

**Philosophy of Attention Session 5:
Towards an ethics of attention
(Watzl 2022)**

- Descriptive centrality of attention: “You can know someone well by knowing her attention patterns”
- Because attention is descriptively central, we need norms for attention.

Q1: Which aspects of the mind can be assessed normatively? Is attention one of them?

Q2: When is a pattern of attention “good” or “bad”, along different dimensions of evaluation? What patterns of attention do we ought to have or avoid?

A roadmap to Watzl’s paper

	Main ideas
Part I Motivating the framework (sections 1-5)	1. Having an ethics of attention is just as important as having an ethics of belief (which we already have, or at least are working on it). 2. An ethics of attention is important not just for philosophers: the general public already makes questions about it. 3. Attention has a central role in explaining many aspects of our mental lives. 4. Attention can in fact be subject to normative assessment (it is the right kind of object for this).
Part II Articulating the framework (sections 6-8)	5. Norms of attention can be content-based (about the <i>things</i> we should pay attention to) or manner-based (about <i>how</i> we should pay attention to those things). 6. Norms of attention can be instrumental (i.e., a pattern of attention as good for a given goal), or they can be non-instrumental (a pattern of attention is good for its own sake). 7. The source of normativity can be prudential, epistemic or moral.
Conclusion	

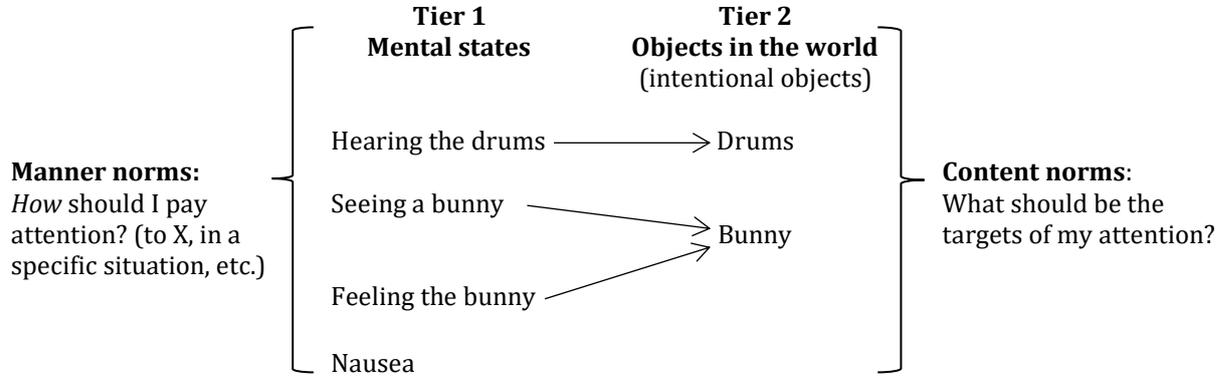
Questions about part I

- Regarding point 2:
- To what extent should philosophers care about what the public cares about?
 - How necessary is an ethics of attention in your everyday life?
 - What is right, healthy, important and correct, regarding attention – what do you think?
- Regarding point 3:
- Is it possible to think, talk and understand things like decision making, emotions, perception and the self, without thinking/talking about attention?
- Regarding point 4:
- Do we need a unified theory of attention, in order to assess attention normatively?
 - How could sub-personal processes, or processes outside our voluntary control, ever be subject to normative constraints? (e.g., of fittingness; cf. Hornsby 2000)

- In what sense is responding to salience “a ripple in a sea of agency”? (see p.14)

The framework

Dimension 1



Dimension 2

Instrumental norms Which patterns of attention are good/bad with respect to an end?

- Evaluator S’s attention is flawed in an instrumental way: it leads to a bad outcome (excluding a qualified candidate; see Handout 4)

Non-instrumental norms Which patterns of attention are good/bad in themselves?

- Evaluator S’s attention is flawed also in a non-instrumental way: it is irrational.

Dimension 3

Prudential norms Which patterns of attention are “good for me”?

Moral norms Which patterns of attention make me a more virtuous person, or a better moral agent?

Epistemic norms Which patterns of attention will lead me to knowledge?
Which patterns are rational?

Questions about part II

- Regarding point 5:
- Kant thinks that “involuntary attentiveness” is instrumentally bad, because it “produces much harm”. What could an example of harmful involuntary attentiveness?
 - Which patterns of attention do you value as means to an end, and which patterns (if any) do you value as good in themselves?

- Regarding point 6:
- Marcus Aurelius thinks that “not observing the movements of your own mind” will make you unhappy. Why could that be? Do you agree?