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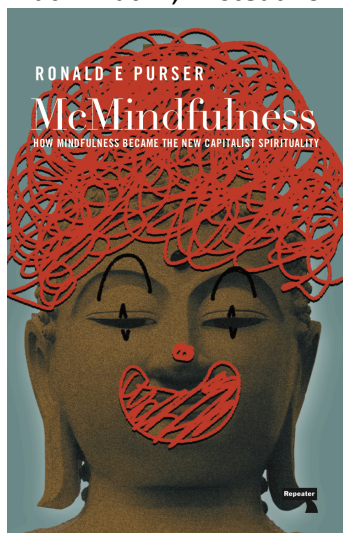
## **McMindfulness: How Mindfulness Became the New Capitalist Spirituality**

**Ronald E. Purser**

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ISBN-13: 978-1-912248-31-5 / Paperback \$15.95 / 304 pages / Kindle \$8.99 / Audiobook Tantor Media

Mindfulness is now all the rage. From celebrity endorsements to monks, neuroscientists to CEOs, it is clear that mindfulness has gone mainstream. Some have called it a revolution.

But what if, instead of changing the world, mindfulness has become a banal form of capitalist spirituality that mindlessly avoids social and political transformation, reinforcing the neoliberal status quo?



The evangelical promotion of mindfulness has begun to give way to a backlash, with questions arising whether its claims for achieving happiness have been over-sold. Expanding on his viral internet essay "Beyond McMindfulness", Ron Purser argues that proponents of mindfulness have reduced it to a self-help technique that fits snugly into a consumerist culture. In a lively critique of mindfulness as it has been co-opted by corporations, public schools and the U.S. military, Purser explains why such programs inevitably fall short of their revolutionary potential. Purser busts the myths its salesmen rely on, challenging the narrative that stress is self-imposed and mindfulness is the cure-all.

If we are to harness the truly revolutionary potential of mindfulness, we have to cast off its neoliberal shackles, liberating mindfulness for a collective awakening.

*Watch the 2-minute book trailer*

<http://www.ronpurser.com>

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Ronald Purser** is Professor of Management at San Francisco State University. His essays and cultural criticism have appeared in the *Huffington Post*, *Salon*, *Alternet*, and *Tricycle* magazine. His viral article, "Beyond McMindfulness", opened the floodgates for the mindfulness backlash. Author of eight books, his recent books include the *Handbook of Mindfulness: Culture, Context and Social Engagement* and the *Handbook of Ethical Foundations of Mindfulness*. Dr. Purser began his Buddhist training beginning in 1981 at the Tibetan Nyingma Institute in Berkeley, California and is an ordained Buddhist teacher in the Korean Zen Taego order. He is co-host of Mindful Cranks podcast and is a regular speaker and guests on radio shows and podcasts. Dr. Purser holds a BA in Psychology from Sonoma State University and a PhD from Case Western Reserve University. He is past Chair of the Organization

Development and Change division of the Academy of Management. He lives with his family and dog in San Francisco, CA. For more information: [ronpurser.com](http://ronpurser.com)

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## **SELECTED PRAISE FOR McMINDFULNESS**

“In this timely and incisive critique, Ronald Purser reveals how mindfulness became a vast industry, promising to cure us of a growing range of psychological ailments, and simultaneously propping up the political and economic system that generates them.”

--**WILLIAM DAVIES**, author of *Nervous States* and *The Happiness Industry*, Goldsmiths, University of London

“An attention grabbing and forceful critique of the over-blown claims of the mindfulness movement.”

-- **DAVID BRAZIER**, Institute for Zen Therapy and author of *The New Buddhism*

“Far from being either a harmless form of New Age self-indulgence or meditation dressed up as a medicalized antidote to the ubiquitous stresses of modern life, Ron Purser sees the mindfulness movement as epitomizing a malignant trend of contemporary Western individualism, one that is blinding us to the social problems of inherent in neoliberalism and capitalism, providing an anodyne where what is needed is rigorous analysis and political action.”

-- **BARRY MAGID**, author of *What's Wrong With Mindfulness*

“What does it really mean to be mindful of our lives? In his eagerly anticipated new book, the foremost critic of the mindfulness revolution, Professor Ron Purser, provocatively illustrates how mindfulness has been hijacked by corporate interests, turned into an opiate of the masses, and how we can radically rethink the meaning of mindfulness in contemporary life.”

-- **STEVEN STANLEY**, School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University

“If you are wondering about whether mindfulness is really a panacea for all our problems, this is the book to read.”

-- **DAVID LOY**, author of *Money, Sex, War and Karma*

“This is it. McMindfulness is just the right book at just the right time. With crystalline clarity and delightfully lucent prose, Ron Purser prosecutes a devastating case that mindfulness enthusiasts have placed their practice in collusion with the malignant individualism of neoliberalism. Purser's argument cannot be ignored. May it help turn the tide of western 'spirituality' toward a genuine model of personal and social health.”

-- **GLENN WALLIS**, author of *A Critique of Western Buddhism* and Director of Insight Seminars

“Why is everyone practicing mindfulness? Is it really making us into better people? This insightful, thoughtful and lively book retraces the rise of mindfulness in all aspects of life. There could be no better guide than Ron Purser who is both an ordained Buddhist teacher, a cultural critic and a professor of management. Purser shows how the mindfulness movement has borrowed many ideas from the business model of McDonalds. He points out how this apparently good idea has had some rather bad outcomes.”

--**ANDRÉ SPICER**, author of *The Wellness Syndrome* and *Desperately Seeking Self-Improvement*, Goldsmiths, City University of London

“Ron Purser's McMindfulness is a much needed wake-up call to the dark side of mindfulness-based practices. For anyone wishing to understand what mindfulness is, what it has become and how easily it has been co-opted by regressive social and political trends this is a MUST-READ.”

-- **RICHARD KING**, Professor of Buddhist and Asian Studies, University of Kent.

“Spiky, witty, meticulously researched and thoroughly engaging, *McMindfulness* is the best assessment of 'Mindfulness' to date. It eloquently critiques the Mindfulness industry, exposing its overblown claims, deriding what is at best political naiveté, at worst a strategy aiming to get us back with a smile to our voluntary servitude, to our reserved seat in the traffic jam. Wedded to a strong sense of ethical and political engagement, Purser's book convincingly denounces the commodification of Buddhism represented by Mindfulness. It unmaskes the deluded claim of healing societal malaise via a thoroughly misguided, self-absorbed puritanical ethos and by entirely individual (and individualistic) means. *McMindfulness* joins the likes of Barbara Ehrenreich's *Smile or Die* as one of the most thoroughgoing critiques to date of the neoliberal colonization of minds and bodies.”

-- **MANU BAZZANO**, author of *Zen and Therapy: Heretical Perspectives* and editor of *After Mindfulness: New Perspectives on Psychology and Meditation*

“Ron Purser cuts through the comforting New Age jargon used to promote mindfulness, enabling us to distinguish between the practice and its marketing.”

-- **RICHARD PAYNE**, Institute of Buddhist Studies

“In this insightful book, Ron Purser has evaluated the strengths and weakness of the mindfulness movement, while clearly showing the way to cultivate authentic mindfulness that liberates us from the true causes of individual and collective suffering.”

-- **B. ALAN WALLACE**, President, Santa Barbara Institute for Consciousness Studies

“McMindfulness makes an important critique of self-centered mindfulness and points us towards a new vision for real social change.”

-- **CHRISTOPHER TITMUSS**, author of *The Political Buddha*

## **SUGGESTED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

### ***McMindfulness***

1. What is McMindfulness? Why is this critique of the so-called “mindfulness revolution” so important?
2. Why have mindfulness training programs become so popular in corporations?
3. How does the neoliberal ethos of self-responsibility influence our way of understanding and practicing mindfulness?
4. Does mindfulness have a capitalism problem? What do you mean by that?
5. Are you against mindfulness as a therapeutic technique and legitimate form of self-care? Aren’t you throwing the baby out with the bathwater?
6. What have we lost in the commodification and marketing of mindfulness?
7. Do you believe mindfulness is a “Trojan Horse” which could potentially transform corporations into being kinder, more humane, compassionate and ethically/socially responsible firms?
8. Mindfulness advocates often say “Buddhists don’t own mindfulness.” Do you agree? What is your point of view?
9. Jon Kabat-Zinn, who is considered the “father of the mindfulness movement” believes mindfulness is the “universal dharma” – that the practice itself will lead to ethical and prosocial behaviors. Mindfulness is often presented as good for everyone. What are your thoughts on these claims?
10. The U.S. military now trains soldiers in mindfulness prior to being deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan? Why do you have a problem with that?

**Ronald Purser** is available for interview. Here are just some of the themes he can discuss:

**McMindfulness and Its Discontents: Countering the Hype, Marketing and Inflated Promises of the Mindfulness Industry.** *There is no doubt mindfulness has become a household word. Time* magazine's cover of a youthful, beautiful, blond woman peacefully blissing out is the backdrop for the feature story, 'Mindful Revolution.' Following a similar trajectory as the \$27 billion yoga industry, mindfulness is now trendy. From endorsements by such celebrities as Oprah Winfrey, Goldie Hawn and Ruby Wax, to monks, neuroscientists, and meditation coaches rubbing shoulders with powerful CEOs at the World Economic Forum in Davos, it's abundantly clear that mindfulness has gone mainstream.

But is the mindfulness boom really a revolution? If it is, what exactly has been overturned or radically transformed to garner such grand status? Wall Street and corporations are still conducting business-as-usual, special interests and political corruption goes unchallenged, public schools are still suffering from massive underfunding and neglect, the concentration of wealth and inequality has reached record levels, mass incarceration and prison overcrowding has become the new social plague, indiscriminate shooting of Blacks by police and the demonizing of the poor is becoming commonplace, America's militaristic imperialism continues to spread, and the impending disasters of global warming are already rearing their ugly heads.

Despite these challenging political and environmental problems, along with mass social suffering, millions of people (mostly white and upper middle class), are receiving tangible benefits from their mindfulness practice: less stress, better concentration, and perhaps a little more empathy. Some may consider this development is in itself revolutionary. But might the 'mindfulness revolution' really be a new apparatus for propagating and legitimizing new technologies of subjectivity? Could one of the reasons mindfulness programs have had such popular appeal be due to their ideological compatibility with the demands of late capitalism? As Slavoj Žižek has noted, "the Western Buddhist meditative stance is arguably the most efficient way for us to fully participate in capitalist dynamics while retaining the appearance of mental sanity." And Bhikkhu Bodhi, an outspoken western Buddhist monk, has warned: "absent a sharp social critique, Buddhist practices could easily be used to justify and stabilize the status quo, becoming a reinforcement of consumer capitalism." Indeed, mindfulness has attained revolutionary status precisely because it successfully promotes the message that individual responsibility and mental fitness are indistinguishable from the values of neoliberalism and free market economics.

It's clear there is a lot of selling going on as the mindfulness movement is now a \$4 billion dollar industry. Business savvy consultants pushing mindfulness training promise that it will improve work efficiency, reduce absenteeism, and enhance the 'soft skills' that are crucial to career success. Headspace, which offers a popular mindfulness app, has a valuation of \$250 million dollars. Uncoupling mindfulness from its ethical and religious Buddhist context is understandable as an expedient move to make such training a viable product on the open market. Clearly, a stripped-down, secularized technique—what is now known simply as 'McMindfulness'—has made such offerings more palatable not just to the corporate world, but also to public schools, government agencies, and even the U.S. military.

**The Branding and Marketing of Mindfulness.** *In their branding efforts, proponents of mindfulness training usually preface their programs as being ‘Buddhist-inspired.’* There is a certain cachet and hipness in telling neophytes that mindfulness is a legacy of Buddhism—a tradition famous for its ancient and time-tested meditation methods. But, sometimes in the same breath, consultants often assure their corporate sponsors that their particular brand of mindfulness has relinquished all ties and affiliations to its Buddhist origins. These are essentially rhetorical moves that have decontextualized and disembedded traditional Buddhist practices, refashioning mindfulness as a pragmatic technique that is fully compatible with modern discourses of science and psychology. In addition, the cachet of touting secular mindfulness practices as modern derivatives and purified extracts of “ancient Eastern meditative practices” (which have been thoroughly purged of faith-based religious doctrines and cultural accretions) has also appealed to the West’s fascination with exoticism and esotericism of the East. These are essentially rhetorical moves that have decontextualized and detraditionalized Buddhist practices, refashioning mindfulness as a pragmatic technique that is fully compatible with modern discourses of science and psychology. Touting secular mindfulness practices as modern derivatives and purified extracts of ‘ancient Eastern meditative practices’ (which have been thoroughly purged of faith-based religious doctrines and cultural accretions) has been the rallying cry of Jon Kabat-Zinn, the pioneer of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and leading advocate for secular mindfulness. He claims meditation is the heart of Buddhism, and MBSR to be essentially ‘Buddhist meditation without the Buddhism.’ Unfortunately, this has promulgated a reductive view that secular mindfulness approaches have become representative of the entire Buddhist tradition, or even rendered the Buddhist guiding principles for the practice outdated and superfluous. They have not.

**Neoliberal Mindfulness.** *There has been little examination of how neoliberal ideology and capitalist imperatives have influenced and exploited the way mindfulness is utilized as modern behavioral technology of the self.* New explorations are beginning to examine how mindfulness programs are governed by the self-governing logic of neoliberalism—the myth that individuals are simply free to choose either stress or wellness, misery or happiness. By deflecting attention from the outer conditions that frame work in a capitalist culture, mindfulness risks being coopted as the brand of a capitalist spirituality. In this form of spirituality, stress is privatized and pathologized. “Search inside yourself,” counsels Google’s Chade-Meng Tan, for there—not in the structures of a market-driven culture—lies the source of your problems. Applied in this way, mindfulness becomes a practice perfectly suited for what Jim McGuigan has called “the neoliberal self.”

Of course, many in the mindfulness movement agree that there are big problems with the world we inhabit. But they generally argue that mindfulness is part of the solution, not the problem. There is a high political cost to pay when mindfulness becomes a buffer against the corrupting influences of society—a return to a more noble way of being not unlike Rousseau’s romantic notions of a natural self corrupted by social conditioning. By promising access to “pure awareness” or “bare attention,” mindfulness becomes part of a therapeutic culture that displaces the practice of democracy and political debate. As a member of the body politic, the neoliberal self is encouraged to “go a little deeper” into the interior, to care for the self. As this journey takes on increased significance, our collective and political lives disappear from view.

**The Mantra of Stress.** *Stress, disengagement and discontent are pathologized as an individual-level phenomenon within the majority of mindfulness programs.* Most contemporary mindfulness programs that I am aware of are both compatible and complicit with neoliberal values which frame mindfulness primarily as an instrumental and privatized practice. This framing essentially depoliticizes mindfulness-training curricula by foreclosing alternative pedagogical encounters that could foster critical engagement with the causes and conditions of social suffering that are implicated in power structures and economic systems of capitalist society. This mode of mindfulness recognizes that there is a

problem – the self is stressed, the self is depressed, the self is having difficulty focusing, coping and relating to its world. A familiar trope among contemporary mindfulness advocates is that we are overwhelmed by a 24/7 digitally networked society. Jon Kabat-Zinn has offered a diagnosis that our entire culture suffers from an Attention Deficit Disorder, and that the cure is mindfulness – mindful individuals. Self-centered mindfulness then seeks a palliative mode of treatment, perhaps an oasis or temporary refuge from the buzz and confusion of our spatial and temporal world. Self-centered mindfulness is not all that interested in questioning the status quo since its goal is to relieve stress and provide emotional relief and comfort for the self.

**The Perils of Corporate Mindfulness.** *With over \$300 billion dollars in losses due to stress-related absences, and nearly \$500 billion in losses due to a lack of ‘employee engagement,’ it should come as no surprise why the corporate sector has warmly embraced the mindfulness bandwagon.* Such losses in production and efficiency are a threat to the logic of profit-making. For capitalism to survive, as Nicole Ashoff points out in her book, *The New Prophets of Capital*, “people must willingly participate in and reproduce its structures and norms,” and in times of crisis, “capitalism must draw upon cultural ideas that exist outside of the circuits of profit-making.” Mindfulness is such a new cultural idea that is serving such a purpose.

Those celebrating the arrival of the mindfulness movement have avoided any serious consideration of why stress is so pervasive in corporations and society. According to David Gelles, author of *Mindful Work*, “Stress isn’t something imposed on us. It’s something we impose on ourselves.” For Gelles, the causes of stress are located inside our heads, from our own lack of emotional self-regulation, from our habitual patterns of thinking – and the neuroscience of fMRI images seems to suggest this is all happening inside our brains – then our misery must be self-created. We only have ourselves – our own mindlessness – to blame for our suffering.

Mindfulness teachers, whether in clinics or in corporations, tend to downplay or simply ignore the extent to which stress is embedded in social, political and economic institutions and policies. Individualized mindfulness training programs pay virtually no attention to how stress is shaped by a complex set of interacting power relations, networks of interests, and explanatory narratives—cultural forces which often remain hidden from public discourse.

**Mindfulness’ ‘Truthiness’ Problem.** *Why has the mindfulness movement grown exponentially and gained increasing acceptance in modern culture? “The reason is the science,” Kabat-Zinn told [Time magazine](#).* One of the foundational claims of the mindfulness movement is that science has proven that mindfulness is good for you. It is an idea expressed by mindfulness advocates that scientific studies have proven reliably that mindfulness has many benefits for improving physical and mental health, relationships, general well being, workplace efficiency, even sex. Neuroscientific studies using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) of meditators’ brain states are frequently touted in the media as incontrovertible evidence that science has verified the efficacy of mindfulness. Whether it’s increasing the size of grey matter, shrinking of the amygdala, or quieting of the default mode network, reports of functional and structural changes in the brain (even if the neuroscientists themselves are more circumspect about the actual significance of their findings) have come to symbolize an official stamp of scientific legitimacy. It is safe to say that the mainstreaming of mindfulness would not have occurred, nor be heralded a “revolution”, if it were not for the proliferation of scientific research and subsequent media attention. However, the enthusiasm for mindfulness in the media (even among some scientists that are involved in such studies) has been outpacing the actual science. The validity and reliability of clinical studies, as well as their exaggerated conclusions in the media, has recently been called into

question. Yet, the marketing of mindfulness has depended a great deal on assuring consumers that mindfulness offerings bear the stamp of scientific legitimacy.

**The Myth of Mindfulness as a “Universal Dharma.”** *One of the main, broader questions is how did Buddhist soteriology with its integrated path of mental cultivation and spiritual development which aimed to transform the delusion of a permanent and independent self and foster dissatisfaction towards mundane worldly pursuits, and which began in the West as a beat generation-hippie counter-cultural, anti-establishment, anti-materialist movement evolve into a therapeutic, medicalized, and instrumentalized self-help technique for pursuing practical and material benefits, as well as becoming a technology for the formation of an entrepreneurial self.* One precursor to such a transformation is the view that mindfulness is a universal, ahistorical and value-neutral practice, stripped of its religious trappings and validated by science. The foundation of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), and to a large degree its mass appeal and those of other MBIs, rests upon the assumption that “the dharma” can be essentialized. Like the universal law of gravity that is trans-historical and trans-cultural, the dharma supposedly is too. It’s not only universal, but also quite portable, since its essence can be extracted independent of historical, cultural and political contexts. However, this move requires sophisticated rhetorical and discursive strategies. Kabat-Zinn’s claim to universality is classic perennial philosophy dressed up in white scientific lab coat attire. It is reflective not only of a belief that the essence of Buddhism is reducible to a non-discursive meditative experience, but that the “dharma,” and mindfulness particularly, are universal in nature and not exclusively Buddhist. This claim to universality has led to some familiar tropes and talking points.

- “The Buddha wasn’t a Buddhist”
- “Buddhists don’t own mindfulness”
- “Mindfulness is an innate, universal human capacity”
- “Mindfulness is a value-free practice that has universal human benefit”
- “Ethics are ‘built into’ mindfulness practices”

Kabat-Zinn is quite fond of saying, both in his public talks and writings that the “The Buddha himself was not a Buddhist,” and other pithy quips that there is nothing particularly Buddhist about mindfulness, compassion and wisdom. However, if his argument were true, wouldn’t we also have to say that there is nothing particularly American or Western about MBSR? Such faulty reasoning is based on the myth of a “context-free” dharma, which conceals, perhaps unwittingly, an unexamined colonialist stance. While Asian Buddhism is seen as being plagued with cultural and ideological overlays which must be purged in order to extract its true essence, the American Dharma, as exemplified by MBSR and MBIs, are sanitized clinical interventions cleansed of dogma, mythology, and free of any extraneous influences. The flatly universalizing rhetoric -- of what amounts to an elite, privileged (and predominantly white) mindfulness movement – has been based on a false unity and fixed universal images of humanity. Within the discursive spaces of the mindfulness movement, universalizing rhetoric allows white people to position themselves as standing outside of culture as reflected in such common tropes as “we are all human,” “we share a common humanity,” and as the universal model of humans.

**Mindful Snipers and the Militarization of Mindfulness.** Mindfulness-based Mind Fitness Training (MMFT, or “M-fit”) is a program taught to cohorts of soldiers over an 8-week period prior to deployment. According to Dr. Amishi Jha and Dr. Elizabeth Stanley, pre-deployment mindfulness training may buffer soldiers against cognitive degradation, acting as a form of “mental armor” or psychological prophylaxis against deployment stressors. MMFT has received a great deal of positive



media attention extolling its salutary mental health benefits; nevertheless, this enthusiasm has managed to detract attention from the ethics of employing mindfulness training for achieving “optimal warrior performance,” which as I see it, is in the service of war and killing in two unjust wars. Yes, MMFT appears to have legitimate potential for preventing PTSD, but I am troubled that mindfulness practices are being utilized for predeployment counterinsurgency training. I am also surprised that the contemplative community has been relatively silent on this matter. Contrary to Dr. Stanley, my understanding is that mindfulness is more than simply paying attention to the present moment. Mindfulness practice in the Buddhist tradition is embedded in an ethical and soteriological framework that includes a cardinal prohibition against intentionally killing a living being. Such ethical restraint against killing can be found throughout the Buddhist path, such as in Right Action, the first of ten unwholesome actions or five precepts—as well as the commitment to non-violence, nonharming and wish for good will for all sentient beings. Mindfulness as a spiritual practice is easily subordinated for military purposes when viewed as a decontextualized, ethically neutral, attention enhancement technique.

**Towards a Social-Civic Mindfulness.** *The faux mindfulness revolution is naively optimistic, saturated with pseudo-utopian prophecies of world peace and global harmony.* It amounts to a secular, messianic and faith-based movement that believes progressive social and political change is our manifest destiny once a sufficient number of individuals on the planet have communed with the “universal dharma” and once they have been indoctrinated into the scientized mindfulness spirituality. Underpinning the mindfulness movement is a passé American belief in progress, along with notions of rugged individualism, idealism, and the desire to be a free and solitary individual. Mindfulness is a contemporary offshoot of a Whitmanesque nineteenth century romantic American Transcendentalism that exalts spirituality by extracting it from religion. Spreading the individualistic gospel of mindfulness will supposedly improve all sectors of society, but without any need for confrontation, engaged protest, collective struggle or resistance against the existing structures of society. The highly commodified mindfulness movement has no qualms of colluding with neoliberal imperatives. Its methods are impotent and politically neutered psychological therapies that do little to question “the way things are”. Mindful quietism offers a detached vantage point to be a passive observer of human afflictions, especially if one is privileged enough sit on a comfortable perch. For the unfortunate, for those sitting on the precipice of economic precarity, for those suffering from the shrinkage of the social welfare state, the corrosion of security, racial discrimination and cultural trauma, the mindfulness pundits can only offer their sloppy sympathy and calls for making mindfulness more accessible. I am urging that mindfulness needs to be liberated from its complicity with a neoliberal ethos and the stranglehold of the biomedical therapeutic paradigm. Ensconced within an individualistic and expert-driven and psychologized modality, mindfulness interventions lack the narrative and explanatory frameworks to focus collective attention on larger social-material systems. The neoliberal fortresses of a privatized, therapeutic mindfulness ensures that it remains theoretically impoverished and practically constrained to offering only quasi-medicalized “interventions.” Captivated by the spell of neoliberal market-generated narratives of personal responsibility, flourishing, resilience, happiness, and the veneer of brain plasticity, the mindfulness pundits can only tell us that we only need to look deep within to find our authentic selves. As Arianna Huffington, one of the biggest cheerleaders for mindfulness says, “Whether you are struggling to put food on the table or you’re on top of the world, mindfulness is something that helps you connect you to yourself.” Liberating mindfulness requires that we turn critique outwards towards the socio-political institutions, as well as the interlinking systems of power,

that have exacerbated human suffering and collective stress. In order to decolonize mindfulness and sever its ties to the marketplace, a new praxis is needed that facilitates critical reflection on the causes of our collective suffering, or *social dukkha*. As socially-engaged Buddhist teacher David Loy has pointed out, the three mental poisons -- greed, ill-will and delusion -- are no longer limited to interior afflictions and causes of personal suffering. These three mental poisons have become institutionalized and proliferated in our society, infecting the media, politics, economy and culture. And, as Rogers-Vaughn has noted, our “oppressors no longer have recognizable faces.” A critical mindfulness cuts through the obscurations that have delinked and disassociated personal stress with social suffering. This requires new theoretical resources and explanatory narratives that expand the boundaries of the individual-level focus of the biomedical paradigm which maintains a universalist and ahistorical account of personal suffering.