certain; there can only be *uncertain certainties* and *uncertain uncertainties*. This initially counterintuitive view has significant implications for how we both understand and live our lives. For instance, from a 'both/and' orientation, uncertainty expresses its presence not only in the surprising events in our lives, but just as equally and forcefully in the expected and (seemingly) fixed or certain meanings and circumstances of everyday life, and urges us to treat each instance of expected certainty as novel, full of previously unforeseen and uncertain qualities and possibilities.

Nearly 400 years ago, a very wise man named Blaise Pascal pointed out that '[i]t is not certain that everything is uncertain' (Pascal, 2006, p. 105). I look forward to the challenges put before us by future theories of depressive realism that acknowledge this conclusion.

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Depressive Realism

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There are facts, there is selection of facts, and there are interpretations of facts. The early studies of Alloy and Abramson quoted by Feltham in his introduction to the theme issue on depressive realism (DR) (Feltham, 2016) recognized that people in ordinary mind-states tend to distort the former, assessing their chances more highly than their neighbours and selectively viewing their experiences according to the dictates of an in-built optimism, whereas those with mildly depressive mind-states tend towards a more realistic and sober assessment of their situations and prospects. Does this mean that one has to be depressed in order to have a better grasp of the truth?

At first reading, depressive realism appeals to me as a Buddhist. Indeed, Feltham includes the Buddha among the many diverse proponents of DR whom he catalogues in his theme issue introduction. His description of the DR movement as rooted in a recognition that 'we suffer, some pleasures notwithstanding. We are susceptible to accidents and disasters, we age in decades and deteriorate; we die, decompose and are forgotten' (88) reads with remarkable, and perhaps not coincidental, similarity to the textual descriptions of *dukkha* (affliction), the First Noble Truth, which, according to Buddhism, we must wrestle with in order to reach a place of equanimity.

The Buddha's spiritual journey began as a quest to discover the meaning of suffering, spurred on by his encounter with four sights representing sickness, old age, death

and the path of enquiry. It led to deep insight into the reality of the apparently depressive facts represented by these sights which formed the foundation for his teachings. Where DR seems to depart from Buddhism, however, is in bringing under scrutiny the process of perception by which these and all other experiences are viewed, and questioning the stamp of interpretation implicit in it, whether this comes from the unremitting negativity of DR, or the avoidant spin of humanistic positivism.

As Pollard (2016) concludes, both DR and its opposite share a liking for certainty and a rejection of its opposite, 'not knowing'. Buddhist practice, conversely, is about extending our inevitably egocentric 'knowing' ever onward until it breaks down under the weight of not knowing. Buddhist psychology suggests that people ordinarily view the world according to conditioned agendas, seeking out those aspects of the phenomenal world that support the ordinary mind-set, and thus avoiding what is uncomfortable in reality. This ordinary mind is escapist, employing strategies of selective perception and ignore-ance, *avidya*. Paradoxically, it clutches at illusory certainties: sense-distractions, a separated sense of self or clinging to social forms, a list remarkably similar to Zapffe's four ways, which Pollard cites in his article. Buddhist practice attempts to change this. The resulting possibility of liberation arises from deep honesty of experiencing, not unlike that freedom of being proposed by existentialism.

Having the courage to stand firm in the face of fear and dread is characteristic of Buddhist method.[1] This practice happens at the micro-level as well as the macro. Focusing attention on direct experiencing, and the ever-shifting complexity of what is arising and passing away in each moment, is the foundation of mindfulness,[2] and, through this, semblances of permanence become lost in a kaleidoscope of flowing cognition.

Paying attention in this way to the arising and passing away of phenomena, whether it be the momentary experience of a breath or the decomposition of a corpse, is not depressing. What generally emerges from the practice of mindfulness is a mind that is at peace. Nor does this religious experience rely upon insight into metaphysics. As we look deeply into what is real and become more aware of how our view of ordinary reality is in fact conditioned, founded on a set of beliefs about what is and what should be – the belief that we should not suffer, we should not die, for example – we find liberation from our depressive fight against the inevitable.

Life includes more than its book-end events, and to reduce it to title and credits is to miss the content that lies between. More importantly, though, even if we look at the irreducible facts of birth and death, are these something to be depressed about? Death is the ending of life, but is it necessary for us to rail against it? Buddhism teaches that it is in the nature of all things to exist in flux, arising from prior conditions and, even in coming to being, so ceasing to be. Our affronted response to the inevitability of death is rooted, not in wrong perception, but in our attachment to personal continuity and individual, separate existence. Given that the finite nature of our individual lives is the reality, then we can choose to view this knowledge with affront, or we can challenge our sense of entitlement. As we do this, we begin to experience everything in a new way. The in-between spaces of ordinary here-and-now experiencing become transformed as we see the reality of the commonplace in a new way. We are no longer fixated on a fictional future death, but on a present reality of aliveness.

The question of what is real has preoccupied philosophers for centuries. Many subjective realities are possible. Life is complex and multi-layered, and experiencing is determined by the experiencer as much as by some objective truth that is being experienced. In the infinitely complex web of conditions, consciously or unconsciously, we choose what to give attention to and how to see it. Here, Buddhism and existentialism

find common ground in seeing one path to liberation as being taken through choice. This is not always easy, however, for we are, as Pollard says, in Heidegger's view, trapped in 'a world of shared meanings, objects and practices' (138).

So is depressive realism itself a delusion? Reading Colin's assertion in his theme introduction that the DR person was 'almost certainly male', I found myself wondering if DR could in fact be viewed as an ennoblement of male depression. Women, after all, are known to be more susceptible to commonplace depression than their male counterparts, but rarely elevate their experience to the realms of philosophy. Certainly, the meanings that we make are important, and a theory stands not only on objective verity, but also on the effects it has on those who hold to it. Here I am with Jeannie Wright (2016) in believing that collective action has much to recommend it; and although we operate within the scope of certain inevitabilities, what we make of the world we share is still open to influence.

Notes

1. Sutta on Fear and Dread, Majjhima Nikaya 4.
2. Satipatthana Sutta, Digha Nikaya 22 and Majjhima Nikaya 10.

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On depressive realism: a letter from John Rowan

Dear Editors,

Depressive realism seems to be a one-level approach – as is, of course, a strictly defined Humanistic Psychology. But I have long argued against one-level thinking, and in favour of multi-level thinking. The Ken Wilber approach is, I suppose, the best-known version of this (Wilber, 2000).

A multi-level approach says that each level of consciousness has its own advantages and limitations, and that it should not attempt to dominate by asserting superiority over any other approach. Horses for courses, in the old adage. Depressive realism seems to be very useful in showing up the problems with any approach that tries to be too positive. But taken by itself, it is one-sided and insufficient, just as positive psychology and a too-narrow version of Humanistic Psychology would also be one-sided and insufficient.