Conscious presence: on psychoanalysis and mindfulness

Jussi Kotkavirta

Abstract

Increasingly the persons who enter psychoanalysis or dynamic therapy also do meditation or some other form of mindfulness oriented practice. Mindfulness has become a kind of megatrend also in therapy-markets. Especially cognitive therapies apply mindfulness-based techniques and the number of mindfulness-base therapies for various psychological as well as somatic disorders is increasing.

In practicing mindfulness a person directs his awareness towards the present moment. He perceives and describes his current experiences and bodily sensations, thoughts and feeling, without judging or attempting to change them. He is attentive and receptive to what is taking place in the present moment, showing acceptance and empathy.

There are interesting similarities as well as difference between mindfulness and psychoanalysis. In both, conscious presence is constitutive of the whole practice, but the overall thinking of the obstacle for achieving such a state is very different. Whereas mindfulness is based on Buddhist religion, philosophy and psychology, psychoanalysis is based Freud’s dynamic theory of psychic conflicts. There is a growing literature on this topic. In my presentation, I will discuss the principal similarities and differences between mindfulness and psychoanalysis, including some clinical observations.