

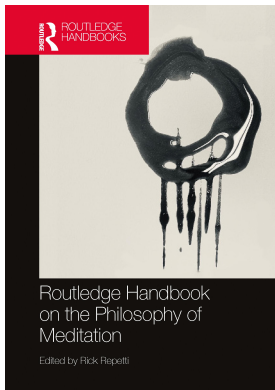
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IS THERE A GLOBAL NORM IN FAVOR OF GLOBAL ATTENTIVENESS?

Jake H. Davis

1 Introduction

A local tracker named Lapata guides my friend on a wildlife safari in Botswana. Fancying himself a bit of the Great White Explorer, my friend peers intently outward into the savannah, searching with his gaze here and there, attempting to be the first to spot the wildlife. Lapata simply waits, alert but relaxed, seeming to be looking nowhere in particular. Again and again, as my friend is searching strenuously and in vain, Lapata – still looking straight ahead – quietly points off to one side or the other, having been alerted by a slight shift of light out of the corner of his eye, or by a whisper from moving leaves reaching his ear. Turning to see where Lapata is pointing, my friend looks intently without seeing anything, until after a few moments, out of the shadows steps a giraffe, zebra, or rhino.¹

Sometimes, looking gets in the way of seeing. When visual cues are subtle and fleeting, for instance, the effort of visual search can prevent unexpected stimuli from popping out. Even when a gorilla dances across the screen, famously, if one's attention is fixated on another task on that same screen, the gorilla can pass unnoticed (Simons and Chabris 1999). However, studies on attention training practices such as mindfulness meditation point to a kind of alert, relaxed attentiveness that can be cultivated so as to become aware of stimuli that are otherwise not grabby enough to get one's attention in a bottom-up way, nor preferentially brought out by top-down attention processes. I will call this Global Attentiveness.

Global Attentiveness: a state involving decreases in the affective biases of attention that lead to fixation, and corresponding increases in generalized alertness, such that one is more aware, and more clearly aware, of subtle fleeting changes, of properties and objects that would otherwise pass unnoticed, across the range of experiential modalities.

Ought we to be globally attentive? I believe so. To mark its normative nature, I will refer to this latter proposal as *Global Attentivism*. Here is an initial formulation of that claim:

Global Attentivism: the norm that one should be in a state of Global Attentiveness.

Or, more explicitly:

Global₁ Attentivism: the norm that one should be in a state involving decreases in the affective biases of attention that lead to fixation, and corresponding increases in generalized alertness, such that one is more aware, and more clearly aware, of subtle fleeting changes, of properties and objects that would otherwise pass unnoticed, across the range of experiential modalities.

Even though I endorse the claim that we should all be globally attentive, other people's normative frameworks differ from mine. Across human cultures and sub-cultures, such values can diverge sharply. The aim of my project here is to work towards a conception of *Attentiveness* that brings out why it might be that even if the norm of *Attentivism* is not true universally, in the context of disagreements across cultures, we nonetheless ought to speak and act as if it were.

I first characterize the state of Global Attentiveness in a way that allows us to articulate a norm of Global Attentivism that could be applicable at all times, in all situations, and from all human perspectives. The second section draws on recent work on idealization to propose that for certain purposes we should think and act *as if* a norm applies from any and all human normative perspectives, even if we know that it does not. Uniting these two points, I develop Global Attentivism as a means to ground normative debates across human cultural contexts. To illustrate this proposal, Section 4 uses an imagined cosmopolitan discussion over whether and when states such as anger and attentiveness should be cultivated. Human cultures and sub-cultures do not agree on how to decide which states should be cultivated. This normative diversity across cultural contexts raises a number of important challenges to the idea of Global Attentiveness and the norm of Global Attentivism, to which I sketch a response in section 5.

One implication of this normative diversity is worth noting at the outset. The Buddhist practice of *satipaṭṭhāna*, along with forms of practice descended from it and now taught in health care settings and elsewhere, is often referred to as 'mindfulness meditation'. Teachings on mindfulness meditation are the most direct inspiration for the notion of Global Attentivism on which the philosophical investigations of this chapter are focused. Nonetheless, I am wary of my project here being seen as part of a field called the 'philosophy of meditation'.

In choosing what to read or what to watch, who to spend time with or where to be, I indirectly choose which sorts of states I want to bring out in myself. Even when I have intentionally chosen conditions that I know will cultivate hatred, anxiety, distraction, resentment, or conceit, however, it sounds odd to say that this counts as a type of meditation. Rather, people use the term 'meditation' to refer to the cultivation of states they – the speakers – see as good.

Crucially, not everyone agrees on which states are good and should be cultivated. Speaking of a field called the 'philosophy of meditation' seems very likely to (mis-)lead people into thinking that there is some set of practices that this field theorizes about, that there are some kinds of cultivation that count as meditative, and some that *do not*.² The concept of a family resemblance between 'meditative' or more generally 'contemplative' practices or qualities (consider, e.g., the open-ended lists proposed by Komjathy 2018, p. 214) does not help here; the fundamental problem is with the normative act of choosing which sets of practices or qualities characterize or fall within the family of to-be-cultivated things. Perhaps the cultivation of attentiveness should be included as variety of 'meditation' but not the cultivation of anger; perhaps the practice of prayer should be counted as 'meditative' but not the focused attention involved in training as a sniper. But *whose* values get to decide that? To settle by definitional fiat ethical questions of what is to-be-cultivated is a kind of intellectual violence: One assumes – in a way that is blind to its own dogmatism – that a particular, parochial set of values is universal. The alternative offered here

is to start from the assumption that there are no universal normative grounds for determining what falls within the family of things that are to-be-cultivated, and instead to assess for each set of conversation partners we engage with whether there are nonetheless normative grounds that we, given who we are in conversation with, ought to treat *as if* they were universal.

2 Strong Global Attentivism

The notion of Global Attentiveness I defined at the outset is most directly inspired by experiential and theoretical investigations of mindfulness meditation. In previous work, Evan Thompson and I brought together Buddhist textual sources with recent cognitive science research to propose that mindfulness meditation may involve two processes that are dissociable but developed together in the course of the practice (Davis and Thompson 2014). Mindfulness meditation involves enhancing basic levels of alertness, for one, in such a way that meditators can report on stimuli in various modalities that would otherwise not be clearly noticed. We suggested that the practice also involves decreasing the kind of fixations that are due to affective biases of attention, allowing for a flexibility and responsiveness of selective attention to incoming stimuli. Increased alertness and increased flexibility of attention are uniquely valuable when the two are brought together. Indeed, heightened alertness can be pathological when paired with biases towards fixation on negatively charged stimuli, as in anxiety disorders. Because depressive patients are prone to negative rumination, the positive effects of mindfulness interventions in such cases have been found to be modulated partly by a reduction in the affective biases of attention that cause attention to get stuck in negative trains of thought (van Vugt, Hitchcock, Shahar, and Britton 2012). The effect of mindfulness practice in reducing fixation seems to be associated with increases in wakefulness (Britton, Lindahl, Cahn, Davis, and Goldman 2014) as well as awareness, measured in terms of ability to report on subtle, fleeting stimuli. And this increased awareness is not limited to subtle external stimuli, but also includes increased ability to report on interoceptive changes associated with emotional reactions (Sze, Gyurak, Yuan, and Levenson, 2010; Silverstein, Brown, Roth, and Britton 2011). In this way, mindfulness meditation cultivates a heightened sensitivity, such that one is more aware, and more clearly aware, of sensory experiences of hearing and seeing, of physical sensations in the body, of states such as anger or states of mental focus, and also of the experiential aspects of pre-verbal speech or visual imagery involved in remembering, action planning, or theoretical reasoning.³

Global Attentiveness, as I have defined it, operates not by diverting cognitive resources towards one area of the visual field or away from other areas, nor by directing attention to the visual field at the expense of auditory or somatic stimuli, nor by diverting attention to perceptual stimuli at the expense of awareness of one's thought processes. Instead, this is a global decrease in the affective biases of attention that lead to fixation and a corresponding global increase in generalized alertness such that one is better attuned to subtle, fleeting stimuli across all experiential modalities.

Despite this generality in regard to experiential content, the norm that one should be globally attentive might still be context-specific, in at least three ways. For one, it might be that there are certain kinds of situations in which one ought to be globally attentive, and other kinds of situations in which one ought not to be globally attentive. One might wonder whether being globally attentive detracts from the focus necessary for driving or performing neurosurgery, and so conclude that we *should not* be globally attentive in every possible situation. As I conceive of Global Attentiveness, however, this state allows for some focus while also allowing unexpected but relevant information to be noticed and taken into account: Perhaps being focused but not fixated on a red traffic light while driving allows one to pick up also (as my Dad did once) on

visual cues in the rearview mirror that an out of control car is approaching from behind, and prepare accordingly; perhaps when operating as a brain surgeon being focused but not fixated on a particular area allows one to notice some unexpected diagnostic clue or some item in the operating theatre in need of correction. These considerations make more plausible the view that one *should* be globally attentive in every possible situation; that there are no contexts in which one should not be globally attentive.⁴

Global₂ Attentivism: the norm that one should be in a state of Global Attentiveness, in any and all conditions in which one finds oneself.

Strengthened in this way, such a norm might still apply only *from* the perspective of certain human cultures or sub-cultures, and not from the perspective of others. Certain Buddhist traditions advocate a cultivation of something akin to Global Attentiveness, and esteem those who are globally attentive in this way, taking their judgments to be wiser than the judgments of those who are less globally attentive. Philosophy in Eurocentric contexts, in contrast, is dominated not by the norm of Global Attentivism but instead by a normative conception of rationality that often includes, for one, the norm that one should not simultaneously believe a proposition and also its negation. Both perspectives, however, tend to take such axioms as applicable not just from within their own perspectives, but rather as having normative force from any human perspective.

Making explicit the claim of Global Attentivism to apply across human cultural perspectives, we arrive at a third iteration:

Global₃ Attentivism: the norm that one should be in a state of Global Attentiveness, in any and all conditions in which one finds oneself, applies from any and all human standpoints.

Still, one might find it hard to make sense of the claim that one should be globally attentive without reference to some purpose for which one ought to do so. In the terms of cognitive science, increases in bottom-up awareness are often driven by top-down goals, which may be specific to a particular normative framework, whether cultural, religious, or personal. This diversity of top-down goals for bottom-up awareness raises important challenges to the idea of Global Attentiveness and the norm of Global Attentivism, to which I sketch a response in Section 5. For now, I will set aside these concerns and assume that it makes sense to speak of cultivating Global Attentiveness as an end in itself and not for some other end. For this reason I will not suggest that we cultivate Global Attentiveness because it endows one with access to truth, nor with ethical virtues, nor because it is pragmatically useful, in any one of many varied cultural conceptions of these. Instead, I will characterize the strongest form of Global Attentivism simply as ‘overriding’ any and all competing norms. On this version of the claim, we should cultivate Global Attentivism no matter what (other) ends this happens to lead us towards or away from.

This results in a version of Global Attentivism that is global rather local in four senses: It is not indexed to specific content to be attended to; it is not indexed to specific contexts in which to be attentive; it is not indexed to specific human cultural perspectives from which the norm is endorsed; and it is not indexed to goals or values other than attentiveness itself.

Global₄ Attentivism: the overriding norm that one should be in a state of Global Attentiveness, in any and all conditions in which one finds oneself, applies from any and all human standpoints.

This is a very strong claim. Indeed, one might well wonder whether there are any normative truths at all that hold in the way Global₄ Attentivism claims to. To bring this possibility out more perspicuously in the discussion that follows, let us take one further step towards generality, abstracting beyond the particular issue of Attentiveness and Attentivism, to describe a Global Norm Schema.

Global Norm Schema (for any humanly possible X): the overriding norm that one should X, in any and all conditions in which one might find oneself, applies from any and all human standpoints.

Perhaps there are no Global Norms. Still, for specific purposes, operating with the notion that one or another norm is a Global Norm in this sense may be useful as an idealization. In particular, I will suggest that even if there is no Global Norm in favor of Global Attentiveness, nonetheless for the purpose of coming to agreement on non-partisan grounds we ought to think and act *as if* there is.

3 Idealizing Global Norms

It is often useful for certain purposes to treat certain postulates *as if* they were true, even though we explicitly acknowledge that they are not. For purposes of making predictions about trends under messy real-world conditions, for instance, the move of simplifying by assuming away some facts is not only helpful, but indispensable. Appiah (2017) draws on Vaihinger (1925/2009) to emphasize that such idealizations – ‘fictions’ in Vaihinger’s terms – are to be justified by their usefulness for some particular purpose. Idealizations in ethical and political contexts, by assuming away certain truths about human psychology and society, may enable us to see ‘real possibilities’ that would not otherwise be apparent. Here, I want to focus on ways in which thinking and acting as if there is a relevant Global Norm, even if we know that there is not, can enable a plurality of normative perspectives to see real possibilities for coming to agreement on non-partisan grounds.

From some normative perspectives, for instance, righteous anger is the appropriate state to cultivate in response to injustice. And for someone taking that stance, if Global Attentiveness gets in the way of cultivating anger in these situations, then perhaps attentiveness should be trained away, not cultivated. Just in virtue of sharing the motivation to come to agreement on non-partisan grounds, the parties to a debate do not necessarily share any further norm that is agreed by all perspectives to have maximum normative ‘pull’, overriding other norms and thus serving as a shared foundation. In the terms introduced above, there may be no Global Norm that could settle the issue at hand. Instead, from each of the perspectives, sets of norms more or less provincial and parochial to that perspective hold sway. These have what we might call Maximum, but Partisan, Pull.

Still, there may be norms X, Y, and Z that have *some* degree of pull from within every perspective party to the discussion, even if there is no one perspective from which there is one of these, X, Y, or Z, that has *maximum*, overriding pull. Crucially, this allows us to look for norms that make the best compromise between having Pull and being Non-Partisan, ones that we might speak of as having Maximum Non-Partisan Pull. Drawing on Appiah and Vaihinger, my suggestion is that for the purpose of coming to agreement on non-partisan grounds, we can treat whatever norms have Maximum Non-Partisan Pull for the purposes at hand *as if* they were Global Norms.

Vaihinger suggests that “what is untenable as a hypothesis can often render excellent service as a fiction”; the difference between the two is that while the hypothesis aims at being estab-

lished, the fiction is “a scaffolding afterwards to be demolished” (1925/2009, p. 88). The sort of ‘semi-fictions’ that assume away empirical psychological or social facts, he suggests, disappear through the workings of history.⁵ Appiah goes beyond Vaihinger in examining cases where the usefulness of the employment of an idealization by any one individual can come apart from the usefulness of us collectively doing so. If only one person believes that people are to be trusted, for instance, they will likely be taken advantage of; the more people there are that think and act as if the belief that people are to be trusted were true, however, the closer that belief will be to becoming true.⁶

Bringing these two proposals together, we can draw the following distinction. For an individual to treat whatever norms have Maximum Pull for her as if they were Global Norms is to engage in a kind of normative solipsism that is philosophically uninteresting, at best, and dogmatic at worst. On the other hand, to treat those norms that have Maximum Non-Partisan Pull across a large range of human perspectives as if *they* were Global Norms, even if they are not, is the sort of semi-fiction that might serve its purpose by making itself truer over the course of history.

One might object that what we should care about is not coming to agreement on non-partisan grounds, but rather coming to *justified* agreement. This is mainly to miss the point. The value of the idealizing move I have proposed, drawing on Appiah and Vaihinger, is precisely that it does not require privileging any one perspective’s view of what is to count as (rationally, objectively, and so on) justified agreement. The spirit of the objection can nonetheless be helpful in pointing out an important distinction from other ways of reducing disagreement. Through violence, political might, or social charisma, the norms of inquiry that belong to those in power and the conclusions that follow from these can come to dominate; alternatively, certain ways of thinking can die off and others be promoted to dominance in a particular context through random, impersonal forces. I hope you share with me the stance that actively trying together to move towards agreement on grounds we can all regard as non-partisan is better than these other ways that disagreement can decrease through the vagaries of history, even if you also feel that it is not *as* good as coming to agreement on the grounds that have the most normative pull from *your* perspective.

4 Adjudicating anger

To make the suggested use of idealized Global Norms more concrete, imagine a discussion on the value of anger, for which individuals embedded in a broad range of human value systems come together. To keep it simple and concrete, imagine four human perspectives: a Burmese Buddhist mindfulness meditator from Mandalay; a philosopher in the contemporary Euro-American Analytic tradition working to revitalize the indigenous philosophy of her Māori community; a French activist of African descent leading Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests in Paris; and a US military veteran of mainly European descent who supports Donald Trump’s efforts to “Stop the Steal” and “Make America Great Again” (MAGA).

It is especially evident in the context of cross-cultural disagreements such as that over the ethics of anger – though it is often true also in disputes closer to home – that the scope and shape of the relevant notions are themselves part of what is at issue: What precisely is to count as ‘anger’, ‘suffering’, ‘flourishing’, or a ‘person’? The construction and application of emotionally charged concepts may be especially sensitive to how attention is directed (Barrett 2013, p. 383). More generally, if patterns of attention can shift the salience and even the paradigm of a concept, norms regarding which patterns of attention we ought to have will have implications for many areas of conceptual analysis. Our judgments about imagined ethically charged scenarios

are profoundly affected by how the situation is described, as Tversky and Kahneman (1981) famously showed. The hypothesis that these effects are due in large part to directing attention towards certain features of the situation seems so plausible as to be almost uninteresting. If this is so, then the relevance of such attentional framing effects is likely applicable not only in imagined scenarios but also – perhaps even more so – to the effects of multi-modal selective attention on ethical judgment in real-world, ecologically valid scenarios.

Since there is vastly more information available than can be processed by finite individuals or groups of human beings, selection is inevitable. Even if other norms are also in force, norms of attention thus play a significant role in determining which conclusions we ought to come to under given conditions of available evidence (*cf.* Siegel 2017, pp. 59 ff.; Wu 2014, p. 244). Norms about how to deploy attention are plans for action, they are “stances”, as Ganeri (2019) uses the term. More broadly, we might speak of normative cultures made up of networks of normative stances, including norms about attention in interaction with norms about the application of concepts as well as norms about action.⁷ Stances in each of these domains may be adopted more or less dogmatically, that is, in a way that prohibits the use of contrary stances (Ganeri 2019).

It may turn out that from within one or another of the normative cultures in our imagined conversation on anger, there is not enough value placed on coming to agreement with others to motivate the search for a norm that makes the best compromise between having normative Pull and being Non-Partisan within the current range of conversation partners, and to treat that norm as if it were a Global Norm. Holding such a stance may prohibit one from gaining the mutual benefits of joining in cosmopolitan conversations. So, let us imagine that whatever perspectives remain, while they disagree on the question of which situations merit angry response, they nonetheless enter into conversation with the motivation that all parties do come to agreement on this question based on grounds that appear non-partisan to all. Among the parties to our imagined conversation, some might hold that the historical treatment of enslaved and indigenous peoples by European colonizers and their descendants justifies angry political responses, while others may hold that increases in the domestic influence of Islamic immigrant groups justify angry political responses. In fact, many Burmese Buddhists maintain both of these, since they see both colonial British (Braun 2016) and also Islamic groups (Fuller 2013) as having threatened their long-standing Burmese Buddhist culture. On the other hand, the Burmese mindfulness meditator in our conversation may also be influenced by Buddhist metaphysical claims that, since there is ultimately no person to be angry at, anger is never justified.⁸ Thus, our group of four might not only disagree over which grounds justify political anger, but also over the question of whether any grounds could ever justify anger. How could we settle that debate?

Drawing inspiration from Buddhist meditative teachings as well as contemporary cognitive science, I have argued elsewhere that to the degree individuals are in a state of Global Attentiveness, and thus really fully feeling what it is like to be motivated by different emotions, they would agree on which are to be valued and disvalued (Davis 2014).⁹ For instance, I suggest that to the degree human beings from any cultural background are globally attentive while being motivated by care or by rage, they might converge on a stance in favor of care and against rage. I won't expand on this here, except to say that I take it as an empirical proposal grounded in facts about shared human affective experience arising from shared human neurobiology. To reach a normative conclusion, however, we need a further normative premise that justifies endorsing whatever judgments would be converged on by those who are globally attentive. In effect, my argument in this chapter serves to justify that further normative premise, though with a twist. If Global Attentiveness is the norm with Maximum Non-Partisan Pull, then our conversation partners may have reason to act *as if* there is an overriding norm that one should, in any and all conditions in which one finds oneself, be in a state of Global Attentiveness, and that applies

from any and all human standpoints. One way of acting as if Global Attentivism is a Global Norm is to defer to the ethical judgments about anger that we ourselves would make if we were globally attentive, since that is the state we should all be in, according to the idealization.

There are two empirical premises here, both of which must turn out true for this to work. First, it must be possible to find at least one norm with Maximum Non-Partisan Pull for a given set of conversation partners. It could turn out that there is not enough agreement even for that. It is also possible, perhaps likely, that in some cases the set of stances with Maximum Non-Partisan Pull will not include Global Attentivism but will include other norms, for instance, the principle that we should never believe a proposition and its negation. In arguing that there must be *some* norms on the processes of belief formation that apply from all human perspectives, for instance, Boghossian (2006) suggests by way of example this principle of non-contradiction. He does note (2006, p. 97) that “there are some philosophers who claim that some contradictions can be true”, but claims that “this is not a widely accepted view”. Presumably, however, Boghossian means something to the effect that the stance that we should never believe a proposition and its negation is not widely accepted in the *decidedly narrow* context of Euro-American analytic philosophy circa 2006. Graham Priest (2006, pp. 207 ff.) has suggested that many of the ways in which this norm is commonly defended in that context look suspiciously question-begging, and has also argued that the opposing dialetheist view is relatively widely accepted among Buddhist philosophers (e.g., Garfield and Priest 2009). Susanna Siegel (2017) argues that norms that apply to the context of reasoning, such as the principle of non-contradiction, apply also to processes of perception and attention. I want to suggest that in many cosmopolitan conversations, Global Attentivism is more likely to turn out to be (among) the norm(s) with Maximum Non-Partisan Pull, but this is an empirical claim.

Secondly, whatever norm turns out to have Maximum Non-Partisan Pull, this only delivers agreement if, to the degree human beings follow this norm, they would converge on some one judgment about the topic at hand. For instance, I suggested that to the degree we are globally attentive we might converge on the judgment that anger is not a state we should cultivate in any circumstance. But for some topics there may be no such convergence available by following any norm. If there is a convergence on stances toward anger to the degree whatever norm has Maximum Non-Partisan Pull is followed, there is no guarantee that the answer turns out the way Buddhists would suggest: Perhaps to the degree human beings are globally attentive they will converge on the judgment that there are certain situations in which we should cultivate anger. The point of making the final normative conclusion hostage to such empirical facts is to release ourselves from dogmatism about any particular parochial stances, while insisting nonetheless that for the purposes of engaging in a cosmopolitan conversation there is good reason to think, speak, and act *as if* certain norms hold among all parties to that conversation.

5 A narrow escape from dogmatism

The evident diversity across human normative cultures opens my project to a central challenge, but also provides the means to address it. Recall the suggestion that sometimes looking gets in the way of seeing. We fail to see the gorilla in the Simons and Chabris (1999) experiment because we are looking for a basketball. The story of Lapata, the tracker, reminds us of the positive flip-side of this, that suspending top-down efforts for particular goals can allow for a heightened awareness across modalities of experience. Similarly, a study on meditators over the course of a three-month mindfulness retreat found increases in awareness of subtle visual cues; later work by the same lab suggested that meditators were able to report on these subtle, fleeting stimuli because their attention was not fixated on the previous stimulus (Slagter, Lutz,

Greischar, Francis, Nieuwenhuis, Davis, and Davidson 2007). The Burmese meditation master Mahāsi Sayādaw (1965, pp. 52–3) suggests that although in beginning stages of *satipaṭṭhāna* great effort needs to be put out to notice experience as it is rapidly arising and passing, as this practice becomes refined “mental and physical conditions make themselves known of their own accord, one after another ... there is no effort that needs to be made to bring these conditions [to awareness]”.¹⁰ By emphasizing the decrease in fixated, effortful search for specific types of stimuli, these formulations point towards a version of Global Attentivism that is not indexed to specific content to be attended to, nor to specific contexts in which to be attentive, nor to specific human cultural perspectives from which the norm is endorsed, nor to any goal or value outside of attentiveness itself.

So suppose that it is possible experientially to separate the cultivation of Global Attentiveness from any culturally embedded top-down goals. Still, we can reason with one another about which norms have Maximum Non-Partisan Pull only by formulating proposed norms in terms that are embedded in a particular normative culture. Aspects of Mahāsi Sayādaw’s description of refined Global Attentiveness might appear parochial from other perspectives: having noted that as *satipaṭṭhāna* becomes refined no effort needs to be made to bring conditions to awareness, Mahāsi also suggests that at this stage no effort needs to be made to see the impermanence, unease, and uncontrollability of these changing conditions – that is, to see them in light of Buddhist truths. The Māori notion of *whakarongo* may partially overlap with mindfulness practices in encouraging one to pay attention with all of the senses; interestingly, it also carries connotations of peace and healing (with the phonemes ‘*rongo*’ and ‘*rongoā*’).¹¹ There may be a similar kind of overlap between *satipaṭṭhāna* and the neo-Confucian notion of ‘*jing*’ (敬) in designating a heightened state of awareness, and also in aiming to use such awareness to access to “the underlying reality of things” (‘*li*’: ‘理’).¹² However, conceptions of underlying reality (e.g., *li*) and of peace (e.g., *rongo*) may differ greatly between the respective neo-Confucian, Māori, and Buddhist contexts. Even over the course of historical development within a single historical lineage of Buddhist thought there is diversity in how the epistemic goal of “knowing and seeing things as they are” is understood (Ronkin 2005), and much more so between diverse Buddhist traditions.

Notice also that offering a definition in terms of generalized awareness and reductions of affective bias, as I have done in Section 2, embeds the norm of Attentivism within the normative culture(s) of contemporary cognitive science, which may include a certain stance of dogmatism about the particular aspects of reality accessed by the tools that cognitive scientists are trained to employ. Moreover, within the normative interpretive framework of cognitive science, affective biases may be thought of simply as the way in which any habits of selective attention are implemented. Relying on the notion of attentional bias in defining Global Attentiveness opens the norm of Global Attentivism to a serious charge of circularity. There may be no basis for specifying what counts as bias to be trained away, without begging the question.

Put more generally, here is the challenge: How is it possible to define the notion of Global Attentiveness in a way that is independent *enough* from any one particular normative culture that we can assess its normative Pull across cultural perspectives?

The point of the idealization is that we are only treating such claims *as if* they were true. No party needs to endorse any other’s specific formulation of the norm with Maximum Non-Partisan Pull. Different parties that endorse a norm of increased awareness in general might have different respective metaphysical theories of consciousness, and so on, which appear to them as reasons for endorsing that norm. In this way we need not homogenize nor water down the features that make each tradition distinctive. Instead, we can take formulations of Global Attentivism in Mahāsi’s terms, or in those of cognitive science or any other normative culture,

as plausible first pass proposals for consideration from multiple normative perspectives, rather than as a final agreement between them. Indeed, agreement may not be a destination but rather a regulative ideal: Perhaps the shared goal of coming to agreement allows us to slowly build up a network of grounding norms, through an iterative process that builds on itself. In determining which habits of selective attention should be treated as if they are to be cultivated, we also move toward determining which patterns of selective attention are to be treated as the sort of affective biases that are to be trained away. Building on this, the question of how we should conceptualize anger, and whether it should (ever) be cultivated can be refined towards a question about which specific plans for attentional action we should endorse and which we should reject. And with an increasingly broad range of conversation partners, the norms that are arrived at gain robustness, in the sense of having better prospects of remaining stable even as further human perspectives are incorporated into the conversation.

There is something of a magical quality to idealizing moves, in that a ground for agreement that is not originally shared comes to nonetheless provide a shared ground for agreement. In the very act of employing Global Attentivism as if it were a Global Norm, to reduce disagreement on the question of whether anger should be cultivated, we may create other areas of shared grounds for further agreement. For instance, if we do in fact come to agree that we should not cultivate anger, then we might act in ways that reduce the looping effects of attentional bias due to anger that drive us to select different sets of information. Put another way, human beings with more even, balanced mind-states may come to agree more fully on which of the available information is meaningful to attend to, as well as how to respond to those situations about which we come to know. This is just the reverse of the process by which social media algorithms feed different groups' selections of information that progressively diverge further and further from one another, leading to further disagreement, hatred, and violence.

6 Conclusion

Taken narrowly, the project of this chapter is to analyze a suggestion inspired by particular Buddhist meditative teachings: that the cultivation of Global Attentiveness through mindfulness meditation provides a means, applicable from every human perspective, to answer normative questions such as what stance to adopt toward the cultivation of anger. As such, this chapter is a contribution to a recent conversation in the literature on Buddhist meditation, attention, and anger (e.g., Carpenter 2017, Garfield 2017, Davis 2017).

More ambitiously, the aim of this chapter is to offer a way forward for cosmopolitan conversations to move towards agreement on normative grounds that appear non-partisan to all involved. Specifically, I have proposed that when there is a group of human beings motivated to come to agreement on non-partisan grounds, we each have reason to treat whatever norms have Maximum Non-Partisan Pull for that group as if they were Global Norms, applicable from all human perspectives. And I have suggested that Global Attentivism is likely to be one of the norms with Maximum Non-Partisan Pull across a broad range of human cultural perspectives. These are separable proposals, but if both are true, then for cosmopolitan discussions of how to be and act, we should treat Global Attentivism as if it were a Global Norm.

Notes

- 1 Thanks to Steven V. Smith for the story, and to audiences at the Columbia Society for Comparative Philosophy (and Katja Vogt as respondent), the NYU Shanghai Virtues of Attention Workshop, the NYU New York Philosophy Department, and the SUNY Binghamton Philosophy Department, and

- to Anthony Appiah, Laura Guerrero, Jared Lindhal, Jesse Prinz, Adriana Renero, Nico Silins, Sharon Street, Krushil Watene, Sebastian Watzl, and an anonymous reviewer for helpful discussion.
- 2 Eliminativism about moral properties gets classified as meta-ethics, which arguably is part of moral philosophy. Perhaps being eliminativist about the concept of ‘meditation’ in that sense could count as a move within ‘the philosophy of meditation’. Nonetheless, it seems to me it does so kicking and screaming, if a philosophical position is able to kick and scream.
 - 3 This formulation is meant to be neutral regarding which aspects of cognitive processing have the potential to be consciously experienced, and in particular on the question of whether there is any distinctive cognitive phenomenology.
 - 4 Indeed, Buddhist teachings on *satipaṭṭhāna* (foundations of mindfulness) meditation do seem to be committed to something along these lines. See, e.g., the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (Majjhima Nikāya 10) and the *Aggi Sutta* (Saṃyutta Nikāya 46.53).
 - 5 These are ‘semi-fictions’ in Vaihinger’s terms; ‘true-fictions’ contain internal contradictions and thus disappear through the course of logic.
 - 6 Appiah (2017, p. 134) credits Phillip Pettit for the example.
 - 7 I bracket here the question of whether norms of attention are specifically *epistemic* stances. Organizing notions such as truth, goodness, and utility – and the resulting boundaries between realms of normativity – are themselves contestable and contested even within particular philosophical traditions, and all the more so in a global philosophical context. In the Buddhist context(s) of *satipaṭṭhāna* practice, for instance, there is no clear distinction drawn between pragmatic goals of reducing personal anguish, and related goals of cultivating ethically good states of being, or epistemic goals of “knowing and seeing things as they are” (*yathā-bhūta-ñāna-dassana*). The stance that these normative domains should be kept separate does not seem clearly in evidence in the early Buddhist texts, nor any proposal for where to draw such boundaries. I am also bracketing here the question of whether the positive stance towards stance pluralism I am endorsing requires or entails the sort of metaphysical realism Ganeri (2019) commits to. Perhaps it merely requires a pluralist openness to various metaphysical stances. See Kachru (this *Handbook*, Chapter 5), for related supports for, and considerations about, the normativity of attention, though his chapter is not restricted in its focus to this feature.
 - 8 See, e.g., *Visuddhimagga* IX.38.
 - 9 In Davis (2014), and in Davis (2017), I use the term ‘Wide Awake’; because of the cosmopolitan context of this chapter, I have used ‘Global Attentiveness’ to point at roughly the same psychological construct.
 - 10 The text contains my translation of the lines from Mahāṣī (1965, pp. 52–3) that Nyanaponika Thera translates as: “there will arise knowledge perceiving evident bodily and mental processes in continuous succession quite naturally ... effort is no longer required to keep formations before the mind or to understand them”. (‘Sayādaw’ is an honorific in this tradition for an advanced teacher or sage.)
 - 11 Krushil Watene (2017) describes the Māori notion of *whakarongo*, meaning to ‘listen’ or ‘pay attention’. Interestingly, the phoneme *‘rongo’* “refers to all of the senses: ‘to hear, feel, smell, taste, perceive’ except for sight”, and furthermore *‘rongo’* “is also the word for ‘peace’ and *‘rongoā’* the word for ‘medicine’ and ‘healing’” (*id.*).
 - 12 Curie Virág (2017) suggests that the neo-Confucian notion of *jing* (敬) “denotes a heightened state of awareness that is free from distractions, and thus capable of providing genuine access to the underlying reality of things” (*li* 理).

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