

*Free Will, Agency,
and Selfhood
in Indian Philosophy*

Edited by MATTHEW R. DASTI
and EDWIN F. BRYANT

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*Dedicated to Anasuya,
Leela, and Mohini*

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THIS VOLUME AROSE from a long-standing friendship between the editors, often centered on shared appreciation and dedication to the interconnected universe of the premodern Indic intellectual traditions. In many conversations probing various aspects of Hindu philosophy, we often puzzled over the nature of free will and personal agency as construed in the various schools. We found ourselves grappling again and again with the philosophical resources available to the Indian thinkers on this issue given the parameters of their metaphysical commitments and presuppositions. From these conversations, this volume was born.

That the exercise of personal agency depends on a variety of factors and conditions beyond the individual agent is brought home in a most personal way as we reflect on the people whose sacrifices and generosity have put us in a position to develop this volume. Matthew Dasti would like to thank his family, especially his wife, Nandanie, for her constant support and love, and his mother, Lynn, for a lifetime of care. He has also benefited from a number of remarkable teachers, and would like to express a particular debt of gratitude to Matt K. Matsuda, Edwin Bryant, Paul Woodruff, Rob Koons, David Sosa, and Stephen H. Phillips. He would finally like to thank his colleagues in the Philosophy Department of Bridgewater State University, for creating and sustaining an atmosphere of profound collegiality and friendship. Edwin Bryant, too, would like to thank all of his mentors and teachers, whose guidance, examples, and encouragement over the years have afforded him the luxury of pursuing his life's interest. He would also like to express his gratitude to Rutgers University for its generous sabbatical program, which allowed this volume to reach its finalized form. The editors would both like to thank David Buchta for his Sanskrit editing of the volume. Finally, many thanks to Cynthia Read of OUP, for her willingness to take on this project.

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Free Will, Agency, and Selfhood in Indian Philosophy

Introduction

Matthew R. Dasti

IF ONE WERE to make a list of the leading topics of debate in classical Indian philosophy, contenders might include the existence and nature of the self; the fundamental sources of knowledge; the nature of the engagement between consciousness and reality; the existence and nature of God/Brahman; the proper account of causation; the relationship between language and the world; the practices that best ensure future happiness; the most expedient method for any soteriological attainment (or not); or the fundamental constituents of reality. We might also include the various debates engendered by the skeptical challenges to philosophy itself. But, as typically formulated, the problem of free will would not make the cut. As a number of our contributors note, classical Indian philosophy simply does not have an overarching debate about free will that neatly corresponds to that within the Western tradition, where it is a prominent, enduring feature of the philosophical landscape. While there are various debates over the existence and proper construal of agency and individual freedom, the "free will debate" does not have this central position.

What then is the motive behind a book centered on the themes of agency and free will in classical Indian philosophy? As illustrated in the following chapters, the lack of a dialectical isomorphism does not entail a lack of shared concerns. In lieu of a clear, genre-defining debate over free will in classical Indian philosophy, discussion of related issues is scattered throughout various topics and ramifies in a number of peculiarly Indian contexts. Commonly, they flow from concerns with agency: what

An earlier draft of this introduction was composed during a writing retreat sponsored by the Bridgewater State University Office of Teaching and Learning, for which I would like to express my gratitude. While conceptualizing this introduction, I have benefitted from discussion with and/or comments by various participants in the writing retreat, as well as David Palmer, Edwin Bryant, Matthew O'Brien, Ed James, and Jim Crowley.

it is and whether we truly have it. The purpose of this volume is to highlight these discussions and bring them into focus. Taken as a whole, this volume illustrates that concerns surrounding the intersection of free will, agency, and selfhood are not unimportant in, or negligible to, the leading schools of Indian philosophy. It also reveals the way in which the concepts of agency and free will provide a helpful context to explore issues within Indian philosophical thought.

For our purposes, “classical Indian philosophy” refers to the philosophical developments in and around India from roughly 100 to 1800 CE. This period is bracketed on one side by the earlier proto-philosophical period centered on the late Vedic culture and its discontents (in the form of the Buddhist and Jaina revolts and the other *śramaṇa* movements of first millennium BCE), and on the other side, the modern period, characterized by a self-conscious attempt to reconsider and rearticulate Indian tradition in response to Western culture and science, and the problems of modernity more generally. Features that distinguish classical Indian philosophy include the common use of Sanskrit as the philosophical lingua franca; the consolidation of various schools of systematic thought (typically called *darsānas*, “viewpoints”) with burgeoning commentarial traditions upon the ur-texts of each school; and a concern with the rational justification of one’s beliefs or the holdings of one’s school, which in turn hinges on examinations of legitimate sources of knowledge (*pramāṇas*).

In the classical period, we find that individual schools try to marshal their philosophical resources to reflect upon and defend the goals of life that they take on from traditional cultural and religious authorities. These various schools were in constant dialogue. Philosophical development often involves inter-school debate, with mutually inspired refinement throughout the generations of commentators and respondents. An individual *darsāna*’s arguments and positions cannot, in fact, be fully understood without determining who its disputants are, whether or not such interlocutors (*pūrvapakṣins*) are stated explicitly or left unmentioned. This fact has guided our approach in this book. Each chapter centers on a specific tradition of thought, but we have encouraged authors to consider points of intersection and to refer to other chapters when relevant. Our hope is that the various chapters reveal a greater perspective not only on specific *darsānas*, but also on the range of responses and debates on core issues which transcend individual schools.

Free Will, Agency, and Selfhood

Free will, agency, and selfhood are terms with rich histories. They have been defined, refined, and debated for centuries. To ground the ensuing discussions, we would like to provide fairly general treatments of each; different chapters will employ them with varied shades of nuance and meaning. *Will* is a capacity to choose certain courses of action. Having *free will* is often understood in terms of one’s being able to choose otherwise or in terms of a person being the proper source of her choice. The Sanskrit term that perhaps best approximates “free will” is *svātantrya*, “independence,” which suggests the capacity for self-determined action. From a psychological perspective, *cikīrṣā*, “desire to act” is analogous to “will” in that it refers to the component of one’s inner life through which one initiates and directs intentional actions.

One key reason that philosophers have typically been interested in free will is that it is often considered a necessary condition for moral responsibility: only those beings that exercise free will can be morally responsible for their actions. Such interest also flows from reflection on human goals and achievement. Do we truly have the ability to freely direct ourselves toward those objectives we deem desirable? Or are we rather powerless, merely driven by the causal currents that envelop us?

An *agent* is someone or something that performs actions. And thus, *agency* is the capacity to perform actions. A stone may roll down a hill and land in a stream. In doing so, it enters into various causal relations and produces various effects, including, for example, splashing water in the air as it falls into the stream. But these are not actions proper, in the sense of being manifestations of agency. Compare this to my jumping into a stream to cool down on a hot summer day. This is an action, which has me, the agent, as its source. The term “agency” is well captured by the Sanskrit term *karṭṛtva*.

Whether or not agency requires a robust capacity for reflection and choice, the kind typically associated with human beings, is debated. Some philosophers have argued that the possession of agency ranges beyond human beings—that spiders, for example, perform actions despite their lacking the rational powers we associate with human agency.¹ Others

1. See Frankfurt 1978. Further, a tradition that may be traced to Aristotle and Aquinas contends that agency is merely the expression of a thing’s nature, which is oriented toward some *telos*. From this perspective, agency may even be possessed by insentient things. Thanks to Matthew O’Brien for calling my attention to this.

have argued that “full-blooded agency” requires rationality and the capacity for reflection and choice.² We (the editors) are not interested in settling this issue here. Nor are we interested in arguing for a specific account of the relationship between agency and free will. We are, however, most interested in the way that agency is manifested by rational agents, and this specific manifestation of agency will be the dominant construal of the notion in the following chapters. Human beings have the ability to intentionally produce certain outcomes that we select as worthy in accordance with our values and desires. And thus, our agency not only allows for ownership of our actions, but a distinctive responsibility for our choices and behaviors. Problems or concerns about agency motivate a host of philosophical questions that naturally intersect with questions about free will.

As a first approximation, we may consider **selfhood** to be the condition of being a locus of various psychological states, that is, being the kind of thing which possesses and synthesizes such states such that they are co-located. This notion of the self is defended by Hindu schools like Mīmāṃsā and Nyāya, which develop metaphysics grounded in common experience.³ Beyond this, however, a number of influential Indian traditions contend that this conception of selfhood is superficial or even false. We have our roots in a deeper self, which transcends the empirical ego and is our truest essence. The famous meditative quest of the Upaniṣadic and yogic traditions is to unearth and fully invest in the deep self. Classical Buddhists, in contrast, while engaged in a similar search, report that there is ultimately no self to be found; there are merely bundles of properties or states beneath which we tend to project the fiction of an enduring self. Debates between Hindus and Buddhists over the existence of the self, and between various schools of the Hindu fold over the nature of the self, are some of the richest veins of philosophical development within the Indian tradition. As is well known, *ātman* is the Sanskrit term which corresponds to “self,” and is invested with a similarly wide range of meanings.

2. See Velleman 1992.

3. “Hindu” is of course, a problematic term for various reasons, including the fact that it refers to hundreds of philosophical and religious movements under a single heading. For our purposes, it refers to persons and traditions that accept the authority of the Vedas and Upaniṣads—if only nominally—along with allied texts, cultural norms, and practices.

The Indian Context

A number of intellectual currents inform the classical Indian treatments of free will, agency, and selfhood and provide a distinctive problem space within which the Indian thinkers operate. Our philosophers inherit questions and a wide range of precursor views from the proto-philosophical period about the efficacy of human action in the grand scheme of things. Amid the *śramaṇa* revolts of pre-classical India, the Ājīvika ascetic Makkhali Gosāla famously argued that human effort is useless; fate rules the lives of all, and our lot is to accept what we are destined to suffer and enjoy until we have exhausted our personal allotment. The Buddha and Mahāvīra, the Jaina luminary, both his contemporaries, vigorously condemned Gosāla and extolled personal effort in the pursuit of the supreme good. In a related development, the Upaniṣadic sages developed the doctrine of karma to account for the way in which small decisions collectively form one’s character and future self.⁴ Despite their other differences, Buddhism, Jainism, and the Upaniṣadic tradition agree that one’s decisions and actions create a sort of momentum that continues after death and into one’s next lifetime, and have consequences that unfold over the course of multiple embodiments. Classical philosophers largely accepted that a person’s karmic inheritance determines the range of options she has in her current life, and they seek to articulate the role of human effort in light of both the causal weight of the past and the complicated set of current relationships that impinge upon individual agency. The Mīmāṃsā (“Exegesis”) school is, of all classical traditions, most devoted to the preservation of ancient Vedic ritual culture, and its concern with agency stems from concerns with ritual obligations and consequences. Mīmāṃsakas appeal to both common experience and the nature of obligation itself to articulate the notion that individuals are indeed agents and possess the freedom necessary for agency. Nyāya philosophers agree that the enduring individual self must be the locus of agency and moral responsibility, and correspondingly attack Buddhist no-self theories. They argue that rejection of an enduring self makes it impossible to explain moral responsibility over time: if there is no enduring self, I am not the same individual that I was last week, or, for that matter, in my previous birth. This disassociation, Nyāya argues, would make me free of moral responsibility for what

4. See Ganeri 2007: 223–228 for a concise discussion of the philosophical origins of the karma doctrine.

“he” did back then as much as I am currently not responsible for what my neighbor does right now. Madhyamaka Buddhists conversely argue that moral responsibility is not to be found in an enduring self, but in the network of relationships, states, and interconnections that constitute our rich identities. Only by navigating these connections will we understand the fact that human agency and the responsibilities that go along with it are multivalent and narrative-dependent aspects of conventional reality.

Traditions of contemplative practice are inherited and developed by a number of classical schools including Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Buddhism, Vedānta, and Kashmiri Śaivism. These schools’ analyses of free will and agency are profoundly influenced by such practice, which is taken to reveal a more accurate picture of selfhood and its capacities than ordinary experience. By appeal to both meditational experience and philosophical analysis, these schools deconstruct the empirical ego into various components and tie such components to more fundamental metaphysical realities and causal processes. Given such a deconstruction, where, if anywhere, are agency and responsibility to be located? Where is the seat of human willing and the origin of human action? Abhidharma Buddhists argue personal agency and free will make sense from the conventional perspective but not according to the fundamental reality of momentary *dharma*s. Part of their challenge is to navigate between both registers to make sense of our felt sense of agency and its importance in the pursuit of enlightenment. Sāṃkhya and Advaita Vedānta conclude that the will is ultimately extrinsic to selfhood, part of a psychological apparatus covering the *ātman* with which we identify in our unenlightened way of thinking. These schools typically say that mistakes about agency are a fundamental part of spiritual ignorance. The notion that we are in control, that we are beings who act, is somehow a crucial aspect of the cognitive and affective disorders collectively called *avidyā*, existential ignorance. Though it too is a monistic school, Kashmiri Śaivism radically differs from Advaita Vedānta over the issue of individual freedom. For the Advaitins, Brahman, the ultimate reality, does not act, as action implies change and Brahman does not undergo modification of any kind. Therefore, since we are identical to that fundamental reality, the notion of ourselves as volitional beings that can generate change is an illusion. For the Śaivas, however, our individual freedom is an expression of the creative spontaneity of the single reality of Śiva. The error that belies our unenlightenment is not our sense of volitional freedom, but rather our failing to see the identity of our

freedom with God’s own power. Somewhat akin to the Śaivas, a number of theistic Vedāntins argue that our problem is not that we think we are agents, but rather that we ignore the fact that our agency is derivative of, and in constant negotiation with, the agency of God, who is the supreme Self. They further reflect on individual freedom in relation to a God who creates, sustains, and oversees the universe, yet responds to the loving entreaties of his devotees.

A further concern carried over from traditional authorities in the proto-philosophical period is the possibility of liberation or enlightenment. Though the details are developed in very different ways, typically liberation is thought of as the ultimate and final goal of life, an achievement that brings freedom from the cycle of rebirth and, at minimum, freedom from the pain of ordinary embodied existence. Though concern with liberation is not at the forefront of every school, classical *darsanas* tend to constrain their metaphysical analyses to allow for its possibility. Any account of agency or individual effort must therefore cohere with this possibility. This is perhaps most starkly seen in the Sāṃkhya school’s rejection of agency as a property of the self, arguing that such would entail that the self undergoes change and therefore be impermanent. It could not, therefore, be the subject of liberation, understood of as a kind of eternal, unchanging self-awareness.

A final significant influence to mention is that of the Grammarian tradition (*vyākaraṇa*) on Indian philosophical analysis generally and questions of agency in particular. It would be difficult to overstate this influence. Led by Pāṇini’s epochal work in linguistics, the Grammarian school seeks to excavate the structure of the Sanskrit language. Commonly, Grammarian accounts are cited and modified by other thinkers as they perform conceptual analysis. Most relevantly, the Grammarians introduce the system of *kārakas*, the individual components of an action as expressed by a sentence (e.g., the agent of the act, the object of the act, the location of the act). This system provides a vocabulary that facilitates the analysis of agency in relation to the other components of an action.

The Western Context

This book is not formally a work of comparative philosophy. Our authors are fundamentally concerned with exploring the richness of the Indian schools on their own terms and according to their own distinct set of concerns. This should be underscored. And yet, as will be evident, our authors

are sensitive to the ways in which conceptions of agency and free will have been informed by the sensibility of what we may loosely call the Western philosophical tradition. Some cite specific analyses from Western thinkers for the sake of explanation or comparison. Others make distinctions in order to recognize that the Indian thinkers should not be forced into Western categories or concerns that are an imprecise fit. Still others use the Indian discussions to motivate an important meta-philosophical critique of Western approaches to free will: what appears to be an obvious and natural philosophical problem may, when seen in the light of a separate tradition of thought, be found to rely on contingent presuppositions or concerns that are provincial to a particular historical context. Given this kind of engagement, it may help us to take note of some of the key figures, options, and motivations in the Western tradition. To that end, let us very briefly, and without trying to get at all of the nuances or competing interpretations, mention some of these key figures and options. The idea, to repeat, is to provide us with some footholds that may be helpful in situating the issues that will be discussed throughout the book. (We would direct readers interested in a more focused investigation of the genesis of the free will debate to the initial sections of Garfield's chapter.)

In the ancients, we find a concern to identify the factors that contribute to autonomy and robust agency that is motivated by both ethical inquiry and investigations into the metaphysics of personhood. Plato repeatedly argues that the best kind of life is governed by a reflective knowledge of what is good. He famously—and perhaps shockingly—contends that the most politically powerful individuals of his time were in a deeper sense powerless; slaves to their passions and ignorant of what is truly good, they were incapable of achieving what they actually wanted, happiness. True autonomy—genuine agency—requires an understanding of the good, with a corresponding rational control over one's desires and actions, aligning them with it. In this light, the Socratic *elenchus* may be seen as a method of integration, of helping an individual gain reflective, critical awareness of his formerly unacknowledged attitudes and beliefs. Plato's concern about autonomy, knowledge, and self-possession iterates in various forms but continues in contemporary action theory insofar as it seeks to understand the way in which actions are motivated by and explicable according to the cognitive and affective states of an individual. Following Plato, Aristotle focuses his characteristically keen eye on the question of human autonomy, identifying conditions that impair or undermine it. In such situations, the origin of action is external to the individual: in

cases of deception, for example, one unwittingly acts for something one would avoid if fully knowledgeable. In simple compulsion, the individual is turned into a mere instrument of some external agent. Aristotle calls attention to a range of important cases of self-caused lack of autonomy. A man whose character strongly inclines him to vice is not necessarily free from blame: his character may be the product of his decisions over the years. Likewise, a drunk person may be culpable for his drunken behavior despite his lack of self-possession; after all, it is he who chose to drink.

For the medieval thinkers, concerns relating to free will and human agency are typically generated by theological reflection. Augustine's response to the problem of free will is grounded in the attempt to assign responsibility to human beings for the Fall, despite God's omnipotence. So long as Adam and Eve truly had free will, even as a gift of God, Augustine contends that they may be properly responsible for their choice. God is off the hook, so to speak. The theological problem of free will is further compounded by God's omniscience: if God already knows the future, how is it possible that my current choices actually make a difference in what happens? Boethius (and following him, Aquinas) solves the problem of God's foreknowledge by situating God outside of time. Our free choices take place within time, and as God is outside of time, it makes little sense to say that "Today, God knows what I will do tomorrow." God's existence cannot be confined to today or tomorrow, and his knowledge is not foreknowledge, but a simultaneous and atemporal immediate awareness of the entirety of reality. Medieval philosophers also continue the tradition of philosophical analysis of human psychology initiated by Plato and Aristotle. Aquinas thus famously develops the notion of the will as rational appetite, a motivation for goal-directed action that is informed by intellectual cognition.

In the early modern period, discussion of free will and human agency starts to transition from a theological to a naturalistic context. Modern thinkers often consider human agency and responsibility as being embedded within a causally determined natural world and provide a corresponding formulation of the problem of free will. Every event in the natural world is causally determined by some prior event(s). We may trace out the ancestry of an event or thing, finding the causal antecedents that collectively necessitate its occurrence. But human animals are part of the natural world, beings whose biological and physiological functioning is subject to strict causal law. How then could we be autonomous agents, possessors of free will? Though the source of external or prior necessity

has shifted from God to nature, the problem remains functionally similar. A number of thinkers respond by embracing determinism while criticizing the very notion of “free will.” Hobbes influentially argues that the term “freedom” simply means a lack of physical impediments to movement, and as such, may only be applied to physical bodies. Therefore, people, as physical things, may or not be free to pursue specific courses of action, but it is incoherent to speak of a will as free or bound. Spinoza argues that while free will as commonly conceived is an illusion, a kind of freedom is possible in the very act of accepting our complete embeddedness within the network of relationships that comprise this deterministic universe. Kant’s famous distinction between the phenomenal and noumenal realms allows him to concede the world of experience to scientific determinism while allowing the possibility of free will from a noumenal perspective.

The history of philosophical engagement, informed by recent scientific discovery, has led to a fairly clear array of contemporary responses to the problem of free will. In short: determinists accept that human behavior is necessitated by prior causes. Some of them, compatibilists, contend that despite determinism, there are ways in which we may speak of ourselves as possessing free will that are important and valuable for human life. Others argue that free will is incompatible with causal determinism. The only non-compatibilist option for such defenders of free will is to deny causal determinism and take up what is typically called the libertarian position on free will. Thus, three primary options remain: rejection of free will, compatibilism, or libertarian free will.

The Papers

Bryant explores the axiom central to Sāṃkhya, perhaps the oldest speculative tradition to emerge in ancient India: if something is eternal, that thing cannot change. Accepting the eternality of the *ātman* that had long been established in the Upaniṣadic tradition, Sāṃkhya’s inflexible position on changelessness causes it to develop an uncompromising dualism: the self is little more than a quantum of consciousness, and all fluctuating features of personhood, such as agency, desire, and propositionally structured cognition, are relegated to the subtle but inert material (*prakṛtic*) coverings enveloping the *ātman*. Thus, the deep self is entirely devoid of agency and will. The chapter engages Nyāya’s much more substantive notion of selfhood as its primary *pūrvapakṣa* and explores the tension inherited by the exegetes of the *Bhagavad Gītā* in their attempt to reconcile the seemingly conflicting views of agency in the Vedānta and Sāṃkhya traditions.

As with other contributions, Meyers’s chapter strives to locate cross-cultural correspondences to frame her discussion of Abhidharma Buddhism. This is complicated by the Buddhist traditions’ absence of any semantic correspondence to Western notions of free will and any enduring entity that might be considered an agent who could be considered free or not. Meyers reconstructs a compatibilist stance consistent with the axioms of the tradition and grounded in the notion of the “two truths”: on the one hand, the individual as construed conventionally who is exhorted to endeavor to pursue the Eightfold Path, and the other, the ultimate reality of the individual as a psychophysical vortex in the flow of interdependent momentariness. She considers the tensions to be faced as Buddhist thinkers must negotiate between these two accounts in order to make sense of not only ordinary experience, but also the Buddhist pursuit of enlightenment.

The Jaina tradition places great emphasis on prescribed voluntarist action, albeit directed at a very different goal than the ritually centered directives of the Mīmāṃsā school we will encounter in Freschi’s chapter. While emphatically a soteriological tradition, the Jaina notion of liberation entails removing karmic coverings from the soul, but a karma much more physically construed than the contemporary Hindu or Buddhist soteriological traditions. These karmic coverings are to be extirpated through assiduous adherence to very strict ethical rules; indeed, the commitment to nonviolent regulatory action defines Jainism. The Jaina precepts covered in Chapple’s chapter, culled from the primary early and medieval sources, exhaustively outline the types of behaviors required to purge this karma, all predicated on the correct utilization of the individual’s will.

Cardona analyzes the Grammarian conception of agency, centered on Pāṇini’s discussion of the application of *kāraka* category names. *Kāraḥ* are the direct participants in the accomplishment of an action, and their category names are assigned according to the kind of role they play. The relevant *sūtra* in this regard (*Aṣṭādhyāyī* 1.4.54) simply notes that the *kāraka* that is independent (*svatantra*) has the category name “agent” (*kartr*). In the act of cooking rice, for example, various participants contribute to its accomplishment, including the fire, wood, pot, grains of rice, et cetera. But the cook is the agent proper, the “independent” participant who manages the other factors, setting them in motion and causing them to cease functioning when the act is accomplished. Much of Cardona’s chapter is devoted to unpacking this notion of agential independence in the work of leading Grammarians, culminating in Bhartṛhari’s explicit criteria for

agency. Since a paradigmatic agent would seem to be a person, as in the example of cooking rice, Grammarians further consider the best analysis of well-attested statements like “the river flows” that seem to allow nonsentient entities to play role of agent. Cardona explores these and highlights the centrality that Grammarians place on common linguistic usage to guide conceptual analysis. Grammarians thus affirm that things that lack volition, cognition, and effort may be spoken of as agents in a straightforward, non-metaphorical manner and thus oppose Nyāya’s contention that agency belongs only to sentient beings.

Dasti explores Nyāya’s conception of the self as a substance that bears psychological properties like cognition, desire, and volition as well as characteristics such as agency. He focuses on Nyāya’s view that that these properties, along with others like karmic merit and moral responsibility, function interdependently and therefore require a self to serve as their shared location. Dasti’s chapter provides a further example of the engaged *pūrvapakṣa* characteristic fundamental to the development of the Indian intellectual traditions, focusing on Nyāya’s refutations of Sāṃkhya’s “frictionless self,” which never truly participates in the world or bears world-engaging properties like volition or intention. Dasti also explores Nyāya’s contention that as knowing is itself an expression of cognitive agency, Sāṃkhya’s dualism of knowing and acting is ultimately unsustainable.

Freschi investigates the intersection of subjectivity, agency, and freedom in the Mīmāṃsā school. Mīmāṃsā takes a common-sense approach to volition, considering felt experience as sufficient to assign agency to the subject. It also implicitly rejects the Sāṃkhya axiom examined by Bryant. Even if the subject truly undergoes change and engages directly with the world, it may still maintain a dynamic identity. This position is due to the Mīmāṃsā emphasis on the moral and epistemological aspect of the subject over the ontological permanence of the *ātman*. Freschi further explores Mīmāṃsā accounts of motivation, focusing on the complex interplay of the Veda as ultimate moral authority, individual desire, the varieties of ritualistic injunctions, and the adjudication of possible conflicts between sources of moral motivation, including apparent conflicts between Vedic injunctions themselves.

Garfield’s chapter is both an examination of Madhyamaka Buddhist accounts of free will and a critique of the very problem of free will as developed in Western philosophy. Beginning with a genealogy of the free will problem in the West, Garfield argues that it is not in fact an inescapable

outcome of reflection on common beliefs. Rather, it is dependent on a handful of contingent historical factors that are, as seen by comparison with classical Buddhist thought, far from being mere givens. Garfield reflects on how the free will problem dissolves under scrutiny informed by the Madhyamaka notion of dependent origination and concludes by discussing how Madhyamaka thought can account for responsibility and agency within its own framework.

Timalsina’s chapter reminds us that like the Mādhyamikas, Śaṅkara (ca. 710 CE), the great Advaita Vedāntin, argued from two perspectives, the conventional and the absolute. While willing to countenance the categories of agent and agency from a conventional view, Śaṅkara follows Gauḍapāda by arguing that from the absolute perspective, agency and free will are nonexistent. They require the possibility of causation, which itself is absent in the ultimate reality. Given that the possibility of genuine causal interaction is central to this issue, Timalsina explores Śaṅkara’s arguments against the possibility of causation from the absolute perspective. He further explores Sureśvara’s arguments that liberation cannot depend on any kind of action, even meditative practice. Finally, he provides a consideration of alternate models of causation developed by Advaitins that may provide context for our felt sense of agency from a phenomenal level.

While Śaṅkara’s nondualism has no scope for agents or agency, Lawrence examines the way in which Kashmiri Śaivas, particularly the Pratyabhijñā philosophers Utpaladeva (ca. 900–950 CE) and Abhinavagupta (ca. 950–1000 CE) wed nondualism with an affirmation of agency. Nondual Śaiva traditions identify Śakti, the Goddess, as the integral creative power and consort of God, Śiva. Lawrence calls attention to the way in which Pratyabhijñā thinkers identify Śakti with “Supreme Speech,” which allows them to understand the creation as linguistic in nature and to adopt categories created by the Grammarian school to develop their robust metaphysics. Given this context, the Pratyabhijñā thinkers deploy the *kāraka* analysis to conceive of all of reality as an action directed by the ultimate agent, God, reducing all causality to the syntax of agency. Lawrence calls special attention to the fact that this ultimate affirmation of agency is in stark contrast to a general Indian tendency to denigrate the role of agents in causal processes. Finally, he elaborates the way in which Kashmiri Śaiva cosmology may be understood to be a spectrum of degrees of agency. As beings’ awareness of their identity with God is obscured, their dualistic vision of the world is wed to an imperfect and limited agency.

Ganeri examines the conception of agency in the work of Rāmānuja (11th century CE), arguably the most influential philosopher amongst the theistic Vedāntins. Ganeri begins with a discussion of Rāmānuja's metaphysics of selfhood—both individual selfhood and the selfhood of God—that allows for a much more robust notion of self-world interaction than Sāṃkhya or Advaita Vedānta. God is, in Rāmānuja's schema, the self of the world insofar as he sustains it, directs it, and is its purpose-giving end. And his agency serves to sustain and delimit all other expressions of personal freedom. Against this background, Rāmānuja takes pains to stress that the agency of individual selves is indeed real, though it is clearly dependent upon and mediated by a host of factors which are external to the individual—chiefly, of course, God's own power. Rāmānuja accordingly must chart the delicate relationship between the individuals' agency and the sovereign power of God. Ganeri focuses on Rāmānuja's notion of God's agency in the form of oversight and sanction of an individual's acts. He concludes by considering both the apparent renunciation of agency advocated by Rāmānuja in the discipline of *karma-yoga* and the complete unfolding of individual agency in the state of liberation.

The last of the three great traditions of Vedānta was founded by Madhva (1238–1317), who is the subject of Buchta's chapter. Buchta illustrates that in many ways—including his approach to agency—Madhva is an exception to major trends in Indian thought. Against the traditional definition of an agent as a causal participant who is independent, Madhva defines individual beings as “dependent agents.” Given the all-encompassing independence of God, nothing else is independent. Further, Madhva holds that different individuals possess different innate natures, eternally established and inexorable, which necessitate their moral decisions and ultimate destination, whether Viṣṇu's heaven, eternal sojourning within *saṃsāra*, or eternal hellish damnation. Buchta provides close analyses of key passages in Madhva's work to illustrate the development of his views. He further considers, somewhat skeptically, whether Madhva possesses the resources for a successful theodicy, as claimed by contemporary Madhva apologists and scholars. Finally, Buchta reflects on later developments in Indian philosophy that adopt or borrow from Madhva.

Our final chapter takes us the closest to the rise of modernity that marks the close of our volume chronologically. Dasa and Edelman focus on the 16th-century *bhakti* school of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism as expressed by its principal exponent, Jīva Gosvāmin. Prioritizing the testimony of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as its highest epistemological authority, this school

accepts features of Sāṃkhya that countenance an individual enduring self, upon which it grafts aspects of Nyāya, arguing that it must be this very self that possesses latent powers of agency, and knowledge, et cetera. Given that certain verses in the *Bhāgavata* and *Bhagavad Gītā* appear to deny agency in the self, in harmony with the Advaita Vedānta perspective, the chapter engages Advaita Vedānta as Jīva's primary *pūrvapakṣa*. Jīva proceeds further than Nyāya, however, by arguing that these latent capacities must have access to a real body in order to find expression not only in the state of *saṃsāra*, but, as with other Vaiṣṇava schools, in the liberated state as well. Here we encounter the notion of transcendent embodiment through a personalized *siddharūpa*, or *brahman* body, that reflects one's personal devotional relationship with God in a dynamic and eternal spiritual realm.

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