



The Future of Our Children's Mind, Spirit and Soul: Will the digital revolution destroy them or can schools grow them?

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2 book reviews: **Mind Change** by Susan Greenfields & **Beyond Happiness** by Anthony Seldon.

I encountered two books that deserve to be considered seriously about changes in the way we bring up children. The first is '**Mind Change**' by **Baroness Susan Greenfields**, the chief scientist in the UK (Penguin Random House UK, 2014). Greenfields first raised her concerns on the effect of digital technologies on the development of the brain and mind in a speech to the House of Lords in Feb 2009. Her book examines the current evidence base. The title is reminiscent of 'climate change', as she is concerned that, like climate change, the changes we are witnessing from the influence of digital media on brain development are global, unprecedented, multifaceted and complex, and like climate change it takes a long time and plenty of research to reach a conclusive understanding. She focuses on the influences of **Screen Time, Social Media and On-line Gaming**.

First there is **screen time** which the average young person uses an average of 53 hours/week. Research shows that the amount of screen time in children and pre-teens predicts psychological issues, behaviour

problems, attention problems and physical health, even factoring out the effects of diet and exercise! Bill Clinton described civilization in three stages: first *isolation*, then *interaction* when communities started to exchange ideas, and *integration* with the globalization of thought in the 'noosphere' with internet connectedness of minds. However, this connection with and reliance on facts and ideas available on the internet risks diminishing human capacity for train-of-thought and use of memory. People are constantly interacting and social networking through **Social Media** with their smartphones and computer, such that the real world becomes less relevant. The outdoor playground is replaced by virtual reality sedentariness, with the loss of physical exploration and freedom of the imagination. This can be seen as the erosion of childhood. Internet and video games expose kids to inappropriate content that is difficult to protect them from. In moderation screen time and the internet can help with stimulation, socialising and can benefit some cognitive functions. But in excess, on-line socialisers are alone, representing a false self to others and themselves. Further, the power of the immediate gratification/stimulation prevents deeper thinking and learning. Children of the new generation are easily distracted with shorter at-



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attention spans, lack face-to-face social skills and are dependent on digital connectivity. On Social Media, people present an unrealistically confident, often hostile and critical persona. Meta analysis of online student communication over 30 years indicates a steep decline in empathy in the last 10 years. Impulsive communication with an average of 500 Facebook friends risks the exclusion of real relationships.

The next digital cornerstone is **video games** which for the average 10-13-year-old boy takes 43 hours per week! There are case examples of gaming addiction leading to childhood death from neglect; violent content breeds violence in the home, and some significant suicides.

Greenfields pursues underlying explanations of the biology of the brain: addictions such as compulsive gambling is related to the dopamine release in the nuclear accumbens, associated with recklessness and this can be at the expense of dopamine activity in the higher centres of the frontal lobes. The brain may be complex but we know that external inputs change the organisation of brain cells and in turn your thinking. For example, the expert geographical knowledge of London Taxi drivers gives them a bigger hippocampus. Such skill-related brain enhancement is also depended on the principle of use it or lose it. Experience in the first three years of life can determine whether a child will grow up to be peaceful or violent citizen. Different

expert skills are associated with the development of different brain capacities. Particularly the richness or lack of early stimulation affects brain development and future capacity for inter-neuronal connectivity. Thinking itself can provide such stimulation. Dopamine is the final common pathway of all psychoactive drugs of addiction, giving a sense of reward or excitement in the (primitive) brainstem. In particular, the dopamine can be diverted from the prefrontal cortex, the crucial centre of cognition. Adolescence is described as one hypo-frontal risk-taking state. Childhood, schizophrenia, overeating, autism and gambling all involve hypoactive dopamine frontal activity. All such states involve reduction in reality testing and looseness of thinking. Conversely excessive screen time and trauma increases the size of the amygdala, part of the midbrain or reptilian automatic brain.

Greenfields contrasts Mindlessness with Mindfulness: **Mindlessness** is linked to sensation, strong feelings, immediacy, driven by external environment, little meaning or self-consciousness, no time or place reference, high dopamine, prefrontal under function, world meaninglessness and a small neurological assembly of consciousness. **Mindfulness** involves cognition, thinking, past-present-future connection, driven by internal perceptions, personalised meaning, robust sense of self, clear sequentiality, less dopamine, frontal activity, world meaningfulness and greater assembly of consciousness.

Social Networking: “do I even know my 800 Facebook friends that I don’t hang out with? Facebook has turned us into paranoid neurotic masses who are afraid of a real human connection”. The average smartphone user checks Facebook 14 times a day! Zuckerberg argues “relationships are how we discover new ideas, understand our world and ultimately derive long-term happiness... More than 800million people



“You are in a continuous state of high arousal, craving novelty and stimulation, but vulnerable to manipulation...”

have mapped out 100 billion connections and our goal is to help this rewiring accelerate”. This notion challenges identity as an internalised construct in close conjunction with others but suggests we function as nodes in a complex machine and this wiring is superior! This is the ‘noosphere’.

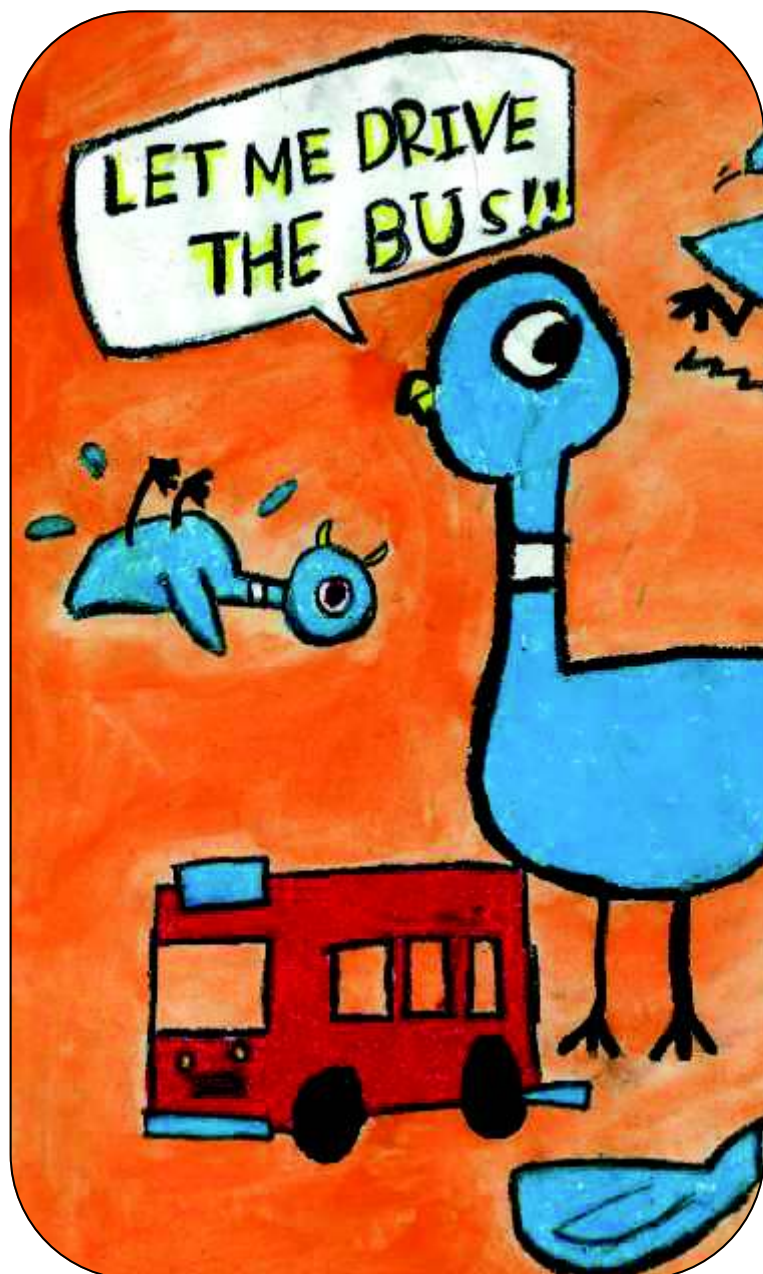
Loneliness and social isolation is bad for health, for example doubling the risk of strokes. We have 209 genes differentially expressed by the level of social contact. Evolution has led to the genetics of immune and cardiac system effectiveness to be sensitive to socio-environmental conditions. These effects are more related to the subjective experience of loneliness than actual social network size. However social contact stabilises heart rate through a burst of the hormone oxytocin. The frequency of living alone has grown dramatically, and the proportion of face to face contact versus electronic connection which was 6:4 hours in 1987 has now reversed! Loneliness predicts attachment to Facebook!

Richard Watson argues that universal connectivity means that we tend to be alone, even when we are together, with social networking even with other people present. Could child care by placing children in front of a screen lead to a primary insecure or avoidant attachment to media? The consequent lonely anxious nature lacks an openness to imagination, new experience and attentiveness to inner feelings as characterises a curious mind. Self disclosure activates brain reward systems which may create the drive for Facebook. However the discrepancy between the public unrealistically positive, narcissistic, false self and the private self may be a key cause for a feeling of disconnection and loneliness.

We all, but particularly the young, use digital communication in greater frequency than face to face. However, face to face communication has physiological correlates from facial expression and body language that reduces stress hormones such as cortisol and raises empathy hormones such as oxytocin, but this chemistry is not seen in digital communication. Further, both genes and emotional communication are key for

growth of mirror neurons which underlies developing the skills of empathy and leads to emotional intelligence. The rise of digital connectedness is inversely related to the availability of friends you can talk to about important matters. Is this the reason for the measured decline in empathy in student cohorts and could this contribute to the rise in psychopathy and autism? Indeed, there is some link between early screen watching and the rise of autistic-like traits associated with lack of eye scanning, lack of emotional communication and theory of mind, with a loss of frontal lobe brain coordination that can be explained by the literal and concrete experience of the screen. Further, excess time on Facebook is related to less time on human relationships which is shown to lead to increased negative, jealous relationships, divorce and destroyed careers. One law firm cited Facebook as a cause in 1/5 divorces.

Rousseau’s notion of the social contract involves an agreement to surrender individual freedoms or rights



for mutual protection and safety. Social networks impact on social morals and cyber bullying has become a new form of violence which is harmful to both bully and victim. Studies suggest 20-40% of young people are victims at some stage. Gossip so easily turns into libel on-line.

Video games are designed to reward users in the same way rats can be conditioned to keep pressing an electric bar to provide food pellets using conditioning behavioural approaches, such that it is designed to be an addictive substitute for real friendship fun. Approximately 8% of young people have all the hall marks of addiction with gaming. They show the growth of ventral striatum, where dopamine is produced in the mid brain, along with desensitisation and tolerance such that gamers lose the dopamine response, in the same way that Ecstasy addicts lose the effect from their fix. In the same way, video games stimulate the user and provides an escape from the real world. Violent video games increase violence in those predisposed. ADHD is a hyper dopamine state, and flooding dopamine receptors with Ritalin re-sensitises you to endogenous dopamine.

Internet Surfing: “without the internet I feel so stupid”. The availability of so much information on the internet means that your capacity for memory and meaningful internalisation of information is less. We bombard ourselves with random information, when knowledge comes from purposeful questioning based on previous perspective.

The impact of the Screen: causes eye strain and presents a world in motion at the expense of visual spatial perspective. You can't write notes in the margin, you can't see where you are on the page or in the book. Memory retrieval is aided by locating the book in your mind in the library and remembering the page with its notes. The consequence of internet knowledge is that you remember less. The average student spends 6 minutes on task before switching to an alternative input. Multi-tasking contributes to short lived attention and this failure to internalise information. Books are generally needed for 'effortful learning'.

Leaving aside measurement issues, only 20-40% of 'g' or general IQ is inherited. Environment has a big impact. The Flynn Effect is the increase in measured IQ over the last 60 years due to a stimulating environment. An alternative explanation is that we have got better and faster at doing tests that are measured in the IQ. Digital natives are better at abstracted pattern recognition and rule recognition independent of context, as found in computer games. However, the Flynn Effect is reversed and intelligence is reduced over time

when one considers appreciation of context rather than facts, and the importance of growth of knowledge from a personalised conceptual framework of understanding. The human capacity for appreciating symbols and meaning which develops into a framework of deeper understanding over time is what characterises the mature mind. Gifted people have greater brain interconnectivity and also analogical thinking. It is thinking in the context of history/memory and experience, along with perspective and empathy that gives us a capacity to imagine and create. Stories and narrative are the staple of culture, requiring time and concentration, not just information. Such deeper thinking is necessary for creativity and meaning. The digital world is not conducive to developing such personalised human higher capacities, in fact risks damaging these key contributors to culture and civilization.

Other potential consequences of greater digital connectedness include the lack of personal privacy, or even internal narrative. The associated loss of personal identity leads to a lack of relationships. Digital sensory stimulation substitutes for meaningful sex and a decline in dating and birth rates as seen in Japan and South Korea. Cyberspace is a 2-D substitute for a 3-D world with a sedentary lifestyle which is contributing to the epidemic of obesity. Your cyber bubble is protected from other real people, yet you are never alone or independent. You are in a continuous state of high arousal, craving novelty and stimulation, but vulnerable to manipulation, as you seek constant approval, with a blurring of fact and fiction, reality and fantasy with a growing ambivalence. Will the growth of bio-technology enhance or harm health and culture, will it promote or frustrate deep thinking, creativity and real fulfilment?

10 years ago Facebook, Twitter and Wikipedia did not exist. 6 of the 7 billion people of the world now have access to a mobile phone, while only 4.5 billion have access to a working lavatory. Did George Orwell's '1984' herald our future world of surveillance and manipulation of thought? Could machines really take over from human creativity? Could biochemistry and genetics transform humans leading to marriage by numbers and eugenics? Humanity has always had a love-hate relationship with progress. Socrates was concerned that writing would destroy mental prowess, 'creating forgetfulness in the learners' soul'. As H. L. Menchen said: 'for every complex question, there is a simple answer and it is wrong!' We have to adapt to change and use the opportunities for greater digital connectedness. It can contribute but not substitute for our nature as social beings. This involves appreciating our need for personal narrative and acknowledged as special, to be accepted as a member of a tribe and part of a larger collective identity, and to experience gratification and

fulfillment. In our efforts to shape the future we need to be aware that cyberspace can be used for both good and for ill.

Although Greenfields raises important questions of childhood neuroplasticity, the strength of her scientific evidence has been challenged, particularly when she suggests media usage may be a factor in the increase in ASD. In particular, the well-respected Dorothy Bishop has criticised Greenfields on her website: <http://deevybee.blogspot.co.uk/2014/09/why-most-scientists-dont-take-susan.html>. This confirms that more research is needed to refine our understanding.

Beyond Happiness: the trap of 'happiness' and how to find deeper meaning and joy by Anthony Seldon.

(2015. Hodder & Stoughton Ltd; London). Anthony Seldon is a prominent headmaster, author of history and biographies, founder member of "Action for Happiness" (2011) and president of the International Positive Education Network. He has implemented his ideas in creative learning, bridging the gap between state and independent schools, holistic education and the teaching of happiness, wellbeing and character education in his latest school, Wellington College. His writing is based on his own experience of life. He posits that we can live our lives on three distinct levels:

I Pain/Pleasure of the body, which involves narcissism and egotism, akin to the behavior of animals; it is amoral, self centered, experiencing the world as if we are the centre of the universe.

II Happiness is based on relationships with others and our deeper selves, a by product of living wisely, treating people as we treat ourselves well, morally and as equals. However, happiness is often built on impulse and gratification, from consumerism, food and excitement. It is often linked to exploitation eg of drugs, alcohol and sex.

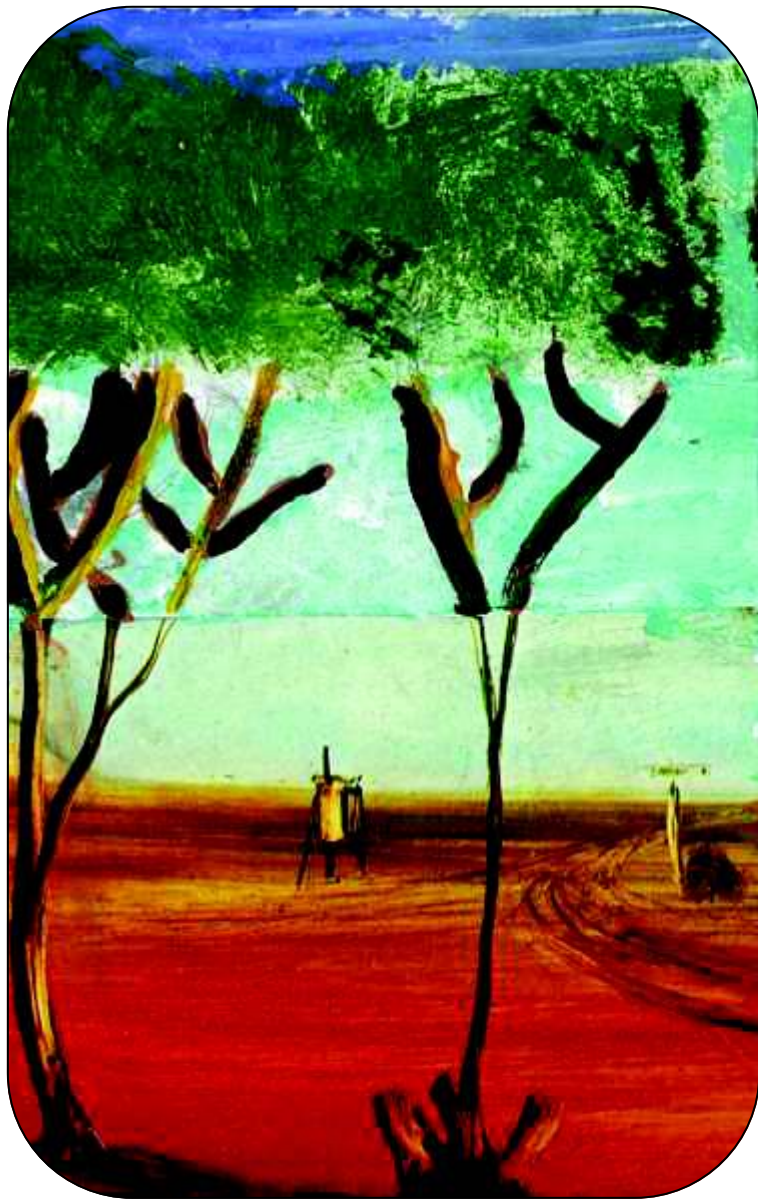
III Joy: once we have built secure egos from happiness, we learn to dissolve our egos into deeper selves in harmony with creation.

The origins of these ideas come from Socrates self-knowledge, Aristotle's virtuous life, the Stoics' use of rational thought and objective perspective, the Utilitarians' greatest happiness for the greatest number, followed by the positive psychology of Maslow with his hierarchy of needs and Seligman and his research 'flourishment'. It is learning about what is right about people, in addition to what is wrong. We can't but feel that there is something deep down that is about more than happiness. The problem is religions often become egotistical and self serving and claim a monopoly on

truth, even as a justification for war. Religion may provide signposts but not a destination. Joy involves enlightenment, experiencing reality beyond our subjective minds, to true freedom and enduring security, towards a more altruistic fulfillment and a more caring society. Life is a journey created by our choices from narcissism to wholeness, such as not blaming others but taking responsibility for who we are and who we resolve to become, from pleasure to self-knowledge to happiness and joy. Eight billion people are each on their unique journey to travel either to greater self-absorption and personal aggrandisement or to immersion in compassion and love for others. We chose the direction we take. Unhappiness and depression does not seem to be reducing with greater affluence and advances in medicine. What is our individual 'song', unique mission or opportunity in life? Have you become more materialistic or more spiritual? Has your aim changed over time? Who has influenced/inspired you and what about? What company do we keep and what is their influence on a road of discovery? In a life well lived death is not to be feared.

We often experience pain from not looking after our bodies well and unwise living. The primary cause of unhappiness is attachment to happiness and dependence on pleasure. Martin Seligman summed happiness in the acronym PERMA: Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment; if embraced happiness will follow. Unpleasant and selfish people are so often miserable. Karma and good actions bring us happiness.

I Pleasure/Pain: If we maximise pleasure and minimise pain, we are no better off than animals. John Stuart Milne wrote: "it is better to be a human dissatisfied than a pig or a fool satisfied. And if the fool or the pig are of a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question". There are higher ends than the chemical sensations of relief of pain. Pleasure should not be denied, as some puritans believe. Pleasures are not evil except if we are obsessed with avoiding pain. Mindfulness of our body contributes to pleasure: eating, flavours, smells, exercise, pets, recreation, relaxing, reading (often in solitude), art, music, architecture, culture, exploring, travelling, appreciating beauty. These things can be enhanced by education teaching more about them. Pleasure in excess can be harmful: overeating, too much wine, drugs, the objectification or exploitation of sex, excessive possessiveness e.g. of children. A balance in work/recreation is necessary so as not to become stale, dull, tired; taking our team sport too seriously. Mindfulness involves travelling lightly through life; a bearable lightness of being.



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II Happiness in the context of this book results from relationships, gained from sharing and giving. The more we grow in our capacity for relationships the happier we become. Happiness is central to individuals, families and wider organisations. Modern life may be characterised by an emphasis on pleasure at the expense of happiness with a consequent society cost in depression and anxiety. At the other end of a -5 to +5 scale of happiness is flourishing, inner fulfilment and radiant energy: a life lived in joy, immersed in love, with an understanding that we are part of a connected and transcendent world in which there could never be anything to fear. The eyes are the window into the heart of where someone is on this scale: a +5 joyful person shows spiritual peace and wisdom, radiates love, compassion and understanding. The eightfold pathway to a happy life is not wealth, possession and power, but:

1. Accepting self, physically and mentally (our past, parents, personality), and others;

2. Belonging to good organisations, being part of something bigger and connected (growing from club, religion or country to a part of humanity);

3. Character virtues (eg hard work, kindness, politeness, punctuality, loyalty, courage, optimism and obedience, and are too often substituted for exam performance);

4. Discipline is vital to resilience and to help us live to our aims and values rather than succumbing to being a victim or pessimist, in different spheres: in body, mind, finances, use of time, relationships, energy and jobs, versus temptation and addictive behaviour in alcohol, bullying, control and cleanliness, drugs, exercise, food, gambling, sex, shopping, status and theft;

5. Empathising and compassion to deepen relationships: that which opens your heart eg music, a memory, a poem or a book, appreciating, forgiving, connecting, taking action, giving thanks, versus judgement, prejudice, cynicism, criticism, detachment and rejection which leaves us isolated and unhappy;

6. Focusing on goals and search for meaning; consider focus under 5 headings, like an archer having 5 arrows to fire: work, family, friends, home and leisure, and any causes you believe in. Aims should be realistic, and achievable within your resources of finances, circumstances, bodily and mental powers. Compare real aims and aspirational, short term and long term. Consider the seven stage model to maximize performance and happiness: read from the 7th upwards: 1. The Crown- be still and reboot; 2. The 3rd eye- appreciate and grow; 3. The Throat- Optimise your wellbeing; 4. The Heart- Empathise with others; 5. The Solar Plexus- Take the initiative; 6. The Sacral- manage your time; 7. The Roots- Set your targets.

7. Giving and serving elevates others and energises us. Seldon lists 10 ways of giving: 1. Acknowledge others; 2. Acceptance without judgement; 3. Using our Expertise for others; 4. Selfless Love is the greatest gift. 5. Money spent wisely on others; 6. ‘One-minute stands’ where we help a stranger; 7. Make Peace with those you have hurt; 8. Smiling makes others happy as well



as ourselves; 9. Giving time, being there for someone; 10. Empathic touch.

8. Health in minds, bodies, and emotions maximises opportunities for happiness. We can all live healthier lives; don't want to only pollute your bodies. What does living at peak effectiveness require? Mastery of breathing prevents fear or anger. Stretching, yoga, relaxation, food, exercise and drink all contribute to bodily and mental health.

III Joy: Deeper, joyful and spiritual vision of happiness is championed by Action to Happiness. the 'eight paths to happiness' are a stage to somewhere, not a place of its own, and will create greater happiness. Happiness can have limitations. It can be superficial, complacent, indifferent, and stultifying to creativity and the depth of human experience. In fact, many religions can be stale and inert. Jesus created a revolution with a focus on a humility and a spirit full of love and joy. Ideology can become a trap of limitations. Is the universe random or a grand design? It is all chance or predestined? A belief in choice suggests it is in between the two. Similarly, Freudian analysis is based on understanding the misfortune of repression, whereas Jung saw misfortune serving a purpose connecting to a collective consciousness. For Freud individuation was freeing us from our unconscious past, whereas for Jung individuation was through achieving inner harmony. For Freud biological necessity was the drive, for Jung life had a divine purpose. Despite the modern cult of individualism, mindful awareness of our consciousness makes aware that the mind is bigger and connected to humanity. "The only wisdom we can hope to acquire is the wisdom of humility. Humility is endless" (TS Elliot).

James Fowler, developmental psychologist, provided a seven stage journey of spiritual growth: 0. Primal/undifferentiated: learning about safety and trust in the first two years of life.

1. Intuitive-projective: fluidity of thought before ego restricts access to sub-consciousness.
2. Mythical-Literal: a strong sense of justice and meritocracy, taking parables literally.
3. Synthetic-Conventional: Teens tend to conform to religious authority.
4. Individuative-Reflective: Struggle with faith, becoming open minded to faith's contradictions.
5. Conjunctive: mid-life adults accept the paradoxes of faith by transcending literal meaning.
6. Universalising: the wise embrace the universals of love, justice, compassion and become enlightened. Simon Walker, a spiritual teacher simplified this to: Lack of Awareness, Awareness, Responsibility and Choice, and Freedom. It is important not to confuse atheism and the rejection with religion, with the existence of a spiritual realm. In fact, fundamentalists have much in common with atheists. They use their understanding of science, philosophy or religion to have a monopoly on truth, and reject spiritual insights of artists, poets, thinkers and statesmen.

Further paths to joy are described:

Inquiry including of our unconscious, learning to live consciously. 'A unexamined life is not worth living' (Socrates). Don't get trapped in happiness and self-satisfaction. Life remains a mystery, but 'whoever knows himself knows his lord' (Islamic saying). Self examination can be aided by looking at your negatives and positives as seen in your: Actions, Beliefs, Fantasies, Fears, Hates, Hopes and Influences, Pressures, Pride, and Traits; all areas of uncertainty of self.

Journey: beyond your own limitations to discover the world afresh. We all have a duty in life to find a purpose. There are two halves of life: as builders of qualifications, careers and families, and the second half we let it all go, becoming less assertive and more compassionate. Pilgrimage is a journey to places of special significance; what are those places for you?

Karma: we are all interconnected in profound and complex ways and the ripples we send out will rebound on us; i.e. 'do as you would be done by' or love others as you would be loved yourself. We are therefore responsible for our actions and it is important to acknowledge harm we have done to others. You can still make peace with those who have died or their families. Acknowledge habitual selfless actions such as volunteering. *Agape* or selfless love is the natural

expression of all on the highest spiritual path and the natural state of those in the highest state of evolution.

Compassion is at the heart of all religions and helps us overcome the drives of feeding, fleeing, fighting and reproduction which are at the heart of our reptilian brain. Karl Jaspers described the Axial age (800-200 BC) when a spiritual awakening occurred including Confucianism, Buddhism and Platonism. CS Lewis describes love of family, of friends and sexual love, which all entail a degree of self-centeredness, whereas Agape alone is the love that yields not benefit but is a sovereign path to joy.

Liturgy: derived from leitōs (public) and ergon (work) or corporate worship. Unfortunately, liturgies are often tightly controlled by religious authorities, often formulaic and rigid. Prayer is a form of liturgy and the main kinds are gratitude, devotion and supplication. We need to be grateful for everything, including what we do not like. We need to think about what we need to give thanks for: food, fresh air, jobs, friends, family and the energy that gives us life.

Life's heroes include those that face horror mindfully, such as those who 'faced' the holocaust like Anne Frank. Devotion can be dangerous whether it be to possessions, sports stars or religious fundamentalism.

However, devotion to the infinite, the source of all love, peace and wisdom is worthy, as it will never harm any being. What are your blocks to such devotion? Prayer as supplication is not to change the sick person who we pray for but to change ourselves and the way we respond to adversity. Facing death with equanimity is the ultimate liberation in life. The 14th century book of 'the cloud of the unknowing' suggests that only by abandoning all our beliefs to feelings of

“Meditation, mindfulness and contemplations are suddenly everywhere...”

'unknowingness' can we begin to comprehend the realm of God. Great sermons, religious songs and holy texts can bind people together and elevate their spirits.

Meditation: meditation, mindfulness and contemplations are suddenly everywhere. They are not new fashions but ancient practices for spirituality, aiming for a quiet, alert mind focused on the present, not darting off. This still and receptive mind is attainable for us all and such a mind is constantly joyful. It is a non-judgmental awareness, to aid relaxation and improve chronic mental conditions. Mindfulness may be seen as secular tool, but awareness of the movement of thought and feeling is your soul, or Atman, a Hindu term. Meditation, in Tibetan means to become familiar with your soul, and is found in all the major religions. Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury is a recent convert. It may involve concentration on a mantra or religious text, an object or statue, a physical posture in Yoga, and includes breath control or pranayama, immersing ourselves in complete silence. Why is your ego preventing you practicing? Are we held back by a fear of extinction or attachment to things that prevent us being free or fully alive? Contemplation is allowing the soul to understand divine forms. Current lives are designed to distract from the present moment. It used to be a fear of attack e.g. of wild animals, now it is the lure of electronic media. Spirituality means waking up, whereas we pass through much of life in partial awareness, like driving automatically. We are inclined to miss the loveliness and beauty of human existence.



Iris Murdock invites us to ‘focus on what is good as doing so will connect us with the true nature of things’. Doing so makes us ‘humble, seeing oneself as nothing and seeing other things as they are’. For Anthony Seldon this journey enabled him to find total love for his dying wife. It taught him to reflect on his own learning and mistakes in life. In such a journey, the more you put into it, the more you get out. Maybe, he concludes, his role is as a teacher. At the end of it he felt lighter than in his previous life, and the future is filled with excitement and anticipation. He invites us to make a similar journey.

I find this book engaging. It brings together inter-denominational commonalities of the great religions and suggests they are still relevant to our post modern world. Great schools teach us about emotions, relationships, character and good, which are arguably more important components of preparing a young person for the future than exam grades. As Hugh Mackay, the social researcher, recently reported: over two thirds of Australians describe themselves as believing in a greater being or God, but less the 10% attend church regularly (Beyond Belief, 2016). This is because most of our society still believe in religious derived attitudes, but not the ideology. Inconsistencies of religious ideologies has sapped the authority each has.

A book such as this may well capture a wide audience, not just those using mindfulness in mental health and social welfare. The idea of a pathway to fulfillment, as here described, will similarly find many adherents. Such ideas are difficult to test empirically, because they derive from history, faith and experience. However, the strength of such an approach is dependent on a spiritual leaders’ familiarity and linkage to a wider literature of ideas.

I am inclined to recognise the descriptions of a pathway of awareness of happiness through life. I adhere to a notion of an evolution of our ways of explaining our purpose in life and the importance of our personal and wider connectivity. How does spiritual connectedness link to the growth of an awareness of the noosphere, as describe in ‘Mind Change’ above? Such global processes of our human connectedness could become a unifying humanising movement, to contrast to other ‘truths” we are fed, such as the inevitable political forces of global economics, resources and climate. I have long felt schools should have a metric of wellbeing, resilience and flourishing against which to benchmark their progress and achievement. For those that believe in moral betterment of the individual and humanity, this book provides an experiential and secular guide to put the human spirit at the centre of life.

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