

WITH INSIGHTS FROM THE
TRADITIONAL COMMENTATORS

EDWIN F. BRYANT

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and therefore not subject to changes such as bondage and liberation;⁵ in the Yoga tradition, the quest for liberation, in other words human agency, is a function of the *prākṛtic* mind, not of *puruṣa*. (We will revisit the implications of this fundamental principle and—since it is perceived by its detractors as the Achilles' heel of an otherwise meritorious system—the reactions to it from other Indic schools of thought in our concluding reflections.) Thus, although the traditional commentators (and the present commentary) sometimes say “*puruṣa* misidentifies itself with *prakṛti*” or “*puruṣa* seeks freedom,” these are rhetorical or pedagogical statements. *Puruṣa* has never been bound; all notions of identity whether bound or liberated are taking place in the *prākṛtic* mind. In conclusion, then, Yoga claims to provide a system by which the practitioner can directly realize his or her *puruṣa*, the soul or innermost conscious self, through mental practices.

The Sāṅkhya Metaphysics of the Text

We have discussed how Yoga and Sāṅkhya are not to be considered distinct schools until well after Patañjali's time, but instead as different approaches or methods toward enlightenment. While there are minor differences between the two traditions, Sāṅkhya provides the metaphysical or theoretical basis for the realization of *puruṣa*, and Yoga offers the technique or practice itself.⁶ While the Yoga tradition does not agree with the Sāṅkhya view that metaphysical analysis, that is, *jñāna*, knowledge, constitutes a sufficient path toward enlightenment in and of itself,⁷ the metaphysical presuppositions of the Yoga system assume those of Sāṅkhya. Therefore, an understanding of the infrastructure of Sāṅkhya metaphysics is a prerequisite to comprehending the dynamics underpinning both the essential constituents of Yoga psychology and practice, as well as the supplementary aspects of the system such as the *siddhi* mystic powers of Chapter III.

As with the cluster of Yoga traditions, there were numerous variants of Sāṅkhya, amply attested in the *Mahābhārata*⁸ (the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Hsüien Tsang's disciple in the seventh century reports eighteen schools,⁹ and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* also refers to several). Only fragments quoted by other authors have survived from the works of the original teachers of the system—Kapila, the divine sage

whom tradition assigns as the original expounder of Sāṅkhyā, is mentioned as early as the *Rg Veda* (X.27.16), the earliest Indo-European text, as well as in a number of other ancient treatises.¹⁰ Additionally, there are quotes from Pañcaśikha, who is sometimes quoted by our commentators,¹¹ and Āsuri, the latter's disciple. There are various references to the original Sāṅkhyā tradition as *Śaṣṭi-tantra*, containing sixty topics (for example, *Sāṅkhyā Kārikā* LXXII),¹² but the original text appears to be lost. The later *Sāṅkhyā Kārikā* of Īśvarakṛṣṇa, which scholars assign to the fourth or fifth century, has by default become the seminal text of the tradition, just as Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras* has become for the Yoga tradition, and represents its developed, systematic form. It is quoted throughout the present commentary (as it is in the traditional commentaries).

In the Sāṅkhyā (literally, numeration) system, the universe of animate and inanimate entities is perceived as ultimately the product of two ontologically distinct categories; hence this system is quintessentially *dvaita*, or dualistic in presupposition. These two categories are *prakṛti*, or the primordial material matrix of the physical universe, "the undifferentiated plenitude of being,"¹³ and *puruṣa*, the innumerable conscious souls or selves embedded within it. As a result of the interaction between these two entities, the material universe evolves in stages. The actual catalysts in this evolutionary process are the three *guṇas*, literally, strands or qualities, that are inherent in *prakṛti*. These are *sattva*, lucidity; *rajas*, action; and *tamas*, inertia. These *guṇas* are sometimes compared to the threads of a rope; just as a rope is a combination of threads, so all manifest reality consists of a combination of the *guṇas*. These *guṇas* are mentioned incessantly throughout the commentaries on the text,¹⁴ as are the various evolutes from *prakṛti*, and thus require some attention.

Given the meditative focus of the text, the *guṇas* are especially significant to *yoga* in terms of their psychological manifestation; in Yoga, the mind and therefore all psychological dispositions are *prakṛti* and thus also composed of the *guṇas*—the only difference between mind and matter being that the former has a larger preponderance of *sattva*, and the latter of *tamas*. Therefore, according to the specific intermixture and proportionality of the *guṇas*, living beings exhibit different types of mind-sets and psychological dispositions. Thus, when *sattva*

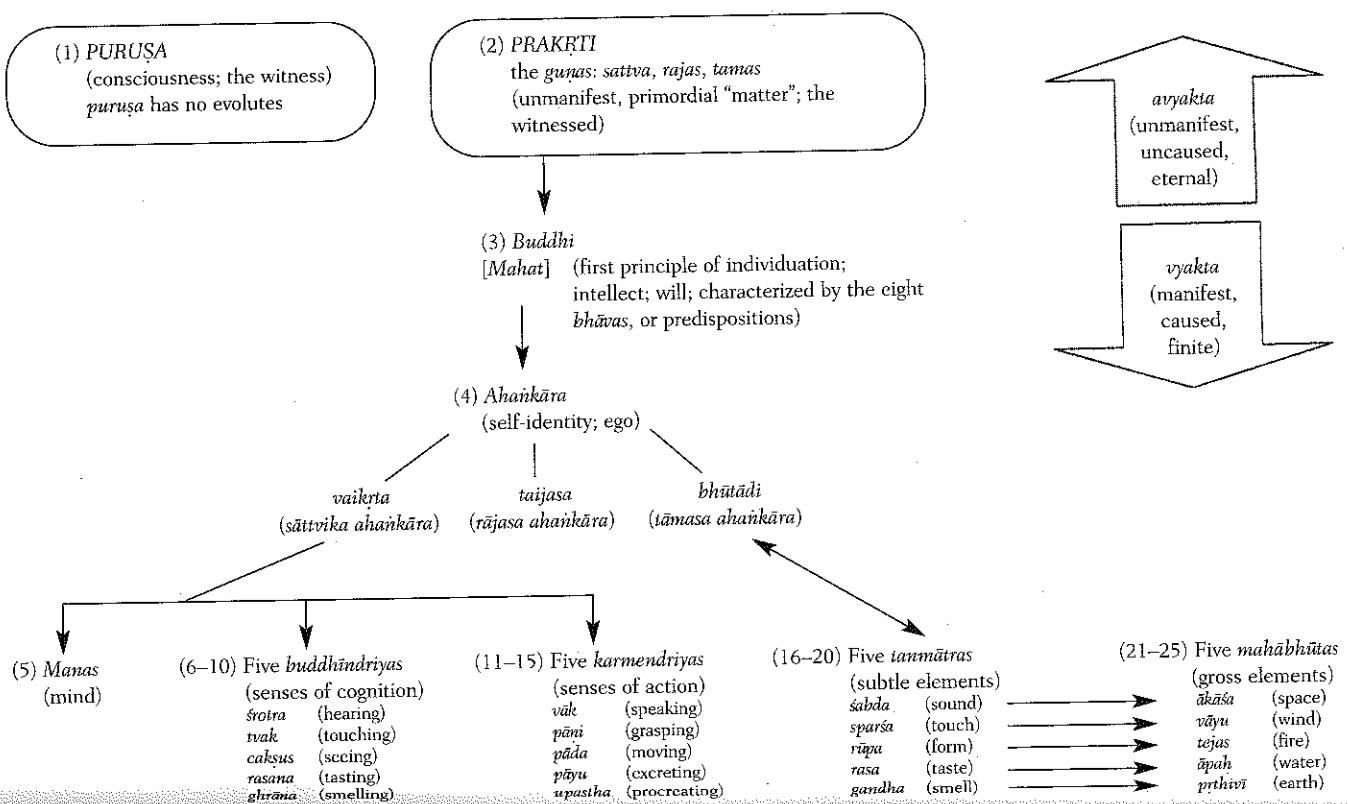
(from the root *as*, "to be"¹⁵) is predominant in an individual, the qualities of lucidity, tranquillity, wisdom, discrimination, detachment, happiness, and peacefulness manifest; when *rajas* (from the root *rañj*, to color, to redden) is predominant, hankering, attachment, energetic endeavor, passion, power, restlessness, and creative activity manifest; and when *tamas*, the *guṇa* least favorable for *yoga*, is predominant, stillness, ignorance, delusion, disinterest, lethargy, sleep, and disinclination toward constructive activity manifest.

The *guṇas* are continually interacting and competing with each other, one *guṇa* becoming prominent for a while and overpowering the others, only to be eventually dominated by the increase of one of the other *guṇas* (*Gītā* XIV.10). The Sāṅkhyān text the *Yukti-dīpikā* (13) compares them to the wick, fire, and oil of the lamp which, while opposed to each other in their nature, come together to produce light. Just as there are an unlimited variety of colors stemming from the mixture of the three primary colors, different hues being simply expressions of the specific proportionality of red, yellow, and blue, so the unlimited psychological dispositions of living creatures (and of physical forms) stem from the mixture of the *guṇas*, specific states of mind being the reflections of the particular proportionality of the three *guṇas*.

The *guṇas* underpin not only the philosophy of mind in Yoga but the activation and interaction of these *guṇa* qualities result in the production of the entirety of physical forms that also evolve from the primordial material matrix, *prakṛti*, under the same principle.¹⁶ Thus the physical composition of objects like air, water, stone, fire, etc., differs because of the constitutional makeup of specific *guṇas*: air contains more of the buoyancy of *sattva*; stones, more of the sluggishness of the *tamas* element; and fire, more *rajas* (although its buoyancy betrays its partial nature of *sattva* as well). The *guṇas* allow for the infinite plasticity of *prakṛti* and the objects of the world.

The process by which the universe evolves from *prakṛti* is usefully compared to the churning of milk: When milk receives a citric catalyst, yogurt, curds, or butter emerges. These immediate products can be manipulated to produce a further series of products—toffee, milk desserts, cheese, etc.¹⁷ Similarly, according to classical Sāṅkhyā,¹⁸ the first evolute emerging from *prakṛti* when it is churned by the *guṇas*

DIAGRAM OF THE TWENTY-FIVE TATTVAS OF CLASSICAL SĀṄKHYA
Illustrating the evolution of *prakṛti* according to the *Sāṅkhyā-Kārikā* of Īśvarakṛṣṇa



(*sattva* specifically) is *buddhi*, intelligence. Intelligence is characterized by the functions of judgment, discrimination, knowledge, ascertainment, will, virtue, and detachment,¹⁹ and *sattva* is predominant in it. This means that in its purest state, when the potential of *rajas* and *tamas* is minimized, *buddhi* is primarily lucid, peaceful, happy, tranquil, and discriminatory, all qualities of *sattva*. It is the interface between *puruṣa* and all other *prākṛtic* evolutes. From this vantage point, it can direct awareness out into the objects and embroilments of the world, or, in its highest potential, it can become aware of the presence of *puruṣa* and consequently redirect itself toward complete realization of the true source of consciousness that pervades it.

From *buddhi*, *ahaṅkāra*, or ego, is produced (*aham*, I + *kāra*, doing; referred to as *asmitā* in this text). This is characterized by the function of self-awareness and self-identity. It is the cognitive aspect that processes and appropriates external reality from the perspective of an individualized sense of self or ego—the notion of I and mine in human awareness. The *Sāṅkhyā-Kārikās* refers to it as conceit, *abhimāna*. It is essential in conceptualizing and distinguishing subject and object, the knower and the known. It creates the notion of an individual self, but additionally, it is from *ahaṅkāra* that both the objective external world, and the instruments through which one can interact with the world (the sense organs, etc.) evolve; in order for there to be a subject, there needs to be a world of objects and instruments through which to access this world. *Ahaṅkāra* also limits the range of awareness to fit within and identify with the contours of the particular psychophysical organism within which it finds itself in any one embodiment, as opposed to another. In other words, the *ahaṅkāra* of a bug acts almost like a concave screen that refracts consciousness to pervade and appropriate the contours of the bug. If the bug dies and becomes, say, a dog and then a human in subsequent lives, the *ahaṅkāra* aspect of the *cittas* adjusts to accommodate and absorb consciousness into these new environments. Thus the bug thinks it is a bug, the dog thinks it is a dog, and the human thinks he or she is a human.

Ahaṅkāra is thus not only pivotal in all experience but also is the critical midpoint in the choice between material identification or spiritual pursuit, the external material world or the pure *puruṣa*. Turned inward, *ahaṅkāra* (*asmitā*) can reflect awareness toward its source, *puruṣa*.

ruṣa; turned outward, it can misidentify the self with its *prakṛtic* entrapment.²⁰ It is the *ahankāra* that determines whether one's notion of self is spiritual or phenomenal.

When ego in turn is churned by the *guna* of *sattva* inherent in it, *manas*, the mind, is produced. The mind is the seat of the emotions, of like and dislike, and filters and processes the potentially enormous amount of data accessible to the senses. It primarily receives, sorts, categorizes²¹ and then transmits. It serves as the liaison between the activities of the senses transmitting data from the external world, and *buddhi*, intelligence; indeed, the only two times the term occurs in the *sūtras* is in connection with its relationship with the external senses. It therefore partakes both of internal and external functioning: internally, it is characterized by reflective synthesis (*sankalpa*) as noted above, while simultaneously being "a sense because it acts similar to the senses" (*Sāṅkhya Kārikā* XXVII).

The *Katha Upaniṣad* (3.9) compares the body to a chariot, the senses to the horses, the mind to the reins that control the horses, the *buddhi* to the driver who controls the reins and charts the course, and the *puruṣa* to the inactive passenger. *Buddhi*, intelligence; *ahankāra*, ego; and *manas*, mind, together comprise the internal body (*antahkaraṇa*), the inner noetic world of thoughts, emotions, feelings, determination, will, cognitions, memories, etc. The *puruṣa* soul is cloaked in these psychic layers prior to receiving a gross body and senses. As noted, the Yoga school, while using the terminology of (especially) *buddhi*, but also *ahankāra* and *manas*, differs somewhat from that of Sāṅkhya in conceiving these three as interacting functions of the one *citta*, mind, rather than as three distinct metaphysical layers. *Citta*, then, is the term used by Patañjali and the commentators to refer to all three of these cognitive functions combined (thus it is not a separate evolute from *prakṛti*).

Moving onto more physical levels of reality, from the ego stirred by *tamas* emerge the *tanmātras*, or subtle elements—the energies or powers underpinning sound, sight, smell, taste, and touch. These are the generic energies behind the sensory powers, not specific sounds or varieties of tastes, etc., hence their name, *tanmātra*, only that (namely, the essences of these energies, not their particular individualized expressions).²² Since knowledge and illumination are qualities of *sattva*,

the *tanmātras* are still very *sāttvic* in nature. These, in turn, sequentially produce the five *mahābhūtas*, or gross elements—ether, air, fire, water, and earth—the world of form, the actual physical, tangible stuff of the universe. This evolutionary sequence must be kept in mind in order to understand the metaphysics behind a number of *sūtras* in the *Yoga Sūtras*, particularly those that deal with the mystic powers.

The Sāṅkhya system is classified in Indian thought as *satkārya*, namely, that the effects of the world are present in their cause. This is one of the important points to keep in mind: Gross matter is actually an evolute or derivative of something subtler, the subtle elements, and these of something subtler still, the ego, which is an evolute of *buddhi*, intelligence. This means *buddhi* underpins all reality, even as *buddhi* itself is a manifestation of *prakṛti* and the *gunas*, or, put differently, any expression of reality, subjective or objective, is nothing other than a manifestation of the *gunas*. These evolutes are all called *tattvas*, thatnesses; they are the real constituents of "that" world out there perceived by the self.

The Goals of Yoga

According to Patañjali's definition in the very first *sūtra*, *yoga* is the cessation (*nirodha*) of the activities or permutations (*vṛttis*) of the *citta*. The *vṛttis* refer to any sequence of thought, ideas, mental imaging, or cognitive act performed by the mind, intellect, or ego as defined above—in short, any state of mind whatsoever. It cannot be overstressed that the mind is merely a physical substance that selects, organizes, analyzes, and molds itself into the physical forms of the sense data presented to it; in and of itself it is not aware of them. Sense impressions or thoughts are imprints in that mental substance, just as a clay pot is a product made from the substance clay, or waves are permutations of the sea. The essential point for understanding *yoga* is that all forms or activities of the mind are products of *prakṛti*, matter, and completely distinct from the soul or true self, *puruṣa*, pure awareness or consciousness.

The *citta* can profitably be compared to the software, and the body to the hardware. Neither is conscious; they are rather forms of gross matter, even as the former can do very intelligent activities. Both soft-