

The Only Knower

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Questioner: Dear Ramji, I came across the following statement in an blog about the importance of God-knowledge. It said, "Using the simple logic of inference, which is a valid means of knowledge for things we can experience, we can legitimately infer that there must be an intelligent conscious cause behind the world because we are conscious, and we exist." Would you care to comment on this statement?

Ramji: Inference is reasoning based on direct perception when direct perception is incapable of delivering knowledge. If you experience a tree, you don't need inference, because direct perception works. If there is an inviolable link between something you can't perceive and something you can, then inference comes into play. You can infer fire from smoke, for instance, because empirical knowledge reveals that smoke only happens when there is fire.

We do experience that we are conscious. Reasoning is not necessary, because it is self-evident. But does it imply that we are consciousness/existence? Is there an inviolable experiential link between being conscious and being consciousness? No. If there was there would be no need for another means of knowledge, i.e. Vedanta. No scripture is required to tell us that smoke is only present when fire is present. We can experience them together directly. But a scripture is necessary to tell us that we are consciousness.

Additionally, to find a link the possibility of a link needs to exist. So we would need experiential confirmation of the two phenomena that we are seeking to link. While it is self-evident that we are conscious, there is no way to experience consciousness directly to determine if it is connected to human consciousness because there are no humans "in" consciousness. Consciousness is non-dual and it is all there is. So empirical knowledge doesn't work.

The "direct" experience of consciousness is not empirical proof that the self is consciousness. It is an experience of the reflection of consciousness in a pure (*sattvic*) mind. It may be useful but it is still a dualistic state. It is usually terribly misleading because it turns freedom into an experience, whereas freedom is not an experience; it is the nature of awareness.

There is an apparent link but an individual can't make the link without help. If a human being could infer that he or she was consciousness because he or she is conscious, we wouldn't need a scripture. But this person is playing the role of a competent witness (*apta vakya* in Sanskrit) by telling people that being conscious implies that they are consciousness. Why? Because nobody draws such an inference. Vedanta teachers are competent witnesses, not because they experience the consciousness "directly" as an object, but because they were taught, i.e. they accepted Vedanta as a valid means of knowledge.

Even Vedanta only indirectly establishes the link because there is no actual link if everything is consciousness as the *Upanishads* state. It establishes it by removing ignorance about the nature of non-dual consciousness, at which time the need for a link is mooted. The person who made that statement didn't draw that conclusion on

his own. He must have heard it from the teaching. If he had, he would not have had a teacher as he claims.

As you know there is no connection between the real (*satya*) and the unreal or seemingly real (*mithya*). The knowledge of experienced objects implies the existence of consciousness but experienced objects don't tell you that you are consciousness. Nor does the knowledge of experienced objects. Similarly, that you exist is self-evident but it does not imply that you are existence itself. *Guru* is required. The same logic applies to the world, i.e. God, which the blogger says is conscious. But does God (*Isvara*) know that it is limitless non-dual awareness (*Paramatma*)? No, because God, the Creator of the world, is inert. Consciousness is not creative. It is existence itself. It is. Being does not imply action.

God only borrows, i.e. reflects, consciousness. However, it seems as if it is conscious because it is so intimately associated with consciousness. It is a *upadhi*, to use a Sanskrit term. It is a "provisional knower" if we don't take consciousness into account. But in fact, consciousness/awareness (*Paramatma*) is the only knower when God is present.

So what does the pronoun "we" refer to in the statement "we can legitimately infer..." If it refers to a person, it is not correct. If the first instance of "we" refers to scripture/*guru*, okay, but the second instance makes it clear that "we" in both instances refers to individuals (*jivas*). If so, the conclusion "because we are conscious and exist" is not warranted.

This is not to say that one can't provisionally say that God is intelligent and conscious - if one knows that it is only a teaching tool, a stepping stone. Nobody for whom this blog is intended is going to understand that awareness is the only knower when the world is present. Knowing is a status that awareness "assumes" when there is something to know. But if reality is non-dual existence/awareness, there is nothing to know. There is only ignorance to be removed.