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Presence of Mind: Consciousness and the Sense of Self

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The rejection of a permanent self as the 'thinker of thoughts' and the 'senser of sensations' poses a significant challenge for Buddhist philosophy of mind: if there is no permanent agent (*kartā*), and if actions (*karman*) are merely transient events within a continuum of causally interconnected states, how is the phenomenal character of conscious experience and the sense of ownership implicit in first-person agency to be explained? At the same time, the rejection of a permanent locus for experience offers an opportunity to explore the problem of personal identity on phenomenological rather than metaphysical grounds: answering the question of why self-awareness comes bound up with a sense of self (whether owned or merely occurrent) can thus be pursued independently of metaphysical concerns about what a self is and what are its fundamental attributes. It also allows for an analysis of the structure of awareness without assuming that such a structure reflects an external relation of ownership between consciousness and the self.

Let us note from the outset that there are substantive disagreements among Buddhist philosophers about how the problem of personal identity should be framed, the kind of evidence that is deemed reliable, and the lines of justification that are worth pursuing: it can be (and has been) framed in both epistemological and ontological terms, drawing on both experiential accounts and metaphysical considerations about what there is, and taking the form of both conceptual analysis

and ostensive demonstration. Nonetheless, there is a general consensus that at the most basic level the no-self view is entailed by a reductive analysis of experience. The claim is that phenomenal consciousness is actually a synthesis of five different kinds of activities: bodily, affective, perceptual, dispositional, and self-reflexive.¹ This view of personal identity informs all debates in Indian and Buddhist philosophy of mind and is indispensable to any account of cognition. By replacing the cognizing 'self' or 'I' with a causal chain the outcome of which is momentary cognitive events, Buddhist philosophers treat the cognizing subject as an emergent aspect of the embodied and dynamic functioning of these aggregates. In short, talk of 'self' or 'I' as the agent of experience is just a mistaken, folk-psychological way of using the first person pronoun referentially (that is, as referring to subjects of experience).

But if this Buddhist account of personal identity is built, as it is claimed, on phenomenological (thus descriptive) rather than metaphysical grounds, the obvious question arises: is there such a place or locus for experience? And if there is, does it have the sort of character that is amenable to phenomenological analysis? A positive answer would suggest that experience is such that at a minimum, the 'sense of self' must be an ineliminable structural feature of cognitive awareness. In what follows I want to pursue the question of precisely what conception of self-consciousness can be supported on experiential grounds, and whether such conception is sufficient to account for the ineliminable features of phenomenal consciousness.

I. Defining Consciousness

It is generally agreed that consciousness is a somewhat slippery term. However, more narrowly defined as 'phenomenal consciousness' it captures at least three essential features or aspects: *subjective experience* (the notion that what we are primarily conscious of are experiences), *subjective knowledge* (that feature of our awareness that gives consciousness its distinctive reflexive character), and *phenomenal contrast* (the phenomenality

of awareness, absence of which makes consciousness intractable) (cf. Siewert 1998). I will only discuss here the subjective and epistemic aspects of phenomenal consciousness, specifically what I take to be two of its constitutive features: *presence* and *reflexivity*.

Phenomenal consciousness is what makes present, disclosing at once a world and a minimal sense of self. It is also constitutive of the character of experience. That there is something it is like to be conscious means that experience is what it is by virtue of being present to itself: the smell of roses is all that is needed for an experience to be disclosed as an instance of olfactory self-awareness. As such consciousness marks a specific cognitive event as being for someone or as having what phenomenologists call 'for-ness' (Kriegel and Zahavi 2015). There is no such thing as a generic experience, as if from nowhere and for no one. We do not experience the world and ourselves as though we were a witness in a Cartesian theatre or a voyeur peeping from behind the scene. Rather, awareness makes manifest, enacts, and transforms the world and ourselves as we move through it. We look on in utter amazement at a world that glances back and makes us blush, for the world in question is the world *as perceived*.

To open up to a world is not to be thrust, as a bystander might, onto a stage and asked to play some unfamiliar part. Rather, it is like taking your turn as the play moves along and the plot unravels. As embodied and minded creatures 'we' are always in character, though, of course, not always in the same character. Consciousness does not begin in reflection, when we pause to remember a line or to ponder an idea. Rather, as a reflection it always finds itself, as the conventions of epic poetry tell us, *in medias res*, in the middle of things. Awareness, and empirical or perceptual awareness in particular, has an intentional character: we always find ourselves in a world, or as Heidegger puts it, in one mood or another, and never simply there, as bare existence.

Phenomenal consciousness is important if we are to understand the world we live in and our place in it. Some argue that the phenomenal character of experience is such that our

most basic beliefs, call them perceptual beliefs, are not only immediately justified (Pryor 2000, 2004) but in effect are nothing but judgments about experience (Dennett 2005); others that experience has a seeming character, that there is a way things seem to us that is different from our judgments about them (Carman, 2005, 2007; Huemer 2005, 2007). Furthermore, some claim that we cannot have first-personal knowledge of our own mental states without phenomenal experience (Pitt 2004); others that perceptual experience must be conscious in a phenomenal sense in order for us to have access to demonstrative thoughts (Smithes 2011); and still others that phenomenal experience is what makes our beliefs, perceptual or otherwise, reliable (Chalmers, 2003). Lastly, some argue that the phenomenal character of experience and its phenomenal content are in effect inseparable (Chalmers 2004, Coseru 2012).

Indian and Buddhist philosophers likewise are split on this issue: some, such as the Vaibhāshika and the Sautrāntikas offer reductionist accounts of experience, others (Vedānta and Sāṅkhya philosophers) argue that an experience should count as such insofar as it is attributable to a self that owns it, and still others (chiefly the Naiyāyikas) that such a self might not admit of qualitative experiences or possess anything like determined awareness. At least in the Indian philosophical context, the main disagreement about phenomenal consciousness is between those who take consciousness to be simple and unanalysable, and those who understand consciousness as a property of certain mental states (typically, states of so-called metacognition or metacognitive awareness).²

Despite significant contributions in this area, we still lack reliable methods for charting the phenomenology of conscious experience. In recent years, a new proposal about the character of phenomenal consciousness has emerged that challenges the received, orthodox view that perceptual phenomenology is the only phenomenology there is. Proponents of this new view argue that conscious thought too possesses a kind of distinct or proprietary phenomenology. Introduced under the rubric of cognitive phenomenology, this proposal is meant to extend, supplement, and even supplant the range and scope of the phenomenal character of experience (Bayne and Montague

2011). Cognitive phenomenology or the phenomenology of thought extends the role of phenomenal consciousness beyond the domain of the present at hand to include all mentality. In other words, proponents of cognitive phenomenology do not simply state that thought has phenomenal character in virtue of being associated with some sensory or affective state.³ Rather they claim that thought, much like sensation, has its own proprietary phenomenology or 'what it is like.' My thought "Paris is the capital of France" does not derive its character from association with co-occurrent sensory, affective, or imagistic experiences. That is, there is something it is like to entertain that thought that is not reducible to how I feel about Paris, political geography or the French people.

However, while cognitive phenomenology may help extend the boundaries of conscious experience beyond the sensory and affective domains, it does little to augment our still rather rudimentary methodological toolset. Instead of using the language of qualia to capture the character of what it is like to have a certain kind of experience, it uses the language of introspection and self-knowledge to ground the content of thought in an experience of the thought's own determinacy.

I am sympathetic to the project of cognitive phenomenology, but, just as with the phenomenology of sense perception, I find it problematic that we are trying to justify the epistemic relevance of phenomenal consciousness rather than explore its structural features. If consciousness is what makes present then arguably it is constitutive of experience. Coming to terms with phenomenal consciousness, then, means resisting the many ways in which it can be substituted for more concrete phenomena like the so-called datum of experience or to judgments about it.

II. Presence and Reflexivity

Let us begin then with experience. Imagine you are travelling to a distant place, perhaps to attend a conference, and upon arrival you step out of the airport only to find yourself immersed in a strange and unfamiliar world. You look around for clues

about how to proceed: directions to a taxi stand, an airport shuttle or the information desk. Before long, and with some luck, you are on your way to your hotel. As airport ramps give way to freeways and freeways to avenues and narrow streets a whole new urban fabric unravels before your eyes. Everywhere, a seething mass of people is going about their daily affairs. You are drawn in, you attend to every gesture and detail of this vast quivering tapestry. As the scene moves along, you find yourself adjusting your gaze to get a better grip. Perhaps you are riding in a shuttle or sharing a taxi with a colleague. Your colleague has been here before, and she knows the place very well. She is a gifted and gregarious storyteller, and on your way into the city you get your first guided tour, punctuated with anecdotes and solicitous advice. You are intrigued, fascinated, but also slightly apprehensive. You wonder what lies ahead for you. As you zoom past imposing landmarks and through crowded thoroughfares, reaching deeper into the heart of the city, it slowly begins to sink in. Like Mary the colour scientist who, upon being released from her black and white room, has her first experience of colour, you are experiencing a world you have only indirectly known about. This is the world *made present*. What kind of presence is this? On reflection, one might say that it is a subjective one, a transformation of self-awareness by immersion into an unfamiliar environment. But this horizon of experience where you now find yourself has not come about solely as a result of what the new surroundings afford.

What do scenarios like the one just described tell us about the phenomenal character of consciousness? Herein lies the problem: unlike the typical thought experiment, there is no setup; no argument about what could conceivably be the case. Inferential relations, though part of the structure of awareness, are not constitutive of it. Small infants are aware, and so are many animals, despite lacking the complex conceptual schema of metacognitive awareness. To proponents of belief based theories of perception this scenario might seem contrived, even impossible, given assumptions about what empirical awareness can and does deliver. But it should not be. And here is why.

In perceiving we do not simply register objects within our

field of experience. Neither do we stand over against these objects in a type of representational relation. Rather, the perceiving act itself makes present its object, say a red apple, as an event that has duration and takes place within a horizon of experience that is pre-reflectively given. On this account of perception, suited to capture its enactive and sensorimotor contingencies, *presence*, that is, the sense we have of enduring objects, states, and events, and *reflexivity*, the notion that our cognitive awareness has a for-me-ness structure, are intrinsic features of experience rather than concepts that frame our thinking about the character of experience.

Critics of sensorimotor accounts of perception (e.g. Clark 2006) claim that perception cannot apprehend past and/ or future events, and thus that presence and temporality are not within the purview of perception. Proponents of the view that perception has a horizon structure and is reflexively constituted (Kelly 2008, Noë 2012) argue that what I perceive seems to include not only those elements that are immediately present to awareness but also those that are only intuitively available. The sensorimotor account of perception, thus, advances the phenomenally plausible view that in perception we apprehend whole objects (and events), not merely their perceptible parts, and apprehend them actively as occasioning different types of experience (the red apple affords such experiences as seeing red, picking or tossing).

While many agree that this debate about the nature of perception cannot be settled on phenomenologically neutral grounds, few doubt that framing it as an account of the structure of phenomenal consciousness can extend it in a profitable direction. Such a framing, not surprisingly, is also at work in Buddhist Abhidharma accounts: Vasubandhu, for instance, understands presence (*smṛti*) as the capacity to “not allow to be carried off” (*ālabhāna-asampramoca*): that is, the capacity to retain the present moment.⁴ My claim is that a solution to the problem of how best to account for the elements of existence and/ or experience (*dharma*s), much like contemporary attempts to frame perceptual awareness in terms of its enactive and sensorimotor contingencies, cannot satisfactorily be offered without coming to terms with the

reflexivity of phenomenal consciousness.

Let us briefly consider the Buddhist analysis of experience. First, the Buddhist rejects the notion of a permanent self as the agent of sensory activity. But this rejection, of course, poses a significant challenge. Indeed, as we noted above, if there is no agent, and if actions are merely transient events arising within a continuum of causally interconnected states, we are confronted with an explanatory gap: how is the efficacy of causal or, in Buddhist terms, kārmic processes to be explained? That is, why is it that some causal chains give rise to the emergent phenomenon of conscious awareness and its implicit sense of self and others do not? It is not surprising therefore that early interpreters of the no-self doctrine in the West (much like Brahmanical critics of the Buddhist no-self view in India) have argued that the denial of self in Buddhism should be understood as targeting common views such as those that associate the self with the psychophysical aggregates, and not the metaphysical notion of self (Bhattacharya 1973: 64).

Can Abhidharma reductionism, with its account of primitive atom-like 'qualitons' of experience, and its various accounts of consciousness in terms of life continuum (*citta-santana*) and repository consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*) provide an adequate conceptual basis for advancing the thesis that mental states have a self-presentational character? That is, does the phenomenal mineness implicit, for instance, in Asaṅga and Vasubandhu's notion that I-thoughts are occurrent features of afflicted minds (*klicma-manas*) count as a descriptive account of the structure of experience? Or is it just an instance of failure to secure epistemic access to what there is? Ganeri (2012: 156ff) has recently claimed that it does not count, and has built a strong case for regarding the first-person stance by means of which thoughts are individuated in the mental stream as an instance of constitutively owned rather than deluded I-thoughts. Later Buddhist solutions to this conundrum vary considerably, from the Pudgalavādin's proposal that first-personal agency non-reductively supervenes on the aggregates to reflexivist accounts of consciousness as articulated mainly by Dignāga and Dharmakīrti and their successors. It is the reflexivist's proposal

that interests us here for the promising way in which it accounts for the character of mental states in terms of features that form an integral part of their structure (such as, for instance, the principle of reflexivity which states that essentially consciousness consists in conscious mental states being implicitly self-aware). Proponents of Buddhist reflexivism claim that consciousness is best understood as a continuum of self-aware experiences that are dissociated both in terms of their phenomenal content and their phenomenal character (Dreyfus 2011: 123; Coseru 2012: ch 8). Additional proposals range from memory-based accounts (Thompson 2011) to enactivist and performative accounts of self-awareness (MacKenzie 2011) that argue for some minimal self as the pre-linguistic structure of lived experience.

III. Mineness without the Self

It is more likely, however, that the early Buddhist tradition is characterized primarily by an attempt to break free both from the speculative notion of an ultimate, immutable and eternal self and, at the same time, from the notion of a concrete psychological or biographical self (Hulin 1978: 43). As I have argued elsewhere (Coseru 2009), the frequent use of indexicals such as 'I' (*ahaṃ*) and 'mine' (*mama*) should not be taken as indicative of the view that the Buddha accepts the conventional reality of persons. Indeed, later Buddhist traditions develop specific notions, such as that of mind-stream, life-continuum mind, and repository consciousness (*citta-santāna*, *bhavaṅga-citta*, and *ālaya-vijñāna*, respectively) precisely in order to avoid not only the trappings of metaphysical notions of the self but also the view that such notions might have a fixed referent.⁵ The denial of a permanent self, as well as the refusal to treat persons as referring to anything real and permanent, does not, however, extend to consciousness, whose temporal and horizon structures make possible reflective or introspective thought.

The centrality of the no-self doctrine in Buddhist thought is explained on the basis of its pragmatic role in guiding the adept on the path to enlightenment. Furthermore, the no-self doctrine provides a justification for treating endurance,

independence, and self-subsistence as neither desirable nor attainable, but rather as what they are: mistaken notions resulting from the habitual tendency to construct a substantive identity from a stream of psychophysical phenomena. Now, how exactly a person without a self lives a good and meaningful life, and makes progress along the path to awakening is, of course, deliciously puzzling.

This Buddhist claim that our sense of self is imputed and our attribution of inherent existence to it habitually acquired,⁶ is not that different, of course, from Hume's claim that a self is never apprehended in the mental series.⁷ The Buddhist, much like Hume, is a bundle theorist, the first such theorist. The routine misapprehension of the discrete phenomena of experience as a self leads to a dualistic perspective: things appear and are categorized as either objective (thus external, but empirically accessible) or as subjective (thus internal, and immediately accessible to consciousness). Puzzled by this dualistic outlook, we cope by constructing a conception of the self as the permanent locus of experience.

What we are left with, then, is the picture of a constantly changing world of sensory phenomena in which there are no independent entities, only textures or clusters of sensory impressions that constitute the content of conscious awareness. In this fluctuating world of minimally sensory awareness entities exist only as aggregated phenomena of experience. But this phenomenality is not simply the experiential counterpart of corresponding physical objects and functions, for what lies outside the sphere of perception is always already constituted by the dynamic structures of our cognitive architecture.⁸ The world *as perceived* is brought into existence through the activity of the senses and goes out of existence with the cessation of sensory activity. This phenomenal realm is not an objective world that exists over and above its intersubjective apprehension, for such a world, devoid of any reference to subjects of experience, is not within the purview of empirical awareness.

Now, Buddhist Abhidharma philosophers do not deny the reality of the constitutive elements of existence and/or

experience (*dharmas*). Rather, the suggestion is simply that we cannot properly discern between the phenomenal character and content of experience if consciousness is not taken to have a specific kind of structure. That structure or schema is most apparent in the dual nature of empirical awareness: indeed, the body, as an instrument (*karana*) of perceptual activity, is both the medium of contact with the world *and* the world with which it comes in contact.

As I have argued elsewhere (Coseru 2012: ch. 3), such a view finds an interesting parallel in Husserl's account of the paradoxical nature of the body as revealed through phenomenological reduction. For Husserl, phenomenological reduction (*epoché*)—essentially a method of bracketing ontological assumptions about the natural world in order to examine the intentional structures of consciousness—reveals the two-fold appearance of the body, first as a biological entity (*Körper*) connected to the continuum of life, and second as a medium for the expression of life (*Leib*). The body is thus the locus of lived experience and, as such, has the capacity for both exploration and receptivity. This intuition about the dual nature of embodied awareness (as locus of lived experience) discloses a world of lived experience whose boundaries are not fixed but constantly shifting in relation to the desires, actions, and attitudes of an agent (Husserl 1970: Part III: A). The world or, better still, the environment that I inhabit is not just a structured domain of causally nested objects and relations but also a meaningful world of experience.

The question that both Buddhist philosophers and contemporary philosophers interested in phenomenal consciousness must address is whether intentional experiences—of the sort that disclose a world as pre-reflectively but meaningfully given—presuppose that consciousness itself, as the disclosing medium, is a knowable object. My claim is that we cannot answer this question in the affirmative: consciousness is not diachronically (or inferentially) known by a subsequent instance of cognitive awareness but rather is inherently self-aware, even if only minimally so. Though we may intend a previous moment of conscious awareness in introspection, this retrospective

apprehension of consciousness as an object cannot be its essential feature.

Presence and *reflexivity* capture at the most basic level what it is like to be in a world whose boundaries are not fixed but constantly changing as the stream of consciousness follows its course. As one of the earliest proponents of what has come to be known as the active perception theory, Merleau-Ponty writes, “I cannot understand the function of living body,—except by enacting it myself” for “my body appears to me as an attitude with a view to a certain actual or possible task” (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 87, 114). What is the best or most effective way of merging this phenomenological account of temporality and disclosure with the subject of experience, the elusive domain where experience presumably takes place?

In a recent take on the debate over whether presence is basic and effortless, a kind of readiness-to-hand, or, on the contrary, something that has to be achieved, making explicit what was hitherto unthought and thus absent, Alva Noë (2012: 10) writes: “... presence does not come for free. We achieve presence. We act it out... [T]his does not mean that our attitude is that of a stranger in a strange land, and that we must always strive to bring the world into focus.” Noë faults existential phenomenologists like Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Hubert Dreyfus for presenting us with a distorted picture of presence. According to one version of this picture, presence stands for deliberate and effortful engagement with the world, and thus for thoughtful as opposed to unthinking attunement. Against the prevailing legacies of intellectualism and empiricism, what is sought is not thematized thought but the unthematized, absorbed coping of the readiness-to-hand of the door knob, the remote control or any other piece of equipment. Noë thinks something has gone amiss here: the problem is not that absence better captures the implicit character of our habitual practices but rather that the ways of presence have not been properly explored.

Now, if experience is a kind of presenting, the contents of which become available for interpretation and understanding only on a subsequent move, then Noë is not entirely right that

presence does not come for free. If, on the other hand, conscious experience is the product of a long and complex process of skill acquisition that opens up to a domain of objects, situations, and events (rather than, say, to a world simpliciter), then there is no pristine encounter and our attitude can never be that “of a stranger in a strange land.”

Recall the early account I gave of what it might be like to be a traveller to an unfamiliar destination. First of all, no destination, no matter how faraway and exotic, is upon arrival entirely unfamiliar. It cannot be, for the journey itself is an opening toward, and getting accustomed to, the unexpected. Journeying to a distant land is a lot like dwelling in anticipation for the arrival of an unknown guest: it alters the perception of one’s surroundings and it invites circumspection. We are strangers in a strange land every time we let this body that is better informed, indeed, than we are about its dispositions and its surroundings fill us in about what is going on. One must choose one’s examples carefully if one wants to get presence right.

Noë uses the phenomenon of reading to make his case that presence is a kind of achievement. We don’t pay attention to words and letters when we read. Rather, what makes reading possible is the possession of a complicated set of skills, including but not limited to, such as the capacity to recognize symbols, to interpret, remember and anticipate. Reading takes place in a language the cultural and communicational norms of which affect how and what one reads, and what for. And while the phenomenon of reading provides a good illustration of how Noë wants us to think of presence, it does little to advance the case that we can never be strangers in a strange land, and that experience can never disclose a wholly unfamiliar world. But travelling is not like reading, unless one takes travelling to be a slow progression through the book of life. At most it is like reading in a foreign language one is yet to master fully. There are always blocks and slippages, half-meanings and guesses. Even in one’s native tongue reading is not like reading in this high achieving sort of way that Noë has in mind. Ask any poet.

IV. Conclusion: Co-constitutive Emergence

Can Buddhist reductionism about persons be reconciled with an analysis of the phenomenal character of consciousness? From a philosophical standpoint, the progressive move towards an analysis of consciousness in terms of its ineliminable phenomenological features championed by thinkers like Dignāga, Dharmakīrti and their successors, can be conceivably claimed as an effort at effecting precisely such reconciliation. That we must and should identify those irreducible elements of experience (sensations, volitions, dispositions, patterns of habituation, etc) that any analysis of phenomenal consciousness can reveal does not mean, however, that there could be unintended consequences to this process of reductive analysis. Although we may debate whether or not the Buddhist phenomenological project is informed by certain metaphysical assumptions about the nature of reality, specifically the assumption that the entities that populate our world do not endure for any length of time, there is no denying that momentariness is taken not only as a principle of the nature of reality, but also (and more significantly) of cognitive awareness itself. The awareness that arises in conjunction with the activity of a given perception, thought or desire is itself impermanent and momentary: visual awareness and visual object, for instance, are both events within a mental stream of continuing relations. The question that Buddhist philosophers confront is precisely what accounts for the sense of presence that accompanies these cognitive series. In other words, if discrete, episodic cognitive events are all that constitutes the mental domain, how does appropriation and grasping, for instance, occur? I have in mind here specifically the basic mode of givenness of our experience. Some causal account is on offer. But the causal account, it seems, gives only an incomplete picture of the mental, for even as the Sanskrit term for cognitive awareness, *vijñāna*, conveys the sense of differentiation and discernment, it is not exactly clear how such discernment also sorts between the pre-reflective and reflective aspects of experience. Indeed, consciousness is not merely a faculty for discerning and sorting through the constitutive elements of experience, but

is itself an event in a series of interdependent causal and conditional factors. Thus, while the generic Buddhist viewpoint is that there is no such thing as a self as the agent of experience, for at least one group of Buddhists, generally associated with the logico-epistemological school of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, an adequate account of phenomenal consciousness cannot dispense with a minimal sense of presence.

These Buddhist epistemologists are concerned, much like Brentano, Husserl, and many contemporary philosophers working on phenomenal consciousness, not with how things, including mental states, are judged to be (without any reference to their mode of presentation) but with how things show up to us, with the phenomena of experience just as they appear to us before we set out to reflect and theorize about them. The picture they present roughly corresponds to what some have termed non-reductive “one-level theories of consciousness”: that is, theories which propose that consciousness is essentially a matter of having or being an awareness of a world that does not require a prior (representational) awareness of our own mental states.⁹

If experience is perspectively given, it has both phenomenal salience and epistemological grounding. Reflexivism, thus, serves as a grounding principle, enabling the intentional and subjective aspects of experience to emerge co-constitutively and simultaneously. Can such a principle provide enough metaphysical support for I-thoughts of the sort “I am in pain,” given the requirement of a criterion for individuating such thoughts in the mental stream? Do such self-ascriptions require independent criteria for individuating streams of subjectivity or can they occur solely on the basis of features that are intrinsic to each mental state?

If reflexivity has a distinctive character, a specific givenness or for-me-ness, then mis-ascriptions are unintelligible if we assume that thought is transparent with regard to its occurrent for-me-ness. This first-personal givenness of experience is unmistakable. Indeed, mental states do not just arise in a mental stream: rather, they arise as having a distinctive intentional content and phenomenal character. Reflexivism then becomes a statement about the self-presentational character of

mental states: there are simply no such generic experiences of seeing or judging a particular state of affairs. Rather, there is experiential or reflexive awareness of occurrent perceptual or conceptual mental states. To postulate a basis for reflexivity outside the structure of experience is to mistakenly assume that experience is an emergent property of something that, while not itself experiential, has the functional organization to support such experiential self-ascriptions.

We do strive to bring the world into focus and we do ourselves show up in an effortful way: by walking, turning, and adjusting our posture and gaze. But it is this implicit and non-reflective awareness that lets new elements effortlessly enter our horizon while others fade away. It may seem natural to think of experience in representational terms or in terms of relations of logical entailment. However, all too often such accounts of experience obscure the fact that the operations of representation and logical entailment are not primitive. Experience is not about representing facts or establishing logical and metaphysical truths, but about acquiring, perfecting, and transmitting practical knowledge and skills.

NOTES

1. These are the so-called five *skandhas*, known as the aggregates of existence and/or experience. For details, see Coseru (2012 ch. 3).
2. Extensive discussions of these classical debates are found in Williams (1998), Garfield (2006), Dreyfus (2007), MacKenzie (2007), Kellner (2010, 2011), Chadha (2011), Arnold (2010), Coseru (2012), and Ganeri (2012).
3. This is a claim principally made by Prinz (2011).
4. For Vasubandhu's discussion of *smiti* see the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* II 24.5 (in Shastri 1970: 187). See also Jaini (2001) and Gethin (1998, 2011) for detailed discussions of the phenomenology of *smiti*.
5. Extensive critiques of the attempt to find support in the canonical literature for the existence of a higher self, perhaps equated with consciousness, are found in Warder (1970), Collins (1982), Kalupahana (1987), Harvey (1995), and De Silva (2005). Vasubandhu's *Pudgala-prativedha-prakarāṇa* ("Treatise on the Negation of the Person") provides one of most detailed Buddhist critiques of the personalist view.
6. Cf. Saṃyutta Nikāya IV, 102 (Feer 1975-2006); Majjhima Nikāya I, 130 (Chalmers 1994).

7. The parallelism between the Buddhist and Humean reductive analyses of the self is explored at some length in Giles (1993), Tillemans (1996), and Kapstein (2001).
8. It is this analysis of the content of experience that leads the ābhīdharmikas to the notion of ‘cognitive aspects’ (*ākāra*), which represent the particular mode of presentation of the contents of one’s experience. For an account of the aspectual nature of cognition, specifically of perception, in the Abhidharma literature, see Dhammajoti (2007).
9. See Thomasson (2008). One level-theories of consciousness oppose higher order thought theories, which postulate that conscious of phenomenal states are essentially those states of which we are immediately aware.

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