

# Buddhist Physicalism III: The Hard Problem

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# Beyond folk psychology

- Avoiding Dharmageddon?
  - beyond folk physics: making those parts of Buddhist metaphysics built around 6<sup>th</sup> c CE folk physics compatible with results of modern natural sciences
  - necessary to do something similar for those parts of Buddhist metaphysics built around 6<sup>th</sup> c CE folk psychology?
  - isn't Buddhism already 'mind science'? systematic dismantling of folk psychology's Cartesian Theatre?
- What cog sci tells us about consciousness:
  - reducible
  - posit of a useful theory
  - only intermittently occurrent
- So to dismantle Cartesian Theatre must reveal illusory nature of consciousness
  - 'illusionism', 'fictionalism'

- But isn't an illusion something that appears to us—i.e., that we are conscious of? How could consciousness itself be illusory?
  - the 'hard problem', zombies and phenomenal consciousness
- Blindsight



# Systems 1 and 2

- System 1: neural system in which sensory input goes straight to motor control system, efferent neural pathways
  - fast, efficient, promoting interests of organism
  - the ducking cyclist: ‘I knew that branch was coming before I even saw it’
- System 2: neural system in which sensory input is posted on a ‘global workspace’ (via short-term memory) for further processing by dedicated mental modules that perform such functions as memory, verbal processing, fine motor control, etc.
  - attention as gatekeeper for global workspace
- The blindsight patient
  - reports:
    - ‘I saw nothing’
    - I walked straight down the hall’
  - Performance: not fast but halting

- Two pathways to inclusion in System 1
  - natural selection
  - Habituation
    - ‘driving on automatic pilot’
    - cf. Dharmakīrti’s notion of *abhyāsavat pratyakṣa*
- Blindsight patient’s performance halting because motor responses selected for coarse-grained motor control
- Is phenomenal consciousness a product of System 2?

# Theory of Mind (ToM)

- Theory according to which a sentient being has covert states such as sensations, desires, feelings of pleasure and pain, beliefs, etc., to which the being has privileged access
- Widely shared, ‘folk psychology’; Cartesian Theatre as a way of modeling
- Innate or developed?
- False Belief Test (FBT)
  - 3<sup>rd</sup>-person FBT
  - Results
  - 1<sup>st</sup>-person FBT
  - results
- ToM in prelinguistic infancy?

- Result: others-before-self acquisition of ToM
- Consequences
  - consonance with *arthāpatti* account of meta-cognition
  - consciousness as theoretical posit
  - ToM as useful fiction
    - explaining development of executive function
    - global workspace as locus of phenomenal consciousness?
    - phenomenal consciousness as illusion?
- Why this may sound absurd:
  - is phenomenal consciousness the mother of all illusions?
  - the child learns, and isn't learning a conscious process?



# Language acquisition: the intuitive account

- The account expressed in the passage from Augustine quoted by Wittgenstein at beginning of PI:
  - The child perceives adults naming objects and moving toward things.
  - Accordingly the child infers that such-and-such an object is signified by a given sound.
  - So, as the child hears words used in sentences, he progressively learns what objects words signify, and in due course comes to use them to express his own desires
- Child already possesses concepts of objects
- Lacks knowledge of local names for these objects
- Capable of forming inferences
- I.e., thinking, but in a private language of thought

# Thought as inner speech

- By critical pre-school years, child has attained sufficient linguistic facility to engage in conversational exchanges
- Begins to talk to itself, e.g. engage in pretend dialog with fantasy friend
- Sometimes extends to asking questions ('Where is the box of chalks?'), issuing commands ('Pay attention!')
- Seems pointless:
  - if the child does not know the answer to the question, then asking it is futile;
  - if the child is not paying attention, then telling itself to do so seems pointless
- But can nonetheless have results
  - shaking loose the relevant information in response to interrogative tone of voice
  - responding to the authoritative tone of voice in which the command is uttered
- Final step: inner speech, being covert, avoids the difficulty of prying ears

- Thought as developed capacity
  - global workspace requires robust capacity of executive function
  - development of autobiographical memory
  - facilitating the syntheses that install the ‘I’-sense
- Folk psychology and the self-fulfilling prophecy
- Inner speech and the Cartesian Theatre
  - inner speech as fostering a doubling/mirroring
  - the mirror image as a stock Buddhist example of illusion
  - the doubling: speech producer and consumer
  - the mechanics of the Theatre’s sound system
    - speech production and the forward model
    - ‘hearing’ the imperative tone of voice