

YOGA, KARMA, AND REBIRTH
A Philosophic Interpretation and Defense
With a Translation of the *Yogasūtra*
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[approximately 300 pages]

Chapter One

Yoga and Metaphysics

1.1. Yoga on Philosophy's Mind-Body Problem

Philosophers of late have been much concerned with what they call the mind-body problem and how consciousness is related to the body and the brain in particular. This has given rise to a certain prejudice and challenge to Yoga. For, Yoga, as a philosophy, whatever its details or scholastic banners, must, in order to support yogic practices, make us believe in the power of consciousness, its power over mental and bodily instruments. To fulfill that responsibility, Yoga has to be dualist—in a sense to be explained—or monist in a different way than materialism is monist, i.e., spiritually monist, like Vedānta or Mahāyāna Buddhism which deny that everything is material.

The reigning philosophic opinion in universities is, unfortunately, decidedly monist in the materialist sense. In the range of views that dominate professional philosophy, thought and consciousness are considered either in some sense identical to brain states and processes or invariably dependent on them as effects or properties. There is nothing mental or conscious apart from the physical body. Yoga, in sharp contrast, teaches the independence and transcendence of consciousness and its ability to rule thought, emotion, and the body, indeed all of its various instruments or “sheaths.”¹ We shall call this Yoga's self-determination thesis. It stands at the center of Yoga metaphysics. That is to say, central to Yoga is the proposition that we can change ourselves,

1. Yoga psychology is not monolithic. There are several overlapping schema, all of which, however, are at odds with materialist assumptions. The “sheath” conception according to which consciousness has five types of embodiment—physical, vital, mental, overmental, and blissful *kośas*—first appears in an old Yoga text (c. 6th century, BCE), the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (Brahmānandavallī 2ff). The idea is picked up by Vedāntic and Yogic commentators and even, arguably, by Buddhists (compare the idea of *skandha*). While famously anti-metaphysical, Buddhist philosophy, like almost all forms of Yoga, assumes a “subtle body” that survives death.

that our bodies are shaped by karma, by what we do, by exercises and training and “self-discipline” (yoga with a small y). Self-determination extends to our emotional and mental bodies as well as our physical “sheath.” Yogic practices make the best sort of karma, so all Yoga philosophies teach. Consciousness is transcendent to and can make, or shape, its embodiments. Yoga metaphysics—whether dualist or otherwise—has the responsibility to make the power of consciousness plain.

Anti-dualist opinion in academic philosophy is carried by arguments first directed against an early-modern tradition in the West of viewing consciousness as an entirely independent substance. Descartes (1596–1650) saw consciousness as a kind of stuff distinct from things physical. But how can consciousness—begins now the standard refutation—be separate from matter? An unbridgeable gulf is unimaginable. For, if there were an absolute barrier, we could neither perceive physical things nor act in the world. Descartes relied on God to pair up the psychological and the physical. And without God to do the work, the connection seems impossible. Modern materialism develops from this insight.

There are of course several competing materialist views, and numerous considerations motivate the one or the other.² Arguments for one theory

2. Here are the major theories. Property dualists say that, contra Descartes, consciousness is not itself stuff. It is a property, like an object’s color or shape. Consciousness is a property of the living body. There is only one kind of stuff, but there are two kinds of property, physical and mental. (Compare classical Indian Cārvāka: “From the material elements, earth, etc., consciousness is produced, like the intoxicating power of grain fermented.”) Others, called functionalists, claim that consciousness is an event. It is something that happens, a bodily process or function, like digestion or sleep. (Certain Buddhists might be called functionalists by this mark, but Western functionalists, unlike the philosophers of the Eastern religion, see mental events as physically caused.) Hard materialists, called reductionists, hold that all description, including description of the mental and consciousness, is reducible to scientific language. The reason—according to “type-type-identity” theorists—is that types of brain event correlate with types of mental event. Others argue that mind-body correlations connect non-repeating particulars which stand as either the mental or physical terms. All mind-body generalizations are, to this group, suspicious: these are “token-identity” materialists. Another faction holds that our ordinary ways of speaking are misguided. What we say about consciousness and its objects phenomenologically is false, and, according to some, can be eliminated. Eventually everyone will learn to speak in technical terms. Words like “consciousness,” “desire,” and “intention” belong to a “folk psychology” that will be replaced by proper science, the terms disappearing, like “phlogiston.” Other non-reductive

and against the other occupy the professional journals. On all views, however, explanatory priority rests with the physical in that consciousness is physically caused.³ Materialism, then, seems to be the right word to capture the common spirit.⁴ On all the theories, conscious states are either identical to physical processes or bubble-like effects of physical causes that themselves have no causal power. In other words, consciousness is not only inseparable from the physical body, it is identical to or entirely dependent on physical states. All volition, everything we choose to do, as well as all thought and emotion and indeed self-consciousness have physical determinants in the brain or another bodily part. Consciousness, etc., may be a bit peculiar as events or properties go, but all subjective as well as objective occurrences belong to a closed physical network, i.e., to

materialists are “mysterians”): consciousness is a natural phenomenon but human concepts are, for various reasons, inadequate to the explanatory task.

Functionalism and other non-identity materialist views have been developed out of an epiphenomenalism in vogue a hundred years ago. Consciousness is an epiphenomenon that while distinct from things physical is by them caused. Consciousness has no causal power itself. The physical universe is causally closed. Consciousness is, then, in the current jargon, supervenient, like the faces in a photograph whose appearance depends on the colors and patterns of pixels on the paper, or computer screen, on which they are seen. Any self or person, on this view, would have an all-determining material substratum, riding piggyback on its material cause. Functionalists say that supervenience occurs not on static physical entities but rather processes. The correlates of consciousness are functions that physical things assume. An analogy to computer programs has become familiar: steps in programs do not reduce to states of electrons, since they might be realized in different ways on different machines. Computers made by one company of silver and by another of lead can all run Word. Programs are nevertheless entity-wise simply physical.

3. Explanations have a structure: propositions that explain—the *explanans*—and propositions that are explained—the *explananda*. According to materialism, brain science would do the explaining; descriptions of consciousness and mental events would be explained. To state the point a little differently: materialists debate among themselves about the ontology of things mentioned in the sentences that comprise the *explananda* of brain science without abandoning the supposition that consciousness is physically caused.
4. Even the non-reductive functionalism that retains an autonomous status for consciousness should be labelled materialist since on it, too, causal relations are physical (although sometimes to be picked out by a mental property). George Bealer, ref. This view is, however, almost dualist, with affinities to the Nyāya/Humean view to be reviewed in the next section.

the natural world. Consciousness emerges in the evolution of life according to physical, chemical, and biological laws. Yoga's self-determination thesis is, therefore, false, along with much of our common belief about ourselves as knowers and agents. The enterprises of philosophy of mind have come to center on how to understand agency and the like on materialist premises.

Yoga as philosophy denies a supposition common to all materialism, namely, that either an identity or a one-directional causal relationship, from body to mind, is the truth about consciousness. That is to say, Yoga denies that consciousness is either identical to or the result of physical entities and processes. This is the materialist view boiled down to its essence—albeit a disjunctive essence, two mouthfulls—a *rasa* that is hard to stomach by Yoga, since Yoga is committed to the irreducible reality of consciousness and its power over itself and its instruments. Although there are disputes among Jainas, Vedāntins, Buddhists, and other advocates of yoga practices ancient and modern concerning the precise types and capacities of consciousness, on all Yoga views at least some consciousness is transcendent to the body and indeed to the mind.

According to the new materialists, in contrast, correlations between brain states and processes and conscious states and processes may be extrapolated to deny all such transcendence. Some correlations, such as the severing of the spinal cord and loss of consciousness, are commonly cited in favor of a general connection. Perhaps we do not ordinarily appreciate the ways we depend on physical functioning. However, a dramatic example is no argument. Yoga has no quarrel with identification of necessary conditions, some of which may be physical, for conscious states of various types. Our quarrel is with the supposition that things physical could ever be sufficient for consciousness. *By definition* the mind's receptivity of sensory input and its ability to respond through bodily movement depend on physical processes functioning normally. In other words, we know *a priori* that bodily events, such as visual perception or lifting a limb, which are discernible through common observation (i.e., not introspectively), depend on the normal functioning of bodily processes. But why should this bit of analytic insight mean that every conscious state correlates with something going on in the brain?

Introspectively, yogins report self-consciousness during periods when their brains show minimal activity.⁵ The materialist answer is typically that in such cases science has a project. We may not know yet but we will. This of course is a convenient attitude towards all inconvenient phenomena, such as, to cite another large example, our apparent freedom to move about. The materialist may be taken to presume that any consciousness touted by Yoga would have a physical correlate and exclusively physical causes. After all, what is the alternative? The entirety of this chapter constitutes a response to such a challenge and attitude, but here is the gist.

First, Yoga in entering philosophy's mind-body debate inherits rich dualist resources, counterarguments about consciousness that so far have not been answered by materialists. We shall survey only a few of these; references to dualist literature, both Eastern and Western, will be given, along with a fuller list of anti-materialist arguments, in a note.

Second, Yoga metaphysics itself, if it need be dualist, need not be Cartesian, need not endorse a dualism of non-interactive substance. Yoga dualism may find that consciousness is a substance in the sense of a locus or substratum of peculiarly psychological properties, but, whatever the precise ontology to be embraced, Yoga at a minimum will be interactionist, as will be explained, avoiding the mysteries of the Cartesian dualism and its non-interactionist successors.

Yoga need not oppose science, not even brain science, although it must be opposed to causal closure. Brain science reveals necessary conditions, never in themselves sufficient. In classical India, the Nyāya school is famous for making the point. Nyāya, "Logic," is a premier dualist philosophy classically allied with Yoga. Nyāya philosophers point out that a genuine perception of a thorn, in the stock example, through the organ of touch requires physical contact between the thorn and a bodily part, a left toe, for instance. But you do not need the toe to remember the thorn. The Nyāya philosopher might agree with the modern materialist that having a brain is a condition of human consciousness. Cut off a head and the person dies. The particular stream of cognition forming

5. Documented cases where there is little or no measurable brain activity: refs.

Devadatta's mental life ends with the death of Devadatta, according to Nyāya, which, unlike Yoga (Vedānta, Buddhism, and so on), does not recognize an occult or "pranic" body (from *prāṇa*, "breath," "life"). But Nyāya does recognize that Devadatta the person is a composite of a self and a body and indeed a life. The body is not sufficient for consciousness, since, Nyāya philosophers argue, we see that material things, excepting the living body, are not conscious.

We shall come back to the general topic of causality later in the chapter and also in connection with our discussion of karma in chapter two. Let us move on with the remark that it is not worth disputing the basic anti-Cartesian argument that we are aware of the world that is explained by physics and chemistry and we act and are acted upon by things physical. Cartesian dualism is indeed untenable. But Yoga dualism is different, building from the insights of its Eastern ally, Nyāya, to which we now turn.

Four types of causal relationship are recognized by the philosophers of classical Nyāya. Nyāya views causal capacities as dispositions, *samskāra*, which are latent properties, lawful tendencies for something to change under certain circumstances, as captured by conditional statements. For example, water has the disposition to freeze or boil at a certain temperature. The liquid in a glass may be said to possess the property, though its having it is not evident. Similarly, we do not continuously remember our breakfast but can if prompted. Simplifying a bit, we may say that Nyāya finds dispositions of four broad types.

1. Physico-physical dispositions, for example, elasticity, for example, of a rubber band. (A rubber band is a physical thing both before and after being stretched.)
2. Physico-psychological dispositions, for example, perceptual capacity, for example, to perceive the cat that jumps into your lap. (The sense organs triggered by connection with a physical object of the right types have the ability to generate, for example, the psychological event of awareness of the cat.)⁶

6. Technically, only "indeterminate perception," *nirvikalpaka pratyakṣa*, is the end result of the triggering of a person's physico-psychological dispositions, since "determinate cognition," *savikalpaka pratyakṣa*, is fed its "predication content" (*prakāra*, the "way" something appears) by an immediately prior indeterminate perception. At least this is the view of the New Nyāya school. The earliest commentators on the *Nyāyasūtra* (until Vācaspati, c. 950) do not distinguish the two

3. Psycho-psychological dispositions, for example, inferential capacity, for example, from sight of smoke on the mountain to the occurrent knowledge that there is fire over there. (The self carries the disposition to infer fire from detection of smoke, a disposition acquired by “wide experience” of the connection between smoke and fire.)
4. Psycho-physical dispositions, for example, to effort and action, for example, from wanting the mango on the table to the effort and action to pick it up. (The self is the locus of a, let us say, desiderous disposition—*cikīrṣā* in Sanskrit, “desire to do”—to such effort and action on the body’s part.)

With its central self-determination thesis, Yoga is committed to the importance of developing dispositions of types three and four, as will become clear.

The bottom-line is that Nyāya’s dualism—which is one option for Yoga, so “Yoga dualism,” let us say—does not make it impossible to understand mental-physical interaction. There are many obvious correlations, and doubtless many less obvious that remain to be discovered in science. Yoga dualism is a thesis that concerns centrally consciousness and self-determination. Consciousness transcends matter and is self-determining or can be. It can reshape its physical sheath, perfect it, bring it into a new harmony with the breath, feeling, and thought. In special experiences, it finds it has, or can have, a body of different stuff or energy than the physical (a karmic body, a subtle or astral body, *sūkṣma-śarīra*, a body of “dream dust”). Always capable of connecting with matter, it can withdraw into itself, and, except for the dispositional property to reconnect, be undisturbed by material happenings. This power (called *saṁyama* in the *Yogasūtra*) is a foundational fact shaping Yoga metaphysics.

There are laws of self-determination, shown by correlations in the reverse direction from those touted by materialists. But Yoga hardly rules out physical dependencies. Causal relations run both ways, and mental

types of perception.

events are typically the result of a complex collection of factors some of which are physical and some of which are not. We might add that if consciousness and the body were not at all physically determined, there would be no point to yogic exercises. We do yoga to augment the causal factors that lie on the side of consciousness.

Yoga dualism in our sense stressing the power, or potential power, of consciousness is compatible, it is important to note, with certain forms of monism. By sketching a dualist version of Yoga metaphysics (in line with Nyāya), I mean to emphasize the transcendence of consciousness and potentialities of reverse dependence to that assumed by materialists. Consciousness can but need not be material. In part it is material in perception of material things and in movements of the physical body. But that it is so in those states is no argument that it cannot exist otherwise than materially.

To sum up our response, then, to the correlations argument of the materialists: Who would not expect (given the truth of Yoga dualism) correlations between brain and mental events? Insofar as the mental events belong to embodied persons, correlations are guaranteed. That there are correlations, however, leaves open the questions of identity and of the directionality of the causal relations.

Yoga contends both that consciousness is not identical to the body and that mind-body (or consciousness-body) causality is not one-directional. What we do shapes the body. The physical universe is not causally closed. There are psycho-psychological and psycho-physical dispositions. This thesis will be elaborated throughout this book, but its truth is rather easy to see. Evidence for it couldn't be closer. For instance, insofar as you and I are moving our eyes as we read (instead of, for example, closing them), we are right now programming, and materially changing our own brains, the physical underpinning of our memories, by reading. Or, if there is no physical underpinning of memory, we are making a psycho-psychological disposition resting in a non-material self. But let us suppose that the brain is like a computer, as materialists think. Then each of us is right now chiseling in a property necessary to a later remembering. People who do not do so cannot remember this sentence.

(Explaining memory is, by the way, one function of the Yoga theory of *samskāra* elaborated in chapter two.) We do not have to look at the special feats of yogins to find reverse correlations between brain and mind that refute materialism.⁷ Yoga philosophy admits physical determinations of consciousness but challenges us to take cognizance of our potential. Yoga stresses personal responsibility: we shape our own good selves and need not be fatalistic or resigned to our biological and physical inheritance (a “make-over” without cosmetics or plastic surgery).

A second prop to anti-Yoga prejudice may be dealt with more briefly. It is motivated by scientific explanations revealing physical identities. That is to say, a “reductionist” argument marshalls to the materialist cause scientific successes in explaining things macroscopic by formula governing the microscopic. Consider weather, heat, and crystals. We understand these things by understanding their physics and chemistry. All phenomena, it is then hastily supposed, can be explained by theories that refer only to physical events and entities (niceties about the ontology of numbers, words, theories, etc., being beside the point).

The problem, however, is how to carry out this agenda with consciousness, with thought, feeling, and other mental events, including the meditative experiences of yoga. The fact is that no one has a clue. In the case of weather, etc., the microscopic *necessitates* the macroscopic. Mean kinetic energy is identical with heat: given a certain value for the one, the other will be absolutely fixed. Similarly, if something is H₂O, then it is water. And there is no water that is not H₂O. With this much, Yoga has of course no quarrel: certain physical things and events can be explained reductively in chemical and physical terms without reference to consciousness. Classical Yoga is realist in this sense, and we should have no qualms about admitting physico-physical capacities and processes going on independently of mind—at least of our minds (the question of the universality of some sort of Divine or cosmic mind being another matter, addressed in section three of this chapter and also in chapters two and three). However, Yoga teaches that nothing in the brain ever

7. Some of these are dramatic. Wild-child examples, e.g., the abused child in LA who did not learn language and whose brain because of the absence did not develop in the normal fashion. [refs.]

absolutely fixes the mind—*a fortiori* where “the mind” includes the extraordinary states of yogic consciousness. In Yoga, we see this, what philosophers call the *explanatory gap*, as the obverse side of the thesis of the self-determining power of consciousness, its control, or potential control, of its range of instruments (thought, emotion, bodily movement, and so on).

To be sure, we know much now about how the brain works. We even have chemical remedies for certain “mental” illnesses. Nevertheless, it must be kept in mind that science presents only correlations between (a) brain or more broadly bodily states or processes and (b) mental phenomena. It does not have a theory about how the latter (b) are *required* by (a) things physical. In other words, neurology and medicine make plain precise dependencies of certain conscious states on certain physical processes. When a loud sound goes off near our ears, willy-nilly we hear it, even if our concentration is elsewhere. But we can block out noise, not attend to it, consciously fail to perceive available data. In other words, Yoga grants that the physical factors can predominate in the determination of a mental event. But often the story is different, and never is a physical one by itself sufficient.

The burning question for materialists is why the physical should bring the mental about or require mental events in some other (non-causal) fashion. Why should neural firings in the synapses of a brain produce, or even “occasion,” consciousness and the life of the mind? This is the explanatory gap talked about in the philosophic literature. It is brought out in a particularly telling fashion by a thought-experiment about a possible “zombie.”⁸

Imagine an exact physical duplicate of your body that did not have consciousness. (We could also call this the “mannequin” thought-experiment.) Clearly we can imagine the artifact without having to imagine that the thing is conscious. So why do you who have the same physical constituents as the zombie have consciousness? Why are you conscious but not the zombie? We are stipulating that the two of you have exactly the same physical parts. Why then should the state of your body

8. refs.

right now bring about your current or subsequent consciousness while the exact same state of the zombie does not trail consciousness? Of course, the Yoga dualist avoids the question because according to us the difference between you and the zombie is the presence in you of consciousness. Consciousness is some sort of basic entity on our view. Consciousness is irreducibly different from the material body, though it can become, shape, and move a body. To explain the phenomena of consciousness, there will always be a gap so long as only matter is recognized.

The difficulty of the zombie question, and of many others bringing out differences between bodies and minds, has spawned incredible ingenuity and dozens of difficult books, without, however, much agreement about proposed solutions. Still, the assumption reigns that mind is somehow invariably dependent on matter. Isn't this simply prejudice that flies in the face of our abilities? Yoga would urge us to pay attention to ourselves, expand our capacities—perhaps, too, expanding our sense of the cogency of dualism!⁹

The correlations and reductionist arguments seem to be regarded—however fantastic this may now appear—as the most powerful weapons in the materialist arsenal. There is, however, another argument that is commonly paraded. It derives from the later Wittgenstein,¹⁰ and we shall call it the public-criteria argument. We shall see that it, too, does not challenge the dualism of Yoga. As will be spelled out in chapter three, a similar line of thought does help to force a certain view of personal identity. But against the self-determination thesis of Yoga, it has no force.

How could a person identify a subjective occurrence, and thus talk about it, even to herself, without knowing objective, i.e., physical, signs or indications? The basic insight is of a need for public criteria for the applications of words to refer even to subjective events. To talk to herself (silently so that only God or a telepath could eavesdrop), a person has to have words whose application is governed by rules set by conventions. If one person can set up a rule and follow it, in principle another can follow

9. Long note rehearsing four or five further arguments against materialism.

10. L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1951.

it too. How otherwise could anyone keep up with his or her own private happenings? In principle, therefore, there can be no “private language.” We come to *know* in the sense of “being able to talk about” inward states (“That’s a toothache”) by learning to recognize behaviorial indications because only bodily behavior has the objectivity—the publicness and accessibility by numerous minds—that makes linguistic conventions possible.

By this demand for public criteria, it seems that nothing that we could talk about could be unconnected to the physical. Nothing transcendent to the physical, it would seem to follow, should be introduced into the debate about consciousness.

However, Yoga dualism is not scathed by the assumption that human beings learn language by learning to recognize public signs. Yoga practices show forms of knowledge and awareness that are not mitigated by language. Intellectual position is not the highest prize. Then with respect to intellectual position and the practical statements of instruction, there are several points to be made. First, the reason why there is so much complaint among mystics about the difficulty in describing their special experiences is rather obvious. If sentences are in their literal meaning restricted to relations of physical things, then thank God for non-literal meaning.¹¹ Through analogy and imagination, mystics do manage to be understood by non-mystics. Why else would there be such a substantial literature? Second, linguistic conventions are developed among yogins and mystics, who use technical terms learned in connection with special training and meditative experience. The technical language of yogic practices are no less instruments of communication than the special vocabulary of an art, craft, or scientific discipline.

In sum, Yoga does rely on imaginative meaning beyond the range of many peoples’ normal experience. But there is surely a good word to be said in general for imaginative capacities. Our imaginations articulate goals of work—an idea to be developed in later chapters, especially in the section (2.4) on karma and social justice, and in the final section of chapter four (4.3) on yoga and the global civilization. Furthermore, yoga develops its own technical vocabulary to be learned in the course of yoga

11. Linguistic requirements targeting mystics’ communicating with non-mystics are discussed in my “Mysticism and Metaphor,” *Language and Mysticism*, ed. Steven Katz.

practice. Therefore, there is no cogent “public-criteria” argument that defeats Yoga. Let us move on to consider Yoga theories of mind-body interaction unencumbered by materialist biases.

1.2. Mind-Body Interaction: Dualism

In the context of the professional mind-body debate, teachings about yoga practice and experience are dualist in the sense of affirming the integrity of self and consciousness against materialism. Yoga teachings engage, like a “how to” book of practical instruction, a first-person point of view as opposed to an externalist, third-person point of view as in science. We have reviewed positions within the now dominant materialist camp. But there are of course many philosophers who champion such “how to” first-person perspective in opposition to materialism. There is thus ready at hand an intellectual alliance, which as focused on errors of materialism perhaps misses the spirit of yoga practice, but provides nevertheless philosophically rich resources for Yoga to mine. Existentialism with its emphasis on choice (*we* make choices) and absurdity (science’s impersonal view of nature) is perhaps the most prominent movement within a Western dualist tradition with which Yoga can make common cause. That is to say, Yoga as an anti-materialist philosophy joins hands with those who couldn’t care less about extraordinary capacities and experiences. (Picture Jean-Paul Sartre in an asana — *with the pipe!*) The distinctive feature of Yoga as a dualism is its understanding of mind and body as instruments.¹² The locus of control lies, or potentially lies, in consciousness. The point of all yoga practice is to take a step towards greater psychological harmony, including, to be sure, self-control as in, for example, bodily suppleness and athletic dexterity. So, at a minimum, Yoga must be wedded to the value of subjectivity, of being a self, and of exercising control. It has to deny that consciousness is fully determined by matter (*we* determine matter). Yoga, then, is “dualist” in contrast with philosophic materialism. But this usage is meant to be loose enough to leave open the question of ties to spiritually monistic views, which will

12. ref to the chariot metaphor of the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*

be discussed in the next section.

In this section, we shall survey both the classical Yoga dualism of Patañjali and Nyāya dualism, the former, but not the latter, a close sister of Sāṃkhya dualism. Dualist philosophies became prominent in India very early.¹³ Patañjali, the author—or more likely compiler/editor—of the *Yogasūtra* (*YS*, c. 350 CE?), may or may not be the same person as the great grammarian of second century BCE (who developed sophisticated positions on language and meaning and a pluralist ontology).¹⁴ But in the *YS*, Patañjali presents a deeply dualist vision, probably following a Sāṃkhya vogue of his time.¹⁵ Indeed, the *YS*'s dualism is, like that of Sāṃkhya, much more radical than the variety we require. Contemporary Yoga dualism should follow Nyāya, I shall argue, which is, of all the classical Indian schools, arguably the closest to common sense. (It also has a long and rich textual history.) We shall see how Nyāya handles mental-physical correlations in a moment. First let us see what is wrong with the dualism of *YS*.

After defining yoga as mental silence, control of the fluctuations of thought (or, of emotion and thought, *citta-vṛtti-nirodha*, “stilling the fluctuations of mentality,” *YS* 1.2: see the discussion of *citta* in the comments on this sūtra, below, p. xxx), Patañjali casts the goal of yogic practice in terms of a radical dualism of self (*puruṣa*) and nature (*prakṛti*): “Then the seer rests in its true form” (*YS* 1.3), by which is meant “rests in itself, self-rapt, unaware of anything other than self, entirely separate from nature.”

There are many problems with this position. Perhaps the worst is that Patañjali's dualistic conception of self and nature is in opposition to own his yogic tradition of *siddhi*, the extraordinary capacities or “powers” to which yoga leads, many of which are occult. The ties between yoga practices and *siddhis* are in my judgment intrinsic both culturally (in the conventions of designating just certain people yogins or yoginis) and in psychological fact.¹⁶ No one counts as a master yogin or yogini who does

13. refs. to Upanishads, etc., Gerald Larson, *Classical Sāṃkhya*.

14. Indological opinion. Chronology.

15. A. B. Keith's comment [ref. in Potter/Larson's *Samkhya* vol in *Ency*]. Dasgupta on Vācaspati etc. claiming that Patañjali is not the author of the sūtras.

16. David White, “Yoga in Early Hindu Tantra,” in *Yoga: The Indian Tradition*, ed. Ian Whicher and David Carpenter, p. 143, underlines the judgment of David Lorenzen, *Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas: Two Lost Śaivite Sects*, pp. 93–4, that as, White puts it,

not possess *siddhis*, and all yoga practice helps one to develop *siddhis* in the generic sense of self-control. Patañjali, however, seeing self-rapt self-awareness as the sole locus of value, joins those who see the self, or consciousness, as the only reality: the *siddhis*, Patañjali says at *YS* 3.37, “though wonders to ordinary persons are obstacles to the goal of yoga.”¹⁷

The denial of the value of *siddhis* presents a problem of textual interpretation. Practically the whole of the *YS*’s chapter three (out of a total of four chapters) is concerned with the development of *siddhis*. By setting aside the teaching of *siddhis*, Patañjali does violence to yoga tradition. He becomes, despite the concerns of his chapter three, apparently personally concerned exclusively with mystic trance, *samādhi*. On this reading, the man would have compiled the text from sūtras that had been formulated generations before him, adding a few framework or metaphysical ideas in accordance with (Sāṃkhya or) his personal sense of consciousness’s power to withdraw utterly into itself. There, he seems to think, it can rest content, totally apart from the world.

Now it may well be that certain yogins have considered this state the single goal of their endeavors. Maybe, too, it’s a real possibility. Note, however, that as far as we’re concerned, such an idea of “liberated” consciousness is pure speculation. The state could not be reported, since reporting requires instruments such as a body or a keyboard.

Furthermore, a charge of self-stultification sticks, especially in the light of Yoga’s own self-determination thesis. This we may say includes the power of self-absorption but also power over and potential transformation of the individual body, life, and mind. Moreover, that it is a self-stultifying philosophy that Patañjali teaches is not only my judgment but that of a host of yogic movements in India, what I like to call in general the Tantric turn. Embrace of *siddhis* may be called the Tantric refutation of Patañjali’s theory.

The mental silence that yoga achieves is not just a state but a power.

“a glance at the *Yoga Sūtra* [shows] that the acquisition of *siddhis* was at the forefront of yogic practice in the first centuries of the common era.”

17. Advaita Vedānta, to be discussed in the next section, as well as the idealist schools of Buddhism are on this score Patañjali’s allies.

Yogins can think if they like. Patañjali in *YS* 1.3 and elsewhere falls victim to a false dilemma. He says that when the *citta* becomes quiet the self or true person, *puruṣa*, rests in its true form; at all other times, he asserts at 1.4, it falsely identifies with *citta*. However, the self, while self-conscious, can also think if it likes. Ask any yogin, anyone who claims to have the ability to turn off the mind, whether he can turn it back on. According to the unacceptably trenchant dualism of Patañjali, in contrast, mentality, *citta*, is part of nature, *prakṛti*, and thus divorced from the self. Since self-awareness apart from nature is the only goal, control is illusory. Awareness of anything other than self is the problem that yogic practice overcomes, according to Patañjali. He uses the word *kaivalya*, “aloneness,” for what he sees as the ontological equivalent of *asampraññāta-samādhi*, a meditation “without prop,” i.e., without any content or intentionality other than self-awareness itself, a self-absorption beyond all space and time. In this way, the metaphysics of the *YS* is made to tie up with the traditional idea of *mukti* or *mokṣa*, “liberation” from suffering and endless rebirth. (But isn’t rebirth generally speaking a good thing?) In sum, according to *YS* a self’s recovery from other- into self-absorption is the *summum bonum*, the supreme value for a person, *paramapuruṣārtha*, the “supreme personal good.” But here I line up with Tantrism and assume that a larger goal is possible, one not so world-negating, including the proposition that *siddhis* are good.

As indicated, Patañjali probably inherited many—in all likelihood, most—of the *sūtras* that make up *YS*. In fact I think he is responsible only for the text’s dualist cast.¹⁸ The *YS* is thematically voluntarist in spite of the dualism of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* and the world-denying concept of *kaivalya*. These are concepts which comprise a kind of metaphysical overlay and can be replaced. Rich psychological veins are there to mine, nevertheless, as well as practice concepts which any Yoga philosophy needs to take stock of. *Despite* the untenability of Patañjali’s dualism and his impoverished conception of an ultimate goal, the *YS* is an authority both for yogic practices and Yoga philosophy.

The chief cost to yogic sensibilities, sensibilities honed on the very

18. “The Conflict of Voluntarism and Dualism in the *Yogasūtra*, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*.

practices outlined in the sūtras, is, as pointed out, the cutting off of one half of Yoga's self-determination thesis, to wit, a denial of consciousness's power, or potential power, over its instruments. But let us note that Patañjali's metaphysics is also untenable pretty much for the same reasons that Cartesian dualism is untenable: we act in nature and perceive physical objects (see above).¹⁹

The self's identification with a mind, body, personality, etc., is, according to *YS*, an illusion. Thus Patañjali aligns himself with certain world-denying metaphysicians who take just one further step to declare the self not only the only value but the only reality. To be sure, in *YS* chapter four there is argument directed against idealists, presumably Buddhist idealists, to the effect that nature is real. The main contention seems to be as follows: since when a single yogin is liberated everyone else remains bound, nature must be objective.²⁰ But since this is the extent of the line separating Patañjali from Buddhist and Advaita illusionists, clearly he shares their perspective. Note, too, that the highest self in Vedānta, at least in Advaita Vedānta (more about which just below), seems hardly different at all from Patañjali's *puruṣa*, since on both views there is in enlightenment no awareness of anything other than consciousness.

But again the main problem is, in a nutshell, that the self does not really act on Patañjali's view. Power of will is stripped from consciousness in the dualism of *YS*, in accordance with the conception of *kaivalya* and its monolithic value. But note that far and away the greater part of *YS* concerns self-determination. Indeed, interpreting self-absorbed trance, *asamprajñāta-samādhi*, as itself a power or a capacity that an accomplished yogin would have, the self-determination thesis can be made to subsume Patañjali's interest. I repeat that practically a fourth of the text is expressly concerned with *siddhis*. The power of trance is, in

19. Classical Indian philosophers writing in Sanskrit were aware of the problems of the *YS*'s dualism, and, indeed, the view is not nearly as prominent as others in late classical times, so far as we can judge from philosophic texts. Jayanta Bhaṭṭa (c. 800), for example, argues [elaboration].

20. Probably, however, a convergence of evidence (*pramāṇa-samplava*) should be viewed as Patañjali's official position, though this does seem the argument of *YS* 2.22 and 4.16. Accepted "knowledge sources," *pramāṇa*, are listed at *YS* 1.7.

my view, another *siddhi*.

Finally, let us look at a telling bit of metaphysical reasoning in *YS*. Quandary occurs about how it could be that the self who practices yoga is not the self who benefits (the former being the illusory image of “self” in nature, the latter the self as it is “in itself,” *svarūpa*). The problem is ingeniously resolved in the proposal (*YS* 2.21) that nature, *prakṛti*, is in the service of *puruṣa*. Nature practices yoga for the purpose of the self’s release. Thus Nature is teleological; yogic practices serve her highest goal, purification, “sattvacization” of the body, life, and mind, so that the true person, *puruṣa*, can recover self-awareness and remain forever self-absorbed. However, the idea that not the conscious individual but unconscious matter does anything (including yogic practices) is entirely counterintuitive. Patently it seems proposed out of a sense of system. For, we practice yoga, not a body, life, or mind mechanically conceived in the fashion of *YS*’s *prakṛti*. In the final analysis, metaphysics is not Patañjali’s talent. As I plan to show through the course of the book, and especially in the appendix, *YS*’s value lies in its psychological and practice concepts which can be extracted out of its flawed metaphysics and axiology of *kaivalya*.

Of course, in classical India and elsewhere, hardly all Yoga metaphysics—in our sense—is in accord with the *YS*’s extremism. There are other world-denying views of a supreme good, but, speaking roughly, there occurs a shift in both Hinduism and Buddhism from a world-denying model of enlightenment to one that is world-affirming. I call this the Tantric turn. It is perhaps best exemplified in the Buddhist doctrine of the Bodhisattva. The saint refuses dissolution of personality in the ultimate bliss of Nirvana, refuses, that is to say, to enter that utterly transcendent state of consciousness, in order to become instead perfectly embodied and thus a perfect vehicle of compassion. The Bodhisattva’s six signs, six “perfections” (*pāramitā*), beauty, uprightness, charity, energy, concentration, and wisdom, are qualities that make him or her capable of helping all achieve the highest good, which is to become themselves Bodhisattvas.

A similar idea is present in the karma-yoga teaching of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, as will be elaborated in the next chapter. Indeed, in the history of Indian philosophy, Vedāntins, Buddhists, Tantrics, and others incorporate yoga practices into world-affirming philosophies that propose different goals than the *YS*’s *kaivalya*, as we shall see.

Let us take stock. All Yoga philosophy—and here I mean to include Advaita and theistic Vedānta, Patañjali's dualism, Buddhism, etc., all the spiritual philosophies of the East—reverse the dependence relation of mind and matter, and are thus “dualist” by current standards or at least sensibilities. Consciousness comes first in Yoga theory. There are of course interesting details in the different ways mental and bodily phenomena are identified, by Buddhists, Tantrics, etc., some of which we shall look at closely in subsequent sections. But in the terms of the current academic debate, the cluster of Yoga philosophies are all dualist. A central commitment in all the views is that consciousness transcends matter such that it need not depend on it. States of the one do not entail states of the other. (Everything is not material.) Then in practically all the views, including the dominant strain in *YS*, it is additionally claimed that consciousness has the power to shape and determine physical things, to control and transform the body, the mind, and the emotions.

Yoga asanas, for example, are premised on the power of the mind, or consciousness, to change the body, to make it a more supple and reliable instrument than it would be without the effort. Other yoga practices are to be responsible for changes of consciousness, self-discovery, self-acceptance, and better psychological as well as physical health. Taking aspirin or another drug may relieve a headache, but yoga practices can do the same trick, and, more importantly, teach a person how to prevent the affliction in the first place. Physically and mentally therapeutic, the practices are becoming widely embraced by individuals as well as in programs of preventative medicine (funded by profit-wise HMOs). Indeed, the practices are fast becoming part of a global culture, no longer restricted to ashrams or meditation halls. The reason, broadly, is that they promote well-being. An adequate Yoga philosophy should explain why this is so—a positive consideration that, it may be argued, pushes Yoga past dualism. This is the topic of the next section. First, let us sum up the extent of Yoga's dualist commitment.

Yoga dualism need not be a Cartesian division of substances. All that is required is that there be distinctively mental entities and properties such as a self or selves and not only brains and other material things. In Western terms, Yoga dualism finds its best ally, in my view, not in Descartes but in the metaphysical minimalism of David Hume (1711-1776), who claims that recognizing correlations is theory enough. In classical Indian philosophy, a similar stance is taken by both Buddhists

and Naiyāyikas. Nyāya in particular has what is called a Humean position about causality: we know only that entities are related causally (through observation of concurrence), not why they are.

Now Nyāya is not only dualist in the sense of countenancing mental entities, including a self, but pluralist, finding nine types of property-bearer and several types of property as ontological items. An awareness is a psychological property, for example, distinct from physical properties such as colors and shapes that belong to rocks and other things that are made of material atoms.²¹ We may ignore the rest of the ontology. The main point is that Nyāya philosophers formulate causal principles on the basis of correlations without bias about the sorts of things that can be correlated. For example, sensory connection with an object *a* that possesses a property *F* is found to be a cause—in the sense of a necessary condition—of a veridical and reliable perceptual awareness with *Fa* as its object. An induction is made relating mental entities, e.g., perceptions of such a type, and physical entities, the *F*-possessing objects that come to be in sensory connection. Correlations are made, similarly, between efforts with propositional content and certain physical, i.e., bodily, acts. Thus Nyāya has an ingenious strategy for the mind-body connection, following the motto, “Look for correlations, but don’t overinterpret. Be economical.” There are, in sum, causal continuities and processes involving entities that are physical and mental, in the one direction through the operation of the sense organs, and in the other in guiding action. There is also a third type of cognitive causal relationship, a kind of mind/mind causation exhibited in the causality obtaining between two successive cognitions.²² This is, by the way, important, according to *YS* and commentaries, for meditative accomplishment, since one wants to be able to battle the firings of distractive *saṃskāra*, subliminal dispositions to desire and remembering, and maintain a quiet mind.²³

21. ref. my *Classical Indian Metaphysics* among other works.

22. In case some may think that Nyāya is not a Yoga philosophy since it is mainly motivated by epistemological questions concerning knowledge of everyday facts, let me point out that every Nyāya philosopher to my knowledge accepts yogic perception, *yaugika-pratyakṣa*, as a genuine knowledge-source, *pramāṇa*. See, e.g., *Nyāyasūtra* xxx and commentaries. And *YS* is often quoted by Naiyāyikas as an authority on psychology.

23. *YS* refs.

Now a standard objection against Western varieties of dualist interactionism is that they leave the interaction unexplained; we want to know how it is possible that things of such disparate natures interact. Indeed, the word “interactionism” seems practically empty, so goes the complaint, if the *tertium-quid* connectors are left unspecified. But to some this might seem a strength. Personally, I can live with Nyāya’s Humean skeptical dualism. The mental-physical correlations indicative of yoga progress—“You do this (the mental cause) and that is gained (the physical or mental effect)”—is, I believe, sufficient paradigm for the sorts of research to be encouraged by Yoga philosophy, if not also for individual pursuits. We shall look at more expansive opinions just below, in the next section.

On the classical Indian scene, there were others besides Nyāya philosophers who saw intellectual restraint as a strength. Indeed, both in Vedānta and Buddhism, there are counterparts to the materialist mysterianism mentioned in a footnote in section one.²⁴ On these views, which somehow also endorse the value of yogic practices, we cannot know the fundamental nature of the connections of consciousness and the world. The Buddhist Nāgārjuna (c. 150 CE) is famous for taking such a skeptical stance, and there is much interesting discussion, both in classical sources and modern commentaries, of the anti-intellectualism of his Mādhyamika school.²⁵ However, in the interests of simplicity we shall look now only at Advaita Vedānta which takes a similar position.

Vedānta derives its name from an epithet for the Upanishads, which date from 800 BCE though many Upanishads are much later. “Vedānta” means literally the end of the Veda, and the Upanishads were appended to the Veda, an even older collection of verses or mantras viewed as sacred, as revealed “Knowledge.” Advaita Vedānta is a classical Vedānta subschool that upholds a non-duality (*a-dvaita*) between the individual consciousness and the supreme Self or Brahman (“Thou art That,” “I am He”). There is also a second sense of non-duality championed by Advaita: our deepest consciousness is immediate and “non-dual” in the

24. refs. See above, note 2.

25. ref. to the four-cornered negation, the parable of the arrow, etc., and the division of Mādhyamika into the Svatantrika and Prasangika subschools.

sense of self-illuminating (*svayamprakāśamāna*).

How then does this consciousness, and Brahman, relate to the body and the physical world? Advaitins refuse to answer, holding that this type of consciousness cannot be conceptualized. Thus it would be independent of all material determinations and states insofar as these can be conceptualized. As in materialist mysterianism, which views consciousness as dependent on matter though precisely how we cannot know, in Advaita there is a relation between Brahman and the world: the world's existence in some way "depends" on Brahman though it is impossible for us to elaborate. There is an uncloseable gap, not between matter and consciousness, but between our thought about the one and about the other. Again, self-illuminating consciousness may not be unconnected to material states; it is nevertheless not connected in a way that can be determined in thought (*anirvacanīya*). Trying to conceptualize the self-illuminating self would be like trying to determine at once the position and momentum of an electron. It cannot be done. Self-illuminating consciousness is inaccessible to representation and all third-person point of view. All talk of it is non-literal, *lakṣanā* ("metaphor" or "indirect speech"), meant to direct a person to find it in herself.

This the central plank of Advaita philosophy suggests an iron-clad defense and response to the materialist argument about correlations. It at least seems to have the dual merit of achieving compatibility with science and insularity from scientific explanation. Correlations with material processes and states may render a science of mentality, but they cannot render a science of consciousness since consciousness cannot be represented. The problem with all this from the perspective of Yoga (whose axe to grind is the value of yogic practices, not the truth of the Upanishads) is that we want a science of consciousness; that is to say, we want to know the principles of self-determination, the laws that correlate practices with self-discovery and personal transformation. Advaita finds no laws of self-discovery and is, by and large, uninterested in personal transformation.

Now of course Advaita is broad umbrella; it is a major philosophic and cultural phenomenon with many able spokespersons in our own time and quite a lot of internal diversity over the centuries.²⁶ Nevertheless, a core

message may be identified. In traditional terms, it is that liberation is immediately available in that all that it takes is a phenomenological sense of what each of us already is. Who then needs yoga? All one needs is to wake up to what one is, namely, self-illuminating consciousness. To those who find this difficult, yogic practices, and meditation in particular, may be recommended.

The recommendation to meditate, etc., connects with Advaita's mysterianism in the following way. The Advaita view is that we cannot know the connections between the world and consciousness, such that yogic practices can at best remove obstacles to self-realization. Yogic practices are like what is called an "indicatory" or ostensive definition (*upalakṣaṇa*) of the self. Directions are given where self-illuminating consciousness can be found (e.g., the injunction, "Meditate"), which are said to be like a phenomenal definition of "red" that describes conditions under which one would experience red. In this view, it is not really yogic practices but the directions of the Upanishads ("The self is to be discovered in meditation" or more simply the cue, "Thou art That"²⁷) that may be said, metaphorically, to achieve the *summum bonum*.²⁸ Perhaps the greatest strength of Advaita is that, like much Buddhist teaching, it eschews intellectual argument for the one that begins, "Do this and see for yourself." We don't know why yoga facilitates self-realization, say Advaitins. It appears to have worked for many, and what's the harm in trying. However what we need is simply to know consciousness as it is in itself.

Advaita thus has no interest in Yoga's self-determination thesis. To try to connect the world to consciousness through "powers" (*siddhis*) is to trespass on the unknowable. Advaita, like the metaphysics of *YS*, strips will and action away from the self. The only value, and indeed the only true reality (to take these words in an imaginative sense), is self-absorption, the self's self-illuminating awareness of itself. This leaves out all of our abilities; the self neither acts nor refrains from action. Extraordinary powers, *siddhis*, are a trap, just as Patañjali asserted.

26. A long historical note. Śaṅkara (c. 700) is Advaita's most famous advocate.

27. Br U xxx.

28. S's rejection of yoga

Indeed, in my estimation, the same reasons that were given why Patañjali's dualism is unsatisfactory show that Advaita is not the Yoga philosophy for us. At least, it cannot be for those who are "experience-seekers" and "seekers of *siddhis*" (terms of derision from an Advaita perspective), including, I confess, yours truly.

Nevertheless, I can see that a combination of spiritual mysticism with the Nyāya/Humean causal minimalism may be the path of wisdom: at least there would be room for mental causation and the reverse correlations identified in Yoga psychology, the dependencies of body on mind. Uninterpreted correlations leave room for a view of the independent reality of consciousness. In the context of Yoga, the Nyāya/Humean strategy encourages paying attention to mental causation. Historically, furthermore, Advaita, again like Buddhism, has maintained a view of rebirth, although it is of course not the true self that reincarnates but only a karmic aggregate. Note, finally, that for Advaita the "mind" would not include the self. Indeed, it is open to Advaita to take a materialist position on mentality. The self transcends all science, and cannot be correlated with anything.

1.3. Yogic Control and Integration: Holism

The dualism just sketched has the merit of protecting philosophers from embarrassment when they try to say something substantial on the relation of consciousness to matter. Unfortunately, however, more may well need to be said with respect to Yoga's self-determination thesis, at least a little more about the intrinsic nature of consciousness and about how consciousness can be a cause of a physical effect. What is it about consciousness and its embodiments that make self-determination possible? As pointed out, Yoga philosophy is committed to dependencies that run from mind to matter. It should also embrace, I shall argue in chapter three, karmic continuities of individual identity that stretch past an individual lifetime. Karma is a mental inheritance that extends before birth and after death, determining talents and traits of personality, for instance, in future embodiments as well as in the current life. So what makes all this possible, what illumines these mental dependencies? And what in general do proponents of Yoga have to say about the metaphysics of self-determination? Of course, much has been said, in India and elsewhere, usually in attempts to see the entire world as in some way the

result of consciousness. We find self-determination writ large as the dominant theme of whole schools and philosophic movements.

In world-affirming Yoga philosophies, self-determination is tied up with holism. Brahman's consciousness, will, and reality extend everywhere. Or, as in most Buddhist philosophy, everything is interconnected, arising interdependently, *pratītyasamutpāda*, as claimed by Nāgārjuna and practically every thinker in the Mahāyāna camp. Holism seems key, furthermore, to the interpretation of several important yogic phenomena. The thesis that holism has, at a minimum, tight ties with our self-determination thesis will be shown by the end of the section.

Our concern consists of phenomena of psychic integration and their implications for Yoga philosophy. Our concern is countercurrent, practically ignored by the entire mind-body industry: the metaphysical implications of the ways in which matter depends on mind. A telling example is visualization, e.g., visualization of healthy tissue which is a yogic technique that helps damaged tissue to heal. The consciousness factors of concentration and the summoning up of a healthy image correlate with an increase in the healing rate.²⁹ A benefit of Yoga philosophy is being able to see why this is true. A person who does not believe in the power of whatever yogic practice would seem less likely to make the necessary effort.

Yogic phenomena such as the healing power of visualization are striking instances of holism and self-determination in our sense. But there are many common activities and experiences that illustrate the general thesis of self-determination, any voluntary action, for instance. Just because this is such a wide class of events, however, it is less useful polemically than extraordinary illustrations of ways matter depends on mind. Yogic practices and the capacities that are developed by yoga exaggerate everyday dependencies that we all know first-hand. For, yoga or no yoga, it seems practically *a priori* that the power of human consciousness is responsible for much of what is human. Thus Yoga metaphysics may be seen as simply trying to stretch the insight a bit further (like an asana) in consonance with the fact that yoga practices

29. refs. There is an inevitable "paradigm-clash" on the part of those who would blah blah blah. Roger Walsh, ref.

show that consciousness could be responsible for more. Bringing the formerly involuntary within the range of the will, making it voluntary, as, for example, with *prāṇāyāma*, “breath-control,” is a Yoga byword. It bears repeating that a good Yoga philosophy would encourage yoga practices by explaining how a reverse dependence is possible (body on mind, or, better, body and mind on consciousness) and why it is good.

One answer, as we have seen, is sattvacization, purification of the nature so that the self can know itself as it really is, separate from nature. This is *YS*’s theory. Nature becomes teleological, serving, as Patañjali says, the purpose of the *puruṣa*. A different answer connects consciousness with its body or bodies and with nature outside itself. Here the point of yoga is not separation but connection, and consciousness is not in reality totally separate from everything else but connected, at least potentially. Yogic practices integrate mind, life, body, and whatever spiritual parts we have. If this is right, Yoga philosophy should reveal the underpinnings of yogic integration. Consonantly with such holistic phenomena, Yoga philosophy should target connectedness and integration. Thus is there “bottom-up” motivation for a holistic theory showing the possibility of connectedness among parts of ourselves.

There is also in this regard a rich inheritance of theory. I propose to examine some of the ideative resources out of which our own holistic Yoga may come. We shall have to be selective, since among holism-friendly philosophies are both pantheisms of the West and a broad range of monistic Eastern views, mainly Indian in origin but also Chinese, notably Daoism. I propose focusing primarily on Vedānta, especially Vedāntic theism, which has its textual origins in the same Upanishads where yogic practices are first mentioned.³⁰ I shall try to bring in other spiritual monisms as best I can.

There may be, I should like to point out, at least some slight grounds for the focus, which is that Vedāntic theists can boast of having advocated yoga practices for more than twenty-five centuries. This is particularly true of the holistic theists (“The world is the body of God”) who also count as important interpreters of *YS* and other yoga manuals such as the

30. refs. including BrU (nidhidhasitavya), Katha, etc.

Bhagavad-Gītā. There is here much in common with Taoism, of course, as well as with Mahāyāna and the Pratyabhijñā philosophy of Kashmiri Shaivism. But at least in vocabulary (though perhaps not in theory) these systems are also a bit further removed from the classic Sanskrit teachings of Yoga. With the Upanishads, in contrast, we have Yoga's oldest texts.

After expositing Vedāntic theism, I shall try to shape up a more diminutive holism that stresses large units but perhaps not so large as the Vedāntic Brahman, the One. Unfortunately, I repeat, Yoga's alliances in Buddhism, Taoism, Neo-platonism, Whiteheadian process philosophy, etc., cannot be paraded, at least not at all in very full dress.³¹ Thus the plan for the remainder of this chapter is to examine the full-blown explanations of Vedāntic holists, who are theists, and then to pare them down in an effort to formulate a non-systematic holism that may be a more suitable Yoga philosophy for us.

Vedāntic theism asserts self-determination to be the fundamental relationship between consciousness and matter, God's *māyā* (from the root *mā*, to measure or delimit), Brahman's making for itself a body in the physical universe.³² The central constraint on the view is the antecedent nature of Brahman which guarantees that everything is interrelated in the self-determinations that create and maintain the universe. This is maximalist theism, which we might for a moment contrast with the minimalist variety endorsed by Nyāya.

Later Nyāya philosophers infer the existence of God by a causal argument. God is inferred as the agent who has brought about things like the earth. But just as Nyāya does not speculate on what makes it possible for mental and physical events to stand as causal factors one for the other, so it refuses to speculate on the connection between God and the things that directly or indirectly God brings about. To be sure, in consonance with the inference to God, Nyāya philosophers attribute omniscience to God as a property needed to bring about the effects the *īśvara* is posited to

31. ref to *The History of Pantheism*. At the end of the section, I say a few words more about the compatibility of Yoga with religious beliefs taken in the spirit of the "overbeliefs" made current by William James.

32. Long historical note tracing the Indian theistic conception, from BrU to Aurobindo. See CIM.

explain. But this is accordance with the policy not to specify the nature of a postulated cause more than is required by the explanatory task. Thus it is school policy not to elaborate, not to speculate further on God's nature. Theistic Vedāntins, in contrast, from Rāmānuja to Aurobindo, begin with the assumption that the reality of Brahman explains even details of worldly phenomena. For example, emotions are forms of God's delight, *ānanda*, flavors or *rasa* to be enjoyed by us as well as by Brahman, worldly manifestations of an intrinsic nature that is beyond the manifest universe. In this way, theistic Vedāntins turn around the materialists' relation of explanans and explanandum: the body is what is to be explained and the nature of consciousness, or Brahman, does the explaining.

Holism is a distinctive feature of Vedāntic theism, equivalent to Brahman's all-inclusiveness. How can Brahman become matter? Well, Brahman can do whatever is possible, and what is possible is fixed by what is compatible with Brahman's nature. Brahman cannot surrender being Brahman. This guarantees that nothing can lie outside God, that everything is tied up with everything else in being Brahman: *sarvam idam brahma*.³³

Brahman's being matter would explain, at the high end, how it is possible that we who are material beings can know ourselves immediately, self-illuminingly, as taught in Advaita and Buddhism. At the low end, matter's being Brahman would explain how there can be sensory connections as well as physical transmissions of mental traits. Though it is hard to say how the view would tie up with biology and chemistry, perhaps the holism of Brahman would provide pull for the emergence of integrated entities that are distinct from aggregates. Biology may eschew final causes in the Aristotelian sense, but there are principles of unification that are, let us say, holism-friendly. Water, for example, is a new thing, not anticipated in hydrogen and oxygen atoms. The same is all the more true of organisms. Parts are not pieces. In sum, since matter on this view would be Brahman, material forms can be conscious as well as vehicles of mental determinations and all the emergent phenomena that make up our

33. Upanishadic references.

macro world.

Some Vedāntic theists put the Advaita and Buddhist notion of self-illuminating consciousness to new use.³⁴ Self-illumination, which Aurobindo calls knowledge by identity, makes possible conscious control. By knowing myself as my hand I can move it, et cetera. A primary teaching in the *YS* is that through *saṁnyama*, “control through conscious identification,” instanced in the control we have over our own bodily limbs, we can expand the sphere of things subject to volition, as in *prāṇāyāma*. Such *siddhis* as an athlete’s being in the zone or, as stated in *YS*, provoking friendship in one’s environment, seem to flow from *saṁnyama*, whether the practice be basketball or *ahiṁsā*, “non-injury” (friendliness is said to flow from mastery of *ahiṁsā* at *YS* 2.35). We might also mention craftsmanship and linguistic ability, which are developed through training, through conscious attention to what the Vedāntin sees as an extension of the self to mastery of tools as well as of our own bodies and minds. (“Yoga is skill in works,” says the *Gītā*, *yogaḥ karmāsu kauśalam*, 2.50.) Vedāntic holism is not shy about *siddhis*, extoling extraordinary capacities that can be brought out when we become the fit vehicles (*adhikāra*) for the activity of a higher self.³⁵

Of course, the problem with theism, whether Vedāntic or a Western variety, is evil. It is notoriously difficult to explain evil on theistic premises, even on those where God is both our highest self and matter, or, perhaps we should say, especially on those premises. Personally, I do not think a Vedāntic theodicy is hopeless, and the topic is taken up in the next chapter in connection with karma and social justice. But for present purposes I wish to take it for granted that it is not easy to explain, e.g., a child’s suffering, on the premise that God, or Brahman, is perfect. Appreciating the difficulty helps to motivate a more modest holism and a Yoga philosophy that presents less of a target, in my view.

I would like to propose a non-systematic or bottom-up version of holism that, like theistic Vedānta, emphasizes possibilities of integration and self-determination, not for God but for us. The by-word is

34. ref. Aurobindo

35. refs. Rāmānuja et alia.

integration. In yoga practice, we learn that a little effort at breath-control or mental silence trails a feeling of harmony and by objective measures better health. There seems to be a continuum related to the power of consciousness to integrate something into itself, from intuition, thought, desire, and the like at one extreme to material determinations at the other. It is difficult to know the limits of this, but the spirit of our bottom-up holism is not to make absolutely fixed pronouncements but to sketch out possibilities to help us believe in ourselves. Still, just about everywhere we look there are analogies. Holism in linguistics stresses a series of significant units whose significance depends upon interrelations among components, the unity of letters in a word, of words in a sentence, and of relevant combinations of sentences in an act of speech. In environmental science, there is species interdependence; in economics, convergence of standard of living through open markets and free trade. Holism about the self in Western philosophy (an example is Plato's tripartite theory³⁶) stresses, like Yoga, potential harmony among the parts of the being, physical, emotional, and mental. Yoga would add to the list (beyond Plato) the self's spiritual side. But whatever its precise metaphysical theses, Yoga is a philosophy that encourages psychological harmony and transformation, transformation directed to greater integration and harmony.

So I propose that Yoga entertain a position on the mind-body relation similar to what is called neutral monism, in the coinage by William James.³⁷ But beyond James, we would see at least in certain units (if not in everything) the disposition to further unify and form complexes with emergent properties that are not explained solely by the constituent parts. This could be held to apply even to God who, like Krishna on some Vaishnava accounts, would seek out souls as much as being sought by them in *bhakti*. In a less minimal version of metaphysical holism than I feel can be responsibly endorsed given current science, the view might try to tie up with biology, chemistry, and physics by proposing that consciousness emerges from an integration of coarse and subtle elements,

36. The Republic and other refs.

37. "Does Consciousness Exist," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 1912.

from influences ranging from the biological and physical to the cultural and spiritual (*adhyātmika*).

But whether or not we try to reframe science, individual life forms are complex unities, and self-determining human beings are capable of mental and emotional unifications that transcend an individual life. These would be, for instance, unifications with cultural traditions, political movements, and so on, including, through yoga, as taught in the Upanishads, a higher self. Precisely how high in this minimalist approach need not be specified.³⁸ The strength of dualistic interactionism—mental causation being upheld—would be taken up into the view. But also physical events could be causal factors for mental events—the misunderstood truth of materialism. Our position would encourage both brain science and mind-body research in the reverse direction. The best evidence for all this is, I think, the human body and its health. Yogic practices harmonize our parts, thoughts, desires, breath, self-awareness, and bodily movements, etc., and the result is both a great sense of health and its reality. For metaphysical holism, there is also ecology and species interdependence which provide solid buttressing. Everything we do helps to create a new self or person and reverberates throughout the environment.

Unlike materialism, even such minimalist holism as I have tried to sketch would not be a value-free metaphysics eschewing every kind of final cause. The thesis that worth tracks degree of complex unity is, I think, central (as I argue in chapter two), and the purposes of human beings both pack causal power and are unificational at the high end. At the low end, our non-systematic holism would promote hypotheses like that, already suggested by a few philosophers cognizant of the weaknesses of materialism, of a physical-(proto)conscious stuff poised to form unities in atoms, molecules, and indeed organisms.³⁹

Everything may be tightly unified in the fashion of the systematic self-determinationism of theistic Vedānta, but the Yoga sketched here is compatible with non-theistic positions. I repeat that whether there is an

38. William James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* takes a similar view about personal survival: we need not pronounce on the eternity of the soul but only on whether what survives this death that is soon to arrive: ref.

39. David Chalmers, ref.

upper limit to unification need not be decided by us. We need enough theory to encourage self-development but not so much that we would be required to solve theism's problem of evil or to dictate to physics and biology. And there is at least a grain of truth, it seems to me, in the mysterian view, both in the Advaita and materialist versions. The dualism of Nyāya may be all that is defensible philosophically, with "overbeliefs" strictly a matter of faith (more about which just below). At the heart of Yoga is commitment to two-directional causation, possibilities of self-development, and, I should like to add, ecological responsibility (this flows from a right understanding of karma, as is argued in the next chapter). But beyond providing a useful framework for yogic practices, Yoga need not take a position, at least not inflexibly (critical reasoning has itself been promoted as a yoga practice in certain traditions, most notably, Tibetan Buddhism). Yoga philosophy should not be an end in itself but subservient to self-development.

Finally, there is the question of compatibility with richer systems of religious and spiritual conviction. Just now I mentioned "overbeliefs"—the coinage belongs to William James—and what James meant by this is, I think, worth our time.⁴⁰ Now the great pragmatist distrusted what he characterized as the excessively theoretical, grandiose statements of traditional religions. But James found in mysticism and the religious life of individuals much to recommend. He identified a tiny core of justifiable religious doctrine,⁴¹ encouraging people to enlarge upon it insofar as such "overbelief" contributed to an inner life.⁴² James' philosophic insight is that one knows about one's own overbeliefs that they are not to be displayed in company, that they are idiosyncratic and not publicly justified or justifiable. But James also felt that with this self-consciousness a belief in divine providence, for example, could be important and entirely within a person's epistemic rights. I feel that much the same attitude should

40. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

41. Quotation from James (end of *Varieties*). Compare Philo's conclusion at the end of *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*: quotation from Hume.

42. The idiosyncratic character of the belief seems like the arbitrariness of one's preference for a particular divinity in the Hindu notion of *iṣṭa-devatā*, "preferred divinity": see, in this book, pp. xxx.

apply to metaphysical explanations of mind-body relations—particularly those that challenge my own pet theory of holism! Yogic laws based on mind-body correlations are a middle-level of theory, and can be interpreted in accord with a range of views. This is the central point.

Similarly, particular teachers of yoga—and, more broadly, of spiritual discipline—have framed these correlations in widely different terms. What is significant however for our purposes is the agreement. Though theologically opposed, Hindus, Buddhists, Jainas, Sikhs, Christians (witness the “prayer of quiet” of Saint Teresa⁴³), Muslims, and modern gurus of holistic health proclaim many of the same laws of self-development. The purpose of this Yoga philosophy is to articulate a non-religious, philosophic framework for yogic discoveries and practices. I recommend the Jamesean “overbelief” attitude to those practitioners who find themselves working within a religious tradition or community whose belief system extends to the mythological. What’s really important is to know the psychological rules.

Now certain yoga practices have a belief component, or practice intentionality, directed to God—to Shiva, the Divine Mother, Tara, the Creator, Dao, the Supreme Self, etc. I take it that *bhakti* yoga would not be possible without such intentionality (*viṣayatā* in Sanskrit, “objecthood”), directionality of consciousness towards a supreme being. To someone steeped in *bhakti*, to recommend a strategy of Jamesean overbelief for the purpose of philosophic legitimacy may seem glibly dismissive. But let me say that personally *bhakti* is my favorite type of yoga. In chapter three, a Yoga defense of God’s perfection in the face of evil will be mustered. Nevertheless, the point of *bhakti* is intimate relation with an unknown *amorant*, a “lover” in an occult but sensuous sense. Who really cares whether the secret embrace that brings bliss belongs to the Creator of Heaven and Earth or, let us imagine for the sake of argument, a personal fairy godmother? (Her charge could be restricted to one’s current lifetime or, imaginably, a span of three or four lifetimes.) Couldn’t a mere angelic lover move the heart? But I say all of this out of regard for devotees who would not, it seems to me, like to spoil the day by

43. ref.

arguing when there is opportunity to dance and sing. Philosophy is notoriously dry, sans *rasa*. Why insist that others see one's personally "preferred divinity," *iṣṭa-devatā*, as the world's Creator or the one savior, et cetera?⁴⁴ In *bhakti* something special is known, and Radha, like anyone else in her sandals, wants to boast to her friends that she and she alone is Krishna's girl. Note, in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, this is the moment when Krishna vanishes, when she loses him.⁴⁵ Besides, who wants to hear about others' trysts?

If someone were to ask me what I really believe in metaphysics, I would say that I am a dualist in the Nyāya/Humean fashion, committed to the irreducibility of self and consciousness. I confess that I would like to understand the connections of mind and matter in a spiritually monistic fashion—all is Brahman, Dao, Empty, Interdependent—but I will settle for, in addition to dualist theses about the non-material reality of self and consciousness, the most minimal version of holism. The self can integrate instruments into itself, and there seems to be a continuum in the degree of responsiveness and assimilability among things. Such a position may not be inspiring, but Yoga philosophy need not be carried by rapturous theorizing. The practices of yoga promote mental quiet and control, and to me it seems noisy to insist on a theory of the One becoming the many. In yoga, we want harmony and integration into the highest consciousness to which we have access. Whether that be Dao, God, Brahman, Emptiness, or only a slightly larger superconscious self or conscious continuum need not be decided by us. Though holists in spirit, we are minimalists with respect to metaphysical explanation.

44. Again, see below, pp. xxx–xx.

45. ref. Book X. A similar parable is told by Apuleius in *The Golden Ass*. The beautiful Psyche has an occult lover, Cupid, who unfortunately flies away when she, prompted by her curious sisters (two older sisters whom she shouldn't have confided in in the first place) tries to know too much. Tr. by Robert Graves.