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Religious Experience without an Experienter: The ‘Not I’ in Sāṃkhya and Yoga

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Abstract: “Experience” is a category that seems to have developed new meaning in European thought after the Enlightenment when personal inwardness took on the weight of an absent God. The inner self (including, a little later, a sub- or unconscious mind) rose to prominence about 200–300 years ago, around the time of the “Counter-Enlightenment” and Romanticism, and enjoyed a rich and long life in philosophy (including Lebensphilosophie) and religious studies, but began a steep descent under fire around 1970. The critique of “essentialism” (the claim that experience is self-validating and impervious to historical and scientific explanation or challenge) was probably the main point of attack, but there were others. The Frankfurt School (Adorno, Benjamin, et al.) claimed that authentic experience was difficult or impossible in the modern capitalist era. The question of the reality of the individual self to which experience happens also threatened to undermine the concept. This paper argues that the religious experience characteristic of Sāṃkhya and Yoga, while in some ways paralleling Romanticism and Lebensphilosophies, differs from them in one essential way. Sāṃkhyan/Yogic experience is not something that happens to, or in, an individual person. It does not occur to or for oneself (in the usual sense) but rather *puruṣārtha*, “for the sake of [*artha*] an innermost consciousness/self” [*puruṣa*] which must be distinguished from the “solitude” of “individual men” (the recipient, for William James, of religious experience) which would be called *ahaṃkāra*, or “ego assertion” in the Indian perspectives. The distinction found in European Lebensphilosophie between two kinds of experience, *Erlebnis* (a present-focused lived moment) and *Erfahrung* (a constructed, time-binding thread of life, involving memory and often constituting a story) helps to understand what is happening in Sāṃkhya and Yoga. The concept closest to experience in Sāṃkhya/Yoga is named by the Sanskrit root *dṛś-*, “seeing,” which is a process actualized through long meditative practice and close philosophical reasoning. The *Erfahrung* “story” enacted in Sāṃkhya/Yoga practice is a sort of dance-drama in which psychomaterial Nature (*prakṛti*) reveals to her inner consciousness and possessor (*puruṣa*) that she “is not, has nothing of her own, and does not have the quality of being an ‘I’” (*nāsmi na me nāham*). This self exposure as “not I” apophatically reveals *puruṣa*, and lets him shine for them both, as pure consciousness. *Prakṛti*’s long quest for *puruṣa*, seeking him with the finest insight (*jñāna*), culminates in realization that she is not the seer in this process but the seen, and that her failure has been to assert *aham* (“I”) rather than realize *nāham*, “Not I.” Her meditation and insight have led to an experience which was always for an Other, though that was not recognized until the story’s end. Rather like McLuhan’s “the medium is the message,” the nature or structure of experience in Sāṃkhya and Yoga is also its content, what religious experience is about in these philosophies and practices. In Western terms, we have religious experience only when we recognize what (all) experience (already) is: the unfolding story of *puruṣārtha*. Experience deepens the more we see that it is not ours; the recognition of non-I, in fact, is what makes genuine experience possible at all.

Keywords: religious experience; *Erfahrung*; *Erlebnis*; seeing; being seen; I; not I; Sāṃkhya; Yoga; *puruṣa*; *prakṛti*; *puruṣārtha*

1. Introduction

Gerald Larson (1969) insightfully described the Indian philosophical system Sāṃkhya¹ as an “eccentric dualism,” its two parts—*prakṛti* (Nature) and *puruṣa* (pure consciousness)—mutually cooperative, but also fundamentally “other” (*para*) to one another (*Sāṃkhya Kārikā* [SK] 61). Only *prakṛti* acts, but *puruṣa* alone provides the consciousness for action and owns it. Made of “strands” (*guṇas*), or deep affective “strivings” (*bhāvas*), there is only one, universal *prakṛti* (often associated in mythology with the Great Goddess, Devi) but a multitude of scintillae of consciousness (*puruṣas*). The body (including sense faculties and objects) and mind of each person are portions of *prakṛti*’s work or action (root *kr-*) for the sake of the experience or pleasure (*bhoga*), and simultaneously for the release (*mokṣa*), of the particular *puruṣa* around which that body–mind–object complex is organized. The default state of *prakṛti*’s experience (at least in her human instantiations) is misery or suffering (*duḥkha* [SK 1]) but her efforts are aimed at overcoming suffering—i.e., gaining positive affect and achieving release (the difference between or unity of these two goals has been a major topic for reflection on Sāṃkhya and I will return to it later). Patañjali’s Yoga is a closely related system of thought which differs somewhat from Sāṃkhya—which focuses on insight, *buddhi* or *jñāna*, as the path to happiness and release—by emphasizing deep meditation (*dhyāna*) leading to ecstasy (*samādhi*)². As a first approximation, we may say that *bhoga* corresponds to ordinary experience, especially of the pleasant sort, while *mokṣa* (and higher states of *samādhi*) are the realm of religious experience. Further reflection, however, will challenge this simple opposition. In the end, Sāṃkhya and Yoga are complex forms of mystical gnosis in which *prakṛti*, or the insightful and self-established mind which is her highest form, recognizes that she has been seen (*drṣṭa*) by *puruṣa* as wholly empty except for her focus on him (her *puruṣārtha*), and is so able to shine in his reflected light, for the first time as she truly is.

To write in 2019 on religious experience in Sāṃkhya and Yoga it is unavoidable to ask first how the general topic of “religious experience” should be understood, given the recent controversies over the reality of the phenomenon (Martin and McCutcheon 2014; McDaniel 2018; Jay 2005) which have called into question the very legitimacy of the field of “History of Religions,” a realm of inquiry partially based on the study of religious experiences (and which have, in the process, systematically devaluated its most prominent practitioner, Mircea Eliade, [Jonathan Z. Smith 2004]).³ We must also consider differences in how India and the West understand both religious “experience” and the nature of the person to whom experience occurs. Finally, to give religious experience context both in India and in the West, we must go beyond religion proper, into the broader understanding of experience in culture, especially the higher stages of cultural reflection called philosophy.

To begin with the third question, in the West experience became a central theme following the “Counter-Enlightenment” (Berlin 2000), particularly in 19th- and 20th-century European and American philosophies such as Pragmatism and Lebensphilosophie (Nietzsche, Bergson, Dilthey, Collingwood, Benjamin, Dewey, Peirce, etc. [Jay 2005]), and later became equally fundamental in religious studies (Schleiermacher, James, Eliade, Otto, van der Leeuw, etc. [Taves 2011, McDaniel 2018]). Dilthey and others had distinguished between *Geisteswissenschaften* (human sciences) which had to do with what is experienced, and *Naturwissenschaften* (natural sciences), which concerned objective, outer realities, following Descartes’ *res cogitans* (thinking entities) and *res extensa* (things taking up space, dimensional entities). The insight—and one could suggest the *hope*—in what might be called the “experiential turn” in philosophy and religion over a few hundred years was the possibility of sustaining a realm of human

¹ I will be discussing the *Sāṃkhya Kārikā* of Īśvarakṛṣṇa, which is generally considered the primary source for the doctrine. Secondary sources besides Larson (1969) include Johnston (1937), Burley (2012), and Larson (2018). For the Patañjali Yoga Sūtras, I have primarily used Bryant (2009), White (2014), and Hauer (1958).

² “Ecstasy” is a term used by Mircea Eliade (2009) to describe yogic experience but was not original with him; it may have been borrowed from Olivier Lacombe (1937).

³ June McDaniel reports that the “wreck of the good ship Eliade” was celebrated at a panel at the American Academy of Religion in 2017 (McDaniel 2018).

value, agency, culture, meaning, and life—in a word, of “experience”—after the “death of God” and beyond the corrosive reach of materialism, and particularly immune, later, to the acid of Darwinian evolutionary theory. Recently (beginning around 1970), the possibility of an independent territory of experience in religion which could be the privileged subject matter of a discipline of religious studies has come under intensive critique and revision as part of the general “linguistic turn” in the humanities and the ascendancy of postmodernism (J.Z. Smith, Sharf, Proudfoot, McCutcheon, etc. [Taves 2011]), partly because it seemed to imply “essentialism,” positing an unexamined category of “religious experience” as a *sui generis* reality immune to criticism and walled off from history and the social (and other) sciences. Besides essentialism, the Western view of religion as experience also was vulnerable to the charge that it saw religion as individualist, the momentary “self authenticating experience of the individual” (ibid, p. 5). This implied removing religious experience from history, politics, class, and power relations. William James defined religious experience in this way as “the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider divine.” (James [1902] 1985, p. 34). Momentary, sometimes mystical flashes of feeling or knowing come upon men (sic) “in their solitude.” Religion was seen as “numinous” (Otto) and sublime because it shook the security of a putatively stable individual with “sudden, discrete” (Taves 2011, p. 5) moments of something radically Other (“revelations, visions, dramatic conversion experiences” [ibid]).

To locate a category of “religious experience” in Hinduism, and specifically Sāṃkhya and Yoga, requires inquiry into how “experience” in general is understood there. Sāṃkhya and Yoga have a number of terms that overlap with Western “experience.” *Bhoga* names either enjoyable experience or experience generally, but most often with an implication of immediate perception with positive or negative hedonic valence. It does not generally name a religious experience, though I will try to show that Sāṃkhya does integrate *bhoga* into religious experience. At an explicitly religious level, that of *mokṣa*, spiritual release or enlightenment, the closest Sanskrit parallel to experience is the concept of “seeing” (*dṛś-*), and I will explore religious experience in Sāṃkhya and Yoga through this perspective. Although seeing in its usual, perceptual sense would seem to describe the immediate, sensory side of experience, *darśana*⁴ is conceived quite differently in Hinduism as a higher or deeper sort of insight/seeing, the product of long training (philosophical study and meditation: *abhyāsa*, *dhyāna*). An unquestioned, perception-like understanding of experience (the “self authenticating” [Taves 2011] perceptions of “individual men in their solitude” [W. James] or (more broadly) the “naked, primitive, self evident experience of the Enlightenment” [Benjamin [1918] 2004]) might fit *bhoga* in its usual sense, but does not cover the semantic range of *dṛś-*. A distinction present in German, and important to a number of German thinkers, may help to see what is missing. *Erlebnis* (the kind of present-focused lived moment that the above citations describe) is distinguished from experience as *Erfahrung* (a constructed, time-binding thread of life, involving memory and often constituting a story). We will find that Sāṃkhya/Yoga experience is generally closer to *Erfahrung* than to the self-validating *Erlebnis* sort of experience. *Darśana* (seeing) is something constructed or worked out in practice (*abhyāsa*) although paradoxically it is also revealed, in the end, to be self-evidently visible—reflected by a seeing Other who shares it with one’s (lower) “self.” The *Erlebnis/Erfahrung* distinction, however, while useful, is not enough. Sāṃkhya/Yoga *darśana* finds the putative seer to be, in fact, *seen*, (the apparent experiencer is actually experienced) and aims to develop in the practitioner the insight (*jñāna*) and meditative focus (*dhyāna*) to realize this. Specifically, Sāṃkhya and Yoga ask us to realize personally, and integrate into life, a principle called *puruṣārtha*, “for the sake of consciousness” (*Sāṃkhya Kārikā* 69). Briefly, this concept—which I believe to be the central idea of Sāṃkhya and Yoga—asserts that all the action of sentient beings (and everything that happens in the universe is action—*karma*) is done “in

⁴ The term *darśana* (“seeing”) is used in both the *Sāṃkhya Kārikā* and *Yoga Sūtra* as are many other words made from the root *dṛś-*. I use *darśana* here because it is the Sanskrit term for *darshan*, the usual spelling in anthropological and religious studies works for a related concept in contemporary Hinduism that will be discussed later. (Eck 1998, etc.)

order to" (*artha*) give *puruṣa* pleasure or experience (*bhoga*) and release (*mokṣa*) from the suffering of bondage to the struggle for satisfaction of desire (*autsukya*, *Sāṃkhya Kārikā* [SK] 58). Actions are done by the body and mind so as to give consciousness these two kinds of experience: pleasure of the eye (and other senses) and enlightenment through seeing. It is the latter that is closest to what is generally understood as "religious experience," but we will find that the eye's pleasure also becomes religious when understood rightly.

2. Western Heuristics and the Indian Understanding of Self

Several Western ways of understanding experience will be of help in this enquiry: among them, Freudian psychoanalysis, Jungian analytical psychology, Heinz Kohut's self psychology, and Walter Benjamin's attempts to root experience in "aura" and the "dialectical image." The fluidity and permeability of the Indian self explored by Frederick Smith (2006), Alan Roland (1989), and Prakash Desai and myself (Collins and Desai 1999) also help to understand a sort of experience that is not based in an individual's momentary life (*Erlebnis*) or even solely in his constructed story (*Erfahrung*). First, in Freud, we find in ordinary pleasure (satisfaction of the drives) the key to understanding the deep and final release he calls the death instinct or nirvana principle (thanatos). I suggest that Freud's drive reduction is like Sāṃkhyan *bhoga* (specifically what is called the latter's *autsukya* quality at SK 58) and that Freudian thanatos is akin to the release (*mokṣa*) that is termed *ānanda* in the Upaniṣads and elsewhere, and which in Sāṃkhya and Yoga is associated with complete satisfaction and wholeness (*kaivalya*). Experience (*darśana*, seeing), is the doorway to *mokṣa*. While integral and in a way unified, *darśana* is also complex. To summarize what will take some effort to explicate, the *Sāṃkhya Kārika* asserts that *prakṛti*, or the *jñāna bhāva* or *sattvic buddhi* (both essentially refer to discriminating insight) that is her true or highest part, realizes that "I am seen as 'nāham', not I", by and for the sake of *puruṣa* who, she realizes, simultaneously recognizes that "I have seen her" (*prakṛti*). Even a cursory glance shows that "religious experience" like this cannot be only a unique, momentary flash of insight into the cognitive/affective/volitional apparatus of an individual person, who is only a construct made of elements of *prakṛti* (i.e., it cannot be just a satisfaction of drives or reduction of *duḥkha*), because *darśana* sees across the division between the two principles, *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*, that are wholly "other" (*para*) to each other. *Darśana* bridges between the halves of Larson's "eccentric dualism," a psychomaterial part or aspect and a part that is pure consciousness. Religious experience involves a subtle and hard-to-comprehend relationship connecting them. To anticipate once again, the nature or structure of experience in Sāṃkhya and Yoga (*prakṛti's puruṣa* orientation) is also, in the end, its fundamental content;⁵ it is what religious experience is about in these philosophies. In Western terms, we have religious experience when we recognize (see) what (all) experience (already) is.⁶

3. The Self as Composite

Psychoanalysis since Lacan in 1936, but most significantly in Winnicott (Winnicott [1971] 1971/2005) and Kohut (1977), has recognized that the sense of self is not entirely a primordial or *sui generis* fact in the personality, or at least that it is not a singular one. Alan Roland (1989) showed that what he called a "familial self" or "self-we regard" is more fundamental in Indian (and to some extent Japanese) psychology than is an individual "I." Winnicott and Kohut, to some degree following Lacan, found that Roland's insight does not apply exclusively to foreign societies and ethnicities but also, if we go deep enough, to Western European and American personality. As Winnicott showed, the Teddy Bear is part of the child who plays with it—part of his family, part of his society and world, and part of his psychodynamics. Kohut named the inner images

⁵ We may be reminded here of Marshall McLuhan's observation that "the medium is the message."

⁶ The ultimate experience for a person (*prakṛtic* construction, *liṅga*) endowed with *puruṣārtha* is precisely to realize that *puruṣārtha* is his own inmost nature.

of aspects of the world that complete us “self objects,” which he defined as parts of the outer world that we treat as if they were aspects of ourselves over which we have the same sort of control and ownership as we do over parts of our own bodies and minds (Kohut 1977). In Bengali fieldwork, Inden and Nicholas (1973) discovered the concept of the *kartā*, the “seed person” within a family, village, larger land area, or region (i.e., a sort of bigger or smaller king) whose family members (wives, sons, servants, etc.) are part of him and are better felt as aspects of his life rather than as independent beings. Similarly, in Vedic thought, “when the father dies, he transfers his vital breaths (*prāṇas*) into the son and gives him the sacred knowledge. . . .” (Collins and Desai 1999, p. 379). In this way he “extends himself through offspring” (*taneyebhiḥ tanute*, *ibid*, p. 378). Smith’s extensive analysis of the possession phenomenon in India (which can be either negative/destructive or positive/enhancing) finds that possession is more possible because the boundaries of the persons who are to possess and to be possessed are relatively permeable and not as sharp as they are in the Western individual. (Smith 2006). The relatively fluid inner workings of the personality of concern to Sāṃkhya are continuous with its outward permeability or “dividuality” (Marriott 1976). (I am proposing, in other words, that the flowing of cause into effect—*satkārya*—within a person makes possible the flowing of one person into another—*praveśa*.)

4. Experience (*Erfahrung*) in Walter Benjamin

Walter Benjamin, following Krakauer and many *Lebensphilosophie* predecessors, sought a way to true experience (*Erfahrung*, rather than *Erlebnis*) in modernity. “Benjamin never abandoned his efforts to reconceptualize the conditions of possibility for experience in modernity. In an unpublished note of 1929, he writes that ‘the word [experience, *Erfahrung*] has now become a fundamental term in many of my projects.’” (Hansen 2012).

The concept of experience (*Erfahrung*) . . . [is emphatically elaborated] in the writings of Benjamin and Adorno. . . . Benjamin, theorizing the conditions of possibility of *Erfahrung* in modernity, had linked its historic decline with the proliferation of *Erlebnis* (immediate but isolated experience) under the conditions of industrial capitalism; in this context, *Erfahrung* crucially came to entail the capacity of memory—individual and collective, involuntary as well as cognitive—and the ability to imagine a different future. (Hansen 2012, p. xiv).

One of Benjamin’s central concepts is that of the “dialectical image,” an image connecting past and present that can make genuine *Erfahrung* experience possible in modernity.

It’s not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on the past; rather, the image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: it is not progression but image, suddenly emergent. (Benjamin 2002).⁷

Benjamin’s complex intellectual development—paradoxically both messianic and materialist—from his twenties until his early death at 48 repeatedly returned to an essentially mystical sense of recognition of similarity between two moments that ignite when they come together. The image created lives between (forms a bond—in Sanskrit a *bandhu*—linking) past and present, like *prakṛti*’s life devoted to *puruṣārtha*, the giving of pleasure and release to *puruṣa*. Benjamin’s understanding of how the dialectical image makes (mystical) experience possible is analogous to the experience shared between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* in *mokṣa*. The image does not live either in the past (for Benjamin, 19th-century Paris) nor the present (Weimar and post-Weimar Germany), just as

⁷ Benjamin (2002), Arcades “Awakening” (Arcades, 462; n2a, 3).

kaivalya—the experience of release into pure consciousness (*citiśakti*)—does not consist of either *puruṣa* alone or of the dissolution of the fluctuations (*vṛtti*) of *prakṛti*, (*citta-vṛtti-nirodha* YS 2), but rather of both as it were together, “constellated” but not touching, because at the moment of the experience *prakṛti* “is not” (*nāsmi*) and *puruṣa*’s vision of her has been completed; it is not something that happens only in a moment (like *Erlebnis* experience) but rather “has” been done (as it were in the perfect tense: “I have been seen;” *drstāham*, is a past-perfect participle). At the complex moment of “being seen” (*drṣṭāham*), the eternal fact of *puruṣārtha* as the essence of the one seen (*prakṛti*) shines forth.

5. *Puruṣārtha*: The Two Aims of Action in *Sāṃkhya* and Yoga

As we have seen, the ultimate purpose of the psycho-cosmology called *Sāṃkhya*, and the meditative practices and theory of higher states of consciousness named Yoga, is to liberate the self (*puruṣa*), which is posited to be pure, objectless consciousness, from the suffering (*duḥkha*) that forms the basic or “default” state of existence in the world. Along the way, however, *Sāṃkhya* reveals an extraordinarily rich perspective on virtually every aspect of life, maintaining a paradoxical but consistent balance between the aims of release from and fulfillment of the psychomaterial qualities and strivings. *Sāṃkhya* proceeds by analyzing natural (principally human) being, finding at the basis of action—strikingly like Freudian psychoanalysis—an implicit urge to satisfy desires, which it understands to mean bringing them to a close⁸; it aims to show that fulfillment of desire for enjoyment (*bhoga*) is similar, or even equivalent, to releasing consciousness from its apparent imprisonment in material experience (*mokṣa*, *kaivalya*) (SK 58). Yoga lays out a moral-ascetic and meditative practice that it claims will move the human mind-body entity in the direction of a less-fragmented, ignorant, overly active, and unfree state (all aspects of suffering, *duḥkha*), towards a new way of being in which the person is able to follow and realize the argument of *Sāṃkhya*’s ontological analysis (*jñāna*). Religion, for Yoga, is meditation in service of a salvific insight or gnosis. Culture, which cannot be separated from religion, properly (though not commonly) enacts and celebrates this insight (Collins 1991, 2006). *Sāṃkhya*/Yoga are therefore fundamentally ways of understanding and living intelligently in the world. While commentators on *Sāṃkhya*/Yoga⁹ from Buddhist and other Hindu perspectives (referring to its emphasis on suffering [*duḥkha*], etc.), and many Western interpreters view it as ascetic and life-denying, a worldlier, life-affirming view of Yoga¹⁰ (at least) has been recognized in recent years (Chapple 2003; Whicher 2003). Lloyd Pflueger, who is partially aligned with this trend, sees Yoga, along with *Sāṃkhya*, as walking the razor’s edge between a desired release (final insight into the radical difference between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*; i.e., *jñāna*) and an inexorable reality: that one can approach the goal of release asymptotically but never fully reach it. The never-quite-achieved *jñāna* or *bhoga* is “glorified” by the meditative practice of yoga and by performance of the other arts and practices of life that can be viewed as lower or less-conscious forms of Yoga. “The real work is the work of treading the path to liberation. In an unexpected sense, the path can be seen as a goal in itself.” (Pflueger 2003, p. 79). In a way, Yoga is a *Bildung*, a practice of spiritual and cultural education. As such, Yogic (and Sankhyan) experience is gradual, growing through the slow diminution of “afflictions” (*kleśas*) and ignorance of the true nature of experience itself (*ajñāna*). The practice of *Sāṃkhya* and Yoga is like Benjamin’s dialectic, a wearing away without end of *kleśas*. *Mokṣa* is, as Benjamin put it, “dialectics at a standstill,” or perhaps we could go a little farther and say it is dialectics resolved into its essence.

⁸ Clearly expressed in SK 2, *yogaś cittavṛtti nirodhaḥ*, “yoga is the suppression of the twists and turns of the mind.”

⁹ The extent to which *Sāṃkhya* and Yoga form parts of what is essentially one perspective is disputed. Larson (1969, 2018), Burley (2012), and Pflueger (2003) are among those who have argued that Patañjali’s *Yogasūtra* belongs to a school or subschool of *Sāṃkhya*. Others have tried to show that Yoga is different from *Sāṃkhya* in important ways. This paper assumes that Larson and Pflueger are basically correct, at least in their conclusion that Patañjali’s Yoga agrees with the fundamental theses of the *Sāṃkhya Kārika*, that *prakṛti* acts solely for the sake of pleasing and releasing *puruṣa*, and that her increasing knowledge of her difference from *puruṣa* paradoxically moves her closer to him and is salvific for her as well.

¹⁰ In order to view Yoga as a way of life in the world, Whicher and Chapple separate it from *Sāṃkhya* more than I find justified.

6. The World of the Self

I will attempt to describe the person and his world as understood by Sāṃkhya/Yoga, emphasizing that the word “his” is not intended to name persons in general; this is a gendered system concerned primarily with the male self, though one caught in an ineluctable relationship with a female environment. In Sāṃkhya’s “eccentric dualism,” one of the two fundamental principles, *prakṛti*, represents almost everything and the other, *puruṣa*, almost nothing. *Prakṛti* is psychomaterial substance of which body and mind both consist, the two differing only in subtlety or degree of density. Everything “from Brahma to a blade of grass” (SK 54) consists of *prakṛti*, which is always implicitly personified and explicitly or implicitly female. *Puruṣa*, literally a male person, is in Sāṃkhya the name of bare awareness, or perhaps better of an instance of bare awareness, a pure consciousness free from intentionality (in the sense of being “about” something, specifically, about *prakṛti*). This is a fundamental fact for Sāṃkhya/Yoga that explains its “eccentricity”: *prakṛti* is about *puruṣa* but *puruṣa* is not about *prakṛti*.¹¹ In her higher or earlier, undifferentiated state, *prakṛti* is called *avyakta*, *mūlaprakṛti*, and *pradhāna*.¹² She evolves through a process called *pravṛtti* (development) or *pariṇāma* (devolution), falling into successively lower states of being in an emanational (d)evolutionary course in which the effect is always implicit in its earlier states or cause (*satkārya*). This is very similar to Buddhist “conditioned origination” (*pratītyasamutpada*), and also like the devolution of the world process imagined in the later Hindu succession of “ages” (*yugas*) leading from the perfect past (*kṛta yuga*, the Golden Age) to the demonic present (*kali yuga*). In another way, however, *prakṛti* is inherently teleological, acting for the sake of *puruṣa* (*puruṣārtha* = *puruṣa* + *artha*). I emphasize the word “act” (Sanskrit root *kṛ-*), for *prakṛti* is never impelled by “efficient” (in Aristotle’s sense) or purely mechanical causation. Whatever happens in the world is always an *action*, something *done*, never unmotivated or random movement, always behavior infused by what we could call character, the sediment or residue of past acts (*karma*, *vāsana*, *saṃskāra*, etc.) that partially or mainly motivates new action.

Prakṛti acts, yet, paradoxically, is not an actor, for she does not own what she does. As noted above, there are two sides of *puruṣārtha*, the action of *prakṛti* for *puruṣa*’s sake: first, there is the desire or impulsion to give *puruṣa* enjoyment, which is understood, much as with Freud, as the cessation of a desire. Second, there is the desire to liberate *puruṣa* from bondage in the “threefold suffering” (*duḥkhatraya*, SK 1) of the human condition, a goal that in psychoanalytic terms corresponds to Freud’s “death instinct” (*thanatos*) or “Nirvana principle.”¹³ The *Sāṃkhya Kārikā* claims that these two, apparently very different, aims are intrinsically similar or even identical.

As (in the world) (a man) engages in actions for the sake of the cessation of a desire; so also does the *prakṛti* function for the sake of the release of the *puruṣa*. (SK 58, Larson’s translation [Larson 1969, p. 273].¹⁴

Suffering, the distance from happiness named by the word “desire” (*audsukya*, from *ud* + *suka*, literally “away from pleasure”), is found by both Sāṃkhya and Yoga to arise from a certain kind of selfhood, called *ahamkāra* in Sāṃkhya and *asmitā* in Yoga. This sort of self asserts itself (*ahamkāra*) and its “I am-ness” (*asmitā*) in a way that can and often does lead in the direction of the demonic. One of the clearest classical examples of this is the career of the demon Rāvaṇa in the epic texts. Grandson of the god Brahmā, Rāvaṇa refuses to accept his place in the proper order (*dharma*) of the world, and inflates his ego (*ahamkāra*) through ascetic practices, aiming to become lord of the whole

¹¹ For a discussion of this eccentricity in feminist terms, see Collins (2000). In the language of (recent) “twenty-somethings,” *puruṣa* is “not into” *prakṛti* as she is “into” him.

¹² And *mūlaprakṛti* and *avyakta*.

¹³ Collins (forthcoming). Also Freud [1930] (Freud [1930] 2010) and Laplanche and Pontalis (1974).

¹⁴ *audsukyānīṣṭhāyāṁ yathā
kriyāsu pravartate lokāḥ,
puruṣasya vimokṣārtham
pravartate tadvad avyaktam* (SK 58).

cosmos. This leads him to cause maximum suffering to himself and others. But Rāvaṇa, far from being unique, is best understood as an “ideal type” (in Weber’s sense) for the world of action (*karmas*) that he wants to rule. His great enemy (and Lord), Rāma, can be seen similarly, as an antitype to Rāvaṇa, overcoming suffering and the cravings of egoism through insight (*sattvic buddhi, prajñā*) that realizes the fundamental difference between our unrolling karmic process (*pariṇāma, pravṛtti*) and the principle of pure consciousness (*puruṣa*) that witnesses *prakṛti*’s evolution. Suffering is thus correlated with ignorance (and demons are typically revealed as witless fools),¹⁵ insight with release from ego.

7. “I Have Been Seen”: Darshan in the Sāṃkhya Kārikā and the Yoga Sutra

While Yoga and philosophical Sāṃkhya are not generally understood as artistic or cultural performances, the texts suggest that this may be a good way of understanding what they are. Indeed, the anthropologist McKim Marriott (1989) has found that much of Indian culture and society can be seen as expressions or embodiments of the three Sāṃkhyan *guṇas*.¹⁶ We will address the trope of Nature (*prakṛti*) imagined as a female dancer (*nartakī*) performing for the eyes of an implicitly royal witness, consciousness (*puruṣa*). Correct thinking (Sāṃkhya) and deep meditation (Yoga) are compared to a dance performed by an unsurpassably refined performer (*sukumārataram na kimcid asti, SK 61*) whose (mental and physical) movements enact a sort of apophatic theology, negating herself more and more until, at a moment of supreme poise, she recognizes her own emptiness and thereby opens herself to be seen by the unobstructed eye of consciousness: “I am not, I own nothing, there is no I in me” (*nāsmi na me nāham, SK 64*). This “not I” realization is at the same time a recognition of *being seen as* fully self-negating, which permits her to pass into a state of empty, but complete, fulfillment in which she need not continue to perform for *puruṣa* (SK 61) but only to recognize, through his eyes reflecting hers seeing his, that all is “pure essential knowledge” (*viśuddham kevalam jñānam, SK 64*).

Puruṣārtha means that all worldly action is already a dance choreographed around giving enjoyment and release to *puruṣa*. It is only so that the dance can reach a satisfactory fulfillment, can finally end, that correct thinking (Sāṃkhya) and meditation (Yoga) need be added to the performance. Yoga and Sāṃkhyan philosophy are refinements, implicit from the beginning in the principle of *puruṣārtha*, but nevertheless requiring careful practice of *jñāna bhāva*, the mental faculty or “fundamental striving” (as Gerald Larson translates *bhāva*) of “insight.” All experience is religious experience when properly understood (with the *jñāna bhāva*).

In fact, the desire to cultivate *jñāna* is suggested in verse 1 of the *Sāṃkhya Kārikā*, and that text ends with insights that only pure *jñāna* can reach. Already the first verse tells us that the desire for *jñāna* (i.e., *jijñāsa*) is the basis for the quest for a “singular” (*aikānta*) and “eternal” (*atyanta*) reality beyond the “threefold suffering” (*duḥkhatraya*) of ordinary life. Near the end of the SK (verse 68), the *prakṛtic* person has become focused on pure *jñāna*, after turning away from the other seven *bhāvas* (mastery, attachment, etc.). This *jñāna* shows *kaivalya* (singular and essential being), which is characterized in the same words we found used aspirationally in verse 1, *aikāntika* and *atyantika*. The SK ends in the achievement of what it sought in the beginning.¹⁷

Sāṃkhya and Yoga are forms of cultivation, higher sorts of “*Bildung*,” culture. They are ways of self-development, of making life a practice of the art of living insight (and so of “religious experience”), moving from the yearning for *jñāna* to the fullness of *jñāna* itself. Both Sāṃkhya and Yoga are aware that their insights and practices can never quite reach, in all its fullness, what they aim for. Imagination and metaphor are the only way to get a sense of the goal, called *kaivalya* (oneness or integrity), and the practitioner of Yoga or thinker of Sāṃkhya enacts a trope, an intricate and subtle

¹⁵ e.g., Kumbakarna.

¹⁶ Also Collins (forthcomingb).

¹⁷ A translation of verse 1 might be: “Because of the impact [*abhighāta*] of the 3-fold suffering there arises the desire to understand how to knock it away or make it rebound [*abhighāta*, the same word, is used again]. If you say ‘there is no reason’ [to seek such a radical solution] we say ‘No, [other means of dealing with it] are not eternal and complete.’”

way of imagining satisfaction and release (*bhoga* and *mokṣa*). Perhaps the two best metaphors are those of the dancer performing before a spectator (SK 59) and the chanting of the syllable OM (YS 1.28). More than metaphors, both are better understood as *symbols*, images that evoke something ineffable, allow communication between the sensible or intelligible and a transcendent reality. The communion between the symbols of dancer and OM, and their ultimate referent, the fact of *puruṣārtha*, is similar to “darshan” in later Hinduism,¹⁸ the two-way reflective gaze between human and divine (Eck 1998, Babb 1981, 1984; Elison 2014).

Seeing and being seen are the principal images the SK uses to describe the process by which *prakṛti* gives experience (suffering or pleasure) to *puruṣa* and also releases him. It is in seeing *prakṛti* in her different states that *puruṣa* seems to experience pain and enjoyment, and it is in seeing her at the moment of her complete recognition of selflessness that *puruṣa* approaches release (in her eye). This recognition of being seen allows *prakṛti* to stop her frantic search for the quenching of desire (*autsukya nivṛtti* SK 58) that has motivated her action previously. In letting go, she realizes that she lacks all selfhood, agency, and ownership. Standing rapt before the mirror of *puruṣa*, *prakṛti* becomes empty and shows *puruṣa* her realization that she shines as a perfect zero in his unstained eye. He no longer reflects pleasurable or painful action from her back to her cognitive faculties (only to receive it again from her in the unsatisfying mirror play that is the ordinary *prakṛtic* mentality). *Puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, through the latter’s realization of *nāsmi* (“not I”), spiral towards a play of intervision (darshan) that explodes in a taste of *bhoga* when each faces their essential nature: integrity (*kaivalya*) in seeing (for *puruṣa*) and integrity in being seen (for *prakṛti*); *drṣtāham* (“I am seen”) and *drṣtā māyā* (“I have seen her”). The two sides of *kaivalya* are also evoked at YS 4.34 where *prakṛti*’s *kaivalya* is characterized by the emptying of the *guṇas* of their urgency to be seen by *puruṣa*, and *puruṣa*’s *kaivalya* is described as *svarūpa-pratiṣṭhā citiśakti*, the “power of consciousness established in its own nature.”¹⁹

Tropes of seeing are also central in the *Yoga Sūtra*. *Prakṛti* is referred to as the realm of the “seen” (*dr̥śya*) and the two *arthas* of *bhoga* (experience, enjoyment) and *apavarga* (release) are referred to *prakṛti* in her form as “seen,” *dr̥śya* (YS 2.18). Spiritual progress is understood as improved “seeing” (*darśana*) and removal of “non-seeing” (*adarśana*). YS 2.26 refers to the purified mind as like a dust-free mirror reflecting clearly the light of *puruṣa*. *Samādhis* (meditative ecstasies) are named by their quality of “insight” or even transcendence of insight (*jñā*, i.e., *samprajñāta* and *asamprajñāta*). *Puruṣa* is characterized as the “Seer” (*dr̥śi*).

Let us pursue our metaphor of the dancer (*nartakī*, SK 59) whose beautiful steps and grace allow her to express her real nature, and, as it were, to tell the story of herself and her “spectator” (*prekṣa*) from both their points of view. The image of *prakṛti*, as she moves towards realization for *puruṣa*, which she receives back from him, shows us the Sāṃkhyan practitioner as performing artist. I believe the same is true in the *Yoga Sūtra* (1.27), where utterance of the *praṇava*, the syllable OM, symbolizes the ineffable in a more continuous way²⁰ that allows *prakṛti* in her *kaivalya* state to become a kind of *puruṣa* (*puruṣa-viśeṣa*, a term used to describe Īśvara, the Lord of yoga [YS 1.24]).²¹ The circular motion implied in darshan (seeing her seeing me seeing her. . .) is held by OM in a single, integral symbol that binds time in a realized whole. The artist lives or enacts the “secret” (*guhya*, SK 69) and enigmatic relationship between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* in a unified image, identified in the YS as the Lord of yoga, Īśvara, the personification of OM.

¹⁸ And Buddhism and Jainism.

¹⁹ The same two-sided vision of spiritual realization is suggested in the first two verses of the *Yoga Sūtra*: “Yoga is the stilling of the fluctuations of thought and emotion.” [1]. Then the seer (the conscious being, *puruṣa*) rests in its own form.” [2] (Phillips 2009, p. 207).

²⁰ OM’s omnipresence, its ability to bind time, is why chanting it immediately invokes its deep sense of the Lord (Īśvara) and makes it (whenever it is uttered) the teacher of the ancients (YS 1.26–1.28).

²¹ The idea of *puruṣa viśeṣa*, which could be construed either as a “specific *puruṣa*” or as a “likeness or sort of *puruṣa*” (along the lines of the use of the same word in Rāmānuja’s *viśiṣṭādvaita*, “qualified, or a sort of, non-dualism”) anticipates the goal of *prakṛti*’s (as opposed to *puruṣa*’s) *kaivalya*. YS 4.34.

The syllable OM (a-u-m) expresses at once the state of suffering or ignorance (a), yogic or philosophical practice (u) and recognition of *nāham* = “not I” (m). As an integral whole, OM represents the source of universal wisdom (*sarvajñā*). The practice of OM and its meaning are one experience (*taj japas tad artha-bhāvanam* [YS 1.28], “reciting OM is to experience its meaning”). There is no separation between word and meaning, no seeking after something unattained, a *puruṣārtha* located in the future. *Puruṣārtha* is still the central idea, but now becomes something timelessly *found* rather than a goal to be sought. We are perhaps returning in the direction of a redeemed *Erlebnis*. There is a fulfillment in the practice of OM, not a dead or rigid stasis but a nimble and flexible state of readiness-cum-attainment, perhaps expressed in the YS by the highest meditative state called *dharma-megha-samādhi* or “raincloud of *dharma*” integrity. At YS 4.34, the final verse of the text, the fulfillment of *puruṣārtha* is described as *pratiprasāva*, a turning around or back of the *guṇas*, the exact opposite of the turnings (forward into greater suffering) of the mind (*cittavṛtti*) that yoga is declared in YS 2 to stop.

The dance between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* is thus the dance of the Lord of Yoga, whom we might imagine as Śiva *tanḍava*, dancing upon a remorseful, but now enlightened, demon of Forgetfulness (Apasmara) representing the unenlightened state of *prakṛti*. This is the life of spiritual art, which we receive in the darshan of the god or goddess, in a relationship that reveals to us the union of suffering and release.

To illustrate this paradoxical vision of seeing and seen as a single fact, we will detour to the reflections of the Swiss psychologist C.G. Jung during his mystical months of 1913–1914, most adequately expressed in the short text from 1916, “Seven Sermons to the Dead.” (Jung 2009). The context is Jung’s visionary guru, the imaginal figure “Philemon,” teaching a group of Christian “dead” a truth that they did not find in their pilgrimage to the Holy Land of Jerusalem (essentially this truth is the necessity to expand God to include evil as well as good). At the same time, the figure of Jung himself within the story queries Philemon about the truth of what he says, asking whether what “Jung,” and the dead, see through Philemon’s teachings is really true. “Jung” (the imaginal figure) asks, “are you certain that things really are as you say?” Philemon replies, “I am certain these things are as I say. . . . my knowledge is precisely these things themselves.” (*Red Book*, p. 515). Forty years later, in a television interview, Jung was asked whether he believed in God. He answered, famously, “I don’t need to believe, I know.” Philemon’s (and Jung’s) teachings—as we see also in Sāṃkhya/Yoga—cannot be understood but can be (at least partially) known in performance, practice, *sādhana*, life—symbolically. As Jung quotes Philemon, “This God is to be known but not understood.” (ibid 522). Knowledge, for Jung and Sāṃkhya/Yoga, is not separate from being. What we know (experience, our *Erfahrung*) is what we are (and already were, at least virtually).

Sāṃkhya and Yoga teach what the thinkers and meditators experience in their practice, the fact of two complementary I-positions (*dr̥ṣṭāsmi*—the “I” of *prakṛti* in Sāṃkhya, corresponding to *dr̥śya* in Yoga; and *dr̥ṣṭā māyā*—the “I” of *puruṣa* in Sāṃkhya, in Yoga called *dr̥śi*) that approach oneness in being performed together. Seeking to give *puruṣa* enjoyment means to give him the experience of one’s *prakṛtic* self. It is the quality of this self that determines whether *puruṣa*’s experience is one of suffering (*duḥkha*) or pleasant repose (*avasthāna svastha*).²² Yet, in truth, it is always *prakṛti* who experiences *puruṣa*’s experience for him.²³ *Puruṣa* is imagined as a necessary “existent” (the term is

²² The practice of Yoga passes through positive rather than painful experience. *Bhoga*, as a *puruṣārtha*, thus emphasizes the quest for pleasant experience rather than experience in general. YS 1.18, for instance, locates one kind of *samādhi* as following focus on the pleasant (Phillips 2009, p. 208, as “contentment”).

²³ This “‘for’ *puruṣa*” follows from and extends the sense of *artha* in *puruṣārtha*. *Prakṛti* lives vicariously, as though she were *puruṣa*, as if she were giving *herself* enjoyment and liberation (this is Whicher’s (2013) “self as seen”); but it is only when she realizes the “as if,” and sees that she is actually doing it for *puruṣa* (who is an Other), that she can reach her goal, be released, achieve realization. *Prakṛti* becomes enlightened “for” *puruṣa* but in the end only she is enlightened, achieves release, as SK 62 clearly states. YS 2.6 “Egoity (*asmitā*) is when it seems as if the powers of seeing and the seen are of the same nature.” (*dr̥ṣṭa darśana śaktyor ekātmātā ivā ‘smitā*, my translation.) This is a very clear statement of the idea of “the self as seen.” Also see SK 56: “This creation . . . functions for the sake of the release of each *puruṣa*; (this is done) for the sake of another [*parārtha*] as if it were for her own (benefit) [*svārtha*].” Larson translation (Larson 1969, p. 272).

from Stephen Collins' [Collins 2010] discussion of Buddhist nirvana), the observer who reflects back *prakṛti*'s affliction (suffering) or takes and passes back her "not-I" realization in a darshan that dances indefinitely closer to oneness (*jñāna*, SK 54). The ineffable is performed in *prakṛti*'s dance of apophysis: *nāsmi na me nāham*. Do Sāṃkhya and Yoga "believe" what they say? We might answer, with Jung, that they do not need to believe, because they are what they experience. *Nāsmi* is not a factual assertion; it is a mystical realization or apotheosis.

8. Darshan in Contemporary Hinduism

Lawrence A. Babb (1981, 1984) and Diana Eck (1998) some years ago studied the role of darshan in a number of Indian religious groups including the Radhasoami sects, the Brahma Kumaris, the modern saint Satya Sai Baba, and the film *Jai Santoshi Ma* and its religious aftermath. William Ellison (2014, 2018) later investigated darshan in the street shrines focused on the other (Shirdi) Sai Baba in Bombay, while Patrick McCartney (2018) looked at darshan-related phenomena in the Shanti Mandir, a very recent and still active offshoot of the "meditation revolution" instigated by Swami Muktananda and his guru Swami Nityananda (senior). Ellison, citing Katherine Katherine (1997), makes use of Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theories to explain darshan, with the fundamental idea being Lacan's seminal concept from 1936, the "mirror stage" and the subsequent creation and transformation of the image the child has of itself. Lacan's basic thought is that the self of the baby is given to her by how the mother (or other caregivers) see her. The world in which the growing child will subsequently live, the so-called "symbolic order" of constraint and unfreedom, is close to Heidegger's "calculative" and "inauthentic" realm of fallen, and "thrown," *dasein*, and perhaps even Max Weber's "iron cage" of industrial life or Adorno's view of culture as indoctrination and anesthesia. It is also close to Sāṃkhyan *ahamkāra* and Yogic *asmitā*. Although Ewing and Ellison disagree with Lacan's extreme cultural pessimism, they find value in his insight that the object of darshan (say a lithographic image of Sai Baba in a Bombay street shrine) reaches out to the passerby and visually lays hold of his consciousness; i.e., it "sees" him and causes him to look back.²⁴ Child research has consistently found that the reciprocal looking and smiling responses of mother and child are fundamental to the child's growing ability to regulate emotions and of the mother's to educate her child into the realities of living. (Infants who are later diagnosed with Autism show reduced sensitivity to direct gaze by the parent). Psychoanalytic self psychology (especially Winnicott and Kohut) trace the development of the self to the child's ambition to be seen as valuable by the mother and the mother's willingness to allow the child to merge with her idealized, much more powerful, adult identity. The child is constituted as a self by being perceived as one. The nature of that self can be one of suffering and disregulation or freedom and creative life.²⁵

A mystery lies at the heart of this self recognized by the mother in the baby, and it is one that Indian thought has worked to understand, and locate within the ritual structure of worship. As Babb points out, darshan is reciprocal between worshipper and god, with visual and other kinds of substance flowing both ways. But in this exchange, the god is clearly the more important source, and the power behind the image is ultimately where the energy of darshan originates. A good way to see this is to consider not one image but a whole "mountainside" of them, i.e., the images carved into the outer surface of a Hindu temple, which is considered to represent a cosmos consisting of a mountain range with many terraces (foothills) occupied by celestial beings (Eck 1998, p. 61). All this rich variety of life and cosmos comes from deep within the mountain-temple, from a cave in its heart called the *garbhagrha* or "womb chamber" (ibid, p. 63). In the same way, every individual image on and in the

²⁴ "Shrines, in the prescribed telling, are the concrete manifestation of a divine agency that is heeded by human subjects. Immanent divinity can reveal itself at some places in the form of a symptom, a material clue like a swelling in the ground or a whorl in a tree that triggers recognition in the right person. This is the logic of the *svayambhu*, or 'self-manifested,' icon, which anchors the origin stories of many of the famous sites of Brahminical Hinduism. At other sites, God—in one of His or Her myriad forms—may appear to the right person through the medium of a dream." (Elison 2018, p. 64).

²⁵ Unfreedom for Lacan, authentic selfhood and creativity for Winnicott and Kohut.

temple can be seen as a projection into our everyday world of an “aniconic” (Eck) divine force that takes shape as it solidifies via the complex rules governing its construction by the artisan (*shilpin*) who makes it according to traditional formulas.

Many Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain images express a similar visual logic.²⁶ For example, the eyes of the three-faced image of Sadaśiva at Elephanta are closed. The pilgrim, or modern-day tourist, arrives in front of the statue after crossing the water, climbing up a hill to the entry of the rock temple in which the image rests, and passing through a series of doors (Berkson et al. 1983). They are there to see the god, and are rewarded with a *trimurti* expressive of three moods of the deity erupting into space from the living stone within which is supposed to live a fourth image still encased in rock. The god has projected these images outward, like the forms on the surface of a temple, from a secret inner space, the *guhya* level of the image, which is implied to be buried deep in the stone. We take darshan of the image, not in this case by gazing into his eyes, but rather, we might say, by seeing the image he projects with *his* eyes.

A series of verses in the *Sāṃkhya Kārikā* (SK 58, 59, 61, 64, 65, 66, 68, 69) lays out how *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* are united in enjoyment and how they mirror the state of enlightenment that follows complete satisfaction or insight. Let us return once again to the image of a female dancer (*nartakī*), the unsurpassably maidenly creature (*sukumāratarām na kiṃcid asti*, SK 61). The *bhoga* aspect of *puruṣārtha* is expressed through *seeing*, very much like the later idea of darshan discussed above. In SK 61 and 66, *prakṛti* announces that “I have been seen” (*drāṣṭāsmi*, *drṣṭāham*) and in SK 66 *puruṣa* states the correlative, “I have seen [her]” (*drṣṭā māyā*). This recognition ends the work of *prakṛti* for *puruṣa*’s sake, leading to enlightenment/release, which likewise is viewed from both points of view. *Prakṛti* utters (SK 64) her great apophatic realization of non-being or non-self: *nāsmi na me nāham*, “I am not, nothing belongs to me, and there is no “I” [in me].” This is apophatic mysticism because *prakṛti*’s non-self-recognition is *puruṣa*’s moment of full, unafflicted selfhood. *Puruṣa*’s vision of the not-I *prakṛti*, in the next verse (65), is the view from *kaivalya*: *prakṛtim paśyati puruṣaḥ . . . avasthitaḥ svasthaḥ*, “*Puruṣa* gazes upon [the nay-saying] *prakṛti* while comfortably established in his own place.” Enjoyment, seeing something utterly beautiful transpire before his eyes, i.e., *prakṛti*’s completion of all action and recognition of having no selfhood or possession, leads immediately to release from struggle against suffering. Seeing and being seen are equivalent to enjoying and being enjoyed. Full enjoyment is the end of the seeking of enjoyment and leads at once to the “superior kind of death” that S. Collins ascribes to nirvana (and Freud to *thanatos*) and that we find also in *Sāṃkhya* in the idea of *kaivalya*. The darshan of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* is a mystical realization that both fulfills and transcends their absolute otherness.

9. Darshan and Intentionality

Prakṛti’s life trajectory in *Sāṃkhya*/Yoga is quite strange: while her nature is to act “for the sake of *puruṣa*,” the text further specifies that this purpose includes *to be seen by puruṣa as “not I.”* It would appear that *prakṛti* exists in order to reveal her non-being, she sees in order to reveal that she does not see, or sees for *puruṣa* rather than for herself. Perhaps her life could be viewed as the enactment of a sort of close reading of intentionality, getting at and overcoming the “consciousness of” things that is fundamental to ahaṃāric existence. What for Brentano and much of European philosophy is the basic condition of the working mind—consciousness of—is split by *Sāṃkhya* and Yoga into two sides, one of consciousness: i.e., *puruṣa*, and one of of (sic!): i.e., *prakṛti*. The practice of close reading the mind to make this split real is both philosophy (*Sāṃkhya*) and meditation (Yoga). What it leads to is a transformation of the mind (*buddhi*, or the mental system of *buddhi-manas-ahamkāra* = *antaḥkāraṇa* of which it is the key element). The key to suffering is the conflation of the two sides of experience, so that something seen (something that consciousness is of) proclaims, in the act of *ahamkāra* (understood, as van Buitenen said in 1957 (Van Buitenen 1957), as “utterance of the word

²⁶ For Jain darshan, see the work of John Cort, e.g., Cort (2001).

'I'), that it is the seer. A limited darshan, the whole functioning of *prakṛti* has sought *bhoga* but obtained *duḥkha* because it substituted *ahamkāra* for *nāhamkāra* (saying "I am," *aham*, rather than *nāham*, "not I"). *Ahamkāra*-infused *buddhi* says (to *puruṣa*) "I act for myself" and so actions (*karmas*), point downward into the world of suffering, i.e., lose their *puruṣa* focus. It is this that leads to the closed but still unfolding *pariṇāma* or *nivṛtti* existence that is named "3-fold suffering" (*duḥkhatraya*) in SK 1. Locked in the "of" and unconscious of consciousness (the *dr̥śi* of *darśana*), *buddhi* nevertheless aims unknowingly at serving *puruṣa*-consciousness. As SK 58 says, in ordinary life we act for the sake of quenching unfulfilled cravings. In Sanskrit, the implication of this is sharper: *pravṛtti* is for the sake of *nivṛtti*, action aims to transcend action. The second half of verse 58 tells us that this really means that already, in our "normal" suffering existence, we are seeking nothing different from what *prakṛti* was doing primordially, before *ahamkāra* (i.e., in her *avyakta* state): acting for the sake of the liberation of consciousness (*puruṣasya vimokṣārtham*).

Sāṃkhya and Yoga, then, move from darshan to darshan, from a lower to a higher form of vision, where the seer in the first darshan is revealed, in the second, to be the seen and, in service to the real seer (or to the seer-ness, *sākṣitva*, of the seer), negates herself and opens the world both for consciousness and for herself.²⁷ This mystical opening, which the word *mokṣa* names, precisely, as "release," changes both life and death.

10. Intentionality and Experience

Religious experience as analyzed in Western terms, both the *Erlebnis* and the *Erfahrung* types, is intentional. It is about something, a moment in the case of *Erlebnis*, and bound time (or a story) in the case of *Erfahrung*. In Sāṃkhya and Yoga, a similar distinction is drawn between "afflicted" (*kl̥ṣṭa*) or ordinary seeing, where the psychomental apparatus (the *liṅgaśarīra*—the Indian parallel to the Western individual) sees (and hears, etc.), but also integrates, sensory data, memories, etc.; and *akl̥ṣṭa* experience which is characterized (in Yoga) as *samādhi* of various types, which approach, or completely are, unintentional, not about something. In these states, the prakṛtic entity or person (*liṅga*) is consciously recognized as being seen (*dr̥ṣṭa*) rather than seeing (*dr̥śi*, etc.). *Prakṛti*, or her highest evolute, *buddhi*, becomes enlightened, attains *mokṣa*, for the sake of *puruṣa*. Conversely, it is the recognition of being "for the sake of *puruṣa*" (*puruṣārtha*) that brings *mokṣa*. Religious experience is experience for another (*parārtha*, SK 17), the other that is one's true self which can only be realized apophatically, in the negation of the lower self: in fully realizing, as SK 64 tells us, to repeat once more, that "I am not, I have nothing, and there is no 'I' in me." (*Nāham na me nāsmi*). In realizing the I-lessness of ordinary experience (*bhoga*), religious experience (*darśana*) begins. To be not-I is to be seen (*dr̥ṣṭa*) as such, and to realize that one has been seen wholly and finally (*aikāntika*, *atyantika*).

In conclusion, Sāṃkhya and Yoga embody—and hold out as a possibility for the practitioner—a complex, endlessly evolving mystical experience that is best understood in its own language as *darśana*, the slowly explosive self-recognition within *prakṛti* of being seen by a *puruṣa* who—she knows, in the moment she finally knows herself—sees her.

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²⁷ Ian Whicher (1998) and Christopher Chapple (2008) have discussed Patāñjali's Yoga in similar terms, especially recognizing that yoga implies a transformation of life, not its negation as is often asserted.

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