

Recontextualizing Mindfulness: An Integral Vision of Social Liberation

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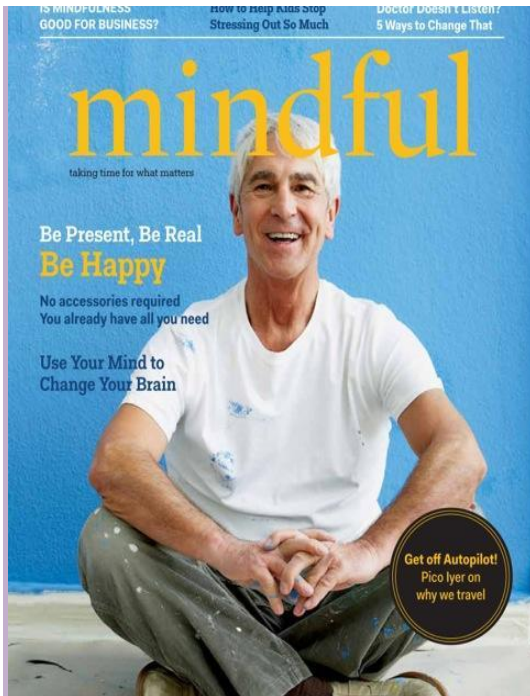
DON'T CHANGE CONTEXT, CHANGE YOURSELF



IT'S ALL ABOUT "CHOICE"

- Stress explained in a decontextualized way (focus on the brain as independent entity) requiring individualized treatment, monitoring, fixing by experts – stress may be symptomatic of the very cultural context that produces such disempowerment
- Individual is fully responsible to choose their own wellbeing, despite social and economic circumstances – and therefore also fully responsible for their own “failure”
- Emerging “science of choice” – ideological shift – merger of individual responsibility with free market economics

THE HAPPINESS INDUSTRY



- Happiness (flip-side of stress/depression)
- Being good vs. feeling good?
 - Was MLK “happy” sitting in Birmingham jail?
- “Depression-Competitive Disorder” of Neoliberalism (William Davies)
- \$550 billion/yr. annual losses “lack of engagement”
- Bio-morality – Moral demand to be happy, healthy and mindful
- Cultural malaise – “Pathology of Normalcy” – E. Fromm

STRESS & UNHAPPINESS AS RISK

- Stress and unhappiness reduction must be managed, otherwise it puts power structures at risk
- Formerly, the measures of mental life were institutionally restricted/limited (IRB, surveys, corporations/prisons, etc)
- Tremendous interest in corporate mindfulness, self-monitoring surveillance technologies for mental optimization -- as a means to neutralize alternative forms of political discourse
- Who controls the explanatory narrative? Bio-neuro-medical-materialist explanations renders human agency as passive, requiring treatment
- Mindfulness restricted to the medical/psy-paradigm

EXPANDING OUR FOCAL SETTING ON SUFFERING/STRESS

- Medicalization of stress, individual dysfunction (neural and behavioral errors, poor self-regulation, mood disorders, etc.)
- Psychology, first person, neuroscience
- Stress is an individual problem that requires treatment
- Focus on individual behavior and mentality of people, critique turns inward
- Monological
- Utilitarianism/Behaviorism
- Stress is embedded in social, political and economic institutions and policies
- Community psychology, social epidemiology, sociology)
- Stress is a socio-political-economic problem that requires civic mindfulness
- Focus on structures of power, critique turns outward
- Dialogical
- Critical/Interpretative

Privatized Mindfulness and Wellbeing

Clinical Mindfulness/Psychotherapy (MBSR, MBCT)
Emotional self-regulation/"resilience"
Focused attention on thoughts, feelings, sensations
Equanimity
Stress reduction/coping/adaptation
Subjective/First-person contemplative experience
Wilber's "I" interior
Dangers of narcissistic self-absorption

Potential indifference to social suffering

Cultural Views/Inter-Subjective

What is the good?
Ethics
Group values/Shared Collective Meanings
Collective Meaning making
Humanities/Human Sciences/Action Research
Meaning of an illness
Second person/Relational
Wilber's "We" interior

Orthodox Medicine/Neuroscience

Pharmaceuticals
Bio-materialist explanations
Brain/Neural Correlates
Scientific materialism
Wilber's "It" exterior
Third-person, objective science
Rats, pigeons, dogs, brains
Bio-Social analytics, self-monitoring wearable technologies

Socio-Economic Systems/Inter-Objective

Interlocking/interdependent socio-political structures
Societal Institutions
Power relations
Economic Factors
Technological infrastructures
Political economies
Healthcare Policies
Social delivery systems
Wilber's "Its" exterior (Third person)

THE BIO-MATERIALIST TAKE-OVER

- Reductionism (neuro-speak) to bio-materialism circumvents human consciousness, agency and voice
- First & second person forms of inquiry being displaced
- What appears at first as benign interventions to improve wellbeing can eventually morph into forms of social control
- “This is an ethic of empathy, which is extrapolated to a society of scientific surveillance” – William Davies, *The Happiness Industry*

REIMAGINING THE MINDFULNESS REVOLUTION

- **Laissez-faire/Privatized vs. Integral, Ethically-Informed Civic-Mindfulness (Loy's integration of Buddhist/Abrahamic traditions- nondual awakening conjoined with social justice)**
- **Using mindfulness and contemplative practice to enhance rather than undermine the integrity of democratic culture**
- **Civic-mindfulness may take root as a grass-roots movement, perhaps as 21st century Gandhian version of Satyagraha (a force of truth)**
- **Occupy Movement, Liberation Theology, Climate change movements – new forms that can radically challenge and address the causes and conditions of Social Suffering**