that the self cognises itself in freedom; so it is said [in the sacred texts], 'by what could one cognise the cogniser?' The self indeed does not have the capacity to cognise without the means. It does cognise through the mind in the state of worldly existence, but there is no relationship with the mind in freedom. Hence, how could the self cognise itself? Obviously, self-cognition is therefore absent in one who is

21 ... *na cā'hampratyayo bhrāntir iṣṭo bādhakavarjanāt.*

> free. The sacred texts have pointed out that only the potency for cognition is resident [in the self]. (*ŚD*, pp. 273-4)[22]

Of course, it is not incontestable that the question, 'by what should one cognise the cogniser?' should be understood only in this way. The Advaitin's interpretation of this would be that the cogniser - the subject self of all conscious states - is never itself the object of cognition. The self always escapes being the object of cognition. Whatever is cognised, the cognition itself is not cognised; and the self is the entity reflexively instantiated in that cognition. That is to say, when there is a cognition, there is within the content of that cognition itself, an ascription to that which is cognising; and that which cognises is the self. The self is therefore always constitutively required for cognition, but cannot, for that very reason, be that which is contingently cognised.

Against this way of reasoning, the Mīmāṃsaka, as we have just seen, holds it possible for the self to be the object of a particular form of cognition, the 'I'-cognition. All cognition requires embodiment. All cognition is of objects. The self is an object as well. In liberation, there is no embodiment, hence, no cognition even of the self that has the capacity to cognise. That is what the sacred assertion means. But from all that gone before, we know that the self has the capacity to cognise; that, indeed, is its nature. Therefore, cognitive potency remains in liberation.

The loss of self-awareness is inevitable in Mīmāṃsā liberation for, without embodiment (and therefore the sensory apparatus), all objects cease to objects of cognition. That must include the self, for the self is an object. Equally, the potency for cognition is retained by the self, for that is not affected by its objectivity.

5. The problems of potency

Sadly, this complex defence of non-cognitive liberation collapses under the weight of its inconsistencies. Presumably, the big difference

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22 *evam arthāntarajñāne sādhanābhāvān nirākṛte satyātmānam eva muktāvasthāyāṃ jānātv ity āśaṅkyāh vijñātāram arekena vijānīyāt iti na hy ātmāpi vinā sādhanena jñātuṃ śakyate manasā khalv asau saṃsārāvasthāyāṃ jñāyate. na ca muktasya manaḥsambandho 'sty ataḥ kenātmānaṃ jānātv iti vyaktaiva muktasyātmajñānasyābhāvo jñānaśaktimātrasyāvasthānaṃ śrutyā darśitaṃ.*

between sleep and freedom as far as potential for re-cognition is concerned is that in the latter this potential is never activated: for what could the conditions be that bring back cognition? It cannot be the intrusion of the world into consciousness because freedom, if truly attained, is eternally freedom from the world.

Neither can it be a decision of the self, for two reasons. The first, comparatively trivial, is that there can be no motivation for the self to return from the liberated state, on the Mīmāṃsā account.

That may be dismissed; there may be a coming back, as with Buddhism and Advaita, for the good of the world. But there is a far more important reason, and this should be devastatingly problematic for the Mīmāṃsaka: nothing could catalyse that re-activation of cognition. If a cognitive act brought the self back into consciousness, liberation could not have occurred in the first place; but if non-cognitive liberation were indeed attained, how could cognition be reanimated?

Actually, this sort of 're-activation' problem is one that plagues both Buddhist and Advaita Vedānta accounts of the *boddhisattva* and the *jīvanmukta* respectively. For the former, if the awakening is a moment in which all conceptuality - that binds through the creation of a world that is desired and a self that desires - is removed, what makes the one who has had that state return to a life of conceptual activity such as is necessary to compassionately teach the world of the possibility of *nirvāṇa*?[23] For the latter, if *mokṣa* is an insight into the universality of consciousness, what brings back the individuation required for the living seer to pursue a life of teaching and sacred interaction with others?[24] Of course, in both these cases, two conditions are supposed to hold that are absent in the Mīmāṃsā case. For one thing, there is the persistence of a sort of consciousness; that, indeed, is the vital cognitivism of both Buddhist and Advaitic conceptions of liberation. So,

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23 I have attempted to develop an account, derived from some ideas in the 6th-century Yogācārin Dharmakīrti, of what could lead from the pure moment of awakening to the subsequent activity of the Buddha; in *Knowledge and the Highest Good: Liberation and Philosophical Inquiry in Classical Indian Thought*, Macmillan Basingstoke (forthcoming). Paul Williams has argued that there is no way in which the requirements of compassionate activity after enlightenment can be met within any traditional notion of the awakening; see Paul Williams, *Altruism amd Reality*, Curzon Press, London, 1998. I hope in the near future to develop some ideas in the synthetic Yogācāra-Madhyamaka of Śāntarakṣita's *Tattvasaṃgraha* and, especially, Kamalaśīla's *Pañjikā*, on how the tension between a conception-free state and a richly conceptual subsequent life may be resolved.

24 See the exploration of this issue in A.O. Fort and P.Y. Mumme (eds.) *Living Liberation in Hindu Thought*, SUNY Press, Albany, 1996.

even if the psychological motivation towards renewed activity may be absent, there is some continuity of awareness. For another, these are specifically cases of embodied - living - realisation; they are clearly distinguished from the final or ultimate state of liberation. Therefore, the basic condition for specific cognitive activity, embodiment, is specifically retained. In contrast, the Mīmāṃsā situation is non-cognitive, without body and, by definition, final.

Furthermore, it can be argued that the eternality of liberation commits the Mīmāṃsaka to saying that it is necessarily the case that there is no re-activation of cognition. If so, what is the worth of the assertion that there is potency, if it is never to be realised? How can the notion of potency be cashed if it is held that potency must never have to manifest itself?

It would seem that Pārthasārathi is misguided in trying to develop the concept of potency in order to distinguish between non-cognitive liberation and annihilation. His concept is neither here nor there. He may think that he must answer the demands of an empiricist epistemology and say how we know that there is a difference between non-cognitive liberation and annihilation. But the notion of potency is no use here because there is no way of confirming it; certainly, it goes far beyond what Kumārila himself, with his rigorously modest epistemology, would be happy to admit. Alternatively, if Pārthsārathi is only trying to give a principled conceptual criterion for distinguishing between the two, he need go no further than invoke the role of the self. In liberation, the self, shorn of cognitive activity, persists, whereas annihilation adverts to the non-existence of the self. Quite simply, liberation is not annihilation because the self persists. There is no chance of actually finding out whether this is the case; but calling upon the idea of cognitive potency does not alter that.

So Pārthasārathi really is better off not using the concept of potency. That means, however, that he must abandon the aim of giving a reading of Upaniṣadic texts on the persistence of cognition that is counter to that of the Advaitins. The choice between philosophical and exegetical coherence is a stark one; and Pārthasārathi is by no means the only Indian philosopher to wrestle unsuccessfully with it.

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