

PPR Symposium on *Attention, Not Self*

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1 | Précis

This book arose out of my conviction that Buddhist philosophy of mind in the Pāli philosophical tradition is of immense potential interest to contemporary research in philosophy. In saying this I am merely echoing a sentiment to which voice was first given by the illustrious philosopher George Herbert Mead, who wrote in his 1913 book *Quests Old and New* that this “analysis of mind as normally known must be admitted to be one of the acutest that has ever been thought out” (Mead 1913, p. vii–viii), adding that “the most elaborate study of man which the East has ever produced cannot be without interest to us in the West” (Mead 1913, p. 95–6). He formed this impression because he had been able to read a new translation, Shwe Zan Aung’s *The Compendium of Philosophy*, published in 1910. *The Compendium of Philosophy* is a translation of the *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, Anuruddha’s 10th century synopsis of the Theravāda philosophy. Anuruddha attempts to summarise the multifaceted ideas of the 5th century philosopher Buddhaghosa, whose work is richly innovative and fascinating in its detail and complexity.

Perhaps of greatest immediate value to Mead was Aung’s own eighty page “Introductory Essay,” in which he tried, for the first time in English, to give a clear and comprehensive description of the overall contours and architecture of the theory. In the years that followed there have been several further attempts to bring out the hidden philosophical riches of this philosophy (including Johansson 1979, Kalupahana 1987, Harvey 1995, and Karunadasa 2010). Yet Mead had already, on behalf of Aung, given the reasons as to why the task was far from easy, for, he says, “unfortunately, however, [the theory] is so overlaid with technicalities as to deter all but the most stout-hearted, unless they are linguistic specialists, and even then the difficulty of finding correct equivalents in modern terms is very great” (Mead 1913, p. 75–6). Indeed, as Mead says, “Mr. Aung again and again insists that philology will not help us to the living meanings of terms which have long departed from their original significance, and points out many fundamental inaccuracies in current Occidental translations” (Meade 1913, p. 97). One motivation for writing this book was that it seemed to me that recent progress in cognitive psychology and philosophy of mind had put us in a position where there is a realistic possibility that, for the first time, the complex technical vocabulary of Buddhaghosa’s philosophy of

mind could be given an interpretation, based not on reading off dictionary definitions of the terms used, as philologists have been prone to do, but finding theoretical equivalents with at least similar functional roles.

I was led to this Pāli theory also through a conviction that it is significantly different from any philosophy of mind to be found in the Sanskrit philosophical literature. Separated as they were, both linguistically and geographically, from the Sanskrit cosmopolis, the Pāli philosophers from Buddhaghosa onwards developed a philosophy of mind with strikingly original theoretical elements. They were not constrained, as were their colleagues in India, to use Buddhist theory to argue against rival Hindu and Jaina accounts of the mind. Such was the case with the Sanskrit Abhidharma thinker who has received the most scholarly attention, Vasubandhu. Yet Vasubandhu's philosophy contains many distinctive features—including a mereological reductionist and presentist metaphysics—some at least of which can be explained by the very different intellectual context in which he wrote. Whole swathes of the Pāli theory are simply absent in Vasubandhu's work, and, on the other hand, the more idealistic strands in his analysis have no counterpart in Pāli theory. Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* served, indeed, as a key source-text in a contemporary work that launched a new cross-cultural and cosmopolitan approach to working with Buddhist theory, *The Embodied Mind* of Francisco Varela, Eleanor Rosch and Evan Thompson, which was published in 1991. More recently philosophers like Mark Siderits have found affinities between Vasubandhu and Parfit's reductionist theory of persons (Siderits 2003), while Monima Chadha has levered the more radical elements in Vasubandhu to develop an account of mind that rejects even ownership in respect of mental states (Chadha 2020). I, however, did not find either of these claims affirmed in the Pāli theory.

Two features of that analysis struck me as of especial interest. First, there is a clear and recurring rejection of a specific account of the self. The false and rejected account is that the self is a sort of CEO, an inner executive controller, the source of willed directives and the governor of the mind. I had just published a book in which I defended a quite different conception of self, based on the underlying idea that selfhood consists in experiential and normative ownership (Ganeri 2012), and the Pāli Buddhist rejection of the CEO model struck me as both exactly right and in tune with much contemporary work in cognitive science and philosophy of mind. Second, and following on from the first point, it seemed to me that the Pāli theorists did not simply leave it at that but instead proposed a quite different model of the control mechanisms in cognition. Central to their entire way of thinking is the insight that attention performs a variety of fundamental executive functions within the mind. Aung had already seen this, commenting that “the selective or co-ordinating activity of attention (*manasikāra*) may be aroused from within or from without, and, in the present case, spontaneously (i.e. without any volitional effort on one's own part or on the part of another) from without by the object itself. And it is directed to this one object. It is the *alpha* and *omega* of an act of consciousness” (Aung 1910, p. 17). The fact that Pāli theory puts attention at the heart of its philosophy of consciousness is extremely interesting, and it also resonated, for me, with a very rapid growth of interest in the philosophy of attention over the last decade. Thus, the title of the book, *Attention, Not Self*, was meant to summarize the two principal poles around which Buddhaghosa's Buddhist theory of mind revolves.

I should highlight one particular feature of my approach to the Pāli Buddhist literature. Although philosophy was written in Pāli from the time of the Niyāka in, approximately, the 3rd century BCE right up and through the 19th century CE, contemporary scholars have tended to concentrate on the earliest stratum, and the accounts they provide of key theoretical vocabulary come from these very early writings. The 5th century philosopher Buddhaghosa is famous for having lent to those multifaceted writings a much greater degree of order, clarity and systematicity. In the course of doing so there is no doubt that Buddhaghosa introduced many innovations, that he was no *mere* “commentator” on

the earlier literature. It is reasonably fair to say that he was to the later tradition what Aristotle was to the history of philosophy in Europe, a towering presence through whose work the theory was invariably understood. The aspect of my own approach that I want to highlight concerns my selection of texts within the corpus of Buddhaghosa's extensive output. Most writers on Buddhaghosa keep to the manual he wrote, the *Visuddhimagga* or "Path of Purification" (hereafter, *Path*). It is an orderly, and fairly simple, summary of the Buddhist path, written as a training manual for novitiates into the monastic order. It is also, for that very reason, comparatively conservative in its theoretical claims. The works that I mostly drew on for this book, by contrast, were his two great "commentaries", the *Sammoha-vinodanī*, or "Dispeller of Delusion" (hereafter, *Dispeller*), and the *Atthasālinī*, or "Fount of Meaning" (hereafter, *Fount*). Buddhaghosa permitted himself a far greater degree of theoretical freedom in these works, and it is within their pages that one finds him at his theoretically most innovative.

I belabour these points in order to emphasise that it would be a mistake to criticise me either on the grounds that my interpretation of the Pāli theoretical terminology does not agree with the use of the terms in the Nikāya, or on the grounds that I ignore the normative and soteriological ambitions of Buddhaghosa as they form part of the *Visuddhimagga*. In writing a book specifically about Buddhaghosa's philosophy of mind, I was considerably aided by the fact that Buddhaghosa himself maintains that there is a structure which is common to every conscious mental episode, the constituents of which are called *sabba-citta-sādhāraṇa*, meaning, as Aung puts it, that they are "common to every class or state of consciousness, or every separate act of mind or thought" (Aung 1910, p. 12). In particular then, this permitted me to finesse issues to do with the effect of meditation on the conscious mind, for the structure I was interested in is present as much in minds uninfluenced by meditation as in the minds of skilled meditators.

So the plan of the book goes as follows. I begin by rehearsing the arguments against the CEO model of the self, and introducing a standpoint one might assume in respect of the philosophy of mind which I called "Attentionalism." Attentionalism is the strategy of seeking, wherever possible, to explain aspects and features of mind in an attention-oriented manner. I then turn to the problem which Aung had highlighted, that of giving philosophically informed analyses of key Pāli terms. If one wishes to identify the correct theoretical term in Pāli philosophy of mind for "consciousness", for example, there is no point just looking it up in a dictionary. What one has to do is to spell out the key functional roles of consciousness, and then discover which Pāli theoretical term or terms refers to an item performing those roles. I go on to try to bring out some of the distinctive features of this theory of mind, and suggest, in particular, that it could offer a way out of the dilemma that is at the heart of the Dreyfus-McDowell debate about the content of perceptual experience. For, in this theory, there is a quasi-conceptual aspect (*saññā*) of every experiential episode, but not one that is undermined by Dreyfus' arguments about expertise, skill and absorbed coping.

I move on to discuss the epistemic role of attention. One of the more startling claims made by the later Pāli theorists is that attention is itself a way of acquiring knowledge. This is one area where their difference from the Sanskrit tradition is particularly evident. In the Sanskrit tradition, ways of acquiring knowledge are called *pramāṇas*, and the philosophers spend a great deal of time identifying and classifying them. Typically, perception, inference, and testimony, along sometimes with abductive or "controversial" reasoning and some more *recherché* suggestions, are identified. Nowhere, however, does a Sanskrit philosopher consider that attention might be a *pramāṇa* (this is my way of putting the Pāli claim; they do not themselves use the term). I took my cue from their claim that attention performs two distinct roles in perceptual experience (corresponding to what they term *manasikāra* and *ekaggatā*), and levered that claim to construct an account of attentional justification.

A very intriguing, and I think important, feature of the work of these philosophers is that they draw a distinction between two sorts of account one might give of the mind. One might describe the mind at the level of conscious experience and provide a constitutive account of conscious experience, including the role of conscious attention within it. Alternatively one might provide a causal-psychological account of the mind, that is, of the processes and mechanisms that have conscious states as their output. In providing a description of the second sort, as well as of the first, Buddhaghosa was at his most original, there being no real equivalent in the earlier literature (though some scholars have claimed to find faint traces). His theory is exceptional, and he illustrated it with three very powerful metaphors, of a falling mango, of a spider and its web, and of a palace (Ganeri 2017, p. 183 ff.). I claimed to find in his descriptions anticipations of such contemporary ideas as working memory, subliminal seeing, three stages of vision, and cross-modal integration. It is here, especially, that I believe cognitive psychology enables us finally to decipher the “living meanings” of Pāli theoretical terminology.

If the first three parts of the book had attempted, as accurately as possible, to accomplish the task of answering Aung’s challenge, Parts IV and V represent a “cosmopolitan” turn. Beginning with chapter 12 I sought to think *with* the theory and to develop it in ways that the Pāli Buddhists philosophers themselves had not done. First of all, assuming the standpoint of an Attentionalist, I argued that both episodic memory and empathy can be given an attention-theoretic interpretation. I found hints and suggestions of these claims in the writings of Buddhaghosa, but certainly do not ascribe my speculations to him. Yet he was himself a creative innovator with respect to the earlier literature, and he encouraged others to adopt the same attitude; so I felt that there was textual warrant for the approach, which was to see how far Attentionalism could go. Regarding episodic memory I took upon myself the task of demonstrating that one can provide a robust account which is compatible with the core Buddhist rejection of the CEO model. With respect to empathy I believe I offered a new analysis, distinct from the three analyses currently on the market, theory-theory, simulation, and experiential access. Then I constructed new accounts of persons, personal identity, intersubjectivity, and self-regarding emotions, drawing inspiration more from Frankfurt and Schechtman than from Parfit. I asked myself what, from the perspective thus far being developed, should one say about the idea of a person as a living being and an evaluative, meaning-seeking being. I found overlaps and resonances, but also contrasts, with the enactivism of *The Embodied Mind* (Ganeri 2017, p. 307–10). In the Postscript, entitled “Philosophy without borders,” I explained why, in this second phase of the book, the methodology was one of cosmopolitan philosophy, drawing on ideas and methods in different intellectual cultures to develop new theories and ideas.

With hindsight, and the benefit of many very insightful reviewer- and commentator- reactions, I see that I should have made it clearer which parts of the book were engaged in the project of seeking to solve Aung’s challenge, that is, to provide philosophically accurate interpretations of key Pāli theoretical concepts and claims, and which parts were engaged in the cosmopolitan project of taking the insights of the theory and running with them (I have done so in the new paperback edition). I should also have clarified how this book fitted in with the overall arc of my research in the philosophy of self, specifically that it is not the case that I now think there is no such thing as the self, but rather only that I agree with Buddhaghosa and his ilk that there is no CEO self. I have no way to know what he would have made about a range of more recent proposals concerning selfhood, because they were not live options for him and he said nothing about them. So, contra Chadha (2019, p. 353), his rejection of what he uses an agentive noun to refer to as an “experiencer” (*bhoktṛ*; *kartṛ*) implies only a rejection of the agent self, self as irreducible *agent* of experiencing, and says nothing about *subjects* of experience. I see no philosophical contradiction between Attentionalism and endorsement of, for example, certain phenomenological conceptions of selfhood. This, indeed, is part of the subject matter of my new book, *Virtual Subjects, Fugitive Selves* (Oxford, 2020).

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1 | REPLIES

Jennings.

With her characteristic precision and acuity, Carolyn Jennings goes straight to the heart of the matter, raising a question for each of the two principal poles around which the book revolves, attention and self. I said that attention performs two roles in conscious experience. The claim is one I trace back to Buddhaghosa, who uses the terms *manasikāra* and *ekaggatā* for the two roles, and he explicitly makes both necessary concomitants in any experiential episode. Aung, as I said in the *précis*, mentioned only the first of these, and Jennings wonders what justifies describing the second as a role of attention too. To answer this we must look again at Buddhaghosa's definitions. He defines *manasikāra* saying, "It has the characteristic of driving associated states towards an object, the function of joining associated states to an object, the manifestation of facing an object. It is included in the aggregate of constructing activities, and should be regarded as the charioteer of associated states because it regulates an object" (*Path*, p. 466 [xiv.152]). His definition of *ekaggatā* is that "It is the centring (*ādāna*) of consciousness and concomitants equally and correctly on a single object; placing (*ṭhapananti*) is what is meant. So it is the state in virtue of which consciousness and its concomitants remain equally and correctly on a single intentional object, undistracted and unscattered—that should also be understood as concentrating (*samādhi*). Concentration (*samādhi*) has non-distraction as its characteristic. Its function is to eliminate distraction. It is manifested as non-wavering" (*Path*, p. 84–5 [iii.3, 4]). I relate this distinction to the distinction between attractor-attenuation ("driving towards") and distractor-elimination ("eliminate distraction"). Are we entitled, though, to describe distractor-elimination as a role of attention? Well, William James thought so, saying "Attention ... is a condition that has a real opposite in the confused, dazed, scatterbrained state which the French call *distraktion*, and *Zerstreuung* in German" (James 1891, p. 382). I adapted John Campbell's example of an Ishihara colour test to illustrate the point (Ganeri 2017, p. 121). In an Ishihara colour test for colour vision, a numeral five is made up from green blobs against a background of red blobs, all of which randomly vary in every respect other than hue. If the task is to make the numeral five the object of awareness, the red blobs

function in the role of distractors, and, when they are eliminated, what one needs to do is to single out the relevant property of the green blobs. In this way “driving the mind towards” relevant features and preventing the mind from being distracted by irrelevant features are the two roles of attention in conscious experience.

Jennings own view, which she has described in a wonderful new book, *The Attending Mind* (Jennings 2020), is like mine in seeing a close conceptual connection between attention and self, but she thinks that one can derive a robust conception of the CEO self from considerations to do with attention. She says, “in my own view, the self is a unified emergent dynamical system that directs attention, and we should see it as having independent metaphysical status due to powers of attention we only get through the emergence of this system.” Observing that there is another self-like concept in the Pāli materials, namely *citta*, she wonders why one cannot simply identify *citta* with this self. Now, as I understand them, the Buddhists whose work I am relying on have nothing against there being complex cognitive systems, especially if they are dynamic and emergent. The further claim they would have trouble with is that such systems have “independent metaphysical status”. If this means that the Jennings self is committed to agent causalism, the view that “when an intelligent agent, A, intentionally performs a so-called ‘basic’ action, such as raising his arm, A is literally the cause of a certain occurrence” (Lowe 2008, p. 162), and so with the self-as-system being a cause which is not itself caused, then they will reject it as being in conflict with the “dependent origination” of everything. I thus agree that *citta* shares some of the functional properties of the Jennings self, but the disagreement over metaphysical status remains. Another way to see this is to observe that *citta* is not in itself responsible for active attention. The leading metaphor used to illustrate the functional role of *citta* is that of a town watch-man: “Just as when a town watch-man sits at the crossroads in the middle of the town and records people as they come thus, “This is a resident, this is a visitor,” so should [the function of *citta*] be understood” (Fount 112). If this says that what *citta* does is to take note of each newcomer in the five senses, then that is surely a passive, not an active, role.

Das.

I found Nilanjan Das’s framing of the issues very helpful and insightful. I mentioned in my *précis* that part of my motivation in writing this book was a conviction that the Abhidhamma of Pāli Theravāda authors beginning with Buddhaghosa was interestingly different from the Sanskrit Abhidharma of philosophers like Vasubandhu. Historically, I think that this has been overlooked for two reasons. One is that Theravāda has very much remained the preserve of philology, philosophers, for the reason mentioned by Mead and Aung, tending to steer clear. The second has been a certain tendency to assume that Vasubandhu can be taken as exemplary of Abhidharma, there being therefore no need to wrestle with the complexities (and, certainly, obscurities) of the Pāli commentarial tradition. Yet one way in which Vasubandhu differs very sharply is in overall philosophical orientation. He is, we might say, a metaphysician: he is deeply engaged in debates about the metaphysical nature of self and external world. Part of the reason for this, no doubt, is that the metaphysical orientation was that of his interlocutors, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist. Pāli philosophy of mind, I contend, does not share this metaphysical orientation. Its primary motivation is grounded, rather, in what can loosely be called a cognitive orientation, an analysis of the structure of experience.

This is not to deny that Buddhaghosa does have metaphysical commitments, but I am very hesitant when it comes to talking about “the background metaphysical commitments he shares with other Buddhists.” And, in fact, whatever Buddhaghosa’s metaphysical commitments are, I think it is a mistake to treat them as “background”. Rather, I see those commitments as *following from* the cognitive

orientation. In other words, he would endorse a position in the methodology of metaphysics that is increasingly coming to be described as “cognitive metaphysics,” the doctrine that “specific metaphysical issues—or the enterprise of metaphysics in general—can profit from the findings of cognitive science” (Goldman & McLaughlin 2019, p. 1). Das refers us to what he calls *The Primacy Thesis*, the thesis that “whenever there is a conflict between one of our best metaphysical theories and a proposed theory in epistemology or philosophy of mind, we should reject the latter.” His argument is that Buddhaghosa’s account of conscious experience is in tension with his “background” metaphysical commitments, and, given the truth of the Primacy Thesis, he concludes that that account is the one under pressure. Das considers the option of rejecting the Primacy Thesis, but this will not be a move Buddhaghosa needs to make. For, as a cognitive metaphysician, he will deny that conflicts of the sort in question arise, because the best metaphysical theories *are* ones which are informed by the best cognitive science. So, being a conditional with a false antecedent, the Primacy Thesis is trivially true for a cognitive metaphysician like Buddhaghosa.

The “background” metaphysical commitments to which Das refers seem to be ones which are in play among some (not all) schools of Sanskrit Buddhism, perhaps including that of Vasubandhu in his Abhidharmic period. To give one striking example of a point of divergence between them: Buddhaghosa explicitly endorses the concept of the “specious present”, a drawn-out time-interval of ongoing awareness. To quote William James again, the specious present is “the short duration...of which we are immediately and incessantly sensible” (James 1891, p. 609). Buddhaghosa says, “That which was said in the Commentary, namely that the extended present is to be shown by the length of *javana*, was well said” (Fount p. 421). Many of the difficulties which follow from Vasubandhu’s doctrine of momentariness, including those highlighted by Das, simply do not arise for the Pāli school as a result. Something similar can be said of another of Vasubandhu’s metaphysical doctrines, that the basic constituents of reality (*dharma*) are ontologically simple and impartite. This claim serves as a premise in Vasubandhu’s argument in defence of his doctrine of momentariness, yet there is little evidence of it in Buddhaghosa. Das concedes that Theravādins do not accept that it holds of the material world, and so he speaks of “the Theravādins’ oddly restricted doctrine of momentariness”. Yet, as I have just shown, they don’t think it holds of the mental either. It was, I speculate, a metaphysical claim designed to put as much distance as possible between Sanskrit Buddhists and their non-Buddhist rivals in the Sanskrit cosmopolis.

Das’s discussion of the motivations that lead Dignāga and Dharmakīrti to Content Non-Conceptualism is, again, very insightful and informative. The framework in play is one of a division, among the characteristics of the basic constituents of reality, between own-characteristics (*svalakṣaṇa*) and common-characteristics (*sāmānya-lakṣaṇa*), which, it is true, I ventured in another book to interpret by appeal to a metaphysics of tropes (Ganeri 2001) (I detected a slight reservation in Das about this, and would have liked to hear more, if indeed he thinks this is a mistake). They use this framework to build an epistemology in which there are two epistemically relevant cognitive capacities, “perception” (*pratyakṣa*) and “inference” (*anumāna*), each of which is restricted to one domain of characteristics. I must confess that I am very uncertain how much of this framework can be read back into the Theravāda philosophy of Buddhaghosa, though I acknowledge that key elements are already present in Vasubandhu. I was at some pains to point out, in the book, that the notion of *saññā*, which serves as the foundation of Buddhaghosa’s rejection of Content Non-Conceptualism, is really quite different from Dignāga’s notion of *kalpanā*, a term that is usually translated as “concept”, appropriately enough since the key role of *kalpanā* is in the context of inferential reasoning. *Saññā* refers to a way of tagging or labelling of an object as a way of identifying it, and Buddhaghosa twice says that even animals are capable of this. He says that “the label-use of an ordinary man is an empty fist because of producing pain through [disappointed] desire or as a forest deer [with a scarecrow] because

of grasping the mark incorrectly (*Dispeller* p. 80); and, again, that labelling is “an objective field in whatever way that appears, like the perception that arises in fawns that see scarecrows as men” (*Fount* p. 111). So *saññā*, qua labelling, has correctness conditions, but if this cognitive capacity is present even in young deer then it is not itself a full-blown conceptual capacity. The quasi-conceptual skill most emphasised is that of recognising again an object seen before but not tracked along a continuous spatio-temporal path, a skill humans share with animals and one that is clearly subject to norms of success or failure.

Thompson.

Let me return to Aung’s challenge (Aung 1910). Aung complained that Western translators and philologists simply had not understood the texts they were translating and commenting on, because they were much too literal in their rendering of a terminology that was theoretical, not colloquial (Schopenhauer famously made a similar complaint about the translations then existing of the Upaniṣads: “If I add to this the impression which the translations of Sanskrit works by European scholars, with very few exceptions, produce on my mind, I cannot resist a certain suspicion that our Sanskrit scholars do not understand their texts much better than the higher class of schoolboys their Greek.” (Schopenhauer 2001, p. 426)). In *Attention, Not Self* my approach was to take the Pāli theoretical terminology, analyse the functional role of the concept designated in its theoretical context, and then provide an English term or phrase, drawn from contemporary theory, which designates an approximately similar functional role. In order to make explicit my divergence from the philological approach, I contrasted what I called “philological renderings” with what I labeled “inter-theoretic identities”. I agree with Thompson that the phrase “inter-theoretic identity” does not quite capture the intention, for if one takes literally the suggestion that an identity is involved there ought to be a possibility of back-translation. All I meant, however, is that my translations were semantically-, not lexically-, driven ones. Let us take as an example the term *javana*. Here is what Aung has to say: “This is one of the most important terms, and I think I had better strike at the root of the matter. The term is derived from the root *ju*, ‘to be swift,’ or ‘to go.’ But Warren’s literal renderings, ‘swiftness’ and ‘swiftnesses’, have, for us Buddhists *no meaning whatever*. What philosophical significance, then, can the other alternative—‘to go’—have? In Pāli roots or words implying a going often mean also a knowing. Knowing is considered a sort of mental going ... Primarily, it denotes a function (*kicca*), and only secondarily a functional state of consciousness (*kiccavanta*). Hitherto I had used ‘cognition’ to express the former, ‘cognitive’ to denote the latter. That *javana*-function lasts seven moments, while others may be briefer, shows that the idea of swiftness is not essential ... In the absence of any English word capable of expressing what *javana* imports for Buddhist psychology, I had fallen back on a term so elastic and untechnical as ‘cognition.’” (Aung 1910, p. 247–9).

Under the influence of Wundt’s psychology some early translators, including C.A.F. Rhys Davis, rendered the term as ‘apperception’, but even she had to concede that “I have spent many hours over *javana*, and am content to throw ‘apperception’ overboard for a better term, or for *javana*, untranslated and as easy to pronounce as our own ‘javelin.’ It suffices to remember that it is the mental aspect or parallel of that moment in nerve-process, when central function is about to become efferent activity or ‘innervation’” (in Aung 1910, p. 249 fn.). In *Attention, Not Self* I carefully examined the functional role of the cognitive process in question, as described in many passages, and the conclusion I came to is that what it best corresponds to in contemporary theory is the concept of working memory (note the reference to the “magic number” of working memory, the number seven; (Miller 1956)). So my rendering was intended to signal that this is not a straight translation of term but an attempt to capture

what the term is actually doing in the theory. If even philologists like Rhys Davis concede that leaving the term untranslated is better than going with its dictionary definition, then I think my policy was a safe enough one to adopt.

Evan Thompson wonders whether my theory, in *Attention, Not Self*, is intended to be “Buddhaghosa-faithful” or merely “Buddhaghosa-inspired”. My answer, inevitably, is both. I reject the idea that philology has a monopoly on what constitutes “faithfulness” in the reading of a philosophical text. It seems to me that we are not being faithful to the text if we make no effort to understand it, and this understanding will in turn inform the way we re-articulate its claims in our own way. That necessarily involves bringing in our own best theories and best understanding of the issues at play. So when Thompson asks whether in my opinion “it matters to transcultural philosophy of mind that we be as faithful as possible to our source materials or whether we can drop this requirement for the sake of creative interpretation”, my answer is emphatically that it does matter, but that being faithful to one’s source materials is not, contra the long-dominant view of Indological philology, an interpretation-free zone. Just as with “faithful” I think that one needs here to be careful with the use of adjectives like “creative”: in the context of interpreting a text, the creativity in question is of the sort I have described above, namely, thinking carefully about the functional role of the terms being used; it does not mean, as philologists are wont to assume, making stuff up. I should, though, have been clearer, as I mentioned in the *précis*, about the point in the book where a transition takes place, where I begin to set aside the task of answering Aug’s challenge and instead move to taking up Buddhaghosa’s challenge. For it was Buddhaghosa himself who called for readers to think further about issues he had left only partly resolved: “This is just a sketch. An in-depth understanding of this question of the [function of consciousness] is only to be gained on the strength of one’s selection after considering views, one’s estimation of reasons, one’s preferences and credences, learning and testimonial reports” (*Fount* p. 74). The final five chapters of the book are responsive to this call.

Thompson is one of *my* philosophical heroes, and he has been an inspiration for this project in more ways than one. I have already mentioned *The Embodied Mind*, and will return to it again. More particularly, though, I was very inspired by an article he wrote, co-authored with Jake Davis, entitled “From the five aggregates to phenomenal consciousness: Towards a cross-cultural cognitive science” (Davis & Thompson 2014). The aim of this essay was to “situate the Buddhist view within recent scientific debates about consciousness” (Davis & Thompson 2014, p. 585), and the authors say at the outset that “the model of consciousness and meditative transformations of consciousness that we offer in this chapter is inspired by the accounts found in the Pāli Nikāyas. Nevertheless, it is important to note at the outset that these texts admit of multiple possible readings. Our reconstruction differs in certain respects from the traditional interpretation of the five aggregates in the Theravāda Buddhist commentaries on the Pāli Nikāyas. Our aim, however, is not to give an historical account of what these concepts meant at any point in the development of Buddhist thought; and we make no claim that anyone in the Buddhist tradition, early or late, actually understood this model in the way we suggest. The model of attention, consciousness, and mindfulness that we draw from the Nikāya account of the five aggregates is of interest to us because it suggests promising new directions for scientific investigations of the mind. Put another way, whatever value our model has lies not in any claim to historical authenticity but, rather, in its claim to being empirically accurate and productive of further research” (Davis & Thompson 2014, p. 585). They go on to say that they find what they call a “close analogue” of *vedanā* in the concept of affect valence, and of *saññā* in Block’s “cognitive access”, and they say “*viññāna* may be best understood from this cognitive science perspective as analogous to a basal level of awareness common to all phenomenally conscious states” (Davis & Thompson 2014, p. 590).

Now the reconstruction of the five-aggregates model that I present in *Attention, Not Self*, based as it is on the 5th century CE commentaries of Buddhaghosa, does indeed differ from the interpretation

offered in this essay, based as that was on the 3rd century BCE Nikāya. It should hardly come as surprise that Theravāda itself evolved in its thinking about the topic over the course of eight centuries; Davis and Thompson themselves concede, indeed, that “these texts allow multiple interpretations, and the conception of *manasikāra* that we employ may not line up neatly with traditional interpretations in the Theravāda Buddhist commentaries” (Davis & Thompson 2014, p. 594). In his comments, though, Thompson slightly misreads what I say about two key aggregates, *vedanā* and *saññā*. For I don’t, as he claims, “equate” *vedanā* with phenomenal consciousness and *saññā* with access consciousness. My interpretation is a little more nuanced. The reason for the nuance is that, as I set out in chapter 2 (Ganeri 2017, p. 72–6), Buddhaghosa employs a method of analysis which consists in attributing to any analysandum four different functional features. When he comes to apply this method of analysis to *vedanā*, what he says is that the task (*kicca*) of *vedanā* is to experience, and that “the significance of *vedanā* is the experiencing of the flavour (*rasa*) of an object ...” (*Dispeller* p. 198). Now his use of the term *rasa* in this context is very interesting, for *rasa* is also a term found in Indian aesthetics. As Buddhaghosa uses it here, I argue, it is the closest one finds, practically anywhere in the Buddhist corpus, to a concept that is *explicitly* to do with phenomenality (the point is easily missed, and was missed, by the translators and philologists, because *rasa* is polysemic, its other meaning being ‘function’). So my claim is that, if one is looking for a term in Buddhist philosophy of mind which is most clearly introducing the idea of phenomenality, then *rasa* is the term of choice (Ganeri 2017, p. 91–2). Saying this in no way precludes identifying other terms which also have a phenomenological aspect, nor does it imply that I “equate” *vedanā* with phenomenal consciousness. The position which I ascribe to Buddhaghosa, Inseparatist Phenomenism, is that consciousness consists in a conjunction of phenomenality and intentionality (Ganeri 2017, p. 53), without either one being reducible to the other.

My discussion of *saññā* was similarly nuanced. It is clear from everything Buddhaghosa says that he thinks of *saññā* as performing an identificatory role in consciousness through a process of tagging or labelling. My claim was that such labelling is a kind of access relation, but quite different from that of Ned Block (see Ganeri 2017, p. 97–99) and not implying “global availability”. Here I quoted John Campbell, who said, “access and labelling are the same thing; to access a feature of a region is to label that dimension (colour, shape or whatever) of the region” (Campbell 2011, p. 327). (Thompson’s criticism is also a little strange, since the view that *saññā* is akin to Block’s cognitive access is the one he himself defends in the 2014 article.) I fear that the misreading is my fault, both because of my incautious use of the phrase “inter-theoretic identity” and because, in the diagramme I presented on p.41, which was meant to give readers a first and simplified overview of the analysis of consciousness, I failed to make these nuances sufficiently clear.

In the article I mentioned above, Davis and Thompson write that “Buddhism originated and developed in an Indian cultural context that featured many first-person practices for producing and exploring states of consciousness through the systematic training of attention” (Davis & Thompson 2014, p. 585), adding that “specific forms of mental training might be able to produce new data about attention and consciousness” (Davis & Thompson 2014, p. 591). Indeed, it was one of the guiding ideas in *The Embodied Mind* that Buddhist attentional practices, including meditation and mindfulness, were used by early Buddhists as a sort of telescope to investigate the inner world, and that their theories were simply write-ups of their observational discoveries. There were two problems with that picture. First, it is now better understood that introspective attention transforms, and does not merely register, one’s inner conscious states. Christopher Hill writes, for instance, that, “There has been little recognition of the fact that a sensation may be transformed by the act of coming to attend to it, and even less of the fact that a sensation may be brought into existence by attention. Instead of facing these facts and attempting to explain them, philosophers have often waged an imperialist struggle on behalf of inner vision and the inner eye hypothesis ... I see no reason to prefer imperialism to the view that the

phenomenal field is often profoundly changed by the process of coming to attend to a sensation ... Thus, consider a case in which someone decides to focus on a sensation that has heretofore been at the margin of consciousness. If the sensation is an itch, attending to it may make it more importunate; if it is a pain, attending to it may make it more severe; if it is an auditory sensation, attending to it may increase its phenomenal volume; if it is a visual sensation, attending to it may increase its vividness; and so on" (Hill 1991, p. 123–5). The second problem with the account in *The Embodied Mind* was that it failed to take seriously enough the theoretical nature of Buddhist theory. Indeed, in his preface to the revised edition of this classic book, Thompson provides a corrective, writing, "As a philosopher, I also feel duty bound to declare that Buddhist philosophy is every bit as abstract, theoretical, and technical as Western philosophy, so the idea that Buddhist philosophy is somehow closer to direct experience and thereby more immediately phenomenological—as we state at certain points in the text—is misguided. Moreover, being able to be abstract, theoretical, and technical is a strength of Indian and Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, and also of the Indian and Tibetan philosophical traditions overall, not a weakness" (Varela, Rosch, & Thompson 2016, p. xxiv). That is indeed exactly what I was trying to do in *Attention, Not Self*, namely, to treat Buddhaghosa's theory seriously as theory. Given, as I mentioned in the *précis*, that the aspect of the theory I was concerned with was a structure common to every mental episode (*sabba-citta-sādhāraṇa*), it was no part of my project, and unnecessary for it, to discuss the effects of meditation on the mind. Thompson feels that I should have taken more seriously the Buddhaghosa who is a "psychologist of meditation", but my project did not require me to do this. The theory I was writing about was that, in Mead's phrase, of "mind as normally known." It is a theory of actual human minds and not the radically transformed minds of enlightened beings, of minds as we know them, not as seen from some transcendental or "ultimate" perspective.

Having said all this, let me repeat that I more than welcome the emergence of alternative readings and interpretations, for this is what indicates that a research field is alive and vibrant and demonstrates the existence of a healthy intellectual culture. When Thompson suggests that we should instead approach Buddhaghosa through the idea that attention is a modification of intentionality, this is a suggestion I welcome and hope, indeed, he will develop more fully in subsequent work. What the suggestion amounts to, in the framework of the Pāli theory, is that the *cetasikas* ("commitments of consciousness") stand in a relation of modification, and not of concomitance, with *citta*. The burden on this interpretation is then to explain how, in the analogy Buddhaghosa uses to illustrate that relation—"Just as when it is said 'The King has come' what it means is not that the King has come alone, leaving his courtiers behind, but that he has come together with his courtiers" (*Fount* p. 67)—the instrumental "together with" signifies modification. It must also show how modification is the right relation for the *cetasikas* other than attention, including labelling (*saññā*), intending (*cetanā*) and the rest. It was for such reasons I did not myself choose to go down that path.

Thompson invites me, finally, to say more about how the project which resulted in *Attention, Not Self* relates to my previous work. This is indeed, the first time I have written a monograph devoted entirely to the thought of a single philosopher; my previous books were devoted to particular historical periods (1656, in the case of *The Lost Age of Reason*), particular concepts (the self, in the case of a book by that name; reason, in the case of *Philosophy in Classical India*), particular texts (the *Śaktivāda*, in the case of *Semantic Powers*), or particular axes of debate (between Mādhyamika Buddhists and Vedāntins, in the case of *The Concealed Art of the Soul*). As I mentioned in the *précis*, I was, and am, convinced that there is a very rich philosophical theory of consciousness in the works of Buddhaghosa, a theory that has not received the attention it deserves from philosophers because of the density and obscurity of its terminological apparatus, and because of the tendency to read Buddhaghosa merely as a "commentator" and not as an innovative thinker, and because, perhaps, of a certain degree of gatekeeping on the part of European Pāli scholars, some of whom have fallen for

the variety of “European exceptionalism” which says that while it is permissible to treat European philosophers from the past as our philosophical interlocutors, we must regard South or East Asian philosophers from the past only as contextually-embedded historical figures. That point was well made, in connection with Islamic philosophy, in a recent interview with Anthony Booth. He writes, “I have found scholarship in Islamic philosophy to have hitherto been overly geared towards philology and textual exegesis. The gatekeepers to that sub-discipline have made it the case that one has to get into, and show the credentials of being capable of grasping, the minutiae of issues concerning translations, for example, in order to be allowed to have a voice. I think this is partly responsible then for the exclusion of Islamic philosophy from the curriculum in modern UK and US philosophy departments – philosophers, qua philosophers, are deemed not to be allowed to say anything about it. They are only allowed to speak about it qua historians or philologists. ... My aim is to show respect to Islamic philosophy by treating it as something that can inform and transform my own tradition” (Booth 2019). Booth’s hyperbolic depiction of the state of scholarship in Islamic philosophy conforms with my impression of the former state of scholarship into Buddhist philosophy in Pāli (it is much less true of contemporary work with Sanskrit philosophical texts). I am sure, though, that there must be a way to treat the ideas of philosophers from the past as having a “living meaning” for us today without making wild claims about their exceptionality, and to find value in their ideas without reducing them to exotica. *Attention, Not Self* was one experiment, most certainly not the last, to seek out this elusive cosmopolitan ground. Our “best” theory in the philosophy of mind may not, ultimately, be an Attentionalist one, but it will certainly accord to attention a far greater centrality and significance than is currently the case, and it is unlikely, I believe, to be one in which a CEO self is postulated as a metaphysical primitive.

Let me conclude by offering a very large word of thanks to all three contributors to this symposium. It may well be the case that we are all, in one way or another, “creole philosophers,” and if my fellow symposiasts will accept that label then I am fortunate to be in very good company indeed.

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