Contemplative Studies in Context

Bishal Karna
Georgia State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/rs_theses

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/rs_theses/39

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Religious Studies at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Religious Studies Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gsu.edu.
CONTEMPLATIVE STUDIES IN CONTEXT

by

BISHAL KARNA

Under the Direction of Abbas Barzegar

ABSTRACT

Contemplative Studies is an emerging field within higher education and American culture that is blurring the boundaries of modernity by bringing seemingly religious practices in spaces such as scientific laboratories, classrooms and corporate workplaces, which are often understood as secular environments. This thesis studies the field of Contemplative Studies in higher education by organizing it into the two categories, Contemplative Science and Contemplative Pedagogy in order to situate them in their proper contexts. The paper, then, situates the discourses of Contemplative Science and Contemplative Pedagogy in the larger context of modernity, spirituality in America, science and secularity. In doing so, it brings to light a number of nuances and paradoxes within the contemplative movement that have heretofore been uncommented upon.

INDEX WORDS: Contemplative, Spirituality, Modernity, Secularity, Religion, Meditation, Mindfulness, Neurophenomenology, Embodied cognition, Pedagogy
CONTEMPLATIVE STUDIES IN CONTEXT

by

BISHAL KARNA

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Masters of Arts
in the College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
2013
CONTEMPLATIVE STUDIES IN CONTEXT

by

BISHAL KARNA

Committee Chair: Abbas Barzegar

Committee: Kathryn McClymond

Jonathan Herman

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University

May 2013
DEDICATION

Gloria in Excelsis Deo!
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Kathryn McClymond, Dr. Jonathan Herman and Dr. Abbas Barzegar, members of the supervising committee, for their guidance and support. I am especially grateful to Dr. Barzegar. Without his loving and kind supervision, I would not have been able to complete the thesis. If there is any worth in this thesis, it is due to the wise direction of the committee members. The weaknesses are consequent to the limitations of my knowledge and intellectual capacity.

I am thankful to Dr. Isaac Weiner, Dr. Molly Bassett and other faculty, staff and friends at the Department of Religious Studies in Georgia State University. Also, I would like to express my gratitude for Dr. John Dunne at Emory University and Dr. Fran Grace at the University of Redlands.

Lastly, I would like to thank my loving family and dear friends, without whose support none of this would have been possible.

~ I thank you all with all my heart. ~
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 The Tree of Contemplative Practices .......................................................... 23

Figure 2 Interest in Contemplative Science .............................................................. 69
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................... v

LIST OF FIGURES .................................................................................................................. vi

1. INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................. 1

   1.1 The Four Noble Truths of Contemplative Studies ......................................................... 7

2. INSTITUTIONS AND PRACTICES ...................................................................................... 11

   2.1 Contemplative Science ............................................................................................... 11

   2.2 Contemplative Pedagogy ............................................................................................ 20

3. CULTURAL HISTORY ......................................................................................................... 30

   3.1 Contemplative Science ............................................................................................... 30

      3.1.1 A New Approach: Neurophenomenology ............................................................ 31

      3.1.2 Coming together of Religion and Science ............................................................ 35

      3.1.3 Buddhist Modernism ............................................................................................ 41

   3.2 Contemplative Pedagogy ............................................................................................ 45

      3.2.1 Cultivating the Inner Lives in Education ............................................................... 47

      3.2.2 First-person Knowledge and Learning ................................................................. 50

      3.2.3 Testimonies of transformation .............................................................................. 52

      3.2.4 Spirituality in Higher Education ........................................................................... 56

4. CONCLUSIONS .................................................................................................................. 67

5. REFERENCES .................................................................................................................. 75
1. INTRODUCTION

At the Center for Investigating Healthy Minds in the University of Wisconsin, in a state of the art scientific laboratory, Dr. Richard Davidson, Dr. Antoine Lutz and other scientists are studying the effects “contemplative” practices on brain function and physiology, genetics and human behavior. In one of the studies, scientists are studying the effects of two different kinds of meditation practices - Focused Attention and Open Presence- on the neural responses to pain.¹ The scientists use neuroimaging (fMRI) and first-person data from expert Tibetan-Buddhist meditators with over 10,000 hours of practice and beginner meditators to study neural activation patterns associated with pain and its recovery during these two practices.² In another research at the same institute, scientists provided meditation training aimed at cultivating compassion to a sample group via an online course. Regarding their findings, the scientists say,

After two weeks of daily online training, we found that participants who learned compassion were more generous in an economic exchange game compared to the control group (who learned how to reframe stressful thoughts). Greater generosity in the compassion group was associated with changes in the brain’s response to human suffering in regions involved in empathy and increasing positive emotions. This work suggests that compassion is indeed an emotional skill that can be trained.³

In the setting of university classroom, in a class called “Compassion” offered by the Department of Religion in the University of Redlands, students sitting on the floor on meditation cushions are studying and practicing the teachings of Mother Teresa, the Dalai Lama, Gandhi, Viktor Frankl, Mary Oliver, Mattie Stepanek, and Nelson Mandela in order to cultivate a “compassionate heart-mind.” One of the practices the students are learning is Tonglen Meditation (In Tibetan tong – sending out or letting go,

¹ According to the website for the Center, Focused Attention is “a directed and sustained attention to a fixation cross and away from the thermal stimulation, which could regulate negative effect through a sensory gating mechanism” and Open Presence is “effortless and open awareness of whatever is occurring in the present moment, without reacting, rejecting or absorbing the contents of the experience.”
³ Ibid.
In recent times, the Dalai Lama and other Tibetan-Buddhist teachers taught students to “inhale” the suffering of others imagining it to be a “black cloud” that destroys their narcissism. Then they are asked to let the “infinite love” that they are transmute the black cloud of suffering into “healing light” and “exhale” it to the sufferer. Dr. Fran Grace tells her students,

In Tonglen, you are asked to acknowledge that suffering is real, yes. But, you are breathing the suffering of yourself and others into an Infinite Love which transmutes the suffering into healing. With your willingness, this Love offers itself through you. See if you can let go of the belief that you have to do it all on your own. All you are doing is breathing, accepting that suffering exists, and offering yourself as a source for Love and Light to others.

In this way, Contemplative Studies brings practices that are thought be in the domain of religion into the fields of science and higher education.

The emerging field of Contemplative Studies argues for a place for these studies and practices that seem to blur the conventional boundaries of religion and science, and religion and secularity in higher education. The scholars of Contemplative Studies argue that scientific evidence increasingly shows the effectiveness of religious practices such as meditation, mindfulness, and prayer in cognitive and behavioral therapy, in handling psychological and emotional stress, in dealing with diseases such as depression and addiction, and in nurturing the overall physical, psychological, intellectual and social health of an individual. Contemplative Studies identifies practices such as meditation, mindfulness, prayer, yoga, tai chi among others that have traditionally fallen in the domain of “religion” as “contemplative” and makes a case for a place them in higher education. Moreover, some scholars of Contemplative Studies argue that practices can be integrated with conventional methods of teaching to educate the “whole person” and fulfill the goals of liberal education. They argue that although liberal education has emphasized self-knowledge and self-mastery as its goals, it has not been able to provide students with tools to that end. Contemplative Studies, scholars argue, does just that by allowing students to access into and mastery over their inner lives.

---

4 *Training the Mind & Cultivating Loving-Kindness* by Chogyam Trungpa, copyright 1993 by Diana Mukpo.

It is beyond the scope of this study to analyze the dynamic and evolving field of Contemplative Studies in its entirety. As the field of Contemplative Studies grows, it is entering into conversation with different religious traditions and practices and is increasingly being incorporated in range of social and professional spaces. This study focuses on Contemplative Studies in the context of its interaction with Tibetan Buddhism because, as will be seen, much of the foundational work being done in the field of Contemplative Studies in the present moment has to do with interaction of science and liberal education with Tibetan Buddhism. Moreover, Tibetan Buddhism is affiliated in one way or another with most forms of discourses and practices of Contemplative Studies. In addition, this paper focuses on practices affiliated with universities and colleges.

This paper divides the field of Contemplative Studies into the two categories, Contemplative Science and Contemplative Pedagogy. It distinguishes these categories on the basis of how contemplative practice is defined and the roles that scientific experimentation and first-person testimonies of transformation play in the practice and discourse of Contemplative Studies. It is important to note that these categories are not recognizable to the theorists or practitioners of contemplative studies. It is argued throughout this study that understanding contemplative studies through these two categories allows for better understanding of the field of Contemplative Studies as it highlights the different modes of argumentation and application within the field. While both categories claim to be based on evidence, what counts as evidence is different. Contemplative Science considers scientific evidence as authoritative. Contemplative Pedagogy, on the other hand, makes reference to the scientific evidence, but goes a step further and argues for first-person experience as being authoritative evidence.

This crucial difference allows this paper to situate the two categories in different conversations. Contemplative Science is a movement within the larger field of science as it makes a leap beyond scientific materialism by incorporating neurophenomenology as a method of study. Thus, the development of Contemplative Science has its intellectual and philosophical roots in the history of science; philosophy of
mind, consciousness and experience; and the study of the brain. Contemplative Pedagogy, on the other hand, has its roots within the field of liberal education, innovative pedagogy and study of religion. By dividing Contemplative Studies into Contemplative Science and Contemplative Pedagogy, this paper is able to study the categories in the context of the discourses they are parts of. Furthermore, the dual categorization also provides the framework of studying Contemplative Science as an interaction between science and religion, and Contemplative Pedagogy as an interaction between liberal education and religion. Therefore, making this distinction, allows this paper and future researchers reference points and framework for the study of the field of Contemplative Science.

Contemplative Science, as categorized in this paper, is the coming together of religion, especially Tibetan Buddhism, and science for the purposes of studying the effects of contemplative practices on brain physiology, genetics, behavior and overall physical and psychological health. Contemplative Science confines itself to the study of contemplative practices with rich historical and textual background. Moreover, the applications of Contemplative Science in fields such as health and education are deliberately confined to what can be established by scientific experimentation. Thus, scientific experimentation and application of contemplative practices from religious traditions with rich historical background are the crux of the field of Contemplative Science.

Contemplative Pedagogy, on the other hand, as categorized in this paper, gives greater emphasis to first-person testimonies of teachers and students than scientific evidence certifying the efficacy of contemplative practice. In doing so, although Contemplative Pedagogy does make use of scientific evidence from Contemplative Science, it goes beyond the scope of established scientific evidence in applying contemplative practices in teaching and learning in various academic fields. Additionally, it characterizes contemplation as a state of mind that can be applied to and practiced in any activity.

The second section of Chapter 1 of this paper summarizes the main arguments of the field of Contemplative Studies. Chapter 2 surveys programs and practices of Contemplative Science and Con-
templative Pedagogy. It determines the purpose, participants and boundaries of Contemplative Studies in these two categories and how they differ from each other with examples from universities and independent institutions. Chapter 3 identifies the main arguments and themes in the discourse of Contemplative Science and Contemplative Pedagogy and contextualizes them in the larger fields of science, spirituality, liberal education, religion and secularity in American culture. Using David McMahan’s study of Buddhist Modernism and Courtney Bender’s study of spirituality in America, this paper will highlight how the discourse of Contemplative Studies relates to the fields of religion, spirituality, modernity, science and secularity. Chapter 4 concludes with a summary of the paper along with providing critiques for the field of Contemplative Studies.

Contemplative Studies is gaining much momentum in higher education in the US. It is making way into diverse academic fields such as neuroscience, medicine, nursing, physics, psychology, chemistry, business, economics, anthropology and religious studies in different forms. In doing so, it is not only changing classroom space and the role of teachers and students, but also blurring the gap between categories of religion and science and religion and secularity that are often considered as binaries. There are now many colleges, universities, and independent organizations actively working in the field of Contemplative Studies. It has made way into national organizations such as the American Academy of Religion (The Contemplative Studies Group in AAR). Moreover, it is part of the larger phenomenon outside academia that is making place for contemplative practices in different aspects of human lives. For example, Google has a “Google Search Within” program that trains its employees in contemplative practices to enhance office work. Furthermore, there is a growing concern for “inner life” in policy-making

---

at a national and international level. For example, The UN General Assembly recently placed “happiness and well-being” as a global political, social and economic agenda.⁷

There is an abundance of literature coming from within the field of Contemplative Studies including scientific research on the effects and applications of contemplative practices, historical studies of contemplative practices, and pedagogical techniques of incorporating contemplation in the classroom. However, there are not many scholarly works that analyze the field, its relation to modernity, secularity, religion and spirituality, and situate it in the proper context. This paper provides an understanding of institutions, practices and participants of the field of Contemplative Studies within higher education. Furthermore, it provides contextual background to the field by bringing it in conversation with scholarship in larger fields such as Buddhist modernism, spirituality in America, and religion and secularity. This paper will also work as a survey of the emerging field of Contemplative Studies in America. Thus, this paper will primarily be helpful to anyone interested in learning about and understanding the emerging phenomena of Contemplative Studies. Hopefully, it will also provide foundation for further research for scholars of religion, modernity, and American culture, as well as scholars of Contemplative Studies.

1.1 The Four Noble Truths of Contemplative Studies

In this section, the paper uses the framework of the four noble truths taught by Gautama Buddha to summarize the arguments made by Contemplative Studies as a field. In doing so, the paper is not claiming that Contemplative Studies is essentially similar to Buddhism but acknowledging that it is in close conversation with Buddhism in regards to concerns, methods and practices. The four truths recognize the inherent dissatisfaction or suffering in human life, point out its cause, assert that cessation of dissatisfaction is indeed possible, and prescribe a path that will lead to cessation of dissatisfaction. Not unlike the four truths of Buddhism, the discourse of Contemplative Studies recognizes dissatisfaction and suffering inherent in modern life; points out its origins in the disregard for inner life in our culture, especially in science and education; asserts that this cessation of suffering is possible; and prescribes incorporation of contemplative inquiry and contemplative practices as the path to the cessation of this suffering.

The first noble truth is the truth of suffering. In the discourse of Contemplative Studies, large scale suffering such as social violence, wars, and environmental degradation, and personal suffering such as stress, anxiety, depression, addiction, and lack of focus and attention are seen as suffering inherent to modern life. Arthur Zajonc, Emeritus Professor of physics at Amherst University, a leading scholar of Contemplative Studies and President of The Mind and Life Institute, says that Contemplative Studies is responding to a “world beset with conflicts, external and internal.”\(^8\) Fran Grace and Judith-Simmer Brown, editors of the book *Meditation and the Classroom*, say that the lives of students are filled with stress and anxiety, and they lack the proper tools for handling such distress.\(^9\) The Dalai Lama, an active participant in the discourse of Contemplative Studies, says, “These are times when destructive emotions such as anger, fear and hatred are giving rise to devastating problems throughout the world.

---


While the daily news offers grim reminders of the destructive power of such emotions, the question we must ask is, what can we do to overcome them?" The state of science and education in America is also seen as a part of this suffering. Contemplative Studies is part of the larger voice in American culture that sees the state of human knowledge, social and personal life in America as incomplete, fragmented, isolated, and in need of revision.

The second noble truth is about the origin of suffering. Contemplative Studies argues that the source of our suffering is the ignorance of our inner lives seen in science, education, and consequently in the worldview. It argues that although we have been pursuing objective knowledge of the material world and have attained a certain level of mastery over it, we are just beginning to explore the internal world. We still lack scientific tools to train our minds to handle crisis and emotional distress, cultivate values such as compassion and enhance faculties such as attention and awareness. Scientists such as Francesca Varela claim that modern science has not been able to solve the fundamental problem of how the mind originates and how it is related to the body. Furthermore, they claim that science has developed no means of studying subjective experience empirically and handling the “inner lives” of humans. The scientific materialist paradigm and ethnocentric biases that limit our epistemology, thus confining reality and its exploration, are seen as blocks to the alleviation of suffering. Referencing the innovator in education Palmer Parker, Zajonc says, the current epistemology coming from scientific materialism has engendered an ethic of violence. He says that although science has brought enormous advances in the objective world, “the modern emphasis on objectification predisposes us to an instrumental and manipulative way of being in the world.”

The third noble truth as taught by the Buddha is that the cessation of suffering is possible. Contemplative Studies makes the case that it is possible to end dissatisfaction in education, science and everyday modern life and embrace transformation. The suffering caused by ignoring our subjective lives can be alleviated by learning to embrace and master our inner lives and by cultivating positive qualities such as lovingness, compassion, and non-attachments. Contemplative Studies presents evidence from scientific experiments to make the claim that it is possible to train ourselves to better handle our emotions and feelings, be more loving, enhance focus and attention, and facilitate the treatment of physical and mental diseases. Scientific evidence is increasingly showing the effects of contemplative practices on a variety of positive health related outcomes such as the reduction of symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress and improvements in immune function, pain management and overall increase in happiness and well-being. Additionally, experimental studies have demonstrated that contemplative practices have the potential to enhance attention and problem-solving ability, increase the speed of information processing, and enhance qualities such as compassion. Moreover, scholar-practitioners present personal experiences and experience of students as evidence that it is possible to bring about inner transformation from a state of suffering to peace. Suffering in the academic world, they claim, can be healed by the introduction contemplative practices that facilitate first person learning and revaluation of experience in scientific inquiry and educational curriculum.

The fourth noble truth is the Eightfold Path as taught by the Buddha which leads to the cessation of suffering. Contemplative Studies prescribes the path of contemplative practices from certain religious traditions, especially Tibetan Buddhism, for freedom from suffering. Contemplative Studies promotes the incorporation of the two main types of meditation- shamatha (calming) and vipashyana (seeing, knowing, or transforming) as ways of first-person inquiry of the mind and experience. Furthermore, these methods are seen as ways of training the mind and gaining mastery over it. Contemplative Studies

---

makes the case for the need for right understanding of consciousness and experience. It expresses the need to study, experiment, develop and integrate contemplative practices in human lives to find ways out of suffering. The development of programs such as Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy, Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Programs, Compassion and altruism research provide examples of this. In the world of education, the development of Contemplative Pedagogy, as varied as studying the contemplative practices first hand throughout the semester to meditating the first five minutes of every class, is seen as a way of addressing the inner lives of the students. Moreover, the practice of contemplation is integrated with different practices such as dance, music, martial arts, fine arts and creative writing. Thus, by cultivating a contemplative practice, Contemplative Studies claims it is possible to transform our experience of the world and alleviate suffering.
2. INSTITUTIONS AND PRACTICES

There are two kinds of institutions working in the field of Contemplative Studies: colleges/universities and independent organizations. In colleges and universities, Contemplative Studies usually take the form of inter-departmental programs usually striding between science, humanities and education. The independent organizations usually provide funding, training, and a platform for sharing and learning for the teachers in colleges and universities. This chapter will outline the institutions, practices and practitioners of Contemplative Studies in the categories of Contemplative Science and Contemplative Pedagogy.

2.1 Contemplative Science

Contemplative Science is the first-person and third-person scientific study of the effects of contemplative practices from religious traditions, especially Tibetan-Buddhism, on brain physiology, neurochemistry, genetics, and behavior, coupled with historical and cultural study of the contemplative practices in their native tradition. Evan Thompson defines first-person methods of inquiry as “practices that increase an individual’s sensitivity to his or her own experience through the systematic training of attention and self-regulation of emotion.” Furthermore, the Contemplative Science project is to develop through experimentation different ways of using the contemplative practices from religious traditions in health care, therapy and education. Although Contemplative Science claims to transcend the limitations of scientific materialism, it still situates itself within the framework of science and considers scientific evidence through experimentation and verification the highest authority.

Davidson et al. define contemplative practices as ways to train the mind to develop concentration and attention; manage stress, anxiety and emotion; and cultivate self-knowledge and compassion, initially through discipline, with the hopes that such skills eventually become automatic. They say,

Contemplative practices such as meditation and yoga are structured and socially scaffolded activities that train skills by placing some constraint or imposing some discipline on a normally unregulated mental or physical habit. A defining characteristic of such practices is that they require individuals to exercise volitional control to sustain the focus of attention on particular objects (such as the breath) or mental contents (such as the suffering and relief from suffering of particular individuals). Other objects of attentional focus may include moment-to-moment fluctuations in the “stream of consciousness” in order to develop the ability to concentrate, to effectively understand and manage stress and emotion, to gain knowledge about oneself, and to cultivate prosocial dispositions. With such sustained practice, complex skills like mindfulness and empathy likely become routinized at neural and mental levels and, subsequently, regulate behavior more or less automatically by being highly accessible and available.  

Thus, contemplative practice as defined in Contemplative Science is training the mind to enhance faculties like concentration and attention, access self-knowledge and handle the vicissitudes of life. Additionally, Contemplative Science at present is limited to those contemplative practices that come from long-standing traditions and have a rich history in texts and practices. John Dunne at Emory Collaborative for Contemplative Studies defines contemplative practice as, “A set of techniques that are explicitly articulated, that can be traced back to a tradition and have been transmitted over several generations that aim for some form of manipulation of the body and or mind for specific kinds of outcomes.” Dunne says that desired outcomes are behavioral transformations tied to some kind of ethical framework. He points out that it is important that the practice be connected to a long-standing tradition that has passed the test of time and is cautious about throwing the net wide open and letting anything be defined as contemplative practice. Most work in Contemplative Science until now has been done with Tibetan Buddhist practices.

The Buddhist practices that are incorporated in Contemplative Science include extensive and diverse methods for the cultivation of meditative quiescence (samatha) and contemplative insight (vipassana). These meditation techniques are taught by both Theravada and Mahayana (including Tibetan Buddhism) schools of Buddhism, with some differences in practice.  

16 Personal Interview with John Dunne, Emory University. 11/27/2012.
teaching of *lojong* or “mind-training,” a prominent genre of teaching that is more focused on handling unskillful emotions, transforming them to facilitate spiritual maturation, and cultivating skillful ones, is the major focus of Contemplative Science along with *samatha* and *vipassana*.” Tonglen Meditation is one of the practices taught in *lojong*. Contemplative Scientists are studying the effects of different kinds of meditation practices and how they can be applied to different contexts according to the effects produced.

The study of the contemplative practices has been possible by the development of neurophenomenological approach. This approach to the study of brain has opened doors for dialogue between religious practitioners, neuroscientists, health practitioners (such as psychotherapists, doctors, nurses and physicists) and scholars of religions. The scientists and scholars of religion who participate in the discourse and practice of Contemplative Science are usually trained in some form of contemplative practice from the Buddhist tradition. For instance, scientists such as Francisco Varela, Allan Wallace, Richard Davidson, Arthur Zajonc, Jon Kabat-Zinn and religious studies scholars such as John Dunne and Anne Klein have personal engagement with Buddhism. Francisco Varela, who was instrumental to the foundation of the field of Contemplative Science because of his work in neurophenomenology, was a renowned biologist, neuroscientist and a long time Tibetan-Buddhist practitioner. Allan Wallace is a good example of a practitioner and scholar. He was ordained as a Tibetan Buddhist monk by the Dalai Lama in 1970 and practiced in a traditional setting for fourteen years. Afterwards, following the advice of the Dalai Lama, he disrobed and went on to earn an undergraduate degree in physics and the philosophy of science at Amherst College and a doctorate in religious studies at Stanford. He has written extensively about the limitations of scientific materialist paradigm and the prospects of Contemplative Science.

Also, religious practitioners who are engaged in Contemplative Science have a background in science. For

---

instance, the Dalai Lama was engaged in dialogue with scientists such as Carl von Weizsacker, David Bohm, and Robert Livingstone long before the establishment of Contemplative Science; and the French Buddhist monk Matthieu Ricard, who is also an active participant in Contemplative Science has a doctorate in molecular genetics. Thus, in a way, Contemplative Science can be envisioned as a coming together of intellectuals and religious practitioners interested in both religion and science. These participants form the basis of the discourse and institutional practice of the field of Contemplative Science.

The Mind and Life Institute is a global non-profit organization founded by neuroscientist Varela and attorney R. Adam Engle in 1987 “to pioneer collaboration between scientists and contemplatives, the world’s most experienced experts of introspection and mental training, with the conviction that such collaboration could potentially be very beneficial to both modern science and to humanity in general.”

The Institute brings together scientists, scholars of religion, religious practitioners (including HH The 14th Dalai Lama) to exchange knowledge and experience, and share practices and methodologies. In 2013, the Mind and Life Institute held its twenty-sixth annual conference in Dharmshala, India. This partnership with the Dalai Lama has resulted in formation of the Contemplative Science program in universities such as Emory, Rice, and University of Wisconsin where scientists are working together with monks to research the effects of meditation and mindfulness on human body, mind, and social interaction using the neurophenomenological approach.

The religious practitioners provide first-person subjective data and become subjects of the third-person experiments. Additionally, historians of religion provide knowledge about the contemplative practices and traditions in their original context. As the research progress, based on subjective and objective evidence, contemplative scientists are working on developing different applications of the contemplative practices in fields of education, health, and

21 The websites for these programs are as follows:
   Emory Collaborative for Contemplative Studies: http://www.emory.edu/ECCS/index.html
   Center for Investigating Healthy Minds, U. of Wisconsin: < http://www.investigatinghealthyminds.org/>
   Contemplative Studies, Rice University: < http://reli.rice.edu/content.aspx?id=770>
psychotherapy. Furthermore, Contemplative Science has begun to take interest in religious practices such as yoga, Centering Prayer as taught by Trappist Monk Fr. Thomas Keating, Transcendental meditation, tai chi and others that are now considered as contemplative practices.

A good example of a Contemplative Science program is the Emory Collaborative for Contemplative Studies (ECCS) at Emory University. ECCS was founded in 2006 under Emory University's Strategic Plan for 2005-2015 under the theme of "Confronting the Human Condition and Human Experience: Religions and the Human Spirit." The mission of ECCS is to "explore contemplative practices and traditions through interdisciplinary dialogue across the sciences and humanities for the advancement of research, clinical practice and education."  

ECCS partners with the Dalai Lama and the Drepung Loseling Tibetan-Buddhist Monastery in Atlanta to develop research and understanding about contemplative practices and their applications in different fields. It offers classes on Western and Buddhist perspectives on mind-body interactions, Buddhist meditation and mindfulness practice (taught by Buddhist monks), and Buddhist philosophy; conducts research on the use of Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy for depression and autism; the use of meditation and mindfulness for stress relief; and the use fMRI to explore different brain states that occur during focused meditation, with an emphasis on utilizing first-person input from the subjects. For instance, one of the larger research projects at ECCS jointly conducted with University of Colorado is "Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy for the Prevention of Perinatal Depression." The project description explains:

This is a two-site study. Sherryl Goodman is the P.I. of the Emory University/Georgia site and Sona Dimidjian is the P.I. of the University of Colorado, Boulder Colorado site. The overarching goal of this proposal is to develop and test a brief behavioral group intervention (Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy; MBCT), which is designed to prevent depressive relapse and recurrence among high-risk pregnant women, with risk based on previous history of depression.

This project is representative of the scientific approach to Contemplative Studies taken by Emory and

---

22 "About the ECCS." Emory Collaborative for Contemplative Studies, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, USA. http://www.emory.edu/ECCS/about_us/index.html (Accessed: 03/20/2013)

other universities that this paper has categorized in Contemplative Science. Furthermore, Emory University is helping to develop the study of science in Tibetan Monasteries. Through the Emory-Tibet Science Initiative Program, Emory faculty help to develop and implement a comprehensive science education curriculum for Tibetan monastics in fields such as neuroscience, biology, physics, mathematics to be taught in Tibetan Monasteries.

The Center for Investigating Healthy Minds in the University of Wisconsin is another leading institute in Contemplative Science, founded in 2008 by Davidson, who had been challenged by His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama, to apply the rigors of science to study positive qualities of mind. The Center currently has more than twenty research projects underway in three different categories: Behavioral and Neural Correlates of Pro-social Behavior, Meditation/Compassion Training, Mental and Physical Health and Illness and Development/Education. Davidson and Antoine Lutz are studying the effects of short term and long term meditation in brain physiology (neuroplasticity), human genes (epigenetics), behavior and emotions. Davidson’s team is also researching the utility of contemplative practices in teaching and learning. They say that although contemplative practices help to develop skills such as focused attention, emotional balance and qualities such as compassion in students, further research needs to be done with the various practices and their applications to develop concrete programs of application. They say,

Research shows that positive self-regulatory skills associated with emotion and attention, which are critical to academic success, can be strengthened through contemplative practices. These practices are shown to induce functional and structural changes in the brain, and support pro-social behaviors such as kindness and compassion in young adults. This evidence suggests the need for more focused, programmatic research to identify which forms and frequencies of practice may be most beneficial.

The role that scholars of humanities engaged in the conversation of Contemplative Science play in

---

this category is of informing the scientific pursuit with contextual background. For instance, religious studies scholar of Buddhism, Dunne at Emory University, who is also the co-director of the Emory Collaborative for Contemplative Studies, is working with different scientists and religious practitioners to build an *Encyclopedia of Contemplative Practices*. With his expertise in Tibetan language and religious history, Dunne functions as a link between the religious tradition and science by providing the scientists with insights about the contemplative practices in their traditional context. Thus, he works very closely with scientists in developing the theory and practice of Contemplative Science. Laurie Patton, who played a crucial role in the foundation of the ECCS, says about the partnership of scientists and humanists,

> When we first began to speak with one another at Emory, humanists were shocked at what the scientists threw into a single grab bag of prayer, meditation, faith, attendance at church, and so on. They seemed singularly unscientific in their descriptive practices. When we collaborated with them, intriguingly, scientists agreed with this statement. What they were describing was religion as a vague social force or set of practices that was not parsed in any detailed way that religious studies takes as normative in our field. In the context of contemplative studies, I encountered the first and perhaps the only time that scientists actually agreed that they could learn something from humanists. \(^\text{26}\)

Furthermore, scholars of humanities also help in the translation of contemplative practices from one culture to another. For instance, Wallace, who is a Religious Studies scholar as well as a practitioner, has done significant work in this area. He studies the changes that Buddhist practices and Buddhism in general have undergone in making the transition from the native context to American culture.\(^\text{27}\) Dunne says that Religious Studies can play a significant role in facilitating the development of Contemplative Science by providing cultural history that examines the interaction between the contemplative traditions and Western modernity. He claims that Religious Studies can provide Contemplative Science with self-awareness that allows the transition of the contemplative practices to the Western culture in a fruitful way. He says,

---


When we look at the way mindfulness is being presented in our culture, it sounds as if it is all coming from Asia. But if we look at our own cultural history, we start to see that our own pre-suppositions and cultural history are camouflaged or hidden either deliberately (rarely) or inadvertently. Much of what is passing for mindfulness is the liberal spirituality of our own tradition. That should make one pause and ask, if the liberal spirituality a good thing? Are we distorting mindfulness by it adapting into our own liberal spirituality? Religious Studies makes it possible to ask these questions. They shouldn’t necessarily answer them but the questions can be asked. 28

Moreover, scholars of religion facilitate conversations between scientists and religious practitioners, as there are language and culture barriers. For instance, scholars such as Dunne and Wallace often act as translators for the Tibetan monks. Thus, the project of Contemplative Science is a joint effort of scientist, scholars of religion and religious practitioners with each playing a significant role. These three fields that are often considered to be exclusive come together in the study of contemplative practices and the development of their application.

Furthermore, Contemplative Science is changing the field of religious studies in a few institutions. Broadly speaking, since the linguistic turn in religious studies that replaced the modernist search for the origin or sui generis element in religion, religious studies has increasingly become a study of signs, symbols and language in various social and historical contexts. Religious studies has confined itself to examining only the “objectively observable” aspects of religion, such as scriptures and their interpretation, institutions and their interaction with society, power relations and politics and so on, most often excluding religious experience and human subjectivity from critical examination. 29 Although the epistemic stance remains largely unchanged, Contemplative Science, by validating the effects of subjective transformation on body and behavior, has re-introduced religious experience into the field and classroom space. Dunne says that scientific research of some of the claims of religious practitioners has implication on how scholars and student read religious texts, especially practice texts. He says that scholars can now ask questions such as, “Are the practitioners fully aware of the kinds of changes scientific research is

28 Personal Interview with John Dunne, Emory University. 11/27/2012.
29 Roth, “Contemplative Studies,” Meditation and the Classroom. 27.
showing? Is the technique doing something other than what the practitioners say they are doing? Religious Studies scholars such as Ann Taves are re-examining religious experience and considering new methods of studying them by integrating methods of humanities and sciences. Other scholars such as Dan Arnold are doing comparative studies of experience, awareness, intentionality in Buddhist philosophy, and Western modernity and scientific findings.

While recent research is showing that contemplative practices can be helpful in enhancing the quality of American public education by assisting in the social, emotional, and ethical development of the students, contemplative scientists emphasize that there is still a lot of research and experimentation required to develop contemplative pedagogy in general. Davidson and his team say,

At present, these proposals concerning contemplative practices in education are speculative, and there is little evidence of their effectiveness. We call on researchers from a variety of disciplines to join in the study of their efficacy. As in all areas of evidence-based practice, the use of carefully designed randomized clinical trials will be a key part in legitimizing such efforts, as will careful qualitative analyses documenting processes of change in a deep and rich way.

Some of the contemplative programs developed by Contemplative Scientists for the field of education are only in pilot phases. Contemplative Scientists highlight the need to research on age appropriateness, dosage, frequency, kinds of practices required for desired outcomes, ways to deal with transformations brought about by contemplative practices that can be hard to handle for students among other issues before fully applying Contemplative Practices in the classrooms, from primary education to higher education. Dunne says that as of now, Contemplative Scientists do not even know if contemplative practices are for everyone. He points out that there has never been a culture in the planet where everyone has meditated. He says that the highest percentage might be in Tibet where a maximum of 30-40% meditated. He says that the highest percentage might be in Tibet where a maximum of 30-40% meditated.

---

30 Personal Interview with John Dunne, Emory University. 11/27/2012.
34 Ibid.
ated in institutional setting. Thus, he says, there is not enough scientific research to justify applying contemplative practices universally in classrooms. Furthermore, he also points out that there is still a lot of research humanities has to do in order for the proper translation and transference of the contemplative practices to occur from their traditional settings to American culture.\textsuperscript{35}

Therefore, Contemplative Science is an evidence-based project that studies the effects of contemplative practices on different aspects of health and human life and to develop applications of these practices based on quantitative and qualitative research. It is formed by the coming together of religion practitioners, scientists and scholars of humanities who share common discourses and practices. Although Contemplative Scientists are personally engaged in contemplative practices, they give primacy to scientific evidence rather than personal experience. Contemplative Science is very cautious in what gets translated as contemplative practice as religion and science interact. Furthermore, it emphasizes the need for more research and study before contemplative practices are applied generously in different settings.

\textbf{2.2 Contemplative Pedagogy}

In the category Contemplative Pedagogy, this paper looks at discourses and practices within higher education that attempt to introduce contemplative practices in the classroom in diverse academic fields. We differentiate Contemplative Science from Contemplative Pedagogy based on the role scientific evidence plays in each and how contemplative practice is understood. Scientific evidence wields the highest authority in Contemplative Science as it takes a scientific approach to Contemplative Studies with an aim to better understand the practices through first-person and third-person study of the effects of contemplative practices. Contemplative Science confines the development of the application of contemplative practices in healthcare and education within the limits of scientific experimentation and verification. Moreover, Contemplative Science confines itself to contemplative practices from religious

\textsuperscript{35} Personal Interview with John Dunne, Emory University. 11/27/2012.
traditions that have rich textual background and history of implementation over many generations. On the other hand, although Contemplative Pedagogy often makes reference to the scientific evidence generated by Contemplative Science, it goes a step further and takes subjective experience and transformation as the highest authority. Moreover, in Contemplative Pedagogy, contemplative practice becomes characterized as a state of mind that can be applied to any activity including teaching and learning in different academic fields. Contemplative Pedagogy becomes an “inner science” with a potential to alleviate suffering that “outer science,” based on objective evidence, fails to address.

Contemplative Pedagogy is an innovation in education that promotes the use of contemplative practices as valid modes not only of teaching and learning but also of knowledge construction and inquiry. It attempts to secularize contemplative practices from their original religious contexts and apply them as pedagogical tools in the classroom. Contemplative Pedagogy argues that contemplative experience is not confined to religion but is a way of being in the world. It claims that education is incomplete unless it addresses the inner life of human beings. It argues that our inner lives and outer lives are not fragmented as it is often considered in our academic and professional culture; rather, collectively they form the whole person. Contemplative Pedagogy embraces the inner life in all disciplines of education in order to educate the whole person. By addressing the inner lives, Contemplative Pedagogy argues, it is possible to transform the inner lives of the students for better, consequently bringing about transformation in society as a whole.

Contemplative Pedagogy integrates traditional third-person teaching methods in diverse fields with first-person contemplative techniques in order to cultivate deepened awareness, sustained attention, insight, compassion and love in classrooms. The practices that these programs use include religious approaches to contemplation such as yoga, tai chi, and various meditation techniques. However, they also utilize a wide range of other approaches such as self-reflection, encouraging students to be more

---

36 We will discuss more about secularization of these practices in the next chapter.
attentive to their environments, and empathetic to the suffering of others. The discourse of Contemplative Pedagogy claims that it is possible to adapt contemplation in any activity, be it religious or secular. Moreover, the discourse claims that contemplative states of consciousness have been reached by “non-religious” practices such as poetry, fine arts, music etc. Harold Roth says,

Contemplative practices abound in societies around the world and throughout history, and they are an important part of the very fabric from which people build meaningful lives. While various methods to attain contemplative states of consciousness can be found in such religious practices as chanting, prayer, ritual performance, and meditation, such states can also be found in a wide variety of nonreligious practices, such as music, dance, drama, poetry and prose, painting, sculpting, and even mindful observation of the natural world.  

Hence, Contemplative Pedagogy argues that contemplative practices or more specifically contemplative states of consciousness can be improvised to fit teaching and learning in all fields. Thus, contemplative practice in this category is defined as any activity that is done in contemplative states of consciousness characterized by qualities such as sustained attention, refined awareness, intuition, tranquility, love and compassion. Moreover, Contemplative Pedagogy can take multiple forms, from a whole semester of exploring one contemplative practice to exploring different contemplative practices from different traditions based on desired results to just five minutes of silence at the beginning and end of class. It can take the form of looking inward or going outward and connecting with nature and society with a contemplative mind. Furthermore, it can relate to a teacher’s way of being in the classroom with refined awareness and mindfulness, without actively involving the students.

The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society is a non-profit organization based in Massachusetts that was established in 1991 with the aim “to integrate contemplative awareness into contemporary life in order to help create a more just, compassionate, and reflective society.” The Center says that contemplative practices in all traditions have two basic intentions as foundations: connection/communion and awareness. Based on these two roots, the Center envisions a tree of contemplative practices that

37 Harold Roth, “Contemplative Studies: Prospects of a New Field.” Teacher’s College Record, p 1790.
encompasses practices from different religious traditions and includes new practices that are developed in secular contexts. Thus, practices as diverse as “mindfulness,” insight meditation, guided meditation, walking meditation, chanting, yoga, tai chi, deep listening, silence, “lectio divina,” pilgrimage, and other ceremonies and rituals from religious traditions as well as adapted practices such as contemplative reading, contemplative writing, contemplative art become categorized as contemplative practices. All of them have the common aim of opening the mind to larger sense of its wholeness and full power through the cultivation of attention and emotional balance on the one hand and faculties of insight and creativity on the other.

![Figure 1 The Tree of Contemplative Practices](http://www.contemplativemind.org/practices/tree)

---

39 Refer to Figure 1: The Tree of Contemplative Practices

The main sites for the practice of Contemplative Pedagogy are school and university classrooms, but non-university organizations such as The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, Fetzer Institute (private operating foundation in Michigan based on the endowments of John E. Fetzer), Mindfulness in Education Network (established in 2001 by a group of educators, students of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh), support the development of Contemplative Pedagogy by providing funds, a platform for sharing and learning, and contemplative retreats for scholar-practitioners.\(^{41}\) In universities, contemplative pedagogy is often applied by professors in class as an individual effort. It can also exist as an inter-disciplinary program housed within a pre-existing department or as an independent center in the university. Because Contemplative Pedagogy is more a method of teaching than an academic field in itself and because of its inter-disciplinary nature, not many separate departments for Contemplative Pedagogy have been developed in universities.

As of now, only a few universities offer contemplative practice as a degree program or a concentration in another degree programs. The School of Music, Theatre and Dance at University of Michigan offers an undergraduate degree, a Bachelor’s of Fine Arts in Jazz and Contemplative Studies, with contemplative pedagogy as a major component. University of Michigan is expanding this degree program to develop an independent department called Program in Creativity and Consciousness Studies under the direction of Ed Sarath.\(^{42}\) This is one of the few departments that offer contemplative practice fully integrated in its curriculum. Another example is the Contemplative Studies program at Rice University led by Anne Klein and housed under the Department of Religious Studies. Rice University offers students the opportunity to take Contemplative Studies as concentration in a Religious Studies degree program to give the students first-person experience of practices that they study in text. It is seen as a way to facilitate understanding and analysis of the material being studied. The program requires that the students

\(^{41}\) See- For The Contemplative Mind in Society -http://www.contemplativemind.org/
  For Fetzer Institute- http://www.fetzer.org/about-us
  For Mindfulness in Education Network- http://www.mindfuled.org/about/

take one credit of Contemplative Practicum taught by Klein and other faculty members. The webpage for the program says,

Contemplative studies is especially complementary with work in textual and cultural history, comparative mysticism, psychology and religion, as well as, at Rice, the G.E.M. [Gnosticism, Esotericism, Mysticism] program. The goal is to provide students with an additional, and emically sensitive lens through which to read and analyze material. Students with a focus on contemplative studies are expected to take the one-credit contemplative practicum for at least two of their four semesters of classwork.43

Other institutions such as Buddhism-inspired Naropa University (founded by Tibetan-Buddhist Master Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche in 1974 in Colorado) and California Institute for Integral Studies (founded by the Indian Professor of Philosophy Dr. Haridas Chauduri in 1968) were founded on principles of contemplative practice. These institutions integrate contemplative practices with all their degree programs and require students in all departments to spend considerable amount of time learning contemplative practices.

Participants in the practice of Contemplative Pedagogy are mostly Western practitioners of contemplative practices who are also professors, educators, and researchers in schools and universities. They come from academic fields as diverse as religious studies, philosophy, women’s studies, economics, political science, law, creative and performance arts, ecology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, architecture, psychology, nursing, among many others. The common denominator is a sustained daily contemplative practice in whatever form it may be. Most of these Western practitioners, who refer to themselves as scholar-practitioners, are often trained in religious practices based on multiple traditions in the West or during travels in the East. They claim some degree of mastery over their practices that allows them to train others, including students in the classrooms. Moreover, most Contemplative Pedagogy programs and classes are designed according to the personal background of the scholar-practitioners and their expertise. Contemplative Pedagogy allows the scholar-practitioners to bring their

contemplative practice to the workplace, thus, transforming the classroom space and the role of teachers and students. In the classrooms, scholar-practitioners take the role of not only imparting information and critical-analytical skills to the students but nurturing and developing the inner lives of students, which were previously the domain of therapists, spiritual and religious leaders.

Scholar-practitioners contend that the change in roles enlivens the classroom by positively changing the classroom dynamics and relationships. They says that it urges students to participate in the classroom at a deeper level, allowing them greater role in shaping the curriculum and class time. Sid Brown says that the changed roles of teachers and students in the contemplative classroom give more room for the students to shape the classroom than in a traditional one, and the knowledge imparted in the classroom becomes personal to the student. She says,

A professor who acknowledges that a student’s interior life plays a role in learning ideally honors that interiority and helps students honor it themselves. Some professors let that interiority stay interior, but others find that attention to our inner lives invites greater personal honesty in the classroom on the parts of both teacher and students. Students and professors both can share more of their interior lives as they explore the topic of the class. The teacher shapes (or tries to shape!) the classroom and the students, of course, but in this case there is more room than usual for the students to shape the teacher and the classroom. As students share more and notice that in this kind of classroom their interior lives create legitimate knowledge in the classroom, they can become more emboldened. Results, then of greater attention to interior lives can include greater reciprocity and mutual assertiveness. In such cases a professor watches what counts as knowledge change depending on who is in the room. 44

The Contemplative Education program at University of Redlands integrates contemplative practice in some classes as just few moments of silence and in others contemplative methods are thoroughly integrated into assignments, exams, and discussion formats. 45 The program offers a variety of classes in religion and contemplative practices, from those that integrate first-person practice of contemplation with third-person study to those that are exclusively based on first-person practice. Fran Grace, Profes-

sor of Religion at University of Redlands and co-editor of the book *Meditation and the Classroom*, conducts all her classes in the meditation room, which is said to be the first exclusive ‘contemplative space’ in university setting in the US.\(^\text{46}\) Instead of traditional desks and chairs, students sit on meditation cushions and yoga mats in her class. Her profile page on the University website lists her current research and areas of expertise as “Meditation, Contemplative Life, Psychology and Religion, Mystics, Paths to Enlightenment, Spiritual Development and research into the "inner arts," that is, the cultivation of Compassion, Joy, Lovingness, Forgiveness, and Peace.”\(^\text{47}\) She presents her spiritual experiences and many student testimonies of subjective transformation in her academic writings and sees her teaching as a part of her spiritual pursuit. The course description of her class, “Quest of the Mystic” says,

We will examine the intense inner quest and the culminating spiritual realizations by mystics and sages found in every religion. The topic is explored through these three lenses: 1) biographical study of representative mystics; 2) comparative analysis of the teachings about Self-Realization, Enlightenment, Divine Union, states of consciousness, and spiritual evolution; 3) first-person investigations of contemplative methods recommended by the mystics under study.\(^\text{48}\)

This exemplifies how Grace integrates third-person learning by comparative analysis with first-person experiential inquiry.

Non-university affiliated independent organizations are also actively involved in the development of Contemplative Pedagogy. For most of these organizations, Contemplative Pedagogy is part of a larger project to integrate contemplative practices in all aspects of life. The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society is an independent organization that intends to promote contemplative practices in daily life including corporations, workspace, and education among other fields.


Mirabai Bush, founding member of The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, is a scholar-practitioner, who regularly writes about contemplative practices, holds training seminars and workshops, and maintains her own contemplative practice. The website for the Center presents her diversity of knowledge of contemplative practices from different traditions and teachers which is common in many scholar-practitioners. It says,

Her spiritual studies include meditation study at the Burmese Vihara in Bodh Gaya, India, with Shri S.N. Goenka and Anagarika Munindra; bhakti yoga with Hindu teacher Neem Karoli Baba; and studies with Tibetan Lamas Kalu Rinpoche, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, Kyabje Gelek Rinpoche, Tsoknyi Rinpoche, and others. She also did five years of intensive practice in Iyengar yoga and five years of Aikido with Kanai Sensei.49

The Center works to bring contemplative practices in secular professional settings, focusing primarily in higher education. Through conferences, retreats, lectures, webinars and intensive workshops, the Center provides resources to scholar-practitioners and connects like-minded individuals and organizations with the purpose of bringing contemplative practice to all of higher education. According to the website, its goal is to transform higher education by supporting and encouraging the use of contemplative practices and perspectives to create active learning and research environments. The website for the Center says, “We envision higher education as an opportunity to cultivate deep personal and social awareness: an exploration of meaning, purpose and values in service to our common human future.”50

The Contemplative Mind in Society, in association with American Council of Learned Societies, has awarded fellowships to 158 educators from 1997 to 2009 to develop curricula and integrate traditional disciplinary methodologies with newer contemplative pedagogies in classroom. The recipients of the fellowship were faculty members from small private institutions such as Middlebury, Amherst, and Vassar to larger universities such as the University of Minnesota, University of North Carolina, and University of Michigan. They were from fields as diverse as arts and humanities, sciences, law, management, and

social sciences. Professor of Economics at Amherst College, Daniel P. Barbezat, was one of the winners of the 2008 fellowship for his class “Buddhist Economics: Skillful Means and the Marketplace.” This class is exemplary of how contemplative theory and practice is integrated in fields such as economics that would otherwise seem completely unrelated. Barbezat’s class approaches economics from a Buddhist perspective at the same time giving the students a taste of contemplative practice first-hand. The course description for the class reads:

This course will examine the relationship between Buddhism and Economics to engender a means to understand individual market interactions and their connection to global economic issues. Students will be introduced to Buddhist scriptures and writings pertaining to economic matters and shown Buddhist practices and their relationship to economics and markets both in microeconomics and macroeconomics, and to businesses that have implemented Buddhist practices in their operations. In recent years, there has been much interest between cognitive sciences and economics. This course will enable students through their own contemplative practices to examine closely the local and global impacts of their market activity.51

Therefore, Contemplative Pedagogy is an innovation in teaching and learning in diverse academic fields emphasizing not only the inclusion of first-person experience in education but certain quality of awareness such as sustained focus, refined awareness, compassion, forgiveness, love, joy, and peace. This innovation is fueled by the scholar-practitioner’s personal engagement with contemplative practices from different religious traditions. The Contemplative Pedagogy project strives not only to bring these practices in the classroom space by secularizing them but by further developing them to fit different fields of education and aspects of life. This has brought about a change in the classroom space and roles of teachers and students therein.

3. CULTURAL HISTORY

In this chapter, the paper maps the terrain of Contemplative Studies showcasing the major trends and discourses in the same two broad categories: Contemplative Science and Contemplative Pedagogy. The paper analyzes the categories in terms of their main arguments in relation to the larger discursive fields of science, Buddhism, liberal education, spirituality. The dual categorization of Contemplative Studies allows this paper to study Contemplative Pedagogy and Contemplative Science by situating them in their respective discourses. Contemplative Science claims to make a leap beyond scientific materialism by incorporating neurophenomenology as a method of study. Thus, this paper studies the development of Contemplative Science in the context of scientific materialism, study of mind and experience, and the study of the brain. Moreover, it studies Contemplative Science as an interaction between religion, science and humanities. On the other hand, this paper studies Contemplative Pedagogy as an response to what it perceives to be crisis in liberal education and the study of religion. The paper presents Contemplative Pedagogy as an interaction between higher education and spirituality.

Among other examples, the paper uses the Emory Collaborative of Contemplative Studies (ECCS), and The Mind and Life Institute as representative of the category of Contemplative Science. As representatives of Contemplative Pedagogy, the paper uses Contemplative Education at University of Redlands and The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society. Drawing on these different examples, the paper outlines the practices and analyzes the discourses of the two categories.

3.1 Contemplative Science

The aim of Contemplative Science as presented in its discourse is to build up information about contemplative practices in their traditional context and to conduct standard scientific experiments to learn about the effects of contemplative practices on brain, behavior and human flourishing. Moreover, Contemplative Science conducts scientific experiments to identify areas of human life where contempla-
tive practices can be helpful and works on building programs of application for contemplative practices in these areas. The paper calls this category Contemplative Science because the discourse in this category claims to be within the experimentally verifiable realm and values the authority of scientific experimentation above all else. The category of Contemplative Science is constructed by the interaction between science and religion and science and humanities with the claim of enriching one another’s understanding of the self and its relation to the world. This category is formed by the interaction between scientists, especially neuroscientists, religious studies scholars and religious practitioners, especially Tibetan Buddhists.

The paper uses David McMahan’s framework of Buddhist modernism as articulated his book *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*. McMahan studies Buddhism in the West as the tradition interacts with different aspects of Western modernity. He analyzes how certain aspects of Buddhism have been de-emphasized and certain aspects of modernity have been incorporated in the formation of Buddhist modernism. His study is relevant to this paper as the category of Contemplative Science is formed by the interaction between Tibetan-Buddhism and science and in this interaction a certain picture of Tibetan-Buddhism laden with values of Western modernity emerges.

### 3.1.1 A New Approach: Neurophenomenology

Active participants in the discourse and practice of Contemplative Science include scientists such as Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, Eleanor Rosch, Richard Davidson and Varela’s student Antoine Lutz, religious leaders such as His Holiness The 14th Dalai Lama and other Tibetan Buddhist Masters such as Matthieu Ricard, and scholars from Humanities such as John Dunne, Harold Roth, Tobin Hart and Allan Wallace, among others. Thus, Contemplative Scientists are neuroscientists, health practitioners (such as doctors, psychotherapists, cognitive therapists and nurses), historians of religion, educators and religious practitioners. Together they form of community of discourse and practices.
The field of Contemplative Science is based on a critique of the scientific materialist paradigm. Broadly speaking, according to this paradigm, the physical world is the only world that can be studied. Matter and energy are seen to be the truly real while everything else is assumed to rest upon them. The main principles of scientific materialism pertinent to our study of Contemplative Studies are: Objectivism, Physicalism, Reductionism and incompatibility of science and religion.  

Scientists such as Richard Dawkins, Edward O. Wilson, Steven Weinberg, and Scott Atran are some prominent scientific materialists.  

Contemplative Scientists claim that the paradigm of scientific materialism confines itself to explicating the underlying principles of the objective world through third-person observation and experimentation. There is a growing consensus that scientific materialism has transgressed the bounds of science by making unverified claims about reality and elevating hypothetical assumptions to the level of metaphysical truth claims. Wallace says that when assumptions that allow scientists to ask particular questions and investigate them become transformed into closely held beliefs then science becomes dogmatic and methodology gets transformed into metaphysics. Scientific materialism, he says, is a metaphysical speculation beyond the scope of experimental evidence about the nature of reality promoted by the scientific community as scientific conclusions. He says,  

...the success of scientific approach has led to speculative extensions of its findings into areas of metaphysics where in fact there is no experimental evidence one way or another. This is the genesis of scientific materialism, which is a dogma, not a scientific theory. Uncritical adherence to this system of belief does a great disservice to science itself.  

Contemplative Scientists point out the recent advancements in physics such as wave-particle duality of nature, nonlocality and entanglement; the vacuum states of quantum electrodynamics; and the eleven dimensions of contemporary string theory that have brought physics to a new era where it is in-

---

52 Wallace, Contemplative Science. 25-33.  
53 Wallace, Contemplative Science. 33.  
54 Wallace, Contemplative Science, 30.  
55 Wallace, Contemplative Science. 29-33.
creasingly difficult to define matter or energy. However, Contemplative Scientists claim that matter, for scientific materialists, fills the role God filled for theists. Moreover, Wallace, as other Contemplative Scientists, says that while scientific materialism as a method of inquiry seems to work for the objective physical phenomena, scientists are increasingly questioning if this method is sufficient for the study of mental phenomena. Cognitive Science (cognitivism and connectivism), they claim, has not yet been able to comprehensively explain the origins, natural or causal efficacy of consciousness or any other mental phenomena. The “hard problem” since the time of Descrates of how physical events give rise to subjective experience still hasn’t been answered definitively. Claiming that modern science does not have the theoretical framework to conduct experimental investigations of the mind other than to study the physical brain, Wallace says,

> Despite centuries of modern philosophical and scientific research into the nature of mind, at present there is no technology that can detect the presence or absence of any kind of consciousness, for scientists do not even know what exactly is to be measured. Strictly speaking, at present there is no objective, scientific evidence even for the existence of subjective experience. (Wallace’s emphasis)

Varela, Thompson, and Rosch express their dissatisfaction with cognitive science, both theoretical and empirical, and the lack of direct, pragmatic first person approach to experience with which to complement science. As a result, they say, both the spontaneous and more reflective dimensions of human experience receive little or no attention at all. Contemplative Scientists often refer to the American pragmatist and psychologist, William James, who pointed out the need to integrate third person investigation with first person inquiry for the study of human consciousness, as potentiating the emergence of Contemplative Studies. A century later, the ideas of James are being materialized as the two domains of experience and neurobiology are coming together in the study of subjective phenomenological descriptions alongside hard scientific data from brain measurement and imagining devices such as functional

---

59 Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, 13-14.
magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and Electroencephalography (EEG). The development of the scientific field of inquiry called neurophenomenology allows for the fusion of inner and outer technologies. Neurophenomenology is based on the theory of enactivism, developed by Varela, Thompson, and Rosch as an alternate to cognitivism and connectionism and as an answer to what has been called the “hard problem”, the inability of the current scientific framework to answer the fundamental question -What are minds, and how do they relate – epistemically and experientially – to the world? Scientists and philosophers, such as Humberto Maturana, Antoine Lutz, George Lakoff, and Hubert Dreyfus, along with Varela, Thompson and Rosch have played significant roles in the development of the enactive approach as a theoretical and methodological foundation for Contemplative Science.

Varela, Thompson and Rosch deny the Cartesian idea that there is a pre-given independent objective world and cognition is a subjective representation of it by a pre-given mind. They suggest that recent scientific findings and Buddhist thought (and practice), especially of the Madhyamika philosophy of emptiness as incorporated by Tibetan Buddhism, challenge this idea. The alternative view, they propose, consists of an enactive account in which the world we experience comes into being by the mutual interactions between the physiology of the organism, its sensorimotor circuit and the environment. Thus, cognition is embodied and situated in the context of interaction with the world. This theory is also founded on the phenomenological idea of Maurice Merleau-Ponty that cognitive agents bring forth a world by means of the activity of their situated living bodies. In other words, our world is 'enacted' or 'brought forth' by the sensorimotor activity of the embodied mind, with world and organism mutually co-determining one another. There is no mind without the world and no world

---

EEG records the electric activity along the scalp by placing electrodes on the scalp. It measures the voltage fluctuation during ionic flow within neurons of the brain. For further information see- E. Niedermeyer and F.L. da Silva, *Electroencephalography: Basic Principles, Clinical Applications, and Related Fields*. Lippincot Williams & Wilkins, 2004.
61 For more information on the use of Madhyamika philosophy in Contemplative Science refer to- Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, 143-146.
62 Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, 145.
63 Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, 9.
without the mind, but both come into being by their structural coupling. Varela, Thompson and Rosch say that the organism and the world are not pre-given realities but “enfold into each other and unfold from one another.” Thus, reality, from this perspective, is neither subjective nor objective, but both subjective and objective at the same time.

Although first-person inquiry through introspection has been highly valued by some Enlightenment thinkers such as Descartes and Locke, Contemplative Scientists claim that they lacked the means to refine their attention to be able to use the mind reliably to observe mental phenomena. Thus, they claim, phenomenology was limited to theoretical reflection and abstract reasoning about experience. Varela, Thompson and Rosch take a methodological leap in incorporating the methods of first-person inquiry from the Tibetan-Buddhist tradition. Thompson defines first-person methods of inquiry as “practices that increase an individual’s sensitivity to his or her own experience through the systematic training of attention and self-regulation of emotion.” The study of experiential awareness is central in the enactivist paradigm as the enactment of the world is both subjective and objective; therefore, it is necessary to study experience first-hand. Thus, Contemplative Science is in partnership with Tibetan-Buddhism fulfilling the impulse of these early Enlightenment thinkers, at the same time refuting the Cartesian duality.

### 3.1.2 Coming together of Religion and Science

Religion was seen as incompatible with the cognitive science borne of the scientific materialist approach. Moreover, cognitive theorists of religion claimed to explain religion as belief in supernatural agents arising as a by-product of our mental faculties. By contrast, Contemplative Science is not so focused in explaining religion as it is in learning from it. Varela, Thompson and Rosch emphasize the utility of meditation practices from the Buddhist tradition, especially samatha and vipassana in training

---

64 Varela, Thompon and Rosch. 217.
65 Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, 19.
66 Quoted in Harold Roth “Contemplative Studies,” *Meditation and the Classroom,* 30.
the mind for first person inquiry of subjective awareness. Thompson says,

I believe that a mature science of mind would have to include disciplined first-person methods of investigating subjective experience in active partnership with the third-person biobehavioral science. “First person methods” are practices that increase an individual’s sensitivity to his or her own experience through the systematic training of attention and self-regulation of emotion. This ability to attend reflexively to experience itself- to attend not simply to what one experiences (the object) but to how one experiences it (the act) seems to be a uniquely human ability and mode of experience we do not share with other animals. First-person methods for cultivating this ability are found primarily in the contemplative wisdom traditions of human experience, especially Buddhism.67 [Emphasis mine]

Buddhism, in general, and Tibetan-Buddhism in particular, appears as a scientific method of first-person investigation of the mind (that fulfills the “uniquely human ability” of self-observation) in the discourses of Contemplative Sciences. The historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, is often presented as a “scientist” and “physician” whose main work was to find the treatment for human suffering rather than the founder of a religious tradition. Kabat-Zinn says,

One might think of the historical Buddha as, among other things, a born scientist and physician who had nothing in the way of instrumentation other than his own mind and body and experience, yet managed to use these native resources to great effect to delve into the nature of suffering and the human condition. What emerged from this arduous and single-minded contemplative investigation was a series of profound insights, a comprehensive view of human nature, and a formal “medicine” for treating its fundamental “dis-ease,” typically characterized as the three “poisons”: greed, hatred (aversion), and ignorance/delusion (unawareness).68

Moreover, Buddhism is seen as a scientific enterprise having its method of experimentation and verification. For instance, Wallace likens advanced meditators to investigators performing repeatable experiments based on first-hand experience and subjecting them to peer-review by fellow meditationers and masters. He says,

Buddhism, like science, presents itself as a body of systematic knowledge about the natural world, and it posits a wide array of testable hypotheses and theories concerning the nature of the mind and its relation to the physical environment. These theories have allegedly

67 Quoted in Harold Roth “Contemplative Studies,” Meditation and the Classroom,” 30.
been tested and experimentally confirmed numerous times over the past twenty-five hundred years, by means of duplicable meditative techniques.  

Thus, Buddhism is shown as a tradition that is not based on blind faith but empirical and experiential evidence. Like noted in the above quote, it is explained as being “systematic,” “testable,” “experimentally confirmed,” and “duplicable.. Moreover, it is presented as a highly empirical psychological science that encourages reliance on individual experience. Varela says,

...Buddhism stands as an outstanding source of observations concerning human mind and experience, accumulated over centuries with great theoretical rigor, and, what is even more significant, with very precise exercises and practices for individual exploration. This treasure-rove of knowledge is an uncanny complement to science. Where the material refinement of science is unmatched in empirical studies, the experiential level is still immature and naive compared to the long-standing Buddhist tradition of studying the human mind.

The discourse of Contemplative Science that emerges through the mechanism of appropriation and disavowal of certain aspects of Tibetan-Buddhism is compatible with the principles of Western modernity such as freedom, the notion of self-possessing inner depths that are deserving of exploration, individuality, affirmation of ordinary life, benevolence toward the suffering of others, rejection of unverifiable notions as superstitions and verification by scientific experimentation. Ritual practices, including sutra chanting, prayer and ceremonies in honor of the Buddha and relics veneration; social context of Tibetan- Buddhism with hierarchical authority of male priests; devotion to deities; beliefs such as karma and re-incarnation; and tantric practices are left out. Tibetan- Buddhism is shown as a religion whose most important elements are meditation, rigorous philosophical analysis, and an ethic of compassion. Thus, the picture of Tibetan-Buddhism that emerges in the discourses is one that is fit to interact with Western science.

Furthermore, the discourse of Contemplative Science shows Western science as presenting a
picture of life that is devoid of meaning and ethical value. Thus, it argues that scientific materialist worldview leads to a distress, stress, anxiety, and emotional crisis. Wallace says that in the scientific materialist viewpoint sees life as arising purely by accident and people’s desires, hopes, intentions, feelings- all experiences and actions-as resulting from the body and the impersonal forces acting upon it from the physical environment. Wallace says that this viewpoint sees life as isolated- left alone to face its suffering without any help from science, and, in a world as being devoid of any intrinsic moral order or values. Furthermore, Contemplative Scientists see the scientific materialist paradigm as being responsible for the deterioration of the environment.

Buddhism is presented as a remedy for the downside of scientific materialist worldview. The discourse of Contemplative Science presents Buddhist values of love, kindness, compassion, and interdependence as universal values and practices such as meditation and mindfulness as ways of dealing with the inner life and living happily. Contemplative Scientists claim, “Ultimately, our goal is to relieve human suffering and advance well-being.” While on one hand, Buddhist leaders such as the Dalai Lama are presenting Buddhist ethics as secular ethics for the whole world with great emphasis, on the other hand, Contemplative Scientists are validating this viewpoint through scientific experimentation. Thus, the value of compassion in Buddhism fulfills the idea of modern selfhood as being benevolent towards the suffering of others. The Mind and Life Institute’s website says:

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said that “in today’s secular world, religion alone is no longer adequate as a basis for ethics...any religion-based answer to the problem of our neglect of inner values can never be universal, and so will be inadequate.” It is in this spirit that Mind and Life has embarked on a new initiative of developing a pedagogy and curriculum in ‘secular ethics’ as part of its mission to promote human flourishing around the globe. As we continue to fund investigations into the therapeutic effects of contemplative practices, we also look to build upon this and investigate how the field of education can apply research at the intersection of evolutionary psychology, moral philosophy, developmental science, and contemplative scholarship. [Emphasis Mine]

71Wallace, Contemplative Science, 29.
Meditation often serves as a focal point as it is presented as a scientific endeavor and a corrective to what is considered excessive rationalism, materialism, and reductionism of mainstream science. Contemplative Scientists claim that the enactivist approach and Buddhist conception of self refute Cartesian Dualism; moreover, Buddhist meditation and mindfulness can be a valid scientific tool for investigating experience as it causes the practitioner “to experience what one’s mind is doing as it does it.” Practicing meditation is taken to be a process that clears biases and prevents distortions of subjective reports which makes first-person reports valid scientific data, which can be correlated with third person neuroimaging. Moreover, long-term practitioners of contemplative practices are said to be able to isolate or enhance various experiences or cognitive or attentional strategies, such as compassion and loving kindness, in order to allow for the scientific study of these experiences using third-person methods neuroimaging or behavioral experiments. Furthermore, Contemplative Scientists claim that anyone can make meditation a daily practice, irrespective of age, class, sex, occupation, or religious orientation.

This appropriation and disavowal of certain aspects of Buddhism is largely deliberate. Davidson says that although there are many parallels between Western science and Buddhism, at some point, science and Buddhism must take separate paths. "There are certainly beliefs in traditional Buddhism that conflict with basic principles of scientific understanding," Davidson says. "We can't make sense of those beliefs in any kind of scientific framework." But Davidson says many scientists have shown it's possible to do research on evolution and still believe in God. He says it also should be possible to study the science of meditation regardless of your views on reincarnation, relics veneration, and other practices.

74 Varela, Thompon and Rosch. 23.
Moreover, this view of Buddhism is not being constructed solely by the scientists but by Buddhists themselves who are taking steps towards compatibility with scientific inquiry and modern western values. This point is well-emphasized in the discourses of Contemplative Science. This becomes evident by recent books such as *Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World* and *The Universe in a Single Atom* published by the Dalai Lama and his campaign to include the study of science and mathematics in the Tibetan Monasteries. The Dalai Lama says, "My confidence in venturing into science lies in my basic belief that as in science, so in Buddhism, understanding the nature of reality is pursued by means of critical investigation." Furthermore, the Dalai Lama says "If scientific analysis were conclusively to demonstrate certain claims in Buddhism to be false, then we must accept the findings of science and abandon those claims."\(^{76}\) Furthermore, he says that the qualities of compassion and love are the essence of religion and all beliefs, philosophies, institutions, and rituals are secondary and even dismissible. He characterizes these qualities as “universal religion” that human life cannot do without. He says,

> Although anger and hatred, like compassion and love, are part of our mind, still I believe the dominant force of our mind is compassion and human affection. Therefore, usually I call these human qualities spirituality. Not necessarily as a religious message or religion in that sense. Science and technology together with human affection will be constructive. Science and technology under the control of hatred will be destructive. ....Sometimes I call love and compassion a universal religion. This is my religion. Complicated philosophy, this and that, sometimes create more trouble and problems. If these sophisticated philosophies are useful for the development of good heart, then good: use them fully. If these complicated philosophies or systems become an obstacle to a good heart then better to leave them. This is what I feel.\(^{77}\)

Therefore, this mutual move towards dialogue and interaction between Tibetan-Buddhism is highlighted in the discourses of Contemplative Science. The sense that emerges is that neither of the two is being subservient to the other, rather they come together for better understanding of the world and alleviation of human suffering. The Mind and Life Institute’s webpage says,

---


Along with his vigorous interest in learning about the newest developments in science, His Holiness brings to bear both a voice for the humanistic implications of the findings, and a high degree of intuitive methodological sophistication. As well as engaging personally in dialogue with Western scientists and promoting scientific research into Buddhist meditative practices, he has led a campaign to introduce basic science education in Tibetan Buddhist monastic colleges and academic centers, and has encouraged Tibetan scholars to engage with science as a way of revitalizing the Tibetan philosophical tradition. His Holiness believes that science and Buddhism share a common objective: to serve humanity and create a better understanding of the world. He feels that science offers powerful tools for understanding the interconnectedness of all Life, and that such understanding provides an essential rationale for ethical behavior and the protection of the environment.  

3.1.3 Buddhist Modernism

David McMahan characterizes this kind of interaction between Buddhism and science as “Scientific Buddhism,” which, he says, is a part of the ongoing construction of Buddhist modernism through the processes of detraditionalization, demythologization and psychologization of Buddhism. McMahan says about Buddhist Modernism,

It is, rather, an actual new form of Buddhism that is the result of a process of modernization, westernization, reinterpretation, image-making, revitalization, and reform that has been taking place not only in the West but also in Asian countries for over a century. This new form of Buddhism has been fashioned by modernizing Asian Buddhists and western enthusiasts deeply engaged in creating Buddhist responses to the dominant problems and questions of modernity, such as epistemic uncertainty, religious pluralism, the threat of nihilism, conflicts between science and religion, war, and environmental destruction. The emergence of Buddhist thought on these problems is the product of a unique confluence of cultures, individuals, and institutions in a time of rapid and unprecedented transformation of societies. Many modernizing interpreters of Buddhism, both Asian and western, have proffered the theme of the rescue of the modern west—which they have claimed has lost its spiritual bearings through modernization—by the humanizing wisdom of the East. In order for the rescue to succeed, however, Buddhism itself had to be transformed, reformed, and modernized—purged of mythological elements and superstitious cultural accretions. Thus the Buddhism that has become visible in the West and among urban, educated populations in Asia involves fewer rituals, de-emphasizes the miracles and supernatural events depicted in Buddhist literature, disposes of or reinterprets image worship, and stresses compatibility with scientific, humanistic, and democratic ideals.

Thus, according to McMahan, Buddhist modernism is a joint project of both Asian Buddhists and Westerners. In this coming together, both parties are transformed. On the one hand, Buddhism transforms by

79 David McMahan, The Making of Buddhist Modernism, 5-6
losing elements such as mythologies, rituals, devotional practices, metaphysical elements, institutional structure and hierarchy. On the other hand, Western modernity gets transformed by finding a solution to what is called the “excesses of modernity” in the ethical values and contemplative practices of Buddhism.

Wallace also points to the transformation that Buddhism is going through in the West, especially in the interaction with American Protestant culture and modern Western ideals such as individualism, egalitarianism, nonconformism, humanism, feminism and scientific rationalism. Wallace notes how this form of Buddhism in the West tends to appropriate certain aspects and disavow others according to the resonance or dissonance with the values of the culture. He points to the disavowal of the notion of rebirth in miserable states of existence, such as hells, as a result of “sinful behavior” on the basis of their objection that this belief is “too compatible with Christianity.” On the other hand, he says that many Western Buddhists “discard the notion of continuity of consciousness following death and the efficacy of karma from one life to the next, on the grounds that they are too incompatible with modern science.”

He calls the changes in Buddhism “Buddhist protestant reformation” where the role of authority—monks, nuns, priests – is declining, the gap between lay community and clerics is decreasing and the laity, including women, is rising. Wallace says,

As the light of multiple Asian Buddhist traditions is refracted through the many facets of the prism of modern Western civilization, a broad spectrum of ways of viewing the world, meditative practices, and lifestyles is cast upon the contemporary cultural landscape. Judging by the trends noted in the above traditions of Buddhist practice in the West, it would appear that a kind of Buddhist protestant reformation is in the making. In this reformation, as in the Christian Protestant Reformation, the role of monks, nuns, priests, and professional contemplatives is on the decline; there is an erosion of the very distinction between laity and clerics; and the importance of the laity, very much including women, is on the rise. These changes are induced by multiple and diverse influences, including individualism and nonconformism, democracy and egalitarianism, humanistic psychotherapy, feminism, the disenchantment of the natural world as viewed by modern science, and, of course, Christianity and Judaism.

81 Wallace, “The Spectrum of Buddhist Practice in the West,” 45.
Therefore, Wallace notes similar phenomena of *demythologization* and *psychologization* noted by McMahan. Furthermore, McMahan says that although meditation is presented as being at the very heart of Buddhism, paradoxically, it is the practice which has in large measure been privatized, deinstitutionalized, and detraditionalized. In the traditional monastic setting, says McMahan,

> Meditation was not so much a method of self-discovery but a tool for reversing the causal processes of birth and rebirth in order to bring about a complete cessation of suffering and attain full awakening. It also generated supernatural capabilities, as well as good karma, propelling the practitioner toward better rebirths.\(^2\)

However, the discourse of Contemplative Science tends to show cultivation of compassion, better handle on emotions, increased focus and attention, and stress and anxiety relief as the effects of meditation. The extraction of meditation from its institutional setting and purpose is, writes McMahan, a consequence of the fact that Buddhism has made way into the modern western culture “by being represented as a path of human development that accorded with western conceptions of the perfectibility of man through rational action, reflection, disengaged self-observation, and the attainment of control over the passions.”\(^3\)

Although meditation is presented in the discourses as the modernist impulse for transformation and self-discovery, what is expected to be discovered by Tibetan-Buddhism and Contemplative Scientists is radically different: it is the discovery of the non-existence of a unified self. Furthermore, the interiority implicated in the discourse of meditation and mindfulness has a paradoxical exteriority to it. Interiority is not presented as an ethereal unified subjectivity but a relationality, interaction and engagement of the embodied mind with the environment. Therefore, unlike the inward-facing ontologically real modern self, the self of Contemplative Science is groundless, but exists virtually in relation to the world (which also has no independent existence). Varela, Thompson, and Rosch say that meditation taken only as a tool for self-improvement can lead to strengthening the notion of self instead of leading to no-self.

---

\(^2\) McMahan, 209.

\(^3\) McMahan, 203.
Thus, the correct way to practice is not to take self-improvement but compassion towards all and the desire to relieve suffering by letting go of the notion of self as the goal of meditation. Varela, Thompson, and Rosch say,

Perhaps less obvious but even more strongly enjoined by the mindfulness/awareness tradition is that meditations and practices undertaken simply as self-improvement schemes will foster only egohood. Because of the strength of egocentric habitual conditioning, there is a constant tendency, as practitioners in all contemplative traditions are aware, to try to grasp, possess, and become proud of the slightest insight, glimpse of openness, or understanding. Unless such tendencies become part of the path of letting go that leads to compassion, then insights can actually do more harm than good.\(^84\)

Hence, the quality of this virtual self depends on the quality of its relation to the world. Varela, Thompson and Rosch say that the point of mindfulness and meditation is not to disengage the mind from the phenomenal world. Rather, it is eventually to enable the mind to be fully present in the world and cultivate compassion in one’s interaction with the world, thus facilitating the emergence of a compassionate world. The goal is not to avoid action but to be fully present in one’s actions, so that one’s behavior becomes progressively more responsive, aware, open and sensitive not only to one’s own immediate sphere of perceptions but to the whole thorough a development of compassionate insight into the predicaments of others.\(^85\)

Therefore, the discourse of Contemplative Science is rich in modern values such as a sense of inwardness, self-discovery, deinstitutionalized individual striving for perfection of the human agent, scientific rationalism, and secular ethics, yet it also has differences in how the self is conceptualized. Contemplative Science emerges out of an engagement of the dominant cultural and intellectual forces of modernity and Buddhism. It exists within the larger fields of Buddhist modernism in American culture and emphasizes meditation, internalization and scientific rationalism, as well as universality of values such as compassion, kindness, and love. On the other hand, it deemphasizes ritual, mythology, and hierarchy. It also attempts to solve the “hard problem” of consciousness that seems to be at an impasse.

\(^84\) Varela, Thompson, Rosch, 252.
\(^85\) Varela, Thompson, Rosch, 224.
in the scientific materialist paradigm. Contemplative Science can be seen as a field that retains the essentials of modernity, but does away with what it characterizes as modernity’s excess and pitfalls. It can be characterized as a new turn within Western modernity in the US, but not a new paradigm altogether.

3.2 Contemplative Pedagogy

What differentiates Contemplative Pedagogy from Contemplative Science is the role first-person experience and testimonies of transformation play in the discourse, the way contemplative practice is characterized, and the role that teachers play in the classroom space. Contemplative Science is based on scientific evidence of the effectiveness of contemplative practices to develop programs of applications in different fields and confines itself to such practices that have long histories and rich textual traditions. The role scholars and scientists play in this category is generally limited to experimentation, research and study. On the other hand, in the discourse of Contemplative Pedagogy, although scientific evidence is referenced, first-person experience and testimony takes primacy as evidence of the effectiveness and for the application of contemplative practices in the classroom. Grace says,

Contemplative process is largely empirical; contemplatives investigate the truth of a claim via their own inner research and first-hand experience. “Come and see” is the common contemplative answer to the question, “What is it?” This was the response of Mother Teresa to questions about her work in Calcutta. And it was the response of the Buddha to inquiries about his teaching. His response, “ehi-passiko,” meant “come and see.”

Therefore, Contemplative Pedagogy presents itself as “empirical,” claiming that its effectiveness can be seen by anyone through “first-hand experience.” Furthermore, contemplative practices become characterized as a state of mind that can be applied to any activity, for instance, nature observation, creative writing, listening. Grace says,

Contemplative pedagogy cultivates inner awareness through first-person investigations, often called contemplative practices. “Contemplative practices in the classroom range widely: silent sitting meditation, compassion practices, walking meditation, deep listening, mind-

fulness, yoga, calligraphy, chant, guided meditations, nature observation, selfinquiry, and many others.\textsuperscript{87}

Contemplative practices, characterized as such, fall outside the scope of scientific evidence but become authoritative by the evidence of “inner research and first-hand experience.” Teachers take the role of instructors of practice in the classroom as contemplative practices are integrated with traditional pedagogy in different academic fields.

Contemplative Pedagogy is more variegated than the previous category of Contemplative Science, but common themes of cultivation of “inner life,” first-person experiential learning and testimonies of transformation run through the different varieties and become defining characteristics of the discourse. In what follows, the paper surveys the different ways inner life is defined and emphasized in relation to liberal education in the discourse of Contemplative Pedagogy. The paper also characterizes the use of first-person learning and testimonies of students and the role they play in Contemplative Pedagogy.

Thereafter, the paper uses Courtney Bender’s recent book, \textit{The New Metaphysicals} to characterize Contemplative Pedagogy as spirituality in higher education. Bender, Associate Professor of Religion and Sociology in Columbia University, identifies the themes of inner life, subjective experience, and an attempt by practitioners to be resonant with scientific evidence as characteristic of the spiritual scene of Cambridge, Massachusetts. This paper uses Bender’s notion of spirituality as interaction of religion with different secular institutions and discourses to explore how religion is making way in the discourses of Contemplative Pedagogy. The paper analyzes the different ways scholar-practitioners construct the category of Contemplative Pedagogy by navigating between the categories of religion and secularity and argue for a place for Contemplative Pedagogy in public and private educational institutions that consider themselves to be “secular.”

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid
3.2.1. Cultivating the Inner Lives in Education

In the discourse of Contemplative Pedagogy, the term “inner life” appears frequently. It can mean a variety of things: habits and thought patterns, affective life, experience, quality of consciousness, a way of knowing from the inside—depending on the context. Scholar-practitioners argue that the concern for inner life has deep roots in modern American heritage. Coburn, Simmer-Brown, Grace, Roth, Hart, and many others, quote William James saying, “The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention, over and over again, is the root of judgment, character, and will…. An education which should improve this faculty would be the education par excellence.” They argue that even though the turn inward to the subject is a defining feature of modernity, higher education in America does not address aspects of inner lives of the students, thus, it does not educate the “whole” person and is incomplete.

Moreover, scholar-practitioners claim that education has become largely career oriented at the cost of character and ethical development. Often many scholar-practitioners distinguish between training the mind for mechanical thinking and intellectual pursuit and training the “heart” for love and compassion. The focus of education, scholar-practitioners claim, has been on content or information of the objective world, thus the only inner life education is concerned with currently is in developing ways of processing—thinking, reasoning, memorizing, critically analyzing—the information. They say that without training the heart, students are unable to be at peace with their own selves; thus, they are unable to create a peaceful world. Cultivation of love, compassion, peacefulness and harmony in the students, they claim, is a necessary step to solve the conflicts and problems humanity is facing today. Zajonc says, Need I say it? The curricula offered by our institutions of higher education have largely neglected this central, if profoundly difficult task of learning to love, which is also the task of learning to live in true peace and harmony with others and with nature. We are well-practiced at educating the mind for critical reasoning, critical writing, and critical speaking, as well as for scientific and quantitative analysis. But is this sufficient? In a world beset with conflicts, internal as well as external, isn’t it of equal if not greater importance to balance the sharpening of our intellects with the systematic cultivation of our hearts? Do

not the issues of social justice, the environment, and peace education all demand greater attention and a more central place in our universities and colleges? Yes, certainly. ⁸⁹

Furthermore, scholar-practitioners argue that although self-mastery and self-knowledge are essential principles of liberal education, they are not being fulfilled by the current state of education. Grace and Simmer-Brown draw upon College Learning for the New Global Century published by Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), which presents “inner fortitude, self-knowledge, and personal renewal,” and “empathy, the ability to care about and even identify with perspectives and circumstances other than one’s own” as specific inner qualities of a liberal arts student. Emphasizing the importance of inner learning as essential to liberal education and as a way to rescue education from becoming only a degree producing industry, Simmer-Brown and Grace say:

Throughout history, liberal education—especially the arts and humanities—has been a constant resource not just for civic life but for the inner life of self-discovery, values, moral inspiration, spiritual quests and solace, and the deep pleasures of encountering beauty, insight, and expressive power. Ultimately, it is this dimension—serious engagement with questions of values, principles, and larger meanings—that makes difference between instrumental learning and liberal learning. ⁹⁰

Scholar-practitioners present Contemplative Pedagogy as a way of bringing fulfillment to liberal education’s goals of self-knowledge and self-mastery and to the dictum, “know thyself.” Harold Roth emphasizes the importance of calmness, tranquility, and attentional ability and focus as important tools for students who desire self-exploration and self-understanding. He says, “if the purpose of a university education is “to know thyself,” there is no better means to do so than through contemplative training.” ⁹¹ Grace and Simmer-Brown claim that first-person methods of inquiry such as meditation can train students to master their inner lives. Moreover, they present contemplative practices as “inner science” for self-knowledge that makes accurate knowledge of the outer world possible. ⁹² In the same vein,

---

⁹⁰ Simmer-Brown and Grace “Introduction,” Meditation and the Classroom. xiii.
⁹¹ Roth, “Contemplative Studies,” Meditation and the Classroom. 34.
Buddhist scholar, Robert Thurman goes so far to say that contemplative education is indispensible for the fulfillment of the goal of liberal education:

.. it [contemplative pedagogy] is virtually indispensible if wisdom is to become fully transformative. The question, then, for academic institutions is not a question of adding a desirable frill to their vast smorgasbord of offerings, rather it is a matter of their effectively fulfilling their duty to provide a liberal- that is, a liberating and empowering- education.93

Furthermore, the discourse of Contemplative Pedagogy claims that students need contemplative education not only to manage their inner lives but to be able to make use of the information presented to them in our educational system. Scholar-practitioners claim that information and its processing do not occur in isolation but they are always taking place in the context of the inner lives of students- their emotions, attentional quality, life experiences, and ethical values. Scholar-practitioners point out that students are generally unaware about the mechanisms of their inner lives. Not only are they unequipped to deal with the turmoil of college life such as negative emotions, stress, and anxiety, they lack the tools to cultivate positive attitude and emotions. Scholar-practitioners argue that instead of being masters of their inner lives, students are victims of it. They think that this becomes an obstruction in the process of learning itself as students are often so overwhelmed by their inner lives that they are unable to give full attention to their studies. Simmer-Brown and Grace say:

We professors notice that only a few students enter college in command of their own inner world. Few seem to know how to cultivate the mind for intellectual pursuit, aesthetic appreciation, or ethical development. Their mental landscapes can seem to storm with uncontrollable anxiety, fear, self-concern, a desire for approval, and sometimes immobilizing despair. They can be lost in random discursive thoughts as well, not able to think clearly about the matters at hand. Paradoxically, the mind can appear to be their worst enemy in the learning endeavor..... In a 2007 survey, 41.5 percent of college juniors reported that they “frequently” feel that their lives are “filled with stress and anxiety.” Undoubtedly, such interior turmoil impedes intellectual success and overall well-being.94 [Emphasis mine]

Hence, scholar-practitioners claim that students are left on their own without any help from the educational system to deal with their emotions that directly impinge their intellectual learning as well as

93 Thurman, “Meditation and Education: India, Tibet, and Modern America,” Meditation and the Classroom. 19-20.
94 Simmer-Brown and Grace “Introduction,” Meditation and the Classroom. xvi
everyday life. It is necessary, claim scholar-practitioners, to make the students capable of dealing with their emotions and make them the masters of their inner lives.

### 3.2.2 First-person Knowledge and Learning

Scholar-practitioners also claim that current education teaches students how to “do” things but does not teach them how to “be” with themselves or the world. Moreover, they claim, education is focused on “thinking about” information and completely neglects ways of applying and dealing with the information in life. They assert that education is unable to be truly transformative, as it neither provides the students tools to know themselves nor to transform themselves. Furthermore, scholar-practitioners claim that education is unable to give the students what they expect to learn from their college experiences—ways to be loving, compassionate and alleviate suffering.

The students enrolled in my Compassion course resemble the college juniors surveyed by HERI in 2007 where 82.8% of the juniors shared that “becoming a more loving person” is very important or essential, and 66.6% endorse the life goal of “reducing pain and suffering in the world.”

Scholar-practitioners present Contemplative Pedagogy as a solution to the suffering of the world caused by the neglect of our inner lives. Only by incorporating and integrating contemplative practices into our educational system, scholar-practitioners argue, can we use institutions of higher education to educate the “whole” person and start healing our culture. Through the integration of contemplative practices in education, scholar-practitioners claim, students can be taught to better handle the vicissitudes of life and cultivate ethical values and positive emotions such as love, compassion, equanimity and peace. Moreover, these practices, they claim, help students in their intellectual pursuits by refining their attention, developing sustained focus and giving them tools to handle the hardships of college life. Thus, Contemplative Pedagogy is presented as the way out of suffering for the students and the larger culture.

Simmer-Brown and Grace say,

When students learn meditation or contemplative process, they are learning that it is possible to repetitive emotional and conceptual patterns and tune into the subtle potential of the mind. Some of them experience freedom from test anxiety, depression, rigid judgmental thinking, and eating disorders for the first time. They speak of sense of empowerment in meditation when they realize that they do not have to be victims of the distractive irrelevancies and repetitive negativities of the mind. They attest that this confidence enhances all areas of life, from their college learning, to interrelation maturity and to a deeper appreciation of nature and, indeed, life itself.  

Scholar-practitioners argue that epistemic assumptions of the modern West usually bring up resistance to even taking contemplative practices from religious traditions seriously, let alone incorporating them in our educational system. They claim that the epistemic superiority of critical rationality is a culturally conditioned element of the modern West. To hold on to it as the only way of knowing, claim scholar-practitioners, is ethnocentrism and cultural imperialism, which confines our access to knowledge that other cultures and traditions have developed highly. Scholar-practitioners claim that the assumption that it is only possible to acquire knowledge through sensory perception or rational and conceptual thinking is responsible for confining education to third person learning or “knowing about.” Simmer-Brown and Grace say, “Conventional teaching aims, almost solely, at requiring students to “think about” rather than “know from within.”  

Moreover, scholar-practitioners argue that by neglecting the systematic exploration of experience and subjectivity, scholars deny themselves valuable approaches to many problems facing human life today, valuable source of empirical knowledge, and valuable method of studying different religious traditions. Scholar-practitioners claim that by contextualizing our epistemological assumptions and not giving it a priori superiority, it is possible to seriously consider the claims of other traditions and explore them. Contemplation, scholar-practitioners assert, is a way of knowing that not only religious traditions, but some non-religious fields such as music, dancing, poetry, painting and sculpting, and scientific fields such as positive psychology (for example Mihlayi Csikszentmihalyi’s study of the state of optimal experi-

---

96 Simmer-Brown and Grace “Introduction,”, “Meditation and the Classroom. xvi-xvii
97 Simmer-Brown and Grace “Introduction,”, “Meditation and the Classroom. xvi
98 Roth, “Contemplative Studies,” Mediation and the Classroom. 29.
ence called “flow”) have been explored in depth.\textsuperscript{99} Tobin Hart says that contemplation can not only open a new way for knowing, but also enhance rational and sensory ways of knowing. He says,

Contemplation adds a third way of knowing - a missing-link- that both complements and enhances the rational and sensory. The contemplative mind is opened and activated through a wide range of approaches- from pondering to poetry to meditation- that are designed to shift states of mind in order to cultivate such capacities as deepened awareness, concentration and insight.\textsuperscript{100}

Thus, scholar-practitioners claim that if we are able to self-contextualize and step beyond our ethnocentric epistemological assumptions, we will not be as resistant to explore different practices that lead to sources of knowledge yet unexplored in higher education.

Scholar-practitioners claim that although experiential knowledge tends to be authoritative in daily life, first-person knowledge via experience has very often been considered untrustworthy by academia. By contrast, first-person knowledge and lived experience are important features of the discourse of Contemplative Pedagogy. First person knowledge is characterized as knowledge not acquired from the outside, but arrived at by identity. In other words, knowing by virtue of being. Scholar-practitioners claim that first-person knowledge has the certitude of knowing by identity which theoretical knowledge cannot provide. Grace says,

When we want to know the taste of chocolate, we are more satisfied by eating it than itemizing its chemical constituents. Parents sending a child off to college want to know what the school is like by going for a campus visit, since the college guidebooks give only part of the story. As a hiker, I prefer to hear about the conditions of a trail from the person coming down off the summit, not the person reading a guidebook at the trailhead. Only the hiker who has “been there” that day can tell me whether the seasonal stream is flowing or not. Theoretical (third-person) knowledge is valuable, but actualized (first-person) knowledge transmits certitude.\textsuperscript{101}

3.2.3 Testimonies of transformation

While first-person reports were corroborated with third person experimentation in the category of Contemplative Science, in Contemplative Pedagogy, they take a forefront role. As many methods

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid. 32.
\textsuperscript{100} Tobin Hart, “Interiority and Education: The Neurophenomenology of Contemplation.” \textit{Meditation and the Classroom}. 130.
and practices of Contemplative Pedagogy are extensions and even modifications of contemplative practices from religious traditions to various contexts and fields in education, they are beyond the scope of what has been experimentally verified by Contemplative Science. Although Contemplative Pedagogy makes reference to the developments in Contemplative Science, personal testimonies emerge as evidence authorizing the use of Contemplative Pedagogy in the classroom. Scholar-practitioners make the pragmatic argument that we should incorporate contemplative practices in education because it works.

Furthermore, scholar-practitioners often cite diverse scientific theories such as quantum mechanics, Jung’s ideas of collective consciousness, Rupert Sheldrake’s concept of morphic fields, William Tiller’s psychoenergetic sciences that are considered marginal and are not fully accepted as scientific facts as they present a picture of subjectivity, experience and reality that greatly contradicts current scientific paradigm.  

The emphasis on first-person experience is expressed in the discourse of contemplative pedagogy as the personal testimonies of subjective experience of transformations of the teachers in their own path of contemplative practice and of the students in contemplative classrooms. Scholar-practitioners present accounts of their own contemplative practice and inner-transformation in the discourse of Contemplative Pedagogy. Grace presents the testimony of her own inner-transformation in many of her writings on Contemplative Pedagogy as “existential example” of inner-outer transformation. Simmer-Brown highlights the importance of the contemplative practice and subjective journey of the professors in bringing contemplative studies in the classrooms. She says, “For many, like myself, the first compelling reason is our own journeys of cultivating interiority in our personal lives and our desire to include this aspect in our academic lives.” She points out that scholar-practitioners are driven by a “sense of how the inner life nurtures wholeness, confidence, intellectual creativity, and compassion.

---

102 For more information see: Christopher M. Bache, The Living Classroom: Teaching and Collective Consciousness, SUNY Press, September 4, 2008. Also see: Fran Grace, “From Content to Context to Contemplation.” Meditation and the Classroom. 41 &61.
in our experience, and promises to do so also for our students.” Likewise, Brown says, “As a person who has engaged in contemplative practices for over twenty-three years and has benefitted from them, I have come to feel obliged to introduce the practices.” Therefore, scholar-practitioners’ personal experiences of transformation provides the impetus for them to develop contemplative pedagogies.

The book *Meditation and the Classroom* starts with the following words referencing the last chapter of the book, “Does it work? Evaluation of our students,” which presents the testimonies of students who have taken contemplative classes with Simmer-Brown and Grace:

We begin this book by telling you how it ends. The final section gives detailed reflections from our students about their experience with “meditation in the classroom.” Students certify that meditation benefits them keenly, both in their academic work and as a lifelong skill. Their learning assessments through the years-- have confirmed over and over again that meditation refines the mind and hones the heart. As a teaching method, we know it works.

Thus, scholar-practitioners present student testimonies as certification of the efficiency of contemplative practices in academic work and in life in general. Scholar-practitioners report that student testimonies illustrate that contemplative practices not only help them deal with emotions such as anger, anxiety, guilt, and depression, but to learn and grow from them. Simmer-Brown says,

My students report that this emotional learning is wonderfully empowering for them. They see that they are not alone in the experience of inner turmoil. They become skilled with contemplative tools and perspectives that allow them a full emotional life without feeling helpless before an emotional hijacking. They learn that intense emotion, when unexamined and not directly experienced, drives them to cause harm to themselves and others. They also learn that there is wisdom within the emotion, and when they listen to intense emotions within the context of mindfulness, that wisdom is available to enrich everyday lives.

Grace says that students of all majors benefit from contemplative pedagogy. She argues that students learn how to be “present”, stay focused and think with “mental clarity” in the classroom. Moreover, she claims that her students report that contemplative practice helps with “factors that impede

academic success...: stress, emotional and psychological problems (eating disorders, anger, self-hatred, depression, anxiety), sleep deprivation, and addiction.” 108 She quotes student, Ashley McQuown saying, “Through meditation, I learned that my thoughts don’t have to control me. After six years of an eating disorder, I am finally winning. I don’t feel like a prisoner anymore.” 109 Additionally, Grace says that contemplative practices help students in ethical cultivation and personal and social responsibility. She claims that unlike the objection of many academicians that conflate self-knowledge with personal opinion and personal therapy, feedback from students suggest that contemplative practices facilitate uprooting of personal opinion and narcissistic self-centeredness. She says that students report that they have become open-minded, compassionate, empathetic, and responsible for their inner intentions, words, and actions. They cultivate a reverent attitude not only towards other people but all of life including, animals and nature.110 She quotes one of her students, Brianna Wettland, saying,

I realized throughout this semester meditating that I had a lot of resentments towards a lot of people in my life, even ones I didn’t know well. I was just angry in my thoughts- nice on the outside but on the inside not very kind. Through meditation, I felt myself changing on the inside, becoming more forgiving towards my peers and family. One day at work, a customer told me I “wasn’t the sharpest pencil in the box.” My immediate reaction was to feel hurt. But then, I wanted to feel compassion for him, so I walked away from the table and breathed in and out a few times. I told myself “This is not about me.” When I went back to the table, I looked him in the eye, smiled, and it was genuine.111

In this way, scholar-practitioners present testimonies of their own and student’s transformation as evidence of the efficacy of Contemplative Pedagogy. Some of these reports are similar to the findings of Contemplative Science. Nonetheless, Contemplative Science is still limited in scope in the kinds of contemplative practices it is studying and in the results that can be established as fact scientifically.

108 Grace, “Meditation in the Classroom.” Meditation and the Classroom,243.
109 Fran Grace, “Meditation in the Classroom.” Meditation and the Classroom. 243.
110 Fran Grace, “Meditation in the Classroom.” Meditation and the Classroom. 244-248
111 Fran Grace, “Meditation in the Classroom.” Meditation and the Classroom. 245.
3.2.4 Spirituality in Higher Education

Thus far, this paper has discussed the arguments presented by scholar-practitioners for the inclusion of Contemplative Pedagogy in higher education. These arguments revolve around the themes of inner life, first person experience and transformation and their place in secular liberal education and modernity. Now, this paper will look into Courtney Bender’s ethnographic study of the “spiritual” communities in Cambridge, Massachusetts from her recent book, *The New Metaphysicals*, where she deals with similar themes and concerns. This paper will also briefly review Talal Asad’s and Jose Casanova’s ideas about religion and secularity and how they relate to the study of Contemplative Pedagogy.

*The New Metaphysicals* by Courtney Bender is relevant to the study of Contemplative Pedagogy as her work deals with the fields of religion, spirituality and secularity, and it examines how they relate to each other. Her main argument is that spirituality is a dynamic category produced by the interaction of religion with different institutions and discourses, which are conventionally not considered to be religious. Like the scholar-practitioners of Contemplative Pedagogy, who have been trained in contemplative practices from different religions and in intellectual work in Western universities, many of those whom Bender interviewed in Cambridge belonged to overlapping organizations, both secular and religious. Furthermore, like the characteristic themes running through the discourse of Contemplative Pedagogy, what identify the people Bender studied as spiritual are their concerns for scientific evidence, resonance with modernity, and personal experience. Bender argues that although spirituality exists in overlapping histories, institutions, practices and discourses, these themes are what distinguish the field called spirituality. Bender surveys spirituality in health, arts, and mainstream religious congregations. These different fields shaped how spirituality was manifested and understood by the practitioners. Bender suggests that *entangled* histories, meanings and institutions produce “not one but many over-
lapping spiritualities that relate in different ways to various institutional fields in American society.”

Therefore, because Contemplative Pedagogy shares the same concerns with spirituality as identified by Bender, with the acknowledgement that Contemplative Pedagogy has differences in practice, discourses and beliefs from the spiritual scene in Cambridge, Contemplative Pedagogy can be envisioned as spirituality in higher education.

Bender’s use of the idea of “entanglements” to the study spirituality is most relevant to our study of Contemplative Pedagogy. The concept of entanglement assumes that a phenomenon is embedded in multiple dynamics that are often in tension with each other. She claims that spirituality exists in the entanglement of categories such as individual and social, religious and secular, science and belief. These categories are characterized as divergent by scholars, but they are experienced without tension by practitioners. Nonetheless, Bender says, even practitioners like to identify themselves as “spiritual but not religious.” The framework of entanglement allows Bender to replace such equal and opposite dualisms of “either/or” with a notion of entanglements that allows her to adopt a “both/and” perspective. Thus, spirituality can be religious and secular at the same time, challenging the modernist idea of separation of religious and secular spaces, practices and discourse. Contemplative Pedagogy can thus be characterized as an entanglement of the seeming dichotomous practices and discourses of religion and secular higher education. In what follows, this paper will demonstrate that Contemplative Pedagogy allows for the entanglement of religion and secularity, making it possible for the scholar-practitioner to claim being secular and modern without being completely disenchanted from religion.

The discourse of Contemplative Pedagogy argues that although integration of contemplative inquiry in higher education brings religious practices into the classroom, it does not involve the wholesale incorporation of religious beliefs and dogmas. This argument comes in response to one of the major resistances to the establishment of Contemplative Pedagogy. Many, including religious studies scholars,
argue that by bringing practices from religious traditions into the classroom, Contemplative Pedagogy is promoting beliefs of one religion or another in secular public spaces. Simmer-Brown identifies the Protestant understanding that belief or doctrine is the primary aspect of religion as one of the main reasons that leads many scholars to suspect contemplative education as being indoctrination or the propagation of religious beliefs. According to scholar-practitioners, what differentiates contemplative practices that have been appropriated and developed in Contemplative Pedagogy from other religious practices such as worship of deities is that contemplative practices do not require prior faith commitment or belief in any supernatural beings or religious doctrines. The website for Contemplative Mind for Society says,

The experiential methods developed within the contemplative traditions offer a rich set of tools for exploring the mind, the heart, and the world. When they are combined with conventional practices, an enriched research methodology and pedagogy become available for deepening and enlarging perspectives, leading to lasting solutions to the problems we confront. *None of these methods require an ideology or creed and each is available equally to all.*  

[Emphasis mine]

According to Simmer-Brown, contrary to the belief of those who are resistant to Contemplative Pedagogy, most of the scholar-practitioners who contributed to the *Meditation and the Classroom* book have been trained in contemplative practices that do not require allegiance to metaphysical belief systems. According to her, in Asian religious traditions, *praxis* rather than doctrine is primary, and the focus of these practices is the cultivation of an interior life rather than indoctrination. She says,

These ethnocentric biases create specters that are primarily Western that do not reflect the profile of religion in the non-Western world. Within the Buddhist, Daoist, and Hindu expressions of religion, missions of this kind are for the most part unknown, and religious identity comes not from belief so much as from community, symbol, and practice.

Other scholar-practitioners argue that even though these contemplative practices may have beliefs attached to them in their religious context, they can be “secularized” and appropriated in settings

---


such as higher education that are conventionally considered secular. The argument being made is that we can take what we need from the religious practices, even modify them as necessary, and leave behind the baggage of dogma, rigid institutional structures and hierarchies. Furthermore, like we discussed previously, scholar-practitioners define contemplation as a state of consciousness rather than any specific activity, which makes it possible to apply it to any field and activity such as photography, poetry etc. Tracy Puett of The Contemplative Pedagogy program at Vanderbilt University says, “I don’t think we have to ascribe to any particular religion or tradition to engage in contemplation. Perhaps, secular contemplation is what we need to be inclusive of when we talk about Contemplative Pedagogy.”

Thus, the discourse of Contemplative Pedagogy, like Bender’s notion of spirituality, envisions the possibility of being “secular” without having to be completely disenchanted by religion. It allows for a place for certain religious practices that address and transform the inner lives of people in institutions that consider themselves to be secular. However, the distinction between praxis and belief itself is a contested issue and not as simple as the scholar-practitioners tend to present it. Moreover, the claim by scholar-practitioners like Simmer-Brown that only praxis and not belief from the Eastern religious traditions is being incorporated is problematic because much of the discourse and practice of Contemplative Studies as a whole incorporates the ethical values of Buddhism.

Although scholar-practitioners claim that allegiance to any belief or creed is unnecessary for Contemplative Pedagogy, most of them promote values such as love, compassion, and justice and claim that it is desirable for all humans to have a certain kind of inner life characterized by qualities like equanimity, focus, and refined attention, calmness. These values and qualities, according to the scholar-practitioners, are beneficial to everyone’s life. Thus, implicit and often times explicit in the discourse of Contemplative Pedagogy is the claim for universal ethics and a normative inner life. A normative image of a person emerges in the discourse of Contemplative Studies. The person is simultaneously inward

---

looking and outward looking; at once individual and communal; and is deeply in touch with its inner
world and working to transform it for better, at the same time, is concerned with and actively engaged
in the outer. The person has intellectual training, is rational and reasonable, and at the same time, has
the heart open and views the world with love. The person is happy, calm, balanced, kind, respectful,
loving and compassionate. The person is ‘mindful’-fully present, focused, and aware. The person is ca-
pable of dealing with emotions- looking at emotions as they arise and fall rather than being distressed
capable of handling stress. Zajnoc says that through the integration of secular ethics and secular spiritu-
ality higher education can become an avenue to build such persons:

We seek to integrate a secular ethics and secular spirituality to the educational endeavor,
that is to say, we seek an ethics and spirituality that is not rooted in an ideology or creed
but which is available equally to all. We seek to recast the traditional foundations for edu-
cation into a truly integrative, transformative, and communal enterprise that cultivates the
whole person in the fullest possible way.  

Scholar-practitioners claim that with the advent of the Enlightenment and the privatization of re-
ligion, the so-called secular education lost some of its core ethical and inner values. Contemplative Ped-
egogy, they claim, brings these values back to education without the institutional and belief structures
of religion. Often times in the discourse of Contemplative Pedagogy, the inner values are termed as
“spiritual” to signify that only certain aspects of religion are being incorporated. Thus, Contemplative
Pedagogy is seen as the coming together of Western Enlightenment thinking with ethical and spiritual
values from religious traditions. Zajnoc says,

The roots of higher education in the West can be traced back to the cathedral schools and
monasteries of the 12th century. Likewise, in Asia, education was inseparable from reli-
gious and spiritual life. With the Enlightenment, education made a crucial and proper shift
towards the secular. Now we are faced with the challenge of creating a form of education
that is at once true to the best ideals of the Enlightenment, which values reason, experi-
ence, and human rights, and at the same time reconnecting to the ethical and spiritual
foundations that support our values and deepest understandings.  

Contemplative Pedagogy can be envisioned as spirituality in education constructed from the coming together of certain practices and values from religion that resonate with and fulfill values of liberal education and modernity. Scholar-practitioners attempt to show a deep connection of Contemplative Pedagogy with liberal education, modernity and democratic values. Drawing upon Martha Nussbaum’s work, *Cultivating Humanity*, Simmer-Brown and Grace connect Contemplative Pedagogy with the Socratic reflection of “the examined life,” Aristotle’s notions of reflective citizenship, and the Greek and Roman Stoic notions of liberal education “liberating the mind from bondage of habit and custom, producing people who can function with sensitivity and alertness as citizens of the whole world with the cultivation of humanity.” Furthermore, Thurman argues that contemplative education is necessary to create a democratic society. He says,

...if the liberal education so essential to modern democratic society really wants to empower the individuals who must constantly recreate democracy, it needs to incorporate contemplative dimensions in its curriculum. For liberal education to fulfill its responsibility, the teaching of contemplative skills is a necessity, not a luxury.

In this way, scholar-practitioners present Contemplative Pedagogy as being resonant with Western modern values. Scholar-practitioners also envision it as a coming together of the values of East and West. Making recourse to the foundations of liberal arts education and Buddha’s enlightenment, Thomas Coburn says,

....Contemplative education sits at the historical confluence of two rivers, one flowing out of Asia, the other out of the eastern Mediterranean. The former has its headwaters in the contemplative traditions of South and East Asia, particularly in the experience of the Buddha......The other river has its headwaters at about the same time in Greece, in the classical liberal arts tradition.

Another way the category of ‘spiritual’ is constructed by scholar-practitioners is by characterizing ‘spiritual’ as being the bright side or up side of religion. Grace calls those aspects of religion the bright side that is concerned with inner life, healing and recovery rather than sin, pun-

---

ishment, and fear. These positive aspects are often teachings of mystics from different religious traditions. Thus, a picture of spirituality emerges in the discourse of Contemplative Pedagogy as being the desirable aspects of religion which includes ethical values, values of inner life and teachings of mystics. Grace’s profile in her faculty page in the University of Redlands website says,

The first several years of her career grappled with the downside of religion-- its dogmatism and judgmentalism. Her first book came out of the effort to understand such impulses not only within religious history but also within herself. Her current teaching and writing examine the upside of religion, mainly the "inner life" -- its inspirational teachers, various methods for spiritual development and healing and the paths to Self-Realization, Enlightenment and Divine Union as taught by the sages and mystics of the world's spiritual traditions.¹²²

Bender says that spirituality exists within religious traditions as well. Scholar-practitioners of Contemplative Pedagogy are often affiliated with religious traditions which are 'spiritualized'. For instance, many scholar-practitioners of Contemplative Pedagogy, such as Thomas Coburn and Judith Simmer-Brown, are students of Chogyam Trungpa, who founded Naropa University. Trungpa’s teaching made many Buddhist practices accessible to Westerners who did not want to study Buddhism formally in Buddhist institutions. His teachings promote an ecumenical path, which assumes that there is a basic wisdom in religious traditions that can be incorporated in everyday life for spiritual progress amidst everyday activities. He taught his students to pursue a spiritual practice within the world rather than in a monastery and incorporate the secular world as a part of that sacred path to transform the world into an enlightened society. He taught the cultivation of qualities such as “awareness of basic goodness, gentleness, fearlessness, non-aggression, letting go, authentic action, leadership skills, and genuine love” for personal and social transformation. Trungpa’s contemplative teachings are in diverse areas such as cal-

ligraphy, flower arrangement, poetry, theatre, dance, fine arts, and martial arts, all of which have been incorporated in Contemplative Pedagogy. ¹²³

Other religious leaders such as Thich Nhat Hanh and HH The 14ᵗʰ Dalai Lama teach “Engaged Buddhism,” which emphasizes meditation and contemplation coupled with social action rather than in the solace of solitude. ¹²⁴ Engaged Buddhism is a dominant genre of Buddhism in America. The first of fourteen precepts of Engaged Buddhism propounded by Thich Nhat Hanh exemplifies the idea argued by scholar-practitioners that contemplative practice such as mindfulness and meditation is not about indoctrination. The first precept says, “Do not be idolatrous about or bound to any doctrine, theory, or ideology, even Buddhist ones. Buddhist systems of thought are guiding means; they are not absolute truth.” ¹²⁵ Engaged Buddhism takes many forms, according to the setting and context, from resistance to war and injustice and social work. In education, it takes the form of Contemplative Pedagogy. The Mindfulness in Education Network is an organization founded by educators who are also Western students of Thich Nhat Hanh. The purpose of the institution is to bring mindfulness as taught by Thich Nhat Hanh into educational settings. ¹²⁶ Furthermore, as discussed in the last section of this chapter, the Dalai Lama has been emphasizing secular ethics and secular practice for everyone. Therefore, there is a growing trend within religious traditions, especially Buddhism, that blurs the distinction between religious and secular spaces and practices. These trends are entangled with the discourse and practice of Contemplative Pedagogy.

Bender says that the category of spirituality allows oppositional binaries of secular and religious to come together. This is apparent in the discourse of Contemplative Pedagogy. Since early 20ᵗʰ century, it has been widely accepted in the West that religion and secularity are dichotomous and as societies

¹²³ Duncan Ryūken Williams, Christopher S. Queen, American Buddhism: Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship, Psychology Press, 1999. 218-219.
¹²⁴ The term was coined by ThichNhatHanh during his struggles in Vietman.
become progressively modern, religion will have lesser influence, finally leading to fully secular society. Another notion of secularity in the modern West is that religion is a private matter and should be displaced from public sphere. These are seen as a foundations for liberal democratic society. According to Talal Asad, secularity is “a direct access to reality,” “a needed disenchantment,” and “stripping away of myth, magic, and the sacred.” He says that in Western modernity, secularity is an organizing principle and form of discourse that keeps religion out of public life and allows people who do not share worldviews to discuss and debate our shared public life. Asad points out that the notion of secularization of public sphere relies upon Western presuppositions about religion as a phenomenon that is distinct and can be differentiated from culture.

Jose Casanova builds on Asad’s insights to argue that secularity is better understood by studying the diverse and dynamic ways different religious practices take forms in and form their institutional and discursive contexts. He says that it is better to look at the new and changing forms that religion is taking rather than to look for religion’s decline. From this viewpoint, American spirituality in general can be said to be a form of religion developed in interaction with modernity and its elements such as science and technology, interiority, and concern for transformation and progress in varied institutional settings that range from traditional religious congregations to public spaces that are conventionally considered to be non-religious space such as higher education. In the same vein, Bender says,

My argument in this volume has been not only that spirituality is lived in concrete and complex ways in contemporary American life, but furthermore that spirituality is produced in multiple social institutions, including many that we regularly do not consider religious. Locating the production of spirituality in so-called secular institutions unsettles the logics of institutional differentiation that continue to lie at the heart of our theories of secularization and, thereby our projects of analyzing religion. This calls us to investigate the multiple spaces (including secular ones) where religious sensitivities and selves are robustly explored and cultivated. Locating spiritual practice in this way does not contribute to an argument that secularization is a ruse, a myth, or a colossal misunderstanding, any more than

---

128 Asad, 13.
it contributes to an argument that American institutions are actually “resacralizing.” Rather, it makes clear that the binaries of religious and secular institutional differentiation are inadequate to our analysis of religious life in America, even as they have been generative for a variety of religious and spiritual dispositions and subjectivities.\textsuperscript{130}

Therefore, according to Bender, spirituality is a dynamic category that allows for the expression of certain religious values and notions in diverse institutions, including those that are often considered secular. Furthermore, spirituality takes the contours and form of the institutional setting it is entangled with. Nonetheless, like Bender points out, spirituality is not religion taking over the secular, rather it is the indication that the exclusive differentiation between religion and secularity has to be transcended for the study of spirituality in America.

Thus, discourse of Contemplative Pedagogy expresses the concern that higher education institutions pay little or no attention to addressing students’ inner lives. The formative roles that colleges and universities play in our society and the ideals of “liberal education,” scholar-practitioners claim, position higher education well to address the questions of how students can balance the exterior and interior aspects of their lives more effectively; how they can develop inner qualities to live more meaningful lives and cope with the challenges of life; and how they serve their communities, society, and the world at. Another major feature of Contemplative Pedagogy is that it takes a leap beyond objective evidence based scientific framework. Although scientific evidence from Contemplative Science is still referenced, scholar-practitioners’ and students’ first person subjective experience of transformation become evidence for the usefulness of contemplative practices, often times authorizing the scholar-practitioners to take the role of teachers of contemplative practices in the classroom. These themes of inner life, concern for scientific evidence and experience resonate with Bender’s characterization of spirituality. Hence, Contemplative Pedagogy can be seen as a form of spirituality in higher education. However, scholar-practitioners envision Contemplative Pedagogy in multiple overlapping ways. Scholar-

\textsuperscript{130} Bender, p 182.
practitioners see Contemplative Pedagogy as a coming together of the values of Eastern and Western Enlightenment; as the intersection of religion and secularity- integrating the ‘upside’ of religion with the ‘upside’ of modernist notion of secularity; and as spirituality in higher education.
4. CONCLUSIONS

In this section, the paper will reiterate the thesis and provide brief summaries of the two categories. Furthermore, it will present some critiques of the field of Contemplative Studies.

Contemplative Studies is a multi-faceted field that brings together various institutions, fields, practices and practitioners. A common concern for emotional, psychological and physical well-being, and enhancement of focus and attention runs through the discourses and practices of Contemplative Studies. Contemplative Studies presents evidences from scientific experiments and first-person testimonies to make the claims that it is possible to train ourselves to better handle our emotions and feelings, be more loving, enhance focus and attention, and facilitate the treatment of physical and mental diseases.

This paper studied the discourses and practices of Contemplative Studies by dividing them into two categories, Contemplative Science and Contemplative Pedagogy, based on the roles that scientific experimentation and first-person testimonies play as evidence; the way contemplative practice is defined; and the different roles scholars and scientists play in the practice. Organizing Contemplative Studies in the dual categories allowed this paper to situate the two categories in their proper contexts. The paper studied Contemplative Science within the discourse about scientific materialism and philosophy of mind. Additionally, it analyzed Contemplative Science, within the scope of this paper, as the interaction between science and Tibetan-Buddhism. On the other hand, the paper situated Contemplative Pedagogy in the conversation about liberal education, study of religion and subjective experience. Furthermore, it characterized Contemplative Pedagogy as the interaction between religion and higher education.

Based on scientific evidence, the main project of Contemplative Science is to research the effects of contemplative practices on physical, emotional and mental health and wellbeing, and to develop applications based on the results of the research in fields such as clinical practice and education. Scien-
tists, religious practitioners, and religious studies scholars are participants in Contemplative Science. Dissatisfied with the scientific materialist approach to the study of mind, Contemplative Science develops the neurophenomenological approach. This approach combines first-person and third-person approach of study allowing religious practitioners, mostly Tibetan-Buddhists at this time, to become active participants in the research. The Tibetan-Buddhist monks are not only valuable source of objective data (for instance of brain states during meditation) but also of subjective reports that corroborate the objective data. Scholars of religion engaged in the discourse and practice of Contemplative Science provide socio-historical data about the religious traditions and their practices, thus providing contextual background to the scientific studies. They also provide cultural history, facilitating the translation of these practices from one culture to another. Therefore, scholars of religion play a crucial role in the understanding of these practices in their native context and their transference in the context of American culture. Additionally, they facilitate conversations between religious practitioners and scientists. Furthermore, Contemplative Science at the present moment is limited to practices from religious traditions that have long history of practice and rich textual tradition.

Contemplative Science can be envisioned as a dialogue between science and religion with humanities as the moderator. That is exactly what is happening in annual conferences organized by the Mind and Life Institute where scientists, Tibetan- Buddhist monks and scholars of religion meet to exchange methodologies, knowledge and practices. Furthermore, universities collaborate with monasteries/monks to research and develop Contemplative Science. For instance, Emory University collaborates with the local Tibetan-Buddhist Drepung Loseling Monastery in Atlanta. In this kind of exchange, science is incorporating contemplative practices from Buddhism as tools for the first-person study of mind. Moreover, science is also appropriating Buddhist ethics and values of compassion that the discourse of Contemplative Science claims that traditional science is lacking. Buddhism, on the other hand, is incorporating values of modernity such as individualism, egalitarianism, and scientific rationalism. In the dis-
course, Buddhism is essentialized as being the practice of meditation which can be used for the study of mind and handling of emotions. In this process, Buddhism as presented in the discourse loses certain aspects such as hierarchical structures, mythologies, rituals, beliefs such as *karma*, reincarnation that do not resonate with modernity. David McMah, in his book *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, calls the discourse and practice resulting from the interchange between science and Buddhism as “Scientific Buddhism,” which, he says, is a part of larger movement of “Buddhist Modernism.”

On the other hand, Contemplative Pedagogy is an innovation in teaching that seeks to integrate traditional third-person teaching methods with first-person contemplative practices in various academic fields. Scholar-practitioners, who are themselves contemplative practitioners, take on the role of instructing and guiding students in contemplative practice, hence changing the classroom space and dynamics. Usually, scholar-practitioners introduce the practices they have training in into the classroom. In the discourse of Contemplative Pedagogy, contemplative practice becomes characterized as cultivation of a state of consciousness which makes it possible to integrate contemplative practice in any field and activity. Furthermore, because contemplative practices are integrated with traditional teaching methods, they may be modified to fit the particular context. Thus, unlike Contemplative Science that confines itself to practices from religious traditions with rich textual history and long history of application, Contemplative Pedagogy allows for innovation and invention in contemplative practice as traditional ones are adapted in secular contexts. For instance, practices such as contemplative listening, contemplative writing, and contemplative art are formed. Contemplative Pedagogy can take different forms, from the teacher practicing contemplative presence in the classroom, having minutes of silence before and after class, exploring number of practices throughout the semester along with studying affiliated texts, to training in a single practice all through the semester.

Although Contemplative Pedagogy makes frequent reference to the scientific evidence coming from Contemplative Science, first-person testimonies of scholar-practitioners and students take prece-
vidence as evidence of efficacy of contemplative practices. The themes of inner life—thoughts patterns, affective life, attention, focus, clarity, and ethical values; first person experiential learning and knowing; and testimonies of inner transformation are common in the discourse of Contemplative Pedagogy.

Scholar-practitioners argue that by neglecting the inner lives of students, liberal education has failed to fulfill its goals of “self-mastery” and “self-knowledge.” They claim that Contemplative Pedagogy can fulfill the goals of liberal arts and provide students with tools to handle their emotional life, cultivate ethical values, and become focused and attentive in class. Furthermore, Contemplative Pedagogy, they claim, also opens up new way of knowing from within for the students. Scholar-practitioners back up these claims with scientific evidence and testimonies of their own and student’s inner transformations.

Using Courtney Bender’s notion of spirituality as a dynamic category entangled in overlapping histories, institutions, practices and discourses that are often thought to be divergent, this paper characterized Contemplative Pedagogy as spirituality in higher education. Bender says that spirituality is entangled in both religious and secular discourses and practices. Likewise, Contemplative Pedagogy has overlapping discourses and practices of religion and secularity. Scholar-practitioners manage the categories of religion and secularity by presenting Contemplative Pedagogy as merging of the values of Eastern and Western Enlightenment; as coming together of “upside” of religion with the “upside” of modernity and liberal values; and as secularization of religion by stripping it of its creedal and metaphysical element and only incorporating the desired practice.

Both Contemplative Science and Contemplative Pedagogy face many questions and resistances. Stephen J. Laumakis and Gregory Robinson-Riegler point out that there is a growing interest on the part of some Western scientists in the study of consciousness and its explanation with “first-person” contemplative science methods in the last twenty years (see Figure 2). However, they point out that the larger Western scientific and psychological community has not embraced this approach. The methods of neurophenomenology and concepts of embodied cognition have been largely ignored by current sci-
cientific thinking about mind, brain, and consciousness. Mainstream psychologists, cognitive scientists and neuroscience researchers, they claim, have embraced neither the notion of “first-person” science of the mind and consciousness, nor its combination with third-person methods. Nonetheless, they point out that there is rapidly growing interest and scientists are finding it harder to ignore or repudiate the findings of Contemplative Science.  

Furthermore, there are issues in the adaptation of contemplative practices and their ethical frameworks from the native context to secular clinical and educational fields. Although an incorporation of ethical standards from religious traditions can be seen in the discourses of Contemplative Studies, in actual practice in clinical and education settings, often times, the ethical concerns and norms of the traditions do not make the transition in an explicit way, given that hospitals and clinics have a mandate to not push any particular religion. Dunne says that this is one of the main problems with the use of contemplative practices in secular contexts. He says that what emerges is “a camouflage, deliberate or in-

---

131 Stephen J. Laumakis and Gregory Robinson-Riegler, 36-38.
advertent, paradigm of what constitutes a good life." A normative behavior of a contemplative person emerges from most of the styles of contemplative practices being taught in secular context in the US. Dunne says, “I see a lot of problems with certain kinds of unquestioned paradigms becoming norms in our western context when we adopt these practices from other traditions into new situations such as healthcare, K-2 schooling or even universities." He says that because these values cannot be explicitly transferred, they get implicitly applied most of the time and become camouflaged, unexamined and problematic. Like Dunne, other scholars of Contemplative Studies, are aware of this issue and emphasize the need for humanities to play the role of studying critical cultural histories of the different traditions-in-interaction to make the incorporation of the contemplative practices effective.

Moreover, since the authoritative evidence in Contemplative Pedagogy is first-person experience, it faces additional challenges. That a scholar-practitioner had a certain transformative experience by practicing certain contemplative techniques does not guarantee that all students who participate in contemplative practices will have the same experience. Individual students have their own psychological and emotional make-up, and are in different levels of maturity. In this context, teaching the same practice to whole a class can be ineffective. Furthermore, like Dunne points out, contemplative practices often bring the student in confrontation with repressed emotions and feelings which can lead to mental and emotional breakdown. These issues point towards the need for further research and experimentation for a safe and effective application of Contemplative Pedagogy.

There are also risks of proselytization, cultural appropriation, and coercion in Contemplative Pedagogy. Scholar-practitioners claim that Contemplative Pedagogy does not require students to accept anything on faith or to commit to any particular faith. Roth says,

133 Personal Interview with John Dunne, Emory University. 11/27/2012.
134 Ibid.
135 Ibid.
137 Personal Interview with John Dunne, Emory University. 11/27/2012.
I make it clear that there is nothing students have to accept on faith – at least nothing more than they do in any college classroom. I have been in many classrooms that are more stifling than our Contemplative Studies Initiative classrooms because professors have their own “true way” of analyzing material and they will not brook any variation from that line. I make sure students know that they are free to accept or reject anything being studied; then there is no problem.  

Similarly, Louis Komjathy points out that Contemplative Pedagogy advocates “critical first-person approach,” much in the same way of a critical third-person approach. He says that students are encouraged to examine their assumptions and qualify their views. He claims that they only have to accept what which works for them. Scholar-practitioners argue that classes with contemplative element should not be mandatory; nonetheless, students who are interested in taking such a class should have an option in academic setting.

Furthermore, scholar-practitioners say that cultural appropriation can be avoided by presenting the practices in their proper context by providing the students with information about the religious traditions in which the practices originated. They argue that providing the students with information about key figures, sacred texts, belief systems, and traditions of practice and making students aware of any changes that the instructor might have made decreases the risk of cultural appropriation. While this could be possible in a religious studies classroom that delves deeper into the religious traditions, it is not an applicable argument for classes in fields such as physics, chemistry, or economics that integrate contemplative practices only for a small portion of the class. Applications of Contemplative Pedagogy in such contexts provide students with minimal contextual background on the practices they are asked to engage in which can lead to an incomplete understanding and ineffective application of contemplative practices.

A major concern in Contemplative Pedagogy is how to determine expertise and qualification of contemplative educators. Traditional teaching has a departmental setting that provides checks and bal-

---

139 Louis Komjathy in “Contemplative Pedagogy FAQs,” 170-171.
ances for the proficiency of educators in their respective fields. Being a pedagogical technique rather than a field, Contemplative Pedagogy does not have its own department that can fulfill the function. Moreover, contemplative educators, as of now, are commonly those that were hired on the basis of their academic expertise in the respective fields rather than their qualification as contemplative educators. This opens the door for self-proclaimed expertise, which by the nature of contemplative practices is difficult to validate in an educational setting. The question becomes- if the first-person testimonies of transformation of the scholar-practitioners are reliable.

Therefore, there is a need to develop ways to examine the credentials of contemplative educators. Simmer-Brown says that this problem can be resolved by allowing only such practitioners that have long history of engagement with a contemplative practice and have been certified to teach the practice they wish to introduce by an authority in the traditional lineage to become instructors in classrooms. She expresses her distrust in “self-made meditation teachers,” who have eclectic training. Given the number of religious traditions and the diversity within them, this can be problematic as it leads to the issue of determining the authenticity of a tradition and its authorities. However, as scientific evidences from Contemplative Science are establishing efficacy of certain traditions and practices, and developing scientific ways of monitoring the efficacy of contemplative practices and corroborating first person testimonies with hard evidence, there may be an outlet to this problem. Furthermore, organizations such as The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society provide training, retreats and a platform for interaction to contemplative educators where they can enhance their practice and contemplative pedagogy.

**Note:**

141 Simmer-Brown, “Training the Heart Responsibly,” *Meditation and the Classroom*, 112.
5. REFERENCES


Sarath, E. “Meditation, creativity, and consciousness: Charting future terrain within higher education.” *Teachers College Record*. 108(9), 1816-1841.


Contemplative Studies, Department of Religious Studies, Rice University <http://reli.rice.edu/content.aspx?id=770> (Accessed: 03/20/2013)


