Journal of the American Philosophical Association (2022) 191–207 © The Author(s), 2022. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of the American Philosophical Association
DOI:10.1017/apa.2020.23

Consciousness and Attention in the *Bhagavad Gita**

ABSTRACT: *Consciousness is a central topic in Hindu philosophy. This is because this philosophy understands reality in terms of* brahman *or* atman *(typically translated as the self), and consciousness is conceived as the essential marker of self. The prominent Hindu text* Bhagavad Gita *offers an exception. Self is conceived in the* Gita *not in terms of its essential identity with pure or transcendental consciousness. But the question remains, does the* Gita *still offer us a theory of consciousness? The goal of my paper is to show that the* Gita *can be taken as offering an interesting empirical theory of consciousness. My paper focuses on determining the nature of attention in the* Gita*'s understanding of yoga, and to articulate the role of such attention in the* Gita*'s theory of consciousness. My working conclusion is that what differentiates an ordinary person's consciousness from a yogi's consciousness is the nature of their attention both in terms of its manner and its object. I argue, further, that exploring the* Gita*'s theory of consciousness, especially in conjunction with the nature of attention, is immensely fruitful because it allows us to see the* Gita*'s potential contribution to our contemporary philosophical discussion of consciousness and attention. This is because bringing the* Gita *into discussion allows us to appreciate a dimension of the metaphysics of attention–namely, the dimension of manner of attending and its cultivation, and the moral and social implications in the proposed redirection of one's attention–not often recognized in the contemporary Western discussion.*

KEYWORDS: *Bhagavad Gita*, consciousness, attention, redirection of attention, yoga, self, self-monitoring, adverbialism, manner of attention, moral and social implications of redirection of attention

The topic of consciousness has played a central role in almost all the major schools of Hindu[1] philosophy since the time of the Upanishads, the earliest Hindu texts

* This article is the ninth in a special series of commissioned articles on non-Western philosophies. The eighth article, 'Thought Experiments and Personal Identity in Africa', by Simon Beck and Oritsegbubemi Anthony Oyowe, appeared in Volume 7, Issue 4, pp. 439–452.

Earlier versions of this paper were presented at Wofford College, Harvard Conference on 'Mind and Attention in Indian and Contemporary Western Philosophy', Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, Towards a Science of Consciousness Conference in Tucson, AZ, and as the Grover Alumni lecture at the University of Connecticut. My ideas benefitted from audience questions and interactions at each of these venues. Special thanks are due to Nico Silins who was the commentator for my paper at the Harvard conference and provided the most pressing, thought-provoking and constructive comments that an author can hope for. My sincere thanks to Miranda Fricker, Paula Droege, Helen Beebee, and Erik Anderson for their insightful and helpful comments on an earlier draft. The remaining errors are mine.

[1] Even though Indian philosophy is often treated as coextensive with Hindu philosophy, there are aspects of philosophical engagements in India, for example, the philosophical explorations in Mughal emperor Akbar's

addressing questions concerning the true nature of the self. This is because even in the early Upanishads reality is conceived in terms of *brahman* or *atman,* which is typically translated as 'the self' and consciousness is taken to be its essential and identifying marker. As Bina Gupta writes, 'The discussions of "consciousness" in the Upaniṣads arise in the context of explaining the real nature of the ātman or the self' (Gupta 2003: 16). Notable also is the celebrated phrase, *sat cit* [the Sanskrit word commonly translated as consciousness] *ananda*, both in the Upanishads and more prominently in eighth-century classical Hindu philosopher Sankara's Vedanta philosophy, as delineating three defining markers of *brahman*. Thus, the discussion of consciousness in Hindu philosophy has been focused on its being a (sometimes essential) feature of self. When understood as an essential feature, consciousness is further characterized as a pure and transcendent notion.

However, a notable exception has been the prominent Hindu text *Bhagavad Gita*.[2] Self is still an ontologically foundational concept in the *Gita,* which Krishna variously characterizes as *brahman*, or Purusha, and which he also identifies as himself. Continuing with the practices of the Upanishads, the *Gita* characterizes the self as the 'unchangeable' (7.13, for example), 'unthinkable'[3] (2.25), and 'unmanifest' (2.25), thereby highlighting its transcendent nature. However, a prominent feature of the Upanishadic self, namely, its essential nature of pure consciousness, remains absent in the *Gita*. Indeed, as Dasgupta observes, 'in the *Gītā* the most prominent characteristic of the self is that it is changeless and deathless; next to this, it is unmanifested and unthinkable. But it does not seem that the *Gītā* describes the self as pure consciousness' (Dasgupta 1975: 471).[4] But the question remains, does the *Gita* still offer us a theory of consciousness?

To clarify my question here let me introduce a distinction that is useful in understanding the Hindu theories of consciousness, namely, 'the empirical-transcendental distinction' that Gupta argues manifests variously in different Hindu theories of consciousness (2003: 9). To treat consciousness as an empirical category is to think of it in terms of its essential intentionality and causal history. To treat consciousness as a transcendental category, on the other hand, is to think of it as a pure category, that is, without any relationalities including intentionality

court in sixteenth century Fatehpur Sikri, which would qualify a philosophical discussion as Indian philosophy but not as Hindu philosophy specifically. So I will characterize the *Gita's* philosophical context in terms of Hindu philosophy and not Indian philosophy.

[2] It is a part of the Sanskrit epic *Mahabharata* containing the conversation where Krishna convinces Arjuna, one of the main warriors in the Mahabharata war, to fight. In spite of its occasion—the conversation takes place after Krishna, serving as Arjuna's charioteer, placed their chariot in the middle of the two armies arrayed, ready to commence the fight—the *Gita* (as the *Bhagavad Gita* is commonly referred to) contains much philosophy. All translations of verses from the *Gita* are from Maitra (2018).

[3] The Self as 'unthinkable' might be a challenging idea for Western readers since the very nature of self is the location for thoughts and other mental operations. For the *Gita*, as well as for much of Hindu philosophy, however, as we will note in the following, 'self,' in being co-extensive with *brahman*, also refers to the foundational, transcendent and eternal principle that is incomprehensible by our ordinary mental operations and therefore 'unthinkable'.

[4] Indeed, as a survey of verses 2.17 through 2.24 will make evident, Krishna uses many different descriptions for the self including indestructible, immeasurable, unborn, eternal, ancient, inexhaustible, immovable, and changeless. But consciousness or *cetana* never appears in this long list.

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and causal history. Thus when the majority of the Upanishads depicts the self in terms of pure consciousness and its self-manifested nature, it is this transcendental category that the Upanishads have in mind. In many other Hindu philosophical schools, namely, Vedanta, Samkhya, and Yoga, consciousness is similarly understood in terms of its transcendental nature. A notable exception in this regard is the Nyaya school that understands consciousness as an empirical category. Thus, interpreted through the lens of this distinction, it could be argued that because consciousness has predominantly been taken as a transcendental entity in Hindu philosophy and because by contrast the *Gita* conceives it mostly as an empirical category, the *Gita's* contribution is inevitably somewhat eclipsed. As a case in point, consider Gupta's (2003) monograph *Cit: Consciousness*, which is devoted entirely to various prominent Indian (Hindu and Buddhist) theories of consciousness. Not only is there no chapter or section devoted to the *Gita* here, but the *Gita* is mentioned only four times in the entire monograph, two of which are in the notes!

However, the claim that the *Gita* employs an empirical conception of consciousness might be considered contentious. If one consults classical Vedanta philosophers such as Samkara or Ramanuja as well as modern interpreters such as Aurobindo and their translations and interpretations of the *Gita*, one quickly finds that they all take consciousness, considered as a *transcendental* category, to be quite central in the *Gita*. As a result, the empirical theory of consciousness that the *Gita* also offers remains unexplored. To clarify, I am not making the argument that the *Gita* offers *only* an empirical theory of consciousness even though I believe that based on a strict textual reading of the *Gita* it is difficult to articulate a thoroughgoing transcendental interpretation of its understanding of consciousness. But I shall not offer arguments for that position here. My goal is to show that the *Gita* can be taken as offering an interesting *empirical* theory of consciousness, and in developing this theory the text also offers a related theory of attention. I want to argue, further, that exploring the *Gita's* theory of consciousness, especially in conjunction with its theory of the nature of attention, is immensely fruitful because it allows us to see the *Gita's* potential contribution to our contemporary philosophical discussion of consciousness and attention. My attempt here bears a modest similarity with Jonardon Ganeri's exciting project in *Attention, not Self* (2017) where he draws on the sixth-century Indian Buddhist philosopher Buddhaghosa to engage with the contemporary philosophy of mind discussion of the nature of attention.

The *Gita's* discussion of consciousness becomes important especially if we are interested in Hindu understandings of attention and, more specifically, in the disciplined redirection of attention. This is because yoga, which is at the heart of the *Gita's* main message, is understood as a discipline to control one's mind. When Krishna says in 2.61, 'Having brought them [the senses] all under control, let him [yogi] sit controlled, intent [i.e., focusing] on me [as the supreme]', it seems reasonable to interpret him as saying that the mark of a yogi's consciousness is his focus or attention—both in terms of its object and its manner. In this endeavor to control one's mind, focus is placed on states of consciousness, attention, and redirection of attention. Since the *buddhi* or intellect or mind of a

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yogi is 'focused (i.e., one-pointed) and resolute' (2.41), it is clear that yoga involves the disciplined redirection of attention. Because awareness allows this disciplined redirection, consciousness becomes the location and anchor for yoga in the *Gita*. Thus, I want to argue that (whatever else it offers) the *Gita* offers us an empirical understanding of consciousness, teasing out the different strands of which will be rewarding from the perspectives of both comparative philosophy and the contemporary discussion of attention. The goal of my paper thus is to determine the nature of attention in the *Gita's* understanding of yoga and to articulate the role of such attention in the *Gita's* theory of consciousness. My working conclusion is that what differentiates an ordinary person's consciousness from a yogi's consciousness is the nature of their attention both in terms of its manner and its object. While the manner of an ordinary person's attention is marked by attachment to objects, that of a yogi is marked by its nonattachment. As we will note, given the *Gita's* metaphysics, a corollary of these two distinct manners is that they have their different respective objects—while the yogi's attention is focused on the self (*atman* or Krishna), an ordinary person's attention is focused on the myriad objects of his experience.

The rest of the paper is divided into three sections: the first focuses more specifically on the only context in which the *Gita* mentions consciousness (the Sanskrit term '*cetana*' most commonly translated as 'consciousness'); the second focuses on the *Gita's* account of an ordinary mind and how it comes to be furnished with its content; the third focuses on the discussion of yoga and the specific transformations required in becoming a yogi so as to highlight the role of attention and redirection of attention in the *Gita's* empirical understanding of consciousness. In this section I also explore briefly some areas of comparison, especially with regard to a family of theories, namely, the adverbial theories, from the contemporary discussion of attention. My proposal here is that bringing the *Gita* into discussion allows us to appreciate a dimension of the metaphysics of attention—namely, the dimension of manner of attending and its cultivation and the moral and social implications in the proposed redirection of one's attention—not often recognized in the contemporary Western discussion. This also prepares us to engage with the discussion of the redirection of attention in a far more nuanced and direct fashion.

1. *Cetana, Kshetra*, and *Kshetrajna:* The Making of an Empirical Consciousness

The *Gita's* discussion of *kshetra* and *kshetrajna* is a good place to start for one general and two specific reasons. Generally speaking, *kshetra* or 'field' and *kshetrajna* or 'field-knower' are two fundamental ontological categories the *Gita* employs to explain the nature of our world, the phenomenology of our experience, and the means of attaining freedom from what the *Gita* considers the state of bondage our typical existence engenders. *Kshetra* or field is understood as the cause and location of our embodied experience. Comparing the use of *kshetra* in many other Hindu contexts, Dasgupta clarifies that in the *Gita* this term is used in its broader sense and thus stands for 'not only the body, but also the entire

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mental plane, involving the diverse mental functions, powers, capabilities, and also the undifferentiated sub-conscious element' (Dasgupta 1975: 464). Now turning to more specific reasons, first, the only occasion the term 'consciousness' (*cetana*) is mentioned in the *Gita* is in the context of *kshetra* or field.[5] According to the *Gita*, the *kshetra* contains within it the conscious principle—the possibility of consciousness, and by associating with this principle, the self becomes a *kshetrajna* or the knower (Dasgupta 1975: 471). Thus, consciousness becomes a condition for any kind of epistemic agency. Second, in the context of the distinction between the *kshetra* and *kshetrajna*, not only does the *Gita* lay out how the phenomenal world of experiences arises but, more important, how one's manner of engagement with such a world—with or without attachment—comes to determine the nature of one's attention. Thus, it is the context in which a clear view of the phenomenology of consciousness and the role of yoga, or disciplined redirection of attention in overcoming the limiting nature of attachment to such phenomenology, starts to emerge.

I have already hinted that the *Gita's* notion of consciousness is empirical. It is time now to flesh out the nature of this empirical notion. While a complete discussion will have to wait until I have laid out some of the basic moves that the *Gita* makes in relation to consciousness and attention, let me describe what I mean by an empirical theory here. In the context of Indian philosophy, as Gupta points out, theories have been categorized in terms of the 'empirical-transcendental' distinction. Included among the features of an empirical consciousness are being 'caused by worldly events and processes', necessarily belonging 'to an embodied self', being '*of* something', or being 'directed towards objects in the world', in other words, its essential intentionality (Gupta 2003: 9). Gupta adds a further feature to this list: 'empirical consciousness must be a temporally changing process in time, and not a timeless entity' (Gupta 2003: 9). It is clear that in the empirical understanding a conscious state is marked by its nature of being caused, being embodied and temporal, and, most important, being intentional. 'Transcendental consciousness, on the other hand, must be independent of worldly causality. . . . It is not a property of an embodied self, and it must not be a process—a series of constantly changing events—in time. In short, a transcendental account of consciousness regards consciousness as without locus (*āśraya*) and without object (*viṣaya*)' (Gupta 2003: 9). In a number of Upanishads (*Mandukya*, *Brhadaranyaka,* and *Chandogya*, to name a few) four states of consciousness are typically recognized, namely, the waking state, the dream state, the dreamless deep sleep state, and finally the *turiya* state. What differentiates the last state from the preceding three is the absence of any intentionality (*nirvisaya*) and worldly

[5] See for example Dasgupta (1975: 471): 'The word *cetanā*, which probably means consciousness, is described in the *Gitā* as being a part of the changeable *kṣetra*, and not the *kṣetra-jña*'. However, not every scholar of the *Gita* translates '*cetana*' as consciousness. Stephen H. Phillips, for example, in personal communication, expressed his trouble with this translation; his suggestion is that the term 'Purusha' should be translated as consciousness instead. But given the range of meanings of the term 'Purusha' in the *Gita,* using it to mean consciousness would make the *Gita*'s notion of consciousness already a transcendental one. Further, given that one of the meanings of the Sanskrit term '*cetana*' is consciousness, I find Dasgupta's rendering of '*cetana*' as consciousness to be on target.

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causality. In all the major Upanishads, the Sanskrit terms '*cit*' and '*atman*' both refer to 'pure' 'trans-empirical' consciousness that is different from empirical consciousness and is taken to exist only at the *turiya* state (Gupta 2003: 16).

In light of the above distinction between empirical and transcendental[6] consciousness, the full force of the *Gita's* contention that consciousness is an empirical category—i.e., caused, embodied, and intentional—becomes clearer. This also allows us to appreciate how the *Gita* differs in this regard from the Upanishads and some of the major schools of Hindu philosophy. In most contexts of Hindu philosophy the emphasis on pure consciousness is due to the fact that such a category provides the 'common locus, . . . , [between] the empirical person and the Brahman' (Gupta 2003: 19). When Uddalaka in *Chandogya* Upanishad says to his son Svetaketu, '*tat tvam asi*' (you are that), he highlights Svetaketu's continuity and identity with the essence of that (*tat*), i.e., self or pure consciousness. However, in the context of the *Gita* consciousness does not serve as the common locus of self and the empirical person because it does not belong to *brahman* or self as its essential property (see, for example, Dasgupta 1975: 477). Indeed, as Dasgupta has noted, the *Gita* does not refer to the self in terms of its self-consciousness or self-luminosity anywhere, thereby implying that consciousness is not essential and inherent to the self (1975: 471). Further, responding to the question, 'if the self was not a conscious principle, [how] could it be described as *kṣetra-jña* (that which knows the *kṣetra*)?' Dasgupta argues that 'the self here is called *kṣetra-jña* only in relation to its *kṣetra*, and the implication would be that the self becomes a conscious principle not by virtue of its own inherent principle of consciousness, but by virtue of the principle of consciousness reflected or offered to it by the complex entity of the *kṣetra*' (471).

Thus the role of consciousness in the *Gita's* metaphysics is to provide a location for the discipline of yoga to be practiced, and through this practice a person becomes a *kshetrajna* or the knower of the true nature of the self. The fact that the *Gita* mentions consciousness only in the context of *kshetra* or field indicates that consciousness here is considered primarily as a caused and temporal category. Given the main project of the *Gita*, namely, to articulate the nature of yoga, such an empirical understanding makes sense. Consciousness functions here as the location for the practice of yoga because that practice involves an awareness of the directionality of one's attention and the cultivation of its redirection. Consciousness as a transcendental category would be ineffectual from that perspective. Indeed, there is no verse in the *Gita* that states that even the *kshetrajna*, who has the knowledge of self and by implication the knowledge of body or field (i.e., *kshetra*), attains the *turiya* state of pure nonintentional consciousness.

Multiple verses in chapter 13 of the *Gita* are devoted to the topic of *kshetra* and *kshetrajna*:

[6] Acknowledging the transcendent/transcendental distinction famously drawn by Kant, Gupta writes, 'In general, on the Indian account, for a transcendental theory of consciousness as herein described, consciousness is in a sense transcendent—for in its pure nature it goes beyond all sensuous experience—but it is also transcendental, in the sense that in the absence of consciousness there would be no knowledge, empirical or otherwise' (Gupta 2003: 10).

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> O son of Kunti (Arjuna), this body is referred to as the 'field' [*kshetra*] (and) one who knows this is called the 'field-knower' [*kshetrajna*] by those who know him. (13.1)
>
> O Bharata (Arjuna), also know me to be the field-knower in every field; I deem this knowledge of the field and its knower as true knowledge. (13.2)
>
> Hear from me briefly about this field, its attributes, its modifications and their causal sources; and also about him (the field-knower) and the nature of his power. (13.3)
>
> The great elements, the sense of I-ness (ego), intellect, and the unmanifest (nature); the ten senses and the one (inner sense, i.e., mind), and the five sense domains, (13.5)
>
> Desire, hatred, happiness, suffering, bodily form (that constitutes the basis of) *consciousness*, persistence—thus is the field with its modifications illustrated in summary. (13.6, italics mine)

Consciousness is treated here as one of the modifications of—that which ensues from—*kshetra* (field) along with desire, hatred, pleasure, pain, the senses, the I-ness (*ahamkara*), the mind, and the *buddhi* or intellect. Since the *kshetra* is identified as the body, it will be helpful to outline briefly the dualistic ontology[7] that the *Gita* proposes between the body and the self at various points. As many verses in chapter 2 point out, the basic distinction between the two is that while the body is perishable, the self is eternal. Further, though this dualism is dealt with in a number of places with varying degrees of details and sophistication in the *Gita*, I believe for our purposes here just the basic structure of the dualism will do. This structure is reflected in the famous verse where Krishna tells Arjuna, 'As a man casts off worn-out garments to put on new and different ones, so the dweller in the body (the embodied self) discards worn-out bodies to enter into others that are new' (2.22). In this understanding a human being is an embodied self—a *jiva*, and in virtue of having a body, the self comes to have different faculties to experience and act in the world.

As I have noted above, the *Gita* never attributes consciousness to the self. Dasgupta has argued that 'it is by virtue of its [consciousness's] association with the self that the self appears as *ksetra-jna* or the knower' (Dasgupta 1975: 471). The reasoning here is that if consciousness is not an inherent property of the self but rather an emergent property following from *kshetra*, the self becomes a knower through its association with consciousness. This association and the resulting epistemic agency of the subject would have to be unpacked at two levels —at the level of the ordinary mind and at the level of that of a yogi.[8] The

[7] It needs to be mentioned that the *Gita* seems to resolve this dualism when Krishna identifies Purusha (self) and Prakriti (body/nature) as his higher and lower natures respectively (7.5). Thus unlike in the Samkhya, where the Prakriti-Purusha dualism is final and unresolvable, in the *Gita* the dualism is subsumed under the single principle of Krishna. However, since much of the *Gita* also highlights the inherent contrast between these two in order to make its central argument, I think it is appropriate for our purpose here to depict this in terms of dualism.

[8] This would also apply to Krishna since he identifies himself as the highest yogi (15.18) and also a *kshetrajna*.

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proposal of my paper is that the difference between these two levels is marked by the *manner* and *object of their respective attention*. In an ordinary mind, consciousness works with other modifications of the *kshetra*/field and results in the common phenomenal experience of pleasure and pain, heat and cold. Such consciousness comes to be marked by the attachment to the mental states of desires, aversions, wants, fears, and so on that seems to follow automatically from those experiences as will be discussed in next section. In the mind of a yogi, as we will see in section 3 while consciousness retains its basic intentionality, it is not accompanied by an attachment to the conscious states of desires and so on and their intentional objects.

To recap quickly what we have so far: consciousness is a modification of *kshetra* along with other modifications like *ahamkara*, the elements, the *buddhi*, and the senses. Along with other modifications, association with consciousness makes the self experience the world and develop, among other things, a sense of agency and attachment. The *Gita* identifies the yogi's project as working toward overcoming the stronghold of most of these modifications of *kshetra,* but the *Gita* remains silent about consciousness. Indeed, consciousness or *cetana* is not mentioned again in the *Gita* after verse 13.6. Further, while most other modifications, for example, the sense of I-ness, desires, and so on are explicitly mentioned as targets that need to be subdued, the *Gita* does not mention consciousness in that context either. In spite of this silence, my argument is that consciousness remains important in the *Gita* because it provides the location for the intellect or *buddhi* to control the mind and thereby the senses and, moreover, to anchor the attention of the yogi.[9] What a yogi does through the cultivation of a self-monitoring consciousness is to master not the world but his own mental realm through the practice of yoga, which enables him to redirect his attention to his *atman* or Krishna, that is, to his transcendent self.

2. Mind and its contents according to the *Gita*

Early on in chapter 2, Krishna outlines how the mind of a non-yogi, that is, an ordinary human mind, comes to have its content, namely, its desires, longings, cravings, fears, angers, and beliefs. The verses I want to work with here are the following:

> Contacts (of our senses) with their objects, O son of Kunti (Arjuna), give rise to the experiences of cold and heat, pleasure and pain. O Bharata (Arjuna), you must learn to bear these transient things patiently—they come and go. (2.14)
>
> Dwelling on sense-objects, a man develops attachment for them; from attachment comes desire, and from desire arises anger. (2.62)
>
> From anger comes delusion, from delusion come memory lapses; from memory lapses comes destruction of the intellect (the ability to think), from destruction of intellect he perishes. (2.63)

[9] Armstrong and Ravindra (1979) provide an excellent account of the role of *buddhi* in the *Gita*.

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The main idea is that when our senses come in contact with their objects, such contact not only gives them 'the experiences of cold and heat, pleasure and pain' (2.14), but also the intentional content of these states such as to allow thinking about those objects. Such 'dwelling' compels the mind to develop attachment to these objects and from such attachment arise desire, anger, fears, and ultimately the 'destruction of intellect' (2.62 & 2.63). As I noted in *Philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita: A Contemporary Introduction* (Maitra 2018: 49), the *Gita* suggests a kind of mutuality between phenomenology and intentionality of our mental content here. First, the sense-object contact furnishes the phenomenal content of the resulting experiences; second, the phenomenal content becomes the intentional content thereby enabling 'dwelling' on them, which finally results in attachments to the sense objects. Indeed, following the *Gita*, we could argue that our first phenomenological experiences of heat and cold or pleasure and pain become the content of our thoughts and beliefs and other mental states involving them. This constitutive mutuality[10] seems to result automatically in attachments to these contents, giving rise to various emotional states of desire, anger, anguish, and fear.

If you are open to my interpretation of the *Gita's* treatment of phenomenology and intentionality here, then the follow-up is an interesting theoretical option in the landscape of contemporary philosophy of mind. As Terence Horgan and John Tienson (2002) point out, a 'separatism' between phenomenology and intentionality—the position that 'there is nothing that it is like to be' in a state 'by virtue of which it is directed toward what it is about' (2002: 520)—is the dominant tendency in contemporary philosophy of mind. Countering this tendency, Horgan and Tienson defend an inseparability between phenomenology and intentionality. However, their account operates on a kind of '*narrow* intentionality' (521, italics in original) which is 'a form of intentional directedness that is built into phenomenology itself, and that is not constitutively dependent on any extrinsic relations between phenomenal character and the experiencer's actual external environment' (2002: 521). What I take the *Gita* to suggest here is not just a close connection between phenomenology and intentionality but also a kind of externalism about phenomenal content where the external environment we experience not only shapes the intentional contents of our thoughts and beliefs but also how we experience this environment.[11]

Thus, intentionality and aboutness come to mark the mental reality of a *jiva* or an embodied self for the *Gita*. When the *jiva*, through the sense of I-ness (*ahamkara* or ego) comes to own these experiences, it develops attachment to these objects and also

[10] Since *nirasraya* (without a subject of experience) and *nirvisaya* (without a content) are taken to be marks of the pure, transcendental consciousness in Indian philosophy, having a content is often considered to depend on the state being experienced by a subject as well. The *Gita* seems to maintain that the phenomenal experience of the subject leads to intentional content.

[11] Bill Lycan in a personal communication has encouraged me to clarify the exact relation between phenomenology and intentionality that I have in mind here. Is it a causal relation? This becomes especially pressing because when Horgan and Tienson take this relation to be constitutive, there is 'nothing causal about it', as Lycan rightly points out. I would argue that this relation is mainly causal in the *Gita* even though I would hope this could retain at least a loose sense of constitutivity.

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to the fruits of the actions involving these objects. Attention in such a consciousness is thus focused on these objects and fruits of actions, and the manner of attending is marked by attachment. Attachment more specifically here involves a certain emotional and mental orientation, namely, that of mineness and ownership, to one's surroundings and internal realms. This attachment—the given mode of engagement of an ordinary mind according to the *Gita*—is also due to a fundamental misunderstanding about the basic ontological dualism between the self and the body/field. This attachment is caused by and concomitant with an individual's confusion between that which is eternal, namely, the self, and that which is transient, namely, the body. As Krishna says, 'These bodies are known to have an end; the dweller in the body is eternal, imperishable and immeasurable' (2.18). The *Gita* here draws on a central theme of Hindu philosophy that maintains that the human predicament is due to a basic misunderstanding or confusion. Due to our ignorance of the fundamental difference between self and body, we identify ourselves with our bodies; as a consequence, we come to *own* everything that our bodies experience. That then becomes the basis of our attachment.

Another mark of an ordinary—non-yogic—mind is that its attachment to sense objects precludes the intellect from being in control of the mind and the senses and from being focused on the self. In such cases, the intellect yields to the senses (2.67), and its focus is diffused and scattered among many objects. In other words, the ordinary mind's attention is imbued with attachment that results from the intentional and phenomenal content of the mind. In a yogi's mind neither the intentional nor the phenomenal content is sublated. Take for example the later part of 2.14 where Krishna clearly says in relation to feelings of heat and cold that we 'must learn to bear these transient things'. Or 2.64 where Krishna characterizes the yogi as one 'whose senses experience sense-objects without attraction and aversion [i.e., without attachment]'. Instead of overcoming the mental states like desires themselves, it is the attachment to them that has to be overcome.[12] What allows such a transformation is also the focus of the yogi's mind on self. Thus, the transformations that mark a yogi's mind are the changes in his *manner* of engagement, which is one characterized by a lack of attachment, as well as the changes in the object of his attention, which is the self.

In his commentary on verse 2.14 Ramanuja—a Vedanta philosopher of medieval India—writes:

> As sound, touch, form, taste and smell with their bases, are the effects of subtle elements (Tanmātrās), they are called Mātras. The contact of these

[12] It is interesting to note here the similarity with the Buddhist idea of mindfulness. Generally speaking, the goal of Buddhist mindfulness practices is *not* to not have thoughts or feelings anymore; rather, the goal is to notice their fleeting, transient, and thus nonpermanent nature with an even mind. Further, as Dasgupta notes, this point also highlights how the *Gita*'s use of the notion of yoga differs in a fundamental way from that of Patanjali in his *Yogasutra*. 'According to Patañjali the advancement of a *yogin* has but one object before it, viz. the cessation of all movements of mind (*citta-vṛtti-niradha*)' (Dasgupta 1975: 447). 'The object of the *yogin* in the *Gītā* is not the absolute destruction of mind, but to bring the mind or the ordinary self into communion with the higher self or God' (Dasgupta 1975: 448).

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> through the ear and other senses gives rise to feelings of pleasure and pain, in the form of heat and cold, softness and hardness. The words 'cold and heat' illustrate other sensations too. . . . The brave must endure them patiently, as they 'come and go'. They are transient. When the Karmas, which cause bondage, are destroyed, this 'coming and going' will end. (Ramanuja 2009: 68)

Ramanuja's commentary helps us understand this verse in the context of Krishna's above-noted claim that from *kshetra*—field and body—arise the elements and senses. This commentary also acknowledges the interconnection between intentionality and phenomenology. But what is even more pertinent here is Ramanuja's point that this phenomenology and resultant intentionality cannot be avoided as they are due to one's karmic past. Thus, what a yogi is advised to do is to not try to undo this 'coming and going', but to control his or her attachment to them. In that transformed manner of engagement with this 'coming and going' a yogi's attention comes to differ from that of an ordinary person. This analysis seems to provide us also with an insight into verse 2.41 where Krishna says: 'O joy of the Kurus (Arjuna), in this (*yoga*) the mind is focused and resolute, but the thoughts of irresolute men are diffuse and endless'. Once we understand attention in terms of attachment, we can make better sense of the mechanism through which the focused one-pointedness of a yogi's mind and intellect is achieved and likewise the diffusion of the ordinary mind. Since the ordinary mind becomes attached to whatever it desires, the attention of such a mind is perpetually drawn outward to endlessly many different objects. By contrast, when such an attachment is overcome, especially through the discipline where the intellect directs the mind to focus solely on the self, then the one-directedness of such attention seems to follow equally naturally.

3. Making of a Yogi's Attention

Let us turn to the description of a yogi in the *Gita*. The *Gita* devotes a significant number of verses to this topic. Here are a few representative ones:

> That yogi, whose self is content with knowledge and realization, who has mastered his senses, who remains unshaken, (and) to whom clods, stones, and gold are the same, is said to be disciplined (in *yoga*). (6.8)
>
> For, when a man's mind is governed by the wandering senses, his mind is carried away as wind carries away a ship on the water. (2.67)
>
> Therefore, O great-armed warrior (Arjuna)! He whose senses are withdrawn from their objects completely, has a mind which is firmly established. (2.68)
>
> When his controlled mind rests within the self alone, free from craving for all (objects of) desires, then he is said to be disciplined (in *yoga*). (6.18)
>
> Having relinquished all desires, when a man acts being free from longing, without possessiveness and the sense of 'I' (individuality), he finds peace. (2.71)

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> The self is the friend of one who conquers his self through that very self; but for one who has not conquered his self, his self behaves with enmity like a foe. (6.6)

Some of the salient points that the *Gita* emphasizes in relation to yoga are: A yogi is one who has renounced attachment, who is even-minded in success and failure, whose mind is in control of all the senses, and whose intellect is one-pointed and transcends the taint of delusion (2.51). Finally, a yogi is one who conquers his self by the self (6.6). The term 'self' is equivocal here, one might argue, to magnify Krishna's point: a yogi's everyday self is being conquered by the transcendent self or Krishna that exists in the yogi. Indeed, when the *Gita* says the yogi conquers the self by the self, it indicates a certain directionality, manner, and object of the yogi's attention. But the question is what characterizes the *manner* of a yogi? Fortunately, the *Gita* provides us with a few verses that respond to this question directly:

> Abandoning attachment, yogis perform action only with the body, mind, intellect, and also the senses for self-purification. (5.11)
>
> Having made his mind one-pointed, restraining the activity of his thought and senses, let him practice *yoga* for self-purification while sitting on that seat. (6.12)
>
> Holding his body, head, and neck erect, motionless and steady; gazing at the tip of his nose without looking in any (other) direction, (6.13)
>
> He, whose self is established in *yoga*, who sees sameness in all things, sees himself as abiding in all creatures and all creatures in himself. (6.29)
>
> Restraining all their senses, with equanimity toward all, they also reach only me, delighting in the welfare of all beings. (12.4)

These verses respond to the question of manner both at the level of process and also at the level of result. In terms of process, the *Gita* specifies the behavioral and physical corollaries of a yogi's attention. This, according to the *Gita*, results in a manner of engaging with the world without attachment. In contemporary Western theorizing on attention, the family of theories that takes the manner of attending to be relevant to the nature of attention is called adverbialism. It has been proposed in response to the dominant representationalism about the phenomenon of attention where the 'phenomenology of attention is exhaustively characterized in terms of the objects and properties the subject's conscious experience presents to her' (Watzl 2011a: 722–23). In other words, representationalism about attention holds that attending *is* representing something to one's consciousness and thus the manner of that attending does not feature in the articulation of the nature of attention. Adverbial accounts, in contrast, treat phenomena as marked primarily by the *manner* in which something happens (see, for example, Mole 2010; Watzl 2011a, 2011b). Mole offers the following example to illustrate his point: 'Traditional presentations of adverbialism often begin by pointing out that a sentence such as 'Jones has a limp' does not entail that there is an object—a

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limp—that Jones has. A limp is not an object Jones has about his person. It is a *manner* of walking that Jones's walking exemplifies' (Mole 2011: 69, italics added). He develops his adverbialism about attention by contrasting it with the 'process-only' version of the representationalist view of attention where attention is often understood solely in terms of '*which* processes are taking place' within the subject's brain. Instead, Mole argues, an account of attention needs to focus on the 'how', that is, on the manner of attending (Mole 2010). This kind of adverbialism, while it takes the manner of attending to be relevant to our understanding of attention, seems to fall short of the nuanced understanding the *Gita* provides not just by outlining the manner in terms of both the process involved and the result attained but also by highlighting what happens when the manner and object of attending are redirected.

Instead of being marked by attachment to sensory objects and fruits of actions, the consciousness and attention of a yogi are marked by their inwardness. His self-consciousness simply becomes the consciousness *of* the self independently of any other objects of experience. The *Gita* thus says not only that a yogi is not attached to the objects of his desires and longings, but that the self is the only anchor of his consciousness, of his awareness that is characterized by its ability to see sameness in all things (6.29) and act with equanimity toward all (12.4). This movement from the lack of awareness of one's attention to the redirection of attention where the self envelops the consciousness is the mark of the yogi's consciousness. Let me outline here my main claims so far:

a) a yogi has to redirect his attention;
b) the training for such a redirection involves training his *buddhi* (intellect) to control his mind and senses in such a way that his attention becomes focused on the self (i.e., *object* of attention changes)
c) Such redirection of attention also brings about an attitude of non-attachment to desired outcomes, and the objects of other mental states like anger, fear, anguish, and so on (i.e., the *manner* of attention changes).
d) An equanimity, or even-mindedness, follows from such retraining by which a yogi comes to view different objects (objects with varying degrees of value such as a stone, a piece of gold, a brahmin, and an outcaste) equally and with impartiality and also 'delights in the welfare of all being' (12.4).
e) Finally, since such a redirection of attention requires self-monitoring on the part of the yogi on what (namely, the self or the object of attachment) his attention is focused and the manner (with attachment or without) of his attention, consciousness becomes central as providing the location for the project of one's becoming a yogi.

It is clear that self-monitoring consciousness and the self-consciousness that results from it play a key role in one's becoming a yogi in the *Gita*. We need to clarify first

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though that this self-consciousness is different from the self-consciousness discussed in the context of contemporary philosophy of mind. In the latter context, we typically understand 'self' to mean our mind or even the embodied mind, and self-consciousness simply means a consciousness of that mind's various states that results from the consciousness being directed inward. However, no self-monitoring understood in terms of a cultivated and disciplined redirection of attention is necessary for this kind of self-consciousness.

In the Hindu context, in contrast, as I noted in section 1, the dominant understanding of consciousness that is taken to be the essential mark of the self (*atman*) is transcendental—nonintentional, noncausal (for example, in the Upanishadic and Vedantic philosophies). One of the implications of the transcendental understanding of consciousness is that self is immediately known (indeed intuited, see, for example, Dasgupta 1975: 471) given its essential nature of pure consciousness. Thus self-consciousness here follows automatically. But it remains to be shown how self-consciousness or self-awareness understood as the consciousness of the self or *atman* comes about within the *Gita's* empirical understanding of consciousness especially since I have argued that pure consciousness does not belong to the self as its essence. Self-awareness here follows only from a kind of self-monitoring consciousness that the *Gita* recommends cultivating. Stephen H. Phillips has argued that a 'monitoring consciousness' is presupposed in all yoga practices as well as all yoga philosophy (2009: 41). I believe such a monitoring consciousness is the nature of a yogi's consciousness in the *Gita* as well. Phillips further takes 'monitoring' to mean 'willfully [deliberately] locating one's attention' (2009: 41). It thus seems reasonable to assume that monitoring consciousness is the same as (or at least similar to) the consciousness as understood in terms of the redirection of one's attention. Phillips argues that in the Samkhya-Yoga school of Hindu philosophy the self-monitoring consciousness results in 'the self disidentifying with the body and mind' and returning or retreating to the 'consciousness's native state of self-absorption and bliss' (Phillips 2009: 42). Thus, Phillips associates self-monitoring with the native (i.e., transcendental) state of self-absorption. However, consciousness is not characterized in terms of transcendental self-absorption as an automatic given in the *Gita*. Instead, the self-absorption is understood in terms of absorption in Krishna (see, for example, 4.9), which happens only after a yogi is able to redirect his attention to the self through the cultivation of a self-monitoring consciousness. We might conclude that what takes primacy here is the ethics (of yoga) rather than the metaphysics (of transcendental consciousness).

How does a yogi's consciousness monitor itself in the process of redirecting its attention? This redirection is of utmost value for the *Gita* as it removes delusion and delivers equanimity or *samatvam* where the yogi 'sees himself as abiding in all creatures and all creatures in himself' (6.29). The yogi is able to do this as a result of two related but distinct steps: the first step involves self-monitoring in terms of the yogi's controlling the mind and senses and thereby not being swayed by impulses and the like when they arise in the mind. This is what is implied by 'restraining the activity of [a yogi's] thought and senses' (2.12). Second, because

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the monitoring and redirecting involves making the self the object of attention, the self-monitoring consciousness results in the realization of the true nature of one's own self. Thus, in focusing on the self without attachment, the yogi realizes his true identity with the self; further, in doing so, the yogi also sees the same truth in everyone else. Both even-minded steadiness—a sensibility of neutrality as regards success or failure—and equanimity—the ability to engage with everyone as the same—result from the transformation in the yogi's consciousness, which is marked by its disciplined redirection of attention (2.56). When such a yogi acts, it is for the welfare of the universe.[13] Discussion of attention in the context of the *Gita* thus allows us to appreciate the dimensions of the ethical and social potential of disciplined redirection of attention.

My above claim might seem counterintuitive at first. If the yogi's attention is directed inward, then how can that self-absorption condition and enable the yogi to act for the welfare of the universe? Such self-absorption can only be socially irresponsible, it might be argued. The *Gita* would respond by clarifying that 'self-absorption' is being used with two different meanings in this worry. Drawing on our everyday notion of self, the 'self-absorption' the challenger has in mind refers to a selfish self-centeredness that overlooks and often negates others and their needs. No true engagement with the welfare of the universe can follow from that other-denying attention. Krishna, however, would clarify that the redirection of attention that the yogi's self-monitoring consciousness endeavors is exactly to counter this kind of self-absorption. The *Gita's* counsel of self-absorption, thus, requires subduing of attachments to sense objects that often function as the central items of one's self-centered, other-denying engagement with the world. The yogi's consciousness realizes not only that it is the same as Krishna but also that the same essence exists in everyone. So even in its inward directionality an equal consideration for everyone else is built in. That, in reality, is the essential feature of equanimity. Further, its ethical and social dimensions—the yogi remaining neutral to his own gain or loss and rejoicing in and acting for the good of all creatures—also become evident (see Maitra 2018: 73–74 for more on this).

The result of this process is a substantive impetus for moral and social engagement on the part of the *Gita*'s yogi. Indeed, in realizing the unity and sameness abiding at the core of every creature, the *Gita* would argue, the yogi's mode of nonattachment and equanimity becomes truly world-affirming. The kind of openness that accompanies such nonattachment allows the yogi to approach other people's suffering more easily. This openness of nonattachment ultimately results in a real 'moral axis for action and compassion' (Goleman and Davidson 2017: 159). Thus, a radical and expansive egalitarian potential is implied by the 'self'-lessness that comes to mark the yogi's self-absorption.

[13] Sreekumar (2012) offers a convincing account of a version of rule-consequentialism in the *Gita's* moral account that he takes to follow from its notion of *lokasaṃgraha* that I have translated as 'welfare of the universe'.

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4. Conclusion

The relation between attention and consciousness is not a straightforward relation (see, for example, Mole [2008] and Saran [2018] for two contrasting positions on this relationship in the contemporary discussion). However, for the *Gita* the yogi's consciousness is marked by a kind of attention that has both cognitive (awareness of the true nature of the self) and ethical (mental attitudes of even-mindedness, compassion, etc.) consequences. Further, because consciousness remains primarily an empirical phenomenon in the *Gita*, it allows a location where the multidimensionality of attention can be appreciated. I have noted that while adverbialism about attention highlights the manner of attending in its theory of attention, the distinctive contribution of the *Gita* is in its articulation of the role of disciplined redirection in the yogi's attention. In this spirit the *Gita* understands consciousness in terms of its empirical or essentially intentional nature. Moreover, as I have tried to show, in the *Gita's* understanding attention is a manner of engagement. That is, what marks a conscious state and act as that of attending is its manner. This manner is further articulated, in the case of the yogi's mind, in terms of a multidimensionality constituted of mental dispositions/attitude of nonattachment through proper cultivation of the intellect and also *samatvam* (evenness) and a kind of intentional directionality informed by knowledge of the self or *atman*. Thus, the *Gita* offers us a nuanced way to unpack the idea of *manner* in attending, and in so doing it helps us make explicit the moral and social implications and radical egalitarian potential of redirection of attention. It is this aspect that makes the *Gita's* account of consciousness and attention interesting and relevant to the Western philosophical reader.

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