

On the Nature of Consciousness



Editor

Adarasupally Nataraju

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The distinguished contributors to this volume explore such topics as nature, content and structure of consciousness from both eastern and western perspectives. Both the schools –phenomenology and Vedanta have received greater attention while discussing the hard and easy problems of consciousness in this work. The book sets a new agenda for doing consciousness studies in Indian context. This is to present western philosophical theories in the language of Vedanta or Nyaya. The methodology is to deviate from doing comparative studies of eastern and western philosophies, and to take up basic or fundamental questions raised by the Indian tradition over the ages, and address them by showing adequacies/in-adequacies in the theories from the western world. This book is an example of creatively interpreting and appropriating western philosophy from Indian philosophical perspective.

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Intentionality and Reflexivity of Consciousness Advaita Perspective

Adarasupally Nataraju
and
Munmun Chakraborty

Abstract: The problem of understanding nature, content and structure of consciousness has had occupied the attention of philosophers through the ages. *Via-negativa* or *neti-neti* (not this, not this) is the best possible way to bring into language the indescribable *Brahman*, the conscious energy. With diligent use of *śabda* as *pramāṇa*, quoting the Vedānta texts, Śaṅkara reaffirms that reflexivity is the fundamental characteristic of consciousness and not intentionality or object directedness. Consciousness is *nirviśaya*, *nirākāra* and *nirāśraya*. It is the *Sākṣi Caitanya* that is contentless, formless and without a base to rest upon. At *pāramārthika* level, consciousness is *svaprakāśa* (self-revealing). It is the ultimate reality that manifests itself and the objects of the world.

Phenomenal Consciousness goes out as it were and takes the shape of the object. Intentionality or object directedness is a mental state and not the original nature – *svarūpa lakṣaṇa* of *Brahman* but it is only a phenomenal character or *tuṣṭastha lakṣaṇa*. In his commentary on *Brahmasūtra-Bhāṣya* Śaṅkara compares the nature of consciousness to that of the formless light. As there is no form to the light of the moon or sun, and takes the form of the object before it, consciousness assumes the form of an object that it illuminates. Consciousness is

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self-luminous, self-existing, self-knowledge, self-delight and self-contained.

Husserlian phenomenology tries to establish that intentionality is indispensable to consciousness. Consciousness is always conscious of something. They are inseparable. Every act of consciousness includes an intentional object in it, the thoughts, emotions, volitions, desires, memory and continuous awareness. I would like to discuss in this paper the apparent tension between intentionality and reflexivity. Does reflexivity give rise to intentionality? Which feature is foundational to consciousness? Are consciousness and objects opposed to each other in their nature? Is Pure Consciousness part of our experiential state of mind? How to prove the existence of Pure Consciousness?

Keywords: Consciousness, Advaita Vedanta, Intentionality, Reflexivity, Rāmānuja, Husserl

BOTH Eastern and Western schools of philosophers have tirelessly tried to expound the nature and constitution of consciousness. The basic questions around which the study of consciousness generally revolves are: 1. What is Pure Consciousness? 2. What is its nature? 3. Is the Pure Consciousness self-revealing or intentional?

Answering this question the Advaita School of Śaṅkara firmly holds that the nature of Pure Consciousness is self-revealing and not intentional. Consciousness is *nirviśaya*, *nirākāra* and *nirāśraya*. It is the *Sākṣi Caitanya* (witness consciousness) that is contentless, formless and placeless. In the Vedānta, this consciousness is termed as *Brahman* which is beyond all names, changes, duality and qualities. "It is neither gross nor minute, neither short nor long" (*Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* III.viii.8). It is "soundless, touchless, colourless, undiminishing" (*Kaṭha Upaniṣad* I.iii.15). Though at the *vyāvahārika* level consciousness is attributed with different forms and qualities for the purpose of worship. Rāmānuja terms this as *dharmabhūta jñāna*. In the

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level of *pāramārthika*, consciousness is self-revealing (*svaprakāśa*). It is the ultimate reality that manifests itself as well as all other objects of the world. So, the material world is the modification of this one ultimate consciousness. In his commentary on the *Brahmasūtra* Śāṅkara compares the nature of consciousness with the formlessness of light. Just as the light of sun or moon has no form in itself and takes the form of the object before it, being formless, consciousness seems to assume the forms of the objects that it illuminates. Consciousness is self-luminous, self-existent, self-knowledge, self-delight and self-contained.

In contrast, for Edmund Husserl, the founder of Western phenomenology, the nature of consciousness is always intentional. Intentionality is the indispensable aspect of consciousness. Consciousness is always consciousness of something. According to Husserl, consciousness and intentionality are inseparable from each other though they are distinguishable. For instance, I am seeing a bird sitting outside the window. Here, my act of consciousness is directed toward the bird. Accordingly, every act of consciousness includes an intentional object within it. This intentional relation is composed of three parts – the act of consciousness, the *noema* and the object. In the above-mentioned example, it is the act of consciousness through which I perceive the bird. And the bird is the object of this intentional act. But besides this act of consciousness and the object, there is also a content of the object, which is termed as *noema* by Husserl. *Noema* is a certain idea or concept of the object. The object may not exist at certain time but the *noema* always exists. Husserl's notion of *noema* in this way seems identical with Plato's concept of idea of universal.

On the other hand, for Śāṅkara, consciousness cannot be the consciousness of an object. Since, in that case it would be no longer qualified as Pure. In his *Brahmasūtra-Bhāṣya*, Śāṅkara clearly maintains a significant difference between consciousness and object. As for him, consciousness and object are diametrically

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B L O O M S B U R Y

Theoretic Grades of Consciousness in Advaita Vedānta Philosophy

ADARASUPALLY NATARAJU*

We are told in no uncertain terms by the Vedantins that Ācitta or internal organ, deriving its consciousness from the Self, goes out as it were and takes the shape of the object. Since objects have *jada svabhāva*, in the sense that the objects like pot, jar, etc., do not have the capacity to throw light on some other objects and become aware of them, therefore, it is consciousness that has the capacity to reveal the objects by throwing its light on them. This goes by the term '*vṛtti*' in philosophical literature. Ācitta has a natural tendency to run outwards, we are told, and take the shape of the object. This is termed as intentionality of consciousness in modern philosophical jargon. 'Conscious of' something or the other, even when one is not in contact with objects. To be conscious of an object is to be conscious of its content or meaning. This meaning conferring act of consciousness is apparent and not real is the contention of the Advaitins keeping in line with their ontology. Consciousness is an attribute '*dharmabhūta jñana*' and does two-fold work, that it reveals an object and also makes the self-aware of its existence. This I would call in this paper as *Tatastha Lakṣana-per accidens* of Brahman, and not the essential feature.

A lakṣana, we are told, serves as a marker. Talking of lakṣana in the case of objects of phenomenal world has a marked difference from pointing at the lakṣana of a metaphysical object. While we discuss the lakṣana of Brahman, the scriptures point at theoretic grades in terms of '*Tatastha*' and '*Svarūpa*'. While commenting on the statement from the Taittirīya Upaniṣad—*Satyam Jñānāmanantam Brahma*—Śankara clearly mentions that this vākya points at the *svarūpa lakṣana* of Brahman. Brahman is existence, knowledge and infinity, not that Brahman is characterized by theses *guṇās*. Consciousness that is self-luminous or *svaprakāśa* is referred to as *svarūpa lakṣana* of Brahman.

Akhaṇḍākara Vṛtti is the culmination of all kinds of *vṛttis* and it results in self-realization. *Vṛtti* is defined as *antahkaraṇa pariṇāma viśeṣa*¹ – a special type of modification of internal organ. Vedānta Paribhāṣa and Siddhānta Leśasangraha give different definitions of *vṛtti* or inner psychosis. Presenting Prakāśātman's view on *vṛtti* Appayya Dikshita says, "though the

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genus *gotva* (cow ness) is all pervasive, yet it is related to the individual cow only, in the same way, though consciousness is all pervasive, it is related to an individual *antahkaraña* in the case of a *jīva*. The *jīva* or individual soul with the help of *vṛtti* cognizes worldly objects. This is an apparent quality of consciousness and cannot be its essential characteristic. The logical necessity is to posit pure consciousness as the background of intentional behavior.

The second view presented by Appayya Dikshita in his text is that the *jīva* with *antahkaraña* *vṛtti* cognizes identity between *viśaya* *śaitanya* and *Brahma* *śaitanya*. This cognizing of identity is also a function of *vṛtti*. Without the help of *vṛtti* there is no mechanism that can help a *jīva* cognize world of objects.

The third view found in *Siddhāntaleśa Sangraha* is that through *vṛtti* the *jīva* gets rid of ignorance, it is only through *vṛtti* that the *jīva* throws its light on the objects and cognizes them. The veil of ignorance is destroyed by the 'coming out' as it were of *vṛtti*. This goes in phenomenological jargon as intentional nature of consciousness, and contemporary western philosophy credits this much to the works of Husserl and his teacher Brentano. Though we can see the presence of such ideas in several texts in Indian sub-continent with Śankara and his followers vouching for transparent nature of consciousness as a logical culmination of intentional phenomenal behavior on the one hand, and Rāmānuja and his followers positing object directed behavior in the fore front of all discussions on the nature of consciousness.

The locus of external objects is considered to be *Brāhmi* *śetana* called as *bimba*, this is different from *jīva* *śetana* called as *pratibimba*, Pure consciousness is indirectly conveyed through *viśaya* *śetana* and *jīva* *śetana*. This is conveyed by *abhedābhivyakti*². There must be some common features between *viśaya* and *jīva* so that the objects are revealed, or else knowledge episode can never happen. That unifying field is Brahman consciousness for an Advaitin. Unless the underlying locus of external objects is Brahman consciousness, the interaction of subject and object and the resultant knowledge is impossible. Therefore, pure consciousness is conveyed in every single experience that we all have in our everyday life-world. Not only Śabda as *pramāṇa* proves the existence of pure consciousness but the *bimba-pratibimba* *śetana* also proves the presence of pure consciousness as the necessary and sufficient condition to unify *viśaya* *śetana* and *jīva* *śetana*. This is the last word of Vedānta.

The contribution of Advaita Vedānta to the world of thought lies in this fact that this school searches for a unifying field to explain a 'knowledge episode'. Schools like the Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika and others explain the interaction between subject and object without referring to any common

field that unifies both the conscious elements—that of the subject and the object. I consider this significant insight of Advaita in to the workings of unifying field of consciousness as containing the potential to logically prove transparent state of consciousness which does not require objects for its existence. It is, therefore, *svaprakāśa*.

Though *antahkaraṇa* and its ignorance ends with the realization of Brahman, there still remains a *vṛtti* in the form of '*aḥam Brahmāsmi*'. This is termed as *akhandākāra vṛtti*. This is not a psychosis or a modification of *antahkaraṇa*. This *vṛtti* does not require the presence of any objects, is the considerate opinion of Advaita Vedānta. The problem that bothers an Advaitin is: whether or not there still remains a *vṛtti* in the pure consciousness? This may not be similar to *Ātma vṛtti*, but there got to be some form of a *vṛtti* to explain such Vedic passages as—'Brahman was one in the beginning; It wanted to become many'. There got to be a *vṛtti* of the form '*aḥam Brahmāsmi*'—I am Brahman. I am not referring to any *antahkaraṇa* in Brahman. Without having any *antahkaraṇa*, since after Self-realization all that is *jāda* has to end, there still has to remain a dim awareness that 'I am Brahman'. However, if there is such a *vṛtti*, it logically contradicts the very idea of 'pure' consciousness. The Advaitin's dilemma continues.

Theoretic Grades of Consciousness

Two grades of consciousness are discussed by the Advaitins, not the followers of Vaiṣṇava Sampradāya. Rather two types of (not distinct) Brahman—*parā* and *aparā* are recognized by Śāṅkara and his followers. Brahman in its purest form which is non-relational, self-luminous, infinite, without a base to rest upon, without any qualities etc., is *parā* Brahman and *aparā* Brahman is with the attributes such as creator, sustainer, destroyer, compassionate Being, and possesses all the auspicious qualities.

Another theoretic gradation is in terms of *Parā* Brahman and *Hiranyagarbha*. Brahman- the primordial cause transforms Itself in to the world of names and forms. This transformation is only apparent and not real is the contention of Advaita. Brahman as the material and efficient cause, and Brahman as the effect in the form of the world of objects and *jīvas*. The entanglement of consciousness with the world of objects, and consciousness getting relegated to the background presents a hard problem to the Advaitin, the hard problem of consciousness as presented by western intellectuals does not bother an Advaitin.

Commentators agree that the second sūtra from *Brahma Sūtra*—'*janmādyaśya Yataḥ*'—points to the *Tatastha* (per accidens) lakṣaṇa of Brahman, *Prakāśātman* in *Pañcāpādika-Vivaraṇa* strongly supports this view. Madhva Ācārya and his followers—Jayatīrtha and Vyāsatīrtha consider

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Collective Human Welfare: Practical Vedanta of Swami Vivekananda

A. Nataraju

Vedānta philosophy in general is characterized as predominantly mystical, other-worldly and life denying. This in contrast to religious man in the west who affirms life, and works with determination and joy in completing the tasks of life. Faith in the reality of world and life, it is understood, results in social service while negation of the reality of world and life leads to retirement from active life and service to the society in which one lives. The starting point of ethics is in affirming world and life. The criticism is: since the general understanding of Vedanta philosophy is that it denies ontological reality of the status of the world, it follows that there is no place for social service and collective human welfare in Vedānta ethics.

This paper examines the persistent criticism historically leveled on Hindu thought in general, Vedānta in particular that they have not shown seriousness on ethical issues and have neglected 'collected human welfare'. There has been over emphasis on individual salvation at the cost of suffering millions. Some of the criticisms put forth by Dr. Schweitzer are as follows: Firstly, the emphasis on ecstasy



in Hindu thought naturally tends to world and life negation. Secondly, Hindu thought is essentially other-worldly and humanist ethics and other-worldliness are incompatible with each other. Thirdly, the Hindu doctrine of *māyā*, which declares that life is an illusion, contains the flaw of world and life negation, and in consequence Hindu thought is non-ethical. Fourthly, the Hindu doctrine of way to salvation is *jñāna* or Self-discovery. This is different from moral development, and so Hindu religion is non-ethical. Fifthly, the goal of human endeavor is escape, not reconciliation. It is the deliverance of the soul from the bonds of finitude, not the conversion of the finite in to the organ and manifestation of the infinite. Religion is a refuge from life and its problems, and man has no hope of better things to come. Sixthly, the ethics of inner perfection insisted on by Hindu thought conflict with an active ethics and wide-hearted love of one's neighbor.

According to Schweitzer, the real belief of the *Brāhmīns* is that man does not attain union with Brahman by means of any achievement of his natural power of gaining knowledge, but solely by quitting the world of the senses in a state of ecstasy and thus learning the reality of pure being. There in the message is that, Christian mysticism represents the enrichment of personality, the heightened expression of spiritual life, and Hindu mysticism requires one to run away from oneself. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan attempted to answer this criticism, he says, "This is the example of oversimplification. In Hindu mysticism it is far from correct. For Hindu 'spiritual' is the basic element of human nature. But spiritual realization is not a miraculous solution of life's

Advaita, Causality and Collective Human Welfare: Revisiting Vedānta's Contribution to World Order

ADARASUPALLY NATARAJU¹

The pluralistic Sāṅkhya School holds that primordial matter (prakṛti) with the presence of consciousness (puruṣa) evolves the products of the world. This theory of creation holds that the world of objects is created out of a material cause (upādāna-kāraṇa) which is distinct from Consciousness. Both matter and force are eternal and co-existing. It is like a potter creating a pot out of clay. Here upādāna or the material cause, which in this case is clay, is clearly distinct from the nimitta-kāraṇa or the efficient cause, which in this case is the potter. On the other hand, Advaita-vedānta works out the 'theory of projection' according to which, the material cause is not distinct from the efficient cause. Brahman is both nimitta- and upādāna-kāraṇa. The example given is like a spider knitting a web out of its own self. The world as such is projected out of a subtle conscious energy (Dr. S. Radhakrishnan translates Brahman as Conscious-energy instead of Consciousness). This theory criticises the theory of creation as upheld by the dualistic schools of Indian philosophy. As the Vedic statement goes "eṣa ejaṭi niṣṛtam – Consciousness projects itself." The world of objects that we perceive – animals, human beings and environment – are all projected from the same source. This theory if applied in the context of our 'life world' would revolutionise our understanding of and relation with the nature surrounding us. Every single particle of the entire cosmos is permeated with the same conscious energy – "īśāvāsyamidam sarvaṃ yat kiñca jagatyāṃ jagat" (Īśā.U.1.1). The question of exploiting nature to fulfil human greed does not arise when the self of an individual expands and encompasses the entire environment.

This paper compares the theories of world creation and projection from the Sāṅkhya and Advaita-vedānta standpoints respectively, and connects this thesis with 'Collective Human Welfare' as propounded in Advaita philosophy. Part I of the paper deals with 'Advaita and Causality', especially its theory of creation. Part II deals with the application of this theory.

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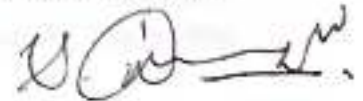
Part I

I would like to posit a hypothesis that an individual's freedom or Mokṣa is incomplete as long as there are suffering millions. The general understanding of the thesis of the 'lokasaṅgraha' or 'bhūtaḥita', Vedānta Ethics, is that working for the welfare of society brings purity to the inner soul – citta-śuddhi. Action thus performed becomes a purificatory exercise. Social service acts not only as a tool for the purification of citta but there is no escape from it even after attaining 'jīvan-mukti' since the completeness of freedom or mukti is not possible if there exists even a single soul that is bound. As in quantum physics, where although particles are separated in space and are not connected materially, they influence each other, so also an individual's freedom is affected by the suffering millions. Freedom needs space to exist; it does not exist in a vacuum. Since there is limitedness to space (according to quantum physics), freedom also becomes limited. The interconnectedness of the freedom of all life forms is what I derive from the Advaita theory of 'Oneness of Life' – *ekam eva advitīyam brahma, neha nānāsti kiñcana*. Thus, it becomes imperative for a human to work for collective human welfare. I strongly believe that this kind of an understanding was the working force behind the likes of Swami Vivekananda, Gandhiji and Swami Chinmayananda in undertaking massive social reconstruction programmes.

There has been severe criticism of Vedānta ethics that it only promotes an individual's Liberation and that it does not concern itself with collective human welfare. Retirement to the forests and working out one's own salvation are cited to support this thesis. Does Vedānta talk about social responsibility and social welfare? What has been the position of Vedānta ethics on a person's duty towards society? I will answer these questions a little later in this paper. For now I turn to Advaita and causality.

Advaita and Causality

The ontological position of the Advaitin is on the following lines. Undivided Consciousness or Brahman is svaprakāśa or self-luminous. Reflexivity is its real nature, though it exhibits intentional character in the phenomenal world. The world is ultimately unreal. The Real is non-dual. Due to beginningless avidyā, superimposition takes place, and the One appears as the many with names and forms. Māyā is neither real nor unreal, it is indeterminable. The phenomenal is characterised by finitude and plurality.



'creations' of the world cease to be authoritative if Brahman is established by Vedānta texts as the cause of the world, because then Brahman must be inclusive of the world.

The Reply (siddhanta): Vedānta-paribhāṣā replies that the passages dealing with creation are not intended to establish creation, but only Brahman, the one without a second – *ekam eva advitīyam brahma. neha nānāsti kiñcana*.

According to Dharmarāja-adhvarīndra, "If without introducing creation, the universe were negated in Brahman, then, like colour denied in air, the universe might be supposed to exist outside Brahman, and hence the indubitable solitariness of Brahman cannot be proved. Therefore, by delineating creation from Brahman, the contingency of an effect existing outside of its material cause is set at rest: there is no presence of actual attributes in Brahman; they are only superimposed for the purpose of contemplation. Like a spider which projects a web out of itself, so does Brahman project the world: *"eṣa eṣāti niṣṭam"* (*Rg-veda*).

Vyāsa-tīrtha criticises the Advaitin view that Brahman is both the material and the instrumental cause. He says, "a material cause always undergoes transformation in the production of the effect, but Brahman is changeless and, as such, cannot be the material cause." According to Vyāsa-tīrtha, "if Brahman who is the ultimate reality were the material cause of the world, then the world also would be permanently real."

Madhusūdana-sarasvatī replies to this criticism: If Brahman is real then the world, which is its effect, should also be real is not valid, because the qualities of the transforming cause are found to pass over to the effect, whereas Brahman being the ground cause, there is no reason to expect all its qualities to be present in the effect. Vyāsa-tīrtha, however, further criticises this theory and says, "if the world had Brahman for its material cause, then since Brahman was pure Bliss, the world should also be expected to be of the nature of Bliss, which it is not" (Vyāsa-tīrtha – *Nyāyāmṛta*). If we are to look at the vivarta theory of causation we find that we do not require a material cause at all. Vedic passages, which seem to imply the identity of the world and God, are to be explained as attributing to God the absolute controlling power. *The reply: Gauḍapāda in Māṇḍūkya-kārikā* (MK 3.19) clarifies: "there is no such thing as creation at all; the real cannot be subject to change; what happens then is 'the immortal would become mortal'." Gauḍapāda continues his argument against Brahman transforming into world order: "all becoming

is unreal, valid only in the empirical world. In reality, there is nothing like distinction – *nāsti bhedaḥ kathaṅcana*” (MK 3.15). All theories of creation (enumerated below) are rejected by Advaita:

- (a) that creation is a dream or an illusion,
- (b) that it is the will of God,
- (c) that it proceeds from time, *kāla*,
- (d) that creation is for the enjoyment of God, *līlā*,
- (e) that it is sport of God, *kṛīḍā* and so on.

Gauḍapāda rejects all these views and says, “it is the inherent nature of the shining One – *devasyaiśa svabhāvo’yam*; what desire can He have who has attained all” (MK 1.7-9) rejecting, therefore, the view that the world is comparable to a dream or an illusion. It is the manifestation of the very nature of God, the expression of His power. This is the last word of Vedānta on the subject (MK 2.12). How could this world be a ‘sport’ or *kṛīḍā* to the Lord where millions are suffering through their lives? That this world is for the enjoyment *līlā* of the Lord is a misinterpretation of the word ‘*līlā*’ by many contemporary Indian thinkers. The word ‘*līlā*’ is to be understood in its true sense. It is the ‘ease’ with which the One has become many, and definitely not for the sake of ‘enjoyment’ that the supreme Truth has created this world.

It is interesting to note here that several critics of the Advaita theory of *māyā*, chief among them being Rāmānuja, have vehemently criticised Śaṅkara on the grounds that he proposes the illusory nature of the world. That the world is a dream or an illusion is ascribed to Śaṅkara by many non-advaitic thinkers. The nature of the world has been an intense topic of debate in Vedānta schools over the past several centuries.

Does Śaṅkara ever attach illusoriness to the world? Does the word ‘*mithyā*’ stand for a non-existing entity? Or does it mean eternally non-existing? *Pārvaṇakṣa*: If Śaṅkara were to attach illusoriness to world, why does he speak about *prātibhāsika* and *vyāvahārika* as also part of *satta* or reality, apart from *pāramārthika-satta*? Does he not attach the word *satta* or reality, though relative, to even the states of dream and waking?

The answer to these questions may not be simple. I cannot attempt to answer them in this paper as there is a space constraint. However, suffice it to say that Advaita, following Gauḍapāda’s commentary on the *Māṇḍūkya-kārikā*, has maintained that it is the very nature of the immutable to express

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