

mainstream psychotherapy courses and considers reasons for that. I regard this book to be a considered, professional and insightful exploration of therapy in nature, and Jordan's reflections about his personal life-long relationship with nature and the consequent transition of his practice into working therapeutically in nature give the reader food for thought about how relationships beyond the intra- and interpersonal affect our emotional and psychological well being. He demonstrates the complexities of therapy and is sensible about the evident boundary complications of taking a therapy practice outside, himself grappling with reconciling his training background with the issues of working outdoors as a therapist, which makes for a responsible and enlightening contribution to the promotion of therapy in nature and, I hope, the first of many.

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## Hazel Surgenor

### After Mindfulness: New perspectives on psychology and meditation

Manu Bazzano (ed). (2014). Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Mindfulness is the buzzword. There probably isn't a week that goes by without the word popping up in the media, and most people interested in well-being and psychology will have heard about it in one way or another. What exactly is it though? And how exactly is it meant to work? Surrounding the buzzword there equally seems to be a vague sense of knowing and not knowing what this idea is about and how it can be applied. *After Mindfulness* is therefore a timely publication, as it offers some useful background information and situates the concept of mindfulness in today's world.

*After Mindfulness* has a particular lens on human existence, looking at

levels of suffering and the approaches that might alleviate that suffering. That lens or particular world-view is embedded in the practice and philosophy of Buddhism. Some might say Buddhism is a religion, but many will say it is a way of life, and a way of being with self and others. The first five chapters set the scene of the context of Mindfulness.

In Chapter 1 John Peacock takes us back to the beginnings, the life of the Buddha in fifth century BCE India, whose teachings were about social and psychological transformation and the examination of the nature of the mind. Central to Buddhist teachings is the understanding of *dukkha*, which gets translated as suffering or dissatisfaction (Peacock, 2014: p 4). ‘The Buddha saw clearly how the inevitable *dukkha* of ordinary experience was fuelled by the psycho-pathology of desire’ (Peacock, 2014: p 5).

Buddha wished to draw our attention to this fact and how we repeatedly turn our focus to objects of desire when life becomes difficult. Understanding this, according to the Buddha, would mean that the individual was in a better position, both psychologically and ethically, to deal with what arises in life. A way of gaining understanding over this vicious circle of psychological attachment is the strategy of *Sati*, which loosely translates as mindfulness or more correctly as remembering. Remembering ancient sacred and wise texts that discuss the ethical dilemmas humans face, but also learning from this ancient knowledge by living them again and again in the present moment (*ibid*).

Peacock tells us that Mindfulness has different levels; the first is simple awareness of pleasant or unpleasant experiences, and staying with it in a non-judgemental manner. The second level is protective awareness, which concerns itself with awareness and restraint of the senses for one’s own protection as opposed to ‘losing one’s head’, and thirdly introspective awareness which is concerned with an internal discriminatory ability of cultivating wholesome and relinquishing unwholesome states.

This ancient tradition of examining the nature of experience and the ethical aspect of living stands in contrast to a Mindfulness taught and disseminated in today’s West in large part as a clinically and evidence-based intervention in the form of MBCT (mindfulness-based stress reduction) and MBCT (mindfulness-based cognitive therapy) first introduced in the 1980s in the US by Jon Kabat-Zinn. This has led to many courses and books flooding the mainstream to help people deal with the complexity of modern life in a better way. Mindfulness, as we know it today, mostly operates at the first level of awareness, simple awareness, but rarely enquires further into the second and third level of awareness, the protective and the introspective level, which has much more to do with an ethical stance towards self and others, towards life in general.

In Chapter 2 Caroline Brazier reflects on the deep truths of embodied reality.

*As such, it sits on the knife-edge between the psychological and spiritual...as we engage the object world, we see in the particular things that we encounter both mundane objects and windows into the spiritual dimension.*

(Brazier, 2014: p 30)

From embodied reality Stephen Batchelor in Chapter 3 moves perhaps onto the other end of the spectrum, the sublime, which is something reminiscent of being in the moment and Being, which is available to all of us. He says ‘nirvana is not reached through sustained non-conceptual concentration on a privileged religious object, but by paying close, uncompromising attention to our fluctuating, anguished bodies and minds’ (Batchelor, 2014: p 44).

David Brazier in Chapter 4 suggests that the above experiences of embodied reality and the sublime arise within an attitude of experiential learning, which is part of Buddha’s teaching; to experience rather than just take on an idea. A sense of liberation follows from experiencing one’s truth. He says ‘When mindfulness becomes a treatment or a technique, it is done with a predetermined aim in view and that is not what liberation means’. He goes on to say ‘to be liberated is to know and to choose where choice is possible and to deeply accept where change is not possible’ (Brazier, 2014: p 58).

Being mindful of the totality of one’s life and the world can be appreciated for what it is. Manu Bazzano in Chapter 5 talks about praising life, the beauty that is, just like the flower in full bloom. However, just as the bloom of the flower fades appreciation of life necessarily includes the sadness of loss. Both beauty and the ugly are part of life. Bazzano says ‘what often happens through sustained and sincere practice, uncluttered by religious Buddhist baggage and/or secular remedial agendas, is a profound appreciation of life’s *givens*, and the realization that life’s *givens* are life’s *gifts*’ (Bazzano, 2014: p 69). Perhaps another way of looking at Mindfulness then is that it puts us in touch with life’s *givens* and that if we are prepared to stay with the *givens* a sense of being unfolds that just *is*, without judgement.

This openness towards what *is*, gets looked at more concretely in the next six chapters concerned with everyday life and clinical practice.

Meg Barker in Chapter 6 argues for an approach to sex and relationships, which takes the social context into account advocating for a social mindfulness. By this she means moving away from labelling and from seeking normative changes through techniques to actively question ideas of mainstream media where there is a tendency towards heteronormativity and gender bias. Instead she advocates interconnectedness and intersubjectivity and adopting a biopsychosocial lens where sex therapy moves away from goal orientation

to an orientation towards experience, flow and pleasure, therefore a non-dualistic (Buddhist) view of life.

Alex Gooch in Chapter 7 is critical of a mindfulness that is about problem-solving and therefore secular in spirit. He lays out the moral landscape of the post-modern world where there is no more religion and no more big narratives, where everything gets deconstructed, and sees this as a spiritual crisis. People crave for an identity, a sense of place and belonging in this world, he argues, where the question of how and what in life cannot be answered by a tool. He concludes perhaps inconclusively that ‘...we require meaningful orientations towards the future, and we require beliefs (at least provisional ones) in order to orient ourselves towards the world and interact with it in a meaningful way’ (Gooch, 2014: p 110).

Rebecca Greenslade in Chapter 8 advocates a scepticism with its roots in the 350 BCE Greek Philosopher Pyrrho, which is an attitude of openness and suspension of judgement rather than a means to academic dispute, which gives rise to a sense of liberation akin to the tranquillity that comes from mindful living and meditation. She talks about a mindfulness-based sceptical psychotherapy that enquires into phenomena with equanimity devoid of attachment, seeking the liberation from beliefs and a move towards tranquillity rather than anxiety. This is sceptical sensibility rather than a technique based mindfulness.

Jeff Harrison in Chapter 9 brings the focus on the partiality of experience, the trickery of language, and the flux of life that require careful attention and openness of judgement in order to feel meaningful to the lived experience. He looks to Merleau-Ponty’s embodied states between the self and the other, the subject and the object, the in-between worlds, and how meditation can capture this spaciousness that is around us, which can never really be seized or sealed. Living in the present body is true mindfulness and is a poetic experience. He concludes that no amount of words or theories can truly capture these states of continuous movement.

Dheeresh Turnbull in Chapter 10 offers perhaps the most pragmatic chapter. He starts off by saying that all modalities, no matter what their starting point, have their pitfalls. He then moves onto mindfulness in the sense of remembering, offering a nice way of looking at it, namely remembering who we really are, which he argues is a task that all therapeutic and spiritual/meditative disciplines are concerned with. He uses the concept of horizontal and vertical meta-perspectives to cut across therapeutic disciplines, as an aid to the clinician to decide on the level and the balance of intervention.

Horizontal meta-perspective is about *detachment* and may be necessary to help clients see things for what they are, i.e. it’s just a thought, or it is a feeling that passes, or a behaviour change can bring about x change. The Vertical meta-perspective on the other hand is about *enquiry* looking at

the different sub-personalities and structures and how they are endowed with feelings, associations, thoughts and voices.

Turnbull convincingly argues that helping people to be more present and to appreciate the every day and little things can be very therapeutic and can increase peoples' quality of life enormously. However, from a Buddhist perspective this is only the beginning. The more fundamental quest he argues is to understand who we really are, he uses the metaphor of the ocean, and a meditation practice as taught by the Buddha or other practices like Shamanism puts us in touch with the *more* or the *after* Mindfulness.

In the final chapter, psychoanalyst Monica Lanyado, describes how her meditation practice helps her to stay with intense present-moment experiences she has with her child/adolescent clients who have experienced deep past trauma impinging on their present. She feels that a meditation practice can help the therapist and the patient experience the now and eventually help sort out the past from the present. She tells a moving story of how her teenage patient 'dropped' into a meditative state for a large part of a session which was a breakthrough and transformative for both. The present and the therapeutic space become something other, which can open up something of the beyond; beyond trauma in the case of this patient.

This final account is a powerful illustration of how a meditative practice and stance within a session can literally move a client along to a different level of consciousness and ability to process and integrate their past experiences. This reminds me of clinicians and researchers at the forefront of trauma research who talk about attitudes and use techniques that fall within the realm of Mindfulness to be present to and help with dissociation, hyperarousal/hypoarousal and post traumatic stress symptoms. Bessel Van der Kolk (2014) calls Mindfulness the ability to hover calmly and objectively over our thoughts, feelings and emotions and then take our time to respond to any given situation from that position. Dan Siegel (2010) uses concepts and describes therapeutic attitudes/techniques such as presence, attunement, and resonance and links these to research that show how these ways of being bring about changes on the neurological level.

There are also links to existential philosophy, phenomenology and ideas around authentic living, at home in the existential perspective which locates these foci within the encounter between therapist and client, and in the experience of being-in-the-world. In many ways the phenomenological method of enquiry is mindfulness on the first level of simple awareness, and existential philosophy and ethics concerns itself with the other two levels of awareness, the protective and the introspective. There is scepticism and caution too within the existential phenomenological community around technique and problem-solving attitudes. Heidegger wisely wrote about

the dangers of adopting a technological approach to life and its problems. However, I believe the book shows well that there is a place for Mindfulness as a technique, because in the first instance, perhaps a bit like an emergency tool kit, it can make suffering more bearable.

Clearly the book advocates that there is something more fundamental beyond Mindfulness as a technique, which is a welcome message. Perhaps *the more is meaning*, and what I appreciated about this book is the consideration of the sacred in life. Bazzano in a concluding postscript wonders about the unashamed secular flavour of Mindfulness brought to the wider masses from the US almost like a McMindfulness brand, besotted with the idea of quick fixes. He cites Kierkegaard and the search for the sacred in life that can be exciting but in equal measures can put the individual in touch with deep fears and despair about what it means to be human.

I agree with this last point yet find that not all people or clients are ready to face this despair and terror. If it is more through a technique that some get to a different, for them more acceptable way of living, then I think there is a place for that. Furthermore, in terms of trauma and intense suffering, as a practitioner I offer techniques, methods if you like, that are known to help. As a long-term practitioner of meditation in both the Zen and Esoteric tradition, variants of Mindfulness such as paying attention to breathing, the felt bodily experience and present moment awareness are embedded in my practice as a Counselling Psychologist and Psychotherapist. I don't see these necessarily as quick fixes but more like stepping-stones. Sometimes people need help to sort out the basics before they can move onto more complex levels of questioning and experiencing.

Thus, there are many different levels to mindfulness. It can be a way of being in the world, it can be a method to engage with the suffering aspect of life, and the joys, it can be part of the therapeutic relationship, it can be a method to understand life, it can form part of a possible healing process and it can serve as a springboard to further personal development, which may include contemplative practices like meditation. The ones who want and can will move onto the deeper levels of engagement with the bigger questions of who we are and what we are meant to do or be and will find the teachings and practices that make most sense to them. It may be embracing Buddhist traditions or can equally come from many other teachings and systems of wisdom that engage deeply with the dilemmas of human existence.

I highly recommend this book to practitioners both in the therapeutic and spiritual fields, as well as to the interested reader of life issues, who wants to learn more about Mindfulness. My experience was of a meditative and poetic book with some pragmatic and clinical pointers bringing the concept of Mindfulness, the practice of meditation and a Buddhist worldview to a more comprehensive and updated place.

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## The Soul of the World

Scruton, R. (2014). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Scruton is an English philosopher who specialises in aesthetics. This book is based on a lecture series exploring ‘philosophical discussions of mind, art, music, politics and law in order to define what is at stake in the current disputes over the nature and ground of religious belief’ (preface). While not defending any particular faith he does argue for making room for the religious world view in current discourse.

He begins with a chapter on the features and purposes of religion. Then proceeds through exploration of ourselves as individuals, our relations with others and the world, and a chapter on ‘the sacred space of music’. His benchmark throughout is the prism of aesthetics and his arguments relate to examples from art, music, literature, maths, architecture and design of cities. He ends with musings on ‘Seeking God’ and ideas of an afterlife.

He discusses the various ‘myths of origin’ that attempt to explain how we transitioned from human animal to self-conscious human person, such as Adam and Eve in the Fall, which he says seeks to explain how we became ashamed of our bodies, only possible for a self-aware animal. It is also when we ‘became tempted to conceive our most intimate relations in objectifying terms’ (p 107). He refers to a fresco by Masaccio ‘The expulsion from Paradise’ where two kinds of shame are depicted – Adam hiding his face, *the self*, and Eve hiding her now private parts from unwelcome eyes. He suggests such myths are important because they tell us deep truths about ourselves.

Scruton takes issue particularly with evolutionary psychologists and what he sees as their trivialising myth of origin – leaving no room to ‘puzzle over the meaning of music or the beauty of art’ (p 142) because they construe such things as adaptations whose meaning resides in what they do for our genes. He believes great works of art grace our lives, they speak across time and space from other existences and are ‘the remedy for our metaphysical loneliness’ (p 173).

My impression, distilling his wide ranging discussion is that this is essentially a well argued plea for us not to throw the baby out with the secular bathwater – while allowing the explanatory priority of science to

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