

## Buddhism, meditation, and ‘the inner world’

CAMPBELL PURTON

*School of Education, University of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ, UK*  
e-mail: [purtonc@hotmail.com](mailto:purtonc@hotmail.com)

**Abstract:** Buddhist meditation seems to involve giving attention to one’s thoughts and feelings, to one’s ‘inner world’. In this article I explore what is involved in such talk of one’s inner world, with special reference to Wittgenstein’s claim that ‘the inner’ is a delusion. The article explores the nature of thoughts and feelings, and suggests that we cannot fully understand what is involved in meditation without some consideration of its ethical and religious context. I conclude with some reflections on how the pictures we naturally employ in thinking about meditation can lead us into a misleading metaphysical view of ‘the inner’.

One of the questions that I want to approach in this article is how we can best understand what people are doing when they meditate, but I will also be concerned more generally with how we should think about what can be called ‘the inner world’. I have a particular interest in Buddhist practices in which one is instructed to focus attention on the breath, or on an image, and then to notice when distracting thoughts and feelings appear. One then is asked to let them go by, and bring one’s attention back to the breath. I will return to the question of why anyone would want to do this. However, there are other less specialized contexts in which we give attention to our own thoughts and feelings. We may pause in the midst of a situation and reflect on what we are really feeling or thinking: for example am I feeling ashamed, or is it more a matter of embarrassment; do I really think that John will leave, or was that just an idle thought? In such situations we turn our attention to our feelings and thoughts. It is natural to say that we ‘look within’, or in a slightly dated terminology, that we introspect. The term introspection suggests that instead of giving our attention to the outer world that we perceive through our senses, we can give attention to our ‘inner world’, or to what is going on in our own mind.

The question I am concerned with is what is involved in this notion of ‘looking within’, or ‘giving attention to the inner world’. This is not a question that often concerns us in practice, even if we engage in meditation, just as in everyday life

we are not usually concerned about what is involved in the notion of time. Yet once we give just a little thought to these notions, they can seem very puzzling indeed.

I will first try to set out very briefly what exactly can seem puzzling about the notion of *the inner*. One starting point would be the idea that our thoughts and feelings must be regarded as ‘inner’ because to a large extent other people’s thoughts and feelings are hidden from us. We can often see easily enough what people are doing, for example that they are walking their dog, but we can’t see what they are thinking as they walk their dog. If we start from everyday facts like this, then with a bit of help from Descartes, we can very easily arrive at the idea that while we are often aware of our own thoughts and feelings, we can’t be aware of other people’s thoughts and feelings, unless they tell us. It is part of the picture of ‘the inner’ that others can inform us of what they are thinking and feeling, but they can only do this because they have access to their inner world in a way that we do not.

The issues here are familiar as the so-called ‘problem of other minds’. It is a problem, like many philosophical problems, that has an odd feel to it. For on the one hand, it is natural to say that we often *do* know what other people are thinking and feeling; to suppose otherwise in everyday contexts would suggest some sort of mental derangement. On the other hand the picture of the hidden inner world has an immense appeal, and it can dominate our thinking when we reflect in a philosophical way. The appeal of the picture extends well beyond the western philosophical tradition and can lead, as it does in some Buddhist philosophical systems, to an idealist ontology. Theravadin interpretations of the canonical Buddhist texts have frequently put forward the view that, as Sue Hamilton puts it, ‘there are no “external” objects as such, but only apparent objects based on the objectivization of certain aspects of consciousness’ (Hamilton (1996), 131).<sup>1</sup> And in the Mahayana tradition, as Janice Willis (1982, 13) remarks, ‘Modern-day Buddhist scholars almost unanimously characterize the Yogacara as being a school of idealism’. Such views, both Hamilton and Willis contend, are not really justified by what is said in the original texts, but there is a strong temptation to read the texts in that way if we begin from the idea of ‘the inner world’ that is present to us when we meditate.

Wittgenstein (2009, § 123) once wrote: ‘A philosophical problem has the form: “I don’t know my way about”’ and if that is right the ‘other minds problem’ is a typical philosophical problem. We are caught between what we would normally say when we are not doing philosophy (for example, that we often do know what people are feeling and thinking), and what we are inclined to say when we begin to reflect in a more philosophical way. Something has gone wrong here, and we don’t know our way about.<sup>2</sup>

Wittgenstein (1992, 84e) also wrote, towards the end of his life, that ‘The “inner” is a delusion. That is: the whole complex of ideas alluded to by this word is like a painted curtain drawn in front of the scene of the actual word use.’ Let me sketch, very briefly, what I take to be the background to this claim, although it should

perhaps first be emphasized that Wittgenstein is not suggesting, as behaviourism did, that while 'the inner' is a delusion, 'the outer' is real. It is the whole complex of ideas involving 'inner' and 'outer' that he is challenging.<sup>3</sup>

One starting point would be that 'inner' things, or events or processes, are associated with talk of thoughts, feelings, sensations, beliefs, expectations, desires, intentions, and so on. Children learn such talk, as they learn the use of words in general, in the context of their lives and their interactions with others. With a bit of reflection, we may be able to set out roughly what the appropriate contexts are for the use of the words. For example, to say that someone expects something to happen seems to be to say that they would be surprised if it didn't happen. It is *not*, Wittgenstein suggests, to say that they have a particular kind of inner experience, which by its very (metaphysical) nature is hidden from others. If that were the case it would be inconceivable how children could learn to speak of people's expectations; but as things stand there is no problem here. We can know what someone *expects* to the extent that we know, from the context, what they would or would not be surprised about. Similarly, to say that someone hopes that something will happen seems to be to say that they would be *disappointed* if it didn't happen. The difference between expecting and hoping does not lie in any supposed differences in the Cartesian 'inner phenomena' that might be involved, but in the surrounding context.

To take a more widely discussed example, children learn the use of the word 'pain' in contexts where they cry out, or others cry out. The exclamations 'It hurts!' or 'I'm in pain!' are learned, linguistic developments out of the unlearned crying, but they serve the same function of drawing attention to a distressing situation. Similarly children learn to exclaim, perhaps of a friend, or of a dog, 'He's in pain!', which is a learned, linguistic development out of the impulse to help the friend or dog. In later uses of language one might report to the doctor that one has a stabbing pain, rather than a dull ache, in one's chest, but such *reporting* of pains is not where the language of pain begins. When the child exclaims about their own pain, or the pain of their friend or dog, they are not reporting on the facts; that is not how the language works here.

I can't get into a detailed discussion of this Wittgensteinian view of the use of words such as 'expecting' or 'pain',<sup>4</sup> which have traditionally been taken to refer to hidden inner states of mind. However, I do want to look in a bit more detail at some difficulties that seem to inhere in any claim the 'inner' is a delusion. One difficulty is in connection with animal consciousness, a second is in connection with our knowledge of the *details* of other people's thoughts and feelings, and a third is with the kinds of experiences that are referred to in descriptions of meditation and similar practices.

In connection with animal consciousness it seems that, for those sympathetic to Wittgenstein's approach, there remains a real question about whether frogs, for example, feel pain. (Or if one has no doubts in the case of frogs, then what of ants or amoebae?) The question here is a question that can arise *in practice*,

and not just when we are doing philosophy; the decision of a biological sciences ethics committee could well turn on what answer is given. Thus it can seem that the question is a real one, but that the answer is hidden from us. Which may make us wonder if, after all, the reason for the answer being hidden is precisely that the feelings of frogs are hidden from us, if they exist at all; that is the point of saying that they are 'inner'. However, I am inclined to think that our genuine uncertainty here is simply a reflection of our uncertainty about how we should treat frogs. We – or some of us – don't quite know where we stand with frogs, and that uncertainty is more basic than our uncertainty about what we should say about them. In other words, it is not that we are unsure about how to treat frogs because we don't know whether frogs have feelings. Rather, it is because we are unsure about how to relate to frogs that we don't know whether to say that they have feelings. My guess is that if we are really serious about finding out what to say about frogs, we need to talk to people who have studied frogs, have worked with them and spent some time in actual lived relationships with them. People who have lived with woolly monkeys (Williams (1980)) would find it bizarre to question whether the monkeys feel pain, but they might be prepared to talk to someone who was doubtful about whether woolly monkeys have *intentions*. If we were unsure in this way, I think that in addition to reflecting on how the word 'intention' is used in relation to people, we would need to talk to people who know about woolly monkeys, and perhaps ourselves spend some time living with the monkeys. Then it might become clearer what we should say. The point is that what we say needs to grow out of our actual involvement in the relevant situations. From Wittgenstein's point of view our linguistic responses are *extensions* of our non-linguistic responses. One of his favourite quotations was from Goethe's *Faust*: 'In the beginning was the deed' (Wittgenstein (1969), §402).

A second doubt we might have about Wittgenstein's view that the 'inner' is a delusion is that the question of whether we can observe other *people's* thoughts and feelings has not been fully resolved. It may be clear in many contexts what we should say about other people's feelings, simply through having learned the words that apply in those contexts. But are not the *details* of other people's thoughts and feelings genuinely hidden from us? Suppose the phone rings and from the call display I see that it is Marcus. I think to myself 'I'm too busy to talk to Marcus now' and I don't answer the call. Then I reflect on this, and soon realize that it's not that I'm too busy, but that I am a bit scared of speaking to Marcus at the moment. Now someone else can see me pause when the phone rings, but they can't see the intricate detail of what I am thinking and feeling. *That* is hidden from them, and a tempting account to give of this hiddenness is that my thoughts and feelings about speaking to Marcus exist not in the 'outer world' that is accessible to others, but in the 'inner world' to which only I have access. It is this kind of thought that gave rise to the behaviourist programme in psychology: the thought that while we can observe the *behaviour* of others we can't observe what goes on in their *minds*.

However, I think that observability (including the observability of others' thoughts and feelings) is a matter of degree, and that it often depends on the context of the observation. An experienced bird-watcher might observe a night-heron's appeasement gesture, while most people would just see the bird bending its neck forward and displaying three white feathers against a black background. Most people don't see the *appeasement* because they don't know enough about night-herons, to be *able* to see it. Similarly, when the phone rang my wife might have (truly) said 'I can see that you are afraid of speaking to Marcus'. Knowing me well, noticing the expression on my face, and knowing what has happened recently between me and Marcus, it is not hard for her to see what I am feeling, or the thoughts that I am having. (Sometimes, indeed, others can see our feelings better than we ourselves can.) Of course, most people would not be able to observe my thoughts and feelings in this context, and it could be said that these thoughts and feelings are hidden from them. But the sense of 'hidden' here is like that in which the night-heron's appeasement is hidden from most people, or like that in which the bird itself may be hidden from most people by its camouflage and the nature of its surroundings, while it is not hidden from the experienced bird watcher. It is quite different from the sense in which the inside of a house may be hidden from an observer outside the house. In that example, there is a clear sense in which the house has an inside, which is hidden. But the hiddenness of the bird has no connection with any notion of 'inside'.

It might still be said that there are, surely, many cases where we can't possibly know what another person is thinking or feeling. My wife may be able to see that I'm scared of talking to Marcus, but she can't see that, as we sit down to lunch, an image or thought of St Michael's Mount flashes through my mind. But what does '*can't*' amount to here? It is a familiar experience, I think, that sometimes when people are personally close, one of them makes a remark, and the other says 'That's telepathy - I was just thinking the same thing!' Suppose that just after we sit down, my wife catches my eye, and I say 'I suddenly thought of St Michael's Mount - do you remember us walking across the causeway at low tide?' and my wife says 'That's telepathy - I knew that's what you were thinking!' To say 'That's telepathy' in such cases is to say that one person could tell what another was thinking without there being any obvious *way* in which they could have known. Of course some people will say that there must be an explanation in terms of unnoticed cues, but while this might be seen as an objection to some notions of telepathy, it also *supports* the view that in such cases we do observe people's thoughts and feelings.

Other people simply regard such cases, not as cases of observation of thoughts or feelings, but simply as coincidences, but it is hard to see why we should accept such a view. It is an objection based on the *assumption* that we can't observe the thoughts of others, from which it would follow that where we do seem to make such observations, this *must* be coincidence. But to argue like that is to *presuppose*

that the thoughts and feelings of others are essentially hidden from us, on account of their metaphysical ‘inner’ status. It is to take for granted the picture of thoughts and feelings as ‘inner things’, yet it is just that picture that is in question. I conclude that, so far, there is no good reason to say that we can’t observe the thoughts and feelings of other people, and hence that to see such thoughts and feelings as essentially hidden, and in that sense ‘inner’, really is to be subject to a delusion.

I turn now to the third kind of objection to the view that the inner is a delusion, which brings us to the topic of meditation. A few years ago Peter Hacker (2010) wrote a review in the *Times Literary Supplement* of Galen Strawson’s book *Selves* (2009), in which Hacker was critical of the way in which Strawson seemed to ignore Wittgensteinian doubts about the notion of the ‘inner self’. In the following issue of the *TLS* Strawson replied that if only Hacker had any experience of meditation he would know very well that there was an inner self. It is easy enough to see what Strawson meant, since meditation would seem to be precisely a practice in which one turns one’s attention inward. In typical meditation instructions one is asked, for example, to focus attention initially on one’s breathing, and then notice what thoughts and feelings arise as one tries to keep one’s attention on the breath. One may be advised not to try to suppress thoughts and feelings when they arise, but nor should one pursue them; one should simply notice their presence. As one does this the thoughts or feelings tend to dissolve or dissipate, and one’s attention can come back to the breath. After a while even one’s breath is no longer a focus of attention, and a space can develop in which no thoughts or feelings come into one’s mind. This ‘space’ is traditionally described as tranquil and luminous. The process of meditation is then like watching clouds drift across the sky, finally to dissipate, so that just the clear sky remains.

In order to understand fully what meditation practice involves, I suspect that it will be necessary to say more about why people do it, and I will return to that point. However, the brief sketch just given seems to be *intelligible* to most people, and it does seem to make reference to what might naturally be called ‘the inner world’, that is, the world of thoughts and feelings. It seems natural to say that just as one can direct one’s attention to what someone is saying, or to the movements of clouds across the sky, so one can direct one’s attention to one’s feelings or one’s thoughts. And the metaphor of ‘outer vs inner’ again seems a natural one: in giving attention to the clouds as they drift through the sky I look *up there*, away from myself; whereas when I give attention to my thoughts as they drift through my mind, I seem to look *inwards*, to what is going on *in me*.

### **The nature of thoughts and feelings**

Suppose that for the moment we go along with the picture of our feelings and thoughts being inner objects to which we can give our attention. The question remains of how exactly this *picture* is connected with our feelings, our thoughts, and the mind across which they drift.

Suppose I am to give a talk tomorrow, about which I am a bit anxious. The talk is very much in my mind. To say it is in my mind is to say that I am attending to the talk, and that might involve my thinking about who will be there, worrying about whether I have done enough preparation, making a mental note that I need to check if the projector is working, etc. In this sort of case we might also say that the talk is very much *on* my mind.

As I sit down to meditate, the talk may still be very much in, or on, my mind. I am still attending to the talk. However, in meditation this giving of attention to the talk is *not* what I am supposed to be doing. I am supposed to be attending, at least initially, to my breathing, and worrying about the talk is a distraction from this. In the meditation instructions I am asked to *notice* such things as my worrying about the talk, give them a little attention, and then 'let them go'. We are asked to attend to *the thoughts and feelings*, not to the situation which the thoughts and feelings are about.

What is it to attend to the thoughts and feelings about my talk tomorrow? I think that it is to attend to how I am reacting to this situation in which I have to give the talk. I might have been excited about it, or found it an annoying distraction from what I would like to be doing tomorrow, but in fact my reaction is an anxious one. The question 'What do you feel about giving the talk?' could equally well be phrased as 'What is your reaction to giving the talk?' I think interviewers often use 'And how do you react to that?' interchangeably with 'And how do you feel about that?'

Our thoughts and feelings are our reactions to our situations, and perhaps the difference between feelings and thoughts here is that 'feelings' covers our non-linguistic as well as our linguistic reactions, whereas 'thoughts' is more appropriate to reactions that have a specific linguistic form. In psychotherapy, or in personal reflection on an issue (though not in meditation), I might hesitate over whether it is anxiety or excitement that I am feeling, and settle for 'anxiety with a tinge of excitement'. That is to find the right articulation of the response – its linguistic form. It is tempting to suppose that I find this articulation through a careful inspection of something inner, through 'introspection' of some 'inner sensation', but that is a misleading picture. It is rather that I have, through my linguistic training, learned to articulate my responses in a variety of situations. Then I attend closely to *this situation* and see what comes to me as a result of my having been, as a child, initiated into the language I speak.<sup>5</sup> What comes might be 'anxiety tinged with excitement'.

Now if our thoughts and feelings are our reactions to things, is there any sense in which these reactions are something 'inner'? Well, I may be aware of certain bodily sensations, e.g. a tension in my chest, as I reflect on the talk I am to give tomorrow. Such sensations could be said to be one element in my response to my situation, and there is a clear sense in which they are inner, i.e. that they are felt at particular places in my body. However these physical reactions do not seem to be essentially hidden from others; an observant person might well notice the tension in my body.

Another sense in which my response is 'inner' is just that it is *my* response. (This is the sense that Sue Hamilton suggests in her rendering of the Pali quotation I referred to in note 1.) If someone else is anxious, then that anxiety is not mine – it is 'outside me'. This is just the point I made earlier, that in attending to the clouds drifting across the sky I look *up there*, away from myself, whereas when I look at the thoughts and feelings drifting through my mind I look at something going on in me. What 'goes on in me' are my responses to things. The *things* can naturally be said to be outside me; my responses can naturally be said to be in me. However, the sense of 'in' and 'inner' here has, again, no Cartesian implications. My responses are not essentially hidden from other people. As we have seen, it may often be *hard* for others to know exactly what my response is to a situation, but this fact has no metaphysical significance.

I have been saying that our thoughts and feelings are the ways we respond to our situations. We can give attention to them just as we can give attention to clouds in the sky. But what are we to make of the other part of the analogy, according to which just as clouds drift across the sky, so our thoughts and feelings may drift through our mind? If our thoughts and feelings are our responses to our situations, what corresponds to the *sky*, in which our thought-clouds drift?

Jon Kabat-Zinn, a biomedical scientist who has developed programmes of mindfulness-based therapy, says (Kabat-Zinn & Davidson (2011), 39): 'What we are really talking about is awareness. The various objects that we can pay attention to and be aware of are important, but most important is the attending itself, awareness itself, or mindfulness.' This suggests that the sky in which our thoughts drift is our awareness, and I think that such a way of talking is common enough amongst writers on meditation. But it is unclear what 'awareness' means here. To say that our thoughts exist in our awareness is like saying that they exist in our consciousness, or in our mind, but none of these forms of expression help us much in understanding how the language is working here. They all make use of the picture of the mind as something like a space in which thoughts occur, but they do not help us with the question of how the picture is being used.

Kabat-Zinn's other formulation, that what is most important is the attending itself, is perhaps more helpful. There is a use of 'mind' that is closely tied to the notion of attention, for example in contexts such as 'He gave his mind to the problem', or 'Her mind was briefly distracted from the main issue', or even 'Mind the gap!' We say that during meditation various thoughts and feelings come to mind, or come into our mind, and that seems to be to say that our attention is caught by our reactions to certain things in our life. Thus to say that thoughts drift through our mind would be to say that our attention is successively caught by various reactions that we have. The point of mindfulness training seems to be that instead of allowing our attention to be *caught* in this way, we should *direct* our attention, first to our thoughts or feelings, and then back to the breath. In this way we practice control of our attention; we develop our 'attention muscles'. Such practice is not being *in the grip of* our thoughts and feelings is



probably one reason that mindfulness-based psychological therapies can be effective.

If we put things like that, it seems that the picture of the mind as an inner space does not play any significant role in our talk about thoughts coming into our mind. To talk that way seems simply to involve saying that various thoughts *come to our attention* as we engage in meditation. Yet I suspect that something is being missed here; that the picture of the mind as the space in which thoughts come, conveys more than the fact that a thought's coming to mind is a matter of its catching our attention. If we return from thinking about mindfulness practice to thinking about Buddhist meditation I suggest that what has been missed is the stage of meditation that goes beyond the giving of attention to thoughts and feelings.<sup>6</sup> In meditation one attends to the breath in order to prevent one's attention from being caught by one's thoughts and feelings. Then as one becomes free from the captivating thoughts and feelings one can also let go of attention to the breath, and so reach the tranquil state I mentioned before. One then gives attention to this tranquil state itself; in Buddhist terminology one gives attention to the tranquil mind. The question is: what is *that*?

### **Buddhist meditation**

In order to understand this way of talking I think we need to remember that Buddhist meditation has its origin and home in a religious and ethical context. Meditation is seen as a training in seeing the world in a way that is not egocentric, that is not, in the Buddhist terminology, *attached* to things. The idea is that while much of the time we are absorbed in our own projects, in our own view of things, we can, if we pause and reflect, realize that our own perspective is just one among many perspectives, and that from a religious or ethical point of view we need to consider the perspectives of others as of equal value to our own. In assessing how we should respond to a situation, we should not simply consider what we want, but what would be for the best, taking into account the whole situation, and the implications for everyone involved. This sort of point is, I imagine, common to most ethical systems, and Buddhist meditation is a practice designed to develop and encourage a non-egocentric view of things.

One traditional formulation of the crux of Buddhist thought is:

Cease to do evil,  
Learn to do good,  
Purify your mind.

Meditation, as a training in the purification of mind, is central to Buddhism, but it is firmly set in an ethical context. The training works by asking us first to *notice* the things that we want and fear, our impulses, plans, hopes, expectations, worries, and so on. If we engage in meditation we may begin to *see* a bit more clearly what our preoccupations and attachments are, rather than being caught up in

them. That in turn can help us not to attend exclusively to these things, but to what our situation *as a whole* requires of us, taking into account everything and everyone who is involved.

We are perhaps not used to the idea that we can attend to a situation *as a whole*. Usually we think of attention as something that is narrowly, not widely, focused. We normally attend to the details of a situation; we analyse it and try to work out how its various aspects are related, and so on. This of course is often valuable, but in some contexts it can be inappropriate and ineffective. If we are dealing with a difficult personal situation we do need to attend to the various aspects of it, but often we come to a point where we say something like 'Logically, I really don't know what is to be done. It is too complicated . . . I need to stand back and get a sense of it as a whole . . . now it is becoming clearer . . . Yes, this is what I need to do'. If we pause, and give ourselves time, we may often arrive at a distinct felt sense of what is needed in a situation. All the varied aspects of the situation come into this, but our response ultimately is not to these aspects, but to the situation as a whole. In fact, in much of our lives, we do not analyse situations into their myriad aspects. Rather, we give attention to the whole situation and then act spontaneously from our sense of what is needed. To take an example from Eugene Gendlin, who has written much on this topic (e.g. Gendlin (1978/2003), *Idem* (1996)), if we are at a party and want to talk to someone we see on the far side of the room, without being caught by another person whom we *don't* want to talk to, we are quite capable of negotiating a way through the crowd without giving attention to exactly where everyone is, and working out what movements we need to make in order to get to the other side of the room. Or again, a situation might arise during a tense discussion of a complex issue, where someone finds just the right remark to defuse the tension and carry the discussion forward. That person was attentive to the situation as a whole, and almost certainly couldn't explain how they arrived at the facilitative remark.

In meditation we are asked to *notice* briefly, but not engage in, our thoughts and feelings. In other words we are to notice that we have been following a certain line of thought or feeling, but we are not to continue to pursue it. We are to take note of it, and then bring our attention back to the breath. Then, if we are fortunate, the medley of thoughts and feelings gradually dies down. For a while, we are attending simply to the breath, and then the next instruction is to let go of our attention to the breath, just as we previously let go of our attention to the thoughts. At that point we are no longer attending to the talk we are to give tomorrow, nor to our thoughts and feelings about it, nor to our breathing. What then *are* we attending to? Well, to nothing *in particular*, which is another way of saying we are attending to things in general, to the world *as a whole*. We are practising seeing things from a perspective that is not centred in our own specific hopes or fears, or our own specific views and plans.

Just as there is such a thing as a *situation as a whole*, for example our situation at the party, there is also such a thing as the *world as a whole*. And just as we can

respond to a situation as a whole, or have a felt sense of that situation as a whole, so it should be possible to respond to the world as a whole, or have a sense of – a feeling towards – the world as a whole. This kind of feeling would be a holistic feeling, an attitude to the world not oriented towards any particular person's hopes or fears. It is a non-egocentric attitude, and for that reason could be said to be an ethical attitude. Schopenhauer, who had a deep respect for Buddhist thought, wrote that: 'the better person is the one who makes least difference between himself and others, and does not regard them as absolutely non-ego; whereas to the bad person this difference is great, in fact absolute' (Schopenhauer (1844/1966), 507). Such an attitude, or feeling, has not only an ethical, but also a religious or spiritual quality to it: Wittgenstein wrote in the *Tractatus* (Wittgenstein (1963), §6.45) 'To view the world *sub specie aeterni* is to view it as a whole – a limited whole. Feeling the world as a limited whole – it is this that is mystical'.

The attitude encouraged in Buddhist meditation is precisely that in which one makes no difference between oneself and others. One is encouraged simply to note one's thoughts and feelings, as one might note the thoughts and feelings of another person. They are not to be taken as especially important just because they are one's *own* thoughts and feelings. I think that such an attitude, or response, to the world is what in Buddhism is called the enlightened mind. To speak of the enlightened mind is to speak of attending to, or responding to, the world in an enlightened way; that is, in a way that is not egocentric.

We are perhaps now in a position to understand better the picture of thoughts and feelings as drifting through the sky of the mind. As we have seen, in meditation various thoughts and feelings come into our mind, and I have suggested that this is to say that our attention is caught by our responses to certain things in our life. But just as these things are only specific aspects of our life as a whole, our responses to them are only specific aspects of our response to the world as a whole. Our response to the world as a whole involves, but goes beyond, all our specific responses, in the way our response to the party situation involves, but goes beyond, our feelings about the people there, and how we are placed in relation to them. The specific thoughts and feelings that come to mind (or attract our attention) in meditation are elements within our overall response and attitude towards the world.

The notion of mind that is often employed in Buddhist philosophy is, I think, the notion of our responsiveness to the world as a whole. It is, we might say, the overall way in which we are inclined to respond to the world, or our overall mindset towards the world. This use of the word 'mind' is quite closely tied to the uses in which 'mind' refers to the phenomena of attending, or minding (as in child-minding). Our mindset, in a particular situation, refers to the aspects of the situation to which we are inclined to give our attention, to those aspects we *mind* about.

Just as waves can be seen as local modes of the sea, we might see clouds as local modes of the sky,<sup>7</sup> and similarly our feelings and thoughts can be seen as

responses that are local modes of our overall response to things. Thus our feelings and thoughts can be said to move within our mind, that is, within our overall responsiveness to the world. This overall responsiveness is perhaps best understood as our *readiness* to respond to things. A readiness to respond is not a thing, but involves a capacity to respond; in that way it is like a clear sky in which clouds may arise or dissipate. The clear sky of the mind is often referred to in Buddhist writings as tranquil and luminous. Tranquil because one's attention is not caught up in one's thoughts and feelings; luminous because the tranquil state allows one to see things as they are, without the distortions of the egocentric mind-set.

It is our everyday mind-set that is seen in Buddhist thought to be generally defective or distorted, in that for most of us it is primarily oriented to our specific attachments and aversions. It seems that in the original Buddhist texts, the Pali/Sanskrit word *citta*, which is often translated by 'mind', can in many contexts better be translated by 'heart' or 'mind-set' (Harvey (1995), 111–116). For example, the Buddhist injunction to 'purify your mind' is probably better rendered as 'purify your heart'. For 'purifying the mind' could be understood to mean simply clarifying one's view of things,<sup>8</sup> while the sense required is that we should try to change our general orientation towards the world as a whole. A change in the mind, or *citta*, is what we could call a change of heart.

In Mahayana Buddhism the world is often pictured as a vast interconnected or interpenetrating realm that, as a whole, eludes our conceptual grasp (Cleary (1993); Cook (1977)).<sup>9</sup> Our concepts can catch only specific aspects of it. We can, however, *respond* to it as a whole, and it is this holistic response within which our thoughts and feelings move. 'Mind' in this sense is the general form that our readiness to respond to the world takes, in the same way that a specific aspect of mind, such as a flash of fear, is a reaction to a specific kind of event in the world, namely, a dangerous event. Buddhist meditation is concerned with *training* the mind, in the sense of developing a non-egocentric mind-set, an enlightened mind, a good heart.

### **The inner as a delusion**

Before concluding, I would like to come back to Wittgenstein's view that 'the inner' is a delusion. I think that we should understand him to be saying that in speaking of the inner we can be misled by the Cartesian metaphysical picture of an 'inner world' to which only I have access. In that sense 'the inner' really is a delusion. On the other hand the picture of thoughts and feelings as drifting through the mind as one sits in meditation is not *necessarily* misleading. Many people find it a perfectly understandable way of speaking about the experience of meditation, and are able to use the picture in elaborating on what they have experienced. For example someone might say 'My mind was quite clear and empty for a few moments, but then the thought came that I'm beginning to get

somewhere with this meditation practice, and a feeling of satisfaction arose. I gave some attention first to the feeling of satisfaction and then to the thought itself, and after a few moments my mind returned to a state of calm. It was as if clouds had gathered and then dissolved again.'

I would say that there is no delusion involved in thus speaking of the realm of the mind; for example, of the mind becoming clear, or its obscuration by various thoughts and feelings. To speak in this way involves the use of a picture or metaphor, in this case a metaphor of the sky and clouds. The delusion arises if we think of the picture as providing a metaphysical explanation of what we experience in meditation. The explanation says that there exists an 'inner world of the mind' across which thoughts and feelings pass, an inner world which only I can observe. But this talk of observation of inner objects just does not fit with how the language works here. To have the thought that now I'm getting somewhere with my meditation is to be responding to the circumstances of my meditation practice in a particular way. My response is 'inner' in the sense that it is *my* response, and also in the sense that it would be difficult for anyone else to observe it, but these ordinary senses of 'inner' are not the Cartesian metaphysical 'inner'.

That Cartesian, metaphysical sense seems to arise, at least in part, from a misunderstanding of how talk of thoughts and feelings works in practice. We talk about my thoughts being inside me, perhaps inside my head. Given this talk of 'inside me', it is easy to picture an inside arena which only I can observe, and thus we are led to an account of what a thought is: it is a process in the inner arena. So it seems as though, in speaking of my thought, I am reporting on an inner process. Yet, as we have seen, the actual use of 'I'm getting better at meditation' (when this specifies a thought) is to articulate in language a response that I have. The articulation is not something separate from the response, but is a linguistic version of it. No doubt much *more* could be said about the way in which talk of thoughts works in our language, but the project of understanding *further* how the language works here can't proceed if we focus on the picture that is associated with it. For the picture allows us to bypass the actual use of the language: it already suggests a use, a use analogous to that in which we report on clouds crossing the sky. Then it can seem (if we don't probe too deeply) that all is clear: we are simply reporting on mental entities crossing our inner arena. But that doesn't help us at all in understanding what we are saying when we say we think something. It is rather as if, on being asked about the meaning of the song line 'her eyes are bright as diamonds', someone said 'it's just a comparison of brightness – like comparing the brightness of two stars'. That response would *block* any further exploration of what the line means, of how it is being used.

Wittgenstein (2009 PPF, §55) discusses a parallel case in connection with the biological evolution of consciousness:

The evolution of the higher animals and of man, and the awakening of consciousness at a particular stage. The picture is something like this: Though the ether is filled with vibrations, the world is dark. But one day, man opens his seeing eye, and there is light.

In the first place our language describes a picture. What is to be done with the picture is still obscure. Quite clearly, however, it must be explored if we are to understand the sense of our words. But the picture seems to spare us this work: it already points to a particular use. This is how it takes us in.

What I have tried to do is to explore how the words that meditators employ are actually used, and how it is a delusion to think that we can understand what meditation involves simply by referring to the pictures which we naturally use in describing meditation experiences.

## References

- CANFIELD, JOHN V. (1975) 'Wittgenstein and Zen', *Philosophy*, **50**, 383–408.
- CANFIELD, JOHN V. (2007a) *Becoming Human: The Development of Language, Self, and Self-Consciousness* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).
- CANFIELD, JOHN V. (2007b) 'Wittgenstein on fear', in D. Moyal-Sharrock (ed.) *Perspicuous Presentations: Essays on Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Psychology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), 12–27.
- CLEARY, THOMAS (1993) *The Flower Ornament Scripture* (Boston: Shambhala Publications).
- COOK, FRANCIS (1977) *Hua-yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra* (London: Pennsylvania State University Press).
- FOGELIN, R. (1987) *Wittgenstein*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge).
- GENDLIN, EUGENE T. (1978/2003) *Focusing*, rev. edn (London: Rider).
- GENDLIN, EUGENE T. (1996) *Focusing-Oriented Psychotherapy* (New York: Guilford Press).
- GUDMUNSEN, CHRIS (1977) *Wittgenstein and Buddhism* (London: Macmillan).
- HACKER, PETER (2010) 'In one's head: review of Galen Strawson's *Selves*', *Times Literary Supplement*, 22 January.
- HAMILTON, SUE (1996) *Identity and Experience: The Constitution of the Human Being According to Early Buddhism* (London: Luzac Oriental).
- HARVEY, PETER (1995) *The Selfless Mind: Personality, Consciousness and Nirvana in Early Buddhism* (London: Routledge).
- HUDSON, H. (1973) 'Wittgenstein and Zen Buddhism', *Philosophy East and West*, **23**, 471–481.
- KABAT-ZINN, JON & DAVIDSON, RICHARD (eds) (2011) *The Mind's Own Physician* (Oakland CA: New Harbinger Publications).
- NAMGYAL, DAKPO TASHI (2001) *Clarifying the Natural State*, Eric Kunsang (tr.) (Hong Kong: Rangyung Yeshe).
- ÑANAMOLI, BHIKKHU (2001) *The Life of the Buddha* (Onalaska WA: Pariyatti Publishing).
- PHILLIPS, D. Z. (1977) 'On wanting to compare Wittgenstein and Zen', *Philosophy*, **50**, 338–343.
- PURTON, CAMPBELL (2014a) *The Trouble with Psychotherapy: Counselling and Common Sense* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).
- PURTON, CAMPBELL (2014b) 'Wittgenstein and the expression of feelings in psychotherapy', *Philosophical Investigations*, **37**, 152–166.
- READ, RUPERT (2009) 'Wittgenstein and Zen: one practice, no dogma', in Jay L. Garfield & Tom J. F. Tilemans (eds) *Pointing at the Moon: Buddhism, Logic, Analytical Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 13–24.
- SCHOPENHAUER, ARTHUR (1844/1966) *The World as Will and as Representation*, II, E. F. J. Payne (tr.) (New York: Dover Publications).
- STRAWSON, GALEN (2009) *Selves: An Essay in Revisionary Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- SUJATA, VICTORIA (2011) *Songs of Shabkar: The Path of a Tibetan Yogi Inspired by Nature* (Cazadero CA: Dharma Publishing).
- TER HARK, MICHEL (1990) *Beyond the Inner and the Outer: Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Psychology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers).
- VESEY, GODFREY N. & BLEAU, RENÉE (2013) *Inner and Outer: Essays on a Philosophical Myth* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).
- WILLIS, JANICE (1982) *On Knowing Reality: The Tattvartha Chapter of Asanga's Bodhisattvabhumi* (Delhi: Motilal Banaridass).
- WILLIAMS, LEONARD (1980) *Samba and the Monkey Mind*, rev. edn (London: Allison & Busby).

- WITTGENSTEIN, LUDWIG (1963) *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul).
- WITTGENSTEIN, LUDWIG (1969) *On Certainty* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell).
- WITTGENSTEIN, LUDWIG (1980) *Culture and Value*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell).
- WITTGENSTEIN, LUDWIG (1992) *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology, II: The Inner and the Outer* (Oxford: Blackwell).
- WITTGENSTEIN, LUDWIG (2009) *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th edn (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell).
- WITTGENSTEIN, LUDWIG (2009 PPF). 'Philosophy of psychology – a fragment', in *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th edn (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell), 182–243.

## Notes

1. This connects with a point that Hamilton makes about the terms *ajjhaam rupa* (internal forms) and *bahidda rupa* (external forms) in Pali. A passage in Pali that can best be understood and translated as 'One who apperceives a visible feature of himself [likewise] sees visible features of others' gets understood instead as 'When somebody experiences forms inside himself, he will see forms outside', so that external forms come to be (mis)understood as 'projections of the mind'. This encourages the development of a Buddhist idealist metaphysics, which Hamilton sees (rightly, I think) as highly dubious, given that the Buddha persistently rejected metaphysical questions.
2. It has sometimes been suggested that there is a parallel between the kind of confusion which, according to Wittgenstein, lies at the root of philosophical problems, and the kind of confusion which, according to Buddhism, lies at the root of human suffering in general. See, for example, Hudson (1973); Canfield (1975); Gudmunsen (1977); Phillips (1977); Read (2009). For the purposes of the present article, it is not important what position we adopt in connection with this suggestion.
3. For further discussion of the notions of 'the inner' and 'the outer' see Wittgenstein (1992); ter Hark (1990); Vesey & Bleau (2013).
4. For more detailed discussion of this theme see, for example, Canfield (2007a); *Idem* (2007b); Fogelin (1987).
5. I have discussed these issues much more fully elsewhere. See Purton (2014a); *Idem* (2014b).
6. The details of meditation instructions vary in different Buddhist traditions. In the Theravada tradition one moves from attending to the breath to attending to feelings and 'mental objects', but then to 'space' or 'nothingness': 'With the complete surmounting of perceptions of form, with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance, by not giving attention to perceptions of difference, (aware of) "infinite space", a bhikkhu [monk] enters upon and abides in the base consisting of infinity of space' (*Majjhima Nikaya* 8, as translated in Ñanamoli (1992), 249). In the Mahayana traditions there is the same distinction between initially reaching a state of tranquillity (*shamatha*) through sustained attention to the breath or other 'forms', and then the stage of seeing (*vipashyana*), in which one 'looks directly into one's mind'. As the sixteenth-century Tibetan scholar Tashi Namgyal, put it (Namgyal (2001), 29): 'The meaning in a nutshell is this: allow your mind to be as it naturally is, and let thoughts dissolve in themselves. This is your innate mind, which is an unidentifiable, self-knowing, natural awareness' (*ibid.*, 42). I will say more later about how the term 'mind' (Tibetan *sems*; Sanskrit *citta*) is being used here.
7. Cf. the nineteenth-century Tibetan poet Shabkar (Sujata (2011), 201): 'Be inspired by the wide open sky | Mind [*sems*] without centre or edge – Meditate on that! | Though inner thoughts build up like southern clouds, | Mind, like the sky, is at ease.'
8. Cf. Wittgenstein (1980, 53e): 'I believe that one of the things that Christianity says is that sound doctrines are useless. That you have to change your *life*. (Or the *direction* of your life.)' The notion of the overall 'direction' of one's life is, I think, quite close to what is meant by '*citta*' in Buddhist thought.
9. This is especially true of the Chinese Hua Yan school of Buddhism. See Cleary (1993), Cook (1977). But the notion of the 'whole' that cannot be articulated is there in the early Pali scriptures: 'There is an unborn. An un-brought-to-being, an unmade, an unformed. If there were not, there would be no escape made known here for one who is born, brought to being, made, formed' (*Udana* 8:1–3, as translated by Ñanamoli (2001)).