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# Revisioning classical Yoga: “Getting it right with *prakṛti*”

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**Summary:** This article challenges interpretations of classical Yoga that have misrepresented Patañjali’s philosophical outlook as being radically dualistic, isolationistic and world-denying. Drawing from classical texts, it is argued that Yoga is a balanced integration of the spiritual and material dimensions of human life. Yoga does not advocate abandonment or condemnation of the world but rather supports a stance that enables one to live more fully in the world without being enslaved by worldly identification. Yoga can thus be seen to incorporate a clarity of awareness with the integrity of being and action.

**Résumé :** Cet article remet en question certaines interprétations du Yoga classique qui ont dénaturé la conception philosophique de Patanjali ; selon elles, il apparaît comme radicalement dualiste, isolationniste et niant le monde. S’inspirant des textes classiques, l’auteur soutient que le Yoga intègre de manière équilibrée les dimensions spirituelles et matérielles de la vie humaine. Le Yoga ne propose ni abandon, ni condamnation du monde, mais plutôt une position qui permet à chacun de vivre pleinement dans le monde sans être esclave des biens de la terre. On peut alors percevoir le Yoga comme un élément intégrateur d’une conscience éclairée à une intégrité de l’être et de l’action.

## Introduction

This article centres on the thought of Patañjali (*ca.* 2nd-3rd century C.E.), the great exponent of the authoritative classical Yoga school (*darśana*) of Hinduism and the reputed author of the *Yoga-Sūtra*. I will argue that Patañjali’s philosophical perspective has, far too often, been looked upon as excessively “spiritual” or isolationistic to the point of being a world-denying philosophy, indifferent to moral endeavour, neglecting the world of nature and culture, and overlooking the highest potentials for human reality, vitality, and creativity. Contrary to the arguments presented by many scholars,

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which associate Patañjali's Yoga exclusively with extreme asceticism, mortification, denial and the renunciation and abandonment of "material existence" (*prakṛti*) in favour of an elevated and isolated "spiritual state" (*puruṣa*) or disembodied state of spiritual liberation, I suggest that Patañjali's Yoga can be seen as a responsible engagement, in various ways, of "spirit" (*puruṣa* = intrinsic identity as Self, pure consciousness) and "matter" (*prakṛti* = the source of psychophysical being, which includes mind, body, nature, material existence) resulting in a highly developed, transformed, and participatory human nature and identity, an integrated and embodied state of liberated selfhood (*jīvanmukti*).

The interpretation of Patañjali's Yoga *darśana* presented here—which walks the line between an historical and hermeneutic-praxis (some might say theological or "systematic") orientation—counters the radical dualistic, isolationistic, and ontologically oriented interpretations of Yoga presented by many scholars and suggests an open-ended, epistemologically oriented hermeneutic which, I maintain, is more appropriate for arriving at a genuine assessment of Patañjali's system.

Patañjali's philosophy is not based upon mere theoretical or speculative knowledge. It elicits a practical, pragmatic experiential/perceptual (not merely inferential/theoretical) approach that Patañjali deems essential in order to deal effectively with our total human situation and provide real freedom; it is not just a theory of liberation or a metaphysical explanation of life. Yoga is not content with knowledge (*jñāna*) perceived as a state that abstracts away from the world removing us from our human embodiment and activity in the world. Rather, Yoga emphasizes knowledge in the integrity of being and action and as serving the integration of the "person" as a "whole." Edgerton concluded in a study dedicated to the meaning of Yoga that: "Yoga is not a 'system' of belief or of metaphysics. It is always a way, a method of getting something, usually salvation..." (1924). But this does not say enough; it does not fully take into account what might be called the *integrity* of Patañjali's Yoga. Yoga derives its real strength and value through an integration of theory and practice (Whicher 1998).

**"Cessation" (*nirodha*) and the "return to the source" (*pratiprasava*): Transformation or elimination/negation of the mind?**

In Patañjali's central definition of Yoga (*YS* 1.2), Yoga is defined as "the cessation (*nirodha*) of [the misidentification with] the modifications/mental processes (*vṛttis*) of the mind (*citta*)."<sup>1</sup> What kind of "cessation" we must ask is Patañjali actually referring to in his classical definition of Yoga? What does the process of "cessation" actually entail for the yogī ethically, epistemologically, ontologically, psychologically, and so on? I have elsewhere suggested (1997, 1998) that "cessation" denotes an epistemological (and moral) emphasis and refers to the transformation of self-understanding brought

about through the purification and illumination of the mind; *nirodha* is not (for the yogin) the ontological cessation of *prakṛti* (including here the mind and its mental processes). Seen here, *nirodha* thus is not, as is often explained, an inward movement that annihilates or suppresses our cognitive and emotive faculties, thoughts, intentions, or ideas (*pratyaya*), nor is it the non-existence or absence of the functioning of the mind; rather, *nirodha* involves a progressive unfoldment of yogic perception (*yogī-pratyakṣa*) through which our intrinsic nature as *puruṣa* or pure consciousness is eventually disclosed. In Yoga it is the states of affliction (namely ignorance, egoity, attachment, aversion, and the desire for continuity, *YS II.3*) evidenced in the mind and not the mind itself that is at issue. Afflicted or mistaken identity in Yoga does not encompass all mental modifications (cognitive, affective, emotive, imaginative), but is the very seed (*bīja*) mechanism of the misidentification with our mental processes and from which all other mental functioning/thoughts arise and are (mis)appropriated or self-referenced in the state of ignorance (*avidyā*), that is, the unenlightened state of mind. Spiritual ignorance gives rise to a malfunctioning or misalignment of our mental processes within consciousness that in Yoga can be corrected thereby allowing for a proper alignment or “right” functioning of mental processes (Whicher 1998). It is our confused and mistaken identity of self, not our thoughts and experiences *in total* that must be brought to a state of definitive cessation.

To be sure, there is a temporary suspension of all the mental processes as well as any identification with an object (i.e., as found in the state of transcognitive unification or ecstasy [*asamprajñā-samādhi*], this being the final purification of the mind), but it would be misleading to conclude that ecstasy results in a permanent or definitive cessation of the mental processes in total thereby predisposing the yogī who has attained purity of mind to exist in a dysfunctional or mindless state and therefore of being incapable of living a useful and productive life in various ways.

From the perspective of the discerning yogī (*vivekin*) human identity contained within the domain of the three constituents or *guṇas* of *prakṛti* (i.e., *sattva* or intelligence, *rajas* or activity, and *tamas* or inertia) amounts to nothing more than sorrow and dissatisfaction (*YS II.15*). The declared goal of classical Yoga, as with Sāṃkhya and Buddhism, is to overcome all dissatisfaction (*duḥkha*, *YS II.16*) by bringing about, in the case of Yoga, an inverse movement or counter-flow (*pratiprasava*) understood as a “return to the origin” (Chapple and Kelly 1990: 60) of the *guṇas*, a kind of reabsorption into the transcendent purity of being itself. What does this “return to the origin,” or “withdrawal from manifestation” actually mean? Is it a definitive ending to the perceived world of the yogī comprised of change and transformation, forms and phenomena?

Does a “return to the origin” culminate in a state of freedom in which one is stripped of all human identity and void of any association with the

world including one's practical livelihood? The ontological emphasis usually given to the meaning of *pratīprasava*—implying for the yogī a literal dissolution of *prakṛti*'s manifestation—would seem to support a view, one which is prominent in Yoga scholarship, of spiritual liberation denoting an existence wholly transcendent (and therefore stripped or deprived) of all manifestation including the human relational sphere. Is this the kind of spiritually emancipated state that Patañjali had in mind? In *YS* II.3-17 (which set the stage for the remainder of the chapter on yogic means or *sādhana*), Patañjali describes *prakṛti*, the “seeable” (including our personhood), in the context of the various afflictions (*kleśas*) that give rise to an afflicted and mistaken identity of self. Afflicted identity is constructed out of and held captive by the root affliction of ignorance (*avidyā*) and its various forms of karmic bondage. Yet, despite the clear association of *prakṛti* with the bondage of ignorance (*avidyā*), there are no real grounds for purporting that *prakṛti* herself is to be equated with or subsumed under the afflictions. In Yoga *prakṛti* is clearly deemed to be real (*YS* IV.13-14), all forms of *prakṛti* having the *guṇas* for their essence.

To equate *prakṛti* with affliction itself implies that as a product of spiritual ignorance, *prakṛti*, along with the afflictions is conceived as a reality that the yogī should ultimately abandon, condemn, avoid or discard completely. Patañjali leaves much room for understanding “dissolution” or “return to the source” with an epistemological emphasis thereby allowing the whole system of the Yoga *darśana* to be interpreted along more open-ended lines. In other words, what actually “dissolves” or is ended in Yoga is the yogī's *misidentification* with *prakṛti*, a mistaken identity of self that—contrary to authentic identity, namely *puruṣa*—can be nothing more than a product of the three *guṇas* under the influence of spiritual ignorance. Understood as such, *pratīprasava* need not denote the definitive ontological dissolution of manifest *prakṛti* for the yogī, but rather refers to the process of “subtilization” or purification of consciousness so necessary for the uprooting of the misidentification—the incorrect world-view born of affliction—or incapacity of the yogī to “see” from the yogic perspective of the seer (*draṣṭṛ*), our authentic identity as *puruṣa*.

The discerning yogī sees (*YS* II.15) that this *guṇic* world or cycle of *samsāric* identity is in itself dissatisfaction (*duḥkha*). But we must ask, what exactly is the problem being addressed in Yoga? What is at issue in Yoga philosophy? Is our ontological status as a human being involved in day-to-day existence forever in doubt, in fact in need of being negated, dissolved in order for authentic identity (*puruṣa*), immortal consciousness, finally to dawn? Having overcome all ignorance, is it then possible for a human being to live in the world and no longer be in conflict with oneself and the world? Can the *guṇas* cease to function in a state of ignorance and conflict in the mind? Must the *guṇic* constitution of the human mind and the whole of *prakṛtic* existence disappear, dissolve for the yogī? Can the ways of spiritual

ignorance be replaced by an aware, conscious, nonafflicted identity and activity that transcend the conflict and confusion of ordinary, saṃsāric life? Can we live, according to Patañjali's Yoga, an embodied state of freedom?

**“Aloneness” (*kaivalya*): Embodied freedom with an ethical rooting**

In the classical traditions of Sāṃkhya and Yoga, *kaivalya* meaning “aloneness” (the term *kaivalya* comes from *kevala*, meaning “alone”), is generally understood to be the state of the unconditional existence of *puruṣa*. In the *YS*, *kaivalya* can refer more precisely to the “aloneness of seeing” (*dr̥ṣeḥ kaivalyam*, *YS* II.25) which, as Patañjali states, follows from the disappearance of ignorance (*avidyā*) and its creation of *saṃyoga*—the conflation or conjunction of the seer (*puruṣa*) and the seeable (*prakṛti*, *guṇas*)—explained by the commentator, Vyāsa, as a mental superimposition (*adhyāroḥa*, *YB* II.18). “Aloneness” thus can be construed as *puruṣa*'s innate capacity for pure, unbroken, non-attached seeing, observing or “knowing” of the content of the mind (*YS* II.20 and IV.18). In an alternative definition, Patañjali explains *kaivalya* as the “return to the origin” (*pratiprasava*) of the *guṇas*, which have lost all soteriological purpose for the *puruṣa* that has, as it were, recovered its transcendent autonomy (*YS* IV.34). This *sūtra* also classifies *kaivalya* as the establishment in “own form/nature” (*svarūpa*), and the power of higher awareness (*citiśakti*). Although the seer's (*draṣṭṛ/puruṣa*) capacity for “seeing” is an unchanging yet dynamic power of consciousness that should not be truncated in any way, nevertheless our karmically distorted or skewed perceptions vitiate against the natural fullness of “seeing.” Patañjali defines spiritual ignorance (*avidyā*), the root affliction, as: “seeing the noneternal as eternal, the impure as pure, dissatisfaction as happiness, and the non-self as self” (*YS* II.5). Having removed the “failure-to-see” (*adarśana*), the soteriological purpose of the *guṇas* in the saṃsāric condition of the mind is fulfilled; the mind is relieved of its former role of being a vehicle for *avidyā*, the locus of egoity and misidentification, and the realization of pure seeing—the nature of the seer alone—takes place.

According to yet another *sūtra* (*YS* III.55), we are told that *kaivalya* is established when the *sattva* of consciousness has reached a state of purity analogous to that of the *puruṣa*. Through the process of subtilization or “return to the origin” (*pratiprasava*) in the *sattva*, the transformation (*parināma*) of the mind (*citta*) takes place at the deepest level bringing about a radical change in perspective: the former impure, fabricated states constituting a fractured identity of self are dissolved resulting in the complete purification of mind. Through knowledge or refined cognition (in object- or content-oriented states of unification = *saṃprajñāta-samādhi*) and its transcendence (in contentless consciousness or unification without an object = *asaṃprajñāta-samādhi*) self-identity overcomes its lack of intrinsic grounding, a lack sustained and exacerbated by the web of afflictions in

the form of attachment, aversion, and the compulsive clinging to life based on the fear of extinction. The yogī is no longer dependent on liberating knowledge (mind-*sattva*), *YB* III.55), is no longer attached to *ṛtti* as a basis for self-identity. Cessation, it must be emphasized, does not mark a definitive disappearance of the *guṇas* from *puruṣa*'s view (Āraṇya 1963: 123). For the liberated yogī, the *guṇas* cease to exist in the form of *avidyā* and its mental impressions (*saṃskāras*), *ṛttis*, and false or fixed ideas (*pratīyayas*) of selfhood that formerly veiled true identity. The changing *guṇic* modes cannot alter the yogī's now purified and firmly established consciousness. The mind has been liberated from the *egocentric world of attachment to things prakṛtic*. Now the yogī's identity (as *puruṣa*), disassociated from ignorance, is untouched, unaffected by qualities of mind (*YB* IV.25), uninfluenced by the mental processes constituted of the three *guṇas*. The mind and *puruṣa* attain to a sameness of purity (*YS* III.55), of harmony, balance, evenness, and a workability together: the mind appearing in the nature of *puruṣa* (*YB* I.41).

*Kaivalya*, I suggest, in no way destroys or negates the personality of the yogī, but is an unconditional state in which all the obstacles or distractions preventing an immanent and purified relationship or engagement of person with nature and spirit (*puruṣa*) have been removed. The mind, which previously functioned under the sway of ignorance colouring and blocking our perception of authentic identity, has now become purified and no longer operates as a locus of misidentification, confusion, and dissatisfaction (*duḥkha*). *Sattva*, the finest quality (*guṇa*) of the mind, has the capacity to be perfectly lucid/transparent, like a dust-free mirror in which the light of *puruṣa* is clearly reflected and the discriminative discernment (*vivekakhyaṭi*, *YS/YB* II.26) between *puruṣa* and the *sattva* of the mind (as the finest nature of the seeable) can take place (*YS/YB* III.49).

The crucial (ontological) point to be made here is that in the "aleness" of *kaivalya prakṛti* ceases to perform an obstructing role. In effect, *prakṛti* herself has become purified, illuminated, and liberated from the grip of afflictions including the misconceptions, misappropriations, and misguided relations implicit within a world of afflicted identity. The mind has been transformed, liberated from the egocentric world of attachment, its former afflicted nature abolished; and self-identity left alone in its "own form" or true nature as *puruṣa* is never again confused with all the relational acts, intentions, and volitions of empirical existence. There being no power of misidentification remaining, the mind ceases to operate within the context of the afflictions, karmic accumulations, and the consequent cycles of *saṃsāra* implying a mistaken identity of selfhood subject to birth and death.

The *Yoga-Sūtra* has often been regarded as calling for the severance of *puruṣa* from *prakṛti*; concepts such as liberation, cessation, detachment/dispassion, and so forth have been interpreted in an explicitly negative light. Max Müller, citing Bhoja Rāja's commentary (11th century C.E., *RM* I.1)

refers to Yoga as “separation” (*viyoga*, 1899: 309). More recently, numerous other scholars (Eliade 1969, Feuerstein 1979, Koelman 1970, and Larson 1987) have endorsed this interpretation, that is, the absolute separateness of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. In asserting the absolute separation of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, scholars and non-scholars alike have tended to disregard the possibility for other hermeneutical options, and this radical, dualistic metaphysical closure of sorts surrounding the nature and meaning of Patañjali’s Yoga has proved detrimental to a fuller understanding of the Yoga *darśana* by continuing a tradition based on an isolationistic, one-sided reading of the *Yoga-Sūtra* and Vyāsa’s commentary. Accordingly, the absolute separation of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* can only be interpreted as a disembodied state implying death to the physical body. To dislodge the yogī from bodily existence is to undermine the integrity of the pedagogical context that lends so much credibility or “weight” to the Yoga system. I am not here implying a simple idealization of Yoga pedagogy thereby overlooking the need to incorporate a healthy, critical approach to the *guru*-disciple dynamic. Rather, I am suggesting that it need not be assumed that, in Yoga, liberation coincides with physical death. This would only allow for a soteriological end state of “disembodied liberation” (*videhamukti*).

Not being content with mere theoretical knowledge, Yoga is committed to a practical way of life. To this end, Patañjali included in his presentation of Yoga an outline of the “eight-limbed” path (*aṣṭāṅga-yoga*, YS II.29) dealing with the physical, moral, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of the yogī, an integral path that emphasizes organic continuity, balance, and integration in contrast to the discontinuity, imbalance, and disintegration inherent in afflicted identity. The idea of cosmic balance and of the mutual support and upholding of the various parts of nature and society is not foreign to Yoga thought. Vyāsa deals with the theory of “nine causes” (*nava kāraṇāni*) or types of causation according to tradition (YB II.28). The ninth type of cause is termed *dhṛti*—meaning “support” or “sustenance.” Based on Vyāsa’s explanation of *dhṛti* we can see how mutuality and sustenance are understood as essential conditions for the maintenance of the natural and social world. There is an organic interdependence of all living entities wherein all (i.e., the elements, animals, humans, and divine bodies) work together for the “good” of the whole and for each other.

Having achieved that level of insight (*prajñā*) that is “truth-bearing” (*ṛtambharā*, YSI.48) the yogī perceives the natural order (*ṛta*) of cosmic existence, “unites” with, and embodies that order. To fail to see clearly (*adarśana*) is to fall into disorder, disharmony, and conflict with oneself and the world. In effect, to be ensconced in ignorance implies a disunion with the natural order of life and inextricably results in a failure to embody that order. Through Yoga one gains proper access to the world and is therefore established in right relationship to the world. Far from being denied or renounced, the world, for the yogī has become transformed, properly

engaged. On the level of individuality, the yogī has found his or her place in the world at large, fitting “into the whole” (Klostermaier 1989: 333).

In the last chapter of the YS (*Kaivalya-Pāda*), “aloneness” (*kaivalya*) is said to ensue upon the attainment of *dharmamegha-samādhi*, the “cloud of dharma” *samādhi*. At this level of practice, the yogī has abandoned any search for (or attachment to) reward or “profit” from his or her meditational practice; a non-acquisitive attitude (*akusīda*) must take place at the highest level of yogic discipline (YS/YB IV.29). Vyāsa emphasizes that the identity of *puruṣa* is not something to be acquired (*upādeya*) or discarded (*heya*, YB II.15). The perspective referred to as “*Pātanjāla Yoga Darśana*” culminates in a permanent state of clear seeing brought about through the discipline of Yoga. Yoga thus incorporates both an end state and a process. Thus the term “Yoga” (like the terms “*nirodha*” and “*samādhi*”) is ambiguous in that it means both the process of purification and illumination and the final result of liberation or “aloneness.” By acknowledging that “aloneness” cannot be an acquired state resulting from or caused by yogic methods and techniques, and that *puruṣa* cannot be known, acquired or discarded/lost, Yoga in effect transcends its own result-orientation as well as the categories of means and ends.

*Dharmamegha-samādhi* presupposes that the yogin has cultivated higher dispassion (*para-vairāgya*)—the means to the liberated, enstatic consciousness realized in *asaṃprajñāta-samādhi* (YB I.18). This includes a dispassion toward knowledge and power both, for the yogī, as Vyāsa tells us, does not abuse or transgress the laws of nature (YB III.45). The culmination of the Yoga system is found when, following from *dharmamegha-samādhi*, the mind and actions are freed from misidentification and affliction and one is no longer deluded/confused with regard to one’s true form (*svarūpa*) or intrinsic identity. At this state of practice the yogī is disconnected (*viiyoga*) from all patterns of action motivated by the ego. According to both Vyāsa (YB IV.30) and the 16th-century commentator Vijñāna Bhikṣu (YV IV.30), one to whom this high state of purification takes place is designated as a *jīvanmukta*: one who is liberated while still alive (i.e., embodied or living liberation).

By transcending the normative conventions and obligations of karmic behaviour, the yogī acts morally not as an extrinsic response and out of obedience to an external moral code of conduct, but as an intrinsic response and as a matter of natural, purified inclination. Relinquishing all obsessive or selfish concern with the results of activity, the yogī remains wholly detached from the egoic fruits of action thus recalling the *Bhagavadgītā*’s teaching on *karma-yoga*. This does not imply that the yogin loses all orientation for action. Only attachment (and compulsive, inordinate desire), not action itself, sets in motion the law of moral causation (*karma*) by which a person is implicated in afflicted identity. This does not mean, as some scholars have misleadingly concluded, that the spiritual adept or yogī is free to commit immoral acts (Zaehner 1974: 97-98) or that the yogī is motivated by selfish concerns (Scharfstein 1974: 131-32).

Actions must not only be executed in the spirit of unselfishness (i.e., sacrifice) or detachment, they must also be ethically sound, reasonable and justifiable. Moreover, the yogī's spiritual journey—far from being an “a-moral process” (Feuerstein 1979: 81)—is a highly moral process. The yogī's commitment to the purification of consciousness, including the cultivation of moral virtues such as compassion (*karuṇā*, *YS I.33*) and non-violence (*ahimsā*, *YS II.35*) is not an “a-moral” enterprise, nor is it an expression of indifference, aloofness, or an uncaring attitude to others. Moral disciplines are engaged as a natural outgrowth of intelligent (sattvic) self-understanding, insight, and commitment to self-transcendence that takes consciousness out of (*ec-stasis*) its identification with the rigid structure of the monadic ego, thereby reversing the inveterate tendency of this ego to inflate itself at the expense of its responsibility in relation to others.

Having defined the “goal” of Yoga as “aloneness” (*kaivalya*), the question must now be asked: What kind of “aloneness” was Patañjali talking about? “Aloneness,” I suggest, is not the isolation of the seer (*draṣṭṛ*, *puruṣa*) separate from the seeable (*dṛśya*, *prakṛti*), as is unfortunately far too often maintained, but refers to the “aloneness” of the power of “seeing” (*YS II.20, 25*) in its innate purity and clarity without any epistemological distortion and moral defilement. The cultivation of *nirodha* uproots the compulsive tendency to reify the world and oneself with an awareness that reveals the transcendent, yet immanent seer (*puruṣa*). Through clear “seeing” (*dṛśi*) the purpose of Yoga is fulfilled, and the yogī, free from all misidentification and impure karmic residue (as in the former contextual sphere of afflicted identity), gains full, immediate access to the world. By accessing the world in such an open and direct manner, in effect “uniting” (epistemologically) with the world, the yogī ceases to be encumbered by egoism (*asmitā* and its egoic attitudes and identity patterns) and ceases to misappropriate the world.

Yoga can be seen to unfold—in *samādhi*—states of epistemic oneness that reveal the non-separation of knower, knowing, and the known (*YS I.41*), grounding our identity in a non-afflicted mode of action. The psychological, ethical and social implications of this kind of identity transformation are, needless to say, immense. The process of “cessation” (*nirodha*) steadies one for a life of compassion, discernment, and service informed by a “seeing” that is able to understand (literally meaning “to stand among, hence observe”) and is in touch with the needs of others. What seems especially relevant for our understanding of Yoga ethics is the enhanced capacity generated in Yoga for empathic identification with the object one seeks to understand. In Yoga philosophy “seeing” is not only a cognitive term but implies purity of mind, that is, it has moral content and value. Nor is “knowledge” (*jñāna*, *vidyā*) in the Yoga tradition to be misconstrued as a “bloodless” or “heartless” gnosis.

This article suggests that through the necessary transformation of consciousness brought about in *samādhi*, an authentic and fruitful coherence of

self-identity, perception, and activity emerges out of the former fragmented consciousness in *saṃyoga*. Rather than being handicapped by the exclusion of thinking, perceiving, experiencing, or activity, the liberated yogī actualizes the potential to live an integrated life in the world. I conclude here that there is no reason why the liberated yogī cannot be portrayed as a vital, creative, thoughtful, empathetic, balanced, happy, and wise person. Having adopted an integrative orientation to life, the yogī can endeavour to transform, enrich, and ennoble the world.

Yoga presupposes the integration of knowledge and activity; there can be no scission between *theoria* and *praxis*. The *Yoga-Sūtra* is a philosophical text where *praxis* is deemed to be essential. Without actual practice the theory that informs Yoga would have no authentic meaning. Yet without examination and reflection there would be no meaningful striving for liberation, no “goal,” as it were, to set one’s sight on. In an original, inspiring, and penetrating style, Patañjali bridges metaphysics and ethics, transcendence and immanence, and contributes to the Hindu fold a form of philosophical investigation that can, to borrow from another context J. Taber’s descriptive phrase, properly be called a “transformative philosophy.” That is to say, it is a philosophical perspective which “does not stand as an edifice isolated from experience; it exists only insofar as it is realized in experience” (Taber 1983: 26).

## Conclusion

To conclude, it can be said that *puruṣa* indeed has some precedence over *prakṛti* in Patañjali’s system, for *puruṣa* is what is ordinarily “missing” or concealed in human life and is ultimately the state of consciousness one must awaken to in Yoga. The liberated state of “aloneness” (*kaivalya*) however need not denote either an ontological superiority of *puruṣa* or an exclusion of *prakṛti*. *Kaivalya* can be positively construed as an integration of both principles—an integration that, I have argued, is what is most important for Yoga. I have proposed that the *Yoga-Sūtra* does not uphold a path of liberation that ultimately renders *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* incapable of “co-operating” together. Rather, the *Yoga-Sūtra* seeks to “unite” these two principles without the presence of any defiled understanding, to bring them “together,” properly aligning them in a state of balance, harmony, and a clarity of knowledge in the integrity of being and action.

The purified mind, one that has been transformed through yogic discipline, is certainly no ordinary worldly awareness nor is it eliminated for the sake of pure consciousness. To confuse (as many interpretations of Yoga have unfortunately done) the underlining purificatory processes involved in the cessation of ignorance/afflicted identity as being the same thing as (or as necessitating the need for) a radical elimination of our psychophysical being—the *prakṛtic* vehicle through which consciousness discloses itself—is, I suggest, to misunderstand the intent of the *Yoga-Sūtra* itself. There are

strong grounds for arguing (as I have done) that through “cessation” *prakṛti* herself (in the form of the guṇic constitutional makeup of the yogī’s body-mind) is liberated from the grip of ignorance. Vyāsa explicitly states (YB II.18) that emancipation happens in the mind and does not literally apply to *puruṣa*—which is by definition already free and therefore has no need to be released from the fetters of samsāric existence.

Both morality and perception (cognition) are essential channels through which human consciousness, far from being negated or suppressed, is transformed and illuminated. Yoga combines discerning knowledge with an emotional, affective, and moral sensibility allowing for a participatory epistemology that incorporates the moral amplitude for empathic identification with the world, that is, with the objects or persons one seeks to understand. The enhanced perception gained through Yoga must be interwoven with Yoga’s rich affective and moral dimensions to form a spirituality that does not become entangled in a web of antinomianism, but which retains the integrity and vitality to transform our lives and the lives of others in an effective manner. In Yoga proper there can be no support, ethically or pedagogically, for the misappropriation or abuse of *prakṛti* for the sake of freedom or *puruṣa*-realization. By upholding an integration of the moral and the mystical, Yoga supports a reconciliation of the prevalent tension within Hinduism between (1) spiritual engagement and self-identity within the world (*pravṛtti*) and (2) spiritual disengagement from worldliness and self-identity that transcends the world (*nivṛtti*). Yoga discerns and teaches a balance between these two apparently conflicting orientations.

This article has attempted to counter the radically dualistic, isolationistic, and ontologically oriented interpretations of Yoga presented by many scholars—where the full potentialities of our human embodiment are constrained within a radical, rigid, dualistic metaphysical structure—and propose instead an open-ended, morally and epistemologically oriented hermeneutic that frees Yoga of the long-standing conception of spiritual isolation, disembodiment, self-denial, and world-negation and thus from its pessimistic image. For far too long now Yoga has been unduly characterized as a form of world-rejecting asceticism. Our interpretation does not impute that *kaivalya* denotes a final incommensurability between spirit and matter. While Patañjali can be understood as having adopted a provisional, practical, dualistic metaphysics, there is no proof that his system either ends in duality or eliminates the possibility for an ongoing cooperative duality. Yoga is not simply a path or philosophy of “*puruṣa*-realization”; it equally implies “getting it right with *prakṛti*,” an affirmation of a complex relational world and a mature ethical commitment to nourish and sustain that world.

The main purpose of this article has been to consider a fresh approach in which to re-examine and re-assess classical Yoga philosophy, and to help to articulate what I have elsewhere referred to as the integrity of the Yoga *darśana* (1998). Thus, it is my hope that some of the suggestions presented

here can function as a catalyst for bringing Patañjali's thought into a more fruitful dialogue and encounter with other religious and philosophical traditions both within and outside of India.

### Abbreviations

- BG *Bhagavadgītā*  
 RM *Rāja-Mārtanda* of Bhoja Rāja (ca. 11th century C.E.)  
 SK *Sāṃkhya-Kārikā* of Īśvara Kṛṣṇa (ca. 4th-5th century C.E.)  
 YB *Yoga-Bhāṣya* of Vyāsa (ca. 5th-6th century C.E.)  
 YS *Yoga-Sūtra* of Patañjali (ca. 2nd-3rd century C.E.)  
 YV *Yoga-Vārttika* of Vijñāna Bhikṣu (ca. 16th century C.E.)

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