

## AWARENESS

Although philosophers have given opposite explanations of the world, some claiming that the world was unconscious and material and the other claiming that it was spiritual, it cannot be denied that in this world we come across phenomena which are diverse in nature. Even admitting for the sake of argument that the chair and the man who occupies the chair are both either matter or only spirit, one has in actual practical life to distinguish between the chair and the man who occupies the chair. Whereas one can talk to the man occupying the chair, one cannot in any sense communicate with the chair. The chair is useful, but it is to others. The man too may be useful to others but his personality cannot be ignored. He can be angry with you, he can be pleased with you, he may want something for himself. The chair does not behave in any of these ways. So whether primarily the chair or the man occupying the chair are made of any substance either matter or spirit, one has to accept the primary distinction between a man and a thing like a chair. What constitutes this difference? One answer is that man is living, man has consciousness, whereas the chair is not living, it does not have consciousness, although a philosophical hypothesis may claim that the chair also has some consciousness, that it may be made of units of consciousness. What is this consciousness of man? Is it to be regarded as something, existing independently, or is it to be regarded as something inseparable from the body? Philosophers like Descartes regarded spirit or consciousness as a substance existing in its own right. It means that for such philosophers consciousness and the body are separables; that is, consciousness could exist apart from the body and the body apart from the consciousness. The second of the alternative is experienced when a man dies. When a man dies his consciousness disappears but his body does not. But this alternative does not prove that consciousness exists in its own right. The first alternative is not experienced, but it is claimed that souls

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and ghosts can exist in a disembodied form and that there can be such existence after death. Here also it should be borne in mind that a large number of those who claim that life continues after death attribute some kind of body either *linga Śarira*, or *Karana Śarira* to this consciousness or spirit. It is not the object of this paper either to affirm or to deny whether such ghosts exist. Such an investigation would be speculative metaphysics. On the basis of our experience, we can only say that when a man is living, his body and his consciousness are inseparable and in fact a belief in *Lingadeha* or *Karanadeha* fortifies this hypothesis. The protagonists of *Lingadeha* and *Karanadeha* hypothesis only claim that although some (gross) body and consciousness may be sometimes separated, consciousness is at least not separable from some kind of body. At least the 'subtle' body must be inseparable from it. We then have no experience of consciousness existing in its own right. We shall, therefore, not carry further the investigation whether consciousness exists in its own right. We shall be only making a distinction between something which has consciousness and something which does not have such consciousness at least apparently. Sometimes, this 'consciousness' is expressed by the verb, to be, or to exist when it is used along with a subject denoting living being.

The word consciousness or 'conscious' is, however, very ambiguously used. Let me make it clear in the beginning that when we use the word consciousness we do not mean by it any abstraction. Thus when we say, a dead body has no consciousness we mean thereby that the consciousness is totally absent from the dead body. But when somebody faints then also we say that he is unconscious, he has no consciousness. But when we say that the fainted person has no consciousness we do not mean that he is dead, i.e., although in one sense we are denying consciousness to him we are still saying that Consciousness cannot be completely and in some other sense denied to him. What are these different senses in which we use the word consciousness? When a man is dead and we say he has no consciousness we mean by it that the body is like some kind of organic matter without life. When a man faints we think that he cannot know, remember, desire or do something consciously, although he is living and some kind of involuntary activity of his body proceeds un-

interrupted. He may, for example, breathe, his heart beats may continue and his lungs and kidney may function. Such a man has consciousness, that is he is living although he is unconscious. This case is to be distinguished from one where a person is conscious as he has not failed and of course no-body can be conscious unless he is living or has consciousness. But there is a difference between just having consciousness and being conscious. This 'being conscious' suggests some kind of *awareness* on the part of the man. The first use of the word conscious or consciousness has only the biological significance whereas the second has epistemological significance. I shall, therefore, use the phrase biological consciousness to signify the first use and epistemological consciousness to signify the second use. The second use, so to say, is grafted over the first and it is about this use that we shall confuse ourselves. But here also we have to make a further distinction. It may be generally granted that when a man is unconscious at that time he does not know, or does not know whether he knows or does not know. So one has to make a distinction between one's knowing and one's knowing that one is knowing. This second is sometimes called self-consciousness. It is again not necessary that when a man knows he should consciously know that he knows. But sometimes at least he knows that he knows or he knows that he does not know. So there is a possibility of a man knowing about his knowing. Is this second state totally absent when he merely knows or perceives something? In most cases knowledge situations or perception situations are complex and there is an element of recognition in such situation. Does recognition pre-suppose an awareness of oneself? It may also raise a point about the status of memory. Can there be memory without there being awareness of oneself? But let us take the case of knowing (or Vyavasaya). Does such situation pre-suppose (1) the 'I' or the knower, or (2) the knowledge of the I or the knower? Descartes' argument "I think therefore I am" could be based on the first alternative. There may be an 'I' without there being an awareness of 'I'. But if this 'I' is not different from consciousness would we be able to say that our consciousness is pre-supposed in the situation without our being aware of it? In other words if any knowledge situation pre-supposes 'I' and if this 'I' is not different

from awareness shall I be able to say that there is an 'I' but this 'I' is not known in knowledge situation? For, 'I' would not denote any ontological object but would rather refer to some epistemic situation. There is certainly a difference between human organism being pre-supposed by knowledge and 'I' being pre-supposed. You cannot have both knowledge and non-knowledge (of the same object) at the same time. Thus the first alternative may eventually turn into the second. I think, when Descartes was saying "I think therefore I am" he had in his mind this epistemic 'I' i.e., awareness although he thought he was talking about 'I'. The ontological I or what I would call the biological consciousness cannot be separated from the body. The question of separation of the epistemic I from the body does not arise. In fact, the real point seems to be whether when I have consciousness of objects in the sense I know them or cognize them, I am also conscious of object in the sense that I am aware, that I know. But whether I am aware of my selfconsciousness (or myself) or not, my consciousness of objects does pre-suppose *consciousness*, in the other sense. And this consciousness and awareness cannot be regarded as altogether different. It is because of this that I can be conscious of my consciousness and I can also be conscious that I am conscious of my consciousness. But each time you cannot say that the 'I' is a different 'I'. So whereas my body and my biological consciousness can be distinguished and also my biological consciousness and my epistemic consciousness can be distinguished, my epistemic consciousness cannot be regarded as entirely different and separable from my biological consciousness. This epistemic consciousness, is awareness and I believe, this is the nucleus of what we generally call, *self-consciousness*.<sup>1</sup> Of course, we should distinguish between self-consciousness, consciousness and limiting case of consciousness where consciousness in the sense of life exists but the states of consciousness do not exist.

Let me explicate my point further. What is the difference between man and the other animals? In a sense both of them are conscious i.e., animate. In the behaviours of man and the other animals, in so far as the urges and drives are concerned, there does not seem to be any difference. Certainly appetites like hunger, sex, fear and sleep seem to be common to man and

other animals. The only difference though a marked one is that the blind behaviour of animals is substituted here by some awareness of what he does. This is purposive. It is a conscious activity. This is a conscious activity because man is conscious of what he does. A man indulges in sex actively almost exactly the way an animal does. But unlike the animal man is conscious of what he is doing. And this consciousness brings him a surplus of pleasure or happiness. This difference in the activities of man and other animals can be shown in this way. The animals do the sex activity only during the mating period. The human can do it any time. Similarly, the humans even though sexually attracted can abstain from sex acts. They are conscious of what they are doing and it is this consciousness alone which prevents them from what they would otherwise do. In the case of individuals where such consciousness is absent neither the acts can be performed nor can they (the individuals) willingly abstain from the acts. It is this additional element of being conscious which plays an important role in human training and discipline and when the occasion arises, of their own accord they can make use what they had learnt by way of conditioning.<sup>2</sup> Both a parrot and a child can be taught certain words. But after some time unlike the parrot the boy can make use of these words for talking to people. To take another example, an infant which moves its hands and feet is definitely conscious. I wonder whether we could prima facie call such a movement a self-conscious movement. Again it can be observed that a young infant sometimes 'smiles'. Is it smiling or is it merely a physiological movement, for this 'smiling' does not give an indication that the child is *aware of* what it does. Perhaps the articulate communication is still latent. Contrast this kind of smile with the smile of a slightly grown up child. This smile is suggestive of the fact that the child is now able to recognise, communicate. A smile which is merely a movement of the face and is not accompanied by recognition is to be distinguished from a smile which is not merely a movement of the face, has an element of recognition. The second case suggests that the child not only 'smiles' but also knows other people, recognises other people and to indicate this it *acts*. The smile is such an act of the child. Let us dilate on the difference between the animal behaviour and

the human behaviour. Many times we say that a monkey imitates. If we show our tongue it reciprocates, if we show our teeth, it copies it instantaneously. Perhaps the monkey is in some sense conscious of what it does. That is why when somebody imitates manners or mannerism of other people, we say he is aping. Let us compare this *imitation* of the monkey with the activity of an actor. One is likely to say that the actor too, imitates. But is there no difference between acting of an actor and the aping of a monkey? Will we be able to make a monkey act? Can a monkey or any other animal except a man pretend or do something corresponding to telling a lie? I should suggest that we would have to distinguish between a purely reflexive action, an action controlled by conditioned reflexes and the action consciously controlled. They say the horse runs but it is only the jockey who runs the race. One may point out instances of 'self-consciousness' amongst animals. But there appears important difference between the 'self-consciousness' of an animal and the self-consciousness of a man. If a cow does not 'want' to give milk, the milkman may not be able to take out milk from the cow. Perhaps this could be regarded as a case of self-consciousness. But there is a difference between the behaviour of a cow and the behaviour of a man. One cannot strictly say that cow has a memory, at least the same kind of memory as a man has. So it is doubtful whether the cow will persist in the same kind of behaviour over a long strand of time. The possibility of using tools is equally important for our investigation. It is not the body which uses the tools, it is the man behind the body which is able to use the tools. Of course, one could say that animals also use tools. McDougal in his *Psychology* quotes a case of a wasp using tools. But there seems to be a difference between a wasp using tools and a man using tools. Do animals commit suicide? Of course, there are cases of dogs and bulls which could not remain alive after their masters died. The problem is whether they knew what they were doing. The phenomenon of alienation is equally intriguing. Think of this case, A man thinks he is not himself. A certain man thinks that he is a woman. A certain woman wants to get her sex transformed. Strangely there is also a case reported of a class of fish which changes its sex. But it is doubtful whether we could strictly say

that it is a conscious act on the part of the fish. Communicating seems to be the main principle by which one is able to decide about self-consciousness. One may, for example ask how is it you know that plants have no self-consciousness? My feeling is, had they had it, it would have been conveyed to us. I am of course, pre-supposing that only two self-conscious creatures are able to communicate and then we expand this thought to fairy tales or mythological stories where they talk of language of animals and birds. If they had any such language just as two people speaking different languages can also communicate similarly birds and animals could have communicated with men. I am not saying that this is altogether impossible. In a way we do communicate with our parrot and our parrot also communicates with us. Similarly we can communicate with a dog. But this kind of communication is extremely rudimentary, limited in the case of animals. And so one would have to say that the animal behaviour is largely instinctive whereas the human behaviour is largely self-conscious. His self-conscious behaviour gives him the ability to control his behaviour. I am again not interested in saying whether this control is identical with self-consciousness or whether it is a factor different from self-consciousness. Most probably it is only when instinctive drives are modified by our conscious behaviour or self-consciousness that we get the concept of will. I may however say that this control cannot be separated from self-consciousness. In fact, I am inclined to think that it is this control, which acts like a pituitary gland and controls all conscious acts. I am further inclined to think that this control part in self-consciousness is the essence of what we call human freedom. It is by this alone that one is able to choose, will, intend and desire. Patanjali in the Yogasutras talks of Yoga as Citta-vṛtti-nirodha. It will be interesting to find out the difference between Citta, Cittavṛtti and Cittavṛtti-nirodha. First we must contrast the Citta from something which may not be Citta. Pure matter where consciousness is not manifested in any way we may regard as acitta. All the three states Citta, Cittavṛtti and Cittavṛttinirodha are of course, the states having consciousness. But here Citta is different from Cittavṛtti. The plant kingdom may be said to have Citta (life) but not Cittavṛtti. In plants there do not seem to be varieties or variations of conscious states

like anger, passion, instinct to mate etc. This is found in animals but the animals are at the mercy of these states. There is no control of the animals over these states. This control is signified by the word *Nirodha*. A hungry man may ordinarily like to eat anything that is offered to him. But if his ego is hurt he may decide to fast. When Mahatma Gandhi used to fast it is not because he was having indigestion. Similarly, even if I am not interested in taking anything, as a polite behaviour I may take a cup of tea. Both these are cases of primary *Nirodha*. I, thus, feel that the concept of will or the concept of control and the self-consciousness cannot be regarded as two different things although their functions can be distinguished. It will be interesting to point out that Aristotle also made a similar distinction when he talked of the human world, the animal world, the plant world and the mineral world. It must be understood that this is a classification of things and not of concepts. Barring the material world every other world has got consciousness and matter in one and so this is in fact a *physical division* and not a classification, as one made by Descartes where he regarded matter and consciousness as two separate substances. But if there are no two substances independently existing, then it would be merely an abstraction.

From what has been said above, it is clear that we could distinguish three orders of human experience, and with these three orders are connected three types of consciousness, although they would be manifestations, of only one consciousness—the biological consciousness. The first is when a man has experiences of the external world without he being consciously aware of the same, the second when he is consciously aware either of his internal states or of the external world. Of course, his being aware of the external world and his being aware that he is aware of the external world do not make any difference in so far as both of them refer to this awareness. The case of dream is more intriguing. At the time of dream we appear to be aware of—fragment of the dream or may not even remember anything. But in a dream-state either the external object gives some inadequate response or it may not be present at all. However, it could be said that in the dream state the ‘knower’ and that which is known are only states of consciousness. We get the third type when a man is conscious in the sense that he is living but not conscious either in the sense



that he is living able to perceive the external world or in the sense that he is able to have internal experience. In the case of a living man such a state probably arises either when he is in deep sleep or when he is unconscious. I am not interested here in finding out the genesis of these three different states, it is sufficient to know that there are these three states. Again although they are manifestations of the state of affairs they are dependent on body for their existence. If all these three states are negated there would be no difference between a living man and a dead man. And in short, conditions of any possibility of knowledge would be removed. There would be merely a state of affairs but not a state of knowing. The states of knowing would wither away in the state of being.

In the light of what we have discussed hither-to let us consider the following propositions :—

- ( 1 ) This is a flower.
- ( 2 ) I know this is a flower.
- ( 3 ) I desire / I wish to have this flower.
- ( 4 ) I will, this to be done.

The proposition 'this is a flower' if true represents a knowledge situation. Corresponding to this situation there must be a case or a state of affairs—there being a flower. This situation would exist, whether or not the knower knows that there is a flower. When someone says there is a flower, some kind of imprint is made on the canvas of the knower's mind. But one thing seems to be clear "there being a flower" or the case that there is a flower is different from a statement that "there is a flower". This difference indicates the difference between some kind of physical or ontological situation and the epistemological situation. When some one says that this is a flower there is indeed a truth-claim. This truth-claim is dependent on the ontological situation i.e. on the state of affair. But is it not also dependent on some one who knows? Granting that some one who knows is not aware of what he does, can there be knowledge unless we grant that the knower 'does' something? It is not the case that the knower's doing something is responsible for this knowledge situation? Even if knowledge is just a passive imprint of the ontological situation, knowledge of an object has to be distinguished from the object. If there had been just a co-existence of the object and the

knower, would there be knowledge? The imprint of the object somehow must go into the knower, must become a part of the knower. A man who is in deep sleep or who is unconscious, co-exists with the object, but we do not say that he knows the object. Although knowledge may be controlled by the object, if this object is photographed on a photographic lense or plate, it does not become knowledge. We cannot say that our knowledge is in the camera. The knower's part in the whole situation however small, cannot be eliminated. Without some specific '*activity*' from the knower, there cannot be knowledge. He must be at least attentive to receive the impressions. Without attention an object cannot be connected with the knower and unless the object is so connected there cannot be knowledge. This attention of the subject or the knower is not a quality or predicate of the knower. It is the knower itself. It is the awareness. In what does this awareness consist? It appears to me that there is some purposiveness, some goal, some direction involved in this act, although one may not be aware of this awareness. Attention in this respect means choosing to do one thing rather than the other, and this, I think, is the essence of will or freedom. Although one may not be aware of what one does, some activity, some doing, some will, in some rudimentary form is definitely involved even in the bare act of perception. What happens when one thinks? There may be a subject-matter for thinking. There may be memory images and concepts. But memory images and concepts in themselves will not make thinking. If there is a proper choosing and selection then there is thinking, otherwise it will be merely a dream, merely a presence of trains of ideas. Of course, I am not suggesting that either the trains of ideas or dreams are merely passive events without there being any direction and if they are not passive, it would in fact, strengthen my thesis.

What happens when one is aware of either one's knowledge or oneself? Let us suppose that, I know that there is a flower. In what does this self-awareness consist? It does not seem to be an accident that I am aware that there is a flower. This awareness seems to be a positive instance of my attending. We may distinguish between attending and consciousness. But attending and consciousness cannot be separated from each other. And in self-consciousness it is attending which becomes conscious. That

is, we are so to say attending to our knowledge that there is flower. This attention part, to my mind, is the will-part or in other words will or the consciousness of the self cannot be separated. When one talks of the self this aspect of the will cannot be left aside. Let us see what happens when I say I desire something. In this the truth claim is totally absent. I can only be aware that I want to get something whether that something exists or not. Some claim is made here, but the awareness claim or the attention claim is not made. The subject has made a selection. In such situations there is a conscious selection claim. One can compare this situation with a belief situation. In a belief situation, there seems to be a selection claim but the claim seems to be unconscious. If this belief claim is supported by truth claim then this belief claim may not be unconscious. And one would have to make a room for rational beliefs or presuppositions. It will be desirable to contrast a desire situation with an appetite situation. In an appetite situation you are aware of your hunger and the object of your hunger, but there does not seem to be a room for selection. This selection is made for you by the instincts or primitive motivation. (The judgement situation of the idealists is something like this appetite situation. According to Idealists when you judge, you have no alternative except to judge in a particular way.) Desire situation seems to be different from this. When I desire something I am aware of what I desire. I am also aware of other things and I am to compare my object of desire with other things. I am also evaluating, that is, regarding in so far as I am concerned that the object of my desire is good for me. Only there is no universalization of all these things. However, when I desire something my desiring something may be determined by the time and situation. And we could roughly say that my desire is not myself. They could be regarded as external to me. Desires are not permanent desires. If there is any permanent element in desire then I say it is my will. A dying man makes a will. It is a document of his permanent desires. In short, there seems to be some continuism between will, desire and awareness and although in pure objective knowledge situation this awareness or the part of the will is not manifest. I presume it will have to be accepted there too. It is this will part which distinguishes a man from animals, plants or inorganic matter. Although I am not asserting that this

will or awareness is a separate entity existing in its own right independently of matter, I feel that it is to be distinguished from other elements of personality and I further think it is this consciousness or will or awareness which is termed as 'I' or Atman in the Upaniṣad.

It is unfortunate that this 'I' is "I" mystified by philosophers by regarding it as an altogether independent entity and dubbing it as metaphysical in nature. This mystification arises out of human ignorance and is immediately accepted by the *religiocity* of man. Atman and spirit for example, are regarded as having such metaphysical existence. We thus begin to think that there is life after death and rebirth and our Karma determines this rebirth. We also begin to think that this Karma and Atman form a unity and is called Lingadeha and it is punished or rewarded after death. All sorts of stories about such punishment are, for example, concocted by Garuda Purana or are attributed to Chitragupta. But when we talk of Atman even from the texts it can be found out that the usual reference<sup>3</sup> is to self-consciousness and as such it *belongs to epistemic sphere*. An instance from Brhadāraṇyaka would be very useful for illustrating my point. In the dialogue between Yājñavalkya and Maitreyi, it is pointed out, "Ātmanastu Kāmāya patiḥ priyobhavati, natu patyuh Kāmāya". This is usually translated as 'husband becomes dear for the fulfilment of our spirit's desire. (Thus Ātman is translated as Spirit). I wonder how the ghost of the spirit comes here. Ātmanah is clearly the genitive case of the reflexive pronoun Ātman and it cannot be regarded here as a noun at all. The translation of the passage should be the following : The husband is loved for the fulfilment of one's *own* (or our own) desire. Of course, there is a difference between Ātman and Asmat. I could not translate 'ātmanah' in the above passage as 'the husband becomes dear for the fulfilment of *my* desire' I have to translate it as 'for the fulfilment of *her* desire' or our own desire. *This is the difference between Ātman and Asmat in Sanskrit*. Ātman is a first person pronoun it refers to I but this I is not a particular I it can be any I, on the other hand Asmat refers to I, a particular I. But the status of Ātman is that of a pronoun and by regarding it as a noun we simply mystify the notion and regard it as metaphysical entity. In our language we use several words

like Jīva, Caitanya, Ātman, Sākṣin, Viṣayi, Puruṣa, Ānanda, Rasa, Consciousness, I, spirit etc. If we have to avoid confusion it is necessary to determine their status and find out which words have epistemological significance and which words have not. To me it appears that the words Caitanya and Jīva do not have any epistemological significance in themselves, although it is on account of Caitanya and Jīva, that the other concepts like Ātman or Sākṣin or self-consciousness etc., become significant in the sphere of knowledge.

I think, this notion of 'I' or some kind of awareness plays a very important role in all human activities like believing, knowing, judging, asserting, liking, seeing, expecting, valuing etc., and I feel, pure sciences like Logic and Mathematics, and Aesthetics and Ethics are also very intimately related to this very notion of 'I' or self awareness.

Let me summarise. In this paper I tried to discuss the status of awareness of self-consciousness as it is traditionally called. I *proposed* that self-consciousness or awareness is not just a name for one state, it is an evolving concept and it is different both from biological consciousness and consciousness as it is ordinarily termed. Though it presupposes consciousness in both these senses. In one sense of the term both self-consciousness and consciousness would be a function of certain organization called the body and so both self-consciousness and consciousness would depend on body. This is clear when a man dies, for it is a state where neither self-consciousness nor consciousness seems to be present but the body is definitely present. But at every other point of life it appears that consciousness and self-consciousness are steering the activities of the body. Perhaps it is this phenomenon which makes people think that consciousness is a substance just like body, and although consciousness and self-consciousness are distinguishable people begin to think that in a sense self-consciousness is not different from consciousness. The fact that I distinguish consciousness from self-consciousness and also distinguish both of them from the body which is their support need not make people think that I regard them separate from one another and independent of one another. Neither consciousness nor self-consciousness may exist without body but that does not mean that consciousness,

self-consciousness, and body do not make a whole which is controlled by self-consciousness. That there is a self-consciousness is a fact, which I think no one can deny. When a knower begins to think of himself, he is self-conscious. But he is also self-conscious when he begins to think of knowledge. In fact one could ask the question whether there could be knowledge without the knower being self-conscious. Of course, one could also argue that sometimes his self-consciousness may become a hinderance to at least some kind of knowledge. But this could only prove that self-consciousness is not of one type.

Poona University.  
Poona-7.

**S. S. Barlingay**

#### NOTES

1. On the basis of these we may distinguish men, animals and plants. Men have all the three, animals predominantly have the two and the plants have only one. Of course, what I say would be only vaguely so. Some rudimentary self-consciousness may be possibly present even in the case of animals.

2. For example, dog's fidelity to his master is known, similarly the cow may not allow to be milked, and a horse may decide not to run. But these exceptions do not disprove my point. It only proves the point that some animals also are so (developed) evolved that they have some kind of awareness.

3. Of course, for various reasons the words may be used in different senses. Thus Ātman is sometimes used as a synonym of Brahman in Gaudapāda.