White Supremacy and Two Theories of *Ahiṃsā*: Jainism vs. Yoga (Draft)

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1. Introduction

Recent research about research on South Asia, to date, has shed light on how it is typically anachronistic and involves projecting backwards, onto the history of South Asia, distinctions that were functions of—and artifacts of—*W*estern colonialism. This should not be surprising as *W*estern colonialism is ubiquitous the world over. Indeed, even the conflation of the geographic area of the West with a political and cultural tradition from Europe is a sign of this colonialism of White Supremacy: it erases the reality of Indigenous and Black people from the Americas and Africa, who are also geographically in the West. So as to not perpetuate this normalization of Eurocentric colonialism---White Supremacy---we can and should distinguish the geography of the West (which contains BIPOC peoples and ancient traditions) from the *W*est: a political and intellectual tradition with roots in ancient Greek philosophy — a tradition that has colonized Europe and the world.

Colonialism is the imposition of a perspective on a colonized population (cf. LaMonica Accessed 2021; Butt 2013), and this process is complete when the colonized adopt the colonial perspective as their own. In the case of South Asia, the academic continuity of this *W*estern colonial history consists in treating the *W*est as the standard for assessing all other traditions, which are then understood in terms of their conformity or deviation from the *W*est. It is in effect, White Supremacy, which measures everything in terms of the intellectual and cultural traditions of White people. Hence, authors project backwards ideas of religion and spirituality on to a South Asian tradition that originally had no such concern, and was

preoccupied with moral (dharma) philosophy. Religion was (as historians of the *W*est will know) an invention of the Romans to deal with colonized traditions (for more about this history, see Beard, North, and Price 1998; Gordon 2008). Spirituality, a term with roots in Christian thought, has come to occupy the same space to depict colonized traditions in terms of their deviation from *W*estern theorization (Oman 2013: 26-28; cf. Solomon 2002). The Roman Empire was of course a very early iteration of *W*estern colonialism. The continuity of the application of these *W*estern colonial ideas to talk about South Asia, an important BIPOC tradition, is nothing but a continuity of *W*estern tradition. Once *W*estern colonialism takes root, BIPOC traditions are no longer understood in terms of what they have to teach us about moral (dharmic), political and other philosophical controversies. They are rather assessed in terms of their conformity and deviation from the *W*estern tradition, and largely studied by those untrained and uninterested in philosophy. In other words, the displacement of BIPOC traditions is normalized by the internalization of the *W*est as the arbitrator of BIPOC traditions. Colonization is hence complete as inheritors of these traditions understand themselves as proponents of religions or spiritualities, and not ancient traditions of moral and political philosophy. All of this is normalized by the invention of Secularism$_2$: accordingly the religious is the Non-*W*estern, and the secular is the *W*estern. Hence all world religions have originally BIPOC origins from outside of the *W*estern tradition. And this contrasts with the indigenously South Asian, Secularism$_1$, which was an open philosophical debate on all topics, including and especially *dharma* (for more on this indigenous Secularism, see Ranganathan 2018).

In this paper I will touch upon the key events that constitute this displacement (for more on this sordid history, see Ranganathan 2022a). However, the point of this paper is not to bring light to how things have gone wrong owing to *W*estern colonialism in the study of South Asia: that is simply what ought to be par for the course. Rather the point is to focus on how we can and ought to learn from the South Asian tradition prior to colonization. Our focus is hence decolonial. What we learn is that there are least two contrasting approaches to *ahiṃsā*. *W*estern colonialism ignores this moral philosophical distinction, attempts to appropriate what it regards as progressive from the South Asian tradition, and denies the maturity of South Asian philosophers to show us the way of decolonization. Rendering explicit these

colonial designs shows that what is known as progressive philosophy today is rooted in the Yoga tradition and the *Yoga Sūtra* in particular. Social justice, anti-colonial philosophy is unsurprisingly BIPOC and in particular Yogic.

In the next section I will review a distinction between explication and interpretation (for greater detail see, Ranganathan 2022b). Explication, the application of logical validity to understanding discourse, renders explicit that "dharma" was not a word that had lots of meanings, but rather the term that South Asians used to talk about *THE RIGHT OR THE GOOD:* the topic of moral philosophy. And the theories of dharma so acknowledged do not correlate with colonial distinctions between different religions, but rather cut across such colonial boundaries. To get the idea of religion off the ground, in contrast, we need to interpret (explain in terms of belief) BIPOC traditions by using *W*estern doxastic resources. This has been the usual approach to dharma in the *W*estern literature, which multiplies meanings of "dharma" in accordance with the beliefs of the interpreter. Interpretation is the methodological kernel of colonialism: it involves understanding as a matter of imposing beliefs on others. The *W*estern tradition with its footing in the ancient Greek idea of *logos* gives rise to interpretation as the default explanatory methodology in its conflation of thought with what we would endorse (believe) in speech. It is *hiṃsā,* which is undermined by explication. The positive point that we can make, by learning *from* the South Asian tradition, was that they were moral philosophically more sophisticated than us. Indeed, Yoga itself provides an ancient foundation for the study of moral philosophy by beginning (especially in the *Yoga Sūtra*) with a distinction between Yoga and non-Yoga, which entails the distinction between explication and interpretation, respectively. And with this metaethical (and metaphilosophical) sophistication, we can discern that there were four basic ethical theories pursued in this tradition. Three of these are familiar: Virtue Ethics, Consequentialism and Deontology. The fourth, Yoga/Bhakti, is the logical opposite of Virtue Ethics and quite unique to the South Asian tradition.

In the third section, we will take the opportunity to contrast the South Asian Virtue Ethical take on *ahiṃsā*, and the Yoga take on the concept. For the Virtue Ethical approach to *ahiṃsā*, we need to look to ancient Jain writings, as Jainism is a classical version of Virtue Ethics, in the South Asian tradition, and has

much to say about *ahiṃsā*. Indeed, it may even be the case that the *Yama*s, also found in the *Yoga Sūtra*, was original to the Jain tradition, and this famous list of five prescriptions begins with *ahiṃsā*. But Yoga being a radically procedural ethical theory provides an activistic account of the topic. Jainism, as radically teleological, provides a passivist approach to the topic. This is a matter of historical interest because contemporary progressive, activist philosophy, as found in the politics of Martin Luther King, who relied on M.K. Gandhi as an example, goes back to the *Yoga Sūtra* (II.30-35). What this means is that what people ordinarily take to be modern engaged political activity is BIPOC, South Asian, and Yoga.

In the fourth section we will consider a ubiquitous *hiṃsā* that characterizes the discourse around South Asia: the *W*estern colonial (White supremacist) appropriation of the actionable solutions by *W*estern authors, with the relegation of South Asia and South Asian sources, like Yoga, as simply not up to the moral and political challenges of the day. A recent and salient example of this type of appropriation includes a 2022 missive sent by the American Yoga (*āsana*) regulatory body, Yoga Alliance, titled, "*ahiṃsā* is not enough" — an email that goes on to recommend various activist interventions to disrupt public violence.

In the fifth section, I conclude with the observation that objective, logic-based scholarship, allows us to be responsible to the traditions we are studying, but also to considerations of justice and *ahiṃsā*. Decolonial scholars are activists because they employ objective, logic-based methodologies. This is an example of activist *ahiṃsā* that disrupts the systemic harm of interpretation, the kernel of colonialism. In contrast, the wall-flower model of South Asian scholarship is made possible by colonial methodologies and is a continuation of that project.

2. Decolonizing the Study of Philosophy

A thought, or proposition, (roughly a *citta* in the language of the *Yoga Sūtra*) has two features. On the one hand, it can be true or false. This is what gets all the attention in the Western tradition. But also, importantly, thoughts can provide *inferential support* for other thoughts, in dependently of their truth. The thought *it is raining outside* entails, or provides inferential support for, the thought that *water is falling from the sky*. Thoughts are also distinct from *beliefs*. A belief is a propositional attitude, like desire, fear, or

hope. When I *believe* that *p* I take the proposition *p* to be true. But a belief is really about my attitude. So whereas the proposition *it is raining outside* entails the proposition that *water is falling from the sky*, if I believe it is true that it is raining outside, it doesn't follow that water is falling from the sky. For in this case of the belief, the topic is switched to my attitudes. In the literature, these are called *intentional contexts* (Quine 1956; Kaplan 1968; Kripke 1988). So if we were to try to switch out thinking with believing, we would be departing from the possibilities of reason. And the source of trouble here would be the prioritization of truth (or at least, what we take to be true) over inferential support. This is made clear if we consider the basic criterion of deductive logic: logical validity. A deductive argument is logically valid just in case, if the premises are true, the conclusion has to be true. Hence, Modus Ponens—

PR1. If P then Q.

PR2. P.

(Therefore) Q.

— is always valid, even if we substitute propositions we disbelieve or are false for P and Q. In contrast, we can create an argument entirely of true premises—

PR1. Biden was POTUS in 2021.

PR2. Modi was PM of India in 2021.

(Therefore) This paper is on *ahiṃsā*.

—and it is invalid. What these considerations show us is that whether an argument or explanation is reasonable or not has nothing to do with what we believe, or even what is true. Logic so understood is objective in an important sense: logical inference *does not depend upon one's perspective,* or *what one believes is true*. That is because logic does not depend upon truth. Interpretation in contrast is subjective and misses the point of reason.

What I have reviewed here is what one would have to master to pass a basic introduction to logic course. And yet, it is disregarded in the academic literature, both in contemporary Analytic and Continental philosophy, and the literature on South Asia where authors use their beliefs, with abandon, to account for South Asia. To bring this to fore, let us distinguish between two methods of explanation. The first has not

been rendered explicit until recently, which we can call *explication.* Explication involves employing logical validity in two steps:

(1) Derive from a perspective a theory that entails its controversial claims about a term such as "*dharma*"

(2) Compare competing theories of "dharma," what they jointly entail as their topic of dissent is the concept of *DHARMA*.

What is worth bringing to fore about this method is that it does not depend in any way on what we believe, or what is true. Rather, as it is driven by logical validity, the entire process bypasses our own biases, prejudices, and beliefs.

The second method is acclaimed in recent Analytic and Continental philosophy. This is often called *interpretation*. Interpretation is widely acclaimed in the twentieth century, Analytic and Continental literature. Authors as diverse as W.V.O Quine (1960: 59), Donald Davidson (2001: 101; 1986: 316), Martin Heidegger (2010), Hans George Gadamer (1990, 1996)—stress the importance of interpretation—often employing the term itself (Davidson) or an analog such as "hermeneutics" (Gadamer) or "Auslegung" (Heidegger) that is readily paraphrased or translated as 'interpretation.' It continues in the widely influential idea that reflection is about arriving at an equilibrium of considered judgments (Rawls 1971: 18).

As noted, colonialism is the imposition of a perspective (and its choices) on a colonized group, and colonization is complete when the colonized absorb and internalize this imposition. Interpretation as the explanation of all by way of one's beliefs is the basis of colonialism for colonialism is an example of this interpretive imposition. Switching our attention back to dharma, to interpret is to use beliefs to explain something, such as a term "dharma." How do these two methodologies of interpretation and explication differ in practice?

Interpreted, "dharma" is depicted as meaning *whatever* one believes it means, and typically this involves correlating uses of "dharma" in the South Asian literature with what the interpreter would have said instead. So if "dharma" is used for what the interpreter believes are ontological and nonethical matters,

it is depicted as having a non-ethical, ontological significance — in this case. If "dharma" is used for what the interpreter would call "religion," it is depicted as meaning "religion," in this case. In this way, meanings of "dharma" are multiplied beyond their means, in accordance with the beliefs of the interpreter. And so we find in the literature the very common claim that "dharma" has no single meaning and that it is used in a "bewildering variety of ways" (for a review of the literature that repeats such claims, see Ranganathan 2017: 52-77).

Explicated, we would first have to render explicit competing theories of the term dharma, and then secondly identify the concept *DHARMA* as what these theories are disagreeing about. So whereas interpretation multiplies meanings of "dharma" *ad nauseum* in accordance with the beliefs of the interpreter, explication constrains the identification of a *single* concept of dharma, that all uses of "dharma" invoke. And we can only identify this concept *after pursuing* disagreements about dharma. If we do this, we discover that there are indeed four basic theories of dharma, and these theories disagree about *THE RIGHT OR THE GOOD*.

The four theories that disagree about *THE RIGHT OR THE GOOD*, and which use "dharma" as their term of articulation, are for the most part familiar to the *W*estern tradition, except the fourth, radically decolonial option.

- Virtue Ethics: The Good (character, constitution) conditions or produces the Right (choice, action). (Vaiśeṣika, Madhva's Dvaita Vedānta, Jainism)

For our purposes, this basket of ethical theories will be important for us as Jainism is a standout example of an Indic Virtue Ethics. Other famous theories that are to be found in this basket include Theism, the idea that there is an ultimately good, powerful and knowledgeable God, whose preferences we should heed. For the Theist, God is the ultimately virtuous agent. And if we ourselves are not virtuous, we ought to find a virtuous individual (God) and seek guidance from them.

Then there are two other important normative theories

- Consequentialism: The Good (end) justifies the Right (choice, action). (Nyāya, Kāśmīra

Śaivism, Cārvākā, Buddhism)

- Deontology: The Right (procedure) justifies the Good (actions, called duties, or omissions, called rights). (Bhagavad Gītā 's Karma Yoga, Pūrva Mīmāṃsā)

Both Deontology and Consequentialism are normative theories that focus on justification, and they are mirror opposites of each other. Virtue Ethics is a story about moral production, specifically producing the right action. The mirror opposite of this theory not found in the *W*estern tradition. Rather we have to look to South Asia:

- Bhakti/Yoga: The Right (devotion to the procedural ideal, Īśvara) conditions or produces the Good.

Bhakti/Yoga is frequently described as a version of theism, but if theism is a version of Virtue Ethics, and Bhakti/Yoga is the normative opposite, this is a mistake. As a very preliminary distinction we can note that while in the case of Virtue Ethics, guidance from a virtuous agent is required to know what to do if one is not virtuous, in the case of Bhakti/Yoga, this is not the case. Rather, in being devoted to the ideal procedural ideal if choice and responsibility, Īśvara, we practice being sovereign ourselves, which means that as we practice, we generate our own moral guidance.

Comparing interpretation and explication, we see that imposition of one's beliefs on to the question of dharma destroys any semblance of reason, and produces noise. Explication in contrasts renders explicit reasons that various agents had for their views on dharma. Interpretation destroys, while explication preserves the options.

As this paper is focused on the Jain and Yoga approaches to *ahiṃsā*, there is lot about Indic moral theory that we will have to leave explored elsewhere (such as in the *Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Indian Ethics*). But for now, we have enough to appreciate how the methodologies of explication and interpretation take us down differing paths in our exploration and study of the options.

We can formulate the comparison as a version of Disjunctive Syllogism:

(1) We can either explicate the options of South Asian philosophy, or we can interpret it (P or Q).

(2) Interpretation should be rejected as it's anti-logical (Not Q).

Therefore, we must explicate (P).

Interpretation makes understanding arguments impossible as an argument is not an explanation in terms of one's beliefs. It is rather an organization of propositions in terms of logical validity. If we adopt interpretation in contrast, we collapse the options with our perspective, and then cannot really choose as there is no space between what we are contemplating and our perspective. This is all another way to note that interpretation is anti-logical. And hence, we have to reject it. In rejecting it, we are not rejecting it because it is false, or that it fails to be true. As a matter of fact, most people interpret so it is a sociological fact. Rather, we need to reject it as it is paradigmatically irrational.

Metaethics is that part of moral philosophy that renders explicit the conditions of participating in moral inquiry This argument underscores the core metaethics that we can rely on in understanding the options of philosophy.

Interpretation is supported by the *linguistic account of thought*. This is the idea that thought is the meaning of what we say. We find this model of thought implicit in the ancient Greek idea of *logos*: one word for language, thought, reason. If thought is the same as what I say, then the distinction between belief and thought is blurred, as what we say is in most cases what we believe. Hence all explanation by way of thought is assimilated to explanation by way of belief: interpretation. This model of thought is a thread to connects contemporary theorizing in the *W*estern tradition to its ancient roots in Greek philosophy. As this tradition grows, it interprets on the basis of the beliefs about ancient Greek philosophy. But then BIPOC traditions that come from outside are at a loss as they do not participate in this tradition. Hence, to normalize this imposition of *W*estern beliefs on alien traditions to make sense of them, the Romans come up with an innovation: *religion*. This is the recognition given to traditions that are subservient to the *W*est and are thereby understood not in terms of their contribution to philosophical disagreement, but their conformity or deviation from the tradition. Hence, in time, all world religions are BIPOC traditions, and there is no doctrinal distinction between secular philosophy and religion: the same position said in BIPOC traditions is religious no matter what, and if one can find it asserted on the basis of the *W*estern tradition, it

is secular (for examples, see Ranganathan 2022a). That is because as part of the colonial growth of this tradition, it manufactures what we can call Secularism$_2$: accordingly, the secular is the purely *W*estern and is not religious, and anything else is religion (basically, BIPOC traditions). As noted, authors writing on South Asia assume interpretation in their account of its history, but also use beliefs about religions to interpret the South Asian tradition. So, distinctions that are a function of colonialism, such as the distinction between Hinduism and other South Asian religions, are treated as though dispositive *of* the ancient South Asian tradition. These impositions are made explicit by applying explication to the *W*estern tradition, discerning its early commitment to the linguistic account of thought, and drawing logical entailments. It so happens to construct the history we inherit. In contrast, if we were to explicate what the British called "Hindu," (itself a Persian, non-South Asian term), we would observe that it was simply the disagreements of philosophy with a South Asian twist. And what underwrote this tradition was a sustain debate and disagreement about dharma (moral) philosophy: *THE RIGHT OR THE GOOD*. It was Secularism$_1$: an open exploration of the options of philosophy.

Decolonizing the study of philosophy is the same as appreciating that interpretation is anti-logical, and also the source of colonialism that can be easily avoided by explication.

3. Tale of Two Theories of Dharma

Yoga is a most, globally underappreciated, yet, paradoxically, influential, ethical theory. First, it is unheard of in the *W*estern tradition and authors on the South Asian tradition are generally unaware that it is a basic view on *THE RIGHT OR THE GOOD*. Secondly, the *Yoga Sūtra* itself, which contains a classical explication of Yoga, begins with proposing a choice between two methods. The first, Yoga, consists in organizing and constraining what we are contemplating (our *citta*-s) to make room for ourselves as epistemic agents (*YS* I.2-3). The second consists of buying the influences of our experiences and perspective (*YS* I.4). The explication and interpretation distinction is a modern retelling of this ancient distinction between Yoga and anti-Yoga. When we explicate, we organize *citta*-s into arguments that entail controversial conclusions, and this process of understanding the controversy allows us to maintain our independence from what we are contemplating. When we interpret, we collapse our selves with the *citta*-s we are contemplating via the

appropriation of these thoughts by our attitudes. Then there is no room left over for us as individuals to evaluate what we experience. Basic Yoga vs. Anti-Yoga sets out the basic disjunction of Yoga's metaethics (YS I 2-4). And it allows us to peel away the layers of colonialism in the study of South Asia. Colonialism is made possible by interpretation, and that is anti-Yoga. It occludes our understanding of the South Asian options by using beliefs of the colonial tradition — the *W*est — in the explanation of South Asian moral philosophy. It is hence fitting that we need to look to a classical South Asian option, Yoga, to get over the problem of *W*estern colonialism in scholarship.

To explicate Jain moral theory, is to render explicit its theory of dharma. According to classical Jain philosophy, the individual (*jīva*), is said to have three main qualities *(guṇa)* or functional aspects: consciousness *(caitanya)*, bliss *(sukha)*, and virtue *(vīrya)'* (Jaini 1998: 104; see also 102–106 for the other innate qualities). This is opposed to various elements that are *not the* self, including action (karma). According to Umāsvāti's *Tattvārtha Sūtra* (*TS*), karma, or action, has three manifestations: in body, speech and mind. And this is called *yoga* (*TS* 6, 1–2) as it consists in the joining of the self with what it is not. Yoga specifically leads to the influx of karma into the realm of the self, and this influx leads to a confusion of the self (defined by its virtue) with the deontic contingencies of body, mind and speech. Moreover, karma is itself characterized as a material substance that obscures the self. This is literal in Jain ethics as the self's essential nature of virtue is quite distinct from activity, which we need to pursue to maintain our physical health. This engrossment with what we are not leads to *adharma* (inertia). Dharma in contrast is the opposite of inertia: it is freedom from inertia. To bring about this freedom from inertia that characterizes Dharma (*THE RIGHT OR THE GOOD*), we need to stop the influx of karma into the realm of the self. This is possible through 'control, carefulness, virtue, contemplation, conquest by endurance and conduct' and shedding them off through penance (*TS* 9, 3). That is, the solution is to give up on karma. This is of course known as *sallekhanā*, which is the choice to do nothing. This is distinct from suicide which is a choice to kill oneself.

It is easy to get confused by the mechanism of *adharma* (not dharma) if we do not render explicit how this is a theory of Dharma, *THE RIGHT OR THE GOOD*. All Virtue Ethics claims that the right thing is

what follows from the virtues. According to Jain Virtue Ethics, the right thing to do is what follows from our essential virtue, but as this is distinct from any action we can engage in, action as such is problematic, and necessarily involves a departure from virtue. This departure has the effect of tying us to material contexts that we support by way of activity. This is the opposite of Dharma, which frees us from such contextual ensnarement (*Uttaradhyayana* XXIX.73). Dharma helps us understand ourselves and choices that are appropriate to who we are. Hence it is also the term used by Jains for their entire doctrine. The Pathfinders (Tirthankaras) are hence the exemplary virtuous agents that model what virtuous choice looks like. And those of us who have yet to unleash our innate virtue would be advised to follow their example. This veneration and idealization of actual virtuous agents is an important part of Virtue Ethics, for in the absence of our own virtue governed choices, the virtue governed choices of the virtuous agent are a model for us to aspire to.

Here, *ahiṃsā* comes to fore as the important bridge between our essential virtue and our inessential karma. For action that takes the form of *ahiṃsā*, of not interfering with anything, is action of the form of virtue. A matter of comparative interest is that both Yoga and Jainism accepts *ahiṃsā* at the head of five values, commonly known as the Mahāvrata, or Great Vow. According to the Svetambara tradition of Jainism, the Pathfinder Pārśva only recognized four of these vows. Mahāvīra is said to have added sexual restraint (brahmacarya) to the list (*Uttaradhyayana* XXIII.12). The list of these values are: *ahiṃsā* (non-harm), *satya* (truth), *asteya* (non-stealing), brahmacarya (*sexual restraint*), and *aparigrahā* (non-appropriation). In the context of Jain Virtue Ethics, these vows constitute an exercise of passivism, which ideally prevents us from doing anything, and hence prevents us from acting in ways that are contrary to our inherent virtue. This passivism is explicitly endorsed in the tradition:

> Those who praise the gift are accessory to the killing of beings; those who forbid it, deprive others of the means of sustenance. Those, however, who give neither answer, viz., that it is meritorious, or is not so, do not expose themselves to guilt, and will reach Beatitude. (*Sūtrakṛtāṅga* I.ii.20–21)

Just to be clear, this analysis of the implications of Jain Virtue Theory means that intervening on the whole

is a bad idea. It is better not to intervene as action is always fraught with problems, and most importantly involves partiality. This partiality of our extensional context (of physical being) is contrary to the impartiality of our intrinsic virtue. Dharma in contrast allows for our impartiality, which liberates us from the particularity of bodily, mental and communicative action.

As an objection, one can imagine some citing Jain practices that are positive actions, and fall considerably short of the passivism of *sallekhanā.* Jains after all have lives, relationships, businesses, and they do stuff. So this explication cannot be right. The response to this objection begins with the observation that, on methodological grounds, we must distinguish between what we appreciate via an explication of the basic philosophical theory of Jain ethics, and the interpretations of Jainism that everyone, including Jains, can engage in. Moreover, lay Jain practice (of being vegan or vegetarian, for instance) is, on an explicatory account of Jain Virtue Ethics, a compromise that falls short of the demands of Jain Ethics, but nevertheless is an improvement over ordinary harm-based practices. Finally, there is nothing logically contradictory between being a committed Jain and failing to live up fully to all of its entailments. Ethical choices are aspirational. That is why the Pathfinders play a special role in Jain Ethics, of being models of Virtue that we can try to emulate.

Yoga, the philosophy, as we find in the *Yoga Sūtra*, as well as other sources, such as the *Bhagavad Gītā,* while endorsing the values of the *Mahāvrata*-s, is inimical to passivism --- *because* it's a radically procedural ethical theory. It is indeed even more procedural than Deontology. Whereas Deontology identifies the right thing to do as a choice among candidate good options, Yoga identifies the right thing to do as devotion to the procedural ideal of the Right (Īśvara). Certainly we know that Kṛṣṇa's argument for Yoga, on the battlefield as depicted in the *Bhagavad Gītā* that aims to motivate Arjuna to take up a call to action, is critical of passivism as a false choice. Kṛṣṇa argues: no matter what, there are implications to one's choices, and these are all in an important sense one's karma. Unlike Jains who view *omissions* (*sallekhanā*) as non-actions, in Yoga, an omission, or choice not to do something, is itself a different kind of negative action of restraint. This is generally entailed by the philosophy of Yoga, but one finds comments to this effect, such as the famous line from the *Bhagavad Gītā* (4.18): "One who sees inaction in action and

action in inaction is intelligent among others and they are in charge of all of their activities." This Yogic stance on the unavoidability of action also serves to explain why past action is the source of problems (*YS* II.12). Unless we engage in tapas, and challenge ourselves to be unconservative, our past actions continue to be in effect but because we imagine them to be a thing of the past. Interpretive tendencies to explain in terms of beliefs, *saṃskāra*-s, are an example of this automated activity on a Yoga account. They are like memories (*YS* IV.9), experiences we choose to hold on to (YS I.11). Like memories we treat the actions of *saṃskāra-s* as something in the past, when they continue to live with us. This ignorance results in affliction (*YS* II.3). To remediate this, according to the Yoga account, we have to treat action as something that has to be perfected, not avoided as action is simply outcome-oriented choice, and negative choices have outcomes too. And this takes us toward activism.

As noted, explication is itself Yoga as defined at the very start of the *Yoga Sūtra* where Yoga is explicated as the organization, stilling and influence of what we can contemplate (thought) so it respects our own autonomy. This contrasts with anti-Yoga, which is relating to what we contemplate passively as a matter of attitude, so that there is no space for autonomy or critical assessment of what we are contemplating (*YS* I.4). This is in a way the Disjunctive Syllogism we examined, which contrasts explication and interpretation in relation to the study of South Asian philosophy. We can rephrase it more generally thus as an argument for Yoga:

(1) We can either organize our thinking so it respects our autonomy (Yoga/explication) or we simply buy what we experience and are thereby influenced by it (anti-Yoga/interpretation) (P or Q)

(2) Buying what we experience and thereby being influenced by it undermines out autonomy and should hence be rejected (Not Q)

Therefore: we ought to practice Yoga (P).

This is the metaethics of Yoga (*YS* I.2-4): it is what allows us to understand the options, which the *Yoga Sūtra* beings with. As noted, when we have a commitment to explication in view, we can identify and explicate four distinct, basic, ethical theories. It is notably an activity. The normative theory of Yoga is to be

found at the start of Book II of the *Yoga Sūtra,* where Yoga is defined as three *kriya*-s. The normative ethics is the idea that the right thing to do is to be devoted to the ideal of the right, or what the *Yoga Sūtra* calls "Īśvara Praṇidhāna," and this involves practising the two traits of Īśvara as set out earlier in *YS* I.24 (of not being constrained by action or affliction): unconservatism (*tapas*) and self-governance (*svādhyāya*). Practising this means that we not only challenge ourselves (*tapas*) but determine our own ideals we submit to (*YS* II.44). This practice comes to fruition via an ethical cleansing (*dharmameghasamādhi*) that involves abandoning interpretation in every context (IV 29-34). The result of this moral transformation is *kaivalya*: autonomy. In this state, experience is cast in an ethical light, as one's own responsibility (not one's experiences) becomes the point of reference (*YS* III.12-14).

As a normative ethical theory, Yoga is remarkable in a few ways. First, it makes *figuring out what to do* our problem. This is the normative import of being devoted to Īśvara: it is to be devoted to our own Sovereignty. And this involves being responsible for our own activity and the values we subscribe to. So unlike other normative ethical theories that we could identify (such as Virtue Ethics, Consequentialism or Deontology) Yoga/Bhakti underspecifies the conception of the Good we should subscribe to. It is unique among the four in *not* elucidating the right in terms of the good. So as practitioners, it's up to us to also choose our own values (*YS* II.44). But like other South Asian options, including Jainism, it defines moral agents in a way that is not speciesist. In Yoga, anything that thrives given its own autonomy is a person—nonhuman animals and the Earth. And hence, the political solidarity of moral practice is something that is inclusive in Yoga and does not reduce moral standing to natural abilities, or traits, such as sex, race, caste, species, or sexual orientation. Later, JS. Mill in *On Liberty* essentially steals this theory from South Asia, that we ought to create a space for moral experimentation (*tapas*) where people are free to determine their own conception of the good (*svādhyāya*), by simultaneously claiming that South Asians are as a race insufficiently mature to handle this freedom and would do better with an Akbar (*On Liberty* I.10). Mill was simply living up to his day job as a colonizer (Zastoupil 1994). But the difference in Mill's *W*estern appropriation (which involves among other things speciesism and the claim that human happiness is more important than the pleasure of nonhuman animals) (*Utilitarianism* Ch.2) is that the commitment to *tapas*

and *svādhyāya* recast as a version of Consequentialism: we ought to engage in this practice of moral experimentation where we determine our own conception of the good as that is the means to maximize happiness. For Yoga, we ought to engage in this devotion as it's part of our own procedural autonomy. We do this not because of an end, but because the devotion to the means (Īśvara) is how we recover our own capacities as autonomous individuals.

But what if we are not very good at this moral practice of devotion to Sovereignty, which involves, essentially, that we make figuring things out our own problem? Here Patañjali recommends an *upāya* or remedial measure (*YS* II.26): the Eight Limbs. In modern moral and political philosophy, this would be identified as Yoga's *non-ideal* political theory: what we are to do in suboptimal circumstances. This contrasts with the idealized normative ethical theory of the three kriyas of devotion to Sovereignty, and the practice of being sovereign: unconservative and self governing. The First Limb of this non-ideal political theory is the Mahāvrata. *Ahiṃsā* comes first, and this is followed by *satya* (truth), *asteya* (not depriving others of their needs), *brahmacarya* (respecting personal boundaries), and *aparigrahā* (not hoarding or appropriating). Here, as this is a remedy for a failure of activity, namely Yogic practice, the First Limb concerns jumpstarting our own practice. In this case, as initiating our devotion to Sovereignty, *ahiṃsā* functions *procedurally,* to disrupt the *systemic harm* of our nonautonomy. It thereby creates a world safe for autonomy.

Why is our nonautonomy a problem of systemic oppression? Because when we fail to practice Yoga, the alternative we engage in, ignorance (*avidya*), or anti-yoga, consists of simply buying our own experiences. This *internalization* of external experiences, which constitutes *asmitā* (or egotism) turns us from autonomous individuals into cogs or agents of our experiences. We in effect become agents of a system, namely that which we internalize. This is a state of *kleśa* or affliction (*YS* II.3). To counteract this is to disrupt *systemic harm.* In disrupting this systemic harm (*ahiṃsā*) we create a social facts (*satya*), where people are not deprived of what they require (*asteya*), their personal boundaries are respected (*brahmacarya*), and there is a vitiation against appropriation (*aparigrahā*). This in turn sets the stage for the subsequent limbs. The next limb, Niyama, consists in a personal commitment to the three-part normative

practice of Yoga (devotion to Sovereignty, and the practice of its essential traits of unconservatism and self-governance) but with the added commitments of being content with the practice (santoṣa) and against what is contrary to the practice (*śauca*) (YS II.32).

So whereas Jain *ahiṃsā* is a form of passivism, Yoga *ahiṃsā* is a form of activism. The Yogic casting of *ahiṃsā* within a radically procedural theory devoted to the abstract ideal of Sovereignty has been historically influential. This is due to the *Yoga Sūtra*'s analysis of violence. According to Patañjali,, when we are presented with someone who recommends or promotes harm, we need to appreciate this as a function of past trauma — the trauma of not being autonomous. We need to hence counter this belligerence with an opposite strategy based on *ahiṃsā* (the disruption of systemic harm). This has the effect of getting one's opponent to renounce their hostility (*YS* II.30-35). This is the blueprint for M,K. Gandhi's politics of *satyagraha* (the methodology of the (moral) facts). Gandhi's *Collected Works* contains hundreds of references to the *Yoga Sūtra*, and in these works, Gandhi credits Patañjali as the source of his politics of direct action (Puri 2015). Of course, not only was this politically successful in decolonizing South Asia, it was influential on Martin Luther King's American Civil Rights movement ('Gandhi, Mohandas K.' Accessed 2019), which formed the blueprint for further progressive protest movements, whether Black Lives Matter, or various animal right and environmental rights movements. Given the nonnatural approach to moral standing in Yoga that defines moral standing in terms of an *interest in* autonomy, as opposed to abilities or natural traits (such as species, race or sex), Yoga with its project of direct action is the very foundations of is often regarded as progressive, political philosophy today.

In short, it is from the *Yoga Sūtra*, via this genealogy, that we derive what is regarded as progressive politics. It is certainly not from the anthropocentric, and often male centred philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel or Mill that we learn about direct action as a mans of disrupting systemic harm. *W*estern moral philosophy, based on the historical *W*estern model of thought, *the linguistic model of thought*, conceives of ethics as a project of social conformity to some conception of the Good. Given the idea that thought is linguistic, and language is a shared social resource, moral theorizing in the *W*estern tradition attempts to recreate deep social constraints that dictate the values we need to live by on the model

of language learning. As language learning is about understanding the rules of fitting in, so to ethics in general. This begins with Plato in the *Republic*, who conceives of the city state as the macroscopic model for the individual human agent and further defines the agent in terms of their role in the state. Then Aristotle in the *Ethics* (I.3) spells ethics out as the task of political science: the knowledge of what it is to get along in one's polis (city). As the *W*estern tradition is a series of footnotes to Plato (as Whitehead reminds us of) the anthropocentric communitarianism of Plato becomes a theme of the tradition. Indologists and South Asianists rely upon this belief about what ethics is to interpret South Asian sources as lacking moral theorizing as South Asian moral philosophy is not anthropocentric or communitarian. The idea of moral activity as something that disrupts social regularities, and resets the moral order is quire foreign to this tradition—as is the idea that our standing as moral agents is reducible to our interest in our own autonomy (kaivalya)—and not natural traits like species, or intellect.

The Yogic activist approach to harm disruption can also be taken up a level to contemplate the conditions under which the normative order of social relations, which respects our shared and individual interest in autonomy and Sovereignty starts to break down. A passivist approach to *ahiṃsā* would require that we do not interfere with this break down. But on a Yoga account, we have an interest in our own autonomy and hence we have to reset the normative order so it respects our autonomy. And that may very well take the form of war (for more on this, see Ranganathan 2019). Of course, this was the theme of the *Mahābhārata*, and Kṛṣṇa's argument for Bhakti (Yoga), which amounts to the theory we find in the *Yoga Sūtra* centred around Īśvara Praṇidhāna.

Put another way, the passivist approach to *ahiṃsā*, especially as supported by Jain Virtue Ethics, evaluates its importance in terms of our own virtue theoretic purity: it is about ourselves not getting our hands dirty. By not interfering with external events, we have done no wrong, and our own essential virtue is not obscured by action. The activist approach in contrast treats *ahiṃsā* as the defining trait of action that makes room for autonomous persons. We are always choosing and doing on this account. The challenge is to choose and do in a manner that respects our own autonomy as an agent. And this requires that we be proactive about creating space for autonomous agents. So with respect to the question: Is it wrong to

engage in violence to put an end to harm? The answer will depend on whether one endorses the Jain Virtue Ethical version of *ahiṃsā* or the radically procedural, Yoga, version of *ahiṃsā*. For Yoga, *ahiṃsā* is doing harm to harmful regularities. For Jainism, it's about avoiding all harm to respect our moral purity.

4. Passivism vs. Systemic Harm

On a Yoga account, when we internalize our experiences as a sense of self, we internalize the system that is our experiences and then become an agent of this. To become an agent of this system is to interpret, explain, and understand, in terms of these experiences. This is certainly injurious to ourselves as it involves undermining our own autonomy and right to be distinguished from the contingencies of our life. But it also constitutes a harm to others. For when we explain in terms of our own beliefs, we deny the freedom for others to occupy distinct vantages and to disagree with us, for we impose our view on them. This is how colonialism operates. This colonialism has been the status quo in the study of South Asia. What should be our response to this?

If we adopt a Jain view of *ahiṃsā*, we should really just leave it all be. If we adopt a Yoga view of *ahiṃsā*, we need to insert ourselves into this order to disrupt it. On the one hand, *ahiṃsā* is about not harming the status quo. This is the passivist version. On the other hand, *ahiṃsā* is a violence to harm. This is the activist version.

Or consider this email from Yoga Alliance, which credentials yoga teacher training programs in the US. The email was titled: *ahiṃsā* is not enough.

> Dear Community,
>
> It is a dark day in the United States. Today, we are facing the horrific news of yesterday's act of violence against children in Uvalde, Texas; still processing last week's shootings in New York and California; and reflecting on the two-year anniversary of George Floyd's tragic murder.
>
> In short, it is overwhelming….
>
> As an organization and community, we must be bold in our approach to systemic violence. It is not enough to stand alone in the peace and truth of our own yoga practice,

> or to hide behind yoga as an aspirational idea. If simply believing in yoga was enough, we would have already changed the world in the ways we envision and strive for.
>
> *And, ahimsa—the ethical yogic principle of non-violence—isn't enough* [my emphasis].
>
> In facing violent tragedy after violent tragedy, Yoga Alliance has leaned into ahimsa as a guiding light. Ahimsa, as yoga teachers know, is an incredibly beautiful keystone in yogic philosophy. But, to be more than theoretical, it requires concrete, practical application in our federal, state, and societal systems—real action to enforce real change. In order for each of us to live into ahimsa, to bring it to life through our practices, we each must act to demand these changes as well…. (Yoga Alliance 2022 (May 25))

Is it really the case that *ahiṃsā* is not enough? The email is certainly confused. For after denying *ahiṃsā*'s sufficiency, it goes on to detail concrete implementations that is about "living into *ahiṃsā*," brought "to life through our practice." So in this light, *ahiṃsā*, that we learn about from Yoga philosophy, is certainly sufficient and it sounds like the problem is that people are not living up to this ideal of activist action. In other words, Yoga Alliance could have taken the opportunity to admonish self avowed American Yogis for failing to live up to the moral and political commitments of Yoga. Instead, they choose to criticize the philosophy of Yoga as insufficient, and to identify the remediation of this insufficiency as the action of Americans, who are citizens of a country born of the colonialism of the *W*estern tradition.

Shouldn't an organization (even though run by Americans) dedicated to Yoga know that *ahiṃsā* is enough? Shouldn't they notice that their own email specifies the ways in which *ahiṃsā*, on a Yoga account, is sufficient? One possible source of confusion is that *ahiṃsā* is not usually understood as an idea that only gets its content *within an explicated philosophy*. Hence, it's possible to conflate the Jain, passivist idea of *ahiṃsā*, with the Yoga, activist, idea of *ahiṃsā*, and claim that it is not sufficient for action—if one is not explicating. But there is also obviously another dimension to this missive. It echoes Mill simultaneous appropriation of ideas from the Yoga tradition and denial that this tradition is sufficiently mature to rise to the occasion of moral and political challenge. *Ahiṃsā* when talked about in the philosophy of Yoga is just a nice idea. To make it make a difference, Americans have to do something. (?) It is nakedly colonial in

exactly the way that Mill was an occupational colonizer. I will then call this the Mill-Yoga Alliance move: take from South Asian moral philosophy and simultaneously deny that South Asian sources are up to the moral and political challenge. And of course, at the root of all of this is interpretation. If Mill and Yoga Alliance explicated South Asian sources, they would render explicit the ways in which Yoga is the source of the policies they themselves endorse. But interpretation in contrast is the methodology of colonialism, and it allows both Mill and Yoga Alliance to *believe* that their ideas are really *sui generis*, while occluding the South Asian sources of what they endorse.

Why bother writing an essay about two different approaches to *ahiṃsā*? Why not just let sleeping dogs lie? Why identify the deep connection between the *W*est, the linguistic account of thought, interpretation and the subsequent creation of White Supremacy as an academic paradigm that dominates South Asian Studies and Indology? How is it that anything is to be gained by complaining about the paradoxical ignorance of a body (Yoga Alliance) that claims to have the authority to adjudicate Yoga education but lacks basic knowledge of Yoga? Here too, the answer to this question will depend upon whether one is inclined to adopt passivist, Virtue Ethics, or the activism of Yoga. But we can ask the question: which approach is correct?

The argument for Jain passivism is that action will really just make any problem worse. On the Jain view, the case of rampant colonialism in the scholarship on South Asia, and the Mill-Yoga Alliance cases are matters that we can only make worse *if* we chose to interfere. If we were to disrupt the activity of interpretation that makes these colonial projects possible, *we* would be guilty of denying their (Mill and Yoga Alliance's) means of subsistence. And that would be wrong. But we ought not to endorse harmful behaviour. So on balance, we ought to just keep our mouths shut as this helps us avoid any guilt (*Sūtrakṛtāṅga* I.ii.20–21). In order for this argument to work, denying colonizers their means of subsistence must be wrong and an evil. But colonizers do not have a right to what they appropriate. And so disrupting this wrong that is colonialism is not evil. It is rather a good thing to happen. But this disruption is a kind of action: aversion of Yoga *ahiṃsā*.

Moreover, the Yogic response to Jain quietism is to note that to *even appreciate* the Jain option,

and its argument for passivist *ahiṃsā*, we must engage in the explicatory activity of Yoga, which reveals various perspectives on *THE RIGHT OR THE GOOD*. So the actual metaethical condition of understanding passivist *ahiṃsā* is an activist *ahiṃsā*, which destroys the systemic harm of interpretation, and permits an understanding of radically divergent ethical theories, such as Jain Virtue Ethics, and Yoga/Bhakti. If we want to understand a world of diverse options, we need to engage in the activism of Yoga.

5. Conclusion

Interpretation is entailed by the basic model of thought in the *W*estern tradition: the linguistic model of thought. Hence the employment of interpretation by this tradition, which leads it to explain everything in terms of beliefs based on its tradition, is the global implementation of White Supremacy. The Mill-Yoga Alliance approach to South Asia is not unusual. It's an example of an interpretive approach from the *W*est that has been the main stay of academic literature on South Asia. We owe a general confusion and ignorance of the deep, profound and sophisticated sources of Indian moral philosophy to interpretation, which allows *W*esterners to appropriate ideas from the South Asian tradition while depicting it as too immature for the challenge. Yet, the opposite is true. It is from South Asia that we derive political projects of direct action and progressive philosophy. Following a Yogic, explicatory, approach to understanding the options of philosophy not only renders explicit the contrast between the Jain and Yoga approaches to *ahiṃsā*. Yoga itself, as a metaphilosophical and metaethical foundation for research, is the implementation of activist *ahiṃsā*. And this activist *ahiṃsā*, that disrupts the systemic harm of interpretation, is logic-based, and the outcomes of the process are *independent* of one's beliefs. Put another way, Yogic procedure is both logically objective, and activistic. Scholars in the interest of objectivity should be such activists. Most South Asianists in choosing interpretation on the basis of the *W*estern tradition are participants in *W*estern colonialism. It is for them to explain why they choose to deviate from logic and support White Supremacy. Drawing this observation is also a logical entailment of objective, logic-based, explicatory research. Of course, one reason all of this will appear to be difficult to follow is the very fault of interpreters: interpretation. It makes following arguments impossible and *saṃskāra*-s in charge.

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