

• Vol. 1, No. 1 • 2021 • (pp. 49-62) •  
[www.istp-irtp.com](http://www.istp-irtp.com)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7146/irtp.v1i1.127078>

## McMindfulness in the Era of Accelerated Life

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### Abstract

*This article addresses how we are to understand mindfulness as a cultural phenomenon and why it has changed so little of what it originally set out to address. In the article, it will be argued that we need to understand the development of mindfulness as a part of the progression of neoliberalism. Central in the analysis of neoliberalism stands Harvey's concept of accumulation by dispossession (2003, 2007) helping us understanding the transformations mindfulness has made from being a part of a religious practice to becoming a product in the modern health discourse through processes of privatizing and commodification. Finally, the article discusses if mindfulness contains critical potentials for change.*

Keywords: Mindfulness, neoliberalism, David Harvey, accumulation by dispossession, change

### McMindfulness in the Era of Accelerated Life

Even though most psychologists take mindfulness to be an instrument and as a technique that can be uncritically applied to solve individual problems in therapy or in counselling sessions, mindfulness was originally developed as an answer to cultural problems (Nielsen & Bondo Lind, 2016). In Kabat-Zinn's groundbreaking work, *Full Catastrophe Living: How to Cope With Stress, Pain and Illness Using Mindfulness Meditation* (Kabat-Zinn, 1990), Kabat-Zinn addressed stress in particular, as a significant cultural problem embedded in a cultural practice: "The popular name for the full catastrophe nowadays is stress" (p. 270). In some respects, Kabat-Zinn's short analysis of our full catastrophe living has similarities to Rosa's (2013) theory of social acceleration, which states that a number of significant problems, like stress, are embedded in ways of living in modernity. However, Kabat-Zinn's analysis of the catastrophe in general and stress in particular as cultural problems is restricted. As will be elaborated below, he turns our catastrophic living into a health problem that can be solved by mindfulness. Basically, Kabat-Zinn argued that we already know what

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the problem is, so what we need to figure out how to solve the problem. Even though Kabat-Zinn acknowledged that the pressure to constantly change is at the heart of the stressful lives we are living, he exclusively focused on developing an instrument to solving the problem. The solution is the mindfulness-based stress-reduction (MBSR) program, the mindfulness program that Kabat-Zinn himself developed.

In this paper, I would like to take Kabat-Zinn and the mindfulness folks up on their intention to introduce mindfulness as way to deal with the cultural practice of social acceleration, or full catastrophe living. How is that working out? I would like to focus on mindfulness as a way to address full catastrophe living as a cultural phenomenon. In that respect, a quick glance over the developments of the last several decades gives a depressing answer to whether the development of mindfulness has changed full catastrophe living in any way. In a recent study from the United States, over 50% of the participants complained that they were so stressed that it influenced their productivity at the workplace (Fink, 2016). The World Health Organization has labeled stress “The Health Epidemic of 21st century” (Fink, 2016), and the number of persons feeling severely stressed has risen by 10–30% among all occupational groups in the United States from 1983 until today (Fink, 2016). This is more or less the same period of time when the mindfulness movement greatly expanded and swept victoriously throughout the Western world. The number of books, courses, lectures, research papers, TV programs, apps, and many other things related to mindfulness have more or less exploded in the last several decades (Purser & Loy, 2013) but with apparently little effect on what mindfulness was set out to address.

The questions for this paper are how we understand mindfulness as a cultural phenomenon and why it has changed so little of what it originally set out to address? I will argue that we need to understand the development of mindfulness as a part of the progression of neoliberalism. In this paper, neoliberalism will be understood in Marxist framework inspired by Harvey (2003, 2007). In this perspective, neoliberalism is comprehended as a part of a political project re-establishing the conditions for capital accumulation and restoring the power of the economic elites (Harvey, 2007, p. 19). Central in Harvey’s analysis of neoliberalism stands the concept of accumulation by dispossession entailing a very different set of practices than capital accumulation as originally described by Marx where capital accumulation primarily happened through expansion of wage labour in industry and agriculture (Harvey, 2007, p. 159). Accumulation through dispossession involves capital accumulation through the commodification and privatization of all kinds of public assets, which hitherto has been as regarded off-limits for privatization and commodification (Harvey, 2007, p. 160). If we return to the aim of this paper, we will argue that the development of mindfulness must be seen as a part of how neoliberalism dynamically transformed modern capitalism through accumulation by dispossession. As will be argued below, Harvey’s notion of accumulation by dispossession will help us understanding one of the transformations mindfulness has made, namely from being a part of a religious practice, to becoming a product through processes of privatizing and commodification. Furthermore, being decouple from a religious practice and privatized, mindfulness opens options for how individuals can find ways of self-healing, and hence, making mindfulness central to a modern health discourse.

## **The Social Production of Mindfulness**

In this article, I will mainly focus on Kabat-Zinn and his understanding of mindfulness. Since Kabat-Zinn is completely dominant within the field of mindfulness, I will dwell on

his transformations of the understanding of mindfulness. Kabat-Zinn is, by all standards, “Mister Mindfulness.” In Barker’s (2007, as cited by Gordon, 2009) words, “If one is interested in understanding the essence of mindfulness as it is articulated in the popular media, one is interested in the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn” (p. 22).

Kabat-Zinn graduated with a degree in molecular biology, after which he founded the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts in 1979 and developed the MBSR program. Since 1979, over 20,000 patients have undergone one of the 740 programs worldwide, which typically include 8-week theory and meditation practice courses. Kabat-Zinn’s book *Full Catastrophe Living* from 1990 has become the curriculum for most MBSR instructors and has long since found its way to booksellers’ shelves. Kabat-Zinn and his group of affiliated peers (Kabat-Zinn, 2005; Hyland, 2015b; Segal et al., 2002; Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Williams et al., 2007) also stand behind the global spread of interest in mindfulness through interventions in a variety of areas, such as in schools, prisons, workplaces, and hospitals, as well as in psychology, psychotherapy, education, and medicine (Hyland, 2015a). Kabat-Zinn was thus the founder of both mindfulness as a medical intervention technique and mindfulness as a medical prevention tool.

## From Religious Practice to Medical Intervention Technique

To understand how mindfulness became a commodity, it is important to understand how mindfulness has been transformed from being an element of religious practice (Buddhism) to being reified into a technique of medical practice.

Mindfulness has roots in Buddhism, and *sati* is the Buddhist word for mindfulness. In traditional Buddhist thinking, *sati* is closely associated with the concept of memory (Stanley, 2013) and can best be translated as “remembering.” Based on the historical Buddha’s teaching in the fifth century AD, mindfulness is defined as a process in which “things said or done long ago are recalled and remembered” (Stanley, 2013). Thus, the original understanding of mindfulness did not focus on deepening the here-and-now situation, as we find in the modern understanding of mindfulness, but rather strongly focused on memory. *Sati* thus describes that the prerequisite for awareness of the here-and-now situation requires an awareness of what has happened in the past. As one of the historical Buddha’s followers of the sixth century summarized about the mindfulness process, “Once mindfulness is present, memory will be able to function well” (Anlayo, 2006; Stanley, 2013). In Buddhist thinking, mindfulness is not only a mental function or mental trait but also part of a specific practice (Grossman & Van Damm, 2011, p. 221). In Buddhist thinking, *Satipatthana Sutta* (one of the oldest Buddhist texts on mindfulness) describes mindfulness as a practice of five features: (a) conscious, open-minded awareness of the experience of the present situation; (b) a process that develops human qualities such as kindness, tolerance, patience, and courage; (c) a persistent nondiscursive and nonanalytic study of our experiences; (d) an awareness that is markedly different from our everyday experiences; and (e) a process that requires systematic practice to cultivate its practitioner (Grossman & Van Damm, 2011; Langer, 1989; Nanamoli & Bodhi, 2001; Stanley, 2013). As the *Sutta* text shows, an ethical set of values are linked to the pursuit of mindfulness (developing kindness, tolerance, patience, and courage).

In the Western world, historically, there has been a movement toward understanding mindfulness as a particular form of attention, while the ethical practice of Buddhism

gradually moved into the background or, as we shall see, been directly decoupled from mindfulness. The term *mindfulness* has been known in the English-speaking world since the 15th century in a variety of different meanings: to pay attention, remember something, be thoughtful, or be conscious of something (Stanley, 2013). Around the beginning of the modern Enlightenment period in the 16th century, the term gained a more specific meaning of attention, memory, or intention, but it was only in the mid-19th century, in Rhys David's 1881 translation, that the *sati* concept of Buddhist thinking was attempted to be translated directly into English so that the present meaning of the word *mindfulness* started to be configured. Rhys David admitted that mindfulness is a difficult concept to translate from the ethical psychology of Buddhism, as he described it, and that he gently translated *sati* as "that activity of mind, constant presence of mind, wakefulness of heart, which is the foe of carelessness, inadvertence, self-forgetness" (Rhys Davids, 1881 as cited in Stanley, 2013).

As described above, the original understanding of *sati* includes an attentional dimension associated with the memory process. This Western translation of *sati*, which focuses directly on the dimension of attention, has been termed *bare awareness* or *bare mindfulness* (Stanley, 2013). Bare awareness is attached to the perceptual dimension that precedes and forms the premise that a particular object is recognized and later conceptualized as a specific object. For example, in *sati*, understood as bare awareness, there is an awareness of how the body is experienced before a particular object is conceptualized as well as a focus on how the body can develop its sensitivity in this process and thus develop the awareness that makes one particularly sensitive to what is going on in and around them.

Bare awareness played a key role in how the concept of mindfulness was later defined in the Western world (Stanley, 2013). In 1953, Nyanaponika Thera defined mindfulness precisely as a nonconceptual perceptual dimension focusing on the here-and-now situation: "the clear and single-minded awareness of what happens to us and in us, those are the successive moments of perception" (Thera, 1953, p. 30; Stanley, 2013). For Thera, the awareness dimension has become a model for and the very essence of how we understand mindfulness today, as a particular kind of awareness linked to the individual. American Buddhist and psychotherapist Jack Kornfield sharpened the understanding of mindfulness as a nonjudgmental bare attention. Kornfield (1977) defined mindfulness as "the attitude of non-judgmental observation (i.e. mindfulness) [that] allows all events to occur in a natural way. By keeping attention in the present moment, we can see more and more clearly the true characteristics of mind and body process" (Stanley, 2013). The most dominant definition of mindfulness today is found in Kabat-Zinn (1990, 1994), who maintained the determination of mindfulness as bare awareness closely related to the individual, but he also does something else with mindfulness—namely, he transformed it so that it could be included into medical practice (Stanley, 2013).

## The Decoupling of Mindfulness From Buddhism

Even though Kabat-Zinn was strongly inspired by Buddhism, one of his central achievements was to decouple the concept mindfulness from Buddhist practice, claiming that the concept is not related to particular religious ethical practices but covers the universal human phenomenon as bare awareness (Gordon, 2009; Fields, 1992). On the relationship between Buddhism and meditation, Kabat-Zinn (2005) wrote:

When we speak of meditation, it is important for you to know that this is not some weird cryptic activity, as our popular culture might have it. It does not involve becoming some

kind of zombie, vegetable, self-absorbed narcissist, navel gazer, space cadet, cultist, devotee, mystic, or Eastern philosopher. (p. xvi)

Kabat-Zinn argued that mindfulness has a universal human character related to the individual and can be achieved without submitting to any form of religious thinking or training and that mindfulness can be understood independently of a Buddhist context (Gordon, 2009). According to Kabat-Zinn, mindfulness is simply a particular way of being aware and a certain way of seeking to understand oneself, where there is no need to appeal to any religious tradition. In this regard, Kabat-Zinn (1990) defined mindfulness as a way of “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally” in a way that “nurtures greater awareness, clarity, and acceptance of present-moment reality” (p. 3). Thus, mindfulness involves nonjudgmental bare attention in everyday activities and offers a “powerful route for getting ourselves unstuck, back in touch with our own wisdom and vitality” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, pp. 4–5). In addition to claiming that mindfulness has a universal quality, Kabat-Zinn distances mindfulness from the Buddhist context for another reason: to adapt mindfulness to a medical discourse. As mentioned, Kabat-Zinn was trained in the medical field and saw great opportunities in mindfulness. The medical discourse is dominated by positivism’s ambition of value freedom and has no room for the normative ethical practice underlying Buddhism. It would be considered unscientific. In an interview, Kabat-Zinn stated,

If you go into talking about the Buddha and inviting masters with shaved heads for lectures, you’re going to be perceived right away as some foreign cultural ideology—a belief system. Understandably so, it would likely be rejected. (Streitfeld, 1991, p. 19)

This decoupling of mindfulness, in the form of a universal bare awareness belonging to the individual, from religious practice has been criticized in recent years, especially by scholars practicing Buddhism (Brazier, 2013; Grossman, 2011; Grossman & Van Dam, 2011). Critics have emphasized that with the decoupling, the social, ethical, and critical dimensions in which the concept of mindfulness is embedded within Buddhist thinking also disappear, and then mindfulness becomes merely a technique on par with other intervention techniques (Carrette & King, 2005, pp. 102–105).

## **Mindfulness as a Self-Healing Phenomenon**

In order for us to understand how and why mindfulness has become so popular, we need to understand the ideological dimensions of mindfulness. The Gramscian concept of common sense, defined as ‘the sense held in common’, plays a significant part in the ideological transformation of mindfulness (Thomas, 2010). Common sense is constructed out of longstanding practices of cultural socialization often rooted deep in regional and national tradition and common sense, therefore, can be profoundly misleading, obfuscating or disguising real problems under cultural prejudices (Harvey, 2007, p. 39). In the case of the long march of neoliberal ideas, the narrative of individual freedom works as “(...) a bottom that elites can press to open the door to the masses to justify almost anything” (Harvey, 2007, p. 40). Where “classical” capital accumulation in the 1950s and 1960s gave rise to an oppositional culture (trade unions and political parties), neoliberalism and accumulation by dispossession talk into the central narratives of the cultural elites and also into the progressive individualistic discourse rooted in countercultural thinking, in which the subject is understood as bearing the potential to transform their own life. This is the central narrative Kabat-Zinn is using for popularizing mindfulness. This thinking originated in Western

romantic thinking and had its heyday around the youth revolt in the 1960s, after which it has left deep traces in Western culture. Understanding the individual human being who carries the potential to transform themselves has played a vital role in the popularization of mindfulness.

In producing the progressive self-healing individual, Kabat-Zinn drew upon a special tradition of American spiritual life: American transcendentalism, which is particularly represented by iconic American writers of the 20th century such as Emerson and Thoreau (Gordon, 2009). American transcendentalism was born from the idea that the principles of human life are derived from its inner essence and that given the right framework, the human inner essence sparks genuine human development. American transcendentalism was inspired by romantic thinkers like Rousseau, from whom one finds the same idea that humans are born with a good nature and that under the right conditions (freedom), each individual carries the prerequisites to transform themselves. American transcendentalism is skeptical of materialism, mass society, and modern institutions and tries to formulate an alternative to the forms of life that modern society offers. In their work, central transcendentalists such as Emerson and Thoreau thematized simple living and nature as alternatives to industrial mass society.

Best known in this context is Thoreau's 1854 *Walden* book, in which Thoreau describes how he lived in a small cabin out in the wild nature at Walden Pond in Massachusetts for 2 years (Thoreau, 1854/2012). In the book, Thoreau described how he turned his back on the dehumanization of mass society and tried to live a simple life in the wild to deepen his own self-reliance. American transcendentalism played a major role in Kabat-Zinn's formulation of mindfulness, and Thoreau and Emerson are frequently cited in his books, such as *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness in Everyday Living* (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). For Kabat-Zinn, the individual is not to move out into nature in the physical sense; rather, the move must be made in a psychological sense, and mindfulness plays a central role in this connection. Thus, mindfulness is the technique by which an individual comes in contact with their inner nature through meditation.

The basic assumption that Kabat-Zinn shares with the American transcendentalists is that humans are fundamentally self-healing, which, in this context, means that humans themselves possess the potentials needed to transcend the ills that follow the general way of life of modern society. More precisely, the concept of healing in Kabat-Zinn's work points to the fact that the individual must learn to be accepting in the present. Kabat-Zinn (2005) wrote, "When we use the word healing to describe the experiences of people in the stress clinic, what we mean above all is that they are undergoing a profound transformation of view" (p. 168). Healing means accepting things as they are, "rather than struggling to force them to be as they once were, or as we would like them to be" (Barker, 2014; Kabat-Zinn, 2005, pp. 136-137). Under the right circumstances—in this context, mindfulness, like the mental version of *Walden*—our bodies and minds can heal themselves.

## **Mindfulness in an Evidence-Oriented Medical Discourse**

By decoupling the concept of mindfulness from a religious practice and turning it into a concept which opens possibilities for the individual's self-healing, through activating deep-rooted narratives about personal transcendence, mindfulness is ready to enter into an evidence-oriented medical discourse. In this section, I will thus describe Kabat-Zinn's

mindfulness program as well as a series of offshoots originating from the involvement of mindfulness in medical practice.

Kabat-Zinn was not the first to seek to use elements of Eastern thinking in medical practice. In the early 1970s, Wallace (Gordon, 2009; Wallace, 1970, 1971) conducted a study showing that people using transcendental meditation (TM) had significantly reduced oxygen uptake and heart rate. Although TM did not originate directly from Buddhism, this form of meditation bears a strong resemblance to mindfulness (Gordon, 2009). Similarly, in a study on the medical implications of meditation, Benson (1975) found that meditation leads to increased well-being, among other things, through lowered blood pressure. Benson (1975) argued in the bestseller *The Relaxation Response* (Benson, 1975) that the very fact that individuals think differently about themselves can lead to increased well-being and that one can find this way of thinking in a variety of traditions other than Eastern religions.

As one of the first to do so, Kabat-Zinn created a systematic treatment program based on mindfulness called mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), which is basically an 8-week stress-management program for a group of 30 people at most. The MBSR program utilizes three mindfulness practices such as body scanning, sitting/walking meditation, and hatha yoga. It was initially applied only at Kabat-Zinn's own stress clinic (Kabat-Zinn, 2011). A number of other intervention programs have been developed based on Kabat-Zinn's MBSR program, such as mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), created by Segal et al. (2002), which has a special emphasis on treating depression, in relation to both the concept of mindfulness and the development of specific techniques. Like MBSR, MBCT incorporates both breathing and breathing techniques but combined with elements of cognitive behavioral therapy. MBCT consists of eight weekly 2-hr workouts (Kang & Whittingham, 2010; Nilsson & Kazemi, 2016). Linehan developed dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT), which was inspired by MBSR, in the 1990s (Linehan, 1993) to treat patients with borderline personality disorder. Since then, DBT has been applied to other diagnoses, such as depression and some binge-eating disorders. Therapy uses mindfulness as a "part-tool"—that is, along with other tools based on dialectical thinking (Kang & Whittingham 2010). Some evidence shows that DBT has an effect on personality disorders (Fiegenbaum, 2007).

In an evidence-based medical discourse, the legitimacy of mindfulness rests on the effectiveness of the program being measured. In this context, various forms of "measurement instruments" have been developed to measure the effects of mindfulness. At the time of writing, there are already nine different self-report questionnaires that attempt to measure whether participants in various types of research are "mindful" (Stanley, 2013). Nilsson and Kazemi (2016) cite the following instruments as common ways of measuring outcomes in relation to the use of mindfulness techniques: the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale, the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory, the Southampton Mindfulness Questionnaire, the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills, and the Philadelphia Mindfulness Scale. The effects of using mindfulness in a medical practice has not been unequivocally positive (Grossman and Van Dam, 2011). In recent years, there has also been a significant methodological criticism of the many studies showing an effect of mindfulness interventions. Criticism points out, 1) that there is a low intercorrelation in the use of different questionnaires' measurements of mindfulness (Grossman, 2011), 2) the use of self-reported questionnaires is problematic in relation to measuring the degree of mindfulness (Grossman and Van Dam, 2011), and 3) there is a lack of control groups and a sufficiently

large number of participants to uncover the effect of mindfulness interventions Nilsson & Kazemi, (2016).

## **McMindfulness: Mindfulness as Market Product**

At the same time as mindfulness became a part of the medical discourse, it did also turn into both a commodity to be sold on the market, helping it's users improving their performances in general. Mindfulness has been turned into a commodity—what some has called *McMindfulness*—with which one can add a piece of mindfulness to their everyday practice to improve their performance (Purser & Loy, 2013). Many titles of the books being published are about improving one's performance: *Mindful Parenting*, *Mindful Teaching*, *Mindful Politics*, *Mindful Therapy*, *Mindful Leadership*, *A Mindful Nation*, *Mindful Recovery*, *The Mindful Mind*, *The Mindful Brain*, *The Mindful Way Through Depression*, *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion* (Purser & Loy, 2013). Likewise, in browsing the Internet, it seems limitless what mindfulness can do for a person. It can increase one's work efficiency, reduce children's school absenteeism, increase employees' "soft" skills, and change companies with a problematic workplace culture for the better. Mindfulness has become a major industry with an estimated billion dollars in sales of products and services involving mindfulness in 2015. The mindfulness industry is expected to more than double its revenue in the following years. Employees and executives regularly use mindfulness in a number of large companies such as Google, General Mills, Procter & Gamble, and Monsanto (Purser & Loy, 2013). Mindfulness has become a central part of the U.S. Military's training. Elisabeth Stanley, founder of the Mind Fitness Training Institute, commented on the military's use of mindfulness that "These techniques can be very effective in increasing situational awareness on the battlefield" (Hruby, 2012).

To return to my original question, mindfulness has become a commodity that has accelerated the striving to optimize performance; hence, mindfulness seems to have accelerated competition more than the opposite. In that sense, it has improved factors that enhance stress more than it has the opposite. A severe side effect of mindfulness as a cultural phenomenon is that produces the conditions that it is concurrently fighting. It is like trying to put a fire out by using gasoline.

## **Mindfulness: Being Habituated to the Neoliberal Market**

As argued above, by seeing the individual as potentially self-healing, Kabat-Zinn's concept of mindfulness is aimed at the well-being of the single individual, which perfectly resonates with the dominant values in a neoliberal worldview. In a neoliberal economy—characterized by social acceleration, with an emphasis on flexible, informal, or part-time labor as well as rapid technological shifts and increasingly brief cycles of obsolescence—workers must develop new emotional, social, and relational skills to survive (Rosa, 2013). According to Sennett (2006), given the erosion of steady, long-term employment and the frame of reference such employment provides, the individual must learn to navigate the "fragmentary social conditions" of neoliberal capitalism and improvise their life narrative. The ideal neoliberal subject must become an entrepreneur who constantly retrains and updates their skills in the face of rapid technological and scientific changes. In that context, mindfulness becomes a powerful tool for boosting one's emotional capital, and practicing mindfulness literally becomes a way of investing in one's entrepreneurial self-project. Mindfulness and neoliberalism exactly converge at the attitude of being the entrepreneur of



one's own life and managing oneself. Kabat-Zinn argued that practitioners are taught to “let go” of habitual ways of perceiving and of instinctual emotional reactions through meditation, thereby allowing themselves to choose more skillful, positive, and creative ways of responding to events and circumstances.

Mindfulness teaches practitioners to develop control over their minds; manage their reactions; and develop emotional qualities like gratitude, positivity, and resilience leading to happiness (Eisen, 2014, p. 50). While “negative” emotions like anxiety, anger, and sadness are to be accepted but only so that they may be managed and eventually let go, “positive” emotions like joy and love are to be cultivated so that one can a deeper sense of happiness and spiritual fulfillment. The basic idea for both neoliberal thinking and mindfulness seems to be that people suffer because they have “mismanaged” their emotions. The problem does not lie in the conditions themselves but rather in how one has “chosen” to perceive those conditions. Even physical health problems can be linked to happiness and hence to a matter of choice. As argued by Kabat-Zinn, “the ways in which an individual chooses to be in a relationship with his/her stress and stressful conditions can actually reduce the rate of telomere shortening” (Eisen, 2014, p. 66; Paulson et al. 2013, p. 97).

In this perspective, one can argue that mindfulness thinking, at its essence, develops with neoliberalism a “responsibilization” of the individual. A rational and calculating individual bears full responsibility for the consequences of their actions. One is poor and unhealthy because they lack self-control and entrepreneurial spirit, not because of their social background, economic issues, or class politics. Someone who is unhappy has nobody to blame but themselves; if someone is happy, good for them—they have earned it. In this perspective, negative emotions are no longer related to anything vital about the world that calls for action and change. Negative emotions are considered matters of personal idiosyncrasy that must be managed as one find one's way, in the neoliberal market thinking.

This neoliberal dimension to mindfulness becomes even more problematic when different mindfulness supporters all over the world—Denmark included—suggest that mindfulness should be a mandatory part of institutional practices to solve and prevent problems in the areas of health, education, labor, and crime (e.g., Loughton & Morden, 2015). From a critical perspective, this institutionalization of mindfulness would work as a systematic habituation to neoliberal thinking. To shortly return to the question I started out with, mindfulness works seem to have accelerated neoliberal thinking rather than setting up an alternative.

## **Final Remarks: The Critical Potentials of Mindfulness**

Given these critical comments about mindfulness, one could easily conclude that society should give up on mindfulness and fight and discard it whenever one has the chance. This is neither realistic nor desirable. Instead, I will shortly consider whether mindfulness has any critical potentials that could be used to formulate critical questions about the Western world's social-acceleration process. I believe there are. The central ideas of mindfulness spring from a Buddhist tradition in which one of the ethical-religious messages was a radical respect for all kind of organic otherness (both humans and otherwise), and Buddhists have formulated the heaviest critiques of modern mindfulness.

In Buddhism, classical mindfulness has other connotations that the one found in modern mindfulness. I will briefly mention some of these connotations because they seem to contain important critical potentials. In Buddhist thinking, (a) mindfulness is a practice that one

slowly acquires through years of training. It is not technique one can learn over a short period of time. In general, there is a critical stand against social acceleration in general. (b) In classical Buddhist thinking, mindfulness is an ethical practice in which respect for otherness is central (in the *Satti* texts, one of the central dimensions is to learn to develop human qualities such as kindness, tolerance, patience, and courage). (c) In classical Buddhism, mindfulness is not an individualistic practice but a shared practice. It is not the well-being of the individual in itself that is central but a question of how people should live together. What I am trying to say here is not that we should become Buddhists but that we need reinstall and emphasize the ethical, social, and political dimensions that the Kabat-Zinn tradition cut out of the classical Buddhist mindfulness tradition to fit the latter into Western culture. Doing so would allow mindfulness to function as genuine platform for posing critical questions about our full catastrophe living. Rather than comprehending mindfulness as a way to reinstall modern neoliberal individualism, mindfulness should reconnect individuality to shared human conditions and ethical practices, which potentially would open for critical questions concerning capital accumulation by dispossession (see also Analayo, 2006; Grossman & Van Damm, 2011; Nanamoli & Bodhi, 2001; Stanley, 2013).

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