

## Chapter One

# BODY AND PHILOSOPHIES OF HEALING

---

Investigation of health and religiousness requires inquiry into ways of understanding the body. Human beings are embodied beings, and must come to terms with their physicality in the process of realizing their spiritual potential. This chapter examines concepts of body, showing how they ground philosophies of healing, with Anglo-European approaches providing a comparative context for Hindu views. Hindu concepts of the body are represented here by classical Yoga, Tantra, and Āyurveda, systems that are unusual in the Hindu tradition because of the priority they give, in different ways, to the body. The spiritually oriented healing paths offered by these three traditions together provide a model of religious therapeutics, useful for interpreting relations between healing and spirituality in world traditions.

### BODY IN WESTERN PHILOSOPHY OF MEDICINE

#### PRESUPPOSITIONS ABOUT THE BODY

Among the root philosophical presuppositions of the Anglo-European tradition is Plato's concept of the person, from which arises his exhortation to purify the soul (by means of a philosophical therapeutic) from the prison-house of the body. The body, according to Plato, is the source of obstacles to attainment of pure, rational consciousness—obstacles such as maintenance demands, sensual distraction, sickness and pain, and motivation toward conflict and war.<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche speaks from the modern period to recognize one of the great mistakes of the Western philosophical tradition: "They despised the body: they left it out of the

account: more, they treated it as an enemy.”<sup>2</sup> Nietzsche inverts Platonic idealism, and against “the despisers of the body” voices a counter-exhortation to recognize the body’s wisdom:

Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, stands a mighty commander, an unknown sage—he is called Self. He lives in your body, he is your body.<sup>3</sup>

Nietzsche calls for a redress of the Western philosophical orientation operative since Plato, in which body is opposed to mind, mind is valorized, and body is overlooked or maligned. Significant among Western concepts of the body are Plato’s prison-house, the New Testament characterization of the body as a temple, and the seventeenth-century scientific view of body as machine, epitomized in the thought of Descartes. In these notions of the human body, the metaphor of body as *container* is dominant. Plato initiated the tradition with the prison-house metaphor, and Christianity contributed the influential image of the body as a temple:

What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.

1 Corinthians 6:19–20

This New Testament passage presents a dichotomous concept of person as composed of spirit contained in body, which implies both the sacredness of body, and its subsidiary position as a vessel for the spirit. Eliot Deutsch points out that the temple metaphor is prescriptive, telling us how we *ought* to regard our bodies: “It finds its intelligibility within a religious framework of values that sees the possibility of a reverential attitude toward all things in virtue of their divine origin and grounding.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, this message from First Corinthians is a cornerstone of codes of health-ethics in many Christian denominations, including, for instance, the prohibiting of tobacco use. The metaphor of the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit grounds an important element of Christian religious therapeutics: The body is not only given by God, but it serves as the abode of the Holy Spirit, instantiated as the individual’s spirit. Thus to neglect the body or to engage in activities damaging to it would be sacrilege.

‘Container’ images of the body are consistent with the speculated etymological association of the English term ‘body’ with the Old High German *botahha*: ‘tub,’ ‘vat’ or ‘cask.’<sup>5</sup> Classical Chinese thought offers a concept of the body entirely different from the ‘container’ image. Roger

T. Ames writes that in classical Chinese thought, “mind and body are polar rather than dualistic concepts, and as such, can only be understood in relation to each other,” and that “‘person’ is properly regarded as a ‘psychosomatic process.’”<sup>6</sup> ‘Polarism’ is a symbiotic relation, a unity of two mutually dependent processes that require one another in order for each to be what it is. Dualism, on the other hand, implies the coexistence of two factors of fundamentally different natures, such as Plato’s *psyche* and *soma*, Descartes’ thinking substance and extended substance, or Yoga’s *prakṛti* (consciousness) and *puruṣa* (materiality). Underlying classical Chinese polarism is the presupposition of a single order of being, wherein various objects and processes differ not in kind, but in degree. Related to Chinese polarism is a commitment to process ontology rather than substance ontology, producing an organismic interpretation of the world as composed of interdependent and intrinsically related processes. The combination of Chinese process metaphysics with a polar conception of the psychic and the somatic yields a holistic notion of ‘person’ as a *psychosomatic process*. An important implication of this concept of person is its circumvention of the main problem faced by dualistic accounts of the person, the problem of how two fundamentally different substances—such as consciousness and matter—can interact.

Deutsch observes that the dominant Western metaphors of body, besides being ‘container’ images, are generally dualistic and conceptually static. That is, it is assumed that the body is an objective given of nature or experience, and that the meaning of ‘body’ can be spelled out in purely descriptive terms. Deutsch argues that the meanings of ‘personhood’ and ‘body’ are found not in descriptive terms, but in terms of *achievement*. Person and body can be understood not just as givens of nature, but in terms of self-cultivation—how an individual appropriates and integrates the conditions of his or her being:

My body *is* only as it is articulated within my being as a person. The isolable physical conditions of my individual being, in other words, are not my body. What I recognize as integral to me qua person is not this configuration but what, in a way, I have made of it as my own.<sup>7</sup>

An interpretation of person and body as *achievement concepts* is an antidote to ‘container’ concepts of the body, and grounds an understanding of the person in which body is integral. The metaphysics of René Descartes (1596–1650) is paradigmatic of the Anglo-European view of rationality as central to personhood, and mind as separate from and superior to body.

## DESCARTES ON BODY AND MEDICINE

Descartes' dualistic metaphysics postulates two fundamental substances, thinking substance and extended substance, and thus he relegates the human being to a schizoid state, where the mind is valorized and the body is considered a material object, analyzable in terms of mechanistic science. The Cartesian legacy, in the words of Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, "has been not only to divide the fundamental integrity of creaturely life, but to depreciate the role of the living body in knowing and making sense of the world, in learning, in the creative arts, and in self- and interpersonal understandings."<sup>8</sup> As we enter the twenty-first century, the redress of philosophical and functional implications of Descartes' casting of the 'mind-body problem' incorporates phenomenological and non-Western approaches to our understanding of person and body. This redress incorporates a range of disciplines including philosophy, anthropology, and linguistics, and generates criticism in medical and social theory.

The damaging social effects of Cartesianism supply compelling reasons to challenge it: "This hierarchical dualism has been used to subvert projects of oppression directed toward women, animals, nature, and other 'Others.'" *The Absent Body*, by physician and philosopher Drew Leder, offers a phenomenological account of how Cartesian-type dualism, while misguided and misleading, is experientially persuasive, owing to our usual state of forgetfulness of our embodiment. Descartes, whose thought was conditioned by, and contributed to, a mechanistic view of person and world, was extremely interested in the philosophy of medicine. Descartes names the philosophy of medicine as his foremost concern in his first published work, *Discourse on Method* (1637):

... I have resolved to devote the rest of my life to nothing other than trying to acquire some knowledge of nature from which we may derive rules in medicine which are more reliable than those we have had up till now. Moreover, my inclination makes me so strongly opposed to all other projects, and especially those which can be useful to some persons only by harming others, that if circumstances forced me to engage in any such pursuit, I do not think I would be capable of succeeding in it.<sup>10</sup>

Another of Descartes' statements pertinent to his interest in medical philosophy is found in his letter to William Cavendish (1645): "The preservation of health has always been the principle end of my studies."<sup>11</sup> Descartes considered his medical philosophy as an application of his physics, which grounds both his medical philosophy and his ethical theory. According to Richard B. Carter, Descartes "envisioned a social revolution

based on his philosophy of medicine.”<sup>12</sup> Descartes endeavored to apply his science of nature to human beings as objects accessible by the same principles as physical objects. With consideration of how humans use institutions for self-preservation, he claimed that his science of nature could explain the constitution of a “body politic” as ethical to the extent that it accords with the natural principles of cosmogenesis and embryogenesis.<sup>13</sup> Descartes was concerned to demonstrate that the self is a thinking being, devoid of spatial characteristics, and is capable of existing independently of the body. The entire title of Descartes’ *Meditations* is *Meditations on First Philosophy, in which are demonstrated the existence of God and the distinction between the human soul and body*. None of the *Mediations*, however, treats the living body in detail, though the human body is a predominant theme in other works of Descartes, notably his *Discourse on Method* (1637) (published posthumously in 1664), and his final work, *Passions of the Soul* (1649). The second meditation is entitled “The nature of the human mind and that it is more easily known than the body.” This meditation does not in fact discuss the nature of the *human* body, but rather addresses the nature of *physical* bodies and our knowledge of them. By way of example, Descartes presents the case of a piece of beeswax, which, after melting, loses its particular shape, color, scent, and resonance, and retains only its extension in space. Spatial extension is known by reason, not by the senses. Descartes regarded extension as the essential property of objects in the category of substance he calls matter, *res extensa* (extended stuff), and distinct from the category of substance he calls mind, *res cogitans* (thinking stuff).

Descartes’ physics is concerned with ‘body’ in general, that is, *substance*, of which particular physical ‘bodies’ are composed. His physical theory of the generation of the cosmos provided paradigms for both his medical theory of the embryogenesis of the human body and his ethical theory of the generation of a healthy “body politic.” His medical philosophy applies principles of his mathematical physics of general body to the living human body, each of which is united with a soul. Descartes conceived the anatomy of the human body from the standpoint of its fitness to carry out the intellectual operations of the mind. In the same way that medicine is the science of maintaining the human body’s organization so that it can carry out the operations of the mind, ethics, in Descartes’ view, is the science of maintaining the organized cooperation of groups of persons as a political body.<sup>14</sup> In the opening paragraph of his *Description of the Human Body*, Descartes expresses the view that both ethics and medicine are informed by our knowledge of ourselves,

specifically of the respective functions of soul and body.<sup>15</sup> Descartes' letters to his Jesuit disciple Père Mesland distinguish physical body from human body on the basis of the human body's "disposition" to receive the human soul. The first letter (1645) stipulates that body in general means "a determined part of matter, and at the same time, the quantity of matter of which the universe is composed." Descartes next states that what is meant by "human body" is not a determinate portion of matter, but "all the matter that is united together with the soul of man . . . and we believe that this body is whole while it has all the dispositions required for conserving this union."<sup>16</sup> In the *Meditations*, Descartes supports his view that the self is incorporeal by applying methodological doubt. In doubting everything that can be doubted in order to seek an indubitable starting point for knowledge, Descartes surmises that anything spatial could be produced by a dream, or by the deceptive work of an evil genius. He concludes that he himself must exist in order to be doubting in the first place, and, from there, he argues that "since he must exist despite the supposition that everything corporeal or spatial is but a dream or a demonic hoax, he cannot himself be anything spatial or corporeal."<sup>17</sup>

Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia challenged Descartes in a letter with a question about how the soul, a thinking substance, can interact with the body when they have nothing in common (20 June 1643). Descartes' reply about an "inexplicable union between body and soul" is unsatisfactory to her, and in a subsequent letter (13 September 1645), she requests that Descartes give "a definition of the passions."<sup>18</sup> Albert A. Johnstone notes that Elizabeth questions Descartes about the influence of emotional turmoil on clear philosophical thinking, and suggests that her criticisms "point toward the necessity of introducing feeling, and hence the body, into the concept of the self."<sup>19</sup> Body for Descartes is the seen body, not the felt body. In ruminating on his experimentally derived conclusion that he must exist as a thing that thinks, Descartes asks, "What is this 'I' that necessarily exists?"

Well, the first thought to come to mind was that I had a face, hands, arms, and the whole mechanical structure of limbs which can be seen in a corpse, and which I called the body.<sup>20</sup>

Descartes conceives body in terms of its appearance, not from the standpoint of what later philosophers have called 'the subjective body,' 'the felt body,' or 'the tactile-kinesthetic body.' Merleau-Ponty contributed to the phenomenology of the experienced body, distinguishing between the objective 'seen' body and the subjective 'experienced body.'

. . . we must learn to distinguish it [the experienced body] from the objective body as set forth in works on physiology. This is not the body, which is capable of being inhabited by a consciousness. . . . It is simply a question of recognizing that the body, as a chemical structure of an agglomeration of tissues, is formed by a process of reduction, from the primordial phenomenon of the body-for-us, the body of experience, or the perceived body.<sup>21</sup>

Tracing the evolution of the concept of the body through the history of Western medicine shows that Descartes' 'mechanical body' dominates early modern medical thinking, and that the 'experienced body' emerges as significant in contemporary medical philosophy.

### BODY IN THE HISTORY OF WESTERN MEDICINE

The history of medicine is a conceptual history of the body. Approaches to understanding and treating the sick body become culturally engrained habits of thought, which in turn engender a metaphysical *Zeitgeist* or 'Spirit of the Age,' claims Sheets-Johnstone. Western medical theory for the 2000 years prior to the Enlightenment and scientific revolution was based on the Greek humoral theory articulated by Hippocrates of Cos in the fifth century B.C.E. A medieval text, *Regimen Sanitarius Salernum*, originating around 1140 C.E. from the School of Salerno, the leading European center for medical study, discusses humoral theory and provides evidence of its prevailing from the ancient period. Greek humoral theory was grounded on Empedocles' theory of the four elements: air, fire, earth, and water, and their basic qualities: cold, heat, dryness, and moistness. Onto the schema of the four elements, Hippocrates mapped the four elements of living things: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. Thus he formulated a medical theory grounded in metaphysics wherein body and cosmos are coterminous.<sup>22</sup>

Ancient Greek diagnostic and therapeutic methods, like those of India's Āyurvedic medicine, address the proportionality of elements constituting both patient and medicinal and pathogenic substances. As in Āyurveda, the goal of diagnosis in the Hippocratic tradition "was to obtain a total unified picture of the patient's condition . . . because the whole body was felt to be involved in any ill that befell it."<sup>23</sup> In both ancient medical traditions, therapeutic restoration of the proper harmonic relationships among elements and their qualities emphasized the patient's diet, regimen, and environmental, seasonal, and interpersonal circumstances. In Greece as in India, the doctrine of humors is a medical formulation of a cosmic physiology dominated by the themes of circulation of

fluids and a chain of successive ‘cookings’ of nutriment by the sun, the cooking fire, and the digestion. The divergence of the ancient Greco-Latin and Indian medical traditions is Āyurveda’s conceptualization of a vast combinative system of humors and qualities. This system consists in enormous catalogues of medicinal substances. Greek and Latin science, by contrast, produced a natural history wherein abstraction was not *combinative* and *ampliative*, but rather *classificatory*, involving the reduction of specifications.<sup>24</sup> However, there is remarkable similarity between Greek and Indian views of the patient not merely as a body, but as person with a consciousness and unique circumstances, who is physically and in other ways part of the world. On such an interpretation of the person, the healing art is concerned with restoring equilibrium within the patient and between patient and environment, and potentiating the body’s innate power to heal.

Classical Western medicine (that of ancient Greece, and the European Middle Ages and Renaissance) regarded the body as “an abstract nomenclatural construct . . . a subtle body of humours and dispositions; but the perception of its ‘nature’ conformed more to a classificatory aesthetic than to the truth of its observable condition.”<sup>25</sup> In the early modern period beginning in the seventeenth century, the rise of empirical science meant a revolutionary change in medicine’s approach to the body, symbolized by the study of cadavers, and marked by an emphasis on the concrete structure of the body regarded as an intricately complex machine. While ancient Western medicine held the body to be a sacred entity—and like ancient Chinese and Indian thought—considered the human body a microcosm corresponding to the whole cosmological order, the early modern scientific approach relegated the body to the status of profane flesh to be empirically analyzed. While ancient etiological theory thought in terms of the balance and imbalance of qualities within a pre-established system of categories, early modern medicine replaced the schemes of qualities with the principle of causal agency. A paradigmatic example of medicine’s success in refining the principle of causal agency is the understanding and controlling of bacterial disease, based on Pasteur’s nineteenth-century discovery of bacterial pathogenicity.

The body, illness, and health were radically reconceptualized in the Western world in the sixteenth century. With Vesalius’ discoveries in anatomy and, in the seventeenth century, William Harvey’s explanation of the circulation of blood within a closed loop, there was a progressive materialization of the body, as structures and functions were “*organ-ized* into discrete functional systems.”<sup>26</sup> (‘Modern’ or Western scientific medicine



was introduced to India during this same period, when the Portuguese conquered Goa in 1510 and established a hospital there.)<sup>27</sup> The mechanistic thinking of early modern medicine remains influential in contemporary medicine. The materialist conception of the body prevalent in contemporary Western medical theory is accompanied by a physicochemical orientation to the person and to therapeutics, which Sheets-Johnstone says “eventuates in both an eroded sense of self and an eroded sense of responsibility.”<sup>28</sup> She lodges the criticism that the paradigm of localization-in-place of the various organs and systems underlies present-day Western medicine’s organization according to various specializations. This organization contributes to the tendency to treat particular parts of the body without much consideration of their relations to other parts, nor to the health of the whole body and person.

Ancient Western science was holistic, and Āyurvedic and Chinese medicine have remained so from ancient times. However, while Sheets-Johnstone is correct to identify a trend of increasing “materialization” of the body in the history of medicine, her account omits postmodern discourse on the body in the context of medicine, a discourse informed by new cooperating technologies and epistemic approaches. The body as a discursive formation in Western medical history has evolved through a number of models. Levin and Solomon identify the ancient period’s *rational body* based on an aesthetic of matrices of dynamic qualities. Next are analytic medicine’s *anatomical*, *physiological*, and *biochemical bodies* originating in the scientific progress of the early modern period. In the twentieth century, the dominant models of the body are the *psychosomatic* and the *psychoneuroimmunological*. If we consider the human body not just as a biological entity, but as a *discursive formation*, as Levin and Solomon recommend, we realize that contemporary Western medical science “has begun to restore the body to the larger world-order.”<sup>29</sup>

The factors instrumental in the current evolution of medical theory are both scientific and philosophical. The analytic medical research of the early modern period investigated the tissues of the body with the eye and then the microscope, revealing the structure of the body not just in terms of major organs and systems, but as networks of tissues. Tissues were analyzed in terms of differentiated cellular bodies, and these in turn were probed at the atomic level, and understood in terms of molecular interactions. In the early twentieth century, there emerged *psychosomatic medicine*, which advocated the unity of mind and body, and made use of biochemistry to account for particular disorders originating in a zone between the material body and the ‘volitional body’ or psyche. Although

psychosomatic medicine advocated the unity of mind and body, “it has failed to overcome the dualism which isolated this unity from its environment—nature, society, and culture.”<sup>30</sup> A current discursive formation of *behavioral medicine* defends an implication of psychosomatic medicine that earlier psychosomatic medicine restricted itself from fully supporting: If ‘mind’ and ‘body’ are indeed dimensions of a unity, then *all* diseases are in some respect psychosomatic, that is, they affect both body and mind. Psychosomatic medicine, however, restricted itself to a limited number of syndromes, for instance, allergy and hypertension, and to a narrow range of mediating instances, notably the tracing of particular diseases to specific personality characteristics.

Behavioral medicine, informed by knowledge of psychoneuroimmunology and psychoneuroendocrinology, provides a new paradigm of the body that works against dualistic views of mind/body, body/environment, and individual/community. As we enter the twenty-first century, research in immunocompetence reveals a new body:

This dynamic, synergic body is seen as a system network functioning in a larger system, a multifactoral network of cause and effect, in which effects also become causes. The body cannot be represented as a “substance.” It has become necessary to represent it, rather, as a system of intercommunicatively organized processes, functioning at different levels of differentiation and integration. It represents a growing body of evidence supporting a *new concept of disease* and a much broadened understanding of epidemiology, according to which diseases do not take place in an environment conditioned only by the forces of nature, but occur, rather, in a *communicative field* [italics added], a world of social, cultural, and historical influences: influences which the proprioceptive body processes as meanings.<sup>31</sup>

The body as conceived by psychoneuroimmunology resonates with the *Bhagavadgītā*’s body as a field within a web of countless other interacting fields, and the Āyurvedic articulation of the body as *samyogavahin*, ‘a vehicle for congruous junctions.’ Contemporary medical philosophy that dissolves dualisms pertaining to personhood invokes principles consonant with those underlying India’s ancient religio-philosophical systems.

There is yet another concept of body emerging in the current evolution of Western medicine, a concept informed by both scientific and philosophical discourse. This is the *body of experienced meaning*, a model of the body that permits accounts of how the processes of disease and healing are related to proprioceptively experienced meanings. The success of establishing correlations between the patient’s phenomenological or ex-

perienced body, and the states of that person's medical body, depends on more than medical knowledge. It also requires patients' abilities to "fine-tune their embodied awareness, their sensitivity to processes of bodily experiencing, and their skillfulness in carrying those processes forward into more articulate, more discriminating meanings."<sup>32</sup>

The emerging awareness of the *experienced body* in the philosophical thinking that bears on medicine may be informed by the Indian tradition's guiding principle of cultivation of self-knowledge. Yoga, Āyurveda, and Tantra offer conceptual grounds and practical means of cultivating self-knowledge in the domain of health. The extension of the term health can be broadened from its usual application to physical and psychological well-being, to encompass freedom from limitations and from suffering of the whole person, inclusive of the human being's spiritual dimension. Concepts of person and body are fundamental to the philosophy and practice of healing arts that serve the purpose of human well-being conceived as broadly as possible. What is called for, according to Sheets-Johnstone, is neither extreme materialization of the body nor extreme animism. Similarly, medicine and the healing arts benefit from deeper consideration of both scientific and spiritual dimensions of human life.

## ICONOCLASTIC CONCEPTS OF BODY IN YOGA, TANTRA, AND ĀYURVEDA

### TRADITIONAL INDIAN VIEWS OF PERSON AND BODY

Hegel's claim that "man . . . has not been posited in India" is the point of departure for Wilhelm Halbfass' discussion of person and self in *Tradition and Reflection: Explorations in Indian Thought*. Halbfass concludes that the idea of the human being as a rational animal, and as a being capable of apprehending the future, has been articulated in Indian thought. However, owing to the soteriological orientation of Indian philosophy, this particular concept of man is not central in the way that it is in Western thought.<sup>33</sup>

The Sanskrit word for human being, *manuṣya*, is derived from the verbal root *man*, 'to think,' which is also the root of the noun *manas*, 'mind.' In Hindu texts, the word *manuṣya* is not as common nor as significant as the word *ātman*: the Self and immortal essence inherent in all living entities.<sup>34</sup> It is the *ātman* and not the human being as *homo sapiens* that is to be liberated.<sup>35</sup> *Ātman* is common to all living beings, yet there

is another way that the human being is not-different from other beings: all are subject to *saṃsāra*, transmigratory existence through innumerable births and deaths. Transitions are possible among existences as supra-human, human, animal, and plant. But the human being has a special and perhaps exclusive soteriological qualification or *adbhikāra*, the capacity for liberative knowledge. Liberative knowledge is knowledge that permits discovery or realization of one's true nature, and freedom from the cycle of *saṃsāra*. In view of this special qualification the *Mahābhārata* says that none is higher than the human being. The potential for religious liberation is a critical factor in Indian views of person, body, and self.

Sanskrit terms for the human body include *śarīram* and *dehaḥ*. Both of these words reflect the predominant Indian view that the body is not the person's true and fundamental nature. *Śarīram* is derived from the verbal root √ *ṣr*, 'to break': the body ultimately breaks apart. The word *dehaḥ* suggests an envelope; it derives from the verbal root √ *dih*, 'to cover,' alluding to the cloak or container of the immaterial Self. John M. Koller identifies, among the details of India's many subtraditions, two common features of concepts of the body:

1. Body is really body/mind, and an ontological line is drawn between body/mind and Self.
2. The body/mind is not a static entity, but a karmic process:
 

. . . constituted by interaction with the other processes in an ever-widening sphere that extends ultimately to the whole world, linking each person to other persons and beings in a web of interconnections that extends to all times and places.<sup>36</sup>

While the Western philosophical tradition has tended to oppose mind and body, the Indian view of the person begins with the presumption of integrated psychophysiological functioning: "seeing the body as conscious and consciousness as bodily activity."<sup>37</sup> The body/mind complex is rejected as the real Self, and similar to the Anglo-European struggle to reconcile body and mind, the Indian traditions have the problem of relating body/mind to Self. While the Anglo-European traditions are interested in the problem primarily from a philosophical standpoint, the Indian concern for the problem is soteriological.

Two Indian traditions reject—on different grounds and with different implications—the existence of a Self beyond the lived body/mind. They are both *nāstika*, that is, not among the Veda-accepting (*āstika*)

systems. In Buddhism, a non-substantialist view of the human psychophysical entity replaces a notion of ‘Self.’ In Cārvāka, the materialist *darśana*, the body and self are considered identical. Cārvāka (also known as Lokāyata) differs from Western materialism in that Cārvāka considers the body to be imbued with consciousness.<sup>38</sup>

Ancient Indian interpretations of the person do not entirely exclude simple mind-body dualism. The *Maitri Upaniṣad* refers to the tranquil eternal one by whom “this body is set up in intelligence . . . (and) who propels it” (Mait. Up. 2.3–4). The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* says the “knowing self” or “breathing self” has entered the bodily self (*śarīra ātman*) as fire is put into a fire receptacle (Bṛhad. Up. 1.4.7).<sup>39</sup> The *nāstika* tradition of Jainism holds a more radically dualistic account of the person than these Upaniṣadic conceptions: The soul, *jīva*, pervades the body and is spatially coextensive with it, because the soul’s indefinitely many space points (*pradeśa*) precisely assume the dimensions of the corporeal form they occupy.<sup>40</sup>

### *Body in the Vedas*

Vedic conceptions of the human nature were embedded in mythic and ritualistic contexts. The climate of the *Vedas* is more earthly and temporal than that of Upaniṣadic and subsequent Indian thought, and in the *Vedas*, humans are treated more as earthly, temporal beings. In Vedic usage, the words *ātman* and *puruṣa* tend to refer to the embodied person, rather than to the absolute spiritual Self. A frequently used Vedic term for person is *jīvā*. Etymologically, *ātman* means ‘breath’ and *jīva* means ‘life.’ Troy Wilson Organ identifies a variety of usages of *ātman* and *jīva*. The word *jīva* is used in the *Ṛgveda* to designate living, breathing beings, for example, “Rise, woman and go to the world of living beings (*jīvas*)” [RV 10:2.2.8]. The term *ātman* is pivotal in a *Ṛgvedic* cremation prayer to Agni that indicates belief in a Self different from the body: “Agni, consume him not entirely. . . . Let the eye repair to the sun, the breath (*ātman*) to the wind” [RV 10:1.16.3]. Besides denoting breath, *ātman* can denote the body, as in these healing hymns:

The virtues of the plants which are desirous of bestowing wealth issue from them, man, towards thy body (*ātman*) like cattle from a pen.

RV 10:8.7.8

I banish disease from each limb, from each hair, from each joint where it is generated, from thy whole person (*ātman*).

RV 10:12.12.5–6

*Ātman* also denotes life as existence in the *Ṛgveda*, for example, in thanks given to Indra for bestowing existence on human beings [RV 1:1.11.8]. *Ātman* also implies the vitality of the life-force: “May he, the bull, be the impregnator of the perpetual plants, for in him is the *ātman* of the fixed and the movable worlds” [RV 7:6.12.6]. Often the word *ātman* is used in the *Ṛgveda* to designate essential identity: “Thou flowest, Indu (denoting Soma), the inviolable, the most exhilarating; thou art thyself (*ātman*) the best support of Indra” [RV 9:4.18.3]. An example of the term *ātman* expressing the meaning of *essential identity* (identity of something, not necessarily a person) is this passage concerning medicinal plants: “As soon as I take these plants in my hand making the sick man strong, the *ātman* of the malady perishes” [RV 10.8.7.11].

Vedic texts, particularly the *Brāhmaṇas*, classify the human being as a *paśu*, an animal, as the preeminent animal, the ruler of all the other animals, and the only animal able to perform ritual and sacrifice. The human being is *sukṛta*, ‘well-made,’ and, according to the *Atharvaveda*, is distinguished by having ritual powers, access to sacred texts, and power to influence the universe. These powers come from the human being’s unique association with *Brahman*, the supreme principle [AV 10:2]. However, the Vedic classification of the human being as a member of the animal kingdom, based largely on physical similarity, demonstrates a body-oriented view of the person. Further evidence of a body-oriented view of the person is present in the Vedic perspective on the human being as agent of ritual and sacrificial acts. Yet a pervasive theme in Vedic views of person is religious holism: body and consciousness are both instruments of agency, particularly sacrificial agency. In the vision of the Vedic *ṛṣis* or seers, no dualism exists in their understanding of person: consciousness has body as its locus, and the body’s volitional actions are entirely dependent on the consciousness.<sup>41</sup>

The human being’s superior intelligence, discernment, and expression are noted in the *Aitareya Āraṇyaka*. A significant application of the human power to know, and our distinctness from other animals, is our consciousness of the future. The ability to ‘know the tomorrow’ (*veda śvasthanam*) is a necessary component of man’s soteriological prerogative. *Mokṣa*, freedom from worldly limitations, is achieved by ritual action informed by knowledge of *dharma*. Acting according to *dharma* (righteousness) requires comprehension of the temporal horizons within which *dharma* has meaning. In Vedic thought, man’s capacity to understand *dharma* grounds human beings’ soteriological mandate and opportunity. The human being as rational animal has powers superior to those

of other animals, but in the Hindu context, man's highest potential is not the exercise of this power in dominion of the earth and its creatures. In fact, such dominion is undesirable. Man's privilege is to become liberated from the world, not master of it. Our mandate is not to make use of other beings, but to use our own human existence as a vehicle of transcendence.<sup>42</sup> The theme of self-transcendence evolves with various paths of self-cultivation—yogic and otherwise—for the purpose of liberation.

### *Body in the Upaniṣads*

The *Upaniṣads* contain a range of understandings of the body, most of them within organic, holistic accounts of the person, showing the person's fundamental nature, *ātman*, to be non-different from the one Absolute, *Brahman*. An illustration is the instruction of Śvetaketu by his father, who imparts that the One, having longed to become many, diversified into the elements fire, water, and earth, and entered these elements as *ātman*. *Ātman* is the ground of all manifest things, just as clay is the basis of various clay objects [Chānd. Up. Bk. 6]. A view of the self as having both an individual and a universal aspect is expressed in the allegory of the two birds in a tree, one eating fruit, the other abstaining and looking on [Muṇḍ. Up. 3:3.1.1; Śvet. Up. 4]. The bird who eats is the individual embodied self, given to enjoyment and suffering, the other is the true Self, the universal and knowing *Brahman*.

In the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, the very body of Brahman is the source of creation of human beings:

From this Self (*Brahman*) space arose; from space, wind; from wind, fire; from fire, water; from water, the earth; from the earth, herbs; from herbs, food; from food, semen and ova, and from semen and ova, the person (*puruṣa*).

Tait. Up. 2.1

Next, the *upaniṣad* presents the widely employed *pañca-kośa* or five-sheaths model of the person, whose core and source is *ātman*. The five sheaths (*pañca*, 'five'; *kośa*, 'sheath') are conceived as enveloping one another, and at their center is the true Self. The outermost sheath is the *body of food*, or the material body, which is filled successively with the sheath or body of *prāṇā*, *breath* (life-force), then *mind*, *consciousness*, and, at the center, *bliss*. The sheath of bliss is interpreted as either identical to, or containing, the innermost true Self, the *ātman*. The *upaniṣadic* five-sheath doctrine is accepted by Vedānta and many post-classical schools of Yoga, but not by classical Yoga itself. An image of the body more consonant with that of classical Yoga is given in the *Maitri Upaniṣad*.

Sir, in this ill-smelling, unsubstantial body, which is a conglomerate of bone, skin, muscle, marrow, flesh, semen, blood, mucus, tears, rheum, feces, urine, wind, bile, and phlegm, what is the good of enjoyment of desires? In this body, which is afflicted with desire, anger, covetousness, delusion, fear, despondency, envy, separation from the desirable, union with the undesirable, hunger, thirst, senility, death, disease, sorrow and the like, what is the good of enjoyment of desires?

Mait. Up. 1:3

The *Maitri* is one of the Upaniṣads that inclines more toward dualism, thus grounding classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga, in contrast to the non-dualistic *Upaniṣads* eventuating in Vedānta. *The Maitri Upaniṣad* also incorporates elements of esoteric psychology, later incorporated in Tantra and Tāntric Yogas:

Now, it has been said: There is a channel called the *Suṣumnā*, leading upward, conveying the breath, piercing through the palate. Through it, by joining [vyuj, 'to join] the breath, the syllable *Om*, and the mind, one may go aloft . . . by binding together [*saṃyoga*] the senses . . . one goes to selflessness . . . becomes a non-experiencer of pleasure and pain, he obtains the absolute unity.

Mait. Up. 6.21

The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad's* enumeration of the aspects of the person is similar to that of classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga: There is nothing higher than *puruṣa*. At successively lower levels are the Unmanifest (*avyākta*), the Great Self (*Ātman*), the discriminative intellect (*buddhi*), the mind (*manas*), the senses, and the objects of sense [Kaṭh. Up. 3.10]. In addition to germs of classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga, the *Kaṭha* also contains elements of the esoteric physiology adopted and elaborated by Tantra. In a concluding verse, reference is made to the 101 *nadīs* or channels that carry *prāṇa* or life-energy, and the one that “passes up to the crown of the head”—the *Suṣumnā* [Kaṭh. Up. 6.16].

#### *Body in the Bhagavadgītā*

The battlefield, the setting for the warrior Arjuna's instruction by Lord Kṛṣṇa, grounds the *Gītā* in a concrete world where Arjuna is at first overwhelmed by the implications of a situation in which body predominates: the physical action Arjuna chooses shall determine the physical survival or annihilation of his kinsmen in the opposing army. This dilemma occasions Kṛṣṇa's teaching that the true Self is not the body. The true Self is eternal, neither dies nor is born, but is reborn in new bodies [BhG 2.20–22].



A rich conception of the person is the *Gītā*'s depiction of the body as a 'field,' and the one who knows this, "the knower of the field" [BhG 13. 1–3]. Koller describes this image as:

... a field of interacting energies of different kinds and intensities, a field which is simultaneously interacting with innumerable other fields. The body-mind is a juncture or constellation of these interactions, born and reborn out of successively interacting energy-fields.<sup>43</sup>

### *Vedānta's Model of 'The Three Bodies'*

Vedānta provides an important account of the person in Śankara's presentation of the three bodies in the *Viveka-cūḍamaṇi*, "The Crest-Jewel of Discrimination" (eighth century C.E.). This doctrine of the three bodies is alluded to in the *Maitri Upaniṣad* [Mait. Up. 6:10]. Wimal Dissanayake gives the following explanation of the three bodies. The *gross body* (*sthūla śarīra*) is the physical body that we erroneously think is the Self. This misidentification results in part from our preoccupation with experiences of pleasure and pain as a result of contact with gross objects. The *subtle body* (*sūkṣma śarīra*), mentioned in *Maitri Upaniṣad* 6:10, can be understood in terms of dream consciousness. The contents of dream consciousness are subtle elements (*tanmātras*), which lack material properties, yet are able to influence personality and waking consciousness. The gross body is unable to understand the subtle forces of the *tanmātras*, but the subtle body can, because it is of the same nature. Thus the subtle body is responsible for the phenomenon of being at once a participant in, and a witness to, one's dream experience. *The causal or karmic body* (*kāraṇa śarīra*) is the most complex of the three bodies. It contains the *saṃskāras* or impressions of experience, which result from one's past actions. The principle of *karma* holds that all actions arise according to past conduct, and that all actions have effects in both the life of the person who acts, and in the world. Therefore, the causal body contains the possibilities of how a person's particular life experiences will manifest.<sup>44</sup>

### YOGA'S USE OF THE BODY TO TRANSCEND ITSELF

In Patañjali's classical Yoga, the body is the ground of action that can lead to or obstruct liberation. Religious therapeutics in classical Yoga operate from a concept of the person as having a psychophysical and a spiritual dimension. Each of these dimensions is subject to healing; in short, to overcoming problems that restrict well-being and vitality, produce suffering, and interfere with the prevailing of the person's true nature. In classical

Yoga, the soteriological aim is realized in the freeing of *puruṣa*, consciousness, from *prakṛti*, material nature. However, among the *darśanas* or systems of Indian philosophy, Yoga is noteworthy for the integral role it accords to the body in the striving for liberation. Given Yoga's premises that (1) body and Self are entirely distinct, and (2) the soteriological goal entails the Self's independence from physicality, what can be gained by investigating Yoga's understanding of the body? The central problem of Hindu soteriology may be expressed in these two corollaries:

1. Liberation from ignorance and the suffering it produces.
2. Attainment of one's highest soteriological potential, generally conceived as realization of one's true spiritual identity.

Since human life has an inevitable physical dimension, a major challenge in seeking a spiritual goal is reconciling the physical with the spiritual, or transcending one's embodied situation to one's ultimate situation. Practice of classical or *aṣṭāṅga* (eight-fold) Yoga incorporates cultivation of the body to achieve the transcendence of embodiment. According to the *Sāṃkhya-kārikā*, which provides much of Yoga's metaphysical foundation, all things (and thus human bodies) are instantiations of the whole of creation, and may function as vehicles for attainment of the highest spiritual goal:

From *Brahman* down to the blade of grass, the creation (*śṛṣṭi*) is for the benefit of the soul, until supreme knowledge is attained.

SK 3.47

The *Yoga-sūtras* explain why the true Self, *puruṣa*, is associated with the human body:

The purpose of the conjunction (*saṃyoga*) of the master [the Seer or experiencer: *puruṣa*] and the experienceable world [*prakṛti*], is the experiencer's recognition of the Self-natures of the two powers.

YS 2.23

Classical Yoga understands mind and body as aspects of the psychophysical person. According to Yoga's metaphysical foundations, body, mind, and senses are all evolutes of matter, *prakṛti*. Mind/body dualism is thus avoided in Yoga, but there remains a dualism separating mind/body from consciousness. The position that 'mind' and 'body' are dimensions of a unity, rather than separate entities, grounds a pragmatically valuable orientation to etiology (the theory of disease-causation) and to treatment,

by recognizing the mutual influence of physical and mental factors in health and illness. Apart from the metaphysical problems inherent in Yoga's dualism, Yoga's distinguishing mind/body from consciousness also yields an important understanding of the relation of health and religiousness: Similar to the way that mental factors have physiological consequences, and physical factors have mental consequences for health, Yoga shows that the wellness of the mind/body can assist the attainment of spiritual well-being. Conversely, the recovery of spiritual Self-nature and well-being helps to heal and vitalize the body/mind.

Because Yoga practices have health benefits, there is a misconception, particularly in the West, that health is Yoga's goal. Indian views of Yoga on the other hand, in recognizing Yoga as a religious system emphasizing the cultivation of Self-nature as consciousness, sometimes minimize the importance of body and health in Yoga. In chapter 3, I locate the soteriological role of human physicality within the context of Yoga's ultimate aim: attainment of liberation from the nature and constraints of *prakṛti*, and transcendence of the ignorance and suffering that attend material existence. Both psychophysical and spiritual meanings of health are instrumental in classical Yoga. As regards psychophysical health, the refined awareness, discipline, and cultivation of the body/mind are integral to yogic religious life, and prepare one for the higher stages of cultivation of consciousness leading to liberation. Chapter 3 presents classical Yoga as a paradigm of religious therapeutics, addressing both somatic and spiritual experience, and revealing two main principles:

1. Although body and psychophysical health are of instrumental and not ultimate value in classical Yoga, body and health have significant soteriological functions.
2. Liberation in Yoga is healing in an ultimate sense. It concerns attainment of well-being with respect to the human being's most fundamental nature and highest soteriological potential.

#### TANTRA'S ENLIGHTENABLE BODY

The Vedic tradition and the Tāntric tradition are distinct but inter-related currents of Indian religious culture, and they share as well as diverge in their constitutions of religious meaning. A major feature of Tantra is its ontological presupposition that the universe, and everything in it, is a manifestation of the one Brahman. Emergent from this principle is

a positive attitude toward material nature and the body. The feminine principle is esteemed as the manifestation of the masculine absolute's immanent and dynamic aspect. Tantra emphasizes religious practice over theoretical knowledge, and seeks liberation through mystical knowledge gained in experience. A prominent feature of Tāntric practice is the utilization of material nature in order to transcend subjugation to materiality. Tantra regards the body as an instrument to liberation, but, more than this, considers the body as part of the sacred creation, and as capable of enlightenment. The word 'tantra' literally means 'loom' or 'that which is woven.' Its verbal root is √ *tan*, 'to stretch,' 'to expand.' Thus it carries the meaning of *expansion*—of being, of knowing, of bliss. Tantra's connotation of *expansion* recalls Wilfred Cantwell Smith's thought about the sacred as something 'more.' Diane B. Obenchain explains:

... religion might be defined generally as giving care to, paying heed to, paying attention to, more *in* human life than meets the eye. What is more in human life is already within us and around us in the world; we are already, in some sense, participating in it. Hence transcendence (more) is also immanence. What we pay attention to or give care to is what is more ... *we give it priority in our lives*, we are in *awe* of it: it is sacred to us. Insofar as we give priority in human life to what is more in human life than meets the eye, we desire to live and move *with* it, not against it.<sup>45</sup>

The term *Tantra* can refer to the vast Tāntric tradition in general, to particular subsystems of thought and practice, and to Tāntric texts. There are many classifications of the subtraditions of Tantra. Tantra may be Hindu or non-Hindu, that is, Buddhist or Jain. Five major divisions of Hindu Tantra, based on predomination of particular deities, are the Śakta, Śaiva, Saura, Gāṇapatya, and Vaiṣṇava, and there are other subdivisions within and besides these. Discussion here and in chapter 4 examines Tāntric approaches to body and religious therapeutics, at points referring to views of particular sub-traditions, but without intending them to be representative of the whole Tāntric tradition.

Tāntric texts are sometimes called *Āgamas*, but this term refers more specifically to the Śaiva texts.<sup>46</sup> The *Āgama* literature is extensive, but is more concerned with religious practice than with philosophical speculation.<sup>47</sup> An anti-ascetic and anti-speculative orientation is characteristic of Tantra. Although Tantra has comprehensive metaphysical foundations, it is mainly concerned with *sādhana*, religious practice. Hindu Tantra has philosophical contributions in addition to those of the six Veda-accepting classical *darśanas*, yet much of Tāntric philosophy involves modifications of Sāṃkhya and Vedānta.<sup>48</sup>