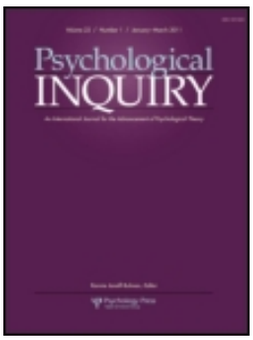

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Commentary on "Mindfulness Broadens Awareness and Builds Eudaimonic Meaning: A Process Model of Mindful Positive Emotion Regulation"

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It has been heartening to see a recent broadening of mindfulness research toward a more nuanced perspective, and so we welcome the theoretical article Garland, by Farb, Goldin, and Fredrickson, and the mindfulness-to-meaning theory they posit. It offers further perspectives on the existing literature and raises some really interesting and important questions.

Unbridled enthusiasm needs to be tempered with recognition of the challenges that learning mindfulness can present for most people at some stage or other. For instance, whereas mindfulness undoubtedly makes us more aware of our internal anxieties and preoccupations, perhaps there has been some inflated concern regarding the so-called "dark night" phenomenon. This refers to the relatively rare experience of people who likely had latent psychotic tendencies and went on to decompensate on intensive retreats. The implication that this is a danger for people doing even small amounts of mindfulness meditation practice is, however, an exaggeration perhaps based on confusing the common internal struggle arising from habitual thought patterns illuminated by mindfulness, and actual adverse events such as psychosis triggered by unskillful teaching or excessive amounts of meditation. Although this is probably overstated in the recent literature that mentions it, it does represent a maturation of the field of mindfulness research, which is a positive step.

More important, Garland et al. (this issue) propose a welcomed move away from a limited emphasis on reducing psychological distress toward a more encompassing view of mindfulness that includes positive states of mind. This is in line with recent developments in positive psychology generally. We agree with the position that a complete theory of mindfulness must account for positive mental states rather than focusing exclusively on the reduction of negative ones. The authors also propose a move away from the historical overemphasis on equanimity (emotional nonreactivity) resulting from mindfulness, which they quite rightly state implies that mindfulness leads to some bland, beige experience of the world—and which could potentially put people off from exploring mindfulness in their own lives. The inclusion of the notion of eudaimonic (meaning-based) happiness as a possible effect of mindfulness, and a motivation for people to practice it, is valuable. Of course, experienced practitioners of mindfulness realize that nonreactivity but with full engagement in the present moment is anything but bland and beige, but that negative perception remains.

However, the mindfulness-to-meaning theory raises a number of issues and poses a number of further questions, which we address here. Specifically, if we are reading it correctly, the article alternates between describing reappraisal as a potential application of mindfulness (i.e., adaptive reappraisal made possible by using mindfulness to decenter from negative appraisals/reactivity and develop metacognition, which then allows for more adaptive reappraisal) and proposing that reappraisal is somehow inherent to mindfulness itself. If so, we would agree with the first position and strongly disagree with the second, on both theoretical and empirical grounds. This also raises broader issues about mindfulness research, including

1. The emphasis on mental contents in current definitions of mindfulness, which is possibly an artifact of the way Jon Kabat-Zinn's initial definition of mindfulness has been operationalized. This has become the dominant definition, although it differs significantly from some classical Buddhist definitions.
2. The need for greater specificity if attempting to recontextualize mindfulness into a "Buddhist" framework.
3. That, being universal as it is, trying to define and contain the practice and experience of mindfulness according to any single philosophical tradition may be unnecessary and possibly unhelpful.
4. The possibility raised by many Buddhist perspectives—and many wisdom traditions generally—that positive emotions may result from stepping out of the appraisal process entirely, and may be inherent qualities of awareness itself.

We think these issues are timely to raise, and so we have used this response as an opportunity to do so.

The Value of Including Eudaimonic Happiness as an Effect of Mindfulness

We believe the authors were very right to explore the importance of eudaimonic well-being as an outcome of mindfulness. The assumed "emptiness" and "impartiality" associated with being mindful in a nonjudgmental and nonreactive way can be, and often is, seen as a negation of experience. This leads to the erroneous perception that being mindful is not an unhappy state totally devoid of meaning, but is not happy and meaningful either. Of course, that view is based on an assumption that being free of negative states of mind and emotion simply results in some kind of vacuum. This doesn't, however, correlate with the actual experience of people who come to deep states of peace and calm through the practice of mindfulness. Such people much more commonly describe fullness of being, freedom, and a quiet contentment. This raises the question as to whether mindfulness by itself has the potential to take a person to high-level well-being over and above eliminating negative states.

Eudaimonia and a broader sense of well-being also encompass the ethical and social dimensions of life. Some can view mindfulness in a very narrow way as insular and isolating and not see it as a foundation for an ethical, meaningful, and valued life. Again, this doesn't accord with the research or experience of people practicing mindfulness. Again, reports from such people more commonly correlate mindfulness with greater emotional intelligence or acting with greater discernment and authenticity.

Another important reason to focus on meaning is that the research agenda, greatly influenced by the need to find strategies for dealing with modern epidemics like depression and anxiety, may have, to some extent, led to a narrow view of mindfulness and what it offers. Until the relatively recent advent of positive psychology, psychological research has tended to focus on one side of the coin—negative mental states—and has almost completely neglected the other.

With the growing level of interest in both positive psychology and mindfulness, there is a need to investigate the similarities and points of departure of each. We applaud Garland, Farb, Goldin, and Fredrickson for proposing such an investigation. However, as we explore in this commentary, there are a number of issues that warrant caution.

The Relationship Between Mindfulness and Reappraisal

Garland et al. (this issue) at times seem to claim that mindfulness may lead to more adaptive reappraisal. They propose that mindfulness helps us ground ourselves in the present moment through the senses, decenter from limiting schemas and scripts, access a state of metacognition, and then leverage this to more adaptively appraise the situation—for instance, by recognizing that adversity presents the possibility of developing resilience and experiencing posttraumatic growth. They also acknowledge that this decentering and metacognition leads to a shift in attention from the contents of consciousness (all the things in our internal and external environments that we are aware of) to consciousness itself (that which is aware) and that this is reflected in neural activation patterns, such as a shift from ventral (which appraise affective salience) to dorsal prefrontal regions (involved in monitoring direct sensory experience). We agree with this position, and believe that the eudaimonic happiness that results is a significant benefit of practicing and applying mindfulness.

However, at other times, the authors seem to imply that mindfulness somehow naturally (or even necessarily) leads to reappraisal, as if the two were somehow inherently related. For instance, they hypothesize that mindfulness leads to positive emotions, which in turn lead to positive reappraisals (p. 295). We question this position on both conceptual and empirical grounds.

From a conceptual and experiential standpoint, the insight that arises from mindfulness represents a shift in perception—a different way of seeing—not a shift in thinking. It involves a process of decentering from discursive thinking in general, rather than just from problematic appraisals (and toward more adaptive ones). Being mindful implies perceiving things directly, as they are, as free as one may be from distorted thinking or conceptual filters. This occurs instantaneously in any moment that we decenter from the thinking process and "come to our senses."

In keeping with the old teaching story about mistaking a rope for a snake because it was dimly lit, from a mindfulness perspective, our negative cognitions and emotions are largely based on misperception and mental projection. If we raise the level of awareness, we see better what is really there. Mindfulness in this sense is like lighting a lamp. This can undoubtedly make more adaptive reappraisal possible.

But even positive appraisals or reappraisals can be distortions of what is actually in front of us. Any reappraisal that follows from being mindful may be an elaboration on what was initially perceived directly. That is, the reappraisal is an "afterthought." As such, reappraisal is by definition limited and conceptual. Sure, we may replace maladaptive cognitions with more adaptive ones, which may in turn lead to greater hedonic or eudaimonic happiness in any given moment, but sooner or later the situation will change and we may again be faced with appraisals that no longer fit. This process is therefore endless and needs constant adjustment. This is true even if we arrive at

some state of eudaimonic happiness primarily via the process of reappraisal and without discovering a state of happiness that is beyond cognition and concepts.

What mindfulness instead offers is a way to step out entirely from the whole process of appraisal and conceptual thinking. It allows us to become present and get directly in touch with what is actually happening in the moment. Distracted and reactive thought processes have the chance to cease and the body and mind relax. We become more able to accurately discern what is happening, rather than judging it through concepts. This is what Shakespeare was referring to in his famous "To be, or not to be" mindfulness speech, when he wrote of Hamlet in his confusion as having a state of mind that was "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought." When more mindful we then become able to respond appropriately to the situation based on clear seeing, rather than reacting to it based on previous conditioning or confusion. This is reflected in demonstrable changes in brain structures such as the amygdala and prefrontal cortex.

This is the position we took in our 2011 theoretical model of *Mindful Emotion Regulation* (Chambers, Gullone, & Allen, 2009). There, we proposed that mindfulness is conceptually distinct from reappraisal and instead reflects decentering from any conceptual processing at all, establishing our attention instead in the present moment. In 2014, we published the results of a clinical trial we conducted that tested this theory (Chambers, Gullone, Hassed, Knight, Garvin, & Allen, 2014). Although that publication has not yet garnered much interest, it provided evidence for our theory. Specifically, factor analysis found mindfulness and reappraisal (as well as expressive suppression, a third emotion regulation strategy we examined) to all be distinct dimensions. Furthermore, mindfulness was found to be more strongly related than reappraisal to lower levels of depression and anxiety symptoms, as well as better quality of life. Trait mindfulness at baseline also predicted recovery from these symptoms (and improvements in quality of life) more than reappraisal. Our conclusions were that (a) mindfulness is distinct from reappraisal, and (b) may be a better emotion regulation strategy. Although it was only a single study in a specific population (of depressed youth in an outpatient clinic) and used only a single mindfulness measure (the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale; Brown & Ryan, 2003), we interpreted this finding as support for our theoretical model of mindful emotion regulation and for the notion that mindfulness and reappraisal are distinct constructs. We have been unable to locate any subsequent research exploring this, and we urge researchers to explore this possibility further.

Reappraisal and increased eudaimonic happiness may therefore be better thought of as *applications* of mindfulness—faculties made more possible by mindfulness. That is, once we have reestablished our attention in the present through decentering from the thinking process and centering instead in the present moment through the body, we gain the necessary metacognition and mental flexibility to then reappraise adaptively what is happening. This may lead to or reinforce eudaimonic happiness as we begin to recognize the inherent meaning behind difficult situations and experience the natural joy of living an engaged, connected life. The insight comes in an instant, without the need for mental elaboration, via seeing what had hitherto been ignored. Any subsequent reappraisal is largely descriptive and affirmative. It could be argued that things like stress reduction, decentering from depressogenic thinking, and performance enhancement are all applications or side effects of mindfulness. This important distinction suggests that these things are made possible—even likely—by mindfulness, although they are conceptually distinct and are not even necessarily inherent results or consequences of mindfulness per se.

Even the term *decentering* may be problematic or could be understood in different ways. It is generally used, as developed by Segal, Williams, and Teasdale (2002), to describe being aware of, but not caught up in, thoughts and emotions. It is one of the primary mechanisms proposed to operate in mindfulness-based cognitive therapy. With respect to describing what actually happens when we decenter, it may be better described as *centering*—in the sense that it gets us directly in contact with the awareness at the center of our being and from which we experience the world. This happens only when we release our attachment to the things we observe. The self we usually take ourselves to be is a mistake, an identification with the transient objects and experiences of body or mind, rather than with the unchanging, formless awareness that is aware of these experiences. That is, we identify with a "self" that doesn't actually exist, supported by endless elaborative narratives and self-absorption. The witnessing "self," on the other hand, can't actually be seen or defined but becomes apparent when the narrative stops and we perceive what remains. A common metaphor is of the clouds of cognitive activity clearing and the limitless blue sky of awareness becoming apparent once more.

It may therefore be more useful to discuss mindfulness as nonconceptual attention, resulting from embodiment and nonjudgmental, nonelaborative engagement with sensory objects. We can then go on to discuss how this leads to a number of beneficial side effects, such as calming the mind and body by deactivating the default attentional network and the associated psychophysiological arousal and stress reactivity. Doing so would allow for definitions of mindfulness to remain unbiased by assumptions about related effects on cognitive processes, emotional

states, and behavioral implications while allowing a broad exploration of the benefits of mindfulness, including for increasing eudaimonic happiness.

Understanding mindfulness in this way still lets us make sense of the research cited by the authors showing that reappraisal mediates the association between dispositional mindfulness and depressive symptoms. We could assume here that people with higher levels of trait mindfulness are better able to decenter from the appraisal process, which includes but is not limited to depressogenic thinking. This ability creates the possibility of more flexible responding and more adaptive reappraisal. Indeed, as the authors note, there is research showing that mindfulness-based cognitive therapy leads to better reappraisal than cognitive behavioral therapy. This is an intriguing finding, given that cognitive behavioral therapy is a therapy designed to enhance reappraisal skills. But again, we would argue that this reflects a decentered relationship with thinking in general, rather than thinking differently (reappraising). We could also assume that anyone who has been treated with mindfulness-based cognitive therapy or cognitive behavioral therapy will also naturally reappraise their depressogenic cognitions after initially decentering via mindfulness. But again, this process is not inherent to mindfulness itself, but is an application—or, at most, a natural consequence.

We therefore agree when Garland et al. (this issue) state that "mindfulness may engender positive reappraisal by virtue of its purported ability to disrupt automatic (negative) appraisal and reactivity, creating psychological distance that is fertile ground for constructive reframing of one's circumstances" (p. 298). But we again stress that mindfulness itself just creates the possibility for this and does not require it or inherently lead to it. Nor is it accurate to say that mindfulness naturally leads to positive emotions. We could even be mindful of and be at peace in the presence of states like anxiety or anger. Instead, the positive emotions such as calm, contentment, and happiness that result from practicing mindfulness may in fact reflect (a) the cessation of negative reactions, (b) the ability to reappraise positively, or (c) overcoming limited states of conceptual mind more generally, or may even be inherent in the awareness we get directly in touch with when we do so.

We could argue the same thing in regard to the way mindfulness seems to result in greater meaning, as raised by the authors. We consider it a strength of Garland et al.'s (this issue) article that they propose broadening the definition of mindfulness to include eudaimonic happiness and issues of meaning, as well as emphasizing the possibility of aversive experiences leading to posttraumatic growth. This points in an important direction for the mindfulness literature as it provides a context for meditation and applications of mindfulness. But again, we question whether mindfulness leads to that greater meaning, or whether this is just a possible application of mindfulness—or even a frame for practicing it. The authors cite some of the Buddhist literature to support their claims for mindfulness inherently having meaning and being imbued with positive qualities such as joy and compassion. However, as we discuss in some detail later in this commentary, this is actually an artifact of the particular Buddhist context(s) they chose to include.

Recognizing the Implicit Bias Toward Cognitive Contents in Contemporary Definitions of Mindfulness

Again, we agree with Garland et al. (this issue) that the definition of mindfulness may benefit from being broadened and that there may be further benefit from recontextualizing it into the Buddhist and other wisdom traditions from which it has been drawn. But it is crucial to maintain the integrity of mindfulness as its definition is expanded. This is particularly apparent from the theory that the authors have put forward.

Perhaps one of the main reasons the authors have gone down the path they have—and, in our opinion, one of the main issues with mindfulness research generally—is the emphasis on mental contents in current definitions of mindfulness. It is worth taking a moment to review the evolution of mindfulness as a construct, both in ancient and modern times, to provide context for what we are saying here. Traditional Burmese Buddhist definitions of mindfulness (such as that found in the Smrtyupasthana Sutra) centered around placing the attention on *objects* of awareness (such as the body and breath) during meditation. Between periods of meditation, these definitions emphasized acting with awareness (i.e., doing things mindfully). These teachings also encouraged meditators to observe reality closely to discern what are commonly referred to as the "three marks of existence"—specifically (a) the fact that we all experience difficulty/suffering and that even when things are pleasant these experiences are temporary, (b) the fact that everything is changing constantly, and (c) the fact that the sense of being a separate person or self is actually an illusion. All three of these things can be pondered on conceptually, but they can also be perceived directly if we meditate on them. The realization of these "three marks of existence" is not so much a matter of a cognitive process but rather a direct observation of how things are. If we look deeply enough, it becomes self-evident that this is so. Cognitive processes are more likely to conceal this basic truth than reveal it.

In the early to mid-20th century, the influential Burmese monk Mahasi Sayadaw (teacher to prominent contemporary meditation teachers such as Joseph Goldstein and Jack Kornfield) included the acts of noting and labelling. This introduced a cognitive component into what was originally a purely attentional activity. Sayadaw also taught a mix of concentration meditation and mindfulness, with an emphasis on mindfulness. This has led to subsequent conflation of concentration and mindfulness meditation by many mindfulness researchers and teachers. At its core, mindfulness according to the early Burmese traditions refers to the nonelaborative present-moment awareness of sensory experience, which later researchers (e.g., Lutz, Slagter, Dunne, & Davidson, 2008) called "open monitoring awareness." Even in this practice, awareness of mental and emotional states becomes apparent, but they are simply observed without any additional engagement or cognitive processing. This is conceptually, experientially, and neurologically distinct from focused attention (concentration) meditation, although both types are often conflated in the literature. Even more recently, influential Theravadin monk Nyanaponika Thera espoused a return to defining mindfulness as "bare attention," free from any subjective judgments (i.e., free from any appraisal process, emotional content, or meaning). Free of judgment or cognitive processes does not mean without insight.

But the most influential figure in the modern mindfulness movement is of course Jon Kabat-Zinn. His most widely cited definition of mindfulness (from his 1994 book *Wherever You Go, There You Are*) is "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally" (p. 4). This is free from any emphasis on mental contents, and instead points to a nonjudgmental, open relationship to whatever is experienced. However, the context within which mindfulness has largely been developed has led to an emphasis on mental contents. Originally, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) was used to treat chronic pain by reducing hypervigilance for it and reactivity to it. This required noticing and letting go of distorted cognitions regarding the pain, such as fear responses, anxiety, and rumination, which tend to amplify the experience of it, hence the implicit emphasis on mental contents. Actually, in the context of what we have stated so far in this response, we would argue that letting go of these distressing cognitive reactions is an application of mindfulness rather than mindfulness itself. By application, we mean something that becomes possible once we have become disentangled from reactivity and thinking. We use the term "mindfulness itself" in this context to refer to original Burmese definitions of mindfulness as placing the attention on *objects* of awareness (such as the body and breath) during meditation and acting with awareness between meditation sessions.

But as MBSR (and, later, its adaptation MBCT) became increasingly popular, this definition of mindfulness with an emphasis on mental contents stuck and has come to inherently influence most contemporary understandings of mindfulness. This includes prominent models such as Brown and Ryan (2003) and Bishop et al. (2004). Obviously, this is also due to the fact that the mindfulness models we are discussing here have evolved mainly in clinical contexts.

Brown and Ryan (2003) created the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale, which has been widely used in research. Even though the items on the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale focus mainly on present-moment awareness of both internal and external stimuli, and their 2003 paper explicitly differentiates mindfulness from reflexive consciousness (i.e, attempts to manipulate cognitive contents), they still have a bias toward the objects of cognition that was not present in early Burmese Buddhist descriptions. Likewise, Bishop et al. (2004), who proposed a two-component model of mindfulness consisting of both an attention-regulation and openness/acceptance dimension, emphasized the power of mindfulness to change our relationship with our thoughts and feelings. Again, this is due to their theory having been developed within clinical settings, where people are often trying to get unstuck from patterns of thinking and appraising that are causing them problems.

The definition proposed by Garland et al. (this issue) in their mindfulness-to-meaning theory also contains this implicit bias. There is therefore a very real risk that their model will unintentionally further entrench this more cognitive view of mindfulness. Given the fact that the authors' stated intention is to broaden the definition of mindfulness and an unstated aim of their article is to recontextualize mindfulness within its Buddhist roots and within a positive psychology framework, we believe it is crucial at this stage to explicitly point out this bias in defining mindfulness and to alert researchers to the fact that the prevailing definition of mindfulness is only one way of looking at it, and potentially a problematic one at that.

Rather than us providing a definition here, we would simply like to alert readers to the original Buddhist definitions and to describe the ways these have been influenced by the contexts in which mindfulness has become popular. It is our hope that this will stimulate discussion and debate, ultimately leading to a clearer, more accurate definition. Such awareness of the historical contexts and definitions of mindfulness will hopefully engender greater care when seeking to broaden or refine such definitions. We think it will be of benefit for researchers to be aware that there are varied classical Buddhist definitions of mindfulness and to be more precise when attempting to

recontextualize mindfulness into them. We consider it equally important that they be aware of the implicit bias toward cognitive contents that exists in the current operationalizations of mindfulness, as just outlined. It is our hope that holding both of these things in mind will result in simultaneously greater flexibility and specificity when expanding theories of mindfulness.

For the reasons given throughout this commentary, it is our view that definitions of mindfulness itself should move away from, rather than toward, emphasizing cognitive contents and processes. We also believe that discussion of the applications of mindfulness should move toward, rather than avoid, eudaimonia and positive states of mind rather than merely the relief of negative ones. We give our reasons for these views in the next section. Before moving on, though, we would like to highlight an inherent problem with creating *any* definition of mindfulness. Insofar as mindfulness may be nonconceptual, this obviously means that it is impossible to fully capture conceptually what it is. At best, any definitions of mindfulness will be, to borrow from the Zen Buddhist tradition, "fingers pointing at the moon." They are always maps rather than the territory, and will by definition always be incomplete, particularly descriptions of something beyond description. This doesn't mean we should abandon any attempt to define mindfulness, but we would do well to hold any definitions lightly. We need to keep in mind the inherent limitations of language, let alone translation, especially when it comes to describing nonconceptual, experiential qualities such as mindfulness. This paradox no doubt underlies the acknowledged difficulty researchers have had in agreeing upon a standard operationalization in the literature.

The ancient story of the blindfolded men feeling the elephant may be relevant here. Each one touched a different part of the elephant (leg, trunk, ears, tail . . .) and described what he thought it was. Naturally, each came to a different conclusion. When they each expressed their view based on their particular experience, they began to argue about who was right and who was wrong. Of course, the one watching on without a blindfold would note that each was right from their perspective but none had the whole view. Perhaps a similar phenomenon is taking place among Buddhist and other philosophical traditions, as much as it is among researchers.

What a Truly Integrative Model Might Look Like

We agree with Garland et al. that a complete theory of mindfulness must account for positive mental states, rather than just focusing on reducing negative ones. However, as we have already stated, we question whether mindfulness creates these mental states, or whether in fact it may be more accurate to say they are uncovered. Put another way, do we need to think our way into positive mental states, or do we just stop thinking our way out of them? This distinction may sound subtle, even semantic, but we believe it is of central practical importance.

Many wisdom traditions describe the nature of awareness itself. That is, they point to something that is awake and unchanging in each of us—an awareness in which all cognitive and sensory processing takes place. A typical instruction might be to just sit quietly without trying to control anything, allowing mental contents to come and go, and to notice what doesn't change. This amounts to an experiential, noncognitive inquiry into what is looking through our eyes and feeling through our body from moment to moment. MBSR includes a meditation called "choiceless awareness," adapted from Zen Buddhism, which aims to foster this awareness.

The wisdom traditions commonly state that this awareness is imbued with and naturally expresses a range of positive qualities such as joy, compassion, and wisdom. Being the unmoving foundation upon which transient experiences take place, it is also associated with emotional nonreactivity (equanimity) and impartiality. That is, when we free ourselves from limited states of mind and directly contact the awareness underneath, we naturally start to experience highly positive states of mind. This leads to improved mental health and enhanced functioning. As evidence for this, many people report experiences like "being happy for no good reason" or spontaneously experiencing compassion for someone's suffering. This may occur as a result of mindfulness practice, or even in people who are not practicing. This often arises naturally when they cease being in conflict with what they are experiencing. As such, there is no need to create these qualities through reappraisal or any other cognitive process. They are inherent, and all we need to do to experience them is to get unstuck from limiting states that block our access to them. Or, perhaps we could more accurately say, our recognition of them.

There are a range of more cognitively based meditation practices in various Buddhist and other traditions aimed at cultivating these qualities, including meditations on lovingkindness and compassion, as well as prayer. However, Mahayana Buddhism and a number of other wisdom traditions state that the purpose of these meditations is to help us refamiliarize ourselves with these qualities, rather than creating them per se. The value of lovingkindness and compassion meditations is to help us see more clearly what is already there. They do this by helping to

decondition the unhelpful and habitual patterns that reinforce negative mental and emotional states, and dysfunctional ways of relating to others. We then become less likely to get caught up in more limited states of mind, and will find it easier to spontaneously recognize these more enlightened qualities in ourselves from moment to moment. We could include eudaimonic happiness and some aspects of positive psychology such as Fredrickson's (2004) *broaden-and-build* theory generally among these methods, insofar as they are powerful means of creating positive emotions, which then increases cognitive flexibility and makes it easier to recognize and relax into awareness and its inherent positive qualities. But perhaps the key distinction here is that such practices are cognitively based and are an application of mindfulness in as much as the person is using or directing attention in a particular way. Mindfulness, by itself, is noncognitive but allows us to be better able to choose which cognitions to give attention to.

Within this framework, living without awareness is a little like living in the dark, and mindfulness may be understood as a way of turning on the light, so to speak, so that we can perceive and understand things in a different way. It allows us to recognize when we are caught in limited states of mind, let go of these, and bring our attention to more positive states or even to awareness itself. Hence, the mind works better. This is a simple process of discernment, in the sense of being able to see more clearly what is actually occupying our attention in any moment and noticing the effect of this. This process of discernment, we should add, is very different to judgment, which by its very nature is limited and includes a quality of categorization. In contrast, discernment arises when we see the *full* picture and understand directly and nonconceptually how things fit together. This allows for much wiser perception and action. A synonym for discernment is *insight*. The term for this in Sanskrit is *buddhi*. When this arises, it does so in the moment and nondiscursively. The Sanskrit term for the discursive element of mind is *manas*, from which we derive the English word "mind." It is this discursive faculty that is brought under control through mindfulness practice. What may follow is the discursive reasoning behind the insight, but the insight contains the understanding within it without the need for elaboration. In fact, the discursive process afterward often leads a person back into confusion or doubt.

This truly mindful process does not require reappraisal—nor any other generative mechanism, for that matter. This is the main point of disagreement we have with Garland et al.'s mindfulness-to-meaning theory, and is why we have emphasized caution around continuing to define mindfulness in terms of cognitive contents and operations such as reappraisal. Mindfulness can and does enhance one's ability to reappraise, but it is not obligatory to engage with a process of reappraisal. Having said that, in the process of teaching mindfulness to a group, exploration of and elaboration on the mindful moments in participants' lives often help them to acknowledge and underline the insights that they often have but have not noted.

Reappraisal is inherently flawed as a method for achieving lasting happiness. Sure, we may be able to reappraisal a situation in a way that leads to better adjustment and increased happiness, but sooner or later the situation will undoubtedly change and we will find ourselves needing to reappraise things once again. This is true even of reappraisal leading to eudaimonic happiness. We risk finding ourselves caught in a "happiness trap" of falling out of and having to think our way back into happiness again and again. In contrast, mindfulness transcends the labels of positive and negative altogether and may lead to lasting happiness. If we continue to tie mindfulness to cognitive processes such as reappraisal, therefore, we risk losing touch with what may be its most powerful function—the ability to wake us up out of conceptual thinking and a limited sense of self in general so that we can recognize and familiarize ourselves with our innate qualities.

Garland et al. touch upon this possibility when they propose a U-shaped function of progressive adoption, strengthening, and ultimately relinquishment of positive reappraisal strategies (p. 300). To integrate this with what we have just proposed, cultivating positive states through mindfulness may relax the mind enough to recognize its own innate qualities. Reappraisal could then be relinquished and we could simply continue to familiarize ourselves with these states. However, this reappraisal process itself may actually become a barrier to simply looking mindfully in the first place and recognizing our innate, positive qualities directly.

Although it is probably beyond the scope of this commentary, we would like to at least acknowledge that any truly integrative model of mindfulness must include the notion of *awakening*. In the current context, this means coming to rest in the clear sky of awareness and being able to fully recognize our tendency to get caught in limited conceptual ways of experiencing reality, such as through a sense of self. Many wisdom traditions refer to this as "enlightenment," although this term tends to evoke a sense of mystique and a number of misconceptions. It could simply refer to getting completely unstuck from limited ways of experiencing the world, resting in awareness and fully and freely experiencing our natural qualities. Many Tibetan Buddhist traditions describe this state as being free from both a sense of self and from any fixed ideas, and instead being able to rest effortlessly in the present moment. This too is a strong theme in the Vedic tradition from which Buddhism arose, and in such a state we are as an impartial witness of the play of life. All classical

Buddhist teachings are clear that mindfulness alone, if it is defined in a narrow sense as bare attention and acting with awareness, is insufficient to achieve this. Instead, they describe mindfulness as a necessary underpinning of all meditation and application of teachings, and then point broadly to both concentration and insight meditation practices as the actual path to awakening. Having said that, other wisdom traditions describe simply being able to rest the attention fully in the present as a path to realization if it is underpinned by a constant discerning between self as changing physical and mental states and self as impartial but unchanging witness of those states. There may therefore be much to gain from expanding any recontextualization of mindfulness beyond Buddhism itself to include all wisdom traditions.

In fact, this is not just an Eastern concept, as illustrated by this quote from Plato's dialogue, *Phaedo* (Jowett translation). In it they have just been exploring the relationship between that which we observe (body and mind) and has form and is changeable, and that which is observing (the seer or observer) which is formless and unchanging.

> And were we not saying long ago that the soul (psyche) when using the body as an instrument of perception, that is to say, when using the sense of sight or hearing or some other sense (for the meaning of perceiving through the body is perceiving through the senses)—were we not saying that the soul too is then is dragged by the body into the region of the changeable, and wanders and is confused; the world spins round her (the soul), and she is like a drunkard, when she touches change. . . . But when returning into herself she reflects, then she passes into the other world, the region of purity, and eternity, and immortality, and unchangeableness, which are her kindred, and with them she ever lives, and is by herself and is not let or hindered; then she ceases from her erring ways, and being in communion with the unchanging is unchanging. And this state of the soul is called wisdom.

Balancing the Need for Greater Specificity with the Need for Flexibility

The issue of recontextualizing mindfulness back into Buddhism and other wisdom traditions is complex. On one hand, decontextualizing mindfulness has made it widely accessible within medicine, healthcare, education, business, and sport because it has allowed it to be communicated in a simple, direct, practical, and nonsecular language. When it is framed as attention training and developing potential, it becomes immediately acceptable to a number of people who would perhaps not be so open to it as a tool for awakening in a broader, more philosophical sense. Although a few would, certainly, many of the people that we teach mindfulness to would not be open to it if we framed it as "Buddhist meditation"—or even as a path to wisdom, let alone enlightenment. However, as many people are starting to acknowledge, there are downsides to this decontextualization also. Arguably, examples include using mindfulness just to maximize profit or to help soldiers become more effective marksmen. Reducing mindfulness to just attention training in this way risks divorcing it from its true meaning.

If we take a broad view of mindfulness—that is, beyond Burmese Buddhist descriptions as simply focusing the attention on the present and acting with awareness, to include qualities such as acceptance and compassion—obviously these applications become problematic. For example, the worker may be involved in unethical work, or the marksman may be killing unjustly. For this reason, there may be value in being aware of the wisdom traditions from which mindfulness has been adapted. At the very least, there needs to be a reminder that to be mindful in a broader sense includes being aware of context for practicing, as well as the way we live our lives. For example, it is not just the greater amount of money that is being made or product sold that we need to pay attention to but also what it feels like within ourselves when we are honest and dishonest in dealing with others, or the effects that our actions have on other people and the wider community. So, in regards to refining definitions of mindfulness, there may be utility in understanding the specific contexts from which mindfulness has been drawn and in which it is practiced.

There is a general lack of specificity in the literature whenever people have attempted to recontextualize mindfulness into a Buddhist perspective. Many researchers refer to "Buddhist traditions" without acknowledging that there is actually a range of different traditions, each of which tends to emphasize different things. Some traditions even use different terms for the same thing, and the same term can mean different things across traditions. Mindfulness itself is one such term. As we have already stated, it refers to present-centered attention and awareness of our actions within Burmese Buddhism and the Theravadin traditions in general, but in Tibetan Buddhism the meaning is more akin to "remembering," in the sense of remembering to be present and being able to bring to mind positive qualities and the motivation to benefit others. Both definitions generally point in the direction of metacognition; however, it is important to acknowledge that they are not completely identical. Many Buddhist terms are like this, and when researchers describe "Buddhist" traditions or specific terms, it would be of great benefit to the literature if they specified exactly which *type* of Buddhism they are referring to and/or exactly what they mean by the specific terms they introduce. Of course, this is not so easy, and readers of

this commentary will probably be able to say the same thing about many words that we have used.

Nevertheless, the authors reference Theravadin Buddhism when they discuss the Noble Eightfold Path (p. 308). Of interest, they mention only Right Action and omit referencing Right Mindfulness, which would seems odd given they are proposing an expanded definition of mindfulness that seeks to contextualize it more within its Buddhist roots. They then go on to discuss Mahayana Buddhist terms when they talk about "cultivation of qualities"—which in Mahayana Buddhism refers mainly to the cultivation of compassion, wisdom, and altruism. The authors then go on to refer to the Lojong practices and the idea of Bodhisattvahood according to Shantideva, both of which are Mahayana teachings, and then reference Mahamudra, which is most often discussed within the Vajrayana.

This selective referencing is easy to do, and we were guilty of this in our 2011 *Clinical Psychology Review* article. We have since recognized that there may be value in being more specific about where we draw Buddhist terms and teachings from, acknowledging that researchers are likely to do so from the traditions they have had experience with. The authors also mention findings from a 2-month retreat, which they use to support their argument that mindfulness meditation leads to increased meaning. Again, it would have been useful for them to clearer about the nature of the retreat—for instance, the fact that it didn't just include mindfulness meditation but also a range of other Buddhist teachings, mainly from the Mahayana traditions, which include explicit teachings on meaning from a Buddhist perspective. Moving forward, it may be very useful for researchers who are interested in recontextualizing mindfulness into Buddhist terms to be more explicit as to the exact traditions and levels of teaching they are referencing. There are many good books that explicitly describe the different levels and types of Buddhist teachings, which researchers interested in recontextualizing mindfulness may be interested in. Two books that we have found useful are *The Way Things Are* by Lama Ole Nydahl (2012) and *The Varieties of the Meditative Experience* by Daniel Goleman (1977).

Having said that, there may also be much to gain from simply situating mindfulness within the wisdom traditions more generally. Clearly the insights that greater awareness offer are available to anybody, anytime, whether within a spiritual tradition or not, if we look deeply enough. In that sense, mindfulness is not "a Buddhist thing" but is really more of "a universal thing." One can explore what it means to be mindful in many philosophical traditions such as Gnosticism, Sufism, Cabalism, Platonism, the Vedic teachings, and countless others. One can even discover it naively and totally independently of any teacher or tradition.

Conclusion

We conclude by stating that although we have made some claims that we believe are important, we don't have a fixed position on the matters just discussed. Instead, we simply feel that there is much to be gained by exploring them, and we hope that researchers and others interested in mindfulness cultivate a balance of open-mindedness and specificity as they do so. The article by Garland, Farb, Goldin, and Fredrickson has been a great catalyst in that regard. Through publishing this response, we simply hope to promote awareness about, and stimulate debate around, certain key issues that we believe are important. For instance, whether mindfulness is a value-independent state of bare attention, or is inherently infused with eudaimonic values and other innate qualities depends largely on how it is defined. We would also like researchers to be aware that how it is understood inherently depends on, and is influenced by, the context in which it is being used or conceptualized. We stress that current definitions of mindfulness emphasize perhaps too strongly cognitive content, and that if researchers are not aware of this, this trend may continue to be entrenched in future research. If this were to occur, we may risk losing sight of the fact that mindfulness may actually be a simple and effective way of stepping out of limiting states of mind and reconnecting with a mode of awareness that is inherently healthy and indeed may lead to transpersonal states of awakening. This is certainly the way it is understood in the Buddhist and other wisdom traditions.

We have emphasized in this commentary that we believe the authors of the mindfulness-to-meaning theory are actually describing a very useful and healthy *application* of mindfulness, rather than some inherent consequence of it. Although mindfulness may create the possibility of decentering, metacognition, savoring, and the subsequent generation of eudaimonic happiness, we believe that this may be an artifact, albeit a very useful one. However, although we agree with the authors that mindfulness and reappraisal are not necessarily contradictory psychological operations, we don't agree that mindfulness is implicitly "part of a positive emotion regulation process that unfolds over time," as they state on p. 309. Instead, it is our opinion that mindfulness may make this process possible, and indeed more effective when it does take place, but is not inherently part of it.

Although we would like to acknowledge the authors for their intention to expand the definition of mindfulness beyond overcoming negative states of mind, by including eudaimonic happiness, we urge caution around their implied link between mindfulness and reappraisal. This emphasis may occlude the true value of mindfulness as a way of directly recognizing the true nature of mind and experiencing the inherently improved well-being and enhanced

functioning that may result from doing so. We believe, as we have said repeatedly in this response article, that the processes of decentering, metacognition, savoring, and eudaimonic happiness specified in the mindfulness-to-meaning theory are best understood as applications, rather than processes, of mindfulness.

Note

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