I. Introduction
Our mind tends to wander.³ Some folk wisdom suggests that such mind-wandering is bad or viceful. A recent empirical study claims to have found that this common lore is correct at least insofar as mind-wandering is bad for you, the mind-wanderer.² Mind-wandering, the study claims, causes unhappiness.

In this poster, we call into doubt the generality of that claim, and articulate ways in which mind-wandering might be good for you, as well as virtuous.

Can Mind-Wandering be a virtue?

II. Mind-Wandering and Unhappiness
The Study
Subjects used an iPhone application which prompted them to answer questions at random intervals throughout the day.

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<thead>
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<th>iPhone Questions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Current Well-Being</td>
<td>“How are you feeling right now?”</td>
<td>_</td>
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<tr>
<td>Current Activity</td>
<td>“What are you doing right now?”</td>
<td>_</td>
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<tr>
<td>Whether their Mind is Wandering</td>
<td>“Are you thinking of something other than what you’re currently doing?”</td>
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III. Killingsworth & Gilbert’s 4 Claims:
1. Mind-wandering occurs in almost half of the samples.
4. Mind-wandering is a major factor in explaining between and within subject variances in happiness.

The Pessimistic Conclusion:
“A human mind is a wandering mind, and a wandering mind is an unhappy mind.”

IV. Types of Mind-Wandering
Different Types of Mind-wandering
Ruminating, being distracted, or daydreaming
Unclear whether these have all the same effect.

Mind-Wandering with and without Endorsement
Sometimes you do not endorse your mind-wandering, but sometimes you do!

Acraic MW =
You are mind-wandering, and either you reflexively desire not to be mind-wandering, or you believe that you ought not to be mind-wandering.

Mind-wandering might make you happy:
"Reading and sauntering and lounging, which I call thinking, is my happy: mind-wandering is necessary for realizing other virtues:

Creative Problem-Solving
An Optimistic Conclusion:
“Free your mind and let it wander!”

Mind-wandering is a major factor in explaining between and within subject variances in happiness.

V. What is Mind-Wandering?
Our Proposal:
You are mind-wandering if and only if you leave almost all of your attentional resources available outside your main task.

Compare:
You are fixated if you leave none of your attentional resources available outside your main task.

VI. Mind-Wandering, Creativity and Insight
Mind-wandering, by definition, cannot be directly controlled. Like other skillful activities such dance or sport, it can, though, be endorsed, and may be skillfully employed without direct control.

If endorsed and skillfully employed mind-wandering might make you happy:
"Free your mind and let it wander!"

Mind-wandering is necessary for realizing other virtues:

Creative Problem-Solving
An Optimistic Conclusion:
“Free your mind and let it wander!”

References


