

Is There 'Self' Identity in Sâmkhya and Ānankara?*

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ABSTRACT

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While underdeveloped as an academic field, Indian philosophical language has permeated Western imagination. However, as concepts such as yoga, karma, or reincarnation enter Western discourse, they tend to be appropriated in a manner that bolsters pre-determined notions of selfhood rather than representing anything "Indian". Thus, these discourses often reveal more about Western ways of thinking. This paper analyzes the concept of 'self' as developed within early Sanskrit texts, including the Sâmkhyakârika and the writings of Vedântin thinker Ānankara, to argue that Western notions of selfhood present an entirely inadequate frame through which to interpret "Indian" self-identity.

Key words: Hinduism, Self, Indian Philosophy, Sâmkhya, Ānankara

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EXISTE IDENTIDAD DEL 'SÍ MISMO'
EN SĀMKHYA Y ĀNKARA?

Resumen

Pese a ser un campo académico poco desarrollado, el lenguaje filosófico hindú ha penetrado en la mentalidad occidental. Aunque conceptos como yoga, karma o reencarnación han entrado en el discurso occidental, han sido apropiados con una tendencia a promover nociones predeterminadas del sí mismo y no a representar algo propiamente hindú. Por esta razón tales discursos reflejan más bien formas de pensamiento occidental. Este artículo analiza el concepto de "sí mismo" como ha sido desarrollado en textos sánscritos primitivos, incluyendo el Sāmkhyakārika y los escritos del pensador del vedānta Ānkara, para mostrar que las nociones occidentales del sí mismo presentan un marco por completo inadecuado para interpretar el sí mismo hindú.

Palabras clave: *Hinduismo, sí mismo, filosofía india, Sāmkhya, Ānkara.*

Indian Philosophy has often been represented to the so called 'West' with terms such as karma, ātman, samsara (as 'reincarnation' or 'transmigration'), mokṣa, yoga, etc. The widespread use of these terms has generated an understanding, or 'folk knowledge', about these concepts based upon an assumed category of 'Indian' self. The translation of Sanskrit terms, such as ātman or Puruṣa, into 'self' or 'spirit' often is accepted blindly by scholars without an investigation into how the terms are delineated in their original context. As such, the folk knowledge is based upon pre-suppositions of 'selfhood' that have been widely accepted in 'western' discourse, but are not clearly existent in the Sanskrit texts. This tendency to identify a single Sanskrit equivalent to the 'self' or 'soul' reflects more of a Western bias than anything Indian. Roy Perrett explains this tendency as follows:

It is symptomatic of the ethnocentrism of contemporary analytic philosophy of religion that the vast majority of philosophers in this tradition continue to ignore Indian religious concepts and prefer to concentrate almost exclusively on Judaeo-Christian religious notions. (Perret, 2000: 213)

While Perrett makes a good point, I would argue that scholars do not so much ignore Indian concepts as *appropriate* them into the Judaeo-Christian concepts. Many scholars employ Indian notions such as ātman or Puruṣa in their analyses, but often represent them according to more

familiar concepts. In other words, by translating the term 'âtman' as 'self' or 'Puru^oa' as 'spirit', âtman and Puru^oa become associated with all that the terms 'self' and 'spirit' designate in Western discourse. Since there is, arguably, certain agreement upon what self and spirit signifies, the supposed Indian counterparts are treated as similarly agreed upon. Put another way, the predominantly Platonic and Hegelian conceptions of 'selfhood' are superimposed upon Indian concepts, thus resulting in the representation not of Indian thought, but of a different version of 'western' philosophy.

Other forms of [mis]appropriation can be argued. Eliot S. Deutsch in *Karma in the Advaita Vedânta* argues against an overly literal interpretation of Indian concepts. He sets out to demonstrate that concepts such as *karma* should not be interpreted literally, but as a 'convenient fiction'. He writes,

Our intention here is to take away some of the literalness from *karma* by showing that, within the framework of the Advaita Vedânta, it is necessarily a 'convenient fiction': a concept which is undemonstrable but useful in interpreting human experience. (Deutsch, 2000: 4)

Perhaps Deutsch has an undemonstrable thesis himself, but his point is well taken. Post-Enlightenment discourse regarding ancient material must be conditioned, to some extent, by the heavy emphasis given to individuality, 'rational man', and literal interpretations. Without engaging the textual arguments behind the nature of 'selfhood', hasn't the point been missed? Once a term is translated, the core issue (i.e. what comprises 'selfhood' in Indian discourse) seems settled. But the issue of 'selfhood' is never settled, even within individual schools, in the first place. Rather, the process of settling the issue expands the problem of how to account for an 'individual self' in each school. Debate amongst *dar^oana*-s has historically offered a playing field upon which concepts and ideas battle.

Progress made during recent decades in the historical interpretation of the philosophical heritage of India has, however, made it abundantly clear that the schools did not develop in pure isolation from one another; they were not only actively engaged in philosophical controversy with one another, they were also nourished by that controversy. (Kapstein, 2001: 37)

However, this does not mean that only 'western' authors have [mis]appropriated material to fit a favored interpretation. Schools of philosophy often invoke more ancient material, from other schools, in order to bolster their own propositions. Chapple describes the syncretism employed by Vedântins:

Hence, the views analyzed below show evidence of syncretism that automatically results from assumptions established by Vedântins. For instance, though the *Sâmkhya Kârîkâ* does not mention *jîvanmukta*, several authors discuss it as if it were part of I^ovarak^{oo}na's system. (Chapple, 1996: 120)

What can be said, then, about "Indian Philosophy" generally? If anything can be summed up and generalized, it is that Indian philosophy, with its endless multiplicity and paradox, can never be 'settled' or 'established'. Only individual truths within a particular *dar^oana* are said to be settled by that school's proponents, but even these 'truths' encompass paradoxical notions and are open to interpretation. Indian scholars generally welcome the interpretation; the debate. Multiplicity characterizes the terms and concepts even within individual schools. The doctrines, while being 'settled' also have fluid applicability and interpretability; and thus take shape in various ways depending upon the questions posed, the receiving audience, etc. John Taber makes this point in regards to apparent contradictions in Çamkara's writings. He claims that Çamkara does seem to contradict himself, but does so in order to accomplish the same goal. Çamkara, he argues, did not reject reason, but he was certainly not a rationalist. Taber writes,

Çamkara is able to turn completely against the (subjective) idealistic arguments associated with the Buddhists on which he once relied in establishing his system but now no longer needs. For the arguments themselves, he is convinced, have no inherent validity... (Taber, 2000: 300)

Therefore, rather than translating terms that have inherent multiplicity into English equivalents that imply singularity of meaning, I argue that we engage the terms, to the extent possible, within their own textual context. While it is perhaps impossible to completely avoid the [mis] appropriation of Indian concepts, textual analysis at least explicitly reflects an attempt, on the author's part, to be more faithful to indigenous categories, methods, and arguments. It is certainly more honest academically to acknowledge the multiplicity rather than creating the appearance of unity where there is none.

So, keeping in mind this multiplicity and danger of misappropriation; how is 'self', or individual human identity, delineated in Indian Philosophy? In an attempt to answer the question, this paper will look into the development of 'selfhood' or 'human identity' in two *dar^oana*-s: *Sâmkhya* (esp. with regards to *Sâmkhyakarîka*) and *Advaita Vedânta* (with a focus on Çamkara's writings).

In *Philology and Confrontation*, edited by Wilhelm Halbfass, one chapter, “Ām̐kara’s Conception of Man”, compares the identity of self in the systems of Sāmkhya and Ām̐kara. At times, the author represents the material as if these schools are speaking the ‘same’ truth. In this chapter, Ām̐kara’s conception is often delineated by employing Sāmkhyān concepts as points of comparison. While this brings a number of schools into conversation with each other in this chapter, Halbfass employs an interpretive framework that results in the dismissal of indigenous categories in favor of the more familiar western notions. He begins by correlating Ām̐kara’s ātman with the word ‘self’ or ‘soul’ (apparently the same thing). He writes,

This abiding substance of the human person is also denoted by the word ‘self’ (ātman, often more or less equivalent to what we call ‘soul’). (Halbfass, 1995: 178)

A couple obvious problems with this argument include the following: a) he assumes that the audience is part of the ‘we’ he invokes, b) he has not qualified, at all, the English notions ‘self’ or ‘soul’, thereby leaving his point completely abstracted and unsupported. He then goes on to place Ām̐kara’s notion of ‘self’/‘soul’ in relation to other philosophical schools as follows:

The systems of Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, and Mīmāṃsā had evolved a concept, denoted by the word ātman, which more or less coincides with the notion of soul as current in Europe. In the Sāmkhya school, however, of which the Pātañjala Yoga was a branch, there was no notion corresponding exactly to what we call ‘soul’ . . . Therefore, we may very well translate Puruṣa by ‘the self’. (Ibidem: 179)

Again, since he has not distinguished between what ‘self’ and ‘soul’ signify to ‘Europeans’ this statement is completely nonsensical. Furthermore, he cites almost zero primary texts to qualify his conclusions regarding Ām̐kara or Sāmkhya. In one of his only textual references in this chapter, Halbfass attempts to further qualify Puruṣa (now replaced in his writing by the word ‘self’) as follows:

But the self as conceived by the Sāmkhya was rather a lame being. There is a well-known simile which compares the relation obtaining between the Puruṣa and prakṛti (material prima) to the relation existing between a lame man and a blind man who carries him. The first cannot walk, the second cannot see. Matter is blind, while the spirit can see but is unable to move. (Ibidem: 180)

The verse he refers to is SK 21. But has he interpreted it correctly? The verse reads as follows:

Puru^oa.sya dar^oanârtham kaivalyârtham tathâ pradhânasya
paMgvandhavad ubhayor api samyogas tatk^otah sargah

Creation is done due to connection of both [Puru^oa and pradhâna], for the sake of Puru^oa's sight and *pradhâna*'s isolation; which is like [the connection] of the blind and lame.

Does this mean that Puru^oa is "rather a lame being"? First, SK never refers to Puru^oa as any type of a "being"; for any "being-ness" would, necessarily be a seeable object (whether mental or material). Puru^oa, in SK, is not established as something, but stated in terms that Puru^oa *is*. Therefore, it seems as if Halbfass has superimposed a Cartesian dualism (between two aspects of prak^oti—'spirit' and 'matter') onto the Sâmkhyan dualism. Second, while it may seem a minor point, he translates the simile as 'blind man' and 'lame man'. But, this translation ignores the consistent and explicit Sâmkhyan use of *she* or other feminine articles to designate prak^oti and *pradhâna*. In short, while this 'philological' analysis perhaps makes some good points, due to the use of generalizations and unsupported translations, his conclusions are not reliable.

Another example of generalized and unsupported [mis] translations is found in Schweizer's article "Mind/Consciousness Dualism in Sâmkhya-Yoga Philosophy". The title itself has already discarded the tradition's terminology as a settled thing; mind = prak^oti and consciousness = Puru^oa—no need for discussion. He explicitly correlates the Indian conceptions with existent categories available to 'western' readers. For, example, he argues,

Consciousness is placed in the realm of Puru^oa, the absolute, unconditioned self, which in some respects is comparable to Kant's noumenal self. (Schweizer, 2000: 331)

He also ignores the controversies between philosophical schools by positing that,

Puru^oa is the metaphysical principle underlying the individual person, and closely corresponds to the âtman of the Vedânta school. (Ibidem: 331)

In Schweizer's picture, Puru^oa=âtman=Kant's noumenal self=absolute self. Also, his conclusions about the school, while perhaps occasionally correct, lack any textual support. As such, it is impossible for the reader to evaluate his argument for themselves; his interpretation is

presented ‘as if’ there were no alternative possibilities for the interpretation. This lack of textual reference seems to be reflected in his inconsistencies. For example, he initially argues that the dualism in Sâmkhya is not a Cartesian split between matter and consciousness. But, his choice of terminology to describe Sâmkhya-Yoga metaphysics makes it sound as if it exactly is that—a consciousness/matter split:

Puru^oa is held to exist in complete independence of the material realm, and so the basic dualism in the Sâmkhya-Yoga metaphysics is between Puru^oa and prak^eti, between consciousness and matter. (Ibídem)

Given his liberal, and unsupported, translations, it is ironic that he states in his footnote that “I have tended to use predominantly Sâmkhya terminology” (Ibídem: 329. Footnote), because he does not use Sâmkhya terminology at all. Rather, he uses English terms that allegedly signify the same *truth* as their Sanskrit counterparts, but he never gives an argument supporting this.

Whicher is much more careful to use original text and qualify his translation of terms, or simply retain the original Sanskrit (not trying to appropriate, but to stay more true to the school’s self representation). He begins his investigation not by seeking the equivalent of ‘self’ in Sâmkhya-Yoga but by beginning with the Sanskrit terms; *antahkarana*, for example. Human awareness functions through *antahkarana*, or “inner instrumentality”, which is comprised of three principles: *manas*, *ahamkâra*, and *buddhi*. “Puru^oa”, he describes, “provides the ‘frame’ for the above mental processes, and though omnipresent, Puru^oa remains ‘unseen’ and transcendent of prak^eti’s activities” (Whicher, 1998: 90). Therefore, he does not posit a Sanskrit equivalent of ‘self’ to be compared to the Cartesian ‘self’. Rather, he immediately opens the door to the complexity of how the human ‘self’ is delineated in Sâmkhyan-Yogic texts. This approach, while undoubtedly more laborious, reflects an academic honesty and humility that I appreciate. After reading his analysis, it may not be easy for the reader to identify exactly what Puru^oa *is*, but therein lays the value of work like Whicher’s: the process of trying to identify and define concepts is what engages the indigenous concepts on their own terms. Once a scholar has settled what Puru^oa is, he has only reached a cognitive understanding which, according to SK, a function of the *antahkarana*. Whicher successfully resists the temptation to fit Sâmkhya-Yoga terminology into his conceptual mitts and, instead, invites the reader to look at the Indian usage of terms.

So, does this mean that scholars should not try to find the notion of ‘self’ in Indian Philosophy? Certainly, not; to dismiss the attempt would be

similar to Hegel's dismissal of Indian thought on grounds that 'man has not been posited' (Halbfass, 1991). Indian philosophy contains an infinite richness that, I believe, offers great potential to anyone who undertakes it. Scholars will always be influenced by the frameworks of interpretation to which they are accustomed. Therefore, it is natural to look for concepts in another tradition that match, on some level, the researchers' own storehouse of terms and thought patterns. This tendency is perhaps unavoidable as well as necessary. But, it should be considered only a first step—an opening into a deeper analysis. Translation of terms, rather than being a mere technicality needed for comparative analysis, should be the focus of comparison. Put another way, concepts like *âtman* and *Puru^âa* are delineated very carefully in the Indian texts. To merely replace them with words like 'self', 'soul' or 'spirit' is to devalue and dismiss the variety and plurality which accompanies these concepts in the Sanskrit texts. That being said, there must be some reason why so many have supported the use of 'self' or 'spirit' as an appropriate translation for *Puru^âa*.

What evidence is offered in SK to lend support to the common translation of *Puru^âa* as 'self' or 'spirit'? Is it a completely incorrect translation, or does it just need to be qualified, as some scholars do, with an adjective just as Absolute or Undifferentiated? At first glance, 'spirit' seems a natural translation, as SK 3 states "*na prak^âtir na vik^âtih Puru^âa*" (*Puru^âa* is not 'manifest' or 'evolved'). Therefore, if something is not manifest or evolved, it is not material and, therefore, must be 'of' spirit. But the problem with reading it this way is that *prak^âti* does not merely translate as the English equivalent of 'manifest'. Manifest, to most English speakers, implies matter. But, as Whicher pointed out in his chapter, *prak^âti* refers to both mental and material evolutes (Whicher, 1998: 90). Therefore, translating *Puru^âa* as 'spirit' wrongly implies a Cartesian dualism that distinguishes between 'spirit' as non-material and 'matter'. When the Sâmkhya dualism is appropriated into Cartesian categories, indigenous concepts are discarded in favor of more familiar ways of delineating 'man' and one side of the Sâmkhya dualism is missed altogether.

Since 'spirit' seems to be misleading, perhaps 'self' is a better translation for *Puru^âa*. But, to translate *Puru^âa* as 'self' first requires that the implications of 'self' be declined. If 'self' implies a seemingly independent experiencer, who has a separate birth and death, then perhaps this can be supported textually. SK 18 establishes the connection between individual beings (who are born, have sense faculties, perform activities and die) and *Puru^âa* as follows:

*JananamaraMakarânâm pratiniyamâd ayugapat prav^âtte^o ca
Puru^âabahutvam siddham traiguMyaviparyayâc caiva*

The plurality of Puru^oa is established due to the separate allotment of sense faculties, deaths and births and because of non-simultaneous activities and, moreover, due to differences among the three *guna*-s.

Since humans experience themselves as having separate births, deaths and activities, it seems that individual selves could be interpreted as individual Puru^oa-s. Therefore, ‘self’ seems to be a good translation; which would require that the nature of the individual self = the nature of Puru^oa. But the next verse, SK 19 further qualifies the nature of Puru^oa as follows:

*Tasmâc ca viparyâsât siddham sâk^oitvam asya Puru^oasya
Kaivalyam mâdhyasthyam dra^otvam akart^obhâva^o ca*

Because of Puru^oa’s difference from all of this [the three *guna*-s], the state of being a witness is established, the separation (*kaivalyam*), the state of being neutral, the state of being an observer and a non-agent is established.

So, if ‘self’ is equivalent to Puru^oa, what accounts for the individual experience of embodied humans—an experience that seemingly verifies the self as an agent that is subject to the *guna*-s? Verse 18 established the plurality of Puru^oa based on the separate allotment of births and deaths but verse 19 strips those ‘plural Puru^oa’s’ of any agency. Verse 20 offers an explanation:

*Tasmât tatsamyogâd acetanam cetanâvad iva lingam
gunakart^otve ca tathâ karteva bhavaty udâsînah*

The unconscious is like a conscious body due to the union of that [Puru^oa and prak^oti]. The indifferent one becomes like an agent due to the *guna*-s being an agent.

Puru^oa only appears as an agent due to the *samyoga* of Puru^oa and prak^oti. But to *whom* does Puru^oa appear this way? Verse 23 establishes that buddhi is apprehension, therefore Puru^oa appears as an agent to the buddhi. But buddhi (from *mahât*) along with the “I-maker” (*ahamkara*), is set out in verse 22 as an evolute of prak^oti (*prak^oter mahân tato ‘hamkâras*). The body, as well as the mental functions, are described in SK as within realm of prak^oti and comprised of two aspects—the subtle body and gross body. The following is written in verse 39:

*Sûk^omâ mâtâpit^ojâh saha prabhûtas tridhâ vi^oe^oâh syuh
Sûk^omâs te^oâm niyatâ mâtâpit^ojâ nivartante.*

The subtle [bodies made of tanmâtras] and those born of parents, together with gross elements are 3 specific things: Among these, the subtle are constant and those born of parents decompose.

Therefore, at this point it seems as if *Prakṛti* would be the nature of self identity and, hence, be a better translation of ‘self’ than *Puruṣa*. Is the essential nature of individual ‘self’ *Puruṣa*? Or is it *prakṛti*? Or *antahkarana* (including *buddhi*)? I think the answer would have to be that the individual self is at once all of these yet none of these. The individual self, as an essentially separate unitary entity, is not spoken of as such in the *Sāṃkhyakārika*. If we must infer an idea of individual self-ness from the text, however, this ‘self’ must be posited as essentially dual—the offspring of *Prakṛti* and *Puruṣa*—being both the *dṛṣya* (the seeable) and *dr̥ṣṭṛ* (the seer). So does *Puruṣa* translate well as ‘self’ or ‘spirit’? No, *Puruṣa* can not be reduced, can’t be ‘settled’. Any knowledge of *Puruṣa* is a *tanmatra* (evolute) of *prakṛti*. To come to a definitive conclusion and, hence, a translation, of *Puruṣa* is to violate the dualism that is explicitly and repeatedly expressed in the text.

Since Ācārya explicitly and repeatedly states the unity of ‘self’ by employing the pronoun ‘I’ (*aham*) and qualifying it repeatedly as *advaya* (non-dual), perhaps *âtman* can be translated as ‘self’ better than *Puruṣa*. After all, Ācārya’s system has no dualism to violate. While the translation may seem to be more appropriate, the word ‘self’ still is too laden with ‘western’ or ‘Christian’ concepts to offer anything to the understanding of Advaita Vedānta as espoused by Ācārya. Christians believe in individual immortality and bodily resurrection in heaven. If ‘self’ be defined as ‘that which persists’; that applies to *âtman* only as long as *âtman* remains in the cycle of transmigration. But, since *âtman* can, through removal of ignorance, be released and no longer differentiated from *Brahman*, it is the ‘self’ as *Brahman* that persists. Ācārya’s *âtman* *is* the ultimate principle, *Brahman*. In Christian literature, the ‘self’ (or the creation) can never be confused with the ultimate principle; God the creator. Therefore ‘self’ signifies a very different entity than Ācārya’s *âtman*. Additionally, in Christian discourse, the individual self is born a sinner and it is only through having faith in Jesus that one can receive the gift of immortality. Ācārya’s *âtman* is already immortal and is inherently stainless, not a born sinner. In the first verse of Ācārya’s chapter “*Conception of Nature*” in *Upadeśa-sāhasrī*, Ācārya writes:

*Dr̥ṣṭṛisvrupam gagana upamam param sakṛt vibhātam tvajamekamaksaram
Alepakam sarvagatam yat advayam tat eva ca aham satatam vimukta aum*

I am always liberated Brahman [whose] nature is seer, similar to sky, the Supreme, always shining but is not born; single, imperishable, stainless, omnipresent; which has no second.

So, theologically, 'man' in the west is a different metaphysical reality than the 'I' in Ćeamkara's writing.

From a philosophical angle, Halbfass argues against the correlation between the 'man' as conceived in the west and Ćeamkara's âtman. He writes, "the emphasis on man as thinking, planning, organizing creature, as potential 'master and owner of nature' ('maitre et possesseur de la nature'), is a conspicuous and deeply significant phenomenon of the European tradition" (Halbfass, 1991: 281). Ćeamkara's metaphysics differ from this picture of man. In contrast to defining 'man' in relation to animals, Halbfass argues that Ćeamkara would see this view of man as master must be transcended to attain liberation. He describes Ćeamkara's position as follows:

To attain liberating knowledge means to discover one's own true identity. But, man's true identity is not his role as reasoning, reckoning, planning animal rationale, nor is it anything specifically or uniquely human. His identity is that of the self (âtman), which he shares with all creatures and which is neither the subject nor the object of planning and reasoning. In trying to discover this self, man has to abandon his humanity; he has to discard himself as rational animal. (Ibîdem)

Here, Halbfass still uses 'self' as a synonym for âtman, but he has at least qualified it as a different type of signifier. He is arguing that self in the West does not equate self in Ćeamkara's system. So, what purpose does it serve if the *English* term does not signify the same thing as the Sanskrit? 'Self' is a misleading translation of âtman and should be abandoned altogether.

Although 'self' is not an appropriate translation, what about using *Puru^oa* as a synonym for âtman/Brahman (as many authors are fond of doing)? This is a key issue when speaking of 'Indian Philosophy' in general. Since the arguments for *Puru^oa* and âtman are drawn primarily from the *UpaMi^oads*, perhaps the terms should have a closer correlation. Is the *Sâmkyakârîka* expounding the same truth as Ćeamkara? Is 'human individuality' or 'self identity' an agreed upon principle between the two schools? I think scholars could make an argument either way.

First, there seems to be significant textual evidence for supporting the equivalence of *Puru^oa* and âtman (brahman) . Like *purusa*, Ćeamkara's 'I' is not subject to birth and death and has neither cause nor effect. Ćeamkara writes the following:

*Ajah amara^ocaiva tathâ ajara am^otah svayamprabhah sarvagata aham
advayah
Na kêraMam kêryamatîva nirmalah sadaikat^opta^oca tatah vimukta aum*

I am liberated brahman, not born, deathless, not subject to old age, immortal, self-illuminating, omnipresent, without a second.
Having neither cause nor effect, utterly stainless, ever one satisfied.¹

In seemingly non-comparable positions, Sāmkhya maintains an irreducible dualism while Ām̐kara repeatedly refers to his 'I' as non-dual (*aham advayah*). But does Ām̐kara stay philosophically true to his monism? Bina Gupta questions Ām̐kara's monism by suggesting that Ām̐kara needs the notion of *Sāk^oin* (witness-consciousness) to preserve his non-dualism. Gupta argues, "Reflecting on the inconsistencies of the Upani^oads, he sometimes speaks of *ātman* as *brahman*, and at other times as the witness-consciousness" (Gupta, 1998: 33). This 'witness-consciousness', (which *is* brahman, which *is* the non-dual "I"), like Puru^oa, is without qualities. Ām̐kara writes,

*Vyomavatsarvabhūnasthah bhūtado^oairvivarjitah
Sāk^oī cetā agunah^ouddhah brahmaivāsmīti kevalah*

I am Brahman itself who is present in all beings like space; devoid of the faults of beings; a witness, conscious without qualities, pure.²

The witness, also similar to Puru^oa, cannot be an agent;

*avidyayā bhāvanayā ca karmabhirvivikta ātmā avyavadhih sunirmalah
dragādi^oaktiprcitah aham advayah sthitah svarupe gaganam yathā acalam*

ātman is devoid of actions, ignorance and imagination, un-obscured and absolutely pure. I am filled with the power of seeing, etc. Since abiding in my own nature [and] immovable like the sky, I am non-dual.³

Given the seeming commonality of 'witnesshood' attributed to *brahman/ātman* and Puru^oa, can we assert their equivalence in meaning? SK19 established the *sāk^oitvam* of Puru^oa. In the above verse, Ām̐kara uses the word *sāk^oin*. Both are *taddhita pratyaya*-s, but different forms. *Sāk^oin* is a derivative noun signifying possession. *Sāk^oitvam* (*sāk^oi + tvam*) forms a *bhavavâcaka pratyaya*, or 'abstract noun'; signifying the 'witnesshood' of Puru^oa.⁴ Are these just two different ways to establish the same truth? I would argue not. First, Ām̐kara uses a noun; suggesting a

1. SamĀkara, *Upadesa-sāhasr...*, Chapter X, "Right Conception of the Nature of Consciousness", verse 3.
2. SamĀkara, *Upadesa-sāhasr...*, Chapter XI, "Nature of the Witness", verse 6.
3. SamĀkara, *Upadesa-sāhasr...*, Chapter X, "Right Conception of the Nature of Consciousness", verse 9.
4. See Goldman, Chapter 20.

being who witnesses (thus, logically dependent upon a prior reality—i.e. the power of witnessing). But, positing the ‘witnesshood’ of Puru^oa does not necessitate the ‘pre-existence’ of either. However, Puru^oa, one may argue, is referred to as *bhokt^o*, which suggests a ‘being who experiences’. In English, I think ‘experiencer’ definitely does suggest ‘one’ who experiences, but perhaps not in Sanskrit. The ‘^o’ form of a verb stem generally is translated by adding ‘er’ to the English verb (for example, leader, seer, etc.) This seems to suggest at least a much more passive agent than the ‘in’ ending. Goldman describes the ‘^o’ derivative as an *agent noun*, suggesting a ‘doer’ of some action. This creates some problems for the Sâmkhya position, because Puru^oa, it has been established, cannot be an agent. But, what is the nature of the action *bhuj* (as experience)? Does ‘experience’ suggest, necessarily, an action performed by a subject? Experience, and even seeing, seem to me to suggest receptive verbs, rather than active verbs, thus clouding the agency issue.

Gupta offers more evidence for why we should not equate the witnesshood of Puru^oa with that of âtman/brahman. He comes up with five characterizations of sâk^oin that can be found in Ām̄kara’s writings; and concludes the following:

A careful examination of the above passages reveals that Ām̄kara provides at least five different, though not mutually exclusive, characterizations of sâk^oin:

1. Sâk^oin as the witness of the intellect
2. Sâk^oin as the nondual, propertyless *brahman*
3. Sâk^oin as identical to âtman
4. Sâk^oin as the witness of all three states; and
5. Sâk^oin as the same as *ÿ^ovara*⁵

Of the above, the following could be said of Puru^oa: the witness of the intellect, propertyless, and the witness of all three states. But, nowhere in the SK will Puru^oa be described as non-dual (perhaps this could be argued, but the plurality of Puru^oa is explicit), identical to âtman, the same as *ÿ^ovara*. Furthermore, Gupta (when discussing the Advaita theory of perceiving) argues that the witness-consciousness manifests nescience (Gupta, 1998a: 77). In SK, only prak^oti can manifest/evolve. Puru^oa, or Puru^oa’s witnesshood (Puru^oasya sâk^oitvam) cannot manifest anything. Therefore, textual evidence does not support the equivalence of ‘witnesshood’ between the two schools.

5. (Minus the verse numbers listed by Gupta); in Gupta, “Samġkara on Sâk^oin” (1998: 39).

But, perhaps this just reflects the difficulty of language. Perhaps the schools decline ‘witnesshood’ differently, but they are still pointing to the same ‘truth’. After all, human identity in both systems is a mistaken identity. Humans mistake themselves, in their individuality, for *the* reality and it is only through correct knowledge that liberation can be attained. In other words, perhaps the differences between ‘witnesshood’ belong only to the conventional truths of the schools and not to the ‘ultimate’ truths. What accounts for the mistaken identity and what is the nature of liberation in each system?

Gupta describes Ām̐kara’s theory of superimposition in a manner to suggest similarities to *samyoga* in SK. If *brahman* is One, pure, devoid of actions, etc., how is it that individuals see themselves as otherwise? How is it, metaphysically, that one can appear as many? Gupta argues that Ām̐kara accounts for this metaphysical problem by positing that “Plurality is real as long as one remains in the empirical world.” (Gupta, 1998: 40). Regarding the nature of agency, it is Gupta’s interpretation that the theory of superimposition explains why the empirical self appears as an agent. He describes,

The reciprocal superimposition of the self and the not self, and the properties of the one on the other, results in the bondage of the empirical self. The empirical self acts and enjoys because of erroneous identification of the inner self with the inner sense (*antahkarana*). (Ib̐dem: 41)

This sounds very much like how S̐mkhya accounts for the appearance of agency—it is due to the *buddhi* mistaking itself to be *Puruṣa*. Gupta continues to describe,

One superimposes not only the inner sense, the possessor of egoity, on the self—the witness of everything—but also the self on the inner sense. Thus, beginningless superimposition, which is in the form of multiplicity of names and forms, results, conjuring up the notions of agency and enjoyer that empirical individuals experience. (Ib̐dem: 42)

Thus, the monism established by Ām̐kara seems to be a qualified monism. In other words, when it comes to the individual, there seem to be ‘two’ selves: the self that is imposed on the inner sense and the pure self. “Ām̐kara defends the view that agency belongs to the self as connected with the inner sense, not to the pure self” (Ib̐dem: 43). Again, this sound very similar to the manner in which SK argues that agency belongs to *prakṛti* and only due to mistaken identity does it appear otherwise. But are the ‘two’ selves described by Ām̐kara describing the duality established in the *S̐mkhyakārikā*? For Ām̐kara the individual ‘I’ is *draṣṭṛ*, but is it not also *dṛṣṭa*, because the ‘seeable’ ‘I’ is only an illusion. We established

above that translating Puru^oa as ‘self identity’ ignores the other half of the Sâmkhya dualism: prak^oti. Individual ‘self identity’, by inference, is understood as the product (samyoga) of Puru^oa and prak^oti, the seer and the seeable. The subtle and gross bodies, both manifestations of prak^oti, are not mere illusion, but existent and seeable. Prak^oti dances for Puru^oa, then disappears. But her ‘being’ is not merely an illusion provided for Puru^oa, by Puru^oa (“*na prak^otir na vik^otih Puru^oah*”), but her being-ness exists in its own right. Thus, it is totally misleading to use the Puru^oa of SK synonymously with Ām̐kara’s âtm̐an. The only way to establish that Puru^oa and âtm̐an can be used synonymously is to do one of the following: a) [mis] translate Puru^oa as essential self identity (thus sublating prak^oti) or b) accept that Ām̐kara repeatedly refers to the self as *advaya*, but needs his theory of *sâk^oin* (as a sort of ‘convenient fiction’) to preserve this.

Perhaps here, we can take refuge in this notion of ‘convenient fiction’ offered by Deutsch. Lance Nelson finds it somewhat appealing. He writes the following:

Although Deutsch may be overstating the case to speak of *karma* in Advaita as a ‘convenient fiction,’ he is certainly correct when he says, “There is nothing within the state of being designated by *brahman* or âtm̐an that admits of being subject to *karma*.” (Nelson, 1996: 30)

Therefore, can we explain the paradox and multiplicity of notions by understanding terms like Puru^oa and âtm̐an to be merely ‘convenient fictions’ rather than supposed ultimate truths? There does seem to be strong textual support in both systems to support this theory. For example, regarding the “bound individual” SK 62 writes the following:

*Tasmân na badhyate nâpi mucyate nâpi samsarati ka^ocit samsarati
badhyate mucyate ca nânâ^orayâ prak^otih.*

Therefore, no one is bound, nor released, nor transmigrates. Prak^oti and the various forms are bound, liberated and transmigrates.

And, in a similar fashion, Ām̐kara writes:

*dehaliMgâtmaMâ kâryâ vâsanârupiMâ kriyâh
netinetyâtm̐arupatvâanna me kâryâ kriyâ kvacit.*

Actions are to be performed by the âtm̐an that has gross and subtle bodies, who has the form of a mental impression.

Due to the nature of âtm̐an, which is ‘not this,’ or ‘not that,’ nowhere can actions be performed by me.⁶

6. SamĀkara, *Upadesa-sâhasr...*, Chapter XI, “*Nature of the Witness*”, verse 14.

The 'no-one' that is bound and the *âtman* that is 'not this' or 'not that' could be explained by Deutsch's theory. But, is a 'convenient fiction' theory just an easy way out? Perhaps the 'unsettled' conclusions are just too uncomfortable to accept, so scholars create theories as a way of avoiding the truth claims made by the texts. What 'truth' could these verses be establishing? SK 62 states that 'no-one is bound'. This infers that the 'I' that is identified in individual experience is "no-one" or, is not an inherently, independently existent *evolute*. Individual identity appears due the combination of subtle and gross elements with the possibility of 'witnesshood'. This combination then ceases to appear when *prak^oti* has finished her dance. Put another way, the 'I' is not ultimately real, but is a combination of a number of factors co-existing, dancing, in front of an audience. *Āmka* suggests that individuality exists only so long as one remains in bondage (either in subtle body or gross body). The *âtman* is 'not this' and 'not that'. This suggests that cannot be identified; named; defined. In other words, *âtman* is no-one also. But someone may accuse me of syncretism here; arguing that I am suggesting SK and *Āmka* share their metaphysical position with the Buddhists. I would not dare make such a grand generalization; I would then be guilty of the fallacies I criticize in others.

This paper began with looking into the development of 'self', or individual identity, in two philosophical schools. As such, it was plagued from the beginning. Perhaps these philosophical schools do not develop a self, but a 'non' self. There is no definition or translation of 'Puru^oa' or '*âtman*' that can be established. Does this mean there is no 'selfhood'? No, because 'selfhood' is explicitly established in each of these schools. But, it does mean that there is no *eternally individual* self. This proposition is, perhaps, what threatens the 'west' the most. Individual identity is one of those concepts to which the west holds most dear. This would explain why so many scholars begin their investigation with identifying the 'self' (as opposed to the 'non-self') in Indian philosophies.

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