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ABSTRACT

The focus of this dissertation is on a comparative study of the notion of the transcendental self or, briefly, the Self as developed by Kant and Śaṅkara. The main purpose is, however, not simply to compare the views of Kant and Śaṅkara, but rather to use the rich sources of both the West and the East—that is, in this case the insights of both Kant and Śaṅkara—to rethink and to elucidate the question of the Self. More specifically, the main problem that is addressed in this dissertation is: what is the ontological status of the Self? Drawing on the insights of both Kant and Śaṅkara, an attempt is made to elucidate, as well as to provide a possible answer to this question.

At the very outset of their projects both Kant and Śaṅkara have started out with basically different questions and assumptions, and as a result divergent views of the Self have emerged. This is, however, not to say that there are no similarities in their viewpoints. Both claim, for example, that the Self is not an object of empirical consciousness. And, furthermore, that the Self is original pure consciousness. These similarities, even though superficial and functional in nature, nevertheless point to some common concerns, which in turn may be useful in extending our understanding of the Self.
But what is perhaps most important is that the discussion of the views of both thinkers in the comparative context shows that the ontological significance attached to the Self varies with the epistemological assumptions with which we operate. This makes it indeed difficult, but certainly not impossible to grasp the ontological status of the Self. A possible way of understanding the ontological status of the Self is to distinguish between the reflexive state of consciousness and original consciousness. While reflexive consciousness is vital for our existence, it keeps us in a perpetual state of becoming. It is suggested that original consciousness as my very mode of being cannot become an object of reflection. It is an experienced reality and not a concept. Thus it is possible to attain genuine self-knowledge when we reach beyond the boundaries of the reflexive state of consciousness.
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CHAPTER 1

KANT'S NOTION OF THE TRANSCENDENTAL SELF

Introduction

Perhaps the most fundamental question which Kant addresses in the Critique of Pure Reason (Critique) is: what can we know? From the first sentence of the Preface to the first edition of the Critique it appears that Kant is aware of the fact that it is natural for human beings to ask questions "which are prescribed by the very nature of reason itself." As such these questions cannot be ignored, but, at the same time, it is of critical importance to ask whether reason is capable of answering questions which are given by its own nature. Is it, for example, possible to have knowledge of such metaphysical objects as God, the transcendental self, freedom and immortality? Kant sets himself the task of investigating whether reason can answer questions about such metaphysical objects.

In the Preface to the first edition of the Critique Kant writes that these metaphysical objects transcend the realm of all experience, and it is, therefore, essential for metaphysics to find out "what and how much the understanding and reason can know apart from all experience?" The pursuit of knowledge independently of all experience would not only involve, according to Kant, the transcendence of subjective categories and conceptions but would in addition settle the
'endless controversies' regarding metaphysical objects once and for all. A metaphysics grounded on pure reason is what rational beings are striving after (one might, of course, ask, who or what--and where--are these rational beings?), and Kant undertakes the challenging task of investigating the possibility of such a metaphysics. In other words, Kant raises the question whether a rational metaphysics is possible. Is metaphysics as a science possible? The Critique attempts to answer this question.

It should be noted, however, that before Kant even starts his investigation he makes the claim that metaphysical objects transcend the realm of all experience. This claim implies that, for example, the transcendental self cannot be experienced directly. This is, I think, the implicit assumption in the Critique which has narrowed down Kant's notion of human experience, and which has consequently influenced his answer to the question whether knowledge of metaphysical objects is possible. By excluding metaphysical objects from the realm of experience, Kant has eliminated a possible avenue of knowledge of the transcendental self. Knowledge of the transcendental self or 'I' is, according to Kant, impossible. This 'I' can only be thought; it has logical meaning and he writes that beyond this logical meaning of the 'I', we have no knowledge of the subject in itself, which as substratum underlies this 'I', as it does all thoughts.²
An important consequence of Kant's investigation is the belief that pure reason is incapable of answering such ontological questions as 'Who or what am I?'. Given the limitation of his notion of human experience, it is, therefore, not surprising that in order to account in some way or other for metaphysical notions, Kant has to resort to practical reason, which justifies a regulative use of these ideas. An attempt to answer the question of the possibility of knowledge inevitably involves the question of the knower, that is, the Self. More specifically, who or what is it that knows or acquires knowledge? And this question raises a more important question: what is the relationship between the knower and the known, the subject and the object of knowledge? What is the Self, and what role does it play in the constitution of knowledge? Can the knower be known? In other words, is self-knowledge possible? This is a question with which Kant concerns himself and he writes that the Critique "is a call to reason to undertake anew the most difficult of all its tasks, namely, that of self-knowledge." The main purpose of this chapter is to examine how Kant deals with these questions in the Critique. I shall be primarily concerned with a discussion of the transcendental self (the unity of apperception) and the empirical self (the phenomenal self), and how they are related.
For the sake of clarity I should point out that although Kant makes a distinction between the phenomenal self and the noumenal self, my discussion of the Self will not include the noumenal self. This self refers to the moral agent. The noumenal self is for Kant the being in itself that is unknown and unknowable, and yet essential for the phenomenal world. How this is possible is unclear in Kant. But what seems to be clear is that the noumenal self is not the transcendental self, for the main function of the latter is to unify the content of empirical consciousness which is, according to Kant, part of the phenomenal world. As such the transcendental self operates in the realm of phenomena, but it is itself not phenomenal in nature. The consequence of this is, of course, that it cannot be an object of knowledge. If it cannot be known, then, one might ask, is the transcendental self a noumenon?

The noumenon or the 'thing-in-itself', says Kant, is not an object of sense-intuition and the categories of the understanding do not apply to it. It is inaccessible to experience and hence it is never an object of knowledge. According to Kant, the objects of the phenomenal world are things (in themselves) as they appear to us and as such they are subject to the categories of the understanding. But these same objects also have an existence in themselves, a noumenal aspect, which cannot be known by us. They belong to thought. In other words, the thing in itself is a formal concept. For
it to be a real existent object, and hence not only a formal concept, an intellectual intuition is required. Kant believes that we simply lack such a special mode of intuition in which the noumenon can be given as an object.\(^4\)

It should be recalled, however, that Kant also claims that the categories of the understanding cannot be applied to the noumenon. But if these categories are only applicable to the objects of the phenomenal world, then the question arises: how can the noumenon be thought? Moreover, if it cannot be known, then how do we know that there is such a thing as a noumenon? That the noumenon can be thought and yet remain beyond the field of knowledge suggests that Kant is making a distinction between knowing and thinking. Both knowing and thinking seem to be part of the faculty of the understanding. But while the faculties of the understanding and the sensibility are necessary for knowing, thinking seems to be possible without the faculty of the sensibility. Thus, thinking the noumenon implies that it is not an object of sense-intuition. If this is true, then what exactly does Kant mean by thinking. Don't we need the categories to think? Kant admits that if we apply the categories to objects that are beyond sense-intuition, then the former have no meaning whatsoever. But what is the meaning of the noumenon, if the categories cannot be applied to it?\(^5\) Even if it is granted that the distinction between knowing and thinking is justifiable, it does not quite explain how the noumenon can be thought. That Kant's position
with regard to the noumenon seems obscure is also clear from the following lengthy quotation. He writes that the noumenon is not indeed in any way positive, and

is not a determinate knowledge of anything, but signifies only the thought of something in general, in which I abstract from everything that belongs to the form of sensible intuition. But in order that a noumenon may signify a true object, distinguishable from all phenomena, it is not enough that I free my thought from all conditions of sensible intuitions; I must likewise have ground for assuming another kind of intuition, different from the sensible, in which such an object may be given. For otherwise my thought, while indeed without contradictions, is none the less empty. We, have not, indeed, been able to prove that sensible intuition is the only possible intuition, but only that it is so for us. But neither have we been able to prove that another kind of intuition is possible. 6

But in spite of the problems raised it is evident that in his view both the transcendental self and the thing in itself cannot be known. One is then inclined to infer that the transcendental self is noumenal in character, and, further, given the problems raised with regard to the noumenon, the transcendental self would be without meaning. Kant explicitly writes, however, that the transcendental self should not be perceived as "appearance nor as thing in itself (noumenon)," and yet it is "something which actually exists." 7 This sounds startling and is in need of explanation. Since it is not immediately clear what the nature of the transcendental self

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is, it is perhaps useful to briefly restate Kant's position in order to make some sense of his claim.

From the preceding discussion about the thing in itself it is clear that the noumenon is, as it were, an underlying substratum that is essential for the phenomenal world. In more conventional philosophical terms we could refer to the noumenon as the transcendental aspect, whereas the phenomenon could be understood as the empirical aspect of reality. Viewed in the light of these terms Kant's claim is, then, that only the empirical aspect of reality, i.e., objects of the phenomenal world, can be known. The transcendental aspect is unknowable and unknown. And that which makes knowledge of the objects of the phenomenal world possible is the transcendental self. In other words, this Self deals with the empirical aspect of reality, and hence it actually exists (for how could a non-existent Self act on reality at all?), but it is itself neither the transcendental aspect (noumenon) nor the empirical aspect (phenomenon) of reality.

This position does not seem to be without problems. The questions that should be raised here in order to make the transcendental self, at least intellectually, more accessible are: can something actually exist and still not be qualified as a phenomenon? If it exists, where exactly should the transcendental self be located (assuming that this is possible), if it does not partake of either aspects of reality? Even if we do not understand the meaning of 'actual existence'
from an empirical point of view, but only intellectually because 'it is given in thought in general', as Kant claims, one can still ask: what does it mean to say that the transcendental self exists and at the same time to assert that it is not possible to know what it is? If it cannot be known, then how does Kant substantiate its existence?

There appears to be a tension between Kant's admission that the transcendental self actually exists and his denial that it can be known as an object that actually exists. Existence as a category applies to objects in the phenomenal world and hence it's possible to know these objects. But if Kant claims that the transcendental self is not a phenomenon, then the category of existence does not apply to it. In this case, Kant needs to explain what he means by 'actual existence.' If, on the other hand, the category of existence is applicable to the transcendental self, then surely it can be known.

This tension seems to be a direct consequence of his attempts to investigate the limits of a rational metaphysics. In addition, Kant speaks of this Self as "the being which thinks in us." Is the self a function, a formal concept or a being? These puzzling statements, as well as Kant's claim that metaphysical objects transcend the realm of experience prompt us to inquire further into the nature of the transcendental self.
The Unity of Apperception

The transcendental self or the unity of apperception plays a crucial role in the constitution of knowledge, and Kant discusses this role in the Deduction of the Pure Concepts. In this section of the Critique he also introduces the distinction between empirical consciousness and transcendental consciousness. Understanding the exact function of the transcendental self should clarify its status and the role that it plays in Kant's philosophy.

According to Kant, the content of our representations is given to us by our senses but its form (i.e., order) --the way in which they are apprehended-- is a spontaneous act of the faculty of representation, that is, of the understanding. The task of the understanding is to synthesize and to combine the multiplicity of concepts and/or intuitions which can be either sensuous or non-sensuous. The process of synthesizing, as a spontaneous operation of the understanding, originates in the subject, not in the object. The mere presence of objects does not yield immediate knowledge; on the contrary, knowledge of objects is the result of this synthesis. Without this spontaneous act of synthesis, objects have no meaning for us. That is to say that objects as such do not impart unity to the manifold representations (intuitions) in us to which they correspond. The unity is only possible by means of the subjective act of synthesis that combines the various intuitions in accordance with a rule. As Kant writes,
It is only when we have thus produced synthetic unity in the manifold of intuition that we are in a position to say that we know the object.¹⁰

But how is this act of synthesis that originates in the subject possible? This seems to be a crucial question in order to understand the transcendental self. Kant does not really give an answer to this question. All he has to say is that underlying this spontaneous act of synthesis is the idea of unity. Without this unity the act of synthesis would not be possible at all.

From what has been said so far it follows that the understanding as the faculty of synthesis presupposes unity; furthermore, that the understanding as a subjective act presupposes a 'subject' that as consciousness is responsible for the act of synthesis. For it is clear that the same (identical) function is operating in all of the acts of synthesis. The act of synthesis thus implies unity of consciousness. This notion of unity necessarily leads us to the acceptance of a 'subject' as consciousness.

This is confirmed by Kant when he writes that this unity is not the category of unity—that is, one of the categories of the understanding discussed in the Analytic of Concepts—but it is at the basis of these categories and refers to the synthetical unity of apperception. As the most fundamental unity it underlies the unity of all the categories. It is the ultimate, original and unchanging category, and Kant calls it
the pure apperception or transcendental consciousness. It is the consciousness of the 'I' as pure subject.

This pure apperception is reflected in the proposition: 'I think.' The 'I think' is conscious of itself as an identical Self or function, and through it all the representations are united in the concept of an object. Without it knowledge of objects is not possible. The 'I think', says Kant, must necessarily accompany all my representations. In other words, whenever I have representations, I also think and reflect on the fact that I am having representations. Knowing, for example, that 'All humans are mortal' necessarily involves 'I think that all humans are mortal.' This amounts to saying that I don't only perceive objects, but also that the subject perceives that it is perceiving objects. Thus, consciousness of objects presupposes self-consciousness. I need to have this capacity of self-consciousness in order to be conscious of objects at all.

The important question to be raised here is: why does knowledge of objects always involve the 'I think'? Or, why does Kant insist that the 'I think' must necessarily accompany all my representations? Kant offers the following argument:

It must be possible for the 'I think' to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me which could not be thought at all, and that is equivalent to saying that the representation would be impossible, or at least would be nothing to me.\footnote{11}
This argument is supposed to reveal the exact function of the 'I think.' But the way it has been presented seems somewhat misleading. One can, for example, easily take the last part of the sentence "...the representation would be impossible, or at least would be nothing to me" to mean that representations would be impossible and perhaps non-existent without the 'I think.' It is, however, clear that Kant is not suggesting that in the absence of the 'I think' no objects would be given in the mind, that is to say that representations would be impossible or non-existent. It has already been noted that, according to Kant, the representations are given to us by the senses. Moreover, he has also clarified this in the Transcendental Logic where he writes that

> without the sensibility no object would be given to us, without understanding no object would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty; intuitions without concepts are blind...The understanding can intuit nothing, the senses can think nothing.

This passage brings to light that the senses and the understanding need to cooperate in order to produce knowledge. Thus it is clear that it is the faculty of the sensibility that is responsible for the presence of representations and objects in the mind, whereas it is through the faculty of the understanding that objects are thought and concepts are generated. The faculty of the understanding presupposes unity or the 'I think' which accompanies all our representations.
It is essential to Kant's argument that the 'I think' is not necessary for representations to occur, but that its importance lies in unifying and 'giving meaning' to the multiplicity of representations that succeed one another in time. Without the 'I think', the understanding (and interpretation) of objects would be impossible; the representations would simply mean nothing to us. That is, a representation that would not be involved in a synthetic act in consciousness would clearly not represent anything. Kant states explicitly that such a representation could not be thought at all. It is important to note that a representation would be present—that is, it exists—but it would not be thought. In other words, no concept of it could be generated and hence it 'would be nothing to me.'

With this argument Kant seems to be emphasizing a fact which we often take for granted, namely that if we don't apply the categories of the understanding, that is, don't interpret the representations, then they mean nothing to us. Kant seems to be saying that, without the categories, the representations of the sensibility are just the raw sensory data in need of interpretation. One could also interpret Kant's argument in a much stronger sense, as pointed out earlier, and hold the belief that the failure to apply the categories (or even the lack of the categories) would mean that we have no representations at all. As a consequence, one could argue further that one is not having experiences or at least that one is not
aware of having experiences. The latter interpretation is, as indicated earlier, not what Kant had in mind. Both interpretations of his argument point, however, to the importance of the categories of the understanding and, in a more fundamental sense, to the 'I think' or the unity of apperception in the constitution of knowledge and our view of the world.

It seems evident that with this argument Kant is attacking the empiricist view, in particular Hume's, that sense-impressions alone give rise to ideas. The ideas are for Hume images or copies of the sense-impressions in the mind. What constitutes an idea—a concept for Hume—is what, in Kant's view, the faculty of sensibility presents to us. This faculty is as important to Kant as it is to Hume, but Kant believes that the sensory input of this faculty lacks unity. In addition to sense-impressions something else is, according to Kant, required to provide unity to the sense-impressions and to constitute an idea.

For Kant, ideas and concepts are only possible when sense-impressions are in some way related to the faculty of the understanding. And this is precisely what Kant intends to show in the *Critique*. With this insight he claims to have brought about a **Copernican Revolution** in the understanding of the human mind and he writes:

> Hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects. But all attempts to extend our knowledge of
objects by establishing something in regard to them a priori, by means of concepts, have, on this assumption, ended in failure. We must therefore make trial whether we may not have more success in the tasks of metaphysics, if we suppose that objects must conform to our knowledge.\textsuperscript{14}

Whereas previously it was assumed that our knowledge must conform to the world of objects, Kant's revolutionary approach suggests that the world of objects conforms to our knowledge. The understanding prescribes rules, and projects its categories to structure our experience of the world.

In fact, Kant in constructing his own view of the human mind follows up Hume's criticism of causality. As is well known, Hume denied that there is a real connection among our sense-impressions, our perceptions. We don't find in our experience, says Hume, a causal link between sense-impressions which appear in succession. Causality is a category which we impose by custom or habit on our sense experience; it cannot be found as such in the world of objects. Kant agrees with Hume's criticism that no causal link is actually seen, but believes that the very fact that we have a systematic and coherent view of the world suggests that such categories as time, space, causality, etc. are part of our mental structure and are projected onto the world. After all, we do work with the concept of causality (for example, in both personal and scientific discourse) and if it cannot be found in our sense
experience, then, so Kant would argue, it must have an a priori origin.

Kant's main claim is that these categories cannot be understood and explained in terms of our sense experience, and that without them our sense experience would be meaningless. Thus the mind plays, in Kant's view, an active role in the constitution of knowledge and as a consequence, one might say, it also influences our attitudes and outlooks in general. With this new approach of Kant's a radical change took place in the perception of the Self.

How this change took place can be illustrated with a brief discussion of Hume's view of the Self. In his attempts to explain his view of the Self Hume offers a line of reasoning similar to the one he employed in criticizing the concept of causality. In his view, all perceptions or mental states are distinct existences which are in a constant state of flux. Hume thinks that we only feel a connection, but a real existing connection cannot be discovered by the human understanding.

The standard objection brought against Hume's view is that in the absence of a real connection it is difficult to see how one could explain continuity in our perceptions and thoughts and, most importantly, in our identity. Such a connection could, for instance, possibly constitute a criterion for personal identity. Since Hume denies a real connection among the mental states, he also fails to find a criterion for
personal identity. His introspection did not reveal a principle or a Self that unites the stream of perceptions. His objection to personal identity (the Self) can be restated as follows: all impressions or perceptions succeed one another at a rapid pace and are in a perpetual flux. Each impression gives rise to an idea. To have an idea of the Self presupposes that the impression from which it originates should be constant, since the Self is "that to which our impressions are supposed to have a reference." But, says Hume, no impression is constant and invariable, hence there is no idea of the Self. And in the absence of such an idea there is no Self. He writes:

> For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception.\(^{15}\)

In other words, the Self is for Hume what it is known to be, namely 'a bundle of perceptions.' One might ask, however, was Hume searching for the Self or for the idea of the Self. The reality of the Self is clearly different from the idea of the Self. That is to say, granting that Hume failed to find in his introspection the idea of the Self, it does not necessarily follow that there is no Self. Moreover, in his search for the Self Hume takes the Self to be an object of perception. But isn't that precisely what he wants to deny? Is the Self an object among other objects? If so, then the
Self as an object requires a subject of which it is an object. And again, who or what is this subject? It is not difficult to see that this position could easily lead to the problem of an infinite regress. Unclear also is who this 'I' is that enters 'most intimately into what I call myself.' What does Hume mean by 'myself'? What constitutes 'myself' is obscure in Hume.

Kant was, however, not immediately concerned with the kind of objections raised above. Rather, his main concern was to show that the mental states are somehow related and that this in turn would explain the possibility of experience and how knowledge is constituted. If a principle could be found (or formulated) that unites the mental states or perceptions, then he would be able to dismiss Hume's denial of a connection among the distinct perceptions. And Kant has found such a principle, namely the act of synthesis. This principle has been briefly discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Since it is an essential aspect of Kant's view of the Self, it can be further explained as follows. By "synthesis" Kant means

the act of putting different representations together, and of grasping what is manifold in them in one [act of] knowledge. ....Synthesis of a manifold (be it given empirically or a priori) is what first gives rise to knowledge. ....synthesis is that which gathers the elements for knowledge, and unites them to [form] a certain content.16
Kant claims further that the unity of apperception reveals the necessity of the synthetic act, for without the synthesis by means of the categories I would not be conscious of myself as an identical Self. Or, as Kant puts it,

I am conscious to myself a priori of a necessary synthesis of representations--to be entitled the original synthetic unity of apperception--under which all representations that are given to me must stand, but under which they have also first to be brought by means of a synthesis.\textsuperscript{17}

These passages reveal the curious relationship between synthesis and the original synthetic unity. While synthesis is necessary for the unity of apperception, Kant maintains at the same time that the unity of apperception is necessary for the possibility of experience; for it is through this original unity that the manifold representations become an object of experience, and hence knowledge of objects becomes possible. In other words, without the unity of apperception synthesis is not possible. Thus underlying the act of synthesis is, as mentioned earlier, a "pure original unchangeable consciousness," namely the unity of apperception or the transcendental consciousness or Self.

Kant distinguishes this Self from the empirical self or consciousness. Since empirical consciousness is always changing, no abiding Self can be found in the constant flux of appearances. Kant sounds here like Hume (and the Buddha), but he adds immediately that a Self, or "that which is numerically identical cannot be thought as such through empirical data."\textsuperscript{18}
It is obvious that this is a clear response to Hume. Hume was apparently searching for a Self in the wrong place; that is, the transcendental self cannot be found, according to Kant, in the phenomenal world. He argues further that there must be a condition that precedes all experience and which is at the same time the ground, and not the object, of all experience. This is the pure and unchangeable unity of consciousness that is even at the basis of pure a priori concepts.

At this stage it is important to point out that Kant uses throughout the Critique a number of concepts, very often inconsistently, to refer to the transcendental self. It is obvious, for example, from the passage quoted above that he does admit that there is something 'numerically identical' in and through empirical experience. Yet it is not certain whether that which is numerically identical is a Self or subject that is identical over time or just an a priori, transcendental condition. At other times he speaks of an abiding, identical Self, a pure original consciousness, a being that thinks in us, unity of apperception etc.

That Kant affirms that there is a condition or Self at the basis of our experiences is beyond doubt. But his inconsistent use of the concepts with regard to this original Self does not contribute to a clearer picture of what this Self is. Perhaps a further consideration of the relationship between the transcendental self and the empirical self will shed more light on the nature of this original Self.
The Empirical Self and the Transcendental Self

According to Kant, empirical consciousness is necessarily related to the unity of consciousness, for without this relationship representations would mean nothing to us and knowledge would be impossible. Thus, representations are meaningful to us only if they belong to one consciousness. The unity of consciousness or the transcendental consciousness is the consciousness of myself. It is the "bare representation I" that is related to all other representations.

In the second edition of the Critique Kant writes that empirical consciousness is in itself fragmented and has no relation to an identical subject or Self. It is only when I am combining one representation with another and am conscious of the synthesis of the various representations that I am conscious of myself as an identical subject. If I were not conscious of this synthesis in one consciousness, then, says Kant, I would have

as many-coloured and diverse a self as I have representations of which I am conscious to myself.20

In other words, in and through this process of synthesis I, as Self, become conscious of myself and of the representations. That is to say that in itself the Self is not conscious of itself. The Self is conscious of itself through the representations, i.e., the content of empirical consciousness; and it is in relation to these representations that its unity and oneness obtains meaning. On the other hand, without the
unity of consciousness synthesis of the representations does not take place. If synthesis of the content of empirical consciousness is necessary in one consciousness, then the critical question is: how is this one consciousness possible? Kant does not really offer an answer to this question, and the relevant references in the Critique are not very helpful in providing a clear explanation, as is, for example, evident from the following quotation on consciousness:

...it is only because I ascribe all perceptions to one consciousness (original apperception) that I can say of all perceptions that I am conscious of them. 21

Surely, if all perceptions belong to one consciousness, then I am capable of saying that I am conscious of them. That I can be conscious of them presupposes this one consciousness. But what this one consciousness is and how it is possible remains unexplained. Furthermore, Kant maintains, as indicated previously, that there must be an original ground that precedes all experience. Or, as he writes in the Critique, the 'unity of consciousness precedes all data of intuitions' and without it no synthesis is possible. This original ground, the transcendental self, is thus prior to the content of empirical consciousness, and in order to explain, at least to some extent, what this ground is, Kant needs to say in what sense it is prior. 22 That Kant refers to this ground as the pure, original and unchangeable consciousness suggests that it is prior in an ontological sense. But in the Paralogisms of
Pure Reason Kant writes that "the modes of representation of myself as subject of thoughts or as ground of thought do not signify the categories of substance and cause." That is, the transcendental self cannot be perceived as substance. In this sense the unity of consciousness has no ontological significance; its main activity consists in providing meaning to the representations and as such it is epistemologically important, for without it no experience is possible.

Two things are important to note. Firstly, although Kant makes a distinction between empirical and transcendental consciousness, it is clear that both are related. Secondly, Kant realizes the necessity of synthesis in one consciousness but he does not explain how this synthesis takes place. Nor does he explain how the unity of consciousness comes into being. He assumes the unity of consciousness that is responsible for the act of synthesis.

Given these difficulties it is questionable whether Kant has succeeded in dismissing Hume's claim that the mental states are not connected. Kant's response is that the unity of consciousness is a necessary condition for the possibility of experience. There has to be a synthesis of the representations in one consciousness in order for us to have experiences at all. But it can be argued that if Kant does not explain how the act of synthesis is brought about, then it is doubtful whether he can explain how knowledge is possible. It should be recalled that for Kant the act of synthesis means the act
of 'putting together different representations', the act of 'gathering elements for knowledge.' It is 'that which gives rise to knowledge.' And he writes further:

Synthesis in general....is the mere result of the power of imagination, a blind but indispensable function of the soul, without which we should have no knowledge whatsoever, but of which we are scarcely ever conscious. 25

It is, however, doubtful whether this really shows how synthesis is brought about. It is evident that Kant's argument would have more force to counter Hume's view if he could show how synthesis is actually produced, rather than merely emphasizing the need for synthesis. 26

On the other hand, there is no doubt that Kant has shed some light on the question of the Self. In particular on the question whether the Self is an object. Hume, as mentioned earlier, in his search for a Self took the Self to be an object. Kant, however, made clear in the course of his discussion of the distinction between the empirical self and the transcendental self that only the empirical self can be considered as object, while the transcendental self is beyond the subject-object dichotomy. Hence we can know the empirical self, but knowledge of the transcendental self is not possible. While Kant's position with regard to the empirical self seems to be unproblematic, his view of the transcendental self is far from clear.

In Kant's view, the transcendental self accompanies all representations of empirical consciousness, but it itself, as
the original ground cannot be accompanied by other representations. It is indispensable for knowing the contents of empirical consciousness. To put it differently, the transcendental self itself cannot be experienced but it is the necessary condition for the possibility of experience. Without it knowledge of objects is not possible but it itself cannot be known. It does not know what it is, it is merely conscious of the fact that it is. Kant states very clearly that

I am conscious of myself, not as I appear to myself, nor as I am in myself, but only that I am. This representation is a thought, not an intuition.\textsuperscript{27}

Thus consciousness of the Self does not imply direct knowledge of the Self, says Kant, for knowledge of ourselves requires both the act of thought and a certain mode of perception. We intuit ourselves, says Kant, only as we are inwardly affected—that is, 'we know our own subject only as appearance, not as it is in itself'—for we do not have a special faculty, i.e., intellectual perception, which is required to know ourselves. We only have a 'thought' of the Self. We know that it is something, an X that actually exists, but we have no knowledge of its nature—that is, we do not know what it is.

But here the same objections raised against the noumenon can be brought against Kant's view that the transcendental self can be thought. Don't we need the categories to think the transcendental self? Moreover, isn't it through the categories that we have knowledge of the unifying function of
the transcendental self? If this is so, wouldn't the transcendent self be phenomenal in nature? Kant does not think so, yet he believes that the transcendental self exists. It does not exist, however, in the same way the empirical self or consciousness is said to exist. With this position we are left with the problem noted earlier: how to make sense of Kant's claim that the transcendental self exists? As a logical function this Self is empty; it is a 'bare consciousness which accompanies all concepts.' In the Paralogisms of Pure Reason Kant writes that the transcendental self is completely empty and

we cannot even say that it is a concept but only that it is a bare consciousness which accompanies all concepts. Through this I or he or it (the thing) which thinks, nothing further is represented than a transcendental subject of the thoughts=x.28

Consciousness of the Self is, in other words, always mediated through the representations and thoughts. And though the Self is present in all thoughts, we cannot perceive it as an essence that persists throughout all change. It is not a permanent intuition in which all thoughts arise and perish. Nor is it an intuition that can be distinguished from other objects of intuition.

To say that we can have knowledge of the transcendental self is to say that we can make the subjective condition of thinking into an object of knowledge. And this is impossible. As said earlier, the transcendental self underlies the
categories of the understanding. To have knowledge of the transcendental self as an essence that persists throughout all change requires the application of the category of substance to the Self. The problem that arises then is: how can the categories be applied to something which they presuppose? How can something by virtue of which knowledge is possible become the object of knowledge? If the subject were to be at the same time its own object, it would have to presuppose itself in order to yield knowledge of itself.

Kant argues further that the unity of consciousness is only unity in thought, and the categories can only be applied to objects given in intuition. Hence it is an illusion to think that we can have knowledge of the transcendental self.

In addition, says Kant, the transcendental self is, in contrast to the empirical self, not limited by the spatio-temporal conditions of existence. The representation of time originates in this Self and, therefore, it is obvious that it cannot determine its own existence in time. The transcendental self is thus clearly not an empirical representation but an empirical proposition and as such it is purely intellectual. The empirical self, on the other hand, is an empirical representation and refers to the empirical content, that is, the constantly changing stream of perceptions, of all our experiences.

A possible way of understanding the relationship between the transcendental self and the empirical self is by perceiv-
ing it as a relationship between content and form. The function of the transcendental self is then to give form to (to unify) the changing stream of perceptions (the content). It is a mere logical function which is empty without empirical contents. What a representation means then is, in a sense, ontologically dependent on the transcendental self. But, as remarked earlier, the transcendental self itself has, according to Kant, no ontological significance, since the category of substance does not apply to it. While knowledge of the empirical self is possible, that which is presupposed in order to make this knowledge possible (the transcendental self) cannot be known. It is not an object of knowledge. To say that a subject can know itself as an object is to commit a fallacy, a paralogism, says Kant.

Thus from the above discussion it is clear that the transcendental self cannot be known nor experienced as an abiding essence. Yet Kant's view does not completely exclude the possibility that I am some sort of essence, for one of his claims is that I cannot know myself as I really am but I can only know myself as I appear under spatio-temporal conditions. Kant writes: "I have no knowledge of myself as I am but merely as I appear to myself." That is, I have knowledge of how I appear (i.e., my empirical self) to myself, not of 'myself.' (This is then supposed to refer to the original or transcendental self.) But not knowing my real nature does not rule out the possibility that I may be some sort of essence or
being. If we consider further that Kant thinks that the transcendental self is 'something which actually exists' and yet unknowable and the fact that he also refers to it as the 'being which thinks in us', then the status of the transcendental self turns out to be quite problematic.

What the function of this Self is seems, however, to be beyond doubt. It is the ultimate principle from which the categories are derived, and as the ultimate principle it is a necessary condition for the possibility of experience, but it is itself beyond possible experience. Kant uses this principle to respond to the problem raised by Hume. As a principle it can be thought of, but it cannot be directly experienced. This should, of course, not surprise us, for, as indicated in the introduction, Kant has at the very outset of his project in the Critique determined that such metaphysical objects as the transcendental self cannot be experienced.

It should be recalled that Kant wanted to show the limits of a rational metaphysics in order to settle the endless controversies regarding metaphysical objects once and for all. But if it is not possible to directly experience and know the transcendental self, then how are we to determine its existence or non-existence? Wouldn't this take us back to the metaphysics of endless controversies which Kant wanted to overcome?

Another related problem is Kant's claim that the transcendental self (as the necessary condition for the possibili-
ty of experience) and the thing in itself (from which the world of objects arise and are given to us) are essential in order to experience the world. Both are assumptions in Kant's system and they are also unknowable. Now, if the status of the transcendental self and the thing in itself cannot be determined clearly, then the crucial question is: how can the experience of the world be based on conditions which are unknowable and obscure? Isn't Kant here involved in metaphysical speculation and hasn't he opened the door for even more controversies with his rational metaphysics?

Furthermore, one might ask: why is the transcendental self just a logical function or a thought and not a reality that can be experienced? If I am conscious that I am, as Kant claims, wouldn't this open new possibilities for me to investigate further into the nature of the knower? If I know that I am, why can't I know what I am? In a sense Kant does point out that in addition to the sense-intuitions we need an intellectual intuition in order to know what I am. Thus by referring to the faculty of intellectual intuition Kant in a sense admits that it is logically possible to know the Self. But since we actually lack such a faculty we can never know the knower. It can be argued, however, that from the fact that the categories do not apply to the Self and the lack of a faculty of intellectual intuition it does not follow that there are no other ways to know the Self. It seems to me that Kant's problem stems from the underlying assumption in his
project that metaphysical objects cannot be experienced. With this assumption he has limited his notion of experience, and as a result such ontological questions as, who am I? cannot be answered.

But one can ask: are all experiences subject to spatio-temporal conditions? If the transcendental self is a condition of the possibility of experience, then Kant is right that it cannot become an object of empirical experience. But, then, is empirical experience the only kind of experience human beings are capable of or can the empirical conditions be transcended in a different kind of experience? Are different levels of experiences and different modes of knowing possible? Different philosophical traditions offer different answers to these questions. In the next chapter the transcendental self will be discussed from a different philosophical perspective. A discussion of Śaṅkara's view of the Self in chapter two may provide possible answers to the problems raised in Kant's position.
Notes to Chapter 1


2. Ibid., p. 334, A350

3. Ibid., p. 9, Axi


6. Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, p. 270, A252

7. Ibid., p. 378, B423   Ibid., p. 168, B157


10. Ibid., p. 135, A105

11. Ibid., pp. 152-153, B132


13. Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, p. 93, B75, A51

14. Ibid., p. 22, Bxvi


16. Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, p. 111, B103

17. Ibid., p. 155, B135

18. Ibid., p. 136, A107

19. Ibid., p. 142, A117

32
20. Ibid., p. 154, B134


22. Banerjee, Kant's Philosophy of the Self, pp. 105-106.

23. Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, p. 382, B429 Ibid., p. 377, B422


25. Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, p. 112, A78

26. I agree with Patricia Kitcher that Kant fails to show how synthesis is brought about. See also note 24.

27. Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, p. 168, B157

28. Ibid., p. 331, B404, A346

29. Ibid., p. 378, B423

30. Ibid., p. 169, B158
CHAPTER 2

ŚAṆKARA'S VIEW OF THE TRANSCENDENTAL SELF

Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed some important problems with regard to Kant's view of the transcendental self. The discussion also showed that, according to Kant, knowledge of the transcendental self is not possible. The Self, as an internal organizing principle, plays, however, an essential role in the process of knowing. As we saw, Kant also believed that the raw sensory data of the external world are structured and interpreted by this principle. Thus, in explaining how knowledge of the world is possible Kant views the world from a dualistic perspective: there is an external objective world and an internal subjective world. The internal principle or the Self cannot know itself, since it cannot be reduced to a sensory datum.

Though the inability of the transcendental self to know itself does not in itself show that Kant's view is wrong, it may be disconcerting or even frightening to some of us to realize that we are simply a principle that accompanies all our thoughts and actions. Very generally speaking, that which we take to be ourselves and which seemingly guides, plans and directs our lives appears to be, from the Kantian view, a mere concept. Some may find themselves in agreement with Kant, while others may reject his view as inadequate and unacceptable. Especially those who do not share Kant's dualistic
perspective and those who claim to have knowledge and experience of a conscious Self may be in a position to challenge the Kantian view that one cannot have self-knowledge.

In this chapter I shall discuss one such perspective from the Indian philosophical tradition. One of the major issues in Indian philosophy has been the question of the Self, and in particular the question: what is the nature of the Self and how can it know itself? The earliest philosophical writings known as the Upaniṣads--dating back to the pre-Buddhistic era, these philosophical writings are generally regarded as the final parts of the Vedic literature--abound with dialogues, instructions and references to the question of the Self. In the Chandogya Upaniṣad, for example, we read that "He obtains all worlds and all desires who has found out and who understands that Self."¹ In the same Upaniṣad we also find the famous dialogue in which a father instructs his son in the nature of the Self and how knowledge of the Self can be obtained.² It was generally believed that knowledge of the Self would result in knowledge of all that is worth knowing and would eventually liberate us from the limiting mundane conditions of life. These conditions were experienced as unsatisfactory, for they perpetuate the state of unhappiness and suffering. The Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad offers hope for liberation when it declares that "he who knows the Self crosses over sorrow, over sin and becomes immortal."³ And in the Bṛihad-Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad it is said that the quest for knowledge of
the Self is the only thing worth pursuing. It is considered sacred and even more valuable than wealth, the worlds and the gods, and one of the central questions raised is: 'How can the Knower be known?'\textsuperscript{4}

As is well known, Indian philosophy offers a wide range of perspectives on this question, and in this chapter I shall restrict myself to a discussion of the teachings of one of the major philosophical schools, the Advaita Vedānta. The teachings of this school are based on the Upaniṣads and their systematization in the Brahma-sūtras. The main exponent of these teachings is the philosopher Śaṅkara (ca. 788-820). It should be noted, however, that Śaṅkara was not only a philosopher, but also a poet, mystic and religious reformer. His Advaita Vedānta philosophy offers a philosophical analysis of the Self as well as guidelines for the realization of the Self. The focus of this chapter will be on the philosophical analysis of the Self. More specifically, Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta philosophy will be presented in order to show how a philosopher from a non-Western tradition has dealt with the question of the Self and to examine in some detail the motivations and assumptions underlying his view of the Self. The comparison and contrast to Kant's view will be taken up in the next chapter.

Unlike Kant, Śaṅkara argues that self-knowledge is possible. In other words, I do not only know that I am, but it is also possible to know what I am. The question which
arises immediately is: how can knowledge of the Self be obtained? For, if the process of knowing involves both the knower (Self) and the known (object), then self-knowledge leads, from a logical point of view, to the somewhat paradoxical situation in which the knower becomes an object to itself. Śaṅkara maintains, however, that knowledge of the transcendental self is possible, but claims at the same time that this knowledge cannot be acquired in the same way external objects are known. In other words, Kant's notions of intuition (with which one perceives objects) and thought do not yield knowledge of the Self.

In this context it is important to note that, according to the Advaitin, the process of knowing presupposes the Self as knower. In other words, the knower is always present (without actually being involved) in the act of knowing, and hence it cannot be an object of knowledge.⁵ Knowledge of the transcendental self is "self-revealed," says Śaṅkara. It is not "in any person's case, adventitious, not established through the so-called means of right knowledge."⁶ These means of right knowledge, such as perception, inference and testimony, presuppose the Self. The Self is beyond the faculties of the understanding and sensibility, and is not, as external objects are, subject to the spatio-temporal conditions of existence. Yet one cannot deny its existence, for he who denies it cannot deny that he exists. And if he does not exist, then obviously its denial is impossible. Denial of the
existence of the Self firmly establishes the Self. The Self, says Śaṅkara, constitutes the very nature of him who denies it. In addition, it is also essential to realize that even though logical proofs can be useful as a means to support and to remove doubts about the Self as well as to yield a reasonable degree of understanding of the Self, they cannot establish its existence, for all such proofs presuppose the Self.

In a similar way Śaṅkara argues that one cannot doubt one's own existence, for who would be the doubter? Here the doubter is supposed to refer to the transcendental self. A possible objection that could be raised against Śaṅkara is that the 'doubter' is the empirical self and not, as he claims, the transcendental self. Śaṅkara would respond that "The conscious subject never has any doubt whether it is itself or only similar to itself." The conscious subject refers to the transcendental self, and a possible way of understanding what Śaṅkara seems to be saying can be illustrated with the following example. If I were to maintain, for instance, that I have changed my attitudes and behaviors, and even if it were true that I have completely changed as a person over time, I am yet 'distinctly conscious' that I am the same subject. That is to say that through the changes over time, I have no doubts that I am the same subject. Doubts may exist with regard to external objects, but not with regard to the Self.
Thus contrary to the Buddhist concept of momentariness and the view that human beings consist of different aggregates or processes, both mental and physical, which are in a constant state of flux, Śaṅkara believes that underlying these changes in the life of a person is an unchanging Self. The ground on which Śaṅkara lends further support to his view of such a Self can perhaps be best clarified by briefly discussing the Buddhist view of 'no-Self' and, most importantly, by considering his argument against the Buddhist concept of momentariness.

As is well known, the Buddhist denies the existence of a Self or "I", for he claims that upon analysis of the five aggregates which are impermanent and interdependent no enduring entity can be found in the constantly changing mental and physical processes. The aggregate of consciousness, for example, is in a state of constant flux and depends on the body and the sense organs. On the Buddhist view each moment of consciousness gives rise to the next moment. The moments of consciousness are never completely the same and they succeed one another at such a rapid pace that one has the impression that consciousness is constant rather than in constant flux. But in reality there is simply a continuity of the moments of consciousness, and, consequently, it is claimed that to even have the impression or idea of a Self is itself a moment in the continuity of consciousness.
Thus for the Buddhist there is no Self, beyond or within the continuity of consciousness, that unifies the various moments of consciousness. All that can be said meaningfully about the 'Self' or "I" is that it is just a word that refers to a particular set of mental and physical processes. No further meaning can be attached to it. What gives rise to the idea of the Self is the use of the word "I" in reference to ourselves as a set of mental and physical processes and our activities, but in reality there is no Self. The Buddhist view, in other words, implies that the 'Self' is a mere linguistic entity rather than a real existing entity underlying the changes in a human being.

The Buddhist account of the 'Self' is, however, not without problems, and based on what can be referred to as 'the argument from memory or remembrance' Sarikara rejects the Buddhist view of momentariness. The essential point which Sarikara wants to bring out with this argument is that if there is only a continuity of the moments of consciousness without a real subject of experience, then it is impossible to account for memory. He points out that memory requires that there be an identical subject that has an experience, for instance a certain perception, and also remembers that experience. If this were not so, that is, if everything were momentary, then we would find ourselves in the absurd situation in which the person who has a certain experience is different from the person who remembers that experience. This is clearly against
our ordinary daily experience. Thus, both the experiences as well as the remembrance of them require, according to Śaṅkara, an identical subject to which they belong.

The important question which Śaṅkara implicitly raises with his argument against the Buddhist view is: who or what is it that remembers, if there is no identical subject? More specifically, how does remembering take place? And extending Śaṅkara's line of reasoning further one could also ask: how does the act of, for example, consciously recalling, and even of repressing, certain experiences take place if there is no conscious subject that remembers? The very fact that we can consciously choose to remember or even repress certain experiences suggests, in a sense, that the act of memory involves 'more' than just a change in the moments of consciousness that, according to the Buddhist, gives rise to the remembrance of past experiences. It seems that Śaṅkara would agree that the Buddhist view is simply inadequate to account for the conscious act of memory, and I take it that this 'more' that is involved in the act of memory is possibly what Śaṅkara refers to as an identical subject.

An equally important point which Śaṅkara emphasizes in this connection is that in the absence of an identical subject we would not be able to make such statements as "I saw that thing, and now I see this thing."10 If I am having different perceptions or experiences at different times, then it does not follow that with each perception I also become a different
subject. That I can assert the statement 'I saw X, and now I see Y' implies that I am the same subject having different experiences over time. It is precisely the identical subject or Self that makes the unity of our experiences over time possible. Unity of experience is the keyword here, and Śaṅkara's main concern seems to be that with the Buddhist concept of momentariness it is difficult, if not impossible, to see how the unity of our experiences can be accounted for.

It should be pointed out that Śaṅkara's objection against the Buddhist is based on our ordinary experience, and it is with reference to the latter that he also claims, as remarked earlier, that in spite of the changing experiences over time no one ever doubts that one is the same subject or Self. The Self is, in his view, a necessary condition of the possibility of knowledge and of all the activities of a person. In short, it is the necessary condition of the possibility of all our experiences.

In the Brīhad-Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad it is said that all the mental events or experiences are unified by the Self, and this Self is 'located' in the mind. This is, for example, clear from the following passage:

He who, dwelling in the mind, yet is other than the mind, whom the mind does not know, whose body the mind is, who controls the mind from within- He is your Soul, the Inner Controller, the Immortal.11

And elsewhere it is said that the transcendental self or Ātman is that which "one cannot think with the mind, but that
whereby the mind can think."\(^{12}\) Though it is inaccessible to the mind and the sense organs, the Advaitin claims, as noted earlier, that Ātman can reveal its true nature with indubitable certainty in an immediate experience.

Śaṅkara's argument with regard to the existence of the Self sounds, in a way, similar to the Cartesian cogito. It seems that Descartes would agree with Śaṅkara that the existence of the Self can be proved with certainty, that is, it is logically impossible to doubt its existence. Yet there is an important difference between them. It should be pointed out that while Descartes believed that the Self as a 'thinking thing' can exist independently of the material world, the Self, according to Śaṅkara, is not an individual thinking substance that is independent of and different from the material world. Thus while Descartes's belief of the Self leads to a dualistic view of reality, the Self for Śaṅkara is, as we shall see later, consciousness without any distinctions, qualities and limitations.

The difference in their viewpoints can in a sense also be reflected in the way in which their positions can be expressed. For example, if one were to express the Advaitic position in Cartesian terminology, then the result would be the following dictum: 'I am, therefore, I think.'\(^{13}\) Without the 'I am', thinking is not possible. The 'I am' is Ātman. In Descartes's cogito the Advaitic conclusion is the major premise from which the 'I am' is inferred. In the Advaitic
view the 'I am' is not an inference, but rather a self-evident fact from which inferences are made.

For Śaṅkara, then, the existence of the transcendental self is beyond doubt. And he writes that:

...everyone is conscious of the existence of (his) Self, and never thinks 'I am not.' If the existence of the Self were not known, everyone would think 'I am not.'

What needs clarification is, therefore, the nature of Ātman, for one can in ignorance easily superimpose the qualities and spatio-temporal conditions of empirical existence on Ātman. The essential question is thus not 'Is there Ātman?', but rather, 'What is Ātman?', and more specifically, 'does it have any distinctive qualities?' I shall now turn to a discussion of this question.

The Advaitic View of the Self: Ātman and Brahman

From the Advaitic perspective Ātman cannot be described nor defined in a positive way. A description or a definition in conventional language involves a subject-object duality. Given this peculiar feature of language, any positive description which would either classify or categorize Ātman would reduce it to an object, an idea or a class, and therefore limit it. But Ātman is not an object and cannot be limited. It is non-dual, and unlike anything in our ordinary experience. Consequently, no positive description can be given. It
is beyond language and all categories as well, and attempts to
describe or characterize it would only misrepresent it.

In fact, on one occasion it is referred to as "nothing at all," and at other times as the "finest essence that cannot be perceived." Since Ātman cannot be positively described and comprehended in conceptual terms, one can only say what it is not: "it is not this, it is not that" (neti, neti). All names, attributes and forms are negated.

This process of negation can be compared to a process or experience in which all that is false and appears to be real is eliminated until one arrives at that which cannot be eliminated. And what is real cannot be negated. What this approach suggests is that knowledge of 'that which is', that is, Ātman, is not a priori determined, but reveals itself in and through this process of negation. It is thus clear that the process of negation does not leave us with a pure emptiness, that is, a non-being. On the contrary, devoid of all attributes Ātman is present in fullness. The presence of the indescribable Ātman is referred to as being (sat), consciousness (cit), bliss (ānanda).

And yet, paradoxically enough, words and concepts have to be used in order to draw one's attention towards Ātman which itself cannot be captured by words. However, it should be emphasized that the above mentioned denotations are not the qualities or attributes of Ātman; rather, they point to a state of being that is fully conscious and blissful.
To the Advaitin, Ātman (or transcendental consciousness) in this state and as this state of being does not need objects for its existence. Nor does it require objects of which it can be conscious. It is self-sufficient, and as such it is being in itself; it is undifferentiated, without dichotomies, beyond thought and constitutes the underlying ground of the phenomenal world. In this sense Ātman is, according to the Advaitin, the "ontological principle of unity." As such Ātman is, as we shall see later, identical with Brahman.

As the ground of the phenomenal world, Ātman is not subject to the categories of space and time. Established in the eternal Now, it is timeless. Unlimited by time, it is without beginning and end. It is beyond space, and as such it is not limited to and by the body. Its all-pervasiveness is expressed in the following way in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad:

Ātman, indeed, is below and above, to the west and to the east, to the south and to the north; it, indeed, is this whole world.17

Ātman is not only being in itself, but as consciousness it is also being for itself. Thus, Ātman is being and consciousness; it is pure consciousness and "does not need another instrument of consciousness to illumine itself." It is self-luminous, and it is said to be the eternal witness (sāksin) of all our acts, cognitions and mental states without actively being involved (as an agent) in these acts. In other words, as the eternal witness, consciousness accompanies our cognitions, but it does not contribute in any way to our
knowledge of objects. It is only conscious of the objects. Furthermore, the self-luminosity of consciousness implies that the knower is not only aware of objects but is also aware that it is aware of objects. That is, I do not only know 'X', but I am also aware that I know 'X.' The Advaitic position amounts then to saying that knowledge of objects is accompanied by self-awareness.

In Kantian terms this means that the Advaitic witness consciousness or transcendental self accompanies all our acts and mental states. But it is important to emphasize that unlike Kant's 'I think', which necessarily accompanies all our mental representations, Atman is not a concept or a thought. On the contrary, as the ultimate reality it is the very ground of our (ordinary) experience, and, in and through its light objects of the world are known. But Atman itself is not affected in any way by these objects.

The Advaitin holds further that without Atman no claims about the world and its objects can be made. To say, for example, that the world exists or to deny its existence requires, at least to some degree, the presence of Atman or consciousness. Knowledge of the world and its objects, whether this knowledge is based on perception, inference or testimony, presupposes Atman. In this sense Atman has epistemological significance. But it should immediately be added that for the Advaitin, Atman, as the ground of the phenomenal world and of experience, is both ontologically
prior and independent. And as noted earlier, Atman derives its ontological significance essentially from its self-luminous nature.

Thus, on the Advaitic view, Atman does not merely illumine objects in the world, but it is itself self-luminous. From the Advaitic perspective this is, of course, not surprising, for if Atman were not self-luminous, then it would require another 'instrument of consciousness' to illuminate it, and this, in turn, would be in need of a further 'instrument of consciousness' etc., and with this the problem of an infinite regress would obviously be unavoidable. Moreover, if Atman constitutes the very ground of our experience, then it cannot become an object of experience to itself. Reducing Atman to an object would require a light other than itself to reveal it as an object. And, in addition, such an objectification would result in a dichotomous nature of Atman. Given these problems, it is not difficult to see why the self-luminous nature of consciousness is of critical importance to the Advaitin.

As self-luminous consciousness, Atman is always present and not different from Brahman. We shall see later that Brahman as self-luminous consciousness underlies objective reality and is said to be identical with Atman. And Śaṅkara writes:

...whatever is perceived is perceived by the light of Brahman...while Brahman as self-luminous is not perceived by means of any other light. Brahman manifests
everything else, but is not manifested by anything else.²⁰

To experience Ātman—that is, the fully conscious and blissful state of being—is, according to the Advaita Vedānta, the ultimate goal of life. And, as remarked earlier, it is only in a direct experience of this non-dual state of being that knowledge of the Self or Ātman is revealed.

From what has been said so far it is clear that Śaṅkara's main interest is focused on the Knower or the Self rather than on the process of knowing the objects of the world. Seen from his philosophical perspective, the Self is ultimately the only reality, and the quest for self-knowledge is imperative if we want to overcome our limitations, ignorance and suffering in the world. Given this view, there is no denying that in the general scheme of his philosophy the empirical or phenomenal world and its objects are undoubtedly perceived as having a lesser degree of reality, but this does not mean that he has rejected the world of objects altogether.

That the empirical world and its objects appear to be less real follows logically from his attempts to establish the reality of the undifferentiated and all-pervasive Self or Brahman. If the Self is an undifferentiated unity, then, clearly, the changing empirical world and its objects which are subject to spatio-temporal conditions cannot actually be ('comprehended as') constitutive parts of this unity. As a consequence of this, the question which arises immediately is: how does Śaṅkara explain the existence of the empirical world?
Is the empirical world a separate reality distinct and different from Brahman? And, one might ask, if Brahman is indeed undifferentiated and all-pervasive, should not the empirical world be included in this unity? If this is not the case, then what is the exact relationship between Brahman and the empirical world?

Śaṅkara maintains that the Self is without parts and only appears to be divided in parts, just as the "moon is really multiplied by appearing double to a person of defective vision."Śaṅkara's answer seems to suggest the curious view, which is, however, consistent from his perspective, that as far as the Self is concerned there is no empirical world, but to those of us who are still confined to the empirical conditions of experience the Self appears in multiple forms. In other words, the empirical world is the Self or Brahman as it appears to us through, for example, the categories of time and space. To say that the empirical world and its objects are appearances of the Self is to say that the former are ultimately not as real as the latter. The Self or Brahman alone is ultimately real. That is, the Self is the only reality, while the different degrees of reality are our experiences of reality in its varying appearances. The implication of this is that even though the empirical world can be distinguished from the Self it is ontologically not different from it. By simply improving our 'defective vision' we will be able to have a clear perception of reality as it
is. It is evident that with this answer Śaṅkara is lending support to his view that the Self or Brahman is non-dual.

Thus by establishing and upholding the view of the undivided Self, Śaṅkara has committed himself to the position that the empirical world is only an appearance. This is not to say that the empirical world is unreal or non-existent. On the contrary, as appearance the empirical world is an actual object of experience. After all, if the world were non-existent, then no knowledge or experience of it would be possible. Śaṅkara was aware of this as well as of the fact that maintaining the claim that the world is unreal would be contrary to our ordinary experience of the world. He clearly states that the world has a certain order, and is subject to spatio-temporal conditions as well as to the law of causality by virtue of which knowledge of the world is possible.\(^{22}\)

His position with regard to the world seems to imply, however, that the experience of the world is a limiting one, because of the spatio-temporal conditions and because our experience of it occurs within the context of a subject-object dichotomy. And since it is possible to negate such an experience in a direct experience of the Self in which the limiting conditions and the subject-object distinction are obliterated, it is considered less real but not unreal.\(^{23}\)

Thus Śaṅkara's claim seems to be that the experience of the world is less real only in relation to the experience of the Self. And it is obvious that what is less real and
necessarily limited cannot lead us, so Śaṅkara would argue, to the experience of our highest possible state as human beings—
that is, to the blissful and natural state of being. A direct experience of the Self is thus essential according to Śaṅkara, and unless we acquire self-knowledge, we will continue to experience reality only as it appears to us, not as it is. In other words, we will continue to take that which is less real, i.e., appearance, to be ultimately real. Śaṅkara writes that:

...the entire complex of the phenomenal existence is considered as true as long as the knowledge of Brahman being the Self of all has not arisen;...For as long as a person has not reached the true knowledge of the unity of the Self, so long it does not enter his mind that the world of effects with its means and objects of right knowledge and its results of actions is untrue; he rather, in consequence of his ignorance, looks on mere effects (such as body, offspring, wealth, etc.) as forming part of and belonging to his Self, forgetful of Brahman being in reality the Self of all.24

In the light of the above mentioned remarks, the primary purpose of Śaṅkara's philosophy seems to be to show that the empirical world and our consciousness of the world are ultimately grounded in pure or self-luminous consciousness, referred to as Brahman or Ātman. And, as we have seen, the highest goal of life is, according to Śaṅkara, to know or rather realize Brahman in an immediate experience.

So far I have discussed how the Advaitin establishes the Self as the ultimate reality and what its nature is. Ultimate reality or pure consciousness is referred to as
Brahman or Ātman. As noted earlier, according to the Advaitin, Brahman is not different from Ātman, and at this stage it seems important to briefly clarify in what sense Brahman is said not to be different from Ātman. If they are not different, then one may ask: are they identical? After all, they refer to the same reality, namely pure consciousness. And if they are identical, then why does not the Advaitin simply use one term to denote pure consciousness? The use of a second term appears to be superfluous. It should be noted, however, that the Advaitin's consistent use of two different terms with regard to pure consciousness seems to suggest that he may be using these terms in a specific sense. The specific sense in which these terms are used, as well as the nature of the relationship between Brahman and Ātman will be discussed in the next section. Moreover, for a better understanding of this relationship it would be instructive to look also at a crucial distinction which the Advaitin makes between the empirical self and Ātman or the transcendental self.

The Empirical Self and Ātman

As pointed out earlier the Advaitin believes that reality is essentially pure consciousness. Yet two different names, namely Ātman and Brahman, are used to refer to pure consciousness. On the one hand, the Advaitin claims that Ātman as pure consciousness underlies subjective reality; it is the essence
of subjectivity and is distinct from the empirical self, that is, from the psycho-physical aspects of the subject. It is thus clear that the Advaitin distinguishes between Atman and the empirical self. On the other hand, Brahman as pure consciousness is the essence of objective reality and is not transcendent to the essence of subjective reality.

Now, if the essence of both subjective and objective reality is pure consciousness, then it is evident that Atman is identical with Brahman. By moving beyond the subjective-objective distinction of reality we arrive, according to the Advaitin, at the underlying identity of reality, i.e., pure consciousness.

The view of pure consciousness as the essence of both objective and subjective reality is crucial to the philosophy of Advaita Vedānta and is expressed in what is perhaps known as its most fundamental proposition: 'Tat tvam asi', that is, 'that art thou.' To the Advaitin this proposition implies the view that reality is non-dual. Even though a first reading of this proposition does not immediately reveal its essential meaning, the Advaitin suggests that the underlying identity of reality can be made explicit by understanding the meaning of this statement in a specific sense. In other words, if it is true that the statement 'that art thou' indeed expresses an identity, then the understanding of its meaning in a very general and ordinary sense would only lead to misconceptions. For example, if one takes the 'thou' to mean
the individual and psycho-physical aspects of a human being which are subject to change, then clearly the 'thou' cannot be identical with the 'that' which refers to Brahman. To say, then, that this statement expresses an identity would be meaningless. From the perspective of the Advaitin, the significance of this proposition lies precisely in the fact that the 'thou' does not refer to the empirical self, i.e., to (you) as you appear in reality, but to (you) as you essentially are, that is, pure consciousness or Atman. Thus, when we move beyond the level of appearance, the meaning of the 'thou' is not different from that of 'that.' That is to say, Atman is identical with Brahman.

An important aspect of the identity between Atman and Brahman should be pointed out here. As noted earlier, according to the Advaitin, there is only one Self, namely Atman or the transcendental self, and knowing it is to realize Brahman. That is, knowing that one is pure consciousness or Atman is to realize Brahman. The significant point to be emphasized here is that this knowledge does not lead to self-realization but is itself self-realization. Brahman is, in other words, not something to be achieved, for this would imply a duality between Brahman and man, and, consequently, this would mean that man is a distinct being separated from Brahman. On the contrary, Brahman constitutes the very nature of man; it is the underlying essence—that is, Atman—and it is man's primary task to know his real nature. To realize Brahman
implies, then, to simply realize one's original nature which is not something external to or other than one's Self.

This, however, seems to be an arduous task, for, wrapped up in ignorance (avidvā), man takes his appearance to be his real nature. That is to say that, according to the Advaitin, man confuses his empirical self with the transcendental self. How this confusion is brought about has been dealt with very briefly in the discussion of the proposition "that art thou." However, a closer look at the specific nature of the relationship between the empirical self and the transcendental self will give us a better understanding of the origin of this confusion.

In the Advaitic view, the empirical self, that is the jīva, is both real and unreal. Given this peculiar feature of the empirical self, the confusion with the transcendental self seems almost unavoidable. The empirical self is, according to the Advaitin, Ātman as it appears under the spatio-temporal conditions of existence, and as such it is empirically real, but transcendentally unreal. In this sense, the jīva is seen to be different from Ātman. Essentially, however, this difference is unreal, for without Ātman the jīva has no basis of existence. In fact, the jīva is said to be a reflection of Ātman. As a reflection it depends on Ātman and is clearly not different from it, even though it may appear to be different. To put it another way, a reflection is not the original object of which it is a reflection, yet it cannot be
said to be essentially different from the original object. Both are linked, and in a similar fashion the relation between the jīva and Ātman should be understood. Śaṅkara illustrates this with the following metaphor. He writes that the jīva is:

...like the reflection of the sun in water; it is neither directly that (i.e., the highest Self), nor a different thing.²⁷

That is, the jīva and Ātman are in essence not different from one another in spite of the distinction between them. A clear perception of this fact leads, according to the Advaita, to the understanding that one is not really different from Ātman and that one cannot exist independently. The clarity of perception depends, however, on the degree of ignorance. The greater the ignorance, the greater the illusion that one is the empirical self. The clearer the perception, the closer one is to the realization of one's true nature.

Another way of understanding the relation between the jīva and Ātman is to perceive the former as a limitation rather than as a reflection of the latter. In ignorance certain limiting conditions (upādhi) can be imposed on Ātman which may create the impression that Ātman itself is limited. For example, under the spatio-temporal conditions of existence Ātman becomes qualified and limited both in time (in this case it has then a beginning and an end) and space—it is confined to a body and thus gives rise to the false idea of multiple Ātmans, while in fact there are only a plurality of jīvas. In
plain terms this means that the jīva is simply the conditioned self-luminous Ātman.

In this context it is perhaps instructive to point out that while Śaṅkara did not differentiate between the metaphors of reflection and of limiting conditions as a means of understanding the relation between the jīva and Ātman, Advaitins after Śaṅkara maintained that these metaphors are basically different. The post-Śaṅkara Advaitins maintained that grasping this difference is essential to understanding the relation between the jīva and Ātman and, in particular, the specific nature of the jīva. For example, the Advaitins of the Vivaraṇa school argued that the different location of the reflection (pratibimba) of an object by no means implies a difference between the reflection and the original object (bimba). Though the original object and its reflection can be distinguished, they are essentially not different. The Advaitins of this school believed that a similar relation holds between the jīva and Ātman. Once we become clearly aware of this connection, we will no longer take the jīva to be independent and separate from Ātman. In terms of the metaphor of reflection this means that just as the clarity of the reflection of, say, the sun in the water is conditional upon the state of the water, in precisely the same way the realization that one—that is, the jīva as a reflection of Ātman—is not different from Ātman is dependent upon the degree of awareness, or rather, the state of ignorance.
The Advaitins of the Bhāmatī school, on the other hand, used the metaphor of limitation (avaccheda) to explain the relation between the jīva and Ātman. They argued that since pure consciousness or Ātman cannot be reflected, the metaphor of reflection cannot explain the specific nature of the jīva. They believed that the jīva is a limitation of Ātman. When Ātman is perceived under limiting conditions, it appears as the jīva. And without the removal of the limiting conditions we will continue to see ourselves as limited individuals, not as we really are—that is, as Ātman. This specific relation between the jīva and Ātman can be best illustrated, according to the Advaitins of this school, by the way we perceive space. While space (ākāśa) is in reality one and undivided, we do impose limiting conditions on it by creating, so to speak, a division between, for example, the space in a jar and the infinite space outside it. Likewise, Ātman or the Self is one, but by imposing limiting conditions on it we perceive it as separate, individual selves or jīvas.

It is, however, important to note that, on the interpretation of the Advaitins of the Bhāmatī school, the jīva, as limited Ātman, appears to have a greater degree of empirical reality than the jīva as a reflection of Ātman. At the same time it is equally important to point out that for Advaitins of both schools the jīva—that is, the jīva as reflection and as limitation—has a lesser degree of reality than Ātman. And as remarked earlier, Śaṅkara employed both metaphors to
emphasize the view that the jīva is empirically real, but transcendentally unreal. But while there appears to be a difference between the jīva and Ātman, there is in essence no difference between them. As pointed out previously, the jīva—whether perceived as a reflection or a limitation—has, on Śaṅkara's view, no basis of existence without Ātman.

Now, if we confine our understanding of ourselves to the jīva and hence remain ignorant with regard to our real nature, that is of Ātman, we will continue seeing ourselves as limited and separate individuals. But from the perspective of Ātman the distinctions between 'I' and 'You' and between subject and object are non-existent. Perceiving Ātman in a spatio-temporal context conceals its infinite and unqualified nature and prevents one from realizing one's true nature. It is only with the removal of the (self-)imposed limitations that one can have a clear perception of oneself as Ātman. That is, one realizes that one does not become, but actually is Ātman. And once again the main point to be emphasized here is that, according to the Advaitin, Ātman is not something to be achieved, but, rather, with the removal of the limiting conditions and of ignorance as well it is revealed as our authentic state of being.

In the light of the preceding discussion about the relationship between the jīva and Ātman it is obvious, according to the Advaitin, that if one identifies the jīva, whether it is perceived as reflection or limitation, with
Atman, then one confuses the empirical self with the transcendental self. In other words, one mistakes the limited individual self for the unlimited Atman. And Śaṅkara writes that:

... as long as the individual soul does not free itself from Nescience in the form of duality— which Nescience may be compared to the mistake of him who in the twilight mistakes a post for a man— and does not rise to the knowledge of the Self, whose nature is unchangeable, eternal Cognition— which expresses itself in the form 'I am Brahman'— so long it remains the individual soul.29

An important consequence of failing to have a clear perception of oneself would be that the basic Vedantic proposition, 'that art thou', would no longer make any sense. For if 'thou' stands for the limited, empirical self, then it is obvious that the 'thou' is not 'that.' With this the essential meaning of the proposition would be nullified. One has to realize, as indicated earlier, that it is not the empirical self (jīva), but the transcendental self (Atman) that is not different from Brahman. It is also evident that the 'I' in the statement 'I am Brahman' refers to the transcendental self and not to the empirical self.

Another, equally important, consequence of the identifi-
cation of jīva with Atman is that the latter, as pure consciousness, appears as different states of consciousness depending on the degree of ignorance. We have seen earlier that pure consciousness is referred to as undifferentiated, non-dual reality. The various states of consciousness are
simply manifestations of non-dual reality and as such they are distinct but not different from it. And the Advaitin claims that just as one identifies the jīva with Ātman due to ignorance, in a similar way we commit the mistake of identifying one state of consciousness with pure consciousness itself. That is, the manifestation itself is taken to be that of which it is a manifestation and consequently the original nature of consciousness becomes obscure.

Furthermore, from the perspective of the Advaitin it is highly doubtful, if not impossible, whether such a misidentification would result in self-knowledge. Just as the image in the mirror only displays how we look without actually revealing who we really are, in the same way the different states of consciousness are merely expressions of consciousness and as such are inadequate as well as limited as a means of disclosing the real nature of pure consciousness.

At best, the states of consciousness can provide us with superficial knowledge about ourselves, and if we are indeed in search of genuine self-knowledge, then, so the Advaitin would argue, we need to look further than the surface. This is, however, not to say that knowledge acquired in, for example, the state of waking consciousness should be rejected. Even though this knowledge is both necessary and useful, yet, according to Śaṅkara, from the standpoint of pure consciousness it is limited and hence less real. The implication of this view is that if we are conditioned to focus our attention
and interest mainly, and perhaps exclusively, on the waking state of consciousness, then our quest for self-knowledge will be fruitless (or any degree of knowledge that we may acquire as a result of this quest will be, at best, limited).

Thus, according to the Advaitin, the direction of our attention to pure consciousness is essential to the search for self-knowledge. As stated earlier, the different states of consciousness form an essential part of the Advaitic view of consciousness. The former emerge from pure consciousness and as such they are not dissociated from one another. Perhaps a brief discussion of the nature of the various states of consciousness and how they are interconnected, as well as how pure consciousness is related to, or may be involved in them, will contribute to a better understanding of the status of pure consciousness.

Strictly speaking, what is generally known in Advaita Vedānta as the fourth state (turīya) or pure consciousness is actually not a state, but the underlying basis or, rather, witness of the three states of consciousness, namely the waking state, the dream state and the state of deep (or dreamless) sleep. As a manifestation of pure consciousness, the specific nature of each state is dependent upon the spatio-temporal conditions and limitations of existence.

An important aspect of the waking state is that consciousness is intentional. Consciousness requires, in other words, objects of which it can be conscious. The implication
is that without objects of thought thinking is not possible. Now, if one were to identify waking consciousness with pure consciousness (or perhaps claim that there is only waking consciousness), then it would follow that in the absence of objects there would be no consciousness at all. This is according to the Advaitin impossible, for, as we have seen earlier, pure consciousness or Atman is internally conscious and its presence is independent of objects. To lend support to his view Śaṅkara compares pure consciousness to the sun, and says that 'just as the sun shines even when there are no objects to be illuminated by it, in a similar fashion pure consciousness is present even in the absence of objects.' In fact, pure consciousness is not only self-luminous, but also illumines our ordinary daily perceptions in the waking state.

What happens in this state, however, is that consciousness, driven by desire and motivated by interest, is constantly moving outwardly in search of objects. This outward movement colors our perception of consciousness. While consciousness immerses itself, so to speak, in the external world and its objects, it also veils in a subtle way its real nature. And it is precisely in and through this process that we perceive consciousness as something which, we believe, can only exist through the mediation of the experience of objects. It is no surprise, then, that we also identify ourselves with our bodies in this state, and we think of ourselves in terms of objects. As a consequence, we take how we appear, i.e.,
the empirical self, to be the real Self. But it should be noted that while waking consciousness can be said to be a mental event, pure consciousness itself is, according to the Advaitin, not a mental event and hence it cannot be perceived nor cognized as an object among other objects.

Contrary to the outward movement of consciousness in the waking state, consciousness in the dream state is moving inwardly. This inward movement involves a greater degree of freedom from the external world. That is, while one is aware of the impressions and perceptions of waking consciousness, one is at the same time free from the limitations of the waking state, namely space, time, law of non-contradiction (and even from the confinement of the body). And in addition, imagination plays an important role in shaping the reality of the dream-world. Although both the dream state and the waking state are part of our ordinary experience, the objects of the waking state clearly differ from the contents of the dream state. Given the peculiar attributes of the dream state, we can infer, according to Śaṅkara, that the waking state has a greater degree of reality. On the other hand, because of the increased freedom in the dream state we are inclined to identify ourselves with the contents of this state of consciousness, and as a result we tend to lose sight of our real identity.

In addition to the two previous states, the Advaitin recognizes a third state of consciousness known as the state
of deep (or dreamless) sleep. This third state is considered more important than the two previous states in that it is the state of consciousness closest (in quality) to pure consciousness. In this state the mind and the senses are said to be at rest after the experiences of the waking and the dream states. There is a complete absence of the sense of 'I', but this does not mean that one is unconscious. That we remain conscious in the state of deep sleep even when all mental activities or events have ceased, seems to be contrary to the, perhaps commonly held, view that with the cessation of all mental activities, consciousness also disappears. This view presupposes, in a sense, that consciousness is a series of mental events without a final level of consciousness.

The difficulty with this view is, however, that it cannot be verified on a personal basis, for one would have to be conscious in order to know that consciousness indeed vanishes when all mental activities end. And this is obviously impossible. If, on the other hand, one excludes personal verification as a source of evidence and argues that one could observe the mental activities of others or perhaps even rely on testimony from others (and this may include scientific evidence), then apart from the question whether this is possible, a more urgent and basic problem which requires clarification is, what exactly constitutes a mental activity? If, for example, signs of consciousness cannot be seen or measured by others, can we infer from this that there is no
consciousness? How do we know what elements are involved in a mental activity or event?

In contrast to this view, the Advaitin offers an interesting example to illustrate that in the state of deep sleep the possibility of consciousness without objects or mental activities cannot be eliminated. If after a deep sleep I claim, for instance, 'I slept soundly, I wasn't aware of anything,' then I am contradicting myself, for, says the Advaitin, I am conscious now that my sleep was sound. It should be recalled that, according to the Advaitin, I do not remember this, for all psycho-physical functions are temporarily suspended. Moreover, if the psycho-physical functions were still active, then it would be highly doubtful whether I indeed had a sound sleep. If memory as well as other possible avenues of knowledge are excluded, then I must have been conscious of the fact that I slept soundly. After all, so the Advaitin would argue, I was conscious that I was not aware of anything, that is, of any objects of thought or mental activities. In Śaṅkara's own words, in the state of deep sleep "you deny only the seen object, not the seeing." The crucial point which the Advaitin wants to bring to our attention with this example is that not being conscious of anything does not mean that one is unconscious.

Thus what seems to be excluded by the commonly held view, seems to be possible in the state of deep sleep. That is, even if intentional consciousness is absent, there is still
consciousness. But consciousness in this state is devoid of impressions, objects, desires, experiences and distinctions, and is known as blissful and silent consciousness in which pure consciousness or Ātman is not yet manifest. The significant point to note is that even though the limiting conditions imposed on the jīva are temporarily eliminated as a result of the suspension of all mental activities in this state, yet one does not know that one is pure consciousness. In other words, there is only consciousness, but one has no knowledge of the external world nor of one's real nature.

This should, of course, not surprise us, so the Advaitin would argue, for the lack of knowledge follows logically from the fact that all mental activities have ceased in this state, and hence knowledge of oneself—as well as of the external world—in an ordinary (waking) sense is not possible. Granted that this is true, yet there appears to be a tension in the Advaitic position, for, if it is claimed that one is conscious in the state of deep sleep, then, one might ask, why is not one conscious that one is Ātman? A possible response of the Advaitin would be that the absence of objects in consciousness does not necessarily entail that immediate knowledge of its real nature is revealed. That is to say that the absence of the subject-object dichotomy in deep sleep consciousness as well as in pure consciousness does not imply that both are identical. The "absence of duality" cannot be equated, in other words, with the "presence of non-duality."³⁴ To suggest
that they are identical, is to mistake one state of consciousness for pure consciousness itself. It is, according to the Advaitin, only in the so-called fourth state that pure consciousness or Atman reveals itself to itself.

Perhaps another way of emphasizing the distinction (not the difference) between deep sleep consciousness and pure consciousness is in the way we can express both. In light of the preceding discussion of the Advaitic view of consciousness I can say, for example, 'I had a deep sleep last night,' but it does not make sense to claim that 'I have pure consciousness.' This example may not be very convincing, but in a sense it does point to the distinction between them.

What we can glean from the discussion of the three states of consciousness is that the jīva moves, so to speak, from the waking state to the dream state, and from the latter to the state of deep sleep.35 Whereas in the waking and dream states the jīva is completely immersed in the objects and mental impressions of the world, and hence is subject to fatigue and pain, in the state of deep sleep it "enjoys full ease."36 In the latter state there is a gradual withdrawal from the realm of ordinary experience (this includes experiences in both the waking and dream states), that is, from the empirical world. This withdrawal is, however, not for too long, for the general pattern seems to be that the jīva remains only temporarily in this blissful state and then returns again to the waking
state. Most of us seem to be involved in this movement from the waking state to the deep sleep state and vice versa.

Even though this movement varies from gross to subtle and may be experienced as pleasant and, at times, even blissful, there seems to be no way out of it as long as pure consciousness is wrapped up in layers of ignorance. It is perhaps important to point out that, on the Advaitic view, the layers which keep us ignorant are known as the five sheaths (kośas) which make up the physical body (sthūla-śarīra), the subtle body (suksma-śarīra) and the causal body (kāraṇa-śarīra) of an individual. Each body is linked to a state of consciousness.37

By identifying ourselves with one of these bodies we remain in ignorance. We have seen, for example, that in the state of waking consciousness we identify ourselves with our physical body which is formed by the sheath of food (annamayakośa). The subtle (or psychological) body is linked to the dream state of consciousness, and is made up of the sheath of vitality (prāṇamayakośa), the sheath of mind (manomayakośa), and the sheath of understanding (vijñānamayakośa). The last two sheaths constitute the so called 'internal organ (antarākṣara) which is essential to all the mental activities in the waking and dream states of consciousness. The internal organ functions through the senses and the mind, and even though it is subtle in nature it is clearly not pure consciousness. When pure consciousness takes on a psycho-physical form the internal organ is superimposed on it as a limiting condition.
Given the limitations of the previous states, it is tempting to identify ourselves with the causal body of the deep sleep state which is made up of the sheath of bliss (ānandamavakośa). But, as indicated earlier, this is a state of withdrawal from the empirical world and not that of pure consciousness. And while it is true that in the process of withdrawing from the empirical world the jīva becomes conscious of the absence of all distinctions and of the root of its ignorance, it is also possible that it eventually realizes that it only appears to be different from Ātman but in essence is not different from it. This realization is known as transcendental or pure consciousness. It is the so-called fourth state:

which is not conscious of the internal world, nor conscious of the external world, nor conscious of both the worlds, nor a mass of consciousness, nor simple consciousness, nor unconsciousness; which is unseen, beyond empirical determination, beyond the grasp (of the mind), undemonstrable, unthinkable, indescribable; of the nature of consciousness alone wherein all phenomena cease, unchanging, peaceful and non-dual. ³⁸

This state is known as Ātman, the ultimate reality not different from Brahman. Thus contrary to our ordinary perception that reality is 'out there', we see that, according to the Advaitin, the search for reality involves an incessant inward movement until consciousness without duality reveals itself to itself. This is not to say, as indicated earlier, that the only reality is the inner reality. On the contrary,
all distinctions, including the dichotomy between inner and outer reality, are obliterated in pure consciousness. Just as a dream is not real from the perspective of waking consciousness, or at least not as real as the experiences of the waking state, in a similar way waking consciousness is not real from the viewpoint of pure consciousness. Therefore, on the Advaitic view, waking consciousness cannot be an instrument by means of which self-knowledge can be attained.

From the above quotation it is also clear that pure consciousness cannot be explained nor be made accessible to the conscious mind, because it is beyond sensory experience and the spatio-temporal framework. Nor can it be known as an object, for it is beyond the subject-object dichotomy. Yet it cannot be denied, for it is the foundation of the states of consciousness. But if this is the case, then, one might ask, what is the philosophical significance, if any at all, of an indescribable and yet undeniable reality? How can one make sense of that which is beyond the senses and the mind? Since this appears to be an unanswerable problem, it is quite tempting to simply dismiss it. But, then, if pure consciousness is indeed undeniable, can it be rejected? It seems that precisely because of its difficult nature, the philosophical significance of this problem does not lie in attempting to find an answer, but, rather, in discovering how the problem arises in the first place.
We have seen earlier that, according to Śaṅkara, pure consciousness, is the necessary condition of the possibility of all our activities and knowledge—in short, of our experiences. It is, however, obvious that pure consciousness or the transcendental self as the ground of all our experiences cannot become an object of experience, and hence knowledge of the Self seems impossible. In other words, since the Self would have to presuppose itself in order to produce knowledge of itself, self-knowledge cannot be attained in the dualistic context of subject and object. Given this difficulty we can either claim that knowledge of the Self is not possible, as Kant did, or we could explore further into other possible modes of knowing, as Śaṅkara did. We need to be aware, however, that from the lack of self-knowledge it does not follow that there is no Self. While Kant's claim is that we can think the Self, but not know it, Śaṅkara contends that we can both think of, as well as know the Self.

But how is a further exploration of the transcendental self possible, if it is indescribable and beyond intellectual understanding? It would seem that an exploration requires some sort of understanding, and this is possible if we have at least a minimal description of the subject matter under consideration. In the absence of some form of description we are left, so to speak, in the dark. It is then perfectly justified to ask whether it is worth looking for something, if we are not sufficiently clear as to what we are looking for.
Yet it seems that the possibility of a further exploration of the question of self-knowledge cannot be completely excluded.

As noted earlier, according to Śaṅkara, the Self cannot be described nor defined. More specifically, this means that we cannot say in positive terms 'what it is', but only 'what it is not' which implies that there is, in a sense, a description in negative terms. In addition, such words as being, consciousness and bliss, are used to refer to it. But, once again, it should be emphasized that the above mentioned denotations are not the qualities of the Self. They merely point to a state of being.

It is, however, possible that even though the Self cannot be described in positive terms, the descriptions in negative terms as well as the denotations which are used to refer to it can provide us with some understanding of the Self which may be useful, and perhaps even necessary, in the process of exploring further into the subject matter. This exploration may point, for example, to the direction(s) in which the search for self-knowledge might be fruitless. Saying 'what it is not' may open up a wide range of possibilities, both conceptual and existential in nature, of what the Self could be, as well as indicate the direction in which to look for it. And if the description in negative terms is indeed a way to eliminate the limitations of the states of consciousness, then the logical possibility of a level of experience other than an empirical experience cannot be excluded.
Śaṅkara states clearly that knowledge of the transcendental self is possible in a direct, immediate experience in which it reveals itself to itself in and through itself. Self-knowledge revealed in a direct (transcendent) experience is thus not grounded in the states of consciousness. Once the limitations of the states of consciousness have been removed, knowledge or intuition of oneself is immediately available. This kind of knowledge is known, according to the Advaitin, as higher knowledge (parā vidyā). It is higher because it is self-evident, intuitive, and immediate, and not because it is the result of an accumulation of knowledge.

This higher knowledge is distinguished from knowledge attained through reason and the senses. The latter is known as the lower or empirical knowledge (aparā vidyā). Empirical knowledge, says Śaṅkara, cannot prove or disprove the higher, intuitive knowledge. From the point of view of higher knowledge, empirical knowledge is unreal. This is, however, not a denial of empirical knowledge in an absolute sense. As we have seen earlier, according to Śaṅkara, the world is empirically real and so is knowledge of the world, and this will remain unchanged 'as long as knowledge of the transcendental self has not arisen.' In other words, empirical knowledge is unreal to only those who have realized pure consciousness in an intuitive experience, but it is real to those who have not yet attained this higher knowledge.
Knowledge of the transcendental self is thus possible on a higher level of experience in which the Self is not an object of experience. Moreover, the higher level of experience cannot be contradicted by any other experience. That is to say that experience, on the Advaitic view, is not limited to empirical experience, just as consciousness is not confined to waking consciousness but is in essence self-subsisting, pure consciousness. Thus, while Śaṅkara deals with a level of experience which is beyond the spatio-temporal framework as well as beyond the subject-object dichotomy, Kant simply denies the possibility of such an experience. This explains why Śaṅkara can claim that knowledge of the transcendental self is possible.

In sum, we can infer from the preceding discussion of Śaṅkara's view of the transcendental self that he has given an epistemological and ontological foundation for the transcendental self. An important aspect of the discussion which is crucial to the epistemological foundation in particular, is the distinction he has made between the different states of consciousness (waking, dreaming and deep sleep), and related to this is his view of the different degrees of reality. In this connection it should be noted that Śaṅkara's analysis of deep sleep consciousness does not only bring to light a new dimension of consciousness, but it may also be conducive to a better understanding of consciousness, especially since he views the deep sleep state as the gateway to pure conscious-
ness. His main claim is that the transcendental self or pure consciousness is at the basis of the various states of consciousness. That is, pure consciousness is the ultimate reality. We have also seen how he establishes the existence of the transcendental self and how he thinks it can be known.

But accepting Śaṅkara's views implies acknowledging that we are not who we think we are or what we appear to be. At first sight, this could mean either of two things or both. Firstly, we acknowledge that there is a discrepancy between our actions, behaviors and our thoughts and intentions. Secondly, we could take his views to mean that we are not yet who or what we want to become. Thus, we are constantly reviewing ourselves in the light of some ideal goal in order to achieve that goal. We move from one state to another with the intent to improve ourselves.

It seems, however, that Śaṅkara's views imply neither interpretation. Surely, we do undergo changes but these changes concern only our personality. And both interpretations refer to changes in (and of) our personality. They do not involve changes in the conscious subject. Even if it is true that I consciously choose to change, this change may not necessarily involve a change of consciousness. Śaṅkara's views, on the other hand, present a profound challenge to the way we perceive ourselves, others, the world, our identities, the various forms of relationships in which we are involved, our concepts of truth, death etc. These, he claims, are
merely appearances of reality—that is, degrees of reality. They are ultimately not real, and yet not unreal. With every bit of ignorance conquered, we get closer to ultimate reality until we exit the 'realm' of appearances.

Taking the challenge presented by Śaṅkara seriously means, in a sense, that we are ready and willing to rethink our preconceptions and perceptions of ourselves, and in particular the question of self-knowledge. In this process of rethinking it is important to raise questions with regard to the nature of pure consciousness. Avoiding this challenge, for whatever reasons, implies that we take consciousness to be intentional. But that is precisely the issue. Is consciousness in all its stages always mediated or intentional? And are there a priori reasons for rejecting or accepting belief in pure consciousness? It is obvious that these questions have a direct bearing upon Śaṅkara's view of the transcendental self. While these questions as well as the possibility of pure consciousness will be further explored in the last chapter, the task of the next chapter is to compare and to contrast Śaṅkara's view of the transcendental self to that of Kant.
Notes to Chapter 2

1. Chandogya Upanisad, 8,7,1, in The Thirteen Principal Upanishads, trans. Robert E. Hume (London: Oxford University Press, 1934). Translations of and references to all the Upanisads are from this source, unless otherwise indicated.

2. Ibid., 6.


4. Brihad-Aranyaka Upanisad, 2,4,5; 4,5,15.


7. Śaṅkara-BSB, II,2,25.


12. Kena Upanisad, 1,5.


14. Śaṅkara-BSB, I,1,1.

15. Chandogya Upanisad, 6,12,2.


21. Ibid., II, 1, 27.


30. Ibid., I, 1, 5.

31. Ibid., III, 2, 3.


34. cf Deutsch, *Advaita Vedanta*, pp. 61-64. On page 61 Deutsch writes, for example, that "deep sleep consciousness is not "transcendental consciousness," the spiritual consciousness in which oneness is obtained, but it is not to be construed as a void on that account." And on page 64: "In deep-sleep consciousness the self is free from objects but has not yet transcended itself."

35. Śaṅkara-BSB, III,2,9.
Śaṅkara argues here that through the various states of consciousness there is a continuity of an identical subject.

36. Ibid., II,3,40.

cf also *Taittirīva Upanisad*, 2,1-9.


39. Śaṅkara-BSB, II,2,29.
cf also II,1,14.

40. Ibid., I,1,2.

41. For Śaṅkara's commentaries with regard to the two levels of experiences, namely, the empirical and the higher experience see, for example, *Māndūkya Upanishad*, IV,24 and IV,25.
cf also Deutsch, *Advaita Vedānta*, pp. 81-82.

42. Śaṅkara-BSB, II,1,14.
CHAPTER 3
KANT AND ŚAṅKARA RECONSIDERED

Introduction

The main purpose of the previous chapters was to discuss in some detail the views of both Kant and Śaṅkara with regard to the transcendental self. In this chapter an attempt will be made to compare their viewpoints. In more specific terms this means that the positions of both thinkers will be reconsidered in order to articulate their presuppositions, as well as to point out similarities, and, in particular, differences in their views of the transcendental self or the Self.¹

Generally speaking, such an attempt would make it possible for us to render judgments about either the philosophers or their viewpoints. But it should be emphasized that the comparison will not be used to make judgments about either philosopher, however tempting that may be. Of course it cannot be denied that even in the absence of any judgment, one's own preconceptions and preferences may play a role in a comparative study, as anyone who is involved in such an enterprise would readily or perhaps reluctantly admit. But while it is difficult, if not impossible, to completely eliminate our personal preferences and biases, it is incumbent on us to suppress or at least to minimize their influences. In this connection it is also crucial to point out that merely focusing on judging is, in a sense, a way of shifting our...
attention away from the more important task of clarifying issues. And the latter is precisely what is intended with the comparison, namely, to clarify the question of the transcendental self using the insights of both Kant and Śaṅkara.

It seems almost natural to assume that the perspective of each philosopher with respect to the transcendental self could not have developed without consciousness. That is to say that to think of, and to even be able to experience the transcendental self presupposes the presence of consciousness. And as we have seen in the previous two chapters both philosophers do indeed refer to the transcendental self as an original consciousness in the absence of which knowledge is not possible. That is to say that to deal with the question of the transcendental self presupposes consciousness.

Given that both Kant and Śaṅkara have lived, and developed their viewpoints in essentially different philosophical traditions and historical contexts, the question which arises immediately is whether the consciousness which was involved in the development of their viewpoints was operating within the confines of their respective contexts. If this is so, then it is not only important to find out what the context-specific questions are which each thinker has raised with regard to the transcendental self, but also how each has approached these questions. In addition, it is equally important to know whether there are questions and issues pertaining to the subject matter which rise above the contextual boundaries.
And if so, did they also deal with them in the same way? While the outcome of the former may be conducive to exposing the presuppositions and to explaining the differences in their viewpoints, the latter may point to common values and concerns.

It is important to note that although the comparison will bring to light both the similarities and the differences in their viewpoints, neither will be explicitly emphasized. A comparative study requires a careful approach. We need to be aware of the fact that laying stress on either the similarities or the differences may result in an extreme position which, in turn, may prevent a clear understanding of the question of the transcendental self. For example, being overly concerned with only similarities in order to find universal values and ideas common to all simply disregards the differences and the uniqueness of each contextual setting. On the other hand, by placing too much emphasis on just the contextual differences we may fail to recognize possible common concerns and insights.

It is, however, not sufficient to simply point out similarities and differences in order to obtain a clearer and broader perspective of the transcendental self. To be sure, it is an important and even necessary activity in a comparative study, yet we need to move beyond this activity and involve both the similarities and the differences in further reflections in order to enrich our understanding of the
transcendental self. These reflections may bring to our attention possibilities and capacities which are native to us as human beings, but somehow we have failed to acknowledge or realize them. For example, the possibility that we are capable of having a richer and wider range of experiences than just experiences which are limited to and shaped by the spatio-temporal framework cannot be ruled out. Including this possibility in addition to, and thus not over and against, the empirical experience will not only broaden the perspective from which to approach the transcendental self, but also throw more light on this subject matter. And a broader perspective is not merely an expression of the wider range of human experiences, but, more significantly, operating from such a perspective is a recognition of the richness of human experiences as well as of our capacity to transcend our own limiting sense of experience.

To be more precise, the comparison will not be used as a means to develop a single, complete and conclusive view of the transcendental self. This is not only undesirable, but seems also impossible. The attempt to develop such a view would most likely involve a refusal to acknowledge the wide range of experiences and, eventually, result in an exclusive and narrow outlook. But even if this is not the case, it is still difficult to see how the wide variety of experiences can be molded in such a way so as to constitute a single all-inclusive view. And, furthermore, even if one discovers similari-
ties in a wide variety of experiences, that in itself does not guarantee or justify a complete absorption in a single view. At most, similarities may provide a basis which will enable us to identify common underlying concerns which in turn may further our understanding of our experiences.

In addition, our experiences, as well as our perspectives and views of ourselves and of our experiences are subject to change. A possible explanation for this is the fact that both the former and the latter are involved in a reciprocal relationship. The desire to understand our experiences causes us to reflect, and this gives rise to certain thoughts and ideas about our experiences. Our reflections and thoughts, even though rarely complete, further expand and unveil new dimensions of our experiences from which new reflections and fresh perspectives emerge. And with the continuity of this dynamics our views and experiences also change.

Yet it is important to note that within the context of this dynamic interplay experience seems to be prior, and is even essential to understanding ourselves. After all, we don't only derive our views from experience, but, at the same time, we also refer to experience in order to verify and justify our views. On this account, the question of the transcendental self arises then in experience. That is, how we experience ourselves in a given situation generates questions about ourselves, and in attempting to understand ourselves we resort to experience. In fact, it seems that the
entire process of self-inquiry stems from experience, for it is in experience that questions arise and answers are sought. In this sense, the understanding of the transcendental self implies the understanding of experience. The depth and the range of experience are essential to the kind of views and perspectives we espouse. It is obvious that the more limited the scope of experience, the narrower the views which can be derived from it. And the broader the range of experience, the better our chances of understanding the transcendental self.

From the preceding discussion it is clear that the comparison as an intellectual activity will involve more than just a mechanical exercise in reviewing and contrasting the viewpoints of both thinkers, even though such an exercise may be inevitable in a comparative study. As stated earlier, a comparison in this sense will, hopefully, prepare the ground for further reflections which may provide insights which would enable us to extend and enrich our understanding of the transcendental self. Bearing in mind the remarks made previously with regard to the purpose of the comparison, we can now proceed with a closer examination of the viewpoints of Śaṅkara and Kant.

The Question of the Transcendental Self Restated

We have seen in the previous chapters that both Śaṅkara and Kant are concerned with the problem of the relationship between the knower and the known. At a basic level this
problem raises a more critical question, namely: can the knower be known? That is, is knowledge of the transcendental self possible? It is important to note that the question presupposes that there is a knower, and it simply asks whether the knower can know itself.

If we assume that knowledge is only possible within the context of a subject-object dichotomy, and an attempt is made to answer this question within this context, then it is clear that the knower cannot be known. For who would be the knower, if the knower were to be made into an object? On the other hand, it should be emphasized that the fact that the knower cannot be known does not imply that there is no knower. It seems that we are left with an unresolved problem.

Yet in spite of this problem the question of the knower has not been dismissed. And one can wonder whether it can be dismissed at all, for there seems to be a deeply felt need in us to know ourselves. It is apparent that this question emerges naturally from this need and it should, therefore, not surprise us that it has been raised time and again. That we do raise this question suggests that we do have, at the very least, some rudimentary understanding of ourselves which in turn invites us to enhance our self-understanding. Evidently not all questions can be answered, but this does not mean that seemingly unanswerable questions do not deserve our attention. Precisely because some questions appear unanswerable, they are
an impetus both to inquire further into the issues they raise, and, more importantly, to understand the question itself.

In addition to eliciting answers, questions often times implicitly serve as a means of calling into question our assumptions and the ways in which we arrive at answers, that is, our modes of knowing. The answers are at least to some extent, if not completely, shaped by the assumptions and the modes of knowing. Thus the latter indicate, and often determine, the possible directions in which answers should be sought. The very fact that the question of the knower recurs time after time should, therefore, urge us to look closer at the assumptions involved in the question and at our modes of knowing. That is, the question itself needs to be questioned. In more specific terms this means asking the question: what is the status of the question of the knower? It is in particular important to look at how and why the question is posed, and, furthermore, how the specific modes in which the question emerged as well as the reasons for raising the question have influenced or shaped the answer to it. And of equal importance is the question: is it possible to seek an answer to the question of the knower without reducing the knower to an object?

As we have seen in the previous chapters, both Kant and Śaṅkara have recognized the importance of this question, and both have dealt with it in their own ways. Since their own particular ways may reveal as well as highlight different
aspects of this question, it seems, therefore, reasonable to expect that a discussion of the transcendental self in the light of their viewpoints may considerably expand our understanding of the problem of the knower or the transcendental self.

Kant developed his view of the transcendental self in response to the views of Descartes and Hume. While Descartes believed that it cannot be doubted that we are essentially a thinking substance, Hume in his search for a possible substance to which all our mental events can be ascribed came across just a bundle of various distinct perceptions which were in a perpetual flux. Hume simply failed to discover an abiding subject among the distinct perceptions. Kant, and Hume as well, rejected the Cartesian view of the Self as a thinking substance, but at the same time Kant believed, contrary to Hume, that our mental events must belong to an identical subject. That is, the changing sense-impressions and mental events must be unified in some way or other in order to constitute knowledge. For, if there were no identical subject, then it would not only be difficult to explain how our mental events and perceptions are connected, but, more significantly, how knowledge and experience are possible at all. This is a clear response to Hume's failure to account for the continuity in our perceptions and mental events. Thus Kant's view of the Self emerges as an answer to a fundamental epistemological question, namely: how can we account for our
coherent view of the world? Put in more general terms, Kant was concerned with the question: how is knowledge and our experience of the world possible?

While Kant criticized Hume's rejection of a Self, he did not seem to have much difficulty with Descartes's view that there is a Self. This is, of course, not surprising, for if he were to reject the Self completely, then he would not be able to explain the possibility of experience. But what Kant did dismiss was Descartes's view that the Self is a thinking substance. It is evident that Kant's rejection of the Cartesian Self as a thinking substance implies that he is calling into question the nature of the Self. The essentially different views which both thinkers have developed with regard to the nature of the Self seem to be largely due to the particular philosophical goals and questions with which each was concerned.

It is, for example, well known that Descartes arrived at his view of the Self as a thinking substance by rigorously employing the method of doubt in his attempts to answer the question 'What can I know with certainty?'. His attempts yielded the insight that it is possible to doubt virtually everything (including the perceptions of his body), except the fact that he exists as a thinking substance. If it is indeed true that one is first and foremost a thinking substance, then an important consequence of this Cartesian insight is that consciousness (mind) exists independently of the body (mat-
A further, and perhaps more significant, implication of this insight is that one can have knowledge of oneself even without having the barest minimum knowledge of the body and the objects of the world. That is to say, on the Cartesian view, self-knowledge does not depend on knowledge of the world and its objects. On the contrary, in a direct intuition one knows with indubitable certainty that one is a thinking substance.

Thus while Descartes's method of doubt led him to the view of the Self as a thinking substance, Kant's attempts to answer, for instance, the question, 'how is knowledge possible?' brought him to the conclusion that the Self is a mere logical function, and as such it is completely devoid of any substance. As mentioned earlier, Kant was primarily preoccupied with finding a principle that would enable him to account for the unity of the manifold representations in the mind. This principle was necessary, if the representations were to have any meaning for us. And in accepting a view of the Self without embracing the Cartesian thinking substance, Kant believed that he had found a principle that could accomplish such a task.

Kant was, however, well aware that the unifying principle he was looking for could be found only outside the stream of the manifold representations. After all, so Kant would argue, how could that which unifies the various representations itself be a part of the representations? To put it different-
ly, the difficulty which Kant seems to be pointing out is: how can that which perceives the representations itself be accessible to perception? Given this difficulty, it should not surprise us that the attempt to look for the Self in, for example, the fleeting representations, as Hume did, would be simply futile. Furthermore, one could also argue that the object that is being looked for is itself essentially involved in the act of looking. And even if one doubts or simply rejects the view that there is such a thing as a Self involved in the act of looking—that is, that there is, so to speak, merely the act of looking without anyone or anything actually looking—it is still questionable whether it is possible to find the Self in the manifold representations.

Kant's main point is that the Self cannot be located in the representations. At the same time, however, Kant is not clear as to where it should be located, assuming that this is possible at all. As discussed earlier, all he has to say is that the Self is neither a phenomenon nor a noumenon. Since it is not a phenomenon, it is obviously not within the bounds of experience. It follows, then, that it cannot be known, and yet Kant maintains that it is 'something which actually exists'. In fact, from Kant's point of view, it has to exist, for without it no experience seems possible.

It is apparent that Kant was not concerned with finding the locus of the Self and perhaps even less with clarifying its nature. His main attention was directed toward finding an
explanation for the possibility of experience. That is to say, how is knowledge of objects and the world possible? In a way, the attempt to answer this question involves an inquiry into a more specific question, namely: what is it that structures the various representations for us in a meaningful way? And, furthermore, these challenging questions are ultimately a means of engaging in inquiry into the structure and the functioning of the human mind.

What has emerged as a result of the inquiry into these questions is Kant's idea of the Self or the transcendental self. And as we have seen previously, Kant claims that it is only in the act of combining the various representations in one consciousness that I become conscious of the representations as well as of myself as an identical subject--that is, as a Self. What Kant seems to be saying is that for me to be able to claim that I am an identical subject as well as that I am having an experience implies that both the representations and the synthesis of these representations must belong to one consciousness--i.e., they must belong to me and not to someone else. If this were not the case, then, so Kant would apparently ask, on what basis would it be justified to say that I am having an experience. That is, what does it mean to say that I am having an experience, if the representations do not belong to me.

Kant's main point is that it is precisely in the act of synthesis that I think that the representations are mine.
For me to be able to say that I am conscious of X means that I am capable of saying *I think* X; that is, X belongs to my consciousness. The thought of the Self arises, in other words, only in and through the representations—i.e., the content of empirical consciousness—but the Self or the *I think* itself cannot be a part of the content of empirical consciousness.

And once the thought of the Self has emerged, it seems almost natural for us, so Kant would argue, to raise questions about its nature and its location. That is, we feel the need to know the Self. To be sure, the need to know the Self, at least to some degree, seems inevitable—it appears to be a basic human need. But the question which arises immediately is: is it also reasonable to expect to know the Self or transcendental consciousness, given the peculiar way in which it emerges? That is, if it is indeed a thought that arises only in relation to empirical consciousness, can we, then, still expect to know the Self as it is, that is, in itself? From Kant's perspective, this is clearly not possible. The implication of this view is that to insist on knowing the Self, and even to claim that knowledge of the Self is possible, is to dissociate it from (the content of) empirical consciousness and, consequently, to treat it as if it were an abiding being in charge of structuring the material in consciousness. Apart from the question whether such an approach would indeed lead to self-knowledge, it is obvious that it
would also be contrary to Kant's point of view with regard to the Self. That is clearly not how he perceives the Self, and yet, surprisingly, Kant does occasionally speak of the Self as if it were a "being which thinks in us." 

The essential point to be emphasized in this connection is, however, that just because certain questions emerge naturally in us—for example, the questions with regard to the nature of the Self—this does not imply that they can be answered. And, furthermore, their being unanswerable is no reason to dismiss them altogether. It is far more important to understand both the context and the mechanisms which have given rise to the questions than to seek answers. Viewed in this light, it is not hard to see that attempts to seek answers will be not only fruitless, but any possible answer that is provided will be most likely assuming too much, and, consequently, not really answering the questions. In a way, it seems that Kant has alluded to this problem, as pointed out earlier, when he writes in the Preface to the First Edition of the *Critique* that

> Human reason has this peculiar fate that in one species of its knowledge it is burdened by questions which, as prescribed by the very nature of reason itself, it is not able to ignore, but which, as transcending all its powers, it is also not able to answer.

What is evident from the preceding discussion is that Kant's view of the Self is the outcome of his search for a unifying principle in consciousness. That epistemological
considerations are involved in, and have essentially motivated his search for such a principle seems to be beyond doubt. And it is also crucial to point out that it is precisely in the context of this search that Kant's particular view of the Self has emerged.

Unlike Kant, Śaṅkara did not construct his view of the Self in response to philosophical developments which were prevalent in his time. Rather, he derived his view from "scripture" (āruti), but at the same time he believed that knowledge of the Self can be verified in an immediate, transcendent experience. In other words, Śaṅkara did not merely ground his view of the Self in scripture, but what is perhaps more significant is that he provided a criterion with which knowledge of the Self could be experientially verified. And the latter, in particular, is crucial to Śaṅkara's view, for he believed that while it is possible to contradict or negate our ordinary experiences of the empirical world, an immediate experience of the Self or consciousness cannot be contradicted by any other experience. To contradict consciousness or to say that it does not exist seems impossible, for its denial is only possible on the basis of consciousness. Consciousness or the Self simply is, and, according to Śaṅkara, this can be verified and confirmed without any doubt in a non-contradictory experience. Thus the Self is for Śaṅkara a self-evident fact that is essential to the developments and inferences made in the empirical world. And whereas
our understanding of the Self is subject to change and further development, the Self as such is not affected by the latter in any way.

It should be noted in this context that while it is true that Śaṅkara did not construct his view of the Self in response to the developments of his time, this does not mean, however, that he did not engage in dialogue with the various philosophical schools and thinkers of his time on the question of the Self. Generally speaking, his own position was often diametrically opposed to the philosophical viewpoints of his opponents. This was usually a good enough reason to inspire and challenge him to refine and establish his own position with greater resolve. Any clarification or modification of his position should be seen in this light. It is apparent from his writings that Śaṅkara oftentimes clearly presents the viewpoints and the possible objections of his opponents (pūrvapakṣa) against his own views before responding to them, and then proceeds to argue for his own position.

Perhaps the most striking example of this approach is the way in which he criticizes the Buddhist concept of momentariness in order to furnish support for his view of the Self. As discussed previously, Śaṅkara exposes the weakness of this concept with his argument from memory, and brings to our attention that an identical subject is necessary to account for the phenomenon of memory. As we have seen earlier, on the argument from memory, both the experience and the memory
of it require an identical subject to which they belong. In other words, the very fact that we are capable of remembering our experiences implies that the person who remembers that he had a certain experience cannot be different from the person who previously had that particular experience. If there were a difference in identity— that is, if I were not the same I, then it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to account for memory.

Śaṅkara's line of reasoning can, however, be further extended in order to expose more explicitly the broader implication of his argument, and to articulate his view that underlying the changes in the life of a person there is a Self. It is conceivable that in addition to us having experiences and remembering those experiences as well, we can also say that based on the memory of past experiences we can choose to take certain actions. For example, it is quite common that in the case of a psychologically painful experience we are inclined to, and very often actually do, take actions in order to protect ourselves against similar painful experiences in the future. The implication of this is that the experience, the memory of it, and the action based on the memory to prevent future painful experiences must all refer to an identical subject. That is, to take actions with the intention to avoid the recurrence of a painful experience of the past presupposes that I am the same person who had that painful experience, who now remembers it, and who wants to
avoid it in the future. If I were not the same person, then, one might ask, why would I bother to take actions to prevent (or even encourage) the recurrence of certain experiences in the future? After all, the person who is going to have the future experience will be different from the person who now remembers the past experience.

It is, however, possible that one might object that this discussion has more to do with the identity of an empirical self than with a transcendental self. But, as pointed out earlier, on Śaṅkara's view, one is 'distinctly conscious' that one is an identical subject, in spite of all the changes over time.9 In light of the above example, this means that the fact that I choose to take action by, for instance, either consciously repressing or erasing (or perhaps encouraging) certain experiences for my own good— that is, to improve myself and my condition— suggests that I somehow know that my real identity does not change over time, even though I may change outwardly.

In Śaṅkara's terms, the preceding discussion can be expressed in, for instance, the following statements: 'I knew (in the past) my experiences, I now know (remember) my past experiences and I also know what to do in the future.'10 That I am capable of making such statements suggests, so Śaṅkara would argue, that even though our experiences over time— that is, of the past, present and future may vary— yet I distinctly know that I am the same subject. What provides unity to our
experiences over time is precisely the identical subject. It is not difficult to see that Śaṅkara’s main point is that if there were no identical subject, then it would be impossible to make coherent statements about our various experiences over time. And continuing Śaṅkara’s line of thinking, as suggested earlier, a more significant question which emerges in the absence of an identical subject is: would I be willing to consciously guide and plan my life in the future, assuming that this is possible and that I do have a future at all? More specifically, why would I choose to have (or perhaps prevent) certain experiences, if I am not the same subject?

In this connection it is perhaps worth mentioning that choosing to take actions to prevent or to encourage certain experiences in the future, in a way, also suggests that I am responsible for my experiences and actions. Even though Śaṅkara did not explicitly point this out, it seems to be implied in his view. For example, if it were indeed true that I am no longer the same person who had certain experiences or who performed certain actions in the past, then the important question that arises is: can I be held responsible for my past experiences and actions? And equally significant is the question: if I am a different person in the present (or perhaps will be a different person in the future), am I then still responsible for commitments and promises I made in the past? It would seem that in the absence of an identical subject the ground for (self-)responsibility and our sense of
commitments would be weakened, if not completely undermined. 11

And more generally speaking, if there were no sense of I, would we be able to function in a responsible and coherent way?

Thus it appears that, for Śaṅkara, the unity of our experiences is absolutely necessary, and this unity is provided by the Self (Ātman) or pure consciousness. The Self is said to be the eternal witness of all our acts as well as cognitions, and as such it is not in any way actively involved in these acts. It accompanies all our acts of cognition without interfering in the process of knowing. That is to say, it does not add anything to the knowledge of the world and its objects, and yet without it no knowledge of the world and its objects is possible. From Śaṅkara's point of view, the Self is, however, not merely the necessary condition of the possibility of all our experiences, but also the very ground of the phenomenal world. And as the very ground of the phenomenal world, it is not limited by the spatio-temporal framework. Hence it can be denoted as the transcendental self. Yet Śaṅkara believes that the fact that it is transcendent to the categories of space and time does not prevent us from gaining access to the Self in an immediate experience.

Seen from Śaṅkara's viewpoint, the Self is ontologically prior, and it is precisely in this sense that it is said to be original, pure consciousness. In other words, it is not derived from nor caused by the physical world or the content
of empirical consciousness. In conventional philosophical terms, Śaṅkara's viewpoint seems to be exactly the opposite of the doctrine of epiphenomenalism. That is, on his view, consciousness is not the effect of the physical world. It is not causally dependent upon the physical world. On the contrary, the physical or empirical world is the effect, the appearance of consciousness. His view implies that the empirical world is clearly distinguished from consciousness, but on the ontological level there is no difference at all. To put it differently, there is no ontological separation between the physical world and consciousness (or between matter and mind). In this sense he holds a non-dualistic view of reality, and viewed from his perspective, the empirical world is simply less real, while consciousness is ultimately the only reality.

Given this view of reality, it is not surprising that Śaṅkara believes that our ultimate goal is to acquire self-knowledge. And if we want to succeed at all in our quest for self-knowledge, then it is incumbent on us, so Śaṅkara would argue, to experience reality not as it appears to us, but as it is—that is, as pure consciousness and not as a manifestation or state of consciousness. In other words, if we indeed desire to realize our authentic state of being—this is only possible in an immediate experience—that is, to know who we really are, then we need to overcome our limitations and ignorance, and move beyond the spatio-temporal confines of empirical experience.
It is obvious from the discussion of Śaṅkara's philosophical perspective that the main focus of his interest is on the Self, its nature and how it can be known, rather than on knowing the world and its objects. What is also obvious is that, on his view, the quest for self-knowledge is motivated by the desire for liberation from ignorance and from the limiting conditions of existence. In this sense, it can be said that for Śaṅkara the primary motivation in the quest for the Self seems to be soteriological. This is, however, not to say that he has ignored the epistemological question, how is knowledge of the world and its objects possible? As we have seen, according to Śaṅkara, knowledge of the world and its objects presupposes the Self. In fact, no knowledge of or judgment about the world and its objects is possible without the Self. That is to say, we cannot claim to have an experience without the presence, at least to some extent, of consciousness.

What the preceding discussion brings to light is that the projects of both Kant and Śaṅkara were at the very outset divergent. The discussion has shown that they were basically pursuing different questions, and, as we shall more explicitly see, as a result different views of the Self have emerged. For example, in contrast with Śaṅkara, Kant's main motivation in his search for a unifying principle was, as pointed out earlier, epistemological. That is, whereas Kant was more interested in finding an answer to such questions as, how is
knowledge possible?, and how can we know the objects of the world?, Śaṅkara was primarily interested in the Knower, i.e., in consciousness as such.

Kant's search led him to an inquiry of the mind which has yielded his view of the Self. And as we have seen, the thought of the Self arises, according to Kant, when I combine or synthesize the various representations in the mind, for it is precisely through this act of synthesis that I become aware of myself as an identical subject. The identical subject is not a part of the representations or of the contents of the mind. Rather, it underlies the act of synthesis and as such it is a 'pure, original unchangeable consciousness.' This pure, original consciousness is the necessary condition of the possibility of all experience and as such it cannot be an object of experience, and hence it cannot be known. Thus what makes the unity of the contents of the mind or empirical consciousness possible on Kant's view, is the transcendentental self which itself cannot be an element of the mental contents, and as such it is original.

From what has been said so far, it appears that both Kant and Śaṅkara claim that there must be an identical subject and that this subject cannot be an object or a part of empirical consciousness. The Self is original pure consciousness. And just like Śaṅkara, Kant also claims that the Self is a necessary condition of the possibility of our experiences. Now given these claims, it is quite tempting to say that their
views are similar or perhaps, in some respects, even identical. But we need to be cautious here, for it seems that the apparent similarities are only on the surface. And, moreover, even if there are similarities at a more fundamental level, it does not follow that their views of the Self are identical.

To clarify and to support these remarks it may be helpful to look more closely at what Śaṅkara and Kant are saying when they claim that the Self is a pure original consciousness. In other words, in what sense do they speak of the Self as a pure original consciousness. It has already been pointed out that, on Kant's view, the Self or the 'I think' is not an object of empirical consciousness. That is, according to Kant, it 'does not belong to sensibility', but it is 'an act of spontaneity.' The spontaneous activity of the Self consists in combining the representations and providing meaning to them, and it is precisely from this activity that it derives its epistemological value. Without this 'act of spontaneity' no experience is possible, and it is in this sense that the Self as an original consciousness precedes all experience. Moreover, the 'I think' or the Self is related to the content of empirical consciousness, for it is in and through the latter that I become aware of myself as an identical subject. What the preceding discussion makes clear is that Kant's Self is not prior and independent in an ontological sense as is the case with Śaṅkara's Self. As we have seen above and also earlier, for Śaṅkara the Self has both epistemological and
ontological significance. The Self is for him ontologically prior and does not depend on any objects or mental events. Nor is it an object or content of empirical consciousness. To be sure, Kant also claims that the Self cannot be an object or content of empirical consciousness. But what clearly distinguishes Śaṅkara from Kant is that according to the former the Self does not emerge in relation to the contents of empirical consciousness. On the contrary, without the Self empirical consciousness and its contents have no basis of existence. As such, Śaṅkara's Self is ontologically prior and original. It is self-sufficient and self-luminous.

Another apparent similarity in their views seems to be that for both Kant and Śaṅkara the Self necessarily accompanies all our mental states. On their views, there is hardly any doubt that the Self provides unity to the mental states. While this is, very broadly speaking, true, it is important to emphasize that there is a significant difference in their viewpoints with regard to the manner in which the unity is provided. As indicated previously, on Śaṅkara's view, the Self as self-luminous consciousness accompanies all our acts and mental states without actively being involved (either as an agent or a principle) in these acts. It is, so to speak, the silent witness of all our acts of cognition, and without its light no objects are known. In other words, it is that which makes the acts of cognition possible, and while it is
conscious of these acts as well as of the objects of cognition, it does not participate in these acts.

For Kant, on the other hand, the Self or the 'I think' is not a silent witness, but an 'act of spontaneity'. It acts, in other words, upon the mental representations. Without this spontaneous activity the mental representations are simply the raw sensory data devoid of meaning. For them to have any meaning at all I need to synthesize or combine them, and it is precisely in this act of synthesis that I become aware of myself as an identical subject. That is, whenever I perform this act of synthesis the thought emerges that the representations are mine—in short, 'I think X'. Thus it appears that the spontaneous act of synthesis is essential to the Self. And Kant believes that this spontaneous act of synthesis is "the mere result of the power of imagination, a blind but indispensable function of the soul." It is, however, important to point out that even though the Self actively involves itself in the contents of empirical consciousness, it does not add anything to the latter. It merely combines the mental representations. In accordance with Kant's line of thinking, this means that without its involvement the representations would mean nothing to us, and, furthermore, without performing the act of synthesis I would not be aware of myself as a Self. It is in this sense that Kant claims that the Self necessarily accompanies all my representations.
This important difference between Śaṅkara and Kant with regard to the way in which the Self accompanies the representations has, in a significant sense, determined their answers to the question, 'Is knowledge of the Self possible'? Unlike objects of the world, knowledge of the Self is, according to Śaṅkara, not gained as a result of any mental activity. We have seen earlier that the internal organ (antahkarana) is essential to the mental activities of the waking and dream states of consciousness. And it is by means of the internal organ that knowledge of the world and its objects are acquired. Now the condition behind the internal organ which makes all our mental activities and ordinary experiences possible in the various states of consciousness is the Self. It is evident that as a necessary condition of our mental activities, the Self cannot become an object of our mental activities. It is not an object of knowledge. For Śaṅkara, the Self is the self-luminous witness (saksin), and as such it does not need a further level of consciousness to illuminate and reveal it. To say that the Self is self-luminous or internally conscious is to say that it reveals not only the world and its objects, but it also reveals itself to itself without becoming an object of experience to itself. As Śaṅkara puts it, knowledge of the Self is self-revealed in an immediate experience. The Self is, for Śaṅkara, an undeniable reality that can be thought, as well as known and directly experienced.
Kant would certainly agree with Śaṅkara that that which is a necessary condition of the possibility of our experiences cannot become an object of experience. The Self or the 'I think' arises in and through experience, but as the very condition of experience it cannot be known or experienced. It is simply a thought that arises, namely the thought that I know that I am. But since the categories of the understanding do not apply to it, I don't know what I am. Or as Kant puts it, 'I don't know myself as I really am, but merely as I appear to myself' under the conditions of space and time. To know what I am would require, according to Kant, a special faculty. But, unlike Śaṅkara, Kant believes that we simply lack a special mode of knowing--that is, an intellectual intuition--that would immediately yield knowledge of the Self. For Kant, then, the Self is a thought or a logical function that can be neither known nor experienced, and yet it actually exists. Its existence cannot be denied, for it acts upon the contents of empirical consciousness. In fact, without the Self we would not be able to make sense of the objects of the phenomenal world.

In the light of the above discussion it is evident that for both Kant and Śaṅkara the Self is not an object of knowledge. It is not an object among other objects, and yet both believe that its existence cannot be denied. The implication of their views is that just because we cannot know the Self in our ordinary experience, it does not follow that
there is no Self. As we have seen earlier, on Kant's view, the existence of the Self cannot be denied, even though it is neither a phenomenon nor a noumenon. Śaṅkara also believes that the existence of the Self cannot be denied. In fact, on his view, it is ultimately the only reality, and he goes even further by saying that knowledge of the Self can be realized in an immediate experience. Unlike Kant, Śaṅkara claims that as human beings we are capable of having experiences which are beyond the spatio-temporal framework and beyond the subject-object dichotomy.

Furthermore, it should be noted that for both thinkers the Self is not something that is added to or imposed upon the contents of empirical consciousness. More specifically, while for Śaṅkara the empirical world and its objects are simply manifestations or appearances of the Self or pure consciousness, for Kant the Self emerges through the contents of empirical consciousness. In other words, for both, the Self is not something that is external to or over and above the contents of empirical consciousness. It is obvious that for both the Self and empirical consciousness are linked. Understanding the particular way in which they are related for each thinker should bring to light further similarities and/or differences between both thinkers, and, most importantly, reveal more, and perhaps different aspects of the Self.
The Transcendental Self and the Empirical Self

As we have seen, both Kant and Śaṅkara make a distinction between the empirical self and the transcendental self or the Self. For both thinkers only the empirical self can become an object of knowledge, whereas the Self, as original consciousness, is beyond the subject-object dichotomy. However, both also claim that the transcendental self and the empirical self are related. The relationship between the two selves is essential, for without the Self no knowledge of the empirical self is possible. For example, for Kant, the Self provides unity to the content of empirical consciousness, and as such the relationship between the latter and the former can be perceived as a relationship between content and form. The Self provides, so to speak, form to the flux of the mental representations (the content). This means that unless the mental representations are acted upon by me, they are meaningless. But this acting upon does not involve adding anything to or even altering the mental representations. Rather, it consists in giving form to the mental representations by combining them with one another, and in this act the 'I think' emerges. That is, I know or 'I think' that the representations belong to me, and, according to Kant, we cannot attach any further meaning to the 'I think'. It is completely empty and does not say anything about me as a subject, even though I may have a strong sense of being a subject. The only purpose of the 'I think' is "to introduce all our thought, as belonging to

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The 'I think' or the Self is a formal unity of consciousness, a unity in thought. And it obtains its unity only in relation to empirical consciousness.

For Śaṅkara, on the other hand, the nature of the relation between the Self and the empirical self is similar to the relation between an object and its reflection. Both the object and its reflection can be clearly distinguished, and yet they are related in such a way that the reflection cannot exist independently of the object. Or, the empirical self could also be conceived as a limiting condition that is imposed on the Self. When the empirical self is perceived as either a reflection or a limiting condition of the Self or as both, then it is obvious that the Self is not imposed upon or added to it. On the contrary, the empirical self is imposed upon the Self, and, in fact, it would have no ground of existence without it. The empirical self is simply the luminous Self or consciousness as it appears under the conditions of time and space. That is, the appearance of the Self under empirical conditions conceals its true nature. And as mentioned earlier, according to Śaṅkara, as long as we confine our understanding of ourselves to our appearance, so long will we not be aware of our true nature. Just as in Śaṅkara, Kant's empirical self also refers to me as I appear under spatio-temporal conditions. But while, on Kant's view, our knowledge of ourselves is limited to how we appear to ourselves, not as we really are, on Śaṅkara's view, limiting
self-knowledge to our appearance implies that we will remain ignorant with regard to our authentic state of being, and hence we will continue perceiving ourselves as limited individuals. When we confound our appearance with our real nature, then we confuse the empirical self with the Self.

An important consequence of this confusion or identification of the empirical self with the Self is that the latter as pure consciousness appears as different states of consciousness, namely, the waking state, the dream state and the state of deep sleep. And it is obvious that from Śaṅkara's point of view, knowledge with regard to the Self acquired in one of the states of consciousness is necessarily limited, no matter how encouraging and important that knowledge may appear to be. An essential aspect of the various states of consciousness is that what is true in one state of consciousness, say the dream state, may not be true in, for example, the waking state of consciousness. And similarly, what is true in the waking state may not be true from the standpoint of pure consciousness which is itself not a state, but the witness of the three states of consciousness. The implication of this is that the waking state is, contrary to what we are inclined to believe, not the highest state of consciousness. And since experiences of the waking state are subject to change and can be negated by the immediate experience of pure consciousness, knowledge acquired in the waking state is, on Śaṅkara's view, limited and hence less real. A further implication of Śaṅkara's view
is that the waking state may provide us 'working' knowledge of ourselves in order to function well in our environment and in relation to others, yet it is limited in scope to yield full knowledge of ourselves. How well we function does not necessarily tell us what we are. In other words, for complete and genuine self-knowledge we need to move beyond the waking state of consciousness.

It seems evident that Śaṅkara offers a view of consciousness that appears to be much wider in range and depth than Kant's view of consciousness. Whereas for Kant the unity of consciousness involves the spontaneous application of the categories to the raw sensory data which makes experience possible for us, for Śaṅkara, consciousness and its various states involve more than just the act of synthesis. From Śaṅkara's perspective, the limitation of consciousness to the act of synthesis—to merely combining the mental representations—confines us within the bounds of the waking state of consciousness and does not take us beyond it. As we have seen previously, on Śaṅkara's view, consciousness in the waking state immerses itself to such an extent in the external world and its objects that it conceals its own nature. One is then under the impression that due to its incessant outward movement consciousness merely exists as an activity or a function and not as pure consciousness.

However, Śaṅkara's distinction between the different levels of consciousness provides a basis to distinguish
between consciousness as an activity and consciousness as a luminous witness which makes consciousness as an activity or a function possible. Although Kant does speak of an original pure consciousness, he simply does not offer any insight into the various states or levels of consciousness as Śaṅkara does. This is a crucial difference between both thinkers. And it can be further argued that the different ways in which they perceive consciousness refer, in a sense, to a difference at a more fundamental level, namely to the possible range of human experiences.

That is to say that if the unity of consciousness is to be more than just a logical function or a unity in thought, then it has to be realized in an immediate experience. But, on Kant's view, this seems impossible, for he claims that the only kind of experience we are capable of having is an empirical experience. It is simply an illusion to think that it is possible to acquire knowledge of something that is 'beyond the limits of experience'. Even though Kant does not rule out the logical possibility of knowing the Self by means of the faculty of intellectual intuition, he believes at the same time that we can never know the Self, since we actually lack such a faculty.

But, as pointed out earlier, from this it does not follow that there are no other ways of knowing the Self. It can be argued that the failure to know the Self may very well have to do with our limited perspective of ourselves and our limiting
sense of experience, rather than with the peculiar nature of the Self. Śaṅkara, for example, believes that we can realize the Self in an immediate experience without reducing the Self to an object of experience. The fact that we fail to realize the Self has, according to Śaṅkara, more to do with ignorance on our part with regard to our true nature and less with the nature of the Self. Our obsession with the manifestation(s) of pure consciousness, so Śaṅkara would argue, blinds us to the reality of the source of the manifestation, and consequently we are inclined to believe that knowledge is only possible in terms of dichotomies, for example such dichotomies as subject and object, and reason and experience.

The dichotomy between reason and experience in particular seems to be essential to Kant's view, and as a major epistemological assumption implicit in his project, it seems to have determined to a great extent his answer to the question of the possibility of self-knowledge. Kant writes, for example, in the introduction of the Critique that "though all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of experience." And elsewhere he writes that "metaphysics is a completely isolated speculative science of reason, which soars far above the teachings of experience." And it is important to note that after having determined that metaphysical objects are beyond the realm of experience, Kant sets himself the task of investigating whether reason can answer questions about metaphysical objects. Can the Self,
for example, be known independently of all experience? By determining that metaphysics—as an 'isolated speculative science'—rises above the realm of experience, Kant has, in a sense, also determined which objects fall within the range of experience. That is to say that by grounding speculative metaphysics on reason, Kant has, so to speak, a priorily determined that such metaphysical objects as the Self cannot be directly experienced, and as a result he has also limited his notion of experience. It is then not surprising that from his viewpoint the claim that the Self can be directly known is an illusion.

Śaṅkara, on the other hand, did not approach the question of self-knowledge in terms of the dichotomy between reason and experience. But from this it does not follow that he did not distinguish between reason and experience. What it does mean, however, is that for Śaṅkara this epistemological dichotomy was simply irrelevant to the question of the Self. The Self is beyond dichotomies. Seen from his perspective, it can be directly known, and failure to do so is simply due to ignorance.

The view that the answer to the question of self-knowledge is determined by this epistemological dichotomy is in very general terms also corroborated by J.N. Mohanty when he writes that

In the Western philosophical tradition, it was usual up until recent times, to ask: does knowledge arise from reason or from experience? The rationalists and the
empiricists gave different answers. These answers, in their various formulations, determined the course of Western philosophy. In Sanskrit philosophical vocabulary, the words 'reason' and 'experience' have no exact synonyms, and the epistemological issue was never formulated in such general terms.²⁰

What the study of Śaṅkara and Kant in the comparative context brings to light is that at the very outset of their projects both thinkers have started out with different questions and assumptions, and as a result divergent views of the Self have emerged. It is crucial to note that the different views are not simply different expressions of common concerns, but, as pointed out, they refer to differences at a more fundamental level. This is, however, not to say that there are no points of convergence in their viewpoints. As we have seen earlier, there are, at least on the surface, some important similarities. These similarities, even though superficial and functional in nature, may nevertheless point to some common concerns, which in turn may help us in extending our understanding of the Self. For example, both thinkers make a distinction between an empirical self and the transcendental self or the Self. Both claim that the Self as original consciousness is transcendent to the empirical self, and without the former no knowledge of the latter is possible. Both also emphasize the fact that only the empirical self can become an object of knowledge, whereas the Self is beyond the subject-object dichotomy. For both thinkers, the Self as original consciousness makes human experience possible.
Yet in spite of these similarities as well as the claim that the Self is the necessary condition of the possibility of experience, we cannot infer, for reasons suggested earlier, that Śaṅkara's Self or pure consciousness is identical with Kant's Self or transcendental subject. Each perceives the status of the Self differently. Kant claims that knowledge of the Self is an illusion, for the Self is beyond the limits of experience. Similarly, Śaṅkara claims that the Self is indeed not within the range of our ordinary experiences, but, contrary to Kant, he states that the Self can be experienced directly. In fact, his claim is that it is not only possible, but, most importantly, imperative to know the Self. While Kant's Self is only a unity of consciousness in thought, Śaṅkara's Self as pure consciousness is a reality that can be experienced.

Śaṅkara believes that the experience of the Self is possible, because human beings are capable of having a transcendent or immediate experience in addition to the ordinary empirical experience. To recognize and to realize this possibility, we need to refocus our attention and interest from the states of consciousness to consciousness as such. What Śaṅkara is implying is that consciousness is not primarily or perhaps only an act of integrating sensory data. This act or function, no matter how important it may be, is an expression of consciousness which is only possible because of consciousness as such or pure consciousness. It seems that,
on his view, we simply mistake a state of consciousness for pure consciousness, if we take consciousness to be exclusively an act of integrating or processing data. Śaṅkara's view of the Self is in a sense a call to rethink and to expand our understanding of consciousness—that is, our understanding of ourselves. Our understanding of consciousness, so Śaṅkara would argue, is conditioned by the activities and functions of the waking state of consciousness. And in order to expand our understanding we simply need to move beyond this conditioned state. The important challenge he faces, however, is, how can a conditioned consciousness become aware of its own conditioning?

To be sure, in the light of Śaṅkara's viewpoint, Kant's view of experience seems limited, but from Kant's perspective, Śaṅkara's view of an immediate experience seems impossible. Yet it should be emphasized that Kant's admission that we do need a faculty of intellectual intuition in order to know the Self, does not exclude the logical possibility of directly knowing the Self, even though we may actually lack such a faculty. What the comparison of Śaṅkara and Kant brings into focus is that the existence of the Self cannot be denied, and that the logical possibility of knowing the Self cannot be excluded. And it is precisely in this respect that the comparison is most instructive. Moreover, given that on Śaṅkara's view it is not only logically possible to know the Self, but we can also actually experience it, then the
question which arises is, how seriously should we take his view? What are the conditions under which it is most likely that we may experience the Self? Keeping the insights of both Kant and Śaṅkara in mind, the possibility of pure consciousness will be further explored in the next chapter.
Notes to Chapter 3


2. cf Larson and Deutsch, Interpreting Across Boundaries, p. 15.
   The comparison will be based on the views of Śaṅkara and Kant as discussed in chapters one and two.


4. cf Chapter 1, p. 21 - 22.
   cf also Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, p. 153, B133

5. Ibid., p. 154, B134

6. Ibid., p. 364, A401

7. Ibid., p. 7, Avii

8. Śaṅkara-BSB, II,2,25.

   For a discussion of the distinction between Atman and jīva
   see also Chapter 2, pp. 53-61.

    Ibid., II,3,7.

11. A similar criticism can also be raised against Derek Parfit's rejection of the notion of personal identity over time. See Derek Parfit, Reasons and Persons, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

12. Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, p. 153, B133

13. Ibid., p. 153, B132

14. Ibid., p. 112, A78
   cf also Chapter 1, p. 24.

15. cf Chapter 2, p. 70.

17. Ibid., pp. 377 - 378, B422/B423
   Ibid., p. 361, A396

18. Ibid., p. 41, B1

19. Ibid., p. 21, Bxiv

CHAPTER 4
THE ONTOLOGICAL STATUS OF THE TRANSCENDENTAL SELF

Introduction

From the discussion of the question of the transcendental self or the Self in the previous chapters it is clear that both Śaṅkara and Kant provide an epistemological justification for the existence of the Self, yet each perceives the ontological status of the Self differently. At this stage, it is perhaps useful to briefly rehearse their positions in order to emphasize once again the main differences between them, and to bring into focus the way in which these differences are reflected in their views with regard to the question of the ontological status of the Self.

As we have seen, Kant claims that the Self is neither a phenomenon nor a noumenon, and yet it exists. That it exists, does not mean, however, that it can be known. As subject, says Kant, I cannot be made into an object that can be known. Kant's main claim is that I am—that is, I exist—but at the same time he believes that it is not possible to know who or what I am. From the discussion in chapter one it is obvious that, on Kant's view, knowledge is only possible in the context of a subject-object dichotomy.

Śaṅkara, on the other hand, thinks that knowledge of the Self or pure consciousness is possible in an immediate experience in which the subject-object dichotomy is absent.
An essential aspect of such an experience is that it cannot be contradicted by any other experience. While, on Kant's view, the Self is merely a logical function or epistemological condition, for Śaṅkara it is a reality that can actually be experienced. This is an essential difference between both thinkers.

This difference is in a sense a difference in the way they perceive consciousness. As pointed out earlier, Kant's original pure consciousness is a spontaneous act of synthesis, and has no ontological significance. By contrast, Śaṅkara's pure consciousness is not a function or an act (of consciousness), but the underlying ground or witness of the latter, and as such it is the "ontological principle of unity."¹ That consciousness involves, on Śaṅkara's view, more than just an act of synthesis is clear from the distinction he makes between the various states of consciousness. Not all the states of consciousness are, on his view, mediated or intentional. While the waking and dream states of consciousness are intentional, the state of deep sleep and the so-called fourth state or pure consciousness are non-intentional. That is, consciousness in the latter states is devoid of objects or content.

Thus contrary to what is perhaps generally believed, Śaṅkara seems to be saying that we can be conscious even in the absence of objects in quite the same way 'as the sun shines without actually requiring objects which can be
illuminated by it.² That is to say that the absence of objects does not necessarily imply the absence of consciousness.

Now, the critical question which should be raised is: is consciousness in all its stages always intentional or mediated? That is, what reasons do we have to believe that consciousness without objects is possible? If we assume that consciousness is always intentional, then no further discussion of this question seems possible. After all, once we have made this assumption, then it is not difficult to furnish numerous instances of intentional consciousness. More specifically, if we operate with this assumption, then consciousness will always strike us as intentional. (As such, it is even conceivable that instances of apparent non-intentional consciousness will be regarded as instances of intentional consciousness.) But it is evident that from this it does not follow that consciousness is indeed always intentional. In fact, what seems to be the case is that what should be proved is assumed. Moreover, with this assumption we have simply dismissed the possibility of non-intentional consciousness altogether, and in particular of pure consciousness. And, more significantly, by dismissing this possibility we have unnecessarily imposed a limitation on a possible, and perhaps actual, wider range of consciousness. In light of the preceding remarks, it is not difficult to see that there are problems involved in the assumption that consciousness is
always intentional. It is, therefore, of critical importance to ask how reasonable such an assumption is.

Generally speaking, when we claim that we are conscious, we, in fact, imply that we are conscious of something or some object. If I say, for example, that 'I am conscious of this desk', then I am not merely referring to a particular object, but I am also saying that I am conscious of it. This statement suggests, in a way, a distinction between the object or content of consciousness and consciousness itself. Some may argue that this is essentially a distinction suggested by the way we use language. While this may be true, at least to some extent, it is also true that we actually do draw a distinction between consciousness and its objects or contents. This is, for instance, clear from our ordinary experience. We may not be immediately aware of this, yet it is quite common for us to take that which we feel, perceive or think about to be the object of consciousness and not consciousness itself. For example, if I feel pain or sorrow, I may decide to repress or simply remove it from (my) consciousness. That we are capable of doing this--and actually often choose to do so--suggests that we do make a distinction between consciousness and its objects. Even if it is granted that this distinction may not be real but is suggested by the way we use language, it is obvious that it is not merely a linguistic distinction. After all, it cannot be denied that the pain which I feel as well as the act of removing it from consciousness is a reality. Both
the actual pain—or, more precisely, the sensations which I experience and identify as pain—and its removal from consciousness are non-conceptual. That is, they are not mediated by language. Thus, while it is true that our language shapes, to some degree, our perception and understanding of reality, it is at the same time important to recognize that our language is informed by our experiences. And as mentioned above, it is clear from our experience that we do make a distinction between consciousness and its objects. In view of this distinction, it is, therefore, reasonable to question whether objects are always involved if and when we are conscious.

A further question that can be raised in this connection is, if we assume that the objects of consciousness are changing, does it follow that consciousness itself is changing? To put it differently, are consciousness and its objects identical? That is, is consciousness itself an object? Or, does it indeed persist in and through the various moments of consciousness? And if it does not, then we must ask a more fundamental question, namely: how are we conscious of the various moments of consciousness? In addition, if we were to cease all our (conscious) activities, both physical and mental, can we infer that consciousness has also disappeared? The purpose of this chapter is to discuss these questions, as well as to explore the possibility of pure consciousness. The
discussion should shed some light on the ontological status of the Self.

The Ontological Status of the Self

An inquiry into the question of the status of the Self involves, in a way, an exploration of the question whether the Self is an object among other objects. In a more specific sense this question refers to the nature of the Self. As we have seen in the previous chapters, both Kant and Śaṅkara claim that the Self is not an object among other objects. If this is indeed true, then it is necessary to look at an equally important question, namely: how is the Self related to objects? Śaṅkara, for example, writes that the Self and objects are as opposed to each other as light and darkness are.⁴ They are essentially of a different nature, and, as such, objects cannot be mistaken for the Self. Just as darkness can be negated by light, in a similar fashion objects can be negated by the Self. But since the Self is not an object, it cannot be negated. As self-illuminating consciousness, the Self illumines objects. And as indicated previously, Śaṅkara uses various metaphors to clarify the relation between the Self and objects. The metaphor of light, in particular, is frequently employed by him to illustrate that just as objects become visible in the light of the sun, in a similar way objects appear to us in the light of the Self.⁵
J.N. Mohanty rightly observes, however, that while a metaphor can help clarify the relation between the Self and objects, it "cannot do the job of an argument." That is to say, a metaphor helps us see that there is—or rather there may be—a certain relation without actually proving it. What Mohanty's objection brings to our attention is that Śaṅkara needs to show that the Self as pure consciousness indeed exists and that objects appear in its light. While Mohanty's point is well taken, from Śaṅkara's perspective it is obvious that a metaphor is a useful, and perhaps the only, linguistic device to express—at least to a certain degree—as well as to acquire some understanding of the ineffable nature of the Self. That is, metaphors seem to be much more effective than, say, propositions (and arguments) in evoking certain meanings and images of the peculiar nature of the Self. And while it is true that metaphors do not (and cannot) provide full knowledge of the Self, they seem to be most effective as a means of drawing our attention to its reality. In this sense metaphors are indeed limited and cannot function as arguments or logical proofs.

It is, however, conceivable that Śaṅkara would respond to the issue raised by Mohanty by saying that providing an argument for the Self presupposes (a certain form of) the Self. The problem which immediately arises is: how can that which presupposes the Self prove the Self? In more explicit terms this means that constructing an argument is an activity
of the waking state of consciousness, and as such our concepts of the Self are shaped and conditioned by this particular state of consciousness. That is, viewing and valuing ourselves exclusively in terms of this state of consciousness will, of necessity, limit or even prevent us from comprehending other states of consciousness, including pure consciousness or the Self.

Śaṅkara's main point seems to be that we need to shift our focus from providing an argument to that which the argument actually seeks to establish. But it can be objected against Śaṅkara that to assert that the Self is—that is, it exists—and yet refusing to allow the possibility of providing a proof for it seems, in a sense, inconsistent. Śaṅkara's response to this objection is well-known and has been discussed in the previous chapters. It is, however, important to note that when he claims that the Self is, he does not mean that the Self exists as an object. His main claim is that the Self can be realized in an immediate experience which is not bound by the categories of time and space. This seems to be the only possible proof. In other words, on Śaṅkara's view, the existence of the Self and its nature can be known in an immediate experience and not by means of an argument.

What the preceding discussion brings to light is that the question of the status of the Self is in one way or another related to the question of how knowledge of the Self is possible. That is to say that the ontological status of the
Self is related to a particular type of epistemology employed in knowing the Self. Or, to put it differently, what the Self is, is linked to the question, how knowledge (of the Self) is possible. This is also clear from the discussion in the previous chapters of the views of both Śaṅkara and Kant with regard to the nature of the Self and how knowledge of the Self is possible.

What the interrelation of ontological views and epistemological assumptions seems to imply is that our perceptions and concepts of the Self are to a large extent, if not completely, conditioned by our epistemological assumptions. At the same time, it is equally true that--our specific ideas of--the Self affects, in some degree, our epistemological assumptions. If the latter were not the case, then it would be difficult to explain how propositions, arguments and methodologies derive their meaning in the absence of some form or state of consciousness. Thus what is quite clear from the discussion so far is that the ontological significance attached to the Self varies with the epistemological assumptions with which we operate. And it is precisely this interrelation which makes it difficult to grasp the ontological status of the Self.

But whether or not we are capable of conceptually grasping the ontological status of the Self, it is important to emphasize that we continue to live as conscious human beings. And there is no denying that it is precisely in the process of living that we experience ourselves as an identical
and unified conscious being—that is, as a Self. We know, for example, in our interactions with others what distinguishes us from others, and what is mine and not mine. We have a basic sense of what we want and do not want. It is obvious that what constitutes 'mine' or 'me' is not just my physical appearance, but also my thoughts, actions, ideals and aspirations. And even if I identify myself with either my physical appearance or my thoughts or some other aspect of myself at some stage of my life, it remains true that I experience myself as an identical and unified being. We rarely, if ever, feel that we are someone else or a completely different human being, even if we experience many (conscious or unconscious) changes within ourselves. And, what is perhaps most important, from different perspectives and at various stages of our lives we identify and experience ourselves as the same identical being.

But we need to be careful here not to be too quick to infer from our actual experiences of ourselves that there is some abiding being in us. After all, it could be argued that just as the experience of pain in my leg does not imply that something really exists in my leg which causes me to feel certain painful sensations (my leg is simply injured), in the same way it can be said that from the fact that I experience myself as an identical being, it does not follow that some being or entity abides in me. Thus to say that I experience myself as an identical being—that is, as a Self—is not to
say that I experience something or some entity in me as a Self. I simply experience myself in the process of living as an identical subject or a Self.

Original Consciousness and the Self

In light of the remarks made above, one possible way of understanding the ontological status of the Self is, then, to look closer at how this experience takes place—that is, how we become conscious of ourselves as an identical subject. In other words, it is important to explore briefly how consciousness actually operates and unfolds in the process of living.

In more explicit terms this means that the main focus of this exploration will be on the question, how we experience consciousness, rather than what it is and how it arises, assuming that it arises at all. With regard to the latter it should be noted that recent scientific research of the mind-body problem seems to point to a possible link between consciousness and neural activity in the brain. This seems to be the focus of much of the current scientific research involved in providing an explanation for consciousness.

No doubt, science, i.e., neuroscience in particular, has unveiled, at least to some extent, certain aspects of the mysterious phenomenon of consciousness, but it has yet to provide significant insight into the exact nature of an apparent link between neural activity and consciousness. It is very well possible that consciousness is "mere matter in
motion" or it is even conceivable that the emergence of consciousness occurs simultaneously with some form of neural activity in the brain. If the latter is the case, then the most that can be said is that consciousness simply coexists with some form of neural activity.

To be sure, the evidence of current scientific research indeed points to a connection between neural activity and consciousness, but we need to be careful not to infer a causal link from observed connections, however tempting that may be. That is to say, there is something about the activity in the brain that makes us believe that brain activity is related to the emergence of consciousness. But we do not yet know what that something is, since we lack full knowledge—at least at this point—of the workings of the brain.

And from a more intuitive perspective, one might ask: what reasons do we have to think that consciousness is located in and limited to the brain? Even if it is granted that consciousness is caused by neural activity in the brain, that in itself does not tell us much, if anything at all, about how we experience consciousness. What is, however, certain is that we as conscious beings experience consciousness in one way or other in the process of living. And in exploring consciousness—in the following pages—emphasis will be laid on how we experience consciousness as it operates and discloses itself in our lives.
Given the preceding considerations, it is clear that an exploration of consciousness should not merely be confined to the conceptual level. It should also, and most importantly, include the experiential level. In addition, it may be useful to explore consciousness in terms of the insights of both Kant and Śaṅkara with regard to the Self, as discussed in the previous chapters. In this context it should be emphasized, once again, that the task of exploring consciousness does not imply providing a complete account or explanation of consciousness. Nor does it imply that the question of consciousness will be settled once and for all. In light of the preceding remarks, that would not only be an impossible task, but also an unreasonable expectation.

Taking Kant and Śaṅkara's claim that the Self is original pure consciousness as a vantage point, it can be said that consciousness is not something beyond, above or external to the Self. Consciousness is the Self. Yet as it manifests itself and operates in our lives it is both temporal and reflexive. The reflexive function of consciousness is unique to human beings and characteristic of what is known as the waking state of consciousness. Through this function we are capable of understanding the world and, to a certain degree, also ourselves. Consciousness in its reflexive state—a state peculiar to human beings—has the inherent capacity to reflect on itself and on external objects, and as such self-consciousness and consciousness of objects emerge. When consciousness
reflects on itself a certain degree of fragmentation takes place within itself, since its attention is, so to speak, no longer directed toward the world of objects, but to itself or to certain states or aspects of itself. In this process of inner-directedness consciousness realizes that the states or aspects reflected upon are its own states—that is, they belong to consciousness. With this realization the (somewhat misleading) idea of an individual self as the owner of these states arises, and at the same time this individual self becomes conscious of a differentiation between itself and what is other than itself.

And it is precisely with the appearance of the individual self that various basic questions about its nature are raised, and a diversity of—often conflicting and mutually exclusive—perspectives on this self have been developed. Furthermore, it is not surprising that the appearance of the individual self has led to (the beginning of) the search for an agent or entity that regulates and unifies its various states. Needless to say, such a search, although quite understandable and even natural, is fruitless, for the agent is always involved in each attempt in which it searches for itself. There are two possible ways of eliminating this difficulty. Either the agent would have to presuppose another agent or one would have to look for the agent outside the realm of consciousness. Both ways seem, however, problematic. It is not hard to see that in the former case the problem of an infinite regress
would be generated, while in the latter case one would have to search for an agent outside oneself. The implication of the latter is an ontological separation between the agent (as an independent entity) and consciousness. And if the agent is indeed separate from as well as outside the realm of consciousness, then, obviously, one is not consciousness, and, as a result, we would not be conscious beings. This is clearly contrary to the direct experience of ourselves. Since both options seem undesirable as well as impossible, many find it difficult, if not preposterous, to accept the view of a self as a unifying agent.

But even if we reject the view of the self as a unifying agent, as explicated above, it cannot be denied that precisely because of our capacity to reflect, we experience a sense of unity or self. A paradox emerges here, for, as we have seen previously, our capacity to reflect causes a separation or fragmentation in consciousness, and yet by virtue of this capacity we feel a sense of self or unity with regard to both our mental states as well as our physical appearance. That is to say, we can clearly distinguish ourselves from others and yet it appears that we are not sure who or what we are.

It might be objected, however, that this is far from the truth, for each time we reflect, we gain access to certain levels of our mental states and to some aspects of our physical appearance. And by continuous reflection we can considerably expand our self-understanding. Indeed, it does
appear that continuous reflection may take us to deeper and increased levels of self-understanding, yet it can be argued that it is highly unlikely that it will lead us to the roots of ourselves. After all, reflection by its very nature causes fragmentation and separation within consciousness, and consequently the resulting knowledge is necessarily fragmentary. Hence knowledge produced by means of reflection is never complete. Moreover, it is questionable whether we will be able to sustain continuous reflection. And if we will be able to do so, it is more likely, perhaps even certain, that reflection by virtue of its paradoxical nature will keep us engaged in a chain of reflections and (inter)actions without yielding full and genuine self-knowledge.

To put it more specifically, as our knowledge increases with reflection, we undergo certain changes, and these changes are reflected in our relationship with others as well as with the world. We do not only affect others and the world in our interactions, but are also affected by them. With these influences the boundaries of reflexive consciousness are expanded. Our interactions and experiences lead to further reflections which in turn produce more knowledge, and the continuation of this chain keeps us in a state of becoming—that is, in a state of uncertainty as to who we are.

No doubt, reflection is necessary and in a sense even vital for our existence. No one would dispute this. Yet it is important to emphasize that knowledge derived from reflec-
tion on the experience of ourselves is of quite a different order than knowledge arrived at as a consequence of directly experiencing ourselves. The fact that most of us are in some way or other constantly involved in the quest for self-knowledge points to a profound sense of dissatisfaction. This dissatisfaction points, in turn, to the limitations of the capacity of reflection. That is to say that the question of self-knowledge cannot be answered merely from the reflexive state of consciousness.

At this stage it is perhaps necessary to say a little more about the reflexive function of consciousness in order to lay bare some further important features of this state of consciousness. Consciousness in its reflexive state requires objects on which to reflect. That is to say, in this state consciousness is intentional. And since reflection requires objects of reflection, it follows that consciousness is not identical with its objects. If we were to deny this or perhaps assert that consciousness is itself an object, then it would simply be redundant, and perhaps even absurd, to use, for example, the expression 'consciousness of objects'. But, as pointed out earlier, from our experience we know that there are objects of consciousness, and we do express this fact in a meaningful way. I shall return to this point later.

Furthermore, if consciousness reflects on its own states, then the states reflected upon become its object. This clearly introduces a subject (i.e., reflexive consciousness)
-object (i.e., consciousness reflected upon) dichotomy within consciousness. As we have seen previously, both Kant and Śaṅkara have pointed out that knowledge of pure original consciousness is not possible if we remain within the limits of a subject-object framework. And if we do so, then we are allowing reflection to dictate our quest for self-knowledge. As a consequence further complications could arise. For it should be noted that consciousness in its reflexive state often takes on the appearance or the form of that on which it reflects, and as a result its original nature, that is, consciousness as such--tends to become obscure. Thus while consciousness in its reflective state involves itself in the objects of reflection, it overlooks, so to speak, its original state. This is to say that in its reflexive mode consciousness is unaware that it is a manifestation or a particular state of original consciousness.

In this context it is crucial to emphasize that original consciousness is not composed of the various mental events. It is not a collection or accumulation of the states of consciousness. As such, it cannot be located in the states of consciousness, nor in the sum of the various states of consciousness. As we have seen in the previous chapters, both Kant and Śaṅkara have argued from their own particular perspectives that there has to be a unity of consciousness. Without a unity of consciousness--that is, original pure consciousness--we would be unable to think coherently and to make
coherent and intelligible statements. Original consciousness is itself, however, not an object that can be perceived, imagined or even thought of. On the contrary, it is precisely that which makes thinking, reflecting, imagining and perceiving possible. Expressed in conventional Kantian philosophical terms, it is the necessary condition for the possibility of experience, and as such it is original pure consciousness.

It is obvious that what is thought of, reflected upon or perceived is an object of consciousness and not consciousness itself. Consciousness is in this sense, as pointed out earlier, not identical with its objects. This can be illustrated with the following example. While I am writing this sentence, I am at the same time thinking of my life of a few years ago in a different country or setting. And as I am recalling the pleasant and unpleasant moments, feelings of sadness or happiness arise in me. I am clearly conscious of all these events taking place--some of them transpire simultaneously and others in succession--and at the same time I am also conscious of my surroundings. While all these events and objects change in succession, I remain conscious (of, for example, the succession of events). That is, I am conscious that the objects are changing in succession. I can (intentionally) change the objects of consciousness as well as the order in which they appear to me, but I am not capable of changing consciousness itself.
It appears, however, that, at certain times, I am fully conscious of certain events or objects, while at other times I am just faintly conscious of them. Since the intensity of consciousness appears to vary with the change of objects over time, one may get the impression that consciousness itself is changing. But the fact that I see that the intensity of consciousness changes—that is, I am conscious of objects in varying degrees of intensity—is itself a conscious experience. That the change of objects does not necessarily imply a changing consciousness can perhaps be clarified in the light of the distinction between the scope and the focus of consciousness. In this context it is essential to note that the appearance of objects within the scope of consciousness does not necessarily mean that all the objects within its range will be brought into sharp focus at all times. Seen in the light of this distinction, the above example means that while I am writing this sentence, the focus is on this particular act, and clearly not on the fact that I am thinking of certain past events. The past events are at this time out of focus, even though they are within the scope of consciousness. Hence, I am faintly conscious of them. That is to say that although objects appear within the scope of consciousness, not every object is within its focus. And since the focus can be shifted from one object to another within the scope of consciousness, this by no means implies that consciousness itself is changing.
Furthermore, it can be argued that since the focus can be shifted from one object to another, it is very well possible not to focus on any object at all. In view of the preceding considerations, it is clear that not focusing, or the absence of focus, on any particular object does not imply the absence of consciousness. I may be simply conscious without actually being conscious of anything in particular. Moreover, from the fact that the waking state of consciousness, in particular its reflexive function, requires objects, it does not follow that consciousness as such also requires objects. As explicated above, pure original consciousness does not require the absence (or presence) of objects, but simply that there be no focus on any object in particular. In other words, when consciousness is not involved in objects, it is in its original state.

Since our familiarity with the phenomenon of consciousness stems primarily, if not exclusively, from the waking state of consciousness, we are inclined and conditioned to believe that consciousness always requires objects. In addition, we use the waking state as the primary, and often as the only source to validate our experiences. While it is true that we do experience the world and ourselves, at least to a certain degree, in the waking state, it may not be true that it is the only way to experience ourselves. As we have seen, consciousness may be broader and wider in range than the
actual knowledge attained about it in the waking state of consciousness suggests.

Now, if, at any time, we are conscious without being conscious of objects, then the implication is that the act of focusing as well as the focus itself is absent. Further, since the act of focusing on objects always occurs in the waking state, this means that the waking state in general and the reflexive mode of consciousness in particular are (temporarily) suspended. After all, to reflect on an object requires that I clearly focus on that object, and that I think about it. But with the suspension of the reflexive mode of consciousness and its concomitant acts of focusing, perceiving and thinking, we return, to borrow Heidegger's term, to a state of "waiting." In this state of waiting we are not waiting for someone or something. It is a waiting in openness --a state of receptivity without anticipation--in order for original consciousness to manifest itself.

In sum, pure original consciousness is the Self. It is, as discussed above, my very mode of being, and as such it is not something other than myself. Genuine self-knowledge arises, then, when we directly experience original consciousness--in other words, when we experience our very mode of being without the mediation of concepts. That is, our mode of being is an experienced reality, and clearly not a concept. In this sense it can be said that the ontological status of the Self derives from the fact that it can be directly
experienced without taking recourse to the capacity of reflection. Thus it is evident that since pure original consciousness is non-reflexive, I cannot attain knowledge about it in the way I gain knowledge in the reflexive mode of consciousness. As we have seen earlier, in the reflexive mode of consciousness a separation is created between myself (as the owner of my states) and my various mental states. With continuous reflection this separation is perpetuated and we are kept in this mode of consciousness without gaining genuine self-knowledge. As a result, we are in a perpetual state of uncertainty as to who we are. Nor do we arrive at self-knowledge by harmonizing ourselves as individual selves with our various states.

In light of the preceding discussion it is obvious that consciousness is not an abstract phenomenon removed from our experiences. Though we rarely, if ever, allow ourselves to experience it directly, it is more immediately present than we often imagine it to be. And it is perhaps not surprising that precisely because of its immediate presence—that is, as our very mode of being—we fail to experience it directly. As a consequence of this failure, we take recourse to complex theories and models for possible explanations of consciousness. Scientific theories, in particular neuroscientific theories, take the brain, for example, as the origin or the locus of consciousness. It is claimed that neural or cerebral activities give rise to consciousness. That is to say that
the brain is perceived as a sophisticated machine with intricate parallel processors which carry out most of the processing, including complex computations. And it is believed that it is from the activities of these parallel processors that consciousness emerges.

But, as remarked earlier, it is not certain that these cerebral activities indeed give rise to consciousness. It is very well possible that cerebral activity and consciousness occur simultaneously and simply coexist. Even though science has made progress in revealing certain aspects of the workings of the mind, it has yet to provide significant insight in the exact nature of the link between cerebral activity and the emergence of consciousness. This means that, at this point, we simply do not know how the brain really works. It seems, therefore, premature to confine consciousness exclusively to the domain of the brain. Moreover, apart from the question whether the brain--that is, matter--can give rise to consciousness, it is also important to realize that any view or theory--no matter how ingenious--that attempts to understand or provide an explanation for consciousness presupposes consciousness. I need to be conscious, if I want to understand consciousness. That is to say that our attempts to understand or explain consciousness always involve some state or form of consciousness. In this context it is also crucial to note that an explanation of consciousness merely in terms of, say, the reflexive state of consciousness will be necessarily
subject to the limitations inherent in this state of consciousness.

In light of the preceding considerations it is of critical importance that we rethink our views of consciousness, and, in particular, our views with regard to the experience of original consciousness. The reflexive mode of consciousness provides us merely with theories and concepts about the experience of ourselves by drawing away from experience. That is, in reflecting on experience, it moves away from experience. In this chapter it has been argued, however, that self-knowledge is possible in a direct experience of ourselves. To accomplish this we need to shift our focus from the reflexive mode of consciousness to original consciousness. In other words, the quest for self-knowledge should be pursued in a new direction—that is, a direction other than the reflexive mode of consciousness. And it is more than likely that in addition to the psychological and experiential insights, the insights of science—especially of neuroscience—may be useful in providing the grounds for this new direction. That is to say, the insights of these combined efforts may point, in a more significant way, to the limitation of reflexive consciousness as a means of attaining self-knowledge.

And, as pointed out previously, even though it is true that we as conscious beings function mainly, if not exclusively, in the reflexive mode of consciousness this does not mean
that we are dissociated from our original state. Nor does being unaware of or failing to directly experience original consciousness imply its non-existence. It is more likely that attempts to seek self-knowledge without reaching beyond the boundaries of reflection imply a refusal to explore the possibility of directly experiencing ourselves. The fact, however, that we are able to recognize the limitations of reflection suggests, in a way, that we have reached a stage at which the possibility of directly experiencing ourselves (can and) should be explored. That is, we have reached a stage of waiting in openness. An exploration of such a stage should be encouraged as well as seriously engaged in without developing an aversion to the reflexive mode of consciousness. To engage in such an exploration is, most importantly, to remind us that it is precisely our capacity to be sensitive and open to a wide variety of experiences that makes us truly unique as human beings.
Notes to Chapter 4

1. Deutsch, Advaita Vedānta, p. 10.

2. cf Śaṅkara-BSB, 1,1,5.
   cf also Chapter 2, p. 64.

3. See also G. E. Moore, The Refutation of Idealism, in Philosophical Studies (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1922), p. 17. Moore makes a clear distinction between consciousness and object of consciousness. On page 17 he writes: "We have then in every sensation two distinct elements, one which I call consciousness, and another which I call the object of consciousness. This must be so if the sensation of blue and the sensation of green, though different in one respect, are alike in another: blue is one object of sensation and green is another, and consciousness, which both sensations have in common, is different from either." It should be noted, though, that Moore regards consciousness as a substance which the various objects have in common. See p. 23.

4. Śaṅkara-BSB, 1,1.

5. cf, for example, Śaṅkara-BSB, 1,3,22.


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