



THE PALGRAVE MACMILLAN
ANIMAL ETHICS SERIES



Yoga and Animal Ethics

Kenneth R. Valpey

OPEN ACCESS

palgrave
macmillan

The Palgrave Macmillan Animal Ethics Series

Series Editors

Andrew Linzey
Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics
Oxford, UK

Clair Linzey
Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics
Oxford, UK

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the ethics of our treatment of animals. Philosophers have led the way, and now a range of other scholars have followed from historians to social scientists. From being a marginal issue, animals have become an emerging issue in ethics and in multidisciplinary inquiry. This series will explore the challenges that Animal Ethics poses, both conceptually and practically, to traditional understandings of human-animal relations. Specifically, the Series will:

- provide a range of key introductory and advanced texts that map out ethical positions on animals;
- publish pioneering work written by new, as well as accomplished, scholars;
- produce texts from a variety of disciplines that are multidisciplinary in character or have multidisciplinary relevance.

For further information or to submit a proposal for consideration, please contact Amy Invernizzi, amy.invernizzi@palgrave-usa.com.

Kenneth R. Valpey

Yoga and Animal Ethics

palgrave
macmillan

Kenneth R. Valpey 
Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies
Oxford, UK



ISSN 2634-6672

ISSN 2634-6680 (electronic)

The Palgrave Macmillan Animal Ethics Series

ISBN 978-3-031-93360-8

ISBN 978-3-031-93361-5 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-93361-5>

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2025. This book is an open access publication.

Open Access This book is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this book are included in the book's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the book's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

If disposing of this product, please recycle the paper.

For all who would stretch themselves for the sake of nonhuman animals.

FOREWORD

In recent years, the climate crisis and environmental devastation have ignited discourse on the dangerous vision of the “ideal human” that emerged in the early modern era and has taken on the flavor of technofeudalism in recent years. This is a vision that elevates the ideal of the (presumed) unrelated, unconditioned, radically independent human, grounded in the denial of our interdependence with the living systems of the Earth in general, and our interconnection with animal species in particular. The sentience, personhood, agency, and intrinsic worth of non-human animals are undermined by the hyper-rationalist vision of humanism, laying bare their lives for exploitation and execution. The Anthropocene, with its sixth mass extinction, a rapidly escalating climate emergency, and the breach of the planet’s bio-geophysical integrity requires a critical assessment of what it means to be fully human—and this entails a thoroughgoing reevaluation of our relationship with nonhuman animals.

Important theories, such as critical posthumanism, are theoretical interventions that question the norms, privileges, and boundaries of the “human.” To find a way forward in a time of civilizational and ecological crises, the discursive oppositions of critical frameworks suggest a need for the erasure of human exceptionalism and its replacement by an integrative inclusivism of the ecosphere. In recent years, alternate epistemologies—ones that extend the concept of sentience and intrinsic value to the more-than-human world—have emerged. This is evident in a number of theoretical rubrics, such as New Materialism and Object Oriented Ontology, which emphasize the agency and internal integrity of animals as

well as natural phenomena and habitats, and even the self-organizing capacity of matter in itself.

Yet, with the expanding amount of scholarship and discourse on the wellbeing and rights of animals, within such rubrics, there is a dearth of material on animal ethics and protection from the viewpoint of the Yoga traditions, which contain a wide-ranging trove of philosophical and ethical resources that are deeply relevant and applicable to the field. This lacuna has been exceptionally well-addressed by this volume. *Yoga and Animal Ethics*, by Kenneth Valpey, is a major contribution to the discourse on Yoga Ethics, as well as the broader field of Religion and Animal Ethics, and Religion and Environmental Sustainability Studies. The work is streamlined and foundationally focused on the *Yoga Sūtra* of Patañjali and the *Bhagavadgītā*, which are the earliest, most important, and the most pertinent texts of Yoga philosophy and ethics. The reasons for this are three-fold: first, the texts remain the best-known and most popular sources of Yoga philosophy; second, both texts offer ethical direction; and third, they offer ontological frameworks to support ethical action in the world. In addition, neither are specifically manuals of Yoga; instead, they offer philosophical and spiritual guidance. This carries weight because an increasing share of the Yoga demographic views the practice of “Yoga” as a spiritual practice.¹ At a time when millions of people across the globe practice yoga, the reflection on, and the development of, animal ethics that arise out of Yoga philosophy is an essential need.

It can reasonably be argued that harm to, and consumption of, animals undermines key disciplines of Patañjali’s list of five *yamas*, including *ahiṃsā* (non-harming), *asteya* (not taking that which belongs to another), and also *aparigraha* (“non-grasping,” non-acceptance of non-essential

¹ A significant number of studies have researched the experience of yoga as “spiritual practice.” See, for example, Csala, B., Springinsfeld, C. M., & Köteles, F. (2021). “The Relationship Between Yoga and Spirituality: A Systematic Review of Empirical Research.” *Frontiers in psychology*, 12, 695939. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.695939>. A 2017 Pew Research Center study in Western Europe asked adults if they “believe in yoga, not just as exercise, but as a spiritual practice.” The median share saying they believed this in the 15 countries surveyed was 26%, including roughly 40% in Sweden and nearly as many in Portugal and Finland. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2018/05/29/attitudes-toward-spirituality-and-religion/>

things). And, a multi-layered ethic of environmental wellbeing can also be elicited from the *Gītā*, as evinced by the work of several scholars.²

However, the most expansive work on the relationship between Yoga and animal ethics per se, and the relevance of yogic principles for the ethics of care, compassion, and concern for the wellbeing of animals, has been done by Kenneth Valpey. He points to four key elements of Yoga that are key components of a framework for animal ethics in relationship to Yoga. These are yogic attention; yoga discipline; yoga ontology; and the telos of self-transformation, which is a hallmark of Yoga. I find the articulation of these four components a compelling and accessible point of departure for the development of a framework for Yoga and animal ethics that will enhance the discourse on this crucial issue, and speak to the experience of Yoga for many practitioners.

~Rita D. Sherma

Director of the Center for Dharma Studies, Graduate Theological Union
 Author of *Religion & Sustainability: Interreligious Resources, Interdisciplinary Responses* (Springer UN SDG Series, 2022)

Berkeley, CA, USA

Rita D. Sherma

²Perhaps the best known is by Ithamar Theodor, (2023). “Extracting a Humanistic Philosophy of Social and Environmental Well-being from the Bhagavad-gītā.” *Journal of Dharma Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42240-023-00138-9> Accessed Feb. 1, 2025.

Also: Supratik Sen, (2021). “The Eco-Theology of the Bhagavad Gītā: A Multi-Layered Ethical Theory.” *Religions* 12, no. 4: 241. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12040241> Accessed Feb. 1, 2025.

PREFACE

*mayy alpa-jñe kṛpām kṛtvā nija-sauṣṭhava-bhāvataḥ
bhavantv evarju-tattva-jñe paṇḍitāḥ sudayodayāḥ*

As I'm so ignorant, may the wise ones, being very merciful upon me due to their own great qualities, become my guide to understand truth in a right manner.¹

The muddy path toward Żyrardów through the forest adjacent to Sādhu Bhavan (in central Poland) is crisscrossed with the tracks of deer, boars, and an occasional raccoon. Rarely do I see a deer, and never have I seen any boars or raccoons (or beavers, also evident in their construction efforts in the marsh next to the small lake). Birds in this forest seem eerily few. If I were not such a product of paved-over city and suburb, I might be more perceptive of the forest's denizens. As it is, I see boar tracks (some quite big!) and hear an occasional woodpecker. It is hard to deny that the end of the "wild" has already arrived, as Stephen M. Meyer has documented.² There are, of course, vast numbers of "farmed" animals. But these I also do not see: they are enclosed, for the most part, hidden from public sight, until they appear shrink-wrapped as tidy portions of meat displayed under near-blinding lights in the supermarket.

There are any number of indicators in our world to justify hopelessness for a less violent, more animal- and nature-caring future, but hopelessness is no basis for writing a book about these matters. I learned to become

¹ Śrī Vamśīdhara's *Bhāvārtha-dīpikā-prakāśa* commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

² Stephen M. Meyer, *The End of the Wild* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006).

hopeful of positive change for animals when I met the fine folks at the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics, down the road from my home institution, the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies. That was about twelve years ago. Professor Andrew Linzey, a veritable incarnation of compassion for animals and a passion for bringing the learned discourse of animal ethics into the public square, has blessed me with all kind words of encouragement to explore and articulate values in Hindu traditions as they bear on “the animal thing.”³ Slow as I was on the uptake of his suggestion to write a monograph on Hindu Animal Ethics for the Palgrave Macmillan Animal Ethics book series, it was his friendly but persistent nudge that got me to do the research and then write *Cow Care in Hindu Animal Ethics*, published in 2020. Two years later, when I mentioned to him that the book had received several thousand digital accesses (as I was able to crowdfund it to be an open access publication), Andrew enthusiastically urged me to write a second book for the series. A bit less slow on the uptake, here it is.

My interest in yoga began decades earlier. Initially, I was discouraged from pursuing it. The running commentary in the Theosophical Society’s English translation of Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtra* told me that in the present age of Kali, it was not possible to practice what the text directed. Nor was B.K.S. Iyengar’s *Light on Prāṇāyāma* encouraging, warning me that for real success in *prāṇāyāma*, I would need to practice the breathing exercises four times per day, two hours each session (including one session at midnight). But being a citizen in a “nation of seekers” (as my later back-to--U.C. Santa Barbara professor Wade Clark Roof called the U.S. of that era), the trail of early ‘70s discontent led me to the world—or universe (a “universe of feelings”—Klaus Klostermaier would call it)—of bhakti and the practice of bhakti-yoga. Becoming a semi-itinerant monk adjoined with the mission-infused International Society for Krishna Consciousness, and continuing as a semi-itinerant monk to the present, the practice of Krishna-bhakti has had its share in shaping my outlook on the bigger questions. At the same time, my training as a scholar of religion has helped me think critically about my location regarding this topic—yoga and animal ethics.

³The Animal Thing, directed by Adam Linzey (to be released in 2025), is the title of a documentary film on Andrew Linzey and his animal rights advocacy. <https://www.theanimalthing.com/> (accessed January 15, 2025).

As the historian Amiya P. Sen observes,⁴ academic writing is aspirational, writing with an eye on one's own intellectual growth. That is to say, it is ever a work in progress, to which claims of completeness are always tentative. As was the case while researching for *Cow Care in Hindu Animal Ethics*, so also while researching for *Yoga and Animal Ethics*. The more I questioned and listened and read (my core methodology aside from bhakti-yoga practice), the more I felt that I'm at best only able to scratch the surface of the subject. My modest hope with this book is that it can serve to stimulate discussion on how yoga (in its many forms, not only those described here) can serve the cause of ethical engagement with animals—of opening eyes and hearts to this great need. For me, this has been a journey into variously charted territory, calling on all my resources of thinking and reflecting to find what I have taken as a necessary way forward.

My gratitude for those who have guided, supported, and encouraged me along this journey's way increases as I compare where my understanding has come from to where it is now. As a student of bhakti-yoga, my ever-deepening gratitude is for my preceptor-guide, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda. Prabhupāda persistently taught his students to place the highest value in the spirit of conscientious service, aiming to see the supreme person in all living beings. Several students in my cohort ("godsiblings") have been instrumental in my learning to apply our guru's teachings in daily life. Two in particular—H. D. Goswami and the late Tamal Krishna Goswami—gave me the courage and resolve to re-enter the academy to "learn the language" of academic discourse on religion and to listen attentively to the many voices of and about its study. Others, especially Sacinandana Swami, Bhakti Vijnana Goswami, Jayadvaita Swami, Radhanath Swami, and Bhurijana Das, have helped me maintain and strengthen my spiritual compass. Rasamandala Das has encouraged me to critically examine the ethical understandings of bhakti traditions.

At U. C. Santa Barbara, Professor Barbara A. Holdrege has been an inspiration for me to mine the riches of comparative religious studies and to look analytically at my chosen tradition of bhakti—the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition traced back to Śrī Caitanya in sixteenth-century Bengal. Professor Francis X. Clooney S.J. patiently and wisely guided me through the doctoral dissertation process at the University of Oxford, following initial

⁴Amiya P. Sen, *Chaitanya: A Life and Legacy* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. ix.

inspiration for comparative theology at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. The late Professor Joseph O'Connell showed by his readiness to give insightful advice that scholarship is a very human activity that can enrich and broaden the horizon of one's understanding.

Almost from the beginning of my return to the academy, my good friend Shaunaka Rishi Das has been a constant support, always with good cheer and a sharp vision that has led to his creation and steady development of the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies. It is within the OCHS that I have been able, since 1999, to find intellectual and cultural bearings needed for productive academic work as well as good collegial *sanga* to regenerate the spirit. Always woven together in our OCHS-related lives, I have ongoing, deepening gratitude to my colleague since student days, Prof. Ravi M. Gupta. Ravi shares and nourishes my other prominent interest alongside animal ethics, namely *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* studies, while also sharing interest in environmentalism and ecotheology.

In preparing this volume, I was blessed with numerous helpful suggestions from scholar friends who read part or all of the manuscript, namely, Janne Kontala, Hrvoje Cargonja, and Charlotte Vyt. Also helpful and encouraging has been Eli Kramer by sharing contacts and resources, and Monica Dabos has been helpful with research. I'm greatly obliged to the numerous authors I quote and reference in these pages, persons whom, if I have not met personally, I feel I have met through their insightful writings.

There are those within my bhakti community who have kindly and immeasurably helped me along the way. Persons whose names that I include here indicate their studentship in my particular tradition of bhakti-yoga (with their names given at initiation, including the title "Das" or "Dasi," a designation that indicates aspiration to be an eternal servant of the supreme divinity). I am grateful to Vrindapati Das, Avadhuta Raya Das, Hemangi Gopi Dasi, and Tamraparni Das, for their research assistance; to Uddhava Das and Rasashraya Rama Das for their computer technical support; and to Madhava Puri Das for his AI-related assistance. I am so grateful to Amy Invernizzi and her production team at Palgrave Macmillan—including Sujatha Mani, Cynthia Kroonen, and Will Wiseman—for their ready help in all matters related to bringing this book into the Animal Ethics books series and, thereby, out into the world.

As a semi-itinerant monk, I am blessed by several friends and students who have extended their warm hospitality to me for shorter or longer periods while working on this book—including excellent vegan cooking:

Dhiralalita Dasi and Jaya Lakshmana Das, Malati-mala Dasi and Nadiya Nimai Das, Sarada-tilaka Dasi, Yamunamrita Dasi, Radharaman Das, Rupa Goswami Das, Madhai Jivan Nitai Das (who especially has kept me peaceful and healthy for weeks and months at a time, with his expert cooking and general assistance); Sarvatma Das and Divyananda Dasi and the folks at Gita Nagari Farm; Divyambara Dasi and Purusa-sukta Das; Subhangada Dasi and Atmanivedana Das; Minakshi Swamini Dasi and her family; Nandimukhi Dasi and her family; Jaganmangala Das and Susanne; Navina Krishna Das and Krishna Bhakti Dasi; and Radhikaraman Das and his family.

I am especially grateful to Dr. Ludwig and Suzanne Jacob for their constant support—medical, emotional, spiritual—not to mention their genuine enthusiasm and encouragement for my writing.

To Rita D. Sherma, who has kindly written a thoughtful Foreword for this volume, I am ever grateful.

To Kaveri Dasi I am so grateful for her cover art, which she painted specifically for this book.

I am very pleased to offer this book to the world as an open access publication (as was also possible with *Cow Care in Hindu Animal Ethics*). This has become possible due to the generous donations of several persons—friends and well-wishers. I wish to especially thank Dr. Ludwig and Suzanne Jacob, Roman Borowski and family; Shyamananda Das and Ratna Manjari Dasi; Mitra Balaram Das; Vishvadeva Das; Annapurna Dasi; Jayananda Govinda Das, Yudhisthira Das, and Sitarani Dasi.

Finally, following Kylie Crane’s example,⁵ I wish to acknowledge the many privileges that enabled me to write this book, including systematic disadvantages that, as Crane writes, “are un-dis-entangle-able” from my privileges. Multiple layers of violence that made up the historical conditions upon which I grew up (in what is known presently as the United States of America) attest to the shortcomings of these acknowledgements.

Oxford, UK

Kenneth Valpey

⁵ Kylie Crane, *Concrete and Plastic: Thinking through Materiality* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024), p. ix.

SERIES EDITORS' PREFACE

This is a new book series for a new field of inquiry: Animal Ethics.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the ethics of our treatment of animals. Philosophers have led the way, and now a range of other scholars have followed from historians to social scientists. From being a marginal issue, animals have become an emerging issue in ethics and in multidisciplinary inquiry.

In addition, a rethink of the status of animals has been fueled by a range of scientific investigations which have revealed the complexity of animal sentience, cognition, and awareness. The ethical implications of this new knowledge have yet to be properly evaluated, but it is becoming clear that the old view that animals are mere things, tools, machines, or commodities cannot be sustained ethically.

But it is not only philosophy and science that are putting animals on the agenda. Increasingly, in Europe and the United States, animals are becoming a political issue as political parties vie for the “green” and “animal” vote. In turn, political scientists are beginning to look again at the history of political thought in relation to animals, and historians are beginning to revisit the political history of animal protection.

As animals grow as an issue of importance, so there have been more collaborative academic ventures leading to conference volumes, special journal issues, indeed new academic animal journals as well. Moreover, we have witnessed the growth of academic courses, as well as university posts, in Animal Ethics, Animal Welfare, Animal Rights, Animal Law, Animals and Philosophy, Human-Animal Studies, Critical Animal Studies, Animals

and Society, Animals in Literature, Animals and Religion—tangible signs that a new academic discipline is emerging.

“Animal Ethics” is the new term for the academic exploration of the moral status of the non-human—an exploration that explicitly involves a focus on what we owe animals morally, and which also helps us to understand the influences—social, legal, cultural, religious, and political—that legitimate animal abuse. This series explores the challenges that Animal Ethics poses, both conceptually and practically, to traditional understandings of human-animal relations.

The series is needed for three reasons: (i) to provide the texts that will service the new university courses on animals; (ii) to support the increasing number of students studying and academics researching in animal related fields; and (iii) because there is currently no book series that is a focus for multidisciplinary research in the field.

Specifically, the series will

- provide a range of key introductory and advanced texts that map out ethical positions on animals;
- publish pioneering work written by new, as well as accomplished, scholars; and
- produce texts from a variety of disciplines that are multidisciplinary in character or have multidisciplinary relevance.

The new Palgrave Macmillan Series on Animal Ethics is the result of a unique partnership between Palgrave Macmillan and the Ferrater Mora Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics. The series is an integral part of the mission of the Centre to put animals on the intellectual agenda by facilitating academic research and publication. The series is also a natural complement to one of the Centre’s other major projects, the *Journal of Animal Ethics*. The Centre is an independent “think tank” for the advancement of progressive thought about animals, and is the first Centre of its kind in the world. It aims to demonstrate rigorous intellectual enquiry and the highest standards of scholarship. It strives to be a world-class center of academic excellence in its field.

We invite academics to visit the Centre’s website www.oxfordanimalethics.com and to contact us with new book proposals for the series.

Oxford, UK

Andrew Linzey
Clair Linzey

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this manuscript.

Praise for *Yoga and Animal Ethics*

“The *yamas* lie as the foundation of morality for almost all yoga systems of India. And the foundation of the *yamas*, in turn, is *ahiṃsā*, non-violence. It is like the elephant footprint which covers the footprints of all other animals, says the great commentator Vyāsa—if there ever is a moral conflict between the other *yamas* and *ahiṃsā*, the latter must always prevail. And it is important for those considering themselves practitioners of *yoga* outside of India to engage the fact that *ahiṃsā*’s application to non-human creatures was a given in Indic *yoga* circles. It was so normative and assumed, it barely required any explication in *yoga* commentary. Unlike much modern discourse promoting the self-centered advantages of a vegan or vegetarian diet—one’s personal health, or the massive global environmental or grain redistribution benefits—Indian *ahiṃsā* sensitivities stemmed from compassion for the suffering of other non-human fellow creatures.

In this timely volume, Valpey creates a bridge between transplanted *yoga* discourse, animal ethics, and environmental solution-making. In the *Yoga Sūtras*, the canonical text of Yoga, *ahiṃsā* is non-negotiable for anyone identifying as any sort of a *yoga* practitioner, so *Yoga and Animal Ethics* provides robust yoga-derived research and insights that will deepen *yoga* practitioners’ understanding of *yoga* as a path of self-discovery that cannot be separated from the treatment of nonhuman beings. Indeed, true *yogis* should be at the forefront of animal rights activism, and this volume invites general readers to consider viable *yoga*-based ways to contemplate and interact ethically with animals.

Valpey is to be commended for bringing one of the most pressing concerns of our days into dialogue with the rapidly growing spread of *yoga* practices. As with the author’s other works, *Yoga and Animal Ethics* is a well-written, carefully thought out and long-overdue volume that merits a place on every *yogi*’s book shelf.”

—Edwin Bryant, Professor of *Hindu Religion and Philosophy*,
Rutgers University, USA

“Kenneth Valpey’s *Yoga and Animal Ethics* is a pioneering exploration that weaves together the philosophical richness of yoga traditions with the ethical imperative of reimagining human-nonhuman relationships. Given the pervasiveness of yoga cosmological principles in the worldviews of South Asian origin, this work is an invaluable contribution to understanding how deeply embedded cultural frameworks can reshape ethical paradigms in contemporary societies.

Drawing on the *Yoga Sūtra*, the *Bhagavad gītā*, and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Valpey reveals yoga not merely as a practice of self-discipline but as a profound, multi-layered process of self-transformation that challenges anthropocentric worldviews. Thus yogic concepts such as *ahimsā* or nonviolence serve as a foundational ethic for interspecies relationality, redefining the moral imagination of contemporary yoga practitioners. This perspective moves beyond Western individualistic wellness trends and popularized postural forms, situating yoga in its original Indic context as a practice deeply attuned to the welfare of all living beings.

Valpey skillfully situates the rise of yoga and its ethical dimensions within the broader historical context of India's transition from ritual animal sacrifice to internalized, nonviolent practices. This historical shift, rooted in the ethos of *ahimsā* is emblematic of a broader reimagining of human-animal relations. It resonates profoundly with the global need for sustainable and ethical living, as cultures are increasingly being called upon to redefine their relationships with the natural world. By linking ancient Indic traditions to modern environmental challenges, the book underscores yoga's enduring relevance as both a cultural and philosophical resource.

The book's emphasis on the interplay between philosophical inquiry, embodied practice, and ecological responsibility opens a much-needed conversation in both yoga studies and animal ethics. By foregrounding the relational and transformative dimensions of bhakti-yoga, Valpey invites readers to envision a world where devotional practices foster inclusive communities that extend care to all beings.

This study will resonate not only with scholars and yoga practitioners but also with anyone seeking a more integrated and ethically grounded approach to environmental and animal welfare. It is an essential read for those committed to exploring the intersections of culture, spirituality, and ethical action."

—Hrvoje Čargonja, Assistant Professor, *Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, Croatia*

"This excellent book offers an account of animal ethics in terms of yoga, arguing that we neglect animal welfare at our peril and that the ethics of yoga provides a way forward. This is an important book and a must read for all interested in ethical concern for animals."

—Gavin Flood, Academic Director, *Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies and Piramal Dean of Hindu Studies, UK*

"Yoga and Animal Ethics is a profound and timely contribution to both yoga philosophy and animal ethics. Kenneth Valpey masterfully weaves together classical texts, including the *Yoga Sūtra*, the *Bhagavadgītā*, and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, to illuminate how yoga's foundational principles—*ahimsā* (non-harming), discipline, devotion, and self-transformation—offer a transformative ethical framework for

human-nonhuman relations. By connecting yoga's deep spiritual insights with pressing environmental and ethical concerns, Valpey challenges readers to expand their moral imagination and engage in 'beautiful action' that fosters compassion for all beings. His nuanced discussion of *bhakti*-based care ethics and leadership provides a refreshing and much-needed perspective in both yoga studies and animal ethics discourse. This book is essential reading for scholars, practitioners, and anyone seeking a holistic approach to ethics that bridges the inner work of yoga with the outer work of environmental and social responsibility. A truly enlightening and inspiring read."

—Joseph Tuminello, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, *McNeese State University, USA*

"Noting that our social settings are suffused with the idioms of 'yoga' and 'animal ethics,' Kenneth Valpey asks a momentous question: what types of resources can Hindu practices of self-transformation provide towards recalibrating our relations with the nonhuman beings that populate our shared world?"

Drawing on an array of texts such as Patañjali's *Yoga-sūtra*, the *Bhagavad-gītā*, and the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, Valpey highlights the cultivation of the virtue of attentive awareness as pivotal to the reorientation of our moral compass to animals. By decentering our anthropocentric presuppositions on horizons of continuity across divine, human, and animal domains, we may yet be able to recover our fundamental kinship with the presence of personality in the world. In this work, animated both by careful textual scholarship and by deep spiritual sensibility, Valpey evocatively situates therapeutic practices of re-yoking under a spiritual canopy that would shepherd an all-inclusive freedom."

—Ankur Barua, Senior Lecturer in Hindu Studies,
University of Cambridge, UK

"I am pleased to endorse Valpey's thought-provoking book, *Yoga and Animal Ethics*, an important work at the intersection of animal studies, vegan advocacy, and yoga studies. This book provides a compelling basis to question the ethics of exploiting animals in our food production, particularly commercial dairy cows. Valpey's nuanced exploration of the complexities surrounding dairy consumption is both informative and inspiring. Readers will appreciate his commitment to minimizing harm to animals and promoting compassion in our food choices. As someone who advocates for a strict vegan stance, I value Valpey's willingness to engage with different perspectives and find common ground. His strategy for promoting *ahiṃsā* (non-harm) has the potential to inspire meaningful change and cultivate a more compassionate and sustainable lifestyle, a vision that must account for the suffering of animals in our patterns of consumption."

This book is not only a valuable resource for scholars of animal studies, vegan advocacy, and yoga studies but also for spiritually inclined practitioners of yoga. Moreover, Valpey's work highlights the importance of understanding food ethics and abstention from animal consumption as an integral part of one's spiritual path. By exploring the intersections of yoga, ethics, animal welfare, and food production, Valpey's book offers a unique perspective on the spiritual implications of our food choices. This is essential reading for anyone seeking to deepen their understanding of yoga as a holistic practice that encompasses physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. I highly recommend *Yoga and Animal Ethics* to anyone interested in promoting a more just, sustainable, and compassionate world."

—Cogen Bohanec, Assistant Professor in *Sanskrit and Jain Studies*,
Arihanta Institute; Visiting Assistant Professor *Claremont*
School of Theology, USA; Author of *Bhakti Ethics: Emotions*
and Love in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Metaethics (2024)

"*Yoga and Animal Ethics* by Kenneth Valpey is a groundbreaking and much-needed work that reorients our understanding of yoga by placing animals and the environment at the heart of the tradition's ethical teachings. Valpey's adept handling of classical Sanskrit sources—combined with lucid analysis of modern ethical discourse—makes this book a must-read for scholars and practitioners alike. It expertly navigates the historical landscape of Vedic ritual, classical Yoga texts, and devotional theology, revealing how yoga, in principle and practice, prompts a profound rethinking of our relationships with nonhuman animals. In an era when ethical and ecological concerns are paramount, this work stands out both for its scholarship and its relevance. It is a thoroughly researched, engaging text that pioneers an important conversation on animal ethics from a yoga perspective. I highly recommend this text for ethics and religion courses in college classrooms."

—Gopal Gupta, Joe Dunham Distinguished Associate
Professor of Ethics, *Aurora University, USA*

"*Yoga and Animal Ethics* is a very well researched book, which excites one's curiosity about a rare combination of subjects: yoga and animal ethics. The author has attributed the change of ancient Vedic rituals involving animal sacrifice to a more benign bhakti system or worship inspired by yoga. This is a very original idea and has been developed very well with reference to several primary and secondary sources. It is very well researched and presented and will definitely excite a lot of attention and readership."

—Nanditha Krishna, Historian, Environmentalist and Author,
Chennai, India

CONTENTS

1	Introduction: Bringing Yoga and Animal Ethics Together	1
	<i>References</i>	12
Part I	Yoga and the Dialectics of Animal/Self-Sacrifice	15
2	Yoga as Reaction to Animal Sacrifice	17
2.1	<i>Introduction</i>	17
2.2	<i>Vedic Animal Sacrifice as Re-membering the World</i>	18
2.3	<i>Vedic Ritual Reasoning</i>	21
2.4	<i>“You Are Not Killed”</i>	23
2.5	<i>Sacrifice’s Inward Turn</i>	25
2.6	<i>Yoga’s Emergence, Jain and Buddhist Yogic Beginnings</i>	29
2.7	<i>Yogic Soteriology</i>	33
2.8	<i>Re-membering Animals</i>	35
	<i>References</i>	36
3	Dharma, Yoga, and Animals in the Mahābhārata	41
3.1	<i>Introduction</i>	41
3.2	<i>A Snake Genocide</i>	44
3.3	<i>Vyāsa Teaches Śuka: Initial Considerations of Dharma and Karma</i>	46
3.4	<i>Tulādhara Teaches Jājali: From Ritual Ethics to Ascetic Ethics</i>	49
3.5	<i>Yudhiṣṭhira’s Virtue Ethics</i>	55

3.6	<i>Krishna Teaches Arjuna: Yoga and Sāṃkhya in the Bhagavadgītā</i>	57
3.7	<i>Alimentary Ambiguity in the Laws of Manu</i>	61
3.8	<i>Learning Yoga Lessons</i>	63
	<i>References</i>	68
Part II	Yoga Ascent, Animal Ethics: Body, Self, and Other in Classical Yoga	71
4	Yoga Ethics—Restraints (<i>yama</i>) and Observances (<i>niyama</i>)	73
4.1	<i>Introduction</i>	73
4.2	<i>Yogic Principles of Self-Restraint (<i>yama</i>)</i>	75
4.2.1	<i>Ahiṃsā—Eschewing Harming, Embracing Compassion</i>	76
4.2.2	<i>Satya—Enacting Truth</i>	82
4.3	<i>Yogic Principles of Self-Cultivation (<i>niyama</i>)</i>	87
4.3.1	<i>Svādhyāya as Study of Selves</i>	87
4.3.2	<i>Īśvara-praṇidhāna—Devotion to God</i>	93
4.4	<i>Yogic Virtue and Care Ethics</i>	98
	<i>References</i>	100
5	Embodied Yoga in Pursuit of Equal Vision	105
5.1	<i>Introduction</i>	105
5.2	<i>The Gītā's Steps to Equal Vision</i>	107
5.3	<i>Āsana as Embodied Inter-Being</i>	110
5.3.1	<i>Āsana and Animal Imitation</i>	114
5.4	<i>Prāṇāyāma—Breathing with the Animals</i>	119
5.5	<i>Pratyāhāra—Redirecting the Senses</i>	125
5.6	<i>Of Mice and Minds</i>	130
	<i>References</i>	132
6	Minding Animals—The Meditational Turn	137
6.1	<i>Introduction</i>	137
6.2	<i>Yogic Attention for Animals</i>	139
6.3	<i>Compassion, Meditation, and Mokṣa in Jain Tradition</i>	147

6.4	<i>The Four Divine Abidings (brahmavihāra)</i>	152
6.5	<i>Meditation and “Becoming Animal”</i>	155
6.6	<i>New Habits of Attention</i>	161
	<i>References</i>	166
Part III	Being Animal, Becoming Devotional Subjects	169
7	<i>The Bhagavadgītā’s Three Approaches to Animal Ethics</i>	171
7.1	<i>Introduction</i>	171
7.2	<i>Devotional Yoga and the Three Approaches to Animal Ethics</i>	173
7.2.1	<i>Equanimity and Equal Vision Devotionally Inflected</i>	173
7.2.2	<i>The Yoga of Devotional Difference and Difference Theory</i>	179
7.2.3	<i>Indistinction Theory and Puruṣottama Yoga</i>	184
7.3	<i>Conceptualizing Animal Ethics in the Practice of Bhakti-Yoga</i>	191
	<i>References</i>	197
8	<i>Animals, Personhood, Wonder, and Bhakti-Yoga</i>	201
8.1	<i>Introduction</i>	201
8.2	<i>An Allegory of Tortured Bovines</i>	203
8.3	<i>An Elephant Remembers to Pray</i>	205
8.4	<i>Teaching Bhakti—Fashioning a Devotional Body</i>	208
8.5	<i>The Demiurge’s Practice of Wonder</i>	213
8.6	<i>Devotionally Refashioning the Social Body: Toward a Communion of Subjects</i>	216
8.7	<i>Animating Samādhi</i>	224
8.8	<i>Anticipatory Devotional Community</i>	229
	<i>References</i>	232
9	<i>Concluding Reflections: Yoga, Animals, Environment</i>	235
9.1	<i>Introduction</i>	235
9.2	<i>The Bhagavadgītā (Again) and Dharma (Again)</i>	238
9.3	<i>Inscribing Virtue in the Bhagavadgītā</i>	240
9.4	<i>A Cosmic Circular Regenerative Economy</i>	243
9.5	<i>Krishna’s Servant-Leadership at Mount Govardhan</i>	246

9.6	<i>Mount Govardhan's Triple Identity</i>	249
9.7	<i>Yoga as Cultural Renewal for an Ailing Planet</i>	252
9.8	<i>Yoga as "Beautiful Action"</i>	255
	<i>References</i>	261
Appendix A—Additional <i>Yama</i> Precepts		265
Appendix B—Additional <i>Niyama</i> Precepts		275
Appendix C—Yoga, Animal Ethics, and Ahimsā Veganism		279
Glossary of Selected Sanskrit Terms		287
Index		293

ABBREVIATIONS

BhP	Bhāgavata – Bhāgavata Purāṇa
Gītā	Bhagavadgītā
KU	Kaṭha Upaniṣad
MBh	Mahābhārata
MDh	Mānava-Dharmaśāstra
PYŚ	Pātañjalayogaśāstra
RV	Rgveda
ŚB	Śaṭpatha Brāhmaṇa
US	Uttarādhyaṇa Sūtra
VM	Visuddhimagga
YS	Yoga Sūtra of Patañjali



CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Bringing Yoga and Animal Ethics Together

“It is remarkable how much has been achieved during the past thirty-five years in the study of moral and scientific questions about animals.” So write Tom L. Beauchamp and R. G. Frey in the Introduction to their 2012 edited volume, *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Ethics*. From the perspective of academic research and writing, the quantity (and quality) of study about moral and scientific matters about animals during this period (and so much more in the years since their publication) *is* remarkable. This is attested only in part by the quantity and range of the articles in that *Handbook*, a collection which in turn refers to scores of germane articles and books listed in the bibliographies of each article therein. But despite this noteworthy upsurge of attention to all things related to nonhuman animals, there is also a noticeable—one might say glaringly so—lack of any significant reform of human society’s behavior regarding animals. There is a sense that, despite the high volume of animal ethics discursivity in recent decades, there is little to show for it in terms of positive change in human-nonhuman animal relations (Donovan and Adams 2007, pp. 1–20; Donaldson and Kymlicka 2013, pp. 1–11). Arguably, this lack of reform is closely related to the lack of substantial change in humanity’s direction regarding care for the environment and responding to, and reversing, anthropogenic climate change. Both areas of concern have in common a broad lack of *paying attention*. There is a great deal of *noticing* (in public discourse on many levels) that there are serious human-caused problems

for nonhuman animals and for the biological health of the earth overall. But, as Simone Weil points out, there is a great difference between merely noticing a need and paying attention to the need (Quick 2022, p. 27, citing Weil 2009).

In another sphere of human culture, during the same recent decades there has been a remarkable development of interest in and engagement with *yoga*. This is especially so regarding what is often called postural yoga, positioning the physical body in various poses in pursuit of self-development variously conceived. A more or less closely related trend is an interest in and practice of meditation. Like yoga, and overlapping with it, meditation practices come in any number of varieties. Similar to moral and scientific studies about animals, both yoga and meditation have become the subject of extensive research in a wide range of approaches (Newcombe and O'Brien-Kop 2021; Farias et al. 2021; De Michelis 2020). We can locate this contemporary globalized interest in yoga and meditation, at least in part, in a wider area of broadening interest, namely, the so-called “self-help” cultural trend in the Western world. Flowing with (and often energizing) these currents is a lively discourse on “mindfulness” (usually traced to Buddhist sources), now popularized to the extent that this author, recently browsing in a mainstream UK bookstore, came across an entire multi-shelf section labeled “Mindfulness.” Contemporary representations of yoga, meditation, and mindfulness can, in turn, fit within a broader rubric of self-disciplining guidelines and practices to foster wellness and well-being, variously conceived. Yet in this sphere, *paying attention* may be more a matter of attending to oneself than attending to others—whether animals or the well-being of the environment.

Whether for self-centered or other-centered reasons, in this same wellness sphere one sees a range of health-pursuing alimentary trends, in particular vegetarian and vegan practices. Both of these diets (with numerous variations) have become “-isms”—vegetarianism and veganism—signaling ideologies of ethical import. There is an obvious convergence of vegetarianism and veganism’s ethical import with what Beauchamp refers to as a “cryptic term,” namely, “animal ethics.” Whoever keeps a vegetarian or vegan diet for ethical reasons, the reasons are bound to include acknowledgement that the unnecessary killing of animals for food is ethically questionable. In turn, there is evidence for a convergence of vegetarian and vegan diet adherence with present-day yoga practices.¹

¹ See Cramer et al. (2018) for a statistical survey and analysis of the yoga and vegetarian diet correlation in the USA.

Is there a significant convergence of cultural practices and ethical valences between yoga (with which I'm here including meditation) and animal ethics to be explored and elucidated? The sense that there is such a convergence and that to explore this convergence can be a valuable contribution to animal ethics is my point of departure in this study. In this book, I propose to give sustained, exploratory attention to this convergence as a way to share my conviction that animal ethics discourse can benefit in several ways from a serious consideration of yoga principles and practices. In what specific ways might animal ethics discourse benefit from the perspective of yoga (or, more precisely, from various perspectives identifiable as yoga)? Very briefly, some benefits are:

Attention: As an ethical principle in the broad sense of pursuing virtue, the conscious practice of attention is of central importance in early (pre-classical) yoga, classical Yoga, and later yoga practices. Paying serious attention to animals is arguably a first step in any approach to animal ethics. Yogic attention can serve this need.

Yoga discipline: As we will see in Part 2 of this study, the first limb of classical (Pātañjala) Yoga's eight-limbed progression delineates specific virtue-ideals that call for self-discipline regarding other beings. Within this first of the eight limbs, *yama* (restraint), the foundational principle specified is *ahiṃsā*—non-injury or non-harm (often translated as non-violence), a principle that we see the ancient Indic emergence of over-viewed in Part I.

Yoga ontology: The wide variety of yoga traditions share a common deep questioning about the nature of (or in Buddhist yoga traditions, the very existence of) the self (*ātman*, *jīva*, *puruṣa*) in relation to the body and to other selves. Contemporary ethical discourse seems to largely avoid such questioning, assuming thereby a primacy to phenomenal existence that Indic philosophical traditions have almost universally challenged. Questioning about the nature of the self carries with it questions about other selves, including nonhuman selves.

Self-transformation: Unlike the many varieties of skills developed by humans—from hunting, fighting, and rocket building to public speech-making, concert piano-playing, brain surgery, or child-raising—skill in yoga pursues what I will call fundamental self-transformation. Yoga is *fundamentally* self-transformative in that it goes even beyond depth psychology to the root of one's habitual ways of perceiving one-self and the world. It is fundamentally *self-transformative* in that it pur-

sues an awakening of awareness or consciousness, comparable to the emergence from the shadowy cave in Plato’s famous parable. It is a basic premise of this study that consequential changes in human relationality with nonhuman animals can best be conceived based on deeply transformed awareness, facilitated by attentive yoga practice.

These four benefits to animal ethics discourse that I see in yoga perspectives suggest a general feature of Indic traditions of ethical reflection that will be good to keep in mind in the course of this study. This feature is what Roy Perrett (2005, p. 327) calls *multilayering* of foundational moral theories. Depending on the specific tradition, the deepest layer might be thought to be one or another of what Hindu traditions specify as four goals of life (*puruṣārthas*). Arguably common to yoga traditions the deepest layer may be expressed as the pursuit of eschatological hope, what is typically referred to in English as “liberation” (*mokṣa*)—freedom from the fetters of worldly existence—although this is variously nuanced in different yoga traditions.² For us to note here is simply that for navigation of yogic ethical thought in relation to animals in this book, it may help to keep in mind this multilayered aspect of yoga ethics. I suggest that readers keep these four benefits in mind while reading this study, as ways of identifying ethical “layers” applicable to animal ethics.

To help readers who may have little or no prior knowledge of yoga philosophy and practice, I aim to provide sufficient explanations to serve our main purpose of attending to the matter of animal ethics. Conjoined with this aim is my hope to open readers familiar with yoga to a deeper appreciation of its potential for allowing us to upgrade, or re-cast, our relationality with nonhuman animals. I should note that this book is neither an instruction manual on how to practice yoga, nor is it a rule book on how to treat animals. Rather, as already suggested, it is largely exploratory of how yoga thought and practice may illuminate our thinking about, and engaging with, nonhuman animals. Occasionally this means painting ideas in broad strokes while drawing from a very limited selection of largely well-known yoga and yoga-related texts and with broad approaches to animal ethics. Regarding “broad approaches” to animal ethics, I find especially helpful Matthew Calarco’s threefold typology of

²These four goals are duty (*dharma*), pleasure (*kāma*), prosperity (*artha*), and liberation (*mokṣa*). “Eschatological hope” is Gavin Flood’s expression for the broad range of aspirations roughly falling under the rubric *mokṣa*. (Flood 2020, p. 10)

approaches or theories of animal ethics. Calarco identifies three different ways that humans may view themselves in relation to nonhuman animals—as being one of *identity*, of *difference*, or of *indistinction*. In this volume, I consider how yoga thought and practice may illuminate all three approaches, and whether it is possible to encompass them in a yogic vision of human/other-than-human relationality.

Knowing that there are several philosophical traditions of India that have developed and endured over centuries of active discourse and debate, one could ask why I single out yoga as the tradition to bring into conversation with animal ethics. Briefly, there are three main reasons. First, in its classical configuration in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*, Yoga (specified with upper-case Y) became an important philosophical tradition (usually referred to in India by the Sanskrit term *darśana*—a view or perspective).³ Yoga has been associated closely with Sāṃkhya, which can mean literally “enumeration,” possibly the earliest philosophical system of the Indian subcontinent. Classical Yoga partakes largely of Sāṃkhya’s metaphysics of distinction between *puruṣa*—immutable, pure consciousness—and *prakṛti*—mutable and insentient matter. This leads to the understanding that all physical bodies, including those of animals, are distinguishable from the conscious beings inhabiting those bodies. What ethical implications this understanding might have, especially in relation to animals, will be a matter for our deliberation. Unlike Sāṃkhya in its classical form, Yoga is somewhat identifiable as theistic,⁴ a feature that develops significantly in traditions characterized by *bhakti*—devotion—and associated with yoga as *bhakti-yoga*.⁵ The theistic dimension of yoga is important for our discussion of human/nonhuman animal relationality.

³ In what is widely referred to as its classical form, the term “Yoga” (upper case Y) is typically used, to distinguish it from a more generic -yoga-, which will also find frequent use in this book. Classical Yoga is especially associated with the *Yoga Sūtra* (YS) attributed to Patañjali together with the earliest known commentary to this text, traditionally attributed to a certain Vyāsa (generally not identified with Kṛṣṇa-dvaipāyana Vyāsa of the *Mahābhārata*) but also, in recent scholarship, thought to be an autocommentary. The YS combined with the commentary is usually referred to as the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* (PYŚ).

⁴ This may be a matter of debate. O’Brien-Kop (2023, p. 132) views the *īśvara* of the PYŚ as “an ambiguously theistic figure,” concluding that “the *Yogasūtra* is a resolutely non-theist text, and it is solely human agency that drives one’s fortunes across one or more lifetimes.” For a strongly opposing view, see Bryant (2009), YS I.23 commentary.

⁵ Anand Venkatkrishnan (2024, pp. 2–3) drawing from several scholarly analyses, identifies twelve ways of characterizing *bhakti*, including “an ascetic model for social elites of turning one’s life into a sacrificial activity for God; the veneration of past and present teachers and

Second, in contrast to Sāṃkhya's (and other classical *darśanas*) speculative character, Yoga emphasizes specific practices to attain direct insight into the reality of Sāṃkhya's metaphysical truths. There is a strong sense in the Yoga *darśana* that to comprehend these truths is less a matter of intellectual deliberation than to follow a specific path (*mārga*) of disciplined bodily and mental practices, culminating in "yogic perception" and permanent freedom from suffering.⁶ Yogic perception is "a special type of *pramāṇa* (means of knowledge) distinguished from the one provided by the senses, reasoning, analogy, or testimony...[Rather, it is] the immediate presentation to awareness of an object or truth through meditation, i.e., through a practice of concentration and contemplation (*samādhi*) that is not mediated by the senses or thoughts" (Maderey 2018). Maderey further notes the commonality among yoga traditions in their conviction that "if a statement is true, then we should be able to experience those truths directly through adequate means" (ibid.). If truths of a metaphysical nature can be directly experienced, this could have ethical implications whereby the fact/value divide would be bridgeable in meaningful ways. A related way to appreciate yoga as a practice is to see it as a therapeutic process. Yoga traditions broadly speaking (including Jain and Buddhist yoga traditions) recognize bodily existence to be a constantly disturbed (dis-eased—deprived of ease), largely miserable condition that can be permanently relieved by a yogic therapeutic process.

A third reason for focusing on yoga in relation to animal ethics is that this term, along with important generic features of its referent (such as the emphasis on self-discipline and meditation) finds place in various traditions and practices, including Buddhist and Jain traditions. Indeed, important elements of yogic thought and practice have likely originated in Buddhist, Jain, and other ascetic milieux, later to be assimilated into the brahmanical (orthodox Hindu) sphere. As we will see (although in this work my attention is mainly on prominent yoga currents associated with

their images; the emotional outpouring of desire for a departed beloved; active participation in a community of worship; the construction of divine embodiment; a devotional sensibility developed both in tandem with and in opposition to antinomian religious modes; 'heart religion... the religion of participation, community, enthusiasm, song, and often of personal challenge'."

⁶ As Karl Potter (1999, pp. 36–37) notes, Yoga is what he calls a "path philosophy" to distinguish it from "speculative philosophies," recognizing that these two types can overlap, and that Yoga is not the only path philosophy or philosopher of India, identifying Śaṅkarācārya, Rāmānuja, and Gautama Buddha in addition to Patañjali.

brahmanical and Hindu—mainly Vaiṣṇava—traditions) Buddhist and Jain traditions have made valuable contributions to animal ethics, broadly sharing as they do important ideas regarding the nature of the temporal world and the call to pursue practices leading to permanent freedom.

Together, these three aspects of yoga (including classical Yoga) support a broad ethical ground consisting of attention, discipline, a “metaphysical grammar” (Quick 2022), and a soteriological telos of freedom. These latter two elements of yoga in particular—a metaphysical grammar and a soteriology of freedom—provide further openings to ethical reflection regarding animals. These openings take the form of what the *Bhagavadgītā* famously calls *bhakti*—a devotional culture and disposition that comes to be coupled with yoga, as *bhakti-yoga*. This devotional culture and disposition points to the religious dimension of yoga, especially in its bhakti-yoga register. In this regard, we can anticipate resonances with animal ethics in the sphere of religion broadly conceived. Andrew Linzey and Clair Linzey have identified seven “fundamental ideas” in religious traditions relevant to the moral status of animals (Linzey and Linzey 2019, pp. 1–10). Common to these ideas is the recognition that humans are not at the center of the universe and that this fact calls on humans to become sensitive to the suffering of other beings, in a spirit of reverence for all life.⁷

Further to the religious dimension of yoga, in its basic meaning, the word *yoga* (from the Sanskrit verbal root *√yuj*) indicates the act of yoking, joining, uniting, or connecting. In the present work, after considering how important aspects of classical Yoga’s *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* can illuminate human relationality (“connecting”) with nonhuman animals, we explore bhakti-yoga as a valuable articulation and culture of a sensibility that envisions a “communion of subjects” (Waldau and Patton 2006, citing Thomas Berry). In the context of bhakti-yoga the act of yoking, joining, or uniting can be compared to *ligation* (from the Latin root *√lig—ligere, ligare*), etymologically related to the English word religion, and suggesting binding, as in the English word *obligation* (Hart 1986, pp. 39–41). Here the aim will be to see how bhakti-yoga serves to expand the moral

⁷The Linzeys’ seven fundamental ideas favorable to ethical engagement with animals are: (1) recognition of the good beyond the human; (2) human relatedness to fellow beings; (3) the experience of reverence for life; (4) recognition of the intrinsic value of each sentient individual being; (5) sensitivity to animal suffering; (6) the pursuit of selfless living; and (7) a sense of future (or eschatological) anticipation.

imagination, paradoxically binding one in relationality to the supreme person, *bhagavān* or *puruṣottama*, thereby freeing one to liberative relationality with all other beings, human and nonhuman.

I have structured this study in eight chapters (beginning with Chap. 2), divided into three parts. Part I, “Yoga and the Dialectics of Animal/Self Sacrifice,” including Chaps. 2 and 3, first sets out the early Indic discourse around the ritual sacrifice of animals and the emergence of a counterpoint marked by the term *ahiṃsā* and the “internalization of the sacrifice” that characterizes nascent yoga formulations (Chapter 2, “Yoga as Reaction to Animal Sacrifice”). Chapter 3 “Dharma, Yoga, and Animals in the *Mahābhārata*” sketches ways that yoga thought and practice develop in relation to reflection on animals in the great Sanskrit epic *Mahābhārata*, a work that continues to hold wide popular interest to the present day in India and beyond. The question “What is dharma?”—the matter of individual, social, and cosmic order and obligation—pervades the *Mahābhārata* and frames a rich consideration of yoga in relation to animals. Together, Chaps. 2 and 3 serve as an historical and conceptual backdrop to the remaining chapters, in which I largely set aside historiographical concerns to concentrate on yoga thought and practice as these are presented in selected texts.

Part II “Yoga Ascent, Animal Ethics: Body, Self and Other in Classical Yoga” encompasses Chaps. 4, 5, and 6, structured in terms of classical Yoga’s presentation of progressive yoga practice in eight “limbs” (*aṣṭāṅga-yoga*). I draw on the *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* aspect of Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtra* because it is widely known in current yoga circles, and because it serves well as a structural scaffolding, with each of the eight components providing varied positions from which to view and reflect on animal ethics from yogic perspectives. Chapter 4, “Yoga Ethics: Restraints (*Yama*) and Observances (*Niyama*),” looks at the first two of Patañjali’s five components of restraint, namely, non-harm (*ahiṃsā*) and truth (*satya*), and it looks at the final two of the five observances, namely, self-study or recitation or study of scripture (or, I suggest, “study of selves”—*svādhyāya*) and devotion to God (*īśvara-praṇidhāna*). We can think of these restraints and observances as yogic conscious cultivation of virtues that establish the ethical space or landscape in which the serious *yogin* can expect to progress. They identify the dispositional foundation’s cornerstones for revering life in its countless forms. Chapter 5, “Embodied Yoga in Pursuit of Equal Vision,” focuses on the next three limbs of the eight-limbed progression, all of which can be characterized as yogic physical practices. Here, physical *embodiment*

becomes an arena for reflecting on the multiplicity of nonhuman animal forms as one practices postures (*āsana*). Regulated breathing (*prāṇāyāma*) affords higher yogic perception of the commonality among all breathing beings, and withdrawal of the senses from sense objects (*pratyāhāra*, like a tortoise contracting its limbs into its shell) frees the mind for the contemplative practices discussed in the next chapter. Chapter 6, “Minding Animals: The Meditational Turn,” takes the final three limbs of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*, namely, concentration (*dhāraṇā*), meditation (*dhyāna*), and absorption (*samādhi*), as a starting point for considering meditative ways of including animals in the moral universe. In particular, following Matthew Calarco (2015), it is here that I set out the threefold typology of ethical approaches to animals—*identity* theory, *difference* theory, and *indistinction* theory—especially in light of specific Jain and Buddhist forms of yogic meditation. Especially promising for expanding relationality with other living beings may be the *brahmavihāra* practice suggested in the *Yoga Sūtra* and developed in the Buddhist *Visuddhimagga*.

Part III, “Being Animal, Becoming Devotional Subjects,” comprises Chaps. 7 and 8, both of which bring forward bhakti-yoga as an enriching way to envision human/nonhuman animal relationality. Chapter 7, “The *Bhagavadgītā*’s Three Approaches to Animal Ethics,” draws on this very foundational text for bhakti-yoga to correlate engagement with three dimensions, or perspectives, of divinity, with the three approaches to animal ethics discussed in Chap. 6. Thus, realization of divinity as *brahman* (the early Upaniṣads’ term for nondifferentiated ultimate reality) brings metaphysical grounding to the *identity approach*; realization of *paramātman* (the *Bhagavadgītā*’s term for omniscient divinity present and active in all differentiated existents, particularly living beings) engages with the *difference approach*; and realization of *bhagavān* (divinity as the supreme person) gives space in the *indistinction approach* for shifting away from anthropocentric thinking while validating a divine basis in care ethics.

Chapter 8, “Animals, Personhood, Wonder, and Bhakti-Yoga,” takes mainly the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as the core textual resource for Vaiṣṇava traditions of bhakti-yoga. Drawing particularly on the work of Barbara Holdrege (2015) on embodiment as a key category for understanding bhakti, here our attention turns to bhakti as a yogic *process* of “fashioning a devotional body” from an ascribed, to an inscribed, and finally to a “remembered,” body. By this process, the practitioner’s aim is to transform the psychophysical body into one that is fit to relate with—to commune with—the divine body, constituted of atemporality, omniscient awareness,

and ever-expanding bliss. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* offers visions of divine-human-animal interactions along with specific guidelines for the practicing *bhakti-yogin* to consciously develop the qualities (or virtues) supportive of such interactions. These developing devotional qualities nurture cultures of care to unfold and thrive, in turn serving as the basis for developing and sustaining “anticipatory communities” with the aim to expand a bhakti-centered “universe of feelings” that is inclusive of all beings—human and nonhuman.

Following Part III, Chap. 9, “Concluding Reflections: Yoga, Animals, Environment,” completes this study, drawing together the themes discussed in previous chapters to consider how yoga thought and practice can contribute to environmental ethics, as inseparable from yoga-related animal ethics. From a devotional (bhakti) yoga perspective, I consider the *Bhagavadgītā*’s “sacrificial wheel” as a model for appropriate human engagement with the environment when performed in a yogic—and hence nonviolent—manner. The turning of the devotional yogic sacrificial wheel (*cakram pravartitam*), with bhakti toward the divine (present in all beings) as its hub, is the practical and ritual activity that creates and sustains anticipatory communities (introduced briefly in Chap. 8) in which nonhuman animals are protected and appropriately cared for. Returning to the narrative teaching approach of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, I consider Krishna’s famous Govardhan *līlā* as a modeling of “servant-leadership,” necessary for meaningful positive change in human culture for the sake of the environment. Finally, I reflect on yoga as cultural renewal, modeled by the sixteenth-century saint Śrī Caitanya in his pilgrimage to Vraja-Vrindavan and his affectionate exchanges with animals in the course of performing *saṃkīrtana-yajña*, considered the ideal, nonviolent way to turn the sacrificial wheel in the present age.

This book is by no means exhaustive of its topic; rather, it is meant to inspire discussion and elaboration. Each of the two subject areas brought partially in conversation here—yoga and animal ethics—are vast areas of research and deliberation in their own right. As noted above, yoga studies is thriving, bringing us hitherto neglected or lost texts and steadily filling in the history of its development and showing the widening variety of present-day interpretations and practices within the rubric “yoga.” In relation to animal ethics (similarly an area of burgeoning research and discussion, within the wider humanities turn to animal studies), there is especially a need for ethnographic research to engage with present-day yoga

practitioners, their yoga-related practices, and their attitudes and practices regarding relationality with nonhuman animals. And, of course, both yoga and animal ethics in relation to each other must also be understood in their varied cultural contexts (along with their gender, racial, class, psychological, and socio-political-economic dimensions). There is also need to carefully work through the wealth of moral and ethical thought in relation to animal ethics in light of yoga theory and practice in its varied traditions.⁸ I hope that this study will spark interest that will guide readers—whether outwardly or inwardly directed—to serve the bigger aim (echoing Thomas Berry) “for humans to resituate themselves in communion with other species, no longer as despoilers, dominators, or manipulators... [rather, to seek] healing our alienation from the natural world, from other species and from one another” (Waldau and Patton 2006, p. 3).

Note on Terminology

Throughout this book I include a number of Sanskrit terms and phrases from the literature cited, always giving English translations if not longer explanations. I have chosen to use the standard system of diacritics for Roman transliteration of these terms, partly to satisfy those accustomed to it, and partly out of personal habit and preference. I indicate these terms in italic script, except when the word has been adopted into the English language (indicated by its presence in standard English dictionaries). This latter group of Sanskrit words includes yoga, karma, dharma, bhakti, and the divinities Krishna and Shiva. Regarding terminology related to animal ethics, recognizing difficulties with any term used, I rather unsystematically refer to animals, nonhuman animals, other-than-human beings, and occasionally creatures. My language is generally gender-neutral, except when the context (such as a particular Indic text) is otherwise.

⁸ Regarding yoga-related moral theory, see Perrett and Pettigrove (2015), in the context of considering virtue ethics and Pātañjala Yoga, and Perrett (2005) in the context of Hindu religious ethics, for a clear, succinct map of the issues, some of which (Perrett notes) remain unresolved both in Hindu and in Western discourse. Further, distinguishing “external history” from “internal history,” where the former consists of the largely underdetermined ethical statements of—in our case yoga—texts, despite this underdetermination the present book focuses on such texts with the aim to prepare the ground toward filling out an “internal history” that would be constituted of present-day thought and practice (Perrett and Pettigrove, 2015, pp. 58–61).

REFERENCES

- Beauchamp, Tom L., and R. G. Frey. 2012. *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bryant, Edwin F. 2009. *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali: A New Translation and Commentary*. New York: North Point Press.
- Calarco, Matthew. 2015. *Thinking Through Animals: Identity, Difference, Indistinction*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Cramer, Holger, T. Sundberg, D. Schumann, M. J. Leach, and R. Lauche. October 2018. Differences Between Vegetarian and Omnivorous Yoga Practitioners—Results of a Nationally Representative Survey of US Adult Yoga Practitioners. *Complementary Therapies in Medicine* 40:48–52. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ctim.2018.07.012>.
- De Michelis, Elizabeth. 2020. The Modern Spirit of Yoga: Idioms and Practices. In *The Oxford History of Hinduism: Hindu Practice*, ed. Gavin Flood. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Donaldson, Sue, and Will Kymlicka. 2013. *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Donovan, Josephine, and Carol J. Adams, eds. 2007. *The Feminist Care Tradition in Animal Ethics: A Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Farias, Miguel, David Brzier, and Mansur Lalljee, eds. 2021. *The Oxford Handbook of Meditation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Flood, Gavin, ed. 2020. *The Oxford History of Hinduism: Hindu Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hart, Ray L. 1986. The Dialectic of Home and Homelessness: Religion, Nature, and Home. In *The Critique of Modernity: Theological Reflections on Contemporary Culture*, ed. Julian N. Hartt, Ray L. Hart, and Robert P. Scharlemann, 35–54. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.
- Holdrege, Barbara A. 2015. *Bhakti and Embodiment: Fashioning Divine Bodies and Devotional Bodies in Kṛṣṇa Bhakti*. London: Routledge.
- Linzey, Andrew, and Clair Linzey. 2019. *The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Animal Ethics*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Maderey, Ana Laura Funes. 2018. An Overview of Classical Yoga Philosophy as a Philosophy of Embodied Self-awareness. In *Routledge History of Indian Philosophy*, ed. Purushottama Bilimoria. Abingdon, UK: Routledge. ch. 26.
- Newcombe, Suzanne, and Karen O'Brien-Kop, eds. 2021. *Routledge Handbook of Yoga and Meditation Studies*. London: Routledge.
- O'Brien-Kop, Karen. 2023. *The Philosophy of the Yogasutra: An Introduction*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Perrett, Roy W. 2005. Hindu Ethics? In *The Blackwell Companion to Religious Ethics*, ed. William Schweiker, 323–329. Oxford: Blackwell.

- Perrett, Roy W., and Glen Pettigrove. 2015. Hindu Virtue Ethics. In *Routledge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, ed. Lorraine Besser-Jones and Michael Slote, 51–62. New York: Routledge.
- Potter, Karl H. 1999. *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Quick, Jacob. 2022. The Gaze of the Animal: On the Role of Attention in Derrida's Animal Ethics. Ph.D. dissertation. KU Leuven, Humanities and Social Science Group, Institute of Philosophy.
- Venkatkrishnan, Anand. 2024. *Love in the Time of Scholarship: The Bhāgavata Purāṇa in Indian Intellectual History*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Waldau, Paul, and Kimberley Patton, eds. 2006. *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science, and Ethics*. Columbia University Press: New York.
- Weil, Simone. 2009. *Waiting for God*. Translated by Emma Craufurd. First Harper Perennial Modern Classics edition. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



PART I

Yoga and the Dialectics of Animal/
Self-Sacrifice



CHAPTER 2

Yoga as Reaction to Animal Sacrifice

2.1 INTRODUCTION

As one of the oldest models of cosmology (Malinar 2011), sacrifice's primordial creation account in the late *Ṛgveda* describes the dismembering and then re-membering of "Cosmic Man" (*puruṣa*). This chapter sets the scene in which ritual animal sacrifice in Vedic India was sustained. What was the logic of sacrifice that gave it legitimacy, even as anxiety over animal killing was ritually expressed in the process? What was the weak point in the edifice that led to its being challenged and—for many—replaced? Yoga, broadly understood, encompasses the major shift in worldview, in which the ethic of non-harm (*ahiṃsā*) holds an important, even key, position.

This chapter opens with a discussion of the *Puruṣasūkta* hymn of the *Ṛgveda* as a foundational text for brahmanical sacrificial rituals, showing how it encapsulates the paradoxical sense of the need to destroy life to sustain life. With a sense of necessity that these rites be performed came an increase in their complexity and specificity regarding which animals were to be immolated and how this was to be done. Such developments occurred along with a deep sense of evil's presence and the need to remedy evil by sacrificial rites involving animal immolation. These actions were done not without a sense of guilt, addressed to some degree by a ritual rhetoric of propriety that suggests acknowledgement of the animal victims' subjectivity.

A complex agglomeration of factors leads to sacrifice's "inward turn," characterized and energized by renunciatory ways of life that likely contributed to the emergence of yoga practices and ideologies that will crystallize over centuries. Such practices and ideologies gain articulation, particularly in what come to be identified as Jain and Buddhist cultures that become distinctively separate from brahmanical sacrificial lifeways. A devaluation of sacrificial ritual over time seems to parallel a re-valuation of *ahimsā* in an ethical framework that valued a soteriology of permanent release from the cycle of death and rebirth over against the brahmanical ritual, cyclically repeating soteriology of heavenly elevation followed by earthly rebirth.

2.2 VEDIC ANIMAL SACRIFICE AS RE-MEMBERING THE WORLD

For us, who live in the twenty-first century, it is hardly possible to conceive of life three thousand or more years ago in the northern plains of the South Asian subcontinent. Even with the profusion of writings—the Veda hymns and their numerous elaborations extending over a millennium of ritual prescription, narrative explanation, and reflective thought—we are challenged to infer the dynamics of human lives and of the nonhuman animal presence with which humans would have had considerable interaction. What is clear from these texts is that what we call ritual activity had great—even central—importance. This was activity required by a cosmos understood to be complete in itself, but nonetheless requiring exactly orchestrated human demonstrations of responsiveness and reciprocation with its varied sorts of inhabitants.

According to the famous Puruṣasūkta hymn near the end of the *Rgveda* (10.90), a primordial sacrificial event marks the beginning of the cosmos, one in which creation of the world's varieties results from the dismemberment of the "Cosmic Man" (*puruṣa*).¹ From that sacrifice conducted by the gods (*devas*),

¹Interpretations of this hymn vary widely, suggesting the inadequacy of terms such as "figurative" and "literal" to clarify their meaning. For us to note is the primordial character of sacrifice the hymn expresses, sacrifice that involves creation out of ritual destruction, from which is taken the implication that re-creation requires the re-enactment of the rites. Regarding *Rgveda* dating: uncontroversial is that it postdates Indus Valley civilization, and usually it is dated from 1200 to 1500 BCE.

...completely offered, the clotted butter was brought together. [That sacrifice] made the beasts—those of the air, of the forest, and of the village....From [that sacrifice] the horses were born and whatever has cutting teeth in both jaws. The cows as well were born from it. From it were born goats and sheep. (*Rgveda* 10.90.8, 10; Myers 1995, p. 66)

Abstruse as this hymn's sixteen stanzas are, in this extract we can glimpse the cause-effect sacrificial process from which, in this case, first an essential ingredient for fire oblations—"clotted butter" (clarified butter mixed with coagulated milk), was taken to be produced. Then come domestic animals that in other texts are prescribed for offering in sacrifice, listed from most to least valued—horses, cows, goats, and sheep (Smith 1998, pp. 177–178). The hymn subsequently (and famously—or infamously) recounts the creation of a fourfold division of labor for human society, patterned after the Cosmic Man's differentiated form (head, arms, torso, and feet). As a product of the primordial sacrifice, this division is also the model for what becomes the hierarchical social structure that is understood to have as its central purpose the performance of sacrifice, "the central action that was meant to motivate and sustain the entire universe" (Patton 2005, p. 18). As Angelika Malinar (2011, p. 65) explains,

On the one hand, this newly created body of society and cosmos is created by re-mem-bering the parts of the *puruṣa* by re-uniting the separated groups as parts of the ritual order that functions on the basis of the cooperation of all parts. This model expresses larger sacrificial concerns about 'gaining life from destroying life'...and about taking care that the body of a sacrificial victim is dismembered in a way that allows for its being re-mem-bered, that is, for keeping its integrity as a whole, and thus for its being re-embodied in a heavenly, ancestral realm.²

Thus, notions of establishing and retaining cosmic order, cooperation, regeneration, wholeness, re-embodiment, and continuity of life in another realm are the broad themes configuring Vedic sacrifice as a purposeful ritual practice.³

² Malinar quotes Heesterman (1993, p. 34) and refers to Malamoud (1996). B. K. Smith (1998, pp. 62–63) describes the Vedic animal sacrifice as a ritual of "cosmic repair," a "mop-up operation which fashions a cosmos out of the chaos that is Prajapati's emission."

³ See Frazier (2017, pp. 51–54, summarizing Smith 1998) on the Vedic sense of a positive, life-giving principle governing the cosmos, a principle that "allows mercurial bundles of elements to become united in the teeming system of selves that is 'the world'."

Most probably the performers of these sacrifices—sponsors and their priests—did not consciously consider their rites in such abstract terms. For sponsors, the immediate impetus was evidently the hope for tangible rewards in this life and similar rewards in a future life, as is explicitly stated in many Vedic hymns (Galewicz 2020, p. 46);⁴ and priests anticipated tangible rewards from the sponsors as well as enhanced status among *brāhmaṇas* (Samuel 2008, p. 155). Yet, it is also safe to assume that these rites were performed out of a sense of necessity: what the texts prescribe *must* be performed, with careful attention to every textually specified detail if the rites are to be efficacious.

Over time, specifications for the more elaborate sacrifices came to be legion, including all matters surrounding the immolation of animals—which animals, with which physical markings or features, how the animals were to be prepared for immolation, in what way they were to be killed and, as already suggested, how they were to be dismembered, with which mantras the body parts were to be offered in the sacrificial fire, and how the remnants were to be distributed.⁵ Animal sacrifice was a serious undertaking that promised great rewards; yet if not performed properly—if not done exactly as prescribed, rewards would be denied. And further, the deeper, cosmic purposes of the sacrifice would be spoiled, namely, the reconstitution of the *puruṣa*'s sacrificed body, rendering assurance of human and biotic regeneration, the affirmation of cosmic wholeness, the re-embodiment of the sacrificed animals after their death, and the assurance of life's continuity beyond the present life (Mahony 1998, pp. 134–136; de Nicolás 1976, p. 143). Taking a simplistic dialectical materialist perspective, one might want to say that these deeper purposes were articulated in hindsight from a society acutely faced with the vagaries of what appears to have been semi-nomadic existence in Vedic times. But

⁴Tull (2004, p. 135) writes, “In its basic form, the Vedic sacrifice may be characterized simply as ‘the offering of a cow to win more cows’.”

⁵Schwab (n.d. [1886], p. xviii) offers an example of some details regarding Vedic animal sacrifice prescriptions with respect to selection of an offerable animal: “The he-goat must be taken from a herd that is one of twins and the father, brother, and other peers of the herd must still be alive; he should already have second teeth, which is to say he should be about two years old, and as far as possible should be without faults.” “When a horn is broken or undeveloped, the ears are too short, single teeth are missing, a hoof is not split, the tail is mutilated, or if he is lame [then the animal cannot be sacrificed].” See also Walli (1974, pp. 113–142).

whatever one's preference for causal explanation, we can appreciate that these deeper purposes indicate a profound sense of the human condition as being characterized by perpetual vulnerability, a sense that unfolds in the Vedic literature as sacrificial ritual, but also as philosophical questioning and reflection.⁶

2.3 VEDIC RITUAL REASONING

The Vedic ritualists understood that this condition of vulnerability was evident in all the contingencies of nature, including the day-to-day reality of predator creatures seeking their creaturely prey for food. Humans could also be prey to large predatory animals. More broadly, as Roberto Calasso (2015, p. 48–49)⁷ rather lyrically puts it, the Vedic seers (sage-poets)

were skilled in detecting evil with supreme ease. Evil was already apparent at the moment when an axe first struck a tree or a hand uprooted a plant. It was metaphysical evil, inherent in everything that is forced to destroy a part of the world in order to survive, therefore above all in mankind.

Calasso notes that “metaphysical evil” necessarily included the act of eating—involuntary acts and acts that cannot be avoided if human beings were to survive. And since evil is everywhere and in everything, therefore “sacrifice is also everywhere and in everything.” Sacrifice is

the act by which evil is brought to consciousness, using an art learned from “he who knows thus.”⁸ That process in which evil is repeated and is directed,

⁶ Smith (1998, p 46) notes that Vedic “equations” (associations of items with cosmic entities) are neither absurd nor random but are rather systematic expressions made possible (and logical) by fundamental Vedic principles of metaphysics and epistemology—of how the world is and how humans know and represent their knowledge.

⁷ Calasso's book *Ardor* is a study of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, an important late-Vedic text that seeks to reflect in detail on and explain elaborately Vedic sacrificial rituals. As Calasso explains, his purpose in studying this work is the hopeless task of understanding the persistence of animal slaughter. “Sacrifice and murder, offering and killing: a conundrum from the very beginning, which history cannot unravel. Indeed, history will be marked by failures to unravel it” (Calasso 2015, p. 258).

⁸ “He who knows thus” is a frequent expression in late Vedic literature, indicating one who possesses higher knowledge of reality. For a different—and enriching—perspective on the logic of the Vedic animal sacrifice as a way of reckoning with “forgetfulness toward death,” see Das (2013).

in its entirety, toward consciousness, through gestures and formulas, is the supreme remedy we can use in combating evil. Otherwise... [t]hose who eat will be eaten. Those who slaughter will be slaughtered. Those who eat food will themselves become food.

Vedic ritualists regarded their ritual acts as the “supreme remedy” for evil, and the remedy partook of, and thereby counteracted, the evil it worked against. On this understanding, animal sacrifice functioned like fighting fire with fire. It was a matter of survival, of necessary ritual acts, in which the ideal sacrifice, that of one’s own life, was allowed to be replaced by a substitution with an animal because animals were considered closest to humans.⁹ And how could animals be readily available for sacrifice? Ruminants (prey for carnivorous animals) could be domesticated—drawn into the human world by assuring them of food and shelter. They would in turn provide food—directly or indirectly (by their meat and milk or by their work)—for humans. Domesticated animals were, in turn, as the Vedic form of wealth, seen as gifts from the gods, and to receive gifts demands reciprocation: the best of one’s possessions must be given to the invisible beings who are duly invited to the sacrificial feast.

⁹ See Hudson (2002, pp 155–159, esp. p. 158) on the *Puruṣamedha* sacrifice. The five-day *Puruṣamedha* sacrifice specifically serves as a reenactment of the *Puruṣasūkta* hymn of the *Rgveda*. Hudson writes, quoting an explanation of the *Puruṣamedha* found in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (13.6.2.1-2), “The meaning of *Puruṣamedha*... is that the *Puruṣa* who dwells within this universe eats whatever is here as its food (*medha*). Moreover, since the five-fold sequence symbolically sacrifices humans (*puruṣa*) that are fit victims (*medha*) on the middle day, it is also called the *Puruṣamedha*.” See also Fuller (1992, ch. 4, “Sacrifice”) for an account of present-day animal sacrifice in rural India. Fuller writes (pp. 84–85), “[I]n Hindu sacrifice—as is true of sacrifice in many religions—the victim is both an intermediary between the deity and the human sacrificer (the donor), and a substitute for the latter. The perfect sacrificial victim, as many myths demonstrate, is always the human sacrificer himself. Animal sacrifice approximates that ideal by merging the sacrificer with the deity... but sacrifice also cuts the two parties apart when the victim dies, so that only the animal’s life passes to the deity. The human sacrificer remains alive, able to reap the benefits of pleasing the deity by making a sacrifice.” How the (male) human is regarded as the “best” of five types of animals for sacrifice is discussed in Smith (1994, pp. 250–251). Further, Calasso (2015, p.49) writes, “The sacrificial flames are like eyes, ‘they fix their attention on the sacrificer and focus on him.’ What they would most desire is not the oblation, but the sacrificer himself... The eye that is studying him is the eye of the fire. Before he himself formulates a desire, he feels it is the fire that desires him, his flesh. Here occurs the substitution, the redemption of Self: a last, swift operation to which the sacrificer resorts to offer the fire something instead of himself. The sacrificer offers food to avoid becoming food himself.”

Sacrificial reciprocity as the Vedic remedy for evil required dismemberment and then re-memberment, and this involved not only the physical immolation and separation of an animal's body parts. It also involved re-membering by metonymical association. A cow, for example, can become—by correct recitation of the proper mantra at the proper time—identified with one of the gods, namely Vāc, the goddess of speech.¹⁰

2.4 “YOU ARE NOT KILLED”

As an integral feature of some—not all—Vedic sacrificial rites, animal immolation served a remedial purpose. In a broken world where human beings struggle with their vulnerability, the evil of eating and being eaten must be addressed, though it cannot be resolved. Addressing the evil brings it to consciousness, and this consciousness is a sense of conscience, a sense of guilt. It is, Calasso suggests, a primordial guilt that arose when humans became predators rather than prey, discovering the meat diet, which in turn was a “stimulus for the development and spread of power” (Calasso 2015, p. 54). The sense of guilt worked its way into, and was expressed in, the sacrificial rituals and in later literature that refers to the rituals. Some of these expressions take the form of what we would call rationalizations, though perhaps “ritual rhetoric of propriety” might align better with the sense of it in its context. So, for example, in the Āśvamedha horse sacrifice, just before the horse's immolation, he is addressed with the formula *na vā u etan mriyase na riṣyase*—“Truly in this way you do not die nor are you harmed” (RV 1.162.21; Jamison and Brereton 2014, p. 346; Alsdorf 2010, pp. 72–73).¹¹ That such a pronouncement of reassurance is

¹⁰For a discussion of metonymy in the Vedic context, see Patton (2005, pp. 46–47). Regarding the cow/goddess Vāc metonymy, this *Rgveda* stanza (8.100.11; quoted in Patton 2005, p. 147) is chanted in an animal sacrifice to Vāc to yield food and vigor: “The Gods produced the Goddess Vāc. Thus animals of all kinds utter speech. May she, Vāc, the joy-bringing cow, yielding meat and drink, come to us, sufficiently praised.”

¹¹For more details on the “non-death” of animals in Vedic sacrifice, see Schmidt in Alsdorf (2010, pp. 117–121). Fuller (1992, p. 83) describes a modern-day goat sacrifice to goddess Chandi, a form of Durga, during an annual festival in Cattuck, Odisha. “Around midnight, a goat was led to a site near the temple gateway, some distance from Chandi's shrine but within the image's line of sight. The goat was purified and promised to the goddess by sprinkling it with consecrated water. It was then worshiped by the temple's Brahman priests, who offered it flowers, incense, food, and water. A prayer was whispered into the goat's ear to cut it free from its life and to promise liberation for its soul. A sword, infused with divine power, was also worshiped. Another man, a non-Brahman, then raised the sword and severed the

made (directly addressing the victim, however lacking in actual reassurance to the animal) suggests a recognition of the animal's self-value and impulse to self-preservation. Possibly in a similar spirit of recognition coupled with rationalization, the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* offers this justification for immolating animals in sacrificial rites:

After having first fastened the animals and lit the fire, they [the priests] offered fire in fire; and then they [the animals] knew that this is truly how the sacrificial food is prepared, that this is the place; that it is in the fire itself that the sacrificial food is offered. And as a result they yielded and were favorably disposed to being immolated. (*ŚB* 3.7.3.2; Calasso 2015, p. 50)

Did the *brāhmaṇa* priests really believe that the animals became “favorably disposed to being immolated?” We cannot rule at this possibility, but we can take note that *some* concern for the animals—however token—is evident in the expression of concern that they, in some sense, “willingly” go to their death.

Perhaps it was such reasoning (and such a pronouncement as, “You do not die here”) that inspired a narration in a much later text, the *Rāmāśvamedha* in the *Padma Purāṇa* (a text regarded to be from a much later period than the Vedic ritual texts). In this account, at the climax of the sacrifice, when the horse is to be killed, Rāma, the divine sponsor of the rite, recites a pseudo-Vedic mantra requesting the horse to purify *him*, the sacrificer, Rāma. Then, receiving a consecrated sword from the sage-priest Agastya, the moment Rāma touches the sword (*spṛṣṭe*) to the horse, the horse suddenly abandons its “animality” (*paśutvam*) and assumes a “divine form” (*divyarūpam*) (Koskikallio 1999, p. 238).

We could call this story of Rāma's *āśvamedha* rite a tale of animal sacrifice in its most perfect, ideal form. The animal victim is, in such a case, seen as being awarded with a celestial body, the highest benefit possible, gained by simply yielding to the properly performed rites done by skilled priests in concert with an ideal (divine) sponsor. But such an ideal performance of rites was—if it ever happened—no longer to be seen, as

goat's head with a single stroke. The head was taken to an altar near Chandi's shrine, and the Brahman priest went inside, closed the shrine doors and completed the act of offering the goat to her... By dawn, over five hundred goats and some thirty fowls had been immolated for Chandi as Kali.” See also Uskokov (2018), showing how a medieval scholastic justification for animal sacrifice was constructed by the Śrīvaiṣṇava preceptor Rāmānuja.

post-Vedic, then Epic (*Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*), and then Purāṇic literature unfolded. Even as non-Vedic “heterodox” traditions (two of which eventually became prominent, designated as *Jaina* and *Bauddha*—Jain and Buddhist) would voice rejection of the orthodox Vedic sacrificial cult, orthodoxy itself showed increasing misgivings about the possibility to correctly conduct the sacrifice of animals, or even the need to do so.¹²

2.5 SACRIFICE’S INWARD TURN

Yet even so, however much ritual sacrifice would become internally changed, especially by substitution of grains for animals as oblations¹³ and, however much ritual sacrifice of animals would be challenged from within the brahmanical (orthodox) fold or from outside it, sacrifice and sacrificial language persisted in post-Vedic and later times.¹⁴ As the narrative shifts in the direction of non-harm (*ahiṃsā*) as an ideal, and as this ideal eventually takes its place as the ethical core of classical Yoga, the act of sacrifice turns “inward.” This inward turn finds expression already in the ritual and law texts, and it is especially marked in the early Upaniṣads, those texts associated with the Vedic hymns but focused on what some would call

¹²A later text, the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* (*kṛṣṇajanmakhaṇḍa* 185.180), quoted in the early seventeenth century work, *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (Ādi-līlā 17, *Śloka* 7; Dimock 1999, p. 323) specifically forbids the practice of *āśvamedha* or cow sacrifice in what is called the Kali age, the present age, characterized by manifold degradation of human capacities. Note also Bryant’s point (2009, p. 55; YS I.15 commentary): “One can read the entire religious and philosophical history of post-Vedic India as a rejection of Vedic ritualism by communities that were eventually to become heterodox to the Vedic matrix—the Buddhists and Jains—and as a demotion or radical reinterpretation of it by those, such as Patañjali and the Yoga school, who remained in the orthodox Vedic fold. Among this latter category, a sometimes quite scathing critique of the ritualistic mind-set can be found in texts as early as the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, a late Vedic text.”

¹³Schmidt (2010, pp. 133–137) questions the notion that substitution of grains for animals in Vedic sacrifices can be regarded as forerunners of vegetarianism. In this regard, it is noteworthy that when grains were offered as substitution for the sacrifice of a goat, the mantras recited for the goat remain unchanged (Smith 1994, pp. 184–185).

¹⁴See Smith (1994, pp. 252–253) on the tale of how grains become *paśu*, fit for sacrifice, and how sacrifice—including of grains—must be done to avoid being the object of revenge in the next life, since all human food consists of divine leftovers. See also Schmidt (2010, pp. 117 ff). For a detailed analysis of the shift from ritual to yoga terminologies in the Upaniṣads, see Haas (2019).

proto-philosophical reflection.¹⁵ Such reflection, as the “inward turn” of sacrifice, was the turn of the renouncer away from this world. As J. C. Heesterman notes (Alsdorf 2010, p. 92–93):

The decisive point in the development [of *ahimsā*] is the breakthrough, out of the vicious life-death circle, that is, the rise of the renunciatory way of life, where death is no longer periodically conquered, but permanently eliminated... *Ahimsā* therefore is proper to the renouncer of the world, its opposite belongs to the sphere of the man-in-the-world.

The life-death circle was ritually perpetuated in the external Vedic rites that included animal sacrifice, wherein the term *ahimsā* is already found, albeit to refer to appeasement rites that affirm the life-death perpetuation (Schmidt 2010, p. 137). In contrast, the renouncer—in his pursuit of higher knowledge on which the Upaniṣads were mainly focused—renounced the outer rituals involving *hiṃsā* (injury), mentally taking the ritual fires into himself and leaving for the forest to pursue permanent freedom from the life-death circle.¹⁶

But how does yoga figure into the account of the shift away from animal sacrifice to practices that would be ethically anchored in *ahimsā*? The story of how yoga emerges at least in part as a protest against the Vedic animal sacrifice is not easily told as a diachronic progression, any more than the early history of yoga can be clearly discerned as a simple sequential development.¹⁷ Still, there are significant moments that we can note as

¹⁵ However, already in the very early text, the *Atharvaveda* (7.5), there is a teaching of the “inner sacrifice,” beginning with the line “By the sacrifice the Gods sacrificed to the sacrifice.” Feuerstein notes that the hymn indicates that the deities’ sacrifices “had no other purpose than the action of sacrifice, which is the giving of oneself” (Feuerstein 2002, p. 154).

¹⁶ Schmidt (2010, p. 132) paraphrases the *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* text (6.38–40): Upon entering the renouncer stage of life (*sannyāsa*), “one performs a sacrifice whose *dakṣiṇās* [fees paid to priests for their services in performing sacrifices] are one’s whole possessions, and one reposit[s] the sacred fires in oneself. One gives the promise of fearlessness (*abhaya*) to all beings, which guarantees one’s own fearlessness.” Similarly (paraphrasing the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 11.5.4.3–4, Schmidt 2010, p. 141), “The teacher commits his pupil to all beings in order to protect him from harm; in turn the pupil has to abstain from harming the beings.”

¹⁷ See Harimoto (2021) for a philological tracing of the term *yoga* from early Vedic through the articulation of “classical” Yoga in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* (referring to the *Yoga Sūtra* of Patañjali together with its primary commentary, the Vyāsa-bhāṣya, possibly an auto-commentary; conjecturally—and controversially—dated as late as the sixth century CE). Not concerned with yoga as such, Alsdorf (2010, pp. 56–57) attempts to trace the development of vegetarianism in ancient India, concluding that its roots can, despite the denial by some

leading eventually to practices we would today consider as yoga and, by implication, would include the practice of *ahimsā* as its foundational ethical principle.

From the earliest Vedic times to those of the later Upaniṣads is seen a significant shift in the meaning of *yoga*. Ironically, *yoga*'s initial primary meaning was the harnessing or hitching of horses to a yoke, as for battle. Yoga seems to have been associated with the violence of war rather than the nonviolence of peaceful, meditational practices. But in the *R̥gveda* the martial meaning is found along with the derived meaning "effort," and effort eventually becomes a mainstay of later yoga practice: successful yoga practice as understood in what will be regarded as "classical" Yoga requires concerted effort for its meditational program to bring realization of its ultimate aim, *samādhi* or *kaivalya*.¹⁸

The *Bhagavadgītā* (*Gītā*), the well-known sacred text situated within the vast epic *Mahābhārata*, uses the word *yoga* and related terms extensively, generally referring to it as disciplined practice aimed at subduing and directing the mind to free one from the fetters of worldly existence and to attach—or yoke—one to transcendence, especially in its "personal" feature as Bhagavān, the supreme being, referred to as Yogeśvara, lord of yoga. With clear affinities to the later classical Yoga compiled as Patañjali *Yoga Sūtra* (especially in the *Gītā*'s sixth chapter), the *Gītā* mentions *ahimsā* four times, including it in lists of principles to be followed in the practice of yoga. In later chapters we will look more into the *Bhagavadgītā*'s

scholars, be postulated to begin in the pre-Aryan (prior to the R̥gvedic) time. But in his review of Alsdorf (Appendix I in Alsdorf 2010), J. C. Heesterman proposes to shift the question of origins to one of meaning, whereby one notes the link between violence and nonviolence (*ahimsā*) in the context of Vedic sacrifice: "[T]he monk (who does not kill) can lead a sinless life thanks to the sin of the layman (who does the killing for him)." If the "monk" is identified as the *yogin*, the practitioner of yoga, we begin to see the connection between yoga, *ahimsā*, and the rejection of animal sacrifice in post-Vedic India. See also Wernicke-Olesen (2021) and for attention to the post-Vedic period in this regard, see Bryant (2006).

¹⁸ Joanna Jurewicz (2021, pp. 357–359) notes that in the *R̥gveda*, *yoga* "means a journey to gain the free space where movement and living is possible... In the later Upaniṣads and in the Smṛti texts, the general domain of Riding In A Chariot begins to be elaborated... to express all aspects of the liberating process. The cognitive faculties and difficulty of their restraint are conceived in terms of restraining reins and horses, the objects of senses are conceived in terms of road or pastures, and the skill of the practitioner is conceived in terms of the skill of the driver." Jurewicz quotes a stanza from the *Mahābhārata* (*Mokṣadharmā Parva* 202.20): "Then the foremost from the gods, himself under a yoke (yoga) and with yoga as his driver, mounted on a chariot (yoga), O the best of the Bhāratas."

(and *Mahābhārata*'s, more broadly) yoga ethics, so for now, is simply to note two points. First is the *Gītā*'s striking teaching regarding religious violence: Krishna's exhortations to his warrior friend Arjuna to fight as a practice of yoga recall the R̥gvedic connection between yoga as yoking horses for battle and yoga as effort; yet in the same text yoga is represented as meditational practice aiming at friendliness and compassion for all beings—the attitudes one associates with the nonviolence principle. Second, returning to the point about the persistence of sacrificial language, the *Bhagavadgītā* uses it extensively, thereby stretching its meaning to include the disciplines of yoga practice. Thus, for example, Krishna tells Arjuna (*Gītā* 4.25–27),

Some *yogins* worshipfully sacrifice to gods alone. Some, by sacrifice alone, offer sacrifice into *brahman*-fire. Others offer senses such as hearing into the self-control fire. Others offer sense objects such as sound into the sense-fire. Some offer all sense actions or breath actions into the yoga fire of self-control, ignited by knowledge. (Goswami trans. 2015, p. 167)

By setting yoga within sacrificial terminology, yogic “oblations” of senses, sense objects, and controlled breathing (*prāṇāyāma*) are “offered” into the “fire” of self-control, or into that of the Absolute of Vedānta (Upaniṣadic) thought, *brahman*. Instead of perpetuating the birth-death circle by ritual immolation of animals, sacrifice here becomes the means for ending the birth-death circle, thereby ending the *yogin*'s repetition of births, whether in human, animal, or even plant form.¹⁹ Yogic sacrifice, now offered into the “fire” of self-control, takes on a much different spirit from brahmanical ritual sacrifice, such that it will be appropriate in this new context (as we will see in the final chapter) to refer to *yajña* as *service*.

¹⁹ Arguably, from the perspective of the *Bhagavadgītā*, it is *not* the case that the term *yajña* (sacrifice) is being used metaphorically. Rather, it is the converse: yogic sacrifice is the model from which ritual sacrificial practices are derived. As Smith (1994, p. 203) notes, “[I]t is quite reasonable to regard the Vedic sacrifice as a model *for* understanding other phenomena as it is to assume that it is only a model *of* other phenomena.” This is hinted at by Krishna's derision of those who regard the Vedic hymns (and by implication the sacrifices in which they are sung) as the be-all and end-all of religious life (*Gītā* 2.42).

2.6 YOGA'S EMERGENCE, JAIN AND BUDDHIST YOGIC BEGINNINGS

That living beings (*jīva*) take on bodily form in accordance with their previous actions (*karma*) is a notion that came to be prominent in almost all the religio-cultural traditions of South Asia, including what has come to be called Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism. Of these, Jain traditions are significant for their dedication to *ahiṃsā* as a foundational ethical principle intended to address the problem of karma-as-bondage. It is this principle that largely guides and determines Jain life, both for laypersons and Jain ascetics. More specifically, *ahiṃsā* informs yoga traditions within the Jain landscape, and it has been noted that this, along with other principles of self-restraint in yoga practice, runs parallel to those in the *Yoga Sūtra* of Patañjali (Sarbacker 2021, p. 99). Thus, the web of ideas and practices that led the performance of ritual sacrifices (including the immolation of animals) to make way for “internal sacrifice”—the interiorization of ritual—includes Jain ideas and practices, which are traceable historically (epigraphically), however, to no earlier than the middle of the second century BCE (Balcerowicz 2016, p. 6).

To draw together the threads of this narrative in relation to Jainism, we can begin with a reference from the orthodox brahmanical sphere of ritual injunctions for householders. The *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, a major Dharmaśāstra text, enjoins:

A householder has five slaughter-houses (*pañca-sūnā*): fireplace, grindstone, broom, mortar and pestle, and water pot. By his use of them, he is fettered. To expiate successively for each of these, the great seers devised the five great sacrifices to be carried out daily by householders. (*Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* 3.68–69; Olivelle trans. 2005, p. 112)

The five “slaughter-houses” of the householder are the essential tools and utensils of domestic life, so harshly designated because each of these, when used even for routine family maintenance, are considered destructive of small and microscopic life-forms. As an expression of post-Vedic orthodoxy, the *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* in this instance parallels the Jain view that this world is teeming with life and, this being the case, human action (*karma*) is implicated by injury and destruction of life forms, however seemingly insignificant or invisible they may be.

How this view relates to the shifting understanding and practices of sacrifice is highlighted in a relatively late Jain text, the *Uttarādhyayana Sūtra*, which tells the story of a certain Jain monk, Harikeśa, as he encounters a group of proud *brāhmaṇas* performing a Vedic sacrifice. After considerable altercation with the *brāhmaṇas*, who become eventually pacified enough to listen to him, Harikeśa says (in Hermann Jacobi's 1895 translation),

O Brāhmaṇas, why do you tend the fire, and seek external purity by water? The clever ones say that external purity which you seek for, is not the right thing. You (use) Kuśa-grass, sacrificial poles, straw and wood, you touch water in the evening and in the morning; thereby you injure living beings, and in your ignorance you commit sins again and again. (US 12.38–39)

The *brāhmaṇas*, now apparently open for good (Jain) sagely advice, request the monk to instruct them on the proper way to perform sacrifice. He begins,

Doing no injury to living beings of the six orders, abstaining from lying and from taking what is not freely given, renouncing property, women, pride, and deceit, men should live under self-restraint. He who is well protected by the five Saṃvaras²⁰ and is not attached to this life, who abandons his body, who is pure and does not care for his body, wins the great victory, the best of offerings. (US 12.41–42)

Listing these practices as the proper way to perform sacrifice conveys the message that true sacrifice consists in the pursuit of renunciation by practicing yogic disciplines. That *ahimsā* heads the list is significant, as is the inclusion of all “six orders” of living beings in the Jain typology of one- to five-sensed beings as deserving of non-injury. We may also note that despite the polemic nature of this story, the argument is not that sacrifice should be abandoned, but rather that it should be transformed to become an internal practice, one that is governed by self-restraint, the pursuit of specific virtues, and acceptance of one's own physical body's inevitable subjection to destruction. On being further questioned how a monk such as Harikeśa can offer sacrifice (which normally requires a fire, a fireplace, a ladle, fuel, and oblations), Harikeśa replies poetically and pointedly,

²⁰ In Jain teachings, *saṃvaras* (“stoppages”) are practices (of which five types are listed) that stop the influx of binding action (karma).

Penance is my fire; life my fireplace; right exertion is my ladle; the body the dried cowdung; *karman* [karma] is my fuel; self-control, right exertion, and tranquility are the oblations, praised by the sages, which I offer. (Smith 1994, pp. 211–212)

In this extended metaphorical play on the various features of Vedic sacrifice, all the elements of Vedic sacrifice become translated into elements of ascetic practice. In this way, sacrifice is affirmed while also being redefined and, in the process, exalted to its “true” form, which is understood to be truly efficacious.

Is a parallel account of early Buddhist traditions in relation to Vedic sacrifice to be told? First we should acknowledge that there are debates regarding the extent to which either Jain or Buddhist traditions were consciously rejecting the Vedic or brahmanical world (Schmidt 2010, p. 143).²¹ What is clear is that both are to be seen as traditions that valorized asceticism to varying degrees, whereby avoidance of harm to living creatures is a pronounced and arguably integral ideal. In the highly complex story of early Buddhist thought and practice, the observance of five precepts (literally, five virtues—*pañca-sīlāni*) (Harvey 2000, p. 66), while not unique to Buddhism, became a prominent directive, positioned as a prerequisite to ordering one’s life toward what we might now call spiritual elevation. How, and to what degree, these precepts were to be followed was largely determined by social position—especially whether one was a monk/nun or a lay householder. Still, the precepts were clearly articulated as practices of self-restraint. The first of these five precepts, abstention from harming living creatures, is clearly counter to the ritual practices of animal sacrifice:

²¹ “Some authors look for pre-Aryan origins of, or at least influences in, Buddhism and Jainism although concrete proof for this assumption is lacking. Jaini (1979, p. 169) argues that the Jains (Jains) have no memory of a time when they fell within the Vedic fold and could accordingly not have started as an *ahimsā* oriented sect within the Vedic tradition. Even if one concedes the rather vague possibility that Buddhism and Jainism originated in a completely different milieu than Vedism, the question remains against which practices the ascetic movements were directed.” Schmidt goes on to discuss the role of the *kṣatriya* spirit of independence in developing opposition to many brahmanic ideas rooted in ritualistic thinking. Both the Buddha and the Jina may have belonged to this line of tradition, going “beyond the royal sages of the Upaniṣads by rejecting the Veda and the ritual based on it.”

Laying aside violence in respect of all beings, both those which are still and those which move...he should not kill a living creature, nor cause to kill, nor approve of others killing. (*Sutta-nipāta* 394)

Abandoning onslaught on breathing beings, he abstains from this; without stick or sword, scrupulous, compassionate, trembling for the welfare of all living beings. (*Majjhima Nikāya* 1.345; Harvey 2000, p. 69).

As we will see in Chap. 4, Patañjali lists *ahiṃsā* as the first of five aspects of *yama*—restraint—at the outset of his classical Yoga tradition’s eight-limbed mapping of yoga practice. Including *ahiṃsā*, four of the Buddhist five precepts are the same for Patañjali, namely, non-harm, truthfulness, refraining from stealing, and sexual continence.²² Thus, we see an obvious minimal parallel between the two traditions. This common theme of explicit injunctive statements against the harming—especially the killing—of beings including animals in Buddhism and classical Yoga indicates a common line of demarcation between them and the sacrificial brahmanical practices described and enjoined in Vedic texts.

But again, we must proceed with caution in making too radical a demarcation, hoping to clearly delineate *śramanical* (ascetic) from orthodox brahmanical worldviews. The notion of sacrifice surely changes, but it does not disappear (Samuel 2008). The Buddhist *Samyutta Nikāya* (3.9.1 *Yaññasutta*) gives a striking illustration of this. The story goes that some monks, followers of the Buddha, begged alms in a place where the king of Kosala, Pasenadi, was conducting a grand sacrifice of several hundred animals. Later, the monks informed the Buddha of what they saw, to which the Buddha is said to have responded by reciting verses (presumably from an unidentified text considered authoritative):

Horse sacrifice, human sacrifice, the sacrifices of the ‘casting of the yoke-pin’, the ‘royal soma drinking’, and the ‘unbarred’—these huge violent sacrifices yield no great fruit.

The great sages of good conduct don’t attend sacrifices where goats, sheep, and cattle and various creatures are killed.

But the great sages of good conduct do attend non-violent sacrifices of regular family tradition, where goats, sheep, and cattle, and various creatures aren’t killed.

²² Regarding the fifth restraint: in place of nonpossessiveness (*aparigraha*) in the Pātañjala *Yoga Sūtra* is an injunction of sobriety in Buddhist texts (Harvey 2000, pp. 67, 77).

A clever person should sacrifice like this, for this sacrifice is very fruitful. For a sponsor of sacrifices like this, things get better, not worse. Such a sacrifice is truly abundant, and even the deities are pleased.

“The great sages of good conduct” express a nonsectarian sense of proper behavior, whereby persons who would not themselves perform physical sacrifices (presumably renunciants) would nevertheless respect householder traditions by attending nonviolent sacrifices. And those (presumably the householders) who perform sacrifices are assured that their nonviolent sacrifices will be fruitful, indeed more so than if they would perform violent sacrifices. It is significant that early Buddhist tradition included lay devotees, and while they were expected to adopt the five precepts, the texts represent the Buddha as encouraging them to do so for the purpose of gaining pious merit (*kamma*, Sanskrit—*karma*). The layperson’s motivation for abstaining from violent acts such as animal sacrifice and hunting was therefore not unlike the motivation of the brahmanical householder in performing ritual sacrifices involving violence (Wijayaratna 1990, pp. 175–178). Both pursued material rewards in this life and elevation to a higher status in the next life. Only the means were different while, according to the above quoted Buddhist text, violent sacrifices were, in fact, ineffectual, whereas nonviolent sacrifices were “very fruitful.”

2.7 YOGIC SOTERIOLOGY

We have noted that the brahmanical practices that included animal sacrifice were embedded in a worldview that called for human beings to affirm their place in the natural order by acts of deliberate ritually structured destruction of life to assure the perpetuation of life. To perpetuate one’s own felicitous existence in and beyond the present life, Vedic ritual reasoning called for blood sacrifices in specific circumstances, essentially substituting animals for oneself as sponsor of a given sacrificial rite. One could extend the substitution such that grains (“cakes” made of grains) represented animals which, in turn, represented the sacrifice’s sponsor;²³ but in any case, a general principle of hospitality for higher, invisible beings, was the rule. The powerful celestials behind nature’s forces could best be made cooperative by pleasing them—by inviting them to a feast. And having

²³ It may be of interest that bloodless sacrifice was also a practice in Ancient Greece: see Obryk (2019).

once invited them—Indra, Candra, or the Maruts, for example—one must be ready to give what they expect.

But in the course of time—arguably from early in the latter half of the first millennium BCE—the value of such sacrifices was questioned. It became increasingly clear that these sacrifices’ results—attractive and promising as they were—were temporary, and that the supposed exaltation to celestial existence for animal sacrificial victims was not guaranteed. Schmidt explains the devaluation of sacrifice in relation to a re-valuation of *ahimsā*:

If the sacrifice could secure only a temporary stay in heaven, it was devalued, became meaningless for the truly knowing one, and with it also the magical means by which one had believed it possible to annul death and injury. *Ahimsā* became by necessity one of the main demands of the thinkers who transcended the ritual. Once one has lost confidence in the magical manipulations, the fear of the revenge of the victim which is repeatedly adduced as a reason for *ahimsā* comes to the fore again. (Schmidt 2010, p. 142)

In other words, initially the practice of *ahimsā* was predicated solely on the fear of revenge of a sacrificial animal victim in a future life, inspiring ritual substitution with grains and the like. But now, considering an entirely different soteriology, namely, pursuit of permanent liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth, the practice of *ahimsā* was still based on the fear of revenge, yet this fear increases with an awareness of the deeper implication of violence, namely, of the perpetrator’s suffering lifetime after lifetime without end. The “truly knowing one” finds the Vedic sacrifice “meaningless” because it fails to address the fundamental problem of human existence. It fails to free one from what is increasingly understood to be a state of perpetual bondage rooted in the dynamics of the cosmic moral order represented by the term *karma*.

This new understanding of the human—actually all creatures’—predicament became a point of broad agreement among the three constellations of tradition, namely what would come to be designated “Hindu,” as well as the Jain and Buddhist constellations.²⁴ This broad agreement on the problem of perpetual karmic bondage in cycles of death and rebirth

²⁴ Historical orientation with respect to this “new understanding” may be assisted with Gerald Larson’s notion of historical “layers” of Indic religion. The new understanding would correspond with the “Indo-Śramanic layer”—c. 600 BCE—300 CE, continuing on in the “Indic (Hindu-Buddhist-Jain) layer”—c. 300–1200 CE (Larson 1995, pp. 52–53).

(*samsāra*) would lead to differing conceptions of the solution, even as each conceived the solution as one or another means of overcoming or ending one's "karmic footprint" in the world. But whichever means might be proffered, common to all was the sense that self-restraint practices, beginning with *ahimsā* (however specified in practice), must be given priority.

2.8 RE-MEMBERING ANIMALS

To begin framing in historical terms how animal ethics can be understood in the light of yoga traditions, I have given considerable attention to early Indic ritualism's rationale for animal sacrifice. This is necessary to see the beginnings of the *ahimsā* turn, which initially served to *preserve* and *sustain* the early brahmanical culture's sacrificial value system (what we could characterize as "sustained re-membrance" of the dismembered Cosmic Man). It would be a gross over-simplification and confounding of history to say that an ideology of *ahimsā* then took a life of its own to become the driving force of ascetic traditions, out of which yoga emerges as a distinct system of self-transformation. Rather, we may better understand the historical connection between yoga and *ahimsā* in complex, organic terms. But however the story of *ahimsā*'s positioning in yoga might be told, yoga, when it takes its "classical" form represented by the much later *Yoga Sūtra* of Patañjali and *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*, will position *ahimsā* as its first and clearly foundational principle of self-restraint (*yama*). In yogic understanding, the "internalization of the sacrifice" therefore begins with the rejection of an integral feature of the external sacrifice, namely, the immolation of animals—ritualized violence thought to be sanctified and sanctifying.

The term "re-membrance," with the intentional hyphenation, will be important when we discuss bhakti-yoga in later chapters, albeit with a different sense than in the present context. But both here and later, the resonance of this term with "remembrance" as the recovery of memory is significant. In the context of sacrifice as described in this chapter, the sacrificial ritual can be seen as an enactment of collective memory, a memory of cosmic unity implied in the Ṛgveda's Puruṣasūkta hymn. In its ritual immolation of animals by which their bodies are dismembered "in a way that allows for [their] being re-membered," the Vedic sacrificial cult sought to sustain the macrocosmic body (the *cosmos body*, as we will refer to this dimension in the context of yogic thought and practice).

The idea of sustaining the macrocosmic body leads into consideration of *dharmā*—a key term in any Indic discussion of ethics—with its verbal root $\sqrt{dhr}$ (to hold, bear, carry, maintain, preserve, keep: Monier-Williams 1995). Importantly, dharma as the subject of ethics takes center stage in the main text of interest for us in the next chapter. There we continue with historical framing in later centuries regarding our topic, as yoga and concern for animals unfold in the great Sanskrit epic poem, the *Mahābhārata*, and as concern about permitted and forbidden food is articulated in the laws of Manu, the *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*.

Questions for Reflection

1. What is meant by “larger sacrificial concerns about ‘gaining life from destroying life’” (in Angelika Malinar’s comment)? (Sect. 2.2)
2. How would you explain Robert Calasso’s description of Vedic sacrifice in terms of being a “supreme remedy we can use in combating evil”? (Sect. 2.3)
3. That sacrificial animals would “yield” and become “favorably disposed to being immolated” strikes us as far-fetched. Yet as a statement in sacred scripture, this would have been taken seriously by the priests. Or would it? (Sect. 2.4)
4. Why is it that, in the early post-Vedic period, according to J. C. Heesterman, *ahimsā* is “proper to the renouncer of the world”? (Sect. 2.5)
5. How would you explain the Jain monk Harikeśa’s expression, “self-control, right exertion, and tranquility are the oblations”? (Sect. 2.6)
6. Why is “a state of perpetual bondage rooted in the dynamics of the cosmic moral order represented by the term *karma*” regarded as “the fundamental problem of human existence”? Is this also a problem for nonhuman animals?

REFERENCES

- Alsdorf, Ludwig. 2010 (1962). *The History of Vegetarianism and Cow-Veneration in India*. New York: Routledge.
- Balcerowicz, Piotr. 2016. *Early Asceticism in India: Ājīvikism and Jainism*. London: Routledge.
- Bryant, Edwin F. 2006. Strategies of Vedic Subversion: The Emergence of Vegetarianism in Post-Vedic India. In *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science, and Ethics*, ed. Paul Waldau and Kimberley Patton, 194–203. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Bryant, Edwin F. 2009. *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali: A New Translation and Commentary*. New York: North Point Press.
- Calasso, Roberto. 2015. *Ardor*. New York: Penguin.
- Das, Veena. 2013. Being Together with Animals: Death, Violence and Noncruelty in Hindu Imagination. In *Living Beings: Perspectives on Interspecies Engagements*, ed. Penelope Dransart, 17–32. London: Bloomsbury.
- Dimock, Edward C., Jr., and Tony K. Stewart. 1999. *Caitanya Caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja—A Translation and Commentary*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Feuerstein, Georg. 2002. *The Yoga Tradition: Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Frazier, Jessica. 2017. *Hindu Worldviews: Theories of Self, Ritual and Reality*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Fuller, C. J. 1992. *The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Galewicz, Cezary. 2020. Ritual, Ascetic, and Meditative Practice in the Veda and Upaniṣads. In *The Oxford History of Hinduism: Hindu Practice*, ed. Gavin Flood, 35–61. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Goswami, H. D. 2015. *A Comprehensive Guide to Bhagavad-gītā with Literal Translation*. Gainesville, FL: Krishna West.
- Haas, Dominik. 2019. Ritual, Self and Yoga: On the Ways and Goals of Salvation in the Kātha Upaniṣad. *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 47:1019–1052. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10781-019-09408-y>.
- Harimoto, Kengo. 2021. How Yoga Became Yoga: Yoga and Meditation Up to the Classical Period. In *Routledge Handbook of Yoga and Meditation Studies*, ed. Suzanne Newcombe and Karen O'Brien-Kop, 65–79. Milton Park (UK): Routledge.
- Harvey, Peter. 2000. *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Heesterman, Jan. 1993. *The Broken World of Sacrifice*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hudson, Dennis. 2002. Early Evidence of the *Pāñcarātra Āgama*. In *The Roots of Tantra*, ed. Katherine Anne Harper and Robert L. Brown, 133–167. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Jacobi, Hermann, trans. 1895. The Uttarādhyayana Sūtra. In *The Sacred Books of the East*, ed. F. Max Müller, vol. 45. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Jaini, Padmanabh S. 1979. *The Jaina Path of Purification*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Jamison, Stephanie W., and Joel P. Brereton. 2014. *The Rigveda: The Earliest Religious Poetry of India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jurewicz, Joanna. 2021. *Invisible Fire: Memory, Tradition and the Self in Early Hindu Philosophy*. Warsaw: Elipsa.

- Koskikallio, Petteri. 1999. The horse sacrifice in the Pātālakhaṇḍa of the Padmapurāṇa. In *Composing a Tradition: Concepts, Techniques and Relationships*, ed. Mary Brockington and Peter Schreiner, 227–243. Croatian Ministry of Science and Technology: Zagreb.
- Larson, Gerald James. 1995. *India's Agony over Religion*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Mahony, William K. 1998. *The Artful Universe: An Introduction to the Vedic Religious Imagination*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Malamoud, Charles. 1996. Paths of the Knife: Carving up the Victim in the Vedic Sacrifice. In *Cooking the World: Ritual and Thought in Ancient India*, ed. C. Malamoud and David White, 169–180. Delhi: Oxford University Press India.
- Malinar, Angelika. 2011. Hindu Cosmologies. In *The Continuum Companion to Hindu Studies*, ed. Jessica Frazier, 60–74. London: Continuum.
- Monier-Williams, Sir Monier. 1995. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Myers, Michael W. 1995. *Let the Cow Wander: Modeling the Metaphors in Veda and Vedānta*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- de Nicolás, Antonio T. 1976. *Four-Dimensional Man: Meditations Through the Rg Veda*. Stony Brook, NY: Nicolas Hays.
- Obryk, Matylda Amat. 2019. Bloodless Sacrifice. In *Animal Sacrifice in Ancient World: Proceedings of the Second and the Third Workshops on Sacrifice*, ed. Krzysztof Bielawski and Matylda Amat Obryk. Warszawa (Warsaw): Global Scientific Platform sp. z o.o.
- Olivelle, Patrick. 2005. *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Patton, Laurie L. 2005. *Bringing the Gods to Mind: Mantra and Ritual in Early Indian Sacrifice*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Samuel, Geoffrey. 2008. *The Origins of Yoga and Tantra: Indic Religions to the Thirteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sarbacker, Stuart Ray. 2021. *Tracing the Path of Yoga: The History and Philosophy of Indian Mind-Body Discipline*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Schmidt, Hanns Peter. 2010. Origins of Ahimsā, Appendix II; Ahimsā and Rebirth, Appendix III. In *The History of Vegetarianism and Cow-Veneration in India*, ed. Ludwig Alsdorf, 94–127. Milton Park (UK): Routledge.
- Schwab, Julius. 1886. *Das altindische Thieropfer mit Benützung handschriftlicher Quellen*. Zürich: EOD Reprint (nd), Zentralbibliothek Zürich.
- Smith, Brian K. 1994. *Classifying the Universe: The Ancient Indian Varṇa System and the Origin of Caste*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Smith, Brian K. 1998. *Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual, and Religion*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Tull, Herman W. 2004. Karma. In *The Hindu World*, ed. Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby. New York: Routledge.

- Uskokov, Aleksandar. 2018. When Killing Is Not Violence: The Justification of Animal Sacrifice in Rāmānuja's Śrībhāṣya. *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 26 (2): 163–181.
- Walli, Koshelya. 1974. *The Concept of Ahimsā in Indian Thought (According to Sanskrit Sources)*. Varanasi: Bharata Manisha.
- Wernicke-Olesen, Bjarne. 2021. Hinduism and Meditation: Yoga. In *The Oxford Handbook of Meditation*, ed. Miguel Farias, David Brazier, and Mansur Lalljee. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wijayaratna, Mohan. 1990. *Buddhist Monastic Life—According to the Texts of the Theravāda Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://web.archive.org/web/20171215160650/http://elibrary.ibc.ac.th/files/private/Buddhist%20%20Monastic%20Life.pdf>.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Dharma, Yoga, and Animals in the Mahābhārata

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, we sketched the contours of Indic non-harm (*ahiṃsā*) practices emerging from Vedic animal sacrifice and the rejection or reinterpretation of sacrifice. Eventually *ahiṃsā* will emerge as a practice and ideal embedded in its classical Yoga textual expression, in particular in the *Yoga Sūtras* (YS) of Patañjali, (a text identified with its principal commentary as *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*—PYS), and in later commentaries on the *Yoga Sūtras*. Before discussing those texts in Chaps. 4, 5, and 6, here the aim is to consider some ways that yoga-inflected practices and ideals—particularly in relation to animals—are expressed in the period that features the appearance of the *Mahābhārata*, roughly prior to the articulation of classical Yoga. The *Mahābhārata* is a massive epic in Sanskrit which, in contrast to the earlier Vedic corpus, enjoys popularity to the present day (mainly through abridged retellings, in various media) throughout and beyond India. The *Mahābhārata*'s claim to popularity is partially due to the engaging story it tells of internecine rivalry and war on heroic and cosmic scales. Yet, it is also valued as wisdom literature, not least for its persistent attention to the subject of *dharma*, the height of which it identifies (in four instances) as *ahiṃsā*, a principle that the epic associates more or less directly with the practice of yoga.

“What is dharma?” is arguably the *Mahābhārata*’s central running thematic question, underscoring present-day writers’ hesitation to assert any precise definition of the term. For our purposes we can identify dharma simply as ethical and dutiful conduct (Sherma 2015), indicating that dharma has broadly to do with normative ethics.¹ As such, in the Vedic and post-Vedic corpus as a whole, dharma (as duty) of all human beings is to be understood largely in terms of, or based on, comprehension of the universe as a complex array of conceptual categories. In short, as Brian K. Smith strikingly puts it, the Vedic and post-Vedic universe is “classified” (Smith 1994) in multiple typologies. From this perspective, classification of creatures—generally in hierarchies based on physical and behavioral characteristics—constitutes an important descriptive aspect of dharma (the “*is*” to be responded to with the “*ought*” of prescriptive dharma). So, for example, human beings, although having in common with nonhuman animals’ basic bodily functions (summarized typically as eating, sleeping, mating, and fearing or defending), they are typically classified as distinct from nonhuman animals due to their need and capacity to act “according to dharma.”²

But also, as was hinted in the previous chapter, there is a counter-impulse to “declassify” the universe as a necessary step toward becoming free from the universe’s bondage and thereby to free oneself from all false

¹For a very readable overview of dharma’s changing meaning from ancient to modern times, see Das (2009, pp. 306–311). See also Kunst (1978, p. 4), who argues that “It is... my conviction that the concept of *dharma* which from the beginning included the concept of duty has, despite diverse interpretations, retained its essential continuity in meaning. What has, to a larger or lesser extent changed, is the object towards which the fulfillment of duty is directed but not the principle guiding the *sense* of duty” (author’s emphasis). See also van Buitenen (1973, pp. xli), explaining his decision to render *dharma* as “Law.” We might also keep in mind Alf Hiltebeitel’s expression “behavioral or attitudinal norms” (2016, p. 36). James Fitzgerald notes that in the Mokṣadharmā portion of the *Mahābhārata*, “the word *dharma* may also, at times, refer to an ‘important truth or teaching’ that entails some particular form of ultimately beneficial behavior” (Fitzgerald 2012, p. 44). In a Buddhist context, I find this succinct definition helpful: “The Dharma is how things truly are and the way to incorporate an understanding of how things truly are into one’s being in the deepest possible way, as expressed and taught by the Buddha” (Williams and Tribe 2000, p. 2).

²*Hitopadeśa* 0.25: The edition published on GRETIL reads differently from other editions, in which *dharma* is what distinguishes humans. In either case, the general idea of human/nonhuman distinction is emphasized. The GRETIL edition (Brzezinski n.d.) could be translated, “Eating, sleeping, fearing, and mating—these are common to humans and nonhumans. But humans are especially distinguished by knowledge [*jñāna*]. Without knowledge, humans are the same as nonhumans” (author’s trans.).

notions of the self in relation to other selves. This latter thought-stream also receives extensive expression in the *Mahābhārata*, continuing from the *Upaniṣads* and valued in the practice of yoga. The declassifying impulse pursues a finality to karma's seemingly endless bondage (including birth in the myriad life-forms), a bondage that classificatory culture is seen to perpetuate. Karma's end, facilitated by declassificatory culture, enables the opening to realization of selfhood extended not only beyond the present life, with its bodily constraints, but into eternity. Ultimately, what human beings *ought* to do, according to this understanding, is to diligently pursue such realization of selfhood, especially by yoga and yoga-inflected practices. Such practices, backed by declassificatory culture, enable comprehension of the ontologically transtemporal, true nature of the self and other selves.

The *Mahābhārata*'s engaging narrative feature invites us to begin this chapter with a major component of its frame story, that of King Janamejaya's snake sacrifice. This story serves to transition from the Vedic sacrificial world of the previous chapter, by way of an interrupted sacrificial travesty, to the yoga world of self-restraint and meditation—a story in which snakes are represented as purposeful, articulate persons seeking self-preservation in a dharmic world. Next, we consider a passage in which Vyāsa exhorts his son Śuka to “resort to dharma” as the guiding principle for pursuing a life that transcends mundane, ephemeral preoccupations, thus rising above *karma-bhumi*—the arena of action that binds one to the conditions of ignorance and suffering.

As one example among several highlighting the yoga ideal and connecting this to questions of human-nonhuman animal interaction, we will then look at the story of a certain *brāhmaṇa* ascetic, Jājali, who is benefitted by the wisdom of a common merchant, Tulādhara, and is finally instructed by the birds whom Jājali had hosted as they nested in his hair. We then jump forward to an oft-recounted episode near the *Mahābhārata*'s end, namely, that of King Yudhiṣṭhira and his dog, representing a convergence of dharmic understanding that hints toward the pursuit of cosmic declassification that yoga represents. This episode can also be viewed as portraying the culmination of Yudhiṣṭhira's education in dharma, as the “dharma king” (*dharmarāja*).

We can then turn back to an earlier section of the *Mahābhārata* to visit the celebrated dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna that becomes known as the *Bhagavadgītā*. This serves as a brief introduction to its discussion of Sāṃkhya ontology in relation to yoga and in relation to the dynamics of

faith, all of which have bearing on the most basic of human activities, such as selection and consumption of food. Then, to further explore alimentary dharma in relation to *abhiṃsā*, concluding this chapter we will turn attention to a passage not in the *Mahābhārata*, but rather in another highly influential text, the *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*. Amidst its thoroughly injunctive style, this work (thought to be from the same or later time frame as the *Mahābhārata*) seems to trade in equivocation when discussing indulgence or abstention from flesh eating.

3.2 A SNAKE GENOCIDE

Let us begin with a short paraphrase of the *Mahābhārata*'s story of King Janamejaya's *sarpa-sattra*—a snake sacrifice intended to exterminate all snakes from the world (Debroy 2015, pp. 124–142).³

King Parīkṣit, the sole surviving descendant of the five Pāṇḍava heroes of the *Mahābhārata*, was hunting in the forest. While searching for an escaped deer that he had wounded with an arrow, the king comes upon Śamīka, an ascetic who, observing a vow of silence, sits motionless and unresponsive to the king's query regarding the deer. Tired, hungry and thirsty, the king's temper frayed, he returns to his palace only after marking his displeasure by draping a dead snake around the neck of the unmoving ascetic. Shortly thereafter, the king is informed that he has been cursed by Śamīka's overzealous young son, Śṛṅgī, to die from snakebite after seven days. The lad's brahmanical curse is potent, such that Takṣaka, king of the Nāgas (serpents or half-serpents, semi-divine denizens of lower realms) bites and kills Parīkṣit at the appointed time.

Years later, on hearing how his father had been slain, the new king, Janamejaya, resolves to avenge his father's death by not only having Takṣaka destroyed, but by exterminating all the world's snakes by means of a ritual fire sacrifice. By the powerful mantra chanting of his priests, thousands of snakes are forcibly drawn into the fire to be instantly immolated. Yet Takṣaka, the one snake whom Janamejaya is most resolved to kill, eludes the priests' invocations.

³ Āstika Parva of the *Mahābhārata*'s first book (1.45–53). See Minkowski (1991, pp. 384–400), explaining that the primordial (or prototypical) *sarpa-sattra* was performed by snakes, the result of which was that they became venomous (p. 388); Minkowski also explains Takṣaka's motivation for biting Parīkṣit. See also Jones 2010 for a placement of this narrative in the wider context of snake worship and three types of snake sacrifice (for, by, and of snakes).

Prior to the commencement of the *sarpa-sattra*, the snakes had been informed that they have been condemned to die in this sacrifice. They discuss among themselves how they could prevent their destruction but come to no solution after considering numerous options. Ultimately, it is Āstika, a *brāhmaṇa* whose mother is a prominent Nāga, who is tasked with aborting the rite: Approaching Janamejaya with profuse praises, Āstika moves the king to offer him a boon. Now duty bound by his promise to fulfill the *brāhmaṇa*'s wish for the sacrifice to be stopped, the king has no choice but to cut short the extermination moments before Takṣaka would have been immolated.

This is a key passage in the *Mahābhārata*'s frame story, in which Janamejaya is positioned to be the principal auditor of the vast epic, said to contain “everything” worth listening to. The passage will serve to frame the discussion of this chapter, as the characters and situation described bear on how the *Mahābhārata* represents questions of appropriate and inappropriate human interaction with animals. Śamīka is a silent and harmless ascetic whose dispositional and societally ascribed opposite, the warrior king Parikṣit, becomes victim to the wrath not of the sage Śamīka but of his proud, hot-tempered son. Three issues concerning dharma converge here. One is adherence to a vow (in this case the vow of silence) in unexpected, morally ambiguous circumstances; second, the issue of strained relationships between kings (followers of warrior dharma) and *brāhmaṇa* ascetics (followers of sacerdotal dharma) regarding exercise of their respective powers; and third, related to the second, is the matter of restraint (exemplified by Śamīka) or its opposite, expending of *brāhmaṇa* power (as done by Śrīgi).

Janamejaya's resolve to rid the world of snakes anticipates several displays of seething anger, greed, and vengeance in the course of the *Mahābhārata*, invariably resulting in violence that is excessive and—in the central war narrative—genocidal.⁴ Further, we may regard the attempt to exterminate an animal species considered unwanted and expendable as a strong message by the text on the absurdity and rank banality of rituals involving animal sacrifice. Tangentially, in the context of present-day

⁴So, for example, using the language of sacrifice figuratively, Sañjaya tells the lamenting king Dhṛtarāṣṭra after all his sons had been killed in the great war, “The Parthas [Pāṇḍavas] were a fire. You and your sons fanned it with the wind of your words. You sprinkled the flames with the clarified butter of your greed. When it was kindled, your sons fell into it like insects” (*MBh*; Debroy 2015, vol. 8 p. 70—Vishoka Parva 1302(1)).

animal extinction rates, we can read it as an indictment of human corporate industry's unrelenting destructive reach throughout nature's domain.⁵ In this case, all notions of the animals "not dying" or being raised to heaven are abandoned along with any idea that gods are thereby supplanted. Also to note is the snakes' discussion among themselves prior to the *sarpa-sattra*. In addition to suggesting the snakes' moral agency, this discussion brings dharma to bear with respect to the rightness or wrongness of various suggested schemes to protect themselves. One of the snakes proposes that they disguise themselves as advisors to the king, then bite the officiating priests. To this, other snakes "who were devoted to dharma"⁶ reply,

This advice is not good. It is not proper to kill Brahmanas. Confronted with any danger, ultimate pacification is only possible when the remedy is based on dharma. As we know, adharma only destroys the entire world. (*MBh* 1.33; Debroy 2015)

Thus, even the *Mahābhārata*'s snakes show awareness of and concern for dharma, distinguishing it from *adharma*—behavior that opposes the order that is upheld in the observance of dharma. They seem to be aware that the chain of actions initially unleashed by Parikṣit's gesture of contempt for Śamīka will not be broken by further improper actions.

3.3 VYĀSA TEACHES ŚUKA: INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS OF DHARMA AND KARMA

Snakes weighing their immanent death against the upholding of dharma serve as an overture to the *Mahābhārata*'s running theme of dharma's necessity threatened by its seeming impossibility. Particularly in the epic's central narrative of familial conflict and fratricide, the story of the five Pāṇḍava brothers' struggle to uphold dharmic principles highlights the "difficulty of being good" (Das 2009). Yet, this difficulty runs in counterpoint to a sense that dharma is clearly defined (by virtue of social and other clear classifications) and established as the way (or ways) of righteousness.

⁵ It may not be too much of a stretch to relate the use of fire (in various forms) in the mass-production of consumables with fire in the context of rituals involving animal sacrifice.

⁶ For further discussion on this episode with regard to dharma and ecology in the *Mahābhārata*, see Feller (2013). The demiurge Brahṁā, anticipating the snake sacrifice, assures the gods that those snakes "who have been true to the Law" will escape the sacrifice.

One is to expect that, if accepted and followed, dharma will bring faithful practitioners to a proper culmination and fulfillment of life. From this perspective, dharma is settled, clearly prescribed duty (*sva-dharma*), determined largely by individuals' specific *varṇa* ("estate") and *āśrama* (life stage).⁷

A significant *Mahābhārata* passage in which Vyāsa exhorts his youthful son Śuka to "resort to dharma" illustrates this confidence in dharma's settled clarity, even as it hints at manifold uncertainties regarding right action in the face of eventual certain death. The uncertainties are addressed not by dharma conceived as rules for worldly well-being; rather, they are addressed by the practice of a yoga-inflected sense of dharma, one that suspends and eventually corrodes the external designations and classifications that dharma ostensibly sustains. Such "yoga-inflected dharma" consists of principles implicitly applicable to anyone who seeks higher knowledge.

In the Mokṣadharmā Parva of the *Mahābhārata*, sage Vyāsa sees that his young son Śuka is "roaming around fearlessly" yet is ripe for learning. Insisting that Śuka "serve dharma," Vyāsa urges him to follow practices that could be associated with renunciation and yoga:

O son! Serve dharma. Conquer extreme cold, heat, hunger, thirst and the wind. Having vanquished these, always subjugate your senses. Always preserve the ordinances of truth, uprightness, lack of anger, lack of malice, self-control, austerities, non-violence and lack of injury. (ch.1637[309], vol. 9; Debroy 2015, pp. 341–42)

Vyāsa here lists typical features of yoga practice, albeit in martial terms: "conquering" of disturbing physical conditions is supported by "subjugation" of the senses.

Again, all the practices listed, preserving "ordinances of truth" and so on, concluding with "non-violence and lack of injury," are settled principles constituting virtuous (right, favorable) conduct for a *yogin*. Yet importantly, later in the same passage, Vyāsa exhorts his son to follow persons who are "content and extremely controlled." Such persons "are devoted

⁷In the *Mahābhārata*, dharma as prescribed duty is understood to be rooted in persons' "nature" within their present lifetime and present body. Deviation from the performance of prescribed duty was therefore understood as going "against nature" and was punishable: "The science of punishment (*daṇḍa-nītiḥ*) regulates the four *varṇas* in terms of their prescribed duties (*sva-dharma*)" (*MBh* 12.70.3, quoted in Sutton 2000, p. 53).

to truth and the sacred texts” and they “tread along the path of dharma.” In other words, acknowledging that dharma can be elusive when it comes to actual application, Vyāsa assures Śuka of success if he follows other persons who are recognized, seasoned practitioners of (presumably yoga-inflected) dharma. Such resolute practice of yoga entails breaking down the designations that separate human beings from each other and from other living beings. This is a radical re-ordering of values and perceptions; hence, it becomes particularly important for the practitioner to follow the lead of persons who are themselves accomplished in the practice.

Vyāsa continues instructing his son by contrasting persons to be followed with foolish persons who are “devoid of consciousness.” Here he calls attention to that crucial determinant of one’s destiny—action (*karma*).

Use supreme intelligence to exercise restraint and prevent the consciousness from treading along wrong paths. There are those whose intelligence is fixed only on today. They are fearless and think that tomorrow is far away. They eat everything. Devoid of consciousness, they do not see that this is an arena for action.

An “arena for action”—*karma-bhumi*—describes the temporal world as a place sustained by karma—the aggregate of human beings’ actions and inactions that perpetually reproduce the conditions of suffering. Ignorant persons, Vyāsa warns, are unaware of the danger that surrounds them. What such persons—including Śuka if he does not take heed—don’t know is that they are trapped “like a silkworm in a cocoon” of their own making, particularly their eating actions. Ultimately, Vyāsa warns, everyone in this world must face a final reckoning of their actions at the time of death, which is compared to a predator animal:

Whether you are seated or lying down, death will seek you out. How will you obtain salvation? How will you escape being devoured by death?

Whereas the snakes anticipating their death in Janamejaya’s *sarpa-sattra* were facing a ritual termination of their lives that was selective for their species, here Vyāsa reminds his audience of death’s universality and non-discriminative character. Everyone acts, everyone dies, and everyone takes the consequences of their acts to their next life.

Vyāsa's rhetorical questions indicate a marked difference in understanding of *karma* (literally “action”) here in the *Mahābhārata* from earlier Vedic and post-Vedic (Upaniṣadic) ritual-related understanding. In those earlier texts, karma is essentially ritual action that necessarily yields results, leading the sacrificer to a world beyond the present one, drawing one, in turn, to a rebirth in this world (Tull 2004, p. 317).⁸ Death, by this understanding, is the “final sacrifice” in the course of a life dedicated to performing ritual sacrifices (including “substitutions” of animals as victims). But the final sacrifice was thought to lead to a better birth in the other world, followed by rebirth in this world. Death was, in this calculation, not so much a problem as a marker of cosmic continuity. By contrast, Vyāsa's warning to his son expresses death's ominous character; awareness of its inevitability demands human beings to see it as a problem that must be solved once and for all. One must seek permanent freedom—salvation or liberation (*mokṣa*)—from the cycle of death and rebirth (*saṃsāra*), and this requires somehow breaking the chain of bondage that is perpetuated by action. For one who would be a dedicated practitioner of yoga, *karma-bhumi* must be transcended once and for all. The *Mahābhārata* makes clear that this is not an easy task. There are many traps, one of which is the tendency to become proud of one's yogic accomplishments. This is an important theme in the story of Tulādhara and Jājali.

3.4 TULĀDHARA TEACHES JĀJALI: FROM RITUAL ETHICS TO ASCETIC ETHICS

Vyāsa's exhortations to his son are emblematic of the *Mahābhārata*'s turn toward yoga as the means of breaking the karma-chain and transcending *karma-bhumi*. As we will see shortly, this turn is famously articulated in a concentrated (and innovative) way in the *Bhagavadgītā*—the eighteen-chapter section of the Bhīṣma Parva (*MBh* 6.23–40; Debroy 2015, vol. 5, pp. 125–207), just prior to the beginning of the great war.⁹ But there are two points and two stories for us to note prior to discussing the *Gītā*.

⁸ Yet prior to the Mahābhārata there is also a sense of generalization of action and its results beyond the formal sacrifice: “[O]ne indeed becomes good by good action, bad by bad [action]” (Tull 2004, p. 312, quoting *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.2.13).

⁹ Yoga is mentioned seventy times in the *Bhagavadgītā*'s seven-hundred stanzas, indicating its importance therein, suggesting one reason why it has endured as a yoga “textbook” (*yoga-sāstra*).

First, scholars have noted a distinct “proto-Sāṃkhya” and “proto-Yoga” character to several stories in the *Mahābhārata*’s Mokṣadharmā section, often stories involving speaking and reasoning animals, typically challenging the rightness of their being immolated in sacrificial rites (Hiltebeitel 2016, p. 28). One such story is that of Tulādhara and Jājali (below). Second, the *Mahābhārata* acknowledges the radical social distinction of the *yogin* as one who places him- or herself outside the community with its *varṇa* designations of social position. There is a distinctive upshot to such voluntary social exclusion, namely, the *inclusiveness* of yoga practice. As Vyāsa tells Śuka, “No man or woman is disqualified from practicing yoga merely on the basis of their position in the social hierarchy” (*MBh* 12.232.32; Sutton 2000, pp. 61–63). One may ask, why is it that in a social milieu in which occupational dharma dictates extensive restrictions on behavior of everyone, no one is excluded from the practice of yoga? This is because the practice of yoga aims toward the realization of a deeper level of identity than is recognized in the social hierarchy. This deeper level is that of fundamental existence as spirit—as *ātman*—residing within while being distinct from physical bodies. On this level, neither *varṇa* nor even species distinctions are relevant designations of either human beings or other creatures (Frazier 2017, pp. 33–36).

Why such designations are irrelevant in yoga practice can be explained in terms of Sāṃkhya, and we will look into this important Indian system of thought shortly in the context of the *Bhagavadgītā*.¹⁰ As for the “proto-Yoga” character of certain *Mahābhārata* didactic stories, there are six tales in particular that show this character, all of which emphasize the superiority of nonviolence or non-injury, showing this to be a core principle of what Nicholas Sutton calls “ascetic ethics” (Sutton 2000, pp. 320–325).¹¹

¹⁰Sāṃkhya runs deep in the Indian philosophical landscape, regarded as possibly its historically earliest “system” of philosophical reflection. It is strongly present throughout the *Gītā* and appears elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata*. It becomes important as a philosophical corollary to later classical Yoga. For an overview of Sāṃkhya thought, see Rusza (n.d.), “Sankhya” in the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://iep.utm.edu/sankhya/>. Regarding Sāṃkhya in the *Bhagavadgītā*, Malinar (2007, p. 192) notes that “fluidity” of terminology and enumeration of the principles “is characteristic of so-called ‘[Indian] epic philosophy’.”

¹¹Nicholas Sutton (2000, p. 320) summarizes the contrast between “ritual ethics” and “ascetic ethics” in the *MBh* context thus: “Whilst the enactors of ritual sought prosperity and order in this world and the joys of heaven in the next, the ascetics rejected both as diversions from the true quest for salvation and as symptoms of ignorance about the true nature of the self.” Essentially this distinction is between *pravṛtti-dharma* and *nivṛtti-dharma*—further explained in the conclusion to this chapter. Raj Balkaran (2019) expands on this theme as

Yet, as we will see in one of these stories—of Jājali and Tulādhara—to discern what is true nonviolence is not necessarily easy, nor is nonviolence unequivocally the domain of the ascetic. To summarize the story (recounted in the Śānti Parva, Mokṣa Dharma section of the *Mahābhārata* (12.253–56):

A certain *brāhmaṇa* named Jājali practices extensive and severe austerities and penances for the purpose of “comprehending dharma.” Despite long periods of self-mortification, including sleeping under the open sky when it rains, remaining exposed to the summer sun, and observing extensive fasting (surviving only on air), he “did not obtain dharma.”¹² Once, while standing in the forest “like a pillar,” a pair of sparrows begins to build a nest in Jājali’s abundant, matted hair. Pleased to accommodate the birds, the ascetic remains completely still while the nest is completed, and the birds produce and raise chicks over a period of several weeks. All the while, “[Jājali’s] mind was always firm on upholding dharma, and adharma did not appeal to him.”

Not until the chicks had grown and permanently left the nest did Jājali end his pillar-like meditational yoga. But then, quite impressed with himself, thinking “I am perfect!” and “I have obtained dharma!” Jājali becomes proud, only to be advised by an invisible voice from the sky: “O Jājali! You are not Tulādhara’s equal in dharma.” Tulādhara, the voice explains, is a merchant living in Vārānaśī, and although more qualified than Jājali, unlike the latter, he remains meek and humble. Eventually Jājali meets Tulādhara, who (very humbly) teaches him about true dharma.

Jājali fancies himself to be an advanced *yogin*, accomplished in ascetic morality (dharma) as demonstrated by perfectly hosting a family of sparrows on his unmoving head through their entire mating and fostering season. But his ascetic feat (sustained self-denial or sacrifice of bodily demands and comforts) gives birth to pride, followed by anger at hearing of one more qualified than he. Still, resolved to meet Tulādhara to learn why he is a more advanced *yogin*, Jājali can suspend his pride and anger to approach the merchant.

what he calls the “dharmic double helix” of Hindu tradition in his analysis of the *Devī Māhātmya*.

¹² na ca dharmam avindata—*MBh* 12.253.16.

Gracious and humble, happy to honor the *brāhmaṇa* Jājali who approaches him inquisitively, Tulādhara (“Bearer of Scales”) freely shares his wisdom on the nature of dharma and how he, as a merchant householder, is able to practice it (*MBh* 12.54). “O Jājali, I know eternal and ancient dharma, with all its mysteries. People who know say that it is nothing but friendliness and being engaged in the welfare of all beings. There should be no violence toward living beings, or limited violence.¹³ O Jājali! Such conduct is said to follow supreme dharma, and that is the way I live.” Explaining his trade (of spices and “juices and many other objects, with the exception of liquor,”) as based on honesty and looking upon all beings as equal, he “holds up his scales equally toward everyone, casting aside love and hate.” This equanimity he accomplishes by “looking upon all beings as his own self, treating all beings equally.” By acting in this way, he gives the highest charity, which is to “give fearlessness to all beings.”

Despite his supposed lower social status as a merchant (*vaiśya*), Tulādhara’s comprehension of dharma is superior to that of the *brāhmaṇa* ascetic Jājali. The latter’s hosting the sparrow’s nest on his head would appear to be a perfect demonstration of *ahimsā*, which seems to accord with Tulādhara’s specification of what constitutes “supreme dharma” (*parodharma*). Perhaps. But Tulādhara has things to say about the (mis)treatment of animals in human society, suggesting that Jājali’s feat, while admirable, fails to address the broader problem.

Unlike those who give fearlessness to all beings, Tulādhara continues, are persons who exploit other humans as well as animals. “There are those who kill bulls, making them bear heavy burdens, binding and restraining them, inserting rings in their noses. Why aren’t these people killed?... Others oppress [animals] in other ways. I think that these deeds (karma) are no different from killing a fetus.”

And then Tulādhara launches into a condemnation of agricultural practices, which are “terrible” (or cruel and dreadful: Monier-Williams on *sudārma*) because plowing injures the earth and kills many creatures living in the earth. Similarly evil, he insists, is the killing of cows “for the sake of gain.” But then Jājali voices what may also be our question: Without agriculture, how can there be human sustenance? To Jājali, what Tulādhara seems to say makes him sound like a “non-believer” (*nāstika*, possibly

¹³ *adroheṇaiva bhūtānām alpa-droheṇa vā punaḥ* (*MBh* 12.254.6ab)

alluding to Jainism).¹⁴ Addressing Jājali's doubt, Tulādhara insists that he is not a non-believer, for he fully respects the practice of sacrifice. However,

“[A] person who knows about sacrifices is extremely rare.” Due to malpractice of sacrifices, selfishness has prevailed. In earlier times, when people sacrificed with the proper understanding, “[t]he earth yielded crops without tilling. Herbs resulted because of the benedictions. No sacrifices were seen to be undertaken with a view to obtaining selfish fruits.”

Here Tulādhara expresses the notion that actions (karma) bring results, or “fruits” (*phala*), and that, as in earlier literature, it is within the context of sacrificial action that such is the case. However, he also generalizes the principle: wicked actions lead to destinations for the wicked; further, persons bent on such actions confuse proper and improper action. Implied is that in the current state of confusion over right and wrong action, the earth no longer yields crops without tilling. What is needed is to return to a proper understanding of sacrifice:

Truth is sacrifice. Self-control is sacrifice. So are lack of jealousy towards everyone, contentment with one's own riches and lack of greed for riches. That is how a renouncer results.

Tulādhara ends his counsel of wisdom by distinguishing the permanent goal of the wise—namely, Brahman—from the temporary goals of the unwise. The wise are true *yogins*, not because they refrain from sacrifice, but because they “yoke themselves” and “use their own selves as beasts of burden... milking their own selves. They make their own selves the sacrificial altars....” In this way Tulādhara indicates to Jājali that the latter's extreme asceticism had missed the point. To underscore his message, Tulādhara then urges Jājali to call back the birds he had hosted on his head. The birds duly return, speaking their own wisdom to confirm that of Tulādhara.

¹⁴ A *nāstika* is generally understood, in the brahmanical world, to be one who does not accept the Vedic literature as authoritative. It is further assumed that such persons reject the Vedic injunctions to perform sacrifices. In particular, Jain and Buddhist traditions are regarded as *nāstika* (whereas followers of the Vedas are referred to as *āstika*).

For this world and for the next, one must perform acts of non-violence.¹⁵

The birds go on to extol faith combined with renunciation, and freedom from competitiveness:

Lack of faith is a supreme sin... Renunciation with faith is superior to all sacred deeds... O immensely wise one! If you conquer the urge to compete, you will obtain the supreme.

Finally, Bhīṣma tells Yudhiṣṭhira that the *brāhmaṇa* Jāli was thus pacified, having gained a full understanding of eternal (*sanātana*) dharma (*MBh* 12.256.17).¹⁶

Viewing the Jāli-Tulādhara story as a whole, we may regard it as a fractal of the Mahābhārata's deep concern to articulate what is dharma in terms of right action, seeking to accommodate both ritual and ascetic moralities in an inclusive vision, the ultimate meaning of which is encapsulated by the word "faith" (*śraddhā*). Notably, it is the birds that Jāli had sheltered who voice the wisdom of this final lesson on the centrality of faith. Faith enables sacrifice to be effective such that cosmic order is sustained. Sacrifice performed in faith is true sacrifice, being ultimately self-sacrifice. This is the arena of formal human action that serves to affirm proper relations with nonhuman animals and nature broadly conceived. Dharma, in its deep sense, is comprehension of such proper relations, and thus dharma is sustained by "acts of nonviolence."

Another lesson of this story seems to be that whether one is a *brāhmaṇa* (like Jāli) or a *vaiśya* (like Tulādhara), and whether one is an ascetic or a householder, the same principles (dharma) of action (karma) apply. What are these principles of action? They are all about the cultivation of nonviolence, giving fearlessness to all beings, and nourishing faith in the cosmic order. But what is the cosmic order in basic terms? If the conventional classifications of human and nonhuman being for ordered (ritual) life are

¹⁵ *abhiṣādikṛtaṃ karma iha caiva paratra ca* (*MBh* 12.256.6ab). *Abhiṣādi*, literally "beginning with nonviolence," suggests that nonviolence is foundational to a variety of dharmic practices, as we will see in Chap. 4.

¹⁶ The term *sanātana*—eternal, perpetual, permanent, everlasting, primeval, ancient (Monier-Williams 1995)—when coupled with dharma (*sanātana-dharma*) denotes an encompassing conception of dharma in pursuit of eternal, perpetual, etc., good; *sva-dharma* (mentioned earlier) in contrast refers to one's "own dharma"—the specific duty or duties based on an individual's specific propensities and qualifications.

set aside, what remains of an order in which one might nourish faith? Dharma as duty—what ought to be done—may be seen in the *Mahābhārata* as a processual understanding, from a level of more concrete, physical, or social distinctions and classifications to a more subtle or nonphysical level or way of being whereby commonalities are foregrounded over distinctions. We may appreciate this sense of dharma in the character of Yudhiṣṭhira.

3.5 YUDHIṢṬHIRA’S VIRTUE ETHICS

As noted earlier, the *Mahābhārata* enjoys present-day popularity as wisdom literature; as such, it serves a didactic function, especially with respect to ethics, or dharma. Yudhiṣṭhira, occasionally referred to in the epic as *dharmarāja*—“dharma king,” “king of dharma,” or “king for dharma”—undergoes, as Alf Hiltebeitel has argued, an education in dharma as the epic unfolds.¹⁷ Thereby emerging from the numerous episodes and words of Yudhiṣṭhira in the course of the *Mahābhārata* is the complexity of his character, in turn reflecting the epic’s view of dharma’s complexity and ambiguity. Without elaborating on this point, here I wish to propose that the well-known story of Yudhiṣṭhira and his companion dog may read as a partial but important demonstration that he has learned his lessons well. Indeed, as the story unfolds, we become aware of its form as a test, which he successfully passes. I summarize the account from the *Mahābhārata*’s penultimate, very brief book, the Mahā-prasthānika Parva:

Years after the devastating fratricidal war, King Yudhiṣṭhira hears of the Vrishni clan’s destruction (Krishna’s clan, in a drunken brawl, the fruition of a sage’s curse). Addressing his brother Arjuna, Yudhiṣṭhira says, “O immensely wise one, time cooks all creatures. I think all this has happened because of that. You should also consider that.”

The time has come, Yudhiṣṭhira concludes, to commence the “great departure” (*mahā-prasthāna*)—to renounce kingdom, palace, and all possessions, and to walk north, ascending and crossing beyond the Himalayas until overtaken by cold and exhaustion, finally departing the body, welcoming its death as passage to a higher realm. Yudhiṣṭhira’s four brothers and their common wife, Draupadī, resolve to undertake the same journey with

¹⁷See Hiltebeitel (2001, pp. 207–208) on the several candidates for being the “highest dharma” and the several candidates for “knowing the highest dharma”—the latter *not* including Yudhiṣṭhira in the list—suggesting that he needs to be educated in this matter.

the same intention. “The great-souled ones immersed themselves in yoga, having decided to follow the dharma of renunciation.” Accompanying the party is a stray dog.

One after another, beginning with Draupadī, the Pāṇḍavas collapse, each—according to Yudhiṣṭhira—falling down due to specific moral weaknesses.¹⁸ Finally, only Yudhiṣṭhira remains. At last, the great king of the heavens, Shakra (Indra) appears before Yudhiṣṭhira, inviting him to accompany him to heaven on his celestial chariot. Shakra reassures Yudhiṣṭhira that his brothers and wife, having given up their mortal frames, are awaiting him in heaven, into which Yudhiṣṭhira will be able to enter with his present body.

Yudhiṣṭhira is ready to mount Shakra’s chariot, intending that the dog should accompany him. “O lord of the past and the present, this dog has always been devoted to me. He should go with me. Because of compassion, that is my view.” A brief discussion ensues between Shakra and Yudhiṣṭhira. Shakra says, in essence, “dogs are not allowed in heaven” because they are “inauspicious,” but Yudhiṣṭhira insists that “there is great sin in abandoning one who is devoted.” Yudhiṣṭhira appears resolved to relinquish his right to enter heaven, when suddenly the dog reveals himself to be Dharma in person. Dharma then praises Dharmarāja (Yudhiṣṭhira) as one born in a noble lineage, behaving as his father (Dharma/Yama) would, showing intelligence, and possessing “compassion for all living beings.”

This episode comes near the end of the *Mahābhārata*, telling how the terrible trials of the five Pāṇḍava brothers and their mutual wife Draupadī finally come to an end. Significantly, it is Yudhiṣṭhira, the eldest of the five, referred to (as noted) as *dharmarāja*—dharma king—who is accompanied by the dog. This story serves to confirm that Yudhiṣṭhira has become indeed the embodiment of dharma in its deepest sense.

We might want to see this final demonstration of his ethical action in terms of virtue ethics, whereby he shows genuine care for the nonhuman animal, regarding it as fully worthy of moral consideration beyond classification as animal (especially as “dog”—traditionally considered highly impure and inauspicious in the sacrificial-brahmanical milieu).¹⁹ Also significant are the references to yoga in this episode—that the Pāṇḍavas “immersed themselves in yoga” (literally, they were yoked to yoga, *yoga-yuktā*)—as they resolved to “follow the dharma of renunciation”

¹⁸Their common weakness was pride, and in Arjuna’s case also failure to fulfill a particular vow.

¹⁹Negative attitudes toward dogs in India are by no means the general rule. See Debroy (2008) for a rich and varied account of Indian dog lore.

(*tyāga-dharma*). After years of worldly conflict and then rulership over the kingdom, the drama of wrestling with the question “what is dharma” finally culminates in the felt need to resort to yoga; it is in this state of yogic absorption that Yudhiṣṭhira’s moral sense shines forth in deference to a “lowly” dog.

From the four briefly sketched narrative episodes, beginning with Janamejaya’s *sarpa-sattra*, an admittedly impressionistic picture emerges of how the *Mahābhārata* holds dharma in high regard without giving an entirely definitive explication of what it consists. Much as one would like to hold out *ahiṃsā* as the text’s conclusive word on the “highest dharma,” the four times that this is repeated must be seen in context: There are fifty-four instances of “highest dharma” throughout the text (Hiltebeitel 2001, p. 207). To be sure, eight thereof identify *anṛśaṃsya*—noncruelty—as the highest, which we can regard as complimenting *ahiṃsā*. But what we can understand is that both these principles are matters of great concern in the *Mahābhārata*, and they point to a moral grounding for the practice of yoga.

We can now turn to the *Bhagavadgītā* to look briefly at its ontological grounding of yoga. The proto-Sāṃkhya mentioned earlier, with its analysis of reality’s basic constituents in two categories—*puruṣa* and *prakṛti*—unfolds in the *Gītā* in concert with yoga as a many-sided process of addressing the problem of bondage in *karma-bhumi*—the arena of action.

3.6 KRISHNA TEACHES ARJUNA: YOGA AND SĀMṬHYA IN THE BHAGAVADGĪTĀ

We may recall how, in the story of Jājali, the final lesson comes from the birds to whom Jājali had initially given shelter. It may be significant that the birds speaking (or indeed singing) to Jājali about the necessity of faith echo a line from an earlier passage in the *Mahābhārata*, in what comes to be known and celebrated as the *Bhagavadgītā* (Song of the Divine). The birds sing, “The living being (*puruṣa*) is constituted of faith. Whatever is his faith, that, verily, he is.”²⁰ In the *Gītā* (17.3) this very same statement

²⁰ *Śraddhamayo ’yam puruṣo yo yac chraddhaḥ sa eva saḥ* (MBh 12.256.14cd; cf. *Gītā* 17.3), my translation; *puruṣa* is often translated as “man” as it can signify the male gender. But in this context the broader sense of “living being” applies, pointing to the Sāṃkhya and Yoga usages of the term. Or, following Bryant (2015, Introduction), *puruṣa* is “the innermost conscious self broadly synonymous with the notion of soul.”

appears near the beginning of the text's penultimate chapter, traditionally titled "The Yoga of Differentiating Threefold Faith" (*śraddhā-traya-vibhāga-yoga*). "Threefold" refers to the Sāṃkhya theory of *traiguṇya-prakṛti*—that the phenomenal world (inclusive of mind and reasoning—*manas* and *buddhi*) is sustained by three "strands" (*guṇa*) of constantly interplaying modalities or principles of nature (*prakṛti*) that function as orientations of awareness. In the *Gītā*, the three *guṇas* form a hierarchy from lower to higher facility for one to elevate oneself from deep bondage toward existential freedom. From the inertia and dullness of *tamo-guṇa* to the passion, energy, or dynamism of *rājo-guṇa* to the luminosity and balance of *sattva-guṇa* is a progression with moral significance: right action (action for the good) is most readily possible under conditions and lifeways characterized by *sattva-guṇa* and, conversely, most unlikely to be performed under conditions and lifeways characterized by *tamo-guṇa*. In turn, right action sustains the conditions that are identifiable as those of *sattva-guṇa*, and ill (binding) actions perpetuate the *rājo-guṇa* and *tamo-guṇa* modalities.

To differentiate faith in terms of these three modalities is to identify greater and lesser qualities of faith, such that one who engages in the yoga of such differentiation learns to scrutinize their own (more or less habituated) ways of acting to recognize the quality of faith that underlies their actions. To engage in "the yoga of differentiation"²¹ is to be analytical (suggesting a generic meaning of *sāṃkhya*—"reckoning"), and thereby diagnostic—a practice that the *Gītā* views as necessary for the acquisition of higher knowledge (*jñāna*, cognate to *gnosis*).²² In this regard, we should note that chapter 17 includes a three-stanza, tripartite categorization of

²¹ We will discuss a different sort of yogic differentiation in relation to three approaches to animal ethics in Chaps. 6 and 7. In the present context, differentiation is between the three *guṇas*—strands or modalities—in which different features of human life are experienced, according to Sāṃkhya philosophy.

²² Each of the *Gītā*'s eighteen chapters bears titles with the word "yoga," thus invariably "The Yoga of..." indicating some of the wide range of meanings that the term *yoga* carries within this text. Other prominent examples in the *Gītā* are "The Yoga of Action" (*karma-yoga*, chapter 3); "The Yoga of Knowledge" (*jñāna-yoga*, chapter 4); "The Yoga of Meditation" (*dhyāna-yoga*, chapter 6); and "The Yoga of Devotion" (*bhakti-yoga*, chapter 12). That there is a range of meanings to *yoga* located in such concentration within the *Mahābhārata* suggests the epic's interest to show its rich usage to articulate ethical themes. Some scholars believe that the *Bhagavadgītā* is a later insertion into the *Mahābhārata*, although there is no solid evidence for this. In any case, the tradition—not unreasonably—sees it as thoroughly integral to the epic.

foods in terms of the three *guṇas*. Thus, for example, persons situated (or habituated) in *sattva-guṇa* enjoy foods that “increase longevity, energy, strength, health, joy and contentment, and that are tasty, appealing, lasting and hearty” (*Gītā* 17.8). In contrast,

Foods dear to the passionate [*rājo-guṇa*] are bitter, sour, salty, too hot, pungent and burning; they produce pain, affliction and disease. Those in darkness [*tamo-guṇa*] like food that is spoiled, flavorless, putrid and stale—and even impure leftovers. (*Gītā* 17.9–10; Goswami trans. 2015, p. 204)

Why these alimentary distinctions are listed in a chapter about faith may become clear when we recognize the act of eating to be at the root of all bodily action (*karma*). Unlike the foolish persons referred to by Vyāsa in his speech to Śuka, who “eat everything” and are “devoid of consciousness,” the *Gītā* suggests that *yogins*—vigilant in all aspects of their lives, which is to say all aspects of their actions—are keen to discriminate edible from inedible substances. Selective physical nourishment (involving the least harm to other beings and least karmic implication) serves to nourish the quality of faith that is liberating.

Also expounding Sāṃkhya ontology and differentiation is Chapter 13 of the *Bhagavadgītā*, traditionally titled “The Yoga of Distinguishing Matter from Spirit” (*prakṛti-puruṣa-viveka-yoga*). Here *sāṃkhya* and yoga notions are explicitly combined as a “practice of *sāṃkhya*” (*sāṃkhyena yogena*, *Gītā* 13.25), where *sāṃkhya* may again be understood as “reckoning” or “discriminating” and *yoga* (in the grammatical instrumental case along with *sāṃkhya*) can mean “by engagement”; combined, it is “by analytical engagement.” The context of this particular statement (13.25) is a suggestion that persons who undertake determined yoga practices, including meditation (*dhyāna*), analysis (*sāṃkhya*), or the “yoga of action” (*karma-yoga*) can *see* (*paśyanti*) the self—*ātman* or *puruṣa*.²³ In turn, all such practices serve one to understand the fundamental distinction characteristic of Sāṃkhya theory, namely, the distinction between the self—again, referred to as *puruṣa* or as *ātman*—and the phenomenal world, known as *prakṛti*, the “original producer” or “progenitor” of the temporal world, or “nature.” An important upshot of this perception for yoga

²³ The *Bhagavadgītā* freely employs both terms—*puruṣa* and *ātman*—in an implied equivalence; in YS 2.5 *ātman* is mentioned, and the Bhāṣya of Vyāsa identifies this as *puruṣa*. That said, YS prefers *draṣṭṛ*—“seer”—to both *puruṣa* and *ātman*.

animal ethics, according to the *Gītā*, is expressed in its fifth chapter (5.18), traditionally titled *sannyāsa-yoga*—“The Yoga of Renunciation”:

The wise see as equal a learned humble *brāhmaṇa*, a cow, an elephant, and even a dog and dog cooker. (Goswami trans. 2015)

The wise person (*paṇḍita*), knowing the difference between the self and the body, sees ontological commonality among all species of life, and this vision provides the basis for knowing how to act in relation with all living creatures.

What will prevail in later classical Sāṃkhya is this fully dualistic ontology, with *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* understood to be irreducibly fundamental principles. To practice *sāṃkhya* is to apply oneself to recognizing this distinction.²⁴ According to the *Gītā*, this distinction is real, even if it is not at all obvious. To aid understanding, Krishna, teaching the eighteen yoga lessons (constituting the eighteen chapters) of the *Gītā* to his warrior friend Arjuna, offers an extended analogy of a “field” and a “knower of the field” (13.27):

Know, Arjuna, that any being that is born, mobile or immobile, arises from the union of the field and the knower of the field. (trans. Sargeant 2009, p. 554, modified)

The field (*kṣetra*) represents the aggregate of constituents that make up the phenomenal world of *prakṛti* and, more immediately, the individual body of a living being. The knower of the field (*kṣetra-jñā*) is the individual living being (*puruṣa*) who animates the particular body in the course of its current life. But according to the *Bhagavadgītā*, this simple dualism is not so simple. Krishna tells Arjuna,

Witness, Permitter, Sustainer, Enjoyer, Great Lord—He indeed is said to be the Supreme Self in this body, the Highest Person. (*Gītā* 13.23; Goswami trans. 2015, p. 195)

²⁴Whether it would be accurate to label classical Sāṃkhya as “substance dualism” may be a matter of research. For a rich contemporary analytical account and argument for substance dualism, see Taliaferro (2018). In any case, classical Sāṃkhya is markedly different from Western dualisms that demarcate the physical from the mental, since Sāṃkhya and classical Yoga (and the *Gītā*) include the mental functions in the same category as the physical, demarcating both these from the self (*puruṣa*, *ātman*, *jīva*, or *draṣṭṛ*).

As we will see in Part 2 and Part 3, a developed yoga-based animal ethics will take into account the existence of a second “knower of the field,” the *paramātmān*. Crucial to a *yogin*’s faith will be acknowledgement of this second knower, who is the “knower of all bodies” and hence is the one being to whom all creatures are related.

The *Bhagavadgītā* functions as a dialogical interlude in the *Mahābhārata*’s central narrative. For us, who are trying to grasp the *Mahābhārata*’s ethical vision in relation to animals, the *Bhagavadgītā* is crucial for working our way through the *Mahābhārata*’s understanding of dharma, karma, yoga, and *ahiṃsā*.²⁵ Taking the *Gītā* as a lens through which to view the *Mahābhārata* as a whole, the dichotomy of sacrificial versus ascetic morality (or ritual versus ascetic ethics) is nuanced in a discourse of dharma and yoga that sets out an explicit ontology of permanent selves amidst changing embodiments. Emmanuel Kant’s fundamental ethical question “What should I do?” begs the question “Who am I?” This latter question unsettles anthropocentrism as the call comes to the fore to realize the self in sacrifice—both external and internal, while practicing harmlessness. It is faith in the Supreme—the “knower of all bodies,” Krishna says at the end of the *Gītā*’s thirteenth chapter—that makes possible the permanence of the good that is sought in ethical deliberation. Yoga as a sense of purposeful practice toward liberation is, in the *Bhagavadgītā*, the frame within which such ethical deliberation is undertaken and then applied.

3.7 ALIMENTARY AMBIGUITY IN THE LAWS OF MANU

In this chapter thus far, I have focused on one essential work, the lengthy and wide-ranging *Mahābhārata*. We are taking the *Mahābhārata*’s composition as chronologically possibly prior to the *Yoga Sūtra* of Patañjali, which we will concentrate on in Part 2. Another important Sanskrit text, the *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* (*MDh*, also known as *Manu Saṃhitā* or *Manu-smṛiti*), that may be closer to the *Yoga Sūtra* of Patañjali in terms of dating,²⁶ deserves our brief attention here, in particular its fifth chapter, which

²⁵ For a detailed analysis of *ahiṃsā* in the *Mahābhārata* see Hildebeitel (2016).

²⁶ Olivelle (2005, pp. 20–25) settles on the second to third centuries CE for the composition of the *MDh*. The Patañjali Yoga Sūtra has been tentatively dated to as late as the fifth century CE, though also considerably earlier, to the first to second century CE (Bryant 2015, p. 457).

discusses food regulations for followers of orthodox brahmanical tradition. What we find in these prescriptions is what appears to be an odd mixture of different standards, especially regarding whether the consumption of meat is permissible, and if so, under what circumstances. Essentially, what this passage shows is a preference for nonviolence and abstention from meat while upholding the Vedic sacrificial order that stipulated animal immolation in certain rites. Over several stanzas, the text moves toward the nonviolent, vegetarian preference: First it recalls earlier times of routine animal sacrifice as reason for it to be allowed in the present (presumably in times later than the time referred to by Tulādhara, when “truth [was] sacrifice. Self-control [was] sacrifice”—above, 3.4). It then stipulates that meat can be eaten *only* because it has first been ritually sanctified through formal sacrificial rites. “Doing it [eating meat] for any other purpose is called the rule of fiends [*rākṣasas*—man-eating ogres]” (*MDh* 5.31; Olivelle 2005, p. 139).

Important for Manu (considered the author of the *MDh*) is the exacting observance of prescribed rules. As a Dharmaśāstra, this text views dharma as constituted largely of settled (prescribed) duty. In the present context, Manu sternly warns of negative consequences for neglect of rules: “[I]f he [a ‘twice-born’ (*dvija*), member of the upper three *varṇas* of the *varṇa* system] eats meat in contravention of the rules, after death he will be eaten forcibly by those very animals” (*MDh* 5.33).²⁷ Better, Manu indicates, than sacrificing animals according to the rules is to substitute an animal replica fashioned from butter and flour. This appears to be the safe option, since the consequences for one who “kills an animal for a futile reason (*vṛthā*—wantonly or frivolously),” which is to say for one’s own culinary purposes, are much worse than would accrue for merely not following the rules:

When a man kills an animal for a futile reason, after death he will be subject in birth after birth to being slain as many times as the number of hairs on that animal. (*MDh* 5.38; Olivelle 2005, p. 140)

²⁷ So firm that sacrificial rules must be followed, Manu goes on to warn against *not* eating sacrificial meat if one has been ritually commissioned in a sacrificial rite (presumably as the rite’s sponsor or as its priest). If that person refuses to eat the sacrificial meat, “after death he will become an animal for twenty-one lifetimes” (*MDh* 5.35; Olivelle 2005, p. 140).

Still, Manu holds firm to the propriety of Vedic sacrifice, assuring his readers of the notion we have already encountered earlier, that “killing is not killing” when the prescribed procedures are carefully followed, and the mantras invoked are properly chanted. Manu is reflecting a spirit of coexistence between sacrificial morality and ascetic morality, especially as he proceeds from the former position to the latter and then seems to return to the former.²⁸ Throughout, Manu holds to a prudential sense of ethics. If one practices ascetic morality by abstaining from meat, Manu assures that the benefits of doing so are “equal” to the benefits of performing an annual *āśvamedha-yajña* (horse sacrifice, a major ritual undertaking) repeatedly for one hundred years. In general, he says, there are “great rewards” for those who practice abstention although, in truth, there is “no fault in eating meat, drinking liquor, or in having sex; that is the natural activity of creatures” (*MDh* 5.56; Olivelle 2005, p. 141).

Returning to the *Bhagavadgītā*, let’s recall Krishna’s threefold food typology in terms of the three *guṇas*. We might have been surprised to see that there was no explicit distinction made in that list between vegetarian and nonvegetarian foods. We could consider various reasons for this silence; but in light of the *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*’s apparent equivocation on this subject, the *Gītā* could intend to be more suggestive than prescriptive in this matter.²⁹ Again, the prescriptive character of the *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* shows us an important—in itself complex—component of the orthodox brahmanical landscape of thinking about dharma; and this is all relevant as cultural background to the expression of what we are calling “classical Yoga” as inscribed in the *Yoga Sūtra* of Patañjali and the *Patañjaliyogaśāstra*.

3.8 LEARNING YOGA LESSONS

India’s ancient brahmanical practices of sacrifice were underwritten by a notion of world order and maintenance, broadly referred to as *dharma*. The internalized sacrifice developed as a counterpart to external, ritual

²⁸ See Olivelle (2005, p. 41), citing Sheldon Pollock: “[Ś]āstras are ‘cultural grammars’ that both reflect and regulate practice (*prayoga*).”

²⁹ On Manu’s ambiguity, see Barnes (2019, p. 178), as Manu’s “attempt to bring [the] more brutal account of nature as sanctioned by the ancient sacrificial cult of the Veda into some sort of correlation with other forms of human religiosity—most obviously the ascetical practices of the ‘renouncer tradition’ and the devotional cults that form around popular god-figures.”

sacrifice, as equally if not more profoundly the enactment of dharma: The former was the dharma of worldly engagement, *pravṛtti-dharma* or “ritual ethics,” and the latter became known as *nivṛtti-dharma*—disengagement from the world, sustained in “ascetic ethics.” Practitioners of both had their settled, prescribed duties (delineated in Dharmaśāstras, essentially works expounding deontological ethics), yet the two were in varying degrees of tension if not open contestation with each other. The *Mahābhārata* frame narrative of Janamejaya’s snake sacrifice dramatizes this tension: King Parikṣit (Janamejaya’s father) embodies the pursuit of *pravṛtti-dharma* and the meditating sage Śamika embodies the practice of *nivṛtti-dharma*. The price that Parikṣit pays for his show of impatience with the silent, unmoving *yogin* Śamika is death from snakebite; but can we also view his fate as a result (a “reaction” in terms of moral cosmic order—*karma*) of his indulgence in hunting, having wounded a deer prior to meeting Śamika? The *Mahābhārata* does not explicitly make this connection; yet it would not be unfitting to the text’s concern with the problem of violence, harm, and cruelty.

Vyāsa’s exhortations to his son Śuka—that he must “serve dharma”—render a concise summary of yoga ideals based on ascetic ethics. Śuka should, in effect, become an exemplary performer of internal sacrifice, which entails the observance of *ahimsā*. Vyāsa doesn’t specify how *ahimsā* is to be practiced, but his expectation for Śuka to “subjugate” his senses suggests the crucial link between sense control—especially the demands of the palate—and the resolve to avoid unnecessary killing of animals for food. Vyāsa contrasts persons who are self-controlled with persons who “eat everything” and who, in their foolishness, fail to see the self-binding, misery-producing consequences of their indiscriminate actions in the arena of action, *karma-bhumi*. In effect, this passage sets up a contrast within what we might call a virtue ethical framework: virtue is served by self-control, whereas the self-indulgent go counter to the culture of virtue. The latter behavior is characterized specifically by indiscriminate consumption.

If Śuka, with all good intentions to follow his father’s advice to practice austerity, would not have also taken his further advice to follow in the footsteps of seasoned yoga practitioners, he might have become like Jājali. Jājali practiced an astounding regimen of (unguided) bodily mortification, taking self-control to an extreme that served well the sparrow family, but unfortunately also served Jājali’s pride. It is Tulādhara’s and then the sparrows’ later guiding wisdom that saves Jājali; and through these exchanges

emerges what we might regard as a nostalgic vision of benign sacrificial order rooted in completely unmotivated observance of nonviolent, non-injurious duties that have the fortunate side effect of untitled bounty for all. As utopian as this vision may be, it invites readers to imagine a possible world characterized by plenitude resulting from a society-wide culture of yogic restraint.

The *Mahābhārata* does not linger over such visions, but it does show great concern about character development of society's leaders. The longest of the *Mahābhārata*'s eighteen divisions is the 365-chapter Śānti Parva, consisting mainly of the dying warrior Bhīṣma's lessons to King Yudhiṣṭhira. These lessons include extensive precepts on civil governance as well as on *mokṣa-dharma*, the duties of one who seeks final liberation from worldly pursuits. Thus, we may view the episode of Yudhiṣṭhira insisting on bringing his companion dog with him into heaven in light of Bhīṣma's instructions. His demonstration of moral concern for the dog shows him comprehending dharma in its deep sense, thereby "finding his relational self" (Dalmiya 2016, p. 63; Veena Das 2013, pp. 27–28).³⁰ We may regard his success in this search as being a result of his attentive tuition with Bhīṣma, matured by all the painful experiences of his and his family's life, culminating in the fratricidal war of Kurukṣetra. In the tradition's persistent sacrificial language, this war was also a sacrifice, yielding human blood as an oblation to the Earth, a massively violent ritual of mass-dismemberment. In this context, Yudhiṣṭhira's remembering his dog is a convergence of dharmic understanding of re-membrance and healing that hints toward yogic declassification of the macrocosmic body's variegated features.

Amidst the *Mahābhārata*'s several lessons on the difficulty of being good (Das 2009, *passim*) are Krishna's lessons to Arjuna in the *Bhagavadgītā*. From Krishna's stern exhortations for Arjuna to perform his *kṣatriya* duty to fight in the ensuing battle, one could take it that Krishna is saying, "To be good is not the point; you must do what is right, and you will know what is right when you practice yoga. And yoga practice begins by developing detachment from the results of your actions, and by seeing all beings as having the same nonmaterial essence." Detachment

³⁰The term "relational self" in Vrinda Dalmiya's care ethics aims to distinguish the ethical subject from the "abstract reasoner," the latter aiming to transcend the perspective of concrete agents, characteristic of Kantian/Rawlsian or Utilitarian approaches. "The ethical subject is *embodied* and an inherently *relational self*" (Dalmiya 2016, p. 4, emphasis in original).

will not occur by trying to refrain from acting. The problem of bondage that *karma* perpetuates is not solved by not acting, Krishna says. No one can be a non-doer, “not even for a moment” (*Gītā* 3.5). Rather, engaging in *karma-yoga* is to begin to solve the problem (to be further discussed in Chap. 9, Sect. 9.4).

To prescribe what is “right” is very much Manu’s preoccupation in the *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, which also includes a section on *karma-yoga*. We bypassed this topic to look at Manu’s somewhat complicated injunctions about food choice, where it became clear that prudential ethics is the framing spirit of his preference for abstention from meat. Yet there is an ironic sense of “inclusiveness” in this passage for us to note, in Manu’s (almost) concluding statement concerning animal killing and eating:

The man who authorizes, the man who butchers, the man who slaughters, the man who buys or sells, the man who cooks, the man who serves, and the man who eats—these are all killers. (*MDh* 5.51; Olivelle 2005, p. 140)

Returning to the topic of classification in relation to dharma, in this case, several actors (none of whom are identified by *varṇa*) are all classified as “killers.” One could read this statement as a neutral claim in the spirit of “classifying the universe”; more likely, it is meant as a moral exhortation. In effect, “Don’t think that you are exempt from the karmic implications of animal killing simply because you are only a functionary in the economy of meat eating.” More ominously, it could also be taken to suggest that all human beings, whether or not they are implicated in animal killing, are nevertheless implicated in killing, simply because we are eaters. We can recall Tulādhara’s description of true *yogins* as persons who “make their own selves the sacrificial altars”: sacrifice is not to be rejected; rather, it can be “internalized,” thereby neutralizing the human being’s predicament in a biologically violent world.

This last suggestion, finally, brings us to briefly note that Jainism and Buddhism—with their varied expressions of resistance to brahmanical orthodoxy and rejection of the sacrificial cult (as we discussed in Chap. 2, Sect. 2.6)—are significant elements of the ethical landscape during the times that the *Mahābhārata* and *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* are thought to have developed into their present forms. Thus, regarding Jain practice, we may wonder if—as a polemic against Jainism—Jāli in the *Mahābhārata* was intended to represent a wayward *brāhmaṇa* turned Jain. His extreme asceticism, leading finally to inflation of pride; his being taught by

Tulādhara that ritual sacrifice as such is not to be rejected; and his learning from the birds he had sheltered, that faith is essential to comprehend dharma, could suggest this. Regarding Buddhism, it has been argued that the *Bhagavadgītā* was in dialogue with Buddhism, possibly so regarding the latter's apparent "no-self" doctrine (*anattā*, *anātmavāda*), which the *Gītā* (following the brahmanical philosophical tradition represented by the Upaniṣads) roundly rejects.³¹ We will have occasion to address these issues in later chapters, as they impact our understanding of yoga in relation to animal ethics.

From this and the previous chapter we now have a basic historical sketch (limited to what can be drawn from textual sources) of the early Indic matrix from which what will come to be called classical Yoga has emerged. As we have seen, questions of how nonhuman animals should or should not be treated were integral to this emergence. In Part Two our attention turns to the text that stands enduringly at the center of classical Yoga thought and practice, the *Yoga Sūtra* of Patañjali, drawing on its eight-limbed frame for yoga practice as a structure to aid in thinking about human-nonhuman animal relations from a yoga-informed perspective.

Questions for Reflection

1. How might the *Mahābhārata*'s story of a snake sacrifice be related to present-day issues of animal species extinction? (Sect. 3.2)
2. What implications might there be for human-nonhuman animal relationality in the notion of a person "conquering" disturbing physical conditions by "subjugation" of the senses? (Sect. 3.3)
3. In the context of this chapter as a whole, how would you explain the birds' statement that "[l]ack of faith is a supreme sin" and that "[r]enunciation with faith is superior to all sacred deeds"? How is it significant that these statements are made by the birds whom Jājali had hosted in his hair? (Sects. 3.4 and 3.6)
4. Yudhiṣṭhira's dog reveals himself to be Dharma in person. How might such an identification serve to improve present-day human engagement with nonhuman animals? (Sect. 3.5)

³¹ See Malinar (2007, pp. 9, 27), on the Buddhism-*Mahābhārata* connection historiography. I say "apparent 'no-self'" in reference to the complexity and ambiguity of the topic in early Buddhism, as argued by Hamilton (2000, chapter 1).

5. How would you explain the Bhagavadgītā's connection of food types with types of faith, and these in relation to karma? (Sect. 3.6)
6. How might Manu's detailed brahmanical food rules related to those of other religious traditions, especially Abrahamic traditions? (Sect. 3.7)
7. In reflecting on "yogic declassification of the macrocosmic body's variegated features," what present-day classifications would a modern *yogin* do well to make effort to "declassify"? (Sect. 3.8)

REFERENCES

- Balkaran, Raj. 2019. *The Goddess and the King in Indian Myth: Ring Composition, Royal Power, and the Dharmic Double Helix*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Barnes, Michael. 2019. Invoking Another World: An Interreligious Reflection on Hindu Mythology. In *The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Animal Ethics*, ed. Andrew Linzey and Clair Linzey, 173–180. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Bryant, Edwin. 2015. Hindu Classical Yoga: Patañjali's Yoga Sutras. In *Contemplative Literature: A Comparative Sourcebook on Meditation and Contemplative Prayer*, ed. Louis Komjathy, 457–502. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Brzezinski, J., and U. Stiehl, Eds. n.d. *Hitopadeśa*. GRETEL: https://gretel.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretel/1_sanskrit/5_poetry/4_narr/hitop_u.htm
- Dalmiya, Vrinda. 2016. *Caring to Know: Comparative Care Ethics, Feminist Epistemology, and the Mahābhārata*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Das, Gurcharan. 2009. *The Difficulty of Being Good: On the Subtle Art of Dharma*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Das, Veena. 2013. Being Together with Animals: Death, Violence and Noncruelty in Hindu Imagination. In *Living Beings: Perspectives on Interspecies Engagements*, ed. Penelope Dransart, 17–32. London: Bloomsbury.
- Debroy, Bibek. 2008. *Sarama and Her Children: The Dog in Indian Myth*. Penguin Random House India.
- Debroy, Bibek, trans. 2015. *The Mahabharata* (vol. 10). New Delhi: Penguin.
- Feller, Danielle. 2013. Ecology in the *Mahābhārata*? *Pandanus* '13: *Nature in Literature, Art, Myth and Ritual* 7 (1): 21–34.
- Fitzgerald, James J. 2012. A Prescription for *Yoga* and Power in the *Mahābhārata*. In *Yoga in Practice*, ed. David Gordon White. Princeton University Press: Princeton.
- Frazier, Jessica. 2017. *Hindu Worldviews: Theories of Self, Ritual and Reality*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Goswami, H. D. 2015. *A Comprehensive Guide to Bhagavad-gītā with Literal Translation*. Gainesville, FL: Krishna West.

- Hamilton, Sue. 2000. *Early Buddhism: A New Approach—The I of the Beholder*. London: Routledge.
- Hiltebeitel, Alf. 2001. *Rethinking the Mahābhārata: A Reader's Guide to the Education of the Dharma King*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hiltebeitel, Alf. 2016. *Nonviolence in the Mahābhārata: Śiva's summa on Rsidharma and the gleaners of Kurukṣetra*. New York: Routledge.
- Jones, Gabriel. 2010. Snakes, Sacrifice and Sacrality in South Asian Religion. *Ottawa Journal of Religion* (2): 89–119.
- Kunst, Arnold. 1978. Use and Misuse of Dharma. In *The Concept of Duty in South Asia*, ed. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, J. Duncan, and M. Derrett, 3–17. Delhi: Vikas Publishing, School of Oriental and African Studies.
- Malinar, Angelika. 2007. *The Bhagavadgītā: Doctrines and Contexts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Minkowski, Christopher. 1991. Snakes, *Satras*, and the *Mahābhārata*. In *Essays on the Mahābhārata*, ed. Arvind Sharma, 384–400. Leiden: E.J. Brill.
- Monier-Williams, Sir Monier. 1995. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Olivelle, Patrick. 2005. *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rusza, Ferenc. n.d. Sankhya. *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <https://iep.utm.edu/sankhya/#H6> (Accessed October 1, 2024).
- Sargeant, Winthrop, trans. 2009. *The Bhagavad Gītā: Twenty-fifth-Anniversary Edition*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Sherma, Rita D. 2015. A Hindu Response to *Laudato Si'* on Care for Our Common Home. In *For Our Common Home: Process Relational Responses to Laudato Si'*, ed. John B. Cobb Jr. and Ignacio Castuera. Anoka, MN: Process Century Press.
- Smith, Brian K. 1994. *Classifying the Universe: The Ancient Indian Varṇa System and the Origin of Caste*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sutton, Nicholas. 2000. *Religious Doctrines in the Mahābhārata*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Taliaferro, Charles. 2018. Substance Dualism: A Defense. In *The Blackwell Companion to Substance Dualism*, ed. Jonathan J. Loose, A. J. L. Menuge, and J. P. Moreland, 41–60. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell.
- Tull, Herman W. 2004. Karma. In *The Hindu World*, ed. Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby, 309–331. New York: Routledge.
- van Buitenen, J. A. B., trans. 1973. *The Mahābhārata: 1. Book of the Beginning*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Williams, Paul, and Anthony Tribe. 2000. *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Buddhist Tradition*. London: Routledge.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



PART II

Yoga Ascent, Animal Ethics: Body,
Self, and Other in Classical Yoga



Yoga Ethics—Restraints (*yama*) and Observances (*niyama*)

4.1 INTRODUCTION

To introduce the basic contours of classical Yoga¹ as they pertain to our concern for human-nonhuman animal relationality, we can begin with the *Bhagavadgītā*'s image of an upside-down banyan tree representing the phenomenal, temporal world. This is a striking image of the living beings' predicament in this world and of the first, essential step for human beings toward resolving this predicament:

The form of this [world-tree] cannot be ascertained—neither its end nor its beginning, nor its foundation.

It is the tree of bondage in *samsāra*, the seemingly endless cycle of death and rebirth to which all creatures are subject, according to all Indic traditions of yoga. However, there is a way to escape this entanglement of misery:

Having slashed through its strong roots with the weapon of detachment, that destination from which there is no return is to be sought. (*Gītā* 15.3, author's trans.)

¹ See Lipner (2018) for a discussion of “classical” in Hindu studies, especially regarding three functions of the term—periodizing, evaluative, programmatic.

Yoga can be viewed as the “weapon of detachment” (*asaṅga-śāstra*) that enables the bound self (*jīva*, *puruṣa*, *ātman*) to become unbound. But, because this is a powerful weapon, it must be handled carefully, with qualified guidance. Such guidance is rendered by a yoga teacher (*guru*) who has become competent as a student of his or her guru, both being competent in the yoga texts that are recognized in their particular tradition and competent in the application of those texts in yoga practice. Widely accepted as such authoritative yoga texts are the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Yoga Sūtra* of Patañjali (YS). For us to note here about these Sanskrit texts is their common acknowledgement that success in yoga requires considerable self-discipline, beginning with the diligent (and constant) practice of certain restraints (*yama*) and observances (*niyama*). Contrary to much modern postural yoga’s exclusive attention on the physical body, classical Yoga’s key aim is mental stillness and clarity. According to the *Gītā*, the mind is to be cultured to be one’s “friend,” uplifting the *yogin*’s consciousness, ultimately to complete and permanent freedom from all disturbances on life’s journey, and to right, ethical engagement with all beings. To gain the mind’s firm friendship, these texts insist that one must practice detachment (*vairāgya*) from all things temporal.

But one might object to the *Gītā*’s rather violent image of cutting down a tree at its root: Whatever is meant by “detachment” in yoga practice, must it be wielded as a “weapon”? Especially in our animal ethics context, surely the aim is to realize, through yoga, a dispositional turn away from the violent treatment of animals. Indeed so, and indeed, according to the *Yoga Sūtra*, *ahiṃsā* (non-harm, non-injury, or popularly translated as “nonviolence”) is the first of the five subcategories of *yama* to be pursued by the *yogin*. As such, the practice of nonviolence is positioned as the ethical ground upon which yoga’s foundation is fixed. Even so, Krishna’s point in speaking of detachment as a weapon serves to emphasize the need to be firm (*dr̥ḍha*) in the practice of yoga for a tangible benefit to be gained. Such firmness begins, as we shall see, with firm resolve in the practice of nonviolence. Another term to describe yoga in the *Bhagavadgītā* (2.50) is *kauśalam*—skill—suggesting that yoga, skillfully practiced, is a *tool* that enables one to reach the goal of existential freedom.

In this chapter, for the sake of brevity, we will attend to two of the five restraints and two of the five observances of classical Yoga specified by Patañjali (see Appendix A and Appendix B for discussion of the remaining three restraints and three observances, respectively). The two restraints are *ahiṃsā* and *satya*—non-harm and truth or truthfulness. As we will see,

ahimsā is the ethical bedrock, as an ideal and as a practice, upon which all other components of restraint and observances rest. Similarly, *satya*—which is so much undermined in our “post-truth” age—is counted as a type of *restraint* that is crucial for success in yoga and for realizing yogic animal ethics. Then, the two observances for our attention in this chapter are *svādhyāya* and *īśvara-praṇidhāna*—self-study (or study of selves) and devotion to God, or contemplation on *īśvara*. As *ahimsā* and *satya* are complementary and mutually supportive, such is the case with *svādhyāya* and *īśvara-praṇidhāna*. The tentatively theistic feature of the *Yoga Sūtras* (fully explicit in the *Bhagavadgītā*) urges reflection on theism’s relevance for animal ethics. All of these together—along with three further restraints and three further observances—we can think of as the key components for fostering “yogic virtue,” and in this regard we can view classical Yoga ethics generally as a type of virtue ethics.

The three remaining restraints—*asteya* (non-stealing), *brahmacharya* (celibacy, continence), and *aparigraha* (nonpossessiveness)—are certainly important in relation to our subject of animal ethics, as are the three remaining observances—*śauca* (cleanliness/purity), *santoṣa* (contentment), and *tapas* (austerity). Aside from Appendix A and Appendix B, I will allude to these in other portions of the book, as they relate with other subthemes.

4.2 YOGIC PRINCIPLES OF SELF-RESTRAINT (YAMA)

Associated with yoga since very early times is the divinity Shiva (Sanskrit Śiva), known also as Yogeśvara—Lord of Yoga. Paśupati—Lord of the Animals—is another epithet of Shiva, thought by some to be depicted in a pre-Vedic Indus Valley seal as seated in meditating yoga *āsana*, flanked by animals.² Noteworthy for the present context is that *paśu* (as in the epithet Paśupati) specifically indicates a domestic animal that is tethered by a *pāśa*—a rope or noose. The principle of self-restraint that is set out in the

²This refers to Mohenjo-daro clay seal no. 420, Indus Valley Civilization (IVC) c. 2600–1900 BCE. See Samuel (2008, pp. 2–4) for a contestation of the claim, originally made by Sir John Marshall, that this image is identifiable as Śiva-Paśupati. Yoga teacher Janne Kontala (personal communication), noting that the figure in the seal seems to be seated in what later yoga texts describe as *mūlabandhāsana*, observes that, “*Mūlabandhāsana* requires so much hip flexibility, and is also useless as a sitting posture for non-yogic purposes, that it is hard to see why anyone would practice it if not for the sake of practicing proto-yoga or some related ascetic practice.”

first limb of the eight-limbed classical Yoga tradition can be regarded as a principle of taming our tendencies to excessively impose ourselves on our environment. *Yama* is the initial tethering of these tendencies; or, to shift the analogy and introduce another arboreal image, *yama* is the *root* of the “tree of yoga,” through which all the branches (or limbs) of yoga are nourished (Iyengar 2013). As roots nourish a tree, they also hold it firmly in place, deep in the soil—the principle of grounding and sustaining growth that eventually bears fruit, providing nourishment and shelter for other creatures. More specifically, the ethical “tap root” of the yoga tree is *ahiṃsā*.

4.2.1 *Ahiṃsā—Eschewing Harming, Embracing Compassion*

Can we humans become completely free of violence or harmfulness? As naïve as this question may seem, classical Yoga places the practice of *ahiṃsā*—nonviolence or non-harming—front and center of its process of self-transformation, thereby suggesting an affirmative answer.³ Humans may be creatures of habit, but habits can be changed by intention, attention, and practice. The ability to intentionally change habits, although not unique to humans, is a prominent capacity upon which much of yoga theory is based. The senses and the mind can be controlled, or “harnessed,” by practice under competent guidance.⁴ *Ahiṃsā* is the first of five principles constituting the first stage of Eightfold Yoga (*aṣṭāṅga-yoga*),

³ Other translations of the word *ahiṃsā* are “refusal to do harm” (Zachner 1973, p. 412); “wishing no harm or violence” (Barnes 2019, p. 178); “not injuring anything, harmlessness” (Monier-Williams 1995, p. 125; he notes that in very early Vedic texts *ahiṃsā* means “security, safeness”).

⁴ For an overview of how the term *yoga* has developed and shifted in meaning since Vedic times, see White (2012, pp. 3–22) and Rose (2016, pp. 83–95). Interesting to note here is that the earliest usage of the term *yoga* was to indicate the *yoking* (an English cognate of *yoga*) of horses to a chariot in wartime. This meaning may seem far distant from its later usages, especially from what it comes to mean in classical Yoga, with its emphasis on nonviolence or non-harm (*ahiṃsā*), as we will see. Yet also already in the same early Vedic period, priests were said to “yoke” their minds to poetic inspiration. More directly expressing a practice that we would recognize today as yoga is a passage in the Kāṭha Upaniṣad (1.3.3–4), an extended analogy that compares one’s body to a chariot, the self to the rider in the chariot, the intellect (*buddhi*) to a charioteer, the mind to the reins, the senses to horses pulling the chariot, and the sense objects to the paths followed by the horses. “He who is linked to (*yukta*, related to *yoga*, here meaning ‘able to control’) the body (*ātman*), senses, and mind, the wise proclaim as the one who enjoys” (Olivelle trans. 1998, p. 389). I discuss this further in Chap. 6, Sect. 6.2.

namely *yama*, restraint. *Ahiṃsā* is a foundational ideal toward which one aims, and which one cultivates throughout one's life of yoga practice. But if *ahiṃsā* is the starting point for yoga practice, what is the starting point for the practice of *ahiṃsā*? As we have discussed in Chap. 2, Sect. 2.5, in its earliest usage in the context of Vedic ritual sacrifice, *ahiṃsā* referred to refraining from ritual immolation of animals. Later, and as much so today, the starting point of *ahiṃsā* is conscious control of one's tongue regarding food intake.

*Thinking about the highest Brahman,
having inclined the mind toward that goal,
the Yogi is always yoked by Yoga,
abstemious in regard to food
and in control of the senses.*⁵

To be “abstemious in regard to food” is to be selective of what one eats and, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, to be “temperate and sparing in food.” For *yogins*—those who are seriously committed to the practice of yoga—such selectivity invariably includes, minimally, avoiding all non-vegetarian means of nourishment. Insofar as their own physical well-being is concerned, *yogins* know that they can maintain health just as well, if not better, with a vegetarian or vegan diet than with the intake of animal flesh, whether terrestrial, aquatic, or avian.⁶ And they recognize that, so long as one can be fully nourished by grains, vegetables, fruits, nuts, and possibly dairy,⁷ to take—or approve the taking of—the lives of animals unnecessarily for one's own sustenance would be, at the very least, a complete failure to take the most minimal step in the practice of *ahiṃsā*. More substantively, it would be to ignore a basic axiom of cosmic moral order, namely, that all actions (*karma*) performed by human beings

⁵ Markaṇḍeya Purāṇa 40.16, trans. Chapple 2020, ch. 1. In a *haṭha* yoga text from c. 1200 CE, the *Dattātreyayogaśāstra*, is this statement (3.1.1.): “The sages who see things as they truly are have said that there are ten rules. Of them, a moderate diet is the single most important, not any of the others. Of the restraints, non-violence is the single most important, not any of the others” (Mallinson 2024).

⁶ As noted in the Introduction, see Cramer et al. (2018) for a statistical survey and analysis of the yoga and vegetarian diet correlation in the USA.

⁷ Those who follow a vegan diet avoid taking all dairy products, many on moral grounds, regarding all forms of dairy production as inherently violent. This is discussed in more detail in Appendix C.

invariably carry consequences—“reactions” (*vipāka*)—that come to bear on the actor.⁸

Of course, there are further measures—beyond abstention from animal flesh—that yoga practitioners might take to observe the *ahimsā* principle. As noted in Chap. 2, as an ancient tradition of India that incorporates yoga practice, Jainism in particular is deeply—indeed centrally—committed to practices of nonviolence. In their understanding that living beings virtually pervade the world, Jain ascetics will, for example, eschew the use of all vehicles, traveling instead only by foot, to minimize the danger of crushing small creatures (or of blasting flying insects against windshields and running over cats or foxes). The same ascetics may also wear a mask over the mouth to avoid—or at least minimize—the intake of microbes, regarding them as no different in essence from themselves, merely residing in different, less developed bodies.⁹

Observances of Jain ascetic *yogins* may strike us as extreme, suggesting a spectrum of possible ways to practice *ahimsā* (Clifton 2023, pp. 174–176). We could locate such Jain practices on a maximal end of a yoga practices scale in pursuit of *ahimsā* and put vegetarian dietary practice at the opposite, minimal point on this scale. What practices might we locate between these two points? Such attempts at mapping yogic *ahimsā* practices bring questions about what exactly *ahimsā* is in its broadest sense, and taking that broad sense, how it would be applied for effective yoga practice.

Classical commentators on Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtra* provide clues about the broad sense of *ahimsā*. Vyāsa (ca. fifth century CE, considered to be

⁸ For a brief explanation of the karma concept in classical Indian philosophy, see section 1.1.1. in Chadha (2022). For an argument that *ahimsā* (and the other four *yamas*) are “non-ethical” concepts, see Bharadwaja (1984).

⁹ Common to Hindu (including classical Yoga) and Jain traditions is an affirmative response to whether there is a self beyond the psycho-physical body. Both traditions may resonate, therefore, with Arne Naess’ observation, that “[b]ecause of an inescapable process of identification with others, with increasing maturity, the self is widened and deepened. We ‘see ourselves in others’. Our self-realization is hindered if the self-realization of others, with whom we identify, is hindered. Our self-love will fight this hindrance by assisting in the self-realization of others according to the formula ‘Live and let live!’ Thus, everything that can be achieved by altruism—the *dutiful, moral* consideration of others—can be achieved, and much more, by the process of widening and deepening ourselves. Following Kant, we then act *beautifully* but neither morally nor immorally (in the sense of from duty)” (Naess 2016, p. 82, emphasis in original). “Less developed bodies” refers to the Jain typology of living beings according to the number of senses they possess.

the keynote early commentator)¹⁰ first notes the importance of *ahimsā* by identifying it as the root—the basis—of the four remaining restraints (*yamas*) and of the five practices (*niyamas*). He then defines *ahimsā* as “not injuring any living creature anywhere at any time.” Further, Vyāsa regards the aim of the remaining four restraints to be the achievement and enhancement of *ahimsā*, for the sake of which the *yogin* willingly increases vows and austerities, thereby purifying the practice of *ahimsā*. But is it really possible to not injure *any* living creature anywhere, at any time? A later commentator, Vijñānabhikṣu (fifteenth to sixteenth century), acknowledges that one must continue performing one’s prescribed duties (*dharma*), duties that are bound to bring unintended and even unavoidable harm to small creatures. Still, he writes, one should avoid harming even the least of creatures as far as possible. How this is to be done is suggested by Manu in the *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*: “To protect living creatures, [one] should walk always—whether by night or during the day—only after inspecting the ground even at the cost of bodily discomfort” (*Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* VI.69; Olivelle 2005, p. 152 and Bryant 2009, pp. 243–248; *YS* II.30 commentary).¹¹

The *Yoga Sūtra* itself offers a further pointer on how to pursue the nonviolence principle. We find this hint in Patañjali’s compact and cogent self-reflective method to counteract one’s tendencies to lapse in the practice of the restraints as well as the observances (*niyamas*). First he gives a general principle, followed immediately by an explanation:

Upon being harassed by negative thoughts, one should cultivate counteracting thoughts.

¹⁰This Vyāsa who wrote a commentary on Patañjali Yoga Sūtras (and who some scholars argue is one and the same as Patañjali) is to be distinguished from the much earlier Vyāsa (Kṛṣṇa-dvaipāyana Vyāsa) credited with compiling the *Mahābhārata*, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and related works. The *Yoga Sūtra* together with Vyāsa’s commentary is referred to as the *Pātañjalayogasāstra*.

¹¹To practice nonviolence is not merely to avoid physical harm. On a deeper level, it is a positive cultivation, aiming to be free of all malice and hatred toward other beings. According to the eighth-century Vedānta commentator Śaṅkara, successful observance of *ahimsā* comes with constant monitoring of one’s thoughts and words, as well as one’s deeds. And, he says, there are degrees of violence with respect to intent. Thus, it is not wrong to defend oneself if attacked, but neither is it proper to aggravate enmity that would lead to the need to defend oneself (Bryant 2009, pp. 243–248; *YS* II.30 commentary). Yoga practice implies minimizing as far as possible the conditions in which the *yogin* would be subject to attack by animals, which he or she would, of course, have no reason to aggravate.

Negative thoughts are violence, etc. They may be [personally] performed, performed on one's behalf by another, or authorized by oneself; they may be triggered by greed, anger, or delusion; and they may be slight, moderate, or extreme in intensity. One should cultivate counteracting thoughts, namely, that the end results [of negative thoughts] are ongoing suffering and ignorance. (*YS* II.33–34; Bryant 2009, pp. 255, 257)

Several points regarding the yogic practice of *ahimsā* are notable from these two aphorisms. First, the *yogin* is exhorted to take responsibility for his or her actions, recognizing that action begins with thought, which may sometimes be recognizable as “negative” (*vitarka*). Such thought “harasses” one who pursues yoga practice by not only distraction but also by implication in action (*karma*) with retributive implications. Second, “violence, etc.” (in the second of the two aphorisms) calls us to recognize violence and harm as the root—the beginning and generative basis—of problematic behavior that is counter to the remaining components of *yama* and *niyama*. Third, conversely to the previous point, the three sets of three degrees of engagement in negative behavior (listed in *YS* II.34, above—type of involvement, emotional triggers, and intensity of engagement), whatever the behavior may be, are all easily traceable back to violence and harm of all sorts, including psychological and socially systemic forms.¹² Fourth, in particular, the first set of three levels of acting—direct and indirect involvement—arguably points most readily to the act of killing animals for food. That is to say, “performed on one's behalf by another, or authorized by oneself,” implicates the moral distance and objectification that sustains the modern meat industry.¹³ Further, the “counteracting thoughts” to be cultivated arise from recognizing two interconnected domains of negative consequences to one's negative thoughts, namely, suffering (one's own and that of others) and ignorance (the first of five afflictions—*kleśas*—to

¹² “Three sets of three degrees of engagement” here refers to, first, the three degrees of causal involvement: “They may be [personally] performed, performed on one's behalf by another, or authorized by oneself”; three degrees (or types) of emotional trigger: “triggered by greed, anger, or delusion”; and three degrees of intensity of engagement: “slight, moderate, or extreme in intensity.”

¹³ Vyāsa, commenting on *YS* II.34, specifically confirms that violence against animals is to be avoided. The first specification of three degrees of engagement may remind us of Manu's statement (quoted in Chap. 3, Sect. 3.8) that all who are directly, indirectly, or approvingly involved in the enterprise of meat consumption “are killers” (Bryant 2009, pp. 257–261).

which bound souls are constantly subjected).¹⁴ And finally, these two *sūtras* show a causal connection between “negative thoughts,” unfavorable actions, and negative consequences.¹⁵ *Sūtra* II.34 further implies that there are multiple possible divisions of violence, since each of the nine factors listed can be multiplied with each other (e.g., each of three possible triggers for one or the other type of involvement are possible).

This aphorism similarly illuminates practice of the remaining four *yamas* and the five *niyamas*. But here let us simply note that the practice of non-harming is indeed a *practice*, an ongoing, conscious endeavor to think and behave in ways that affirm the inherent value of all living beings. As such, it is also a form of practical reasoning, which is inherent to ethical behavior. And while there is no end to this practice and its reasoning (nor to any of the *yamas* and *niyamas*—they should always be pursued) Patañjali does identify a specific beneficial result for the *yogin* of successful practice of *ahiṃsā*:

In the presence of one who is established in nonviolence, enmity is abandoned. (*YS* II.35; Bryant 2009, p. 261)

One hint of how such interspecies peace might be conceived is in the *Bhagavadgītā*’s description of the sage’s “equal vision” (which we saw in Chap. 3, Sect. 3.6):

The wise see as equal a learned humble *brāhmaṇa*, a cow, an elephant, and even a dog and dog cooker. (*Gītā* 5.18; Goswami trans. 2015, p. 170)

Such vision is understood in classical Yoga to be rooted in recognition that all living beings are of the same non-material, non-temporal and real constitution.¹⁶ If such is the case, it is easy to see that to be committed to non-harming is a first step toward gaining such vision. And when a *yogin*

¹⁴Patañjali identifies five types of *kleśas*: “The impediments [to *samādhi*, the *kleśas*] are nescience, ego, desire, aversion, and clinging to life” (*YS* II.3; Bryant 2009, p. 175).

¹⁵Vyāsa offers a striking example of how one might counter one’s perverse thoughts: “Burning in the fire of this world, I have taken shelter of *yoga* by committing myself to the welfare of all creatures; after having renounced such perverse thoughts, by again resorting to them, I am behaving like a dog who licks its vomit” (Bryant 2009, p. 256; *YS* II.33 commentary).

¹⁶For an overview of Western development of ideas on animal-human equality, “equal consideration” and “equal treatment,” see Preece (1999, pp. 24–25). Preece finds this discourse muddled as it is applied in animal rights advocacy. The proposal of *Yoga and Animal Ethics* is that yogic thought and practice may offer correctives and depth to the discourse.

is accustomed to see various beings with equal vision, he or she may radiate from themselves such a serenity that other beings—human as well as animal—find it possible to drop defenses, to put aside any spirit of competition or aggression that would incite enmity. On a deeper level, the *yogin* committed to nonviolence recognizes the *being*—the objective reality—of other beings, in comparison to which the differentiation of their particular body types is of secondary concern (Bohanec 2024, p. 39 and *passim*). In another sort of comparison, namely, to oneself regarding experience of dualities such as happiness and distress, the *Bhagavadgītā* (6.32) states that the best *yogin* is one who “sees equally everywhere” (*sarvatra samam paśyati*). More to the point here because the advanced yoga practitioner has such equal vision, creatures in proximity to them may similarly sense that the core source of enmity among different embodied creatures, namely predation, need not be feared in those persons’ presence.

Somewhat parenthetically, I will mention here that the yogic notion of equal vision presented here will be important in later discussion (in later chapters) on three fundamental theories of animal ethics, namely, *identity* theory, *difference* theory, and *indistinction* theory (Calarco 2015). As we will seek complementarity among these, *ahimsā* will prove to be important as a catalyst for thought.

This necessarily brief discussion of *ahimsā* as a conscious practice of restraint as foundational to yoga practice places a premium on self-honesty. The first step in the practice of *ahimsā* is recognition that what one consumes to maintain one’s physical body both directly and indirectly affects other living beings. My fondness for some particular animal flesh comes at the cost of a particular animal’s life, a life not willingly given; and further, my act of turning that life into a means for my nourishment indirectly brings countless further causes of suffering and ignorance, both to others and to myself. As one practices self-honest self-control, particularly of the tongue, one becomes better sensitized both to the needs of sentient beings to avoid suffering and to the ways of one’s own mind as an instrument needing fine-tuning to serve its purpose well in yoga practice. Such attention to tongue and mind applies equally to the next principle of self-restraint, the practice of truthfulness.

4.2.2 *Satya—Enacting Truth*

In his study of Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtra*, *The Yoga of the Luminous*, Christopher Chapple shares a personal realization about the nature of truth as an

integral element of yoga practice, intimately related with care. “Like a child, the world does not know how to live by itself. It requires constant attention and careful, patient understanding. Truth necessitates care. Without care there can be no world, no *satya*, no life” (Chapple 2008, chapter 3).¹⁷

The Sanskrit word *satya* is an abstract noun from *sat*, a term with a wide range of meanings, beginning with “being” or “existing,” but also “real, actual” and “true, good, right” (Monier-Williams 1995, p. 1134). Classical Yoga subscribes to a realist ontology largely derived from Sāṅkhya thought, in which two aspects of reality are recognized, namely, conscious, subjective, non-material beings (*puruṣa*) and objective matter (*prakṛti*). The practice of *satya* in pursuit of yoga in the framework of classical Yoga aims toward discernment of the distinction between these two principles. Such discernment of the truth of this distinction positions the *yogin* to render appropriate care for living beings in all their varied bodily forms, each in accord with their particular forms and lifeways. More to the specific context of considering *satya* as a component of self-restraint, we can note the connection between this principle and the broader sense of a caring disposition. We just noted in relation to the sense of equal vision arising from commitment to non-harming that the *yogin* recognizes the being of other beings as objective reality. In this light, to *truly care* is to place oneself in a position of, minimally, acknowledging the reality—the being—of other beings, thereby consciously restraining the tendency to insist on one’s own desires as primary. Conversely, taking one’s own desires as primary is to deny the reality and being—the truth—of other beings and therefore to ignore their needs.¹⁸

The English word *truthfulness* typically evokes the idea of truth-telling which, in turn, calls attention to actions of the physical mouth and tongue (again, as with the practice of *ahimsā*). Although numerous animal species rely on various forms of deception to protect themselves and advance their

¹⁷ Another way one might say this, keeping in mind that in Sāṅkhya/Yoga, since care is a function of *buddhi* (the organ of discernment or “intelligence” that is a component of *prakṛti*, of this world), would be, “the world does not know how to live by itself, yet it can care for itself when *satya* is applied.” My thanks to Janne Kontala for this suggestion. See also *Yogayājñavalkya* (I.53cd), a medieval *haṭha* yoga text: “Satya is not merely speaking the plain truth, [but to say] that which is beneficial to all beings” (Mohan 2013, pp. 11–12).

¹⁸ See Raveh (2016, pp. 28–58) for a discussion of dharmic complexities surrounding questions of truth and truthfulness in social dealings—especially in relation to the upholding of vows—in relation to the story of Ekalavya in the *Mahābhārata*.

interests, humans seem to be especially equipped for deception, specifically and primarily through speech (Rappaport 1999, pp. 11–15). We humans find ready ways to advance the social self at the expense of others—human or nonhuman—by expression of untruth, thereby perpetuating the affliction (*kleśa*) of our ignorance (*avidyā*). The same tendency toward untruth in individuals becomes compounded exponentially in the public sphere, most glaringly and yet carefully hidden in the conglomerate of institutions that sustain meat industries (Kim 2021). From the perspective of serious yogic engagement, the advertising and media powers that promote meat consumption, the massive CAFOs, the out-of-sight slaughter and meat-packing industries themselves, and the legal system that protects these industries from criticism (such as “ag-gag” laws)—must be considered a thick, tightly woven net of untruth. Recalling Patañjali’s pithy analysis of threefold types, causes, and intensities of negative thoughts leading to “ongoing suffering and ignorance” (YS II.34), the human collective indulgence in untruth in relation to animals as objects for consumption gives pause to marvel at just how deeply implicated in world-affliction we humans have allowed ourselves to become. Far from pursuing *satya*, habituated to untruth, from the perspective of classical Yoga theory we become alienated from ourselves as we become alienated from our environment, yielding a constricted, impoverished, even crude sense of self, clamoring for justice and human dignity while ignoring the cries of the countless animals we eat. Patañjali insists that this is precisely the ongoing suffering and ignorance that results directly from the “negative thoughts” such as greed, anger, and illusion (*lobha-krodha-moha*) that are sustained in untruth. In effect, Patañjali advises reversing the tendency to ignore other beings’ suffering by paying more attention to our own self-deceptions in the form of greed and anger, by which illusion about our own self-importance persists.

Among the many varieties of deception that the practice of *satya* enables the *yogin* to counter, the first and foremost is self-deception. An especially debilitating form of self-deception has to do with inconsistency in our treatment of animals. Such inconsistency is secured by habituation to untruth with respect to one’s relationship with animals. This has a specific, far-reaching consequence: the habit of untruth becomes both cause and effect of moral disengagement that allows one to ignore the “meat

paradox,” namely, “the mental contradiction that helps devoted animal lovers continue eating animals” (Gradidge et al. 2021).¹⁹

Countering untruth and deception, truth-telling as self-restraint in yoga practice with respect to animals may take the form of animal activism. A broad purpose of animal activism is to pressure individuals and institutions to adopt and facilitate various forms of restraint—especially self-restraint—in the public sphere with respect to animals. As a positive (and positively restrained) activity, a basic truth-telling function is education, bringing awareness and knowledge to a public that is shrouded—or allows itself to be shrouded—in ignorance about the harsh truths by which carnism’s food system is sustained. A yogic approach to such truth-telling activism would begin with the self-restraint to, for example, take care to have accurate information to share with others regarding phenomena related with animals and human mistreatment of animals. Truth-telling activism as a component of yoga practice is grounded in “luminous culture,” what in Yoga’s sister philosophical tradition, Sāṃkhya, is called *sattva-guṇa*, the “quality of luminosity” (see Chap. 3, Sect. 3.6). The pursuit of truth must grow from the ground of knowledge nourished by care (Dalmiya 2016, *passim*), whereby knowledge and illumination are closely allied components of successful yoga practice.

As with *ahiṃsā*, so with *satya*, one may ask how it is cultivated in yoga practice, and what is its result. To the latter question, Patañjali states:

When established in truthfulness one ensures the fruition of actions. (YS II.36; Bryant 2009, p. 262)

This aphorism can be understood in terms of virtue ethics as highlighting accord between action and result as that which comes about from dedication to truthfulness. It can also be understood as affirming coherence between faith and action (Linzey and Linzey 2019, p. 13). In relation to nonhuman animals, truthfulness is the pursuit of responsible action in relation to them, which brings about the fruit of rightness and well-being for both humans and animals, arguably a fundamental aim of dharma in Indic traditions. Such rightness and well-being is experienced as enriched,

¹⁹The “meat paradox” is identified as a form of cognitive dissonance. Gradidge et al.’s study identifies seven disengagement strategies, i.e., ways to disengage from the psychological disturbance caused by the cognitive dissonance arising from considering oneself as one who “cares about animals” (value) while continuing to eat meat (behavior).

non-competitive and non-exploitative relationships among humans and nonhumans thriving in mixed communities (Naess 2016, p. 82).

This *Yoga Sūtra* aphorism can also be understood in terms of “speech acts,” in the sense that the advanced *yogin* is said to have such powers of speech that what he or she speaks is thereby made possible to come about (Bryant 2009). In this sense, *satya* as self-restraint is seen as a source of power. In our context, the effort to restrain speech that perpetuates human neglect or mistreatment of animals can lead to bringing about conditions liberating for animals, thereby liberating as well for humans.

To the first question regarding how the practice of *satya* may be cultivated, I suggest we consider it as a noun with a verbal force. *Satya* as a positive practice is a process of realization, specifically of self-realization in yoga’s soteriological sense of pursuing final liberation, or what I would call “progressive freedom.”²⁰ Integral to self-realization is the pursuit of “other-realization”—the acknowledgement, acceptance, and welcome of otherness, not least the otherness of other living beings, whether human or nonhuman. In this sense, *satya* can be regarded as a *commitment* (an alternative translation for the term *yama*). Taken in this way, we can think of *satya* as signaling the serious yoga practitioner’s standard of “moral character,” in the sense of having an excellent trait strongly entrenched.²¹ This understanding of truthfulness as an ongoing pursuit is complemented by one of the five practices (*niyama*), namely, *svādhyāya*, “self-study,” which we will consider shortly. Another approach to the practice of *satya* is *through* the practice of *ahimsā*. As the *yogin* consciously acts to reduce harm in thought, word and deed, she becomes an embodiment of the truth of coexistence among creatures, as one who *truly acts* for the well-being of all beings. Such practice of truthfulness is self-transformational in a way that fosters re-membrance in a yogic sense (rather than the ritual

²⁰ Recalling our premise that animal ethics discourse can benefit from yoga thought and practice, we identified “self-transformation” as one of four benefits. Yoga, as profound transformation of awareness, has a soteriological aim. Like other Indic philosophical traditions, the broad aim of yoga is final liberation, though as we will see, this can be understood in various ways. *Satya* can be seen as the commitment (*yama*) to pursue this aim, thereby infusing the *yogin*’s moral character with strong determination to pursue the “good life in terms of the moral life” (Perrett 1998, pp. 59–60).

²¹ Hursthouse (2011, p. 127) defines an excellent character trait as “a strongly entrenched dispositional state of a person or a certain sort of way they are all the way down, and the disposition is of a complex sort. It is, for a start, a disposition to act in certain ways, that is, in accordance with the virtue in question.”

sense discussed in Chap. 2, Sect. 2.2), as an essential means for the *yogin* to see the self (*puruṣa*) as distinct from the psychophysical body. Acting for the well-being of all beings is from a position of self-knowing beyond the contingencies of the *yogin*'s psychophysical body.

We now consider two of the five yogic observances (*niyama*), the second of the eight *aṅgas* or limbs of classical Yoga, as essential to the development of yogic animal ethics.

4.3 YOGIC PRINCIPLES OF SELF-CULTIVATION (NIYAMA)

After listing five features of self-restraint as the first limb of his eightfold yoga system, Patañjali lists five “observances,” which we can regard as practices of self-cultivation in the pursuit of ethical virtue.

The observances are cleanliness, contentment, austerity, study [of scripture], and devotion to God. (*YS* II.32; Bryant 2009, p. 252)

Here I will focus on the last two observances—study (*svādhyāya*) and devotion to God (*īśvara-praṇidhāna*). As we focused on the first two of the five restraints for the sake of brevity, here I wish to call attention to the last two observances in relation to our concern for human relations with nonhuman animals. Aside from brevity, these two observances—particularly in combination—bring into sharp focus an important ontological distinction—or apparent distinction—between yoga as represented by Patañjali and yoga as represented in non-Vedic and (more or less) non-theistic Jain and Buddhist traditions.

4.3.1 *Svādhyāya as Study of Selves*

A *yogin* is always a student. We may recall from Chap. 3, Sect. 3.3, how Vyāsa taught his son Śuka, exhorting him to practice dharma as a *yogin*, following the example of other seasoned *yogins*. As represented by Patañjali, yoga is practiced within a culture of traditional teaching that is conveyed orally and then, later, in writing. The aphorisms of the *Yoga Sūtras* are thought to have been composed as mnemonic devices to recall more detailed lessons received aurally from one's teacher (Feuerstein 2003, p. 279). The same teacher would have referred to other texts, some of which would include didactic narratives and teacher-student dialogues. We have already encountered such text genres, including the Upaniṣads

and the *Mahābhārata*, both of which have strong narrative and dialogical components. A *yogin* would be inspired to become familiar with such works, particularly those portions that describe or extol yoga ideals and practices. They would learn to recite and recall stories of model *yogins*, some of which might serve as cautionary tales of pitfalls to be avoided on the path of yogic practice and discipline.

Yoga practitioners could thereby recall stories of how *yogins* have interacted with animals, and of how animals may be remembered as showing moral agency and spiritual wisdom. In the previous chapter we noted one example of such a narrative in the *Mahābhārata*, wherein snakes express concern to respect dharmic constraints on their behavior. Another striking example of animal agency and expression of wisdom that a yoga practitioner might recall in the practice of *svādhyāya* is found in the Chandogya Upaniṣad's story of the yoga student Satyakāma Jābāla's education. A short summary of this story will serve our purpose of appreciating how *svādhyāya* as recollection of canonical narrative can complement the other initial stages of yoga practice (in *yama* and *niyama*) for leading to the sort of self-transformation that may open the *yogin* to deeper comprehension of the self and of other beings.

The young Satyakāma Jābāla, having proven himself qualified by virtue of his truthfulness, has been initiated as a *brahmacāri* (celibate Vedic student) by a certain sage, Hāridrumata Gautama. Satyakāma's first task as a student is to tend four hundred of the master's most lean and feeble cows, promising his master, "I will not return without a thousand [cows]." Some years pass, and the bull (*ṛṣabha*) informs Satyakāma that there are now a thousand cows, urging him, "Take us back to the teacher's house, and I will tell you one quarter of *brahman*." On the journey back to the teacher's house, one day after another, the young man receives instruction on "one quarter" of *brahman*, the Absolute, successively from the bull, fire, a wild goose (*haṁsa*), and a waterbird. Upon returning, Satyakāma's teacher exclaims, "Son, you have the glow of a man who knows *brahman*! Tell me—who taught you?" After explaining that he had heard from "other than humans," Satyakāma humbly requests to hear this knowledge from the teacher. Hāridrumata Gautama promptly obliges, confirming what Satyakāma had heard from the three animals and the fire. The Upaniṣad explains that by receiving confirmation from his teacher, the student was assured that the knowledge thus received would lead him "most securely to the goal." (*Chandogya Upaniṣad* 4.4.1–4.9.3; Olivelle 1998, pp. 219–223)

In several ways, the yoga practitioner who remembers this Upaniṣadic tale can take inspiration from it, viewing Satyakāma Jābāla as a model for yoga practice. First is his truthfulness (the second of the five *yama* principles), his honesty about his questionable background, which wins his teacher's willingness to accept him as a student. A corollary implication may be that truthfulness as inquisitiveness about higher truth conjoined with service qualifies one to be truly receptive—even from nonhuman beings—to the radical teaching of consciousness transformation that yoga calls for. Second is his persistence in the observance of austerity (*tapas*, the third of the five *niyama* principles) by remaining for an extended time with the cows he had been given charge to tend—apparently with no shelter and no human company. Third, Satyakāma wins—presumably by his extended benign treatment of the cows—the confidence of the bull and is fully receptive to the bull's "speech" (*ha uvāca*—he indeed spoke). Fourth, the yoga practitioner may appreciate that careful yoga practice may enable positive relationality with nonhuman animals (hence the three animals in the story volunteer their wisdom for Satyakāma's benefit). Finally, the story suggests a completeness in the process of yogic learning, whereby animals become catalysts for comprehending higher truth (*brahman*, in Upaniṣadic and later Vedānta discourse), a truth of which they are themselves a part.²² To this last point, one can read the story as crediting the teacher—Hāridrumata Gautama—for his skill in preparing his student to receive higher truth by tasking him with the care of animals over an extended period of time.²³

In a traditional reading of Patañjali's injunction to practice *svādhyāya*, one might be expected to study and recite texts only from within the Sanskrit canon that includes the Veda collections and related works.²⁴ In

²² Regarding instruction by animals, we find an interesting parallel in the biblical Book of Job (*The Holy Bible* 2011, Job 12:7–10): "But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish in the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind."

²³ We may note a contrast in this story's representation of animal speech with Buddhist stories involving animal speech. In the latter, as Reiko Ohnuma (2017, p. 179) points out, the content of the animals' speech is typically the voicing of "rampant cruelty, abuse, and exploitation in humanity's treatment of the animal world."

²⁴ We have already discussed some of these, including the Rgveda, the Upaniṣads, Dharmasāstras, and the *Mahābhārata*. Regarding recitation, Vyāsa (the Yoga Sūtra commentator) includes the recitation of the sacred syllable *om*, which is extensively eulogized in Vedic literature (Bryant 2009, pp. 273–279; YS II.44 commentary).

this remarkably extensive collection of texts there is a wealth of resources for the practicing *yogin* to find insight, inspiration, and support for progressing on the yoga path. Further, Patañjali's call for *īśvara-praṇidhāna* (our next topic) would seem to indicate that it is this Sanskrit literary corpus, with its broadly theistic orientation, that is meant to be studied by *yogins*. I propose, however, that we read Patañjali in a broader, more inclusive spirit. Several elements of his *Sūtra* resonate with (indeed, arguably draw from)²⁵ non-Vedic yoga traditions and practices—specifically Jain and Buddhist, both of which have their own vast collections of canonical texts that are supportive of yoga thought and practice in important respects. Thus, the range of literature providing models for yoga practice and moral behavior in relation to animals, as well as for reflection on animals as moral and spiritual beings, is greatly expanded beyond the Vedic and post-Vedic Sanskrit corpus. Both Jain and Buddhist traditions are known for their richly illuminating stories involving animals—typically as tales imputing them with moral status as well as wisdom or showing the dynamics of karma as it plays out from one life to the next.²⁶ Even further, one may find inspiration and guidance for yogic principles and relationality with animals in wisdom traditions worldwide.²⁷

Of particular relevance in Buddhist traditions as potential textual resources for *svādhyaṃ* regarding animals are the Jātaka tales, several of which involve animals, including some in which the Bodhisattva lives as an animal in some prior birth. As just one example, the Maccha-jātaka (*Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 75) tells of a time when the Bodhisattva, as a fish, saved his fish and tortoise kin from a severe drought. From under the mud in a dried lake, the Bodhisattva breaks forth from the mud and utters an “act of truth,” a solemn “Profession of Goodness,” declaring to Pajjunna, King of Devas (celestials),

²⁵ Sutton (2019, p. 62) argues, “What seems likely is that numerous ideas were current in this period [of classical Yoga's emergence], which were made use of by those who followed the Buddha, and equally freely by Jains, Vedāntists, and others. One might even argue that the Buddha borrowed his ideas from the Yoga teachings he encountered on his travels, but again, this type of assertion is probably too simplistic.” See also Harimoto (2021) and O'Brien-Kop (2022).

²⁶ See Ohnuma (2017) for a study of Buddhist varied understandings of animals in relation to the aims of Buddhist practice. See Appleton (2014) for an analysis of both Buddhist and Jain narratives, including animal narratives, with respect to the dynamics of karma and rebirth.

²⁷ See, for example, Malecki et al. (2019).

My heart is heavy within me for my kinsfolk's sake, my good Pajjunna. How comes it, pray, that, when I who am righteous am distressed for my kinsfolk, you send no rain from heaven? For I, though born where it is customary to prey on one's kinsfolk, have never from my youth up devoured any fish, even of the size of a grain of rice; nor have I ever robbed a single living creature of its life. By the truth of this my Protestation, I call upon you to send rain and succour my kinsfolk."

Moved to heed the Bodhisattva's act of truth, Pajjunna sends heavy rains, thereby "relieving numbers [of living beings] from the fear of death" (Cowell 1895–1907, vol. I, pp. 183–185). This particular story is interesting for its reference to truth-telling which, in turn, is in reference to a practice of nonviolence. Thus, a yoga practitioner, recalling this story, may feel fortified in her or his resolve to maintain firmness in these ethical practices.²⁸

Literally translated, *svādhyāya* means "reciting or repeating or rehearsing to oneself, repetition or recitation of the Veda in a low voice to one's self" (Monier-Williams 1995, p. 1277). However, in modern works on yoga we may at times find *svādhyāya* translated as "study" or "self-study," suggesting a practice of inward-directed attention, possibly in preparation for the later practices of concentration and meditation culminating in *samādhi*, full "absorption."²⁹ We can allow for this perspective, especially if we take the regular recitation of canonical yoga texts as a process of developing what we can call "yogic discernment." This process amounts to *guided* self-study, whereby the *yogin* becomes habituated to question—based on learned and regularly recollected texts—to question his or her presuppositions about the nature of the self. Or, as Michael Stone puts it, for Patañjali, *svādhyāya* is "a method of seeing through our attachments" that sustain a false sense of what is the self, this false sense of self being sustained, in turn, by a narrative of one's own making (Stone 2018, p. 89).

²⁸ Oddly, however, at the end of this story, the fish-Bodhisattva addresses the celestial storm-god: "Pajjunna, thunder! Baffle, thwart, the crow! / Breed sorrow's pangs in him; ease me of woe!" His harsh words for the crow (who kills and eats the fish from the dried lake bottom) seem incongruously cruel, possibly necessitating the *svādhyāya*-practitioner to take this aspect of the story figuratively, the crow representing his or her own tendency toward destructive acts.

²⁹ *Svādhyāya*, parsed as *sva adhyāya*, can be read as "one's own going into." Emphasizing the importance of *svādhyāya* in the practice of yoga, Georg Feuerstein (2003, p. 164) quotes the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (6.6.2): "From study one should proceed to practice (*yoga*), and from practice to study. The supreme Self is revealed through perfection in study and practice."

I suggest that another way to understand *svādhyaṃya* could be “study of selves,” with emphasis on the plurality of individual selves or *puruṣas*. Such a reading emphasizes how the yoga aspirant attends to the study of sacred texts that recognize all life—in all its plurality—as sacred. By this understanding, inward-directed attention is simultaneously other-directed attention in pursuit of cognizing other selves as being of the same non-prakṛtic substance (*puruṣa*) as oneself.

From any and all of these perspectives on the meaning and practice of *svādhyaṃya* we may appreciate Patañjali’s declaration on the result to be expected from the successful observance of *svādhyaṃya*:

From study [of scripture], a connection with one’s deity of choice is established. (YS II.44; Bryant 2009, p. 273)

When one’s practice of *svādhyaṃya* fosters deconstruction of false self-identity (or identities, associated with one’s psychophysical—prakṛtic—body) and false other-identities, the mind can be said to significantly relax its grip on the actual self (*puruṣa*), thereby opening awareness to the presence of a higher self, which Patañjali refers to in the next *sūtra* as *īśvara*, the Lord. Significantly, Patañjali uses the word *samprayogaḥ* to indicate the strength and thoroughness of connection between the *yogin* and this higher self—here referred to as the *yogin*’s *īṣṭa-devatā*, “deity of choice.”

As Edwin Bryant (2009, pp. 232–233; YS II.24 commentary) argues persuasively, it is reasonable to assume that the *īṣṭa-devatā* Patañjali would have had in mind would have been either Shiva or Vishnu. Both deities are known as *Yogeśvara* (*yoga īśvara*—lord or master of yoga)—Shiva, famously, for his absorption in yogic meditation atop Mount Kailash, and Vishnu (as Krishna) as the teacher of the *yoga-sāstra Bhagavadgītā*. Now, thinking about yoga in relation to animals, some *yogins*’ *īṣṭa-devatā* being Shiva, they will remember him as *Paśupati*, lord or protector of animals. Further, remembering—by the practice of *svādhyaṃya*, particularly drawing from the corpus of Purāṇic literature which gives extensive accounts of what we may call “engaged divinity”—this identification with animals can lead to a further association, namely, Shiva’s elephant-headed “son” *Gaṇeśa*, also known as *Gaṇapati*—lord and protector of multitudes. Similarly, some *yogins*’ *īṣṭa-devatā* being Vishnu, they may remember Vishnu’s theriomorphic and semi-theriomorphic *avatāras* (divine descents), such as *Matsya*, the protector from cosmic flood (appearing as a great fish), or *Narasimha*, the combined human-lion form famous for protecting the young devotional *yogin*, *Prahlāda* (Sherma 2015, p. 365).

4.3.2 *Īśvara-praṇidhāna—Devotion to God*

Recollection—as an aspect of *svādhyāya*—of divine forms as described in Sanskrit works such as the Purāṇas, brings us to Patañjali’s fifth and final observance (*niyama*), listed (in *YS* II.32) with the four other observances.³⁰ Patañjali has already mentioned *īśvara-praṇidhāna* in the first chapter of his work (*YS* I.23), where he indicates that devotion to God can be a means (and, arguably, for Patañjali the preferred means) of attaining advanced levels of perfection in mental focus that he calls *samprajñāta-samādhi*. In his rather abstract and minimalist—but suggestively theistic—language, Patañjali accepts a minimally described supreme divinity as an integral feature of ultimate reality.³¹ He elaborates briefly: *Īśvara* is a “special soul,” untouched by any of the contamination that affect other souls or by the obstacles to the practice of yoga. Further, *Īśvara* is “unsurpassed” in his possession of the “omniscience-seed”—the ever-increasing capacity to understand “all things from all time” (Bryant 2009, pp. 99–103; *YS* I.25 commentary). In summary and remembering that both Vishnu and Shiva are identified by the tradition as Yogeśvara—the lord, or master, of yoga—we can conjecture that the *Yoga Sūtra*’s descriptions of *īśvara* indicate general characteristics of the same being, whether he is identified as Vishnu or as Shiva. This suggests that such a being, as one particular *puruṣa* among the countless *puruṣa* conscious beings, is the perfect *yogin* as well as the perfect teacher of yoga.

Recalling Patañjali’s indication that *īśvara-praṇidhāna* is a means of attaining *samādhi*, we can ask why this is so. Why might “devotion” (as *praṇidhāna* is here translated) lead to absorption of the mind, such that it is free from all disturbances and distractions?³² Three reasons may explain this. First, as an “observance” (*niyama*), *īśvara-praṇidhāna* is a practice of giving attention to, or *attending to*, *īśvara*. *Samprajñāta-samādhi* means fully focused attention on a particular object excluding all other objects, but in this case, one’s focus is on a *subject* rather than an object. As a

³⁰ *Īśvara-praṇidhāna*, together with *svādhyāya* and *tapas* (austerity), also constitute what Patañjali refers to as *kriyā-yoga*, “action-yoga” or “the path of action” (*YS* II.1).

³¹ See Jakubczak (2021) for a comprehensive explanation and contextualization of *īśvara-praṇidhāna* in the *Yoga Sūtra*, highlighting points made by the prominent twentieth-century commentator Swāmī Hariharānanda Āraṇya (1869–1947).

³² “The word *praṇidhāna* literally means laying on, fixing, applying, as well as access, endeavor, respectful conduct, attention paid to something or to somebody, profound religious meditation, vow, prayer” (Jakubczak 2021, p. 56 n.5).

subject (or, indeed, as the primordial Subject), *īśvara* is always in a position to reciprocate with the yoga practitioner, such that the *yogin*'s attention is naturally impelled to dwell on Yogeśvara in what can unfold as a dynamic relationality. Second, according to the *Yoga Sūtra*'s meditational psychology, the mind-complex (*citta*) assumes the form of its object of attention (YS I.4), and this feature works to the advantage of one whose object of meditation is one who is free from desire (*vīta-rāga*, YS I.37). Such an "object" is (to a maximum degree) *īśvara*. By meditating on *īśvara*, the mind is purified from the afflictions (*kleśas*) that otherwise prevent sustained absorption (*samādhi*).³³

Third, if *īśvara* is forever free from all contaminations that affect other souls—other *puruṣas*—it means that he does not possess a body with limitations on his powers of perception. He thus perceives things as they are: he perceives all beings as *puruṣa*, beyond the particular bodies they inhabit. From this position, as the perfect teacher of yoga, *īśvara* can help the dedicated, devotional *yogin* to develop his or her ability to perceive first himself or herself (the mind being purified from the afflictions) as *puruṣa* and then, based on that perception, to perceive all other beings as *puruṣa*.

Shifting briefly from the *Yoga Sūtra* to the *Bhagavadgītā*, this last point is underscored by the *Bhagavadgītā*'s identification of *īśvara* with *paramātman* (briefly introduced in the previous chapter). As the fully conscious subjective *puruṣa* who is Yogeśvara, the master of yoga, *īśvara* as *paramātman* is the "knower of the field" (the body) of *all* bodies—all creatures. Because *īśvara* resides in all bodies and is aware of their experiences, by the principle of identity (the same *īśvara* is in all bodies), the *yogin* who attends to him (specifically as *paramātman*) can, in effect, connect (yoga) "through" *paramātman* to any and all beings.³⁴ Such a state of connection can be regarded as perfect *samādhi*, whereby due to having "conquered" oneself, the higher self—again, *paramātman*—becomes "well established" in all different conditions of one's life. Krishna, using a derivative of the word *samādhi* for "well established," declares in the *Bhagavadgītā*:

³³ YS I.4: "Otherwise [if the seer does not abide in its own true nature], at other times [the seer] is absorbed in the changing states [of the mind]" (Bryant 2009, p. 24). In Chapple's (2008) translation, "Otherwise, there is conformity with the fluctuations." (I am grateful to Janne Kontala for pointing this out.)

³⁴ Here we need to be careful to distinguish different senses of the term *yoga*. In the YS it is famously defined as "stilling the mind" (YS I.2), *not* as "joining" oneself with another entity. For the positive sense of yoga as joining self with supreme Self I am drawing on the *Bhagavadgītā* which, I argue later, serves as an elaboration on *īśvara-praṇidhāna*

For the peaceful who conquer self (*ātman*), Higher Self (*paramātman*) is fully established (*samāhita*, derivative of the word *samādhi*) in cold and heat, joy and sorrow, and so too in honor and dishonor.” (*Gītā* 6.7; Goswami trans. 2015, p. 172)

The three pairs of opposite conditions listed here—heat, cold, joy, sorrow, honor, and dishonor—stand for all the endlessly disturbing conditions of embodied life. As the last of the five preliminary observances listed by Patañjali as *niyama*, *īśvara-praṇidhāna* is—I would argue—crucial for the aspiring *yogin* to become lastingly successful in yoga practice. In the *Gītā*’s language, this success occurs as the *yogin* learns to “fully establish” *paramātman* in all conditions of his or her life. This is to say that *īśvara*, as *paramātman*, becomes the fixed reference point of conscious awareness in relation with all beings.

The question may arise whether there is a specific practice or technique by which one might accomplish *īśvara-praṇidhāna*. Patañjali succinctly offers such a technique in his earlier (Chap. 1) discussion of *īśvara-praṇidhāna*, albeit in that context the technique is apparently meant for practitioners already nearing the state of full absorption, *samādhi*.³⁵

The name designating him [*īśvara*] is the mystical syllable *om*.

Its repetition (*japa*) and the contemplation of its meaning [should be performed].

From this comes the realization of the inner consciousness [*pratyak-cetanā*] and freedom from all disturbances. (*YS* I.27–29; Bryant 2009, pp. 105–117)

Here Patañjali identifies a particular syllable—*om*—with the supreme divinity. This syllable is celebrated in Vedic and post-Vedic literature as a sound-embodiment of transcendence that, if carefully repeated and

³⁵ Patañjali begins the *YS*’s second chapter (*Sādhana-pāda* II.1) with a description of what he calls *kriyā-yoga*, the yoga of action. According to the commentators, this is meant for the less advanced practitioners, who, their minds being unsteady, need physical activity to progress in yoga. Here the three aspects of *kriyā-yoga* listed are *tapas* (austerity), *svādhyāya* (self-study; recitation), and *īśvara-praṇidhāna* (devotion to God). The early commentator Vyāsa lists recitation of the sacred syllable *om* among *svādhyāya* practices. In contrast to the meditative *īśvara-praṇidhāna* of the first chapter (*YS* I.28), the commentators emphasize that in this context the practitioner is advised to dedicate his or her activities and their results to the divinity.

contemplated upon, can quickly elevate one's consciousness. More specifically, the "realization of the inner consciousness" can be understood as *discovery of oneself*, which is to say that oneself, as *puruṣa*, becomes *uncovered* from the vicissitudes of the mind and body. How this occurs is by *īśvara*'s grace, by which, further, the *yogin* realizes him- or herself to be, so to say, a "part" (*aṁśa*) of *īśvara* (cf. *Gītā* 15.7). Being a part of the whole, which is *īśvara*, one understands the part by understanding the whole (Bryant 2009, pp. 117–118; YS I.29 commentary). By such understanding, it is only a short further step to understand that all living beings are part of *īśvara*. It is this understanding that is the ontological foundation of yoga's normative animal ethics, which is integral to yoga's general ethics as codified in the five features of *yama* and the five features of *niyama*.

Returning to Patañjali's advice to repeat the mystical syllable *om*, it is apparent from the classical commentators on the *Yoga Sūtra* that, because this syllable is identified with *īśvara* who is the primordial Subject, such recitation is not to be done mechanically. The fifteenth-sixteenth-century commentator Vijñānabhikṣu emphasizes this point when he identifies *īśvara* as Vāsudeva who is, in turn, identified in the Purāṇas as Vishnu or Krishna. We recall from the discussion of Vishnu as *iṣṭa-devatā* or deity of choice that Vishnu is celebrated as an "engaged divinity" who appears and acts in the phenomenal world for the welfare of the world's creatures. Thus, for a *yogin* whose deity of choice is Vishnu, contemplation on the meaning of the syllable *om* may lead to contemplation of Vishnu's numerous appearances and acts. Such contemplation can arouse a devotional attitude, particularly because Vishnu's appearances and acts are all considered purposeful. His purpose, according to the *Bhagavadgītā*, is to sustain dharma and to protect all beings from sufferings imposed by unscrupulous persons or—at times—from nature's wiles.

Some of these appearances (*avatāras*; again, as previously mentioned) are theriomorphic. That Vishnu appears as the great aquatic Matsya, for example, reminds the *yogin* that it is ultimately *īśvara* who protects all beings. In his or her contemplation on the syllable *om*, the *yogin* may recall the details of Matsya's story as described in, for example, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (8.24), which I summarize here to enrich our understanding of *īśvara-praṇidhāna* in relation to animals:

In prehistoric times, a certain king named Satyavrata (“he whose vow is truthfulness”) is observing an extreme alimentary vow of subsisting only on water. One day, while scooping water with his cupped palms from the Kritamala River, Satyavrata is surprised to find a tiny carp fish in his hands. More surprising, the fish speaks to him, soliciting his protection from predators. The king duly transfers the fish to a water-filled jug, only to soon need to transfer his ward again, to a large well. The fish continues to grow, eventually to such a massive size that only the ocean can contain him. By now, Satyavrata knows that this extraordinary creature is none other than Vishnu appearing in an aquatic form, and he asks the scaly divinity what his purpose is in appearing thus. Now begins what sounds very much like the Biblical story of Noah and his ark: Matsya (Vishnu as the giant fish) informs Satyavrata that an irregular world-inundation is immanent and that when it begins, a large ship will appear. Satyavrata shall see to it that sages, humans, animals, and plants, along with himself, board the vessel. Matsya explains further that he, Matsya, will then appear in the rising waters, and Satyavrata shall tie the ship to Matsya’s pointed nose with a rope made of the giant serpent king, Vāsuki. Concluding his warning and advice, Matsya departs. In Matsya’s absence, while waiting for the predicted deluge to come, Satyavrata sits, meditating on the divine form he had witnessed. Sure enough, all occurs as predicted, and Matsya duly tows the saving watercraft while enlightening Satyavrata about the subtle truths of Yoga, Sāṅkhya, and the nature of the self (*ātman*).³⁶

In his encounter with the divinity Matsya (Vishnu), Satyavrata is identified as a king—a leader in human society. Yet despite his worldly identity, he has experience in yoga practices, including the practice of compassion: he listens to, responds to, and *cares for* the tiny fish, giving him shelter and accommodating him as needed in the fish’s changing (expanding) conditions. As the fish expands to a gigantic size, Satyavrata identifies him as Vishnu, who thereby becomes the object (Subject) of the king’s sustained meditational attention. Vishnu, in turn, performs his role as

³⁶ Even though stories such as that of Matsya and the deluge may have very low epistemic status in our culture, it arguably holds high epistemic status within the culture in which yoga has been originally articulated and practiced. More to the point in this context, the yoga practitioner who hears and remembers the story of Satyavrata and Matsya will accept it as serving to deepen his or her empathy for creatures in all conditions (Howard 2018). In regard to intellectual humility (arguably an essential aspect of yoga practice as an aspect of cultivating truthfulness), see Church and Samuelson (2017, pp. 3–5).

world-maintainer (as sustainer of dharma) as Matsya, reciprocating with Satyavrata's kindness by protecting him, along with other beings of all varieties, from the devastating storm. In doing so, Matsya frees Satyavrata "from all disturbances" (as Patañjali states regarding the results of *īśvara-praṇidhāna*).

We may see a very limited parallel between this story of Matsya and the Maccha-Jātaka story of the Bodhisattva as a fish. Both are savior stories in which the heroes are aquatic animals that are in some respect divine beings, and both describe rescue from extreme weather conditions—a drought and a flood respectively. But this may be as far as the similarity goes. Why the Matsya story is relevant to the practice of *īśvara-praṇidhāna* has to do with its role reversals: King Satyavrata from protector to protected, and Matsya from protected to protector, serve to nourish the yoga practitioner's awareness of the connection between dedication to *īśvara* and his or her care for creatures of this world. In this, and in numerous other narrative examples, the Deity *embodies* an animal form, challenging anthropocentric assumptions of superiority while inviting participation in a "communion of subjects" (Waldau and Patton 2006).

Finally regarding *īśvara-praṇidhāna*, anticipating our elaboration on the yoga of devotion (*bhakti-yoga*) as an important development for animal ethics (in Chaps. 7 and 8), we may note Gerald J. Larson's understanding of classical Yoga's concept of *īśvara*: He is constituted of "countless consciousness that can only manifest or reveal itself in the presence of perfectly pure *sattva* (*prakṛṣṭa-citta-sattva*); therefore, 'worship' or 'prayer' in the Yoga system should be understood as a profound meditation and longing (*bhakti-viśeṣa*) for the 'eternal excellence' (*śāśvatika utkarṣa*) of that 'perfect embodiment' (*prakṛṣṭa-sattva*)" (Jakubczak 2021, p. 57 n. 18, paraphrasing Larson). "Profound meditation and longing" for a "perfect embodiment" points toward the importance of embodiment in classical Yoga and bhakti-yoga practice, about which we will have much to consider in coming chapters.

4.4 YOGIC VIRTUE AND CARE ETHICS

In concluding this chapter, we may briefly consider the four principles—*ahiṃsā*, *satya*, *svādhyāya*, and *īśvara-praṇidhāna*—as key components for the cultivation of yogic virtue ethics. By "yogic virtue ethics" I mean an approach to ethics as giving primary importance to virtues such as

compassion, respect, and justice (Hursthouse 2011, Chapter 4), virtues understood as possible to be intentionally cultivated and deepened by regular, purposeful yoga practice. The four principles discussed in this chapter (as also the other components of *yama* and *niyama*) can be easily seen as serving appropriate human-nonhuman animal relations—and pursuing these virtues consciously in ways that are supported by yoga practices that bring higher knowledge (in classical Yoga, distinguishing *puruṣa* from *prakṛti*). We saw that, among the five negative restraints, *ahiṃsā* holds central importance for resisting the tendency to unnecessarily destroy (or approve others' doing so) other lives for sustaining one's own life. We also saw that *satya* is crucial in reducing the adverse impact of humans on nonhuman animals and for resisting the web of untruth that perpetuates violence against nonhuman animals. As positive observances, *svādhyāya* opens the yogic practitioner to a wider world of yogic ethical possibility in terms of human-nonhuman relationality, in which a *yogin* combines self-examination and contemplation of the being of other selves. Similarly, *tīśvara-praṇidhāna* opens him or her further, to a vision of interconnection through the Lord of Yoga, Yogeśvara, by directing the mind (possibly aided with the mantra *om*) to the perfect Yogin who is situated in all beings.

Again, regarding *satya*, let us recall Christopher Chapple's insight that care is a prerequisite for truth. In turn, care may be regarded as the complementary positive attitude to *ahiṃsā*'s negative valence: The positive counterpart to avoiding harming and aggression is offering appropriate care and attention. Such care and attention may be expressed in numerous ways, including public activism: negatively, one can, for example, call attention to the horrors of the meat industry and its adverse environmental, social, and psychological effects; and positively, one can educate others in the numerous personal and social benefits of respecting other-than-human beings and maintaining a non-meat or plant-based diet.

Along with yogic virtue ethics, "care and attention" suggests a possible framing of yogic ethics as care ethics. An important dimension of care for and attention to animals is to pursue learning more about them—by conscious direct observation, engagement in their care and protection, and by hearing and reading about them from others who have relevant qualifications (Dalmiya 2016). Such self-education could be considered an aspect of both *satya* and *svādhyāya*, recognizing the culture of knowledge about animals as a virtue-of-care that can increase one's respect for them and

enable appropriate, caring relationality with them. Finally, for Patañjali, arguably his inclusion of *īśvara-praṇidhāna* as the final component of yogic observances signals a recognition that respect and care for living beings begin with acknowledging the practitioner's subordination to a higher being—as primordial Yogin—upon whom he or she, and all other living creatures, depend in all respects.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why is *ahimṣā* the ethical tap root of the yoga tree? (Sect. 4.2)
2. “Truth necessitates care.” Why is this so, and what implications of this do you see for yogic animal ethics? (Sect. 4.2.2)
3. Why might a “connection with one’s deity of choice” be relevant to yogic animal ethics? (Sect. 4.3.1)
4. The story of Matsya saving Satyavrata and many creatures in a great ship during a world-ending flood has long been recognized as cognate with the biblical story of Noah and the flood. What might these stories suggest in relation to present-day preservation of endangered species? (Sect. 4.3.2)

REFERENCES

- Appleton, Naomi. 2014. *Narrating Karma and Rebirth: Buddhist and Jain Multi-life Stories*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Barnes, Michael. 2019. Invoking Another World: An Interreligious Reflection on Hindu Mythology. In *The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Animal Ethics*, ed. Andrew Linzey and Clair Linzey, 173–180. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Bharadwaja, V. K. April 1984. A Non-Ethical Concept of Ahimsa. *Indian Philosophical Quarterly* XI (2): 171–180.
- Bohanec, Cogen. 2024. *Bhakti Ethics, Emotions, and Love in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Metaethics*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books (Rowman & Littlefield).
- Bryant, Edwin F. 2009. *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali: A New Translation and Commentary*. New York: North Point Press.
- Calarco, Matthew. 2015. *Thinking Through Animals: Identity, Difference, Indistinction*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Chadha, Monima. 2022. Personhood in Classical Indian Philosophy. In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2022 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2022/entries/personhood-india/>.
- Chapple, Christopher Key. 2008. *Yoga and the Luminous: Patañjali’s Spiritual Path to Freedom*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

- Chapple, Christopher Key. 2020. *Living Landscapes: Meditations on the Five Elements in Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain Yogas*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Church, Ian M., and Peter L. Samuelson. 2017. *Intellectual Humility: An introduction to the philosophy and science*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Clifton, Wolf Gordon. 2023. Sustainability Policy and the Stage of Divine Play: Hindu Philosophy at the Nexus of Animal Welfare, Environment, and Sustainable Development. *Journal of Animal Ethics* 13/2: 169–183.
- Cowell, E. B. (Ed.). 1895–1907. *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*, vol. 6. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://jatakastories.div.ed.ac.uk/stories-in-text/jatakatthavannana-75>
- Cramer, Holger, T. Sundberg, D. Schumann, M. J. Leach, and R. Lauche. 2018. Differences Between Vegetarian and Omnivorous Yoga Practitioners—Results of a Nationally Representative Survey of US Adult Yoga Practitioners. *Complementary Therapies in Medicine* 40:48–52. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ctim.2018.07.012>.
- Dalmiya, Vrinda. 2016. *Caring to Know: Comparative Care Ethics, Feminist Epistemology, and the Mahābhārata*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Feuerstein, Georg. 2003. *The Deeper Dimension of Yoga: Theory and Practice*. Boulder: Shambhala.
- Goswami, H. D. 2015. *A Comprehensive Guide to Bhagavad-gītā with Literal Translation*. Gainesville, FL: Krishna West.
- Gradidge, Sarah, Magdalena Zawisza, Annelie J. Harvey, and Daragh T. McDermott. 2021. A Structured Literature Review of the Meat Paradox. *Social. Psychological Bulletin* 16 (3): e5953. <https://doi.org/10.32872/spb.5953>.
- Harimoto, Kengo. 2021. How Yoga Became Yoga: Yoga and meditation up to the classical period. In *Routledge Handbook of Yoga and Meditation Studies*, ed. Suzanne Newcombe and Karen O'Brien-Kop, 65–79. Milton Park (UK): Routledge.
- Howard, Veena Rani. 2018. Lessons from 'The Hawk and the Dove': Reflections on the *Mahābhārata's* Animal Parables and Ethical Predicaments. *Sophia* 57:119–131.
- Hursthouse, Rosalind. 2011. Virtue Ethics and the Treatment of Animals. In *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Ethics*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp and R. G. Frey. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Iyengar, B. K. S. 2013. *The Tree of Yoga*. London: Harper Thorsons.
- Jakubczak, Marzenna. 2021. Why Meditate on God? The role of *Īśvara-praṇidhāna* in the Classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga Tradition. In *Contemplative Studies and Hinduism*, ed. Rita D. Sherma and Purushottama Bilimoria, 49–58. London: Routledge.
- Kim, Hemi. 2021. Factory Farming: What the Industry Doesn't Want You to Know. <https://sentientmedia.org/factory-farming> (Accessed October 7, 2024).

- Linzey, Andrew, and Clair Linzey, eds. 2019. *The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Animal Ethics*. London: Routledge.
- Lipner, Julius. 2018. Roots and Routes of the 'Classical' with Illustrations from Hinduism. *The Journal of Hindu Studies* 11 (2): 85–106.
- Małecki, Wojciech, Piotr Sorokowski, Bogusław Pawłowski, and Marcin Cieński. 2019. *Human Minds and Animal Stories: How Narratives Make Us Care About Other Species*. New York: Routledge.
- Mallinson, James. 2024. *The Dattātreyayogaśāstra*. Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondichéry.
- Mohan, A. G. 2013. *Yoga Yājñavalkya*. 2nd ed. Svastha Yoga Pte Ltd.
- Monier-Williams, Sir Monier. 1995. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Naess, Arne. 2016. Self-Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World. In *Arne Naess—Ecology of Wisdom*, ed. Alan Drengson and Bill Devall. UK, USA: Penguin Books.
- O'Brien-Kop, Karen. 2022. *Rethinking 'Classical Yoga' and Buddhism: Meditation, Metaphors and Materiality*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Ohnuma, Reiko. 2017. *Unfortunate Destiny: Animals in the Indian Buddhist Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Olivelle, Patrick. 1998. *The Early Upaniṣads: Annotated Text and Translation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Olivelle, Patrick. 2005. *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Perrett, Roy W. 1998. *Hindu Ethics: A Philosophical Study*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Preece, Rod. 1999. *Animals and Nature: Cultural Myths, Cultural Realities*. Vancouver: UCB Press.
- Rappaport, Roy A. 1999. *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Raveh, Daniel. 2016. *Sūtras, Stories and Yoga Philosophy: Narrative and Transfiguration*. London: Routledge.
- Rose, Kenneth. 2016. *Yoga, Meditation, and Mysticism: Contemplative Universals and Meditative Landmarks*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Samuel, Geoffrey. 2008. *The Origins of Yoga and Tantra: Indic Religions to the Thirteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sherma, Rita D. 2015. A Hindu Response to *Laudato Si'* on Care for our Common Home. In *For our Common Home: Process Relational Responses to Laudato Si'*, ed. J. B. Cobb Jr. and Ignacio Castuera. Anoka, MN: Process Century Press.
- Stone, Michael. 2018. *The Inner Tradition of Yoga*. Boulder: Shambala.
- Sutton, Nicholas. 2019. *The Yoga Sūtras: A New Translation and Study Guide*, The Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies Mandala Publishing Series. San Rafael, CA: Mandala.

- The Holy Bible: New International Version*. 2011. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Waldau, Paul, and Kimberley Patton. 2006. *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science, and Ethics*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- White, David Gordon, ed. 2012. *Yoga in Practice*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Zaehner, R. C. 1973. *The Bhagavad-Gītā with a Commentary Based on the Original Sources*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Embodied Yoga in Pursuit of Equal Vision

5.1 INTRODUCTION

As yoga has become modernized, globalized, and commodified in recent decades,¹ it has also become characteristically *embodied*. Later (especially in Chaps. 7 and 8) we will consider embodiment in more theoretical terms in relation to devotional (bhakti) yoga, but for the present, I mean by “embodiment” simply that yoga practice as it is known today is largely characterized by the enactment of various physical postures (*āsana*)—positioning of the body in prescribed, more or less motionless or slowly moving configurations, each of which bears a descriptive name. Typically, integral to these positionings is focused attention on and control of breathing (*prāṇāyāma*), and the combination of these two aspects of bodily self-discipline may implicitly call upon practitioners to withdraw their senses from objects that would distract the attention (*pratyāhāra*). As the practices of *yama* and *niyama* are foundational to the remaining six limbs of yoga practice in Patañjali’s system, *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, and *pratyāhāra*

¹ See Jain (2021, pp. 51–62), for an analysis of modern yoga as embedded in neoliberalism’s hegemonic discourse. In the same volume, see Strube, pp. 130–145 on modern yoga’s embeddedness in Western esotericism. Again in the same volume, see Newcombe and Deslippe, pp. 350–365, for an overview of modern yoga’s development in the Anglophone world, and Borkataki-Varma, pp. 366–379, for an overview of how the “yogic body” developed and globalized.

are similarly prerequisite to the later stages of concentration and meditation culminating in *samādhi*. And all of this disciplined effort aims toward knowledge of one's self as non-material *puruṣa*. As Ana L. F. Maderey notes, "The knowledge of one's self as distinct from that which is constantly changing is the result of an effort that involves becoming aware of all aspects of the body, clearly outlined by Patañjali in the eight parts of Yoga (YS II.28–29)" (Maderey 2017, ch. 26).

However much these practices in their modern forms may be adaptations or elaborations of classical or medieval texts and practices, we can nonetheless see their kinship with those earlier expressions.² In any case—whether earlier or later expressions of what we may call the physical aspects of yoga—these are important and helpful for us to "think with"³ animals through philosophy(ies) and practice(s) of yoga.

Taking each of the three limbs (third, fourth, and fifth limbs) of classical *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* in turn—*āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, and *pratyāhāra*—here one aim will be to consider how these practices support self-transformation enabling the vision of *śamatva*—equal vision—that is an important dispositional foundation for yogic animal ethics. A second aim is to explore a two-part question, namely, how yoga practices of the body—*āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, and *pratyāhāra*—can be aided by thoughtful reflection on and perception of animals and by reformed relations to animals; and conversely, how these yoga practices can aid our comprehension of and enactment of ethically informed and reformed relations with animals.

To this end, it may be helpful to first see the bigger picture of the yoga process and its aim as summarized in the *Bhagavadgītā*'s sixth chapter (which is traditionally named *Dhyāna-yoga*—the Yoga of Meditation). This chapter in particular seems to mirror the *Yoga Sūtra*'s eight-limb scheme of yoga progression, albeit beginning with *āsana* and progressing, through meditational practice, to full mental absorption (*samādhi*) in a devotional register. For us to note is that equal vision—seeing the sameness of all beings—arises only after extensive, determined practice that develops into deeply fixed yogic engagement.

² Unlike Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra*, which is decidedly minimalist in its reference to *āsana*, the much later (twelfth century onward) yoga texts—of which the *Haṭha-pradīpikā* of Svātmārāma has become most prominent—provide detailed descriptions of *āsana* postures.

³ "Thinking with" animals alludes to the famous, generally misquoted, comment of Claude Lévi-Strauss. See Stanescu (2012) for a discussion of this idea and its (mis)quoting.

5.2 THE GĪTĀ'S STEPS TO EQUAL VISION

The *Bhagavadgītā*'s chapter 6 in particular offers a summary of the yoga practices that are generally identified by Patañjali as eight-limbed yoga. Stanzas 10 and 11 of the *Bhagavadgītā*'s chapter 6 advise the *yogin* to resort to a secluded and pure place, “without desires, possessionless,” on a firm seat that is “neither too high nor too low,” a seat consisting of *kuśa* grass covered by the skin of an antelope, in turn covered by a cloth.⁴ Here we can note the reference to the environment for yoga practice, typically understood to be a forest—a place away from human habitation and, by implication, a place of nonhuman animal habitation.⁵ The prescription to be “without desires, possessionless” echoes the *yama* restraints, particularly the fifth of these, *aparigraha*—the same term used here for “possessionless.”

Already in the *Gītā*'s chapter 6, stanza 12, attention turns to the central business of classical Yoga, namely, concentrating the mind, declaring the purpose of yoga to be “to purify the self” (*yogam ātma-viśuddhaye*). As we have already mentioned briefly (at the end of Chap. 4), unlike Buddhist apparent denial of the self's existence, classical Yoga (and more broadly, Vedic and post-Vedic “orthodox” traditions) explicitly and strongly affirms the existence of a self (here referred to as the *ātman*, elsewhere as *puruṣa*). According to the *Bhagavadgītā*, when the self is purified from gross and subtle “contaminations,” it can be experienced as indeed truly existing (and hence beyond temporality). The physical body is the gross manifestation of contamination, and the “subtle body” consisting of the mind, faculties of discrimination (*buddhi*), and the “I”-sense (*ahaṁkāra*) is the subtle manifestation of contamination. Of particular concern are contaminations the locus of which is the mind; among these contaminations *Yoga Sūtra* commentators list jealousy, pride, vanity, hatred, and attachment (Bryant 2009, pp. 252–254; *YS* II.32 commentary).

⁴ An antelope skin (presumably from an antelope that has died of natural causes) as a seat is said to be prescribed because it deters disturbing creatures such as snakes and insects, especially scorpions. Some interpret this stipulation as one of three options, namely, *kuśa* grass *or* an antelope skin *or* a cloth.

⁵ This image of a lone *yogin* in a forest gives rise to much Indic literature portraying ascetics in forest *āśramas* that may function as animal sanctuaries—most famously the description of such an *āśrama* in the opening act of Kalidas' celebrated Sanskrit drama, *Abhijñāna Śakuntalā*. And yet, we might note the *Gheranda Samhita* (5.4; Vasu 1979, p. 37), which advises *against* practicing yoga in a forest, where one is “without protection” (*araṇye rakṣivarjitam*).

Stanzas 13–15 sketch further what the *yogin* should do while sitting (presumably in a cross-legged position, such as the lotus posture):

Holding the body, head, and neck erect, motionless and steady, gazing at the tip of his nose and not looking in any direction, with quieted mind, banishing fear, established in the *brahmacārin* vow of celibacy, controlling the mind, with thoughts fixed on Me [Krishna], he should sit, concentrated, devoted to Me. Thus, continually disciplining himself, the *yogin* whose mind is subdued goes to the highest *nirvāṇa*, to peace, to My abode. (adapted from Sargeant’s trans. 2009, pp. 284–286)

That the *yogin*’s mind must be “quieted” (*praśāntātmā*) and that fear is to be “banished” (*vigata*—ceased or gone, compared to the flying away of birds) suggests the achievement of the result of perfected *ahiṃsā* noted in Chap. 4, Sect. 4.2.1 (quoting Patañjali *Yoga Sūtra* II.35; Bryant 2009, p. 261): “*In the presence of one who is established in nonviolence, enmity is abandoned.*” Practically speaking, it can be understood that the *yogin* is thereby free from fear of free-roaming animals that may reside or roam in the forest where the *yogin* sits in meditation, since the animals are understood to sense the benign nature of his or her presence. Supporting such fearlessness is the *yogin*’s repudiation of sexual activity by the vow of celibacy (*brahmacāri-vrata*). Without such interest, the *yogin* is free from sexual competition in all its gross and subtle forms, whereby sexual pursuit and competition are prime drivers of violence in its innumerable forms. Further, the mention of *brahmacarya* in this passage confirms Patañjali’s specification of the same as one of the five requirements of *yama*, restraint. As such, it alludes to the *yogin*’s possession of mental power of concentration (*vīrya*), which Patañjali identifies as the result of *brahmacarya*. We should note here that this understanding challenges a common belief that sexual engagement, typically energized by consumption of meat, affirms and enhances one’s power. Finally, in these three stanzas we find affirmation of the last of the five *niyamas*, namely, *īśvara-praṇidhāna*—attending to, or worshipping, the Supreme. The “Me” mentioned in the *Gītā* stanzas refers to Krishna, who is identified—as we have already noted—as the supreme *īśvara* or master, and more specifically as the supreme master of yoga, *yogeśvara*.⁶

⁶We may note the mention of *nirvāṇa* in this passage, possibly a nod to Buddhist soteriology, with a strong hint of one-upmanship in the word *paramam*—the *highest nirvāṇa*.

Having already noted (in Chap. 3, Sect. 3.6) Krishna's classification of foods according to the three qualities (*guṇa*), as we read Krishna's description of yoga meditational practice, we could wonder what he enjoins regarding bodily necessities of eating and sleeping.

Yoga is not eating too much, nor is it not eating at all, and not the habit of sleeping too much, and not keeping awake either, Arjuna. For one who is moderate in food and diversion, whose actions are moderate, who is moderate in sleep and waking, yoga destroys all sorrow. (*Gītā* 6.16–17, trans. adapted from Sargeant, pp. 287–288)

Krishna counsels a middle path regarding bodily maintenance.⁷ Providing no specifics, the implication is that the *yogin* must use his or her judgment regarding consumption and restoration.⁸ Still, we can interpret “not eating too much” as including not eating any substances that are unnecessary for health, including animal flesh. In any case, this passage further suggests that yoga practice is not beyond the reach of ordinary human beings; it also suggests that the yoga practitioner must avoid self-inflicted violence. Appropriately practiced, yoga “destroys sorrow” (*duḥkha-bhā*) for the yoga practitioner as well as for all beings in relation to the *yogin*.

Indeed—says Krishna a few stanzas later (6.21)—an accomplished *yogin* “knows endless happiness that is cherished by the intelligence and transcends the senses,” and being so situated he “wavers not from the truth” (*sthitaś [na] calati tattvataḥ*). Again, we see a reinforcement of an aspect of *yama*, namely *satya*—truthfulness, though here the sense of being *situated in truth*, carries a different epistemological sense. It is as if one's very being becomes a truth-bearing entity, or *an embodiment of truth*. The word *tattva*—literally “that-ness”—carries a sense of ontological being. Thus, the *yogin*, as an embodiment of truth, embodies what in

⁷A strong resonance with Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean may be obvious here. Interesting to note is, as Roopen Majithia points out (2024, pp. 114–117), that “the Mean is absolute” regarding food and water intake: for plants and animals, any given plant, animal or human, in its specific circumstance, has precisely one mean amount that is optimal. There is thus an important element of *law* in Krishna's statement on eating, rest, etc. See Majithia for further discussion on law in relation to virtue for Aristotle (*ibid.*, chapter 6).

⁸We have noted (in Chap. 3, Sect. 3.7) the *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*'s alimentary injunctions. The *Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā* (5.16–32) lists several specific foods either recommended or forbidden specifically for the *yogin*. Meat is not found in these lists. This text advises that the *yogin* should take two meals per day, one at noon and one in the evening (Vasu 1979, pp. 39–41).

Buddhist traditions might be called “suchness” (*tathātva*), a state of authenticity whereby one’s being is a complete instantiation of irreducible, absolute reality (*brahma-bhūtam*, *Gītā* 6.27). For an accomplished *yogin*, *satya* is not a “restraint” that must be consciously practiced; rather, he or she freely *partakes* in truth, for the well-being of all creatures.

It is in such a state of joyful yogic accomplishment, Krishna says, that after much patient and careful practice of bringing the mind under the control of the self (6.25–26), when contaminations (or “evils”) have “flown off” (*vigata-kalmaṣaḥ*, 6.28) and absolute reality is readily encountered (*sukhena brahma-saṃsparśam*) that the *yogin* “sees the Self in all beings and all beings present in the Self” (6.29).⁹ Further, in stanza 32, Krishna highlights the nature of such seeing as true empathy: The accomplished *yogin* sees equally in comparison with himself or herself the experiences of pleasure and pain in other beings.

5.3 ĀSANA AS EMBODIED INTER-BEING

We have seen how, according to the *Bhagavadgītā*, a yoga practitioner strives to minimize physical and mental disturbance while consciously directing attention to self-purification. An essential sign of success in this practice is a particular sensibility of identification with all beings by “seeing” them all and oneself—as non-temporal selves—in relation to the higher (equally non-temporal) Self. But now let us step back and look at each of the three yoga limbs that are characterized by physicality, viewing them sequentially. Yoga practice acknowledges embodiment as its point of departure, and it is on the basis of physical embodiment that we, as human beings, think about and act in relation to nonhuman animals as physical embodiments in their myriad forms.¹⁰

⁹ Here, as elsewhere in the *Gītā*, the term *ātman* can refer either to the individual self or to the higher Self, as there is no lowercase/upercase distinction in written Sanskrit. That “Self” is here written with upper-case “S” indicates a presumption that the higher self—*paramātmā*—is intended, since in the next two stanzas (6.30–31) Krishna identifies himself as the one being seen “everywhere” by the *yogin*.

¹⁰ Olivelle (2011, pp. 101–102) writes, “[L]ike most aspects of Indian ascetic ideology and practice, the ascetic creation of the body can be understood adequately only within its structural relationship to the human body as social creation. Thus, at least for heuristic purposes, I think it is useful to consider the ascetic creation as a deconstruction of the socially created body.” We will take up this theme further in Chap. 7, when considering the “social body” in relation to the “devotional body.”

In considering the physical aspects of yoga practice, the aim is to begin to expand the range and depth of yoga-based reflection on not just the sameness of animals with humans (emphasized in *identity theory*, calling attention to animal nondifference from humans); but also on differences (the focus of *difference theory*, wherein animals are appreciated for their individual differences); and on what Matthew Calarco (2015) calls *indistinction* (in which human non-distinction from animals is emphasized). This will be further explored in the next chapter, but we can touch on these three theories in light of yoga embodiment-related practices in this chapter. We begin with *āsana*, the practice of postures, or “postural yoga,” moving our attention from the minimal references thereto in the *Yoga Sūtra* and *Bhagavadgītā* to later texts that greatly expand the number and variety of postures, several of which take the names of various animal forms.

In a general sense, according to Patañjali, *āsana*, posture, is merely a steady and comfortable position, achieved when one’s effort to hold a given posture becomes relaxed, or as one becomes absorbed in the infinite (*ananta*).¹¹

Posture should be steady and comfortable. [Such posture should be attained] by the relaxation of effort and by absorption in the infinite. (YS II.46–47; Bryant 2009, pp. 283, 287)

¹¹ Philipp Maas argues (Maas 2018) that because the two *sūtras* II.46–47 comprise one sentence, the point is that by becoming relaxed (presumably settling into an *āsana* with practice), or else by becoming absorbed in the Infinite, one’s posture becomes steady and comfortable; not, as some translations have it, the other way around. This basic purpose of *āsana*—minimizing disturbances and distractions of the physical body and maximizing the practices of concentration—is also echoed in an important twelfth-century Jain text, the *Yogaśāstra* of Hemacandra (4.134): “Whichever [posture is required] for the mind to obtain steadfastness, that very posture should be undertaken for the benefit of meditation” (Quarnström 2002, p. 99).

“Absorbed in the infinite”: Sutton (2019, p. 81) translates the same phrase as “making contact with the unlimited.” However, the two *sūtras* are translated, they suggest that *āsana* is perfected when that which is limited—the physical body—is so perfectly positioned that it not only doesn’t hinder one’s awareness of the Infinite, or the unlimited, but that it positively facilitates that awareness and connection: meditation on the Infinite enables steady and comfortable physical positioning which, in turn, fosters meditation on the Infinite. (And this infinite may be understood as infinite plenitude, not as infinite space or emptiness; thus, the sense of fullness of “countless” living beings may be cultivated as an infinity of which one’s body is a minute, finite portion.) We find another perspective on *āsana* in the fifteenth-century *Śivayogaprādīpikā* (4.6): *āsana* is being situated in one’s *svarūpa*, in a state of neutrality (*udāśīna*) toward all things (Powell 2023, p. 331).

Note that the term translated here as “the infinite,” *ananta*, can also refer to Ananta Śeṣa, described in Purāṇic literature as the cosmic serpent who sustains the cosmos. As the Ananta Śeṣa serpent effortlessly and firmly sustains the worlds, the *yogin* absorbed in thought of Ananta Śeṣa gains steadiness and ease in sustaining yogic postures.¹² For our purposes in this book, I venture to take *ananta* in its sense of “endless” to also mean “beyond counting,” as a way to suggest the seemingly endless variety of animal forms (keeping well aware that the rate of extinction of animal species is accelerating alarmingly). Taken in this way, *ananta-samāpatti* could mean “coming together with the endless (variety of creatures).”¹³ This understanding invites us to draw on the various animal forms of yoga postures from later tradition as means to ponder nonhuman animal forms in relation to our (presently) human form.¹⁴

Whatever the case, both resulting from and enabling attention on the infinite, *āsana* practice aims toward the opposite from attention on the finite body, which is subject to the dualities and vulnerabilities of pleasure, pain, heat, and cold. Patañjali assures his readers that the proper practice of *āsana* will free one from the afflictions of these dualities (YS II.48). In effect, the materiality of the physical body, awareness of which in *āsana* practice will be intensified for the beginner (especially in the pains of stretching and compressing into particular *āsana* postures), becomes

¹² Bryant (2009, p. 288) citing Rāmānanda Sarasvatī’s commentary on YS II.47; note that the identification of *ananta* with Ānanta Śeṣa for Patañjali is historically less plausible; classical commentators disagree about what this means.

¹³ This is not to ignore that focusing on infinitude of space has a specific function in *āsana* practice, namely, securing the sense of calm as one settles into a given *āsana*, favorable to mental focus.

¹⁴ The identification of some *āsanas* with animal names could be ancient, considering that Vyāsa’s list of eleven *āsanas* (commenting on YS II.46) includes three with animal names. Noteworthy also is that a widespread Indic tradition specifies the total number of different forms or “species” of life-forms as 8,400,000; the same number of *āsanas* are said to exist (according to the twelfth century *Dattātreyayogaśāstra*, which, however, prescribes only one *āsana*, namely, *padmāsana*) suggesting an intriguing identification of living forms with yoga practice as means to, in effect, experience these forms, thereby presumably making it possible to avoid actual birth in animal forms, fast-tracking one toward final liberation. Also, from the *Vivekamārtaṇḍa* (ca. twelfth-thirteenth century; stanzas 8–10): “There are as many *āsana*-s as there are types of living beings (*jīva-jātayaḥ*). Śiva knows all the varieties of them. Every one of the eight million four hundred thousand *āsana*-s has been named by Śiva, and, from among them, he taught eighty-four postures” (Birch 2018, p. 11).

attenuated for the adept, freeing the *yogin* to concentrate on the self within. Yet, a paradox lurks in this physicality of *āsana* practice: One can regard *āsana* formative practice as the conscious directing of awareness to the positioning of the body, somewhat comparable to the bodily attention of dancers or martial artists exactly learning and perfecting their arts. In this light, regarding *āsana* engagement of the body as an *activity* of yoga, I suggest that one is specifically extending and affirming the practice of *karma-yoga* that Krishna describes in the *Bhagavadgītā* before his sketch of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*. In the *Gītā*'s fourth chapter (4.21) Krishna speaks of action only for [sustaining] the body (*śārīraṃ kevalaṃ karma*); it is such minimized action, he goes on to say, that is free from *kilbiṣam*—fault, offense, sin, guilt, injustice, transgression, or injury (*Gītā* 4.20; Monier-Williams 1995, p. 284). In other words, we can consider *āsana* practice to be the paradigmatic situation wherein the physical body—which, outside of yoga practice (specifically, *karma-yoga*), is subject to implication in self-serving action that is directly or indirectly injurious to the bodies of other beings—is consciously positioned in yoga practice to perceive, as Krishna says, “action in inaction and inaction in action” (*Gītā* 4.18).¹⁵

Further, by viewing *āsana* in terms of minimizing karma, we can also see *āsana* practice as the specific application of *tapas*—the third of five aspects of *niyama*, the second limb of eight-limbed yoga (and the first of three aspects of what Patañjali calls *kriyā-yoga*—YS II.1). *Tapas* broadly means “austerity,” derived from *tap*—“to make hot or warm... to consume or destroy by heat... to practice austerity” (Monier-Williams 1995, p. 436). By practice of *āsana*, the physical body's implication in karmic transgressions from the past against other living beings is, in effect, “burned off” by the heat of austerity. The mind, freed from the burden of the body's karmic interference, can give full attention to the infinite Self and its relation to the infinity of selves in their countless forms.

¹⁵This understanding counters the criticism of yoga *āsana* practice as self-indulgence and preoccupation with one's own well-being. Patañjali does not discuss *karma-yoga* explicitly, but he does mention *kriyā-yoga*—the path of action—at the beginning of YS chapter 2. Bryant (2009, pp. 171–172; YS II.1 commentary) notes, “The commentators take this dedication of one's fruits of action to *Īśvara* [referring to *īśvara-praṇidhāna* as a component of *kriyā-yoga*] as an implicit reference to the *bhakti*-centered *karma-yoga* of the *Gītā*, where, of course, Kṛṣṇa identifies himself as *Īśvara*. Indeed, the term *kriyā* overlaps considerably with the term *karma*—action, deed, etc.—both being nominal derivatives of the root *kr*, to do.”

5.3.1 *Āsana and Animal Imitation*

In the centuries following the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* the number and variety of *āsana* postures being practiced multiplied (Birch 2018). Each of the various *āsana* postures are designated by a name, each name being more or less descriptive of how the named posture looks or how it is meant to position the physical human body. Several postures carry the name of animal forms. One may ask whether there is a significance in these names, or whether the *āsanas* so named serve in some way for the *yogin* to “connect” with the named animals, or, more broadly, with the natural environment.¹⁶ Early *haṭha-yoga* texts that describe *āsanas* with animal names do not show explicit intention for a practitioner engaging in these postures to be induced to contemplate the particular animals named by particular *āsanas*. And yet, there is a clear notion that a given animal-named *āsana* shows—in crude fashion—what we humans might consider characteristic of that particular animal form. So, for example, *mayūrāsana* suggests the long-feathered body of a peacock or cock (*mayūra*) as one balances on one’s two hands with legs suspended straight back, feet above the ground, aligned with one’s horizontal back.¹⁷ Another example is *matsyāsana*, a supine reclining position with arched back and head facing back that suggests the form of a fish (*matsya*).¹⁸ Or, there is the *hasti-niṣadana* pose,¹⁹

¹⁶ As Megan M. Burke (2012, p. 182) writes, “[A] genuine yoga practice recognizes the important connection between the name of the pose and the significance and benefits of the pose itself. When I am in the frog pose (*bhakasana*), it is not that I am a frog but that, in assuming the shape of a frog, I begin to relate to myself differently. In turn, I get a different perspective on the world.”

¹⁷ *Mayūrāsana* and other *āsanas* mentioned here are attested in *haṭhayoga* texts from the seventeenth century onward (Bühnemann 2021). Incidentally, there may be parallels in certain animal-like postures performed in the martial arts tradition of Kerala, Kalarippayattu.

¹⁸ A quite different description of *matsyāsana* is found in a late-medieval *haṭha-yoga* text, the *Haṭhābhyāsapaddhati*: “Lying prone and having raised up the elbows by the sides [of the body, the yogi] should support [himself on] the ground with the palms of both hands and fly up again and again. [This] is the fish pose” (Birch 2018, p. 153, #24).

¹⁹ *Hasti-niṣadana* pose is one of the eleven poses listed in Vyāsa’s *YS* commentary; hence it is documented several centuries earlier than most *āsanas* in the *haṭha-yoga* lists, suggesting ancient origins for designating some *āsanas* with animal names.

which imitates an elephant (*hasti*) sitting on its haunches, with one's hands extended forward, parallel to the forward-angled shins sloping down from raised knees.²⁰

Animal-named yoga postures and their practice can thus be considered through the lens of animal imitation, a theme to which Christopher Chapple dedicates a chapter in his book *Yoga and the Luminous*.²¹ Chapple begins his discussion by pointing out that animal veneration and imitation is found in cultures throughout the world. There is a common recognition that animals have specialized capabilities that humans lack. Imitation can be one way that animal capabilities are assumed, especially when performed in an altered state of consciousness such as might be induced in shamanic practices.²² But such altered states of consciousness may not be required for a yoga practitioner to benefit from animal-like yoga postures as a means of expanding yogic awareness in relation to animals.

From a modern perspective on yoga practice, in her book *Wild Asana*, Alison Zak (2023) offers numerous reflections on how animal-like yoga

²⁰ Arguably, since many of the *āsanas* are related to animals in their particular postures, suggesting certain features of their “consciousness” while in such postures, there can be a relationship to animals in this way. To exemplify, *adhomukha-svānāsana*, among other things, is meant to bring about a consciousness of a dog in this downward facing position. It is a stretching and resting position, whereby one can imagine dogs having a similar stretching and resting experience. Likewise, *uṣṭrāsana* (camel posture) gets its name since combining the posture with a particular meditational focus is said to produce the ability to tolerate hunger and thirst, and as such, the practitioner develops the *siddhi* (perfection) of the *uṣṭra* (camel) to tolerate hunger and thirst. (I am grateful to Janne Kontala for these insights.)

²¹ See Chapple (2008, chapter 4, Imitation of Animals in Yoga Tradition). An interesting possible (remote) anticipation to such imitation can be found in Vedic literature, in the story of the cows who perform a *sattra* sacrifice, where their efforts become the model for priests to imitate the cows by their hair configurations (Sojková 2023, pp. 49–72).

²² It may be relevant to reflect on altered consciousness practices in relation to animals from a broader perspective. Ralph R. Acampora (2006, p. 19) observes, “Humans, in ways that are more complex than those of any other animal, can change and symbolize their environments and habitats by relocating and redefining them and themselves. Cultural processes take two directions: one whereby we inhabit someplace with ever-intensifying degrees of domestication, and another whereby we ‘dehabit’ our usual domicile via various ecstatic techniques. Certain aesthetic or ritual practices could serve as examples of these techniques, such as Native American vision quests, Buddhist meditation trances, psychoactive drug trips, and perhaps even Mardi Gras carnivals. The positive functions of this cultural modality are: (1) to encourage exploration of other non/human lifeworlds, and (2) to continually revitalize our own cultural home by transgressing and reshaping its boundaries.” Acampora goes on to discuss “transpecific intersomaticity” and “transpecific interanimality.”

postures can aid the development of such awareness.²³ One example describes a practice that invites awareness of kinship with primates by performing a (admittedly difficult) *āsana* posture that calls particular attention to the celebrated semi-divine monkey Hanumān of the equally celebrated ancient Indian epic, the *Rāmāyaṇa*: While presenting *hanumānāsana* (“the splits”—a sitting *āsana* with one leg extended straight forward and the other leg extended straight backward), Zak notes how the form of this *āsana* recalls Hanumān’s famous flight while transporting an entire mountain covered with medicinal herbs to Lanka to save the life of battle-wounded Lakṣmana, Rāma’s brother. In his prior leap to Lanka, Hanumān seeks and finds the divine hero Rāma’s abducted wife Sītā, thereby being instrumental in the couple’s reunion. The accomplished *yogin* (possibly inspired by practicing *hanumānāsana*) similarly strives to bring about the reunion of the individual self with the supreme Self, through whom, as explained in Chap. 4, relationship between oneself and all other beings is possible.²⁴

²³ Janne Kontala reminds us (personal communication) that such reflections are a departure from classical or medieval yoga understanding of *āsana* practice. One might be initially encouraged to think of a given animal form to aid in learning and adapting the specific position and how to approach it internally, but then the *yogin* would seek to still the mind, overcoming the dualities of the body by keeping still in the posture for a long time. Only later, after gaining such stillness and focus, gradually overcoming *vāsanās* (deep-seated impressions) that have led to violence against animals, one would develop deep awareness of animals as feeling subjects.

²⁴ Regarding shamanic practice (mentioned above) in connection with the *Rāmāyaṇa* hero Hanumān, see Jarow (2004). Jarow shows how Hanumān’s messenger journeys can be read as shamanic flights. In this case, an “animal” (monkey) acts as a (super-)human shaman, thus reversing the usual notion of shamanic practice, in which the (human) shaman communes in some sense with one or more animals. Further for us to note is Jarow’s comparative reference to the *Rgveda*’s identification of the mind as the “swiftest of birds” (*RV* VI.9.5) as the beginnings of a magical flight motif in the Sanskritic tradition. While classical Yoga is concerned to still the mind, there is in the wider tradition a contrary notion that the mind’s power to “fly” enables persons to rise above quotidian existence to reach transcendence.

Also regarding the practice of *hanumānāsana*, its association with the legendary heroic animal becomes a way of conceiving—with one’s physical body—extraordinary capacities of animals in general. Further, it invites contemplation on the potential for a human being to assume animal capacities. One way this is envisioned as being possible to assume is through renderings of fantastic animal-human forms, which are found in numerous cultures worldwide. In prehistoric South Asia this practice can be seen, for example, in some Harappan seals. Some of these seals depict human-tiger composites, whereby a standing man with human legs, arms and head, has a tiger body with its rear legs extending back from the man’s buttocks (Aruz 2018, pp. 26–32).

True, Hanumān being no ordinary monkey, the point of practicing *hanumānāsana* for an animal ethicist may be less to seek communion with nonhuman primates as it would be to aspire toward the transcendent self's potential to advance across the apparent chasm of difference between one's own and other beings' consciousness, much as Hanumān gallantly leaps from India to Lanka. Yet, this particular *āsana* can also serve to reflect on human-primate psychophysical similarity and, more broadly, all human-nonhuman animal similarity and kinship, in that Hanumān exhibits both human and nonhuman characteristics. Thus *hanumānāsana* may prompt reflections that evoke appreciation of both identity theory and difference theory of animal ethics. As Hanumān is similar to yet different from humans, so humans are similar (or identical with) yet different from other-than-human beings.

Another already mentioned *āsana* that can help yoga practitioners “think with” animals is *matsyāsana*—the fish posture. Living immersed in a water environment is entirely foreign to us humans. If any animals are different from humans, it is surely fishes, specifically because of the watery environment they inhabit. Zak suggests one way that humans of a particular religious tradition—Christianity—originally were enabled to overcome, or at least reduce, this difference, namely, through *baptism*.

In the book of Mark, which was originally written in Greek, baptisms not only occurred in the river; they occurred *into* the river... Jesus was not baptized in the River Jordan; he was baptized into union with her. Into meaningful relationship with the living, wild waters, with God, and with nature. (Zak 2023, p. 45)

The notion of initiation *into* “the living, wild waters, with God, and with nature” is richly suggestive of how yoga—as connection—may be thought of in terms of bodily engagement with—rather than aloofness from—the environment.²⁵

More specifically regarding aquatic creatures, as many studies have shown, fish of various kinds exhibit remarkable capacities and, as Zak

²⁵ Keeping aware that classical Yoga is about *disconnection* rather than connection with the environment, still, the broad argument is that yoga's disconnection on one level leads to a higher-level re-connection (or “re-memberment”), post-liberation engagement with the environment. We will consider this issue further in Chap. 6, Sect. 6.2. Incidentally, it is interesting to consider Jesus as a *yogin*, for which several examples from the accounts of his later life are suggestive.

points out, they have complex social lives in that they recognize each other as individuals, enjoy each other's touch, engage in consensus decision-making, learn from each other, and engage in social play (Zak 2023, pp. 48–49). All these capacities could be contemplated while performing *matsyāsana*, while one also remembers the fish-protecting action of the *yogin* king Satyavrata and the reciprocal earthly creature-saving action of Matsya *avatāra* (described in Chap. 4, Sect. 4.3.2).

In relation to these as well as other animal form *āsanas*, yoga practitioners can be encouraged to reflect on lessons favorable to progress in yoga that one can learn from various animals. As described in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the *yogin avatāra* Dattātreya was pleased to learn lessons from twenty-four “gurus” in the form of several features of the natural world and several animal species.

The earth, air, sky, water, fire, the moon, the sun, a pigeon, a python, the ocean, a moth, a honeybee, an elephant, a honey-thief, a deer, a fish, the prostitute Piṅgalā, a *kurāra* bird, a child, a young girl, an arrow smith, another snake, a spider, and a wasp: These, o King, are the twenty-four gurus who are my guides. In this life, I have been instructed by their behavior, thus learning well (the identity) of the self. (*BhP* 11.7.33–35; Clifton 2023, p. 179; trans. adapted from Goswami et al, 1988)

Dattātreya elaborates on the lessons he learns from each guru, some positive, and others negative (favorable and unfavorable behavior for a *yogin*).²⁶ He concludes his speech by adding that he has also learned from his own body, the *deha-guru*—the “body teacher,” the “cause for pondering detachment” (*virakti-viveka-hetuḥ*, *BhP* 11.9.25). The lesson learned, detachment (one of the initial teachings in the *Yoga Sūtra*, I.12) arises from recognizing that bodily suffering and ultimate destruction of the body is unavoidable. This lesson serves as a caution to the modern yoga practitioner not to wrongly apprehend *āsana* practice as a means for physical grooming or styling. In truth, says Dattātreya, the temporal body belongs to others (*pārakyam*), a word that we can take in an inclusive sense: *Yogins*, while engaging in the careful practice of *āsana*—in particular postures reminiscent of various animal forms—see themselves as one small creature in the greater whole consisting of all creatures, whether aquatic, terrestrial, or avian.

²⁶ These lessons are summarized in Haigh (2007).

As we proceed to consider the fourth of the eight-limb classical yoga path in relation to animal ethics, we can again think of the *matsyāsana*, now as a prompt to ponder the long-extended breathing of whales. Can whales (“fish” that are actually air-breathing mammals) be regarded in some sense as models for the practice of *prāṇāyāma*—the regulation of breath as a means of enabling the mental stamina required in advanced yoga practice (especially in post-classical *haṭha-yoga* traditions), thereby fully opening the *yogin* to the yogic perception of kinship with all creatures?

5.4 PRĀṆĀYĀMA—BREATHING WITH THE ANIMALS

A simple way to experience oneself as having agency is to intentionally hold one’s breath for some seconds. Our body and nervous system work most of the time autonomically for respiration, but it is easy to intentionally—consciously—slow, quicken, or stop our breathing for some time. In simple terms, agency indicates the presence of consciousness, and consciousness is arguably present wherever, or in whatever, breathing takes place (this is not to imply that consciousness necessarily indicates agency).²⁷ In recent decades, Gaia theory, which may be said to expand animism and a measure of panpsychism to a planetary dimension, prompts David Abram to write,

It may be far more parsimonious [than considering consciousness, or mind, to be a uniquely human property], today, to suggest that mind is not at all a human possession but rather a property of the breathing Earth—a property in which we, along with the other animals and plants, all participate. (Abram 2010, p. 222)

Expanding the notion of respiration to include the earth as a whole suggests *participation* in the planet’s biome. By conscious breathing, as in

²⁷ See Bryant (2009, pp. 461–574 “Concluding Reflections”) for a clear exposition and analysis of a centuries-long controversy over whether Patañjali accepts that the *puruṣa* (the locus of consciousness) has agency (*kartṛtva*). Bryant, concurring with the argument of Shyam Ranganathan in favor of agency in the *puruṣa* for Patañjali (contrary to classical Sāṃkhya, which locates agency in the *buddhi* of *prakṛti*), concludes, “For there to be any coherence to the law of *karma*, the condition of the living beings in *saṃsāra*, and the decision to take up the path of *yoga* and follow the *yamas* and *niyamas* of II.30–45; or the friendship, compassion, joy, and equanimity prescribed in I.33; or essentially any of the prescriptions of the *Yoga Sūtras*, one must assign free will to the *puruṣa* as the ultimate agent of its condition.”

prāṇāyāma practices, it is possible to extend awareness to other beings as participating in the same life-sustaining function. The *Praśna Upaniṣad* identifies lifebreath (*prāṇa*) as foundational, as the basis of all life:

In the power of lifebreath is this whole world,
As also what exists in the third heaven.
Protect us, as a mother, her sons.
Grant us prosperity and wisdom. (*Praśna Upaniṣad* 2.13; Olivelle 1998, p.463)

Later Sanskrit texts such as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* locate the primordial act of breathing in divinity: Vishnu, reclining comfortably on his serpent bed Ananta Śeṣa while absorbed in a state of *yoga-nidrā* (“yogic sleep”), manifests innumerable universes with every exhalation, then annihilates those same universes with every inhalation into his transcosmic body after each trillions-of-years cycle.²⁸ These texts suggest that we can regard our very existence in this temporal world in yogic terms: The world is the product of a transcosmic yogic event, in which all living beings and even (apparently) non-living substances are thoroughly interrelated and where consciousness is pervasive.

This understanding calls us to ponder how humans can best live in this world in yogic terms, in which breathing becomes a yogic act. Reflecting on the Buddha’s approach to this question, Luce Irigaray considers the Buddha’s spirit of renunciation in meditational yoga:

If [the Buddha] renounces—at least according to our perspective—it is because the objects of desire, the objective correlates of my subjective desires, oppose harmony with the universal breath. They [the objective cor-

²⁸ See Prabhupāda (2017): *BhP* 2.6.39 describes Vishnu as the “primordial *puruṣa*” who creates (*ṣṛjaty*) worlds repeatedly, millennium after millennium; *BhP* 2.10.6 refers to Vishnu’s act of withdrawing the worlds (*nirōdha*); *BhP* 2.10.15 refers to the generation of *prāṇa* (life-breath) from Vishnu (again referred to here as *puruṣa*); *BhP* 3.8.10 describes Vishnu as reclining “in slumber” (*nīdṛayā*) on the serpent bed Ananta Śeṣa while the worlds are “submerged” (*āplutam*) during the eons of their being unmanifested. In another, very short text that is highly regarded in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition, the *Brahma-saṃhitā* (5.48), the time of Vishnu’s one breath (*eka-niśvasita-kālam*) measures a period when the lords of universes (*jagad-aṇḍa-nāthāḥ*) thrive. There are similar accounts of Shiva as the transcosmic *yogin* creating universes, and being himself identified with *prāṇa*, “life-force” (Frawley 2016, pp. 89–98).

relates of my subjective desires] tear me to pieces. The quest of the Buddha seems to me to correspond to the search for a continuous communion with the respiration of the macrocosmos... He tries to become pure subject but on a model forgotten by us: pure subject means here breathing in tune with the breathing of the entire living universe. (Irigaray 2002, ch. 1, “The Time of Life”)

Whether the Buddha practiced *prāṇāyāma* in any way comparable to much later descriptions of breath regulation, this is not Irigaray’s point. Rather, she calls attention to the deeper purpose of yogic discipline, namely, to find “a continuous communion” with all that breathes, the living world as a whole. This aspiration accords, arguably, with the two positive results of successful *prāṇāyāma* practice according to Patañjali,²⁹ namely, self-illumination and mental fitness for concentration. Firstly,

Then [having become adept in *prāṇāyāma*], the covering of the illumination [of knowledge] is weakened.

Illumination (*prakāśa*) suggests a state of transcendent knowledge. In Sāṃkhya terms, it indicates comprehension of the distinction between self and not-self (*puruṣa* and *prakṛti*), an experiential awareness that facilitates the second result of successful yogic breath control:

Additionally, the mind becomes fit for concentration. (YS II.52–53; Bryant 2009, p. 295, 296)

“Concentration” here translates a plural locative of *dhāraṇā*, anticipating the sixth limb of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*, which we will discuss in the next chapter. To note here is the mind’s powerful potential to become progressively released when the bodily disciplines of regulated breathing are intently practiced.

A variation on the theme of breath control leading to higher knowledge is found in a lesser-known Jain yoga text from the twelfth century, the *Yogaśāstra* of Hemacandra:

²⁹ Regarding “aspiration,” we may note the etymology of *prāṇāyāma*: *āyāma* has the sense of expansion, something that is not there in *yama*. *Yama* has the sense of restriction, *āyāma* of expansion (Janne Kontala, personal communication).

...Then, having gradually withdrawn the mind along with the breath [from the aperture of the crown of the head (*brahmarandhra*)], the mendicant (*yogin*) makes it enter inside the lotus of the heart [and] restrains it [there].

As a result [of restraining the mind and the breath in the heart lotus], ignorance disappears, desires for sensual enjoyments are eliminated, mental constructions do not arise, and knowledge blossoms from within. (Quarnström 2002; V.39–40, p. 107)

Here the emphasis is on breath restraint or retention (in Patañjali's terms, *vidhāraṇābhyām* [I.34] and *gati-vicchedaḥ* [II.48]; in Hemacandra, *niyama*), an important result of which is that the “tearing to pieces” that Irigaray experiences in the disconnect between subjective desires and objects of desire is no longer suffered because “desires for sensual enjoyments are eliminated” (*viśayeccha vināśyati*).³⁰ Here the breath and the mind are to be “gradually withdrawn”—arguably anticipating the fifth limb of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*, namely *pratyāhāra*, withdrawal (from the sense objects), or reabsorption, as in Vishnu's reabsorption of the cosmos into his reclining *yoga-nidrā* body. A further result of restraining the mind and breath in the heart is, according to Hemacandra, freedom from “mental constructs” (*vikalpa*). *Vikalpa* can mean “false notion” (Monier-Williams 1995, p. 955): In place of the false notions about animals as objects for human exploitation that habituate us to unethical (in particular, violent, harmful) behavior in relation to them, there can emerge a true notion about them that impels us to ethical, respectful behavior. Returning to Irigaray's reflection on the Buddha, we can note the Mahāyāna Buddhist idea of the “Buddha nature,” whereby the true notion of all beings is regarded to be that they all possess Buddha nature or that, in fact, all sentient beings are Buddhas, albeit presently in a covered state.³¹

As radical as we may think it is to regard all sentient beings as Buddhas, this notion can encourage us to take cue from Dattātreyā's regard for certain animals as his teachers (mentioned previously, or from Satyakāma's

³⁰To be exact, we should note that here Hemacandra does not refer to *vāsanās*—subliminal imprints from which conscious desires are propelled—but only to conscious desires for sense objects. According to the *YS* only *saṁādhi* can clear away *vāsanās*.

³¹See King (1991), who writes (p. 1) that the Buddha nature doctrine answers unequivocally whether all beings are capable of attaining Buddhahood: “‘All sentient beings possess the Buddha nature’ and thus are guaranteed the realization of Buddhahood. Not only human beings, but all beings born and reborn in the six destinies—hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, fighting demons, human beings, and gods—are promised that Buddhahood awaits them.”

learning *brahman* from animals, as we discussed in Chap. 4, Sect. 4.3.1). So, for example, thinking of whales' ability to retain their breath for an hour or more, can we regard them as our teachers for the practice of *prāṇāyāma*?³² For that matter, perhaps they could even be regarded as potential teachers for the Buddha in the proper practice of breath restraint: It is said that before enlightenment he had indeed practiced breath retention but rejected it as not serving his aim of liberation. Along with other practices he rejected as extreme, he turned instead, famously, to an ethic of "the middle way," based on distinguishing what is wholesome or skillful (*kuśala*) from what is not wholesome or skillful (Anālayo 2023, pp. 17–18). The Buddha (and other human *yogin* Buddhas), seeking "continuous communion with the respiration of the macrocosmos," could well be students of the massive yet ruthlessly exploited whales of the world, as they expertly adjust themselves and their breathing constantly to their marine environment. As students of the whales, we humans might begin to understand that we should not be killing our gurus.

Whether all beings are to be regarded as Buddhas, it is clear that all living beings breathe, as the means by which bodies take in oxygen and expel carbon dioxide (or, for plants, the reverse). As they breathe, animals go about their activities of life maintenance, which (as noted in Chap. 3, Sect. 3.1) Indic texts classify as four engagements, namely, eating, sleeping, mating, and defending.³³ Humans are no different from nonhuman animals in these activities, with a significant twofold exception. First, except for humans, nonhuman animals are understood to generate no reactive or retributive karma from their life-sustaining engagements. While in Indic texts nonhuman animals are typically regarded as having obtained their

³² It may be interesting to note that a pre-tenth century yoga text, the *Yogayājñavalkya* (6.32–34, Mohan 2013, pp. 60–61), defines *prāṇāyāma* as *kevalakumbhaka*—the complete arresting of breath. Some whale species can remain underwater (arresting their breath) for 60–90 minutes.

³³ Aristotle, famously, reflected on the commonalities among animals (Barnes 1991, p. 2; 436a7–436a16, emphasis in original): "The most important attributes of animals, whether common to all or peculiar to some, are, manifestly, attributes of soul and body in conjunction, e.g., *sensation, memory, passion, appetite* and *desire* in general, and, in addition, *pleasure* and *pain*. For these may, in fact, be said to belong to all animals. But there are, besides these, certain other attributes, of which some are common to all living things, while others are peculiar to certain species of animals. The most important of these may be summed up in four pairs, viz. *waking* and *sleeping*, *youth* and *old age*, *inhalation* and *exhalation*, *life* and *death*. We must examine these, determining their respective natures, and the causes of their occurrence."

particular forms due to retributive karmic actions in earlier human lives (or from previous other nonhuman life forms), their present nonhuman bodies' actions have invariably unidirectional "upward mobility" to future life forms that anticipate human existence.³⁴ The human form is, in contrast, the uniquely ambivalent condition of being potentially a springboard to final freedom (*mokṣa*) but also, dangerously, the arena for implicating oneself in karmic bondage leading to "downward mobility" into nonhuman life forms.

Secondly—related to this first—fundamentally ambivalent characteristic of humans in comparison to nonhumans, the texts distinguish humans by their capacity to pursue principles of dharma, which, in this context, can be taken to mean principles of sensitivity to and pursuit of norms conducive to gaining freedom from the bodily demands (eating, sleeping, mating, and defending) and thus from the bondage of karma. We have discussed dharma in Chap. 3, but here, in the context of physical yoga practice and specifically that of *prāṇāyāma*, conscious breath regulation compliments *āsana* practices as minimizing bodily maintenance. As we noted regarding *āsana* practice, it can be considered action (karma) only for [sustaining] the body, action that is free from retributive fault. Difficult as it may be for us to imagine as possible, both Krishna and Patañjali (and later yoga preceptors) describe advanced *prāṇāyāma* as a state of complete stoppage of breathing (*YS* II.51), or a simultaneous in- and out-breathing practice (*Gītā* 4.29). Regarding these physical practices as karma-minimizing, I suggest that they may remind us of Jain ascetics' practice of keeping a mask over the mouth (or nose and mouth) to keep from breathing in microbic beings, thereby killing them.

More broadly, we may consider the dharma that distinguishes humans from nonhumans in light of yoga practice as the pursuit of "internal environmentalism." By this, I mean that specifically the three bodily focused limbs of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*, *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, and our next topic, *pratyāhāra*, attend deeply to the physical body as the locus for freeing not only one's own mind in the final three limbs (*dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi*), but

³⁴ According to Jain tradition, the living being (*jīva*) "possesses a sort of built-in advantage, an everpresent tendency to develop its qualities and temporarily reduce the influence of the karmas." From this "arises a universal urge toward self-development, present even in the smallest life-forms, to combat the passions and deluding karmas that prevent it" (Donaldson and Bajzelj 2021, p. 55, quoting Jaini, P. 2001/1979 *The Jaina Path of Purification*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass).

just as importantly for, in effect, freeing the inner environment to be spiritually and ethically contiguous with the outer environment. This threefold physically oriented practice (*āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, and *pratyāhāra*) paradoxically becomes the foundation for the process of decentering—countering anthropocentrism, which is rooted in misidentification of oneself with the psychophysical body. One can then effectively develop concentration up to absorption (*samādhi*), in which the boundary maintained by misidentification with the body and mind, which has the effect of isolating self from other, becomes permeable.

5.5 PRATYĀHĀRA—REDIRECTING THE SENSES

But let us return to consider another animal form in relation to yoga practice. If whales have something to teach us about the yogic practice of *prāṇāyāma*, could tortoises give us a model for the practice of *pratyāhāra*, the withdrawal of the senses from sense objects?³⁵ This possibility is suggested by Krishna in the *Bhagavadgītā*:

When one entirely withdraws the senses from the sense objects, as a tortoise [withdraws] its limbs [into its shell], one's wisdom is well established. (*Gītā* 2.58; author's trans.)³⁶

A tortoise withdraws its limbs into its shell when it perceives danger. Similarly, a *yogin* becomes sensitized to perceive the dangers wrought by unnecessary or uncontrolled sense engagement. The particular danger of unnecessary sense engagement for the committed yoga practitioner is

³⁵ “*Kurmāsana* and *suprakurmāsana* are *āsana* names, and my own experience in practicing these tells me they are related to sense-withdrawal, kind of gross-level preparation for more subtle *pratyāhāra*” (Janne Kontala, personal communication).

³⁶ A similar stanza appears in the fifteenth century text, the *Śivayogapradīpikā* (3.3), “A Lamp on Śivayoga”: “Just as a tortoise on land contracts its limbs into its shell, in the same manner one who is self-restrained continually withdraws (*pratyāhārati*) all of the sense-organs into oneself. We think that itself is knowing the supreme Reality (*paramatattva*)” (Powell 2023, pp. 212, 324). Also in the same text (4.8; Powell, pp. 331–332), “Close contact (*saṁsakti*) with the extensive opinions (*matī*) and mental formations (*vikāra*) which arise from the net of pleasures of manifold consciousness is obstructed (*pratibhata*) through the inward turning of the mind. Seizing all of the various mental formations—that is taught by knowers of yoga as *pratyāhāra* indeed. I, with an unwavering good-mind, always praise that.”

distraction of the mind, disturbing and potentially spoiling one's efforts to direct the mind for realization of the self in relation to the higher Self who—as we have already noted—is understood to be present in—or rather accompanying—all beings.

The basic activity of the physical body's senses—seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling—is consumption, taking matter from the environment—matter that is the bodies of living beings—into the consumer's body to fuel the body, destroying what is consumed in the process. The Sanskrit word *āhāra* refers to eating or consuming, and *prati* (against, counter to) as a prefix to *āhāra* indicates countering the tendency to consume or over-consume (*atyāhāra*). It is easy to see how *pratyāhāra* complements the five elements of eight-limbed yoga's first limb, *yama* (restraint). The opposite of restraint—indulgence—can easily lead to violence, deception, theft, sexual incontinence, and a false sense of ownership—all varieties of excess that easily lead toward causing unnecessary suffering and death to nonhuman (as well as human) animals. We may say that *pratyāhāra* is the specifically focused practice of countering over-consumption. By this practice, the *yogin* brings the senses into fully cooperative engagement with the mind, as the mind—now in knowledge of the self's difference from the body—becomes an instrument of yogic concentration, meditation, and, finally, absorption (*dhāraṇā*, *dhyaṇa*, and *samādhi*).³⁷

In his short definition of *pratyāhāra*, Patañjali suggests that as an instrument of yogic concentration the mind can draw the senses in its now focused direction.³⁸ Vyāsa, the principal *Yoga Sūtra* commentator, explains this with an analogy from the *Praśna Upaniṣad* (II.4): In a bee colony, all the worker bees follow the queen bee.³⁹ As they are directly interconnected, so the *yogin's* senses are directly interconnected with his or her

³⁷ An interesting comparison may be between these yoga practices and a statement by Augustine (*an. quant.* 28.54, *On the magnitude of the soul*): “Human soul, through use of reason and knowledge... removes itself as far as possible from the body and gladly enjoys the delight of an inner life. The more it turns to the senses, the closer to the beast it renders man.” Quoted in Hoenig (2023, p. 129).

³⁸ In Bryant's translation (YS II.54; 2009, p. 297): “*Pratyāhāra*, withdrawal from sense objects, occurs when the senses do not come into contact with their respective sense objects. It corresponds, as it were, to the nature of the mind [when it is withdrawn from the sense objects].” Chapple (2008) offers an interesting alternative translation: “Inwardness of the senses is the disengagement from conditions as if in imitation of the own-form of the mind.”

³⁹ “Just as all the bees set off when the queen bee sets off, and settle down when she settles down, so did speech, mind, sight, and hearing” (Olivelle 1998, p. 461).

mind. Further, Patañjali and his commentators suggest that truly successful sense control occurs when the mind *entirely* controls the senses. This means the *yogin* is beyond all danger of even sense enjoyment not scripturally prohibited; or of enjoyment according to one's direction rather than by the senses' dictations; or from presuming to be able to engage with sense objects while remaining aloof from them, free from the dualities of attachment and aversion, happiness and distress (Bryant 2009, pp. 298–300; *YS* II.55 commentary). In other words, sense enjoyment of all kinds and degree is understood to be dangerous, and the adept *yogin* takes no such risks, instead regarding his or her senses as so many “worker bees” whose only business is to follow the “queen bee” mind's attention, which Patañjali suggests can reach its goal by focusing on *īśvara*, the supreme self.

From this brief description of sense withdrawal becoming rigorous obedience of the senses to a disciplined mind, we could begin to wonder whether this is all required for our purpose, which is to re-vision human relations with the nonhuman—or greater-than-human—world around us. Is serious yoga practice setting the bar too high for any of us to reach, leading us to an apathetic rejection of yoga as the way to such re-visioning? I suggest that we resist apathy and seek to value the breadth and depth of yoga thought and practice.⁴⁰ Regarding this stage of yoga under discussion, *pratyāhāra*, we may recognize that its essence—conscious choice to direct attention and action—is not at all foreign to us in daily life.

A valuable aid to this particular practice has already been suggested by Patañjali earlier: “Upon being harassed by negative thoughts, one should cultivate counteracting thoughts” (*YS* II.33). The word translated here as “thoughts,” *bhāvanam*, can also mean “imagination” (Monier-Williams 1995, p. 755).⁴¹ Yoga can be understood as a disciplined practice of

⁴⁰ “[If] diligent, everyone, even the young or the old or the diseased, gradually obtains success in yoga through practice. Whether brahmin, ascetic, Buddhist, Jain, Skull-bearer (*kāpālīka*) or materialist (*cārvāka*), the wise man endowed with faith who is constantly devoted to his practice obtains complete success. Success happens for he who performs the practices—how could it happen for one who does not?” (*Dattātreyayogaśāstra* 3.1.2/40–42, trans. Mallinson [2024]).

⁴¹ Janne Kontala notes (personal communication): “However, in the context of classical Yoga, *cintanam* is related to thinking including creative imagination. *Bhāvanam* is the phase between thinking and *dhāranā*. It involves a deliberate cultivation of an emotional state conducive for the purpose, which is determined by the context. *Bhāvanam* as in *YS* I.28 is positive practice of developing devotion in *japa*, while *pratipakṣa-bhāvanam* is the opposite, replacing a *rāga* [attachment]-based feeling with repulsion towards the desired object. In

imagining a radical alternative, imagining a different way of seeing (and of hearing, tasting, touching, and smelling), rooted in a different understanding of the self. Yoga can then serve to anticipate freedom both for oneself and for other humans and nonhumans, freedom from the five afflictions (*kleśas*) that perpetually plague us—ignorance, false sense of self, attachment, aversion, and clinging to life (*avidyā*, *asmitā*, *rāga*, *dveśa*, and *abhiniveśa*).

One oblique way to grasp the radical nature of this alternative vision can be by considering a certain pilgrimage practice found in the western Indian state of Maharashtra. This pilgrimage's destination is a particular stone image of Gaṇapati, the elephant-headed divine, self-created son of Pārvatī, consort of Shiva. To reach the mountain cave of Lenyadri (near Junnar) in which this self-manifest image, Girijātmaja Gaṇapati, is lodged, "[one] must ascend a wall of rock, almost straight up, 283 steps, to reach the cave. One must ascend the barren rock of an infinite number of sense pleasures" (Grimes 1995, p. 115). Once inside the dark cave, Grimes explains, one strains to see—to "have *darśana*" or sacred sighting of—the image:⁴² "It is set deep in the darkness of the cave at the far wall, so when you see him you wonder if he is facing you or facing in the other direction," for it appears that his back is toward the cave entrance, with his elephant face turned to the side.⁴³

Gaṇapati, one of the most popular deities in South Asia and beyond, revels in enigma, beginning with his semi-theriomorphic form. He is celebrated as the lord of obstacles—both as their creator and their destroyer, and he is the lord of thresholds—hence of liminality. He is a gatekeeper, preventing or permitting one to enter the shrine of transcendence. He is regarded as lord of the mind, holding in one hand an *aṅkuśa*, an elephant goad, representing the taming of the wild-elephant-like mind (Grimes 1995, p. 192–193).

The point of this—for us mental—pilgrimage to see Girijātmaja Gaṇapati in a Maharashtrian mountain cave is to venture the possibility of going entirely beyond the "barren rock of an infinite number of sense

both cases it can be aided by imagination but should lead to a sustained emotional cultivation that goes beyond the mere mental image. I believe imagination can act as the first step to enter *bhāvanam*, but *bhāvanam* is more strongly associated with emotions in the *Yoga Sūtra*."

⁴² See Chap. 8, Sect. 8.6 for further explanation of *darśana* in relation to divine images.

⁴³ There are many references to the "cave of the heart" in Indic literature. See for example *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 2.2.1 and 2.2.6 (quoted in Mahony 1998, p. 190).

pleasures,” which is said to be the driving force behind repeated transmigration in the myriad life-forms, each offering different configurations of sense pleasures. In the *Bhagavadgītā*, Krishna offers a hint of what the experience of such a “beyond” might be:

The joyous self, existing in the Absolute (*brahman*) neither laments nor hankers. [This self] is equal to all beings [and] attains superordinate devotion (*bhakti*) unto me. (*Gītā* 18.54, author’s trans.)

Gaṇapati could represent the yoga teacher guiding the student toward such a joyous state of being. Gaṇapati’s theriomorphic form with an elephant head can indicate the ambiguity of human identity with and difference from nonhuman animals, and his guarding thresholds can evoke the sense that yoga is a doorway to both negative and positive freedom. Negatively, it offers *freedom from* the demands of the senses and the physical and mental body’s vulnerabilities; and positively, yoga offers *freedom to* be joyously engaged with a clear comprehension of oneself in relation with the animate world. Thus, Gaṇapati embodies a sense of yogic possibility, opportunity, and anticipation such that the mind becomes a true friend of the *yogin*, with increasing strength of focus that the senses readily follow.⁴⁴ From this perspective, withdrawal of the senses in *pratyāhāra* becomes a byproduct of the mind’s positive guidance as it approaches full awareness of the higher Self, the *paramātman* or *īśvara*. Again, quoting Krishna in the *Bhagavadgītā*,

For the tranquil person who has subdued the mind amidst heat, cold, happiness and distress as well as honor and dishonor, the higher Self has been attained. (*Gītā* 6.7, author’s trans.)

Taking the imagery of the Maharashtrian Gaṇapati pilgrimage a step further in relation to the yoga practice of sense withdrawal, this particular image of Gaṇapati is in a cave; similarly, the heart, or center of consciousness, can be compared to a cave. As we read Hemacandra’s description of withdrawing the mind and breath into the heart (which he compares to a lotus blossom), it is there, in the heart, that the higher Self is located.

⁴⁴ *Bhagavadgītā* 6.5-6 urges the *yogin* to “conquer” the mind so that it serves one as a friend; otherwise it will act as the *yogin*’s enemy.

Gaṇapati, the enigmatic theriomorphic, elephant-headed being, guides one to the higher Self (*paramātmān*), such that one easily redirects the senses to be engaged in relation to that higher Self.⁴⁵

5.6 OF MICE AND MINDS

Like all the major forms of divinity in Indic traditions, Gaṇapati has an animal as his carrier, his *vahana*. Gaṇapati's *vahana* is, ironically, a mouse, a *mūṣaka*—ironic because Gaṇapati's form, with the head of an elephant and a portly human body (sometimes portrayed with multiple arms), is understood to be massive in comparison to the tiny mouse. In any case, there are multiple meanings given to this odd relationship. To quote John Grimes at some length,

[One] meaning of the word *mūṣaka* is “thief.” Some interpret Gaṇeśa's [Gaṇapati's] mouse as representing the mind. The mind is like a thief. You must watch it constantly, not because you want anything from it, but because you don't want it to steal. Some individuals want to control their mind, but it is, by its very nature, uncontrollable. It is nothing but movement, fluctuations (*vṛttis*). It hides behind the shapes of illusion. But the mind is also one's friend, in that it may be used to dispel illusions. Ride the thief; don't let the thief ride (steal from) you. (Grimes 1995, p. 90)

To “ride the thief” is to engage the mind favorably for removing the layers of illusion that cover the essential, blissful self. The basic scaffolding (in our microcosmic dimension of experience) that sustains the “shapes of illusion” is our own physical body and our perceptions of other physical bodies, whether human or nonhuman. How we perceive our bodies in relation to nonhuman animal bodies has been a concern of this chapter, whereby the physical components of yoga practice may be regarded as means for changing these (mis)perceptions. Our twofold guiding question has been (I) whether yoga practices of the body—*āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, and

⁴⁵As an alternative to maligning Western philosophy (as “dualistic, violent, hierarchical, and, ultimately oppressive—and to seek and find everywhere its contrary in Eastern philosophy—as holistic, peaceful, egalitarian, and just”), Ken Burak (Swan 2012, p. 70) suggests that philosophy teachers who teach about yoga consider “that Western philosophy has been a very long and intensive exploration of the yogic practice of *pratyahara*, wherein the yogi indeed draws her attention away from her sensory, bodily experience and retreats into the interiority of her mind.” If so, the animal ethicist may wonder that Western philosophy has progressed so little over that period in applying sense withdrawal to relationality with animals.

pratyāhāra—can be aided by thoughtful reflection on and perception of animals and by reformed relations to animals, and (2) whether these yoga practices can aid our comprehension of and enactment of ethically reformed relations with animals. I suggest that this is a bidirectional process, affirmative in both ways. Thus, one can begin careful practice of the bodily disciplines of yoga, aided by reflective perception of animals in an attitude of acknowledging kinship with even the most physically different forms. These practices—positioning the body in certain postures favorable for focusing the mind; conscious, controlled breathing that serves to steady the mind; and intentionally redirecting the senses away from distractions to the locus of the “ridden” mind’s attention—can all be supported and enhanced by relating these with nonhuman animals’ forms; ways of engaging with the environment; and symbolic associations of certain animal characteristics in human terms. In turn, by virtue of becoming adept in these physical bodily oriented practices, the enhanced awareness of one’s own being in relation to the body affords the *yogin* support for developing the clarity of vision in the last three limbs of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*—vision that results in ethically appropriate relations with nonhuman animals.

According to the eight-limb yoga system made famous by Patañjali, three of the eight limbs are particularly concerned with aligning the physical body for the sake of steadying and freeing the mind. We should note: Our presupposition regarding yoga in relation to animal ethics is that a steadied and freed mind will enable us to properly comprehend the being of nonhuman animals, by which ethical being in relation to animals becomes possible. To this end of steadying and freeing the mind, the physical body with its various senses can be either a liability or an asset in yoga practice. The body is a liability insofar as it is constantly subject to discomfort and pain, giving rise to powerful emotions arising out of fear, causing resistance to what may be beneficial for one’s yogic progress due to failure to “work with” the body. It is equally a liability insofar as the body seeks pleasure, giving rise to other powerful emotions such as lust, impelling the pursuit of control over objects, concepts, and especially over other persons. Physical and mental pain and pleasure persistently demand the attention of, and cause distraction for, the mind, which leads to lamenting over misfortune or perceived shortcomings of the past, and hankering after fortune and imagined future felicity.

However, the same body can be an asset to yoga practice. To shift the orientation of the body from being a liability to being an asset is a process

of re-forming or re-fashioning the body, fundamentally reconceptualizing it or, indeed, *deconceptualizing* it. In this chapter, I have briefly sketched some ways that nonhuman animals, or idealizations of animals, may aid in serving this purpose in relation to *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, and *pratyāhāra* practices. But before discussing these specifics, we considered the *Bhagavadgītā*'s brief overview of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* practices and its description of a *yogin*'s perfection of these practices, in some ways anticipating the subject of the next chapter, which focuses on the final three limbs of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*, all of which serve to sharpen attention, a key requirement for positive yogic relationality with nonhuman animals.

Questions for Reflection

1. In general, how can physical yoga practices help to realize the non-physical reality of the *puruṣa*—as one's own identity and as that of other living beings? (Sect. 5.1)
2. Can you suggest how “downward-facing dog” *āsana* could help to appreciate dogs? (Sect. 5.3.1)
3. Some scientists suggest that whales may be more intelligent than human beings. What are the ethical implications if this is true? If it is not true? (Sect. 5.4)
4. What are the ethical implications of considering the earth as a whole as a breathing entity (as David Abram suggests)? (Sect. 5.4)
5. Why does Luce Irigaray write that the “objective correlates of my subjective desires... tear me to pieces”? How does the aim of the Buddha, as she understands it, resolve this problem? (Sect. 5.4)
6. Why might comparison of the senses with worker bees and the mind with a queen bee help to practice *pratyāhāra*? (Sect. 5.5)
7. How does the comparison of the mind with a mouse help to control it? (Sect. 5.6)

REFERENCES

- Abram, David. 2010. In the Depths of a Breathing Planet: Gaia and the Transformation of Experience. In *Gaia in Turmoil: Climate Change, Biodepletion, and Earth Ethics in an Age of Crisis*, ed. Eileen Crist and H. Bruce Rinker. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Acampora, Ralph R. 2006. *Corporal Compassion: Animal Ethics and Philosophy of Body*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.

- Anālayo, Bhikkhu. 2023. Gotama Buddha: His Quest and His Teachings. In *The Routledge Handbook of Indian Buddhist Philosophy*, ed. William Edelglas, P. Harter, and S. McClintock, 11–26. Routledge.
- Aruz, Jean. 2018. Reflections on Fantastic Beasts of the Harappan World: A View from the West. In *Walking with the Unicorn: Social Organization and Material Culture in Ancient South Asia—Jonathan Mark Kenoyer Felicitation Volume*, ed. Dennys Frenez, Gregg M. Jamison, et al. Oxford: Archaeopress.
- Barnes, Jonathan, ed. 1991. *The Complete Works of Aristotle: Sense and Sensibilia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Birch, Jason. 2018. The Proliferation of *Āsana*-s in Late-Medieval Yoga Texts. In *Yoga in Transformation*, ed. Karl Baier, Philipp A. Maas, and Karin Preisendanz, 103–179. Göttingen: Vienna University Press.
- Bryant, Edwin F. 2009. *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali: A New Edition, Translation, and Commentary*. New York: North Point Press.
- Bühnemann, Gudrun. 2021. *Eighty-four Āsanas in Yoga: A Survey of Traditions (with Illustrations)*. New Delhi: D. K. Printworld.
- Burke, Megan M. 2012. Becoming-Frog: *Yoga as Environmentalism*. In *Yoga Philosophy for Everyone: Bending Mind and Body*, ed. Liz Stillwaggon Swan, 178–186. Chichester UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Calarco, Matthew. 2015. *Thinking Through Animals: Identity, Difference, Indistinction*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Chapple, Christopher Key. 2008. *Yoga and the Luminous: Patañjali's Spiritual Path to Freedom*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Clifton, Wolf Gordon. 2023. Sustainability Policy and the Stage of Divine Play: Hindu Philosophy at the Nexus of Animal Welfare, Environment, and Sustainable Development. *Journal of Animal Ethics* 13 (2): 169–183.
- Donaldson, Brianne, and Ana Bajželj. 2021. *Insistent Life: Principles for Bioethics in the Jain Tradition*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.
- Frawley, David. 2016. *Shiva: The Lord of Yoga*. Delhi: New Age Books.
- Goswami, Hridayānanda dāsa et al., trans. and ed. 1988. *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam—Eleventh Canto*. Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.
- Grimes, John A. 1995. *Ganapati: Song of the Self*. Albany NY: State University of New York Press.
- Haigh, Martin. 2007. Sri Dattatreya's 24 Gurus: Learning from the World in Hindu Tradition. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education* 12:127–142.
- Hoening, Christina. 2023. Augustine of Hippo on Nonhuman Animals. *Journal of Animal Ethics* 13 (2): 122–134.
- Irigaray, Luce. 2002. *Between East and West: From Singularity to Community*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Jain, Andrea R. 2021. Neoliberal Yoga. In *Routledge Handbook of Yoga and Meditation Studies*, edited by Suzanne Newcombe and Karen O'Brien-Kop. London: Routledge, pp. 51–62.

- Jarow, E. H. Rick. 2004. Voyage by the Mind through a Sea of Stars: Hanumān's Shamanic Journey in the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki. *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 12 (2, Spring): 77–104.
- King, Sallie B. 1991. *Buddha Nature*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Maas, Philipp A. 2018. 'Sthirasukham Āsanam': Posture and Performance in Classical Yoga and Beyond. In *Yoga in Transformation*, ed. Karl Baier, Philipp A. Maas, and Karin Preisendanz, 49–100. Göttingen: Vienna University Press.
- Maderey, Ana Laura Funes. 2017. An Overview of Classical Yoga Philosophy as a Philosophy of Embodied Self-Awareness. In *The Routledge History of Indian Philosophy*, ed. Purushottama Bilimoria. London: Routledge.
- Mahony, William K. 1998. *The Artful Universe: An Introduction to the Vedic Religious Imagination*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Majithia, Roopen. 2024. *The Highest Good in Nicomachean Ethics and the Bhagavad Gītā: Knowledge, Happiness, and Freedom*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Mallinson, James. 2024. *The Dattātreyayogaśāstra*. Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondichéry.
- Mohan, A. G. 2013. *Yoga Yājñavalkya*. Svastha Yoga: 2nd edition.
- Monier-Williams, Sir Monier. 1995. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Olivelle, Patrick. 1998. *The Early Upaniṣads: Annotated Text and Translation*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Olivelle, Patrick. 2011. *Ascetics and Brahmins: Studies in Ideologies and Institutions*. London: Anthem Press.
- Powell, Seth. 2023. A Lamp on Śivayoga: The Union of Yoga, Ritual, and Devotion in the Śivayogapradīpikā. Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences.
- Prabhupāda, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami. 2017. *The Complete Teachings of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda*. Vedabase CD-ROM Version 2017.2 Sandy Ridge, NC: Bhaktivedanta Archives.
- Quarnström, Olle, trans. 2002. *The Yogaśāstra of Hemaṇḍa: A Twelfth Century Handbook on Śvetāmbara Jainism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Sargeant, Winthrop, trans. 2009. *The Bhagavad Gītā: Twenty-fifth-Anniversary Edition*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Sojková, Barbara. 2023. When Cows Sacrifice: The Meaning of Vedic *tūpara*. In *Science and Society in the Sanskrit World*, ed. Christopher T. Fleming et al. Leiden: Brill.
- Stanescu, James K. 2012. Animals are More Than Good to Think With, part 1. <http://www.criticalanimal.com/2012/07/animals-are-more-than-good-to-think.html> (Accessed October 8, 2024)

- Sutton, Nicholas. 2019. *The Yoga Sutras: A New Translation and Study Guide*. San Rafael, CA: Mandala Publishing.
- Swan, Liz Stillwaggon. 2012. *Yoga Philosophy for Everyone: Bending Mind and Body*. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Vasu, Rai Bahadur Sisu Chandra, trans. 1979 [1914–1915]. *Gheranda Samhita*. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications.
- Zak, Alison. 2023. *Wild Asana: Animals, Yoga, and Connecting Our Practice to the Natural World*. Berkeley CA: North Atlantic Books.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Minding Animals—The Meditational Turn

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Any conscious engagement with nonhuman beings by human beings involves focused attention, or some degree of directed awareness, with what is commonly called the “mind.” Classical Yoga explicitly aims to address what is regarded as an endemic problem with what is referred to as *citta* (broadly: mind), namely, its persistent unsteadiness, countering its ability to hold sustained attention on any valued matter. We can ask: What benefit could there be for one who is concerned to be in ethical relations with other-than-human beings if the unsteadiness of that person’s mind (whatever mind is—for us to examine) could be curbed, freed from its tendency to be inconstant and inconsiderate—*cañcalam* (shaking, flickering, unsteady, inconsiderate—Monier-Williams 1995, p. 382), as Arjuna describes the mind (*Gītā* 6.34)? What if one could be like the arrow smith whom the divine *yogin* Dattātreyā admires for being so absorbed (*avaruddha-cittah, gatātmā*) in making an arrow perfectly straight—perfectly true—that he fails to even notice when the king and his retinue passes directly by him in grand procession (*BhP* 11.9.13)? Could the mind then serve to open one to a deeper comprehension of the reality of other, nonhuman beings while, at the same time, opening one to deeper self-comprehension? And if so, could such comprehension transform human engagement with nonhuman beings in ways that are liberating for both human and nonhuman beings? To put this question in somewhat

figurative terms, as already hinted in the previous chapter: Can liberative animal ethics be served and advanced by yoga practices of concentration, meditation, and absorption such that one's mind acts as a *true friend*, enabling one to think, speak and act consequentially as a true friend of all beings?

Of course, the premise of this book is a positive response to these questions, and the aim in this chapter will be to explore how the threefold mental discipline—*dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi*—may serve this purpose. This will bring us to some further explanations found in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* (which includes the *Yoga Sūtra* of Patañjali and the earliest commentary said to be composed by a certain Vyāsa, possibly an auto-commentary by the compiler of the *Yoga Sūtra*). We will also consider Jain and Buddhist resources, since they show concern with the same issues that are found in the brahmanical tradition (as we noted earlier) in some respects possibly predating the latter.

My argument will be essentially cumulative and theoretical—not based on empirical evidence, desirable as this might be.¹ This is to say that it will be built up as a varied assemblage of possibilities for deepening our engagement as human beings with the nonhuman world, but invariably doing so from a position of “practice and detachment” (*YS* I.12), Patañjali's core formula for success in yoga. After revisiting classical Yoga metaphysics (including references to the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* and the *Mahābhārata*), we will look at Patañjali's overview of mental disciplines for honing the *citta* (the aggregate of *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi*—concentration, meditation, and absorption). A brief look at Jain meditational ideals is our next focus, directing the practitioner to elevated and detached consciousness. Proceeding to what is usually regarded as a Buddhist practice of the “divine abidings” (*brahmavihāra*, also found more widely in Indic traditions, including the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*), we see how this meditational fourfold practice of taking “creative control of [one's] inner world” (Frazier 2021) intrinsically lends itself to radical inclusivity of the more-than-human

¹One promising area of research is animal communication—human communication with nonhuman animals—as practiced by persons like Anna Breytenbach. Breytenbach invites people to “connect” with animals through “intuition,” a quite dramatic instance of which was her successful pacification of a leopard, as documented in the film “The Animal Communicator.” Clearly, such communication requires highly focused attention. See Breytenbach (2012).

world. “Radical inclusivity” calls for nuanced consideration, which we will attempt here by continuing (as briefly introduced in the previous chapter) to relate our findings about yogic meditation to Matthew Calarco’s three-fold typology of approaches to animal ethics, namely, *identity*, *difference*, and *indistinction*.

6.2 YOGIC ATTENTION FOR ANIMALS

Before looking at aspects of Patañjali’s approach to befriending the mind (his declared purpose of yoga being removal of the mind’s fluctuations), we may recall (from Chap. 3, Sect. 3.6) classical Yoga’s association with Sāṃkhya metaphysics, a tradition of thought that some scholars regard as India’s earliest philosophical system. According to Sāṃkhya’s dualistic ontology, the point of enumerating (*sāṃkhya*) the constituents of the phenomenal world (*prakṛti*) is to extricate from it the conscious self (*puruṣa*) and thus to free the self from bondage (or, more precisely, from its *apparent* bondage) in *prakṛti*. Important to remember is that while a disciplined mind (*manas*) is crucial to this process of extrication, the mind is understood to be itself one of the constituents of *prakṛti*. Hence, the mind-body dualism of Western thought is not relevant as a consideration in classical Yoga philosophy; indeed, Sāṃkhya sometimes identifies the mind with the five senses as a sixth sense. Still, as described in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (3.3–6; c. third century BCE), the mind is understood to be in a superior position in relation to the senses, and therefore it can and should control the “horses” which are the five senses to bring the self to its intended destination of liberation:

- (3) Know the self [*ātman*] as the rider in a chariot,
and the body [*śarīra*], as simply the chariot.
Know the intellect [*buddhi*] as the charioteer,
and the mind [*manas*], as simply the reins.
- (4) The senses [*indriya*], they say, are the horses,
and sense objects [*viśaya*] are the paths around them;
He who is linked to the body [*ātman*], senses, and mind,
the wise proclaim as the one who enjoys [*bhoktā*].
- (5) When a man lacks understanding,
and his mind is never controlled;
His senses do not obey him,

as bad horses, a charioteer.

(6) But when a man has understanding,
and his mind is ever controlled [*yukta*];

His senses do obey him,

as bad horses, a charioteer. (Olivelle 1998, p. 389, quoted in Wernicke-Olesen 2021)

In this well-known graphic extended metaphor, the source domain of chariot, horses, reins, charioteer and the “one who enjoys” serves to express the relationships in the target domain between the body, senses, mind, intellect, and the self within the body.² This is a completely different—more hopeful—image of the mind’s functioning than the mind-as-mouse image we encountered at the end of the previous chapter. Within this martial-inflected analogy, the horses (the senses) are meant to be under the control of the charioteer (the intellect) by his control of the reins (the mind). Significantly, the word *ātman* is here translated both as *self* and as *body*, whereby it is understood that the one who identifies with the body, mind, and senses, is referred to (or considers oneself) as the “one who enjoys.” In that condition, persons whose senses are not restrained (*yukta*—yoked, engaged in yoga) by the intellect through the disciplined mind will necessarily be reborn into the mortal world, possibly in a nonhuman form, following the present life, according to the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (3.7). In contrast,

When senses are firmly reined in,

that is Yoga, so people think.

From distractions a man is then free,

for Yoga is the coming-into-being,

as well as the ceasing-to-be. (*KU* 6.11; Olivelle 1998, p. 401, quoted in Wernicke-Olesen 2021)

The “firmly reined in” horse-like senses are, in the metaphor, controlled by the reins-like mind which, in turn, is controlled by the charioteer-like intellect. Being free from distractions, one will not be forced to undergo

²These are notions found in cognitive linguistics: “The concept that lends its categories is called ‘the source domain’ while the concept that is conceived in terms of these categories is called ‘the target domain’” (Jurewicz 2018, pp. 22–23).

rebirth because one's attention will be entirely on moving toward one's final destination beyond the temporal world.³

We have already discussed the development of yoga ideas in the *Mahābhārata* (Chap. 3), but here we can note this text's emphasis on meditation as the "most powerful" means of practicing yoga. In the *Mahābhārata's Mokṣadharmā Parva*, sage Vasiṣṭha specifies two types of meditation, namely, mental focus (*ekāgratā*—literally "intentness in the pursuit of one object") and breath control (*prāṇāyāma*) (*MBh* 12.294.7cd-8ab; Wernicke-Olesen 2021, p. 111). Recalling our discussions on *prāṇāyāma* and the subsequent practice of sense withdrawal (*pratyāhāra*) in Chap. 5, Sects. 5.4 and 5.5, we can appreciate how closely related they both are with specifically meditational practices. In classical Yoga, the understanding is that once the mind has successfully subdued (or, better, *redirected*) the senses in *pratyāhāra* (the queen bee leading the worker bees, as noted previously), the mind can turn its attention inward. Initial steps toward singular focus (*dhāraṇā*) lead to full meditation characterized by fully singular focus (*dhyaṇa*) culminating in absorption (*samādhi*)—"a transformative inner experience par excellence." According to the *Yoga Sūtra*, *samādhi* can result in the attainment of yogic special powers (*siddhis*) or in reaching a state of "isolation" (*kaivalya*).⁴

³Note that in this metaphor, it is the senses (as horses) that do the work of "pulling" the self to its destination. In the practice of *pratyāhāra* (discussed in Chap. 5, Sect. 5.5), the senses are being re-directed from sense objects, yet they remain active. This may be better understood in the practice of *bhakti-yoga*, the subject of Chap. 7.

⁴The *Vibhūti-pāda*, the third of the *Yoga Sūtra's* four chapters, describes several specific *siddhis*, said to be the result of meditations on specific objects or principles (*saṁyama*), of which we may note a few relevant ones here. III.17—by meditating on the distinction between word, meaning, and idea, "knowledge of the speech of all creatures arises"; III.18—"By bringing [previous] *saṁskāras* (mental impressions) into direct perception comes the knowledge of previous births"; III.23—"By [*saṁyama*] on friendliness and such things [see *YS* I.33, discussed below], strengths are acquired"; III.24—"By practicing *saṁyama* on strengths, [the *yogin*] attains the strength of an elephant, etc." III.31—"By [*saṁyama*] on the subtle tortoise channel (*kurma-nāḍī*), steadiness is attained"; III.35—"Worldly experience consists of the notion that there is no distinction between the *puruṣa* self and pure intelligence, although these are completely distinct. Worldly experience exists for another [i.e., for *puruṣa*]. [By *saṁyama*] on that which exists for itself (*svārtha*) [i.e., on *puruṣa*], comes knowledge of *puruṣa*"; III.36—"From this [*saṁyama* on *puruṣa*], intuition (*prātibha*) as well as higher hearing, touch, vision, taste, and smell are born." III.37, however, warns the *yogin*, "These powers are accomplishments for the mind that is outgoing but obstacles to *samādhi*" (Bryant 2009).

Before proceeding with further discussion of yogic meditational practice, we should pause to consider classical Yoga's soteriology. The final aim in classical Yoga (and classical Sāṃkhya) is declared to be some sort of isolation of the self from *prakṛti*—the phenomenal world, so an important question looms that deserves attention. What, in light of this final aim, can be said about yoga as a culture of ethical engagement of humans with nonhuman animals? If isolation is indeed the final goal of Yoga, despite the ethical concerns embodied explicitly in the first and second of the eight limbs of Yoga—*yama* and *niyama*—surely this enterprise culminates in radical *dis*-engagement that one might conjecture to be an attitude of thorough indifference to any beings—whether human, nonhuman, or otherwise. If isolation (*kaivalya*) constitutes the full separation and liberation of the self (*puruṣa*) from the fetters of phenomenal existence (*prakṛti*), and if we take *kaivalya* in a literal sense (as some, perhaps most, scholars argue that we must), the term yoga could be regarded as misleading, since the term indicates *joining* or *yoking* rather than disconnecting and separating (*viyoga*), which, indeed, classical commentators on the *Yoga Sūtra* explicitly assert to be the aim. Alternatively, we may consider differing views of yoga texts composed later than the *Yoga Sūtra*, wherein yoga may be interpreted as, for example, “the union of the *jīvātman* [individual self] with the *paramātman*” (Whicher 1998, p. 27; *Yoga-Yajñavalkya-Samhitā*)—hence very much a matter of joining or yoking. Or could it be that these are not entirely contradictory views? As Ian Whicher notes, the early *Yoga Sūtra* commentator Vyāsa defines *samādhi* as “placing, putting together.” Further,

....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) resulting in a highly developed, transformed, and participatory human nature and identity, an integrated and embodied state of liberated selfhood (*jīvanmukti*). (Whicher 2003, p. 51)

From a careful analysis of Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra* (and reference to Vyāsa's commentary), in particular Patañjali's statements on the mind, Whicher concludes,

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 emo-

tional, 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. (Ibid., p. 62)

Such a this-worldly interpretation of classical Yoga is controversial, insofar as it pertains to *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* and the *Sāṅkhya Kārikā* of Īśvarakṛṣṇa, the *locus classicus* of Sāṅkhya philosophy.⁵ However, our study is not limited to the *PYŚ*, nor are we bound to Īśvarakṛṣṇa's Sāṅkhya presentation, although both texts are important foundations for providing a yogic perspective on animal ethics. As in earlier chapters, we will continue to refer to other texts and other traditions with significantly different metaphysical perspectives, all within the broader ambit of self-transformative practices within the *yoga* rubric. That said, I am inclined to agree with Whicher that Pātañjala Yoga embraces “moral amplitude for empathic identification with the world,” since otherwise the ethical principles of *yama* and *niyama* would seem to be reduced and confined to instrumental functions to serve the *yogin's* selfish aim of liberation.

This issue took the form of ascetic ethics versus ritual ethics in Chap. 3, Sect. 3.4. Somewhat differently inflected, we will return to this matter of worldly engagement versus disengagement in Chap. 8, Sect. 8.4, where we will see that *bhakti-yoga* addresses and seeks to resolve this opposition. For the present, let us proceed to consider classical Yoga's understanding of the mind and its dynamics. For this, we move back from chapter 2 of the *Yoga Sūtra* (*Sādhana-pāda*, in which *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* is described) to chapter 1, *Samādhi-pāda*, which sets out the basic problem of the mind's constant fluctuation and the process of curbing its fluctuation, leading to concentration, meditation, and absorption. My simple proposal is that ethical relationality with animals can best be cultivated with a clear,

⁵ See Pflueger (2003) for a critique of a “this-worldly” interpretation of the *Yoga Sūtras*, specifically naming Whicher. Pflueger argues, strikingly, that classical Yoga's and Sāṅkhya's radical dualism ultimately collapses into a sort of nondualism and that the fully liberated self could not live in this world. Hence, what is interesting and valuable in classical Yoga is the process more than the goal (a position also expressed by a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava expositor of *bhakti-yoga*, Viśvanātha Cakravartī [18th c.]). Noteworthy also is a comment by the respected teacher of classical Yoga, Hariharānanda Āraṇya (1869–1947), to the effect that even after complete arresting of the mind in *samādhi*, “the Yogin who wants to do good to humanity with a *Nirmāṇa-chitta* (constructed mind) arrests the mind for a specified time, and his mind rises after that period as a constructed mind” (Āraṇya 2000, p. 111; *YS* I.51 commentary).

attentive mind; for the mind to become clear, yoga traditions offer specific practices.

Patañjali initially identifies the mind (*citta*) in negative terms, as a function of awareness that is constantly subject to movement (*vr̥tti*), a condition that can be overcome by practice and dispassion (YS I.12–16).⁶ The constantly moving *citta* (an umbrella term referring to *buddhi*—reasoning, *ahaṃkāra*—“I-maker,” and *manas*—mind, all constituents of *prakṛti*) is subject to distractions (*vikṣepa*), which he lists as “disease, idleness, doubt, carelessness, sloth, lack of detachment, misapprehension, failure to attain a base for concentration, and instability” (YS I.30; Bryant 2009, p. 118). These distractions are overcome by holding attention on a single object, or a single truth (*tattva*), or—crucially for this study—by cultivation of four attitudes in relation to other beings (more on this below). From these practices one can achieve serenity of mind (*citta-prasādanam*, YS I.33). Patañjali then lists several further possible practices for achieving this serenity of mind, including breath regulation and contemplation on a particular pure-minded *yogin*.⁷

Patañjali describes the desired state of awareness attained by these practices as *samāpatti*—literally, the state of attainment of a particular place or condition⁸ (Sutton 2019, p. 56):

Samāpatti, complete absorption of the mind when it is free from its *vr̥ttis*, occurs when the mind becomes just like a transparent jewel, taking the form of whatever object is placed before it, whether the object be the knower, the instrument of knowledge, or the object of knowledge. (YS I.41; Bryant 2009, p. 142)

⁶For a detailed explanation of Patañjali’s understanding of *citta*, with comparison to classical Sāṃkhya understanding of the mind, see Whicher (2003, ch. 3), “The Mind (*Citta*): Its Nature, Structure, and Functioning.”

⁷Additional methods are listed: YS I.34—by breath control; YS I.35—focus on a particular sense object; YS I.36—when the mind is “pain free and luminous”; YS I.37—having attention on a person who is free from desire; YS I.38—from the knowledge attained from dreams and sleep; YS I.39—meditation on anything of one’s inclination; and YS I.40, “The *yogī*’s mastery extends from the smallest particle of matter to the ultimate totality of matter.”

⁸Whicher (1998, p. 216) lists thirteen different translations of this term from different sources, settling finally on “unification,” which, he further explains, “denotes the proficiency, accomplishment, and transmutation of the mind (*citta*) that takes place in *samādhi*. More specifically, *samāpatti* is the insight (*prajñā*) thus gained as derived from *samprajñata* [*-samādhi*] (YS I.17) signifying that the mind ‘breaks into’ and coincides with the sphere of the ‘object’ grasped, unifies or fuses with it, and reveals its innermost nature or ‘essence’.”

The comparison of this state of mind with a transparent jewel suggests, by the notion of clarity, the mind's capacity—once this *samāpatti* state has been developed—for profound receptivity to and comprehension of the environment (all that the mind directs attention to), a capacity referred to epistemologically as *yogi-pratyakṣa*—direct perception that surpasses that of ordinary perception due to the mind's fluctuations having subsided.⁹ Ian Whicher explains (I quote at some length):

In the process of *nirodha* [subsiding of the fluctuations of *citta*, YS I.2] there takes place an interiorization of attention, a necessary, inward movement or 'flow' of consciousness in the mind, allowing for a retracing of consciousness and identity from a distorted, unsteady state of dispersion and emergence (*vyutthana*) to a finer, concentrated state whereby experience, no longer frustrated due to epistemic distortion, is allowed to complete itself through a full merging or unification with the object of experience. This process involves as well a retrieval in consciousness of the formerly obscured and misappropriated source principles or subjective evolutes (e.g., *manas*, *ahaṃkāra*, *buddhi*) through which experience takes place. Only such a merging or 'oneness' with the object will enable the yogin to transcend the mechanism of ignorance through which misidentification and dissatisfaction are perpetuated. At each stage in *samādhi* consciousness is focused so as to dispel the ignorance coloring the mind's perception. The yogin can then 'see' and 'know' the object as it actually is, in itself. (Whicher 1998, p. 222)

The technicalities of just how the mind becomes clear to become fully receptive to objects of attention need not detain us. The key point is that the meditational practices of yoga as described in the *Yoga Sūtra* hold forth a striking possibility that can be called “deep perception” whereby the *yogin's* consciousness becomes in some sense pervaded by what is perceived. Such pervasion is transformative, in which experience is “allowed to complete itself” and whatever is perceived (such as a particular nonhuman animal—Yoga commentaries typically suggest a cow as object of perception—or one's surrounding environment) is seen and known “as it actually is, in itself.”¹⁰

⁹ See Maderey (2018, ch. 26) for an insightful discussion of yogic perception. She concludes, “In the multilayered process of yogic perception, the highest attainment that results from it is not only the absolute freedom of the self, but also the liberation from a reduced and limited conception of one's own embodiment (body-mind unit).”

¹⁰ Whicher (1998, p. 213) reviews several challenges to this notion, concluding that the PYS insists that it *is* possible to have such perception, that it is not merely a mental construct.

We noted that one of the ways that the *yogin* can overcome distractions such that the *ṛttis* of the mind can subside is to cultivate four attitudes toward other living beings.

By cultivating an attitude of friendship toward those who are happy, compassion toward those in distress, joy toward those who are virtuous, and equanimity toward those who are nonvirtuous, lucidity arises in the mind. (YS I.33; Bryant 2009, p. 128)

Just what such cultivation might entail is not elaborated in the *Yoga Sūtra*, possibly because the practice was already widely known among various practitioners and traditions, as we will see regarding Jainism and Buddhism. However, the YS commentator Vācaspati Miśra tells of specific results of such cultivation.¹¹ As Bryant paraphrases,

By being a well-wisher toward those who are happy, as well as those who are virtuous, the contamination of envy is removed. By compassion toward those who are miserable, that is, by wishing to remove someone's miseries as if they were one's own, the contamination of the desire to inflict harm on others is removed. By equanimity toward the impious, the contamination of intolerance is removed.

What we will be interested to see is how these cultivations might apply in terms of regard for animals.¹² What is noteworthy initially is that these cultivations bring the *yogin* to be in the modality of *sattva-guṇa*, characterized by lucidity. As we discussed briefly in Chap. 3, in the Sāṃkhya-related cosmology highlighted in the *PTŚ*, *prakṛti* unfolds its multiplicity of features in modalities of *sattva-guṇa* (luminosity), *rajo-guṇa* (passion), and *tamo-guṇa* (inertia and ignorance). Of these, *sattva-guṇa*, being natural to the mind, when allowed to prevail, enables the mind to spontaneously focus on higher reality. We will find hints toward specifics about cultivating these attitudes in Buddhist writings, suggesting their

¹¹ YS III.23 points to further results from perfecting such cultivation, namely, the acquisition of “strengths” which, when the strengths are focused on in turn (*saṃyama*), results in obtaining “the strength of elephants, etc.” (YS III.24).

¹² Jonathan Dickstein (2017) points out that YS I.33 is a “not-so-strong” argument for vegetarianism in the *Yoga Sūtra*. He shows that, in contrast, there is a very strong case for the YS (the *PTŚ*) insisting on vegetarianism in its presentation and discussion of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*.

application in elevating attitudes toward animals. But first, we do well to look briefly at the Jain meditational tradition, as a forerunner to Buddhist meditational practices.

6.3 COMPASSION, MEDITATION, AND *MOKṢA* IN JAIN TRADITION

As noted in Chap. 4, Sect. 4.2.1, Jain tradition, which reaches back in traceable history possibly to the time of Parshvanatha (c. 700 BCE), considered the twenty-third of twenty-four Tīrthaṅkaras (literally “ford-makers”), is characterized by the centrality of *ahiṃsā* as the key principle of ethical observance. To minimize and ultimately eliminate all harm to any living creatures became foundational to Jain ascetic life, aiming to systematically reduce and finally eliminate karma as that which binds one to temporal bodily existence (*saṃsāra*), which is filled with anxiety and suffering. Thus, Jain practitioners hold essentially the same soteriological aim of *mokṣa*, liberation, as practitioners of classical Yoga. To attain such perfection, various yoga-related practices developed in Jain culture, later to be explicitly referred to as yoga. Included among the practices are forms of meditation. Here we want to see how the *ahiṃsā* ideal is expressed in, or related to, Jain meditation practices. In light of the apparent anti-relationality of *kaivalya* (as in Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtra*, but in Jain texts said to result in “omniscience”), to which Jain meditators strive, we may see an interesting Jain perspective on the “identity approach” versus the “difference approach” versus the “indistinction approach” to human-nonhuman relations, as described by Matthew Calarco (2015).

Early Jain tradition is striking for its articulation of extreme ascetic practices, which largely revolve around forbearance and tolerance of other living beings’ impositions on one’s own body. In what may be the earliest (c. fifth century BCE) surviving detailed text describing Jain ascetic practice for liberation, the author advises the candidate to begin by reducing food intake, then to find a secluded place, where “he should reject body, activity, and movement,” and if he becomes ill “in the presence of food,” he “should not long for life, nor strive after death; he should not be attached to either, life or death.” With this attitude,

Impartial, intent on the destruction of activity (*nijjarā*) he should preserve his concentration (*samāhim*). Renouncing internally as well as externally he strives after a pure heart.

And further,

He [the monk] should not hurt nor rub away living creatures which creep on the ground, or fly high or low, and eat his flesh and blood. Creatures injure his body, yet he should not walk from his place. Being pained by all kinds of outside influences, he should bear [it all], going to the other shore of his span of life, [free] from all kinds of knots. This is well-accepted by the self-controlled and understanding person. (*Āyāraṃga* 233, 237–239; Bronkhorst 2000, p. 8)

To say the least, these severe guidelines make extreme demands on a practitioner to become completely aloof from the pains of the body. Living creatures are to be tolerated, even allowing the practitioner's body to supply their nourishment!¹³

As extreme as this regimen is, the ideal of refraining from action (to shed accumulated karma) that these instructions invoke suggests an anticipation of the “indistinction approach” to human-nonhuman animal relations. In such a state of ascetic resolve, the spirit of “live and let live” implies more a logic of “let live, even if it means let me die.” Ironically, it is such embracing of total “indistinction” that the Jain tradition regards as the way to becoming a perfected being—referred to as a *jina*, literally, a “conqueror.”¹⁴

Later Jain classificatory texts give lists and taxonomies of what they refer to broadly as *jhāṇa* (Sanskrit *dhyāna*). In these contexts, “meditation” includes a range of mental activity, identified in four categories, all referred to as *dhyāna*. The first two of these, “afflicted” and “wrathful,” account for all karmically binding mental activity, while the third and fourth—“pious” (*dharmya-dhyāna*) and “pure” (*śuddha-dhyāna*) are purifying and liberating practices. But whereas “pure” meditation is regarded as being not possible to practice in the present troubled age, “pious” meditation is encouraged. In these texts’ propensity for fourfold classification, *dharmya-dhyāna* practice has four “manifestations,” four “characteristics,” four “supports,” and four “reflections.” For us to note

¹³ Such account may derive from descriptions of the Tīrthāṅkara Mahavira’s arduous asceticism (see Donaldson and Bajželj 2021, p. 48).

¹⁴ This attitude becomes idealized and celebrated ritually in the giant stone image of Bahubali, in Karnataka. Bahubali is remembered as a brother of Bharata (discussed in the next section) who renounced his claim to royal power and retired to the forest where, standing still as foliage grew around him, he became perfected in his meditation.

in particular are the four types of reflections: reflection on being alone, reflection on transitoriness, reflection on there being no refuge, and reflection on birth and rebirth of living beings (Bronkhorst 2016, pp. 2–3). Each of these reflections (*anupreksā*) could be called “ponderings” on fundamental Jain metaphysics, intended both to deeply imbibe the principles to strengthen the resolve for ascetic practices and to sharpen attention on the practices’ aim of liberation. Further, they could be easily applied to other yogic traditions, all of which emphasize the contingency of temporal life.

Regarding human-nonhuman animal relationality, the last of these, “reflection on being alone” aims to sharpen the practitioner’s sense of difference and separateness from all other beings, suggesting resonance with the “difference approach” to human-nonhuman relationality. In this case, difference is understood to be absolute, in the ultimate sense that all individual beings, as nontemporal *jīvas*,¹⁵ have their unique being and unique journeys through the course of eternity. In concert with this is “reflection on transitoriness,” which holds one’s attention on the nature of any given lifetime as one of being in transit; hence one is in no position to make any territorial claims in this world—a reflection that, in turn, complements “reflection on there being no refuge.” Thus, not only is there fundamental difference among all beings, but there is also difference in how each being uniquely transits from one life to the next. Finally, “reflection on birth and rebirth of living beings” could be said to support both the “identity approach” and the “indistinction approach.” This reflection directs one to identify oneself as no exception to the rule: *all* living beings, including oneself, are subject to birth, death, and rebirth, and this is a—or rather *the*—problem of all living beings, not just of human beings. *Identifying* with other, nonhuman beings in terms of common subjection to death, rebirth, and sufferings in the course of life leads one to a humbling recognition of *indistinction*.

All four reflections serve the practitioner’s impetus toward detachment and renunciation which, we recall from Chap. 5, Sect. 5.3.1, is seen in Patañjali *Yoga Sūtra* (I.12) as a key component of stilling the mind. But all these reflections can also be regarded as conjoined to a sense of compassion for all beings, which, in turn, is regarded in Jain tradition as a

¹⁵ In Jain texts, as well as in Vedānta discourse, the term *jīva* refers to the atemporal, individual living being, sometimes differentiated from the term *ātman* to indicate the *ātman* specifically ensconced in the temporal world.

powerful impetus for renunciation leading to final liberation. The well-known story of the handsome young prince Nemi dramatically illustrates this connection. Summarizing one version of this account,

En route to his wedding, to be united with princess Rājīmatī, Nemi hears the pitiful cries of many animals. Inquiring from his charioteer, he learns that these are the animals to be slaughtered and cooked for his wedding feast. Nemi orders his chariot driver to bring him to where the animals are, and there he is shocked to hear and see the animals' desperation. "Protect! Protect!' they said to Nemi, each in his own language." The prince immediately orders for all the animals to be released before turning back to his home, having resolved not only not to marry, but to renounce the world entirely. Questioned by his friends as he begins to turn away from the wedding destination, he replies, "Just as these animals were bound by bonds, so we are bound by bonds of karma. Just as there was release from bondage for them, so I shall take initiation to make my own release from the bondage of karma—the sole source of happiness." (De Clercq 2013, p. 154, quoting *Trīṣaṣṭaśalākāpuruṣacarita* 8.9.171–184)

Prince Nemi withdraws to a secluded place on Mount Girnar (in Gujarat), reduces his eating to once every three days, meditates for fifty-five days, attains the perfection of omniscience and *mokṣa*, over a period of seven-hundred years preaches *ahiṃsā* and detachment, gathers some 62,000 monks and nuns as his students, and becomes known as the twenty-second of the twenty-four Jain Tīrthaṅkaras—Neminātha—said to have lived some 83,000 years ago.

Later (much later!—eighth century CE), in his *Yogadrṣṭisamuccaya* (185; Collection of Views on Yoga), the Jain author Haribhadra attempts to describe the state of one who reaches the perfected state of *mokṣa*. In one stanza describing *para-yoga* (the highest yoga), he writes,

With faults eliminated, omniscient,
endowed with the fruits of all that can be accomplished,
with things to be done now only for the sake of others,
such a one attains the end of Yoga. (Chapple 2003, p. 142)

"With things to be done now only for the sake of others" could be said to encapsulate the Jain ethics of care that is inclusive of all beings by virtue of "omniscience," suggesting awareness of the conditions of all beings

ensconced in the cycle of death and rebirth. But that such care ethics is rooted in compassion may seem antithetical to the ideal of aloofness identified with Jain mendicant practice, much the same issue raised before about reaching *kaivalya* in classical Yoga. “If the ultimate goal is to avoid attachment and escape from the world of suffering, does that mean that orthodox mendicant practice is incompatible with a thoroughgoing sense of—and acting from—compassion?” According to Padmanabh Jaini (quoted by Donaldson and Bajželj 2021, p. 57), the Jain texts distinguish between ordinary compassion tinged with pity or attachment to its object, and “*anukampā* [compassion] [which is] free of such negative aspects; it develops purely from wisdom, from seeing the substance (*dravya*) that underlies visible modes [*pariyāya*], and it fills the individual with an unselfish desire to help other souls towards *mokṣa* [liberation].”¹⁶

To “help other souls towards *mokṣa*” is here identified as an “unselfish desire” that is such by virtue of having attained the “end of Yoga,” as Haribhadra has written. From this perspective, we might regard such helping as a “drawing towards” final freedom, from one who has already achieved that state. Complementary to this, Jain traditions also call for what we could speak of as meditational practices of “pushing towards” final freedom, by and for those who are advancing toward perfection. Animals could be included in such practices, meditatively urging them to be accelerated toward liberation by obtaining a human birth in the next life, in which full dedication to liberative meditation is possible.

In addition to practices of compassion (*anukampā* which, as we saw, is free from negative pity or attachment to its object), there are other contemplations (*bhāvanā*) that support and strengthen the Jain practitioner’s vows. The *Tattvārtha-sūtra* (c. second to fifth century CE) explains: “Friendliness (*maitrī*) toward all living beings (*sattva*), delight (*pramoda*) with those whose qualities are superior (*guṇa-adhika*), compassion (*kāruṇya*, another term for *anukampā*) for the afflicted (*klīṣyamāna*), and equanimity (*mādhyaṣṭha*) toward the ill-behaved (*avinaya*) [should be contemplated]” (Donaldson and Bajželj 2021, p. 58). Readers may recognize in these four attitudes a fourfold meditational practice often

¹⁶ Donaldson and Bajželj (ibid., p. 59) further note, “Even if compassion is an attachment that must be ultimately overcome, as most scholars and texts seem to suggest, its experience can be a catalyst for advancement up to that point, and perhaps nurture qualities of Jinahood at an early stage.”

associated with Buddhism. This is one of many aspects of cross-fertilization among yoga-related traditions in South Asia, one that calls for us now to consider it within the context of Buddhist practice, especially regarding nonhuman animals.

6.4 THE FOUR DIVINE ABIDINGS (*BRAHMAVIHĀRA*)

We have already seen that in the *Yoga Sūtra* chapter I (*Samādhi-pāda*), after describing different types of absorption (*samādhi*), Patañjali briefly lists a few techniques for fixing the mind and thereby eliminate mental distractions. Initially, one is advised to practice fixing attention on a single object, which traditional commentators specify to be *Īśvara*’s sound designation, *om*. More specifically, and to deepen the mind’s lucidity (*citta-prasādanam*), one should cultivate the four attitudes previously mentioned. The four attitudes echo the well-known Buddhist meditational four-part practice of *brahmavihāra*, sometimes translated as the four “divine abidings.”¹⁷ As in the *Yoga Sūtra* reference to these attitudes (*YS* I.33), the Buddhist practice is directed to four meditation subjects. However, in the Buddhist texts we find additionally the notion of extension or expansion of each attitude. Thus, one should cultivate the development or unfolding of *unlimited* goodwill (Pali—*mettā*; Sanskrit—*maitra*),¹⁸ *unlimited* compassion (*karuṇā*), *unlimited* empathetic joy (*muditā*) and *unlimited* equanimity (Pali—*upekkhā*; Sanskrit—*upekṣā*). Clearly these four attitudes are primarily understood to be in relation to beings apart from the meditator, and it is normal for everyone to experience these felicitous attitudes to a limited degree spontaneously in relation to specific others, without special meditational endeavor. That such is the case points to the aim of *brahmavihāra* meditation, namely, to *expand* these already existing attitudes to include all beings, applicable in all situations—unlimitedly.

¹⁷ *Visudhimagga* explains (106; Ñāṇamoli 2011, p. 314): “The divineness of the abiding (*brahmavihāratā*) should be understood here in the sense of best and in the sense of immaculate. For these abidings are the best in being the right attitude towards beings. And just as Brahmā gods abide with immaculate minds, so the meditators who associate themselves with these abidings abide on an equal footing with Brahmā gods. So they are called divine abidings in the sense of best and in the sense of immaculate.” For a more extensive explanation of the *brahmavihāras* in Buddhist practice, see Garfield (2022, pp. 131–151), “The *Brahmavihāras* and the Achievement of Nonegocentricity.”

¹⁸ “Goodwill”: here I follow Thānissaro Bhikkhu’s translation, which he defends over against the popular “loving kindness” expression.

Regarding the first of the four subjects, goodwill (regarded as foundational to the remaining three), a Theravāda Buddhist Pali canonical text advises what Thānissaro Bhikkhu identifies as a skillful “verbal fabrication” (what nowadays might be called a “positive affirmation”) modeling the inclusiveness that goodwill meditation pursues:

Happy, at rest, may all beings be happy at heart. Whatever beings there may be—weak or strong, without exception, long, large, middling, short, subtle, blatant, seen & unseen, near & far, born & seeking birth: May all beings be happy at heart. Let no one deceive another or despise anyone anywhere, or through anger or irritation wish for another to suffer.

Possibly anticipating present-day ethics of care, the text continues,

As a mother would risk her life to protect a child, her only child, even so should one cultivate a limitless heart with regard to all beings. With goodwill for the entire cosmos, cultivate a limitless heart: above, below, & all around, unobstructed, without hostility or hate. Whether standing, walking, sitting, or lying down, as long as one is alert, one should be determined on this mindfulness. This is called the Brahmā abiding here & now. (*Khuddakapāṭha* 9; Bhikkhu 2014, p. 32)

Harking back to *ahimsā* as the foundational principle of Patañjali’s fivefold restraints (*yama*), we may think of this goodwill meditation practice as a powerfully positive antidote to the tendency toward violence and harmfulness. From this perspective, it will be worthwhile to linger briefly on further guidelines for developing *brahmavihāra* practice by mentally expanding—making increasingly inclusive—the four subjects or attitudes and their recipients. According to a later Buddhist text, Buddhaghosa’s *Visuddhimagga*, a fifth century CE commentary on the Pali canon (quoting and paraphrasing):¹⁹

¹⁹Jay Garfield (2022, p. 93) explains about the *Visuddhimagga* text: “*The Path of Purification* (*Visuddhimagga*) is an extraordinarily detailed exploration of ethical cultivation in the Theravāda tradition. Buddhaghosa’s path is a path of diminution. To purify is to reduce our moral and cognitive psychopathology, to eliminate adventitious contaminants in our psychophysical continuum. This is articulated through a complex joining of metaphors. The first is the spatiotemporal journey metaphor of the path. The second is the chemical metaphor of purification. Together they set out the dimensions of ethical progress as Buddhaghosa sees it.”

“To start with, [one] should review the danger in hate and the advantage in patience,” by remembering that when one hates, one is prey to hate, one’s mind is obsessed by hate, and “he kills living beings.” One is to begin the meditation by applying goodwill to oneself such as “May I keep myself free from enmity, affliction and anxiety and live happily.” The purpose of beginning with oneself is not to increase self-centeredness, but rather its opposite: making oneself an example, the practitioner reflects, “Just as I desire, so do other beings, too.”²⁰ Buddhaghosa writes that the initial result of this practice is that the mind becomes “malleable.” (*VM* 9.2, 10–12; Ñāṇamoli 2011, p. 291)

Thus, the essential principle of practice is a mental extrapolation from one’s own experience, to which is applied a logic of extension possibly resembling Emmanuel Kant’s universalizing categorical imperative.²¹ One does, however, distinguish between self and other. Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu (2014, p. 7), a contemporary exponent of Buddhist meditation, notes that goodwill for oneself involves determination to “act skillfully,” with “skillful intentions,” whereas goodwill for others “means hoping that they will understand the causes for true happiness and act in line with that understanding.” To the latter, while we may not readily see how it could be applied to other-than-human animals, it could easily be applied to humans as a hope that they will understand that the practice of nonviolence and non-harming toward animals is a cause for true happiness and that they will “act in line with that understanding” (e.g., by abstaining permanently from eating animal flesh).

The *Visuddhimagga*, referencing earlier Buddhist texts, dilates on each of the remaining three subjects of *brahmavihāra* practice following

²⁰ This reflection relates to a desire-based argument for non-harming, “I do not desire to suffer. If I were killed that would cause me to suffer. Animals are like me in not desiring to suffer. Killing animals causes them to suffer. So, I should not kill animals” (Finnigan 2017, section 4.2).

²¹ In *Kantianism for Animals*, Nico Dario Müller (2022, p. 238) argues that “[t]he further we remove the Categorical Imperative from direct action-guidance, the greater the prospect of including those who do not share the moral law.” This is to say that nonhuman animals are beings who do not share the moral law with humans. Animals may be included in moral consideration (in a Kantian universe), according to Müller, by recognizing that Kant’s Categorical Imperative (“Act only according to the maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law”) does not provide any specific guidance on how to act in specific circumstances. Regarding “applying goodwill to oneself” (in the *Visuddhimagga* quote), this could resonate with Müller’s notion of duty to self to promote one’s own moral perfection (*ibid.*, p. 181).

goodwill—compassion, gladness, and equanimity—always emphasizing that they are *practices* which can always be expanded to “pervade” to all beings, however they might relate (or seemingly not relate) to the practitioner. Then follows a series of general characteristics and advice on *brahmavihāra* practice. Of particular interest for us is the specification of a “near enemy” and a “far enemy” to each of the four divine abidings. Goodwill’s near enemy is greed, whereas its far enemy is ill-will; compassion’s near enemy is “grief based on the home life” and its far enemy is cruelty; empathetic joy has “joy based on the home life” as its near enemy and aversion or boredom as its far enemy; and finally, equanimity has “the equanimity of unknowing based on the home life” as its near enemy, and greed and resentment as its far enemy. Looking again at Buddhaghosa’s analysis of compassion (*karuṇā*), as noted, the far enemy is cruelty. The text explains, “for it is not possible to practice compassion and be cruel to breathing things simultaneously” (*VM* 9.99; Ñāṇamoli 2011, p. 313). Significantly, the near enemy of compassion is “grief based on the home life,” whereby a person grieves for loss of worldly gains and for failure to obtain worldly aspirations. The implication could be that entrenchment in worldly life (centered in the home) can easily lead—due to frustration of desires—to cruel acts against “breathing things,” which is to say all sorts of living beings.

Referring to obstacles to successful cultivation of the divine abidings as “near enemies” and “far enemies” can remind us that the aim of controlling the mind in yoga practice is for the mind to become our friend. As a friend helps his or her friend, so the mind that acts as a friend helps the *yogin* to extend the *brahmavihāra* attitudes without being obstructed by inimical mental habits.

6.5 MEDITATION AND “BECOMING ANIMAL”

The description of *brahmavihāra* in the *Visuddhimagga* indicates several times that the divine abidings’ *telos* is “unlimited”—inclusive of all living beings in all circumstances. Still, the specific practices advised for extending the abidings invariably refer to human beings, either as close friends, favorable persons, enemies, or neutrals.²² There are no references to animals as specific objects upon which to apply the divine abidings’

²² In contrast, *YS* I.33 lists happy, unhappy, pious, and impious as the four types to which the four abidings are to be respectively applied.

meditations. Nevertheless, I suggest that this basic meditational pattern lends itself to be extended and applied to other-than-human animals. So, for example, one could begin by applying goodwill to a companion animal, then mentally extend the goodwill attitude to the companion animals of neighbors, then to animals in the local zoo, then to farm animals, and then to free roaming animals.²³

But such meditational extensions (including the remaining three divine abidings) might seem superficial, despite the practitioner's good intentions. We could explore a deeper *brahmavibhāra*-configured engagement: Would it be possible to extend goodwill to a predator animal for whom we humans are regarded as potential food? I raise this question in light of Val Plumwood's well-known account and philosophical deliberations as the survivor of an attack by a large crocodile (in Stone Country of northern Australia) in 1985. Plumwood faced an extreme near-death, physically and emotionally agonizing situation of being attacked as potential food. Despite the trauma involved, Plumwood did not retreat into an attitude of hostility to predator animals. Rather, she awakened to a deep sense of non-exceptionality of herself and all human beings.²⁴ Reflecting later on facing the crocodile, she reported:

I was suddenly transformed in the parallel universe into the form of a small, edible animal whose death was of no more significance than that of a mouse, and as I saw myself as meat I also saw with an incredible shock that I inhabited a grim, relentless and deplorable world that would make no exceptions for me, no matter how smart I was, because like all living things, I was made of meat, was nutritious food for another being. (Plumwood 2012, p. 13–14)

A large predator animal, a north Australian crocodile, very suddenly and unexpectedly forced her to completely drop all her culturally constructed preconceptions (her self-classifications) of herself as exceptional. She recognized that she was not aloof from the biotic food chain, in which all

²³ One could also direct such a meditation for animals in terms of Stephen Meyer's three categories, "weedy species" (such as raccoons that thrive in suburbs), "relics" (like African elephants and giant pandas), and "ghosts" (animals heading toward extinction) thereby recognizing the reality he describes, of accelerating species extinction in what he calls "the end of the wild" (Meyer 2006, pp. 7–17).

²⁴ Jennifer Wise (2019) expresses an interesting similar sensibility regarding her relationship with female mosquitos as one of "blood sisters."

living beings are food for other living beings.²⁵ One could say that, in her raw struggle to survive, she was instantly, involuntarily made to “become animal,” echoing Gilles Deleuze, for whom (albeit voluntarily) “becoming-other is a refusal to enact the ideals and subjectivity that the dominant culture associates with being a full human subject and to enter into a relation with the various minor, or nondominant, modes of existence that are commonly viewed as being the ‘other’ of the human” (Calarco 2015, p. 57).

Human biotic non-exceptionalism calls attention to the “indistinction theory” of human-nonhuman relationality. An important purpose of Calarco’s “indistinction approach” (inspired in part by Deleuze) is to address a problem with the “identity approach” to human-nonhuman animal relationality, namely, its tendency to anthropocentrically determine what is valuable or “identical” in animals with humans. The problem with the identity approach is the tendency to limit the range of nonhuman animal types for consideration in terms of animal rights and animal welfare, hence going shy of the unlimitedness principle in *brahmavibhāra* meditation.²⁶ The indistinction approach proposes to address this problem, and for Plumwood, the experience of indistinction, visceral as it was, may serve as an extreme yet useful example of how this approach may be relevant to our inquiry. In light of an indistinction approach, our question becomes whether such meditational practice as *brahmavibhāra* can bring about deep change in the human-nonhuman relationship, one that is consequential in decentering the human.

Let us pursue this somewhat obliquely by considering the idea of “becoming animal” in relation to meditation in a general sense associated with yoga as represented in a tale of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (5.7–5.13 summarized; Prabhupāda 2017), wherein a *yogin* hero is followed over three successive lifetimes:

²⁵ Yann Prisner-Levyne (2024) describes intriguing ways that humans participate in the biotic food chain in relation to large predator animals by “living with” them in India and Kenya. He also notes that large predators are “necessary to maintain healthy ecosystems,” maintaining biodiversity, and “enhancing carbon storage capacities” by regulating the population of herbivores.

²⁶ In a nutshell, identity theory emphasizes recognition of shared capacities of human and nonhuman animals, namely, that animals have sentience; animals are conscious subjects with a stake in how they are treated; animals are agents, having goals and desires they seek to fulfill; and animals are persons with intentionality and a sense of self (Calarco 2021, pp. 80–81).

In a bygone age, King Bharata, one of R̥ṣabha's one-hundred sons, retires to the forest to assume the life of an ascetic *yogin*. In course of time in his daily practice of meditation he becomes thoroughly adept in fixing his mind. However, one morning, while sitting on the bank of the Gaṇḍakī river, meditating on the *praṇava-mātra* (*om*), a nearby pregnant doe, suddenly terrified by a lion's roar, in its anxiety gives birth in the river, then dashes to the river's opposite shore, where it subsequently dies. Bharata, seeing the newborn fawn, "like a friend" (*bandhur iva*) with compassion (*anukampayā*) rescues it from the river, brings it to his ashram where, in course of time, his careful nurturing of the defenseless fawn draws him away from his meditation practice. In his increasingly intense care for the fawn, Bharata reasons that this is his primary duty, having been a king "with knowledge of the fault of neglect" (*upekṣā doṣa-viduṣā*). And so his life comes to revolve exclusively around care for the charming young deer. One day, anxiously searching for the now older and active fawn that had wandered off from the ashram, fearful that it may have fallen prey to a wolf or boar, Bharata meets his own death. His thoughts of the deer in his last moments carry him to his next life, namely, as a deer, but one who retains clear memory of his previous life as a *yogin*. With a heart repentant for having lapsed in his yoga practice, he now finds shelter at an ascetics' ashram, where he lives out his cervid life "eating dry leaves and bathing in the river."

Bharata, initially meditating on the sacred sound *om*, was not thereby engaging in any aspect of *brahmavibhāra* practice. It is the sudden event of the doe's birth-giving and orphanage of the fawn that evokes his feelings of compassion (the second of the four "divine abidings") coupled with a sense of duty to protect and care for the animal. Ironically, the last of the four divine abidings, *upekṣā*, is in this context negatively marked as a fault—as neglect of duty—rather than a virtue as imperturbability (McEvilley 2002, ch. 25) in the context of *brahmavibhāra* meditation. The sudden interruption of the former king's meditational practice turns his attention—and his emotions—increasingly to the young deer, which becomes for him increasingly charming to the point of being thoroughly engaging to the otherwise lone ascetic. That he eventually transmigrates into the body of a deer conforms to a standard Indic notion that present actions and attention prepare one's subsequent body (Krishan 1997, p. 173; *Gītā* 8.6). In this case, we are to understand that, although he has "become animal," the ascetic Bharata-turned-deer (by virtue of his previous yogic practice) remains fully aware of his previous life and his previous spiritual aspiration. In this condition of quasi-human awareness and yogic

aspiration, his interactions with the natural world are quite minimal as he benefits from the company of peaceful ascetics, almost as if one of them. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* continues Bharata's story into his next life:

After his life as a deer-ascetic ends, Bharata is born in a family of *brāhmaṇas*. Now, acutely aware of his two previous lives, to vouchsafe maximum advantage for resuming his yoga meditational practice by minimizing social interaction, he feigns behavior as a “madman, dull, blind and deaf.” In his present life, having endured and tolerated much abuse without protesting, Bharata (now referred to as Jaḍa Bharata—“Dull Bharata”) is enlisted into a team of palanquin carriers for Rahūgaṇa, king of Sindhu and Sauvīra. Now a strapping young man, he is the target of Rahūgaṇa's verbal abuse for his irregular, erratic pace, out of step with the three other carriers. The problem is that Jaḍa Bharata's attention is constantly on the ground immediately before him, frequently slowing and shifting his pace while he carefully avoids stepping on ants as the palanquin contingent moves forward.

Jaḍa Bharata, the former king turned *yogin* turned deer, is now regarded in human society as more or less a nonhuman animal, best employed in menial labor. Once a king himself, now he is the servant-carrier of a king. But now, from his perspective of realized indistinction from nonhuman animals and heightened moral awareness, his concern is more for the least of creatures—ants—as much as for the king, who presumes to sit at the apex of human perfection.

The story continues with a further role reversal: Now Jaḍa Bharata breaks his life-long silence to firmly call out Rahūgaṇa, who quickly understands that this palanquin carrier is, in fact, a highly advanced sage—so clearly accomplished in yoga that Rahūgaṇa genuinely humbles himself before Jaḍa Bharata. Over the next three chapters (*BhP* 5.11–13) Jaḍa Bharata, speaking from his experience of remembered transmigration, expounds to the now submissive king on the mechanisms by which the materially absorbed mind keeps one in the “multitudinous cycles of transmigration” (*saṃsṛti-cakra-kūṭaḥ*, *BhP* 5.11.6), elaborating a litany of follies to which humans are subject to when they fail to pursue yogic freedom.²⁷ Conversely, he explains, the same mind can be the cause of

²⁷ Jaḍa Bharata's exposition appears to be a blend of nondual Vedānta, the Buddhist emphasis on all things being transitory, the Jain concern to shed karma by higher knowledge and nonviolent behavior, and the *Bhāgavata*'s theism. Significantly, it was Rṣabha who fathered Bharata, who later became Jaḍa Bharata, suggesting the *BhP*'s awareness of Jain

freedom from this cycle, an opportunity that Rahūgaṇa should take by giving up his worldly position to become “one who is a friend of all beings” (*kṛta-bhūta-maitraḥ*, *BhP* 5.13.20).

Within this rather extended yogic adventure narrative are passing hints or echoes of the four aspects of *brahmavihāra* meditation. *Goodwill* is embodied in Jaḍa Bharata as he cares for the fawn and as he teaches Rahūgaṇa, and he shows *compassion* to Rahūgaṇa as well, as he shows to the deer fawn in a very different way. *Empathetic joy* is suggested when Jaḍa Bharata sees the playfulness of the growing fawn, and it is indirectly suggested in his strong teaching to Rahūgaṇa that he should renounce what the *Visuddhimagga* calls the “near enemy” of empathetic joy, namely, feeling joy upon worldly gain. *Equanimity* is alluded to, but as a negative quality of indifference to suffering, an attitude (which Bharata rejects as he resolves to shelter the fawn) opposed to compassion.²⁸ The *Visuddhimagga* refers to such negative equanimity as positive equanimity’s “near enemy,” as “the equanimity of unknowing based on the home life,” exhibited by Rahūgaṇa and critiqued by Jaḍa Bharata.

I will make three more brief observations about this story as a narrative reflection on yogic meditation in relation to nonhuman animals. First, the broad contours of the story can serve as a reflection on “becoming animal,” in that Bharata is described as literally becoming a deer in his next life. But the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*’s perspective (representing in this case much Indic tradition) is that yes, it may be good for humans to become animal to recognize one’s indistinction from nonhuman animals as full participants in the natural world rather than being in opposition to it. But rather than making such a detour, this purpose may best be served by serious meditative yogic practice to realize oneself in relation to other selves, as inclusive of experiencing one’s body in relation to other bodies. Only as an accomplished *yogin* will one comprehend and act rightly on the truth of self in relation to all other selves, in their myriad forms.

Second, for us to note is Jaḍa Bharata’s forthright criticism of Rahūgaṇa’s attitude as a ruler, for the latter’s irresponsible neglect of his dependents,

regard for Rṣabha as a Tīrthāṅkara—perfected being—of the Jain tradition. Further to Jain allusions, the abuses that Jaḍa Bharata endured resonate with early Jain reference to silent endurance of abuses by practicing Jain mendicants (see Pragyā 2021, p. 174).

²⁸ In further details of the *BhP*’s Jaḍa Bharata account, he displays equanimity toward persons who abuse him, including thugs who abduct him intending to kill him and offer his body to an image of the goddess Kālī (who bursts out from her apparently lifeless image and kills all the thugs).

as evidenced by his palanquin bearers' sorry condition in forced labor (*BhP* 5.12.7). Where Jaḍa Bharata embodies care for all beings—including ants—Rahūgaṇa embodies disdainful violence against creatures, including the human citizens of his kingdom. To rectify him, Jaḍa Bharata speaks strong words—speaking truth to power—thereby modeling the principle of truthfulness as a support for nonviolence (recalling Patañjali's first two principles of *yama*). His “animal activism,” based as it is in self-knowledge, commands respect from the king to the extent that it transforms the latter's life and behavior toward all creatures.²⁹

Finally, we can note the strong theistic orientation of this narrative, characteristic of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as a whole. As Bharata begins his meditation, he worships the rising sun as Nārāyaṇa, a form of Vishnu. Later, he expresses anxiety for the fawn's safety, concerned that it will be protected “by the gods” (*deva-guṇam*, *BhP* 5.8.17). Further, according to the text, it is “by divine grace” (*bhagavat-anugraheṇa*, *BhP* 5.9.3) that Jaḍa Bharata remembers his past life as a deer, and he is identified as “one who is the friend of all living beings” (*sarva-bhūta-suhṛt-ātmā*) because he is a “dear abode of the Lord” (*bhagavat-priya-niketam*, *BhP* 5.10.8). As we will see in the next chapter, yoga as theistic devotion (*bhakti-yoga*) offers important perspectives on the application of yoga to animal ethics. Arguably, *bhakti-yoga* expands Patañjali's enigmatic prompt for the *yogin* to acknowledge and practice devotion to a highest *yogin*—Yogeśvara—as a key component for the perfection of yoga practice (*īśvara-praṇidhāna*).

6.6 NEW HABITS OF ATTENTION

From this necessarily brief sketch of meditational practices associated with Indic yoga traditions, we get a picture of how the mind may become powerfully supportive of deep self-reformation that enables a fundamental shift toward right living with the other-than-human world. First, the *Yoga Sūtra* of Patañjali describes methods of meditational practice that remove obstacles to maintaining steady attention, leading to a condition of “absorption” in the object of attention. This suggests the possibility of achieving a level of identification with other living beings (as “objects of attention”) that goes beyond all discursive acknowledgment of moral

²⁹ His change of behavior is seen in his respectfully inquiring from Jaḍa Bharata and listening attentively to his explanations of higher truths, and it is implied by his completely giving up (*viśaṣarjā*) the worldly conception of self-as-body (*dehātma-matim*, *BhP* 5.13.25).

standing, to a level of deep empathy that extends beyond an egocentric notion of limited animal “rights” thinking. Following Calarco’s threefold typology of approaches to animal ethics, such practices can be regarded as *enacting* the “identity approach,” thereby reaching beyond the cognitive limitations of animal rights discourse.

Second, from Jain tradition we are reminded that ascetic practices, dispassion, and renunciation may be considered crucial to robust enactment of *ahiṃsā*. This point calls attention to *YS* I.12, which identifies *vairāgya*—dispassion or renunciation—as necessarily coupled with *abhyāsa*—regular practice. It also points to the *Yoga Sūtra*’s reference to *tapas*—austerity—as essential elements of successful yoga practice (*YS* II.1; II.32; IV.1). From the Jain text initially quoted here, austerity and renunciation are conceived of as going so far as to allow one’s own body to voluntarily endure injury from other creatures without making any effort to defend oneself. This extremity sharply highlights the problem of karma, the notion that our very existence as physical bodies that feed on other bodies implicates us in future lives of similar or worse conditioning. It also points toward the “indistinction approach” to animal ethics by its hard-gazing recognition of human participation in the biotic reality of creaturely consumption and sustenance. From a different angle, the story of the Tīrthaṅkara Neminātha’s change of heart and turn to renunciation points again to the identity approach, but in this case, there is a strong “activist” dimension included (in his rejection of royal life and in his successful proselytizing). Additionally, we noted that the Jain “reflection on being alone” resonates with the “difference approach” to animal ethics, suggesting respect for the uniqueness of each living creature and therefore the unique value of each.

Third, we looked at Buddhist *brahmavihāra* “divine abidings” practices (which, we noted, are echoed in *YS* I.33) as meditational cultivation of four attitudes toward other persons, extendable by virtue of their unlimited potentiality of scope to all creatures. In this case, the first three of the four attitudes (goodwill, compassion, and empathetic joy) accord with the “identity approach” to animal ethics, insofar as their starting point is one’s spontaneous feelings toward oneself and toward persons already near and dear. The fourth attitude, equanimity, as the attitude acknowledging otherness, can serve to enrich the “difference approach” to animal ethics, for example by deepening one’s sense of respect for lifeways that are incomprehensible from one’s own perspective. Significantly, I would add, incomprehensibility can be impetus for a positive sense of *wonder* which does not

aim to be dispelled by knowledge, but rather leads to further wonder that can be toward or *over* all living beings, enabling one to “see another in their own right” (Bendik-Keymer 2023, p. 106).

Finally, with the contemporary report of philosopher Val Plumwood’s gruesome encounter with a crocodile and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*’s account of the sage Jaḍa Bharata, we explored the notion of “becoming animal” as experiential cases resonating with the “indistinction approach” to animal ethics. Jaḍa Bharata emerges from his remembered previous two lives—as a king-turned-*yogin* and as a deer—to impart higher truth and wisdom to a repentant monarch. Higher truth includes recognition of entrapment in the “multitudinous cycles of transmigration,” and wisdom begins with disengagement from the world, positioning one to become “a friend of all beings.”

With more elaboration and detail than we can render here, such meditational yoga practices as we have looked at briefly in this chapter could be seen in light of a contemporary analysis of five “key processes” by which they support self-transformation. Following Jessica Frazier (2021, p. 406) very briefly, these include (1) *selective attention*, (2) recognizing the mind’s *plasticity*, (3) the application of *intentional control* supported by (4) *introspection*, and (5) clear understanding of the *goals* of transformation. We can see selective attention as a priority in the *Yoga Sūtra* in, for example, its exhortation to practice four attitudes related to four types of persons (*YS* I.33); these practices (and the practices of yoga in general) assume that the mind possesses plasticity—a capacity to direct attention to felicitous objects and become free from all distractions and disturbances (*kleśas*). Intentional control is enjoined from the very beginning of classical Yoga practice, beginning with the five restraints and on through advanced meditation and absorption. As for introspection, all the aphorisms (*sūtras*) of the *Yoga Sūtra* serve as “maps for imitative introspection” (Bryant 2009, p. 62; *YS* I.17 commentary, quoting Georg Feuerstein [1980, p. 117]). As a map can serve a practical function for efficient travel to a desired destination, these aphorisms show practitioners their current “location” and the way forward to the goal. Similarly, in *brahmavihāra* meditation, the analysis of near and far “enemies” is an introspective practice of recognizing dangers to be avoided along the meditational way. Finally, regarding understanding the goals of transformation, we can easily recognize a common theme among the meditational traditions mentioned in this chapter (classical Yoga, Jainism, and Buddhism), namely, the pursuit of a final and permanent solution to—or freedom from—the travails

of temporal life. A further common goal of these traditions is to gain knowledge of a higher truth accessible through one or another form of meditational practice. In whatever way that knowledge is articulated, these traditions show meditational trajectories either toward realization of morally significant commonalities between human and nonhuman beings; or, they point to deep recognition of differences and the honoring of differences among species and the countless individuals of human or other-than-human being; or, they show the meditator her or his indistinction as but one participant in a vast theater of purposeful life. Unlike in much contemporary philosophy that seeks to deny metaphysical thinking, in all of these traditions of yoga and meditation with which we are concerned here, there is a clear sense that life has a *telos*—an ultimate aim—which carries an integral moral dimension rooted in recognition of the value-laden character of existence (Bohanec 2024, pp. 47, 56).

In terms of classical Yoga's threefold characterization of mental attention as *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna* and *samādhi*, these may be characterized as, respectively, "focused" attention (helping one to narrow one's attention to one kind of object); "sustained" attention (enabling one to sustain the focus over extended time); and "executive" attention (giving one the ability to direct attentional control and "orchestrate the functions of the complex psyche" (Frazier 2021, pp. 407–408). What is particularly interesting about these practices for animal ethics is that, as Frazier points out, they trace the growth of the abstract mind, and this is "not a one-way street: once formed, the 'higher' systems of selection such as memories, identity, values, and so on proceed to exert their own influence over the 'lower' levels of selective attention to data that shaped them, creating a constantly transforming loop" (p. 408).³⁰ The upshot of this dynamic is that one can develop new "habits of attention" leading to profound changes in one's self- and other-perceptions. A further implication of this "constantly transforming loop" may be a profound change in one's perception of and interaction with other-than-human beings.

This chapter completes my survey of yoga as a transformative approach to animal ethics in terms of its "classical" articulation in the *Yoga Sūtra* or

³⁰Whether this idea of "systems of selective attention" developing new "habits of attention" fits into the *YS*'s "maps for imitative introspection" is a matter for further study, considering the *YS*'s description of some levels of *samādhi* as being characterized by lack of all conceptualization.

Pātañjalayogasāstra, structured by the eightfold progression of practices delineated in the *Sādhana-pāda* (chapter II) portion of Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra*. A further enrichment of this enterprise, pursuing especially Patañjali's curt indications regarding devotional practices (*īśvara-praṇidhāna*), will be our main concern in the third and final part of this study.

Questions for Reflection

1. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*'s chariot-and-horses analogy compares "disobedient" senses with "bad horses." Aside from the analogy's specific function to highlight a major challenge in yoga practice, what does it say about nonhuman animal instrumentality for humans? (Sect. 6.2)
2. What could be practical implications for animal ethics in relation to classical Yoga if classical Yoga is interpreted as "incorporat[ing] the moral amplitude for empathic identification with the world"? What would be the implications for yogic animal ethics if this interpretation of Yoga is rejected? (Sect. 6.2)
3. In terms of eliminating violence and harm, what is the logic of the Jain ascetic practices described in this chapter (Sect. 6.3), and why is there an affinity of such practices with the "indistinction approach," the "difference approach," and the "identity approach" to human-nonhuman animal relations?
4. Was the Tīrthaṅkara Neminātha's renunciation inspired by ordinary compassion or *anukampā*? (Sect. 6.3)
5. In regard to the four "divine abidings," how might it be possible to achieve an attitude of *unlimited* goodwill, *unlimited* compassion, *unlimited* empathetic joy, and *unlimited* equanimity, considering the limitations of one's own physical body and mind? (Sect. 6.4)
6. We could call the crocodile's attack on Val Plumwood a threat of being dismembered. How might this situation be meaningfully compared to the Puruṣasūkta description of a primordial sacrifice (Chap. 2, Sect. 2.2)? (Sect. 6.5)
7. What would be a plausible alternative scenario of the *yogin* Bharata saving the baby deer, different from that described in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, that could accord with a yogic practice of human-nonhuman relationality? (Sect. 6.5)

REFERENCES

- Āraṇya, Swami Hariharānanda. 2000. *Yoga Philosophy of Patañjali with Bhāsvatī*. Kolkata: University of Calcutta.
- Bendik-Keymer, Jeremy David. 2023. *Nussbaum's Politics of Wonder: How the Mind's Original Joy Is Revolutionary*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Bhikkhu, Thānissaro. 2014. *The Sublime Attitudes: A Study Guide on the Brahmavihāras*. Valley Center, CA: Metta Forest Monastery. https://cdn.amaravati.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/20/TheSublimeAttitudes_181215.pdf.
- Bohanec, Cogen. 2024. *Bhakti Ethics, Emotions, and Love in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Metaethics*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books (Rowman & Littlefield).
- Breytenbach, Anna. 2012. *The Animal Communicator*. Directed by Swati Thiagarajan and Craig Foster. NHU Africa. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T2vhV63lx2k> (Accessed December 13, 2024).
- Bronkhorst, Johannes. 2000. *The Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Bronkhorst, Johannes. 2016. Discontinuity and Innovation in the History of Jaina Meditation. In *Asian Traditions of Meditation*, ed. Halvor Eifring, 93–102. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Bryant, Edwin F. 2009. *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali: A New Edition, Translation, and Commentary*. New York: North Point Press.
- Calarco, Matthew. 2015. *Thinking Through Animals: Identity, Difference, Indistinction*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Calarco, Matthew R. 2021. *Animal Studies: The Key Concepts*. London: Routledge.
- Chapple, Christopher Key. 2003. *Reconciling Yogas: Haribhadra's Collection of Views on Yoga*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- De Clercq, Eva. 2013. Karman and Compassion: Animals in the Jain Universal History. *Religions of South Asia* 7:141–157.
- Dickstein, Jonathan. 2017. The Strong Case for Vegetarianism in Pātañjala Yoga. *Philosophy East and West* 67 (3): 613–628.
- Donaldson, Brianne, and Ana Bajželj. 2021. *Insistent Life: Principles for Bioethics in the Jain Tradition*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.
- Feuerstein, Georg. 1980. *The Philosophy of Classical Yoga*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Finnigan, Bronwyn. 2017. Buddhism and Animal Ethics. *Philosophy Compass* 12:e12424. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12424>.
- Frazier, Jessica. 2021. The Self in Meditation: The Art of Self-Transformation. In *The Oxford Handbook of Meditation*, ed. Miguel Farias, D. Brazier, and M. Lalljee. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Garfield, Jay L. 2022. *Buddhist Ethics: A Philosophical Exploration*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Jurewicz, Joanna. 2018. *Fire, Death and Philosophy: A History of Ancient Indian Thinking*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Krishan, Yuvraj. 1997. *The Doctrine of Karma: Its Origin and Development in Brāhmaṇical, Buddhist and Jaina Traditions*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Maderey, Ana Laura Funes. 2018. An Overview of Classical Yoga Philosophy as a Philosophy of Embodied Self-awareness. In *History of Indian Philosophy—Routledge History of World Philosophies*, ed. Purushottama Bilimoria. London: Routledge.
- McEvilley, Thomas. 2002. *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies*. New York: Allworth Press.
- Meyer, Stephen M. 2006. *The End of the Wild*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
- Monier-Williams, Sir Monier. 1995. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Müller, Nico Dario. 2022. *Kantianism for Animals: A Radical Kantian Animal Ethic*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu, trans. 2011. *Visuddhimagga: The Path of Purification*. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society.
- Olivelle, Patrick. 1998. *The Early Upaniṣads—Annotated Text and Translation*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Pflueger, Lloyd W. 2003. Dueling with Dualism: Revisioning the Paradox of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. In *Yoga: The Indian Tradition*, ed. Ian Whicher and David Carpenter, 70–82. London: RoutledgeCurzon.
- Plumwood, Val. 2012. In *The Eye of the Crocodile*, ed. Lorraine Shannon. Canberra: ANU E Press.
- Prabhupāda, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami. 2017. The Complete Teachings of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda. Vedabase CD-ROM Version 2017.2 Sandy Ridge, NC: Bhaktivedanta Archives.
- Pragya, Samani Pratibha. 2021. Yoga and Meditation in the Jain Tradition. In *Routledge Handbook of Yoga and Meditation Studies*, ed. Suzanne Newcombe and Karen O'Brien-Kop, 171–188. Abingdon UK: Routledge.
- Prisner-Levyne, Yann. 2024. People Already Live Alongside Predators in India and Kenya—Here's How It Could Work in Scotland. *The Conversation*, December 19. <https://theconversation.com/people-already-live-alongside-predators-in-india-and-kenya-heres-how-it-could-work-in-scotland-245511?utm> (Accessed January 5, 2025).
- Sutton, Nicholas. 2019. *The Yoga Sutras: A New Translation and Study Guide*. San Rafael, CA: Mandala.
- Wernicke-Olesen, Bjarne. 2021. Hinduism and Meditation: Yoga. In *The Oxford Handbook of Meditation*, ed. Miguel Farias, David Brazier, and Mansur Lalljee. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Whicher, Ian. 1998. *The Integrity of the Yoga Darśana: Reconsideration of Classical Yoga*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Whicher, Ian. 2003. The Integration of Spirit (*Puruṣa*) and Matter (*Prakṛti*) in the Yoga Sūtra. In *Yoga: The Indian Tradition*, ed. Ian Whicher and David Carpenter. London: RoutledgeCurzon.

Wise, Jennifer. 2019. Blood Sisters. *Utne Reader* (online, July 9). <https://www.utne.com/environment/mosquito-blood-sisters-zm0z19uzhoe/>

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



PART III

Being Animal, Becoming Devotional
Subjects



The *Bhagavadgītā*'s Three Approaches to Animal Ethics

7.1 INTRODUCTION

We have already discussed important ideas of the *Bhagavadgītā* relevant to animal ethics in Chaps. 3 and 5, and in this chapter we continue examining the *Gītā* as we turn attention to its arguably main theme, namely, *bhakti-yoga* and its metaphysical basis in a supreme divinity. A key starting point for this way of conceiving yoga thought and practice is (as we have also already indicated) the experience of equanimity regarding the vagaries and dualities of temporal life. Among his other definitions, Krishna defines yoga (not specifically *bhakti-yoga*) in such terms, as a certain attitude to be cultivated while being active in the world:

O Dhanañjaya [Arjuna], situated in yoga, perform actions having renounced attachment; being equipoised in success and failure—[such] equanimity is called yoga. (*Gītā* 2.48, author's trans.)

Two stanzas later, Krishna advises Arjuna to engage himself in yoga with discernment (*buddhi*) that is above self-centered considerations of good or ill deeds, concluding that “yoga is skill in actions” (*yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam*—*Gītā* 2.50). Since, as we have already seen in Chap. 3, Sect. 3.6, Krishna extols the *yogin* who sees with equal vision (*sama-darśinah*),

“a learned humble *brāhmaṇa*, a cow, an elephant, and even a dog and dog cooker” (*Gītā* 5.18), we can ask how these two sorts of “equality”—equality and equal vision—are related, and what their implications could be for animals, when viewed within the framework of devotional yoga. Put another way, if we take these sorts of equality as being rooted in, or arising from, successful yoga practice as taught in the *Bhagavadgītā*, one may ask: is it correct to say that the latter’s theistic orientation is the ground that nourishes the tree that has equal vision as one of its fruits? Arguably, this is the case. Patañjali’s *īśvara-praṇidhāna* can be considered a subdued version of the strong theistic and devotional character of the *Gītā*, which repeatedly declares the highest, omnipotent, omniscient divinity’s existence and elaborates the value of cultivating devotion to that divinity as a yogic practice or discipline.¹ In contrast to the terse *Yoga Sūtra*, the *Gītā* presents a vision that effectively defines yoga as fundamentally the practice of linking the self with the higher Self, the lord of yoga—Yogeśvara—who, we have seen, is characterized as the “lord of all beings” (*īśvaraḥ sarva-bhūtānām—Gītā* 18.61) with whom he reciprocates as the “friend of all beings” (*Gītā* 4.11; *subṛdam sarva-bhūtānām—Gītā* 5.29).

One aim of this chapter is to show how bhakti-yoga as presented in the strongly devotional work *Bhagavadgītā* serves to foster an ethically significant transformation of vision. Such a transformed vision is deeply non-speciesist,² opening bhakti practitioners to what we may designate as trans-temporal animal ethics rooted in a sense of nonhuman beings’ “constrained personhood.” I will begin by revisiting the *Gītā*’s notion of equal vision and comprehending metaphysical ultimacy as nondifferentiated *brahman*. To this notion, I juxtapose Matthew Calarco’s identity theory of animal ethics. Next, I will juxtapose the *Bhagavadgītā*’s differentiated ultimacy, *paramātman*, with Calarco’s difference theory of animal ethics. Finally, I place the *Gītā*’s personal ultimacy, *bhagavān* (or *īśvara*) next to Calarco’s indistinction theory of animal ethics. To explore this last connection, I will draw on Barbara Holdrege’s analysis of bhakti as a process of “fashioning a devotional body,” a body that connects (*yoga*) in

¹The *Mahābhārata*’s *Bhagavadgītā*, even if considered a later insertion into the *MBh*, is generally regarded as earlier than the *YS* or the *PYŚ*.

²For discussions on speciesism, see Beauchamp and Frey (2012, p. 21) who, in their Introduction, define the term thus: “A speciesist is one who believes that the interests of members of one or more particular species, usually the species *Homo sapiens*, are to be favored over the interests of the members of other species. Species membership therefore is a factor in determining whether a creature has a high or a low level of moral status.”

liberative ways with the world of living beings. This will lead us to consider just what the devotional component—devotion to a divinity—offers in the way of support for a non-speciesist attitude, and how this attitude would be positively shaped in a devotional yoga context.

7.2 DEVOTIONAL YOGA AND THE THREE APPROACHES TO ANIMAL ETHICS

7.2.1 *Equanimity and Equal Vision Devotionally Inflected*

In previous chapters, we have encountered some expressions of equanimity as an ideal worth pursuing in the practice of yoga, an ideal favorable to yogic animal ethics. Both the Pātañjala *Yoga Sūtra* and the Buddhist *Visuddhimagga* express this ideal with the term *upekṣā*, albeit with some difference in criteria, calling for living beings of all sorts to be regarded with equanimity. We have also seen instances in the *Bhagavadgītā* where equanimity is praised and—akin to a response or disposition of equanimity—where “equal vision”—*sama-darśana*—is lauded as an appropriate perception of nondifference prevailing over normally perceived bodily difference. In the *Gītā* there are at least four shades of “sameness” that are valued as yogic ideals. Each may be considered as processes of valuation by the *yogin* involving both epistemic (equal vision) and affective (equanimity) dimensions: (1) sameness of *response to physical and mental conditions* that would normally be experienced and interpreted as pleasant or unpleasant; (2) sameness of *attitude regarding results* of one’s actions, whether desirable or not; (3) sameness of *valuation of external objects* that would normally be regarded as having greater or lesser instrumental value; and (4) sameness of *regard for persons* that one would normally gauge with various criteria in relation to oneself—as good or bad, friendly or inimical, intelligent or foolish.³ Between the latter two sorts of sameness there is a marked difference. Krishna identifies one who exhibits sameness of regard for various persons as “still better” than one who values external objects “equally.”

A soul content with knowledge and wisdom, who stands at the peak with senses conquered, is said to be linked—a *yogin* for whom clay, stone and

³Sameness type 1—e.g., *Gītā* 2.14; sameness type 2—e.g., *Gītā* 2.48; sameness type 3—e.g., *Gītā* 6.8; sameness type 4—e.g., *Gītā* 6.9.

gold are equal. Still better is one with equal reason [*sama-buddhiḥ*] among the kind-hearted, friends, foes, abstainers, mediators, the odious and kindred, and even among saints and sinners. (*Gītā* 6.8–9; Goswami trans. 2015, pp. 172–173)

In ranking as more accomplished in yoga the yoga practitioner whose reason (*buddhi*) is equal (*sama*) among the various types of human beings listed, Krishna acknowledges that it is much more difficult to sustain such equanimity in relation to other persons—about whom one may have strong positive or negative emotions—than to sustain sameness of valuation of external objects. We could wonder whether this difference in degree of difficulty sheds any light on what sort of perception is referred to as “equal vision” (*sama-darśana*) in the *Gītā*’s chapter 5 (which we have seen in our Chap. 3, Sect. 3.6).

The wise see as equal a learned humble *brāhmaṇa*, a cow, an elephant, and even a dog and dog cooker. (Goswami 2015, trans.)

In this stanza, equal vision in relation to a wide variety of living beings (both humans and nonhumans) is attributed to the “wise” (*pañḍita*). According to the Kashmir Shaiva *Gītā* commentator Abhinavagupta (950–1016 CE) the point here is that the *pañḍita*’s equal vision consists in not regarding different beings in terms of instrumental value:

... Thus these *yogins* do not think regarding the *brāhmaṇa* that by service etc. (of the *brāhmaṇa*) they will earn spiritual merit etc., or regarding the cow that it bestows holiness etc. Regarding the elephant they do not think of its value etc.; regarding the dog they do not consider that its impurity harms them; regarding the outcaste they are not exercised over his sinfulness, lack of purity, etc. Thus do they regard all equally, but they do not act thus in their worldly conduct. It has been said, [the soul] whose nature is pure consciousness is present in all bodies, there is no distinction within it. Therefore he who cherishes (*bhāvayan*) everything that is pervaded by it breaks [the bonds] of transmigration. (*Gītārthasaṅgraha* 5.18; Sharma 1983, p. 142)

It may be easier to regard a cow grazing in a field as you pass by as a living—and therefore spiritual—being with no direct instrumental value to you, than to regard with “equal reason” (*sama-buddhi*) someone who has

stolen your car or insulted you in public!⁴ In either case, the sense of instrumentality of other beings in relation to oneself is the issue. We can simply acknowledge the potential difference in degree of difficulty to experience equal reason regarding humans over that of viewing equally various other-than-human beings. But in both cases, in the wider context of the *Gītā* as a whole, equal vision and equal reason are both causes and consequences of the wise person's (the renounced *yogin*'s) comprehension of ultimate reality, or the Absolute, as *brahman*.⁵ As we discussed in Chap. 3, Sect. 3.6, the analytical (*sāṃkhya*) yogic process brings awareness of the self (*puruṣa* or *ātman*) in contradistinction to physical and mental embodiment. But Krishna offers a different ontological perspective in the *Gītā*'s fifth chapter in the context of *sannyāsa-yoga*. Inclusive of *Sāṃkhya*'s *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* categories, Krishna here refers to the nondual ontology espoused in the early Upaniṣads and later Vedānta, wherein *brahman* is the one absolute, nondifferentiated Being of which all beings (*puruṣa*) and all objects (*prakṛti*) are differentiated manifestations.

How does the *Gītā* elaborate on implications of a nondual ontology? Krishna ties the achievement of yogic absorption in *brahman* with the nature of a sage's pure consciousness as awareness of the "self, being the self of all beings" (*sarva-bhūtātma-bhūtātmā*—*Gītā* 5.7), that is, having full spiritual empathy or even identity with all beings.⁶ Moreover, and importantly, this state of awareness is not one of inaction; and yet, paradoxically, it is characterized as such:

"I do nothing at all." Thus a linked truth-knower (*tattva-vit*) should think. While seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, going, dreaming,

⁴These are, of course, two extreme examples, between which are at least two other types, namely, humans who are regarded as irrelevant to one's well-being (e.g., passers by on the street), and nonhuman animals regarded as a threat to oneself or one's property.

⁵One technique for developing equal vision from Buddhist tradition in Tibet is the practice of *lojong*, which includes "seeing others as equal to oneself," "exchanging oneself with others," and "taking others as more important than oneself" (Halkias 2021, p. 270). To include animals as these "others" is not mentioned but could be taken as an added challenge for the practitioner.

⁶Another possible translation of this compound phrase: "whose self has become the self of all beings" (Sargeant 2009, p. 249). R. C. Zaehner (1973, p. 205) cites the 12th c. Vaiṣṇava commentator Rāmānuja, "... for whom this [phrase] appears altogether too pantheistic... that this realization of the true essence of the self means no more than that all selves have one 'form' (*ākāra*)—that of 'wisdom', by which he means eternal being beyond space, time, and action. Diversity is due to material Nature."

breathing, chatting, letting go, grasping, even opening and closing the eyes—one should hold this conviction: *the senses move in sense objects*. (*Gītā* 5.8–9; Goswami trans. 2015, p. 169, italics in original)

Importantly, holding this conviction of detached action makes possible the second sort of sameness mentioned above—sameness of attitude regarding results of one’s actions. Since the results of one’s actions are within one’s control only to a very limited extent, and since one’s actions are essentially mere movements of senses in sense objects, this awareness fosters detached action which means detachment from actions’ results.

For one who holds such conviction of detached action, Krishna then enjoins that one entrust his or her actions “in the Absolute” (*brahmaṇy ādhāya karmāṇi*, *Gītā* 5.10).⁷ This fourfold concerted practice—of cultivating a sense of sameness of response to various physical and mental conditions; of practicing yoga as action in a spirit of renunciation of actions’ results; of sameness in valuing external objects; and striving to have sameness of regard for various persons—all serve to develop the sort of equal vision that Krishna portrays the learned sage as having in relation to various human and nonhuman beings.

But sameness, equanimity, equal reason, and equal vision are by no means the final goal of bhakti-yoga practice. Far from it. Nonetheless, the *Bhagavadgītā* places considerable importance on their intentional cultivation. I suggest that this emphasis has a therapeutic function, preliminary to the full development of bhakti. Looking again through the lens of Sāṃkhya, to overcome the heavy gravitational pull of *prakṛti*’s three modalities, one needs to go beyond the manifold dualities of ordinary phenomenal existence. Only then can one remain aloft in the practice of devotional yoga. Viewing through a Vedantic lens, in the *Gītā*’s eighteenth chapter (18.54), Krishna identifies the successful practice of devotional yoga as possible when one has achieved realization of the Absolute (*brahma-bhūta*—being of the nature of *brahman*).

That said, we may note parenthetically that Krishna also speaks of sameness of vision within the context of the Sāṃkhya-inflected perspective of

⁷ In the language of analytical ethical discourse, with its concern with the “right” and the “good,” it could be said that Krishna enjoins the moral agent to entrust him or herself to the good. See Perrett (1998, pp. 1–2).

three phenomenal modalities, identifying such vision with the quality of goodness, *sattva-guṇa*. “Knowledge in goodness” enables a vision of singularity in the multiplicity of beings:

Learn that knowledge (*jñānam*) in goodness (*sāttvikam*) is that by which one sees (*īkṣate*) a single unchanging reality (*ekaṃ bhāvam ayaṃyam*) in all beings (*sarva-bhūteṣu*), undivided in the divided (*avibhaktaṃ vibhakteṣu*). (*Gītā* 18.20; Goswami trans. 2015, p. 208)

Here, the sense of sameness as seeing “a single unchanging reality in all beings” is understood to be rooted in knowledge of a reality beyond temporal differences. The *Gītā* urges the yoga practitioner to awaken a vision of sameness among all living creatures, in accord with recognition of one’s own atemporal identity. One is not blind to differences in bodies. Rather, as one thinks of oneself, “I do nothing at all” while observing his or her senses “moving in sense objects,” one similarly thinks, “These cows, dogs, birds and lizards do nothing at all.” Their particular configurations of senses move in sense objects according to the capacities and constraints of their particular physical body types formed as specific bodies.⁸

The *Bhagavadgītā*’s exhortations to develop equanimity, equal vision, and equal reason can suggest a possible resonance and alignment with “identity theory” in animal ethics, a theory that we have touched on briefly in Chaps. 5 and 6. Within present-day animal ethics discourse, identity theory emerges from the neo-Darwinian observation of phylogenetic continuities in physical forms between human and other species. This diachronic understanding undergirds the synchronic observation of numerous similarities between human and nonhuman animal physiologies and behaviors. Acknowledging these similarities reverses the long tradition of regarding humans as unique, instead seeing differences as a matter of degree rather than of kind. Identity theory thus opens ethical space to nonhuman animals as having similar interests as humans, based on the principle of equal consideration of interests (Calarco 2015, pp. 11–24).

⁸ As an application of the *Gītā*’s teaching to the *Yoga Sūtra*, recall (from Chap. 4, Sect. 4.2.1) Patañjali’s advice to counter “negative thoughts” by cultivating counteracting thoughts, consisting of recognizing that such negative thoughts result in “ongoing suffering and ignorance.” Countering ignorance in particular is, according to the *Gītā*, knowledge in goodness (*sāttvikam jñānam*), characterized, as Krishna says, by “seeing a single unchanging reality in all beings.”

For us to note is that the *Gītā*'s equal vision ideal may extend identity theory, insofar as it aims to bypass all considerations of bodily or even mental similarities, differences, and capacities, in order to access a fundamental commonality, namely atemporal consciousness. Practitioners of yoga, pursuing this ideal, might agree with current identity theory's critics, who find it too logocentric, making justice for animals the domain of (unequal) reason alone—reason that is limited in its ability to discern non-phenomenal equality due to lack of yogic practice. From the *Gītā*'s perspective, such reason—however well-intentioned—is disconnected from the Absolute, *brahman*, the root Being of all individual beings, and therefore the pursuit of ethical treatment of nonhumans is bound to be noncomprehensive.⁹

While the *Bhagavadgītā*'s *brahman*-based identity theory of animal ethics promises greater comprehensiveness and inclusiveness of all animal life forms, Krishna hints at another advantage for identity theory:

Self-restrained sages, their sins spent, gain *nirvāṇa* in Brahman. Their duality severed, they delight in the good of every being. (*Gītā* 5.25; Goswami trans. 2015, p. 171)

We could be forgiven for being surprised that the sages in question “*delight in the good of every being*” (*sarva-bhūta-hite ratāḥ*). After all, equanimity and equal vision are expressions that suggest lack of emotion or even indifference, and the state of *brahman* that the sages have attained is characterized by nondifferentiation. Yet in this statement, Krishna directly connects this strong positive emotion of caring with attainment of *brahman*. In turn, *brahman* is here associated with *nirvāṇa*—a word we usually associate with Buddhist traditions as their ultimate soteriological aim. In those contexts, the word is typically translated as “extinction” or “cessation”

⁹There are possible objections to the moral reasoning implied here in terms of *brahman*, as the cause of all beings, justifying recognition of all beings as “intrinsically valuable” and possessors of “direct moral standing.” This issue is thoroughly discussed by Christopher Framarin (2011), who identifies three versions of the argument as a basis for an environmental ethic (and, I would add, an animal ethic). Identifying weaknesses in all three versions, Framarin offers an alternative that does not rely on any kind of identity between nature and God (or *brahman*). Rather, following Roy Perrett (1993, p. 94), he proposes the intrinsic value of pursuing *mokṣa*, liberation, for oneself and equally for all other sentient beings, as an appropriate basis for an environmental ethic.

and associated with the notion of absolute annihilation of the self (or annihilation of the notion that there *is* a self). However, in the context of the *Gītā* (which insists on the self's reality and eternal existence), *nirvāṇa* means "highest bliss or beatitude" (Monier-Williams 1995, p. 557). The point is that the *Bhagavadgītā* contributes to animal ethics identity theory by grounding it in the inclusive ontology of *brahman* which, when identified with by the *yogin*, awakens caring that goes well beyond an analytical sense of rightness to "grant" rights to (certain types of) animals.

7.2.2 *The Yoga of Devotional Difference and Difference Theory*

As an important approach to animal ethics, identity theory has had considerable traction in arguing for animal rights. In simple terms, animals—or at least certain animal species—are sufficiently like humans to warrant moral standing. Yet identity theory has its critics, whose concern is largely about its over-dependence on, or determination of rights based on, discursive reasoning. The negative effect of such reasoning is the arbitrary exclusion of some (or many) species from moral standing. One important alternative approach (or cluster of alternatives) to animal ethics, namely, *difference theory*, seeks to correct identity theory's shortcomings. We will briefly look at this approach as we explore possible parallels with a pivotal element of the *Gītā*'s (and later texts') ontology, namely, the further specification of the single ontological Absolute *brahman* as *paramātman*, the supreme Self.

As already noted in Chap. 3, Sect. 3.6, in his discussion of Sāṃkhya in the *Bhagavadgītā* (in its thirteenth chapter), Krishna speaks of two types of atemporal selves; one type consists of the countless living beings (*puruṣas*) who are ensconced in the aggregate of matter, *prakṛti* (*Gītā* 13.22). The second type is *puruṣa-parah*—a singular, highest Self, identified as "Witness, Permitter, Sustainer, Enjoyer, Great Lord," present in the bodies of all living beings along with the individual *puruṣa* (*Gītā* 13.23). This Self, *paramātman* (also referred to as *puruṣa-parah* and *parameśvaram*), which Krishna identifies as himself, is similar to the individual *puruṣa* in being a "knower of the field" (*kṣetra-jña*), one who experiences the phenomenal world through the psychophysical body. But this Self is different from the countless individual *puruṣas*, in that he is the knower of *all* fields, which is to say *all* bodies (*Gītā* 13.3, *kṣetra-jñaṃ*...

sarva-kṣetreṣu). Now the yoga practitioner is called upon to perceive—to *see*—how this Self of all selves is positioned in equanimity, and as such, is the supreme Lord:

One *sees*, who sees the Supreme Lord (*paramēśvaram*) standing equally in all beings (*samaṃ sarveṣu bhūteṣu*), unperishing as they perish. In fact, seeing the Lord abiding equally everywhere, one does not harm self by self. Then one travels on the highest path. (*Gītā* 13.28–29; Goswami trans. 2015, p. 196)

Here the nexus of equality has shifted from undifferentiated *brahman* to a higher locus of consciousness. Now it is the supreme Self that is *equally present* in all living beings and, as such, is omniscient as the “knower of all fields,” knower of all psychophysical bodies. The *yogin* who was previously described as *seeing* all beings equally now perceives that this equality is not simply because of an all-pervading, nondifferentiated *brahman*. Rather, *brahman* is differentiated as *paramātman*, distinct from *ātman* while present at all times with *ātman*. The nondifference, or identity, of all beings with oneself by acknowledging and dedicating one’s actions to the Absolute is now enriched by an ethics of difference that acknowledges a categorical difference between oneself and the supreme Self. This is a difference in a hierarchical sense, especially in terms of limited versus unlimited cognition of the finite *ātman* in contrast to the infinite *paramātman*. And by virtue of acknowledging this difference, one’s yogic perception of the Lord “abiding equally everywhere” (*samavasthitam īśvaram*), ensures in particular that the practice of *ahimsā*—non-harm—is rightly applied: “One does not harm self by self” (*na hinasty ātmanātmānam*). From this more developed way of seeing, the *yogin*’s conviction “I do nothing at all” becomes firm by virtue of understanding that *paramātman* is present and is similarly inactive-yet-witnessing in all living beings (*śarīra-stho ’pi... na karoti—Gītā* 13.32).

That a recognition of difference between the finite, individual self and the supreme Self is liberating is illustrated in a well-known parable in the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* (3.1.1–3), which reads as an allegorical illustration of the teacher-student relationship between the supreme Self and the individual self engaged in a lesson on detachment from worldly preoccupations that prevent one from seeing things as they are.

Two birds, companions and friends, nestle on the very same tree.
 One of them eats a tasty fig; the other, not eating, looks on.
 Stuck on the very same tree, one person grieves, deluded by her who is not
 the Lord;
 But when he sees the other, the contented Lord—and his majesty—his grief
 disappears.
 When the seer sees that Person, the golden-colored, the creator, the Lord,
 as the womb of *brahman*;
 Then, shaking off the good and the bad, the wise man becomes spotless, and
 attains the highest identity.
 (Olivelle 1998, p. 449)¹⁰

This brief, ancient didactic narrative tells of a dramatic moment of fundamental transformation, an epiphany, when the grieving bird-like person who has been preoccupied with enjoying the tree-like world's "fruits" perceives—becomes aware of—the other (bird-like) person who is the Lord (*īśam*). Seeing that this Lord is contented (*juṣṭham*), in contrast to his own discontent, and seeing the Lord's majesty (*mahimānam*), compared to his own smallness, suddenly this now enlightened person is freed from grief and thereby freed *for* full, unconstrained personhood. Notably, the contented Lord in this account has done nothing except "look on." Unlike his friend, he does not eat—he does not seek to enjoy the tree-like world and its fruits. He is the Person who is complete in himself, yet he "looks on" to the one who "eats a tasty fig."

Returning to the *Bhagavadgītā*, Krishna underscores difference between the individual self and the supreme Self in several ways, and the text also portrays, in the person of Arjuna, a dramatic turn away from grief as he comprehends that his interlocutor, Krishna, is a—or rather *the*—supreme divinity, the supreme person. But our question now is whether this understanding of difference between two categories of self serves to better grasp and engage with difference theory as an approach to animal ethics. From the *Gītā*'s perspective, the category of individual selves (referred to as *puruṣa*, *ātman*, or *jīva*) is inclusive of all living beings, as we have seen in the previous section. The second category consists of a single supreme Self (referred to variously, including *īśvara*, *puruṣottama*

¹⁰ A very similar story of two birds in the same tree is found in *Rgveda* 1.164.20 and in the *Bṛhādāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.1.2.

and *paramātmān*) who perpetually accompanies—like a companion bird in a fig tree—each individual self. In normative ethical terms, the individual self does well to turn attention to and consciously entrust him or herself to the companion *paramātmān*. By contrast, contemporary difference theory shows no concern with the metaphysics of selves and a supreme Self, typically rejecting entirely the “grammar of transcendence” and its function of grounding ethics (Quick 2022, p. 131 and *passim*; Bohanec 2024, *passim*). In contemporary difference theory, manifold difference between and among individual nonhuman animals and among humans, as well as difference among species, is the key starting point for recognizing moral worth. A critique of humanism and an ethics of difference (the irreducible uniqueness of the Other)¹¹ are at the root of this approach (Calarco 2015, pp. 28–39), but there appears to be no attempt to locate a metaphysical referent for difference, nor is there any explicit acknowledgment of relationality in terms of personhood. What exactly is the basis of difference is not discussed. From the perspective of the *Bhagavadgītā* (and the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*, quoted above), contemporary secular animal ethics theory retains an “absent referent” insofar as it avoids or rejects the grammar of metaphysics and transcendence.¹²

Nevertheless, both the *Bhagavadgītā*’s and contemporary approaches to difference may have common cause. Both can be said to recognize radical diversity, calling attention to the irreducible uniqueness of individual creatures, suggesting a feature of personhood, which I will consider further in the next section regarding the supreme person as *puruṣottama*.

¹¹ The critique of humanism (1) questions the notion of “human nature,” especially a fixed human nature or identity; (2) sees humans as irreducibly enmeshed in sociohistorical processes and cultural relations that constitute us from the ground up; (3) regards the “self” and the world one lives and moves in as “gifts of a sort, received from others, and not of [one’s] own making.” An ethics of difference (1) tries to respect and attend to the “emergent individuals”; (2) refigures the individual as “a unique node in a network of relations, an irreplaceable being-in-becoming—a *singular Other*”; (2) recognizes that the Other in effect issues a challenge to one’s way of life, others against whom one unthinkingly enacts violence in one’s daily life; and (3) pursues acts of affirmation and transformation, “of responding to the ‘call of the Other’.” Finally, (4) “[a]n ethics of difference starts from the premise that the ultimate origin of ethics resides not with me (my rationality, my freedom, my autonomy) but with the Other, with radical difference, or *heteronomy*” (Calarco 2015, pp. 30–32).

¹² The “absent referent” notion in animal studies usually refers to nonhuman animals being deprived of their unique subjectivity, especially by the production of meat for human consumption. But here I extend the meaning to indicate the animal ethics discourse insofar as it denies the existence of a transcendent referent which, in the *Gītā*, as central to its teachings on yoga and which is acknowledged in the *PYŚ* and other yoga texts and traditions.

Because of uniqueness, one is said to be called by the other to ethical behavior (rather than ethical behavior being initiated from oneself). And both approaches can be said to recognize that this call comes not only from other human beings, but also from nonhuman beings, in all their uniqueness.

But there may be a significant distance between the *Gītā*'s perspective on difference and contemporary understandings. We noted that the *Gītā* identifies the perception of a single unchanging reality in all beings as knowledge in goodness. In contrast, knowledge in passion (*rajo-guṇa*) is characterized by perception of various separate realities (*nānā-bhāvān*) among living beings (*Gītā* 18.21). Does this mean that perception of difference as such is of a lower cognitive level than perception of a "single unchanging reality," since the *Gītā* clearly urges the *yogin* to rise to *sattva-guṇa* from *tamo-guṇa* and *rajo-guṇa*? In this context, the difference between the *ātman* and the *paramātman* is salient, whereby the yoga practitioner who begins to cultivate devotion, bhakti, pursues sensitization to the watchful call of *paramātman*. According to this understanding, it is *through paramātman* who, uniquely, is present in the bodies of all living beings (accompanying each individual, unique *ātman*), that one is called to ethical behavior that is responsive to the uniqueness of each living being. Such ethical behavior brings to full fruition the companionship and friendship of the "two birds"—*ātman* with *paramātman*.

Thus, what the *ātman-paramātman* differentiation approach brings to difference theory as an approach to animal ethics is threefold. First, it offers an ontology on which difference theory can be grounded by recognizing each living being as irreducibly unique, a uniqueness that is expressed or manifest in part—but not entirely—by the specific bodily and mental situatedness of each being. Second, as *paramātman* is one single entity in—or accompanying—all living beings as the well-wishing friend of all beings (*subhṛdam sarva-bhūtānām*; *Gītā* 5.29), there is a single, sublime source of the call to ethical behavior, and this can explain why the call is compelling: the one who calls (the *paramātman*) is completely in accord with the unique living being to whom one is called to respond with ethical behavior.¹³ Such perfect accord is such because, according to Vaiṣṇava

¹³ A detailed analysis of the relationship between *ātman* and *paramātman* in terms of the latter's full cognizance of the former in all its particularities is found in the sixteenth-century treatise of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theologian Jīva Gosvāmī. See Dasa (2016, *passim*). We could also consider relating *brahmavibhāra* meditation (see Chap. 6, Sect. 6.4) to this notion of the

theology, *paramātman*'s witnessing (*kṣetra-jñā*) of all bodies and their actions is thorough and complete: by definition he is omniscient and unaffected by the cause of illusion and suffering (*avidyā* or *māyā*) for embodied beings. Third, the omniscience of *paramātman* also suggests his capacity to bridge what is typically considered a major difference between human and nonhuman animals, namely, language.¹⁴

Before proceeding to consider indistinction animal ethics theory, we can pause to question the value of theory as such, at least insofar as it diverts us from what I have just alluded to regarding there being a single, sublime source of the call to ethical behavior—to which, or whom, I am suggesting, yoga practice can serve to sensitize one. This notion of the call was famously articulated by Emmanuel Levinas to rethink ethical behavior among humans, though to my knowledge he never included nonhuman animals in his deliberations. Levinas has, nevertheless, been invoked regarding how one may be moved to good ethical behavior in relation to animals because—quoting Levinas—one may be struck by “the existential autonomy of the Other [becoming] irrefutable” (Potts 2010, p. 21). The salient point for us about *paramātman* in this context is that it is he who is the autonomous source of the call, and it is his otherness, present in all beings, to which one is impelled to respond. Further, because of *paramātman*'s presence in all beings, one can respect all beings, but always in appropriate ways, acknowledging the uniqueness of the conditions of a given nonhuman animal. Put simply, the *yogin* would treat cows and poisonous snakes with equal respect, but differently so.

7.2.3 *Indistinction Theory and Puruṣottama Yoga*

We recall that there is a third general approach to animal ethics, namely, indistinction theory. This approach addresses shortcomings in identity theory and difference theory by aiming to more deeply unsettle

ātman-paramātman connection: *paramātman* could be conceived as the perfect meditator who extends the fourfold meditation in relation to all beings. From this perspective, it is *paramātman* who enables a meditator to extend the meditation to unlimited goodwill, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity.

¹⁴See Nagel (1974) for a consideration of human inability to comprehend the experience of nonhuman animals, in his well-known essay, “What is it like to be a bat?” See Smith (2008) for a quite different perspective, namely, that it is indeed possible to comprehend animals' experience if one practices communicating with them telepathically, under qualified guidance.

anthropocentric thinking and acting, “leaving behind the search for anthropological differences” (what separates human beings from animals) (Calarco 2015, p. 53). Indistinction seeks to reverse the direction of bodily and mental features continuity. Rather than proceeding evaluatively from human to animal (“animals are like us humans”), indistinction theory proceeds from animal to human (“what about animals that are *not* like us?”). Recall (in Chap. 6, Sect. 6.5) Val Plumwood’s experience of biotic vulnerability, as potential food for a crocodile. She suddenly experienced the world as deplorable, seeing herself as nothing more than a part of the biotic food chain. In those moments of terror, she suddenly “became animal,” shorn of any presumed privileged status based on being human.

Also, recall the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* story of Jaḍa Bharata (also in Chap. 6, Sect. 6.5), who literally becomes animal in his next life, as a deer, a life in which he learns to care even for ants, the “least” of creatures. In this connection, we may recall the theistic character of the Jaḍa Bharata narrative, as we now explore this dimension in light of the *Gītā*’s teaching: beyond *brahman* and *paramātmā* is *bhagavān*, referred to in the *Gītā*’s chapter 15 as Puruṣottama, the fullest expression of the Absolute, the ultimate Person. In the *Bhagavadgītā* chapter 15 (traditionally titled Puruṣottama Yoga), Krishna (Puruṣottama) identifies himself as the active principle of all the various functions in the phenomenal world:

The splendor in the sun that lights up the whole world, and that in moon and fire—know it to be My own splendor. Entering Earth, I preserve beings with vigor; becoming the nectar-made moon, I nourish all plants. Becoming the digestive fire abiding in bodies of breathing beings, I mingle with in-and-out-breath and digest four-fold food. I dwell deep in the heart of all. From me come memory, knowledge and forgetting. By all Vedas, I alone am to be known. I made Vedānta and I alone know the Veda. (*Gītā* 15.12–15; Goswami trans. 2015, p. 201)

In these four stanzas Krishna uses the first-person singular pronoun “I” five times, identifying himself as the cause of cosmic illumination, the preserver of beings’ vigor, the nourisher of plants, the fire of digestion, as dwelling in all beings’ hearts, as the source or cause of remembering, knowing and forgetting, and as the final object and knower of Vedic knowledge. Krishna asserts himself to be the active principle of all things and all beings. He concludes the chapter (15.17) by declaring himself to be Puruṣottama, the highest or ultimate Person (*uttamaḥ puruṣaḥ*) who

is also called the supreme Self (*paramātmān*), the perpetual Lord (*avyaya īśvaraḥ*) who, having entered the “three worlds,”¹⁵ maintains them.

With this passage (among others), the *Gītā* takes a significant theological step to delineate a further distinction, beyond that between the *ātman* and *paramātmān*. This further distinction is between the Lord as *paramātmān* and the Lord as *puruṣottama*, whereby the latter designation alerts us with pointed force to what is touched on in the *Yoga Sūtra* of Patañjali, namely, that the Lord, *īśvara*, is a “special person” (*puruṣa-viśeṣa*; YS I.24). Whereas in that context the distinguishing features of his specialness are expressed in largely negative terms,¹⁶ this passage lists some of his several positive features. In other words, the *Gītā* brings to front and center the notion that what in English language is denoted as *personhood* is found in its fullest measure in that one who is the “lord of yoga,” *yogeśvara*, the *īśvara* of yoga who is a “special person,” *puruṣa-viśeṣa*. At the same time, I would argue, this emphasis on the specialness—the uniqueness of a single, particular, named person (*Krishna*, also referred to by several other epithets in the *Bhagavadgītā*)—suggests that personhood should be considered a characteristic of *all puruṣas*, all living beings.¹⁷

But how does the *Gītā*’s understanding of divinity as outlined just above complement or advance indistinction theory’s approach to animal ethics? Recall that this theory serves to unsettle anthropocentric thinking, “leaving behind the search for anthropological differences” from nonhuman animals. Indistinction theory decenters humans by acknowledging their embeddedness in the biotic world—their embodiedness. The *Gītā* also decenters humans by recognizing their embeddedness, along with all living beings, in *prakṛti*—characterized as a “field” (*kṣetra*) consisting of

¹⁵ “Three worlds” (*loka-trayaṃ*) is a common classical Indic way of indicating the entirety of the cosmos, consisting of lower, middle, and higher realms, whereby Earth is regarded as a middle realm. For an overview of how Krishna is identified in the *Gītā* as the supreme *person*, see Goswami (2015, pp. 45–48).

¹⁶ In the *Yoga Sūtra*, *īśvara* is “untouched by the obstacles (to the practice of yoga), karma, the fructification (of karma), and subconscious predispositions.” Positively, however, *īśvara* is identified as the first guru, in whom “the seed of omniscience is unsurpassed” (YS I.24–26; Bryant 2009, pp. 87–105).

¹⁷ Thus, the *Gītā* suggests that personhood is understood by first considering the special—the greatest—person, of which all other persons are in some way (as *aṃśas*—“portions”) related. Individual *puruṣas* in physical bodies—including all living creatures—are more or less *constrained* by their bodies, even as they all exercise various limited capabilities. In contrast, the *uttama puruṣa* is understood to have unlimited capabilities and no physically or otherwise imposed constraints.

the several components of nature (*prakṛti*) and their interactions (*Gītā* 13.2 and 13.6–7). But arguably the *Gītā* then calls for a human being to, in effect, reconstitute or refashion her or his body as a *devotional body*—a composite of physical, psychological/emotional, and intellectual capabilities and habits that direct the self outward to connect (*yoga*) with a *social body*, a *cosmos body* and—most especially—a *divine body* in a way that is liberative on all levels.¹⁸ By understanding *bhakti-yoga* in such terms, following Barbara Holdrege in her emphasizing the complex embodied nature of *bhakti*, a transformational sense of indistinction comes into view.

To see how *bhakti-yoga* complements indistinction theory of animal ethics, it will be worthwhile to briefly consider Holdrege's scheme of multiple dimensions of bodies.¹⁹ There are four steps to setting out this scheme of embodiment (Holdrege 2015, pp. 12–25). First, we note the broadly Indic conception of the body as a *psychophysical continuum* with both gross and subtle dimensions, and that this body has a *transmigratory history* with a karmic heritage (carried with the body's subtle dimension) as well as the genetic heritage of the body's gross dimension. Next to consider is the ontology of person and self in relation to embodiment, as understood specifically in *bhakti*-inflected thought and practice systems. Crucially, the system studied by Holdrege, that of the Gauḍīya Sampradāya, rejects both the sharp dualism of Pātañjala Yoga (of the *Yoga Sūtra*, reflecting Sāṃkhya ontology) and the monistic, or nondual, ontology of Advaita Vedānta.²⁰ Holdrege (p. 15) writes,

¹⁸In the language of the *Gītā*, the devotionally inflected social body develops in the exchanges among *bhaktas*, whereby they “enlighten one another” in speaking about the divine (*bodhayantaḥ paraṣparam*—*Gītā* 10.9). The devotionally inflected cosmos body develops in the yogic practice of *yajña* that sustains the “cosmic circular economy” (described in *Gītā* 3.9–16; see Chap. 9, Sect. 9.4). The devotionally inflected divine body unfolds in service to the divine, service that Krishna describes only in the most general terms: “Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you sacrifice, whatever you gift, whatever trouble you take—make that an offering to Me” (*Gītā* 9.27; Goswami trans. 2015, p. 183).

¹⁹There are several Sanskrit terms indicating *body* and, in addition to Holdrege's analysis, there have been others applied to Indic worldviews, invariably related to various theories of self. See Frazier (2017, pp. 32–33) on three classical Hindu notions of self in terms of degrees of disengagement or engagement with the world, namely, the *pure self* that is unaffected by any association with the world; the *core self* that may interact with the world but stands in counterpoint to it; and the *open self* that is deeply engaged in the world and continuous with it. All three notions of self find resonance in *bhakti* traditions.

²⁰The Gauḍīya Sampradāya, or tradition of Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism, refers to the *bhakti* tradition of devotion to Krishna shaped in the sixteenth century by Śrī Caitanya (1486–1533) and his immediate followers. See Gupta (2014) for a substantial introduction to Caitanya

The Gauḍīyas promulgate instead the ideal of *acintya-bhedābheda*, inconceivable difference-in-nondifference, which re-visions prevailing notions of the relationship between embodiment, personhood, and materiality on both the divine and human planes. On the one hand, they assert the deity Kṛṣṇa's supreme status as *pūrṇa* Bhagavān, the full and complete Godhead, who is beyond the impersonal, formless Brahman and is supremely personal and possessed of an absolute body (*vigraha*) that is nonmaterial. On the other hand, they maintain that the goal of human existence is for the *jīva*, individual living being, to awaken its *svarūpa*, its unique inherent nature, as a part (*aṁśa*) of Bhagavān and to realize the particular form of its *siddha-rūpa*, its eternal, nonmaterial body made of bliss... In the Gauḍīya perspective... the body is not a problem to be overcome but, on the contrary, is ascribed a pivotal role on multiple levels—divine and human, material and nonmaterial—as the very key to realization.

Thus, bhakti-inflected thought in this particular tradition offers a third option, beyond the dichotomy of ontologies represented by Sāṃkhya and Advaita Vedānta. In this understanding, the human psychophysical body has a pivotal role as a vehicle for higher realization (which, in the Gauḍīya tradition, is constituted of realizing one's *siddha-rūpa*—perfected, atemporal form).

A third step in understanding embodiment (in Holdrege's analysis) is to extend our usual notion of *body* to “include a hierarchy of structurally correlated bodies corresponding to different planes of existence: the human body, the social body, the cosmos body, and the divine body,” whereby the human body is nested in the social body, which is nested in the cosmos body—all of which are nested in the divine body. These *integral bodies* are complex wholes inherent in the structure of reality, first described in the Puruṣasūkta hymn (which we encountered in Chap. 2, Sect. 2.2). Finally, we can consider the human body (that, recall, is a psychophysical continuum with a transmigratory history) as a *processual body* that, in human form, assumes various *modalities*—ritual, purity, ascetic, tantric, or devotional—“in order to mediate transactions among the social body, the cosmos body, and the divine body” (Holdrege 2015, pp. 15–16).

Vaiṣṇava philosophy. Advaita (non-dualist) Vedānta refers to the philosophical tradition of which Śaṅkara (8th c. CE) is regarded as the founder. Vedānta thought is based largely on early Upaniṣads, and Advaita Vedānta specifically insists on a nondual ontology (*brahman* as the single absolute reality), in opposition to the ontological dualism of Sāṃkhya.

As complicated as this scheme may sound, readers are asked to bear with me. In previous chapters we have already considered ritual, purity, and ascetic modalities of the processual body, without using these terms explicitly. The ritual and purity bodies are those engaging with the social, cosmos, and divine integral bodies largely through the performance of sacrificial rites. As we have seen (in Chap. 2, Sects. 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4), animals are immolated in many of these rites, acts regarded by their performers as necessary for propitiating divinities, which is to say, for securing proper connection with the divine and other integral bodies.²¹ In contrast, the ascetic modality of the processual body can be seen in early expressions and later, classical Yoga practices (discussed in Chaps. 4, 5, and 6). In this case, the aim is, in effect, to *disassociate* the processual body from the social and cosmos integral bodies, bypassing them to possibly engage with the divine body, as suggested in Patañjali's advice to practice *īśvara-praṇidhāna*, to gain permanent release from all temporal bodily conditions or constraints. In contrast, the *Bhagavadgītā* synthesizes all these modalities (ritual, purity, and ascetic bodies, and tangentially also the tantric body²²) to highlight *bhakti*—engagement in the devotional body modality—as the culmination and final aim of the previous four modalities (ritual, purity, ascetic, and tantric). Krishna highlights his personhood in terms of his relationality with his devotees by declaring that when the devotional modality of embodiment is adopted and practiced, he is pleased (*Gītā* 12.13–20; 18.64–65). For the *bhakta*, divine satisfaction is considered the final *telos* and locus of value, the basis of ethical valuation. Within this frame of valuation, by following the principles and practices of *bhakti*, the practitioner enters into an ethically appropriate relation with all dimensions of reality—with all levels of integral bodies (psychophysical, social, cosmos, divine), and thus with all living beings, in recognition of their intrinsic value. Keeping to the terminology of integral bodies, Krishna locates the divine body—which he identifies as coextensive with

²¹ Alternatively to “proper connection” we might borrow from Frazier (2017, p. 195) her expression, “artful sovereignty over these realms of embodiment.”

²² Holdrege (2015, pp. 19–20) briefly explains the tantric body as a mapping of the divine into the human body, “in the form of the subtle physiology, which consists of an elaborate network of *nāḍīs* (channels) and *cakras* (energy centers) and the *kuṇḍalinī*... [which is] constituted through an elaborate system of ritual and meditative practices, termed *sādhana*, that involves instantiating the divine-cosmos body in the human psychophysiology with such devices as *bīja-mantras* (seed-syllables), *maṇḍalas* and *yantras* (geometric diagrams), *mūrtis* (ritual images), and *mudrās* (bodily gestures).”

himself—in the place of precedence, or absolute value (Holdrege 2015, p. 20).²³ This divine body is the eternal, all-conscious, ever-blissful supreme person who transcends, includes, and sustains all phenomenal bodies—psychophysical, social, and cosmos.

In this transcendent position of supreme personhood Krishna extends unlimitedly outward to all beings—in all their varied bodies—the possibility of personal relationality with the divine that may unfold and develop in a present body and over multiple lifetimes of psychophysical bodies, human and nonhuman. Such relationality is understood to be possible by virtue of his presence in all bodies as *paramātmān*, as we have already discussed, but also because of the specific nature of the divine body, namely, that it is constituted of eternity, knowledge, and bliss (*saccidānanda-vigraha*).²⁴ So constituted, the divine body is understood to *be the divinity*: Not that the divinity *has* a body (as is the case of all creatures); rather, the divinity and the divinity's body are one and the same. Importantly, the *saccidānanda* features also characterize all individual selves (persons) *in potentia*, whereby Krishna explains that each self (in the *Gītā* in this context referred to as the *jīva*) is related ontologically with him as his “part” (*aṁśa*). Being a part of the *saccidānanda* whole implies that the *jīva* also has the same features in kind, but to a very limited degree, and largely covered by temporal conditions and constraints of a given psychophysical body.

In the living world, the eternal living being [*jīva*], part [*aṁśa*] of Me alone, presides over matter-based senses, whose sixth is the mind. (*Gītā* 15.7; Goswami trans. 2015, p. 200)

Krishna clearly states that the part-whole relationship he holds with all living beings is eternal, without beginning or end. Consequently, the *jīva*—all *jīvas*, not only humans—as individual selves in psychophysical bodies

²³ Holdrege (2015, pp. 22–23) enumerates seven aspects of divine embodiment that distinguish later bhakti traditions from early Vedic formulations of divine embodiment, namely, particularized divine bodies, embodiment of the divine in time, in place, in image, in name, in text, and in human form. Common to them all is *accessibility* to the *bhakta*—the person pursuing the development of a devotional body.

²⁴ The theology of Krishna's identity as *bhagavān*, the supreme divinity, and analysis of his attributes, is discussed extensively in the *Bhagavat-sandarbhā* of Jīva Gosvāmin. See Dasa (2014, especially pp. 557–573, in which the transcendent nature of Krishna's body is discussed).

consisting of senses, including the mind, are constituted by knowledge (*cit*) and bliss (*ānanda*) that is perpetual (*sat*).

The upshot of this understanding from the *Bhagavadgītā* for animal ethics is that what we may call the center of gravity for ethical valuation is not located in the human; rather, it is located in the supreme person, *puruṣottama*, also referred to as *bhagavān* and, in the *Gītā*, as *yogeśvara*. From the bhakti perspective of the *Bhagavadgītā*, indistinction theory is thus grounded in a theistic ontology that, more specifically, is panentheistic in character: God both pervades the creation (the cosmos body) and is distinct and aloof from the creation. The practitioner of *bhakti-yoga* comprehends and acts based on what we can call “transcendent indistinction,” relating as a devotional body to the transcendent God as divine body, which encompasses all bodies.

In her study of Hindu worldviews, Jessica Frazier highlights how this interaction of devotional and divine bodies takes place in concrete conditions of time and space, whereby “interactive rituals cultivate the intimacy of space-sharing, that is, of feeling the spatially proximate presence of another body.” In the practices of *bhakti-yoga*, one engages with, or serves (*sevā*) a visible, physical image (*mūrti*), which “contributes to the creation of a ‘neighbourhood’ of both mortal and nonhuman persons. As such, embodiment here enables all sorts of beings to be b[r]ought within a spatio-temporal ‘neighbourhood’ defined by the routinization of regular bodily interactions within a locale” (Frazier 2017, p. 177). A “neighbourhood” inclusive of “all sorts of beings” is suggestive of a modestly scaled community that sustains a dynamic of interrelationality that is weighted always toward inclusivity based on divine absolute inclusion. This points toward “anticipatory community,” which we will discuss in Chap. 8, Sects. 8.7 and 8.8.

7.3 CONCEPTUALIZING ANIMAL ETHICS IN THE PRACTICE OF BHAKTI-YOGA

Let us now recap the *Bhagavadgītā*'s three perspectives on divinity and how *bhakti-yoga*, informed by these perspectives, can complement the three approaches to animal ethics—identity theory, difference theory, and indistinction theory. From comprehending divinity progressively as *brahman*, *paramātmān*, and *bhagavān* (or *puruṣottama* or *yogeśvara*) I suggested parallels with the three animal ethics approaches. Thus, identity

theory resonates with the *brahman* conception by virtue of *brahman*'s equal pervasion: All that exists is a manifestation of *brahman*; hence all living beings can be favorably compared by the thoughtful yoga aspirant to him or herself, who can *identify* with all living beings—*all* meaning *with no exceptions*—by virtue of recognizing this common denominator of atemporal Being. Because *brahman* is fundamentally conscious being, individual beings—which all exhibit consciousness, however minimally—have some claim to moral standing as portions of divinity.

In like manner, I suggest that difference theory resonates with the *paramātman* conception insofar as a difference between *ātman* and *paramātman* is recognized. The yoga practitioner who specifically prioritizes devotion to the supreme Lord is attentive to the spiritual identity of all beings as individual selves in *brahman*, but he or she is additionally cognizant that a second, *other* Self abides with all beings. As we noted, Krishna informs Arjuna that this cognition is liberating, freeing one from the preoccupations of one's own temporal, self-centered wants, as one's own moral personhood in relation to divine personhood comes to the fore. One is thereby free to fully acknowledge the endless differences among living beings as expressions of *their* personhood, of which, I should add, "incommunicability" (essentially, irreplaceability) is a key feature.²⁵ In effect, one is free to hear *paramātman*'s call to felicitous ethical action in relation to all living beings.

Regarding indistinction theory, we saw that the *Bhagavadgītā*'s panentheistic turn—presenting Krishna as the supreme *puruṣa*, inclusive of and transcendent to the world—decenters the human most thoroughly not by denying the existence of any center, but rather by locating the center entirely beyond the human, social, and cosmos bodies, in the divine body. The specific features of this divine body are radically different from psychophysical bodies: the divine body is constituted of being, consciousness, and bliss, whereas the psychophysical bodies of human and nonhuman beings are subject to nonbeing, benighted (or illusioned) consciousness, and misery. In contrast, as an "integral body," the divine body is "a

²⁵ See Zagzebski (2004, p. 194), listing and discussing five characteristics of persons, the fourth of which is *freedom*. Fifth (and for Zagzebski most important feature of personhood) is *incommunicability*: "A person is a being which belongs to itself and which does not share its being with another." Here we may also note Jacques Derrida's observation about his famous cat: "[The cat] comes to me as this irreplaceable living being that one day enters my space... What we have here is an existence that refuses to be conceptualized" (Derrida 2008, p. 9, quoted in Quick 2022, p. 92).

complex whole that is inherent in the structure of reality” (Holdrege 2015, p. 16). As such, it encompasses and replicates in the cosmos, social, and psychophysical bodies, suggesting that these all have potential to manifest, to some degree, the same features as the divine body, namely, being, consciousness and bliss.

It is precisely this potential that the *bhakti-yogin* pursues in a process of transformational yoga practice in a devotional modality. As Holdrege explains, the practitioner aims to transform the material body to a perfected nonmaterial body through a three-phase process of refiguring bodily identities—from an *ascribed identity* to an *inscribed identity* to a *re-membered identity*, a notion I will elaborate on in the next chapter. The *bhakti-yogin* thereby strives to facilitate the divinization of the social and cosmos bodies, such that the divine body reveals the core principle of ethical action in relation to all living beings in the social and cosmic spheres.²⁶

This brings our attention to the need to clarify what is meant by “body” when we see three aspects of “divine body” in relation to a “processual” body in the modality of bhakti. Is the devotional (bhakti) body not just another psychophysical body? And as such, is it not just another body like all nonhuman bodies, as all three approaches to animal ethics—*identity*, *difference*, and *indistinction*—assume with varying inflections? Going by contemporary theories of the body, this would seem to be the case.²⁷ This is where the theism of bhakti traditions is distinctive. The *Bhagavadgītā*

²⁶ See Holdrege (2015, ch. 2). This process of yogic facilitation of divinization of the social and cosmos bodies may be expressed in terms of Western ethics discourse as Cogen Bohanec (2024, ch. 1) does with respect to Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava ethics: “[V]irtue ethics, care ethics, and theological voluntarism are intertwined theories where the former (virtue ethics) focuses on the ‘bottom-up’ (from the worldly to the divine) perspective..., theological voluntarism focuses on the ‘top-down’ (from the divine to the worldly) perspective (theological voluntarism), and care ethics is the loving relationship between all levels of the ontological hierarchy in a way that is antagonistic to that hierarchy.”

²⁷ See Holdrege (2015, pp. 308–316) for an insightful discussion on contemporary theories of the body. She quotes Michael Radich who, surveying the range of such theories, concludes, “Through all these theories one particular body—the ordinary living human body—runs like a relentless *idée fixe*, and, we might say, the outlines of the ordinary human body demarcate the limits beyond which all such theories will not or cannot think.” Contrasting Western theories of the body with the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava conception, Holdrege concludes, “[T]he Gauḍīya discourse of embodiment not only challenges the privileging of *material* bodies; it also challenges the privileging of *human* bodies as the default template by positing a multiform array of divine bodies beyond the human realm and giving precedence to the absolute body of Kṛṣṇa, the supreme Godhead, as the paradigmatic body in relation to which all other bodies—divine as well as human—are classified and ranked.”

(and later Vaiṣṇava texts) comprehend as divine body both a singularity of form (*eka-rūpa*) and a multiplicity of form (*ananta-rūpa*) (Holdrege 2015, p. 311). As we will see in Chap. 8, the divine body can manifest multiple forms simultaneously; but also, divine embodiment can take various “mesocosmic” forms to facilitate the fashioning of devotional bodies. The upshot is that *bhakti-yoga* calls us to rethink our notions of the body as limited to the psychophysical body of living beings, and this can have important implications for our understanding of human relationality with nonhuman animals.

Slightly parenthetically, put no less importantly, since our attention in this chapter is on the *Bhagavadgītā*, and since we have identified *ahimsā* as foundational to classical Yoga practice, as we close this chapter it behooves us to consider the *Gītā*’s apparent ambiguity regarding violence and non-violence. Krishna’s exhortations to Arjuna that he must fight in the ensuing battle against his Kaurava cousins seem starkly opposed to the nonviolence ideal that Krishna specifically enunciates, using the word *ahimsā* four times in the course of the dialogue. Moreover, declaring, “Time I am, destroyer of the worlds,” (*Gītā* 11.32). Krishna himself appears to set the nonviolence ideal aside while executing his divine destructive purposes. If, following Patañjali and his commentators, *ahimsā* is foundational to the practice of yoga, and as we are taking this as a key element of the moral compass orienting yogic animal ethics, do Krishna’s statements apparently endorsing violence require us to reject his teachings, either in whole or in part?

Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869–1948), India’s emblem of nonviolent political action, tried to resolve this apparent contradiction by interpreting the *Bhagavadgītā* allegorically: the battlefield of Kurukshetra represents the human predicament; the five Pandava brothers represent the five senses; and the practice of yoga is for the purpose of bringing these five senses under control, conquering the passions and elevating oneself to spiritual perfection by unwavering morality, of which *ahimsā* is the highest principle.²⁸ For some, Gandhi’s allegorical approach may seem to deny that there is any contradiction in the *Gītā* regarding violence and nonviolence (the latter term being Gandhi’s preferred English translation of *ahimsā*). It could be said that his approach reduces the characters in the

²⁸For a multi-article discussion of the issue of violence versus nonviolence in the *Bhagavadgītā*, see Rosen (2002).

Mahābhārata epic to symbols, thereby trivializing the moral dilemmas portrayed therein.

Another approach to resolve the apparent contradiction is to focus on the *Gītā*'s context as part of the *Mahābhārata*. As we saw in Chap. 3, the *Mahābhārata* has a transitional quality, shifting away from the Vedic sacrificial ideology toward a yoga-inflected ethos. From this perspective, the *Gītā* can be seen as pivotal, as the issue of dharma comes into sharp relief. As an active member of the social body, viewing himself as a psychophysical body, Arjuna is obliged to perform his ascribed duty as a *kṣatriya* (warrior), for whom pacifism is not an option. Still, Krishna urges him to perform his duty with an attitude of yogic detachment and with awareness of higher truth: killing the body is not killing or harming the soul (the self, *ātman*, *puruṣa*). Social duties must be observed for such a person as Arjuna. In his particular conflicted context Arjuna acts compassionately (perhaps in a sense understood as such in Buddhist traditions).²⁹ For him, fighting does not oppose the *ahiṃsā* ideal any more than a person progressing in yoga practice by sitting in meditation who develops thereby an ascetic body that has minimal physical needs. Unlike the sitting *yogin* intent on withdrawing from the social body, Arjuna represents the *yogin* actively engaged with the social body, which is a field of activity in which conflict and violence is likely to erupt, demanding an appropriate—possibly violent—response.

Related to the contextual approach to the *Bhagavadgītā* with its emphasis on historical transition, a third way to resolve the apparent contradiction is to note that *ahiṃsā* is a component of “knowledge” (*jñānam*), listed in the thirteenth chapter (*Gītā* 13.8–12) along with several other components thereof (some of which resonate with the five *yamas* and five *niyamas* of the *Yoga Sūtra*). In this context as a component of knowledge, *ahiṃsā* is a *principle of valuing*—a way of knowing how to apply and enact the valuing of other beings in particular circumstances. In knowledge-based *ahiṃsā*, in a non-malicious way an enlightened ruler may inflict punishment on dangerous enemies to protect the innocent (Goswami 2015, p. 121). Further to *ahiṃsā* as a component of knowledge, as a key component of valuing (and thereby evaluating) activity, *ahiṃsā* serves as a moral compass in the process of transforming the devotional yoga practitioner's

²⁹ For example, see Jenkins (2022).

psychophysical body to a bhakti body.³⁰ In this understanding, as one practices valuing—particularly of living beings, according to particular considerations—a change of identity takes place. From an *ascribed* identity (in Arjuna’s case, ascribed as a warrior, requiring him to act “violently” to protect innocent others from violence), the *bhakti-yogin* shifts to an *inscribed* identity, which he or she “fashions” by the regular and regulated devotional activities referred to as *sādhana* (literally, “leading straight to a goal”).³¹ As *sādhana* practice becomes mature, one completes the change of identity to a *re-membered* identity (Holdrege 2015, pp. 311–315), one that, recalling Patañjali, is the complete fulfillment of *īśvara-praṇidhāna*, devotion to the supreme Lord. As we will see in the next chapter, this practice of valuing other beings in the practice of *bhakti-yoga* in relation to the *parama-puruṣa*, Yogeśvara, requires the exercise of moral imagination.

Questions for Reflection

1. As a human being contemplating the *brahman* identity of nonhuman animals, what is the value of having the conviction, “the senses move in sense objects”? (Sect. 7.2.1)
2. How is an ethics of difference an enrichment to the sense of nondifference of all beings with oneself? (Sect. 7.2.2)
3. The Upaniṣadic parable of the two birds in a tree describes them as “companions and friends.” Why is this significant, considering that the emphasis here is on difference between oneself and other living beings? (Sect. 7.2.2)
4. In the *Gītā*, Krishna claims all the credit for every phenomenon of this world, from providing the light of the sun and moon, to digest-

³⁰ Here I am drawing on Ryan Darr’s (2024, pp. 11 ff) distinction between value as a noun and value as a verb. Darr writes, “But when we look at practices of valuing, we find remarkable diversity. Consider the following: admiring, attending, protecting, preserving, respecting, befriending, caring for, teaching, cultivating, encouraging, comforting, praising, supporting, studying, challenging, providing for, giving, being present to. Our vocabulary for practices of valuing is so much richer than our vocabulary for value, and we should not let our limited vocabulary for value limit our ethical imagination” (p. 11).

³¹ The term *sādhana* is not found in the *Bhagavadgītā*; however, Krishna speaks of *abhyāsa-yoga*—yoga practice (*Gītā* 12.9), by which one progresses to yogic perfection, expressed in several stanzas (such as *Gītā* 6.45). Holdrege’s focus on bodily transformation in bhakti-yoga is based less on the *Gītā* and more on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and its interpretation within the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition.

ing our food, to enabling us to remember anything. What does this suggest about the practice of attention for the bhakti practitioner? (Sect. 7.2.3)

5. If the *ātman* and *paramātman* are distinguished from *prakṛti* and therefore from living beings' psychophysical bodies, why is there so much emphasis on the "devotional body" and its connection with a "social body" and a "cosmos body"? (Sect. 7.2.3)
6. In the context of understanding yoga as self-discipline, what "important implications" might there be for our understanding of human relationality with nonhuman animals by rethinking our notions of the body as "limited to the psychophysical body of living beings"? (Sect. 7.3)
7. Considering Krishna's declaration, "Time I am, destroyer of the worlds," how would you characterize his attitude to violence and nonviolence? (Sect. 7.3)

REFERENCES

- Beauchamp, Tom L., and R. G. Frey, eds. 2012. *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bohanec, Cogen. 2024. *Bhakti Ethics, Emotions, and Love in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Metaethics*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Bryant, Edwin F. 2009. *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali: A New Edition, Translation, and Commentary*. New York: North Point Press.
- Calarco, Matthew. 2015. *Thinking Through Animals: Identity, Difference, Indistinction*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Darr, Ryan. 2024. The Great Web of Being: Environmental Ethics without Value Hierarchy. *Religions* 15:520. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15050520>.
- Dasa, Satyanarayana, (trans. and commentary). 2014. *Śrī Bhagavat Sandarbha: God—His Qualities, Abode and Associates—Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī*. Vrindavan, India: Jiva Institute.
- Dasa, Satyanarayana, (trans. and commentary). 2016. *Śrī Paramātmā Sandarbha: The Living Being, Its Bondage, and the Immanent Absolute—Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī*. Vrindavan, India: Jiva Institute.
- Derrida, Jacques. 2008. *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. Edited by Marie-Louise Mallet. Translated by David Wills. Perspectives in Continental Philosophy. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Framarin, Christopher. 2011. *Ātman*, Identity, and Emanation: Arguments for a Hindu Environmental Ethic. *Comparative Philosophy* 2 (1): 3–24.

- Frazier, Jessica. 2017. *Hindu Worldviews: Theories of Self, Ritual and Reality*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Goswami, H. D. 2015. *A Comprehensive Guide to Bhagavad-gītā with Literal Translation*. Gainesville, FL: Krishna West.
- Gupta, Ravi M. 2014. *Caitanya Vaiṣṇava Philosophy: Tradition, Reason and Devotion*. Farnham, U.K.: Ashgate.
- Halkias, Georgios T. 2021. Buddhist Meditation in Tibet: Exoteric and Esoteric Orientations. In *The Oxford Handbook of Meditation*, ed. Miguel Farias, D. Brazier, and M. Lalljee, 263–287. Oxford University Press.
- Holdrege, Barbara A. 2015. *Bhakti and Embodiment: Fashioning Divine Bodies and Devotional Bodies in Kṛṣṇa Bhakti*. London: Routledge.
- Jenkins, Stephen L. 2022. Buddhism and Nonviolence. Chapter 3. In *Nonviolence in the World's Religions: A Concise Introduction*, ed. J. D. Long and M. G. Long. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003006763-4>.
- Monier-Williams, Sir Monier. 1995. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Nagel, Thomas. 1974. What Is It Like to Be a Bat? *The Philosophical Review* 83 (4): 435–450. <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0031-8108%28197410%2983%3A4%3C435%3AWIILT%3E2.0.CO%3B2-Y> (Accessed October 18, 2024).
- Olivelle, Patrick. 1998. *The Early Upaniṣads—Annotated Text and Translation*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Perrett, Roy W. 1993. Moral Vegetarianism and the Indian Tradition. In *Ethical and Political Dilemmas of Modern India*, ed. N. Smart and S. Thakur, 82–99. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Perrett, Roy W. 1998. *Hindu Ethics: A Philosophical Study*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Potts, Annie. 2010. The Politics of Carol J. Adams. *Antennae: The Journal of Nature in Visual Culture*, issue 14—Autumn, The Politics of Meat, pp. 10–24.
- Quick, Jacob. 2022. The Gaze of the Animal: On the Role of Attention in Derrida's Animal Ethics. Ph.D. dissertation, KU Leuven, Humanities and Social Sciences Group, Institute of Philosophy.
- Rosen, Steven J. 2002. *Holy War: Violence and the Bhagavad Gita*. Hampton, VA: A. Deepak Publishing.
- Sargeant, Winthrop, trans. 2009. *The Bhagavad Gītā: Twenty-fifth-Anniversary Edition*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Sharma, Arvind, trans. 1983. *Gītārthasaṃgraha of Abhinavagupta*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Smith, Penelope. 2008. *Animal Talk: Interspecies Telepathic Communication*. New York: Atria Books.
- Zachner, R. C. 1973. *The Bhagavad-Gītā with a Commentary Based on the Original Sources*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Zagzebski, Linda Trinkaus. 2004. *Divine Motivation Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





CHAPTER 8

Animals, Personhood, Wonder, and Bhakti-Yoga

8.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we will begin to draw together some idea-strands from previous chapters, aiming to fill in a tapestry of *bhakti-yoga*-inflected vision for human-nonhuman relationality that is liberating for all beings. A major conceptual thread, introduced in Chap. 2, is tied to the Vedic world of ritual sacrifice, which functioned in a context of divine, cosmic, and social bodies sustained in human community. In that milieu, certain nonhuman animals were regarded instrumentally, as means of gaining divine favor by technologies of immolation. We saw in Chaps. 2 and 3, emerging largely from this ritual matrix in reaction to it (yet also running parallel to it in time), was the more or less trans-cosmic, asocial, or even possibly anti-social orientation of yoga. Early yoga was located within an ideal of detachment and renunciation intended to foster the mental discipline and freedom from self-centered action, aiming toward a final transcendence of temporal life. In Chap. 4, Sect. 4.2.1, we saw that the ethical foundation of what we now call “classical” Yoga was encapsulated in the term *ahimsā*—the principle of non-harming, to be applied with respect to all creatures. This principle offered a strong challenge to animal instrumentalization, replacing it with a culture of reverence for all life. Then, the physical aspects of classical Yoga—*āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, and *pratyāhāra*—showed potential for yoga practitioners to identify with nonhuman animals in various respects (in Chap. 5). Further, through yoga meditational practices of

attention (in Chap. 6), the *brahmanivihāra* model of expansive inclusivity took shape, giving what we could call “meditational space” for the inclusion of nonhuman animals to have what some modern ethicists call moral standing or moral status (Beauchamp and Frey 2011). Further, in Chap. 7, expanding on the *Yoga Sūtra*’s (*Pātañjalayogaśāstra*’s) references to *īśvara-praṇidhāna*, our attention turned to the *Bhagavadgītā*’s unambiguously theistic orientation of *bhakti-yoga* highlighting three different ways of conceiving relationality between human and nonhuman beings in terms of different aspects of the divine body. Specifically, these three aspects of the divine body—*brahman*, *paramātmā*, and *bhagavān*—showed possible resonances respectively with three ways of conceiving relationality of human with nonhuman animals, namely, identity, difference, and indistinction.

Picking up earlier strands from the *Bhagavadgītā*, in Chap. 3, Sect. 3.6 and Chap. 5, Sect. 5.2, I have already introduced aspects of Krishna’s teachings that are germane to yoga thought and practice, leading into a devotional yoga (*bhakti-yoga*) approach to animal ethics. We touched on the *Gītā*’s teaching of the self-body distinction (in Chap. 3, Sect. 3.6) and its summary description of meditational yoga practice that culminates in endless happiness (in Chap. 5, Sect. 5.2). With these teachings in mind, and to explore in greater depth the process of “fashioning a devotional body” to enact a devotional vision in service to animal ethics, we now turn in this chapter to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and (briefly) to a later bhakti-centered text that is foundational to the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition, the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*—an early seventeenth-century sacred biography of Śrī Caitanya (1486–1533). In doing so, we bring important threads that enrich the patterns of our yoga-and-animal-ethics tapestry, beginning with the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*’s self-identified location in cosmic, cyclical time as *kali-yuga*—the aconic present age, characterized by endemic moral degeneration. We have already met the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in the account of the Fish Avatāra (Matsya, in Chap. 4, Sect. 4.3.2), and the story of the sage Jada Bharata (in Chap. 6, Sect. 6.5), calling attention to the importance of this text’s narrative dimension for conveying ethical values in a devotional register. Here we will consider further narratives as well as didactic passages of the *Bhāgavata*, as ways by which the *bhakti-yogin* is called to expand her or his reasoned imagination to accommodate and participate in a “universe of feelings” (Klostermaier 1988) in which the divine body (again, as described in Chap. 7, Sect. 7.2.3) extends personhood throughout creation.

After considering the *Bhāgavata*'s etiological allegory of the Kali age's inception linked to the torture of bovines, we shift to the text's account of a celestial elephant, Gajendra and his agonized struggle with an attacking crocodile that awakens Gajendra's devotional memory from his previous life as a human being. These two narratives set the background for teachings and further narratives that exhort auditors and readers to engage in *bhakti-yoga*. Then we will enter the *Bhāgavata*'s celebrated tenth book (of altogether twelve books), to the bucolic land, Vraja-Vrindavan, where the cowherd lad Krishna frolics with friends and fights with foes (both categories including both human and nonhuman beings). Vraja-Vrindavan (or simply Vrindavan, or Vraja/Braj) is a place that is pervaded and governed by what I call the *bhakti logos*, an all-encompassing understanding of devotional order that frames thinking about divine embodiment, becoming divinized (refashioning the psychophysical body as a bhakti body), and relating divine and human agency (Valpey 2006, p. 3). We will then consider how the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* expands on the *Bhāgavata*'s Vraja-Vrindavan vision of inclusive devotional community in pursuance of a "re-membering" of devotional bodies that fulfill the *Yoga Sūtra*'s ideal of *kaivalya*—albeit radically differently than portrayed in that text—by an ever-expanding community perhaps best described as a universe of feelings. Finally, returning to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, we will consider a didactic passage as a blueprint for inclusive "anticipatory communities." Such communities can be rooted in the "yoga" of connecting devotional virtue ethics with a theologically based voluntarism, the combination of which can foster an ethics of care for other-than-human beings in their uniqueness and in their numbers.

8.2 AN ALLEGORY OF TORTURED BOVINES

It is well known that Indic literature abounds in narratives with talking animals, serving educational purposes for imparting wisdom (Olivelle 2013; Taylor 2007). The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is a significant repository of this bounty, invariably locating wisdom in the precincts of bhakti, where creatures' bodily forms put no limitations on their devotional capacities (Gupta and Valpey 2013, pp. 1–17). The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* locates itself temporally in the Age of Kali (*kali-yuga*), fourth in a four-part cycle of increasing discord and decreasing human capacities (Valpey 2020, p. 28), a cosmic age extending from the time of Lord Krishna's departure from the world (said to have occurred some five millennia ago) to begin the

cycle anew after more than four hundred millennia. Included in the text's list of Kali's degraded features (*BhP* 12.2.1) are the day by day diminution of dharma, truthfulness, purity, tolerance, mercy, life duration, physical strength, and memory. Notably, these fading virtues, qualities, and capacities are typically advised to be cultivated in the practice of yoga. Book 1 (chapters 16 and 17; Prabhupāda 2017) recounts the scene in which this process of degradation first commences. To summarize:

Dharma, in the form of a bull, and Earth, in the form of a cow, discuss possible causes of their miserable present condition. The bull has lost three of its four legs (representing three principles of dharma—purity, austerity, and mercy—the fourth being truthfulness)—yet his concern is for the cow, who is grieving at the disappearance from the world of numerous virtues and qualities since the time of Krishna's departure from the world.

The earth-cow (*dharaṇī*—she who sustains) remembers when Krishna was present: she was relieved from the burden of military hordes trampling her body, and Dharma was relieved of his distress. Abundance prevailed, so much so that her “hair” (grass) horripilated.

The next scene is the back story to this discussion: King Parīkṣit (see Chap. 3, Sect. 3.2; grandson of Arjuna), out to rectify the increasing effects of Kali's presence in his kingdom, encounters Kali in person, appearing as an uncultured (*sūdra*) man clothed as a king, fiercely beating a cow and a bull. “For harming innocent beings, you deserve to be killed!” thunders Parīkṣit to Kali.

After assuring the cow and bull of protection, the king urges the bull to name the perpetrator of its mutilations, the loss of three of its legs. But the bull refuses to assign blame, instead reflecting philosophically on the difficulty of determining causality. “We are bewildered by different statements (of theorists); hence, we know not what are the seeds of affliction (*kleśa-bījāni*).” Perhaps the original cause is oneself; perhaps it is destiny (*daivam*); perhaps it is karma, or perhaps it is one's disposition (*svabhāvam*). Hearing these thoughtful reflections, the king now declares the dharma-bull to be Dharma in person, for he, the bull, refusing to assign blame, recognizes that both the accused and the accuser may share the same destination (a state of continued bondage in the cycle of death and rebirth).

In the end, the king restores the bull's (Dharma's) three lost legs and restores the cow (Earth) to health by his responsible rule. He confines Kali's residence to five types of places, namely, wherever there is gambling, drinking, prostitution, animal slaughter and accumulation of gold—the adharmic activities by which dharmic cultures of truthfulness, austerity, purity, and mercy are undermined.

Thus, the final settlement with Kali (whose life Parīkṣit is impelled to spare due to Kali's having surrendered to him) is the *Bhāgavata's* explanation for present-day and future disturbed and decadent conditions.

We in the twenty-first century might want to identify several additional features of degradation to those listed in the text, from human-generated climate change, desertification, and species loss, to rampant industrial animal slaughter, child trafficking, genocide, pandemics, widespread malnutrition, widespread chronic mental depression, and so much more. From one side, the *Bhāgavata* conveys a sense of inevitability to present conditions, the locus of which is an invisible, diabolical character who takes disguises and lurks wherever unseemly activities thrive. On the other side, it suggests memory, awareness, and anticipation of an alternative, blessed way of human and other-than-human life which, by virtue of being remembered, is recoverable by pursuing the devotional ideals displayed in the *Bhāgavata*, as exhibited in the practices of *bhakti-yoga*. Combining these two aspects, this narrative sets up a frame of valuation, a moral compass for positioning the cultivation of the bhakti body in relation to the social, cosmos, and divine bodies. Encapsulating virtues and practices that sustain the moral compass are four ideals echoing Patañjali's *yamas* and *niyamas*—mercy, truthfulness, purity, and austerity—that are represented by the four legs of the bull, Dharma. As we will see next, within this frame, a devotional body can manifest in any physical form, including that of nonhuman animals such as an elephant.

8.3 AN ELEPHANT REMEMBERS TO PRAY

As noted, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* situates itself in the cosmic time of the Kali age. Its cosmic spacial center is our planet earth. Its narratives range far into previous ages and far beyond earth to other realms in the cosmos, taking as a given that life forms of all sorts populate its furthest reaches, including many beings that are superior to humans in several capacities (Frazier 2017, pp. 165–166). There are also celestial regions with animals like those on our planet, such as elephants and crocodiles. There, biotic violence as we find here on earth, while just as harsh as on earth, can prompt an elephant's memory of a previous life, reawakening his devotion to Vishnu, leading to divine, liberative intervention (*BhP* 8.2–4 summarized; Prabhupāda 2017).

Gajendra (king of elephants, different from Gaṇeśa/Gaṇapati, discussed in Chap. 5, Sect. 5.5), together with his consorts, children, and elephant

companions, to refresh and sport, ventures into clear lake waters in a valley of Trikuṭa, a triple-peaked mountain in an unspecified celestial realm. The garden surrounding the lake is rich with varieties of flora and fauna, and the lake teems with various fish and waterbirds. Suddenly, while enjoying in the water with his family, Gajendra is attacked by a crocodile clamping its jaws into one of his legs. Desperately trying to fight off the crocodile, Gajendra loses strength while the crocodile gains strength in its watery element. Aware that neither by himself alone nor with all his companions can he be rescued, Gajendra takes refuge in the Lord (*īśah*, *bhagavān*), meditating upon him (root $\sqrt{dhyai}$) as the self-existent one (*svayambhuvam*) and root of the self (*ātma-mūlah*). Among his several (perfectly composed Sanskrit) praises, Gajendra declares,

“I am devoted to You. I offer homage to You who are Yourself free, and who can easily free a beast like me from bondage, as You are very compassionate. I offer homage to You, *Bhagavān*. You are *Brahman*. You are known as the inner Seer of the mind of all embodied beings by means of one of Your partial manifestations.” (*BhP* 8.3.17; Bryant trans. 2017, p. 445)

Within moments, four-armed Lord Nārāyaṇa (Vishnu) descends from his eagle mount, Garuḍa, drags Gajendra and the crocodile from the water, and slices off the crocodile’s mouth with his disc weapon *Sudarśana*.

The text continues with back stories: In his previous life, the crocodile had been King Hūhū of the celestial Gandharva clan, cursed by a certain sage Devala. Similarly, Gajendra had been in his previous life King Indradyumna of southern India, cursed by sage Agastya for failing to welcome him and his entourage while he (the king) was in deep meditation, having retired to the forest.¹ And now that Nārāyaṇa delivered them both, the crocodile resumes his identity as a Gandharva king, and Gajendra—rather than returning to be a ruler in south India—achieves liberation from temporal existence altogether, assumes a form like that of Nārāyaṇa, and accompanies Nārāyaṇa (riding on Garuḍa’s back) to his atemporal abode.

¹This story inverts that of King Parīkṣit (referred to in Chap. 3, Sect. 3.2) being cursed by a *brāhmaṇa* boy to die in seven days for having disrespected his father who, absorbed in meditation, seemed to ignore the impatient king. In the back story of Gajendra, Agastya—a renunciant—replaces the *kṣatriya* king Parīkṣit, and King Indradyumna replaces the silent sage Śamīka, the renunciant father of the *brāhmaṇa* boy. Parīkṣit is cursed to die by snakebite (of a flying “snake-bird”) for silently draping a dead snake around the neck of Śamīka, whereas Indradyumna is cursed to become an elephant for simply remaining silent in the presence of Agastya.

As improbable as this and the previous narrative may seem to us late modern readers, they open us to their “universe of feelings” in which non-human animals are portrayed as participants as much as humans.² In the elephant-crocodile episode, the ordinary reality of biotic violence, of predator versus prey fighting for survival, is reconceived as a scene of forgotten identities remembered with divine intervention rooted in divine care. Even if we moderns are allergic to *deus ex machina* solutions to dramatic conflict, a message is derivable here: in the logic of bhakti, the supreme person, although entirely beyond the phenomenal world, is ready and able to intervene quite physically on behalf of his endangered *bhakta*.³ Further, outward appearances can deceive: any life form may, in fact, be a *bhakta*, temporarily ensconced in a nonhuman body (as we saw in Chap. 6, Sect. 6.5, the case of the *yogin* Bharata being born as a deer),⁴ so situated for reasons we may not know. Thus, the divine body is never entirely separate from the devotional body, as the latter progressively remembers the former. A measure of indistinction obtains between the *bhakti-yogin* and Yogeśvara—a measure that becomes one of emotional intensity as the devotional universe of feelings expands to be inclusive of all creatures.

² See Balkaran (2019, pp. 6–33) for a helpful discussion of reading “behind,” “within,” and “in front of” a text. A bhakti practitioner aims to read “within” the *BbP* to benefit from its devotional lessons.

³ There is an obvious parallel between Nārāyaṇa’s intervention in this account and Matsya’s intervention (discussed in Chap. 4, Sect. 4.3.2) to save King Satyavrata. The word *bhakta* refers to a person devoted to a particular divinity, or one who practices bhakti, the yoga of devotion.

⁴ Greg Bailey (1989, p. 30) identifies a sequential devotional pattern of nine functions in Puranic narratives: (1) introduction; (2) spiritual ignorance of the future devotee; (3) beginning of spiritual realization for the future devotee; (4) demonstration of the god’s grace; (5) “conversion” of the devotee; (6) demonstration of the devotee’s devotion; (7) the god offers grace to his devotee; (8) the devotee re-affirms devotion by accepting the grace; and (9) the devotee performs specific activities as an expression of devotion. This pattern can also be seen in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*’s devotional narratives, with variations. Invariably what is described are profound transformations of character, whereby it may be said that there is a convergence of virtue ethics and theological voluntarism (Bohanec 2024, ch. 1).

8.4 TEACHING BHAKTI—FASHIONING A DEVOTIONAL BODY

These two narratives, one etiological account of the present dark age's inception and the other of divine intervention in a universe of biotic violence, will serve as narrative background for a look into the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*'s didactic dimension as it relates to our concern for yoga and animal ethics, now in a devotional register. I noted (in Chap. 4, Sect. 4.1) that, as a discipline, yoga traditions invariably call for the practitioner to practice under the guidance of a qualified teacher or guru. Our attention here is on the practice of bhakti-yoga, as a transformational process moving from an ascribed psychophysical body to an inscribed, and finally remembered nonmaterial body, as we saw in the previous chapter. Several extensive *Bhāgavata* didactic passages are aimed at facilitating such practice and transformation, and they typically consist in the teachings of a guru figure to a disciple figure (recapitulating the text's outer frame structure, in which the sage Śuka teaches King Parīkṣit who, recall from Chap. 3, Sect. 3.2, had been cursed to die in seven days). The paradigmatic guru in Vaiṣṇava bhakti traditions is Krishna, celebrated especially for his teachings in the *Bhagavadgītā*. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* showcases several *bhāgavatas*—persons dedicated to *bhagavān*—who act as gurus. Among them, we have already encountered Jaḍa Bharata teaching King Rahūgaṇa (in Chap. 6, Sect. 6.5) as he humbles the proud ruler and enlightens him about basic higher truths on the distinction between self and body.

Another explicit, guru-given lesson in the bhakti-yoga register is in the form of an extensive allegorical cautionary tale, told by sage Nārada to a certain King Prācīnabarhiṣat. Prācīnabarhiṣat is a typical, materially pious person who considers himself a good follower of his dharma as a ruler who respects and is ready to listen to a sage such as Nārada. Nārada first alerts the king to the certainty of the king's future suffering for his having killed so many animals in sacrificial rituals, despite having done so according to sacred writ:

All these animals are awaiting your death so that they can avenge the injuries you have inflicted upon them. After you die, they will angrily pierce your body with iron horns. (*BhP* 4.25.8; Prabhupada trans. 2017)

To urge the king to abandon his benighted ways and take to the serious practice of *bhakti-yoga*, Nārada tells him an allegorical story, of a certain King Purañjana ("city man") who rules a city of nine gates (the physical

body, with its nine orifices). There he experiences all possible enjoyments, with a wife and numerous children, for one hundred years. One of Purañjana's amusements is to hunt and kill animals in the forest—animals which are all themselves nonviolent, “like sages following vows of harmlessness.” But in the course of time, Purañjana's city is destroyed by Kālakanyā, the daughter of Time, and Purañjana is ingloriously dragged away to be gored by the horns of the animals he had previously sacrificed.

Concluding an extensive explication of the allegory (including references to Sāṃkhya ontology and cosmology), Nārada urges the king to adopt the process of bhakti-yoga, which is constituted in particular by dedicating oneself to hearing narratives (*kathā*) in relation to “he who is not fallen” (*acyuta*, an epithet of *bhagavān*). Persons who do so in the company of broad-minded *sādhus* who are *bhāgavatas* (persons devoted to *bhagavān*), will not, says Nārada, be affected by hunger, thirst, fear, lamentation, or illusion (*BhP* 4.29.37–40).

Nārada's teaching introduces the process of *inscription* of a devotional body, a processual body that has the potential to recognize and engage with the divine body, characterized, as we saw, by eternality, illumined consciousness, and bliss (*saccidānanda-vigraha*). By interaction between these two bodies, the entirety of the phenomenal world—constituted of the cosmos and social bodies—become subjects of care. We get clear indications of how this happens through both the modeling and teaching of such practice in the figure of Prahlaḍa, represented in the *Bhāgavata*'s seventh book (Prabhupāda 2017).

Prahlaḍa (“filled with joy”) is a young boy, a son of the tyrannical titan Hiraṇyakaśipu (“he whose cushion is golden”) who, with his brother Hiraṇyākṣa (“golden eyes”), was forced to leave their positions as guards to Vaikuṇṭha, the transcendent realm of Vishnu, in their previous forms as Jaya and Vijaya. Forgetting his previous blessed identity, Hiraṇyakaśipu now obsessively longs to avenge the death of his brother at the hands of Vishnu who had, in the form of a giant, club-wielding boar (Varāha) slain the mischievous titan in a duel, thereby recovering the Earth, which had sunk into the nether regions (as told in *BhP* 3.16–19).

Prahlaḍa, a student of Nārada, is an embodiment of virtue, the opposite of his father in character. Among Prahlaḍa's qualities (praised by Nārada as “innumerable”—*asaṅkhyeya*) are: determination to comprehend spiritual truth (*satya-sandha*); self-control; being “like the (supreme) self,” a kind friend to all beings; and freedom from pride and passion. Most importantly,

he has a natural attraction (*naisargikī rati*) for Vāsudeva (Vishnu). Like Jāda Bharata (see Chap. 6, Sect. 6.5), even as a child Prahḷāda would appear aloof from the world and, from time to time, he would exhibit characteristics of one deeply absorbed in devotional feelings that would erupt in crying, laughter, singing, dancing, and dramatically acting out the Lord's divine acts (*BhP* 7.4.31–41).

In addition to all these good qualities, Prahḷāda is an exceptional teacher. Unfortunately, his father does not appreciate his lessons. When Prahḷāda offers him good advice—that he should retire from his kingship and household, retreat to the forest, and there take refuge in Hari (Vishnu)—Hiraṇyakaśipu dismissively laughs, ordering the boy's tutors to be vigilant against any devotional influence on the boy. Prahḷāda, undeterred, later offers further advice to his father:

“Hearing, praising, remembering Vishnu, serving humbly, worshipping, praying, assisting, and giving oneself—if one practices bhakti toward Vishnu in these nine ways, I regard that person as most learned” (*BhP* 7.5.23–24; author's trans.).

From dismissive laughter, to anger, to rage, the boy's deranged father tries, and fails, to have his son slain, and it is this despicable behavior that leads to Hiraṇyakaśipu's death at the hands (or claws) of Vishnu in his semi-theriomorphic form as Narasiṃha—human-lion. Even then, despite his father's having attempted to kill him, Prahḷāda begs the Lord to deliver his father rather than punish him further after death.

Embedded in this account of the joyful Prahḷāda as a devotional *yogin's* father-son conflict culminating in a semi-theriomorphic theophany is a list of nine devotional yogic practices. Later tradition will elaborate on these as the means for developing a devotional body, or *inscribing* a devotional body.⁵ At first glance, we may see no connection between the contents of this list and our topic of interest, animal ethics. But the location of this explicitly didactic moment within the story of the human-lion *avatāra*, Narasiṃha, prompts me to identify a meaningful connection. First, we can draw on Cogen Bohanec's proposal to frame bhakti as a convergence of

⁵ Later Vaiṣṇava tradition—in particular the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition—will identify such inscriptive practice as *vaidhī-sādhana-bhakti*, regulation-based practice of devotion, and will elaborate extensively with details of how this is done in practical ways by engaging all one's faculties in acts of service to the divine body of *bhagavān*. See especially David Haberman's (2003) translation of Rūpa Gosvāmin's sixteenth-century masterpiece, the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* (the Ocean of the Nectar of Devotional Relish).

virtue ethics,⁶ “theological voluntarism,”⁷ and care ethics⁸ (Bohanec 2024, chapter 1). So, for example, we recall that Nārada sees Prahḷāda as “like the (supreme) self,” a kind friend to all beings; thus, he models the virtue of unrestricted kindness, mirroring that of the divinity and thereby responding to and enacting the divinity’s innermost yearning. By *hearing* (*śravaṇam*) about such virtue exhibited in a *bhakta*, the practitioner becomes inclined to imbibe the same virtue. Further, the first three of the nine practices—*hearing*, *praising*, and *remembering* Viṣṇu—are three ways of focusing attention directly on (or concentrating and meditating on—*dhāraṇā* and *dhyāna*) the divinity as the supreme well-wishing friend of all beings (the substance of the divine will to which the devotee responds, in the spirit of theological voluntarism). Also, Prahḷāda models *assisting* (*dāsyam*) the divinity, demonstrating care for his father and for the world by fearlessly speaking truth to power. This Prahḷāda does in such a way that the divinity dramatically bursts onto the scene to protect his innocent, equipoised devotee, and to dispatch his viciously unhinged father to the next world.⁹ Prahḷāda also *prays* (*vandanam*) to Narasiṃha thus (in another section of the *Bhāgavata*—5.18.9):

Let there be good fortune in the universe. Let the deceitful be pacified. Let creatures meditate on what will bring each other well-being. Let the mind be calm in the worship of Adhokṣaja [Krishna]. Let our intelligence be immersed in him, without any motive. (Debroy trans. 2018, Fifth Skandha)

⁶ Bohanec (2024, chapter 1) explains: “As a form of virtue ethics, bhakti ethics (as I understand it) needs not provide a universalizable standard for decision making (such as consequentialism or deontology), rather (as per virtue ethics) it is concerned with the ethical character development of the practitioner where to be a more ethically developed person makes it more likely that one will make the more ethical decision when a conundrum arises—irrespective of if that decision favors individuals and specific moral precepts more (e.g. deontology) or favors systems and outcomes more (e.g. consequentialism).”

⁷ Bohanec identifies “the discovery of God’s innermost yearning,” namely, his desire for “love and happiness for all beings,” as the substance of God’s will (*ibid.*, previous note).

⁸ Bohanec defines care ethics as “ethics that emphasize relationally engaged moral responsibility over disengaged, individualist, abstract universalizable rules for decision making” (*ibid.*, previous two notes).

⁹ An important function of the *Bhāgavata*’s Narasiṃha narrative is to show that divinity always outwits any attempts to thwart his power or to be impervious to death: Despite receiving several protective boons from the demiurge Brahmā, such as not to be slain by man or beast nor by any weapon, Hiraṇyakaśipu is killed by the claws of the “half-man, half-lion” *avatāra*. Hiraṇyakaśipu can be said to embody the five afflictions (*kleśa*) listed by Patañjali, including fear of death (*abhiniveśa*; *YS* II.3).

Beyond these examples of the ninefold bhakti practice's application, others can be developed whereby the emphasis is on *attention* to other-than-human beings while regarding them as part-and-parcel of the divine body. Of course, these activities—hearing, speaking, remembering in particular—are also integral to animal exploitation in all its varieties, arguably at the root of so much that most of the human species regards as “civilization.” But the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* suggests that the same activities—the same simple psychophysiological functions—when framed in the practice of bhakti-yoga, can be transformative to human relations with nonhuman beings. Moreover, *attending* to nonhuman beings in the devotional register of seeing their participation in divinity, one's attentive hearing, speaking, and remembering animals in relation to Vishnu (or possibly to Shiva, as Paśupati—lord of animals) serves the counteractive function that Patañjali advises in the *Yoga Sūtra* (II.33–34) for overcoming thoughts and actions unfavorable to the five aspects of restraint and the five aspects of observance (*yama* and *niyama*). Put another way (prompted by Jacob Quick's discussion of Jacques Derrida's animal ethics), attentive hearing, speaking and remembering animals in relation to divinity can powerfully turn us from the “discourse of disregard” to the “discourse of recognition” (Quick 2022, p. 90). Further, the bhakti-yogin will come to recognize through careful, well-guided practice that, while intuiting the presence of the divinity in nonhuman animals as well as in humans, there comes the possibility to approach and enter a place of *re-membrance*. There, the devotional body (which is to say, the devotee) may participate in supermundane visions of what Vaiṣṇava traditions call *līlā* (roughly, divine pastime, play, or supermundane adventure).

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*'s extensive book ten famously recounts Krishna-*līlā* in narrative fashion, structured roughly as a diachronic sacred biography, beginning with Krishna's childhood adventures in the bucolic land of Vraja-Vrindavan. Generally in the background of Krishna's story, but at times brought to the foreground, is the presence and importance of various animals. Most prominent among the animals are cows, since Vraja-Vrindavan is a cowherd community and Krishna acts as a cowherd boy (*gopāla*). All residents of Vraja-Vrindavan—human and other-than-human, flora as well as fauna, are entranced by Krishna's wonderful form and qualities, so much so that their meditation on Krishna is constant, even as they go about their routine activities or, in the case of flora, remain stationary.

As one of several *līlās* recounted in the *Bhāgavata* that shows the interplay of devotional (human and nonhuman) and divine bodies, we can

consider an episode in which the young child Krishna counters the cosmic demiurge Brahmā's theft-and-disappearance trick with his own, far more wonderful, appearance trick.

8.5 THE DEMIURGE'S PRACTICE OF WONDER

A narrative in book 10, chapter 13 of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* that is much beloved by many Krishna-*bhaktas* is the Brahmā Vimohana Līlā—the pastime of Brahmā's bewilderment. This story illustrates some important features of what I will call the *practice of wonder*, a key component of *bhakti-yoga* practice. The episode is important, as it calls on us who read or hear it to exercise considerable imagination. We are told how Krishna “expands” himself to become so many exact replicas of his friends as well as of the calves they had been attending.

Six-year-old Krishna is in Vrindavan forest with his friends, tending the village's calves while amusing themselves in various boyish ways. It is around midday, so they sit together on the Yamunā river bank to enjoy the lunch they have brought with them. While the boys eat, sharing their delectables with each other and laughing, celestial denizens peer down at the scene, amazed to witness the supreme person, the recipient of sacrificial rites (*yajña-bhuk*) casually picnicking with his friends.

Absorbed in their fun, only when it is too late do the boys notice that the calves in their charge have wandered off (despite that the area the boys had left them in was so rich with fresh grass). After convincing the boys to stay and continue with their lunches, Krishna sets off searching for the calves. Meanwhile, the highest celestial, Brahmā, had become greatly astonished (*praptaḥ param viśmayam*) while witnessing from on high Krishna's wondrous feat of slaying the monstrous serpent Agha just before the boys have lunch. Agha (“sin,” “evil”), like several animal-shaped monsters before and after him, had been sent by the evil king Kāṁsa to kill Krishna. For Krishna, this threat was just another adventure for him and his friends. For Brahmā, however, it is an inspiration to display his own powers to Krishna.

And so, Brahmā causes the calves to disappear, returning to his celestial abode to wait and see how Krishna will react. Krishna, not finding the calves, returns to his friends and sees that now they are also nowhere to be seen. As the omniscient Lord—*viśva-vit*, he immediately understands that this is all Brahmā's trick. “Then, to please the mothers of the calves and the cowherd boys, and also to please Brahmā, Krishna, the creator of the cosmos, the *īśvara*, expanded himself”:

Krishna, the unborn one, the underlying identity of all, was so many small bodies of calf herders and of calves, in whichever way their hands, feet, and other body parts were, and was so many staffs, horns, flutes, leaves, *śīkya*s [poles for carrying pots], ornaments and garments of the same kinds as theirs, to the extent that the temperaments, virtues, voices, shapes, age, amusements and so on were as before; hence he was resplendent as though he were the embodiment of the text “Everything is imbued with Vishnu.” (*BhP* 10.13.19, based on trans. of Dāsa 2018, p. 171)

The story continues: for an entire year Krishna enacts the routines of cowherd village life with all the boys and calves who were expansions of himself interacting in their relationships in their routine ways. The only difference is that the calves’ and boys’ mothers’ feelings of affection for their calves and boys become intensified “without limit” as Krishna, in the form of all the calves and boys, enjoys drinking the milk from his many “mothers.” When Brahmā returns after one year (after a moment, by Brahmā’s celestial time frame), he finds Krishna and his friends together with the calves, as if nothing had happened. Seeing that these expansions of Krishna were all different from the originals, “having meditated for a long time to understand who were real and who were not, Brahmā could not understand at all” (*BhP* 10.13.43).

Readers of the *Bhāgavata* are then informed that all the calves and boys who were Krishna’s expansions now transformed before Brahmā’s eyes, morphing into so many four-armed forms of Vishnu; further, “all living beings—stationary and moving, from Brahmā to clumps of grass—” were, in countless varied ways, honoring those Vishnu forms (*BhP* 10.13.47–51; Prabhupāda 2017).

How can we value this story in relation to the practice of bhakti-yoga and relationality between human and nonhuman animals? First, the demiurge Brahmā can be understood as being constituted of the cosmos body (following the *Bhāgavata*’s descriptions of him as the creator of the cosmos, under Vishnu’s direction). The cowherd boys’ parents in relation to their children can be understood as the social body. Krishna’s expansion as exact copies of the boys and calves constitutes a demonstration of all-inclusiveness as the divine body, facilitating devotional meditation for the parents and cows, and inducing wonder in the celestial Brahmā. The scene described suggests a “communion of subjects” (Waldau and Patton 2006).

Further, let us recall the practices of *svādhyāya* culminating in *īśvara-praṇidhāna* within *niyama* of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* (in Chap. 4, Sect. 4.3). I suggest that this *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* book 10 passage serves as a guided vision in extended narrative form that unfolds the practice of *svādhyāya* leading

into *īśvara-pranidhāna*, exercising the imagination to identify the story's bovine calves with divinity, or as included in the divine body. In other words (in Holdrege's terms of fashioning a processual body), remembrance and visualizing of this passage facilitates bodily transformation of the bhakti-yoga practitioner's temporal, psychophysical body to an atemporal, devotional body that enables her or him to imagine nonhuman animals as extensions of the one supreme being, the supreme person. In this story, the cosmic engineer, Brahmā, prompts the supreme person to display his unlimited yogic powers of self-replication. In effect, Brahmā is like a yoga student who dares to test his yoga teacher's yogic power, while Krishna, as Yogeśvara, is the yoga teacher who, as the divine person, can effortlessly expand the divine body. Importantly, Krishna's reason for doing so arises from an overflowing of affection for his student as well as for the mothers of his friends and of the calves in his charge.¹⁰ The vision is so overwhelming for Brahmā that his sense of cosmic order is thoroughly unsettled, as he is unable to determine which forms of calves and boys are "real" and which are "unreal," or whether such a distinction makes any sense. And in the end, his sense of creaturely hierarchy is upended as he witnesses how all beings throughout the cosmos, each according to their particular ways, are engaged in devotionally honoring the one supreme being. Brahmā's state of awareness is one of *liberative wonder*, a deep sense of interest that goes far beyond his initial curiosity.¹¹ This difference between curiosity and wonder impels Brahmā to honor Krishna with choice prayers, expressing his shame for having dared to test Krishna while also confirming Brahmā's designation as *adi-kavi*, the primordial poet.¹²

¹⁰The phrase "overflowing with affection" is suggestive of the Sanskrit term *ānanda*, the bliss aspect of the divine body, *saccidānanda-vigraha* (Puri n.d.).

¹¹Robert C. Fuller (2006, p. 10–11) helpfully elucidates the notion of wonder in relation to Indic traditions' expressions of encounter with the divine. Distinguishing wonder from curiosity and surprise, he writes, "Instead, wonder in the Indic tradition is a reaction to the opportunity to witness divine, heavenly, or exalted phenomena. Wonder, therefore, is intimately linked with what the Indic tradition calls *darshan*, the ritual act of seeing divinity. Whether occasioned by a temple icon or a sacred place in nature, 'religious seeing' is thought to disclose the life and consciousness that pulsates throughout the whole of creation... Religious seeing entails actually participating in the essence and nature of the person or object that elicited this perception... Religious seeing is thus fraught with wonder. It takes a person beyond his or her own individuality to participate in a greater ontological whole."

¹²These prayers are in *BhP* 10.14, the chapter immediately following the chapter in which this story is narrated.

8.6 DEVOTIONALLY REFASHIONING THE SOCIAL BODY: TOWARD A COMMUNION OF SUBJECTS

As we have already noted, along with what we could call narratively guided meditations such as the one just described, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* includes several extended didactic passages, including elaborations on yoga philosophy and practice. We noted previously (in Chap. 5, Sect. 5.3.1) Dattātreyā's learning from twenty-four gurus, several of whom were non-human animals. Continuing from this passage in the *Bhāgavata*'s book 11 is Krishna's teaching to his cousin Uddhava, extending through twenty-five chapters (in later tradition referred to as the Uddhava-gītā). Chapters 17 and 18 therein introduce some aspects of how the social body changes in terms of the cosmos body's cyclical time dimensionality, specifically from the golden age, *kṛta-yuga*, to the next age, *treta-yuga*. This history (or parahistory) will be useful for us to note, to grasp the *Bhāgavata*'s vision of the social body in which the devotional—"processual"—body moves from ascription to inscription to re-membrance. These moves can be seen as an expansion of vision and sense of wonder that favors the discourse of recognition with regard to animals.

As we saw in Chap. 2, Sect. 2.2, the Puruṣasūkta hymn of the *Rgveda* famously—or notoriously—gives an originary account of the fourfold *varṇa* system of a social body conceived in terms of four features of the primordial Puruṣa's body:

The brahmin was his mouth. The ruler was made his two arms. As to his thighs—that is what the freeman was. From his two feet the servant was born. (*RV* X.90.12; Jamison and Brereton 2014, p. 1540)

But in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* Krishna tells Uddhava that in the Kṛta Age—the first of the cycle of four that ends with the present Kali Age—there was only one *varṇa*, which he refers to as *haṃsa*. At that time, all persons were “free from sin” (*mukta-kilbiṣāḥ*), being always engaged in *tapas*—austerities for self-purification. Not until the next, the Tretā Age, does the practice of ritual sacrifice begin, sustained by the fourfold *varṇa* social body. In an intriguing echo of the Puruṣasūkta, Krishna then identifies a fourfold life-stage (*āśrama*) counterpart to the *varṇa* system, bringing to the latter a temporal dimension in terms of an individual human lifespan. Thus, the *āśrama* of married life appears from Puruṣa's loins; *brahmacarya* (celibate student life) appears from his heart; from his chest appears the

forest-dwelling retired life-stage; and from the Puruṣa's head appears the stage of renunciation (*saṁnyāsa*) (*BhP* 11.17.13). Although there is a sense of fixity to the *varṇa* aspect of the social body—that an individual's ascribed identity in terms of *varṇa* is determined by one's birth in the family of a particular *varṇa*—there is also a sense of completeness and sustainability of this social body, based on interdependence—as the various parts of a single physical body are interdependent—with a recognition of changing needs in the course of individuals' lives as one proceeds through different life-stages.¹³

To be sure, the *Bhāgavata*'s picture of social organization is, to a large extent, one of rule-bound behavior within a hierarchical classificatory framework of ascription. *Brāhmaṇas* are “superior” to *kṣatriyas*, as the head is superior to the arms, and so on. And yes, a sort of great chain of being finds recognition—as throughout Indic literature—also in the *Bhāgavata*.¹⁴ Still, with the development and perfection of bhakti as its core aim, the text conveys a strong sense of expansiveness: rules are to be supportive of the devotional spirit and conducive to the cultivation of devotional emotions. The spirit—not the letter—of the law is to be observed. One particular example (in the book 11 account listing *āśrama* rules for living in the Tretā Age, and presumably through the next period—the Dvāpara Age—and even in the present Kali Age) is the ancient rule for the householder to acknowledge and repay the fivefold congenital debts.¹⁵ One way expansiveness is expressed in this context is the recognition of invisible beings as requiring acknowledgment (through daily performance of various prescribed rituals), namely, celestial beings that sustain nature's bounty (*devas*), bygone sages, who provide human society with their collective wisdom (*ṛṣis*), and ancestors, who make life possible by procreation

¹³We may note that the *BhP* suggests some flexibility in *varṇa* designation, indicating (in 7.11.35) that it is a person's characteristics (*lakṣaṇam*), not his or her birth into a family of a particular *varṇa*, that determines one's *varṇa* identity. For an overview of “on the ground” current and recent social dimensions in Indian Vaiṣṇava traditions, see O'Connell (2019, esp. chapter 3).

¹⁴One example of this hierarchical view of living beings is in *BhP* 10.13.51—*ātmādi-stamba-paryantaiḥ*—“from himself (Brahmā) down to a clump (of grass).”

¹⁵“One in the *grhastha* [householder] order of life should daily worship the sages by Vedic study, the forefathers by offering the *mantra svadhā*, the demigods by chanting *svāhā*, all living entities by offering shares of one's meals, and human beings by offering grains and water. Thus considering the demigods, sages, forefathers, living entities and human beings to be manifestations of My potency, one should daily perform these five sacrifices” (*BhP* 11.17.50; Prabhupāda trans. 2017). See also Valpey (2020, p. 171).

and nurturing (*pitṛs*). Visible beings—humans, who make up all the varied components of human society (*nr*) and all living beings, who constitute animate life in all respects (*bhū*)—are to be acknowledged by hosting and feeding, respectively. Such expectations serve to help householders restrain and overcome selfish tendencies that would go against the basic ethical principles and observances required in the practice of yoga (as articulated, for example, by Patañjali as *yama* and *niyama*). Krishna (11.17.50) emphasizes the devotional dimension of this fivefold rule by exhorting the householder to regard all five types of beings as forms of himself (*mad-rūpāṇi*). Simply by consciously making a mental identification of all these types of beings as forms of the supreme being, *bhagavān*, the preoccupied householder practices devotional meditation that evokes an impulse to appropriately and generously honor all beings.

A key bhakti-focused counterpoint to the *Bhāgavata*'s articulation of rules is also to be found in book 11 (2.45–47), before the Uddhava-gītā, in a discussion on *bhāgavata-dharma*—appropriate ways of living for persons seeking to be accomplished in bhakti-yoga. Here we find a threefold typology of devotional progress, or fashioning a devotional body, in terms of expanding perception and valuing of other beings. I believe it will be useful to relate these levels of progress in bhakti-yoga to the three approaches to animal ethics described by Matthew Calarco, approaches that we have already discussed in relation to three conceptions of the supreme person, as *brahman*, *paramātmān*, and *bhagavān*.

In the beginning level of devotional progress, the practitioner is primarily concerned with the practice of rituals performed in bhakti-yoga for engagement of one's physical senses in divine service (*sevā*). This is an essential aspect of *sādhana-bhakti*, the regulated practice of devotion that develops an inscribed identity to replace the ascribed identity of one's birth and social position. The rituals performed in *sādhana-bhakti* are centered on daily attending to a particular divinity represented in physical form, as a "mesocosmic embodiment" of the *saccidānanda* divine body. As Jessica Frazier notes (2017, p. 167), the aggregate of such practice, known as *arcana*, is importantly different from earlier, instrumental forms of Indic interactional worship in that "the interaction itself has intrinsic value." This practice consists in making of one's own body—including the senses and mental faculties—an instrument for the Lord's service, conceived as various routine or occasional bodily conveniences, comforts, and pleasures as might be enjoyable for the "supreme enjoyer" (*bhoktr*) (Valpey 2006, *passim*). For a Krishna-bhakta, Krishna as the supreme person is

fully present in his form seemingly constituted of stone, metal, wood, or other materials, once the image has been properly consecrated according to scriptural injunctions. It is quite possible, therefore, for a serious practitioner, even as a beginner, to experience “worship as the communion of persons” (Frazier 2017, p. 167). Frazier further notes (p. 168),

The ritual enactment of a profoundly interactive relationship with the divine is nowhere more explicit than in the practices of *darśana* by worshipers, and *mūrti-sevā* by temple priests. In these cases, in addition to participating as a member of a divine community, a neighbour of the gods, as it were, one also undertakes direct personal bodily interaction with the physical form of the deity on earth.

As a communion of persons, this practice serves to span the mundane-supernatural divide (p. 170) in the simplest of ways, namely, the viewing (*darśana*) of the divine image, whereby the viewer (including the non-priest temple visitor) experiences both *seeing* the divinity and *being seen* by the divinity (Eck 2024, *passim*). In our context, this is significant as an experience of extending recognition of personhood beyond the human to not only the nonhuman but to the (apparently) inanimate temple image. This is understood by the *bhakti-yogin* as not mere attribution of personhood—as a form of anthropomorphism—but rather as a *recognition* (recognition), an experience of remembrance of the personal ground of reality about which there is extensive analytical discourse in Vaiṣṇava and other bhakti literature.¹⁶

Invariably, a major component of *arcana* is preparing and offering food to *bhagavān* as present in the divine image. In all Vaiṣṇava bhakti-centered traditions, the food offered is strictly vegetarian, and because dedicated practitioners want to cultivate a sense of being directly dependent on the divinity rather than on any cosmic (natural) or social contingencies, they restrict their diet to exclusively consecrated food—the vegetarian fare that has been received by the divinity, blessed by him, and “returned” as *prasāda*. This practice is regarded as honoring the yogic principle of *ahiṃsā*, insofar as any retributive and world-binding consequences of the

¹⁶ See for example Dasa (2014), one of six treatises—*Ṣaṭ-sandarbhā*—on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, developing therefrom a systematic personalist theology. See also Haberman (2020), especially pp. 202ff, “Intentional Anthropomorphism.” I should note that this idea of “recognition” and “remembrance” need not be taken as an indication of time as a sequential movement, such that what was “forgotten”—one’s relationship with the divine—before some inconceivably long temporal interval, is now being “remembered” in the conventional sense.

acts of acquiring and preparing the food offerings are understood to be removed by the grace of the supreme person.¹⁷

These *arcana* practices are mainly associated in this section (book 11) of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* with the beginning stages of *bhakti-yoga* (*prākṛta-bhakti*). On this level, even while focusing on cultivating a sense of communion with the supreme person in the physical image, the beginner might be neglectful of the fact that the same supreme person is present in all creatures as *paramātmān*. Consequently, the beginner may be neglectful of other human persons, including other devotees, and might also show little interest in nonhuman animals. Such a beginner *bhakta*'s approach to animal ethics (if consciously considered) might be significantly colored by the *brahman* conception of the supreme and hence would likely resonate with *identity* theory: Nonhuman animals—at least some—are like humans in important ways that indicate, minimally, the reasonableness of according rights to animals. The locus of such a *bhakta*'s ethics would be himself or herself as validator of other creatures as, in effect, “potential humans”—creatures that may take human form in a future life, understood to be the only bodily form enabling practice and perfection of yoga, permanently transcending the psychophysical body in all its possible forms.¹⁸ This attitude might manifest as a quietist sensibility of live and let live, primarily honoring the principle of *ahiṃsā* in one's personal life by maintaining a vegetarian or vegan diet.¹⁹

Continuing with the *Bhāgavata*'s three-level typology of devotional progress, the second level of devotional yoga is found in persons who progress further in developing an inscribed identity. Again, this is a “devotionally informed body” that—evoking Bourdieu's notion of a ‘socially informed body’ (*habitus*)—is *inscribed* with the socioreligious taxonomies

¹⁷ See *Gītā* 3.9, 3.13, and 9.26.

¹⁸ While this perspective might be condemned as Indic human exceptionalism, the exceptionality pertains if and only if a human pursues yogic elevation; otherwise, the human is regarded as unexceptional, potentially preparing for a nonhuman animal birth in his or her next life.

¹⁹ Regarding quietism in relation to animal ethics, see Williams (2023, pp. 186–87) quoting D. Cooper, *Animals and Misanthropy* (New York: Routledge, 2018): Quietism “is not shoulder-shrugging indifference or abandonment of action. It is precisely because they are disturbed and depressed by the truth of the misanthropic verdict that quietists seek to shape their lives in ways that respond to this verdict. Nor does quietism entail the abandonment of action—of, for example, action that alleviates the suffering of some creatures. But it does mean maintaining a focus on what one can sensibly hope to achieve oneself, rather than on the prospects of big ‘causes’ and social movements.”

of the *bhakta-saṅgha*, the... community of *bhaktas*” (Holdrege 2015, p. 95). A person cultivating this second level of devotional life distinguishes four categories of beings, namely, the supreme person (*īśvara*); persons inclined toward serving the supreme person (*adbhīna*); foolish, ignorant, or disempowered persons (*bāla*); and persons who are inimical to the culture of bhakti (*dviṣa*). One who acknowledges these distinctions reciprocates with each of the four categories in different ways, namely, by showing or cultivating love (*prema*) toward the supreme person; cultivating friendship (*maitrī*) toward the supreme person’s servants (those who are also intentionally cultivating love toward the supreme person); showing compassion (*kṛpā*) toward foolish persons who are ignorant of spiritual matters or are otherwise disempowered; and maintaining indifference or equanimity (*upekṣā*) toward persons who are inimical toward oneself as a practitioner of devotional yoga.

More so than the first level of practitioners, those who experience these fourfold distinctions reflect an appreciation of “horizontal” as well as “vertical” bhakti, a significant step toward participation in bhakti-oriented community, which is regarded as essential for making devotional progress.²⁰ By its nature of supporting and encouraging devotional insight—aiming to see all beings in relation to the supreme being, *bhagavān*—the bhakti-oriented community is inherently expansive and appreciative of difference as expressions of personhood, including differences among human and nonhuman beings beyond the human-nonhuman divide.

Related to this last point, in terms of approaches to animal ethics, we can consider it as an expression of devotional practice that resonates with *difference* theory: Seeing and appreciating difference between *ātman* and *paramātman* is played out, in part, in seeing differences in these four categories of beings and responding to each appropriately. As we have seen, difference theory emphasizes the call of the Other, the ethical demand to show one’s ability to respond (response-ability). Noteworthy also is this fourfold typology’s similarity to *Yoga Sūtra* I.33, with its fourfold method of cultivating *citta-prasādanam*, and the Buddhist practice of *brahmavihāra*, the four divine abidings. Like these practices, as we have

²⁰ I am gratefully indebted to the late Joseph O’Connell for discussions in which he shared his notion of horizontal and vertical bhakti. The latter, which tends to be the focus of the bhakti-yoga beginner, refers to practices and cultures focused on the divinity; the former focuses on practices and cultures of relationality between and among *bhaktas* and, more broadly, the wide world of living beings.

seen in Chap. 6, Sect. 6.4, the practice of bhakti serves to expand the practitioner's horizon of concern in ways that can be inclusive of nonhuman animals, by remembering the presence of *paramātmān* in each unique creature. More so than the quietism of the initial level of bhakti, this level of bhakti practice could be more positively engaged in acts of compassion aimed to heighten awareness of the *ātman-paramātmān* relationship in all beings. Being well inscribed with a devotional body, the *bhakti-yogin* on this intermediate level of progress experiences greater freedom to act with care for other beings, supported by the quality of illumination (*sattva-guṇa*, in the Sāṃkhya system associated with classical Yoga).

On the third of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*'s three-level typology of devotional yoga progress, the text identifies the most accomplished *bhakti-yogin* (*uttama-bhakta*) as follows:

One who sees the presence of the Lord (*bhagavad-bhāvam*), one's (*ātmanah*) [object of worship], in all beings (*sarva-bhūteṣu*) [and] sees all beings in the Lord (*bhagavaty ātmany*) is the best of *bhāgavatas*. (*BhP* 11.2.45; author's trans.)

The emphasis on *seeing* in this verse highlights the sense of direct experience (*pratyakṣa*) that is so important in yoga epistemology.²¹ One of the *Bhāgavata*'s prominent models of this highest level of bhakti is Prahlāda who, as we noted before, is portrayed as one who prays for the well-being of all creatures (*BhP* 5.18.9): "Let creatures meditate on what will bring each other well-being." The narrative of Prahlāda's direct meeting with Vishnu (as Narasimha) suggests that his mood of compassion is rooted in his direct perception of the divinity. The *Bhāgavata* also indicates that such accomplished *bhakti-yogins* have an intimate relationship with the divinity, who declares,

Sādhus [devotees] are in my heart, and I am in their hearts; they know no one but me, and I know none but them. (*BhP* 9.4.68)

²¹ The *Bhagavadgītā* (9.2) also points to the value of direct experience in yoga practice, specifically identifying its own teaching as *pratyakṣāvagamam*—"realized by direct perception." Of the several means of knowing (*pramāṇa*) delineated in Indic thought, classical Yoga accepts three, namely, direct perception (*pratyakṣa*), inference (*anumāna*), and verbal testimony (*āgama*, especially divine scripture—*śruti* or *śabda*). The *PTŚ* specifies direct perception as superior to other sources of knowledge (Bryant 2009, pp.32–38; *YS* I.7 commentary).

Surely, the point here is not that the supreme person is ignorant of, or ignoring, all beings apart from his devotees, or that the devotees are ignorant of, or ignoring, anyone besides him. Rather, the opposite: it expresses a heightened appreciation by the divinity of the *bhakta* due to his or her sharpened awareness of the divinity's presence in all beings, as well as the *bhakta's* deep regard for the divinity in being present in and caring for all beings.

A *bhakta* of this caliber is fully aware of the fourfold distinctions among persons perceived by practitioners on the second level of progress, previously described. Yet for this more accomplished *bhakta*, all distinctions tend to be subordinated to a single distinction, that of the singular supreme person, *bhagavān*. Perceiving *bhagavān's* presence in all beings impels the *bhakta* who sees (root $\sqrt{drś}$)—far more so than the lesser accomplished *bhakta*—to envision an ever-widening community—indeed a “communion”—of sentient beings that are irreducible, intrinsically valuable *subjects* rather than instrumental objects.²² The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and its adherents would claim that it is such persons—those who actually perceive *bhagavān's* presence in all beings—who are most able to recognize experientially that “animals are, in their own right, *subjects* of experience, beings with consciousness, emotional and moral range, ontological status, theological value, or pain comparable to our own, rather than the *objects* of human perception or usage” (Waldau and Patton 2006, p. 11). Only based on this single distinction of a single divine presence in all creatures, they would claim, is it at all possible to meaningfully conceive of a true communion of subjects. This point is underscored by taking the word “subject” in its other sense, as one who is in a ruler-subject relationship, whereby the ruler is the supreme person, the one who accompanies and guides all beings in their multi-life sojourns. The *bhakti-yogin* seeks to experience such guidance as always with bhakti, devotional exchange, a liberative rather than an oppressive relationship, as the aim.

Can we think of this third level of bhakti as resonating with Calarco's third approach to animal ethics, *indistinction*? I believe this is a meaningful perspective. On this third level of bhakti there is re-membrance of one's atemporal body whereby the devotional body becomes fully

²² It is interesting to note that the eighteenth-century Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava commentator on the *BhP*, Viśvanātha Cakravartī, writes that this stanza (*BhP* 11.2.45) can be interpreted as indicating that the devotee who is on this advanced level of devotion should cultivate the mood that *all* beings have the highest love (*prema*) for the Lord.

formed.²³ Any vestige of psychophysical identification gives way to the devotional body's absorption in the *samādhi* of service to the divine body of eternal consciousness, overflowing with blissful devotional feeling. Yet we might well wonder, where is the indistinction in this third level of bhakti? All distinctions of privilege in being human, of being aloof from the workings of nature, lose their meaning for the *bhakti-yogin* who has gone beyond ascribed identity and even beyond inscribed identity to re-membered identity. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is celebrated for its presentations of re-membered identities—persons of human and nonhuman being whose devotional bodies are overwhelmed in the universe of feelings that is Vraja-Vrindavan. This is a universe that, as a locus of yoga practice, is far removed from the austere precincts of Pātañjala Yoga. In Vraja-Vrindavan, where divine play is the paramount value, the sober perfection of the *Yoga Sūtra*'s stilled mind is left aside. In Vraja-Vrindavan all beings—fully liberated, free from the afflictions (*kleśas*) of ignorance (*avidyā*), a false sense of identity (*asmitā*) and so on—revel in intense emotions of anticipation to meet and play and dance with Krishna in his eternal *līlā*.

8.7 ANIMATING SAMĀDHI

If I am to be a man, then let me, Rasakhan,
 Live as a cowherd in the village of Gokul [in Vraja].
 If I am to be an animal, then let me live
 Always grazing among the cows of Nanda [Krishna's father].
 If I am to be a rock, then let me be one
 upon the very hill that Krishna used as
 an umbrella against Indra's storm.
 If I am to be a bird, then let me live
 In the branches of a kadamba tree
 On the banks of the Yamuna [river in Vraja].²⁴

²³ See Holdrege (2015, pp. 98–103) for a lucid explanation of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava elaborations on the process of re-membering one's atemporal identity (*siddha-rūpa*) in Vraja-Vrindavan and the practices leading to and sustaining awareness of this identity.

²⁴ David Haberman (1994, p. 40–41n1) who quotes this poem as an epigraph to the first chapter of his book, notes, "The epigraph is from Rasakhan, *Rasakhan-Granthavali*, ed. With introduction by Desharajasingh Bhati (Delhi: Ashok Prakashan, 1987), p. 154. This poem by Rasakhan, a sixteenth-century Muslim convert, is extremely popular in Braj [Vraja]; many living in the area have memorized it. It is usually placed at the beginning of the collections of his poetry. The translation is mine."

As we noted earlier, Vraja-Vrindavan is the bucolic land of Krishna's childhood adventures. In the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition, one of the mesocosmic embodiments of Krishna is the land of Vraja-Vrindavan (Holdrege 2015, chapter 5; Haberman 1994, *passim*), an area south of present-day Delhi.²⁵ There is an extensive devotional literature that celebrates this land, inviting practitioners to meditatively visualize a place of exquisite beauty, teeming with flora and fauna of all varieties, all conscious and all singularly absorbed in the *samādhi* of devotion (*prema*) to Krishna and his beloved consort Rādhā. For Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, the ideal practitioner of such meditational visualization and model of the accomplished *bhakta* just described was the ecstatic saint Śrī Caitanya (1486–1533). Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, Caitanya's most celebrated biographer (early seventeenth century), describes Caitanya's journey on foot with two companions from Puri (in present-day Odisha) to Vraja-Vrindavan in the year 1515 as a journey characterized by high anticipation of his destination. Readers of Kavirāja's account are encouraged to themselves envision Caitanya's seemingly other-worldly encounter with animals along the way as an anticipation and extension of Vraja-Vrindavan's multi-species communion of subjects. Kavirāja writes,

One day a tiger was lying on the path, and Prabhu [Caitanya], absorbed, stepped on its body. Prabhu said, 'Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa' arousing the tiger; the tiger got up; and saying 'Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa' the tiger began to dance. Another day Prabhu was bathing in a river, when a herd of rut elephants came to drink water there. As the elephants came before him, Prabhu splashed water on them, saying 'Say the name of Kṛṣṇa'. Those whose bodies were touched with the tiniest drop of water said 'Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa' and danced and sang in *prema* (devotional love). Some fell to the earth, and others trumpeted. And watching all this, the mind of Bhaṭṭācārya [one of Caitanya's traveling com-

²⁵ Vraja-Vrindavan is, in modern Hindi, referred to as Braj. Other mesocosmic divine embodiments besides the *dhāman* (Krishna's embodiment in a geographic place) are *śāstra*—sacred texts, especially the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*—and Krishna's divine names (*nāman*), and the *mūrti*, physical images of Krishna, worshiped in temple and home shrines. All these forms are understood to be “transmundane (*alaukika*) forms” that are nondifferent from Kṛṣṇa and are therefore capable not only of enlivening the *sthāyi-bhāva* [foundational aesthetic emotion] of Kṛṣṇa-*rati*, love for Kṛṣṇa, in the hearts of *bhaktas* but also of manifesting Kṛṣṇa himself on the gross material plane” (Holdrege 2015, p. 96).

panions] was astonished. Prabhu was going along the path loudly singing *saṁkīrtana*;²⁶ hearing the sound of his honeyed voice some does came. Hearing the sound, they accompanied Prabhu on the left and right, and Prabhu stroked their bodies, and in delight recited a *śloka*:

Caitanya then quotes a stanza from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (10.21.11) spoken (or sung) by the cowherd maidens of Vraja-Vrindavan in praise of Krishna's flute-playing:

Though they are dumb animals, all these does are blessed, for hearing the sound of the flute they worship, with this deer, with glances full of love, the son of Nanda (Krishna) adorned in various ways.

Kavirāja continues to describe the scene. Now some tigers *and* deer together follow Caitanya, prompting him to remember another *Bhāgavata* stanza (10.13.60) spoken by the demiurge Brahmā, expressing his astonishment on seeing Vraja-Vrindavan after he had attempted to trick Krishna (as described above):

At that time five or seven tigers came to that place, and the tigers and deer together went with Mahāprabhu [Caitanya]. And when he saw that, Mahāprabhu remembered Vṛndāvana, and he recited a *śloka* describing the qualities of Vṛndāvana:

He drove out anger, thirst, etc., from the place of the unconquerable one, and in that place the natural enmity among men and among deer etc., (was dispelled), and men and beasts lived in friendship with one another. (Dimock and Stewart 2000, pp. 582–583)

Kavirāja then offers his readers further cause for wonder as he tells how Caitanya induces the tigers and deer to chant Krishna's names and to dance; the tigers and deer even “embraced each other and, mouth to mouth, they kissed each other” as Caitanya laughs and proceeds with his astonished companions through the Jhārikhaṇḍa forest. Further along, more animals in the forest are attracted by Caitanya's joyful singing of

²⁶ *Samkīrtana* is a form of devotional singing of praise for the divinity, especially in repetitions of divine names, as in this *mantra*, said to have been especially favored by Caitanya: *hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare / hare rāma hare rāma rāma rāma hare hare*.

divine names, causing them to be “drunk with *prema* (divine love) by the name of Kṛṣṇa” (ibid., p. 583).²⁷

For us to note from this account is that, somewhat like the story of Brahmā’s “practice of wonder” (above), it represents a guided meditation for a bhakti practitioner that serves to engage one in an imaginative expansion of the possible. Such a vision goes beyond that of seeing *bhagavān* in all beings and all beings in *bhagavān* within the ordinary world of biotic violence (as quoted above, *BhP* 11.2.45). In this vision of Śrī Caitanya there is a convergence of divine mesocosmic embodiments that creates an affective window into a transcendent world, where natural enmity among living beings is conspicuous by its absence. In this account, the divine body appears in three ways. First, there is the divine abode, Vraja-Vrindavan (anticipated and remembered by Caitanya); second, there are divine names (regarded as “nondifferent” from the names’ referent, the singing and chanting of which were central to Caitanya’s devotional mission); and third, Caitanya himself, regarded by his biographers (and apparently by his immediate followers) as Krishna himself. The devotional *yogin* is encouraged to, in effect, enter into such a realm, shifting “from the *inscribed identity* of a devotionally informed material body to the *re-membered identity* of a perfected nonmaterial body that is *like*—but at the same time eternally distinct from—the absolute body of Kṛṣṇa” (Holdrege 2015, p. 98, emphasis in original). Such a nonmaterial identity could possibly be in the form of a *nonhuman animal* with full, blissful awareness in eternal service to Krishna and his consort Rādhā.

We can also note from this account that the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*’s author, Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, gives a vision of *anticipation*. Śrī Caitanya eagerly anticipates entering Vraja-Vrindavan which, according to this account, he is soon to do, as a culmination of his long-cherished desire to enter Krishna’s homeland. His anticipation is so strong that already long before arriving there, early in his journey, he experiences the atmosphere of Vraja-Vrindavan. Tigers and deer join Caitanya as he and his companions trek through the Jhārikhaṇḍa forest, and elephants join in his singing of Krishna’s names. These animals feel safe in Caitanya’s and

²⁷ For a detailed discussion of Caitanya’s interactions with animals, see Bohanec (2023a), showing in aggregation an “ethic for animal care and advocacy that allows for significant status of non-human personhood and inclusion of animals as full members of a moral and spiritual community alongside humans, and even at times surpassing humans, in their capacity for spiritual attainment expressed in a loving relationship with God as Kṛṣṇa incarnate in the person of Śrī Caitanya” (ibid., pp. 154–155). See also Bohanec (2023b).

each other's company, recognizing that Caitanya has no ill intentions against them. Caitanya can thus be considered as a perfect model of human engagement with nonhuman animals by virtue of his full regard for them as spiritual beings worthy of respect.²⁸ Moreover, the animals are drawn to Caitanya's singing divine names, a practice designated by the term *kīrtana* or *saṁkīrtana*. Interesting and important for us to note is that *saṁkīrtana*, or community singing in praise of the supreme, is specifically identified in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (11.5.32) as *yajña*—sacrifice or divine service. According to this passage, which is strongly highlighted in contemporary anticipatory Vaiṣṇava communities, this is the activity that drives the sacrificial wheel (described in the *Bhagavadgītā*, discussed in Chap. 9, Sect. 9.4) by which the social, cosmic, and divine body are linked by humanity. Further, in Vaiṣṇava traditions, the epitome of effective cultivation of virtues culminating in devotional love of the supreme is sought in assemblies of persons performing *saṁkīrtana-yajña*. According to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, it is this activity that most effectively elevates all participants to enter the realm of Vraja-Vrindavan where, as already noted, all beings are understood to be absorbed in the *samādhī* of loving devotion—*prema-bhakti*.

To backtrack slightly before proceeding to further discuss anticipatory community, recall that the description of Caitanya's forest adventure with the animals serves to engage one in an expansion of the possible. Recall also the previous section's portrayal of the demiurge *Brahmā*'s practice of wonder. A point to call attention to, although I cannot expand on it, is offered by Jeremy Bendik-Keymer in his study of wonder in relation to politics. He notes that human beings have a need to make sense of the world, and that this need appears early in life as wonder. Integral to wonder is imagination, and being imaginative is inherently non-narcissistic and virtuous when it "becomes basic to being thoughtfully human in any walk of life at any time when we are responsive, not reactive, to the world"

²⁸ Cogen Bohanec (2023a) discusses in detail the ethical implications of the Jhārikhaṇḍa episode, as well as other relevant episodes with animals in the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*. Of particular note is how he develops the notion of animal personhood, whereby personhood is defined as "an ontological and axiological essence... an achievable ideal that gives all living beings purpose, meaning, and value stemming from—and in relationship to—their potential to realize the full expression of their soul's personhood." The ethical import of this position? "This shared personhood of all beings implies their inherent worth irrespective of the degree to which a being has realized their ideal state."

(Bendik-Keymer 2023, pp. 86; 45). This point will help us to think about community that is imaginatively, dynamically expansive in its engagement with the more-than-human world.

8.8 ANTICIPATORY DEVOTIONAL COMMUNITY

The vision of Śrī Caitanya dancing with animals in the Jhārikāṇḍa jungle is portrayed as an anticipation of his visit to Vraja-Vrindavan, where a similar harmony among animals and with humans is portrayed. In light of this vision of converging manifestations of divinity, let us recall the earlier recounted vision from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, of Krishna replicating the many calves and cowherd boys, causing Brahmā to be overwhelmed with confusion and wonder. That Krishna is himself a cowherd boy is of great significance for the Krishna-bhakti tradition. Post-*Bhāgavata* elaborations on Krishna's youthful adventures (*līlā*) in Vrindavan note details about the cows. For example, they each have a name, by which Krishna calls them as he leads them home after a day of grazing in Vraja's forests and pastures. For us to note is that Krishna is represented as regarding himself as *servant* to the cows. To be sure, the female cows would be milked (after their calves had had their fill). There is no mention of calves being separated from their mothers, no mention of cows or bulls being mistreated in any way, what to speak of being slaughtered. Rather, the sense of these texts is that Krishna's first priority is to protect and care for the cows, always in gentle and loving ways, not least by his enchanting flute-playing.

For yoga practitioners who are concerned about animals in particular and more generally about the disintegrating conditions of the world's environments, such a bucolic picture can be a valuable source of inspiration, not to be dismissed as mere wistful imagination.²⁹ As noted, devotional yoga is effectively practiced in community. The many components of a bhakti-based intentional community have their center point in the supreme person, *bhagavān*. The picture of smiling Krishna surrounded by his boisterous friends sharing lunch, joking and laughing, epitomizes the sort of harmony for which devotional intentional community aims. It is a community characterized by abundance rooted in simplicity and satisfaction with necessities, in which human and nonhuman beings live with a

²⁹ This is not to ignore the rampant environmental degradation taking place in the Vraja-Vrindavan area during the last few decades. See Hawley (2020) for a cultural study of this trend.

single purpose, namely, to offer service to the one single Person recognized as the one single enjoyer and protector of all beings, all of whom *participate* in the personhood of the supreme person. Even the trouble-making creatures who enter Vrindavan to attack Krishna and his friends (as described in the *Bhāgavata* and other texts) are regarded as contributing to the service effort. They provide opportunities for Krishna to display his artful (weaponless yet deadly) prowess while his devotees' affection for him intensifies, thereby expanding the universe of feelings.

Sustaining such feelings is a collective ethos of humility which is, in turn, supported by the practice of wonder. What we have come to call virtue ethics is for the *bhakti-yogin* the affirmation that all persons, as partaking minutely in the *saccidānanda* features of the divine, are inclined to virtue and to act out of virtue. Although virtue is fully manifested in the re-membered devotional body of the bhakti practitioner, the inscribed devotional body conscientiously cultivates virtue, doing so in the semi-sheltered conditions of an intentional devotional community. In a *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* passage (immediately after the Prahllāda-Narasimha narrative, *BhP* 7.11.8–12, discussed earlier in this chapter), sage Nārada lists thirty characteristics of “the highest dharma” (*para dharma*), thereby outlining a cultural blueprint for what may be called “anticipatory communities” in terms of virtues and practices favorable for sustaining such communities. The concept and term “anticipatory communities” is drawn from Larry Rasmussen (2013), who conceives them as “intimate communities of moral nurture” in which the “seeds of an Earth ethic” must be planted and nurtured to meet “adaptive challenges.” He explains further,

‘Anticipatory communities’ are home places where it is possible to reimagine worlds and reorder possibilities, places where new or renewed practices give focus to an ecological and postindustrial way of life. Such communities have the qualities of a haven, a set-apart and safe place yet a place open to creative risk. Here basic moral formation happens by conscious choice and not by default (simply conforming to the ethos and unwritten ethic of the surrounding culture). Here eco-social virtues are consciously cultivated and embodied in community practices. Here the fault lines of modernity are exposed. (Ibid., pp. 223, 226–227)

This sketch of anticipatory communities' basic contours could align well with the *Bhāgavata*'s list of specific virtues favorable to devotional anticipatory community. Nārada includes most of Patañjali's ten *yama* and

niyama principles in his list, including *ahiṃsā*, *satya*, *brahmacarya*, *śauca*, *tapas*, *santoṣa*, and *svādhyāya* (see Chap. 4). Devotion to the Lord (*īśvara-praṇidhāna*) is clearly central to the list, which also includes most of the nine practices in Pahlāda's list, described above.

Two points about this list are for us to note in the present context. One is that Nārada sees them as meant for all humans to purposefully cultivate: "This is the highest dharma for all humans" (*nrṇām ayaṃ paro dharmah*). They are not limited to those who practice yoga. This suggests that the *Bhāgavata* envisions a means by which the whole of humanity can become spiritually elevated, living in anticipatory communities that foster these principles of virtuous life. Second, Nārada identifies the practice of these thirty principles as the means to satisfy (*tuṣyati*) the "self of all" (*sarvātām*), the supreme being, *bhagavān*. When human beings purposefully practice these dharmic (ethical) characteristics, the supreme person is served, acknowledging a divine priority. Thus, we can see in this list the bringing together of virtue ethics and what may be understood as theological voluntarism, whereby the key principle is *service* (*sevā*). The term *bhakti* derives from the Sanskrit verbal root $\sqrt{bhaj}$, which means "to share." Unlike classical Yoga, which emphasizes isolation of yoga practitioners (at least in theory), *bhakti-yoga* is practiced as service in communities of sharing, extending outward the communion of subjects as the devotional universe of feelings expands in acts of caring rooted in the pursuit of self-knowing in relation to a supreme, knowing Self.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why does the dharma-bull's refusal to identify the perpetrator of his mutilations demonstrate that he is Dharma in person? (Sect. 8.2)
2. In the story of Gajendra and the crocodile, Nārāyaṇa swiftly slays the crocodile, releasing it from a curse. Similarly, Narasiṃha slays Hiraṇyakaśipu as his son Pahlāda watches. What can be said about the moral universe in relation to the "logic of *bhakti*" as represented by these stories? (Sects. 8.3 and 8.4)
3. In light of the *Brahmā Vimohana Līlā*, what can be said about the "practice of wonder" as an aspect of *bhakti-yoga* that can illuminate human-nonhuman relationality? (Sect. 8.5)
4. How do the householder's duties regarding congenital debt serve a yogic ethic in relation to nonhuman animals? How does *darśana* (viewing of a divine image) serve this purpose? (Sect. 8.6)

5. One might object that the threefold typology of *bhaktas* (in *BhP* 11.2) defeats the classical Yoga purpose of declassification. Is this a valid objection? (Sect. 3.1; Sect. 8.6)
6. In what way does “divine mesocosmic embodiment” create an “affective window into a transcosmic world,” and why might this be valuable for fostering felicitous human-nonhuman animal relationality? (Sect. 8.7)
7. Why might Bendik-Keymer’s notion of wonder in relation to politics be relevant to the development of anticipatory devotional community? (Sect. 8.7; Sect. 8.8)

REFERENCES

- Bailey, Greg. 1989. The Semantics of Bhakti in the Vāmana Purāṇa. *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 62:25–57.
- Balkaran, Raj. 2019. *The Goddess and the King in Indian Myth: Ring Composition, Royal Power, and the Dharmic Double Helix*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Beauchamp, Tom L., and R. G. Frey, eds. 2011. *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bendik-Keymer, Jeremy David. 2023. *Nussbaum’s Politics of Wonder: How the Mind’s Original Joy is Revolutionary*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Bohanec, Cogen. 2023a. Śrī Caitanya’s Implicit and Explicit Regard for Animals. *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 32 (1): 145–158.
- Bohanec, Cogen. 2023b. A Theocentric Argument for Animal Personhood in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. *Journal of Dharma Studies* 6:121–136. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42240-023-00146-9>.
- Bohanec, Cogen. 2024. *Bhakti Ethics, Emotions, and Love in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Metaethics*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books (Rowman & Littlefield).
- Bryant, Edwin F. 2009. *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali: A New Edition, Translation, and Commentary*. New York: North Point Press.
- Bryant, Edwin F. 2017. *Bhakti Yoga: Tales and Teachings from the Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. New York: North Point Press.
- Dasa, Satyanarayana, trans. and commentary. 2014. *Śrī Bhagavat Sandarbha: God—His Qualities, Abode and Associates—Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī*. Vrindavan, India: Jīva Institute.
- Dāsa, Gaurapada. 2018. *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam: A Symphony of Commentaries on the Tenth Canto*, vol. 3, Chapters 12–14. Vrindavan: Rasbihari Lal & Sons.
- Debroy, Bibek. 2018. *The Bhagavata Purana*. Vol. 2. London: Penguin.
- Dimock, Edward, and Tony Stewart, trans. 2000. *Caitanya Caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja—A Translation and Commentary*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Eck, Diana L. 2024. *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Frazier, Jessica. 2017. *Hindu Worldviews: Theories of Self, Ritual and Reality*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Fuller, Robert C. 2006. *Wonder: From Emotion to Spirituality*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Gupta, Ravi M., and Kenneth R. Valpey. 2013. *The Bhāgavata Purāṇa: Sacred Text and Living Tradition*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Haberman, David L. 1994. *Journey through the Twelve Forests: An Encounter with Krishna*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Haberman, David L. trans. 2003. *The Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu of Rūpa Goswāmin*. New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts / Motilal Banarsidass. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Haberman, David L. 2020. *Loving Stones: Making the Impossible Possible in the Worship of Mount Govardhan*. Oxford University Press.
- Hawley, John Stratton. 2020. *Krishna's Playground: Vrindavan in the 21st Century*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Holdrege, Barbara A. 2015. *Bhakti and Embodiment: Fashioning Divine Bodies and Devotional Bodies in Kṛṣṇa Bhakti*. London: Routledge.
- Jamison, Stephanie W., and Joel P. Brereton, trans. 2014. *The Rigveda: The Earliest Religious Poetry of India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Klostermaier, Klaus K. 1988. A Universe of Feelings. In *Śrī Krishna Caitanya and the Bhakti Religion*, Studia Irenica 33, ed. Edmund Weber and Tilak Raj Copra, 113–133. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- O'Connell, Joseph T. 2019. *Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal: Social Impact and Historical Implications*. Edited by Rembert Lutjeharms. London: Routledge.
- Olivelle, Patrick. 2013. Talking Animals: Explorations in an Indian Literary Genre. In *Charming Beauties and Frightful Beasts*, ed. Fabrizio M. Ferrari and Thomas Dähnhardt, 3–14. Sheffield: Equinox.
- Prabhupāda, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami. 2017. *The Complete Teachings of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda*. Vedabase CD-ROM Version 2017.2 Sandy Ridge, NC: Bhaktivedanta Archives.
- Puri, B. P. Swami. n.d. *Art of Sadhana: A Guide To Daily Devotion*. San Francisco: Mandala Publishing.
- Quick, Jacob. 2022. The Gaze of the Animal: On the Role of Attention in Derrida's Animal Ethics. Ph.D. dissertation, KU Leuven, Humanities and Social Sciences Group, Institute of Philosophy.
- Rasmussen, Larry L. 2013. *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Taylor, McComas. 2007. *The Fall of the Indigo Jackal: The Discourse of Division and Pūrṇabhadra's Pañcatantra*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

- Valpey, Kenneth Russell. 2006. *Attending Kṛṣṇa's Image: Caitanya Vaiṣṇava mūrti-sevā as devotional truth*. London: Routledge.
- Valpey, Kenneth R. 2020. *Cow Care in Hindu Animal Ethics*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Waldau, Patton, and Kimberley Patton, eds. 2006. *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science, and Ethics*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Williams, Nancy M. 2023. Ethical Veganism as Quiet Resistance. *Journal of Animal Ethics* 13 (2): 184–194.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Concluding Reflections: Yoga, Animals, Environment

9.1 INTRODUCTION

One way to think about yoga in relation to animal ethics is as a story—a narrative about human beings recognizing the fragility of life on this planet, fragility for ourselves no less than for all other living beings. We may recognize this as both an existential truth and as a truth of present times, when anthropogenic effects on weather patterns, biodiversity loss, and pollution are multiplying in disastrous and potentially cascading, irreversible ways. Stories can be determinative of how we respond to these new developments.¹ In her book *Dancing with Disaster*, Kate Rigby writes,

The stories that frame the meanings and moral imperatives that we discern in such disasters will also determine whether our responses are geared toward maintaining current systems, relations, and practices or whether they are transformative, enabling the emergence of new ways of being and dwelling that might prove not only more adaptive but also more just and compassionate, in the long run. (Rigby 2015, p. 2)

¹ Environmentalist Thomas Berry (1999, pp. 159–165) expresses the need for appropriate response to ongoing environmental devastation as a mission “to re-invent the human,” an undertaking that should be done (1) at the species level; (2) with critical reflection; (3) within the community of life-systems; (4) in a time developmental context; and (5) through story and shared dream experience.

My proposal in this volume has been that we human beings can benefit ourselves as well as nonhuman beings, individually and collectively, by learning from well-established principles and practices of yoga. “New ways of being and dwelling” may be more accessible if we take seriously and learn to appropriately apply the rich teachings of yoga traditions available to us. One might object, though, that it is naïve to think that adopting assorted yoga and meditational practices would have any significant positive effect on the other-than-human world. However, I argue that yoga, as I have only briefly outlined in this book, can be transformative by virtue of its challenge to reductive views of selves coupled with its teleological character—its promise of progressive freedom for the yoga practitioner as well as for the environment in which we all live, with all other-than-human beings.²

In the course of discussing yoga practices for illuminating human relationality with nonhuman beings, in some of the foregoing pages we have considered stories of *yogins* engaging with, learning from, or even *becoming* animals (who subsequently become again human *yogins*). We have also noted accounts of theriomorphic and semi-theriomorphic divinities or forms of the divine, and how these accounts may inspire yoga practice that fosters deep regard or reverence for animals as partaking in divinity. “Partaking in divinity” suggests being part of the “divine body” to which the *yogin* in the devotional register relates as a re-membered devotional body. To this point, it is noteworthy that one celebrated narrative of *cosmic recovery* in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* identifies one *avatāra* of Vishnu as a free-roaming animal, a sort of cosmic boar—Varāha (mentioned in Chap. 8, Sect. 8.4). Also, significant is that Varāha is identified as the embodiment of sacrificial ritual (*yajña*), a theme we have discussed in Chap. 2 and which we will return to in this chapter. Briefly recounted,

The entire Earth has been dislodged by perfidy and neglect, sunk into the primordial waters by the nefarious ways of the titan Hiraṇyākṣa, who disturbs the entire cosmos as he ranges high and low, challenging the celestial lords to face him in battle. Meanwhile, Svayambhuva Manu has been ordered by his father, the demiurge Brahmā, to become a progenitor on

² Considering story and narrative in the category of “enchantment,” for an overview of how “disenchantment” prevailed in Western discourse, see O’Niell (2022, pp. 91–94). O’Niell argues that re-enchantment involves recovering Aristotle’s formal and final causes as warrants for respecting nonhuman nature. We may regard such recovery as closely related to, or necessary for, story to have meaning.

Earth, which is now, however, inaccessible and uninhabitable. As Brahmā ponders how to set things right, a baby boar (*varāha-tokaḥ*) appears from Brahmā's nostril, quickly expanding in the sky into a gigantic boar, armed with a mace, roaring like a great mountain. After initially playing in the cosmic waters "like an elephant," he dives to the depths, finds the Earth, and raises her on his tusks, setting her in her proper place. Varāha then faces off with Hiraṇyākṣa, and they duel long and ferociously until Varāha decides to dispatch the demon to relieve the celestials from their distress. The gods are thrilled witnessing this wonder, showing their gratitude with exuberant encomium, praising Varāha as worshipable by all chants (*akḥila-mantra*), the embodiment of all sacrifices (*sarva-kratave kriyātmane*), realized by one who has subdued the mind by devotion with detachment (*vairāgya-bhakti-ātma-jaya-anubhāva*), and who is the embodiment of knowledge and master of all learning (*jñānāya vidyā-guru*). (*BhP* 3.13; 3.13.39; Prabhupāda 2017)³

This vision of heroic divine intervention to save the ailing earth (here identified as the feminine Earth and in later tradition as Varāha's consort Varāhī) suggests that human efforts to reverse the direction of environmental degradation—however well-intentioned and executed—may not, in themselves, be effective. Rather, I suggest reading this as a call to acknowledge and celebrate divinity *within* the nonhuman animal realm as the very key to the process of reversal.⁴ Important to note is the reference to Varāha as the embodiment of all sacrifices. In Chap. 2, Sects. 2.5 and 2.6 we have seen the excesses of Vedic animal sacrifice gradually mitigated by the yogic sensibility of *ahiṃsā*. The principle of sacrifice was never abandoned; rather, it was transformed—internalized through yogic asceticism. But such asceticism swung from one extreme to another, from excessive worldliness at the cost of animals as sacrificial victims to excessive

³ See Kumar and Mehndiratta (1993, pp. 27–33) for a discussion of this story in the context of modern Hindus' search for applicable ethical blueprints for present-day environmentalism that "address questions of social and resource-use equity, massive poverty and unfulfilled expectations."

⁴ Yoga practitioners who find value in such narrations as this, of the Varāha boar recovering the earth, in my view would be sympathetic to critiques against the claims of "ecomodernists." Bruno Latour is paraphrased in this critique of ecomodernism: "Latour rejected a fundamental tenet of ecomodernism—that humanity can save wild nature through modernization by accelerating decoupling and technological innovation. Rather, modernization is a myth of 'emancipation from some stagnant, archaic, and stifling past,' but actually further entangles society with nature rather than decoupling from it." <https://thebreakthrough.org/articles/what-is-modern-in-ecomodernism> (accessed December 24, 2024).

human self-abnegation leading to swollen pride about protecting animals (as in the story of Jājali in the *Mahābhārata*, recounted in Chap. 3, Sect. 3.4). Arguably, as a *yoga-sāstra* (an authoritative yoga treatise), the *Bhagavadgītā* (which is also a story, of Krishna teaching yoga to his warrior-student Arjuna) calls for the sort of yogic balance needed to effect a healing ethics of devotional yoga for an ailing Earth. In the next three sections, we will see how Krishna sets out a practical means for accomplishing such balance. Thereafter, I describe Krishna as a model “servant-leader” in his playful role as a young cowherd, engaging his Vraja-Vrindavan community in the subversive act of serving Mount Govardhan rather than performing the traditional Vedic sacrifice to the celestial king Indra. Finally, we will reflect on how yoga practice broadly speaking can be an element of cultural renewal by which practitioners engage in “beautiful action” in relation to nonhuman animals and the environment.⁵

9.2 THE BHAGAVADGĪTĀ (AGAIN) AND DHARMA (AGAIN)

As we revisit the *Bhagavadgītā* to explore its resources for environmentalism in relation to yoga and animal ethics, it is important to remember its setting within the vast epic poem, the *Mahābhārata*. As such, it is particularly concerned with the theme of dharma which, in our present context, can be translated as “that which sustains” (Sherma 2015).⁶ Current environmental discourse invariably includes discussions on sustainability, a term enshrined by the United Nations in its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).⁷ There is nothing new about the concept of environmental sustainability, yet the UN’s declared sustainability aims—despite their largely anthropocentric orientation—can serve as a point of departure for our purposes. On a hopeful note, a 2022 UN resolution on the *Animal Welfare—Environment—Sustainable Development Nexus* shows that “[T]he recognition of a ‘nexus’ between animal welfare, the environment, and human interests rather than a mere instrumental relationship can be construed as a shift from an ‘anthropocentric’ to an ‘anthropocosmic’

⁵ For a further, excellent discussion of yoga in relation to the environment and animal ethics, see Chapple (2025).

⁶ See Chap. 3, Sect. 3.1 for more discussion of dharma’s definition, especially in relation to the *Mahābhārata*. Sherma notes, “Dharmic action is that which sustains the world order.”

⁷ “The 17 Goals”—*Sustainable Development Goals*. UN. <https://sdgs.un.org/> and <https://sdgs.un.org/goals> (accessed December 24, 2024).

worldview” (Clifton 2023, p. 171).⁸ This recognition resonates well with the dharma ideal of sustainability articulated in the *Bhagavadgītā*.

As noted, the *Bhagavadgītā* can be read as a story—a narrative of yogic transformation, from apathy to resolve and from inaction to action. It is thereby a story of teaching by the supreme master of yoga, Yogeśvara (Krishna) to the fully receptive yoga student, Arjuna (Valpey and Sharma 2024). Integral to this story is Arjuna’s ascription as a warrior (*kṣatriya*), an identity—and hence dharmic obligation—that, for Arjuna, subordinates other identities, in particular his clan membership. As a warrior, Arjuna is a martial leader and, in peacetime, a leader of the human populace within his charge. Reading the *Bhagavadgītā* with awareness of this context can prompt us to take it as a guide for present-day readers to become competent leaders of environmental care within their spheres of influence. As Ace Simpson writes in the Introduction to his book *Leadership Lessons from the Bhagavad Gita*, readers can derive from the *Gītā* “an alternative to conventional leadership... a vision of *linked leadership*—leaders who are linked through loving connection or *bhakti yoga* with themselves (through self-knowledge), with other beings, with nature and with the Supreme Source” (Simpson 2020, xiii, emphasis in original). Keeping in view these two notions—linked leadership and the nexus of animal welfare, environment, and human interests—we can revisit the *Bhagavadgītā* for its potential leadership guidance toward appropriate care for nonhuman animals, considering environmental concerns.⁹

⁸The UN Environment Assembly’s March 2022 resolution on the *Animal Welfare—Environment—Sustainable Development Nexus* states that “animal welfare can contribute to addressing environmental challenges” and that “the health and welfare of animals, sustainable development and the environment are connected to human health and well-being” (p. 1). As Clifton notes (2023, p. 171), the language remains anthropocentric, but nonetheless it “suggests a view of humanity as part of a larger moral universe whose good should coincide with that of other entities, and not be derived at their expense.”

⁹Simpson (2020, p. 287 and *passim*) analyzes “linked leadership” teachings of the *Bhagavadgītā* in four aspects, namely, *philosophical*, *practical*, *self*, and *others*. Corresponding to these are, respectively, *higher purpose*, *holistic systems*, *self-leadership*, and *servant-leadership*. The *Gītā*’s teachings in relation to higher purpose are categorized as *loving service*, *stakeholder orientation*, and *divine grace*. Categories of teachings related to holistic systems are *sustainable*, *culture*, *change*, *innovation*, and *strategy*. Self-leadership is about being *spiritually aware*, *service oriented*, *virtuous*, *authentic*, and *mentally disciplined*. Finally, servant-leadership is developed in terms of *equality*, *personality profile*, *strengths*, and *team composition*.

I will structure this discussion in three sections, drawing on Cogen Bohanec’s formula (mentioned in Chap. 8), namely, that Vaiṣṇava care ethics combines virtue ethics and theological voluntarism. I will further associate Clifton’s three Indic (or specifically “Hindu”) foundational concepts for constructive engagement of Hindu traditions with animal welfare, environmental protection, and sustainable development initiatives (Clifton 2023). These concepts are *ahiṃsā*, *līlā*, and *sevā*—respectively, the pursuit of nonviolence or non-harming, the notion of divine play, and the practice of attentive service. Further, within these three sections we will find four aspects, or dimensions, of linked leadership, namely, self-leadership, higher purpose, servant-leadership, and holistic systems—all derived from specific passages in the *Bhagavadgītā*.

9.3 INSCRIBING VIRTUE IN THE BHAGAVADGĪTĀ

As we have seen throughout this study, yoga is very much a matter of self-discipline in pursuit of self-transformation, which is crucial for pursuing a communion of subjects—a vision of human-nonhuman animal relationality that leads to yogic freedom for all beings. As we saw in Chap. 5, Sect. 5.2, Krishna characterizes yoga’s specific aim as “to purify the self” (*yogam ātma-viśuddhaye*). For the *Gītā*, the purified self is the basis for virtuous action, and to cultivate a virtuous disposition is to pursue such purification. As we also noted, *Yoga Sūtra* commentators identify the contaminations from which the *yogin* needs to gain freedom as jealousy, pride, vanity, hatred, and attachment (Bryant 2009, pp. 252–254; YS II.32 commentary). One important way Krishna advises Arjuna to purify the mind of these contaminations is to practice austerity (*tapas*), which is one of the five observances (*niyama*) of Patañjali’s *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* system. Krishna elaborates on how to practice (and how *not* to practice) austerity while explaining action in terms of the three constituents of materiality (*prakṛti*) in the Sāṃkhya system, namely, illumination (*sattva-guṇa*), passion or dynamism (*rajo-guṇa*), and darkness or inertia (*tamo-guṇa*). Action characterized by *sattva-guṇa* is most beneficial for progress in yoga, so Krishna extends his description of sattvika austerity to three stanzas—specifying separately austerities of the body, speech, and mind (*Gītā* 17.14–16).

For my purpose, it will suffice to discuss just one out of the several elements listed in each of these three stanzas (some elements of which echo components of *yama* and *niyama* in Pātañjala Yoga). As an element of *bodily* austerity (*śarīram tapas*), continence or celibacy (*brahmacarya*, a

component of *yama* in the *Yoga Sūtra*), may strike us moderns as antiquated, if not simply unimaginable. But we do well to find wisdom in this important aspect of yoga practice. In the context of our concern for the environment, we may note that early references in Vedic literature associated this practice with student life that was typically conducted in forest hermitages under the guidance of a teacher who was likely a householder (Jamison and Brereton 2014, p. 1575; see Chap. 4, Sect. 4.3.1 above, the account of Satyakāma caring for his teacher's cows). The forest hermitage was a sanctuary where flora and fauna were protected. The young *brahmacārin* would learn to respect the ways of nature and to have a custodial, caring attitude that he (usually the texts refer to males) would carry with him throughout his life. At the same time he would imbibe the value of self-restraint required for celibacy, extending into later household life proper respect for the opposite sex.¹⁰ He would also imbibe a sense of respect and inclination to care for ascetics, thereby supporting a visible culture of yogic asceticism in the wider society.¹¹ This culture of asceticism would, in turn, model frugal living for the wider society, thereby fostering environmental care.

Among the *Bhagavadgītā*'s specifications for austerity of *speech* (*vāṇ-mayam tapas*), we can note "pleasing, beneficial speech" (*priya-hita*; *Gītā* 17.15). Aside from the manifold forms of sound pollution in the form of dishonesty and deception (discussed in Chap. 4, Sect. 4.2.2), the social environment is filled and overburdened with harmful and insulting speech, which aborts the opportunity that yoga practice offers to promote peaceful coexistence among living beings. Conversely, pleasing and beneficial speech (counted as an austerity because it calls for conscious effort to enact) is illuminating to the social atmosphere, "clearing the air" to enable positive working conditions for developing anticipatory communities that pursue a communion of subjects.

Krishna concludes his list of threefold *sattvika* austerities with those of the *mind* (*mānasam tapas*), beginning with "satisfaction of the mind"

¹⁰An argument could be made that a yogic culture that encourages *brahmacarya* would support environmental sustainability by limiting human population growth. Human population is clearly a major factor in driving environmental breakdown (Smaje 2020, chapter 1).

¹¹The fourfold *āśrama* system (mentioned in Chap. 8, Sect. 8.6) reflects society-wide respect for celibacy by encouraging retirement (*vānaprastha*) and full renunciation (*sannyāsa*) after householder (*grhastha*) life naturally runs its course when one's children have become adults. Specifying *yogic* asceticism is meant to distinguish intentional and voluntary practices from any sort of asceticism forced on one by unwanted circumstances.

(*manah-prasāda*, echoing the *Yoga Sūtra*'s term *santoṣa*—one of the five observances, *niyama*). Reflecting an oft-repeated yogic value of non-disturbance amid life's uncertainties and reversals, *manah-prasāda* places the yogic leader in a position of strength to effect positive collective action for the environment. In the language of sustainability, this austerity of the mind is the psychological basis for effectively contributing to sustainable human life in ways that prioritize care for the environment. Cultivating mental satisfaction guards one against unnecessary and unfavorable lamentation and hankering, both of which draw the mind away from the present environmental reality (*Gītā* 18.54).

All these austerities (and the others listed by Krishna in *Gītā* 17.14–16) are supportive of *ahimsā* which, we recall from Chap. 4, Sect. 4.2.1, is foundational to and supported by the restraints and observances (*yama* and *niyama*) of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*.¹² By practicing these three types of austerities, the leader-*yogin* (the linked leader) can be well positioned to function with *sattvika* qualities. By these, in turn, he or she can keep distance from the mentality and behavior that Krishna characterizes as *āsuric*, the way of evil, opposed to divinity. Krishna notes (somewhat polemically) that those of evil character,

... claim the world has no truth, no foundation, no Lord—that it arose from interaction and is based on nothing but selfish motives (*Gītā* 16.8; Goswami trans. 2015, p. 202)

Further, such unprincipled persons commit terrible acts (*ugra-karmāṇaḥ*), and they thrive on culturing avowed degradation (*pravartante śuci-vratāḥ*) (*Gītā* 16.9, 10). These and several other qualities and attitudes that are destructive of well-being and environmental balance listed by Krishna in the *Bhagavadgītā*'s sixteenth chapter can all be overcome by cultivation of *sattvika* virtues favorable to the culture of dharma, the principle of sustainability.

¹²The three stanzas (*Gītā* 17.14–16) are as follows (underlined words and phrases can be correlated with the ten components of *yama* and *niyama* in the *Yoga Sūtra* II.30, 32): “Honor to gods, gurus, the twice-born and the wise, *cleanliness*, *rectitude*, *chastity* and doing no harm—these are said to comprise bodily austerity. *True*, pleasing, beneficial speech that does not disturb as well as *regular study of scripture*—these are said to comprise speech austerity. *Serenity of mind*, gentleness, quietude, self-control, and *purity of being*—these are said to comprise mental austerity” (Goswami trans. 2015, p. 205).

Returning to the theme of linked leadership for a sustainable future, we can note Krishna's simple but astute observation on the nature of effective leadership: "Whatever the greatest one does, common people do just the same, following the standard he sets" (*Gītā* 3.21; Goswami trans., 2015, p. 162). One who has been raised in a *sattvika* atmosphere and is educated by a *sattvika* guru imbibes *sattvika* qualities (*guṇa*, also translatable as virtue). Such a person, practiced especially in *sattvika* austerity, is successful in self-leadership and, Krishna suggests, is in a position to lead others in *sattvika* ways by personal example, which is to say in ways that are supportive of dharma. But what is the specific sphere of activity by which linked leaders contribute to sustainable environmentalism? This brings us to the second of two components that combine to yield devotional care ethics, namely, theological voluntarism or, in Barbara Holdrege's language, devotional engagement with the divine body. Or, again, in the language of the *Bhagavadgītā*, the practice can be called regenerative ritual, the locus of which is *yajña*. In Chap. 2 we translated *yajña* as "sacrifice," as it is usually translated and as it is in that context appropriate. However, in our present context, it will be appropriate to take the term's broader sense of *service* (following Simpson's translation—see below).

9.4 A COSMIC CIRCULAR REGENERATIVE ECONOMY

In the *Bhagavadgītā*'s third chapter, which is traditionally titled *karma-yoga*, the yoga of action, Krishna sketches what we can call a "cosmic circular regenerative economy" based on transcendent service characterized by ritual performances—*yajña*. This economy recognizes and upholds the centrality of food, including the key components of its production and distribution.¹³ To quote Krishna at some length, he advises Arjuna,

Unless work (*karma*) is performed as an offering of service (*yajña*) it causes bondage. Therefore, perform work for that purpose, free from attachment. Long ago, the creator [Prajāpati, usually identified as Brahmā, but also regarded as *īśvara*] sent forth generations of beings (*prajāḥ*) into the world along with service (*yajña*) saying, "Prosper by this service, its performance will yield all you desire." Divine beings (*deva*), nourished by your service, will nourish you. Nourishing one another, you will attain the ultimate good (*śreyah param*). Satisfied by your service, divine beings will provide all you

¹³ Here I focus on the *Bhagavadgītā*'s karma-yoga inflected presentation of sacrifice as an approach to ecology. For a wide-lens perspective on this same topic (including reference to both Indic and Western religious traditions' representations of sacrifice) see Chapple (2008).

desire. But enjoying gifts without giving in return is theft. Eating food first offered in sacrifice releases one from all offense (*kilbiṣa*). Those who prepare food only for themselves, eat suffering. The body subsists on food. Food is nourished by rain. Rain is nourished by service, and service arises from prescribed work (*karma*). Prescribed work comes from the Veda, and the Veda from the Supreme (*akṣara*). The all-pervading Supreme is therefore ever situated in acts of service. The cycle of service thus turns. One who does not contribute to the turning of this wheel, living only for personal sense enjoyment, lives in vain. (*Gītā* 3.9–16; Simpson trans. 2020, pp. 46–47)

Unlike the paradigmatic R̥gveda's Puruṣasūkta account of primordial sacrifice as a story of cosmic origins (noted in Chap. 2, Sect. 2.2), Krishna's account in this *Gītā* passage puts attention on the “generations of beings” and their expected reciprocal work, resulting in all stakeholders, including “divine beings” being “nourished.” As emphasized in this part of the *Gītā*, one who would be a linked leader must work (for no one can avoid acting, even for a moment—*Gītā* 3.5), but he or she must do so in a spirit of detachment, linked to a higher purpose. In this context, quite unlike in the *Yoga Sūtra*, the higher purpose is not one's own liberation (*kaivalya*). Rather, it is in consideration of, and acting for, the benefit of the world (*loka-saṃgraha*—*Gītā* 3.20; 25).¹⁴

How can we view this cosmic circular economy in environmental, ecological terms? While we cannot go into detail about the depth and richness of the *Gītā*'s vision of human-cosmic interaction (quoted above, in part), a basic appreciation of its transformative and sustaining character is possible. First, we may note the presence of divinity in the cycle—initially outside it, as its creator, but then present throughout as *akṣara* (“he who is imperishable”). As the source and ground of the cycle, but also as the aggregate of all the components of the cycle, divinity can also be regarded as embodied in the ritual, which is to say that the divine body is visible as

¹⁴Dalal (2021, p. 71) summarizes the lessons of this passage: “The sacrificial wheel's cyclical structure of production and consumption makes *karmayoga* comprehensible. It wedges several concepts: a theory of action and motivation as devotional offering; a yogic psychology of equanimity and acceptance; a metaphysical world view of reciprocal causality and interconnection; and a theoretical grounding in embodiment—all of which extend to an ecopsychology and environmental ethic.” Regarding the term *kaivalya* in the context of bhakti-yoga, in his *Bhakti Sandarbha* treatise on the *BhP* (Anuccheda 253; Dasa 2021, vol. 2, pp. 263–264), Jīva Gosvāmin calls attention to *BhP* 2.3.12 and *Gītā* 18.54 to identify *kaivalya* as the “approved path,” which is “the gateway of attainment” (*prāpti-dvāram*) that leads to bhakti-yoga. Also to note is *BhP* 11.9.18.

a ritual process or ritual body (Dalal 2021, p. 76).¹⁵ Thus, the person who engages with this cycle as the *Gītā* passage above directs is engaged with the environment as dynamic divine body. This body is dynamic in that it consists of cycles from which the person who performs the ritual is inseparable. As Neil Dalal notes (*ibid.*, p. 77),

Understanding myself within the cycles and its causal layers transforms my self-identity and changes my perception, reception, and relationship to the world... I must see myself as part of a reciprocal and recursive cycle, an interconnected, participatory, and dependent entity... The wheel requires my freewill, agency, and personal responsibility.

Dalal notes further that this “wheel” (*cakra*) of cosmic exchange has a teleological purpose. In the language of the *Bhagavadgītā* (4.8), this purpose is to “establish dharma” (*dharma-samsthāpana*), the principle of sustainability, a purpose for which divinity enacts *līlā*, as we have seen in Chap. 8. Further, the enactment of divine *līlā* occurs in the phenomenal world, the creation of which is itself understood in Vaiṣṇava traditions as an arena in which living beings are enabled to act out their karmic propensities. Intriguingly, Jonathan Edelmann (2012) contrasts world creation as *līlā* with evolution theory, whereby the latter is without a *telos*. But Vaiṣṇavas, referring to Krishna’s explicit statements in the *Bhagavadgītā*, will view this world-arena as an expression of the divine will or divine purpose that theological voluntarism calls for (Valpey and Sharma 2024). In this line of thinking, Clifton (2023, pp. 173–174) suggests, “If the evolution of living beings through dynamic interaction with their environment is regarded as the Supreme Being’s play, it can be argued that one of the roles of humans in the game is to support a healthy biosphere as the stage on which divine play occurs.”¹⁶

¹⁵ Dalal (2021, p. 72) notes that in his commentary to *Gītā* 3.9 Śaṅkara identifies *yajña*—the performance of cosmos-maintaining ritual—as Vishnu or *īśvara*. This stanza enjoins that action—karma—must be performed “for *yajña*.”

¹⁶ The notion that divinity is involved in natural phenomena began to wane in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe, where “natural evils” and “natural disasters” replaced religious ideas that earthquakes, floods, wildfires, droughts, avalanches, tornadoes, hurricanes, and pandemic disease were divine punishments for wayward humanity. But as Kate Rigby (2015, pp. 3–4) notes, “[T]he toll that the calamities [now designated as ‘natural disasters’] were taking on both human and nonhuman lives and abodes had actually begun to escalate.” Rigby continues, quoting Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, summing up their thesis of the “dialectic of enlightenment” which they had composed during the Second World War: “The fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant.”

At this point one may ask, what is the difference between the ritual-led environmental custodianship that Krishna outlines here in the *Bhagavadgītā* and the Vedic *yajña* referred to in Chap. 2, wherein rituals of animal sacrifice are performed? This brings us to a devotional (*bhakti*) perspective on the ethics of care in relation to environmentalism. As mentioned previously, for Vaiṣṇavas, care ethics grows from the combination of virtue ethics and “theological voluntarism,” or, in the Vaiṣṇava idiom, divine service. In the sphere of environmental concern in particular, we look to linked leadership to foster cultures of virtue and cultures of divine service. Here we can do this by revisiting the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* wherein Krishna himself is the linked leader who organizes a *yajña* leading to surprises and wonders, a full display of divine *līlā* that offers a vision of environmental sustainability that appropriately honors and cares for all creatures.

9.5 KRISHNA’S SERVANT-LEADERSHIP AT MOUNT GOVARDHAN

We noted Krishna’s instruction to Arjuna, that he should perform ritual service that maintains a cosmic circulation of life’s necessities. Such performance becomes yoga when the primary intention is sustaining the cosmic ritual order (Dalal 2021, p. 74). Whenever Yogeśvara—the master of yoga, Krishna—himself acts as a performer of such ritual service, one can be sure that interesting and instructive features will emerge. Such is the case with the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*’s account of how Krishna, acting as a seven-year-old boy, causes a major stir in the cowherd community of Vraja-Vrindavan (*BhP* 10.24–25), thereby bringing all residents together under one mountainous, devotionally yogic “roof.” To summarize:

Krishna’s father Nanda, the chieftain of the cowherds, is organizing the annual autumn Indra-*yajña*, the ritual of offering to the celestial storm-god (the most prominent god in the Ṛgveda). Krishna, intent on humbling the overly proud Indra, charmingly persuades Nanda and the elders to instead, this year, perform the offering to Mount Govardhan. This would demonstrate their gratitude to the immediate source of the village’s well-being—the visible source more accessible than the ever-invisible god of lightning, thunder, and rain.

All the villagers happily assemble, bringing forth their rich harvest-season varieties of cooked foods, making sizeable hills of sweets, savories, rice, and

various cakes (all plant-based and dairy).¹⁷ As the villagers present their offerings to Mount Govardhan and to the local *brāhmaṇas* and give fresh grass to their cows, a giant form (*br̥had-vapuḥ*) appears atop the mountain. Declaring loudly, “I am the mountain!” this giant form proceeds to eat all the food offerings.

Young Krishna, who has instigated this ritual innovation, then bows down to the giant form, leading all the villagers to do the same. The text implies that the giant form is Krishna himself, as his expansion. Later texts will elaborate extensively on this story (including how the villagers enjoyed feasting on the food sanctified by ritual offering), but at this point in the narrative, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* simply notes that, after offering respects to the *br̥had-vapuḥ*, they all returned home.

Seeing that the Vraja-Vrindavan folk have intentionally neglected his annual offering, Indra is enraged. Thinking he will teach the villagers and Krishna a hard lesson, Indra releases his special clouds meant for cosmic annihilation to inundate the land. The panic-stricken cowherd men and women rush to Krishna, begging him to protect the cows, which also gather before him expectantly. After briefly reflecting on the situation, Krishna reaches under and then lifts “effortlessly” (*līlayā*) the entire Mount Govardhan with his left hand and holds it aloft, “just as easily as a child holds up a mushroom” (*chatrākam iva bālakah*; *BhP* 10.25.19). While Krishna remains stationary, steadily suspending the mountain like a great umbrella, all the villagers, together with their cows, come underneath and remain comfortably sheltered for the seven days’ and nights’ time span it takes Indra to understand his mistake and withdraw his clouds.

What can we learn from this much-loved story from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* to illuminate a bhakti-inflected yogic approach to environmentalism in relation to human-nonhuman animal relationality? First, as we want to approach environmentalism from the perspective of “linked leadership,” it is significant that it is Krishna himself, the master of yoga (Yogeśvara), as the primordial leader, who involves the entire population—human and nonhuman—in his newly fashioned ritual observance. In this sense, the

¹⁷ Surprisingly, the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*—generally dated earlier than the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*—mentions that the villagers offered “yoghurt, milk and meat” (*VP* 5.10.44; Taylor trans. 2021, p. 368). The *BhP* lists several lacto-vegetarian dishes; there is no mention of meat, nor is there any indication that the Indra-*yajña* that Krishna cancels would have involved animal sacrifice.

picture conveyed is of a *holistic system*, from which no one is excluded—human or nonhuman.¹⁸ That this ritual observance replaces the traditional Indra-*yajña* is important, portraying ritual *innovation*. Spurning the Vedic sacrificial order, which revolved around ritual animal immolation, Krishna offers a nonviolent alternative. Yet more than being simply nonviolent (Krishna refrains from attacking Indra, which he could have done to put a quick end to Indra’s interference), this alternative is actively protective. Krishna, the supreme master, acts as a *servant-leader* as he raises and sustains Mount Govardhan to protect all the human and nonhuman residents of the land, integral to his *strategy* to tame the heavens (embodied in Indra). In terms of specific action to favor the environment, we can think of Krishna’s taming action as representing processes for reversing climate change.¹⁹ Further, absorbed in their mutual affection, during the seven days and nights of Indra’s inundation, none of the Vraja-vāsīs (Vraja residents), including the animals, feel any physical inconvenience of hunger or thirst. All are free to simply gaze with wonder and love on the charming form of Krishna while he reciprocates with each individual resident by his captivating glances and smiles, which we may regard as expressions of Krishna’s *cultural skills*—the *bhakti-yogin’s* practical wisdom rooted in deep care.

Recall (from Chap. 7, Sects. 7.2.3 and 7.3) Barbara Holdrege’s representation of bhakti-yoga in terms of fashioning devotional bodies (from ascribed, to inscribed, to re-membered devotional bodies that interact with a social, cosmos, and divine body). In the Mount Govardhana story, later Vaiṣṇava tradition regards all those who participate in it, including the animals, as Krishna’s permanent associates. In effect, they are all beyond even the stage of re-membered bodily identity; rather, theirs are permanent forms, as *rāgātmika bhaktas*—so called because “their very essence (*ātman*) is spontaneously absorbed in passionate, all-consuming

¹⁸ Although the celestial god Indra is initially and quite purposefully excluded, the exclusion is calculated to precipitate his transformation of attitude. After recognizing his mistake of inappropriate pride, Indra is included in the community by his acknowledgment of Krishna’s identity, specifically as Govinda—Indra of cows.

¹⁹ Krishna’s action in lifting Govardhan is understood to be his *līlā*, which can be understood as action free from karmic implication or “reaction.” In this particular case, Krishna’s apparent interference with nature (by lifting Govardhan) is an illustration of what Krishna refers to in the *Bhagavadgītā* (4.18) as “inaction in action.” According to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, after the storm ended and Krishna sent all the villagers out from under the mountain, he replaced it exactly where it had been before lifting it.

love (*rāga*) for Kṛṣṇa” (Holdrege 2015, chapter 2). Going even further, and already expressed in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Mount Govardhana is identified as Krishna’s devotee—indeed, as his *best* devotee (*hari-dāsa-vārya*—*BhP* 10.21.18). This idea bears expansion, for which I follow closely the explanation of David Haberman in his book *Loving Stones: Making the Impossible Possible in the Worship of Mount Govardhan*.

9.6 MOUNT GOVARDHAN’S TRIPLE IDENTITY

In remembrance of Krishna’s Mount Govardhan *līlā*, Vaiṣṇavas walk the twenty-one kilometer periphery of this long, narrow, and now only thirty-meter-high hill. On certain days of the year, the number of pilgrims swells to tens of thousands—most walking barefoot, some covering the distance by full-body obeisance, body length by body length (*daṇḍavat-parikramā*). These are people from all social classes; women, men, and children; more or less educated, rich and poor—all having in common a sense that Govardhana is special—alive, conscious, a person who is pleased to bless whoever comes to him (or indeed her, as we shall see shortly). As a sacred hill, all avoid to step on Govardhan; rather, they will sprinkle some grains of Govardhan earth on their heads as a gesture of respect.

Reflecting on Govardhan’s complex identity can illuminate the rich potential of bhakti-based environmentalism by re-visioning nature as divine embodiment. To explain the multiple identity of Govardhan, we need to introduce three Sanskrit technical terms that describe three dimensions or ways of perceiving a form. These are *adhibhautika*, *adhyātmika*, and *adbidaivika* dimensions—terms that we find in early Sanskrit texts, including the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.²⁰ Briefly, according to one of Haberman’s learned local informants, first, Govardhan’s physical, material form is the *adhibhautika* form. Although this form is ever-changing (*kṣara*), it is an “essential aspect” of Krishna. As a tangible mountain, it is fully visible and tangible to anyone and everyone, for whom it may appear quite ordinary and unremarkable. Yet, it is understood to be fully divine, as the *adhibhautika svarūpa* form, where *svārūpa* refers to a

²⁰We may note that the *BhP* (2.10.13–30) gives a different order and association of the terms *adhyātmika* and *adbidaivika* in relation to components of the *virāt-rūpa*, the cosmic divine form consisting of sense organs, sense divinities, sense experience, material elements, and activities. See Prabhupāda (2017).

divine manifestation, a full presence of divinity, an “essential form” of Krishna (Haberman 2020, p. 91).²¹

Second, there is the *adhyātmika svarūpa* form of Govardhan. This is “that unified all-pervasive dimension of reality that is unmanifested, the nothingness that is nondifferent from everything.” This *adhyātmika* perspective has to do with acknowledging the “*brahman*-ness” of everything, whereby the self, the *ātman*, is ontologically identified or (as Vaiṣṇavas would generally say) *connected* with *brahman*. According to Haberman’s informant, it is this form that is approached by pilgrims who, while genuinely devotional in attitude, generally come with hopes to gain worldly goods (*bhoga*) and spiritual liberation (*mokṣa*) by the spiritual power that—although everywhere—is understood to be especially concentrated in places like Govardhan. And then, third, there is the *adbidaivika svarūpa* form of Govardhan. This is the expressly divine form of Krishna (*devatā-rūpa*) that Krishna identifies in the *Bhagavadgītā* as the supreme person, *puruṣa*, who is more specifically identified as *puruṣottama*, the supreme divinity or supreme personality. As Haberman notes, “Within the conceptual context of the three dimensions of Mount Govardhan, this is the supreme personality of the mountain that allows for deep connective relationship” (Haberman 2020, pp. 93–96).

The matter of Mount Govardhan’s identity doesn’t end here. According to Haberman’s source, the *adbidaivika svarūpa* comprises two *sva-rūpas*, namely, as the Lord (*bhagavān*) and as the “best devotee of Hari [Krishna]”—(*hari-dāsa-vārya*). Why Govardhan is praised as the best devotee is because he serves all of Krishna’s devotees, including the cows and other animals, by facilitating them in their service to Krishna, whom he also serves directly. Most famously, as we saw, Govardhan serves as an umbrella for the Vraja-vāsīs during Indra’s torrential onslaught. Thus, in the story of Mount Govardhan is a wonderful convergence and playful

²¹ Haberman relates a striking analogy told him by a resident of Mathura (near Govardhan): “Likely not knowing how my great-grandfather looked, if shown a photograph of him without being told of my family relationship to him, I would probably view the image with indifference, as an ‘ordinary man’. However, if I would be informed that the image is of my great-grandfather, I would surely be keenly interested and inclined to honor the person in the photograph.” The gentleman explained further, “It is like this with Giriraj [Govardhan]. Those who do not know him see only an ordinary mountain, but when those who know who Giriraj is look at him they feel something deeply and honor him accordingly. We have been listening to stories about Giriraj since we were very young. Therefore we see the specialness of this mountain in a way outsiders cannot” (Haberman 2020, p. 94).

interaction of divine form—or divine body—on both cosmic and rural village scales, wherein the integrity of the social body manifests in harmonious and concerted service (*sevā*) to the supreme person in his multi-faceted *svarūpa* (literally, “own form”).

But again, the story continues! A prominent contemporary leader of the Pushti Marg Vaiṣṇava tradition, Goswami Shyammanohar, in his Hindi work *Giriyāga*, identifies a third personality of the *adhidaivika svarūpa*: “[T]his is the *Svāminī svarūpa*, the feminine personality of Mount Govardhan that is identified with Radha, the preeminent lover of Krishna.” Haberman continues, telling of his research on Govardhan, “Once I discovered the female *Svāminī* identity of the mountain... I encountered it everywhere around the mountain in embodied forms, temple and home shrine rituals, theological conversations, artwork, and stories” (ibid., p. 97).

Understandably, this identification of Govardhan with Krishna’s feminine counterpart, Rādhā, belongs to the more esoteric (*bhāvātma*) side of Vaiṣṇava interpretation. Even so, this identification of femininity with Mount Govardhan as a manifestation (*svarūpa*) of divinity is relevant to reflection on bhakti-yoga, human-nonhuman animal relationality, and ecology. Returning to the UN recognition of a nexus between animal welfare, the environment, and human interests, this identification goes beyond identification of nature with the feminine. In this devotional perspective, Rādhā is the supreme feminine, the divine feminine counterpart of the divine male, Krishna. It is understood that Govardhan is one of their most important meeting places in Vraja-Vrindavan. For the many people who have some regard for Mount Govardhan (whether or not they would regard themselves as Vaiṣṇavas), whether they are aware of this esoteric dimension of Govardhan’s identity, Govardhan can be said to represent the nexus of animal, environment, and human interests, insofar as these are valued as integral to a transcendent reality. The *bhakti-yogin* seeks to acknowledge and enter this reality as the proper location to be in right relation to the environment which, for her or him, has meaning ultimately as a communion of subjects in relation to a supreme Subject, the transcendent body of whom is *saccidānanda-vigraha*—the form of eternal, blissful consciousness.

9.7 YOGA AS CULTURAL RENEWAL FOR AN AILING PLANET

As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, Kate Rigby suggests that when natural disasters occur, we tend to frame the meanings and moral imperatives of these events with stories. Depending on what sort of stories we tell and hear determines how we respond to nature's ways. We can repeat familiar (counterproductive) patterns or, alternatively, our stories can be transformative, "enabling the emergence of new ways of being and dwelling," ways that "might prove not only more adaptive but also more just and compassionate, in the long run" (Rigby 2015, p. 2). In his book *A Small Farm Future*, Chris Smaje, discerning an ongoing and worsening global natural disaster, offers a convincing story of a possible hopeful future by the very practical means of reorganizing agriculture. Based on research and carefully reasoned arguments, Smaje argues that the world needs to foster small farms as a major way to reverse the present destructive direction of humanity. He begins his case by listing and describing ten global crises—from population to climate change to soil degradation, identifying the tenth crisis as that of *culture*.²² He summarizes what he identifies as the crisis of culture in terms of modernity and modernism:

This, then, is the crisis of modernist culture—the ability to create ourselves as individuals and protect ourselves from the vicissitudes of the non-symbolic world, set against the ability to alienate ourselves as individuals and offload the consequences of our self-creation onto other people (including future people) and the non-symbolic world. (Smaje 2020, chapter 1)

Smaje notes that, along with our modern ability to "create ourselves as individuals," especially through technology and bureaucracy feeding dreams of uni-directional "progress" we have, over the last few centuries, become very accomplished at sustaining slavery—both literal and figurative—slavery of other persons and of ourselves. Despite our aspirations for freedom, variously conceived, human life becomes more restricted, in numerous ways, rooted largely in cultural disabilities. Addressing the cultural crisis, Smaje further suggests,

²² The other six crises Smaje discusses are: (1) the extreme level of energy consumption; (2) human over-use and misuse of "stuff"—especially non-renewable materials; (3) use, over-use, and misuse of water; (4) limitations on arable land; (5) degradation of health and nutrition; and (6) the expansionist nature of the political economy.

In view of the other crises we face, the only convincing way I can see of transcending this [cultural] crisis is to start making ourselves as individuals in less materialised ways that are more engaged with the Creation, the non-symbolic world, around us. (Ibid.)

Smaje goes on to specify what is for him the most promising form of such engagement with Creation, namely, the “small farm future” that he describes throughout his book. I would suggest that Smaje’s proposal is excellent and important as far as it goes. Let there be a major cultural movement back to the land, with people rediscovering the virtues and pleasures of hard physical work for tangible nourishment of body, mind, and spirit. Let there be small-scale intentional anticipatory communities and a re-creation of local commons, with trading largely on local markets, and let there be—as the author also suggests—republics rather than nations within which “reconstituted peasantries” can emerge—all in the spirit of creating a workable future—“an enormously tall order”—rather than trying to restore a lost past (ibid., chapter 19). Let there be a small farm future story that inspires economic as well as cultural transformation, a story that can effectively bring about “new ways of being and dwelling.”

All of these ideas are good as far as they go. One may question, however, whether it is possible to “start making ourselves as individuals in less materialised ways that are more engaged with the Creation” without giving place for what (or who) is beyond Creation. Even the United Nations has recognized faith-based organizations as important stakeholders and partners in promoting sustainability (Clifton 2023, p. 170). Why such organizations are important stakeholders has been identified by Rita Sherma in terms of four areas of relevant values common to most major religions including, I would add, yoga traditions. These four areas are (1) a critique of greed and overconsumption; (2) prioritization of communal good over selfish interests; (3) celebration of modest, low-impact lifestyles; and (4) recognition of humans’ interconnection with the natural world (ibid., citing Sherma 2021, p. 108).

The proposal of the present book is to bring yoga into the cultural renewal discussion, applying yogic wisdom to such a small farm story of sustainability. Yogic wisdom can provide the metaphysical and practical grounding to a small farm story for it to inspire being and dwelling in ways that are strongly conducive to fostering justice and compassion among humans and regarding nonhuman animals and the other-than-human world. A truly workable future is one that accepts guidance from persons

accomplished in long-established, as well as more recently developed, traditions of yoga. Everyone can engage in yoga practices according to their capacities as a means of self-transformation that expands the sphere of individual and collective awareness, attention, and care toward the varied human and other-than-human world.

In the *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* structure of the Pātañjala Yoga tradition that we focused on in Chaps. 4, 5, and 6, practice begins with simple, yet also deeply challenging, normative principles—*ahimsā* and *satya*—continuing with attentive observances leading into a devotional culture (*īśvara-praṇidhāna*). The physical aspects of yoga practice—*āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, and *pratyāhāra*—can all be practiced as one is able, as a means to greater awareness of one's body as made of the same sentient stuff as all other bodies, and to build a strong basis for meditational practices. Then the meditational practices—*dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi*—are not inaccessible if one has good guidance and determination, leading one from constricted toward limitless extension of goodwill, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity. Further, as we discussed mainly in Chaps. 7 and 8, and also in the present chapter, the practices of yoga in the devotional register (bhakti-yoga) are particularly accessible. The epic *Mahābhārata* indicates that yoga, especially bhakti, the “yoga of devotion,” was taught by Krishna to Arjuna—a warrior and householder (neither a *brāhmaṇa* nor an ascetic)—to show that yoga is for everyone, to awaken everyone to a higher vision of nontemporal selves living, breathing, and pursuing interests in myriad temporal forms.

Keeping in mind the importance of stories to changing our lives, in this book I have summarized several narratives from yoga- and yoga-related literature of India. We might be inclined to think of these accounts in this and previous chapters as instances of the symbolic world from which Smaje would have us turn away. Even if we take these stories in symbolic ways, they—and so many other stories from yogic traditions—serve a liberating purpose.²³ Divine fish, divine tortoise; a cosmic boar; a man-lion *avatāra*; snakes that speak of dharma; a *yogin* hosting a bird nest on his head; a dog that transforms into Dharma; Krishna multiplying himself into so many bovine calves and boys; and Krishna balancing aloft a mountain for seven

²³ It may be argued that symbolization is integral to meaning making, hence what is needed for positive transformation is not to turn away from the symbolic world but rather to recover and revise the symbols that bring meaning favorable to cultures of care. See Neville (1996) for a thorough treatment of this subject.

days and nights—all such stories aim to turn our attention and stretch our imagination to possible worlds wherein human beings experience the joy of yogic becoming in a communion of subjects.²⁴ Descriptions of Vraja-Vrindavan, the bucolic home of mountain-lifting child Krishna, may strike us as the product of over-indulged devotional contemplation. Alternatively, recognizing the extent of our modern (or postmodern) cultural impoverishment and angst, we may see them as an invitation to “come forth into the light of things.”²⁵ I have concluded this discussion by relating this famous mountain-lifting story said to have taken place in Vraja-Vrindavan because it encapsulates much of the cultural meaning of this particular region, present in northern India and visited by millions of pilgrims every year. But also, far beyond the immediate Vraja-Vrindavan region, practitioners of bhakti-yoga worldwide now celebrate the annual (autumn) festival of Govardhan Annakūṭa—offering a feast to Govardhan and relating the story (summarized above) of which the food offering—always strictly vegetarian—is an important feature. People from around the globe look to (and visit) the Vraja-Vrindavan area to be nourished by the devotional lore that offers visions of a reality that is a true communion of subjects, a place where every being’s attention and perception is conceived as devotional yogic absorption in the *samādhi* of tastefully joyful living in relation to the supreme, transcendent person, the “Lord of Yoga,” Yogeśvara.

9.8 YOGA AS “BEAUTIFUL ACTION”

Early in this chapter, I discussed the *Bhagavadgītā*’s three-stanza description of austerity (*tapas*) characterized by the quality of illumination (*sattva-guṇa*). I suggested that such practices of austerity (which largely overlap with the *yama* and *niyama* components of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*) can be understood in terms of virtue cultivation. In turn, cultivation of the virtues engenders linked leadership that supports participation in the cosmic

²⁴ A possible point of connection between the Indic notion of *līlā* and Western thought in pursuit of a better world is in the literary sphere of literary utopias, insofar as accounts of *līlā* and utopias are both “idealized states” that can inspire new directions of action (as suggested by Kate Rigby regarding stories). Whether any literary utopias explore yogic/contemplative cultures would be a matter for investigation. For an overview of utopian studies in relation to science fiction, see Rogan (2009). Significantly, in the same volume as Rogan is Joan Gordon’s chapter “Animal Studies.” Gordon notes that science fiction is “particularly well suited as an exploratory site for animal studies” (p. 331).

²⁵ Rigby (2020, p. 37), quoting William Wordsworth’s poem “Expostulation and Reply.”

circular regenerative economy (*yajña*) in which Krishna calls all human beings to participate. By such participation, virtue ethics supports environmentally ethical living by acknowledging a metaphysical foundation, an engagement with and transformation through the divine body that manifests in this world in several ways. For Krishna *bhaktas*, one way the divine body is manifested in this world is as a particular hill—Govardhan—in north India, identified as nondifferent from Krishna, the primordial linked leader, Yogeśvara. Finally, I suggested yogic wisdom as a needed integral component of cultural renewal that could serve to develop anticipatory communities that sustain themselves by small-scale farming.

Throughout this book, I have tried to show that yoga thought and practice constitutes a rich resource for establishing ethically appropriate relationality with animals and, necessarily, with the environment as a whole. We may say that yoga's starting point is a fundamental questioning of one's own identity and, by extension, of human identity. In particular, it involves an inquiry into the nature of self in relation to other, whereby the context of the inquiry is shifted from the ascribed designations of time-bound physical bodies (designated by gender, nationality, race, class, and so on) to an open-ended dimension unbounded by time. This is a profound shift in perspective that can be empowering. As deep ecology pioneer Arne Naess (2008, p. 81) has pointed out,

We underestimate ourselves. And I emphasize *selves*. We tend to confuse our “self” with the narrow ego.

Yoga is fundamentally concerned with clearing this self / ego (*ātman* or *puruṣa* / *ahamkāra*) confusion. By doing so, to continue with Naess' language, we can experience a “widened and deepened self,” which amounts to “realizing inherent potentialities.” Such inherent potentialities are the motivating force behind the “beautiful acts” that Naess, in his interpretation of Emmanuel Kant, distinguishes from moral acts performed merely out of duty (*ibid.*, pp. 85–86, 93; Defrančeski 2024). Moral acts are within the sphere of normative ethics, an area of thought that is questionably compelling or effective in environmental matters. Naess resonates with what I understand from yoga thought when he writes,

The requisite care [for the environment, for the diversity of life] flows naturally if the self is widened and deepened so that protection of free nature is

felt and conceived as protection of ourselves... If reality is experienced by the ecological self, our behavior *naturally* and beautifully follows norms of strict environmental ethics. We certainly need to hear about our ethical shortcomings from time to time, but we more easily change through encouragement and through a deepened perception of reality and our own self. (Ibid., p. 93, emphasis in original)

A “deepened perception of reality” is, as we have seen, an important concern of yoga. Advanced yogic perception is described as direct perception of reality, and such perception can be said to bring about ethical behavior “naturally and beautifully.” To consider action in relation to the other-than-human world in terms of beauty leads me again to think in terms of yoga as Krishna describes it in the *Bhagavadgītā*. One of Krishna’s definitions of yoga is “skill in actions” (*yoga karmasu kauśalam*—*Gītā* 2.50), also translatable as “artfulness in actions.” In later bhakti-yoga traditions, devotional aesthetics takes center stage. The key technical term in devotional aesthetics is *rasa*, a Sanskrit word that has to do with the sense of taste and translatable as “essence,” “juice,” “nectar,” “taste,” and “flavor” (Holdrege 2015, p. 86). Without elaborating on the rich tradition of aesthetics in India that has developed around this concept, here the point is simply to suggest an important connection between yoga, “widening and deepening the self,” and tasting. Both physical and figurative tasting are relevant. Regarding physical taste, its relevance has been implied in earlier references to food in this study, as a minimal application of the restraint principle of non-harm, *ahiṃsā*. Yoga practice requires selectivity in what one eats, and the *ahiṃsā* principle directs the *yogin* to reject nonvegetarian—or for some, non-vegan—food. The yoga practitioner cultivates a taste for vegetarian or vegan fare, becoming fully satisfied with such taste. To practice this way of life can be considered “beautiful action”—free from the burden of moral turpitude, based on perception resulting from a “widened and deepened self.”

As figurative tasting, *rasa* in the bhakti tradition refers to aesthetic relish of tasteful relationality with the supreme person. Significantly, devotional *rasa* theory is closely related with Indian Sanskrit analysis of poetry and drama—language and story. By associating and expanding the theory in relation to devotional yoga, the bhakti tradition saw the proper—fully liberative and joyful—locus of *rasa* experience to be in relation to the supreme person, whom Rūpa Gosvāmin (16th c.) in particular identifies as

“he who is the embodiment of unlimited ambrosial *rasa*.”²⁶ From this perspective, yoga is constituted of *tasteful* engagement with the divine body, the atemporal, blissful form of pure consciousness (*saccidānanda-vigraha*). And as we have seen, in the divine body is embedded the cosmos body and social body. Thus, such yogic engagement becomes “beautiful action”—action that is tastefully joyful as it is naturally respectful of all living beings, as subjects, each experiencing their individual bodily field (*kṣetra*) within the temporal, cosmic sphere.

Returning to Matthew Calarco’s three approaches to animal ethics—identity theory, difference theory, and indistinction theory, the practicing *yogin* is practiced to perceive the *beauty* in each of these approaches and can therefore *act beautifully* in view of them. Thus, one sees the beauty in recognizing that other-than-human animals are the same as oneself (identity theory) because one acknowledges—in terms of classical Yoga—the *puruṣa* present in all the variegated multiplicity of bodies to be of the same non-*prakṛtic*, conscious existence. Or, in devotional Vedāntic terms, one sees that the all-pervading, absolute Being that is *brahman* is equally represented in all beings. With this perception of identity, while cultivating a therapeutic nondualist sensibility, the advanced *yogin acts beautifully*: as we saw in Chap. 7, Sect. 7.2.1, she or he may deeply feel that “I do nothing at all,” even while being highly active—for example as an activist pursuing rights for animals in the public sphere.

Similarly, difference theory—based on the sensibility that living beings are profoundly *other* to each other—can be seen by the yoga practitioner as holding great beauty. In this case, (following the *Bhagavadgītā* more explicitly than the Pātañjala *Yoga Sūtra*), the difference between self (*ātman*) and higher, supreme Self (*paramātman*) is most important for the *yogin*. This too is an opportunity for one enriched by yogic vision to *act beautifully*, by turning attention to that higher Self within one’s own body and entrusting oneself to him. As Patañjali indicates (YS I.23), nothing less than *samādhi*—the state of full absorption of the mind—is possible by such entrustment. In that position, one’s perception and reasoning function under higher inner guidance, assuring that one’s actions in relation to the different living beings will be appropriate, sensitized to the call from the source of ethical behavior, being attuned with the same higher Self in these other living beings.

²⁶ Akhila-rasāmṛta-mūrti—from Rūpa Gosvāmin’s masterpiece, *Bhaktirasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.1.1. (Haberman 2003).

And then, concerning indistinction theory, here also the *yogin* finds beauty, seeing herself or himself as but one of countless living beings in the vast phenomenal world, governed ultimately by the ultimate Person, Puruṣottama. Identified also as *bhagavān*, the full possessor of unlimited plenitude, Vaiṣṇava practitioners of bhakti-yoga celebrate this ultimate Person as Krishna, the all-attractive one. The beauty perceived by the bhakti-yoga practitioner inspires *beautiful action* by taking up the call to fashion a devotional body, which is by constitution an “ecological self” (Naess 2008, pp. 82, 93). With a devotional body, one is entirely given over to service (*sevā*) to Puruṣottama, in such a way that anthropocentrism loses all meaning in the presence of devotional relish (*rasa*).

As I end this discussion of yoga and animal ethics, I suggest that the reader picture the goddess Lakṣmī, said in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and other Purāṇas to have appeared out of the cosmic ocean’s depths from the churning effort of the celestials and titans. Beautiful, radiant Lakṣmī sits cross-legged in yogic lotus posture (*padmāsana*) on a great lotus blossom, flanked by elephants. Lakṣmī is celebrated as the embodiment of transcendence, purity, and poise (Balkaran 2022). She sits still, in perfect poise, unfettered by any worldly pollution. In this position, she bestows the abundance of well-being to all beings, enabling them to progress on their journeys to yogic freedom and devotion.

This picture of Lakṣmī in a peaceful yogic posture serves to bring this extended reflection on yoga and animal ethics to an end, allowing her to remind us that *slowing down and paying attention* are key features of yoga practice. By simply slowing down and paying attention to the living beings around us, we can open ourselves to the beauty and wonder that every living being is. The simple practice of slowing down and paying attention can awaken us to a world of possibility in which we human beings can fundamentally re-set our ways of being on this planet earth, for the well-being of all. The widely felt urgency “to re-invent the human” (Berry 1999, pp. 159–165) calls for a studied, yogic gaze to more deeply comprehend just who we are and what we are about. This may involve rethinking what it means to be “persons.” As the twentieth-century Czech philosopher Erazim Kohák wrote, “Humans are beings capable of being persons,” going on to say that animals

are not humans, yet neither are they impersonal, biomechanisms. Their life has an integrity, they command respect as bearers of value in time. They,

too, are persons, each after its own kind. Nor could we speak of the universe as human: in defining ourselves as distinctively human, we stress our isolation within it. Yet it is not inappropriate to speak of the *kosmos* as personal, the locus of eternal value embodied in time, marked by an integrity that demands respect. As humans, we may feel strangers within it, yet as Persons, we are radically kin. (Kohák 1984 “Of Humans and Persons”)

To become “capable of being persons,” and thereby to recognize nonhuman animals as persons in a personal *kosmos*, may be possible in a world where yogic slowing down and paying attention is widely fostered as a way to re-invent ourselves for the good of all.

Questions for Reflection

1. What is meant by “linked leadership,” and how might it contribute to effectively addressing environmental degradation? (Sects. 9.2, 9.3, 9.4, and 9.5)
2. What are the connections between the practices of *brahmacarya*, *priyabhita*, and *manah-prasāda* and environmental care? (Sect. 9.3; Appendix A and B)
3. The *Bhagavadgītā* warns that “[t]hose who prepare food only for themselves, eat suffering.” Why might this be the case? (Sect. 9.4)
4. “[T]o support a healthy biosphere as the stage on which divine play occurs” suggests participation in a story with a happy ending. Is there any plausibility to this scenario? (Sect. 9.4)
5. How might the story of Krishna lifting Mount Govardhan, portraying him as a “linked leader,” be applied or translated into devotional engagement (bhakti-yoga) favorable for the environment? (Sect. 9.5)
6. What is the significance of Mount Govardhan being gendered, both male and female, as an inspiration for devotional engagement favorable for the environment? (Sect. 9.6)
7. What is wrong with modernity and modernism, and what can the practice of yoga (in one form or another) do to counter the wrong? (Sect. 9.7)
8. How might the “deepened perception of reality” that yoga practice offers complement a “small farm future” in fostering environmental care and care for nonhuman animals? (Sects. 9.7 and 9.8)

REFERENCES

- Balkaran, Raj. 2022. *The Stories Behind the Poses: The Indian Mythology That Inspired 50 Yoga Postures*. London: The Quarto Group.
- Berry, Thomas. 1999. *The Great Work*. New York: Doubleday.
- Bryant, Edwin F. 2009. *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali: A New Edition, Translation, and Commentary*. New York: North Point Press.
- Chapple, Christopher Key. 2008. Sacrifice and Sustainability. *Theological Faculty Works*. 20. https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/theo_fac/20/ (Accessed January 14, 2025).
- Chapple, Christopher Key. 2025. *Embodied Ecology: Yoga and the Environment*. San Rafael, CA: Mandala Publishing Group.
- Clifton, Wolf Gordon. 2023. Sustainability Policy and the Stage of Divine Play: Hindu Philosophy at the Nexus of Animal Welfare, Environment, and Sustainable Development. *Journal of Animal Ethics* 13 (2): 169–183.
- Dalal, Neil. 2021. The Ritual Roots for an Advaita Vedānta Ecotheology. *Journal of Dharma Studies* 4 (1): 65–89.
- Dasa, Satyanarayana. 2021. *Śrī Bhakti Sandarbha: The Sublime Path to Attain Perfection*. Vol. 2. Vrindavan: Jiva Institute of Vaishnava Studies.
- Defrančeski, Jan. 2024. Between Beautiful and Moral Action: Immanuel Kant and Arne Naess. *JAHN European Journal of Bioethics* 15/1:29. <https://doi.org/10.21860/j.15.1.6>
- Edelmann, Jonathan B. 2012. *Hindu Theology and Biology: The Bhāgavata Purāṇa and Contemporary Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Goswami, H. D. 2015. *A Comprehensive Guide to Bhagavad-Gītā with Literal Translation*. Gainesville, FL: Krishna West.
- Haberman, David L. 2003. *The Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu of Rūpa Gosvāmin*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Haberman, David L. 2020. *Loving Stones: Making the Impossible Possible in the Worship of Mount Govardhan*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Holdrege, Barbara A. 2015. *Bhakti and Embodiment: Fashioning Divine Bodies and Devotional Bodies in Kṛṣṇa Bhakti*. London: Routledge.
- Jamison, Stephanie W., and Joel P. Brereton, trans. 2014. *The Rigveda: The Earliest Religious Poetry of India*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kohák, Erasm. 1984. *The Embers and the Stars: A Philosophical Inquiry into the Moral Sense of Nature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kumar, Sehdev, and Aaloka Mehndiratta. 1993. Environmental Ethics: Ancient Traditions and Contemporary Dilemmas—A Hindu Perspective. *Hindu-Christian Studies Bulletin* 6:9.

- Naess, Arne. 2008. *Ecology of Wisdom*. New York: Penguin.
- Neville, Robert Cummings. 1996. *The Truth of Broken Symbols*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- O’Niell, William. 2022. The Ethics of Enchantment: Spirituality and Ecological Ethics. In *Religion and Sustainability: Interreligious Resources, Interdisciplinary Responses*, ed. Rita D. Sherma and Purushottama Bilimoria. Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature.
- Prabhupāda, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami. 2017. *The Complete Teachings of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda*. Vedabase CD-ROM Version 2017.2 Sandy Ridge, NC: Bhaktivedanta Archives.
- Rigby, Kate. 2015. *Dancing with Disaster: Environmental Histories, Narratives, and Ethics for Perilous Times*. Charlottesville VA: University of Virginia Press. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Rigby, Kate. 2020. *Reclaiming Romanticism: Towards an Eco-poetics of Decolonization*. Bloomsbury.
- Rogan, Alcena M. D. 2009. Utopian Studies. In *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. A. M. Mark Boulton, Adam Roberts Butler, and Sherryl Vint, 308–316. London: Routledge.
- Sherma, Rita D. 2015. A Hindu Response to *Laudato Si’* on Care for Our Common Home. In *For Our Common Home: Process Relational Responses to Laudato Si’*, ed. John B. Cobb Jr and Ignacio Castuera. Anoka, MN: Process Century Press.
- Sherma, Rita D. 2021. Sustainability Studies—Beyond the Denial of Religion and Theology as Resources: An Introduction. In *Religion and Sustainability: Interreligious Resources, Interdisciplinary Responses*, ed. R. D. Sherma and P. Bilimoria, 1–8. Cham, Switzerland: Springer.
- Simpson, Ace V. 2020. *Leadership Lessons from the Bhagavad Gita*. New Delhi: SAGE.
- Smaje, Chris. 2020. *A Small Farm Future: Making a Case for a Society Built Around Local Economies, Self-Provisioning, Agricultural Diversity and a Shared Earth*. London: Chelsea Green.
- Taylor, McComas. 2021. *The Viṣṇu Purāṇa: Ancient Annals of the God with Lotus Eyes*. Canberra, Australia: Australian National University Press. <https://doi.org/10.22459/VP.2021>.
- Valpey, Kenneth, and Shivanand Sharma. 2024. The God of *yoga*: Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda and Divine Pedagogy Addressing Divine Hiddenness. In *Vaiṣṇava Concepts of God: Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. R. S. Silvestre, A. C. Herbert, and B. P. Göcke. London: Routledge.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



APPENDIX A—ADDITIONAL *YAMA* PRECEPTS

As we know (from Chap. 4), the first two “limbs” of Patañjali’s eightfold system (*aṣṭāṅga-yoga*) described in Chapter 2 and the beginning of Chapter 3 of the *Yoga Sūtras* are, first, the five restraints (*yama*—YS II.30–31), and second, the five observances (*niyama*—YS II.32). Having discussed only the first two restraints and last two observances in Chap. 4 as particularly bearing on animal ethics, for completeness, here we briefly consider the remaining three restraints (in Appendix A) and the three remaining observances (in Appendix B). Since all the restraints and observances bear specifically on and support non-harming (*ahimsā*), they are also essential first-order moral precepts foundational to classical Yoga and widely valued in present-day yoga cultures (O’Brien-Kop 2023, p. 129).¹

¹O’Brien-Kop notes, “Of course, there is a gap between the early social context of Patañjali’s *Yogasūtra* and the variegated contemporary social contexts in which its precepts are now practised. Nonetheless, as an ethical code, the applied value of these precepts is extraordinary in its popular reach and appeal for global audiences today. The moral precepts of Patañjali’s system are used to inform and underpin all kinds of social engagement and ethical standpoints—from environmental activism to anti-consumerism, social justice, animal ethics and so-called ‘conscious capitalism’.” Karen O’Brien-Kop, *The Philosophy of the Yogasutra: An Introduction* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), p. 129.

NON-STEALING (ASTEYA)

With respect to the first two restraints—*ahimsā* and *satya*—we identified our physical body’s oral functions as the locus for these practices: The *yogī* restrains the tongue (representing the alimentary system) from eating animal flesh as an essential starting point for the cultivation of *ahimsā*. Similarly one restrains the tongue (representing speech and communication) from speaking untruth—such as to deny the sentience and the subjective being of animals—as the starting point for cultivating *satya*.

We may regard the locus of the third restraint, *asteya* (literally “non-stealing,” or “refraining from theft”) to be our hands, since these are our primary instruments for grasping and fabricating, as *homo faber*. It is with the hands that we fashion our built environments and with which we draw and take in nourishment from the environment. It is also with the hands and arms—with or without weapons—that we defend ourselves or show aggression toward other beings. More generally, our hands—so finely suited to performing a vast range of skills for manipulating our environment—point to the problem of *karma*.

Karma (literally “action”) is a key term in yoga philosophy, sketched briefly in the Pātañjala *Yoga Sūtra* (II.12–15) and elaborated upon in the *Bhagavadgītā*: Every action we perform has consequences both in the outer world and for the actor. Both the cause and the effect of binding action is the fivefold afflictions (*kleśa*—YS I.8—nescience [*avidyā*], egoity [*asmitā*], attachment [*rāga*], aversion [*dveṣa*], and fear of death [*abhiniveśa*]).

Asteya in particular enjoins restraint of the human tendency to misappropriate physical resources for immediate or extended selfish purposes. It challenges the *yogin* to question his or her notion of entitlement, urging one to become detached from all phenomenal conditions, not least one’s physical body.

Referring to *asteya* as “avoiding misappropriation” serves to highlight the broadest possible sense of the term. It particularly suggests a responsibility of leaders—whether of a small family or of a nation—to properly and conscientiously manage resources for the benefit of all, where “all” includes nonhuman animals as well as flora. Yoga practice means taking responsibility for the well-being of one’s outer environment as much as for one’s inner environment, by which the “environmental self” is fostered

and realized.² As we discussed in Chaps. 2 and 9, in traditional Vedic terms, there is a process for proper appropriation of resources, encapsulated by the term *yajña*, often translated as “sacrifice,” though generally holding wider connotations than the English term. Unlike in many of the early Vedic *yajña* rituals which involved highly regulated immolation of certain animals, since yoga practice begins with *ahimsā*, *yajña* is “internalized” such that the *yogin*’s appropriations of resources are greatly simplified and minimized. From this understanding we may appreciate Patañjali’s statement of *asteya*’s result when perfected (*YS* II.37):

When one is established in refrainment from stealing, all jewels manifest.³

“All jewels” may be taken as “all that is valuable,” whereby successful yoga practice brings about a radical revaluation, a change in perception of what has enduring value and therefore what has real meaning and purpose.⁴

Such revaluation is supported by an attitude conducive to the practice of *asteya* that finds expression in the German word *Gelassenheit*—letting be or not-seizing—a relaxation of one’s tendency to overly and inappropriately manage others’ lives, including the lives of animals. Further, this attitude can be conducive to the development of what may be called “mixed community” by allowing space for various life-forms to coexist without claiming ownership.⁵ The converse attitude, which *asteya* serves to overcome, unfolds as commodification of the world: everything and every being are priced and up for sale, and in particular, many animals are valued only for mass-production as human food, clothing, and what-not. Forests are for clearing to grow fodder for proliferated farm animal production, and desertification is an unfortunate but necessary consequence. Thus commodification can be seen as institutionalized theft, whereby that which is of real value for planetary sustainability and well-being—beginning

² Arne Naess, *Ecology of Wisdom* (New York: Penguin, 2016), p. 82.

³ Edwin F. Bryant, *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: North Point Press).

⁴ Significantly, the Sanskrit word *artha* carries the sense of *value* as well as *meaning*, and also *purpose*. The commodification of animal lives for food, clothing, and other purposes may be seen as a glaring instance of how human perception of value becomes degraded and impoverished, dulling the capacity to perceive enduring value and meaning in practices of animal care.

⁵ Eli Kramer, *Intercultural Modes of Philosophy, vol. 1: Principles to Guide Philosophical Community* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), p. 230; Naess, *Ecology*, p. 82.

with biodiversity and a stable climate—is spoiled through systematic misappropriation of the world’s wealth and sources of energy. These types of misappropriation are, following the *Yoga Sūtra*’s reasoning, rooted in ignorance, a false sense of self, attachment, aversion, and the fear of death.

From these roots sprout the sense of proprietorship, both of objects and of other living beings. This ignorant sense is to be overcome by acknowledging that we are not the creators of life, nor of any living being. Claiming ownership of other beings, humans unnecessarily deprive other beings of their lives—theft of the worst sort.

CONTINENCE/CELIBACY (BRAHMACARYA)

The earliest known references to *brahmacarya* are found in the ancient Atharvaveda, which refers to the life of a Vedic student. According to later texts, a *brahmacārīn* was typically a young, unmarried student who, observing strict celibacy, would live for several years in the *āśrama* (hermitage) of his teacher, providing menial services and learning the Vedic texts.⁶ We have already discussed the Upaniṣadic story of the young *brahmacārīn* Satyakāma Jābāla approaching sage Hāridrumata Gautama for higher knowledge (in Chap. 4, Sect. 4.3.1).⁷ This meaning is still relevant today (in that young male students in present-day *āśramas* in India are referred to as *brahmacārīns*), but in our context of yoga practice *brahmacarya* refers especially to the practice of sexual continence as such, regardless of one’s life-stage.⁸

This broader sense of *brahmacarya*—beyond designation of young studenthood—is more specifically to the point in the context of yoga. The practice of *yama*—self-restraint—is fundamentally about restraining the urges of the bodily senses to engage with sense objects in pursuit of sense

⁶ Stephanie W. Jamison and Joel P. Brereton, *The Rigveda: The Earliest Religious Poetry of India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 1575.

⁷ See Valpey, Kenneth R., *Cow Care in Hindu Animal Ethics*, (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28408-4>), pp. 20–23, for further discussion of this story in the context of discussion on Indic traditions of cow care.

⁸ As a practice of self-restraint, traditional Indian (brahmanical) social structure in terms of life-stages (*āśrama-dharma*) restricted sexual activity to only one of the four stages, namely, that of the householder (*gṛhastha*). Whereas the first stage—that of the student (*brahmacarya* proper), the third stage of retirement (*vānaprastha*), and the final stage, full renunciation (*sannyāsa*)—demand complete celibacy, the householder’s sexuality is restrained within the social boundary of marriage.

pleasures. Of particular concern is sexual engagement, always regarded as a powerful distraction from yoga practice.⁹ Conversely, to appropriately restrict sexual activity within marriage, or ideally to give it up altogether (as an unmarried youth, retiree, or renunciant, or possibly also as a householder) is seen as essential to progress toward freedom from the five afflictions (*kleśas*) mentioned previously, namely, ignorance, ego, desire, aversion, and clinging to life. With freedom *from* these afflictions comes freedom *to* direct one's mental activity toward becoming adept in yoga, to achieve its fulfillment in perfect freedom, *kaivalya*.

According to Patañjali (YS II.38), there is a specific result to be gained by practicing *brahmacarya*:

Upon the establishment of celibacy, power is attained.¹⁰

The word *vīrya*, here translated as “power,” also means “virility” as well as “heroism”.¹¹ That sexual abstention, not sexual indulgence, fosters virility, is well known. Yet, it is widely believed in present-day culture that virility is gained by meat consumption, and manliness (along with heroism) is associated with the power to kill and consume animals. Animals, in turn, are associated with femaleness, whereby in many cultures meat-eating is a male prerogative.¹²

That the power won by *brahmacarya* holds connotations of heroism is strikingly portrayed in the person of Bhīṣma in India's classical epic, the *Mahābhārata*. To facilitate his father's second marriage, Bhīṣma makes a solemn vow to his father's father-in-law-to-be that he, the great semi-divine warrior Bhīṣma, will never marry nor father children. In gratitude, his father, Śantanu, blesses him with the ability to choose his own day and time of death. Years later, Bhīṣma, on his deathbed of arrows on the

⁹That the restraint of sexual activity is integral to successful yoga practice is likely to be left unmentioned in modern postural yoga studios. In this regard, see for example, Andrea R. Jain, “Neoliberal Yoga,” in *Routledge Handbook of Yoga and Meditation Studies*, edited by Suzanne Newcombe and Karen O'Brien-Kop (London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 51–62. Note also her discussion of contradictions, in particular the occurrence of sexual scandals involving some yoga teachers.

¹⁰Bryant, *The Yoga Sūtra*.

¹¹Sir Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1995), p. 1006.

¹²Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 48–52.

Kurukṣetra battlefield, gives extensive instructions to the succeeding King Yudhiṣṭhira. For us to note is that it is Bhīṣma, the heroic *brahmacārin* who instructs his successor on the principle of *ahiṃsā*, and that he refers to it as the highest dharma—the best practice of righteousness:

Ahiṃsā is the highest dharma, ahiṃsā is the supreme restraint, ahiṃsā is the highest gift, ahiṃsā is the highest penance, ahiṃsā is the highest sacrifice, ahiṃsā is the supreme force, ahiṃsā is the highest friendship, ahiṃsā is the highest happiness, ahiṃsā is the highest truth, ahiṃsā is the highest revelation. (Mahābhārata 13.117.37–38; Hildebeitel 2016, p. 136)¹³

It is ironic that Bhīṣma eulogizes *ahiṃsā* while lying on a battlefield, about to die. But actually this setting, and the fact that Bhīṣma is revered as one of the greatest of the epic’s warrior heroes, lends special force to his plea for nonviolence.

Another way to understand the heroism of *brahmacarya* is suggested by the early scholar of religions, Émile Durkheim who, in discussing the subduing of one’s “own nature” wrote:

[By such practice of self-restraint, a person] makes himself unique among all the other creatures, which go blindly where pleasure leads them ... so he who is delivered in this way is not the victim of mere illusion when he believes he is endowed with a kind of mastery over things. By the very act of renouncing things, he has risen above things. Because he has silenced nature, he is stronger than nature. (Durkheim 1995, p. 320)¹⁴

Durkheim here argues that “nature”—that is, the force that drives animate beings to seek sense satisfaction—can and should be overcome through self-restraint. It may not be helpful to characterize all nonhuman animals as following “blindly wherever pleasure calls them,” but the idea that humans can be characterized as having a special capacity for intentional sense restraint bears consideration. It is largely on the basis of this capacity that the yoga system as a whole is built. Krishna informs Arjuna in the *Bhagavadgītā*, “Engaging sense objects with self-controlled senses, free

¹³ Alf Hildebeitel, *Nonviolence in the Mahābhārata: Śiva's summa on Ṛṣidharma and the gleaners of Kurukṣetra* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 136.

¹⁴ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: Free Press, 1995), p. 320.

from delight and hate, the accomplished soul attains clarity” (*Gītā* 2.64).¹⁵ It is such clarity (*prasāda*) that enables the adept *yogī* to see (Sanskrit verbal root $\sqrt{ikṣ}$) the self (*ātman*) in all beings and all beings in the self, “with equal vision everywhere” (*Gītā* 6.29),¹⁶ and it is this ability to see the self in all beings and vice versa that is crucial to realizing oneself, following Arne Naess, as what we may call the “ecological self.”¹⁷

In the wider canon of classical yoga literature we find important guidelines for successful practice. With respect to self-restraint in sense activity in general and restraint of sexual activity specifically, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* tells of sage Dattātreya (discussed in Chap. 5, Sect. 5.3.1), who takes important life lessons from twenty-four “gurus”—mainly features of the natural world and behavior of certain animals. For example, he learns sexual restraint from the negative example of the male elephant’s folly in pursuing a female elephant that has been tied next to a hidden deep pit into which the male elephant falls and is trapped. Serious yoga practitioners are urged not to allow themselves to become trapped by unregulated sexual activity, whereby yoga’s aim of freedom is undermined by the binding force of sensory compulsion.¹⁸

In this context we may note that the broader Indic tradition in which yoga tradition is situated extensively considers the issue of human nondifference and difference from nonhuman animals. One stanza from a wisdom literature text, the *Hitopadeśa*, encapsulates the general conclusion:

Eating, sleeping, fearing and mating—for human beings these [activities] are common with animals. The special higher [principle] for humans is dharma. [For humans] lacking dharma there is no distinction from animals. (*Hitopadeśa* 25)¹⁹

¹⁵ H. D. Goswami, trans., *A Comprehensive Guide to Bhagavad-Gītā with Literal Translation* (Gainesville, FL: Krishna West).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Naess, *Ecology*, p. 82.

¹⁸ In brahmanical Indic traditions, “unregulated” sexual activity is, minimally, indulgence outside of marriage. Of four traditional life-stages, the first (*brahmacarya*), third (*vānaprastha*—retired), and fourth (*saṁnyāsa*—renounced) are for practicing strict celibacy. The second (*gṛhastha*—householder) permits “regulated” sexual activity as proper, dharmic behavior. In all four life-stages, yoga can be practiced effectively when these restrictions are maintained.

¹⁹ Paṇḍit Rāmeshvar Bhaṭṭ, *The Hitopadeśa of Nārāyaṇ Paṇḍit* (Bombay: Satyabhāmābai Pāṇḍuraṅg) <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.325936/page/n1/mode/2up> (accessed January 15, 2025).

Dharma, broadly speaking, can be translated as “ethics,” and in this context the human-animal distinction is identified as hinging entirely on human intentionality in the form of conscious acceptance of social norms that are verbally communicated. These social norms invariably involve the establishment of social boundaries, and these are often, if not always, related directly or indirectly with sexual boundaries. The power resulting from the sexual restraint called *brahmacarya* can be regarded specifically as that which enables one to experience freedom from the demands of the senses and mind, including the demands to be preoccupied with all matters related to one’s own nourishment, rest, and defense. As we will see next, these preoccupations are further overcome by non-possessiveness.

NON-GRASPING (APARIGRAHA)

As we have seen, in the list of five restraints, prior to *brahmacarya* is non-theft (*asteya*). Complementing and strengthening non-theft is the fifth and final restraint, non-grasping.²⁰ Arguably, non-grasping (including non-covetousness) is at the root of non-theft. When free from possessiveness, there is no need and no inclination to take what is not given to us. Thus, in that condition non-theft no longer requires intentional efforts at restraint.

One who engages seriously in yoga practice seeks understanding of root causes for suffering conditions. For example, why does one feel possessiveness in the first place? Yoga philosophy, closely overlapping with its analytical counterpart, Sāṃkhya, identifies as one of the five “afflictions” (*kleśas*) the sense of identification of the nontemporal self with the temporal body. In the *Yoga Sūtras*, this affliction is called *asmitā*, literally “I-ameness.” The Sāṃkhya equivalent term is *ahaṅkāra*, literally “I-maker,” and both terms may be translated as “egoity.” Closely related to the sense of identification with matter is the sense of ownership, encapsulated in the Sanskrit expression *aham mameti*, literally the exclamation “[It is] I [and this is] mine!” From the perspective of ancient Indian culture, that this deeply rooted impulse to claim ownership is closely associated with the

²⁰The Buddhist eightfold noble path prescribes the observance of five practices (*śīlas*), four of which coincide with the first four *yama* restraints; the fifth *yama* in Patañjali *Yoga Sūtra*, *aparigraha*, is replaced in the Buddhist system with abstinence from intoxication (Bryant 2018, p. 249). Avoidance of intoxication in the yoga system can be counted with one of the *niyamas*, namely, austerity (*tapas*), which we will consider in Appendix B.

sense of owning animals is hinted by the extent to which wealth is marked by possession of bovines and horses in the *Ṛgveda* hymns.

Yet the same tradition, especially in its narrative genre, questions the propriety of animal ownership. A key episode in the celebrated *Rāmāyaṇa* epic poem turns on Sītā's wish that her husband, the story's hero, Rāma, capture and bring to her a particular deer that she has aspired prancing through the forest bearing a charming silvery-golden coat of fur. Rāma's absence from their forest cottage while chasing the deer allows the ogre Rāvaṇa to abduct Sītā, from which moment the story's troubled remainder unfolds. This can be read as a cautionary tale, a warning that human efforts to possess nonhuman animals can be incalculably dangerous.²¹

In a converse relation to the story of Sītā's abduction is the story of Gautama Buddha's progression to perfect realization—*nirvāṇa*. As he approaches his final stage of enlightenment, “[h]e remembered thousands of past lives, as if reliving them again, that ‘I had been such and such a person at that time, and then, passing out of that life I had come to this other life’”²² Buddhist tradition, especially as represented in the *Jātaka* tales, tells that several of the previous lives the Buddha recalls were lived as animals. Thus, the Buddha's awakening and remembrance of past lives accords with Patañjali's indication of non-possessiveness' result:

When refrainment from covetousness becomes firmly established, knowledge of the whys and wherefores of births manifests.

By cultivating non-possessiveness one may gain the ability to perceive one's own past lives, including lives as nonhuman animals. This link between restraint of the tendency to claim ownership—whether of animals, other humans, physical objects, ideas, actions, emotions, or territories of any sort—and the potential to perceive the changeful character of one's identity, points to a core feature of yoga's purpose, namely, to

²¹ A further implication of Sītā's abduction: She being identified as a form of the goddess Lakṣmī—embodiment of fortune—her abduction can be read as a loss of good fortune for one who presumes to possess animals. Incidentally, it is noteworthy that in the classical *Rāmāyaṇa* of Valmīki text, Sītā tells Rāma that if he cannot capture the deer alive, he should bring it to her dead. The passionate nature of possessiveness drives humans to claim nonhuman animals both alive and dead.

²² *Buddha-carita* XIV.2–3, quoted in Edwin F. Bryant, *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali* (New York: North Point Press, 2009), p. 266.

experience the self as fundamentally distinct from its embodiments from lifetime to lifetime.

Again regarding animal ownership: there is a long history of animal ownership practices being compared to or equated with slavery, a human practice based on the notion that human beings can be legally owned by other human beings, to be engaged in labor for the latter's benefit. From the perspective of yoga's aim, namely, to reach a state of freedom from the bondage of worldly existence, it behooves the practicing *yogin* to think carefully about the extent one is implicated in essentially false claims with respect to other living beings for one's own self-interest. By such reflection leading toward non-possessiveness, an awareness of kinship with all creatures can rapidly awaken and blossom into a full sense of relatedness by identification with the ecological self.

Regarding animals, the issue of possession is crucial for understanding whether, and if so in what contexts and in what ways, animals may be regarded as possessions or as beings protected under stewardship that are temporarily under one's care.

APPENDIX B—ADDITIONAL *NIYAMA* PRECEPTS

Patañjali specifies five observances (*niyama*) constituting the second of his eight-limbed (*aṣṭāṅga*) yoga system, namely, purity (*śauca*), contentedness (*saṃtoṣa*), asceticism (*tapas*), self-study (traditionally, recitation or study of scripture—*svādhyāya*), and devotion to God (or contemplation on *īśvara*—*īśvara-praṇidhāna*). In Chap. 4, Sect. 4.3 we discussed at some length the last two observances in relation to animal ethics. Here we can briefly consider the first three observances as precepts the practice of which can be valued as fostering a virtuous disposition favorable to ethical relationality with nonhuman animals.

PURITY (ŚAUCA)

External and internal purity are distinguished in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* (II.32). External purity comes with washing and so on, and consuming pure food (especially food that is offerable to a divinity—*medhya*). Internal purity is “the removal of impurities of the mind.”¹ The distinction is also indicated by two sorts of results to be had from the perfection of its practice. The result of external cleanliness may strike us as strange, if not shocking:

¹Swāmi Hariharānanda Āraṇya, *Yoga Philosophy of Patañjali with Bhāsvati* (Kolkata: University of Calcutta, 2000), p. 213.

By cleanliness, one [develops] distaste for one's body and the cessation of contact with others. (*YS* II.40; Bryant 2009, p. 267)

The commentator Vyāsa notes that this “distaste” for one's own body comes from perceiving its imperfections (*avadya*). In other words, the *yogin* becomes acutely aware that the body's apparent attractiveness is only skin-deep, and even this ends at the moment of death, when the body immediately begins to decompose. “Cessation of contact with others” indicates the *yogin's* sense of resolve to rise above identification of the body with the self. The modern *Yoga Sūtra* commentator Hariharānanda Āraṇya (1869–1947) writes, “Love of a Yogin is expressed through sentiments of friendliness, compassion, etc. which are free from sensuousness.” What is more, “By the practice of purification, the desire for contact with women and children totally disappears.”² Clearly an ascetic understanding is expressed here, but we can also derive an important consideration related to diet. The word “distaste” (*jugupsā*), or “disgust” points to gustatory perception. *Yogins* become disgusted with impure food and drink, especially animal flesh and alcohol. Āraṇya further explains:³

Practice of cleanliness helps continence etc. The smell of putrid animal products generates a sedative feeling. From that people seek excitement and under its influence take to drinking and seek titillation of their senses....In Yoga, the mind has to be controlled. With intoxicants, the mind ceases to be under control; they are therefore harmful to Yoga.

Āraṇya identifies “arrogance, conceit, malice, etc.” as the impurities of the mind. Purification of the mind, says Patañjali, results in “cheerfulness, one-pointedness, sense control, and fitness to perceive the self” (*YS* II.41). All of these qualities can be valued as components of a virtuous disposition favorable to appropriate relationality with nonhuman animals.

CONTENTEDNESS (*saṃtoṣa*)

The two *yama* precepts—non-stealing and non-grasping—are restraints that are accomplished by the positive observance of contentedness. Vyāsa explains simply that contentedness “implies absence of desire for any

² Ibid., p. 223.

³ Ibid., p. 214.

possession in excess of the immediate necessities for maintaining one's life." Āraṇya offers a practical application, beginning with what nowadays might be called a "positive affirmation":

[T]he thought 'What I have got is enough' should be cultivated and meditated upon....It is said in the Śāstras that just as to escape from thorns it is necessary only to wear shoes and not to cover the face of the earth with leather, so happiness can be derived from contentment and not from thinking that I shall be happy when I get all I wish for.⁴

This humorous image of pursuing happiness as one would foolishly attempt to "cover the face of the earth with leather" suggests that contentedness is easily experienced, much as one can avoid thorns simply by wearing shoes. The image suggests further that anyone can cultivate contentedness, just as anyone can wear shoes. Let us recall that non-harm (*ahimsā*) is the foundational virtue or first-order moral precept of the *Yoga Sūtra* that all the remaining restraints and observances are meant to support. The shoes example's implication is that the practice of contentedness, accessible to all, could foster this virtue on a broad scale, contributing significantly to a reduction of violence in society, not least violence to nonhuman animals. The "shoes" in question are the simple practice of cultivating and meditating on the thought, "What I have got is enough."

ASCETICISM (TAPAS)

The restraints and observances as a whole could be regarded as encompassing asceticism; indeed, one can view the entire system of classical Yoga as one of asceticism. However, in this context, according to Vyāsa, *tapas* refers specifically to enduring physically disturbing conditions such as hunger and thirst, heat and cold. One is reminded of the other—*Mahābhārata*'s—Vyāsa exhorting his son Śuka to serve dharma by first conquering "extreme cold, heat, hunger, thirst and the wind" (in Chap. 3, Sect. 3.3). Āraṇya (2000, p. 215) notes that through *āsana* "steadiness of body is acquired," and that, "Physical (penitential) hardship is to be practised only if necessary for expiating sins, not otherwise." One positive practice of asceticism recommended by Vyāsa is the observance of silence

⁴Ibid., p. 214.

(*mauna*), and this can include refraining from gesturing or making signs (*kāṣṭha-mauna*). Āraṇya (ibid.) adds,

By observance of silence one acquires the power to refrain from useless talk and use of rude words; it also helps practice of truth, develops power to withstand abuses and restrains the begging propensity.

Thus, *mauna* serves as a positive support of the second of the five restraints, truthfulness (*satya*). Such practice of silence should not, however, be understood as silent approval of injustices generally and injustice to non-human animals specifically. It could, however, be an expression of quietism regarding pervasive mistreatment of animals, in the sense explained in Chap. 8, Sect. 8.6 n19.

Another form of *tapas* long recognized in Indic traditions is fasting, which may be observed in a variety of ways, durations, and for varied purposes. Although in classical Yoga fasting is not necessarily associated with vegetarianism,⁵ it may serve to bring the mind to a peaceful condition favorable to yogic perception that, in turn, strengthens the *yogin*'s resolve to practice the restraint of non-harming. Also, occasional fasting can be beneficial for general physical health, which is important for successful yoga practice.

⁵ Jonathan Dickstein, "The Strong Case for Vegetarianism in Pātañjala Yoga," in *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 67, no. 3, (2017): 617.

APPENDIX C—YOGA, ANIMAL ETHICS, AND AHIMŚĀ VEGANISM

In this brief essay, I offer additional reflections on the subject of food and eating in the nexus of yoga and animal ethics, especially regarding lacto-vegetarian versus vegan diets. As we noted in the introduction to this book, in present-day yoga circles, there is a correlation between yoga practice and adherence to a vegetarian or vegan diet. It may be safe to say that for what I will loosely call “committed” yoga practitioners, it is uncontroversial that animal flesh (including aquatic and avian animal flesh) is to be strictly avoided. More controversial for some yoga practitioners may be whether other products from animals—in particular the milk of bovines—is acceptable. I noted in the discussion about the practice of *ahimśā* as the starting point of classical Yoga (in Chap. 4, Sect. 4.2.1) that to honor this principle, *yogīs* who are committed to the practice of yoga will invariably maintain “at least a vegetarian if not a vegan diet.”¹ In Indic traditions,

¹ I say “invariably” with an emphasis on “seriously committed.” This is admittedly a rhetorical claim, and it may not be accurate outside certain yoga communities. From their 2020 survey of UK yoga teachers’ and practitioners’ attitudes and practices, Mace and McCulloch concluded that: “(i) UK yoga teachers have very progressive beliefs about farmed animals; (ii) around 30% of UK yoga teachers follow a plant-based diet, which is 25 times the proportion in the general UK population; (iii) nearly 75% desire to follow a plant-based diet; (iv) over two thirds regard plant-based diets as best aligned to their yogic practice; and (v) UK yoga teachers with more progressive beliefs about farmed animals and greater knowledge of agriculture abstain from consuming animal products to a greater extent. The high propor-

including Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist, it is fairly common that persons pursuing ascetic, yogic practices would follow a vegetarian diet, at least in certain historical periods and regions. That a purely plant-based (vegan) diet would be expected may be less likely: the extent of praise for bovines and their protection, especially in the *Mahābhārata*, suggests that, historically, dairy consumption (at least in areas where the *Mahābhārata* was influential) has been common. Where cows were kept, their milk would be processed into clarified butter (*ghee*) for cooking and religious rituals since, unlike milk, *ghee* could be stored for long periods of time.²

In the present day, in economically developed places, a vegan diet has become a viable option that bears consideration as a way to honor the classical Yoga ethically foundational virtue of non-harming or nonviolence (*ahimsā*). However, specifically in the Vaiṣṇava traditions of Krishna-centered bhakti-yoga, there is noticeable resistance to “veganism.” To a large extent, this resistance stems from Krishna’s identification as a cowherd during his childhood and youth, according to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and other texts. In his cowherding role, Krishna is celebrated as the divine “butter thief,” for whom his mother, Yaśodā, is ever at pains to prepare delectables from dairy products. Present-day Krishna-*bhaktas* honor this tradition by preparing varieties of milk-sweets and ritually offering them in temples and home shrines dedicated to Krishna. The other common reason given for resisting a vegan diet is the nourishment value of milk, whereby there is some evidence that (depending on the source of the milk), it is, in particular, thought to be beneficial for human health.³

Yoga practitioners, including Krishna-*bhaktas*, are becoming increasingly aware of the violent conditions of modern-day dairies. One response to this awareness that this author hears from some Krishna devotees takes

tions of UK yoga teachers following vegetarian and plant-based diets, relative to the wider population, are likely based on applying the principle of *ahimsa*, or non-harming, to farmed animals and abstaining from consuming their products.” Jenny L. Mace and Steven P. McCulloch, “Yoga, *Ahimsa* and Consuming Animals: UK Yoga Teachers’ Beliefs about Farmed Animals and Attitudes to Plant-Based Diets,” *Animals—MDPI*, March (2020), 10, 480; doi:10.3390/ani10030480.

² See Dickstein (2017, reference in n. 23 above) for a careful analysis of *PTŚ* in terms of its stance toward vegetarianism and veganism, concluding that, while the former is unequivocally expected for yoga practitioners, the latter is not.

³ See Valpey (pp. 126–127, with notes) on the cultural and medical complexities surrounding milk valuation: Kenneth R. Valpey, *Cow Care in Hindu Animal Ethics* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

the form of a logic of divine reward to the milked cows. The argument is that when a cow's milk is ritually and devotionally offered to Krishna according to prescribed procedures, Krishna accepts and relishes the offering; Krishna reciprocates with the cows from which the milk has come with gratitude, which he shows by elevating them in their next life to a human birth. This author has not seen where such a claim is textually supported in the Krishna tradition's most canonical text, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Nor, even should there be textual support for this claim, could one expect it to be convincing to a public that subscribes to a vegan diet.⁴ Neither does this claim address the fact that all male bovines born in dairies are destined for slaughter.

One effort to resolve this matter among bhakti-yoga practitioners devoted to Krishna is to practice “cow protection”—the care of bovines for their entire natural lives, accepting only milk from such cows. This approach resonates with the ethical “formula” mentioned earlier in our study (see Chap. 8, Sect. 8.4). This is that a combination of yogic virtue ethics and theological voluntarism (responding to divine will) converge in a practice of care ethics. In this case, *ahimśā* encapsulates yogic virtue ethics, and cow protection (*go-rakṣa*—referred to in the *Bhagavadgītā* as one of the occupational duties of *vaiśyas*) together with the injunction to offer one's food to the divinity (*yajña*), would be the essential elements of response to divine command. Care ethics would find substance in the daily care of bovines (both male and female) throughout the natural duration of their lives, as well as proper care of all humans who assist in their care.

⁴In particular, the abolitionist vegan position rejects the notion that life-long care for cows is nonviolent, or that milking such cows is not nonviolent, or that engaging bulls in labor (generally requiring castration) is nonviolent. See Valpey (2020, pp. 137–143; referenced in the previous note) for a discussion of these issues. On the broader issue of human engagement with animals, Ralph Acampora (2006, p. 153) concludes his study of animal ethics thus: “We need ... to work at nurturing and developing salutary and authentic modes of animal-affiliative *engagement*—and this is something corporal compassion is very well suited to enable or even engender. Our culture and we as individuals have much to gain anew on this front” (emphasis in original). Ralph R. Acampora, *Corporal Compassion: Animal Ethics and Philosophy of Body* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006).

A PERSONAL RESOLUTION

To address this issue with a hope to make a meaningful, specific application of yogic principles to animal ethics, here I present my personal resolution to always observe what I call an “*ahimśā* vegan diet.” Although this is an unusual style of presentation for this sort of publication, I believe it will best serve the purpose of clarity and conciseness. I present this in the form of a formal resolution (with *whereas* clauses), including several notes. Although it is my personal resolution, it may serve at least in part as a template for readers who would be inspired to make a similar resolution for themselves.

1. Whereas I recognize my privileged economic and social position that allows me—to a great extent—to determine the content of my diet;⁵
2. Whereas I have committed myself (formally, in a process of initiation) to strictly follow basic yogic regulative practices, based on two canonical yogic texts, namely, the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*;⁶

⁵ For a hard-hitting analysis of the privileged position of vegan advocates in their “whiteness,” see Jennifer Polish, “Decolonizing Veganism: On Resisting Vegan Whiteness and Racism,” in *Critical Perspectives on Veganism*, edited by J. Castricano and R. R. Simonsen (Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature, The Palgrave Macmillan Animal Ethics Series, 2016). Polish shows how the predominantly white, and therefore privileged, vegan movement in the USA is entangled with the perpetuation of racism, often inadvertently pitting speciesism *against* racism as the more important anomaly to be overcome. Modern yoga is also largely a domain dominated by privileged whiteness, with negative social and political implications accompanying good intentions. Shameen Black (p. 13) pithily notes in this context, “No practice is solely emancipatory, yet no practice is bereft of the potential to liberate. The ambivalences continue to shape yoga today.” Shameen Black, “Decolonizing Yoga,” in *Routledge Handbook of Yoga and Meditation Studies*, edited by Suzanne Newcombe and Karen O’Brien-Kop (London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 13–21.

⁶ Vaiṣṇava bhakti tradition (like many Indic “path”—*mārga*—traditions), involves formal initiatory rites establishing a life-long commitment between a teacher (guru) and a disciple (*śiṣya*). This rite typically includes a commitment to vows—in the case of my own Gaudīya tradition, commitment to a vegetarian diet; to avoid all intoxicants (including green tea and coffee); to avoid “illicit” sexuality, and to avoid gambling. Respectively, these restraints are understood to foster four virtues, namely, mercy, austerity, purity, and truthfulness. See “An Allegory of Tortured Bovines” in this volume, Chap. 8, Sect. 8.2. Also in Chap. 8, Sect. 8.8, “Anticipatory Devotional Community,” see my discussion of thirty principles of dharma listed in *BhP* 7.11.8–12.

3. Whereas both of these texts enjoin the practice of *ahimśā*—nonviolence or non-harming—which, according to a third important yoga text, the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*, can be understood to be a fundamental virtue;⁷
4. Whereas subordinate virtues specified in yoga texts are supportive of *ahimśā*, I experience also increased well-being by pursuing these principles;⁸
5. Whereas I find it wrong to approve of the slaughter of bovines by accepting as my food any dairy products from standard dairies;⁹
6. Whereas I do not experience that my physical and mental health are dependent on the consumption of dairy;¹⁰

⁷The *Gītā* refers to *ahimśā* four times and the *BhP* refers to *ahimśā* nine times. Perritt and Pettigrove (p. 59) quote the *PTS* commentary on *YS* II.30–45 to confirm that in this text, *ahimśā* is held to be most fundamental as a virtue to be cultivated: “[A]bstinence from injury [*ahimśā*] means the abstinence from malice towards all living creatures in every way and at all times. And the other abstentions [*yama*] and observances [*niyama*] are rooted in it. In so far as their aim is the perfection of it, they are taught in order to teach it.” Roy W. Perrett and Glen Pettigrove, “Hindu Virtue Ethics,” in *The Routledge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, edited by Lorraine Besser-Jones and Michael Slote (New York: Routledge, 2015).

⁸As mentioned in Chap. 4, Sect. 4.1, the three *yamas* not discussed there are non-theft (*asteya*), celibacy (*brahmacarya*), and non-greed (*aparigraha*). Along with truth or truthfulness (*satya*) and the three observances (*niyama*) not discussed in Chap. 4 (purity—*śauca*, contentment—*santoṣa*, and austerity—*tapas*), I find that all these aspects of virtue cultivation are ideals the pursuit of which afford a sense of well-being that is favorable for pursuing the *ahimśā* ideal.

⁹*YS* II.34 (quoted in full in Chap. 4, Sect. 4.2.1) includes harm “performed on one’s behalf by another, or authorized by oneself” as equally contrary to the *ahimśā* principle as directly oneself committing an act of harming. That commercial dairies function as extensions of the meat industry is obvious, considering that all male bovines born in dairies are sent for slaughter (unless retained as stags). Milking cows are sent for slaughter when their milk production reduces and they can no longer be expected to reproduce (and therefore again produce substantial milk volume). As one example of the degree to which commercial dairies function as extensions of the meat industry, “Data from the British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS) tells us that in 2023, 2.28 million cattle (of all ages) were slaughtered in GB. Approximately 52% of these animals were born to dairy dams, with the remainder born to non-dairy (beef) dams.” Hannah Clarke, “How much beef is produced from the GB dairy herd?” *AHDB* (2024), <https://ahdb.org.uk/news/how-much-beef-is-produced-from-the-gb-dairy-herd> (accessed January 15, 2025).

¹⁰In fact, I experience the opposite, since very soon following adoption of this diet (in 2013). Yes, I do take a Vitamin B-12 supplement, as generally advised for vegetarians. I have experienced fewer respiratory ailments, no nasal or sinus congestion, and increased energy levels. Aside from my own anecdotal experience, a good starting point for research into vegan diet and health may be the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, “according to which

7. Whereas there is no specific injunction in the yoga texts referred to above that a yoga practitioner *must* consume dairy;¹¹

I resolve to accept for my own nourishment any and all foods that do not contain dairy products, with one except, as follows:

1. Whereas the *Bhagavadgītā* mentions “cow protection” (*go-rakṣa*) as a duty of persons classified as *vaiśya*—merchants and farmers;¹²
2. Whereas small-scale *go-rakṣa* establishments are environmentally friendly, unlike large-scale industrial dairies;¹³

plant-based diets are nutritionally complete and may even be healthier than animal-based ones.” Melanie Joy and Jens Tuider, “Foreword,” in *Critical Perspectives on Veganism*, edited by J. Castricano and R. R. Simonsen (Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature, The Palgrave Macmillan Animal Ethics Series 2016), p. xii. DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-33419-6_2.

¹¹ While it is true that cow’s milk can be nutritional and medicinal according to Ayurvedic tradition and texts, there is no specific injunction to accept dairy products for personal consumption in any of the three yoga texts mainly considered in this study (*PYŚ*, *Gītā*, and *BhP*). In the *Gītā*’s specification of foods in terms of the three *guṇas* (see Chap. 3, Sect. 3.6 in this volume), dairy (when fresh) could be included in the list of *sāttvika* foods, although not specifically identified as such. Nor does Krishna mention dairy among his four examples of items ritually offerable, namely, “a leaf, a flower, fruit, or water” (*Gītā* 9.26). The *BhP* (1.19.39) alludes to a tradition in India whereby some ascetics subsist on milk alone, but the milk is acquired directly from a householder who keeps a cow that would not be subjected to slaughter.

¹² “Cow protection” is commonly understood in present-day India to mean, minimally, to maintain cows—both female and male—throughout their natural lives. On the history, controversies, and present-day practices of cow protection, see Valpey (*Cow Care*, 2020, Chaps. 2–4). As a practice enjoined in the *Gītā* and the *BhP*, followers of these texts who accept the responsibility to protect cows may be recognized as practicing theological voluntarism. This means that they accept divine will as ethically foundational. See Chap. 8, Sect. 8.4, and Cogen Bohanec, *Bhakti Ethics, Emotions, and Love in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Metaethics* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books—Rowman & Littlefield, 2024, ch. 1).

¹³ Both meat and dairy industries are vigorously critiqued for the environmental damage they cause. Arguably, small-scale cow protection, as integral to small-scale farming, is more beneficial to the environment than damaging. This claim accords with the “cosmic circular economy” approach to environmental care described in Chap. 9, Sect. 9.4. Further, for an excellent analysis of just how small-scale farming—including having ruminant animals—can work in favor of the environment, see Chris Smaje, *A Small Farm Future: Making the Case for a Society Built Around Local Economies, Self-Provisioning, Agricultural Diversity and a Shared Earth* (London: Chelsea Green, 2020), Chap. 4.

3. Whereas proper care of cows serves the ethics of care dimension of animal ethics;¹⁴
4. Whereas *go-rakṣa* can be accepted as an opportunity to serve Krishna by serving animals regarded as most dear to him;¹⁵
5. Whereas Krishna-*bhaktas* understand that dairy products from protected cows, offered with devotion to Krishna, are particularly pleasing to Krishna;¹⁶
6. Whereas the *prasāda* (consecrated food) from dairy products from protected cows, offered with devotion to Krishna, is appreciable as a special delicacy, the tasting of which is regarded in Vaiṣṇava bhakti traditions as having a purifying effect on the senses and mind;¹⁷
7. Whereas the *prasāda* from dairy products from protected cows, offered with devotion to Krishna, satisfies stipulations for *sāttvika* foods.

¹⁴The ethics of care, as an approach to animal ethics, seeks to address perceived inadequacies in deontic, consequentialist, and virtue ethics paradigms. One inadequacy is the recognition of the importance of human-nonhuman animal relationships, a recognition that opens the way to acknowledging the personhood of animals, and hence, their potential citizenship. See Valpey (*Cow Care*, 2020, pp. 189–201). For an excellent study of present-day cow care in Germany (in German language), see Patrick Meyer-Glitze, *Rinderhaltung ohne Schlachtung: ein Agrar-Care-System* (Marburg, Germany: Metropolis-Verlag, 2021). Regarding the charge of violence in engaging male bovines in traction work, see Valpey (*Cow Care*, pp. 137–144).

¹⁵The understanding that cows are especially dear to Krishna draws especially from descriptions of Krishna's activities in the *BhP*, book 10, and from later writings. A general high valuation of cows is attested from the ancient *Rgveda* onward (Valpey, *Cow Care*, 2020, chapter 2). The notion of *serving cows*—*go-sevā*—is common in present-day India.

¹⁶A much-celebrated *līlā* of Krishna (described in *BhP* Chaps. 8 and 9 and elaborated in later texts) is his childhood mischief in stealing butter and yogurt from the storage rooms of his parents' neighbors and his breaking dairy storage pots at home to feast on their contents. Dairy-based sweet preparations are a common feature of ritual food offerings in Krishna temples. Some temples maintain *gośālas*—cow sanctuaries that protect the cows throughout their natural lives—specifically to supply milk for such offerings. (Sadly, by no means all Krishna temples have their own *gośālas*; hence, they may be using milk from unprotected cows.)

¹⁷There are numerous stories of devotional exchange between *bhaktas* and their worshipable Lord, stories that involve food offerings, often specifying sweet milk preparations. For examples, see R. S. Khare (Ed.), *The Eternal Food: Gastronomic Ideas and Experiences of Hindus and Buddhists* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), Chap. 1; and Paul M. Toomey, *Food from the Mouth of Krishna: Feasts and Festivities and a Shared Earth* (London: Chelsea Green, 1994), pp. 48–59 and *passim*.

I resolve that, on occasion, when dairy products are certified to be from protected cows, and they have been properly consecrated as Krishna-*prasāda*, after seeing that others are also receiving portions of this *prasāda*, I may honor with gratitude such *prasāda* as a form of divine grace.

GLOSSARY OF SELECTED SANSKRIT TERMS

- ahimsā** non-harm, non-injury, or (in modern usage) nonviolence.
- aparigraha** nonpossessiveness.
- āsana** a seat for meditation, or a posture for meditation.
- āśrama** a hermitage, or one of four life-stages—student, householder, retired, or renounced.
- aṣṭāṅga** eight-limbed or eight-auxillary: the classical Yoga practice described in the Sādhana-pāda of Patañjali *Yoga Sūtra*.
- ātman** self, nontemporal identity; the favored term in Vedānta for the conscious nonmaterial being; in Vaiṣṇava Vedānta, the individual soul that is accompanied by the supreme soul, *paramātmā*.
- avatāra** divine descent, one of several forms of Krishna or Vishnu appearing in the phenomenal world to reestablish principles of dharma.
- bhagavān** an exceptionally powerful person; in this book referring exclusively to the supreme person, the personal and highest aspect of divinity.
- bhakta** one who practices bhakti, devotional yoga.
- bhakti** devotion, from the verbal root *bhaja*—to share.
- Brahmā** the semi-divine demiurge, who manifests the phenomenal world according to Vishnu's guidance.

brahman all pervasive, absolute Being, the nondifferentiated aspect of the supreme.

brāhmaṇa (/brahmin) a person of the social division (*varṇa*) acting as priest, educator, royal advisor.

brahmanical a cultural order based on Vedic texts, typically oriented to the performance of sacrificial acts (*yajña*).

brahmavihāra “divine abidings,” four meditational practices to extend goodwill, compassion, gladness, and equanimity.

buddhi intelligence, discrimination, reasoning power.

darśana view, point of view, seeing a divine form.

deva celestial being, god, or supreme being.

dhāraṇā concentration.

dharma ethical and dutiful conduct.

dhyāna meditation.

guṇa (**tamo-guṇa**, **rājo-guṇa**, **sattva-guṇa**) quality or modality; in Sāṃkhya (and in the *Bhagavadgītā*) tamo-guṇa is the quality of inertia, darkness, or ignorance; rājo-guṇa is the quality of energy, activity, or passion; and sattva-guṇa is the quality of illumination, balance, and knowledge.

Hindu a common blanket term for persons who identify with a wide range of cultural and religious traditions, typically but not always associated with the Vedic literary corpus, and largely differentiated from—but with numerous overlaps in practice and thought—Buddhist and Jain traditions.

īśvara-praṇidhāna devotion to God.

jīva a nontemporal, embodied living being.

jñāna knowledge of spiritual reality, or pursuit of such knowledge.

kaivalya isolation

Kali-yuga the current cosmic age, according to Purāṇic literature, the last in a cycle of four ages.

karma action, ritual action, all activity that implicates one in further temporal embodied life.

kaśālam skill, art.

kleśa affliction, listed as of five types in the *Yoga Sūtra*: ignorance (*avidyā*), ego (*asmitā*), attachment (*rāga*), aversion (*dveṣa*), and ignorance causing fear of death (*abhiniveśa*).

kṣatriya a person of the social division (*varṇa*) acting in martial capacities.

kṣetra field; in Sāṃkhya philosophy, the aggregate of gross and subtle body in which a person “cultivates” their life.

kuśa a type of grass used in Vedic rituals.

līlā divine activity, divine sport, pastime, which is free from karmic implication.

mokṣa liberation from temporal existence and the cycle of death and rebirth.

nāstika one who rejects the authority of Veda and orthodox brahmanical culture.

niyama observance of discipline; in classical Yoga, the second of eight limbs of practice, consisting of cleanliness (*śauca*), satisfaction (*saṁtoṣa*), austerity (*tapas*), self-study (*svādhyāya*), and devotion to God (*īśvara-praṇidhāna*).

paṇḍita a scholar of traditional learning.

paramātmān the higher Self, the aspect of the supreme absolute who is locally present in all living beings.

Pātañjala related to Patañjali, the sage identified as the author of the *Yoga Sūtra*.

Prajāpati the cosmic progenitor, in Purāṇic literature identified with Brahmā.

prakṛti primordial nature, the unconscious counterpart to the conscious puruṣa in classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga.

pramāṇa means or source of knowledge; evidence.

prāṇāyāma regulated breathing, the fourth of the eight limbs of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*.

pratyāhāra withdrawal from sense activity, the fifth of the eight limbs of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*.

prema love, especially exalted love of the supreme.

puruṣa the innermost conscious self broadly synonymous with the notion of soul.

puruṣottama the supreme *puruṣa*, the supreme person, identified in the *Bhagavadgītā* as Krishna.

saccidānanda-vigraha transcendent form, constituted of nontemporality, consciousness, and bliss.

samādhi fully focused meditative absorption, the eighth and final limb of eightfold yoga (*aṣṭāṅga-yoga*)

Sāṃkhya ancient Indian philosophical system often coupled with classical Yoga; analysis of the constituents of the phenomenal world (constituted of *prakṛti's* evolutes) as a means to separate and liberate oneself, as *puruṣa*, from it.

samsāra endless repetition of death and rebirth, from which the *yogin* strives to become liberated.

santoṣa inner satisfaction; one of the preliminary observances (*niyama*) in the practice of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*.

śāstra sacred text; authoritative text providing guidance in a discipline such as yoga.

satya truth, truthfulness; one of the preliminary restraints (*yama*) in the practice of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*.

śauca cleanliness, purity; one of the preliminary observances (*niyama*) in the practice of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*.

sevā service, especially devotional, attentive service to the supreme.

Smṛti a category of sacred text, “that which is remembered,” holding authority for Hindus as supportive of Śruti—“that which is heard”—regarded as revelatory.

śraddhā faith, especially conviction that a given (ritual) action will bring about a certain result.

śramana (śramanical) a person or tradition of ascetic culture, usually contrasted with orthodox brahmanical culture.

sūkta a hymn, such as the Puruṣasūkta of the R̥gveda.

sūtra a brief aphorism; literally “thread,” thus also a series of aphorisms on a particular topic, threaded together as a single teaching.

svadharma “own duty,” the specific type of activity appropriate for a given person according to their nature.

svādhyāya self-study, or “study of selves”; one of the preliminary observances (*niyama*) in the practice of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*.

svarūpa literally “own form,” a divine manifestation, a full presence of divinity, an essential form.

tapas austerity; one of the preliminary observances (*niyama*) in the practice of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*.

Tīrthaṅkara a “ford-crosser”—the title of certain rare persons regarded as perfected, liberated beings in Jain traditions.

Vaiṣṇava worshipper of Vishnu or Krishna.

vaiśya a person of the social division (*varṇa*) acting in wealth-producing capacities—a merchant or farmer.

varṇa literally “color,” a designation of occupation according to quality and activity. One of four divisions (*brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, and *śūdra*).

Veda (Vedic) a collection of sacred texts (*śruti*) regarded as foundational to brahmanical culture.

Vyāsa as the earliest known commentator on the *Yoga Sūtra* of Patañjali, by some scholars identified as the same person who compiled the *Yoga Sūtra*; generally regarded as different from Kṛṣṇa-dvaipāyana Vyāsa, the traditional compiler of Vedic and post-Vedic literature.

yajña sacrifice; ritual service.

yama restraint—five practices comprising the first of the eight limbs of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*.

yoga practices of self-discipline in pursuit of liberation from *samsāra*.

Yoga classical yoga, as described and prescribed especially in the *Yoga Sūtra* of Patañjali along with its principle commentary.

yogeśvara the master of yoga, an epithet of both Krishna and Shiva.

yogin one who practices yoga, one who is accomplished in yoga practice.

INDEX¹

A

Abhiṃsā, viii, 3, 8, 17, 18, 25–27,
27n17, 29, 30, 31n21, 32,
34–36, 41, 44, 52, 57, 61,
61n25, 64, 74–83, 85, 86,
98–100, 108, 147, 150, 153,
162, 180, 194, 195, 201, 219,
220, 231, 237, 240, 242, 254,
257, 265–267, 270, 277,
279–286, 280n28, 283n34,
283n35, 283n36

Ānanta Śeṣa, 112, 112n12,
120, 120n28

Animal, vii, xi, xvii, 1, 17, 41–68, 74,
106, 137–165, 172, 201–232,
235–260, 266

activism, 85, 161

ethics, viii, ix, xii, xiv, xvii, 1–11, 35,
58n21, 60, 61, 67, 74, 75, 82,
86n20, 87, 96, 98, 100, 106,
117, 119, 130n45, 131, 138,
139, 143, 161–165, 171–197,

202, 208, 210, 212, 218, 220,
220n19, 221, 223, 235, 238,
238n5, 258, 259, 265, 265n1,
275, 279–286,
281n31, 285n41

forms, 9, 98, 111, 112, 112n14,
114, 116n23, 118, 125

ownership, 273, 274

relationality, 5, 9, 73, 149, 157,
232, 240, 247, 251

sacrifice, 17–36, 41, 45, 46n5, 62,
237, 246, 247n17

welfare, xvii, 157, 238–240,
239n8, 251

Animal-like yoga, 115

Arjuna, 28, 43, 55, 56n18, 57–61, 65,
109, 137, 171, 181, 192,
194–196, 204, 238–240, 243,
246, 254, 270

Āsana, 9, 75, 105, 106, 106n2,
110–119, 124, 125, 125n35,
130, 132, 201, 254, 277

¹ Note: Page numbers followed by ‘n’ refer to notes.

Asceticism, 31, 53, 66, 148n13, 237,
241, 241n11, 275, 277–278
Ātman, 3, 50, 59, 59n23, 60n24, 74,
76n4, 95, 97, 107, 110n9, 139,
140, 149n15, 175, 180, 181,
183, 183n13, 186, 192, 195,
197, 221, 248, 250, 256,
258, 271
Austerity, 47, 51, 64, 75, 79, 87, 89,
93n30, 95n35, 113, 162, 204,
205, 216, 240–243, 242n12,
255, 272n20, 282n33, 283n35

B

Bhagavadgītā, viii, 7, 9, 10, 27, 28,
28n19, 43, 49, 49n9, 50, 50n10,
57–61, 63, 65, 67, 73–75, 81,
82, 92, 94, 94n34, 96, 106, 107,
110, 111, 113, 125, 129,
129n44, 132, 171–197, 202,
208, 222n21, 228, 238–243,
239n9, 243n13, 245, 246,
248n19, 249, 250, 255, 257,
258, 260, 266, 270, 281,
282, 284
Bhagavān, 8, 9, 27, 172, 185, 188,
190n24, 191, 202, 206, 208,
209, 210n5, 218, 219, 221, 223,
227, 229, 231, 250, 259
Bhāgavata Purāṇa (*BhP*), xin3, xiv, 9,
10, 79n10, 96, 118, 120,
120n28, 137, 157, 159–161,
159n27, 160n28, 161n29, 163,
165, 185, 196n31, 202–206,
207n2, 207n4, 208–210,
212–214, 215n12, 216, 217,
217n13, 217n14, 217n15,
219n16, 220, 222–224, 223n22,
225n25, 226–230, 232, 236,
237, 244n14, 246, 247, 247n17,
248n19, 249, 249n20, 259, 271,

280–282, 282n33, 283n34,
284n38, 284n39,
285n42, 285n43
Bhakta, 187n18, 189, 190n23, 207,
207n3, 211, 213, 218, 220–223,
221n20, 225, 225n25, 232, 248,
256, 280, 285, 285n44
Bhakti, xii–xiv, 5, 5n5, 7, 9–11, 35,
58n22, 98, 105, 113n15, 129,
141n3, 143, 143n5, 161, 171,
172, 176, 183, 187–189,
187n19, 187n20, 190n23,
191–197, 201–232, 239,
244n14, 246–248, 251, 254,
255, 257, 259, 260, 280, 281,
282n33, 285
Bharata, 27n18, 158–161, 159n27,
165, 207
Bhīṣma, 54, 65, 269, 270
Boar, xi, 158, 209, 236, 237,
237n4, 254
Body/bodies, 2, 5, 19, 47n7, 50, 61,
74, 78, 78n9, 94, 105, 113, 123,
124, 126, 130, 139, 160, 162,
172, 174, 177, 179, 180,
183–185, 186n17, 187–194,
190n23, 193n26, 193n27, 197,
201–203, 205, 209, 212, 214,
224–226, 236, 248, 254, 256,
258, 266
Brahmā, 46n6, 152n17, 153, 211n9,
213–215, 217n14, 226–229,
236, 237, 243
Brahmacarya, 75, 108, 216, 231, 240,
241n10, 260, 268–272, 268n8,
271n18, 283n35
Brahman, 9, 23–24n11, 28, 53,
77, 88, 89, 123, 129, 172,
175, 176, 178–181, 178n9,
185, 188, 188n20, 191, 192,
196, 202, 206, 218, 220,
250, 258

Brāhmaṇa, 20, 24, 30, 43, 45, 46, 51,
52, 54, 60, 66, 81, 159, 172,
174, 206n1, 217, 247, 254
Brahmavikāra, 9, 138, 152–158, 160,
162, 163, 183n13, 202, 221
Breath/breathing, xii, 9, 28, 32,
89n22, 105, 119–125, 131, 132,
141, 144, 144n7, 155, 176,
185, 254
Buddha, 31n21, 32, 33, 42n1, 90n25,
120–123, 122n31, 132, 273
Buddhaghosa, 153–155, 153n19
Buddhism, 29, 31, 31n21, 32, 66, 67,
67n31, 146, 152, 163
Buddhist practice, 90n26, 138, 152,
152n17, 221

C

Caitanya, 225–228, 226n26, 227n27
Caitanya-caritāmṛta, 25n12, 202,
203, 227, 228n28
Calves, 213–215, 229, 254
Charioteer-like intellect, 140
Classical Yoga, 3, 5, 5n3, 7, 8, 25,
26n17, 27, 32, 41, 50n10,
60n24, 63, 67, 73–76, 76n4,
78n9, 81, 83, 84, 87, 90n25,
98, 99, 107, 116n24, 117n25,
119, 127n41, 137–139,
141–143, 143n5, 147, 151,
163–165, 189, 194, 201, 222,
222n21, 231, 232, 258, 265,
271, 277–280
Compassion, ix, xii, 28, 56, 76–82,
97, 99, 119n27, 146–152, 155,
158, 160, 162, 165, 184n13,
221, 222, 253, 254, 276, 281n31
Consciousness, 4, 5, 21–23, 48, 59,
74, 89, 95, 96, 98, 115, 115n20,
115n22, 117, 119, 119n27, 120,
125n36, 129, 138, 142, 145,

174, 175, 178, 180, 192, 193,
209, 215n11, 223, 224, 251, 258
Cosmos body, 35, 187, 187n18, 188,
189n22, 191–193, 193n26, 197,
214, 216, 258
Cows, 19, 20n4, 23, 23n10, 25n12,
52, 60, 81, 88, 89, 115n21, 145,
172, 174, 177, 184, 204, 212,
214, 224, 229, 241, 247,
248n18, 250, 268n7, 280, 281,
281n31, 283n36, 284–286,
284n38, 284n39, 284n40,
285n41, 285n42, 285n43
Cultivation, 8, 54, 79n11, 98,
127–128n41, 144, 146, 146n11,
153n19, 155, 162, 176, 205,
217, 228, 242, 255, 266, 283n35

D

Dairy, 77, 77n7, 247, 280, 281,
283–286, 283n36, 284n38,
284n40, 285n43
Devotee, 33, 189, 207n4, 211, 212,
220, 222, 223, 223n22, 230,
249, 250, 280
Devotional body, 9, 110n10, 172,
187, 189, 190n23, 191, 194,
197, 202, 203, 205, 207–213,
215, 218, 222–224, 230, 236,
248, 259
Dharma/*dharma*, 4n2, 8, 11, 36,
41–68, 79, 85, 87, 96, 98, 124,
195, 204, 205, 208, 218, 230,
231, 238–240, 238n6, 242, 243,
245, 254, 270–272, 277, 282n33
Dhyāna, 9, 58n22, 59, 106, 124, 126,
138, 141, 148, 164, 211, 254
Difference approach/theory, 9, 82,
111, 117, 147, 149, 162, 165,
172, 179–184, 191, 192,
221, 258

Divine body, 9, 187–194, 187n18,
190n23, 193n27, 202, 205, 207,
209, 210n5, 212, 214, 215,
215n10, 218, 224, 227, 228, 236,
243–245, 248, 251, 256, 258

E

Eight-limbed Yoga, 107, 113, 126
Elephant, 60, 81, 92, 115, 118,
128–130, 141n4, 146n11,
156n23, 172, 174, 203, 205–207,
225, 227, 237, 259, 271
Environment, 1, 2, 10, 76, 84, 107,
114, 115n22, 117, 117n25, 123,
125, 126, 131, 145, 229,
235–260, 266, 284n40
Equal vision, 81–83, 105–132,
171–179, 175n5, 271
Ethics, viii, ix, xvii, 4, 9, 10, 11n8, 17,
28, 36, 42, 49–57, 61, 63, 64,
65n30, 66, 73–100, 123, 143,
150, 151, 153, 178n9, 180, 182,
182n11, 193n26, 196, 203,
207n4, 211, 211n6, 211n8, 220,
227n27, 230, 231, 238, 240,
243, 244n14, 246, 256, 257,
272, 281, 285, 285n41

G

Gajendra, 203, 205, 206, 206n1, 231
Gaṇapati, 92, 128–130, 205
Gandhi, Mohandas K., 194
Gauḍīya Sampradāya, 187, 187n20
Govardhan, 10, 248n19, 249–251,
250n21, 255, 256

H

Hanumān, 116, 116n24, 117
Hemacandra, 111n11, 121, 122,
122n30, 129

Householder, 29, 31, 33, 52, 54, 217,
217n15, 218, 231, 241, 241n11,
254, 268n8, 269,
271n18, 284n38
Human body, 110n10, 114, 130, 188,
189n22, 193n27
Humans, vii, xiv, xviii, 1, 18, 42, 73,
107, 137, 174, 201, 235, 266

I

Identity approach/theory, 9, 82,
111, 117, 147, 149, 157,
157n26, 162, 165, 172,
177–179, 184, 191, 192,
220, 258
Indistinction approach/theory, 9, 82,
147–149, 157, 163, 165, 172,
184–192, 258, 259
Indra, 34, 56, 224, 238, 246–248,
248n18, 250
Īśvara, 5n4, 75, 92–96, 98, 108,
113n15, 127, 129, 152, 172,
181, 186, 186n16, 213, 221,
243, 245n15, 275
Īśvara-pranidhāna, 8, 75, 87, 90, 93,
93n30, 93n31, 94n34, 95,
95n35, 96, 98–100, 108,
113n15, 161, 165, 172, 189,
196, 202, 214, 215, 231,
254, 275

J

Jaḍa Bharata, 159–161, 159–160n27,
160n28, 161n29, 163, 185, 202,
208, 210
Jain, 6, 7, 9, 18, 25, 25n12, 29–34,
36, 53n14, 66, 78, 78n9, 87, 90,
90n25, 90n26, 105n1, 111n11,
121, 124, 124n34, 127n40, 138,
147–152, 159–160n27, 162,
165, 280

Jājali, 43, 49–55, 57, 64, 66, 238
Jīva, 3, 29, 60n24, 74, 124n34, 149,
 149n15, 181, 188, 190
Jīva Gosvāmī, 183n13,
 190n24, 244n14

K

Kali/*kālī*, xii, 24n11, 25n12,
 160n28, 203–205
 Karma, 11, 29, 30n20, 31, 33, 34, 36,
 43, 46–49, 52–54, 54n15, 59,
 61, 64, 66, 77, 78n8, 80, 90,
 90n26, 113, 113n15, 119n27,
 123, 124, 124n34, 147, 148,
 150, 159n27, 162, 186n16, 204,
 243, 244, 245n15, 266
Kaṭha Upaniṣad (KU), 76n4,
 138–140, 165
 Krishna, 10, 11, 28, 28n19, 43, 55,
 57–61, 63, 65, 66, 74, 92, 94,
 96, 108–110, 109n7, 110n9,
 113, 124, 125, 129, 171,
 173–176, 176n7, 177n8, 178,
 179, 181, 185, 186, 186n15,
 187n18, 187n20, 189, 190,
 190n24, 192, 194–197, 196n31,
 202–204, 208, 211–216, 218,
 224–227, 225n25, 229, 230,
 238–251, 248n19, 254–257, 259,
 260, 270, 280, 281, 284n38,
 285, 285n42, 285n43, 286

M

Mahābhārata (MBh), 5n3, 8, 25, 27,
 28, 36, 41–68, 50n11, 54n15,
 57n20, 79n10, 83n18, 88, 138,
 141, 172n1, 195, 238, 254, 269,
 270, 277, 280

Matsya, 92, 96–98, 97n36, 100, 114,
 118, 202, 207n3
 Meditation, 2, 3, 6, 9, 43, 59, 91,
 92, 93n32, 94, 98, 106, 108,
 111n11, 115n22, 126, 138,
 139, 141, 141n4, 143, 144n7,
 147–161, 163, 164,
 183–184n13, 195, 206,
 206n1, 212, 214, 216,
 218, 227
 Milk, 19, 22, 214, 247n17, 279–281,
 283n36, 284n38,
 285n43, 285n44
Mokṣa, 4, 4n2, 49, 124, 147–152,
 178n9, 250

N

Niyama, 8, 73–100, 105, 108,
 113, 119n27, 122, 142,
 143, 195, 205, 212, 214,
 218, 231, 240, 242,
 242n12, 255, 265,
 275–278, 283n34, 283n35
 Nonhuman animal, vii, 1, 2, 4, 5,
 7, 9–11, 18, 36, 42, 54, 56,
 67, 85, 87, 89, 99, 107,
 110, 112, 123, 129–132,
 138n1, 142, 145, 152,
 154n21, 157, 157n26, 159,
 160, 165, 175n4, 177, 182,
 182n12, 184, 184n14, 186,
 194, 201, 202, 205, 207,
 212, 214–216, 220,
 220n18, 222, 227, 228,
 231, 238, 239, 253, 260,
 266, 270, 271, 273,
 273n21, 275–278
 Nonviolent/non-violent
 sacrifices, 32, 33

P

- Paramātman*, 9, 61, 94, 95, 110n9,
129, 130, 142, 172, 179, 180,
182–186, 183–184n13, 190–192,
197, 202, 218, 220–222, 258
- Paśupati, 75, 92, 212
- Patañjali, viii, xii, 5n3, 6n6, 8,
25n12, 27, 29, 32, 35, 41, 61,
61n26, 63, 67, 74, 78, 79,
79n10, 81, 81n14, 82, 84, 85,
87, 89–93, 93n30, 95, 95n35,
96, 98, 100, 105–108, 106n2,
111–113, 112n12, 113n15,
119n27, 121, 122, 124, 126,
127, 131, 138, 139, 142, 144,
144n6, 147, 149, 152, 153,
161, 165, 172, 177n8, 186,
189, 194, 196, 205, 211n9,
212, 218, 230, 240, 258, 265,
265n1, 267, 269, 272n20,
273, 275, 276
- Posture, 9, 75n2, 105, 106n2, 108,
111, 111n11, 112, 112n14,
114–118, 114n17, 115n20,
116n23, 131
- Prahlāda, 92, 209–211,
222, 231
- Prāṇāyāma*, xii, 9, 28, 105, 106,
119–125, 130, 132, 141,
201, 254
- Pratyāhāra*, 9, 105, 106, 122,
124–132, 130n45, 141, 141n3,
201, 254
- Precepts, 24n11, 31–33, 65, 211n6,
265, 275–278
- Purity, 30, 75, 174, 188, 189, 204,
205, 242n12, 259, 275–276,
282n33, 283n35
- Puruṣa*, 3, 5, 17–20, 22n9, 57,
57n20, 59, 59n23, 60, 60n24,
74, 83, 87, 92–94, 96, 99,
106, 107, 119n27, 120n28,
121, 132, 139, 141n4, 142,

175, 179, 181, 186, 186n17,
192, 195, 216, 217, 250,
256, 258

Puruṣottama, 8, 181, 182, 184–191,
250, 259

R

- Ritual, 8, 10, 17–19, 18n1, 19n2,
21–26, 25n14, 28, 28n19, 29,
31, 31n21, 33–35, 44, 45, 46n5,
48–55, 50n11, 61, 63–65, 67,
77, 86, 115n22, 143, 188, 189,
189n22, 191, 201, 208, 215n11,
216–219, 236, 243–248,
245n15, 251, 267, 280, 285n43

S

- Sacrifice, 8, 17–36, 41, 43–45, 44n3,
45n4, 46n5, 46n6, 49, 49n8, 51,
53, 53n14, 54, 61–67, 77,
115n21, 165, 187n18, 201, 216,
217n15, 228, 237, 238, 243,
243n13, 244, 246, 247n17,
267, 270
- Sameness, 106, 111, 173, 174,
176, 177
- Sāṃkhya, 5, 6, 43, 50, 50n10, 57n20,
58–60, 58n21, 60n24, 83n17,
85, 119n27, 121, 139, 142,
143n5, 144n6, 175, 176, 179,
187, 188, 188n20, 209, 222,
240, 272
- Śaṭapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 21n7, 22n9,
24, 26n16
- Satya*, 8, 74, 75, 82–87, 86n20, 98,
99, 109, 110, 231, 266,
278, 283n35
- Satyakāma, 88, 89, 122, 241, 268
- Satyavrata, 97, 97n36, 98, 100, 118
- Shiva, 11, 75, 92, 93, 120n28,
128, 212

Snake, 43–46, 44n3, 46n6, 48, 64,
88, 107n4, 118, 184, 206n1, 254
Supreme Lord, 180, 192, 196
Supreme person, xiii, 8, 9, 181, 182,
186n15, 190, 191, 207, 213,
215, 218, 220, 221, 223,
229–231, 250, 251, 257
Sustainable development, 239n8, 240
Spādhyāya, 8, 75, 86–93, 91n29,
93n30, 95n35, 98, 99, 214,
231, 275
Svarūpa, 111n11, 188, 249–251

T

Tortoise, 9, 90, 125, 125n36,
141n4, 254
Tulādhara, 43, 49–55, 62, 64, 66, 67

V

Vaiṣṇava theology, 183–184
Varāha, 209, 236, 237, 237n4
Varṇa, 47, 47n7, 50, 62, 66, 216,
217, 217n13
Vedic, 19n2, 19n3, 20–27, 20n5,
21n6, 21n7, 21n8, 23n10,
23n11, 25n12, 26n17, 28n19,
31–33, 31n21, 35, 41–43, 49,
53n14, 62, 76n3, 76n4, 77, 88,
90, 95, 107, 115n21, 190n23,
195, 201, 217n15, 237, 241,
246, 248, 267, 268
Vedic sacrifice, 19, 20n4, 25n13,
27n17, 28n19, 30, 31, 34,
36, 63, 238
Veganism, 2, 279–286, 280n29
Vishnu, 92, 93, 96, 97, 120, 120n28,
122, 161, 205, 206, 209–212,
214, 222, 236, 245n15
Visuddhimagga, 9, 153–155, 153n19,
154n21, 160

Vraja, 203, 224, 224n24, 229, 248
Vrindavan, 203, 213, 229, 230
Vyāsa, 5n3, 43, 46–50, 59, 59n23, 64,
78, 79, 79n10, 80n13, 81n15,
87, 89n24, 95n35, 112n14,
114n19, 126, 138, 142, 276, 277

Y

Yajña, 10, 28, 28n19, 63, 187n18,
213, 228, 236, 243, 245n15,
246, 247n17, 248, 256, 267, 281
Yama, viii, 3, 8, 32, 35, 56,
73–100, 105, 107–109,
119n27, 121n29, 126, 142,
143, 153, 161, 195, 205, 212,
218, 230, 240–242, 242n12,
255, 265, 268, 272n20, 276,
283n34, 283n35
Yoga, viii, xii, 1–11, 17–36, 41–68,
73–100, 105–132, 138, 158,
171, 201–232, 235–260, 265
Yoga Sūtra (YS), viii, xii, 5n3, 5n4, 8,
9, 26n17, 27, 29, 32n22, 35, 41,
59n23, 61, 61n26, 63, 67, 74,
75, 78–82, 79n10, 79n11,
80n13, 81n14, 81n15, 84–87,
89n24, 92–96, 93n30, 93n31,
94n33, 94n34, 95n35, 106–108,
106n2, 111–113, 112n12,
112n14, 113n15, 114n19, 118,
119n27, 121, 122n30, 124, 126,
126n38, 127, 127–128n41, 138,
141–147, 141n4, 143n5, 144n7,
144n8, 146n11, 146n12, 149,
152, 155n22, 161–165, 172,
172n1, 173, 177n8, 186,
186n16, 187, 195, 202, 203,
211n9, 212, 221, 222n21, 224,
240–242, 242n12, 244, 258,
265–269, 272, 272n20, 276,
277, 283n34, 283n36

- Yogin*, 8, 10, 27n17, 28, 47, 50, 51,
61, 64, 74, 79–84, 79n11,
86–88, 86n20, 90–96, 99, 100,
107–110, 107n5, 109n8, 110n9,
112–114, 116, 116n23, 117n25,
118, 119, 120n28, 122, 123,
125–127, 129, 129n44, 131,
132, 137, 141n4, 143–146,
143n5, 155, 157–161, 163, 165,
171, 173, 175, 179, 180, 183,
184, 193, 195, 202, 207, 210,
212, 219, 222–224, 227, 230,
236, 240, 242, 248, 251, 254,
257–259, 266, 267, 274,
276, 278
Yudhiṣṭhira, 43, 54–57, 65