SKM YOGA

Yoga Teacher Training Programme

BRIDGES BETWEEN

East & West

A Comparative Study of Yoga Philosophy and Western Thinkers

For Yoga Teachers Training Students of SKM Yoga

Compiled by

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Founder, SKM Yoga | Yoga Acharya | Author | Philosopher

Prajnanam Brahma — Aitareya Upanishad

— Consciousness is Brahman

To the great rivers of human wisdom —
the Ganges of the East and the Thames of the West —
that have, since the beginning of human wondering,
been flowing toward the same sea.

And to every yoga teacher training student who dares to think deeply —
across traditions, across centuries, across the apparent divisions
between East and West, Self and Other, Silence and Word.

— Dr. Shivam Mishra

CHAPTER

Foreword

A Letter from Dr. Shivam Mishra

Dear Student of SKM Yoga,

Philosophy — the love of wisdom — is not a Western invention, and yoga is not merely an Indian exercise system. Both are expressions of the same primordial human longing: to understand what it means to be alive, to be conscious, and to be free. This book exists because of my deep conviction that the most important conversations about the nature of reality, consciousness, suffering, freedom, and meaning are not the exclusive property of any single tradition.

In more than two decades of teaching yoga and studying philosophy across traditions, I have been struck again and again by the extraordinary resonances between the ancient insights of the Vedic and yogic sages and the deepest explorations of Western philosophy. When I read Patanjali alongside Immanuel Kant, I see two brilliant minds wrestling with the same problem: how can consciousness know itself? When I study the Upanishads alongside William James, I recognise the same astonishment before the mystery of consciousness. When I read the Bhagavad Gita's teaching on action alongside Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of amor fati — love of fate — I find two courageous spirits reaching toward the same affirmation of life.

This is not to say that the Eastern and Western traditions are identical. They are not. Their methods, their metaphysics, their epistemologies, and their ultimate goals differ in important and interesting ways. The yoga teacher who understands these differences — not to rank one tradition above the other, but to appreciate the unique contribution of each and the larger truth that both are pointing toward — becomes a teacher of extraordinary depth and breadth.

This book is designed specifically for you — the yoga teacher training student at SKM Yoga who is ready to engage with yoga philosophy not merely as a set of techniques and beliefs to be memorised, but as a living tradition of inquiry that gains new dimensions of meaning when brought into conversation with the great thinkers of the Western world. Plato and Patanjali, Kant and the Upanishads, Hegel and Vedanta, Nietzsche and the Bhagavad Gita, Freud and the Kleshas,

Heidegger and Being — these conversations illuminate both traditions in ways that neither illuminates alone.

Read every chapter with an open mind. Bring your practice to the philosophy and the philosophy to your practice. Allow the encounter between these great rivers of wisdom to do what rivers do when they meet: to deepen, to widen, and to carry you further toward the sea.

With love and philosophical enthusiasm,

Dr. Shivam Mishra
Founder, SKM Yoga

CHAPTER

Preface

Purpose, Scope, and How to Use This Book

Purpose and Scope

This book undertakes a systematic comparative study of yoga philosophy as expressed primarily in the foundational Indian texts — the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, Advaita Vedanta, Samkhya philosophy, and Tantra — alongside the major philosophical traditions of the Western world, from the ancient Greeks through the Enlightenment, German Idealism, Existentialism, Phenomenology, Psychoanalytic thought, and Postmodern philosophy.

The comparison is not one of mere surface similarities. It is a rigorous intellectual engagement that examines: the fundamental metaphysical positions of each tradition (What is real? What is consciousness? What is the self?); the epistemological methods each tradition employs (How do we know what we know?); the ethical frameworks each tradition constructs (How should we live?); the psychological understanding each tradition develops (What are the sources of human suffering, and how is liberation from suffering achieved?); and the ultimate vision of human flourishing that each tradition holds forth.

Structure of the Book

The book is organised into five Parts, each addressing a major philosophical domain from a comparative perspective:

- Part I establishes the historical and intellectual context — the origins of yoga philosophy, the major Western philosophical traditions, and the methodology of comparative philosophy.
- Part II explores Metaphysics — the nature of reality, consciousness, and the Self in both traditions.
- Part III examines Epistemology — how the yogic tradition and Western philosophy understand knowledge, perception, and the limits of the mind.
- Part IV investigates Ethics and the Human Condition — suffering, freedom, moral action, and the question of how to live.
- Part V addresses Psychology and Liberation — the understanding of the mind, the ego, and the ultimate goal of human existence.

Each chapter includes: a foundational overview of the yogic position; an exposition of the relevant Western philosophical position; a systematic comparative analysis; a synthesis that identifies convergences and genuinely irreconcilable differences; practical implications for yoga teaching; and reflection questions for the yoga teacher training student.

Note on Language

Sanskrit terms are introduced with their full etymological meaning and, where possible, their experiential dimension. Western philosophical terms are explained in accessible language without sacrificing precision. The goal throughout is scholarly rigour in service of practical wisdom — not academic philosophy for its own sake, but depth of understanding in service of depth of teaching.

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PART I

Foundations

CHAPTER 1

The Rivers of Wisdom

Origins, History, and the Meeting of East and West

Ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti — Rig Veda 1.164.46

— Truth is one; the sages call it by many names

1.1 The Primordial Question

Every great philosophical tradition in human history begins with the same irreducible wonder: what is this? What is this world of experience in which I find myself? What am I — this being who thinks, feels, suffers, loves, and eventually dissolves back into the mystery from which it arose? These questions are not the property of any culture, continent, or century. They are the most fundamental expressions of human consciousness turning upon itself in astonishment and inquiry.

The yoga philosophical tradition, whose roots reach back more than four thousand years into the Vedic civilisation of ancient India, and the philosophical traditions of the Western world, which find their earliest systematic expression in ancient Greece approximately six centuries before the Common Era, both arise from this same primordial astonishment. That they developed along different lines, employed different methods, arrived at different — though often strikingly convergent — conclusions, and embedded themselves in vastly different cultural contexts is what makes their comparison so intellectually rich and so practically illuminating.

For the yoga teacher of the 21st century, this comparative study is not an academic luxury. It is a practical necessity. Your students come from every philosophical background. They have been shaped by Descartes' mind-body dualism (even if they have never heard his name), by Kant's categories of experience, by Freud's model of the unconscious, by the Enlightenment's faith in reason. When you teach the yogic understanding of consciousness, the nature of the self, or the causes of suffering, you are speaking across a philosophical background that has been invisibly shaping your students' understanding of these very concepts. Knowing that background — and

knowing where yoga philosophy converges with and diverges from it — makes you an incomparably more effective teacher.

1.2 The Origins of Yoga Philosophy

The Vedic Period (c. 1500–600 BCE)

The oldest stratum of yoga philosophy is found in the Vedas — specifically the Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda, and Atharva Veda — collections of hymns, cosmological speculations, and ritual instructions that represent the earliest recorded attempts of the Vedic civilisation to understand the nature of reality. The Rig Veda's famous Nasadiya Sukta (the Hymn of Creation, 10.129) is one of the most extraordinary philosophical poems in all of human literature: it contemplates the paradox of the origin of existence from non-existence with a radical agnosticism that anticipates some of the most sophisticated positions of contemporary philosophy of cosmology.

From this Vedic root, several major streams of philosophical inquiry emerged. The Upanishads (c. 800–200 BCE), sometimes called the Vedanta (end of the Vedas), moved from the external ritualism of the earlier Vedic period toward a profound inner inquiry. The great question of the Upanishads is not 'How should we perform the ritual?' but 'What is the nature of the self? What is the ultimate ground of reality? And are they the same?' The answers developed in the Upanishads — particularly the teaching of Tat tvam asi (That thou art) and Aham Brahmasmi (I am Brahman) — constitute one of the most audacious and radical propositions in the history of human philosophy: the individual self (Atman) and the ultimate ground of reality (Brahman) are not two separate things but one and the same.

The Systematic Period (c. 600 BCE – 500 CE)

From the Upanishadic foundation, several major systematic philosophical schools (darshanas — literally 'views' or 'visions') emerged, each addressing the fundamental questions of reality, consciousness, self, and liberation from a somewhat different angle. The six orthodox darshanas — Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, and Vedanta — together constitute the primary intellectual heritage of the yoga philosophical tradition.

Of these, the Samkhya and Yoga darshanas are most directly relevant to this comparative study. Samkhya, systematised by the legendary sage Kapila, provides the cosmological and psychological framework that underlies classical yoga: the fundamental dualism of Purusha (pure consciousness) and Prakriti (primordial nature), the twenty-five tattvas (principles of manifestation), and the map of the mind's structure. Yoga, as systematised by Patanjali in the Yoga Sutras (c. 200 BCE–400 CE), builds upon the Samkhya cosmology to provide the most comprehensive map of psychological transformation and liberation in the ancient world.

Maharishi Patanjali
c. 200 BCE – 400 CE | Classical Yoga / Samkhya Philosophy
Key Insight: Chitta vritti nirodhah — yoga is the cessation of the mind's fluctuations; consciousness freed from its modifications rests in its own nature.

1.3 The Origins of Western Philosophy

The Pre-Socratics and the Birth of Rational Inquiry (c. 600–400 BCE)

Western philosophy as a distinct discipline is generally dated from the Pre-Socratic philosophers of ancient Greece — Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Heraclitus, Parmenides, and others — who made the revolutionary move of attempting to explain the nature of reality without primary recourse to mythology or divine intervention. This move — from mythos to logos, from story to reasoned argument — is often identified as the birth moment of the Western philosophical tradition.

What is remarkable, from the perspective of comparative philosophy, is that the questions the Pre-Socratics were asking were almost identical to those being explored simultaneously in the Upanishads. Heraclitus (c. 535–475 BCE), whose thought is almost exactly contemporary with the later Upanishads, taught that underlying the apparent multiplicity of phenomena is a single unifying principle — the Logos — and that all apparent opposites are secretly one. This is strikingly convergent with the Upanishadic teaching of Brahman as the single ground of all apparent multiplicity.

Heraclitus of Ephesus
c. 535–475 BCE | Pre-Socratic Greek Philosophy

Key Insight: Everything flows — panta rhei. The Logos is the underlying unity of all apparent opposites. 'The way up and the way down are the same.'

Plato, Aristotle, and the Classical Period (c. 428–322 BCE)

The towering figures of Western philosophy's classical period — Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle — established the fundamental questions and methods that would dominate Western philosophy for more than two millennia. Plato's theory of Forms (the eternal, unchanging archetypes of which the material world is merely an imperfect reflection), his understanding of the soul as the locus of reason and the true self, and his conviction that genuine knowledge is the knowledge of these eternal Forms — not the fluctuating world of sense experience — have remarkable structural parallels with the yogic understanding of the self and the nature of reality.

Aristotle, Plato's great student who diverged from his teacher in fundamental ways, grounded his philosophy more firmly in the observable world. His concepts of eudaimonia (human flourishing), the doctrine of the mean, and the study of the soul (De Anima) offer rich comparative material alongside the yogic understanding of human wellbeing, the ethical path, and the structure of the psyche.

1.4 The Historical Encounters Between East and West

The intellectual encounter between the philosophical traditions of India and Greece is far older than most people realise. Alexander the Great's campaigns in India (326 BCE) brought Greek philosophers — including the famous gymnosophists (naked philosophers) who engaged in intellectual dialogue with Alexander's entourage — into direct contact with Indian thinkers. Pyrrho of Elis, the founder of Greek scepticism who accompanied Alexander, is widely believed to have been significantly influenced by the Indian philosophical traditions he encountered.

In the modern period, the encounter deepened dramatically. The translation of the Upanishads into Latin by Anquetil-Duperron in 1801–1802, and Schopenhauer's passionate engagement with this translation, brought Vedantic thought into the mainstream of European intellectual life. The Theosophical movement, the encounter between Swami Vivekananda and the West beginning in 1893, and the 20th-century work of scholars like Sri Aurobindo, S. Radhakrishnan, and D.T. Suzuki further deepened the cross-cultural philosophical conversation.

> *"The Vedas and the Upanishads contain the profoundest human wisdom I know. They are almost alone in recognising the metaphysical needs of man with the insight that the world we see is not the true world."*
>
> *— Arthur Schopenhauer, Parerga and Paralipomena*

1.5 Why This Comparison Matters for the Yoga Teacher

The yoga teacher of the modern world operates in a philosophical climate that is predominantly shaped by Western assumptions — even when those assumptions are invisible. The dominant Western understanding of the self as a bounded individual consciousness, the materialist assumption that physical reality is the fundamental reality, the Enlightenment faith in reason as the primary instrument of knowledge, the Protestant work ethic that measures human worth by productivity — all of these are philosophical positions that yoga implicitly or explicitly challenges.

When a student sits down on a yoga mat and begins to breathe consciously, they are, whether they know it or not, beginning to question these assumptions with their body and breath before they have any intellectual framework for doing so. The yoga teacher who understands the philosophical stakes of this moment — who can articulate clearly why yoga's understanding of consciousness differs from Descartes', why yoga's approach to suffering differs from Freud's, and where the two traditions genuinely agree — is a teacher who can meet their students' questions with philosophical substance and transformative depth.

> *"To compare means not merely to set side by side, but to discover the deeper unity behind apparent differences — and the genuine differences behind apparent similarities."*
>
> *— Dr. Shivam Mishra*

1.6 Reflection Questions

- What is the philosophical tradition you were raised in, consciously or unconsciously? How has it shaped your understanding of the self, consciousness, and the purpose of life?
- Heraclitus and the Upanishads were developing similar ideas simultaneously without apparent contact. What does this suggest about the nature of philosophical inquiry?
- How might knowledge of Western philosophy make you a more effective yoga teacher? Give three specific examples.

CHAPTER 2

The Philosophical Landscape

Key Schools of Yoga and Western Thought

2.1 The Six Darshanas — India's Philosophical Schools

Indian philosophy, unlike its Western counterpart, has historically organised itself not around individual thinkers but around schools — darshanas — each of which represents a comprehensive, internally consistent view of reality, knowledge, ethics, and liberation. The word darshana itself is instructive: it means 'seeing' or 'vision.' A philosophical school is not merely a set of arguments but a particular way of seeing — a coherent lens through which the totality of experience is interpreted.

School	Key Metaphysics	Epistemology	Goal
Samkhya	Strict dualism: Purusha (consciousness) and Prakriti (matter) are entirely distinct realities	Pratyaksha (perception), Anumana (inference), Shabda (testimony)	Discrimination (Viveka) between Purusha and Prakriti — liberation from misidentification
Yoga (Patanjali)	Modified Samkhya dualism; Ishvara (special Purusha) introduced; chitta (mind-stuff) as the field of practice	Adds Yogic direct perception (Samadhi) as highest pramana	Kaivalya — pure isolation of consciousness from all objects; Samadhi
Advaita Vedanta	Strict non-dualism: Brahman alone is real; Atman = Brahman; world is apparent (Maya)	Shabda (Upanishadic testimony) primary; direct realisation (Aparoksha Anubhuti)	Moksha — recognition of one's identity with Brahman; liberation from illusion of separation
Nyaya	Realist: external world is real, knowable through correct reasoning	16 categories of valid argumentation; perception most basic	Liberation through correct knowledge; logical rigour as spiritual path
Vaisheshika	Atomistic realism: world composed of eternal atoms	Empirical observation, inference	Liberation through knowledge of categorical distinctions

Mimamsa	Eternal, beginningless Vedas are the primary reality	Vedic testimony as the highest pramana	Dharma — right action as prescribed by the Vedas; heavenly reward

2.2 Major Western Philosophical Schools — A Compressed Survey

Ancient Greek Philosophy (c. 600 BCE – 400 CE)

Ancient Greek philosophy established the fundamental questions and methods of the Western tradition. The Pre-Socratics sought the fundamental substance (arche) of reality. Plato developed a systematic idealist metaphysics centred on the eternal Forms. Aristotle created the first systematic biology, physics, logic, ethics, and politics. The Stoics developed a sophisticated ethics of rational self-governance aligned with the natural order (Logos). The Epicureans sought freedom from suffering through simple pleasure and philosophical understanding. The Neoplatonists, especially Plotinus, developed a mystical philosophy of the One that offers some of the richest comparative material with Advaita Vedanta.

Plotinus
204–270 CE | Neoplatonism
Key Insight: The One is beyond all predication; the soul returns to the One through philosophical contemplation and ecstatic union — the flight of the alone to the Alone.

The Rationalist and Empiricist Traditions (17th–18th Century)

The early modern period in Western philosophy was defined by the debate between Rationalism — the view that reason alone, independent of sensory experience, can arrive at genuine knowledge (Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz) — and Empiricism — the view that all genuine knowledge derives from sensory experience (Locke, Berkeley, Hume). This debate has direct parallels in the yoga philosophical tradition, where the respective authorities of pratyaksha (direct perception), anumana (inference), and agama (scriptural testimony) as sources of knowledge are similarly contested.

Kant and the Critical Turn (18th Century)

Immanuel Kant's 'Copernican revolution' in philosophy — his demonstration that the mind actively structures experience rather than passively receiving it — represents perhaps the single most important development in modern Western philosophy from the perspective of comparative yoga philosophy. Kant's distinction between phenomena (the world as we experience it, structured by the mind's categories) and noumena (things as they are in themselves, forever inaccessible to direct cognition) has profound structural parallels with the yoga philosophical distinction between the apparent world as structured by chitta (the mind-stuff) and the reality of Purusha-consciousness that is beyond the mind's reach.

Immanuel Kant

1724–1804 | Critical Idealism / German Enlightenment

Key Insight: The mind does not conform to objects; objects conform to the mind. Space, time, and causality are not features of reality-in-itself but forms of our perception. We can never know the Ding-an-sich — the thing-in-itself.

German Idealism (19th Century)

The German Idealists — Fichte, Schelling, and above all Hegel — took Kant's critical philosophy in a direction that brings it into very close proximity with Vedantic thought. Hegel's concept of Geist (Spirit or Mind) as the self-unfolding of the Absolute through history, his dialectical method (thesis-antithesis-synthesis), and his ultimate vision of the Absolute as self-knowing consciousness — these ideas were explicitly and consciously influenced by Indian philosophy in several important respects, mediated through Schopenhauer and the broader Orientalist movement.

Existentialism and Phenomenology (19th–20th Century)

Existentialism and Phenomenology represent the Western philosophical tradition's most sustained engagement with the themes of consciousness, lived experience, freedom, and human finitude — themes that are at the very heart of yoga philosophy. Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Husserl each developed important positions on consciousness, selfhood, freedom, and meaning that yield rich comparative material when set alongside the yogic tradition.

20th-Century Psychology and Philosophy of Mind

Freud's psychoanalytic theory of the unconscious, Jung's concept of the collective unconscious and individuation, Maslow's hierarchy of needs and peak experiences, and the contemporary

philosophy of mind's engagement with the 'hard problem of consciousness' (Chalmers) all offer important points of comparison with yoga's highly developed psychology of mind, ego, and liberation.

2.3 A Summary Comparison of Core Positions

Question	Yoga Philosophy	Western Counterpart
What is ultimately real?	Samkhya: Purusha + Prakriti; Advaita: Brahman alone; Yoga: modified dualism	Plato: eternal Forms; Descartes: mind + matter; Hegel: Absolute Spirit; Materialists: matter
What is the self?	Atman = Brahman (Vedanta); Purusha = pure witness (Samkhya/Yoga); No permanent self (Buddhism)	Descartes: thinking substance; Hume: bundle of perceptions; Hegel: self as process; Sartre: radical freedom
What is knowledge?	Direct perception, inference, scriptural testimony + yogic direct perception	Rationalism: reason; Empiricism: sense experience; Kant: synthesis; Phenomenology: lived experience
What is the source of suffering?	Avidya (ignorance of true nature), Kleshas, karma, samsara	Aristotle: lack of virtue; Schopenhauer: will-to-live; Freud: repressed unconscious; Sartre: bad faith
What is the goal?	Moksha, Kaivalya, Samadhi — liberation from suffering and identification with the limited self	Eudaimonia (Aristotle); Self-actualisation (Maslow); Freedom (Sartre); The Absolute (Hegel)
What is the method?	Ashtanga Yoga: ethical restraints, asana, pranayama, meditation, absorption	Dialectic (Plato); Analysis (Aristotle); Pure reason (Kant); Dialectic (Hegel); Phenomenological reduction (Husserl)

2.4 Reflection Questions

- Which Western philosophical school strikes you as having the greatest resonance with the yoga tradition? Why?
- Where do you see the most fundamental and irreconcilable difference between the yogic and Western traditions? What are the implications for your teaching?

- Hegel famously said 'The owl of Minerva takes flight only at dusk' — philosophy understands an era only after it has passed. How might this apply to our current understanding of the relationship between Eastern and Western philosophy?

CHAPTER 3

Methodology of Comparative Philosophy

How to Think Across Traditions

3.1 What Does Comparison Mean?

The methodology of comparative philosophy — the systematic intellectual practice of examining philosophical traditions from different cultural contexts in relation to each other — is itself a philosophical activity of considerable complexity. It is not merely the identification of similarities (though similarities are important and often illuminating). It is the sustained, rigorous, and honest examination of both convergences and divergences, conducted with genuine respect for the integrity of each tradition and genuine curiosity about what the encounter between them might reveal that neither tradition can see from within itself alone.

Three common methodological errors must be understood and avoided by anyone engaged in this work:

Error 1: Perennialist Over-Identification

Perennialism — the view, associated most prominently with Aldous Huxley and Frithjof Schuon, that all the great spiritual and philosophical traditions are saying essentially the same thing in different cultural clothing — is the most tempting error of comparative philosophy. It feels generous, ecumenical, and spiritually satisfying. But it is intellectually dishonest, because it irons out genuine and important differences that both traditions themselves consider significant.

For example: the Advaita Vedanta teaching that the individual self is identical with Brahman (the ultimate reality) is emphatically NOT the same as the Christian teaching that the individual soul is a created being in loving relationship with a personal God who is Other than the soul. These are genuinely different philosophical and spiritual positions, and treating them as merely different expressions of the same truth does justice to neither. The yoga teacher must be willing to hold the genuine differences without collapsing them into false unity.

Error 2: Reductionist Dismissal

The opposite error is to dismiss the comparison as illegitimate on the grounds that the traditions are so different in their cultural context, their language, their methods, and their goals that no meaningful comparison is possible. This error is often made by scholars who have invested deeply in one tradition and feel that comparison inevitably distorts the tradition they love by making it serve a foreign agenda.

This error too must be avoided. The fact that two traditions developed in different contexts does not mean they cannot be asking the same questions or arriving at related insights. The comparison does not require that either tradition become the other — it requires only that each tradition be respected in its own terms while being genuinely open to the light that the other can shed.

Error 3: Projection and Appropriation

A third methodological danger is the projection of one tradition's categories onto another without adequate attention to whether those categories actually fit. This error has been common in the appropriation of Indian philosophy by Western thinkers who have imposed Western conceptual frameworks onto fundamentally different philosophical structures. Equally, it appears in yoga teachers who reduce the rich philosophical complexity of the Western tradition to a few caricatures in order to make the yoga tradition look better by comparison.

The methodology of this book — and of the SKM Yoga comparative philosophy approach — is to let each tradition speak in its own terms first, before seeking points of genuine resonance and genuine difference. We do not ask 'Is Patanjali a Kantian?' or 'Is Kant a closet yogi?' We ask: what is each thinker actually saying, and what does the encounter between these genuinely different perspectives illuminate about the philosophical question at hand?

3.2 The Four Steps of Comparative Analysis

1. Exposition: Present each philosophical position in its own terms, as its most sophisticated proponents would present it, without distortion or premature simplification.
2. Contextualisation: Locate each position within its historical, cultural, and intellectual context. Philosophical positions are not free-floating; they arise in response to specific problems, in conversation with specific predecessors, within specific cultural assumptions.
3. Comparison: Identify genuine points of convergence (where the two traditions arrive at similar or identical conclusions) and genuine points of divergence (where they differ fundamentally and specifically).

4. Synthesis: Reflect on what the encounter between these two perspectives illuminates about the philosophical question at hand. What does yoga philosophy see that Western philosophy misses? What does Western philosophy see that yoga philosophy can be enriched by? What does the comparison reveal that neither tradition fully sees from within itself?

3.3 Special Challenges in Yoga-Western Comparison

Several features of the yoga philosophical tradition create particular challenges when comparing it with Western philosophy, and the honest student must keep these in mind throughout the study:

- The integration of philosophy and practice: Western philosophy has, for most of its history, been a primarily intellectual activity. Yoga philosophy is inseparable from practice — the claim is that philosophical insight is not merely achieved by argument but by the direct transformation of consciousness through specific practices. This means that many of yoga's most important philosophical claims are not primarily propositional (claims to be evaluated by argument) but experiential (claims to be evaluated by practice). How do we compare these kinds of claims with the primarily propositional claims of Western philosophy?
- The diversity within 'yoga philosophy': The term 'yoga philosophy' encompasses a vast diversity of positions — Samkhya dualism, Advaita non-dualism, Tantra, Buddhism, Jainism — that often disagree with each other as fundamentally as they disagree with Western philosophy. The yoga teacher must resist the temptation to treat 'yoga philosophy' as a single, unified position.
- The translation problem: Philosophical concepts do not translate perfectly across languages. Sanskrit philosophical terms — Atman, Brahman, Karma, Maya, Dharma, Prana — carry associations and dimensions of meaning that no single English word can capture. We must always hold the translation lightly and return to the original.

> *"The meeting of two traditions is never the merger of two into one. It is the creation of a third space in which both can become more fully themselves."*
>
> *— Dr. Shivam Mishra, SKM Yoga Foundations*

3.4 Reflection Questions

- Have you encountered perennialist over-identification in yoga communities — the tendency to say 'all traditions are essentially the same'? What is useful about this view, and what does it miss?
- Which is harder for you personally: to respect genuine difference, or to celebrate genuine similarity? What does this reveal about your own philosophical tendencies?
- How might the methodology of comparative philosophy — exposition, contextualisation, comparison, synthesis — be applied in your yoga teaching?

PART II

Metaphysics — What Is Real?

CHAPTER 4

Consciousness and Reality

Purusha, Prakriti, and Western Ontology

Prajnanam Brahma — Aitareya Upanishad 3.3

— Consciousness is Brahman — the ultimate ground of all reality

4.1 The Central Problem

Of all the questions that philosophy has ever addressed, none is more fundamental — or more resistant to resolution — than the question of consciousness and its relationship to the material world. What is the relationship between mind and matter? Is consciousness a product of the physical brain, or is it something irreducibly different, perhaps even more fundamental than matter? Does the universe give rise to consciousness, or does consciousness give rise to — or in some sense constitute — the universe?

This is not merely an academic puzzle. It is the foundational metaphysical question that underlies every aspect of yoga philosophy and every claim yoga makes about the possibility of liberation. If consciousness is merely the product of a physical brain — as modern materialist philosophy of mind maintains — then the yoga claim that pure consciousness (Purusha, Atman, Brahman) exists independently of and prior to all material phenomena is simply false. If, on the other hand, consciousness is the fundamental ground of reality — as the Upanishads and Advaita Vedanta maintain — then the materialist assumption that underlies most of modern Western science and medicine is itself the great illusion (Maya) from which human beings suffer.

This chapter examines the principal positions on this question in both the yogic and Western philosophical traditions — not to definitively resolve it (the question remains open), but to equip the yoga teacher with the philosophical vocabulary and conceptual clarity to engage with it honestly and productively.

4.2 The Yogic Map of Reality — Samkhya Cosmology

The Samkhya darshana, which provides the philosophical foundation for classical yoga, offers one of the most complete and systematic maps of the structure of reality in any philosophical tradition. Its central claim is a strict ontological dualism: reality is composed of two fundamentally irreducible, eternal, and qualitatively distinct principles — Purusha and Prakriti.

Purusha — Pure Consciousness

Purusha (literally 'the dweller in the city,' i.e., the city of the body) is pure consciousness — not consciousness as a quality or property of something else, but consciousness as an irreducible, self-luminous, self-knowing reality. Purusha is: without beginning or end, without change or movement, without qualities, without action. It is pure witnessing awareness — the seer that is never itself seen, the knower that is never itself known as an object, the light by which all other things are illuminated.

This is a position of extraordinary philosophical boldness. Modern Western philosophy of mind, in its dominant materialist forms, takes the opposite view: consciousness is a property or function of the physical brain, and the brain, as a physical object, is fully describable in terms of matter and energy. The Samkhya-Yoga tradition maintains, with equal boldness, that this is precisely backwards: matter (Prakriti) is constituted by and in some sense dependent upon consciousness (Purusha), not the other way around.

Prakriti — Primordial Nature

Prakriti (literally 'original creation' or 'primary nature') is the second eternal principle in Samkhya cosmology — the primordial, undifferentiated matrix from which the entire manifest universe unfolds. Prakriti is not matter in the simple physical sense. It is the primordial potential from which all physical matter, all energy, all psychological processes — including the mind (manas), the intellect (buddhi), and the sense of individual selfhood (ahamkara) — evolve through a series of thirty-six tattvas (principles or categories).

The three gunas — Sattva (clarity, luminosity), Rajas (activity, passion), and Tamas (inertia, heaviness) — are the fundamental qualities of Prakriti. In its unmanifest state, Prakriti is a perfect equilibrium of these three qualities. The disturbance of this equilibrium — triggered, in the Samkhya account, by the proximity of Purusha to Prakriti — sets off the process of cosmic

evolution, from subtle to gross, from undifferentiated potential to the manifest multiplicity of the physical world.

Ishvarakrishna
c. 350 CE | Samkhya Philosophy — Samkhya Karika
Key Insight: Neither Purusha nor Prakriti is the product of anything else. Both are eternal and self-subsisting. Liberation is the Purusha's recognition of its own distinction from Prakriti.

4.3 Advaita Vedanta — Non-Dual Reality

While Samkhya posits a fundamental dualism of Purusha and Prakriti, the Advaita Vedanta school of Adi Shankaracharya (788–820 CE) argues for a radical non-dualism: Brahman — pure, undivided, self-luminous consciousness — is the only reality. The apparent multiplicity of the world, the apparent individuality of the self (Atman), and even the apparent dualism of Purusha and Prakriti are all expressions of Maya — the cosmic power of illusion that makes the one appear as many.

The Advaita position is captured in the four Mahavakyas (great sayings) of the Upanishads: Prajnanam Brahma (consciousness is Brahman — Aitareya Up.); Aham Brahmasmi (I am Brahman — Brihadaranyaka Up.); Tat tvam asi (That thou art — Chandogya Up.); Ayam Atma Brahma (this self is Brahman — Mandukya Up.). Together, these four statements constitute the most radical non-dual metaphysical claim in any philosophical tradition: the individual self is not a part of Brahman, or similar to Brahman, or in loving relationship with Brahman — it IS Brahman, appearing as an individual due to the power of Maya.

Adi Shankaracharya
788–820 CE | Advaita Vedanta
Key Insight: Brahma satyam jagat mithya, jivo brahmaiva naparah — Brahman alone is real; the world is appearance; the individual self is none other than Brahman.

4.4 Western Ontology — The Spectrum from Dualism to Idealism

Plato's Idealism and the Theory of Forms

Plato's metaphysics, while very different in its cultural and conceptual context from Advaita Vedanta, shares its most fundamental structural feature: the primacy of the non-material over the material. For Plato, the ultimate realities are the eternal, unchanging, immaterial Forms — the Form of Beauty, the Form of Justice, the Form of the Good — of which the material world is merely an imperfect, transient reflection or copy. The material world is to the Forms as shadows on the wall of a cave are to the real objects outside — a metaphor that is, of course, the famous Allegory of the Cave from the Republic.

The structural parallel with Advaita Vedanta is striking: in both systems, the material world is a kind of appearance or shadow of a more fundamental, non-material reality; in both systems, ordinary human consciousness is trapped in identification with appearances rather than reality; and in both systems, the philosophical or spiritual path is the path toward direct acquaintance with the ultimate reality. The differences are equally significant: for Plato, the ultimate reality is a plurality of distinct Forms (not one undivided consciousness); for Plato, the path is rational dialectic (not yogic meditation); and for Plato, liberation is the philosopher's apprehension of the Good (not the recognition of identity with the ultimate).

Plato vs. Advaita — Plato (Western Idealism)

- Material world = imperfect copy of eternal Forms
- Ultimate reality = plurality of eternal, distinct Forms
- Path = rational dialectic and philosophical love (Eros)
- Goal = philosopher's apprehension of the Form of the Good
- The soul is distinct from the Good/Forms it contemplates

Plato vs. Advaita — Adi Shankaracharya (Advaita Vedanta)

- Material world = apparent (not absolutely unreal, but not ultimately real)
- Ultimate reality = one undivided consciousness (Brahman)
- Path = Sravana (hearing), Manana (reflection), Nididhyasana (meditation)
- Goal = recognition of identity with Brahman (Moksha)
- The self is not distinct from Brahman but IS Brahman

Descartes and Substance Dualism

René Descartes (1596–1650), the founder of modern Western philosophy, proposed what became known as substance dualism: reality consists of two irreducibly distinct substances — res cogitans (thinking substance, or mind) and res extensa (extended substance, or matter). The human being

is a composite of both: a material body and an immaterial mind, mysteriously united (Descartes infamously located this union in the pineal gland).

Cartesian dualism has a superficial resemblance to Samkhya's Purusha-Prakriti dualism but differs in crucial respects. For Descartes, the mind is a personal, individual substance — each human being has their own mind. For Samkhya, Purusha is not a personal individual consciousness but pure universal consciousness appearing as individual through identification with particular Prakritis. More importantly, Descartes' dualism created the famous 'mind-body problem' that has haunted Western philosophy ever since: if mind and matter are completely different substances, how do they interact? Samkhya avoids this problem by understanding the mind (manas, buddhi, ahamkara) as part of Prakriti, not of Purusha — the mind is matter, not consciousness.

René Descartes

1596–1650 | Rationalism / Substance Dualism

Key Insight: Cogito ergo sum — I think, therefore I am. The only certainty is the existence of the thinking self. Mind (res cogitans) and matter (res extensa) are entirely distinct substances whose interaction is the fundamental mystery of human existence.

Kant's Transcendental Idealism

Immanuel Kant's metaphysical position — Transcendental Idealism — offers what is arguably the most sophisticated parallel with the yoga philosophical understanding of the relationship between consciousness and reality in all of Western philosophy. Kant's central thesis is that the forms of space, time, and the twelve categories of understanding (causality, substance, unity, etc.) are not features of the world as it is in itself (the noumenon) but are imposed upon experience by the structure of the human mind. We do not receive experience as it is; we structure experience through the forms of our cognition.

This has a profound structural parallel with the yoga philosophical claim that the world we experience is not reality as it is but reality as it appears through the lens of chitta (mind-stuff) — structured by the vrittis (mind-modifications), coloured by the kleshas (afflictions), and distorted by avidya (fundamental ignorance). Both Kant and yoga philosophy make the same fundamental move: the world of ordinary experience is not to be taken as the face of reality itself — it is, in important ways, a construction of the observing mind.

The crucial difference is this: for Kant, the noumenon — the thing-in-itself — is permanently and in principle inaccessible to human cognition. We can never know reality as it is in itself. For yoga philosophy, the direct apprehension of reality as it is — Purusha-consciousness experiencing itself without the mediation of Prakriti — is not only possible but is the entire goal of the path, realised in the state of Samadhi and stabilised in Kaivalya (liberation).

> *"Kant showed us that we can never know the thing-in-itself through the ordinary mind. Patanjali showed us that there is a state of consciousness in which the mind dissolves into pure awareness — and in that dissolution, what remains is the thing-in-itself, knowing itself."*
>
> *— Dr. Shivam Mishra*

4.5 The Hard Problem of Consciousness — East and West

The contemporary philosopher David Chalmers has identified what he calls the 'hard problem of consciousness': the question of why and how physical processes in the brain give rise to subjective experience — the felt quality of seeing red, tasting honey, or feeling pain. The 'easy problems' of consciousness (explaining how the brain processes information, integrates perceptions, controls behaviour) are scientifically tractable. The hard problem — explaining why any of this processing should be accompanied by subjective experience at all — resists all purely physical explanation.

The yoga philosophical tradition can be understood as having posed and addressed the hard problem of consciousness millennia before Chalmers formulated it. The Samkhya solution is that subjective experience cannot be explained by physical processes because consciousness (Purusha) is not itself a physical process — it is a different kind of reality entirely. The Advaita solution is more radical: consciousness is not something the brain produces; it is the fundamental ground of reality within which the brain (and all other material phenomena) appears.

Position	Theory of Consciousness	Problem with This View
Physicalism (dominant Western science)	Consciousness is produced by the physical brain; no consciousness without brain activity	Cannot explain WHY physical processes produce subjective experience (Chalmers' hard problem)
Cartesian Dualism (Descartes)	Mind and matter are two distinct substances; each	How do they interact? Interaction problem; how does immaterial mind affect material

	human has an individual mind	body?
Transcendental Idealism (Kant)	The mind structures experience; the thing-in-itself is unknown	Leaves us permanently cut off from reality-in-itself; agnostic about the ultimate
Samkhya Yoga	Purusha (universal consciousness) and Prakriti (matter) are co-eternal; mind is part of matter	How does Purusha 'see' Prakriti if it has no contact with it? The proximity problem
Advaita Vedanta	Brahman (pure consciousness) is the only reality; matter is appearance within consciousness	How does the one Brahman appear as many? Maya is invoked but not fully explained
Panpsychism (Chalmers, Goff)	Consciousness is a fundamental feature of reality, present at every level	Combination problem: how do micro-consciousnesses combine into human experience?

4.6 Synthesis and Teaching Implications

The comparison of yogic and Western positions on consciousness and reality reveals a fascinating and practically important pattern: the traditions that most seriously engage with the mystery of consciousness — Advaita Vedanta, Neoplatonism, Kant, German Idealism, and contemporary panpsychism — tend toward positions in which consciousness is understood as more fundamental than, or at least irreducible to, matter. The traditions that proceed most confidently with purely physical explanations — scientific materialism, behaviourism, and much of contemporary neuroscience — do so at the cost of either ignoring or explaining away the very reality of subjective experience.

For the yoga teacher, the practical implication is clear: yoga's understanding of consciousness as primary, as the ground of experience rather than its product, is not philosophically naive or culturally parochial. It is a sophisticated and defensible position that the most rigorous Western philosophy repeatedly approaches, even if it has not definitively settled there. You teach from a tradition that has engaged with this question with extraordinary depth and arrived at conclusions that the Western tradition is, in its most honest moments, still circling.

4.7 Reflection Questions

- Do you approach your own consciousness as something the brain produces, or as something more fundamental? How does this assumption affect your practice and your teaching?
- Kant says we can never know reality as it is in itself. Yoga says we can, in Samadhi. What would it mean to verify this claim? Can it be verified? Does it need to be?
- How would you explain the difference between Samkhya dualism and Cartesian dualism to a student with a background in Western philosophy? What is the key distinction?

CHAPTER 5

The Nature of the Self

Atman, Anatman, and Western Selfhood

Tat tvam asi — Chandogya Upanishad 6.8.7

— That thou art — the individual self and the ultimate reality are one

5.1 Who — or What — Is the Self?

No question is more central to the comparative philosophy of yoga and the Western tradition than the question of the self. What is the entity that I call 'I'? Is there a permanent, continuous self that persists through time, underneath the flow of changing experiences? Or is the self a construct — a useful fiction, a narrative the mind tells itself? Is the self ultimately identical with the universal ground of reality, as Advaita Vedanta maintains? Or is it radically individual and free, as Sartre argued? Or is it an evolving social-historical process, as Hegel contended? Or is there, at the deepest level, no self at all — as the Buddhist tradition of Anatman (no-self) asserts?

These questions are not merely theoretical for the yoga teacher. Every student who enters your class carries, whether consciously or not, a particular understanding of what they are. That understanding shapes what they expect from yoga, how they relate to the practices, and what obstacles and openings they encounter on the path. The teacher who understands the philosophical landscape of selfhood — in both its Eastern and Western expressions — is equipped to meet students where they are and guide them, through the practices, toward a lived encounter with the deeper dimensions of their own nature.

5.2 The Upanishadic Self — Atman as Brahman

The philosophical understanding of the self in the Upanishads is one of the most radical and subtle in all of human philosophy. The Atman — the individual self or soul — is initially described in experiential terms as the innermost witness: the awareness that is aware of the body, but is not the body; the awareness that is aware of the mind, but is not the mind; the awareness that is aware of experience, but is itself beyond any particular experience.

This characterisation already goes far beyond most Western accounts of the self. But the Upanishads go further: this innermost witnessing awareness — the Atman — is not, in its deepest nature, an individual thing separate from other individual things. It is Brahman — the unlimited, unbounded ground of consciousness that is the single reality of the universe. The individual appearance of the Atman is due to Upadhi (limiting adjuncts) — the body, the mind, the intellect, the sense of individual identity — that make the unlimited Brahman appear as a limited individual self.

The teaching of Tat tvam asi — 'That thou art' — is the direct transmission of this realisation. The Chandogya Upanishad records the sage Uddalaka Aruni transmitting this insight to his son Shvetaketu through a series of analogies: the rivers that flow into the ocean become the ocean; the salt dissolved in water is everywhere in the water; the essential being of a seed contains the entire tree. In each case, the teaching points toward the same recognition: beneath the apparent individuality and multiplicity of phenomenal existence is a single, continuous reality — and that reality is what you fundamentally are.

5.3 Patanjali's Yoga — The Purusha as Witness

Patanjali's understanding of the self is derived from Samkhya rather than directly from Advaita Vedanta, and it differs in an important respect. For Patanjali, the goal of yoga is not the recognition of identity between the individual self and the universal Brahman (as in Advaita), but rather the discrimination (Viveka) between Purusha (pure consciousness, the true self) and Prakriti (primordial nature, including the mind). The liberated state in classical yoga is Kaivalya — the aloneness or isolation of Purusha in its own nature, free from all identification with the modifications of Prakriti.

In practice, the distinction between the Advaita and Yoga approaches to the self converges more than it theoretically diverges. In both cases, the ordinary sense of individual self — the 'I' who thinks, desires, fears, and acts — is understood as a misidentification: the Purusha misidentifying itself with the modifications of chitta (the mind), or Brahman appearing as individual through the power of Maya. And in both cases, the direct recognition of the true nature of the self — beyond the mind, beyond the ego, as pure witnessing awareness — is the liberating insight.

Adi Shankaracharya on the Self
788–820 CE | Advaita Vedanta
Key Insight: I am not the body, the senses, the mind, or the intellect. I am the eternal witness, the pure awareness in which all these appear and disappear like clouds in the sky. I am Brahman.

5.4 Western Theories of the Self

Descartes — The Thinking Substance

Descartes' foundational contribution to Western theories of the self is the cogito: 'Cogito ergo sum' — 'I think, therefore I am.' Through his famous method of radical doubt, Descartes systematically questioned every belief that could conceivably be doubted until he found one certainty that could not be doubted: the very act of doubting presupposes a doubter. Whatever else might be uncertain, the existence of a thinking, experiencing subject cannot be doubted without self-refutation.

This is a powerful philosophical move, but it arrives at a very different conception of the self than the yogic tradition. For Descartes, the self that is certain is an individual, thinking substance — defined essentially by its capacity for rational thought. It is an isolated, enclosed entity whose primary certainty is its own thinking. For the Upanishads, the self that is certain is not a thinker but the witness of thinking — not the thought but the pure awareness in which thoughts arise and dissolve. Descartes and Patanjali agree that the existence of pure consciousness cannot be doubted — but they disagree about what that consciousness is.

René Descartes
1596–1650 | Rationalism / Modern Western Philosophy
Key Insight: Cogito ergo sum. The self is essentially a thinking substance (res cogitans). The body is a machine; the mind is the ghost in the machine. Their interaction remains the central puzzle of Western philosophy of mind.

Hume — The Bundle Theory of Self

David Hume (1711–1776) arrived at a position on the self that, from within the Western empiricist tradition, remarkably anticipates the Buddhist doctrine of Anatman (no-self). Through rigorous introspective analysis, Hume concluded that when he looked inward seeking a permanent, unchanging self, he never found one. What he found instead was a 'bundle of perceptions' — a

constant flow of impressions, ideas, emotions, and sensations — but no underlying subject who was having these experiences.

Hume's bundle theory dissolves the Cartesian self: there is no thinking substance behind the thoughts; there is only the succession of thoughts themselves. This has striking parallels with the Buddhist Anatman teaching — the denial of a permanent, unchanging self (Atman). However, Hume's conclusion is different from the Buddhist one in its implications: for Hume, the dissolution of the self-concept leads to a kind of philosophical scepticism and even melancholy ('I am ... a bundle of perceptions only'). For the Buddhist tradition, the recognition of Anatman leads to liberation — because the self that was causing suffering by its grasping and craving turns out never to have existed.

> *"Hume looked for the self and found none. The Buddhist says: correct — there is no fixed self, and knowing this is liberation. Patanjali says: you looked in the wrong place. The self is not in the stream of mental contents but in the pure witness of that stream."*
>
> — *Dr. Shivam Mishra*

Hegel — The Self as Process

Hegel's philosophy of the self represents one of the most ambitious attempts in Western philosophy to understand selfhood as a dynamic, relational, and historical process rather than a fixed substance. For Hegel, the self (Geist — Spirit or Mind) is not a given reality but an ongoing achievement — a process of self-differentiation, self-alienation, and return to self through which consciousness progressively comes to know and be itself.

This processual, dialectical understanding of the self has interesting parallels with the yoga philosophical understanding of the unfolding of consciousness through the tattvas of Samkhya cosmology, and with the Tantric understanding of Shiva-Shakti as the self-differentiation of pure consciousness into the multiplicity of experience. The important difference is directionality: for Hegel, self-realisation is achieved through engagement with the world, through history and social struggle. For yoga philosophy, self-realisation is achieved through the progressive withdrawal of consciousness from its identifications with the world, toward its own pure nature.

Sartre — Radical Freedom and the Constructed Self

Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist account of the self represents the most radical affirmation of individual freedom in Western philosophy. For Sartre, 'existence precedes essence': there is no pre-given human nature, no fixed self that precedes the choices and actions through which the human being creates itself. The human being is 'condemned to be free' — there is no God, no fixed nature, no social role that determines what one must be. The self is radically self-created, moment by moment, through one's choices.

Sartre's radical freedom is a powerful corrective to every form of determinism and fatalism, and it shares yoga philosophy's insistence on the possibility of radical transformation of the self. But it differs from yoga in a crucial respect: for Sartre, the fundamental structure of consciousness is a permanent, un-fillable void — 'being-for-itself' is the nothingness that reaches toward 'being-in-itself' (the fullness of purely objective being) and can never be satisfied. For yoga philosophy, the fundamental nature of the self is not void but fullness — Sat-Chit-Ananda, pure being, pure consciousness, pure bliss.

Thinker	Account of the Self	Liberation/Fulfilment
Upanishads (Atman)	Atman = Brahman; eternal, pure, self-luminous consciousness identical with the universal ground	Moksha: direct recognition of one's identity with Brahman; permanent liberation from suffering
Patanjali (Yoga)	Purusha = pure witness consciousness, distinct from but entangled with Prakriti (mind/matter)	Kaivalya: discrimination of Purusha from Prakriti; pure consciousness resting in its own nature
Buddhist (Anatman)	No permanent self; self is a conventional designation for a stream of causally connected experiences	Nirvana: cessation of the grasping, craving self; liberation through recognition of no-self
Descartes	Self = individual thinking substance (res cogitans), certain of its own existence but mysterious in its relation to the body	Rational clarity; the clear and distinct ideas of the thinking mind

Hume	Self = bundle of perceptions; no permanent underlying subject behind the flow of experience	Philosophical equanimity; recognising illusions without claiming to replace them with truth
Hegel	Self = dialectical process of Geist's self-realisation through history and social life	Absolute Knowing: Geist fully knowing itself as the Absolute through human history and culture
Sartre	Self = radical freedom; existence precedes essence; self is continuously self-created	Authentic existence: owning one's radical freedom and accepting responsibility without illusion

5.5 Synthesis — What the Comparison Reveals

The comparison of yogic and Western theories of the self reveals a remarkable philosophical geography. At one extreme are the positions that affirm a fixed, substantial self: Descartes' thinking substance, the ordinary human assumption of a permanent individual identity. At the other extreme are the positions that deny any self: Hume's bundle theory, Buddhist Anatman, and certain strands of postmodern thought. Between these extremes are positions that understand the self as dynamic, relational, or processual: Hegel's dialectical Geist, Sartre's self-creating freedom, and the Sartrean existentialists more broadly.

The unique position of the Upanishadic-Advaita tradition is that it makes a move none of the Western positions quite makes: it simultaneously denies the ordinary, empirical self as a permanent, bounded entity AND affirms the existence of a deeper, universal Self (Atman-Brahman) that underlies and pervades all individual appearances of selfhood. This is neither the Cartesian affirmation of an individual self, nor the Humean denial of any self, nor the Hegelian understanding of self as process — it is a recognition of the Self as the ground of all process, all experience, and all reality.

For the yoga teacher, this synthesis has profound pedagogical implications. Students come with many different implicit theories of self — Cartesian isolationism, Humean scepticism, Sartrean freedom, simple everyday assumption of a fixed personal identity. Each of these positions is an opening: Descartes affirms the certainty of consciousness; Hume prepares the ground for the deconstruction of false self-identification; Sartre affirms radical freedom and transformation. Your

teaching, informed by the yogic tradition, meets each student where their implicit theory of self has brought them, and gently invites them toward the deeper inquiry.

5.6 Reflection Questions

- When you look inward right now, do you find a fixed, permanent self — or a flow of experiences? What is the difference between Hume's answer to this question and Patanjali's?
- Sartre says existence precedes essence — there is no fixed human nature. How does this compare with the yogic teaching that the true Self (Atman/Purusha) is the eternal, unchanging ground of all experience? Are these irreconcilably opposed, or is there a synthesis?
- Your student says: 'I don't believe in a soul — science has shown the self is just the brain.' How do you engage with this philosophically, without being dismissive of either science or yoga?

CHAPTER 6

Time, Impermanence, and Eternity

Kaala, Maya, and the Western Experience of Time

Kshana pratiyogi parinama aparanta nirgrahyah kramah — Yoga Sutras 4.33

— The sequence of moments that correspond to changes form the substance of time, comprehensible only at the final moment of transformation

6.1 The Philosophical Problem of Time

The human experience of time is one of the most philosophically enigmatic features of consciousness. We are creatures of time — we live in a continuous flow from past through present into future. And yet, when philosophers have examined time with careful attention, it consistently reveals itself as far more mysterious than it appears in ordinary experience. What is the present moment? By the time we name it, it has become the past. What is the past? It no longer exists. What is the future? It does not yet exist. Does time exist independently of consciousness, or is it a feature of the way consciousness organises experience?

Both the yogic tradition and the Western philosophical tradition have engaged with these questions with extraordinary depth, and their divergent and convergent answers illuminate some of the most practically important aspects of yoga philosophy — including the understanding of karma, the nature of liberation, and the yogic claim that there is a dimension of existence that is timelessly present beneath the temporal flux of ordinary experience.

6.2 Time in the Yogic Tradition — Kaala and Kshana

The yogic tradition approaches the phenomenon of time through several interrelated conceptual frameworks. The Sanskrit word for time is Kaala — a term that encompasses not only chronological time but also fate, opportunity, and the temporal dimension of cosmic cycles (the four Yugas). Patanjali, in the Yoga Sutras (4.12–4.14), gives a sophisticated philosophical analysis of time: the past and future exist in the present as different forms of the same substance (dharma), and what we call time is the sequence of moments (kshanas) in which qualities (dharmas) manifest.

More fundamentally, yoga philosophy distinguishes between the time-bound dimension of existence (the realm of Prakriti, which is subject to the three modalities of past, present, and future) and the timeless dimension of Purusha-consciousness (which is, in itself, not subject to temporal sequence). The liberation of the yogi — Kaivalya — is precisely the recognition of one's identity with the timeless witness (Purusha) rather than with the time-bound contents of experience (the vrittis of chitta).

Maya and the Cosmic Illusion of Time

In the Advaita Vedanta framework, time itself is understood as part of the cosmic appearance (Maya) through which the timeless, eternal Brahman appears as a world of temporal flux. This is a position of remarkable philosophical boldness: time is not an ultimate feature of reality but an appearance within the timeless awareness of Brahman. This does not mean that time is 'unreal' in the ordinary sense — within the domain of Maya, time is perfectly real and practically important. But it is not the ultimate truth of reality.

The Mandukya Upanishad's analysis of the four states of consciousness — waking (jagrat), dreaming (svapna), deep sleep (sushupti), and the fourth (Turiya) — is directly relevant here. In the waking and dreaming states, time and change are the fundamental features of experience. In deep sleep, time and change are absent — yet consciousness does not disappear (we know, upon waking, that we slept). Turiya — pure witness-consciousness — is described as the substrate of all three states, present throughout yet itself untouched by time: nitya, eternal.

6.3 Western Engagements with Time

Heraclitus — The River of Change

Heraclitus of Ephesus, the great Pre-Socratic whose thought most closely approaches certain dimensions of the yogic worldview, made the famous observation: 'You cannot step into the same river twice.' His philosophy of panta rhei — everything flows — affirms that change is the fundamental character of reality: 'All is flux, nothing stands still.' For Heraclitus, the only constant is change itself, held in dynamic tension by the Logos — the universal reason or principle that governs the pattern of change.

This is precisely the perspective that Advaita Vedanta would ascribe to the realm of Maya: within the domain of temporal experience, Heraclitus is absolutely right — everything is in constant flux. But what Heraclitus did not fully articulate (though his concept of the Logos gestures toward it) is the timeless awareness that witnesses this flux without itself being subject to it. The Logos as the unchanging pattern within change approaches, but does not fully reach, the yogic understanding of Purusha or Brahman as the timeless witness of temporal experience.

Heraclitus of Ephesus
c. 535–475 BCE | Pre-Socratic Philosophy
Key Insight: Everything flows — panta rhei. 'The river is the same and not the same; we are and are not.' The Logos is the hidden unity that governs all flux. 'Character is fate.'

Heidegger — Being-toward-Death and Authentic Temporality

Martin Heidegger's analysis of time and human existence in Being and Time (1927) offers one of the most profound and challenging points of comparison with the yoga philosophical understanding of time and liberation. Heidegger's central insight is that human existence is fundamentally temporal — and that the most revealing feature of human temporality is death: the certain, indefinitely future end of all my possibilities. Heidegger calls this structure Being-toward-death, and he argues that authentic human existence — Eigentlichkeit — requires the courageous confrontation with one's own finitude.

For Heidegger, most human beings flee from this confrontation into what he calls Das Man — the anonymous 'they' of everyday social existence, where one lives as 'one' lives, doing what 'one' does, without owning one's unique temporal existence with its finite horizon. Authentic existence requires resolutely owning one's Being-toward-death — not as a morbid obsession, but as the liberating recognition that each moment matters because it cannot be repeated.

This has remarkable parallels with certain dimensions of yoga philosophy — particularly the teachings on Vairagya (dispassion, usually cultivated partly through the contemplation of impermanence) and the various yogic practices that involve contemplation of death (maranasmarana). But the comparison also reveals a crucial difference: for Heidegger, authentic existence is achieved by fully owning one's temporal, finite existence. For yoga philosophy,

authentic existence is achieved by recognising one's identity with the timeless, the eternal — not by embracing finitude but by discovering what is beyond finitude.

Martin Heidegger
1889–1976 | Existentialist Phenomenology
Key Insight: Dasein (human existence) is Being-toward-death. Authentic existence requires owning one's temporality and finitude. Being itself — the question of what it means to be — is the deepest philosophical question, systematically forgotten by Western philosophy.

Henri Bergson — Duration and the Living Present

Henri Bergson's philosophy of time, developed in works including Time and Free Will (1889) and Creative Evolution (1907), offers another rich comparative resource. Bergson distinguished between two radically different understandings of time: clock-time (temps) — time as measured, spatial, quantitative, divisible — and duration (durée) — time as it is actually lived, as a continuous, indivisible flow of experience that cannot be adequately captured by any spatial or quantitative representation.

Bergson's concept of duration has a notable parallel with the yogic understanding of the present moment as lived experience (rather than as a mathematical point on a time-line). Both Bergson and the yogic tradition are making the same fundamental point: the scientific-mathematical understanding of time as a series of discrete, identical units misses the qualitative reality of lived temporal experience. And both point toward a direct, non-conceptual apprehension of temporal reality that goes beyond the analytical intellect — Bergson through philosophical intuition, yoga through meditative awareness.

6.4 Practical Implications — Teaching Time and Presence

The philosophical analysis of time has immediate and practical implications for the yoga teacher. One of the most consistent experiences reported by students in yoga and meditation practice is a shift in the quality of temporal experience: the slowing of subjective time, the deepening of the sense of the present moment, the gradual diminishment of anxious future-orientation and regretful past-orientation. These are not mere psychological relaxation effects — they are shifts in the relationship between consciousness and time that the greatest philosophers of both East and West have recognised as philosophically significant.

When you guide a student into a deep forward fold and invite them to stay with the quality of sensation in this moment, you are doing far more than stretching their hamstrings. You are initiating them into a different relationship with time — away from the Heideggerian flight into Das Man and toward the yogic cultivation of present-moment awareness. Understanding the philosophical depth of what you are guiding students toward makes you a teacher who can meet their deepest questions with substance and conviction.

> *"Every meditation session is a philosophical experiment: can I rest in the awareness that does not come and go with time? Can I be the witness of time rather than a prisoner of it?"*
>
> *— Dr. Shivam Mishra*

6.5 Reflection Questions

- In your own meditation practice, have you encountered a quality of awareness that seems independent of temporal sequence? How would you describe it? How does it relate to what Patanjali calls Purusha?
- Heidegger says authentic existence requires owning one's Being-toward-death. Does yoga philosophy agree or disagree? What is the yogic teaching on mortality and its relationship to liberation?
- How do you teach the value of present-moment awareness to students who live in constant future anxiety or past regret? What philosophical resources from both traditions support this teaching?

PART III

Epistemology — How Do We Know?

CHAPTER 7

The Sources of Knowledge

Pramana and Western Epistemology

Pratyaksha anumanagamah pramanani — Yoga Sutras 1.7

— The valid sources of knowledge are direct perception, inference, and authoritative testimony

7.1 The Epistemological Question

Epistemology — the philosophical study of the nature, sources, and limits of human knowledge — is one of the central disciplines of philosophy in both the Eastern and Western traditions. Before we can make any claim about the nature of reality, the self, or the path to liberation, we must ask: how do we know what we know? What counts as genuine knowledge as opposed to mere opinion, belief, or illusion? What are the valid instruments of knowledge, and what are their limits?

The yoga philosophical tradition's systematic treatment of this question — through the concept of Pramana (valid sources of knowledge) and the extensive analysis of the mind's epistemological operations — is one of its most sophisticated contributions to world philosophy and one of the richest areas of comparison with Western epistemology. The comparison reveals both remarkable convergences and significant differences that illuminate the unique character of each tradition.

7.2 Pramana — The Yoga Theory of Valid Knowledge

Patanjali identifies three Pramanas (valid sources of right knowledge) in Yoga Sutra 1.7: Pratyaksha (direct perception), Anumana (inference), and Agama (authoritative testimony or scripture). This tripartite classification is shared, with variations, by most of the classical Indian philosophical schools. Understanding each source and its relationship to the others is fundamental to understanding how the yoga tradition understands the epistemological journey from ordinary human knowledge to the liberating knowledge of Samadhi.

Pratyaksha — Direct Perception

Pratyaksha (literally 'before the eye' or 'directly evident') is the knowledge arising from direct sensory and perceptual experience. It is the most immediate and, in most Indian philosophical schools, the most fundamental of the Pramanas — the foundation upon which all other knowledge ultimately rests. But the yoga tradition is profoundly aware of the limitations of ordinary sensory perception: the senses can be deceived (a straight stick appears bent in water), the mind structures what the senses report (we see what we expect to see), and the deepest realities — the nature of Purusha, the ground of consciousness — are entirely beyond the reach of sensory perception.

The yoga tradition therefore expands the concept of Pratyaksha to include a higher form of direct perception that becomes available through the meditative practices: Yogic Pratyaksha — the direct perceptual awareness that arises in the deepened states of Samadhi, in which Purusha perceives reality as it is without the distorting mediation of the ordinary mind. This expansion of the concept of Pratyaksha is one of the most important and distinctive epistemological contributions of the yoga tradition: it claims that there is a form of direct knowledge available through practice that transcends the limitations of ordinary sensory cognition.

Anumana — Inference

Anumana (literally 'measuring from what remains') is the knowledge arising from logical inference from known facts to unknown conclusions. The classical Indian example: I cannot see the fire on the hill, but I see smoke, and where there is smoke there is fire — therefore there is fire on the hill. The Nyaya school developed an extraordinarily rigorous theory of inference and syllogism that in some respects anticipates Aristotelian logic, though the two systems developed independently.

The yoga tradition values inference as an important epistemological tool, particularly in philosophical investigation, but recognises its fundamental limitation: inference can only operate within the domain of the already-known. The nature of Purusha-consciousness — which is, by definition, not an object and not within the domain of the already-known — cannot be arrived at by inference alone. Inference can point toward it, can eliminate false conceptions, can prepare the mind for direct realisation — but the realisation itself requires the third Pramana and ultimately the direct yogic perception of Samadhi.

Agama — Authoritative Testimony and Scripture

Agama (also called Shabda — the Pramana of 'word' or testimony) is the knowledge arising from authoritative testimony — primarily, in the Indian context, from the revealed scriptures (Shruti — 'that which is heard,' i.e., the Vedas and Upanishads) and from the testimony of reliable, trustworthy teachers. This Pramana is at the centre of important philosophical debates between the Indian schools: the Mimamsa school treats Vedic testimony as the highest and most fundamental Pramana; the Nyaya and Yoga schools treat it as one valid source among several; some Buddhist schools reject scriptural authority altogether.

The philosophical question raised by Agama is: under what conditions is the testimony of another a valid source of knowledge for me? The Indian philosophical tradition's answer involves several conditions: the source must be non-defective (not mistaken, not lying, not confused), the transmission must be accurate, and — critically — the testimony must be verified by the other Pramanas wherever possible. The yoga teacher who simply repeats what they have been taught without direct experiential verification is not practising genuine Agama Pramana — they are practising intellectual transmission without the validation that makes it a genuine source of knowledge.

Pramana	Definition	Western Equivalent	Limitation (Yogic View)
Pratyaksha (Direct Perception)	Knowledge through direct sensory or perceptual experience; extended to Yogic direct perception	Empiricism (Locke, Hume); Phenomenology (Husserl, Merleau-Ponty)	Ordinary senses are limited, deceivable, and mind-structured; cannot perceive Purusha directly
Anumana (Inference)	Knowledge through valid logical inference from known facts to unknown conclusions	Rationalism (Descartes, Leibniz); Aristotelian logic; Scientific method	Cannot go beyond the domain of what is already known; cannot arrive at pure consciousness by inference
Agama (Testimony/Scripture)	Knowledge through reliable testimony of enlightened teachers and authentic	Tradition; Authority; Testimony in epistemology	Dependent on reliability of source and transmission; must be verified by practice

	scriptures		
Samadhi Prajna (Yogic Knowledge)	Direct, unmediated knowledge arising in the highest states of meditation — beyond the three ordinary Pramanas	Mystical experience (James); Intellectual intuition (Bergson); Peak experience (Maslow)	Not publicly verifiable in ordinary scientific sense; requires extensive practice to access

7.3 Western Epistemology — The Rationalism-Empiricism Debate

Rationalism — The Priority of Reason

The Rationalist tradition in Western philosophy — represented primarily by Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz — argues that genuine knowledge cannot be grounded in sensory experience alone. The senses are unreliable; the physical world is subject to illusion and change. Genuine knowledge is achieved through reason alone: through the innate ideas that reason discovers within itself, through mathematical demonstration, through the clear and distinct perceptions of the rational intellect.

Descartes' method of radical doubt is the paradigmatic rationalist epistemological procedure: systematically reject everything that can be doubted, until you arrive at certainties that reason itself guarantees. The cogito is the first such certainty; from it, Descartes derives the existence of God and the reliability of clear and distinct ideas. Spinoza developed this rationalist method into a complete philosophy demonstrated more geometrico — in the geometric manner, like a mathematical proof.

The Rationalist tradition has clear affinities with certain aspects of the Vedantic approach to knowledge: both privilege a non-sensory form of knowing (reason for Rationalism; spiritual intuition/Samadhi for Vedanta), both are suspicious of ordinary sensory experience as the ultimate ground of knowledge, and both seek certainty rather than mere probability. The key difference: Rationalism locates the highest form of knowledge in the reasoning intellect (buddhi in the Samkhya framework — still part of Prakriti); yoga philosophy points beyond even the intellect to the direct self-luminous awareness of Purusha.

Empiricism — The Priority of Experience

The Empiricist tradition — Locke, Berkeley, and Hume — argues the opposite: the mind at birth is a tabula rasa (blank slate), and all knowledge ultimately derives from sensory experience. There are no innate ideas; all concepts are abstracted from experience. Hume took this position to its radical conclusion: if we can only know what experience gives us, then we cannot know the existence of God, the self, the external world, or the necessary connection between causes and effects — only the constant conjunction of our experiences.

Empiricism's strengths are its methodological rigour, its basis in the actual practice of natural science, and its healthy scepticism about speculative metaphysics. Its weakness — from the yogic perspective — is precisely that it limits the domain of valid knowledge to what the ordinary senses and the mind abstracted from them can provide. If the nature of pure consciousness (Purusha) is not accessible to ordinary sensory experience — as yoga philosophy claims — then Empiricism, by its own epistemological principles, would have to deny that this knowledge is possible. This is precisely the kind of limitation that the expanded Pramana framework of yoga — including Samadhi Prajna — is designed to address.

David Hume

1711–1776 | Scottish Empiricism

Key Insight: All ideas are copies of impressions. Causality is not logically necessary but a habit of the mind. The self is a bundle of perceptions. Custom, not reason, is the great guide of life — a radically deflating conclusion that Kant called his awakening from 'dogmatic slumber.'

Kant's Synthesis — Transcendental Epistemology

Kant's great philosophical achievement — the Critique of Pure Reason (1781) — was his synthesis of Rationalism and Empiricism that simultaneously salvaged the achievements of both traditions and transformed the entire field. Kant agreed with the Empiricists that all knowledge begins with experience, but he argued with the Rationalists that not all knowledge comes from experience. Some knowledge — specifically, the forms of intuition (space and time) and the categories of understanding (causality, substance, unity, etc.) — are contributed by the mind itself, as the necessary conditions for experience to be possible at all.

This 'Copernican revolution' — making objects conform to the structures of the mind rather than the mind conform to objects — is profoundly relevant to yoga epistemology. Patanjali's entire

programme of yogic practice can be read as an extended epistemological project: the investigation and eventual transcendence of the mind's structuring of experience, in order to arrive at an awareness that is no longer filtered through the mental categories that Kant identified as the permanent, inescapable structure of human cognition. Where Kant concluded that the mind's categories are inescapable, yoga claims that through the cultivation of Samadhi, they can be transcended — not ignored, but seen through, in the direct awareness of pure Purusha-consciousness.

7.4 The Unique Claim of Yogic Epistemology

The most distinctive and philosophically bold claim of yoga epistemology is that there is a form of direct knowledge — Samadhi Prajna — that transcends the limitations of all three ordinary Pramanas. In the deepened states of Samadhi, consciousness is no longer filtered through the vrittis (modifications) of chitta; it encounters reality directly, without the mediation of perceptual apparatus, inferential processes, or conceptual frameworks.

William James, in The Varieties of Religious Experience (1902), identified four characteristics of mystical experience that are directly relevant here: noetic quality (mystical states have the character of knowledge — they are felt as genuine insights into reality, not merely as pleasant feelings), ineffability (they cannot be adequately expressed in ordinary language), transiency (they do not last), and passivity (the subject feels as if they are in the grasp of a superior power). James' noetic quality is precisely what the yoga tradition means by Samadhi Prajna — the direct, self-certifying quality of knowledge that arises in the depths of meditative absorption.

William James

1842–1910 | American Pragmatism / Psychology of Religion

Key Insight: Mystical states are noetic — they carry the authority of genuine knowledge. 'The dumbness of being' is our natural condition; mysticism is its temporary overcoming. The varieties of religious experience point toward a reality beyond the reach of ordinary consciousness.

7.5 Reflection Questions

- In your yoga practice, have you experienced a form of knowing that felt different from sensory perception, inference, or what you had been taught? How would you describe it? Does it fit the category of Samadhi Prajna?

- Kant says the mind's categories (including causality) are imposed on experience rather than derived from it. How does this relate to the yoga philosophical understanding of how chitta structures experience?
- How do you handle the epistemological challenge in teaching: when a student asks 'How do you know the things you teach about consciousness are true?'

CHAPTER 8

The Limits of the Mind

Maya, Avidya, and Western Epistemic Humility

Na tatra suryo bhati na candra tarakam — Katha Upanishad 2.2.15

— There the sun does not shine, nor the moon, nor the stars — that light by which all these are illuminated, that alone shines

8.1 The Paradox of the Knowing Mind

One of the deepest themes in both yoga philosophy and the Western philosophical tradition is the paradox of the mind that attempts to know itself. The mind is the instrument of knowledge — and it is also the object to be known. But can any instrument fully know itself? Can the eye see itself directly? Can the measuring rod measure itself? The yogic answer — and the answer of several important Western philosophers — is that the ordinary mind cannot fully know itself, because it is always, in its ordinary operations, entangled with the very processes it is trying to examine. This limitation of the ordinary mind is what yoga philosophy calls Maya and Avidya, and what several important Western philosophers have identified through different conceptual frameworks.

8.2 Maya — The Cosmic Power of Appearance

Maya is one of the most complex and most misunderstood concepts in the yoga philosophical tradition. It is commonly translated as 'illusion,' but this translation is misleading if it suggests that the world of experience is simply unreal — like a dream from which we will simply wake to find it was nothing. The Advaita Vedanta understanding of Maya is far more nuanced: the phenomenal world is neither simply real (since it is not the ultimate reality — Brahman) nor simply unreal (since it appears, it is experienced, it has practical consequences). It is anirvachaniya — indescribable as either real or unreal.

Shankaracharya's analysis of Maya identifies two fundamental operations: Avarana Shakti (the power of concealment) — Maya conceals the true nature of Brahman, making the unlimited appear as limited, the non-dual appear as dual, the impermanent appear as permanent. Vikshepa Shakti

(the power of projection) — Maya projects a false appearance in place of the concealed reality: it projects the multiplicity of the phenomenal world, the individuality of the separate self, the solidity of material objects, in place of the single, undivided Brahman.

This double operation of concealment and projection is philosophically precise and practically important. It explains why ordinary human experience feels so convincing — Maya does not simply subtract reality; it replaces one reality with an apparently equally vivid and self-consistent alternative reality. This is why, from within ordinary experience, the yogic teaching that the world of multiplicity and individuality is not the ultimate truth seems so counterintuitive, so philosophically exotic. Maya is doing its job well.

8.3 Avidya — The Root Ignorance

If Maya is the cosmic power of appearance, Avidya is its psychological correlate — the fundamental ignorance at the root of individual human suffering. Patanjali identifies Avidya as the first and root Klesha (affliction) in Yoga Sutras 2.4–2.5, describing it as: mistaking the impermanent for the permanent, the impure for the pure, the painful for the pleasurable, and the non-self for the Self. This is not ordinary factual ignorance (not knowing a specific piece of information) but a primordial misorientation of consciousness — the fundamental error of misidentifying the Purusha (pure consciousness) with the modifications of Prakriti (the mind and its contents).

The practical consequence of Avidya is the entire structure of human suffering: because I misidentify with a particular body, mind, and story, I grasp at what seems to support this misidentified self and push away what seems to threaten it. This grasping and aversion — the second and third Kleshas — generate the karma that perpetuates the cycle of suffering. Liberation (Moksha, Kaivalya) is therefore, at its most fundamental level, an epistemological event: the dissolution of Avidya and the recognition of the true nature of the Self.

8.4 Plato's Allegory of the Cave — Structural Parallels

Plato's famous Allegory of the Cave (Republic, Book VII) offers one of the richest points of structural comparison between the Western and yogic philosophical traditions on the question of cognitive limitation and liberation. In the allegory, prisoners are chained in a cave, facing a wall

on which shadows of objects are projected. They have never seen the actual objects, let alone the sunlight outside the cave. They mistake the shadows for the only reality, and they even develop considerable expertise in predicting the sequence of shadows.

When one prisoner is freed and led, painfully and reluctantly, through the difficult ascent to the sunlight outside the cave, he first sees the actual objects casting the shadows, then the stars and moon, and finally — the climax of the ascent — the sun itself, the source of all visible light and (allegorically) of all truth and being. When he returns to the cave to share what he has seen, the remaining prisoners regard him as having gone mad — his eyes have adjusted to the light and can no longer see the shadows clearly.

The structural parallel with the Maya-Avidya framework is unmistakable: the prisoners mistake appearances (Maya) for reality due to their constrained epistemic situation (Avidya); the liberated prisoner has come to know reality as it is (Brahma-jnana); the difficulty of sharing this knowledge with those still in the cave is the classic problem of the teacher of liberation. Even the violence of the transition — the pain of the prisoner's eyes adjusting to the light — parallels the yogic understanding that the dissolution of deep-seated Avidya is not always comfortable.

Epistemic Liberation — Plato's Cave Allegory

- Prisoners = ordinary humans trapped in Maya-like illusion of shadow-reality
- Chains = Avidya — fundamental cognitive limitation
- The painful ascent = the philosophical/spiritual path
- The sun = the Form of the Good (equivalent to Brahman/Purusha)
- The liberated prisoner = the philosopher/sage
- Return to the cave = the teacher's mission (cf. the Bodhisattva)

Epistemic Liberation — Yogic Maya-Avidya Framework

- Chitta-vrittis = the projected appearances of ordinary experience
- Avidya = fundamental misidentification of self with non-self
- Yoga practice = the progressive purification of the mind (chitta shuddhi)
- Brahman/Purusha = ultimate reality beyond all mental modifications
- Samadhi = the direct apprehension of reality beyond Maya
- The yoga teacher = the one who has seen, returning to guide others

8.5 Kant's Phenomena and Noumena

Kant's distinction between phenomena (things as they appear to us, structured by the forms of intuition and the categories of understanding) and noumena (things as they are in themselves, independently of any epistemic structuring by the mind) is one of the most important and most

discussed contributions of Western philosophy to the question of cognitive limitation. For Kant, the noumenon — the thing-in-itself — is permanently inaccessible to human cognition. We can only ever know phenomena — the world as structured by our cognitive apparatus.

This has a clear structural parallel with the Maya-Avidya framework: for Kant, the mind necessarily constructs the phenomenal world rather than passively receiving reality as it is — just as the yoga philosophical tradition holds that the chitta (mind-stuff), through its vrittis (modifications), constructs the experiential world that appears to the consciousness entangled with it. The key difference, as noted in Chapter 4, is that Kant regards the noumenal reality as permanently inaccessible, while yoga philosophy claims that through the deepened practices of Samadhi, the veil of chitta-vrittis can be stilled, and consciousness can encounter reality directly.

This difference is not merely theoretical — it has profound practical implications. Kant's position leads to a kind of epistemic modesty that has been enormously productive for Western science and philosophy: we must work within the limits of our cognitive apparatus and resist the temptation to make claims about what lies beyond it. Yoga's position leads to a very different conclusion: the limits of ordinary cognition are not fixed limits of consciousness as such, but limits of consciousness identified with the mind — and those limits can be transcended through systematic practice.

8.6 Wittgenstein — The Limits of Language

Ludwig Wittgenstein's famous conclusion to the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus — 'Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent' (Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen) — represents one of the Western philosophical tradition's most direct engagements with the limits of linguistic cognition. For Wittgenstein (in his early philosophy), the world consists of facts that can be pictured in language; but the limits of the world are also the limits of language, and there are things — value, meaning, the mystical — that cannot be said but can only be shown.

This convergence with the yogic tradition's insistence on the ineffability of the highest states of realisation — the Upanishadic Neti, neti ('not this, not this' — the only adequate description of Brahman is the negation of all inadequate descriptions) — is striking. Both Wittgenstein and the Upanishadic tradition are pointing at the same boundary: the edge of what language can

legitimately say, beyond which lies a domain that can only be pointed at, hinted at, gestured toward — and ultimately must be directly realised.

> *"The highest teaching cannot be said — it can only be transmitted. The finger pointing at the moon is not the moon. But without the finger, how would you know where to look?"*
>
> — *Dr. Shivam Mishra*

8.7 Reflection Questions

- In your own meditation practice, have you encountered the 'concealment' and 'projection' operations of Maya — moments when the ordinary world seemed to be constructed rather than simply given? Describe the experience.
- Plato's prisoners consider the person who has seen the sun to be mad. Have you encountered this in your own experience as a yoga practitioner or teacher? How do you handle the challenge of sharing realisations that resist ordinary verification?
- Wittgenstein says we must be silent about what cannot be said. What does this imply for how you teach the deepest aspects of yoga philosophy? When is silence more powerful than speech?

CHAPTER 9

Consciousness and Experience

Chitta, Phenomenology, and the Philosophy of Mind

Chitta vritti nirodhah — Yoga Sutras 1.2

— Yoga is the cessation of the fluctuations of the mind-field

9.1 The Turn Toward Experience

One of the most significant developments in both Eastern and Western philosophy is what might be called the 'turn toward experience' — the systematic investigation of the structure, quality, and conditions of conscious experience itself, rather than simply arguing about the nature of an external world that is assumed to be independent of experience. In the West, this turn is associated above all with the philosophical movement known as Phenomenology, founded by Edmund Husserl in the early 20th century. In the yogic tradition, it has been central from the very beginning: the Yoga Sutras are, at their core, a systematic phenomenology of consciousness — a detailed, rigorous account of the structure of mental experience and the stages of its purification and transcendence.

9.2 Yoga's Map of the Mind — Chitta and Its Modifications

Patanjali's analysis of the mind is one of the most sophisticated psycho-philosophical maps of consciousness in any tradition. The Sanskrit term chitta — usually translated as 'mind-stuff,' 'consciousness,' or 'the mind-field' — refers to the entire field of mental activity: not just the thinking mind, but the complete substrate of psychological experience including perception, memory, imagination, emotion, and the deep unconscious processes.

Chitta has three principal functions or aspects: Manas (the sensory-processing mind — the faculty that receives and coordinates sensory input); Buddhi (the discriminative intellect — the faculty of judgment, discrimination, and decision); and Ahamkara (the ego or self-sense — the faculty that appropriates experience as 'mine' and creates the sense of individual identity). Together, these three aspects constitute what the yoga tradition calls the Antahkarana — the inner instrument of consciousness.

The Vrittis — Modifications of the Mind

Patanjali identifies five types of Vrittis — modifications or fluctuations of the chitta — in Yoga Sutras 1.5–1.11: Pramana (right knowledge — the vrittis corresponding to the valid Pramanas discussed in Chapter 7); Viparyaya (wrong knowledge — the vrittis corresponding to mistaken cognition); Vikalpa (imagination or conceptual construction without a corresponding real object); Nidra (deep sleep — the vritti corresponding to the absence of other vrittis); and Smriti (memory — the vrittis corresponding to the retention of past experience).

This classification is not merely academic — it is the foundation of yoga's entire meditative programme. The goal of yoga (chitta vritti nirodhah) is the cessation of these modifications: not the destruction of the mind, but the stilling of its constant fluctuations, so that the pure consciousness of Purusha can be revealed, undistorted by the turbulence of ordinary mental activity. This is precisely parallel to the Upanishadic metaphor of the lake: when the waters are disturbed, the reflection of the sun on the surface is fragmented and distorted; when the waters are still, the sun is reflected perfectly.

9.3 Husserl and Phenomenology — Consciousness as Intentional

Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), the founder of Phenomenology, made a fundamental philosophical discovery that he called intentionality: consciousness is always consciousness of something. There is no such thing as pure, contentless consciousness — every mental act (perceiving, judging, imagining, remembering, desiring) is directed toward an object. This directedness toward an object is the defining structural feature of consciousness.

Husserl's phenomenological method — the epoché or 'bracketing' — involves suspending the natural attitude (the ordinary, unreflective assumption that the world exists independently of our experience of it) and attending purely to the structures of experience itself, exactly as it appears to consciousness. This is, in its methodological intention, closely related to the yogic practice of Pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses) and Dharana (concentration): both involve a deliberate withdrawal from the natural attitude toward reality and a turn toward the direct, careful observation of the structure of conscious experience.

Edmund Husserl

1859–1938 | Phenomenology (Founder)

Key Insight: Consciousness is always intentional — directed toward an object. Phenomenology studies the essential structures of consciousness through the epoché: bracketing the natural attitude and attending purely to what appears, exactly as it appears, to consciousness.

The comparison with yoga's approach to consciousness is rich and complex. Both Husserl and Patanjali begin with the direct observation of the structure of mental experience. Both identify the habitual, unreflective orientation toward the external world as philosophically problematic. Both prescribe a method of deliberately examining the mind's own operations. The crucial difference is in the ultimate aim and the ultimate finding: Husserl's phenomenological analysis reveals the essential structures of intentional consciousness — it is a philosophy of consciousness's structure. Yoga's meditation practice aims at the dissolution of those very structures — the cessation of the vrittis — to reveal what lies beyond the structured, intentional mind: pure, objectless awareness.

Merleau-Ponty — The Phenomenology of the Body

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961) extended Husserlian phenomenology in a direction that has particular relevance for yoga teaching: the phenomenology of the body. Against the Cartesian legacy that treated the body as a mere object (res extensa), Merleau-Ponty argued that the lived body (le corps propre — one's own body as experienced from the inside) is not an object among objects but the very ground of all experience — the original 'zero point' from which all other objects are perceived and all experience is organised.

Merleau-Ponty's concept of the 'body schema' — the pre-reflective, pre-conceptual bodily intelligence through which we navigate the world without conscious deliberation — is directly relevant to the yoga teaching of pranamaya kosha and the yogic understanding of the relationship between consciousness and the body. Both traditions are pointing at the same reality: the body is not merely an object that consciousness inhabits, but an intelligent, responsive, experienced reality that is continuous with consciousness in ways that Cartesian dualism entirely misses.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty

1908–1961 | Phenomenology of Embodiment

Key Insight: The lived body is not an object in consciousness but the vehicle of being in the world. The body has its own intelligence — a pre-reflective bodily knowledge that precedes and underlies all explicit cognition. Consciousness is not in the body; consciousness is embodied.

9.4 William James and the Stream of Consciousness

William James (1842–1910), the founder of American pragmatism and one of the pioneers of modern psychology, developed an account of consciousness in his Principles of Psychology (1890) that has important parallels with the yoga philosophical understanding of the chitta. James described consciousness as a continuous 'stream' — not a series of discrete, separate mental events, but a flowing continuity that includes not only clear, focal thoughts and perceptions but also the 'fringe' — the vague, felt quality of meaning, transition, and relation that surrounds every explicit thought and gives it its sense of connection to what came before and what follows.

James also made crucial contributions to the psychology of religious and mystical experience in The Varieties of Religious Experience (1902). His identification of four characteristics of mystical experience — noetic quality, ineffability, transiency, and passivity — constitutes one of the most careful Western philosophical analyses of the states that yoga describes as Samadhi and Moksha. James' pragmatic conclusion — that if mystical states have genuine noetic quality and produce genuine positive transformation in the individual's life, then they should be taken seriously as sources of genuine knowledge — is a remarkable convergence with the yoga philosophical position that Samadhi Prajna is a valid and indeed supreme Pramana.

> *"Our normal waking consciousness is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded."*
>
> — *William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience*

9.5 The Contemporary Philosophy of Mind — The Hard Problem Revisited

Contemporary philosophy of mind and consciousness studies have become one of the most active and contested areas in Western academic philosophy, precisely because the dominant materialist framework struggles to account for the very features of consciousness that the yoga tradition takes as its primary subject matter: the felt quality of experience (qualia), the unity of consciousness, the

first-person perspective, and above all the 'hard problem' of why any physical process should be accompanied by subjective experience at all.

Thomas Nagel's famous essay 'What Is It Like to Be a Bat?' (1974) crystallised the problem: even if we had complete physical knowledge of the bat's neurological processes, we could not, from that knowledge, determine what it is like to be a bat — the subjective, felt quality of echolocation as experienced from the inside. This inside, first-person perspective — what philosophers now call phenomenal consciousness — is precisely what the yoga tradition has been systematically investigating and mapping for thousands of years. The contemporary Western philosophy of mind is, in this sense, catching up with a problematic that yoga philosophy identified and began working on millennia ago.

Philosopher	Key Concept	Parallel in Yoga Philosophy
Husserl	Intentionality — consciousness is always directed toward an object	Chitta-vrittis are always directed toward objects; yoga reverses this toward pure Purusha
Merleau-Ponty	Lived body — the body is the ground of all experience, not a mere object	Pranamaya kosha; the yoga body as intelligent, conscious, experiential reality
William James	Stream of consciousness; noetic quality of mystical states	Chitta as continuous flow; Samadhi Prajna as highest valid source of knowledge
Heidegger	Being-in-the-world — consciousness is always already embedded in a world	Yoga acknowledges the world-embedded nature of consciousness and provides a path beyond it
David Chalmers	Hard problem of consciousness — WHY does any physical process feel like something?	Yoga's answer: because consciousness (Purusha) is primary, not derived from matter
Thomas Nagel	What is it like to be X? — the irreducible first-person perspective	The entire yoga tradition is about the first-person investigation of the nature of that 'what it is like'

9.6 Reflection Questions

- In your asana teaching, how do you teach students to develop phenomenological attention to their bodily experience — the capacity to notice what is actually present rather than what they expect or fear? What methods do you use?
- Merleau-Ponty says the body has its own intelligence that precedes conscious thought. How does this insight enrich your understanding of yoga practice and teaching?
- William James argues that mystical states should be taken seriously as sources of knowledge if they produce genuine positive transformation. Do you agree with this pragmatic criterion? What are its limitations?

PART IV

Ethics and the Human Condition

CHAPTER 10

Suffering and Its Cause

Duhkha, the Kleshas, and Western Philosophy of Suffering

Heyam duhkham anagatam — Yoga Sutras 2.16

— The suffering that has not yet come can and should be avoided

10.1 The Universality of Suffering

If there is one theme that unites the yogic and Western philosophical traditions across all their differences, it is this: the seriousness with which both traditions take the reality of human suffering and the urgency of understanding its causes in order to address them effectively. Philosophy, in both traditions, is not a merely academic exercise — it is driven by the most fundamental practical concern: how can human beings live well, suffer less, and arrive at the fullest possible expression of their nature?

Patanjali's declaration in Yoga Sutra 2.16 — 'The suffering that has not yet come can and should be avoided' — captures the entire practical orientation of yoga philosophy in a single sentence. Yoga is not pessimistic about human potential; it is realistic about the current human condition. Suffering is real, it is pervasive, it has identifiable causes — and it can be addressed. This is the foundational claim from which the entire yogic system flows.

10.2 The Yoga Analysis of Suffering — Duhkha and the Kleshas

The Sanskrit word Duhkha (suffering, dissatisfaction, the fundamental unsatisfactoriness of conditioned existence) is the central problematic of yoga philosophy — as it is of Buddhism. The Bhagavad Gita's first word, significantly, is 'Dharma-kshetre' (on the field of right action) — but the central drama that the Gita addresses is Arjuna's Duhkha, his profound suffering and inability to act in the face of an impossible moral situation.

Patanjali identifies the Kleshas — the five afflictions or mental poisons — as the root causes of all Duhkha:

Klesha	Sanskrit Meaning	Psychological Description	Western Parallel
Avidya	Fundamental ignorance	Misidentifying the impermanent as permanent, the painful as pleasant, the non-self as self — the root of all other afflictions	Plato's ignorance; Sartre's bad faith; Heidegger's Das Man; Freud's repression
Asmita	I-am-ness; ego	The sense of individual selfhood arising from the misidentification of Purusha with Prakriti; the I-maker	Descartes' thinking substance; Freud's ego; the psychological self-concept
Raga	Attachment; attraction	Persistent attraction toward pleasant experiences based on the mistaken assumption that they will produce lasting satisfaction	Freud's libido; the pleasure principle; hedonic adaptation
Dvesha	Aversion; repulsion	Persistent aversion to unpleasant experiences and their associated memories	Freud's thanatos; aggression; pain-avoidance; reactive anger
Abhinivesha	Will to live; fear of death	The instinctive clinging to life and self-preservation that persists even in the wise	Freud's death anxiety; Heidegger's Being-toward-death; Schopenhauer's will-to-live

10.3 Schopenhauer — The Will as Universal Suffering

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) is the Western philosopher who came closest to the Buddhist-yogic understanding of suffering — not coincidentally, given that he was one of the first major Western philosophers to engage seriously and deeply with Indian philosophy. His masterwork, The World as Will and Representation (1818), argues that the fundamental reality of the world is Will — a blind, purposeless, insatiable striving that manifests at every level of nature and finds its highest expression in human consciousness as desire, ambition, sexuality, and the will to live.

Schopenhauer's understanding of suffering is strikingly close to the yogic analysis: suffering arises from desire (Raga), from the will's perpetual striving for satisfactions it can never permanently achieve; from the clinging to existence (Abhinivesha); and from the fundamental illusion (Maya) of individual separateness that drives competitive, self-interested behaviour. His proposed solutions — aesthetic contemplation, compassionate action (Mitleid), and the ultimate denial of the will through asceticism (Tapas) — also closely parallel the yogic path.

Arthur Schopenhauer

1788–1860 | German Idealism / Pessimist Philosophy

Key Insight: The world is will — blind, striving, insatiable. The root of all suffering is desire and the illusion of individuality. Salvation lies in the denial of the will through aesthetic experience, compassion, and ascetic renunciation. 'The Vedas and Upanishads contain the profoundest human wisdom I know.'

10.4 Aristotle — Eudaimonia and the Good Life

Aristotle's approach to the human condition offers a striking contrast with both Schopenhauer and the yogic tradition, while sharing important elements with both. Where Schopenhauer sees the fundamental structure of human existence as suffering, and the yogic tradition sees it as suffering caused by misidentification (from which liberation is possible), Aristotle sees human existence as fundamentally oriented toward Eudaimonia — a term usually translated as 'happiness' or 'flourishing,' but perhaps best understood as 'the fullest expression of the excellent functioning of human nature.'

For Aristotle, Eudaimonia is not a subjective feeling of pleasure but an objective condition of living and acting well — in accordance with reason, in the exercise of virtue, in friendship and community, in the contemplative life of the intellect. The causes of human suffering, for Aristotle, are the failure to live in accordance with reason, the domination of the passions over reason, vicious character, and deficient social circumstances. The remedy is the cultivation of virtue through practice (habituated moral action), the development of practical wisdom (Phronesis), and participation in the good life of the polis.

The Aristotelian and yogic approaches to suffering and wellbeing share several important elements: both are practice-based (virtue for Aristotle, Ashtanga Yoga for Patanjali); both

emphasise the formation of good habits (Aristotle's hexis, the establishment of Samskaras in yoga); both see the cultivation of discriminative wisdom (Phronesis for Aristotle, Viveka for yoga) as central to the good life. The crucial difference is in the analysis of the root cause: for Aristotle, the primary cause of human failure is the domination of appetite over reason — a problem to be solved within the framework of the reasoned life. For yoga, the root cause is the misidentification of the self with the mind — a problem that requires the transcendence of the mind, not merely its better regulation.

10.5 Existentialist Suffering — Sartre, Camus, and the Absurd

The Existentialists — Kierkegaard, Sartre, Camus, and Heidegger — offer analyses of human suffering that arise from the specifically modern experience of radical freedom without a pre-given meaning or purpose. For Sartre, the fundamental structure of human consciousness is anguish (angoisse) — the vertigo of radical freedom, the recognition that there is no pre-given essence determining what one must be or do. For Camus, the fundamental problem is the Absurd — the gap between the human desire for meaning, clarity, and rational purpose and the universe's total silence in response to that desire.

These diagnoses of suffering are importantly different from the yogic analysis. For yoga, suffering arises from Avidya — not knowing one's true nature. For the Existentialists, suffering arises precisely from the clarity of knowing one's situation — that existence has no pre-given meaning, that there is no essential self, that freedom is total and therefore responsibility is absolute. The yogic response to Absurdist suffering would be: the very recognition of the absence of external meaning points toward the discovery of the internal ground — Purusha, Atman — whose nature is Sat-Chit-Ananda (pure being, pure consciousness, pure bliss), which is meaning not given from outside but discovered as the nature of consciousness itself.

> *"Sartre says existence precedes essence — there is no pre-given meaning. The Upanishads say: correct that there is no external essence imposed from outside, but wrong that there is no essence at all. The essence is consciousness itself — Sat-Chit-Ananda — and discovering it is precisely the path."*
>
> *— Dr. Shivam Mishra*

10.6 Reflection Questions

- Match each of the five Kleshas to a specific experience in your own life where you can observe its operation clearly. How does naming the Klesha change your relationship with the experience?
- Aristotle says suffering arises from the dominance of appetite over reason. Yoga says it arises from the misidentification of self with mind. Are these compatible accounts? Which do you find more complete?
- How would you explain the yogic understanding of Duhkha to a student who has a background in cognitive-behavioural therapy or positive psychology? What overlaps and differences would you highlight?

CHAPTER 11

Moral Action

Dharma, Karma, and Western Ethics

Sreyan sva-dharmo vigunah para-dharmat sv-anushtitat — Bhagavad Gita 3.35

— Better is one's own dharma, though imperfectly performed, than the dharma of another well performed

11.1 The Question of How to Live

Ethics — the philosophical investigation of how we ought to live and act — is one of the central preoccupations of both the yoga philosophical tradition and the Western philosophical tradition. How should I act? What do I owe to others? What is virtue, and how is it cultivated? What is the relationship between individual wellbeing and social obligation? These questions are addressed with extraordinary richness and diversity in both traditions.

For the yoga teacher, the ethical dimension of philosophy is not merely theoretical — it is the living foundation of the teaching relationship. Every aspect of how you interact with students, conduct your business, maintain your community, and navigate the complex realities of professional life is an application of ethical philosophy. Understanding the philosophical depth and the different ethical frameworks available — from both the yogic and Western traditions — is essential equipment for the reflective practitioner.

11.2 Dharma and Karma — The Yogic Ethical Framework

Dharma — Right Action in Context

Dharma is one of the most complex and most important concepts in the entire yogic tradition, and one of the most difficult to translate into Western philosophical categories. It is usually rendered as 'duty,' 'righteousness,' 'law,' or 'right action,' but none of these captures the full range of its meaning. Dharma encompasses: the universal moral order that sustains the cosmos (Rita in the Vedic tradition); the social and ethical norms that structure human community; and the individual's unique calling and right way of being in the world — what the Bhagavad Gita calls Svadharma (one's own dharma).

The Bhagavad Gita's ethical teaching is centred on the problem of Dharma in a particularly acute form: Arjuna, a warrior (Kshatriya), faces a battle against his own family and teachers. His Svadharma as a warrior requires him to fight; his Adharma (violation of dharma) would be to abandon the battle out of personal sentiment. Krishna's resolution of this dilemma — Act according to your dharma, offering the fruits of action to God (Karma Yoga), without attachment to results — is one of the most sophisticated ethical teachings in any tradition.

Karma — The Law of Moral Causation

Karma — literally 'action' — refers in its philosophical dimension to the universal law of moral causation: every intentional action generates a corresponding effect, not only externally but in the inner structure of the actor's character and consciousness. Good actions (actions aligned with Dharma, performed without ego-driven motivation) generate Samskaras (impressions) that purify the mind and support the path to liberation. Self-motivated, harmful actions generate Samskaras that bind consciousness more tightly to the cycle of suffering.

The philosophical implications of the karma doctrine are far-reaching: it grounds a completely self-consistent ethical system in which the ultimate consequences of every action fall upon the actor — not as a divine punishment or reward, but as the natural unfolding of the law of moral causation. This makes yoga ethics fundamentally empirical rather than purely prescriptive: the ethical path is not a set of commandments imposed from outside but a systematic investigation of what kinds of action, intention, and character genuinely produce wellbeing, for oneself and others.

11.3 Kant's Categorical Imperative — Duty and Universal Law

Immanuel Kant's ethical philosophy — the most rigorous and influential ethics produced by the Western Enlightenment — offers one of the richest points of comparison with the yoga ethical tradition. Kant's central ethical principle, the Categorical Imperative, has three famous formulations, of which the most important are: 'Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law' — the Universal Law Formula; and 'Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only' — the Humanity Formula.

Kant's ethics is fundamentally deontological — it holds that the moral worth of an action lies in its conformity with duty (the Categorical Imperative) rather than in its consequences. A good will is

the only unconditional good; everything else — intelligence, wealth, even happiness — is good only conditionally. This absolute grounding of ethics in rational duty has a structural parallel with the Gita's teaching of Nishkama Karma — action performed from duty, without desire for the fruits. In both cases, the moral quality of the action lies in the quality of the will and intention behind it, not in the outcome.

Immanuel Kant

1724–1804 | Deontological Ethics

Key Insight: Act only according to that maxim you could will to become universal law. Treat persons always as ends, never merely as means. Moral worth lies in acting from duty (the good will), not from inclination or consequence. The highest moral achievement is autonomy — giving the law to oneself through pure reason.

Karma Yoga vs. Kantian Ethics — Bhagavad Gita — Karma Yoga

- Act according to your Svadharma (individual calling)
- Perform action without attachment to fruits
- Dedication of action to Ishvara removes ego from the equation
- The quality of intention determines the karmic consequence
- Context-sensitive: same action may be dharmic in one context, adharmic in another

Karma Yoga vs. Kantian Ethics — Kant — Categorical Imperative

- Act only on universalisable maxims (universal law formula)
- Act from duty, not from inclination or desire for consequence
- Treat persons as ends, never merely as means
- The rational will alone determines moral worth
- Context-independent: moral law applies universally without exception

11.4 Utilitarianism — The Ethics of Consequences

Utilitarianism — the ethical theory associated with Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) — argues that the morally right action is the one that produces the greatest happiness for the greatest number. It is a consequentialist ethics: moral value lies entirely in the outcome of actions, not in the intentions behind them or the conformity of actions to universal rules. Mill refined Bentham's crude 'pleasure calculus' by distinguishing between higher and lower pleasures and by grounding the ultimate criterion of morality in the flourishing of rational beings.

Utilitarianism converges with the yoga ethical tradition in its concern for the wellbeing of all beings — the Vedic vision of Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhavantu (may all beings be happy and free) is deeply utilitarian in spirit. But it diverges in its exclusive focus on consequences and its

neglect of the dimension of character and inner transformation that is central to both virtue ethics (Aristotle) and yoga ethics (the Yamas and Niyamas). From the yoga philosophical perspective, a purely consequentialist ethics misses the most important truth about moral action: that the quality of the acting consciousness matters as much as, or more than, the measurable consequences of the act.

11.5 Virtue Ethics — Aristotle's Ethics of Character

Aristotle's virtue ethics — perhaps the Western ethical framework most deeply congruent with the yogic approach — focuses on the cultivation of character (ethos) through habituated practice. Virtue (arete) is a stable disposition to feel the right emotions, at the right time, toward the right objects, in the right way — and to act accordingly. The virtues — courage, justice, temperance, practical wisdom, generosity, and the rest — are not merely behavioural patterns but deep character traits, acquired through practice and constituting the person's very identity.

The parallel with the yoga ethical framework is direct and substantial. The Yamas and Niyamas of Patanjali are precisely a system of virtue cultivation — the development of stable character traits (non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, right energy use, non-possessiveness, purity, contentment, discipline, self-study, surrender) through sustained practice. Both Aristotle and Patanjali understand that ethical character is not achieved by knowing the right rules or calculating the best consequences but by the patient, sustained practice of virtuous action until it becomes second nature.

The crucial difference: Aristotle's ethics is aimed at Eudaimonia — the full flourishing of human nature within the social world. Yoga's ethics points toward a more radical transformation: the liberation of consciousness from the very identification with the ego-mind-body complex that drives even the virtuous but unawakened person's moral striving. The yoga ethical path does not stop at virtue — it uses virtue as the foundation for the deeper practices that lead to Kaivalya.

11.6 Reflection Questions

- The Gita says 'better is one's own dharma, though imperfectly performed, than another's dharma well performed.' How do you understand and apply this teaching in your life as a yoga teacher?

- Kant's ethics is universal and context-independent; Dharma is context-sensitive (Svadharma varies by individual, stage of life, circumstances). Which approach do you find more practically useful? More philosophically defensible?
- Reflect on a genuinely difficult ethical dilemma you have faced as a yoga teacher or student. How would Kant, Aristotle, the Gita, and a utilitarian each approach it? Which framework is most helpful?

CHAPTER 12

Freedom and Determinism

Kaivalya, Liberation, and Western Concepts of Freedom

Tada drashtuh svarupe avasthanam — Yoga Sutras 1.3

— Then the seer abides in their own true nature

12.1 The Question of Freedom

Is the human being genuinely free? Or are our choices, characters, and destinies determined by prior causes — biological, psychological, social, karmic? This question — the problem of free will and determinism — is one of the most deeply contested in the history of both Western and yogic philosophy, and the answer has profound implications for every aspect of the ethical and spiritual life.

The yoga tradition's answer is complex and sophisticated: at the level of ordinary conditioned existence, the human being is largely determined by karma, Samskaras, the gunas, and the conditioning of the mind. But at the level of pure Purusha-consciousness — the deepest dimension of the self — the human being is not determined by any external cause, because Purusha is not part of the causal chain of Prakriti at all. Liberation (Kaivalya, Moksha) is the realisation of this unconditioned freedom — not a freedom to choose among worldly options, but the freedom of pure awareness from all identification with the conditioned.

12.2 Spinoza — Freedom Through Understanding

Benedict de Spinoza (1632–1677) developed one of the most sophisticated philosophical treatments of freedom and determinism in the Western tradition. For Spinoza, everything that exists is a mode of the single, infinite substance — what he calls Deus sive Natura (God or Nature). Every event, including every human thought, emotion, and action, follows necessarily from prior causes within this single substance. There is no free will in the libertarian sense — no uncaused cause, no escape from the causal chain of Nature.

And yet Spinoza argues for genuine human freedom — not as escape from causation but as self-determination: the freedom of acting according to one's own nature rather than being driven by external forces and passions that one does not understand. The wise person — the one who understands the nature of the whole and their place within it — acts from their own nature (sub specie aeternitatis — under the aspect of eternity) rather than from reactive passion. This is genuine freedom, for Spinoza: not the absence of causation but the presence of self-knowledge and rational self-governance.

The structural parallel with the yoga teaching is striking. At the level of Prakriti, the yogi (like Spinoza's human being) is part of the causal chain. Liberation (Kaivalya) does not mean escape from Prakriti's causal order but the recognition of Purusha as the witness of that order — self-possessed, undisturbed, free in the deepest sense: not because it acts without cause, but because it knows itself as beyond causation entirely.

Benedict de Spinoza

1632–1677 | Rationalist Metaphysics / Pantheism

Key Insight: Deus sive Natura — God or Nature is the one, infinite substance of which all things are modes. Freedom is not escape from causation but self-determination — acting from one's own nature, understood sub specie aeternitatis. The highest good is the intellectual love of God.

12.3 Hegel — Freedom as Self-Realisation

Hegel's concept of freedom — developed across his entire philosophical corpus — is dialectical and processual: freedom is not given but achieved, not a static condition but a dynamic process of self-realisation. The Phenomenology of Spirit traces the journey of Geist (Spirit/Mind) from immediate, unreflective immersion in the world, through various stages of self-alienation and self-recognition, to the final stage of Absolute Knowing — in which Geist fully knows itself as free, as the ground of its own world.

The Hegelian understanding of freedom as the process of self-realisation — Geist coming to know itself through the stages of its own unfolding — has important parallels with the yoga philosophical understanding of consciousness progressively recognising its own nature through the stages of Samadhi. In both frameworks, freedom is not a pre-given condition but a progressive achievement;

in both, the highest freedom is a form of self-knowledge; and in both, the process of achieving freedom requires passing through stages of increasing subtlety and depth of self-awareness.

12.4 Sartre — Radical Freedom and Responsibility

Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist concept of freedom is the most absolute in the Western philosophical tradition: the human being is 'condemned to be free' — there is no God, no fixed nature, no social determination that removes the human being's radical responsibility for what they make of themselves. Existence precedes essence: I am not anything until I make myself something through my choices and actions.

Sartre's radical freedom has both an inspiring and a terrifying dimension. The inspiring dimension: no one and nothing can finally determine who you are — you are always free to respond differently, to choose differently, to become otherwise. The terrifying dimension: this freedom comes with absolute responsibility — there is no one to blame for what you are, no destiny to appeal to, no nature to excuse the choices you have made. This double-edged quality of radical freedom — what Sartre calls anguish — is philosophically important and has genuine resonance with the yoga teaching that liberation is available to every human being, and that the primary obstacle to it is not external circumstance but the habits and misidentifications of one's own mind.

The crucial difference with the yogic understanding of freedom: for Sartre, the human being is free within the world — free to define oneself through worldly choices and actions. For yoga, the deepest freedom is freedom from the world — from the identification with the conditioned, temporal, bounded self that makes choices — the discovery of the unconditioned, timeless awareness of Purusha that is not free in the world but free from the very structures within which worldly freedom operates.

Philosopher	Account of Freedom	Parallel in Yoga
Spinoza	Freedom as self-determination through understanding; acting from one's own nature, not driven by external passion	Yoga: freedom through Viveka (discrimination) and Vairagya (dispassion); acting from one's true nature (Purusha), not from conditioned reaction
Hegel	Freedom as the progressive self-realisation of Geist	Yoga: liberation as the progressive self-recognition of Purusha through the stages of

	through history and self-knowledge	Samadhi
Kant	Freedom as autonomy — rational self-governance, giving the moral law to oneself through reason	Yoga: freedom as self-governance through Tapas, Svadhyaya, and Ishvara Pranidhana; the disciplined will aligned with dharma
Sartre	Radical freedom — condemned to be free; existence precedes essence; total responsibility	Yoga: freedom is available to all, and internal obstacles (Kleshas, Samskaras) are the primary limitation, not external determinants
Schopenhauer	Freedom through denial of the will; ascetic renunciation of desire	Yoga: Vairagya (dispassion) and Tapas (austerity) as paths to the recognition of the free Purusha beyond the will
Patanjali (Kaivalya)	Purusha as eternally free; liberation = recognition of Purusha's freedom from all identification with Prakriti	Structural parallel: the 'free will' debate in Western philosophy resolves into the discovery that the deepest self was never un-free

12.5 Reflection Questions

- Do you experience your yoga practice as a path toward greater freedom? What does that freedom feel like from the inside? How does it relate to the philosophical accounts discussed in this chapter?
- Sartre says we are condemned to be free. Patanjali says liberation is the recognition of the Purusha's freedom. Are these the same insight, or different insights? What is the crucial difference?
- How do you explain the relationship between karma (the law of cause and effect that conditions the mind) and freedom (the possibility of liberation from conditioning) to students who find this apparently paradoxical?

PART V

Psychology and Liberation

CHAPTER 13

The Unconscious Mind

Samskara, Vasana, and Western Psychology

Samskaras are the impressions left in the chitta by every experience, thought, and action — they are the hidden architects of personality and destiny.

13.1 The Discovery of the Unconscious

One of the most significant intellectual developments of the modern period — in both the yogic and Western traditions — has been the discovery of the unconscious: the recognition that the vast majority of mental activity occurs below the threshold of conscious awareness, and that this subterranean mental life exerts a profound and often decisive influence on conscious thought, emotion, and behaviour. While this discovery is most prominently associated in Western culture with Sigmund Freud, the yogic tradition had developed a far more comprehensive and detailed map of the unconscious dimensions of the mind thousands of years earlier — through the concepts of Samskara, Vasana, and the deep structures of the chitta.

13.2 Samskara and Vasana — The Yogic Unconscious

The Sanskrit term Samskara (literally 'something well-made' or 'a polishing, a refining, an impression') refers to the impressions left in the chitta (mind-field) by every experience, thought, emotion, and action. Like grooves worn in soft earth by the repeated passage of water, Samskaras are the neurological and psychological patterns formed by the repetition of experience — patterns that then shape future experience by determining which aspects of a given situation are noticed, how they are interpreted, and how one responds.

Vasanas (literally 'perfumes' or 'residual impressions') are the deep, dispositional tendencies that arise from the accumulation of Samskaras across many lifetimes — the habitual inclinations of character, the recurring patterns of attraction and aversion, the underlying themes of a person's psychological life. If Samskaras are individual impressions, Vasanas are the deep character grooves formed by the cumulative weight of many Samskaras over time.

Together, Samskaras and Vasanas constitute yoga's theory of the psychological unconscious — and it is, in important respects, more comprehensive than either Freud's or Jung's. It includes not only the personal unconscious (the repository of individual experience) but the trans-personal (the Samskaras carried across lifetimes and constituting the deep structure of character), and it situates these unconscious structures within a comprehensive cosmological and soteriological framework that Western psychology largely lacks.

13.3 Freud — The Dynamic Unconscious

Sigmund Freud's model of the unconscious — developed across his vast and evolving body of work — posits a dynamic unconscious: a domain of mental activity that is not merely inactive or forgotten but actively repressed — pushed below the threshold of consciousness because its contents (primarily sexual and aggressive drives, and the desires, memories, and fantasies associated with them) are incompatible with the demands of the conscious ego and the social superego.

The Freudian unconscious is fundamentally a repository of conflict — between the id's pleasure-seeking drives, the ego's reality-bound reasoning, and the superego's internalised social prohibitions. Neurotic symptoms, dreams, slips of the tongue (parapraxes), and free associations are all royal roads to the unconscious — windows through which the repressed material makes itself known obliquely, because it cannot be directly admitted to consciousness.

The structural parallel with the yogic understanding of Samskaras is significant: both traditions recognise that past experiences leave deep impressions that influence present behaviour and experience below the level of conscious awareness; that these impressions are often inaccessible to ordinary introspection; and that their recognition and working-through is essential for psychological freedom. The important differences are equally significant: Freud's unconscious is essentially pathological — it is the repository of repressed material that causes suffering. The yogic Samskaras include both those arising from painful experiences (Klishta — afflicted) and those arising from positive practices (Aklishta — non-afflicted). Crucially, yoga practice itself generates new, purifying Samskaras that progressively transform the chitta.

Sigmund Freud

1856–1939 | Psychoanalysis / Psychology of the Unconscious

Key Insight: The unconscious is the larger part of the mind, containing repressed desires, memories, and drives. The ego negotiates between the id's pleasure principle and the superego's moral demands. Neurosis is repression's failure. The goal: where id was, ego shall be.

13.4 Jung — The Collective Unconscious and Individuation

Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961) extended Freud's model of the unconscious in a direction that brings it into far closer proximity with the yogic tradition. Jung's most important contribution was the concept of the collective unconscious — a layer of the unconscious psyche that is not personal but universal, shared by all human beings, and constituted by primordial patterns of psychological energy that he called archetypes.

The archetypes — the Shadow, the Anima/Animus, the Persona, the Self — are not inherited memories or learned patterns but primordial structural patterns of the psyche, analogous to the instinctual patterns of animal behaviour but operating at the psychological level. The archetype of the Self — the central archetype of totality and integration — occupies a position in Jung's psychology remarkably analogous to the Atman in the yogic tradition: it is the deepest centre of the psyche, the ground of the whole personality, whose realisation (Individuation) is the goal of the psychological journey.

Jung's concept of Individuation — the lifelong process of becoming one's fullest self by integrating the various dimensions of the psyche, including the previously repressed or denied aspects represented by the Shadow — has clear parallels with the yogic process of Svadhyaya (self-study) and the progressive dissolution of Avidya. Both Jung and yoga understand the path to wholeness as requiring honest engagement with the rejected, feared, or denied dimensions of the self — the integration of the shadow, the dissolution of false persona, the encounter with what is most deeply and truly oneself.

Carl Gustav Jung

1875–1961 | Analytical Psychology

Key Insight: The personal unconscious contains repressed material; the collective unconscious contains the archetypes — universal patterns of psychic energy. Individuation is the lifelong process of realising the Self — the central archetype of psychic wholeness. 'Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes.'

13.5 Maslow — The Hierarchy of Needs and Peak Experiences

Abraham Maslow's humanistic psychology, particularly his concept of the hierarchy of needs and his research into peak experiences and self-actualisation, offers another important Western parallel with the yogic understanding of human psychological development. Maslow's hierarchy proposes that human needs form a pyramid structure: at the base are physiological needs (food, water, shelter); above them, safety needs; then belonging and love needs; then esteem needs; and at the apex, the need for self-actualisation — the fullest development of one's unique human potentials.

Maslow's peak experiences — moments of ecstatic unity, boundlessness, loss of the ego boundary, sense of profound meaning and value — describe states that are structurally similar to, though not identical with, the states of Samadhi described in the yoga tradition. Maslow's recognition that these states are not pathological but represent the highest functioning of the human psyche — and his argument that mainstream psychology's focus on pathology had systematically neglected the upper reaches of human experience — resonates deeply with the yoga tradition's insistence that the highest states of consciousness are not aberrations but the natural destiny of the human being fully realised.

Framework	Model of Unconscious	Path to Liberation/Integration	Goal
Yoga (Samskara-Vasana)	Deep impressions in chitta from all past experience and action, including trans-personal; both afflicted and purifying Samskaras	Yoga practice generates purifying Samskaras; meditation dissolves all Samskaras; Nirodha — cessation	Kaivalya: chitta purified to perfect clarity; Purusha resting in its own nature
Freud	Dynamic personal unconscious: repressed sexual and aggressive material in conflict with ego and superego	Psychoanalysis: making the unconscious conscious; working through repressed material via free association, dream analysis	'Where id was, ego shall be': rational self-governance; relief from neurotic suffering
Jung	Personal + collective unconscious; archetypes	Individuation: integrating Shadow, relating to	Wholeness: the Self realised; the paradox of the individual

	as universal psychic patterns; Shadow, Anima/Animus, Self	Anima/Animus, realising the Self through symbolic understanding	as expression of the universal
Maslow	Deficiency needs (lower levels of hierarchy) drive unconscious motivation; peak experiences point beyond ordinary consciousness	Meeting lower needs to enable self-actualisation; intentional cultivation of peak experience	Self-actualisation: the fullest development of individual human potential; transcendence

13.6 Reflection Questions

- Identify three Samskaras — habitual patterns of thought, feeling, or reaction — that you can clearly observe in your own experience. How do they manifest in your teaching? In your relationships?
- Jung says 'Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes.' How does this relate to the yoga teaching of Svadhyaya (self-study) and the practice of turning awareness inward?
- How might an understanding of Samskaras and Vasanas make you a more effective yoga teacher — specifically in understanding why students get 'stuck' in certain patterns and how practice can help dissolve them?

CHAPTER 14

The Ego and Its Transcendence

Ahamkara, Nietzsche, and the Mystical Tradition

Aham Brahmasmi — Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.4.10

— I am Brahman — the deepest truth of the self is the universal ground of all reality

14.1 The Central Problem of Ego

The ego — the sense of being a bounded, continuous, individual self — is simultaneously the most intimate and the most philosophically problematic feature of human existence. It is the ego that gives us the sense of personal identity, that makes meaningful relationships possible, that sustains the commitment to a life-project over time. And it is the ego that, according to yoga philosophy, Buddhist psychology, and many Western philosophers and mystics, is the primary source of suffering: through its grasping, its defensiveness, its endless self-comparison and self-protection, the ego creates the very suffering it is trying to prevent.

The yoga philosophical tradition is clear: Ahamkara (the ego or I-maker) is not the true self. It is a function of Prakriti — the mechanism by which pure consciousness comes to identify with a particular body-mind complex and takes itself to be a bounded individual rather than the unlimited awareness it truly is. The dissolution of this misidentification — not the destruction of the ego as a functional personality, but the liberation of consciousness from the mistaken belief that the ego is the self — is the central event of yogic liberation.

14.2 Ahamkara in the Samkhya-Yoga Framework

Ahamkara (literally 'the I-maker') is the third level of the evolution of Prakriti in the Samkhya cosmological sequence: from the unmanifest Prakriti, the first evolution is Mahat (great principle) or Buddhi (intellect); from Buddhi evolves Ahamkara (the ego principle); and from Ahamkara evolve the mind (Manas), the five sense faculties, the five action faculties, and the five subtle elements. Ahamkara is therefore the principle of individuation — the mechanism by which the undifferentiated intelligence of Buddhi becomes organised into a particular, bounded perspective.

Patanjali identifies Asmita (a closely related concept — literally 'I-am-ness') as the second Klesha: the afflicted sense of individual selfhood arising from the misidentification of Purusha (pure consciousness) with Prakriti (the mind-body complex). This misidentification is the psychological consequence of the Ahamkara principle — the sense that 'I am this particular body, this particular mind, this particular story.' The yogic path progressively dismantles this misidentification through the cultivation of Viveka (discrimination) and the deepening of Samadhi.

14.3 Nietzsche — The Affirmation of the Self

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) offers, paradoxically, one of the most useful comparative frameworks for understanding the yogic teaching on the ego — not because his position converges with yoga's, but because the way in which it converges and diverges illuminates both traditions with unusual clarity. Nietzsche is in many ways the philosopher of the ego's fullest affirmation: his concepts of the Will to Power, the Übermensch (the self-overcoming individual who creates their own values), and amor fati (love of fate — the total affirmation of everything that happens) represent a philosophical programme of heroic self-creation that seems, at first glance, to be the opposite of yoga's programme of ego-dissolution.

But the relationship is more subtle. Nietzsche's critique of the 'herd morality' of conventional Christianity — which he saw as life-denying, self-negating, and driven by a disguised resentment that poisoned the will — has genuine parallels with the yoga critique of Tamas (inertia) and certain forms of misunderstood renunciation. Nietzsche's Übermensch is not the petty ego of ordinary self-interest but a self-overcoming being who has dissolved the conventional identity in order to become more fully what they are. The concept of Nietzsche's eternal recurrence — the thought experiment of affirming your life so completely that you would will to live it again, infinitely — is philosophically close to the Gita's Karma Yoga: the total affirmation of the present action without any escape into the future or the past.

Friedrich Nietzsche

1844–1900 | Existentialism / Philosophy of Culture

Key Insight: God is dead — and we have killed him. The will to power is the fundamental drive of all life. The Übermensch is the self-overcoming individual who creates their own values. Amor fati: love your fate — affirm the totality of what is. Eternal recurrence: would you will this moment to return, eternally?

> *"Nietzsche says become who you are. Yoga says discover who you are. The apparent difference conceals a convergence: in both cases, what you are becoming/discovering is something beyond the petty ego's horizon."*
>
> — *Dr. Shivam Mishra*

14.4 The Mystical Tradition — Meister Eckhart and the Annihilation of the Ego

The Christian mystical tradition — particularly in the work of Meister Eckhart (1260–1328) — offers perhaps the closest Western parallel to the yogic teaching on ego-transcendence. Eckhart's concept of Gelassenheit (releasement or letting go) — the total abandonment of the individual will to the divine — and his teaching on the 'birth of the Word in the soul' have remarkable structural parallels with the yoga teaching on Ishvara Pranidhana and the dissolution of Ahamkara.

Eckhart's famous teaching that 'God is nearer to me than I am to myself' — and his argument that the true ground of the soul (Seelengrund) is identical with the divine ground (Gottesgrund) — is philosophically almost identical with the Upanishadic teaching of Atman = Brahman. Both traditions are pointing toward the same recognition: beneath the apparent boundaries of the individual ego lies an identity with the unlimited that has never actually been broken — the ego's separateness is the illusion, and its recognition is liberation.

The significant methodological difference: Eckhart works within a theistic framework in which the recognition of identity is described as the soul's return to God — a recognition of relationship, albeit the most intimate relationship possible. The Advaita Vedanta tradition dissolves even this relational framework: there is no relationship between Atman and Brahman, because they are not two — they never were. The appearance of relationship itself is the final form of Maya, dissolved in the highest recognition.

14.5 Practical Teaching Implications

The philosophical analysis of the ego — across yogic, Nietzschean, Jungian, and mystical frameworks — has direct and practical implications for the yoga teacher. The single most common spiritual confusion in contemporary yoga culture is the distinction between the dissolving of the ego as a spiritual achievement and the suppression or denigration of the ego as a psychological

defence against genuine engagement with life. These are not the same — and confusing them produces the pattern known as spiritual bypassing: using spiritual concepts to avoid psychological work, and using the ideal of ego-dissolution to justify irresponsibility, relational unavailability, or a disguised narcissism that performs humility while protecting an unusually fragile sense of self.

Healthy ego development — the capacity for authentic self-expression, clear boundaries, genuine responsibility, and sustained engagement with reality — is the necessary foundation for genuine ego-transcendence. You cannot surrender what you do not have. The yoga teacher who helps students develop a healthy, grounded, responsive sense of self — and who knows the difference between healthy ego-functioning and the ego-identification that causes suffering — is serving both the psychological and the spiritual dimensions of the practice with genuine integrity.

14.6 Reflection Questions

- Jung says you cannot dissolve what you have not first developed. What does a healthy ego look like, and how does yoga practice support its development as the foundation for genuine transcendence?
- Nietzsche's amor fati — the total affirmation of one's fate — and the Gita's Karma Yoga — acting without attachment to results — share structural similarities. Where do they part ways?
- Reflect on an experience in your own practice where what felt like ego-dissolution was actually the deepening of authentic presence. How do you distinguish between the two?

CHAPTER 15

Liberation and Human Flourishing

Moksha, Eudaimonia, and the Ultimate Goal

Samatvam yoga uchyate — Bhagavad Gita 2.48

— Equanimity is called Yoga

15.1 The Ultimate Question

What is the highest human possibility? What is the fullest expression of human nature? What would it mean to be completely, irreversibly free — not merely free from this or that constraint, but free in the deepest sense: free from the suffering caused by misidentification, free from the anxiety of the uncertain future, free from the regret of the unchangeable past, free from the compulsive seeking that generates more seeking?

This is the question that both the yoga philosophical tradition and the greatest Western thinkers have addressed as their ultimate concern. The answers are different in important respects — but the seriousness, the urgency, and the depth with which both traditions engage the question reveals a common recognition: the human being is not finally satisfied by ordinary conditions of wellbeing, however comfortable. Something in us reaches further — toward a dimension of experience that the yogic tradition calls Moksha, Kaivalya, or Samadhi, and that the Western tradition has approached through the concepts of Eudaimonia, Absolute Spirit, Self-actualisation, Mystical Union, and Authentic Existence.

15.2 Moksha and Kaivalya — The Yogic Vision of Liberation

The Sanskrit term Moksha (liberation, release) describes the ultimate goal of human existence in the yogic and Vedantic traditions — the permanent recognition of one's true nature as free, as pure consciousness, as unlimited awareness that was never actually bound. Kaivalya — Patanjali's term for liberation — literally means 'aloneness' or 'isolation': the pure awareness of Purusha, no longer identified with or entangled in the movements of Prakriti, resting in its own intrinsic nature.

What is remarkable about the yogic description of Moksha is that it is not described as a state to be achieved but as a recognition of what has always already been the case. The Atman — pure consciousness — has never actually been bound; the bondage was always a misidentification, not a reality. Liberation is therefore not the acquisition of something new but the dissolution of a misunderstanding — the removal of the veil of Avidya to reveal the truth that was present all along. As the Kena Upanishad says: 'It is not known by those who know it; it is known by those who do not know it' — meaning that Brahman cannot be known as an object, because it is the knowing itself.

The experiential quality of Moksha — Sat-Chit-Ananda (pure being, pure consciousness, pure bliss) — is not a pleasurable feeling that passes. It is the ground of all experience, the unchanging presence in which all changing experiences arise and dissolve. It is not opposed to the world of ordinary experience but is its very ground and substance. The liberated yogi does not cease to perceive the world — they perceive it differently: no longer through the distorting lens of Avidya and the Kleshas, but with the clear, compassionate, undisturbed awareness of Purusha witnessing Prakriti's magnificent dance.

15.3 Aristotle's Eudaimonia — Flourishing in the World

Aristotle's concept of Eudaimonia — the highest good for a human being, the end toward which all other goods are means — represents the Western philosophical tradition's most systematic account of the ultimate goal of human existence. Eudaimonia is not a feeling but a condition: the condition of a human being who is living and functioning in accordance with their nature — exercising their capacities of reason and virtue excellently, in a community of friendship, with sufficient external goods to support the virtuous life, over a complete lifetime.

The Aristotelian vision is fundamentally this-worldly: Eudaimonia is not transcendence of the human condition but its fullest expression within it. It requires the body (health, energy), the world (friends, family, political community, sufficient material resources), and the cultivation of character through social practice. It is deeply social and relational — a human being cannot flourish in isolation.

The contrast with the yogic Moksha is instructive. Moksha does not require particular external conditions — indeed, the yogic texts repeatedly emphasise that liberation is available even in

conditions of physical difficulty, poverty, or social marginalisation. What it requires is the inner transformation of the relationship between consciousness and experience — a transformation that is, at its deepest level, independent of external conditions. And yet the yoga tradition also honours the Aristotelian insight: the Grihastha ashrama (the householder's stage) is recognised as a legitimate and important stage of the yogic life, in which the full engagement with worldly relationships, social responsibilities, and professional excellence is understood as a legitimate form of spiritual practice (Karma Yoga).

15.4 Hegel's Absolute Spirit — The Self-Realisation of Consciousness

Hegel's vision of the ultimate goal of the philosophical and historical process — the Absolute Knowing of Geist, in which Spirit fully knows itself as the ground of all reality — is one of the most ambitious philosophical accounts of human fulfilment in the Western tradition, and one of the closest to the yogic vision of Brahma-jnana (the direct knowledge of Brahman). For Hegel, the ultimate is not a transcendent God separate from the world but the self-knowledge of Absolute Spirit — consciousness knowing itself through and as the totality of its own expressions.

The parallel with Advaita Vedanta is striking: Brahman knowing itself as the ground of all individual consciousnesses and all phenomenal appearances is structurally similar to Hegel's Absolute Spirit knowing itself through the history of human consciousness. The crucial difference: Hegel's Absolute realises itself through the temporal process of history; the Vedantic Brahman is already self-realised — timeless, complete, perfect — and the apparent process of individual liberation is, from the ultimate perspective, the already-accomplished recognition of what was never other than what it always was.

15.5 The Convergence — What All the Great Traditions Are Pointing At

As we survey the full landscape of the comparative philosophy between yogic and Western traditions, a remarkable pattern emerges. The deepest thinkers of both traditions — at their most rigorous and their most honest — consistently find themselves pointing toward the same horizon: a dimension of experience or reality that is beyond ordinary conditioned existence, that is characterised by a quality of peace, clarity, freedom, and fullness that ordinary achievement and

acquisition cannot produce, and that is discovered not by adding something to the existing self but by a kind of fundamental recognition, reorientation, or transformation of the relationship between consciousness and its contents.

Whether this horizon is named Moksha or Eudaimonia, Kaivalya or Absolute Spirit, Mystical Union or Peak Experience or Authentic Existence, the greatest thinkers of both traditions agree on several things: that ordinary, unreflective existence is in some important sense limited, suffering, or incomplete; that genuine transformation is possible; that this transformation requires serious philosophical and practical engagement — it is not automatic; and that what is discovered in this transformation is of a qualitatively different order from all the goods that ordinary seeking can provide.

> *"The entire comparative study of yoga philosophy and Western thought leads to one insight: the question of what it means to be fully human has been asked with extraordinary seriousness, and answered with surprising convergence, by the deepest thinkers of every tradition. Our task, as yoga teachers, is to carry this convergence into the lives of the people who come to our classes."*
>
> — *Dr. Shivam Mishra*

15.6 A Final Synthesis — For the Yoga Teacher

The yoga teacher who has engaged seriously with this comparative study returns to the teaching room with something that technical training alone cannot provide: a philosophical depth of understanding that permeates every instruction, every silence, every choice of language, and every quality of presence they bring to their students. They know that when they guide a student into the stillness of a long, supported pose, they are participating in the same inquiry that Plato called 'the turning of the soul toward the sun,' that Kant called 'the critique of pure reason,' that Husserl called 'the epoché,' and that Patanjali called 'chitta vritti nirodhah.

They know that the question 'Who am I?' is not a yoga question or a Western philosophy question — it is the deepest human question, asked with equal seriousness by Socrates and Shankara, by Hume and Patanjali, by Heidegger and the Upanishadic seers. And they know that the answer to this question — or rather, the recognition that makes the question dissolve — is not arrived at through intellectual accumulation but through the patient, courageous, sustained practice of the very disciplines they are now equipped to teach.

Go teach. Teach with depth. Teach with honesty. Teach from genuine inquiry. And bring the full richness of humanity's philosophical heritage — East and West — to every student who comes to you seeking what all great philosophy and all genuine yoga practice ultimately point toward: the recognition of who they really are.

Sarvesham svastir bhavatu — Ancient Vedic Benediction

— May there be well-being for all; may there be peace for all; may there be wholeness for all; may there be happiness for all

CHAPTER APPENDIX A

Comparative Timeline

Thinkers East and West

The following timeline places the major philosophers and sages of both the yogic and Western traditions in their historical context, revealing the remarkable parallels in the timing of their philosophical explorations.

Period	Yogic / Indian Tradition	Western Tradition
c. 1500–1000 BCE	Vedic Hymns — Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda, Atharva Veda; early cosmological speculation; Nasadiya Sukta	Mycenaean Greece; pre-philosophical mythology; no systematic philosophy yet
c. 800–400 BCE	Principal Upanishads: Brihadaranyaka, Chandogya, Taittiriya, Mandukya, Kena, Isha; Atman-Brahman teaching	Pre-Socratics: Thales, Heraclitus, Parmenides, Pythagoras; foundations of rational inquiry
c. 500–400 BCE	Gautama Buddha (c. 563–483 BCE) — Anatman, Pratityasamutpada, Dharma; Mahavira — Jain philosophy	Socrates (469–399 BCE); Plato born 428 BCE; Golden Age of Greek philosophy begins
c. 400–300 BCE	Samkhya systematised (attributed to Kapila); Bhagavad Gita composition begins; Chanakya's Arthashastra	Plato (428–348 BCE) — Forms, Republic, Phaedo; Aristotle (384–322 BCE) — Ethics, Metaphysics, De Anima
c. 300 BCE–200 CE	Patanjali's Yoga Sutras (c. 200 BCE–400 CE); Nagarjuna (c. 150–250 CE) — Madhyamaka Buddhism	Stoics: Zeno, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius; Epicurus; Plotinus (204–270 CE) — Neoplatonism
c. 500–900 CE	Adi Shankaracharya (788–820 CE) — Advaita Vedanta; Ramanuja (1017–1137) — Vishishtadvaita	Augustine (354–430 CE); Boethius; beginning of Scholastic philosophy; Islamic Golden Age
c. 1200–1600 CE	Madhva (1238–1317) — Dvaita Vedanta; Ramananda, Kabir, Mirabai — Bhakti movement	Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274); Meister Eckhart (1260–1328); Renaissance; Montaigne

c. 1600–1800 CE	Colonial period; translation of Sanskrit texts into European languages begins; Navya-Nyaya flourishes	Descartes (1596–1650); Spinoza (1632–1677); Leibniz (1646–1716); Hume (1711–1776); Kant (1724–1804)
c. 1800–1900 CE	Ram Mohan Roy (1772–1833) — Bengal Renaissance; Ramakrishna (1836–1886); Vivekananda (1863–1902)	Hegel (1770–1831); Schopenhauer (1788–1860); Nietzsche (1844–1900); William James (1842–1910)
c. 1900–2000 CE	Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950); Ramana Maharshi (1879–1950); Krishnamurti (1895–1986); T.K.V. Desikachar; B.K.S. Iyengar	Husserl (1859–1938); Heidegger (1889–1976); Sartre (1905–1980); Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961); Jung (1875–1961)
21st Century	Global yoga movement; Integral philosophy; Consciousness studies; East-West dialogue deepens	Chalmers (b. 1966) — Hard Problem; Nagel; Parfit; Neurophilosophy; Transpersonal Psychology

CHAPTER APPENDIX B

Glossary

Key Sanskrit and Western Philosophical Terms

The following glossary provides concise definitions of the most important Sanskrit and Western philosophical terms used throughout this book. Students are encouraged to return to these definitions regularly and to refine their understanding as their study deepens.

Sanskrit Terms

Term	Transliteration	Definition
अहंकार	Ahamkara	The ego-principle; the I-maker; the function of Prakriti by which pure consciousness comes to identify with a particular individual body-mind complex
अनात्मन्	Anatman	The Buddhist doctrine of no-self; the denial of a permanent, unchanging individual soul (contra the Upanishadic Atman)
अपरिग्रह	Aparigraha	Non-possessiveness; non-grasping; the fifth Yama — releasing attachment to objects, outcomes, status, and identity
आत्मन्	Atman	The individual self or soul; in Advaita Vedanta, identical with Brahman (the universal ground of consciousness)
अविद्या	Avidya	Fundamental ignorance; the first and root Klesha — misidentifying the impermanent as permanent, the non-self as self; the root cause of suffering
ब्रह्मन्	Brahman	The ultimate ground of reality in Vedantic philosophy — pure, unlimited, self-luminous consciousness; the one reality of which all apparent multiplicity is an expression
बुद्धि	Buddhi	The discriminative intellect; the highest faculty of Prakriti; the instrument of Viveka (discrimination) and direct yogic insight
चित्त	Chitta	The mind-field; the entire substrate of psychological experience including Manas (processing mind), Buddhi (intellect), and Ahamkara

		(ego)
धर्म	Dharma	Right action; the moral and cosmic order; one's individual calling and right way of being — the fulfilment of which constitutes the yogic ethical life
दुःख	Duhkha	Suffering; dissatisfaction; the fundamental unsatisfactoriness of conditioned existence — the central problematic of both yoga and Buddhist philosophy
गुण	Guna	The three fundamental qualities of Prakriti: Sattva (clarity, luminosity), Rajas (activity, passion), Tamas (inertia, heaviness)
कर्म	Karma	Action; the law of moral causation — every intentional action generates corresponding effects in the actor's consciousness and future experience
कैवल्य	Kaivalya	Liberation in the classical yoga system — the aloneness of pure Purusha consciousness, no longer identified with or entangled in the movements of Prakriti
क्लेश	Klesha	Affliction; the five root causes of suffering: Avidya (ignorance), Asmita (ego), Raga (attachment), Dvesha (aversion), Abhinivesha (fear of death)
माया	Maya	The cosmic power of appearance; the force that makes the one Brahman appear as a multiplicity of individual beings and objects
मोक्ष	Moksha	Liberation; the ultimate goal of human existence — the permanent recognition of one's true nature as free, unlimited, pure consciousness
प्राण	Prana	Vital force; the animating energy that pervades and sustains all living beings; the bridge between consciousness and matter
प्रमाण	Pramana	Valid source of knowledge — the yoga tradition identifies Pratyaksha (direct perception), Anumana (inference), and Agama (authoritative testimony)
प्रकृति	Prakriti	Primordial nature; the second eternal principle in Samkhya cosmology — the undifferentiated matrix from which all physical, energetic, and mental phenomena evolve
प्रणायाम	Pranayama	Breath regulation — the fourth limb of Ashtanga Yoga; the systematic cultivation and direction of prana through conscious breathing

		practice
पुरुष	Purusha	Pure consciousness; the first eternal principle in Samkhya cosmology — the unchanging, self-luminous witness that is the true self
समाधि	Samadhi	The eighth limb of Ashtanga Yoga — the state of complete absorption in which the distinction between knower, knowing, and known dissolves
संस्कार	Samskara	Impressions left in the chitta by every experience, thought, and action — the hidden patterns that shape perception, character, and destiny
सत्य	Satya	Truthfulness; the second Yama — speaking and living in alignment with reality, without self-deception or manipulation
स्वाध्याय	Svadhyaya	Self-study; the fourth Niyama — the study of sacred texts and the direct inquiry into one's own nature
वैराग्य	Vairagya	Dispassion; non-attachment to the fruits of experience; one of the two fundamental means of yoga practice (alongside Abhyasa — sustained practice)
विवेक	Viveka	Discrimination; the capacity to distinguish between the real (Purusha) and the unreal (Prakriti) — the fundamental liberating insight of classical yoga
वृत्ति	Vritti	Modification; fluctuation; the five types of modifications of the chitta (right knowledge, wrong knowledge, imagination, sleep, memory)

Key Western Philosophical Terms

Term	Origin	Definition
A priori / A posteriori	Latin (Kant)	A priori: knowledge independent of experience (e.g. mathematics, logic). A posteriori: knowledge derived from experience. Kant's critical philosophy distinguishes these as the two sources of human knowledge.
Categorical Imperative	Kant	The supreme principle of Kantian ethics: act only on maxims you could universalise; treat persons always as ends, never merely as means. The moral law binding on all rational beings unconditionally.

Cogito ergo sum	Descartes	'I think, therefore I am.' Descartes' foundational certainty — the existence of the thinking subject cannot be doubted without self-refutation.
Dialectic	Greek / Hegel	In Plato: the method of philosophical dialogue through question and answer. In Hegel: the triadic movement of thesis-antithesis-synthesis through which Geist (Spirit) progressively realises itself.
Epoché	Husserl (Greek)	Phenomenological 'bracketing' — the suspension of the natural attitude (the unreflective assumption that the world exists independently of our experience) to examine the structures of experience itself.
Eudaimonia	Aristotle (Greek)	Human flourishing — the fullest expression of excellent human functioning through the exercise of virtue, reason, friendship, and the contemplative life. Often translated as 'happiness' but better as 'the good life well lived.'
Geist	Hegel (German)	Spirit or Mind — Hegel's term for the self-unfolding, self-knowing consciousness that constitutes the ultimate reality. Not an individual mind but the universal Mind that realises itself through history and culture.
Hard Problem	Chalmers	The question of why any physical process should be accompanied by subjective experience — why there is 'something it is like' to be a conscious being. The hard problem resists all purely physical explanation.
Intentionality	Husserl	The structural feature of consciousness identified by Husserl: consciousness is always consciousness of something — every mental act is directed toward an object. There is no contentless, purely subjective consciousness.
Logos	Heraclitus / Greek	The universal rational principle governing all things; the hidden unity that underlies the apparent multiplicity and flux of the world. In Christian philosophy, the divine Word or Reason through which creation is structured.
Maya	Sanskrit (by adoption)	Now used in Western comparative philosophy to denote the yogic concept of cosmic appearance — the power that makes the unlimited Brahman appear as a world of limited, individual beings.

Noumenon / Phenomenon	Kant (Greek)	Noumenon (thing-in-itself): reality as it is, independent of any cognitive structuring. Phenomenon (appearance): reality as it appears to human cognition, structured by the mind's forms and categories.
Ontology	Greek	The philosophical study of being — what exists, what kinds of things exist, and how they are related. Fundamental questions: What is real? What is the relationship between mind and matter?
Panta Rhei	Heraclitus (Greek)	'Everything flows' — Heraclitus' doctrine that change and flux are the fundamental character of reality, held in dynamic unity by the Logos.
Phenomenology	Husserl / Greek	The philosophical study of the structures of conscious experience — examining how things appear to consciousness, exactly as they appear, without importing assumptions about the independently existing world.
Res cogitans / Res extensa	Descartes (Latin)	Descartes' two fundamental substances: thinking substance (mind, the self) and extended substance (matter, the body). Their interaction constitutes the classic mind-body problem of Western philosophy.
Sub specie aeternitatis	Spinoza (Latin)	'Under the aspect of eternity' — Spinoza's description of the philosophical perspective that sees things as they truly are, in their necessary relation to the whole of nature, free from the distortion of time-bound perspective.
Übermensch	Nietzsche (German)	The 'overman' or 'beyond-human' — Nietzsche's concept of the self-overcoming individual who creates their own values rather than inheriting them from the herd, affirming life in its totality.

CHAPTER APPENDIX C

Recommended Reading

A Study Guide for the Serious Student

Primary Yogic and Indian Texts

- The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali — Commentary by Sri Swami Satchidananda (Integral Yoga Publications). Begin here.
- The Bhagavad Gita — Translation and commentary by Swami Chidbhavananda or Winthrop Sargeant (with Sanskrit). Read slowly, one chapter per week.
- The Principal Upanishads — Translated by S. Radhakrishnan (Oxford University Press). Particularly: Brihadaranyaka, Chandogya, Katha, Isha, Kena, Mandukya.
- Vivekachudamani (The Crest Jewel of Discrimination) — Adi Shankaracharya, translated by Swami Madhavananda. The most accessible introduction to Advaita Vedanta.
- Samkhya Karika — Ishvarakrishna, translated by Gerald Larson. The foundational text of Samkhya philosophy.
- Who Am I? — Ramana Maharshi. The most direct introduction to self-inquiry (Atma Vichara). Short, profound, inexhaustible.
- The Life Divine — Sri Aurobindo. The most ambitious attempt to synthesise Vedantic and Western evolutionary philosophy.

Western Philosophy — Essential Reading

- Plato — Republic (especially Books VI–VII: the Sun, Line, and Cave analogies); Phaedo; Meno. A good translation by G.M.A. Grube or Allan Bloom.
- Aristotle — Nicomachean Ethics. Penguin Classics edition. The foundational text of virtue ethics.
- Descartes — Meditations on First Philosophy. Very short; very important. Read with commentary.
- Hume — A Treatise of Human Nature, Book I (Of the Understanding). Especially the section on personal identity.
- Kant — Critique of Pure Reason (Prefaces and Introduction); Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals. Both available in accessible modern translations.
- Schopenhauer — The World as Will and Representation, Volume 1. The most India-influenced of the major Western philosophers.
- Nietzsche — Thus Spoke Zarathustra; Beyond Good and Evil; The Gay Science. Read in this order.
- Heidegger — Being and Time (Divisions I–II). Challenging but transformative. Read with a good secondary text.

- Sartre — Existentialism Is a Humanism (short); Being and Nothingness (selected chapters).

Comparative Philosophy — Bridging Texts

- Eastern Philosophy, Western Philosophy — Ninian Smart. A systematic comparative overview.
- The Perennial Philosophy — Aldous Huxley. Classic comparative anthology — read critically (note the perennialist methodology discussed in Chapter 3).
- The Varieties of Religious Experience — William James. Essential reading on the philosophical status of mystical experience.
- Indian Philosophy — S. Radhakrishnan (2 volumes). The most comprehensive scholarly introduction to Indian philosophy in English.
- The Philosophy of the Upanishads — Paul Deussen. Detailed German scholarly analysis — excellent for depth.
- Philosophy East and West — Academic journal. Quarterly publication devoted exclusively to comparative philosophy.
- Yoga and the Quest for the True Self — Stephen Cope. Accessible integration of yogic and Jungian psychology.
- The Yoga of the Bhagavad Gita — Sri Krishna Prem. A practitioner-philosopher's commentary — rare depth.

CHAPTER APPENDIX D

Seminar Discussion Questions

For Group Inquiry and Personal Reflection

The following questions are designed for seminar discussion, journaling, or personal philosophical inquiry. They are deliberately open — they do not have correct answers, but they do have better and worse ways of being engaged with, and that engagement is itself the practice.

Metaphysics and the Nature of Reality

5. Plato's prisoners mistake shadows for reality; Advaita Vedanta teaches that ordinary experience is Maya. Is this the same insight? Where do these two accounts of illusion converge and diverge in their metaphysical implications?
6. David Chalmers' hard problem asks why physical processes should give rise to subjective experience. How would a Samkhya philosopher respond? How would an Advaita Vedantin respond? Which response do you find more philosophically satisfying?
7. Kant argues that the noumenon (thing-in-itself) is permanently inaccessible. Yoga philosophy claims that Samadhi provides direct access to reality beyond the mind's structuring. Is this a genuine philosophical disagreement? Can it be resolved, or does it require taking a position?

The Self and Consciousness

8. Hume finds no permanent self on introspection — only a bundle of perceptions. The Buddhist tradition agrees: Anatman. The Upanishadic tradition disagrees: Atman is the permanent, self-luminous witness. Whose account do you find most plausible? What would it take to test these competing claims?
9. Sartre says 'existence precedes essence' — there is no fixed human nature. The Upanishads say Atman = Brahman — consciousness has an eternal, unchanging nature. Are these positions ultimately irreconcilable? Or is there a philosophical synthesis available?
10. Merleau-Ponty argues that the lived body is the ground of all experience. Patanjali's yoga works with the body as an instrument of consciousness. Are these compatible views? What does Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology add to the yoga teacher's understanding of embodied practice?

Ethics and Action

11. Kant's ethics is universal and context-independent; Svadharma (one's own dharma) is context-sensitive and individually determined. Can you construct a case in which following your Svadharma would violate Kant's Categorical Imperative? How would each tradition respond to this conflict?
12. Nietzsche's amor fati (love of fate) and the Bhagavad Gita's teaching of Karma Yoga (acting without attachment to results) share structural features. What are the deepest similarities? What is the most important difference?
13. Aristotle says genuine virtue requires habituation — the repeated practice of virtuous action until it becomes second nature. Patanjali says the Yamas and Niyamas are cultivated through sustained practice. Are these the same insight? What does each tradition add to the other?

Liberation and the Goal of Human Existence

14. Aristotle's Eudaimonia is fundamentally this-worldly and relational — it requires health, friendship, and community. Patanjali's Kaivalya is described as the 'aloneness' of pure consciousness. Are these compatible visions of human fulfilment, or are they fundamentally different? What does each miss that the other provides?
15. Maslow's self-actualisation requires the satisfaction of lower needs (safety, belonging, esteem) before the highest needs can be addressed. The yoga tradition teaches that liberation is available regardless of external conditions. Are these positions in genuine conflict? How might a yoga teacher working in an impoverished community navigate this philosophical tension?
16. William James identifies mystical states as having four characteristics: noetic quality, ineffability, transiency, and passivity. Based on your own practice, do you recognise these characteristics in the states of deep meditation or Samadhi? What does James' analysis add to your understanding of these states?

SKM YOGA

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Compiled by Dr. Shivam Mishra — Founder, SKM Yoga