



The SAGE Encyclopedia of the Sociology of Religion

Mindfulness

Contributors: Vincenzo M. B. Giorgino

Edited by: Adam Possamai & Anthony J. Blasi

Book Title: The SAGE Encyclopedia of the Sociology of Religion

Chapter Title: "Mindfulness"

Pub. Date: 2020

Access Date: April 9, 2020

Publishing Company: SAGE Publications, Inc.

City: Thousand Oaks,

Print ISBN: 9781473942202

Online ISBN: 9781529714401

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781529714401.n282>

Print page: 495

© 2020 SAGE Publications, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

This PDF has been generated from SAGE Knowledge. Please note that the pagination of the online version will vary from the pagination of the print book.

The term *mindfulness* originates from Buddhism and has been imported in Western culture through the counterculture of the 1960s. At the end of the 1970s, it also became secular practice through Jon Kabat-Zinn's *mindfulness-based stress reduction* program. It was first designed for the general population and was inherently nonpathologizing. Its orientation was nonhierarchical and was mainly educational rather than clinical. Since the 1990s, however, it has become part of a scientific approach in clinical settings. The biopsychosocial model is the pillar of this lay mindfulness model, and it pays attention to environmental and social factors as determinants of health and well-being. A neuroscientific approach has later developed and is more focused on the individual.

Mindfulness is a human capacity grounded on an accepting awareness and attention to the stream of lived experience. It favors a clear understanding of how one's inner mental, emotional, and sensorial work can affect our vision and our actions. Intention, attention, and attitude are the three main aspects that characterize it. It positions itself beyond the traditions of wisdom, mainly religious, from which it comes. Its secular orientation is not entirely new, but its integration into the scientific world, such as in medicine and psychology, is.

The mindfulness movement is a significant and successful social innovation of the past century. Nevertheless, about 40 years after its birth, some unavoidable challenges have emerged.

One of them is the commodification of the practice: the US\$1.2 billion industry (in the United States alone) seems to many scholars and socially engaged practitioners to be a deviation from the movement's origins and a manifestation of subservience to the dominant economic logic. A second challenge is the epistemological neuroscientific model underpinning, which privileges the atomized individual—that is, subjects studied in social isolation. Probably, the loss of Francisco Varela (1946–2001), the principal scientific animator of the Mind and Life Institute at the time, favored this turning point. Varela had started working in the 1990s on an enactive (nonrepresentational) epistemological approach, which has since been developed by many scholars in other areas. This paradigm, with its four main aspects—enaction, embodiment, embeddedness, and extension—could constitute a more open, nonreductionist redefinition of the current model.

The aforementioned issues have given rise to a number of efforts and experiments to overcome these problems. First, and especially noteworthy, is the introduction of intersubjectivity as a fundamental element in practice programs and the evaluation of its collective effects. Second, the denial of commodification for some has created a move toward the search for origins, sometimes understood as a return to an uncontaminated purity, not corrupted by the institutionalized greed of post-industrial capitalism. Third, the social dimension is intended as a democratization of the practice, offering mindfulness training in specific social settings such as prisons, schools, hospitals, marginalized communities, and other self-organized contemplative practices.

See also [Buddhism](#); [Contemplation](#); [Counterculture](#); [Secular Spirituality](#)

Further Readings

Bauwens, M. (2018). Par Cum Pari: Notes on the horizontality of peer-to-peer relationships in the context of the verticality of a hierarchy of values. In V. M. B. Giorgino, & Z. Walsh, (Eds.), *Co-designing economies in transition: Radical approaches in dialogue with contemplative social sciences* (pp. 73–88). London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (1991). *Full catastrophe living: How to cope with stress, pain and illness using mindfulness meditation*. New York, NY: Dell.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Coming to our senses: Healing ourselves and the world through mindfulness*. London, UK: Piatkus Books.

McCown, D., Reibel, D., & Micozzi, M. S. (2011). *Teaching mindfulness: A practical guide for clinicians and educators*. New York, NY: Springer.

Purser, R. E., Forbes, D., & Burke, A. (Eds.). (2016). *Handbook of Mindfulness culture, context, and*

social engagement. New York, NY: Springer.

Purser, R. E., & Milillo, J. (2014). Mindfulness revisited: A Buddhist-based conceptualization. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 24(1), 3–24.

Vincenzo M. B. Giorgino

- mindfulness

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781529714401.n282>

10.4135/9781529714401.n282