

dissipates into the digital ether. Pramuk does that pretty consistently, but there are certain presumptions in his conclusions which can constrict rather than open up a dialogue.

Despite this caveat, I have to consider at bottom how I have been affected by the book. The truth is that I am a “better” Pink Floyd fan, a better teacher and more attuned to art for reading this book. Followers of Jesus have to live somewhere between Woodstock and Altamont, seeing each as an expression of a fallen humanity. I have concluded thus because Pramuk brings us along with sensitivity and pastoral care, opening us to artistic renderings of glory and tragedy in order that we feel them more authentically – informed, we hope, by the tenderness of the Holy Spirit.

Aaron K. Kerr

MEYER, William, *Three Breaths and Begin: A Guide to Meditation in the Classroom* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2019), pp. 242 pp. ISBN: 978-1608685721 (paper) \$16.95.

William Meyer, author of two young adult historical adventure novels and an illustrated picture book for children on guided meditation, *Big Breath*,¹ offers a practitioner’s guide for educators to introduce meditation into the classroom through his latest work, *Three Breaths and Begin*. As a full-time secondary educator, always in search of additional classroom resources to help engage students to further self-discovery, I was intrigued and excited to get my hands on a copy of this book to learn what type of practical insights could be gleaned and integrated within my own course materials.

The premise of *Three Breaths and Begin* is a timely one. Students at all levels need more opportunities to engage and come in tune with the needs of a wholeness of health and exploration of the self in contemporary culture (see 5). There has been a recent growing body of scholarly literature exploring the incorporation of meditative practices in the classroom, to engage students of all ages into a deeper sense of mindfulness and stress release with much acclaim and success.² In the realm of popular

1. William Meyer, *Big Breath: A Guided Meditation for Kids* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2019).

2. See Lana Zinger, “Educating for Tolerance and Compassion: Is There a Place for Meditation in a College Classroom?” *College Teaching Methods & Styles Journal* 4.4 (2008) 25-28; Jennifer Mata, “Meditation: Using It in the Classroom,” in W. V. Moer, D. A. Celik & J. L. Hochheimer, eds., *Spirituality in the 21st Century: Journeys beyond Entrenched Boundaries* (Oxford, UK: Inter-Disciplinary, 2013) 109-19; E. James Baesler, “Meditation in the Classroom: Cultivating Attention and Insight,” *Listening Education* 1.6 (2015) 8-15; Daria Pizzuto, “Mindful in Middle School: Strategies for Teachers,” *Kappa Delta Pi Record* 56 (2020) 122-27.

culture this is also the case, as a special edition of *TIME* magazine was completely devoted to the topic of the benefits of meditation and mindfulness, which included a practical exploration of the use of meditation with students in the classroom.³ It is indeed essential that in the era of a social media revolution students need time to experience stillness and personal reflection. Meyer rightly reminds the reader: “We must not forget that it is in our stillness that we find our selves, we find our dreams, and we find our light” (188).

Meyer revisits and establishes well the need for change from a strictly standards-based academic curriculum to include transformational engaging activities that explore the inner energies and heart space of students, especially through the context of meditation (see 11-18, 54-56, 121). The push for academic excellence, high-stakes standardized testing scores, pressures of preparing for college and the lack of connection to the reality of the student in many curricular expectations across the nation have left many youth and young adults without opportunities for internal introspection, or time to rest and reflect in the peace of the present moment.⁴ The contemporary restrictions and regulations during the Covid-19 pandemic have brought further challenges to students and educators, and have deepened a feeling of displacement and greater stress and anxiety upon students, limiting their ability to engage with authentic processes of self-discovery through their educational experiences.

Although published before the additional challenges of a pedagogical perspective bound within a pandemic culture, Meyer’s insights throughout the textual narrative, as a teacher, evolve from description and experience into a call for action and change from contemporary pedagogical approaches that often leave students feeling objectified to an educational encounter that renews and restores the dignity and wholeness of the human person (see 58). Meyer’s pedagogical outlook could be placed firmly in the perspective of holistic educators like Mark Van Doren, Thomas Merton and Parker Palmer.⁵ Throughout his manuscript, Meyer embodied the

3. See Mandy Oaklander, “Om for Kids: Mindfulness and Meditation Exercises Are Helping the Next Generation Get an Edge in the Classroom,” *TIME: Mindfulness – The New Science of Health and Happiness* (2016) 28-29.

4. See Vicky Abeles and Grace Rubenstein, *Beyond Measure: Rescuing an Overscheduled, Overstressed, Underestimated Generation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015); Padraic O’Hare, “Christ and the Undivided Young Adult: Clues from Merton and More,” *The Merton Seasonal* 43.1 (2018) 3-11.

5. See Thomas Del Prete, “Thomas Merton on Mark Van Doren: A Portrait of Teaching and Spiritual Growth,” *The Merton Seasonal* 16.1 (1991) 16-18; Thomas Merton, “Learning to Live,” in Thomas Merton, *Love and Living*, ed. Naomi Burton Stone and Brother Patrick Hart (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1979) 3-24; Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*:

importance of meditation bringing a student to self-discovery: “In seeking to understand the connection between the mind and the heart, this book explores meditation as a tool for helping students make meaning of their own lives and develop a deeper sense of self” (16).

Three Breaths and Begin includes twelve thematic chapters, each focusing on a different example of meditative activity grounded in tangible experience, as well as a section of common questions and answers about incorporating meditation in the classroom, an appendix of sample scripted classroom meditative activities and a brief resource listing of groups, locations and organizations to contact about further information about meditative practices. Each of the twelve contextual chapters follows a parallel structure: (a) a personal story or experience; (b) an introduction of the chapter theme and its meditative activity; (c) a personal narrative or informal experiential evidence; and (d) a script for a practical meditation experience for classroom use. Meyer’s use of frequent anecdotal experiences and guided-example meditations aids the reader to visually understand each activity, such as when using meditation within a small-group student club atmosphere, elementary and secondary settings, situations of tragedy and trauma affecting an educational community, professional development workshops for educators, and spatial awareness through field trips and various learning environments, inside and outside the traditional classroom atmosphere.

Meyer acknowledges to the reader at the onset of the book that it should not be approached as an “academic discourse on mindfulness or psychologist’s treatise” (5) but the consistent use of anecdotal evidence may seem to leave sections of the narrative as superficial or missing crucial evidence that would directly strengthen the author’s points. The stories and personal reflections offered at the beginning of each chapter lay a tangible context for the concept of the meditative practice and may be beneficial for introductory educators, but the veteran educational practitioner may find some of the narratives forced and often distracting from the primary purpose of the text. Likewise, an educator with an interest of researching and applying the writings of Thomas Merton to the classroom may be disappointed to experience that the writings and insights of such seminal contemplative individuals as Thomas Merton and Thich Nhat Hanh are mentioned through only cursory explanation, limited to merely a few sentences or brief paragraphs.

As a whole, *Three Breaths and Begin* does offer a primer and basic introduction for educators into the art and experience of incorporating meditation into the classroom. It is full of practical advice and helpful

awareness of common pitfalls when inviting students into the patient stillness of listening to the heart in silence, but the manuscript lacks the depth and richness of supporting scholarship that would offer insight and guidance beyond pedagogical situations. One of the greatest strengths of *Three Breaths and Begin* is that Meyer offers multiple helpful script-guides that lay a strong foundation for starting points for teachers interested in introducing guided meditation into their classroom environment, which can help lead students to a deeper encounter of their authentic self. As Meyer stated: “Meditation doesn’t create something that isn’t there, but it often will bring to the surface what has been hidden away” (73).

Thomas Malewitz

KERR, Aaron K., *Encounters in Thought: Beyond Instrumental Reason* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019), pp. 135. ISBN: 978-1532639173 (paper) \$20.00.

Aaron Kerr’s new monograph asks the question: how can we rouse ourselves from the mental torpor induced by technology and instrumental reason? As Kerr sees it, “if we do not interrogate our technological culture we remain distracted in digital patterns of consumerism” (xi). The central chapters of the book each outline a single mental process that can free us from our unreflective state, followed by a discussion of an exemplar of said process, and finally an everyday depiction of it. Thomas Merton exemplifies *openness* and is used throughout the book as a figure capable of encounters in thought. He is an iconoclast against the backdrop of our preoccupied culture whose lead we should follow. The book is theoretically rich and practically useful as a guide to renewed practices of thinking.

Kerr spends the first chapter delineating the problematic of modern technology and instrumental reason with appeal to Albert Borgmann’s *device paradigm*. Technological convenience – and increasingly the internet and screens – alienate us from the true experience of things. Things become transposed from what they are into data for our consumption (hence the emphasis on instrumental reason). Kerr then offers two case studies of high school teachers who have combated the grasp of technology on youth. One theology teacher uses exercises of silence to interrupt digital reliance. A biology teacher uses field trips into nature. Both create a reflexivity that students need in order to recognize their ordinary void of thinking. The pedagogical examples Kerr provides are instructive of Kerr’s purposes: one use for the book is to help academic teachers reflect on their practices.

The second chapter creatively borrows from infant psychology to describe how to hone the intellectual virtue of *openness*. Openness