"From contemplative science to contemplative society"

Day:	Time:	Track:
Wednesday 11th July 2018	3.30- 4.45 pm	Philosophical and Dharma Underpinnings

Current approaches to mindfulness and mindfulness research have been criticized for their individualistic and reductionist model in which individuals are seen as atoms isolated from the societal context. In this symposium, ethical considerations of MBIs and of the mindfulness research context will be considered. The first presenter will discuss a vision for a more collaborative culture in the field of contemplative sciences. The second presenter will reflect upon ethical challenges in neuroscientific meditation research. The last presenters will provide a view of MBIs through the lens of critical social science, and highlight areas that will require realignment within the emerging social and economic models.

Symposium overview

Presenter 1   **Mareike Smolka** - The meditating brain in context: when an embedded humanist elicits ethical reflections on neuroscientific meditation research

Presenter 2   **Vincenzo Giorgino** - Opening a Contemplative Commons During the Great Transition: Reorienting the MBIs (part 1)

Presenter 3   **Donald McCown** - Opening a Contemplative Commons During the Great Transition: Reorienting the MBIs (part 2)

Chair: *Nirbhay Singh*

The meditating brain in context: when an embedded humanist elicits ethical reflections on neuroscientific meditation research

Mareike Smolka

Department of History, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University Maastricht, Maastricht, Netherlands

Background and objectives: Neurophysiological measurements render evidence for meditation affecting the brain and improving health, well-being, and cognition. The religious practice integrates smoothly in a scientifically informed, neoliberal culture where it is sold as a therapeutic product. This poses ethical challenges: the risk of adverse effects, the investment of public money in cost-intensive meditation research, the introduction of meditation to workplaces for enhancing employees' productivity. Finally, comparing "the Buddhist brain" to "the secular brain" in research and media essentializes cultural differences and promotes a simplified understanding of culture and humanness. My research develops a critical understanding of ethical challenges in neuroscientific meditation research.

Methods: These ethical challenges are similar to those addressed in other fields by so-called "Responsible Research and Innovation" (RRI). Introduced in academia and policy making in the 21st century, RRI aims at the establishment of a democratic process including all stakeholders in ethical reflections on how research and innovation should be steered. Yet, the implementation of RRI faces problems. An inclusive, democratic process of ethical reflection cannot be realized if the fluidity of stakeholder groups and ethical reflections remains disregarded. Tackling these problems, I implement RRI as an embedded humanist in the Silver Santé Study, currently Europe's biggest neuroscientific meditation research project on the impact of meditation on healthy aging. I conduct ethnographic research including participant observation, interviews, and document analysis. The empirical material is subjected to rhetorical discourse analysis informed by the theoretical framework of ethical boundary-work.

Results: The analysis unpacks the fluidity of stakeholder groups and ethical reflections. This demonstrates how stakeholder groups form and re-form; how stakeholders rhetorically enact ethical reflections; and how ethical reflections and daily occurrences in research co-evolve.

Discussion and conclusion: Analyzing ethical reflections of different actors, including myself, generates a critical understanding of ethical challenges in neuroscientific meditation research whose relevance extends into two directions. One is to help realize the ideal of RRI – directing neuroscientific meditation research in a more ethical, inclusive, and equitable manner. Encouraging stakeholders to explore ethical reflections might stimulate them to deal with ethical challenges. Proposing recommendations for improving RRI's implementation is of subordinate relevance.

Opening a Contemplative Commons During the *Great Transition*: Reorienting the MBIs

VIncenzo Giorgino[2], Donald McCown[1]

[1]West Chester University of Pennsylvania
Center for Contemplative Studies, West Chester, United States
[2]State University of Torino, BRYN MAWR, United States

Background: Current approaches to mindfulness have been criticized for their individualistic and reductionist model in which individuals are seen as atoms isolated from the societal context. Moreover, as being one of the main branches of the self-help industry, MBIs are seen as based on an ideology that best fits with the requirements of post-industrial society. Engaged Buddhists and critical mindfulness authors raise very important issues that acquire greater significance as deep transformations of social and economic interactions call into question the historical written and unwritten social pact, in which a certain amount of social protection was guaranteed in exchange for a low rate of social conflict. Simultaneously, the extraordinary advances of the digital economy present opportunities for self-governance through distributed technologies, while the meaning of work is challenged under the pressure of automation and the profitable value attributed to human interaction in social networking. A socially oriented, enactive approach offers one possible way to train and sustain the soft- and life-skills embedded in the MBIs, which are essential for navigating the Great Transition to a new social and economic model.

Objectives: Provide a view of the MBIs through the lens of critical social science, and highlight areas that will require realignment within the emerging social and economic models. Present emerging trends in MBI pedagogical practice that are departing from the individualistic approach to emphasize group experience. Demonstrate how contemplative practices may be understood as a commons, and how the digital economy offers instruments to promote and sustain such practices.

Methods: Review and critique of the existing literature on the MBIs with particular attention to social engagement and online communities. Describe emerging group-based contemplative practices; demonstrate a newly devised practice centered on socially oriented, embodied responses to a literary text. Demonstrate online a block-chain method of exchange of value of contemplative practice sessions within an online community dedicated to social action.

Results: Response from participants in the audience.

Discussion and Conclusion: Generation of dialogue with participants. Distribution of practice scripts and references for technology innovations.