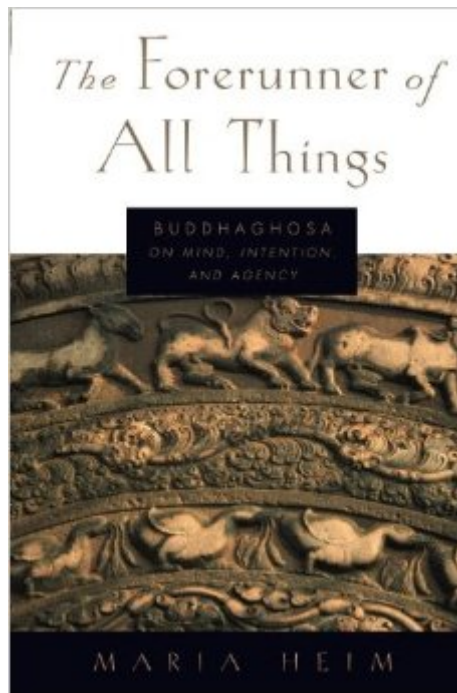


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# The Forerunner Of All Things: Buddhaghosa On Mind, Intention, And Agency



## Synopsis

Scholars have long been intrigued by the Buddha's defining action (karma) as intention. This book explores systematically how intention and agency were interpreted in all genres of early Theravada thought. It offers a philosophical exploration of intention and motivation as they are investigated in Buddhist moral psychology. At stake is how we understand karma, the nature of moral experience, and the possibilities for freedom. In contrast to many studies that assimilate Buddhist moral thinking to Western theories of ethics, the book attends to distinctively Buddhist ways of systematizing and theorizing their own categories. Arguing that meaning is a product of the explanatory systems used to explore it, the book pays particular attention to genre and to the 5th-century commentator Buddhaghosa's guidance on how to read Buddhist texts. The book treats all branches of the Pali canon (the Tipitaka, that is, the Suttas, the Abhidhamma, and the Vinaya), as well as narrative sources (the Dhammapada and the Jataka commentaries). In this sense it offers a comprehensive treatment of intention in the canonical Theravada sources. But the book goes further than this by focusing explicitly on the body of commentarial thought represented by Buddhaghosa. His work is at the center of the book's investigations, both insofar as he offers interpretative strategies for reading canonical texts, but also as he advances particular understandings of agency and moral psychology. The book offers the first book-length study devoted to Buddhaghosa's thought on ethics

## Book Information

Paperback: 272 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; 1 edition (October 10, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0199331049

ISBN-13: 978-0199331048

Product Dimensions: 9.1 x 0.7 x 6.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (6 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,122,732 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #117 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality > Other Eastern Religions & Sacred Texts > Karma](#) #225 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Eastern > Buddhism > Theravada](#)

## Customer Reviews

Cetana, intention is the core of this book, as perhaps it needs to be the core of our spiritual path. The author follows the teachings of Buddhaghosa, roughly translated "the voice of the Buddha" in

defining cetana as the forerunner of all things, an essential element in our individual karma (Accepting movement of the mind with varying degrees of intention as the definition of karma). Intention is the doorway to our actions, physical, mental and verbal. It is a very important concept if you are to develop the wisdom necessary to personal awakening. The author does the subject justice. Doing justice to this book in a short review seems an impossible task and so here's just a taste of the author's approach by listing the chapter headings. Keep in mind each topic is covered in studied detail: Constructing Experience ..... The work of Intention .... Culpability and Disciplinary Culture .... Making Actions Intelligible.... One additional comment here: The last chapter is filled with delightful ancient stories to illustrate the understanding of intention and mind. It's like saving the cherry on top for last. It goes without saying that when you spend 237 pages on one subject you have an exhaustive study. This is not a book for someone with just a passing interest in Buddhism or the ethics of intention, but it certainly deserves a place in the library of a serious practitioner of Buddhism and the devoted seeker from any spiritual background. It's that kind of book you can finish reading and turn right around and read from the first page and still gain new understanding. Here's a great gift for friends with a serious spiritual practice who are open to a Buddhist solution.

Not for everyone, terrific. Scholarly investigation into cetana with an emphasis on Buddhaghosa's interpretation. For me, very useful. I have struggled with the idea of free will in Buddhist thought. Heim puts the topic of cetana in the context of Buddhist thought and Western philosophy, psychology, ethics, and religion. Discusses the varied attempts by Westerners to define cetana and relate it to approaches to will, volition, agency, and morality in Western thinking. Then details the discussions in the suttas, abhidhamma, and vinaya, mostly drawing on Buddhaghosa.

A very complicated book, this is not a book for beginner or novices. The author scholarship is very impressive, her attention to detail is just amazing. Having said that; I sometimes had a hard time following her argument and exactly what she was trying to bring out of the Buddha philosophy . I am going to wait six months and reread this book and see if it me and not he author that is opaque .

Is karma = determinism? Does free will exist? In the mean time we know that Descartes is wrong; there is no homunculus in our brain telling us what to think and what to do next. The author uses Buddhaghosa, one of the most distinguished Buddhist scholars, to answer those questions. Cetana, as one of cetasikas grouped under Sankharas in the five aggregates, plays a pivotal role in understanding karma, and indirectly conditionality and dependent origination.

Excellent book and research from a an expert.

It is a great book... for those who learn to understand the nature of the mind and how to learn the Tipitaka properly... and the delivery and packing of the book is great...

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