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Against One Method: Toward a Critical-Constructive Approach to the Adaptation and Implementation of Buddhist-based Contemplative Programs in the United States

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Abstract

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This dissertation adopts a critical-constructivist approach to the development of secular, Buddhist-based contemplative programs in the United States. Mindfulness- and compassion-based programs--including in particular Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Cognitively-Based Compassion Training (CBCT) and Innate Compassion Training (ICT)--offer distinct models for healing that rest on different Buddhist assumptions of the causes of suffering and the means for overcoming suffering. MBSR, CBCT, and ICT have been influenced by and respond to the American cultural context in which they are delivered. They developed within what Charles Taylor terms the "immanent frame," and have been shaped by their assimilation into and critique of other discourses of modernity, including scientific rationalism and romanticism. Each program variously interprets and rhetorically employs the categories of the secular, the scientific, and the spiritual to create frames permitting different claims to universal applicability. Such universalizing rhetorical strategies are effective tools insofar as they provide these programs with internal coherence, as well as access to various audiences. Yet these universalizing rhetorical strategies also ignore important contextual factors key to the success, adaptability, and sustainability of the programs, while simultaneously obscuring alternative healing methods that may be more effective for individuals or communities in particular settings.

This dissertation adopts a critical-constructivist approach to this growing field. It first deconstructs the universal rhetoric employed by these programs through an analysis of their theoretical and cultural frames, and then considers potential reframes of their approach and rhetoric in a contemporary context, including a broader interpretation of the Buddhist doctrine of skillful means and of the category of the secular. However, there are also downsides to the simple dismissal of the notion of a universally applicable approach. Thus this dissertation attempts a constructive inquiryinto which approaches and methods may be most effective for individuals and communities within particular contexts, while holding open the question as to whether there are shared principles or methods that are generalizable or essential to the larger aims of these programs. In the final analysis, this work calls for more context-sensitive and principle-driven approaches to the ongoing development, adaptation, and implementation of contemplative-based programs in the United States.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The last several decades have seen a sharp rise in the development and implementation of secular, Buddhist-based mindfulness and compassion programs in the United States of America. Such programs have gained increasing popularity as a growing body of research suggests that such programs effectively enhance health and well-being.[1] A majority of the research to date has assessed the efficacy of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programs in alleviating stress and other forms of psychological distress in adult clinical and non-clinical populations. In the last several years, however, numerous other mindfulness-based programs have been adapted for use in educational and other contexts.[2] More recently, compassion-based contemplative approaches, including Cognitively-Based Compassion Training (CBCT) and Innate Compassion Training (ICT), have also been selected for scientific study. Preliminary research on these programs suggests that such approaches may, similarly, be of benefit in clinical, non-clinical, and educational settings.[3]

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[1] Paul Grossman, Ludger Niemann, Stefan Schmidt, & Harald Walach, "Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction and Health Benefits: A Meta-analysis," *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 57 (2004): 35-43.
[2] Charlotte Zenner, Solveig Herrnleben-Kurz & Harald Walach, "Mindfulness-based Interventions in Schools: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis," *Frontiers in Psychology 5* (2014): 1-20. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00603
[3] See, for example, Paul Condon, Gaelle Desbordes, Willa B. Miller, & David DeSteno, "Meditation Increases Compassionate Responses to Suffering," *Psychological Science 24* (2013): 2125-2127; Thaddeus W. W. Pace, Lobsang Tenzin Negi, Daniel D. Adame, Steven P. Cole, Teresa I. Sivilli, Timothy D. Brown, Michael J. Issa & Charles L. Raison, "Effect of Compassion Meditation on Neuroendocrine, Innate Immune and Behavioral Responses to Psychosocial Stress," *Psychoneuroendocrinology 34* (2009): 87-98; Brendan Ozawa-de Silva, & Brooke Dodson-Lavelle, "An Education of Heart and Mind: Practical and Theoretical Issues in Teaching Cognitively-Based Compassion Training to Children," *Practical Matters 4* (2011): 1-28.

MBSR, CBCT and ICT offer methods for cultivating mindfulness and compassion designed to help participants deal with stress and suffering. These three programs have been selected for study because they represent distinct contemplative approaches that rely on different theoretical assumptions about the causes of stress and suffering and the most effective means for overcoming it. Although each program takes inspiration from diverse Buddhist contemplative traditions and employs distinct educational and therapeutic approaches, each also claims some form of universal applicability, whether in terms of identifying the universal causes of suffering, the universally applicable method for overcoming it, or both. The founders of each of these programs are aware—in different ways and to varying degrees—of their own stances and the effectiveness of such universalizing rhetorical strategies in terms of providing both coherence and access to various audiences. Yet the underlying assumption that there is a *universal* method that can be applied skillfully and effectively to remedy a *universal* cause of suffering in a variety of *particular* contexts raises a number of challenges.

I will argue below that while this assumption is both limited and limiting, it can also serve as a corrective or counterpoint to a radically relativist approach or purely deconstructive critique. It is one thing to simply dismiss the very notion of a universally applicable approach; it is another to inquire into which approaches and methods are most effective in alleviating the stress and suffering of particular individuals and communities within particular contexts, while holding open the question as to whether there are shared principles or methods that are generalizable or essential across contexts. To extend this line of thinking, we will consider how our analysis might reveal alternative rhetorical strategies or reframes that MBSR, CBCT and ICT could adopt to improve and sustain

their applicability and sustainability in North American cultural contexts. In other words, how might a constructive analysis inform or benefit the adaptation and implementation of these Buddhist-based contemplative programs?

This dissertation thus adopts a critical-constructivist approach to the growing field of the study of Buddhist-derived secular contemplative practice programs. It begins by deconstructing the universalizing rhetoric employed by three popular programs through an analysis of the particular Buddhist theoretical models and American cultural conditions that have framed them. It then considers potential ways of reframing or understanding the relationship between these different models and also the category of the universal. The final section of the dissertation offers suggestions for more context-sensitive and principle-driven approaches to the ongoing development, adaptation, and implementation of mindfulness- and compassion-based programs in general.

Mindfulness- and Compassion-Based Contemplative Programs in North America

One of the best-known and most commonly researched meditation programs in the United States today is Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn, a molecular biologist by training, and founder of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center in Worcester, Massachusetts. The program, which began in 1979 as the Stress Reduction and Relaxation Program, is a participant-centered behavioral medicine program that combines mindfulness meditation training with yoga and psycho-social skills training. The program was designed to empower participants—in particular those whose health needs were not being adequately addressed by standard medical treatments—by offering them viable tools that would

allow them to participate proactively in their own healing.[4] Accordingly, MBSR assumes that people have a profound innate capacity for self-healing, and that this ability can be best nurtured by focusing more on what is "right" with people rather than what is "wrong" with them. Although Kabat-Zinn has acknowledged the various Buddhist and Hindu influences that have shaped MBSR—including Theravada Buddhism, Rinzai Zen, Soto Zen, and Vedanta—the program is presented as a secular method for transmitting or accessing the "universal dharma" and of practicing Buddhist meditation "without the Buddhism."[5] For Kabat-Zinn, this so-called secular, universal dharma is congruent with the *buddhadharma* or the teachings of the Buddha.[6]

Framing MBSR as secular and of relevance to medical audiences afforded the program initial widespread appeal: since its inception in the late 70s, interest in mindfulness has grown exponentially, and MBSR's scope of application has similarly expanded beyond the clinic into education, law, business, and other settings.[7] In addition, the program has spawned or influenced a host of other mindfulness-based interventions—or 'MBIs'—that provide targeted support for depression, addiction, eating disorders, and so on; these include, for example, Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), Mindfulness-Based Relapse Prevention (MBRP), and Mindfulness-Based Eating Awareness Training (MB-EAT).[8] MBSR and related mindfulness-based programs are offered widely at a host of medical and other institutions, and to date over twenty

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[4] Jon Kabat-Zinn, "Some Reflections on the Origins of MBSR, Skillful Means, and the Trouble with Maps," *Contemporary Buddhism*, 12:01 (2011): 281-306; Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness* (New York: Bantam Dell, 2000).

[5] Kabat-Zinn, "Some Reflections on the Origins of MBSR," 289, 290, 294.

[6] Kabat-Zinn, "Some Reflections on the Origins of MBSR," 290.

[7] Mark G. Williams and Jon Kabat-Zinn, "Mindfulness: Diverse Perspectives on its Meaning, Origins, and Multiple Applications at the Intersection of Science and Dharma," 12:01 (2011): 1-18.

[8] Kabat-Zinn, "Some Reflections on the Origins of MBSR," 284.

thousand people have participated in an eight-week MBSR class offered at the Center for Mindfulness alone.[9] This figure does not reflect the many others who have participated in this program through a number of other institutions or training venues, or those who have encountered this approach through Kabat-Zinn's best-selling books, media, or other means.[10]

Although they incorporate elements of mindfulness practice, compassion-based programs differ in substantial ways from those that are mindfulness-based. Cognitively-Based Compassion Training (CBCT) is a secular program for training compassion developed by Geshe Lobsang Tenzin Negi at Emory University, where he is Professor of Practice in the department of Religion. Negi, a former Tibetan Buddhist monk, also acts as spiritual director of the Drepung Loseling Monastery in Atlanta, and serves as the director of the Emory-Tibet Partnership. Negi originally developed CBCT in 2005 as a means of addressing the rising rate of depression among undergraduate students.[11] In subsequent years, the program has been adapted for use with healthy adults, medical students, nurses, elementary school children and teachers, adolescents in foster care, incarcerated women, veterans, and survivors of trauma as a means of promoting pro-social skills, resiliency, health, and well-being.

Despite including elements of mindfulness practice, CBCT differs substantially from mindfulness-based programs in that it relies heavily on analytical meditation

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[9] "History of MBSR," Center for Mindfulness, accessed March 16, 2015, http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/stress-reduction/history-of-mbsr/.

[10] See, for example, Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Coming to Our Senses* (New York: Hyperion, 2005); Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness* (New York: Bantam Dell, 2000); Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life* (New York: Hyperion, 1994).

[11] For more, see http://www.tibet.emory.edu/cognitively-based-compassion-training/index.html.

practices drawn from the Tibetan Buddhist *lojong* (or "mind training") and *lam rim* (or "stages of the path") traditions. These contemplative traditions offer systematic methods to help practitioners progressively cultivate other-centered, altruistic thoughts and behaviors while overcoming maladaptive, self-focused thoughts and behaviors, understood on this model to be the cause of suffering for oneself and others. From the perspective of CBCT, mindfulness alone is not sufficient in helping practitioners root out the deep causes of stress and suffering, and thus specific types of compassion practice are necessary.

CBCT emerged in the mid-2000s during a period of increasing interest among researchers and the general public in the impact of positive emotions and social connectedness on health and well-being.[12] Although CBCT's frame was to some extent implicitly influenced by this shifting medical discourse, its approach was also explicitly strategic. The program is presented as a kind of response to MBSR: as a means of correcting for what is missing or lacking in MBSR, in part through the introduction of a style of practice, rooted in an alternative Buddhist tradition (Tibetan), that in some ways is antithetical to MBSR. For example, consider the following excerpt from the preface of the unpublished CBCT manual:

> The choice of the compassion meditation technique, as opposed to practices that are more commonly studied—such as mindfulness or Transcendental Meditation™—was deliberate. In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, compassion meditation practice requires practitioners to actively work with their emotions in order to develop a deep feeling of affection for others. This creates strong feelings of positive connection with other people, and research has now shown that social connectivity has a protective effect against a wide range of factors that contribute to deleterious psycho-social impacts, including stress, depression and PTSD (see, for example, J.T. Cacioppo, 2006 and

[12] See, for example: Anne Harrington, *The Cure Within: The History of Mind-Body Medicine* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 139-204. See also: John T. Cacioppo and Louise C. Hawkley, "Perceived Social Isolation and Cognition," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, *13,* (2009): 447-454.

> 2008). Within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, compassion practice is considered to confer immeasurable benefits to the individual and to society; some researchers, including our own team, are beginning to record a number of the measurable effects of the practice on the body and the mind.[13]

As we will see, in relying on analytical meditation practices, CBCT attempts to correct for what it considers to be missing in mindfulness-based programs in general and also from presentations of Buddhist-based secular programs in America.[14] In what follows, I locate two main points of difference between the more widespread mindfulness-based approach and CBCT. First, I find a difference in their specific interpretations of the causes of stress and suffering; second, I note a difference in their understanding of whether the capacities for overcoming suffering are innate or need to be trained.

In addition to framing itself as a means of enhancing health, CBCT has also positioned itself as a method for promoting what the Dalai Lama refers to as "secular ethics,"[15] especially through its application within educational settings.[16] Although CBCT and other compassion-based programs have not achieved the same widespread popularity as mindfulness-based programs, they continue to garner increasing attention. Another notable compassion-based program is the Compassion Cultivation Training (CCT)

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[13] Lobsang Tenzin Negi, "Cognitively-Based Compassion Training: A Manual." (Unpublished manuscript, Emory University, 2009), 2.

[14] Brendan Ozawa-de Silva & Lobsang Tenzin Negi, "Cognitively-Based Compassion Training: Protocol and Key Concepts," in *Compassion: Bridging Theory and Practice,* ed. Tania Singer & Matthias Bolz (Leipzig: Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences, 2013): 416-437.

[15] Dalai Lama, *Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2011), xiv-xv.

[16] See, for example, Ozawa-de Silva & Dodson-Lavelle, "An Education of Heart and Mind: Practical and Theoretical Issues in Teaching Cognitively-Based Compassion Training to Children." *Practical Matters*, *4* (2011):1-28"; Brendan Ozawa-de Silva, Brooke Dodson-Lavelle, Charles L. Raison & Lobsang Tenzin Negi, "Compassion and ethics: Scientific and practical approaches to the cultivation of compassion as a foundation for ethical subjectivity and well-Being," *Journal of Healthcare, Science & the Humanities.* 2, (2011):145-161.

Program, developed by Geshe Thupten Jinpa at Stanford University in 2009.[17] CCT and CBCT are strikingly similar to the extent that they draw from the same Tibetan Buddhist contemplative traditions and thus share the same theoretical framework and employ similar practice methods. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, I have chosen to analyze CBCT rather than CCT because I have trained in and taught the former. Much of what is presented here regarding CBCT might also be applied to CCT.

Another related, yet distinct, and increasingly popular compassion-based program is Innate Compassion Training (ICT), first developed by John Makransky, Professor of Buddhism and Comparative Theology at Boston College and a recognized teacher, or lama, in the Nyingma lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. In 2008, Makransky began teaching a secularized version of ICT that he had previously developed to help Western Buddhists deepen their practice.[18] The secular version of ICT, which draws from Dzogchen and Mahāmudrā practices from the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, was primarily aimed at helping those in social service professions become more compassionate, present, and resilient, in order to avoid the burnout often associated with prolonged exposure to stress and trauma. The program is currently being adapted for use with nursing students and college students suffering with body image issues.[19] Most recently ICT has also been

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[17] Geshe Thupten Jinpa, "Compassion Cultivation Training Program: An Eight-Week Course on Cultivating Compassionate Heart and Mind: Instructor's Manual," (Unpublished manuscript, Stanford University, 2009).

[18] John Makransky, *Awakening Through Love: Unveiling Your Deepest Goodness* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2007).

[19] John Makransky, "How Contemporary Buddhist Practice Meets the Secular World in Its Search for a Deeper Grounding for Service and Social Action" *Dharma World,* March 2012. http://www.rk-world.org/dharmaworld/dw_2012aprjunebuddhistpractice.aspx.

adapted for use by teachers and students in educational settings as part of the Mind and Life Institute's new Ethics, Education, and Human Development Initiative.[20]

ICT draws on contemplative reflections similar to those utilized in CBCT, but it considers these as supportive practices for other, more primary meditations that tap into the innate potential for compassion and self-healing contained within each practitioner. In this regard it relies on what we might call *innateist* assumptions similar to those found in MBSR, while also embracing the *constructivist* styles of practice found in CBCT and CCT. In addition, although it regards itself as secular, the ICT program uniquely adapts and incorporates patterns of Buddhist devotional practices. In accord with this and as will become clear in the following chapters, ICT also embraces a more expansive interpretation of the category of the "secular"—ICT programs and workshops are regularly offered in interfaith and mixed-faith contexts.

From what has been stated thus far, it should be clear that MBSR, CBCT, and ICT rely on different theoretical frames to construct their particular arguments for employing distinct practice styles in support of the cultivation of mindfulness and compassion in secular settings. Although all three programs are designed to reduce stress and suffering and to improve health and well-being, each model takes a different approach, prescribing sets of practices for realizing those goals that are distinct from, if not in conflict with, the sets of practices prescribed by the others.

MBSR, for example, emphasizes the cultivation of mindfulness as the primary means of reducing stress and suffering. Meanwhile, both CBCT and ICT explicitly emphasize the cultivation of compassion as the main way to reduce stress and suffering.

[20] For more information, see: "Call to Care," Mind & Life Institute Programs & Events, accessed March 16, 2015, http://www.mindandlife.org/care.

The current model of MBSR does not place any such explicit emphasis on the process or practice of cultivating compassion, though it does assume that compassion is a natural outcome of its training.[21] CBCT and ICT, on the other hand, assume that mindfulness practice is not in itself the most effective method of enhancing health and wellbeing, and that it must be complemented with the cultivation of compassion.

Fundamentally, these disparate sets of assumptions stem from competing understandings about the causes of stress and suffering and the best methods for overcoming stress and suffering. As will be discussed in the following chapter, each program assumes that compassion is essential to relieving suffering, yet each understands it to arise or manifest in different ways. MBSR assumes that compassion is innate such that it arises spontaneously once one learns to eliminate or reduce stressful cognitions and mental patterns that obscure one's capacity for self-healing and deep interconnection with others. For proponents of MBSR, maintaining a belief in the innateness of compassion in this way provides the grounds for arguing that one need not engage in contemplative practices as exercises that build up compassion; within MBSR, the operative metaphors with regard to compassion concern its discovery, realization, or revelation. CBCT, on the other hand, assumes that while the potential for compassion exists in everyone, it nevertheless needs to be cultivated through systematic analytical reflections. Such reflections are understood to help one enhance affection and empathy for others and to overcome obstructions to compassion (such as, for example, implicit in-group biases). Accordingly, for proponents of CBCT, maintaining a belief in the potential for compassion in this way provides the grounds for arguing that one does in fact need to

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[21] Kabat-Zinn, "Some Reflections on the Origins of MBSR," 285.

engage in contemplative practices as exercises that build up compassion; within CBCT, the operative metaphors with regard to compassion concern its construction, development, or strengthening. ICT, like MBSR, assumes that compassion is innate and that it arises once one removes or overcomes obstacles or blocks to compassion. Although in this way ICT is similar to MBSR, it offers a theoretically distinct approach to cultivating compassion that includes analytical methods for overcoming obstacles to compassion that are in some ways analogous to CBCT. Further, ICT emphasizes that the qualities of compassion are manifest relationally. This theoretical assumption distinguishes ICT from both MBSR and CBCT.

Assumptions regarding the nature of mind and the role of analytical meditation in cultivating compassion mark key differences among the practices that these programs recommend: whereas MBSR emphasizes non-dual practices of non-doing or non-striving, and explicitly de-emphasizes the role of cognitive work or effort, CBCT practice is heavily "cognitive." Though mindfulness practices are indeed taught in CBCT, these are seen as *supportive of* analytical meditations, and not as transformative *in themselves*. ICT employs its own distinct, hybrid approach in which analytical meditations are seen as supportive of, yet subordinate to, non-dual and other devotional and affective practices. For proponents of these programs, these contradictory understandings of the mind represent more than merely semantic distinctions. In other words, the concept of innateness is non-trivially distinct from the concept of the potential for compassion, even though these might seem like different ways of talking about the same thing, or different means to the same end.

The brief sketch provided thus far offers a simple introduction to the three distinct contemplative models that are the focus of this dissertation. In the following chapters we will explore each of these programs in greater detail as we consider claims regarding the universal applicability of their respective methods. Although universalizing rhetorical strategies can be effective healing tools and can also grant these programs access to various audiences, I will argue that these same rhetorical strategies also ignore or conceal important contextual factors that function as critical components of the success, adaptability, and sustainability of the programs. As a result, alternative healing methods and approaches that may be more effective for particular individuals or communities in particular settings have been trivialized and undermined. We will return to this final point at the end of the dissertation.

The Search for a Universal Approach: A Personal Story

Questions concerning the efficacy and universal applicability of these contemplative models have occupied my mind throughout much of my academic and professional training. Soon after completing my BA in religion and psychology at Barnard College in 2003, I completed the eight-week Practicum at the Center for Mindfulness in Worcester, MA, the first step of the MBSR teacher certification program. Shortly thereafter, I began teaching MBSR programs to patients and staff at the Columbia University Medical Center in my role as a meditation teacher, yoga instructor, and research coordinator for the Columbia Integrative Medicine Program. Most of the patients who attended the MBSR courses were living with heart disease or recovering from cardiac surgery. Demographically speaking, a majority were also white, middle-aged males who were highly educated, wealthy, and non-religious. I remember a number

of them struggled with the "non-doing" orientation of the MBSR program. They resisted the deep allowing and accepting rhetoric of MBSR, and instead craved theoretical discussions about the nature and causes of their stress and illness. This sort of dialogue was antithetical to MBSR, yet it seemed that these individuals, many of whom possessed above average levels of therapeutic insight, needed more skills, tools, or approaches for dealing with their stress. One observation might be to say that, given their preferences, or conditioning, the rhetoric of and practices prescribed within MBSR were exactly what they needed. In other words, perhaps it was their habit of (over) analyzing or rationalizing their experiences that kept them from actually encountering their feelings, thereby exacerbating their stress. There is likely some truth to this. At the same time, an alternative option seemed to *not* meet these people where they were.

Many of these participants also struggled with difficult emotions, like anger, and I felt at a loss for tools to offer that would help them deal or work with that anger (save inviting them to "notice it"). My guess is that most people who have experienced intense anger might be able to imagine how they felt when encouraged to relate to their anger by "watching it like a cloud passing in the sky," a typical instruction for MBSR. One can understand how such advice might be incredibly infuriating.

As powerful as I found much of the MBSR approach to be, I often felt as if something was missing. In other ways, I sensed that something was not connecting for the groups with which I was able to work, and I intuited that I could not be the only one struggling with this. While working at the medical center, I was also completing my MA in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism at Columbia University, where I studied the theory and practice of various Tibetan Buddhist traditions. In my personal time, I attended

Theravada and insight meditation retreats, as well as teachings at a local Pure Land Zen temple and at several Tibetan Buddhist centers. I was confused. The Buddhist teachings I was encountering were so rich, so diverse, and at times so contradictory. I struggled to make sense of it all, and to somehow (naïvely) synthesize these teachings through the lens of a singular Buddhism. At the same time, I struggled to figure out how best to communicate the "essence" of this one Buddhism in a secular frame. MBSR, or mindfulness more broadly, seemed like the only option at the time—certainly the Tibetans, and even the Zen practitioners I encountered, appeared far too religious for their teachings to make sense in a clinical setting. And yet the mindfulness groups seemed too sanitized, too cleansed of the teachings, ritual, imagery, and metaphors that I found so inspiring.

Years later, in 2007, I began doctoral studies at Emory University. I was motivated to return to school in part to study the long-standing debate between the so-called "innateists" and "gradualists" and the means for attaining Buddhahood in Tibetan Buddhism. This had emerged as an interest through my coursework at Columbia, and I found it so captivating because it provided some conceptual coherence to the diversity of teachings and practices I had been encountering within the tradition. It especially helped me negotiate the tensions between secular mindfulness and the Tibetan traditions I was studying at the time.

At Emory, in addition to training in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, I also began studying the theory and practice of CBCT under Geshe Lobsang Negi. I remember feeling that CBCT contained all that was missing from MBSR, and seemed at the time to provide a corrective to the anti-intellectual, non-doing rhetoric of MBSR that

had not seemed terribly effective for those I worked with in New York. CBCT's emphasis on cultivating compassion, and the methods for doing so, also seemed to be a necessary improvement.

In 2009 I was invited to teach CBCT to adolescents in Atlanta's foster care system. Given my knowledge of and experience with mindfulness-based programs, I expected CBCT to provide the missing tools necessary for deep healing. Yet this experience shifted everything: these teenagers, many of whom had suffered abuse or neglect, did not need to engage in analytical reflections on their self-centeredness, or the "internal" causes of their suffering—two themes taught in CBCT. These adolescents had not felt seen, safe, accepted, or basically okay throughout much of their lives. They did not need a cognitive-behavioral program for dealing with their trauma—they needed to feel loved and accepted. Neither MBSR nor CBCT seemed to have the tools to address this need.

Around this same time I encountered John Makransky and his ICT program at a conference on compassion hosted at Emory in 2011. It seemed to me as if he had pulled together the strands of MBSR and CBCT and offered them in a relational frame that was utterly necessary and obviously missing in the secular context. His approach also seemed to meet a need of the groups with which I was working, including adolescents in foster care and also those in educational settings. This was a need to feel "seen"—or in other words, to feel welcomed, loved and accepted as they are. While in Atlanta I also began to notice a new personal need to connect with other religious and spiritual traditions. It seemed as if there was so much to learn about my own Buddhist tradition through such encounters, and also about ways of adapting contemplative practices to reach those of

many other faith or spiritual traditions. The category of the secular seemed so fraught, and ICT offered a more expansive interpretation that did not exclude religion, but rather actively *embraced* it through interreligious dialogue.

I hope it will be clear throughout the following dissertation that I have found benefit from all of these approaches, despite working predominantly from the ICT model in recent years. Further, I want to clarify my position that this model, as a stand-alone program, also has its limits. In 2013, as I was working to complete my degree at Emory, I took a position leading the Ethics, Education, and Human Development Initiative at the Mind & Life Institute. In that capacity, I led an interdisciplinary team of educators, clinicians, contemplatives, and scientists in the creation of a program to support teachers and students in the cultivation of care and compassion. The project was global in scope and also included a number of teams from countries around the world who were invited to participate in the co-development of a universal framework for fostering "secular ethics" at the request of the Dalai Lama.

During the course of this project, I began to realize the limits of working within or from *any* particular method, program, or frame, while I continued to recognize the benefit of, and need for, the development of common frameworks or languages of understanding that cut across both disciplinary boundaries and cultures. ICT seemed to address a set of needs that were not being met by other contemplative programs. Yet on its own, it was unable to address all the needs of the various educational communities with which we had begun to work. The education initiative is still in progress, and thus reflects an aspiration not yet realized. The writing that follows stems from a deep engagement with that work and is intended not to offer a solution to the many debates within and around

the secularization of diverse Buddhist-based contemplative programs, but rather to offer some conceptual clarity to the issues at stake and suggest potential ways forward. It is meant therefore not only to reveal and discuss the limits of these programs, but also to invite us to consider new, constructive ways forward for this growing field.

Against One Method

The Ethics, Education, and Human Development Initiative at the Mind & Life Institute was launched in part as a response to the Dalai Lama's call for the development of a universally applicable curriculum and pedagogy for the cultivation of compassion, or what he has termed "secular ethics." As we will see below, the Dalai Lama's interpretation of secular ethics hinges on the idea that there is a set of basic human values, like compassion, that can be fostered through and assessed by universal methods and means. For reasons that I will give in the following chapters, I find the notion of a universal curriculum or pedagogy limited and limiting in that it tends to privilege the global over the local, the general over the particular, and biology over culture. By assuming that there is a universally applicable method or practice that will work for individuals everywhere, it fails to take context seriously.

In his keynote address at the 2014 International Symposium for Contemplative Studies, David Germano lamented the tendency within the field of contemplative studies to be too dismissive of cultural context.[22] Although he acknowledged that contexts are messy, and often difficult to define and assess, on his view, these very contexts not only

[22] David Germano, "Contemplation in Contexts: Tibetan Buddhist Meditation Across the Boundaries of the Humanities and Sciences" (paper presented at the International Symposium for Contemplative Studies, Boston, Massachusetts, December 2, 2014).

impact practices, they also constitute them. Further, he argued that when practices are extracted from their institutional, rhetorical, linguistic, cultural and environmental contexts, they are changed in ways that are not yet understood. Germano maintained that practices ground and are grounded in forms of life, and thus when contemplation is divorced from its context, as when a kernel is differentiated from its shell, ultimately, "what is at stake is no less than the worlds in which we live."[23]

Germano stated that there are many assumptions operative within the field of contemplative studies that shape the way we consider adapting, delivering, and assessing contemplative practice. On his view, the scope of what is considered efficacious is limited to a narrow idea of what counts as practice. Preliminary practices, intention setting, post-practice reflections, body movements, and so on, are often dismissed as procedural, ritual, or even cultural framing that are incidental to the practice itself. He argued that we must account for various contextual factors and their influence on practice including conceptual frameworks, aesthetic factors, social settings, environmental factors, embodied contexts, temporal contexts, and intention, motivation, and expectations. This is in spite of the fact that the rhetoric of certain practices—including modern mindfulness and its traditional roots—appears dismissive of context. Yet as Germano pointed out, and as will be seen below, these practices, especially in their traditional forms, were embedded within highly ritualized practice systems and worldviews. Contemporary adaptations are also embedded within their own (also ritualized) contexts, and we need to attend more closely to the ways in which such contexts impact, mediate or even moderate practices.

[23] Germano, "Contemplation in Contexts."

To take context seriously is to stop searching for a universal, "one size fits all" approach. In my assessment, MBSR, CBCT and ICT represent three possibilities among many healing paths that each have something to offer. They resonate in different ways, for different individuals and groups, and within different institutional and cultural contexts. The efficacy of each of these programs is supported to a certain degree by at least some empirical research. Yet the research is fraught with methodological problems: existing data on the efficacy of mindfulness and compassion interventions in general are, frankly, not very strong. As a number of researchers have pointed out, studies of MBSR and related programs suffer from numerous methodological issues, including inconsistencies regarding the operationalization of "mindfulness," small sample sizes, a lack of active control groups, evidence that these programs are more effective than controls (when comparisons can be made), deficient use of valid measures and tools for assessment, and often little to no assessment of teacher competence or fidelity.[24] Further, no published research to date has evaluated the efficacy of one program versus another. Even if, however, the field were to begin comparing the efficacy of these programs, this type of efficacy research would not be able to offer a definitive assessment of a particular program's universal efficacy.[25] In short, the assumption that we could simply compare

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[24] See, for example, Yi-Yuan Tang, Britta K. Holzel, and Michael I. Posner. "The Neuroscience of Mindfulness Meditation," *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 16, (2015): 213–225, doi:10.1038/nrn3916; Scott R. Bishop, "What Do We Really Know About Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction?" *Psychosom*atic Medicine 64, no. 1 (2002): 71–83; Edo Shonin, William Van Gordon, and Mark D. Griffiths, "Mindfulness-Based Interventions: Towards Mindful Clinical Integration," *Frontiers in Psychology* 18 (April 2013), doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00194; and also Madhav Goyal, Sonal Singh, Erica M.S. Sibinga, Neda F. Gould, et al. "Meditation Programs for Psychological Stress and Well-being: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis" *JAMA Internal Medicine* 174, no. 3 (2014): 357-368, doi:10.1001/jamainternmed.2013.13018.

[25] I would argue that the field of contemplative studies could learn from the history of psychotherapy, which had earlier embraced a similar positivist stance. Over the course over the last hundred years, the field of psychotherapy has attempted to address and understand human experience. Part of psychotherapy's

the efficacy of one program to another, without a sophisticated conceptual lens as well as assessment tools capable of evaluating the influence of various contextual factors, neither of which are available to the contemplative studies community at present, rests on a positivist-objectivist interpretation of science. Such an interpretation tends to assume that there is a singular, objective truth that can be "found" and measured. In regard to our work here, a positivist-objectivist stance assumes that there is one universal cause of suffering, and the goal of "contemplative science" is to discover and effectively apply *the universal* method of healing.

The issue, however, is far more complex than such a caricature would suggest: the various contemplative traditions that are commonly selected and adapted for scientific study are communicating dynamic life worlds—ways of being and becoming—as well as models of how one ought to be, and what constitutes happiness, or freedom from suffering. Thus we are not only concerned with what constitutes stress or suffering, but what also constitutes health and happiness.

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earlier project had been to develop and determine the psychotherapeutic approach or treatment that aligned with the correct vision of reality and thus was most therapeutically efficacious. In this vein, research was driven by an attempt to scientifically validate the correct theory among many emerging and often contradictory paradigms of human experience, including psychoanalysis, behaviorism, Rogerian or person-centered therapy, and so forth. Rather than affirming the efficacy of one particular theory or approach, this research instead yielded a flood of statistical data that paradoxically affirmed the efficacy of a variety of psychotherapeutic approaches and thereby also challenged psychotherapy's positivist claims.

The results of a comparative study by Lestor Luborsky, which found few significant differences among a range of psychotherapies, were termed the "Dodo bird verdict." (The terminology—coined by Saul Rosenweig—was borrowed from a scene in Alice in Wonderland in which the Dodo bird issued a competition to the characters at the table who had become wet. He urged them all to run around until they became dry, and without accounting for the way in which they became dry, he simply declared, "Everybody has won and all must have prizes!") The Dodo bird verdict legitimized the pluralist approach in psychotherapy and purported to reveal common factors that are shared by all treatments (including, for example, therapeutic alliance). Yet the results of this study also led others, who were convinced of the efficacy of various methods or techniques for specific individuals and populations, to develop more context-sensitive approaches to the study and development of psychotherapy treatments. See Lestor Luborsky, Barton Singer, and Lise Luborsky, "Is It True that 'Everyone Has Won and All Must Have Prizes?'" *Archives of General Psychology* 32 (1975): 995–1008.

For these reasons, it seems to me that a more sensible and compelling approach to the development, implementation and assessment of contemplative programs would consciously and systematically address the role of context. For example, such work might consider which particular programs might be best suited to particular individuals or groups in particular contexts (e.g. across time, space, and development). Such research might also consider what counts as evidence for whom and it what contexts. In other words, how do the ways in which practices or evidence is framed for particular audiences impact their efficacy? And, in turn, how do particular audiences, or imagined audiences, in turn impact the design and delivery of such practices, and the presentation of their potential efficacy?

I argue in this dissertation that research in the field of contemplative studies should proceed in this context-driven way, and that it ought to avoid overgeneralizing its findings to an imaged universal audience. In the following chapters I will demonstrate how the methods for healing offered by MBSR, CBCT, and ICT are situated within and constrained by various discourses, despite claims to a universally applicable method or universally accepted approach to healing. These claims to universality are based upon different models of human nature that are located in distinct Buddhist theoretical and contemplative traditions.

Such claims are also influenced by various interpretations of and responses to features of modernity. The growing field of contemplative studies has been shaped in very particular ways by the study of Buddhist religious practices adapted to and delivered in secular contexts. Often, popular discussions concerning the secularization of contemplative practices focuses on distinctions between the “secular” and the “religious”

and where or how lines are to be drawn between these spheres. These are important issues, yet such discussions can both miss and also signal far deeper issues at stake. Central to the discussions and debates concerning secularization is the issue of the continuity or transmission of traditional practices or lineages into modern, secular contexts. Are these practices being watered down, stripped of their worldviews in such a way that some of their communicative or transformative power is adulterated or corrupted?[26] This line of questioning suggests that there is some potentially universal or timeless teaching or truth that is in danger of being lost. An alternative perspective, however, might suggest that the transmission and adaptation of these practices in secular contexts presents an opportunity, rather than an obstacle. Thus the following questions remain: is there a universal truth or worldview that can be communicated via a universal method (or skillfully via different methods)? Or is the very idea of a universal cause, method, *and* truth entirely fraught?

Appeals to universality in the name of "secular ethics," to take just one example, can be rhetorically effective pragmatic devices insofar as they make programs and their practices applicable (or at least seem applicable) to a wide audience. Universalizing rhetorical devices and frames can also provide practitioners a sense of coherence, meaning, and purpose, as well as a sense of belonging and validation. At the same time, such universal frames can also obscure alternative perspectives and healing paths. They can, therefore, have the unintended effect of alienating certain groups of people and

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[26] Germano reflected on one of his most important teachers whom he understood to be one of the greatest contributors to Tibetan Buddhism of the 20th century because of his unique ability to transmit unique Tibetan values and worldviews through his very embodiment, or as Germano described, his ability to "transmit a lived world." Embodied transmission and learning is still poorly understood in relation to this field. For more on this topic, see Donna Lynn Brown, "A Many-Splendored Thing: Anne Carolyn Klein on the Transmission of Tibetan Buddhism," *Mandala*, July-December 2015, accessed July 14, 2015, http://fpmt.org/mandala/archives/mandala-for-2015/july/a-many-splendored-thing/.

denying individuals' particular experiences. Universal descriptions of health and well-being and of stress and suffering can also appear abstract, and thus seem irrelevant to individuals in particular contexts.

Universalizing rhetoric is dominant in this field—due in part to the dominance of scientific-rationalist or objectivist perspectives as well as ahistorical tendencies within the Buddhist tradition itself—and its presence threatens to mask or negate more complicated, contextual concerns. Although we might understand the drive toward and need for coherence, or even sameness (or "shared humanity") in the name of universality or universal "secular ethics," we must take care not to mistake the frame for the full picture—the map is not the territory. And at the same time, we must take care not to reject outright the notion of a universal secular ethics, or a basic common ground. To privilege culture or difference at the expense of commonality is to undermine, or at the very least significantly limit, the possibility of adapting and implementing practices across contexts. This would have significant implications not only for the transmission and secularization of Buddhist-based programs in the United States, but also for a host of other religious and cultural practices. To avoid these pitfalls endemic to debates between the humanities and the sciences,[27] we must maintain an open inquiry into the relationship between the universal and the particular, the global and the local, and even theory and context. I believe the field of contemplative studies must embrace "the wisdom of sameness and of difference," to quote Germano,[28] and would benefit from ecologically-

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[27] See, for example, Edward Slingerland, *What Science Offers the Humanities: Integrating Body and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and Francisca Cho & Richard K. Squier, "Reductionism: Be Afraid, Be Very Afraid," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76, no. 2 (2008): 412-417.

[28] Germano, "Contemplation in Contexts."

driven approaches informed by systems-thinking and recent work in grounded cognition.[29] We will return to these topics in the final chapter.

The Limits of Frames

In his book, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience,* Erving Goffman puts forth an approach to identifying and analyzing frames of social interaction. He advances the notion that individuals rely on "frameworks of understanding"—background schemata of interpretation influenced by culture and experience—to make sense of events. In Goffman's terms, these frameworks help individuals grasp the significance of events and communicate "what is it that's going on here."[30] Goffman speaks also of "frames," that is, principles of organization that govern *specific events or activities* and an individual's involvement in them.[31] Like the frame of a picture, frames highlight what to attend to and what not to attend to. In other words, frames emphasize certain aspects of experience while de-emphasizing others. Both frameworks and frames guide the perception and representation of reality and thus there is admittedly some slippage between these terms. Frameworks, however, tend to refer to the background knowledge from or against which we construct frames. Frameworks also may contain instantiations of many frames.

Frames are situational, perspectival, and subject to varying motivations, positions, and other intersecting frames. Goffman explains:

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[29] For more background on grounded cognition, see Lawrence W. Barsalou, "Grounded Cognition," *Annual Review of Psychology* 59 (2008): 617-645; and Lawrence W. Barsalou, "Grounded Cognition: Past, Present, and Future," *Topics in Cognitive Science*, *2* no. 4 (2008): 716–724.

[30] Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986), 25.

[31] Goffman, *Frame Analysis,* 10-11.

> [T]he question "What is it that's going on here?" is considerably suspect. Any event can be described in terms of a focus that includes a wide swath or a narrow one and—as a related but not identical matter—in terms of a focus that is close-up or distant. And no one has a theory as to what particular span and level will come to be the ones employed […]
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> A similar issue is found in connection with perspective. When participant roles in an activity are differentiated—a common circumstance—the view that one person has of what is going on is likely to be quite different from that of another. There is a sense in which what is play for the golfer is work for the caddy. Different interests will […] generate different motivational relevancies. (Moreover, variability is complicated here by the fact that those who bring different perspectives to the "same" events are likely to employ different spans and levels of focus.) […]
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> Further, it is obvious that in most "situations" many different things are happening simultaneously—things that are likely to have begun at different moments and may terminate dissynchronously. To ask the question "What is *it* that's going on here biases matters in the direction of unitary exposition and simplicity.[32]

Despite their situational and perspectival nature, frames imply coherence: they provide a means of making sense of, or "getting our head around," our experience. On the surface, they also give the impression that we have the full picture, or an unobstructed perspective.

As Goffman suggests, frames limit the scope of interpretation and establish the lens through which we analyze the very scale of or implications of that interpretation. Frames are motivated by our own positionality, perspective, agenda, and, as above, our assumed audiences. They are also shaped and limited by implicit frameworks or "frameworks of understanding." Frames also have a way of presenting something that is dissynchronous as uniform, or something that is in motion as static. This has direct

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[32] Goffman, *Frame Analysis,* 8-9.

bearing not only on the subject matter, but also on the way in which I have introduced, and will discuss, the issues at stake throughout the dissertation. I will employ my own set of frames and frameworks, including what I call "Buddhist theoretical frames" and "American cultural frames" that develop in relation to broader theoretical and cultural frameworks of understanding to help us compare, analyze, and understand the distinct contemplative programs that are under analysis. Yet as we consider the limits of some of the universal frames employed by these programs, we must bear in mind that the picture is of course more complicated than is possible to present here.

The contemplative programs under analysis here are dynamic; they shift and adapt over time as they accommodate new situations and trends, and as they adapt and respond to each other. For the purpose of this analysis, however, I have presented them as somewhat static, as if the contexts in which they were developed and are being adapted were not constantly shifting. My presentations of MBSR, CBCT and ICT below are intended to serve as heuristic devices—I have not fully captured the range of teachings, practices, rhetorical devices, and various adaptations or instantiations of these programs. MBSR in particular has become something of a cultural phenomenon that stands for much more than just the eight-week program described here, as evinced by the many MBIs derived from MBSR noted earlier.

The three programs I am investigating, MBSR, CBCT, and ICT, each offer distinct frames for healing; and each program is also consciously, to varying degrees, framing itself in relation to the dominant theoretical and cultural "frameworks of understanding" described below. The programs also consciously, to varying extents, frame their rhetoric in response to particular audiences. Thus I am not suggesting that the

founders are unaware of their audiences, nor that they are naïve to the limits of the concept of a universal audience. Nevertheless, as will become clear below, they are wrestling with certain universalizing tendencies found in the Buddhist tradition, and they are also negotiating both universalizing and relativizing discourses in modernity and postmodernity, especially in relation to Buddhism's transmission, reception, and adaptation in America. They are also, as Buddhist-derived programs, negotiating the problems with frames themselves, and the limits of frames for radical or ultimate health and healing. Although the programs attempt in different ways to bracket soteriological concerns from therapeutic contexts, the tensions concerning the nature and possibility of health and healing remain.

To examine the rhetorical frames employed by each of these programs is one way of addressing context, as such analyses can reveal implicit background "frameworks of understanding" that often go unnoticed. This type of examination is also a way of asking not only how these programs understand themselves but also how they wish to be understood. The programs all understand themselves to be skillfully adapting Buddhist contemplative traditions and practices—even though they claim that they are *not* Buddhist—for use by contemporary secular audiences in different ways. MBSR understands itself to be transmitting an unadulterated version of the *buddhadharma* or the teachings of the Buddha; CBCT understands itself to be transmitting and preserving a more authentic or traditional version of the dharma than MBSR; and ICT understands itself to be more skillfully transmitting the essence of the dharma in new ways that may be more relevant to our current cultural context. At stake is the question of whether there is one dharma, and if and to what degree these programs are perceived to be transmitting

the most authoritative version of the dharma in the most effective ways. Also of significant importance is what they understand their ultimate end-goal to be: are they primarily concerned with communicating secular means for reducing stress and suffering, or are they predominantly concerned with offering methods for deeper healing (what some might call "awakening" or "enlightenment")? To put it another way, are they comfortable simply offering methods for stress-reduction? Is holding stress-reduction as one's primary goal in tension with the goal of deeper healing? Does the stress-reduction frame limit one's capacities for awakening and deeper healing?

The tendency to frame these programs as universally applicable is driven at least in part by a need to preserve and present some form of coherence, especially in relation to the Buddhist tradition. This drive comes into tension with more relativizing or deconstructive approaches. In the following chapters I will outline the limits of this rhetoric and the limits of other frames—including the secular, scientific, and spiritual—that are influenced by it. Yet rather than simply pointing out problems with the universal rhetoric employed in these programs, I will suggest constructive reframes and new paths forward for the field.

Contemplative Practice in Context

To ground our discussion, in the following chapter we will explore how MBSR, CBCT, and ICT were developed within and against debated "frameworks of understanding" within Mahāyāna Buddhism concerning the nature of mind and the means for attaining enlightenment, known otherwise as "awakening" (*bodhi*). Put simply, the debate hinges on whether the qualities of awakening are innate to one's mind or whether they need to be cultivated. "Innateist" models contend that the qualities of awakening are

present, yet are obscured or concealed by mistaken structures of cognition in the mind. The goal of practice therefore is to eliminate, or at least reduce, these distorting structures. "Constructivist" models, in contrast, hold that the potential for awakening is present in one's mind, but that it must be nurtured and trained. Prescribed practices therefore foster the cultivation of positive qualities and emphasize changing the content of cognitive structures rather than the structures themselves. In light of the brief, simplified sketches of the programs' theoretical models outlined above, we can locate MBSR on the innateist end of the spectrum of the traditional debate, and CBCT on the constructivist end of the spectrum. ICT falls more toward the innateist end of the spectrum, yet it relies also upon cognitive practices more typical of constructivists to help uncover and draw out the mind's true nature.

Considerable scholarly attention has already been paid to the innateist-constructivist debate in Buddhist studies,[33] though this work has tended to focus primarily on the history of the debate as well as the legitimacy or authenticity of the two approaches. Until fairly recently, far less attention has been paid to the development of these approaches in context.[34] Such a cultural-historical reading of the two approaches in context

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[33] See, for example: David Seyfort Ruegg, *Buddha Nature, Mind and the Problem of Gradualism in a Comparative Perspective: On the Transmission and Reception of Buddhism in India and Tibet* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1989); Klaus-Dieter Mathes, *A Direct Path to the Buddha Within: Gö Lotsāwa's Mahāmudrā Interpretation of the Ratnagotravibhāga* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2008); Sam Van Schaik, *Approaching the Great Perfection: Simultaneous and Gradual Approaches to Dzogchen Practice in Jigme Lingpa's Nyingtig* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2004).

[34] John Dunne, "Toward an Understanding of Nondual Mindfulness," *Contemporary* Buddhism 12 (2011), 71-88: doi: 10.1080/14639947.2011.564820; John Dunne, "Buddhist Styles of Mindfulness: A Heuristic Approach," in *Handbook of Mindfulness and Self Regulation,* ed. Brian Ostafin, Brian Meier & Michael Robinson (New York: Springer, 2015); John Makransky, "Historical Consciousness as an Offering to the Transhistorical Buddha," in *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars,* ed. John Makransky and Roger Jackson (New York: Routledge, 1999); *The Svātantrika-Prāsangika Distinction: What difference does a difference make?* Ed. Georges B.J. Dreyfus and Sara L. McClintock (Boston: Wisdom Publications; 2003); and Germano, "Contemplation in Contexts."

is in tension with traditional tendencies to interpret and present Buddhism as monolithic, and to reconcile diverse and even seemingly contradictory teachings in a hierarchy of truth under the banner of "skillful means."[35] This traditional Buddhist approach to presenting and reconciling the two streams has, in my view, influenced discussions of contemporary models such that programs are evaluated as being more or less authentically correct; a program's context, and the possibilities open to it for development and innovation, are therefore not given sufficient attention.[36]

The founders of these three programs all understand and negotiate tensions between traditional and contemporary interpretations of the innateist-constructivist debate (and between universalizing and relativizing rhetoric) in different ways, which we will explore in the following chapters. In addition to the influence of the aforementioned Buddhist theoretical debates, or frames, on MBSR, CBCT, and ICT, it is important to emphasize that these programs are also shaped in response to various specifically North American, and more generally modern, cultural forces. These broader theoretical and cultural frameworks of understanding both laid the groundwork from which the programs originally developed and were subsequently adapted.

In his book, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism,* David McMahan traces the historical-cultural forces that have shaped the adaptation Buddhism in Asia and in the West from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day. He argues that the Buddhism we have inherited in the West, which emphasizes contemplative practice and its compatibility with science, is the product of modernity. He outlines three discourses of modernity in

[35] Makransky, "Historical Consciousness," 111-135.

[36] Dunne (2011, 2015) has drawn attention to this problem, particularly in relation to the debates concerning the definition of mindfulness and the authenticity of contemplative practice styles found in MBSR.

particular—namely: 1) monotheism, as influenced by the Protestant Reformation; 2) scientific rationalism and naturalism; and 3) romanticism. He traces the influence of these three themes on Buddhist modernism and shows how they are also in turn marked by a particularly modern, secular "world-affirming" attitude, as well as a shift toward interiority.

The modern discourses of rationalism and romanticism, in particular, are simultaneously interwoven and in tension: Buddhism assimilated the rhetoric of scientific rationalism while simultaneously offering a spiritual corrective for it. Buddhism was presented by early modernizers as a rational religion completely compatible with science in response to what many took to be an attack on their so-called "primitive" religion by Christian colonizers in Asia.[37] Buddhist teachings were often thus re-interpreted, or demythologized, to accord with a scientific-rationalist view.

Partly in conversation with and in response to this presentation of Buddhism as a rational religion by early modernizers such as Anagarika Dharmapala and Paul Carus, figures such as Henry Steel Olcott and Helena Blavatsky (founders of the Theosophical Society) resisted what they interpreted to be solely reductive descriptions of Buddhism as a "positivist science." Instead they sought to embrace the empirical spirit of rational or mainstream science while infusing it with forms of romanticism and the occult sciences that could simultaneously serve as critiques to extreme forms of scientific rationalism. Their project was to empirically study the connection between the human and spirit worlds and reveal the hidden teachings of eastern mystical and metaphysical traditions

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[37] David L. McMahan, "Modernity and the Discourse of Scientific Buddhism," in *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 89-116. See also Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *Buddhism & Science: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

that pointed to the unifying, perennialist, or transcendent Truth.[38] Similarly, other Transcendentalists, in opposition to reductionist trends in science, also embraced and promoted "the exaltation of nature, the idea of spiritual experience as identifying with the natural world or a universal spirit, the emphasis on spontaneity and creativity through the cultivation of an interior experience, the transcendence of conventional morality through an intuitive and interior source of ethics, [and] the reverence of the simple and the rustic over the complex and the technological."[39] Other notable modernizers, including D. T. Suzuki, similarly emphasized the rhetoric of spontaneity, creativity, and universal "pure experience," thereby offering Buddhism as a method not just for Buddhists, but also for those interested in self-actualization and different forms of psychotherapy, including analysis[40] Buddhism was presented by these early modernizers as a pragmatic, experiential path of awakening, free from faith, cultural trappings, rituals, and religious institutions.

Buddhism in the West has additionally been shaped by and in response to other features of modernity, including the contested category of the "secular." The rise of science and a scientific worldview, as well as a general increase in the number of competing models of reality, has had a relativizing effect on religious traditions. In the face of competing religious, scientific, and spiritual claims to reality and objective truth, individuals have come to rely increasingly on their own experience, and have grown suspicious of institutionalized religious authority. Individuals have grown to trust their

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[38] McMahan, "Modernity and the Discourse of Scientific Buddhism," 89-116.

[39] McMahan, "Modernity and the Discourse of Scientific Buddhism," 76.

[40] Anne Harrington and John Dunne, "When Mindfulness is Therapy: Ethical Qualms, Historical Perspectives," *American Psychologist* (October 2015), doi:10.1037/a0039460.

own personal experience as the source of truth or morality, which has fostered what Charles Taylor refers to as the "subjective turn."[41] This subjective turn thus signals not the decline of religious or spiritual beliefs *per se*, as common theories of secularization had predicted, but rather has marked a shift in the locus of morality and spirituality from God and religious institutions to individuals.[42]

The themes of modernity—privatized spirituality, deinstitutionalization, and an immanent or world-affirming attitude—have also shaped the elements of Buddhism that have been drawn forth and considered central. As McMahan notes, meditation has become the hallmark of modern Buddhism. It is often presented as a technique or tool for individual self-healing and transformation that is fully divorceable from its larger religious or cultural framework. Relevant to our work here, this deinstitutionalization of meditation has had the effect of separating certain forms of contemplative practice from traditional frameworks and contexts while also granting them an unprecedented centrality to the tradition itself.[43]

In spite of its implied narrative of scientific progress, modernity, as McMahan notes, also "carries with it a nostalgia for the pre-modern and a hope that ancient traditions can help in re-enchanting the world, through, ironically, their own kind of 'sciences' and 'technologies'—those of the spirit."[44] This nostalgia for the pre-modern encourages a return to the origin of Buddhism, and thus encourages a belief in the "pure"

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[41] Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 55-70.

[42] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 539-772.

[43] McMahan, *Buddhist Modernism,* 24.

[44] McMahan, *Buddhist Modernism,* 13.

Buddhism taught by the historical Buddha himself.[45] We have inherited a Buddhism that is largely a creation of these modern discourses. This modernized rhetoric lends itself to the search for an ahistorical, a-cultural, monolithic Buddhism. Yet ironically, it is precisely because Buddhism develops and adapts in various cultures that it is able to survive and thrive through place and time. The tension, however, between fixedness and fluidity, or the eternal and the transient, is tangible, and it openly as well as tacitly influences the development of modern contemplative programs.

Although we will primarily focus on the discourses of modernity that form the background conditions within which MBSR, CBCT, and ICT develop and to which they explicitly adapt and respond, certain features of Buddhist modernism have come into tension with various discourses of postmodernity. Such post-modern critiques challenge universalizing grand meta-narratives, reject the ahistorical presentation of the Buddha's teachings, and are more suspicious of traditional claims regarding the authority or authenticity of teachings and practices. [46] The relativizing nature of these discourses are understood and addressed in different ways by each of the three programs discussed here.

Toward a Critical Constructive Approach

The three programs we are examining, MBSR, CBCT, and ICT are all contemporary programs shaped *for* particular modern, predominantly North American audiences (real or imagined). At the same time, they are shaped also *by* traditional

[45] Donald S. Lopez, Jr., "Introduction," in *A Modern Buddhist Bible: Essential Readings from East and West,* ed. Donalds S. Lopez (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), ix–x.

[46] See, for example, Makransky, "Historical Consciousness," 126-135 and Ann Gleig, "From Buddhist Hippies to Buddhist Geeks: The Emergence of Buddhist Postmodernism?" *Journal of Global Buddhism*, 15 (2014): 15-33.

Buddhist contemplative models. The goal here is to explore the ways in which these Buddhist theoretical models and American cultural considerations influence the frames of contemporary Buddhist-based programs. The goal is not to determine which practice is most effective or authentically Buddhist. This multi-dimensional frame analysis will help us consider the implications of these various frames, with particular attention to how such frameworks shape, limit, and permit different possibilities for health and healing.

The purpose of this dissertation is to deconstruct and analyze these frames and the limits of their universalizing rhetoric, yet it is not solely a critical project. Revealing the dominant frames that shape and inform these programs can highlight our own conditioned and limited biases and thereby help us explore new frames, or new ways of communicating these practices in effective ways to various audiences. In other words, this project in large part assumes that these practices and approaches can be of benefit, and perhaps even of greater benefit, if the limits and contours of their frames are made known. The project is also constructive in another sense: rather than simply deconstructing the construct of a frame and pointing out the limits of any one perspective, especially our particular modern perspective, the project holds open the possibility of some universal truth that might be communicated through these secular contemplative programs. This is not to advance a particular Buddhist position, but rather to keep alive the very source of creative tension—that is, between the universal and the particular, the global and the local, the "secular" and "religious," healing and "ultimate healing"—that gives fuel to this field and the ongoing transmission and adaptation of Buddhist-based contemplative practices in North America. The question of what works best and for

whom is a question of skillful means that is central to both therapeutic and soteriological frames which are also operative and in tension throughout this discourse.

This constructive approach is inspired by a recent movement in the academic study of Buddhism, which John Makransky and others refer to as "Buddhist theology." This movement adopts a critical-historical approach to the study of Buddhist thought and practice in order to better understand how the Dharma may best be understood, expressed, and communicated across time and space. In the following excerpt from his article, "Historical Consciousness as an Offering to the Trans-historical Buddha," Makransky explains the need for and the approach of this critical-constructive movement:

> Although Religious Studies, including Buddhist studies, has begun to shed light on the historical nature of Buddhist traditions, only Buddhist traditions can reflect critically upon the implications of such findings for their own systematic understandings, practice and relevance to our time.
>
> For the most part, however, Buddhists East and West have hardly begun to assess the implications of historical consciousness for their own self-understanding. For example, many of the most learned Asian Mahāyāna teachers continue to speak as if the historical Buddha personally taught the Mahāyāna scriptures, in spite of much evidence to the contrary. And long time Western students of such teachers, who have begun to teach Zen or Tibetan practice in the west, often do the same […]
>
> We seem to find ourselves today in a confusing position analogous to […] Tibet from the 8th century: an early period of encounter between several Buddhist traditions at once with a new culture, a period in which intense exchange occurs in some sectors of the new culture even as barriers go up in other sectors. In contemporary Western academic culture, Religious Studies (or History of Religions) seeks to protect its hard-won status as "detached observer" that was necessary for it to emerge as a discipline distinct from Theology in the academy, and contemporary Buddhist studies inherits that ethos, enabling it to uncover historical and cultural data from an "objective" distance that renders it important to evaluate the implications of its findings for a tradition which still remains largely unaffected by them.
>
> Buddhist Studies scholars have been taught how to critically analyze traditional Buddhist understandings of text, lineage, tradition, etc., but only to "bracket" (and therefore leave unexplored) what underlying truth or value in Buddhism may be

> left untouched by the critique, or may even be better revealed through such critique. Yet it is precisely Buddhism's possible truth and transformative value that has elicited to much of the contemporary world's interest in it […]
>
> The purpose [of this approach] is to argue for a new appreciation of the tremendous wealth of methods for and perspectives upon awakening bequeathed to us from diverse, culturally specific communities of practice experience, as Buddhism and our culture enter a process of mutual transformation that will require us to draw upon a diversity of approaches founded upon the long experience of prior traditions. Another purpose is to demonstrate the inevitability of new authentic embodiments and expressions of Dharma in our culture, emergent now and in the future, as a phenomena in long continuity with the ancient process of ongoing (never closable) Mahāyāna revelation that has always been specific to time and place.[47]

The underlying impetus for this work, then, informed in large part by this critical-constructive approach, is to discover ways in which Buddhist teachings, practices and worldviews may be made more accessible and effective. Thus assessing theoretical and cultural frameworks of understanding helps uncover not only limits, but also the diverse and often dynamic ways in which these practices have been adapted in our time. Such reflections may deepen our understanding of these practices and also inform new adaptations necessary to meet new, evolving circumstances and cultures.

Adopting this critical-constructive approach does not solve or alleviate the creative tensions present in this field. It does provide, however, an intention with which we approach this work. Yet what counts as the truth or essence of Buddhism remains at issue, as does the question of who can and should do such critical, constructive work on behalf of Buddhism. Our own view(s) of what counts as Buddhism—and also what aspects of the tradition are worthy of or in need of transmission or skillful adaptation—are culturally conditioned, as are our understandings of what is most helpful and most

[47] Makransky, "Historical Consciousness," 111-114.

needed in our world. This makes the entire enterprise profoundly challenging, yet also exciting.

Outline of the Dissertation

In the following chapters I address these tensions and provide some conceptual clarity to the issues in this emerging field. I first outline both the theoretical and cultural frames that have given shape to the development and adaption of Buddhist-based secular programs and analyzes their limitations and rhetorical skill. I then consider ways in which programs might perhaps effectively reframe some of their rhetoric in light of some of these limitations. In line with this critical-constructive approach, I also consider what else might be missing from this discussion, and proposes further directions for the field.

Chapter 2, "Buddhist Theoretical Frames," provides an overview of the "frames of healing" employed by MBSR, CBCT, and ICT, including their conceptualizations of the problem of stress and suffering; the causes of that stress and suffering; their vision for health and healing; and the path or method for overcoming that suffering or realizing health and well-being. The chapter provides a brief assessment of these competing models, and also includes an overview of the Buddhist theoretical models from which these programs take their inspiration. It then provides a summary of the debate within the tradition between the so-called "innateists" and "constructivists" concerning the correct or most efficacious means of awakening. The chapter concludes with a brief analysis of the limits of these theoretical frames.

Chapter 3, "North American Cultural Frames," offers an analysis of the ways in which the three contemplative programs have been framed by and in response to various discourses of modernity, including scientific rationalism and romantic expressivism.

Much of the chapter focuses on the “secular frame” and the ways in which the programs position themselves in relation to the categories of the “secular” and “religious.” The chapter also reviews ways in which the programs variously present themselves as scientific and spiritual, and questions what is at stake in the secularization of these practices.

Chapter 4, “Frames, (Re)frames, and New Directions,” offers a critique of the limits of each of the major frames analyzed in this dissertation, including the Buddhist-theoretical frame, the secular frame, the scientific frame, and the spiritual (but not religious) frame. In turn, it suggests potential reframes for each of these limiting frames. In the final section, I engage in some meta-reflection on the issues of frames in general and gesture toward some constructive paths forward for the field.

Chapter Two: Buddhist Theoretical Frames

The three contemplative programs under analysis in this dissertation, MBSR, CBCT, and ICT, are all informed by and in response to Buddhist contemplative frameworks of understanding. These innateist and constructivist frameworks assume different causes of suffering and thus prescribe distinct practice methods in support of the relief of that suffering. MBSR, CBCT, and ICT interpret and respond to these frameworks in various ways. The first part of this chapter will provide an overview of the "frames of healing" in each of the three programs through an analysis of the ways in which they: (i) define the problem to be addressed by their program and thus implicitly make judgments about what is "good"; (ii) diagnose the causes of this problem; (iii) outline the goals of their program, including who or what one is to become; and (iv) prescribe a remedy or path to realizing these goals. (The structure of these frames of healing parallels the Buddha's Four Noble Truths including: (i) the truth of suffering; (ii) the truth of the causes of suffering; (iii) the truth of the cessation of or freedom from suffering; and (iv) the truth of the path of liberation or the Eightfold Path.) The second part of this chapter will analyze the ways in which contrasting Buddhist theoretical frames have influenced these modern adaptations. The following chapter examines the various modern cultural conditions, themes, and audiences that further shape the framing of these programs.

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

The Problem, Its Cause(s), and the Goals of MBSR

On the MBSR model, stress and suffering are understood to arise from a lack of awareness of, as well as an inability to be present to and accepting of, things "as they

are." The program therefore involves training in mindfulness—meaning both the training of attention as well as the cultivation of a particular stance toward the world—as a way of helping participants come to terms with reality as it is. It is through this "coming to terms" with things "as they are," without trying to change them, that healing takes place. As Kabat-Zinn notes, "We often see that healing takes place on its own over time as we align ourselves with what is deepest and best in ourselves and rest in awareness moment-by-moment without an attachment to outcome."[48] The practice therefore involves learning to become more present to stress, pain, illness, and the challenges in one's life, while discovering the capacity to experience a sense of stability and peace within these very challenges:

> We practice mindfulness by remembering to be present in all our waking moments. We can practice taking out the garbage mindfully, eating mindfully, driving mindfully. We can practice navigating through all the ups and downs we encounter, the storms of the mind and the storms of our bodies, the storms of the outer life and of the inner life. We learn to be aware of our fears and our pain, yet at the same time stabilized and empowered by a connection to something deeper within ourselves, a discerning wisdom that helps to penetrate and transcend the fear and the pain, and to discover some peace and hope within our situation *as it is*.[49]

Participants thus learn to heal and grow through the process of living in the moment and waking up to the potential for healing and transformation that each moment contains.

The Path of MBSR: Cultivating Mindfulness

Mindfulness as a way of being is often described as a means of "waking up," or becoming more "alive."[50] In terms of practice, mindfulness, the key contemplative

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[48] Kabat-Zinn, "Some Reflections on the Origins of MBSR," 293.

[49] Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness* (New York: Bantam Dell, 2013 [1990]), 29.

[50] See, for example, Kabat-Zinn, *Coming to Our Senses,* 2.

practice taught in MBSR programs, is operationally defined as the act of "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally."[51] As the definition suggests, mindfulness does not consist merely of attention training, but rather implies a particular way of seeing the world that is facilitated by the cultivation of a certain set of attitudes. These are: (1) non-judging; (2) patience; (3) "beginner's mind"; (4) trust; (5) non-striving; (6) acceptance; and (7) letting go.[52]

Non-judging refers to an attitude of impartiality; a way of bearing witness to one's experience without "the veil" of implicit biases or preferences. It involves simply noticing things "as they are," without evaluating them as good or bad and so forth. Patience refers to the ability to abide in this moment, and to allow all things—including one's own healing—to unfold in their own time. In terms of practice, patience encourages one to be with and accept this moment, without wishing it away, or reaching out for the next moment. "Beginner's mind" involves approaching each moment with an innocent, child-like curiosity. In other words, "beginner's mind" refers to an attitude that encourages one to try to see things as if for the first time, which is thought to afford flexibility in perceiving and responding to situations. Trust concerns developing one's intuition and learning to rely on one's own experience; rather than relying solely upon a teacher, text, or habitual method of practice, trust involves cultivating one's own capacity for self-care. Non-striving refers to the paradox of non-doing: the act of trying to achieve

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[51] Note that this definition did not appear in the foundational work of Kabat-Zinn's Stress Reduction Clinic, *Full Catastrophe Living*, first published in 1990. Kabat-Zinn explains that in that work he resisted attempts to narrowly or concisely define mindfulness, and instead opted to describe the experience of mindfulness in detail, for he believed the description necessarily varied according to context. As he explains, the entire text of *Full Catastrophe Living*—which includes class descriptions, practice instructions, mindful attitudes, notes on committing to practice and personal participant narratives—is a definition of mindfulness. For an account of this, see Kabat-Zinn, "Some reflections on the origins of MBSR," 288-294.

[52] Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living,* 31-46.

a particular goal (e.g., abiding in the present moment) is thought to undermine the cultivation of mindfulness by reducing one's willingness and ability to abide in the present moment. The attitude of acceptance pushes this notion further. One is encouraged to open to the present moment and embrace all experiences contained in it. This attitude of acceptance is illustrated by the following poem, *The Guest House,* authored by the 13th century Sufi mystic poet, Rumi, which is frequently taught in MBSR classes:

> This being human is a guest house.
> Every morning a new arrival.
>
> A joy, a depression, a meanness,
> some momentary awareness comes
> as an unexpected visitor.
>
> Welcome and entertain them all!
> Even if they are a crowd of sorrows
> who violently sweep your house
> empty of its furniture,
> still treat each guest honorably.
> He may be clearing you out
> for some new delight.
>
> The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
> meet them at the door laughing,
> and invite them in.
>
> Be grateful for whoever comes,
> because each has been sent
> as a guide from beyond.[53]

Acceptance is also described as "clear seeing." It is not passive; rather, seeing things as they are is understood is the first step in allowing the process of ameliorative change to begin. The final attitude of "letting go,"[54] or "non-attachment," is the practice of putting

[53] Coleman Barks, trans., "The Guest House," in *The Essential Rumi* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 109.

[54] Kabat-Zinn notes that "letting go" comes to be understood as "letting be" as one advances in the practice. First one learns to let go of clinging to certain experiences, and gradually "senses into" the practice of

aside the tendency to want things to be a certain way. It involves letting go of thoughts of the past or future, or the tendency to cling to certain aspects of experience while rejecting others.

Taken together, this set of attitudes creates the frame or conditions for practice, and importantly, for self-healing to take place. MBSR situates itself within a larger conceptual framework oriented towards patient education and self-care. This emphasis on self-care is connected to MBSR's early beginnings in hospital settings, in which classes were initially offered primarily for chronic pain patients whom were not benefitting from traditional forms of standard medical treatment. Although MBSR's applications have extended beyond clinics to include schools, prisons, and a variety of other non-clinical settings, the emphasis on self-care and psycho-education remains. Classes include education on the causes of health and well-being, as well as the ways in which certain maladaptive habits contribute to suffering, pain, and stress. The program aims to help participants realize their innate resources for self-healing, and thus includes instruction in a range of self-regulatory skills.

Typical MBSR classes are organized sequentially around the following topics: (1) the theoretical underpinnings of mind-body medicine, mindful eating (often illustrated through the well-known "raisin eating exercise"), mindfulness of breathing, and the body scan; (2) the role of perception and conditioning in the appraisal and assessment of stress (which includes exercises to help participants learn to think outside the box, so to speak); (3) hatha yoga (usually described as Mindful Movement); (4) the physiology of stress and the use of MBSR skills to reduce the negative effects of stress; (5) the participant's

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letting be (Kabat-Zinn, personal communication, November 1, 2014). This is related to the approach of ICT discussed below.

capacity to adapt and respond more effectively to stressors; (6) the development of transformational coping strategies, or attitudes and behaviors that enhance "stress hardiness"; (7) effective interpersonal communication (usually taught through *aikido* exercises); and (8) daily strategies for maintaining one's practice at home.

MBSR programs also include instructions for specific meditation practices, including sitting meditation and the body scan. Instructions for sitting meditation encourage the participant to refocus attention on the experience of breathing:

> We *feel* it come in, we *feel* it go out. We dwell in the present, moment-by-moment, breath by breath. It sounds simple, and it is. Full awareness of the in-breath, full awareness on the out-breath. Letting the breath just happen, observing it, feeling all the sensations, gross and subtle, associated with it.[55]

Note the emphasis on *feeling* the breath, and not *thinking* about or *analyzing* it. The emphasis is placed firmly on the practitioner's ability to *experience* it. The instructions continue:

> [W]henever we find that our attention has moved elsewhere, wherever that may be, we just note it and let go and gently escort our attention back to the breath, back to the rising and falling of our own belly.[56]

Thus each time the attention drifts to an object—a thought, sensation, feeling, memory—other than the breath, the instructions are to gently but firmly return attention to the feeling of the breath as it enters and leaves the body. In the beginning stages, thoughts continuously divert the attention, and the practice of repeatedly "letting go" and returning to the breath is said to help build stability and equanimity.

Once participants develop familiarity with this practice during the first few weeks of the program, they are then invited to expand their attention to include awareness of

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[55] Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living,* 62.

[56] Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living,* 64.

somatic sensations, sounds, and thought processes and to "be receptive to whatever unfolds in each moment."[57] According to Kabat-Zinn, this practice, known as *choiceless awareness*,[58] "is one of the most characteristic and valuable features of mindfulness meditation."[59] The instructions are as follows:

> Just sit. Don't hold on to anything, don't look for anything. Practice being completely open and receptive to whatever comes into the field of awareness, letting it all come and go, watching, witnessing in stillness.[60]

These instructions are deceptively simple. They require the practitioner to not get caught up in thoughts of the past or future, to not judge, resist, or close off any aspect of experience. One is instructed to simply "just sit" or "let go" and allow the mind to rest in present-centered, non-judgmental awareness. As Kabat-Zinn explains, mindfulness means being present on purpose, and "does not mean a 'rehearsal' or a perfecting of some skill so that we can put it to use at some other time…The means and the end of meditation are really the same. We are not trying to get somewhere else, only working at being where we already are and being here fully."[61]

Roots of MBSR: The Buddhist Theoretical Framework

The practices and skills that form the foundation of MBSR programs are drawn from a variety of Buddhist traditions. Some elements of MBSR, including the *body scan* and certain mindfulness practices (including *mindfulness of breathing*), were influenced by teachings and texts within the Theravada tradition, including the *Mahāsatipaṭṭāna-*

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[57] Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living,* 71.

[58] For the first use of this term, see Jiddu Krishnamurti, "Volume V, 1948-1949: Choiceless Awareness," in *The Collected Works of J. Krishnamurti* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2013).

[59] Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living,* 66.

[60] Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living,* 74.

[61] Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living,* 17-18.

sutta, and also by well-known modern Theravada or *vipassanā* teachers such as Jack Kornfield and Nyanaponika Thera.[62] Kabat-Zinn notes that he was also influenced by a number of other popular modern meditation texts, including Chogyam Trungpa's *Meditation in Action* (1969), Thich Nhat Hanh's *The Miracle of Mindfulness* (1976), and Joseph Goldstein's *The Experience of Insight* (1976).

Although MBSR has clear links to the modern *vipassanā* movement, I argue that MBSR was most inspired by the American Zen tradition. Its rhetorical emphasis on direct experience, naturalness, and simplicity mirrors popular, mainstream Zen texts, including, most notably, Shunryu Suzuki's classic American Zen text, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* (1973). Kabat-Zinn, a student of Soto and Rinzai Zen, seems especially influenced by the descriptions of "Right Attitudes" and "Right Understanding" described in this text, particularly by those passages regarding trust in oneself, non-striving (or non-doing), and "non-specialness." Kabat-Zinn states:

> [T]here was from the very beginning of MBSR an emphasis on non-duality and the non-instrumental dimension of practice, and thus, on non-doing, non-striving, not-knowing, non-attachment to outcomes, even to positive health outcomes […] The emphasis in Chan [i.e., Zen] on direct transmission outside the sutras or orthodox teachings (Luk, 1974) also reinforced the sense that what is involved in mindfulness practice is ultimately not merely a matter of the intellect or cognition or scholarship, but of direct authentic full-spectrum first-person experience, nurtured, catalysed, reinforced and guided by the second-person perspective of a well-trained and highly experienced and empathic teacher. Therefore, MBSR was grounded in a non-authoritarian, non-hierarchical perspective that allowed for clarity, understanding, and wisdom, what we might call essential dharma, to emerge in the interchanges between instructor and participants, and within the meditation practice of the participant as guided by the instructor.[63]

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[62] Kabat-Zinn, "Some Reflections on the Origins of MBSR," 289.

[63] Kabat-Zinn, "Some Reflections on the Origins of MBSR," 292.

Further, as in Zen Buddhist discourse, MBSR centrally employs a rhetoric of anti-intellectualism and anti-authoritarianism. MBSR does not rely on analytical or cognitive strategies to engender or awaken one's innate capacity for healing. Rather, it relies more on affective[64] attitudes and approaches for supporting one through a personal process of self-inquiry that emphasizes direct experience over reasoning or analysis. The affective emphasis in MBSR is further reflected through the regular utilization of poetry—especially poems by Rumi, Mary Oliver, Walt Whitman and the like—to evoke particular feelings and moods.[65]

MBSR teachers, too, are encouraged to welcome people into the "mystery" of mindfulness and uphold the view that people intuitively know how to care for themselves.[66] MBSR teachers are thus positioned as guides[67] who help participants tap their own inner wisdom and strength by allowing, embodying, and by guiding the process of inquiry. This is further emphasized through teachings that stress the importance "not of what was said, but of what was not said," and also the ways in which language is

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[64] Though we may draw a casual distinction between affect and cognition, these terms are not mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, this persistent distinction reflects perhaps both naïveté and a holdover of modern discourses especially concerning the nature of religious experience (see, for example, Luiz Pessoa, "On the Relationship Between Emotion and Cognition," *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 9 (February 2008): 148-158, doi:10.1038/nrn2317.

[65] This approach also echoes modern romanticist sentiments of Friedrich Schleiermacher, who emphasized that the essence of religious experience was a direct, intuitive feeling or experience unmediated (or inaccessible) via analysis or the intellect. See, for example, McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism,* and also Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

[66] In a teaching offered at the 2012 Teacher Development Intensive (TDI) in Massachusetts, the program leaders encouraged participants to learn to *be with* suffering through the following story: Once a dying Native American man called his doctor, and said "Doctor, I am dying. Please come." The doctor arrived and said, "I'm afraid I can't give you any medicine. You are dying. And you know that. Why did you call?" The man took the doctor's hand to his heart and said, "I just want you here with me."

[67] For a discussion of the role and skills required of an MBSR teacher, see Donald McCown, Diane K. Reibel, and Marc S. Micozzi, "The Skills of the Teacher," in *Teaching Mindfulness: A Practical Guide for Clinicians and Educators* (New York: Springer, 2011), 103-134. Of particular relevance here, they highlight the anti-hierarchical nature of the MBSR approach and the democratic nature of its classes.

limiting. Skillful teachers thus help orient participants: "the mind tries to capture what cannot be captured: we tip into something we can't grasp, but we need to be tipped into it."[68]

The inquiry process—inspired by *kōan* practices and the "Dharma combat" exchanges characteristic of Soto and Rinzai Zen[69]—is a key feature of MBSR group classes that helps focus participants' attention on their own first-person experiences. This emphasis on raw experience is further reinforced through teachers' explicit instructions for students to avoid theoretical debate or discussion in class, and to continually turn toward and speak from experience.[70] Teachers are also encouraged not to teach or lecture a lot "for the sake of your own vanity," but rather to teach a "spark," "and if it is good, it will ignite."[71] Further, although there is a more or less standardized eight-week MBSR curriculum, teachers are discouraged from relying on it as a script or protocol, and are instead encouraged to embody the teachings and to communicate the essence of the program in an original and direct way.[72] They do this, in large part, through relying on their own practice, informed by ongoing training and practice in diverse Buddhist traditions (we will return to this below).

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[68] Kathryn Bonus, personal communication, April 2012.

[69] Kabat-Zinn, "Some Reflections on the Origins of MBSR," 289.

[70] These instructions were provided to trainees and participants in the MBSR Practicum, 2003.

[71] Florence Meleo-Meyer (talk at MBSR Teacher Development Intensive, Shrewsbury, MA, April 2012).

[72] Despite this instruction and Kabat-Zinn's resistance to developing a formal protocol for MBSR, the curriculum itself has become rather canonized. The MBSR curriculum has been officially revised or updated only once, by senior teachers Melissa Blackburn and Florence Meleo-Meyer in 2003, many years after the original program was written by Kabat-Zinn. The exercises largely remain the same, as does much of the somewhat dated psycho-educational material on stress, heart disease, and nutrition. What *has* changed is that there is a reduced focus on relaxation and an increased focus on the cultivation of "bare" attention. Some other MBSR-based models (though not the 'official' model taught at the Center for Mindfulness) also incorporate loving-kindness practices. The relevance of these particular adaptations will be discussed below.

This inquiry-driven, anti-authoritarian approach reflects the spirit of the assumptions articulated by the so-called innateist camp that were briefly sketched above. In short, this approach assumes that people are endowed with natural capacity for self-healing (and other beneficial qualities), and therefore that they do not need to follow a particular script or teacher to awaken this capacity. Kabat-Zinn explains that "Buddhism is fundamentally about being in touch with your own deepest nature and letting it flow out of you unimpeded. It has to do with waking up and seeing things as they are."[73] He also notes:

> Meditation is synonymous with the practice of non-doing. We aren't practicing to make things perfect or to do things perfectly. Rather, we practice to grasp and realize (make real for our selves) the fact that things already are perfect, perfectly what they are. This has everything to do with holding the present moment in its fullness without imposing anything extra on it.[74]

The emphasis on something akin to Buddha-nature in the statement that "things already are perfect" highlights MBSR's anti-constructivist rhetoric. The rhetoric of "non-doing" is also a signifier for nonconceptual practices, to which analytical practices are considered antithetical. In other words, cognitive practices are regarded as external impositions that serve to obscure one's awareness of and access to the present moment. These rhetorical emphases are indicative of additional Tibetan Buddhist influences—including Mahāmudrā and Dzogchen—on MBSR. They also further reveal MBSR's innateist frame. Such themes also reveal particular yet related modern influences that will be addressed in the following chapter.

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[73] Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go, There You Are,* 6.

[74] Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go, There You Are*, 45.

Analyzing MBSR's Frame

The MBSR program has been framed as a method for healing for various audiences across time. What began as a program primarily tailored for patients suffering from chronic pain evolved into a program for recovery from diverse medical and psychological illnesses, as a preventative regimen to promote overall well-being, and as a program that could be applied in a variety of institutional contexts. As such, MBSR has been shaped and framed in various ways to meet and accommodate these various audiences. Therefore, MBSR's frame is not *static*, nor does the heuristic sketch provided here accurately capture MBSR's fluidity. It does, however, provide a somewhat coherent frame for comparative purposes.

MBSR has also positioned itself in relationship to other programs and approaches, often in response to critiques of its innateist stance. One particular critique, leveled by proponents of CBCT (that we will explore below in more detail), targets MBSR's claim that "spontaneous compassion" arises out of the practice of mindfulness. Although this claim was not present in early MBSR publications—for example, Kabat-Zinn states, in *Wherever You Go, There You Are,* that compassion must be cultivated[75]—the attempt to demonstrate or prove a relationship between mindfulness practice and the emergence of compassion seems to have become more prominent as interest in loving-kindness and compassion has increased during the last ten to fifteen years in both contemplative practice communities and research circles. Such a rise in interest may be attributed to shifting conceptions of the causes of stress discussed in the introduction, and of the role that social connections play in attenuating stress-related illnesses. The Fourteenth Dalai

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[75] Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go, There You Are,* 49-50.

Lama's emphasis on "secular ethics" has contributed to this increased interest. In his various public talks and recent publications he places compassion training—and not mindfulness training—at the heart of his vision for "global transformation."[76] The rising public interest in compassion and compassion-based practices as means for both healing and ethical development challenges proponents of MBSR and other mindfulness-based programs to explain the relationship between mindfulness and compassion.

In contrast to earlier writings that either did not thematize compassion or suggested that it needed to be cultivated, by 2011 Kabat-Zinn had begun to more clearly articulate the claim that compassion develops spontaneously out of mindfulness training:

> We might say that if mindfulness does not in some sense become our default mode, then its opposite, mindlessness or unawareness, will certainly retain that role. The inevitable result is to be caught up in a great many of our moments in a reactive, robotic, automatic pilot mode that has the potential to easily consume and colour our entire life and virtually all our relationships. One of the major discoveries of MBSR is that our patients realize this in dramatic ways and become motivated to live a life of greater awareness that extends far beyond the eight weeks they are in the programme. That greater awareness includes, of course, our intrinsic interconnectedness as beings, and so the possibility of greater spontaneous compassion toward others and toward oneself.[77]

While these comments suggest that compassion arises spontaneously through mindfulness training, other MBSR teachers and programs have begun explicitly incorporating loving-kindness practices into their programs. This suggests that MBSR teachers are responsive to the benefits of offering and including loving-kindness practices in their approaches, though it is not clear whether they believe such practices add value, are necessary for the cultivation of compassion, or are skillful responses to popular so-

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[76] See, for example, Dalai Lama, *Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011), 101-184.

[77] Kabat-Zinn, "Some Reflections on the Origins of MBSR," 293.

called market trends.[78]

The role of mindfulness in cultivating or awakening spontaneous compassion has been framed and reframed in response to various cultural and perhaps even political forces, suggesting either a shifting or expanding frame, or perhaps a limit or lack of coherence in MBSR's underlying theory. The fact that mindfulness-based programs now claim compassion as an outcome make this type of comparison between MBSR, CBCT, and ICT even more relevant. We will discuss implications of these theories and frames—particularly in terms of the innateist/constructivist debate—below.

Cognitively-Based Compassion Training (CBCT)

The Problem, Its Cause(s), and the Goals of CBCT

On the CBCT model, suffering and stress are presented as arising from an excessive, maladaptive concern with one's self, which in turn inhibits healing connection with others. Compassion, which is incompatible with obsessive self-concern, is therefore framed as an antidote to stress and suffering. CBCT is also concerned with compassion on a broader, social scale. In addition to being framed as a means of enhancing personal health and well-being, CBCT positions itself as a method for promoting what, following the Fouthteenth Dalai Lama, are often referred to as "secular ethics," particularly through its application

[78] In speaking with several MBSR teachers, I have encountered both perspectives: some see loving-kindness as already present in MBSR, and thus such practices help make explicit what is already implicit; others see MBSR as lacking explicit loving-kindness practices that they understand to be critical to the cultivation of compassion. Most MBSR teachers hold that there is a distinction between various types of loving-kindness and compassion practices found in these programs in the literature, though the differences are often overlooked. Loving-kindness meditation typically involves the generation of an affective state (love and affection), which is then extended outwardly to encompass ever-broadening circles of individuals. However, these practices, as commonly introduced in MBSR and other mindfulness programs, do not necessarily address the cognitive mechanisms that underlie feelings of hostility or instances of prejudgment and bias that is found in certain compassion practices, including those found in CBCT and ICT, for example.

within institutions of formal education.[79]

CBCT was initially framed and justified mainly in relation with—and by appeal to—literature in psychoneuroimmunology and evolutionary biology, academic fields that view stress primarily as a negative outcome of social disconnection and isolation, and not simply emotional dysregulation. This new conception reflects shifting understandings of stress and health.[80] Although CBCT's frame was to some extent implicitly influenced by this shifting medical discourse, its approach was also explicitly strategic. As we saw above, the program is presented as a particular kind of response to MBSR and as a means of correcting for what is missing or lacking in mindfulness-based programs in general. The need for this new explicit focus on compassion is related to the issues outlined above regarding the relationship between the causes of suffering and the means for overcoming suffering. On CBCT's view, mindfulness alone is not sufficient in helping practitioners root out the deep causes of stress and suffering, and thus particular types of compassion practice are necessary.

The Path of CBCT: Cultivating Compassion

CBCT defines compassion as the heartfelt wish to alleviate others' suffering.[81] It is understood that compassion arises from a deep sense of affection for others, coupled with the recognition that their suffering can be alleviated. This affection arises from both a sense of closeness or connectedness to others as well as a recognition of the causes of

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[79] See, for example, Ozawa-de Silva and Negi, "Cognitively-Based Compassion Training—Protocol and Key Concepts," 416-437; and Brendan Ozawa-deSilva, "Secular Ethics, Embodied Cognitive Logics, and Education," *The Journal of Contemplative Inquiry* 1, no. 4 (2014).

[80] See Anne Harrington, *The Cure Within,* for a discussion of the evolution of the research on stress.

[81] Ozawa-de Silva and Negi, "Cognitively-Based Compassion Training—Protocol and Key Concepts," 420.

their suffering.[82]

CBCT assumes that while one is readily able to empathize with members of one's own family or social group—or, at least, that all human beings share a common foundation of a "biologically-based"[83] compassion—one also generally finds it more difficult to empathize with strangers, members of other social groups, and especially those who have harmed or threaten to harm one in some way. Proponents of CBCT emphasize two claims: first, that increasing compassion for others is a trainable skill, such that one can learn to extend compassion in ever-widening circles, including to those who have caused one harm, through the cultivation of impartiality. Second, that in order to enhance feelings of closeness and connection to others, one must "generate" affection towards them. One strategy for this is to cultivate gratitude for others by reflecting on the kindness of others, and on the countless ways in which we depend on others to survive.

Importantly, CBCT distinguishes compassion from the more rudimentary feeling of being moved or concerned by others' suffering. At times, witnessing the suffering of others can be overwhelming, and can result in empathic distress or burnout. Thus CBCT aims to foster inner strength and emotional stability. One gains this strength in part by deepening insight into the causes of suffering and recognizing that they can be overcome. When one realizes that suffering can be transformed, one gains confidence and sets the determination to do so. This step—in which one gains insight into the causes of suffering, recognizes that these causes can be overcome, and sets a determination to overcome them—is called in CBCT "self-compassion."

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[82] See Negi, "Cognitively-Based Compassion Training: A Manual," 3.

[83] A common phrase used by the Dalai Lama. See Ozawa-de Silva and Negi, "Cognitively-Based Compassion Training—Protocol and Key Concepts," 416-421.

These three qualities—impartiality, affection, and self-compassion—are central components of the CBCT program. The cultivation of these qualities is supported by foundational training in attention and insight practices as well as through reflections on gratitude. Aspirational and active compassion are said to naturally arise through the practice and cultivation of these steps, and are also reinforced through practice. Thus compassion on the CBCT model is taught systematically through eight ordered steps, typically over the course of six or eight weeks, along with several other supportive practices. The steps are: (1) developing attention and stability of mind; (2) cultivating insight into the nature of mental experience; (3) cultivating self-compassion; (4) developing impartiality; (5) developing appreciation and gratitude; (6) developing affection and empathy; (7) generating aspirational or wishing compassion; and (8) realizing active compassion. Classes typically include presentations of pedagogical material, discussion, and a range of guided meditations, such as attentional, analytical, and visualization practices.[84]

Analytical meditations encourage practitioners to gain insight into their thoughts, feelings, and emotions, and to actively simulate alternative ways of relating to oneself and others. While mindfulness-based programs encourage the reduction of cognitive simulations, CBCT programs encourage the activation of cognitive and emotional simulations that orient, or habituate, oneself to healthier and more constructive modes of being. Rather than learning to change one's relationship to thoughts, CBCT employs an "antidote model" which one constructs a "remedy" for a mental "poison" and then applies it as a cure through repeated practice. For example, one might use a series of

[84] Negi, "Cognitively-Based Compassion Training: A Manual."

analytical contemplations to arrive at the conclusion that anger leads to suffering and does not bring happiness. One next constructs the antidote to anger, in this case love and compassion, and then repeatedly familiarizes oneself with this feeling through meditation until it becomes vivid. Through repeated practice, one's feeling of love or compassion becomes stronger and more refined, and, importantly, more integrated into one's way of being.

These analytical meditations, which also include other styles of practice, are introduced sequentially, as they build upon one another in a cumulative manner. In the following section, I provide a brief description of the key theoretical and pedagogical points contained within each of the eight steps of the CBCT program.

Step One: Developing Attention and Stability of Mind

The program assumes that one needs to cultivate a basic degree of attention and mental stability as a foundation for the practice of compassion. This basic attentional training—typically introduced through breath-focused meditation—is necessary for practitioners to gain awareness into thoughts, feelings and emotions. Without gaining this awareness, one cannot interrupt and transform habitual, maladaptive reactions. Focused meditation is also necessary in order for one to learn to stabilize and incorporate the understanding that results from the analytical meditations that follow.

Step Two: Cultivating Insight into the Nature of Mental Experience

After cultivating a degree of stable attention, practitioners are taught to turn the focus of their attention to the inner processes of thoughts, feelings, and emotions in order to gain insight into their mental experience. In this step, practitioners are instructed to simply attend to whatever arises within their fields of awareness, without judgment, and without

getting caught up or carried away by thoughts, images, or emotions that may arise. This style of practice is not object-focused, but instead encourages one to monitor the content of experience, without rejecting or suppressing any particular thoughts or feelings. In learning to attend to their experiences without judgment, practitioners cultivate an openness or tolerance to all experiences.

The practice instructions for developing attentional stability and cultivating insight into the nature of mental experience are nearly identical to those found in MBSR programs, but here attentional stability and insight are taught in service of other analytical practices, not as the main practice itself. As in MBSR programs, the participant is first guided through basic attentional training, using the breath as the object of attention. From a base of focused mental stability, one turns one's attention to thoughts, feelings, and emotions in order to gain insight into their fleeting nature. The practitioner is then instructed to "relax into awareness," and to become aware of experience without rejecting or suppressing any particular thoughts or feelings; in other words, "to just be."[85]

Step Three: Cultivating Self-Compassion

In this step, the practitioner explores their innate desire for happiness and well-being, and investigates the mental states and habits that contribute to well-being, as well as those that contribute to suffering. The program invites practitioners to recognize that it is their desire to want things to be a certain way, and their habit of mistakenly looking to material or other external sources of happiness that causes suffering. Once the practitioner becomes aware of these habits, they are instructed to resolve to overcome negative and harmful mental and emotional states and to cultivate those that promote and increase

[85] Negi, "Cognitively-Based Compassion Training: A Manual."

happiness and well-being. "Self-compassion" is understood to consist in (1) the recognition of the source of one's own suffering, together with (2) the understanding that one can change one's mental habits, as well as (3) the commitment to change those habits.

Developing self-compassion is considered to be the most difficult—and most crucial—step in the protocol.[86] In this stage, the practitioner is encouraged to reflect upon his or her desire for happiness and well-being, and to consider which mental states contribute to happiness and which ones prevent it. With the insight that one desires to be happy, which is the most important—and perhaps the most normative—assumption that the protocol makes, the practitioner resolves to overcome negative and harmful mental and emotional states, and to cultivate those that promote happiness and well-being. Given the importance of this step in the protocol, it is worth quoting the guided meditation at length:

> [B]egin to reflect on your inner world of thoughts and emotions. Underlying all of our mental experience, all of our hopes, expectations and worries, is the yearning for happiness and for freedom from suffering and misfortunes. Recognize this innate aspiration as the motivating force driving all of our thoughts and actions.
>
> Reflecting on our lives, we must recognize that we are often deprived of the very things we desire and constantly meet with the things we don't want. These circumstances give rise to dissatisfaction, disappointments, frustrations and all manner of suffering. Our misplaced expectations, arising from a lack of understanding of reality, exasperate us as we continuously confront the same situations….
>
> We usually feel that external circumstances themselves are to blame for our unhappiness. As we reflect more carefully, however, we can see that it is primarily our afflictive emotional and behavioral reactions to circumstances that give rise to our mental suffering…
>
> If our unhappiness is caused in part by our destructive emotional reactions, we must emerge from those unhealthy patterns in order to be free of

[86] This is according to remarks by both Lobsang Negi and a number of CBCT teachers I have spoken with who often state that this is the most difficult week to teach and the most challenging session for participants.

> suffering and gain happiness. Realizing this, try to generate this thought as strongly as you can: "My unhealthy patterns can be transformed, and I have the potential to transform them. I resolve to transform my unhealthy emotional and behavioral patterns in order to emerge from suffering and realize my aspirations for happiness."
>
> As you maintain this resolve, imagine the essential goodness of your own awareness as a pearl of radiant white light at your heart. That radiant white light is the essence of all the strength and goodness within you. See this light expand to every part of your body and mind, and by doing so, it relieves you of all discomforts, anxieties, fears, jealousy and other negative emotions.[87]

The assumption that all individuals desire happiness is relevant to our discussion of secular ethics, and will be taken up with more detail in the next chapter. Note that the explicitly normative prescriptions detailed in this contemplative practice place it in marked contrast to MBSR's more implicit normative suggestions. Also note the final visualization in which one is to imagine their essential goodness. Although this step is repeated throughout the contemplative practices contained within the CBCT program, the notion of essential goodness is downplayed in class discussions. Instead, CBCT heavily emphasizes the need to cultivate—rather than recognize or reveal—qualities of compassion.

Step Four: Developing Impartiality

In this protocol, impartiality refers to specific analytical training aimed at helping practitioners overcome bias and develop equanimity towards others. The program assumes one tends to cling to categories such as friends, strangers, and adversaries, and to react unevenly to people, based on those categories, with over-attachment, indifference, and dislike. In this step, the practitioner is instructed to visualize a friend, a stranger, and a

[87] Negi, "Cognitively-Based Compassion Training: A Manual," 21-26.

person with whom they have difficulties and to note the different and uneven feelings that arise as they imagine these three individuals undergoing positive or negative experiences. Typically the degree of intolerability participants feel when witnessing the suffering of others correlates directly with how endearing those others appear to them. That is, the closer participants feel to them, the more unbearable they will find their pain. Next, the practitioner is encouraged to investigate these responses and examine whether the categories of friend, stranger, and adversary appear fixed and rigid, or superficial. For example, one may recognize the changing nature of these categories when reflecting on a former adversary who has become a friend, or vice versa. Upon recognizing that these categories are flexible and not based on any inherent differences, one generates the intention to relate to people from an equal perspective, and one also works to recognize that all people are alike in wanting to be happy and avoid suffering.

This step helps the practitioner facilitate an openness to others who are not normally considered part of one's in-group. One also learns to recognize the social dangers inherent in biased thinking, and works to correct for these prejudices. By reducing the strong boundaries that seem to exist between these groups, it is assumed that one can also slowly learn to expand one's own social circle and feel more connected to others.[88]

Step Five: Developing Appreciation and Gratitude for Others

In this step, one reflects on all the ways in which one's very survival is dependent on the support and kindness of countless others. For example, practitioners are instructed to visualize someone in their life who has been kind or generous, and to reflect on the various

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[88] This is an important "hook" for the social connection frame as discussed in the introduction. The theme of social connection and interdependence is also relevant to our discussion of modernity. We will return briefly to the theme of connection in the final chapter.

ways in which this person has helped them. One then considers the many ways in which this kindness could be repaid. The practitioner is then encouraged to reflect upon the interdependent web of individuals that one relies upon for basic needs like food, clothing or shelter. A deep recognition of this fundamental interdependence is said to naturally give rise to a sense of appreciation and gratitude for others (including strangers and adversaries), which is considered key to developing affection and empathy:

> [L]et's explore the incredible kindness of others. Every one of us knows someone whose kindness or generosity made a significant difference in our life. Bring this person to mind, and reflect on the many ways this person has helped you. Allow gratitude to arise in your heart, and think of the ways you could repay their kindness.
>
> Now expand this awareness of the kindness of others by bringing to mind other people who have been helpful to you throughout the course of your life. Then let's move beyond the people whose kindness we know about by reflecting on the countless others who benefit us every day in ways we aren't aware of. Sit with this awareness and let it sink into your heart to allow appreciation and gratitude to arise. Think of how much you would like to repay the kindness of all these people.[89]

Here, too, note the prescriptive language, including the instruction that everyone call to mind someone who is kind, and based upon this, to allow gratitude to arise in their heart. The language is at times suggestive, but more often directive; rather than inviting participants to inquire into what it feels like to reflect upon the kindness of others, CBCT assumes one would feel gratitude, and in addition directs them to consider repaying it.

[89] Negi, "Cognitively-Based Compassion Training: A Manual," 33-38.

Step Six: Developing Affection and Empathy

This step involves deeper contemplation and insight into how one is benefited in many ways by countless others in order to help participants enhance their sense of concern and affection for others:

> Bringing to mind the myriad ways that we benefit from others, reflect on how inappropriate it is to ignore the needs of others and to focus exclusively on our own selfish concerns. Think of the many ways that selfish and self-centered behaviors manifest in our personal life, in society, and in public life. Many of the world's problems, between people or between countries, are rooted in selfish, self-centered attitudes […] Think of the many disadvantages of selfishness and the many advantages of cherishing others. Remember how the concept of "me" as distinct from "other", independent and unrelated, is an illusion. Our own interests are intertwined with every other being on this planet. Remembering how all your necessities, comforts and accomplishments come from the countless others who benefit you every day, reflect on the value of cherishing others. Allow affection and tenderness for others to develop and sit with this awareness so that it sinks into your heart.[90]

Again, here, note the directive language. Also note the emphasis on individual self-centeredness as the root of the world's problems. The limits of the focus on the individual will be addressed below.

Steps Seven and Eight: Generating Wishing and Realizing Active Compassion

The last two steps can be described together in that they are equally regarded as the culmination of the preceding weeks. These steps—generating wishing compassion and realizing active compassion—encourage enhanced empathy for others, which, coupled with intimate awareness of their suffering and its causes, naturally gives rise to compassion. As one further develops one's empathy, one naturally becomes more aware of the suffering of others. In this step, the practitioner is instructed to visualize and reflect upon the suffering of three people—a loved one, a stranger, and an adversary. One is then encouraged to

[90] Negi, "Cognitively-Based Compassion Training: A Manual," 39-43.

recognize how difficult it is to witness another's suffering, and to allow one's heart to resonate with the wish for this person to be free from suffering.

As one further develops empathy, one becomes more acutely aware of others' suffering. This naturally gives rise to the wish that others be relieved of this suffering. This is understood as "wishing compassion." In the final step, the participant is guided through a meditation designed to move from simply wishing others to be free of unhappiness to actively committing to assistance in their pursuit of happiness and freedom from suffering. One continues to work through the analytical contemplations in an effort to engender a deep, felt sense of compassion and a wish to act. As one begins to feel the impact of this experience, they are directed to "further reinforce it with a sense of greater urgency to see all these people happy and free from suffering." Participants are instructed to:

> [c]ultivate this urgency by thinking, 'May every one of you be happy and be free from suffering.' Focus whole-heartedly on wanting all these people to be happy and free from suffering. Infuse your mind with these feelings, and integrate them completely with your experience.[91]

A close reading of CBCT's meditation practice instructions reveals the program's strong emphasis on intellectualization and conceptual understanding. Although the meditations above include various kinds of visualization—including those that involve reflections on essential goodness—these are downplayed in favor of a rhetoric of analysis and insight and the effective cultivation of compassion. Unlike MBSR, CBCT contemplations are heavily prescriptive, not evocative, and in many instances they instruct the practitioner as to what or how they should feel. Even though classes include meditation

[91] Negi, "Cognitively-Based Compassion Training: A Manual," 44-56.

instruction, practice, and discussion, a considerable amount of time is devoted to explaining the key concepts and logic of practice.

The course content is ambitious for a standard eight-week program, and it is understood that the program serves as a road map for continued learning and practice. The material builds sequentially, and course themes are rehearsed repeatedly in both lecture and guided meditation practice. It is understood that this framework provides a map for the cultivation of compassion, one that a practitioner may return to and continue working on after the conclusion of the course. It is not expected that one would necessarily master each step in one week, but rather that the seeds are planted, so to speak, for the generation of compassion.

Roots of CBCT

The CBCT program was adapted from the Tibetan Buddhist *lojong* or "mind training" and *lam rim* "stages of the path" traditions. Its format and sequence are most closely tied to the "Seven Point Cause and Effect Method" and the practice for "Equalizing and Exchanging Oneself with Others."[92]

The "Seven Point Cause and Effect Method" begins with training in equanimity, by helping practitioners learn to see others (loved ones, strangers, difficult persons, etc.) as equal, without more or less positive regard for any particular person. To do this, one uses different strategies, such as calling to mind people in each 'category' and noticing their cognitive and affective responses. One is then instructed to reflect on how loved ones, for whom we feel positive regard, may (unintentionally) harm us or cause us pain in

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[92] Tsongkhapa, *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment,* ed. Joshua C. Cutler, trans. Lamrim Chenmo Translation Committee (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 2000). See also Dalai Lama, *Path to Bliss: A Practical Guide to Stages of Meditation,* ed. Christine Cox, trans. Thupten Jinpa (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 2003), 150-174.

the future. In the same way, enemies, toward whom one might feel aversion, may have been one's friends at some point in time. Through this and related discursive practices, it is understood that one will come to see that partiality towards particular people is groundless.[93]

Once a stable sense of equanimity has been developed, one then proceeds through the "Seven-Point Cause and Effect Method" which involves the following seven steps: (1) recognizing all beings as having been one's mother or close relative in some previous lifetime, which is said to engender a state of mind that will enable the practitioner to regard all beings as objects of affection; (2) recollecting the kindness of others, which includes considering ways in which parents and caretakers have selflessly supported and attended to you; (3) setting the intention to repay the kindness of others; (4) generating loving-kindness, or the wish that others be happy and free from suffering; (5) cultivating compassion; (6) generating a sense of responsibility and determination to help others relieve suffering; and (7) making the commitment to work to become enlightened for the benefit of all beings.[94] CBCT's protocol adopts a nearly identical training sequence, except that it removes steps one and seven—recognizing that all beings have been your mother and making the commitment to become enlightened for the benefit of all—presumably because of their religious or metaphysical assumptions. The psychology or logic of this missing step is supplemented or replaced by an emphasis of the interdependence of all beings for one's survival.

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[93] See also Jeffrey Hopkins, *A Truthful Heart: Buddhist Practices for Connecting with Others*. (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 2008).

[94] Dalai Lama, *Path to Bliss,* 150-160.

CBCT also incorporates methods from "Equalizing and Exchanging Self with Others," including reflecting on the advantages of cherishing others and disadvantages of cherishing oneself, as well as the practice of *tonglen* ("sending and receiving"), in which one imagines taking on the suffering of others ("receiving") and endowing them with happiness ("sending"). Although the practice of *tonglen* is embedded in the CBCT protocol, the program emphasizes the "sending" aspect of the practice by encouraging practitioners to allow the compassionate desire to alleviate others' suffering to arise in their hearts, and to imagine sending others the source of happiness and well-being in the form of white light. Practitioners are not explicitly encouraged to imagine taking on the suffering of others, for it is understood that it may be too difficult for beginners to do this in a meaningful way,[95] and moreover it may very well be too overwhelming for those who have experienced abuse or trauma.

Analyzing CBCT's Frame

CBCT closely follows two traditional Tibetan contemplative models with little innovation or adaptation. The most obvious difference is the exclusion in the CBCT protocol of reference to particular lines of reasoning involving claims about reincarnation, as well as stronger language about selflessness.

CBCT is distinct from MBSR in that it involves primarily analytical meditation and visualization, and also that it is explicitly normative and prescriptive. One has the sense, in reading the guided meditations, that one is being asked to cultivate a very particular way of thinking and feeling, an approach that stands in marked contrast to MBSR (though, of course, even in the latter there are attitudes embedded in the rhetoric that one is meant to

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[95] Lobsang Tenzin Negi, personal communication, May 2012.

embody). Rather than discovering one's innate capacity for self-healing as in MBSR, in CBCT, one is given a map and instructions for cultivating one's capacity for healing by developing positive qualities like empathy and compassion. The insight practices taught in CBCT are aimed at directly defining and pointing out one's limitations, biased thinking, and false or unhealthy views, whereas in MBSR such inquiry is used to help people transcend their own limited ways of being in the world. In CBCT, practitioners are also frequently "informed" that they want to be happy, suffer less, and so on, rather than invited into the "mystery" of their being, as they would be in MBSR. Finally, unlike in MBSR, there is very little attention to the body in CBCT, which focuses overwhelmingly on the content of thoughts. In short, the program is highly intellectualized. These three features of CBCT—normativity, authoritarianism, and intellectualism—run counter to many dominant themes in modernity that have shaped programs like MBSR. These features do, however, correspond well with the modern emphasis on rationality, and thus CBCT, as mentioned above, might be understood as an attempt at a corrective for or counterbalance to those more romantic or expressive themes that are particularly emphasized and drawn out in programs like MBSR.

Innate Compassion Training (ICT)

The Problem, Its Cause(s), and the Goals of ICT

ICT was developed primarily as a method to help those in social service professions—social workers, teachers, healthcare workers, social justice activists, and so on—to alleviate burnout, become more fully present to those they serve, and effect social

change.[96] Makransky, in developing ICT, recognized a need among those in such professions for a method that would help them recognize their innate capacity for health and healing. On his view, people are endowed with a fundamentally pure, perfect, and primordially good nature that is obscured by narrow, habitual, self-clinging patterns of thought. The goal of the program therefore is to provide training that helps draw out one's unconditional nature, which in turn relaxes the "grip" of these patterns. In other words, the aim is not to cognitively or intellectually struggle with these patterns through direct confrontation—as, it would seem, in CBCT—but to allow them to de-habituate on their own through practices of deep love and connection.[97] The program was also developed in part for North American Buddhists whom Makransky sensed were unable to engage successfully with traditional forms of Buddhist practice. For him, it was as if "something was not connecting, as if something was being lost in the transmission of these practices to America."[98]

The goal of ICT is thus to provide existing practitioners (including practicing Buddhists), as well as newcomers in social service fields, a fresh means of accessing their innate resources for "inner safety," "replenishment," and compassion. This is done through practices of (1) receiving love and compassion; (2) deepening awareness; and (3) extending love and compassion. The relationality implied by ICT's focus on receiving and extending love and compassion is foundational to the program, and is central to understanding the

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[96] Makransky, "Innate Compassion Training (ICT) and Adaptation of Devotional Practice for Secular Application," (paper presented at Emory University Consultation, Atlanta, Georgia, April 25, 2011).

[97] Makransky, "ICT and Adaption of Devotional Practices," 2.

[98] Makransky, personal communication, October 17, 2014. See also the See also Makransky, *Awakening Through Love*, 1-14.

ways in which this program is seen both as a corrective to other approaches and as an adaptation for particular American practitioners and students.

The Path of ICT: Awakening Compassion

In the ICT model, compassion is understood as a form of love and empathic concern that involves the wish for someone who is suffering to be free from stress and pain. According to this model, compassion has five aspects: (1) affection; (2) empathic concern; (3) the wish for others to be free from stress and suffering; (4) compassionate action; and (5) wisdom, or insight.[99] Affection here refers to sensing others as worthy of unconditional love and respect, including not only those whom one finds it easy to care for, but also those who fall outside of one's in-group, or who are challenging in some way. Empathic concern involves becoming aware of the suffering of another and sensing this suffering as similar to one's own. Getting in touch with one's own difficult experiences helps one to sense more deeply what it is like for another to undergo such experiences. The wish for others to be free from suffering reflects one's natural capacity for care and compassion that is evoked when one witnesses someone one loves in pain and discomfort. Through training, one learns to extend this natural capacity—which is often held back—to others. Wisdom or insight involves recognizing that others are more than just one's limited, shifting, biased thoughts or perceptions of them. Learning to sense the worth and potential of others more deeply helps draw out one's natural capacity of care for them. Compassionate action emerges naturally from the cultivation of the components of care outlined above, and it can also emerge naturally from a firm sense of

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[99] John Makransky, "Adapting Compassion Training from Tibet: Empowering the Deeper Personhood of Self and Others" (paper presented at Naropa University, Boulder, Colorado, September 12, 2014).

security as well as a responsibility for the well-being of others.[100]

The program defines, and aims to address, a number of common impediments to the cultivation of compassion, including: (1) reducing others to one's limited, stereotypical thoughts of them, and relating to them in biased ways; (2) strong feelings of self-dislike that are thought to be particularly prevalent in American culture, and which make one feel unworthy of receiving compassion; (3) aversion or inability to bear witness to one's own feelings; (4) a rigid sense of self that is independent from others; and (5) a tendency to experience distressing feelings and suffering as all-consuming.[101]

Although ICT draws on analytical reflections similar to those utilized in CBCT, this approach assumes a more relational view as foundational to the cultivation of compassion. ICT rests on the assumption that one needs to experience oneself as worthy of care and compassion in order to see others as worthy of compassion. Makransky explains:

> The assumption in this approach is that we learn loving kindness and compassion first by experiencing what love and compassion feel like in relationship with others. So, in Asian Buddhist traditions, contemplative cultivation of loving kindness and compassion is not just a matter of taking up a technique to make oneself more loving— rather, practitioners first need to *feel what it is like* to be held in the loving kindness and compassion of others, which for them includes spiritual family as well as biological, so these loving qualities become *real* in their experience, from which they learn in meditation to extend the same sort of loving affection and compassion to many others.[102]

By recalling and connecting with "benefactors" in one's life, one is empowered to access and develop trust in one's innate capacity for compassion. The program thus begins by

[100] Makransky, *Awakening Through Love,* 157-200.

[101] Makransky, "Innate Compassion Training: Six Impediments to Cultivating Compassion" (paper presented at the Mind and Life Summer Research Institute, Garrison, New York, June 15-21 2013).

[102] Makransky, "Adapting Compassion Training from Tibet."

inviting participants to recall a moment of loving connection in their lives in which they were held in loving affection by another. Participants are further instructed to reimagine this moment as if it were present right now, and to allow themselves to be drawn into their natural capacity for care through the practice of communing with their benefactors. The *Communing with Benefactors* practice is as follows:

> Recall a benefactor moment, and imagine that person present to you now in that way. That moment is now. Notice the happiness of holding them in mind. Imagine they are communing with you in the goodness of your very being, your deep worth and potential beyond limiting judgments, taking joy in you, wishing you well. Feel the happiness of holding them in mind, opening, accepting, letting them commune with you in depth of your being, wishing you deeply well.
>
> Relax into that feeling of loving energy and kindness, without holding onto the vision of them, just let go into the feeling, dropping all frameworks, letting the mind fall totally open, with all senses wide open, letting everything be. Let all patterns of thought, feeling and worry just self- unwind within this space of deep allowing, accepting, letting be. Experience all thoughts, feelings, sensations within this compassionate space of deep acceptance and allowing— the natural kindness of letting all be.[103]

It is assumed that bringing to mind and communing with loving benefactors from one's life enables the practitioner's habitual, self-focused patterns of thinking and reaction to relax and unwind. With practice, it is said that the mind can relax and settle into its natural state of simplicity, where deep rest (even "refuge") and replenishment are accessed.[104] Between sessions, practitioners are often invited informally to notice these benefactor moments that are always available as ways of getting in touch with and learning to sense into the capacity for connection and healing that is always available.[105] This is emphasized in the following poem, *At the Corner Store* by Alison Luterman,

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[103] Makransky, "ICT and Adaption of Devotional Practices." See also Makransky, *Awakening Through Love,* 26-32.

[104] Makransky, "ICT and Adaption of Devotional Practices."

[105] See, for example, John Makransky, "Love is All Around*" Tricycle*, Fall, 2007.

which is frequently taught in ICT classes:

> It was a new old man behind the counter,
> skinny, brown and eager.
> He greeted me like a long lost daughter,
> as if we both came from the same world,
> someplace warmer and more gracious than this cold city.
>
> I was thirsty and alone. Sick at heart, grief-soiled
> and his face lit up as if I were his prodigal daughter
> returning,
> coming back to the freezer bins in front of the register
> which were still and always filled
> with the same old Cable Car ice-cream sandwiches and cheap frozen greens.
> Back to the knobs of beef and packages of hotdogs,
> these familiar shelves strung with potato chips and corn chips,
> stacked-up beer boxes and immortal Jim Beam.
>
> I lumbered to the case and bought my precious bottled water
> and he returned my change, beaming
> as if I were the bright new buds on the just-bursting-open cherry trees,
> as if I were everything beautiful struggling to grow,
> and he was blessing me as he handed me my dime
>
> over the dirty counter and the plastic tub of red licorice whips.
> This old man who didn't speak English
> beamed out love to me in the iron week after my mother's death
> so that when I emerged from his store
>
> my whole cockeyed life—
> what a beautiful failure!—
> glowed gold like a sunset after rain.
>
> Frustrated city dogs were yelping in their yards,
> mad with passion behind their chain-linked fences,
> and in the driveway of a peeling-paint house
> a woman and a girl danced to contagious reggae.
>
> Praise Allah! Jah! The Buddha! Kwan Yin,
> Jesus, Mary and even jealous old Jehovah!
> For eyes, hands of the divine, everywhere.[106]

[106] Excerpted from Makransky, *Awakening Through Love,* 19-20.

This first practice of *Communing with Benefactors* is introduced as a means of helping service providers access these deep capacities for replenishment. The practice of receiving love helps practitioners learn to recognize the fuller potential that others see in them, thereby empowering them to recognize that potential in others. Receiving love practices facilitate a sense of deep safety, which is further cultivated in other ICT practices such as the *Three Letting Be-s* of body, breath, and mind. Sample instructions for this practice are as follows:

> Begin by dropping into the body, feeling it as a whole in a relaxed way with a sense of openness. If you notice a feeling of tenseness anywhere, try relaxing right *within* the tenseness, just letting be within it. Sensing the groundedness of the body, letting be within the body, just become one with the body. Deeply let be within the body, as if you are becoming one with it.
>
> After a little while, sense any tension in the breathing process, and let that relax. Let the breath settle into its own natural flow, as if you are becoming one with the breath, feeling it breathe you, and letting be into it.
>
> After a little while, in a similar way, notice any grasping to the thinking process in the mind—any holding on to a pattern of thought, memory, to-do list—and let that feeling of holding on relax deep within. Give the mind permission to fall totally open. Let all patterns of thought, feeling and worry just self-unwind within this space of deep allowing, accepting, letting be. Let this wide-open expanse of space and awareness itself do the knowing. Experience all thoughts, feelings, and sensations within this compassionate space of deep acceptance and allowing—the natural kindness of letting all be.[107]

These two practices—Communing with Benefactors and the Three Letting Be-s—are often introduced together in the ICT program. On this model, learning to commune with benefactors helps participants learn to "relax" into the "ground of their being" and "find rest and replenishment in the openness and simplicity of nonconceptual awareness."[108]

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[107] Makransky, "ICT and Adaption of Devotional Practices." See also Makransky, *Awakening Through Love,* 51-54.

[108] Makransky, "ICT and Adaption of Devotional Practices."

From here, one can learn to sense the potential in others, beyond one's limiting thoughts of them (e.g., as a friend or enemy, or one worthy of love and compassion). The third type of practice invites the practitioner to take the position of the benefactor, communing and connecting with others in the depth of their very being. The practice of *Taking the Position of Benefactor for Others* begins with the first two practices described above, and then proceeds by instructing the practitioner to recall their benefactors' smiling faces, and imagine *communing* with or receiving their energy into their body and mind. After some time, the practitioner then is invited to bring to mind a loved one, such as a family member or friend, and, while receiving loving energy from their benefactors, extend the wish of love from their benefactors to this person. Key here is the instruction to allow this loving energy to move through oneself, as if one were a windowpane, revealing that this is not so much about constructing a feeling as it is getting in touch with an underlying capacity.

After exploring this practice with a loved one for some time, the practitioner is invited to gradually extend this wish of love to other persons, "communing with each in their essential goodness and worth beyond limiting judgments."[109] Then one imagines their benefactors dissolving into loving energy and that energy dissolving into their heart. They imagine their own heart, now one with that of their benefactors, as "radiant like the sun, extend[ing] the same loving energy and wish to all persons in all directions at once, communing with them all in the goodness of their very being."[110] As the practice concludes, the practitioner releases the visualization, allowing their body and mind to

[109] Makransky, "ICT and Adaption of Devotional Practices."

[110] John Makransky, "Compassion Beyond Fatigue," in *Meditation and the Classroom: Contemplative Pedagogy for Religious Studies*, ed. Judith Simmer Brown (New York: SUNY, 2011), 85-94.

"fall completely open, letting all thoughts, feelings and perceptions arise and dissolve of themselves like wispy clouds in sky-like openness […] allowing all to be just as it is."[111]

Learning to commune with benefactors enables practitioners to commune with others, beyond their limiting judgments of them. Thus receiving love and compassion, deepening or relaxing into our natural capacity, and extending love and compassion form the basic pattern of the ICT program. These three kinds of practices are understood to be mutually reinforcing. The ICT program further contains a number of other practices that can be included in these three "directions" of care, including *Communing with Stable or Spiritual Benefactors; Compassionate Mindfulness of Breath, Body, Thoughts, and Feelings; Receiving Compassion into Difficult Feelings;* and staged practices for extending care to loved ones, strangers or neutral persons, and difficult ones. The emphasis on social action (in addition to avoiding burnout and learning to become more fully present), hinges upon this final set of practices for extending love and compassion to all. While many social activists are motivated by anger at injustice, ICT holds that an overreliance on anger as a motivating force can undercut the work itself. On this view, activism requires compassion for all (and not anger), that affirms and upholds the good in others, while at the same time challenging that which is harmful in them. Compassion as construed in ICT therefore confronts; it is not passive.

Roots of ICT

ICT emphasizes the centrality of relationships in cultivating compassion. In particular, it assumes that in order to cultivate love and compassion, one needs to experience being the object of love and compassion from another. Put another way,

[111] Makransky, "Compassion Beyond Fatigue," 89.

compassion is not a quality one cultivates in isolation; one needs to be empowered to access one's innate capacity for compassion. This empowerment draws out one's natural capacity for care, which enables one to respond to others in their "unconditional worth and potential."[112]

Although ICT draws from the *lojong* and *lamrim* traditions of Tibet—especially for techniques to help practitioners develop equanimity and affection for others, as well as for practices of recalling one's benefactors to put practitioners in touch with unconditional love—it draws more directly from devotional and non-dual strands of Tibetan Buddhism. Some particular texts that influenced the development of ICT include Tulku Thondup's *Healing Power of Mind* (1996), Sogyal Rinpoche's *Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* (1992), and Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche's *Excellent Path to Enlightenment* (1996). The practice of recalling one's benefactors adopts a pattern of guru yoga practice from foundational or *ngondro* training in which practitioners are introduced to their innate capacity for compassion (and wisdom) *relationally* (typically with a spiritual teacher, including the Buddha, bodhisattvas, gurus, lineage teachers, and so on).[113] In secular settings, practitioners are invited to call upon mentors, teachers, inspirational figures from history, as well as spiritual figures from any religious tradition, if relevant.

Analysis of ICT's Frame

ICT combines the flavor and feel of both MBSR and CBCT-style practices, though it emphasizes non-cognitive and affective experiences of compassion and

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[112] Makransky,"Adapting Compassion Training from Tibet."

[113] For another contemporary account of ways in which devotional practices are being adapted and made accessible to a wider audience, see Tulku Thondup, *The Heart of Unconditional Love: A Powerful New Approach to Lovingkindness Meditation* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2015).

connection as the basis of training, and it sees analytical practices such as those found in CBCT as supportive, rather than constitutive. Such cognitive practices are employed to counter common impediments or blocks to compassion, and not as the primary approach for realizing or awakening compassion. Like MBSR, ICT tends to emphasize the rhetoric of immediacy, spontaneity, and innateness, while coupling this approach with visualization and some analytical practices found also in CBCT.

In addition to the rhetoric of innateness that distinguishes ICT's approach from that of CBCT, the inclusion of patterns of devotional practices from the Tibetan tradition also reveals a further point of distinction between ICT and MBSR. These various distinctions reveal not only the tensions between their theoretical frames, but also the ways in which the programs understand and frame the secular. Briefly put, CBCT excludes "religious" practices in secular contexts, whereas MBSR dismisses such practices altogether as unnecessary ritual. ICT, in contrast to both the other programs, sees certain so-called "religious" practices as not only theoretically integral to the ICT framework, but also as permissible in secular contexts. The rationale for this permissibility is given as the similarity of the practices to other styles of religious practices and also as the parallels to clinical, or "secular" interventions (including, for example, work on therapeutic alliance and practices for priming and enhancing secure attachment). Such practices highlight the importance of relationships in cultivating compassion, an important aspect which is, in ICT's perspective, missing from other contemporary, secular programs.

Preliminary Analysis of Competing Frames

To summarize, then, MBSR, CBCT, and ICT all rely on different frameworks to

shape the description of the problem, the cause, the goals, and the path of their approaches, and this has implications for the kinds of practices used, as well as for how practitioners understand the potential *possibilities* of practice. MBSR's emphasis on present-centered awareness as an approach to reducing stress is in tension with the emphasis in CBCT to engage in analytical practices alter one's thoughts, and to actively cultivate particular states of mind. CBCT employs a variety of practices that can be understood as both "antidotes" and constructive practices for cultivating particular qualities of mind. In tension here is the need for cognitive engagement or conceptual practices as methods for reducing stress and enhancing compassion. Thus on the MBSR model, cognitive practices will tend to be de-emphasized and even discouraged. Prescriptive and normative practices will also be avoided. On the CBCT model, in contrast, rhetoric and practices that point towards innate knowing or qualities will be de-emphasized. This is quite different from MBSR, where even the very idea of a framework or set of goals will be rhetorically downplayed.

ICT approaches this fundamental tension differently yet again: it emphasizes the non-conceptual practices of mindfulness while acknowledging the role of conceptual practices in its program. Yet this is not simply a both/and approach, for ICT relies on a broader framework than just that of the combination of MBSR and CBCT. Although ICT incorporates cognitive practices like those found in CBCT, these are presented as helping practitioners remove blocks or obstacles to accessing their innate capacity for compassion, and not for cultivating these qualities. The program further assumes not that compassion is a quality to be revealed through intrapersonal mindfulness practices, or to be cultivated through conceptual practice, but rather that compassion is revealed

relationally.

As indicated above, one of the driving forces behind these differences is the existence of competing assumptions about the nature of mind, or what I call the theoretical frame, that has been inherited from and influenced by various Buddhist traditions. CBCT assumes a constructivist stance, whereas MBSR assumes an innateist stance. ICT tends much more towards the innateist end of the spectrum in terms of both its rhetoric and dominant contemplative approach. Although these programs do not make the innateist/constructivist debate a central theme in their descriptions, they certainly do employ the rhetoric of these different "camps." The fact that this centuries-old "debate" is still being played out in contemporary contexts reveals the power that these frames continue to hold. Additionally, the presence of this debate in contemporary circles might also reveal modern programs' attempts to remain true to their traditional sources, by showing how their program is "authentically" rooted in the "authority" of traditional Buddhist practices. We will address some of the issues related to authority and authenticity in the Chapter 4; for now, we will consider the ways in which these innateist and constructivist frames have shaped the development of these programs.

Below I will very briefly sketch the key features of this debate, as thematized in the so-called "Great Debate" between Kamalaśīla, a "constructivist", and Hvo-shang Mo-ho-yen (Tib. *Hva shang Mahāyāna*), an "innateist", and discuss the ways in which the main issues at stake in this debate both influence and map onto tensions between MBSR, CBCT, and ICT.

The Debate

The “Great Debate” between the Indian monk Kamalaśīla and the Chinese monk Hvo-shang Mo-ho-yen was held at Samye, the first Buddhist monastic institution in Tibet, in the late eighth-century CE. As the story goes, tensions between the Indian Buddhist traditions and Chinese Buddhist traditions linked to Ch’an had reached a critical point. The presiding king Trisongdetsen therefore arranged a debate between Kamalaśīla and Hvo-shang Mo-ho-yen. Hvo shang allegedly conceded defeat and the king declared that his teachings would no longer be studied or practiced in Tibet.[114] Despite this decree, however, the debate raged on for centuries between and among various traditions and schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

Hvo shang allegedly advocated for the cessation of all discursive thinking or analysis—which he took to be manifestations of ignorance—and instead promoted the practices of “non-mentation” and “non-attention.” He argued that all mental constructions and fabrications must be eliminated in order for the practitioner to have a direct, unmediated experience of reality. On his view, the aim of practice was to uncover the mind’s innate nature, rather than further occlude it through the obfuscating effects of dualistic cognition.[115] Kamalaśīla rejected this approach. On his view, the practitioner must understand and precisely discern how the structures of ordinary cognition are erroneous, or binding, rather than forcibly put a stop to them through what he understood to be “quietistic” or “cessative” means. In other words, on his view, the mere absence of

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[114] Though no definitive account of this debate exists from this time period, David Seyfort Ruegg has constructed a compelling account from manuscripts recovered from Dunhaung. See for example, David Seyfort Ruegg, *The Buddhist Philosophy of the Middle: Essays on Indian and Tibetan Madhyamaka* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010).

[115] Ruegg, *Buddha Nature,* 99-105.

mistaken cognition does equal insight into or knowledge of reality. Kamalaśīla instead called for a graded approach to buddhahood or awakening that required one to develop insight into the nature of reality (even if this realization is ultimately non-conceptual) through discerning the correct view of reality with which one repeatedly familiarizes themselves. This approach is akin to the "antidote model"[116] described in the CBCT program above. This type of approach also involves systematic cultivation of particular qualities held within a particular set of conditions and ethical framework.

The role of such ethical frameworks and other preliminary preparatory practices are important for understanding the distinction between these two thinkers. From an extreme innateist perspective, since all of the qualities of enlightenment are already present, albeit obscured, performing other preliminary practices and so forth are not necessary, for there is nothing one needs to cultivate that is not already innately present. From a constructivist perspective, however, ordinary beings have only the *potential* for buddhahood, or only possess some of the qualities of awakening, and thus the practitioner must construct the conditions necessary for awakening, in part through the cultivation of various preparatory practices.

The Debate's Influence on Contemporary Programs

This brief sketch of the two sides of the debate allows us to locate contemporary models along a spectrum, on which Kamalaśīla and Hvo shang occupy extreme ends. While MBSR does not promote a cessative model of practice, its Zen-influenced rhetoric of non-doing, combined with its resistance to conceptual reasoning and analysis, enables

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[116] For a relevant discussion of Dharmakīrti's theory of yogic perception, see John Dunne, "Realizing the Unreal: Dharmakīrti's Theory of Yogic Perception," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 34, no. 6 (December 2006), 497-519.

us to draw parallels between its approach and that of the innatetist camp. CBCT, as outlined above, falls on the constructivist end of the spectrum. These differences in assumptions have implications not only for particular contemplative practices, but also for the explicit contexts that shape and contain the programs.

Yet this is an overly simplified sketch of this historical debate and its relation to current models. As we will explore in the following chapter, these programs are influenced by a number of other contextual factors, and are also constructed in relationship to one another. Thus, these heuristic categories are not fixed or determined; rather they are employed to help us compare particular themes, approaches, and tensions. Further, there are additional ways to interpret these approaches, as other scholars have done. Some, invoking a particular interpretation of the doctrine of "skillful means," have argued that gradualist approaches were taught for those of "inferior faculties,"[117] or that highly systematized gradualist methods emerged to combat perceived anti-institutional or antinomian tendencies in Tibet.[118]

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[117] See, for example, van Schaik, *Approaching the Great Perfection* and Ruegg, *Buddha Nature*.

David Seyfort Ruegg has also criticized the sectarian feel of the debate by taking particular objection to the assumption that they are contradictory or opposing theories that operate on the same level of discourse, located on the same level of discourse, an assumption, as Makransky notes, partly based upon the ahistorical hermeneutics of prior Tibetan systematicians. Rather than striving toward complementarity, Ruegg argues that we may need to embrace incommensurability. Makransky quotes him:

> What is needed in Buddhist studies is not enlistment in campaigns and polemics with other schools of Buddhist thought, but careful descriptions and analyses of the various traditions establishing their sources and religio-philosophical problematics and identifying how each dealt with the philosophical and hermeneutical questions that arose in their respective schools. (Makransky, "Historical Consciousness," 122).

Makransky further argues that from a constructive or theological perspective, such careful approaches are necessary to meet the needs of the transmission and skillful adaptation of the tradition. See also C.W. Huntington, Jr., "Was Candrakīrti a Prāsaṅgika?" in *The Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika Distinction: What difference does a difference make?* ed. Georges B.J. Dreyfus and Sara L. McClintock (Boston: Wisdom Publications; 2003), 67-92.

[118] According to Ruegg, there was a dangerous potential for misunderstanding innateist tradition which in turn could lead to ethical and moral relativism.

Some have attempted to demonstrate the complementarity between these camps by adopting a "both/and" approach. For example, proponents of the both/and view have suggested that the nondual practices taught in MBSR help eradicate dualistic structures in the same way that analytical practices in CBCT help overcome or at least attenuate similar dualistic structures through eradicating self-grasping tendencies. It may seem contradictory to posit that non-conceptual and pro-conceptual practices could elicit or lead to the same experience. If, however, we understand both nonconceptual and conceptual practices to be deconstructive in nature—in other words, if we assume that both styles of practice help practitioners overcome or break down unhelpful mental structures—we might grant these seemingly contradictory approaches some form of complementarity. To put it another way, what matters most is that one overcomes or deconstructs negative structures; the method with which one does so is less important.[119]

Others have resisted embracing innateist and constructivist approaches as complementary, or as the only two possible paths to awakening, as it seems other methods warrant their own classification or position on the innateist/constructivist spectrum. Such models—namely, certain strands of Mahāmudrā—laid the pathway for ICT and its emphasis on patterns of devotional practice. One such example is the stages of practice outlined in Gampopa's (1079-1153) *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*. In this text, Gampopa, founder of the Dagpo Kagyü school of Tibetan Buddhism, lays out an exposition of the stages of the path to awakening beginning with a discussion of innate Buddha-nature. The text emphasizes the importance of devotion for receiving teachings,

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[119] For further discussion on this synthesis, see Yaroslav Komarovski, "Shakya Chokden's Interpretation of the Ratnagotravivhāga: 'Contemplative' or 'Dialectical'?" *Journal of Indian Philosophy* (2010); doi: 10.1007/s10781-010-9090-z.

thus affirming the role of transmission and encountering the teachings relevant to ICT. His *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* also emphasizes the importance of accumulating merit and of cultivating insight into the nature of reality. Though Gampopa privileged direct, non-conceptual means for realizing awakening,[120] and at times even criticized analytical or intellectual methods altogether (via the *dkar po chig thub*, or "self-sufficient white remedy" metaphor), Gampopa's approach is distinctive to that of innateists like Hvo shang.[121] In other words, even if certain devotional and other preliminary practices came to be relegated as subordinate to nondual practices, the recognition that a particular kind of frame is needed for one to slowly realize new degrees of insight is important.

While the specific nondual meditative instructions presented in texts like Gampopa's bear striking resemblance to practices found in MBSR,[122] the omission of preparatory practices in MBSR marks an important distinction. In other words, there is a sense that some sort of ethical frame must be operative before, possibly during, and certainly between sessions to support practitioners on this path. ICT makes a similar claim to Gampopa about such devotionally inspired practices: that they are, in fact, simply revealing qualities of one's awareness. The fact that they are included as a frame signals something quite different from MBSR. One could argue, of course, as has John Dunne, that an implicit framework is provided in and through the structure and diverse

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[120] Scholars like David Jackson have also shown how Gampopa's teachings became increasingly innateist over time. See David Jackson, *Enlightenment By A Single Means: Tibetan Controversies on the "Self-Sufficient White Remedy" (dkar po chig thub)* (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 1994).

[121] Ruegg notes that Gampopa draws a distinction between "authentic mahāmudrā" and "new-mahāmudrā", which he takes to be a Chinese meditation system, that involves "a sort of cataleptic fixation on the empty." Ruegg, *Buddha Nature,* 107.

[122] For more on these connections between nondual strands and MBSR, see Dunne, "Toward an Understanding of Nondual Mindfulness," 71-88, and Dunne, "Buddhist Styles of Mindfulness, a Heuristic Approach."

teachings presented in MBSR.[123] True, too, that MBSR is embedded and taught in a particular cultural context that provides implicit and explicit ethical frames. Yet in his talk, "Contemplation in Contexts: Tibetan Buddhist Meditation Across the Boundaries of the Humanities and Sciences," David Germano seemed to challenge the heuristic model I have presented here (following Dunne) in which I suggest that "modern mindfulness" shares significant features with "traditional" non-dual practices such as Mahāmudrā or Dzogchen. On Germano's view, it is not only that modern interventions eschew devotional and other preparatory practices, but also that these practices are held within worldviews in which the very motivations for approaching such practices might be radically different. Conceptions of the "selves" undertaking these practices to relieve different interpretations of "suffering" might also differ substantially. Thus, whether so-called "modern" and "traditional" mindfulness practices can be so easily compared or correlated should be investigated. Even if there are parallels between modern and non-dual mindfulness, or between CBCT, ICT and other constructive approaches, what are the differences? What are the implications of those differences? How do the cultural contexts and life worlds in which these practices exist shape and influence the practices themselves?

Although I glossed over many important details in the heuristic presentation of these various contemplative models, I have attempted to make the general case that (1) MBSR aligns more closely with an extreme innateist position, one that also informed certain strands of Mahāmudrā; (2) CBCT aligns with a strong constructivist position; and (3) ICT does not simply combine innateist and gradualist practices, but rather it proposes

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[123] See Dunne, "Toward an Understanding of Nondual Mindfulness," 85-88.

a more contextualized and relational of awakening compassion than does either CBCT or MBSR. ICT, on my view, is somewhat distinct in that it is less constrained by the secular frame that limits MBSR's and CBCT's inclusion of certain devotional practices. And even though I find this innateist/gradualist heuristic a useful tool to helping us unpack the theoretical differences between these contemplative programs, this exercise has its limits. The traditional Buddhist innateist and constructivist contemplative frames have rather powerfully constrained and informed contemplative discourse and practice. In a similar way, these contemplative frames have, on my view, constrained the development of contemporary secular programs, such that we can observe striking theoretical similarities among these various approaches.

For these reasons, I believe we need to take Germano's challenges to context-independent (or context-naïve) comparison and analysis quite seriously. Rather than simply assessing the validity, authenticity, or compatibility of different theoretical models, we can begin to sketch thicker descriptions of what counts as practice in various contexts. In the following chapter we will examine ways in which these various Buddhist contemplative frames have been shaped through their interaction with secular, spiritual, and scientific frames in an American cultural context. This analysis can help us consider that contemplative frames are not only adapting to cultural context and factors, but also that they are constituted by them.

Chapter Three: North American Cultural Frames

While it is true that MBSR, CBCT, and ICT have all been shaped and constrained by various Buddhist contemplative models, they have also been influenced by the North American cultural context in which they have been developed and delivered. As discussed above in the Introduction, Buddhism's encounter with the West over the last couple of centuries has been shaped by its assimilation and critique of several dominant themes of modernity, including monotheism, scientific rationalism, and romanticism. Together, these "discourses of modernity"[124] provide the implicit frameworks of understanding against which these contemplative programs have been explicitly framed. In this chapter, we will analyze the ways in which MBSR, CBCT, and ICT variously accommodate, respond to, and are influenced by these themes, and how they employ particular frames to promote access to their respective programs for modern American audiences.

To focus our discussion, we will explore three distinct sub-frameworks related to each broad domain of modernity: (1) the "secular frame," or "framework" which does not account for contemporary programs' responses to and critiques of monotheism, but nevertheless reveals the ways in which they position themselves in relation to the category of "religion"; (2) the "scientific or evidence-based frame," which reveals both a particular way of relating to rational-scientific, naturalistic, and highly medicalized discourse, while also critiquing the limits of scientific inquiry; and (3) the "spiritual" frame, which highlights the influence of romantic expressionism—with its emphasis on

[124] For further discussion, see McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism,* 3-26.

individual experience and its suspicion of religious authority—on modern conceptions of spirituality and ethics. The analysis of the "secular frame" will take up most of our attention because it reveals some of the most common and contested ways in which the programs present themselves. The full scope of such an investigation into the category of the secular and the process of secularization is of course much wider and richer than can be presented here.[125] Nevertheless, this approach should offer us sufficient material to consider the potential limits and opportunities that these frames offer.

The Secular Frame

It is interesting to note that while MBSR, CBCT, and ICT all openly trace their roots to various Buddhist contemplative models, they also explicitly emphasize the secular nature of their programs. One dominant rationale for secularizing these programs is to make them more widely appealing and accessible to people of diverse faith traditions and worldviews. Yet some have criticized secular, Buddhist-based contemplative programs for "distorting" or "diluting" the dharma[126] through their attempts to eliminate religious frames and practices—including references to notions of enlightenment, reincarnation, and emptiness, as well as the use of certain preparatory, devotional, and ethical practices, for example—that are understood to be essential to the success of Buddhist practice traditions in many contexts. Discussions concerning the

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[125] See for example Michael Warner, Jonathan VanAntwerpen, and Craig Calhoun, eds., *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, eds., *Rethinking Secularism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2003); and Taylor, *A Secular Age.*

[126] See for example Jenny Wilks, "Secular Mindfulness: Potentials and Pitfalls" *Insight Journal,* 2014. http://www.bcbsdharma.org/2014-10-8-insight-journal/http://www.bcbsdharma.org/2014-10-8-insight-journal/; and Linda Heuman, "What's at Stake When the Dharma Goes Modern", Tricycle, Fall 2012.

secularization of these Buddhist-based contemplative programs therefore often tend to focus on what gets lost in the process. Although the goals of MBSR, CBCT, and ICT may differ from those of the Buddhist practice traditions from which they are drawn, two central questions remain: first, how and why do these programs draw the line between the religious and the secular, and second, what are the effects of adopting a secular frame on the goals, accessibility, coherence, and potential efficacy of these programs?

Answering these questions is a difficult task, for MBSR, CBCT, and ICT place varying emphases on the secularity of their respective programs, and thus construct and employ the rhetoric of the secular in different ways. In the same way that there is no singular definition of religion, there is also no singular definition of the secular, and this further complicates the task of responding to these sets of questions. Although the secular is often imagined in opposition to religion, other categories, such as spirituality, superstition, magic, and science, render the distinction between religion and the secular far from stable or obvious. The categories of secular and religious are mutually constituted, and the lines between them are drawn in different ways in different times and places. In some contexts, for example, the secular is constructed in opposition to the religious and often demarcates the natural as opposed to supernatural. In other contexts, the secular signals that which is common to people of diverse or of no religious or spiritual traditions.[127]

In the following sections we will examine the different ways in which the secular frames and is framed by MBSR, CBCT, and ICT. Special attention will be paid to the ways in which each program: (1) interprets the secular and religious divide, and in turn is

[127] See for example Craig Calhoun, "Rethinking Secularism," *The Hedgehog Review* (Fall 2010): 35-48.

influenced by this division; (2) uses its particular secular frame to promote or make its program accessible to a modern secular audience; and (3) reveals hidden or implicit influences of other discourses of modernity in its rhetorical framing of the secular. Investigating these explicit and implicit frames opens the discussion from one focused primarily on what gets *lost* in the process of secularization to one that considers what gets newly added, or even *created*, and why. From this perspective we can engage these modern interventions as dynamic, adaptable methods that not only respond and adapt to various and even competing forces within modernity, but also to each other. Deepening our understanding of the secular frame can reveal cultural assumptions or tendencies that were previously obscured, thereby potentially opening new areas of adaptation or development. Further, greater insight into the secular frame may make available new lines of inquiry into the underlying theoretical frameworks of these interventions.

Competing Models of the Secular

The historical development of the secular as a modern category is fascinating and complex. Though the distinction between the secular and religious initially marked a division between two equally present dimensions of life—the worldly or immanent, and the other-worldly or transcendent—the secular later began to signal the existence of the "real," self-sufficient, and immanent sphere, which stood in stark contrast to the "unreal," transcendent dimension.[128] A key difference is that in this later transformation, the transcendent is considered to be *either* a real possibility, or an imagined falsity. These two distinct conceptions of the secular—the first involving a simple separation of the

[128] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 299-321.

secular and religious aspects of life, and the second involving an outright rejection of religion—remain prominent today. They shape both current thinking and debate about the nature of the secular in general, and have influenced at least two distinct conceptions of the secular—what I call "open" and "closed" models of the secular[129]—operative in contemplative programs. These two distinct models do not fully represent the range of interpretations of the secular, nor do they necessarily reflect the ways in which the creators and proponents of MBSR, CBCT, and ICT understand themselves to be secular. However, when understood as heuristic tools, these models are useful for uncovering the approaches to the secular that are at least tacitly employed by these interventions.

The first, "open" model of the secular operative in the discourse of contemporary contemplative communities rests on the simple separation thesis. On this model, the secular is simply differentiated from the religious. The range of what counts as secular and religious may, however, vary between different open models, as might the degree to which religious ideas and worldviews are permitted in the discussion. Thus we might consider a variety of open models of the secular employed in modern contemplative programs. Programs that employ extremely open models of the secular would tend to permit, hold, and attempt to negotiate a variety of views and belief systems. Programs that employ moderately open models of the secular would tend to bracket out religious beliefs (variably defined) altogether, in order to protect their program from appearing to be influenced by religion. Programs like ICT would fall in the extremely open secular category, as they tend to make a less pronounced distinction between religious and secular views, they tend to interpret scientific claims as reductive, and finally they

[129] Here I borrow from and adapt Charles Taylor's open and closed heuristics, which refer to immanent frames that are either open to or closed off to transcendent possibilities.

assume a generally spiritual or religiously-inclined audience. Programs like CBCT would fall in the moderately open secular category. Although these programs are not anti-religious, they do attempt to bracket out certain religious beliefs (primarily to avoid potential conflict), even though such beliefs are not necessarily regarded as incompatible with the program. Efforts are made to show that the program is compatible with the findings and worldview of modern science, and that the theory underlying the need to cultivate compassion hinges on universal or basic human values.

The second, "closed" model of the secular hinges on the sociological secularization thesis, in which the process of secularization is understood to be the defining feature of modernization. On this model, secularization marks a progressive transformation from so-called "primitive" religious systems to the modern secular worldview.[130] This secular frame implies a naturalistic framework that is explicitly contrasted with the supernatural, and thus most often entails an outright rejection of religion altogether. A critical assumption of the secularization thesis is that the secular, scientific worldview will gradually displace various religious—and presumptively false, unempirical—worldviews. At stake are not only competing worldviews, but also issues of authority over what counts as evidence. Closed models of the secular privilege empirical evidence and reject religious (i.e. supernatural or scriptural) truth claims because such claims are not verifiable through—or are directly contradicted by—empirical observation and experimentation. In short, this version of the secular aligns itself with some notion of the scientific method and sees the "religious" as mired in unscientific, premodern beliefs.

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[130] Jose Casanova, "Rethinking Secularization, A Global Comparative Perspective," *The Hedgehog Review,* Spring and Summer (2006), 1-22.

Closed models tend to define the secular in more universalizing terms, as a space, or set of views and practices that are free from the trappings of particular cultural and religious beliefs, rituals, and institutions. This version of the secular is most noticeably present in the rhetoric of MBSR programs, which claim to preserve the essential, universal features of Buddhist practice while getting rid of unnecessary and overtly religious beliefs and rituals. Though this particular secular frame has been critiqued by various scholars for its oversimplification and naïveté,[131] it nonetheless shapes much of current thinking about the secular in the West. It is also arguably the most prominent interpretation of the secular used to justify or explain that Buddhism is a rational philosophical, and scientific—and therefore not religious—system.[132]

There are important differences between these open and closed models employed by ICT, CBCT and MBSR, and these differences have significant implications for the ways the programs are understood as models for healing and transformation. The difference between the uses of the secular in these programs is notable: on the MBSR model, the secular view is the most true, whereas on the CBCT and ICT model, the secular view may or may not contain all that is true. MBSR subscribes to a type of modern, universalizing ideology, whereas CBCT seems to embrace more of a modern,

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[131] See, for example, Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 221-269, and Casanova, "Rethinking Secularization, A Global Comparative Perspective."

[132] See, for example, Stephen Batchelor's, *Buddhism without Beliefs* (New York: Riverhead Books,1997) and *Confessions of a Buddhist Atheist* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2011). Batchelor's interpretations are representative of a rationalist movement that aims to strip Buddhist practice of its supernatural beliefs. It is explicitly anti-authoritarian, in that it challenges hierarchical power systems found in various Buddhist lineages, and also reflects an interesting modern form of "demythologized" Buddhism. See McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism,* 27-60 for further discussion.

ecumenical model.[133] ICT suggests that there is far more in common among religious traditions than limiting secular models might suggest. MBSR's approach is modern in that there is one universal reality. CBCT's and ICT's models, on the other hand, at least permit a variety of religious realities, although in CBCT these are bracketed in the program so as to skirt the question of the veracity of these claims. In other words, CBCT, unlike MBSR, appears to sidestep any claims on ultimate truth or reality. Put differently, MBSR would seem to be offering a means to access a kind of ultimate, universal health and well-being, whereas CBCT might be better understood as offering a first, though still secular, step to deeper religious or spiritual models of healing. ICT suggests that the motivation to engage with such practices often is given by various religious frameworks, and thus that such frameworks are indispensible to engaging and sustaining the practice. Regardless of the secular rhetoric they employ, Buddhist beliefs and assumptions about the cause of suffering, the goals of practice, and the path to awakening ground each programs' theoretical models. These implicit religious frames at times are in tension with the explicit secular frames. Probing these tensions, which we will do below, can help us get to the heart of what is at stake in the secularization of these practices.

CBCT's Secular Frame

As discussed earlier, CBCT draws heavily from the Tibetan Buddhist *lojong* and *lam rim* traditions, yet it is presented as a secular contemplative intervention. As Geshe Lobsang Tenzin Negi notes in the introduction to his unpublished CBCT manual, he chose particular practices for cultivating compassion from a diverse set of practice

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[133] This is more complicated than this statement suggests, for there are different models of pluralism and inclusivism at play: is there one truth with many approaches? Or is truth itself something that can vary in different times and places? We will take up this complicated issue in Chapter 4.

lineages in the Tibetan tradition. He explains that he specifically selected those practices most amenable to a secular research context, deliberately leaving aside overtly religious doctrines, including, for example, reincarnation, which as noted above is an important object of reflection in the *lojong* tradition. He goes on to note the universality of the practices contained within the CBCT protocol:

> The compassion meditation protocol presented here is grounded in ancient Tibetan Buddhist tradition, but has been modified to render it completely secular, without relying on any particular religious doctrine or beliefs. Still, it speaks to universal themes inherent in all major religious and humanistic traditions while remaining faithful to the empirical and experiential spirit of Tibetan Buddhism.[134]

Here Negi invokes the "open" secular model by claiming that although the protocol is free of any particular belief system, it remains true to the spirit of Tibetan Buddhism. This suggests an openness to religious traditions, but perhaps only religious traditions that are compatible with science (note the use of "empirical" to refer to Tibetan Buddhism).

Another implicit claim here is that at its 'core,' Tibetan Buddhism shares the same values as secular humanism. This understanding of the secular is tied closely to the Dalai Lama's vision of secular ethics and universal human values. On this view, the secular is not understood as anti-religious, or as the antithesis of religion, but rather refers to a set of values including kindness and compassion that are universally shared by all people. This view is further explained in an article co-authored by Negi and I, along with other CBCT colleagues:

> Ethical values are indispensable for human happiness and well-being on both an individual and collective level, and this is becoming even clearer as our world becomes smaller and our communities become more diverse. Whereas in the past

[134] Negi, "Cognitively-Based Compassion Training (CBCT) Protocol," 2.

> religion and families played a central role in instilling ethical values in new generations, modern pluralistic and multicultural societies must adapt to the times and find ways to instill ethical values in coming generations in ways that are not partial to one religious tradition over another, or over those who follow no religious tradition. The question of ethics will always be central to religious traditions. In the public square, however, the question of ethics must be separated from the question of religious adherence. New times call for new thinking[…]
>
> Compassion appears to be the most stable foundation for a secular ethics that transcends religious, cultural, and philosophical divides, because it is based on the fundamental human aspirations to have happiness and avoid suffering, because it is rooted in our human nature and our evolutionary heritage, and because it is something that we have the capacity to cultivate individually and socially as human beings endowed with intelligence and reason…[W]e feel strongly that all religious traditions (and several secular ones) contain methods for the cultivation of compassion, and may serve as sources for the development of secular programs such as the one presented here. [135]

There are three claims operative here that are worthy of attention. The first, which reveals the implicit religious (Buddhist) frame, is that all human beings wish to be happy and avoid suffering. The second claim (i.e. that we are "wired", so to speak, for compassion) reveals an appeal to evolutionary biology, thus making a secular-scientific case for this approach. The third claim—that we have the capacity to cultivate compassion through our faculties of reason—further reveals the implicit modern, naturalistic secular frame. The assertion here is that humans are endowed with an innate moral sense, as well as pro-social capacities, and are therefore capable of living ethically and creating ethical laws without reliance on religious institutions or prescriptions. Ethics, on the CBCT model, are not understood as a set of laws or policies that stipulate right and wrong, but rather are viewed more broadly as a set of principles that concern how human beings relate to

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[135] Brendan Ozawa-de Silva, Brooke Dodson-Lavelle, Charles L. Raison and Lobsang Tenzin Negi, "Compassion and ethics: scientific and practical approaches to the cultivation of compassion as a foundation for ethical subjectivity and well-being," *Journal of Healthcare Science and Humanities* 2 (2012): 145-161.

others with regard to suffering and its alleviation. "Secular ethics," on this view, thus are grounded in the common or universal wish humans share for happiness and well-being.

In a similar vein, the Dalai Lama, in *Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World,* writes:

> I am confident that it is both possible and worthwhile to attempt a new secular approach to universal ethics. My confidence comes from my conviction that all of us, all human beings, are basically inclined or disposed toward what we perceive to be good. Whatever we do, we do because we think it will be of some benefit. At the same time, we all appreciate the kindness of others. We are all, by nature, oriented toward the basic human values of love and compassion. We all prefer the love of others to their hatred. We all prefer others' generosity to their meanness. And who among us does not prefer tolerance, respect, and forgiveness of our failings to bigotry, disrespect, and resentment?
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> In view of this, I am of the firm opinion that we have within our grasp a way, and a means, to ground inner values without contradicting any religion and yet, crucially, without depending on religion…[A]ll the worlds' major religions, with their emphasis on love, compassion, patience, tolerance and forgiveness, can and do promote inner values. But the reality of the world today is that grounding ethics in religion is no longer adequate. This is why I believe the time has come to find a way of thinking about spirituality and ethics that is beyond religion.[136]

The Dalai Lama's model and his promotion of secular ethics—which serve as the main source of inspiration for the CBCT program—rests on an open interpretation of the secular as a pluralistic space in which various religious beliefs are permissible, yet are bracketed in public contexts for the purpose of dialogue. True interfaith dialogue is certainly tricky. On this view, however, the secular becomes a common denominator, in which all traditions and practices are reduced to what is common to all. CBCT claims that

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[136] Dalai Lama, *Beyond Religion,* xiv-xv. The Dalai Lama's view seems to be heavily influenced by Indian views of secularism that are quite different from the way the secular developed in the United States. India was home to a plethora of religious diversity, and secularism was implemented at the state level in an effort to ensure neutrality and even-handedness. Though this in principle is the case for the United States, protections for religious pluralism was historically reserved for Protestant denominations. For more on the history of secularism in the US, see Susan Jacoby's, *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004).

there are certain universal capacities, including love, compassion, and a commonly shared desire for happiness and well-being, regardless of one's belief system. Yet the understanding of what is common to all—e.g., a universal desire to be happy and avoid suffering—is implicitly grounded in a Buddhist framework.[137]

The Dalai Lama tries to explain the relationship between the secular and religious. His claim is that humans have a "basic human spirituality" that is "more fundamental than religion."[138] This basic human nature is a disposition toward love, kindness and affection, and is the first dimension of spirituality as he sees it.[139] The second dimension of spirituality is religion-based, and is tied to particular cultural beliefs and practices. The difference between these two, he notes, is like the difference between water and tea:

> Ethics and inner values without religious content are like water, something we *need* every day for health and survival. Ethics and inner values based in a religious context are more like tea. The tea we drink is mostly composed of water, but it also contains some other ingredients—tea leaves, spices, perhaps some sugar or, at least in Tibet, salt—and this makes it more nutritious and sustaining and something we want every day. But however the tea is prepared, the primary ingredient is always water. While we can live without tea, we can't live without water. Likewise we are born free of religion, but we are not born free of the need for compassion.[140]

This is a significant distinction. Here we note that the Dalai Lama divides spirituality into two tiers: the first, basic level is analogous to the water that must be used,

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[137] The divide between public and private, which is central in certain configurations of secular space, is significant. While secular public space is meant to protect private belief and practice, and impede violent disagreement between adherents of various belief systems, claims to "universal" human qualities seem paradoxical: are these qualities public or private? Does the secular contain the scope of universal qualities, and if so, how do we negotiate different universal claims?

[138] Dalai Lama, *Beyond Religion*, 17.

[139] This rests on claims of human nature as innately pro-social, and ignores innate capacities for non-prosocial capacities, which are often downplayed in this care-based model. Developmental psychologists would agree that humans have a capacity for both, and the Dalai Lama has argued that although this may be the case, it seems clear that the pro-social capacities are more conducive to our health and well-being and therefore more natural (Public talk, Emory University, October 9, 2013).

[140] Dalai Lama, *Beyond Religion*, 17.

whatever kind of tea we wish to make. This basic level concerns "inner mental and emotional strength and balance" that are universal, and it thus aligns with his conception of secular ethics. This basic level is the dimension in which secular contemplative programs, including CBCT, claim to operate. His discussion of the second dimension—analogous to "tea"—is rather important, for just as tea provides something more "nutritious and sustaining," so too diverse religious traditions and cultural systems provide a richness that enhances practices for promoting basic human values like compassion, even though these practices are not necessarily universally generalizable. This two-tier approach—in which it is possible that the rhetoric of the secular is employed as a means of bringing everyone to the table, so to speak—clearly distinguishes this program from MBSR, as we will see below in more detail. It also implies that there is something "more" to religious practice than what is available in their secular adaptations. The universally recognized values of the secular dimension is at the level of the "water" that we all need to make tea, but the diverse religious traditions enhance that water to make their unique versions of "tea" that are even more sustaining and nutritious than the secular "water."

ICT's Secular Frame

ICT was developed for use among Buddhist practitioners in the West and also for those working in interfaith and secular settings (especially the social service professions). Makransky recognizes that many people in today's secularized world have rejected religion as oppressive, dogmatic, or out of touch. At the same time, he believes that people actually long for what religions at their best have provided; namely:

> [A]ccess to a primal power of goodness that transcends the world's limiting attitudes and structures of greed, apathy, and prejudice, that liberates people to

> discover a greater potential in themselves and others, and that empowers wise, compassionate and creative responsiveness to the world's needs."

He further argues:

> This yearning to rediscover our connection to the primal or unconditioned ground of our being, so as to live, act and serve others in a more deeply grounded way, takes expression in a host of modern desires that the materialism of the modern world does not address: the search for deep rest from the freneticism of modern life; the desire for a much deeper healing of body, mind and spirit than health-spas can provide; the wish to find a sustaining power of love for self and others in a hyper-competitive world; the desire for a renewed spirituality within or beyond mainstream religions; the urge to protect nature from the predations of our own consumerism; the desire to relieve suffering and establish lasting peace and justice in a world of increasing possessiveness, apathy and violence. Although many people today believe they have transcended religious ways of thinking, and indeed many blame religion as a major cause of the world's current problems, the same people often long for a deeper grounding for their lives and actions, the kind of grounding that was accessed in the past through the spiritual disciplines of religious traditions.[141]

While the overt rhetoric of the secular employed by other contemporary programs assumes a predominantly secular audience, Makransky believes the majority of people that participate in ICT programs (and presumably other modern contemporary programs) are religious or spiritual in some capacity (note the use of the "transcendent" in the passage above). On his view, they are looking for contemplative practices that would help them encounter the "deepest reality of their being," that would "replenish their spirit," and "strengthen their motivation" to serve others.[142] For him, then, the openness of modern contemplative programs must offer inclusive language that helps people map the essence of their practices back into their spiritual or religious worldviews. Rather than neutralize language in a secular key, he believes the programs can be more efficacious

[141] Makranksy, "How Contemporary Buddhist Practice Meets the Secular World," 1.

[142] Makranksy, "How Contemporary Buddhist Practice Meets the Secular World," 3.

when they hold *both* religious and secular space.[143]

Though he respects the Dalai Lama's version of the secular as one that is open to religion, Makransky sees that programs like CBCT rely too heavily on secular-scientific worldviews (e.g., theories of evolutionary biology, or the assumption put forward by the Dalai Lama and others that we are basically "born good") at the expense of embracing or exploring commonalities among religious traditions. For him this is a false choice, for he sees universality, or common ground, in patterns of diverse religious practice. He explains:

> There is a renewed yearning in our time to find greater access to the depth of our being, to find within us a source of profound wisdom, loving connection and creative responsiveness. From my Buddhist perspective, this is a yearning to return to the empty ground of our experience (suchness) where all conditioned patterns of self-clinging thought and reaction are discovered to be already embraced in the primal energy of unconditional compassion, the energy of primordial Buddha nature. There, all such patterns can be deeply healed and self-released in the ground of our awareness, where a potential for deep inner freedom lies. This is the *unconditioned* (empty) ground of our being that makes *unconditional* love and compassion for self and others possible […] [T]o find access to such depth requires immersion in disciplines that repeatedly turn our attention to the unconditioned ground of the depth of our being, to help us become increasingly transparent to its qualities.
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> Something analogous is posited in many world religions, which teach variously that there is, at the core of our being, an unconditioned ground that empowers us to respond in unconditionally ethical and creative ways to our suffering world. The word "God" in theistic traditions refers, in part, to the unconditioned ground of all creation (and thus all creativity), in light of which humans can find their deepest purpose as creatures in working for the benefit of all creation […][144]

On Makransky's view, many others—including Jews, Christians, and even atheists—are searching for the "unconditioned ground of their being" that can empower their relationship to themselves and others. Because of this similarity across traditions, he does

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[143] Makransky. Personal communication, October 17, 2014.

[144] Makransky, "How Contemporary Buddhist Practice Meets the Secular World," 3-4.

not consider his approach to be a means of introducing people to Buddhism, but rather of "implicitly reintroducing them to the deepest source of compassionate and creative energy that their own spiritual and religious heritages have drawn upon."[145] Rather than being newly drawn to Buddhism, as some might suspect, such individuals report a renewed engagement with their primary religious tradition in a more meaningful and enlivened way. In contrast to MBSR, as we will see below, Makransky does not claim that through ICT people are drawn into *the* universal tradition, but rather into their own traditions, thus attempting to respect a certain kind of pluralism not found in other models of the secular. Makransky therefore articulates an extremely "open" model of the secular in which diverse religious and spiritual worldviews are not only permitted, but welcomed. He sees such frameworks as necessary for providing the motivational structure necessary for people to engage and sustain practice.

Makransky perceives such motivations to be missing from other programs, like CBCT, as a consequence of their problematically bracketing out any elements of religious or spiritual worldviews, including discussions of the unconditioned or empty nature of mind or phenomena he understands to be essential to the cultivation of unconditional compassion. He explains:

> Devotional practices of refuge and guru yoga… have also played an important part in cultivating the wisdom of the unconditioned nature that supports unconditional compassion. To realize impartial, all-inclusive compassion requires one to recognize the emptiness of all reductive concepts of self and others that have prevented equal compassion for all. It is the experience of oneself and one's world as being embraced in the unconditional love and compassion of the Buddhas (in devotional practices) that gives practitioners the deep sense of safety required to trust the empty, ungraspable nature of things enough to release their grip on their reified world of "strangers, enemies, friends." Or, expressed in

[145] Makransky, "How Contemporary Buddhist Practice Meets the Secular World in Its Search for a Deeper Grounding for Service and Social Action," 4.

> another way, it is the experience of being embraced in the unchanging compassion of the buddhas that helps the mind trust and open toward the source of such compassion, the unity of emptiness, cognizance and compassion in the nature of their minds. The wisdom of the *unconditioned* which grounds *unconditional* compassion is empowered by the deep experience of safety that devotional practices of refuge and guru yoga provide.[146]

For Makransky, emptiness is central to the cultivation of compassion, yet this is not the case for CBCT. CBCT holds that one does not need to realize emptiness to cultivate universal compassion. Whether one can realize great compassion without first realizing emptiness is a contested issue among various Buddhist traditions and thus the difference between CBCT and ICT on this issue is not only influenced by their interpretation of the secular. Though emptiness may have been left out of the discussion in CBCT for theoretical and secular reasons (see the Dalai Lama's tripartite distinction below), devotional practices seem to have been sidelined pre-emptively, perhaps for seeming overtly religious. Makransky suggests devotional practices are an integral part of the practice (and moreover are part of the fabric of Tibetan culture), for as he understands, one needs to be seen as an object of love to be the source of it.[147] He notes however that many westerners have difficulty extending compassion because they do not experience themselves as objects of love. Instead, many practitioners report feeling unworthy, unlovable, or not good enough.[148] Here too we note Makransky's particular secular

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[146] Makranksy, personal communication, June 2012. See also Makransky, "Innate Compassion Training (ICT): Six Impediments to Cultivating Compassion." In this talk Makransky describes the ways in which he adapted certain Tibetan Buddhist devotional practices to meet the needs of his western Buddhist students.

[147] Here too Makransky notes that he has adapted these practices to meet the needs of a particular American audience. This emphasis on being the object of love in order to be the subject of love has precedence in psychology (i.e. attachment theory) and educational theories (see, for example, the work of Nel Noddings and her discussion of the "ethic of care" in *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013)) which Makransky references in various writings and public teachings.

[148] Makranksy, personal communication, June 2012.

adaptation of devotional practices within the Tibetan tradition to meet psychological needs of particular North American audiences.

In addition to their religious overtones, it is perhaps the case that such devotional practices have not been seen as central to contemporary secular practices because the very vulnerability and surrender involved run contrary to the self-empowered and self-transformational disposition of secular forms of American spirituality. They do, however, align with certain features of American religiosity. The increasing focus on self-compassion practices in CBCT and other similar programs suggests, to my mind at least, that something needs to be adjusted to address this particular cultural need to feel a sense of self-worth and to feel that one is loved and accepted as one is. Thus, rather than relying on a secular-scientific worldview at the expense of religion, Markansky believes it possible to hold both.

Although he is far more open to interfaith discussions within the ICT program, he too attempts to provide a scientific grounding for this approach. As discussed in Chapter 2, ICT emphasizes that one is introduced to the depth of their being in and through loving relationship with others. To be seen—that is, to be accepted, loved, and welcomed as one is—is what empowers one to similarly see others in the depths of their being. He suggests that the meditations introduced in ICT are in line with approaches taken by clinical psychologists, including Carl Rogers, for example, who found that a therapist's unconditional regard for his clients was the key to their healing and transformation. Such practices as he sees them are also in line with work in developmental psychology on attachment theory: children who experience loving, caring relationships early in life often develop more secure attachment styles as they grow older; they are also generally more

confident, more resilient, and more readily able to form healthy relationships with others.[149] Therefore, practices that help people reconnect with moments of positive love and regard, as well as even more stable caring spiritual figures or mentors, can help people experience a more "secure base," at least temporarily.

Makransky's attempt to have the ICT program hold both religious and secular space assumes a model of the secular in which there is more to be gained through the interaction of these two domains. Rather than attempting to bracket metaphysical assumptions, as in CBCT, ICT seems to assume that its approach operates within a universally acceptable frame, or at least that enough of its approach is universal that it can provide relatively wide access to religious- and secular-minded individuals alike.

There are parallels here between Makransky's interpretation of the secular and Charles Taylor's resistance to and critique of what he terms "subtraction models" of the secular. In his book, *A Secular Age,* Taylor distinguishes between three types of secularity; to paraphrase, Secularity 1 involves the retreat or expulsion of religion from the public sphere (in which the public sphere is conceived of as a neutral, a-religious space—this defines the "secular state"); Secularity 2 involves the decline of religious belief and practice (similar to the secularization thesis); and Secularity 3 refers to "the conditions of experience of and search for the spiritual" that make it possible to speak of ours as a "secular age." This third secularity is the context in which we develop our ideas about religion and science in modernity; it is not a set of beliefs about what constitutes the secular. Religion and spirituality are not absent from this secular context; rather, they

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[149] See, for example, NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, "The Effects of Infant Child Care on Infant-Mother Attachment Security: Results of the NICHD Study of Early Child Care," *Child Development*, Vol. 68, No. 5 (Oct., 1997): 860-879, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1132038

are reconfigured as possibilities within a modern, naturalistic, or "immanent frame."[150]

In this immanent frame, in which the secular connotes immanence yet permits at least the possibility of transcendence, it is incorrect, or at the very least limited, to view the secular as a mere subtraction of or from the religious. Rather, if we follow Taylor, the secular is not a mere subtraction, but is rather a cultural construct or frame that shapes the way we perceive the world. It is further the condition by which we are faced with the choice of both belief and unbelief as live options. Taylor explains that we have come to understand our lives as taking place within a self-sufficient, naturalist "immanent frame" or order. It can be understood as open to transcendence, or closed, but it demands neither. Makransky likewise seems more inclined to adapt this "background" model of the secular—rather than defaulting to a scientific-naturalist account. As we have seen, this approach seems to permit a different range of possibilities for practice and also for interfaith learning and dialogue.

MBSR's Secular Frame

Unlike CBCT and ICT's open models of the secular, MBSR takes a different approach, one in which religious beliefs, practices, and so on are closed off from secular space. In "Some reflections on the origin of MBSR, skillful means, and the trouble with maps" (2011), Kabat-Zinn offers his suggestion for adapting "mindfulness" for mainstream audiences. Though he does not explicitly outline his theory or understanding of the secular, he does address several closely related themes which serve as important reference points for understanding MBSR's secular frame.

Kabat-Zinn makes several key moves in this article that reveal his secular stance:

[150] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 539-593.

he glosses mindfulness as "universal dharma"[151]—which I interpret as a conception of the essence of Buddhism—that he has decontextualized from its Buddhist cultural context and recontextualized within the frameworks of science and modern medicine in order to make it accessible to many people, including those who might turn away from or outright reject an overtly Buddhist program. He notes that he initially—and I would add skillfully—adopted the language of self-regulation that was popular during the time he founded the stress-reduction clinic. He explains:

> The intention and approach behind MBSR were never meant to exploit, fragment, or decontextualize the dharma, but rather to recontextualize it within the frameworks of science, medicine (including psychiatry and psychology), and healthcare so that it would be maximally useful to people who could not hear it or enter into it through the more traditional dharma gates, whether they were doctors or medical patients, hospital administrators, or insurance companies. And because naming is very important in how things are understood and either accepted or not, I felt that the entire undertaking needed to be held by an umbrella term broad enough to contain the multiplicity of key elements that seemed essential to field a successful clinical program in the cultural climate of 1979. Stress reduction seemed ideal, since pretty much everybody can relate to that instinctively, even though 'reduction' is a something of a misnomer.[152]

Kabat-Zinn acknowledges mindfulness's Buddhist roots throughout much of his work—and in this article he states that mindfulness is a "universal dharma" that is "co-extensive, if not identical, with the teachings of the Buddha, the *buddhadharma*."[153] Yet he simultaneously makes a point of explaining that "mindfulness, often spoken of as 'the

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[151] Kabat-Zinn, "Some Reflections on the Origins of MBSR," 296.

[152] Kabat-Zinn, "Some Reflections on the Origins of MBSR," 288. On page 282 of that same article, he notes that "from the beginning of MBSR, I bent over backward to structure it and find ways to speak about it that avoided as much as possible the risk of it being seen as Buddhist, 'New Age,' 'Eastern Mysticism' or just plain 'flakey.' To my mind this was a constant and serious risk that would have undermined our attempts to present it as commonsensical, evidence-based, and ordinary, and ultimately a legitimate element of mainstream medical care. This was something of an ongoing challenge, given that the entire curriculum is based on relatively (for novices) intensive training and practice of meditation and yoga, and meditation and yoga pretty much defined one element of the 'New Age.'"

[153] Kabat-Zinn, "Some Reflections on the Origins of MBSR," 290

heart of Buddhist meditation,'" has little or nothing to do with Buddhism per se, and everything to do with wakefulness, compassion, and wisdom. These are universal qualities of being human [...]."[154] These statements seem to reveal a contradiction in Kabat-Zinn's approach. On one hand, he claims to be sharing the teachings of the Buddha under the umbrella of "mindfulness," teachings made accessible to scientists and health care providers, for example, who are unable to enter through traditional "dharma gates." On the other hand, he goes to great lengths to assert the universal (and specifically *not* Buddhist) nature of mindfulness and its related qualities.[155]

In an earlier article, "Indra's Net at Work: The Mainstreaming of Dharma Practice in Society," Kabat-Zinn shares his reflections on a conversation that took place in 1990 between a group of scientists and the Dalai Lama:

> At one point in our discussions, the question was put to His Holiness about the danger of bringing the Dharma into the world in ways that might require giving up much of the traditional form and vocabulary, and whether that was possible without destroying the religion and the culture from which it springs and also without, in some way, profaning and betraying the moral and ethical foundations of Dharma practice.
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> I had more than a little interest in the Dalai Lama's answer, since I had been involved in just that kind of effort [...] I found myself sitting there wondering how I would take it if the Dalai Lama's response were that it was an unwise, perhaps even sacrilegious thing to do [...] So the question hung there for me for what seemed an eternity while His Holiness listened to the translation into Tibetan. Then he said something I'll never forget: 'There are four billion people on the planet. One billion are Buddhists, but four billion are suffering.'

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[154] Kabat-Zinn, "Some reflections on the Origins of MBSR," 283

[155] On the word "dharma", for example, he has noted: "The word Dharma refers to both the teachings of the Buddha and also the way things are, the fundamental lawfulness of the universe. So although the Buddha articulated the Dharma, the Dharma itself cannot be Buddhist any more than the law of gravity is English because of Newton or Italian because of Galileo. It is a universal lawfulness." Jon Kabat-Zinn, "Why Mindfulness Matters," in *The Mindfulness Revolution: Leading Psychologists, Scientists, Artists, and Meditation Teachers on the Power of Mindfulness in Daily Life*, ed. Barry Boyce (Boston: Shambhala, 2011), 57.

> The implication was clear. It made no sense to withhold the Dharma, which we know to be fundamentally universal, so that its teachings are only accessible to Buddhists. The challenge is to make it accessible to all human beings, and to do it in ways that are authentic, true to the heart of the Dharma but at the same time not so locked in or wedded to tradition and vocabulary that prevent the practice from assuming new forms over the years, to grow and deepen (as it has always done) as it encounters new cultures.[156]

There are a number of assumptions operative in these quoted passages that reveal the tension between Kabat-Zinn's account of MBSR's implicit religious frame and its rhetorically explicit secular frame. The first is that he understands "mindfulness" to be the essence of the Buddhist tradition. The second, and perhaps more fundamental, assumption, is that mindfulness practice—as the essence of the tradition—can be "extracted" or dissociated from its religious, cultural, and philosophical frameworks. The third is that mindfulness is an umbrella term for qualities, including love, wakefulness and compassion that are universal to all beings. The fourth is that mindfulness, glossed as "universal dharma," is compatible with—and, importantly, justified by—a modern scientific worldview. Taken together, these assumptions reveal a particular understanding of the secular, which, as noted above, is conceived of as a universal space, free from or closed off to particular religious or cultural trappings. Such a space may be considered a-religious in the sense that it is perceived to be free from religious institutions and authoritative influence.

This account also reveals a particular approach to framing the Buddhist path that, as discussed in Chapter 2, differs in substantial ways from CBCT and ICT. The operative assumption is that a Buddhist practice, in this case mindfulness, could or should be

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[156] Jon Kabat-Zinn, "Indra's Net at Work: The Mainstreaming of Dharma Practice in Society," in *The Psychology of Awakening: Buddhism, Science and our Day-to-Day Lives*, eds. Bay Watson, Stephen Batchelor, and Guy Claxton (London: Rider, 1999), 226-249.

divorced from particular religious, philosophical, or even conceptual frameworks that block or occlude one's ability to know 'how things actually are.'

This overview of the different ways in which MBSR, CBCT and ICT interpret and employ the secular frame reveals tensions within the discourse of the secular, including ways the larger framework of understanding implicitly shapes these programs as the background condition of modernity, against or within which these programs are developed. It also further reveals the continuation of longstanding tensions within the Buddhist tradition concerning the correct or most effective approaches to awakening. We will return to these issues in more detail in Chapter 4. For now, we will continue our analysis of the ways in which the various discourses of modernity have shaped these programs by examining the ways in which MBSR, CBCT, and ICT responded (and continue to respond) to the modern discourses of scientific rationalism and romantic expressionism through the lens of the "scientific" and "spiritual" frames.

The Scientific Frame

Recently, numerous popular media outlets have given much attention to many features of the "secularization" of contemporary programs,[157] spawning a great deal of debate on the question of the degree to which religion, and Buddhism specifically,

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[157] See, for example, Candy Gunther Brown, "Mindfulness: Stealth Buddhism for Mainstreaming Meditation," *Huffington Post*, December 2, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/candy-gunther-brown-phd/mindfulness-stealth-buddh_b_6243036.html; Ronald Purser and Andrew Cooper, "Mindfulness' 'Truthiness' Problem: Sam Harris, Science and the Truth about Buddhist Tradition", *Salon*, December 6, 2014, http://www.salon.com/2014/12/06/mindfulness_truthiness_problem_sam_harris_science_and_the_truth_about_buddhist_tradition/); Linda Heuman, "What's at Stake When the Dharma Goes Modern", *Tricycle*, Fall 2012, http://www.lindaheuman.com/stories/Tricycle_Magazine_Whats_At_Stake.pdf. See also the related court case in Encinitas, CA on yoga in schools (Will Carless, "Yoga Class Draws a Religious Protest," *New York Times,* December 15, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/16/us/school-yoga-class-draws-religious-protest-from-christians.html?_r=0.)

penetrates each of these programs. Above we explored how each program appeals to various claims of universalism found within common human qualities like love and compassion as a means of justifying or demarcating their secular approaches. Another feature shared among all three is a preference for framing these Buddhist-based contemplative models and practices as thoroughly scientific, or at least as thoroughly compatible with modern science. Indeed, the discourse of scientific rationalism and naturalism has shaped Buddhism's reception in the West, and has offered another means by which these programs justify, legitimize, and expand access to their respective programs.

One central way these programs explicitly frame themselves as scientific is to invoke the image of the historical Buddha as a "great scientist." In discussing why Buddhism is "not the point" of mindfulness, Kabat-Zinn says:

> The way I see it, Buddhism itself is not the point. You might think of the Buddha as a genius of his age, a great scientist, at least as towering a figure as Darwin or Einstein, who, as the Buddhist scholar Alan Wallace likes to put it, had no instruments other than his own mind at his disposal and who sought to look deeply into the nature of birth and death and the seeming inevitability of suffering. In order to pursue his investigations, he first had to understand, develop, refine and learn to calibrate and stabilize the instrument he was using for this purpose, namely his own mind, in the same way that laboratory scientists today have to continually develop, refine, calibrate, and stabilize the instruments that they employ to extend their senses […] in the service of looking deeply into and exploring the nature of the universe and the vast array of interconnected phenomena that unfold within it…[158]

The implication here is that MBSR offers not religious but rather scientific methods for gaining insight into one's mind. CBCT takes a similar rhetorical approach in offering itself as a 'science of mind':

[158] Kabat-Zinn, *Coming to Our Senses,* 25

> As modern scientific research demonstrates the wide-ranging benefits attributable to qualities such as mindfulness, love, forgiveness and compassion, the Tibetan science of mind offers time-tested techniques for effectively developing and strengthening these attributes...[159]

This so-called "science of mind" is offered as a means to help people reduce stress, cope with chronic pain, enhance their immune function, deal with a host of other medical and psychological issues, and also as a tool to investigate the very nature of the mind. In this frame, the Buddha is likened to a "great healer" who diagnoses an illness or disease, identifies the cause, offers hope for recovery, and prescribes a remedy or path.

MBSR, for example, was initially framed as a method for dealing with pain and reducing stress along these lines (despite the misnomer implied in stress 'reduction' discussed in the passage above). Kabat-Zinn notes:

> What better place than a hospital to make the dharma available to people in ways that they might possibly understand it [...] since the entire *raison d'être* of the dharma is to elucidate the nature of suffering and its root causes, as well as provide a practical path to liberation of suffering?[160]

While CBCT was initially framed as a response to MBSR (as we saw in Chapter 2), and while the rhetoric of CBCT presented in this chapter focuses primarily on the cultivation of compassion and secular ethics, the first research studies conducted on CBCT were, in a

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[159] Geshe Lobsang Negi. Available on CBCT's home website—the Emory-Tibet Partnership—at http://tibet.emory.edu/about/index.html. The website also states:

> Based on the understanding that self-centered thinking and behavior cause suffering for self and others, while other-centered thoughts, emotions, and behaviors ultimately benefit all, CBCT works to promote a deep sense of endearment for others. Compassion is fostered through a process that begins with the stabilization of the practitioner's mental activity, and then progresses to the cultivation of a sense of closeness or connectedness to others, and the recognition of the causes of suffering.
>
> The fundamental premise—that compassion is a trait that can be developed and expanded, and that its practice benefits both self and society—is a view expressed by great thinkers from Charles Darwin to Albert Einstein to the 14th Dalai Lama. And now scientific research is demonstrating what a wide variety of religious and wisdom traditions have held for centuries: that the practice of compassion yields tangible benefits.

[160] Kabat-Zinn, "Some Reflections on the Origins of MBSR," 288.

way similar to MBSR, focused on the program's efficacy in reducing stress and enhancing immune function.[161] Only years after its formal introduction did researchers begin assessing the effects of CBCT on pro-social qualities like compassion, for example. And ICT, despite its relatively stronger resistance to the perceived limitations of secular-scientific discourse, also alludes to the modern notion of stress when it frames its program as one that helps those who serve others "find a place of deep inner reset and replenishment so as to heal from dynamics of burnout," and which offers a method that would sustain their service "beyond 'compassion fatigue.'"[162]

This explicit "medicalization" of mindfulness and compassion has likely afforded these programs wider access to audiences and spaces than religious-based programs would have done. Thus the "medicalization" of these programs has likely been both influenced by the larger scientific framework and is also a strategic response to it. It is also likely that such an approach has been, and still is, influenced by aspects of the self-help and "mind-cure" movements, which some have interpreted as having taken a powerful hold in America.[163] In any case, the "medicalization" of these programs has arguably been reductive, insofar as it has reduced the programs' scope and efficacy to that which can both be operationalized and assessed by modern discourse. Harrington and Dunne, for example, track the ways in which MBSR was first envisioned as a program that offered total transformation of one's life, rather than just stress or symptom

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[161] See, for example, Thaddeus W.W. Pace et al., "Innate Immune Neuroendocrine and Behavioral Responses to Psychosocial Stress Do Not Predict Subsequent Compassion Meditation Practice Time," *Psychoneuroendocrinology* 35 (2010): 310–315; Pace et al. "Effect of Compassion Meditation on Neuroendocrine, Innate Immune and Behavioral Responses to Psychosocial Stress," 87–98.

[162] Makransky, "How Contemporary Buddhist Practice Meets the Secular World," 1.

[163] See, for example, Harrington's *The Cure Within;* Richard Payne's "Buddhism and the Power of Mind" in *Buddhism in the Modern World,* ed. David McMahan (New York: Routledge, 2012); and Jeff Wilson's *Mindful America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

reduction, and that the move toward this more limited or reductive frame was triggered in part by the need to operationalize the approach for scientific research purposes.[164] Further, the scientific frame, through the process of medicalization, has to a large extent facilitated the decontexualization of the practice. It has also limited or framed the goals of such contemplative interventions in relation to current medical discourse. Kabat-Zinn reveals as much in his reflections on the foundation of MBSR:

> With the aim of bridging these two epistemologies of science and dharma, I felt impelled to point out in the early years of MBSR the obvious etymological linkage of the words medicine and meditation and articulate for medical audiences their root meanings […] In that context, it felt useful to adopt the already established terminology of self-regulation […] and describe meditation operationally, in terms of the self-regulation of attention […] The intention and approach behind MBSR were never meant to exploit, fragment, or decontextualize the dharma, but rather to recontextualize it within the frameworks of science, medicine (including psychiatry and psychology), and healthcare so that it would be maximally useful to people who could not hear it or enter into it through the more traditional dharma gates, whether they were doctors or medical patients, hospital administrators, or insurance companies. And because naming is very important in how things are understood and either accepted or not, I felt that the entire undertaking needed to be held by an umbrella term broad enough to contain the multiplicity of key elements that seemed essential to field a successful clinical programme in the cultural climate of 1979. Stress reduction seemed ideal, since pretty much everybody can relate to that instinctively, even though 'reduction' is a something of a misnomer. The term stress also has the element of dukkha embedded within it. In fact, some Buddhist scholars translate the term 'dukkha' in Buddhist texts as 'stress' (see, for example, Thanissaro Bhikkhu 2010). Moreover, there was already a growing literature related to the psychophysiology of stress reactivity and pain regulation […][165]

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[164] Harrington and Dunne trace the early framing of meditation as a stress reduction technique to Herbert Benson of Harvard Medical School in the 1970s. Benson framed meditation as a universally applicable "relaxation response" that, on their view, "helped create a secular cultural space for the practice within medicine." This laid the groundwork for Kabat-Zinn's approach, which they argue was originally "envisioned [as] a rigorous training program that would aim, less at symptom reduction (Benson's focus) than at a total transformation of a person's approach to his or her illness and life. In this sense, he began with a vision that – like humanistic psychoanalysts a generation earlier—was less medical than existential. The goal was less to change people's physiology than it was to help them find ways to *suffer* less from what ailed them." Harrington and Dunne, "When Meditation is Therapy," 8-9.

[165] Kabat-Zinn, "Some Reflections on the Origins of MBSR," 288-289.

While this framing is presented as merely skillful, I argue that it has had the unintended consequence of limiting the scope of these programs to the reduction of stress and suffering. In another time, and under other conditions, these programs could have been shaped by the field of positive psychology, and the focus could have been on enhancing happiness rather than reducing suffering. It is clear, however, that Kabat-Zinn, and presumably others, does not wish for MBSR to be reduced to "stress-reduction." He notes in the sentence following this excerpt that those who partake in MBSR realize that it is actually about much more than reducing stress: "[A]s more than one participant in MBSR has exclaimed on occasion after a few weeks in the programme: 'This isn't stress reduction. This is my whole life!'"[166]

Somewhat ironically, this tendency to decontextualize the dharma and recontextualize it in a modern medical frame seemingly ignores the social nature of medicine. As Kabat-Zinn reveals in the quote above, MBSR borrowed the language of stress in light of fashionable medical discourse of the day, yet at the same time, the rhetoric of the medicalization tends to ignore cultural and historical developments in favor of universalist or objective explanations. For example, Anne Harrington has traced the shifting historical development of the concept of stress from the 1950s conception of stress as reactions to traumas, to the subsequent reconceptualization of stress as the feeling of being overwhelmed by modern life, to the later sense that certain personality traits—like hostility and cynicism—were linked to higher incidence of stress, and finally to the current, widely-held conception that stress and stress-related illnesses result from

[166] Kabat-Zinn, "Some reflections on the Origins of MBSR," 289

social isolation and disconnection.[167] Interestingly, although the medical literature has shifted, programs like MBSR have not suggested that they have evolved in response to these developments. Nor has CBCT, which as I stated above developed in response to MBSR and during the rise in interest the relationship between stress and social connectedness, explicitly recognize this shift. In other words, these programs make no explicit reference to the fact that scientific discourse is historical or contextual, or that treatments are developing and perhaps *evolving* in response to medicine.[168] This, on my view, helps maintain an underlying narrative that is in tension throughout this research: that somehow the truth or essence of the Buddha's teachings are ahistorically true, and thus there is no evolution or development in terms of this tradition, but rather the teachings are merely adapted in skillful ways to meet the needs of particular times and individuals.[169] It also suggests that modern science is somehow validating Buddhism. The caution here is that it is validating a particular modern vision of Buddhism void of or free

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[167] Anne Harrington, *The Cure Within,* 139-204.

[168] This, too, of course, is in contrast with the *rhetoric* of Buddhism as being changeable. As Sharon Begley notes in the section on "Buddhism and Science" in her bestselling popular book, *Train Your Mind, Change Your Brain,* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2007), 11-15:

> Although science and religion are often portrayed as chronic opponents and even enemies, that misses the mark for science and Buddhism. There is no historic antagonism between the two […] Instead, Buddhism and science share the goal of seeking the truth, with a lowercase t. For science, truth is always tentative, always subject to refutation by the next experiment; for Buddhism—at least, as the Dalai Lama sees it—even core teachings can and must be overturned if science proves them wrong. Perhaps most important, Buddhist training emphasizes the value of investigating reality and finding the truth of the outside world as well as the contents of one's mind. "Four themes are common to Buddhism at its best: rationality, empiricism, skepticism, and pragmatism," says Alan Wallace... "His Holiness embodies these. He often says with delight that if there is empirical evidence that contradicts something in Buddhism, 'Into the garbage!' He is quite adamant that Buddhism has to yield to rational argument and empiricism…"

[169] The same might be argued about discourse concerning human nature. As the narrative of human nature has shifted from one of selfishness to prosociality, programs, especially CBCT, have seemed to adopt the rhetoric that we are "wired" for connection, as if science were merely "catching up" or "revealing" that which the Buddhist tradition already knows to be true. What happens if and when the scientific discourse shifts again? The fact that we so readily accept scientific theories to be "true" given that "current" theories are so often radically displaced by new, paradigm shifting theories is also astonishing.

from cultural "baggage" and religious practices, thereby liberating it from its religious (i.e., "irrational") roots.

Some have expressed concern over other aspects of the "medicalization" of contemplative practice, including MBSR in particular, for its tendency to expand the scope of disease (or "dis-ease" to borrow Kabat-Zinn's term) and its causes—namely, inattention—without a clearly defined end goal. The inarticulateness of the end goal results from a lack of clarity about what healing is, an over-general categorization of disease, and a tension between therapeutic and soteriological healing frames, which seem to be in tension in contemplative programs. As critics like Kristin Baker explain:

> [C]ompared to orthodox medicine, mindfulness represents a significant expansion in the conceptualization of disease […] Paradoxically, this is the direct result of an expansive definition of health, which includes total wellness of mind, body and spirit […] Second, mindfulness puts forth an elusive and over-determined etiological model that increases the scope of therapeutic intervention. Because anything and everything can cause "dis-ease," individuals are adrift in a sea of conceptual confusion that nevertheless places responsibility for their sickness or at least their path to wellness, squarely at their feet. In response, they must vigilantly surveil everything they do, think, and feel. Third, [b]ecause mindfulness relies on ambiguously defined notions of what it means to be healed (i.e., it simultaneously leaves open the possibility that one is never fully healed in the broadest sense and that one can readily be healed - even when sick - by simply accepting things as they are) it traps individuals in an ongoing disease-therapy cycle.[170]

Baker also notes that mindfulness places the onus on the individual and their response to stresses of modern life, and gives less critical attention to the sociological causes of stress. Thus mindfulness, and thereby stress, become decontextualized, mirroring a problem that others, including medical anthropologist Arthur Kleinman, have decried. He has critiqued ways in which mental, social, and existential suffering is altogether

[170] Kristin K. Baker, "Mindfulness meditation: Do-it-Yourself Medicalization of Every Moment," *Social Science & Medicine* 106 (2014): 174, http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2014.01.024

dismissed or denied if it cannot be reduced to the level of biological disease.[171] He has also taken issue with the ways in which suffering has become universalized through processes of medicalization.

When suffering is understood as an a-cultural, universal experience that can be overcome or attenuated through a-cultural, universal practices, we overlook the richness of frames of meaning and healing that are provided by the very differences immanent in the particularity of people and contexts. Totalizing frames might enable a program to acquire significant reach, yet they can inadvertently and problematically delegitimize individual participants' experiences.[172] In the following section we will explore the curious observation that even though MBSR, CBCT, and ICT participate actively in the medicalization (and scientification) of their programs to varying degrees, they at the same time also attempt to *resist* the reduction of their programs to the domains of science and medicine. It thus appears that, while embracing the discourse of modern science, they also offer an implicit critique of its limits, especially through the frame of spirituality.

The Spiritual (But Not Religious) Frame

The presentation of these programs as drawn from a Buddhist "science of mind" that can offer something *additional* to the modern sciences suggests that they cannot be simply reduced to a framework of scientific rationalism. The Dalai Lama's tripartite view of Buddhism—in which he distinguishes among (i) Buddhist religion (which includes

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[171] See Arthur Kleinman and Johan Kleinman "Suffering and its Professional Transformation: Toward an Ethonography of Interpersonal Experience," in *The Art of Medical Anthropology Readings*, eds. Sjaak van der Geest and Adre Rienks (Amsterdam: Het Sphinius Publishers: 1998), 201.

[172] See also Arthur Kleinman, "Experience and Its Moral Modes: Culture, Human Conditions, and Disorder," (paper presented for The Tanner Lectures on Human Values, Stanford University, April 13-16, 1998).

Buddhist ritual, practice, and beliefs); (ii) Buddhist philosophy (including Buddhist concepts such as emptiness and dependent origination); and (iii) Buddhist science (which includes theories of mind and mental functions)—offers a clear articulation of this distinction.[173] The purpose of this tripartite view is to conceptually differentiate among (1) the set of religious practices and beliefs that constitute Buddhism; (2) the philosophical and theoretical systems that underpin or are used to justify those practices and beliefs; and (3) verifiable, empirical knowledge of the world, both external (the physical world) and internal (the nature of the mind and emotions). On his view, contemporary meditation models are grounded in "Buddhist science," that is, the study of cognition and emotions (or what I refer to here as "science of mind"), and do not, or should not, address issues of Buddhist religion or philosophy. This tripartite model, which would arguably fall apart under certain forms of scrutiny, seems motivated by a kind of pragmatism. Specifically, it takes concepts and beliefs that run counter to both science and other faith traditions off the table, while strategically insulating certain aspects of Buddhism from scientific study (usually because the model assumes that science does not have the tools to effectively research those aspects).[174] It also follows a

[173] Dalai Lama, (private teaching to participants of the Emory-Tibet Science Initiative delegation, Dharamsala, India, June 2009).

[174] The Dalai Lama still sees a utility and place for religion in the modern world. On page 16 in *Beyond Religion* he writes: "I am not among those who think that humans will soon be ready to dispense with religion altogether. On the contrary, in my view, faith is a force for good and can be tremendously beneficial. In offering an understanding of human life which transcends our temporary physical existence, religion gives home and strength to those facing adversity….for all its benefits, however…I do not think that religion is indispensible to the spiritual life. But where does this leave us with regard to grounding ethics and nurturing inner values? Today, in a scientific age in which religion strikes many as meaningless, what basis for such values is left to us? How can we find a way of motivating ourselves ethically without recourse to traditional beliefs?"

pattern common to other "Buddhist modernizers," for whom Buddhism is aligned with scientific naturalism but not scientific materialism.[175]

MBSR resists this reduction in a similar way. Although the sketches presented above of MBSR's secular and scientific frames might make the program appear reductive or sanitized, they also suggest a discernable sense that there is something more—perhaps even something "spiritual"—to mindfulness. For example, as noted above, more than one participant has exclaimed, "This isn't stress reduction. This is my whole life!"[176] The felt sense that there is 'something more' to MBSR emerges in part as a result of Kabat-Zinn's own description of the great mystery, the big "M" of mindfulness, by which he refers both to its depth and to the unfolding or development of mindfulness in America. His own origin story is particularly revealing:

> On a two-week vipassanā retreat at the Insight Meditation Society (IMS) in Barre, Massachusetts, in the Spring of 1979, while sitting in my room one afternoon about Day 10 of the retreat, I had a 'vision' that lasted maybe 10 seconds. I don't really know what to call it, so I call it a vision. It was rich in detail and more like an instantaneous seeing of vivid, almost inevitable connections and their implications. It did not come as a reverie or a thought stream, but rather something quite different, which to this day I cannot fully explain and don't feel the need to. I saw in a flash not only a model that could be put in place, but also the long term implications of what might happen if the basic idea was sound and could be implemented in one test environment—namely that it would spark new fields of scientific and clinical investigation, and would spread to hospitals and medical centres and clinics across the country and around the world, and provide right livelihood for thousands of practitioners. Because it was so weird, I hardly ever mentioned this experience to others. But after that retreat, I did have a better sense of what my karmic assignment might be. It was so compelling that I decided to take it on wholeheartedly as best I could.[177]

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[175] See McMahan's *The Making of Buddhist Modernism,* 61-88.

[176] Kabat-Zinn, "Some Reflections on the Origins of MBSR," 289.

[177] Kabat-Zinn, "Some Reflections on the Origins of MBSR," 287.

There are further spiritual tensions evident in this so-called secular program. Despite claims that mindfulness (as taught in MBSR) is the essence of the Buddha's teachings, Kabat-Zinn clearly states that one needs to study Buddhism in order to teach MBSR, suggesting that there is *more* to MBSR than what is offered in a secular, clinical space. Here he discusses the requirements for MBSR teachers:

> Since all mindfulness-based interventions are based on relatively intensive training in awareness in the context of a universal dharma framework (and as I have been asserting here, not different in any essential way from Buddhadharma), the various maps of the territory of the dharma can be hugely helpful to the MBSR instructor in certain ways. This all is to say that it can be hugely helpful to have a strong personal grounding in the Buddhadharma and its teachings, as suggested in the earlier sections. In fact, it is virtually essential and indispensible for teachers of MBSR and other mindfulness-based interventions. Yet little or none of it can be brought into the classroom except in essence. And if the essence is absent, then whatever one is doing or thinks one is doing, it is certainly not mindfulness-based in the way we understand the term.[178]

The last few lines of this excerpt reveal the tensions between MBSR's implicit, religious frame, and its explicit secular (and perhaps explicitly public) frame. Though the last few lines make a clear assertion that a Buddhist grounding or framework is necessary for the delivery of this program, Kabat-Zinn is equally adamant about what he sees as a universal, explicitly non-religious grounding (or delivery) of this approach. By his view, an MBSR instructor is not to bring Buddhist elements into the classroom per se, but rather is expected to extract the "universal essence" from this worldview and present it in a secular way. This suggests that there is more to mindfulness than what an explicit secular frame might permit. At the same time, the anti-religious rhetoric used here signals that the essence of Buddhism is not religious, but rather spiritual.

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[178] Kabat-Zinn, "Some Reflections on the Origins of MBSR," 296-7. On page 299 he notes: "But we are never appealing to authority or tradition, only to the richness of the present moment held gently in awareness, and the profound and authentic authority of each person's own experience, equally held with kindness in awareness." This is another important modern theme that will be taken up below.

Despite their secular rhetoric, both CBCT and MBSR attempt to retain a spiritual dimension to their programs to avoid being interpreted as somehow “less than” religious. They do this in different ways by envisioning themselves as “spiritual-but-not-religious,” though they arrive at this stance in different ways. MBSR offers a “something more” that is said to be ultimately compatible with a naturalized framework, whereas CBCT suggests that the “something more” falls within the domain of the religious, and not within a naturalistically constrained version of the secular. To be clear, CBCT adopts a “spiritual-but-not-religious” stance in explaining the nature of its secular protocol, yet the version of the secular it employs seems to remain open to religious or supernatural accounts of the world. Yet CBCT brackets these religious accounts in its program, as only naturalistic explanations are permitted in its interpretation of secular space. The program suggests that religious or non-naturalistic explanatory systems may offer something that science cannot (a notion reflected in the Dalai Lama’s tripartite distinction above). On this model, “spiritual-but-not-religious” is more than “secular,” but somehow less than “religious.” MBSR, on the other hand, rejects explanations perceived as supernatural or religious—all non-naturalistic accounts of the world are rejected such that spiritual content or practice is explained in both natural and universal terms. Thus MBSR employs “spiritual-but-not-religious” as an encompassing view that aligns with naturalism bur resists a reductive materialist stance.

As discussed above, the secular is often regarded as a space that is distinct from religious traditions and beliefs of different kinds, either by bracketing them (as done in Indian secularity, or the “open model”) or by rejecting them (as in the secularization thesis, or the “closed model”). It is my contention that both CBCT and MBSR rely upon

limiting "subtraction models" of the secular in which religious beliefs and practices are either bracketed or rejected. While these versions of the secular attempt to uphold the divide between private belief and public religious affiliation through attempts at bracketing out or rejecting religious belief and practice, the category of the spiritual attempts to embrace and unite various religious and faith by positing a universal, trans-cultural spirituality.[179] As McMahan explains in his article, "The Enchanted Secular: Buddhism and the Emergence of Transtraditional 'Spirituality,'" the term "spiritual" has been used synonymously with the term "religious," even though historically the term "spiritual" tended to refer to the private domain of belief and practice, whereas "religious" referred to public religious communal participation or institutional affiliation. The rise of scientific rationalism and the encounters between various religious traditions during the late 19th and early 20th centuries prompted a "crisis of belief" in which competing religious and scientific claims were evaluated on the same level of discourse. Such encounters changed the very nature of belief. Religious beliefs were no longer given; they needed to be evaluated and assented to. Modern conceptions of the secular arise from this framework, and with them a new concept of spirituality as distinct from religion is developed.

The idea that there is a universal spirituality, a universal religious experience, or even a universal set of human values is, of course, highly controversial. The criterion for determining what is essential is largely influenced by this very "spiritual-but-not-religious" category that draws on allegedly universal features of human spirituality. Yet this universal spirituality does not extract equally from all religious traditions; it draws

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[179] See David McMahan, "The Enchanted Secular: Buddhism and the Emergence of Transtraditional 'Spirituality,'" *The Eastern Buddhist* 43, no. 1&2 (2012): 1-19.

most significantly from Protestantism in the American cultural context.[180] It is also a decidedly modern concept.

If we consider a spectrum of stances ranging from an emphasis on difference to an embrace of universality, both MBSR and CBCT have tended strongly toward the universalizing end of that spectrum, albeit in different ways. In their attempts to be perceived as secular, but not reductionist or religious, I believe they have overlooked the importance of rich religious and cultural symbols and practices that represent and communicate deep meanings. This is not to say that such symbols and practices have not been replaced in the American context, but rather that this attention to context has been neglected or not sufficiently developed in these two programs in particular.

Further, CBCT's version of the secular seems to tolerate contradictory claims to truth from competing religious traditions. Either this version of the secular tolerates contradiction—and must thus give an account of why one ought to tolerate contradictions concerning truth-claims—or it assumes that the truth-claims of these traditions are perhaps subject to a sliding scale of truth. Given that both Negi and the Dalai Lama suggest that religious practices can enhance these secular programs, it seems they assume a more flexible model of the secular that holds multiple truths valid in an attempt to "skillfully" avoid the problem of having to adjudicate between truth-claims (though calling this approach "skillful" obfuscates the implicit hierarchy of belief embedded in it). We will address some of these adaptations in the following chapter, though for now it is important to point out the general danger involved in creating overly generic categories out of notions like "spirituality." Religious and cultural systems contain diverse paths for

[180] For a discussion of Protestantism and the so-called universal secular, see Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

healing and often present challenges to practitioners in order to help them grow and transform. Removing these challenges—by stripping spiritual programs of cultural contexts, or dispensing what seems foreign to us—can undo some of their potential.

Although ICT does not handle the secular and religious divide in the same way that MBSR and CBCT do, in the sense that it does not attempt to reject or bracket religious influences, or create a universal, culturally neutral program, it does similarly frame its approach as one that is 're-spiritualizing' the modern world by offering people a means of reconnecting to the primal or unconditional ground of their being.[181] To this end its rhetoric mimics a form of romantic expressionism articulated by other Buddhist modernizers; this includes, for example, the notion that the ills of a mechanized, industrial, modern society can be assuaged by "recovering" a spiritual practice.

The view that the world can be recovered or "resacralized" through spirituality points to a common theme in the discourse of modernity. The rejection (or restoration) of spirituality, whether within or beyond the bounds of mainstream religion, is yet another feature of modernity that unites these three programs. As both Taylor and McMahan note, the rise of science and certain related forms of secularism have had a relativizing effect on religious traditions. In the face of competing claims concerning the nature of reality and objective truth, many came to rely more on subjective experience, growing suspicious of institutionalized religious authority. Trusting instead in their own personal experience as a legitimate source of truth, this "subjective turn"[182] helped generate a widespread understanding of humans as natural beings endowed with an innate, creative,

[181] Makranksy, "How Contemporary Buddhist Practice Meets the Secular World, 1.
[182] See McMahan, *Making of Buddhist Modernism,* 188-192.

and spontaneous moral sensibility. The view was that one should learn to trust their own experience, rather than rely on prepackaged religious interpretations. This new, modern focus on individual ethics and authenticity bears directly on how we ground morality and ethics, which is one of the most contentiously debated points concerning the secularization of Buddhist practice. This is also one of the main issues at stake in the innateist/constructivist debate.

Certain features of contemporary mindfulness reflect or align with these romantic or spiritual features of modernity that, to restate, have precedence in certain Buddhist traditions as well as certain strands of American spirituality.[183] Central to critiques of the secularization of Buddhist practices is the question of whether or not they omit theoretical, philosophical, and contemplative frames that support a practitioner's ethical development. Programs like MBSR suggest that such frames are unnecessary because humans, in a sense, already have an innate capacity for ethical conduct, and need not rely on external or authoritative institutions for such guidance. In Kabat-Zinn's words:

> [I]t is also all too easy to fall into a kind of moralistic rhetoric that can sound a lot like sermonizing, and *that* invariably brings up legitimate questions in people's minds as to whether the person espousing such values actually adheres to them…in the context of teaching mindfulness …we find it more effective and more authentic to embody openhearted presence, trustworthiness, generosity, and kindness as best we can as an essential part of our own practice, and in how we live and teach and carry ourselves, letting the more explicit conversations around morality and ethics arise naturally out of conversations in which people share in dialogue their experiences with the meditation practice itself, which means, with life itself….ethics and morality are seen, known, and recognized through being lived far more than they are through words, however eloquent…they are inherent in the cultivation of mindfulness, by seeing and feeling firsthand the inner and outer effects of our actions, our words, and even our thoughts and our facial expressions, literally moment by moment, breath by breath, day by day.[184]

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[183] For more on this, see Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit* (New Haven: Yale, 1997).

[184] Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go,* 106-107.

Critics of the secular mindfulness movement, including B. Alan Wallace, contend that MBSR represents a watered-down, inauthentic assemblage of Buddhist practices that get mindfulness 'wrong,' so to speak, by promoting the practice of 'bare attention' without attention to ethical cultivation. Wallace notes, for example:

> 'Nonjudgmentally accept every aspect of yourself' is a refrain I've heard time and again, and on multiple levels this is fundamentally at variance with the whole of the Buddha's teachings… Apart from the issue of definitions alone, I am concerned that Buddhist Vipassanā practice is not only being radically simplified for the general lay public (some would say "dumbed down"), but that it is being misrepresented in such a way that the rich teachings (in theory & practice) of the *Satipaṭṭhānasutta* are being overlooked or marginalized.[185]

On Wallace's view, not only is popular mindfulness inauthentic, it threatens to reduce or simplify Buddhist practice. Yet Kabat-Zinn responds:

> The practice of mindfulness is undertaken as a way to enable people to enhance their appreciation of the present, to *be* more fully in the here and now, to accept more completely and totally the world with all its vicissitudes and uncertainties…In a way, this is almost the converse of the classical function of *sati*, which is to induce "disenchantment" with the here and now. One can see how mindfulness practice could acquire this function as a means to help people overcome the sense of alienation from direct experience that set in as a consequence of the industrial and technological age, with its stress on the conceptual mastery of nature and its subjugation of the natural world to human purposes.[186]

These passages reveal not only tensions within the Buddhist tradition that re-surface in contemporary discourse, but also tensions within various discourses of modernity. If we were to bracket the Buddhist debate temporarily, we could read the same passages as a debate between a scientific-rationalist and a romantic-expressionist (or spiritual)

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[185] B. Alan Wallace and Bhikkhu Bodhi, "The Nature of Mindfulness and Its Role in Buddhist Meditation," *A Correspondence between B. Alan Wallace and the Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi*, Winter, 2006. http://shamatha.org/sites/default/files/Bhikkhu_Bodhi_Correspondence.pdfhttp://shamatha.org/content/correspondence-between-b-alan-wallace-and-venerable-bhikkhu-bodhi

[186] Wallace and Bodhi, "The Nature of Mindfulness and Its Role in Buddhist Meditation," 14.

approach to ethics.[187] This is interesting, for it reveals modernist influences that affect each of the contemporary Buddhist models. For example, while CBCT and Wallace both draw from similar Buddhist models, CBCT's secular rhetoric emphasizes the innate capacity that humans have to be compassionate and kind, rooted in their evolutionary biology. In fact, CBCT, MBSR, and ICT *all* claim, to varying degrees, that humans are endowed with these capacities; however, a few key differences are, for example, (1) that CBCT emphasizes more heavily the need for training; (2) that, as in the passage quoted above, CBCT emphasizes the notion that humans can cultivate these qualities because they are endowed with reason; and (3) that CBCT is far more prescriptive in its instructions for practice. ICT and MBSR, as discussed in Chapter 2, both emphasize the availability of these capacities for compassion and kindness, and the need for them to be uncovered and developed. Yet one could also claim, as Ron Purser and others have, that the rhetoric of (moral) innateness is not merely a doctrinal issue concerning whether ethical dimensions are implicit or explicit in contemporary applications, but rather reveals "a set of assumptions that view ethical frameworks for contextualizing mindfulness practice as an inconvenient 'add-on'," or set of rules or moral prescriptions for behavior and action.[188] He further explains:

> Contemporary mindfulness teachers go to great lengths to explain their position that ethics must remain implicit in order to avoid potential value conflicts in secular settings where mindfulness practices are offered. There are a variety of arguments offered that support this position: the practice of clinical and

[187] We also must question whether appeals to Buddhist traditional accounts of ethics should have any bearing on these discussions of ethics. It is not so much that we cannot look to these accounts to inform our understanding of ethics, but rather that to suggest that particular Buddhist interpretations of these topics should inform how all people everywhere *ought* to live is an overreach. For more on this, see Jake H. Davis, "Facing Up to the Question of Ethics in Mindfulness-Based Interventions," *Mindfulness* 6 (2015): 46-48. doi:10.1007/s12671-014-0374-3.

[188] Ronald Purser, "Clearing the Muddled Path of Traditional and Contemporary Mindfulness: a Response to Monteiro, Musten, and Compson." *Mindfulness* 6 (2015): 23-45. doi: 10.1007/s12671-014-0373-4.

> contemporary mindfulness practices naturally lead to ethical behavior; that ethical dimensions are “built-into” the practice itself; ethical outcomes depend on the mindfulness teacher “embodying” and modeling ethical behavior, and so on. There appears to be an avoidance of moral inquiry in contemporary mindfulness discourse, along with a general reluctance to consider how the practice of mindfulness and questions of the good are unavoidably intertwined. This is due partially to the fact that the contemporary mindfulness movement is operating within a market society, where the dominant ethos is market logic and the value neutral discourse of economics. Thus, there is a powerful appeal to avoid engagement with moral and ethical questions when economistic conceptions of virtue have entered spheres of life that were traditionally buffered from market logic […] Letting the market decide questions of the good [assumes] that ethical behavior will “naturally” arise out of […] the practices themselves […]

Concerns regarding not only the rhetoric of these programs (and its appropriateness) but also of its ability to be misunderstood, co-opted, or misused by others who may not share the same ethical value system assumed by these *Buddhist-based* secular programs has caused great concern in this growing field. Such concerns, I find, reveal the underlying tensions within the programs, and the underlying ethical commitments (i.e., generally Buddhist) that drive and give shape to the programs’ rhetorical projects.

An American Civil Religion? Or Stealth Buddhism?

Again, though there are important distinctions theoretically between these approaches, the modern rhetoric of innateness helps each program to ground its approach in a kind of universal human spirituality that is not tied to any religious tradition. The ways in which these programs interpret and respond to dominant discourses of modernity not only influences their design and development, but also has the potential to influence the modern conception of Buddhism as a tradition. In *Mindful America,* Jeff Wilson writes about the ways in which mindfulness and compassion programs operate in a “quasi-religious” fashion, because even though such programs tend to downplay ethics and values, proponents of these programs are convinced that such practices have an

ability to alleviate suffering, "illuminate the truths of life," and bring about "salvific improvement on the individual, national, and even planetary levels."[189] He sees the modern mindfulness movement as a type of American Buddhist civil religion that provides a picture of the good life and a good (or "mindful") society. His work suggests, like others before, that proponents of the modern mindfulness and compassion movements want to have it both ways. That is, they want to claim that these programs are Buddhist yet they want to do so without Buddhism itself; in other words, they want to believe that they have somehow extracted the universal, secular essence of Buddhist practices.

As Thupten Jinpa commented at a recent mindfulness conference at McGill University:

> Although I am aware that sometimes the presenters of mindfulness practices on the one hand want to argue this [mindfulness] has nothing to do with Buddhism, [that] it is secular… at the same time, they want to argue this is the essence of the Buddhist teachings. I've often told them, you know, you cannot have it both ways.[190]

One response to this line of commentary is to conclude that modern programs are attempting to teach stealth Buddhism, and that they are attempting to skillfully adapt Buddhist teachings to a modern audience through a secular frame.[191] Another option is to

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[189] Wilson, *Mindful America,* 161.

[190] Excerpt from Thupten Jinpa Langri's, "Mindfulness in Global and Local Cultural Contexts," (talk at the Mindfulness in Cultural Context Conference, McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, June 3, 2013). Quoted in Purser, "Clearing the Muddled Path of Traditional and Contemporary Mindfulness," 4.

[191] This certainly seems to be one option embraced by a number of teachers and practitioners. I am part of a mindfulness in education email list on which regular postings appear that either blatantly or suggestively describe ways in which program developers and implementers have "masked" or "hidden" the Buddhist roots of their mindfulness-based education programs. The sense is that one needs to employ a secular rhetoric to gain access into educational institutions, and once one's 'foot is in the door', so to speak, one is then free to teach whatever Buddhist teachings they deem appropriate. There is another related "insider" discourse that emerges on this email list from time to time, which suggests that discussions concerning

consider the possibility that something new—a new approach to articulating and addressing stress and suffering—is being created. Attempts to locate these practices in Buddhist discourse and to employ the language of skillful means, however, suggests that the programs are "trying to have it both ways," or at least trying to negotiate tensions between the universal and the local, the secular and the religious, and even the modern and post-modern.

The ways in which such programs are framed impacts their coherence, relevance, and efficacy for wider audiences. It still may strike some as naïve to assume that when one removes a dimension of culture in the name of secularization—in this case, the Buddhist frameworks that support these practices—that the practice traditions themselves remain intact. Put another way, there is a tendency to assume that techniques are not bound to or even influenced by the contexts in which they are delivered and practiced. The frames we explicitly employ, along with those that implicitly provide the backdrop to our experience, give shape to what we do, how we think, and perhaps most importantly, what we believe is possible. Frames have their utility and their limitations. In this and the previous chapter we have considered some of the potential implications of these frames. In the following chapter—Chapter 4—we will consider possible 're-frames' that have the potential to afford these programs greater degrees of efficacy, flexibility, creativity, and freedom as they negotiate this challenging terrain.

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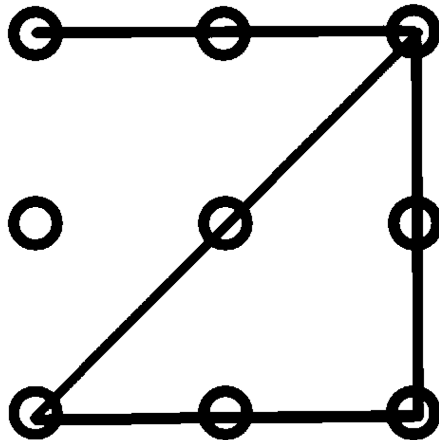
secularization are merely semantic games designed for "them", because "we" all really know what is going on here. (See, for example the Mindfulness in Education Network (MiEN) email list.)

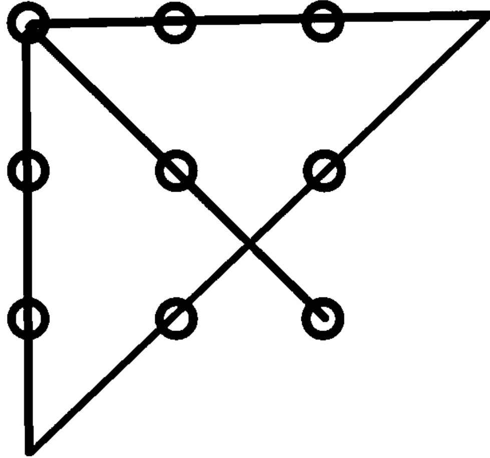
Chapter Four: Frames, (Re)Frames, and New Directions

One of the first exercises assigned in a typical eight-week MBSR course is called "Nine Dots." Participants are instructed to connect all of the following dots using only four straight lines, without lifting the pencil and without retracing any of the lines:



Participants often struggle with this exercise, finding it difficult to connect all nine dots using only four lines. We are so accustomed to thinking "inside the box" that it takes some time before we realize that we are drawing lines as if there were an artificial box or boundary around the nine dots. But this is merely a limit of our own self-imposed frame on the dots, which in turn inhibits our ability to complete the task.

If we were to think outside the box, so to speak, we might solve the problem in the following way:



This exercise—and others like it, including the image, “My wife and mother-in-law,” a famous ambiguous image of an old woman and a young woman’s face—are used in MBSR classes to awaken in participants the idea that our ways of seeing the world are limited, in many ways fixed, and often unconscious.

The practice of mindfulness, following this idea, calls participants to become aware of these limits, as well as what they obscure, in order to wake up to the "full spectrum" of their experience in the world.[192] In another sense, it invites them to learn to see as, rather than to see that. In other words, these practices invite participants to learn to see the ways in which our perceptions are conditioned, or to borrow from Wittgenstein's duck/rabbit drawing, to learn to the ways in which frames can shift our perceptions.[193]

Our disparate views of the world are shaped by our infinitely distinct habits, sensory limitations, and cultural backgrounds. Our experiences are constrained, and framed, by what we expect or want to see, and what we do not. In Chapters 2 and 3, we explored the ways in which MBSR, CBCT, and ICT frame and are framed by Buddhist contemplative models as well as various discourses of modernity. Above we discussed the idea that each of these three programs variously claims universal applicability, and that such claims have proven to be rhetorically effective teaching tools and interpretive devices to the extent that they are able to provide participants' experiences with a sense of coherence and even connection—a sense of belonging and validation regarding what it means to be human. At the same time, however, I suggested that such universal frameworks are problematic to the extent that they obscure, and perhaps suppress, 'healing paths' associated with alternative frames and perspectives.

This chapter will take up the work of articulating just those ways that universalizing frames obscure and suppress these alternatively framed possibilities for healing. I will attempt to highlight these alternative *re*frames with two goals in mind: (1)

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[192] Kabat-Zinn, *Coming to Our Senses*, 50.

[193] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2009).

to buttress my critique of universal frames, and (2) to articulate possible *re*frames of the background Buddhist debate concerning the nature of mind, in addition to possible *re*frames of the aforementioned discourses of the secular, the scientific, and the spiritual.

The final section of this chapter offers suggestions for new directions in the research, development, and application of these Buddhist-based contemplative programs in general, by drawing on both narrative therapy and ecological systems theory. In brief, I will suggest that the field of contemplative studies needs to attend much more closely to individuals' narratives of suffering and healing as critical parts of the process of program development and provision. Attending to individuals' unique contexts and personal narratives in this way will help shape Buddhist-based contemplative programs that are more responsive to the often un-generalizable needs of individuals embedded in highly specific ecosystems. In addition, programs need not only attend to individuals' contemplative or personal development, but they must also, on my view, deepen their understanding of the dynamics of the systems and context within which they work. Ultimately, programs need to adopt more ecologically sensitive approaches to development and implementation.

A Buddhist (Re)Frame: Skillful Means

Whether framed as freedom from veiled or habitual ways of seeing and reacting to our world, or as freedom from self-centeredness or limited ways of relating to others, MBSR, CBCT, and ICT offer different methods for dispensing with habits of mind and body implicated in our stress and suffering. Each program offers methods for helping us *break free from* (in the case of MBSR and ICT) or *transform* (in the case of CBCT) particular limiting frames.

Kabat-Zinn maintains the view that we can learn to cultivate an awareness that can:

> discern, embrace, transcend and free us from the veils and limitations of our routinized thought patterns, our routinized senses, and routinized relationships, and from the frequently turbulent and destructive mind states and emotions that accompany them.[194]

In breaking free from these habits that distort our view, or by "coming to our senses," we can access our inner resources for growth and healing. In doing so, according to the MBSR view, we learn to see that our experience exists within an infinite web of relationships. In a similar vein, Negi and Ozawa-de Silva[195] assert that many of our difficulties arise as a result of not seeing "reality as it is." On the CBCT view, we experience afflictive emotions like anger, for example, because we perceive reality or others' behavior in particularly limiting ways. Yet, they say, if we could learn to reassess situations that cause us anger, or approach it from another perspective, we might see that the situation could indeed be viewed differently, perhaps even positively, and thus our feelings could shift or be attenuated. Makransky, too, supports the claim that we have an innate capacity for wisdom and love, as well as an "inborn ability to be present to others beyond self-centered thinking."[196] Our habitual ways of mistaking our thoughts of persons for the persons themselves, however, continues to obscure our capacities for fuller connection. Part of the work of ICT, then, involves learning to see and commune

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[194] Kabat-Zinn, *Coming to Our Senses*, 10.

[195] Ozawa-de Silva and Negi, "Cognitively-Based Compassion Training," 416-437.

[196] John Makransky, "Teaching Spiritual Practice: One Contemporary Buddhist Approach," (paper presentation at the American Academy of Religion Panel, "Pedagogies in Practical Theology: Inter-religious Perspectives on Teaching Spiritual Practices," San Diego, California, November 17-20, 2007.)

with the fuller reality of persons themselves.[197] Thus all three programs invite individuals to break through certain patterns of thinking and ways of seeing the world, learning gradually to "wake up more fully" to the "hidden dimensions"—or to what Kabat-Zinn calls "new degrees of freedom"—that are available to us.

As we saw in Chapter 2, each program presents a different method for helping us wake up: MBSR and ICT emphasize an innateist approach for revealing our inner capacities for healing, while CBCT takes a constructivist approach. We might understand MBSR and ICT as leaning more towards an approach that aims to help us *break through* limiting frames, while CBCT leans towards an approach that aims to help us *reframe* or *transform* our limiting frames. The irony of these approaches, however, is that each one, in dispelling unwanted frames, advances a new frame with just as much potential to shape, define, and perhaps obscure our experience in new ways. Part of my argument is that these programs advance a model of "ultimate healing"—or, at least, that they draw from broader frameworks of understanding in which enlightenment is considered to be a

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[197] Makransky often offers, as an illustration, the following true story of Lucy, a hospital nurse who recounts her experience with a new nurse on her unit:

> I thought I was having a pretty good day at work. I knew what to do for my patients, and they seemed appreciative. My hair was behaving. I wasn't eating too much chocolate, and I was treating everyone with kindness—everyone except the new nurse. She just rubbed me the wrong way, with her sad, insecure smile. She was a little too eager, too needy. That evening I overheard the new nurse talking about her struggle to become pregnant. She'd finally had a child at the age of thirty-nine, she told the listener, but the little girl had needed heart surgery, and they'd lost her to an infection. By that time, premature menopause had ended the nurse's hope for another child. Sheepishly, I asked the new nurse what her baby's name was. Her face lit up with a mother's love. 'Rebecca. She would be five next month!' She pulled out a photograph of a beautiful, bright-eyed little girl. My heart ached with shame, sadness, and awe. 'Thank you,' I said. What I meant was: thank you for teaching me how much I have to learn.'

Makransky comments that this account reveals how we can be awakened to the "fuller reality" of persons, which in turn can elicit awe and gratitude. Although these qualities for wisdom and deep connection are ever-present, and emerge when limited views are undercut, the purpose of practice is to help individuals "wake up to reality more fully over time." Makransky, "Teaching Spiritual Practice: One Contemporary Buddhist Approach."

real possibility. When it comes to training in contemplative practice, contemporary programs such as the ones discussed here borrow from these original, broader "frameworks of understanding," yet will consistently attempt to frame themselves in a secular key. As a result, enlightenment gets taken off the table, or at least is bracketed out temporarily, and the programs are left promising a (perhaps intentionally) vague sense of well-being that involves some experiences of feeling better, less stressed, less angry, and more connected with others.

I want to suggest that a better approach to teaching contemplative practice might involve recognizing and softening the grip of these new frames—e.g., the imagined frame of "health" or "well-being" that one arrives at through the practices described in each of these programs—if not attempting to discard them altogether. Rather than perpetuating the innateist/constructivist debate by trying to determine which frame is "right," as if there were only one frame, a more sophisticated approach might ask, "For whom are these approaches most helpful, and under which conditions?" For example, we might consider whether certain styles of practice are better suited to different types of individuals or communities, or whether different practices are more helpful to individuals at different phases of their development. This type of "personalized-medicine" approach invites us to engage these various frames directly, thereby opening up new possibilities for insight that enable us to transform and transcend our own limiting, habitual frames.

I argue that this more flexible approach is in line with the spirit—if not the universalizing rhetoric—of the programs discussed in this dissertation, and also that it has justificatory precedent within the Buddhist tradition itself. Notably, the doctrine of "skillful means" supports the notion that various frames are "true" insofar as they help

alleviate suffering. The Buddha is said to have taught, for example, 84,000 dharmas, or teachings, for individuals of 84,000 different capacities. This notion of the need to work skillfully with a multiplicity of different perspectives is characteristic of, for example, the Buddhist parable of the blind men and the elephant, which has been used to teach the limits of sectarian perspectives, *as well as* the authority of Buddhist perspectives. As the story goes, a number of the Buddha's followers observed individuals from different sects quarreling with one another and disputing each other's views. Upon sharing this with the Buddha, he recounted the story of a king who rounded up all of the blind men in the village and brought them to his palace where they were asked to touch and describe an elephant. Some of the men were presented with the head of the elephant, others the ear, others the tusk, and so on. After the blind men had touched the elephant, the king asked them to describe what an elephant is like. Those who had been shown the head said it was like a water jar, those who had been shown the ear said it was like a basket, and so on. Each man described the elephant in relation to the part he had been shown, and quarreled with the others over the status of the elephant. In the Khuddaka Nikaya, the Buddha concludes,

> Then saying, "An elephant is like this, an elephant is not like that! An elephant is not like this, an elephant is like that!" they fought each other with their fists. And the king was delighted. Even so, monks, are the wanderers of other sects blind and sightless, and thus they become quarrelsome, disputatious, and wrangling, wounding each other with verbal darts.[198]

Teachers like Kabat-Zinn can be seen as invoking this parable in order to show that we do not (perhaps cannot) always have the "full picture," and that we mistake our

[198] This version of the parable from Bhikkhu Bodhi, ed., *In the Buddha's Words* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2005), 214-215.

individual views for "reality." They use the parable to suggest that we do not fully see all aspects of the situation, or that our views—or grasp on reality—are limited by our perspective and conditioning. Yet, contra Kabat-Zinn, what is perhaps more interesting about the parable is that it reveals a hierarchy of belief within Buddhism. In the story the Buddha does not say that we *all* have a limited view of reality; rather, the parable quite strongly suggests that *non-Buddhists* have a distorted view, and that Buddhism lays claim to the ultimate truth. Therefore, while Kabat-Zinn and others may invoke the principle of "skillful means" to justify their adaptations of the dharma for a modern, secularized American audience, tensions remain regarding their authenticity as well as their status in the hierarchy of "dharmic" truth.

"Skillful means" is often used to refer to the ways in which the Buddha adapted his teachings in appropriate ways to help beings advance on the path. The doctrine also has functioned historically as a hermeneutic device for both advancing and making sense of new developments within the Buddhist tradition.[199] Contrasting or conflicting teachings were interpreted within a hierarchy of truth for those of "greater" or "lesser" capacities. One of the best known classic example of this is represented in the parable of the burning house, in which a father uses skilfull means to lure his three children quickly out of the house and into safety. The children are said to be engrossed in games and thus unaware of the dire situation they are in. To get them out quickly, the father tricks them into believing that there is a toy outside for each of them. The children rush out of the burning house to find not the particular toy they each expected to see—each toy

[199] Richard Gombrich, "How the Mahāyāna Began" In *The Buddhist Forum 1,* ed. Tadeusz Skorupski, (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1990), 21-30. See also Michael Pye, *Skillful Means: A Concept of Mahāyāna Buddhism* (London: Duckworth; and Dallas: Southwest Book Services, 1978).

representing one example of the diverse methods and teachings employed by the Buddhas and bodhisattvas to reach diverse individuals—but rather a beautiful, bejeweled carriage drawn by a white ox, representing the great or one vehicle.[200] The implication here is that the Buddha used different means (and even deception and trickery![201]) to help people on the path, and that these represent multiple teachings, but not multiple (ultimate) truths.

Makransky, for one, has critiqued this narrow interpretation of skillful means, first for overlooking potential insights into the needs of different individuals, communities, and contexts that such a critical-historical approach to program development (contra the more common traditional ahistorical or acultural reading) could otherwise address, and second for paradoxically stifling creative development within the tradition, which has been essential to its survival via adaptation.[202] In place of this narrow interpretation, Makransky advocates for a "historically conscious" approach that respects a diversity of skillfully adapted teachings and practices. Such an expanded interpretation of the doctrine of skillful means would ask not which teaching or tradition or approach has captured the Buddha's absolute teaching, but rather questions which elements of thought and practice most effectively "speak to the conditions of our current place and time."[203]

Such a historically-grounded, context-focused approach has the potential to shift the rhetoric from one about the "debate" concerning the correct or most effective program to one that welcomes a plurality of approaches and perspectives. This expansive

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[200] See, for example, Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 150-157.

[201] See also Sara L. McClintock, "Compassionate Trickster: The Buddha as a Literary Character in the Narratives of Early Indian Buddhism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79, no 1 (2011): 90-112. doi: 10.1093/jaarel/lfq061

[202] Makransky, *Historical Consciousness,* 129.

[203] Makransky, *Historical Consciousness,* 130.

interpretation and application of "skillful means" could also go a long way toward ameliorating the political tensions and concerns over authority and authenticity that exist in the field. Not only are programs vying for power to communicate and spread the approach they understand to be most helpful, they are also competing for power to transmit and preserve their own authentic version of the dharma.

This dimension is most obvious with respect to CBCT, which is situated as part of a broader mission to transmit and preserve Tibetan Buddhism. The Emory-Tibet Partnership, of which the CBCT program is a central component, was formed with the express intent of bringing "ancient wisdom" (i.e., "unbroken lineages" of Tibetan Buddhism) to the "modern world." The 'History' section of the Partnership's website describes the relationship between Emory University and its main partner, Drepung Loseling Monastery, as follows:

> Drepung Loseling Monastic University, Emory's original partner, exemplifies a system of academic excellence complementing the best of western academia. Located at the crossroads of India, China and the Middle East, Tibet served—for centuries—as a repository of many important traditions of learning. After 12th century invaders destroyed the ancient Indian university of Nalanda […] Tibetan masters continued to analyze, refine, and expand the sophisticated systems of philosophy, psychology and science practiced there—thus saving this precious legacy from extinction.
>
> After the Communist invasion of Tibet in the 1950s, this profound storehouse of knowledge was again preserved from annihilation through the painstaking efforts of both Tibetan scholars and ordinary people. Texts were smuggled out of the country, monastics that escaped to India reconstituted entire volumes from memory, and the great monastic universities, including Drepung Loseling, were reestablished in exile so that the teachings and meditation practices could be passed along via unbroken lineages. Today, this ancient heritage informs the work of the Emory-Tibet Partnership.[204]

[204] See the website for the Emory-Tibet Partnership, www.tibet.emory.edu.

We can certainly understand and appreciate the drive towards preservation by a culture under threat of extinction. Yet CBCT is not unique in this enterprise: as we have seen, Kabat-Zinn understands himself to be preserving and transmitting the "universal dharma."[205] Makransky, too, understands himself to be preserving and transmitting a "truer" version of Asian Buddhist methods for cultivating compassion.[206]

The public debate among secular programs regarding authority and authenticity within the Buddhist tradition has, however, centered primarily on the definition and use of mindfulness, which Dunne has shown employs a "rhetoric of authenticity" that obscures and ignores the diversity of views within the Buddhist tradition.[207] As Dunne notes, such claims of authority or authenticity are problematic because they assume that there is only *one* Buddhism, and more specifically, one traditional account of "mindfulness." This approach not only ignores the diversity of views across Buddhist traditions, but also ignores "the historical development of individual traditions themselves."[208]

Embracing an expansive version of the doctrine of skillful means—which hinges on adopting a "historically conscious" approach to the tradition—could shift the focus of the debate from concerns of authority to concerns regarding efficacy. Yet this is not to

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[205] Kabat-Zinn, "Some Reflections on the Origins of MBSR," 283, 290.
[206] Makransky, "Adapting Compassion Training from Tibet," 1. See also Makransky, "Innate Compassion Training: Six Impediments to Cultivating Compassion."
[207] For a fuller treatment of these issues, see the special issue of *Contemporary Buddhism, "*Mindfulness: diverse perspectives on its meaning, origins, and multiple applications at the intersection of science and dharma," 12-1 (2011) 1-306; and also *Mindfulness,* 6:1 (February 2015).
[208] Dunne, "Buddhist Styles of Mindfulness: A Heuristic Approach," 4. For more on the need for critical historiography within the Tibetan tradition, see C.W. Huntington, Jr., "Was Candrakīrti a Prāsaṅgika?" 67-92.

suggest that debates concerning issues of authority are not already related to questions of efficacy. They are in fact quite likely related, as scholars and practitioners assume that, because their version or interpretation of practice is the most authentic version of the dharma, that it is therefore the most efficacious. Thus accepting a more expansive version of the doctrine of skillful means still leaves us with the following questions: what is the essence of the tradition, and what is its effective adaptation?

As for the first question, the doctrine of the Four Noble Truths could arguably serve as a set of identifiable essential teachings of Buddhism. As for the second question, there are different ways of conceiving of, and thus experiencing, suffering. There are different patterns of practice that may be more or less helpful to individuals with diverse dispositions in various cultural and historical settings. The essential teachings thus provide the framework, and the various teachings and applications provide specific instances or frames of practice. The historically-conscious interpretation of skillful means requires that both the framework and the frames remain open to continual reinterpretation to prevent them from becoming absolutized or reified. While this more expansive interpretation of skillful means may be perceived to be either “excitingly illuminating or deeply disturbing,”[209] to borrow a line from the theologian John Hick, I believe it offers a middle-way approach to negotiating the extremes of relativism and essentialism. On the one hand, the notion of a principle-driven framework provides some grounding, while on the other hand, the possibility of multiple frames permits new articulations and adaptations of the core principles. This approach, with its embedded cultural sensitivity and adaptability, thus permits an evolution of the core principles, and at the same time

[209] See John Hick, “Religion as Skillful Means,” available at: http://www.johnhick.org.uk/article9.html.

does not rule out the possibility of a transhistorical truth. Although the possibility of a transhistorical principle may seem at odds with the context-sensitive version of skillful means being argued for here, the assumption that there can be *no* universally applicable principles is also problematic. On what grounds could we rule that out entirely? Despite our different conceptions and experiences of suffering, certainly there are also similarities, perhaps even equivalencies.[210] Makransky raises this issue as follows:

> Can a contemporary critic rule out the possibility that persons of different places and times have had a direct awareness of the impermanent and insubstantial nature of phenomena, an awareness that liberates from self-clinging and takes expression in unconditional love? From what frame of reference would such certainty come? A Western post-Enlightenment assumption of universal human limitation, imputed as meta-narrative upon all cultures and history?
>
> There are not only dissimilarities, but also similarities among the diversity of human experiences in history and cultures. Sexual love, hatred, envy, grief are unique in each culture and time, but not entirely unique. Similarly, the dynamics of self-clinging, the expressions it takes, the sufferings it elicits, the possibility of freedom from it, and the means to that freedom (the Four Noble Truths) may be, in certain ways, uniquely experienced by persons of different places and times, without being absolutely unique.

The approach outlined above has its limits; it does not, for example, provide conclusive answers to questions concerning that which is essential to the tradition and that which can be regarded as an effective or skillful adaption of the essence of the tradition.[211] Nor is it meant to: this project assumes that there cannot be one complete, final articulation of what works for whom in all contexts. The aim is to keep alive a

[210] John Makransky, "The Emergence of a Buddhist Critical-Constructive Reflection in the Academy as a Resource for Buddhist Communities and for the Contemporary World," *Journal of Global Buddhism* 9 (2008): 131.

[211] Nor does it address another significant concern central to the discourse of authority regarding who speaks for Buddhism. In many parables, the dharma is skillfully adapted and communicated by the Buddha (sometimes through deception) and also an array of bodhisattvas. Yet as Wilson (2014) and Purser (2014) both have pointed out, when Kabat-Zinn and others invoke the concept of skillful means they essentially authorize themselves to adapt the tradition.

collaborative and dynamic inquiry into the specific frames and the larger frameworks of understanding that are of greatest benefit. This is the constructive intention behind the critique of a purely critical assessment.

This also means, on my view, that we can continue to learn from various Buddhist traditions and the ways in which they adapted to their cultural conditions to preserve the principle teachings of the dharma across time and place, in the same way that we can continue to learn from contemporary, secular, Buddhist-based traditions, and the ways in which they are adapting to and communicating the principles of dharma in their particular cultural conditions. This does not necessarily mean that we must accept all of these adaptations as skillful, however. Rather, this approach enables us to inquire into whether and how various frames are efficacious.

A Secular (Re)Frame: Towards Interfaith Dialogue

As we saw in Chapter 3, ICT, CBCT and MBSR each interpret the secular frame in different ways. Each, however, bracket the religious frame from their programs and employ varieties of “open” and “closed” secular frames. ICT employs the broadest, most “open” conception of the secular, in which religious beliefs are not only permitted, but also considered potentially helpful to the process of transformation. It is this open, interfaith approach that I wish to put forward as a potential reframe to other secular approaches.

CBCT and MBSR employ subtraction models of the secular, which bracket religious traditions and their practices, or at least non-Buddhist ones, in ways that imply they are ultimately not needed or useful on the path. I think such subtraction type models are problematic because they both limit the scope of practices and approaches from

which these programs draw their inspiration, and also reinforce a particular set of views (including what it means to be religious) that narrowly frame our thinking and potential for growth and healing.

Perhaps more to the point is that both MBSR and CBCT operate as quasi-Buddhist methods: above we noted that MBSR teachers are required to be grounded in the dharma and to attend Buddhist retreats. CBCT is also not shy about its Tibetan Buddhist roots (its teacher training is held at Drepung Loseling Monastery). It seems as if the secular container in which the programs are packaged has more to do with skillfully integrating such programs into clinical and educational settings through the path of least resistance than with actually engaging in a secular, common ground dialogue with other approaches and traditions. For these reasons, as well as those articulated in the previous section regarding narrow interpretations of skillful means and the related idea of a singular Buddhist tradition, I read both of these programs as attempting to share their version of Buddhism or the *buddhadharma*, with little interest in genuinely learning with and through other perspectives and approaches. I find this strategy both limiting and flawed within a Buddhist context, but especially within a so-called secular context.

The universal rhetoric of the secular espoused by MBSR and CBCT suggests that the programs have something for everyone, yet the reach of these approaches certainly is not universal in scope.[212] These programs appeal predominantly to white upper-middle class individuals; the language and format of these classes also typically cater to (or at least are most familiar to) those with a Buddhist background. One could suggest that these programs are merely "preaching to the choir." Although the demographic make-up

[212] See Jeff Wilson's chapter entitled "The Whitening of Mindfulness" in his book, *Mindful America,* 61-65.

of these programs might merely indicate that these programs have not been successful enough at skillfully adapting or messaging their method, this line of thinking assumes that the programs have something that is, in fact, universally applicable. I think it is worth calling this view into question, yet this cannot be done as long as the programs endorse this particular type of secular frame. In other words, if MBSR and CBCT assume they have a universally applicable program, and that other programs and practice traditions are insufficient methods of healing, then we cannot avoid describing them as endorsing a view that assumes they have nothing to gain from others. Such an attitude may result from an assumption that their path is the only correct path (which would make them exclusivist) or that other paths are helpful to an extent yet not as helpful or effective as their own frame (which is a variation of an inclusivist frame). A pluralist frame, on the other hand, would permit the expression of many paths and many truths, while a certain type of perennialist frame would assume that all programs point toward the same (or a variation on the same) universal truth—we will return to this below.

I take MBSR and CBCT to embrace exclusivist and inclusivist frames to different degrees. MBSR brackets or rejects "religious" frameworks, where in that they are constituted by truth-claims that are incompatible with the scientific method, thereby suggesting an exclusivist frame. Yet MBSR presents itself as a method for accessing the universal dharma, and subsumes an array of practices under the umbrella of mindfulness. The CBCT model is in principle open to the healing potential of other religious traditions (suggesting it would not endorse an exclusivist frame); yet what is taught, and thus what is highlighted as effective, are practices derived solely from the Buddhist tradition, not from an amalgamation of the world's religious and spiritual traditions in the name of

secular ethics or pluralism. One question that naturally arises is: What or whom are these secular programs asking participants to become? Are participants benefitting because they are becoming better Christians, Jews, or spiritual "nones,"[213] or are they being healed because they become, in effect, "Anonymous Buddhists"? The notion of the Anonymous Buddhist, a play on Karl Rahner's notion of the Anonymous Christian, reflects an inclusivist stance toward other religious traditions and assumes that there is ultimately only one path to salvation, or in our case, healing. In an excerpt from *Religious Diversity and the American Experience*, Rahner reports being asked by Keji Nishitani, a famous Japanese philosopher and Zen Buddhist priest, how it feels to be considered an "Anonymous Buddhist." Rahner replies:

> Certainly you may and should do so [...] from your point of view; I feel myself honoured by such an interpretation, even if I am obliged to regard you as being in error or if I assume that, correctly understood, to be a genuine Zen Buddhist is identical with being a genuine Christian, in the sense directly and properly intended by such statements. Of course in terms of objective social awareness it is indeed clear that the Buddhist is not a Christian and the Christian is not a Buddhist.

Nishitani replies: "Then on this point we are entirely at one."[214] What is perhaps most interesting about this notion is that Rahner dismisses the views of others (in virtue of imposing his Christian views upon them), while also attempting to exhibit a deep respect for others and their views. His move is to assume, not that they are somehow other, but

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[213] This term refers to Americans who do not identify with any particular religious tradition. A 2012 Pew Study suggests that one-fifth of the US population is unaffiliated. Yet 68% say they believe in God; 58% claim to feel a deep connection with nature; and 38% identify as "spiritual-but-not-religious." See, for example, Barry A. Kosmin, Ariela Keysar, Ryan Cragun and Juhem Navarro-Rivera, "American Nones: The Profile of the No Religion Population, A Report Based on the American Religious Identification Survey 2008," (Hartford, Connecticut: Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture, 2009).

[214] Terrence W. Tilley, *Religious Diversity and the American Experience: A Theological Approach* (London: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008), 78. For more on Rahner's notion of the "Anonymous Christian" see Karl Rahner, *Content of Faith: The Best of Karl Rahner Theological Writings* (New York: Crossroad, 1993).

rather that they may (unwittingly) be one who has been touched by God's grace. This is not unlike certain theories of buddha nature, and certainly not unlike statements made by Kabat-Zinn.[215]

Given the prevalence of ongoing claims that MBSR is not about Buddhism, the answer to whether it embraces adopts an inclusivist, Anonymous Buddhist stance might be thought to be "no." Given repeated reference to mindfulness as the universal dharma found within MBSR, however, the answer might be thought to be "yes." (This would, however, work against their image of themselves as secular!) Proponents of CBCT, following the Dalai Lama, would likely say "no," but here once more we encounter the assumption that practices leading to transformation for those of any or no faith tradition are and ought to be drawn exclusively from the Buddhist tradition.[216] (Advocates of ICT, which adopts the most open stance, would likely answer "no.")

A precedent for a kind of limited inclusivist frame can be found within the Buddhist tradition itself; it is analogous to methods of arranging seemingly contradictory teachings within a hierarchy of truth under the banner of skillful means as discussed above. It is thus worth questioning whether or not what proponents of these programs say is actually in line with what they believe. And if not, then what are the potential implications of such a stance? In other words, it seems that MBSR promotes a "closed" inclusivist frame—in line with its "closed" secular frame—insofar as it draws almost

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[215] Kabat-Zinn, *Contemporary Buddhism*, 299-300.

[216] The Dalai Lama has stressed that he is in no way interested in converting anyone to Buddhism. In line with this, he has suggested that this is precisely why secular dialogue ought to be free from Buddhist notions such as "emptiness." He once remarked he felt strongly that dialogue between practitioners of different faiths should center on what is common between them, and that concepts like emptiness, for example, which might challenge others' beliefs in God, should in particular be avoided. Dalai Lama, (private talk to members of the Emory-Tibet Science Initiative, Dharamsala, India, June, 2010).

exclusively from the Buddhist tradition (as well as related mystical traditions including certain forms of Hinduism and Sufism) and assumes it contains all that is needed for universal health and healing. On my view, CBCT similarly embraces a "closed" inclusivist frame—despite its "open" secular frame—insofar as it too draws exclusively from the Buddhist tradition and seems to have little interest in engaging with and learning from other traditions and healing approaches.

Tools for embracing a more "open" inclusivist frame can also be found within the Buddhist tradition. As mentioned above, the adoption of an expansive view of the doctrine of skillful means could direct MBSR and CBCT to address the problems immanent in the notion of "one Buddhism," and encourage them to acknowledge the possibility of learning from the truths of other Buddhist and even non-Buddhist traditions.[217] The current approach to other traditions on the parts of MBSR and CBCT—to primarily bracket *other,* non-Buddhist religious influences on their programs—seems both a result of trends within the tradition as well as its encounter with modernity.[218] Thus a potential reframe makes explicit these tendencies and tensions, and provide a compelling rationale for why these programs could benefit from dialogue with others.

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[217] The Ecumenical or Non-sectarian (Tibetan: *ris med)* movement seems to offer a model for this type of work, though the little contemporary scholarship that exists on this work suggests it has been idealized by modern scholars. In principle, the drive toward inclusivism has been present in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition; some interpret the nineteenth-century *ris med* movement, led by Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo and Jamgon Kongtrul, primarily as a reaction to increasing Gelug hegemony. For some background, see van Sam van Schaik, *Tibet: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), and also Alexander Gardner's 2006 dissertation, "The Twenty-Five Great Sites of Khams: Religious Geography, Revelation, and Nonsectarianism in Nineteenth Century Eastern Tibet." See also Douglas Duckworth's commentary that *ris med* should be understood as a drive toward inclusivity, not an amalgamation of views. Duckworth, "Introduction," in *Mipham on Buddha-Nature: The Ground of the Nyingma Tradition* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008).

[218] As we saw in Chapter 3, these programs not only bracket religious influence in the name of the secular frame, but also tend to insulate Buddhist beliefs and practices through a particular scientific reframe, exemplified by the Dalai Lama's tripartite distinction of Buddhist religion, philosophy, and science.

MBSR and CBCT endorse insular secular frames; they reify the paths that each program puts forward, thereby undermining to some extent the very goals of these programs. The drive to preserve tradition, which as we have seen has been interpreted and performed distinctively by these programs, also reduces the effectiveness of their adaptations to various cultural contexts. Though many have remarked on Buddhism's ability to adapt in various historical periods and under various conditions, the drive to prohibit or exclude other perspectives threatens to arrest and restrict these programs' growth and adaptability. It also limits their potential reach beyond Buddhist and secular-Buddhist communities as well as their ability to learn from other traditions and approaches. This is particularly problematic in a secular context.[219] Thus another step in the process of a potential reframe is for these programs to recognize that their dissemination and survival depends upon dialogue with others.

Perhaps more importantly for our purposes, learning from and through secular, religious, and spiritual others offers the possibility of perceiving new dimensions of and paths towards health and healing, by drawing attention to aspects or approaches that had been obscured or overlooked. This approach further helps loosen the grip of each program's frame, which can become absolutized. The very limits of this process, and of frames themselves—religious or otherwise—is described by Makransky in the following passage:

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[219] A Christian contemplative participating in a CBCT course once remarked to me that this was "baby stuff," and that it did not grip the depth of contemplative yearning that so many felt. In a sense, what was being offered was the lowest common denominator, so to speak. In another context, teaching ICT, a participant who had been quite resistant to the practice started to notice a parallel between this approach and her own spiritual practice. She communicated to me that the language of the secular had suggested to her that the most important thing to her had been stripped from this work, and thus she felt cut off. How, she wondered, was one to cultivate love and compassion, if their very source of love and compassion (in her case, God) is not welcome in the room?

> The fullest realization of reality [as formulated in my own tradition] is a stable, non-dual insight into the empty, unconditioned nature of all experience—the emptiness of all conceptualized appearances—accompanied by an impartial, powerful compassion for all beings who have not realized the inmost freedom of such insight. Any religious beliefs or practices that encourage reifying and clinging to any conceptualization of truth, God, scripture, religious identity, ritual, religious experience or ethical prescription as an ultimate would obstruct realization of the emptiness of all such constructed forms, and thus, even in the name of religion, prevent the attainment of the fullest religious end, the unconstructed, unconditioned, nirvana. Careful guidance is required to learn to pay such penetrating, stable attention to experience that even the subtlest clinging to reified concepts collapses.[220]

An interfaith approach requires, instead of the surrender of one's tradition in the name of an abstract universal spirituality, a deep grounding in one's tradition. It is precisely because various traditions and approaches inhabit different frameworks that new learning and possibilities for healing can emerge through dialogue. Such dialogue can help us break free from, transform, see past, and transcend our limiting frames or impressions of others, as MBSR, CBCT, and ICT invite us to do. Through interfaith, or "interframe," dialogue, our normal frames and ways of seeing the world are interrupted, and we are called—or compelled—to "wake up more fully." In other words, we are called to encounter the worldview of the other, which they may very well assume to be universal; this act in turn calls us, at the very least, to consider the universal nature or potential limits of our own worldview.

One specific way to integrate inter-learning into these programs would be in and through their teacher trainings. Rather than focusing on the science of mindfulness and compassion and the Buddhist-roots of these practices, trainings could also incorporate reading and training from other religious, spiritual, and secular approaches that could

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[220] John Makransky, "Thoughts on Why, How, and What Buddhists Can Learn from Christian Theologians," *Buddhist Christian Studies* 31(2011): 119-133.

both inform and strengthen instructors' abilities to be with and relate to the participants that show up in their courses.

Spiritual (Re)Frame: Against "One Dharma"

To advocate for interfaith dialogue and learning does not mean one needs to assume that all traditions and approaches offer equally successful or sophisticated methods for healing. Nor does it mean that one should attempt to integrate all approaches into one inclusive, universal meta-tradition—inclusivity that prohibits exclusivity imposes its own type of limiting frame. Put another way, a perennialist frame that assumes that the world's great religious and spiritual traditions engage in the same truth and thus lead to the same result is another kind of inclusivist frame.[221] To accept a perennialist approach is to fall into another extreme.

Adopting an uncritical perennialist approach does not seem to be a concern for these modern programs, which, on my view, imagine themselves in different ways to be bringing the dharma to the west (much like the Buddha 'turned the wheel of dharma' to reintroduce the path to the world and correct the shortcomings of other contemporary spiritual paths). Yet because of the way they configure themselves as "spiritual-but-not-religious," they are prone to (perhaps inadvertently) positing a kind of trans-cultural, universal spirituality. This so-called "universal" spirituality, however, is primarily

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[221] The uncritical perennialist approach is supported by modern forms of liberal spirituality, including Transcendentalism and Unitarian Universalism, and also by forms of theological pluralism. See, for example, Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit,* and also Edwin Gaustad and Leigh Schmidt, *The Religious History of America* (New York: HarperOne 2002). This line of argumentation is also reminiscent of the Forman and Katz debate on mystical experience. For more, see *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy,* ed. Robert K.C. Forman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). The debate regarding the nature of the relationship between experience and culture concerns whether one believes that the underlying experience is the same but is just mediated by culture or whether experience is in some fundamental way shaped by culture from the start. For issues with this view, see Slingerland, *What Science Offers the Humanities*.

modeled after various Buddhist traditions that are in turn influenced by forms of North American spirituality. The challenge for these programs, therefore, is to find ways of becoming more openly inclusivist without assuming an exclusivist stance toward other traditions and without demanding a pluralist stance. A secular context demands such a stance.

In *One Dharma: The Emerging Western Buddhism,* Joseph Goldstein offers an attempt at an inclusivist frame for western Buddhist practitioners that unites and reconciles seemingly incongruous approaches and teachings. After years of studying with teachers from diverse traditions and lineages, and of observing the unique cross-fertilization of these different strands on western ground, Goldstein became concerned with whether this cross-fertilization was creating a "melting pot" approach in which essential teachings were being jumbled, lost, or obscured by our cultural frames. He wrestled personally with finding a frame that could hold the often contradictory viewpoints and teachings he had received from his respected teachers. The book primarily set out to address this particular question: is there a path—or frame—that embraces all of the diverse Buddhist teachings? The short answer, he found, was "yes." These various paths, he concluded, all point us toward freedom and are helpful in illuminating our different blind spots as we begin working with them.

For Goldstein, four basic principles lie at the heart of his "One Dharma" approach. In his words, these are:

> [F]irst, that philosophical concepts are only descriptions of experience, and not the experience itself; second, that mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom weave together as essential strands of a nonsectarian path of practice; third, that what is called in Buddhism "the two truths"—the relative and ultimate perspectives of reality—together provide a framework for holding divergent points of view; and, last, that the mind of

> nongrasping is the essential unifying experience of freedom.[222]

I sympathize with this approach, as I agree that part of the issue here is our tendency to get caught in our own frame, and that holding onto a frame is a problem in itself. At the same time, however, his position begins with the premise that all Buddhist traditions (he has trained with various Theravada, Tibetan, and Zen teachers) are equally valid and lead to the same end. For reasons stated above, I find this particular interpretation of skillful means somewhat narrow, and naïvely perennialist. It reflects a lack of historical consciousness and appears to overlook potentially important differences among the traditions. It is very possible that the traditions are not equally valid or efficacious, or at least that they are not so in all contexts. The drive to prematurely assume or assert agreement or commensurability erases important differences into which we should inquire. In other words, there is a way by which a certain kind of nonsectarianism—in the name of universal spirituality—whitewashes nuances that can be illuminating, if not critical on the path.

Once again, it seems the tension here emerges because of a belief in the possibility of a transhistorical truth—in this case a Buddhist truth—that is communicated across time and place. Stephen Batchelor reveals another dimension of this tension. He asserts that the historical Buddha taught a set of a-cultural, a-historic truths relevant to beings across time and place:

> The course of the Buddha's life offers a paradigm of human existence, which has been realized in diverse forms throughout Asia over the past two-and-a-half thousand years. The genius of the Buddha lay in his imagination. He succeeded in translating his vision not only into the language of his time but into terms sufficiently universal to inspire future

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[222] Joseph Goldstein, *One Dharma: The Emerging Western Buddhism* (New York: HarperOne, 2003).

> generations in India and beyond. His ideas have survived in much the same way as great works of art. While we may find certain stylistic elements of his teaching alien, his central ideas speak to us in a way that goes beyond their reference to a particular time or place.[223]

Thus actual or pure Buddhism is that which is purified of all religious practices and beliefs, including, for example, doctrines like reincarnation, and even cultural nuances. In this way, Batchelor asserts a type of "spiritual-but-not-religious" interpretation of the dharma that embraces certain universalizing, yet also exclusive, tendencies. Batchelor, like many others, seems unaware of the ways in which his own cultural conditioning shapes his interpretation of the tradition. *Buddhism without Beliefs,* for example, begins with a quote from the Buddha in the Kālāma Sutta in which he encourages followers to empirically explore and evaluate practices for themselves, and not to take them up on faith or solely on the instructions of a teacher. As scholars like McMahan have pointed out, this reflects a modern tendency to reinterpret Buddhist practice within a liberal spiritual frame and to imagine the Buddha as a type of freethinker who encouraged individual spirituality. McMahan quotes Bhikkhu Bodhi's observation that this way of thinking makes the Buddha out to be "a pragmatic empiricist who dismisses all doctrine and faith, and whose Dhamma is simply a freethinker's kit to truth which invites each one to accept and reject whatever he likes."[224] David Loy picks up on this same modernizing tendency in a review of *Confession of a Buddhist Atheist:*

> Almost every religious reformer tries to return to the original teachings of the founder, only to end up projecting his or her own understanding back onto those origins. Batchelor's Buddha too seems too modern: humanistic and agnostic, skeptical and empirical—by no coincidence, a superior

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[223] Stephen Batchelor, "Buddhism without Beliefs" *Tricycle* 6, no 3 (1997), 18-23.

[224] McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 248.

version of us, or at least of Stephen Batchelor.[225]

Both Goldstein and Batchelor are trying to serve their communities of fellow Buddhist and secular-Buddhist practitioners by inviting them to take a fresh look at their tradition in order to see past or work through limiting biases or assumptions that are an impediment to one's success on the path. In doing so, however, both of these thinkers have *reframed* the path in new frames that also are limited. Though such frames may be skillful applications of the teachings for particular audiences, neither reframe goes far enough in breaking through a recurring framing problem within the Buddhist tradition, especially as it takes new shape in modern, secular contexts. Rather than arguing for what amounts to Buddhist-inclusivism or Buddhist exclusivism, the field would benefit from a more openly-inclusive reframe that does not demand a pluralist frame.

The tension here is a result of the ultimate goals of these contemporary programs coming into contact with their status as either therapeutic or soteriological interventions. If we were to take at face value the claims that MBSR, CBCT, and ICT are designed to help people reduce stress, enhance social connection, and improve their overall well-being, there seems to be little at stake in saying they are all somewhat effective for various audiences. If the concern were solely one of therapeutic efficacy, it would seem less threatening to compare approaches, or to create new, hybrid approaches (setting aside for the moment the challenges involved in this kind of research). The fact is that there is an unnamed, underlying tension: these programs are all putting forth methods that point towards what they take to be a kind of ultimate healing. There are, therefore, far bigger issues at stake, including those that have been debated within the tradition as

[225] David Loy, "Secular Buddhism?" *Tricycle*, Fall 2010.

discussed above. Given the variation among individuals and communities, the presence of such distinct approaches ought to be conceived as a constructive necessity, rather than a problematic contingency. Thus the work involves not a drive toward one frame in the name of a universal secularity or spirituality, but rather an ongoing inquiry into frames and continued reframes of these programs.

Scientific (Re)Frame: Toward a Richer Conceptualization of Suffering

In the previous chapter we explored some of the limits of the scientific frame with respect to the ways in which it (1) delegitimizes participants' experiences by universalizing the experience of suffering and its causes, and (2) decontextualizes suffering and its causes through the process of medicalization and its focus on the individual. A scientific reframe therefore requires that we attend more closely to individuals' various conceptions of suffering and the ways in which such programs may (and may not) ameliorate that suffering. It also requires that we recognize the social dimensions and manifestations of stress and suffering. These two issues are deeply related.

MBSR, CBCT, and ICT each attempt to universalize the experience of suffering by identifying its common or universal causes. MBSR attributes the cause of suffering to a lack of mindfulness or awareness; CBCT attributes the cause of suffering to self-cherishing or self-centered thinking; ICT attributes the cause of suffering to misperceiving or concealing one's compassionate nature. Such ways of framing the cause of suffering organize these healing paths and provide direction and coherence. Yet problems arise when we confuse coherence for truth. The "truth" of suffering proposed in

each model serves as a therapeutic tool for transformation. The rhetoric of each model positions itself as offering a complete and ultimate account, thereby excluding, to varying degrees, other accounts of suffering and, in turn, of change. Multiple accounts of suffering can support and facilitate various pathways of healing and transformation.[226]

Such single frames—which seem to be attempts to address ultimate causes of suffering—presume a monopoly over other sorts of truth. Yet these frames reflect a very Buddhist way of conceiving of suffering. There is also a sense in which, as helpful as this may be to dig deep and consider what *really is going on here,* such totalizing frames flatten the experience of suffering. In other words, these so-called 'ultimate' frames tend to negate or overlook different layers of suffering, or levels at which we might analyze, speak of, and relate to suffering. The experience of suffering is shaped by an individual's social and cultural conditioning—attempts to generalize suffering homogenize differences and wipe out people's diverse experiences, beliefs, circumstances, and personal healing narratives.[227]

Generalizing the experience of suffering can also impact motivation, which is critical to these programs' uptake and success. The rhetoric of suffering is designed to persuade individuals to participate, practice, and ultimately transform themselves in some

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[226] There are important parallels to this discussion and work in psychotherapy, especially with notions of narrative frameworks, coherence, and closure. Spence, for example, saw the drive toward narrative closure, popular during his time, as too easily getting in the way of patients' experiences, thereby "prematurely streamlin[ing] a chaotic life." *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth: Meaning and Interpretation in Psychoanalysis* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1982), 14. See also Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning: Four Lectures on Mind and Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

[227] See, for example, work by Cheryl L. Woods-Giscombé and Marci Lobel which suggests that so-called generic conceptualizations of stress do not necessarily account for various populations' experience of stress, and thus more robust measures should investigate and consider factors like race, gender, etc., that contribute to stress experiences but are not accounted for in most global stress measures. See their "Race and Gender Matter: A Multidimensional Approach to Conceptualizing and Measuring Stress in African American Women." *Cultural Diversity Ethnic Minority Psychology,* July 14, no 3 (2008): 173–182. doi: 10.1037/1099-9809.14.3.173.

way, whether be it through improved health, behavior change, or the attainment of certain personal or spiritual goals. In order to be effective, such rhetoric must speak to a particular individual or audience, or in other words, such rhetorical arguments must be presented in such a convincing way that the audience or individual is convinced that he or she is suffering, and persuaded to believe that the proposed method could alleviate that suffering. On my view, the programs attempt to both appeal to some sort of universal audience, as well as a particular local audience—that is the secular, and often clinical, American audience. As we have seen, however, the image of this audience has been shaped by modern frames—namely the secular, scientific, and spiritual—that also have universalizing tendencies. My friends and colleagues who have taught CBCT, for example, have noted the ways in which the universalizing rhetoric of the causes of suffering, especially as described in the self-compassion section of the protocol, proved to be an obstacle, rather than a facilitator to experience. They reported that a number of participants struggled to connect with notions of "worldly concerns" as one of the causes of suffering, and for some this rhetoric did not resonate at all. For others, and this is a common concern I have heard directly and through others, the notion that "all beings want to be happy and avoid suffering" failed to resonate as well. One instructor remarked to me that the challenges she faces with this approach were so persistent, that she wondered if she should be using concepts like "happiness" and "suffering" in the first place. Thus for these and a host of other reasons, recognizing the limits of these frames, and the universalizing rhetorical strategies they promote, can open new opportunities to learn from and connect with the realities of suffering experienced by many in various

American cultural contexts.[228]

There is also a moral and ethical dimension to the conceptualization of stress—these scientific frames are not neutral. Insofar as program developers adopt or assume a vision of good health, and an attendant vision of the good life, they in turn encourage non-trivial changes in other people's health-related thoughts, beliefs, and behavior. These programs are morally substantive as a consequence of the fact that they tell people, at least implicitly, stories about what they *ought* to be thinking, feeling, or doing in various contexts. They are also ethically substantive as a consequence of the fact that they establish or encourage particular ways of conceptualizing the self, the good life, and the potential for transformation of the self towards a better kind of life.[229] Each program projects a universal conception of health, despite the fact that these normative generalizations are culturally and socially conditioned. As we saw in Chapter 2, each contemplative framework promotes a different diagnosis of suffering, an interpretation of its cause, an evaluation or judgment regarding the good, and a path for overcoming that suffering and/or realizing the good. Further, these conceptions of the goals of the programs are not limited to improvements only in health and well-being: the vision for MBSR is to learn to be with things as they are, not to merely reduce stress; CBCT in its emphasis on "secular ethics" promotes a vision for its program that has potentially

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[228] These programs and also the growing field could benefit from a deeper study of rhetoric and the concept of audience. Undoubtedly these programs, whether consciously or not, have effectively employed various rhetorical strategies. Yet on my view, for reasons argued there, these have been limited by certain frames or blind spots.

[229] A full account of the distinction many make between morality and ethics is beyond the scope of this work. Nonetheless, one might begin with Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana, 1985); Charles Taylor, *Source of the Self*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); Alastair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010 [1981]); and Chris Higgins, *The Good Life of Teaching*, (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

significant social implications; ICT too often holds up the vision of non-violent leaders of social justice movements—like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.—as exemplars of compassionate beings. This suggests to me that programs would benefit not only from gaining insight into particular healing frames of individuals that participate, or may participate, in their courses to expand their conceptualizations of suffering, but also find new ways of 'scientifically' accounting for efficacy outside of or beyond the discourse of bio-medicine.

The scientific reframe to the conceptualization of stress—at least in terms of its medicalized discourse—would need to involve an ethnographic approach that takes individuals' health narratives into account so as to gain a deeper understanding of what ails and matters to people. Such an approach would seem to follow through on the rhetoric of "meeting people where they are" and of learning to "see them"—beyond our limiting frames or impressions of who they are and what they may need—by modeling an act of healing that involves listening, empathizing, and responding to participants rather than imposing a pre-determined agenda. Moreover, an ethnographic approach would likely delay an immediate intervention, and would likely encourage a deeper consideration of what a particular individual needs at a particular time.[230]

In his Tanner Lectures on Human Values, entitled "Experience and Its Moral Modes: Culture, Human Conditions, and Disorder," Arthur Kleinman explains the importance of ethnography as a model for ethical practice in medicine:

> [C]linical work can be modeled on ethnography […] [C]linicians can undertake a mini-ethnography of the illness experience and interpretation of illness narratives as both collective and individual to the benefit of care […] [T]he ethnographer's

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[230] Kleinman, "Experience and Its Moral Modes," 417-418. See also Kleinman's *Illness Narratives*, which serve as an important resource for this type of approach.

> willingness to listen to others, to solicit and attend to their stories, and her skill in getting at what matters to people going about all the things that make up everyday life [involve a] disciplined yet open-ended engagement [that] could be a model for caregiving […]

He notes that "the ethnographer's self-reflective criticism of her own positioning and its limitations, her hesitancy to prescribe interventions, […] and her willingness to compare local processes and nonlocal discourse so that they can come into relation with each other"[231] empathically call or draw the ethnographer into the experience and lives of others. Further, the ethnographer's commitment to listening, witnessing, and accounting for what matters to people "becomes an instructive aspect of the ethnographer's sensibility."[232] This ethnographic stance invites a way of listening and learning from others, rather than assuming to know *the* problem, *its* cause, and *the* solution. I think a deeper learning from participants engaged in contemplative training, and those in our broader communities who for various reasons have not connected to or resonated with this work, might enhance the programs' relevance and application, and also model a way of being with and acknowledging others that the programs themselves preach.

A reframe that focuses on individuals' healing narratives does not negate the significance of collective healing narratives. These programs are, after all, psycho-educational interventions that are often offered in group settings. The thrust of this argument, rather, is that these programs have, for various and understandable reasons, provided universal narratives of suffering and healing that limit their scope and applicability. Privileging individual healing narratives can inform and add richness to collective healing narratives. Further, focusing on particularities of individuals' healing

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[231] Kleinman, "Experience and Its Moral Modes," 417.
[232] Kleinman, "Experience and Its Moral Modes," 417.

narratives—for example, particular experiences of shame, racism, illness, and so on—can reveal not only differences, but likely also many similarities that may actually offer an added therapeutic benefit of helping us recognize our shared experiences. This type of shared experience comes through more forcefully in the particularities of our experience, not the abstracted generalities of universalized discourse—especially a "universalized" discourse that is constructed predominantly from a white, educated, upper-middle class, "spiritual-but-not-religious," demographic.[233] Sharing unique experiences can prevent us from overlooking or casting aside difference, and can thereby afford us opportunities to resist homogeneity, conformity and oppression.

Along these same lines, I would caution against over-using the notion of "basic human values" or "shared humanity" in this work. This particular form of universalizing rhetoric stems in part, on my view, from a felt need to ground ethics and values. Appealing to "shared humanity" or "natural" or "innate capacities" allows these programs to subtly appeal to a value system without (seemingly) grounding it in a religious tradition. Leslie Kolakowski has written on the "myth" of communion with others that hinges on ideals of interconnection and interdependence. In his book, *The Presence of Myth*, Kolakowski argues that the value placed on communion with other humans is the mythic glue that keeps our species alive.[234] He claims that as inherently independent, isolated beings, we are "consistently plagued by the suffering of indifference, or the fear of social rejection and isolation."[235] Though we try to overcome

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[233] See also Lila Abu-Lughod, *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories*. (Oakland: University of California Press, 2008).

[234] Leszek Kolakowski, *The Presence of Myth,* trans. Adam Czerniawski (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989).

[235] Kolakowski, *The Presence of Myth,* 70.

this disconnection through communion with others, we cannot fully transmit ourselves to another the same way in which we experience ourselves. He notes: "we are unable properly to satisfy a dual demand: to preserve the state of possession in relation to ourselves, and simultaneously to overcome the separatist, exclusive character of that property, that is, to compel the world to abandon its indifference towards us."[236] I think we find similar so-called "unifying myths" in contemporary Buddhist-based programs. The Dalai Lama, for example, grounds ethics in our "human capacity for care" and our natural, "compassionate concern for the welfare of others."[237] And while we might recognize the significant social and rhetorical functions that these myths serve, Kolakowski, notes that:

> maintaining any kind of human fellowship [requires] a faith in ready-made and non-arbitrary values…[A]t the same time it is dangerous to believe that these values are at any time fixed and completed, that they can relieve one of situational interpretations and a situational responsibility for them. A mythology can be socially fruitful only when it is unceasingly suspect…[238]

Kolakowski continues that a "total taming of the world" through a totalizing ethic or mythology may not only be impossible, but may also be dangerous. This relates directly to our concerns here with universalizing or totalizing frames. While I do not necessarily agree with Kolakowski—in fact here I agree with the Dalai Lama and others that we are motivated by an ethic of care—his view is not uncommon. I am aware of compassion-focused clinicians and researchers, including, most notably, Paul Gilbert, the founder of Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT), who strongly resist the notion that humans are both

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[236] Kolakowski, *The Presence of Myth,* 79.

[237] Dalai Lama, *Beyond Religion*, 48, 71.

[238] Kolakowski, *The Presence of Myth,* 105.

innately caring and primarily motivated by an ethic of care.[239] Although Gilbert does not reject our capacity for care, he argues that buying into this universal myth, to borrow Kolakowski's term, causes us to dangerously overlook the natural capacity humans possess for violence and evil. Naïvely or prematurely buying into the innately caring frame can blind us to potential dangers and leave us vulnerable to harm as individuals and communities. Thus while I disagree with both Kolakowsi and Gilbert about human nature and our capacity for care, I agree that we must consider the implications of our universalizing rhetoric, no matter how seemingly natural or desirable, and recognize that not all "necessary myths" are rhetorically efficacious in all contexts.

To return to our focus on the reframe, this new approach must also take care to focus on the individual *in context*. This is perhaps the most critical intersection of this work. Buddhist practice has tended to emphasize the individual's path (despite the centrality of community in a number of traditions and despite the critique of individualism that is implicit in the Buddhist doctrine of no-self); this focus on the individual has also been heightened in Buddhism's encounter with the West and modern forms of liberal spirituality.[240] This focus, combined with certain features of the biomedical paradigm that tend to locate illness *within* the individual (despite the availability of more robust bio-psycho-social models) provides an implicit frame in which our general conception of the individual as an autonomous, isolated agent, is taken for granted. Despite the rhetoric of interdependence in MBSR, the causes of suffering are

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[239] Paul Gilbert, personal communication, October 17, 2014. See also Paul Gilbert, *The Compassionate Mind: A New Approach to Life's Challenges* (Oakland: New Harbinger, 2009).

[240] The rising interest in forms of "self-compassion" that privilege "self-love" and promote a form of spiritual bypass (on my view) are a result of this individualistic frame. I plan to develop this idea further in subsequent work.

squarely located within the individual's ways of perceiving or misperceiving the world, and the path of healing involves individuals changing the way they see and relate to the world. In CBCT, we find a similar suggestion regarding the causes of suffering, and also an emphasis on the individual, the compassionate hero, who works to serve others. Kristen Baker has addressed some of the limits of medicalization, as noted above. Ron Purser, too, has flagged similar issues within various mindfulness-based interventions. He explains:

> There are a number of unexamined assumptions that [the] therapeutic stance entails. First is the notion that the individual client has full control and agency for their own emotional reactivity, as well as their ability to decenter from the contents of their experience […] Second, the assumption that a client has full agency over their cognitions also assumes that they are fully responsible for their own "healing," a popular narrative in the complementary and alternative medicine domain. This philosophy is closely aligned with much of the self-help and pop psychology literature which proselytizes mindfulness can tap into "inner resources" that will facilitate recovery from, or at least acceptance of, an illness—and in some cases, serve as preventive medicine from the onset of stress-related diseases and chronic illnesses […]
>
> This cultural bias places a heavy burden on the individual, as the source of suffering is viewed as a lack of self-regulation and entirely self-made. Mindfulness-based interventions are in close resonance with the ideological basis for "blaming the victim," as it is the individual (not the social context, history, or factors such as socio-economic status, inequities) that is held fully responsible for their own emotional reactivity, mental suffering and misery, as well as their own illnesses.[241]

ICT differs, somewhat, in its emphasis on relationality; Makransky explicitly describes our ability to "see others" as dependent on our capacity to "be seen." Much of the actual path in ICT, however, like MBSR and CBCT, involves intra-personal contemplative practice. Yet suffering is also interpersonal; it is social. Suffering can be

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[241] Purser, "Clearing the Muddled Path," 13.

understood as social in several ways. Caring for a loved one with chronic illness or disability, losing a loved one, and bereavement may be considered social or inter-subjective forms of suffering. Violence and war inflict trauma on communities, and this trauma can be passed generationally. We can also consider suffering as social in the sense that it is caused or exacerbated by social, political, and economic policies and practices.[242] The very notion of what constitutes suffering is socially constructed. Therefore programs that offer means of overcoming suffering must take into account these causes, and thus there is a need for a broader approach for responding to suffering.

The need for a broader, systems-level approach was driven home to me during my work in the Atlanta foster system. I was teaching a CBCT course to adolescent girls, many of whom had suffered abuse, trauma, and neglect in their lives. After finishing a particularly powerful session one afternoon, in which the participants began to start to connect more deeply to one another and the material, I noticed a palpable sense of warmth and connection pervaded the room. This warmth quickly dissipated as the class door opened to the sound of one of the foster parents screaming at one of the participants. The juxtaposition was striking: we had in class been supporting the cultivation of their capacities for compassion, yet were neglecting the broader context in which they were embedded. Were we placing too great of a burden on these students by expecting them to be resilient and strong, and in a sense to overcome much of what so many adults still struggle to learn, all while remaining stuck in a system offering little support? This is not to place the blame on the foster parents and other service providers, for they too are caught in a system. Nor is it to disempower the adolescents themselves. The point is

[242] See *Social Suffering,* eds. Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das, and Margaret M. Lock (Oakland, University of California Press, 1997).

simply to surface a significant limitation of the individual-focused approach of current contemplative models.[243] The founders of the programs discussed here are, of course, not completely unaware or naïve to this social dimension of suffering and its causes; I argue, however, that our Buddhist and modern frame of the individual is so deep, so often unconscious, that we are unaware of the extent of this bias. We human beings are in relationship, and thus the social dimension of suffering also points to the need for a systems-approach to healing that places the individual, and healing, not only in context, but also in community.

Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory offers one example of a model for accounting for relationships between individuals and their environment.[244] On this model, healthy human development is understood within the context of the individual's unique environment and is affected by relationships with other individuals and also by a complex matrix of relationships within their families, communities, and institutions. The model articulates several nested layers of the environment in which the child develops. These include the microsystem (which typically include the child's immediate family, school, and peer group); the mesosystem (a system of linkages that connect the child's various microsystems, including teachers and parents); the exosystem (which describes linkages between an aspect of the child's microsystems and the larger social system, e.g.,

[243] A number of other teachers of have also remarked to me that there needs to be more of a relational focus in contemplative-based programs. Several CBCT instructors who had worked in both prisons and also the foster system similarly noted the need for practices that helped them cultivate a sense of warmth and connection to another, and began incorporating practices similar to the benefactor practice found in ICT (in fact, the most recent version of the CBCT curriculum now includes a practice like this at the start of each contemplation). These teachers also felt the need to include more somatic practices, more time for "checking in" to facilitate group trust and cohesion, and also more attention to the spiritual traditions—namely, Christianity but also potentially Judaism, Islam, and other traditions—that gave life and support to many of the program's participants.

[244] See, for example, Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design (*Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

the parent and her workplace); the macrosystem (which includes the cultural values, norms, customs, and lifeworlds in which the child is embedded); and finally the chronosystem (which attempts to account for not only the timecourse of development, but also of a larger cultural-historical developments and, more recently, inter-generational development). The model offers a conceptual frame with which we can identify and consider the bi-directional effects of development on the child and the system.

While it may seem rather obvious that children's development is shaped and influenced by various layers of the ecosystem, and thus that effective interventions should adopt multi-systems approaches, most programs—and in particular nearly all contemplative-based programs reviewed here—are delivered at the individual systems level. Despite the knowledge that various social, economic, cultural and historical forces have a direct effect on the health and well-being of all members of the system, our approach to fostering health and well-being has placed the burden almost entirely on the individual. This is due in both in part to a modern (and Buddhist) cultural emphasis on the individual and also to an inability to imagine and assess a systems-based contemplative training.

Based on our analysis thus far, it seems that MBSR, CBCT, and ICT believe their training programs have the capacity to inspire and effect social change, and not just improvements on individual health and well-being alone. Yet these programs, to varying degrees, are so imbedded in an individualistic paradigm that cannot seem to account for or engage with social and cultural forces. As Baker and Purser point out, and as I have attempted to illustrate with my example of my work in Atlanta's foster system, these contemplative programs by design suggest that systemic, structural problems, like racial

and economic injustice and inequity, are to be solved by promoting care, equity and compassion, and by reducing racism, bias and stereotype *at the individual level.* Are we to wait for everyone to "wake up" and "come to their senses" before we consider the possibility of addressing issues of systemic and structural violence?

The highly individualistic frame or paradigm has gained traction in other areas as well. In her research on educational equity and racism, Leah Gordon traces the ways in which a modern individualistic frame—what she termed "racial individualism"—shaped the direction of movements that sought to challenge racial injustice. Her work found that this racial individualism frame suggested that racial justice could be achieved through reducing prejudice among white individuals, or by "changing white minds."[245] Gordon shows how this movement neglected attending to economic and political structures that undermined attempts at educational equity, and also how this frame of racial individualism attracted attention, in large part because of the difficulty of defining and assessing social systems. This individual frame created unrealistic expectations for educational equality, and ultimately failed to achieve its goals.

The field of contemplative studies faces similar challenges. The call for an ecological approach to the development and implementation of contemplative-based programs brings to the fore another complicated issue in the field: the (perhaps false) tension between individual transformation and social engagement. Some, like Slavoj Žižek, have critiqued contemplative programs for essentially helping individuals become

[245] Leah N. Gordon, *From Power to Prejudice: The Rise of Racial Individualism in Midcentury America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 139.

more content with and accepting of inequality.[246] Though an ecological approach in turn assumes that an individual's transformation impacts the system in some way, are we naïve to assume that individually-focused programs—such as mindfulness programs now being offered in corporate settings or in the military—are capable of creating significant change within these institutional cultures? Are they in fact causing more harm than good to individuals within these systems?[247] It seems such programs have significant potential for transformation within western cultures, yet the actualization of this vision may be unfeasible unless programs can come to terms with, and learn new ways of working through or passed their limiting frames. Such work requires an interdisciplinary approach towards addressing deep individual and social problems within specific cultural contexts.

Frames: The Map is Not the Territory

Frames organize experience and provide coherence and a means of making sense of our experience. As much as frames facilitate certain experiences and possibilities for transformation, they also occlude and obscure other perspectives and paths. Our work here therefore has been to complicate the frames presented by each of these programs, both by pointing to limits of their Buddhist- and modern-influenced frames, and by suggesting potential reframes. And yet to investigate frames and consider alternative frames is to begin to recognize that there are infinite maps! Even the exploration of

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[246] Slavoj Zizek, "From Western Marxism to Western Buddhism," May 4, 2011: http://speculativenonbuddhism.com/2011/05/04/slavoj-zizek-heresy-western-buddhism-and-the-fetish/

[247] There are also institutional cultures: hospitals, schools, the military, and so on, each of which face their own institutional challenges. One must consider whether the program one intends to implement has adequately assessed the culture it attempts to meet and transform. This seems especially relevant in terms of mindfulness programs that are being offered to military personnel—a practice which has been challenged by many for being unethical and naïve. See for example Ronald Purser, "Militarization of Mindfulness," *Inquiring Mind,* Spring 2014. http://www.inquiringmind.com/Articles/MilitarizationOfMindfulness.html

particular frames undertaken here has been shaped by various other frames—including my own agenda, location in this field, relationship with these programs and their founders, scholarly training, and assumed audience, to name a few—that occlude and obscure a host of alternate interpretations.[248] Though the map may not be the territory, to quote Jonathan Z. Smith: "maps are all we possess."[249]

The goal, it seems, is to work with frames to overcome or relate to our suffering in new ways, and then to abandon the particular frame (and perhaps ultimately all frames, although this cannot be imposed as a frame). Frames in this sense are skillful means—like rafts that help us cross over, as in the famous Buddhist parable—that are not to be clung to, absolutized, or reified. In other words, frames are useful not as ultimate explanations, but as skillful interventions. This line of reasoning invites us to adopt a sort of pragmatic, empirical stance that permits, or even requires, a flexibility with regard to "truth." In adopting this type of stance, one is no longer committed to or limited by a particular frame, or dogma, but can move between seemingly paradoxical or contradictory perspectives without necessarily negating or rejecting the previous or alternative frame.

Thomas Tweed, in *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion,* offers a way of reconsidering the map-as-territory metaphor in line with this frame-as-intervention approach. He writes: "The map as territory metaphor, as powerful and effective as it has

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[248] This work is of course also framed by and in response to current trending topics within the mindfulness movement involving ethics, authenticity, authority, and secularization. How one relates to these debates depends a great deal on one's particular perspective and agenda. For some, the secularization of mindfulness is a welcome therapeutic advancement; for others, the adaptation of Buddhist models signals a naïve, modernist adulteration of the tradition. Still others might find this process helpful, and may be able to encounter the 'dharma' through this door (thus perhaps multiple agendas are served?).

[249] J. Z. Smith, *Map is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1978), 309.

been, tends to support the comprehension of territory as static, as stable, as mappable, as graspable from some view."[250] Such spatial images and metaphors, like frames, he argues, lead us astray when we take these to represent static universals. Rather, he suggests we understand theory not as representing some grand universal, but as embodied travel. In other words, different frames and perspectives invite us to be in the world in different ways that shape and configure experience, and in this way, by being on the ground, so to speak, we can come to sense and experience new ways of seeing the world, and of healing, that were previously unavailable.[251] To put it another way, embodied travel invites us to explore and inhabit various lived worlds, or various *habitus.*[252] Frames, like theories, become interventions as we work with and move through them. Understood in this way, framing is no longer the problem, it is the practice.[253] It is also central to a critical-constructive analysis of these contemplative programs: rather than simply deconstructing the limiting nature of frames and bracketing truth claims, a constructive approach involves the search for new ways of framing and communicating the healing potential or truths of these programs.[254]

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[250] Thomas Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling,* 10.

[251] This idea is related to the argument against the creation of a universal language, which would inevitably shift the way the world is perceived and experienced. A universal language in turn would make many of the world's inhabitants consumers rather than co-creators of culture.

[252] The study of Bourdieu's notion of habitus is also relevant to this discussion, and might offer another way of engaging or playing with the notion of frames. For more, see Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power." *Sociological Theory,* 7 no 1 (1989) 14-25. See also Lawrence W. Barsalou, "Grounded Cognition," for consideration of ways in which this recent work in cognitive science could further inform research in the field of contemplative studies, especially in relation to David Germano's call for context-sensitive approaches and assessment tools.

[253] See also Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 1995).

[254] Makransky has communicated a similar idea in his article, "Historical Consciousness." JZ Smith has articulated this in relation to the applicability of myth: "the power of myth depends upon the play between the applicability and inapplicability of a given element in the myth to a given experiential situation," (*Map is Not Territory,* 308).

This pragmatic approach to framing parallels van Fraassen's empirical stance. In discussing what empiricism can and should be, van Fraassen points out that we need to adopt a stance free of dogma, on which we can revise our theories when new 'evidence' arises. As he insightfully points out, we live with contradictory beliefs. The most basic accepted theories of physics—relativity and quantum physics—are not consistently combinable, yet we must learn to hold these contradictory beliefs in such a way that we do not succumb to "false consciousness," or lack of awareness that one holds a contradiction. As he points out, adopting the empirical stance admits that knowledge is not totalizing. Remaining open to other theories necessarily suggests that one's own theory is incorrect or incomplete; it is culturally mediated and embedded, and therefore not reducible to truth claims.[255]

Yet I think we can do better than simply suggesting reframes for limiting frames, however, as these new frames also have their own limits. Many of the suggestions for reframing mentioned above argued, in general, for more inclusive frames, as opposed to merely alternative or multiple frames. This push reflects the need, in my account, for an emphasis on principle-driven *frameworks* rather than merely frames. There is admittedly some slippage between these two terms, but *frame* refers to specific programs or interventions (e.g. the eight-week MBSR program), whereas by *framework* refers to a broader model for healing that may contain instantiations of many frames. I believe the move towards the development of broader frameworks will offer the field a flexibility and adaptability that is more sustainable than frames (or curricula). Pragmatically driven frameworks afford more flexibility than frames, for they can hold various conceptions of

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[255] Bas Van Fraasssen, *The Empirical Stance (*New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002).

the causes of stress as well as various methods for healing. They can also be modular and adapted more easily to meet an individual's need in context.

These background frameworks—or frameworks of understanding, to borrow from Goffman—enable and permit multiple frames and various applications in diverse settings. They are also able to, in principle, evolve and adapt as they too encounter new information, new contexts, and new ways of conceptualizing the human experience. They are not intended to be utterly comprehensive, descriptive, or fixed. They are intended, rather, to provide just enough conceptual coherence to facilitate discussion and collaboration. Yet calling for a move from frames to frameworks is not simply a call for a relativist approach to health and healing. Rather, I believe the very concept of the universal continues to remain a necessary tension or counterpoint to the field. The universal as an ideal is what holds us accountable to one another; it is what calls us to consider what is the same and what is different, what is fixed and what is up for negotiation. In that sense the notion of the universal is part of an ethical project. But the universal is only capable of holding us ethically accountable to one another so long as it is permissible to challenge the notion of the universal. We can never realize a completely unbiased universal conception of or agreement on the universal. If it is imposed, it can be used in service of ignoring, concealing, denying and oppressing the other. Thus the success of this critical constructive approach hinges on the possibility of ongoing inquiry into the relationship between the global and the local, the universal and the particular, and the wisdom of sameness and difference.

New Directions: From An Egological To An Ecological Approach

Above I suggest that the field of contemplative studies is limited by various frames that restrict the potential for healing in various ways. One of the most pervasive frames is that of the autonomous individual. It is so prevalent, and so deeply a part of our modern condition, that it often goes unnoticed. On my view, it is one of the most limiting frames operating on these contemplative programs, insofar as it most obviously fails to address the individual in *context*. Thus, as I argued above, an important direction for the field is to move from a predominantly ego-logically oriented approach toward an eco-logical approach that takes seriously the systems in which these programs are implemented *to the same degree* with which it takes seriously the study and training of contemplative techniques.

One example of this kind of reframe is to adopt an ecological approach to healing in the vein of Otto Scharmer, who advocates for a move from ego-systems to eco-systems.[256] A move toward eco-*systems* thinking involves widening the scope of the modern Buddhist lens from a focus on the autonomous individual to the individual in his or her environment. Scharmer articulates five conditions needed in order to shift from an ego- to an eco-systems focus. These are: 1) a container or meeting ground; 2) good data or science; 3) interdisciplinary dialogue; 4) aesthetics (or perhaps embodiment—experiencing systemic inequities); and 5) facilitation (to hold the space together). I think this serves as a simple yet concise set of conditions needed to support the development and implementation of contemplative-based programs going forward.

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[256] Otto Scharmer,"From Ego-System to Eco-System Economies," *Transformation,* September 23, 2013. https://www.opendemocracy.net/transformation/otto-scharmer/from-ego-system-to-eco-system-economies

To be effective, an eco-logical approach requires that programs address the relational nature of health and healing, not only at the level of interpersonal interaction, but also at the systems level, in which the individual is considered as part of a dynamic system. As mentioned above, rather than conceptualizing stress and suffering at the universal level, such an approach would consider local, individual healing narratives as well as their relation to the broader community, culture, or system. This approach enables a natural expansion or re-articulation of the causes of suffering, and allows one to draw on ecologically-sensitive approaches for healing that may be in service of transformation, but which have been overlooked because of a narrowly imposed frame. In other words, our own doubts or limited views about our own capacities, and our tendency to think inside the frame, continue to impose boundaries upon our potential to effect deeper healing at individual and community levels.

There is not one single vision for a healthy, just society; nor is there one single method for achieving well-being and peace. There are different visions of human potential that embody complex sets of ideals, hopes, values, and goals; these need to be acknowledged in their complexity. This does not mean that we cannot be open to universal features that might pervade these various worldviews, but our exploration of complexity need not be reduced to simplicity.

The call for an ecological approach does not suggest that we need to find ways of "fixing the system" before programs can be implemented or effective. Rather, this integrated approach recognizes individuals as active agents within their systems, and thus change even at the individual level affects the system. This also therefore affirms the programs as they are, yet suggests that even simple adjustments, such as offering

integrated programs for caregivers, school parents, families, and so forth (which select groups are already doing), and finding various “leverage points” at which programs can intervene, is a huge step forward for the field.

And yet there is still more work to be done. We face problems in our world far more complex than eight-week trainings in mindfulness or compassion are capable of addressing. We should, on my view, therefore concern ourselves more with these systems-level issues than with the micro-debates between the theoretical models of these contemplative programs. Of course this is not to suggest that these debates are not important, as I hope has been made somewhat clear above, but rather to suggest that the implications of such debates should be considered in relation to the scope and scale of the systemic suffering they encounter.

It seems Buddhist practice communities in the West could also benefit from such an ecological approach. The focus on the individual in many Buddhist traditions leaves much to be desired in terms of how the dharma can be applied at a systems level in the modern world. In spite of the secular rhetoric, finding ways of adapting the dharma that are relevant to our time and place is crucial to the process of preservation and transmission that seems to drive a good deal of these contemplative programs’ agendas. Contemplative traditions are traditions in progress—they are subject to ongoing transformation. While this seems to cause alarm to some traditionalists or purists, the very fact of this change suggests great possibility and sustainability. Yet with that insight also comes responsibility.

It is my hope for these programs, and for the many that participate in their development, adaptation, and implementation, that we can find a collaborative way

forward for the field, one that balances the preservation of the integrity and sophistication of the practices with a creative, dynamic, and humble stance.

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