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The intergenerational transmission, neurolinguistic construction and contemplative transformation of character: an evolutionary approach to using the core Buddhist psychological theories of active development (*karma-phala*) and selflessness (*anatmata*) in contemplative psychotherapy.

Abstract

With the rise of mindfulness-based therapies, clinicians must choose how to integrate the psychology which supports mindfulness as a method and way of life. In contrast to its simple utility, the core concepts of Buddhist psychology clash with Western worldviews and ethical systems. Selflessness challenges religious views of an eternal spirit or soul, though in ways familiar from psychoanalysis and neuroscience. More challenging, the theory of active development assumes a multi-life, evolutionary perspective on development that challenges both Darwinism and creationism. At its core is a model of mental causation: all intentional acts have some effect on development; all development is mainly shaped by the individual's mental, verbal and physical habits. This presentation offers a modern reading of the theory's most critical form: personal identity forms when intergenerational habits of intention, speech and action passed on (through adult caregivers) from prior lives are appropriated, identified and reified as "I" and "mine." These ideas and images of "myself" and "others," invested with innate desire and aggression, act as memes or seeds which help organize a perceptual mindset, personal narrative and behavioral style in the course of neuropsychological development. Hence the guiding insights of contemplative self-analysis and self-change: as a neurolinguistic construction, a variation on an intergenerational theme, "self" can be deconstructed and consciously changed through mindfulness, insight and behavior change. This approach is compared with Freud's "reincarnation of former ego-structures" and Jung's "archetypes of the collective unconscious," and illustrated with case vignettes; its clinical and cultural implications are explored.

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