**Philosophies of Happiness**

**Appendix 21: Mindfulness: Model of the Senses**

The first five senses bring in information from the outside world, enabling us to sense the physical domain of reality. When we become aware of the first five senses, we take in points along that sector of the rim that represents the physically knowable aspects of the world.

The sixth sense sector of the rim represents our awareness of sensations in our own bodies, which is known as proprioception. This includes sensations in our limbs, our awareness of our body in motion, the tension or relaxation of our muscles, and the state of our internal environment, including organs such as the lungs, heart, and intestines. These bodily aspects of our awareness can be a source of intuition and shape our emotional state; we can “feel things in our gut.” The neural processors around our internal organs directly influence our reasoning. Jonathan Haidt calls this our “gut brain;” its keen neural sensitivity gives us a great deal of information. The hormonal state of our bodies and the tension of the muscles in our limbs, torso and face each contribute directly to the way our interior world shapes our feelings. We use what neuropsychologists call the process of interception to perceive this information from our “sixth sense,” bringing them in to our sensorimotor awareness.

Siegel calls the seventh sense the capacity that enables aspects of mind to be brought to our attention—thoughts, feelings, intentions, attitudes, images, hopes, imagination. He calls this capacity to perceive the contents of our own minds “mindsight,” and argues that it enables us to develop insight into and empathy for others. In our discussion of Aristotle, we termed this the capacity for self-reflexive awareness. Like Aristotle, Siegel describes this as the metacognitive process of being aware that we are aware and being able to focus attention on the contents of the mind itself. The practice of being self-reflexively aware directly develops our mindsight abilities. In addition, he argues that what he calls the seventh sense enables us to ultimately become aware of the mental nature of the six senses that bring us physical information. Aristotle likewise noted this function of the mind that is aware that we see, feel, think, and perceive.₁
We thus come to realize how our minds shape the reality we perceive. For example, awareness of the color of a flower is a product of our own mind. This need not destroy our appreciation for sensory experience and pleasures; to the contrary, meta-awareness can enable us to appreciate the process by which the mind creates our perceptions. Aristotle likewise posited that this is the basis of pleasure: our awareness of the functioning of our living faculties.

Siegel also proposes an eighth sense, which he calls the “relational sense.” Let us return to the model of the center of the mind that is aware of various sorts of information that are brought to it. The eighth sector of the rim would represent our sense of relationship or connection, with some being, experience, or sphere. In the following chapter, we will discuss the findings of Jeanne Nakamura and Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi that our sense of relatedness with the world is a vital core of human well being. Likewise, Jonathan Haidt has posited that happiness comes from “between,” from the sense of interconnectedness. When we are attuned to other people, for example, we can become aware of a state that is created within the relating, a kind of relational or group self. Indeed, we recall that Aristotle called a friend “another oneself,” and noted the importance for human well being of sharing experiences with another.

The eighth sense is how we are aware of the other person and “feel felt” by him or her; this enables us to feel connected to a larger whole. As we will see in our discussion of the flow experience, there are many ways in which we can feel connection to a larger whole. Spiritual practices such as meditation and prayer, participation in activities such as religious rituals, sports, and musical performances enable people to feel that they are connected to a human community and larger world. Siegel extends this model to our attunement to our own minds. It may be that when we attune to ourselves through mindful awareness, we become aware of the connection between the ordinary experience of our senses, mind, and emotion, and the mind’s observation, the witnessing awareness. Our “eighth sense” would enable us to be aware of being attuned to our own minds, just as we can become attuned to others. We achieve connection within ourselves just as we can achieve connection and community with others.
In becoming aware of any aspect of the rim, we send out an intention; the spokes of the wheel of awareness represent the intentional focus of our attention on some aspect of the rim. During walking meditation practice, we focus a spoke on the sensation of our feet and legs. We can build the skill of concentration by the practice of focusing on one chosen object at a time: the breath, our steps, the moves of our body in tai chi or yoga, the sensations of a part of the body. We noted that this was the focusing aspect of Tibetan Buddhist meditation: by focusing the mind and returning to the object when our attention wanders, we develop a capacity to sustain concentration. We also strengthen the hub’s capacity to send a spoke to an intended target on the rim. Siegel acknowledge that this skill of concentration is the building block of mindful awareness, a necessary but not sufficient characteristic, just as Tibetan Buddhists integrate two aspects of awareness: focusing (samatha) and insight (vipassana).

---


4 Siegel, 123.

5 See above, 3-5, notes 8-17.

6 A term sometimes interchanged with the word reflective is the idea of reflexive awareness. Being reflective, as Siegel defines it, includes reflexivity. Some authors use the terms synonymously; others view being reflective as an active, conscious process of being thoughtful about one’s experiences, whereas reflexivity is the automatic self-awareness we all have as conscious beings, which is effortless, non-verbal, and non-conceptual. This is the self-reflexive capacity noted by Aristotle.