COMPASIÓN. HACIA UNA ÉTICA DEL MINDFULNESS

COMPASSION. TOWARD AN ETHICS OF MINDFULNESS

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SUMARIO: I. INTRODUCTION. II. MINDFULNESS AND ETHICS. III. A NOTE ON COMPASSION. IV. TAKING CARE IN MINDFULNESS AND PHILOSOPHY. V. CONCLUSION. VI. REFERENCES.

RESUMEN: Este trabajo está guiado por dos hipótesis con un objetivo general de establecer una ética del mindfulness. La primera hipótesis es el concepto de motivador moral o *moral intencional.* Tanto la filosofía occidental como el mindfulness operan con una intención influenciada por sus creencias morales. La segunda hipótesis es la relación entre el razonamiento moral y la sabiduría. Es decir, nuestro razonamiento se ve afectado por

ABSTRACT: This work is guided by two hypotheses with one overall objective of establishing an ethics of mindfulness. The first hypothesis is the concept of moral motivator or *intentional moral.* Both Western philosophy and mindfulness operate with an intention influenced by their moral beliefs. The second hypothesis is the relationship between moral reasoning and wisdom. That is, our reasoning is affected by our moral belief. To

nuestra creencia moral. Para combinar esas dos tesis, presento el concepto compasión de la atención plena y la ética basada en el filósofo francés Gilles Deleuze. Por la presente, sugiero que, al practicar mindfulness, uno puede desarrollar su capacidad de compasión, pero también –esta práctica– es una «forma de vida» que puede ayudar a proteger el planeta: una práctica ética.

combine those two theses, I introduce the concept compassion from mindfulness and the ethics based on the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. Hereby, I suggest that by practicing mindfulness, one can develop his or her capacity for compassion, but also – this practice – is a «way of life» that can help protect the planet: an ethical practice.

Palabras clave: Mindfulness, Compasión, Deleuze, Ética.

Keywords: Mindfulness, Compassion, Deleuze, Ethics.

I. INTRODUCTION

In October 2015, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) organized a dialogue to protect the planet from some of the world's greatest challenges.[1] Two questions were addressed: What human and organizational transformation is required to support a sustainable development? How might such transformation arise?

The answer can be found in the *Enhancing Human Flourishing Within the 2030 Development Agenda: The Spirituality of Global Transformation* report (2016). It concludes that a «sustainable development requires a 'spiritual transformation'». Furthermore, it stresses that a spiritual transformation requires an understanding of how everything is interconnected. The underlying premise for establishing a sustainable change to protect and save the planet is, therefore, awareness (or consciousness) of what is referred to as *oneness* or *interconnectedness* (UNFPA, 2016). All sentient beings hang together.

The concept of a spiritual transformation is defined in the report through a list of contrasting words:

> … compassion over indifference, humility over humiliation, cooperation over isolation, kindness over cruelty, transparency over deception, forgiveness over revenge, equality over disparity, oneness over fragmentation, security over fear, rights over abuse,

1. Among the participants were policy expects, psychologist, neuroscientist, academics, ethicists, journalist, spiritual leaders, and those who work in the field delivering UN programs.

> empathy over detachment, respect over discrimination, tolerance over fundamentalism, liberty over oppression, life over killing, love over hatred, giving over hoarding, peace over war, and hope over despair. (UNFPA, 2016)

Thus, a spiritual transformation is a form of life or way of being that is characterized by being compassionate, humble, cooperative, kind, etc.

In continuation of this UNFPA report, I wish to explore whether mindfulness can play a crucial role in cultivating such a transformation. In other words, whether mindfulness can be seen as not only a personal ethic, but also a social one. Although Buddhism has «developed a robust personal ethic, it may well be accused of never having developed a systematic and comprehensive social ethic» (King, 2016). The same may be said for mindfulness, for which reason I try to outline a mindful ethic-that is, unfold the ethics that are already there.

Mindfulness is commonly described as something taught and practiced by the historical Buddha some 2,500 years ago (Shonin *et al.*, 2015). It is related to Eastern philosophy, where the truth is often understood as an inner disposition, contrary to Western philosophy, which tends to focus more on the exterior (e.g., Hamilton, 1993). Yet, Eastern and Western philosophy, of course, are not that rigid. It is much more balanced. Similarly, mindfulness encapsulates both an inward and outward orientation, as I will show.

Mindfulness can be defined as follows: «…paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally» (Kabat-Zinn, 2014, p. 4); «…being fully aware of what is happening in the present moment, without filters or the lens of judgment» (Stahl & Goldstein, 2010, p. 15); and '… simply observing, watching, examining. You are not a judge but a scientist» (Rahula quoted from Stahl & Goldstein, 2010, p. 15).

By paying attention to the present moment, one is not only cultivating his or her awareness, but also minimizing potential forgetfulness-that is, «remembering where we are, what we are doing, and who we are with» (Huxter, 2015). There is, therefore, a responsible link between the past, which is not yet over, and the future, which has not yet come into being. It is also here that that I locate a potential relationship between a more personal and social kind of ethic. For example, to act responsibly and protectively toward the planet, it might be useful (if not required) to consciously be aware of what is happening currently, notice how this relate to societies' norms, and then decide how we can best relate to this in order to pass on what is beneficial for future generations. Norms are social artifacts; they change as we gain new knowledge (Wallace, 1988). By paying attention, I also become aware that some forms of life cannot exist without my care or compassion.

Among the UNFPA report's long list of valuable skills, I will pay closer attention to compassion as a way of cultivating a social responsibility.

The philosopher Schopenhauer has argued that compassion is the base of morality, and the biologist Darwin stressed that compassion was a distinctive human character (Negi *et al.*, 2016). Nevertheless, it is an intricate concept: «Compassion is part of a complex of interrelated concepts that express empathetic attitudes. Many terms indicating helpfulness, kindness, affection, caring, and empathy are employed to enrich its meaning» (Jenkins, 2016). Compassion vibrates in between you and me. Or as Dorjee (2014) writes, «Compassion represents the courage to see our existence, others and the world around us clearly without the preconceptions of stereotypes, fear, and avoidance.»

According to the Oxford English dictionary, compassion can be defined as a «sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings and misfortunes of others,» whereas empathy, for instance, is defined as «the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.» The two concepts complement each other. For example, empathy puts me in the shoes of another person; however, how I use the information I receive depends on my compassion. For instance, in the film *The Silence of the Lambs*, Hannibal Lector is a very empathic person, yet few would describe him as compassionate. (I will return to the differences between empathy and compassion in the next chapter.)

Compassion aims at a releasing of all beings from suffering, or as the Dalai Lama says, «If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion» (Simon, 2014). In addition, clinical psychologist Paul Gilbert (2015) defines compassion as the behavior «that aims at nurture, look after, teach, guide, mentor, soothe, protect, offer feelings of acceptance and belonging-in order to benefit another person.» Kristin Neff (2015) has argued that compassion is not only addressed toward the others, but that through the concept of «self-compassion,» we «stop to recognize our own suffering.» Take care of the self.

In connection with ethics, it is interesting that compassion functions as a moral motivator (Garcia-Campayo and Cebolla, 2016). We are motivated to act with compassion for both our own sake as well as for the sake of the other (cf. Dalai Lama and Neff). In Buddhism (and mindfulness (e.g., Stanley, 2015)), there is a recognized «reciprocal interrelationship between altruism and self-benefit» (Jenkins, 2016). Furthermore, one practices mindfulness with the knowledge that liberation of suffering is possible, which nourishes spiritual and meditative energy (Shonin & Van Gordon, 2015).

Yet, to act with compassion, we first have to be taught, trained, and developed in these skills (Garcia-Campayo & Cebolla, 2016; Simon, 2014). It is also through this element of training or development that mindfulness

correlates with certain ethical practices in Western philosophy.[2] In his *Ethics*, Aristotle addressed the paradox of doing morally good, when he said that one can only do morally good when one knows what it is, but before one knows what is morally good, one must have experienced it. Experience and practice are mandatory. Foucault (1990) emphasized something similar when he described how the ancient Romans (i.e., stoic philosophers) tried to cultivate the «art of existence,» or the «care of oneself,» which also «took the form of an attitude, a mode of behavior; it became instilled in ways of living…that people reflected on, developed, perfected, and taught.»

Ethics is here understood as a mode of existence or a way of life, rather than a moral system that tells us what we ought to or should do (Deleuze, 1997; Smith, 2011). The moral motivator in mindfulness, I propose, aims at changing our *ethical* approach to life in order to see what may *also* be possible. The guiding questions are: How can we also live? How does it work? What is working? For example, when Kabat-Zinn (2013) pointed out that, as long as we are breathing, there is more right than wrong with us, he is addressing this affirmative approach. Similarly, Saki Santorelli (2000) spoke about healing ourselves when we «establish contact» with that which is «alive,» such as in our relationship with other people, as a way to «turn our lives inside out.»

To summarize, this work is guided by two hypotheses with one overall objective. The first hypothesis is the concept of moral motivator or *intentional moral*. That is, both Western philosophy and mindfulness operate with an intention influenced by their moral beliefs. For example, there is a basic belief that a certain way of being or living (e.g., being compassionate) can minimize the suffering of others and ourselves, and make everyone happier.

The second hypothesis is the relationship between moral reasoning and wisdom. That is, our reasoning is affected by our moral belief. This also encapsulates both compassion and empathy; for instance, empathy helps one to understand another form of life, and compassion helps one to use this knowledge in a respectful way. Moral reasoning here refers to compassion, whereas wisdom or insight refers to empathy.

Last, by practicing mindfulness, I not only propose that one can develop his or her capacity for compassion, but also that it is a «way of life» (i.e., «spiritual transformation») that can help protect the planet: an ethical practice.

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2. There are many different ethical theories in Western philosophy. Most known are utilitarianism and deontology; both refer to transcendent categories for what is good, whereas other ethical theories are immanent-here, one cannot step outside the immanent movement of life to evaluate whether it is good or bad *before* it is experienced. The correlation that I try to explore between mindfulness and some ethical theories deals mainly with what can be called "immanent ethics" (Smith, 2011).

In what follows, I will first briefly describe how we might see mindfulness as an ethical practice within a Western philosophical context, and then I will situate mindfulness through the concept of compassion by contrasting it in relation to empathy. Finally, I will argue that mindfulness-especially through my focus on compassion-may not only be a practice of healing ourselves, but also a way of empathizing with the planet to take better care of it. In doing so, I will relate mindfulness to some Western ethical exercises.

II. MINDFULNESS AND ETHICS

According to the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, there is a clear distinction between ethics and morality: «Ethics, which is to say, a typology of immanent modes of existences, replaces Morality, which always refers existence to transcendent values» (1988, p. 23). Deleuze goes on to stress that morality is a system of judgment, whereas ethics overthrows such a system (1988, p. 23).

In other words, ethics is relational when it questions how one might also act in relation to what is happening, unlike morality, which is concerned with judgment. Recalling Kabat-Zinn's operative definition of mindfulness that says, «Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally» (Kabat-Zinn, 2014, p. 4), then Deleuze's understanding of ethics shares the nonjudgmental part-perhaps more.

In his introduction to the second edition of *Full Catastrophe Living*, Kabat-Zinn (2013) wrote that «this book is about you and your life. It is about your mind and your body and how you might actually learn to be in wiser relationships with both.» It is mindfulness' relationship with life that makes it ethical, at least in the spirit of Deleuze.

In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze says, «Either ethics makes no sense at all, or this is what it means and has nothing else to say: not to be unworthy of what happens to us» (2004, p. 169). Ethics is understood as an ongoing process of becoming worthy of what happens to us in the present moment. Being worthy correlates with accepting, which, of course, is not a passive position, or one of «defeated resignation, but rather it is about looking around to see what we can do now with what we've got. It's about 'being in the moment' as opposed to living in regret and with 'if only's' or 'isn't it unfair'» (Gilbert, 2015, p. 67).[3]

In continuation hereof, I propose that mindfulness is an *immanent* ethical practice understood as an exploration of how one both responds to life-e.g.,

3. To be critical toward transcendent values is "not a re-action of *re-sentiment* but the active expression of an active mode of existence" (Deleuze, 2002, p. 3). Critique is something positive and creative.

with compassion-as well as how one creates oneself in relation with one's present moment. Emphasizing the immanence underlines that we are dealing with a secular practice. Mindfulness may still operate with the four noble truths of Buddhism and how liberation can minimize suffering, but without operating with nirvana or reincarnation (Gilbert suggests something similar, 2015). One's engagement with life is a way of unfolding and understanding what actually takes place for us to respond more wisely. Mindfulness, then, can be seen as both a practice and a way of being. Or to put it differently, the mind in mindfulness is part of reality and unfolds as an activity through your relationship with your body, your mind, and the life that surrounds you. For example, Deleuze wrote (referring to Spinoza's *Ethics*),

> The *Ethics* judges feelings, conduct and intentions by relating them, not to transcendent values, but to modes of existence they presuppose or imply: there are things one cannot do or even say, believe, feel, think, unless one is weak, enslaved, impotent; and other things one cannot do, feel and so on, unless one is free or strong…There is no Good and Evil in Nature, there is no moral opposition, but there is an ethical difference. The difference lies in the immanent existing modes involved in what we feel, do and think. (Deleuze, 1997, p. 269)

Here, the judging takes place within the present moment, and not *beforehand* according to an already given transcendent system of Good and Bad. Compassion-both self-compassion as well as compassion for the others-turns out to be a process of becoming one with what happens. Similarly, mindfulness transgresses a moral dualism (i.e., it is a non-dual practice), not only by being nonjudgmentally aware, but also by remembering our purpose or intention to be present as a way of seeing the big picture (Huxter, 2015).

Kabat-Zinn's operative definition consists of four elements, where the first seems to be the most important qua being particular. The four elements are: 1) Paying attention *in a particular way*, 2) on purpose, 3) in the present moment, and 4) nonjudgmentally. «Paying attention» is both a request and an invitation. It is important to emphasize that the expression «paying attention» can only be fully understood by adding the three other operations. «In a particular way» stresses that attention «consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty and ready to be penetrated by the object,» as Simone Weil said, referring to her own philosophy, adding that attention is «… not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object which is to penetrate it» (Weil, 2009, p. 111). The object is life as such. «On purpose» signifies that we need to establish some effort or motivation to accept this invitation, especially since what we should pay attention to is life, not just something that we already find pleasurable because such «pleasure» only cements that we have a problem with craving or attachment (which

also is aligned with Buddhism's second noble truth referring to the cause of our suffering). Furthermore, doing something on purpose requires that one knows something *about* a certain thing. Cultivating this purpose of paying attention, therefore, emphasizes that a mindful person does something with intention (i.e., being aware), not that he or she is aware of something specific on purpose.

Mindfulness is a radical openness, a kind of exposure. As such, it is on purpose that we are aware. The tricky part is, of course, regarding why we should pay attention to our perceptions more than the memories that they might awaken-our memory changes as well. This touches upon the idea of moral motivation or intention.

For example, when I see my son smile, his smile is the object of my seeing. If I then remember the smile, I think *about* that past event, and then the smile is an object of my memory. Although mindfulness stresses the first-since the latter is a memory of my son's smile-the practice implicitly plays on one's past experiences-these brief moments of awareness that everyone has experienced (e.g., moments of flow or joy). Remembering moments of pure awareness can motivate one's concentration in the present moment. The moral is that we do not want to miss our life. Thus, when I see my son's smile, I must see his eyes and not be thinking about the past or the present. Each present moment is already gone as I am thinking about it. Then, once he turns the corner, I can recall the smile to comfort myself, but I should not dwell on the smile because then I would just miss being present in the next moment, and so forth. The memories that we treasure confirm this, which also illustrates the secret paradox of mindfulness: Without my memory, I would not pay attention on purpose.

The premise for paying attention intentionally is to secure a good storage of my life experiences. I can use these once I recognize that my son's smile has changed. I can learn from my past experiences without reliving them over and over. However, awareness also means seeing things as they are (including my own feelings and thoughts), which is that my son's smile is actually impermanent.

Goldstein elaborated on the concept «the present moment» when he said, «Dogs are present, but not mindful» (Goldstein, 2014). Next to living in the moment, mindfulness is also being aware of our mind, body, and feelings in each present moment. This means that your awareness is expanded or extended between your past and future. As a simple example, you are aware of certain feelings, but due to your memory (and general knowledge), you know how to act to avoid unbeneficial or unwholesome actions. The moral motivation is related both to not missing life (cf. Gilbert's «no regret»), but also to gradually enhance our storage of experience that may help us deal more beneficially in the future when future challenges emerge.

Paying attention is, therefore, related to time. Each present moment goes infinitely into both the past and the future. Likewise, Dógen, a 13th-century Zen master, said,

> It [time] flows from today to tomorrow. It flows from today to yesterday; it flows from yesterday to today, from today to today, from tomorrow to tomorrow. It is as if you were sweeping your gaze over one continuous fabric of time. Past time and present time do not accumulate, and future time does not deplete. (Purser, 2015, p. 685)

Thus, the challenge is to be open to the infinite time that each moment carries. To put it differently, one should be cautious not to turn «be here now» or «the present moment» into an ideal or object of desire (Purser, 2015). On the contrary, «to wake up» is something that happens in time, just as you wake up from a dream; it is a process.

Therefore, the two concepts «in the present moment» and «nonjudgmentally» are ways of helping the practitioner to pay attention with intention. The simple reason for this is that to be fully aware and attentive in each present moment is difficult. The moral motivates us through reasoning-that is, showing (self–) compassion with how difficult it is to pay attention.

But how does one pay attention to the present moment on purpose without any kind of judgment? To do something «on purpose» means that there is a reason behind it that makes it less reasonable to focus on something else. The argument here is again related to time. The claim is that only this moment exists. Yet, as already mentioned, the present moment is all there is, although it does not really exist. It is a constant process of actualization that depends on awareness; therefore, «the present moment» and «nonjudgmentally» are strictly operational concepts.

Both (i.e., present moment and nonjudgmental) basically claim the same thing: Do not get caught up in the past, do not worry about the past and what you did not do, etc., and do not get caught in future planning and fantasies, ideals, and norms that you have to live up to; do not postpone your life until after you have received or achieved something. Stay in the flux of the moment. See what it has to offer. Paying attention is becoming worthy of carrying whatever may emerge, which correlates with Deleuze's definition of ethics.

Again, mindfulness does not tell us what is right and wrong beforehand, but that by paying attention we will better to evaluate what happens both according to our future existence, but also for other people's life. Being worthy of what happens is to acknowledge how everything is interconnected, which gives us a basis for positive relating, as well as a sense of being in this together (Gilbert 2015, p. 53). Thinking, feeling, and acting are engagements with life. They vibrate in between what is *no longer* and *not yet*. Mindfulness

can help people pay attention, which is part of a «spiritual transformation» that experiences how everything is interconnected. Weil described attention as something that «is so full that the 'I' disappears» (Weil, 2005, p. 233). «I» becomes someone else, or the self is seen as a changing process (Gilbert, 2015). For a similar reason, Gilbert (2015, p. 137) calls compassion our potential antidote for selfishness.

The survival of compassion stresses that we care about what is happening because what arises is constantly in the process of disappearing. And sometimes, what is in the process of coming into being never succeeds because no one cares.

III. A NOTE ON COMPASSION

Compassion, as we have already seen, is part of myriad interrelated concepts that express empathetic attitudes as well as altruism. In order to strengthen our understanding, I will contrast compassion with empathy and sympathy.

In 1903, the German art historian Theodor Lipps coined the concept «Einfühling» (i.e. «feeling into») as a contrast to «Mitfühling» (i.e. «feeling with»). The first is typically translated into empathy, whereas the latter is translated into sympathy or compassion. The Latin term *compassio* stems from the Greek s*ympatheia* (i.e., feel or sense together), which is related to *empatheia* (i.e., feel or sense into) (Ribaudi, 2016). Compassion can, therefore, be seen as the capacity-through a person's sensibility (not sensitivity)–to move *into* and become *with* another sentient being. This is not to say that we can know for certain what another person is feeling and thinking, but rather that we understand another human being's vulnerability, his or her suffering. If for no other reason, at least because we acknowledge that we share it.

When Lipps spoke of empathy in relation to art, he stressed that, when a work of art impresses or marks us, it is due to our capacity to relate emotionally and mentally with it, or go into the piece, that is, *imitate* the inherent motives of the piece of art. Some may argue that certain pieces of art have the capacity to open, confront, or challenge us, regardless of how closed we are, yet for the purpose of my errand, this is less important.

What I propose as a tentative operative definition of compassion is a mixture of both empathy and sympathy. Yet, none of the concepts should be regarded as moral virtues by itself.

Bubandt and Willerslev (2015) have argued that empathy should not solely be related with understanding, care, and altruism, but also deception, seduction, and even violent purposes (p. 6). This contrast the claim that the Buddhist monk Hanh (2015) is making when he says, «Understanding and

love are not two things, but just one…When you understand, you cannot help but love.» Bubandt and Willerslev's studies also contrast how some social thinkers use the concept; for instance, in *The Empathic Civilization*, Rifkin (2009) argued that our globe can only survive through a «global empathy.» However, the concept of empathy is more than bright. It also has a dark side.

In *Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion*, the psychologist Paul Bloom (2016) outlines two forms of empathy: a cognitive and an emotional empathy. They emerge from different brain processes, he explains, but when we focus on empathy and moral issues, it is normally the emotional side that is in focus. Instead of emphasizing either an emotional or cognitive variant of empathy, Bubandt and Willerslev (2015, p. 18) stress that empathy needs to be seen simultaneously as emotional, cognitive, and corporeal. This fits with mindfulness as a way of mastering a balanced attentiveness in the present moment, «whether in the body, the feelings, the mind, or the interplay between all three» (Shaw, 2014, p. 27).[4] Empathy is an embodied form of knowing, which can be used in beneficial or unbeneficial ways.

So, where sympathy is about feeling or mentally bonding with the other person, empathy is about understanding without losing one's own identity (e.g., strategic purpose) (Bubandt & Willerslev, 2015, p. 7). «Empathy involves, therefore, a double movement of the imagination: stepping into and stepping back from the perspective of the other, at once an identification with another and a determined insistence on the other's alterity' (Bubandt & Willerslev, 2015, p. 7). And it is here that a link between empathy and potential deception emerges, which is part of both biological evolution, but also the constitution of society itself. The conclusion that Bubandt and Willerslev draw is, therefore, that empathy is having both a bright and dark side; henceforth, it is a mistake to see empathy as a moral virtue. On the contrary, it is important to emphasize that «taking another's perspective is a neutral capacity. It can serve both constructive and destructive ends,» as primatologist Frans de Waal writes (Bubandt & Willerslev, 2015, p. 9).[5]

Returning to Bloom, his claim is that we are more empathic toward those who are like us, e.g., sharing language, culture, and ethnicity. Instead of deceiving or faking our intentions, we might become too soft to really act. He agrees with what another psychologist, Daniel Batson, calls «the empathy-altruism hypothesis»–that is, when you empathize with others, you are more likely to help them. The problem emerges because empathy tends to be biased.

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4. The four foundations of mindfulness are the body, feelings, mind, and dharma (i.e., the Buddhist teachings and laws (see Shaw, 2016)).
5. The same can be said about mindfulness. Being mindful is not morally good; it is neutral since it can serve both constructive and destructive ends. Yet, to minimize the potential damage, compassion does serve as a moral motivator.

In other words, we are more prone to feel empathy for people that look like us. Bloom quotes Mother Teresa as an example hereof, when she said, «If I look at the mass, I will never act. If I look at the one, I will.»

What Bloom, however, does not address here is the underlying metaphysical claim that underlies mindfulness, which suggests that everything is interconnected and therefore interdependent (Gilbert, 2015, p. 52). Therefore, Mother Teresa was helping the many when she was helping the few, at least since each child is part of every other child. The argument can appear abstract, but the eco-philosopher Arne Næss (2001) said something similar when he stressed that destroying nature equals destroying a part of myself. We have even said that, at its core, mindfulness is about *relationality* (Kabat-Zinn, 2013, p. 271), emphasizing that nothing exists apart. Here we might also find the argument against Bubandt and Willerslev's description of the tactical and strategic deceiving use of empathy because it only happens when people are not aware of how everything is interconnected, which also underlies Hanh's idea about the connection between understanding and love. Similarly, Weil (2005) advocated for attention as an ethical way of being. It is through one's attention that one can experience compassion for other forms of life.[6]

The moral of mindfulness is: If you are compassionate to others, they are more likely to be the same to you (Gilbert, 2015, p. 137).

Bloom's argument advocates for a utilitarian ethics when he suggests that it is easier to address climate change without empathy. The question is, of course, whether moral reasoning contradicts empathy as he suggests (again, it depends on a more metaphysical foundation); yet, it is important to acknowledge that empathy alone might not be sufficient. For this reason, I propose that it makes more sense to focus on compassion. For example, when Mother Teresa cares for the one child on her lap, she shows compassion for this child, which not only makes her «go into» this child, but also feel and reason *with*. The latter will also enhance her understanding of the social mechanisms that brought this particular child onto her lap, such as war, starvation, fatigue, violence, discrimination, etc. Such understanding opens a social responsibility as well. In other words, I may empathize easier with my own daughter, but that doesn't make me accept, for example, repression or discrimination of girls and women in any parts of the world.

Thus, although I think that Bloom operates with a too-simplistic either-or moral, it is still important to stress that empathy per se is not necessarily good. For example, in relation to parenting, Bloom (2016) emphasizes that «Good

6. Thus, it is not empathy per se that is the problem, but whether one operates with a metaphysic of being or a metaphysic of becoming.

parenting involves coping with the short-term suffering of your child-actually, sometimes *causing* the short-term suffering of your child.» Too much empathy or identification with one's child's suffering can hinder parents in taking the necessary decisions that ensure long-term benefits for the child, whether it is healthy lifestyle, brushing teeth, sharing toys, etc. A similar argument is unfolded on a political level since a person might empathize with someone who is not paying tax, and yet, it would be unwise to sympathize with it. In addition, empathy often leads to the experience of negative emotions, which can cause burnout, while compassion provokes positive emotions and feelings of affiliation and love (Simon, 2014, p. 209).

Neither Bloom nor Bubandt and Willerslev are in favor of heartlessness; rather, they call for a more thorough awareness or moral reasoning. Yet, whereas Bubandt and Willerslev's approach to empathy is descriptive, Bloom is more prescriptive-from a utilitarian position. For instance, Bloom (2016) advocates for the concept of «rational compassion.»[7] Although a critique of a too-naïve understanding of empathy is needed, Bloom's moral reasoning is also too simplistic. Moral reasoning is not either emotional or rational, but both: «Reason loses its function where there is no motivation, and motivation is absent where there are no feelings either for or against» (Næss, 2002). And as mentioned, mindfulness is awareness of both one's feelings, thoughts, and body, if not in relation to the Dharma, then to the current norms and human rights that operate within a democratic world. Therefore, when Bloom (2016) is making a case for deliberative reasoning, arguing that we should use our heads rather than our hearts, I would say *balance* our heart and mind. «The qualities of the quiet mind are spaciousness and clarity, the source of our capacity for discerning wisdom. The open heart is tender, warm, and flowing. Together, these attributes allow us to feel deeply and to act wisely» (Santorelli, 2000). Therefore, understanding should not be seen as sentimentalism, but rather it touches upon the distinction between intelligence and wisdom in Buddhism and mindfulness, where the latter may be defined as «the extent to which an individual accurately apprehends both themselves and reality» (Gordon *et al.*, 2015), or «intelligence can become an obstacle to…the development of a dynamic and fluid wisdom» (Gordon *et al.*, 2015). Sometimes we might have to do more than what seems reasonable.

Thus, what I suggest is that compassion overcomes both the metaphysical obstacle of Bubandt and Willerslev, as when one is suing empathy for unbeneficial purposes, but also not to become too soft to act in a responsible way. Ribaudi (2016) mentions, for example, how compassion is both affective and cognitive when one can empathize *without* necessarily sympathizing, for

7. This is related to the Buddhist idea of how wisdom and compassion work together, since knowledge without compassion can be misused.

example, it is possible to empathize with a pedophile without sympathizing. Similarly, Neff (2015) operated with three components in her concept of «self-compassion,» which are: 1) self-kindness, 2) common humanity (i.e., «feeling connected with others in the experience of life»), and 3) mindfulness (i.e., «hold our experience in balanced awareness,» e.g., in relation to human rights or ethical standards within clinical psychology).

Compassion as a mixture of both empathy and sympathy also avoids vertical sympathy, where one show pity because one may feel or believe himself to be superior. This is where mindfulness becomes an ethical practice. From being solely a technique of self-regulation, it also becomes a self-exploration, for example, to what extent «I» as a mindfulness teacher embodies what «I» teach, «I» teach, what «I» am as a human being (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Santorelli, 2000). Crane (2015) wrote, «How can I teach if I am not also engaged in an exploration of how to sit in the midst of my life?» The challenge is to integrate what «I» do with what «I am» in an ongoing quest to *become* a more compassionate person.

IV. TAKING CARE IN MINDFULNESS AND PHILOSOPHY

Can mindfulness facilitate a global solidarity through a secular spiritual transformation? In order to answer this question, it is useful to understand how compassion can be trained and developed. I have already mentioned how compassion differs from empathy and sympathy, although it is related.

The development of compassion through mindfulness focuses on diverse aspects: affective, cognitive, attentive, motivational, and behavioral (Simon, 2015, p. 218). I will not go deep into any of the particular programs since my errand is a broader understanding of developing compassion, whereas the different programs focus on compassion in relation to something specific. The four programs are, according to Simon (2015, pp. 218-220), cognitive-based compassion training (CBCT), compassion cultivation training (CCT), compassion-focused therapy (CFT), and mindful self-compassion (MSC). What all the programs share despite their differences in theoretical foundations is a double focus of compassion, where altruism and self-interest merge. For this reason, Simon (2015, p. 225) concluded that both individual and collective cultivation of compassion could be essential in reducing violence and the promotion of love and peace. In order to strengthen the link between mindfulness and Western philosophy, I will try to illustrate how some of the exercises for cultivating compassion correlate with self-care in stoic philosophy (I have already shown strong correlations with Deleuze's ethic as a way of being worthy of what happens).

Philosophy in the Western world has always been seen as intimately connected with self-knowledge. Weil (1978) wrote, «All you need to do is know

yourself.» Self-knowledge is understood as a way of avoiding self-deception. It is something that emerges through self-care. Foucault describes how the need to take care of oneself brought the idea of self-knowledge into operation (Foucault, 1997, p. 231). In *The History of Sexuality: 3*, Foucault examines the experience of sexuality in the golden age of Rome. Contrary to the classical Greek version where one was encouraged to control and command one's sexuality, the ancient Romans tended to speak about «the care of the self» or «the cultivation of the self.»

The notion «the care of the self» complements the Greek idea about self-knowledge («know thyself»). The moral is that, to know yourself, you must take care of yourself, and while taking care of yourself, you will also gain self-knowledge. The concept of *self-care* is important because it puts more focus on care or cultivation than knowledge-this care and cultivation work both inwardly and outwardly, that is, on a personal as well as societal level, or as Foucault (1997) wrote, referring to Socrates, «in teaching people to occupy themselves with themselves, he teaches them to occupy themselves with the city.» The point is, if people do not learn how to take care of themselves, it affects society since it will have to take care of them. This idea correlates with mindfulness.[8]

Furthermore, the concept of truth is not something universal and unchangeable, but rather changeable and related to ourselves, that is, our relationship with life. For example, Foucault mentioned how «one must become the doctor of oneself» and «one must be one's own censor' (Foucault, 1997, pp. 235, 241). Similarly, Santorelli (2000) wrote, «Each of us must come to recognize the authorship of our own lives and to stand on the solid ground of our experiences.» The latter is also part of some exercises that Neff established to cultivate compassion, and especially self-compassion, for example, by identifying what we really do, noticing if we judge and why we judge, observing how our emotions arise, and reflecting about how you may use self-criticism as a motivator, etc. (Neff, 2015, p. 167).

One of the exercises that the stoics cultivated and which Foucault refers to is «self-writing,» which is «associated with 'meditation,' with that exercise of thought on itself that reactivates what it knows, call to mind a principle, a rule, or an example, reflects on them, assimilates them, and in this manner prepares itself to face reality» (Foucault, 1997). Both Gilbert (2015) and Neff (2015) recommended writing your progress in a journal, but more importantly, some of their exercises refer to a principle of compassion-i.e., whether we treat others with compassion or how we treat ourselves.

8. And with Aristotle, who understood theory as something that could be applied to a philosophy, which is practiced, lived, and active while it tries to bring happiness (Hadot, 2006, p. 81).

Ethics and morality differ in the sense that ethics deals with forms of life, that is, how one *might* live, whereas morality deal with a baseline of values and norms that one *ought* to live according to. Ethics, as understood here, concurs with the idea that life gradually transforms due to my understanding of and interpretation of my experiences. It is always in a process of becoming.

Henceforth, mindfulness is not necessarily *more* or *less* ethical in a Buddhist sense (e.g., «as demoralizing Buddhism» (Stanley, 2015)), but is ethical in its own right as a way of life. However, not in the sense where the mindful is good and the mindless is bad (see Wilson, 2014); rather in its way of *relating* with life, which qua nonjudgmental is beyond good and bad–»beyond liking or disliking» (Santorelli, 2000, p. 44). This claim consists of one risk, which is how mindfulness is practiced. And yet, despite the different focuses, what matters is the moral intention to pay attention to the present moment, and not some already-defined objective. If we place a memory or an objective of how we were or would like to be over what we are becoming, we might close out all sorts of possibilities (paraphrasing Santorelli, 2000, p. 29). Ethics, therefore, does not necessarily abandon morality, but questions the idea that values and norms are something fixed and given beforehand.

For example, the «ethical» exercises of mindfulness and ancient Western philosophy question the values of values because they can easily lose all value if we just take these values for granted without asking whether they are important or where they came from. To frame this even more positively, ethics as described here constantly explores and experiments with the limits of moral values and norms, often describing how morality can turn into moralism, which hinders us in living an even richer life. Contrary to this, Spinoza speaks about our embedded human right to explore what one is capable of doing, of course, without making other people suffer. «All a body can do (its power) is also its 'natural right'» (Deleuze, 1997, p. 257). Huxter (2015) relates this «natural right» to mindfulness when he wrote:

> If our work involves doing something that for us is meaningless or is going in the opposite direction of what we value then, even if it is not criminal, it could be wrong livelihood for us because we increase our vulnerability to becoming unmotivated, frustrated, feeling trapped, and generally unhappy. Right livelihood is an essential component of the path and if it is ignored it negatively impacts the ability to train our mind with meditation.

Ethical testing and exploration, therefore, does not run counter to the moral baseline. Yet, it remains critical while exploring whether we can facilitate life better; in other words, it debates or negotiates with the moral baseline but always from a nonviolent and compassionate position. Ethics, as life, is a risky business. It is possible for us to make mistakes, but at least we

learn from them because the moral baseline of right and wrong is dynamic. But the main point is that we cultivate our self-care consciously: «When we closely observe and track changing conditions of body and heart-mind we begin to understand ourselves» (Huxter, 2015).

To become worthy of what happens is to be able to carry along what is in the midst of becoming, to allow the event to express itself, to make sense of it. This can also be related to Kabat-Zinn's claim that mindfulness «is about your mind and your body and how you might actually learn to be in wiser relationships with both,» not about imitating, accepting what our body and mind can do in this moment, not what it could do or what it one day might be able to do. Each moment vibrates with an unknown potential. What is actualized depends on our capacity to pay attention.

Similarly, Williams and Kabat-Zinn wrote, «the rush to define mindfulness within Western psychology may wind up denaturing it in fundamental ways,» mainly due to the underlying norms or normality that psychologists use to diagnose. They continue asking whether there is «the potential for something priceless to be lost» (2011, p. 4).

I suggest that it is the radical openness that risks being lost, that is, allows mindfulness to be ethical as a way of living, not as a utilitarian virtue or even Buddhist ethic. Mindfulness can facilitate a change from seeing therapy as *doing something* with the mind (e.g., correcting) to change our relationship with our thoughts and feelings. As Neff (2015) wrote, «We can't control which thoughts and emotions pass through the gates of awareness and which do not. If our particular thoughts and feelings aren't healthy, we can't make these mental experiences go away. However, *we can change the way we relate to them*» (italics in original).

The challenge is to regulate our approach to life, to cultivate a more balanced and harmonious lifestyle, and to notice significant changes in our behavior. Likewise, Aristotle spoke about building excellence in character, which is when you act appropriately for the situation and want to act so. The idea is that you can train your attention to both differentiate between the many problems that a situation may confront you with and understand your feelings better to offer a more fruitful response to what is happening. Meet the world and yourself with less criticism and more compassion.

It requires that we pay attention to what happens while it happens. This stresses that mindfulness should remain open; it ought to remain an immanent practice. Mindfulness *can*, therefore, be seen as an immanent practice, as I have suggested. For example, it can help you gain awareness of whether you really are open to all experiences or whether you are merely looking to cement certain wishes, or overcome certain forms of life in order to normalize according to an ideal. Mindfulness can train our capacity to

pay attention with the intention of experiencing life with a gentle kindness that does not judge it.

What seems to be the stabilizing factor is the approach that extends the space between the stimulation that we all perceive and our response. We are mindful when we do not respond against, but rather accept what is happening. Our relationship with life is evaluated beyond a fixed set of norms. Kabat-Zinn described this challenge: «Since no map completely describes a territory, ultimately it has to be *experienced* in order for us to know it, navigate within it, and benefit from its unique gifts. It has to be *inhabited* or, at the very least, visited from time to time, so that we can experience it directly, firsthand, for ourselves» (2013, p. xxvii). There is no unchangeable moral map; we draw our maps as we walk through life.

Mindfulness moves from reaction to action. When we react, we tend to follow our default setting or autopilot; that is, we are neither open to nor aware of what actually is taking place. Instead, we expect that things represent what we already know. Deleuze spoke about how one constructs problems. For Deleuze, problems are not something that one merely waits for the solution to emerge. Rather, to problematize is to act responsibly in one's relationship with life, for example, by questioning what happens, including one's own actions. For instance, I may question myself if I act differently depending on who I am with; then, such a process of problematization investigates whether I am subjugated to certain ideals or norms that guide society, whether I am-in a specific moment-under pressure, feeling anxiety, guilty, etc. The whole process of elaborating is a process of problematization, which is also a way of responding. When I notice certain stimuli or impulses, I begin the process of responding to the problem; for instance, I begin to construct certain ways of approaching this stimuli. This is an ethical practice, not a way of reaching a destination. This also counts for mindfulness.

For example, Kabat-Zinn said about this program, «…is that we don't really *do* anything for them. If we tried, I think, we would fail miserably. Instead we invite them to do something radically new for themselves, namely to experiment with living intentionally from moment to moment» (2013, p. 5).

What the participants are doing is «non-doing.» Non-doing is not synonymous with doing nothing because consciousness and intention (i.e., purpose) matter. «Non-doing simply means letting things be and allowing them to unfold in their own way…Meditation is synonymous with the practice of non-doing. We aren't practicing to make things perfect or to do things perfectly. Rather, we practice to grasp and realize (make real for ourselves) the fact that things already are perfect, perfectly what they are» (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, pp. 44-45). Practicing non-doing, for instance, does not say *how* one should cultivate his or her life. Rather, one should just sit down and

be aware of what happens-i.e., meditate. Once again, this addresses the risk of letting mindfulness fit within a too-rigid normative psychology, rather than expanding Western psychology, as Williams and Kabat-Zinn wrote (2011). What might be lost is a cultivation of a radical openness and acceptance that everything is becoming, even our own self.

The wisdom of mindfulness, therefore, functions like the world; it is integrated into the world; all it requires is awareness. The participants in mindfulness who are practicing mindfulness «are actively turning in to each moment in an effort to remain awake and aware from one moment to the next. They practice mindfulness…no one is living your life for you, and no one's care for you could or should replace the care you can give to yourself» (Kabat-Zinn, 2013, pp. 6-7). There is no moralizing on behalf of the others; instead, the practice works inwardly, addressing one's relationship with life. This is why experiencing plays such a crucial role in mindfulness: «He who wishes to come through life safe and sound must continue throughout his life to take care of himself» (Foucault, 1990).

V. CONCLUSION

The tenet that mindfulness and ethics (according to Deleuze) share is that both are an ongoing exploration of what our body and mind can do, e.g., what experiences can we embrace without judging. Mindfulness cultivates our capacity to be affected, as our power to respond wisely depends on our openness. Mindfulness is a philosophy understood as a form of life with the following characteristics: it is an immanent practice, rather than transcendent; it is ethical, rather than referring to a moral system.

I have tried to show that mindfulness can play an important role in facilitating a «spiritual transformation» in order to save the planet (UNFPA, 2016). This may be done by putting focus on the concept of compassion, which reaches both in as well as out. I have thus intended to move mindfulness from being primarily an inward practice to being more outward-turned. This, however, should not be understood as if mindfulness is either-or (i.e., inward or outward), but rather that mindfulness is *both-and*. In other words, I propose that mindfulness can be seen as a philosophy, a way of life. I also suggest that mindfulness as such (although many practices of mindfulness exists) is already ethical. There is, in other words, no reason to emphasize the lineage with Buddhism for the sake of making it ethical, although there might be for several other reasons (i.e., metaphysical and ontological claims).

Mindfulness is a relational or connective practice emphasizing that relation comes before being. It unfolds an ethic where one tries to become worthy of what happens, as it happens, while it also treasures this particular experience because it gradually helps one to make more mature or wiser decisions.

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