The last large blue butterfly (and individual flourishing)

Michael A. Peters

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Somewhere in the English countryside near the southern Lake district, 2031 …

Marti Selig woke up from his REM Deep Sleep program feeling refreshed but still vaguely apprehensive. It had been almost nine months of a new chemo-electrical treatment that recorded, analyzed and stimulated his brain wave activity. The program was helping him to relocate in the REM zone during sleep time and it had certainly helped him to overcome the nightly panic attacks that he had been experiencing. The same dream had recurred: he dreamed he was the last man on the planet and he walked around in dust up to his ankles calling for his children. It was spooky and Marti woke up from the dream feeling utterly exhausted. He had registered himself on a platform he had helped to create. It was a mix of mindfulness techniques, mostly commercialized forms of Eastern meditation, and Health Watch that recorded at the microlevel the physiological data of vital signs and expressed them in elegant patterns. His beautiful female robo-doktor related to him the latest full body report in a sing-song soothing voice every week.

He was no slouch himself on these matters. During the 2020s he had turned his interest to mindfulness and published almost a dozen papers on a theme like ‘A multi-method examination of the effects of mindfulness on stress attribution’. He had been instrumental in devising mindfulness-interventions for students, soldiers and parliamentarians who suffered from anxiety...
disorders and depression. This was part of the Emotion Regulation Strategy (ERS) that he had invented to show that mindfulness training could be more cost effective than antidepressants. Marti was one of the ‘positives’ or ‘posies’ who had helped the WHO to identify patterns of self-harm and the rise of youth suicide rates after the Sixth Great Extinction had seen the last of the bumblebee. There was no great cause for alarm as it turned out: while everyone was sad to see the demise of the humble bumble, entrepreneurs had discovered new means of pollination and elsewhere in the wilds of northern New Zealand there were still some hives functioning to make Manuka honey. Marti himself was partial to the products and at great expense to himself he spooned himself a generous dollop every morning.

He had established meditation regimes, self-improvement digital profiles, life lessons, LIFE (a new fully integrative platform with mood enhancement therapy), and subjective well-being which had been turned into the ‘curriculum of human flourishing’ supported by various education authorities. Marti was a consultant to the project and rather proud that techniques he had assembled and measured comparatively across different student populations on 37 different variables showed that the program was even successful in treating some forms of psychosis. Ontological Addiction Therapy and Co-created Happiness Experiences had even been used for irritable bowel syndrome, although its success with bringing down the suicide rate was somewhat limited. Marti himself followed these self-techniques – he was a past master at meditation and mindfulness. He often used mindfulness and meditation techniques to handle personal stress and to help cope with his facial rash that flared up occasionally. On the International Mindfulness Awareness Test, he ranked highly and he used the same self-technologies to control his own tendencies toward obesity. Marti had a soft spot for new household dispensaries of fast food that could replicate the old Big Mac and Finger-Licking Deep-Fried Chicken.

At the latest conference, off the record Marti, had shared his sleep problems and presentations with a couple of closest colleagues. He described the recurring dream – like a painting in a dark purple where it was impossible to make out the vague shapes in the distance. He was always alone. His heart was palpitating. He was sweating. The dust got up his nose and choked him. It left a nasty taste at the back of the palate which he couldn’t cough up. They recommended the dream therapy. He had tried all the techniques he knew. In terms of personal growth, he was so to speak fully grown. He had experimented with all the forms of the ‘mindfulness revolution’ techniques of the 2000s. In one of the mindfulness sessions using a model of meditation he decentered himself enough to understand a possible cause of the chronic insomnia he was suffering. He dated it to a report he had read on the state of the natural world in the UK that indicated then in 2019 more than a quarter of mammals were facing extinction. The so-called State of Nature Reports provide a picture examining data from over 7,000 species. The report had documented the species extinction facing the UK with the loss of a quarter of all moths and almost one in five butterflies. The numbers showed the plunging declines of all species and threatened the complete extinction of the large blue butterfly, an insect with which he had had a love affair during his growing up. He used to collect butterflies and the large blue butterfly was his favorite specimen. He was rattled that the large blue butterfly might be on the endangered list and even in spite of his ‘happiness reframing’ he could not bear to think of the end of this delicate and beautiful creature. It was to him a haunting metaphor for life itself and despite his continual reframing, individual flourishing modification, and lessons for life that now had become his background worldview, he could not bring himself to dwell on the death and extinction of large blue butterfly.

Yet seemingly without fail every time he went to bed, he dreams the dream of the large blue. This time waking up in a panic he remembers looking down at his feet and there in the dust is a luminous phosphorescence of the wing of the large blue butterfly. He had trammeled it and he knew that it could be the last. For the first time he faltered in his self-indoctrination of the ideology of human flourishing. He heard his children screaming in the distance.
Notes

1. [https://nbn.org.uk/stateofnature2019/reports/](https://nbn.org.uk/stateofnature2019/reports/)
2. Why did the large blue butterfly become extinct in Britain? Jeremy Thomas, ‘It is believed that the large blue butterfly became extinct in Britain in 1979. It is over 50 years since any British butterfly was lost, but the demise of the large blue is particularly sad because it was one of our most attractive species and because it has a particularly interesting life cycle. Eggs are laid on thyme *Thymus praecox*, on which the young larvae feed, but older larvae are carried by red (*Myrmica* spp.) ants to their underground nests, where they live for nine months, feeding on ant grubs.’ The red ant had saved the large blue and now it was back on the extinction list. [https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/S0030605300024625](https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/S0030605300024625)

Michael A. Peters

*Beijing Normal University, Beijing, PR China*

contact: mpeters@bnu.edu.cn