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## Preface

This volume is a critical inquiry into the meaning of mindfulness today. It explores the extent to which classic and modern concepts and practices of mindfulness clash, converge, and influence each other, and what that exchange holds for the future. The problematic, as the Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi has said, is that mindfulness as a concept has become “so vague and elastic that it serves almost as a cipher into which one can read virtually anything we want” (Bodhi 2011). Indeed, the increasing popularity of mindfulness in the West has led to it being called a “movement.” *Time* magazine’s cover article went so far to declare a “Mindful Revolution” was sweeping the country (Pickert 2014). The launch of the glossy new magazine, *Mindful*, is a signal for a growing market demand for what was once considered a strange and foreign “Eastern religious” practice. Indeed, secular mindfulness has situated itself as a new brand within a self-help industry, promising to offer a panacea for the existential angst of mainly the white middle and upper classes. In fact, in 2007, the National Institute of Health (NIH) estimated that consumers spent \$4 billion on meditation (Barnes et al. 2008).

The mindfulness movement received a great deal of media attention that has, until recently, been uncritically celebratory and positive. Even among prominent clinicians, researchers, and scientists, the way scientific investigations have been reported, both in print and in public, has often overstated the benefits and efficacy of mindfulness interventions while downplaying a range of methodological weaknesses. The emerging field of contemplative studies and the burgeoning “science of mindfulness” has sought refuge in the fields of psychology and neuroscience, capitalizing on the West’s cultural fascination with brain imagery. Neuroscientific studies using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) of meditators’ brain states are frequently touted in the media as incontrovertible evidence that science has verified the efficacy of mindfulness. Whether it is increasing the size of gray matter, shrinking the amygdala, or quieting the default mode network, reports of functional and structural changes in the brain (even if the neuroscientists themselves are more circumspect about the actual significance of their findings) have come to symbolize an official stamp of scientific legitimacy.

Yet, the meteoric rise of the “mindfulness revolution” has led to growing chorus of criticism. Those who initially raised critical questions regarding the mindfulness movement were few and far between, and they were often

rebuked or dismissed as either Buddhist fundamentalists, naysayers, or downright cranks. In 2013, Ron Purser and David Loy's article "Beyond McMindfulness" in the *Huffington Post* called into question the efficacy, ethics, and narrow interests of corporate mindfulness programs (Purser and Loy 2013). This scathing critique seemed to open the floodgates as a stream of critical commentaries appeared in a scattered corpus of writings found on Internet blogs, social media outlets, as well as in a number of academic journals and books. Such was the beginning of what the media termed the "mindfulness backlash" (North 2014; Roca 2014).

Buddhist scholars and teachers began comparing and contrasting Jon Kabat-Zinn's definition of mindfulness as "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally" (the gold standard for secular mindfulness-based interventions) to various Buddhist conceptualizations of mindfulness. Numerous scholars took issue with Kabat-Zinn's bold claims and rhetoric, calling into question the reductionistic and mystifying assertion that "meditation as being the heart of Buddhism," and mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) is "Buddhist meditation without the Buddhism." Kabat-Zinn even went so far to claim that MBSR is the "universal dharma that is co-extensive, if not identical, with the teachings of the Buddha, the Buddhadharmā" (Kabat-Zinn 2011, p. 290).

This backlash also included a number of contemplative scientists who began raising questions regarding the media hype and exaggerated scientific claims about the validity and reliability of mindfulness research studies (Heuman 2014a; Purser and Cooper 2014). Scientific claims of mindfulness research studies are also being examined now with greater scrutiny. A meta-analytic study on the efficacy of mindfulness meditation was recently published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), Internal Medicine*. Dr. Madhav Goyal and his colleagues from Johns Hopkins University searched databases using a set of key meditation terms. They obtained 18,753 citations of which 47 matched their inclusion criteria, such as being randomized controlled trials. They found that mindfulness was moderately effective in treating a variety of conditions, but was not found to be more effective than other active treatments, such as drugs or exercise (Goyal et al. 2014).

"Public enthusiasm is outpacing scientific evidence," says Brown University researcher Willoughby Britton (Heuman 2014b). And "experimenter allegiance," she goes on to say, which is a factor when the researcher also happens to be a creator of the therapy, "can count for a larger effect than the treatment itself. People are finding support for what they believe rather than what the data is actually saying." Moreover, there is convincing evidence that mindfulness studies suffer from positive reporting bias (Coronado-Montoya et al. 2016). A team of researchers at McGill University recently found that authors of mindfulness studies tend to spin their positive results, downplaying negative results. Given the small sample size and weak statistical power of the pool of studies examined, McGill researchers were concerned by the skewed results.

A number of Buddhist scholars, teachers, and practitioners have become increasingly concerned about the long-term implications of the mindfulness

movement, and whether the rush toward secularization may lead to a gradual denaturing and banalization of the Buddhist path of awakening. Some Buddhist teachers believe that the West is moving too quickly to appropriate Buddhist mindfulness practices, diluting and adapting the teachings to fit our consumerist society. Other teachers and practitioners, usually those who also have a professional investment in promoting mindfulness, have advocated that such rapid secularization of mindfulness is necessary if it is to be made more widely available and relevant to a modern society.

Clearly, extracting a spiritual and meditative discipline from its social and historical contexts in which it originates has radically changed the meaning, function, and fruition of mindfulness practices in the West. On the one hand, Buddhism must change as it takes root in the West. Traditional concerns for preserving the authenticity, integrity, and canonical authority with regard to Buddhist conceptions of mindfulness, while admirable, have failed to take into account the pluralistic nature of Western society. In addition, such a defensive and reactionary posture also fails to address the inevitable migration and transformation of Buddhism in its encounter with modernity. As David Loy has argued, the East and the West need each other, and this meeting has already begun to come about. However, we must ask what the relationship is between the two, what is problematic about that relationship, and how can they be of mutual benefit. Buddhism will change and is changing, as it mixes with the dominant values of modern Western cultures. A significant question addressed in this volume is what actually happens to Buddhist mindfulness teachings and practices as they are decontextualized, adapted, and applied in secular contexts? What is gained and what is lost?

Another equally important question and central concern of this volume is what is mindfulness for? Are mindfulness-based interventions limited to a palliative for individual stress relief and mental hygiene, or can mindfulness programs develop in ways that call into question deeply rooted cultural assumptions which have been the source of so much misery, injustice, and unnecessary suffering in the modern Western world? Or will mindfulness be used to accommodate to those cultural assumptions? What is the relation between the efficacy of mindfulness practice and the contexts that inform its pedagogical goals and applications? Is mindfulness practice (or any meditative discipline) the main reductive ingredient that can function as a neutral tool or technique independent of its context?

Numerous contributors to this volume show how mindfulness in the West, under the claim that it is derived from Buddhism, has become severed from not only Buddhist ethical contexts, but also its roots in Buddhist philosophy and soteriology. Advocates of secular mindfulness have for the most part downplayed questions of ethics and what constitutes the good life by insisting that ethical development is simply intrinsic or “built-into” the practice. Such a claim is also an appeal to a universal view of human beings that transcends culture and context. A perennialist view underlies the discourse that mindfulness is a “free agent”—a universal human capacity—un beholden to any historical contingency or cultural context. This *laissez-faire* “innatist” philosophy puts mindfulness programs at risk of being employed as a technology to accommodate people to individualistic, consumerist, and

corporate values. Rather than developing a critical pedagogical framework for mindfulness programs which could potentially challenge, interrogate, and transform our deeply rooted Western cultural values and assumptions, the majority of clinical, school-based, and corporate mindfulness training programs are informed by biomedical models of stress and well-being. The medicalization of mindfulness has limited program curricula to essentialist constructs that explain stress as an individual pathology, deflecting attention away from culture and context. Indeed, the cultural dominance of the biomedical paradigm has reinforced the notion that disease (including psychosomatic symptoms such as chronic stress, depression, and anxiety), along with interventions for enhancing health and well-being is a matter for autonomous individuals. Because mindfulness practice has succumbed to an individualistic worldview, it has “overstated internal pathology while understating environmental stressors” (Goddard 2014, p. 212). Individualistic, laissez-faire oriented mindfulness programs, perhaps unwittingly, are preserving the status quo and maintaining institutional structures that contribute to social suffering. Moreover, considering mindfulness as simply a form of “mental fitness” analogous to autonomous forms of physical exercise such as weight-lifting or running reinforces reductionist conceptions of psychological distress.

In broad terms, the Buddhist practice of mindfulness is concerned with the interior, or first-person perspective. It values higher states of consciousness that are historically intended to lead to deep and irreversible insights into the nature of reality, including a dissolution of a separate sense of self as a real and permanent identity. However, the Buddhist practice of mindfulness is also a socially engaged endeavor and insists on a commitment to the fulfillment of ethical awareness and practices such as right speech, intention, action, and livelihood. Buddhism offers a soteriological solution to human suffering based on a deep and embodied insight into the nature of reality. The fruition of full realization is the outcome of an integrated path of ethical and moral development, conjoined with the meditative training and the cultivation of insight that leads to seeing the truth of impermanence, the illusoriness of a permanent and separate sense of self, and that all conditioned phenomena has the nature of suffering (the “three marks” in Buddhist teachings). “Seeing things as they truly are” is simultaneously seeing there is no ultimate split between one’s experience and all others. This is liberation from suffering, a non-dual wisdom that manifests as spontaneous and uncontrived universal compassion for all sentient beings.

Buddhism, however, as a religion must find its way in a secular society that relies on scientific evidence and the study of cultural and historical contexts as manifestations of the forms of everyday life. Toward this end, it is arguable that Buddhism and mindfulness can adapt to and gain from the West’s social scientific (e.g., developmental and clinical psychology, sociology), historical, and neuroscientific knowledge and practices and make it more widely available without diluting its foundational premises and approach. In this regard, Wilber (2014) suggests Buddhism is ripe for a “Fourth Turning” that includes the best wisdom of the West.

The West tends to emphasize exterior, objective, or third-person perspectives that promote the historical progress of society and social institutions through science, technology, and economic growth (materialism, consumerism). This tendency minimizes the development of interior and moral wisdom which Buddhism provides and which can benefit the West. There is no disputing the fact that mindfulness-based interventions have been shown to have salutary health benefits and have alleviated psychological suffering, helping thousands of people reduce and manage chronic pain. While this has occurred to an extent, this volume is critically concerned with the numerous ways the West employs the Buddhist-derived practice of mindfulness out of context and in ways that reinforce its problematic tendencies. While there have been attempts to have dialogues between Buddhism and cognitive/neuroscience, as well as between Buddhism and Western psychiatry and psychology, these dialogues have often privileged Western metaphysical assumptions based on scientific materialism and a narrow focus on biophysical explanations of mental health and illness (Kirmayer 2015, p. 451). As Kirmayer and Crafa (2014) have pointed out, the dialogue between Buddhism and neuroscience has not only been limited by the narrow focus on neural correlates of meditation, but brain-based explanations have occluded giving equal attention to “social, contextual, and value-based aspects” of such practices (Kirmayer 2015, p. 451).

The contributions in this volume situate the mindfulness movement within broader philosophical, historical, and cultural contexts. The theory and practice of mindfulness and its various manifestations in health care, education, contemplative neuroscience, and corporations are examined in terms of how mindfulness is being influenced and shaped by cultural assumptions, institutional structures, economic systems, and political forces. Given that the mindfulness movement has spread to practically all domains of society, as editors, we have solicited and selected a wide range of contributions from authors in order to offer a more transdisciplinary perspective. Indeed, this handbook includes contributions from prominent Buddhist scholars and teachers, clinicians and contemplative scientists, as well as scholars in such fields as philosophy, educational counseling, sociology, anthropology, social psychology, media and cultural studies, and management. What these differing perspectives share is a core concern with the ways in which the nexus between the mindfulness revolution in the West and Buddhism is shaping and being shaped by each other. Further, each of the contributors of this volume *deeply care* about the dissemination and practice of mindfulness in society; their varied breadth and depth of professional and personal experience provides a multitude of voices that provoke, question, and challenge the status quo.

We hope that this handbook volume will help establish the foundations for an emerging field of critical mindfulness studies. It is intended for academics, clinicians, scientists, and Buddhist teachers and scholars, social activists, and university students, as well as mindfulness practitioners who are sympathetic to the need for more critical inquiry and cultural analyses of the mindfulness movement. Readers will find this handbook to offer a comprehensive compendium of social criticism that is aimed at excavating and exposing hidden

assumptions, misconceptions, and ideologies that have remained below the surface of modern mindfulness discourse. The purpose of such critiques is grounded in the faith that secular mindfulness practices can be reformed and reoriented to enhance the common good. This passion for critique among the contributors of this handbook is matched by their passion for truth-telling, often going against the mainstream narrative with its self-help rhetoric and psychological-neurospeak explanations that have characterized the benefits of mindfulness. Because mindfulness practices are intended for the relief of human suffering in society, the questions our contributors raise are significantly ethical and political ones. A medicalization of mindfulness limits the practices and programs to the symptomatic relief of individuals' distress, essentially a highly privatized and individualistic approach that has favored neurological and psychological reductive explanations of meditation. The effects of social, political, and economic factors, as well as the situational stressors caused by our major institutions themselves, are left out of such mainstream accounts. The emancipatory potential of mindfulness for addressing social suffering will remain neutered and limited so long as "critique is turned inward," as Davies (2015) so eloquently stated in his book *The Happiness Industry*. It is in this spirit that criticism plays a role in fostering civic or social mindfulness—where those teaching and practicing mindfulness turn critical attention outward to include institutions, histories, socioeconomic, and cultural influences that contribute to, and are often causes of, social suffering.

The handbook consists of thirty-three chapters organized into four parts: (1) "Between Tradition and Modernity," (2) "Neoliberal Versus Critical Mindfulness," (3) "Genealogies of Mindfulness-Based Interventions," and (4) "Mindfulness as Critical Pedagogy." Now, we move on to a preview of the chapters.

## Part I

Part I, "Between Tradition and Modernity," sets out to define key issues of concern and contested meanings of mindfulness as those teachings and practices have migrated from traditional Buddhist settings into a modern and Western context. A number of scholars have questioned whether the dominant meaning of modern mindfulness of "paying attention to the present moment" by cultivating nonjudgmental "bare attention" (Bazzano 2013; Bodhi 2011; Brazier 2013; Dreyfus 2011; Purser 2015; Sharf 2015; Wallace 2007) forecloses the wider ethical aspects of the practice, along with omitting the cultivation of compassion commitment to social welfare. Mindfulness training represents only a sliver of the plethora of Buddhist meditation methods (Lopez 2012). In addition, even within Buddhism, there are varied conceptions of mindfulness across various schools and traditions (Dunne 2011; Sharf 2015).

Within a Buddhist context, the term "mindfulness" first appeared in 1881 in Max Müller's book, *Buddhist Suttas*, translated by Thomas W. Rhys

Davids. Sir Monier Monier-Williams, a Sanskrit scholar at Oxford University, also deliberately used the term in his 1889 book, *Buddhism in its Connexion with Brahmanism and Hinduism*. According to Buddhist scholars, the modern translation of mindfulness from *sati* (*smṛti* in Sanskrit) is derived from the verb, “to remember,” or the act of “calling to mind” (Anālayo 2010; Davids 1881; Gethin 2001; Nanamoli and Bodhi 2005; Ṭhānissaro 2012). The establishment of mindfulness in meditation, however, is not merely a function of memory, nor merely a passive and nonjudgmental attentiveness to the present moment exclusively, but an actively engaged and discerning awareness that is capable of recollecting various teachings, ethical commitments, and the eradication of greed, ill will, and delusion.

It is also worth noting here that the Buddhist tradition is not monolithic. The affinities between modern therapeutic mindfulness-based interventions and “Buddhist conceptions of mindfulness” have often been over-generalized, linking more often than not to recent modernized versions of Theravada Buddhist vipassana insight meditation practices that have their origins in the Theravada revival movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Braun 2013). In other Buddhist schools and traditions, such as Tibetan Buddhism, mindfulness has never been foregrounded or relegated such central status as a core practice. Many of the Tibetan Buddhist schools first required students to engage in intensive analytical and textual studies, philosophical meditations, combined with devotional and purification practices, along with a progressively being introduced to preliminary reflective practices before a student is exposed to formal meditative methods and somatic and energetic yogic trainings. This progressive and graduated approach is considered foundational to providing the educational and values-based framework for contemplative practice.

Modern cultural translations of mindfulness practices have also excluded and downplayed the vast array of contextual and cultural mediated forms of understanding, considering such practices as “culturally laden forms of baggage.” However, it is precisely this comprehensive and cultural framing of contemplative experience that provides the interpretative frameworks for guiding, making sense of, and enacting meditative insights on progress of the path of liberation.

As Germano (2016) has asked, “If the preliminary practices create a context for meditation in Tibet, what creates the context for meditation in the West?” The current contemporary fascination with mindfulness as a therapeutic intervention, what Richard King, a contributor to his handbook refers to as the “mindfulness-only” school, is a relatively recent phenomenon. This is understandable given that the goals of therapeutic mindfulness diverge from traditional Buddhist soteriological aims for total and complete liberation from suffering. Indeed, the mainstreaming and medicalization of mindfulness has often been conjoined with enhancing sensual pleasures, intensifying appreciation for present-moment aesthetic experience, and seeking happiness in various mundane worldly concerns (career success, relationships, better sex, weight control, and so on) (Wilson 2014). The recontextualization and cultural transmission of modern mindfulness has often failed to illuminate or take into account how such practices and interventions are themselves

Westernized “forms of life that are social, embodied, and enacted in social contexts” (Kirmayer 2015). In this respect, the “mindfulness-only” school with its universalizing rhetoric has situated itself within the individualistic norms of Western consumer capitalism as its *de facto* educational context.

The Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi’s chapter “The Transformation of Mindfulness” leads off Part I by offering his very personal account of how mindfulness took the route it did in America over the course of the past forty years. Having been an American Theravada Buddhist monk since his ordination in 1972 in Sri Lanka, as well the foremost scholar and translator of Buddhist texts from the Pāli Canon, Ven. Bodhi is able to describe how early Western Buddhist teachers severed the explicit connections between insight meditation and Buddhist spirituality. These transformations significantly altered the practice of mindfulness by reframing it in psychological terms, eventually undergoing a major overhaul with regard to its objectives and goals.

Next, in Chap. 2, David Loy addresses how we need both individual and social transformation, and how the best ideals from the Western tradition with its concern for social justice and human rights can join forces with the most important goal for traditional Buddhism—to put an end to one’s *dukkha* (“suffering” in the broadest sense), especially that associated with the delusion of a separate self. Loy calls on the mindfulness movement to go beyond its current individualistic, consumerist orientation in order to mitigate the causes of collective and organizational *dukkha*.

In Chap. 3, Richard King examines the role of intellectual analysis and ethical judgment in ancient Indian Buddhist accounts of *sati* and contemporary discourses about “mindfulness.” King draws on sources from the Abhidharma and early Mahāyāna philosophical discussions in India, which informed the cultivation of *sati*, comparing and contrasting these ancient understandings with modern discourses of mindfulness. He offers a cogent analysis of how the rise of modern mindfulness is linked to the processes of detraditionalization, the global spread of capitalism, and widespread adoption of new information technologies. In addition, King explores the modern history of attention, tracing how these trajectories have produced divergent contemporary accounts of mindfulness. The history of attention, King argues, cannot be separated from the history of mindfulness given how both streams are implicated in the rise of digital technologies and neoliberalism as cultural phenomenon.

Geoffrey Samuel undertakes the task in Chap. 4 of first providing an overview of how the early stages of the mindfulness movement were defined mainly by the meditation practices from the nineteenth-century Theravada reform movement, what is now often referred to a strand of Buddhist modernism. Samuel describes the early research on mindfulness meditation as it was focused mainly on therapeutic efficacy and how this was key to situating modern mindfulness within contemporary scientific thought and biomedical practice. He goes on to explore for consideration a much wider range of meditative forms that exist within Asian Buddhist traditions which could themselves stimulate and expand our Western modes of scientific

thought and aid us to develop a more varied and productive range of therapeutic applications.

Next, in Chap. 5, David Brazier distinguishes modern, utilitarian mindfulness from traditional, Buddhist mindfulness. He examines and critiques a number of the cultural factors that have shaped utilitarian forms of modern mindfulness, including what he describes as “here-and-now-ism” and the overvaluation of consciousness. Brazier questions whether the modern version will prove to be simply a weak variant, or a step on the way to a more wide-ranging transformation of our cultural values.

In Chap. 6, Candy Gunther Brown disputes a major claim that “secular” mindfulness programs teach a purely secular, universal technique. She argues that so-called secular mindfulness programs instill culturally and religiously specific and contested worldviews, epistemologies, and values. Her chapter critically examines Jon Kabat-Zinn’s mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) in terms of three common patterns: (1) code-switching (skillful means, stealth Buddhism, Trojan horse, and scripting), (2) unintentional indoctrination, and (3) religious and spiritual effects. She goes on to argue that in particular cultural contexts, mindfulness programs could explicitly or implicitly convey religious meanings or facilitate religious and spiritual experiences. Despite the use of secularizing rhetoric, she contends the separation of mindfulness from its religious worldview and values may not be entirely possible.

Part I concludes with a contribution by Jack Petranker as he introduces a novel “field-centered” mindfulness, a practice that focuses on the fullness of space rather than the present-centered immediacy of time. According to Petranker, field-centered mindfulness builds on present-centered mindfulness, but introduces a fundamentally different orientation to the stream of experiences and appearances we encounter. He points out that the currently popular practice of present-centered mindfulness does little to challenge the standard subject/object framework. His proposal for “field-centered mindfulness” is consonant with the sensibilities of modern secular practitioners who need not study and accept Buddhist doctrines or a Buddhist worldview, yet it still offers a way of seeing that is congruent with key Buddhist insights.

## **Part II**

In Part II, “Neoliberal Mindfulness Versus Critical Mindfulness,” the chapters address a range of issues and concerns with regard to how neoliberal discourse and capitalist imperatives have influenced and exploited the way mindfulness is utilized as modern behavioral technology of the self (Foucault 1998). Stress, disengagement, and discontent are pathologized as an individual-level phenomenon within the majority of mindfulness programs. This is particularly true in corporations where mindfulness programs aim at the formation of an entrepreneurial self that is willfully productive and responsible for their own self-care. The contributions in this section help to expose how contemporary mindfulness programs are both compatible and

complicit with neoliberal values which frame mindfulness primarily as an instrumental and privatized practice. This framing essentially depoliticizes mindfulness training curricula by foreclosing alternative pedagogical encounters that could foster critical engagement with the causes and conditions of social suffering that are implicated in power structures and economic systems of capitalist society. A number of contributions draw on the work of Michel Foucault, particularly his 1979 lectures where he explained how neoliberal modes of governing amount to a form of “biopolitics” and “biopower” which infuse self-disciplinary regimes into the embodied and social domains of modern society. Mindfulness then can be envisioned as a form of embodied mental cultivation that is employed productively in the workings of power. In attempting to account for the processes of subjectification in capitalist societies, Foucault (2008) introduces the concept of “governmentality” which he often referred to as the “conduct of conduct.”

Conforming to the logic of governmentality, the project of contemporary mindfulness is a conservative one: The mindful subject is constituted as being free to choose happiness or misery, stress or well-being. It is important to point out that this mode of control is not repressive or coercive, nor is it a sinister form of mind control or brainwashing as some mindfulness proponents have misrepresented recent critiques of contemporary mindfulness. Rather, the recontextualization of mindfulness in late capitalist society is a cultural and political translation that relays neoliberal values in the formation of a new subject that is freely choosing to control his or her own freedom. It is in this sense that form of disciplinary power is productive; mindfulness practice can then be viewed as a technology for reflexive self-formation, shaping and producing the behavior of a conservative “mindful subject.”

The popular interest and widespread acceptance of contemporary mindfulness programs might partially be explained by the fact such programs are conducive to an instrumental reformulation of all spheres of life, those which were previously impervious to the market and institutions. In this respect, mindfulness also represents a new form of *biopower* where both the mind and body become sites for self-disciplinary control, self-surveillance, and self-optimization. As a disciplinary apparatus, mindfulness can also serve to ensure that subjects are constituted as private and atomistic individuals that not only voluntarily participate in their own governance, but also come to forget and forfeit bonds of solidarity and collectivity. This ideology of individual autonomy strongly resonates with neoliberal values of freedom, choice, authenticity, entrepreneurialism, and competitiveness. When viewed through the lens of biopower, mindfulness is also constituted as a lifestyle choice, fully symmetrical with market imperatives for consumption, efficiency, productivity, and social order.

Jeff Wilson begins this section with his chapter that describes how mindfulness meditation has been shaped and influenced by capitalist values and marketed as a commodity to Western consumers. Wilson provides a detailed analysis of the popular magazine *Mindful*, paying particular attention to its advertising policies and featured advertisers. His chapter provides insight into the forces at work in the commodification and diversification of the mindfulness movement.

Next, in Chap. 9, Richard Payne examines how American self-improvement culture has shaped the propagation and ethos of mindfulness training. Payne argues the driving ethic of that culture is the moral imperative to improve oneself, rooted in Puritan theology. Tracing these historical influences, Payne shows how the ethic of self-improvement has infected the ideology of American popular religious culture and how this moral imperative is linked to neoliberalism and foundational to the marketing and promotion of mindfulness.

In Chap. 10, Edwin Ng explores a style of thought that he aptly calls “critical mindfulness.” He describes how the adaptation of mindfulness across multiple domains has to negotiate the dominant logics of the present neoliberal capitalist order of things. Ng argues that neoliberalism is not a sinister ploy that hides the truth, but is a regime of truth that functions as a political ontology. It is within this everyday, uncritical acceptance of neoliberalism that conditions how we come to make reasonable judgments and conduct our own lives and behavior. Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, Ng explores how mindfulness might function as a disruptive technology of the self within and against these dominant logics. Ng makes use of Foucault’s analytic of governmentality as a means for developing this style of thought and explains Foucault’s work is not restricted to Engaged Buddhist concerns.

In Chap. 11, Zack Walsh presents a discourse analysis of mindfulness critiques circulating in online media, identifying the key contested issues that have framed the public debate on mindfulness. Walsh not only provides a coherent summary of critics’ concerns, but he also outlines the conditions for renegotiating how mindfulness can be reframed. Arguing that neoliberalism has transformed mindfulness into a variety of depoliticized and commodified self-help techniques, Walsh explains why universal, asocial, and ahistorical views of mindfulness should be replaced by critical, socially aware, and engaged forms of mindfulness. Walsh’s chapter must be considered in conjunction with the chapter that follows. Here, Per Drougge identifies many of the same issues as Walsh, drawing even further attention to the upsurge in critical engagement with mindfulness and the mindfulness industry. Drougge offers a penetrating critique on the marketing and presentation of mindfulness, its relation to the Buddhist tradition and cultural appropriation, its conceptual fuzziness and exaggerated claims, methodological insufficiencies in studies of meditation and mindfulness, and the ideological function of mindfulness practices. His chapter summarizes and discusses a number of critical articles that have appeared on Web sites and in popular media during the past few years and the responses they have elicited.

Longtime Buddhist meditation teacher Christopher Titmuss explores the recent development of mindfulness in the West since the late 1970s, focusing particularly on the growth of mindfulness programs in large corporations. Titmuss raises a number of concerns and questions pertaining to whether corporate mindfulness programs are offering a comprehensive application of mindfulness and/or whether such programs are quietly subservient to the productivity and efficiency goals of corporations. In addition, Titmuss calls for the application of a modern variant of the Four Noble Truths to business.

Continuing with a critique of corporate mindfulness programs, in Chap. 14, Alex Caring-Lobel provides an in-depth historical account of the ideological drivers of corporate mindfulness initiatives, viewing such management-driven programs as part of an evolutionary response to the specific needs of capital. Caring-Lobel explains that corporate mindfulness programs have been enthusiastically embraced because they offer a way of mitigating the psychological collapse of postindustrial knowledge workers without confronting the social and economic causes of their discontent. In particular, noteworthy is how his chapter connects the corporate mindfulness movement to the work of past management science gurus going back to Frederick Taylor and Elton Mayo. He calls for a repoliticization of the forms of worker stress and discontent that workplace mindfulness rhetoric and praxis obfuscate by framing them in purely psychological terms.

In the concluding chapter in this section, Massimo Tomassini begins by reviewing and critiquing the dominant conceptions and applications of mindfulness within corporations. Going beyond these corporate-driven approaches, Tomassini considers a different approach to mindfulness at work, one that is not simply a form of stress reduction or attention enhancement technique, but a liberating communal practice that can occur outside of the normal performance-driven work culture, incorporating more reflective types of practices that are self-determined by the participants themselves.

### Part III

Part III of the handbook, “Genealogies of Mindfulness-Based Interventions,” turns to critical examinations of mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs), along with the scientific and public discourse that has served to establish the legitimacy of MBIs as a psychotherapeutic technique. Collectively, these chapters constitute a genealogy of the mainstreaming of MBIs, and each attempts to historicize and contextualize the emergence of mindfulness within the helping professions and healthcare institutions. It is in this section that authors examine the medicalization of mindfulness and how the behavioral medicine paradigm has been used as an explanatory narrative for making individuals responsible for their own stress and healing. One of the basic assumptions of MBSR and MBIs is that our failure to pay attention to the present moment, that is, our mindlessness and mind-wandering, is the main reason underlying of dissatisfaction and disease. This etiological explanation for stress as being a deficit of an individual’s attention is a common trope. But Kabat-Zinn takes it even a step further by claiming that our cultural malaise is also the result of an attention disorder *en masse*; capitalist societies are themselves suffering from attention deficit disorders (ADDs). As Kabat-Zinn (2005, p. 143) states our “...entire society is suffering from attention disorder-big time.” Apparently, widespread societal stress and social suffering are not the result of massive inequalities, material conditions, nefarious corporate business practices, or political corruption, but

an individual-level psychic dysfunction—a “thinking disease” (Barker 2014; Goto-Jones 2013).

The unspoken assumption here is that there is nothing inherently dysfunctional with capitalism itself; rather, we simply are not mindful or resilient enough as individuals to be fully functioning, authentic, and happy human beings. The mindfulness revolution promises to bring relief and resolution to individuals debilitated by the demands of late capitalism, but without any political agenda, or any substantial challenge to the institutional structures which enable capitalism to inject its toxicity system-wide. And, as Goto-Jones (2013) points out, the mindfulness revolution also functions as a type of secular, quasi-religion within capitalism, especially in such regions as Silicon Valley where corporate mindfulness programs have become the rage.

The solution for addressing the ills of society and for social change will come about not through any form of political struggle or grassroots political revolution, but through a conservative mindful revolution—training individuals in mindfulness (Goto-Jones 2013). This is also known as the “Trojan horse” hypothesis that individuals who are more mindful, compassionate, and authentic themselves will slowly and peacefully ensure the emergence of a humane and compassionate capitalist society. The mindfulness revolution then is essentially a therapeutic not a political project. As we saw in Part II, neoliberal mindfulness emphasizes the sovereignty of autonomous individuals who can navigate the vicissitudes of late capitalist society by becoming self-regulating and self-compassionate, governing themselves, and by freely choosing their own welfare, well-being, and security.

In this narrative, moderns are disenchanted, suffering from an obsession with “doing” rather “being.” Kabat-Zinn’s famous initiation rite for MBSR programs—to slowly savor and mindfully eat a raisin—is symbolic of the mindfulness cure, to appreciate the present moment in all its fullness. Such appreciative apprehending, for Kabat-Zinn, “coming to our senses” by dwelling in the “being versus doing” mode, draws its phenomenological inspiration directly from the American transcendentalists (McMahan 2008). It is supposedly through non-striving and non-doing that a magical re-enchancement occurs, countering the iron cage of rationalization and frantic pace of our 24/7 digital economy. Barker (2014) points out that Kabat-Zinn’s social admonition to rest in the mindful being mode as a cure for our thinking disease is contradicted by his own opposing disciplinary injunction of the need to be mindful as one goes about all of one’s daily activities. Indeed, one of Kabat-Zinn’s most favorite public quips is “mindfulness is the hardest thing to do.”

The popular portrayal of the mindful subject as one who must be constantly in a mode of self-surveillance is reflective of what Nikolas Rose characterizes as the “genealogy of subjectification” (Rose 1998). Rose (1998, p. 23) elaborates:

A genealogy of subjectification takes [this] individualized, interiorized, totalized, and psychologized understanding of what it is to be human as the site of a historical problem, not as the basis of a historical narrative.

In this respect, MBSR and MBIs can be understood as rationalized schemes that are what Foucault referred to as “self-steering mechanisms” that shape our behavior (the conduct of conduct). Mindfulness as a regulatory mode of thought is one of the most recent additions to what Rose has called the “psy-sciences.” Rose situates the psy-disciplines as a historical project, problematizing their emergence in relation to the crises of capitalism, political economies, and institutional structures. Offering a critical history of the psychological sciences, Rose is able to describe and articulate how psychology is a form of technology which has provided answers to contemporary society by legitimizing expert claims to authoritative knowledge production (Doran 2011, p. 23).

The modern self is impelled to make life meaningful through the search for happiness and self-realization in his or her individual biography: the ethics of subjectivity are inextricably locked into the procedures of power (Rose 1998, p. 79).

Kabat-Zinn’s proclamations that the problems of society can be traced to mindless individuals suffering from a disease of thinking is a continuation of the psy-sciences predilection for producing expert knowledge that construes our lives in psychological terms, and reduces the problems of economic and social life to the calculability of individuals. It is important to point out that the regulatory and disciplinary functions of mindfulness that Kabat-Zinn professes are not necessarily conscious aims. As part of the psy-sciences, mindfulness as a liberation technology of the self is a system of expert thought for governing certain forms of thinking, or mental ruminations, as governable by individuals themselves. The contemporary regime of the free individual in capitalist society is now the mindful individual.

Brooke Lavelle begins this section with a chapter that examines three modern secularized mindfulness and compassion-based contemplative programs, namely mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), cognitively-based compassion training (CBCT), and sustainable compassion training (SCT). Lavelle challenges the rhetoric that such programs have universal applicability, along with pointing out how the underlying assumption of universality has created a cultural blind spot and bias that has had the result of privileging theory over context. Her chapter provides a useful framework for understanding how certain Buddhist contemplative frames (i.e., innatism and constructivism) and modern cultural frames (i.e., individualism, scientific reductionism, and secularization) both limit and permit different possibilities for health and healing.

Next, David Lewis and Deborah Rozelle closely examine mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) and in particular mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), comparing these psychological treatments to the fundamental tenets and ultimate goals of the Buddhist path of liberation, which they refer to as the Buddhadharmā. Their critique takes aim at the claim that MBIs (and MBSR) embody the essence of Buddhadharmā. Their analysis employs a unique analogical methodology to compare key aspects of both MBIs and the Buddhadharmā teachings and practices, focusing on such

commonly used terms as suffering (*dukkha*), impermanence, and no-self. Lewis and Rozelle are able to demonstrate that many of the claims put forth by Jon Kabat-Zinn—that MBIs embody the essence of the Dharma—actually have the result of reducing the Buddhadharma to the psychological level, while inflating MBIs to a transcendent level. By providing a cogent analogical framework, they are able to show that MBIs are actually a psychological analog of the transcendental realm, with a similar structure but at a very different ontological level.

In Chap. 18, Paul Moloney takes the critique a step further by exposing the limits, methodological weaknesses, and unsubstantiated claims of mindfulness-based interventions. Moloney critiques the popular mindfulness movement by situating its discourse within a much wider historical context originating in the psychotherapy industry. Examining the exuberant claims of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) and the Mindful Nation report, Moloney scrutinizes the scientific methodologies of psychotherapy research. His chapter illustrates how mindfulness is the latest phase in the privatization of the self that has been underway from the middle of the twentieth century, and in which the applied psychology professions have been instrumental.

Manu Bazzano begins Chap. 19 by noting that our age, in terms of Buddhism’s “three treasures” (the Buddha, Dharma and the Sangha), is that of the Sangha, or spiritual community. Bazzano instructs us that creative engagement with these three treasures requires a form of active adaptation, rather than simply defending tradition or passively adapting to it. Active adaptation requires going beyond the reductionism that has characterized the mainstreaming of neoconservative mindfulness practices as they have been propagated through the proliferation of the contemporary neuroscience literature. His chapter goes on to explore the desirability of a *fourth treasure*, psychotherapy and its relation to the Dharma—a potential pathway away from the current mindfulness brand with its communal deficits. Drawing on humanistic psychology and Zen, Bazzano affirms the value of inquiry, social solidarity, and the ability to perceive the elusive dimension of affect.

Next, Steven Stanley and Charlotte Longden report on their research on mindfulness courses using a combination of discourse and conversation analysis of language used within these courses. Their chapter begins by situating mindfulness historically within therapeutic culture, discussing how both the medicalization and psychologization of mindfulness practices as forms of self-help have strong affinity to the “psy-complex” and psychological styles of “governmentality” (Rose 1998). Their findings describe how affective–discursive and inquiry practices in mindfulness courses, particular the interactions between teachers and participants, function to practically produce mindful subjects who can monitor, govern, and take care of themselves. Mindful subjectivity is produced through the application of liberal power and negotiation of ideological dilemma within inquiry sequences, functioning as technologies of the self.

In Chap. 21, Jenny Eklöf examines the ways in which the scientific meaning of mindfulness is communicated in public and to the public. Her chapter shows how experts in the field of mindfulness neuroscience seek to communicate to the public at large the imperative of brain fitness for the

promotion of health, well-being, and happiness. Through her analysis of the claims being made in popular outlets such as self-help books, Web sites, and online videos, Eklöf identifies what she describes as *personalized* science communication, demonstrating that the boundary between science and popularized science is the outcome of human negotiations. Her analysis also shows how prominent contemplative neuroscientists have used personalized communications as a way to infuse their scientific findings with subjective meaning, turning their communication with the public into a moral vocation.

Part III concludes with a chapter by Lisa Dale Miller that examines the mental and emotional suffering involved in what Buddhist psychology identifies as “self-cherishing.” Her chapter compares Western and Buddhist psychological models of self, Buddhist theories of not-self, and conventional and ultimate self-cherishing. In addition, she outlines a clinical approach that can help individuals to recognize self-cherishing mentation, illustrating through examples of therapist–client dialogue how such individuals struggling with depressive, anxious, trauma-related symptoms and addictions can lessen its deleterious effects.

## **Part IV**

Part IV, “Mindfulness as Critical Pedagogy,” discusses how mindfulness programs are employed in K-12 and postsecondary education. As with corporations, mindfulness programs in schools arise within and are influenced by broader neoliberal structures and ideologies. Although the aim of public education is not intended to be about profitability, productivity, and consumption per se, it is nevertheless a contested site that is subject to market forces and demands. Within an undertheorized neoliberal climate, mindfulness programs in schools become a form of governmentality that helps shape individuals to adjust to the needs of a society that must compete in a global economy. Mindfulness practices in many school programs encourage both students and educators to self-regulate and become the kind of self-sufficient, emotionally adjusted entities that can function and thrive in a market-based and consumer society. What is often omitted from such programs is the critical cultivation of awareness, appreciation, and employment of the cultural context and cultural capital of both students and educators; this omission contributes to reinforcing racist systems within education that in turn reproduces racism in the larger social structure. A number of articles in this section point to ways in which mindfulness can be embedded within education programs that are informed by critical pedagogy, interconnectedness, awareness of structural inequities, and engaged practices that promote inclusive and universal social justice. Others also build bridges between classical Buddhist wisdom and contemporary scientific and practical knowledge, suggesting new directions for mindfulness education programs.

In Chap. 23, David Forbes provides an overview of the problematic of mindfulness education programs that do not address contested social, developmental, and cultural contexts within which such programs are practiced in schools. He defends the merits of social critique and those critics who have called out McMindfulness, the use of mindfulness for self-aggrandizement and adjustment to social institutions that promote greed, delusion, and ill will. Forbes critically employs concepts from integral metatheory with an emphasis on cultural meanings, optimal human development, and universal social justice within schools. He offers directions toward a critical integral contemplative education that promotes full individual, interpersonal, and social development.

Next, in Chap. 24, Funie Hsu looks further at secular mindfulness programs in schools within the contexts of neoliberalism and race. In particular, she focuses on the ideology of white conquest that makes invisible the enduring efforts of Asian and Asian American Buddhists in maintaining the legacy of mindfulness practices. She shows how mindfulness curricula discipline students through neoliberal self-regulation and the racial conditioning of white superiority. Hsu calls for secular mindfulness to be part of a broader paradigm shift in education that enhances the value of education as a public good.

Terry Hyland examines in Chap. 25 mindfulness-based applications within education against the background of the ethical and educational shortcomings of the McMindfulness models of practice. He argues for the need to foreground educational and moral components of mindfulness programs related to personal and social transformation in order to avoid the limitations of McMindfulness. Hyland recommends that mindfulness-based interventions be firmly grounded in Buddhist ethical foundations in order to achieve the full objectives of the transformative project of the dharma.

Jennifer Cannon continues in Chap. 26 viewing the mindfulness education movement through a social justice and antiracist lens and develops a constructive critique that calls for a socially engaged mindfulness. She analyzes a film that promotes mindfulness in schools that unwittingly demonstrates the white savior trope. Cannon offers a social justice framework that shifts the deficit discourse of school failure and troubled communities to a collaborative practice that critically considers the social conditions that create suffering, and that promotes mindfulness as a practice of freedom rather than a technology of compliance.

In Chap. 27, Joy L. Mitra and Mark T. Greenberg seek to create a secular ethical framework for interpersonal forms of compassion that reflect the relational nature of the self and mental processes. The relational nature is supported by both classical teachings and contemporary evidence-based research in many disciplines. They are critical of mindfulness approaches that do not account for the illusory boundaries of the separate self. Mitra and Greenberg argue there is an urgent need to instead create new modes of secular education, such as a curriculum of Right Mindfulness that is based on softened boundaries between self and other. These would support nonviolent and sustainable communities and can be applied to educational settings.

Rhonda Magee makes the case in Chap. 28 that social justice concerns are inherent to mindfulness and secular Buddhist practices and describes an approach she terms community-engaged mindfulness. She first discusses how mindfulness practices cultivate a felt sense of solidarity among people with a common purpose such as working together for a more just world. Magee provides an exploratory case study involving a community that was dealing with evidence of racial bias within the local police department. She describes two workshops she co-facilitated that included mindfulness-and-compassion-based-practices that enabled participants to feel heard, build on their own community resources, and begin to heal and initiate policy changes.

Next, in Chap. 29, Natalie Flores brings a critical approach to mindfulness to bear on early childhood education settings. She investigates how mindfulness is used with respect to school readiness and schoolification. Flores examines three popular mindfulness programs that have been used with young children and argues that these aim to provide educators with tools to more effectively implement school readiness and schoolification. She also makes recommendations that would assist educators to implement a more holistic approach to mindfulness in early childhood education settings.

Next, in Chap. 30, Joshua Moses and Suparna Choudhury investigate some mindfulness meditation programs in schools, including ones that emphasize neuroscience, and remain ambivalent about their benefits. They note that good contemplative programs touch on interconnectedness and social relationships, as Mitra and Greenberg also point out. They argue that all programs, even ones that focus on neuroscience, have implicit moral assumptions and that they could enable children to become more socially engaged and critically examine their circumstances. Moses and Choudhury suggest an ideological underpinning for the popularity of mindfulness programs that combine neuroscience with a secularized spiritual–moral discourse: They expand the hopeful scientific narrative about human nature that people are social, benevolent, and evolving toward better futures.

In Chap. 31, Adam Burke describes a course he developed that employs mindfulness practices in helping underrepresented college students improve their rates of retention, graduation, and academic success. Unlike many programs that apply mindfulness in education, Burke is aware of the structural and systemic forces both at the societal level and university level that impede many students of color, women, and those from working-class backgrounds. He notes that although it does not impact structural change, the focus on classroom instruction, including mindfulness practices, does provide students with awareness tools they can use at an individual level to navigate diverse institutional settings.

## Commentary

The final segment of this volume then turns to invited commentaries by Rick Repetti and Glenn Wallis. Repetti's chapter aims to defend secular mindfulness programs against the "McMindfulness" critique. He first argues that

mindfulness is a form of metacognitive awareness that is intrinsic to, and a universal property of, human consciousness— independent of any religious or secular context, or ethical commitments. Thus, mindfulness can be put to use—it is a tool, but a tool for enhancing metacognitive awareness, not changing the world. And because mindfulness can be viewed simply as context-free form of mental cultivation, analogous to weight-lifting or physical exercise, expecting anything more than individual mental enhancement from mindfulness training is both unrealistic and misplaced. Thus, the objections raised by the McMindfulness critique are nothing more than hand-waving hyperbole.

In the concluding chapter, Glenn Wallis offers a cogent rebuttal by first noting how Repetti’s chapter actually is reflective of how secular mindfulness advocates have failed to respond to criticisms by resorting to what he refers to the rhetorical strategies of “conceptual shape-shifting and covert idealism.” Wallis points out that Repetti sidesteps the fact that an ideological edifice has been erected around Jon Kabat-Zinn’s operational definition of mindfulness, turning it into a system of thought and practice that is embedded within a social–economic–political context, and which produces a very particular form of subjectivity and world. Indeed, Wallis argues that Repetti’s reactionary stance to the McMindfulness critique amounts to a faithful valorization of the diminished neoliberal subject who utilizes mindfulness practice as essentially a self-help technique for enhancing our (natural) capacities for adaptation, acceptance, and resilience.

Taken in its totality, this handbook provides a wide-ranging overview and introduction to the emerging field of critical mindfulness studies. As Edwin Ng, one of our contributors points out, “When we speak of ‘critical mindfulness,’ we are following Foucault in performing critique not simply to decry that things are not right as they are. Rather, it is ‘to show that things are not as self-evident as one believed, to see that what is accepted as self-evident will no longer be accepted as such.’” Each of our contributors has engaged in critical inquiries, examining and interrogating the ideologies, cultural context, and institutional interests that have shaped and framed our contemporary understanding of mindfulness. At a time when the hype, commercialization, and popularity of mindfulness are at its peak, critical mindfulness has much to offer by challenging the dominant frames that have informed contemplative programs and concomitant scientific research. For students and professionals wishing to go beyond universalist, ahistorical, and decontextualized treatments of mindfulness, and for scholars seeking new frames that take into account historical, cultural, social, political, economic, racial, and ethical dimensions of contemplative practice, this handbook will provide both insight, inspiration, and direction.

San Francisco, CA, USA  
Brooklyn, NY, USA  
San Francisco, CA, USA

Ronald E. Purser  
David Forbes  
Adam Burke

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