Chapter 2
Ascetic Arjuna: (Im)Mortal Self as Political Battlefield and Becoming a Yogic Hero

Contextualizing the political thought of the *BhG* within the *MBh* remains essential, since key themes introduced in Book 1 of the *MBh* supply the necessary conceptual framework for explicating the *BhG*'s political theory as a justificatory theory for rule anchored in Brahmanism. Here political cosmology serves as the organizing framework for understanding how Brahmanical political thought, extending from the Vedic into the post-Vedic period, creatively synthesizes ideas of martial and spiritual heroism. On the surface of the epic lies the key conflicts between the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas as martial clans seeking to consolidate political power. Beneath this level, however, lies the historical experiences of the alienated Brahmanical authors of the epic and *BhG.* These authors claimed to possess not only the supreme knowledge contained in Vedic texts, but also answers to how key political and spiritual ideas could be woven together in a totalizing theory framed through cosmology, ontology, and metaphysics. The *BhG* thoroughly synthesizes these categories in its political vision. As I will argue in the next two chapters, Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa represent key figures for this vision, culminating in a tri-level, monarchical unification that could serve as a political-philosophical solution to finding temporary peace in a conflict-ridden age. What the *BhG* thus represents is an astute attempt by brahmins to justify not only their religio-political significance to society at large but also a comprehensive theory exhibiting a deeply ideological vision of the world.

Within this vision, Arjuna stands as one of the two central characters in the *BhG* and the primary target of Kṛṣṇa's teaching. As we saw in the last chapter, the *MBh* portrays a world that is always veering entropically, so both the self and society must be properly ruled to prevent their untimely destruction. Proper rule at the level of the self, I will argue, operates "yogically" through self-discipline directed toward deeper levels of self-knowledge, which ultimately leads toward liberation from the cycle of suffering, death, and rebirth (*saṃsāra*), and finally achieves *mokṣa* (liberation). Yogic self-rule at the micro-level entails becoming a *yogin* (contemplative ascetic), and I outline below how Kṛṣṇa describes this ascetic figure to Arjuna. Consequently, in the face of an entropic world and temporality, one must be able and willing to efface personal attachments to others to perform one's duties with the proper sensibility of dharmic disinterestedness. Before examining the *yogin*, I first explain the structure of the self and how the body is politicized as a "nine-gated fortress" (*pur*; *BhG* 5.13), with "the embodied self" (*dehin* or

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ātman) dwelling inside.[1] I then explicate the significance of this description as a basis for the micro-level politics that is the starting point for the *BhG*'s political thought. I first examine the self to argue that the *BhG*'s political thought and vision of proper rule begins at the individual level, which we must unpack before turning to the meso-level of interpersonal politics. As we approach this meso-level, my analysis returns to fire imagery as a symbol of political unification, which appears as a synthetic theme running throughout both the *MBh* and *BhG*. Ultimately, this imagery leads to a vision of heroism that finds its perfection in devotion to Kṛṣṇa. Both religious and philosophical thinking then support political unification through the Supreme Godhead, thus unifying the micro-, meso-, and macro-cosmological levels to support a form of deep ideology, which I will revisit in the final three chapters of the book.

Micro-Politics and the Material World: Ontology of the Self as Political Battlefield

According to the *BhG*, individuals are multifaceted and possess several hierarchically related components, and we can begin to see how this is the case by returning to the beginning of the *BhG*'s dramatic staging. Standing in his chariot situated between the Pāṇḍava and Kaurava armies, Arjuna becomes utterly despondent with the idea of slaughtering his kith and kin. As he laments to his charioteer and dear friend Kṛṣṇa: "When I see all my family poised for war, my limbs falter and my mouth goes dry. ... I am not able to hold my ground and my mind seems to whirl ... I see no good to come from killing my family in battle" (*BhG* 1.29–31). As an incarnation of the Supreme Being, the divine Kṛṣṇa advises Arjuna to dispel his doubts and engage in battle (*BhG* 2.3), explaining that Arjuna misunderstands the very nature of his own selfhood and existence. Arjuna's misapprehension, according to Kṛṣṇa, begins with an ontological distinction lying at the heart of one of the text's expressed philosophical systems, Sāṃkhyan dualism, which enumerates several concepts predicated on a fundamental distinction between spirit and physical matter. Along these lines, one of the central concepts in the *BhG*, *dehin*, denotes an "embodied one that does not perish." The term denotes a *deha*, or physical body, and an *ātman*, an inner spirit or self that inhabits the body as an inactive spectator. In one of many passages explaining the relationship between the *ātman* and its physical body, Kṛṣṇa explains: "Never was there a time when I did not exist, or you, or these kings, nor shall any of us cease to exist hereafter.

1 The "gates" here refer to the nine bodily orifices.

Just as creatures with bodies [*dehinaḥ*, "possessing a body"] pass through childhood, youth, and old age in their bodies, so there is a passage to another body, and a wise man is not confused about it" (*BhG* 2.11–13). The first part of this passage needs unpacking, as it refers to one of the core ontological concepts of the *BhG*, namely the *ātman*.

Kṛṣṇa begins by telling Arjuna that the two of them have always existed. While this is quite jarring for Arjuna to hear, elsewhere Kṛṣṇa explains that the *ātman* does not perish but rather persists over time and survives the body: "Our bodies are known to end, but the embodied self is enduring, indestructible and immeasurable; therefore, Arjuna, fight the battle!" (*BhG* 2.22). Hence, the body ages as time destroys it but the *ātman*, the embodied one (*dehin*), does not. In these verses one also notes a cyclical process, wherein aging denotes an entirely acceptable, natural process beginning in childhood and progressing toward old age. According to Kṛṣṇa, there is nothing to lament about this progression within a lifetime, which is paralleled by a longer progression of the *ātman* passing from one body to the next—an entropic sub-cycle in itself. The cycle is inevitable and thus should not be lamented: "Suppose you hold that he is constantly born and constantly dead, you still have no cause to grieve over him, strong-armed prince, for to the born, death is assured, and birth is assured to the dead; therefore there is no cause for grief, if the matter is inevitable" (*BhG* 2.26–27). This idea would purportedly alleviate the attachment Arjuna feels to his and others' bodily existences, which supplies the first step in convincing Arjuna that he is foolhardy for not engaging in battle and endangering his bodily existence, along with the physical existence of others. The ontological relationship between the *ātman* and physical body is also significant, as one might ask: are these two entities completely distinct and disconnected from one another, or is there some level of attachment that would explain Arjuna's reticence to kill another person, let alone family and friends? What's causing his delusion?

To answer these questions, one must understand the ontology of the self expressed in the *BhG*. The *ātman* may be immaterial and imperishable, but ignorance of its existence at the deepest layer of Arjuna's selfhood arises because he is deluded by its apparent connection to *prakṛti* (primal, material nature). To begin with, *prakṛti* consists of the material, phenomenal world accessible through our sense faculties (*indriya*s). According to Kṛṣṇa, due to our tangible connection with this aspect of the world, including the sensations and desires it produces, we are easily led to believe that it constitutes our true, albeit fleeting, reality: "The contacts of the senses with their objects, which produces sensations of cold and heat, comfort and discomfort, come and go without staying. … When a man thinks about sense objects, an interest in them develops. From this interest grows desire, from desire anger" (*BhG* 2.14, 62). Hence, the senses connect and tend to bind us to the material

world, producing destructive emotions that do us harm.[2] These potentially destructive sense objects are the first, ontological wave of enemies for the self, and the *ātman* must properly stand guard over the nine-gated fortress, or body, through yogic discipline. This discipline, however, requires that Arjuna gain proper knowledge of additional structures of his selfhood. Importantly, the immortal *ātman* stands outside or beyond the material realm, but within this realm higher faculties exist, and we can ultimately discern the following hierarchical schema within oneself.

Above the sense faculties (*indriya*s) lie the *manas* (lower mind), *buddhi* (higher mind and intellect), and ultimately the *ātman* and *puruṣa* (pure, immaterial substrate of our being and selfhood). The *manas* is a cognitive faculty allowing us to process thoughts and physical sense impressions. Above this stands the *buddhi*, which allows us to discriminate between these impressions and make judgments about them, but it also supplies us with the capacity to ascertain the deeper ontological entity that is one's *ātman* and the pure consciousness of *puruṣa. Puruṣa* is a passive spectator standing beyond *prakṛti*, existing as a sentient entity that constitutes an aspect of the Supreme Being's higher nature. The being's reality is independent of and transcends the properties of material nature. Importantly, each of the faculties—*indriya*, *manas*, and *buddhi*—exists in the ontological realm of *prakṛti*, giving us access to and helping us make sense of the material, phenomenal world. Through the proper training in one of three paths to liberation (*mokṣa*)—knowledge (*jñāna*), disciplined action (*yoga*), or devotion (*bhakti*)—one can cross over the ontological divide between material *prakṛti* and immaterial *puruṣa* to cognize the deeper reality of the imperishable *ātman.*[3] As Kṛṣṇa summarizes: "The senses, they say, are superior to their objects; the mind [*manas*] is higher than the senses; the spirit [*buddhi*] is higher than the mind; and beyond the spirit is he [*ātman*]" (*BhG* 3.42). At this stage in the dialogue, Arjuna has not fully cognized this truth and continues to think that he, through his physical self, will be the causal actor in the death of his enemies.

According to the ontology outlined above, causal action all occurs within the realm of *prakṛti* governed by three distinct material forces or *guṇa*s (*BhG* 3.27–29), and Kṛṣṇa ultimately transcends all *prakṛti.* As he explains to Arjuna,

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2 For a contemporary expression of this argument regarding the importance of controlling one's emotions, which appears in a book published by the Gita Press and displays the impact the *BhG* has had on contemporary social and spiritual reform projects, see Freier (2012: 397–398).

3 The distinction between *puruṣa* and *ātman* is aspectual in nature. One could view them as two sides of the same coin: *puruṣa* refers more to the pluralized, immaterial aspects of the Supreme Being, while *ātman* refers to the immaterial aspect of a distinct self that is connected to a particular *buddhi-manas-indriya* construct that extends into the realm of *prakṛti.*

"Know that all conditions of being, whether influenced by *sattva*, *rajas*, or *tamas*, come from me; but I am not in them: they are in me" (*BhG* 7.12). Hierarchically aligned and serving as the chief properties or characteristics of all existent material things, the forces (*guṇa*s) of *sattva* (lucidity, purity, goodness), *rajas* (passion, emotion), and *tamas* (darkness, ignorance, illusion) drive causal relations in the physical world and help constitute a person's nature (*BhG* 14.1–27). Kṛṣṇa thus claims that he, as the Supreme Being, exists as the causal totality within which these material forces operate. Kṛṣṇa also explains how the preponderance of a particular *guṇa* at one's death will dictate how one is reborn: "If the embodied soul dies when *sattva* reigns, he attains to the pure worlds of those who have the highest knowledge. The one dying in *rajas* is reborn among people who are given to action; while one expiring in *tamas* is born among the witless" (*BhG* 14.14–15). These *guṇa*-forces are all part of Kṛṣṇa's creative, illusory power, called *māyā.* In fact, Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that he must "create himself" in avatar form in the realm of *prakṛti* from eon to eon, using his *māyā*, in order to reestablish *dharmic* order (*BhG* 4.5–9). I will discuss these larger cosmological topics in the next section of the chapter, but it is relevant to point out that in transcending the cycle of rebirth, the *guṇa*s also play a crucial role:

> When a man of insight perceives that no one but the *guṇa*s acts and knows the one who transcends the *guṇa*s, he ascends to my being [i.e., *ātman* merging with its source, *brahman*, the unmanifest absolute]. By transcending these three *guṇa*s, which are the sources of the body, the embodied soul rids himself of the miseries of birth, death, and old age and becomes immortal. (*BhG* 14.9–10)

Arjuna can thus achieve *mokṣa* through a proper understanding of ontological truths that would release him from disillusioned attachment to the material realm. The imperishable self is *not* an actor or causal agent, which diverges from many familiar conceptions of agency that might be related to terms often used to translate *ātman*, such as "soul" or "spirit." In this regard the *BhG*'s stance on materialism remains crucial for understanding why all the killing and death that will result from the war is not to be lamented, at the end of the day, since this is the natural course of physical matter in an entropic world.

In sum, Arjuna's charioteer reveals himself as the causal force behind everything. As the supreme reality lying beyond all material creation, Kṛṣṇa is not only the efficient cause of everything at the level of *ātman*/*puruṣa*, but also the material cause of things through his *māyā* in the form of *prakṛti* and the three *guṇa*s. The final cause is dharmic order of the cosmos, which is inured in a process of gradual dissolution. I will discuss Kṛṣṇa and his political associations in greater detail in the next chapter, but here I want to ask: what does all this mean for Arjuna, espe-

cially concerning the nature of war and killing other human beings out of ethical-political or dharmic duty?

Categorically speaking, this means Arjuna's imperishable *ātman* cannot technically act in the phenomenal world because an ontological divide separates the material or phenomenal and immaterial realms. It follows that the true self, the *ātman*, cannot kill or be killed. Arjuna's delusion thus stems from his misapprehension of this ontological reality, whereby the lower parts of Arjuna's self that exist in the material world—the *buddhi, manas,* and *indriya*s, in descending order—mistakenly draw him toward and bind him to *prakṛti*, thus making him think *he* is the true killer. Ontologically, this could never be the case. Rather, death is part of yet another changing, cyclical state of *prakṛti* in which illusory aspects of a phenomenal world inevitably come and go, like new clothes and stages of a life cycle come to pass. Aging and death thus constitute what Kṛṣṇa explains as illusory modes of a deeper reality and agency that remain immune from material destruction. Along these lines, Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna two important things. First, he claims, "At any rate, actions are performed by the three forces of nature, but deluded by self-attribution, one thinks: 'I did it!'," thus failing to "see that all actions are performed by Prakṛti alone and that the self [*ātman*] does not act at all" (*BhG* 3.27; 13.29). Second, he explains, "For whenever Law [*dharma*] languishes, Bhārata [Arjuna], and lawlessness flourishes, I create myself. I take on existence from eon to eon, for the rescue of the good and the destruction of the evil, in order to reestablish the Law" (*BhG* 4.7–9). Therefore, Kṛṣṇa is the ultimate cause of death and all righteous order, including political order. Nevertheless, for *dharmic* order to be attained, Arjuna must perform his duty and engage in this battle, doing so in a particular state of consciousness.

Before examining this state of consciousness and yogic rule over oneself, I must highlight an important Sanskrit term used to describe the body, *pur*, which fills out some of the most intriguing political dimensions that exist at the micro-level of the self. Previous scholars have not unpacked the significance of this term for the *BhG*'s political ontology, which has prevented them from fully appreciating how the text's political thought begins at the micro-level of the body. The term *pur* can denote a rampart, fortress, or castle, but also a city or town. Likening the body to such structures and bearing the discussion of key ontological terms mentioned above, especially those associated with the self, we can see how the body and its internal components could be viewed as a sort of "city" containing a plurality of interrelated entities (e.g., *buddhi*, *manas*, *indriya*s). Moreover, the martial associations of a defensive fortress intimate the constant threat of conflict and entropic destruction that can occur with(in) a physical body that is drawn toward any number of sense objects out in the world. These sense objects all represent potential "enemies"—namely the destructive, offensive elements that call

forth a defensive position of the nine-gated fortress. As we shall see in greater detail, at any time the sense objects can overpower the fortress of the body and become rulers over our higher faculties such as the *buddhi*, thus drawing the *ātman* into another round of (re)birth and suffering.

Relatedly, other potential enemies are woven into our ontology per the *guṇa* of *rajas* (passion, emotion): "It is desire [*kāma*], it is anger [*krodha*], which springs from the force of *rajas*, the great devourer, the great evil: know that that is the enemy here … Therefore, bull of the Bharatas [Arjuna], first control your senses, then kill off that evil which destroys insight and knowledge" (*BhG* 3.37, 41). One material "thread of our being," namely *rajas*, opens us to these destructive vices and conflicts that they create, both internally and externally. Desire and anger thus become some of our most persistent enemies at the level of the self. As the second part of this passage indicates, this evil destroys our would-be knowledge regarding what is highest and most essential in each of us. The passions and objects of the passions can easily overrun the fortress if they are not ruled over in the proper fashion. Moreover, one can read a subtle historical-ideological element in this micro-politics, which I will mention briefly and elaborate on in greater detail in the next chapter. The sense objects that stir our destructive emotions are plural, while a properly ruled self is ruled in a more stratified, monarchical fashion. Here we see a connection to older *saṅgha*-style politics associated with plurality, paralleling the multiple senses and sense-objects, contrasted with a monarchical politics organized under single ruler (*ātman*, ultimately Kṛṣṇa) represented in the Pāṇḍava camp in the figure of Yudhiṣṭhira—whose name also means "firm or steady in battle." The battle thus begins internally, as various components of the self interact with one another while simultaneously interacting with the external world and sense objects. The very name "Yudhiṣṭhira" personifies the *BhG*'s micro-political stance. So, now we must ask: what does a "well-defended fortress" look like? This brings us to the position of the disciplined *yogin*.

Get Yoked! Yogic Ruling, Dharmic Disinterestedness, and the Politics of Effacement

Kṛṣṇa describes the *yogin*, or meditative ascetic, in numerous passages. The first mention of the qualities of such a figure appears in chapter 2, with a description of "the person whose insight stands firm," or *sthita-prajña*, as one who "forsakes all the desirable objects that come to his mind … and is sufficient unto himself. Not distressed in adversities, without craving for pleasures, innocent of passion, fear and anger, he is called a sage whose insight is firm" (*BhG* 2.55–56). In a memorable

passage, Kṛṣṇa makes one of his many analogies to the natural world, but one that nicely encapsulates some of the ideas discussed thus far:

> When he entirely withdraws his senses from their objects as a tortoise withdraws its limbs, his insight stands firm. For an embodied man who does not eat,[4] the sense objects fade away, except his taste for them; his taste, too, fades when he has seen the highest. (*BhG* 2.58–59)

Here we see how one must restrain oneself and refrain from making strong, egoistic connections to sense objects. The philosophical term and compound describing this "renunciate in disinterested action" is a *saṃnyāsayogayuktātmā*, "one whose self is yoked to the *yoga* of renunciation" (*BhG* 9.28). When this is accomplished and one has climbed up the "ontological ladder," so to speak, and realized that the *buddhi*, *ātman*, and eventually the imperishable *brahman* and Kṛṣṇa are the "highest" things, this person's insight stands on firm ground and remains there, ruling from within.

Later in the text, Kṛṣṇa goes into greater detail about the *yogin*, explaining one of the central philosophical pillars of the *BhG*, namely non-attachment to the consequences or "fruits" (*phala*) of one's actions. In chapter 6, Kṛṣṇa explains:

> Know, Pāṇḍava [Arjuna], that what they proclaim as 'renunciation' is precisely this discipline, for no one becomes a man of discipline without abandoning the intention of fruits … For he is said to have risen to the discipline only when he is interested no longer in sense objects, no longer in his acts, but has renounced all intentions. (*BhG* 6.1, 4)

The *yogin* must renounce his attachment to the fruits or consequences of one's actions, but not renounce action altogether. Rather, one must non-egoistically and "sacrificially" fulfill one's respective duties, which uphold the proper structure within oneself, within society, and within the cosmos more broadly. The *yogin*, I will argue, must therefore act in a state of dharmic disinterestedness, thus becoming an ascetic ruler over oneself—one that does not forsake action entirely, but quite the opposite. I will unpack each of these claims below.

Considering the knowledge that the *ātman* is an interconnected aspect of the Supreme Being, "Puruṣottama" (i. e., Kṛṣṇa in his unmanifest, absolute form), one must relinquish credit for one's actions. In another passage that captures Kṛṣṇa's teachings, Kṛṣṇa states that results of one's actions must be given up to Kṛṣṇa as a form of sacrifice:

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4 Van Buitenen clarifies that this phrasing is figurative, meaning someone "who does not feed on, thrive on, external objects" (1981: 163).

> But he who curbs his senses [*indriyas*] with his mind [*manas*], Arjuna, and then disinterestedly undertakes the discipline of action with his active faculties, stands out. All the world is in bondage to the karmic consequences of action, except for action for the purposes of sacrifice: therefore, engage in action for that purpose, disinterestedly … (*BhG* 3.7–9)

Intentionality thus plays a central role in the *BhG*'s theory of action. As Kṛṣṇa states, "The wise call that man a sage all of whose undertakings are devoid of intention to achieve an object of desire, for his *karman* [consequences of the act] has been burned off by the fire of insight. If one engages in an act while forgetting about its fruit … one does not incur any *karman* [negative *karmic* residue] at all" (*BhG* 4.19–20). Assuming responsibility for the fruits of one's actions binds the person to *prakṛti*, thus preventing liberation. Arjuna can only progress toward escaping the cycle of death and rebirth by performing his dharmic duty in a disinterested fashion, without any regard for the consequences. This is the well-known idea of "desireless action," or *niṣkāma-karma.* Performing one's *svadharma* (one's own, proper duty) upholds social and cosmic structure, and this applies to Kṛṣṇa as well: "I have created the society of the four classes with due regard for the various distribution of the *guṇa*s … know that I am its author, and that I am forever without *karman.* Actions do not stick to me, for I have no yearning for the fruits of my actions"—that is, not in any egoistic sense (*BhG* 4.13–14). Attachment to the consequences of action, following the false belief that the senses and our material bodies put us in contact with what is most real about us, is what binds us to the world and the cycle of *saṃsāra.*

Liberation (*mokṣa*) requires following Kṛṣṇa's example, which entails acting dutifully to maintain the integrity and harmony of a three-tiered cosmic structure: the micro-level of the self, the meso-level of society, and the macro-level of the cosmos. Escaping one's material death requires familiarity with a deep organizing principle of the *BhG*, namely dharmic disinterestedness. At the micro-level of the self, one must understand how the *ātman* does not act and stands as a disinterested spectator of *prakṛti* and the body, the latter of which the *BhG* describes as the nine-gated fortress within which the *ātman* dwells peacefully and stands watch (*BhG* 5.13). At the meso-level of society, fulfilling one's *svadharma* entails disinterestedly acting out one's dharmic duties associated with family (*kūla-dharma*), life stage (*āśrama-dharma*), and social group (*varṇa-dharma*), which maintain the social order in a manner that parallels self-order at the micro-level. Finally, at the macro-level of the cosmos, Kṛṣṇa explains that he disinterestedly stands watch over the cosmos, creating himself when necessary in order to reestablish dharmic order (*BhG* 4.7–8). The theme of cyclical creation and destruction also plays a role at each level of dharmic disinterestedness. Because the body, socio-political order, and cosmos find themselves entwined in an entropic cycle spiraling toward degra-

dation and physical destruction, one reason the logic of disinterestedness would appear to make sense is because it would alleviate the anxiety and pain one suffers in experiencing processes of aging, death, and in Arjuna's case, killing other human beings.

To achieve a sensibility of dharmic disinterestedness requires someone to participate in what I will call a *politics of effacement*. That is, human beings must diffuse strong attachments to particular people and specific relationships by effacing, or erasing, the significance of particular marks that exist at the surface-level of *prakṛti* to achieve a deeper understanding of one's broader socio-political duties. For example, Arjuna hesitates at the start of the *BhG* because he is overly attached to specific people such as Droṇa, Kṛpa, and Bhīṣma as his former teachers. Even participating in one's *varṇa* duties entails effacing specific attachments for a broader purpose or cause. It is not so much the particular person—say, Arjuna—that matters in this battle, but that he is a *kṣatriya* who must fight to perform his *svadharma* for the purposes of maintaining or enhancing the integrity of his self and the cosmos more broadly.[5] Such effacement dodges difficulties associated with particular attachments to other people (family members, friends, teachers), as well as the sentiment that we are the ultimate doers of our deeds and thus personally responsible for the subsequent consequences. As Kṛṣṇa instructs Arjuna, the *ātman* or true self does not really act at all, and the "doing of deeds" is simply *prakṛti* acting upon itself. In a sense, the *ātman* has no face to efface. Only in the realm of *prakṛti* is material carved up and given some type of face or self-demarcated physical identity. By effacing specific attachments Arjuna can then relinquish the idea that action is self-originating and self-referential in an egoistic manner, so that he can fruitfully participate in the process of cognizing his inherent connectedness to everything else in the cosmos and participate in integrating it in more fruitful ways according to *dharma.*

In the context of the *BhG*, Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that his socio-political duty as a warrior supersedes his family duty, the latter of which would prevent him from fighting and killing family members. If family duties supersede his broader socio-political duty, he would fail to engage in battle, his side would likely lose, and the evil Kauravas would (wrongly) retain political power as rulers of Hāstinapura. Therefore, Arjuna must participate in a politics of effacement because otherwise both earthly and cosmic *dharma* would suffer further, and most importantly for the broader narrative, the demon-Kauravas would win. Hence, his *svadharma*

5 This is not to claim that Arjuna's specific identity is entirely unimportant in the broader narrative, only that his duty as a *kṣatriya* acts as a trump card over his own idiosyncratic preferences in this scenario, whatever those preferences may be.

is to follow injunctions according to the duties of his *kṣatriya-varṇa.* As Kṛṣṇa reminds him:

> The embodied being [*ātman*] is in anybody's body forever beyond killing … therefore you have no cause to sorrow over any creatures. Look at your *svadharma* and do not waver, for there is nothing more salutary for a *kṣatriya* than war that is lawful. It is an open door to heaven, happily happened upon; and blessed are the warriors, Pārtha [Arjuna], who find a war like that! (*BhG* 2.30–32)

Therefore, his duty is to fight heroically as a *kṣatriya*, to defeat the evil Kaurava forces, and to help his brothers establish a righteous political order. To fail to engage in battle would incur dishonor and shame, which is worse than physical death according to Kṛṣṇa (*BhG* 2.34–35). Moreover, Kṛṣṇa explains that following his *kṣatriya-dharma* results in a "win-win" situation: "Either you are killed and will then attain to heaven, or you triumph and will enjoy the earth" (*BhG* 2.37).

Yogic discipline, achieved through action (*karma-yoga*), knowledge (*jñāna-yoga*), or devotion to Kṛṣṇa (*bhakti-yoga*) all allow a person to efface problematic attachments to *prakṛti* and achieve *mokṣa* as liberation from the cycle of suffering and rebirth. Linking each of these methods for achieving *mokṣa* constitutes an underlying philosophical principle of yogic discipline. The term *yoga* derives from the Sanskrit verb root, *yuj-*, which can mean "to yoke or harness" one thing to another, often in the sense of yoking one's horses to a chariot. Again, we see the martial aspects of the *BhG*'s ontology. The proper yoking process is associated with going into battle with one's fighting instruments properly yoked, which also entails having the proper agent in charge. Through each of the aforementioned methods, one can come to greater conscious awareness of the proper ontological components of oneself and the world around oneself, leading up to one innermost, imperishable self or spirit (*ātman*) that has no particular face.

Related to this martial image of yoking, the *ātman* had been likened to an actionless rider in a chariot with the *buddhi* serving as charioteer, the *manas* as the reins, the body as the chariot, and the sense objects as the surrounding paths. This influential allegory is first seen in early Upaniṣadic thought expressed in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* and is called the *Raṭha Kalpana.*[6] Proper yogic rule thus entails passing on to ever-higher entities and yoking oneself to whatever entities they happen to be. Without the *buddhi* holding the reins and the chariot-rider in control, the "horses" or senses will presumably run amok and take the inhabitants of the chariot in whatever direction the horses decide. Alf Hiltebeitel (2011b) explains the

6 See *KU* 1.3.3. On a detailed analysis of the Upaniṣadic connections and background for this "two Kṛṣṇa" image, see Hiltebeitel (2011b: 485–512).

deep Indo-European, Vedic, and Upaniṣadic philosophical background to the chariot allegory, which channels duality upward to a unity ordered by some higher entity. For example, citing passages from Book 11 in the *MBh* (11.7.13–15, 19cd–20), Hiltebeitel explains:

> Here *buddhi* as the restrainer-charioteer (*yantṛ*) is identifiable with *sattva*, 'goodness', the *guṇa* which characterizes the *buddhi* or understanding at its most lucid. On this ... 'spiritual' chariot, the *buddhi*, by restraining the horses of the senses and transforming them into yogic restraints identified as the 'horses of *brahman*,' enables the *ātman* to attain the world of *brahman*. ... [*B*]*uddhi* and *ātman* have a reciprocity that implies a unity, which may help explain why certain epic passages make the soul itself the charioteer. (2011b: 497–498)

In earlier Upaniṣadic passages, the endpoint for such unity was *brahman*, but in the devotional context of the *BhG*, we shall see how liberation requires passing through *brahman* to reach Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme God. As I will argue in Chapter 3, this provides further imagery in support of a unified, monarchical political vision.

Therefore, only in yoking himself to the highest will Arjuna understand why he must yoke himself to his dharmic duty as *kṣatriya* and fight the battle. As Kṛṣṇa commands Arjuna in chapter 2: "Yoke yourself to the battle!" (*BhG* 2.38). In the literal action of the *BhG* and taken from a broader metaphorical perspective, the charioteer is God himself. This command is both literal and philosophically significant: fight the battle against your enemies in the form of the Kauravas, which is also predicated on fighting the internal, ontological battle against destructive emotions in preparation for combatting attachment to the sense objects. In this context we can better understand a later passage where Kṛṣṇa states: "This body, Kaunteya [Arjuna], is called 'the field', and the ones who know this call the one who knows this 'field' the 'guide' to this field. Know, Bhārata, that I too am such a guide, *but to all fields*; this knowledge of guide and field I deem knowledge indeed" (*BhG* 13.1–2; italics mine). In the first part of the passage, the body is referred to as a "field," and I would add, "field of battle," with *ātman* as the proper "guide" to this field. However, Kṛṣṇa identifies himself as the highest guide, or the guide to all fields—everything existing in the realm of *prakṛti*—and therefore the final guide to which we must yoke ourselves. As Kevin McGrath points out, this field is both terrestrial and human, universal in scope, and becomes the "primary medium—*qua* the actual and material personage of Kṛṣṇa himself—for a devotee to transcend from the terrestrial toward the divine" (2016: 79). In these images we clearly see the associations with military implements, which is even more appropriate in Arjuna's case because he himself is a *kṣatriya*, so it is his nature and duty (*svadharma*) to engage on the battle*field*.

In renouncing one's egoistic attachments to the fruits of one's action by acting in a state of dharmic disinterestedness, one is not ascetically renouncing action al-

together, thus displaying an important historical development in Brahmanical political thought. Johannes Bronkhorst highlights this somewhat counterintuitive ascetic position posed by the *BhG*, explaining, "one can pursue the highest goal while yet staying in society. … Arjuna can pursue the highest goal while yet fulfilling his obligations as a warrior" (2015: 5). Each of the *varṇa*s (brahmin, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, *śūdra*) must fulfill its respective dharmic duties through the same process of renouncing egoistic attachment to the result of one's actions, allowing Brahmanical political thought to incorporate the idea of ascetic renunciation while maintaining and justifying its ideal, hierarchical social order—a social order that resembles the four-fold hierarchy within each individual (*ātman*, *buddhi*, *manas*, and *indriya*s) and macro-temporal structure (Kṛta, Tretā, Dvāpara, Kali). Within each of these fourfold schemas, a scale of purity runs from top to bottom, highlighting an important ideological element in Brahmanical political thought propounded in the *BhG* and *MBh*, more generally. Within each category—self (micro-), *varṇa* (meso-), and *yuga* (macro-)—the lower element indicates moral decline and closer proximity to entropic destruction extending from the self, outward to the socio-political order, and finally, connecting to the cosmic structure. The cosmology is thus shot through with conflict and battle, and *dharma* (verb root *dhṛ-*, "to uphold") upholds the integrity and welfare of each fourfold structure as it inevitably veers toward decline. This decline invokes ideas of disintegration that I examined last chapter, but here mapped on to the self. As we saw in Book 1 of the *MBh*, Brahmanical political thought employs the imagery of fire to conceptualize how such disintegration can be avoided and how integration, and political unification, can be achieved. In the next section, therefore, I will use the conceptual framework outlined in the previous chapter to elucidate how this framework simultaneously operates at the micro-level of the individual, with Arjuna serving as a concrete example. In fact, I argue that one of the *BhG*'s most important political innovations within the longer trajectory of Brahmanical political thought lies in its creative synthesis of older Vedic concepts and images, on the one hand, and more contemporary ascetic-philosophical ideas, on the other.

Fire Imagery and Political Unification

An important term discussed earlier in the chapter appears in the last passage quoted above from chapter 13 in the *BhG*, namely *jñāna* (knowledge, wisdom, or insight), and this philosophical term allows me to further explicate the important imagery of fire and its political salience. In chapter 4, Kṛṣṇa states:

> The wise call that man a sage whose undertakings are devoid of the intention to achieve an object of desire, for his *karman* has been burned off by the fire (*agni*) of insight (*jñāna*). If one engages in an act while forgetting about its fruit … one does not incur any *karman* at all. He is not polluted when he does only bodily acts, without any expectations, keeping mind and self controlled, and renouncing all possessions. (*BhG* 4.19–21)

Jñāna provides one way of achieving *mokṣa* (liberation), and here Kṛṣṇa associates it with fire. Recalling a point made in the last chapter, fire (*agni*) has destructive, unifying, and purifying qualities, as it allowed Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna to clear the space that was the Khāṇḍava Forest so that the Pāṇḍavas could erect their palace at Indraprastha and take the next step toward dharmic rule. Above we see that knowledge plays a similar role within the self, preventing one's actions from being "polluted" through dharmic disinterestedness. It is the *kṣatriya*'s duty to help the brahmin/Agni incinerate the forest, and Arjuna/Kṛṣṇa do so in a dutiful manner that does not account for the suffering and death of the forest's inhabitants, just as Arjuna must engage in battle and "burn down" his kith and kin. The language of pollution/purity is also relevant here, hearkening "lower" versus "higher" entities in the Brahmanical cosmos. Objects of desire, already discussed as micro-political enemies to a self, are inferior and injurious to the process of renunciation explained above.

Placed in a broader historical context, this language displays how brahmins can internalize the imagery of fire as it relates to traditional Vedic ritualism. In the earlier Vedic Saṃhitās (ca. 1500–800 BCE) and Brāhmaṇas (ca. 900–650 BCE), Agni was the ritual fire and god that relayed the offerings to the intended deity, but after the Upaniṣads' ascetic and philosophical internalization of ritual fire in the form of *tapas*—heat achieved through meditative austerity and power—the ritual of meditation now generates a type of fire that purifies oneself through internal means. As in the Khāṇḍava episode, fire also possesses destructive capacities, but these capacities are leveled for positive, creative purposes in both cases. The fire of knowledge destroys or burns off ignorance and delusion, as literal fire destroyed the Khāṇḍava Forest. In the *BhG*, however, this creative/destructive process is internalized for micro-political purposes: namely, to establish proper ruling relations within the self by pursuing unification under a micro-monarchical type of rule by "the highest." Following Theodore Proferes' (2007) analysis of fire and conceptions of sovereignty in earlier Vedic thought, here we can see how fire represents political unification as a symbol for sovereignty at the individual or micro-level. I contended that fire's power to destroy must be paired with its power to create or renew, to disintegrate *and* integrate. In the *BhG*, knowledge as fire clears ground for something higher, properly integrating and unifying hierarchical ruling components within the self. This move effectively synthesizes

Vedic ritual elements with new ascetic ideas that had posed certain challenges to orthodox strains of Vedic ritualism.

These political valences, I argue, are invoked and creatively deployed at the individual level. In making this move Brahmanical political thought finds a new way to politicize the self by extending its political ontology and cosmology into new terrain, effectively expanding this terrain to formerly apolitical spaces. Brahmins expand this space by turning inwardly to a smaller space and developing a deeper, more expansive political ontology within the self. Yogic self-rule then serves as preparation for envisioning a vast cosmo-ontological connectedness through the self, with the self becoming the commonly possessed, political "hook" for the entire ideological structure. In other words, one must go through the self to properly understand its terrain, so that one knows how to act out in the world on more traditional, external political terrain. In the *BhG* the body and one's selfhood thus become a Brahmanized political instrument that solidifies their socio-political station, as the authors of the text drill into the bedrock of the self and then expand and connect everything in the cosmos through the medium of Kṛṣṇa.[7] In sum, the self becomes not only a ritual and spiritual space but also a *political* space, pervaded by associations with (im)purity and hierarchical order, further connected to the fundamental constituents of the material world (*sattva-rajas-tamas*). In the language of the politics of effacement, the lower levels of the material world must be effaced so that higher, "purer" elements of both the self (such as the *buddhi*) and the world can be set over the lower elements, and proper ruling relations can then be established. This development also shows a new modality of Brahmanical ideology that I will touch upon in the next chapter and examine in more detail in Chapter 4. However, self-knowledge is not the only place where older Vedic ideas associated with fire and political power are fused with newer ascetic ideas.

Kṛṣṇa also instructs Arjuna on the *yoga* and "fires" of self-restraint. Here we again see ascetic elements paired with the imagery of fire:

> Others offer the senses of hearing and so forth into the fires of restraint, while others sacrifice the objects of sound, etc., into the fires of the senses. Others again offer up all the actions of the senses and those of the vital faculties into the wisdom [*jñāna*]-kindled fire of the *yoga* of self-restraint. (*BhG* 4.26–27)

In this passage, Kṛṣṇa describes how restraining the senses is an ascetic practice that acts as a sacrificial fire; however, instead of ritual offerings being given to a literal fire as Agni, the objects of the senses and their significance become the sacrificial offerings that are burned in the "fires of restraint" to help purify the self of

7 I will expand on this point in the next chapter.

potential roadblocks to achieving *mokṣa.* As before, we see the individualization and internalization of the Vedic ritual sacrifice, kindled again by wisdom or knowledge, which is cultivated in turn by the *yoga* of self-restraint. I want to emphasize the conflictual nature of the self that is suggested in this passage, which indicates how the self is a battlefield of sorts that entropically gravitates toward the senses and sense objects, moving one further and further away from one's true self or *ātman.* Part of what brahmins have done is map external elements of the ritual and political world *onto and into* the self, thus subtly politicizing the self while retaining hierarchical structures and categories centered around the organizing dichotomy of purity/impurity.

To get a further sense of how the internal/external and purity/impurity dichotomies operate together, one can take a closer look at the different "types" of human beings said to exist in Brahmanical political thought. Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna he has set in motion an ontological complex that taxonomizes people through the *guṇa*s within the realm of *prakṛti*, informing Arjuna about the binding nature of the *guṇa*s and *prakṛti:* "The *guṇa*s called *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* are born from Prakṛti, and they fetter the eternal embodied souls [i.e., *ātman*s] to their bodies" (*BhG* 14.5). The predominance of a given *guṇa* in any individual determines this person's nature—for example, as attached to joy and knowledge (*sattva*-nature) versus passion and attachment to craving (*rajas*-nature) (*BhG* 14.7). This means that peoples' natures are "woven" differently, with the *guṇa*s acting as the essential threads of the material world. Later, in chapter 18, Kṛṣṇa further explains:

> There is not a creature on earth, nor in heaven among the Gods, which is free from these three *guṇa*s that spring from Prakṛti. The acts of brahmins, *kṣatriya*s, *vaiśya*s, and *śūdra*s, enemy-burner, divide themselves according to the *guṇa*s that spring from nature. … self-control … purity … insight [*jñāna*], knowledge [*vi-jñāna*], and true faith are the brahmin's task, which derive from his nature [*sva-bhāva*, lit. 'self-being,' or 'nature of oneself] (*BhG* 18.42).

Not surprisingly, while the brahmins possess all the positive characteristics mentioned above, Kṛṣṇa simply says that the *śūdra*'s "natural task is to serve" (*BhG* 18.44). In describing the brahmin's nature we clearly see various characteristics I've been discussing, especially those centering on self-control and purity. If this is indeed the case, by implication the brahmins are also the most properly self-ruled as individuals. Again, the underlying message is that brahmins, while they are not supposed to serve as rulers, are in fact the *best* rulers—albeit at the micro-scale—and therefore can serve as a model for *kṣatriya*s, to whom falls the proper meso-level of ruling over other people. Relatedly, Hiltebeitel has argued that the proper actions (*svakarma*) of the brahmin "provides the paradigm that models the activities of other classes on prerogatives grounded in sacrificial ritual. Kṣatriya *svadharma*, on the other hand, is a role model for all classes to fulfill du-

ties that uphold the Brahmanical order" (2011c: 562). This Brahmanical paradigm partly begins with the theory of the *guṇa*s and *karman* (actions from previous lives leading to birth in a particular *varṇa*), providing an underlying logic for why particular *varṇa*s have specific duties assigned to them.[8] Sacrificial ritual then provides an overarching category that explains how and why members of each group must act sacrificially according to *varṇa-dharma*, with *kṣatriya*s such as Arjuna serving as role models for all classes to fulfill their duties. These duties may be difficult to swallow (as they are for Arjuna), but they must be fulfilled for maintaining cosmic order, which, at an ideological level, also helps solidify and uphold the Brahmanical order.

In the face of such ontological distinctions and the destructive results that come about if each social group does not perform its proper dharmic duties, the answer Kṛṣṇa provides relates back to dharmic disinterestedness, thus tracking two additional images related to temporality and the imagery of fire in the *BhG*'s political thought. The first image is the "wheel." In the previous chapter I explained temporality as a "wheel" spinning indifferently to any given person's concerns or desires. In the epic the wheel can have strong martial connections to the chariot, which also happens to be the site of the conversation between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. Moreover, we can observe how Arjuna's chariot unifies Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, but this time to "burn down" their foes. Time as a wheel that turns and destroys everything thus relates to the warrior's chariot wheels turning and facilitating destruction of the lives of fellow warriors on the battlefield. When the wheels are turning—and they must always be turning so long as *kṣatriya*s exist—someone is killing and someone else is being killed. Moreover, Arjuna must keep the wheel(s) turning in a dharmically disinterested fashion: "He who does not keep rolling the wheel that has been set in motion, indulging the senses in a lifespan of evil, lives for nothing" (*BhG* 3.16). Human beings must participate, in time, by turning this wheel of disinterested action, performing acts and duties accordingly (*BhG* 3.19). We can see this idea summed up in the figure of Kṛṣṇa, who declares during his theophany: "I am Time grown old to destroy the world, Embarked on the course of world annihilation" (*BhG* 11.32). During his theophany we see Kṛṣṇa identifying himself as Time, which has "grown old" (approaching the end of a Yugic cycle) and embarks on a course of annihilation in a disinterested fashion, wherein "Your [i. e., Kṛṣṇa] dreadful flames are filling with fire, And burn to its ends this universe, Viṣṇu!" (*BhG* 11.30). Since time is impartial or indifferent

8 For a philosophical challenge to this presumption that one can derive such an "ought" (dharmic duty) from an "is" (*varṇa*-status) based on *guṇa*-theory in texts such as the *BhG*, see Prasad (2008: 335–57).

to human concerns, humans must combat this by acting disinterestedly themselves, which, ironically enough, is the only way out of the "wheel" of birth, death, and rebirth. The lesson stands: participate in the wheel to escape the wheel. This process necessarily entails sacrifice, which re-invokes the *BhG*'s Vedic/post-Vedic synthesis.

Vedic rituals entailed making sacrificial offerings to Agni for transport to the gods, and dharmic disinterestedness in the *BhG* now becomes a form of sacrifice. As discussed earlier, one must sacrifice egoistic attachments to objects of desire and to the fruits of one's actions. Kṛṣṇa states: "All the world is in bondage to the *karman* of action, except for action for the purposes of sacrifice: therefore, engage in action for that purpose, disinterestedly" (*BhG* 3.9). Warriors themselves become, in this militaristic context, sacrificial offerings on the battlefield, as they selflessly fulfill their *svadharma*, remaining indifferent as time is indifferent. Both the wheel of time, and battle as sacrifice, can then spin indifferently as the cosmos moves in an entropic direction toward the destruction of beings.[9]

This point brings me to the second image and related activity, namely gambling. The battlefield—both self and literal battlefield of Kurukṣetra—is likened to a gambling den by King Dhṛtarāṣṭra toward the start of the *BhG:*

> That dangerous and inhospitable gambling den on the battlefield, where the carpet for the dicing had been spread out with the bodies of men, elephants, and horses, and the dice rolled with the arrows, spears, clubs, swords, and javelins—what slow-witted warrior gamblers entered that den to gamble for the fearful stakes of their lives? Who won? Who lost? Who carried off the prize? (*MBh* 6.63.66–68)

This passage provides an image wherein most warriors will become sacrificial victims, losing their lives as gamblers (*kitava*s), with gambling analogized with fighting and dice analogous to various types of weaponry. Here I want to recall a point I made in the previous chapter regarding the parallels between gambling and dice, on the one hand, and temporality and the four ages on the other. Time or temporality has been depicted as a wheel and now we have the gambling imagery as well. The names of the four *yuga*s match the names for the different numbers and throws in a game of dice descending from "4" (the "Kṛta," winning throw) to "1" (the "Kali," losing throw). We can glean an important nexus of associations here between temporality, entropy, and politics. Gambling itself is part of the kingly consecration ritual, as we see in Book 2 of the *MBh.* Duryodhana cheats in the dice match, and Yudhiṣṭhira's loss signals a major setback in the Pāṇḍavas' reemergence as legitimate rulers in their home-base of Indraprastha, which kickstarts

9 On the topic of war as a type of sacrifice for *kṣatriya*s, see Brekke (2006: 113–144).

a waning period for their political power vis-à-vis the Kauravas. Again, everything is cyclical, and cyclicality partakes of divinity. Or, as Ruth Cecily Katz puts it: "God himself cannot change the inevitable cyclical course of fate that dominates the epic world view; God *is* the *yuga*s" (*MBh* 12.325.105–7; Katz 1989: 230). A bout of gambling led to the Pāṇḍavas' exile and a new episode of gambling, this time through warfare, will now lead to the Kauravas' downfall.

This war could be interpreted as possessing each of the valences: as a gambling den inhospitable to warriors' (and the Pāṇḍavas in Book 2) lives, with the gambling-as-warfare itself serving as part of the Pāṇḍavas—and Yudhiṣṭhira's in particular—coronation as the proper dharmic rulers on the human plane. The war can also be viewed as a ritual fire that will destroy or burn down most of the warrior-gamblers on the battlefield, purifying the political space by defeating the evil Kauravas and further clearing the ground for dharmic rule by the Pāṇḍavas at the meso-level. In general, then, we get an image of human existence as not only a battlefield but a sort of gamble in the face of an indifferent world and an entropic, cyclical temporality. In the face of this cosmic indifference and entropy, to live well is akin to living a heroic warrior's life, capable of combatting indifference with indifference, or more properly speaking, with dharmic disinterestedness.

Heroism and Goodness through Devotion

Arjuna's ascetic heroism highlights an important category that I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter but should be introduced in the context of this chapter's analysis, namely religious devotion. As Katz has argued, "a heroism of religion is able to restore a hero to heroic status even in an age that is not conducive to heroism" (1989: 213). Interpreting Arjuna's political significance in the *BhG*, one can combine two categories that had not traditionally been paired with one another: asceticism and heroism. Traditionally, ascetic traditions promoted withdrawal from worldly activity, with asceticism often connected to the Sanskrit term *nivṛtti* (renunciation of worldly life, oriented toward personal liberation), contrasted with *pravṛtti* (active engagement with worldly life), which is connected to things like the heroic activity of fighting in battle. Ascetic religions such as Buddhism and Jainism were also seen as contending with orthodox Brahmanical religion in the historical context of the epic's composition. However, considering my reading of the body as a political battlefield, we can see how the two categories intertwine as asceticism becomes a form of heroic political activity and combat *par excellence*, whereby the body is likened to a mobile fortress: one must control one's senses to stave off defeat at the hands of emotional enemies such as greed

and anger. However, religious devotion also serves as an important hinge for such ascetic heroism in the *BhG.* Katz's analysis of Arjuna explores what she calls the "religious dimension of Arjuna," which she claims most strongly suggests that he be taken as a role model (213). Since I have also argued that Arjuna should be viewed as a role model of the ascetic-heroic type, I would like to examine Katz's reading of Arjuna's devotional-heroic nature both as a supplement to my reading and as a precursor to my examination of Kṛṣṇa and the role of devotion in the *BhG*'s political thought in the next chapter.

Katz argues that Arjuna becomes a heroic role model through a devotional medium, which emphasizes the intimate connection between the two heroic figures of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. She not only explains how Arjuna's full character is predicated on his relationship with Kṛṣṇa and that Kṛṣṇa is the source of Arjuna's power, but also that Arjuna's exploits at the devotional level "greatly resemble exploits of Krishna" (217). As I will explain in the next chapter, this resemblance is no coincidence insofar as we can interpret Arjuna as a literal *part* of Kṛṣṇa when viewed from a macro-level perspective. This divine connection plays a central role in the political thought of the *BhG*, as Katz explains: "he [i. e., Arjuna] is fully divine as Vishnu/Krishna's friend and devotee" (218). Submitting to a higher power can be construed as a political act, and here it is not just submission, but loving devotion that sublimates the relationship to a divine level. An aspect of this devotion is grounded in the idea of a lower being or entity humbling itself before a higher being, giving up one's self-centeredness out of loving devotion to that which is higher and purer. Of course, this idea connects with a central idea in the *BhG*, namely renunciation as desireless action (*niṣkāma-karma*) and acting out of a sense of duty for higher purposes related to *dharma.*

Kṛṣṇa's theophany can then be read in this context as the maximum revelation of Kṛṣṇa's supreme form, which helps complete Arjuna's enlightenment and solidify his humble devotion to the Supreme Godhead. This theophany plays a key role in enlightening Arjuna, as M. M. Agrawal explains that once Arjuna views and existentially experiences a vision of macro-cosmic reality, thus perceiving the entire process of cosmic creation and destruction, this vision destroys his attachment to mortal existence along with "the sentiments and fears consequent upon his attachment" (1989: 140). Egoism and any sense of personal gain dissipate because he now understands the macro-level context, which completely shifts his perspective and leads Arjuna to realize "not only intellectually [per the previous philosophical instruction from Kṛṣṇa] but deeply, existentially, that the inner self is immortal … [so] Arjuna now feels no grief at the thought of the death of his affectionate and respected ones"; on his part, Arjuna is now ready to accept "a position to act from the motive of duty alone" (140). Perhaps paradoxically, heroism is not captured in distinguishing oneself in pursuit of honor or glory

but rather in humbling oneself, devotionally, to something higher and taking direction from this higher being. Heroism becomes grounded in a deep humility, leading toward dharmic disinterestedness and non-egoism. For Arjuna, this humility is partly based on the revelation that one's *ātman* is eternal and does not perish, freeing him up existentially to act out of dharmic disinterestedness because he now realizes the relative insignificance of his personal attachments to particular people in the realm of *prakṛti*, along with his much deeper cosmological attachment to Kṛṣṇa.

Katz advances additional analytic points pertinent to my own analysis of both Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa. She explains that Arjuna "is viewed as partaking of divinity insofar as his splendor (*tejas*) is equal to Vishnu's" (1989: 218). I will argue that this makes complete sense since Arjuna is revealed to be part of Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa himself, and specifically, a *kṣatriya-aṃśa* (particle) of Kṛṣṇa, whose nature is characterized by *rajas* (or *tejas* in Sāṃkhyan philosophy). Devotion signals the key medium through which Arjuna participates in Kṛṣṇa's divinity and assumes his religious heroism. As Katz observes, "Arjuna *as devotee* participates in Krishna's divine nature" (218, emphasis mine). In other words, devotion triggers the divine connection and participation. As Katz also comments, the identity of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa can be viewed as a poetic expression of a monistic philosophy, wherein "the two are really one self" (218). I will build upon this observation in showing the political valences of this monism, unpacking its political parallel in monarchy. Finally, as Katz concludes: "Arjuna restores his threatened heroic potential, and transcends it, by his devotion to God" (219). What I will argue is that this is not only a theological claim, but a deeply political one as well, and one rife with ideological elements.

The last component of Katz's analysis that I would like to draw upon is the connection she draws between goodness and devotion to Kṛṣṇa. While the righteous cause of the Pāṇḍavas is symbolized by their kinship relation with Kṛṣṇa, Katz explains how this connection is deepened through Arjuna's specific relationship to Kṛṣṇa through devotion. She argues, "Arjuna's restored superheroism resides in the fact that he is the chief proponent and practitioner of devotion in the epic, supplying it to the rest of the family" (233). This relationship is yet another reason that Duryodhana's character and the Kaurava side must be viewed as the evil side that will lose the war. For example, Arjuna's embrace of Kṛṣṇa stands in sharp contrast to Duryodhana's rejection of Kṛṣṇa when they must make a choice between either taking Kṛṣṇa alone, or his army as allied forces, before the war. As Katz reminds us, Duryodhana violently rejects Kṛṣṇa, attempting to imprison Kṛṣṇa during his pre-war peace mission (234). These acts seal the image of the Kauravas as demonic entities, soon to be extinguished in the cataclysmic war on the field of Kurukṣetra: as the *MBh* clearly states, with Kṛṣṇa lies victory. This com-

mentary on Arjuna's special connection to Kṛṣṇa now sets the stage for a closer examination of Kṛṣṇa in the next chapter.

Conclusion

As I argue in this chapter dharmic disinterestedness stems from yogic rule over oneself, helping stave off the natural entropy of the cosmos, especially at the (micro-) individual and (meso-) political levels. This heroic form of asceticism further requires taming egoism and effacing particularities that attach us to specific things and people, preventing us from undertaking our dharmic duties. This politics of effacement helps us uncover and better understand the interconnectedness of everything, and how participating in the harmonious integration of the cosmic structure requires becoming a yogic ruler at the micro-level of the self, which, according to the *BhG*, is all we can control and the most any one of us can contribute to helping uphold a cosmic structure that is always veering toward entropic destruction.

In the next chapter, my analysis will shift to Kṛṣṇa, his attributes, and the ideological components of *bhakti.* However, before leaving Arjuna, I would like to reiterate a key ideological feature that surrounds this character. Arjuna is perhaps the epic's penultimate *kṣatriya*/warrior-hero, evoking older Vedic ideas associated with martial abilities and responsibilities. In the *BhG*, this martial heroism is spiritualized in innovative ways, bridging a theoretical gap between ruling and spiritual authority. Arjuna's deference to Kṛṣṇa signals an important attempt to restore the authoritative link between brahmins as spiritual or religious advisors, and *kṣatriya*s as the proper agents of rule. In other words, the *BhG* forges several new conceptual connections between such figures, helping establish a new framework in which to understand the meaning of rule within a cosmos in entropic decline.