

## What is *Bhāvanā*?

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**Abstract** *Bhāvanā*, “bringing into being,” is one of Mīmāṃsā’s hallmark concepts. It connects text and action in a single structure of meaning. This conjunction was crucially important to Mīmāṃsā’s own interpretive enterprise, and functioned—controversially but influentially—in a broader theory of language. The goal of this paper is to outline *bhāvanā*’s major contours as it is developed by Kumārilabhaṭṭa and some of his followers (Maṇḍanamiśra, Pārthasārathimiśra, Someśvarabhaṭṭa, Khaṇḍadeva, and Āpadeva) and to examine some of the arguments they marshaled in support of it. *Bhāvanā* is shown to open up, for these Mīmāṃsakas, an understanding of the “deep structure” of Vedic injunctions and the vocabulary for systematically representing it; it accounts for both what people do when they perform an action that is enjoined (*ārthī bhāvanā*) and what the injunction itself does when it motivates people to performance (*śābdī bhāvanā*). *Bhāvanā* has resonances with, and relevance to, contemporary discussions of the nexus of language, understanding, and action, and its value as a carefully-elaborated concept of hermeneutical significance should not be overlooked.

**Keywords** Language · Action · Interpretation · Mīmāṃsā

### Introduction

Mīmāṃsā has proven difficult to comprehend as a system under the various concepts, themes and traditions that continue to articulate philosophical thought in the West: sometimes it figures in discussions of the philosophy of language, where its interlocutors are the grammarians; other times, in a conversation across the

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*darśanas* about epistemology; much more rarely, in discussions of textual interpretation. Jha's division (1942) of the system into "philosophical topics" and "Mīmāṃsā topics proper" reflects the difficulty of reconciling Mīmāṃsā as a science of ritual procedure, obsessed with rice-grains and ladles, with its more recognizably philosophical first principles. More recent scholarship has challenged this division by pointing to the philosophical sophistication and wider influence of the "Mīmāṃsā of the rice-grains" (e.g., McCrea 2000). What an understanding of Mīmāṃsā as a system still urgently requires is a recovery of those concepts that relate its various components to each other—concepts which will account for the dispersion of Mīmāṃsaka ideas and techniques into an otherwise inexplicable constellation of enterprises, and the transformation of a system thoroughly grounded in the practices of Vedic ritual into a general "science of interpretation" (*vākyaśāstra*) cultivated by literary critics, grammarians, sectarian apologists, and anti-ritualist philosophers.<sup>1</sup>

*Bhāvanā* is one of Mīmāṃsā's most important organizing concepts, as noted by Edgerton (1928, p. 174: "the *Prunkstück* of the Mīmāṃsā") and Frauwallner (1938, p. 219: "er gehört zu jenen Grundbegriffen, auf denen das Mīmāṃsā-System beruht und mit den es steht und fällt"). It refers both to what we do, as actors in the world, and to what the Veda does in getting us to do that. It connects the Vedic text, the sacrifice, and the sacrificer—or, more generally, the text, the act, and the actor. It included a theory of sentence-meaning within a larger theory of language-in-action and action-in-language that could be, and was to be, detached from narrow ritual concerns. As Halbfass (1991, p. 32) observed, "such concepts as *bhāvanā*, *vidhi*, and *niyoga* all deal primarily with the causal and motivating power of the Vedic word, and with the sense of obligation arising out of the commitment to the Veda; but they also refer to problems concerning ethics, the causality of human actions, and the motivating power of language in a far more general sense." These concepts appealed strongly to literary scholars, whose appropriation of *bhāvanā* completely transformed the discourse on aesthetics (Pollock 2010), and they helped to underwrite Mīmāṃsā's culturally and pedagogically important reputation as a science of interpretation.

Its traversal of several domains that are now claimed by different disciplines—linguistics, hermeneutics, moral philosophy, psychology—is one of the challenges of understanding *bhāvanā*. There is the issue of translating a discussion in technical Sanskrit into the language of one or another modern discipline; there is the larger issue that *bhāvanā* was actually devised to make leaps across the boundaries of meaningful inquiry that these disciplines enshrine: the leap from a descriptive to a normative vocabulary, from "is" to "ought," from the nature of language to the nature of the world, from the text to life. For the same reasons, however, *bhāvanā* provides us with a productive way of thinking about the nexus of language and human action that preoccupied philosophers in the middle of the twentieth century (Wittgenstein 2001 [1945]; Austin 1975 [1955]; Gadamer 2004 [1960]). It is telling that the "force" of a statement had been introduced into the vocabulary of the

<sup>1</sup> For Mīmāṃsā as a *vākyaśāstra* see Pollock (2011, p. 23). For the influence of Mīmāṃsā on literary science (*alaṅkāraśāstra*) see Rajendran (2001), McCrea (2007, especially chapter 4), and Pollock (2010).

philosophy of language as a translation of *bhāvanā* before Austin popularized the term.<sup>2</sup> Throughout this paper I will compare the Mīmāṃsakas' forays into these issues with those of Heidegger, Gadamer, Wittgenstein and Austin; my motivation is not to erase the enormous differences between these philosophical projects, but to demonstrate that *bhāvanā* is a philosophical as well as a historical problem.

My point of entry into this problem, however, is historical: my goal is a broad and synthetic account of *bhāvanā* drawn from discussions of the concept in the works of Kumārilabhaṭṭa and his followers. Such an account is possible because, despite their loudly-broadcast differences, the Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsakas largely agree on the nature of *bhāvanā*, and the principal positions in the debate are sketched already in Kumāriḷa's *Tantravārttika*. It is desirable because *bhāvanā* is crucial to the reconstruction of Mīmāṃsā as a coherent intellectual system, and because without understanding how the Mīmāṃsakas imagined *bhāvanā* to operate, it is impossible to understand why the concept was so important to them—why, in other words, the whole world of Vedic ritual came to rest on it. I have not encountered such an account in the secondary literature: Frauwallner (1938) summarized and criticized Kumāriḷa's views; Ramaswami Shastri (1951, 1952) and Diaconescu (2010) discuss *bhāvanā*, the latter at some length, within the context of the philosophy of language; the lineaments of the concept are clearly drawn in Kataoka's short article (2001) and D'Sa (1974, 1980) gives some sense of its importance.

The evolution and architecture of the Mīmāṃsā system itself accounts in some way for the neglect of *bhāvanā* in modern scholarship. A theory of *bhāvanā* is absent *per se* in the foundational text of the system, Jaimini's *Mīmāṃsāsūtras* (MS), and only inchoate in Śabara's *Bhāṣya* (ŚB) on those *sūtras*. The *locus classicus* for the concept is Kumārilabhaṭṭa's discussion in two sections of his *Tantravārttika* (TV), namely the *arthavādādhikaraṇa* (MS 1.2.1–18) and the *bhāvārthādhikaraṇa* (MS 2.1.1–4). These sections are "Mīmāṃsā topics proper" in the sense that they are occasioned by questions that only a Mīmāṃsaka, who accepts the authority of the Veda and the necessity of understanding what it says, would ask (What are we to make of Vedic texts that do not specifically tell us to do something? What do the words of a Vedic injunction actually mean?); for this reason, these topics do not figure in the well-known debates with Buddhists about the sources of knowledge and authority, on which rests the Mīmāṃsakas' reputation as defenders of Vedic orthodoxy. Another factor in the neglect of *bhāvanā* is likely to be its narrow construal as one among several theories in an extensive, but also extremely technical, debate about the production of sentence-meaning: from Kumāriḷa in the seventh century to Khaṇḍadeva in the 17th, Mīmāṃsakas are concerned to reconcile *bhāvanā* with existing theories of sentence-meaning in the finest detail.

Yet a sense of *bhāvanā*'s importance is evident throughout the history of Mīmāṃsā after Kumāriḷa. Maṇḍanamīśra's *Bhāvanāviveka* ("Exposition of *Bhāvanā*," BhV) is a defense of the concept against the criticisms of grammarians

<sup>2</sup> See Edgerton (1928) and (1986 [1929]). Edgerton calls *bhāvanā* "efficient-force."

(who are committed to another model of the production of meaning in a sentence) and the followers of Prabhākara (who account for the deontic nature of Vedic sentences in a very different way). Maṇḍana was not criticizing Kumārila, as some have suggested, but reformulating Kumārila's ideas on the subject—which, as we will see, are rather dispersed and telegraphic—into a coherent *siddhānta*. Mīmāṃsakas after Maṇḍana never fail to discuss *bhāvanā* in some length. The authors I have considered here are Pārthasārathimiśra in his *Śāstradīpikā* (“Light on the System,” ŚD), a commentary on the TV, and in an essay on injunctions (*Vidhinirṇaya*) in his *Nyāyaratnamālā* (“Jewel-Garland of Principles,” NRM); Someśvarabhaṭṭa in his own commentary on the TV, the *Nyāyasudhā* (“Nectar of Principles,” NS); and Khaṇḍadeva, the foremost expositor of the “new Mīmāṃsā,” in his *Bhāṭṭadīpikā* (“Light on Kumārila's System,” BhD) and *Bhāṭṭatantrarahasya* (“Secrets of Kumārila's System,” BhTR).

Āpadeva's presentation of *bhāvanā* in his introductory textbook on Mīmāṃsā, the *Mīmāṃsānyāyaprakāśa* (“Illumination of the Principles of Mīmāṃsā,” MNP) is an appropriate place to begin, not because he has any original insight into the matter—he largely defends Pārthasārathi's views—but because *bhāvanā* actually structures the text in a clear and unprecedented way. In the beginning of the MNP, Āpadeva introduces the concept of a Vedic injunction (*vidhi*), and immediately enters into a discussion of *bhāvanā*, which serves two purposes: first, it accounts for the injunctive character of Vedic texts—how, in other words, the words of the Veda can get us to perform sacrifices—and second, it provides Āpadeva's readers with the tools they will need to understand the analysis of Vedic injunctions that follows, particularly in the “rephrasing” of Vedic injunctions in the technical and unambiguous language of *bhāvanā*. The MNP ends with a set of short essays that recapitulate some of the arguments that have played out, over the centuries, in the commentaries to Kumārila's works. The final two essays treat the two varieties of *bhāvanā*: thus the MNP, which was clearly intended to teach Mīmāṃsā to beginning students, begins and ends with *bhāvanā*.

## The Meaning of Injunctions

*Bhāvanā* occurs as an explanation of the term *bhāva* in the *bhāvārthādhikaraṇa* at the start of the second *adhyāya* (MS 2.1.1–4). Śabara here notes that the first *adhyāya* was devoted to what we could call the epistemology of *dharma* (*pramāṇalakṣaṇa*), that is, the definition of *dharma* and the means by which we know about it. The important *sūtra* is:<sup>3</sup>

(1) *codanālakṣaṇo 'rtho dharmah* [MS 1.1.2]

“*Dharma* is an end defined by injunction.”

<sup>3</sup> See Kataoka (2011) for Kumārila's detailed discussion of this *sūtra*.

*Dharma* is what the Vedas enjoin us to do. At the beginning of the second *adhyāya*, Śabara raises an obvious question about this definition: what exactly is the relationship between the language of the Vedas, where these injunctions are found, and the system of ritual action, in which *dharma* consists? The polyvalence of the word *artha* offers another way of thinking about this question: what is the relationship between *artha*, the “goal” or “end” (*arthyata ity arthaḥ*) which is sought in ritual action, and *artha*, the “meaning” of the Vedic sentences that somehow cause us to engage in that kind of action?

We could attempt to answer this question as if it were about the relationship between language and action in general, leaving Vedic injunctions aside for the moment. In that case, we can compare an action and a sentence that describes it: we can map the relations between participants in the action (a set of semantic relations) against the relations between the words in the sentence that refer to those participants (a set of syntactic relations). This mapping between semantics and syntax is exactly what the grammarians sought to establish with their *kāraka* theory. The verb is the hinge between the two sets of relations: it encodes the action under description as a lexical meaning (*dhātvartha*) and the participants as arguments (i.e., subject and object). The structure of the action is thus accommodated into the structure of the sentence, which is organized around the verb. And thus an action comes to be a meaning of a sentence.

*Dharma* could be the meaning of a Vedic injunction in a similar way. But in this case we have to understand “meaning” in a slightly different sense: for an injunction does not *describe* or *represent* an action, but *enjoins* it. In other words: a sentence like “Rāma goes to the forest” has a meaning, which is precisely the fact of Rāma going to the forest; a sentence like “one who desires heaven should sacrifice,” on the other hand, has a meaning, but this meaning is not, or not entirely, the fact of someone who desires heaven performing a sacrifice. In the first example, the meaning is quite independent of the sentence that represents it (Rāma goes to the forest regardless of whether this fact is narrated); in the second example, the meaning is *constituted* by the sentence. In fact the sense of the word *vi-dhā* and its cognates, literally “lay down” and often translated as “enjoin” or “prescribe,” comes quite close to “constitute.” The sense in which *dharma* is the meaning of a Vedic injunction therefore comes close to the sense in which—to adapt Wittgenstein’s example—a game of chess is the meaning of the game’s rules. Searle’s (1969, p. 32) distinction between “constitutive rules” and “restrictive rules” is useful but somewhat misleading in this context. Kumārila had anticipated Searle by including both of these types—under the terms *apūrvavidhi* and *niyamavidhi*—under the broad category of injunction (TV, p. 152). But *all* injunctions share a semantics that distinguishes them from non-injunctive sentences: the latter have as their meaning a state of affairs that already exists or will exist in the world (*siddha*) and which has been constituted independently of the sentence; the former have as their meaning a state of affairs, *constituted by the injunction itself*, that needs to be brought into existence (*sādhya*) by someone who acts in accordance with the injunction. In remarks that I will discuss further below, Wittgenstein correctly noted the special

relationship that injunctions have with events: “In the order the fact as it were ‘casts its shadow before.’ But this shadow, whatever it may be, is not the event” (1967, §70)

The characterization of the relationship between the order and the event, the injunction and the ritual act, is the question of the *bhāvārthādhikaraṇa*. Śābara raises the issue with characteristic directness: “Is a different *dharma* enjoined by each individual word in a sentence, or is a single *dharma* enjoined by all of them?” [ŚB, p. 372]. The eventual answer awards primacy to the verb: the verb organizes the sentence’s other components into a syntactic unity. This is a necessary condition for the sentence to enjoin a single *dharma*, but because a syntactic unity by itself cannot enjoin anything, it is not a sufficient condition. Mīmāṃsakas maintained that a special semantic feature of finite verbs—the fact that they had *bhāva* as their meaning—was what united the injunction and the ritual act into a single structure of meaning. That is the purport of the *sūtra*:

- (2) *bhāvārthāḥ karmaśabdās tebhyaḥ kriyā pratīyetaiṣa hy artho vidhīyate*  
[MS 2.1.1]

“Words for action have *bhāva* as their meaning. Activity should be understood from them. For this is the end (*artha*) that is enjoined.”<sup>4</sup>

The *sūtra* says that what characterizes the class of “words for action” (*karmaśabda*) is a particular meaning, *bhāva*. Later Mīmāṃsakas developed the theory of *bhāvanā* in order to explain what this *bhāva* consisted in. But in this formulation, it is neither a novel nor uniquely Mīmāṃsaka idea. *Bhāva* in the grammatical tradition designates a verb’s lexical meaning, often in contrast to the thematic roles that the verb encodes (thus while *dyuti*- “illumination” and *dyotaka*- “illuminating” are both formed from the root √*dyut*, the first expresses *bhāva*, and the second expresses the agent, or *kartr̥*). In the *Nirukta*, we encounter a formulation very similar to the MS: *bhāvapradhānam ākhyātam*, “a verb is that in which *bhāva* predominates” [p. 27]. The *sūtra* connects this *bhāva*, an element of meaning (*artha*) that verbs have in common, with the ritual action that constitutes *dharma*: what the Veda enjoins is a *bhāva*. Thus it is the verb of an injunction that constitutes *dharma*, not each and every word, nor the unstructured aggregation of all of the words.

The remaining portion of the *sūtra*, “activity should be understood from them,” is vague. Śābara, followed by Kumāṛila, understands this phrase in a very specific way. The “activity” (*kriyā*) is not the *sense* of activity; that is, the phrase does not express a word–meaning relationship, since that would be redundant with the preceding (“words for action have *bhāva* as their meaning”). The “activity” is an

<sup>4</sup> See also Kumāṛila’s versification of the *sūtra* [TV, p. 375]: *bhāvārthāḥ karmaśabdā ye tebhyaḥ pūrvakriyāgatīḥ | taiḥ kuryād yajinā svagam eṣa hy artho vidhīyate* ||

actual activity, the production of a result (*phalasya kriyā karaṇam niṣpattir iti*, ŚB, p. 375).<sup>5</sup> The logic is something like this: because verbs have this meaning of *bhāva*, which we can provisionally translate as “bringing into being” (perhaps not the most obvious translation—that would be “state of being”—but the one that Kumārila accepts, as shown below), we must understand from them the bringing-into-being of a result. In the case of the Veda, the results are those things for the sake of which one undertakes a sacrifice, and which are indicated in the Veda itself (heaven, sons, wealth, and so on). Or more precisely, the result is “the unprecedented” (*apūrva*), the invisible causal link between the performance of the sacrifice and the achievement of the desired end (heaven and so on). This understanding of *kriyā* takes the Mīmāṃsakas from the older idea of *bhāva* to the novel concept of *bhāvanā*. It also introduces a teleological nuance to the sense of *artha*: besides being the “meaning” of a Vedic injunction, and the “thing” which the injunction constitutes, it is the “goal” or “purpose” which is inherent, and congruent, in both the semantic structure of the injunction (for *bhāva* refers to the production of a particular *result*) and the purposive action of the ritual (for a ritual is undertaken for a certain *end*).

### *The Structure of Bhāvanā*

To summarize briefly: in order to explain the manner in which the language of the Veda constituted an obligation in the world, early Mīmāṃsakas relied on the notion that verbs in general expressed *bhāva*. This “bringing into being,” or actualization, is what the verb in a given injunction expresses, and it is also—and therefore—what the injunction tells us to do. But what is the nature of this “bringing into being,” what direct consequences does it have for the understanding of the Veda and Vedic ritual, and what are its indirect consequences for the philosophy of language?

For these questions we turn to the TV, where Kumārila addresses a number of issues related to the nature of *bhāva* and especially to the way in which this *bhāva* is denoted in language. The first is the derivation and meaning of the word *bhāva* itself. Kumārila rejects the obvious derivation of this word from the root  $\sqrt{bhū}$  (“become”) with the primary derivational suffix *GHaÑ* (taught in *Aṣṭādhyāyī* 3.3.18 in the sense of *bhāva*, which as noted above refers to the lexical meaning itself), according to which *bhāva* would mean “being” or “becoming.” He instead goes for a derivation from  $\sqrt{bhū}$  with the causative suffix *ṆiC* (3.1.26) and the primary derivational suffix *aC* (taught in 3.3.56); *bhāva* thus formed would mean “causing to become” or “bringing into being.” In this case, it would be a synonym of the unambiguously causative form *bhāvanā*:

<sup>5</sup> For this reason I do not think that Śābara used *kriyā* simply as a synonym for *bhāva* or *bhāvanā* (pace Kataoka 2001).

- (3) *siddhāntavādī tu bhavater ṇijantāt ‘er ac’ ity ac-pratyaye kṛte bhāvanāvācīnaṃ bhāvaśabdaṃ vyutpādyākhyātasya cānvayavyatirekābhyāṃ tatparatvaṃ kartrabhidhānapraṭisedhaṃ cābhipretyodāharati—yajati dadāṭī* [TV, p. 374]

“But the proponent of the accepted view applies the suffix *aC* to the root *bhū* followed by the causative suffix *ṆiC*, and therefore derives the word *bhāva* as synonym of *bhāvanā*, ‘bringing into being.’ With this he has in mind the fact that *bhāvanā* is the most important element in finite verbs—which we can show by the method of positive and negative concomitance—as well as the refutation of the grammarians’ point of view, according to which the finite verb denotes the agent [in active verbs]. Thus he gives the examples ‘one sacrifices’ and ‘one gives.’”

Kataoka calls this derivation “rather forced,” but it is formally unobjectionable, and Kumāṛila is clearly correct in attributing this understanding of *bhāva* to Śābara.<sup>6</sup> For throughout his *Bhāṣya* Śābara reformulates injunctions such as *svargakāmo yajeta* (“one who desires heaven should sacrifice”) with the verb *bhāvayet* (“should bring into being”), and this reformulation depends upon the capacity of the verb to express the sense of “bringing into being,” and not simply “being.”

The reformulation of Vedic injunctions in the language of *bhāvanā* is, in fact, the most common and most recognizable application of this concept in Mīmāṃsā; Khaṇḍadeva, one of the few authors to talk about this practice, calls it *vivarāṇa*. When we encounter a sentence like *svargakāmo yajeta*, it may at first seem perfectly clear that the Veda is enjoining an action, namely sacrifice, upon a person, namely one who desires heaven. But the *sūtra* (2) has already told us that the Veda does not enjoin simply anything, but specifically a “bringing into being,” a *bhāvanā*, which is expressed by the verb. It is crucial that *bhāvanā* has its own structure, which may differ significantly, even counterintuitively, from the surface structure of the injunction as it is encountered in the Veda. In order to understand the meaning of the injunction, we have to relate the surface structure of the injunction to the deep structure required by the semantics of *bhāvanā*. The original injunction, *svargakāmo yajeta*, is therefore restructured and reformulated as *yajñena svargaṃ bhāvayet*, “one should bring heaven into being by means of sacrifice.” This restructuring is an exegetical device: it serves to explain an injunction, not to produce a new injunction that is somehow parasitic on the content and force of the original. Yet this approach raises a number of questions that extend far beyond Mīmāṃsā’s exegetical concerns. What is this hypothetical “deep structure” actually like? Why should we believe that it exists? And why should we believe that it is universal?

Mīmāṃsakas discussed the deep structure of *bhāvanā* in terms of three “components” (*aṃśa*). These components are also described as “expectancies” or “requirements” (*ākāṅkṣā* or *apekṣā*). There is a clear homology with sentential syntax, in which the words of a sentence look to or depend upon (*apekṣate*) the other words in order to produce a unified sentence-meaning. But these components are also “requirements” in another sense: they are abstract terms that stand in need of a

<sup>6</sup> Kataoka (2001, p. 1031). See Diaconescu (2010, n. 417 on p. 222) for a discussion of the derivation of *bhāva*.

particular characterization, which the interpreter must supply either from the passage in question, from related passages, or from certain inferentially-determined “default” values. While the vocabulary used to describe these components is drawn from different spheres, their number and nature are clearly set out in Śabara’s *Bhāṣya*.<sup>7</sup> Kumārila additionally makes it clear that these components stand in a particular order, which is both logical (an order of dependency) and cognitive (an order in which they present themselves to our understanding). I list the components here, each under the heading of my preferred translation, for the sake of clarity.

(1) *Goal*. *Bhāvanā* is the “bringing into being” of some thing, which is its *goal*. This component is designated with various nuances by different words: *bhāvya* (“what is to be brought into being”), a *kṛtya* or gerundive form that corresponds lexically to *bhāvanā*; *sādhya* (“what is to be effected”), a *kṛtya* form from the root  $\sqrt{sādh}$  which carries the ontological implication that the goal of *bhāvanā* is not already in existence (*siddha*); *karman*, a derivative of  $\sqrt{kr}$  that denotes a “goal” in grammatical discourse (*kartur īpsitatamaṃ karma*, “the *karman* is what the agent most desires to obtain,” *Aṣṭādhyāyī* 1.4.49), which is most frequently mapped onto the syntactic object of active verbs. The “requirement” (*apekṣā*) that the goal answers is the question, “*what should one bring into being?*” (*bhāvayet kim*), as Kumārila says:

(4) *sā tu pratūtamātraiva prādhānyād apekṣāntarānadhīnatvāc ca prathamam tāvat sādhyāṃsam apekṣate bhāvayet kim iti* [TV, p. 383]

“But just as soon as we understand a “bringing into being,” it requires as its first component a *goal*, because the goal is most important and because it does not depend upon the other requirements. The form of this requirement is, ‘*What should one bring into being?*’”

As with the other components, the requirement for a goal is satisfied by construing (*anvaya*) some particular thing as the goal. In the case of the sentence “One who desires heaven should sacrifice,” Mīmāṃsakas argued at length—for reasons that will be examined below—that “heaven,” rather than “sacrifice,” should be construed as the goal. The construal of some particular thing as the goal in the structure of *bhāvanā* can be expressed by its formulation as an object of the verb *bhāvayet*, “should bring into being.” Thus the requirement for a goal is satisfied with the partial reformulation “one should bring *heaven* into being” (*svargaṃ bhāvayet*).

(2) *Means*. The means by which the goal is brought into being is designated by the words *sādhana* (“means of effecting,” a term corresponding to *sādhya* with predominantly ontological significance) and *karaṇa* (“instrument,” a term from grammatical discourse which corresponds to *karman* and which often maps onto an instrumental case ending). According to Kumārila,

<sup>7</sup> Thus ŚB on MS 2.1.1 (p. 376): *yajetetyevamādayaḥ sākāṅkṣā yajeta kiṃ kena katham iti*, “words like *yajeta* ‘one should sacrifice’ have expectancies, namely: one should sacrifice *what*, *by what means*, and *how?*”

- (5) *tato 'vadhṛtasvargādisādhyāṃsā bhāvanā kena bhāvayed ity evaṃ karaṇam apekṣate* [TV, p. 384]

“After that, once the goal-component (heaven, whatever else it may be) has been determined, *bhāvanā* requires a means. The form of this requirement is, ‘by what means should one bring it into being?’”

The nature of this requirement calls for some comment. There is, in the semantics of *bhāvanā*, a basic logical dependency of the means upon the goal, by virtue of the fact that the means is *eo ipso* a means toward some goal. But the dependency is as much a feature of the human subject as the objective structure of action: if the goal—as Kumārila explains elsewhere—is something that a person actually wishes to accomplish, he will naturally ask after, or even have a “desire” for (*ākāṅkṣā*), the means to that end. This prudential aspect is important because *bhāvanā* is meant, in part, to account for how the Veda gets humans to engage in action. On this point, Śabara makes the following observation:

- (6) *bhāvārthaiḥ kim api bhāvayitavyaṃ, svargakāmasya ca kenāpi bhāvayateti tayor naṣṭāśvadagdharathavat samprayogaḥ* [ŚB, p. 376]

“On the one hand, verbs which ‘have *bhāva* as their meaning’ need to cause *something* to come into being. On the other hand, the desired object—in this case, heaven—needs to be brought into being *by some means*.<sup>8</sup> These two—the something that is brought into being, and the something that serves as its means—are joined, like one man whose horse is dead, and another whose wagon has been burned.”

D’Sa understood this passage to mean that the language of the Veda and the desires of human agents “hang together” by reason of their mutual expectancy.<sup>9</sup> What “hangs together” is, more precisely, the requirement for the goal and the requirement for the means. The fact that the Veda indicates means to ends that we in fact desire is not a sign of some impersonal providence, but an *ex hypothesi* feature of a system that defines “heaven” (*svarga*) as “felicity” (*prīti*), which serves a similar architectonic purpose in Mīmāṃsaka psychology that *eudaimonia* serves in Aristotelian ethics (see ŚB on 6.1.1–3, the *svargakāmādhikaraṇa*). It is important, however, that both the logico-syntactic “dependency” and the psychological “desire” coincide in *ākāṅkṣā* as it is used here.

For reasons that will be discussed below, the lexical meaning of the verb (*dhātvartha*) is often construed as the means toward the goal. In such cases the lexical meaning appears as an instrumental case-form in the reformulation of the

<sup>8</sup> Taking *bhāvayatā* as the predicate of *svargakāmasya*, which seems to be a *tatpuruṣa* rather than a *bahuvrīhi* here (an observation I owe to Lawrence McCrea). In Śabara’s commentary on the *svargakāmādhikaraṇa*, *kāma* generally refers to the object of desire rather than the desire itself.

<sup>9</sup> D’Sa (1980, pp. 103–104).

injunction: hence *yajeta* (“one should sacrifice,” a verbal form of  $\sqrt{yaj}$ ) appears as *yāgena* (“by means of sacrifice,” a nominal form of the same root) in the reformulation of *svargakāmo yajeta* into *yāgena svargaṃ bhāvayet*.

(3) *Procedure*. The way or manner in which the goal is brought into being is called the procedure (*itikartavyatā*, literally “something’s needing to be done in such a way”). Kumārila says:

- (7) *seyam bhāvanāṃśadvayaparipūrṇā satī sarvakaraṇānām  
upāyānanugrhitānām karaṇatvānupapatteḥ katham bhāvayed itītikartavyatām  
apekṣate* [TV, p. 385]

“And so this *bhāvanā*, once its two other components have been filled out, requires a procedure, because it’s impossible for any means to be a means at all without the facilitation of some method. The form of this requirement is, “in what manner should one bring it into being?”

The requirement for the procedure arises, on a logical analysis, from the fact that the means has to be employed in some specific manner for it to actually lead to the goal: an axe might be a means for chopping wood, but not if one hits the log with the axe’s handle. On a psychological analysis, the procedure is a prudential strategy that one pursues after having cognized the means–end relationship of the other two components. Unlike an Aristotelian practical syllogism (“I want to do  $x$ ;  $y$  is a means to  $x$ ; therefore I should do  $y$ ”), the requirement for a procedure implies that knowledge of a means–end relationship alone does not necessarily lead to prudential action. This is an important point for Mīmāṃsakas, for in some cases, the procedure will be perfectly obvious (nobody needs to be told how to use an axe, although there may be better and worse axe-swinging techniques), while in others, the procedure will be a whole panoply of ritual actions, whose sequence, relational structure, and conditions of correct performance it is Mīmāṃsā’s purpose to explicate. A much-cited verse generally thought to belong to Kumārila’s lost *Bṛhaṭṭikā* (Halbfass 1991, p. 33) programmatically identifies Mīmāṃsā with the procedural part of *bhāvanā*’s tripartition:

- (8) *dharme pramīyamāne hi vedena karaṇātmanā  
itikartavyatābhāgaṃ mīmāṃsā pūrayisyate*

“Given that dharma is known through the Veda, which is a means, it is the task of Mīmāṃsā to fill out the procedural part.”

The procedure is often abbreviated or left out of the reformulation: in the case of *svargakāmo yajeta*, it is usually said to be *prāyājādayaḥ* “the preliminary rites and everything that follows.” This reflects not the procedure’s relative unimportance, but the reformulation’s purpose of disambiguating the different components of *bhāvanā*, for the procedure can be extremely complex. Here, also, there is a problem with the expedient of representing *bhāvanā*’s components as case-forms governed by the verb *bhāvayet*, since the instrumental case has been reserved for the means.

The tripartition that matches the elements of a text with the elements of purposive action is, as the emphasis on reformulation suggests, a hermeneutical structure: to understand the injunction is to understand, specifically and in a step-by-step manner, what it would mean to enact it. There are clear parallels here with Gadamer's hermeneutics. He compared (2004 [1960], p. 330) the recipient of an order and the historian who wishes to understand a text: the historian is not necessarily the person to whom the text is addressed, but in order to understand the text, he must perform the same act of understanding that the recipient of an order performs in order to execute the order. Gadamer does not mean that you will inevitably perform a sacrifice after reading the injunctions in this paper; he is rather gesturing towards the kind of understanding on which the text is isomorphic with the action (which is possible even if one does not accept their validity), as opposed, one imagines, to a kind of understanding that leaves the text suspended in its own play of signification. Yet Gadamer also makes space for a real-world application of textual understanding in his concept of *applicatio*, drawn from Western legal and theological hermeneutics. The hermeneutics of *bhāvanā*, however, makes it easier to see—and therefore easier both to follow and to resist—the links between understanding and action. The goal can only be a goal if one in fact wishes to bring it about (here, regarding the desirability of “heaven,” is where Mīmāṃsakas differed most from seekers of liberation like Buddhists and Vedāntins); the means can only be a means if one credits a particular means–end relationship (here, regarding the reliability of the Veda, is where Mīmāṃsakas and the people who presently study them are most likely to disagree); the procedure can only be a procedure if one accepts its propriety for realizing the end through the means (here, regarding the details of sacrificial procedure, is where Mīmāṃsakas established their hermeneutical monopoly).

For Mīmāṃsakas the reformulation of an injunction in the language of *bhāvanā* simply makes explicit a meaning that is already there, in the “deep structure” to which *bhāvanā* refers, and produces neither a new injunction nor a new injunctive modality. D'Sa maintains that the reformulation of *svargakāmo yajeta* into *yāgena svargaṃ bhāvayet* transforms the injunction from a hypothetical imperative (“if one desires heaven, he should sacrifice”) into a categorical imperative (“by means of sacrifice, one should bring heaven into being”).<sup>10</sup> It is true, in a broad sense, that the understanding that one obtains through the hermeneutics of *bhāvanā* can correct or sublimate an existing understanding of an injunction. But there are reasons to resist characterizing the injunctions themselves as Kantian maxims.

First, a similar dispute takes place between conditional and unconditional interpretations of the injunction in Śabara's *Bhāṣya* on 6.1.1–3 (the *svargakāmādhi-karaṇa*). There the *pūrvapakṣin* and *siddhāntin* disagree over whether heaven or the

<sup>10</sup> D'Sa (1974, p. 104): “Man beachte dabei, dass das konditionale Element, das durch den Ausdruck „der den Himmel Begehrende“ gegeben war, in dieser Umformulierung völlig verschwunden und dafür ein absolutes „soll“ eingeführt ist. Statt der alten Vorschrift „wenn man den Himmel begehrt, soll man mit Soma opfern“, ist eine neue *bedingungslose* Vorschrift eingeführt worden: „Man soll den Himmelslohn durch das Opfer bewirken.“ See also D'Sa (1980, p. 178).

sacrifice is primary. The *pūrvapakṣin* construes the sacrifice as primary, in effect turning the desire for heaven into a secondary qualification of the sacrificer: The *siddhāntin* argues that the heaven is primary, since it is that for which the sacrifice is undertaken. The *pūrvapakṣin*'s interpretation makes the injunction conditional upon being a person with a desire for heaven: "A person who desires heaven—and not anyone else—should sacrifice." The *siddhāntin*, however, dismisses the condition as vacuous, since "heaven is felicity (*prīti*), and everyone desires felicity."<sup>11</sup> When construed in such a way that heaven is the goal, and sacrifice is the means ("one should bring heaven into being by means of sacrifice"), it becomes clear that the injunction is therefore unconditional, or more precisely, does not specify any conditions besides the ones we must assume in any case (e.g., the sacrificer is a *traivarnīka* who has completed his Vedic study). The *siddhāntin*'s construal does not cram the injunction into the framework of *bhāvanā*, but simply makes explicit the teleological priority of heaven to the sacrifice, which is established independently of this framework.

Secondly, a distinction similar to that between hypothetical and categorical imperatives was available to Mīmāṃsakas, in the form of *niyoga* ("obligation") and *iṣṭasādhanatā* ("being a means to an end"). This distinction, however, applies to the different ways in which schools of Mīmāṃsā understood injunctions in general. Bādari had proposed a theory according to which injunctions produce a binding obligation (*niyoga*) precisely because they are encountered in the Veda and independently of any benefit that might result from their execution (Bhatta 1994, p. 13; Yoshimizu 1997, pp. 165–168). Prabhākara and his followers proposed to subordinate the obligation to perform a momentary act to the production of a transtemporal potency (*apūrva*); their account remains deontic but not disinterested, at variance with the Kantian position. Kumārila Bhaṭṭa and his followers argued that Vedic injunctions were binding only insofar as they indicated a means–end relationship that we would not otherwise know about. The Bhaṭṭas, particularly Maṇḍanamiśra and Pārthasārathimiśra, argued at length against the idea of *niyoga* and its Prabhākara reformulations; they maintained, as shown below, that there is simply no such thing as disinterested moral action.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, Mīmāṃsaka themselves make it clear that reformulation is a hermeneutic strategy—a way of making explicit what is already implicit in the injunction—rather than a way of wringing strongly normative statements from weakly normative ones. In a passage from his *Ślokavārttika* (ŚV) which can also serve as a summary of the structure of *bhāvanā*, Kumārila draws an analogy with grammar (vv. 251–256 in the *vākyādhikaraṇa*):

<sup>11</sup> *prītir hi svargaḥ, sarvaś ca prītiṃ prārthayate* (p. 1256). The quotation actually comes from ŚB on 4.3.15 (in the *viśvajidādeḥ svargaphalakatvādhikaraṇa*, where it is established that heaven is to be understood as the goal whenever the Veda does not explicitly state a goal).

<sup>12</sup> For the wider Prabhākara–Bhaṭṭa debate on this topic I refer the reader to Natarajan (1995, pp. 41–62) and Bhatta (1994, pp. 14–17).

- (9) *sā sādhyasādhanopāyasāmānyārthāvadhāraṇāt |  
 anyalabhyam viśeṣāṃśam yaṃ kañcid abhikāñkṣati || 251 ||  
 kāmāvagatasādhyatvaḥ svargaḥ kāñkṣati bhāvanām |  
 tatra sannidhiyogyatvāt sambandhaḥ kalpyate tayoh || 252 ||  
 tataḥ sā kṛtasambandhā sādhanāṃśam apekṣate |  
 dhātvarthāsādhanam kiñcin nānuṣṭhānam hi siddhyati || 253 ||  
 dhātuvācyaś ca yāgādir atrītyāparo 'pi san |  
 svabhāvād bhāvanāsaktaḥ sādhyam kiñcid apekṣate || 254 ||  
 pratyāsattinimitto 'yaṃ sambandhaḥ kalpyate 'nayoḥ |  
 taṃ ca vispaṣṭam ākhyātum yāgeneti prayujyate || 255 ||  
 yathaupagavaśabdārthaṃ tasyāpatyam itīdrśāt |  
 kathayanti na caitasmin ṣaṣṭhyantopagusambhavaḥ || 256 ||*

“(251) Once we determine that there are these three general meanings—the goal, the means, and the procedure—the injunction’s ‘bringing-into-being’ (*bhāvanā*) requires a specific meaning for each of these components, which we must get from some other source. (252) Heaven, which we determine to be the goal on account of the word ‘desire,’ in turn requires a ‘bringing-into-being’ (*bhāvanā*). Because of their proximity to each other, and the fact that they fit with each other, we posit a relation between the injunction’s *bhāvanā* and heaven. (253) Then, once this relation has been posited, the injunction’s *bhāvanā* requires another component: the means. This is because there can be no execution of the injunction at all if there is no means for its execution, which is here provided by the lexical meaning. (254) And even though the lexical meaning ‘sacrifice’ does not have an instrumental case ending, it naturally requires some goal and thus fits into the injunction’s *bhāvanā*. (255) This relation between the lexical meaning and the means of *bhāvanā* is posited on account of the contiguity of the lexical meaning, denoted by the verbal root, and *bhāvanā*, denoted by the suffix. And in order to clearly explicate this relation, we use the expression ‘by means of sacrifice.’ (256) In the same way, grammarians explain the meaning of the word *aupagava* by saying ‘the descendant of him,’ even though a relation between *upagu* and a genitive case ending is not present in the word *aupagava* itself.”

In explaining how *bhāvanā* works, Kumārila refers to several specifically linguistic issues which will be discussed below. The point here, however, is that he sees the reformulation of a Vedic injunction as parallel to the grammatical analysis of a derived word. In what respect is “descendant of Upagu” (*upagor apatyam*) an acceptable gloss on the word *aupagava*? *Aupagava* expresses the same semantic relationship between Upagu and his descendant with a *taddhita* suffix (taught by *Aṣṭādhyāyī* 4.1.92) that the gloss expresses with a genitive case-ending; the gloss merely makes the semantic relation grammatically explicit. In the same way, Mīmāṃsakas can make the relation of the lexical meaning to the *bhāvanā* of the sentence as a whole explicit by expressing it as an instrumental case-form of a nominal derivative (as in *yāgena*, “by means of sacrifice”).

The Linguistic Expression of *Bhāvanā*

As seen in the last example, the set of meanings required by *bhāvanā*—the goal, the means, and the procedure—fits together in a very specific way with the word-meanings encountered in the injunction. Śabara was content to use this interpretive strategy without offering a theory of *bhāvanā per se*. But if *bhāvanā* was merely a contrivance that the Mīmāṃsakas used to spin out their own interpretations of Vedic sentences, there would be no reason to prefer them to competing interpretations. Kumārila sought to transform *bhāvanā* from a conventional but ultimately unargued intuition about how verbs work into a general theory of sentential meaning—a theory which could ground Mīmāṃsā's interpretive enterprise in universal principles and which could compete favorably with rival theories. I discern four basic steps in this argument: first, it must be established that verbs have some element of meaning in common; second, it must be established that this element of meaning is *bhāvanā*; third, it must be explained exactly how verbs express *bhāvanā*; and fourth, it must be explained how *bhāvanā* works with the other elements in a sentence to produce a unified sentence-meaning. Later Mīmāṃsakas followed in Kumārila's steps, but they are surer of these steps than Kumārila was, and as Frauwallner observed, they jettisoned his more tenuous distinctions.<sup>13</sup>

*The Common Basis (Samānādhikaraṇa) of Verbal Meaning*

The core of the theory of *bhāvanā* lies in the notion that verbs are *bhāvārtha*, that is, that apart from their individual lexical meanings, they express an additional, supralexical meaning that can be captured as *bhāva* or *bhāvanā*. It stands to reason that verbs as a class will possess some *differentia specifica* that sets them apart from other classes of words; otherwise these distinctions would be arbitrary. The difficulty lies in the fact that there are numerous differences, which are hard to isolate, and among which it is hard to ascertain which is more fundamental. Hence if we compare the noun *yāgaḥ* “sacrifice” to the finite verb *yajati* “sacrifices,” we will note: (a) the verb takes different morphology, i.e., a different grade of the root vowel, a different variant of the root-final consonant, and a different suffix; (b) the verb has different syntactic agreement patterns, i.e., it agrees in number with an agent in the nominative case; (c) the verb expects (in Sanskrit grammatical terminology) or subcategorizes for (in modern syntactic terminology) something in the instrumental case with which one sacrifices; (d) the verb has a particular temporality (present) and modality (indicative). Mīmāṃsakas held that all these morphological and syntactic differences all supervened upon a key semantic difference: (e) the verb has a sense of “does” which the noun lacks. Expressing this sense of “does” is the reason for employing a verbal form as opposed to a nominal form, and thus for using the finite verbal affixes (*tiṅ*).

The evidence for supposing that finite verbal forms share this particular semantic value comes from the coreferentiality (*sāmānādhikaraṇya*) of any given finite verb with the verb “do” ( $\sqrt{kr}$ ). That is, in answer to the question “what is he doing?”

<sup>13</sup> Frauwallner (1938, p. 235).

(*kiṃ karoti*) we can say “he’s cooking” (*pacati*), “he’s chopping” (*chinatti*), and so on. We can also say “he’s doing some cooking” (*pākaṃ karoti*). These responses are acceptable because what someone refers to in saying “what is he doing?” is the same as what we refer to in saying “he’s cooking,” and the statements are therefore coreferential (*samānādhikaraṇa*); their difference consists, among other things, in referring to that referent in a general way (*karoti*) or a specific way (*pacati*). Kumāriḷa provisionally describes this common reference as “the sense of ‘does’” or “the sense of ‘makes’” (*karotyārtha*). Nouns, which lack this sense, are not coreferential with “does”; in response to the question “what is he doing?” we cannot simply say “cooking” (*pākaḥ*) without implicitly construing it with a verb (e.g., *kriyate*). Kumāriḷa says [TV, p. 376]:

- (10) *siddhakarṭṛkriyāvāciny ākhyātapratyaye sati |*  
*sāmānādhikaraṇyena karotyārtho ’vagamyate ||*

“When the finite verbal affix expresses an activity of which the agent is already in existence, the sense of ‘does’ is understood [from every finite verb] by reason of its coreferentiality [with ‘does’].”

There is a weak point in this argument, which Kumāriḷa is acutely aware of. We don’t say “he’s being” (*bhavati*) or “he exists” (*asti*) in answer to the question “what is he doing?” In fact there is a whole class of verbs, which we can designate “existential verbs,” that do not appear to be coreferential with “does,” on account of the fact that they do not express an activity at all. At first, Kumāriḷa argues that these verbs constitute an exception: despite being finite verbs, they are not *bhāvārtha*. Later, when Kumāriḷa discusses Vedic injunctions that contain such existential verbs, he argues that they do express *bhāvanā*, but in a kind of provisional way (*apāramārthika*, TV, p. 381). Frauwallner criticized Kumāriḷa for this contradiction.<sup>14</sup> The problem seems to be in the presentation. Kumāriḷa certainly did not forget that some Vedic injunctions, which *ex hypothesi* express *bhāvanā*, contain existential verbs. Rather, at this early stage of the argument, his conceptual resources are limited to a speaker’s intuitions about coreferentiality. Immediately after noting that existential verbs constitute an exception, he proposes a deeper and more universal form of verbal meaning to accommodate them.

Coreferentiality is not as facile or naïve an argument as it might at first appear. Wittgenstein (1967, §290) puzzled over the sentence “he did what I told him”: “Why should one not say here: There is an identity between the action and the words?! Why should I interpose a shadow between the two?” Here the relative pronoun refers to a verbal command, and its antecedent to its execution. Kumāriḷa’s inherited focus on verbs should not obscure the broader question of how language—which some theories, ancient and modern, have represented as a self-contained system—comes to intersect with human action in precisely the ways that

<sup>14</sup> Frauwallner (1938, p. 222): “Es wäre ja auch ein Widerspruch, die Verba des Machens in der besprochenen Weise den Verben des Werdens gegenüber zu stellen, aus dieser Gegenüberstellung den Begriff der *bhāvanā* abzuleiten, and dann doch zu behaupten, daß auch die Verba des Werdens die *bhāvanā* ausdrücken.”

Wittgenstein points to. For both Wittgenstein and Kumāriḷa, however, coreferentiality was merely a starting-point: while Wittgenstein leaned toward an externalist conception of language as a symbolic instrument, Kumāriḷa went deeper into the internal structure of language.

### *The Universal Form of Verbal Meaning*

Having accepted, at least provisionally, the coreferentiality of all non-existential verbs with the verb “does” or “makes,” Kumāriḷa begins to reflect critically on the extent to which “does” can serve as the universal form of verbal meaning. The problem is this. Any verb, including “does,” refers to an action, selects out participants in that action (which Kumāriḷa refers to using the *kāraḷas* of the grammarians), and encodes the participants as its syntactic arguments. “Does,” for example, implies an agent (*karṭr*) and a goal (*karman*), which become the verb’s subject and object respectively. But any action can be brought under a variety of descriptions. For Kumāriḷa, the obvious example of this multiplicity of descriptions is the “primary action” (*pradhānakriyā*) that includes a number of “inclusive actions” (*avāntarakriyā*), the way that cooking includes lighting the fire, assembling the ingredients, and so on. The consequence of this is that the particular configuration of participants (*kāraḷas*) that we get by describing an action using a particular verb might be drastically reconfigured if we choose to describe that action using a different verb: the agent might become the goal, or vice versa.

This multiplicity of descriptions seems, at first, to threaten the project of finding a universal form of verbal meaning. “Does,” in any case, can no longer be considered as that universal form, because it picks out a non-universal configuration of participants. But here Kumāriḷa comes upon an important insight. There is a deep and internal connection between the meaning of the verb “makes” (*karoti*, also “does”) and the meaning of the verb “becomes” (*bhavati*). He arrives at this connection by the method of positive and negative concomitance (*anvaya-vyatiṛeka*): anything that can be described as the goal (*karman*) of “makes” can also be described as the agent (*karṭr*) of “becomes” and vice versa, while anything that cannot be described as the agent of “becomes” cannot be described as the goal of “makes.” We will never see something that has always existed (like space) or something that cannot exist (like sky-flowers) “become,” nor will we ever see somebody “making” it.

The relationship of coreferentiality between the agent of one verb and the goal of another is exactly what we see in causative verbs, and Kumāriḷa draws upon the vocabulary that grammarians had devised to describe this relationship. The agent of the noncausative verb (e.g. “Devadatta walks,” *devadatto gacchati*) becomes the goal of the causative verb (e.g., “Yajñadatta makes Devadatta walk,” *yajñadatto devadattaṃ gamayati*), and thus the subject of the noncausative verb corresponds to the object of the causative verb. But since causative verbs simply add onto the argument structure of noncausative verbs, there is a sense in which the agent of the noncausative verb continues to be an agent in the causative verb. Causative verbs therefore have two agents: the agent of the noncausative verb is an “employed agent” (*prayojya-karṭr*), since he is made to perform the designated activity by the

agent of the causative verb, who thereby becomes an “employing agent” (*prayojaka-kartr*).<sup>15</sup> In the case of “makes” and “becomes,” we can describe the agent of “becomes” and the goal of “makes” as an employed agent. Nor is this description limited to the two verbs “makes” and “becomes”: we can include under each the whole set of verbal expressions that are coreferential with them. Thus, considering a single action that is described by the two sentences “he cooks the rice-grains” (*taṇḍulān pacati*) and “the rice-grains soften” (*taṇḍulāḥ viklidyanti*), the rice-grains, which are at once the object of “cooks” (a *make*-word) and the subject of “soften” (a *become*-word), are the employed agent.

Kumārila now comes to the reason why *bhāvanā*, “bringing into being,” can be considered the universal form of verbal meaning. Because of limitations in the expressive power (*śakti*) of verbs, we can usually only describe one aspect of an action at a time. The exception is causative verbs, which present what we are now able to recognize as a complete semantic picture of an action. Kumārila gives a typology of sentences that is worth quoting at length, as it culminates in the determination that “brings into being” (*bhāvayati*), and not “makes” or “becomes,” is the semantic element that absolutely all verbs partake of [TV, pp. 377–378]:

- (10) *bhavatikarotyoh śaktibhedād viklidipacatyor iva niyatam prayojyaprayojakakartrvyāpāravacanatvaṃ. tatra ca kadācit abhidhīyamānakarmaśabdaśaktyākṣiptaprayojyavyāpāro vā svayam eva vākṣiptaprayojyavyāpāro kevalam prayojakavyāpāra eva vivakṣyate, kaṭam karoti, odanam pacatīti. kadācit ākṣiptaprayojakavyāpāram prayojyavyāpāramātram, ghaṭo bhavati, viklidyanti taṇḍulā iti. kadācid ubhau bhinnau samuccitya prayogaḥ, karoti kaṭam devadattaḥ sa ca bhavati. kadācid upasarjanībhūtaprayojakavyāpārah prayojyavyāpārah, kriyate devadatteneti, svayameveti vā prayoge. kadācit punaḥ samānapadaikadeśopāttopasarjanībhūtaprayojyakriyah prayojakavyāpāro vivakṣyate, tadā ca karotipacatyos tādātmyenāśakter aprayogād, bhūviklidyos ca kevalaprayojyakriyāniṣṭhatvān, na sāksāt pravartitum śaktir astīti vācakatvena dyotakatvena vā nijaparah prayujyate bhāvayati vikledayanti ca. tathā cāha—*
- prayojyakarṭṛkaikāntavyāpārapratipādakāḥ |*  
*ṇyantā eva prayujyante tatprayojakakarmasu ||*  
*na ca teṣām anyantānām āśaktir ity anyeṣām āśaktyā bhavitavyam. anyeṣām vā śaktir ity eṣām api tadvad bhavitavyam. kutaḥ—*  
*śaktayah sarvabhāvānām nānuyojyāḥ svabhāvataḥ |*  
*tena nānā vadanty arthān prakṛtipratyayādayaḥ ||*  
*evam karotyarthadvāreṇa sarvākhyāteṣu bhāvayatyarthāḥ siddhaḥ.*  
*tena bhūtiṣu karṭṛtvaṃ pratipannasya vastunaḥ |*  
*prayojakakriyām āhur bhāvanām bhāvanāvidaḥ ||*

<sup>15</sup> Grammarians sometimes express this relationship with the verb *pra-√yuj* “employ,” e.g., *kurvānam prayunkte kārayati* (“he employs him in doing, i.e., causes him to do,” *Kāśikāvṛtti* on *Aṣṭādhyāyī* 1.4.55).

“The verbs ‘become’ and ‘make,’ like ‘soften’ and ‘cook,’ have different expressive powers, and thus they always express the activity of an employed and an employing agent respectively. But given those two ways of expressing an action: (a) Sometimes we only intend to express the activity of the employing agent, and in that case the activity of the employed agent is implied, either by the expressive power of the word that directly denotes the goal, or by the activity of the employed agent itself. For example, ‘he’s making a mat,’ ‘he’s cooking rice.’ (b) Sometimes we only intend to express the activity of the employed agent, and in that case the activity of an employing agent is implied. For example, ‘a pot is coming into existence,’ ‘the rice-grains are softening.’ (c) Sometimes we take these two distinct expressions together and use both. For example, ‘Devadatta is making a mat, and that mat is coming into existence.’ (d) Sometimes we intend to express the activity of the employed agent, wherein the activity of an employing agent is subsidiary. For example, we have the option of saying ‘such-and-such is made by Devadatta’ alongside ‘such-and-such is made by itself.’ (e) Sometimes, however, we want to express the activity of an employing agent, wherein the activity of an employed agent is subsidiary and included within the very same word. And in that case, we can’t use ‘makes’ or ‘cooks,’ because by their very nature they don’t have this expressive power. Nor can we use ‘softens’ or ‘becomes,’ since they are based upon the activity of an employed agent alone. There is then no possibility of using these words directly. Accordingly we have to use a causative verb, like ‘brings into being’ or ‘causes to soften,’ since only these verbs can denote—or manifest—both aspects of the action. And thus:

Verbs which express the activity of an employed agent exclusively can be used with a causative suffix with reference to the actions of those agents that employ them.

And it’s not the case that, simply because these verbs can’t express both activities when they don’t have the causative suffix, that other verbs [which do have the causative suffix], should also lack this power, or that because the other verbs [which do have the causative suffix] have this power, these verbs should have it too.

All things have expressive capacities, and we can’t expect these to be any different from what they naturally are. Hence various roots, suffixes, and so on denote various meanings.

In this way, it is established that it is the sense of ‘brings into being’ (*bhāvayati*), through its inclusion of the sense of ‘makes,’ that is present in every finite verb.

Therefore, those who know *bhāvanā* define it as the activity of something that employs something else to thereby be an agent of the verb ‘become.’”

This is a *tour de force* that culminates in a general definition of *bhāvanā*. Some reflection is warranted at this point on what exactly Kumāṛila has accomplished. In his search for an element of meaning that is common to all verbs, the first candidate he settled upon was the sense of “does.” This candidate had certain problems, like its incompatibility with existential verbs, but coreferentiality was a strong argument in its favor. Kumāṛila, however, saw that no particular lexical meaning, like

“makes,” can ever serve as the universal form of verbal meaning. Lexical meanings preselect a particular configuration of thematic roles (agent, goal, instrument, and so on), and descriptions of the same activity through different lexical meanings may and often do configure those roles differently. If there is a universal form of verbal meaning at all, it has to be supralexical: that is, it must unite under a single description the multiplicity of descriptions of an activity. Something like this unified description was already available in the relationship between employed agent and employing agent spelled out by the grammarians; Kumāriḷa made the leap of using this terminology to describe a necessary and inherent connection between the semantics of two classes of verbs, “makes” and its coreferents on the one hand, and “becomes” and its coreferents on the other. In any given case, the lexically-preselected thematic roles of one of these verbs can be mapped onto those of the other: the agent of a *become*-verb corresponds to the goal of a *make*-verb. This mapping is effected through *bhāvanā*, “bringing into being,” a semantic structure that includes both the activity of an employing agent and the activity of an employed agent, and hence encompasses the semantic value of “does” (*karotyārtha*) that had been proposed earlier as the *differentia specifica* of verbs.

*Bhāvanā* underlies the various expressions with which we talk about verbal action. It is a “deep structure,” in the sense that it goes deeper than the thematic roles (*kāraḷas*) that constitute the semantic structure of any particular verb. Thematic roles are universal as an analytic, insofar as every lexical meaning selects thematic roles, but they are not universal as an underlying semantic structure, since the agent of one verb might correspond to the goal of another. Kumāriḷa emphasizes in a later passage (TV, p. 385) that the thematic roles assigned by the lexical meaning need not correspond at all to the components of *bhāvanā* (which Kumāriḷa confusingly describes with the vocabulary of thematic roles). Since *bhāvanā* requires a goal (*bhāvya*), in the case of intransitive verbs, which by definition lack a goal (*karman*), we need to suppose one, or bring it in from a word elsewhere in the sentence. A sharper distinction between the thematic roles and the components of *bhāvanā*, and a clear indication of their hierarchical relationship, is offered elsewhere (p. 382): “Strictly speaking, thematic roles should *only* be construed with a lexical meaning [and not with the superordinate meaning of *bhāvanā*], since their senses arise in connection with a lexical meaning that is *subordinate* (*upasarjana*) to *bhāvanā*.”<sup>16</sup>

Hence, what Kumāriḷa does not quite succeed in doing is replacing the vocabulary of thematic roles (in which he has conducted his analysis) with a more general vocabulary of *bhāvanā*. This is left to later Mīmāṃsakas. Pārthasārathi is halfway there when he defines *bhāvanā* as “the activity of one thing that causes another thing to come into being.”<sup>17</sup> Āpadeva finally does not refer to “goals” (*karman*) or “agents” (*kartr*), whether employing or employed, in his definition: *bhāvanā* is, instead, “a particular activity of one thing, which ‘brings into being’ (*bhāvaka*), that is conducive to the coming into being of another thing, which

<sup>16</sup> *atha vā bhāvanopasarjanadhātvarthanīṣṭyārthatvāt kārakāṇām dhātvarthenaiva sambandhasiddhiḷ.*

<sup>17</sup> ŚD p. 101 (on 2.1.1): *tad eva ca bhavituḷ prayojakavyāpāro bhāvanety ucyate.*

‘comes into being’ (*bhavitr*).”<sup>18</sup> To make clear its superposition in the hierarchy of meaning, Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, the first to import this theory from the realm of Vedic interpretation to the realm of literary criticism, assigned *bhāvanā* an expressive power (*śakti*) over and above the limited denotative powers (*abhidhāśakti*) of individual lexemes (Gnoli 1956, p. 57).

### *The Expression of Bhāvanā by Finite Verbal Endings*

Having defined *bhāvanā* and established it as the element of meaning which is common to all verbs, Kumāṛila addresses a number of more technical questions regarding the manner in which *bhāvanā* is expressed in language. The fundamental issue is whether *bhāvanā* is expressed by the verbal root or by the finite verbal suffix; this bears upon whether *bhāvanā* can be expressed in non-finite verbal forms. Kumāṛila is curiously uninvested in these issues, as suggested first in his ŚV (*vākyādhikaraṇa*):

- (11) *anvayavyatirekābhyāṃ pratyayārthas tu seṣyate* || 248 ||  
*kaiścid, anyais tu dhātvarthas tatsāmīpyopakārataḥ* |  
*aparaiḥ samudāyārthas tata eva hi gamyate* || 249 ||  
*pākāḍau yan na dr̥ṣṭāsau bhavatyāḍau tathaiva ca* |  
*vivekaphalamandtvāt pacatyāḍau yatheṣṭatā* || 250 ||

“Some people use the method of positive and negative concomitance to consider *bhāvanā* to be the meaning of the affix. Others consider it to be a meaning of the root, with the support of its proximity to the affix. And others think that it is the meaning of their conjunction, since it is understood from the conjoined root and affix. And just as we don’t notice *bhāvanā* in nominals like ‘cooking’ (*pākāḥ*), in the same way we don’t notice it in verbs of existence like ‘becomes’ (*bhavati*). But in cases like ‘cooks’ (*pacati*), there’s not much at stake in determining which of the three options—the root, the affix, or both—denotes *bhāvanā*, so it can go any way you like.”

In the TV (pp. 379–380), he presents a series of short arguments for understanding *bhāvanā* in a variety of non-finite verbal forms. The overall import of the discussion is that once we identify *bhāvanā* in finite verbs, it becomes difficult to deny it to other verbal forms, which necessarily have a similar semantic value. And when we try to identify semantic differences between these verbal forms and finite verbs, we run the risk of undermining the universality of *bhāvanā* among finite verbs. For example, Kumāṛila notes that gerundives (*kr̥tya*) like “a Brāhmaṇa is not to be killed” do not explicitly refer to the activity of an employing agent, and for that reason the *bhāvanā* that we understand from them is “somewhat lesser” (*kiṃcin nyūnā*) than the *bhāvanā* that we understand from finite verbs. (This is surely a grammatical rather than a logical point, since it is precisely the activity of an employing agent, the potential Brāhmaṇa-killer, that the sentence prohibits.) But

<sup>18</sup> MNP p. 6: *bhāvanā nāma bhavitur bhavanānukūlo bhāvavakavyāpāraviśeṣaḥ*.

there are also finite verbs—namely passive and stative verbs—which similarly do not refer to the activity of an employing agent. The objector tries to tie Kumārila’s hands: if you throw out gerundives, you’ll have to throw out a large group of finite verbs as well. Kumārila is apparently sympathetic to many of these arguments, but he responds that “in this discipline, we always speak of *bhāvanā* as the meaning of the affix.”<sup>19</sup>

Diaconescu says that this is not Śābara’s position, so Kumārila’s defense of it as the *siddhānta* must come from a teacher after Śābara, or from a tradition parallel to Śābara.<sup>20</sup> I would rather take Kumārila’s half-hearted defense as an indication of his view that, however reasonable the objections may be, the theory of *bhāvanā* is absolutely necessary for giving a coherent sense to Vedic injunctions, and the question of how exactly it is expressed is of secondary importance. Kumārila does not have a problem with understanding *bhāvanā* “incompletely” (*nātīva*), or “in a provisional way” (*aparamārthika*), or “in a somewhat lesser way” (*kiṃcin nyūnatarā*), or “in a somewhat diminished form” (*kiṃcidapakṛṣyamānarūpa*). We might be able to explain this range of expression by appealing to the complicated interactions between the putatively universal semantics of *bhāvanā* and the semantics of various roots and affixes, which as Kumārila has emphasized, are subject to certain limits on their expressive capacity. But this is not Kumārila’s primary concern. His goal is to identify *bhāvanā* in a particular set of expressions and suggest, to the satisfaction of hostile interlocutors, a plausible mechanism by which *bhāvanā* is denoted.

Kumārila admits that the method of positive and negative concomitance (*anvaya-vyatireka*) cannot be used within a finite verbal form to determine whether it is the root or the affix that denotes *bhāvanā*, since the root and affix cannot be separated. Nevertheless—and although Kumārila’s own view is that “there’s no point to knowing about such fine distinctions”<sup>21</sup>—there are two arguments for having the affix denote *bhāvanā*. The first is “primacy” (*prādhānya*). According to Patañjali, between a word’s stem and its affix, the latter is primary because it adds a new meaning to the already-established meaning of the stem.<sup>22</sup> Kumārila likely has this characterization in mind when he assigns the expression of *bhāvanā* to the “primary” element in a finite verb. The second is the fact that *bhāvanā* is cognized only once the finite verbal suffix has been pronounced, and an interpretive principle of Mīmāṃsā tells us that *x* denotes *y* when we understand *y* at the appearance of *x* (MS 4.1.15: *śabdavat tūpalabhyate tadāgame hi taddr̥ṣyate tasya jñānaṃ hi yathānyeṣām*).

The association of *bhāvanā* with a morphological element allows Kumārila to return to the vexed issue of existential verbs. If *bhāvanā* is expressed by the finite verbal affix, then verbs like “becomes” should express *bhāvanā* despite their

<sup>19</sup> TV, p. 380: *śāstre tu sarvatra pratyayārtho bhāvanety vyavahārah*.

<sup>20</sup> Diaconescu (2010, pp. 255–256).

<sup>21</sup> TV, p. 379: *na ca vivekajñānaprayojanam asti* (see also example 11).

<sup>22</sup> *Mahābhāṣya* on 3.1.1 (on the third *vārttika*), vol. 2, p. 2. I owe this reference to Lawrence McCrea.

apparent incompatibility with the general definition offered above (the activity of something that causes another thing to come into being). Yet this incompatibility is a phantom of Kumārila's mixture of grammatical terminology with the newly-invented terminology of *bhāvanā*. He solves the problem by distinguishing the agent of the verb from the agent of the activity; the former is *eo ipso* unitary, but the latter can be complex, constituted by various components or aspects that might each undergo some kind of change throughout the course of the activity. *Bhāvanā* can therefore be thought of as the "bringing into being" in oneself of a particular state of being, a process that links together (*samparka*) a number of other activities in which some components of the agent act as employing agents and others act as employed agents. "Becoming a doctor," for example, would involve an agent "bringing into being" the state in which he or she possesses the requisite knowledge and skills, and this would be a complex and (mostly) internally-motivated process of self-transformation. Thus, in order to explain the injunction "therefore on the days of the initial offerings one should become an *ṛtvij*" (*tasmāt prāyaṅīyasyāhna ṛtvijā bhavitavyam*), Kumārila reformulates it as: "a person who already exists in a certain state (*siddha*) should 'bring into being' (*bhāvayet*) something which 'comes into being' (*bhavat*) and which can provide the basis for construing this activity with a goal, namely the state of his being a *ṛtvij*, by means of particular activities of speech, body and mind."<sup>23</sup> By construing a state of being as something that can be "brought into being," Kumārila opens up a pathway for fitting even existential verbs into the tripartite structure of *bhāvanā*.

### *The Conjunction of Lexical Meaning and Bhāvanā*

We have already seen how *bhāvanā* possesses a deep semantic structure that subordinates the particular lexical meanings (*dhātvartha*) belonging to various roots; we have also seen the arguments for considering *bhāvanā* to be expressed by the finite verbal affix, rather than the verbal stem. At a glance, these positions seem to be at variance. Many of the objections that Maṇḍanamiśra addresses in his *BhV* stem from the difficulty of bringing to order the proliferation of meanings that Kumārila has introduced: *bhāvanā* itself, the "sense of 'does'" (*karotyartha*), the meaning of the stem and the meaning of the affix (*prakṛtyartha* and *pratayārtha*), and the lexical meaning (*dhātvartha*). Are *bhāvanā* and the lexical meaning related as a general meaning to a specific one? Wouldn't the expression of the lexical meaning thus make *bhāvanā* redundant? What's the point of repeating in the affix a meaning that is present, in some form, in the stem? How can the affix express

<sup>23</sup> TV, p. 381: *siddho hi puruṣaḥ karmasambandhanimitam ṛtviktvam bhavad anyair eva vākkāyama-novyāpārair bhāvayed.*

*bhāvanā* if it already serves to express grammatical categories like voice and number? These issues are technical, but if Kumārila’s followers cannot defend his views against their critics, *bhāvanā* will topple, along with the theories of action and interpretation that depend on it. In the *précis* of the Bhāṭṭa position below, I mostly follow Pārthasārathimīśra’s account (SD pp. 101 ff.).

Kumārila’s discussion begins with a *pūrvapakṣin* who maintains that the definition of *bhāvanā*, “the activity of an employing agent,” could easily apply to any given lexical meaning, and so it’s not clear why we need a separate notion of *bhāvanā*. Kumārila tries out one response as follows:

- (12) *dhātvarthavyatirekeṇa yady apy eṣā na labhyate |  
tathāpi sarvasāmānyarūpeṇānyāvagamyate ||*

“Even though *bhāvanā* is not taken to be entirely different from the lexical meaning, nevertheless, we understand it to be something additional, which is common to *all* lexical meanings.”

Good, the *pūrvapakṣin* responds: you’ve basically admitted that *bhāvanā* is merely the general form (*sāmānya*) of lexical meaning. Kumārila says that this is true, but adds that we have to understand “general form” in a very precise way. There is a relationship between cowness, the general form of a cow, and a given individual cow: this is the relationship between a class-category (*sāmānya*) and its particular instantiation (*vyakti*). But this is not the relationship between *bhāvanā* and a given lexical meaning. *Bhāvanā* is indeed the universal form of verbal meaning, but it has a distinct structure, which a given lexical meaning can map onto in different ways. The lexical meaning therefore serves not as an instance (*vyakti*) of *bhāvanā*, but as a qualifier (*viśeṣaṇa*) of it. In several places Kumārila speaks of the lexical meaning as “coloring” (*anurañjana*) *bhāvanā*.

Maṇḍanamīśra further distinguishes between *bhāvanā* and lexical meaning in two *kārikās* of his BhV. These *kārikās* rely on his characterization of *bhāvanā* as “conducive to the production of some other thing,” which comes to replace Kumārila’s characterizations in subsequent discussions:

- (13) *kathyamānād rūpabhedād dvidhā dhātvarthasaṅgatiḥ |  
anyotpādānukūlātmā bhāvanā kiṃ pradūṣyati || 39 ||  
dhātūnām abhidhānīyān kartṛkarmasamāśrayān |  
labdhātmano ’kriyārūpān viśeṣān pratijānate || 40 ||*

“Lexical meanings can be construed in two ways, in accordance with the two forms discussed here. One of these forms is *bhāvanā*, which is conducive to the production of some other thing. The *pūrvapakṣin* cannot find fault with that. He will also recognize, however, that what verbal roots denote are particular forms of something that already exists, which reside in an agent or a goal, and which do not take the form of activity.”

Pārthasārathi’s explanation of this distinction in the ŚD is very clear. Like Kumārila and Maṇḍana, he finds that *bhāvanā* is not just an abstraction from the

lexical meaning, but makes a qualitatively different contribution to the meaning of the verb:

- (14) *dhātvarthānām eva tu dve rūpe pāko yāgaḥ prayatnaḥ saṃkalpaś calanaṃ kledanaṃ abhidhānam iti prāṭisvikaṃ dhātvaḥhidheyam ekam akriyātmakaṃ siddhasvabhāvam. aparāṃ tu sarvadhātvarthānuyāyi karotipratyayavedyaṃ kriyātmakaṃ sādhyasvarūpam anyotpādānukūlātmakaṃ ākhyātapratyayābhidheyam.* [ŚD, p. 101]

“Lexical meanings have two forms. One, denoted by the verbal root, is particular: ‘cooking,’ ‘sacrifice,’ ‘effort,’ ‘resolve,’ ‘walking,’ ‘softening,’ and even ‘denoting.’ Action is not intrinsic to this form, which has the nature of an *ergon*. The other form accompanies every lexical meaning, but it is cognized under the concept of ‘makes’/‘does’; action is intrinsic to this form, which has the nature of an *energeia*. It is therefore conducive to the production of some other thing. And it is denoted by the finite verbal affix.”

The distinction between *siddhasvabhāva* and *sādhyasvarūpa*, which I have tried to convey with the Aristotelian terms *ergon* and *energeia*, is extremely important. The “two forms” of verbal meaning are really two modalities of meaning, one referential and one performative. The referential modality operates on the level of *facts* in the etymological sense (= *siddha*, things that already exist or have already been produced); the performative operates on the level of action (= *sādhya*, things that must be produced or brought into existence). Mīmāṃsakas maintain that the Veda’s primary purpose is to tell us about things we need to do rather than things that have already been done; Mīmāṃsā *qua* Vedic hermeneutics is therefore primarily concerned with this performative modality. No other modality can account for the role of the timeless and impersonal Vedic text in the continuous performance of ritual acts. Just like the root and the affix are bound inextricably in one linguistic form, however, their associated modalities complement each other to produce a single meaning that can only be taken apart under careful analysis.

The lexical meaning particularizes *bhāvanā* by filling one or another of its components; the verbal root’s discrete and substantive meaning, an *ergon*, is thereby placed into a structure of *energeia* that is fundamentally dynamic and processual. Where it is placed in this structure is not always clear. Pārthasārathi tells us that the lexical meaning can be construed as the goal (*sādhya*) or the means (*sādhana*) of *bhāvanā*, according to one’s intention (*yathāvivakṣitam*). What Pārthasārathi calls “intention” emerges not from the interpreter’s subjectivity—and still less from that of the impersonal Vedic text—but from the extensive, and objective, teleological hierarchy of *dharma*. In the standard example of *svargakāmo yajeta*, Mīmāṃsakas hold firmly to the interpretation that “heaven” and not “sacrifice” is what must be actualized (both because “heaven” is indicated as such in the word *svargakāmaḥ*, and because nobody could possibly be motivated to perform a sacrifice for its own sake), and therefore “sacrifice” can only function as the means. Of course, the sacrifice is also brought into being, but its actualization is entirely instrumental to the actualization of heaven. Maṇḍana clarifies this interpretation with an analogy: in

“one cuts with an axe” (*paraśunā chinatti*), the cutting is instrumental to another result, namely the splitting of the wood; but because the agent cannot directly accomplish this result (which is the goal of *bhāvanā*), he resorts to another activity, namely the raising and lowering of the axe (which is the lexical meaning of “cut,” and the instrument of *bhāvanā*).<sup>24</sup>

The factors that determine where the lexical meaning fits into the tripartite structure of *bhāvanā* thus lay outside of the lexical meaning itself, but since they relate to putatively objective features of the world like human psychology and the teleology of ritual, there is no space left for arbitrariness or convention.

On the basis of this distinction between the two components of verbal meaning, Pārthasārathi offers a novel way of glossing the meanings of verbs. The lexical meaning is particular and has the character of an *ergon*, so it can be expressed by a verbal noun (as it is in example 14 above). *Bhāvanā* in general has the sense of “makes” and has the character of an *energeia*. These two can be therefore brought together in a compound with “making” (*kr̥ti*): “cooks” (*pacati*) is “cooking-making” (*pāka-kr̥ti*), and so on. When the lexical meaning has to be construed as the means and not the goal of *bhāvanā*, we supply the goal from elsewhere: thus the verbal meaning in *svargakāmo yajeta* is “heaven-making” (*svarga-kr̥ti*). These glosses, which superadd the sense of “makes” to a lexical meaning, demonstrate Pārthasārathi’s conclusion that *bhāvanā* is something above and beyond a lexical meaning (*dhātvarthātirikta*).

### Characterizations of *Bhāvanā*

As we would expect, Kumāriḷa’s followers maintained his theory of how *bhāvanā* is expressed in language. They disagreed with each other, however, regarding its precise characterization. The general definition of *bhāvanā* follows Kumāriḷa’s unification of “makes” and “becomes” into a single semantic structure: according to Āpadeva, it is the activity of something (the *bhāvaka*) that brings something else into being (the *bhavitṛ*). Maṇḍanamiśra introduced into this general definition the notion that the *bhāvaka*’s activity is conducive (*anukūla*) to the *bhavitṛ*’s activity. But “conductive” is an exceedingly vague term. What in fact does it mean for an operation to be “conductive” to another operation? Is it a cause? If so, precisely what kind of cause? Under what description must we understand an activity if we are to understand it as “conductive” to the production of something else? The basic issue at which these questions tilt is *lakṣya-lakṣaṇa-vyāpti*: what is the characterization of *bhāvanā* that will apply to every instance which we wish to describe, and none that we don’t?

Pārthasārathimiśra (ŚD, p. 100) outlines four positions, all of which harken back to the discussion in the TV, and mentions a possible objection to each. The first—his own position—is that *bhāvanā* is simply the activity of an agent. This is open to the objection that a lexical meaning, too, is the activity of an agent, which was resolved in the manner discussed above. The second position is that *bhāvanā* is will

<sup>24</sup> See the discussion in Bhatta (1994, pp. 223–225) and Diaconescu (2010, p. 299).

(*prayatna*). Since will is a quality of sentient (*cetana*) agents alone, this position complicates the interpretation of sentences with an insentient agent, like “the wagon goes” (*ratho gacchati*). On the third position, *bhāvanā* is movement (*spanda*). Because Mīmāṃsakas do not admit of any physical movement in the case of mental activity, this position complicates the interpretation of sentences like “he sacrifices” (Pārthasārathi understands sacrifice as “mental relinquishment” rather than the physical performance of a ritual). Finally, we can understand *bhāvanā* as the cessation of a state of inactivity in general (*udāsīnatvavicchedasāmānya*), which is common to both will and movement. But because Mīmāṃsakas need to be able to speak of *bhāvanā* in relation to language (*śābdī bhāvanā*, discussed below), and because the operations of language (denotation and so on) cannot at any point be described as inactive, nor as ceasing from that inactivity, this position comes with a major liability.

Locating Kumārila’s position in this matrix is not straightforward. At one point he refers to our understanding of “an activity directed toward the coming into existence of another thing, when the agent has already come into being” (*siddhe kartari anyātmalābhaviṣayavyāpārapratītiḥ*, TV, p. 376). And then he elaborates on what, precisely, he means by the word “activity”:

- (15) *dravyam eva ca viśiṣṭaśaktyupetaṃ pracalitātmatattvaṃ  
viprakīrṇasvabhāvaṃ pūrvāparībhūtaṃ prathamāvasthātaḥ pracyutaṃ  
parām avasthām aprāptaṃ vyāpāraśabdavācyaṃ bhavati* [TV, pp. 376–377]

“What I mean by the word ‘activity’ is precisely that thing which is provided with a definite power, whose ‘being what it is’ is fundamentally processual, whose nature is dispersed across multiple points, which is organized into prior and subsequent parts, and which has left its initial state without having attained its final state.”

This definition occurs at that stage of the argument where Kumārila tries out the sense of “does”/“makes” as the universal form of verbal meaning, and the definition could serve to explain what it would mean for something to have the sense of “does”/“makes.” And in fact, when later Mīmāṃsakas describe *bhāvanā* as “consisting in action” (*kriyātmaka*) or “having the form of action” (*kriyārūpa*), as Pārthasārathi did above, they probably mean something close to what Kumārila expresses here: something processual, in a state of neither potentiality nor completion, an *energeia*.

But later on, after having replaced “makes”/“does” with “brings into being” as the universal form of verbal meaning, Kumārila says that *bhāvanā* is “what can be characterized as having the form of movement, but only on account of leaving a state of inactivity” (*yad audāsīnyapracyutimātreṇa parispandarūpaṃ nirūpyate sā bhāvanā*, TV, pp. 382–383). Here the third and fourth positions outlined by Pārthasārathi are combined, as though what it means to have the form of movement is to cease from a state of inactivity.

Pārthasārathi again takes his cue from Maṇḍanamiśra, who argues that a suitable characterization of *bhāvanā* must not be sought in will or movement, but in the

general form of activity that is common to both. Maṇḍana identifies this with the cessation from a state of inactivity:

- (16) *udāsīnatvavicchedasāmānyātmā tato mataḥ |  
karotyartho dvayoś ceha tadrūpapratyayodbhavaḥ || 48 ||*

“Therefore, in its general form, the sense of “does” is cessation from a state of inactivity. This sense belongs to both will and movement, but it is based on an idea of what ‘cessation from a state of inactivity’ means in either case.”

Maṇḍana elaborates on this idea in his *vṛtti*. In general, the sense of “does” is just the cessation from a state of inactivity. But agents can be either sentient or insentient, and we have a different idea of what this “does” means in either case: for a sentient agent, it means will (*prayatna*), and for an insentient agent, it means movement (*spanda*). Pārthasārathi, for his part, rejects cessation from a state of inactivity as a suitable characterization of *bhāvanā* for the reasons mentioned above (namely, its inapplicability to language), and wants to return to a more general definition:

- (17) *ye 'pi prayatnaṃ bhāvanām āhuḥ ye ca spandaṃ ye cobhayaṃ te 'pi na  
svarūpeṇa teṣāṃ bhāvanātvam āhuḥ, kiṃ tv anyotpādānukūlatvam. tac ca  
sarvadhātvarthānām astīti sarvavyāpy eva bhāvanārūpam aṅgīkartavyam.  
[ŚD, p. 101]*

“Even those who say that *bhāvanā* is will, or those who say it’s movement, or those [like Maṇḍanamiśra] who say it’s both, don’t say that these things are *bhāvanā* as such, but only insofar as they are conducive to the production of some other thing. And being conducive to the production of some other thing belongs to every lexical meaning, and hence this is the form of *bhāvanā* which applies in every instance and which we must therefore accept.”

Āpadeva follows Pārthasārathi, but attempts to explain by way of periphrasis what it means for an activity to be conducive to the production of some other thing. *Bhāvanā* is an activity such that, when that activity is completed, the means becomes capable of producing the goal.<sup>25</sup> Thus the reformulated injunction “one should bring heaven into being by means of a sacrifice” (*yāgena svargaṃ bhāvayet*) could be further reformulated as “one should engage oneself with sacrifice such that when one’s activity is completed, the goal, i.e. heaven, arises from the means, i.e., sacrifice.”<sup>26</sup>

There was, however, a strong countercurrent to this line of interpretation. For several Mīmāṃsakas, it was will (*prayatna*) rather than a productive operation in general that was central to *bhāvanā*, despite Maṇḍana’s and Pārthasārathi’s criticisms. An early representative (thirteenth century?) is Someśvarabhaṭṭa, who

<sup>25</sup> MNP p. 275: *yasmin vyāpāre kṛte karaṇaṃ phalotpādānāya samartham bhavati tādrśo vyāpāra iti yāvat.*

<sup>26</sup> MNP p. 275: *yāgena tathā vyāpriyeta yathā yasmin vyāpāre kṛte yāgāt svargaṃ bhavati.*

presents his view that *bhāvanā* must be regarded as equivalent to will in thirteen *kārikās* of his NS. I cite here only the second:

- (18) *prayatnavyatiriktārthabhāvanā tu na śakyate |  
vaktum ākhyātavācyeha prastutetyuparamyate* || [NS, p. 579]

“The ‘substantive’ *bhāvanā* under discussion here, which is expressed by the finite verbal suffix, cannot be said to be anything above and beyond will: that’s where the argument stops.”

Someśvara’s reasoning is quite bizarre. First, he suggests that we use finite verbal endings, which denote will, with reference to insentient beings in exactly the same way that we use feminine suffixes with reference to things, like bedposts, that have no natural gender. Next, he suggests that all sentences with an insentient agent must be regarded as figurative: we can only say “the wagon goes” when we transfer the will of the driver, or the horse, onto the wagon. Then he cites lexicographers, who record “will” (*prayatna*) as one of the synonyms of “activity” (*vyāpāra*). Then he argues along the following lines: if “will” is not a precondition for performing an activity, then the Veda could enjoin insentient things; as it happens, the Veda only enjoins sentient beings, who are possessed of will. None of these arguments is especially compelling, though the last raises an interesting question about the nature of Vedic injunction and its objects, to which we will turn shortly.

Khaṇḍadeva, in his BhD and more extensively in his BhTR, attacks Pārthasārathimīśra’s position and seeks to establish will as the basic definition of *bhāvanā*, or as he says using Navya-Nyāya terminology, “the delimiter of the expressive capacity” (*śakyatāvachchedaka*) of the finite verbal affix.<sup>27</sup> He insists (BhTR, p. 61) that the different types of results and the different types of activities make it more economical to assert that will alone is the delimiter of the affix’s expressive capacity, and paraphrases sentences like “he cooks” (*pacati*) as “he willfully endeavors in cooking” (*pāke yatate*). Similarly to Someśvara, he insists that insentient objects can only become the agent of the verb “does” or “makes” by secondary signification (*lakṣaṇā*).

The position taken by Someśvara and Khaṇḍadeva is not entirely unreasonable, especially in view of the latter’s preoccupation with linguistic analysis. There are natural languages in which insentient beings cannot be construed as the subject of a transitive verb (requiring instead what would be called a *bhāve prayoga* in Sanskrit); Sanskrit’s close relative, Old Avestan, was one such language. And there are many other ways in which languages draw distinctions among the related semantic qualities of sentience, animacy, or definiteness. The question of whether verbal meaning is invariably concomitant with will may seem fatuous, since there are plenty of counterexamples in which insentient and therefore unwilling beings

<sup>27</sup> See McCrea (2002) for a discussion of Khaṇḍadeva’s use of Navya-Nyāya terms and concepts, with specific reference to this debate.

construe with verbs, but Someśvara and Khaṇḍadeva endeavored to explain away the counterexamples either as merely morphological phenomena which do not touch upon the semantic issue of *bhāvanā*, or as figurative usages. For reasons pointed out by their opponents—including Āpadeva, who defends Pārthasārathimīśra against Khaṇḍadeva’s criticisms (McCrea 2002, fn. 9)—these explanations are not entirely successful. But beyond that, they seem misguided: they follow Kumārila down a certain path which, in my view, he himself abandoned. The basic argument in favor of will is the coreferentiality of verbs with “makes” or “does,” a verb which takes predominantly sentient and willing agents. But starting from the sense of “makes,” Kumārila proceeds to derive a supralexic semantic structure that has the general sense of “brings into being.” The meaning that all verbs partake of arises from this structure, or more precisely from the conjuncture of this structure and a particular lexical meaning. Despite Khaṇḍadeva’s extensive defense of *bhāvanā* from its Navya-Naiyāyika critics, and his effort to show that *bhāvanā* is the principal element in a sentence that the other elements qualify (*mukhyaviśeṣya*), he seems to treat *bhāvanā* as if it were a kind of lexical meaning rather than an entirely different and superordinate kind of meaning that requires its own concepts and its own vocabulary. This leads him to reject as vague and incommensurable Pārthasārathi’s characterization of *bhāvanā* as “an operation of one thing which is conducive to the coming into being of another thing.”

### Śābdī Bhāvanā and Vidhi

The finite verbal affix is the keystone in Mīmāṃsā’s account of *what* Vedic injunctions mean. To summarize briefly: the affix contributes a semantic value that is qualitatively different from anything else in the sentence; this value is an *energeia*; this *energeia* is an actualization or *bhāvanā*; *bhāvanā* has a universal form (“the activity of one thing that is conducive to the coming-into-being of something else”) and a general tripartite structure that accommodates particular lexical meanings within it; and it is possible to explicate the way in which a sentence relates to this structure by reformulating it according to a standard hermeneutical procedure.

Mīmāṃsakas also turned to *bhāvanā* to explain *how* Vedic injunctions mean—in other words, how the words of a Vedic injunction actually induce people to do things. This was a brilliant maneuver, whether seen in its original context of Vedic hermeneutics or in the *longue durée* of linguistic thought. Since Mīmāṃsakas maintained that the Veda was eternal and impersonal, the actualization of its words in action could not be made to depend on anything external to the text itself—certainly not on the personal authority of a god, a king, or a social superior. The concept of *bhāvanā*, however, had opened up a performance-oriented modality of meaning: the Vedic text did not suspend its meanings inside of it for all time, but actually required, by the nature of its language, the constant actualization of these

meanings in the world. On this view, the “how” of Vedic injunction involves the same kind of actualization as the “what.”

Corresponding to the “what” and the “how” of injunction, Mīmāṃsakas posited two kinds of *bhāvanā*, *ārthī* and *śābdī*.<sup>28</sup> Kumārila first distinguishes these two types in his commentary on the *arthavādādhikaraṇa* (MS 1.2.1–18).<sup>29</sup> By Āpadeva’s time, more than a millennium later, *śābdī* and *ārthī bhāvanā* could be understood respectively as “*bhāvanā* located in language (*śabda*)” and “*bhāvanā* located in a thing (*artha*), i.e., a person.” His son Anantadeva clearly understood the terms in this way, explaining the odd equivalence of *artha* with persons with the etymology “a person is an *artha* because he *strives after* something” (*arthayata ity arthaḥ puruṣaḥ*).<sup>30</sup> It seems unlikely, however, that Kumārila had intended “person” by *artha* in this context. The contrast with *śabda* almost guarantees that this type of *bhāvanā* referred to a meaning. Kumārila probably had in mind MS 2.1.1, according to which *bhāvanā* constitutes the meaning (*artha*) of an injunction. *Ārthī bhāvanā* would therefore be the “actualization” that is in fact the meaning of the injunction: in the case of *svargakāmo yajeta*, it is the actualization of “heaven” through the sacrifice. It is worth emphasizing again that on this theory no alchemy is required to convert between inert text and dynamic action, no Wittgensteinian “mode of projection” from the words of the order to its execution: the act is itself the meaning of the words. The understanding of *ārthī bhāvanā* as an activity of which the agent is a person seems to be a narrowing of this original understanding, facilitated by the understanding of *śābdī bhāvanā* as an activity of which the agent is language.

In *śābdī bhāvanā*, language is the agent only in the sense that it “brings into being” a certain effect. But even if *śābdī bhāvanā* does not involve any mystic personalization of language, the very notion that words can be efficacious in themselves is likely to arouse suspicion. One consequence of the longstanding distinction between “words” and “things” in the West is the idea that “words” are mere instruments that need to be operated by a person to have any effect whatsoever (Gadamer 2008 [1960]). This idea has been subjected to intense critique in the last century; two notable strands are Gadamer’s hermeneutics, which follows the consequences of language’s priority to language use, and Foucault’s anti-subjectivism, which seeks to displace the individual from the privileged site of historical agency. *Śābdī bhāvanā* belongs to quite a different historical trajectory: for Mīmāṃsakas, it was perfectly obvious that words could have real-world effects;

<sup>28</sup> Also referred to with various synonyms or glosses: *arthabhāvanā* and *śabdabhāvanā*, or *arthātmikā* and *śābdātmikā*, etc.

<sup>29</sup> TV, p. 114 (on MS 1.2.7): *iha tu liṅādīyukteṣu vākyeṣu dve bhāvane gamyete, śābdātmikā cārthātmikā ca*.

<sup>30</sup> MNP[2], p. 25, commentary: *śābdyāṃ bhāvanāyāṃ matadvayaṃ vakṣyate, prerañātmikā seṣtasādhanatā veti. ādye śabdaniṣṭhatvāc chābdīti vākṣyate dvitīye śabdaikagamyatvācchābdīti. ārthyā api yatnaikarūpatvamate arthayata ity arthaḥ puruṣaḥ taddhetutvād ārthī*.

people organized their lives around texts whose authors, if they were believed to have authors at all, merely put to palm-leaves a truth that transcended them; within the sphere of Vedic ritual, people “did what the text said” at great expense and for no apparent reason other than that the text said to do it. *Śābdī bhāvanā* is intended to account for this behavior. Thus, with remarkable economy, the theory of *bhāvanā* serves as its own meta-theory: *ārthī bhāvanā* deals with the semantics of injunctive sentences, and *śābdī bhāvanā* deals with the semantics of injunctive modality.

What *śābdī bhāvanā* “brings into being” is the performance of the enjoined action. This performance is nothing other than *ārthī bhāvanā*, the actualization of the Vedic injunction. The embedding of *ārthī bhāvanā* into *śābdī bhāvanā* is evident in Kumārila’s discussion (Kataoka 2001), but Āpadeva makes it even clearer by slotting *ārthī bhāvanā* into the goal component of *śābdī bhāvanā*. On this analysis, there is a sense in which injunctions, by reason of the injunctive modality of the language itself, are self-actualizing. Actualization, however, presupposes human activity. In fact the sphere of *dharma* with which Mīmāṃsā is concerned is the sphere of human activity in accordance with Vedic injunctions. The effect that requires explanation is a person’s engaging in action (*puruṣapravṛtti*).

The second component of *śābdī bhāvanā*, the means, was the occasion for extensive debate. The core issue is injunctiveness: what is it that makes injunctions the normative, regulative, binding statements that they are? There was little disagreement over the formal features of injunction—surprisingly little, given how Mīmāṃsakas aggressively extracted injunctive meanings from sentences with no injunctive morphology—but wide disagreement over the nature of the obligation that a Vedic injunction imposed. The means of *śābdī bhāvanā* was therefore variously identified with “knowledge of incitement” (*pravartanājñāna*), “being a means to a desired end” (*iṣṭasādhanatā*), or “knowledge of the injunctive affixes” (*līnādijñāna*). These positions rely on very different psychological and deontological assumptions, but what they have in common—and what distinguishes them from the positions of many moral philosophers—is a commitment to the efficacy of language itself, without any appeal to the authority of its speaker or author.

The first major split is between Kumārila and Prabhākara. Kumārila takes a firm position which Western philosophers would identify as “psychological egoism”: nobody intentionally engages in action without being motivated by some benefit to himself. In Kumārila’s words, “even if he is addressed by a hundred orders, a person acting intentionally will never carry out an activity which does not serve any human end (*puruṣārtha*).”<sup>31</sup> It therefore becomes hermeneutically important to construe Vedic injunctions with a “human end” (*puruṣārtha*) that can sustain a

<sup>31</sup> TV, p. 383: *na ca buddhipūrvakārī puruṣaḥ puruṣārtharahitaṃ vyāpāraṃ vacanaśatenāpy ukto 'nutiṣṭhati*. See also TV, p. 114: *buddhipūrvakārīṇo hi puruṣā yāvāt praśasto 'yam iti nāvabudhyante tāvan na pravartante*.

person's interest and energy; otherwise Vedic rituals would go unperformed, and the Veda would become pointless. What makes Vedic injunctions binding is their relation to a set of incentives that extends beyond the sphere of Vedic ritual. At the same time, the Veda does not simply depend on the chance that people's desires and priorities are configured in a certain way: it was the only way of knowing about *dharma*, and at the same time, the only way of knowing that the system of ritual obligations that constitutes *dharma* is in fact a "human end." As Kumārila argues in the *arthavādādhikaraṇa*, the Veda can tell us that some of the activities that it enjoins are worth the effort of engaging in them, for example by describing the felicity of people who have conducted sacrifices in the past. In this way, Kumārila argued, *everything* that the Veda enjoins must find a motivational basis in its construal with a "human end." Prabhākara, by contrast, takes a deontological approach. What an injunction communicates to us is *niyoga*, or "obligation," which is equivalent to the sense that what is enjoined must be done (*kāryatā*). This sense is obtained directly from forms such as the optative affix (*liṅādi*). Since we encounter these obligations in the Veda, *ex hypothesi* they cannot be known from any other source. They are therefore independent from other sources of knowledge, including those which would incline us toward or away from their fulfillment. A Prabhākara, if for some reason he accepted the Bhāṭṭa theory of *bhāvanā*, would identify the knowledge of the optative affix itself (*liṅādijñāna*) as the means of *śābdī bhāvanā*.

Maṇḍana, and Pārthasārathi following him, undertake a defense of Kumārila's position with careful attention to the linguistic, social, and psychological dimensions of injunctive modality. They are skeptical of the Prabhākara idea that the form of a Vedic injunction itself can directly express an unconditional obligation; Pārthasārathi in fact says that it is "a trick played on children like some kind of vast magical illusion."<sup>32</sup> What an injunctive sentence—and what formally distinguishes it as an injunctive sentence—is one of several affixes, of which the optative affix (*liṅ*) is most familiar, which convey a particular sense. Pārthasārathi gives a compelling reason for why this sense is not *kāryatā*. We could only understand the sense that something is to be done (*kāryatā*) from an injunction in the first place if we observed people actually doing the things that the injunction says. But a condition of people doing something, and therefore of our own understanding that something is to be done, is that the action in question is "fit for doing" (*kṛtyarhatā*). The only reason why an independent agent (*svatantra*) should consider an action "fit for doing," according to Pārthasārathi, is that he understands it to be a means to an end that he desires (*iṣṭasādhanatā*). The deontic sense that Prabhākaras would like to assign to the optative affix is therefore reducible to the prudential sense that Kumārila assigns it. Pārthasārathi summarizes:

<sup>32</sup> NRM, p. 41: *tad idaṃ bālasaṃmohanaṃ mahendrajālopanaṃ vā*.

- (19) *na kāryāvagatiḥ kvāpi pravṛtteḥ kāraṇaṃ matā  
kartur iṣṭābhyupāyatvabodhāt sā sarvadā yataḥ* || [NRM, p. 41]

“The understanding that something is to be done is never considered to be a cause of engaging in action, because in every case it arises from the awareness that it is a means to the end that the agent desires.”

Maṇḍana’s analysis of the optative affix proceeds along different lines, but reaches the same conclusion.<sup>33</sup> He examines the semantic range (*pravṛttinimitta*) of the optative suffix, starting from Pāṇini’s list of this suffix’s meanings (*Aṣṭādhyāyī* 3.3.161). Maṇḍana finds “incitement” (*pravartanā*) in all of its uses: besides injunction (*vidhi*), we use the optative to make a polite request of a social superior (*nimantraṇa*), to grant permission to an inferior (*āmantraṇa*), to entreat (*adhīṣṭa*) or beg (*prārthanā*) a superior, or to politely ask for advice from a superior (*saṃpraśna*). The basic sense of “incitement” is filtered through the various social relations that regulate our use of language; in some cases, it might be more correct to say that social relations *create* the sense of incitement. Once the analysis turns to Vedic sentences, however, these social relations are off the table: as an impersonal text, the Veda cannot possess any of the personal properties (*puruṣadharma*) on which mundane uses of the optative depend. The Veda cannot command us as a social superior, nor can it politely ask us to do something as a social inferior. How, then, can we make sense of the use of the optative in Vedic injunctions? Maṇḍana claims that Vedic injunctions take the form of “advice” (*upadeśa*): what is enjoined benefits the person who is enjoined to do it, and has no bearing whatsoever on the person who enjoins it (*niyojyārthakarma*); further, it incites to action someone who is not already inclined to act (*apraśhitacodanā*). These two features are, on the one hand, appropriate to a Mīmāṃsaka’s conception of the Veda: the Veda illuminates a field of action which we would otherwise be unaware of and not inclined to participate in, and by necessity it does so disinterestedly. On the other hand, they dovetail with the account of motivation that Maṇḍana proceeds to defend: the Veda enjoins us for our benefit, and we are in turn motivated by the knowledge that what the Veda enjoins is a means to an end. Again, the sense of the optative affix is determined to be “being a means to an end” (*iṣṭasādhanatā*).

The final position of Maṇḍanaśrī and Pārthasārathīśrī is that “being a means to an end” is the most basic meaning of “incitement” (*pravartanā*), and the only one which does not depend on language-external facts about social relations or political power. The *kārikā* of Maṇḍana’s that both Pārthasārathī and Āpadeva quote is this:

<sup>33</sup> For a discussion of Maṇḍana’s argument, see Natarajan (1995, pp. 63–76).

- (20) *pumsām neṣṭābhyupāyatvāt kriyāsv anyah pravartakah |  
pravṛtthetuṃ dharmam ca pravadanti pravartanām ||*

“There is nothing else which incites men to action besides the fact of being a means to an end. People define the quality which is a cause of engaging in action as incitement.”

Someśvarabhaṭṭa resists boiling down “incitement” any further. Āpadeva makes a strong argument against Someśvara’s position, and for the position of Maṇḍana and Pārthasārathi, by showing that it is both more economical and more consistent with our existing views about language and motivation to fix the meaning of the optative suffix as “means-end instrumentality” (*iṣṭasādhanatā*), rather than the more general “incitement” (*pravartanā*):

- (21) *kiṃ ca śabde eko vyāpārah spandādyatiriktaḥ kalpanīyah. tasya ca  
svapravṛttau parādhīnapravṛttau vā kāraṇatvenākṛtasya pravartanātvēna  
rūpeṇa jñātasya pravṛtṭyanukūlatvaṃ, śabdasya ca  
paraniṣṭhavyāpārājñāpakatvena kṛtasya svaniṣṭhavyāpārābodhakatvaṃ,  
vidheś ca pravartakatvanirvāhārthaṃ dhātvarthasya samīhitasādhanatvam iti  
kalpanād varam āvaśyakasyaiva samīhitasādhanatvasya svapravṛtthetutvena  
kṛtasya pravartanātvēna vidhyarthakalpanam, lāghavāt anyaniṣṭhatvāc ca.  
[MNP pp. 271–272]*

“Further, we can only assume a single activity in the language of the injunction, an activity that is distinct from movement and so on. This activity, if we understand it in the form of ‘incitement’ (*pravartanā*), would have to be conducive to engaging in action, without having been previously assumed to be the cause of a person’s engaging in action either for his own sake or on behalf of someone else. We would also have to assume that language makes us aware of an activity (namely incitement) that is internal to it, whereas the prevailing assumption is that it can only make us aware of an activity located outside of itself. And finally, if the injunction is to succeed in inciting anyone, we would have to assume that the lexical meaning is a means to a desired end. But instead of assuming all of this, it is better to assume that the meaning of an injunction is just ‘being a means to a desired end’: this is necessary in any case, and since we have independently assumed ‘being a means to a desired end’ as the cause for a person’s engaging in action for his own sake, it can easily serve as an ‘incitement.’ The assumption that injunction really means ‘being a means to an end’ is more economical, and it does not run into the problem of language making known an activity that is internal to it, since ‘being a means to an end’ is located outside of it.

Attributing to language an independent power to incite people to action, solely in order to explain its injunctive modality, is special pleading; language's motivating power should be based on something that we know to be able to motivate people anyway. Āpadeva's concern with whether the "incitement" is internal or external to the language of the injunction is directly related to the question of how *śābdī bhāvanā* works: the means by which the goal of a person's engaging in action (*puruṣappravṛtti*) is realized must be some epistemic state produced by the language of the injunction. Language does not primarily serve to produce knowledge of its internal operations, and it would contradict this general principle to identify the epistemic state of "incitement" with a special linguistic modality. Āpadeva suggests that it would be preferable for the optative affix to produce an epistemic state of "incitement" that was different from its own expressive power, and since something can be a means to an end regardless of whether it is ever mentioned in an injunction, "being a means to an end" fits this requirement. Yet it can hardly be said that a *siddhānta* on this particular point was ever established. Kumārila's followers debated whether the knowledge of the injunction (*vidhijñāna*), the knowledge of the optative affix (*liṅādijñāna*), incitement (*pravartanā*), or the fact of being a means to an end (*iṣṭasādhanatā*) was the means by which *śābdī bhāvanā* operates.

The procedure of *śābdī bhāvanā* is, however, everywhere admitted to be "the fact of being commended" (*prāśastya*), following Kumārila's argument that the Veda's explanatory passages (*arthavāda*) served the purpose of commending certain sacrificial acts. How exactly this commendation answers to *śābdī bhāvanā*'s procedural requirement depends, of course, on the precise characterization of the means, but it seems clear that these explanatory passages produce or reinforce an awareness that a certain act is "to be done" by showing that it is in one's interest.

A consequence of the theory of two *bhāvanās* is that the optative affix will express both *śābdī bhāvanā*, by virtue of the fact that it is an optative affix, and *arthī bhāvanā*, by virtue of the fact that it is a finite verbal affix. This poses a threat of polysemy (*anekārthatā*), which is a serious fault in Mīmāṃsā's theory of language. Kumārila has addressed the question of their compatibility in a much-quoted verse:

(22) *abhidhābhāvanām āhur anyām eva liṅādayaḥ |*  
*arthātmabhāvanā tv anyā sarvākhyāteṣu gamyate ||* [TV, p. 378]

"The optative affixes express one kind of *bhāvanā*, *abhidhābhāvanā*, while another kind, *arthātmabhāvanā*, is understood in all finite verbs."

The term *arthātmabhāvanā* is relatively clear: as noted above, this probably refers to the "bringing into being" or actualization of the meaning (*artha*) of the injunctive sentence. *Abhidhābhāvanā* is less clear, since Kumārila elsewhere uses the term *śābdātmikā bhāvanā*. In his discussion of this verse in the NRM, Pārthasārathimīśra tries out several interpretations. If the theory of *śābdī* and *arthī bhāvanā* has seemed suspiciously neat and schematic so far, this passage speaks to the real difficulty of accommodating both within a single conceptual framework:

- (21) *abhidhābhāvanām āhur ity asyāpi vārtikasyāyam evārthaḥ. abhidhīyate ity abhidhā, pravartanā, kartavyatā vā, saiva ca puruṣapravṛtṭim bhāvayatīti bhāvanā, tām āhur iti. atha vā abhidhāyāḥ śabdasya bhāvanā, abhidhābhāvanā, saiva pravartanā parasamavetāpi śabdena puruṣam pravartayatā tatsiddhaye 'bhidhīyamānā śabdavyāpāratvenocyate, tām āhur iti. atha vā iṣṭasādhanatābhidhānam abhidhā, saiva vidhānaṃ vidhir iti vyutpattyā vidhir ity ucyate, saiva ca bhūtikarṭṛvaṃ pratipādyamānāyāḥ puruṣapravṛtteḥ prayojakasya śabdasya vyāpāro bhāvanā, tām āhuh kurvantīti odanapākaṃ pacatītivad vyākhyeyam.* [NRM, p. 53]

“And this is the meaning of the *vārtika*. (1) *Denotation* refers to *the thing that is denoted*, which is either incitement or obligation. This is what brings into being a person’s engaging in action, and that is why it’s called *bhāvanā*. Alternatively, (2) *denotation* refers to *language*. The *bhāvanā* of denotation, which, while it encompasses the other kind of *bhāvanā*, is denoted by language that incites a person to carry out that other kind, is in fact the ‘incitement’ that is said to be an activity of language. Alternatively, (3) *denotation* refers to denoting the fact of being a means to an end, and this is what we call injunction (*vidhī*), by deriving it from the word ‘noting down’ (*vidhāna*). This *bhāvanā* is an activity of language which causes a person’s engaging in action (*puruṣapravṛtṭi*) to take on the agency of the verb ‘becomes.’ To say that the optative affixes *express* this kind of *bhāvanā* is to say that they *perform* this activity. We can explain *bhāvanā* of this kind like we would explain sentences like ‘he cooks the cooking of the rice.’”

From the final sentences one could easily get the impression that *śābdī bhāvanā* is merely *bhāvanā* convoluted awkwardly and uselessly upon itself. If *ārthī bhāvanā* is the activity of someone who “brings into being” the meaning of a Vedic sentence, and *śābdī bhāvanā* is the second-order activity of the Vedic sentence which “brings into being” that activity, what stops us from positing an additional *bhāvanā* that “brings into being” the second-order activity of the Vedic sentence? What, in other words, are the limits to *bhāvanā*’s recursiveness? For Mīmāṃsakas, of course, the buck stops at the Vedic sentence, but *bhāvanā* could easily fall into the hands of theistic Naiyāyikas or Vedāntins. Pārthasārathi’s hesitation over the sense of *abhidhā*—it is either what is denoted by the optative affix, or the denotative function of the language, or the injunction itself—also shows that the “meaning” of injunction *as a linguistic modality* is less straightforward and intuitive than the “meaning” of a particular injunction.

## Conclusions

The questions with which Pārthasārathi struggled are, of course, difficult questions, and it is to the credit of Kumārila and his followers that *bhāvanā* even allowed them to inquire into them. The concept of *bhāvanā* presents a number of interesting similarities with modern ideas of how language and action fit together, and a larger

number of suggestions that warrant further reflection. This is not in itself surprising; we can often be stunned by the power and sophistication of premodern Indian thought if we only choose to read it. What may be surprising is that these ideas were hammered out in the forge of orthodoxy; but we will miss a lot of philosophy if we only looked for philosophy that advertised itself as such. In these concluding paragraphs I will briefly examine how *bhāvanā* ties in with more recent, and to some audiences more familiar, strands in the theory of meaning, the theory of understanding, and the theory of speech-acts.

Two striking aspects of the theory of meaning developed through *bhāvanā* are the central, even architectonic, role of action, and the independence of language from extralinguistic sources of meaning. The core of the theory, and the upshot of the discussion on the *bhāvārthādhikaraṇa*, is the identification of the meaning (*artha*) of a Vedic injunction with action (*kriyā*). Mīmāṃsā is well-known for its analysis of the ways in which language produces meaning. Less well-known is dynamic and performative aspect of this meaning in the context of *bhāvanā*, which contrasts with the static and referential character of meaning in most other contexts. The notion that what language means is not an act represented to the mind as an object (*actus signatus*), but an act of non-objectifying engagement (*actus exercitus*) was a starting-point for Heidegger's phenomenology and, through Heidegger, exerted a profound influence on Gadamer's hermeneutics (Gadamer 2008 [1963], p. 156). A similar idea, facilitated by etymology, underlies Heidegger's extraction of a "sense of actualization" (*Vollzugssinn*) from the act of understanding (*Nachvollzug*). *Vollzugssinn* may in fact be the most felicitous translation of *bhāvanā*.

A number of scholars (D'Sa 1974; Clooney 1987; Bilimoria 2008) have pointed to the parallel consequences of the authorlessness of the Veda and various echoes of the "death of the author" idea in Western critical theory. One of these consequences is that textual meaning cannot always be pushed back, outside of the text, onto the transcendental subjectivity of an author. Another interesting consequence is the impossibility of locating the source of the text's normativity outside of the language of the text itself: the claims that the texts make on us are strictly independent of any external authority or threat that may compel our obedience. The account that Kumārila and his followers offered of the text's normativity—the theory of *śābdī bhāvanā*—is grounded in a thoroughly realist view of interest and motivation. There is a sustained effort, most pronounced in Āpadeva's arguments, to get the text's normativity "for free," as a corollary of conclusions that we have come to independently (such as the motivating power of the knowledge that an activity is a means to a desired end). The general principle underlying both the theory of and the argumentation for *bhāvanā* is that Vedic language is *just* language; it is neither an esoteric mystical jargon, nor it is burdened with the historicity of speakers and their often-perverse intentions; to understand how Vedic language works is to understand how language *per se* works.

*Bhāvanā* bears on the concept of understanding in two related ways. First, it supplies a set of hermeneutical techniques. If we want to understand a Vedic injunction, we have to map its "surface structure" onto the "deep structure" of *bhāvanā*, which is made up of three interlocking components. Once this is done, we can reformulate the injunction in such a way as to elicit the goal, means, and

procedure of the actualization that it enjoins. Second, the theory of *bhāvanā* posits an internal connection between the performative meaning of the injunction and the understanding that is ultimately required to perform it—between what Heidegger would call the *Vollzugssinn* and the *Nachvollzug*. So close was this connection that Maṇḍanamiśra and others actually identified the meaning of the optative affix with incitement (*pravartanā*), the motivational kernel of the performance. Wittgenstein also sought to explain the way in which an order casts its “shadow”—the understanding of the order—before its execution (1967, §70). Natarajan (1995, p. 20) quotes his observation from *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein 2001, p. 108<sup>e</sup>): “There is a gulf between an order and its execution. It has to be filled by the act of understanding.”—“Only the act of understanding can mean that we are to do THIS. The *order*—why, that is nothing but sounds, ink-marks.—” Wittgenstein’s influential suggestion was to look to *use* as the key to transforming sounds and ink-marks into action: we know *how* to effect this transformation, and more importantly we know *that* we should do it, only by reason of participating in a language-game that employs words as symbolic instruments in a certain way. For Kumārila and his followers, however, the seeds of understanding are planted in the order itself. The “expectancies” (*apekṣā*) of *bhāvanā* are not just the components of the action, embedded in the meaning of the injunctive sentence; they are the questions which we logically and spontaneously ask when we encounter the sentence, and which we must answer in order to know what it would mean to perform the action. The text’s “expectancy” or even “yearning” (*ākāṅkṣā*) for understanding recalls Gadamer’s description of the temporality of the aesthetic (2004 [1960], p. 119 ff.): the arc of the text’s meaning always stretches into the future, where it is realized in an endless sequence of acts of understanding.

Finally, there is a clear homology between *bhāvanā*, understood as “something words do” (*śabdavyāpāra*), and the “things we do with words” that have been theorized by Austin (1975 [1955]), Searle (1969) and others as speech-acts. As noted above, Edgerton (1928) used the word “force” (actually “effective force”) as a translation of *bhāvanā* long before Austin used the term to refer to the real-world effects of language; subsequent translators have followed Edgerton’s example (Bhatta 1994: “impellent force”; D’Sa 1980: “efficient force”; Benson 2010: “productive force”). Austin distinguished two kinds of force, one proper to illocutionary acts (what a person does *in* saying something, such as conceding an election in saying “I hereby concede”) and another proper to perlocutionary acts (what a person does *by* saying something, such as demonstrating a commitment to democratic institutions by the abovementioned concession). Taber (1989, p. 158) suggested that *śābdī bhāvanā* gives Vedic sentences an “*inherent* illocutionary force,” which consists in motivating the listener to perform a sacrifice, or whatever it is that the sentence in question enjoins. Injunctions can also be thought of as having a perlocutionary force, which consists in the ultimate performance of the enjoined action.<sup>34</sup> These are productive ways to think about *bhāvanā*, especially in view of the deep and instructive differences between *bhāvanā* and Austin’s “force.”

<sup>34</sup> Elisa Freschi noticed this similarity in a blog post from June 4, 2009 (<http://elisafreschi.blogspot.com/2009/06/bhavana-and-speech-acts.html>).

Foremost among these is that *bhāvanā* hierarchically orders the meanings of the words into a single real-world effect, whereas the “force” of a locution is analyzed separately from its “meaning.” The coimbrication of force and meaning in *bhāvanā* makes it difficult to separate locution, illocution, and perlocution. Further, *bhāvanā* strictly delimits the force of an injunction (an injunction, in other words, never impels us to do something other than what it says), but in Austin’s theory “we can import an arbitrarily long stretch of what might be called the ‘consequences’ of our act into the nomenclature of the act itself.”<sup>35</sup> The final and most obvious difference is that no human being stands behind *śābdī bhāvanā*. Austin, of course, does not stipulate that speech-acts need to have a personal agent; the problem never comes up. Nevertheless an idea of words as symbolic instruments—and conversely, of historically- and socially-located persons who are employing those instruments strategically—pervades Austin’s theory, and it is unclear what kind of agent the eternal and authorless Veda would be, or even what the “locution” of the Veda would mean in this context.

One possible perspective onto *bhāvanā* and other concepts unique to Mīmāṃsā sees them as a dubious and strained exercise in apologetics, intended to defend the legitimacy of Vedic ritual practice at any cost. There may be senses in which this is true (my own view is that it is unfair to the interests and arguments of the people who spent so long thinking about them), but my goal in this paper was to recover the concept, in most of its original complexity, and to understand its importance within Mīmāṃsā as an intellectual system and its resonances with broader philosophical problems. This paper is in no way a complete picture of *bhāvanā*, which was debated for more than a millennium. I have, for example, largely left out the criticisms of Prabhākara’s followers and the responses of Maṇḍanamiśra and Pārthasārathimiśra. What I have tried to do—and what is crucial both for the history of Indian thought and for philosophical inquiry more broadly and inclusively defined—is go into the texts and to meet these concepts on their own terms.

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- ŚD = *Śāstradīpikā* of Pārthasārathimīśra: [1] The *Śāstradīpikā* with the Commentary *Mayūkhmālīkā* (from second pada of first chapter to the end) by Somanātha, and with the Commentary *Yuktisnehaprapūraṇi* with *Gūḍhārthavivarāṇa* (for the first *Tarkpada*) by Rāmākrishna. Edited by Śrī Dharmadattasūri. Bombay: Nirnaya-Sagar Press, 1915. [2] *Saṣtradīpikā* of Pārthasārathi Mīśra, with the commentary *Prabha* by Tatsat Vydyanatha. 1st Part. Edited by Acharya P. N. Pattabhirama Sastri. New Delhi: Sri Lalabahadur Kendriya Sanskrit Vidyapeetha, 1978.
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