On the Buddhist roots of contemporary non-religious mindfulness practice: Moving beyond sectarian and essentialist approaches [1]

VILLE HUSGAFVEL
University of Helsinki

Abstract

Mindfulness-based practice methods are entering the Western cultural mainstream as institutionalised approaches in healthcare, education, and other public spheres. The Buddhist roots of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and comparable mindfulness-based programmes are widely acknowledged, together with the view of their religious and ideological neutrality. However, the cultural and historical roots of these contemporary approaches have received relatively little attention in the study of religion, and the discussion has been centred on Theravāda Buddhist viewpoints or essentialist presentations of 'classical Buddhism'. In the light of historical and textual analysis it seems unfounded to hold Theravāda tradition as the original context or as some authoritative expression of Buddhist mindfulness, and there are no grounds for holding it as the exclusive Buddhist source of the MBSR programme either. Rather, one-sided Theravāda-based presentations give a limited and oversimplified picture of Buddhist doctrine and practice, and also distort comparisons with contemporary non-religious forms of mindfulness practice. To move beyond the sectarian and essentialist approaches closely related to the 'world religions paradigm' in the study of religion, the discussion would benefit from a lineage-based approach, where possible historical continuities and phenomenological similarities between Buddhist mindfulness and contemporary non-religious approaches are examined at the level of particular relevant Buddhist teachers and their lineages of doctrine and practice.

Keywords: *Buddhism, mindfulness, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, meditation, world religions paradigm*

The current use of non-religious mindfulness practices for practical health benefits dates to 1979, when Jon Kabat-Zinn introduced Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) as a treatment method for chronic pain and stress

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patients at the *University of Massachusetts Medical Center* (Kabat-Zinn 2011, 286; Samuelson et al. 2007, 255). After this pioneering work a wide variety of mindfulness-based interventions have emerged,[2] and the effects of these approaches have been analysed in a burgeoning number of academic publications (Eklöf 2014, 33–4; Lazar 2005; Mindful Nation UK 2015, 6; Wilson 2014, 2). With the support of scientific research, mindfulness-based practice methods are entering the Western cultural mainstream and becoming institutionalised approaches in public healthcare and education (Frisk 2011; Hornborg 2012a; 2012b; 2014; Plank 2010; 2011; 2014a; 2014b; Wilson 2014). In the United States mindfulness-based approaches are already widely accepted as 'mainstream', with applications in hospitals, prisons, therapy, primary schools, higher education, business, and military training (Wilson 2014), and in the United Kingdom an all-party parliamentary group has recently given several recommendations for the nationwide incorporation of mindfulness practice in public healthcare, education, the workplace, and the criminal justice system (Mindful Nation UK, 2015). In Swedish healthcare the *Karolinska Institutet* has offered MBSR courses to its employees since 2007, psychiatric wards use MBSR or other mindfulness-based therapies, and mindfulness approaches are widely popular among cognitive therapists (Karolinska Institutet 2015; Plank 2010, 50). In the Finnish educational sector *Folkhälsan* and *the University of Helsinki* are coordinating a largescale research project in which the effects of mindfulness training[3] are being studied among 2400 pupils in 50 public schools (Folkhälsan 2015). Apart from the emerging institutional contexts and clinical settings, MBSR and other mindfulness-related methods are also widely popular as private tools for health and well-being, and are offered to a large constituency in the form of training courses, books, mobile applications, and other commercial products (see Wilson 2014; Plank 2011; 2014a; 2014b).

In the foreword to *Mindful Nation UK* Kabat-Zinn describes the historical roots of mindfulness: 'While the most systematic and comprehensive articulation of mindfulness and its related attributes stems from the Buddhist tradition, mindfulness is not a catechism, an ideology, a belief system, a technique or set of techniques, a religion, or a philosophy. It is best described as "a way of being".' (Mindful Nation UK 2015, 9) This argument has been characteristic of Kabat-Zinn's approach to meditation since his first academic publication

2 Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) and Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) are the most prominent programmes (Germer 2005, 11).

3 The Stop and Breathe (.b) programme, which is based on MBSR and MBCT, but modified for school contexts (Folkhälsan 2015; Mindfulness in Schools Project 2015).

in 1982, in which he explains how 'mindfulness meditation' has roots in the *vipassan*ā practice of Theravāda Buddhism, in Mahāyāna Buddhism, in Sōtō Zen Practice, and in particular yogic traditions, but asserts that 'all mediation practices used in the SR&RP[4] were taught independent of the religious and cultural beliefs associated with them in their countries and traditions of origin' (Kabat-Zinn 1982, 33). The institutionalisation and application of mindfulness approaches in religiously and ideologically neutral public spheres may be seen as a sign of the widespread acceptance and *de facto* validation of this claim.

While research on mindfulness is abundant[5] and the effects of mindfulness-based practice methods have been analysed in a vast number of publications, historical and cultural study of the subject has received less attention. Furthermore, many of these studies are marked by critical differences in both approaches and interpretations. Some scholars treat therapeutic mindfulness-based methods as essentially contemporary Western forms of Buddhism and as a new phase in the long history of the Buddhist tradition (Wilson 2014). Others emphasise the differences between MBSR and Buddhist mindfulness, suggesting that there is a hollow cultural appropriation – and even colonisation – of Buddhist concepts and practice to support individualistic and economic aims and values (Plank 2011; 2014a; 2014b). Buddhist conceptions of mindfulness have also been analysed for their possible relevance in therapeutic work (Germer 2005; Gilpin 2008; Siegel et. al 2009; Olendzki 2005; 2009; Rapgay & Bystrinsky 2009), and to examine historical processes of conceptual recontextualisation (Sun 2014). In all these research approaches there is a need to address the question of which 'Buddhism' is being discussed. Because of the multitude of subbranches within the Buddhist tradition and its ca. 2500 years of history and expansion to all five continents, capturing the characteristic features of the Buddhist concept of mindfulness (Pāli *sati*, Sanskrit *smṛti*, Tibetan *dran pa*, Chinese *nian*)[6] is challenging, to say the least. The abstract and multilayered nature of the concept itself does not make the task any easier, and if this challenge is to be tackled, one needs to anchor the perspective to (a) particular viewpoint(s) within Buddhist tradition. However, because of Buddhism's doctrinal and practical plurality, the selected viewpoint may radically limit or distort the picture of 'Buddhist mindfulness' if its relevance for the particular research question is not well grounded.

4 The original name of the MBSR programme.

5 It is estimated that there are around 500 hundred peer-reviewed publications a year (Eklöf 2014; Wilson 2014; Mindful Nation UK 2015).

6 Later, Romanised Pāli is used for specific Buddhist terms, if not otherwise indicated.

In this article I first observe presentations of Buddhist mindfulness in the academic discussion on the Buddhist roots of contemporary non-religious mindfulness practice, and, based on various perspectives of the history of Buddhist doctrine and practice, I argue that most of these presentations seem to be inadequately one-sided simplifications and generalisations. I continue by locating influential Buddhist teachers and texts in the life of Jon Kabat-Zinn and in the development of the MBSR programme, and, based on my analysis, I argue that in addition to the well-known Theravāda influences there is a wide variety of influential texts and teachers from the other main branches of Buddhism, and especially from the Zen tradition.[7] In the final part of the article I examine some doctrinal differences, together with their practical and conceptual implications, as found among influential modern Theravāda and Zen teachers, and conclude by arguing that the plurality of Buddhist tradition and the variety of different doctrinal positions should be taken into account in the academic discussion on contemporary mindfulness approaches, because different interpretative frames and doctrinal views are inseparable from the objectives of Buddhist meditation practice and conceptions of mindfulness.

Previous research: A bias in favour of Theravāda Buddhism

A common or even dominant argument presents Theravāda Buddhism as the original context and an authoritative representation of the Buddhist concept and practice of mindfulness, or as the main source of Buddhist influences in the development of MBSR and related mindfulness-based methods. The argument about Theravāda origins is explicitly made by Katarina Plank (Plank 2011, 186–7; 2014a, 43; 2014b, 73–4), who grounds it in her fieldwork within the *vipassanā* movement of S.N Goenka and with reference to an article by Andrew Olendzki – in spite of the fact that Olendzki neither uses the word Theravāda nor makes any explicit claims concerning Theravāda origins in his study (Olendzki 2005).[8] Instead, Olendzki represents another common approach in which Buddhist mindfulness is presented through notions of 'classical Buddhism' or 'classical mindfulness training', without any reference to particular sub-traditions, but with exclusive use of text sources from

7 The Japanese term *Zen* is used in a general sense to include the Chinese *Ch'an*, Korean *Seo*n, and Vietnamese *Thien* traditions.

8 Without any academic discussion of the topic or explication of her line of reasoning, Plank seems to present her position rather as a matter of fact, with no further problematisation of the subject.

the Pāli canon and later Theravāda commentaries (Bodhi & Nāṇamoli 1995; Bodhi 2000a; Olendzki 2005; 2009).[9] Others may refrain from making claims of originality or references to 'classical' Buddhism, but present Theravāda as the major Buddhist influence in MBSR and MBCT, and consequently use only Theravāda sources in their historical analysis (Gethin 2011).[10] In many studies Mahāyāna interpretations may also be recognised to a degree, but 'traditional Asian' or 'classical' Buddhism is still defined and analysed through the Pāli canon and Theravāda sources (Germer 2005; Gilpin 2008; Olendzki 2014; Rapgay & Bystrinsky 2009; Sun 2014; Väänänen 2014). In addition to research articles, a variation of this approach is found in *Mindful America*, the first book-length study of the contemporary mindfulness movement, whose main argument presents 'traditional monastic Buddhist' mindfulness and 'premodern Asian Buddhism' with exclusive reference to the Pāli canon and Theravāda authorities (Wilson 2014, 21–2, 48–54, 107–19).

Based on canonical Theravāda texts[11] and the views of contemporary Theravāda teachers, these studies arrive at various Theravāda-based characterisations of mindfulness. In her texts Plank describes Buddhist mindfulness as an analytical awareness enabling the deconstruction of sense experiences into increasingly subtle elements, and as an integral part of *satipaṭṭhāna* practice[12], which is equated with *vipassanā* meditation (Plank 2011, 188–96; 2014a, 43). The application of mindfulness in *vipassanā* practice leads to experience-based wisdom and final liberation (*nibbāna*) through the observation of *dhamma*s, the smallest basic elements of the psychophysical body, and through the realisation of impermanence (*anicca*), non-satisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and impersonality (*anattā*) as the characteristic marks of existence (Plank 2011, 190–3, 196). Furthermore, mindfulness must be accompanied by a 'clear awareness of all bodily activities' (*sampajañña*),[13] as well as 'diligence' *(ātāpi)*, if it is to be Buddhist 'right mindfulness' (*sammāsati*) (Plank 2011, 195–6). Although arguable, as later analysis will show, and mainly an expression of a specific

9 For similar approaches see also Malinen 2014; Siegel et al. 2009.

10 However, in his recent article Gethin makes a valuable contribution to the discussion by also analysing the conceptualisations of mindfulness in Buddhism through Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna sources, and recognising these as possibly relevant for contemporary non-religious approaches (Gethin 2015).

11 Mainly *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, and *Abhidhamma* commentaries.

12 See pages 96–7.

13 Among modern Theravāda teachers the concept of *sampajañña* can also mean 'reflexive cognition of mental events', which matures into insights and wisdom (Bodhi 2011, 33–35), or an active manifestation of 'right mindfulness' in all skilful mental and physical activities that accord with the teaching of Buddha (*Dharma*) (Nyanaponika 1962, 45–56).

interpretation of Buddhist mindfulness, *satipaṭṭhāna* and *vipassanā* practice, which can be associated with a particular Burmese tradition of meditation,[14] Plank's characterisations have been influential in many Nordic studies of the topic (see Frisk 2011; Gottfredsen 2014; Hornborg 2012b; 2014; Jääskeläinen 2013). For example, Anne-Christine Hornborg cites Plank in equating Buddhist mindfulness (*sati*) with *vipassanā* meditation to contrast 'Western' health-seeking practice with the transcendent goals of Buddhist practice, and to present contemporary non-Buddhist forms of mindfulness as 'white American middle-class' interpretations (Hornborg 2012b, 44).

In his articles Olendzki refers to mindfulness as 'simple presence of mind upon currently arising phenomena' (Olendzki 2005, 258), or as 'a quality of attention that is at once confident, benevolent, generous, and equanimous'. Based on Theravāda *Abhidhamma*, he emphasises that mindfulness is present 'at any time one has a wholesome thought, performs a wholesome action, or speaks a wholesome word', and is always accompanied by other beneficial mental qualities (Olendzki 2009, 42; 2011, 61; see also Plank 2011, 196–7). Olendzki's presentation of 'classical mindfulness training' is a summary of the 'four contemplations' found in *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, again interpreted exclusively as *vipassanā* practice (Olendzki 2005, 254–9), and mindfulness is depicted essentially as 'a tool to be used for gaining wisdom, which consists of the direct, experiential understanding of the impermanence, selflessness, unsatisfactoriness, and interdependence of all phenomena' (Olendzki 2009, 43–4). According to Olendzki, mindfulness meditation is specifically *a particular type of meditative practice* in which the concentrated mind 'is directed to a moving target—the flowing stream of consciousness', differing essentially form meditations aiming at one-pointed concentration. (Olendzki 2009, 41–4. Emphasis by the author.)

In *Mindful America* Wilson gives no explicit definition of mindfulness as a concept, yet comparisons between 'traditional Buddhist' mindfulness practice and contemporary manifestations are important for his overall arguments concerning historical change within Buddhism. For Wilson, 'traditional' mindfulness is 'an early *type of meditation* that likely traces back to the historical Buddha himself.' (Wilson 2014, 21. Emphasis by the author.) It includes *both* the deep one-pointed concentration of jhāna states *and* awareness of body and mind as described in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, but it differs essentially from visualisations and other forms of meditation (Wilson 2014, 21–2). This premodern Buddhist mindfulness is also 'clearly associated with traditional

14 Plank's description fits well with the tradition of Burmese *vipassanā* meditation she is studying, which can be traced from S.N. Goenka, to the lay teacher U BA Khin, and to the Theravāda monk Ledi Sayadaw (Braun 2013; Houtman 1990; Plank 2011).

transcendent monastic concerns (nirvana)', and 'a part of a celibate, renunciatory, home-leaving monastic Buddhist path' (Wilson 2014, 109, 119). According to Wilson, in the framing 'that mindfulness techniques receive in the traditional commentaries of Buddhist lineages over nearly the entire sweep of Asian Buddhist history, regardless of lineage or location' (Wilson 2014, 21),

> [m]indfulness is presented as a strenuous, lifelong task, one that occurs within a framework of renunciation and detachment: the practitioner seeks to acquire eventually the bliss enjoyed in peaceful meditation, rather than to enjoy the activities of daily life via mindful attitudes … [I]n this traditional framework, mindfulness operates as something that puts distance between oneself and one's experience, so that one ceases to be troubled by it. (Wilson 2014, 21–2.)

Within the research discussion there are also various comparisons between Buddhist mindfulness and contemporary non-religious practice. Plank states that contemporary non-religious forms of mindfulness are 'wrong mindfulness' (*miccha sati*)[15] from a Buddhist point of view, because they advocate mindful appreciation of 'worldly' sensual experiences. To support the claim that Buddhist mindfulness cannot contain any sense-based enjoyment or contentment, she cites the modern Theravāda teachers, Bhikkhu Thanissaro and Bhante Henepola Gunaratana (Plank 2011, 215–6; 2014a, 51). Plank also quotes Thanissaro to emphasise that the mere acceptance of different mental states is not enough in Buddhist mindfulness practice:

> [In] establishing mindfulness you stay with unpleasant things not just to accept them but to watch and understand them. Once you've clearly seen that a particular quality like aversion or lust is harmful for the mind, you can't stay patient or equanimous about it. You have to make whatever effort is needed to get rid of it and to nourish skillful qualities in its place by bringing in other factors of the path: right resolve and right effort. (Thanissaro Bhikkhu 2010, cited from Plank 2011, 197.)

In other comparisons Rapgay & Bystrinsky state that for modern therapeutic proponents 'mindfulness is a practice without goals—a state of non-striving

15 This concept is found in early Buddhist text sources as the opposite of 'right mindfulness', but without further explanation (Kuan 2008, 1–2). Thich Nhat Hanh uses it in a very different sense than Plank and translates it as 'forgetfulness'. For Hanh, it refers to a psychological defence mechanism that represses mental contents and emotions beneath the conscious mind (Hanh 2006, 104).

without any specific objective', whereas 'classical mindfulness' has specific goals associated with every phase of the practice (Rapgay & Bystrinsky 2009, 158), and Bhikkhu Bodhi summarises the difference between 'a traditional Buddhist' and 'a contemporary westerner who takes up meditation against the background of a holistic secular perspective' by quoting Gil Fronsdal:

> Rather than stressing world-renunciation, they [Western lay teachers] stress engagement with, and freedom within the world. Rather than rejecting the body, these Western teachers embrace the body as part of the wholistic [sic] field of practice. Rather than stressing ultimate spiritual goals such as full enlightenment, ending the cycles of rebirth, or attaining the various stages of sainthood, many Western teachers tend to stress the immediate benefits of mindfulness and untroubled, equanimous presence in the midst of life's vicissitudes. (Bodhi 2011, 31; Fronsdal 1995.)[16]

These Theravāda-based presentations and comparisons would be quite legitimate if Theravāda tradition[17] could be held as the original historical context of mindfulness practice, as an authoritative representation of Buddhist tradition, or if contemporary non-religious mindfulness methods were based solely or mainly on Theravāda sources. However, none of these assumptions seems valid in the light of historical research. In addition, many of these characterisations lack sensitivity to the differences between modern and premodern interpretations of Buddhist practice (see Braun 2013; McMahan 2008; Sharf 1995a) and also to the plurality within Theravāda interpretations of mindfulness and meditation.

The early Buddhist roots of mindfulness practice

The English word 'mindfulness' is an established translation of a Pāli term '*sati*' (and its counterparts in other Buddhist canons), first introduced by

16 However, it is notable that in the context of the original article Fronsdal did not mean this description to be a comparison between traditional Buddhist and contemporary 'secular' practitioners of meditation, as Bodhi uses it. Instead, he wanted to highlight the differences between monastic Asian and Western lay teachers of *Buddhist vipassanā* meditation, and argued quite convincingly for the impact of American culture on the 'world-affirming' attitude of Western lay Buddhist practitioners (Fronsdal 1995).

17 The whole notion of a clearly identifiable 'Theravāda tradition' in the precolonial history of Asian Buddhism can be contested, and seen partly as a later projection of Western scholarship (see Skilling 2009; Skilling et al. 2012). However, with sensitivity to its limitations, the concept of 'Theravāda Buddhism' is widely accepted as a useful heuristic device in historical research for capturing particular developments within the history of Buddhist thought and practice.

T.S. Rhys Davids in 1881. The choice of expression was not obvious, for the Buddhist technical term refers to a doctrinal concept, which differs from mere 'remembering' or 'recollection' as the basic meanings of the word's root (Gethin 2011, 263–6). In her study of Buddhist meditation Sarah Shaw captures this difference, while pointing to the importance of the concept in Buddhist tradition as a whole:

> The word derives from the root for 'memory' (Skst *smṛti*) though this does not quite accommodate all its shades of meaning, which is more an 'attentiveness directed towards the present'. Mindfulness is that quality that characterizes the mind that is alert, awake and free from befuddlement. Rightly applied it becomes a path factor, the first of the factors of enlightenment, considered to be the basis of all Buddhist meditation teaching. (Shaw 2006, 76.)

Even if the English word 'mindfulness', with its particular Western connotations (see Gethin 2011; Sun 2014), was first introduced as a translation of a Pāli term from the Theravāda canon, the concept signified by the term goes back to the early days of Buddhism, and it is essential to all the later main branches of Buddhism: Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna.[18]

As a historical concept, early Buddhism can be used specifically to designate a relatively unified canonical period before the rule of King Asoka (ca. 270–230 BCE) and the division of the early Buddhist community (*saṅgha*) into different schools with their particular doctrinal and practical positions (Collins 1990, 89; Kuan 2008, 2–3; Lamotte 1988, 517–21).[19] In his doctoral thesis Tse-fu Kuan has reconstructed and analysed the doctrinal concept of mindfulness (P. *sati*, S. *smṛti*) in early Buddhist texts through a comparative and critical analysis of particular Pāli *Nikāyas* of the Theravāda canon, together with their Sanskrit and Chinese counterparts from comparable early schools, which are 'just as important as the Pāli *Nikāyas* in understanding early Buddhism' (Kuan 2008, 3–4).

In the early text formulas or 'pericopes' the faculty of mindfulness (*satindrya*) and the right mindfulness of the eightfold path (*sammā sati*) can be defined as the accurate function of memory:

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18 Within these main Buddhist traditions a multitude of heterogeneous sub-traditions is to be found, divided on doctrinal, practical, historical, and geographical grounds (Samuels 1993; Skilling et al. 2012; Williams 2009), and in critical research differences are also found between teachers and students in direct teacher lineages (see e.g. Braun 2013; Bodhi 2011).

19 The chronology of early Indian Buddhism, and the possibility of making solid arguments about the characteristic doctrinal or practical positions of 'pre-Aśokan' Buddhism, is a much debated topic among scholars. For discussion and different viewpoints on these contested issues, see Cousins 1996; Gombrich 1996; Ruegg & Schmithausen 1990, 1–56; Williams 2009, 7–20.

> And monks, what is the faculty of *sati*? Here, monks, a noble disciple is possessed of *sati*, endowed with supreme "mindfulness and discrimination" (*satinepakka*), is one who remembers, who recollects what was done and said long ago. (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* V 198, cited from Kuan 2008, 15.)

Nevertheless, the definition referring to the 'four establishments of mindfulness' (*satipaṭṭhāna*) is more common, and it can be held as the paradigmatic definition of mindfulness in the early texts:[20]

> The four establishments of mindfulness. What four? Here, monks, a monk dwells contemplating the body as a body[21] […] contemplating feelings as feelings […] contemplating mind as mind […] He dwells contemplating *dhammas* as *dhammas*, ardent, fully aware, possessed of mindfulness, in order to remove[22] covetousness and dejection concerning the world. (Majjhima Nikāya I 56; Dīgha Nikāya II 290, cited from Kuan 2008, 112.)

S*atipaṭṭhāna* refers to a comprehensive method of Buddhist practice, both in meditation and in daily life, in which all the physical and mental experiences of an individual are observed and reflected in the light of Buddha's teaching (*Dharma*) (Kuan 2008, 13–16, 104–138). The contemplation of impermanence (*anicca*) is especially emphasised (Kuan 2008, 119). The detailed instructions are mainly articulated in the different versions of *Satipaṭṭhāna* and *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, where it is described as the comprehensive, direct, or only (*ekāyana*) path 'for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of suffering and dejection, for the attainment of the method', and 'for the realization of *Nibbāna*' (*Majjhima Nikāya* I 55-56; *Dīgha Nikāya* II 290, cited from Kuan 2008, 128).[23] *Satipaṭṭhāna* can sometimes be presented exclusively as a description of *vipassanā*

20 See Kuan 2008, 140; Bodhi 2011, 23–7.

21 Possible translations also include 'the body in the body' (see Kuan 2008, 113; Hanh 2006, 10).

22 Also translated as 'having removed…' (Bodhi & Nāṇamoli 1995). Bhikkhu Sujato accredits both translations, and presents them as different stages of the practice (Sujato 2012).

23 However, it should be kept in mind that the relevance or widespread use of *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* as a 'practical guide' to meditation in premodern Asia can be questioned. According to Sharf, prior to the late 19th century and the work of Phra Acharn Mun (1870–1949) in Thailand, Dharmapaila (1864–1933) in Sri Lanka, and U Narada (1868–1955) and Ledi Sayadaw (1846-1923) in Burma this text was used more for the accumulation of merit through devotional recitation than for practical instructions for meditation in South Asian monastic settings (Sharf 1995a, 242). The discussion around *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* gives valuable insights into the continuities and discontinuities between early texts, canonical commentaries, and practical interpretations of modern Buddhist teachers in the postcolonial era.

meditation, in the manner of Plank and Olendzki, but several scholars and Theravāda authorities argue that this is mainly a modern interpretation[24] and *satipaṭṭhāna* should rather be seen as a set of comprehensive instructions for Buddhist practice, which covers both the deep meditative absorptions (*jhāna*) induced by 'one-pointed concentration' in serenity meditation (*samatha)* and the development of insight (*vipassanā*) in both meditation and daily life (Bodhi 2000b; 1515; Gethin 2015, 15–7; Nyanaponika 1962, 104; Kuan 2008, 104–31; Sujato 2012, 317–36).[25]

As the early canonical definition of *satipaṭṭhāna* practice implies, mindfulness holds a central place in the soteriological scheme of early Buddhist texts. According to Kuan, it 'serves as a general guideline or a fundamental principle that is to be applied to various practices, including *samatha* and *vipassana* meditation as well as daily activities' (Kuan 2008, 139), and it works through different functions of simple awareness, protective awareness, introspective awareness, and deliberately forming conceptions[26] (Kuan 2008, 41–56). In all these functions mindfulness conducts the cognitive processes of identification, recognition, conception, and memory in a 'wholesome' way in line with Buddhist ideals, and protects the practitioner from harmful mental states, habitual reactive tendencies, and subjective misconceptions based on the 'unwholesome' tendencies of desire, ill-will, and ignorance. Thus, with mindful awareness 'one can properly identify reality, abandon wrong views and maintain emotional equanimity, *upekkhā*' (Kuan 2008, 139). Through these cognitive and emotional transformations, achieved mainly through a combination of *samath*a and *vipassanā* practice,[27] it is possible to attain freedom from greed, hatred, and ignorance and to gain insight into the three characteristics of existence, i.e. impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and lack of self (*anattā*). In a fully developed form this process leads to the realisation of Nibbāna and the final liberation from the wheel of rebirth (*saṃsāra*) (Gethin 1998, 198–201; Gombrich 1996, 96–133; Kuan 2008, 13–40, 57–80, 139).

24 Sujato connects it specifically to a particular modern sub-school called 'vipassana-doctrine' (*vipassanāvādā*) within the modern Theravāda tradition (Sujato 2012).

25 This is also the view expressed by Buddhaghosa in canonical Theravāda commentaries from 300–400 C.E. (Gethin 2015, 16).

26 By aiding the formation of beneficial conceptions and mental images, mindfulness also has a key role in loving-kindness (*mettā*) meditation, recollection of Buddha (*buddhānussati*), and different types of visualisation (Kuan 2008, 52–6).

27 The exact relationship between *samatha* and *vipassanā* practice in early Buddhism is a debated topic among scholars: for a discussion, see Bronkhorst 1993; Gethin 1998, 198–201; Gombrich 1996; King 1992.

Buddhist mindfulness: A general importance and a variety of interpretations

Theravāda tradition is based on one of the many early schools of Buddhism that developed after the pre-sectarian canonical period, when the Buddhist community (*saṅgha*) broke into various sub-schools because of differences concerning doctrine and the monastic code. The teachings of other early schools were not lost, but many positions were developed further within Mahāyāna and the later Vajrayāna traditions (Gethin 2015, 25–9; Williams 2009, 1–44). Although it is the oldest surviving Buddhist sub-school, Theravāda cannot be *equated* with early Buddhism or considered a shared root of later Buddhism. Similarly, while the Pāli canon of Theravāda is the oldest complete collection of canonical texts, it is not an unaltered representation of early Buddhism. Besides the inevitable errors of oral transmission, it contains editorial modifications to support particular doctrinal positions, and these have also affected the texts of *Satipaṭṭhāna* and *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*[28] (Gethin 2001, 16–25; Gombrich 1996, 8–12; Kuan 2008, 3–8, 83–97, 105–12; Sujato 2012, 317–36). While the Pāli canon is an essential source of Buddhist thought, it would be highly misleading to claim uncritically that 'all Buddhists uphold the presentation of mindfulness in Pali, the oldest language extant that documents the original teachings of the Buddha' (Rapgay & Bystrinsky 2009, 152), or to use only Pāli texts as the source for an understanding of 'original' Buddhist mindfulness. For example, where Theravāda *Abhidhamma* classifies mindfulness as a universal wholesome factor which is only present in wholesome mental states and always connected to other beneficial qualities, canonical *Sarvastivāda* sources present it as a general mental quality that is always present in both skilful and unskilful states of mind. Yet another later school, *Yogācāra*, holds it as a feature of only some particular states of mind, both skilful and unskilful. Not surprisingly, these influential schools also differ in their precise definitions of mindfulness and in the possible range of its objects (Gethin 2015, 21–3).

Instead of being an essentially Theravāda concept, mindfulness (with its closely associated attributes of awareness, wakefulness, clear view, equanimity, and concentration) is valued within all the 'main branches' of Buddhism: Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna (Berzin 2002; Nagarjuna & Gyatso 1975; Gethin 1998, 161–201; Gethin 2015; Nyanaponika 1962, 194–204). In

28 Among the influential contemporary Buddhist teachers, e.g. Thich Nhat Hanh uses both Pāli (Theravāda) and Chinese (Sarvastivāda/Mahāyāna) translations of *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* in his treatise on mindfulness practice, and explicitly draws out the differences between them (Hanh 2006).

the long history of Buddhist thought and practice it has repeatedly been used to capture relevant mental functions and qualities in the various forms of Buddhist meditation. Besides Theravāda-based *vipassanā* and *samatha* practice, including loving-kindness meditation (*mettā-bhāvanā*) and recollection practices (*anussati*), mindfulness is also an integral constituent in descriptions of Chinese Ch'an meditations and the visualisation of the early *Fa-hsiang* tradition, or the Tibetan *Dzogch'en* and *Mahāmudrā* practices, to name just some examples[29] Gethin 2015, 25–30; Harvey 2013, 318–75; Sharf 2014, 938–40; Shaw 2006, 109–67; 2009, 188–90; Sponberg 1986, 25–30). As a common characteristic within the diversity of practice methods, 'mindfulness seems always to be understood as holding of attention on something; in some practices this involves holding the attention on the breath or the emotion of friendliness; in others, the emphasis is on holding attention on the way mind works, that is, on the process of attention itself' (Gethin 2015, 31). Besides meditation, it can be seen as a crucial ingredient in devotional activities[30] and everyday life, 'whether one is chanting, studying, meditating, debating, or engaging in daily affairs' (Olendzki 2014, 68). Because of its general importance, mindfulness is sometimes presented as a distinct characteristic of the Buddhist tradition as a whole (Conze 1962, 51), and the significance of mindfulness in the Buddhist path is captured in many widely shared core doctrines as the seventh factor of the 'noble eightfold path',[31] the first 'factor of enlightenment' (*bojjhaṅga*), and one of the five 'spiritual faculties' *(indriya)* and 'spiritual powers' (*bala*) (Berzin 2002; Bodhi 2011, 24; Gethin 1998, 59–84; Harvey 2013, 321–324, 50–87; Nyanaponika 1962, 28–29).

While the general importance of mindfulness in Buddhist tradition seems undeniable, its conceptualisations and practical implications may still vary considerably between premodern and contemporary interpretations, between particular lineages and branches of Buddhism, and between teachers within particular lineages (See Bodhi 2011; Gethin 2015). Even if one were to describe solely canonical Theravāda notions, this diversity of interpretations must be acknowledged, as Bodhi emphasises:

29 At the same time, some *particular* definitions of mindfulness may be criticised on doctrinal or practical grounds in certain approaches (Sharf 2014).

30 In many cases separating Buddhist 'meditation' from 'devotional practice' may prove difficult (see Sponberg 1986, 15–21).

31 The 'noble eightfold path' includes 'right' view, resolve, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration. It leads 'to the cessation of the painful', as described in four 'Noble Truths' (*ariya-sacca*) (see e.g. Harvey 2013, 50–87).

> In certain types of mindfulness practice, conceptualization and discursive thought may be suspended in favour of non-conceptual observation, but there is little evidence in the Pāli Canon and its commentaries that mindfulness by its very nature is devoid of conceptualization. In some types of mindfulness practice emphasis falls on simple observation of what is occurring in the present, in others less so […] Mindfulness may be focused on a single point of observation, as in mindfulness of breathing, especially when developed for the purpose of attaining concentration (samādhi). But mindfulness may also be open and undirected, accessing whatever phenomena appear, especially when applied for the purpose of developing insight (vipassanā). Still other types of mindfulness practice make extensive use of conceptualization and discursive thought, but apply them in a different way than in ordinary thinking. (Bodhi 2011, 28.)

Beyond the context of meditation Bodhi describes 'right mindfulness' as the 'guarantor of the correct practice of all the other path factors', which helps to 'distinguish wholesome qualities from unwholesome ones, good deeds from bad deeds, beneficial states of mind from harmful states' (Bodhi 2011, 26). These descriptions clearly show the danger of overly narrow definitions and characterisations of mindfulness, and its importance in Buddhist life beyond the practice of meditation.

While simple uniform presentations may accurately describe *a type of Buddhist mindfulness in a particular historical lineage of practice*, they do not do justice to the variety of functions and qualities associated with mindfulness in the complexity of Buddhist thought and practice. When this plural and multifaceted nature of Buddhist tradition is acknowledged, there are concrete implications for the discussion concerning the Buddhist roots of contemporary non-religious mindfulness practice. Instead of Theravāda-based presentations or abstract notions of 'classical Buddhism', the discussion would benefit from a lineage-based approach, where particular Buddhist teachers influential in the development of a certain contemporary mindfulness approach are first located, and all historical or phenomenological analyses are based on their practical and doctrinal interpretations of mindfulness and meditation practice. This lineage-based approach avoids the one-sided simplicity of sectarian views, the abstract generalisations of essentialist interpretations, and the randomness of selective 'cherry-picking',[32] i.e. choosing suitable Buddhist quotations to support particular

32 An expression used by Wilson in his critique of Walpola Rahula's eclectic presentation of Buddhism as essentially rational and humanistic religion (Wilson 2014, 26–7).

arguments or agendas. In the study of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction as the pioneering and most influential contemporary mindfulness-based approach, arguments should be based on the explicitly Buddhist sources in the life and work of Jon Kabat-Zinn, the developer of the MBSR method.

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction: Channels of Buddhist influence in the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn

Buddhist teachings reached Kabat-Zinn via various routes, including the Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna interpretations. He first studied Theravāda-based *vipassanā* meditation with Robert Hover and later with Jack Kornfield, Joseph Goldstein, and other teachers in the American Insight Meditation Society (IMS) (Gilpin 2008, 238; Kabat-Zinn 2005, xxi; Kabat-Zinn 2011, 287–9). Through direct teacher-student lineages, essential in the traditional transmission of Buddhist practice, the lines of practice taught by Hover, Kornfield, and Goldstein can be traced to the Burmese monk Mahasi Sayadaw, the Burmese lay-teacher U Ba Khin, and to Ajahn Chah, a monk from the forest tradition of Thailand.[33] Robert Hover studied with U Ba Khin and his student S.N. Goenka, Joseph Goldstein with Mahasi Saydaw and his students and also with U Ba Khin's student S.N. Goenka, and Jack Kornfield was a student of both Mahasi Sayadaw and Ajahn Chah (Braun 2013, 160–3; Fronsdal 1998, 166–7; Gilpin 2008, 238; Plank 2011, 94–8).[34] U Ba Khin's lineage can be traced further back to the Burmese Theravāda monk Ledi Sayadaw (Braun 2013, 156–9), Mahasi belongs to another Burmese tradition connected to the teachings of Mingun Jetawun Sayadaw (Houtman 1990, 198–201; Mahasi 1965, 34), and Ajahn Chah was influenced by Ajahn Mun, a respected teacher in the history of modern Thai Buddhism (Chah 2011, iii–iv; Sharf 1995a, 254). Besides learning from direct teacher-student relationships with Hover and IMS teachers, Kabat-Zinn was also inspired and informed by texts from the Pāli canon and contemporary Theravāda teachers. In his writings he refers to the canonical texts *Ānāpānasati Sutta* and *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (Kabat-Zinn 2003, 146), and identifies Nyanaponika Thera's

33 All these teachers of meditation are important figures in the development of the modern postcolonial Theravāda tradition, and in the revival of *vipassanā* practice as a popular lay movement that started in Burma in the early 20th century and spread rapidly in South East Asia. While many practitioners emphasise the ancient roots and unbroken teacher-lineages of each practice method as the original teaching of Buddha, this view has been severely questioned by many scholars of Buddhism (see Braun 2013; Sharf 1995a).

34 S.N. Goenka does not consider his *vipassanā* practice as explicitly 'Buddhist' (Braun 2013, 159–160: Plank 2011, 96–105).

book *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* (1962), together with Goldstein's *The Experience of Insight* (1976), as central sources in the development of MBSR and in his 'appreciation of the dharma' (Kabat-Zinn et al. 1985, 165; Kabat-Zinn 2011, 290; see also Gilpin 2008, 238).

Kabat-Zinn's affiliation to the Zen traditions of Mahāyāna Buddhism is also based both on direct teacher-student relations and on written sources. He was a student and 'a Dharma teacher in training' under the Korean master Seung Sahn, and worked for a time as the director of the *Cambridge Zen Center* (Kabat-Zinn 2011, 286–7). Besides Sahn, Kabat-Zinn points to Philip Kapleau as influential, because of his participation in Kapleau's meditation retreats while studying in MIT, and he also names Suzuki Roshi and Thich Nhat Hanh as Mahāyāna teachers to whom he is 'greatly indebted' (Kabat-Zinn 2005, xxi). Among canonical Mahāyāna texts *Heart Sutra* (*Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya*) is clearly studied in detail, and its central teachings on 'emptiness' (S. *śūnyatā*) are applied to the MBSR programme:

> [T]here was from the very beginning of MBSR an emphasis on non-duality and the non-instrumental dimension of practice, and thus, on non-doing, non-striving, not-knowing, non-attachment to outcomes, even to positive health outcomes, and on investigating beneath name and form and the world of appearances, as per the teachings of the Heart Sutra, which highlight the intrinsically empty nature of even the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, and liberation itself. (Kabat-Zinn 2011, 292.)[35]

Among the texts of contemporary Mahāyāna teachers Kabat-Zinn presents Shunryū Suzuki's (Suzuki Roshi) book *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* (1970) as one of the main written sources in the development of MBSR, and Thich Nhat Hanh's *The Miracle of Mindfulness* (1976) as another significant early influence (Kabat-Zinn 1982, 34; 1985, 165; 2011, 289–90). He also cites Seung Sahn's *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha* (1976) and Kapleau's *Three Pillars of Zen* (1965) (Kabat-Zinn 1982, 34). Through these teachers Kabat-Zinn was influenced by various Zen traditions within Mahāyāna Buddhism; Seung Sahn was ordained in the Korean *Chogye* school, a branch of Korean *Seon* rooted in Chinese Ch'an traditions, and later founded his own international *Kwan Um School of Zen* (Harvey 2013, 224–5, 435; Sahn 1997, xvii, 279); Shunryū Suzuki

35 The principle or attitude of practising without any expectation of attainments or goals is also expressed in the texts of the influential modern Zen teachers (Sahn 1997, 136, 226–7; 2006, 17–9; Suzuki 1970, 49, 59–61; Hanh 2006, 122–3), and also by the Thai Theravāda master Ajahn Chah (Chah 2011, 33).

represents the Sōtō school of Japanese Zen (Suzuki 1970); Kapleau belongs to the Japanese *Sanbōkyōdan* tradition, which is a mixture of Zen teachings from the *Sōtō* and *Rinzai* schools (Kapleau 1967; Sharf 1995b, 417–26); Thich Nhat Hanh is affiliated with the Vietnamese *Thien* schools *Lieu Quan* and *Lam Te*, which both are descended from the *Lin-Chi* school[36] of the Chinese Ch'an tradition, and in 1966 founded his own school *Thiep Hien* (The Order of Interbeing) (Harvey 2013, 411–2; Hunt-Perry & Fine 2000, 36–40).

The Vajrayāna influences of Tibetan Buddhism are less articulated in Kabat-Zinn's work, but he names Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche's *Meditation in Action* (1969) as an influential book at the time he developed MBSR (Kabat-Zinn 2011, 289–90), and mentions his practice with Tibetan *Dzogch'en*[37] teachers in more recent years (Gilpin 2008, 238). Trungpa is affiliated with both the *Kagyu* and *Nyingma* schools of Tibetan Buddhism, and *Dzogch'en* meditation is especially connected with the *Nyingma* school (Harvey 2013, 144, 437; Trungpa 1969).

This short review of the known Buddhist influences in Kabat-Zinn's life and work demonstrates his study of a broad spectrum of Buddhist thought and practice, and that his knowledge is *both theoretical and embodied* through the study of canonical and contemporary Buddhist texts and years of personal meditation practice with Buddhist teachers. Kabat-Zinn describes his own practice as 'a mix of Zen and vipassana elements, now leavened by Dzogchen', and the MBSR method as *vipassanā* practice 'with a Zen attitude' (Gilpin 2008, 238). In his inclusive view of Buddhism all three major traditions may provide useful insights for teaching mindfulness in the MBSR method, for 'we cannot follow a strict Theravadan approach, nor a strict Mahayana approach, nor a strict Vajrayana approach, although elements of all these great traditions and the sub-lineages within them are relevant and might inform how we, as a unique person with a unique dharma history, approach specific teaching moments' (Kabat-Zinn 2011, 299). This same inclusive approach is evident in his wider conceptualisation of mindfulness, rarely mentioned in any research:

> Naming what we were doing in the clinic mindfulness-based stress reduction raises a number of questions. One is the wisdom of using the word mindfulness intentionally as an umbrella term to describe our work and to link it explicitly with what I have always considered to be a universal dharma

36 Also the origin of the Japanese *Rinzai* school (Harvey 2013, 231).

37 *Dzogch'en* is a meditation practice which emphasises 'pure awareness' and the inherent Buddha-nature within all beings (Harvey 2013, 359–61).

> that is co-extensive, if not identical, with the teachings of the Buddha, the Buddhadharma. By 'umbrella term' I mean that it is used in certain contexts as a place-holder for the entire dharma, that it is meant to carry multiple meanings and traditions simultaneously, not in the service of finessing and confounding real differences, but as a potentially skillful means for bringing the streams of alive, embodied dharma understanding and of clinical medicine together. (Kabat-Zinn 2011, 290.)

In conclusion, there seems to be little justification for basing arguments about the Buddhist roots of MBSR and contemporary non-religious mindfulness solely on Theravāda doctrine and canonical Pāli sources. On the contrary, the reference to 'Heart Sūtra' or a past teacher position in the Zen centre shows a deep familiarity with Mahāyāna doctrine and its principles of practice. In addition, it is worth noting that a large part of Kabat-Zinn's Buddhist influences comes directly from contemporary teachers, who represent 'Buddhist modernism', referring to postcolonial 20th century interpretations of Buddhist practice which have been shaped in many ways through cultural contact and dialogue with Western values and worldviews (Braun 2013; McMahan 2008; Sharf 1995a).

Mindfulness and the doctrinal frames of meditation practice

Space does not allow a detailed analysis of the Buddhist influences on Kabat-Zinn's work and the MBSR method within this article. Instead, I will proceed by drawing attention to the connections between particular doctrinal positions, the objectives of meditation practice, and the interpretations of mindfulness to show some significant variations in thought and practice among the above-mentioned Buddhist teachers, and to highlight the fact that particular interpretations of Buddhist mindfulness are closely intertwined with specific doctrinal positions and practical approaches. [38]

While different Buddhist approaches share the aim of 'seeing things as they are', there are significant differences in their underlying assumptions concerning 'liberative insights' and the ultimate nature of reality. These assumptions, expressed in doctrinal positions, affect the conceptions of Buddhist mindfulness and objectives of meditation, as they '[put] into practice the Buddhist understanding of the world' (Gregory 1986, 6). The doctrinal

38 This analysis is grounded in the views of particular teachers with self-proclaimed Theravāda or Mahāyāna affiliations. The aim is not to compare or to make claims about the Theravāda or Mahāyāna traditions as unitary entities or substantial categories.

foundations of both modern and premodern Theravāda practice are based on interpretations of the Pāli canon and later *Abhidhamma* commentaries, and the essential liberative insights uniformly emphasised by the influential modern Theravāda teachers Mahasi Saydaw, U Ba Khin, Ajahn Chah, and Nyanaponika Thera are realisations of impermanence (*anicca*), suffering or non-satisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and the lack of soul or permanent self (*anattā*) (Chah 2011, 252–3, 459; Nyanaponika 1962, 36, 43–4; Mahasi 1965, I, 9; 1971, 18–23, 31; Ba Khin 2012, 12–22). These 'characteristics of existence' are perceived through *vipassanā* practice, or the combination of *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditation, and especially in the Burmese approaches the progressive path to liberation is seen to follow the stages of 'purification' described in Buddhaghosa's canonical commentary *Visuddhimagga* (5th century C.E.) (Mahasi 1965, 1–26; Ba Khin 1961). In the approaches of Mahasi Saydaw and U Ba Khin the 'deconstructive' side of mindful observation and meditation is central, as liberative insights and the attainment of 'stream-entry' (understood as the direct experience of Nibbāna) follow directly from the deconstruction of sense experiences into their fundamental constituents (Sayadaw 1965, 20–1; 1971, 27–33; U Ba Khin 1991, 26–7). In the deep states of *vipassanā* meditation this process is described as reaching levels in which one 'comes to know even the momentary sub-consciousness in-between the processes of cognition' (Sayadaw 1971, 24), or where one can vividly see the body as a continual flux of 'sub-atomic particles' (*kalāpas*)[39] (Ba Khin 1991, 26; 2012, 15).

Among all the studied Theravāda teachers the frame of meditation practice is strongly marked by a worldview in which suffering is an inherent part of reality, and the ultimate goal is to find a 'supramundane' escape from the worldly existence, as summarised by U Ba Khin:

> [T]he disciple […] focuses his attention into his own self and, by introspective meditation, makes an analytical study of the nature […] He feels—and at times he also sees—the kalāpas in their true state. He begins to realize

39 'A corporeal unit of matter in the *Abhidhamma* system, often equated to a subatomic particle in contemporary literature, primarily comprised of the four primary elements (*dhātus*)' (Braun 2013; 173). The direct observation of *kalāpas* is strongly emphasised in U Ba Khin's (and S.N. Goenka's) *vipassanā* method, but this objective is rarely found among other contemporary Theravāda teachers, and it can also be seen as a simplification of Ledi Saydaw's method (Braun 2013: 157–8).

> that both rūpa[40] and nāma[41] are in constant change—impermanent and fleeting. As his power of concentration increases, the nature of the forces in him becomes more and more vivid. He can no longer get out of the impression that the pañca-kkhandhā, or five aggregates, are suffering, within the Law of Cause and Effect. He is now convinced that, in reality, all is suffering within and without, and there is no such thing as an ego. He longs for a state beyond suffering. So eventually going beyond the bounds of suffering, he moves from the mundane to the supramundane state and enters the stream of sotāpanna, the first of the four stages of the ariyas (Noble Ones). (Ba Khin 1991, 26–27.)

This view exhibits a sharp qualitative differentiation between immanent reality and transcendent 'supramundane' states (culminating in the experience of Nibbāna) in which mundane worldly existence is seen as highly unsatisfactory. This same dualism is also vividly expressed in Nyanaponika Thera's description of mundane existence as 'a revolting Wheel of Life and Suffering to which, like to an instrument of torture, beings are bound, and on which they are broken again and again' (Nyanaponika 1962, 51).

Doctrinal developments in Mahāyāna Buddhism, and especially in the *Mādhyamika* and *Yogācāra* traditions, question these dualistic views of reality by emphasising the interconnected nature of all phenomena, and their fundamental 'emptiness' (S. *śūnyatā*) of independent or separate existence. According to these 'philosophical schools', all dualistic conceptual distinctions, including those between the phenomenal world (*saṃsāra*) and the unconditioned *Nibbāna*, can be seen as misleading or only 'conventionally' true in the light of 'absolute' understanding (Williams 2009, 63–102). This doctrine of emptiness, together with the '*tathāgatagarbha* tradition' of Mahāyāna thought, was adapted and developed further by the early traditions of Chinese Buddhism that gave rise to Ch'an (J. Zen) practice. In interpretations of '*tathāgatagarbha*' doctrine the empty nature of absolute reality can be understood as a pure, radiant, and beginningless 'inherent Buddha nature' of all existence, and, in distinction from the 'limited and partial' Theravāda and *Hīnayāna*[42] conceptions, all forms of existence can now be seen as manifestations of an intrinsically pure absolute nature (Gregory 1986,

40 'Form, meaning physicality or materiality' (Braun 2013, 175). Footnote added by the author.
41 'Literally, name, meaning mind or mentality' (Braun 2013, 174). Footnote added by the author.
42 A pejorative name for those 'mainstream' Buddhist schools that did not accept the authority of the Mahāyāna *sūtras* (Harvey 2013, 112–113; Williams 2009, 268).

6–8). Consequently, the phenomenal world of mundane everyday experience could be revalidated and the beauty of the natural world appreciated in Chinese Ch'an forms of Buddhist thought and practice (Gregory 1986; Harvey 2013, 138–49; Stevensson 1986, 65–83; Williams 2009, 103–48).

Zen views on mindfulness and meditation: Thich Nhat Hanh, Seung Sahn, and Shunryū Suzuki

These different doctrinal emphases within the Mahāyāna tradition are clearly visible in the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh, Seung Sahn, and Shunryū Suzuki, whose lineages go back to Chinese Ch'an Buddhism and its sub-schools.[43] In Hanh's interpretation of *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* the doctrine of interdependence and emptiness is essential, as 'a student of Buddhism who doesn't practice the mindful observation of interdependence[44] hasn't yet arrived at the quintessence of the Buddhist path' (Hanh 2006, 99):

> There is no dharma[45] which can exist apart from other dharmas, and that is why we say that the real nature of dharmas is emptiness […] With insight into emptiness, we'll go beyond concepts of 'it is' and 'it is not,' birth and death, one and many, coming and going, and we'll transcend the fear of birth and death. (Hanh 2006, 96–7.)

This non-dualistic metaphysical view and interpretative frame of experience is embodied and validated in the practice of meditation, which 'doesn't lead us to feel aversion for life´, but 'helps us see the preciousness of all that lives' (Hanh 2006, 56). For Hanh, the main emphasis in meditation is on 'the mindful observation of the interdependent and empty nature of things' (Hanh 2006, 98):

> Sit in the full or half lotus. Begin to regulate your breath. Contemplate the nature of emptiness in the assembly of the five aggregates: bodily form,

43 For the traditions and sub-schools of Ch'an Buddhism, see Dumoulin 2005.

44 This is not only 'a Zen perspective', as is also reflected by Nyanaponika Thera's influential view that mindful observation 'is of importance not only for the analytic, i.e. dissecting and discriminating function of mind by which the elements of the object's make-up are revealed. It is also of great assistance to the equally important synthesis, i.e. for finding out the object's connections with, and relations to other things, its interaction with them, its conditioned and conditioning nature.' (Nyanaponika 1962, 35)

45 For Hanh, 'the objects of mind' and 'all that can be conceived of as existing´' comprised of 'the six sense organs, the six sense objects, and the six sense consciousnesses' (Hanh 2006, 94).

> feeling, perception, mind functionings, and consciousness […] See that all transform, are impermanent and without self. The assembly of the five aggregates is like the assembly of all phenomena: all obey the law of interdependence […] See clearly that the five aggregates are without self and are empty, but that they are also wondrous, wondrous as is each phenomenon in the universe, wondrous as the life which is present everywhere […] Try to see by this contemplation that impermanence is a concept, nonself is a concept, emptiness is a concept […] You will see that emptiness is also empty, and that the ultimate reality of emptiness is no different from the ultimate reality of the five aggregates. (Hanh 1987, 92–93.)

Doctrinal views have a direct effect on the objectives of meditative practice, and they also affect the interpretations of mindfulness as a central concept frequently related to meditation. This becomes evident in Hanh's emphasis of non-duality as a characteristic of mindful observation:

> Mindfulness is the observing mind, but it does not stand outside of the object of observation. It goes right into the object and becomes one with it. (Hanh 2006, 121.)

> While we are fully aware of and observing deeply an object, the boundary between the subject who observes and the object being observed gradually dissolves, and the subject and object become one. […] That's why the Sutra on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness reminds us to be aware of the body in the body, the feelings in the feelings, the mind in the mind, and the objects of mind in the objects of mind. (Hanh 2006, 10.)[46]

These notions of the non-dual unity of sense-objects and the observing mind become understandable in the light of the underlying *Yogācāra* teachings concerning the nature of reality, consciousness, and 'emptiness', in which all phenomenal objects can be seen fundamentally as mental projections and cognitive constructions (Hanh 2006, 119–21; Harvey 2013, 127–38; Williams 2009, 84–102). As a quality of awareness and observation, mindfulness can also be closely associated with the radiance and purity of an awakened 'true mind', which is the inherent ultimate nature of every being in the light of the *Yogācāra* and *tathāgatagarbha* interpretations:

46 Hanh's interpretation shows how details of translation can reflect doctrinal positions and vice versa. In this case both 'body as the body' and 'body in the body' are possible translations, as the original Pāli text includes both these connotations (see Kuan 2008, 113).

> Mindful observation brings out the light which exists in true mind, so that life can be revealed in its reality. In that light, confusion becomes understanding, wrong views become right views, mirages become reality, and deluded mind becomes true mind. (Hanh 2006, 122.)

In the texts of Shunryū Suzuki and Seung Sahn the presentations of reality also reflect the Mahāyāna emphases on non-duality and emptiness, and in Suzuki's texts especially the doctrine of the 'inherent Buddha-nature' is emphasised (Suzuki 1970; Sahn 1976; 1997; 2006). In Sahn's Seon approach these doctrinal views are realised mainly through *koan* practice[47] (Sahn 2006, 36–41), and in Suzuki's Sōtō Zen practice they are manifested in *zazen*, which includes both sitting meditation and everyday activities (Suzuki 1970, 118–24):

> In zazen practice we say your mind should be concentrated on your breathing, but the way to keep your mind on your breathing is to forget all about yourself and just to sit and feel your breathing […] If you continue this practice, eventually you will experience the true existence which comes from emptiness. (Suzuki 1970, 113.)

> When we ask what Buddha nature is, it vanishes; but when we just practice zazen, we have full understanding of it. The only way to understand Buddha nature is just to practice zazen, just to be here as we are. (Suzuki 1970, 131.)

For Suzuki, the most important thing is for a Zen student 'not to be dualistic' (Suzuki 1970, 21). This means that all analytical dichotomies creating separation from the oneness of reality, such as 'you and I', 'good and bad', or 'practice and enlightenment', should be avoided, as 'it is impossible to divide one whole existence into parts' (Suzuki 1970, 103, 114–21). This view also has implications for the definition of mindfulness. If Theravāda *Abhidhamma* interpretations can be more inclined towards an analytical formality in which 'a crossing of technical terms' should not exist in Buddhist terminology (Bodhi 2011, 27), Suzuki instead avoids dualistic distinctions and uses overlapping terms:

47 A form of meditation practice that aims at non-dualistic and non-conceptual insights into the nature of absolute reality through the use of (often paradoxical) questions and symbolic narratives (see Sahn 2006, 36; Harvey 2013, 366–9).

> We should accept things as they are without difficulty. Our mind should be soft and open enough to understand things as they are. When our thinking is soft, it is called imperturbable thinking. … This kind of thinking is always stable. It is called mindfulness. Thinking which is divided in many ways is not true thinking. Concentration should be present in our thinking. This is mindfulness… Your thinking should not be one-sided. We just think with our whole mind, and see things as they are without any effort. Just to see, and to be ready to see things with our whole mind, is zazen practice. If we are prepared for thinking, there is no need to make an effort to think. This is called mindfulness. Mindfulness is, at the same time, wisdom. By wisdom we do not mean some particular faculty or philosophy. It is the readiness of the mind that is wisdom […] So the point is to be ready for observing things, and to be ready for thinking. This is called emptiness of your mind. Emptiness is nothing but the practice of zazen. (Suzuki 1970, 115.)

Here again, the characteristics of mindfulness as a certain quality of thinking and observation are closely intertwined with the doctrine of emptiness and its realisation in *zazen* practice. In accordance with the emphasis on non-dualism, mindfulness is also characterised by an attitude of perfect acceptance of things 'as they are without difficulty', for 'this is the true understanding transmitted from Buddha to us' (Suzuki 1970, 120–1).

The question of the acceptance of every kind of mental state, including 'unwholesome' or 'unskilful' ones such as anger, without discrimination is complex, and there is variation in the different approaches to Buddhist practice. Whereas Suzuki's view can be seen as representing one end of the continuum, Bhikkhu Thanissaro's view, as cited by Plank,[48] represents the other. Nevertheless, there are many modern Buddhist teachers, affiliated to both Theravāda and Mahāyāna, who see patient acceptance and sheer mindful observation of unwholesome mental states such as anger and greed as a way to transform or extinguish these (see Hanh 2006, 81–3, 108; Mahasi 1971, 22–3, 27–8; Nyanaponika 1962, 42).

'World-affirming' interpretations of Buddhist thought and practice

Thich Nhat Hanh explicitly criticises the objective of a transcendent 'escape' from the cycle of rebirth, because there is no need ´to run away from our

48 See page 93.

body or from the world' (Hanh 2006, 56–61; 122–4).[49] As part of this world-affirming orientation, it is possible to appreciate aesthetic experiences and sense-based pleasures as positive forces on the Buddhist path, when enjoyed without attachment:

> Everything is impermanent. Everything is in a temporary form. Nevertheless, there are many wondrous phenomena in nature that can refresh and heal us. If we can be in contact with them, we will receive their healing benefits. If peace and joy are in our hearts, we will gradually bring more peace and joy to the world […] The blue sky, the white clouds, the gentle breezes […] free speech, good schools for children, beautiful flowers, and good health – these are the positive ingredients of peace and happiness. (Hahn 2006, 115.)

Similarly, Suzuki states that it is not a Buddhist view 'to expect something outside this world' (Suzuki 1970, 103), and he describes 'enlightenment' as the strength and deep meaningfulness in life arising from the realisation that 'everything is just a flashing into the vast universe' (Suzuki 1970, 107). The goal of practice does not lie in extraordinary states or experiences, but 'when your practice is calm and ordinary, everyday life itself is enlightenment' (Suzuki 1970, 59). For Suzuki, a certain kind of attachment to beauty can even be presented as a manifestation of the Buddha nature in human beings:

> Dogen-zenji said, 'Although everything has Buddha nature, we love flowers, and we do not care for weeds.' This is true of human nature. But that we are attached to some beauty is itself Buddha's activity. That we do not care for weeds is also Buddha's activity. We should know that. If you know that, it is all right to attach to something. If it is Buddha's attachment, that is non-attachment. (Suzuki 1970, 119.)

These 'world-affirming' interpretations of Buddhist teachings affect the conceptualisations of mindfulness, because the unattached appreciation and enjoyment of sense experiences, the physical body, and worldly joy may now be considered as essential elements of the 'right mindfulness' contributing to individual and collective happiness:

49 These views can be seen as a reflection of Hanh's commitment to socially 'engaged Buddhism', but at the same time the whole idea of 'engaged Buddhism' can be seen as a logical outcome of doctrinal interpretations, where 'individual' suffering or unhappiness cannot be separated from the suffering of 'others' at both the social and environmental levels (see Queen, 2000).

> To be able to breathe can be a great source of real happiness […] To be able to see beautiful colors and forms is happiness […] Having sound and healthy limbs to be able to run and jump, living in an atmosphere of freedom, not being separated from our family – all these things and thousands more can be elements of happiness […] Awareness of these precious elements of happiness is itself the practice of Right Mindfulness. (Hanh 2006, 70.)

These views of the explicit appreciation of worldly life and sense-based enjoyment seem to stand in sharp contrast with some conceptions found in the early Buddhist texts, in which 'whatever in the world has an agreeable and pleasing nature is called a thorn in the Noble One's Discipline' (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* IV 189, cited from Kuan 2008), or with modern Theravāda teachers such as Bhikkhu Thanissaro[50] and Mahasi Sayadaw, who may present any 'sensual delight' as a distraction and hindrance to Buddhist practice (Mahasi 1965, 7). Nevertheless, they are authentic expressions of Buddhist thought, based on the Mahāyāna Sūtras[51] and long traditions of doctrine and practice, displaying the wide variety of orientations and interpretations found within 'Buddhism' as a whole.

A remark on the relationship of soteriological goals and practical benefits in Buddhist practice

While the fundamental frames of meditation practice are tied to various soteriological goals and doctrinal ideals, the judging of practical worldly benefits, and especially of psychological well-being, as 'extra-Buddhist goals' (McMahan 2008, 57; Plank 2011, 187; 2014a, 46–7) is not necessarily entirely justified. Buddhism has always spread to new geographical and cultural areas through its ability to provide practical benefits at both societal and individual levels (Reader & Tanabe 1998; Wilson 2014, 4–6, 142), and the modern history of Buddhist meditation is no exception (Braun 2013, 165; Sharf 1995a, 258–9; Wilson 2014, 24–9, 76–8, 109–12). Among modern Theravāda teachers the practical everyday benefits of mindfulness and meditation practice are usually seen as auxiliary gains on the way to the ultimate goal, as presented by Nyanaponika Thera (Nyanaponika 1962, 7, 49–50), Ajahn Chah (Chah 2011, 219), and U Ba Khin (for whom the un-

50 See page 93.

51 Such as *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* and *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* (Hanh 1990, 94–6, 120–30; Suzuki 1970, 38, 48, 113).

limited healing potential of meditation still includes even the eradication of radioactive poisons) (Ba Khin 1991, 85–6). But for Thich Nhat Hanh, the practical benefits of health and well-being have a central role instead. Here, soteriological liberation and the psychological healing of anxiety, guilt, childhood traumas, and past mistreatments are two sides of the same process, because different psychological conditions are manifestations of karmic attachments and internal mental formations (S. *saṃyojana*) which can be brought to awareness and transformed through the practice of meditation and mindfulness (Hanh 2006, 99–112). For Hanh, worldly benefits are not merely the auxiliary by-products of Buddhist practice, but the essential ingredients and manifestations of liberation, as the title of his commentary on *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta Transformation & Healing* implies (Hanh 2006, 112–7).

Summary and conclusions

In the light of historical and textual research it seems unfounded to hold the Theravāda tradition as the original historical context of mindfulness practice or as an authoritative form of Buddhism. Nor, based on the analysis of diverse Buddhist influences in the life and work of Jon Kabat-Zinn, should it be presented as the exclusive Buddhist source of the MBSR programme. When presentations of Buddhist mindfulness are based solely on Theravāda sources, whether explicitly or by reference to 'classical Buddhism', they give a limited and oversimplified picture of Buddhist doctrine and practice, and distort all further comparisons between Buddhist mindfulness and contemporary forms of non-religious mindfulness practice. Consequently, most of the characterisations of Buddhist mindfulness and their claimed key differences from contemporary Western or non-religious forms of mindfulness as presented in a number of previous studies on the subject seem valid only from particular Theravāda perspectives, or if the concept of 'traditional' or 'classical' Buddhism is used as a synonym for the Theravāda tradition.

Plank's emphasis on the deconstructive aspects of mindfulness awareness, her interpretation of related key concepts, and the equation of mindfulness (and *satipaṭṭhāna* practice) with *vipassanā* meditation by both Plank and Olendzki constitute an accurate presentation of a particular interpretative tradition of mindfulness and meditation practice associated especially with certain modern Burmese Theravāda teachers. However, historical examination shows that this description should not be taken as a standard or 'original' model of Buddhist mindfulness. Rather, it may be seen as specific or idiosyncratic even within the Theravāda canon. Similarly, the claim of the

inseparable connection between mindfulness and other 'wholesome' and beneficial mental states is based solely on Theravāda *Abhidhamma*, and it does not do justice to the formulations of the *Sarvastivāda* or *Yogācāra* schools which serve as the canonical basis for many Mahāyāna interpretations.

Both Olendzki and Wilson seem to over-emphasise mindfulness practice as *a type of meditation – vipassanā* with a 'moving concentration', according to Olendzki, and a combination of both *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditation (but excluding visualisations), according to Wilson. However, the historical presentations of mindfulness seem to be more indicative of a general principle or mental function relevant in a range of Buddhist meditative practices, and also in devotional activities and daily practice. The concept of mindfulness seems to be closely linked to the ability to keep in mind the teachings and viewpoints of a particular Buddhist tradition, to reflect all subjective experiences and specific situations through these teachings, and to act on the basis of these reflections, which form the basis for the Buddhist identity and way of life[52]. This general relevance of mindfulness inevitably challenges Wilson's idealisation of premodern Asian Buddhist mindfulness practice as 'clearly associated with monastic concerns' and essentially 'a part of a celibate, renunciatory, home-leaving monastic path'.

Even if we focus only on the specific functions of mindfulness in meditation, it should not be associated exclusively with a particular type of concentration or practice method. Instead, it can be seen more as a quality of introspective or metacognitive awareness of the present moment experience which 'guards the mind' from distractions, however these are interpreted in a particular approach. This characteristic functioning of mindfulness in meditation comes close to the root meaning of *sati* as 'remembering', because the practitioner must remember to keep in mind the object of meditation again and again (Gethin 2011, 270). Through these aspects mindfulness is an elementary part of all attention-regulation and the purposeful development of any type of sustained concentration, explaining its significance in a wide variety of meditative practices in the history of Buddhism.

This brief examination of the doctrinal views of the various Buddhist teachers who have influenced Jon Kabat-Zinn and the development of the MBSR method shows how different the underlying views of reality and 'liberation' can be within Buddhism, and how these ultimate frames of interpretation have a significant impact on the aims of meditative practice and the particular conceptualisation of mindfulness. Based on the analysis

52 See also Gethin 2011, 270–1.

I have presented, I am led to conclude that aiming for the practical benefits of psychological well-being, enjoying sense experiences and the physical body with appreciation, accepting difficult mental states as they are (without acting on them), and the practice of meditation with the attitude of 'non-striving' can all be elements of Buddhist mindfulness and meditative practice as presented in the texts of modern Buddhist teachers. Thus, they cannot be held as definitive criteria for contrasting contemporary non-religious mindfulness approaches to Buddhist practice in any generally obvious sense.[53] Recognising various 'world-affirming' traditions and viewpoints in the history of Buddhist thought and practice and among influential modern teachers is important because it questions all simple characterisations of Buddhist meditation as invariably 'other-worldly' oriented, or categorically denying the possibility for appreciation of worldly life and sensual experiences. The 'Americanisation' of Buddhist practice, adaptations to the Western individualistic ethos, and features of the 'Buddhist modernism' already found in postcolonial Asia have certainly played a significant part in the 'world-affirming' views of many contemporary teachers and practitioners of meditation (both Buddhist and non-Buddhist) (Braun 2013; Fronsdal 1998; McMahan 2008; Wilson 2014). Still, these orientations can be seen as already having roots in the doctrinal changes of the early Mahāyāna tradition and their practical implications, especially in the Chinese Ch'an lineages of Buddhist practice (Gregory 1986; Harvey 2013, 138–149; Williams 2009).

Discussion

According to some historians of religion, the pluralism within Buddhism is so rich 'that it seems better to regard the term 'Buddhism' as describing a family of religions, each with its own integrity, much as 'monotheism' covers a family of religions that are related but so inherently different that they cannot be reduced to a common core' (Robinson et al. 2005, xxi).[54] While separating Buddhist tradition into three different religions may go too far in 'downplaying the continuities and the many connections in the vast network

53 However, this does not mean that there are no significant differences between Buddhist practice and contemporary therapeutic mindfulness approaches, but only that the issue is more complex than often presented.

54 Robinson et al. delineate three separate Buddhist religions in the living traditions of Buddhism in the modern world: the Theravāda tradition centred on the Pāli canon; the East Asian tradition centred on the Chinese canon; and the Tibetan tradition centred on the Tibetan canon (Robinson et al. 2005, xxi).

of Buddhism' (Harvey 2013, 5), it shows the problems inherent in presenting Buddhism as a unitary phenomenon, or giving an authoritative position to some particular sub-tradition as 'the Buddhist view' on doctrinal or practical issues. In previous studies on the historical Buddhist roots of contemporary non-religious mindfulness practice explicit Theravāda-based presentations of Buddhist mindfulness may be seen as exemplifying 'sectarian' approaches which present the formulations of one Buddhist sub-tradition as the relevant, authentic, or authoritative Buddhist position. In turn, the presentations of 'classical Buddhism' and 'classical mindfulness training' fall prey to the fallacy of essentialism, which occurs 'when we take a single name or a naming expression and assume that it must refer to one unified phenomenon', instead of looking behind linguistic unities and seeing them as 'simply constructions' (Williams 2009, 2–3).

Besides being relevant for historical research on Buddhism, the critique of essentialism is also emphasised in contemporary discussion concerning the 'world religions paradigm' within the study of religion (see Fitzgerald 1999; King 1999; Masuzawa 2005; Smith 1982; Owen 2011; Taira 2013). Here, it is directed towards presentations of religion that are 'subjective (biased) and unempirical (based on essentialisms rather than ethnographic and historical data)' (Owen 2011, 253–4), and part of a model which 'conceptualises religious ideas and practice as being configured by a series of major religious systems that can be clearly identified as having discrete characteristics' (Suthren Hirst and Zavos 2005, 5, cited from Owen 2011, 254). Because of the long history of textual bias in academic research, the 'true' form of religions is often idealised as abstractions to be found in authoritative texts, instead of being presented as the living expressions of actual people.[55] As a result, the model of world religions often 'hierarchizes the diverse traditions within each broadly defined religion […], and marginalizes localized expressions' (Owen 2011, 255). In the case of Buddhism 'authentic' tradition often becomes located in canonical texts, not in the lives or actions of living Buddhist people (King 1999, 150), and 'usually the earliest form, such as the Buddhism of the Pāli texts, is presented as the norm, while later forms, such as Mahāyāna Buddhism, may be excluded altogether or only given a brief overview' (Owen 2011, 255). The idea that Theravāda Buddhism is closer to the Buddha's original teaching and a purer form of Buddhism, which already has a long history in academic research, persists even today, at the expense of other Buddhist traditions (King 1999, 159).

55 This observation is highly relevant in discussion concerning the 'true' objectives of Buddhist meditation.

The essentialist presentations of 'classical' Buddhism, with their emphasis on Theravāda sources and canonical Pāli texts, and the sectarian views of Theravāda as the original religious context of mindfulness practice, seem to follow these questionable historical patterns of academic research quite closely. As it is, there are grounds for some intriguing historical comparisons, based on King's description of 'Orientalist' ideological agendas in the early academic 'discovery of Buddhism':

> Locating the essence of 'Buddhism' in certain 'canonical' texts, of course, allows the Orientalist to maintain the authority to speak about the 'true' nature of Buddhism, abstractly conceived. Such ahistorical constructs can then be contrasted with the corrupt and decadent practices of contemporary Asian Buddhists by a normative appeal to the purity of the 'original texts'. (King 1999, 146.)

It seems that a similar approach may be found in contemporary discussion when one-sided presentations of 'original' or 'traditional' Buddhism serve to highlight critical differences or sharp contrasts between Buddhist practice and contemporary non-religious mindfulness,[56] and between 'traditional Asian' and contemporary Western forms of practice. Abstract generalisations may also help to present complicated historical processes in a simplified unilinear way. Taken together, these different forms of one-sidedness, whether based on a lack of sensitivity towards the plural and multifaceted nature of Buddhist tradition or on the practical challenges of writing from multifocal viewpoints, contribute to an oversimplified picture of the Buddhist concept and practice of mindfulness. To balance this bias in research growing sensitivity to the richness of variation within the family of traditions knowns as 'Buddhism' and to the significant role of individual Buddhist 'tradition-bearers' is needed, as Paul Williams emphasises:

> There is a Tibetan saying that just as every valley has its own language so every teacher has his own doctrine. This is an exaggeration on both counts, but it does indicate the diversity to be found within Buddhism and the important role of a teacher in mediating a received tradition and adapting it to the needs, the personal transformation, of the pupil. This diversity prevents, or strongly hinders, generalizations about Buddhism as a whole. (Williams 2009, 1.)

56 This approach also represents the 'official' strategy of S.N. Goenka's *vipassanā* movement, as posited by its representatives within academic research (Plank 2011, 229–30).

As a way to move beyond the fallacies of various sectarian and essentialist approaches, academic research on the Buddhist roots of the MBSR programme and other forms of contemporary non-religious mindfulness practice would benefit from a lineage-based approach, where possible historical continuities and phenomenological similarities are examined at the level of particular relevant teachers and their lineages of doctrine and practice. Similarly, the particular approach among various mindfulness-based therapeutic interventions, such as MBCT or DBT, should also always be explicitly articulated, as they each vary in their methods, aims, vocabularies, and backgrounds in terms of possible Buddhist influences (see Gilpin 2008; Plank 2011). With a lineage-based approach, future research can accurately localise the Buddhist influences of each method or programme, and make solid arguments on possible historical continuities and phenomenological similarities. Without this clear articulation and localisation of research objects, attempts to present 'critical differences between classical and modern versions of mindfulness' (Rapgay & Bystrinsky 2009) or 'how mindfulness may be understood and developed in the traditional context of classical Buddhist practice' (Olendzki 2005) are bound to give abstract, arbitrary, and simplified views on the subject matter.

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VILLE HUSGAFVEL is Doctoral Student in Study of Religions, Department of World Cultures, University of Helsinki, Finland. Email: ville.husgafvel@helsinki.fi

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