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On Pre-reflectivity of Self-consciousness in the Traditions of Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta

SUMMARY: By pointing out different forms of pre-reflective consciousness and comparing them to the concepts of self in Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta, it could be shown that both schools apply a kind of consciousness that corresponds to Frank's concept of self-consciousness and self-knowledge. As demonstrated, the first form of pre-reflective consciousness complies with the advaitic teaching of an unchangeable eternity of consciousness, which is *subjectless* and understood as being without time and space, even as being omnipresent. It appears impossible to relate it to something else without it being objectified. The Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta school reinterprets the concept of pure consciousness and accepts it as objectifiable consciousness, which is now considered "knowledge". At the same time it presupposes a kind of individual consciousness which is called "I". Moreover, this school uses the argument that consciousness is unobjectifiable against the Advaitin to establish that objectifying does not imply the cessation of consciousness, that is, in their case the consciousness of the individual self. Rāmānuja thus theorises, a thesis continued by Veīkaṭanātha, that knowledges (*saṃvit*) can be remembered over time because, first, they are based on a constant self, that is, a pre-reflective "I"-consciousness, and secondly, through this "knowledge", they can be known again by referring to itself in another state (*avasthā*) than it earlier held. But what does this mean for the familiarity of (self-)consciousness? Is it mediated? The self, the "I"-consciousness, is always in a new, changed state of knowledge. As far as self-luminosity is possible, even if the self can be objectified, it is possible to say, without negating consciousness, that it is immediately aware of being in a special state if this can be proven through different means of knowledge.

KEYWORDS: prereflectivity, self-consciousness, self-knowledge, self-illumination, familiarity, difference, self-contradiction, substance (*dravya*), state (*avasthā*), qualifying knowledge (*dharmabhūtajñāna*)

Introductory remarks

To demonstrate the differences but also the accordance between concepts of (self-)consciousness in the traditions of Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta, which in the history of their polemic discussions stand in clear opposition to each other, I will base my remarks on concepts of pre-reflective consciousness in the European tradition. For particular developments in the European philosophy of consciousness it has been demonstrated by Dieter Henrich¹ and later by his student Manfred Frank that consciousness cannot be defined according to the reflection model due to circular arguments; a subject's reflection on what is identical to the subject is impossible, because it can be aware of an identity with itself only if it already has knowledge of itself. In such a case, while (self-)consciousness is not objectifiable, it must be presupposed. A decisive and influential passage to this effect, by Johann Gottlieb Fichte, through which the understanding of consciousness received a new impetus in the late eighteenth century and on which the philosopher Dieter Henrich has relied in the last century,² reads as follows:

We become [...] conscious of the consciousness of our consciousness only by making the latter a second time into an object, thereby obtaining consciousness of our consciousness, and so ad infinitum. In this way, however, our consciousness is not explained, or there is consequently no consciousness at all, if one assumes it to be a state of mind or an object and thus always presupposes a subject, but never finds it.³

To differentiate between references to consciousness and its description in terms of a subject–object relationship,⁴ Manfred Frank has

¹ Cf. Henrich 2016: 38–39 [1967: 10–14].

² Cf. *ibid.*: 40 [1967: 13].

³ Quoted according to Henrich 2016: 40 [1967: 13] fn. 4: “Fichte, *Schriften aus den Jahren 1790–1800*, ed. Hans Jacob (Berlin: Junker and Dünnhagen 1937), *Nachlass*, 356.”

⁴ By which it has often been defined in the Western tradition. We can trace the meaning of the word consciousness in the European tradition

investigated⁵ the development of theories of reflective and immediate consciousness in European philosophy from Fichte onwards, demonstrating that (self-)consciousness is not a kind of *reflective* consciousness, but is pre-reflective, that is, it is prior to any relational concept.⁶

Such concepts of pre-reflective consciousness will be taken as a background for analysing how consciousness is viewed in the Indian Vedānta traditions: the tradition of the Advaita Vedānta on the one hand, and the tradition of Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta on the other. Both developed a concept of consciousness that corresponds to the above pre-reflective consciousness as traced by Frank in the European tradition. The explanation of *subjectless* consciousness (Advaita Vedānta) or the *subject's* state of being conscious (Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta) revolves around the two schools' different concepts of self (*ātman*). The debate between the two traditions involves their claiming different forms of consciousness (general or individual), and in how they avoid a regress *ad infinitum*.

to the Latin term *conscientia*. The Latin term is again a translation of the Late Greek *συνείδησις*. In these languages it is characterized by the prefixes *συν-* or *con-*, with both words thus expressing the meaning 'knowing together with'. The meaning of phrases such as *συνειδέσθαι τινί τι* or *scire aliquid cum aliquo* is the knowledge of something that appears together with somebody. Here, the word 'somebody' can mean, for example, oneself, in the sense that I am the one who is aware of something by virtue of consciousness. Therefore *conscientia* means, above all, an accompanying awareness that is always co-present and has a concomitant function for every kind of knowledge. For the meaning of *conscientia*, cf. Gloy 2004: 80–81.

⁵ Cf. Frank 1991, especially pp. 415–599.

⁶ For the purpose of this article, a selection of Frank's work seems recommendable. An overview of the historical development of concepts of consciousness is found in Frank 1991 and Frank 1994. The latter volume is a collection of positions of self-consciousness of the analytical philosophy of language. Recent publications in German in which Frank develops his basic view of familiarity of self-consciousness are: *Ansichten der Subjektivität* (2012) und *Präreflexives Selbstbewusstsein* (2015).

What matches?

The Advaitic tradition comes close to what Frank considers immediate self-consciousness, while the Viśiṣṭādvaitic tradition reinterprets the Advaitic concept of consciousness, albeit still keeping the self (*ātman*) as pre-reflective.

The Viśiṣṭādvaitic tradition refers to what Frank calls self-knowledge, which takes its shape through the mere fact that a subject is able to recognize itself over different times and places, and even after unconscious states like dreaming, sleeping, etc. And yet, if a subject becomes aware of itself, it does not have awareness of an I-object. This case is compared to what was pointed out by Immanuel Kant: the idea that there is a crossover from the mere “I think” to an object “I” is incorrect. In order to objectify the “I”, the fact of “I think” must already be presupposed; “I think” defines the transcendental subject only as a vehicle, but this subject can never become a content of our thoughts. Any attempt at making it an object of knowledge would lead to a vicious circle.⁷

In contrast, what Frank calls immediate self-consciousness can be compared to the Advaitic concept of consciousness. Although it is not denied that consciousness is consciousness of a subject, the subjectivity denoted by the first person singular pronoun “I” plays a secondary role.

Hence, according to this view, a person can never perceive something without presupposing the possibility of becoming or being conscious, without presupposing the fact of being conscious *that* something is being perceived. Frank illustrates this through the impossibility of not being conscious *that* one is conscious. For him a statement like “I think that *p*, but that I think that is not known to me” is meaningless. He argues:

⁷ Cf. Kant 1996: B 577 ff.: “We can, however, lay at the foundation of this science nothing but the simple and in itself perfectly contentless representation ‘I’, which cannot even be called a conception, but merely a consciousness which accompanies all conceptions.”

I can have knowledge regarding something that I am not experiencing. But there seems to be an analytic relation between experiencing and consciousness of experiencing. This familiarity is immediate. I mean by this that it does not come about by way of a detour via a second consciousness, such as ‘by means of’ an act of judgment. (Frank 1995: 180–181)

Frank provides examples of “familiarity” for different cases. For him there are two forms of subjectivity, these corresponding to two ways of how familiarity can be made explicit. Both forms are important for our comparison with the traditions of Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta.

The essential self-familiarity of subjectivity can concern the mental event itself (anonymous, non-conceptual) or the agent him or herself (the “I”, conceptual). In the first case it has become common to speak of self-awareness or self-consciousness; in the second, to speak of self-knowledge. In both varieties, [...] both are not derivable from each other, and (third thesis) they present themselves as irreducible to natural events or objects, respectively. (Frank 2013: 171)

In the first case, self-consciousness *is* prior to what we can refer to with any indexical word like the personal pronoun “I”. Therefore it “is absolutely not analysable in expressions that do not already presuppose it” (Frank 1995: 185). Any reference “to a description to ourselves is preceded by being familiar with the bearer of this property in a way that cannot be explained from the description itself” (ibid.: 186). In the following discussion, these are the cases which will come up: that consciousness is always presupposed, that it is not objectifiable, and that it is inaccessible through deictic terminology. Familiarity enables one to situate oneself in space and time; it also enables every description of ourselves (ibid.: 186ff). Thus, “pre-reflective” implies for Frank that one always has consciousness, not only if one is intentionally aware of it. It negates any distinction between subject and object and cannot be objectified by a second consciousness. Whenever there is consciousness, one can always be immediately aware of it.

These points are also applicable for what Frank defines, in the quote above, as pre-reflective self-knowledge, which is essentially subjective and “just as immediate as that of self-consciousness”. In addition, “immediate” means here “that it could not be mediated through

presentations or objects, which would then turn out to be the knowing ‘I’” (Frank 2013: 179). Just as self-consciousness is not analysable in expressions that do not already presuppose it, this is also the case for self-knowledge. Every time a subject tries to refer to itself, it has circularly presupposed an understanding of the “I”. But familiarity “develops itself immediately—without any intervention of an instruction coming from an object, a definite description or some demonstrative reference” (ibid.: 179–180).

Thus far it can be summarized that according to Frank, both concepts of consciousness, understood as self-consciousness or as self-knowledge, try in their own way to avoid the flaw of falling into a dualism that implies a subject–object difference. But how are these two concepts applicable to the two traditions of Vedānta?⁸

The Vedānta School, following the teachings of the philosopher Śaṅkara (8th century), holds consciousness as being in and of itself, this defined by terms such as “self-established” (*svataḥsiddha*) or “self-illuminating” (*svayaṃprakāśa*). Such a definition implies that consciousness is immediately aware of itself: one cannot deny the *fact* of being conscious. And *that* one is aware or conscious can be understood as preceding any concept of individual subjectivity. Due to being already self-evident and self-illuminating, the *ātman* can never be aware of the *ātman*; to be conscious the *ātman* never has to objectify itself because it *is* already consciousness. Thus, for the Advaitin, self-reflection of consciousness is unacceptable, since it would be a contradiction to say that the *ātman* is consciousness of its own consciousness.⁹

The other Vedānta tradition, the Viśiṣṭādvaita of the Rāmānuja School, represents at first sight the exact opposite view. The *ātman* means

⁸ An attempt to link concepts of analytical philosophy with the advaitic concept of consciousness was undertaken in Strawson 2015. Here and there the position of Advaita Vedānta is referred to appropriately; cf. 9; 11 fn. 22; 14; 18–19.

⁹ If this terminology is taken seriously, there are plenty of examples in which the concept of consciousness in Advaita Vedānta is understood as (self-)reflective awareness; cf. Ram-Prasad 2010: 234–236.

an individual *subject*, that is, an agent referred to by the word “I” (*aham*), this defined as a conscious “knower” (*jñātr*). To this is added consciousness. Nevertheless, the *ātman* here is not identical to some kind of empirical “I”. According to Rāmānuja, the *ātman* denoted by the word “I” (*aham*) cannot be proven by any means other than itself. The term in this School not used before Yāmuna is *ahamartha*, the referent of the word “I”. The self is even defined as self-illuminating (*svayamprakāśa*); the self has the form of being conscious, but is at the same time qualified by consciousness. (Śrībh I 153,5: *ātmā cidrūpa eva caitanyaguṇaka*).¹⁰

Thus, as I will try to demonstrate, for the Advaita tradition, a comparison looks promising with what Frank and his tradition define, in contrast to an egological-concept, as non-egological: a *subjectless* concept of consciousness. In contrast, the concept of *ātman* in the Viśiṣṭādvaita tradition can be interpreted as based on an egological concept of consciousness, understood as the conscious *subject*, that is, the living self (*jīvātman*). The first person singular “I” (*aham*) is only an indexical word and is not to be identified with something perceptible, although in everyday language it is used by speakers to draw attention to themselves in contrast to others. The denotation of the *ātman* as “I” not only implies individuality, but also inter-subjectivity,¹¹ and thus it would not be possible without accepting a concept of embodiment.

Manfred Frank	Non-egological concept of pre-reflective self-consciousness	Egological concept of pre-reflective self-knowledge
Advaita Vedānta	Self (<i>ātman</i>) as self-illuminating (<i>svayamprakāśa</i>), self-evident (<i>svataḥsiddha</i>)	
Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta		Living self (<i>jīvātman</i>) as agent of knowing (<i>jñātr</i>), referent of the word “I” (<i>ahamartha</i>)—having consciousness as the self’s eternal specification (<i>caitanyaguṇaka</i>)

¹⁰ How Rāmānuja “relates” what he says here as *cidrūpa/cidrūpatā* and *caitanyaguṇa* will be made clear below.

¹¹ See Schmücker 2011: 309–340.

Thus, I see it possible to make a comparison between Advaita and non-egological theories of consciousness on the one hand,¹² but also with the egological pre-reflective form of consciousness on the other hand. As I will demonstrate, the latter is inseparably connected to knowledge of the outside world. This variant, from the perspective of the tradition of Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta, is more complex and takes into account that self-knowledge is related to being in a special state (*avasthā*). Nevertheless, this does not imply that self-knowledge has the form of a subject–object relationship.

Examples of pre-reflective consciousness in the tradition of earlier Advaita Vedānta

The concept of *ātman*, which can be seen in the Advaitic School of Vedānta as being equivalent to mere consciousness, does not imply an objectifiable entity. It is not something accidental (*āgantuka*) that can be proved and established by a means of valid cognition (*pramāṇa*) such as perception (*pratyakṣa*) or inference (*anumāna*). Every piece of knowledge about an object, or, better, any use of such a means of valid cognition (*pramāṇa*) requires a self, that is, the *ātman*, identified as consciousness (*caitanya*). Thus, according to the advaitic tradition it is impossible to refer to the *ātman* as being an object of knowledge, because every objectifying act presupposes the *ātman*, that is, the inevitable existence of consciousness. Śaṅkara thus differentiates the self, due to its being self-established (*svayamprakāśatvād*), as distinct from any adventitious entity.¹³ As he writes in his *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*:

¹² Already in Schmücker 2018: 225–239, I tried to point out analogies between Frank’s concept of pre-reflective subjectivity and the advaitic concept of consciousness. Here, however, I refer to different sources of the tradition of Advaita Vedānta and do not refer to its opponents.

¹³ Śaṅkara’s BSūbh 585,1–3: *ātmatvāc cātmano nirākaraṇaśaṅkānu-papattih. na hy ātmāgantukaḥ kasya cit, svayamsiddhatvāt. na hy ātmā-tmanah pramāṇam apekṣya siddhyati.*—“And because the Self is the Self [i.e. not changing], no doubt of its refutation is possible; because due to its

In contrast, the self, due to its being the base for daily use as a means of valid cognition, etc., is established only before (*prāg eva*) the use of a valid means of cognition, etc. And a refutation of such a [self-established] entity is impossible. An adventitious thing, indeed, may be refuted, but not that which is the essential nature [of the refuting person].¹⁴

Further, if one tries to describe the Advaitin's concept of *ātman* based on the aspect of the non-reflectibility of consciousness, it is worth mentioning the character of consciousness defined as being without any relation and therefore being independent (*anapekṣa*). Another characteristic feature is its definition as self-establishing: it is without change/modification (*nirvikāra*) and is one (*eka*), and is therefore in strict opposition to what is referred to in this school as unconscious/insentient (*jaḍa*). What is self-established cannot be detected as different from something else—a point that becomes more and more important in this tradition in treatises refuting any knowledge of difference (*bheda*) of the self. Śaṅkara's direct pupil, Padmapāda (9th century), emphasizes in his *Pañcapādikā* the impossibility of a relational self. A knowable difference (*bheda*) from consciousness is impossible, because to recognize any difference, consciousness must be accepted as counter-positive (*pratiyogin*). Difference is only between consciousness and non-consciousness, and the latter is, according to his view, exclusively insentient (*jaḍa*):

And consciousness is not an object of consciousness, because there is no difference from the nature of consciousness, just as for light another light is [not different].¹⁵

Prakāśātman (12th century), who comments on this passage in his *Pañcapādikāvivarana*, explains that Padmapāda is referring to the unknowability

being self-established the Self is adventitious for nobody; because the Self does not depend on means of valid cognition for [knowledge of] itself.”

¹⁴ BSūbh 585,3–6: *ātmā tu pramāṇādivyavahārāśrayatvāt prāg eva pramāṇādivyavahārāt siddhyati. na cedrśasya nirākaraṇaḥ saṁbhavati. āgantukaḥ hi vastu nirākriyate na svarūpam.*

¹⁵ PP 125,2–3: *na ca saṁvit saṁvido viśayaḥ, saṁvidātmanā bheda-bhāvāt, pradīpasyeva pradīpāntaram.*

of a difference from consciousness. He elaborates on the argument that knowing the difference from another consciousness is impossible by stating that the counterpart of consciousness would not be another consciousness, but objectified consciousness, i.e. non-consciousness (*asaṃvit*). To realize any difference of consciousness, consciousness itself must be accepted as given. Prakāśātman's explanation is as follows:

Consciousness is not different from another consciousness in the form of consciousness; consciousness is one, because its counter-part would be non-consciousness. Even in the case of difference in the form of non-consciousness, consciousness would only be one; therefore, for consciousnesses (*saṃvidām*), the relation of object and subject [i.e. object-bearer] is impossible.¹⁶

With these words he not only refutes that there is any difference, because its counter-part is unconscious, but also points to the implication that consciousness remains one, exactly because its counter-part cannot be again consciousness. He concludes that more than one consciousness, i.e. consciousnesses (*saṃvidām*), is unacceptable, insofar as one consciousness cannot be an object of another consciousness. This view also rejects the understanding of (self-)consciousness as a reflective consciousness. Prakāśātman's rejection of any related type of consciousness is taken up again in a later context, with Śrīharṣa (12th century) discussing the same case albeit independently of Prakāśātman's thoughts on the matter. Thus it is clear that the advaitic view not only rejects any difference (*bheda*) of consciousness, if the concept of self-illumination is accepted; it also rejects any kind of reflective consciousness, as this would imply that a second different consciousness would be able to objectify another (previous) consciousness. In this school, consciousness is thus in fact understood as pre-reflective.

These short examples from the Advaita Vedānta tradition exemplify non-egological viewpoints within the Indian context of the Vedānta

¹⁶ PPV 332,4–7: *saṃvit saṃvidantarān na saṃvidākāreṇa bhidyate, pratiyogino 'saṃvittvaprasaṅgād ekā saṃvit syāt. asaṃvidākāreṇa bhede 'pi saṃvid ekaiva syād iti na saṃvidām viṣayaviṣayibhāvaḥ iti.*

tradition, but they also reveal a decisive point through which one can refer back to the European context. Although the European discourse of *subjectless* consciousness versus a *subject* of consciousness is controversial, it can nonetheless be pointed out that the discrepancy in the premises between the two views, namely, whether consciousness can or cannot recognize itself, is problematic. In order to avoid accepting that consciousness requires a second consciousness, it in turn requiring a next consciousness, this causing an infinite regress, an absolute source, an irreducible consciousness is necessary, one that is therefore pre-reflective, a source that is self-given in the sense that its immediateness is unnoticeable before the cognition of something can take place.

This concept can be linked to Frank's key term "familiarity". While it is not absolutely equivalent, it can be shown that the Advaita tradition responds to the problem that consciousness itself cannot be known without getting caught in vicious circles by proposing the basic concept of self-established (*svataḥsiddha*) consciousness.

Another analogy is relevant in this context: in the European tradition, the concept of *subjectless* consciousness challenges the objection that relating a past state with the present, that is, recognition, is problematic if a concept of *subject/subjectivity* does not exist. But is not a pre-reflective consciousness needed even in a case like this? This opposition can be considered a historical counterpart to the Advaitic concept of self, the Viśiṣṭādvaitic concept of individual self (*ātman*), which is spontaneously able to refer to its conscious and unconscious states at any time. While this idea was developed from the times of early Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta, in this paper I will focus only on Rāmānuja (1077–1157)¹⁷ and, for the later period, on Veṅkaṭanātha (1268–1369), who developed the position of his authoritative predecessor. Before I refer to the concept of individual self in detail, I will follow up on the advaitic concept of consciousness by examining the ideas of the later Vedāntin Śrīharṣa.

¹⁷ For this date I follow the considerations of Carman.

Later Advaita Vedānta on pre-reflective consciousness: Śrīharṣa

To introduce some of Śrīharṣa's key terms, I will refer to certain sections in the first chapter of his *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādyā*, namely, "The (self-) illumination of consciousness" (*saṃvitprakāśa*) and "The refutation of the relation between object and object-bearer (i.e. consciousness)" (*viśayaviśayibhāvakhāṇḍana*).

In the introductory passage of the third section of this first chapter (*saṃvitprakāśa*), Śrīharṣa defends the self-evidence (*svataḥsidhhi*) of consciousness against the Buddhist doctrine of the void (*śūnyatā*). The passage is relevant to our context, because Śrīharṣa points out that any kind of knowledge which argues against the existence of consciousness, trying to prove its non-existence, must presuppose a consciousness that every living being (*sarvajana*) can immediately be aware of. For the passage quoted below, it should be mentioned that a soteriological meaning of the self-established consciousness can also be implied, this including the following question: What evidence can be found for someone who is desirous to know (*jijñāsa*) not only an object, but the highest Being, i.e. *brahman*, which is treated as equivalent to consciousness, i.e. the inner self (*ātman*)? One might respond: if a person cannot objectify his/her own self as an empirical object, the highest aim, i.e. *brahman*, cannot be identified with a self-establishing consciousness, and hence no liberating insight would be possible and the doctrine of the void (*śūnyatā*) indeed successful. Against this notion, Śrīharṣa argues that consciousness is a given fact; it forms the basis of every act of cognition and precedes any cognition by which one could negate the *ātman*, that is, the condition of being already conscious.¹⁸ Now, after having claimed that such consciousness is self-establishing, Śrīharṣa corroborates his own thesis by refuting

¹⁸ Here Śrīharṣa takes up a remark of Śaṅkara, cf. BSūbh 81,1–2: *sarvo hy ātmāstitvaṃ pratyeti, na nāham asmīti. yadi hi nātmāstitvaprāsiddhiḥ syāt, sarvo loko nāham asmīti pratīyāt.*—"For everyone is conscious of the existence of (his) self, and never thinks 'I am not'. If the existence of the self were not generally accepted, every one would think 'I am not'."

any possible cognition of the non-existence of consciousness. Neither doubt (*saṁśaya*), nor false cognition (*viparyaya*) of the absence of consciousness, nor valid cognition of its absence (*vyatirekapramā*) can refute the fact that even a negative cognition already implies consciousness. This is why, in the case of knowing, it is impossible to negate or not to be aware of the fact *that* one knows. Hence, for Śrīharṣa one cannot doubt *that* one knows, on the condition that what is desired to be known (*jijñāsita*) has really been experienced. Even if one denies the condition of being aware, knowledge must be supposed that reveals the absence of the fact that the object one desires to know (*jijñāsita*) is indeed known (*pramītatva*). But knowledge of this type would have no result. Such cases are described by Śrīharṣa in the following passage:

Indeed, when knowledge arises for someone who desires to know, the uncertainty “Do I know or not?” does not exist, nor the false cognition “I do not know”, nor the valid cognition of non-existence, “I do not know”. Therefore, the total lack of incorrect cognition and of valid cognition of non-existence of what is desired to be known (*jijñāsita*) leads by implication to the fact that [the object] which is desired to be known is [indeed] known. Because, otherwise [i.e., if there were no absolute lack of incorrect cognition or of a valid cognition of non-existence] someone whose desire to know is not impeded would have a cognition that reveals the absence of the object desired to be known, [and this would be a cognition] which is implied by the absence of the being known (*pramītatva*) of the object that is desired to be known (*jijñāsita*).¹⁹

¹⁹ Khkh 119,2–122,1: *na khalu vijñāne sati jijñāsor api kasya cijjānāmi na veti saṁśayaḥ, na jānāmīti vā viparyayaḥ, vyatirekapramā vā. tena jijñāsitasyātattvajñānavyatirekapramāṇām abhāvasamudāyaḥ svavyāpakam jijñāsitasya pramītatvam ānayaḥ. anyathā hi jijñāsitaḥ pramītatvavyatirekavyāpakam jijñāsitaḥ vyatirekallekhi jñānam avighnītajijñāsasya syāt.*

For a more comprehensive interpretation of this passage, including the historical background and Śrīharṣa’s discussion with his opponent, a Naiyāyika, see Granoff 1978: 110–112. She makes the following comment on this passage: “When knowledge arises, no one doubts, ‘Have I knowledge or not?’ Nor does anyone ever assume that he does not know, validly or falsely. [...] He knows correctly that he has knowledge. Śrī Harṣa adds that this valid perception can

From the impossibility for someone to deny the fact of knowing, that is, of being aware, Śrīharṣa derives the theorem that consciousness is aware in and of itself. He concludes this passage with the sentence:

Therefore, the very nature of this knowledge is exclusively established by all people's own self-consciousness.²⁰

For Śrīharṣa, the fact that the *ātman* is self-established is decisive and shows that there is no individual character of consciousness. The fact that every person can ascertain that he/she is conscious due to the self-evidence (*svataḥsiddhi*) of consciousness, and that they do not deny that he/she is conscious, points, on the contrary, to the general character of consciousness and implies the definition of omnipresence (*vibhu*). This description gives him no reason to establish a completely independent "spiritual" being that exists only for itself, even though, according to his school, the *ātman* is defined as self-dependent (*svatantra*) or independent from everything else (*anapekṣa*). This description is rather aimed at every entity and corroborates the self's general nature. Thus Śrīharṣa can say that consciousness is the real nature/the self of everything else (*sarvāmatva*). And because of its all-comprehending character, it can be considered to be without any knowable difference (*bheda*) from anything else and held to be as having no difference, as being without a second (*advaita*). Consequently, the *ātman* is unlimited by time (*kālānavaccheda*), has no knowable quality (*dharmā*), and is not reducible to any particular place (*deśānavaccheda*). Hence it is said to be "all-pervasive" (*vibhu*). In Śrīharṣa's words:

For this very reason it is not an object of language use, caused by grasping a property [of the self]; and by its being unlimited by time it is said metaphorically to be permanent. Through its being unlimited by space, it is denoted as all-pervasive. And the usage of saying that it is the nature of all things and non-dual, etc. is based on the absence of any limitation in terms of a modification of existence.²¹

only come about if knowledge is self-aware and requires no other knowledge for the demonstration of its own existence." Cf. also Phillips 1997: 78–80.

²⁰ Khkh 122,1–2: *ataḥ sarvajanasvātmasamvedanasiddham evāsya bodhasya svarūpam.*

²¹ Khkh 143,2–146,1: *ata eva dharmopagrahapravartīṣṇuvāgyavahārāvīṣayatvam, kālānavacchedam ādāya ca nityatvopacārah. deśānavacchedam*

Despite these descriptions of consciousness as a metaphysical principle, it is in fact open to question whether such a concept could be realized as consciousness in relation to an object. But is it not contradictory to say that the *ātman*/consciousness is the essence of all things (*sarvātman*), all-pervasive (*vibhu*), etc., and at the same time to say that in its nature it is completely unrelated? What does it mean to suppose a relation (*saṃbandha*) for consciousness? Would a relation not again lead to subject–object divisions?

Śrīharṣa deals with this problem in the fifth section (*viṣayaviṣayi-bhāvakaṇḍana*) of the first chapter of his *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhāḍya*. If consciousness is self-evident for every person, its relation (*saṃbandha*) to each individual for whom it is evident—not reducible to a single relation to one person—must somehow be described. Nevertheless, he must solve the question of how an object (*viṣaya*) is compatible with the above-mentioned essential ascriptions to consciousness. How does Śrīharṣa evade the difficulty of explaining a relation between consciousness and an objectified consciousness?

The following words of an opponent, who holds a different concept of relation (*saṃbandha*), make clear that such a concept implies duality, that is, a difference (*bheda*) within self-evident consciousness. Nevertheless, this contradicts its non-dual (*advaita*) and all-pervasive (*vibhu*) nature. For the opponent, the meaning of *viṣayin*, lit. “having an object”, implies a relation between consciousness and objectified consciousness. If a relation exists, difference (*bheda*) cannot be avoided. And if there is no difference, identity (*abheda*) would be established and no relation necessary. According to the opponent’s view, in either case, whether it is identity (*abheda*) or difference (*bheda*), the argument to prove a relation between object and consciousness fails. The opponent’s argument is as follows:

Objection: And if [object and object-bearer, i.e. consciousness] are not different, the very relationship between object and object-bearer is unsuitable, because ‘bearing an object’ means ‘the fact of possessing a relation

ādāya vibhutvavyapadeśaḥ, prakārāvacchedavirahanibandhanaś ca sarvātmavādvaitādivyavahārah.

to an object' and a relationship cannot exist without difference. For [this reason], it is always observed that knowledge of this relationship is impossible if there is no knowledge that the two objects so connected are in their own nature different.²²

Śrīharṣa's discussion with the opponent is based on the dialectic opposition of difference (*bheda*) and identity (*abheda*). Where difference exists, there is duality, that is, a knowable distinction (*bheda*) between consciousness and something else; if identity (*abheda*) is the case, one asks what consciousness is related to. The problem that arises here is its connection with something different, while at the same time preserving its self-established nature and pure character. Śrīharṣa must answer the question of how, or in what way, one can argue that a self-established consciousness is connected to something else without restricting or objectifying its own real nature (*svarūpa*). In this context we can again refer back to the original point: how or in which way is it possible to presuppose an original consciousness prior to any difference in subject and object, but nevertheless for us to know *that* we are conscious of it without objectifying our consciousness?

Thus, the problem remains for Śrīharṣa of how to describe their relation. Or should it be rejected? He tries to solve this by characterizing the relation (*saṃbandha*) in the same way the nature (*svarūpa*) of both relation-bearers (*saṃbandhin*), consciousness and object, is described, replying to the opponent's arguments as follows:

[Answer:] Not in this way, because the relation consisting in the connection between object and subject is not different from the very nature of [both] relation-bearers [i.e., object and subject]. And were it to be so, in the end their relation must also be admitted to be of the nature of its locus, out of fear of an infinite regress. And if it is as [you pretend it to be], it must be admitted that, just as the cognition of the relation itself is possible without any difference between the two relation-bearers [i.e. object and subject/object-bearer] and of

²² Khkh 168,2–4: *nanu cābhede viṣayaviṣayibhāvasyaivāsaṅgatatvam, viṣayitvaṃ hi viṣayasambandhitā saṃbandhaś ca bhedaṃ antareṅsaṃbhavadavasthitīḥ, saṃbandhamiteḥ saṃbandhisvarūpabhedamitivyatireke vaiparītyāvadhāraṇāt.*

the relation itself, because the relation that is of the very nature [of its locus, i.e., the relation-bearer's] exceeds the limits of other relations—in the same manner, a relation that consists in its essence in the connection between object and subject/object-bearer will take place even without any difference between the correlates [i.e. object and subject/object-bearer], and in the same way, its knowledge will be possible without knowledge of their difference. What is contradictory in this?²³

From this passage it becomes clear that Śrīharaṣa is responding with a differentiated form of identity (*abheda*) and arguing that a relation between consciousness and object does not imply a knowable difference (*bheda*). By defining the relation in this way he avoids the division in subject–object.

But is the problem of relationship solved? Is it not equally contradictory to say that even a single relation connects an object to the nature of consciousness? The question about the relation between these two extremes again raises new problems and does not solve the opposition between an object and the consciousness of it. What characteristics does this relation have? Is it eternal like consciousness or is it non-eternal and changing like an object or a content? No satisfactory solution can be found conceptually and perhaps this is even intended by Śrīharaṣa.²⁴ But if one places Śrīharaṣa's solution against the background of the European

²³ The translation here is close to Granoff 1978: 131. Khkh 169,2–170,4: *maivam, viṣayaviṣayibhāvasaṃbandho hi na saṃbandhisvarūpād bhinnah. tathābhūtatve 'pi cāntataḥ tatsaṃbandhasyāpi svāśrayātmakatvam abhyupagamyam, anavasthābhayāt. tathā sati ca saiva yathā saṃbandhamitiḥ saṃbandhasvarūpāt saṃbandhinor bhedaṃ anādāyaiva paryavasyatīty abhyupagantavyam, svabhāvasaṃbandhasyetasāṃbandhamaryādātīśāyitvāt tathā vināpi saṃbandhibhedaṃ viṣayaviṣayibhāvātmā 'yaṃ saṃbandhaḥ paryavāsāsyati, tadavagamo 'pi tathāvagamavyatirekeṇaiva bhaviṣyati, ko virodhaḥ?*

²⁴ Phillips interprets this as an 'apparent paradox of relationality' and comments on the passage of Śrīharaṣa quoted above: "In brief, no story can be told about the relation between awareness and its content, because that would invite the question of what ties the relation to each, *ad infinitum*. What then about self-linkage (*sambandha-svarūpāt sambandhinor*)? This proves only the identity of cognition and its content—precisely the Advaita position" (Phillips 1997: 95–96).

traditional concept of consciousness, one might say that he does claim to establish the pure fact of consciousness; he argues for the *fact* that something can become aware. For this he must presuppose that consciousness is already given. Nevertheless, Śrīharṣa does not give a clear answer as to how one might determine a relation. He even says nothing against a relationship, but rather tries to avoid seeing the relation as a subject–object relation in which consciousness must be proved by way of its being objectified. If we contextualize our result, a comparison to Frank seems reasonable, namely, that consciousness is more familiar than anything that can be cognized from outside, and that we inevitably have consciousness before we refer to objects or are able to refer to anything else. This is because the fact of being conscious is not analysable in terms that do not in turn presuppose consciousness.²⁵

Although Śrīharṣa’s central concept of consciousness is outlined here quite briefly, it can be seen that such a concept is a decisive criterion for rejecting other schools’ arguments—this is what most of his *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādyā* does. For Śrīharṣa, what is presupposed must be presupposed by every representative of an Indian philosophical school. Whatever is claimed as existent or non-existent takes

²⁵ How is Śrīharṣa able to solve the problem of different times with one unchangeable concept of self-illuminating consciousness? Does he do this by avoiding the subject–object division, especially in reference to the problem of time and consciousness, which seems to be a challenge? Indeed, another difficult question is involved, namely, how Śrīharṣa addresses the question of different times and unchanging consciousness. His answer is central for his view: Both memory (*smṛti*) and experience (*anubhava*) coincide in a kind of consciousness that Śrīharṣa calls recollection (*pratyabhijñā*). He argues that both experience and consciousness are nothing other than memory (*smṛti*), memory is nothing other than experience (*anubhava*), that both can coexist in recollection/recognition (*pratyabhijñā*), and experience can also mean memory. The passage where Śrīharṣa is dealing with this question is the *anubhūtitvaṅjātikhaṇḍana* (and following chapters) of the first *pariccheda* Khkh 133–179. For the important discussion of the concept of time (*kāla*) in Śrīharṣa, cf. Duquette 2016: 43–60.

consciousness as an ineluctable fact prior to existence or non-existence of the world. As a consequence, nothing can be accepted as either existent (*sat*) or as non-existent (*asat*).²⁶ Śrīharṣa himself expresses this, applying it in any debate with an opponent. If the opponent does not accept this presupposition, he contradicts his own arguments, which thus fail. The opponent himself must presuppose consciousness, without which he could not argue for the existence (*sat*), the non-existence (*asat*), or the irreality (*mithyā*) of the world.

Śrīharṣa happily (*sukham*) relies on the self-established *brahman*/consciousness (KhKh 67,1 *svataḥsiddhe cidātmani brahmatattve*). He uses this to point out a self-contradiction in the statements of his opponents, who decide, apparently arbitrarily (*svaparikalpita*), how to differentiate between the means for establishing existence or non-existence and the means for criticising other arguments. Śrīharṣa's remark is important; he is able to criticize his opponents since they contradict their own assessments and thus stand in contradiction to their own premises of criticism: KhKh 67,3–4 “This conviction in your considerations is not right, because it is contradicted by the conviction itself (*eva*), which is accepted by you” (*na sādhvīyaṃ bhavatāṃ vicārayavasthā, bhavatkalpityavavasthayaiva vyāhatatvāt*).²⁷ In Śrīharṣa's own view this means that if someone denies consciousness as being given, before it is possible for them to deny this, they must have already presupposed consciousness as self-given to argue against unobjectifiable consciousness.

As convincing as this argument seems, its reverse can also be claimed. In the following discussion—especially Venkaṭanātha's rejection of pure consciousness—exactly the same argument can be

²⁶ For the implied meaning in this context of *anirvacanīya*, “indefinability”, neither expressible as existent (*sat*) nor as non-existent (*asat*), cf. Granoff 1978: 141ff.

²⁷ As Granoff translates: “These arguments of yours are not correct, for they are contradicted by the very principles which you admit” (Granoff 1978: 141).

directed against the Advaitin, i.e. Śrīharṣa himself: If consciousness is defined as unobjectifiable, one cannot use consciousness to prove that consciousness is unobjectifiable. For Veṅkaṭanātha, the consequence is that one makes use of different means of valid cognition, such as language, inference, authoritative passages of the Upaniṣads, etc. And by using them to prove that consciousness is unobjectifiable, self-given, etc., one does not objectify consciousness, but has to presuppose another consciousness, and so forth. Thus, Veṅkaṭanātha holds the view that the Advaitin contradicts his own premises, because he necessarily objectifies consciousness to prove that it is pre-reflective consciousness.

This outline of the advaitic concept of consciousness against the background of the European concept of pre-reflective consciousness may suffice for my purposes here. If one follows the historical discussion of Advaita Vedānta with the later tradition of Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta, this debate became endless. But in a certain way the argument of pre-reflective consciousness is similar, and perhaps in some parts even identical, to the Viśiṣṭādvaitic concept of consciousness. It therefore seems legitimate to ask how the view of pure consciousness is reinterpreted from the perspective of the school of Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta. How is the concept of pre-reflectivity still served?

Rāmānuja's concept of "I"-consciousness

In Rāmānuja's comprehensive reply to the various teachings of the advaitic tradition—following in part his predecessor Yāmuna, (10th century)—he transforms two important issues, elaborating on them thoroughly. First, he accepts the irreducibility of consciousness, albeit not a general consciousness, but an individual consciousness. Thus, secondly, replacing the advaitic concept of a pure, all-pervasive and timeless consciousness, Rāmānuja develops the view of an "I"-consciousness, which is inseparably connected to knowledge.

What does a connection between "I"-consciousness and knowledge mean and what implications does this have for the concept of pre-reflective consciousness? For Rāmānuja, this involves an immediate awareness of a special state. Insofar as one always has a special state

of knowledge, one is always immediately and therefore pre-reflectively aware that one is in a state of knowledge.

In Rāmānuja's terminology, the self (*ātman*), the agent of knowing (*jñātr*), is neither identified with what we call the empirical "I", nor is it identified with something completely beyond subjectivity. What in this context is also defined as self, that is, the self of the living being (*jīvātman*), implies an ability to be immediately aware of states in which something that has passed may have been unconscious. But how this is possible?

Pre-reflective individual consciousness for Rāmānuja can be described in the following way: When he defines the eternally self-luminous individual *ātman* with the word "I", this does not mean that everything which is said about the *ātman* is likewise applicable to "I". The word (i.e. pronoun) "I" (*ahaṃśabda/-pada*) itself is not self-luminous. "I" is not something transient or something that arises and disappears with the statement "I recognize" (*ahaṃ jānāmi*). For Rāmānuja, the individual *ātman* cannot be an object of a designation for the pronoun "I". And the meaning of "I" does not have a representational function. It does not represent the *ātman* itself, nor does it express an exclusive reservation for a single *ātman*. Moreover, not only *one* being says "I" to itself. Therefore, whoever uses *aham* does not refer to a meaning of "I", especially not to "I" as an object. Therefore, whenever we are attentive of our self, we have, according to Rāmānuja, knowledge based on a pre-reflective "I"-consciousness. It is only knowledge (and not "I"-consciousness) that can be objectified.

But isn't this a contradiction? Having one part of a cognition being by itself/for itself, the other part being objectified by something else? How did Rāmānuja arrive at this completely different perspective on the relationship between knowledge and "I"-consciousness? And how did he react to the irreducibility of immediate consciousness as defended by Advaitins?

Rāmānuja's reinterpretation of the advaitic consciousness as qualifying knowledge

First, to reject the concept of general consciousness, Rāmānuja uses the metaphor of light. For him, the meaning of "shining/illuminating"

in this context implies the shining *of* someone/something (*kasya cid*). This is in exact opposition to the advaitic identification of *ātman* and consciousness (*saṃvit*), as exemplified above. Rāmānuja describes the difference between them as follows:

Precisely because it is illumination, the illumination should belong exclusively to a particular one (i.e. the self), like the light that belongs to a lamp. Therefore the self cannot be [identical to] consciousness (*saṃvit*).²⁸

While the advaitic position clearly advocates the identity between self (*ātman*) and consciousness (*saṃvit*), here Rāmānuja makes a clear distinction between them. As mentioned above, Rāmānuja retains the irreducibility of consciousness by defining it as individual consciousness. He does not do this by substituting the self-illuminating “I” for the advaitic consciousness, but rather by retaining what the Advaitins understand as pre-reflective consciousness. He gives it a different meaning, however. Instead of using the main advaitic terms referring to consciousness, *anubhūti*, *drś* or *saṃvit*, Rāmānuja refers to a kind of knowledge that he no longer understands as pure and independent consciousness, but as a “quality” (*dharma*) of the individual pre-reflective “I”-consciousness. In contrast, the *anubhūti* is now provided with an object (*sakarmaka*), which still has its own being (*sadbhāva*) and provides its own base (*svāśraya*) according to the daily use of language. Furthermore, the “I”-consciousness, that is, the self as agent, functions in this object-gaining process only as a witness (*ātmasākṣika*).

What is called consciousness (*anubhūti*) is a special quality of the self, which is the agent of being aware; it is provided by an object, [it is] synonymous to ‘knowledge’, ‘awareness’, ‘consciousness’ etc. (*jñānāvagatisaṃvidādi-*), [and it] effectuates by nature the suitability of a certain entity to everyday usage merely through its own reality in regard to its own base [i.e. the self]. Just like having the self as [its] witness, it is well known to everybody [as in sentences such as:]

²⁸ See also Śrībh I 155,1: *prakāśatvād eva kasya cid eva bhavet prakāśaḥ, dīpādīprakāśavat. tasmān na ātmā bhavitum arhati saṃvit.*

“I know the pot”, “I conceive this object”, “I know this cloth”. Even by you [i.e. the Advaitin], the self-illumination of consciousness is proved as being of such a nature.²⁹

As this passage shows, while Rāmānuja does not discard the advaitic conception of consciousness, he defines it as a special quality (*dharmaviśeṣaḥ*) of the self. The result of this step is the following: The self, which in fact *is* individual consciousness, always *has* consciousness as a quality (*dharma*). However, in this context, terms like *saṃvit*, *anubhūti*, *avagati*, by which the Advaitin refers to pure consciousness, are no longer translatable as “consciousness”, but their meaning is now rather “knowledge” (*jñāna*). Indeed, in several passages the word *jñāna* is used. But the fact that the term *buddhi* becomes especially in the works of Veṅkaṭanātha as frequent as the term *dharmabhūtajñāna*, the cognition process is apparently being given a dualistic form. This makes one consider the possibility of remodeling the cognition process according to Sāṅkhya, in which the self, like *puruṣa*, is the conscious principle, with the other principle, the change implying *prakṛti*, active *for* the *puruṣa*. But Rāmānuja is not representing the Sāṅkhya view and his terminology is again here the reverse. The Sāṅkhya terms for insentience, like *caitanya*, refer to the self, but the term *jñāna* refers, as for Rāmānuja and Veṅkaṭanātha, to cognitions like perception. In contrast, Rāmānuja makes an effort to explain the two different principles as a unity. Insofar as the self as “I”-consciousness is also defined as knowledge (*jñāna*), the resulting duplex with the term *jñāna*, “knowledge”, is irritating, but in fact it does appear later, in works by Veṅkaṭanātha, to make the distinction between *dharmabhūtajñāna*, “knowledge that possesses a quality” and *dharmabhūtajñāna*

²⁹ Śrībh I 145,1–5: *anubhūtir iti svāśrayaṃ prati svasadbhāvenaiva kasyacid vastuno vyavahārānugūnyāpādanasvabhāvo jñānāvagatisaṃvid-ādyaparanāmā sakarmako ’nubhavitur ātmano dharmaviśeṣaḥ, ghaṭam ahaṃ jānāmi—imam artham avagacchāmi—paṭam ahaṃ saṃvedmīti sarveṣāṃ āmasākṣikāḥ prasiddhaḥ. etatsvabhavatayā hi tasyaḥ svayamprakāśatā bhavatāpy upapādītā.*

“knowledge that is a quality”. While these two forms of knowledge are used as homonyms when they occur side by side, they have in fact different meanings. Indeed, they are discussed in different places in Veṅkaṭanātha’s work. But when they belong inseparably together, they are essentially part of every cognitive process, as for example in the sentence: “He knows” (*jānāti*), which is explained by Rāmānuja in words like:

Because neither in vedic nor in ordinary language usage is the pronunciation of a sentence like ‘He knows’ observed as having no object and no agent of knowing.³⁰

The two constitutive factors that are essential for the act of knowledge expressed in the sentence “He knows” are the agent, namely, the self-illuminated *ātman* denoted by the word “I”, and his “knowledge” (*anubhūti*, *avagati*, *saṃvit*), that is, the former advaitic mere consciousness. In the following, when referring to knowledge as a property of the self (*dharma-bhūtajñāna*, i.e. *saṃvit*, *anubhūti*, *avagati*, *buddhi*, *dhī*), I enclose the word “knowledge” in quotation marks. “Knowledge” cannot be something that is produced. If the factor of “I”-consciousness in the cognitive process is pre-reflective and therefore given as by itself (*svataḥ*), the other, i.e. “knowledge” (*dharmabhūtajñāna*), must be as well. Due to this, especially in the work of Veṅkaṭanātha, “knowledge” also retains its definition of being self-illuminating. In another passage, Rāmānuja explains the sentence “He knows” by stating that knowledge, like happiness, appears *for* someone. By this appearing *for* someone else, the sentences “I am happy” and “I know” are equal not in content, but in function. He concludes that “knowledge” is not only given in and of itself, but shines for something else (Śrībh I 156,5–6: “Being established only by its own being [and not by something else] in reference to its own self [as its base]”; *svātmānaṃ prati svasattayaiva siddhyan*); in contrast, mere “I”-consciousness is sentient and also establishes its own being in and of itself.³¹ Object-related

³⁰ ŚrībhI155,2–3: *nahī lokavedayoḥjānātyāderakarmakasyākartṛkasya ca prayogo dṛṣṭacarah*.

³¹ Cf. the passage of Yāmuna’s *Ātmasiddhi* (p. 84,6–8): *svāśrayaṃ prati sattayaiva kasya cit prakāśanam hi saṃvedanam. svayaṃprakāśatā*

“knowledge” manifests itself for this self-illuminated “I”: something manifests itself *for* the pre-reflective “I”-consciousness. This is why Rāmānuja refers to the self as “I” and not as pure consciousness (cf. Śrībh I 156,7 *na jñaptimātram ātmā, api tu jñātaivāhamarthah*). Rāmānuja is clearly continuing this dualistic interpretation of the cognitive process when he says that consciousness provides knowledge for his own base and accomplishes the object for its base due to its own being:

What is defined as the fact of being conscious [means] illuminating in reference to its own base, solely due to its own being in a present state, or [alternatively it means:] it is accomplishing its own object exclusively due to its own being. And these [both], being established by their own knowledge, do not vanish, although they are knowable by another knowledge; therefore the being of consciousness/knowledge does not vanish.³²

Thus, while self and “knowledge” are not identifiable *with* each other, they are inseparable from each other; they form a unity without which no cognitive process would be possible. If one accepts only one of them and says that “knowledge” arises and disappears, one abandons the self as a pre-reflective “I”-consciousness. On the other hand, assuming that only the mere “I” as the individual self exists, the problem then arises of how something immutable can be reconciled with the “knowledge” of changing things that emerge and pass away.³³

Against this background, according to Rāmānuja, the conscious agent, that is, the self, experiences its relation to the world through different changing conditions. The agent is able to know if he has slept

tu sattayaivātmane prakāśamānatā. For a discussion of this passage cf. Oberhammer 2006: 157–160. Compare also the following quote of Rāmānuja in the next fn.: *svāśrayaṃ prati prakāśamānatvam.*

³² Śrībh I 134,7–135,1: *anubhūtitvaṃ nāma vartamānadaśāyāṃ svasattayaiva svāśrayaṃ prati prakāśamānatvam, svasattayaiva svaviśaya-sāadhanatvaṃ vā. te cānubhavāntarānubhāvvyatve 'pi svānubhavasiddhe nāpagacchata iti nānubhūtitvaṃ apagacchati.*

³³ In his *Śrībhāṣya* (Śrībh I 145,6–146,3), Rāmānuja addresses the inseparability of the self from successive cognitions, but also its difference.

well, is happy or feeling tormented, is still going through different stages of life or has been redeemed. In the passages cited above, one does find terms that represent the advaitic principle of knowing, terms such as *anubhūti*, *saṃvit*, etc. But they are used to denote a property (*dharmā*) and refer to rising and vanishing “knowledges”. The meaning of these terms as found in passages by Śaṅkara’s disciples or by Śrīharṣa has changed completely. Presupposed by a stable self that is a self-illuminated knower, excluding cognitions can take place continuously.

Later Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta: Veṅkaṭanātha’s argument

How does Veṅkaṭanātha respond to the resultant question of changing “knowledge” and pre-reflective consciousness? Like Rāmānuja, Veṅkaṭanātha defines the self, as for example in the *Nyāyasiddhāñjana* (=NSi), as an inward agent denoted by the word “I”. This is completely different than the advaitic concept of mere consciousness (NSi 187,2–188,2). If the self were anything else, an immediate cognition or recollection such as “I, [enjoying happiness now], I am the one [who was in pain the other day]” would be impossible. Therefore, for this kind of “knowledge”, Veṅkaṭanātha presupposes that the self is pre-reflective “I”-consciousness (cf. NSi 195,1–2 [verse 28]).

Thus, what is permanent is the individual *ātman*, the knower (*jñātr*). It refers to its own experiences at particular times through its own “knowledge” (*dharmabhūtajñāna*), which is defined by Veṅkaṭanātha as a separate substance (*dravya*). While still called a property (*dharmā*), it is now again characterized by properties defined as states (*avasthā*). But even if the meaning of “I” is clearly an indispensable point of reference, the question remains of how the self-illuminating self, denoted as “I”, can remember *itself*, and, as a consequence, imply in a present state a relation to a past state of one’s self?

Veṅkaṭanātha explains different functions of self (*ātman*) and “knowledge” (*dharmabhūtajñāna*), but mentions the dependency of cognitions³⁴ on “knowledge”, even if both (self and “knowledge”)

³⁴ Cognitions are different “states” (*avasthā*) of the “knowledge, which functions as a property of the self” (*dharmabhūtajñāna*).

are defined as knowledge (*jñāna*). In this context he also mentions the possibility of recollecting an earlier cognition, that is, a past state (*avasthā*). One can remember that the person who slept was oneself, even though in deep sleep one had no waking consciousness. But one still has “I”-consciousness. Recollection (*pratyabhijñā*) is the actual proof of the preservation of continuity. This would not be possible without such an individual “I”-consciousness. One would not be able to remember past experiences as being one’s own. Thus the self, that is, the “I”-consciousness, as one and the same, has various cognitions at different times through “knowledge” and can be aware of what was cognized earlier.³⁵

But how does Veṅkaṭanātha describe this kind of “knowledge”, to which he refers now with terms like *dharmabhūtajñāna*, *saṃvit* and *buddhi*? As Rāmānuja did, Veṅkaṭanātha teaches that if the self had no “knowledge”, it would be unable to cognise anything. This is because presupposing only “I”-consciousness does not take the place of a complete cognitive process. “Knowledge” is realized only as knowing one’s own being in a special state, be it present, past or future. Thus, while “knowledge” (*saṃvit/buddhi*) must be objectified, it is not thereby negated. In this case, it is memory (*smṛti*) by which one is aware of what happened at an earlier time. “Knowledge” of what happened in the past becomes an object of present “knowledge”. This view is once again a criticism of the Advaitin’s thesis, which, as has been demonstrated, involves consciousness (*anubhūti*) becoming

³⁵ Already Rāmānuja pointed out that the Advaitin’s concept of consciousness would not be able to refer to earlier times; cf. Śrībh I 146,2–146,3: “If consciousness were admitted to be the self, though it is permanent, there would be the same impossibility of recollection; because recollection proves that the conscious agent is continuous from an earlier time to a later time, but not mere consciousness: ‘I myself was aware of this even earlier.’”—*anubhūter ātmatvābhyupagame tasyā nityatve ’pi pratisandhānāsambhavas tadavasthaḥ; pratisandhānaṃ hi pūrvāparakālasthāyinaṃ anubhavitāram upasthāpayati, nānubhūtimātram—aham evedaṃ pūrvam apy anubhūvam iti.*

non-consciousness (*ananubhūti*) in case of being objectified. When one says “knowledge exists”, then “knowledge” (*buddhi*) objectifies a different “knowledge” (*buddhi*). But a different “knowledge” is the same “knowledge” but of another state (*avasthā*). In this way, “knowledge” knows itself in the light of “I”-consciousness.

In more detail than above, the following table summarizes and contrasts the main key terms used by the authors of the two Vedānta schools and places them in relation to the two above mentioned concepts of pre-reflective consciousness.

Schools, authors	Pre-reflective consciousness	Pre-reflective knowledge
Advaita Vedānta Śaṅkara, Padmapāda, Prakāśātman Śrīharṣa	<i>ātman</i> (= <i>saṃvit</i> , <i>anubhūti</i> , <i>dr̥ṣ</i> , <i>avagatī</i>) independent (<i>anapekṣa</i>) one (<i>eka</i>) sentient (<i>aṣaḍa</i>) no knowable difference (<i>bheda</i>) without modification (<i>nirvikāra</i>) not limited by time (<i>kālānavaccheda</i>) not limited by space (<i>deśānavaccheda</i>) pervasive (<i>vibhu</i>) not in the realm of lan- guage (<i>vāgyavahārā- viṣaya</i>), no knowable property (<i>dharma</i>)	
Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta Rāmānuja		<i>ātman</i>, <i>dharmaviśeṣa</i> = <i>dharmabhutajñāna</i> self is the referent for the word “I” (<i>ahamartha</i>), knower (<i>jñātr</i>), self-illuminating (<i>svayaṃprakāśa</i>), having the form of consciousness (<i>cidrūpa</i>) and having a special property (<i>dharmaviśeṣa</i>)

Schools, authors	Pre-reflective consciousness	Pre-reflective knowledge
Veṅkaṭanātha		Substance ₁ (<i>dravya</i>): <i>ātman</i> Substance ₂ (<i>dravya</i>): <i>dharmabhū-tajñāna</i> (= <i>saṃvit</i> , <i>anubhūti</i> , <i>dhī</i> , <i>buddhi</i>) having beginningless and endless series of states (<i>avasthā</i>)

In the following, I illustrate Veṅkaṭanātha's arguments for the self-referentiality of "knowledge" having different states by quoting from three works by Veṅkaṭanātha: the *Tattvamuktākālāpa* with its auto-commentary *Sarvārthasiddhi*, the *Śatadūṣaṇī*, and the *Nyāyasiddhāñjana*. The claim of Śrīharṣa given above, namely, of an argument being contrary to the opponent's own premises, is now applied by Veṅkaṭanātha against the advaitic thesis that consciousness is unobjectifiable. The decisive question of whether statements *about* consciousness, such as its being self-illuminated, etc., provide information or not, demonstrates for Veṅkaṭanātha the necessity to accept other means of cognition that presuppose objectifiable "knowledge".

The first example is the second verse of the fourth chapter on "knowledge" (*buddhisara*) of the *Tattvamuktākālāpa*; here Veṅkaṭanātha demonstrates that "knowledge" is not something that one can be aware of immediately, i.e. without using other means of valid cognitions. It must always be recognized through other means of valid cognition, such as the authoritative passages [of the Veda] (*śabda*), inference (*anumāna*), etc.

Due to memory and also due to [means like the] word [of the Veda], inference, etc., knowledge is known as self-illuminated. For the one who says that this unknowable knowledge is without specification, negation of his own speech would arise, because of being knowledge, etc. And the sentence/thesis: "In the case of being knowable, knowledge would be insentient", is characterized by defeat.³⁶

³⁶ TMK 4.2: *smṛtyā śabdānumānaprabhṛtibhir api dhīr vedyate svaparakāśā | dhītvādes tām avedyām anupadhi vadataḥ svoktibādhādayaḥ syuḥ | vedyatve sā jaḍā syād iti ca vihatimat [...]*.

The argument of contradicting one's own statement not only concerns the fact that one is immediately aware of consciousness, but also refers to "knowledge", which never lacks a relation to some sort of objective content. With this, Veṅkaṭanātha corroborates the view that we can only know something by presupposing self-given "knowledge". According to him, such "knowledge" does not cease to exist if one proves it with another state of "knowledge". But this argument cannot be used if nothing exists for which the above mentioned means of valid cognition is applicable. To substantiate the view that consciousness is self-illuminating, one has to involve conditions other than consciousness. In his auto-commentary (*Sarvārthasiddhi*) on the above-quoted verse, Veṅkaṭanātha elaborates on this, arguing against self-illuminated consciousness by reproaching the Advaitin that his statement about the self-illumination of consciousness is not viable. If the Advaitin argues that a sentence presupposing other means does not communicate anything, his statement ends in a self-contradiction since he must always admit that something is to be made known (*bodhyatva*). If he does not admit this, he can neither communicate that he knows another person's "knowledge", nor can he refer to authoritative sources like the *śāstra*, which is another means that propagates the desire to know *brahman*. The above quoted verse explains Veṅkaṭanātha in his auto-commentary as follows:

Is consciousness known by means of words like property-bearer, *probandum*, logical reason, etc., [by sentences] like "Consciousness is self-illuminating due to its being consciousness", or [is this] not [the case]?

For the first case, how would negation be impossible? How is it possible that in the second case this application may establish what is accepted by you? If one objects: By error, something is known, but not because of being real. [Our response is:] Then the fact that something is to be made known, which is established by error, is undeniable, because of being approved. In contrast, what is to be made known is in reality established nowhere; therefore, it is in the same way not to be denied. [...] The same as this is the negation of [one's] own knowledge [by thinking:] "I know the knowledge of the other [self]". And there would be the negation of [your] own proposition: "The *śāstra* aims at the knowledge of *brahman*, which has the form of knowledge."³⁷

³⁷ SAS to TMK 4.2: *anubhūtiḥ svayaṃprakāśā anubhūtitvād ityādibhir dharmisādhyahetvādiśabdair anubhūtir bodhyate na vā? ādye katham na*

The same type of argumentation is used again by Veṅkaṭanātha in two other central passages in his works: the twentieth Vāda (*avedyatvabhaṅgavāda*) of his *Śatadūṣaṇī*, and in the section on God (*īśvarapariccheda*) in the third chapter of his *Nyāyasiddhāñjana*. In both passages, Veṅkaṭanātha illustrates that for their definition of self-consciousness, Advaitins must presuppose other means of valid cognition. By doing so, do they not commit the main fault claimed by the advaitic position, namely, thinking that consciousness is an object? But does not Veṅkaṭanātha take into account the deep insight of the advaitic position that the self is not objectifiable? He does! He consequently demonstrates that the approach to the self, which is individual and in the same way not objectifiable, is possible only through several means of valid cognition. And he points out that the Advaitin, if he argues for pure consciousness, cannot even speak about it without presupposing in the same way valid means of cognition to prove that consciousness is self-evident, self-illuminated etc. He presents the same argument against the Advaitin in the *Śatadūṣaṇī*, where he demonstrates the thesis that consciousness is self-established presupposes more than only consciousness:

Therefore it is not possible to say [the sentence] “If consciousness (*anubhūti*) is self-established”, because the following case holds true: Does the word ‘consciousness’ (*anubhūti*) add knowledge of something to the sentence “The consciousness (*anubhūti*) is self-illuminated”, or not? If it brings knowledge of something, does it bring the knowledge of the true nature of the *brahman* or something different from it? If it brings knowledge of the true nature of the *brahman*, the illuminating is established due to its being an object of knowledge which is produced from it. If, in contrast, it brings knowledge of something different, exactly its being self-illuminating would be admitted.³⁸

tadbādhaḥ? dviṭīye katham ayaṃ prayogas tvadiṣṭaṃ sādhayet? bhrāntyā bodhyate na tu vastuta iti cet tarhi bhrāntisiddhaṃ bodhyatvam anumatatvān na pratiṣedhyam. vastutas tu bodhyatvaṃ na kvacit siddham iti tathāpi na pratiṣedhyam. [...] evaṃ parabuddhim ahaṃ jānāmīti svabuddhibādhaḥ; jñānarūpabrahmabodhanārthaṃ śāstram iti svasiddhāntabādhaś ca.

³⁸ ŚD 20 Vāda, 109,11–16: *ato ’nubhūtiś cet svatas siddheti vaktum na śakyate iti. tathā hi anubhūtiś svayamprakāśety atrānubhūtiśabdaḥ kasyacid bodhako na vā? bodhakatve ’py anubhūtirūpabrahmasvarūpabodhakas*

We find the same argument, in nearly the same words, repeated in the third chapter of the *Nyāyasiddhāñjana*. If one asks, “Does the sentence that consciousness is not knowable communicates either something or nothing,” the answer is clear: it brings the knowledge of something and not of nothing. If one objects that *brahman* is completely unknowable, one contradicts exactly the passages of the authoritative tradition upon which the doctrine relies. This would mean that a teacher is instructing something that has no purpose.³⁹

If you say “Consciousness is not an object of knowledge because it is consciousness”, then this is not the case. Does the sentence “Consciousness is not recognizable” convey knowledge or not? In the first case, awareness is cognisable exactly through this sentence; if it is undetectable, what is affirmed [by such a sentence]? And if *brahman* is unrecognisable, it would contradict sentences [which are accepted by yourself], as for example [*Brahmasūtra* 1.1.1.]: “Then therefore the inquiry into *brahman*”, “The knower of *brahman* reaches the Highest” [TaiU 2.1.1], “The self indeed is to be known” [BĀU 2.4.5]; and what is the teacher instructing and for whom when referring to the ascertainment and non-ascertainment of non-duality?

To sum up: Venkaṭanātha takes into account the deep insight of the advaitic position that the self is not objectifiable, consequently arguing that the approach to the “I”-consciousness is individual and unobjectifiable in the same way as the Advaitin’s concept of consciousness; it is only possible through several means of knowledge, such as memory, reasoning etc., which is nothing other than a state of the “knowledge” (*dharmabhūtajñāna*).

*tadanyabodhako vā? brahmasvarūpabodhakatve siddham tasya tajjanya-
saṃvitkarmatayā prakāśamānatvam. tadanyabodhakatve tu tasyaiva svayaṃ-
prakāśatvaṃ pratijñātam syāt.*

³⁹ NSi 311,1–5: *anubhūtir avedyā anubhūtityād iti cen, na anubhūtir
avedyetyi vacanaṃ bodhakaṃ na vā. ādye tenaiva vedyatvaṃ no cet kiṃ kva
vidhīyate* (verse 59). *brahmaṇas cātyantāvedyatve, athāto brahmajijñā-
sā, brahmavid āpnoti param, ātmā vā are draṣṭavyaḥ ityādivyākopaś ca.
upadeśaś ca niṣprayojanah, upadeṣṭuś cādvaitaniścayāniścayayoḥ kasmai
kim upadeśyam?*

Moreover, the Advaitin himself must admit that he cannot prove self-consciousness in and of itself, but must presuppose different means of knowledge. Thus, “knowledge” (formerly for the Advaitin the pure consciousness) never ceases to be conscious, even if it becomes an object. Indeed, if one says that consciousness is immediate and therefore without specification, then exactly this “being without specification” is according to Veṅkaṭanātha already a specification of consciousness. Using memory, etc. to prove what is self-illuminating is thus inevitable. And it is exactly through these forms of “knowledge” that self-illumination or being self-evident, etc. is presupposed. But what implications does this view have regarding “knowledge”? If one objectifies “knowledge”, one has again presupposed a state of “knowledge”, and in doing this, a series of alternating states (*avasthāsantāna*) of “knowledge” (*dharmabhūtajñāna*) is being described *ad infinitum*. Thus, there is no reason not to objectify “knowledge”, which is manifest through its states again and again.

Why isn’t such a regress *ad infinitum* a fault for Veṅkaṭanātha? The regress concerns only the series of states (*avasthāsantāna*) of knowledge presupposing each other, not the “knowledge” as a substance (*dravya*) while the self (*ātman*), “I”-consciousness, is still the indispensable base for each cognition; if one is immediately aware of something, one has no object-knowledge of “I”-consciousness. Thus, Veṅkaṭanātha provides the human being with an implicit pre-reflective “I”-consciousness on the one side, and the reflective, self-referential knowledge on the other. Presupposing each other, they are different in function. “Knowledge”, which can be objectified, enables an explicit self-reference. The ways to refer to oneself are innumerable, because my “knowledge” has been in the past, is present, and will be in future in the according state (*avasthā*). The pre-reflective “I”-consciousness is the presupposition for being aware that it is “me” who “knows” my own past, present or future states.

Ending here, the question remains how could one tie up with the European discussion of self-consciousness and self-knowledge, by which I tried to elucidate the concept of consciousness of the Advaita

Vedānta on the one hand and of the Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta on the other hand? To contextualize self-knowledge in the European debate not only Frank's reference to the view of German idealism is helpful, but also his references⁴⁰ to positions of analytic philosophy of language like argumentation by Sidney Shoemaker, who holds the view of subjective use of "I" which is resistant against any misidentification.⁴¹ This concept of consciousness—consciousness that precedes any objectified reference to oneself and therefore exemplifies pre-reflective self-knowledge—can be demonstrated by the impossibility of saying that one is in pain without being aware of the fact that "I" experiencing pain. Or, in other words, pain without "I"-consciousness is not possible, and therefore no difference can be obtained between the *existence* of pain and the fact that "I" am *conscious*. It is absurd to undertake a kind of self-identification to know that "I" have pain. Shoemaker differentiates this from an objective use in which we can misidentify which does not originally belong to us. His differentiation⁴² of "I"-use in subjective and objective helps us to understand the function of self and knowledge in Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta: Applying on Veṅkaṭanātha's thoughts this would mean: "I"-consciousness is the basis for consciousness of objects and self-referential knowledge.

⁴⁰ Cf. Frank 2007: 159–169.

⁴¹ Self-knowledge is not a kind of object-knowledge; a knowledge of mine could not be explained like I have "I"-consciousness, because this again presupposes "I"-consciousness. This is expressed in Shoemaker's words: "For awareness, that the presented object was ϕ , would not tell one, that one was oneself ϕ , unless one had identified the object as oneself; and one could not do this unless one already had some self-knowledge, namely the knowledge, that one is the unique possessor of whatever set of properties of the presented object one took to show it to be oneself" (Shoemaker 1984: 105).

⁴² For Oetke's reference to Shoemaker cf. Oetke 1988: 536–549.

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