Although the study of the *Mahābhārata* continues to attract a great deal of disagreement, especially about the nature of its authorship, on one point a variety of scholars have reached a bit of a consensus: The oldest written archetype of the epic was most likely written in the late first millennium BCE as a response to the threat posed to Brahmans posed by foreign invasions and non-Brahmanical rulers like Aśoka Maurya. In spite of their other disagreements, eminent scholars such as Alf Hiltebeitel, James Fitzgerald, Madeleine Biardeau, and Nick Sutton have all contributed to this emerging contextual reading of the *Mahābhārata*.[1] Yudhiṣṭhira emerges as an intentional contrast to Aśoka as *dharmarāja*—engaging in warfare, grappling with the ideals of renunciation, but ultimately serving to uphold the Brahmanical order of *varṇāśrama dharma*.

In my own work on religion in late-first-millennium BCE India, I have argued that scholars have overemphasized the dichotomy between Brahmans and *śramaṇa*s in ancient India, treating the two as metahistorical essences when in fact the dichotomy between them emerged only through centuries of contestation over the term *Brahman*.[2] I have argued that we should understand Indian religion around the fifth century BCE as a variegated field of "Brahmanism," with different teachers subscribing to different views of what constitutes a Brahman.[3] Out of this field, the most radical members of the *avant-garde* took key ideas from late Vedic thought—*karma,* rebirth, celibacy, and renunciation—and ran with them. They coalesced into the main *śramaṇa* groups, the Buddhists, Jains, and Ājīvakas, and like most *avant-garde* movements, they had little interest in maintaining overt ties to their intellectual forebears, which in this case would be the Vedas, Vedic mythology, Vedic language, and Vedic sacrifice.

On the other end of the spectrum were the reactionaries. These are best represented by the authors of the Dharmasūtras, who, I have argued, constructed the *āśrama* system to catalog all major forms of religious (i.e., Brahmanical) practice in their day with the purpose of valorizing

one form of practice—the *gṛhastha*, or householder—above all others.[4] Their basic argument was that because there is a Vedic injunction to produce children, codified in the theology of "three debts," all *āśrama*s other than that of the householder are invalid, since they are celibate and do not produce children.[5] At the same time, these reactionaries codified the *varṇa* system to counter the radical śramaṇic model of Brahmanhood as being rooted in *brahmacarya*. By making Brahmanhood something that one can only be born into, they undercut the śramaṇic model that makes celibate renunciation a prerequisite for becoming a Brahman.[6]

Between these two extremes, however, was what I call a "conservative mainstream." These are those Brahmans who are referred to in the Dharmasūtras by the descriptive term *vānaprastha*s ("forest-dwellers") and in Buddhist texts by the slang term *jaṭila* ("matted hair").[7] They were "conservative" in the sense of carrying forward tradition while exploring new ideas and avenues of practice, eschewing the extremes of both the radical *avant-garde* who had little use for retaining tradition and the reactionaries who rejected new ideas and practices in defense of a narrowly imagined "tradition." For some time I have puzzled over where this conservative mainstream is to be found in the historical record, knowing about them primarily from their critics, the authors of the Dharmasūtras and the Buddhists. I have come to realize, however, that their mark can be found in many of the texts we now associate with the classical Hindu tradition, first and foremost the *Mahābhārata*. Indeed, the fictionalized self-representation of the authors of the *Mahābhārata* in the epic itself as *ṛṣi*s (note also the conflation of the term *jaṭila* with the term *ṛṣi* in the Buddhist commentarial tradition[8]) engaging in long *sattra*s in the forest begs for precisely this conclusion.

In this article, I will argue that the *Mahābhārata* should be read as a unitary work of creative genius, coming out of the conservative Brahmanical mainstream of *vānaprastha*s, that

nonetheless represents the *magnum opus* of Brahmanical reaction to the radical *avant-garde*. That is to say, by creatively reimagining Vedic tradition in such a way as to encompass the śramaṇic worldview, it created an all-encompassing imaginary, exclusionary of the radical *śramaṇa*s, the newly dubbed *nāstika*s, that would serve as the basis for nearly all of the classical Hindu tradition that followed. Furthermore, I will argue that the discourse on *sāṃkhya-yoga* that forms one of the epic's recurrent and most enigmatic themes is not reflective of pre-existing Sāṃkhya or Yoga traditions, but rather represents the epic author's or authors' innovative response to *śramaṇa* thought, which only later came to appropriated and codified as the classical philosophical systems of Sāṃkhya and Yoga.

In advancing this argument, I am of course situating the *Mahābhārata* in my own schema for understanding Indian antiquity, but I am also particularly indebted to the work of two scholars, Alf Hiltebeitel and Johannes Bronkhorst. I am indebted to Alf Hiltebeitel for his career-long insistence on the (relatively) unitary authorship of the *Mahābhārata*, which has attracted an increasing number of adherents, of which I must confess to being a late one. Likewise, I am indebted to Johannes Bronkhorst for his argument, presented in *Buddhism in the Shadow of Brahmanism*, that what he calls "the new Brahmanism" engaged in an extreme process of reinvention that involved in part what he calls the "colonization of the past." I therefore begin by reviewing these two insights in turn, situating them in my own understanding of the formation of religious identity in ancient India so as to describe a new interpretive framework for reading the *Mahābhārata*. I then turn more specifically to the epic's discourse on *sāṃkhya-yoga*, elaborating on an overlooked 100-year-old insight from Franklin Edgerton to argue that this theme in the epic is not so much reflective of a pre-existing tradition or traditions as it is an innovative argument representing an indirect response to the intellectual challenge posed by the radical

*śramaṇa*s' worldview. Finally, I will synthesize the insights from this discussion to offer a comprehensive hermeneutic for reading the *Mahābhārata* in its historical context.

The Nature of the Mahābhārata*'s Composition*

The theory that the *Mahābhārata* is a composite text is as old as the modern study of the epic itself. In particular, E. Washburn Hopkins popularized this paradigm with his fourfold scheme of composition involving the gradual evolution of the theology of the epic and its concomitant elaboration with didactic material and additional stories (*upākhyāna*s).[9] Although the details of this paradigm have changed over the past century, it continues to find significant support in *Mahābhārata* studies, in particular in the work of John and Mary Brockington and of James Fitzgerald.[10] Nevertheless, in recent decades there have been increasing calls by some scholars to regard the archetype disclosed, however imperfectly, by the Critical Edition as representing a work of more-or-less unitary authorship.[11] In particular, Alf Hiltebeitel has spent much of his career arguing that the continued insistence on reading the *Mahābhārata* as the result of centuries of accretions is based on prejudices and uncritical assumptions. He argues that the entire *Mahābhārata* as it comes down to us in the Critical Edition was written by one person or a small committee of authors working over the course of at most a few years, sometime in the second or first century BCE.[12]

I must confess that for many years I was unconvinced by Hiltebeitel's argument. I subscribed instead to the theory advanced by James Fitzgerald that, while the *Mahābhārata* was indeed first written around the same period as posited by Hiltebeitel, it received a series of elaborations, corresponding to the overtly Vaiṣṇava and didactic portions of the current text, until a new, expanded version was codified under the Guptas, which in turn became the

archetype for the entire surviving manuscript tradition[13] My reasons for accepting this latter theory of a "Gupta edition" were not based solely on the *Mahābhārata* text itself and its place within the history of Hinduism, however; I was even more strongly inclined to read the Critical Edition as a composite text because of what I have long recognized as a problem in the history of ancient Indian religion: the place of Brahmā as Supreme Deity. The early Buddhist *sūtra*s represent a prevailing Brahmanical theology at the time of their composition of Brahmā as a Supreme God, both Creator of the universe and the ultimate goal one would seek to reach after death. Yet if we look at the Brahmanical textual tradition, such a worldview is difficult to find. In much of the Vedic corpus, there is speculation about an ultimate God, with much of this speculation coalescing around the name Prajāpati. In the Upaniṣads, there is an ultimate principle behind all of reality, *brahman*, which one is encouraged to realize, but it is grammatically neuter and only occasionally personified, unlike the Brahmā of the Pali Canon, whose name is masculine and is clearly understood to be a personified deity. Much of the *smṛti* literature features Brahmā as a personified god, but he is usually subordinated to either Śiva or Viṣṇu. The early Buddhist literature, on the other hand, knows nothing about the cults of these two latter gods as supreme deities. Since the early Buddhist literature clearly knows of a stage in Brahmanical thought in which Brahmā was conceived of as supreme deity, where is this to be found reflected in Brahmanical literature?

It is for this reason that I found the model of composite authorship of the *Mahābhārata* to be appealing. While the epic as a whole is clearly Vaiṣṇava, there are certain passages that, when read in isolation, appear to present Brahmā as the Supreme Deity. Chief among these is *Mbh.* 1.58, in which Brahmā sends the gods, *including Viṣṇu*, to incarnate as human beings to relieve the earth which is being overburdened by demons. Hopkin's model in which there is a stage of

the *Mahābhārata*'s composition in which Kṛṣṇa/Viṣṇu is merely a demigod (i.e., just one of the gods sent by Brahmā to incarnate as a human being, not God as disclosed in the supposedly later *Bhagavad Gītā*) is thus appealing as disclosing a stage in Brahmanism corresponding to that reflected in the early Buddhist texts. In my very first academic publication as a scholar of religion, I argued that the "Brahmanical synthesis" represented by Brahmā was so successfully ridiculed by the Buddhists that it led to new Brahmanical syntheses—Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva—that are reflected in the "later stages" of the *Mahābhārata*'s composition.[14]

While I still agree with the basic thesis of that article—that the sectarian subordination of Brahmā to either Viṣṇu or Śiva is reflective of the earlier subordination of Brahmā to the Buddha in Buddhist literature—I no longer believe that there was an "earlier" version of the *Mahābhārata* in which Brahmā was supreme God and Viṣṇu was merely sent by him to incarnate as Kṛṣṇa. My disquiet was raised by closer reading of the key episode of a putative earlier Brahmā-centric epic—the supplication to Brahmā and sending of the gods to incarnate on Earth (*MBh.* 1.58). It is true that this episode formally sticks to a Brahmā-centric hierarchy in which the Earth goes to Brahmā for help against the demons and the latter sends the gods to incarnate themselves to help her. It is also true that the cosmogony that follows in chs. 59-60 begins with Brahmā. Yet the account of the supplication of Brahmā in ch. 58 is immediately preceded in ch. 57 by a specific account of the incarnations of the gods as the Pāṇḍavas in which Viṣṇu is praised in terms clearly in line with the Vaiṣṇavism of the epic as it comes down to us:

> For the sake of favor to the worlds, Viṣṇu, world-honored,
>
> Of great fame, became manifest in Devakī by Vasudeva.
>
> Without beginning or end, that god is the maker, lord of creatures,
>
> Unmanifest, imperishable *brahman*, primary, without qualities.

And the unchanging self, nature, the ultimate source,

The person, the maker of all, the yoke of being, the eternal imperishable,

Endless, unmoving god, the swan, Nārāyaṇa the lord,

The founder, ageless, eternal—that do they call him, the supreme unchanging.

The person, that omnipresent maker, grandfather of all beings,

For the sake of the prospering of *dharma*, was born among the Andhaka-Vṛṣṇis.[15]

Likewise, this exalted language is reflected in the abbreviated form of the account of the incarnations found in ch. 61, in which Nārāyaṇa, incarnating as Kṛṣṇa, is called "eternal god of gods" (*MBh.* 1.61.90: *devadevaḥ sanātanaḥ*). There thus is not really any "clean" account of Brahmā sending the gods to incarnate on earth, absent allusions to Viṣṇu's supreme Godhead. One can of course posit that these are later interpolations, but given the fact that all parts of the epic are replete with such allusions, this requires assuming a very extensive process of editing and re-editing, not simply the addition of certain sections like the *Gītā* and the didactic *parvan*s.

Worse still, the external evidence does not support the theory that Vaiṣṇava exaltations of Kṛṣṇa are late additions to the epic. The well-known Garuḍa-pillar of Heliodorus in Vidiśā refers in its inscription to "Vāsudeva, god of gods," and it can securely be dated to the late second century BCE because it refers to the Hellenistic king Antialcidas.[16] Various other inscriptions dating from the first century BCE also reflect devotion surrounding Vāsudeva: a second Garuḍa-pillar erected by a "Bhāgavata" in Vidiśā; a votive wall in Ghasundī in honor of Saṃkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva, "invincible lords and supreme sovereigns"; statues of the five heroes of the Vṛṣṇis in Morā near Mathurā; a gateway and balustrade erected in the same place in the temple of the Bhagavān Vāsudeva; and an inscription by a Queen Nāyanikā in Nānāghāṭ in Mahārāṣṭra that invokes Saṃkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva.[17] Moreover, Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*, which refers to

Puṣyamitra Śuṅga as a contemporary and thus dates to the mid- to late-second century BCE,[18] refers to various characters from the *Mahābhārata* (Bhīmasena, Sahadeva, Nakula, Duryodhana, Duḥśāsana, Yudhiṣṭhira, Kṛṣṇa, Saṃkarṣaṇa) and contemporary plays about the murder of Kaṃsa by Vāsudeva, thus suggesting that he was familiar with the *Mahābhārata* in some form.[19] In addition, he refers to *bhakta*s of Vāsudeva, implying that he is not just an ordinary human character, but a significant god.[20]

To summarize, then, Patañjali is aware of the *Mahābhārata* in the mid- to late-second century BCE, *and* he appears to be aware to the worship of Vāsudeva as not just one god among many, but as a highly exalted being. This is then followed by a host of inscriptional evidence beginning in the late second century BCE of devotees of Vāsudeva and the Vṛṣṇis. Given that we (1) know that Patañjali was aware of the *Mahābhārata* in some form, (2) have evidence from Patañjali and inscriptions from the same era of devotees of Vāsudeva, and (3) have in the Critical Edition a version of the *Mahābhārata* that exalts Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva as Supreme Deity, there seems to be no particular reason to believe, at least on the basis of its Vaiṣṇava theology, that the version of the *Mahābhārata* disclosed by the Critical Edition isn't or could not be the version of the *Mahābhārata* known to Patañjali in the second century BCE. Indeed, insofar as the Critical Edition discloses, however imperfectly, the archetype of *all manuscript traditions* of the *Mahābhārata* in India, and we have good reason, on the basis of internal evidence, to believe that this text was written *after* the fall of the Mauryas,[21] the most parsimonious conclusion would seem to be that this text *is* the *Mahābhārata* that was known to Patañjali and that it was written sometime in the second century BCE.

Of course, another common objection to accepting the Critical Edition as corresponding in full to the "original" *Mahābhārata* written in the late first millennium BCE is the "didactic"

portions, namely the *Śānti* and *Anuśāsana Parvan*s, which are long, seemingly irrelevant to the epic story, and read to many modern scholars as a miscellany, a grab bag of conflicting stories and teachings that could not possibly come from the same authorial hand or time period. I would contend that the inability to see how these sections could be part of an original text is the result of certain (very) modern assumptions about writing style, as well as a lack of imagination. In his study of the *Mokṣadharma Parvan* of the *Śānti Parvan*, James Fitzgerald, working under the assumption that this section of the *Mahābhārata* is an anthology of texts that was compiled by a redactor using the "frame" of Yudhiṣṭhira asking Bhīṣma questions, finds that this frame is "intellectually weak and unmotivated, that the only concerted effort it makes is to sustain narrative continuity with the epic."[22] It is true that, insofar as Yudhiṣṭhira's questions to Bhīṣma serve as an "outline" to the *Mokṣadharma Parvan*, that outline does not adhere to the ideal rhetorical structure in modern English composition, and as such would likely receive low marks in a modern college class, whether from Prof. Fitzgerald, myself, or any one of us who teaches in higher education. Nevertheless, we should not lose sight of the fact that the way we teach students how to write is not the only way that one can write, nor is it the only way that one can write that *makes sense*. Indeed, as Fitzgerald himself concedes,

> …this picture of disarray is not entirely accurate. I noted above a few examples in which the redactor has coordinated the framing of two different texts. There are also in the collection certain instances of thematic grouping of texts which are not signalled (*sic*), at least not clearly, in the redactorial framing. …That is to say, there was some degree of redactorial organization of the collection beyond the selection and collation of the texts and the insertion of the collection into the epic narrative.[23]

In other words, although there is a lack of a strong global organizational scheme to the *Mokṣadharma Parvan*, there are thematic links between adjacent episodes within it, *both* within the Yudhiṣṭhira-Bhīṣma frame *and* within the stories themselves. But there is a simpler way to understand this than assuming the work of a redactor: There was an author (or authors) who composed each episode one-by-one, without a predetermined plan but nonetheless linking, however loosely, each episode to the ones that precede it.

What sort of writing habitus would result in the sort of end-product we see in the *Mahābhārata*, especially in the didactic portions but also in the epic as a whole? The answer is quite simple: a serial. The *Mahābhārata* was written as a serial. To be clear, this is not the sort of serial that we find in limited series on Netflix today, which are planned out in advance, but something more akin to the older television series of network television or, better yet, soap operas, whose rapid schedule of production requires writing on the fly. Although many of us who grew up in America in the last few decades have little familiarity with the soap opera genre because they are not shown at prime time, I became more familiar with soap operas by watching them in Thailand, where they are the prime-time form of televised entertainment, as I learned Thai. My wife, who grew up watching these soap operas, pointed out to me that when a particular soap opera is popular, the writers will find often contrived ways to drag it out for a few more weeks. On the other hand, once the soap opera is scheduled to end, what once was a long, drawn-out, and histrionic storyline can often be hastily tied up in just one or two episodes.

We see exactly this sort of structure in the *Mahābhārata*. In theory, the epic should have ended shortly after the end of the final battle in Book 9. Instead, through a series of contrivances, including, most noticeably, the *extremely* drawn-out death scene of Bhīṣma (what is more operatic than than?), the author(s) are able to keep the series going for ten more books. Then, for

whatever reason, it was time to bring the series to a close, so they hastily tied off loose threads in what many scholars have noted are the uncharacteristically short last three *parvan*s. But that was not the end of the road for the universe created by the *Mahābhārata*. As with any highly successful series, it gave birth to a spin-off, a prequel exploring the earlier life of one of the supporting characters. Just as *Better Call Saul* shows us the early life of Saul Goodman from *Breaking Bad* and *Young Sheldon* shows us the early life of Sheldon Cooper from *The Big Bang Theory*, so too does the *Harivaṃśa* show us the early life of Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva from the *Mahābhārata*.

So what set of circumstances led to the writing of this series: who, where, and why? These questions, I think, have mostly been adequately dealt with by earlier scholarship, but I would like to hone these answers with my framework for understanding ancient Indian Brahmanism and the insight that the *Mahābhārata* was a serial. The easiest question to answer is where. Given the subject matter of the *Mahābhārata*, it seems pretty clear that it was most likely written in the more Western region of classical India, i.e., the Kuru-Pāñcāla region. Of course, it is possible that authors can write about a region other than where they live, but given the political circumstances in the second century BCE and how the *Mahābhārata* reacts to them, it seems most likely that the author(s) were writing about their home region. North India (and for a time all of India) had by this point been ruled over by Māgadhas in the East for well over a century. Even Puṣyamitra Śuṅga, the Brahman general who overthrew the Mauryas by assassinating their last king, Bṛhadratha, continued to rule from Pāṭaliputra. It is difficult not to read an epic glorifying the great history of the West, which by this point was a political (and likely cultural) backwater, as a deliberate act of nostalgia on the part of locals in the "heartland" who felt alienated from the metropole. This is especially true when one considers, as Witzel has shown,

that the *Mahābhārata* constructs a novel "lunar lineage" to rival the Vedic "solar lineage" that had been appropriated by eastern dynasties.[24] In addition, as we will see below, the discourse on *sāṃkhya-yoga* found in the *Mahābhārata* draws heavily upon Upaniṣadic texts associated with the Black Yajurveda, again suggesting a Western provenance.

As several scholars have noted, the frame stories of the *Mahābhārata* suggest the immediate context in which it may have been composed—namely, during a long sacrificial session performed by Brahmans for Brahmans, known as a *sattra*.[25] I would add that this context also explains why the *Mahābhārata* has an episodic character. Insofar as the epic itself portrays stories being told during the breaks between sacrificial sessions, we can imagine the *Mahābhārata* being written, *adhyāya*-by-*adhyāya*, to be recited during the breaks in a sacrifice that lasted a year or more. Or perhaps the Brahmans involved in the sacrifice collaborated in the writing of these "episodes" during the breaks in sacrifice and then shared them in some way with a larger public.

As for the sort of Brahmans involved, there is every indication that they were *vānaprastha*s, i.e., those that I have dubbed the "conservative mainstream" of antique Brahmanism. This is suggested immediately by their fictionalized counterparts in the epic itself, who are portrayed as dwelling in *āśrama*s and engaging in intensive Vedic practice (the performance of *sattra*s) in the forest—namely, Naimiṣa Forest. Moreover, as Hiltebeitel has noted, the *Mahābhārata* "show[s] a deep appreciation of, and indeed exalt[s], Brahmans who practice the 'way of gleaning': that is, *uñchavṛtti* Brahmans reduced to poverty who live a married life and feed their guests and family by 'gleaning' grain."[26] But this lifestyle of gleaning is precisely that of the *vānaprastha*s (and I am not sure that poverty is necessary to explain it).

Likewise, Fitzgerald has shown that the *Mokṣadharma Parvan* ends with a series of episodes on the four *āśrama*s that concludes with a praise of the *vānaprastha*.[27]

Indeed, the portrayal of the authors as *ṛṣi*s may reflect a growing perception that the practice of *vānaprastha* was a return to the authentic practice of ancient Vedic *ṛṣi*s. This is corroborated by Buddhist texts, which speak in approving terms of the ancient *ṛṣi*s in contradistinction to the rich householder (*mahāsāla*) Brahmans of which they are critical[28]; at the same time, the Buddhist Vinaya gives preferential treatment to *jaṭila*s (the Buddhist term for *vānaprastha*s) by exempting them from the probationary period if they joined the Buddhist *saṅgha*.[29] The conflation of *jaṭila*s/*vānaprastha*s with *ṛṣi*s was then completed in the Pali commentaries, which use *isi* as a synonym for *jaṭila*.[30] To this day, so-called *ṛṣi*s—holy men who are not Buddhist monks—are an important part of the religious imaginary in Theravāda Buddhist Southeast Asia, drawing in a complicated way from the *jaṭila*s of the Pali *imaginaire* and *ṛṣi*s such as Nārada and Agastya in the Hindu imaginary.[31]

In order to simplify my prose, and in recognition of what I consider the likely unitary authorship of the *Mahābhārata*, I will henceforth refer to the epic's author(s) simply as Vyāsa. This is not to deny that there may well have been, as Hiltebeitel has suggested, several authors involved, but it is meant to indicate that the *Mahābhārata* was written all at once, over a relatively short period of time, by a single author or authors who were working together. Although we have no way of knowing whether *Vyāsa* was the real name of anyone working on this project, it is a useful convenience, and an appropriate one, given that the author(s) of *Mahābhārata* chose this name to represent themselves in the epic itself.

*The Mahābhārata's Project as "History" (*Itihāsa*)*

One of the more subtle reasons that I think has led so many modern scholars to view the *Mahābhārata* as a composite work compiled over a period of centuries has to do with the sharp dichotomy between classical Hinduism and the Vedic religion that preceded it. Since classical Hinduism is characterized by a series of theistic and philosophical trends that branch off from each other and depart in ever-more significant ways from their Vedic heritage, and the *Mahābhārata* as it comes down to us seems to dabble in so many of these different trends, it seems logical at first blush to assume that the *Mahābhārata* must be full of accretions and interpolations that reflect the evolving trends of classical Hinduism up to the Gupta period. What I am suggesting is that we have gotten this backwards. It is not that classical Hinduism was new and the *Mahābhārata* was expanded and altered to reflect these new trends. It is that the *Mahābhārata* was itself radically new and happened to be so widely influential that it became the basis and inspiration for nearly every new trend in classical Hinduism.

In advancing this argument, I am indebted to Johannes Bronkhorst's concept of the "new Brahmanism," which for economy I prefer to call "Neo-Brahmanism." In his book *Buddhism in the Shadow of Brahmanism*, Bronkhorst argues that "Brahmins coped with the changed political circumstances that had arrived with the creation of empire in northern India"[32] in three main ways: the "spread of Sanskrit" (encouraging the use of Sanskrit in new ways outside of Vedic recitation)[33], the "brahmanical colonization of the past,"[34] and "the brahminization of borrowed features."[35] I would argue that the *Mahābhārata* engages in all three of these strategies and as such can be considered the *magnum opus* of the Neo-Brahmanical project. In particular, however, I would like to focus on what Bronkhorst calls the "brahmanical colonization of the past." By this, he means that the works of Neo-Brahamanism "all deny that the new Brahmanism is new at all. Brahmanism and all that is part of it has always been there, and is the very opposite

of new."[36] As an example of this strategy, he cites the late tradition that a Brahmanical *purohita*, Cāṇakya, later identified with Kauṭilya the author of the *Arthaśāstra*, was instrumental in helping Candragupta Maurya to found his empire, even though we know that the Mauryas were largely antithetical to traditional Brahmans.[37] But an even more obvious example of this tendency to rewrite the past has been staring us in the face all along, rendered all the more invisible to us by its success: the *Mahābhārata*, India's work of history (*itihāsa*) *par excellence*.

We should not concern ourselves too much over the fact that, from a modern historical-critical perspective, the *Mahābhārata* is not "history" at all, but rather myth,[38] or, to use a familiar modern literary category, something more akin to historical fiction than history. The point is that the *Mahābhārata* tells a story (cognate with *history*) of the past, and in so doing, it writes, as Bronkhorst argues, a particular *Brahmanical* vision of society into that past, thus naturalizing it. In advancing that Brahmanical vision of society, it makes legitimating reference to older texts, gods, myths, and practices associated with the Vedic heritage, but it does so in a fundamentally novel and creative way. And because the *Mahābhārata* was such a smash hit, the imaginary it created served as the basis for centuries of innovation in the classical Hinduism that followed.

In order to understand how Vyāsa accomplished this feat, it is important first to consider what I take to be his primary inspiration, the *Rāmāyāṇa* of Vālmīki. I follow Pollock in taking the bulk of the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* as older than the *Mahābhārata* and also in seeing certain parts of it as later additions. This may seem to be a convenient and hypocritical stance considering that I have just argued for the unitary authorship of the *Mahābhārata*, but, as Pollock notes, the manuscript traditions for the *Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhārata* are fundamentally different:

> That the *Rāmāyaṇa* is an oral composition has now been statistically demonstrated …. The history of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in its written form effectively commences in the eleventh century. … Unlike the *Mahābhārata* (and this is of primary significance for the text criticism of our poem), the recensions of the *Rāmāyāṇa* display disagreements of a sort that cannot be accounted for by the inevitable accidents of written transmission.[39]

Thus, while the Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata* discloses (however imperfectly) a written archetype, which, as I have argued, we have no particular reason to believe is substantively different from the one known to Patañjali in the second century BCE, the Critical Edition of the *Rāmāyaṇa* instead constructs an average of oral traditions around India that were not stabilized by writing until the eleventh century.

What is striking about the *Rāmāyaṇa*, even in the form it comes down to us, is that with few exceptions—most significantly Brahmā's revelation to Rāma that he is the Supreme God Viṣṇu (*Rām.* 6.105)—for the most part it reads like the Brahmā-centric epic that Hopkins assumed as a stage for the *Mahābhārata* and that I once accepted as evidence for the *Mahābhārata*'s gradual composition. The entire account of Brahmā's boon to Rāvaṇa, the appeal from the gods for help, Brahmā's task to Viṣṇu to defeat Rāvaṇa, and the descent of the incarnations (*Rām.* 1.14-16) proceeds as if Brahmā is the supreme deity giving orders to other gods, including Viṣṇu, and Brahmā reappears as such throughout the epic (*Rām.* 2.102.2, 3.3.6, 3.4.45, 3.30.17, 4.50.12, 4.65.25, 5.1.7, 5.11.65, 5.18.14, 5.21.6, 5.30.8, 5.46.37-41). What I would suggest, then, is that the *Rāmāyaṇa is* the earlier version of the *Mahābhārata* in which Brahmā is the supreme deity and Viṣṇu is merely one of the gods he sends to incarnate on Earth. That is to say, Vyāsa knew a version of the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* in which Viṣṇu incarnated to fight Rāvaṇa at the bidding of his superior, Brahmā, and he used this story as the template for his

own epic—in the process, however, *subverting* it through the gradual revelation of Kṛṣṇa/Viṣṇu's identity as the supreme deity.

Indeed, that Vyāsa was inspired in this way is suggested by his inclusion of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in the *Mahābhārata* as the *Rāmopākhyāna* (*MBh.* 3.257-275). In order to console Yudhiṣṭhira, who is despondent over the abduction of Draupadī while he and the other Pāṇḍavas are in exile in the forest, Mārkaṇḍeya tells him the story of Rāma. This account, which is quite detailed, follows the version of Vālmīki as it has come down to us closely, with two major exceptions. First, it presents Brahmā as the lead god who sends Viṣṇu and the other gods to incarnate on Earth to fight Rāma, with no hint of Viṣṇu's superiority. Second, it ends with Rāma returning to Ayodhyā, assuming kingship, and performing ten *aśvamedha*s—that is, it omits the *Uttarakāṇḍa* completely, thus supporting the scholarly consensus that the *Uttarakāṇḍa* is a late addition. Mārkaṇḍeya then explicitly says that he has recounted this tale to make the point that Rāma suffered exile in the forest just like Yudhiṣṭhira is now, and things turned out well for him in the end, so Yudhiṣṭhira should not despair.

From a historical perspective, however, Vyāsa seems to be tipping his hand here. He knew the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and he used its basic plot to create a new story of his own. Think about the basic plot of the *Rāmāyaṇa*: In response to a demonic threat, Brahmā sends the gods, led by Viṣṇu, to incarnate on Earth. The rightful king and his entourage are forced into exile in the forest. Upon their return, they engage in a great battle in which the demons are defeated. Then the rightful king finally takes up kingship. This basic plotline is lifted by Vyāsa to serve as the outline for the *Mahābhārata*, much like Shakespeare lifted plots from classical, historical, and literary sources for his plays. But also like Shakespeare, Vyāsa makes the story his own, creating his own unique story, with its own unique characters, and introducing a major twist to the plot.

That twist, of course, is the role of Viṣṇu. Instead of having Viṣṇu incarnate as the main character, the rightful king Yudhiṣṭhira, he has him incarnate as Kṛṣṇa, an apparent sidekick. Then, slowly, over the course of the long epic, he subverts the Brahmā-centric plotline that he has cribbed from Vālmīki, repeatedly—not only but most famously in the *Bhagavad Gītā*—having Kṛṣṇa reveal himself as God (*MBh.* 5.129.1-15, 6.33.5-49, 14.54.3-7),[40] who contains all things, all the worlds, all the other gods, even the Grandfather Brahmā, in himself. We learn over the course of the epic—and as Hiltebeitel and others have rightly noted, this theme is so thoroughly interwoven into the plot that it is unlikely to be the result of interpolation[41]—that Kṛṣṇa, as God, has orchestrated all of the events of the *Mahābhārata* to unfold according to his will. By introducing this plot twist, Vyāsa effectively founded Vaiṣṇavism and set the stage for theistic sectarianism as a driving force in classical Hinduism.

In saying this, I do not mean to imply that Vyāsa created the idea of an ultimate God behind the multiplicity of gods out of nothing—this idea has clear antecedents in Vedic thought.[42] Nor am I saying with certainty that there existed in India no devotion to Viṣṇu as Supreme Deity prior to Vyāsa penning the *Mahābhārata*—that is ultimately an unanswerable question based on the silence of our evidence, and perhaps not even that, if the *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad* predates the *Mahābhārata*.[43] What I am saying is that if we take the *Mahābhārata* seriously as a work of unitary authorship from the second century BCE, then its plot twist revealing the sidekick Kṛṣṇa as God clearly had a major impact on the course of Indian religion. Prior to the *Mahābhārata*, Vaiṣṇavism, if there even was such a thing, was not a major force in Indian religion—the early Buddhist *sūtra* literature, which I date in its developed form to the third century BCE[44], knows nothing about it. After the *Mahābhārata*, it clearly was, as attested by the inscriptions I cited above, not to mention the proliferation of Vaiṣṇava *smṛti* literature in

the classical period.[45] Indeed, we can point to the *Harivaṃśa*, the *Mahābhārata*'s prequel, as evidence of the immediate demand to know anything and everything about this God Vāsudeva.

But aside from making for a good story, what were the theological reasons for Vyāsa to subvert the plot he took from the *Rāmāyaṇa* by revealing Kṛṣṇa as God? Although I have revised my thinking about the authorship and significance of the *Mahābhārata*, I still concur with the basic argument of my previously published article that Brahmā had been so thoroughly discredited by the Buddhists that he was no longer seen as a suitable object of devotion as the highest god. Early Buddhist literature ridiculed Brahmā as a buffoon and criticized the idea that the Creator of the universe could also be the goal of escape from it. In so doing, it converted Brahmā from a singular figure, an ultimate principle, to a class of beings that anyone could attain in their next rebirth, but which still fell short of ultimate liberation from *saṃsāra*.[46] The *Mahābhārata* responds to this critique by introducing, in the person of Viṣṇu, a new way of thinking about the Supreme Deity—not as a Creator who one aspires to go to after death, but as *including* the entire universe within himself, thus transcending the tension between this-worldly and other-worldly values and allowing for the inclusion of a worldview of rebirth and liberation within an overtly albeit thoroughly reimagined Vedic imaginary.

Every facet of the *Mahābhārata* should be read within the horizon of this ideological project. We must constantly remind ourselves that the *Mahābhārata* was written in an India that had moved intellectually quite far from its Vedic roots. The radical *śramaṇa avant-garde* had taken certain key ideas from late Vedic thought—karma, *saṃsāra*, and liberation—and run with them, obviating the need for knowledge of the Vedas; ritual expertise; or even knowledge of the archaic Vedic language, which was increasingly removed from everyday speech. Moreover, these radical *śramaṇa*s had, through the patronage of India's imperial masters, become the de

facto intellectual elites. Aside from its demonization of so-called *nāstika*s and occasional jabs at the philosophical tenets of these elites, the *Mahābhārata* ignores all this. It instead constructs a world, through a story about the past, written in Sanskrit, in which the political backwater of Kuru-Pāñcāla is the center of civilization, in which *varṇa* is the operative social principle; in which Vedic rituals are commonplace; in which myths about the gods are bandied about at the drop of a hat; and, most importantly, in which salvation does not involve the humiliating transcendence of the gods, but rather a return to God himself.

It is this ideological project—not centuries of accretion—that explains the relative, shall we say, exuberance of the *Mahābhārata* compared to the *Rāmāyaṇa*. If the *Rāmāyaṇa* is like a Gothic cathedral, then the *Mahābhārata* is like a baroque cathedral. The *Rāmāyaṇa*, in other words, is the aesthetic reflection of a stable social order. The *Mahābhārata*, on the other hand, is the aesthetic expression of reaction to a changing social order, an ostentatious act of defiance to change that reasserts everything that is (perceived to be) being left behind in an exaggerated and, therefore, creative and innovative way.

Having said this, however, we should be clear that Vyāsa was not representative of the most stalwart reactionaries within Brahmanical culture, the authors of the Dharmasūtras. Those Brahmans were clearly committed to householdership and therefore hostile to any accommodation with the ethic of renunciation. They were so committed to this reactionary project that they even, in some cases, rejected the *āśrama* of the *vānaprastha*, in spite of the fact that, as Olivelle has convincingly argued, that lifestyle had at one time been seen as the ideal pursuit of exemplary Brahmans, as indeed it is portrayed in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.[47] Instead, as I argued above, Vyāsa came from the *vānaprastha* milieu, what I have called the "conservative mainstream" of antique Brahmanism. This is borne out by the consistent ideological positioning

of Vyāsa throughout the epic: not rejecting renunciation and the śramaṇic worldview out of hand but rather seeking a synthesis that takes the śramaṇic worldview seriously while preserving what are perceived as non-negotiable "fundamentals"—the social order of *varṇa*, Sanskrit, the gods, the Vedas, Vedic ritual. Over and over again, we find characters in the *Mahābhārata* seriously grappling with what Vyāsa, quite rightly, takes to be a real tension in the Vedic heritage between world-affirming (*pravṛtti*) and world-negating (*nivṛtti*) values.[48]

The Mahābhārata *and the Creation of "Sāṃkhya-Yoga"*

In order to illustrate how the *Mahābhārata*'s baroque aesthetic advanced a project of synthetic reaction to the threat posed by radical śramaṇism, I would like to focus on one particular example, the *Mahābhārata*'s recurring discourse on *sāṃkhya-yoga*. Scholarship on the early Hindu philosophical systems of Sāṃkhya and Yoga, or Sāṃkhya-Yoga, has tended to take the form of mining late Vedic texts, the *Mahābhārata*, and the *Buddhacarita* for evidence of the development of a supposed "proto-Sāṃkhya," which later was codified in the classical Sāṃkhya of the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* and "borrowed" wholesale for use in the theistic system of Patañjali in the *Yoga Sūtra*.[49] Since much of the earliest evidence for this philosophical system or systems is in the *Mahābhārata*, concentrated in the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Mokṣadharma Parvan*, the theory that the *Mahābhārata* was subject to elaboration and accretion over many centuries has led to scholarly efforts to trace the development of Sāṃkhya-Yoga philosophy in the *Mahābhārata* itself, with various passages dubbed earlier or later.[50] In light of my argument that the *Mahābhārata* was a unitary work of creative genius from the second century BCE, this approach has been, in my opinion, a wild-goose chase. Indeed, given that the *Mahābhārata* is one of the earliest pieces of evidence for Sāṃkhya-Yoga that we have, we need to stop looking at it as

"reflecting" the development of a putative proto-Sāṃkhya tradition and instead take Vyāsa seriously as a, probably the, major contributor to the formation of the Sāṃkhya and Yoga philosophical systems in the first place.

Stratifying the *sāṃkhya-yoga* material in the *Mahābhārata* has been motivated in part by scholars taking a discriminatingly philosophical approach to the texts, motivated understandably by the fact that Sāṃkhya and Yoga did later become philosophical systems. Since, from the perspective of these scholars, different passages addressing the themes of *sāṃkhya* and *yoga* were incompatible with one another, they could not come from the same authorial hand or time period. But this is reading the later philosophical character of Sāṃkhya and Yoga back into the epic text. Nearly 100 years ago, Franklin Edgerton recognized this fact and argued that we must understand the words *sāṃkhya* and *yoga* as they are actually used in their immediate epic context:

> *Nowhere is there a suggestion that [Sāṃkhya]—or Yoga either—means any particular system of metaphysical truth.* In the Gītā Sānkhya and Yoga are not metaphysical, speculative systems, not what we should call philosophies at all, but ways of gaining salvation; *that and nothing else*. … It seems to me that all previous studies in this field have suffered from the initial error of failing to inquire of the Hindu texts (of this period) themselves exactly what they mean by the words "Sānkhya" and "Yoga." The usual method is first to study the Sānkhya Kārikās (admittedly dating from not before the 5th century A. D., and admittedly the earliest "systematic" Sānkhya treatise); then to look in earlier texts for ideas resembling its ideas, and to call these ideas "early forms" (or "distortions") of the "Sānkhya system," taking for granted the existence of a "Sānkhya system" (in the sense of a speculative metaphysics) at this time.[51]

It is unfortunate that Edgerton's warning has gone largely unheeded, although understandable given the fact that this approach to early Indian philosophy and the theory of the *Mahābhārata*'s gradual authorship are mutually reinforcing.

Although there are a few stray references to *sāṃkhya* and *yoga* together earlier in the epic,[52] the first point in the *Mahābhārata* where *sāṃkhya-yoga* is thematized at length is the *Bhagavad Gītā*. As is well known, on the surface level the thesis of Kṛṣṇa's sermon in the *Gītā* is that Arjuna should follow his *svadharma* as a *kṣatriya*; on a deeper level, one of his most important arguments is that one should engage in action but renounce the fruits of action, a procedure usually referred to as *karma-yoga*. Less well recognized, I think, is how these two arguments are linked given the *Mahābhārata*'s intellectual context. Through the principle of *karma-yoga* that he has Kṛṣṇa present, Vyāsa is defending the practice of violence against the radical *śramaṇa* principle of *ahiṃsā*, especially as espoused by those I have dubbed the "radical materialists"—i.e., the Nirgraṇṭhas/Ājīvakas.[53] They argued that, in order to escape from *saṃsāra*, one must completely cease engaging in *all* forms of action—a principle that motivates to this day the Jain practice of *sallekhanā*, or fasting until death. This position is refuted in *BhG* 3.5, in which Kṛṣṇa states baldly, "*No one*, not even for a moment, has ever existed without performing action; *everyone* is forced to perform action involuntarily by the characteristics born of nature."[54]

Just prior to this verse, Kṛṣṇa introduces the binary of *sāṃkya* and *yoga* for the first time in the *Gītā*: "In this world, a twofold basis was previously proclaimed by me, Blameless One: the yoke (*yoga*) of knowledge of the enumerators (*sāṃkhyānāṃ*), the yoke (*yoga*) of action of the yokers (*yogināṃ*)."[55] It is clear, if we rid ourselves of preconceptions about *sāṃkhya* and *yoga* taken from the later philosophical traditions, that Vyāsa is playing on words here, as *yoga* serves

both to refer to something that two distinct groups of people possess (albeit in different varieties) *and* to one of those two groups of people. On the face of it, however, these two groups of people are those who engage in (lit., are "yoked to") the pursuit of knowledge, known as *sāṃkhya*s, and those who engage in (again, are "yoked to") action, known as *yogin*s. The dichotomy appears to be between those who are more theoretically inclined and those who are more inclined to act. Both are *doing* something (with "doing" expressed through the metaphor of the yoke), but the latter are doing so more *actively*.

A few chapters later, Kṛṣṇa reintroduces the dichotomy between *sāṃkhya* and *yoga* in slightly different terms:

> Renunciation (*saṃnyāsa*) and the yoke (*yoga*) of action both lead to ultimate bliss.
> Of the two, however, the yoke of action is better than the renunciation of action.
> ……..
> The childish say that enumeration (*sāṃkhya*) and the yoke (*yoga*) are distinct, not the wise.
> (If) even one is practiced correctly, the fruit of both is found.[56]

Here again *yoga* is associated with action, while *sāṃkhya* is associated with renunciation. Thus, implicitly, renunciation is being associated with knowledge, which is logical given that Indian renunciatory traditions of all stripes strive for gnosis. In thematizing a binary distinction between *sāṃkhya* and *yoga*, then, Vyāsa is not speaking about two "philosophical systems." He is speaking about the same debate over this-worldly and renunciatory values that is characteristic of the *Mahābhārata* as a whole. And by introducing the concept of *karma-yoga*, i.e., acting while renouncing the fruits of action, he is able to make space for the ethic of renunciation while at the same time preserving this-worldly action. This is why he has Kṛṣṇa say that *sāṃkhya*

(renunciation) and *yoga* (action) are the same but also that *karma-yoga* is the superior of the two, because it avoids the pitfall of deluding oneself into thinking that the cessation of action is possible.

But why does Vyāsa introduce the vocabulary of *sāṃkhya* and *yoga* to make this point? I have already suggested that he is playing on words, but to fully understand that play on words, we need to look at the Vedic sources that Vyāsa is drawing from. Scholars as early as Hopkins have recognized that the *Mahābhārata* draws from three major late Vedic sources: the *Kaṭha*, *Śvetāśvatara*, and *Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad*s.[57] All three of these texts derive from the Black Yajurveda, which is associated with the more westerly Kuru-Pāñcāla region,[58] thus lending further credence to the westerly provenance of the *Mahābhārata* itself. What has been less recognized—due to interference from the model of gradual, composite authorship of the epic, as well as the metahistorical reading of a Sāṃkhya-Yoga tradition back into pre-classical sources—is that Vyāsa makes use of these three sources to—quite inadvertently, I might add—*construct* a Sāṃkhya-Yoga tradition out of what had originally been a mere set of scriptural passages.

The nexus of these scriptural passages is a metaphor involving a chariot found in the oldest of the three sources, the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*. In responding to Naciketas's question about what happens after death, Death constructs a metaphor using the following correspondences: the self (*ātman*) is the rider in a chariot, the body is the chariot itself, the intellect (*buddhi*) is the charioteer, the mind (*manas*) is the reins, the senses are the horses, and the sense objects are the paths around them. Obviously, when things go well with a chariot, the charioteer has control of the horses via the reins, and the chariot goes where the rider wants to go. Likewise, in the metaphor, when the *buddhi* does not have control over the *manas*, the senses go wildly after sense objects, and the *ātman* goes around the wheel of *saṃsāra* (this word being used for the first

time in Vedic literature at KU 3.7). When *buddhi* does have control over the *manas*, the senses are controlled, and the *ātman* "reaches the end of the road, the highest step of Viṣṇu."[59] Death then recapitulates by enumerating in ranked order the constituents of reality named or implied by the chariot metaphor: senses, sense objects, mind, intellect, great self, unmanifest (*avyakta*), and person (*puruṣa*), with the person being the highest state, beyond which there is nothing (KU 3.10-11). Later in his long discourse, Death refers to this process of "reining in the senses" as "the yoke" (*yoga*, KU 6.11), which is logical given that he has illustrated the process through the metaphor of a chariot, a vehicle that is literally held together and controlled through its *yoga*, or "rigging."[60] The Upaniṣad then closes by referring to this teaching again as the "rule of the yoke" (KU 6.18: *yogavidhiṃ*).

To be clear, these passages in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* are not "reflective" of an early Yoga tradition. They simply represent one out of many novel speculations about the sacrifice and the nature of reality found in the Vedic literature. It seems, however, that the metaphor it constructed was considered particularly apt, and thus it was taken up by other authors, even in late Vedic times. The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*'s main theme, building on the famous *kaḥ* hymn of the *Ṛg Veda* (10.121), is to establish one God (which it mostly refers to as Rudra) as the source of *brahman* and thus all reality. In doing so, it quotes from the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*,[61] equates God with the person (*puruṣa*, ŚU 3.8-19) of the *Puruṣa Sūkta* (RV 10.90) that the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* identifies as the highest reality, and uses the word *yoga* to refer to the practice that leads to the realization of God and escape from rebirth (ŚU 2.10-15). Alluding to the *Kaṭha*'s original metaphor, the author of the *Śvetāśvatara* writes, "A wise man, not careless, should keep his mind steady, like that vehicle yoked to spoiled horses."[62]

Likewise, the *Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad* takes the *Kaṭha*'s chariot metaphor and runs with it. Like the *Śvetāśvatara*, it is determined to establish an ultimate being, identified with the *puruṣa*, who as such dwells within each individual as the *ātman*. The *puruṣa* enters each body, where it becomes the so-called "field-knower," or *kṣetrajña*. Not being content there, he opens up the orifices of the body and sends out "rays" (*raśmi*) to "eat" the objects of the senses. The author then uses a play on the word *raśmi* (which means both "ray" and "rein") to transition to a chariot metaphor, but with slightly different correspondences than those given by the *Kaṭha*:

> These orifices are the faculties of the intellect. They are his reins (*raśmi*). The faculties of action are his horses. The body is the chariot. The mind is the driver. His goad is made of nature (*prakṛtimayo*).[63]

Using the "goad" of nature, the *puruṣa* sets the characteristics (*guṇa*s) of nature in motion. These envelop the *ātman*, resulting in a lower, individual self, or *bhūtātman*, that becomes ignorant of its original nature and is subject to rebirth (MU 3.2-3.3). Later, we learn that the three characteristics of nature are *tamas*, *rajas*, and *sattva*. They are correlated, respectively, with Brahmā, Rudra, and Viṣṇu. Of these, *sattva* is the highest and forms the *kṣetrajña* in every individual (MU 5.2). The solution to this unfortunate situation of the *ātman*—or rather the *bhūtātman*, seduced by the play of the *guṇa*s, not realizing its true nature—is the same as that offered by the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*: reining in the senses with "the yoke." As the author of the *Maitrāyaṇīya* writes, "He who does not touch sense objects that have entered is a renouncer (*saṃnyāsī*), a yoker (*yogī*), and a sacrificer to the self."[64]

We can see how the chariot metaphor established by the *Kaṭha* and elaborated upon by the *Śvetāśvara* and *Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣads* would have been an attractive one for Vyāsa to work with. To begin with, it is intrinsically connected with war, the main theme of the epic.

Indeed, Vyāsa enacts the metaphor on a literal level by having Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa drive their chariot out to the middle of the battlefield just before the beginning of the final battle. Following the *Kaṭha*'s metaphor, Arjuna is the *ātman*, who has to be taught the path to salvation by Kṛṣṇa, who as the charioteer is the *buddhi*. (This, by the way, is not just my interpretation; Kṛṣṇa himself says, "I am the *buddhi* of those with *buddhi*."[65]) Moreover, the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, from which the chariot metaphor originates, contains a verse that proves useful to a justification of violence: "If the killer thinks that he kills, if the killed thinks that he is killed, they both do not understand. He does not kill, he is not killed."[66] In the immediate context of the *Kaṭha*, the point of this verse is simply that the *ātman* is immortal. In the words of Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā*, it is transformed into a justification for killing in war:

> These bodies that have an end are said to belong to the permanent, the embodied,
> The imperishable, the immeasurable. Therefore, fight, son of Bharata!
> Whoever perceives this as a killer, and whoever thinks this is killed,
> They both do not understand. He does not kill, he is not killed.[67]

Finally, as David White has shown, one of the most common ways that Vyāsa uses the word *yoga* throughout the epic is to refer to warriors gaining liberation at death by "yoking" themselves to the rays of the sun, transporting themselves to the world of the deathless beyond the solar disk.[68] We thus can see that the Vedic concept of "the yoke," with its connotations of war[69] and thematization through a chariot metaphor for restraining the senses, is a very productive one for an author grappling with the tension between this-worldly action and renunciation in the context of an epic about a war.

But Vyāsa does not just allude vaguely to the chariot metaphor or Vedic passages about "the yoke" that that metaphor gave birth too. He grapples in deep philosophical detail, especially

in the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Mokṣadharma Parvan*, with the actual *content* of Upaniṣadic discourses on the nature of reality. This may seem surprising, especially given that the *Gītā* introduces (or rather borrows from the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*[70] and elaborates upon) the concept of *bhakti*, devotion to God that allows one to attain liberation by simply engaging in life according to one's *svadharma* and renouncing the fruits of one's actions. If this is the best or only real way to attain liberation, then why the need for elaborate philosophical talk of the *ātman*, *buddhi*, senses, *manas*, *puruṣa*, *prakṛti*, *guṇa*s, and so forth?

At this point, it is useful to step back and remember what Vyāsa's project was in his immediate historical context. In retrospect—and this is certainly how it has come to be read by the tradition—it can seem that the goal of the *Mahābhārata*, with the *Gītā* as its climax, is to reveal Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva as God, an all-encompassing being that contains the entire universe, including the multitude of gods, within himself. But, as I have argued, this was not Vyāsa's ultimate goal; it was rather a means to his goal. That goal, both in the *Gītā* and in the *Mahābhārata* as a whole, was to provide a *synthesis* that incorporated the renunciatory worldview of karma, rebirth and liberation while preserving the fundamental trappings of the Vedic world—the gods, the sacrifice, and the Vedas and Vedic language themselves. The late Black Yajurvedic discourse on *yoga* allowed him to do that.

In doing so, Vyāsa weaves together several key elements from the Upaniṣads. He begins with the *Kaṭha*'s chariot metaphor for the embodied self, bearing the trappings of the senses, mind, and intellect. He adds in the *Śvetāśvatara*'s concept of an ultimate God, who as *puruṣa* is simultaneously the supreme being of the universe and the ultimate reality behind the individual *ātman*. He then completes this mix with the *Maitrāyaṇīya*'s explanation for why individual

*ātman*s are trapped in rebirth: God, as *puruṣa*, stirs up the characteristics (*guṇa*s) of nature (*prakṛti*), shrouding the *ātman* and blinding it to its true nature.

But there is a twist that Vyāsa adds to this package: his creative and playful use of the word *yoga*. In the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, the word *yoga* ("yoke") is used metaphorically, via the chariot metaphor, to refer to control of mind by the intellect so as to "rein in" the senses. What is described, therefore, is a meditative exercise, the province of renunciants, and it is taken as such by both the *Śvetāśvatara* and the *Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣads*. Indeed, as we saw, the latter specifically refers to the person who controls the senses in this way as both a renouncer (*saṃnyāsī*) and a *yogin*. Vyāsa flips the martial metaphor on its head to make the word *yoga* primarily about action. It is clear at times that he is aware that *yoga* was used to refer to a meditative exercise (e.g., BG 6.20-21), but by capitalizing on *yoga*'s association with war, he develops his theory of *karma-yoga*, in which a person is "yoked" to action but still can be considered a renunciant insofar as they let go of the fruits of action. *Karma-yoga* simultaneously serves two useful purposes in Vyāsa's synthetic project. First, it allows him to synthesize renunciatory values with the worldly values of the Brahmanical social order (one renounces but still acts/sacrifices, one kills but does not kill, one performs *dharma* but still adheres to one's proper *varṇa*). Second, it allows him to keep theism relevant. Because the ultimate is conceived of as a personal God and not an abstract principle, there is an incentive to retain the basic theistic apparatus of the bygone Vedic era. As Kṛṣṇa says, "I am the enjoyer and lord of all sacrifices."[71]

Vyāsa's idiosyncratic use of the word *yoga* also explains why he thematizes a tension between this word and a relatively new word, *sāṃkhya*. The word *sāṃkhya* is found, for the first time in the Vedic corpus, in compound with *yoga* in a somewhat obscure verse near the end of the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*.[72] It is possible that Vyāsa thematizes the *sāṃkhya-yoga* duality in

part as a sort of exegesis of that verse, but it is clear that, in general, he uses the word *sāṃkhya*, as Edgerton recognized, to refer to a theoretical approach to liberation that is associated with renunciation. Insofar as the theory of liberation that Vyāsa adopts is referred to in the Upaniṣads as *yoga*, and Vyāsa uses the word *yoga* idiosyncratically to mean action (*karma-yoga*), we can say, then, that Vyāsa uses the word *sāṃkhya* to refer to the prior referent of the now-displaced term *yoga*.

Given my overall argument in this article, however, I think we can articulate this in a more fruitful way. By *sāṃkhya*, Vyāsa means, in the first sense, *any* theoretical approach to liberation that is tied to renunciatory practices. That would include, in theory, the approaches of radical *śramaṇa*s. Although he does not engage or describe these approaches in any great detail, he certainly alludes to them when he has Kṛṣṇa criticize the idea that one can completely cease engaging in action—the key assumption of the Nirgranṭhas and Ājīvakas. But, he has Kṛṣṇa argue, *sāṃkhya* (renunciation, the path of knowledge) and *yoga* (the path of action) are ultimately the same if understood correctly (BG 5.4-5). How does one understand them correctly? By subscribing to the *particular* theory of the universe, God, self, and liberation that Vyāsa weaves out of passages from the discourse on *yoga* found in the *Kaṭha*, *Śvetāśvatara*, and *Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad*s. This subtlety is obscured, especially in retrospect, by Vyāsa's playful use of the word *yoga*. What he means to say is that knowledge-through-renunciation (what he calls *sāṃkhya*) is the same as action (what he calls *yoga*) if you subscribe to the theory of liberation that the Upaniṣads of the Black Yajurveda call *yoga*, with the added twist of *karma-yoga* (renouncing the fruits of action).

We thus finally can see clearly what Vyāsa is doing with all his talk of *sāṃkhya* and *yoga*. He is not "reflecting" a proto-Sāṃkhya, early Yoga, or Sāṃkhya-Yoga tradition. Rather,

he is *constructing* a theory of liberation out of specific Upaniṣadic sources that is compatible with the Neo-Vedic worldview he wishes to advance through the epic. These sources, which share a common metaphorical complex involving a chariot and its rigging (*yoga*), are not, it should be emphasized, representative of the Upaniṣads as a whole. Most of the principal Upaniṣads do not speak of the ultimate as a personal God, but rather as the abstract principle *brahman*, and most do not use the word *yoga* to describe the path to realization of the *ātman*. Vyāsa privileges these particular sources because they are useful to his project.

In so doing, he inadvertently created the basis for the first two Hindu *darśana*s, Sāṃkhya and Yoga. Vyāsa himself was not talking about any pre-existing philosophical system, much less two. Nevertheless, the theoretical complex he constructed would serve as a useful basis for the later development of Hindu philosophical systems to rival those of the Buddhists and Jains. Moreover, because Vyāsa thematized a tension between two things called *sāṃkhya* and *yoga*, these two terms became rubrics under which two distinct philosophical traditions could develop. Both of these, beginning with the *Yoga Sūtra* of Patañjali and the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* of Īśvarakṛṣṇa, diverged from Vyāsa's model in significant ways (especially the latter with its dualism), but given their common origins in the *Mahābhārata* and its Black Yajurvedic sources, they both shared a common set of categories, the *tattva*s and *guṇa*s.

Conclusion

In this article, I have outlined a hermeneutic for the *Mahābhārata* that I believe offers a powerful tool not only for the interpretation of the epic itself, but also for clarifying the history of ancient India. The study of ancient Indian history is notorious for the difficulty posed by the dearth of securely datable historical evidence from that period. But what if we have been

compounding the difficulty by unjustifiably ignoring the signpost offered by the largest and most influential written text from that period? Imagine if scholars two millennia from now were for some reason unable to date any historical evidence from the modern Anglo-American world but then added to that difficulty by arguing that Shakespeare's works were not the work of a single author in a single lifetime, but rather an encyclopedic body of literature that grew over the course of five centuries. They would not be able to use Shakespeare and his tremendous influence on the English language as a signpost to separate modern historical works in English from pre-modern, and they would waste time stratifying the Shakespearean corpus according to themes, neologisms, and turns of phrase that were expanded upon by later authors and figures.

I am arguing that Vyāsa (whether individual or committee) and his *Mahābhārata* hold a similar and in fact even greater position in the history of India. For while Shakespeare's singular influence has been limited primarily to the English language as such, Vyāsa's was far more wide-reaching and ideological. Through his epic, Vyāsa created an imaginary that became *the foundation* for classical Hinduism. I have only scratched the surface with my brief study of the foundation laid for Sāṃkhya-Yoga laid by the *Mahābhārata* in this article. Nearly every aspect of classical Hinduism—its gods, its myths, its theologies, its ideological principles, and so forth—can and should be read as elaborations upon the *Mahābhārata*'s Neo-Brahmanical imaginary.

We need to set aside the misguided quest to stratify the *Mahābhārata*, as well as attempts to sidestep the issue by citing *Mahābhārata* passages alongside other pieces of historical evidence as part of an undatable soup of sources. Instead, scholars should focus on identifying which sources predate the *Mahābhārata* and were either used or ignored by Vyāsa in constructing its epic universe and which sources clearly post-date the epic and elaborate upon

that universe like modern-day fan fiction. The result, I predict, will be a much clarified picture of ancient Indian history, culture, literature, and religion, as well as the recognition of the *Mahābhārata*'s rightful place as a civilization-defining work of literature on par with the works of Shakespeare, Dante's *Inferno*, the Qur'an, and the New Testament.

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[1] Madeleine Biardeau, *Le Mahābhārata: Un récit fondateur du brahmanisme et son interpretation*, 2 vols. (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2002); James L. Fitzgerald, "Making Yudhiṣṭhira the king: The dialectics and the politics of violence in the *Mahābhārata*," *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 54, no. 1 (2001): 63–92; James L. Fitzgerald, trans. and ed., *The Mahābhārata*, vol. 7 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 100-142; Alf Hiltebeitel, "Buddhism and the *Mahābhārata*: Boundary dynamics in textual practice," in *Boundaries, dynamics, and construction of traditions in South Asia*, ed. Federico Squarcini (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2005), 107–131; Nick Sutton, "Aśoka and Yudhiṣṭhira: A Historical Setting for the Ideological Tensions of the *Mahābhārata*?" *Religion* 27 (1997): 333-341.
[2] Nathan McGovern, *The Snake and the Mongoose: The Emergence of Identity in Early Indian Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).
[3] Nathan McGovern, "Identity in Early Indian Religion," in *Routledge Handbook of South Asian Religions*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen (London: Routledge, 2021), 60-63.
[4] McGovern, *Snake and Mongoose*, 133-164; McGovern, "Identity," 62-64.
[5] Patrick Olivelle, *The Āśrama System: The History and Hermeneutics of a Religious Institution* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1993), 46-53, 83-94; cf. McGovern, *Snake and Mongoose*, 137-140.
[6] McGovern, *Snake and Mongoose*, 140-151.
[7] On the identity of these two groups, see McGovern, *Snake and Mongoose*, 113-115.
[8] Nathan McGovern, "Seers (*ṛṣi*/*isi*) and Brāhmaṇas in Southeast Asia," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism, Vol. II: Lives*, ed. Jonathan A. Silk (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 438.
[9] E. Washburn Hopkins, *The Great Epic of India: Its Character and Origin* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), 397-398.
[10] John Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); Fitzgerald, *Mahābhārata*, xvin2.
[11] See, for example, Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, *The Nay Science: A History of German Indology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) and the contributions to their edited volume, Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, eds., *Argument and Design: The Unity of the Mahābhārata* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).
[12] Alf Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata: A Reader's Guide to the Education of the Dharma King* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 17-31.
[13] Fitzgerald, *Mahābhārata*, xvin2.
[14] Nathan McGovern, "Brahmā: An Early and Ultimately Doomed Attempt at a Brahmanical Synthesis," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 40, no. 1 (Feb. 2012): 1-23.
[15] *MBh.* 1.57.83-87: *anugrahārthaṃ lokānāṃ viṣṇur lokanamaskṛtaḥ /*
vasudevāt tu devakyāṃ prādurbhūto mahāyaśāḥ //
anādinidhano devaḥ sa kartā jagataḥ prabhuḥ /
avyaktam akṣaraṃ brahma pradhānaṃ nirguṇātmakam //
ātmānam avyayaṃ caiva prakṛtiṃ prabhavaṃ param /
puruṣaṃ viśvakarmāṇaṃ sattvayogaṃ dhruvākṣaram //
anantam acalaṃ devaṃ haṃsaṃ nārāyaṇaṃ prabhum /
dhātāram ajaraṃ nityaṃ tam āhuḥ param avyayam //
puruṣaḥ sa vibhuḥ kartā sarvabhūtapitāmahaḥ /
dharmasaṃvardhanārthāya prajajñe 'ndhakavṛṣṇiṣu //
[16] Etienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism: From the Origins to the Śaka Era*, trans. Sara Webb-Boin (Louvain-la-Neuve, France: Université Catholique de Louvain, Institut Orientaliste, 1988), 394.
[17] Ibid.

[18] George Cardona, *Pāṇini: A Survey of Research* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976), 263.
[19] Patañjali, *Vyākaraṇamahābhāṣya*, commentary on Pāṇini, *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, 4.1.4, 3.3.1, 2.2.34, cited by Ramakrishna Gopal Bhandarkar, "Consideration of the date of the Mahâbhârata, in connection with the correspondence from Col. Ellis," *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 10 (1871-1872), 84; Patañjali, *Vyākaraṇamahābhāṣya*, commentary on Pāṇini, *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, 3.1.26.6, cited by Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, 393.
[20] Patañjali, *Vyākaraṇamahābhāṣya*, commentary on Pāṇini, *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, 3.1.26.6.
[21] Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata*, 17-18; Michael Witzel, "The Vedas and the Epics: Some Comparative Notes on Persons, Lineages, Geography, and Grammar," in *Epics, Khilas, and Purāṇas: Continuities and Ruptures (Proceedings of the Third Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas, September 2002)*, ed. Petteri Koskikallio (Zagreb: Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 2005), 51-54.
[22] James L. Fitzgerald, "The *Mokṣa* Anthology of the *Great Bhārata*: An Initial Survey of Structural Issues, Themes, and Rhetorical Strategies" (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1980), 297.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Witzel, "Vedas and Epics," 43-50.
[25] Christopher Z. Minkowski, "Janamejaya's *Sattra* and Ritual Structure," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109, no. 3 (Jul.-Sep. 1989): 401-420; Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata*, esp. 92-130.
[26] Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata*, 19.
[27] Fitzgerald, "The *Mokṣa* Anthology," 319.
[28] See, e.g., *Sn.* 2.7.
[29] *Vin.* I.71.
[30] McGovern, "Seers," 438.
[31] Ibid., 438-439.
[32] Johannes Bronkhorst, *Buddhism in the Shadow of Brahmanism* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 38.
[33] Ibid., 42-65.
[34] Ibid., 65-74.
[35] Ibid., 74-97.
[36] Ibid., 66.
[37] Ibid., 66-73.
[38] Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'* (London: Routledge, 1999), 39-40.
[39] Sheldon Pollock, "The *Rāmāyaṇa* Text and the Critical Edition," in *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki: An Epic of Ancient India, Vol. I: Bālakāṇḍa*, trans. Robert P. Goldman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 83-84.
[40] For an extended discussion of the first two theophanies, see Alf Hiltebeitel, *The Ritual of Battle: Kṛṣṇa in the* Mahābhārata (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990), 114-140.
[41] Alf Hiltebeitel, "Kṛṣṇa at Mathurā," in *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage*, ed. Doris Meth Srinivasan (Delhi: American Institute of Indian Studies, 1989), 93-102.
[42] This idea is at least as old as the famous *ka* hymn (RV 10.121), which is so named because it repeatedly asks who (Skt. *ka*) is the ultimate god who should be honored with sacrifice. But it is also a central theme, in particular, of the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, which, as we will see, was one of Vyāsa's main sources.
[43] On this relatively late and little-studied Upaniṣad, see Signe Cohen, "The *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad*," in *The Upaniṣads: A Complete Guide*, ed. Signe Cohen (London: Routledge, 2018), 429-439.
[44] McGovern, *Snake and Mongoose*, 44-51.
[45] Of course, although it lies beyond the scope of this article, there was also a proliferation of Śaiva literature after the *Mahābhārata*, which likely also can be traced to inspiration from it (albeit less direct), especially the account of Śiva's exclusion from the gods' sacrifice in the *Sauptika Parvan* (*MBh.* 10.17-18).
[46] McGovern, "Brahmā," 8-11; Naomi Appleton, *Shared Characters in Jain, Buddhist and Hindu Narrative: Gods, Kings and Other Heroes* (London: Routledge, 2017), 57-81.
[47] Olivelle, *The Āśrama System*, 19-24, 103.
[48] Although it lies beyond the scope of this article, I would like to note that one of the legacies of the *Mahābhārata*'s search for synthesis was most likely the reconception of the four *āśrama*s as stages of life rather than life-long vocations. As this transition has already been studied in great detail in Olivelle's classic study (*The Āśrama System*), it is unnecessary to go into great detail here. It suffices to note that if we take the *Mahābhārata* seriously as a work of unitary authorship and assume, following Olivelle's dating, that the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* postdates it, then this reconception of *āśrama*, which is unknown to the Dharmasūtras, would appear to have either been invented or popularized by Vyāsa, from which it, together with the *Mahābhārata*'s endorsement of the worldview of *saṃsāra*

and liberation, was taken up by Manu and thus entered the Dharmaśāstra tradition. (On the date of Manu, see Patrick Olivelle, trans. and ed., *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the* Mānava-Dharmaśāstra [New York: Oxford University Press, 2005], 25).

[49] For a comprehensive summary of this approach, together with history of relevant scholarship, see Gerald James Larson, *Classical Sāṃkhya: An Interpretation of its History and Meaning*, 2nd ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979). See also Edwin F. Bryant, *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali: A New Edition, Translation, and Commentary* (New York: North Point Press, 2009), xxv-xxvii.

[50] See, e.g., E. H. Johnston, *Early Sāṃkhya* (London: The Royal Asiatic Society, 1937), 5-7; J. A. B. van Buitenen, "Studies in Sāṃkhya (I)," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 76, no. 3 (Jul.-Sep. 1956): 153-157.

[51] Franklin Edgerton, "The Meaning of Sānkhya and Yoga," *American Journal of Philology* 45, no. 1 (1924), 5-6.

[52] *MBh.* 3.2.14, 3.211.21. *Sāṃkhya* alone is mentioned at *MBh.* 1.70.6.

[53] McGovern, "Identity," 65-67.

[54] *na hi kaś cit kṣaṇam api jātu tiṣṭhaty akarmakṛt / kāryate hy avaśaḥ karma sarvaḥ prakṛtijair guṇaiḥ //.*

[55] BG 3.3: *loke 'smin dvividhā niṣṭhā purā proktā mayānagha / jñānayogena sāṃkhyānāṃ karmayogena yoginām //.*

[56] BG 5.2, 5.4: *saṃnyāsaḥ karmayogaś ca niḥśreyasakarāv ubhau / tayos tu karmasaṃnyāsāt karmayogo viśiṣyate // … sāṃkhyayogau pṛthag bālāḥ pravadanti na paṇḍitāḥ / ekam apy āsthitaḥ samyag ubhayor vindate phalam //.*

[57] Hopkins, *Great Epic*, 27-46. For more recent discussions, see Brian Black, "The Upaniṣads and the *Mahābhārata*," in *Upaniṣads*, ed. Signe Cohen, 222-238, and Simon Brodbeck, "The Upaniṣads and the *Bhagavadgītā*," in *Upaniṣads*, ed. Signe Cohen, 239-261.

[58] Michael Witzel, "Tracing the Vedic Dialects," in *Dialects dans les littératures indo-aryennes. Actes du Colloque International organisé par UA 1058 sous les auspices du C.N.R.S. avec le soutien du College de France, de la Fondation Hugot du College de France, de l'Université de Paris III, du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Paris (Fondation Hugot) 16-18 Septembre 1986*, ed. Collette Caillat (Paris: College de France, Institut de Civilisation Indienne, 1989), 97-264.

[59] KU 3.9cd: *so 'dhvanaḥ pāram āpnoti tad viṣṇoḥ paramaṃ padam*.

[60] Although the English cognate of *yoga* is *yoke*, David White has usefully suggested the translation "rigging" to indicate that even the literal referent of *yoga* indicates a wider range of connective apparatus than a rigid bar between two oxen. See David Gordon White, *Sinister Yogis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 63.

[61] ŚU 3.13ab, KU 6.17ab: *aṅguṣṭhamātraḥ puruṣo 'ntarātmā sadā janānāṃ hṛdaye saṃniviṣṭaḥ*.

[62] ŚU 2.9bc: *duṣṭāśvayuktam iva vāham ēnaṃ vidvān mano dhārayetāpramattaḥ.*

[63] MU 2.6: *buddhīndriyāṇi khānīmāni / etāny asya raśmayaḥ / karmendriyāṇy asya hayāḥ / rathaṃ śarīraṃ / mano niyantā / prakṛtimayo 'sya pratodaḥ /.*

[64] MU 6.10: … *indriyārthāṃs … yo na spṛśati praviṣṭān saṃnyāsī yogī cātmayājī ceti*.

[65] BG 7.10c: *buddhir buddhimatām asmi*.

[66] KU 2.19: *hantā cen manyate hantuṃ hantaś cen manyate hatam / ubhau tau na vijānīto nāyaṃ hanti na hanyate //.*

[67] BG 2.18-19: *antavanta ime dehā nityasyoktāḥ śarīriṇaḥ / anāśino 'prameyasya tasmād yudhyasva bhārata // ya enaṃ vetti hantāraṃ yaś cainaṃ manyate hatam / ubhau tau na vijānīto nāyaṃ hanti na hanyate //*. Note that the last hemistich is a direct quote from KU 2.19.

[68] White, *Sinister Yogis*, 60-71.

[69] As far back as the *Ṛg Veda*, the words *yoga* and *kṣema* were used as antonyms to refer, respectively, to the period of mobilization during war and the period of fixed habitation in peace. See Theodore N. Proferes, *Vedic Ideals of Sovereignty and the Poetics of Power* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 2007), 17.

[70] The final verse of the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (6.27) introduces the concept of devotion (*bhakti*) to god (*deva*): *yasya deve parā bhaktir yathā deve tathā gurau / tasyaite kathitā hy arthāḥ prakāśante mahātmanaḥ prakāśante mahātmanaḥ //.*

[71] BG 9.24ab: *ahaṃ hi sarvayajñānāṃ bhoktā ca prabhur eva ca*.

[72] ŚU 6.13: *nityo nityānāṃ cetanaś cetanānām eko bahūnāṃ yo vidadhāti kāmān / tatkāraṇaṃ sāṃkhyayogādhigamyaṃ jñātvā devaṃ mucyate sarvapāśaiḥ //*. The issue is how to translate the compound *sāṃkhyayogādhigamyaṃ*, which modifies "that cause" (*tatkāraṇaṃ*), God (*devaṃ*). One could take it as "which is attainable through the yoke of enumeration" or as "which is attainable through enumeration and the yoke."

ABBREVIATIONS

BG	*Bhagavad Gītā*
KU	*Kaṭha Upaniṣad*
MBh.	*Mahābhārata* (Critical Edition)
MU	*Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad* (Vulgate)
Rām.	*Rāmāyaṇa* (Critical Edition)
ŚU	*Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*
Vin.	*Vinaya Piṭaka* (Pali)

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