



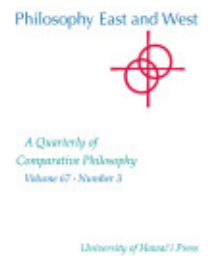
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Epistemic Enhancement in Yogic and Cartesian Meditation

Gary Jaeger

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# SŪKṢMA AND THE CLEAR AND DISTINCT LIGHT: THE PATH TO EPISTEMIC ENHANCEMENT IN YOGIC AND CARTESIAN MEDITATION



**Gary Jaeger**

Philosophy Department, Vanderbilt University  
gary.a.jaeger@vanderbilt.edu

## 1. Introduction

Yoga, like the other five orthodox schools or *darśanas* of Hindu philosophy, is primarily soteriological in purpose; it offers the hope of salvation from the inevitable suffering of life and the cycle of death and rebirth more broadly. Unlike the other *darśanas*, its prescribed method for achieving this salvation is meditation, by which the practitioner focuses his or her attention so as to become undisturbed by the fluctuations of his or her own consciousness caused by stimuli in the external world and by upheavals in his or her own emotional state. In light of this, the individual practices that comprise the path of meditation are often understood to liberate one from one's own consciousness by turning one's attention away from disturbance until one's consciousness loses its nature as an object-laden consciousness.<sup>1</sup> This loss is not completely nihilistic because Yoga maintains the existence of a pure consciousness that lies beyond object-laden consciousness. Nevertheless, it does seem to require an eradication of the practitioner's own cognitive and conative function so that pure consciousness can lie alone in a state of freedom from disturbance. Mikel Burley, for one, asserts that *kaivalya*, the freedom identified as Yoga's end, should be understood in negative terms alone as a freedom *from* experience, a mindless state in which pure consciousness stands alone.<sup>2</sup>

While the definitive text of classical Yoga, the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali, does depict the end of Yoga to be the cessation of the fluctuations of thought (YS I.2), it also holds out the promise of a truth-bearing wisdom (YS I.48). Rather than as a diminution of cognitive function, Yoga could be understood as a path toward epistemic enhancement. On the face of it, cessation of thought and epistemic enhancement seem to be at odds, and so it is not surprising to see theorists emphasize one of these aspects at the expense of the other. Burley, representing a more commonplace position, emphasizes the role of cessation over enhancement.<sup>3</sup> Some scholars, however, have attempted to emphasize the converse. Ian Whicher, for instance, has argued that the point of Yoga is not to eradicate cognitive or conative function, but only to eradicate the attachment we have to the objects of our thoughts and desires.<sup>4</sup> Implied in his view is not only a negative account of freedom *from* attachment, but also a positive account of being free *to* engage with the world in an enlightened way.<sup>5</sup> Whicher's view, however, has been criticized for overstating its case by redefining

the concept of cessation as mere detachment.<sup>6</sup> While Whicher's view has been labeled a renegade account, it remains to be seen whether a less controversial version of it can be defended, one that maintains a traditional conception of cessation while still advancing an understanding of Yoga as a path toward epistemic enhancement.

I aim to explore two different interpretative strategies for understanding the path and point of Yoga. The first, which is more in line with the commonplace view, understands the end of Yoga as a negative freedom from object-laden consciousness, pursued solely by means of turning away from the objects of consciousness. The second, taking its lead from Whicher's view but departing from its controversial conception of cessation, understands the individual practices that comprise Yoga to be not only the means by which the practitioner turns away from disturbance, but also the means by which he or she intentionally turns toward pure consciousness and takes it as the object of his or her consciousness. In this interpretation the end of Yoga is understood not merely as a negative freedom from disturbance that belongs to pure consciousness, but also as a type of positive freedom that belongs to the practitioner's own object-laden consciousness.<sup>7</sup> While the version of the second strategy that I expound avoids criticism directed at Whicher's view, it nevertheless faces potential objections concerning the interaction between a fluctuating and a pure consciousness, objections that need to be addressed in order for the second strategy to be as plausible as the first.

To bring the second strategy into greater focus, I look not only at the final stages of yogic meditation that yield liberation, but also at those stages that initiate the practitioner into the path of meditation. In particular, I analyze how the practice of regulating one's breath in *prāṇāyāma* teaches the practitioner intentionally to seek out the subtlety that guides him or her toward pure consciousness. My argument proceeds by placing YS II.50 in the context of the other *yoga sūtras*, their commentary, and the metaphysics and epistemology of the Sāṃkhya *darśana* from which the Yoga *darśana* develops. It is in YS II.50 that we learn that the practitioner first experiences the quality of *sūkṣma* or subtlety. By examining all other occurrences of *sūkṣma* in the *Yoga Sūtras*, it becomes clear that it is associated with those enhanced states that most closely resemble pure consciousness. Because it is in *prāṇāyāma* that the practitioner first experiences *sūkṣma*, I argue that it plays a foundational role in the progression of the practitioner's meditations. The *sūkṣma* experienced in *prāṇāyāma* points the way out of the spiritual ignorance that conflates the fluctuations of consciousness with pure consciousness, and points the way toward enhanced states that approach pure consciousness.

In section 2, I lay the groundwork from which I warrant the second interpretative strategy. This interpretation, which I defend in section 3, identifies the meditator's own will as the efficient cause of progress in yogic meditation, and it ascribes a freedom to the will that is characterized by the intention to apprehend a purified level of consciousness. In section 2, I also identify an objection that the second interpretative strategy must surmount. Since my interpretation assumes that one must apprehend a purified consciousness different in kind from one's own fluctuating consciousness, it must account for a way in which one can come to gain access to pure consciousness

without relying on the fluctuations of thought that comprise one's ordinary consciousness. My preferred strategy for surmounting this objection, which I lay out in section 4, likens the yogic meditator's apprehension of pure consciousness to the spontaneous apprehension of certitude experienced by Descartes' meditator in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Although comparing Patañjali to Descartes requires some qualification, such a comparison nevertheless illustrates how truth-bearing wisdom can be spontaneously apprehended without relying on ordinary ways of coming to know, like sense perception and inference, which cause the consciousness to fluctuate. Taking my lead from Descartes, I argue that the spontaneous apprehension of pure consciousness not only liberates the meditator from the fluctuations of thought, it also liberates him or her to act in accordance with its own nature, which in the yogic context is as a medium through which pure consciousness can flow.

## 2. Meditative Practice and Its Metaphysical Underpinnings

The principal practice discussed in the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali is a type of meditation in which the practitioner focuses on a single object, called a support (*ālambana*), to the exclusion of all other objects, in order to bring about the cessation of the fluctuations of consciousness.<sup>8</sup> Patañjali discusses these practices in ways that can be understood by novices and initiates. The first chapter, or *pāda*, is called the *Samādhi Pāda* because it discusses the most advanced stages of this meditational practice known as *samādhi*, in which the practitioner focuses so intensely on his or her object of support that his or her own sense of subjectivity dissolves, at which point "the mind becomes just like a transparent jewel, taking the form of whatever is placed before it."<sup>9</sup> Patañjali divides *samādhi* into progressive stages, which are distinguished by the objects of support they take. At first, the practitioner focuses on an object comprised of the gross elements (*mahābhūtas*) of earth, water, fire, wind, and ether. This could be any object in the external world "that is of one's inclination."<sup>10</sup> In time, the practitioner becomes ready to shift focus from the gross aspects of that support to the subtle aspects of it, which include the experience of perceiving the object. From the object itself to the experience of perceiving it, the practitioner then shifts focus again, taking the even subtler faculties of consciousness themselves as objects of support. In the standard reading of Yoga, the progression from the gross to the subtle continues until no support is needed to cease the fluctuations of consciousness.

Practicing *samādhi* is subtle work indeed, too subtle for the novice, and so, in the second *pāda*, Patañjali presents another set of progressive practices, which he calls *aṣṭāṅga yoga* (eight-limbed yoga), meant to prepare the novice for eventual success in *samādhi*. The first two limbs, moral observance (*yama*) and personal discipline (*niyama*), prepare the practitioner to focus by diminishing the distractions caused by desire and emotional upheaval. They prohibit violent, sexual, and covetous actions and thoughts, and oblige the practitioner to engage in austere, reflective, and devotional practices.<sup>11</sup> Through correct practice of the third limb, posture (*āsana*), the practitioner learns to sit properly for meditation, so as not to be distracted by the discomfort or instability of his or her body. Once the seated posture has been mastered,

the practitioner can begin the fourth limb, breath control (*prāṇāyāma*), which Patañjali tells us prepares the mind for the sixth limb, *dhāraṇā*. Here the practitioner begins to concentrate on the object in which he or she eventually will be absorbed in *samādhi*, which Patañjali lists as the eighth and final limb.<sup>12</sup> In the next section, I will return to the specific role that *prāṇāyāma* plays in directing the mind toward subtler levels of meditation. For now, I turn my attention to an analysis of that path more generally.

Patañjali uses the term *pratiprasava* to refer to the path along which one's meditative progress ought to progress (YS II.10). The term is often translated as involution. *Prati* means against and *prasava* is the process of evolution by which the gross elements that comprise the objects in the external world evolve from unmanifest *prakṛti*, their material cause. Meditative practice allows practitioners to traverse the psychological landscape of their *citta*, which is always already shaped by the objects of experience. Its point is to move the practitioner far enough toward the interior of this landscape to be able to remain undisturbed by the most distracting fluctuations of consciousness existing at the periphery. To make this journey, the practitioner must follow the path that moves from a mental state that is agitated by thoughts and images of gross objects to one that is fixed by the apprehension of consciousness itself.

Gross objects contain much of the inert (*tamas*) and kinetic (*rajas*) *guṇas*, which incite the fluctuations of *citta*. As *citta* focuses in on itself and in particular on *buddhi*, its subtlest aspect comprised far more of the *guṇa* of transparency (*sattva*) than of inertia or kinesis, it becomes ready to apprehend the light of *puruṣa*. Because of its sattvic quality, the *buddhi* is most like the *puruṣa*, which the sixteenth-century commentator Vijñānabhikṣu likens to a crystal: "The idea is that just as the crystal is not red in the absence of the red china rose, and remains as itself, so also, when the modifications of the mind are absent."<sup>13</sup> When *citta* focuses on gross objects it is colored by them. When it turns away from the external world and toward itself, it becomes like the transparent crystal that is no longer distorted by the presence of the red china rose. It thereby becomes a medium through which *puruṣa*'s pure, object-less consciousness can flow.<sup>14</sup>

Involution's opposite, evolution, adheres to the principle of *satkāryavāda*, "according to which an effect (*kārya*) is pre-existent (*sat*) in the cause (*kāraṇa*)."<sup>15</sup> Standard readings depict this principle as applying to a discrete effect with a single factor that causes it. Take Anima Sen Gupta's reading, for instance, which claims, "a cause can produce *that* effect only for which it possesses efficiency or potency."<sup>16</sup> Gerald Larson, offers a more complex reading in which *satkāryavāda* is taken not to govern a single instance of causation, but rather to govern a closed system with multi-factorial etiology.<sup>17</sup> Regardless of whether the process of evolution admits of singular or multiple causes, the point I wish to emphasize is that the manifestation of evolutes is determined by the material nature of their evolvents. Since *pratiprasava* reverses the determined course of manifestation, it would have to involve some cause other than the material nature of *prakṛti* that would otherwise lead to *prasava* and not *pratiprasava*. Since the *Yoga Sūtras* are written as guides to practice, which suggests

that the practitioner's will can be guided, it stands to reason that the practitioner's own will serves as the efficient cause that redirects the material cause of *prasava* and brings about this reversal. Before the will's role as a self-moving principle can be developed, the concept of evolution should be sketched out in greater detail.

To a contemporary Western audience, this theory of evolution is perplexing. That unmanifest *prakṛti* is the material cause of the gross elements is not particularly perplexing. That process by which unmanifest *prakṛti* evolves into the gross elements (*mahābhūtas*) is. As the Sāṃkhyan metaphysics that Yoga adopts has it, there are twenty-four *tattvas* (literally, "that-ness-es") that play a role in evolution. Unmanifest *prakṛti* evolves into *buddhi*, the part of consciousness (*citta*) that is responsible for much of our higher intelligent function. *Buddhi* further evolves into *ahamkāra*, the aspect of *citta* that constructs our individual sense of subjectivity (literally, "I-maker" or "I-doer"), and which is often translated as "ego." This ego further evolves into a number of evolutes including, among others, *manas*, which is the aspect of *citta* responsible for the apprehension and coordination of sense data, and the *tanmātras* or "subtle elements," which include the experience of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting. That these subtle elements of perception evolve into the gross elements that comprise our objects of perception is what most find perplexing. From a contemporary Western perspective, this seems to put the cart before the horse. It would seem that the object of perception should exist before the experience of perceiving it.

One recent, controversial attempt to make sense of this order of things has been made by Burley, who argues that it is only perplexing if one assumes that evolution produces actual matter. He suggests instead that it should be understood as producing intra-psychic experience only. Burley's view is consonant with more commonplace views of Yogic and Sāṃkhyan metaphysics in that it emphasizes intra-psychic experience. For instance, Edwin Bryant claims that Yoga "is concerned with presenting a psychology of mind and understanding of human consciousness rather than a metaphysics of all manifest reality."<sup>18</sup> Burley and Bryant are agreed that Yoga-Sāṃkhya seeks to make sense of intra-psychic experience and so places an explanatory priority on these experiences. Similarly, Larson argues for an epistemological priority for that experience over the knowledge we have of the objects of that experience, since "the world is not understood in itself apart from human experience."<sup>19</sup> Burley differs from these more commonplace views, however, by denying the existence of the objects of our experience.

In the commonplace view, consciousness itself is taken to be material and can be understood to be real because of its material nature. Since consciousness and the senses that inform it are both taken to be material, it is not so perplexing to assume that the senses could evolve into the objects of sensation. This commonplace view uses the word "matter" as a translation of *prakṛti*. Burley rejects this translation of *prakṛti*, claiming that it makes little sense to talk of material consciousness. He suggests instead that both consciousness and its objects should be understood in terms of experience only: "On my own reading of *prakṛti*'s 'evolution' or manifestation, the manifest principles ought not to be regarded as components of the world at all, but

as components of an experience of the world."<sup>20</sup> Burley's view is controversial not only because it breaks the trend of understanding *prakṛti* and its evolutes as material, but also because it does so by rejecting the traditional commentaries of Vyasa and Vijñānabhikṣu, which claim that Yoga is a realist school counterpoised to the idealism of *Vijñāna* Buddhism, and as such is committed to the extant reality of an external world independent of the *citta*. Burley's anti-realist view is that "we might speak of objects as 'empirically real' without thereby committing ourselves to the view that those objects have formal, spatiotemporal, existence."<sup>21</sup> According to this view, all we can be certain of is that we have perceptions of objects; whether or how these perceptions correspond to actual objects in the external world are questions that need not be answered.

Regardless of whether we take consciousness (*citta*) to be as material as the objects (*mahābhūtas*) of which it is conscious, or we take the objects of consciousness to be as experiential in nature as the consciousness that conceives them, we can make some sense of how the *mahābhūtas* are the final evolute. Before an object can be perceived, there must be extant faculties of perception ready to perceive that object. Before there can be sense perception there must be an extant consciousness to which the faculties of perception belong. Although not immediately intuitive, this last point should resonate with readers of Descartes since something like it underpins his "ego sum, ego existo" argument in *Meditation* II. Before there can be a thought, there must be a thinker.

While this way of looking at things might help rearrange the order of the cart and horse, it does not yet fully explain how *prakṛti* composes consciousness and eventually comes to create the objects of consciousness. To answer this, one must first understand what might be the most important point of distinction between Patañjali and Descartes. Both are dualists of a sort, but while Descartes differentiates *res cogitans* from *res extensa*, consciousness from matter, Patañjali and his Sāṃkhyan forebears include *citta* within *prakṛti*, which in the standard reading, at least, is material. The twenty-four *tattvas* of *prakṛti* are all comprised of the *triguṇa*, the characteristics of inertia, kinesis, and transparency. Since the *citta* is conscious of objects that are inert, kinetic, and transparent, it must have these characteristics as well. To use a Cartesian term to explain a rather un-Cartesian concept, the thoughts and images we have of the material world, which compose the movements of *citta*, have a formal reality that is just as material as the formal reality of the objects of these thoughts and images.<sup>22</sup> The relevant duality for Patañjali, then, is not between consciousness and matter, but between *prakṛti*, which includes the material world and the *citta* that is conscious of it, and pure consciousness, which Patañjali calls *puruṣa*. This pure consciousness is entirely unsullied by *prakṛti*, but is responsible for illuminating or animating material *citta*, which would otherwise be dark and lifeless.<sup>23</sup>

Including the most salient aspects of consciousness among the material also might seem counterintuitive. How can something material produce thought? A virtue of Burley's anti-realist view is that it obviates the need to answer this question by maintaining that consciousness is not material. Realists, on the other hand, must answer the question and do so by maintaining that thoughts are as material as the

consciousness that produces them. Paul Schweizer argues for the intuitiveness of the realist view by noting that it avoids Cartesian dualism's inability to explain the interaction of a mind and matter that are of different kinds. It need not answer questions about how a non-extended mind can move an extended body:<sup>24</sup> "By including the mind in the realm of matter, mental events are granted causal efficacy, and are therefore able to directly initiate bodily motions."<sup>25</sup> No complex account of interaction is required in the Yoga-Sāṃkhya view because mind and matter are of the same kind. Although offered in the service of the realist view, Schweizer's argument could be marshaled for the anti-realist view as well. Whether one takes the commonplace realist view that *citta* and all its evolutes are material, or one takes Burley's view that the *citta* and *mahābhūtas* are both aspects of qualitative experience, both *citta* and its objects are of the same kind.

Even though this sameness in kind of *citta* and its objects resolves Descartes' problem of mind-body interaction, Larson argues that the very same problem reemerges at the level of *puruṣa*'s interaction with *prakṛti*. Rather than having to explain how a non-extended "ghost" could operate within an extended "machine," as Descartes must, Sāṃkhya "refurbishes" the ghost in the form of *puruṣa*, thereby requiring "a dualism between a closed causal system or reductive materialism . . . on the one hand, and non-intentional and contentless consciousness on the other."<sup>26</sup> The question of how *puruṣa* could interact with *prakṛti* remains a puzzle even if *puruṣa* and *citta* are not on different sides of a material/non-material divide. Sāṃkhya and Yoga take *puruṣa* to be radically different from *prakṛti* regardless of whether or not *prakṛti* is material; *puruṣa* is taken to be passive and unchanging while *prakṛti* is taken to be active and changing.

The degree to which Larson's concerns are destructive should not be overstated. The dualism of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* is in some important ways less complicated than that of Descartes. For Descartes, the mind must receive the body's sensations of the world while at the same time commanding the body to move through the world. *Puruṣa*'s interaction with *prakṛti* is mostly one-way. *Puruṣa* is a passive witness that does not directly move *prakṛti*. In fact, its witnessing has no bearing on itself or on how *citta* conceives of or moves through the world. All that this dualism requires is that *puruṣa*'s consciousness flow outward so that it may animate *prakṛti*. Once *prakṛti* is animated, Schweizer's point stands; *citta* takes on its own causal efficacy. It can then operate within its own closed causal system, evolving into faculties of perception needed to perceive the world, and into the organs of action needed to move through the world. Vyasa likens the initial interaction of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* to that between a magnet and iron. Just like the piece of iron that has become magnetized by its proximity to the magnet, the *citta* actualizes the consciousness emitted by *puruṣa*, allowing it to take on the characteristics of *puruṣa*.

The piece of Larson's "ghost-in-the-machine" objection that does need to be resolved for my purposes here, however, is the question of whether some interaction between *puruṣa* and prakṛtic *citta* is required to reverse the material causation of evolution to allow the *citta* to make its way back toward unmanifest *prakṛti* and the pure consciousness of *puruṣa* that lies beyond it. I would like to suggest that there are



two strategies for answering this question. The first denies that any interaction between *citta* and *puruṣa* is required for *citta* to move itself back along the path of *pratiprasava*. This strategy envisages *citta* doing nothing more than continually moving away from its own fluctuations until it is as still, and therefore as pure, as *puruṣa*. This strategy interprets *pratiprasava* as a destructive process in which *citta* becomes less and less like itself, continually diminishing its own cognitive and conative function. The second strategy contends that backing away from its own nature will not by itself lead *citta* to become more like *puruṣa*. It therefore maintains that *citta* does interact with *puruṣa* in order to move itself along the path of *pratiprasava*. It requires us to envisage *citta* deliberately taking *puruṣa*—or its proxy, *prakāśa* (illumination)—as the intended object of its consciousness. Rather than envisaging this process as destructive, the second strategy sees the process of *pratiprasava* as a path of cognitive and conative enhancement.

To be clear, the difference between the two interpretations is not a matter of whether *pratiprasava* requires the cessation of thoughts. Any interpretative strategy that denied the role of cessation in Yoga would have to overlook the very clear textual evidence found in a number of important *sūtras* and their traditional commentaries. Both strategies, therefore, understand the complete cessation of thought to be the goal of Yoga. Moreover, both see the attempt to block out the fluctuations of thought to be a necessary means to achieve that goal. The difference lies in whether the mere blocking out of fluctuations is sufficient to achieve the final goal of permanently bringing about the ceasing of the fluctuations of thought. The first strategy claims that it is, the second that it is not.

Taking a look at how the two strategies would interpret *YS* I.18 should help to bring their difference into clearer focus. This *sūtra* describes *asamprajñāta samādhi*, the final stage of *samādhi* at which no object of support is needed to keep the mind from fluctuating. Patañjali explains that this stage is “*virāma-pratyābhīyāsa*.” A fairly literal translation of this phrase reads “preceded by the practice of cessation of modifications (knowledge).”<sup>27</sup> This makes it clear that cessation is necessary to achieve this final stage. Bryant seems to deploy something like the first interpretative strategy when he translates this *sūtra* less literally as “The other *samādhi* [*asamprajñāta-samādhi*] is preceded by cultivating the determination to terminate all thoughts.”<sup>28</sup> Both of these translations make clear that the practice of cessation is a necessary condition for bringing about *asamprajñāta-samādhi*. By emphasizing the determination to terminate all thoughts, however, Bryant makes an additional claim about the object of *citta*’s intention as it transitions to this final stage: it intends nothing more than shutting down its own function. The more literal translation leaves open the question of what *citta* is intending as it makes this final transition, if it is intending anything at all. I think Bryant is correct to assume that the *citta* must be intending something since it must be its own motive cause. I wish to suggest, however, that the second interpretative strategy gives us a way to posit a different intention for *citta*.

The first strategy requires us to believe that the *citta* deliberately intends to terminate all thought by eradicating the faculty of thinking. In short, the *citta* willfully

terminates its own cognitive and conative function. Complete destruction of the thinking and willing apparatus is required, in the first strategy, in order for the cessation of the fluctuations of thought to be permanent. While it might not be logically impossible, it is somewhat incoherent to imagine that *citta* deploys its nature as a thinking, willing thing to eradicate that very nature. Perhaps what is most incoherent about this interpretation is that it presumes that a thought alone can be sufficient to terminate the faculty of thinking. The second strategy concedes that an intention to terminate the fluctuations of thought (though not thought itself) precedes the final stage of *samādhi*, but it denies that this intention is sufficient. Moreover, it denies that the cessation of the fluctuations of thought requires the eradication of the faculty of thought or the destruction of the thinking apparatus. Rather, it imagines *citta*'s intentional apprehension of *puruṣa* to be so resounding that it sustains *citta* in a permanent state of suspended animation. *Citta* retains its nature as an object-laden consciousness, but pure consciousness occupies the position of the object so firmly that no prakṛtic object could come to occupy it. Because *puruṣa* omnisciently holds all possible objects of thought simultaneously, it does not fluctuate.<sup>29</sup> As long as the pure consciousness of *puruṣa* perfectly occupies *citta*'s consciousness, it also will not fluctuate.

Interestingly, I find Vijñānabhikṣu's argument against a line of thought that resembles the second interpretation of YS I.18 to provide us with some of the best justification for adopting the second interpretation. He writes, "The practice of one-pointedness of the mind in any support up to *puruṣa* cannot be the direct cause in (the attainment of) *asamprañāta*, as the modification directed toward a support is not opposed to [*samprañāta samādhi*]." <sup>30</sup> Here, he insists that a one-pointed apprehension of *puruṣa* could not bring about a transition from *samprañāta samādhi* because something other than a one-pointed apprehension is needed to transition away from one-pointed apprehensions. Implied in his argument is the claim that something contrary to a state of mind is needed to eradicate that state of mind. By these lights, the intention to terminate thought, which is after all a thought in itself, could not by itself eradicate thought. Since the second interpretative strategy denies that thought need be eradicated, it can surmount this objection so long as it can explain how something contrary to *samprañāta samādhi* could effect a transition away from it.

To settle this concern, the second interpretative strategy can reply that *puruṣa*'s light is different in kind from prakṛtic objects of consciousness and so can oppose them. *Asamprañāta samādhi* should be understood as not lacking all support, but lacking only the type of prakṛtic support that *citta* can give itself. Interestingly, Patañjali does not use the term *asamprañāta*. He only writes of a type of *samādhi* that is different from *samprañāta*, and does not specify what makes it different. It is Vyasa who uses the negation of *samprañāta* to refer to this other *samādhi*, and implies that it must be without support. But even Vyasa concedes that in this state it only appears that the *citta* is non-existent. This implies that it is not eradicated, but rather remains well-enough unsullied by prakṛtic supports to allow the light of *puruṣa* to shine through it. I contend that Vyasa's commentary leaves it open enough to allow an

interpretation wherein it is *citta*'s apprehension of the light of *puruṣa* that enables a permanent absence of prakṛtic support.

Since the second interpretative strategy maintains that *citta* does not supply itself with all of the resources needed to cause the fluctuations of consciousness to cease, it must account for how *citta* comes to gain access to these resources. I aim to provide that account in the next two sections by first examining the way in which the practitioner initially gains access to these resources through *prāṇāyāma*, and then by comparing that access to the clear and distinct perception discussed by Descartes in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Since the second-interpretative strategy assumes that these resources are provided, in part, by *puruṣa*'s light, it must be sensitive to "ghost-in-the-machine" concerns about the interaction between *citta* and *puruṣa*. That *citta* can receive *puruṣa*'s light is just a stipulation of Sāṃkhyan metaphysics, a stipulation that Yoga accepts. Whether this stipulation is damning to the Yoga-Sāṃkhya system as a whole is a question that is beyond the scope of this essay. While I might not be able to allay all concerns about *citta*'s interaction with *puruṣa*, I do aim to show that Yoga is better equipped than *Sāṃkhya* to account for this interaction because of its emphasis on revealed truth through practice.

### 3. Sūkṣma and the Path toward Epistemic Enhancement

Patañjali characterizes *prāṇāyāma* as an external limb (*bahirāṅga*) of yogic practice. This characterization is apt, as *prāṇāyāma* is first and foremost a discipline that regulates the body's respiratory function. As an external practice, it is concerned with the gross. The body is comprised of gross elements and it breathes by moving the gross element of wind through its organs of respiration. Nevertheless, this practice of manipulating the gross materiality of one's breath prepares one's mind for the internal meditative practice that begins with *dhāraṇā* and ends with *samādhi* (*YS II.53*). How does it do this? The answer to this question will depend on which of the two above-mentioned strategies we deploy for understanding the cause of *pratīprasava*. The first strategy requires us to envisage *prāṇāyāma* solely as a tool for obstructing material consciousness. The second strategy requires us to envisage the subtlety experienced in *prāṇāyāma* as a type of signpost that directs the *citta* inward, along the path of *pratīprasava*.

In line with the first strategy, the late world-renowned guru B.K.S. Iyengar explains in his commentary on the *Yoga Sūtras* that learning to restrain the breath prepares the practitioner to restrain the emergence of rising thoughts that would otherwise dislodge the consciousness from its meditational support. "The pauses between breaths, which take place after inhalation and exhalation[,] are akin to the intervals between each rising and restraining thought. The mutation of breath and mutation of consciousness are therefore identical, as both are moments of void in which a sense of emptiness is felt."<sup>31</sup> As Iyengar has it, the role of *prāṇāyāma* in progressing the mind toward the higher, meditative stages of yogic practice is one of turning away and foreclosing; it begins to shut out the fluctuations of thought. At any time, a rising thought can cause the mind to veer off the path of *pratīprasava*. It is as

if *prāṇāyāma* constrains one's thought by setting up roadblocks that shut off the roads that break away from one's journey back toward *puruṣa*. Seeing *prāṇāyāma*'s purpose in this way is consonant with the purpose of yogic practice more generally as it is explained in *YS* 1.2–3. Here Patañjali tells us that *yoga* is the cessation of the fluctuations of consciousness, whereby the seer abides in his own true nature. As the material consciousness continually becomes attracted to new objects, it fluctuates. By turning away from the objects of material consciousness, one can transform one's consciousness to be more like the objectless consciousness of *puruṣa*.

One benefit of this first strategy for understanding *prāṇāyāma* and its role in *pratiprasava* is that it can resolve one type of “ghost-in-the-machine” concern. At the heart of this concern lies the thought that *puruṣa*'s pure consciousness is entirely different in kind from *citta*'s object-oriented, intentional consciousness. If *pratiprasava* requires *citta* to take as its goal the achievement of *puruṣa*'s pure consciousness, as the second strategy contends it must, then we have to explain how *citta* could take the means to an end of which it does not (and cannot) conceive. The first strategy obviates the need to explain this because it does not require *citta* to intentionally become more like *puruṣa*. *Citta* must only intentionally become less like itself, requiring it to understand only its own nature as an object-laden and fluctuating consciousness.

If the practitioner accepts this way of understanding, however, he or she must also face an apparent incoherence between the means to and the end of Yoga: it is not clear whether one can thoughtfully and willfully eradicate thought and will. In the face of such an incoherence, it is uncertain whether a practitioner could have the faith (*śraddhā*) to continue, the faith that Patañjali, in *YS* 1.20, claims is needed for success in *samādhi*. If success is to be achieved, then the practitioner must imagine some other cause of the eradication of his or her own thought and will. Since the first strategy aims to identify the cause of *citta*'s eradication, it would appear that it must locate that cause outside *citta*'s prakṛtic nature. The only option, therefore, would be to posit *puruṣa*, or perhaps *Īśvara*, which in *YS* 1.24 Patañjali calls a special *puruṣa*, as that cause. This reading is suggested by Bryant, who claims that “the goal of *yoga* can be attained by the grace of God, *Īśvara*.”<sup>32</sup> The problem with this reading, however, is that it envisages something utterly unprakṛtic moving something prakṛtic, and thereby re-incites ghost-in-the-machine concerns.

The second strategy envisages a more coherent goal than an intentional eradication of cognitive and conative function. It envisages the end of Yoga to obtain when the practitioner intentionally apprehends the light of pure consciousness. This strategy contends that merely turning away from its own nature does not entail that *citta* will move in the right direction. In order to continue along the path of *pratiprasava*, *citta* must not only transition away from a scattered consciousness, it must also transition toward a one-pointed consciousness that becomes increasingly more subtle. As explained above, this requires *citta* to select increasingly more subtle objects of meditation. This, in turn, requires that *citta* retain enough of its cognitive function to be able to discern which objects are indeed subtle, and enough of its conative function to willfully fixate on these objects. The second strategy, therefore, understands

*prāṇāyāma* not just as a device for shutting down the distractions of fluctuating consciousness, but as a device for searching out pure consciousness. It assumes a more robust role for the conative function of *citta* by envisaging an intentional effort on the part of *citta* in making itself more like *puruṣa*. Since this strategy assumes that *puruṣa*—or its proxy, the light of pure consciousness—can be taken as the object of *citta*'s intention, it also assumes that pure consciousness—or its proxy—can be apprehended by *citta*. Furthermore, it assumes that *citta*'s freedom to apprehend pure consciousness can be understood in positive terms as a freedom to exercise its own best nature and not just in negative terms as a freedom from its nature as a fluctuating consciousness.

Patañjali provides only five *sūtras* that discuss *prāṇāyāma* directly. In YS II.50, he describes the practice of *prāṇāyāma*, explaining that it consists of external, internal, and restrained movements, which are “drawn out and subtle in accordance to place, time, and number.” In short, *prāṇāyāma* regulates cycles of inhalation, exhalation, and retention of breath. These cycles are practiced with attention to the space the breath inhabits as it moves through the organs of respiration, the duration of the breath and its retention, and the number of cycles taken. By breathing in this way, Patañjali tells us, the breath becomes subtle (*sūkṣma*). It might seem that there is not much to this ascription of subtlety, that Patañjali is simply explaining the nuances of breath. This would be a mistake. The word *sūkṣma* is a technical term that Patañjali adopts from Sāṃhkyan metaphysics. He uses it only six other times in the *Yoga Sūtras* (I.44, I.45, II.10, III.25, III.44, and IV.13), and in all these instances it refers to the quality by which the *tattvas* are arranged on the Sāṃhkyan evolutionary hierarchy. For instance, I.45 tells us, “the subtle nature of things extends all the way up to [unmanifest] *prakṛti*.” The unmanifest (*aliṅga*) *prakṛti* referred to here is the first evolver from which all the other *tattvas* evolve. It is also the closest to *puruṣa*, containing the *guṇas* only in latent form. In YS II.10, Patañjali uses *sūkṣma* in relation to *pratiprasava* itself, reminding the reader that involution is a process of augmenting subtlety.

Even though Patañjali uses the word *sūkṣma* three times before he uses it to describe *prāṇāyāma* (two of which explain the progression of *samādhi*), one must remember that the early portions of the YS provide advanced metaphysical explanation for the initiate. By contrast, the eight-limbed practice to which *prāṇāyāma* belongs is meant to provide foundational steps for the novice. *Prāṇāyāma* is the first of these steps to be associated with *sūkṣma*, which suggests that it is through the practice of *prāṇāyāma* that the practitioner first experiences subtlety. In YS II.50, Patañjali makes clear *that* the experience of subtlety is worth the practitioner's attention. In YS II.52, he makes clear *why* this is so. Here he explains that through *prāṇāyāma* “the covering of illumination is weakened.” Illumination (*prakāśa*) is a synonym for *sattva*.<sup>33</sup> It is through its relationship to the *sattvoguṇa* that many scholars analyze the concept of *sūkṣma*. Anima Sen Gupta expresses this relationship elegantly when she notes that “subtlety can be generated in a category merely by increasing its *sattvoguṇa*.”<sup>34</sup> Some of these analyses emphasize the qualitative

nature of subtlety and some do not. The second interpretative strategy can deploy either analysis.

Sen Gupta, for one, analyzes subtlety in terms of its qualitative nature. More precisely, she understands *sūkṣma* in two distinct but related ways: as a substance and as quality. Generally speaking, qualities are ascribed to substances. Sāṃkhya, however, goes one step further and sees the relationship between qualities and substances not as one of ascription, but rather as one of identity. Sen Gupta explains, “Since there is *abheda* (non-difference) between substances and quality, [*guṇas*] are also substances.”<sup>35</sup> Mircea Eliade subscribes to this “dual nature” view of the *guṇas* as well. Rather than use the labels substance and quality, however, he explains that the *guṇas* are at once both objective and subjective: “objective, since they constitute the phenomena of the external world,” but also “subjective, because they support, nourish and condition psychomental life.”<sup>36</sup> With this view of the *guṇas*, *sūkṣma* can also be understood in two ways: as an increase of sattvic substance and as an increase in the quality of illumination possessed by a mental state saturated with *sattva*.

In his anti-realist rendering of the Yoga-Sāṃkhya system, Burley rejects the analysis of *sūkṣma* as a substance. Because he denies a material ontological status to the *guṇas*, he approaches his analysis of the *guṇas* from an epistemological angle. As he has it, a more precise way of expressing the notion that increasing *sattva* increases *sūkṣma* is to say, “by means of the cultivation of the quality of [*sattva*] . . . increasingly difficult to comprehend (and hence ‘subtle’) aspects of the psychosensory apparatus are revealed to consciousness.”<sup>37</sup> By taking this angle, he not only rejects the conception of *sattva* as substance, but also shifts focus away from a qualitative analysis of subtlety. The analysis he provides still has both a subjective and an objective component, but is more quantitative rather than qualitative. He claims that *sūkṣma* “should be taken primarily to indicate an object’s degree of accessibility to a knower,”<sup>38</sup> In this analysis, an object’s subtlety is a measure of epistemic accessibility. Correspondingly, a state of consciousness’ subtlety is a measure of how well it grasps a subtle object. Depending on whether one places more emphasis on the subjective or the objective component of Burley’s analysis, *sūkṣma* can be taken to be either a measure of how well one perceives an obscure object or a measure of the object’s obscurity itself.

Burley’s quantitative analysis of *sūkṣma* would depict *pratīprasava* as a process of coming to know, in which *prāṇāyāma* moves the practitioner along by enabling some type of epistemic enhancement. Qualitative analyses, like Sen Gupta’s, can remain consistent with Burley’s quantitative analysis so long as the qualities described belong to psychomental states and not material substances. Regardless of whether we take a qualitative or a quantitative analysis of *sūkṣma*, I would like to suggest that it is during *prāṇāyāma* that a practitioner first apprehends it. Having apprehended it allows him or her to advance in his or her practice, and provides the faith with which to continue. In this reading of *YS* II.50 and 52, *prāṇāyāma* not only introduces the practitioner to the experience of subtlety, it also points the way toward the apprehension of *puruṣa* (or the fact of its disunion with *prakṛti*). Far from being a

device for shutting down and blocking out epistemic activity, it enables more rarefied epistemic states.

#### 4. *Sūkṣma and the Clear and Distinct Light*

To illustrate the way that the second strategy interprets the role that subtlety plays in *pratiprasava*, I will compare it to the role that the clear and distinct light plays in Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Both Patañjali and Descartes deploy the metaphor of light to describe how the apprehension of this light advances the meditator along the path of meditation. Moreover, as I will later demonstrate, just as *sūkṣma* lends itself to two types of analysis, one that emphasizes its qualitative nature and one that does not, so, too, does the clear and distinct light. Because they identify a qualitative experience that supervenes on certainty, qualitative analyses leave open the possibility of understanding the apprehension of the clear and distinct light as a piece of evidence that warrants assent to a belief. Charles Larmore calls such analyses "normative theories of assent" because they maintain that "we should assent to a proposition we recognize as evident because we can understand it to be in accord with a norm of rationality." He contrasts these theories to "psychologistic theories of assent," which maintain that "propositions which we recognize as evident are ones to which we cannot help but assent."<sup>39</sup> Psychologistic analyses of clear and distinct perception do not emphasize the qualities that are perceived so much as they emphasize the nature of perception and its relation to belief formation. Antonia LoLordo notes that in this type of analysis, "clarity and distinctness need no mark beyond the compulsion to believe."<sup>40</sup> Because *sūkṣma* lends itself to two types of analyses, plausible comparisons can be made to either normative or psychologistic analyses of clear and distinct perception. I will lay out both sets of comparisons, but ultimately suggest that psychologistic analyses accommodate a compatibilism between free will and determinism that is more in line with yogic conceptions of causation.

Of course, any comparison of Patañjali to Descartes should not proceed too quickly. On first approximation, these two figures seem worlds apart. As mentioned above, the two operate with profoundly different ontologies of consciousness. For Descartes, there is no consciousness beyond the mind, so any epistemic progress that is made must happen at the level of that mind. This difference seems starker if one interprets the point of Yoga in line with the first interpretative strategy. On this interpretation, *pratiprasava* proceeds solely by way of ceasing the fluctuations of the mind (*citta*) until the intentional, object-laden nature of that mind is eradicated. Because Yoga maintains the existence of a *puruṣa* situated beyond the mind, an eradication of the mind is not nihilistic. For Descartes, it would be. Far from ceasing the fluctuations of thought, Descartes' point in the *Meditations* is to determine which thoughts are certain enough to accept. The second interpretative strategy reconceptualizes the point of Yoga in a way that makes possible instructive comparisons to Descartes. In this interpretation, the point of Yoga is not to eradicate the mind, but to enhance it by training it to focus on increasingly more subtle objects; epistemic enhancement

happens at the level of the mind and to the mind. The second strategy does not discount the importance of ceasing the fluctuations of consciousness; rather it sees that cessation as a prerequisite for fully apprehending pure consciousness.

Although Descartes does not wish to free himself from the fluctuations of thought, he does wish to free himself from false and uncertain thoughts. To do this, he proceeds from a radically skeptical position, withholding his assent first from empirical beliefs, since senses deceive, and finally from all belief, since he cannot be certain that these beliefs were not the product of a deceitful God. His point in doing this is to clear his mind of all presupposition and to determine what really can be known with certainty. To begin anew, taking nothing for certain, he needs an Archimedean point from which to rebuild his set of beliefs. He takes as this point the *cogito*, the belief that he is an extant thinking being. "So after considering everything very thoroughly, I must finally conclude the proposition, *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind."<sup>41</sup> Such a belief, he maintains, requires no sense perception to be known and so could not be the product of sense deception. Moreover, even if there were a deceiving God who put that belief in his mind, there would still need to be a mind—a thinking thing—to serve as the locus of that false belief. With this belief in himself secure, the meditator can begin to rebuild his set of beliefs upon it.

In order to rebuild, Descartes' meditator evaluates the process by which he comes to believe in his own existence to see whether this process can be replicated. Interestingly, Descartes' meditator does not reach this belief by way of inference. Since he is aware that a conclusion can be reached by way of false inferences, Descartes is careful in the *Meditations* to depict the belief in his own existence as the spontaneous apprehension of a truth as opposed to the conclusion of an inference, as he does in the *Discourse on the Method* and the *Principles of Philosophy*, where he more readily wields an ego, claiming, "I am, therefore, I exist."<sup>42</sup> Seeing that this experience alone is enough to assent to one belief, he concludes that other instances of this experience would be sufficient to account for other beliefs. In the *Third Meditation*, he asserts:

I am certain that I am a thinking thing. Do I not therefore also know what is required for my being certain about anything? In this first item of knowledge there is simply a clear and distinct perception of what I am asserting; this would not be enough to make me certain of the truth of the matter if it could ever turn out that something which I perceived with such clarity and distinctness was false. So I now seem to be able to lay down as a general rule that whatever I perceive very clearly and distinctly is true.<sup>43</sup>

This clear and distinct perception or "light of reason" or "light of nature" as he refers to it in the *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* and the *Principles of Philosophy*, respectively, serves as an exemplar of certitude that advances the meditator toward gradual epistemic enhancement.

Once the Cartesian meditator apprehends the existence of a perfectly benevolent God with the same clear and distinct light, he can rest assured that he is not being deceived. With no firm reason to reject other beliefs, the meditator can look for



proper justification with which to warrant other beliefs. As long as the meditator refrains from assenting to unwarranted belief, Descartes claims, he attains an infallibility that, although not omniscient, still resembles God's omniscience since it is not susceptible to deception. The meditator approaches this godly state by first making a distinction between the intellect and the will. Descartes claims that the source of all error is the conflation of these two faculties: "When I look more closely at myself and inquire into the nature of my errors . . . I notice that they depend on two concurrent causes, namely on the faculty of knowledge which is in me, and on the faculty of choice or freedom of the will; that is they depend on both the intellect and will simultaneously."<sup>44</sup>

The first step in overcoming this ignorance is in distinguishing intellect from will and recognizing the limits of the intellect: "Now all that the intellect does is to enable me to perceive the ideas which are subjects for possible judgment; and when regarded in this light, it turns out to contain no error in the proper sense of the term."<sup>45</sup> Once this distinction is made, the meditator can appreciate the limitlessness of his will: "It is only the will or freedom of choice, which I experience within me to be so great that the idea of any greater faculty is beyond my grasp; so much so that it is above all in virtue of the will that I understand myself to bear in some way the image and likeness of God."<sup>46</sup>

The will can indeed go astray, but only when it assents to a perception that is less than clear and distinct. "If, however, I simply refrain from making a judgment in cases where I do not perceive the truth with sufficient clarity and distinctness, then it is clear that I am behaving correctly and avoiding error."<sup>47</sup> The will acts on its own best nature only when it assents to the clear and distinct light.

The faculty of will that Descartes associates with godly infallibility is a freedom of spontaneity, which he distinguishes from freedom of indifference. Anthony Kenny explains that with freedom of indifference "we are free in doing something if and only if it is in our power not to do it," and that with freedom of spontaneity "we are free in doing something if and only if we do it because we want to."<sup>48</sup> Coming from the Latin *sponte*, spontaneity is the quality of acting on one's own accord. By placing emphasis on the way in which acting on one's own accord frees one to do what one wants, Kenny highlights the positive aspect of freedom of spontaneity. It can also be understood to contain a negative aspect. Vere Chappell does just this when he describes spontaneity as an absence of external influence. He writes, "an action is spontaneous if it is performed by its agent entirely on his own, without being forced or helped or affected by any external factor, or by anything other than his very self."<sup>49</sup> Chappell, however, also explains that Descartes' notion of spontaneity must be compatible with Descartes' position that our actions are determined by our nature as God's creations. This explanation is consistent with "occasionalist" readings of Descartes, which claim that God is the only real cause of anything.<sup>50</sup> Following to this reading, a spontaneous action happens suddenly when the will is allowed to act on its God-given nature. Through the practice of skeptical meditation, one can free one's will of uncertainty and thereby indirectly free it to assent only to clear and distinct ideas, as its God-given and best nature compels it to. One's assent is

the indirect result of one's actions in the sense that it is not the direct result of inference, but rather the indirect result of practices that create conditions conducive to assent.

By my comparison with Descartes, I do not mean to offer an occasionalist reading of the *Yoga Sūtras*. As I have already argued, readings that posit *Īśvara's* grace as the cause of *citta's* progress in *pratiprasava* are problematic. By my comparison, I do mean to suggest that the Yoga practitioner indirectly causes his or her *citta* freely and spontaneously to apprehend *sūkṣma* at each preliminary stage of *pratiprasava* until it finally apprehends pure consciousness. By ceasing the fluctuations of thought and creating conditions conducive for apprehension, the practitioner indirectly allows his or her *citta* to act on its own best nature as a medium through which pure consciousness can flow. I leave it open from where *citta* derives its best nature.

Even if occasionalism is stripped out of the comparison between spontaneously assenting to the clear and distinct light and spontaneously apprehending the light of *puruṣa*, there remains the question of whether the latter ought to be compatible with determinism in the same way that the former is. If we operate with a qualitative analysis of *sūkṣma* like Sen Gupta's, then it is not clear that *citta's* spontaneous apprehension of *puruṣa* needs to be understood as being determined. This is to say that when the practitioner first experiences the subtlety of breath in *prāṇāyāma*, he or she experiences a particular quality that he or she later recognizes in potential objects of meditation, allowing him or her to choose them as meditational supports. This understanding of the practitioner's apprehension of *puruṣa* is in line with normative analyses of clear and distinct perception that are warranted by passages from Descartes' *Meditations* that suggest that the *Meditator* has a choice in whether he assents to a proposition when he sees it clearly and distinctly, passages like the one quoted above in which the meditator takes as a general rule the proposition that whatever he sees clearly and distinctly is true.<sup>51</sup> Rules of rationality should be followed, but one can refrain from following them. Cartesian scholars like Larmore, LoLordo, and Chappell take passages like this less literally when they insist that spontaneity is compelled.

While an agent is not directly the cause of a compelled action, he or she can be the indirect cause of it. LoLordo explains that the Cartesian meditator can indirectly cause his own assent to the clear and distinct light through skeptical practice, even if that assent is ultimately compelled. "Those who have freed their intellect will never disagree about what is clearly and distinctly perceived." Since her interpretation of clarity and distinctness focuses on the degree to which a proposition is perceived rather than on the qualities perceived by the agent, it is more in line with Burley's analysis of *sūkṣma*. Following her interpretation, meditators cannot but assent to a proposition whenever they perceive it in the clear and distinct light. The second interpretative strategy that I have been defending can explain the practitioner's progress in *pratiprasava* along similar lines. Whenever a practitioner apprehends the greater subtlety of increasingly more obscure psychomental states, he cannot but fixate on them. According to this reading, both the spontaneous apprehension of the

clear and distinct light and the spontaneous apprehension of subtlety are the result of a freedom from the fluctuations of thought. Before the Cartesian meditator assents to the correct belief, his attention oscillates between true belief and other competing beliefs. Once he has assented, his mind becomes fixed on the correct belief alone. He has been liberated from uncertainty.<sup>52</sup> This freedom, however, is not merely a negative freedom or a “freedom from,” but is also a positive freedom to exercise one’s will in assenting only to certain beliefs while remaining agnostic on uncertain beliefs.

This comparison, which highlights the psychologistic aspect of assent and the indirect role that the meditator plays, can be rendered more consistent with types of causation discussed in the *Yoga Sūtras*. Since I have identified *citta* as the cause of its own soteriological apprehension of pure consciousness, it is worth considering what type of cause it is. Patañjali identifies two types of causation: material and efficient (*nimitta*). He discusses these most explicitly in YS IV.2–3, where he explains the causes of rebirth. Here, he identifies *prakṛti* as the material cause because it is the fructification of prakṛtic *saṃskāras* that largely determine the life into which one is born. One does, however, have some control over how one responds to these *saṃskāras*. One can react in accordance with or contrary to one’s duty (*dharma*). Vyasa identifies *dharma* and *adharma* as efficient causes in his commentary on YS IV.3. Similar to Descartes’ position that the meditator is only the indirect cause of his will’s spontaneous assent to the clear and distinct light, Patañjali’s own remarks in this *sūtra* reveal the indirect way in which efficient causation operates. While Descartes maintains that the meditator’s skeptical practices create conditions under which the will cannot but suddenly act on its own accord, Patañjali explains that an efficient cause does not impel a material cause into action; rather, it is more like a farmer who changes the banks of an irrigation ditch so that water, on its own accord, can find its own level. Presuming that the same relationship of material and efficient causation applies to the stages of *pratiprasava*, we can conjecture that *citta*’s deliberate attempt to cease the fluctuations of consciousness redirects the course of evolution and enables the *citta* spontaneously to apprehend pure consciousness rather than attach to *prakṛti*.

In addition to these parallel notions of free will and indirect causation, the second interpretative strategy that I have been defending can draw interesting parallels to Descartes’ understanding of the sources of error and the role that the clear and distinct light can play in overcoming that error. In short, the clear and distinct light first apprehended in the *cogito* orients the Cartesian meditator from within his radical skepticism, and points the way toward an enhanced epistemic state that resembles God’s infallibility. Similarly, the subtlety first experienced in *prāṇāyāma* orients the yogic meditator from within his or her radical detachment, and directs him or her toward an enhanced epistemic state that resembles *puruṣa*’s omniscience.<sup>53</sup> According to Patañjali the source of error is a type of conflation as well, in particular the conflation of *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*. He calls it *avidyā* and defines it in YS II.4: “[*Avidyā*] is the notion that takes the self [*puruṣa*], which is joyful, pure, and eternal, to be the nonself [*prakṛti*], which is painful, unclean, and temporary.” True freedom, for Patañ-

jali, is what he calls *kaivalya*. Following the first interpretative strategy, *kaivalya* can be understood only as a negative freedom that belongs to *puruṣa* after *citta* has been eradicated. But if *puruṣa* is immutable, then it makes little sense to speak of it as becoming liberated, for two reasons: it would never have been enslaved, and it would not be able to undergo change. The second interpretative strategy, more sensibly, attributes *kaivalya* to *citta*, which can and does undergo change. In *kaivalya*, *citta* is not only freed from its fluctuations; it is also free to act on its own best nature as an uncorrupted medium through which *puruṣa*'s consciousness can flow.

To approach this state of independence, the meditator must first be able intellectually to distinguish *puruṣa* from *prakṛti*. Patañjali calls the discernment by which the meditator makes this distinction *viveka* and in YS III.54 claims, "knowledge born of discrimination is a liberator." In III.55, he elaborates: "When the purity of the intellect is equal to that of *puruṣa*, *kaivalya* liberation ensues." Although it is not by limiting the intellect and expanding the will in precisely the same way that Descartes imagines, Patañjali does imagine that the yogic meditator can be most free only after he overcomes the ignorance born of conflation and identifies with the aspect of himself that is most godly. Strictly speaking, as Patañjali understands it, *puruṣa* is not God. Each individual has his or her own *puruṣa*. *Īśvara*, however, is a special *puruṣa* that is untouched by all things *prakṛtic*.<sup>54</sup> When the meditator's *citta* becomes increasingly freer from its fluctuations, it becomes increasingly freer to apprehend the subtlety that makes it increasingly more like *puruṣa*. The second interpretative strategy maintains that becoming more like *puruṣa* requires the *citta* not only to cease its own fluctuations by detaching as much as possible from the objects in the material world, but also to respond properly to the guiding light of subtlety. The first interpretative strategy can account for how the *citta* becomes free from its debased nature as a fluctuating consciousness, but cannot account for how *citta* is free to become more like *puruṣa*.

The second interpretative strategy maintains that *citta* becomes more like *puruṣa* by apprehending increasingly more subtle objects until it ultimately apprehends *puruṣa* itself. Because it maintains that *citta* ultimately apprehends a pure (omniscient and unfluctuating) consciousness that is utterly unlike it, it must understand this apprehension, and the apprehension of subtlety that precedes it, to be unlike ordinary ways of coming to know. In this way, it is also like Descartes' conception of non-inferential apprehension. Along with perception (*pratyakṣa*) and testimony (*āgama*), Yoga recognizes inference (*anumāna*) as a form of correct knowledge (*pramāṇa*). This knowledge is adequate for learning about the *prakṛtic* world, but only obstructs epistemic access to *puruṣa* or its illumination. Departing from Sāṃkhya, Yoga considers *pramāṇa* among the fluctuations of thought that need to be ceased in order to apprehend the truth of *puruṣa*'s existence and its disunion with *prakṛti*.

Sāṃkhya, on the other hand, maintains that inference can yield knowledge of these truths. In fact, Sāṃkhya recognizes three types of inference.<sup>55</sup> Through *pūrvavat*, one can infer the existence of some phenomenon's existence without

witnessing it directly so long as one has, in the past, witnessed some sign or feature of that phenomenon in conjunction with the phenomenon itself, and now witnesses that sign or feature directly. The standard example of this is inferring that there is fire from seeing smoke in the present and having seen smoke and fire conjoined in the past. Through *śesavat* one infers universal claims from a particular instance, for example seeing smoke accompany fire once and inferring that it will always do so. Through *sāmānyatodṛṣṭa*, one can infer, by way of analogy, knowledge of objects unseen from seen objects that are presumed to be similar. Anything about the objective world that cannot be witnessed directly or inferred can be learned through testimony from one who remembers having seen it (*smṛti*), or from one who has heard about it in the revealed truth of the scripture (*śruti*).

While Sāṃkhya maintains that these ways of coming to know can reveal all forms of knowledge, Yoga denies they can reveal the truth about *puruṣa* and its disunion with *prakṛti*. The two methods that might come closest are the *sāmānyatodṛṣṭa* form of inference and the *śruti* form of testimony, but even these fail (YS I.49). Patañjali and his commentators use a number of analogies (light, magnets, mirrors, and crystals, to name just a few) to attempt to describe pure consciousness. At a point, analogies break down, and we are left wondering what pure consciousness is really like. It is unlike anything else and so can only be understood by experiencing it firsthand through practice. Certainly descriptions of pure consciousness can be found in scriptural texts, but here it can only be described in words, and words fail. At best, these texts can be taken as proof that pure consciousness exists, but not proof of what pure consciousness is like. To overcome the spiritual ignorance (*avidyā*) that confuses *puruṣa* for *prakṛti*, the Yoga practitioner must not merely know that *puruṣa* exists, but must also understand what it is like so as not to confuse it with *citta*. Any access to pure consciousness, therefore, must come from spontaneous apprehension experienced in practice.

If the second interpretative strategy has it right, this apprehension happens gradually as the practitioner experiences the increased subtlety of each stage of *pratiprasava*. At each stage, *citta* cannot but apprehend the subtlety of its new support so long as it continually ceases its own fluctuations. Though not the direct result of inference, as Sāṃkhya would have it, salvific progress is the indirect result of practice. Once being initiated to subtlety in the early stage of *prāṇāyāma*, the practitioner cannot help but spontaneously apprehend increasingly more subtle supports wherever he or she encounters them. This account of the apprehension of subtlety through practice might not resolve all ghost-in-the-machine concerns about *citta*'s ability to interact with *puruṣa*. Nevertheless, it goes some distance filling in lacunae left by Sāṃkhya's account of knowledge by *pramāṇa* alone.

### 5. Conclusions and Remainders

It should already be clear that the second strategy reserves a more robust role for the will than does the first strategy. As opposed to the first strategy, which allows the will to be active only to the point where it must willfully eradicate itself, the second

strategy allows the will to be active up to and including the point where *citta* spontaneously apprehends pure consciousness. At that point, *citta* is not dissolved so much as it is freed from all of its fluctuations so that it loses its nature as a fluctuating consciousness. Without this distortion, *citta* takes on a new nature. As is the case with Descartes' freedom of spontaneity, negative freedom from uncertainty enables a type of positive freedom. For Descartes, the will experiences a positive freedom to act on its own best nature as a faculty that only assents in the face of certainty. For the second strategy, *citta* experiences its own best nature as a medium through which pure consciousness can flow. Both of these positive freedoms are epistemic enhancements.

Some might object that the role reserved by the second interpretative strategy for the will and its freedom is too robust to fit a classical Indian context. If the second strategy's only motive for deploying a conception of free will is to impose a modern Western ideal where it has no context, then it is a strategy better not pursued. I would like to suggest, however, that some questions posed by the second strategy about the will's freedom were questions found puzzling by at least some Indian perspectives contemporaneous with Yoga and Sāṃkhya. Recent work has highlighted the degree to which agency and free will are of concern to classical Indian philosophy. Matthew Dasti has newly analyzed the way in which the Nyāyaikas' concern for the topic led them to object to the stark way in which Sāṃkhya distinguished *puruṣa* from *prakṛti*. One such objection argues that "the Sāṃkhya divorce between cognition (a property of the *antakarana* [or *citta*]) and consciousness (a property of the self [or *puruṣa*]) is unstable. To be conscious requires that one has the capacity to undergo cognition, which ultimately entails being a cognitive agent."<sup>56</sup> In this objection, we see a precursor of Larson's ghost-in-the-machine concern about the interaction of two entities purported to be of different kinds. Nyāya locates the source of their concern in the Sāṃkhya conception of *puruṣa*. As Nyāya has it, Sāṃkhya requires *puruṣa* to be not only lame, but blind and mute as well. Sight requires not only the apprehension of images, but also the ability to attach concepts to those images in order to make sense of what one is seeing. Even if *puruṣa* were active enough to conceptualize the world around it, which Sāṃkhya denies, it still could not provide direction to *citta*.

I mention Nyāya's objection in order to show that questions of agency were of concern to Patañjali's contemporaries. It is worth mentioning, however, that my analysis above has already gone some distance in showing how Yoga, if not Sāṃkhya, can surmount Nyāya's objection. The blind and lame men metaphor belongs to Sāṃkhya and not Yoga. There is no reason why a proponent of Yoga could not concede to the Nyāyaika that *puruṣa* is in fact blind and dumb. Rather than equate *puruṣa* to the faculty of sight, the Yogin can equate *puruṣa* to the source of light that enables the sight of *citta*. This would be consistent with references to *prakāśa* (light) and *prajñālokaḥ* (light of awareness) found in *YS* II.52 and III.5, respectively. Once this concession has been made, there is no reason not to assume that all of the faculties of cognition needed to engage in the soteriological pursuit of *pratiprasava* could happen entirely at the level of *citta* (or *buddhi*, more narrowly).

## Notes

I would to thank Edwin Bryant for his useful points in the right direction, Jeffrey Tlumak and Thomas Holaday for their helpful conversation, Lois Steinberg for all of her teaching, and the two anonymous referees who provided valuable feedback.

- 1 – See, e.g., Swami Vivekānanda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekānanda*, vol. 2 (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1977), p. 256.
- 2 – Mikel Burley, *Classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga: An Indian Metaphysics of Experience* (London: Routledge, 2007), chap. 7, and esp. p. 41. Italics added.
- 3 – Although the position Burley takes on the concept of cessation represents the commonplace view on this issue, his view is otherwise quite uncommon in its defense of idealism in Yoga. See below for a discussion of this iconoclastic aspect of his view.
- 4 – Ian Whicher, “Cessation and Integration in Classical Yoga,” *Asian Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (1995): 47–59; “Nirodha, Yoga, and Transformation of the Mind,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 25 (1997): 1–67; *Integrity of the Yoga Darśana: A Reconsideration of Classical Yoga* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998). Cf. Christopher Key Chapple, “Living Liberation in Sāṃkhya and Yoga,” in *Living Liberation in Hindu Thought*, ed. Andrew O. Fort and Patricia Y. Mumme (Albany: State University of New York Press), pp. 15–34.
- 5 – Whicher’s view of freedom is in some ways similar to Kant’s view of positive freedom or autonomy in that it sees an individual as being free to act only when he or she is acting on reasons that have been purified from the influence of desires and other attachments. The view of positive freedom that I attribute to Yoga is less Kantian than it is Cartesian.
- 6 – Gerald James Larson, “On *The Integrity of the Yoga Darśana: A Review*,” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 3, no. 2 (1999): 183–186—a review of Ian Whicher, *The Integrity of the Yoga Darśana: A Reconsideration of Classical Yoga* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998); Burley, *Classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga*, pp. 138–140.
- 7 – Here I follow Mircea Eliade in arguing that the freedom promised by Yoga must be understood in both negative and positive terms. See his *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 34.
- 8 – The definition of *yoga* given in YS 1.2 is *Yogaścitta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ*: “Yoga is the stilling of the changing states of mind.” Unless otherwise noted, all translations of the *Yoga Sūtras* are from Edwin Bryant, *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali* (New York: North Point Press, 2009). The word *nirodhaḥ*, translated by Bryant as “stilling” is alternately translated as “cessation.” See Gerald James Larson and Ram Shankar Bhattacharya, eds., *Sāṃkhya: A Dualist Tradition in Indian Philosophy*,

vol. 4 of *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 28; Jean Varenne, *Yoga and the Hindu Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 87; B.K.S. Iyengar, *Light on the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012).

- 9 – YS I.41.
- 10 – In YS I.34–39, Patañjali provides a list of possible meditational supports, finally suggesting that the support can be any object.
- 11 – The five *yamas* listed in YS II.30 are *ahimsā* (non-violence), *satya* (truthfulness), *asteya* (non-stealing), *brahmacarya* (celibacy), and *aparigrahāḥ* (non-covetousness). The five *niyamās* listed in YS II.32 are *śauca* (cleanliness), *santoṣa* (contentment), *tapas* (austerity), *svādhyāya* (study of the self through scripture), and *Īśvara praṇidhānā* (devotion to God).
- 12 – The fifth and seventh limbs, respectively, are *pratyāhāra* (withdrawal of the mind from the senses) and *dhyāna* (the continuation of *dhāraṇā* over time).
- 13 – *Yogavārttika of Vijñānabhikṣu*, vol. 1, trans. T. S. Rukmani (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2007), p. 42.
- 14 – Whether or not consciousness can be pure is a controversial issue. Steven Katz argues that the notion of an objectless or unmediated consciousness is incoherent since consciousness is always constructed by concepts of something. See his “Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism,” in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Steven Katz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 22–74. Robert Forman, among others, disagrees, noting that Katz’ position simply disregards the experiences of mystics. The conceptions of consciousness laid out by Yoga are consistent with each of these views, up to a point. According to Yoga, *citta* is always mediated, but *puruṣa* is not. Only yogic practice can enable the apprehension of pure consciousness. A verbal description of pure consciousness is therefore not possible, and the inability to provide such a description should not count as a mark against the existence of pure consciousness. To deny that pure consciousness is possible, therefore, is simply to beg the question against Yoga. See Robert Forman, “Introduction: Mysticism, Constructivism, Forgetting,” and Christopher Chapple, “The Unseen Seer and the Field: Consciousness in Sāṃkhya and Yoga,” both in *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy*, ed. Robert K. C. Forman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 3–52 and 71–97.
- 15 – Ian Whicher, *The Integrity of the Yoga Darśana*, p. 60.
- 16 – Anima Sen Gupta, *Classical Sāṃkhya: A Critical Study* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1982), p. 72; italics have been added.
- 17 – Gerald James Larson, “The Notion of *Satkārya* in Sāṃkhya: Toward a Philosophical Reconstruction,” *Philosophy East and West* 25, no. 1 (1975): 31–40.



- 18 – Bryant, *Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, p. xiv. This commonplace view is shared by the traditional commentators Vyasa and Vijñānabhikṣu, who see Patañjali's *sūtras* as being positioned against the idealism of Buddhism.
- 19 – Gerald James Larson, *Classical Sāṃkhya: An Interpretation of Its History and Meaning* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979), p. 135.
- 20 – Mikel Burley, "'Aloneness' and the Problem of Realism in Classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga," *Asian Philosophy* 14, no. 3 (2004): 226.
- 21 – Mikel Burley, *Classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga*, p. 83.
- 22 – Descartes deploys the scholastic distinction between formal reality, which belongs to the intrinsic reality of an entity in itself, and objective reality, which belongs to representations of the entity in the mind, in order to prove God's existence. See his third *Meditation*.
- 23 – Instead of illumination or animation, Vyasa uses the metaphor of magnification.
- 24 – Other than the unsatisfactory description found in *The Passions of the Soul*, where the animal spirits passing by the pineal gland serve as the mechanism of interaction, Descartes fails to provide an explanation for how the mind and body interact. See esp. Article 34 in René Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*, trans. Stephen Voss (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989), pp. 37–38.
- 25 – Paul Schweizer, "Mind/Consciousness Dualism in Sāṃkhya-Yoga Philosophy," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53, no. 4 (1993): 845–859.
- 26 – Gerald James Larson, "As Eccentric Ghost in the Machine: Formal and Quantitative Aspects of the Sāṃkhya-Yoga Dualism," *Philosophy East and West* 33, no. 3 (1983): 416.
- 27 – YS 1.18, collected in Rukmani, *Yogavārttika of Vijñānabhikṣu*, vol. 1, p. 111.
- 28 – Bryant, *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, p. 70.
- 29 – Patañjali makes this claim about *puruṣa*'s omniscience in YS IV.18, when he writes, "The permutations of the mind are always known to its Lord, the *puruṣa* soul, because of the soul's unchanging nature."
- 30 – Rukmani, *Yogavārttika of Vijñānabhikṣu*, pp. 112–113.
- 31 – Iyengar, *Light on the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, p. 177.
- 32 – Bryant, *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, p. 81.
- 33 – *Ibid.*, p. 295.
- 34 – Sen Gupta, *Classical Sāṃkhya*, p. 98.
- 35 – *Ibid.*
- 36 – Mircea Eliade, *Patañjali and Yoga*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), p. 31.

- 37 – Burley, *Classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga*, p. 122.
- 38 – Ibid.
- 39 – Charles Larmore, “Descartes’ Psychologistic Theory of Assent,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1994): 61.
- 40 – Antonia LoLordo, “‘Descartes’s One Rule of Logic’: Gassendi’s Critique of the Doctrine of Clear and Distinct Perception,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 13, no. 1 (2005): 58.
- 41 – René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, vol. 2 of *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 17.
- 42 – Jaakko Hintikka famously argues that any attempt by Descartes to prove the certainty of his own existence by way of inference would beg the question by asserting that inference was a legitimate route to certain knowledge. See his “Cogito, Ergo Sum as Inference and Performance,” *Philosophical Review* 72, no. 4 (1963): 487–496. In contradistinction, Harry Frankfurt claims that Descartes does take himself to be arguing by way of inference. See his “Descartes’ Discussion of his Existence in the Second Meditation,” *Philosophical Review* 75, no. 3 (1966): 329–356. Much has been written on this disagreement, and a resolution of the issues is beyond the scope of this article. I follow Hintikka’s view because it is a plausible reading of Descartes and because it more closely approximates my account of *citta*’s spontaneous and non-inferential apprehension of *puruṣa*.
- 43 – Descartes, *Meditations*, p. 24.
- 44 – Ibid., p. 39.
- 45 – Ibid.
- 46 – Ibid., p. 40.
- 47 – Ibid., p. 41.
- 48 – Anthony Kenny, “Descartes on the Will,” in *Cartesian Studies*, ed. R. J. Butler (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972), p. 17.
- 49 – Vere Chappell, “Descartes’s Compatibilism,” in *Reason, Will, and Sensation: Studies in Descartes’s Metaphysics*, ed. John Cottingham (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).
- 50 – See, e.g., Norman Kemp Smith, *New Studies in the Philosophy of Descartes: Descartes as Pioneer* (London: Macmillan, 1952). For an alternate reading of Descartes’ notions of causation, see Tad M. Schmaltz, *Descartes on Causation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Although the reading of the *Yoga Sūtras* offered here is more in line with Schmaltz’ view in that it does not emphasize the role of God in causation, I highlight the occasionalist view here

because it is more widely received. See below for the ways in which my reading departs from the occasionalist reading.

- 51 – See note 43 above.
- 52 – Jeffrey Tlumak goes so far as to claim that cessation of the oscillations of indifference is one of the points of Descartes' meditations: "One main goal of meditation is to convert indifference to spontaneity." See Tlumak, *Classical Modern Philosophy: A Contemporary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 47.
- 53 – At times Patañjali seems to depict the quality of subtlety in terms of clarity and distinctness. For instance, in YS I.44, he defines the *vicāra* stage of *samādhi* into *savicāra* and *nirvicāra*. In the former, one's attention oscillates between the object of awareness, the concept of that object, and the word for that object. In the latter, one's attention is entirely fixed on that object alone.
- 54 – YS I.24. All *puruṣas* are untouched by *prakṛti* in the sense that they are immutable and so undisturbed by the material realm. Patañjali's point here seems to be that while each *puruṣa* is undisturbed by its correlative material consciousness, *Īśvara* has no correlative material consciousness by which to be disturbed.
- 55 – See *Sāmkhya Kārikā* V.
- 56 – Matthew Dasti, "Nyāya's Self as Agent and Knower," in *Free Will, Agency, and Selfhood in Indian Philosophy*, ed. Matthew Dasti and Edwin Bryant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 125.