MIND FOUNDATION

Inside the MIND Foundation

DATE PUBLISHED

14 June 2021



Between June and August 2021, we published a series of blog posts about the MIND Foundation's INSIGHT conference. The blog posts describe the defining ideas that drive this biennial meeting in Berlin. The second edition of INSIGHT took place on Sept 9–12 at the Langenbeck-Virchow Haus in Berlin. It was also live-streamed into the world. In the first blogpost, Henrik Jungaberle summarized some challenges that are specific to psychedelic conferences. In subsequent blogposts, we outline questions that need to be addressed to create a rational culture around consciousness.

The work and spirit of the MIND Foundation are guided by a set of values that relate directly to the philosophical movement of Enlightenment (Aufklärung). The Enlightenment can be understood as a process of questioning and creation: by scrutinizing traditions, power structures, and background beliefs of all kind, the road is paved for building an improved social world on top of the old – in this sense, it aims at "humankind's release from its self-incurred immaturity" (Immanuel Kant). Many would agree with the assumption that Enlightenment is an "open and unfinished process of social, psychological or spiritual development, unbound to time or place" (Standford Encyclopedia of Philosophy).

In their famous collection of essays, "Dialectic of Enlightenment," (1944) Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno analyzed the potentially dark and destructive side of Enlightenment.1,2 In the core of their writing stands the idea that an "instrumental rationality" selfishly dominates everything outside and inside of the human mind – leading to a process of destruction and self-destruction.

Many members of the MIND community would say that some psychedelic states can facilitate what has been called “self-reflection” or rather self-criticism of the Enlightenment proposed by Horkheimer and Adorno. Can the dark sides of the human mind be tamed by the experience of connectedness, awe in the light of nature’s complexity and beauty, and humility in its relationship to the self? We don’t know yet, if this can become a culturally relevant effect, but there is reason for hope.

This a far reaching introduction for the short list of values that the MIND Foundation has developed for itself. We want to give an impression of how they relate to the architecture of our bi-annual conference. And we will give readers a grasp on who we are, why and how we do our work. This explains partly what kinds of individuals and institutions we choose to partner with. The list of values itself can be found on our website since 2017, but how we strive to integrate them on a day-to-day basis follows below.

Image 1. The MIND Foundation Values

Why do we think it is important to base our approach on a set of values? We understand values as guiding principles or desired long-term outcomes that need to be acted upon even in the face of contrary short- or medium-term incentives. Referring to these values encourages the discussion around meaningful, purpose-driven, and value-based outcomes in science, therapy and the enculturation of psychedelic states.

Scientific approach

Beginning with the ***scientific approach***, we dive into the heart of our work: scientific methodology, intellectual rigor, evidence-based education, and a proactive openness to falsification of knowledge by new and validated discoveries. By inviting *transdisciplinary* thinking, we strive to avoid the pitfalls of reductionism and appreciate different forms of knowledge. A *systematic* access to an object of interest can be communicated to and shared with others. And it reveals what we do not or cannot know – thus making it possible to critique the result of a certain research project – be it on molecules, history, or subjective experience.

Whether it is the educational program of MIND Academy, our collaborators’ research projects (e.g., EPIsoDE), our science communications such as Resources and the MIND Science Blog, we are grounded in scientific thinking, which also includes systematic skepticism towards authoritarian traditions or traditionalist belief systems. In addition our group is opposed to radical cultural relativism – a position that puts all forms of knowledge that emerged in the evolution of human groups or subjective experience on one level with the scientific process.

It is not our *primary* goal to convince others of our ideas but to actively *engage communities in a rational discourse*. In a rational discourse we tell each other about the principles that our arguments are built on and try to find consensus about these principles. Such a consensus seems particularly important with the topic of psychedelic states and the transrational characteristics that some of these states carry with them. We want to share knowledge that is grounded in logic and any empirical data that we can access intersubjectively. As Karl Popper famously stated: “*The true Enlightenment thinker, the true rationalist, never wants to talk anyone into anything … He would much rather invite contradiction, preferably in the form of rational and disciplined criticism.*“3

What better place for *intellectual arguments* than a science conference? To approximate intersubjectivity and truth, to revise previously held ideas and beliefs, to (in Popperian words) falsify scientific theories, we need exchange.

Spontaneous encounters between talks, the presentations with each their Q&A phase, and especially the expert panels at INSIGHT are such a place to explore and test your mettle.

Image 2. Expert Panel at INSIGHT 2019 with: (left to right) Matthew Johnson, Bennet Zelner, Henrik Jungaberle, Franz Vollenweider, Thomas Metzinger, Steve Paulson)

While most talks at INSIGHT are based either on empirical or philosophical academic work, another principle is to translate discoveries into means by which we can help build better mental health and human development in support of open and democratic societies.

Innovation

Innovation could be defined purely economically with Joseph Schumpeter:4 as ideas that result in the introduction of new goods or services or improvement in offering goods or services. However, we believe that big ideas are supposed to serve the common good. Some new ideas or inventions come without sustainable influence on a culture, society or market. If they have one, we should measure them against valuable long-term values like the 17 sustainable development goals formulated by the United Nations.5

What does this have to do with psychedelic research? We think that implementing psychedelics into the mental health – and potentially other – systems of modern society cannot be done with the instruments of traditionalist societies. The model character of pre-historic, pre-industrial and "shamanic societies" is limited. Comparisons to such societies have to be considered critically and they may already involve exploitative relationships.

Enculturation of psychedelic states will not happen by itself: We need innovations that help to mitigate the risks and sustain the benefits of immersive, psychedelic experience.

Professionalism

Being professional is about mastery, having or building skills in the field that you're working in. There is also an ethical component to professionalism: You should be aware of the consequences of your communications, services and products – it's not only about yourself and how you feel. It is about yourself as a model, too. Reliability and accountability, conscious decisions for etiquette, being willing and able to organize yourself and your colleagues, and poise are among the qualities that we associate with working in the psychedelic field. Or working in general.

Professionalism also means that all of us are not working machines – so we need to find the balance between professional self-composure and healthy loss of control.

Community

We strive to build communities that appreciate integrity, invite diversity, foster tolerance for others and engage in self-critical reflection.

The communities we build in our organizations, our conferences, and in our office are designed to live in the midst of society. We avoid building "esoteric" echo chambers characterized by a limited set of ideas and practices that are often self-confirming.

Science is a good way of learning to look beyond the limits of one's current group. It's sometimes exhausting but rewarding in the long run to be around other beings who ask critical questions.

Integrity

We understand integrity as acting in accordance with principles (values) such as honesty and sincerity. Such behavior involves accounting for one's complete spectrum of impulses – including mistakes and shortcomings. Achieving integrity is a complex and continuous process. It involves knowing one's self in the best possible and complete way. Many people in our community would say: no one knows herself fully, no one is enlighted, there is only light. This is important when integrating psychedelic insights into one's every-day life: people strive to live in accordance with their insights, they succeed, they fail, they try again.

A person's – and an organization's – wholeness and integrity are fragile assets and must be protected against continuous external temptations and attacks. "Integrity" is also used in the sense that a person is not corruptible or is directed towards strong values.

There is an important bridge between integrity and (psychedelic) integration. We define it as "learning from the psychedelic experience" and "wholeness in connection" (see our integration program BEYOND EXPERIENCE).

By striving to "act in accordance to learnings (not only from the psychedelic experience)" we support humans to strive for becoming more "whole". Such a state could be compared to a harmonious relationship between body, psyche and the mind. Using Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi's metaphors: "hand", "heart" and "head" come into balance with each other. Just as with "enlightenment," wholeness cannot be fully achieved. Humility is an essential part of integrity.

Connectedness

Connectedness might be the most "psychedelic" state-related value in our list – next to integrity. A sense of connectedness has been described as a potential key element of the psychedelic state.6

We work to build structures and processes that support people to feel connected to their self, to others ("social connectedness"), and to life as a whole ("connectedness to nature"/being). Enabling stronger connectedness to "nature" is closely associated with the foremost critical topic of our times: the ecological crisis. Don't misinterpret this – we are not saying that a "state" within humans can solve the ecological crisis. If it can be solved, humans will need policies, technologies, and innovations, too. Connectedness though is a value that helps to critically assess the self's place in the (dis)order of things. And we believe this assessment is key.

Summary

Image 3. MIND Members Convention 2020

All in all, the MIND Foundation's translational work between scientific disciplines, between communities, languages, and belief systems requires tools we seek to master – and strong allies that share our vision. On the macro level, both MIND and INSIGHT are such tools that connect stakeholders in policy making, industry and local communities, media, and research. We build community, we are diverse, we are (becoming ever more and more) multilingual.

Finally, the INSIGHT conference is a valuable tool to drive forward the European idea of unity in diversity. There is not one insight, wisdom, method or psychedelic therapy that can solve the existential crises that humanity faces – and psychedelics alone will not "solve" the mental health crisis. This crisis is heavily built on socioeconomic and cultural factors. But the implementation of psychedelic therapies and the enculturation

of psychedelic experience for human development and well-being will hopefully be one positive tool. And a critical discourse on psychedelic experience may hopefully contribute to maturing our sense of rationality (in the sense of an *aufgeklärte Aufklärung*). This is where philosophical Enlightenment as a never-ending process and psychedelic exploration *could* come together.

We at MIND work to make the potential of psychedelic states a reality – and the body of evidence that this may succeed currently grows stronger.7,8,9 A paradigm shift may be closer than you may expect: the German government for example provides substantial public funding (2.3M Euro) to clinical research on psilocybin in the EPIsoDE study8 – and other governments worldwide are following.7,8,9

We as the MIND community have already come a long way. From a committed group of researchers, medical doctors, and idealists, we built a living organization in only four years. We are a non-profit, and together with our clinical partner organization OVID, we are purpose-driven and dedicated to enacting our values and oriented towards the common good.

If you missed INSIGHT 2021 or are still interested in the presentations, you can access the recorded content from the INSIGHT conference here if you have an an active MIND Membership.

References

1. Habermas J, Levin TY. The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Re-Reading Dialectic of Enlightenment. New German Critique 1982: 13. doi:10.2307/488023
2. Horkheimer M, Adorno T. Dialectic of Enlightenment. 1947. Internet: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialectic_of_Enlightenment; Stand: 06/03/2021
3. Popper. Karl. All life is problem solving. London – New York: Routledge; 1999. Im Internet: https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/2912020
4. Schumpeter JA. The theory of economic development : an inquiry into profits, capital, credit, interest, and the business cycle. Harvard: Harvard University Press; 1934. Im Internet: https://www.worldcat.org/title/theory-of-economic-development-an-inquiry-into-profits-capital-credit-interest-and-the-business-cycle/oclc/8493721; Stand: 06/03/2021
5. United Nations – Department of Economic and Social Affairs (Sustainable Development). THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development. Internet: https://sdgs.un.org/goals; Stand: 06/03/2021
6. Carhart-Harris RL, Erritzoe D, Haijen E, et al. Psychedelics and connectedness. Psychopharmacology 2018; 235: 547–550. doi:10.1007/s00213-017-4701-y
7. Jungaberle H, Thal S, Zeuch A, et al. Positive psychology in the investigation of psychedelics and entactogens: A critical review. Neuropharmacology 2018; 142. doi:10.1016/j.neuropharm.2018.06.034
8. Bundesmininsterium für Bildung und Forschung. EPIsoDE – Eine klinische Phase II-Studie zur Untersuchung der Wirksamkeit und Sicherheit von Psilocybin bei behandlungsrefraktärer unipolarer Depression. 2021. Internet: https://www.gesundheitsforschung-bmbf.de/de/episode-eine-klinische-phase-ii-studie-zur-untersuchung-der-wirksamkeit-und-sicherheit-von-13049.php; Date: 06/03/2021
9. Gründer G, Jungaberle H. The Potential Role of Psychedelic Drugs in Mental Health Care of the Future. Pharmacopsychiatry 2021. doi:10.1055/a-1486-7386