

Evan Thompson

## *Introduction to Symposium*

### *Perceiving Reality: Consciousness, Intentionality, and Cognition in Buddhist Philosophy, by Christian Coseru*

This Symposium devoted to Christian Coseru's book, *Perceiving Reality: Consciousness, Intentionality, and Cognition in Buddhist Philosophy* (Coseru, 2012), stems from an invited 'Author Meets Critics' session that I organized and chaired at the annual meeting of the Pacific Division of the American Philosophical Association, which was held in Vancouver, 1–5 April 2015. Coseru began the session with a précis of his book; this was followed by critical commentaries from Laura Guerrero, Matt MacKenzie, and Anand Jayprakash Vaidya, as well as Coseru's response. The revised versions of these five presentations make up this Symposium.

Coseru's book exemplifies an important new way of doing philosophy in our polycentric, multicultural world. Jay Garfield (2001) calls it 'cross-cultural philosophy'. Instead of prejudicially regarding 'philosophy' as denoting 'western philosophy', cross-cultural philosophy is based on the premise that philosophy should not be limited to the conceptual constructs and linguistic practices of any one community of thinkers, but rather should strive to learn from diverse cultures of philosophical investigation (Ganeri, forthcoming). In the case of Coseru's book, these diverse cultures of investigation are classical Indian Buddhist philosophy, western phenomenological philosophy (following Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty), and western analytical philosophy. Coseru's enquiry using these sources can also be described with Mark Siderits's term, 'fusion philosophy'

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(Siderits, 2003). Fusion philosophy counterpoises the analyses and arguments from distinct philosophical traditions in order to address philosophical problems within a given tradition and across multiple traditions. In the present case, these problems concern the nature of consciousness, the directedness or intentionality of mental phenomena, and the nature and sources of knowledge.

The commentaries bring out the complexities of such a project and enrich the discussion. Guerrero targets Coseru's epistemological views, specifically his attempt to reconcile a causal theory of knowledge (to which Indian philosophy in general is committed) and its apparent realist commitments, on the one hand, with a phenomenological account of intentionality and the general Buddhist trend toward anti-realism, on the other hand. MacKenzie raises conceptual and interpretative questions for Coseru's treatment of reflexivity and consciousness, specifically the view that all awareness is also awareness of itself, or that reflexive awareness belongs to any conscious state or conscious mental event. Finally, Vaidya questions whether Husserlian phenomenology and Buddhist philosophy can be made broadly compatible, given that the former tradition is committed to the existence of essences, whereas the latter tradition is strongly nominalist.

In these ways, the commentaries and Coseru's reply demonstrate not only the complexities but also the richness of bringing these diverse philosophical traditions into dialogue with each other about a range of issues in epistemology, the philosophy of mind, and metaphysics. It is to be hoped that philosophy in the twenty-first century continues to build these kinds of cross-cultural bridges.

## References

- Coseru, C. (2012) *Perceiving Reality: Consciousness, Intentionality, and Cognition in Buddhist Philosophy*, New York: Oxford University Press.
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- Siderits, M. (2003) *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy: Empty Persons*, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd.