



“Philosophical and anthropological perspectives on the mindfulness movement”

Day: Thursday 12th July 2018 Time: 3:30 – 4:45 pm Track: Philosophical and Dharma Underpinnings

The first presenter, Graeme Nixon, will talk about a conceptual review of philosophical and conceptual approaches to mindfulness as well as a consideration of contemporary critiques of the emergence of mindfulness within Euro-American culture.

The second presenter is Jane Kellock Arnold, she will talk about a research study exploring the experience and effects of long-term practice by six student practitioners of secular mindfulness, compassion and insight forming the Mindfulness-Based Living model incorporated into the MSc in Mindfulness Studies at the University of Aberdeen.

The third presenter is Ngar-Sze Lau, who will talk about a paper exploring the interpretation and adaptation of the new meditation practices in the contemporary context.

Finally, Josef Mattes will contribute to the discussion about controversies concerning the relationship between modern mindfulness based interventions and Buddhism from the point of view of the psychology of judgement and decision making (JDM).

Symposium overview

- Presenter 1** **Graeme Nixon** - Mindfulness - The Full Catastrophe
- Presenter 2** **Jane Kellock Arnold** - Living A Mindful Life: An Hermeneutic Phenomenological Inquiry Into The Lived Experience Of Secular Mindfulness, Compassion And Insight
- Presenter 3** **Ngar-sze Lau** – Exploration of inter-religious meditation experience: Mindfulness practice of Christians in Hong Kong
- Presenter 4** **Josef Mattes** - On the psychology of mindfulness dogmatism
- Chair:** **Graeme Nixon**



Mindfulness - The Full Catastrophe

Graeme Nixon, Sean McGovern, Jane Kellock Arnold

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Background and Objectives: Many of the current criticisms of secular mindfulness discuss an apparent lack of compassionate or spiritual heritage or content in secular approaches and interventions. The 'instrumentalisation' of mindfulness has provoked criticism from a range of spiritual or religious commentators and figures about the misuse of mindfulness out with its various putative religious birth traditions. The use of the term 'secular' in this context has been described as a prophylactic that, while making mindfulness palatable to the western mind-set, has also rendered it infertile. In this paper Dr Graeme Nixon will argue that much of this criticism relies on false binaries around terms such as spiritual and secular, and that mindfulness whilst perhaps being ubiquitous to religious traditions (to varying degrees) is also present in western philosophy and the scientific temper. Graeme will argue for the recognition that, with a better grasp of secularity (as opposed to secularism), a more inclusive, accessible and, at the same time, pluralistic understanding can emerge.

Methods: This paper is a conceptual review of philosophical and conceptual approaches to mindfulness as well as a consideration of contemporary critiques of the emergence of mindfulness within Euro-American culture.

Discussion and Conclusion: This paper aims to explore the appeal of mindfulness to the Euro-American mind, the extent to which this has manifested in a largely uncritical 'Eastward glance'; with opportunity costs in terms of exploring indigenous approaches to mindfulness within western religious and philosophical traditions. This paper explores arguments relating to the secularity of mindfulness; the sanitisation of religious mindfulness (particularly from Dharma traditions), and concludes by offering the possibility of a more inclusive, critical and discerning approach which is prepared to see aspects of mindfulness in multiple traditions.



Living A Mindful Life: An Hermeneutic Phenomenological Inquiry Into The Lived Experience Of Secular Mindfulness, Compassion And Insight

Jane Kellock Arnold

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The Mindfulness Association, Aberdeen, United Kingdom

This research study explores the experience and effects of long-term practice by six student practitioners of secular mindfulness, compassion and insight forming the Mindfulness-Based Living model incorporated into the MSc in Mindfulness Studies at the University of Aberdeen. A review of existing literature on the topic of mindfulness highlights that research is predominantly postpositivist and quantitative in approach, only recently incorporating limited qualitative studies, and is focused chiefly on mindfulness as a treatment for a range of mental and physical disorders. However, the nature of mindfulness particularly when practised in conjunction with compassion and insight suggests that it is a more intense, complex, nuanced and pervasive experience than is reflected in the literature. An exploration of Buddhist and Western phenomenology highlights important parallels with contemporary secular mindfulness studies indicating, firstly, the value of an in-depth qualitative study capable of surfacing potentially transformative effects of the practice of mindfulness and related disciplines, and, secondly, the potential relevance of mindfulness to the praxis of phenomenological research.

Towards these aims, this study utilises an hermeneutic phenomenological approach incorporating mindfulness approaches in its execution. Interview data were collected from participants on multiple occasions over durations of between seven and twelve months and are presented as rich narrative texts organised around emergent themes. Analysis indicates the occurrence of intense, embodied, authentic transcendental experiences that pervade day-to-day life and extend beyond a remedial effect. Researcher data indicate the usefulness of mindfulness to the practice of phenomenological research, supporting embodied interview and phenomenological reduction.

The study highlights findings useful to the design of secular programmes and to further research, notably the incorporation of compassion and insight approaches, the centrality of embodiment, and the effects of long term practice on social cohesion.



Exploration of inter-religious meditation experience: Mindfulness practice of Christians in Hong Kong

Ngar-sze Lau

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With the influence of globalization and Buddhist modernism from East Asian countries, various transnational Buddhist meditation and mindfulness practices have been transmitted rapidly to Chinese societies such as Taiwan and Hong Kong as popular lay practices in the past two decades. Unlike traditional religious context, an increasing number of people who practice and teach mindfulness are from different religious background. The plurality and emergence of various forms of mindfulness practice not only reflects the dynamics between the decline of old-formed institutionalized religion and the resurgence of new forms of religion, but also the interaction between Buddhism and modernity. Mindfulness practitioners are not restricted to Buddhists, but include people from different religious and social background including Chinese Buddhists, Christians and atheists. By examining the recent literature and ethnographic information collected through participant observation and in-depth interviews, this paper explores the interpretation and adaptation of the new meditation practices in the contemporary context. Through case studies of Christian mindfulness practitioners, the hybrid-religious identity and inter-religious experience of practitioners will be examined.



On the psychology of mindfulness dogmatism

Josef Mattes

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Background and objectives: Recently, considerable controversies concerning the relationship between modern mindfulness based interventions and Buddhism arose. Objective of this contribution is to contribute to these discussion from the point of view of the psychology of judgement and decision making (JDM).

Method: Selective review of the literature on JDM (cognitive illusions) and moral psychology (dilemmata), and synthesis with aspects of the Theravada canon, including a discussion of the standard "sniper" example.

Results: It is argued that, even though there is some evidence that mindfulness practice does improve judgment and decision making, this improvement tends to be not nearly strong as implicit in various attempts to dictate certain ideas of morality to others. In addition, the paper contains some remarks on claims that "the original teachings of the Buddha" justify the moral stances taken in the above mentioned discussions: an argument is sketched that these stances are likely owned at least in part to culturally transmitted cognitive dissonance of early Christianity, rather than being inherent in the Buddha's teachings.

Conclusion: More humility as to our ability to "see things as they really are" or to exercise "pure awareness", and more restraint in the urge to meddle in others decisions, is not only warranted by the results of modern science, but also counseled by ancient wisdom.