

## Review

Gerhard Oberhammer, *Meghanādārisūris Lehre vom jīvaḥ als Subjekt des Erkennens. Eine begrifflich kritische Rezeption der überlieferten Lehre*. Wien: De Nobili Research Library, 2023. 51 pp. (Publications of the De Nobili Research Library, Occasional Papers 10).

The booklet under review consists of two parts: a German translation of a part of the “Prameyanirūpaṇa” in Meghanādārisūri’s treatise *Nayadyumaṇi* (pp. 33–50) and a study of the doctrine of the *jīva* as it can be extracted from this passage (pp. 9–31), an extended version of a 2017 lecture, published in English translation in 2018 (p. 7).

Meghanādārisūri [= M.] (14th cent. CE) belongs to the school of Rāmānuja. So fittingly, first the author tries to show how M.’s conception of the *jīva* (a term that he uses synonymously to *ātman*, but more frequently, as denoting the subject of knowledge) is connected to Rāmānuja’s understanding of the body as “substance that can be controlled and preserved for its own purpose” by a conscious entity.<sup>1</sup> One part of his definition of the *jīva* is its being “the body of the brahman” (*brahmaśarīrabhūtaḥ*, *Nayadyumaṇi* 234,16). M. understands this aspect in such a way that the *brahman/paramātman* controls the individual *jīvas* by completely pervading them from inside and making them perform activities at will. This can be taken as the theological background of M.’s conception of the *jīva* as the subject of knowledge, which – in the main part of the passage under discussion – is developed against the backdrop of a Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika *pūrvapakṣa*. First, the *jīva/ātman* is essentially knowledge and is therefore,

<sup>1</sup> *dravyaṃ sarvātmanā svārthe niyantum dhārayitum ca śakyam*. (It is not clear to me why the author translates *śakyam* here by “muss”.)

in every act of apperception, constantly aware of the “ego” (*ahamartha*). Second, the *jīva* is atom-sized (*aṇu*). The author points out that M. links this feature of *aṇutva* with its being directed at itself (*pratyaktva*) and limited (*paricchinnatva*), and so interprets it as an expression of its “relational subjectivity” (p. 22). What links the *jīva* to the outer world is “knowing” (*jñāna*), understood as a kind of substance that – during the *saṃsāric* existence – uses the sense organs to leave the body. It is not a fully independent substance, however, but is ultimately connected to the *jīva* as to its substrate (*āśraya*), which therefore can be directly apprehended. The author summarises this interpretation by stating that “*ahamartha* and *dharmabhūtajñāna* form an ontological unity that precedes every existence in the *saṃsāra*” (p. 29). In addition, the author deals with M.’s explanation that a certain karma residue (*adṛṣṭa*) is linked to a given *jīva* as its own by virtue of the fact that the Lord (*īśvara*) has given it “the means and so on” (*karaṇādi*). He takes this to indicate the “interrelational dialectic dynamics inside the *ahamartha*h, which is internally pervaded by the *Paramātmā*” (p. 30) and thanks to that “achieves freedom and responsibility” in his actions (p. 31).

The present publication is valuable, as it throws light on one of the most intriguing problems in Indian philosophy – the question of subjectivity and self-awareness – from an unusual angle. The author achieves this task both by his well-informed interpretations and excellent translations, which manage to walk the tight line between literalness and excessive freedom. It has to be said, though, that the argumentations in the booklet are not always easy to follow, and the strategy to operate with modern philosophical conceptions like “apperception” or “openness” in the translations is not unproblematic. From a practical perspective, it is not convenient for the reader that the Sanskrit text is given in footnotes to the translation – the customary solution of printing original and translation on facing pages would have been far superior. But these points do not change the fact that the reviewed publication is a must-have for scholars dealing with the history of the Rāmānuja school, and – far beyond this group of readers – recommendable for everybody interested in the universal philosophical problem of self-awareness.

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