

# A Critical History of Mindfulness-Based Psychology

by

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## **Introduction**

From yoga classes at local gyms, to neuroscientific research on meditating Buddhists, there can be no doubt that Eastern styles of meditation have had an increasing influence on Western culture within recent years. Even Jon Stewart's popular television show "The Daily Show" ironically references the movement in a regular comic feature called the "Moment of Zen." While there is a long tradition of Eastern meditative practices in the United States, the extent to which it has become a cultural force today has not been seen since the heyday of the counterculture movement of the 1960s and 1970s. In its most current incarnation, however, the influences of meditation go far beyond a youthful and rebellious counterculture to the very mainstream of society, including the biomedical establishment.

This thesis examines one of the more popular meditative practices being used in the medical world today called mindfulness meditation. The goal of my study is to critically examine this movement, asking *why* has mindfulness come to popularity *now* and *what* can understanding its emergence reveal about the production of psychological knowledge today?

The word "mindfulness" as used in mindfulness meditation, is a translation of the term *sati* from the Indo-Aryan language of Pali, although it

has not always been the preferred translation into English.<sup>1</sup> *Sati* was described by the historical Buddha in discourses attributed to him known as the *Anapanasati Sutra* and the *Satipathana Sutra*. In the variant of mindfulness meditation in twenty-first century Western culture, much of the practice has been stripped of its historically Buddhist context. Instead, it has been adapted to secular, universal and medical practices.

Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center describes mindfulness as the awareness that emerges through attending to the present moment from a nonjudgmental perspective. By shifting preoccupation away from the past and future, practitioners of mindfulness “drop in to” the “actuality of the lived experience.”<sup>2</sup> An example of a mindfulness technique used in MBSR is the body-scan, during which participants direct attention and awareness towards various areas of their bodies. Other techniques include sitting meditation, Hatha yoga, diaphragmatic breathing, among others. Kabat-Zinn often writes that

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<sup>1</sup> Alternative translations have included “self-possession,” “attention,” “concentration of mind development,” and “bare attention.” The translation to the English term mindfulness was first used by Rhys Davids in *The Questions of King Milinda I* at the turn of the 20th century. A half century later, Nyanaponika Thera’s used the same term in his text *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*. These texts, along with Thich Nhat Hahn’s *Miracle of Mindfulness* and Daniel Goleman’s *The Varieties of the Meditative Experiences*, set the stage for the popular usage of the term mindfulness as a translation for the term *sati* in the West; see Dryden, W., & Still, A. (2006). “Historical aspects of mindfulness and self-acceptance in psychotherapy.” *Journal of Rational-Emotive & Cognitive-Behavior Therapy* **24**(1): 3-28.

<sup>2</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). “Mindfulness-based intervention in context: past, present, and future.” *American Psychological Association* **12**: 148.

mindfulness is a practice, not in the sense that it is a rehearsal for a future performance, but instead as a way of being in the unfolding present moment.<sup>3</sup>

Within the medical literature, mindfulness is defined as attention, awareness, and acceptance.<sup>4</sup> In this context, awareness refers to the subjective experience of internal and external phenomena, and attention refers to the activity of focusing on selected aspects of that reality, thus determining that which is included in awareness. Finally, acceptance refers to an open, receptive, or nonjudgmental attention to and awareness of present moment consciousness. In letting go of desired outcomes, acceptance does not refer to resignation, but, rather the ability to embrace whatever one encounters in the present moment.

Mindfulness techniques have a significant role in a new generation of psychotherapeutic interventions. These mindfulness-based therapies include Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT), and Mindfulness Based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (MBCT) among others. Over the past thirty years, mindfulness-based therapies have rapidly grown more popular, with over 17,000 participants graduating from over 200 MBSR centers in the

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<sup>3</sup> There is a common misconception that in emphasizing the present moment, mindfulness discourages remembering or planning. What mindfulness does discourage is *obsessive* remembering and planning, that is, when dwelling on the past and fantasizing about the future paralyzes action and fulfillment in the present moment.

<sup>4</sup> Brown, K. W., & Ryan, R.M. (2004). "Perils and promise in defining and measuring mindfulness: observations from experience." *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice* **11**(3): 243; Bishop, S. R., Lau, M., Shapiro, S.L., Carlson, L., & Anderson, N.D (2004). "Mindfulness: A proposed operational definition." *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice* **11**: 230-241.

United States alone.<sup>5</sup> The influence of mindfulness in the world of psychotherapy is also evident in the growing number of therapists and counselors who teach and use mindfulness themselves as one of several tools in the course of therapy.<sup>6</sup>

The clinical effects of mindfulness meditation have caught the attention of evidence-based researchers. A recent search on the abstracts database PsychInfo received 1266 hits for the search term “mindfulness.”<sup>7</sup> In fact, more than seventy scientific articles on mindfulness meditation were published in scholarly journals during the year 2007 alone. The efficacy studies on mindfulness meditation have explored its usefulness for treating Eating Disorders, Depression, Psoriasis, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Anxiety Disorder, Fibromyalgia, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Boderline Personality Disorder, and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.<sup>8</sup> This list is just the tip of the iceberg. In many ways, mindfulness meditation has become a kind of panacea for contemporary ills.

Despite a wealth of literature on how to engage in mindfulness meditation, there are few histories of mindfulness meditation. The histories that

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<sup>5</sup> “Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society: Stress Reduction Program” *University of Massachusetts Medical Center* [Broacher]: 1; [http://www.umassmed.edu/content.aspx?id=41252.](http://www.umassmed.edu/content.aspx?id=41252;);

<sup>6</sup> There is reason to believe that DBT and ACT centers are also expanding, but there is limited statistical evidence available; *Personal communication*, Dr. Daniel Guerra, October, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Search completed on April 11<sup>th</sup> 2009  
<http://ovidsp.tx.ovid.com/spa/ovidweb.cgi?&S=A0BFFPEDCIDDPBDFNCGLKDJJKPFAA00&SELECT=S.sh%7c&R=1&Process+Action=display>.

<sup>8</sup> Baer, R. A. (2003). “Mindfulness training as a clinical intervention: A conceptual and empirical review.” *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice* **10**: 125-143.

do exist take the approach of naïve naturalism, a view that tends to trace a history of popular theories and theorists. By contrast, critical histories consider the social and cultural contexts and explore the relationship between power and knowledge. Rather than implying blame, the word critical is used in the sense of opening up the possibility for analytical perspectives. Critical histories investigate the past as a way to think differently about the present. However, nearly no critical histories exist in the literature on mindfulness.<sup>9</sup>

As a critical history my thesis proposes that the emergence of mindfulness is intimately tied to modern notions of self and represents a turn towards a thought style that has deep roots in the American psychological tradition, that is, one that turns itself towards the space between the two dominant thought collectives of the past century and a half in psychology. Drawing on his experiences as a clinical bacteriologist and immunologist, Polish physician Ludwik Fleck posited that training, preconceptions, and anticipations can shape how objects are thought of in scientific inquiry and that scientific facts are constructed within “thought collectives” consisting of individuals who share similar “thought styles.”<sup>10</sup> This study proposes that modern psychology has negotiated between two particular thought collectives, those that champion mechanistic thought styles, and those that privilege

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<sup>9</sup> For an exception see Barker, K. (2007). "Self-healing in late-modernity: The case of mindfulness." *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, New York City, Aug 11, 2007.*

<sup>10</sup> Fleck, L. (1935/1979). *Genesis and development of a scientific fact*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.

subjectivist thought styles. For the purposes of this paper, mechanistic thought styles are those approaches that rely on determinism, materialism, reductionism, and rationalism in describing human nature and consciousness. Meanwhile, subjectivist thought styles are those that place a primacy on subjective ways of knowing and often emphasize the lived experience, agency, and non-conceptual thought. The difference between mechanistic and subjectivist approaches can be likened to the distinction between analyzing a score of music as opposed to listening to that music in the pursuit of describing its nature. To the extent that mindfulness champions subjectivist thought styles while maintaining certain mechanistic assumptions, mindfulness can be understood as a subjectivist turn towards the space between thought collectives in a psychological community that has become dominated by the mechanistic thought collective.

Chapter One looks back at previous subjectivist turns towards the middle ground between collectives as a way of understanding why subjectivist leanings may have become popular again more recently. Examining the subjectivist turns of William James and the humanistic psychologists lays the foundation for broader claims on the history of knowledge production in psychology later in the study. Chapter Two, a case study of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, reviews the basics of mindfulness meditation including its relationship with Buddhism as well as how it fits into modern medicine.

Chapter Three considers the ways in which mindfulness fits in as a subjectivist

turn, explores the impetus for its recent popularity, and hypothesizes on the waxing and waning of mechanistic and subjectivist thought styles in the history of psychology more generally. This chapter will explore how directions in the production of psychological knowledge are intimately tied to developments in culture, particularly popular conceptions of self. Furthermore, that psychology is currently caught in a paradigm that negotiates between mechanistic and subjectivist thought styles due to this relationship.

## **Chapter One: Subjectivist Turns of the Past**

In looking back to the work of William James and the humanistic psychologists, this chapter aims to better understand the common threads to these turns away from mechanistic psychologies and towards more subjectivist thought styles. The goal is not, however, to establish a direct intellectual lineage between the two and mindfulness. Examining the social and cultural contexts of these two turns offers clues for understanding that which influences mindfulness today.

### **William James as a Subjectivist Turn**

By the turn of the twentieth century, the nascent field of psychology was attempting to establish itself on equal scientific footing with physics, chemistry, and astronomy. Many psychologists attempted to replicate the design of these fields by privileging “objective” experimental methods. In 1879, German physiologist Wilhelm Wundt opened the first laboratory committed to experimental psychology at a university in Leipzig, Germany. Wundt posited that consciousness can and should only be observed through the manipulation of internal conditions so that they can be witnessed externally. For example, in the controlled conditions of the laboratory, Wundt conducted experiments on how subjects responded to physical stimuli of varying

intensity, duration, and quality.<sup>11</sup> The early psychologists called for a revolution by emphasizing the scientific model and denouncing the methods of their predecessors in the introspective philosophies. At the heart of the transformation was a rethinking of how mental life can be studied, what constitutes evidence, and who has the power to produce knowledge?

The center of experimental psychology in mid-nineteenth century, German was going through the “second industrial revolution,” sometimes called the “technical revolution.” This was a period of great expansion in the mass production of consumer goods as well as in the chemical, electrical, steel, and oil industries. Students increasingly entered fields relevant to the emerging industrial and technologically-based culture in masses, which included engineering and the sciences. This new industrial ethos brought new attitudes to a variety of disciplines, including the study of mental life. As the natural world increasingly became rationalized by scientific pursuits, there was growing support for rationalized understandings of human nature.

Not everyone was convinced that these experimental methods alone were satisfactory. Through music, art and literature German Romanticism resisted industrialization and embraced instead instinct, nature, imagination, folk traditions, and the sublime. The so-called father of modern experimental psychology Wundt himself maintained interest in the *geisteswissenschaft*, that is, the mental or more experiential approaches that are associated with

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<sup>11</sup> See Danziger, K. (1990). *Constructing the subject: Historical origins of psychological research*. New York, Cambridge University Press.

subjectivism. The historian George Mandler notes that the duality of Wundt's approach, one that used both formalized experimentation and *geisteswissenschaft*, characterized the nineteenth century German split between democratic and radical idealism on one side and Prussian militarism and radical rationalism on the other.<sup>12</sup> Wundt battled these opposing forces in his own life, which was very much reflected in his psychology. In this sense, the tensions between subjectivist and mechanistic approaches contributed to the very birth of modern psychology.

On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, a professor at Harvard named William James was grappling with some of the very same concerns as Wundt. James came to believe that the emerging rigidity and mechanistic emphasis within experimental psychology were sending the field off course.

Psychologist Edna Heidbreder writes that, while other psychologists at the time were intent on "making the new psychology a science," James was concerned that "the new science be psychology."<sup>13</sup> In 1890, James addressed this concern in *The Principles of Psychology*, which shook the very ground that the new scientific psychology was standing on. The American Psychological Association has described James's groundbreaking text as "without question the most literate, the most provocative, and at the same time the most intelligible book on psychology that has ever appeared in English or in any

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<sup>12</sup> Mandler, G. (2007). *A history of modern experimental psychology*. Cambridge, The MIT Press.

<sup>13</sup> Heidbreder, E. (1933). *Seven psychologies*. New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts: 152.

other language.”<sup>14</sup> One of the more subjectivist leaning section in *Principles* is James’s writing on the stream of consciousness.

While other psychologists of his era were attempting to explain why consciousness exists, James sought to describe consciousness for the perspective of the lived experience. Regarding the positivistic pursuits of his peers he wrote that consciousnesses, “certainly follows or accompanies our brain states, and of course their special forms are determined by our past experiences and education... [however] we have not the remotest inkling of an answer to give” as to the question of why consciousness exists.<sup>15</sup> For James, determinism is impossible and, therefore, explanation should be discounted in favor of description.<sup>16</sup>

James held that deconstructing mental life by reducing mental states to physical brain states treats the individual as if it is “completely without any power of modifying... Inert, uninfluential, a simple passenger on the voyage of life.”<sup>17</sup> He described a then current mechanistic conception of the human mind as follows:

An influential school of psychology, seeking to avoid haziness of outline, has tried to make things appear more exact and scientific by making the analysis more sharp. The various fields of consciousness, according to this school result from a definite number of perfectly definite elementary mental states,

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<sup>14</sup> MacLeod, R. (1969). *William James: unfinished business*. Washington, D.C., American Psychological Association: iii.

<sup>15</sup> James, W. (1899). *Talks to teachers*. Boston, Geo.H. Ellis Co. (Inc.): 20.

<sup>16</sup> James, W. (1884). "The dilemma of determinism" in James, W. (1884). *Will to believe*. Unitarian Review.

<sup>17</sup> James, W. (1879). "Are We Automata?" *Mind* 4: 1-22.

mechanically associated into a mosaic or chemically combined. According to some thinkers, - Spencer, for example, or Tain, - these resolve themselves at last into little elementary psychic particles or atoms of ‘mind stuff’ out of which all the more immediately known mental states are said to be built up.<sup>18</sup>

Dissatisfied with the loss of agency in explanations that reduced consciousness to the level of materialism, he turned to a subjectivist leaning psychology of consciousness and attention, eventually positing that volition is the effort of attention; that the will exists insofar as what is attended to is voluntary. According to James, the mutations of our fields of consciousness gradually drift from one to another and distinctions between fields are not sharp or abrupt. These fields include various degrees of sensations, memories, thoughts, feelings, desires, emotions, and the will. He posits that, while such a description is indeed vague it is at least free from positive error and hypothesis.

James claimed that subjective life is composed of that which we attend to; out of “the infinite chaos of movements,” each sense-organ picks out certain objects and ignores the rest as if they did not exist.<sup>19</sup> He writes, “What is called our ‘experience’ is almost entirely determined by our habits of attention.”<sup>20</sup> A person may pass an object one hundred times, but if he never notices it, it cannot be considered to be part of his experience. To describe this phenomenon, he offers the example of four men who are touring Europe. One might bring home only “picturesque impressions,” another will only remember

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<sup>18</sup> James, W. (1899). *Talks to teachers*. Boston, Geo.H. Ellis Co. (Inc.): 29.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*: 28.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*: 28.

“distances and prices, populations and drainage-arrangements, door-and window-fastenings.” Another traveler will recount “the theaters, restaurants, and public halls,” while a fourth might “perhaps have been so wrapped in his own subjective broodings as to be able to tell little more than a few names of places through which he passed.”<sup>21</sup> In selecting specific objects of attention, each experiences a different reality.

In his theory on the stream of consciousness, James moved away from a static and quite literally mechanistic conceptualization of mind, that of “links on a chain.”<sup>22</sup> Instead, James writes, “consciousness then does not appear chopped up in bits...it is nothing jointed; it flows...In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life.”<sup>23</sup> In turning away from determinism to more experiential ways of knowing, James called for psychology to consider what could be called more subjectivist thought styles.

However, James maintained certain mechanistic assumptions. In his view, subjective ways of knowing were quite difficult to realize accurately. In fact, not only did James teach a course in experimental psychology at Harvard during his early years with the university, but he established the Harvard laboratories, and, in doing so, pioneered the laboratory methods of German psychologists in America. Nevertheless, James felt that highly objective

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<sup>21</sup> James, W. (1890/2007). *Principles of psychology*. In Cosimo Classics: 286.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid: 239

<sup>23</sup> Ibid: 239.

approaches and their mechanical accounts of mental life missed the genuine questions that ought to be asked in a science of mental life; ambitions, worries, and love were just as much part of experience as the topics being examined in the new scientific psychology such as stimulus response and the reflex arc.

Unsatisfied with the limitations of both subjective and objective ways of knowing, James introduced the idea of lived experience as a way of knowing in the psychological sciences with a postulate that came to be known as radical empiricism. He posited that experience includes both “particulars” and “relations between particulars,” and that meaning comes from explanations that include both; understanding an object is more than just explaining an object’s deterministic state, rather it must also include the object in relation to the subject. James writes, “The relations that connect experiences must be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as ‘real’ as anything else in the system.”<sup>24</sup> James called for an urgent need to “return to life” to “non-conceptual” thought and to “lived experience” in the empirical methods of experimental psychology so that the relations between subject and object can be better addressed.<sup>25</sup> His radical empiricism was pluralistic, willing to include a number of methods from logical analysis to the observation of mundane everyday experience.

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<sup>24</sup> James, W. (1904) “A world of pure experience” in McDermott, J.J. (1977). *The writings of William James: A comprehensive edition*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press: 195.

<sup>25</sup> James, W. (1904). "The continuity of experience," in McDermott, J.J. (1977). *The writings of William James: A comprehensive edition*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press: 297.

Despite great admiration for James both within and outside the psychological community, most of his work has receded from popular and academic attention over the course of the past century. As psychology gained more institutional significance in the 1890s and early 1900s, it established its own set of conventions, one not entirely sympathetic with James's radical empiricism. Any calls against the notion of a purely objective epistemology posed a challenge to the survival and status of the newly born academic institution. Not surprisingly, some psychologists viewed James as a nemesis. G. Stanley Hall, an early psychologist and student of James, wrote in a letter to a college, "The medium-mad Bostonians...all point to James and say with him that there is a germ of truth in all the bosh and dross. It is James who laid the foundations of all this credulity."<sup>26</sup> In his *Varieties of Religious Experiences*, James acknowledges such hostility, writing, "the current of thought in academic circles runs against me, and I feel like a man who must set his back against an open door quickly if he does not wish to see it closed and locked."<sup>27</sup>

Casting James's theories aside, psychological practices during the next fifty years utilized mostly mechanistic models for the most part.<sup>28</sup> While Freud was fundamentally indebted to James, his take on free will was also overtaken by Freud's theory of psychic determinism, which asserted that everything a

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<sup>26</sup> Coon, D. (2002) "Testing the limits of sense and science: American experimental psychologists combat spiritualism, 1880–1920." in Pickren, W., Dewsbury, D. (2002). *Evolving perspectives on the history of psychology*. Washington, D.C., American Psychological Association: 125.

<sup>27</sup> James, W. (1902/1994). *The varieties of religious experience: A study in human nature*. Random House, Inc: 411.

<sup>28</sup> For the exceptions see Gardner Murphy, Gordon Allport, Lois Barclay Murphy.

person does, thinks, or feels has a specific and identifiable cause that can be determined from earlier experiences.<sup>29</sup> By the second decade of the twentieth century, the behaviorists limited their concerns to outward behaviors and eliminated the role of thoughts and feelings from experimental psychology. To behaviorist John B. Watson psychology should no longer use terms like “consciousness, mental states, mind, content, introspectively, verifiable, imagery, and the like,” rather, psychology could work on the premise of “stimulus and response...habit formation...habit integrations and the like.”<sup>30</sup> By mid century, cognitive psychologists revived interest in internal states, but in considering the mind to be a computer processor they treated mental life in much the same mechanistic ways that James had earlier described so negatively. As a result, subjectivist ways of knowing became stigmatized as a biased way of studying mental life. Subjectivist approaches as therapy was a different story, for self-examination and contemplation was an integral part of traditional Freudian psychoanalysis and many schools of psychotherapy thereafter. What the scientific community rejected during these early years was the notion of subjectivism as a valuable way of producing legitimate psychological knowledge.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See Freud, S. (1901/2005). *The psychopathology of everyday life*. Digireads Publishing.

<sup>30</sup> Watson, John B. (1913). “Psychology as the behaviorist views it.” *Psychological Review* **20**: 166-167.

<sup>31</sup> Other late nineteenth and early twentieth century psychologists continued to believe that introspection could be a valuable way of knowing. The Englishman Edward Bradford Titchener’s introspective psychology, known as structural psychology, posited that the mind was comprised of sensations or images of sensations. He believed that the most basic sensations could be understood

To the extent that he felt that psychology needed to examine the relations between particulars, James can be understood as a subjectivist turn. However, noting that are indeed particulars, James did not give up all mechanistic assumptions. In this sense, James might be understood as an individual who stood in the space between two thought collectives, those of mechanized thought styles and subjectivist thought styles.

Because James's radical empiricism suggests that the power to produce knowledge should not solely be in the hands of those who have access to those tools that are considered objective, James was popular among those with antiauthoritarian and pro-individualistic orientations. In this sense, James can be said to be drawing from uniquely American currents.<sup>32</sup> Religious philosopher Louis Dupre writes, "Those authors [fans of James], raised in the hard school of a pioneering country where a man had to find things out for himself, deemed it necessary to acquire experience before interpreting it. Nor did they, as 'empiricists' of the past, restrict experience to sense perception and its interpretation. Those men let no one tell them what was, and what was not 'meaningful' as experience."<sup>33</sup>

At the time of James's life, late nineteenth century New England was a place where many religious believers alienated by their parents religions, as

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through a systematic dissection of experience via introspection. See Titchener, E. B. (1897). *An outline of Psychology*. New York, Macmillan.

<sup>32</sup> Danziger, K. (1990). *Constructing the subject: Historical origins of psychological research*. New York, Cambridge University Press: 23.

<sup>33</sup> Dupre, L. (1972). *The other dimension: A search for the meaning of religious attitudes*. New York, Doubleday: 42.

well as by life in industrial settings, sought new ways of thinking about self and new paths for developing spiritual capacities.<sup>34</sup> Some religious liberals in this time turned to spiritualism, mind-cures, homeopathy, new thought, theosophy, deism, Christian Science, as well as other trends. Rick Fields writes that by the end of the nineteenth century, “The drawing rooms of Boston were awash with mysticism, occult fancies and Eastern religions.”<sup>35</sup> James called this cultural movement the “religion of healthy-mindedness,” the “Gospel of Relaxation,” and the “Don’t Worry Movement.”<sup>36</sup> These mind-cure groups held that people possess great powers within themselves from which they heal and that these powers can be accessed by thinking about wellness. While not a congregant of the religion of healthy-mindedness, James found their perspective fascinating: “The greatest discovery of my generation is that man can alter his life simply by altering his attitude of mind.”<sup>37</sup> He writes that to face life you must, “unclamp your intellectual and practical machinery and let it run free,” allowing yourself to “descend to a more profound and primitive level,” to “the level of pure sensorial perception.”<sup>38</sup>

However, during this time certain types of people were turning to the new science of psychology to think about human nature. The historian Robert

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<sup>34</sup>White, C. (2008). *Unsettled minds: psychology and the American search for spiritual assurance, 1830-1940*. Berkeley, University of California Press: 2.

<sup>35</sup> Fields, R. (1992). *How the swans came to the lake: A narrative history of Buddhism in America*. Boston, Shambhala: 157.

<sup>36</sup> See Richardson. R.D., (2007). *In the maelstrom of American modernism*. Houghton Mifflin: 397.

<sup>37</sup> James, W. (1902/2004). “The religion of healthy-mindedness” lectures 4 and 5 from *The varieties of religious experience: A study in human nature*. New York, Wayne Proudfoot: 95.

<sup>38</sup> James, W. (1899/2007) *Talk to teachers*. Biblio Bazar: 170.

Fuller writes, the “discrepancy between two competing avenues of truth, science and biblical religion, caused an entire generation of American college students to experience an acute tension between head and heart, rationality and faith.”<sup>39</sup> Fuller explains that ultimately, these students mostly had no choice, but to chose what was became more intellectually secure, that is science. He concludes by suggests that a generation of young people who may have in earlier generations chosen a career in the ministry, came to careers in science, philosophy and the new fields of psychology and sociology.<sup>40</sup>

Like James, however, some worried that the new science of psychology obliterated moral choice and meaning. In the *Universalist Quarterly*, liberal minister William Jewett Tucker claims that reducing the mind to matter is “suicidal” and that in a materialistic worldview “the freedom to choose between right and wrong, virtue and vice, moral action and moral character would be impossible.”<sup>41</sup> Critical of psychology, a writer for the *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* writes that psychology “deals with states of consciousness...without inquiring into their ultimate ground or meaning.”<sup>42</sup>

It is no surprise then that many turned to James’s writings to look for ways out. For example, Bill Wilson founder of Alcoholics Anonymous and the Twelve Step Program was a follower of James and was particularly interested

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<sup>39</sup> Fuller, R. C. (2004). *Religious revolutionaries: The rebels who reshaped American religion*. New York, Palgrave Macmillian: 121.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid: 121.

<sup>41</sup> Tucker, W. J. (1890). "The psychology and physiology of will." *Universalist Quarterly and General Review* 47(27): 392.

<sup>42</sup> Griffin, E. H. (1901). "Psychology as a natural science." *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* July: 566-567.

in how spirituality might be disentangled from institutionalized religion.<sup>43</sup> As some academics sought to explain away spiritual or religious beliefs, even blaming religious fervor to autointoxication brought on by disordered digestion or nerves, James emphasized the functional value of religion. James writes, “Medical materialism finishes up Saint Paul by calling his vision on the road to Damascus a discharging lesion of the occipital cortex, he being an epileptic.”<sup>44</sup> In *Varieties*, James offers a pragmatic response, that to find the meaning of God, one must consider actual religious experience and its implications on the lived experience. Since there is practical value in belief, it is worthwhile

James’s approach to psychology spoke to the concerns of a culture that was experiencing monumental changes in their modes of knowledge production; to those unsatisfied with their parent’s religions as well as deterministic sciences of mental life, James provided a pragmatic framework for understanding the human perspective. While James’s writings were only read by a particularly educated class, a variety of different people found solace in his work; some looked to James’ in order to understand themselves as active participants in this world, as individuals with the ability to tap into personal experience in the search for meaning. James simultaneously reflected and informed these turbulent and uncertain times.

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<sup>43</sup> Fuller, R. C. (2004). *Religious revolutionaries: The rebels who reshaped American religion*. New York, Palgrave Macmillian.

<sup>44</sup>James, W. (1902/2004). “Religion and neurology.” In *The varieties of religious experience: A study in human nature*. New York, Wayne Proudfoot: 13.

## Humanistic Psychology as a Subjectivist Turn

Humanistic psychology is a heterogeneous assortment of views that initially came about as a reaction to the deterministic and reductionist demands of psychoanalytic and behaviorist theory during the 1950s. Humanistic psychologist Kirk Schneider suggests that the term “humanistic” in humanistic psychology refers to the broad philosophy affirming the dignity and worth of human beings as also expressed during classical antiquity, the European Renaissance, eighteenth and nineteenth century German and British Romantic thought, and American transcendentalism, as well as in existentialist, socialist, and pragmatic philosophy.<sup>45</sup> Like German Romanticism, Schneider describes that humanistic psychology as a rebellion against some of the technical and deductive ideals of the Enlightenment, particularly its rationalization of nature. A more humble account may offer that humanistic psychologists re-introduced psychology to subjectivist thought styles after wrestling with some of the same issues that James dealt with a half a century earlier; humanists rejected the deterministic treatment of the human subject that had been held by the dominant psychologies over the previous half century and replaced it with a more person-centered approach, one that considered the lived experience as a valuable way of knowing.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Schneider, K. J. (1999). "The revival of the romantic means a revival of psychology." *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* **39**(13): 13-26.

<sup>46</sup> In fact, just as the humanistic tradition was taking shape as a self-conscious movement, personality psychologist Henry A. Murray, proposed a twelve point program to the leaders of the humanistic

Humanist psychologist Abraham Maslow believed that by dealing solely with neuroses and pathologies, the earlier psychologies lowered expectations of the possibility of human potential. He argued that humans are not only motivated to react to “deficiency needs,” but have desires for “being needs,” which includes a yearning to actualize one’s own being. Maslow posited that a human science must do justice to the highest reaches of human achievement, namely self-actualization and peak performance by studying healthy, fully functioning, creative individuals. These self-actualized individuals are able to transcend their narrow personal and cultural perspectives and reach enlightened states.<sup>47</sup> Maslow pleaded for psychology to talk about wholeness, morality, richness, beauty, creativity, uniqueness, honesty, and self-sufficiency during a time in which behaviorist were more concerned with studying operant conditioning, reinforcement schedules, social control, and cognitive computing. Insofar as it treaded the human subject as an exceptional being, humanistic psychology was a critical break from its contemporaries.

As Maslow brought forth the conceptual framework of the human in Humanistic psychology, Carl Rodgers provided the clinical framework for the tradition’s therapies. Rodgers aimed to facilitate client’s longing for self-

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tradition to reorient psychology toward its original “Jamesian trajectory” as a person-oriented science; see Taylor, E. (1999). "An intellectual renaissance of humanistic psychology." *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* **39**(7).

<sup>47</sup> Maslow puts in this category: Abraham Lincoln, William James, Jane Addams, Eleanor Roosevelt, Albert Einstein, and Albert Schweitzer; see Maslow, A. (1968). *Toward a psychology of being*. New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold.

actualization in his “client-centered therapy.” For Rodgers, in an ideal therapeutic setting, a therapist provides unconditional positive regard and empathetic understanding to the client’s internal phenomenological viewpoint.<sup>48</sup> Rodgers denounced the interpretative and judgmental stance of psychoanalytic approaches, explaining that the client’s internal framework provides the best context for understanding relevant issues. The therapist in a psychotherapeutic setting should not tell the client how to fix their problems, but rather to assist the client in figuring things out for themselves. Other important humanistic psychologists include Rollo May, who introduced American psychology to the European philosophies of phenomenology and existentialism, Antony Sutich who helped put together the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, and Clark Moustakas who help form the *Association for Humanistic Psychology*.

As a whole, the humanistic psychologists were concerned, very much like James, that psychology had become too reductionist and mechanical. They feared that psychology had forgotten about the vastness of human potential and proposed that psychology start asking questions about the outer potentials of human nature. They believed that this new direction required psychology to avoid positivism in favor of more experientially-based research. In one of Maslow’s studies of self-actualization, he writes that despite the projects “methodological shortcomings,” and with apologies “to those who insist on

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<sup>48</sup> Rogers, Carl. (1951). *Client-centered therapy: Its current practice, implications and theory*. London, Constable.

conventional reliability, validity, sampling, and the like,” his qualitative investigation might have real value.<sup>49</sup> To the extent that humanistic psychology turned to phenomenology and qualitative research, they, like James, stood in the space between the mechanistic and subjectivist thought collectives.

Humanistic psychology as a self-conscious movement took root in post-World War II America; baby boomers, economic prosperity, suburbia, and consumerist lifestyles ignited a culture imagining the endless limits of national as well as human potential. However, it was also a time that was not simply socially conservative, but socially repressive and restrictive as exemplified by anti-communist hysteria, fear of nuclear fallout, segregation, strict gender and family norms, as well as mass consumerism.<sup>50</sup> The new postwar American industrial society placed a primacy on training students to be competent, reliable, predictable, and efficient rather than analytic, critical, and creative.

During the 1950s, voices of dissident in literature and social theory against a perceived oppressive establishment began to appear. J.D. Salinger in *Catcher in the Rye* criticized the “phony” and hypocritical lifestyles of adults. In *The Technological Society*, social critic Jacques Ellul’s warned that the original goals of human pursuits had been lost along the way to industrialization and that productivity and efficiency had become the ends

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<sup>49</sup> Maslow, A. (1954/1987) *Motivation and personality*. New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold: 125.

<sup>50</sup> Moss, D. (1999). “The historical and cultural context of humanistic psychology: Ike, Annette, and Elvis.” in *Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology: A Historical and Biographical Sourcebook*. Westport, Greenwood Press.

rather than the means to more meaningful lifestyles. To these critics, humankind had begun to lose access to meaning and spiritual fulfillment.<sup>51</sup> By the 1960s, these voices of dissent had contributed to the emergence of an American counterculture which rejected middle-class values, racism, war, capitalism, sexism, sexual monogamy, and consumer culture. In *The Greening of America*, Christopher Reich writes that the counterculture promised “a higher reason, a more human community, and a new liberated individual...a renewed relationship of man to himself, to other men, to society, to nature, and to the land.”<sup>52</sup> The counterculture was more than just a group of angry adolescents. Rather, it was part of a monumental shift in a generation’s conception of self and the individual’s relationship to others.

Humanistic psychology simultaneously reflected and contributed to this counterculture. They adopted the counterculture’s antiestablishment stance and took on many followers who had become disillusioned with mainstream American life. What began as a protest against narrow conceptions of human in the psychological sciences also came to be a critique of living in society more generally. Many humanistic psychologists envisioned a remaking of society into one that triumphed over the loss of meaning and renewed a

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<sup>51</sup> Ellul, J. *La Technique ou L'enjeu du Siècle*. Paris, Armand Colin.

<sup>52</sup> Reich, C. (1970/1995). *The Greening of America*. New York, Three Rivers Press: 2.

generation with spiritual fulfillment. In doing so they provided “intellectual and moral armor” for the counterculture.<sup>53</sup>

One of the most well known centers for humanistic psychology research was the Esalen Institute in Big Sur California, founded in 1961 by Michael Murphy and Richard Price. Esalen was established as a place to explore and integrate aspects of human nature from many traditions, particularly spiritual disciplines. For the humanistic psychologists, Esalen became a type of laboratory for experimenting with the outer reaches of human potential including alternative states of consciousness, peak experiences, and self-transcendence. Individuals at Esalen experimented with techniques such as sensitivity training, psychodrama, massage therapy, yoga, and Zen Buddhism.

By the 1980s, the popularity of the humanistic psychology began to wane. During the new era of conservatism, the very term “humanistic” came to take on negative associations. The pressure was felt so strongly that the Humanistic Psychology Institute felt it necessary to change its name to the Saybrook Institute in order to give itself and its graduates a more mainstream appearance. By 1998, the division of Humanistic psychology in the American Psychological Association had declined from 1150 in 1977 to 673 members.<sup>54</sup>

It appeared that humanistic psychology, like James had been usurped by

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<sup>53</sup> Matson, F. (1999). “Epilogue.” in *Humanistic and transpersonal psychology: A historical and biographical Sourcebook*. Westport, Greenwood Press: 295.

<sup>54</sup> Aanstoos, C. Serlin, I., & Greening, T. (2000). “History of Division 32 (Humanistic Psychology) of the American Psychological Association.” In Dewsbury, D. (2000). *Unification through division: histories of the divisions of the American Psychological Association* Vol. V. Washington, DC, American Psychological Association.

psychologies emphasizing measurability, physiological substrates, and computer-based models. However, the humanistic ideals have been incorporated into other schools of thought, such as transpersonal, interpersonal and relational psychology.

To the extent that James and the humanistic psychologists dropped the sole pursuit of determinism in favor of approaches that included experiential ways of knowing, they can be understood as subjectivist turns in psychology. However, each held onto certain mechanistic assumptions. In this sense, they both turned towards the space between the mechanistic and subjectivist thought collectives.

## **Chapter 2: A Case Study of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction**

Jon Kabat-Zinn is the individual most responsible for introducing mindfulness into mainstream medicine. He is a charismatic leader and one might go so far as to say, an industry unto himself. As sociologist Kristin Barker writes, “If one is interested in understanding the essence of mindfulness as it is articulated in the popular media, one is interested in the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn.”<sup>55</sup> Kabat-Zinn and his work with Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) has been the topic of innumerable newspaper articles, radio shows, television programs, and magazine articles. He has produced numerous best-selling books and audio recordings, and gives lectures at business, hospitals, and schools across the world. He has even trained an Olympic rowing team, and contributed to the coaching of two professional basketball teams from a mindfulness perspective. However, the work of Kabat-Zinn and MBSR is just one example of a recent mindfulness-based psychology. MBSR does not represent all the ways in which mindfulness is being used today. Nevertheless, Kabat-Zinn’s seminal role in the popularization of mindfulness suggests a deeper look at him as an individual in order to understand the foundation of the movement.

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<sup>55</sup> Barker, K. (2006). "Self-healing in late-modernity: The case of mindfulness." *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, New York City, Aug 11, 2007.*

Born in 1944, Kabat-Zinn was raised in a household in which his mother was a prolific painter and his father was a “world-class, hard-core, data-driven scientist.”<sup>56</sup> As a young boy growing up in the New York City area, he echoed both his parents’ interests by simultaneously developing a passion for science, to “understand the nature of nature” as he has described it, while also participating in an art school at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.<sup>57</sup> This household environment fundamentally influenced his intellectual life. In an interview Kabat-Zinn said,

There is the culture of the humanities and the culture of the sciences. They speak different languages and have different perceptual frameworks for understanding reality, but neither is complete without the other...I think growing up in a family like that gave me a profound love of learning and a profound love of seeing, of appreciating the beauty in the light shimmering off of a pond or the many different colors in one flower...I was very intrigued by the question of consciousness.<sup>58</sup>

Years later, while studying molecular biology at MIT, he maintained his curiosity for interdisciplinary or inter-thought style approaches regarding the nature of consciousness, and the nature of human beings. His plan was to “push the frontiers of understanding” in molecular biology by studying the subtext of the nervous system, “in how we generate consciousness, how we see, how we hear, and how we know.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Gazella, K. (2005). "Bringing mindfulness to medicine: An interview with Jon Kabat-Zinn." *Advances in Mind-Body Medicine* 21(2): 22.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid: 22.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid: 22.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid: 23.

Kabat-Zinn has described his experience studying in Cambridge, Massachusetts during the mid-1960s as a “period of amazing growth, social inquiry, and discovery.”<sup>60</sup> He attended numerous lectures in the vibrant intellectual center during the course of his undergraduate and graduate studies; one was a talk on Zen Buddhism by Phillip Kapleau, author of *Three Pillars of Zen* which had a significant impact on Kabat-Zinn. He was fascinated by the Zen notion of paying attention to inner experience by quieting the mind, through first-person experience. Later, Kabat-Zinn practiced Zen Buddhism as a student of Zen Master Seung Sahn and was a founding member of the Cambridge Zen Center.<sup>61</sup> Regarding his current relationship to Buddhism Kabat-Zinn writes, “There was a time that I considered myself to be a Buddhist, but I actually don’t consider myself to be one now, and although I teach Buddhist meditation, it’s not with the aim of people becoming Buddhist.”<sup>62</sup>

Kabat-Zinn has no academic training in clinical or experimental psychology. Rather, his mindfulness approach is fundamentally informed by his Buddhist training.<sup>63</sup> In this sense, he and MBSR are somewhat like

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<sup>60</sup> Gazella, K. (2005). "Bringing mindfulness to medicine: An interview with Jon Kabat-Zinn." *Advances in Mind-Body Medicine* 21(2): 23.

<sup>61</sup> Streitfeld, R. (1991). “Mindful medicine.” Kwan Um School of Zen. Visited November 2008 <http://www.kwanumzen.com/primarypoint/v08n2-1991-summer-jonkabat-zinn-mindfulmedicine.html>.

<sup>62</sup> Rapaport, A., Aiken, B., & Hotchkiss, B. (1998). *Buddhism in America*. Rutland, VT, Charles E. Tuttle: 479.

<sup>63</sup> MBSR was not the first psychotherapy to involve Buddhist principles. During the 1920s, Psychologist Shoma Morita developed a psychotherapy influenced by Zen Buddhism seeking to deal with a disorder known in Japan as *Shinkeishitsu*, which may be thought of as a type of anxiety disorder. Instead of fighting symptoms, Morita therapy focused on training patients to accept symptoms, with calm awareness. The treatment was based on two principles of mindfulness:

outsiders in the mainstream biomedical therapeutic world. However, his experience with scientific and medical ways of thinking as well as his awareness of the politics involved with working in the medical mainstream has better enabled him to bring mindfulness to prominence within the confines of a hospital setting.

In 1979, Kabat-Zinn opened what was first called the Stress Reduction Clinic, later renamed the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center. The program was initially named a stress reduction clinic, because of his concern that the word “meditation” would be viewed with skepticism in an academic medical center at that particular time. Now, three decades later, the term mindfulness is very much front and center in the hospital and Kabat-Zinn maintains the position of a Professor Emeritus at the university.

In starting MBSR, Kabat-Zinn hoped that patients could transform their relationship with pain through the practice of mindfulness mediation. In doing so, they would realize that at least some amount of their suffering was the result of emotional reactions to pain and not the actual source of pain itself. The MBSR program is now typically conducted as an eight-to-ten week course for groups of up to 30 participants who meet weekly for two to three hours. An all-day (seven to eight hours) session is usually held during the sixth week. Participants also

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*arugamama* (acceptance of feelings and of the self as it is experienced) and *muga* (absorption in tasks); see Dryden, W. & Still, A. (2006). "Historical Aspects of Mindfulness and Self-Acceptance in Psychotherapy." *Journal of Rational-Emotive & Cognitive-Behavior Therapy* **24**(1): 3-28.

complete mindfulness sessions at home at least six days a week for the entirety of the eight weeks.

Mindfulness practices can take many forms, but primarily fall into the categories of concentration and awareness/insight. During meditation, individuals maintain attention and awareness on a particular point of focus, commonly on somatic experiences such as the in-and-out of breathing. This concentrative meditation is said to foster experiences of mental stillness, calm, and tranquility. It is during these moments of mental stillness that an attitude of curiosity allows the mind to develop a heightened state of awareness or insight. In the context of therapy, insight refers to an increased awareness of personal habits and the realization of the means by which to avoid them in the future. In this sense, concentrative meditation enhances the potential for active observation of conscious experience and insight into the nature of mental life and individual behavior.

For all mindfulness exercises, participants are encouraged to be accepting or nonjudgmental as they focus on particular targets such as emotions, sensations, or cognitions. As the mind wanders, the participants are reminded to return to the present moment. Patients are encouraged to see that sensations, thoughts, and emotions are transient; this perspective is thought to reduce stress and ruminative thinking. Kabat-Zinn explains that when participants learn to experience pain sensations without excessive emotional reactivity, the associative suffering and

distress is reduced even if the physical source of the pain does not go away. The ultimate goal is to incorporate these practices into everyday life.<sup>64</sup>

In order to understand mindfulness as a clinical intervention, an example of a typical patient in the MBSR program is helpful. John is a middle-aged male who has been referred to the program by his physician for problems he has recently experienced with panic attacks. Teachers at the MBSR program are usually physicians, nurses, social workers, and psychologists, all of whom have mindfulness practices of their own.<sup>65</sup> During the first class, the teacher offers a lesson on *non-doing*. The teacher says, "It is important to sometimes stop our doing and start simply being. Each day, even if it for just a short time, we can purposefully stop and create an island of being in the sea of constant doing in which our lives are usually immersed."<sup>66</sup> Then, the teacher pulls out a bag of raisins and offers one raisin to each participant. The teacher says,

To eat this raisin mindfully we might first observe its texture between our fingers, notice its colors, and surfaces. We might then notice thoughts and feeling of liking or disliking raisins as they come up. Do not judge these thoughts. Then, we might smell the raisin for awhile and finally with complete awareness, we might bring the raisin to our lips. Before eating the raisin notice where the mind wanders as it anticipates eating. This process of concentration and awareness continues as we chew the raisin slowly, experiencing the actual taste of one raisin. Then, as we have the impulse to swallow we stop ourselves so that the

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<sup>64</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J. (1982). "An outpatient program in behavioral medicine for chronic pain patients based on the practice of mindfulness meditation: Theoretical considerations and preliminary results." *General Hospital Psychiatry* 4: 33-47.

<sup>65</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). "Mindfulness-based intervention in context: past, present, and future." *American Psychological Association* 12: 149-150.

<sup>66</sup> paraphrased from Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). *Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain and illness*. New York, Delacorte: 20.

experience becomes conscious. We may even imagine ourselves being one raisin heavier after swallowing.<sup>67</sup>

Ideally, through a number of these mindfulness practices, John will come to see the benefits of living in the present moment for himself. Rather than being talked to about the concept of mindfulness, in the program John is encouraged to see the benefits of mindfulness himself through his own practice. Kabat-Zinn has said, “If you were to look in on one of our classes at the hospital, the chances are you find us with our eyes closed, sitting quietly or lying motionless on the floor. This can go on for anywhere from ten minutes to forty-five minutes at a stretch.”<sup>68</sup> Over the course of the eight-week program, John will learn a number of techniques, some of which might include sitting meditation, the body scan technique, yoga, and walking mediation.

Kabat-Zinn believes that mindfulness is particularly helpful for individuals with panic and anxiety issues because it helps the sufferer to realize that the emotion does not derive from an outside force, but is part of his or her own emotional make-up. Mindfulness allows participants to step back from thoughts and feelings during stress, and to appreciate that thoughts are transient mental events with no inherent power of their own to overwhelm. With techniques learned through MBSR, John, who might have previously attempted to run away from his thoughts and emotions during a panic attack, instead stops and observes the feelings without less terror. He sits with his

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<sup>67</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). *Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain and illness*. New York, Delacorte: 22.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*: 19.

anxiety and visualizes his thoughts as if they were a leaf on a river traveling downstream. He sees for himself that mindfulness is not about intentionally changing or manipulating thoughts, but rather is a practice in observation. At some point, the leaf will be far enough away to be imperceptible. When the emotion has passed, John cannot expect this calmed state to last forever; in the program, he learns that desiring that things be a certain way all the time is one of the causes of panic attacks in the first place. Rather, John accepts the present moment whether it includes bad, neutral, or good thoughts from the perspective of a nonjudgmental observer.

MBSR is not exactly psychotherapy so much as a stress-oriented medical modality. As described earlier, Kabat-Zinn has no academic training in clinical psychology nor is it a prerequisite for MBSR teachers to have such backgrounds. However, MBSR and mindfulness are relevant as a psychotherapy insofar as it has come to have a remarkable influence on diverse levels within the psychotherapeutic community; the influence of MBSR ranges from therapists who use mindfulness technique to listen more carefully with patients, to highly organized treatment modalities based on the techniques used in MBSR such as Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy. During a personal interview with licensed clinical psychologist and director of the Psychological Stress Management Service, Dr. Daniel Guerra said that Kabat-Zinn is an

inspiration to him and that he refers his patients to Dr. Kabat-Zinn's publications in the course of treatment.<sup>69</sup>

The majority of individuals who practice mindfulness techniques are not patients in clinics, but instead learn about mindfulness through books, audio recordings, or both.<sup>70</sup> Kabat-Zinn's books have been very popular, even reaching best-seller lists.<sup>71</sup> These works include: *Full Catastrophe Living: Using Your Body and Mind to Face Stress Pain and Illness* (1990), which offers detailed instructions of the eight-week MBSR program so it may be imitated at home; *Wherever You Go There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Living* (1995), which delves more in to the nature of mindfulness itself; and, *Coming to Our Senses: Healing Ourselves and the World Through Mindfulness* (2005), which reflects on the mindlessness of society and offers a way out through mindfulness. These three texts are critical primary source materials for discussions in proceeding sections.

### Mindfulness and Buddhism

Kabat-Zinn begins one of his books with the quote, "A student once said: 'When I was a Buddhist, it drove my parents and friends crazy, but when

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<sup>69</sup> *Personal communication*, Dr. Daniel Guerra, October, 2008

<sup>70</sup> Barker, Kristin. "Self-healing in late-modernity: The case of mindfulness" *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, New York City, Aug 11, 2007.*

<sup>71</sup> For details on sales rates see Table One in Barker, Kristin. "Self-healing in late-modernity: The case of mindfulness" *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, New York City, Aug 11, 2007.*

I am a Buddha, nobody is upset at all.”<sup>72</sup> For those unfamiliar with the Buddhist tradition that MBSR has tapped to develop mindfulness techniques, this might cause concern that a religious agenda drives the movement. This section addresses the question of mindfulness’ relationship with Buddhism and examines Kabat-Zinn’s writings on the topic. A question becomes: to what goals do Kabat-Zinn’s claims on the relationship between mindfulness and Buddhism serve in the overall presentation of MBSR?

In order to flush out these issues, it is essential to first have at least a brief description of Buddhism and the history of Buddhism in America. The task is a humbling one because Buddhism, like all major religions, has multiple faces. The following description of Buddhism is in no way comprehensive or exhaustive. In many ways, the Buddhism described in this section suits the needs of a twenty-first century Western reader and falls prey to the same issues that limit the already relatively few descriptions of Buddhism in literature on the underlying philosophies of mindfulness. These accounts typically strike on that which resonates with Western readers and leave the rest behind.

Buddhism is not one thing, therefore, it is critical not to essentialize and put all “Buddhists” under the same category. For example, there is a split between the Theravada and Mahayana traditions; within Mahayana there are different paths to enlightenment such as Tantric and Zen; within Zen there are differences in the practices of Soto and Rinzi; there are differences between the

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<sup>72</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. New York, Hyperion: 7.

various schools of both and, in America, there are all sorts of overlaps and amalgamations in the practices of the various forms of Buddhism. Thus, the history of Buddhism in both Asia and the West is best characterized by *change* rather than stagnancy and *variety* rather than essence. In fact, the very word “Buddhism” itself has been alternatively translated as “The Way” or “The Path” and some say refers to more a more philosophically-based tradition than what is typically considered by many to be considered religious.<sup>73</sup>

There is a debate over whether to classify Buddhism as a philosophy or a religion. If the definition of religion is that it relates to a belief in God, then Buddhism cannot be considered a religion because there is no discussion of such a being in Buddhism. If religion is more broadly defined as a system of stories, beliefs, and rituals that help individuals find meaning, then Buddhism falls into the category of religion. Still, others make the case that Buddhism can be stripped from these contexts and independently exist as a philosophy.<sup>74</sup> Kabat-Zinn writes that it is not necessary to think of Buddhism as a belief, an ideology, nor a philosophy, but rather a “coherent phenomenological description of the nature of mind, emotion, and suffering and its potential release, based on highly refined practices aimed at systematically training and cultivating various aspects of mind and heart via the faculty of mindful

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<sup>73</sup> In Sri Lanka, Buddhism is referred to as “sasana” or the teaching. In Tibet it is commonly referred to as nang pa’I chos, or “the religion of the insiders.” In China it is go jiao “the teaching of the Buddha.” In Japan it is butsudo “the way of the Buddha.” European’s classification of Buddhism as a singular pan-Asian tradition only came about by the end of the eighteenth Century; see Fields, R. (1992). *How the swans came to the lake: A narrative history of Buddhism in America*. Boston, Shambhala.

<sup>74</sup> Batchelor, S. (1998). *Buddhism without beliefs: A contemporary guide to awakening*. New York, Riverhead Trade.

attention.”<sup>75</sup> It is not the aim here to determine what category that Buddhism falls into, but rather to explore the underlying philosophies of mindfulness as developed by Buddhism and how it came to influence this new psychotherapeutic tradition. Furthermore, the aim is to show how in “cutting ties” with Buddhism, Kabat-Zinn pushes MBSR towards the mainstream of medical practice.

If there is one common thread to all forms of Buddhism it would be a commitment to the alleviation of the suffering of all sentient beings as described by the historical Buddha. In his search for the cessation of suffering, Siddhartha Gautama, born a prince sometime around 400 years before the Common Era, first realized the Middle Path between self indulgence and self mortification and eventually realized enlightenment, becoming the Buddha, or “the awakened one.” The Buddha’s first discourse included the teachings of what he called the Four Noble Truths, which are fundamental to Buddhism. These Four Noble Truths include: (1) in life there is suffering and it is ubiquitous; (2) the origin of suffering is “craving” or “thirst”; (3) in life there is a cessation of suffering; and (4) the path leading to the cessation of suffering is the Eightfold Path. Suffering is the most frequently used translation of the Sanskrit word *dukkha*, but other translations include anguish, pain,

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<sup>75</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). "Mindfulness-based intervention in context: past, present, and future." *American Psychological Association* **12**: 145.

unsatisfactoriness, sorrow, misery, and the separation from objects of craving.<sup>76</sup>

In much of the literature on mindfulness, there is a conflation between stress and *dukkha*. In fact, Kabat-Zinn has written, “Stress is part of life, part of being human, intrinsic to the human condition itself.”<sup>77</sup> This is almost a direct quotation of the First Noble Truth. Kabat-Zinn more clearly conflates the two when he writes, “I want to make a connection between the words stress in English and our general concept of it in this society, and the Buddhist concept of *dukkha*.”<sup>78</sup>

The Fourth Noble Truth, or the path leading to the cessation of *dukkha*, is the Eightfold Path, namely: (1) right view, (2) right thought, (3) right speech, (4) right action, (5) right means of livelihood, (6) right effort, (7) right *mindfulness*, and (8) right meditation. The Eightfold Path can be organized in terms of morality (2, 3, 4, 5), concentration (6, 7, 8), or wisdom (1), but each may overlap into other categories. In this sense, within Buddhism, mindfulness is part of a path to realizing the cessation of suffering and to realize the true nature of reality.

Mindfulness in Buddhism is part of a worldview that views the self as empty and interdependent. In this way, mindfulness is not a way to make

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<sup>76</sup> Rahula, Walpola. (1974). *What the Buddha taught*. New York, Grove Press.

<sup>77</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). *Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain and illness*. New York, Delacorte: 30.

<sup>78</sup> Rapaport, A., Aiken, B., & Hotchkiss, B. (1998). *Buddhism in America*. Rutland, VT, Charles E. Tuttle: 481.

oneself feel better, but rather part of a path towards relief for all sentient beings, in that the distinction between self and other is blurred in Buddhism. According to the law of *karma*, or the law of cause and effect, the consequences of our actions are felt on manifold levels, some of which are extremely difficult to observe. Because Buddhism is concerned with the cessation of suffering, it stresses awareness of the positive and negative consequences of actions in order to inform ethical conduct.

Buddhism is not new to America. During the nineteenth century, large numbers of Chinese Buddhists came to the West coast of the United States. At that time, the first Buddhist monasteries were built in the U.S. The American transcendentalists authors including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman studied Buddhist texts which were often reflected in their writings. Buddhism experienced a resurgence in popularity during the Beat Movement of the 1950s. Japanese Zen scholar Daistez Suzuki taught on the West coast in San Francisco and on the East Coast in New York, where he taught a seminar at Columbia University. His students included psychotherapists like Erich Fromm and Karen Horney as well as artists and writers such as John Cage, Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder, and Allen Ginsberg. Rick Fields, author of one of the seminal texts of the history of Buddhism in America, says that these seminars at Columbia sowed the seeds of the Zen

boom of the late fifties.<sup>79</sup> Suzuki caught the eye of the public imagination during the 1950s, when Zen became “the magic password at smart cocktail parties and bohemian get-togethers.”<sup>80</sup>

One of the inroads for Buddhism in twentieth century America has been its dialogue with the relatively new disciplines of psychology and psychotherapy. For example, a Buddhist spokesman named Dharmapala came to Harvard to give a lecture 1902. To the crowd of listeners James said, “Take my chair. You are better equipped to lecture on psychology than I...This is the psychology everybody will be studying twenty five years from now.”<sup>81</sup> Also, Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung wrote about the Tibetan Buddhist’s conception of the afterlife in his “Psychological commentary” published in 1927. Later, a generation of psychologists who themselves became Buddhist practitioners developed further discussions of the common ground. This group included Alan Watts’ *Psychotherapy East and West* (1961) and Erich Fromm and Daistez Suzuki’s *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* (1960).

Biomedical experiments on meditation began to appear by the 1970s. Robert Keith Wallace, a graduate student at UCLA in 1970, conducted a research project on the physiological effects of the Maharishi’s Transcendental

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<sup>79</sup> Fields, R. (1992). *How the swans came to the lake: A narrative history of Buddhism in America*. Boston, Shambhala: 205.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid: 205.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid 134-135.

Meditation.<sup>82</sup> It should be noted that TM does not have origins in Buddhism, but is indeed an example of a meditation practice with parallels to mindfulness that caught the interest of the biomedical establishment. Wallace found that subjects who practiced TM experienced reduced oxygen consumption and heart rate, and experienced skin resistance changes during meditation.<sup>83</sup>

Harvard medical researcher Herbert Benson also studied medical applications of meditation and its relationship with his previous research on stress and biofeedback as a means to lower blood pressure. Benson's work showed that TM not only led to physical changes in the body, but that these changes were medically beneficial. Apparently, by changing thought patterns, individuals could experience stress reduction. This process became the topic of a popular best selling book, *The Relaxation Response*.<sup>84</sup> Benson posited that evoking the "relaxation response" was known to many traditions, not just Eastern ones. Benson grounded his work in the world of stress research rather than counterculture of the time, as one commentator of his book wrote, "I am glad that someone has finally taken the nonsense out of meditation."<sup>85</sup>

Like Benson, Kabat-Zinn makes a concerted effort to frame mindfulness within the paradigm of behavioral medicine rather than spiritualistic practice.

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<sup>82</sup> Transcendental Meditation, a practice of repeating a mantra to bring states of calmness and "transcendental being" comes from the teaching of the Maharishi Mahesh; See Harrington, A. (2008). *The cure within: A history of mind-body medicine*. New York, W.W. Norton & Co.

<sup>83</sup> Wallace, R. K. (1970). *The physiological effects of transcendental meditation*. Los Angeles, Students' International Meditation Society.

<sup>84</sup> Wallace, Robert K., Benson, Herbert, & Wilson Archie F. (1971). "A wakeful hypometabolic physiologic state." *American Journal of Physiology* 221(3): 795-799.

<sup>85</sup> Nolen, W. on the back jacket of Benson, H. (1975). *The relaxation response*. New York, Morrow.

He writes, “We’re not trying to disguise Buddhism and sneak it in. We’re not talking about Buddhism, were talking about mindfulness.”<sup>86</sup> While he acknowledges Buddhism primary influence on the type of meditation employed in MBSR, he attempts to drop the baggage of Buddhism. Kabat-Zinn writes:

When we speak of meditation, it is important for you to know that this is not some weird cryptic activity, as our popular culture might have it. It does not involve becoming some kind of zombie, vegetable, self-absorbed narcissist, navel gazer, space cadet, cultist, devotee, mystic, or Eastern philosopher.<sup>87</sup>

He claims to “drop the baggage” in almost every one of his writings and his position has remained fairly constant through the years. His belief is that although mindfulness is at the very heart of Buddhism, mindfulness is a universal quality that transcends religious traditions and can exist independently of any Buddhist context. Mindfulness is simply a particular way to pay attention, to look into oneself with the perspective of self-inquiry and self-understanding. Thus, no appeal to Eastern or Buddhist traditions is necessary. He offers an analogy: scaffolding is needed in the process of construction, however, when the project is complete, the scaffolding is no longer needed, having only been a useful means for constructing the essence of

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<sup>86</sup> Rapaport, A., Aiken, B., & Hotchkiss, B. (1998). *Buddhism in America: The official record of the landmark conference on the future of Buddhist meditative practices in the West, Boston , January 17-19, 1997*. Rutland, Charles E. Tuttle: 483.

<sup>87</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Coming to our senses: Healing ourselves and the world through mindfulness*. New York, Hyperion: xvi.

the endeavor and not the essence itself.<sup>88</sup> As Kabat-Zinn explains, so too with mindfulness the scaffolding of Buddhism is not the essence of the endeavor and may only be needed for “touching up, for restoration, for repair or fine-tuning over the years.”<sup>89</sup>

One explanation for why Kabat-Zinn cuts ties with Buddhism has to do with a basic Buddhist stance on attachment, that is, attachment to “Buddhism” itself. In this sense, his turning to non-Buddhist ways of explaining mindfulness techniques may be viewed as “Buddhist” rhetoric. This explanation forces a rethinking of the questions: What exactly is Buddhism, who are Buddhists?

Kabat-Zinn tells a story about a time he met with a roshi, a teacher of Zen Buddhism, at the Saishu-In temple within the Ryoanji monastery in Kyoto. He asked the roshi how to teach the heart of Buddhism to patients who were in desperate need of the “wisdom, clarity, and self-compassion” that can come out of the meditation practice, but were resistant to stories from Zen including mentioning of the name Buddha and to more general Asian religious contexts within which the practice of mindfulness is embedded.<sup>90</sup> The roshi’s reply was, “Throw out Buddha, throw out Zen.”<sup>91</sup> The roshi wanted to talk about the potential for the Buddha’s teachings to be carried into more universal modes

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid: xvi.

<sup>89</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Coming to our senses: Healing ourselves and the world through mindfulness*. New York, Hyperion: 100.

<sup>90</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). "Mindfulness-based stress reduction." *Constructivism in the Human Sciences* 8(2): 74.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid: 75.

where it could be, “no longer Buddhist, no longer Zen, but never less than what all that is and points to beyond name and form.”<sup>92</sup> Kabat-Zinn, writes, “I felt, he blessed our enterprise.”<sup>93</sup>

In thinking about Kabat-Zinn’s rhetoric, a famous Buddhist saying is relevant: “If you meet the Buddha, kill him.” The basic meaning is that practitioners should cut any conceptual attachment to Buddha or enlightenment; what is truly important is not particular revered names or relics, but rather “the way” itself. Another saying goes “Once you have crossed the river, leave the raft by the river banks instead of carrying it with you.” This notion emphasizes that the means of “travel” should not be elevated in importance over the journey itself. Kabat-Zinn echoed this sentiment when he wrote, “One of the reasons I stopped being a Buddhist at a certain point was because I ...understood Buddhism as being something much larger that was pointing to finding your own path.”<sup>94</sup> Thus, if his potential patients were not pleased with thinking of MBSR as Buddhism in a hospital, it is possible that Kabat-Zinn was more than happy to eliminate the regalia of Buddhism; nothing could have been more “Buddhist.”

However, as Kabat-Zinn’s position implies, it can be problematic defining who exactly is or is not a Buddhist. How is “dropping the baggage” of Buddhism in MBSR to be understood if doing so is a common practice among

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid: 76.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid: 76.

<sup>94</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Coming to our senses: Healing ourselves and the world through mindfulness*. New York, Hyperion: 496.

“Buddhists” themselves? The very basis of the question, what is the relationship between mindfulness and Buddhism is complicated by the problematic nature of the question of “what is Buddhism” and “who are Buddhists.” Pragmatically, one might call his approach “Buddhistic,” but not “Buddhist” in that he is using Buddhist meditative practice while claiming no lineage. Accepting the ambiguity of the task of determining the relationship between MBSR and Buddhism, another way to examine the issue might be to consider how Kabat-Zinn’s interests of cutting his ties with Buddhism serve the interest of MBSR; in doing so, Kabat-Zinn has moved his therapy further towards the mainstream medical ideal of separating medical from spiritual. However, in “dropping the baggage,” Kabat-Zinn must be careful not to strip away that which has drawn participants to the MBSR in the first place, that is, an alternative to mainstream medical treatment.<sup>95</sup>

Looking past Kabat-Zinn’s take on the relationship between mindfulness and Buddhism, there can be no doubt that there is pressure on mindfulness to deemphasize the exotic or the unscientific. This pressure is salient in Kabat-Zinn’s writings. He writes, “If you go in talking about the Buddha and inviting masters with shaved heads for lectures, it’s going to be perceived right away as some foreign cultural ideology – a belief system.

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<sup>95</sup> Baim, A. (2007). “Reform and perpetuation in mind-body medicine.” *Science in Society*. Middletown, Wesleyan University. Bachelor of Arts.

Understandably so, it would likely be rejected.”<sup>96</sup> The role of self-consciousness and self-presentation in the medical world has become a critical component in developing successful treatment modalities. The case of Kabat-Zinn and MBSR is no different.

### American Transcendentalism

In his writings, through his references and his style, Kabat-Zinn constructs a lineage between mindfulness and American transcendentalism. He calls for people to return to nature, to lead more simple lives, and to take the path of the “rugged individual.” How Kabat-Zinn writes about the relationship between mindfulness and American transcendentalism sheds light onto the place of mindfulness more generally.

American transcendentalism was a movement evidenced in literature, philosophy, and politics, which grew out of early nineteenth century New England. It championed notions of life-fulfillment through private experiences extending beyond a perceived oppressive and mundane life in society. Its proponents believed that life principles are best derived from one’s inner essence and rejected the philosophy of John Locke including rationalism and materialism. The transcendentalists sought to replace his approach with one in which the mind played a more active role in determining experience. Since the materialism and passive model of John Locke was so influential at the time in

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<sup>96</sup> Streitfeld, R. (1991). “Mindful medicine.” Kwan Um School of Zen. Visited November, 2008 <http://www.kwanumzen.com/primarypoint/v08n2-1991-summer-jonkabat-zinn-mindfulmedicine.html>.

America, particularly in the New England institutions such as Harvard that educated many of the transcendentalists, their view was a radical departure from the status quo.

Many of the transcendentalists were attracted to alternative lifestyles very much stemming from their dissatisfaction with the evils they attributed to social institutions. They were highly critical of the policies of the United States government particularly their treatment of Native Americans, its war with Mexico, and – most of all – the institution of slavery. In fact, Emerson called society a “mass” of “bugs or spawn.”<sup>97</sup> Some who were influenced by the movement believed that they needed to remove themselves from the confines of city and town life; some chose to live in communities engaged in social experiments, such as Brook Farm, Fruitlands, and Walden. Transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* is a detailed account of the author’s experiences living in “isolation” in a cabin on the property of his mentor Ralph Waldo Emerson near Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts. By returning to an agrarian life, Thoreau aim was to take a step away from the dehumanization of the Industrial revolution and the injustices of the U.S. government. In *Walden*, Thoreau calls for simple living, self-scrutiny, self-reliance, solitude, contemplation, closeness to nature, and the transcendence of the mundane existence of typical life in society. He describes the value of conscious

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<sup>97</sup> Emerson, R. W. (1893). The American scholar, self-reliance, compensation. Boston, American Book Company.

awareness and suggests how individuals might come to live life more deliberately and include nature in this process.

Kabat-Zinn's *Wherever You Go There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Every Day Living*, has many parallels to *Walden*. In fact, Kabat-Zinn refers to or directly quotes the writings of Henry David Thoreau 16 times in that book.

<sup>98</sup> His references to transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson are also numerous. These references range from brief images of Walden Pond to lengthy quotations that take up more than an entire page. In two of his more obvious attempts at co-opting the message of American transcendentalism, Kabat-Zinn writes,

[Mindfulness] offers a view of the world which is complementary to the predominantly Western thought and institutions. But this view is neither particularly Eastern nor mystical. Thoreau saw the same problem with our ordinary mind state in New England in 1846 and wrote with great passion about its unfortunate consequences.<sup>99</sup>

He later goes on to write,

Henry David Thoreau's two years at Walden Pond were above all a personal experiment in mindfulness. He chose to put his life on the line in order to revel in the wonder and simplicity of present moments.<sup>100</sup>

Kabat-Zinn adopts the transcendentalist tradition of writing on the ills of modern society. He writes that modern society as a whole suffers because individuals are generally out of touch with their feelings, perceptions,

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<sup>98</sup> These references and citations are on pages: 1,4,5,24,25,25,26,27,71,79,98,143-144,179,183,231 .

<sup>99</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. New York, Hyperion.: 4

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*: 24.

impulses, emotions, thoughts, and bodies; they are obsessed with the past and future, and are consumed by expectation and fears. From this mindfulness perspective, the entire nation has a collective case of Attention Deficit Disorder, as detailed in the chapter “ADD Nation” of his 2005 book *Coming to Our Senses: Healing Ourselves and the World Through Mindfulness*. According to Kabat-Zinn, our “time-saving” devices actually do more harm than good, so much so that “focusing in on anything at all has become something of a lost art.”<sup>101</sup> For him, this obsession with efficiency has contributed to a “kind of free-floating urgency attached to even the most trivial of events...It robs of time even as we complain we don’t have any.”<sup>102</sup> Worst of all, in his view, our mindlessness contributes to the prevalence lack of compassion in the public today.

Kabat-Zinn postulates that individuals need to remove themselves from the evils of society, not necessarily physically, but rather psychically put themselves in a place that allows for an appreciation of nature. Kabat-Zinn’s appeals to images of mountains are particularly noteworthy. For example, the Lake Meditation technique asks participants to view their mind as the surface of a lake. When the surface is still, it is “mirror-like, it reflects trees, rocks, sky, and clouds, holds every in itself momentarily.”<sup>103</sup> When there are winds, which

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<sup>101</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Coming to our senses: Healing ourselves and the world through mindfulness*. New York, Hyperion: 147.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid: 148.

<sup>103</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. New York, Hyperion: 142.

presumably means disturbances in mental clarity and mindfulness, waves come onto the lake, from “ripples to chop.” Echoing the writing style of Thoreau, Kabat-Zinn writes,

“But sunlight may still sparkle in the ripples and dance on the waves in a play of shimmering diamonds. When night comes, it’s the moon’s turn to dance on the lake, or if the surface is still, to be reflected in it along with the outline of trees and shadows.”<sup>104</sup>

Like Thoreau in *Walden*, Kabat-Zinn not only asks us to return to nature, but to the lost days of simplicity. He writes,

In the old days, once the sun went down...human beings sat round fires, gazing into the flames and embers with cold and darkness at our backs. Maybe this is where formal meditation got its start...In today’s fast-paced world, fires are impractical or an occasional luxury to set a certain mood...We no longer have a fixed time when we have to stop what we are doing because there’s not enough light to do it by...we have precious few occasions nowadays for the mind to settle itself in stillness by a fire...We can develop other habits that bring us back to that elemental yearning inside ourselves for warmth, stillness, and inner peace...we can stumble upon an ancient stillness- behind and within the play of our thoughts and feelings- that in a simpler time, people found in sitting by the fire.<sup>105</sup>

Transcendentalism, particularly its emphasis on direct experience, was a critical force in the development of what some consider being the first indigenous American philosophy. Their approach to meaning as derived from fulfilling one’s needs rather than from truth value was adopted later by Charles Pierce, John Dewey, William James, and the school of thought known as pragmatism. Both the transcendentalists and the pragmatists considered

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid: 142.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid: 173-175.

knowledge to be a temporary construction and open to tests of experience. With its ties to transcendentalism, pragmatism proved critical not only to America's future philosophies, but to the American way of life in general. It was a shaping force for John Dewey's educational philosophy, which has been a strong force in American school systems; notions of self-reliance, individualism, imagination, and democracy in the classroom likewise are legacies of transcendentalism's influence. Similarly, Thoreau's approach of civil disobedience was later echoed during civil right movements, including the one that occurred in America during the 1960s. Most of all, the movement's ideal of "rugged individualism" continues to thrive at the very heart of the essential tradition of America.

By drawing lines connecting mindfulness and American transcendentalism, Kabat-Zinn thus presents mindfulness as a uniquely countercultural yet mainstream tradition, one that is more American than Asian in spirit. In order to make inroads into mainstream medicine, it has been crucial for Kabat-Zinn to present the therapy as one that rings true for his audience in the medical profession as well as with a more general public in the West. Through his writings, he has chosen to do so by in some ways cutting ties with Buddhism, and tracing a lineage with American transcendentalism.

## **Chapter 3: Mindfulness as a Subjectivist Turn**

In 1994, then president of the American Psychological Association Frank Farley suggested that psychology “stands very close to being a discipline concerned with superficial problems” and that it needs to once again consider “deep feelings about soul and eternity...a psychology of meaning in the broadest sense...placing the mystery of life in context, and most importantly, showing the road to generosity and love.”<sup>106</sup> Kabat-Zinn echoes Farley’s concerns, professing that the current medical system has become depersonalizing, objectifying, compartmentalizing, treating illness in mechanical terms, and neglecting the body as painfully lived. He writes, “Haven’t we lost perspective just a tad...Are we not also ignoring our beauty and our remarkable potential, a mysterious flowering of possibility...Are we not ignoring the miracle of the human form, this thimbleful of atoms birthed in stars that is the human body.”<sup>107</sup> To this end, mindfulness not only asks practitioners to more subjectivist perspectives as a way of being, but the psychological community more generally to return to the lived experience as a way of knowing.

One mechanistic model in modern psychotherapy that Kabat-Zinn may find limiting is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). The cognitive model in

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<sup>106</sup> Martin, S. (1994). “Farley sums up his ’93-’94 presidential year.” *American Psychological Association Monitor*: 12.

<sup>107</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Coming to our senses: Healing ourselves and the world through mindfulness*. New York, Hyperion: 608.

CBT likens the human mind to an information processing machine, and mental illness as a broken link in that machine; maladaptive thoughts, schemas, or information processing styles are responsible for undesirable affect and behavior.<sup>108</sup> For example, an influential cognitive therapist Aaron Beck hypothesized that depression, which had been previously viewed as a disorder of affect or mood, actually was a disorder of thinking. Through goal-oriented and systematic therapies Beck posited that depression could be modified or eliminated.

In introducing cognition to the behavioral tradition, cognitive-behavioral theory attempted to rid itself from the deterministic demands of behavioral therapy, however, determinism still lingers in CBT. CBT posits that cognition, affect, behavior, and meaning are determined by genetically and environmentally processes or structures called schemas. These determinants preclude active participation or agency. At least in theory, the tacit assumption in CBT is that manipulating environments and redrawing cognitive processing systems can lead to change, not the client themselves.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Beck, A.T., Rush, A.J., Shaw, B.F., & Emery, G. (1979). *Cognitive therapy of depression*. The Guilford Press.

<sup>109</sup> A mindfulness-based therapy called Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) has attempted to integrate mindfulness techniques into a behaviorist tradition. Founder of ACT, Stephen Hayes posits that its predecessors in CBT place far too great an emphasis on content, form, reduction, first-order change and truth, and overlook context, coping strategies, and practicality.<sup>109</sup> Instead of focusing on changing the content or frequency of thoughts, feelings, cognitions, mindfulness techniques are used in ACT to help patients change their relationship with these categories. ACT's underlying philosophy of functional contextualism maintains that people are situationally defined and that therapy should have only functional goals; instead of pursuing "truth," patients in ACT are encouraged to explore aspects of what they call valued living. There is a debate within the psychotherapeutic community over whether to classify mindfulness-based therapies like ACT as a "third wave" in the behavioral tradition or as a natural progression of the second wave CBTs.<sup>109</sup> However, it might be more accurate to classify the

Dropping the importance of determinism, mindfulness considers attention as the key to understanding conscious experience. According to mindfulness, obsessively dwelling on thoughts of the past or fantasizing about the future removes one's attention and awareness from the present moment which can contribute to more fractured and stressful ways of living. Meanwhile, a non-judgmental focus on the present promotes more healthy and more fulfilling experience. Kabat-Zinn writes, "Each person is already the world authority on him – or herself, or at least could be if they started attending to things mindfully."<sup>110</sup> In this sense, by exercising greater command over attention and awareness, greater choice, empowerment, and will becomes accessible. In *Coming to Our Senses*, Kabat-Zinn starts chapter two with a quote from James's *Principles*:

The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention, over and over again, is the very root of judgment, character, and will. No one is *compos sui* if he have it not. An education which should improve this faculty would be the education *par excellence*. But it is easier to desire this ideal than to give it practical instruction for bringing it about. (Original italics)

Kabat-Zinn writes about James:

William James obviously didn't know about the practice of mindfulness when he penned the passage... [However,] I am sure he would have been delighted to have discovered that there was indeed an education for improving the faculty of

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mindfulness-based therapies as *outside of the behaviorist tradition altogether*. Insofar as these new therapies treat the human in an entirely different way than the behavioral tradition, they may be more inclined with a humanistic or subjectivist tradition.

<sup>110</sup>Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Coming to our senses: Healing ourselves and the world through mindfulness*. New York, Hyperion: 192.

voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention over and over again.<sup>111</sup>

To the extent that mindfulness, like James, shifts from deterministic models to attention as a describing consciousness, it represents a subjectivist turn in modern psychological discourse. There is another way in which mindfulness has come to represent a subjectivist turn and this relates to how it evaluates efficacy. With a nod to James's radical empiricism, mindfulness, particular as articulated by Kabat-Zinn has come to challenge the mainstream mechanized modes of evaluating effective therapies, by claiming that in order to understand the benefits of mindfulness, one must consider the actual experience of mindfulness and not simply data analysis.

Over the course of the past hundred years, quantitative methods, evidence-based, and objectivity in research are now the hallmarks of contemporary psychology. By the 1980's, the models developed to measure the efficacy of pharmaceutical therapies were extend to evaluate the worth of psychotherapeutic interventions. Randomized Control Trials (RCT), a type of experimental methodology employing the random allocation of treatment conditions, is a primary method of measuring the efficacy of therapies in the medical world. Without the mark of approval from an RCT, treatments will not be respected within the mainstream psychotherapeutic community.

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid: 118.

Attempts at RCTs have been conducted on Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction. The National Institute of Health funded a 472 page report in 2007 reviewing and synthesizing the state of research on a variety of complementary and alternative medicines including mindfulness meditation.<sup>112</sup> A critical review of these empirical studies on mindfulness based therapies suggests that many of these studies have methodological flaws.<sup>113</sup> For example, some of these studies have failed to make a distinction between the effectiveness of mindfulness and other therapeutic techniques. In other words, do subjects feel better simply because they were receiving attention or is there something more effective than this with mindfulness techniques? This limitation notwithstanding, several critiques suggest that there might indeed be something particularly effective about mindfulness, but recommends that better studies on mindfulness-based interventions be conducted.

Other critiques of efficacy studies on mindfulness claim that they have unsuccessfully employed the full extent of the RCT method. In response, researchers explain that they have encountered difficulty designing controls in examining mindfulness. In assessing the efficacy of pharmaceutical interventions, creating a control group is fairly easy; the researcher need only

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<sup>112</sup> Notably, half of the studies reviewed in the meta-analysis were published after 1994; Ospina MB, Bond TK, Karkhaneh M, Tjosvold L, Vandermeer B, Liang Y, Bialy L, Hooton N, Buscemi N, Dryden DM, Klassen TP. (2007) "Meditation Practices for Health: State of the Research. Evidence Report/Technology Assessment No. 155." (Prepared by the University of Alberta Evidence-based Practice Center under Contract No. 290-02-0023.) AHRQ Publication No.07-E010. Rockville, MD: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality: 18.

<sup>113</sup> Baer, R. A. (2003). "Mindfulness training as a clinical intervention: A conceptual and empirical review." *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice* **10**: 125-143.

compare how the pill of interest compares with that of a placebo. However, a placebo group for mindfulness meditation has proven to be difficult for researchers to formulate. Determining how well subjects receive and embody the mindfulness treatment has also proven to be difficult. In order to quantify and assess degrees of mindfulness within individuals in treatment, researchers have constructed various scales: the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale; the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory; the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills; the Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale and the Mindfulness Questionnaire.<sup>114</sup>

Quantifying mindfulness or measuring the “amount of mindfulness” cultivated by any individual runs counter to the way in which mindfulness is cultivated in therapy. The mindfulness techniques involve “letting go of expectations, goals, aspirations for becoming.”<sup>115</sup> Focus away from “outcome” is a major thrust of Mindfulness-based therapies. How do those in the field of Mindfulness and Acceptance-therapy react to demands for evidence-based evaluations of the value of the techniques? In his senior thesis at Wesleyan University Adam Baim pointed out that the research produced at a mind-body clinic he observed seemed to “perpetuate the very theoretical commitments of

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<sup>114</sup> See Baer, R. A. (2003). "Mindfulness training as a clinical intervention: a conceptual and empirical review." *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice* **10**: 125-143.

<sup>115</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). "Mindfulness-based intervention in context: past, present, and future." *American Psychological Association* **12**: 148.

mainstream medicine being disavowed in the clinic.”<sup>116</sup> In his example, the use of research methods like RCT focuses on curing rather than healing and treats patients as embodying illnesses rather than as individuals, undercutting the very reasons why employees and patients were attracted to the clinic in the first place. Extending Baim’s critique, to what extent are efficacy reports of the mindfulness undervaluing their own technique of nonjudgmental acceptance, in other words, *is there a lack of mindfulness in the evaluation of mindfulness?*

Despite these problems, Kabat-Zinn has embraced the use of RCT in research on MBSR: he has published numerous articles applying statistical treatment of data to MBSR and recently reviewed some of this research for the *Journal of American Medical Association*.<sup>117</sup> He asserted that “high-quality, mechanism-oriented studies and randomized controlled trials of mindfulness in medicine are needed.”<sup>118</sup> More radically, however, Kabat-Zinn maintains that subjective ways of knowing still have a place in the production of modern psychological knowledge. Kabat-Zinn challenges the evidentiary status of the standardized empirical methods of RCT. He enumerates what is lost in RCT:

They necessarily gloss over or leave undescribed the nature, spirit, and substance of the curriculum of mindfulness-based intervention...its reliance on essential core meditative practices grounded in silence, stillness, self-inquiry, embodiment, emotional sensitivity, and acceptance of the full gamut of emotional expression held in awareness... acknowledgement of

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<sup>116</sup> Baim, A. (2007). Reform and Perpetuation in Mind-Body Medicine *Science in Society*. Middletown, Wesleyan University. Bachelor of Arts: 4.

<sup>117</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J. (2008). "Mindfulness in medicine." *Journal of America Medical Association* **300**(11): 1350-1352.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*: 1352

the universal longing in people for happiness, well-being, resilience, and peace of mind, body, and soul, and how that longing might be effectively met, honored, and mobilized for transformation among program participants <sup>119</sup>

While the methodologies of the RCT are useful and necessary, Kabat-Zinn claims that they are also incomplete because they omit the actual experience of mindfulness, that is, the way in which patients find meaning in mindfulness. He then challenges the exclusive use of RCT among medical institutions, and calls for a plurality of input. He explains that we limit ourselves by only using “one way of knowing, or one vocabulary, or one set of lenses through which to look,” and that we should “take delight in all the various ways we have of knowing something.” He writes, that “we realize all that we are, at the level of the material and the non-material, object, and subject, and beyond subject and object, in this very moment, simultaneously.”<sup>120</sup> Kabat-Zinn strikes upon a particularly Jamesian chord with an appeal towards experience as a legitimate way of knowing. He writes in his book *Coming to Our Senses*,

Having no words, we tend to fall back on the mechanical, which includes a lot of machine language, in an attempt to convince ourselves that we do understand. In fact, the dominant vocabulary for thinking about biology, about living organisms, and about the brain and the body and even the mind is machine language, machine imagery, machine analogies... And yet such ways of speaking of architecture and mechanism, of machines and factories, whether molecular or supra-molecular, are limited

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<sup>119</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Coming to our senses: Healing ourselves and the world through mindfulness*. New York, Hyperion: 148.

<sup>120</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Coming to our Senses: Healing ourselves and the world through mindfulness*. New York, Hyperion: 590-602.

and limiting, even in their beautiful and partial truth...For our mechanical descriptions tend to leave out the reverence, the awe, the miracle of it all, the very 'isness' of it. Those descriptions leave out all that doesn't exactly get explained away no matter how much we know in our heads. They leave out *experience* and the mystery of *experiencing*. (Original emphasis)<sup>121</sup>

In an academic journal Kabat-Zinn writes,

One might think of the historical Buddha as, among other things, a born scientist and physician who had nothing in the way of instrumentation other than his own mind and body and experience, yet managed to use these native resources to great effect to delve into the nature of suffering and the human condition. What emerged from this arduous and single-minded contemplative investigation was a series of profound insights, a comprehensive view of human nature, and a formal 'medicine' for treating its fundamental 'disease.'<sup>122</sup>

By comparing the Buddha to modern scientists, Kabat-Zinn is suggesting that the sciences of mind have been missing out on a vital way of knowing during much of the last century.

It seems as if there were a contradiction in Kabat-Zinn's writings on the need for more "mechanism-oriented studies" and his avowed dissatisfaction with such ways of knowing. One explanation is that his calls for more RCT-style research on mindfulness are directed to critics that are concerned with his scientific credibility; while the studies that have been conducted thus far have been less than ideal in their design or results he welcomes studies to appease his critics. The duality of his approach may also be a way to attract patients who might have been unwilling to walk into a dharma center or ashram twenty

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid: 584-587.

<sup>122</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). "Mindfulness-based intervention in context: past, present, and future" *American Psychological Association*: 145.

years ago, but would be willing try mindfulness meditation because of its more mainstream stance. Another explanation might be that his appeals to experience as a way of knowing are directed solely at appeasing those disenchanted with the current health care system and looking for an alternative to the mainstream medical model while under the surface he is a more ardent supporter of RCT.

Kabat-Zinn's dualistic stance reflects his atypical road into the psychotherapeutic tradition. Kabat-Zinn's doctorate is in molecular biology, not clinical or experimental psychology. While clinical and academic psychologists are generally trained to design studies that attend to the difficulties of working with human subjects, molecular biologists typically do not have to consider the subjectivity of the objects in their studies. Also, in molecular biology, the object of study is not the thing doing the studying as is the case in psychology. The philosopher of science Ludwik Fleck posited that the differences in perception of medical specialists depend on differences in their training and that each medical specialist is able to observe pathological phenomenon only in the framework of the specific thought style in which he as trained.<sup>123</sup> In this sense, Kabat-Zinn's thought style has been uniquely shaped by molecular biology training as well as his years as a Buddhist practitioner.

In light of his background, the duality of Kabat-Zinn's approach may not necessarily reflect a contradiction at all; rather than a complete critique of

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<sup>123</sup> Fleck, L. (1935/1979). *Genesis and development of a scientific fact*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.

reason, Kabat-Zinn's inclusion of subjectivist ways of knowing may be a call for getting beyond what he considers to be the narrow treatment of reason in mechanistic approaches. To the extent that Kabat-Zinn straddles the two dominant thought collectives in modern psychology, he might be understood as an individual with what Fleck called a, "personal thought style." This notion of the "persona thought style" will be discussed more in depth later in the chapter.

To the extent that Kabat-Zinn turns towards a descriptive psychology of attention based on his own experience in a scientific climate that tends to investigate the faculty of attention in more deterministic ways and third person perspectives Kabat-Zinn and mindfulness more generally represents a subjectivist turn in modern psychological discourse. In this sense, mindfulness is both a subjectivist turn as a way of being and knowing. While mindfulness is indeed being used as a clinical intervention, it defies the neat split often used to describe the differences between research and clinical psychology. In mindfulness literature, epistemology and ontology merge into one, that is to say that mindfulness is both a way of knowing and a way of being. The inability to neatly categorize mindfulness is salient in popular literature on mindfulness which often borders between the traditions of self-help and academic psychology. This may in part reflect the origins of mindfulness from a system separate from the mainstream of modern psychology.

There is something particularly American about mindfulness beyond Kabat-Zinn's appeal to American transcendentalism. James's philosophy was

essentially American insofar as it promoted resistance to dominant ways of thinking imported from Europe- both scientific and religious- and instead champions pragmatism, pluralism, and alternative ways to understand and be in the world.<sup>124</sup> Criticizing rationalism, James writes, “rationalism in general thinks it gets the fullness of truth by turning away from sensation to conception, conception obviously giving the more universal and immutable picture.”<sup>125</sup> Mindfulness too asks practitioners to go beyond rational thought, beyond conception, and return to sensation as a way of knowing. The echoes of pragmatism in mindfulness resonate with a uniquely American psychological tradition.

It is important to remember that the current study focuses mainly on the work of Kabat-Zinn and MBSR and it would be unfair to generalize the same subjectivist assumptions of Kabat-Zinn to all mindfulness-based therapies. However, Stephen Hayes, founder of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy has voiced concerns over what he calls the “technological model.” Hayes explains that while empirical clinical psychology is effective at testing the usefulness of certain therapeutic technologies, it is a weak source of innovation. To this end, he claims that combining spiritual traditions with science will advance our understanding of human suffering.<sup>126</sup> That being said, some other

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<sup>124</sup> Pratt, S. (2002). *Native pragmatism*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press.

<sup>125</sup> James, W. (1909/2005). *A Pluralistic Universe*. Kessinger Publishing: 105.

<sup>126</sup> Hayes, S. (2002). "Acceptance, mindfulness, and science." *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice* 9(1): 105.

mindfulness-based therapies tend to be less outspoken regarding the possible shortcomings of mechanistic thought styles.

### The Context of Mindfulness

The rise of experimental psychology during the late nineteenth century reflected and informed changes in way in which people thought about human nature. Historian of psychology Graham Richards explains that while human nature was traditionally described by religious and cosmological systems via ‘folk wisdom,’ as society became radically different than the ones in which the descriptions were formulated, its systems of describing human nature also came to change.<sup>127</sup> Richards argues that descriptions of human nature are created in reference to people’s lived experiences and that what we think of today as psychology can be thought of as the institutionalization of this process; psychology has in some form or another existed for a very long time, supplying/replacing traditional ideas that no longer seem relevant with reference to people’s lived experiences.

This study shows that despite attempts to move away from subjectivist thought styles, subjectivism have remained an essential part of the human sciences from its very inception until today. Richards asserts that while “modern culture has set as a general condition for all knowledge claims that they be ‘scientific’” and that “modernist humans tend to really think and

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<sup>127</sup> Richards, G. (1996). *Putting psychology in its place*. London, Routledge.

operate in a ‘scientific’ way,” scientific reason is not uncontested in the human sciences. There are increasingly numbers of critiques not of reason itself, but of “a too limited concept of reason, seeking not science’s overthrow, but is extension and loosening.”<sup>128</sup> The subjectivist turn of mindfulness is a cogent example of Richard’s observation.

Exploring the context that Richards referred to helps to answer the important questions of *why* mindfulness has become popular *now* and *what* does this says about the evolution of psychological thinking in the twenty-first century. Exploring the context that has drawn people to mindfulness as a therapy serves as a starting point for making broader claims about why subjectivist ways of knowing may be gaining some favor in psychology.

### *Life in the Information Age*

The informational landscape of twenty-first century America has brought upon changes as radical as those brought on by industrialization and urbanization during the late nineteenth century and suburbanization and the commodity culture after World War II. According to a 2008 Nielsen report on television, internet, and cell phone usage, on average Americans spend 127 hours per month watching television and 26 hours a month on the internet.<sup>129</sup>

With the proliferation of digital communication technologies, a sea of

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<sup>128</sup> Richards, G. (1996). *Putting psychology in its place*. London, Routledge: 181-182.

<sup>129</sup> “Nielsen reports on TV, internet and mobile usage among Americans” Visited on March 19, 2009 <http://www.marketingcharts.com/television/nielsen-reports-on-tv-internet-and-mobile-usage-among-americans-5190/>

information has become accessible at virtually any time and place. This culture of connection to information is even stronger among those under the age of thirty, and the force only seems to be growing stronger with time.

In *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, Katherine Hayles explains that subjectivity in the information age has become increasingly disembodied. Since information is distinct from the body, and descriptions of consciousness have become based on information, she argues that modern technology has contributed to a general lessening of perception of differences between “bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals.”<sup>130</sup> And, as those immersed in modern technology use their physical bodies less and less, the line between our physical bodies and subjective experience are being redrawn. A particularly vivid example of disembodiment in the information age is the virtual world called “Second Life.” Started by Linden Lab in 2003, Second Life allows users to interact in a virtual community through the perspective of avatars, or virtual characters created by users to represent themselves or to create alter-egos. Users of Second Life can visit virtual concerts, cafes, religious centers, and university classrooms, and can even purchase virtual products, all without leaving the computer, or having any face-to-face interaction with another person. Digital technologies have become substitutes for communicative and cognitive

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<sup>130</sup> Hayles, K. (1999). *How we became posthuman: Virtual bodies in cybernetics, literature, and informatics*. University of Chicago Press: 3.

capacities. For example, instead of memorizing phone numbers, many today rely on the cell phone's memory chips to place phone calls. In this sense, the cell phone has become an extension of our cognitive capacities.<sup>131</sup>

To some, the mindfulness approach has appeal as a way to recapture embodiment in a world that is moving in the opposite direction. As the title of Kabat-Zinn's *Coming to Our Senses* suggests, mindfulness calls practitioners to physically return to ways of living that place a greater emphasis on embodiment within our own skin. Kabat-Zinn explains that life in "24/7 Connectivity" culture has caused people to lose touch with some of the essential aspects of being human, including sensitivity to one's own physical body. In a highly technological and rationalized world, mindfulness asks practitioners to have no agenda, to be intentionally unproductive, and to break away from information.

The mindful way of being in the information age is similar to what German philosopher Martin Heidegger described as the ontological solution to our technological understanding of being.<sup>132</sup> Heidegger was concerned that in our technological society, flexibility and efficiency simply were being pursued for their own sakes. It is a way of being that the robot HAL in the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey* expressed when asked if he is happy on the mission: "I'm using all my capacities to the maximum. What more could a rational entity

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<sup>131</sup> See [seconflife.com](http://seconflife.com)

<sup>132</sup> Heidegger, M. (1966). *Discourse on thinking*. New York, Harper and Row: 53.

desire?”<sup>133</sup> Heidegger is not opposed to technology itself. He writes, “We can affirm the unavoidable use of technical devices, and also deny them the right to dominate us, and so to warp, confuse and lay waste our nature.” Heidegger explains that if we were more receptive to our technological understanding of being, we could see that efficiency and enhancement are not the most important things in our lives. Thus, by recognizing that the technological way of being is a choice, we can overcome restricted modern ways of living

Like Heidegger, mindfulness proclaims that efficiency in and of itself is not the problem, but rather, the goal of efficiency for its own sake is the root of much of our suffering. For example, in the walking meditation exercise in MBSR, the goal is not to reach any particular destination. Instead participants focus on becoming more aware of the temporal experience of walking. Poking fun at a common saying, one line that Kabat-Zinn often repeats in his writings is, “Don’t just do something, sit there!”<sup>134</sup> There is indeed something taboo in our culture about stillness, about non-doing. With its emphasis on simplicity and calm, mindfulness techniques challenge this assumption. For this reason, it has appeal as a structured occasion to turn off the noise and the technology, and take a vacation from the pressures of life in the information age. In this light, “mindful living” can be seen as a means of combating the hectic, competitive lifestyles encountered in the twenty-first century.

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<sup>133</sup> Kubrick, S. (1968). *2001: A space odyssey*. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

<sup>134</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. New York, Hyperion: 11.

## *N-R Society*

Biological psychiatry is so central to modern thought that one need look no further than to some common expressions to see its impact. It is cliché at this point to hear people speak of a cup of coffee as a caffeine boost, exercise as an opportunity to release endorphins, and a bad mood as the consequence of chemical imbalances.<sup>135</sup> Between 1990 and 2000 the prescriptions for traditional forms of antidepressants grew 48% and the SSRI family of antidepressants grew over 1300%.<sup>136</sup> A philosophy that has grown from the rapid expansion of this field, “eliminative materialism” proposes that that the sciences of mind need to eliminate categories like beliefs and feelings and replace them with more “concrete” and “precise” terms like neurons and neurotransmitters; neuroscience presumably will solve all of the problems of mental life, and treatments based on brain physiology will replace the need for one-on-one contact in therapy all together.<sup>137</sup> Although, few psychiatrists recommend this therapeutic path for their patients, psychopharmaceutical interventions have become ubiquitous within recent years.

This trend of viewing human behavior in terms of biological substrates is part of what Rose calls the growing psychopharmacological society. In this society, he predicts people will increasingly use psychopharmaceuticals for cosmetic purposes, such as modifying personality and altering mental acuity.

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<sup>135</sup> Rose, N. (2003). "Neurochemical selves." *Society* **41**(1): 46-59.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*: 52.

<sup>137</sup> Churchland, P. (1981). "Eliminative materialism and the propositional attitudes." *Journal of Philosophy* **78**. 67-90.

As a result, Rose posits that we will begin to think of ourselves as complex systems of chemical interactions. However, Rose's vision underestimates the force of more subjectivist thought styles and interest in more embodied ways of living that have been revived as of late.

Like James's criticisms of the absence of will, morality, and meaning in the material worldview of biological psychiatry over 100 years ago, there is a community today that bemoans neuro-reductive, or rather, N-R society's ways of associating with mental life. Philosopher John Searle discounts purely mechanistic approaches to the study of consciousness when he writes, "Although consciousness is a biological phenomenon like any other, its subjective, first-person ontology makes it impossible to reduce it to objective third-person phenomena in the way that we can reduce third-person phenomena such as digestion or solidity."<sup>138</sup> Marjorie Garber describes our culture as elevating numbers, statistics, and empirical methods to a universal or mythic status at the expense of imagination.<sup>139</sup> She explains that, in a world that is an entirely knowable and controllable, surprises become impossible, the extraordinary is replaced with the ordinary, and the possibility of wonder is all but lost. Garber calls this trend the "tyranny of the empirical." In this sense, neuro-reductionism has implications our subjectivity.

The case of William James's depression exemplifies this phenomenon.

After graduating from Harvard with a degree in medicine in the 1860s and

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<sup>138</sup> Searle, J. (1998). *Mind, language and society: Philosophy in the real world*. Basic Books: 57.

<sup>139</sup> Garber, M. (1998). *Symptoms of culture*. New York, Routledge: 158.

studying the new experimental psychology in Germany, James experienced bouts of depression and nervous disorders that would remain with him for much of his life. As he described it, the new physiologically-based psychology he had been taught eliminated the possibility of individual control, meaning, and moral choice and thus took away his will to live. Inspired by the writings of French philosopher Charles Renouvier, and personally experiencing a series of earthquakes while lecturing in California, James had a moment of realization whereby he made the choice to act freely and regained his will to believe.<sup>140</sup> This will to believe became the foundations for his writings in *Varieties*. It may be that today, as biological psychiatry continues to affect attitudes towards human experience, many feel the same invalidation and lack of connection to self that James felt. These individuals may be looking for alternative medical modalities that champion the will to believe.

Mindfulness is often described as an alternative to psychopharmaceutical approaches. Regarding the patients at MBSR, Kabat-Zinn writes,

They came because they wanted to take charge in their own lives and get off their pain medication or their anti-anxiety medication...They came because they were finally open, often out of desperation, to do something about it for themselves, something that no one else on the planet could do for them, including their doctors, namely, take charge in their lives and do what they could on their own.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Leary, D. (2002). "William James and the art of human understanding." in Pickren, W., Dewsbury, D. (2002). *Evolving perspectives on the history of psychology*. Washington, D.C., American Psychological Association: 32.

<sup>141</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Coming to our senses: Healing ourselves and the world through mindfulness*. New York, Hyperion: 140.

Maybe these patients are asking, “At what point do pharmaceutical forms of self-improvement no longer empower individuals, but rather belittle key aspects of personhood?” Obviously, there are countless people that benefit from psychopharmaceuticals today. In many cases, taking psychopharmaceuticals is a matter of life and death. What the emergence of mindfulness may reflect is a culture that is choosing not to take the easy way out when it comes to certain forms of struggle and is instead deciding to sit with the pain and to try to learn and understand what conflicts and feelings the pain may be expressing.

### *Mindfulness as a Way of Being*

Psychologist Betty M. Bayer describes a “culture of seekers” that has become a force “deeply embedded in daily routine.” She writes, “Around almost every corner, it seems, one is greeted by messages to tune in to one’s inner harmony, to commune with the universe’s sights and sounds,” to search “for something more.”<sup>142</sup> The culture of spiritual seekers is catered by a vast industry of self-help literature. In the past, self-help literature mainly dealt with questions of how to gain power, wealth, and dominance. However, during the 1990s the literature increasingly turned towards more “inward” topics, such as breaking down the labor/joy dichotomy in the workplace, finding one’s path or one’s true calling, and healing mind and body.<sup>143</sup> Between 1991 and 1996, self-

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<sup>142</sup> Bayer, B.M. (2008). “Wonder in a world of struggle.” *Subjectivity* 23: 157.

<sup>143</sup> See McGee, M. (2005). *Self-help inc.: Makeover culture in American life*. Oxford University Press.

help book sales rose by 96 percent.<sup>144</sup> In some ways, self-actualization has become the newest variant of the American dream in late-capitalist society. Bayer sees this culture of seekers as a distinct feature of a new upturn in ontology after a century dominated by epistemology. During the twentieth century, she notes, as Americans became more psychologically oriented than ever they also became more spiritual.<sup>145</sup> This was the end result of ontology being left behind as psychologists cut themselves off from spiritual concerns. Political scientist Elizabeth Wingrove likewise notes that there seems to be “something like a religious rapprochement” in the upturn in ontology. She asks, “isn’t it possible that ontology is simply a more acceptable language in which to explore what remain, at root, theological concerns?”<sup>146</sup>

For those who have moved away from their religions of origin or other traditional alternatives, mindfulness may serve a role not unlike that of religious observance in that it provides an entire framework for being. There are some underlying themes and parallels in mindfulness that relate to many world religions: stepping back from daily life to reflect, establishing a framework for how to live life, and a shared community of common stories. One author offering a Christian critique of mindfulness references Matthew

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> For the psychologization of Americans during 20<sup>th</sup> century see Pfister.

<sup>146</sup> Wingrove, E. (2005). "Ontology: A Useful Category of Analysis." *Hedgehog Review*: 86-92.

6:34 to draw similarities between her faith and the qualities of mindfulness.<sup>147</sup>

Some writers describe mindfulness as an essential part of all world traditions even when it has not been described in the language of mindfulness. They say that mindfulness would be familiar to a musician who experiences a “dropping out” of self during performance or an athlete whose mind and body are completely in unison during peak performance. As Bayer might say, mindfulness goes beyond the rational epistemic and brings wonder and ontology back into a discussion of psychology.

Kabat-Zinn often claims that mindfulness is not a technique or a concept, but rather an entire way of being. A brochure for the Stress Reduction Clinic includes one of his poems:

*Have you ever had the experience of stopping so completely,  
of being in your body so completely,  
of being in your life so completely,  
that what you knew and what you didn't know,  
and the way things are right now  
no longer held even the slightest hint of anxiety or discord?  
It would be a moment of complete presence, beyond striving, beyond mere  
acceptance,  
beyond the desire to escape or fix anything or plunge ahead,  
a moment of pure being no longer in time,  
a moment of pure seeing, pure feeling,  
a moment in which life simply is,  
and that “isness” grabs you by all your senses,  
all your memories, by your very genes,  
by your loves, and  
welcomes you home.<sup>148</sup>*

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<sup>147</sup> “Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself”; Lui, N. (2005). “Mindfulness: A Christian critique.” *Fuller Theological Seminar*: 6.

[http://www.fuller.edu/sop/integration/Publications/Travis\\_papers/nancyLui.pdf](http://www.fuller.edu/sop/integration/Publications/Travis_papers/nancyLui.pdf)

<sup>148</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J. (2009). “Letter of support.” *Presented at a conference at the Warsaw School of Social Sciences and Humanities, Warsaw, Poland. Visited on March 22, 2009.*

On the back-cover of Kabat-Zinn's book, *Wherever You Go There You Are*, one commentator writes, "Want to meet the most interesting, exciting person you will ever know? Let Jon Kabat-Zinn introduce you to YOU. Nowhere else in the literature of meditation can you find so simple and commonsensical a path to yourself."<sup>149</sup> Inside the book, Kabat-Zinn claims that what we perceive as inadequacy is often the result of the perspective we take; constantly looking for the perfect option will not necessarily make everything better and often our attitude that "things would be better if only..." is the root cause of much of our struggle. No matter where you go, there will always be something to dislike, so why not surrender to the present moment and be at home wherever you go. To someone who is perpetually searching for an "answer," mindfulness beckons with its promise that everything that we need is always present right in the present moment.

Mindfulness is obviously not the first or only therapy today to provide a framework for being in therapy. Sigmund Freud posited that adult life is fundamentally shaped by past experience, particularly in the first six years of life. Furthermore, the self could be liberated from its past by a process of free association on past experiences in order to access and confront repressed memories and conflicts between the id, ego, and superego. In this sense, a

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[http://www.buddhisminpsychology.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=50&Itemid=1](http://www.buddhisminpsychology.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=50&Itemid=1)

<sup>149</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. New York, Hyperion.

psychoanalytic framework of being suggests that in life we must confront our neuroses and that a therapist is critical to this process.

While mindfulness is clearly not the only framework for being, its framework is one that may have particular resonance today. The mindfulness way of being embraces a system of ethics based on the notion of interconnectedness. Mindfulness asks practitioners to reach out to the suffering of others, to end ignorance, to promote compassion, and ultimately, to show the way towards a transformation in society. In *Coming to Our Senses*, Kabat-Zinn notes that it is impossible to embody stillness and calm if one's actions are immoral, "clouding, agitating, and destabilizing."<sup>150</sup> He writes that when we lie, steal, kill, cause harm, pollute, or take drugs, the effect can be destructive for ourselves and others over the long term.

To this end, mindfulness may resonate with those of a certain political inclination. For example, Kabat-Zinn's discussions of *karma* and *non-harm* may ring true with those that have concerns regarding the environment. As noted last chapter, Kabat-Zinn's appeal to nature is quite salient in his writings. While typically conceived of as a political movement, environmentalism points to the interconnectedness of life and nature which is in this sense, a framework for being and acting in the world. The interconnected worldview may provide meaning and fulfillment to a particular type of person that growing up in a

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<sup>150</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Coming to our senses: Healing ourselves and the world through mindfulness*. New York, Hyperion: 102.

generation that is becoming more conscious about the effects of wasteful ways of living on a more global level.

### The Waxing and Waning of Subjectivist Turns and the Space Between Thought Collectives

There are people around today that value both subjectivist and mechanistic thought styles. This subjectivist/mechanistic hybrid might heed a physician's advice to use a general antibiotic to fight off an illness, but resist the use of psychopharmaceutical medication. Such individuals might accept biological descriptions of an illness they accept as outside a perceived sense of essential self, yet reject biological descriptions of which they feel more essential part to their self-concept. For these people, mechanical explanations are useful until they reject agency. For such a person, mechanistic explanations of human are useful up until they seem to implicate some fundamental sense of what it means to be a distinct person. Those dissatisfied with principally biological view of the workings of the human mind, more experiential accounts of mental processes provides a more comfortable fit. Kabat-Zinn provides such an approach.

French philosopher Michel Foucault writes, "We should try to discover how it is that subjects are gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted through a multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials,

desires, thoughts, etc.”<sup>151</sup> Foucault’s perspective provides an avenue for understanding how this subjectivist/mechanistic hybrid came into being and why it persists, and helps to answer the central question, “why do the sciences of mind commit to both mechanistic and subjectivist thought styles?” An examination of these questions sheds light on the dynamic relationship between modern notions of self, the public, and the production of psychological knowledge.

While humans cannot experience directly many anatomical aspects of the brain such as the cerebral cortex, they have a direct experience with being human. To this end, people can decide for themselves what kinds of explanations of human nature make sense. Anthropologist Emily Martin writes, “If a more reductionistic, brain-based picture of human action did...win...in the court of scientific opinion, it would be because the environment we live in (and that scientific theories are produced in) has shifted so that a brain-centered view of a person began to make cultural sense.”<sup>152</sup>

While brain-centered understandings of the human have gained support in recent years, they still do not make complete cultural sense today. Much of biological psychiatry today problematizes agency and is based on epiphenomenalism, the theory that thoughts are derived from physical states, but cannot cause physical states. However, Rose explains that our current

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<sup>151</sup> Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge*. London, Harvester: 98.

<sup>152</sup> Martin, E. (2003). “Talking back to neuro-reductionism.” in Thomas, H., & Amhed, J. (2003). *Cultural bodies: Ethnography and theory*. Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell: 200.

ethical climate values the self in terms of “autonomy, identity, individuality, liberty, choice, and fulfillment.”<sup>153</sup> To this end, biological psychiatry clashes with the current ethos of self.

Does this mean that the human sciences are fundamentally stuck in a paradigm that waxes and wanes between subjectivist and mechanistic thought styles? Until there is a revolutionary shift in the way in which society thinks about self, the current paradigm of waxing and waning will persist. So long as mechanistic thought styles preclude the possibility of the agency, and the public maintains its belief in agency, there is no reason to believe that periods of revived interest in subjectivist thought styles will disappear anytime soon. In this sense, there is nothing fundamental about the human subject that resist mechanistic or subjectivist thought styles, rather this paradigm is informed by notions of self. Furthermore, the modern notion of an agentic self has greatly contributed to the recent interest in returning to the lived experience as a valuable way of knowing, including the emergence of mindfulness.

Mechanistic thought styles can have powerful effects on our subjectivity, however. Rose writes that the human sciences have “brought into existence a variety of new ways in which human beings have come to understand themselves and do things to themselves.”<sup>154</sup> Similarly, philosopher of science Ian Hacking posits that the categorization of people actually affects

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<sup>153</sup> Rose, N. (1998). *Inventing our selves: Psychology, power, and personhood*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 1.

<sup>154</sup> Rose, N. (1998). *Inventing our selves: Psychology, power, and personhood*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 1.

the people being categorized, that is to say, the way humans are described in science impacts the way people think about themselves and the world.<sup>155</sup> Insofar as knowledge produced by the sciences affects our subjectivity, such descriptions can limit or create possibilities for action, ways of being, and types of people. The human sciences maintain claims on the natural world, so they hold great power in modern conceptions of the human. It is indeed possible that more brain-based conceptions of self could come to make cultural sense and that in the process, there could be rethinking of the self.

Yet, the sciences are far from the only discipline contributing to discourse on figuring the human. While scientists may have a monopoly on describing the cerebral cortex, there is a plurality of ways in which Western culture describes human nature. In a culture that includes diverse ways of describing human nature, it is possible that people with different understandings of themselves will be “made up.” Individuals with subjectivist/mechanistic viewpoints may be a result as well as a contributor to this culture of diverse ways of knowing and being. The subjectivist/mechanistic hybrid is located in space between mechanistic and subjectivist collectives, a space that has been explored before in the American psychological tradition by James and the humanists as well as others that this thesis has not examined.

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<sup>155</sup> Hacking, I. (2002) “Making up people.” in his *Historical ontology*. Boston, Harvard University Press: 99-114.

Does the emergence of the subjectivist/mechanistic hybrid signal a move towards a more established thought collective grounded in the space between the current collectives? According to Fleck, a thought collective is “a community of people mutually exchanging ideas or maintaining intellectual interaction” and that what serves to link these individuals together within a collective is a shared thought style.<sup>156</sup> He posits that, while truth only makes sense within the context of a particular thought collective, thought collectives can change, emerge, or disappear. Through collective interaction, resistance to a particular aspect of a thought style can become stylized, consolidated, and eventually emerge as an accepted fact. If a new collective is emerging, could it become unified or will it remain dialectical? If the latter, would a new paradigm altogether emerge?

Fleck explains that change to a more established thought collective occurs most often when certain individuals with strong personal thought styles maintain the ability to exchange ideas with more than one collective at the same time, bridging incommensurable collectives and opening up possibilities for new thought styles and new thought collectives.<sup>157</sup> How is it that individuals with “personal thought styles” come to these border spaces? Put differently, how did James, Maslow, and Kabat-Zinn turn away from the more established mechanistic thought styles of their training to become scientific

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<sup>156</sup> Fleck, L. (1935/1979). *Genesis and development of a scientific fact*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press: 39.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid*: 45.

rebels? Wundt and Freud were initially interested in explaining consciousness as the net result of neural causes, but both ultimately came to reject this notion as the sole explanation. How and why did this happen?

One answer is that the ability to experience alternative collectives and experiment with bringing innovative thought styles into the mainstream may be linked to privilege. James was chair of the psychology department at Harvard when he wrote about radical empiricism. Kabat-Zinn is Executive Director of the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society and professor emeritus at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. With socially privileged statuses, and with obvious ability to negotiate the social and political terrain necessary to achieve such status in well-established institutions, these individuals with “personal thought styles” have been in strategic positions to challenge norms of the institution. They had more opportunities and less risk in challenging the orthodoxy of mainstream psychology and medicine.

Another answer is that these individuals were trained in multiple thought collectives, that is, they became unsatisfied with the dominant thought style of their day because they had experienced alternative thought styles in the course of their own lives and education. In this light, it is not a coincidence that James and Kabat-Zinn were trained as artists in their early years. Both James and Kabat-Zinn were also influenced by schools of thought entirely outside of

institutional psychology. Kabat-Zinn spent many years of his life as a devotee Buddhist. At a conference about Buddhism in America Kabat-Zinn said,

I'm telling you these things because I'm going to try, in painting this picture to give you a sense of how the Dharma perspective might influence some aspect of mainstream – in this particular case, science medicine, health, and health care. I am looking for an opportunity or an interface and a connection between languages, so that some kind of larger connection might become apparent and both a need and an opportunity for something to emerge, for something to happen, for a receptivity that might not have been seen before.<sup>158</sup>

These unique perspectives promoted a greater degree of openness to less conventional ways of looking at the human mind in the psychological community.

Without an accommodating cultural climate, however, these individuals would not have been able to cross-over into and explore alternative thought collectives in the first place. Fleck writes that such “personal exploits” can “prevail only if they have a seminal effect by being performed at a time when the social conditions are right.”<sup>159</sup> To this end, what Fleck calls the “thought community” contributes to the development or denial of an idea. Fleck explains that transformations “often occur during periods of general confusion and that “such periods of unrest reveal the rivalry between opinions... [and] a

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<sup>158</sup>Rapaport, A., Aiken, B., & Hotchkiss, B. (1998). *Buddhism in America: The official record of the landmark conference on the future of Buddhist meditative practices in the West, Boston, January 17-19, 1997*. Rutland, Charles E. Tuttle: 480.

<sup>159</sup> Fleck, L. (1935/1979). *Genesis and development of a scientific fact*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press: 45.

new thought style arises from such a situation.”<sup>160</sup> James drew from currents of religious liberalism and mind-cures as well as his medical training in the development of his ideas. Similarly, Kabat-Zinn was able to study Buddhism with Zen Master Seung Sahn during a time in which studying Eastern philosophies was not the mainstream, but was at least a significant part of the counterculture of the day.

Could today be described as such a period of general confusion? If so, does this suggest that a new paradigm may emerge? Today, as in James’s time, there does appear to be a rethinking of the questions about how human nature can be known, what constitutes evidence, and who has the power to produce knowledge? This confusion may be contributing to a multiple, fragmented, and protean modern self. Psychologist Kenneth Gergen writes that relationships in modern life “pull us in a myriad directions, inviting us to play such a variety of roles that the very concept of an ‘authentic self’ with knowable characterizes recedes from view.”<sup>161</sup>

Whereas James lived during a time when religious believers were becoming more liberal and more secular, the current period of confusion is arriving on the heels of a more recent religious revivalism. The current confusion might be signaling a movement from a more multiple and fragmented self to the reemergence of something like the soul, ontology, or as

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid: 177.

<sup>161</sup> Gergen, K. (1991). *The saturate self: Dilemmas of identity in contemporary life*. New York, Basic Books: 7.

Coon writes, something “to hold our multiple selves together and help us judge their relative worth, something to serve as a common cultural referent to anchors.”<sup>162</sup> As the American psychotherapist Ira Progoff writes, “Although it began as part of the protest against religion, the net result of modern psychology has been to reaffirm man’s experience of himself as a spiritual being” and that there is a need for a “soul beyond psychology.”<sup>163</sup>

While there are many avenues for exploring the “general confusion” of the current moment, a revived interest in scholarship with respect to James highlights this trend rather poignantly. Coon writes, “With pans dipped into the archival record, increasing numbers of scholars are now sifting the Jamesian stream-of-consciousness for gold nuggets.”<sup>164</sup> This turn to James may reflect a contemporary struggle with some of the same issues with which James wrestled. James offered a way out of the confusion by turning towards subjectivist thought styles. Will others besides Kabat-Zinn also offer a revised form of objectivity that use ways of knowing that resemble James’s radical empiricism?

Though a general confusion has emerged, the current environment may not be as perplexing as that described by Fleck. Fleck suggests that confused moments of the past include the early renaissance and the period following

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<sup>162</sup> Coon, D. (2000). “Salvaging the self in a world without soul: William James’s the principles of psychology.” *History of Psychology* 3(2): 100. (83-103)

<sup>163</sup> Progoff, I. (1956). *The death and rebirth of psychology*. New York, McGraw-Hill: 3.

<sup>164</sup> Coon, D. (1990). “Of gold and pyrite.” *Biology and Philosophy* 5(4): 493.

World War I.<sup>165</sup> The current moment hardly compares to the conflict of thinking and strife of those past periods. This is particularly the case when comparing the radical rethinking of human nature that occurred during these past historical periods. Subjectivist turns of the past in psychology have been followed by periods of mechanized thought styles. Even if this trend comes to pass again, until there is a radical rethinking of self, subjectivist turns will reemerge in the future again.

The current subjectivist turn differs in some regards from earlier turns. For one, Kabat-Zinn is less vehement in his opposition to mechanistic styles than were both James and the humanistic psychologists. Kabat-Zinn tends not write in scientific journals about the inadequacies of RCT and the deficits of the medical system. This may be the case because the pressure to maintain mechanistic thought styles in the medical world may be heavier now than in the past, especially when comparing today to James's day. Indubitably, what is considered valid to most today requires at least some basis in mechanistic rationalization. Also, to gain entry in mainstream hospitals, Kabat-Zinn has had to carefully present MBSR not as Buddhism, but simply as a practice in paying attention.

Another difference between mindfulness and past subjectivist turns is how integrated mindfulness ideas have become into the mainstream.

Mindfulness and meditation in general have been incorporated into recent

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<sup>165</sup> Fleck, L. (1935/1979). *Genesis and development of a scientific fact*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press: 178.

neuroscientific research. Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch suggest that in order to better understand the mental life, cognitive science and neuroscience must take into account subjective experience, linking biobehavioral investigations of the mind to phenomenological investigations. They write, “Mindfulness provides a unique perspective that can inform critical issues in cognitive science, neurophenomenology, and attempts to understand the cognitive underpinnings of the nature of human experience itself.”<sup>166</sup> Also, mindfulness is being incorporated into a new generation of therapies that self-describes as members of the behavioral and cognitive-behavioral traditions. In some ways, mindfulness has already become more of a part of mainstream institutions than humanistic psychology was during its prime.

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<sup>166</sup> Varela, F., Thompson, E., & Rosch, E. (1996). *The embodied mind: Cognitive science and human experience*. Boston, The MIT Press: 146.

## **Conclusion**

Resistance to mechanistic thought styles has been a part of modern psychology since its very birth. At times, this resistance has manifested in what this thesis has referred to as subjectivist turns, that is, ways of knowing that emphasize the lived experience. These subjectivist turns have taken place during times in which mechanistic thought styles have dominated not only psychological discourse, but wider cultural conceptions of the self as well. As a subjectivist turn, mindfulness does not only call for more individualistic way of knowing oneself, but represents a move towards more experiential ways of knowing in the modern day production of knowledge. The turn that mindfulness takes is towards the space between the two dominant thought collectives in psychology over the past century and a half.

This study has focused almost exclusively on the work of Kabat-Zinn and MBSR. This poses a limitation in its scope. As stated earlier, many of Kabat-Zinn's claims for subjectivism are not as insistent in the more self-proclaimed third wave behavioral therapies like DBT, ACT, and MBCT. It would be revealing to explore these therapies in greater depth. Questions that may be worthy of future study include: how does this hybrid subjectivist/mechanistic kind bode for changing culture? What role has Orientalism and exotified notions of Buddhism played in the popularity of mindfulness? Does mindfulness force psychology to reconsider certain classes

of diagnoses? Who are the people using mindfulness (where are they from, what are their political inclinations, what race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic backgrounds do they come from)? If mindfulness continues to gain popularity will therapist begin to send clients to dharma centers, temples, and ashrams rather than medical clinics to see more advanced meditation teachers? If mindfulness techniques continue to get incorporated in to school curriculum, what will its impact on the current generation? What will be the long term impact of the influx of Eastern ideas of the interdependent nature of self on Western notions of self? By what standards will mindfulness be evaluated?

As a therapy, mindfulness has gained popularity, at least in part, because it offers a framework for being that promotes embodiment and agency for navigating life in the information age. To this end, directions in the production of psychological knowledge are intimately tied to developments in culture, particularly the contemporary ethos of self. Knowledge production in psychology is currently caught in a paradigm that negotiates between mechanistic and subjectivist thought styles. The fate of this paradigm will be critically informed by future directions in conceptions of self.

Like James and the humanists, Kabat-Zinn's work may have far reaching effects on the future of psychology insofar that he has contributed to the creation of a space between mechanistic and subjectivist thought collectives for others to explore. As more people come to explore this space, it is possible that various kinds of subjectivist/mechanistic hybrids will appear in

greater numbers. Just as mindfulness has gained increasing popularity in an era fascinated with simplifying aspects of daily life, future explorations of the space between thought collective and future subjectivist/mechanistic hybrids will be influenced by cultures yet to come.

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