ILLUSION OR DELUSION? A RE-EXAMINATION OF BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY OF PERSONAL IDENTITY

by Antoine Panaïoti

Abstract. In this article, I argue against the conventional view that Buddhist philosophy of personal identity regards the self as an illusion. Critically engaging the work of Miri Albahari, I defend the view that it is instead centered around the properly diagnostic claim that the overwhelming majority of human beings suffer from a *delusion* concerning the nature of the self. In the central section of the paper, I draw from contemporary work in philosophy of psychiatry to gain clarity on what delusions are and how they are distinct from illusions. On the *narrative theory of delusions* I thence develop, delusions are best understood as *faulty and harm-inducing self-referential narrative constructions*. Buddhist views on human beings' confusion concerning the self, I then submit, consist of the diagnosis of a delusion in precisely this sense. At the end of the article, I argue that in addition to its intrinsic merits this interpretation has the added advantage of bringing into sharper focus the irreducibly therapeutic character of Buddhist philosophy of personal identity, and I discuss the implications of this for future cross-cultural research on the problem of selfhood.

Keywords: Buddhism; delusion; illusion; philosophy of psychiatry

Introduction

All schools of Buddhist philosophy (1) affirm that the overwhelming majority of human beings are—if not explicitly, then at least implicitly—committed to some version of the view that the self is a simple, bounded, enduring entity and (2) deny the reality of any such self.[1] Buddhists further observe that merely rejecting the view that the self is an entity is not enough to lay this ontological error to rest.[2] Revising my beliefs is of course an important step in that direction, but genuinely relinquishing the self[3] requires cognitive and behavioral reconditioning by means of meditation

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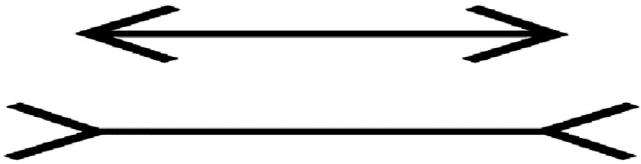

Figure 1. The Müller-Lyer illusion. The double-arrowed line appears shorter than the double-branching line, though they are in fact of equal length.

practices and ethical training.[4] A key tenet of Buddhist philosophy of personal identity, in short, is that confusion about the nature of selfhood runs very deep and is sustained by powerful positive feedback loops.

The conventional view is that what the Buddhists are claiming here is that the self is an "illusion" (Albahari 2006; Bodhi 1994; Harvey 1995; Siderits 2003; Goodman 2009; Westerhoff 2009; Strawson 2010; Flanagan 2011; Garfield 2015; Garfield, Nichols and Strohminger 2018; Struhl 2020). If the sense that I am a self is so tenacious, so the reasoning goes, it must be because ordinary human beings are under the spell of a powerful "illusion of self."[5] Indeed, it is well-known that certain phenomenal illusions continue to fool us even after we have ascertained beyond doubt that they misrepresent reality. For example, no matter how many times I measure the two lines in the Müller-Lyer illusion (Figure 1) and confirm that they are of equal length, the double-arrowed line continues to *appear* shorter than the double-branching line. Likewise, though sound philosophical argumentation can convince me that there is no self, the *impression* that I am a self seems to remain entirely untouched. Does this not support the view that the self is an illusion of some kind? On the conventional view, the Buddhist answer to this question is an unequivocal "Yes."

Pay a little more attention to the details of what is set out in the Western philosophical commentarial literature, however, and it quickly becomes apparent that things might not be quite so straightforward. Indeed, in most of the works listed above, the phrases "illusion of self" and "delusion of self" are used interchangeably (though use of the former strongly predominates).[6] This is rather puzzling. For even in ordinary, nontechnical language, the terms "illusion" and "delusion" denote distinct phenomena. Illusions are commonly taken to involve fairly localized misrepresentations of reality, which—even when these are recalcitrant—can generally be "worked around" without great difficulty from the moment one becomes aware of the faulty processing that underpins them.[7] Delusions, in contrast, are generally understood as consisting in faulty, evidence-resistant, and emotionally charged beliefs[8] with adverse effects on individuals' overall functioning.[9] It seems obvious, then, that there exists an important difference between claiming that the self is an illusion and claiming that it is a delusion. But this difference gets blurred in much of the

contemporary philosophical reception of Buddhist thought, which, concerning this matter, suffers from an uncharacteristic lack of conceptual clarity.

This is all the more surprising as an appropriately fleshed out "*delusion of self*" account would *prima facie* do at least as good a job at explaining why belief in the existence the self is, as Buddhists point out, reasoning-resistant. And it might do a *better* job at making sense of the other principal dimensions of the problem of personal identity in Buddhism: confusion concerning the self, according to Buddhists, has broad-ranging deleterious effects at the level of affect, judgement, and behavior (which is a feature of delusions, but not of illusions). Is it not to a delusion rather than to an illusion that Buddhist philosophy of personal identity points? Most commentators have not bothered to consider this question, seemingly content to discuss this matter in very loose terms.

Miri Albahari is a notable exception. In her 2006 monograph, *Analytical Buddhism: The Two-Tiered Illusion of Self*, she argues that the self is an illusion, not a delusion (122–25).[10] In a 2014 article, Albahari revisits this question and revises her account. She now argues that, for Buddhists, the "sense of self" is a "cognitive illusion" that is "*anchored in* a delusion of self, a belief that the content of the illusion is real" (2014, 15).

In this article, I critically engage Albahari's work and argue that Buddhist philosophy of personal identity is *not* concerned with an illusion of any kind. What Buddhist philosophy advances, I claim, is the properly *diagnostic claim* that the overwhelming majority of human beings suffer from a delusion concerning the nature of the self. At the end of the article, I argue that, in addition to its intrinsic merits, this interpretation helps to bring into sharper focus the irreducibly therapeutic character of Buddhist philosophy of personal identity.

My discussion proceeds in four steps. In the "Albahari on the "Sense of Self" as Illusion" section, I explore Albahari's 2006 "illusion" and 2014 "illusion-*and*-delusion" accounts. In the "Narrative Theory of Delusions" section, I point to problems in Albahari's 2006 account. Building off of this critique, I draw from contemporary work in philosophy of psychiatry (Gallagher 2003; Gerrans 2009; Coltheart et al. 2010) to develop a theory of delusion that clearly and systematically sets them apart from illusions. On this theory, delusions are *faulty autobiographical narrative constructions*. In the "Self as Delusional Construct in Buddhist Philosophy of Personal Identity" section, I argue that the Buddhist view on human beings' confusion concerning the self consists in the diagnosis of a delusion as defined in the previous section, then critique Albahari's 2014 account on the ground that it is redundant to speak of "cognitive illusion of self" once one admits of the existence of a "delusion of self." In the "Conclusion: Buddhist philosophy of personal identity as therapy" section, finally, I consider some of

the implications of my results for future directions of research on Buddhist philosophy of personal identity *qua* therapy.

Albahari on the "Sense of Self" as Illusion

Key to Albahari's 2006 account of the illusory nature of the self in Buddhist thought is what I will call her "big-tent" illusion theory. The "broader definition of illusion" she proposes, Albahari explains, is "needed to properly capture the way in which the self might, plausibly, count as an illusion" (2006, 125). Let us begin, then, by taking a detailed look at this theory and at how Albahari puts it to work.

Albahari defines illusions as follows: "When X purports (through a medium of appearance) to exist in manner F, to person P, X-as-F is illusory when X does not really exist in manner F" (2006, 122). Thus, in the case in the Müller-Lyer optical illusion, the *double-arrowed line* [X] appears to *me* [P] to exist in the manner of *being shorter than the double-branching line* [F], when really it is not shorter than (but of equal length with) said double-branching line. Illusions, Albahari explains, are necessarily cognitive in that they "openly conve[y] a message about X's manner of existence," albeit one that "turns out to be false" (2006, 123).

Albahari also stipulates that illusions' medium of (deceptive) appearance must be something broadly sensory. One of the five sense organs is general at play when a person experiences an illusion. But Albahari thinks an illusion may also involve a diffuse, nonperceptual "sense impression" (2006, 123). She gives the example of the "sense of danger" I might experience during a midnight stroll even though I cannot point to any sense experience to support or explain the feeling that I am in danger (2006, 18, 124).

According to Albahari, what she calls "standard illusions" (e.g., the Müller-Lyer illusion), hallucinations, and delusions all fit this basic model. They should thus be thought of as three subclasses of the broader class of illusions.

The major difference between delusions and other members of this class, according to Albahari, concerns their doxastic status. A standard illusion or hallucination is doxastically neutral: though I may initially be fooled by a standard illusion or hallucination, I need not be (2006, 123). Thus, rational people who are familiar with the Müller-Lyer illusion will cease to believe that the two lines are of unequal lengths even though they continue to perceive them as being so. Likewise, a person who has consumed lysergic acid diathylamide—or LSD—may hear the clouds above her singing heavenly hymns while remaining aware that this is a drug-induced false appearance. It is when certain "major" or "central" beliefs are "drawn into the illusion," Albahari explains, that we speak not just of standard illusions or hallucinations, but of delusions (2006, 124). Robust

doxastic commitment, in short, is of the essence of delusions. She offers two examples. The first concerns a person with schizophrenia who hears (what she believes to be) the voice of God enjoining her to embark on a grand mission (call this the *voice of God delusion*). The second concerns a person with paranoid personality disorder who "senses" that aliens are monitoring his every move (call this the *alien delusion*). Albahari argues that these count as cases of "illusions in the broad sense" in that they involve a false cognition the medium of appearance of which is broadly sensory. But what makes these illusions *delusions* is that, unlike standard illusions or the hallucinations of a self-aware LSD-user, harboring them implies being fooled by them.

Albahari points to two other differences between standard illusions and delusions, with hallucinations now sharing one property with standard illusions, and the other with delusions:

(1) While standard illusions, like hallucinations, are always "perceptually oriented," delusions may or may not be—thus, the voice of God delusion is perceptually oriented, while the alien delusion is not, having for its medium of appearance not an ordinary sense impression, but instead a vague "conscious impression" (2006, 124).

(2) While delusions, like hallucinations, imply cognitive or perceptual "malfunction or abnormality," standard illusions do not imply such malfunction—on the contrary, it is not experiencing them that would betray malfunction or abnormality (2006, 124).

Now, to see why being able to count the self as an illusion requires this big-tent illusion theory, we must consider what Albahari thinks Buddhists are saying when they deny the self's reality.

According to Albahari, the Buddhist view is that though the self appears to be an unconstructed, ontologically bounded entity, it is really the product of ongoing processes of identification with various mental and physical factors.[11] The sense that the "self" is an unconstructed and enduring entity (i.e., that the self [X] exists in the manner of being unconstructed [F]) is thus a *false impression*.

As Albahari notes, what Buddhism primarily focuses on is not belief in the existence of self-entities as a theoretical commitment. It is with the deeply visceral and intrinsically first-personal "sense of self," not with a particular reflectively endorsed metaphysics of self, that Buddhists are concerned with.

On Albahari's account, this "sense" commands robust doxastic commitment, like all delusions and unlike standard illusions and hallucinations: it is impossible for me to harbor it without being fooled by it (2006, 125). Further, again unlike standard illusions or hallucinations, the deceptive sense of self is not perceptually oriented, which makes it much closer to

such delusions as the alien delusion (2006, 125). However, the sense of self is crucially unlike a delusion in that it does not "involve cognitive malfunction or abnormality" (2006, 124–25), but is, on the contrary, "statistically very normal" (2006, 125).

Albahari thinks it would thus be a mistake to interpret Buddhist thought as claiming that our confused sense of being a self is delusional. We ought to regard it instead as a *special kind of illusion*, namely, a nonperceptual, doxastically staunch, highly normal illusion. Of course, it would be difficult to conceive of a such a delusion-illusion hybrid if one did not accept Albahari's big-tent illusion theory.

Albahari tells a very different story in a more recent article (2014). She now presents illusions and delusions as separate albeit tightly connected phenomena, and our confusion about selfhood as involving both a self-illusion and a self-delusion. Illusions, she claims (much as in 2006), are doxastically noncommittal in and of themselves, but they can become doxastically anchored if they are accompanied by a concordant delusional belief (which she describes as a distinct mental event). "[I]n many delusions," she writes, "the subject will take the content of the illusion to be real"; conversely, I am fooled by an illusion *iff* said illusion is doxastically anchored by an attendant delusion (2014, 15). Thus, when I first encounter the Müller-Lyer illusion, I experience both an illusion and a delusion; after coming to learn than the lines are actually of equal length, I overcome the delusion, and continue to experience the illusion alone.

With regard to selfhood, there is likewise according to Buddhists (and Albahari) both a "cognitive illusion" of self and a "delusion of self, a belief that the content of the illusion is real" (with the latter serving as an "anchor" for the former) (2014, 15). But Albahari thinks that the relation between the illusion and delusion of self is even tighter than it is in ordinary illusion-delusion duos: contrary to what happens in many other cases of illusions when I become aware that the impressions they impart are false, the self-illusion *does not persist* after I have overcome the self-delusion. This, she explains, is because the same psychological mechanisms are responsible for both the cognitive illusion and the delusion of self (2014, 19).

The problem, however, is that the delusion of self is extraordinarily difficult to overcome. For Albahari, this is because the self-delusion is not of the standard "reflectively endorsed judgment," but rather of the "action-based" variety (2014, 15). While the former type of belief is ascribed on the basis of the subject's conscious and reflective judgement that P, the latter is ascribed "on the basis of nonreflective criteria such as observable patterns of emotions and behaviors" (2014, 17). The delusion of self, in short, is rooted in the deeper pre-reflective, affective layers of the psyche. Hence, its profound recalcitrance or evidence-resistance (relative to other delusions—like the "delusion" that the double-arrowed line is shorter than the double-branching line in the Müller-Lyer illusion). This also helps

make sense of Albahari's claim that, because the illusion and delusion of self are produced by the same psychic mechanisms—namely, mechanisms that are mobilized in desire-formation and action-performance—the self-illusion and self-delusion stand and fall together (2014, 19).

The Narrative Theory of Delusions

In this section, I point to shortcomings in Albahari's 2006 account of delusions, then defend an alternative, more compelling theory of delusions.[12] On this theory, delusions are self-referential narrative fabrications and, as such, must be firmly distinguished from illusions and hallucinations.

Consider, to begin, what Albahari tells us about the "sense of being watched by aliens" (2006, 125). On Albahari's view, this delusion's medium of appearance, though nonperceptual, is nevertheless sensorial. What is at play here is a "sense impression" similar to what happens when I experience a sense of danger "without obvious input from a particular sense organ" (2006, 18, 124). Many clinical delusions seem to fit this description. For example, persons suffering from delusion of grandeur may be described as harboring the "sense that I am one of the greatest persons ever to have lived," while persons suffering from Capgras delusion may be described as harboring the "sense that my friend/spouse/parent/pet is an impostor."[13] These delusions, though not perceptually oriented, may be described as being anchored in the kind of elusive "sense impression" Albahari has in mind.

There is something incongruous, however, with the very notion of a perceptually unsupported sense impression. If a "sense" arises without any particular sense organ being stimulated, then is it appropriate to describe it as a "sense impression"? Would not it be more natural to describe the "sense" at work in the delusions mentioned above as kind of "impression" *simpliciter*?

Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that this were precisely what Albahari's discussion of nonperceptually oriented delusions points to. On this line of thought, talk of a sense impression with reference to this type of delusion's medium of appearance should not be construed in standard causal terms—namely, in terms of sense stimulation *causing* a sense impression. Rather, such talk is to be understood in phenomenological terms: I do not just happen to believe that my spouse is an impostor, I first and foremost *sense* that he is (which I then take to ground my belief that he is effectively an impostor). Such "sensing that…," Albahari might close, is what the notion of a nonperceptual sense impression denotes.

The problem with this reply is that it creates problems for Albahari's big-tent illusion theory. Indeed, on this construal of her claim that all illusions have for their medium of appearance a sense impression, the phrase "sense impression" means one thing when it is used to account for percep-

tually oriented illusions—namely, "sensory stimulation and processing" *qua* "cause of false impression"—and something entirely different when used to describe nonperceptual illusions—namely, "sensing that…" *qua* "pre-reflective phenomenal ground of belief-formation." Such equivocation undermines the very foundation of Albahari's big-tent illusion theory. So, the reply we have just explored does not work.

A more promising way to salvage a big-tent illusion theory *à la* Albahari might be to backtrack on the notion that there exist any nonperceptually oriented delusions. Recall how, for Albahari, some delusions are straightforwardly tied to perceptual experiences. Thus, the voice of God delusion is anchored in a powerful auditory hallucination. The strategy here would be to claim that delusions involving a diffuse "sense that…" have more in common with hallucination-related delusions of this kind than first meets the eye. Contemporary work in neuropsychiatry suggests that many of the clinical delusions that from an outside perspective do not appear to be anchored in a sense impression are in fact genetically related to anomalous percepts. Studies of the Capgras delusion (Ellis et al. 1997; Brighetti et al. 2007), for instance, show that it is connected to neurophysiological disturbances that inhibit the usual affective and autonomic (i.e., brain-triggered somatic) responses that kick in when a I see the face of a person I love. This gives rise to an uncanny, dissonant percept: I *recognize* the face, yet I am not *moved* by it in the way I normally am when I see a person I know and trust. This percept, to put things in somewhat simplistic terms, is what fuels the "sense that you are not really my spouse, but an impostor." Now, suppose that it turned out that all delusions involving not an outright hallucination but merely a diffuse "sense that…" were in fact genetically related to uncanny percepts resulting from neurophysiological malfunctioning.[14] A defender of Albahari's big-tent theory of illusions could then qualify her account by claiming that all delusions are in fact perceptually oriented, and thus that it is true that all "illusions" (broadly defined, Albahari-style) have for their medium of appearance a "sense impression" (in the same sense of the term).[15]

These same data can be used to support a very different understanding of the nature of delusions, however. On Philip Gerrans' analysis of the Capgras delusion (2014), the uncanny percept I experience when I recognize a loved one's face yet remain psychosomatically unmoved by it is, in and of itself, *pre*-delusional. The delusion proper begins when I *interpret* this bizarre percept as *evidence* that "it is not really my husband—but an impostor!—whom I share my life with," that is, *when I start telling a story that explains, as it were, the uncanny percept*. This is the work of the brain's Default Mode Network (DMN), the complex, multi-hub brain network responsible for reflexive, autobiographical, and broadly social thought. And the delusion is anchored, finally, when the metacognitive systems responsible for assessing the plausibility of various conjectural ideations fail to rule out this explanation as outlandish (Gerrans 2014, 224–25).[16]

Gerrans' account tells us three things about delusions: (1) delusional belief-formation is driven by abductive-*cum*-interpretative cognitive processes (on this particular point, see Coltheart, Menzies and Sutton 2010); (2) the systems responsible for delusion-formation and maintenance (the DMN and systems responsible for metacognition,[17] respectively) are separate from the systems responsible for sense experience (the occipital cortex for vision, the superior temporal gyrus for hearing, the amygdalae for emotional responses to sense stimuli, and so on); (3) in that having a delusion involves telling oneself (and others) a story, delusions may be defined as *narrative constructions*—and more specifically as narratives concerning the *self* (see Gerrans 2009 and the more extended discussion below).

Now, consider what happens when we examine hallucination-related delusions through this lens. Take the example of the person with schizophrenia who hears the "voice of God" sending her off on a grand mission. On the narrative theory of delusions, there is a two-step process here: (1) I experience a hallucination that, in and of itself, is no different from that of a self-aware LSD-user who realizes that, contrary to appearances, the clouds are not actually singing heavenly hymns (i.e., I experience what Albahari would call a "doxastically neutral" hallucination); (2) I form the delusional conviction that my role in the universe is of such great importance that I have been selected by God to go on a special mission, and thus that it is actually God's voice I am hearing. Otherwise stated, a powerful hallucination that I could in principle have realized is a false appearance gets fed into a delusional narrative centered around a particular interpretation of said hallucination, whereupon I robustly assent to the proposition, "What I heard was the voice of God instructing me to… ." On this view, then, what is properly delusional is the *narrative* that I weave around my (in and of itself pre-delusional) hallucination. In other words, it is the *interpretation* of my extraordinary experience as best explained by my hyperprivileged cosmic status—not the hallucination itself—that is delusional. This entails that, even in the case of a hallucination-related delusion, the perceptual experience that triggers (and/or sustains) the delusion is distinct from the delusion itself. Delusions, in short, are never perceptual—and, as such, they are firmly set apart from "standard illusions"[18] and hallucinations.

This narrative theory of delusions tells a clearer and simpler story that does Albahari's.

In that she claims that delusions are themselves sensorially oriented, Albahari's account entails that any hallucination can in principle become a delusion from the moment "major beliefs" are "drawn into" it. When this happens, doxastical neutrality (which is a property of hallucinations) gives way to robust doxastic commitment, such that we are no longer faced with a mere hallucination, but with a delusion.

There are two closely related problems here, and both help us see why the narrative account of delusions is superior to Albahari's. First, in so

far as the neuronal systems involved in sensory processing and delusional belief-formation are separate (as seen above), it cannot be right to say that a hallucination *becomes* a delusion; what we must say, rather, is that the hallucination gives rise to the delusion. This must indeed be what Albahari means to say. Note, however, that there are no reasons to think delusional belief-formation is in any way more closely associated to sense stimulation than the formation of any other belief concerning empirical matters. What is distinctive about delusional beliefs, then, is not their sensory orientation, but rather (1) their propositional content and (2) the obstinacy with which they are held on to even when they are exposed as warped fictions. Unlike the optical illusion- or hallucination-caused cognitive states any person who experiences an illusion or experiments with psychedelic substances momentarily harbors, delusional beliefs (1) concern certain major "facts" about the self (a point I discuss in more detail below) and (2) perdure over long periods of time, even when they can easily be seen to be wildly implausible. The implication is that whatever "sensory experiences" a subject may feed into their delusional narrative is ultimately a contingent matter.[19] This both speaks against Albahari's account of delusions as a subtype of illusions and supports the narrative theory of delusions.

Second, given what we know about the division of labor in the brain, it is misleading to say, as Albahari does, that doxastic neutrality is a property of such perceptual phenomena as "standard illusions" and hallucinations. These may seem doxastically neutral, but the truth is that, as strictly sensory phenomena, they are simply nondoxastic. In other words, the fact that I may or may not be "fooled" by a hallucination (or the Müller-Lyer illusion) is not explained by the fact hallucinations (or "standard illusions") are intrinsically "doxastically neutral," but rather by the fact that belief-formation involves brain processes that are separate from those that are mobilized in sensory processing.[20] Delusions, then, are not just sensory illusions (broadly defined) that happen to command unreasonably strong doxastic commitment. If they command such commitment, it is because they are not, in and of themselves, sensory at all. Rather, they are erroneous autobiographical narratives produced by the DMN to "make sense" of certain impressions, the core postulates of which command the subject's robust doxastic assent.

More needs to be said on the model I am proposing here. Delusions, I suggest, are odd autobiographical stories that, though they initially arise as hypothetical scenarios designed to explain some set of phenomenal data, crystallize—in part as a result of metacognitive failure—into heavily self-referential recalcitrant or evidence-resistance beliefs. More specifically, they are *narratives that involve* (1) *appraising situations through the lens of either self-victimizing, self-belittling, or self-aggrandizing*[21] *interpretations of certain experiences (be they diffuse "impressions" owing to neurophysiological disturbances, hallucinations, or any other form of data) and* (2) *taking these*

interpretations for (very) hard facts. Though this model builds off the work of Gerrans (2009, 2014), Shaun Gallagher (2003), and Max Coltheart and his colleagues (2010), it more strongly emphasizes the autobiographical and thus self-referential character of delusions, a move that I take to be warranted by the "propositional content" of delusional narratives and further supported by the fact that neurological research has shown that DMN is responsible for delusion-formation (bearing in mind that autobiographical tales are the DMN's specialty, so to speak). My model also comes apart from Gerrans' (2014) in that it does not stipulate that neurophysiological malfunction in brain systems responsible for metacognitive monitoring are *necessarily* at play in delusion-formation. On the less neuro-deterministic delusion theory set out here, the failure of metacognition responsible for the crystallization of spurious self-referential conjectures into hard-set beliefs may in some cases be the result of powerful affective states (wish fulfillment, existential angst, sense of threat, thirst for membership in a tight community, admiration for a charismatic leader, and so on), socialization, preponderant moods, or personality traits that need not necessarily be correlated to neurological malfunction. The differences between my delusion model and those of the above-discussed researchers is likely due to the broader scope of what it aims to cover: unlike Gerrans's and others', which only concern the delusions currently treated by psychiatrists, my model is also designed to cover political delusions (e.g., recalcitrant belief in a (self-victimizing) "conspiracy theory," (at once self-aggrandizing and self-victimizing) xenophobic or misogynistic imbecilities of all kinds, the (typically self-belittling) delusions diagnosed by Frankfurt School-style ideological critique, and so on) as well as other types of delusion that have not, so far, attracted the attention of clinicians (e.g., the putative "self-delusion" diagnosed in Buddhism).

With its stronger focus on self-referentiality, the narrative theory of delusion has the virtue of making sense of two other important features of delusions concerning which, incidentally, Albahari remains silent.

As a number of philosophers of psychiatry[22] have noted, the affective dimension of delusions is indissociable from their doxastic (or, according to some, quasi-doxastic) dimension. Delusions, in short, appear to involve appraisals in which beliefs, desires, and affects are inextricably intertwined.[23] This is an important part of the what makes them so debilitating: delusions involve maladaptive feelings and thus often prompt maladaptive behavior that harms both self and other.[24] The narrative theory of delusions provides a straightforward explanation for delusions' intrinsic affect-ladenness. For delusions, it states, are not constituted by just any narrative fabrication, but specifically by narrative fabrications *about the self* that, as such, cannot but be heavily value-laden (on the safe assumptions that (1) values are an integral part of any possible self-schema and (2) affects and values are very closely tied).

Next, unlike "standard" or sensory illusions and hallucination, which lead to highly spatially and temporally localized false impressions, delusions comprise broad-ranging false interpretations that are not spatially bounded and very tenacious indeed. Again, the narrative theory of delusions helps explain these features of delusions. On this theory, the value-laden self-referential narrative fabrications that constitute them do not merely concern some incidental or short-lived features of the subject and/or her "situation," but feed instead into her very sense of identity. In so far as beliefs concerning one's "identity" (in the so-called *qualitative* sense of the term) are deeply rooted in the less consciously accessible recesses of the psyche and, as such, are neither reflectively endorsed nor easily revisable, this would effectively help explain why delusions tend to persist over long stretches of time. The fact that delusions shape one's sense of identity also goes a long way toward explaining their evidence-resistance—a datum, as it happens, which metacognitive failure alone is not sufficient to account for (irrespective of whether or not said failure is due to neurological malfunction).[25] After all, on the theory I am proposing, to challenge a delusional belief is to threaten the integrity of the delusional subject's self-understanding—with predictable effects on their degree of recalcitrance and evidence-resistance.

To conclude, the evidence and arguments set out in this section provide strong support to the view that delusions are value-laden, autobiographical narrative constructions grounded in a flawed, heavily self-referential interpretation of certain real or imagined facts and which, having passed metacognitive screening, become central to subjects' self-schemata.

The Self as Delusional Construct in Buddhist Philosophy of Personal Identity

This section sets itself two main goals. First, I will argue that, for Buddhists, the sense that I am an enduring self together with the affective, conative, and doxastic states that typically co-emerge with this sense partake of a delusion as defined in the "Narrative Theory of Delusions" section. Second, I will argue against an alternative account—namely that which Albahari puts forward in her 2014 article—which has it that, for Buddhists, the "sense of self" is a cognitive illusion anchored in a self-delusion. In closing, I will critically appraise Jay Garfield's, Shaun Nichols', and Nina Strohminger's recent suggestion that Buddhist conceive of the self as a "cognitive illusion" (2018) and argue, again, that my interpretation better captures the spirit of the Buddhist diagnosis.

To attain my first goal, my strategy is to show that belief in one's existence as a self-entity has, for Buddhists, all of the core characteristics of delusions. As set out above, delusions have the following properties:

(1) they are centered on the self;

(2) they endure over long periods of time;

(3) the beliefs that form their core are either entirely unwarranted, grossly underdetermined or rationally indefensible, yet evidence-resistant and thus very difficult to challenge rationally;

(4) these same beliefs are initially formed through (faulty) automatic abduction, which creates the impression, for the person who has the delusion, that the delusional belief/s at hand are supported or evidenced by a certain set of data;

(5) they hold a strong affective charge; and

(6) the vast majority of them are positively correlated with painful mental states and maladaptive behavior.

Showing that Buddhism takes belief in one's existence as a self-entity to exhibit these six properties counts as strong evidence that Buddhist philosophy of personal identity is centered on the diagnostic claim that the vast majority of human beings are afflicted by a delusion concerning the nature of the self.

For ease of exposition, throughout this section I use the Sanskrit phrase "*ātma-moha*" coined by eighth-century Buddhist philosopher Śāntideva to denote the object of Buddhists' philosophic-therapeutic focus. This phrase translates as "confusion (*-moha*) concerning the self (*ātma-*)."[26] Though it does not appear in earlier Buddhist texts on personal identity, this phrase may safely be regarded as a convenient short-hand for what all Buddhist philosophical traditions are fundamentally concerned with.

To begin, that Buddhist regard the *ātma-moha* as (1) centered on the self and (2) long-lasting is evident. The *ātma-moha*, after all, concerns the ontology of the self—it manifests discursively as the belief that I exist as an enduring self-entity *qua* transcendent owner and inner controller of the mind-body complex—as well as the superlative evaluative weight commonly ascribed to it. Indeed, the sense that "my" weal and woe are of paramount importance is an essential feature of the *ātma-moha* (Garfield 2015, 118–21). As for its endurance, Buddhist texts describe the *ātma-moha* as very firmly entrenched in most people's minds, forming, as it were, a central feature of what we now call the "everyday" or "natural standpoint" (Gethin 1998, 133ff.). In fact, as previously discussed, the sense and attendant belief that I am a self is regarded as so tenacious a misconception that reasoning alone is not enough to supplant it. Rational enquiry must be buttressed by meditative practices—including *vipaśyanā* (Pāli: *vipassanā*) meditation, which trains the practitioner to become "mindful" of the ever-fluctuating character of psychophysical processes and attendant "corelessness" of body, mind, and consciousness[27]—and behavioral

training, which together are meant to alter one's entire frame of mind (Panaïoti 2015).

Such a holistic approach to changing people's views, attitudes, and feelings with respect to personal identity counts as clear evidence that characteristic (3), above, is central to the Buddhist understanding of the *ātma-moha*. Buddhist thinkers—starting with the Buddha himself—devoted considerable efforts to arguing that belief in the self is rationally indefensible.[28] This being said, they were well aware that such a conclusion would be met with strong resistance. Indeed, various versions of the "self" view are, according to Buddhists, the object of extremely strong attachment,[29] which, as mentioned above, cannot be undone through reasoning alone. What is more, some primitive, visceral version of the belief in the self-entity is said to persist even when a Buddhist practitioner has gone a long way toward undermining the *ātma-moha*.[30] In short, the *ātma-moha* certainly foots the bill as a nexus of beliefs that are rationally indefensible, yet very difficult to challenge rationally and even impossible to undo through reasoning alone.

With regard to characteristic (4), above, while different schools of Buddhist philosophy disagree on the details, there is broad agreement over the notion that the *ātma-moha* emerges on the basis of certain features of conscious experience[31]—features that purport, precisely, to be *explained* by the existence of the self *qua* essential core of the conscious subject.

In the Western philosophical tradition, certain characteristics of subjective conscious life are broadly regarded as contributing to the impression that the self has synchronic and diachronic unity and thus that it is an enduring entity. These are: (1) the phenomenology of episodic memory (I do not just remember yesterday evening's performance of Bach's Goldberg variations at the Royal Albert Hall, it is claimed, but *my experiencing* said performance—which is said to support the view that the self has diachronic unity); (2) the phenomenology of temporal flow (which, as Edmund Husserl ([1913] 1983) and some of his contemporary disciples argue, implies a kind of transcendental diachronic unity for the subject); (3) the so-called "self-givenness" or "mineness" of conscious experience (thus described as irreducibly first-personal, radically private, and intrinsically perspectival—which is taken to suggest that the self has synchronic unity); and (4) what Immanuel Kant ([1787] 1998) called "the synthesis […] of the manifold" (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A77/B103ff. —which, again, is taken to speak in favor of the self's synchronic unity).[32]

It is worth noting that Diṅnāga (sixth century) and Dharmakīrti (seventh century), the founding figures of the Indian Buddhist epistemological tradition, deployed significant theoretical resources to respond to challenges raised by Classical Indian self-realists (primarily orthodox Brāhmaṇical Mīmāṃsakas taking their cue from Śabara's teachings) by

making room for precisely these same features of the phenomenology of conscious life in their account of the psychological mechanism at work in the construction of a metaphysically thick sense of self.[33] Their predecessors' accounts, though less developed, gesture in the same direction.[34] In short, all Buddhist thinkers agree that the phenomenology of conscious life acts as fodder for the narrative construction that give rise to the "sense that I am a self" and thence crystallizes as a confused, hard-set belief in one's existence as a bounded entity.[35] More specifically, the *ātma-moha* appears to be generated through a *flawed interpretation* of what for lack of a better term we may call certain facts of inner life. This interpretation purports to explain these facts by appealing to existence of a self. The *ātma-moha*, to use contemporary technical language, seems to be formed through (faulty) automatic abduction.

This, incidentally, helps explain why Buddhists regard the *ātma-moha* as so difficult to do away with: the phenomenal features of subjective experience listed above do not go away, and, even though sound argument can show that they by no means entail the existence of a self-entity, the bad habit of taking these to support the belief that I am self is exceedingly hard to quit.[36]

The case for the conclusion that Buddhist regard the belief "I am a self" as delusional becomes stronger yet when we consider its affective and behavior-prompting dimensions, which line up neatly with characteristics (5) and (6), above. For Buddhists, the sense of being a self involves more than just harboring certain propositional attitudes; it also has a rich affective texture, and bears an intimate relation to motivation, practical deliberation, and behavior (Gethin 1998, 146–49).[37] Among the affects that are tied up with the *ātma-moha* we must first mention fear at the prospect of undesired changes to "who" or "what" I am, and especially fear of the very radical change from "existence" to "nonexistence" known as death.[38] The list is of course much longer, and includes such self-regarding affects as greed, jealousy, pride, conceit, arrogance, anxiety, guilt, nostalgia, possessiveness, and various forms of hostility to what threatens the self's interests or integrity.[39] If Buddhist texts are anything to go by, then, the *ātma-moha* generally takes a self-aggrandizing form, though it can also manifest through self-belittlement—self-hatred, after all, being just another form of egotism.

As it happens, a number of psychologists, psychiatrists, and neuroscientists curious about the psychological and cognitive effects of various forms of Buddhist meditation are now busy tracking the ways in which increased narrative self-referentiality in everyday life co-varies with negative affects, weaker performance in cognitive tasks, and egotistic attitudes and, inversely, the ways in which decreased narrative self-referentiality co-varies with positive affects, better performance in cognitive tasks, and greater other-oriented concern in practical deliberation (Farb et al. 2007; Brewer

et al. 2011). The evidence accumulated so far suggests that the kinds of self-schemata that Buddhist meditation practices help to undermine constitute the self as, precisely, an independent, unconstructed, bounded, and enduring entity. This lends further credence to the hypothesis that what Buddhist philosophy of personal identity (hand-in-hand with Buddhist mediation) targets is an affect-laden and maladaptive behavior-prompting delusion. In fact, what this empirical work shows is that Buddhist meditation alters our sense of personal identity by weakening the role of the DMN in our neuronal economy. The DMN—that is, precisely the system that cooks up delusional narratives (Gerrans 2014) —appears to be responsible for the kind of narrative self-referentiality that co-varies with negative affects, weak attention and concentration skills, and egotistic attitudes and conduct (Brewer et al. 2011).

All of this supports the verdict that, for Buddhists, the self is no mere illusion, but a delusion, namely, a harm-inducing, value-laden, autobiographical narrative construct grounded in a flawed interpretation of certain "facts of inner life."[40]

Let us consider an objection. Recall Albahari's claim that our deceptive sense of self is crucially unlike a delusion it does not indicate "malfunctioning or abnormality" (2006, 125). Albahari, here, states that "even Buddhists" recognize that the sense of self is entirely "normal"—and so that it cannot be a delusion (which is by construction abnormal). What Albahari does not tell us here is that, for reasons that should now be obvious, Buddhists think that the sense of self is related to cognitive, affective, and behavioral *dys*function.[41]

Consider, to begin, the strictly cognitive dimension of the phenomenon at hand. Buddhists certainly regard it is irrational (*anupapanna*; *ayukta*) to continue believing in the self-view after considering the arguments against it. As mentioned above, however, they were keenly aware that most people will not give up this belief even when they are presented with very good reasons to do so. Further, it would appear that even when people cease professing belief in this sort of view of the self as a general theory of personal identity, they continue (tacitly) to regard *themselves* as entities—their "first-person view" on personal identity thereby coming apart, as it were, from their "third-person view" about the topic. This is the *nec plus ultra* of irrationality. Instead of thinking of this state of affairs as analogous to what happens with recalcitrant optical illusions, the Buddhist delusion theorist could point to this as evidence that *cognitive dysfunction* attends the majority of human beings' confusion concerning the self.

Turning to affects and behavior, like Derek Parfit (1984), Buddhists claim that "liberation from the self" (to use Parfit's phrase) makes most people less selfish, and more concerned about the welfare of others. Inversely, Buddhists claim (as does Parfit) that there is a deep connection between confusedly interpreting one's existence as involving the enduring

existence of self and being (1) more fretful at the prospect of change and death and (2) more selfish (see, in particular, Parfit 1984, 281–82). On the assumption that ethical egoism is a practical and theoretical dead end, the implication of these claims would be that there is a close connection between whatever gives rise to the conviction that I am a self and *affective and behavioral dysfunction*.

From a Buddhist standpoint, then, our confusion about the self may arise naturally in most "normally functioning" people and in this sense be very normal indeed, and yet nevertheless involve *dys*function. What most of us are in the grips of, in their view, is just a very normal delusion.

At this stage, the objector's last resort would be to fall back on the principle that a belief can be deemed delusional *iff* it is out of sync with the beliefs held by most people in one's community. This may be dubbed the *doxastic isolation condition*. Two responses are on offer here. First, this condition is now seriously called into question with respect to delusions considered *en bloc* (see, in particular, Coltheart 2007). This is a theoretical development of which Buddhists may happily avail themselves. The second, more sophisticated strategy would be to claim that the term "delusion" refers to what is now known in the literature on natural kinds as a "cluster kind" (Millikan 1999). The term "delusion" would then cover phenomena that have a certain number of properties among a broader cluster of key properties. On this account, then, not all types of would share exactly the same properties. Thus, while all delusions might have the property of being self-victimizing, self-belittling, or self-aggrandizing narratives initially produced by the DMN, and so on, some types of delusions might indeed be characterized by doxastic isolation, while others are not. This would effectively clear conceptual space for the Buddhist diagnosis of a delusion that is very widespread indeed.

As I report at the end of the "Albahari on the "Sense of Self" as Illusion" section, Albahari has recently shifted her view and now recognizes that Buddhist think ordinary beings are in the grips of a self-delusion (2014). Her new story is more complicated than that, however. Indeed, Albahari still thinks that the "sense of self" is a "cognitive illusion," but she now adds that what doxastically anchors this illusion is a visceral "action-based" (and thus difficultly revisable) delusional belief that the "content" of this illusion is "veridical" (2014, 15–17). Because the same processes of "craving" (*tṛṣṇā*; Pāli: *taṇhā*) underpin *both* the cognitive illusion of self *and* the action-based delusional belief in the existence of the self, Albahari explains, the illusion and delusion of self *stand and fall together* (unlike in most cases of illusions, where the attendant delusion is far less difficult to subdue, and where the illusory appearance will (innocuously) survive belief revision) (2014, 19).

The main problem with Albahari's 2014 account is that it is unnecessarily complicated. More specifically, pointing to a "cognitive illusion of self"

in addition to a "delusion of self" is redundant. If we are indeed, as Buddhists aver, in the grips of a delusion of self, then this is enough to account for the presence of a diffuse, pre-reflective "sense of self"—and there is no need to regard this "sense" as a separate, "illusory" mental event susceptible of being "doxastically anchored" by an attendant delusion. As Albahari makes clear in her 2006 monograph (and as her 2014 account of the illusion and delusion of self being inextricably intertwined clearly entails), the "sense of self" is *intrinsically* doxastically committed. This means it has no need for a doxastic anchor. And why is that? For the simple reasons that it is an essential component of the delusion of self, period. It is not that the self-illusion and self-delusion stand and fall together, then, but rather that there is just one thing at play here, namely, the delusion of self. Likewise, it is not that the same *tṛṣṇā*-based psychological mechanisms are at work in the formation of both the illusion and the delusion of self, but rather that just one thing is generated here, namely the delusion of self. In short, the account I am ascribing to Buddhists is simpler, clearer, and more elegant than Albahari's accounts, old and new.

A critic might object that there are clear cases in everyday life of visceral, nonnarrative, sensuous impressions of "selfhood" that may well be illusory, but not delusional, such that Albahari's story, though more complicated than mine, is truer to the facts. If I break my arm during a severe bicycle accident, for instance, I will certainly be upset about my bike being wrecked, but I will feel considerably more distressed at the sight of my pain-ridden, twisted arm. This is presumably because I spontaneously construe this as an injury to my *self*, and, as such, as being an evil fundamentally different from and deeper than damage to my property. Such a spontaneous construal, a defender of Albahari will be keen to argue, is illusory—and it is precisely the kind of mental event that is supported by and in turn supports the action-based delusion of self. I am doubtful, however, that the sense of "self *qua* entity" that concerns us here is necessarily at play in my spontaneous response to physical harm. Although it is true that this response may, for most of us most of the time, rapidly be overlaid with identity-related ideation, but it need not be. Consider the memorable episode in the Buddha's biography in which he suffers a painful foot injury as a result of his cousin Devadatta's homicidal attempt to crush him under a boulder. Though he experiences excruciating physical pain, the Buddha is said to have remained unperturbed (*Saṃyuttanikāya* I, 27). In the language of another important discourse on pleasurable and painful feelings, on this occasion the Buddha experienced physical pain (*kāyika dukkhavedanā*), but remained untouched by mental suffering (*cetasika dukkhavedanā*) (*Saṃyuttanikāya* IV, 208). The Buddha's immunity from properly mental distress, I submit, is precisely due to the fact that all identity-related ideation has been quieted; pain appears, but the Buddha's physical distress

does not get fed into a "story" about his *self*. This suggests that automatic responses to threats to my physical integrity signaled by pain are orthogonal to what Buddhist philosophy of personal identity is concerned with. On this reading, there is no spontaneous, nonnarrative "illusion of self" in situations of, for example, physical injury. There is simply, for most of us, a "delusion of self" that interprets our spontaneous sensuous responses to physical harm as evidence for our existence *qua* selves.

Before drawing this discussion to a close, I wish to explore and discard one last hypothesis. This is that Buddhist regard the self and more specifically "self-grasping" as a "cognitive illusion," as is claimed (without argument, or considering alternative interpretations) in a recent article by Garfield, Nichols, and Strohminger (2018). They write:

> Buddhist thought about the self and about self-consciousness is grounded in the idea that we are subject to profound cognitive illusions, and one of those is that we are distinct selves. That illusion grounds our instinctive conative orientation to the world, and a rational conative and ethical orientation to the world, Buddhists argue, would be one freed from that illusion. (2018, 394)

Analogues for the "cognitive illusion of a persisting self," they add, include "the tendency to misidentify objects as guns in situations of high threat, or to distrust those perceived as outsiders" (2018, 394).

One problem with this interpretation is that the "cognitive illusion" construct is very fuzzy indeed. It covers the "heuristics" or misleading mental shortcuts (also known as "cognitive biases") studied by social scientists, behavioral economists, and psychologists (Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky 1982; Laplace [1825] 1995; Blanco and Matute 2018), the common "thinking traps" or "thinking errors" of overgeneralization, mind-reading, fortune telling and the like studied in psychiatry and psychotherapy (Dubord 2011), as well as the so-called "memory illusions/distortions" studied in cognitive neuroscience (Schachter, Verfaellie and Pradere 1996). Garfield, Nichols, and Strohminger mention "implicit bias" in passing (2018, 394), which—together with the examples they provide—suggests they have something like "cognitive illusion" *à la* social science (and behavioral economics) in mind, but they remain vague on what exactly this phrase is supposed to refer to. What, we may more pointedly ask, does belief in my existence as an enduring, unitary self *qua* pivotal locus of meaning and value have in common with a policeperson in Washington DC deciding that the object the African American 10-year old over there in the park is holding is a loaded handgun (confirmation bias/racial profiling) or with my sister asserting that she really should go to a show for which she bought a pricey ticket, even though she does not feel like going anymore (sunk cost fallacy)?

Now, let us assume for the sake of argument that a general theory of even the slightly more precise notion of "cognitive illusions" as "implicit biases" could be devised, with the hope of showing that belief in the self (as Buddhists understand it) is indeed such an illusion. Let us assume, to pursue this line of thought, that cognitive illusions were defined as failures of rationality, and more specifically as the result of unsound information-processing leading to errors in deductive reasoning, estimating probabilities, the degree of credence lent to demonstrably underdetermined conclusions, practical deliberation concerning "what I have reason to do," and so on. On this theory, cognitive illusions involve (1) false/underdetermined/unwarranted *judgments* that (2) concern a *highly localized question* (e.g., "What are the 'risks that… X', in this specific case?") and (3) are formed on the basis of an appropriately *restricted set of data*.

The trouble is that the confusion about selfhood explored in Buddhist philosophy of personal identity has a very different profile. As earlier discussed, (1) it does not involve a mere judgement, but a comprehensive narrative about one's life as whole, (2) it concerns not a localized or situation-contingent question, but the fundamental issue of one's nature or "mode of existence" in general, and (3) it feeds off and mobilizes a very large share of one's total "life experience," to use a somewhat tired phrase. The "self" as the Buddhists understand it, in short, is no mere "cognitive illusion," but a *delusion*.

Conclusion: Buddhist Philosophy of Personal Identity as Therapy

I would like to conclude this article with a brief foray into the domain of metaphilosophy.

I have argued that Buddhist philosophy of personal identity is centered around the diagnostic claim that normally functioning human beings are in the grips of a powerful delusion concerning the nature of the self. The Buddhist claim is not just that the synchronic and diachronic unity of the self as an enduring entity is a *false impression*—that is, that the self is an illusion, as the conventional view has it—but rather than the "sense that I am enduring entity" together with the beliefs, evaluative attitudes, feelings, egotistic frame of mind, and so on, that co-emerge with it are the result of a faulty interpretation of certain features of subjective experience, and more specifically that they are the result of a *delusional narrative construction*.

This way of understanding Buddhist philosophy of personal identity, I submit, speaks more clearly and more loudly than any possible "self as illusion" account to the *irreducibly therapeutic character* of Buddhist thought. If what Buddhist thought hones in on is a delusion, it is because its fundamental goal is to heal the psyche from a severe malady with wide-ranging deleterious effects. The idea, here, is not just to have us revise false beliefs

provoked by one among countless other fairly localized illusions (e.g., that the earth is flat and stationary, that the colors we see exist "out there" in the world, and so on), but to overcome an unhealthy mindset and adopt a healthy one instead.

Over the last two decades, there has been growing awareness among Western-trained commentators that Buddhist philosophy is, much like the Hellenistic schools of philosophy, oriented toward the practical goal of curing mental disorders (Kapstein 2013b; Gowans 2003; Burton 2010; Fiordalis 2018; Collins 2020). This trend seeks to push back against the tendency, most prominent among analytically trained commentators, to isolate the claims and arguments of Buddhist philosophers putatively weighing on the properly "theoretical" problem of personal identity from the ethical-*cum*-psychological dimension of Buddhist philosophy of personal identity, meditation, and ethical training (see, in particular, Fiordalis 2018, 9ff.). In addition to its intrinsic merits, the "self as delusional construct" interpretation I have defended here helps make it clearer why any such bifurcation must be ruled out. For it suggests that Buddhist philosophy of personal identity is therapeutic through-and-through,[42] and thus that our understanding of what it is Buddhist philosophers claim about selfhood must be informed by the psychological, neurocognitive, and behavioral effects of Buddhist meditation and ethical training.

Whether the self is an illusion or a delusion, some professional philosophers might feel, is a problem for psychotherapy, not for philosophy. But this only begs the metaphilosophical question. And this question is one that we have no choice but to grapple with as we move toward greater philosophical cosmopolitanism. For indeed, if much of professional Western philosophy is committed to a "philosophy as pure theory" framework (which, incidentally, is happy to consider "illusions" but ill-equipped to combat delusions) while Buddhist thought operates in a "philosophy as therapy" framework (wherein the curing of delusions is the goal), then the emergence of a genuine dialogue between these two traditions will require us to (1) overcome the "theory *versus* therapy" disjunct and (2) develop interdisciplinary frameworks in which the problem of selfhood can be studied holistically, in all of its closely interrelated dimensions (metaphysical, existential, ethical, psychological, psychotherapeutic, neurological, social, political, and so on).

Acknowledging that Buddhist philosophy of personal identity, focused as it is on the diagnosis of a delusion, is therapeutic through-and-through represents an important step toward broadening our philosophical horizons to respond with creativity and imagination to the demands of global philosophical cosmopolitanism.

Notes

1. For a brief overview of the Buddhist arguments against the existence of the self-entity, see Struhl (2020, 115–19). For a more detailed, text-based treatment based on Pāli canonical texts, see Collins (1982, 95–110) and Gethin (1998, 133–46).

2. The case of the monk Khemaka nicely illustrates this point. Khemaka knows that there is nothing in the stream of fleeting physical and mental "factors" (*skhandha*; Pāli: *khandha*) that qualifies as a self-entity, and yet he remains subject to the "'I am' conceit" (*asmi-ma¯na*) (*Saṃyuttanikāya* III, 128). Derek Parfit similarly notes that those who reject the self-entity view will typically continue to hold beliefs concerning their own death or survival that entail that they are just such an entity (1986, 834–35). Acknowledging that he is no exception, he hypothesizes that some Buddhists may have "found the answer" to more permanently stunning their natural inclinations (1986, 836).

3. Henceforth, I use the phrase "self" in place of "self-entity."

4. On the tripartite structure of the Buddhist path (where philosophical insight (*prajñā*; Pāli: *paññā*), moral practice (*śīla*; Pāli: *sīla*), and meditation practice (*samādhi*) are meant to complement and mutually reinforce one another; see *Majjhimanikāya* I, 301, where the nun Dhammadinnā explains to her former husband (turned lay disciple) Visākha how the eightfold noble path is subsumed under this threefold rubric) and its structural affinities with cognitive-behavioral approaches in contemporary psychotherapy (especially those that involve the practice of "mindfulness" meditation), see Panaïoti (2015).

5. For a more detailed version of this abduction, see Struhl (2020, 118).

6. Strawson's case is exemplary. He writes: "Consider certain Buddhist philosophers who argue, on a variety of metaphysical grounds, that our natural notion of a persisting individual self is an illusion. Having reached this conclusion, they set themselves a task: that of overcoming the delusion" (2010, 110). Similar things happen in Bodhi (1994), Flanagan (2011), Garfield (2015), Goodman (2009), Harvey (1995), and Siderits (2003)—to list but a few examples.

7. This characterization of illusions is meant to cover both perceptual (e.g., optical) illusions and so-called "cognitive illusions" (e.g., implicit biases and the like). Becoming aware of the faulty processing responsible for the latter and thus also of the errors that they give rise to might be more difficult than it is for the former, but there is no comparison here with the degree of reasoning- and evidence-resistance met with in delusions. For more on the "cognitive illusion" construct, see the end of the "Self as Delusional Construct in Buddhist Philosophy of Personal Identity" section.

8. Some philosophers of psychiatry (Berrios 1991; Currie and Jureidini 2001) argue that delusions do not consist in actual beliefs because (1) they are evidence-resistant, (2) they are typically ill-integrated with the subject's (actual) beliefs, and (3) they often fail to guide action in the way one would expect them to. The standard response is that propositional attitudes that are evidence-resistance, ill-integrated with other such attitudes, and so on should nevertheless be considered doxastic states and thus that delusions are indeed beliefs (Bayne and Pacherie 2005; Bortolotti 2009). In what follows, I will follow the majority view in assuming that delusions are doxastic states (however peculiar these might be).

9. This is not to say that some delusions (viz., so-called "motivated delusions") can be construed as playing a defensive function, and thus as bringing benefits to those who harbor them *even as* they compromise their overall good-functioning. On the *pro tanto* adaptiveness of certain features of some (though by no means all) delusions, see, in particular, Bortolotti (2015) and McKay, Langdon, and Coltheart (2005).

10. Albahari's broader program consists in rationally reconstructing, then defending a particular version of the view that the self is an illusion. In this article, I am concerned only with her interpretative claim that, from the Buddhist standpoint, the self ought to be regarded not as a delusion, but as an illusion.

11. In the Early Buddhist texts that serve as Albahari's source, this is described in terms of "appropriating" or "laying claim" (*upādāna*) to various evanescent and intrinsically impersonal physical and mental constituents. According to these texts (e.g., the *Milindapañha*; Trenckner (ed.) 1880), pointing to the causal relations between nexuses of such constituents to be enough to account for such things as memory, the persistence of character traits, and responsibility attribution (Gethin 1998, Chapter 6). The "self," on this model, is an explanatorily superfluous

mental fabrication (for a helpful, philosophically rigorous survey of these themes, see Siderits 2003).

12. I take up and critique Albahari's more recent account (2014) in the "Self as Delusional Construct in Buddhist Philosophy of Personal Identity" section.

13. Other examples include the "sense that I am dead" (the Cotard delusion), the "sense that I am being conspired against" (persecutory delusion), or the "sense that I have or am about to succumb to a debilitating illness" (hypochondriac delusion).

14. Bell et al. (2008) reject on strong empirical grounds the hypothesis that anomalous perceptions are necessary for delusion-formation (let alone sufficient, as some have argued; see, in particular, Maher 2001). I suggest that, for the sake of argument, we tentatively assume that Bell et al. (2008) are mistaken.

15. Note that on this version of the theory, the sense impression that forms the medium of appearance of the (seemingly nonperceptually oriented) delusion is *not* the "sense that…," but rather the uncanny percept that fuels it. The revised proposal we are considering thus departs from Albahari's initial model on two (closely related) counts: (1) all delusions are in fact perceptually oriented; (2) the "sense impression" that fuels them is either a hallucination or an anomalous percept (from which is derived the more discursive "sense that…").

16. On the correlation between metacognitive failure and delusion-formation and delusion-maintenance, see Bruno et al. (2012).

17. Where exactly metacognition "happens" in the brain remains uncertain. For an attempt at charting this territory, see Fleming and Dolan (2012).

18. Jakob Hohwy has recently argued that the processes underpinning delusion-formation and illusions share more structural affinities than has heretofore been supposed (2013). But the differences between delusions and illusions discussed so far (and further along) in this article are left unscathed by the parallels Hohwy establishes. More generally, Howhy's claim that Bayesian probabilistic inferential processes are plausibly at work not only in cognitive, but also in sensory functions, is perfectly consistent with the account set out here.

19. This claim is further supported by Bell's, Halligan's, and Ellis' (2008) above-mentioned results, which indicate that anomalous percepts are neither sufficient nor necessary for delusion-formation.

20. In that it entails that illusions are in and of themselves nondoxastic, Albahari's (2014) account is better aligned with the view I am defending here. However, her claim that the false beliefs that I form when I first encounter, for example, the Müller-Lyer illusion, are *delusions* (2014, 15) strikes me as an abuse of language (in that it drastically overstretches the sense of the term "delusion" to include any illusion-caused belief). I critique Albahari's 2014 account on different grounds in the "Self as Delusional Construct in Buddhist Philosophy of Personal Identity" section.

21. It may be objected that the Capgras delusion does not fit my characterization of delusions as involving a self-centered narrative on the ground that it is on the contrary constituted by an other-oriented belief, namely, the belief that *you*, my purported spouse, are really an impostor. But people suffering from this delusion unequivocally regard themselves as the "victim" of some impostor. As such, their suspicion that the loved one is an impostor turns out to be deeply self-referential.

22. Most notably, Sass (1994), Gallagher (2009), Currie (2000), Currie and Jureidini (2001), Radden (2010), Gold and Hohwy (2000), Stephens and Graham (2004), Egan (2009), and Hohwy and Rajan (2012).

23. Albeit, as Louis A. Sass (1994) observes, not always in the ways an outside observer might expect (a point I shall return to in note 39).

24. A caveat is in order here. See, on this point, note 9.

25. In fact, it may plausibly be argued that metacognitive monitoring meets with considerably more obstacles when the "propositions" at hand concern the subject's identity—or heavily value-laden "qualitative" sense of self. If this were true, then it would suggest that, in the case of certain delusions at any rate, the relation between metacognitive failure and delusion-formation might not be one of monodirectional causality, but something closer to a positive feedback loop. This, however, is a topic for another day.

26. In the verse in which this phrase is introduced (Vaidya 1960, IX.78), Śāntideva explains that the "'I'-constructing" (*ahaṃ-kāra*) that is the source of suffering (*duḥkha-hetu*) emerges on the basis of this self-confusion. The term "*moha*" is often translated as "delusion" but, in the

context of this discussion, translating it in this way would be question-begging. Hence, my decision to render it as the more neutral "confusion."

27. The canonical *locus classicus* for the cultivation of "mindfulness" or "mindful attention" (*smṛti*; Pāli: *sati*) is the "Great Discourse on the Establishment of Mindfulness" (*Mahāsatipatthānasutta*) at *Dīghanikāya* II, 289ff.

28. This is not the place to go over these arguments, the numerous variations on these, nor other, independent arguments produced by later Buddhist thinkers (for helpful recent overviews of these, see the sources listed in note 1). Suffice it to say that, like most contemporary neuroscientists and philosophers, Buddhist philosophers regarded it as evident that clear thinking and the unbiased examination of the evidence at hand quickly reveals that the self(-entity) is a fiction.

29. The technical term, here, is "attachment to doctrines concerning the self" (*ātma-vāda-upādāna*) (*Dīghanikāya* III, 230; *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* of Vasubandhu [henceforth *AKBh*], 306).

30. This is discussed in note 2.

31. Thus, according to the standard 12-factored chain of dependent co-arising (*dvādaśa-nidāna pratītya-samutpāda*; Pāli: *dvādasa-nidāna paṭicca-samuppāda*) teaching (see, for instance, *Saṃyuttanikāya* II, 31–32), the "thristing" (*tṛṣṇā*; Pāli: *tanhā*) and "attachment" (*upādāna*) factors regarded as bearing an intimate relation with the self-confusion (see, in particular, *Majjhimanikāya* I, 299) are said to follow on the heels of sensory experience (*sparśa*; Pāli: *phassa*) and feelings (*vedanā*).

32. Phenomenologist Dan Zahavi's broadly synoptic 2005 *Subjectivity and Selfhood: Investigating the First-Person Perspective* is now the *locus classicus* for these themes—and for their mobilization in support of the existence of a so-called "minimal self." The precise ontological status of this "minimal self," however, remains somewhat mysterious, perhaps by construction (Zahavi, after all, is doing phenomenology, *not metaphysics*).

33. Diṅnāga and Dharmakīrti refer to this mechanism as the "I-constructor/-ing" (*ahaṃkāra*), a fairly ancient Buddhist technical term that points to the constructed status of the "I" (*aham*). For a philosophically rigorous and exegetically careful examination of this strand of Classical Indian Buddhist thought and the context of debate in which it developed, see, in particular, Dreyfus (1997).

34. Noa Ronkin provides a scrupulous overview of the discussions surrounding individuality-construction in the Pāli Abhidhamma tradition (2005, Chapter 6).

35. Cf. Albahari's far less metaphysically neutral account, which has it that the mind is composed of an enduring, unitary, and experience-transcendent *yet impersonal* witness-consciousness overlaid with a constructed *personal self* that, in that it purports to be unconstructed, is illusory (2006). This is not the place to critique Albahari's account, nor her claim that Buddhist theoreticians went wrong in instead espousing what she describes as "bundle theory of the self."

36. An alternative account would have it that the "sense that I am an entity" is a primary phenomenal datum or a kind of structural feature of the interface between consciousness and world, along the lines of what Thomas Metzinger (2003, 2009) argues. On my interpretation of Buddhist philosophy of mind, primary phenomenal data are certainly fodder for the (delusional) "sense of self," but this "sense" is too discursive/conceptual to be plausibly regarded as a primary phenomenal datum in and of itself. Thus, what happens to the monk Khemaka (see note 2) is not that he is left with a phenomenologically primitive "I am"-sense, but rather that he has not yet succeeded (as the Buddha and perfected *arhats* presumably have) in overcoming the hard-wired bad habit of interpreting unerasable features of mental life as evidence for the existence of his "self."

37. The fourth-century Buddhist philosopher Vasubandhu thus speaks not only of the "false view of self" (*vitatha-ātma-dṛṣṭi*), but also of "grasping to the self" (*ātma-grāha*) (*AKbh*, 461), though these are really two sides of the same coin.

38. Parfit aptly describes how it feels to overcome the delusion Buddhism purports to cure, having seemingly attained a similar state by allowing the results of his philosophical meditations to seep into the less discursive layers of his psyche:

> [Formerly] I seemed imprisoned in myself. My life seemed like a glass tunnel, through which I was moving faster every year, and at the end of which there was darkness. When

> I changed my view, the walls of my glass tunnel disappeared. I now live in the open air. There is still a difference between my life and the life of other people. But the difference is less. Other people are closer. I am less concerned about the rest of my own life, and more concerned about the lives of others. (1984, 281)

39. Garfield (2015, 118–21) is helpful on this point. Some may argue, at this juncture, that to regard oneself as an entity provides no rational justification for the affects listed above and that, conversely, regarding these affects as fitting would do nothing to support the self-view. The conclusion that seems to follow from this is that Buddhists must have gotten something wrong in thinking that the *ātma-moha* is related to such affects as pride, greed, jealousy, and so on. But this line of reasoning assumes that Buddhist thinkers have a broadly rationalist view of human cognitive functioning and especially of the relation between emotions and beliefs, which is a highly questionably assumption. Another line of defense takes its cue from the observation, mentioned in passing above (note 22), that the beliefs, affects, and behaviors of people with delusions do not "fit" together in expected or "rational" ways (Sass 1994). Thus, if it were true that there is in fact no rational relation between belief in the self and the kinds of affects Buddhists regard as correlated with it, this would not necessarily count against (and could even be construed as supporting) the idea that what Buddhist thinkers are in the business of diagnosing is a delusion.

40. The Buddhist account I present in this article intersects with the views developed in the "narrative identity" approach in the philosophy of personal identity (Schechtman 1996, 2014; DeGrazia 2005). More specifically, this account points to a fundamental structural feature of the autobiographical tales that, according to this type of view, constitute persons' identities. This is that these tales concern a protagonist *qua* bounded, simple, enduring, and mind- and body-transcendent entity. This is not to say that narrative identity accounts entail the Buddhist account. Rather, the relationship runs in the other direction: the account presented here, if it were right, would support narrativity views (though it would also qualify them in two crucial regards, namely, by stipulating that a central feature of normal persons' self-constituting autobiographical narratives (1) concerns numerical identity and (2) is delusional).

41. The argument I am about to make turns on the subtle (and novel, as far as I know) distinction between *mal*function and *dys*function. Although both concepts are evaluative, the former, I suggest, is not essentially normative and broadly tracks statistical "normality." In contrast, I take the latter to be intrinsically normative and as bearing no relation to statistical normality. On the contrary, in the universe of human affairs (broadly construed), it is not implausible to think that *dys*function is the norm.

42. Though this would require a far longer discussion, I would surmise that this is equally true of the other domains of Buddhist metaphysics, as well as of Buddhist epistemology. For recent work that points in this direction, see Carpenter (2014a, 2014b) and Kapstein (2013a).

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