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This paper brings contemporary cognitive science understandings of brain and mind to bear on religious mystical experience. For this I examine two recent formulations of how mind and brain interact, using Giulio Tononi's Integrated Information Theory (IIT 3.0) and Antonio Damasio's work on the connections between cognition and emotion (1994, 2010) as a way to probe traditional Indian religious conceptions of consciousness, particularly drawing on medieval Indian religious ideas of the 11th century Kashmiri mystic and philosopher Abhinavagupta.

Much of the current debate on consciousness in cognitive science and philosophy of mind discussions has been pre-occupied, and from the perspective of many, stymied by the inability to adequately explain the phenomenology of subjectivity, its accompanying qualia—the “what it feels like” to be a person, or a bat (Nagel, 1974). A capacity to say “I” underpins how we define self. I suggest that bringing our current biological knowledge into a larger picture that integrates cultural conceptions of religious experience will help to give us a broader perspective on the connections between biology, psychology and human religious impulses.

Religion as a human cultural historical practice is incredibly diverse; for the purposes of this project I focus on the thoughtful articulations of religious subjectivity expressed in the writings of an influential mystic and philosopher for India, Abhinavagupta.

A key theory of his links the awareness of self to a mystical apprehension, a “recognition” (pratyabhijñā) that operates on the levels of mind and on the body. With this novel religious inclusion of the body as key to spiritual experience, he and the 9th -12th century Kashmiri Śaiva school to which he belongs, diverges from classical Indian religious conceptions of the self as a solely disembodied spiritual entity.

The similarities of his view to Damasio's connection of emotion with cognition and to Damasio's proposals for a proto-self linked to emotion and the body offer a rich comparative map of self and body. Here Abhinavagupta's explicit reliance on a religious conception of selfhood can help us to augment our portrait of psychology and the religious impulse.

I use Tononi's neuroscientific formulation of consciousness as a product of information that makes use of integrated feedback loops (in his case, linking an understanding of neuronal activity with computer information models) in a similar vein. Tononi's model overcomes the cartesian gap between mind and brain—plaguing nearly all current explanatory models—by linking “causal” and “intrinsic” aspects of information. For his theory “causal” references physical, objectively apprehended neuronal and circuit interactions, while the “intrinsic” aspect references the mind-centered, subjective components of experience. Tononi's model conspicuously parallels Abhinavagupta's use of *kriyā*, action and *jñāna*, knowledge, as a way to bring together the material world of objectively experienced phenomena with the subjective experience of awareness (IPVV). Both systems operate by joining subjective and objective components of self as a modal unity. With this I hope to demonstrate the inclusion of body-based experience as a way to link traditional religious conceptions of self to our contemporary models of consciousness