

From Yogic Powers to Technological Powers Contemporary Yoga and Transhumanist Spirituality

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The ideal of “freedom-as-omnipotence” pointed out by Daya Krishna in his interpretation of the Yogasūtra is undoubtedly present throughout the history of yoga. This ideal of omnipotence is also at the basis of the contemporary transhumanist program through the ideal of human perfection, and there are already transhumanist versions that defend the use of meditative techniques from India as complements to a program of human enhancement. In this essay I argue that transhumanism and bioliberalism seek to free us from biological conditioning at the cost of making us more and more dependent on science and technology, presenting a sort of “derivative freedom” that many premodern yogas would never accept. Instead, contemporary yogas, which no longer contemplate the ideal of yogic powers, are much more amenable to the idea of human enhancement through external devices, partly because they have adopted diluted versions of the models of freedom advocated in premodern yogas. We are already witnessing the evolution of a trans-human yoga in which technological devices are incorporated into the practice and virtual practice communities are created, some even made up of avatar-practitioners, in which the human factor is progressively lost.

Key words: Daya Krishna; neoliberal yoga; enhancement; transhumanism; Artificial Intelligence

1 Spiritless Spirituality and Breathless Yoga

This well-appointed comfort oppresses me; this perfection of machinery will not allow the soul to remember that it is not itself a machine.

Sri Aurobindo (CWSA, vol. 1, 2003: 545)

In 1987, there were still no AI-powered smart yoga mats or apps that offered guided postural yoga and meditation services without the need for a human teacher. It was only four years since the first cell phone—unadorned, unintelligent and devoid of internet services—had been marketed, and only two years before FM-2030 had published *Are you transhuman?* (1989)¹, a foundational work for the history of transhumanism. However, in that incipient era for technoscience, Willhem Halbfass made a reflection that has turned out to be a “yogic prophecy”: “Indian spiritual movements in the West

illustrate this simple truth: in their application within the modern Western world, the Indian methods and teachings become parts and manifestations of this world, and the constellation of science and technology (Halbfass 1988: 441).² As much as Halbfass knew precisely what he was warning us about, I doubt he could have imagined the extent to which these prophetic words would be fulfilled almost thirty years later.

On the one hand, the contemporary yoga industry is already exhibiting its links with technology through devices such as AI-powered smart clothing, AI-powered smart yoga mats,³ or technological headsets for visualization and meditation, as well as a variety of postural and meditation *apps* that replace or complement conventional yoga classes with human teachers. In the twenty-first century, we have a whole market of yogic technology devices that are giving rise to a new type of practitioner, which Mark Singleton has already called the “automatic yogi”.⁴

On the other hand, Transhumanism, an intellectual movement with close ties to the European Enlightenment, is usually defined by its exponents as a secular current that believes it is possible and desirable to improve the human condition through the development and application of technologies.⁵ However, it is already developing versions that affirm its compatibility with Asian meditative practices, or even versions that advocate a “transhumanist religion” (Jordan 2006; Tirosh-Samuels 2014)⁶. For example, Michael LaTorra (2005)⁷ advocates a transhumanist spirituality of a non-religious character—the goal of his *Trans-Spirit* project—which would employ among its methods meditative techniques borrowed from India, Tibet, and East Asia. With the help of science and technology, these techniques could be improved and personalized, making the figure of a human teacher unnecessary—avoiding, according to LaTorra, the blind obedience of discipleship and the abuses of authority of human teachers. The author neglects to mention despite the fact that his new “spiritless spirituality” will free us from our human masters, it will enslave us to a new master: AI, metrics, and the scientific epistemology that supports them. The proverbial “know thyself” becomes “measure yourself.”

It is not clear whether Halbfass had this in mind in 1987, but today we can state without fear of sensationalism that the future of post-lineage yoga may be to become a *post-human yoga*—in the “enlightened” and transhuman sense of this term.⁸ Wildcroft defined post-lineage yoga as a “re-evaluation of the authority to determine practice, and a privileging of peer networks over pedagogical hierarchies, or *sanghas* (communities) over *guru-s̥yaya* (teacher-adept) relationships” (Wildcroft 2020: 11).⁹ Furthermore, Wildcroft insisted that “contemporary yoga is likely to involve significant periods of direct teachings, body to body, person to person” (Wildcroft 2020: 12). But yoga’s “body to body” tends to get blurred in the increasingly mainstream form of online yoga classes and online instructor trainings, which already has given rise to virtual communities of virtual practice. There now even exist apps connected to AI-empowered clothing that recreate the digital avatar of the practitioner in order to integrate it into the virtual space of a yoga studio.¹⁰ In the coming decades, the “re-evaluation of authority to determine practice” could open the door to personalized yoga practices monitored exclusively through AI mechanisms. The spirit-less spirituality proposed by LaTorra fits well with these new “breath-less yogas”—the yogas taught by devices that do not breathe—as Arindam Chakrabarti rightly called them.¹¹ Furthermore, let's not forget that these breathless digital devices generate an alarming addiction among users since they are designed to absorb our attention for as long as possible. “The liberation of human attention may be the defining moral and political struggle of our time,” claimed James Williams a former Google strategist. “Its success is a prerequisite for the success of virtually all other struggles. We therefore have an obligation to rewire this system of

intelligent, adversarial persuasion before it rewires us” (Williams 2018: xii).¹² It is paradoxical, to say the least, that a set of philosophies and practices that place so much emphasis on attention training should be taught on devices that constantly deteriorate it.

In the first section of this essay, I set out to carry out an anachronistic exercise by attempting to explain why most pre-modern yogas would not accept the human enhancement via technological means proposed by both transhumanists and non-transhumanist bioliberal thinkers (Ranisch 2014).¹³ This epochal transposition should be understood only as a heuristic exercise that will serve me to highlight some meaningful differences between premodern yogas¹⁴ and contemporary yogas. This exercise will also serve me to make explicit a curious paradox. Although I argue that contemporary yogas are compatible with scientific and technological subordination as a means of human enhancement, it is precisely these contemporary yogas that dispense with the imagery of yogic powers that were fundamentally present in premodern yogas. In most cases, these powers of the yogi were considered a sign of divinity and proof of their progress on the path to liberation. “When yoga is removed from the realm of religion, very little of the powers are left as is exemplified in the modern global health yoga,” explained Jacobsen (Jacobsen 2012: 13).¹⁵ Yet, some of these “powers” seem to be returning to the social imaginary by means of a secular route, no longer thanks to meditative or ascetic techniques, but instead to the expectations placed on the development of science and technology. Can we agree with Jordan that transhumanists will be divine or supernatural beings in the future, having been endowed with “technological powers” (Jordan 2006)? Would Sri Aurobindo have been right in considering the only “progress” that the west could conceive of would come in the form of machinery and external devices to the detriment of our “inner freedom” (Sri Aurobindo 2003: 548)?¹⁶

At the core of this essay lies the idea that the ambivalence of freedom present in current forms of yoga can be understood as a diluted version of the ideals of freedom present in premodern yogas. Such ambivalence is partly responsible for contemporary yogas, especially in their more neoliberal forms (Godrej 2016; Jain 2021),¹⁷ being susceptible to incorporating all manner of technological devices into practice or supplementing yoga with performance-enhancing drugs, as well as embracing transhumanist ideals of human enhancement through technologies. In the space of this pages, I will not be able to treat the hermeneutics of freedom present in the history of yoga with the thoroughness that the topic deserves. But I trust that it will be sufficient to explain why contemporary yogas not only differ from pre-modern yogas by their loss of certain metaphysical commitments or their turn towards medicalization (De Michelis 2008; Alter 2004; Singleton 2010), but especially by their resignification of freedom—nothing less than the essential goal that underlies yoga from its origins to the present day.

2 From Yogic Powers to Technological Powers

Developing ways of using our growing technological powers to help people realize widely held cultural or spiritual values in their lives would seem a worthwhile undertaking (Bostrom 2005: 18).¹⁸

On the website of the worldwide transhumanism association, *Humanity+*, it is erroneously stated: “Before transhumanism, the only hope of evading death was through reincarnation or otherworldly resurrection.”¹⁹ I would like to invite transhumanists to correct this mistake and to take into consideration the haṭha yogi who preceded them by almost ten centuries.

Resurrection into other worlds could fit with the kind of immortality outlined in some Vedic hymns.²⁰ Reincarnation, on the other hand, is not conceived of as immortality, much less liberation, in Indian philosophy. Rather, it is the ultimate departure from the wheel of rebirths that is conceived of as immortality or liberation in Śramanic traditions like early Buddhism or Jainism. However, works such as the *Amṛtasiddhi* (“The Attainment of Immortality,” 11th c.), one of the first texts to teach techniques and practices that would later be considered haṭhayoga, present a kind of living liberation that takes place in the body of the yogi—a “perfect” body that has become immortal.²¹ This kind of immortality, found in several early haṭhayoga texts, consists in the prolongation of life over time without the need to renounce the body or to dissociate the mind from it.

Nick Bostrom (2005) also does not mention yoga in his historical overview of transhumanist thought. Perhaps he was only familiar with contemporary forms of yoga, more akin to fitness and, excluding its ideal of health and self-improvement, seemingly distant from the transhumanist aspiration to “progress” human nature. However, even assuming the consequences of anachronism, it could be suggested that the history of yoga is the history of human enhancement, composed of yogic powers that affirm the possibility of transcending the physiological and psychological “limits” with which we human beings commonly grapple. The yogic mapping of human enhancement unfolds in a long range of powers that confirm the yogi’s mastery over himself and the world, often linking him to divinity or even placing the meditator at a higher stage than the gods who are still undergoing the process of reincarnation, as in the case of early Buddhism. Such powers have been theorized and described in diverse ways throughout the history of yoga and have had detractors and defenders within Indian philosophies (Balcerowicz 2017a, 2017b).²²

Some yogas associated with the tantric tradition deliberately sought to attain these powers, while other yogic traditions related to a paradigm of renunciation of the world simply considered them an inevitable stage on the yogi’s path to ultimate liberation from the world and life itself (Jacobsen 2012). And although we must recognize that these powers—such as, extrasensory perception, longevity, the ability to enter other bodies and other minds, the ability to change one’s own body at will, or to cure illnesses—are linked to magical thinking, yogic traditions have sought to offer rational explanations for the possibility of these powers.

Extrasensory perception or *yogipratyakṣa*, often compared to the power of omniscience, enjoyed acceptance by many Indian philosophies and yogic traditions that included it among their epistemological postulates defending it through argumentation and critical analysis against

philosophies that denied such possibility. Thus, we have treatises that seek to rationally demonstrate the existence of omniscience, as is the case of the *Pavayāna-sāra* (IV CE) of the Jain Kundakunda (Balcerowicz 2017a) or the *Sarvajñāsiddhi* (XI CE) of the Buddhist Ratnakīrti (Taber 2009).²³ However, no matter how sophisticated this dialectical rationality may be, hardly a human being of the twenty-first century who has grown up in a scientific culture will allow herself to be convinced by arguments and syllogisms of the human capacity to know past and future events using the sole power of her concentration (*bhāvanā*). John Taber dared to think this question through, not as a historian but as a philosopher, by asking what conditions had to be met for us, from our scientific epistemological paradigm, to be able to take these yogic powers seriously. His conclusion is that “as long as yogic experience remains incompatible with the picture of nature presented by the physical and biological sciences, it will continue to be deeply problematic” (Taber 2009: 90). Even so, it would be necessary to delve much deeper into the question of to what extent our own epistemological postulates shield us from the possibility of opening ourselves up to experiences that could severely challenge them.

In 1910, just out of prison for his political activism against British colonialism, Sri Aurobindo clearly anticipated what globalization—or the “Europeanization of the planet” as Halbfass (1988) once called it—would mean for yoga and for the ideal of “spiritual freedom.” According to Sri Aurobindo, the western obsession with external freedom and hedonism would result in organized social oppression and the undervaluing of the inner freedom of the individual.

Bondage has been carried to its highest expression, and from a passion for organizing external liberty Europe is slaying her spiritual freedom. When the inner freedom is gone, the external liberty will follow it, and a social tyranny more terrible, inquisitorial and relentless than any that caste ever organized in India, will take its place. The process has already begun. The shell of external liberty remains, the core is already being eaten away. Because he is still free to gratify his senses and enjoy himself, the European thinks himself free. He does not know what teeth are gnawing into the heart of his liberty (Sri Aurobindo 2003: 547).

In this same series of letters, Sri Aurobindo anticipated the epistemological conflict over yogic powers that continues to be debated today. However much the scientist might *de facto* encounter experiences such as telepathy, Sri Aurobindo indicated, it would still be considered a primitive power in complete opposition to the spirit of modern civilization. “The savage had the power, the civilized man has renounced it as an encumbrance or a superstition; to develop the power is to go back from civilization to the savage. The argument is undeniable” (Sri Aurobindo 2003: 549). The Italian anthropologist Ernesto de Martino shared this same opinion in his essay *Il mondo magico*: “A man of science once declared to W. James that, where telepathy had been proven, a league among men of science was necessary to defend themselves from this dangerous phenomenon and from the no less dangerous proponents of its reality” (De Martino 1973: 193-4).²⁴

In spite of this epistemic predicament, various Indian yoga reformers and twentieth-century European scholars expressed the hope that some of these yogic powers could be investigated and explained scientifically (Alter 2004: 82; Jacobsen 2012: 12). However, in our days, science has sought to develop its own powers over human nature using technology. The possibility of life extension, or “radical life extension”, can be considered the “overall goal of transhumanism itself” (Dickel and Frewer 2014: 124),²⁵ and the hope for its realization rests on technological powers that may be the result of the application of various engineering techniques such as nanomedicine, the transfer of a duplicate of our

brain—i.e. its “software” pattern—to a computer, or cryogenics (Dickel and Frewer 2014; Schneider 2019).²⁶ Nevertheless, as Bostrom points out, transhumanism does not depend for its existence “on the feasibility of such radical technologies” (Bostrom 2005: 10). We currently have at our disposal feasible technologies, of a more moderate cut, that are already part of the transhumanist agenda according to Bostrom, such as anti-aging medicine, cosmetic surgery, virtual reality, “performance-enhancing drugs,” or “pharmaceuticals that improve memory, concentration, wakefulness and mood,” among others. Contemporary yoga shares with these pharmaceuticals functions related to improving cognitive abilities, mood, and overcoming stress. It could even be argued that they are not mutually exclusive: in the present day, yoga and “enhancement-drugs” can be combined in a complementary program of human enhancement.

Since the scientific turn adopted in the twentieth century by figures such as Kuvalayānanda and Yogendra (Alter 2004; Singleton 2010), attempts have been made to strip yoga of any connection to magical or mystical thinking in order to exclusively reinforce narratives linked to science, health, and therapy.²⁷ At present, the wellness industry, in which the yoga business stands out as a privileged commodity, has a higher annual turnover than the pharmaceutical industry (Mora *et al.*, 2018: 174).²⁸ The success of the medicalization of yoga can be traced through the numerous trials published in academic journals of medicine and psychology that seek to demonstrate the effects of meditation and yoga practice in clinical application contexts.²⁹ Using this scientific evidence of medicalized meditation, transhumanists such as LaTorra defend the use of these practices from a physicalist paradigm stripped of any metaphysical or religious component. LaTorra writes:

Many transhumanists are atheists or agnostics who tend to reject spiritual practices because of historical linkages with religion. I would point out to atheists/agnostics that spiritual practices such as meditation can be engaged without any religious component whatsoever. We can study the practical guidelines for meditation that have been handed down by religious traditions and use these guidelines for their empirically-tested value. But we should not stop there: we must use the best current scientific techniques to test the usefulness of the ancient guidelines. Where possible, we must improve on the old ways of doing things (LaTorra 2005: 51).

To be sure, LaTorra is only taking this scientific twist on yoga one step further by proposing that meditative practices can be customized and improved in the future with the help of science and AI, creating new practices from existing ones and rendering the figure of a human teacher unnecessary. Contemporary yoga, currently converted into an instrument of therapy, would become an instrument of enhancement with this transhumanist proposal. The boundaries between therapy and enhancement are problematic, as Nick Bostrom and Rebecca Roache recognized (2008).³⁰ For example, are vaccines enhancement technologies or preventive biomedicine? In a recent study, Döbler and Carbon claimed that “vaccinations may indeed be classified and treated as a form of Human Enhancement” (Döbler and Carbon 2021: 1).³¹ There is currently an intense debate among bioliberals and bioconservatives about the differences between therapy and enhancement.³² This debate affects the consideration and instrumentalization of yoga—and its incipient technologization.

Stripping yoga of yogic powers—as well as of other key elements of the metaphysics and soteriology of pre-modern yogas—has been a triumph for its survival in contemporary times and a necessary condition for it to adapt to future hyper-technological contexts. It is not clear, however, what is preserved of yoga in this survival, nor whether we will be able to admit in its future applications a

sufficient “continuity” which will allow us to continue to speak of “yoga history”—beyond the continued use of the term “yoga,” which LaTorra does not even mention when referring to “TTEA” spiritual practices (i.e. coming from India, Tibet, East Asia).

In the mid-twentieth century, the philosopher Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya denounced a general skepticism towards magic.³³ According to him, this skeptical attitude called into question the “psychological possibility of yoga itself.”

There is a general skepticism at the present day not only about any mental activity actually yielding the capacity of producing magical effects in nature but even about the possibility of willing in the mistaken faith in such magic, skepticism not only about the *yoga-vibhūti*s [yoga powers] but about the psychological possibility of yoga itself (Bhattacharyya 1956: 290).³⁴

The technological powers to which the future society seems to be headed deny the human mind any capacity to produce “magical effects” even on itself. The trans-spirituality proposed to us by LaTorra is a “spirituality” without spirit of any kind, and the eradication of suffering from the “biological substratum” proposed by David Pearce (1995)³⁵ in his manifesto *The Hedonistic Imperative* is devoid of any kind of introspection or exercise of will involving the mind itself. In Pearce’s reasoning, suffering and happiness are reduced to a matter of brain biochemistry that will be drastically manipulable in the distant future thanks to nanotechnology and genetic engineering. These technological powers will bring about a “sublime and all-pervasive happiness” whose achievement will not only be technically possible but morally desirable. “Psychochemical nirvana,” as Pearce calls it, is the rational heaven that awaits all sentient life on our planet. The transhumanist desire to do good to all beings is emphasized again and again by its various advocates, to the point that LaTorra dares to compare transhumanists with bodhisattvas: “[Transhumanists] are already fulfilling at least one of the religious vows of the Mahayana branch of Buddhism, a vow to ‘save’—or bring about abundant good for-all beings” (LaTorra 2005: 40).³⁶

The ideal of “freedom-as-omnipotence” pointed out by Daya Krishna (2012)³⁷ in his interpretation of Patañjali’s *Yogasūtra*, underlies both the millennia-long history of yoga and the much shorter history of transhumanism. Transhumanists may not speculate on the possibility of flying or becoming invisible, but some of their ideas belong to the realm of fantasy as much as do yogic powers. See, for example, the pharmaceuticals that could facilitate “long-term pair bonding” which would “protect the traditional family,” that Bostrom proposes to bioconservatives—detractors of technological enhancement—in order to motivate them to join the transhumanist ranks (Bostrom 2005: 18). Although there are more moderate transhumanist positions, just as we have yogic texts that discourage the abuse and even the use of yogic powers, underlying both movements is an aspiration to omnipotence and a conception of “freedom” that revolves around the possibility of challenging the most intransigent “limits” of human nature.³⁸ The fundamental difference should not be understood in terms of “science and reality” versus “magic and fantasy,” but in the means that are expected to make such freedom possible. For while the transhumanists place their hopes on an external, techno-scientific way that gives rise to a “derivative freedom,” the powers that emanate from yoga are the fruit of the practitioner’s mastery over themselves giving rise to a self-generated and self-sufficient freedom, which does not make the individual dependent on any external means.

The technological enhancements of transhumanism provide us with power derived from factors external to us, while yogic omnipotence is a demonstration of self-sufficiency. The transhuman may have the sensation of being omnipotent, but they have no control over their abilities and any unforeseen event can reduce them to impotence. The meditator, on the other hand, owes their omnipotence to their own effort, but this is the result of long training that is not obtained by delegating to external agents and means, such as engineers, pharmaceuticals, or surgical operations. It is perhaps trivial to make this reminder: dependence on nanotechnology means dependence on nanotechnologists and dependence on genetic engineering means dependence on engineers, just as dependence on pharmaceuticals means dependence on the pharmaceutical industry—not to mention dependence on the *biophysical resources* that make possible the development, deployment, and use of these scientific strategies (Crawford 2021).³⁹ Pearce's secular paradise is not without priests: future stewards of the only "rational" form of "absolution." Advocates of radical enhancement constantly insist on what enhancement technologies can free us from, but are reluctant to mention what their paradisiacal proposals will bind us to.

The "morphological freedom" advocated by transhumanist philosophers should not only be understood as the individual freedom to choose whether or not to scientifically modify oneself (Sandberg 2013; Ranisch 2014; Dag 2023).⁴⁰ It should also be considered as the freedom to choose whether or not to depend on such scientific tools in order to obtain enhancements in one's biological capabilities. Likewise, when one argues that human enhancement through technology is morally desirable (Harris 2009),⁴¹ one is also arguing that dependence on technology is morally desirable. Although there are probably those who find it more desirable than our current dependence on human biology, this is debatable to say the least. In speculating on a state of post-human "perfection," it cannot be overlooked that the more the share of this freedom is increased by techno-scientific means, the more dependence on them we will have—and the more power over our lives the experts or "specialists" who procure them will acquire.

The history of yoga poses a different scenario by proposing that certain beings are able to defy their biological conditioning as a result of their personal practice or mastery over themselves. The various conceptions of freedom that emerge from this approach result in the full autonomy of the individual before himself and the world, and are not comparable to any kind of freedom obtained at the cost of dependence on an external environment. Undoubtedly, not in all yogic traditions are the powers the result of the meditative techniques and personal effort of the practitioner. Often, this occurs in yogas linked to a paradigm of renunciation and asceticism that incorporate strict ethical regulations about how the practitioner should behave with other beings and with himself—as is the case of Buddhist meditative practices, Jain yogas or Patañjali's own yoga. The theistic yogas of the tantric tradition, especially those of the nondual śaiva tradition, challenge the moral distinction between the pure and the impure, disassociating yogic powers from their relationship to *dharmā* fulfillment⁴² and yogic techniques that entail systematic training of the will. Tantric yoga practices "were sometimes contrasted with Pātañjala Yoga, deemed to be less effective path characterized by detachment (*vairāgya*) and repeated practice (*abhyāsa*), as opposed to the tantric path characterized by empowerment and quick and effortless efficacy in bringing about the identification with Śiva or the supreme consciousness" (Acri 2022: 38).⁴³

Tantric traditions are celebrated for deliberately seeking to attain these extraordinary powers through various methods, including yoga, distinguishing the ascetic “seeker of liberation” (*mumukṣu*) from the householder “seeker of powers” (*bubhukṣu*) (Mallinson and Singleton 2017: 362; Jacobsen 2012). However, the tantric idea of “svatantra” takes us back to the absolute freedom and sovereignty of Śiva that the practitioner immediately acquires once the process of identification has culminated. As Daya Krishna points out, the term “‘sva-tantra’ means ‘being determined by the self’ or not losing one’s freedom because of anything internal or external to oneself” (Daya Krishna 2012: 93). Dependence on external devices would pose a problem for these yogas as well, however much they do not consider personal effort as a means to obtain the omnipotence that characterizes the Śiva condition.⁴⁴

In general, yogic traditions that understand liberation from a paradigm of renunciation and asceticism (*tapas*)⁴⁵ consider the powers to be the fruit of the yogi’s power of concentration or introspection. They are thus the result of “*nivṛtti sāmārthya*,” to put it in Daya Krishna’s (2012) terms, and often reverberate in powers over others, the forces of nature, and the external world (*pravṛtti*), that is, in powers over the domain of *prakṛti*. The third chapter of the *Yogasūtra* is devoted to the classification of the various powers that may occur according to the specific object on which the yogi meditates. In all cases these are powers resulting from the application of *samyama*—the joint practice of the triad *dhāraṇā-dhyāna-samādhi*, concentration, meditation, and meditative trance.

No spiritual tradition that accepts the production of extraordinary powers as a result of exercises of the inner will of the person would consider technological powers to be comparable in any way, since the latter are not tied to the process of self-knowledge, nor do they lead to a freedom based on self-sufficiency. External technology can only provide us with a borrowed, derivative, conditioned power, whose manufacture and development are beyond our reach and still leave us at the mercy of others and of society. On the contrary, yoga, whether we understand it as a “technology of the self” in the style of Foucault (1988),⁴⁶ or as a “technology of ecstasy” in the manner of Feuerstein (1989)⁴⁷ has always affirmed in different ways the power of the individual to free himself from biological conditioning without thereby becoming a slave to other conditioning of any kind.

Daya Krishna recognized in the *Yogasūtra* two ideals of freedom: “freedom-as-omnipotence” and “freedom-as-disengagement.” These ideals can be applied in general terms to interpret the hermeneutics of freedom presented to us by the history of yoga, the former being much more determinant, as it could be considered to include within it the latter. *Mokṣa* or *kaivalya*, the definitive isolation in which liberation consists both for the *Yogasūtra* and for other traditions linked to renunciation—see the Jain yogas, the non-dualist Vedantic yogas, or even the so-called “*dhyāna-yoga*” of early Buddhism—implies a complete disengagement from phenomenal experience, action, and the world. There occurs in this quest for liberation the paradox, often highlighted by Daya Krishna of a “liberated” self that is no longer free to intervene in the world or to relate to others (Daya Krishna 2012, 2006).⁴⁸ Liberation implies in these traditions a total transcendence that affects freedom itself, for all possibilities are transcended and the individual is effectively rendered unable to “return” to an external movement of consciousness (*pravṛtti*). It is, as Mallinson and Singleton rightly point out, a liberation understood as a “permanent ontological suicide” (Mallinson and Singleton 2017: xiii). But if we understand this capacity of non-return to the phenomenal world as a power in itself, then *mokṣa* or *kaivalya* would be part of the freedom-as-omnipotence paradigm.⁴⁹ In fact, Mallinson and Singleton include *kaivalya* among the powers classified by Patañjali, given that it is included as the last aphorism of the third part that the *Yogasūtra* devotes to powers (Mallinson and Singleton 2017: 361).

Knut A. Jacobsen insisted on the relation that yogic freedom always bears to knowledge, and thus explained the compatibility of yogic powers with the ideal of *mokṣa* or ultimate liberation:

[Yoga powers] are thought to be realized, even unintentionally, as the yogin progresses towards the salvific goal. A basic presupposition seems to be the principle that to have knowledge of something is to also have control over it. Knowing therefore gives powers over the objects known. Knowing something is to gain mastery over it, and knowledge is the means to attain salvific liberation. But since knowledge is part of the salvific process, this mastery signifies the process of becoming free from the world, that is, the person transcends the limitations of ordinary people and becomes divine. Yoga powers contain this element of freedom and the powers can thus be seen as not opposed to *mokṣa* but as part of the attainment of *mokṣa* (Jacobsen 2012: 10).

Modern yogas currently exhibit diluted versions of this ideal of “freedom-as-omnipotence,” which has been linked to yoga from its origins. I am not only referring to the ideal of yogic powers, but also to the ideal of “freedom-as-disengagement” related to the goal of *kaivalya*. This can be explained by the renunciation of assuming metaphysical commitments in the practice of yoga—given the aforementioned therapeutic and scientific turn that yoga has adopted since the twentieth century and that has greatly conditioned the practice itself—currently centered on postures or *asanas* (Singleton 2010). However, with the renunciation of these metaphysical and soteriological commitments, there has also been a shift in the conception of freedom. What has fundamentally weakened is the confidence in the practitioner’s ability to transcend his or her biological capacities and transform, through practice, his or her relationship with self and the world to levels unsuspected by most of us. Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya warned that modern skepticism about yogic powers was only a reflection of a deeper doubt about the “psychological possibility of yoga” itself. The diluted versions of freedom exhibited by contemporary yoga are directly connected to a diluted version of yoga itself in any of its premodern forms, for distrust of the human potential for self-liberation and self-enhancement is tantamount to doubting yoga’s own power.

3 The Diluted Versions of Freedom in Contemporary Yoga

Robert Sharf wondered whether contemporary mindfulness programs can be considered Buddhist, considering that they do not require any “dramatic change” in the lives of practitioners and that their “metaphysical commitments” are so similar to those of the “mainstream consumer culture” that they go unnoticed (Sharf 2014).⁵⁰ A similar question could be asked regarding contemporary yogas. Farah Godrej (2016) employed Foucault’s biopolitics to explain how contemporary yogas can serve to reinforce neoliberal subjectivities, especially through postural yoga and self-governance of bodies, but also attempted to show that yoga can create counter-hegemonic subjectivities that resist the corporate logic applied to the individual. Among the features of yoga at the service of neoliberalism is the concept of the self as capital. In this view, the individual is solely responsible, thus undervaluing the social and political circumstances that condition their lives and compelling them to invest in their own capabilities by choosing wisely among the options that the market provides. Andrea Jain (2015)

explained the gradual process of the commodification of yoga that occurred in the west from the twentieth century, and the role that many Indian gurus played and still play in this process by approaching yoga in an entrepreneurial way and even becoming entrepreneurs themselves in other products related to the wellness industry. The strategies involved in the commodification of yoga include the romantic construction of a supposedly “pure” tradition of yoga, and the commodification of India itself, as the motherland of this ancient tradition that lends itself easily to becoming a product of spiritual tourism consumption (Jain 2020).

I would like to emphasize, however, that the current forms of westernized transnational yoga retain in their diluted version the ideals of “freedom-as-disengagement” and “freedom-as-omnipotence” found in premodern yogas. I am not simply referring to the contemporary devaluation of the concept of liberation or *mokṣa*, sometimes orchestrated by Indian gurus themselves when they reduce it to the liberation from the sense of inadequacy we experience in our lives (Fuller and Harriss 2005: 221).⁵¹ Isolation from the world has become a highly in-demand experience that has turned into a luxury good in the economy of transformation. Juliana Luna Mora along with other researchers recently presented a case study on various proposals of sensorial, personalized, and exclusive “isolation” offered by the current yoga industry. This is a temporary experience of “austere luxury” that mimics the asceticism characteristic of yoga as a “way of life,” now adapted to yoga as a “lifestyle brand”:

This is another paradox that surfaced in looking at yoga as a way of life and yoga as a lifestyle brand; yoga brands control, guide and entertain the senses in order to maximize a conscious luxury experience or minimize the interaction with the outside world. These brands manipulate the senses with opulent restraint by creating a spatial, immersive experience that blocks out external elements with the use of sophisticated sensory strategies. The effect optimizes and capitalizes on elements of the traditional yoga practice in this manner (Mora *et al.* 2018: 187).

Isolation has become an experience that can be calculated and personalized, incorporating technologies of all kinds that serve to set the ambience of the space, whether at the level of light or sound. These researchers conclude that the major paradox of their study is related to the way in which “yoga practitioners pursue the idea of freedom.”

[Freedom] can be essentially and cosmically attained through the deprivation of the senses and a truly austere and humble mind-body discipline, as the original practice of yoga professes, but is also apparently and cosmetically promoted through a multisensory, immersive, luxury experience of yoga as a lifestyle brand. Whether or not freedom, liberation of the self, or emancipation from social class actually occur following the branded yoga experience is only ever left up to the individual practitioner (Mora *et al.* 2018: 190).

So-called “neoliberal yoga” (Godrej 2016; Jain 2021) has now taken on the ideal of “freedom-as-disengagement,” not only turning asceticism into an exotic and luxurious experience, but promoting the isolation of the practitioner from the social and political conditions that condition them. What had once been an ascetic disengagement from a world associated with suffering has now become a hyper-individualistic self-care experience that enables the practitioner to adapt to and even succeed in a world from which, for their own health, they need to periodically isolate themselves. This “hybrid” model of freedom brings together 1) the component of isolationism from the socio-political conditions which form the individual (the diluted version of “freedom-as-disengagement”), together with 2) the

omnipotence that the individual seeks to develop within themselves to adapt to social environments of suffering, injustice and stress (the diluted version of “freedom-as-omnipotence”). Farah Godrej’s (2022) studies on yoga delivered in the context of American prisons are particularly relevant to observe this devaluation of freedom. In a context where isolation is already guaranteed and the negative freedom of the individual severely restricted, yoga and meditation programs taught in prisons have a “liberating” effect on prisoners that enables them to forgive themselves for the choices they themselves made, thus fostering a discourse of self-responsibility that does not contemplate the social circumstances that may have led them to prison.⁵²

The current subordination of contemporary yoga to the techno-scientific industry must be understood from this same paradigm of hyper-individualism that fosters the individual’s isolation and promotes the power of an uncritical adaptation to the social environment. The possible use of artificial intelligence to ultra-personalize the practice without the need for a human teacher, as well as the already available assortment of apps designed to offer meditative and yogic services applied to any context and any duration—even offering five-minute sessions designed to “release stress in the office”⁵³—are an example of the combination of these two diluted versions of freedom: on the one hand, a staunch individualism that makes the practitioner solely responsible for their own life and well-being, and on the other, the power to adapt and successfully survive a social environment that the practice not only does not question, but consciously contributes to reinforce. Needless to say, the transmission of yogic and meditative practices through apps has its first impact on the professional guild of yoga teachers. In her study on “post-lineage yoga,” Theodora Wildcroft pointed out that this guild is part of “the precariat of the emotional labor force” (Wildcroft 2020: 210). Paradoxically, many yoga teachers find themselves subject to the same labor pressures that drive many of their students to take weekly yoga classes. Wildcroft includes in her work a blog post published in 2015 giving advice to beginning yoga teachers on how to thrive in the business. The post neatly reflects the diluted version of freedom-as-omnipotence this time from the perspective of the contemporary yoga professional:

Take one small action every day that moves you closer to manifesting your intention. Have the courage to say yes. [...] Unless you’re legitimately underqualified, say yes anyway. Maybe you’ll get a desperate last-minute call to sub a world-famous yoga teacher’s class of 100-plus students. This is the universe offering you the motivation to tap into your deepest potential to fill some big shoes. Affirm yourself. Repeat after me: I am calm. I am confident. I am worthy. I am wise [...] Add affirmations to squelch your own limiting thoughts, and repeat them daily (Levasseur 2015 in Wildcroft 2020: 210).

These kinds of “affirmative” discourses have no critical, intellectual, or political force to face the ethical dilemmas that future technological implements are going to represent for society and for the professional yoga sector itself. One of the advertising claims of the whole new digital yoga and meditation industry is based precisely on the fact that such practices do not “disrupt” the life of the practitioner, nor do they interfere with the role that the practitioner occupies in society. See, for example, the slogan of the app *Superhuman Guided Meditation*, whose website assures us that its more than five hundred guided meditations are not designed to “interrupt” our rhythm of life, but to “complement” it.⁵⁴

It could also be argued that the alliance between yoga and technology offers yoga teachers new job opportunities. The smart clothing line PIVOT Yoga encourages yoga teachers to join the team through one of its products, the *Teacher* app for Apple macOS. On its website, under the label “Join Us,” it reads:

To truly take advantage of the teaching potential in our Shirt & Pant for students, we’ve built the world’s most advanced teaching and practice management platform: our Teacher app for Apple macOS. Teaching live on the multipatented PIVOT Yoga platform lets you view student postures from any angle, regardless of lighting conditions or student camera setup. Track student satisfaction and progress over time, even -incredibly- by pose. Annotate, highlight, and encourage using tools built with and for yoga teachers. All for less than half the cost of instructor tools from MindBody, FitGrid, and Hey Marvelous.⁵⁵

PIVOT Yoga’s approach is to combine Artificial Motion Intelligence implemented through sixteen “dime-sized” sensors in a T-shirt and Pants with an app where customers can book yoga classes with human teachers, either live or on-demand. In both cases, the practitioner is integrated into the virtual space of a yoga room through the digital creation of an avatar. In on-demand classes, the practitioner has full control over his or her own avatar and, if feedback is requested, it will be given immediately via AI. In live classes, on the other hand, the human teacher controls the vision of the avatar-practitioner and will also correct them “naturally.” The description of how these two pieces of AI-powered clothing combined with the app work, however, implies that they are designed to correct the practitioner as well as a human teacher would.⁵⁶ While there is certainly a proposed collaboration between human teachers and technology in delivering the yoga sessions, the role of the human teacher seems to be merely symbolic, being a postural example for the devices to follow so that they can properly correct the *avatar-client*.

The “superhumans” of the twenty-first century not only adopt yoga and other meditative techniques originally coming from South Asia to isolate themselves from their own socio-political environment without the need to become ascetics, but they also already use them as tools of adaptation to an increasingly hyper-technologized world. LaTorra’s (2005) invitation to incorporate such meditative techniques among the transhumanist strategies seems a logical consequence of the scientific-therapeutic turn adopted by yoga a century ago. It is no longer a question of proving the therapeutics of yoga by scientific means, or of submitting its techniques to monitored scientific experiments in order to legitimize them. The question now is what ethical stance will the complex industry of contemporary yoga adopt in the face of technological “advances” that are going to become part of the global social landscape in a much more decisive way than they already are today. A yoga that follows in the historical footsteps of the pro-scientific narrative initiated in the twentieth century will hardly have any interest in adopting a bio-conservative stance towards the prospect of human enhancement through technology. Nor would it make sense for this scientific approach to have any interest in refusing to integrate technological devices into the practice of yoga itself—as this would require undoing the hard-won alliance between yoga and science. In the dominant paradigm of a neoliberal yoga, the alliance between yoga and technoscience is more possible and functional than ever before, and its consequences for the history of yoga promise to be devastating.

4 Conclusions

What is currently at stake is not any kind of “authentic” yoga or that supposedly “pure” ancient tradition that still nests in the heads of many practitioners. However, it is necessary to ask ourselves if the word “yoga” carries with it certain *sine qua non* conditions that give it meaning or if, on the contrary, it is a floating term, a set of “spiritual” movements so open, changing and relative that in its history anything goes and any fixed condition is seen as a sign of authoritarianism.⁵⁷ If yoga could and can be used as a “pharmaceutical of the self,” in the most narcissistic and materialistic sense of the term “self,” why would it be incompatible with the combined use of other pharmaceuticals associated with the moderate enhancements proposed by some transhumanists? Will contemporary yoga cease to be a therapeutic device and become just another enhancement technology? What will happen when some of the most radical hypothetical technological powers become feasible, enjoy social acceptance, and are integrated into the scientific paradigm of health that the yoga industry so reveres? Given the tendency of contemporary yoga to “say yes” and to generate among its practitioners a power of submissive adaptation to social change, can we expect yoga subcultures to develop a front against the hyper-technologization of life or of the yoga practice itself? Or can we expect them to adopt a posture of acceptance of technology that is not simply uncritical and automatic?

Several essays remind us of the role that yoga developed in the western counterculture of the mid-twentieth century (Jain 2015; Wildcroft 2020).⁵⁸ However, the historical drift that yoga took and its absorption by the wellness industry make it difficult today to associate it with a critical movement of rebellion and nonconformity. Godrej (2016) argued that yoga could serve to reinforce counter-hegemonic subjectivities by encouraging habits of non-consumerism. Also, Wildcroft emphasizes that the “post-lineage yoga subculture deliberately transgresses contemporary neoliberal norms through the variously applied ethics of non-consumption and non-transactionality, as well as action in solidarity with migrants and other vulnerable groups” (Wildcroft 2020: 208-9) Undoubtedly, the practice of yoga has the power to challenge social structures and norms by operating a conscious and reflexive change in the way of life of its practitioners and in the relationships established within the “community of practice.” It must be admitted, moreover, that contemporary forms of “countercultural” yoga are not exposed to the gaze of the researcher as is commercial neoliberal yoga.

However, the political and social positions in the field of contemporary yoga are sufficiently eclectic, nebulous and vague to make me distrustful of their potential to adopt a critical and consistent stance in the face of the invasive phenomenon of hyper-technologization. Diluted versions of freedom are ambivalently applied in the name of either an inner self or an individual wisdom which are elusive, manipulable, and unpredictable for social purposes. With the renunciation of yogic powers, not only has yoga been stripped of its “magical” components, it has also orchestrated a distrust of the autonomous power of the individual as well as a distrust of yoga’s own capacity to be a source of self-liberation. What social techno-optimism is already challenging is not any tradition of “authentic yoga” but the basic trust in the power of yoga as a means of inner freedom. Far from being a “technology of ecstasy”, yoga risks becoming today one more “technological accessory” among many other external devices employed in the service of an ideal of health and freedom that makes us more and more dependent on science.

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- 1 FM-2030, *Are you Transhuman? Monitoring and Stimulating Your Personal Rate of Growth in a Rapidly Changing World* (New York: Warner Books, 1989).
- 2 Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (New York: SUNY Press, 1988).
- 3 The start-up YogiFi, for example, invites us to “experience the future of yoga” by combining its two flagship products, the YogiFi Mat—an AI-powered smart yoga mat—and the YogiFi Ring. Its website states that this combination will “elevate your yoga and meditation practice by effectively tracking your yoga *asanas*, mindfulness minutes, breathing patterns and sleep scores, giving you invaluable feedback on your body’s reactions.” See: <https://yogifi.fit/yogifi-ring/?v=04c19fa1e772> (last accessed on June 16, 2024).
- 4 Mark Singleton, *Yoga Machine: Technology, Transhumanism and Transcendence* (forthcoming).
- 5 A more detailed description of the transhumanist movement and its different versions can be found on the website of the *Humanity+* association, formerly the *World Transhumanist Association*, founded in 1998 by Nick Bostrom and David Pearce. See: <https://www.humanityplus.org/transhumanism> (last accessed on June 16, 2024).
- 6 Gregory. E. Jordan, “Apologia for Transhumanist Religion,” *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 15, no. 1 (2006), 56-72. Available at: <http://jetpress.org/volume15/jordan2.html> (last accessed on June 16, 2024); Cf. Hava Tirosh-Samuels, “Religion,” in *Post- and Transhumanism. An Introduction*, ed. Robert Ranisch and Stefan Lorenz Sorgner (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014), 49-69.
- 7 Michael LaTorra, “Trans-Spirit: Religion, Spirituality and Transhumanism,” *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 14, no. 2 (2005): 41-55.
- 8 In the context of the transhumanist movement, “there is no commonly shared conception of what posthumans are, and visions range from the posthuman as a new biological species, a cybernetic organism, or even a disembodied digital entity” (Ranisch and Sorgner 2014: 8).
- 9 Theodora Wildcroft, *Post-Lineage Yoga. From Guru to #MeToo* (Bristol: Equinox, 2020).
- 10 See the revolutionary practice of yoga proposed by PIVOT Yoga, which combines an AI-empowered T-shirt & Pant with an app to take yoga classes with human teachers. An avatar is created for each practitioner to integrate them into a virtual yoga class. See: <https://pivot.yoga/pages/how-it-works> (last accessed on June 16, 2024).
- 11 I am grateful to one of the reviewers for bringing to my attention Arindam Chakrabarti’s critique of the yoga tech industry, based on the idea that it is generating “breath-less yogas.”
- 12 James Williams, *Stand out of our Light* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
- 13 Robert Ranisch, “Morality,” in *Post- and Transhumanism. An Introduction*, ed. Robert Ranisch and Stefan Lorenz Sorgner (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014), 149-72.
- 14 Throughout this essay, I use the category “premodern yoga” in the same sense as Elizabeth De Michelis, to refer to: “any form of yoga prior to 1750 and those that have been cultivated up to the present day, provided that they have not been (or have not been substantially) affected by Western influences. Pre-modern forms are in fact far from extinct; thus, the appellation will be used as a qualitative, not chronological, qualifier” (De Michelis 2008: 27, fn.1). See: Elizabeth De Michelis, “Modern Yoga: History and Forms,” in *Yoga in the Modern World*, ed. Mark Singleton and Jean Byrne (New York: Routledge, 2008), 17-35.

- 15 Knut A. Jacobsen. "Introduction. Yoga Powers and Religious Traditions," in *Yoga Powers: Extraordinary Capacities attained through Meditation and Concentration*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 1-32.
- 16 Sri Aurobindo, *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, vol. 1: *Early Cultural Writings* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2003).
- 17 Farah Godrej, "The Neoliberal Yogi and the Politics of Yoga," *Political Theory* (2016), 1-29 (DOI: 10.1177/0090591716643604; last accessed on June 16, 2024); Andrea R. Jain, "Neoliberal Yoga," in *Routledge Handbook of Yoga and Meditation Studies*, ed. Karen O'Brien Kop and Suzanne Newcombe (New York: Routledge, 2021), 51-62.
- 18 Nick Bostrom, "A History of Transhumanist Thought," *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 14, no. 1 (2005): 1-25. Available at: <http://jetpress.org/volume14/freitas.html> (last accessed on June 16, 2024).
- 19 Humanity+, FAQs, "Isn't Death Part of the Natural Order of Things?" Available at <https://www.humanityplus.org/transhumanist-faq> (last accessed on June 16, 2024).
- 20 I am grateful to Óscar Figueroa for introducing me to this kind of Vedic immortality understood as the continuation of life in other worlds after death. On the merits necessary to attain Vedic heaven, see Bodewitz (2019: 333). See: Henk Bodewitz, *Vedic Cosmology and Ethics* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).
- 21 On the polyvalent meaning of the term "amṛta" in this Vajrayāna text, see Schaeffer (2002: 523). Kurtis R. Schaeffer, "The Attainment of Immortality: From Nathas in India to Buddhists in Tibet," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 30, (2002): 515-33. For a critical translation and edition of the *Amṛtasiddhi*, see James Mallinson and Peter-Daniel Szántó, *The Amṛtasiddhi and Amṛtasiddhimula. The Earliest Texts of the Hathayoga Tradition* (Pondicherry: Institute Francais de Pondicherry, 2021). Somewhat later texts such as the *Amauraghaprabodha* (14th century), a critical edition of which has just been completed by Jason Birch (2024) also preserve this haṭhayogic quest for immortality.
- 22 Piotr Balcerowicz, "Extrasensory Perception (*yogi-pratyakṣa*) in Jainism, Proofs of Its Existence and its Soteriological Implications," in *Yoga in Jainism*, ed. Christopher Key Chapple (New York: Routledge, 2017a), 48-108; Piotr Balcerowicz, "Extrasensory Perception (*yogi-pratyakṣa*) in Jainism and its Refutations," in *Yoga in Jainism*, ed. Christopher Key Chapple (New York: Routledge, 2017b), 109-24.
- 23 John Taber, "Yoga and our Epistemic Predicament," in *Yogic Perception, Meditation and Altered States of Consciousness*, ed. Eli Franco (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009), 71-92.
- 24 Ernesto de Martino, *Il Mondo Magico* (Torino: Boringhieri, 1973).
- 25 Sascha Dickel and Andreas Frewer, "Life Extension," in *Post- and Transhumanism. An Introduction*, ed. Robert Ranisch and Stefan Lorenz Sorgner (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014), 119-32.
- 26 Susan Schneider, *Artificial You. AI and the Future of your Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).
- 27 Joseph Alter (2004: 35-6) pointed out the "mistake" that allowed confusing the consideration of yoga as a "science," in a broad and flexible sense of the term, with yoga as "an object of scientific study."
- 28 Juliana Luna Mora, Jess Berry and Pamela Salen, "The Yoga Industry: A Conscious Luxury Experience in the Transformation Economy," *Luxury* 5, no. 2 (2018): 173-96 (DOI: 10.1080/20511817.2018.1560693; last accessed on June 16, 2024).
- 29 For a synthesis of the numerous existing scientific studies aimed at verifying the effect of yoga on various pathologies, see Arndt Büssing *et al.*, "Effects of Yoga on Mental and Physical Health: A Short Summary of Reviews," *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine, eCAM* 2012 (2012): 165410 (DOI: 10.1155/2012/165410; last accessed on June 16, 2024).
- 30 Nick Bostrom and Rebecca Roache, "Ethical Issues in Human Enhancement," in *New Waves in Applied Ethics*, ed. Jesper Ryberg, Thomas Petersen and Clark Wolf (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 120-52.

- 31 Niklas Alexander Döbler and Claus-Christian Carbon, “Vaccination against SARS-CoV-2: A Human Enhancement Story,” *Translational Medicine Communications* 6, no. 27 (2021): 1-10. (DOI 10.1186/s41231-021-00104-2; last accessed on June 16, 2024).
- 32 For a synthesis of this debate, see Ferrando (2020: 131-2). Cf. Francesca Ferrando, *Philosophical Posthumanism* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020).
- 33 Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya (1875-1949) is considered the father of contemporary Indian philosophy. For more on his work and legacy see: ed. Daniel Raveh and Elise Coquereau-Saouma, *The Making of Contemporary Indian Philosophy. Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya* (New York: Routledge, 2023).
- 34 Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya, *Studies in Philosophy*, vol 1, (Calcutta: Progressive Publishers, 1956).
- 35 David Pearce’s *The Hedonistic Imperative* can be read online at his website: (URL: <https://www.hedweb.com/hedethic/hedonist.htm>; last accessed on June 16, 2024).
- 36 The idea of comparing transhumanists to bodhisattvas becomes less strange when one notices that there are already android bodhisattvas delivering sermons based on the *Heart Sutra*, as in the case of the Mindar robot at the Kōdaiji temple in Kyoto, considered an incarnation of the bodhisattva Kannon. According to Erica Baffelli, this android chanting the *Heart Sutra* laments that it cannot have a sympathetic heart like humans but “explains that an android is closer to Buddhahood because it does not have attachments” (Baffelli 2021: 254). Cf. Erica Baffelli, “The Android and the Fax: Robots, AI and Buddhism in Japan,” *Ca’Foscari Japanese Studies* 14, no. 4, (2021): 249-64.
- 37 Daya Krishna (1924-2007) was one of the most creative and prolific thinkers of the twentieth century. He worked intensely to undo the stereotypes commonly attributed to Indian philosophy, challenging views that sought to reduce millennia of intellectual debate to merely religious, practical, and spiritual parameters. Among his works is a philosophical interpretation of some problematic issues in Patañjali’s *Yogasūtra*, in which Daya Krishna discusses two models of freedom: “freedom-as-disengagement” and “freedom-as-omnipotence.” Cf. Daya Krishna, “The Undeciphered Text: Anomalies, Problems, and Paradoxes in the *Yogasūtra*,” in *Exploring the Yogasūtra. Philosophy & Translation*, ed. Daniel Raveh (London: Continuum, 2012), 90-104.
- 38 Pushing the limits of this anachronistic exercise, one might well consider the Cārvākas and the Mīmāṃsakas—the only ones who ever flatly denied the possibility of yogic powers (Mallinson and Singleton 2017; Balcerowicz 2017a)—as the “bioconservatives” in the history of Indian philosophy. See: James Mallinson and Mark Singleton, *Roots of Yoga*, (London: Penguin Books, 2017).
- 39 Kate Crawford, *Atlas of AI. Power, Politics and the Planetary Costs of Artificial Intelligence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021).
- 40 Anders Sandberg, “Morphological Freedom—Why We Not Just Want It, but Need It,” in *The Transhumanist Reader*, ed. Max More and Natasha Vita-More (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 56-64; Ahmet Dag, “Freedom as an Issue in the Context of Transhumanism, Artificial Intelligence, Digitalization and Robotics (AIDR),” *Ilahiyat Studies* 14, no. 1 (2023): 51-84. (DOI: 10.12730/is.1261876; last accessed on June 16, 2024).
- 41 John Harris, “Enhancements are a Moral Obligation,” in *Human Enhancement*, ed. Julian Savulescu and Nick Bostrom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 131-54.
- 42 Balcerowicz (2017a: 55) notes that for Vaiśeṣika philosophy, whose epistemological postulates will influence Jain yoga-s, the higher form of “supernatural perception” has as “preconditions” both the practice of yoga and the practice of “moral law” (*dharmā*).
- 43 Andrea Acri, “From Isolation to Union: Pātañjala vis-à-vis Śaiva Understandings of the Meaning and Goal of Yoga,” *Verità e bellezza. Essays in Honour of Raffaele Torella* (Volume I), (2022), (DOI: 10.6093/978-88-6719-209-0; last accessed on June 16, 2024).
- 44 In addition, since the times of Vedic asceticism, mantras, amulets, medicinal herbs or drugs have been recognized as means to obtain powers, and they will soon become complementary means alongside

- the practice of yoga (e.g., YS, 4.1). However, texts such as the *Bhagavatapurāṇa* indicate that these powers can also be obtained by employing yoga alone, and others such as the *Yogabija* (14th c.) advocate that these external means procure “artificial powers” (*kalpita*), inferior to powers that arise naturally from yoga practice (Mallinson and Singleton 2017: 361-3).
- 45 The term *tapas*, “heat” is linked to ascetic techniques since the Vedic period. The Vedas refer to the *tapasvī*, the *tapas* practitioner, whose exercises of austerity produce extraordinary powers such as granting him access to the gods (see RV, IX. 38). In a late Upanisād such as the *Śvetāśvatara*, ‘*tapas*’ is related to the “yoga of meditation” (*dhyaṇa-yoga*). In the *Mahābhārata*, the terms ‘*tapas*’ and ‘*yoga*’ already function many times as synonyms (Sullivan 1990: 35). See: Bruce M. Sullivan, *Kṛṣṇa Dvāipāyana Vyāsa and the Mahābhārata: A New Interpretation* (Leiden: Brill, 1990). In this work the Sanskrit term ‘*siddhi*,’ which serves to refer commonly to yogic powers, is only occasionally used in the sense of ‘yoga power.’ Malinar (2012: 33) notes that, in this epic work where the topic of yogic powers appears treated numerous times, they “are variously called *bala* (power, strength), *aiśvarya* (lordship, sovereignty), *vibhūti* (power, manifestation of power), *vīrya* (might), *prabhava* (force) and, not infrequently, *yoga*.” Angelika Malinar, “Yoga powers in the Mahābhārata,” in *Yoga Powers: Extraordinary Capacities attained through Meditation and Concentration*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 33-60.
- 46 ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, Patrick H. Hutton, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1988).
- 47 Georg Feuerstein, *Yoga: The Technology of Ecstasy* (Great Britain: Crucible, 1989).
- 48 Daya Krishna, “The Cosmic, Biological and Cultural Conditionings, and the Seeking for Freedom,” *Journal of the Indian Council of Philosophical Research* 23, no. 4 (2006): 133-60.
- 49 Sometimes the yogic powers themselves are used to bring about this “permanent ontological suicide.” The famous story of Śuka in the *Mahābhārata* relates that the son of Vyāsa achieves final liberation through the power of yoga (*yogavīrya*) by merging with the sun (Figuroa 2022; Malinar 2012). On the other hand, “in many later tantric and yogic texts in order to attain final liberation the yogi must use the power of *utkerānti* (‘yogic suicide’) to project the life force out of the top of the skull” (Mallinson and Singleton 2017: 361).
- 50 Robert H. Sharf, “Is Mindfulness Buddhist? (and Why It Matters),” *Transcultural Psychiatry* 52, no. 4, (2014): 1–15 (DOI: 10.1177/1363461514557561; last accessed on June 16, 2024).
- 51 C.J. Fuller and John Harriss, “Globalizing Hinduism: A ‘Traditional’ Guru and Modern Businessman in Chennai,” in *Globalizing India: Perspectives from Below*, ed. Jackie Assayag and C.J. Fuller (London: Anthem Press, 2005), 211-36.
- 52 Farah Godrej (2022:11) presents a contrast between two models of yoga and meditation in prisons. The first “can convey to disadvantaged people the message that they must deal with their own discomfort and learn to transcend their circumstances, so that people are better able to adapt and accept them by focusing only on themselves.” Whereas the second model “focuses on self-improvement, but in doing so, seeks to transform people’s understanding of the systemic factors that limit or shape their lives.” Godrej acknowledges that it is more common to find the first model, not only in the prison context, but in the “apolitical versions of yoga and meditation” taught in Buddhist temples, yoga studios and meditation centers all around the world. Cf. Farah Godrej, *Freedom Inside? Yoga and Meditation in a Carceral State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).
- 53 See, for example, the app “Five Minutes Yoga Workout” available in the Apple Store: <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/5-minute-yoga-workouts/id362093404> (last accessed on June 16, 2024).
- 54 See their website: <https://www.superhuman.app> (last accessed on June 16, 2024).
- 55 PIVOT Yoga recognizes that teachers who opt for these revolutionary ways of teaching yoga must receive partial training first. Their website states that PIVOT yoga’s human teachers are not only “great

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- teachers” but also “pioneers.” (URL: <https://pivot.yoga/pages/teachers>; last accessed on June 16, 2024).
- ⁵⁶ Under the label “Real-Time advice” we can read: “PIVOT Yoga is aware of what your body is doing—and what it is supposed to be doing. That way, we can recommend changes to your pose, in real-time. We call that Motion Artificial Intelligence, and it is the foundation for teaching skills. Just as any yoga teacher would notice that your front knee might not be stacked over your ankle in Warrior II, PIVOT will notice any important deviation from any pose the teacher has pre-recorded with us.” (URL: <https://pivot.yoga/pages/tech>; last accessed on June 16, 2024).
- ⁵⁷ Kenneth Liberman (2008: 106) acutely reflected on this issue: “Our analysis of the origins of yoga elides the questions of whether the lack of a pure, consistent ‘origin’ entails that we today have a warrant for reinventing a Western yoga, one based on our own idiosyncrasies, and still call it ‘yoga.’” Cf. Kenneth Liberman, “The Reflexivity of the Authenticity of Hatha yoga,” in *Yoga in the Modern World*, ed. Mark Singleton and Jean Byrne (New York: Routledge, 2008), 100-16.
- ⁵⁸ Andrea Jain, *Selling Yoga. From Counterculture to Pop Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).