

Social Consciousness Pedagogy

Charles Pidgeon

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The speculative text Social Consciousness Pedagogy synthesizes intriguing ideas from disparate fields to suggest beneficial modifications to human belief systems.

Charles Pidgeon's *Social Consciousness Pedagogy* draws on multiple disciplines to argue that the mind matters most.

Pidgeon begins from the premise that modern psychology puts forth a number of principles that can be used to facilitate interpersonal communication. With this in mind, the book proposes a twist on the serenity prayer, substituting "mind" for "God":

May the mind grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the ability to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

Pointing to examples from neuroscience, the book asserts that the body/brain system, and the daily experience of embodiment, compose a person's "preality" or personal reality, and that when individuals understand their own preality, it aids in relationship building—as between people with religious perspectives, and those who are atheist and agnostic, both of whom have orientations to ethics and the idea of being a good person to build from.

The book's chapters on multiple religions, atheism, and agnosticism seek out the roots of human social wisdom in order to locate points of congruence and demonstrate common grounding in acceptance of reality and moral guidance. Found in human expressions of ethics and values, social wisdom, the book asserts, can be taught to children in order to help them develop maturity and the ability to interact with others.

While the book's religious examples are concrete, its treatment of other disciplines is more vague, as when globalization is defined in contradictory and erroneous ways. Some assertions are baseless, such as the claim that "Moneymen have an epigenetic environmentally modified brain that seeks dopamine rewards in the ventral striatum when they accumulate money, power, and social status." Here and elsewhere, scientific-sounding language is used to lend validity to unsupported ideas.

Broad in scope, the book wanders into questionable territory at times, as when it presents the unproven notion that serotonin is the root cause of autism, and compares LGBTQ+ people to abused women. Its suggestion that cognitive anchors may help people put their beliefs into action is sensible; its remark that the bodies of teenage girls serve as cognitive anchors for boys, dismissed as "human nature," is misogynistic. Ultimately, the text's interest in big ideas obscures the impact of its unexamined assumptions.

Much of the book leads up to the recommendation that the US replace the phrase "In God We Trust" on all of its printed money with "In Mind We Trust," including a sample graphic of how this money would look. This combines with the book's proposal of a switch to Mind Money: replacing bank logos on credit cards with images of the human brain in order to create cognitive anchors to associate collective spending power with one's purchases. Such ideas are provocative, but without being made to seem feasible. Elsewhere, a long list of quotes from the Alcoholics Anonymous

Big Book is shared without any context or analysis. The book's illustrations, as of cartoon figures of women attending a group for domestic violence survivors, and its anecdotal sections written by high school students, also impede its sense of cohesion.

For the good of all people, the speculative text *Social Consciousness Pedagogy* synthesizes intriguing ideas from disparate fields to suggest modifications to human belief systems.

JEANA JORGENSEN (August 25, 2021)

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