

Contemplative Studies

Contemplative Studies (CS; COST) is an emerging interdisciplinary field dedicated to research and education on contemplative practice and contemplative experience, including the possible relevance and application to a wide variety of undertakings. As it is still in its formative moments, being expressed in various ways, the parameters of the field invite exploration and are open to debate. In the present chapter, I begin with an overview of the field in which emphasis is placed on defining characteristics. This is followed by a “meta-history” of the field, including critical reflection on cultural influences and emerging trends. Next, I discuss important programs, organizations, and venues. Here I highlight some examples as models and opportunities for reflection. The chapter concludes with reflection on critical issues in the field as currently expressed.

An Emerging Interdisciplinary Field

Contemplative Studies is an emerging interdisciplinary field dedicated to research and education on contemplative practice and contemplative experience,¹ including the possible relevance and application to a wide variety of undertakings. It may employ first-person, second-person, and third-person approaches, although “critical first-person discourse” is a defining characteristic. In short, Contemplative Studies represents a paradigm shift, a new model for research and education. There are some parallels and overlapping concerns with other fields of inquiry, such as consciousness studies, mysticism studies, neuroscience, psychology, Religious Studies, and so forth. Individuals familiar

with or located within religious traditions, especially the contemplative expressions of Christianity, might think that “Contemplative Studies” refers to the study and practice of contemplation, but the name is increasingly being used to designate the emerging field, the “contemplative movement.” Contemplative practice and contemplative experience are the primary focus and shared interest. As explored more fully in subsequent chapters, “contemplative practice” is a larger umbrella category; it encompasses approaches and practices more commonly referred to as “meditation,” “prayer,” and cognate disciplines. Contemplative practice refers to various approaches, disciplines, and methods for developing attentiveness, awareness, compassion, concentration, presence, wisdom, and the like. Possible connective strands or family resemblances include attentiveness, awareness, interiority, presence, silence, transformation, and a deepened sense of meaning and purpose (see Komjathy 2015). Such practices include not only religiously committed and tradition-based methods, but also ecumenical, spiritualist, and secular ones. Recognizing but even going beyond modern movement awareness practices, members of Contemplative Studies tend to understand “contemplative practice” in terms of a specific approach, an approach that may be applied to and expressed in almost any activity. This includes art, dance, writing, photography, research, teaching, theatre, walking, and so forth.² That is, as discussed below, the “interdisciplinary” or “multidisciplinary,” even “transdisciplinary,” dimension of Contemplative Studies may include almost any undertaking, area of interest, or field of inquiry. Along these lines, Contemplative Studies concerns itself with “contemplative experience,” or experiences that occur within the context of contemplative practice, are associated with particular contemplative practices, and/or are deemed significant by contemplatives and related communities. The field is also closely connected with “contemplative pedagogy,” or teaching and learning informed by and perhaps expressed as contemplative practice. While these are sometimes conflated, Contemplative Studies, in my way of thinking, encompasses contemplative pedagogy; contemplative pedagogy is one expression of Contemplative Studies, perhaps, albeit, an essential one.

Although the parameters of this exciting, controversial, and potentially subversive field are still being established, we may identify a specific *esprit de corps* (“spirit of body”), *gestalt* (“shape”/“form”), and *zeitgeist* (“spirit of the age”). It also involves a “paradigm shift” (see Kuhn 1996). One key characteristic and generally shared commitment is contemplative practice. Contemplative Studies involves, perhaps requires, *practice*. We may refer to this dimension of Contemplative Studies as “practice commitment.” For this type of inquiry to be fully successful, individuals need to have direct

experience with personal contemplative practice. One critically investigates one's personal experience, whether psychological or somatic, in the context of one's own actual practice. This includes recognition of embodied, lived, sociopolitical, and other layers of practice and experience. We may refer to this second key characteristic as "critical subjectivity," or "critical first-person discourse" (Roth 2006, 2008). As first described by the Dutch psychologist Han de Wit in his influential *Contemplative Psychology* (1991),

Psychology of religion, "of" being used in the conventional sense of "about," is a form of what is nowadays called *third-person psychology*. Psychology in the third-person is *about* other people, about "him" or "her" or "them"; it has other people as its object of study ... Contemplative psychology, however, focuses rather strongly on personal experience as it occurs to me or us. While also accepting the approach of a third-person psychology, contemplative psychology comprises a *first-person psychology* and methodology that includes subjectivity or "private experience." (31–32, italics in original)

We will return to psychological approaches to Contemplative Studies and the concept of "experience" later. For the moment, we may note that this line of inquiry is not just knowledge *about*, but knowledge *of* and *from* (see also Forman 1993, 1998; Komjathy 2016a, 2016b, 2017a). The practical and experiential dimension of the field is one area of discomfort for more conservative individuals, including some educators and scholars. Rightfully so. In addition to practice commitment and critical subjectivity, members of the field generally recognize and emphasize the beneficial and transformative effects of contemplative practice. These extend from positive psychosomatic changes to forms of sociopolitical engagement and application, including action directed toward increased peace and social justice. The latter may involve concern for the alleviation of suffering, even extended to animal welfare. That is, there is an ethical and social, or at least an existential and psychological, dimension. We may refer to this third characteristic of Contemplative Studies as "character development."³ Given such commitments, it is legitimate to question the informing motivations, rationales, agendas, and the like. As discussed below, these are often sources of concern for potential critics, though the latter's discomfort may increase considerably when the gaze is reversed to illuminate their own unrecognized biases as well as larger social forces and institutional structures, including issues of access, discrimination, power, privilege, and so forth (see Chapter 7). In any case, some generally shared values of members of the field include awareness, empathy, interiority, presence, reflection, silence, wisdom, and of course

appreciation of the beneficial and transformative influences of contemplative practice itself (see Chapter 3). Individuals familiar with ancient Hellenistic culture and the monastic foundations of the university may hear echoes here (see, e.g., Hadot 1995; Ferzoco and Muessig 2000), but comparative Religious Studies reveals some important cross-cultural parallels with respect to contemplative practice and contemplative experience (see, e.g., Komjathy 2015). In this way, there is overlap with Spirituality as an Academic Discipline (see, e.g., Frohlich 2001; Dreyer and Burrows 2005; Sherman 2014a)⁴ and even the “new monasticism” movement (see, e.g., McEntee and Bucko 2015). That is, from a certain perspective, there might be some connections with critical adherence, lived religion, interreligious dialogue, and even comparative theology. However, many, perhaps most, members of the field generally conceive of it or wish to conceive of it as a “secular,” “objective,” and/or “scientific” undertaking, as explicitly “not religious.” This is partially a protective strategy, rooted in fear of potential opposition to perceived sectarianism and (covert) proselytization. I will critically investigate these various claims and views in the pages that follow. For the moment, we may say that practice commitment, critical subjectivity, and character development are three essential features of the emerging field. While alternative and complementary approaches (e.g., historicism, neuroscience) are possible, the field would not be what it is and what it may be without these characteristics.

As mentioned, the field of Contemplative Studies is still in its formative phase, even though certain trends and social expressions have been established. Although there is some coherence as well as shared interests and values, Contemplative Studies as a field is diverse, disparate, and decentralized. There is no single or dominant model or authority. In fact, as the history of the field reveals (see below), it may be that egalitarianism and anti-authoritarianism are implicit values. Given the recent pedigree, radicalness, and diversity of the field, there is thus great potential for exploration, collaboration, and innovation. That is, individuals and communities with affinities for contemplative practice and associated applications have an opportunity to participate here. In terms of my own involvement, I have found that acceptance and experimentation are the norm. We do not really know what we are doing or what is possible. I do not say this as support for critique and dismissal, as though participating individuals are unconscious and uncritical. While there clearly are blind spots, areas of denial and resistance, and tendencies requiring deeper reflection, the field evidences a high degree of critical awareness and intentional development. However, there is no single approach or mandated

structure for participation, even if some patterns are becoming more entrenched. Perhaps this is analogous to the Indian parable of blind men trying to describe an elephant, with each understanding a certain part that they have touched. Ultimately, Contemplative Studies represents an open field (no pun intended) for interested individuals. In its current and emerging expression, it has a vaguely recognizable form with a spaciousness capable of encompassing diverse interests, approaches, and articulations. It invites and encourages personal inquiry, reflection, and perhaps application. This even extends to informed and thoughtful critics. From my perspective, the *contemplative* in Contemplative Studies presupposes such characteristics, including a commitment to meta-reflection. The latter involves the investigation of unquestioned assumptions and the overcoming of ingrained opinions, both within and beyond the field. It involves asking to what extent the field's members and diverse expressions are actually contemplative.

Given the recent emergence of Contemplative Studies, there have been few explicit discussions on a conceptual and theoretical level. One of the earliest attempts to describe the field was written by Harold Roth (2006), director of the interdisciplinary Contemplative Studies Initiative at Brown University:

Prospects for a New Field

A new field of academic endeavor devoted to the critical study of contemplative states of experience is developing in North America. It focuses on the many ways human beings have found, across cultures and across time, to concentrate, broaden and deepen conscious awareness. Contemplative studies is the rubric under which this research and teaching can be organized. In the field of contemplative studies we attempt to:

1. *Identify the varieties of contemplative experiences of which human beings are capable;*
2. *Find meaningful scientific explanations for them;*
3. *Cultivate first-person knowledge of them;*
4. *Critically access their nature and significance.*

That is, we study the underlying philosophy, psychology and phenomenology of human contemplative experience through a combination of traditional third-person approaches and more innovative, critical first-person approaches. In other words, we study contemplative experience from the following perspectives:

1. *Science, particularly psychology, neuroscience, cognitive science and clinical medicine;*
2. *The humanities, exploring the contemplative dimensions of literature, philosophy and religion;*
3. *The creative arts, focusing on the study of the role of contemplation in both the creation and the appreciation of the visual and fine arts, creative writing and in the various performing arts of dance, drama and music.* (Roth 2008: 19–20, italics in original; see also Roth 2006, especially 1794)

While this is largely a description of the Brown program, what might be labeled the “Brown approach,” offered as a model for the larger field, it remains a foundational and helpful starting point. It remains viable and has influenced my own conceptions (see Komjathy 2015, 2016b). Roth emphasizes the importance of both third-person and “critical first-person” approaches. The former involves studying contemplative practice from the position of observer and outsider (“objective”; “they”), while the latter from that of participant and insider (subjective; “I”), at least to a certain extent. In technical language, these are etic and emic approaches, respectively. The critical first-person approach has some parallels with Mary Frohlich’s notion of “critical interiority” (2007) and with the “participatory approach” advocated by Jorge Ferrer and his colleagues (Ferrer and Sherman 2008).⁵ As mentioned, Contemplative Studies is distinguished by what I have labeled above as “practice commitment” and “critical subjectivity,” although conceptually Roth emphasizes contemplative experience over contemplative practice. In addition to subjective investigation of meditation and cognate disciplines, Contemplative Studies also employs more familiar research methodologies, such as historical contextualization, literary analysis, philosophical reflection, and so forth. In my way of thinking, individuals may simply conduct research on contemplative practice and contemplative experience, without having any direct personal experience with lived and

living expressions. In addition, the field tends to aspire to be more “objective” and “scientific,” particularly through empirical and quantitative research. The latter includes various forms of psychological inventories, clinical applications, and neuroscientific studies. This approach is sometimes called “contemplative science” (see below; Chapters 6 and 7). In fact, Roth himself refers to the meditation sessions utilized in his courses as “labs” (see Roth 2008), in the sense of the human body as a locus of experimentation and discovery. Thus, the “critical” dimension of critical first-person discourse involves systematic investigation of and reflection on one’s own psychosomatic experience, including unquestioned assumptions and ingrained opinions. As discussed below, although recognizing the importance of subjectivity, members of Contemplative Studies resist the tendency to privilege one’s own “experience” and the danger of narcissism; that is, the “contemplative approach” of Contemplative Studies is rooted in modern academic values of systematic, critical investigation and public examination. While Contemplative Studies empowers individuals, larger claims about contemplative practice and contemplative experience are open to discussion and debate. Roth also helpfully outlines some interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary trajectories, which he places in the categories of the creative arts, the humanities, and the sciences. Here one also thinks of the emphasis on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) or the so-called professional schools (e.g., business, law, medicine) in some programs and universities. I will return to the Brown program as well as complementary and competing models later in the present chapter and in Chapter 5.

Developing Roth, and drawing upon conversations with other leaders in the field and my own experience at the University of San Diego and in the American Academy of Religion, I have presented and advocated a more inclusive vision for and expression of Contemplative Studies. Specifically, I imagine a field that is truly interdisciplinary, collaborative, and integrated. In such an expression, each approach and area of inquiry would be recognized for its unique contributions, and cross-disciplinary exchange would result in a fuller understanding of contemplative practice and contemplative experience. No single approach would be privileged or given authoritative interpretive status. For the field of Contemplative Studies to realize its goal of comprehensive, sophisticated, and integrated understanding of contemplative practice and contemplative experience, a multidimensional and multi-perspectival approach is required (see Figure 1.1).

This vision is also well represented by the cover of this book, which depicts a detail of a walking path made from river stones (see also Komjathy 2015). Like

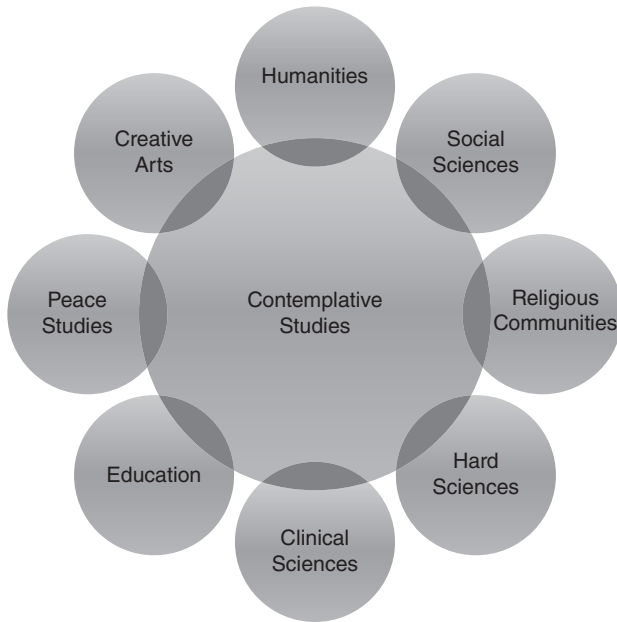


Figure 1.1 Contemplative Studies as interdisciplinary field.

such a path, Contemplative Studies is cobbled together by multiple hands with materials containing many different histories, textures, and characteristics. In this respect, we may recognize and embrace a more complex mapping of potential approaches and areas of inquiry, with their own contributions. Specifically, while we find many individuals in various clinical, creative, humanistic, professional, and scientific disciplines engaging contemplative practice and contemplative experience,⁶ there is also great potential in the areas of comparative theology, education, ethnic studies, peace studies, Religious Studies, and so forth (see Chapters 6 and 8). In fact, a number of “centers of teaching” at different American universities are beginning to engage Contemplative Studies, and contemplative practice is beginning to be employed in every level of the American education system and beyond. There are also increasing numbers of publications on “critical pedagogy” and the “scholarship of teaching” that address and incorporate a contemplative approach, including the practical dimensions and transformative effects (see Chapter 5).

One noteworthy, and perhaps radical, element of my model involves the inclusion of religious adherents and religious communities (“critical adherent discourse” [CAD]), which I have advocated within the field of Religious Studies as well (see, e.g., Komjathy 2015, 2016a). As discussed in

the pages that follow, there is a tendency in Contemplative Studies to exclude religious adherents, to emphasize “secular,” “non-sectarian,” and perhaps “spiritual” approaches and techniques.⁷ This statement must be slightly qualified. A select and elite group of religious leaders, specifically individuals willing to “go with the program,” especially with respect to hybrid spiritualist appropriations as well as clinical and neuroscientific agendas, are included and given voice. However, “professional contemplatives,” such as those associated with formal contemplative communities or particular monastic orders,⁸ are more often than not ignored, dismissed, or excluded. In this respect, the perspectives of such religiously committed contemplatives may help to clarify and challenge certain tendencies and issues. More engagement with actual religious adherents, specifically individuals with a lifelong commitment to contemplative practice, will help to strengthen the field and deepen individuals’ personal practice and understanding. In terms of potential critics, this should include adherents who have reservations or actively object to the field’s project.

In any case, Figure 1.1 intentionally depicts Contemplative Studies as the primary field, with each particular discipline or approach as independent, but potentially overlapping fields. This is done to suggest that the latter, the shaded areas, are relatively small. Only some associated individuals will be interested in Contemplative Studies, and only some dimensions of those fields may be applicable to Contemplative Studies. Ideally, however, members of Contemplative Studies will be open to the relevant perspectives and insights (see Chapter 6). As an alternative educational, scholarly, and perhaps personal and communal model, I would hope that Contemplative Studies would root itself in mutual respect and mutual support, in dialogue and collaboration. Finally, although personal contemplative practice and direct experience with such practice tend to be hallmarks of Contemplative Studies, I believe that this need not be the case for *every* participant and contributor. We of course need “scholar-practitioners,” “insiders,” and “participants” for the field to develop and flourish.⁹ However, Contemplative Studies will also benefit from individuals who only utilize third-person and their own discipline-specific approaches to the study of contemplative practice and contemplative experience. Not everyone in the field needs to engage the various associated disciplines or research findings. For example, historians of religious traditions and textual scholars of contemplative literature have made and could make significant contributions. The same is true with respect to clinical and neuroscientific approaches. One need not be a “contemplative” to participate in the field.

Toward a (Meta) History of the Field

Every discipline, field, and movement has a particular history. More conventional historiographies emphasize major events and influences, specifically origins and development. More comprehensive historiographies also provide larger inventories, documenting frequently unrecognized tendencies and forces. That is, there is a straightforward history, often agreeable to participants, that resembles a linear series of related and connected moments; there is also a “meta” or critical history, often disagreeable to collaborators, that examines deeper structures and informing commitments, including cultural influences and social contexts. A variety of historical accounts, with their own orientations, agendas, social locations, and possibly self-justifying narratives, are thus possible (see, e.g., Benjamin 1968; Foucault 1972; Nietzsche 1980).

In terms of *Contemplative Studies*, a straightforward history of the field would probably begin with events in the 2000s, while acknowledging precursor developments in the 1990s and possibly even from the 1960s forward (see Komjathy 2015).¹⁰ However, this would not enable us to understand the larger historical momentum and cultural trends. A meta-history is required if we wish to understand “why this, why now?” Although members of this emerging field often take it as a self-evident given, observers and “outsiders” frequently express perplexity, dismay, and even resistance.¹¹ Given the problematic and potentially subversive characteristics of the contemplative movement, which are discussed in more detail below, we should attempt to investigate the deeper structures and cultural contexts. For this, we need to undertake an exercise in cultural studies and intellectual history. As I have suggested elsewhere (Komjathy 2007, 2015), contextualization (i.e., locating events, movements, people, texts, and so forth in their associated culture, society, and historical moments) is essential, including with respect to disciplinary approaches and commitments themselves. Suffice it to say, a comprehensive account, with the necessary details and analysis, is beyond the confines of the present chapter and would require an entire book on its own. Here I will simply provide a brief and preliminary sketch.

Contemplative Studies is primarily an American movement, although some Europeans are also prominent and influential. In terms of demographics, the vast majority of members are Euro-Americans (“white people”), although there is increasing awareness of and concern over apparent homogeneity and resultant engagement with ethnic studies and critical race theory (see below and Chapter 8). The field is also largely populated by scholars,

adherents, or sympathizers, knowingly or unknowingly, of Asian religions (“Eastern philosophy” and “wisdom traditions”), especially Buddhism. Thus, although one might begin the meta-history of Contemplative Studies earlier, I would suggest that 1893 is a key moment, as it is for American religious and academic history more generally.¹² That year corresponds to the World’s Parliament of Religions (WPR), which was held at the Chicago World’s Fair. Connected to earlier Western engagements with Asian religions, such as those of the American Transcendentalists (see Versluis 1993, 2014), Theosophical Society (see Lavoie 2012), and Max Müller’s Sacred Books of the East series (1879–1910, 50 vols.; see Stone 2002), the World’s Parliament of Religions was a watershed moment: it gathered together and provided a platform for major ethnic birthright representatives of various Asian religions (see Seager and Eck 1993; Seager 2009; also Tweed and Prothero 1999).¹³ Some of these individuals subsequently became the earliest Asian missionary-teachers in the United States (e.g., Soyen Shaku [1860–1919], Vivekananda [1863–1902]). These teachers and their spiritual heirs also helped to establish some of the earliest Western organizations associated with Asian religions (e.g., Buddhist Churches of America, Self-Realization Fellowship, Vedanta Society). For present purposes, such events are noteworthy for the introduction and increasing opportunities for the study of “meditation” in the United States, specifically Asian techniques as practiced by Euro-American (largely Protestant Christian) sympathizers and eventually convert adherents.

These historical and cultural developments culminated in changes to US immigration law in 1965, which abolished earlier quota-based restrictions on Asian immigration (see Tweed and Prothero 1999). Such modifications both reflected and influenced the larger cultural trends in 1960s America. They led to an influx of Asian immigrant teachers, to increasing numbers of religious communities associated with them and their spiritual successors, and to greater access to Asian meditation methods, especially those associated with Buddhism and Hinduism. Such techniques included Transcendental Meditation, Vipassanā, and Zen (see Chapters 2 and 4). These years also corresponded to the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) in the Roman Catholic Church, the seminal *Nostra Aetate* (“In Our Time”) declaration, and the increasing call for ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. Simultaneously, the period witnessed an amplified presence and development of “spirituality,” that is, personal religious expressions unaffiliated with religious traditions and often rooted in an explicit critique of institutional religion. This “new religious movement” (NRM) is often referred to as the “New Age movement,” “unchurched spirituality,” “inter-spirituality,” and

more critically “hybrid spirituality” (see below; also Komjathy 2015).¹⁴ It corresponds to the more recent “nones” and “spiritual, but not religious” (SBNR) phenomenon. There were thus accompanying demands on the part of Euro-American consumers to “untether” practices from their source-cultures and source-traditions, with the latter often identified as “limitations” and even “trappings.” It is thus no coincidence that the first-generation representatives and proponents of Contemplative Studies came of age during the 1960s and 1970s, with such contemporaneous countercultural values as anti-authoritarianism, egalitarianism, experimentation, freedom, independence, justice, peace, progress, and so forth (see Braunstein and Doyle 2001; Oppenheimer 2003). That is, the pioneers of the field are part of the “Baby Boomer generation” (see Roof 1999; cf. Beaudoin 1998; Wuthnow 2007), individuals who were born between the years 1946 and 1964.¹⁵ This is not to deny the authentic vocations of contemplative educators or their profound impact on their students. Rather, these details are meant to point toward key cultural influences and social patterns. Significantly, even Centering Prayer, an ecumenical Christian contemplative practice and movement, emerged under these same conditions (see Komjathy 2015).

Other key cultural influences on the emergence of Contemplative Studies include Western Buddhism, meditation research, hybrid spirituality, and critical pedagogy (see Figure 1.2), often in complex combinations. Each of these is an intricate phenomenon in itself, but here we are primarily concerned with the elements that influenced and were incorporated into the emerging field. As mentioned, the 1960s saw the increased presence of Asian immigrant teachers of meditation, with the most prominent probably being Maharishi Mahesh (1918–2008) and his Transcendental Meditation™ (TM™) movement (see, e.g., Forsthoefel and Humes 2005; Williamson 2010; Gleig and Williamson 2013).¹⁶ The latter technique is a modified Hindu *mantra* practice. Maharishi Mahesh also was a pivotal influence on early scientific research on meditation, as he sought to validate claims about the unique benefits of TM (“Vedic science”). This early, often problematic research established a major precedent and inspiration for what would become the “neuroscientific study of meditation,” eventually referred to as “contemplative neuroscience” or “contemplative science” (see Chapters 6 and 7). Two other key early meditation teachers in the United States were the Japanese Zen Buddhist Shunryu Suzuki (1904–1971) and Tibetan Buddhist Chogyam Trungpa (1939–1987). These individuals may be thought of as placeholders for the increasing interest in and access to Zen and Tibetan Buddhist meditation. Simultaneously, the Vipassanā movement

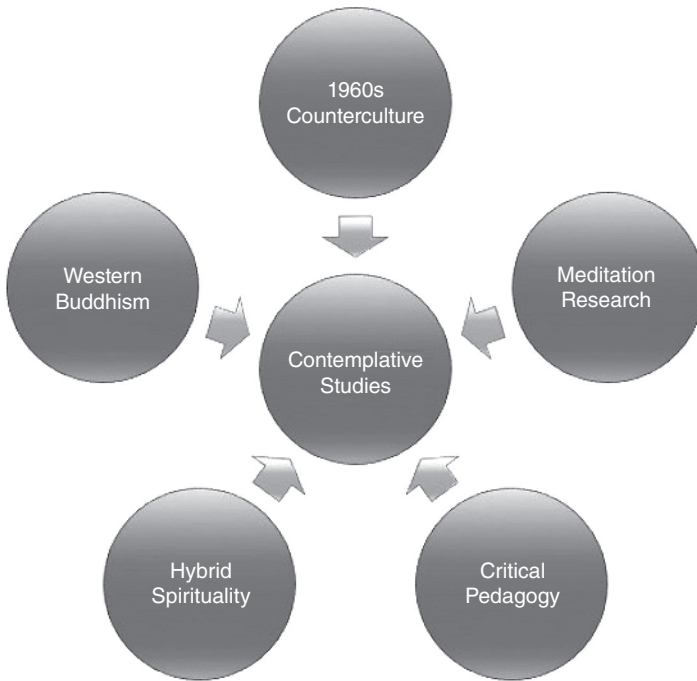


Figure 1.2 Cultural influences on the emergence of Contemplative Studies.

(see Chapters 2 and 4), also known as the Insight Meditation movement, represented by such individuals as Joseph Goldstein (b.1944), Jack Kornfield (b.1945), and Sharon Salzberg (b.1952),¹⁷ was becoming established. These developments eventually led to the creation of early forms of therapeutic meditation, such as Herbert Benson's (b.1935) Relaxation Response and Jon Kabat-Zinn's (b.1944) Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR), including the establishment of Mind–Body Medicine (see Harrington 2008; Komjathy 2015). MBSR has become particularly influential among psychologists and clinicians, not to mention practitioners of “secular meditation.” Synthesizing these details, it becomes apparent that the fusion of interests in Western Buddhism, meditation, science, and therapeutic concerns, one of the most visible expressions of Contemplative Studies, has a particular history. We might refer to this as “Buddhocentric Contemplative Studies,” and more critically as “Buddho-neuroscientific hegemony.” While early meditation research focused on Transcendental Meditation and Vipassanā, more recent expressions focus on Zazen and Tibetan Buddhist

methods (see Engel 1997b; Murphy, Donovan, and Taylor 1999; Andresen 2000; Lutz, Dunne, and Davidson 2007).¹⁸ As discussed below, early interest in neuroscience and Tibetan Buddhist meditation partially developed out of the collaboration of the 14th Dalai Lama (b.1935),¹⁹ the American entrepreneur R. Adam Engle (b.1942), and the Chilean neuroscientist Francisco Varela (1946–2001), and resulted in the establishment of the Mind & Life Institute in 1990. A key issue here is the relationship between Buddhism and science (see Lopez 2008; also McMahan 2008; Faure 2012). Specifically, one notices a conception of Buddhism as compatible with science, and even inherently scientific. Another key influence is hybrid spirituality (see Lewis and Melton 1992; Heelas 1996; Hanegraaff 1998; Taylor 1999; Barnard 2001; Goldman 2012; Schmidt 2012). This is not to say that all, or even most, members of Contemplative Studies are hybrid spiritualists. Rather, the ubiquity of hybrid spirituality in modern American society, with the associated secularized Protestant values of anti-institutionalism, anti-clericalism, egalitarianism, individualism, and simplification, often frames and exerts influence over the field. There are, in turn, related patterns of appropriation and commodification (see below). Here we should note that the history of such categories as “meditation,” “contemplative practice,” and the like has yet to be written (see Engel 1997a; Gill 2005; Underwood 2005; Baier 2009; Komjathy 2015); this includes the emergence of “meditation,” and even “mindfulness,” as an independent practice and a new religious movement (see Chapters 2, 4, and 7). Finally, critical pedagogy, especially what has become known as “spirituality in education” (see Chapter 5), exerted influence on the emergence of Contemplative Studies. That is, as discussed below, many members of the field believe in values-based education, transformative teaching and learning, and the necessity of educational reform. In this respect, it is noteworthy that one of the earliest models of contemplative education, in which formal meditation became part of the curriculum, developed at Naropa University, which is an accredited, private liberal arts, Buddhism-informed college in Boulder, Colorado established by Chogyam Trungpa and his supporters in 1974.

Moving from wide-angle and telephoto lenses to macro ones, from panoramic and distant views to the immediate situation, the field of Contemplative Studies as such first emerged in the 2000s. It appears that Harold Roth of Brown University, a scholar of Daoism (Taoism) and a Zen Buddhist practitioner, was the first person to use the term “Contemplative Studies” (see Roth 2006, 2008), specifically in the context of the Brown Contemplative Studies Initiative. While this is most likely

the case, I would also point to various earlier publications, such as *Seeds of Contemplation* (1949) and *Contemplative Prayer* (1969) by the American Trappist Catholic monk Thomas Merton (1915–1968),²⁰ and earlier inter-religious and inter-monastic gatherings as indirect influences (see Komjathy 2015). In any case, during this time, “Contemplative Studies” also became used to identify programs at Emory University and Rice University, among others (see below). Members of the field collectively adopted the term “contemplative practice,” rather than the narrower “meditation,” as an umbrella category in order to include a broader range of approaches and methods. As discussed in Chapter 2, while encompassing meditation, prayer, and cognate disciplines, “contemplative practice” may also include art, dance, literature, martial arts, movement studies (somatics), music, photography, theatre, and so forth.²¹ Related approaches and methods may also be applied to any discipline or undertaking. The collaboration of the directors of some of these programs led to the establishment of the Contemplative Studies Group of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) in 2010. Anne Klein (Rice University) and I served as founding co-chairs, while the steering committee consisted of Thomas Coburn (Naropa University; Brown University), Fran Grace (University of Redlands), Harold Roth (Brown University), and Judith Simmer-Brown (Naropa University) (see Coburn *et al.* 2011). Significantly, with the exception of me, at the time every member was a tenured full professor. This provides some insights into the politics of the field, which I will address toward the end of this chapter. “Contemplative Studies” has increasingly become the preferred name for the field since the institution of the International Symposium for Contemplative Studies (ISCS; 2012, 2014, 2016), which is organized under the auspices of the Mind & Life Institute. While early deliberations centered on using the name “Contemplative Science,”²² the organizers eventually selected “Contemplative Studies” under the influence of Roth and support of Clifford Saron, who were serving on the steering committee, and of the AAR program unit (Harold Roth, Clifford Saron, pers. comm.). The existence of the latter helped to reveal that Contemplative Studies had become a larger academic field, beyond any one particular program or group of people. The MLI-organized event now identifies itself as the “premier meeting for Contemplative Studies,” although for contemplative pedagogy that moniker probably applies most to the annual ACMHE Conference and Summer Session on Contemplative Pedagogy through the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society and for Religious Studies it

more clearly corresponds to the annual meeting of the Contemplative Studies Group of the American Academy of Religion.

When scholars outside of Contemplative Studies, especially individuals associated with Religious Studies, engage the field, they frequently ask questions equivalent to “why this, why now?” I have attempted to outline origins, developments, and contexts above, but this type of question also relates to rationales, motivations, and values. Interestingly, I have heard similar inquiries (and implicit critiques) from clergy, especially with respect to concerns over campus ministry and perceived relativization of their preferred form of religiosity. Given the diversity and complexity of the emerging field, a more complete answer would require extensive ethnographic research, interviews, and direct conversations. There are psychological and interpersonal dimensions beyond the cultural influences and social contexts. In this way, involvement in Contemplative Studies possibly resembles contemplative practice itself: While the latter can be contextualized, such contextualization does not explain personal experiences with and the transformative effects of practice (see Chapter 3). This occurs in individual and social lives. In my experience and observations, members of Contemplative Studies generally believe in the beneficial and transformative effects of contemplative practice, especially dedicated and prolonged practice. This includes the importance of interiority and silence for human flourishing, whether personal or communal. Such individuals also tend to engage in deep reflection, reflection that recognizes potential contributions and that results in particular critiques and responses. Specifically, members of the field generally value holistic and integrated education, hallmarks, it should be mentioned, of a liberal arts and humanities-based education. There is thus an accompanying critique of various dimensions of the American education system, and possibly the larger American culture. Some perceived deficiencies include careerism, competitiveness, corporatization, homogenization, hyper-intellectualism, instrumentalism, opportunism, rankism, scientism (science as religion), technocracy, and so forth. As discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, the issue of scientific and technocratic tendencies is somewhat complex in the field. In terms of daily academic life, one also might, unthinkable, point toward widespread dysfunction and social distortion. For caring and considerate individuals, modern academic life, with its emphasis on power, prestige, and privilege, often results in feelings of meaninglessness and dissatisfaction. That is, personal and perhaps collective contemplative practice may help one overcome what B. Alan Wallace of the Santa Barbara Institute for Consciousness Studies calls the “taboo of subjectivity” (2000). We do not need to accept alienation from ourselves, especially through conformity to demands for

disembodiment and aberrations of “objectivity” (see Zimbardo 2007; Milgram 2009). In addition, as research suggests, many students are primarily interested in exploring existential and spiritual dimensions of human being (see, e.g., HERI 2005, 2006; Walvoord 2007). For individuals with such affinities, concerns, interests, and commitments, Contemplative Studies, especially as expressed in contemplative pedagogy (see Chapter 5), offers one potential methodology for addressing these and similar issues.

Programs, Organizations, and Venues

Contemplative Studies is currently expressed and being explored in a variety of academic programs, organizations, and venues. The most prominent academic programs include those of Brown University, California Institute of Integral Studies, Emory University, Naropa University, Rice University, University of Michigan, University of Redlands, and University of Virginia. Programs are also emerging at Centre College, Evergreen State College, New York University, Oregon State University, Ramapo College, Syracuse University, Texas Christian University, University of British Columbia, University of San Diego, University of Wisconsin, Madison, and Vanderbilt University, among others.

Steps toward Developing a Contemplative Studies Program

Phase 1

- Personal inquiry
- Informal conversations
- Guest lectures
- Workshops/seminars
- Meditation group

Phase 2

- Discussion/reading group
- Professional Learning Community (PLC)
- Workshops/seminars
- Faculty lectures
- Course development

Phase 3

Living Learning Community (LLC)

“Clusters”

Campus events

Additional courses

Phase 4

Interdisciplinary minor/major

Contemplative space/classroom

Conferences

Phase 5

Contemplative Studies program

In addition to a more integrated and multidisciplinary curriculum, academic programs offer the possibility of formal, campus-wide lectures, seminars, and events. Here it is important to recognize that most of the major programs are in private institutions of higher education, and, due to the legal separation of church and state, there may be particular challenges to utilizing a Contemplative Studies approach in public and governmentally funded institutions (see Chapters 2 and 5). This highlights the issue of locatedness, positionality, and participation (see below). Some of these programs are more interdisciplinary and integrated than others. For example, there is increasing interest among psychologists, neuroscientists, and healthcare professionals, with their own discipline-specific expressions. Some key organizations and research centers include the following: Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine (BHI; Massachusetts General Hospital); Center for Contemplative Mind in Society (CMind; CCMIS)²³ and its Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education (ACMHE); Center for Healthy Minds (CHM; University of Wisconsin, Madison); Center for Mind and Brain (CMB; University of California, Davis); Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Healthcare, and Society (CFM; University of Massachusetts Medical School); Contemplative Sciences Center (University of Virginia); Contemplative Studies Group (CSG) of the American Academy of Religion; Fetzer Institute; Garrison Institute; Mind & Life Institute (MLI); Mindfulness in Education Network (MiEN); and Santa Barbara Institute for Consciousness Studies (SBI). It is not my intention here to review these various programs. Interested individuals may

peruse the associated websites or participate in the associated offerings.²⁴ Rather, I will highlight some representative and influential examples, particularly as models and opportunities for reflection.

As mentioned above, one of the most developed and integrated programs is the Contemplative Studies Initiative (CSI) at Brown University, although readers would also benefit from consulting the programs at Naropa University and University of Virginia. As discussed in Chapter 5, these universities have developed university- and curriculum-wide courses and programs. According to the Brown CSI website,

The Contemplative Studies Initiative is a group of Brown faculty with diverse academic specializations who are united around a common interest in studying the underlying philosophy, psychology, and phenomenology of contemplative experience, across time, cultures and traditions. Following the establishment of our Concentration, the Initiative continues to work to coordinate research and teaching across the diverse fields of Contemplative Studies at Brown, including Arts and Sciences, Medicine and Public Health.

As of May 2014, Contemplative Studies is an official concentration at Brown! The concentration investigates the underlying philosophical, psychological, and scientific bases of human contemplative experience. Students pursue a “third-person” academic approach drawn from the humanities and sciences to analyze the cultural, historical, and scientific underpinnings of contemplative experiences in religion, art, music, and literature. This is developed in combination with a “critical first-person” approach based in practical experience of contemplative techniques and methods to provide an integrated understanding of the role of contemplative thought and experience in societies and on the individuals who constitute them. We also support independent and dual concentrations in the Contemplative Creative Arts.

The Contemplative Studies Initiative also pursues an active program of contemplative scientific research through the Clinical and Affective Neuroscience Lab, the Translational Neuroscience Lab, and the Laboratory for Clinical and Perceptual Learning. Student lab members present their research in a bi-annual research symposium, and publish scientific articles of their work.

Here we find parallels with my earlier discussion of Roth’s vision for the field of Contemplative Studies. What is noteworthy for present purposes is the diverse, collaborative, and interdisciplinary nature of the program.

The organizations associated with Contemplative Studies, broadly and inclusively conceived, are diverse. However, one generally shared characteristic

is social engagement—that is, the transformative power and application of contemplative practice to address various issues and problems. As discussed in Chapter 3, this challenges some of the assumptions about meditation as “navel gazing” and a form of “escapism.” Let us briefly examine the mission and vision statements of some prominent organizations, many of which also organize conferences and workshops:

- **Center for Contemplative Mind in Society:** “The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society transforms higher education by supporting and encouraging the use of contemplative/introspective practices and perspectives to create active learning and research environments that look deeply into experience and meaning for all in service of a more just and compassionate society.”
- **Fetzer Institute:** “To foster awareness of the power of love and forgiveness in the emerging global community. People across the globe, from all cultures and traditions, embrace love and forgiveness in daily life. These values are universally viewed as central to the fabric of humanity. Yet, the emerging global community has few institutions dedicated to deepening the understanding and fostering deeper awareness of these values. In this context, the Fetzer Institute pursues a unique role—working to investigate, activate, and celebrate the power of love and forgiveness as a practical force for good in today’s world. We are interested in how people truly experience and understand love and forgiveness from their diverse points of view, especially from the perspective of their daily work in the world.”
- **Garrison Institute:** “The Garrison Institute applies the transformative power of contemplation to today’s pressing social and environmental concerns, helping build a more compassionate, resilient future. We envision and work to build a future in which contemplative ideas and methods are increasingly mainstream, and are applied at scale to create the conditions for positive, systemic social and environmental change. A positive state of mind is a critical condition for a positive future, because it profoundly affects future behavior. Contemplation will be increasingly recognized and practiced as a key pathway to positive states of mind and behavior, helping to cultivate caring, insight and courage in individuals, to forge new ways of thinking, new learning and leadership networks among key leaders and groups, and to shift collective values, worldviews and practices in society.”

- **Mind & Life Institute:** “The Mind & Life Institute is a non-profit organization committed to building a scientific understanding of the mind as a way to help reduce suffering and promote human flourishing. To accomplish this, we foster interdisciplinary dialogue between Western science, philosophy, humanities, and contemplative traditions, supporting the integration of first-person inquiry through meditation and other contemplative practices into traditional scientific methodology.”

Simply stated, these organizations believe that contemplative practice has the power to change societies and the larger human condition in beneficial ways. Collectively, they emphasize such values as the alleviation of suffering, awareness, compassion, human flourishing, peace, and social justice. Deeper engagement with their various projects reveals initiatives that address educational reform, environmental degradation, personal healing and wellness, poverty relief, urban renewal, and similar commitments and activities.

Given space constraints, I would simply like to highlight two of the most prominent and influential organizations, with some critical reflection on perhaps unrecognized assumptions and agendas. These are the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society (CMind), headquartered in Northampton, Massachusetts, and the Mind & Life Institute, formerly headquartered in Hadley, Massachusetts, and now located in Charlottesville, Virginia. Observant readers will note the high concentration of Contemplative Studies in the northeast part of the United States. Both of these organizations have been instrumental in the formation and development of Contemplative Studies. Briefly, CMind was co-founded in 1991 by Mirabai Bush (b.1939),²⁵ an organizational manager, educator, and spiritual teacher, while MLI was founded in 1990 through the collaboration of the 14th Dalai Lama (Tenzin Gyatso), the American entrepreneur R. Adam Engle, and the Chilean neuroscientist Francisco Varela. CMind began with the motivation to support personal and social transformation as well as engaged action through contemplative practice. This group is among the most open and inclusive, including with respect to their definition of “contemplative practice.” MLI began as an investigation of the relationship between Buddhism and science, and specifically the neuroscience of (Tibetan) Buddhist meditation. Given the Dalai Lama’s commitment to compassion and peace, there was also an informing interest in the possibility of personal and social transformation. CMind is currently under the direction of Daniel Barbezat (d.u.), a professor of economics at Amherst College, while MLI is under the presidency of

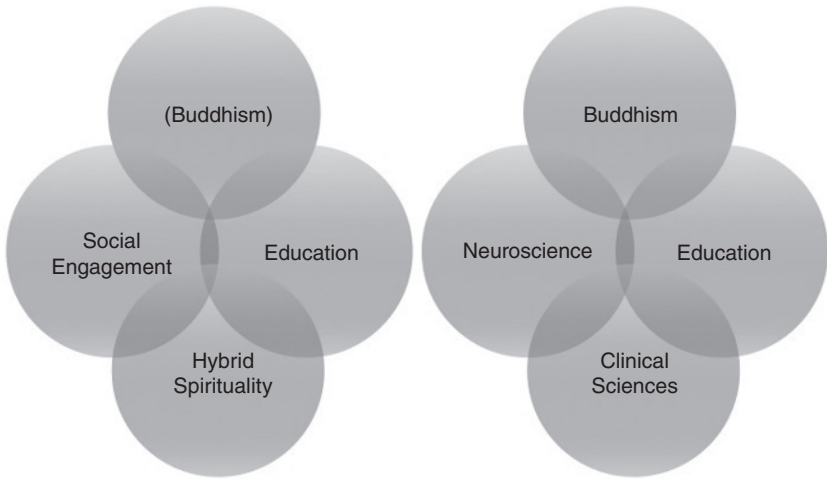


Figure 1.3 Contemplative Studies as expressed by the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society (left) and the Mind & Life Institute (right).

Susan Bauer-Wu (d.u.), a professor of nursing at the University of Virginia. Bauer-Wu succeeded Carolyn Jacobs (d.u.), Professor Emerita of Social Work at Smith College, who served as interim president after Arthur Zajonc (b.1949) stepped down due to his Parkinson's disease. Significantly, Zajonc, a professor of physics at Amherst College, previously served as director of CMind. Along these same lines, consideration of the consulting members and partners of these organizations is also an enlightening exercise.

While there can be no doubt that CMind and MLI have made and continue to make important contributions, there are also patterns that deserve deeper reflection, including among participants who are potentially being inculcated into particular values. Having personally participated in events organized by both organizations, and as the above-mentioned histories reveal, each organization has its own motivations and agendas (see Figure 1.3). Within the confines of their own events and projects, these are of course not unexpected and perhaps appropriate. However, they are increasingly constructing the field of Contemplative Studies in particular ways, often without explicit acknowledgment or critical discussion. As a scholar of Religious Studies, I have observed that their leaders and supporters often express particular views of and placements of "religion." Specifically, while overt "religious practices" are primarily seen as problematic or inappropriate, secularized Buddhist methods

are frequently used with either implicit Buddhist or hybrid spiritualist views. That is, decontextualized and reconceptualized Buddhist techniques are often presented as unproblematic; assumed Buddhist values (e.g., compassion, mindfulness, wisdom) are discussed as self-evident universal ones; and religion (with the exception of Buddhism) is often characterized as “trappings.”²⁶ In addition, personal spirituality is frequently contrasted with (institutional) religion. We will return to some of these issues shortly and in subsequent chapters.

Returning to the larger phenomenon of Contemplative Studies, there are also a variety of venues for participation, including conferences, lectures, and workshops. Here I would highlight the work of the above-mentioned Contemplative Studies Group. Established in 2010, the CSG is a program unit within the American Academy of Religion; it sponsors at least two anonymously peer-reviewed panels at the annual meeting of AAR held in different cities each November. Most of the early panels focused on disparate and inclusive topics as well as theoretical and methodological issues, with explicit discussion of the parameters of the field. More recent panels exhibit attempts to establish new models and trajectories, especially from a comparative Religious Studies perspective. For example, in 2014, this group sponsored “Maps of Transformation: Ox Herding, Horse Taming, and Stages on the Contemplative Path” and “Mindful Teaching and Learning: Contemplative Pedagogy in the University Setting.” In 2015 panels included “Listening Closely: Toward an Interdisciplinary Ethnographic Neuroscience of Contemplative Practice,” “Mystics and Contemplatives in the Academy Today: Religious Experience from the Outside In and Inside Out,” and “Toward an Ethics-Based Mindfulness: Rationales and Resistances.” The above-mentioned organizations also organize various conferences and seminars. Some important and representative gatherings include the Annual ACMHE Conference (CMind), the annual Contemplative Pedagogy Summer Session (CMind), the biannual International Symposium for Contemplative Studies (MLI), and the annual Summer Research Institute (MLI). With respect to ISCS, which is becoming the major venue for the interdisciplinary field and which may be understood as an extension of earlier MLI gatherings (see Dalai Lama *et al.* 1991; Harrington and Zajonc 2006; Luisi and Houshmand 2009), the first installment (2012) largely expressed the MLI project, privileging Buddhism, neuroscience, and clinical applications (author’s field observations; see above). The second iteration (2014) addressed a variety of humanities- and creative arts-based criticisms of the former and was more inclusive and balanced (Harold Roth

and Judith Simmer-Brown, pers. comm.). The next installment (2016) appears to be an even fuller and more representative presentation of the field, which represents larger shifts in the Mind & Life Institute. One major issue with this venue is the large size and format, with the “keynote addresses” resembling motivational speakers and corporate presentations with high degrees of technological mediation and given to a large amphitheater filled with a seated audience. From certain perspectives, such a format lacks contemplative characteristics, which may appear strange given the fact that some representatives of “leadership” and “organizational studies” were involved (see Chapter 7). There was also the recent interdisciplinary Conference on Contemplative Studies, organized by me and held at the University of San Diego in 2014. This conference gathered together many of the major representatives of the field and some younger voices. Particular attention was given to a critical discussion of the field as well as panels expressing a balanced and collaborative model. One helpful critical suggestion was a future round table and seminar-style gathering, absent of formal papers delivered to an audience. There also is an increasing number of invitation-only conferences, often under the auspices of “mindfulness.” One issue involves insular disciplinarity as well as the recurrent featuring of the “usual suspects,” that is, the most prominent and visible proponents. We notice a system of cultural and symbolic exchange, largely based on access, prestige, and privilege (see Chapter 7). A fuller appreciation of the field, including individuals with alternative and critical perspectives as well as theorists only loosely connected to Contemplative Studies as such, will help to clarify various issues and to advance the corresponding projects. One significant, though largely unrecognized, recent gathering was the Cultural Histories of Meditation (CHM; 2010), which was held in Oslo, Norway and organized by Halvor Eifring, a professor of Chinese language and literature at the University of Oslo and a member of Acem. The latter is an international Norway-based organization that advocates and disseminates a modified form of Transcendental Meditation. The CHM conference resulted in a number of publications edited by Eifring, although the cross-cultural and interdisciplinary spirit of the conference was partially dissipated in the subsequent division into “Abrahamic traditions,” “Asian traditions,” and so forth. Nonetheless, the conference and the subsequent publications are noteworthy for their inclusion of international scholars and of “under-represented contemplative traditions.”

These various programs, organizations, and venues reveal the strength of and widespread interest in Contemplative Studies. The field, perhaps now

better considered as a “movement,” has become established and is developing in multiple directions. It is here to stay. While many critical issues have yet to be fully explored and adequately addressed, *Contemplative Studies* offers opportunities for participation and inquiry by providing diverse perspectives on contemplative practice and contemplative experience, including personal and social transformative effects.

Critical Issues

To this point, my account, however idiosyncratic, should inspire and perhaps provoke a variety of responses. These probably range from excitement and inspiration to concern, consternation, and even outright resistance. *Contemplative Studies* is clearly a complex, controversial, and potentially subversive field. There are also rising voices of critique and calls for opposition. However, in my experience, these are largely whispered or conveyed in indirect ways; I have only heard such comments as second-hand critiques or under-the-breath comments. At this point, we are primarily dealing with pseudo-intellectuals and faux critics. They are perhaps comparable to the famous Indian parable wherein individuals mistake a rope for a snake. In keeping with contemporaneous “academic” trends, many of these individuals issue “critiques” without the requisite familiarity, suggesting that *Contemplative Studies* is “problematic” and even “dangerous,” that its members are engaging in an uncritical undertaking. We/they have “drunk the Kool-Aid.”²⁷ As most of these “critics” utilize caricatures, straw-man and red-herring arguments in technical philosophical language, rooted in their own fears and misrepresentations, they are negligible, underserving of serious consideration. Like contemporary academia more generally, one finds various petty careerist, opportunist, pseudo-intellectual, and politicized motivations (e.g., concern for fame, power, and influence) (see Bourdieu 1988; Freire 2000; Weber 2004; Komjathy 2016a, 2017a). As will be discussed in Chapter 5, they often exhibit the very characteristics of which they accuse religious adherents: dogmatism, fanaticism, sectarianism, and so forth. They have not actually engaged members of the field in generous and thoughtful ways, especially in public discussion. Just as I have worked to facilitate collaborative discussions and explorations of *Contemplative Studies*, I, for one, would welcome invitations for public debate, but that would require actual academic discourse. In terms of the commitments of *Contemplative Studies*, it would actually involve critical subjectivity, deep

reflection, open receptivity, as well as increased awareness and understanding. The field is indeed challenging for the ordinary rank and file of contemporary academia and conventional educators, with their frequently unrecognized values, commitments, and *practices*.²⁸ Everyone is practicing something, but many people are unaware of what they are practicing or unwilling to acknowledge this fact. They would prefer to enculturate (proselytize?) others into their own value systems, including secular materialism, social constructivism, and scientific (scientistic?) reductionism. They would prefer an academic culture that is purely conceptual, philosophical, and theoretical, one in which participants avoid considering aspects like practice, embodiment, and transmission. Contemplative Studies inspires more conscious being and living. As discussed in Chapter 5, it also poses significant challenges for educators and teachers who lack intentionality in course design and pedagogical approach, especially with respect to the diversity of students, student learning styles, and relevant topics.

Rather than address these various misconceptions and uninformed opinions, here I will consider actual critical issues in Contemplative Studies, with particular attention to those most relevant to the field itself. While it is important to acknowledge that Contemplative Studies exists beyond the confines of academia, especially when the practice of “meditation” or “mindfulness” is included, most of the leading representatives are professional academics, that is, teacher-scholars at universities, usually with tenure-track or tenured positions. Even the above-mentioned private organizations are largely under the direction of or associated with academics, although the latter’s disciplines are diverse (e.g., economics, education, neuroscience, physics, psychology, Religious Studies). For this reason, I will restrict most of my comments on “critical issues” to those related to academia and the field itself. I will discuss some issues related to specific expressions, such as experiences associated with contemplative practice, in subsequent chapters. Again, such issues are wide-ranging, and the present section reflects my own observations and concerns. They may not be as representative as they should be. While I expressed discipline-specific views (namely, comparative Religious Studies and critical adherent perspectives) in the introduction to my edited volume *Contemplative Literature* (2015), here I attempt to provide a broader set of considerations.

To begin, it is reasonable for individuals outside of or unfamiliar with the field to have questions, concerns, and perhaps reservations. Generally speaking, members of Contemplative Studies need to be willing to explain the informing values, commitments, and projects. This is one motivation

behind the present book. We also need to be open to informed critical responses; these include analyses of Western engagements with Asian religions and even “meditation” (see below). There are many opportunities for reflection and development. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 5, a “contemplative approach” is only one potential line of inquiry, and other approaches are possible and important. This partially depends on corresponding aspirations, commitments, motivations, and so forth. Diversity and plurality of perspective are positive characteristics. In all cases, greater degrees of awareness may further the given project.

On a deeper level, we must recognize that Contemplative Studies is indeed challenging and potentially subversive, especially with respect to mainstream American academia and possibly to dominant modern cultural values. For example, many scholars adhere to various secular materialist and social constructivist views as though they are self-evident givens and shared (required?) commitments (see, e.g., McCutcheon 2001; cf. Cabezón and Davaney 2004; Orsi 2005; Cabezón 2006; Clooney 2006; Komjathy 2016a). These perspectives are often presented as though they are or should be the foundations of higher education, as though the latter is not based on *free inquiry*, with its parameters open to debate. Here one thinks of key insights from and applications of postcolonialism and postmodernism. That is, the emergence of Contemplative Studies may be read as *both* an expression of *and* a response to hyper-relativism and (post)subjectivity. In any case, more conventional and conservative teacher-scholars are right to be concerned about Contemplative Studies because the field challenges their assumptions, reveals their commitments, and undermines their authority. The dominant values of “neutrality” and “objectivity” have come to resemble quasi-religious commitments, including corresponding dogmatism and sectarianism. That is, conformity is the foundation of access and participation (see Komjathy 2016a). There is a certain subsection of modern academia that functions as a hegemonic discourse community. Some informing principles include the following: renounce your own values and subjectivity; acknowledge your experience as irrelevant; accept the primacy of mind over body; accept the primacy of theory over practice; embrace secular materialism, social constructivism, and scientific reductionism; ignore corruption and hypocrisy; and conform or risk exile. On a political level, participation in Contemplative Studies involves danger and risk with respect to access, position, and livelihood. In fact, when I was organizing the AAR Contemplative Studies Group, many senior scholars and colleagues cautioned me about potential career repercussions, including “professional suicide” (see also Benson and Klipper 2000); such is the

internalized fear and self-censure of the larger academy. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. On another level, Contemplative Studies, with its emphasis on embodiment, interiority, locatedness, practice, subjectivity, and alternative values, represents a different model and enactment of education, not to mention being. It is one approach for overcoming the “taboo of subjectivity” (Wallace 2000) and for realizing the promise of values-based education, including existential and spiritual inquiry (see Chapter 5). As will become clear shortly, one key dimension here is not just subjectivity, often constructed as “consciousness,” but also embodied and kinesthetic dimensions of being and aliveness.

Another key issue brought into high relief by Contemplative Studies is positionality and participation, specifically one’s location with respect to particular areas of inquiry. This relates to one’s own values, commitments, and institutional affiliation. Considering contemplative practice, and religiously committed and tradition-based contemplative practice in particular, this relates to “adherence” and what is often referred to as the “insider–outsider question (problem)” (see, e.g., McCutcheon 1999; Kripal 2001; Cabezón and Davaney 2004; Orsi 2005; Cabezón 2006; Clooney 2006; Tweed 2006; Komjathy 2016a). Technically referred to as *emic–etic* (insider–outsider) perspectives, such concerns and approaches correspond to first-person (adherent) and third-person (academic) perspectives, respectively. As we have seen, academic discourse has tended to emphasize the latter with the often accompanying “taboo of subjectivity” (Wallace 2000). Identification as an adherent or contemplative is sometimes framed as “coming out” or “being outed,” with the attendant politicization and threat of exclusion, marginalization, or ostracization. It is as though being religious or being contemplative now has a similar standing and parallel risk as being a member of the LGBTQ community in certain contexts. For my part, I am interested in the possibility of “theorizing from the inside out” as well as the more standard outside in. Perhaps we need outsider–insiders, insider–outsiders, or other hybrid and transgressive identities (see Komjathy 2016a). Thus, in the larger academy, especially in Religious Studies, the insider/outsider question is often framed as an “either/or” rather than a “both/and” choice. In contrast, Contemplative Studies suggests that both have important contributions to make. In addition, adherents, practitioners, and “scholar-practitioners” may offer unique perspectives, specifically embodied, lived, and participatory ones. As Contemplative Studies seeks to understand contemplative practice, and as contemplative practice is about *practice*, is it not worthwhile, perhaps even necessary, to develop an appropriate experiential methodology? To

understand contemplative practice in a fuller and more complete way, direct experience with contemplative practice may be required, at least on the part of some individuals. However, we should not stop here. Everyone is committed to something and practicing something. Contemplative Studies asks for an account of one's location, in its various dimensions (see Chapter 8), on the part of each and every person, including "critics" (see also Staal 1975; Wallace 2000; Roth 2008). This might also involve recognition of the ways in which one's perceptions and interpretations have been conditioned. That is, on some level, one may understand every theoretical and interpretive position as a form of "adherence" *and* "practice." In keeping with the ideals of Religious Studies, one might, in turn, suggest that participant-observation ethnography, applied to both the study of contemplative practice and engagement with the field, is a viable and potentially important approach.

Other major critical issues center on contemplative practice itself. One legitimate concern with Contemplative Studies involves the introduction and advocacy of the practice of meditation and cognate disciplines. However, as briefly touched upon, members of Contemplative Studies generally utilize a fairly broad and inclusive understanding of "contemplative practice." The latter encompasses secular and therapeutic methods, including modern movement awareness practices, and discipline-specific exercises (see Chapters 2 and 5). In addition to considering context-specific challenges and opportunities, we must recognize that what I refer to as "religiously committed" and "tradition-based" contemplative practice may not be appropriate for public universities. There are two major dangers here. The first involves unrecognized sectarianism and (covert) proselytization. In terms of its actual contemplative approach, Contemplative Studies contests apologetics, confessionalism, dogmatism, evangelism, insularity, sectarianism, and similar tendencies. This is a prescriptive, rather than a normative position.²⁹ However, there is also the accompanying danger of secularization, specifically requiring religious adherents to renounce their commitments and to conform to secular materialist values. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, there are ways to utilize Contemplative Studies in public schools, including ways in which classrooms may honor and engage multiculturalism, multiethnicity, and religious pluralism. As with the earlier discussion of academic politics and locatedness, this dimension of the field brings the issue of religious identity and participation into high relief.

Along these lines, one also thinks of the history and contemporary practice of meditation and cognate disciplines. Although there are

increasing varieties of secular, therapeutic, and hybrid spiritualist methods, there are various related issues. As discussed in more detail in Chapters 2, 4, and 7, many of these techniques are adaptations of tradition-specific practices. More reflection on the ethics and politics of appropriation is required (see Lau 2000; Carrette and King 2004), including the associated decontextualization and reconceptualization in terms of hybrid spiritualist values (see Komjathy 2015). As will be explored in the pages that follow, contemplative practice, as a committed and sustained undertaking, is neither a hobby nor another form of “exercise,” even if spiritual dilettantism is increasingly the norm. For example, at the first International Symposium for Contemplative Studies (2012), during his keynote address Jon Kabat-Zinn asked the 900+ audience members if they self-identified as “contemplatives,” with the majority raising their hands. Except under the most superficial and simplistic of definitions, this clearly is not the case (cf. Sinetar 1986).³⁰ We cannot accept the status quo and lowest common denominator as a viable methodological approach to Contemplative Studies. To engage actual contemplatives, whether members of religious orders or individuals following a contemplative way of life, challenges the assumptions of many “connoisseurs of meditation.” This recalls my vision for the field as including religious adherents and religious communities. Such individuals and engagements with expressions of the associated traditions clarify the deeper dimensions of contemplative practice and contemplative experience, of a “contemplative approach” and “contemplative commitments” as a way of life.

As we have seen, there are also particular expressions of Contemplative Studies with their own values and agendas. As discussed above, there are certain unacknowledged, or at least unstated, biases and privilegings. Under my reading of the emerging field, these include secularized Buddhism, hybrid spirituality, neuroscience, and clinical applications. In addition to being rooted in a particular construction of Buddhism (see Lopez 1995, 1999; Žižek 2001a; McMahan 2008; Faure 2012; Wilson 2014; Huntington 2015; Ng and Purser 2015), these become fused into an interconnected and mutually reproducing system. For Contemplative Studies to realize its stated aims—namely, sophisticated, comprehensive, and integrated understanding of contemplative practice and contemplative experience—such biases need to be acknowledged and overcome. Specifically, greater inclusion of alternative perspectives and other traditions, engaged on their own terms, will strengthen the field. This could include interreligious dialogue.

Along these lines, while neuroscience, psychology, and clinical sciences have made important contributions (see Chapters 6 and 7), they have

established one of the dominant interpretive frameworks, to the point of being the deferred, primary authorities for the field. This is partially connected to the above-mentioned scientism and technocracy (see Roszak 1969; Postman 1992; Stenmark 2001; Peterson 2003), but it is also related to economics. Major funding sources primarily support “scientific studies of meditation.” In this respect, one also notices the increasing reference to the neuroscience of meditation as “contemplative science” (see Wallace 2007). For example, there is the “Contemplative Sciences Center” at the University of Virginia, which is under the direction of David Germano, a professor of Tibetan Buddhism. Although a primary motivation behind the name selection involved securing participation from UVA faculty scientists (David Germano, pers. comm.), it is indicative of larger cultural trends. One issue here, discussed in more in detail in subsequent chapters, is the extent to which technological mediation and interventions are “contemplative” (see Komjathy 2015). Again, for the field of Contemplative Studies to realize its stated goals, greater recognition and mutual support among scholars across disciplines are required. In terms of interdisciplinarity, we need to acknowledge the unique contributions of different disciplinary perspectives and approaches. However, as is the case with the larger academy, this would involve a radical restructuring of values and trends, specifically an overturning of the decline and degradation of the creative arts and humanities in the name of “progress,” “utilitarianism,” and so forth.

Another issue deserving reflection is the question of white privilege and middle-class escapism. As we have seen, Contemplative Studies generally has a socially engaged component. Nonetheless, although only beginning such exploration (see Žižek 2001a; Ng and Purser 2015), members of the field would benefit from greater engagement with ethnic studies and critical race theory (see Chapter 8). Along similar lines, though perhaps more surprising, we might consider the lived dimensions of contemplative practice with respect to animals and dietetics. This statement is meant to point toward the complex connection between the treatment of human and “non-human” animals (see Gross and Valley 2012; Gross 2014), including the symbolic representations of the former through the latter and the actual suffering and violence inflicted on other animals. One’s relationship with animals, in all of their multifaceted presences, may reveal more about contemplative practice than anything else (see Chapter 8). There are also discipline- and project-specific issues, which will be addressed in the relevant chapters. By way of conclusion, I would simply remind readers that the field is diverse and disparate. Given the

wide-ranging backgrounds, motivations, and approaches, we must consider specific expressions, whether on the part of individual members, communities, programs, or organizations. There is no single authority, dominant program, or central organization. In fact, Contemplative Studies, as expressed in the individual and social lives of its members, is a grass-roots and decentralized movement.

Further Reading

- de Wit, Han. 1991. *Contemplative Psychology*. Translated by Marie Louise Baird. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.
- Komjathy, Louis. 2016. "Contemplative Studies: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)." Contemplative Studies Website. www.sandiego.edu/cas/contemplative-studies. Accessed June 1, 2017.
- Roth, Harold D. 2006. "Contemplative Studies: Prospects for a New Field." *Teachers College Record* 108.9: 1787–1815.
- Sherman, Jacob. 2014. "On the Emerging Field of Contemplative Studies and Its Relationship to the Study of Spirituality." *Spiritus* 14.2: 208–229.

Notes

- 1 As is the case with other categories, the use of the singular in "contemplative practice" and "contemplative experience" is meant to suggest a larger umbrella category similar to "meditation" or "praxis." There are, of course, various and diverse contemplative *practices* and contemplative *experiences*. See Chapters 2 and 3 herein; Komjathy (2015).
- 2 I am less familiar with acting and theatre studies, but there seems to be a contemplative element in "method acting," for example. See, for example, Zarilli, Daboo, and Loukes (2013). I have benefited from many profound interviews on the television show *Inside the Actors Studio* (1994–present), which centers on members of the Actors Studio in New York City. One issue here involves "authentic identity" and its relationship to "persona." See, for example, Goffman (1959).
- 3 By "character," I do not mean persona, but rather the ground and possibility of being. It thus relates to moral conduct and distinctive qualities of oneself. Character development, in turn, raises questions about authenticity and self-actualization. See, for example, Rogers (1961); Deikman (1982); Maslow (1999 [1968]). Cf. Goffman (1959).

- 4 Like the academic field of Theology, Spirituality as an Academic Discipline tends to be synonymous with Christian expressions. However, as discussed by Mary Frohlich and other contributors to *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality*, it has the potential to be more inclusive. Interested readers may also consult the World Spirituality series published by Crossroad Publishing.
- 5 As discussed in Chapter 8, one issue here is the apparent exclusion of “second-person” (interpersonal/intersubjective; “you”) discourse. See De Quincey (2000, 2005); Thompson (2001); Bache (2008); Gunnlaugson (2009); Olivares *et al.* (2015).
- 6 For example, as explored in Chapters 5 and 6, we are beginning to witness contemplative approaches to business, law, medicine, and technology.
- 7 Specifically, following the trajectory from secularized Protestant Christian values to the New Age movement, there tends to be an anti-religion bias, especially one in which “religion” is understood as institutional religion and in which religion is identified as a limiting, perhaps even an oppressive, pathological and dangerous, influence. This is yet another dimension of the emerging field that points toward the importance of Religious Studies.
- 8 In this respect, it is important to recognize the historical connections between contemplative practice and asceticism and monasticism. On a deeper, pragmatic level, one might thus reflect on the extent to which an ascetic and/or monastic approach is required; this includes such concerns and commitments as celibacy, fasting, solitude, voluntary simplicity, and so forth. See Chapters 4 and 8 herein.
- 9 In the pages that follow, we will have opportunities to consider the backgrounds of some prominent advocates and scholars. As it turns out, many scholars focusing on the contemplative dimensions of religious traditions are adherents of the given tradition and/or practitioners of associated methods. See Komjathy (2015). There is an interesting parallel with scholars of mysticism. See Forman (1999); Wasserstrom (1999); Kripal (2001); Paper (2004); Komjathy (2016a). Cf. McCutcheon (1999).
- 10 There are various “inner histories” of Contemplative Studies, that is, accounts that point toward the importance of particular people, organizations, and projects. These include ones focused on Brown University, Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, Mind & Life Institute (MLI), and Naropa University, among others. For example, as one might expect, MLI chronicles emphasize their early gatherings and conferences that established “contemplative neuroscience” and that eventually led to the International Symposium for Contemplative Studies (see www.mindandlife.org; cf. Bush 2011). While MLI no doubt has played and continues to play an important role, especially with respect to the neuroscientific study and application of Buddhist meditation (many of the most prominent researchers are MLI associates),

here I am attempting to write a more comprehensive and integrated chronicle.

- 11 Though I acknowledge that it is possible to imagine Contemplative Studies as having roots in tradition-based contemplative practice and contemplative lifeways, including many additional influences, here I am focusing on the emergence of an interdisciplinary academic field now called "Contemplative Studies."
- 12 While it is rare to find explicit and critical discussions of the history of academia, there is no doubt that these and related cultural events had a decisive influence on scholars of Asian religions and the emergence of Religious Studies as an academic discipline. Here one notices a complex relationship between religion as lived adherence and scholarship on religion. In this respect, one might also note the massive increase in faculty hires in Islamic studies and thus of Islamicists (scholars of Islam; cf. Buddhologists) in American higher education after the events of September 11, 2001.
- 13 In the context of Religious Studies and American religious history, a distinction is often made between "affiliates," "adherents," and "sympathizers." Affiliates are individuals (e.g., clergy) with formal standing in a given religious community or tradition. Adherents are individuals who have some association, whether formal or informal (i.e., self-identification). Sympathizers are individuals who find some aspect of a given religion interesting or appealing, but who do not identify exclusively with that tradition. A further distinction is made between "birthright" and "convert" adherents. In the case of Asian religions in America, birthright adherents tend to be immigrants or ethnic members of the source-tradition and source-culture, while converts tend to be primarily Euro-Americans (see, e.g., Tweed and Prothero 1999; Seager 2012). There are also complex patterns related to immigration, with first-generation ethnic adherents maintaining "tradition," including cultural dimensions, second-generation descendants becoming more assimilated, and third-generation descendants seeking return to lost roots (see, e.g., Herberg 1955). Finally, there are often differences in relation to source-cultures and "practice styles." Generally speaking, immigrant and ethnic members tend to see a close connection between "religion" and "culture" and often engage in "other-power" practice. Converts tend to separate religion and culture and often engage in "self-power" practice.
- 14 As a critical category, "hybrid spirituality" refers to the modern phenomenon in which individuals combine elements from various religious traditions (so-called "wisdom traditions") in highly individualized ways. This often consists of autodidacticism, eclecticism, experimentation, syncretism, and spiritual colonialism, with the latter involving appropriative agendas with(out) respect to source-cultures and source-traditions. A representative example is so-called Yin Yoga. "Yin," as in yin-yang, is a traditional Chinese cosmological category, while "yoga," as in meditative discipline aimed at liberation from samsara, is a traditional Indian Sanskrit term. So-called Yin Yoga has little if

any connection to either culture or the associated traditions; it is a modern American stretching and breath-work routine (see Komjathy 2013b, 2014a). We will return to hybrid spirituality in subsequent chapters.

- 15 Some prominent first-generation representatives include Daniel Barbezat (Amherst College; Center for Contemplative Mind in Society), Mirabai Bush (Center for Contemplative Mind in Society), Fran Grace (University of Redlands), Anne Klein (Rice University), Harold Roth (Brown University), Edward Sarath (University of Michigan), Judith Simmer-Brown (Naropa University), Francisco Varela (Mind & Life Institute), B. Alan Wallace (Santa Barbara Institute for Consciousness Studies), and Arthur Zajonc (Amherst College; Mind & Life Institute). Given the recent pedigree of the field, it is somewhat problematic to identify “first-generation” and “second-generation” representatives, as such individuals are intermingled and frequently collaborate. However, the distinction is important in order to understand certain tensions, revisionist tendencies, and alternative models among second-generation members.
- 16 In fact, many of the first-generation pioneers in the field, like Baby Boomers more generally, began their meditation practice with Transcendental Meditation (author’s field observations). As discussed in later chapters, this either eventually led to or has been replaced by the practice of various forms of Buddhist meditation.
- 17 Here and in the larger field of Contemplative Studies one notices a significant proportion of Jews, especially ethnic Jews, although the same is true with respect to major philosophers and theorists. One thinks, for example, of Herbert Benson and Jon Kabat-Zinn, among others. There is also the accompanying cultural phenomenon of “Jubus” (Jewish Buddhists; also “Jewbu” and “Buju”). This term was first brought into wide circulation with the publication of *The Jew in the Lotus* (1994) by Rodger Kamenetz (b.1950). I will examine religious identity, including multiple religious participation and syntheses, in subsequent chapters.
- 18 As discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, there has also been an increase in historical and literary studies of meditation (see Komjathy 2015). This includes critical analysis of modern adaptations, appropriations, and expressions (see Žižek 2001a; Williamson 2010; Wilson 2014; Huntington 2015; Komjathy 2015; Ng and Purser 2015; also Lau 2000; Carrette and King 2004).
- 19 The current Dalai Lama, born Tenzin Gyatso, is considered the fourteenth incarnation of the Dalai Lama *tulku* (“incarnate lama”) lineage associated with the Gelug (“Yellow Hat”) lineage/monastic order. The name *dalai* (“ocean”) is a Mongolian translation of the Tibetan *gyatso*, thus pointing toward earlier political alliances with the Mongolians. The Dalai Lama is identified as an incarnation of Avalokiteśvara (“lord who gazes down”; Bodhisattva of Compassion), the leader of the Gelug lineage, and historically the religious-political leader of Tibet.

- 20 Significantly, Thomas Merton was an early model of ecumenism. In addition to dialogue with “non-Christians,” such as his friendship with the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh (b.1926), Merton wrote books on the *Zhuangzi* (*Chuang-tzu*; Book of Master Zhuang) (1965), a classical Daoist text, and on Zen Buddhism (1967, 1968). Also noteworthy is the fact that B. Alan Wallace cites *Happiness and Contemplation* (1966) by the German Catholic philosopher and theologian Josef Pieper (1904–1997) in the opening pages of his *Contemplative Science* (2007).
- 21 From my perspective, some noteworthy examples include Mark Rothko’s (1903–1970) paintings contained in the Rothko Chapel (Houston, Texas); the experimental composer and music theorist John Cage’s (1912–1992) 4’33”; the Zen Buddhist photography of John Daido Looi (1931–2009); the modern dance performances and choreography of Philippina “Pina” Bausch (1940–2009); as well as *The Artist is Present* (2010) by the modern performance artist Marina Abramović (b.1946). For an explicit discussion of music as contemplative practice, see Sarath (2013).
- 22 Nonetheless, as discussed in other chapters herein, “contemplative science” continues to have wide circulation, especially among neuroscientists, MLI associates, and University of Virginia affiliates. However, technically speaking, contemplative science refers to the neuroscientific study of meditation and accompanying areas of inquiry. It also apparently privileges scientific disciplines, or at least attempts to legitimize the field through scientific constructions. In this respect, one notes the connection with public, secular education and research projects.
- 23 While CCMIS is the obvious abbreviation, representatives of the organization prefer CMind.
- 24 A fairly comprehensive overview with related website links may be found on the Contemplative Studies Website (CSW) at the University of San Diego (www.sandiego.edu/cas/contemplativestudies).
- 25 Interestingly, Mirabai Bush has been a life-long student of and collaborator with the spiritual teacher Ram Dass (Richard Alpert; b.1931), with whom she helped to establish the Seva Foundation. In his pre-Ram Dass incarnation, Alpert became (in)famous as a member of the “Harvard psychedelic club” (see Lattin 2010). Here again is an important connection between the 1960s American counterculture and the eventual emergence of Contemplative Studies with its accompanying concern for “experience” and “experimentation.”
- 26 Readers outside the field may be surprised by this, and it is indeed surprising. We may identify our own and others’ commitments and potential biases, usually manifested in patterns of reactivity, through a simple substitution method. For example, if the emerging field were Christocentric rather than Buddhocentric, there would probably be mass outrage. There is often an unspoken or unrecognized

- accompanying anti-Christian bias in the field, partially due to the assumption that Christianity is “more doctrinal (theistic)” than Buddhism.
- 27 The phrase “drinking the Kool-Aid” derives from the November 1978 Jonestown deaths, in which over 900 members of The Peoples Temple, who were followers of the Christian preacher Jim Jones (1931–1978), committed suicide by drinking a mixture of a powdered soft drink flavoring agent laced with cyanide (see, e.g., Wessinger 2000). That is, members of Contemplative Studies are in a cult, and those who accept this field are risking “brainwashing” and mass suicide. No doubt a certain type of “death” may be involved, but this might actually require “exiting the cult” (see, e.g., Goffman 1959; Deikman 1994; Komjathy 2015).
 - 28 Indirectly speaking and beyond academia, one finds secularist and conservative Christian criticism of and resistance to the introduction of meditation, “American Yoga,” and similar practices in public institutions, including public schools and prisons (see Chapters 2 and 5). While these practices are usually decontextualized, reconceptualized, as well as secularized and medicalized, critics argue against the appropriateness based on the legal separation of church and state. This, however, begs the question of the actual relationship between contemplative practice and religious commitment. There are ways to engage and participate in Contemplative Studies without crossing this divide and risking personal position and institutional funding.
 - 29 From my perspective, members of Contemplative Studies ideally should inhibit and critically investigate these tendencies, but that does not preclude individuals who frame contemplative practice along such lines. In addition, *as a field*, Contemplative Studies needs parameters and guidelines for participation, which should be a matter of debate. This includes consideration of appropriate context-specific and institution-specific forms of discourse.
 - 30 This is not to suggest that “ordinary people” cannot be contemplatives. Following the model of the “new monasticism” (see Chapter 4), I accept this possibility (see, e.g., Panikkar 1982; Teasdale 2002). However, the actual parameters and qualities of being a contemplative deserve deeper reflection. Practicing “10-minute meditation” does not make one a contemplative (see Chapters 7 and 8).

