

Mindfulness in Behavioral Health

Series Editor: Nirbhay N. Singh

Steven Stanley · Ronald E. Purser

Nirbhay N. Singh

Editors

Handbook of Ethical Foundations of Mindfulness

 Springer

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Handbook of Ethical Foundations of Mindfulness

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In loving memory of Shelley Stanley (1951–2016)

Steven Stanley

*To B. Alan Wallace, who has been a guide, friend,
and spiritual mentor*

Ronald E. Purser

*To my dharma brothers, Jon Kabat-Zinn and Bhikkhu
Anālayo, for the journey ahead*

Nirbhay N. Singh

Preface

Mindfulness has become a therapy, a mass movement, and global industry. Yet where are the ethical foundations of mindfulness to be found? In our individual experience, ancient texts, or the wider social worlds in which we live? Is the secular mindfulness taught in mindfulness-based courses inherently ethical and moral? Is mindfulness itself religious, secular, or post-secular? *Handbook of Ethical Foundations of Mindfulness* is a cutting-edge, international, multidisciplinary exploration of the ethical and moral dimensions of the global mindfulness movement. It provides no easy answers, but many challenging questions.

World-leading researchers, clinicians, and teachers—from academic psychologists to Buddhist teachers, from scholars of religion to educationalists, and from organization theorists to environmental sociologists—discuss current debates concerning the ethics of mindfulness across the applied fields of education and pedagogy, business, economics, and environment. This handbook takes a broad and critical perspective on mindfulness, ethics, and morality and frames the debates against the background of Buddhist traditions and within the context of our contemporary world and escalating global crises. This handbook is comprised of 18 chapters and divided into four parts which together show how matters of mindfulness can no longer be reduced to the sole domain of therapeutic efficacy alone. The ethical foundations of mindfulness, however variously they are formulated and interpreted, are simultaneously matters of *how we live together* in this changing world.

Cardiff, UK
San Francisco, CA, USA
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Steven Stanley
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Nirbhay N. Singh

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About the Editors

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Ronald E. Purser is a Professor of Management at San Francisco State University. He is co-author of five books including, *24/7: Time and Temporality in the Network Society* (Stanford University Press, 2007), and over 60 academic journal articles and book chapters. More recently, Professor Purser's writings critically examine Buddhism's encounter with modernity, capitalism, and individualism, particularly in corporate settings. Dr. Purser began his Buddhist training in 1981 at the Tibetan Nyingma Institute in Berkeley. In 1985, he was a student at the Cleveland Zen Center under Koshin Ogui Sensei who had been Shunryu Suzuki's personal assistant in the early 1960s. He has studied with numerous Zen teachers and Tibetan lamas and is now an ordained Dharma instructor in the Korean Zen Buddhist Taego order. His recent articles include *White Privilege and the Mindfulness Movement*, *Confessions of a Mind-wandering MBSR Student: Remembering Social Amnesia*; *Clearing the Muddled Path of Traditional and Contemporary Mindfulness*; *Revisiting Mindfulness: A Buddhist-Based Conceptualization* (with J. Milillo); *Zen and the Art of Organizational Maintenance*; *Zen and the Creative Management of Dilemmas* (with Albert Low); *Deconstructing Lack: A Buddhist Perspective on Egocentric Organizations*; and *A Buddhist-Lacanian Perspective on Lack*. His articles *Beyond McMindfulness* (with David Loy), *Mindfulness' Truthiness Problem*

(with Andrew Cooper), and *Corporate Mindfulness Is Bullsh*t* (with Edwin Ng) went viral in the *Huffington Post* and *Salon.com* in 2013, 2014, and 2015. He is co-editor of *Handbook of Mindfulness: Culture, Content and Social Engagement* published by Springer in 2017.

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Ethical Foundations of Mindfulness

1

Steven Stanley, Ronald E. Purser, and Nirbhay N. Singh

Introduction

At the turn of the twentieth century, the Welsh Buddhologist Thomas William Rhys Davids (1843–1922)—then the world’s foremost interpreter and popularizer of Buddhist texts—predicted that Buddhism would greatly influence European thought. Working as a translator and government official in late nineteenth-century British-colonized Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and as a Pāli scholar who founded the Pāli Text Society in collaboration with his wife Caroline Rhys Davids, Thomas William believed that Buddhism, as a historical phenomenon, would spread across many lands and that, in each, it would acquire somewhat distinctive characteristics. Rhys Davids predicted that Buddhism would come to influence European discourse on *social issues*—war and peace, women’s rights, and social class (Wickremeratne, 1985). But he was skeptical that Buddhist morality was practicable in modern societies. Buddhism comprised an ethically intoned, world-renouncing asceticism and selfless, benevolent compassion for all living beings that he thought was inimical to Western individualism.

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Humanities scholars have rarely been noted for their ability to accurately predict the future. Yet, in his case, we might forgive Rhys Davids for failing to predict how, over one hundred years later, Buddhism would come to (a) be understood in the Western world not so much as a religion per se and primarily influence discussion of social issues but rather more as a *psychology*, comprising a collection of useful therapeutic tools—such as “mindfulness,” (b) influence our understandings of mental health and distress and be made compatible with the discoveries of a modern “science of happiness” (or positive psychology), and (c) seemingly secure individualism, along with the “liberal neutrality” and “open-mindedness” required for the successful workings of democratic consumer capitalism (Cohen-Cole, 2014; Farb, 2014; Schmidt, 2016).

Indeed, Rhys Davids could not have predicted how a “mindfulness movement” (or so-called revolution) would come to spring up among mostly white, middle-class, city dwellers and thereby become a staple part of our contemporary therapeutic culture (Illouz, 2008). Despite his prophetic failure, however, Rhys Davids’ influence and legacy is abiding and lives on. In several fundamental ways, Rhys Davids set the scene and much of the interpretative framework for the debates currently raging among scholars and clinicians about the ethics of mindfulness within the professional mindfulness field. Indeed, although his influence has now largely been forgotten, his sentiments echo across the centuries and can even be heard in the debates about the significance of the contemporary mindfulness movement, and most relevant to us now, in the debates about the ethical foundations of mindfulness taking place within the present volume.

The topic of ethics and mindfulness has previously been the subject of volumes concerning Buddhist thought (Badiner, 2002; Harvey, 2000; Keown, 1992). This is the first academic handbook to explicitly address, from within the psychological and behavioral sciences, some of the ethical and moral issues surrounding the emergence of mindfulness as a therapeutic modality in the modern world. The field of mindfulness studies has, up until relatively recently, been predominantly occupied with, and almost exclusively focused upon, the therapeutic effectiveness and efficacy of mindfulness, its mechanisms of action, and its impact upon physical and mental health and personal well-being, arguably to the neglect of broader social issues beyond personal well-being alone (Stanley, 2012). By topicalizing the ethics and morality of mindfulness, including the ethics and morality of the field of mindfulness studies itself, along with the broader mindfulness movement or industry as a popular, globalized self-help culture, this volume addresses issues which cannot be so easily confined to psychological and medical science.

Popular expressions of mindfulness suggest that we can feel good and happy simply by paying better attention to what we are currently doing in the present moment. By noticing more, the argument goes, we thereby enhance our well-being. A mindful mind is, by implication, a happy mind (Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010). And, in popular psychology and self-help culture, it is often suggested that to be mindful is to be well and that to be well is not only to be a happy person but also to be a good person. A good person conscientiously makes themselves well by working to be more mindful and thereby achieving the good life. Yet, arguably, each of

these promises is deeply misleading, and based upon problematic premises, for at least one simple reason, they each overlook *what we are doing* while we are paying attention with mindfulness. The popular and commonsensical understanding of mindfulness as a meditation *technique* presumes that we can feel good and happy simply by being more mindful (i.e., noticing and paying careful attention) alone and irrespective of our sustained ethical and moral conduct in the world. That is, irrespective of the substantive content of what we think, say, feel, and do in our everyday and working lives and, indeed, irrespective of what has happened to us and how others have treated us over time (Smail, 1987). For certain advocates of mindfulness, “it ain’t what you do, it’s the way that you do it”—to quote the British band Bananarama—that counts.

This volume attempts to redress this problematic and undeveloped understanding of mindfulness in the popular imagination by seeking to remedy the neglect of ethical issues in the psychological literature on mindfulness. In the very broadest of senses, we examine how we (should) treat each other and ourselves and the consequences of how we treat each other. We reconsider the relations between mindfulness and how we live together in this world. What kind of a world do we want to live in? How do we get there? And who are “we” in this process?

The broad aim of this volume is to bring ethical and moral issues to the forefront of the professional discourse and scholarly debate about mindfulness and, most importantly, to the attention of researchers, clinicians, and professionals in the emerging field of mindfulness studies—a multidisciplinary matrix predominantly comprising vocal and powerful institutional interests within integrative medicine, psychiatry, clinical psychology, and cognitive neuroscience (among other established academic, clinical, and applied disciplines), as well as simultaneously addressing a diverse audience of students, trainees, doctors, therapists, counselors, psychologists, neuroscientists, cognitive scientists, and health-care and social workers, along with policy-makers, managers, business leaders, journalists, independent consultants, coaches, and trainers. “The very fact that a major scientific publisher thinks the subject of mindfulness and ethics is relevant enough to invest its resources to bring this topic into this conventional form of mainstream academic discourse is significant, as is the fact that there are so many different credible voices and perspectives being expressed from vastly different backgrounds” (Kabat-Zinn, 2017, p. 1126).

We complement and extend the growing mainstream literature on mindfulness, as it is developing predominantly within the psychological, biomedical, and cognitive neurosciences, with critical attention to the ethico-moral dimensions of mindfulness. This move immediately takes us into complex territory and contested terrain concerning the social, cultural, political, historical, religious, and spiritual aspects of mindfulness, meditation, and contemplative practices in our rapidly changing contemporary world. This turn in research, scholarship, and practice has been variously named as “critical,” “social,” and “civic” mindfulness and represents an attempt to shift the emerging fields of mindfulness and contemplative studies to better encompass and more directly tackle pressing issues of injustice and inequality concerning the contemporary social, cultural, political, and environmental issues of our time (Carrette, 2007; Healey, 2015, pp. 21–22; Konik, 2016; Ng, 2016;

Walsh, 2016). This critical turn involves engaging in challenging multidisciplinary exchanges and collaborations across mainstream “psy-,” “neuro-,” and “biomedical” disciplines, the social sciences and humanities, and the worlds of activism and engaged Buddhist teaching and practice, especially as applied to social movements working for social, economic, and cultural change. The present volume, in this sense, represents a continuation of the ambitious project initiated in the *Handbook of Mindfulness: Culture, Context, and Social engagement* (Purser, Forbes, & Burke, 2016) and can also be read alongside the *Practitioner’s Guide to Ethics and Mindfulness-Based Interventions* (Monteiro, Compson, & Musten, 2017) which primarily addresses ethical issues arising from teaching mindfulness to specific populations.

In this introductory chapter, we will set the scene by articulating some of the background context and historical conditions which frame the current debates about the ethical foundations of mindfulness, in addition to how these have been most recently approached. We will then overview the topics addressed by each of the four parts of the volume, before providing concise summaries of each of the 19 chapters making up the present volume.

Mindfulness in the Modern World

Since at least the industrial revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, peoples of predominantly European and Anglo-American societies—the Western countries of the “Global North”—have turned to Asian body-mind practices and training regimes, as therapeutic ways of living with rapid socioeconomic change and political turmoil (McMahan, 2008; Williams, 2015; Wilson, 2014). Mindfulness, or Buddhist *sati*, is a case in point. Emerging out of complex, intercultural exchanges—notably British colonial expansion in Southeast Asia—mindfulness meditation, or *Vipassanā*, now features as a prominent feature of the globalized self-help industry and therapeutic cultural scene. North America, the United Kingdom, and the Nordic countries of Western Europe are perhaps the most striking exemplars of the exponential growth and expansion in the provision and practice of mindfulness, meditation, and related contemplative practices in the modern world.

Morone, Moore, and Greco (2017) have recently estimated that over 2 million adult Americans alone have used mindfulness meditation for health purposes. Psychologists and neuroscientists, along with respected Buddhist teachers, have arguably been the key representatives and dominant voices in the mainstreaming of mindfulness. Yet, when it comes to the professional authority required to evidence mindfulness in the mainstream, the center of gravity appears, at least on the surface, to have been decisively shifted from religion to science. Today, scientific interest in mindfulness is expanding at an astonishing rate. Over 3000 scientific articles have been published on the topic of mindfulness since 2010, with no sign of this publication trend abating (American Mindfulness Research Association, 2017; Valerio, 2016). The broader movement of mindfulness—sometimes parenthetically associated with “slow” culture—has, ironically, moved so rapidly and gained unprecedented momentum, perhaps due to its institutionalizing as an academic and professional field,

in addition to its community-led and grassroots initiatives. This seems to be particularly the case of the situation in the United Kingdom (Mindful Nation UK, 2015).

To date, along with the scientific publications, the academic and popular debate about mindfulness has so far been characterized by polemics, pivoting around issues that can broadly be considered as ethical and moral and tending to become starkly polarized between proponents and critics of mindfulness.

On the one hand, of the growing number of psychology and neuroscience articles published on mindfulness since the 1980s, the overwhelming majority positively evaluates mindfulness as an effective therapeutic tool. Clinicians have shown how standardized, 8-week courses of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT; Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2013) can be effective for the relief of chronic pain, stress, anxiety, and depression. In the United Kingdom, this evidence base did not initially result in the rollout of public provision, but in 2014, a *Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Group* was established. Members of the MAPPG taught mindfulness to 130 parliamentarians and 220 Westminster staff, aiming to build on the momentum of the “grassroots” mindfulness community and lobby politicians to fund mindfulness provision and roll mindfulness out en masse across diverse civil society sectors—health, education, the workplace, and criminal justice. Their vision was to turn the United Kingdom into a “mindful nation.” Meanwhile, mindfulness was being eagerly taken up by leaders of nation states and CEOs of transnational corporations, especially technology corporations, to prop up their shared projects of enhancing national and global mental health and well-being (Davies, 2015). Global leaders listened to the “happiest man in the world,” the French-born philanthropic Tibetan Buddhist monk Matthieu Ricard, who taught them meditation at the *World Economic Forum* in Davos, Switzerland, alongside the American film actress Goldie Hawn. An explosion of mindfulness self-help books, magazines, and meditation “apps” has since flooded the mind-body-spirit marketplace. And, in a perhaps bizarre twist of fate, mindfulness-based programs are now being exported from the United States and United Kingdom east not only to the social democratic countries of Western Europe but also back to the East Asia of China, Japan, and South Korea as well as Southeast Asian countries including Sri Lanka and Thailand—countries where these practices arguably originated and flourished, as part of liberal democratic development programs promoting “global mental health” (Cox & Webb, 2015; Huang, Fay, & White, 2017). Where liberal democracy and consumer capitalism go, it seems, “mindfulness” must follow in their wake.

On the other hand, the oftentimes evangelical promotion of mindfulness as a neutral and universally applicable panacea for world peace (Tan, 2012) has given way to a backlash, with critics arguing that mindfulness has been oversold (Brazier, 2013) and corporate McMindfulness is exposed as a capitalist bandwagon (Purser & Loy, 2013). Critics of mindfulness contest the extent to which mindfulness, as a therapeutic or social movement, is a revolutionary force for individual awakening and liberation, or a conspiracy to enslave individuals to consumer capitalism, by making them individually responsible for their own suffering, distress, and well-being. According to one particularly vocal critic, mindfulness, as a development of

a Western Buddhist “awareness movement,” is arguably becoming established as “the hegemonic ideology of global capitalism,” its meditative stance “the most efficient way, for us, to fully participate in the capitalist dynamic while retaining the appearance of mental sanity” (Žižek, 2001, pp. 12–13). Humanities scholars have, in turn, shown how Asian disciplines, such as mindfulness, have been transformed into therapies and made compatible with empirical science. They have illustrated how Asian religious traditions have been reframed psychologically as “spiritualities” and meditative practices commodified for consumers of Western digital capitalism, through the development of meditation self-tracking apps, like Headspace, Buddhify, and Calm.com, which potentially contradict their arguably socially radical origins in Buddhism (Carrette & King, 2005; King, 2016).

The default social science position on mindfulness (and similar psycho-spiritual practices) is that it resembles a neoliberal therapeutic self-technology—one which medicalizes, psychologizes, and individualizes well-being and distress as being the sole responsibilities of autonomous individuals within consumer capitalism (Arthington, 2016; Barker, 2014; Cohen, 2010; Stanley & Longden, 2016; Rose, 1998). From this perspective, the emergence of Kabat-Zinn’s “Stress Reduction and Relaxation Program” (“SR + RP”) in 1979 (later renamed as MBSR in the 1990s) dovetails closely with the political and economic reforms of the Reagan (United States) and Thatcher (United Kingdom) governments of the 1980s. Practitioners of mindfulness are “entrepreneurs of themselves,” flexibly coping with the vulnerabilities of risk, change, and social fragmentation and facing the increasing withdrawal of social support of the welfare state or community fabric (Binkley, 2014). When understood historically, mindfulness can be understood as an outgrowth of medical research on the psychophysiological stress response cycle and as an attempt to develop techniques of therapeutic relaxation to bring the body-mind of individually stressed people into better balance and equilibrium (Jackson, 2013; Nathoo, 2016). According to critics, the mindfulness movement, taken as a whole, is an “individualizing” culture and therefore ethically and morally suspect.

Critics have built upon this social scientific research and humanities scholarship to develop socially engaged mindfulness-based interventions, engaging particularly with traditions of “engaged Buddhism” (Bell, 1979; Bentz & Shapiro, 1998; Bentz & Giorgino, 2016; Doran, 2017; Gonzalez-Lopez, 2011; Lee, 2015; MacNevin, 2004; Purser, Forbes, & Burke, 2016; Stanley, 2012a, 2012b; Stanley, Barker, Edwards, & McEwen, 2015; Stanley, Edwards, Ibinarriaga-Soltero, & Krause, 2018). They have questioned whether mindfulness meditation should be best understood as a transhistorical and universally applicable stress reduction technique—comprising ancient perennial wisdom translated for modern times and proven by neuroscience—or rather a modern Buddhist religio-spiritual, ethico-moral, and socially engaged practice of awakening, designed to uproot greed, hatred, and delusion.

Yet, the mindfulness milieu, as a cultural field as a whole, arguably emerges out of several intertwining and sometimes hidden (or at least overlooked) historical roots which, in total, may produce an effect that is more complex than “individualization.” When understood historically, mindfulness appears to be a complex and

hybrid cultural genre—a kind of “culture jam.” Indeed, Wilson (2014, p. 74) asked whether the so-called mindfulness movement signals “the triumph of Buddhism in a non-Buddhist culture, or its death knell?” Is MBSR a new Buddhist “lineage” (Cullen, 2011) or a degenerate corruption of “original” Buddhism? Helderma (2016, p. 962) similarly asked “Is the translating religion approach of therapeutic mindfulness practices a case of capitalistic secularization or a re-enchanting subversion of secular spheres?” It is in this regard that mindfulness-based therapies have been accused of promoting a so-called “Trojan horse,” “stealth,” or “crypto-Buddhist” secular religion in public civil institutions, especially in schools (Brown, 2016; Compson & Monteiro, 2016; Purser, 2015).

Arguably, not all of the historical roots of mindfulness are within the Buddhist traditions (Dryden & Still, 2006). We mentioned the root of medical stress research above. But, as well as British colonial expansion and military intervention in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Southeast Asia, several of the roots of the mindfulness movement can also be found in the “countercultural,” “New Age” spirituality, and “anti-psychiatry” movements of the 1960s and their subsequent development in the human-potential movement, psycho-spiritual growth, and humanistic and transpersonal psychologies and psychotherapies of the 1970s. A single example will suffice to illustrate one of these “hidden” roots. In 1971, after the closure of the experimental therapeutic community Kingsley Hall in London, the controversial and radical Scottish psychiatrist R.D. Laing took a sabbatical year, during which it is reported he spent 2 months studying Theravāda Buddhist texts and learning meditation at a monastery in Ceylon, before travelling on to India (Kotowicz, 1997). Laing’s radical experiments in self-healing and his attempts to make psychiatrists more receptive to understanding the personal meaning of mental distress parallel subsequent developments in complementary, alternative, and mind-body medicine and traditions of therapeutic relaxation, as well as mindfulness, which all gain ground across liberal democratic societies from the 1970s and 1980s onward (Nathoo, 2016; Sointu, 2012).

Scholars are now asking if matters of mindfulness are more complex and contradictory than the individualization and psychologization theses of neoliberalism suggest. While the pattern identified above of the “psy-,” “neuro-,” and biomedical dominance of the mindfulness field can certainly be detected, there are signs that something more complex is happening. Other, more contradictory, themes can be detected through empirical social science research, especially research being conducted by sociologists, anthropologists, and critical psychologists. We can briefly mention three relevant insights, before moving from background considerations to a discussion of the central theme of the book.

First, there is emerging evidence to suggest that mindfulness might pose a challenge to the ideal of self-contained individualism, thereby exposing the limits of neoliberalism (Carvalho, 2014; Cook, 2016; Mamborg & Bassarear, 2015; Samuel, 2015). Mindfulness teachers may encourage social and political engagement and self-transcendence among their students, along with self-responsibility and self-improvement (Reveley, 2015). Second, while mindfulness-based courses often involve teaching people to close their eyes and look within to find liberation from

suffering and inner peace inside themselves, practices of mindfulness are also most commonly taught in small groups or to relatively large-scale collectives at professional conferences—sometimes en masse to hundreds of people at a time (Pagis, 2009). These patterns suggest that something more than just individualizing might be happening within the mindfulness milieu. And, third, while mindfulness is often presented as a merely secular therapeutic technique, it is also often suggested to be a spiritual or sacred practice or indeed a “universal dharma” being skillfully taught in secular settings. This suggests that mindfulness is something more than simply a secular cultural field alone but also may contain “post-secular” threads (Arat, 2017, pp.174–175).

While it is likely that mindfulness will continue to be presented in popular and professional circles as simply and solely a therapeutic tool for self-healing, grounded in ancient wisdom yet proven to be beneficial by contemporary science, our volume suggests that more significant and fundamental issues are at stake, and that more complex and nuanced sociocultural changes are afoot, when we take the mindfulness movement as a whole into broader account. In the following section, we build upon the inevitably partial and schematic scene setting provided above and turn explicitly to current debates about the ethical and moral foundations of mindfulness, which frame the contributions to this volume.

Ethical Foundations of Mindfulness

What are the ethical and moral foundations of mindfulness? This question could be understood and answered in a multitude of ways. In an obvious and immediate sense, the title *Ethical Foundations of Mindfulness* implies mindfulness might, or should, have a basis in ethico-moral conduct and that this basis is composed of multiple features. The ethical foundations of mindfulness are named as being plural, rather than singular. Following this argument, it might be assumed that mindfulness alone lacks ethical foundations, guidance about which is to be found within the present volume, or, by contrast, that the ethical foundations are considered endemic to mindfulness itself, a core feature of its practice or a course in mindfulness. With respect to the latter point, it might be argued that a course in mindfulness, understood as a practice or “way of being,” *always and already* involves sensitizing us to ethico-moral issues, that is, how we treat ourselves and each other, and the resulting consequences of this treatment, as these emerge in a patterned way over time.

Where we situate ourselves with respect to these fundamental issues partly depends upon how widely we draw the boundaries of the “ethical” and the “moral.” And, indeed, in providing a basic outline of some potential lines of investigation now, several of which are being explored in the wider literature, we are already addressing themes explored in much more depth and detail throughout the chapters of the present volume.

A commonly expressed and arguably dominant position within the professional field of mindfulness theory and practice is that the roots of mindfulness are to be found within the Buddhist traditions—often referred to generically and abstractly as “ancient,” “original,” “traditional,” “classical,” “spiritual,” or “contemplative”

wisdom traditions—and that the ethical foundations of mindfulness are therefore best found in the various Buddhist lineages that make up this multifaceted and pluralistic “religion.” Indeed, in common understanding, Buddhism is widely respected as “one of the world’s most ethical religions” (Keown, 1992, p. 9). Yet, there are multiple viewpoints, diverse positions, and profound conflicts and disagreements, with precious few points of consensus, within and outside of the “Buddhist” traditions themselves, concerning basic questions of the meaning of mindfulness and ethics, whether “Buddhism” is a singular or multiple phenomena, is itself a religion (or a psychology or philosophy or universal dharma), whether the historical Buddha was himself a Buddhist, and the relative status of Buddhism to science when it comes to crucial and pressing debates about mindfulness and ethics (Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2011).

When taken in broad brush strokes, however, there does seem to be a general scholarly tendency in the contemporary field of mindfulness studies to view the early *Pāli* discourses of the *Theravāda* school of Buddhist thought of Southeast Asia—the “school of the elders” or “abiding” or “original” teaching—as being perhaps the central authority concerning mindfulness and ethics, at least when it comes to the Buddhist traditions as a whole. This tradition arguably contains some of the most extended and rich discussions of Buddhist ethical cultivation. After all, according to *Pāli* scholar Gombrich (2009), the “whole universe is ethicized” (p. 35) in the historical Buddha’s teaching.

This may go some way to help explaining why the modern neo-*Vipassanā* or insight meditation schools of Southeast Asia have had such a profound influence on the mindfulness-based therapies, both traditions being heavily influenced by the *satipaṭṭhāna* discourse while simultaneously also courting so much controversy as reform movements and modernizing influences upon the Buddhist tradition (Braun, 2013; Jordt, 2007; Houtman, 1999). Their alleged emphasis on so-called “mindfulness only” or, perhaps, “bare attention” (Thera, 1954) practices which arguably lack ethical discernment and moral judgment would later come to leave a major mark on subsequent debates about the ethics of mindfulness (King, 2016; Wallace & Bodhi, 2006; Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2011). Kabat-Zinn’s (1994, p. 4) operational definition of mindfulness as a conscious awareness that arises when we “pay attention on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally” has been a particular focus of critique and debate.

Recent commentators have suggested that many of the debates within so-called secular contemporary mindfulness discourse mirror earlier debates within the history of Buddhism, especially debates concerning controversial Buddhist reform movements (Harrington & Dunn, 2015; Lavelle, 2016; Lindahl, 2015; Sharf, 2015). Indeed, Kabat-Zinn’s (1994) definition closely mirrors the words of the North American psychologist and meditation teacher Kornfield (1977), who described the attitude of Buddhist mindfulness in the following way: “The attitude of non-judgmental, directed observation 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 our mind and body process” (p. 13).

The basic principle that the roots of mindfulness are to be found in the early Buddhist discourses, that this is the place to look for the ethical foundations of

mindfulness, along with the related idea that these discourses represent a kind of ethical psychology, rather than as a religion per se, can all be traced back to Thomas William Rhys Davids. It is worth us now explaining his significant contribution to current debates about mindfulness and ethics, which have arguably yet to be properly acknowledged in the literature thus far.

Rhys Davids and the Construction of Buddhism

During his lifetime, Rhys Davids was the leading Western interpreter of Buddhism. His popular books explaining Buddhism for a Western audience were well known, including being widely read as introductions to Buddhism within Southeast Asia. Rhys Davids was so well regarded that in 1894/1895, the American philosopher-psychologist William James invited Rhys Davids to Harvard University to lecture on “Buddhism: Its History and Literatures.” Yet, sadly, and as he feared might happen, outside of small academic circles, Rhys Davids is now a largely forgotten figure. Certainly, popular accounts of mindfulness meditation are much more likely to mention a certain American scientist, than they are to acknowledge their debt to this obscure Welsh figure. While Rhys Davids might have been largely forgotten, at least in terms of the detailed specifics of his contributions to Buddhist thought, his influence lives on in the present, and we might do well to remember his legacy and that of his wife, Caroline. Three of these influences can be briefly charted.

First, Rhys Davids’ interpretation of early Buddhism was *humanistic* and *rational*: he understood Buddhism as a religious tradition with a historical founder, Siddhartha Gautama. In 1877, Rhys Davids was the first to date the death of the historical Buddha at 412 BC (a recent attempt similarly dates the Buddha’s death at 80 years old sometime between 411 and 399 BC; Gombrich, 1992). This is in stark contrast to the Theravāda Buddhist tradition itself, which tended to see the Buddha as one among many Buddhas repeatedly reborn into the world to teach the eternal *dhamma* (Snodgrass, 2007) (a similar position to that adopted by those contemporary advocates who believe mindfulness courses contain an inherent “universal dharma”). The Rhys Davids are important figures in the broader project of constituting “Buddhism” as an Asian religion. As many scholars of world religions would point out, Buddhism is partly a nineteenth century invention of European orientalist and colonizers (for a critical discussion of this idea, see Hallisey, 1995). The Rhys Davids are key representatives of what subsequently came to be known as “Protestant Buddhism” or “Buddhist Modernism”: a historically recent form of Buddhism made to be compatible with the empiricism of Western psychological science, Darwinian evolutionary theory, and democratic individualism (Gombrich, 1988; McMahan, 2008; Sharf, 1995). This Modernist Buddhism constitutes one element of what Taylor (1989) has described as the subjective turn of modernity in which citizens look within to gain meaning in their lives rather than looking to external authority and tradition for guidance. For example, James (1902) understood the heart of religion to be a psychological experience existing within the individual person. The Rhys Davids, along with William James, were influential figures in interpreting

Buddhism as a religion in which the authority of experience is prized. Indeed, Rhys Davids showed how early Buddhism did not make a distinction between secular life and religious life. In his personal life, he reflected on the Buddhist doctrines of *kamma* (intention and action), *anicca* (change), and *anattā* (not-self). He displayed a lifelong personal and scholarly obsession with what came to be understood as the “early Buddhism” preserved in the Pāli Nikāya (baskets of teachings Carpenter, 1923; Chalmers, 2004; Rhys Davids, 1881).

Second, Rhys Davids helped to initiate a *textual* understanding of early Buddhism and specifically established scholarship of the Pāli Canon as the central authority from which to gain understanding of Buddhist teachings. Pāli scholarship just about survives now among a minority of influential Buddhists and academic Buddhist scholars, some of whom are on display within this volume. Rhys Davids founded the Pāli Text Society in London, and Thomas and Caroline Rhys Davids, as a married couple of Pāli scholars, were the first to translate the Pāli canon into a European language. Pāli is the ancient Indian language in which the “words of the Buddha” were preserved. The Pāli canon includes the *satipaṭṭhāna sutta*, a discourse on the establishment of mindfulness, modernized interpretations of which have come to play a vital role in laying the foundations of the modern mindfulness movement, as illustrated especially in the chapters contributing to the first part of this volume.

Third, and most significantly to the interests of the present volume, Rhys Davids was the first to offer mindfulness as a translation of the Pāli word *sati*. He wrote that it is one of the most difficult words in the whole Buddhist system of “ethical psychology” to translate. Its etymological meaning is memory, and indeed in his first book, Rhys Davids (1877) translated *sati* as memory or recollection, the verb *sarati* meaning to remember. But Rhys Davids (1890) argued that the Buddha of the Pāli canon more commonly gave *sati* an ethical meaning: “that activity of mind, constant presence of mind, wakefulness of heart, which is the foe of carelessness, inadvertence, self-forgetfulness ... it is a very constant theme of the Buddhist moralist” (p. 58). While sometimes rendering *sati* as self-possession, in modern times his translation of *sati* as mindfulness has endured.

In making their translations of the Pāli canon, the Rhys Davids were influenced by their Christian colonial context. We have mentioned above that, as a young man, Thomas William was himself a civil servant stationed in Ceylon. In offering his translation of *sati*, Rhys Davids was partly influenced by the use of the adjective “mindful” in the King James Bible (1604–1611) (see Bible: King James Version, 2017):

My son, be mindful of the Lord our God all thy days, and let not thy will be set to sin, or to transgress his commandments: do uprightly all thy life long, and follow not the ways of unrighteousness.

For they were pricked, that they should remember thy words; and were quickly saved, that not falling into deep forgetfulness, they might be continually mindful of thy goodness.

Perhaps this “hidden” Christian influence on the translation of this key Pāli Buddhist word partly explains how we have come to inherit the idea of being mindful as somehow morally good or righteous. Mindlessness and mind wandering are,

in turn, considered to be something like new, secular cardinal sins. In *The Wellness Syndrome*, Cederström and Spicer (2015) called this “the wellness command”: the moral injunction for an individual to be well, or indeed to flourish, through being mindful and the equation of wellness with moral rightness. If we are well, then it must be assumed, we are also good.

When Rhys Davids offered mindfulness as a noun referring to both an Asian Buddhist meditation practice and mental function, as he did in the nineteenth century, he thereby laid the groundwork for mindfulness to later become an inner mental object, prized by psychologists and Buddhist scholars alike. This was necessary for mindfulness to be treated as a psychological category and taken up as an object of scientific investigation in the twentieth century. Psychologists could stack mindfulness up alongside their related concepts of attention, metacognition, and—that most elusive of psychological categories—consciousness (Danziger, 1997). It would even go on to become the title of a prestigious scientific journal.

In retrospect, we can appreciate that Rhys Davids was an unconventional scholar and perhaps ahead of his time. Unlike the orientalists and missionaries before and after him, and despite being a British civil servant, he did not look upon Buddhism and Buddhists with disdain, regarding Buddhism as an inferior religion to Christianity. He did not conform to colonial exploitation of the colonized. Instead, he was a sensitive interpreter of the Buddhist culture. He learnt Sinhala, the language of the Sinhalese people. He was a careful and respectful translator and a scholar of early Buddhism. He was inspired by the early Buddhism of the Pāli Canon and the monastics he met, particularly Yātrāmullē Unnānsē, from whom he learnt the Pāli language. Rhys Davids devoted his life to the study of Buddhism and its promotion in Victorian society.

In this sense, he was a nonconformist, like his father. Rhys David’s father, Thomas William Davids (1816–1884), was a Welsh nonconformist congregational minister. His father was born and raised in Swansea but he relocated to Hackney, London, to study for the ministry and became a minister in Colchester, Essex. He was fondly referred to as the “Bishop of Essex.” Along with being a popular preacher, he was fascinated by ecclesiastical history, especially the history of nonconformist Christianity. Familiar with religious persecution, his son brought to Buddhism a congregationalist mistrust of established religion and liberal willingness to independently question religious belief and authority. Rhys Davids was apparently “rather fond of poking fun at the symbols and trappings of imperial splendor and did so with impish irreverence” (Wickremeratne, 1985, p. 164).

Bhikkhu Bodhi (2011), writing about the emergence of mindfulness within clinical and popular settings, has recently commented that:

We take the rendering ‘mindfulness’ so much for granted that we rarely inquire into the precise nuances of the English term, let alone the meaning of the original Pāli word it represents and the adequacy of the former as a rendering for the latter. The word ‘mindfulness’ is itself so vague and elastic that it serves almost as a cipher into which we can read virtually anything we want. Hence we seldom recognize that the word was chosen as a rendering for *sati* at a particular point in time, after other terms had been tried and found inadequate. (p. 22)

The voice of Rhys Davids occupies what we might appropriately see as more of a “middle way” between proponents and critics of mindfulness. Deeply acknowledging historical contingency and change might help us to put a limit on our narcissistic sense of originality and entitlement while also demanding that we pay our debts to the past. In that sense, we cannot leave all of the subsequent developments of the mindfulness movement at his door and by implication at the door of Europe and America. We must also do well to remember the Asian modernizers who have participated in these processes, often in response to Euro-American colonialism. We will be remembering some of these figures in the chapters that follow: Thich Nhat Hanh, Ledi and Mahasi Sayadaw, Ajahn Chah, U Ba Khin, and S. N. Goenka. Without acknowledging our debts to these and many other Buddhists and Buddhist scholars, we will be unable to learn our lessons from the past as well as the present.

Ethical Foundations of Mindfulness: Contemporary Debates

We will now turn to a consideration of three central ways that the current debate about mindfulness and ethics are carried out. In the following sections, we will summarize some of the characteristics of these debates. We can broadly characterize the key positions as suggesting that the ethical foundations of mindfulness are (a) “lost in translation,” (b) implicitly inherent, and (c) constitutive of a wider milieu. We will discuss each in turn as a way to introduce the crosscutting themes that are explored in more depth within the chapters that follow.

Lost in Translation

The lost in translation argument is that, through being modernized and secularized, contemporary versions of mindfulness training—whether mindfulness-based programs as a whole or their corporate-style workplace-based McMindfulness variants—have been “de-ethicized” or “demoralized” to an unacceptable degree, when compared with their Buddhist religious traditions of origin (e.g., Kirmayer, 2015; Purser & Milillo, 2015; Stanley, 2013, 2015a, b). This argument is often predicated upon making a distinction between the original or traditional Buddhist religious and contemporary secular manifestations of mindfulness. The lost in translation position is popular among Buddhist teachers, Buddhist Studies scholars, as well as some psychologists, who will tend to engage in practice and textual scholarship, especially of the early *Pāli* Buddhist discourses, in order to reclaim the “lost” ethical foundations of mindfulness. Buddhist scholars and psychologists often bring a similar eye for detail when they conduct careful textual and conceptual examinations of the categories of mindfulness and *sati*, which for psychologists informs the development of applied interventions and psychometric measurement of mindfulness.

Such an argument forms the basis for developments in so-called “second-generation” mindfulness interventions, which teach mindfulness in a more explicitly Buddhist framework. Reflecting on the ambiguity of mindfulness-based

interventions (MBIs) vis-a-vis religion and spirituality, and challenging the ethics and credibility of the claims that MBIs are simply and solely secular, Shonin, Van Gordon, and Griffiths (2013) address a potential “identity crisis” of MBSR, especially as it moves into the context of the UK NHS (see also Purser, 2015). This point of view has, perhaps predictably, given weight behind arguments about “Trojan Horse” stealth Buddhism in public institutions, as discussed above.

Buddhist John Peacock (2014) has recently written of the mutual suspicion that is evident among practitioners on both sides of the divide between representatives of the ancient Buddhist religious approach to *sati* and the modern clinical science of mindfulness. While the latter might suggest the Buddhist background is unnecessary or irrelevant to understanding and practicing mindfulness, the former might see mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) as “somehow ‘dharma’ light” (p. 2). For example, in relation to MBCT in the United Kingdom, Gilpin (2008, p. 228) distinguished a Theravāda spiritual perspective—grounded in monastic religious contexts—and the secular perspective of MBCT, grounded in an “evidence-based” clinical psychology.

Generally speaking, the lost in translation argument appears to be the majority view within the literature on mindfulness and ethics, commensurate with the points made above about the Buddhist roots of mindfulness, and therefore is broadly represented across this volume, especially in the first part, on *Buddhist Foundations of Ethics and Mindfulness*. It is also evident in later chapters by Titmuss, Lucas, Schipper, and Kearney and Yoon-Suk Hwang.

Implicitly Inherent

The next most common argument made concerning mindfulness and ethics is that the practice of mindfulness, especially as it occurs within the teaching of mindfulness-based courses such as MBSR and MBCT, contains an *implicitly inherent* ethico-moral orientation that is sufficient to satisfy the purposes of these programs. Williams and Kabat-Zinn (2011) argue that MBIs such as MBSR and MBCT are “Dharma-based portals” (p. 12) which contain a “universal dharma” taught in secular settings (Kabat-Zinn, 2011, p. 301). For example, Kabat-Zinn (2017) argued “the mainstreaming of mindfulness in the world has always been anchored in the ethical framework that lies at the very heart of the original teachings of the Buddha” (p. 1125). MBSR is a skillful means of mainstreaming and making available the “universal essence of dharma” (p. 1130) available to course participants, which is implicitly (rather than explicitly) transmitted to them through the embodiment and “authentic presence” (p. 1134; endnote 15) of the mindfulness teacher. Therefore, from his point of view, nothing has been “lost in translation” in the mainstreaming of contemporary mindfulness courses (see also Grossman, 2015).

Yet, while being regularly articulated by the influential “founding father” (Baer, 2017) of the mindfulness field, this is not the only position espoused as part of the implicitly inherent argument. Within the community of mindfulness teachers and researchers, there is criticism of Kabat-Zinn’s position. McCown (2013) argued that

it is ethically undesirable and inappropriate to look to Buddhist thought for an ethical psychology to ground or supplement mindfulness teaching, given the secular settings in which most mindfulness courses are taught. It is also unnecessary, he suggests, because there is already an implicit “relational ethic” embedded in the ethical space of the mindfulness course, which now needs to be articulated and made explicit. McCown develops this perspective further in his chapter in this book.

In a somewhat different register, Baer (2015) has recently proposed an “implicit ethics” stance by suggesting that “psychological science provides well developed alternatives for researchers and clinicians interested in secular approaches to ethics-related issues in MBIs” (p. 956), which are evidence-based. A collective of esteemed founders and key proponents of the mindfulness movement within clinical settings have recently endorsed the broad argument of ethics being implicitly inherent within the teaching of courses in mindfulness. For example, Crane et al. (2017) suggested, “MBP teachers operate within professional ethical codes anchored within their root profession (i.e., medicine, clinical psychology, teaching, etc.) ... and appropriate to the ethos and ethics of the mainstream public institution within which they are implementing” (p. 996); “[t]he embodied practice element of ethics within MBPs are thus emergent and cultivated through the practice rather than being mandated” (p. 995).

Constitutive of a Wider Milieu

For many social scientists and humanities scholars, including those contributing to the contemporary field of mindfulness studies, ethical and moral issues are widespread and cannot be easily separated from the specifics of clinical or social practices. At the same time, so-called psychological topics, such as mindfulness, attention, and consciousness, cannot easily be separated from ethical and moral life. Indeed, researchers and scholars within the interpretative social sciences and humanities are often investigating practices, such as mindfulness, in order to say something about the wider social and cultural worlds in which we live. For interpretative scholars, the ethical foundations of mindfulness might, therefore, be found in the broader social and cultural frameworks, which people draw upon to make sense of this practice, as it is employed within its wider fields of intelligibility. For such scholars, mindfulness can never be a stand-alone phenomenon.

The debates discussed above, concerning the neoliberal and secular-religious status of mindfulness, are all couched within the broader assumption that mindfulness, as a practice, is constitutive of a wider milieu. That is, for many social scientists and humanities scholars, broadly speaking, mindfulness would be considered both the product of and itself as feeding back into broader social and cultural trends. Indeed, research on the rise of a global therapeutic culture or ethos attests to the broader milieu or social water in which we currently swim (Illouz, 2008). It is therefore arguably now very difficult, if not impossible, to engage with Buddhist ideas and practices in the modern world, without also feeding into this therapeutic culture, in which we understand ourselves as psychological beings in need of therapy.