

THE CONCEPT OF GOD (ĪŚVARA)  
IN CLASSICAL YOGA

In the *Yoga-Sūtra* of Patañjali the concept of the “Lord” (*īśvara*) is dealt with in the following six aphorisms:

- I.23: *īśvara-praṇidhānād vā*, “Or [enstasy is achieved] through devotion to the Lord.”
- I.24: *kleśa-karma-vipāka-āśayair aparaṁṛṣṭaḥ puruṣa-viśeṣa īśvaraḥ*, “The Lord is a special Self, untouched by the causes-of-affliction, action, fruition, and the deposits [in the depth-memory].”
- I.25: *tatra niratiśayam sarvajña-bījam*, “In Him the seed of omniscience is unsurpassed.”
- I.26: *pūrveṣāṃ api guruḥ kālena anavacchedāt*, “[The Lord was] also the Teacher of the earlier [teachers] because [He] is not interrupted by time.”
- I.27: *tasya vācakaḥ praṇavaḥ*, “His symbol is the *praṇava* [i.e. the sacred syllable *om*].”
- II.1: *tapāḥ svādhyāya-īśvara-praṇidhānāni kriyā-yogaḥ*, “Asceticism, self-study, and devotion to the Lord [constitute] the Yoga of Action.”
- II.32: *śauca-samtoṣa-tapāḥ-svādhyāya-īśvara-praṇidhānāni niyamāḥ*, “Purity, contentment, asceticism, self-study, and devotion to the Lord are the observances.”
- II.45: *samādhi-siddhir īśvara-praṇidhānāt*, “Through devotion to the Lord [comes about] the attainment [or perfection?] of enstasy.”

From aphorism I.23 it is clear that Patañjali regards “devotion to the Lord” (*īśvara-praṇidhāna*) as an auxiliary practice leading to the enstatic consciousness. Vyāsa in his commentary (YBh I.23) defines this act or attitude of devotion as a “special love” (*bhakti-viśeṣa*). As a result the Lord “favors” (*anugṛhṇati*) his devotee by virtue of the latter’s “mere intention” (*abhidhyāna-mātra*), which Vācaspati Miśra

(TV I.23) understands as a “desire for a future object” (*anāgata-artha-icchā*). Thus Vyāsa introduces the idea of the Lord’s agency, which is in keeping with Patañjali’s notion of the *īśvara* as Teacher of the teachers of yore (see YS I.26).<sup>1</sup>

Since the tradition of Classical Yoga is known to admit of only two transcendental categories, the “Self” (*puruṣa*) and “Nature” (*prakṛti*), the question arises how the concept of the *īśvara* is to be understood. Patañjali anticipates this question in his aphorism I.24. There he defines the Lord as a special kind of Self. His specialness lies in that He was at no time embroiled in the play of Nature, whereas the Self of any Enlightened being can be said to have, at one time, been caught up in the illusion of its bondage to the mechanisms of Nature.

More precisely, Patañjali states that the *īśvara* transcends the “causes-of-affliction” (*kleśa*),<sup>2</sup> “action” (*karma*) and action’s “fruition” (*vipāka*), as well as the “deposits” (*āśaya*) in the depth-memory<sup>3</sup> which, in the ordinary individual, lead to repeated embodiment.

To make the special status of the *īśvara* quite clear Vyāsa emphasizes that those who have attained to “Transcendence” (*kaivalya*)<sup>4</sup> are many. These multiple “Transcenders” (*kevalin*) differ from the Lord in that they attained Transcendence by severing the “three bonds” which Vācaspati Miśra (TV I.24) explains as (a) the “natural” (*prakṛta*) bond of those who have merged into the Ground of Nature (i.e. the phenomenon of *prakṛti-laya*); (b) the “modified” (*vaikārika*) bond of the “disembodied” (*videha*) entities (such as the deities); and (c) the bond of “sacrificial offerings and so on” (*dakṣiṇā-ādi*) of those who pursue the experience of divine and non-divine matters.

By contrast, the Lord’s relationship to the Condition of Transcendence pertains, as Vyāsa (YBh I.24) puts it, neither to the past nor to the future. In other words, it is eternal. Lest there should be any doubt of his meaning, Vyāsa adds: “He is always Liberated, always the Lord” (*sa tu sadā eva muktaḥ sadā eva īśvara iti*).

Vyāsa (YBh I.24) also indicates that the Lord’s “eminence” (*utkarṣa*) results from His “acquisition of a perfect *sattva*” (*prakṛṣṭa-sattva-upādāna*). That is to say, since the transcendental Self, by its very nature, cannot intervene in the spatio-temporal processes of Nature, the Lord must appropriate for Himself a medium through which He can exert his influence. The highest expression of manifest

Nature, as recognized by all Sāṃkhya-Yoga traditions, is that aspect or “quality” (*guṇa*) of Nature which has from ancient times been called “*sattva*” (meaning literally “being-ness”).<sup>5</sup> It conveys, as the name indicates, the idea of sheer existence, or presence. In combination with the qualities of “dynamism” (*rajas*) and “inertia” (*tamas*), it is thought to weave the whole web of manifestation.

As Vācaspati Mīśra (TV I.24) makes clear the “perfect *sattva*” of which Vyāsa speaks is devoid of any trace of *rajas* or *tamas*. This is strikingly different from the position of the author of the *Yukti-Dīpikā*, a sixth-century commentary on Īśvara Kṛṣṇa’s *Sāṃkhya-Kārikā*. This work (YD LXXIII.25) speaks of the Lord’s occasional assumption of a “glorious body” (*māhātmya-śarīra*) which consists of much *rajas*, even though his proper medium is constituted predominantly of *sattva*.<sup>6</sup>

As we learn from Vyāsa (YBh I.25) the Lord appropriates such a perfect *sattva* for the “gratification of beings” (*bhūta-anugraha*). We know from the *Yoga-Bhāṣya* (I.23) that the *īśvara* favors the *yogin* who is intent on Him. Does he favor *only yogins* or all beings? The phrase “gratification of beings” suggests the latter. This is made evident in a passage (YBh I.25) where Vyāsa has the Lord ponder “Through instruction in morality and wisdom I shall uplift the world-bound selves, at the end of the age or at the great [cosmic] end” (*jñāna-dharma-upadeśena kalpa-pralaya-mahā-pralayeṣu samsāriṇaḥ puruṣān uddharisyāmi iti*). This resolution is a sufficient motive. The Lord, as Vyāsa affirms, is above “self-gratification” (*ātma-anugraha*). The motive is, in other words, selfless “compassion” (*karuṇā*), as is acknowledged by Vācaspati Mīśra (TV I.25). He makes the point that the Lord’s compassionate instruction of beings is to be distinguished from the compassionate instruction engaged by such Enlightened beings as Kapila, the legendary founder of the Sāṃkhya tradition. As Vācaspati Mīśra emphasizes, Kapila’s own Enlightenment was due to the “compassion” (*anukarūṇya*) of Maheśvara (= Śiva) alone.

Vācaspati Mīśra also explains that being uplifted means to attain to Transcendence, but this interpretation seems too extreme, unless one were to assume that the *īśvara* Liberates all beings regardless of their spiritual condition. If Liberation were guaranteed, there would be no motivation to observe the moral law given by the Lord nor apply His wisdom to life.

The Lord's acquisition of a medium of pure *sattva* is, of course, not the result of ignorance. As Patañjali (YS I.24) states, the Lord is untouched by the causes-of-affliction of which the root-cause is "nescience" (*avidyā*). Vācaspati Mīśra (TV I.24) concedes that the Lord appears to behave as if he were under the spell of nescience. He compares Him to an actor who acts out his role without becoming confused about his real identity.

Vācaspati Mīśra elaborates Vyāsa's theology. Thus he argues that the Lord is not only eternal, but also responsible for the creation and dissolution of manifestation. The world is dissolved into the transcendental Ground of "Nature" (*prakṛti*) when the *īśvara* resolves to assume a perfect *sattva*. This "resolution" (*praṇidhāna*) causes an "impression" (*vāsanā*) in the Lord's "consciousness-*sattva*" (*citta-sattva*). His consciousness-*sattva*, carrying the imprint of this resolution, tends toward homogeneity with the transcendental "Foundation" (*pradhāna*) of Nature. Nevertheless, the Lord's consciousness-*sattva* assumes the condition of *sattva* and is not dissolved together with the rest of manifestation. In other words, Vācaspati Mīśra proposes that the relationship between the Lord and His *sattva* is an eternal one; the Lord's "appropriation" (*upādāna*) of a perfect *sattva* is a continuous act. And it is through the medium of this *sattva*, which can retain the imprint of His resolution, that He fashions the manifest cosmos out of the transcendental Ground of Nature only to dissolve it again at (regular) intervals.

For Vācaspati Mīśra (TV IV.3) the Lord necessarily has a rather delimited sphere of activity, which is confined to the removal of obstructions in the moral nature of beings so that they can mature spiritually and thus ultimately discover that "man is neither mind nor subtle body, but the Power of Consciousness which does not conjoin [with objects]" (*na ca cittam vā sūkṣma-śarīram vā puruṣaḥ kiṃ tu citi-śaktir apratiśamkramā* — TV IV.10).

Vācaspati Mīśra (I.24), moreover, argues that these activities of world creation and destruction as well as spiritual upliftment could not possibly be ascribed to more than one being, which would be like having an "assembly" (*pariṣad*). For the same reason he rejects the idea of different transcendental Selves assuming the role of the *īśvara* by turns.

Yet, interestingly enough, the transcendental Selves — and a multiplicity of Selves is distinctly recognized by Vyāsa<sup>7</sup> and Vācaspati Mīśra<sup>8</sup> — are not without agency or influence either. Vyāsa (YBh I.45), for instance, speaks of the Self as being an “instrumental-cause” (*hetu*) in relation to the first evolute of Nature, the *liṅga-mātra* (lit. “sign-only”).<sup>9</sup> The “causal nexus” (*anvaya*) is inherent in Nature itself so that the unfolding of manifestation follows its own laws.

Furthermore, Patañjali (YS II.18) postulates that objects — i.e. the manifest forms of Nature — exist for the sake of the worldly “experience” (*bhoga*) or the “Liberation” (*apavarga*) of the Self. However, as Vyāsa (YBh II.18) explains, experience and Liberation occur only in relation to the individualized consciousness or *citta*, but in no way affect the Self itself. He employs the simile of an army commander who is credited with victory or blamed for defeat, whereas the actual fighting is done by his soldiers. The “seen” (*dr̥śya*) — which refers to any form within the compass of manifest Nature — is noticed by the apperceiving Self. Vyāsa compares this cognitive process to that of a magnet which becomes efficient through sheer proximity.

The teleology of Nature is an important Sāṃkhya-Yoga concept. This inherent orientedness of Nature is inferred from the fact that “Nature” (*prakṛti*) is a composite and, like all composites, does not exist for its own sake.<sup>10</sup> This argument, which is not convincing, has its parallel in Christian scholasticism.<sup>11</sup> Since Nature (including the individualized consciousness) does not exist for its own sake, it can only exist for the sake of the transcendental Reality, the Self. The Sanskrit exegetes did not ask the question of whether Nature might not exist specifically for the sake of the “Lord” (*īśvara*), although they otherwise affirm His special ontological status.

The Self, again, exists for its own sake. As Vācaspati Mīśra (TV II.20) states, “Everything exists for the Self, but the Self [exists] for no-one else” (*sarvaṃ puruṣāya kalpate puruṣas tu na kasmaicit*).

As Patañjali (YS II.17) notes, there is an obvious “correlation” (*saṃyoga*) between the “Seer” (*draṣṭṛ*) and the “seen” (*dr̥śya*) or the whole manifest realm of Nature. According to Vyāsa (YBh II.17), this correlation is “beginningless” (*anādi*), that is, it cannot be traced back in time. However, it can clearly be terminated, as is demonstrated in the event of Liberation, and indeed, this termination is the great *opus*

of Yoga. The termination of this natural correlation coincides with the perfect Transcendence of the most fundamental (or highest) mode of Nature, which is the *sattva* quality as it is present in the cognitive apparatus, the *citta*. This Transcendence consists in the reinstatement of the perfect autonomy of the Self which is not a doer, but the transcendental Witness. In the words of Vācaspati Mīśra (TV II.21): “Liberation is the Experience of the distinction between the Self and the *sattva*” (*apavargaḥ sattva-puruṣa-anyatā-anubhavaḥ*). However, this explanation appears to contradict Patañjali’s (YS III.49, 50) own definition of “Transcendence” (*kaivalya*), which presupposes the cessation of even this apperception of the distinction between the Self and the *sattva*.

At the moment of Liberation, the Self and the mind’s *sattva* shine forth in equal purity (see YS III.55). Then the illusion of being a separate, experiencing entity or body-mind is shattered. As Vyāsa (YBh III.55) makes clear, this Liberation occurs for the “theist” (*īśvara*) as much as for the “atheist” (*anīśvara*), just as it occurs for anyone who “partakes of the knowledge born of discernment” (*viveka-ja-jñāna-bhāgin*). Vācaspati Mīśra (TV III.55), however, understands these two terms differently, though his statement is somewhat obscure. He seems to hold that *īśvara* refers to that *yogin* who is endowed with the powers of wisdom and action (that is, who has supernatural faculties), as developed in the course of a full yogic program; *anīśvara*, again, appears to refer according to him to that *yogin* who achieves Liberation directly through the process of higher discrimination (as described in YS II.52).<sup>12</sup>

However, the more economic interpretation of these two concepts, *īśvara* and *anīśvara*, as “theist” and “atheist” respectively, is the more convincing. It ties in with the fact that Patañjali (YS I.23) did introduce the whole notion of devotion to the Lord as a matter of choice (indicated by the word *vā*, “or”). In theory, a follower of Patañjali’s Yoga will be a “theist,” since the doctrine of the existence of the *īśvara* is central to his philosophy. In practice, however, a follower of Pātañjala-Yoga may disregard the Lord’s existence without the risk of heresy, although this does not seem a very likely course of action. After all, “devotion to the Lord” (*īśvara-praṇidhāna*) is listed among the constituents of both *kriyā-yoga* (see YS II.1) and the

“observances” (*niyama*) of the section dealing with the eightfold path that has come to be so exclusively associated with Patañjali (see YS II.32).

It has often been suggested that the doctrine of the *īśvara* is an unconvincing craft upon the dualistic metaphysics espoused by Patañjali. But this is too shallow a view, which ignores the theistic (or, rather, pan-en-theistic) pre-classical heritage of Patañjali’s school of thought. It also pays no attention to the experiential dimension of Yoga and its long history of encountering the numinous, which readily lends itself to a theistic interpretation of sorts.

It cannot be denied that the concept of the *īśvara*, as formulated by Patañjali and his exegetes, fits ill into his dualistic system. Yet, one should not overlook the fact that its inclusion might have met primarily psychological rather than philosophical needs or the diplomatic purpose of appeasing the authorities of mainstream Hinduism. That is to say, the concept of *īśvara* may have been felt necessary in order to account for certain yogic experiences. This explanation is not discredited by the fact that Patañjali (YS II.44) also acknowledges the possibility of making contact with one’s “chosen deity” (*īṣṭa-devatā*) as a result of “self-study” (*svādhyāya*). He manifestly distinguishes between this kind of contact with a higher being and devotion to the transcendental Lord, which devotion well may lead to numinous encounters. Indeed, this possibility is indicated in Śaṅkara’s fine commentary on the *Yoga-Bhāṣya* (YBhV I.23) when he states that the Lord “comes face to face with him and gives him his favor” (*anugrahaṃ pratyabhimukhī-bhāvam āpāditāḥ tam*).

What possible proof is there for the existence of the *īśvara*? Patañjali (YS I.25) appears to address this issue briefly and enigmatically, giving rise to much exegetical elaboration. His aphorism “In Him the seed of omniscience is unsurpassed” has generally been interpreted as being the equivalent to the ontological proof of the existence of God proposed by such Christian theologians as St. Augustine and St. Anselm. Vyāsa (YBh I.25) expounds thus: “Supersensuous knowledge (*atīndriya-grahaṇa*), of the past, the future, or the present — singly or collectively, great or small — is the seed of omniscience. He in whom this [seed] grows unsurpassed is omniscient” (*yad idam atīta-anāgata-pratyutpanna-pratyeka-samuccaya-atīndriya-*

*grahaṇam alpam bahv iti sarvajña-bījam etadd hi vardhamānaṃ yatra niratiśayaṃ sa sarvajñah*). Lest antagonists should abuse this inferential argument to prove the supremacy of, say, the Buddha, Vyāsa adds that it has only a general thrust and therefore is not applicable to individual cases. These have to be decided on the basis of “tradition” (*āgama*), by which he undoubtedly means the “true” tradition of Yoga which reserves this supremacy for the transcendental Lord. Of course, Vijñāna Bhikṣu (YV I.25) unashamedly equates Vyāsa’s “tradition” with Vedānta.

Of all the exegetes Śaṅkara (YBhV I.25) has the most prolific commentary on this particular aphorism. He speaks of the Lord not only as the supreme Knower, but also the Creator of the universe. For, he argues, only one who knows absolutely can construct such a complex and functional world. He writes for instance: “The waxing and waning of the moon is regulated by a single Knower of the time of the lunar day etc., because [there is evidence for an exact] proportioning of time, as with an ‘hour-bearer’ (*candramaso vrddhi-kṣayau tithy-ādi-kāla-jñānavata ekena prayuktau, kāla-paricchedakatvāt, ghaṭikā-hara-ādi-vat*).<sup>13</sup>

Śaṅkara furnishes an abundance of similar examples and illustrations, some very striking, and then even refers to the testimony of the Vedānta scriptures (*viz. Muṇḍaka-Upaniṣad* I.1.9 and *Kaṭha-Upaniṣad* VI.12). Next he invokes common experience (“the whole world”, *samasta-loka*) to demonstrate the existence of a supreme Lord, saying that even women and cowherds bow their heads to the *parama-īśvara* in the form of Śiva or Nārāyaṇa. Finally he engages in a bit of sophistry when he refutes his (putative) opponent’s denial of the existence of an omniscient Lord by arguing that such a denial contains its own refutation, since the words “omniscient” and “Lord” cannot be used apart from their conventional meaning. In other words, by speaking about the Lord one already affirms His existence. Words, he says, necessarily have a referent. The counter-argument that expressions such as “the son of a barren woman” have no referent is not denied by Śaṅkara, but he explains that propositions of this kind are also not generally accepted. So, in the last analysis, Śaṅkara resorts to revelation and belief.

The philosophical notion of the eternal relationship between word



and objective referent, invoked by Śaṅkara, is an integral part of the metaphysics of Classical Yoga. This is borne out by Vyāsa's (YBh I.27) treatment of Patañjali's aphorism "His symbol is the *praṇava* [i.e. *om̐*]." Vyāsa declares: "The relationship between the symbol and that-which-is-to-be-symbolized is fixed. But convention, [as determined] by the Lord reveals the meaning [of the sacred syllable *om̐*] as fixed" (*sthito'sya vācasya vācakena saha sambandhah, samketas tv īśvarasya sthitam eva artham abhinayati*). Thus, the relationship is not adventitious as, for instance, a son's name which is bestowed on him by his father. It is rather, in Vyāsa's imagery, similar to the relationship between a lamp and its light.

The syllable *om̐*, symbolizing the Lord, is understood as a revealed sound. It is, in the words of Bhāvāganeśa (YSV I.27), the Lord's "principal name" (*mukhya-nāman*). Because of the eternal relationship between the Lord and His name, the *praṇava* is seen as a fit vehicle for fixing attention upon the transcendental Reality. Therefore Patañjali (YS I.28) also recommends the age-old practice of meditative recitation or *japa* of *om̐* and "contemplation" (*bhāvana*) upon its meaning. Undoubtedly, the underlying principle here is the esoteric recognition that one becomes what one meditates upon.

Many questions remain unanswered. For instance, what precisely is the relationship between the Lord's *sattva* and the *sattva* of the individualized consciousness? If Liberation signifies the unconditional Transcendence of the *sattva* (together with all other qualities of Nature, and thus of Nature itself), then, how can the Lord be perpetually associated with a *sattva* without forsaking his Condition of Freedom?

Moreover, if the *īśvara* is eternally associated with a pure *sattva*, why does Vyāsa (YBh I.25) speak of a resolution to *acquire* a pure *sattva* on the part of the Lord?

Also, if there are many transcendental Selves, how are they related to one another and to the Lord, singly and collectively? Since the Lord is characterized as a Self, albeit a special kind of Self, and since all Selves are by definition not encapsulated by space-time, it follows that the relationship between the Lord and the other transcendental Selves must be one of coalescence, and this is appreciated by Vācaspati Miśra (TV I.41), for instance, who observes that there is a

lack of distinction in “Selfhood” (*puruṣatva*). I have elsewhere even suggested that this coalescence is one of “enclosure” of the Selves by the Lord.<sup>14</sup> This interpretation admittedly tends toward the type of qualified nondualist metaphysics espoused by Rāmānuja, but it seems entirely unsatisfactory to consider the relationship between the *īśvara* and the multiple *puruṣas* in terms of a Leibnizian monadology, in which there is an eternal chasm between all the Selves and between the Selves and the Lord.

Furthermore, how could the desire to benefit beings arise in the Lord prior to his assumption of the *sattva*, since such a desire presupposes association with Nature? Bhoja (RM I.23) bluntly argues that one should not ask this question, because the logical problem involved is one of what we would call the chicken-and-egg variety. If we were to follow his advice, we would have to exercise silence on all other metaphysical issues as well, since they are largely of such a paradoxical nature. Vyāsa’s (YBh I.24) answer is a dogmatic assertion that the association of the Lord with a pure *sattva* is beginningless.

To the question what this *sattva* might conceivably be, there is no answer, because the question has never been asked. According to Vācaspati Miśra (TV I.24) the perfect *sattva* of the Lord can neither be perceived nor inferred. It is simply revealed in the scriptures. Thus the authorities of Classical Yoga ultimately make this doctrine a matter of belief.

Why would Patañjali speak of the *īśvara* as the “Teacher” (*guru*) of earlier sages (who might possibly even belong to earlier world cycles)? Is this merely a concession to popular theistic notions, vindicating the idea of the transcendental “authorship” of the Vedas? The commentaries offer only scant information, with the notable exception of Śaṅkara (YBhV I.26) who states: “The supreme Lord, in the form as described, is ‘the Teacher of the earlier’ teachers who instruct in all the related means and ends for prosperity and for the *summum bonum* (*niḥśreyasa*) [which is Liberation]. The meaning is that He creates even their knowledge and instruction, because of the arising of all knowledge from Him — just as sparks arise from a flame or salt particles from the briny ocean.” (*saḥ yathā-ukta-rūpaḥ parama-īśvaraḥ pūrveṣāṃ api guruṇāṃ abhyudaya-niḥśreyasa-sarva-sādhana-sādhya-saṃbandha-upadeśināṃ guruḥ teṣāṃ api jñāna-upadeśasya kartā ity*

*arthah, tad udbhavatvat sarva-jñānānām, yathā jvalana-lavaṇa-jaladhī-samudbhava visphuliṅga-lavaṇa-kaṇāḥ.*) The metaphor of the sparks of fire and salt particles is, to be sure, a didactic device familiar to students of the Vedānta school of thought, which is usually applied to the relationship between the “individuated self” (*jīva*) and the “transcendental Reality” (*brahman*).<sup>15</sup> Here, however, it designates the peculiar dependence of the knowledge in finite minds upon the perfect knowledge in the Lord’s consciousness-*sattva*. The distinctly vedantic flavor of this interpretation can be thought to point both to the metaphysical leanings of the author of this commentary and to the nondualist (“epic” or “pre-classical”) roots of Patañjali’s Yoga.

Śaṅkara goes on to defend the doctrine of the Lord’s association with a pure *sattva*. He argues that the Lord’s *sattva*, though perfect, is in fact manifest and therefore determinable, while still transcending time. He further states that the knowledge that springs up in it also transcends time and is of the “nature of the essence of the *sattva*” (*sattva-svarūpa-vat*). He moreover argues that the Lord’s role as original Teacher is not only revealed by the scriptures, but proved by inference relative to the fact of creation. This presumably means that the Lord’s Teaching function is inferred from the fact that all knowledge must have a beginning.

Even though Śaṅkara’s tight-rope apologetics is not satisfactory, it is passages like this which testify to the extraordinary intellectual acumen of the author of the *Vivaraṇa* and which lend strength to the assumption that he was indeed the great Śaṅkarācārya.

By way of conclusion, it can be said that the theology of Classical Yoga is surrounded by philosophical conundrums that have only been inadequately resolved. The Sanskrit philosophers are, however, not alone in their failure to formulate a theoretical framework that convincingly demonstrates the existence of God and satisfactorily defines his relationship to the conditional world. The same failure can be witnessed in all theologies, notably those that are grounded in a metaphysical dualism. The theoretical propositions of these theologies, East and West, have so far failed to satisfy the rational understanding of all minds. It is clear that they proceed from within a particular metaphysical commitment structure, as do those philosophies that reject not only theological solutions to the problem of the existence of

God but discard the theological enterprise itself. But this is another consideration.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> One can see in this doctrine an echo of Kṛṣṇa's declaration in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* (IV.1) that he has imparted the ancient "imperishable Yoga" first to Vivasvat and that (IV.7–8) he incarnates — as a teacher — whenever there is a decline of religiosity or spirituality.

<sup>2</sup> According to Patañjali (YS II.3) the five "causes-of-affliction" (*kleśa*) are: "nescience" (*avidyā*), "I-am-ness" (*asmitā*), "attachment" (*rāga*), "aversion" (*dveṣa*), and the "will-to-live" (*abhiniveśa*). Nescience is the source of all the others, and therefore when it is removed in Enlightenment the remaining causes-of-affliction are also obviated. Since the Lord's *sattva* is absolutely pure, that is, devoid of any trace of nescience, He also does not suffer the limitations of the other four *kleśas*.

<sup>3</sup> The "deposits" (*āśaya*) of the individual's action or volition are the countless "subliminal-traits" (*vāsanā*) that compose the individuated consciousness (see YS IV.8, 24). Since they extend beyond a person's present embodiment they can be considered transpersonal. Hence I speak of their matrix as a "depth-memory". See G. Feuerstein, *The Philosophy of Classical Yoga* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1980), p. 70.

<sup>4</sup> The word "*kaivalya*" is the gunated form of "*kevala*," and means literally "aleness." This phrase reminds one of Plotinus' use of the Greek term "*monos*" for the soul and the Divine.

<sup>5</sup> The notion of the *sattva* is one of the most interesting of Indian ontology. It also belongs to its most ancient vocabulary. In its earliest conception it applied to both microcosmic (psychic) and macrocosmic referents. Subsequently the term was increasingly restricted to the psychic dimension. See e.g. J. A. B. van Buitenen, 'Studies in Sāṃkhya III,' *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 77 (1957), pp. 88ff.

<sup>6</sup> See J. Bronkhorst, 'God in Sāṃkhya,' *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens*, vol. XXVII (1983), pp. 149–164.

<sup>7</sup> On the plurality of the Selves, Vyāsa (YBh I.24) states unequivocally: "And the Transcenders who have indeed attained Transcendence are many" (*kaivalyam prāptas tarhi santi ca bahavaḥ kevalinah*).

<sup>8</sup> Vācaspati Miśra accepts Vyāsa's position on the plurality of the Selves, without entering into a discussion of this issue. This is also the attitude of all the other exegetes, including Viñāna Bhikṣu (YV II.22) who, however, interprets this pluralism along vedāntic lines, affirming that there is a very real and permanent distinction between the "individual self" (*jīva-ātman*) and the "transcendental Self" (*parama-ātman*) or God.

<sup>9</sup> Patañjali's (YS II.19) concept of *liṅga-mātra* is identified by Vyāsa (YBh II.19) as the "great principle" (*mahā-tattva*) or "mere being-ness" (*sattā-mātra*), whose only characteristic is that it exists. It is the first evolute to emerge from the "signless" (*aliṅga*), the undifferentiated transcendental Ground of Nature. The *liṅga-mātra* is

pure differentiated existence, but without any qualities and can be compared to the Neoplatonic concept of *nous*.

<sup>10</sup> The teleology of Nature is clearly expressed by Patañjali (YS II.21) when he says “The essence of the ‘seen’ is only for the sake of that [‘seer’, the apperceiving Self]” (*rad-artha eva drśyasya ātmā*). In another aphorism (YS III.35) he speaks of the “other-purposiveness” (*para-arthatva*) of the *sattva* (as the highest form of Nature) and (YS IV.24) of the consciousness as “other-purposed” (*para-artha*). The term “purposiveness” (*arthavattva*) employed by him elsewhere (YS III.44, 47) has presumably the same meaning. For, as he explains (YS IV.32), upon Liberation the very building-blocks, the *gunas*, of Nature have fulfilled their purpose (*krta-artha*) so that they are now “devoid of purpose for the Self” (*puruṣa-artha-sūnya*, YS IV.34). This concept is obviously of primary importance in Classical Yoga.

<sup>11</sup> This is known in Christian theological circles as the teleological argument of “design” or the evident orderliness of the universe.

<sup>12</sup> The word “*aniśvara*” has caused some difficulty to previous translators in connection with its appearance in several stanzas of the *Mahābhārata* (XII.238.7; 289.3; 294.40). F. Edgerton, *The Beginnings of Indian Philosophy* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1965), p. 291 *n*, takes this to be a straightforward synonym for “soul.”

<sup>13</sup> The Sanskrit phrase *ghaṭikā-hara-ādi-vat* “like an ‘hour-bearer’ etc.” is obscure. Presumably it refers to a device by which a *ghaṭikā* (a period of forty-eight minutes) was measured. The Sanskrit edition of the *Vivarāṇa* gives the alternative reading of *ghaṭikā-ādi-vat*. T. Leggett’s translation of the former variant with “as with a clock-maker” is surely erroneous. See T. Leggett, *Śaṅkara on the Yoga-Sūtra-s, Volume 1: Samādhi — The Vivarāṇa Sub-Commentary to Vyāsa-bhāṣya on the Yoga-Sūtra-s of Patañjali: Samādhi-pāda* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981).

<sup>14</sup> See G. Feuerstein, *The Philosophy of Classical Yoga* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1980), p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> See e.g. Vijñāna Bhikṣu’s employment of this metaphor in his *Yoga-Vārttika* (I.26) in explaining the relationship between the *īśvara* and the individualized beings.

#### LEGEND AND SANSKRIT EDITIONS USED

- YS = *Yoga-Sūtra* of Patañjali, Bhāratīya Vidyā Prakāśana edition (1963);  
 YBh = *Yoga-Bhāṣya* of Vyāsa, *op. cit.*;  
 TV = *Tattva-Vaiśārādī* of Vācaspati Miśra, *op. cit.*;  
 YV = *Yoga-Vārttika* of Vijñāna Bhikṣu, ed. by T. S. Rukmani, *Yogavārttika of Vijñānabhikṣu*, vols. 1 and 2 (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1981 and 1983).  
 YBhV = *Yoga-Bhāṣya-Vivarāṇa* of Bhagavatpāda Śaṅkara, Madras Government Oriental Series (1952);  
 RM = *Rāja-Mārtaṇḍa* of Bhoja, Kashi Sanskrit Series (repr. 1982).  
 YSV = *Yoga-Sūtra-Vṛtti* of Bhāvāgaṇeśa, Kashi Sanskrit Series (repr. 1982).