

FEELING KARMICALLY:  
*MĀYĀ* AND THE *GUṆAS* AS KINESTHETIC LOCATION

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Advisor: Hyo-Dong Lee

Joseph Pryor  
Drew University  
Madison, New Jersey  
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## ABSTRACT

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Joseph Pryor

This thesis proposes that the classical doctrine of *karma* as given in the Advaita school of Vedānta can be fruitfully rearticulated through a dialogue with processual notions of concrescence. By re-reading karma as the lived site of relational becoming, this study aims to extend karmic theory beyond anthropocentric moral causality toward a material expression, and to offer a new horizon of construction and comparison for Vedānta and Process thought.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all my teachers, in this life, and the ones yet to come.

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## CHAPTER ONE: RELATIONSHIP IN ENDLESS MOTION

*“We don't have written compositions or any fixed things, so, even I don't really know what it will be. That is the greatest thrill for me, as well as the listener, because it is like cooking fresh food and serving it hot.”<sup>1</sup>*

### INTRODUCTION

This project proposes a modest but significant contribution to comparative philosophy of religion by reinterpreting the doctrine of karma<sup>2</sup> as outlined in the Advaita school of Vedānta through the lens of Alfred North Whitehead's notions of concrescence. Auxiliary process concepts of extensive continuum, primordial and consequent natures of divinity, appetite, and novelty will be used to support the central theme of karma and concrescence.

The doctrine of *karma* (कर्म) has long been regarded as one of the defining features of Indian philosophy.<sup>3</sup> In Advaita Vedānta, however, its role is ambiguous. In Śāṅkara's commentaries on the Brahmasūtras, Upaniṣads, and Bhagavad Gītā, *karma* is routinely subordinated to *jñāna* (ज्ञान), the liberating knowledge that removes suffering. Action prepares the mind, purifies it through discipline, but cannot itself confer liberation, the volitional end for the Vedāntin. As a result, Advaita's doctrinal emphasis has often led interpreters to treat *karma* as a secondary concept, of primarily moral or pedagogical significance, without broader philosophical potential. This, among myriad other issues has further led some interpreters to view Advaita as virtually synonymous with acosmism,

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<sup>1</sup> Ravi Shankar, “John O'Mahony Talks to Sitar Giant Ravi Shankar,” The Guardian, June 4, 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2008/jun/04/worldmusic.india>.

<sup>2</sup> While the Sanskrit lexical stem is *karman*, this paper employs the more common nominative form *karma* for the sake of readability, except where grammatical precision is required.

<sup>3</sup> Swami Medhananda, *Karma and Rebirth in Hinduism* (Cambridge University Press, 2025), 1.

amoralism, nihilism, and even atheism.<sup>4</sup> This characterization however is not new, as the Advaitins were accused by Bhaskara of being *crypto-buddhists* in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, again by Ramanuja in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and by Bhakti schools in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> Advaita did form in relationship with multiple philosophical schools, including early Mahayana Buddhism, though the substance of this critique was to express a discontinuity between the authority of Vedic ritual karma, and the underlying philosophical structure of Advaita. This is no doubt due to the relativizing of ritual karma within the system of Advaita. Even when *karma* is not fully ignored, it tends to be shaped by the anthropic moral register of the term exclusively, with any other conceptual harmonies—if they are noted at all—existing as a lyrical black box. Karma certainly *may* work uniquely outside the realm of human behavior, but how exactly this manifests is left undisclosed. This neglectful and reductive interpretation is all the more strange when a close reading of the term is engaged. *The Bhagavad Gita*, a source text for myriad traditions, centers the discussion of action in its pedagogy;

Verily, none can ever remain, even for a moment, without performing action; for, everyone is made to act helplessly, indeed, by the qualities born of prakṛti.<sup>6</sup>

Kṛṣṇa firmly links this same body with action by saying later, “Verily, it is not possible for an embodied being to abandon actions entirely.”<sup>7</sup> The centrality of action—not simply of

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<sup>4</sup> See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. R. F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson, and J.M. Stewart (Berkeley, Calif.: University Of California Press, 1988), 269-270; Rudolf Otto, *Mysticism East and West* (Macmillan, 1976), 187-188; Alternatively see Friedrich Max Müller, *The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy* (New York [etc.] Longmans, Green, and Company, 1899), xvi.

<sup>5</sup> See Bhaskara’s commentary on BsBh 1.4.25, Ramanuja’s *Sri Bhasya* on 2.2.27, and *Pādma-Purāṇa* (*Uttara Khanda* 236.7).

<sup>6</sup> na hi kaścitkṣaṇamapi jātu tiṣṭhatyakarmakṛt, kāryate hyavaśaḥ karma sarvaḥ prakṛtijairguṇaiḥ. *BhG* 3.5, trans. Swami Chinmayananda, *The Holy Geeta* (Mumbai Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> na hi dehabhṛtā śakyam tyaktuṁ karmānyaśeṣataḥ, yastu karmaphalatyāgī sa tyāgīyabhidhīyate. *BhG* 18.11, trans. Swami Chinmayananda, *The Holy Geeta*.

moral activity—to all forms of life makes it apparent that *karma* is not simply a brute fact of moral consequence, but a recognition of the deeply relational structure of being. Every act wells up creatively, flows through braided and channelized currents, and ripples out into a shoreless ocean. From there it evaporates, sublimates, transpires, and advects into great clouds of potential, before precipitating back into its terrestrial *loka*. Karma names the entangled web of causality that cannot be reduced to moral calculus, but must necessarily expand as the lived site of relational becoming. For this purpose, I place Advaita Vedānta’s equally unique and inherited view of karma into dialogue with the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. Śankara and the Advaita tradition have been placed in comparative dialogue with numerous partners from a wide array of fields of thought. In addition to the usual suspects of Yogacara and other Sanskrit philosophies, comparison has been made with Heidegger and the continental philosophers, Jung and the psychoanalysts, Eckhart and Bonaventure, and other Christian mystics through the notion of transcendence. Perhaps due to the neglect of the admittedly minor aspects of Advaita, little attempt has been made to bring Indian non-dualism into conversation with Whitehead’s process-relational thought. In his magnum opus, *Process and Reality*, Whitehead puts forth a speculative cosmology of organism, in which reality is not composed of ideal substances, but of events, or actual occasions. In this event-ontology, each actual occasion arises through a process he describes as *concrecence*: the prehension and integration of past actual occasions into a novel unity, lured by a subjective aim toward satisfaction.<sup>8</sup>

The Advaitins also strongly railed against the thing-ontology of the Nyāya and Vaiśeṣikas, even while borrowing and repurposing their terminology. It is my contention

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<sup>8</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, ed. David R Griffin and Donald W Sherburne (New York, N.Y.: The Free Press, 1985), 244.

that *karma*, like concrescence, describes the relational structure of becoming where no thing exists in isolation, where every drop of experience is conditioned, at least in part, by what precedes it, and where novelty arises through the transformation of inherited data. Unfortunately, Whitehead's system has been criticized for its abstraction and unclear thinking by analytic philosophers; concrescence, and God for that matter, risk becoming rarified metaphysical concepts without logical or phenomenological grounding.<sup>9</sup> In its utterly different context, Advaita's doctrine of karma risks being too narrowly defined, confined to the straight-jacket of anthropocentric moral causality and subordinated to transcendent knowledge. Whitehead's doctrine of concrescence, despite its immanence, risks a fate of disembodied abstraction. Thus, Advaita and Process both mirror each other's limitations; whereas karma is too particular in the former, it is perhaps too diffuse in the latter. My central proposal is that these ambiguities can be mutually transformed in dialogue. By disentangling the category of karma from imposed substance models of identity that have long plagued its western interpretations, and by re-reading karma through process thought as the site of concrescence, the Advaitic notion of karma can broaden its ontological reach, extending beyond moral causality toward a universal grammar of relational becoming. Conversely, by locating concrescence within karma, Whitehead's conceptual referents gain a phenomenological concreteness as textures of lived, embodied action. To aid in this, the *guṇas* (गुण), constituents of Advaitic creativity can be interpreted as atmospheric modes of disclosure and attunement. The *guṇas* will be seen to give process-creativity a living body.

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<sup>9</sup> See Susan Stebbing, *Creativity and Its Discontents: The Response to Whitehead's Process and Reality*, ed. Michel Weber and Alan Wyk (Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2009), 57-67. Also Michael Flannery, "'Feeling' and Other Problems in Whitehead's Metaphysics," *Libraries Professional Work* 27 (2025).

In scholar of Vedānta Eliot Deutsch’s reconstruction, Advaita interprets the doctrine of karma epistemologically as a “convenient fiction”, an aspect of the empirical order of reality (*vyāvahārika satya*), indeed as a cycle of action and fruition (*karma-phala*) that binds the individual to the cyclical duress of *saṃsāra* and must ultimately be transcended in the realization of the *Brahman*, the sole reality.<sup>10</sup> However, that does not exhaust the Advaitic treatment of the concept. Madaio’s examination of Vidyāraṇya’s medieval text of *Jivanmuktiviveka* notes that, “rather than dismissing the karmic nature of the relative world as inconsequential, it is, in fact, crucially important to Vidyāraṇya’s rationale for the yogic oriented *sadhana* of *vidvat-samnyasa*, which is designed to prevent obstacles that can obscure non-dual knowing”.<sup>11</sup> The ripening of this fruit *is* the production of the empirical order of experience—the essential proving ground for the *jivanmukta*, and the ontological location of our process comparison.<sup>12</sup> As such, the doctrine of *karma* operates as a multi-modal explanatory device; it acts as a descriptive mechanism of cause and effect, a framework for moral and *dharmic* action, and as a foil for the soteriological goal of liberation. It is one which assures that even amidst the most “trivial puff” of longing in far-off empty space, that “no effort goes to waste”.<sup>13</sup> Whitehead, by contrast, coins the term “concrecence” for the process through which each actual occasion of experience integrates past prehensions, or feelings, and gives rise to novelty.<sup>14</sup> Though Whitehead does not describe non-duality in quite the same manner as Advaita, both metaphysical

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<sup>10</sup> Eliot Deutsch, *Advaita Vedanta: A Philosophical Reconstruction* (1969; repr., University of Hawaii Press, 1973), 79.

<sup>11</sup> James Madaio, “The Instability of Non-Dual Knowing: Post-Gnosis Sādhana in Vidyāraṇya’s Advaita Vedānta,” *Journal of Dharma Studies* 1, no. 1 (August 4, 2018): 21-22. See further JMV 1.3.11.

<sup>12</sup> *bhoga-pradena prārabdhena*. JMV 2.4.3

<sup>13</sup> Eliot Deutsch, *Advaita Vedanta: A Philosophical Reconstruction* (1969; repr., University of Hawaii Press, 1973), 78.

<sup>14</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 245.

frames endeavor to give a description of reality as a dynamic interplay of causes and conditions, speaking from vastly different tonal registers.

Whitehead's revolutionary approach, developed most fully in his pivotal work *Process and Reality*, offers a comprehensive vision of reality as dynamic, creative, and relational. Rather than an atomic world of inert objects, aligning with classically substance-oriented metaphysics, Whitehead's process oriented view sees a cosmos composed of "actual occasions", or events as irreducible units of experience. These events occur in a continuous state of becoming that incorporates all prior events, while also ushering in novel possibilities enacted selectively by an event's inherent agency. Each event feels, or "prehends" the totality of events available to it, collapsing the many into a holographic instantiation of the one, now increased by one. For Whitehead, reality is relationship in endless motion. Every entity in this schema is internally constituted by its relation to all other entities, expressing a radical interconnectedness that spans the sentient, as well as the insentient.

The present thesis argues that Whitehead's detailed exposition of prehension and the process of concrescence bears astounding similarity to certain Buddhist teachings of *pratītyasamutpāda*, and the Vedic conception of Karma. Without any simple drawing of parallels, I believe there can be a mutually beneficial dialogue between the speculative philosophy of process, and the phenomenology of karma. Whitehead can offer a reinvigoration of karmic theory, even as karmic theory may offer a more practical application of the process phenomenology. Additionally, there is potential for my research in linking what some process thinkers like Robert Mesle call 'pan-experientialism' with a

Vedāntic *Cinmātra*, or consciousness-only school of practice.<sup>15</sup> This juxtaposition is promising in bringing the perspective of Indian thought into contemporary western discourse, but also in grounding the speculative philosophy of process in a rich pedigree of embodied praxis.

By placing the doctrine of *karma* and Whitehead's concrescence in dialogue, I will propose that *karma* can be reinterpreted as the lived, kinesthetic site of relational becoming. This choice of words is deliberate in countering the prevalent western and typically Orientalist assumption that the Vedānta is at its core an intellectual pursuit divorced from the body.<sup>16</sup> The scars of western philosophical and theological history that have estranged the mind from the body, and the body of the individual from the community are still in a convalescent phase, where the pain of past violence can be imprudently projected onto the philosophical subaltern.<sup>17</sup> To counter these projections, a semantic elaboration must occur. Only instead of taking place in the traditional container of the *parampara*<sup>18</sup>, it must for now take place within the confines of academic theology.

The etymology of the proposed *kinaesthesia* derives from the Greek root *kinein* signifying the infinitive "to move". This movement serves as an intimation of the body of knowledge that corresponds to a Whiteheadian philosophy of organism on the one hand, and the *knowledge-body* of incessant flux signified by the category of *māyā* (मया), on the other. The suffix *aisthanesthai* alternatively denotes the infinitive of "to feel"<sup>19</sup>. The

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<sup>15</sup> C. Robert Mesle, *Process-Relational Philosophy: An Introduction to Alfred North Whitehead* (West Conshohocken, Pa.: Templeton Foundation Press, 2008), 93.

<sup>16</sup> Lance E Nelson, *Purifying the Earthly Body of God* (State University of New York Press, 1998), 62.

<sup>17</sup> J Baird Callicott, *Earth's Insights: A Survey of Ecological Ethics from the Mediterranean Basin to the Australian Outback* (Berkeley: University Of California Press, 1998), 196-197.

<sup>18</sup> Succession or lineage of transmitted knowledge through direct relationship.

<sup>19</sup> "Kinaesthesia," in *Oxford Reference*, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100037216>.

aesthetic nature of feeling that lies implicit within the Vedāntic tradition is able with this reformulation to become explicit, relating feeling with knowing as the predominant language of becoming. Thus taken together, the *kinaesthesia*, or perhaps better *feeling-moving* becomes a sufficiently capacious category to hold a dialogue that enriches both Process thought and the Vedānta. This interpretation endeavors to expand karmic theory past its colloquial deterministic valuation of human agency, beyond anthropocentric moral causality, and possibly beyond even a biocentric designation to encompass the colloquially insentient.

Additionally, this proposal allows process philosophy a concrete experiential grounding within the context of Vedāntic pedagogy. Connecting both the sentient, and insentient aspects of karmic unfolding allows for a recognition of the human agent's place within the network of causation without necessitating a hierarchical division or anthropocentric hegemony. It is my intention for this project not to simply be an occasion for further translation of indigenous wisdom streams into the idiom of the Western theological academy, a practice that has been heavily critiqued by Indian scholars for its distortion of the tradition for modern palatability. Instead, it is my *sankalpa*<sup>20</sup> to remove both '-etic' and '-emic' obscurations that limit the inherent versatility of the doctrine and its potential in contemporary discourse. The scope of this project is therefore both comparative and constructive.

The study will begin with a brief description of the unique methodological frame to be used for the comparison. How can and cannot the metaphysical aspects of these traditions be compared, and in what respect or sense? Based on the work of John

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<sup>20</sup> Typically glossed as wish, will, or intention.

Thatamanil with respect to comparative theology, much emphasis is here placed on the semantic “truth-value” of similarities between streams of the religious, in opposition to the postliberal notion of “incommensurability” put forth by the narrative insularity of George Lindbeck. Francis Clooney instead champions a more granular analysis, deeply and closely reading and learning across traditional demarcations, seeming to imply that one can voluntarily step beyond the confines of a semeiotic world through a humility open to transformation in which one’s theological frame becomes instrumentally marginal.<sup>21</sup> What determines whether the close reading of the source texts Clooney suggests accomplishes an irruption of the other into one’s own worldview, instead of an appropriative inclusivity is conveniently left to the comparativist in their aspirational humility.

Epistemological concerns between traditions do however remain ambiguous due to the complex and possibly incommensurate nature of the epistemologies of the traditions in comparison. A philosophical or theological premise can be true, but for whom, and in what context? Can two metaphysical concepts be framed as commensurately true when the criterion of what defines truth in either frame of reference differs? In order to avoid a conceptual quagmire of category errors, there must be an initial understanding of, or at least respect for plural epistemic arenas. With respect to Advaitic epistemology proper, truth-value has its ultimate terminus in that which is *abhāditatva*—“not subject to negation”—a reality that lies beyond the pale of our immediate discussion of *guṇa* and *karma*.<sup>22</sup> In conjunction with this concern, the primary descriptive categories that are leveraged in Advaita to qualify the nature of the absolute—pure awareness invulnerable to

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<sup>21</sup> Francis X. Clooney, *Theology after Vedanta* (State University of New York Press, 1993), 158.

<sup>22</sup> For a description of *abhāditatva* and its relation to *samvāditva* (harmony of experience), see Dhirendra Mohan Datta, *The Six Ways of Knowing*, 1972, 19. See also *Vedānta Paribhāṣā* 5-7, *Advaitasiddhi* Pariccheda 1.34.5.

spatio-temporal change or decay specifically, are somewhat more readily articulable with the Neoplatonically influenced theologies of the Rhineland. The negative theology of Meister Eckhart, for example have been notably compared and contrasted with Śaṅkarācārya's pedagogy, which heavily utilizes apophatic designations for the Brahman. These negative categories are typically rejected wholesale by Process thinkers as incompatible with their metaphysics of becoming.

Further, a prime feature of the soteriological orientation of Advaita Vedānta—liberation *in* the living body—is the propaedeutic *epoche* that temporarily, but rigorously, brackets the phenomenological transience of quotidian experience for the express purpose of nondual realization. Overcoming the barrier of process rejection of the Advaitic categories of practice unavoidably requires an epistemic humility—or at least a bracketing—on the part of process thinkers with respect to the differential epistemic planes of the *vyavahārika satya* and the *paramārthika satya* within Vedāntic discourse. To force Indian epistemologies into a western framework based on a rejection of the ‘unbecoming’ vocabulary associated with it would be to engage in the same proxy debates Rudolf Otto uses to project critiques of Eckhart onto Śaṅkara.<sup>23</sup> As Wilhelm Halbfass notes, “The West has imposed its methods of research, its values and modes of orientation, its categories of understanding, its “epistemic absolutism” upon the Indian tradition” and must allow it to restore its self-determined “epistemic and axiological sovereignty”.<sup>24</sup> Surmounting the Advaitic rejection of process categories requires a different method, one that simultaneously reaches back into Advaita's own developmental past, and its open future.

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<sup>23</sup> Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion* (Routledge, 2013), 126-127.

<sup>24</sup> Halbfass, quoted in Francis X Clooney, “Wilhelm Halbfass and the Openness of the Comparative Project” in *Beyond Orientalism: The Work of Wilhelm Halbfass and Its Impact on Indian and Cross-Cultural Studies*, ed. Eli Franco and Karin Preisendanz (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2007), 34.

The Sanskrit terms *guṇa* and *karma*, though present in the middle to late Upaniṣadic period (500-100 BCE) were likely adopted and transformed from pre-existing exegetical traditions including Sankhya and Yoga. The usage of the adopted terms was subsequently modified for use in the Advaita project of re-establishing a non-dualist interpretation of the Upaniṣads. *Guṇa* and *karma* thus become useful to the Advaitic discourse as preparatory concepts to assist in both the cosmological description of transactional reality, as well as conceptual tools to allow for the therapeutic regime dictated as prerequisite for acquisition of liberating knowledge. In later developments like the 14th century *Jivanmuktiviveka*, Vidyāranya openly injects *post-enlightenment sadhanas* to politically placate Śrī Vaishnavas within his extent of influence, and to pastorally support his more immediate aim of liberation *in* the body, a soteriology rejected by Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Purva Mīmāṃsā, Vishishtadvaita, and Dvaita schools.<sup>25</sup> In that sense, the present flirtation with Process metaphysics itself is a *continuity* of the tradition of Vedānta in both using and transforming the language of its interlocutors.

Following this section, there will be a review of the context for the evolution of the doctrine of *karma* within the relevant Vedic traditions of Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta. How does relation function in action, and does it fall within categories of retribution or continuity, morality or generality, biology or materiality, stasis or dynamism, individuality or collectivity, exclusion or relation, and linearity or non-linearity? For this, the work of Hajime Nakamura on early Vedānta, Eliot Deutsch on classical Vedānta, and A.J. Alston on Śankara Vedānta are essential in outlining the shape of the traditional approaches to

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<sup>25</sup> The practices of *manonāśa* and *vāsanākṣaya* together form a triad with *tattvajñāna* in Vidyāranya's soteriology, and serve to support the purification of the attentive faculty and the nourishment of pure tendencies, *sattva*.

karma. The various contemporary mischaracterizations of the approaches will be briefly addressed, such as their limitation on human agency, assertion of victim blaming, cyclical repetition, and determinism. At this point, the constructive portion of the study will begin. The primary portion of the paper will leverage a suite of categories to traverse the location of the lived body, or perhaps *saunter* in the etymological sense of *sainte-terre* from the universal to the particular, as well as draw out the wider implications of an expanded doctrine of *karma*. The category of *kalpanā* will be proposed as a corollary for the process notion of *creativity*—creating a nuanced distinction from existing comparative scholarship of Advaita and Whiteheadian thought by scholars at the intersection of Hinduism and Process such as Jeffrey Long and Frances-Vincent Anthony. The work of Christopher Key Chapple will then be utilized to connect notions of creativity with *karma* proper.

To end with the Sankhyan conclusion of consciousness isolated from materiality is to court philosophical dualism, but to adopt it as an efficient means to non-dual direct apprehension is the particular flexibility of the Vedāntic approach. Examination of the Vedānta in general, or the Bhagavad Gita in particular must take account of the contextual aim of both the tradition and the text in soteriological orientation. As Sinha mentions, the Vedāntins are animated by an insatiable value drive that culminates in the freedom of life. This freedom, both in approach and in effect, relies on a functional view of creativity. For a look within the connectivity of notions of *karma* and creativity, we can conveniently look to the monograph of Christopher Key Chapple, *Karma and Creativity*. Chapple provides a helpful overview of the way notions of *karma* are approached in various streams of Indic tradition, including Vedic Brahminism, Upaniṣadic Vedānta, Yogacara Buddhism, Later *Dṛṣṭisrṣṭi* Vedānta (दृष्टिसृष्टिवाद), and the Puranic traditions. In all of the models examined,

the Indic notions of *karma* differ greatly from the Western conception, influenced by modernist and Theosophical misunderstandings. The predominant view of *karma* in colloquially western usage brings to mind connotations of fate, of destiny, and the added pessimistic valence of deterministic powerlessness. Chapple fortunately reverses this conception to reveal the more contextual meaning of *karma* as the functioning of creative verdure in the life of humanity. The two primary characterizations of life in the Vedānta, suffering and liberation, are both a function of proper relationship with action.

What is the causal context of karmic relation, and what textures does imagination take? How is it concreate? The *guṇas* will then be introduced as constituents of Vedāntic imagination to speak to these questions, and as a heuristic to denote atmospheres of affect that throttle the prehension of novelty. Alternative conceptions of *guṇa* such as the Vaiśeṣika concept outlined by Wilhelm Halbfass will be shortly discussed. The psychological and therapeutic research of Maika Puta, Peter Sedlmeier, Pratibha Gramann on the *guṇas* will also be touched upon. Finally, the *ṛtti* will be approached as the location of concreate itself, where occasions of feeling flash forth as seemingly diffracted expressions of experience mediated by the pattern formations inherent in the *vāsanā* laden *triputi*.

In this way, the thesis aims to show that the doctrine of *karma* as conceived in Advaita Vedānta, in consonance with its soteriological aims, and extended via process thought promotes a vision of knowledge that is not representational but creative, direct, and transformative. This novel re-envisioning of the tradition asserts a direct realism, both in the body of the liberated while alive, and in the bodied life of God. This embodied knowledge, taken in the Whiteheadian sense of feeling and articulated through the

atmospheres of guṇas will be underscored as the kinesthetic location for feeling-movement. This proposal in part accepts the promise of comparative scholars like Thatamanil and Clooney for a deep interreligious learning, and becomes an attempt at radical translation, rather than an exercise in abstract system-building. As Gangadean attests, "precisely because the native interpretation of a paradigm is corrigible and distinguishable from the paradigm itself, there is room for the *development* of interpretation of the paradigm", through creativity.<sup>26</sup> Through this ethic, I will affirm that a process-Vedānta articulation is possible—through a creative and constructive exercise—without marring the historical and cultural integrity of the classical tradition.

In the following section, I will establish relationality as a multivalent shared category, beset as it is with parametric differences. We will adopt a reverse-reading where classical Advaita engages with its own capacity to develop Process themes, guided by John Thatamanil's fourfold criteria for a theology of religious diversity. Our next step will be to outline a brief genealogy of the concept of karma as it evolves in conversation with classical and modern commentators. Points of contemporary critique will be examined, and an alternative imagining of karma will be suggested that leverages notions of creativity through non-linearity and transference. Following this, the causal context of karmic relation will be placed within the traditional category of māyā. We will then juxtapose the "primordial" and "consequent" natures of God against Īśvara and Her causal body. Finally, we will propose the lived textures of creativity with reference to the triguṇa typology of *tamas*, *rajas*, and *sattva*.<sup>27</sup> In the context of the guṇas, the vṛtti will be put forth as the

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<sup>26</sup> Ashok Gangadean, "Comparative Ontology and the Interpretation of 'Karma,'" *Indian Philosophical Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (January 1979), 243.

<sup>27</sup> Typically glossed as inertia, passion, and lucidity.

atomization of karmic causal flows that highlights the actual occasion of Vedāntic imaginative consciousness.

### **METHODOLOGY: RELATIONALITY AS LOCUS OF COMPARISON**

To begin, we must set forth a methodological frame with which to engage both the Process and Vedāntic worlds. Due to the directionality of this exercise, i.e. endeavoring to develop a processual articulation of features ‘native’ to the Vedānta, the category of relationality will first be examined.

Relationality, though differently conceived, is a shared and contested descriptor in so-named metaphysical systems. While some post-modern forms of thought court the grand narrative of relationality itself as ultimate, other pre-modern philosophies tend to place relationality itself within a broader scope of ontology. Termed the “ontological relativity of sense” this difference is the “reason it is problematic to speak of the “same” term between different paradigms.”<sup>28</sup> The Process thought of Alfred North Whitehead is animated by the conceptual notions of becoming, passibility, and flux. In contrast, the Advaita Vedānta tradition of Upaniṣadic philosophy is in large part centered around notions of the absolute as *sat* (being), *nitya* (non-temporal), and *stitha* (unchanging). Differences between (and within) the traditions can be clearly seen, but are they inherently incommensurable? Thatamanil’s criterion would respond negatively, but it may not be as simple as identifying the two wisdom streams as commensurable or incommensurable *within a single epistemic regime*. In what *sense* can the Whiteheadian notions of relationality speak to the Advaitic characterization of Brahman as *asangah* (non-relatedness)? Can Advaita’s reading of reality as the *asparsha* (untouched) be placed in

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<sup>28</sup> Gangadean, “Comparative Ontology and the Interpretation of ‘Karma’”, 237.

fruitful conversation with Whitehead’s “fellow sufferer” without collapsing its relational intuition? To support this, we will examine the vague category of relationality within the context of the traditions of Advaita Vedānta and Process Philosophy/Theology.

In contrast with much of the literature of comparative theology which begins from the standpoint of either a confessional Christian perspective, or a meta-confessional western academic pluralist perspective, this study will journey from the perspective of classical Advaita Vedānta to engage a process perspective. This will effect the promised reverse reading: rather than reading Sanskrit philosophy through the lens of western Christian categories, it will instead examine Process thought through the *darśana* (view) of non-dual Vedānta. Methodologically, we will aim to incorporate the suggestions of comparative religious scholars, while avoiding their critiques as far as possible. In particular, John Thatamanil’s fourfold criterion for a theology of religious diversity will be followed, including “non-incommensurability”, “truth-value”, “criticality”, and “intrinsic interest”. Although many process thinkers including John Cobb and David Ray Griffin opt for a polycentric pluralism as opposed to a monocentric pluralism, this idea of many discrete absolutes would be incomprehensible within the Vedāntic environment. With respect to this critique which may privilege one tradition over the other, Perry Schmidt-Leukel’s advisement that the consequent step of “joint and reciprocal integration of different religion-specific pluralisms within a process of multiperspectival exchange” will be attempted to prevent a *primus-inter-pares* pluralism.<sup>29</sup> It will not only be questioned where Process fits into the Advaitin’s worldview, but where Advaita fits into the Process theologian’s worldview. This aspect will be useful in preventing the collapse of pluralism

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<sup>29</sup> Perry Schmidt-Leukel, *Religious Pluralism and Interreligious Theology* (Orbis Books, 2017), 139.

into an inclusive superiority. By allowing Advaita's open epistemology to consult the Process commitment to temporal becoming through relationality, we will encourage interreligious learning across borders of differentiated ontology, culture, and time. Rather than erasing difference, this contribution will leverage it for useful rearticulation of categories of relationality within the context of each tradition.

The central and defining feature of Whiteheadian thought is its uncompromising emphasis on an ontology unmoored from the substantive and unmoving banality of its classical predecessors. In his vision, to be at all is to be in relation, or further: to be is to *be* relation itself. Actual entities, the fundamental constituents of Whitehead's reality, are graded in terms of function and efficacy, but are ontologically homologous and interdependent events of experience. Discussing the meeting point of Whitehead and Deleuze, Roland Faber unfolds the notion of a '*Chaosmos*' in which, "We are all hybrids, shifting identities, combinations, complexities, multiples; or *infinite* contrasts of indissoluble opposites..."<sup>30</sup> In the speculative metaphysic of Process, the flesh and blood world of actuality apprehended by presentational immediacy is a community of actual entities of experience, the potentials of which are facilitated by what he calls the "extensive continuum". Though phenomenologically known through the divulgence of space and time, the extensive continuum is described by Whitehead as "one relational complex in which all potential objectifications find their niche" and "a complex of entities united by the various allied relationships of whole to part, and of overlapping so as to possess common parts, and of contact, and of other relationships derived from these primary

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<sup>30</sup> Roland Faber and Andrea M Stephenson, *Secrets of Becoming: Negotiating Whitehead, Deleuze, and Butler* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 158.

relationships.”<sup>31</sup> The real potentiality here described is not limited to geometric or temporal dimensionality, nor is it previous or external to, but instead, arises in and *with* the nature of the present character of the world, “atomized” by drops of experience which act as instantiations of division in an infinite field.

The world, though both explicitly and implicitly multiple, is held together by bonds of feeling in a presumably infinite range of complexity. Isabelle Stengers extends the image by relating it to the prehension native to entities and their societal nexuses, “The extensive continuum itself is nothing other than the impartial articulation of all situations, that is, of all possible viewpoints on each other, an expression of the solidarity of all these viewpoints, of their belonging to a single community.”<sup>32</sup> The felt unification of relations within the context of social belonging with this continuum is what denotes one of the most explicit valuations of relationality within Whiteheadian thought. It is in these terms that process-relationality is made paramount, not in a remote transcendent manner, but consubstantially from the most trivial entity, to the God of the chaosmos. Relation and singularity, in this schema, are hand and glove. The theological implications of this arrangement are that God, as Whitehead understands, is not impassible as the classical Western tradition holds, but a relational being that provides the lure for the universe’s creative advance into evergreen arrangements of community and intensity. Whitehead holds that God is, “the great companion—the fellow sufferer who understands”.<sup>33</sup>

It is well known in theological circles the disdain which Whitehead and his retinue hold

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<sup>31</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, David Ray Griffin, and Donald W Sherburne, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York, N.Y.: The Free Press, 1985), 66.

<sup>32</sup> Isabelle Stengers, Michael Chase, and Bruno Latour, *Thinking with Whitehead: A Free and Wild Creation of Concepts* (Editorial: Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2014), 373.

<sup>33</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 351.

for notions of divinity as impassible. For the bearing this has on our comparison, it is worth quoting Whitehead at length here:

The vicious separation of the flux from the permanence leads to the concept of an entirely static God, with eminent reality, in relation to an entirely fluent world, with deficient reality. But if the opposites, static and fluent, have once been so explained as separately to characterize diverse actualities, the interplay between the thing which is static and the things which are fluent involves contradiction at every step in its explanation. Such philosophies must include the notion of 'illusion' as a fundamental principle—the notion of 'mere appearance.' This is the final Platonic problem.<sup>34</sup>

If taken at face value, this piercing statement would seem to obviate for Whitehead any engagement with ontologies that entertain notions of illusion or appearance. The Advaita Vedānta, whether in its *Bhāmatī* formulation of manifestation through limitation, in its *Vivarana* analysis as actualization through reflection, or in its *Abhāsa* conclusion as the play of shadow—all of which are images—copiously leverages the language of illusion and appearance to describe the nature of subject-object experience. The critical point, one where there may be an opening for further comparative articulation, is that this Advaitic languaging is expressly used to describe the nature of experience *in relation* to an alternative epistemology. It is because of this alternative epistemological formulation unique to Advaita that Thatamanil's criterion of difference without incommensurability can be met.<sup>35</sup>

In the Advaitic metaphysical horizon, reality in its ultimacy is held with scriptural justification to be the Brahman of the Upaniṣads, a neuter form not to be confused with the creator god Brahma, the source of all manifestation. It is the trust in the authority of scripture that initially grounds the Vedāntic epistemology with *śruti*, what is heard, as the

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 346-347.

<sup>35</sup> John J Thatamanil, *Circling the Elephant* (Fordham University Press, 2020), 73.

*pramāna*, or means of knowledge par excellence. Arvind Sharma intimates the rationale, “..even God is eliminated as the author. The Vedas are woven into the fabric and texture of the universe, which is eternal.”<sup>36</sup> Since the *Vedas*, the repertoire from which the Upaniṣadic statements come, are generally accepted as co-eternal with the universe, they are held as the enduring epistemic authority, even if ultimately transcended by the Advaitic soteriology. The diversity of scriptural interpretations however, is a direct function of their ambiguity with regard to the categories of relationality. As Mysore Hiriyanna notes, “The vagueness of Upaniṣadic teaching is particularly in reference to the relation of Brahman to the individual soul on the one hand, and to the physical universe on the other.”<sup>37</sup> This ambiguity with regard to relationality is historically what allows for the classical divisions between the major and minor schools of Advaita, the Vishishtadvaita of Ramanuja, the Dvaita of Madhva, the Dvaitadvaita of Nimbarka, the Shuddhadvaita of Vallabhācārya, and others. It is also this opacity in the spectrum of possible imaginaries of relation that begins to crack the door to a contemporary Process influenced interpretation of Advaita.

The limited existing comparative scholarship on Advaita and Process thought tends to be philosophically adjacent by using it as a foil, or places the Advaitic Brahman in anachronistic categories divorced from its own contextual self-understanding, as a static or remote absolute in opposition to the manifest chaosmos. J. Bruce Long proposes the “pluralistic-monist” Bhaskara, a critic of both the Advaita and Dvaita schools, as a fruitful interlocutor for Whitehead due to his intermediate position of *bhedhabhedavada* (identity-in-difference) which suggests a reality that is simultaneously one and many.<sup>38</sup> Long posits

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<sup>36</sup> Arvind Sharma, *Advaita Vedānta: An Introduction*. (Delhi; Varanasi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2004), 7.

<sup>37</sup> Mysore Hiriyanna, *Essentials of Indian Philosophy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1949), 152.

<sup>38</sup> J. Bruce Long, “God and Creativity in the Cosmologies of Whitehead and Bhaskara,” *Philosophy East and West* 29, no. 4 (October 1979): 396.

a comparison in which, “Bhaskara, like Whitehead, rejects the implication of philosophical monism that transitoriness and unreality are coterminous concepts.”<sup>39</sup> In contrast, Jeffrey Long positions the Advaitic absolute in a somewhat parallel metaphysical status, “the sum total of reality—Brahman—contains within itself a formless aspect, corresponding to the process concept of creativity, but that Brahman also possesses an aspect *with* form, corresponding to the universe of actual entities.”<sup>40</sup> While the latter Long places Whiteheadian Creativity in the position of *Nirguna Brahman*, the formless absolute, this position in our proposal is reserved for the Brahman as the sole existent. Because Whiteheadian Creativity is a speculative concept inconceivable apart from relation, it is my contention that when held to the rigor of classical Advaita, it belongs to an altogether different epistemic mode, and thus is not suitable as a parallel category due to different respects of interpretation. In its stead, the category of *māyā* as conceived in the Vedānta is a more truly parallel metaphysical notion. To understand *māyā*, our discussion requires a turn to the trifold epistemology of Vedānta.

Contrary to certain logocentric valuations by comparativists such as Francis Clooney, Advaitic epistemology does not merely rest on a contentious interpretation of *śruti*. For Śankara, the most devotionally revered and academically studied systematizer of the Advaita tradition, it is our quotidian experience of reality itself that renders truth intelligible through valid *pramāna*. This typically unified experience is imbued with tensions, which are rationally graded into the forms of *prātibhāsika* (प्रातिभासिक), *vyavahārika* (व्यवहारिक), and the *pāramārthika* (पारमार्थिक).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Long, 406.

<sup>40</sup> Jeffrey Long, *Handbook of Process Theology*, ed. Jay McDaniel and Donna Bowman (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2006), 8.

<sup>41</sup> For the rationale behind the pedagogical distinction of the absolute and empirical, see BsBh II.i.14.

This trinitarian formulation of reality is positioned over and against utter non-being, as exemplified by the horns of a hare, or the child of a barren woman, something non-existent at any particular point in time. The *prātibhāsika* aspect occupies the chimeric realm of hallucinatory visions, fever dreams, and ephemeral imaginings. A commonly used image invoked to refer to this ontological stratification is the serpent seen in a length of rope, often, but not exclusively a privatized experience. These apparitions are then contradicted by the secondary division of the typically designated ‘transactional’ world of typical waking cognizance, though, for our purposes, this would more appropriately be recast as the relational sphere. This epistemic layer is one of phantasmagoric transience, where singularity and relation subsist within the scale of human perception, and scientific measurement. But even these phenomena are themselves fluid, *anitya*, “perpetually perishing” from view in the Whiteheadian sense.<sup>42</sup> In this sense they occupy an indeterminate ontological state, what is termed inexpressible as either real or unreal, *anirvacanīya* (अनिर्वचनीय). Finally, the foremost classification in the Advaitic schema, the *pāramārthika*, is one defined epistemically as *abādhitatva*—that which is not subject to negation, or never “is not”. This does not in any way mean the other echelons of knowledge are contradicted by the *parama*; on the contrary, what is unique to the absolute truth is that, “it is not contradicted by the rest of our experience, but harmonizes with it.”<sup>43</sup> The harmony that comes is a result of what Eliot Deutsch reconstructs as “subration”. In his definition, subration is an ordering in which a subjective entity may, “undergo an *experience*, practical, intellectual, or spiritual which radically changes one’s *judgement* about

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<sup>42</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 347.

<sup>43</sup> Hirianna, *Essentials*, 167.

something.”<sup>44</sup> In this sense, the Advaitic re-ordering of ‘levels of being’, as Deutsch puts it, is a particular resonance of experiencing that occurs within the domain of recognition. This bears out in a commentary by Śankara’s *paramaguru*, Gauḍapāda on the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*, a primary root text of the Advaitic tradition. In his commentary, titled the *Māṇḍūkya Karika*, Gauḍapāda’s elucidates the parallel formulation of *turīya*<sup>45</sup> in his explication of the ubiquitous Vedic *pranava*, ॐ (*Om*). In Śankara’s commentary on the verse, he clarifies, “That Ātman, indicated by *Aum* [sic], signifying both the higher and the lower Brahman, has four quarters (*Padas*), not indeed, like the four feet (*Padas*) of a cow”.<sup>46</sup> The fourth in this sequence is not a separable entity from the first three quarters, but merely the last in the series of discussion, and therefore an epistemic signifier. Although not correspondence, and not completely consonant with the western philosophical notion of coherence, there is in the *pāramārthika* nevertheless a melliflence, a euphony rendered appreciable by the *tanpura* as it gently lifts and provides a sonic womb for the chanting of Vedāntic texts and invocations. The epistemic distinction between regimes of knowledge in Śankara Advaita is itself what allows for differentiated ontologies, making space for ground, relation, and singularity—to borrow the Trinitarian intimation of Thatamanil.

Here there may be a felt tension that for a classical Vedānta, to relate implies the existence of discrete entities to be related to each other across an interstice of non-being, necessitating either a dualism or ontological pluralism. Duality in the Advaitic environment is underlain by *avidyā* (अविद्या), a fundamental ignorance as to the true nature of phenomena.

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<sup>44</sup> Eliot Deutsch, *Advaita Vedānta: A Philosophical Reconstruction* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), 15. (Emphasis mine)

<sup>45</sup> Lit. “the fourth”.

<sup>46</sup> Swami Nikhilananda, *The Māṇḍukyopanishad with Gaudapada’s Karika and Śankara’s Commentary*, 3rd ed. (1936; repr., Mysore: Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, 1949). 12 (I, 2).

The soteriological orientation of this philosophy is that of liberation from the existential dissatisfaction that comes as a result of the non-apprehension, and subsequent misapprehension of experience, termed by Śankara in his introduction to the *Brahma Sūtra Bhasya* as the technical term *anyonyādhyāsa* (अन्योन्याध्यास), or “mutual-superimposition”. If the tradition is held fast to this point, the highest truth is that of *non*-relatedness, *āśaṅgah* (आसंग). In fact, any discussion of experience conceptually unfolded from the absolute level is what constitutes *māyā*, which in theistic contexts is described as the inscrutable power of *Īśvara*, or the Lord. The category of relation belongs only to the epistemic level of transaction, an organism in which desire itself is the metabolic engine. The *vyavahārika* does not however occupy some conceptual space cut off from the *pāramārthika*, rather it is pervaded by it in being, and revealed in it through its own lambency. Swami Jagadananda in his commentary on Śankara’s *Upadeśa Sahasri* clarifies that, “The Self is thus related to external objects through Its reflection.”<sup>47</sup> The use of language translated as “appearance” or “illusion” is thus due to the integrated ontological-epistemology of Advaita that sees both the actual and potential as only conceptually separable from the self-existing (*svayambhu*) and self-revealing (*svayamjoti*) nature of the absolute. This does *not*, as is commonly misunderstood, represent strict monist sensibilities, which stand at odds with dualism, and which necessitate *parināma*, the transformation of substance. In this sense, as Roland Faber rightly notes, “...monism stands as an accusation against Asian religious expressions, such as the Advaita Vedanta view in Hinduism, and against Buddhism in general.”<sup>48</sup> This crucial difference in the Advaitic schema renders the notion of appearance

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<sup>47</sup> Swami Jagadananda, *Upadeśa Sahasri* (Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2023), 249.

<sup>48</sup> Roland Faber, “Bahá’u’lláh and the Luminous Mind: Bahá’í Gloss on a Buddhist Puzzle,” in *Lights of Irfán*, vol. 18, 2017, 53. Faber also notes that non-dualism remains at the center of his own work in process and postmodern thought, and interreligious discourse.

not as a reductive hand-waiving of an idealist monism, but rather as an explanatory mechanism for actuality itself. Sinha reads this aspect of the Advaita well, concluding that, “on ultimate analysis, *ajñāna* could be taken to represent the functional aspect of Consciousness” which is freely associative, and which is modalized in the form of modifications, or *vṛtti* (वृत्ति).<sup>49</sup> Thus taken strictly in itself, the Brahman is non-causal and non-related, though not in an exclusive sense. The sentiment communicated is rather that the Brahman is neither related, nor unrelated, nor both, nor neither—but with respect to the inexplicable existence of the manifest universe, it is the non-causal ground and fruition of relationality itself.

It may be questioned at this point if even ‘relation’ itself as a vague category for comparison is consonant enough in respect of interpretation to qualify as a useful category in this case. Robert Neville and Wildman both caution that “..respects of interpretation will frequently pass unnoticed. How many debates lapse into confusion because the respect of interpretation is shifted subtly in just this way!”<sup>50</sup> If the conceptual machinations of both Process and Vedānta are taken seriously, but not exhaustively, it becomes increasingly clear that the differences in their epistemic basis and soteriological aim affect the respect of interpretation with which they employ the category of relation. While this may seem to indicate an impasse, it may also be a capacious opening. Great care no doubt needs to be taken to prevent disorientation, and yet this also can be of benefit in the comparative endeavor. It is, after all, because of different respects of interpretation that reconciliation is possible. If the categories of Whiteheadian Creativity and the Advaitic Brahman were

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<sup>49</sup> Debabrata Sinha, *The Metaphysic of Experience in Advaita Vedānta*, 1995, 109.

<sup>50</sup> Robert C. Neville and Wesley J. Wildman, *Ultimate Realities* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 192.

conceptually parallel, they would likely be in direct conflict, and thus fail any criterion of incommensurability. Because of their different expositions of epistemology and axiology, Process and the Vedānta—though internally consistent—are oriented toward plural realities.

To the Vedāntin, relation is a category implicitly instrumental, but not explicitly fundamental to their project of *mokṣa*, while to the Process philosopher or theologian, relation is integral to their metaphysical enterprise. This not only showcases the difference and diversity in their metaphysical outlooks, but the facets of reality that they are oriented toward. It is this difference that makes the datum for comparison interesting, precisely because the pragmatic orientation of comparative theology towards some *anta* is not limited to the discipline itself, but is relevant to each of the domains of knowledge being compared. In that context, the nexus of a semeiotic category like ‘relation’ “are the result of mental operations undertaken by scholars in the interest of their intellectual goals”; not only for the scholar, but for the *ācārya* as well.<sup>51</sup> For the Vedāntin, the category of relationality seen in the Process *darśana* is not only an acceptable, but a *necessary* account of actualities within the epistemic strata of the empirical realm of the *vyavahārika satya*. It is this intrinsic interest that makes Whiteheadian relationality a vital area of study in the continuation of the Vedāntic tradition.

Whether this characterization is acceptable to Process-*vādins* is tenuous at best. This approach is in all likelihood to be seen as a *primus-inter-pares* position to many, due to intolerance of any hierarchical ‘ordering’ of what is colloquially misrendered as the ‘lower’ and ‘higher’ truths. However, as previously stated, what designates the value status

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<sup>51</sup> Jonathan Z Smith, *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*, ed. Kimberley C Patton (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London University of California Press, 2007), 239.

of epistemic modes is their vulnerability to subration and their soteriological utility; even the most encompassing *pāramārthika* view of truth is open to critique, as the millennia of debate without *and* within the Vedānta can attest. In other words, if the Advaitic experience of non-duality can be expressly denied *within* experience itself, then it too would necessarily be embraced by the *vyavahārika satya*. It is for this reason that the open epistemology of Advaita invites interreligious dialogue. For this to be possible however, the interlocutor would need to not only be familiar with scholarly accounts of the Vedānta, but through becoming multiple, be actively engaged in the ‘therapeutic regime’ of direct relationship with a living teacher, and the unique scope of praxis they prescribe. To be considered seriously as a subration of their central view, disputation must not remain on the merely abstract, conceptual, or speculative metaphysical level of discourse, it must have a communicable and experiential referent that defines the reality of the agent. In other words, any competing vision of truth that survives the *pāramārthika* must itself be *lived*.

From the Process thinker’s perspective on a pluralist theology of religious diversity, one could as Thatamanil has done, propose a homaloidal pluralist ontology that denies epistemic levels, and instead posits a multi-faceted religious ultimate. Alternatively, one could, per Cobb and Griffin, posit multiple metaphysical ultimates while also denying plural epistemic spheres. The former, though not disagreeable, fails to account for the specificity of the Vedāntic traditions self-understanding, an aspect Thatamanil himself might locate in his criteria of truth-value and intrinsic interest. The latter, while rationally incoherent, additionally seems to be a theological sleight-of-hand that relocates post-liberal incommensurability within the absolute, above the realm of contention and conflict. It may be preferable then for a Process pluralism to rehabilitate the former position of

Thatamanil's multi-faceted religious ultimate in order to account more charitably for the articulation of the Vedānta as given by the mass of its resources. Doing so would require an acknowledgement of the alternative epistemologies of Advaita and locating them in reference to a process-relational framework that takes seriously their truth-value and expresses genuine interest in expanding Process metaphysics to accommodate it.

For the Vedānta as well, a renewal of its own open epistemology is necessary to court the Process framework in a way that both challenges, and complements their notions of relationality as co-extensive with the *asangah*. While the depth and nuance required for such a project is beyond the scope of this work, what follows will serve as a hopeful invitation for this development to be undertaken in the future. For our purposes, we will primarily leave aside notions of the *pāramārthika*, Nirguna Brahman, absolute non-dual consciousness, and *mokṣa* in order instead to deal explicitly with the *vyavahārika* frame of reference, as it is most communicable with the insights of the Process tradition. It will be prudent to follow Gerald Larson in his insistence, "that "consciousness" and its freedom (*kaivalya*) must be, as it were, "bracketed" in any discussion of karma."<sup>52</sup> This specific description of the freedom of consciousness in itself, however, does not preclude discussion of its freedom as it relates to the relational sphere. As this proposal will ultimately show, the relationality of karma allows for a dynamic expression of freedom in and through the lived body. This free-and-easiness of karma is first of all seen in the diversity of its traditional and modern interpretations. It is to this discussion of karma that we now turn.

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<sup>52</sup> Gerald J. Larson, "Karma as a "Sociology of Knowledge" or "Social Psychology" of Process/Praxis" in *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 309.

## CHAPTER TWO: A PRELIMINARY GENEALOGY OF KARMA

*“Whatever I do today is the whole continuum of my experience..If I write for the symphony today, you’re listening to everything that’s happened to me since I was 18 years old.”*<sup>53</sup>

Now that a methodological posture has been outlined, we may begin to examine the forest of ancient and modern interpretations of karma. Karma, like many terms employed in multiple religious and philosophical systems, eludes simple definition. On the personal and traditional level, William Mahony’s entry in the *Encyclopedia of Religion* has it thus, “a person’s behavior leads irrevocably to an appropriate reward or punishment commensurate with that behavior. This, briefly stated, is the law of karman.”<sup>54</sup> A.L. Herman describes it as, “a device for linking up conduct and consequences, in this life, perhaps, or in the next”; following Weber, he carefully supports the theory of karma as the most able of devices to confront theodicy.<sup>55</sup> Typical descriptions invoke frequent reference to the above judicially colored themes of retribution, punishment, or consequence associated with the behavior of individual human subjects. If this brief description is taken as a point of beginning in a traverse of karmic boundaries, it will anthropocentrically limit the scope of karmic action, as well as frame the results of actions in a punitive light that many process thinkers may see as a non-starter. For our current purposes, a working definition suffice: volitionally engaged mutually receptive activity oriented toward a definite and desired end. Reframing karma in this way allows for a transhumanist conception that includes, yet decenters

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<sup>53</sup> Yusef Lateef and Herb Boyd, *The Gentle Giant: The Autobiography of Yusef Lateef* (Irvington, N.J.: Morton Books, 2010), 176.

<sup>54</sup> William K. Mahony, *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones, 2nd ed., vol. 7 (Detroit: Thomson/Gale, 2005), 5093–94.

<sup>55</sup> Arthur L Herman, *The Problem of Evil and Indian Thought* (Motilal Banarsidass Publ., 1993), 212–13.

humanity while emphasizing the non-arbitrary nature of karmic fruition. That fruition rests on a gradient of agential freedom to act based on plural conceptions of *Ananda*, or a plurivalent value maximum that serves as inexhaustible allure. In various streams of Sanskrit thought, there is a natural progression of this erotic lure through the span of human existence encompassing security (*artha*), pleasure (*kama*), ethics (*dharmā*), and liberation (*mokṣa*). According to Sneha Sharma and most other scholars of Indian philosophy, these four aims are conceptual distinctions that express the variable nature of Hindu axiologies, aspects of which reflect an entity's capacity for a dynamic relationship with their environments.<sup>56</sup> When the capacity for process and novelty is increased in particular modes of relationship, the causal efficiency of the system increases in general. In terms of organism, there is an internal integrity that is able to actively process the 'wreckage' produced from life processes. This open ended capacity for biological efficiency forms an intra-subjective evolution of eros that naturally draws experience to its consummate fulfillment. Karma, however broadly defined, functions here as a vector or kinesthetic location for the pursuit and/or attainment of desire; an inherent vibrancy that expresses forward the moment of experience by suggestion of all that is present to awareness. The *Bṛhadaranyaka Upaniṣad* provides the archaic throughline from *vāsanā* as residuals of desire, to *karma* as desire-prompted action, to identity: "As is a man's desire, that becomes his will; what his will becomes, that is the action he does; what action he does, he turns out to be that."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Sneha Sharma, "Purusharthas-Aims of Life" (Joshi - Bedekar College, Thane, 2008), 70.

<sup>57</sup> *BaU* 4.4.5 translated by Robert Goodding, "The Treatise on Liberation-In-Life Critical Edition and Annotated Translation of the Jivanmuktiviveka of Vidyaranya" (Dissertation, 2002), 138.

## DENDRITIC WATERSHEDS OF KARMA

The notion of karma has spread so far from its initial seedbed as to become commonplace in English vernacular. Although typically framed in a colloquial sense of “what comes around, goes around”, mimicking the reciprocal justice of the Hammurabic code, the word itself has come to be a vacuous signifier of a Newtonian-esque moral retribution. “Good—good, bad—bad, and none escape the law” as the renowned Swami Vivekananda quipped in his *Song of the Sannyasin*.<sup>58</sup> There remains a distinction between a more general and universal law of causation, and ethical-moral causation that further muddies the waters. The Theosophical and Orientalist descriptions of karma however are accretions onto the simpler etymology of the phoneme *kr*, and the neuter *karman* (the object of action). The bare definition of karma we can use then, is *action as such*. Moral responsibility undoubtedly retains efficacy on the level of the human social nexus, however can be conceived as parallel to, or an instantiation of universal causal flows. The distinction below, noted by Reichenbach, is determined by their derivative products. The colloquial law of karma as the limited application of causality, functions in the production of *saṃskāras*, while general applications of causality function to produce *phala*, or fruit. Ultimately, for a process-relational articulation of karma, the objective general and subjective particular accounts of causality require reconciliation. Reichenbach notes that, “the adequacy, then, of this reconciliation of the two laws by the distinction between the *phalas* and *saṃskāras* rests on the adequacy of the account which brings the dispositional

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<sup>58</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda (Volume I)* (Lector House, 2024).

and environmental-physical back together.”<sup>59</sup> It is this reconciliation which we aim to sketch out in the following pages.

The mass of secondary literature treating the concept of karma is astounding in itself, dwarfed only by the breadth and application of the concept within primary sources across a diversity of religious traditions. No other concept is so widely assumed in disparate streams of the religious than that of karma; there are intimations of it projected from the pre-Vedic era onward. The generalized tents of Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Jainism, both ancient and modern, are all home to some iteration or other of the somewhat loosely termed ‘doctrines’ of karma and rebirth. While their specific perspectives on karma are distinctive, what is largely shared is a valuation of past and present activity in its efficacy on the dimensions of future experience.<sup>60</sup> As such, it is a supremely vague category for comparison, one that can—and continually has—been shaped by the specific cultural and theological contexts of lived traditions. As with Upaniṣadic descriptions of relationality, it is the existing polyvocal character of *karma* that makes it an ideal vehicle for further articulation within an Advaita-Process dialogue. We must first, however, attempt to discern the form and fluidity of karma as it has been inherited as far as is practicable.

The origins of the karma theory are as opaque as the doctrine seems to be, with no scholarly consensus taken on its original context, nor its development. Eliot Deutsch attests to the general sense of karma as it spans the array of doctrinal specificity, “Whether karma has its roots in the *Rg Veda*, or was borrowed from non-Aryan sources, or whether again it

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<sup>59</sup> Bruce R. Reichenbach, “The Law of Karma and the Principle of Causation,” *Philosophy East and West* 38, no. 4 (October 1988): 406.

<sup>60</sup> Swami Medhananda, *Karma and Rebirth in Hinduism* (Cambridge University Press, 2025), 1.

is but a natural extension of beliefs present in early Vedic times, is of historical importance. All the later systems of Indian thought agree, though, that karma is operative in life; they disagree only about *what* it is that transmigrates and about *how* it takes place; *that* it takes place is accepted, and this alone is of philosophical importance.”<sup>61</sup> Ultimately, as O’Flaherty suggests, the source of karmic thought is inescapably obscure, and rather than a meandering dendritic channel, is instead, “a watershed consisting of many streams—each one an incalculably archaic source of contributing doctrines—Vedic, Ajivaka, Jaina, Dravidian, and tribal.”<sup>62</sup> Doctrinal deltas such as these are as rich and fertile as their metaphor suggests, not only for reconstruction of historic ontologies, but also for the process of eroding and reconstructing the ephemeral bars of sediment that separate braided flows to create new patterns of life.

Johannes Bronkhorst, in an opinion much contested by his peers suggests that the doctrine itself, being completely absent from the Vedic corpus, was—after complete disinterest—grafted onto Brahminic ritualism as a pseudo-political form of power consolidation.<sup>63</sup> Bronkhorst however makes many sweeping claims without sufficient source attribution, and with strange textual dating that reads almost as polemic, casting doubt upon his theory. The late Sri Lankan anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere proposed that a general theory of rebirth served as the conceptual root for eventual flourishing of Indian theories of karma by the process of what he terms “ethicization”. In his view, one shared by other scholars, the pre-Vedic tribal groups of the Gangetic settlement were the

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<sup>61</sup> Eliot Deutsch, *Advaita Vedanta: A Philosophical Reconstruction* (1969; repr., University of Hawaii Press, 1973), 68.

<sup>62</sup> Wendy Doniger, *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), xviii.

<sup>63</sup> Johannes Bronkhorst, *Karma (Dimensions of Asian Spirituality)* (University of Hawaii Press, 2011) 35.

originators of the later composite structure of karmic theory, though similar ideas are even found as far west as Pythagorean and Orphic Greeks. Obeyesekere states his assumption that “religious eschatologies are not unique creations of individual religious geniuses, but are also collective representations—socially shared ideational systems—which have their genesis in the social structure and the collective historical experience of a particular social group.”<sup>64</sup> If rebirth is the essential core of the doctrine of karma however, are they at least conceptually distinguishable? While Obeyesekere takes karmic eschatology to include the three facets of cyclical rebirth, ethical determination, and interdependent continuity (*samsāra*), these are not necessarily mutually implicated in a general sense. As Arvind Sharma indicates, “It is important to recognize that the doctrines of karma and of reincarnation, although logical corollaries, are analytically separable doctrines, even though the two intermesh neatly.”<sup>65</sup> One reason for this is that the first order phenomenon with which karma as a general explanatory theory of cause and effect concerns itself is somewhat empirically observable, though symbolized by non-observable principles. Rebirth, by contrast, is a philosophically necessary rationalization of the continuity of karmic causation, without which diversity in karmic effects would be continually stochastic. This fact may underlie the summary statement of Austin Creel that, “One point on which there seems to be wide agreement is that karma is basic and rebirth is derivative.”<sup>66</sup> Other descriptions of this distinction between karma and rebirth by Indologists tend toward hypothesis against fact, corollary, aspect, or attendant. The import

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<sup>64</sup> Doniger, *Karma and Rebirth*, 139.

<sup>65</sup> Arvind Sharma, “Karma and Reincarnation in Advaita Vedanta,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 18, no. 3 (1990): 219.

<sup>66</sup> Austin B. Creel, “Contemporary Philosophical Treatments of Karma and Rebirth” in *Karma and Rebirth: Post Classical Developments*, ed. Ronald W. Neufeldt (State University of New York Press, 1986), 2.

of this analysis is, if it is granted that the doctrine of rebirth historically preceded the doctrine of karma, the later development seems to require the causal continuity that rebirth provides. Conversely, even if the auxiliary component is unpalatable for modern tastes, it remains often found alongside more general notions of karmic causality.

The separation of rebirth from karma present in secondary literature on karma seems to be representative of the larger penchant of western scholarship to isolate strands of tradition in search of a mythologized purity of doctrine. This habituation is attested to by the division in early Vedic studies between the Brahmanic and Upaniṣadic expressions of karma. For earlier scholars like Deussen and A.B. Keith, the ethical or moral component of karma introduced in the Upaniṣads was a fundamental turning point from the perceived amorality of the Brahmanas. Against this aberration, Herman W. Tull has shown not only the physical, textual contiguity in the Brahmanic expressions of ritualized karma, but also the conceptual continuity between sacrificial causality and the more expansive ethical character of actions in the whole of life. According to Tull, the emphasis on the ethicized interpretation of karma allowed previous scholars to ignore contrary evidence in animistic contexts based on what would appear as a secular—if not liberal protestant—bias. This superficial interpretation of karma, he argues, “echoed the larger view that scholars held regarding the relationship of the Brahmanas and the Upaniṣads.”<sup>67</sup>

The early Upaniṣads, though containing the *bija* of future karmic developments, were still doctrinally indeterminate until the middle Upaniṣadic period. Influence from the Patanjali system of Yoga, the Sankhya, along with poetic verse, and conceptual specificity are unique to the middle and late Upaniṣads such as the *Kathaka*, *Svetaśvatara*, and the

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<sup>67</sup> Herman W Tull, *The Vedic Origins of Karma* (State University of New York Press, 1989), 27.

*Maitrayana Upaniṣads*.<sup>68</sup> The prototypal expression of karma as it is generally understood is found in the *Bṛhadaranyaka Upaniṣad*, dated to the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. In the text, Ārtabhāga asks the sage Yājñavalkya, a figure carried over from earlier ritual narrative, what it is that occurs after the terminus of the deceased. Ārtabhāga is already well acquainted with the relational commingling of the individual with the totality, as he describes “the nose in air, the eye into the sun, the mind in the moon” etc., effectively reversing the sacrificial creation of the cosmos by the membering of the lord Prajāpati. Yet Ārtabhāga implores, what happens next? Yājñavalkya then takes him by the hand, and imparts to him the esoteric doctrine of the return;

What they mentioned there was only work, and what they praised there was also work alone. (Therefore) one indeed becomes good through good work and evil through evil work.<sup>69</sup>

This good and evil is proposed by Tull not as a reference to generalized moral value, but as the extension of a more particularized notion of ritual efficacy; a mistake in the performance of the ritual results in the inability to attain the desired end. It is for this reason that he confirms the Upaniṣadic doctrine of karma as conceptually continuous with the sacrificial context of the Brahmanas.<sup>70</sup> The *punya karman*, or good action (often translated as merit) indicated the transient effect of the ritualized action to achieve its essential aim, or world. The *papa karman*, or bad action (demerit) on the other hand, indicated the absence of necessary ritual injunctions. If one achieved *punya* through the prescribed exterior ritual sacrifices proxied by priestly specialists, one would attain to the cyclical transience of *pitryana*, the path of the ancestors. Alternatively, if one instead “interiorizes”

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<sup>68</sup> Hajime Nakamura, *A History of Early Vedanta Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990), 38.

<sup>69</sup> Bṛhadaranyaka Upaniṣad 3.2.13 translation by Swami Swahananda, *Chandogya and Bṛhadaranyaka Upaniṣads* (Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1989).

<sup>70</sup> Tull, *The Vedic Origins of Karma*, 31.

this sacrifice by the dissolution of subject-object distinction and sacrificial approach to life itself, the *devayana* is attained, a teleologic world where continual karmic maintenance is not required. This endeavor to become increasingly integrated with the universe was a fundamental aim of the Upaniṣads karmic process. Francis Clooney emphasizes that for Śankara and the Vedāntins, it is *Brahman* as the Lord that provides the fundamental animation of action itself. In the classical view, Brahman is responsible for the apportioning of karmic results as a response to the previous free choice of the agent. Thus, Brahman conceived as both the material and efficient cause of the universe, is in a relationship of beginningless and non-reciprocal dependence, or *tadatmya* with the cosmos. This is seemingly in continuity with the general theory of causality held by the Vedānta, and from Śankara through Prakāśātman is seen as *naisargika* (natural) as the example of seed and sprout. Although sharing the general shape of the *asatkāryavāda* of the Vaiśeṣika and the *satkāryavāda* of the Sāṃkhya philosophical schools, the Vedāntic expression of causality situates the ultimate origin of any effect not to a self-organizing mass of atomic constituents, nor to an inert unmodified *prakṛti*, but to the Absolute. In the *asatkāryavāda* theory, an effect can manifest effectively *ex-nihilo*, while in the *satkāryavāda* theory, every effect is latent in a potential state. The Vedāntins anticipate Whitehead’s ontological principle in which, “there is nothing which floats into the world from nowhere.”<sup>71</sup>

The unmanifest (*asat*) is conceived as simply the dialectical absence of expression, not what is commonly thought of as pure nothingness.<sup>72</sup> Where Vedānta parts ways with Sāṃkhya on causation, is that for Śankara and his lineage, change necessitates the lucidity

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<sup>71</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, David Ray Griffin, and Donald W Sherburne, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York, N.Y.: The Free Press, 1985), 244.

<sup>72</sup> Daniel Soars, *The World and God Are Not-Two* (Fordham University Press, 2023), 106.

of experiencing, or perhaps *feeling* consciousness. While causality is entertained *sub specie durationis*, the flow of multiplicity comes forth out of the very being of Brahman. The potentiality of those unmanifest forms before actualization are not substantive in Brahman, but are instead contained within the *tattva* of the ineffable power of *māyā*, to which we shall turn in the next chapter. Nevertheless, in Clooney's reading, "the sacrifice is a microcosm showing us how causality in general works."<sup>73</sup> This ritually and scripturally informed view of activity is what constitutes a specifically Vedāntic interpretation of karma.

### MODERN VEDĀNTIC NOTIONS OF KARMA

The contemporary discussion of karma, perhaps in part from its divorce from the Vedic context, seems to gravitate toward critiques of ontological closure, temporal determinism, and lack of human agency or freedom. Critics have levied accusations that the doctrine of karma, and by association any streams of the religious that claim it are deficient to Abrahamic religions in terms of the affirmation of world-value, an orientation toward charity, and a progressive social and political ethic. This critique has been responded to in numerous ways by ensuing commentators, correcting prevailing misunderstandings by proposing that the conditions provided for by karma are not a hierarchical restriction on free will, but in some respects a result of the previous free choice of a given agent. Karma then is not a prison of mechanically predetermined action but what N.A. Nikam calls, "a modal possibility or a conditional relativity" grounded in the self-givenness of free response.<sup>74</sup> J. Bruce Long alternatively proposes the *Mahabharata*

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<sup>73</sup> Francis X. Clooney, "Evil, Divine Omnipotence, and Human Freedom: Vedānta's Theology of Karma," *The Journal of Religion* 69, no. 4 (October 1989): 541, <https://doi.org/10.1086/488203>.

<sup>74</sup> Narayanrao Appurao Nikam, *Some Concepts of Indian Culture; a Philosophical Interpretation*

contribution of *bhakti*, or devotion, as counterpoint to the Vedāntic expression of karma, where rather than mokṣa, emphasis is placed on the pragmatic removal of karmic debt. In his view, “The Indian sages conceived of life, within both the micro- and macro-cosmic spheres, not as a steady state but as a process”, one which he glosses as a movement of “energy conceived to be something on the order of an electrical current or a bundle of forces fluctuating within an electromagnetic field (*kṣetra*) with good and bad, meritorious and unmeritorious deeds acting as the positive and negative charges.”<sup>75</sup> Additionally, notions of karma contain both polarities of sin, in the psychologically motivating sense, and of evil in the passive sense of explanation for events of experience. These two, *daivam* as passively received, and *puruṣākara* as volitional action are expressed in the *ayurvedic* medical texts as expressions of karma. Austin Creel further divides contemporary notions of *karma* into the exclusive and associational views, the former being a view where it is exhaustive of causal occurrence, and the latter where there are accompanying forces in addition to *karma*. This marginalization of karma may not be entirely compatible with the classical view, however it may be an organic evolution of the doctrine when placed in conversation with liberal philosophy. As well-intentioned, but misinformed Orientalist interpretations of karma as deterministic flourished in early Vedic studies, defenders often took to theodictic arguments that stressed the ethical and volitional components of karma, along with its ‘external’ or non-ethical causes. The exclusive view, Creel suggests, is supported by Advaitins by locating freedom within a non-material “spiritual realm”. This assertion, although understandable if importing foreign categories of ‘material’ and

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(Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1967), 29.

<sup>75</sup> J. Bruce Long, “Human Action and Rebirth in the Mahabharata” in Wendy Doniger, *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 57-58.

‘spiritual’, is a category error, whether genuine or not. The western liberal notions of individual freedom are not as neatly translatable to Indian conceptual schemes as Creel may think. Śrī Rāmānuja for instance, takes *karma* to be entirely deterministic of experience, and freedom (from *karma*) as a subjective disposition of service to the Supreme Being.<sup>76</sup> A secondary defense is shared by some commentators such as Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Hiriyanna in terms of self-determination even within exclusive views of karma, where even if karma is the sole determinant of present conditions, it is a continuation of that self-determinative freedom.<sup>77</sup> Radhakrishnan, the former president of India and a perhaps more modern representative of Vedānta, takes this apologetic stance towards the karma doctrine in part due to the religious marginalization he faced as a Hindu in academic spaces dominated by Christianity. An analogy famously utilized by Radhakrishnan to explicate the function of *karma* to free will is that of a game of bridge where one perpetually retains the autonomy to play the hand one is dealt. He summarizes, “The cards in the game are given to us. We do not select them. They are traced to past Karma but we are free to make any call as we think fit and lead any suit.”<sup>78</sup>

For Matilal, the beginningless nature of karma is not at all unintelligible, however, “karma doctrine is intelligible only if we assume that nature has a purpose and direction.”<sup>79</sup> There must be, in short, *allure*. An evolutionary interpretation of the doctrine is further given by both Radhakrishnan and Sri Aurobindo, one where karmic fruition maintains some ultimate teleological orientation, and where the universe itself is a “progressive

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<sup>76</sup> Swami Tapasyananda, *Bhakti Schools of Vedānta* (Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2019), 58.

<sup>77</sup> Austin B. Creel, *Karma and Rebirth: Post Classical Developments*, ed. Ronald W. Neufeldt (State University of New York Press, 1986), 5.

<sup>78</sup> Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *An Idealist View of Life* (Harper Collins, 2009), 205.

<sup>79</sup> Bimal K. Matilal, “A Note on Śamkara’s Theodicy,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 20, no. 4 (1992): 375.

becoming”.<sup>80</sup> Ultimately however, according to Aurobindo, the Absolute is beyond the conceptual distinctions of being or becoming, while still including them non-exclusively. In his estimation, the very process of evolution itself was indicative of karma at work, and karma at work was indicative of evolution. In an almost Teilhardian way, Aurobindo shapes his interpretation of karma by appealing to causal increases in complexity, “Nature develops from stage to stage and in each stage takes up its past and transforms it into stuff of its new development.”<sup>81</sup> In his own framing, Aurobindo distances himself from a retributive karmic mechanism of reward and punishment. Rather than seeing moral, or *dharmic* action as the central operative factor in evolutionary progress, it is a variegated appropriation of cosmic energies where, “at each stage she gives returns according to the development of the aim and consciousness of the being.”<sup>82</sup> Thus we have in both Radhakrishnan and Sri Aurobindo a re-expansion, or perhaps more accurately, a translation of the doctrine of karma into contemporary language and philosophy. The engine of the cyclical aspect of karmic rebirth is for the express purpose of attaining to novel forms of complexification, where “the whole of evolution is the Spirit’s free becoming, experiencing freely the involution and evolution of the many possibilities of the process”.<sup>83</sup>

For Radhakrishnan, two fundamental differences arise in his evolutionary view of karma. In contrast to Sri Aurobindo, Radhakrishnan, according to Robert Minor’s analysis, retains a somewhat temporal eschatology at odds with traditional Advaita cosmology that confirms the perpetuity of becoming. The soteriological orientation retained by

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<sup>80</sup> Robert N. Minor, “In Defense of Karma And Rebirth: Evolutionary Karma” in *Karma and Rebirth: Post Classical Developments*, ed. Ronald W. Neufeldt (State University of New York Press, 1986), 16.

<sup>81</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, vol. 21–22 (1940; repr., Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 2005), 790-1.

<sup>82</sup> Sri Aurobindo, quoted in Robert N. Minor, “In Defense of Karma And Rebirth: Evolutionary Karma” in *Karma and Rebirth*, 29.

<sup>83</sup> Minor, “In Defense of Karma And Rebirth: Evolutionary Karma” in *Karma and Rebirth*, 30.

Radhakrishnan, perhaps due to his association with scholars of Christianity, takes on a notably cosmological role. Secondly, though agreeing with Aurobindo in the denial of retributive models of karma, he affirms the continuity of universal energetic causation as represented in Sri Aurobindo, with the ethical orientation of that same energetic causative principle as it operates within the field of human relations. It is for this continuity that Radhakrishnan can confirm positively that attributes like justice are themselves inherent in the Absolute. Karma then is symbolic not only of temporal continuity, but with future possibility. God, for Radhakrishnan, does not merely dole out pre-packaged karmic results, unfolding them from a realm of pure potentials, but instead is intimately involved in the creative process of ever-new possibilities. Rather than an aloof notion of deity, “Struggle and growth are real in the life of God” who is not diminished by association with time, but bound to it by the love of an artist.<sup>84</sup> Perhaps most importantly for the purposes of this study, the cosmos in its interdependent nature is for Radhakrishnan a living plurality: “Reality, in other words, is an organism, furnished with a multiplicity of organs and manifestations of life.”<sup>85</sup>

Although there is precious little cross-philosophical work with Process and Advaita, Radhakrishnan himself engaged significantly with Whitehead’s thought, and according to Hartshorne, did not perceive his position as entirely incompatible with the process view. Likewise, Hartshorne himself sees value in Radhakrishnan’s thought, extolling him as among the chief “wise men and lovers of wisdom” he had met in his life. Radhakrishnan’s concern with Whitehead’s expansion of feeling is the looming confusion

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<sup>84</sup> Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *An Idealist View of Life* (Harper Collins, 2009), 252.

<sup>85</sup> Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, “The Vedanta Philosophy and the Doctrine of Maya XXIV (October, 1890 to July, 1914),” *The International Journal of Ethics* 24, no. 4 (July 1914): 440.

that a psychologism of matter would entail, and he opts for a more neutral monism rather than a Berkleyan idealism, where matter, in “its otherness to mind is unaffected, however much it may be etherealized.”<sup>86</sup> Secondly, in terms of creativity, Radhakrishnan takes issue with the opacity of Whitehead’s creativity which is actualized, or real only in its eventive entities. Radhakrishnan asks, “What is the source of limitation which turns this purely indeterminate creativity into a determinate freedom? Since God is only one of the accidents, he cannot be regarded as the source of the accident itself. He cannot be both the cause and the effect.”<sup>87</sup> In comparison to Radhakrishnan’s engagement with Whitehead, a similar dialogue takes place as between the Bhāmatī and Vivarana schools of Advaita a thousand years prior. Where they inquire, is the location of the causal factor of relationality within the related entity? Or is the related entity a product of causal relation? The Bhāmatī would of course say that relation is actualized and real in the life of the related entity, but of the Vivarana, this does not pass their logical standard. For Padmapādācārya, relationality has its locus in the Absolute itself. Both of these interpretations are however porous and relevant to the epistemic level of the inquirer. Most of Hartshorne’s confusion with the thought of Radhakrishnan concerns the latter’s seeming rejection of panpsychism, for which he offers a helpful clarification. It is not that he specifically rejects panpsychism outright, but simply that his idealism is one that concerns *value*, not metaphysical definitions of mind or matter. For the most part, Radhakrishnan finds the reduction of matter to mind somewhere in the gradient of unnecessary to irrelevant.

Specifically regarding the third onto-epistemic level of the *paramārthika*, Hartshorne highlights the potential benefit in Whiteheadian cosmology of adopting a

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<sup>86</sup> Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *An Idealist View of Life* (Harper Collins, 2009), 247.

<sup>87</sup> Radhakrishnan, *An Idealist View of Life*, 329.

logical distinction between the subjectivity of God and the Absolute in no uncertain terms. He admits, “Such phrases as, “the Absolute is the pro-cosmic nature of God,” God is the Absolute “in relation to the cosmos,” can perhaps be assimilated to our theory.”<sup>88</sup> Where Hartshorne finds difficulty is precisely at the point where Radhakrishnan’s metaphysical precision wanes, and he breaks with tradition. Hartshorne notes Radhakrishnan’s association of activity (and I would include causal potentiality) with the Absolute as unacceptable, a point on which Śankara himself would agree. However Radhakrishnan in his response notes that he locates both the potential and actual in a non-separable God-Absolute. Although this tallies with the epistem-ontological *tadatmya* relation between the relative and absolute views, Radhakrishnan’s playfulness with the frameworks is somewhat perplexing. Hartshorne further brings attention to the temporal eschatology of Radhakrishnan, where the cosmos is not endless, but achieves a definite aim. In this regard, it appears that Radhakrishnan is more alluding to the Indian cyclical cosmology of consecutive *srsti*, *stithi*, and *pralaya*. It is the co-eternality of *this* universe that is temporally contingent, not universality as such. In this, Radhakrishnan does agree with Hartshorne that the divine purpose is in fact, inexhaustible.

### **WHOSE KARMA?**

For Swami Vivekananda as well, karma is not the mechanistic determination of fate, but the evolutionary and “eternal assertion of human freedom”.<sup>89</sup> This freedom inherent in his interpretation of the doctrine allowed for a social element likely nourished

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<sup>88</sup> Charles Hartshorne, *The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (Delhi Motilal Banarsidass, 1992), 320.

<sup>89</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. V (Lector House, 2024), 213.

by the burgeoning decolonization of India, a self-determinacy that was not solely individual, but communal. George Williams proposes that, “Vivekananda extended individual karma to a notion of collective karma; but this notion changes simple karma (reaping what you sow) to a compounded karma (reaping what others sow as well).<sup>90</sup> The lasting nature of experience, Vivekananda held, cannot be destroyed, but is spread out equally in space-time, and that like a bio-physical echo, revisits both individual and collective karma in subjective experience.<sup>91</sup> The concept of group karma, to some a seeming imposition upon ‘classical doctrine’—which we have seen is itself a contested phrase—is complicated further by notions of agency, efficacy, and moral justice. Some modern commentators like Daya Krishna hold that the moral and causal intelligibility of the world itself—facts required by a coherent doctrine of *karma* according to Chatterjee—would fall into question if it were possible to harvest the results of another’s work. However, there need not be such an impasse. One possible rectification is that individuals experiencing similar events have similar karmic pedigrees that join them together in common experience. Jeffery D. Long seems to allude to this position with respect to the Jain tradition’s reception; although explicit notions of collective karma are absent, this does not preclude a natural biomagnification effect of individuated karmic residues.<sup>92</sup> P. Paramewara alternatively proposes a zero-sum solution, wherein the actions visited upon someone by another are not exclusively a foreign source of *karma*, but rather a calibrated

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<sup>90</sup> George M. Williams, “Swami Vivekananda’s Conception of Karma and Rebirth” in *Karma and Rebirth: Post Classical Developments*, ed. Ronald W. Neufeldt (State University of New York Press, 1986), 54.

<sup>91</sup> Vidyāranya himself seems to associate the fruition of karma not just with the individual, but with the cosmos. (JMV 1.6.17) It seems reasonable to suggest, just as the personal aspects of *prārabdha* must be borne out in the body, so-called non-personal aspects must be experienced in the life of the world.

<sup>92</sup> Jeffery D. Long, *The Roar of Awakening: A Whiteheadian Dialogue between Western Psychotherapies and Eastern Worldviews*, ed. George Edward Derfer, Zhi He Wang, and Michel Weber (Frankfurt Am Main: Ontos Verl., Cop, 2009), 85.

receipt of karmic fruits via the instruments of intersubjective or world forces.<sup>93</sup> This interpretative solution effectively preserves the intelligibility criterion of karmic causation, while still allowing for more branching karmic streams. The notion of karmic transfer is one that reaches as far back as the origins of the doctrine itself.

Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty surveys the doctrine from an alternate point of beginning, that of Indic death ritualism. Following David Knipe’s research into the Vedic *śraddha* rites, she suggests that the original ritual conception of merit transfer to deceased ancestors was thought to *prevent* ‘re-death’ in lower realms through a surrogate source of beneficial karmic substance provided through the male lineage. Through the real offering of food, *karma* was thought to be transferred from the living descendent to the deceased ancestor, extending their existence in post-mortem realms of existence. Further examples of transference include bequeathment to descendants from parents, sexual intercourse, or the transfer of demerit to guests, rivals, or religious figures. O’Flaherty notes that the process of merit transfer can also be seen in the extant ritual process of *prasada*; she proposes, “*Prasada* in this sense is a recycling of powers; the offering is a food (the usual medium of merit transfer) given to the god to keep him “alive” in limbo, like a *preta*, to give him the power to act; and the *prasada* is a form of power granted to the worshipper in return. This transfer is a practical, ecologically ethical exchange.”<sup>94</sup> Karmic transference in this case, seems to also necessitate the existence of a body, volitional agency, and functional capacity. Following Mckim Marriott, the notion of transference relies on a

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<sup>93</sup> Creel, *Karma and Rebirth*, 6.

<sup>94</sup> Wendy Doniger, “Karma and Rebirth in the Vedas and Puranas” in *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 12.

postulation of “substance-code” that forms a dividual conception of agency where actor and action are mutually implicated. Marriott’s position is here worth being quoted fully.

Indian thought about transactions differs from much of Western sociological and psychological thought in not presuming the separability of actors from actions. By Indian modes of thought, what goes on *between* actors are the same connected processes of mixing and separation that go on *within* actors. Actors' particular natures are thought to be results as well as causes of their particular actions (*karma*). Varied codes of action or codes for conduct (*dharma*) are thought to be naturally embodied in actors and otherwise substantialized in the flow of things that pass among actors. Thus the assumption of the easy, proper separability of action from actor, of code from substance (similar to the assumption of the separability of law from nature, norm from behavior, mind from body, spirit or energy from matter) that pervades both Western philosophy and Western common sense (see, for example, the analysis of American kinship by Schneider 1968) is generally absent: code and substance (Sanskrit *purusa* and *prakriti*, *dharma* and *śarira*, and so on) cannot have separate existences in this world of constituted things as conceived by most South Asians.<sup>95</sup>

It becomes quickly apparent that discussing the general doctrine of *karma* within alternative language models is fraught with the obstacles of mistranslation. The neat categories of Cartesian dualism, Berkeleyan idealism, and scientific materialism are ill-fitted garments for the particular and plural bodies of Sanskrit philosophy. If what constitutes spirit, or body for that matter is internally coherent within schemes of post-Hellenic theological or Euro-Atlantic philosophical discourse—and even this is hyperbole—those same terms cannot be applied unilaterally within linguistic translation without conceptual aberration. As Marriott’s work itself attests, a compound neologism must sometimes be introduced to attempt fidelity to an ontological scheme within natural language. The term dividual, coined by Marriott, is proposed to highlight the belief in and experience of the nonduality of the *dvandvas*, or pairs of opposites that constitute experience. The experiential spectrum itself, as Marriott confirms, is graded along a

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<sup>95</sup> McKim Marriott, *Transaction and Meaning: Directions in the Anthropology of Exchange and Symbolic Behavior*, ed. Bruce Kapferer (Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1976), 109-110.

virtually infinite continuum of *sthula* and *sukhma*, with identity being negotiated based on the hospitality of transactional relationships. These transactions themselves touch every aspect of human life as described by Marriott in terms of both caste and *asrama*. Variables of both power and value are implicated in this gradient based on capability of transformation, which will be relevant to my argument in following chapters. Transactions of substance-code, as Marriott describes them, are categorized quantitatively on a spectrum of minimal and maximal. Qualitatively, transactions can be distinguished on a continuum of pessimal to optimal. In other words, there is a multi-axis gradient of transference in terms of volume of karmic transactions, and transaction in terms of the asymmetrical subtlety of karmic residue.

The notion of transference however was vitriolic to both the Buddhists, and the Jainas, as P.S. Jaini points out, “Jaina tradition has always held that an individual soul can experience results accruing only to actions which it has *itself* performed.”<sup>96</sup> To put it another way, the monadic karmic windows are tightly shut. In soteriologically oriented systems like Buddhism, Jainism, as well as Yoga and Advaita Vedānta, the non-transferrability of karmic residues, however conceived outside of its philosophical implications, emphasizes the personal responsibility and agency required in remitting them for liberatory purposes. As Creel posits, “understanding karma provides therapeutic knowledge; one blames oneself, not anybody else, for one’s present state, and one knows that one’s future will be shaped by one’s own actions. This obviates bitterness toward others.”<sup>97</sup> Karl Potter however reluctantly disagrees with Marriott’s analysis with respect

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<sup>96</sup> Karl H. Potter, “The Karma Theory and Its Interpretation in Some Indian Philosophical Systems” in *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 235.

<sup>97</sup> Creel, *Karma and Rebirth*, 2.

to the Yoga and Advaita conceptions of karma on similar grounds as Jaini. He seems to find a discrepancy in approach within Hindu systems that he describes as the parallel indigenous transactional and philosophical streams. While one stream of tradition accepts the transfer of *karma*, the other parallel stream does not. Potter suggests that, “the karma theory did not arise from the transactional one, or vice versa, but that they represent two distinct traditions requiring reconciliation in any satisfactory world-view.”<sup>98</sup> The former view of non-transference has been termed by Potter as the *nivṛtti* perspective, while the latter represents the *pravṛtti* perspective that have been held in tandem by historical South Asian traditions. This synthesis, he proposes, is attested to in the addition of *mokṣa* to the *trivarga* of *dharma*, *artha*, and *kama*, as well as the reconciliatory framing of the *Bhagavadgita*. It is no surprise then, that if the notion of karma as non-transactional stems from an alternative development in bio-teleology, that it would possibly require an internal revision of transactional relationships to suit that end. For this reason, it is possible to say that some iterations of karmic doctrine were not intended to serve as air-tight theoretical formulations, but as frameworks for soteriological efficacy. However, the very argument given by Potter for the non-transferability of *karma* is its focus on individual liberation. While this point is valid, the soteriological aim of Vedānta is insufficient reason to propose that its model of causality rejects interdependence on the liberal end, or mutual influence on the conservative end of the matter. Though in Marriott’s estimation, the karmic self is individual, that self is not equatable with the *Ātman* of the Advaita tradition.

These issues of transferability and non-transferability of karmic residues are not as incommensurate as Potter suggests. For Ashok Gangadean, Yoga and Advaita do not seem

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<sup>98</sup> Potter, “The Karma Theory”, 266.

to explicitly deny the general notion of what he deems “lateral” transaction in the temporal process of birth, death, and rebirth. This, as other scholars have proposed, is a shared commitment within the scope of samsāra and qualificational monism. Instead, he proposes that the general notion of transferability is accepted, while the more nuanced notion of “vertical transference of karmic residues *between* different *jivas* is a point of specific disagreement which is permitted within the generic paradigm.”<sup>99</sup> The basic paradigm put forth supports karmic transferability in all respects as intelligible. Gangadean leaves open the rationale for rejecting this specific premise, while accepting the general—though it can be reasonably proposed based on the previously mentioned soteriological orientation, in addition to the coherence of the doctrine of rebirth. If karmic residues are able to be transmitted between entities, how can karmic results be adequately and justly appropriated? Perhaps it is better to tally with Gangadean when he asserts, “Causality in *karma* ontology is not an external principle of association of distinct events but rather an *internal* principle of qualitative inheritance..”<sup>100</sup>

The notion of a historical analysis in which reconciliatory efforts are made with respect to divergent traditions is, to Gerald James Larson, a scholarly imposition with no basis in indigenous cultural systems. Instead, he proposes that both the transactional and non-transactional paradigms can be subsumed within a larger conceptual framework such as found in the Sankhyan tradition of Sanskrit philosophy. There is, to his estimation, a confluence of both vertical and horizontal transactions within the person, one of which is instantaneous and thus non-transferable, while the other is diachronic and temporally forward-leaning. The *linga* level, for *Sankhya*, “defines the appropriation of “pastness” in

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<sup>99</sup> Gangadean, “Comparative Ontology and the Interpretation of ‘Karma’”, 253.

<sup>100</sup> Gangadean, “Comparative Ontology and the Interpretation of ‘Karma’”, 214.

the present point-instant, whereas the *bhava*-level defines the projective, futural possibilities for any subsequent point-instant in the present point-instant.”<sup>101</sup> Both of these aspects together constitute his reconciliation of both transferable *praxis* oriented, and non-transferable *process* levels of karma. This dyad is located in Larson’s interpretation within the *Sankhyan* metaphysic of the *guṇas*—specifically the externalizing mode of *rajas*. The *Sankhyan* system is well-known to the Vedāntins, and borrowed from extensively both in metaphysical terminology, and preliminary spiritual practice. One crucial point of difference is that while the *Sankhya* posits an effectively infinite number of *purusas*, Advaita posits the non-plurality of the Atma. Additionally, the *Sankhya* has no particular use for the concept of *Īśvara*, due to the fact that the dynamism inherent in the *Sankhyan* conception of *prakṛti*, or nature is the source of its self-organization. Transference of karmic residues is for the followers of Kapila, a self-contained organic process, whereas for the Vedānta, *Īśvara* is an essential component of the apportioning of karmic results in all instances, both process and praxis. As the medieval Advaitin Vidyāraṇya Swami later asserts, “..do not think that individual efforts are not necessary, for the Lord transforms Himself as those efforts. If all actions proceed from *Īśvara*, is there any scope left then for human endeavor? The will of *Īśvara* is converted into the individual will and endeavor.” Will, properly centered in Advaitic tradition, is a shared category belonging to all entities. Despite the major philosophical deviations of Larson from our subject matter, this approach bears the most similarity to a treatment of the problem of transferability within Advaitic notions of karma.

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<sup>101</sup> Gerald J. Larson, “Karma as a “Sociology of Knowledge” or “Social Psychology” of Process/Praxis” in *Karma and Rebirth: Post Classical Developments*, ed. Ronald W. Neufeldt (State University of New York Press, 1986), 5.

Karma, if taken to be compossible with notions of transferrability, takes on a properly *sympathetic* character, where personal karma is unrestricted to individuality, but is affected by the karma of the world. Additionally, this affectivity is not only impacted by other individuals, but by the communal karma that arises in the aggregate. Abe suggests, “in terms of collective karma - we are responsible for everything caused by human *avidyā* universally rooted in human nature - that is, for everything including what is apparently unrelated to us in the ordinary sense.”<sup>102</sup> This radical sense of karmic imperative is applied by Abe even to shared responsibility for events like the Holocaust. Though the issue of karmic responsibility raised by Abe is important to note with reference to the transferability issue, it is our argument that this transferability extends outside the anthropocentric bounds Abe delineates. Both the depth of individual karma, and the breadth of collective karma must be stretched not just horizontally across societies, but vertically through grades of intensity. Abe refers to this as the “cosmic solidarity” where, “even such natural phenomena as earthquakes and sunshine are not excluded from the sympathetic universality of karma, but are realized as a unitary dimension of karma pervading the entire universe, this cosmic unity of karma being now realized at the depth of one's realization of individual karma.”<sup>103</sup> It is this more-than-human sympathetic character of karma that allows karmic residues to affect, and be affected by each other in webs of ever intensified webs of mutual relation.

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<sup>102</sup> John B Cobb, Christopher Ives, and Masao Abe, *The Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 40-41.

<sup>103</sup> Abe, *The Emptying God*, 49-50.

## REINCARNATION AS HAUNTING

No discussion of karma would be acceptable without reference to the traditional view of reincarnation, or the transmigration of souls. Although the technical details of this specific approach to theodicy are beyond the range of elucidation here, the concept further helps to decenter anthropocentric tendencies. J. Bruce Long again identifies the perpetuity of the soul with the fundamental condition of agential capacity, “Reward and punishment are thus not decreed by a god or gods nor by any other supernatural personage. It is a person’s own actions, in conformity to the moral and cosmic law (dharma), that is determinative.”<sup>104</sup> To revisit the earlier referenced themes of reward and punishment would be in a way to retrogress to a more narrowly defined examination of karma. We should be cautious however to avoid intellectual colonialism and retain a supportive stance toward humanistic representations for the sake of cultural reincarnation beliefs of indigenous peoples. Indeed, as Mayra Rivera offers in speaking of the haunting nature of decentralized memory, “Possession is the result of the failure to acknowledge the necessary distance from and otherness of the past—a past that cannot be fully present.”<sup>105</sup> While the notion of possession as Rivera describes it is not applicable to our treatment of karma, perhaps it can still be said that in the sense of karmic continuity, as new bodies of action and feeling are formed in relation, insufficiently felt karmic residues take possession of those bodies as hauntings that potentially diminish creative arrangements. The re-enfleshment of bodies are, in a certain sense, corporeal ghosts caught in the tension between an honoring embrace of the past, and a coercive clinging to it.

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<sup>104</sup> J. Bruce Long, *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones, 2nd ed., vol. 8 (Detroit: Thomson/Gale, 2005), 7677.

<sup>105</sup> Stephen D Moore and Mayra Rivera, *Planetary Loves: Spivak, Postcoloniality, and Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 123.

To maintain a properly theandroc cosmic versioning of *karma*, channeling Raimundo Pannikar, the transspecies view of textual commentators is of value. Frequently referenced in prakāraṇa texts by Adi Śāṅkarācārya is the glory of the human birth, indicated as a fortuitous event within the range of saṃsāric nativities. In the introduction of his Vivekacudamani, worth quoting at length, he extols,

For all living creatures, a human birth is indeed rare; much more difficult it is to attain full manhood; rarer than this is a sāttvika attitude in life. Even after gaining all these rare chances, to have steadfastness on the path of spiritual activity as explained in Vaidika literature is yet rarer; much more so, to have a correct knowledge of the deep significances of the scriptures. Discrimination between the Real and the unreal, a personal experience of spiritual glory and ultimately to get fully established in the living consciousness that the Self in me is the Self in all – these come only later on and culminate in one's Liberation. This kind of a perfect Liberation cannot be had without merits earned in hundred crores of lives, lived intelligently.<sup>106</sup>

However, far from privileging the human consciousness, the sentiment sits within a greater schema of the fluidity of societies of actual occasions to transgress the hegemonically demarcated boundaries of species. By the force of agency modulated by the *guṇas* acting on the karmic variegation of suggestive experience, societies of actual occasions become eddying vortices within the braided stream of becoming. Reincarnation is here taken in its true sense, as re-enfleshment, as continual resurrection of new life from death. Sanskrit philosophical theology like the Vedānta does not seek escape from this cycle per se, but rather recognition of reality in the depths of time, space, and causation.

In the Uttara Mīmāṃsā Sūtras (3.1.1-5), Bādarāyana sets out to defend the position of the Vedānta with respect to the way in which the vital principle enveloped in its accidents travels through the beginningless wheel of existence. Drawing from the fourth chapter of

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<sup>106</sup> Swami Chinmayananda, Shankara's Vivekacudamani (Chinmaya Publications, 1991), 14.

the Brihadaranyaka Upaniṣad, “Then those pranas gather around him”, Śankara commenting asks in a manner, ‘Do we take the world with us when we go?’. The purvapakshin replies no, but Śankara counters by affirming. “We must understand that the soul when passing from one body to another is enveloped by the subtle parts of the elements which are the seeds of the new body.” There is, to hastily preempt a term, an objective immortality to the world as it is taken in causal form through the series of geneses and termini. The form of the world however, as it disembogues through the ritual offering of the five libations moves as fluid, as de-substantialized flows of experience. Śankara continues with the example of a caterpillar stretching, reaching, yearning out of its current arrangement toward something new, something novel, something fresh. “The (action of the) caterpillar is (not the non-abandonment of the old body but) merely the lengthening out of the creative effort whose object is the new body to be obtained, which (new body) is presented by the karman of the soul.” Finally, it is followed to a new bodiedness, a new fleshly corporeality by the lingering affects of its longing.

This imagery used by the Vedāntins in explaining the transmigratory biotics of consciousness is of dual purpose. The primary aim of the elucidation by Śankara is to draw out the more condensed teachings of the original sūtras to strengthen the position of the Vedānta against a multiplicity of competing ontologies, epistemologies, and phenomenologies of the Naiyaya, Vaiśeṣika, Purva Mīmāṃsā, and also the Buddhists. Secondly, the propagation of detailed textual analysis and study was and is still itself a form of ritualized knowledge formation in the tradition. The threefold Vedāntic sadhana of *śravana*, *manana*, and *nidhidhyāsana* formed the core injunctive practice of the *jijñāsu* to attain to stable and direct experiential knowledge of the Absolute. The second facet of this

sadhana, mananam, is leveraged to gain essential clarity about the darśana of the Self, but more functionally to remove contrary and competing ideas that cloud that view. The soteriological aim of the Vedānta is unfailingly the freedom available not simply beyond the body, displaced in space, nor postponed to a later date in time. The heartfelt endeavor of Śāṅkara and his followers is to reveal the trans-temporal freedom as it is embodied in the flesh of the world. The Vedāntic body-mind, itself a unified entity in contradistinction to much Western discourse, includes the gross and subtle *vyakta* and *avyakta*, and is the abiding place where karmic feeling and fruition occurs. The body becomes a field, persuaded by *vāsanā* where the echo of past action is felt, and its malleability for the future is made available. The world as it appears to us may not directly coincide with the testament of Vedic scripture, however *śruti* itself is leveraged to bridge the seeming gap between experience and knowledge. To accomplish this, Śāṅkara and his kin often begin by courting generously the world as given in our own experience, slowly and surgically moving one engaged in close study to subtler modes of experience that accord with more fidelity the knowledge of Advaita. Śāṅkara, in many ways like the caterpillar in the vignette, stretches out between the *vyavahārika* and the *pāramārthika*, precariously perched between bodies to risk a freshness, a new way of being, a resurrection body.

Several distinctions arise in the examination and interpretation of the foundational notion of karmic activity; the doctrine can be perceived along a spectrum of dualities as retributive or continual, moral or general, associational or exclusivist, biological or material, individual or group, and linear or non-linear. This genealogical instability prepares us to ask whether karma may be ontologically rearticulated rather than merely defined. It is the latter of these options that remains underdeveloped, and occupies our

interest here. The rearticulation to be offered however, is not a complete departure, but simultaneously a retrieval of structural possibilities latent in the tradition, a conceptual rehabilitation from the mires of Western substance models of interpretation, and the taking flight of a new discovery. The retributive interpretation of karma as a system of Brahminic social control and as a foil to the free exercise of charity was a further Western imposition, contrary to which Christopher Chapple suggests the usage of *karma* as an interpretive framework for the introduction of creativity. The diagnosis is explained succinctly by Chapple, “Every action (*karman*) leaves a residue (*saṃskāra* संस्कार, also from the verbal root *kr*) in the memory of a person. These residues or traces collectively form habit patterns (*vāsanā*, from the root *vas*, to dwell) that dictate personality: how one perceives and reacts to the world.”<sup>107</sup> These *vāsanās* take on three primary distinctions of temporal manifestation, summarized neatly in Śankara’s *Crest Jewel of Discrimination*:

All our activities are called ‘karma’. Karma is of three types. It is classified with reference to the past, present and future. The total impressions gained by an individual through his activities and thoughts accumulated at the unconscious level of the mind are called ‘sañcitam’ – acquired. The large number of *vāsanās* within is all sañcita-karma. Of them a few become fructified (*phalonmukha*) and surge forth to express. They are called ‘prārabdha-karma’, that which has started yielding fruits. There are yet other *vāsanās* which are awaiting maturity. They are yet to become effective. Such *vāsanās* are called ‘āgāmī’ – yet to come.<sup>108</sup>

These *vāsanās* are glossed by traditional commentators from Śankara to Chinmayananda as a remnant perfuming of space;

A passing breeze is not at any time separate from atmospheric air that is everywhere, and yet, when the breeze passes over a flower, or some sandal-paste, or a scent-bottle -- which are all seats of fragrance – it carries with it the respective aroma. Similarly, the subtle-body, when it moves out, carries along with it the

<sup>107</sup> Christopher Key Chapple, *Karma and Creativity* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1986), 5.

<sup>108</sup> Shloka 451 Translated by Swami Chinmayananda, *Talks on Sankara’s Vivekachudamani Text with Translation and Commentary*. (Mumbai Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, 2013), 732. It is generally accepted by scholars that *Vivekacudamani* is a text of pseudo-Śankara provenance.

senses, mind and intellect, not in any gross form, but as a mere ‘fragrance’ of what all they had lived through, felt in, and thought of. Thus viewed, the mind is nothing but a bundle of *vāsanās*.<sup>109</sup>

Bondage is characterized as compulsory activity, an imprisonment of cyclical repetition that occludes the relationality required for an unhampered mode of creativity. To metaphorically open the door to novelty, a praxis is introduced that touches the realms of ethics, psychology, and phenomenology. These practices effectively dampen the cyclical activity of past action to promote an openness to fresh possibility. Again Chapple offers a tidy summation: “Through activity, the binding influences of the past are overcome and a new order, a new vision is brought forth, a way of life anchored in creativity rather than mired by past actions.”<sup>110</sup> This activity is exemplified in the microcosm of the Vedic ritual, through which vitality—through rupture—leads to eternal forms of unities that spring forth new lifeworlds, new possibilities. Proper ritual action then is that which both stymies compulsive influences of the past, as well as cultivates future fruits. Without ritualized sacrificial action, the crops to be harvested will primarily consist of the remaining seeds planted in the past. This focus of minimizing past influence, aided by an intentional program of action is itself what limits negative prehension, allowing for an increase of possibilities in the life of the event that the Yoga Vasiṣṭha terms *paurusa*. The sage Vasishtha encourages the Prince Rama, “By as much effort as good creativity (*supaurusa*) is sought, accordingly, one’s impure creativity of the past is appeased.”<sup>111</sup> Karma and creativity are shown in this ecumenical text to be co-operative in the production of free worlds.

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<sup>109</sup>Commentary on *BhG* 15.8, Swami Chinmayananda, *The Holy Geeta* (Mumbai Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, 2013).

<sup>110</sup> Chapple, *Karma and Creativity*, 8.

<sup>111</sup> *Yogavasishta* III.96.94 Translated in Christopher Key Chapple, *Karma and Creativity* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1986), 71.

## NON-LINEARITY

Similarly, rather than dividing moral and general causality as in Sri Aurobindo's treatment, a Process treatment of karma necessitates the multi-spectral holding of both the moral and the general. The general interpretation occupies Creel's exclusivist distinction, seeing moral and psychological mechanisms as subsets of a broader karmic scheme of causation. This is extended past the anthropocentric emphasis of Radhakrishnan—who mysteriously sees karmic activity as species specific—toward the perhaps more classical understanding of metempsychosis in which biological and even material life is the field of karmic movement. Distinctions of movement and scale in non/transferable individual and group karma are finally contextualized within the more capacious scheme of what I will call non-linear karmic theory. Rather than linear development of causal factors—a singular particulate and monadic event giving rise to another in Newtonian fashion—karma can be conceived as the non-linear coalescence of multivariate waves of energetics in an infinite process of interaction. This physical process plays out in all states of matter as a fundamental aspect of energy transfer. From photo-receptive liquids, to spatial or bright solitons, energy gives shape and takes it away. Explicitly naming the playful musicality inherent in fluid dynamics, Theodor Schwenk states;

The whole morphological character of a lake finds expression in this natural period of vibration; it is like a "note" to which the lake is "tuned". This "note" has "overtones" in its vibration, like a flute or the string of a musical instrument.<sup>112</sup>

Using the example of waveform propagation, we can see that in large bodies of water such as an ocean—a common Vedāntic metaphor for reality—energy is transported in ways that are both relational, and not fully predictable. In linear models of particle motion, transport

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<sup>112</sup> Theodor Schwenk, *Sensitive Chaos* (Rudolf Steiner Press, 2013), 30.

in a given wave is generally elliptical; forward and backward movement is nearly symmetrical. Linear wave models assume proportionality and predictability. In non-linear models of particle motion however, microenergetic interactions modulate each waveform as energy spills across the wavefield. The reality of nonlinear processes in complex wave fields enables modulational instability, also called Benjamin-Feir instability. Small perturbations through modulational instability can both amplify and distort a signal (Figure A).<sup>113</sup> Instability in modulation drives asymmetrical motion and allows for mass transport, described commonly as Stokes drift. This instability does not however lead to absolute chaos; instead, it allows for the maintenance of coherent wave forms over time and space with minimal loss of shape. This can be seen in the example of tidal bores like the Qiantang “Silver Dragon” in East China’s Hangzhou Bay. Object of the first known tidal chart in 1056 A.D., the wave itself can reach maintained heights of 9 meters, speeds of 40 kilometers per hour, and be seen and surfed for miles. Nonlinear modulational instability therefore is able to both disrupt linear wave function, as well as produce and perpetuate new forms of energy transport.

A linear model of karma, as one could describe the dominant understanding, works in a similar fashion as linear wave theory. An independent actor or group engages in an act that leads to an immediate or delayed proportional result. This is often portrayed by the previously mentioned distinctions of individual and non-transferrable retributive moral consequence. Karma is viewed as retribution based on individual moral action, solely limited to the biological (or more restrictively anthropocentric sphere) and only

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<sup>113</sup> See Tsunehiko Kakutani and Keiji Michihiro, “Marginal State of Modulational Instability –Note on Benjamin-Feir Instability–,” *Journal of the Physical Society of Japan* 52, no. 12 (December 1, 1983): 4129–37, <https://doi.org/10.1143/jpsj.52.4129>.

associational in its explanatory power. Classical Indian philosophies however for the most part do not treat karma in this linear fashion. While arguments can be made for linear karmic theory, the view of Advaita Vedānta is capacious enough to incorporate nonlinear expression. In a nonlinear karmic theory, karma operates in a relational, field-like way where *saṃskāras* and *vāsanās* act as energy transport through the world system, moving amidst and between events of agency. These wave shaping tendencies occur fractally at all energetic levels, from the quantum and atomic, through the chemical and moral, to the cosmic. This is not a simple extrapolation of the moral to the metaphysical, if we are to take Obeyesekere's ethicization theory seriously; further, complex systems dynamics are applicable as well to ethical-psychological causality.<sup>114</sup> As conditions shallow, the degrees of constraint increase, allowing the fructification of latent energy in karmic shoaling. In the Advaitic frame, karmic waves co-emergently combine, cancel, and amplify without existing in isolation. Habitual patterns that are generated and maintained through *sankalpa*, or the force of the initial aim toward an eternal object retains form across temporal and spatial contexts, forming a karmic soliton. In short, rather than a judiciary or fiduciary account of karma as a ledger of individual moral activity, and in opposition to a cinematic disjunction of discrete moments of feeling, nonlinear dynamics allows karma to operate as a processual field of interaction, emergence, and instability. This suffices as a preliminary Vedāntic description of concrescence. As each event selectively prehends its contexts, integrating and transforming the past by leaning toward its aim, energy is modulated through the system in novel ways. Newly defined, a processual account of karma is the nonlinear relational entanglement of experiential conditions through temporal and spatial

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<sup>114</sup> See chapters 5, 6 of Jiří Šubr, *The Systemic Approach in Sociology and Niklas Luhmann* (Emerald Group Publishing, 2020).

vectors. The next question we must ask is, what is the kinesthetic location of karma, or more pointedly, where does karma *live*?

### CHAPTER THREE: *KALPANĀ* AND CREATIVITY

*“You just bother the shell a little, so it tries to integrate the sand being there. ... If you are infusing something into the music, a different element, it should become richer—that’s the important part.”*<sup>115</sup>

#### **DEPARTING FROM ORIENTALIST CONCEPTIONS OF MĀYĀ**

Having delineated our comparative method in the first chapter by epistemologically bracketing the *pāramārthika satya*, and subsequently tracing the conceptual instability of historical notions of karma in the second chapter, we now follow a throughline from Key Chapple’s framing of karma as synonymous with creativity toward Advaitic metaphysics. At first blush, the word *māyā* would seem to be the point of departure for any genuine comparative dialogue between Advaita and Process thought. Typically glossed as appearance or illusion, it strikes at the heart of Whitehead’s critique as previously mentioned in chapter one. As it has come to us through orientalist Vedic scholarship, it undoubtedly lends itself to misguided interpretations of acosmism and world denial. It is for this reason that scholars like Colebrook and Thibaut propose it as a later Buddhist graft onto the system of the Vedānta from Gauḍapāda through Śāṅkara, one that seemingly corrupts a supposed doctrinal purity. Even the contemporary apologist Radhakrishnan, perhaps in his effort to eke out a seat at the table for the chosen philosophy of his modernizing nation after centuries of colonization, boldly asserts that, “the text of the Vedānta...does not suggest, even remotely, the theory of *māyā*”, favoring in its place a somewhat realist ontology.<sup>116</sup> Others like Gough, Deussen, and Shastri advocate for the

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<sup>115</sup> Toshiko Akiyoshi, quoted in William Minor, *Jazz Journeys to Japan: The Heart Within* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 37-38.

<sup>116</sup> Radhakrishnan, “The Vedanta Philosophy and the Doctrine of Maya”, 432.

doctrine's nativity in fidelity to exegesis of the Vedas, concluding that it is "the very life of the primitive Indian philosophy".<sup>117</sup> This can be observed from the time of the Upaniṣads themselves up to and including the twentieth century sage and *biḍī* seller Nisargadatta Maharaj. When asked about the mystery of the real, Nisargadatta commented, "How can it be? The real is simple, open, clear and kind, beautiful and joyous. It is completely free of contradictions. It is ever new, ever fresh, *endlessly creative*. Being and non-being, life and death, all distinctions merge in it."<sup>118</sup>

Radhakrishnan asserts the Vedic primacy of the "divine community" of nature, an interlacing *mātrikā*, mother, or matrix of subjectivities that constitute the cosmos, not without intimations of subjective unity that were later developed in the Upaniṣads. The later *rṣis*, or seers were not content with the archaic expressions of polytheism, but neither did they dismiss the multiplicity of the universe as illusory in the colloquial sense. *Brahman* as the immanent cause of the universe was not a disparate presence, "not *apart* from the world,—it *is* the world."<sup>119</sup> What goes unrecognized, is that the *yukti* and *anubhāva* that animate later articulations of *māyā* stems directly from a desire to coherently and logically bear these themes out.<sup>120</sup> Radhakrishnan takes up a polemical position with respect to *māyā*, denying the fecundity of scripture to contain multiple layers of meaning, and instead seeming to collapse at times into a modalism of *parināma*. Much of Radhakrishnan's misrepresentation of the doctrine of *māyā* likely stems from a lack of attention to the nuances of epistemological factors that were central for earlier Vedāntins. What he rejects

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<sup>117</sup> Gough, quoted in Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, "The Vedanta Philosophy and the Doctrine of Maya XXIV (October, 1890 to July, 1914)," *The International Journal of Ethics* 24, no. 4 (July 1914): 432.

<sup>118</sup> Nisargadatta Maharaj, *I Am That* (Nesma Books India, 1998), 340. Emphasis mine.

<sup>119</sup> Radhakrishnan, "The Vedanta Philosophy and the Doctrine of Maya", 437. Emphasis mine.

<sup>120</sup> *Yukti* and *anubhāva* refer respectively to the practical poles of communal reasoning and direct experience that comprise the Vedāntic praxis.

is the view of the (epithetic) *śūnyavadins* that Śāṅkara and the later proponents of *vivarta* also distinguish from their own view. Due to this oversight, he largely reiterates a somewhat accurate rendering of the doctrine while disavowing the unfortunate term typically used to describe it: illusion. However, for our purposes his organic systems-view bears relevance; it defines a cosmopsychist view of reality through the epistem-ontological lens of creativity.<sup>121</sup>

Shastri in his detailed study concludes that contrary to much early Sanskrit scholarship—which posits the doctrine as a Buddhist importation—the conception of *māyā* can be found as early as certain layers of the *Rg Veda*, though seemingly at odds with its later connotations of illusion. The two primary translations he proposes, following Sayana’s commentary on the *Rg Veda*, are *prajñā* (power/knowledge) and *kapata* (deception). The figures of Indra, Agni, and other devas are discussed in hymns as associated with volitional capacity to bring forth new forms of reflexive identification (*mayin*). Shastri connects the “wondrous” and “magical” nature of the creative power through the shared sense of mystery that becomes more explicit in the later Atharva Veda.<sup>122</sup> The Śvetāśvataropaniṣad as an almost syncretic text adopts the word *māyā* to describe the *prakṛti* (or cosmic nature) of the Sankhya, overcoding the blind *upadhāna karana* of the Sankhyan system with the vital capacity of *Maheśvara* (the great Lord). Śāṅkara in his Upadeśa does the same by circumventing the issues inherent in the *Brahmasutras* by introducing his *avyakṛte namarupe*, or unevolved name and form, to be modified by later Vedāntins and collapsed into the term *avidya* (non-knowing). In

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<sup>121</sup> It is requisite to note however, that Radhakrishnan explicitly denies the epistemic division between Nirguna and Saguna Brahman that is essential for the viability of this comparative project.

<sup>122</sup> Prabhu Dutt Shastri, *The Doctrine of Maya in the Philosophy of the Vedanta* (London: Luzac and Co, 1911), 11.

Śankara's *Bhramasutrabhasya*, the relation of *namarupa* to avidya is expressed in various ways, one primarily being *kalpitā*, or imagination.<sup>123</sup> The unintelligible seed of the phenomenal world is itself transformed (*parināma*) by the evolving force of *īśvara-māyā*.<sup>124</sup> Causality as such, in this sense is transposed to an altogether different epistemic level. Like Whitehead's creative rendering of Aristotelian matter, the Advaitic *māyā* is, "divested of the notion of passive receptivity, either of "form," or of external relations" and constitutes the "pure notion" of karma as action conditioned by the objective immortality of past *saṃskāras*.<sup>125</sup> In the third *mantra* of the Śvetāśvataropaniṣad we have:

*te dhyānayogānugatā apaśyan devātma-śaktim svaguṇair-nigūḍhām |  
yaḥ kāraṇāni nikhilāni tāni kālātmayuktānyadhitiṣṭhatyekah ||*

"Following the path of meditation, the students saw the power of the Lord, hidden by its own inherent qualities, the Lord who, alone presides over all the causes—from time to the individual self."<sup>126</sup> The later *prakāraṇa* text, *Vedantasara* highlights this power as "intangible, which cannot be described either as being or non-being", a phrase equally used to denote its difference from the actual and potential, and also to represent its nature as a positive, inexplicable abstraction.<sup>127</sup> *Māyā* in this sense is consonant with Whiteheadian creativity in that it is also deficiently actual, without character of its own, being entirely conditioned and actualized by the karmic flows that atomize it. Isabelle Stengers intimates the non-transcendent and trans-objective nature of this power with reference to

<sup>123</sup> Sengaku Mayeda, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadesahasri of Śankara* (Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2006), 24-25.

<sup>124</sup> See Upad II, 1, 23., of which Śankara's śruti reference is Chandogya Up. VI, 3, 2, see also Upad. I, 19, 17. Cf. Upad. I, 17, 14; 26; 78

<sup>125</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 31.

<sup>126</sup> Śvetāśvataropaniṣad I.3. Translation by Swami Tejomayananda in, *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* (Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, 2011).

<sup>127</sup> Swami Nikhilananda, *Vedantasara of Sadananda* (Advaita Ashrama, 1931), 22.

Whiteheadian creativity, “Creativity is "activity," but activity affirms, simultaneously and inseparably, the river and the banks without which there would be no river, whether it overflows or not.”<sup>128</sup>

The *devātma sakti*, or what I will here call the divine self-power of entities is apprehended by the students in the Śvetāśvatara narrative after the abandonment of conceptual ratiocination, discovering the shared basis of the manifold. Swami Tejomayananda comments, “The infinite truth has an infinite potential to create. This inscrutable divine power is called *māyā* or *prakṛti*.”<sup>129</sup> Tejomayananda differentiates the terms based on connotation, where *prakṛti* denotes the material cause of world production, and *māyā* denotes the psychosomatic power of world production without a separate and inert material substrate, or, what Catherine Keller terms a *creatio-ex-profundis* where, “every creature emerges moment by moment from a wavy boundlessness.”<sup>130</sup> It is precisely this dismantling of the conceptual inadequacies and mutual opposition of spirit (*puruṣa*) and matter (*prakṛti*) that defines the Vedānta against the Sankhyan dualism. *Īśvara* and *Māyā* are not to be considered in abstraction from each other as substance and function, except as a purely pedagogical device. In reality, the two are co-constitutive and relationally actual, like fire and its power to burn. The central claim of Shastri’s argument is that *māyā* is not a departure from earlier Vedic thought, but a *continuity*. Referencing the intra-Vedānta critiques of the doctrine from Ramanujacarya and Madhvacarya of the Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita schools, he reasons that the primary criticisms levied against the

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<sup>128</sup> Isabelle Stengers, Michael Chase, and Bruno Latour, *Thinking with Whitehead: A Free and Wild Creation of Concepts* (Editorial: Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2014), 256.

<sup>129</sup> Swami Tejomayananda, *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* (Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, 2011), 27.

<sup>130</sup> Catherine Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 152.

Advaitins with respect to māyā base their argument on the false premise that it is meant to reference an abstractable reality in itself, a point already refuted. Shastri argues that analysis of Vedāntic creativity hampered by a creeping substance-ontology makes it, “exceedingly difficult to free one’s mind from a theistic bias when approaching the doctrine of Maya.”<sup>131</sup> It is then no special wonder to Shastri why Ramanuja’s interpretation of the Vedānta is suitable to Christian theological preference. In any case, properly exegeted, the localized objective “sense of “illusion” is a natural development of the idea of such a “power”.”<sup>132</sup> He is clear that the later tradition, as Radhakrishnan disdains, references this mysterious power as illusion. This phantasma however is understood as a relative and technical term within the system proper that specifically refers to non-reciprocal dependence, as made clear by modern Christian comparativists Richard De Smet, Sara Grant, and Daniel Soars, and in places by Radhakrishnan himself. This does not render the doctrine of illusion an aberration, as some would have it, but rather expresses the mystery of creative power in its original dialect. It is this creativity that is through disparate grammars syncretically united in the words of the sage Vasiṣṭha as, “*Mahasāttā* (the great existence), *Mahāciti* (the great intelligence), *Mahāśakti* (the great power), *Mahādrsti* (the great vision), *Mahākriyā* (the great doer or doing), *Mahābhavā* (the great becoming), *Mahāspandā* (the great vibration).”<sup>133</sup>

It is clear then, that any critical reading of Advaita must move past wooden orientalist associations of illusion, however this does not equate to a reinforcement of

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<sup>131</sup> Shastri, *The Doctrine of Maya*, 137-138.

<sup>132</sup> Prabhu Dutt Shastri, *The Doctrine of Maya in the Philosophy of the Vedanta* (London: Luzac and Co, 1911), 21.

<sup>133</sup> Christopher Key Chapple, ed., *The Concise Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*, trans. Swami Venkatesananda (Albany, N.Y.: State University Of New York Press, 1984), 73.

ontological substance either. This substance obstacle for the doctrine of māyā can be intimated as it relates to the Deleuzian reading of Spinoza. In Deleuze's estimation, difference is expressed fully in its differentiations, not divided as subject and predicate. Michael Hemmingsen holds that Tripathi's Vedāntic reading of Spinoza "goes sharply against" Deleuze's reading which does not differentiate attribute from existence, but instead affirms that the expression of the expressed has no existence apart from its expressions.<sup>134</sup> Hemmingsen seems to be familiar with the epistemic and ontological distinction Tripathi makes, however, as is often the case in western-centric discussions, misinterprets his argument as promoting a substance ontology. Of course, if that is Tripathi's reading of the Vedānta, then he too has given himself over to misrepresentation, but perhaps it is not Tripathi that has misrepresented the Vedānta, but Hemmingsen that misrepresents Deleuze. If we understand Deleuze to mean that the gold has no existence apart from the ornaments it has 'involvement' in, then the Vedānta is perfectly in agreement with a Deleuzian reading of Spinoza, and perhaps by consequence a Deleuzian reading of Whitehead. Māyā, taken in this sense, *is* the very involvement of difference—the very process of relationality that precludes substance from being a viable category in any epistemic strata. It is not that there is an ontological remainder of undifferentiated 'being' over against becoming, as Hemmingsen rightly notes. Rather, the indeterminate irresistibly gives itself over to determination, relative infinity being the natural instantiation of an infinity of infinities, where all contrasts are harmonically non-other. Rather than digressing to a conversation on the *non-Aliud*, it is best to leave the notion here and return to our

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<sup>134</sup> Michael Hemmingsen, "Māyā and Becoming: Deleuze and Vedānta on Attributes, Acosmism, and Parallelism in Spinoza," *Comparative and Continental Philosophy* 10, no. 3 (June 18, 2018): 238–50, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17570638.2018.1488354>.

karmic focus.

In one instance, Shastri skeptically notes that Sayana takes X.53.9 of the Rg Veda usage of *māyā* to directly refer to karma. However, Shastri himself attests to usage of *māyā* as both cause and effect; and if understood with similar context of knowledge as the object of ritual performance, its usage is clear: in the Vedānta, the empirically defined reality is itself a *ritual of organism*. This power is referenced in the Brahmasutra Bhasya 2.1.14 as “*anīrvacaniya*” or inexplicable, not definable as either manifest being, nor as the potential category of what is typically translated as dialectical non-being. Neither moniker of real, nor unreal exhausts the nature of this *māyā*, though many commentators miss the import of these categories. The primary state of non-being referenced in the creation hymn of the Rg Veda reflects not an antithetic absence of being, but the unified and potential being which is known as *kāranāvasthā*, in the *Māṇḍūkya-kārikā* as *prajña*, and in later texts as the *Ānandamayakoṣa*. This aspect of reality, as we shall see, defines the creative mode of the Brahman.

## ĪŚVARA AND THE ĀNANDAMAYAKOṢA

Although not overtly confessional or missional, Whitehead felt the need to account for novelty in the universe by the positing of a redefined image of God. In his alternative characterization, Whitehead strips God of his traditionally unilateral omnipotence, recasting the divine in the dual poles of primordial and consequent. The primordial nature of God for Whitehead represents the source of all definite forms, comprising the Platonically toned eternal objects, while the consequent nature acts as the “judgement on the world” that digests and incorporates history through conceptual harmonization.

Whitehead breaks from his typically abstruse jargon to wax poetic, “He is the lure for feeling, the eternal urge of desire.”<sup>135</sup> This divine lure is then tempered by the synergistic modal variation of resorption, “He saves the world as it passes into the immediacy of his own life. It is the judgement of a tenderness which loses nothing that can be saved. It is also the judgement of a wisdom which uses what in the temporal world is mere wreckage.”<sup>136</sup> As we observed earlier, karma too, ensures that despite appearances, nothing is lost.

One of the most common remonstrations by Euro-American continental philosophers on the indigenous wisdom traditions of India is against the perceived cyclical nature of time. As the argument is typically framed, cyclical time leaves the cosmos doomed to rote repetition, rather than leaving the future as an open invitation as indicated by process thinkers. This characterization however does not hold when in true dialogue with the theological other. The cyclical nature of creation in some karmic schemas is rather a Deleuzian repetition and difference that escapes simple generality. There is a pattern of course, as in all nature, but it is one of what fluid dynamics terms *neutral dynamic stability*, capable of shifting frequencies in an improvisatory manner not unlike modal jazz. As Davis and Coltrane exchange currencies of mood in “Flamenco Sketches”, each note is chosen freely, unencumbered by the restriction of vertical arrangement, but horizontally open to the history of the piece and its unknown future; as Akiyoshi ‘bothering the shell’, disrupting racialized conventions with infused novelty in her masterpiece, “Deracinated Flower”.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 344.

<sup>136</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 346.

<sup>137</sup> Kevin Fellezs, “Deracinated Flower: Toshiko Akiyoshi’s ‘Trace in Jazz History,’” *Jazz Perspectives* 4, no. 1 (April 2010): 36.

In a similar way, cyclic-spiral patterning in process-relational karma lends itself to the musicality of existence, variations on themes of feeling.

In Vedānta, this cosmic avant-garde is facilitated by Īśvara, the wished-for one. Typical definitions of the term would make even the most forbearing of process-theologians blush: Ruler, Controller, Supreme Lord. The *Bhagavad Gīta*, adopting the *Sankhyan* frame of reference, personifies Īśvara as the free agent of creativity. “Though I am unborn and am of imperishable nature, and though I am the Lord of all beings, yet, ruling over My own Nature, I take birth by My own māyā.”<sup>138</sup> Etymologically however, the sanskrit root *Īś* (ईश) refers to capacity, or potentiality—the un-actualized actuality of the en-actual. The suffix *vara* (वर) symbolizes desire-as-such, or more functionally, choice; Īśvara in this way refers not to an omnipotent being, but rather the *power to choose*. Īśvara as the Controller is, when seen in continuity with earlier Vedic thought, not a hegemonic oppressor, but more precisely, the interface of *play*. Functionally, prior to the Islamic conquest of India and its subsequent theistic bhakti developments, the occupation of Īśvara was, in a similar manner to Whitehead’s God, to provide a solution to a problem. Stengers again is helpful here, “For Whitehead, an actual but nontemporal God had no other "reason" than to act as a remedy for the confrontation between two kinds of reason: those designated by the ontological principle, referring to the actuality of decisions already taken, "objectively immortal," and those that imply a reference to what is possible.”<sup>139</sup> Whitehead himself explains that despite the infinite and free creativity of the universe, “..this creativity

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<sup>138</sup> jo’pi sannavyayātmā bhūtānāmīśvaro’pi san, prakṛtiṃ svāmadhiṣṭhāya sambhavāmyātmamāyayā. *BhG* 4:6 (Translation Chinmayānanda)

<sup>139</sup> Isabelle Stengers, Michael Chase, and Bruno Latour, *Thinking with Whitehead: A Free and Wild Creation of Concepts* (Editorial: Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2014), 265.

and these forms are together impotent to achieve actuality apart from the completed ideal harmony, which is God.<sup>140</sup> Likewise, Īśvara, or Saguna Brahman is designated as the non-temporal entity by which all karma and its associated phala finds coordination. In contrast to Jaimini, who, in a theodictic effort to guard Deity from charges of partiality or cruelty places causal efficacy in independent dharmas, Bādarāyana instead posits Īśvara as the guarantor of fruits, and the eros of causal impetus, the *karmaphaladata*.<sup>141</sup>

While Vedānta does not typically differentiate Īśvara into reified poles, it could be said to form a sort of bistable oscillation around two primary frequencies. In one respect, *Īśvara* through *māyā* acts as infinite valence, supreme beatitude, and illimitable freedom that produces novel possibilities for actualization. She is the Good as such—as if mediated by and mediating its mirror frequency. This primordial aspect is organically balanced by the consequent aspect of *māyā*, the projective, sustaining, and digesting power of *Saguna Brahman*, God with qualities. In this sense, God is self-conditioned through an internal vibrancy that allows contrast without division. Whitehead’s God seems to be akin to Saguna Brahman in the Vedānta: the Godhead as Satchitananda (or the Good, True, and Beautiful) viewed through the gravitational lensing, as it were, of time, space, and causation. When God views Herself through the refracting lens of *māyā*, it stirs actual occasions into desire prompted activity by its subjective aim and divine lure acting on past prehension. This primordial-consequent faculty, acting as a unified responsive memory shapes every “drop” of moment-to-moment experience.

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<sup>140</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 115.

<sup>141</sup> See *BhSBh* III.ii.38-41.

Although there is in Whitehead a conceptual distinction between God and Creativity, Nirguna Brahman, as framed by Jeffrey Long—God as beyond time, form, and causation (pure, undifferentiated reality)—necessitates expression. In Long’s Process-Vedānta, the attributeless Brahman occupies a corollary status with the primordial nature of God, with Īśvara being placed at the physical pole of consequence: “[T]he “multiple ultimate realities” of Griffin and Cobb’s deep pluralism can be seen to refer to different aspects or dimensions of what is, finally, a single ultimate reality in the conventional sense of the term: the abstract, primordial nature of God; the concrete, consequent nature of God; and the cosmos of actual entities—or, in Hindu terms, the nitya, or eternal, unmanifested (nirguṇa) Brahman; Īśvara, or Bhagavān, the Supreme Lord; and the universe made up of the many souls, or jīvas, whose collective experience constitutes the jagat, or flow of existence over which the Lord reigns (or, in process terms, that God coordinates and constitutes as a universe).”<sup>142</sup> As explained previously, our treatment of Advaitic metaphysics based on epistemological concerns prevents us from locating the Vedāntic absolute within the Whiteheadian schema, as the trinitarian dance of Īśvara (comprising both primordial and consequent natures), jagat, and jīva, are seen to be creatures of kalpanā; on this aspect of creativity we are in full agreement with Long: “This inner dynamism and trajectory towards the intensification of experience that characterizes all things, a trajectory that involves the evolution of increasingly complex forms of experience (such as consciousness) and a drive towards beauty (the experience of which could be called bliss) is called, in process thought, the principle of creativity—another meaning, again, of the

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<sup>142</sup> Jeffery D. Long, *Models of God and Alternative Ultimate Realities*, ed. Jeanine Diller (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2013), 357–67.

Hindu term Maya.”<sup>143</sup> The intrinsic dynamic activity of Īśvara, although analytically separable, is not a dependent function outside colloquial definitions. Īśvara, in much the same manner as the evolution of Whitehead’s God, is “no longer merely a nontemporal accident of creativity, but, like all other entities, a "creature of creativity.”<sup>144</sup> Saguna Brahman, i.e. God as perceived within the world, with qualities that relate to creation, change, and divine action, comprises both Creative Lure—Whitehead’s harmonious novelty—and what other Sanskrit philosophers like those of the *Mahāyāna* term *ālayavijñāna*, the ground of all consciousness, and the unstable repository of karmic seeds. These seeds are saved from the harvest of every moment, and stored for later germinating concrescence. This seedbed of experience in the Vedānta is termed *kāraṇa-śarīra*, or the *Ānandamayakoṣa*.

The causal features of karma likewise in the early Theravada corpus of Buddhism take on a prominent, though primarily psychologized role, as noted by Woohyun Jung, “descriptively, karma illustrates the principles of causality and continuity, highlighting how actions lead to specific consequences within the broader framework of paṭiccasamuppāda, which is often translated as “dependent origination.””<sup>145</sup> *Pratītyasamutpāda* (प्रतीत्यसमुत्पाद) expresses the interdependence and conditionality of all phenomena. It denies both independent self-existence (*svabhāva* स्वभाव), and a first cause or permanent essence. Especially in Nāgārjuna’s *Madhyamaka*, this becomes a subversive ontological movement: all phenomena are empty of inherent essence (*śūnya* शून्य) precisely

<sup>143</sup> Long, *Handbook of Process Theology*, 262–65.

<sup>144</sup> Isabelle Stengers, Michael Chase, and Bruno Latour, *Thinking with Whitehead: A Free and Wild Creation of Concepts* (Editorial: Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2014), 266.

<sup>145</sup> WooHyun Jung, “Karmic Momentariness and Rebirth from Early Buddhism to Abhidhamma,” *Journal of Dharma Studies* 8 (June 2, 2025), 742.

because they are dependently arisen. This perspective of non-substantiality is partially what makes Buddhist thought amicable with process. Despite the later advent of event-based metaphysics leading to a reification of substance, according to Jung, the earlier Indian context of Buddhism located karma in phenomenological fluidity. Although Advaita Vedanta uses differently framed metaphysical premises, its methodology of the *kośas*, of appearance (*vivarta*), causality, and *māyā* functions in a way comparable to dependent origination. Whereas Buddhagosa shapes karma around the doctrine of momentariness, for Vedānta and the early Theravadins, conscious moments of experience are deliquescent and extensional. This allows for a multivalent concrescence that nourishes experience with inherent dynamism and zest.

There have been numerous attempts to bring Whitehead's scheme into dialogue with Asian philosophical frames, the most prominent being Masao Abe of the Kyoto School, and more recently, the "Great Vehicle" of Buddhism. In his examination of the *Mahāyāna śraddhotpāda śāstra*, Steve Odin has likened the dual nature of Whitehead's demiurge with both the Jungian collective unconscious, and the repository of karmic action in the Mahāyāna. Due to the similarity of Vedāntic and Mahayana conceptions of the beginningless inheritance of karmic impressions from their unmanifest causal locus, the precedence of Abe and Odin's work is of paramount importance for our purposes. Quoting Jung, Odin concurs that God, as Whitehead may have interpreted, and the unconscious are indeterminable as disparate entities. It is surprising to note that although Jung was intimately familiar with the Vedānta and its living teachers via the Belur Math in Calcutta, this association is left unmentioned by Odin. Odin, through Jung (and perhaps Jung through the Vedānta) understands the dipolar God, "to represent the syntheses of imagination (the

projection of future possibilities) and memory (the restitution of the past in the present) by means of which each occasion of experience emerges into determinate actuality at every instant through nontemporal concrescence.”<sup>146</sup> Dennis Hirota speaks to this homology in reference to the *ālayavijñāna* of Shin Buddhism as the “storehouse of all karma and as such the vital pulse of creativity.”<sup>147</sup> Hirota affirms that Whiteheadian notions of objective immortality are in full anticipation within the generic Buddhist view of *karma*. In a theological and soteriological register, Hirota proposes that the karma of all entities is both experienced and transformed by Amida Buddha for the purpose of Enlightenment. While Hirota tends to theistically reify the entity of Amida, Odin escapes reification by skirting the psychologism of actual occasions. Other arguments have been proposed to characterize the Neo-Confucian notions of the Non Ultimate (*wuji*) and Great Ultimate (*taiji*) with the dipolar aspect of Whitehead’s deity. As the uncompounded and unconfused substance-function hypostasis of Pattern and Psychophysical energy, Lee’s proposal suggests that the Neo-Confucian cosmological framework may also contain the ‘karmic seeds’ for translation into a process idiom. In speaking of the homology, Lee states, “the indeterminate and chaotic “all figures” within the Non-Ultimate may be likened to infinitely multiple circles of abstract potentials, for the empathy seen to permeate the primordially indeterminate many strongly echoes the prelogical and preconceptual compossibility of the mutually open and mutually attracting eternal objects within God’s primordial nature.”<sup>148</sup> The consequent nature of Whitehead’s God is associated by Lee with

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<sup>146</sup> Steve Odin, *Process Metaphysics and Hua-Yen Buddhism* (State University of New York Press, 1982), 170.

<sup>147</sup> Dennis Hirota, *Toward a Contemporary Understanding of Pure Land Buddhism: Creating a Shin Buddhist Theology in a Religiously Plural World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 95.

<sup>148</sup> Hyo-Dong Lee, *Spirit, Qi, and the Multitude* (Fordham University Press, 2014), 177.

the Great Ultimate as function (*yong*), embodying the creative actualization of the ten thousand things. The bistable oscillation of the consequent nature in Vedānta is expressed in the body-as-causation. This can be seen most clearly in Brihadaranyaka 1.6.1-3;

This (universe) indeed consists of three things: name, form and action. Of those names, speech (sound in general) is the Uktha (source), for all names spring from it. It is their Saman (common feature), for it is common to all names. It is their Brahman (self), for it sustains all names. Now of forms the eye (anything visible) is the Uktha (source), for all forms spring from it. It is their Saman (common feature), for it is common to all forms. It is their Brahman (self), for it sustains all forms. *And of actions the body (activity) is the Uktha (source)*, for all actions spring from it. It is their Saman (common feature), for it is common to all actions. It is their Brahman (self), for it sustains all actions. These three together are one—*this body*, and the body, although one, is these three.<sup>149</sup>

The trinity of *nāma rūpaṃ karma*, according to the above, compose and are composed within the body in a general sense, corresponding to the inseparable macrocosmic categories of *deha* (space), *kala* (time), and *vastu* (causation). To what does “this body” refer? From the preceding verse it is clear that the body—composed of and composing action—is “*prāṇo vā amṛtam*”: an endlessly resurrecting vitality that is apprehended through the coalescence and ossification of seemingly opaque entities. This fact is not simply restricted to the individual being (*jīva*), but since there is a fractal relationship between whole and part, refers to bodies both gross and subtle, both macrocosmic and microcosmic, both sentient, and colloquially insentient. Karmic activity, in the preceding sense *is* the relational reality of body.

The previously mentioned ‘storehouse consciousness’ as it is colloquially defined is placed within a larger schema in Vedānta as the *kāraṇa-śarīra*, or the aspect of causal somatics. The causal body represents the *avyakta*, or unmanifest aspect of both the subtle

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<sup>149</sup> Brihadaranyaka 1.6.1-3, trans. Swami Swahananda, *Chandogya and Brihadaranyaka Upaniṣads* (Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1989). Emphasis mine.

and gross bodies, both microcosmic and macrocosmic. For our purposes here, a similar harmony can be made regarding the *kāraṇa-śarīra*, and the *sukṣma* and *sthula śarīras* of *Īśvara*. While the *kāraṇa-śarīra* typically occupies the causal matrix (*mātrkā*) of Marriott's code-substance, the subtle and gross sheaths name the as-yet manifest subjective and manifest objective articulations of that code-substance in full actualization. This creation body of *māyā* blushes but also enables experience—without it, individual beings would not be individuated, and so not *be*, nor *become*, and thus could not be in relationship with the divine or the world. Each moment of experience is felt by *Īśvara*, and inscribed into Her causal body. So-called individual experience is microcosmically enveloped, but also digested, preserved, and propagated through the macrocosm in an organically fractal relationship. This is the embodied space where the 'haunting of time' is done.<sup>150</sup> The passing away of karmic seeds into the storehouse of *Īśvara*'s memory-body constitutes the qualified objective immortality of *vāsanās* in the *kāraṇa śarīra*, or in the *pañcakośa* geodatum as the unconscious, the *Ānandamayakośa*. These lingerings themselves are not simply calcified possibilities, they are *hauntings* 'present' continually. As such, they could be argued to belong to the *kāraṇa śarīra* as "virtual" states of resonance that are real in the Proustian sense without necessarily requiring them to be actual, and ideal without necessitating abstraction.<sup>151</sup>

The involuntary shock of *vāsanā* irrupting its aroma into present experience can take the form, as the taste and texture of a madeleine in *tilleul*, or, as Padmapādācārya

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<sup>150</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 86.

<sup>151</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (1968; repr., London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 208.

attests in his *Pancapadika*, the flash of *idam rajatam* (रजतम्) in nacre. He too argues that it is not simply memory that haunts us, but something positive, something not true, yet nonetheless real. Śankara in his *Upadeśa* explicitly connects the *vṛtti* of the waking state with the *vāsanā* of the dream state, which subsequently conditions perception in the waking state.<sup>152</sup> The apprehensibility of the madeleine itself (the *saṃskāra*) originates from the “*pramāna* which in the past occasioned the knowledge relating to that object”<sup>153</sup>, viz., Aunt Léonie and her lime-blossom tea one Sunday morning in Combray. Both Padmapādācārya and Prakāśātman affirm that the “power of revealing plurality” (*vikśepa śakti*), the force of the past articulation of karma, is responsible for the flaring forth of memory-laden experience.<sup>154</sup> *vāsanās*, as the virtual plane of karmic difference, remain “poised a long time, like souls, remembering, waiting, hoping on the ruins of all the rest, bearing without faltering, on the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of memory.”<sup>155</sup>

Whitehead identifies the metaphysical ultimate of creativity as the fundamental animating force of reality. Creativity in this sense is non-substantial; it does not exist as an ontological absolute apart from phenomenal reality, but is instantiated in every moment of concrescence. The function of creativity is also not simply the perpetual recombination of past events, but an active and ongoing emergence of new possibilities. Actual occasions

<sup>152</sup> मानसे तु गृहे व्यक्तः सोऽविद्याकर्मवासनाम् । पश्यंस्तैजस आत्मोक्तः स्वयंज्योतिः प्रकाशिता ॥ २४ ॥

*Upadeśa Sahasri* I.15.24 Manifested in the abode of the modifications of the mind (in dream), and witnessing the impressions produced by actions due to Ignorance, the Self is called Taijasa. It is then the self-effulgent witness. See also I.17.25.

<sup>153</sup> Padmapādācārya, *Panchapadika of Padmapada Acharya*, trans. D. Venkataramiah (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1948), 18.

<sup>154</sup> Prakāśātma Muni, *Panchapadika Vivaranam of Prakasatma Yati*, trans. P.S. Sastri (Tenali: Sadhana Grantha Mandali, 1997), 37.

<sup>155</sup> Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way* (Yale University Press, 2013), 53.

then are the subjective agents of this creativity, rendering forms of the possible into specificity and actuality. In a similar way, the Advaitic category of *māyā* acts as the fundamental well of creativity for fields of karmic relation. Traditionally described by later Advaitins in soteriological context as the two-fold power of concealment (*āvarana*), and projection (*vikśepa*), *māyā* and its natural constituents are representative of the locational setting for karmic feeling. Specifically relevant to this point is the aspect of *vikśepa*, which we can tentatively posit as the corollary to the primordial nature of Whitehead's God. While traditional descriptions of the projecting aspect of *māyā* are not accompanied by descriptions of anything resembling eternal objects, what is posited is its associational *nama* and *rupa*, or names and forms. These *upādhis* are what render the trifold of reality as *jīva*, *jagat*, and *Īśvara*. The *jīva*, or living being, in common parlance corresponds to the individual subjectivity in continuous interdependent relation with the *jagat*—representing the phenomenal world—and *Īśvara*, the God of the universe. *Īśvara* and the *jīva* are differentiated primarily on the basis of their bodied relationship to karma. This karmic differentiation is most notably seen in the gloss on the shortest of the *Upaniṣads*, the *Māṇḍūkya*.

The *Māṇḍūkyakārikā* of the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* forms a core text of the Advaita tradition, marking the most seemingly uncompromising expression of non-duality. Influenced heavily by Nagarjunian dialectics, Gauḍapādācārya—the parama guru of Adī Śankara—divides up the universe into six primary conceptual divisions according to their scope and constitution based on the three alphabets constituting the Vedic *prānava*, ॐ (*Om*). The three phonetic alphabets अ (*akara*), उ (*ukara*), and म (*makara*), collectively map onto the distinctions of conscious experience: waking, dream, and sleep. From *MK* I.3

through I.6, Gauḍapāda and Śankara traverse the terrain of the microcosm and macrocosm, delineating the broad features of the experiential landscape. The individual entity in the subjective experience of waking state consciousness takes the name of *vaiśvānara* as it experiences the gross objects of typical sensory experience. The same entity, when associated with subtle levels of manifestation akin to dreaming, is spoken of as *taijasa*. The entity is further rendered as *prajña* when associated with the unmanifest causal potential of deep sleep. The corresponding macrocosmic bodies of an entity are alternatively described as *Virat*, *Hiranyagarba*, and *Īśvara*, respectively. The *Virat* in Śankara's commentary on the text constitutes "the totality of the gross universe", and extends the identity of the totality of the subtle universe: *Hiranyagarba* and *Taijasa*, in addition to the totality of the causal cosmos: *Īśvara* and *prajña*.<sup>156</sup> *Īśvara* is seen by Śankara as not an extra-cosmic creator, for She, "is not something separate from the universe as others hold."<sup>157</sup> Rather the subjective and objective waves of experience through Her causal potency crest and fall, contributing to the embodied life of God. As mentioned previously, while the *Mīmāṃsā* commentators saw harmony as a result of an entity's *dharma* or *apūrva* (new potential), the residual power resulting from the appropriate completion of ritual action, causal efficacy remains unexplained.<sup>158</sup> Bādarāyana alternatively posits supreme deity as a necessary condition, a *hetu* for *karma phalam*.<sup>159</sup> This move by Bādarāyana is purely philosophical, and does not attenuate the pluriform agency of the multiplicity.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Śankara quoted in, Swami Nikhilananda, *Māndukya Upanishad with Gauḍapada's Karika and Sankara's Commentary* (Mysore: Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, 1949), 15.

<sup>157</sup> Śankara quoted in, Swami Nikhilananda, *Māndukya Upanishad with Gauḍapada's Karika and Sankara's Commentary* (Mysore: Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, 1949), 27. Śankara has also refuted the view of *Īśvara* as solely the efficient cause of the universe in the *Saririkabhāṣya* 2.2.37.

<sup>158</sup> It is Bādarāyana's refutation of this point that highlights the reliance of *dharma* on the intelligence of *Īśvara*. Cf. III.ii.38-39.

<sup>159</sup> Nakamura, *A History of Early Vedānta Philosophy*, 421.

<sup>160</sup> Nakamura sees *Īśvara*'s role as that of a mechanism, or "automaton" that has somewhat of a

Īśvara is, by reason, requisite to apportion the results of action, but is fundamentally incapable of coercion, due to complete dependence on the relational value of karma.<sup>161</sup> It must be remembered that the initial aim of Vedānta's overcoding of karma is soteriological, not an attempt to construct a speculative metaphysic. *Īśvara*, as the *tattva* pertains to the Brahma Sūtras, serves a tripolar purpose. In one sense, *Īśvara* as Brahman associated with the causal body delivers the results of every action, ritually conceived or otherwise. Being the functional fulfilment of every finite act's completion does not necessarily equate to operating as a final cause *à la* the lure of an eternal object, however here must be remembered the secondary aspect. *Īśvara* as Brahman viewed through subject-object distinction represents an equilibrium of the *guṇas*, the phenomenological modes of attunement to be addressed in the following chapter. The equilibrium of *Īśvara's* gunic body takes on the aspect of unities as the bliss of the *Ānandamayakoṣa*, the sheath of harmonious multiplicities that flows forth through the upwelling nourishment of *māyā*.

Although the aspect itself is sometimes equated with an unalloyed *tamas*, due to its veiling capacity associated with the *prajñā* state for the entity in *avidyā*, the *avyakta* or unmanifest mode of Vedic non-being itself comprises the unconscious potential of every actuality in its as-yet unprojected state. Here it is important to note that because time itself has a cyclic, or more appropriately *cyclic-cum-spiral* character in Vedāntic cosmology, any unprojected actualities are themselves seed-forms of previous action that flourish with new life. The Vedāntins, although holding reasonably to a modified *satkaryavāda* scheme of causality, do not maintain *Īśvara* to be the simple guarantor of Her own purposes. As

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negative valence, yet this interpretation places the efficacy and responsibility for reality in the hands of entities themselves (Ibid, 496).

<sup>161</sup> This position occupies the vyavahārika epistemology, and is further subrated in BhG V.14-15. na kartṛtvaṁ na karmāṇi lokasya sṛjati prabhuḥ, na karmaphalasaṁyogaṁ svabhāvastu pravartate.

Śankara in his *Brahma Sūtra Bhasya* indicates, it is ultimately God who says, ‘thy will be done.’ Every entity shares some participation in this dance, as every entity—including God—follows the non-temporal directionality of actualization from causal, to subtle, to gross states of experiential embodiment. The causal ‘sheath’, as it is often later called, is sometimes discussed as the storehouse for karmic residues as they pass from potentiality to actuality, and back to a transformed potentiality. Owing to the Vedāntic theory of causality, of modified satkaryavāda, the gross and subtle actualizations do not differ in kind ontologically from their causal potential forms. Rather, the totality of consciousness as embodied causality is a movement where its forms, “spread over the two states (*viz.* The waking and the dream), reach the state of indiscrimination or non-differentiation *without losing their characteristics*, as the day, revealing phenomenal objects, is enveloped by the darkness of night.”<sup>162</sup> This motion of concealment preserves the integrity and vitality of manifest forms while they await further actualization, or in Vedāntic parlance, ‘revealing’. This indicates an opening for the reimagining of karmic residue storage as compatible with Whiteheadian objective immortality, as entities pass into the bodily life of Īśvara. While the bodies of these entities determine the extent of their objective manifestation, they resemble even in the strict non-dualism of Gauḍapāda an organic part-whole relationship via *samaśti*, or the principle of aggregation. All of these bodies together constitute the actualization of the creativity of māyā.

The association of māyā with creative power is brought forth in detail by Staneshwar Timalisina, as he takes up the *Māṇḍūkya-kārikā* in an original study that examines māyā in the context of Gauḍapāda’s application of the term *kalpanā*, from the

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<sup>162</sup> Śankara quoted in, Swami Nikhilananda, *Māṇḍūkya Upanishad with Gaudapada’s Karika and Sankara’s Commentary* (Mysore: Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, 1949), 23. (Emphasis mine)

root *kalpanā*. *Kalpanā*, the principle of inexplicable creativity runs like a thread through Śankara's *bhaṣya*, and on through Mandana, and Vācaspati Miśra.<sup>163</sup> Timalsina translates *kalpanā* as imagination, and situates it at the heart of Gauḍapāda's Upaniṣadic project. Imagination, as he discerns, is part and parcel with every event of perception, whether exhaustive or not. For the early Advaitins, reality is not a Kantian representation, but a process whereby subjective and objective poles exist in mutual self-creation. "Consciousness, accordingly, is inherently creative, imagination being its essential nature."<sup>164</sup> The reality of externals, according to Timalsina, is not explained *away* by recourse to imagination, but instead given place within a system where process and consciousness are *indistinguishable*. A key verse to explicate this is given in the twelfth verse of the second chapter, "The luminous (*deva*) self, with its own *māyā*, imagines/constitutes the self on its own."<sup>165</sup> The chief function of *māyā* in the context of early Advaita is then one of pure creativity (*kalpayati*) which is read in tandem with *vikalpa*. The distinction from Madhyamika in this case is that rather than negating experience, situating it within the nature of *kalpanā* lends a positive sense to all plurality born of experience. Timalsina mentions the importance of reading Gauḍapāda not as an idealist, but only explaining the phenomenological givenness of externality as it emerges in the dyad of subject-object relation. This is not, however, equating or limiting the principle to mere anthropocentric intentionality.

The cyclical retention of *saṃskāra* in the macrocosmic body of Īśvara can be

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<sup>163</sup> Pulasth Soobah Roodurmum, *Bhāmatī and Vivaraṇa Schools of Advaita Vedānta: A Critical Approach* (Delhi Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2002), 33.

<sup>164</sup> Sthaneshwar Timalsina, "Gauḍapāda on Imagination," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 41, no. 6 (November 8, 2013): 591–602, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10781-013-9203-6>.

<sup>165</sup> *kalpayaty ātmanātmānam ātmā devaḥ svamāyayā* || GK 2.12.

intimated even in recent quantitative scientific theoretical frameworks, such as the one offered by Neukart, Marx, and Vinokur in what they call the Quantum Memory Matrix (QMM). In their analysis, space-time itself acts as a finite receptacle for quantum information through storage in a discrete network of Hilbert cells. Every quantum event irreversibly writes information into this quantum ledger that results in the cyclical rebounding of cosmic cycles.<sup>166</sup> This stored information is measured by the variable of imprint entropy, which never decreases, but acts as a cycle counter for expansions and contractions of the cosmos. Thus the materialist paradigm of thermodynamic entropy gives way to an entropy defined by information, where “imprint entropy is monotonic: once information has been stored in the QMM register, it cannot be erased, because the Hilbert space of each cell has a finite, saturating capacity set by the holographic bound.”<sup>167</sup> Although based on quantitative predictions the model holds a finite number of possible cycles—a detail that would strain the “beginningless” nature of Vedāntic Creativity—this remains merely predictive. The central theoretical framework itself allows for a material form of quantum memory, one that echoes both the Vedāntic causal body of Īśvara, as well as the primordial and consequent natures of Whitehead’s God. Māyā, often defined in terms of time, space, and causation itself can be proposed as Īśvara’s functional “grace of deity as divine memory”, a creative imagination that both *projects* unities, and that *remembers* them eternally.<sup>168</sup> If there can be a teleology for this imagination, it is necessarily relational.

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<sup>166</sup> Although the analogy is tenuous, it is interesting to note that this study asserts per astronomical data the cosmos being on its fourth entropic cycle—bearing an intriguing congruency with the four *yugas* of traditional Indian cosmology.

<sup>167</sup> Florian Neukart, Eike Marx, and Valerii Vinokur, “Counting Cosmic Cycles: Past Big Crunches, Future Recurrence Limits, and the Age of the Quantum Memory Matrix Universe,” *Entropy* 27, no. 10 (October 7, 2025): 1043–43, <https://doi.org/10.3390/e27101043>.

<sup>168</sup> Steve Odin, “God as Peace-Bestowing Buddha/Christ” in *Deep Religious Pluralism*, ed. David Ray Griffin (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 81.

Although this bodying of the Vedāntic Absolute is more general, we may take by way of induction the specificity of the *avatāra*. The Lord creates for Herself a body to bring into harmonic justice the dissonance of *adharma*.<sup>169</sup> Although in a general sense, prior to the exercise of *kalpanā*, no *adharma* would be present, since that *kalpanā* is in a sense co-eternal with *Īśvara*, the beginningless and endless process of creativity is for the purpose of *dharma*, the actualization of novel and self-creative possibilities of imaginative resonance. *Dharma* here is not conceived as a predetermined pattern of order, but as a somatic spontaneity that exponentially amplifies the capacity for new expressions of harmony. *Īśvara*, as the fundamental interface of *Kalpanā*, is the ceaseless dynamic union of active creativity, and receptive harmony. If the “Song of the Lord” were to have a genre referent, the free jazz of Coltrane’s *A Love Supreme* is as good as any. In its through-composition, there is no preset arrangement, but only the aims of acknowledgement, resolution, pursuance, psalm: harmony is only discovered as closely as the next note.

*Māyā*, in this exegetical approach, is imaginal creativity not conceived of as a subsistent reality apart from actualization, but as the illustrative metaphysic for the process of karma. When karma is viewed in light of this reframing, it is given new life. Karma is not simply a moral law imposed upon beings, but the non-linear structure of causal relation within the conceptual location of *māyā*. *Māyā* can then be more appropriately understood as the infinite field of disclosure where all relations are felt. *Māyā* here is not simply identical with Whiteheadian Creativity, rather it names the experiential field in which creativity is phenomenologically registered. It is in a way that will become more explicit in the following chapter, the bodily location in all actual entities where karma lives. To

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<sup>169</sup> *yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānirbhavati bhārata abhyutthānamadharmasya tadātmānam sṛjāmyaham || BhG 4:7* (Translation Chinmayananda).

continue this exploration, we may then ask, what are the textures of karmas becoming—or more conversationally—*how is it* for karma to become?

## CHAPTER FOUR: ATMOSPHERES OF FEELING

*“But music, don't you know, is a dream from which the veils have been lifted. It's not even the expression of a feeling, it's the feeling itself”*<sup>170</sup>

In the antecedent chapters, we have outlined the requisite methodological approach for comparing the philosophies of Advaita and Whitehead, namely the bracketing of the paramārthika layer of epistemology by the Vedānta to explicitly engage in the empirical reality of the vyavahārika. We then attended to a brief genealogy of the conceptualization of karma as our main comparative category in classical and post-classical Indian contexts. Having examined the plurality of approaches to karma, and addressed some contemporary misconceptions, we have leveraged Christopher Key Chapple’s approach to karma as defined by the nature of creativity. In the previous chapter, we examined the causal context for this creativity as animated by *māyā*, interpreted through the kalpanā of Gauḍapāda’s imagination, via Sthaneshwar Timalisina. Māyā, as Vivekananda has it, is the very body of God, “She is the life of the Law of Karma or causation. She is the fructifier of every action. Under Her guidance we are manufacturing our lives through our deeds or Karma.”<sup>171</sup> Māyā, as now placed alongside Whitehead’s metaphysic of Creativity, is the kinesthetic ‘location’, or feeling-body of consciousness—a term borrowed from Hermann Schmitz, progenitor of the ‘new phenomenology’. Schmitz, like Whitehead, sought to dissolve the philosophical legacy of the bifurcation of nature, of body and soul. For Schmitz, the felt body is the primary organizing concept whose, “mode of existence cannot be separated

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<sup>170</sup> Claude Debussy, *Debussy Letters*, ed. Lesure François and Roger Nichols (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987), 41.

<sup>171</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. V, (Lector House, 2024), 434.

from its becoming manifest to the conscious subject in specific kinds of corporeal feeling”.<sup>172</sup> The feeling body thus represents an absolute kinesthetic location for subjective orientation. The only difference in this application is the granularity of approach, and the scale of corporeality. First, we will examine the physical pole via the ontological framing of the guṇas from traditional sources of Śāṅkara Vedānta; following, we will examine the mental pole via the psychometric studies of the last few decades.

### THE TRIGUNA MODEL

Leveraging continued insights from the new aesthetics and phenomenology of Schmitz, in this chapter I examine the constituent moods of karmic imagination as atmospheres. Schmitz defines the atmosphere as, “the complete occupation of a surfaceless space in the region of experienced presence”.<sup>173</sup> In this instance, atmospheres are invoked as the trans-spatial location where emotions as “half-entities” (*halbdinge*) move. Atmospheres escape the subject-object dichotomy, and as such are not components of substance ontology, but are, “the shared reality of the perceiver and the perceived.”<sup>174</sup> For our purposes, this model will be extended using aspects of Vedāntic cosmology to account for atmospheres as they occur for all entities, be they human social nexuses, or otherwise.

Having prepared the ground for this constructive and comparative endeavor, we now turn our attention to the phenomenological nature of karmic creativity as it is experienced by actual entities. To do this effectively, we shall adopt certain terminology

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<sup>172</sup> Rudolf Owen Müllan, and Jan Slaby, “Emotions Outside the Box—the New Phenomenology of Feeling and Corporeality,” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 10, no. 2 (February 8, 2011): 244.

<sup>173</sup> Hermann Schmitz, “Emotions Outside the Box—the New Phenomenology of Feeling and Corporeality,” translation by Rudolf Owen Müllan, and Jan Slaby. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 10, no. 2 (February 8, 2011): 255.

<sup>174</sup> Gernot Böhme, *Atmospheric Architectures: The Aesthetics of Felt Spaces* (London Bloomsbury Publishing Plc Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 23.

originating in alternative schools of Sanskrit philosophy, notably the *guṇas* (or quality-values) of the dualistic *Sankhya*. Various schools of Vedānta, including Advaita made efficient use of the conceptual schemes of *Sankhya* and *Yoga* philosophy as well as terminology from *Yogacara* and *Madhyamika* Buddhism to advance their own *darśana*. Śankara in his *Bhagavad Gita Bhasya* overcodes the Sankhyan scheme in Advaitic fashion:

“My own *Prakṛti*,—*i.e.*, the *Prakṛti* which belongs to me, the *Māyā* made up of the three *Guṇas*, the material cause of all beings; This *Prakṛti* is spoken of as great because it is greater than all effects; and as the source and nourishing energy of all its modifications, it is termed Brahman.”<sup>175</sup> (See Appendix Figure B)

Though typically translated as ‘attributes’, *guṇas* are not shared properties to be confused as universals. Other translations include ‘particular character’ (Potter), ‘abstract particular’ (D.C. Williams), and ‘trope’ (G. Santayana). As Halbfass has suggested, “According to the *Nyāya* and *Vaiśeṣika* concept of *guṇa*, there is no such immediate affinity between “quality” and “universal”, as it is widely presupposed in the European philosophical tradition.”<sup>176</sup> In Advaita however, rather than substance being a locus for quality, substance itself (as well as quality) is derivative of *guṇa* in the specific sense of constitution. To ‘be’ or, in this case ‘become’ in any sense of the word, “is to be qualified (constituted by *guṇas*).”<sup>177</sup> Śankara himself notes this explicitly in his commentary on the fifth verse of the chapter, differentiating the use of *guṇa* in this technical sense from the colloquial notions of substance and attribute;

‘*Guṇa*’ is a technical term. It does not mean a property, attribute or quality, such as color, as opposed to the substance in which it is said to inhere. No separate existence of a *guṇa* and a *gunin*—of an attribute and a substance—is meant here.<sup>178</sup>

<sup>175</sup> Alladi Sastri, trans., *The Bhagavad Gita with the Commentary of Sri Sankaracharya*, 7th ed. (1897; repr., Madras: Samata Books, 1977), 380.

<sup>176</sup> Wilhelm Halbfass, “The Vaiśeṣika Concept of *Guna* and the Problem of Universals,” *Wiener Zeitschrift Für Die Kunde Südasiens Und Archiv Für Indische Philosophie* 24 (1980), 235.

<sup>177</sup> Gangadean, “Comparative Ontology and the Interpretation of ‘Karma’”, 213.

<sup>178</sup> Śankara, commentary on *Bhagavad Gītā* 14.5, in Sastri, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 381.

Thus *guṇa* is not a simple objective value, but pattern of valuation itself. As Gangadean rightly says, “It is a mistake to import alien *substance*-models of identity and individuation into the karmic world.”<sup>179</sup> Instead, this *qualitative model of identity* is what underlies ontological and phenomenological divisions. The qualitative model of identity is further bound up with the process of karmic feeling. *Guṇas* can thus be described as the coloring of karmic action. Śankara attests to this tangentially in saying that *svabhāva*, or the individual nature of any existent is the *samskāras*, the latent impressions of activity. Any and every entity—actual or otherwise—is concretized by its *guṇa* articulation, and consequently maintains fluid and porous boundaries open to relational becoming.

In his introduction to the *Pancikaranam* of Śankara, N.D. Mehta suggests that, while Vedāntic pedagogy emphasizes epistemology over ontology, “those students, who desire to study Metaphysics from the Ontological standpoint should first begin with Sankhya, the elementary principles of which, with the exception of the independent existence of Nature and plurality of souls, are tacitly admitted by Vedānta.”<sup>180</sup> As mentioned previously, the *prakṛti*, or nature, of the Sankhya is transposed to the *māyā* of the Vedānta, associated as the inherent and non-different mysterious creativity of the Absolute. This creativity in its causal aspect is naturally at a state of equilibrium with respect to the *guṇas*, which manifest imaginatively in subtle and gross states. As the *gūnic* constituents yawn from equipoise, they form the matrix of *Adhibhuta*, *Adhidaiva*, and *Adhyatma* from the admixture of the *guṇas*: *tamas*, *rajas*, and *sattva*. Typically symbolized chromatically by black/blue, red, and white, respectively, the *guṇas* are sometimes translated as heaviness or inertia, motion or passion, and lightness or satisfaction. The

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<sup>179</sup> Gangadean, “Comparative Ontology”, 215.

<sup>180</sup> Śāṅkarācārya, *Pancikaranam*, ed. Shastree Gajanana Shambhu Sadhale (Gujarati, 1930), 12.

Adhibhuta is constituted by the simplistic form of *tanmatras*, or the five subtle elements, from which the five gross elements proliferate. The Adhidaiva denotes the natural cosmic forces that facilitate growth, maintenance and decay of the Adhibhuta. The Adhyatma finally signifies the subjective principle of individuation, which arises in congruity with the preceding two factors. A preponderance of *tamas* gives rise to terrene aspects of experience; the *pañcamahābhūtas* of space, air, fire, water, and earth. A predominance of *rajas* facilitates the movement of vital energy, or *prana* in living bodies through the *karmendriyas*, the five organs of action. A prepotency of *sattva*, alternatively allows for the subtle processes of sense recognition, memory, and intentionality through the *jñānendriyas*, *manas* and *buddhi*. The pentamorous folding process purposively blurs the lines between phenomenological experience and local realism, forming a spectrum between the *visva* and *Virat*, and the *prajña* and *Īśvara*, as outlined in the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*. The *guṇas* unfolding and enfolding accordingly constitute the reality of all activity in the relational sphere. Śankara explains, “the *guṇas* transforming themselves into the body, senses and sense-objects, act and react upon each other.”<sup>181</sup> Thus the import of the *guṇas* is that they supply both a causal and phenomenological link between the concepts of *māyā* and *karma*, respectively.

In the final discourse of the Bhagavad Gita, Kṛṣṇa expounds both the impulse and the basis for action. The impulse to action, *karma codanā*, technically defined in Vedānta as the *triputi*, is a threefold assemblage of *jñānam*, *jñeyam*, and *parijñāta*—the experiencing subjectivity, the experienced suchness, or phenomenological givenness of objectivity, and the resultant experiential tone of their confluence. The basis for action—

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<sup>181</sup> Sastri, trans., *The Bhagavad Gita*, 392.

*karma sangrāha*—is that which is constituted of the *kāranām* (instruments), *phalam* (product), and *karta* (agent) of action. The fruit, glossed by Śankara here represents the distal ‘end’ or finality of karma. These three thus constitute the karma assemblage, but the explanation of karmic difference is given by a reference to the *guṇas*, what Swami Chinmayananda refers to as the “varying climates” of experience.<sup>182</sup> These climes dynamically condition the *karma sangrāha* of knowledge, action, and actor according to the threefold *guṇic* temperaments. Sattvic knowledge, according to Krishna, is the apprehension of non-duality in the intellectual strata of experience, while rajasic knowledge characterizes ontological distinction and separation of isolated entities. Tamasic knowledge seems to convey a narrowing of vision, a lack of ingression, or perhaps a ‘misplaced concreteness’ that occludes the laminar flow of experience. Kṛṣṇa exhorts, “That knowledge which clings to one single effect as if it were the whole, without reason, without foundation in truth and narrow, that is declared to be tamasic.”<sup>183</sup> In classifying the karma *guṇas*, Kṛṣṇa teaches the warrior (*kṣatriya* क्षत्रिय) that *sattvic* activity is that which is at service to the whole of life in a dedicated activity of love, while rajasic activity is based on the pronging of individuated subjective action shadowed by infatuation or hatred. Tamasic action is that which is done utterly mechanistically, as by an entity robbed of agency and intelligence, wracked by a reduced vitality that ripples out through action. The *karta* *guṇa* classification of agency primarily highlights this entropic function of the *guṇas*. As Swami Chinmayananda notes, an agency of the *sattvic* environment, “suffers the

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<sup>182</sup> Chinmayananda, *The Holy Geeta*, 1157.

<sup>183</sup> *BhG* 18:22 trans. Chinmayananda, *The Holy Geeta*, 1160.

least dissipation of his energies, and so he successfully manages to bring into the field of his actions the mighty total possibilities of a fully unfolded human personality.”<sup>184</sup>

Due to the implicit functions of inertia, motion, and luminosity, the guṇas are more akin to quantum fields than philosophical universals (*sāmānya*), as previously stated. Although, those fields are themselves only existent in terms of the particular instantiation of unique particular gunic ‘recipe’ in any nourishing event. Though these guṇas are typically described as strand-like energetics of an ontological schema, they are also examined in behavioral or psychological terms in contemporary studies. Attempts have been previously made to derive psychometric inventories from the tri-guṇa system by David Wolf and previous researchers.<sup>185</sup> Wolf’s quantitative study includes significant analyses that propose statistical significance for the categories when applied to human psychology and behavior. “Over-all there is encouraging evidence for construct validity. For sattva, the mean  $r^2$  for convergent validity is .34, while  $r^2$  for discriminant validity is .02. For rajas,  $r^2$  for convergent validity is .50, and for discriminant validity it is .04. For tamas, mean  $r^2$  is .26 for convergent validity and .03 for discriminant validity measures.”<sup>186</sup> These statistical explanations of variance quantitatively show that not only can the guṇas be used in the objective-cosmological sense, but also in the accurate characterization of experience. This confirmation bears out further in subsequent studies. In an effort toward a trans-diagnostic approach to psychiatric disorders and cross-cultural care methodologies, Bhargav et al. proposed the guṇas as conceived in Yoga philosophy as diagnostic tools to

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<sup>184</sup> Chinmayananda, *The Holy Geeta*, 1167.

<sup>185</sup> Further psychometric theoretical frameworks such as those based on the *Pancakosha* system have been suggested by Biswajit Satpathy, “Pancha Kosha Theory of Personality,” *The International Journal of Indian Psychology* 6, no. 2 (2018): 2349–3429, <https://doi.org/10.25215/0602.105>.

<sup>186</sup> David B. Wolf, “A Psychometric Analysis of the Three Gunas,” *Psychological Reports* 84, no. 3 (June 1999): 1379–90, <https://doi.org/10.2466/pr0.1999.84.3c.1379>.

assess diagnoses and treatment protocols. This analysis saw statistically significant results with respect to a lower prepotency of sattva, “It was observed that patients with psychotic disorders (SCZ and BPAD) had significantly lower levels of sattva ( $F_{(7, 234)} = 35.07$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) and higher levels of tamas than patients with other psychiatric illnesses.”<sup>187</sup> The methods of diagnosis using the guṇas are not siloed, but are interdependent and capable of transformation. The *tri-guṇa* model has been used in this transforming sense for contemporary occupational therapy theory, and by Puta and Sedlmeier to provide a working model for interventions in clinical psychology settings. One of the most important results to note for our purposes, is that a refinement of a gunic recipe toward/by sattva is to many researchers correlated with intensification of capacity for creativity, and cognizance of aesthetic beauty, while a dominance of rajas or tamas is positively correlated with psychological diagnoses. This creativity in the anthropic sphere may be due to a reduction in the mechanistic proliferation of experience due to “*sattva* correlated with openness to experience ( $r=.23$ ,  $p<.01$ ).”<sup>188</sup> In another study, Garrido and Wolf use the Guṇa-enhanced Leaky Competitive Accumulator Model (GLCA) to quantitatively measure how the guṇa space modulates the decision making process in subjects using the parameters of threshold, neural decay constant, loss aversion curve, and attention probability weights. One of the significant variables in the construction of the experiment is the inertial mass  $I$ , a function for measurement of resistance to change, and negatively related to the nourishment of sattva: “There is a clear, positive correlation between

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<sup>187</sup> Hemant Bhargav et al., “Composition of Yoga-Philosophy Based Mental Traits (Gunas) in Major Psychiatric Disorders: A Trans-Diagnostic Approach,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 14 (February 1, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1075060>.

<sup>188</sup> Maika Puta and Peter Sedlmeier, *Meditation - Neuroscientific Approaches and Philosophical Implications, Studies in Neuroscience, Consciousness and Spirituality* (Springer International Publishing, 2014), 326-331.

cultivation and development of *sattvic* habits and life paradigms, with those interior states of being for which people strive.”<sup>189</sup> One primary import of these studies is, the more an individual agent is continually oriented toward *sattva*, the less resistant to change, and more open to novelty they become. While these studies are designed within the context of human psychology, they may have further relevance when applied to the process of *conrescence*. Because *guṇas* in Vedāntic-cum-Sankhyan ontology are flows of valuation, subjective forms that determine all existence in perpetual interdependence and becoming, they function as a primary characterization of the tone of *conrescence* of actual entities as existents. To become is feeling-with all events of experience along a dynamic (or extensive) field (or continuum) of *tamas*, *rajas*, and *sattva*, where the entities’ location in that field determines its capacity for positive or negative prehension of the past karmic residues, as well as its openness to novelty. This can be surmised partially in human studies through the association of *sattvic* results with increased memory function, although it is unclear if psychoanalytic integration of suppressed trauma, or conversely whether a pathological incapacity for negative prehension are associated factors. Thus, the *guṇas* are not merely external conditions, but the internal affective tones that modulate the movement from the many to the one in *conrescence*.

In addition to the operation of the erotic lure, *guṇa* functions as a trifold assemblage that acts as both a representation of motivational intensity, as well as a modifier of the psychological valence of the activity. J. Bruce Long in his *Encyclopedia of Religion* entry tersely describes these triune aspects as lethargy, passion, and mental clarity, again as

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<sup>189</sup> Mauricio Garrido and David Wolf, “A Mathematical Model of the Gunas as a Foundation for Expanded Understanding of Decision-Making Process,” *The International Journal of Indian Psychology* 7, no. 4 (December 2019), <https://doi.org/10.25215/0704.056>.

traditionally anthropocentric categories.<sup>190</sup> Although it is important to note that philosophies and religious traditions are human developments meant to mediate human needs, the central aspect of experience when taken from a pan-experientialist view, such as Whitehead's, is meant to contain in linguistic form what is non-discursive and ubiquitous in the greening sphere of life itself. In a more embracing view, the *guṇas* can be alternatively recast as the process-oriented triad of non-receiving, spontaneous-impelling, and novel-fluorescing. The confluence of these processes are what constitutes karmic activity. When the scope of qualia is expanded in this way, the particularity of karmic action becomes the embodied location for affective prehension in a way that incorporates the anthropic as well as the under-emphasized aspects of ecology and biology. Given this, it seems reasonable to conclude that in a Vedāntic conception of the *guṇas*, an increasing orientation toward *sattva* indicates a burgeoning freedom of the entity in openness to novelty, in apprehending with more granular fidelity the harmony of eternal objects for which it reaches out.

### **POLYTONALITY AND KARMIC SOLITONS**

Due to the unified Vedāntic ontology and epistemology, the *guṇas* can also be viewed from the standpoint of phenomenological atmospheres of consciousness. Swami Vivekananda intimates this phenomenological description of the *guṇas* when he describes their unity—a *perichoresis* of Energy-Love-Beauty—as the engine of every attraction and struggle for equilibrium in the life of all.<sup>191</sup> Śankara uses Kṛṣṇa's discourse on the *guṇas* as a way, in some resonance with Heidegger, to both provide an explanation for and critique

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<sup>190</sup> J. Bruce Long, *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 5447.

<sup>191</sup> Vivekananda, *The Complete Works*, vol. V, 433.

of the notion of isolated subjectivity. Once seen with eyes unclouded by longing, the cloud of intersubjectivity is itself seen as the most sacredly mundane of actors. To illuminate the flux of the ‘They’, Heidegger discusses moods, or attunements, as infectious determinants of *dasein*, the manner in which entities inter-are. In his *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Heidegger writes, “It seems as though an attunement is in each case already there...like an atmosphere in which we first immerse ourselves in each case and which then attunes us through and through.”<sup>192</sup> The atmospheric attunements proposed by Heidegger are not isolated subjective descriptors, they are *contagions*; shared waves of intentionality that entrain nexuses of subjectivity. At least in terms of societies of actual occasions, *eros* is a shared and participatory reality.

A phenomenological rearticulation of the *guṇas* would mean describing them not exclusively as abstract ontological substances or as psychological typologies but as lived structures of experience: modes of how the world is given, how consciousness inhabits its environment, and how action unfolds. *Guṇas* in this sense are not merely descriptive substance categories of *prakṛti*, but are phenomenological structures that mediate karma as relational concrescence. The *guṇas*, as the textures in the feeling-body of karma are plural—yet nondiscrete—shared atmospheres of attunement. Feeling in this way acts as the phenomenological frame that encompasses *vijñāna* (विज्ञान), or experience as such. *Vijñāna* is, in Husserlian terms, always intentional, and in Merleau-Ponty’s sense, always in body schema. Karma as experienced via the atmospheres of *guṇa* then is constitutive of both the *feeling* of becoming, and the *becoming* of feeling, a Merleau-Pontian chiasm of flesh. The flesh, both in macro and microcosm is animated by the *prana*, to which we may

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<sup>192</sup> Heidegger, quoted in Mark A Wrathall, *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger’s Being and Time* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 147.

invoke another of Schmitz conceptions of *vital drive*. This force of life is dynamic and dialogical in character, oscillating and pulsing with a bodily rhythm of expansion and contraction. These postures move within the context of a self-consciousness without identification which takes shape in the form of what Schmitz terms *affective involvement*. This expansion and contraction can be seen with no great difficulty in the *guṇas*—a pulsation that Whitehead describes as “an emotional appreciation of the contrasts and rhythms inherent in the unification of the objective content in the concrescence of one actual occasion.”<sup>193</sup>

The first of the *guṇas*, *tamas*, is frequently translated as darkness, heaviness, inertia, dullness, heedlessness, indolence, sloth, or concealing. For Śāṅkara, *tamas* acts as a veil that, “covers the judgement caused by *Sattva* and attaches one to heedlessness, *i.e.*, to the non-performance of necessary duties.”<sup>194</sup> In the context of Vedic ritualism, this entails an abandonment of required scriptural injunctions, a refusal to acknowledge the interconnected and dependent nature of all action, and the ritualist’s unfulfilled responsibility toward their environment. In a broader sense of ritual as a symbol of general causality however, *tamas* indicates the non-capacity for achieving a result, or the insensitivity to feeling and prehending both the past, and openness to the future; in Heideggerian terms, the *Einebnung*, or leveling down of the potentialities of becoming. Vidyāraṇya’s use here of the *Laghuyogavasishta* (5.1.48) is illuminating; *vāsanā*, the actuated karmic residue that takes the shape of *guṇic* affective modes of experience is described as *dr̥ḍhabhāvanayā*, the strength of feeling that renders objects of experience

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<sup>193</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 213.

<sup>194</sup> Sastri, trans., *The Bhagavad Gīta*, 384.

abstracted from their causal environment.<sup>195</sup> These habitual energetics imply not only phenomenological givenness, but the affective and value-oriented *bhāva* (भाव), the resultative noun form for the act of being and the feeling of givenness tinged with the presence of eros. The inclination, or affective mood, and the formerly stored and presently actuated *vāsanās* are mutually implicated in the active-causal noun form *bhāvanā* (भावना). Both forms derive from the verbal root √bhū, with the former designating an active state, and the latter its process of ripening. While *bhāvanā* linguistically operates at the ‘subjective’ becoming or arising, *vāsanā* references the particularity of the imaginative becoming of phenomenon. In Sanskrit aesthetic theory, it is this imaginative becoming that allows a viewer to transform experience into felt emotion, *rasa* (रस), a term denoting taste or flavor. For the sage Vasiṣṭha, as well as Vidyāraṇya, karma is implicated here as both the source of a particular habituation of experience, and the means to its transformation. Tamas names more than a metaphysical substance; it is a lived atmosphere of opacity, or kinetic attunement in which givenness is in a mode of withdrawal. Linear dynamics is an appropriate framing here, as *tamas* tends toward brute repetition of past events in a linear or laminar way that stifles novelty, limiting the possibilities available to an actual entity in the process of concrescence. Put in terms of a non-equilibrium system, Crockett frames it thus;

Here the physical system “remembers” its previous states and is much more likely to repeat the pattern that it previously followed. This memory is called hysteresis, which is a retardation or lagging induced by tendency to repeat previous patterns of organization. Hysteresis is a kind of implicit memory that is expressed by physical systems; it is not conscious but demonstrates that previous states contribute to future states based on their organization and history.<sup>196</sup>

<sup>195</sup> Robert Goodding, “The Treatise on Liberation-In-Life Critical Edition and Annotated Translation of the Jivanmuktiviveka of Vidyāraṇya” (Dissertation, 2002), 137.

<sup>196</sup> Clayton Crockett, *Energy and Change* (Columbia University Press, 2022), 53-54.

Perception, and more generally prehension, never attains to complete transparency; it is always involved and implicated in resistance and obscuration. Tamas represents this mood of feeling at its most pronounced. Read through Whitehead's concrescence, *tamas* can be interpreted as the inertia of the past, a prepollency of objective immortality that conditions each event of becoming. Concrescence as *tamas* integrates past data, but can also limit novelty by the weight of habituated patterns of mutual inhibition, or karmic resistance.

*Rajas*, the second of the *guṇas*, is most closely associated with a restlessness of urging, the ceaseless propulsion of *eros* into action. While *tamas* inhibits and obscures, *rajas* excites, and agitates, and impels entities toward amorous objectification. It is therefore a horizontal tension responsible for the bulk of manifestation and processes of the cosmos. It is often described as denoting activity, passion, desire, or projecting. Śāṅkara describes it as the “*thirst* after what has not been attained, *attachment* or mental adherence to what has been attained.”<sup>197</sup> *Rajas* then is the primary volitional capacity of an actual entity, the mode of intention or will in embodied beings, providing the sustaining function of continuity, and the causal arrow forward in time. It is additionally the primary driver of the mechanistic return to previous *saṃskāras*, underlying the cyclical nature of *samsāra*; both of these *rajasic* functions together constitute the spiral nature of becoming. In conversation with Whitehead, *rajas* most strongly resonates with his category of *appetition*, the orienting toward a subjective aim that lures each actual occasion of concrescence toward its own distinctive satisfaction, in whatever degree it may, or may not be consonant with the initial aim. Whitehead says this principle of unrest is what “thereby conditions creativity so as to procure, in the future, physical realization of its [the actual entity’s]

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<sup>197</sup> Sastri, trans., *The Bhagavad Gita*, 383.

mental pole, according to the various valuations inherent in its various conceptual prehensions.”<sup>198</sup> Rajas is likewise never neutral, but like the morning sun, colors vermilion the atmosphere with a drive toward order, to the novel, in the direction of the fulfillment of an initial aim. Through the *guṇa* schema, Advaita expresses that the world is not simply given, but charged with a bodily affectivity. This is not reducible to passion in the moral sense, nor to the privation of a psychometric restlessness, rajas is an organic attunement of the Husserlian *lebenswelt*, a kinesthetic atmosphere of becoming where the event is already always stretching out like the caterpillar toward its next feeling-body, where relational karma surges forward. The ubiquitous phenomenon of modulational instability allows for a perhaps more material description of rajas. Modulational instability occurs in a number of manifestations across seemingly unrelated fields of optics, plasma physics, and fluid dynamics. As a function of non-linear fluid dynamics, modulational instability occurs as perturbations in a wave's amplitude or phase are reinforced by environmental factors. Two factors must be balanced for modulational instability to occur, the intensity of the wave, and the diffraction of wave frequencies; when these two capacities cooperate rather than conflict, an increase of intensity and amplitude allows for an ingression of surrounding frequencies. The uniformity of a train of swells across a deep water catchment may ‘spontaneously break down’ or perhaps more appropriately, collectively dis/organize into groups or rogue waves. Far from being simply chaos, as Prigogine and Stengers have it, “the transition from laminar flow to turbulence is a process of self-organization.”<sup>199</sup> This process of autopoietic dis/formation can be offered as a material expression of rajasic activity.

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<sup>198</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 32.

<sup>199</sup> Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, *Order out of Chaos* (Bantam Books, 1984), 141.

Lastly, *sattva* denotes the clarity and lucidity of the subjective pole of experience, typically defined as goodness, intelligence, luminosity, or revealing. Śāṅkara in his *Gita Bhasya* equates *sattva* to happiness itself as bringing about the union of subject and object—unities one could perhaps say are provided by the primordial nature of God as the unity of unities. As the *jiva* perishes, the predominance of a particular *guṇa* determines the post-mortem state of the subtle body. With a *sattvic* disposition, the embodied being attains to *Brahmaloka*—traditionally described as the *Uttarayanic* path of the sun—a realm of rajas-tamas equilibrium. Again, though speaking of what Whitehead would term *societies* of actual occasions, it is my argument that Śāṅkara’s point holds true for the fractal nature of actual entities. This equilibrium is itself fluid and impermanent, subject to change, return, and becoming. That temporality is what drives traditional disclaimers of its binding capacity to knowledge or happiness.<sup>200</sup> The increase in *sattva* equates to an intensifying gradient of value, one which in the anthropic sphere takes the shape of the *puruṣārthas*. Although problematically framed in terms of a hierarchy of intrinsic value, David Ray Griffin neatly summarizes a value progression that here illuminates *sattva* *gunic* modulation: “This Whiteheadian criterion for judging evolutionary progress—greater capacity for experience that is intrinsically valuable—is positively correlated with greater capacity to include more feelings and objective data from the environment in one’s experience.”<sup>201</sup> It would be wise here to explicitly separate the scheme of *triguna* modulation from any notion of a species-specific evolutionary hierarchy. *Gunic* flows are not restricted to a particular species of subjectivity, but are de-substantialized atmospheres

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<sup>200</sup> See *BhG* 14:6, 22.

<sup>201</sup> David Ray Griffin, *Religion and Scientific Naturalism: Overcoming the Conflicts* (State University of New York Press, 2000), 301.

of collective karma that are more or less instantiated by moments of karmic feeling. The human species, therefore is not, contrary to Griffin, at the pinnacle of an evolutionary axiology, but merely has an anthropic trajectory, just as any other species or inanimate subjectivity might have their own. Complexity is perhaps not best exemplified in the single register of the human, but is itself multivalent.

To continue the symbolic language of fluid dynamics, when the mood of concrescence allows for the viscosity of a laminar flow, *and* the turbulence from the roughness of its bed coefficient, prehending the past with limited distortion, and integrating novel possibilities, it gives itself toward an enhanced dis/charge—what Whitehead terms “intensity of experience.”<sup>202</sup> The width of a diverse datum of *samskāras*, combined with the narrowness of specificity allows for a saturation of feeling where the aesthetically real structure of harmony and intensity rushes forth. Henning emphasizes that the feeling open to beauty “seeks to bring the elements within its actual world together in a way that avoids the painful clash of conflicting ends (harmony) and furthermore seeks to relate these elements together in such a way as they not only avoid the conflict of mutual inhibition, but deepen the intensity of experience felt through the introduction of new contrasts.”<sup>203</sup> This intensity provides an appropriate dynamic equivalent for *sattva* as an atmosphere of feeling in which freshness arises with clarity and harmony, in which “the many become one and are increased by one”. *Sattva* as a mood of disclosure is not a moral ‘quality’ possessed by individuals, nor a metaphysical substance that inheres in *prakṛti*, but is itself an attunement toward transparency, to the rushing forth of unities in experience, perhaps

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<sup>202</sup> Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 109.

<sup>203</sup> Roland Faber, Brian G. Henning, and Clinton Combs, eds., *Beyond Metaphysics? Explorations in Alfred North Whitehead’s Late Thought* (Rodopi, 2010), 202.

toward saturated phenomena. This atmosphere of clarity is what renders the experience of the flesh of the world as radiant and in cooperation with both opacity and propulsion. Sattvic atmospheres attest that māyā retains not only its imaginative capacity of rajasic differentiation, but its harmonizing patterning of unification. To return again to Schwenk in his discussion of the fluid vortex;

Wherever any qualitative differences in a flowing medium come together, these isolated formations occur. Such differences may be: slow and fast; solid and liquid; liquid and gaseous. We could extend the list: warm and cold; denser and more tenuous; heavy and light.<sup>204</sup>

To Schwenk's list we could contribute the gunic atmospheres of rajas and tamas, which together with sattva interminably body the 'sensitive chaos' of non-linear karmic feeling.

Schwenk further adds;

..wherever the finest differentiations are present the water acts as a delicate "sense organ" which as it were perceives the differentiations and then in a rhythmical process causes them to even out and to merge.<sup>205</sup>

For that reason, the most compelling rendering of sattva for our purpose of a general process interpretation of karma is, *dynamic equilibrium*.<sup>206</sup> Dynamic equilibrium is an energetic posture that retains a stable oscillation within a spectrum of frequencies while openly accommodating new modulations into its overall range. Rather than the rigidity of linear-dynamics where frequencies are repeated along a fixed band, as does tamas, and rather than the modulational instability of rajas, sattva balances these relational energetics in a coincidence of opposites, a dissipative soliton that promotes new intensities, and dissolves the fact-value distinction (See Appendix Figure C). A perhaps more aesthetic

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<sup>204</sup> Theodor Schwenk, *Sensitive Chaos* (Rudolf Steiner Press, 2013), 39.

<sup>205</sup> Schwenk, *Sensitive Chaos*, 39.

<sup>206</sup> Gangadean, "Comparative Ontology", 219.

description of this *gūṇa* would be the example of modal jazz composition. As Henning also suggests in his invocation of Ellington's *Far East Suite*, the patterned contrast of jazz makes for a rich illustration of Whitehead's aesthetics.<sup>207</sup> A musician such as Alice Coltrane, one shaped by the environments of both jazz and Indian thought, may be well-versed in scales and modes, but she is not bound to them in any restrictive way. In the pleurably tortuous and fever-pitch *Mantra*, Coltrane casually stretches dissonance to the point of harmony. Alice inherits the melody and timing from past notes, but she also *chooses* a response, one that introduces new possibilities that only are determined as dis/harmonious depending on the lure of the following note. The Deleuzian striated space of ordered hierarchy and controlled sequential arrangement gives way through improvisation to the smooth space of openness and fluidity that characterizes *la duree* of her repertoire. As the capacity of dynamic equilibrium intensifies, new forms of harmony can occur, as in the polytonality of Stravinsky's *Petrushka*, the swaying ostinato of Milhaud's longing in *Saudades do Brasil*, or the phrygian-lydian polymodality of Bartók's *Mikrokosmos*.

Ultimately, as Long states, "The freedom of the individual to respond to the fruits of its karma is like the freedom of an actual entity to synthesis [sic] the objects of its prehensions."<sup>208</sup> The *gūṇic* constitution then is determinant of the nature of prehension in actual entities, and thus its karma, as "activities constitute the existential identity of existents, their quality-values and states."<sup>209</sup> Although separated conceptually for the

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<sup>207</sup> Faber, *Beyond Metaphysics?*, 202.

<sup>208</sup> Jeffery D. Long, *The Roar of Awakening : A Whiteheadian Dialogue between Western Psychotherapies and Eastern Worldviews*, ed. George Edward Derfer, Zhi He Wang, and Michel Weber (Frankfurt Am Main: Ontos Verl., Cop, 2009), 76.

<sup>209</sup> Gangadean, "Comparative Ontology", 219.

purposes of examination, these guṇas are never encountered in isolation, but are always in a recipe, a blend, or perhaps a *perichoresis* of difference. The dynamism of the guṇas rests precisely in their warp and weft, suggesting that the guṇas themselves act as modal gradients rather than discrete shapes, shading into one another as atmospheres of dawn and dusk in the liminality of lived experience. These gunic textures are neither solely subjective psychometric states, nor objective properties of a substance ontology, but relational atmospheres of shared feeling that condition and constitute prehension in the process of bodily concrescence. The guṇas are textures of that concrescence as it is felt and lived by actual entities. This uniting of the dispositional and the environmental-physical provided by our exegesis of the guṇas is a direct response to Reichenbach's challenge mentioned in chapter two in his division of *phalas* and *saṃskāras*.

Like the bouquet of santal atomizing through a Bernoullian mist into drops of perfume, *vāsanā* likewise atomizes into the actual entity of karmic process, the *vṛtti*. Although Śankara utilizes *vṛtti* in *Upadeśa Sahasri* (Upad I.11.3; 11.4; 13.7; 18.1; 17.35; 17.36), *Bhagavad Gita Bhasya* (XIII.6) and his *Brihadaranyaka Upanisad Bhasya* (IV.3.7)—all accepted as authentic works—his preferred term, according to Sengaku Mayeda seems to be *pratyaya*, or notion, which he uses as a synonym.<sup>210</sup> These notional events are themselves modifications of the reflective portion of the evolved *namarupa*, and thus occupy the subtle-body pole of any and every act of perception, or feeling. This again is not simply a passive receptivity, but an active taking on of the shape of what is prehended with the internal organ. Consciousness, in a similar manner to typical fluids, conditions and is conditioned by its 'containing' body. Whether this conditioning is expressed in the

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<sup>210</sup> Mayeda, *A Thousand Teachings*, 35.

meandering courses of a river, the spiral fold in the blood stream of a lung-fish, or in the stream of cognition, the processual events of karmic feeling uphold the dividual and qualitative model of identity.<sup>211</sup> Theodor Schwenk describes this ubiquitous patterning of wave formation as, “..the creation of form purely through movement, inscribing itself into the water in rhythmical pulsation.”<sup>212</sup> Unlike in the Sankhyan system, the Advaita conception of *vṛtti* contains an objective moment of reference. Drawing from the psychological school of Werthimer, Koffka, and Köhler, Datta reframes the *vṛtti* holistically via the inner-instrument of mind. Datta suggests that the *antaḥkaraṇa-vṛtti* (अन्तःकरण)—literally, the “I-causation-fold”—although conceived as the consequence of subject-object interaction, is comparable to a physiological *Gestalt*. It is this taking on the shape of objectivity that defines each complete moment of perception. Datta insists that the simulacrum of past experience is what defines the turning fluctuation of the whole as given in consciousness, “the antaḥkaraṇa-vṛtti is found to possess the form of the object perceived in the past, and it is through this mode (*vṛtti*) that we remember the object.”<sup>213</sup> *Vṛttis* as a category can be further divided into cognitive (or evidencing), non-cognitive (or volitional/affective, *avaidyā-vṛtti*), and abstract-objective divisions, though we may argue that these are moments equally compatible with the gestalt description, as Datta holds. Per Sinha, the *vṛtti* is the conceptual referent to the event of relation itself, “not as a pre-existent content which happens to be evidenced by *cit* through mechanical relation but as the functional correlate of *cit*.”<sup>214</sup> Taking the above points into consideration, the *vṛtti* in Advaitic character acts as the experiential event of relation where *vijñana* (experience as

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<sup>211</sup> Schwenk, *Sensitive Chaos*, 91.

<sup>212</sup> Schwenk, *Sensitive Chaos*, 56.

<sup>213</sup> Dharendra Mohan Datta, *The Six Ways of Knowing*, 1972, 61.

<sup>214</sup> Debabrata Sinha, *The Metaphysic of Experience in Advaita Vedānta*, 1995, 95.

such) is shaped by past karmic feeling in conjunction with an affective directedness, modulated by the atmospheres of the guṇas. As such, the vṛtti serves as our soft corollary for the actual occasion of experience. The vṛtti functions as the atomized and fully actual location of the deficiently actual karmic body of māyā.

## CHAPTER FIVE: TOWARD A PROCESSUAL REARTICULATION OF KARMA

*“There is never any end. There are always new sounds to imagine; new feelings to get at. And always, there is the need to keep purifying these feelings and sounds so that we can really see what we've discovered in its pure state. So that we can see more and more clearly what we are.”<sup>215</sup>*

The aim of this chapter is to bring together the insights developed thus far: Advaita Vedānta's doctrine of karma as conditioned by the *guṇas* and *māyā*, Whitehead's account of concrescence as the basic unit of processual becoming, and phenomenology's descriptive language of atmospheres and attunements. By integrating these perspectives, I propose that karma can be reinterpreted as the lived site of concrescence and that the *guṇas* provide the atmospheric modalities through which relational becoming is embodied. This constructive synthesis moves beyond descriptive comparison to articulate a new horizon for both Advaita and process thought within contemporary philosophy of religion.

### **KARMIC CONCRESCENCE**

The greater tradition of Vedāntic discourse remains fertile ground to cultivate the resonances and distinctions between Alfred North Whitehead's process-relational philosophy and classically South-Asian<sup>216</sup> notions of interdependent qualities, and karmic causation aided by *kalpanā*, *kāraṇa śarīra*, and *triguna* phenomenology. Both process philosophy and Indian metaphysics share an emphasis on a non-substantial model of identity, the impermanence of perpetual becoming, and the interdependent relationality that

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<sup>215</sup> Chris Devito and John Coltrane, *Coltrane on Coltrane: The John Coltrane Interviews* (Chicago, Ill.: Chicago Review Press, 2012), 264.

<sup>216</sup> The problematic nature of this term is noted by Harvard Divinity scholar of Indian philosophy Parimal G. Patil for being functionally meaningless, adopting instead for Sanskrit Philosophies; this designation is further noted for its reductive nature in absence of reference to oral traditions, as well as Persian and Arabic traditions.

enfolds and unfolds in and as moments of particular experience. This comparative analysis seeks to highlight how these wisdom flows frame the relational nature of existence in multivalent ways. I have shown that Whitehead's concept of prehension is enriched by dialogue with the theory of karma, providing an intra-entity telic actualization both in, and through time. Furthermore, I have begun to clarify how the Vedāntic *kāraṇa śarīra* strengthens Whitehead's notion of the primordial and consequent natures of God, leveraging responsive memory as a dynamic repository that shapes ongoing experiential processes.

At their core, both karma and concrescence describe processes of relational causality. Karma, in Advaita, is not only the law of moral action but the ongoing interplay of past deeds, tendencies, and dispositions (*saṃskāras*) that condition present embodiment. Concrescence, in Whitehead's system, refers to the integration of past actual occasions into a new unity of experience, guided by subjective aim. Both concepts emphasize that no moment of existence is self-sufficient; each is constituted by what precedes it and opens onto what follows.

The parallel becomes clearer when karma is reframed phenomenologically. Karma is not merely the moral "fruit" of deeds but the kinesthetic accumulation of lived action, sedimented in the body and atmosphere of the lifeworld. Similarly, concrescence is not a bloodless metaphysical mechanism but the felt movement of becoming, a process that has the texture of propulsion, resistance, and harmony. When read together, karma and concrescence describe the same ontological fact: the world is a tissue of relational becomings, where each act is simultaneously conditioned by the past and oriented toward novelty. If karma can be understood as concrescence, then the *guṇas* can be understood as

its modalities. Each *guṇa* corresponds to a phenomenological atmosphere that colors how concrescence unfolds. *Sattva* *guṇa* harmonizes with the phase of concrescence that achieves clarity and harmony in integration. It corresponds to the luminous atmosphere of disclosure, where the many are harmonized into a coherent unity. *Rajas* collocates with appetite, the propulsion of subjective aim. It is the kinetic atmosphere of becoming, where concrescence presses forward restlessly toward satisfaction. Finally, the *guṇa* of *tamas* aligns with the mechanistically rehearsed inertia of the past. It is the opaque atmosphere of resistance, where concrescence is weighed down by inherited actualities. These *guṇic* modalities reveal that concrescence is not uniform but atmospheric. Every actual occasion of becoming has its tone: novel-fluorescing non-linearity, spontaneous-impelling modulational instability, linear non-receiving—or, more accurately, some admixture of all three. What Advaita provides is a vocabulary for describing these tonalities within felt experience, which Whitehead left largely abstract. The *guṇas* thus ground process metaphysics in phenomenological texture.

This synthesis also extends Advaita Vedānta's doctrine of karma beyond its conventional anthropocentric scope. Traditionally, karma is tied to moral causality, rebirth, and soteriological bondage. But if karma is reinterpreted as concrescence, it becomes a universal principle of relational becoming that applies not only to human agents but to all entities, organic and inorganic alike. Whitehead's speculative cosmology and metaphysics makes this clear: concrescence is the activity of *every* actual occasion, whether in a human society, a tree stretching toward the sun, or an electron's cloud of possibility. By bringing Advaita into dialogue with process thought, modern discussions of karma can likewise be extended beyond the human sphere to describe ecological and material processes that is

both resonant with its classical interpretation, and open to novel possibilities. Rather than the moral burden of human action, karma becomes the ontological texture of becoming.

## PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The implications for this multi-spectral theory of karma are manifold; if humanity places trust in the emphasis of past thinkers on the liberty of the present for the future, then creativity is itself enacted within each body. If a person has cultivated anger and hatred, they are more likely to both effect, and experience disharmony and suffering. In my reading, sancita karma, the storehouse of karmic impressions are the reflexive memory that inscribes selective prehension as the consequent causal body(ies); in this schema, body and prehension are mutually constituting. However, the conditioning wrought is not invulnerable. It is this fluxibility that Herbie Hancock relates in a memory when his accidental inclusion of an atonal chord was the occasion for a prompting of Miles Davis' creativity. Hancock reminisces that, "Miles was able to make something that was wrong into something that was right with the power of the choice of notes that he made and that *feeling* that he had. Miles didn't hear it as a mistake, he heard it as something that happened, just an *event*."<sup>217</sup> With each new moment, new possibilities emerge for compassion, learning, and flourishing. With the alteration of *guṇa* toward novel-fluorescing *sattva*, negative prehension and correlative repetitive patterns of reaction are reduced to make space for fresh and vibrant creative response. This is precisely how process thought sees

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<sup>217</sup> Herbie Hancock, "Playing Wrong Notes in Jazz - Herbie Hancock on Miles Davis, a Fantastic Story about Mistakes", YouTube, October 7, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6fVZtp9vGQ>. Emphasis mine.

actual occasions—they are molded in part by the past, but not inescapably bound to it. Just as karma is an unfolding of past causes into present effects, Whitehead’s prehension describes how each new moment integrates past experiences within a gradient of openness to novelty. Causality in this sense is non-linear and relational in the continuous evolution of the cosmos. The affective judgement of events, modulated by *guṇa* and karma, acts as the digestive power of each node in the web of time. Following Simran Raina’s Advaitic ethics, the universe itself is a dynamic and living entity that vivaciously responds to the patterns of its own being. In each instance of non-apprehension, there is an opportunity for cultivating greater social, ecological and relational harmony.<sup>218</sup> Non-linear karma in this sense is transferable, shared, and collective. When harmony sours, suffering acts as the dissonance to return the frequencies to a dynamic equilibrium. In this sense, process thought through the Sanskrit philosophical framework of karma and *guṇa* does not make a place for God, but instead, makes a place *of* God. *Īśvara* is the openness where process takes place as kinesthetic causal location.

More work is essential in the new dialogue between Sanskrit philosophies and process thought. Doing so will require a re-examination of classical and modern categories, the psychological motivations for their use, a functional approach to religious phenomenology, and a decentering and defamiliarization of western and specifically Christian conceptions of the divine-human relationship. To survive as a viable form of theology, Process proponents must continue to discover novel positions within the spectrum of theologies – not to unilaterally coerce, but to persuasively complement. As we have shown, this may involve a dialogue of mutual and genuine interest, a respect of

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<sup>218</sup> Simran Raina, “The ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’ in Advaita Vedānta,” *Obnovljeni Život* 73., no. 4 (December 28, 2018): 535–35, <https://doi.org/10.31337/oz.73.4.6>.

alternative epistemologies, a charitable criticality, and a trust that things are not as incommensurable as they may initially seem. Engaging in this way of interreligious dialogue not only makes the legacy of Whitehead more relevant and applicable outside of academia, but also beyond the ecclesia. This new diaspora of process may indeed be resonant with Whitehead's own subjective aim. Likewise, the lived tradition of Advaita must engage with the breadth of contemporary philosophical, ethical, social, and environmental thought that can fruitfully critique and complement its own positions.

The extension I have proposed has important theological implications. It reframes karma as not merely punitive or deterministic but creative: the relational *mātrkā* through which novelty arises. The *guṇas*, then, are not only dispositions of human psychology but atmospheres of cosmic process—modalities of how relational becoming is felt across spectrums of body. This shift from anthropocentric to material-ecological karma allows Advaita to speak into contemporary concerns about interdependence, climate, and planetary relationality. Intimations of this potential in karmic discourse have been noted by some scholars such as Alan Coward, who has proposed that the Yoga conception of the theory of karma—one that Advaita leverages in its explanation of the relational episteme—naturally offers a socially and environmentally ethical frame with which to approach contemporary questions of what constitutes right-relationship with the poor, and the “new poor” of the more-than-human world. Although Coward distances his position from the Advaita tradition, and in footnotes seems to misrepresent it by mistaking its pedagogy for doctrinal positions, Coward nonetheless suggests that;

For karma theory, my existence as a being is not independent but in a continuum with all other beings, with all of nature (*prakṛti*). Therefore, what I choose to think and do affects not only my present and future life but also the rest of the environment of which I am an interconnected part. In this regard, my karmic

responsibility is both individual and cosmic. The way I make my choices conditions not only my future lives but also the future of all other beings, which in the karma perspective includes all of nature.<sup>219</sup>

The synthetic conversation proposed here not only enriches cross-cultural philosophical dialogue, but also presents an integrated metaphysical framework suitable for addressing contemporary ethical and ecological crises. Sanskrit flows that invoke māyā, guṇa, and karma are incredibly diverse in their approach, and treatment of phenomenological and empirical realities. The centering of a non-linear theory of karma, modulated by atmospheric guṇas reveals the myth of the colloquially non-sentient, seeing instead a cosmic community of subjects whose liberation is inexplicably bound up together by our uniquely particular, yet shared *dharma*. The ecological is included in karma, but more pointedly, ecology unveils the shape our collective action has taken to this point in history. Whether the causal framework underlying karma is parināma, or *ajāti* (non-origination), the divinization of material reality available via dialogue with Sanskrit philosophy is equally liberatory for environmental and social justice. In Vandana Sharma's novel monograph, *Śāṅkara Vedānta for Environmental Harmony*, she outlines the often overlooked ecological facets of Advaita. In her discussion of the tīrthas, or natural pilgrimage sites, she elucidates the integrated nature of divinity, materiality, and experience through a Turbidinidae gastropod associated with the river Gomatī they call Mother, the veneration and protection of the ancient Kalpavrkṣa tree, or the consecration of the Śringerī Matha at the site where Śāṅkara saw the compassion of a cobra spreading out its hood to shade a mothering frog and her tadpoles from the sun.<sup>220</sup> This form of

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<sup>219</sup> Harold Coward, "The Ecological Implications of Karma Theory" in *Purifying the Earthly Body of God: Religion and Ecology in Hindu India*, ed. Lance E Nelson (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1998), 45.

<sup>220</sup> Vandana Sharma Diya, *Śāṅkara Vedānta for Environmental Harmony* (Mlbd Publications, 2021),

indigenous Advaitic panentheism and interspecies compassion necessitates an alternative relationship with the world: one centered on a nurturance of agency and diversity, biological or otherwise. A renewed understanding of karma underscores the necessity for respect of not only all inequalities in human self-determination, but also including animal sensorimotor agency, vegetal responsiveness, and geophysical patterning. Fluvial degradation, monocultures, urban heat-islands can be viewed as sites where *tamas-rajās* intensifications dominate, both resulting *from* anthropic *guṇa* temperament, and in turn karmically influencing those that suffer from degraded environments and unequal human vulnerability downstream. Climate anxiety becomes an essential signal to attend to ecological karma, just as petrochemical infiltration serves as a appraisal of, and injunction for our own *guṇatrāya vibhāga yoga* (गुणात्रय विभाग योग, yoga of the distinction of the three *guṇas*) Alternatively, examining old-growth forests, fungal networks, and river deltas can show not only how land inherits action, but how humanity's own inheritance benefits and propagates benefit from interrelated sattvic environs. To exploit and exhort nature, one must first be separate from it. The dominant worldview today—thanks to the penchant of western nations to reform the world in their own image—is materialist reductionism. While much critique has rightly dismantled classical theological notions of divine omnipotence against a passive world, it is *this* desacralized ontology, whether examined or unexamined, that lies at the base of capitalist exploitation and environmental destruction. Conjunctive with materialist reductionism is the epistemological issue of subject-object distinction; it is this distinction that process thought as well as Sanskrit philosophy seeks to suspend.

This study has traced a comparative arc between Advaita Vedānta's inherited and transformed doctrine of karma, and Whitehead's process philosophy of concrescence, mediated by phenomenology. Beginning with a preliminary methodological discussion, we saw how the Advaitic vyavahārika satya epistemologically relates to the relational sphere ontologized in Whiteheadian thought; how they can and cannot be compared. Chapter 2 served as a preliminary genealogy of the loosely termed doctrine of karma as it relates to both classical and modern commentators of Vedānta. We saw that relationality functions through dynamic, general, material, and non-linear action. In Chapter 3, we saw the causal context of karmic relation via the non-totalizing category of māyā. We leveraged the work of Staneshwar Timalsina and Christopher Key Chapple in identifying both māyā and karma with creative imagination. In Chapter 4, we probed the question of what textures kalpanā may take within karmic concrescence. The guṇas were rearticulated phenomenologically as material atmospheric attunements—sattva as dynamic equilibrium, rajas as modulational instability, tamas as linear patterning—so that karma could be described as the kinesthetic texture of lived becoming within māyā. Finally, karma is reinterpreted as concrescence, phenomenologically modulated in the three guṇas. Kalpanā, or creativity manifests in unique affective modes; those modes of feeling influence the texture of karma as it concresces in vṛttis, which represent the actual entities of karmic prehension. Just as an actual occasion denotes an instance of concrescence effected by the feeling process, so too the vṛtti conveys the karmic event effected and affected by the guṇic atmospheres of feeling. Atmospheres of the guṇas are thus the karmic constituents of the one continuous process of transformation. Just as the affective lure of eternal objects are what draws

possibilities into concrescence, so the lingering of *vāsanā* coaxes the spiral nature of karmic creativity.

Despite the initial signal for epistemological caution, there may remain objections to this process-relational rearticulation of karma. A traditional pundit, for instance, may assert that the present reinterpretation risks a conceptual reification of the both empirically inexplicable, and experientially sublateable *māyā*. If a redescription of karma as the Advaitic process of concrescence, and *guṇas* as phenomenological texture of becoming is accepted, does this stand at odds with the Advaitic ontology? To ensure a non-violent dialogue between these traditions, this concern must be taken in earnest. Classical Advaita frames *māyā* within the context of non-reciprocal dependence, as *anirvacanīya*, and intelligible only within the sphere of *vyāvahārika* relationality. If the present argument were to treat either *māyā* or karma hierarchically, either in a superior or inferior position, it would truly violate Advaita's non-dual commitments. This proposal however does not elevate *māyā* to the status of an absolute, rather it endeavors to describe the empirical domain itself as fundamentally relational. This is an operation which lives explicitly in the realm Advaita presents for causal discourse. To describe karma as the texture of concrescent relationality is not to reify *māyā* independently of *Brahman*, but to rearticulate in process idiom how relational phenomenology unfolds within non-duality. In his lectures on the fourteenth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, the current President of the Vedānta Society of New York, Swami Sarvapriyananda expresses this with reference to Ramakrishna's notion of *Vijñāna*;

What are these *guṇas*? You can regard them as false transient appearances or you can regard them as Brahman as God—Saguna Brahman, because they *are* Saguna Brahman after all. If God is non-dual, if Brahman is non-dual, there cannot be anything that is not Brahman. So, whatever you are experiencing is in some way it

is Brahman. If I'm experiencing a world produced by the guṇas, this world, it must be Brahman.<sup>221</sup>

In classical Advaita, the empirical world is not denied functional coherence; causality, guṇic modulation, and karmic transference are acknowledged as fully real within the domain of empirical experience. The current proposal deepens that functional realism by proposing that māyā names the experiential and relational field within which creative becoming is registered, and also remains consistent with classical Advaita in preserving its core intuition of non-duality.

From the other end of the dialogical spectrum, we may anticipate the objection of process philosophers that non-duality cuts across Whitehead's pluralism: If Brahman is non-dual and without internal differentiation, does this not dissolve the many into an absolute unity without the capability for concrescence? Though understandable, this objection also arises from the assumption that non-duality implies the absolute negation of plurality. Again, Advaita does not deny empirical multiplicity, only ultimate separation. While Whitehead's metaphysics proposes that reality is relationally constituted by actual occasions of experience, Advaita asserts that plurality itself is relationally dependent; these two claims do not admit logical incompatibility. In this proposal, both non-duality and plurality are preserved in non-competing epistemes. The guṇas themselves articulate qualitative modulation within the process of concrescence. The constructive synthesis offered does not collapse Whitehead into monism, nor does it dissolve Advaita into an exclusively pluralist ontology.

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<sup>221</sup> Vedanta Society of New York, "170. Bhagavad Gita | Chapter 14, Verses 26-27 | Swami Sarvapriyananda," YouTube, February 13, 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=18Ye71VvXLU&list=PLDqahtm2vA72IzPW1nuJohTvoTGCJUKGR&index=29>.

Finally, a historical-philosophical critique may be levied that this project anachronistically imposes process categories onto Advaita. Neither Śankara himself, his predecessors, nor his followers spoke of concrescence, just as Whitehead did not speak of karma. This being the case, what legitimates this ‘radical translation’? First, there is no claim to be made for historical influence or doctrinal equivalence. The method undertaken is a constructive and comparative phenomenological metaphysics, guided by the principle of structural resonance rather than textual identity. This thesis seeks to sketch out functional homologies in how each system describes relational becoming. Secondly, comparative philosophy does not, or more truly *cannot* require conceptual isolation. Traditions have perpetually evolved through proximity to sociological, historical, economic, and political factors, even beyond philosophical-religious dialogue. As mentioned previously, Vedānta itself bares this theme out, attesting to internal debate, revision, and assimilation of rival frameworks. To rearticulate Advaita in process grammar is not a distortion, but a continuation of a native hermeneutic. The fruit of synthesis is not a claim of authorial intent, but rather a question of the extent to which Advaitic categories can sustain the weight of that fruit.

Despite epistemological differences, Advaita and process thought mutually illuminate one another. Advaita expands process categories with a phenomenological grammar of *guṇic* atmospheres, resisting potential abstracting tendencies. Whitehead extends Advaita’s doctrine of karma beyond anthropocentric moral causality, opening it to ecological and material horizons. The ‘New’ Materialism and ‘New’ Phenomenology provide the methodological discipline that allows comparison without collapsing difference. The result is a vision of karma as atmospheric concrescence: the lived site of

relational becoming, textured by luminosity, propulsion, and opacity. By retrieving karma in this way, Advaita can be seen as offering insights directly relevant to phenomenology and process thought. This counters the common perception that Advaita is primarily world-denying or quietist, instead revealing its subtle attention to the textures of embodied life. By aligning a non-linear expression of karma with concrescence, karma can be reinterpreted as a principle of ecological entanglement: every action, whether human or nonhuman, reverberates across the relational field.

This insight, that *guṇa-karma*, or feeling-moving is synonymous with creative activity that refuses to divide the dispositional and environmental-physical, has the potential to shift the truth-criterion emphasis in comparative philosophy of religion. As Stravinsky tersely expresses, “Though I admire the structured thought of theology..it is to religion no more than counterpoint exercises are to music.”<sup>222</sup> Rather than juxtaposing systems of belief at the level of logocentric textual studies, or an epistemologically ambiguous analysis of doctrinal propositions, the karmic ritualization of knowledge suggests the comparing of lived attunements: how internally plural traditions themselves cultivate atmospheres of non-linearity, of modulational instability, and of linearity; how they interpret the binding and liberating dimensions of relational becoming. One might ask, how do traditions attune practitioners atmospherically? How do rituals shift the *guṇic* balance, cultivating clarity, channeling propulsion, or stabilizing inertia? Knowledge becomes a practice of atmospheric transformation, not the static possession of concepts. Comparative philosophy of religion, in this light, becomes a phenomenology of ritual atmospheres. To feel karmically is to recognize that life is always already mutually

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<sup>222</sup> Igor Stravinsky, *Expositions and Developments* (Univ of California Press, 2022), 75.

conditioned by the interplay of guṇas, by the non-receiving, spontaneous-impelling, and novel-fluorescing of embodied existence. To think karma with Whitehead is to recognize that the actual is itself concrescence; processes that are lived atmospherically, as moods of the lifeworld. By bringing these traditions into dialogical range of each other, this thesis has sought to demonstrate that karma can be reinterpreted as atmospheric concrescence: the lived site of relational becoming.

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## APPENDIX

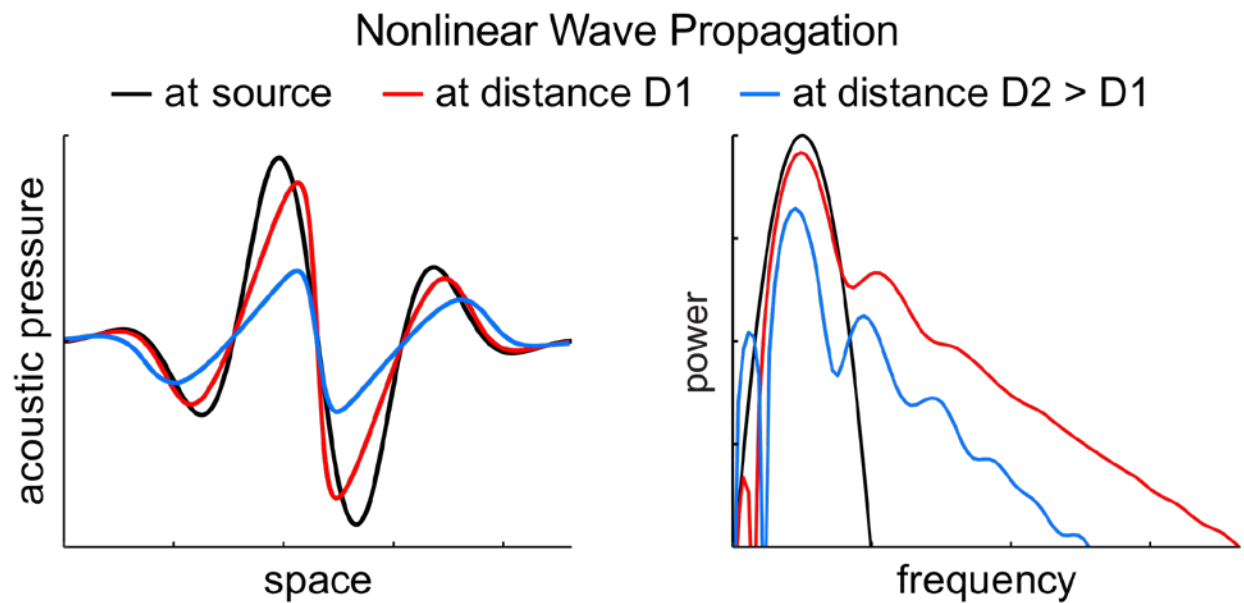


Figure A: Nonlinear wave propagation By David Maresca, Daniel P. Sawyer,

Guillaume Renaud, Audrey Lee-Gosselin, and Mikhail G. Shapiro -

<https://doi.org/10.1103/PhysRevX.8.041002>, Attribution,

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=90227377>

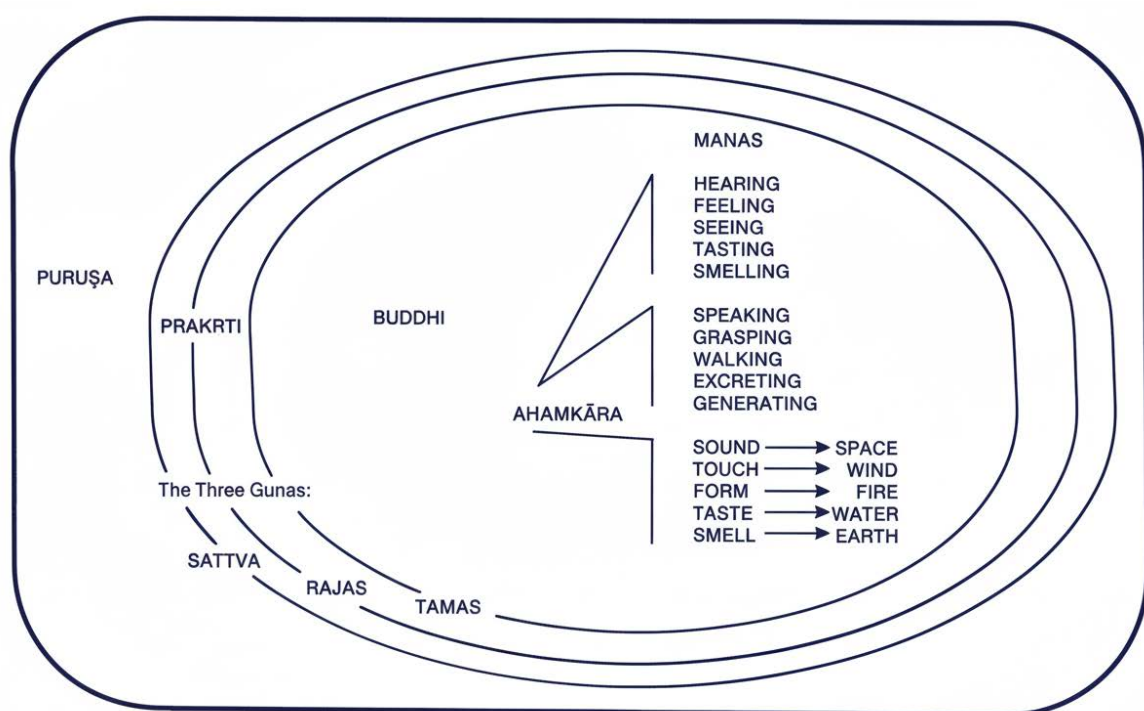


FIGURE ONE: The 25 tattvas of the Sāṃkhya System

Figure B: Cosmo-phenomenological diagram of the Sankhya system.

Key Chapple, Christopher. *Karma and Creativity*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1986, 24.

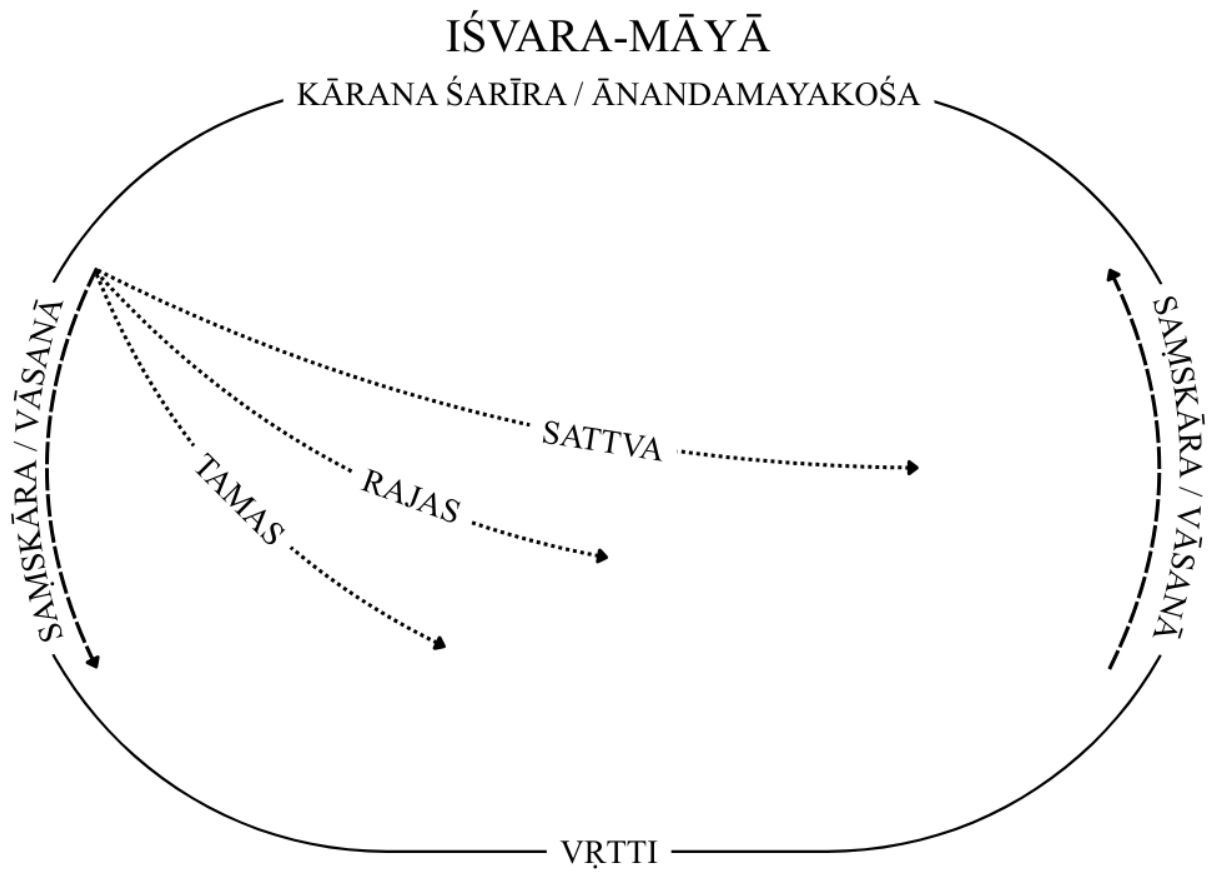


Figure C: Vyavahārika Satya (Relational Sphere) of creative karmic influence through the triguna model.