

THE OUTWARD CONTEMPLATIVE IN HIGHER EDUCATION: MINDFULLY FORGING
ONTOLOGICAL SECURITY IN INTERSUBJECTIVITY

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with three fundamental questions. First, why does North American higher education minimally engage with the existential dimensions of its students (their interests and inquiries regarding the formation of their personal narratives of meaning, moral directions, and a sense of stable identity)? Second, what are the potential psychological and social consequences of such negligence? Third, how can contemplative pedagogy adequately address such existential dimensions? This thesis explores the history of Western higher education, particularly the way that changing educational philosophies and curricula of education have affected the understanding of the self. I argue that there has been a radical shift in the understanding of self in higher education. The self has been progressively ejected from its proximate temporal, material, institutional, and metaphysical surroundings. In the process, the internal self became the source for truth and ethics formerly derived from the objectivism of religion and science.

With the loss of objective moral and existential facts as philosophically disputable, politically uncomfortable, and institutionally irrelevant, this new self was made to bear a heavy burden. In these conditions, minimal engagement with existential dimensions of students in higher education can exacerbate ontological insecurity, where the individual experiences an instability and discontinuity in their sense of self. I argue that ontological insecurity has become normalized within higher education, leading to the perpetuation of destructive behaviours on both individual and group levels.

Contemplative pedagogy has the potential to address issues of ontological insecurity. By examining the major discourses of contemplative pedagogy, I argue that current two dominant discourses of mindfulness, *scientific-psychological mindfulness* and *transpersonal mindfulness*,

are inadequate in addressing ontological insecurity. I propose supplementing mindfulness with traditional Theravāda notions of dependent co-arising and the phenomenological-existentialist understanding of intersubjectivity. By integrating dependent co-arising and intersubjectivity with mindfulness, a student can be sensitized to their existential dependence on social relationships with others. Ethically sensitive relationships with others provide the fundamental source of ontological security.

Lay Summary

The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) shows that the majority of students in higher education are interested in exploring and clarifying questions regarding identity, meaning, spirituality, and morality. Yet such questions are only minimally addressed, leaving their existential explorations outside the scope of contemporary pedagogy. If a student's existential explorations are neglected, they may engage in behaviours resulting in destructive relationships and ideological rigidity. In order to address this issue, I explore contemplative pedagogy. Contemplative pedagogy involves meditation and introspective exercises to allow students to engage in meaningful learning. At present, however, its dominant approaches are inadequate because they minimally emphasize the ethical and relational dimensions of meaning formation. Therefore, I propose a philosophical supplement to contemplative pedagogy that emphasizes the importance of an awareness of social relationships as a fundamental source of meaning and identity.

Preface

This thesis is the original, unpublished, independent work of the author, Steven Zhao.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iii
Lay Summary	v
Preface.....	vi
Table of Contents	vii
List of Abbreviations	x
Acknowledgements	xi
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Structure	5
Chapter 2: Soul and Reason	9
2.1 The Start of Higher Education	10
2.2 Scholasticism	11
2.3 Humanism	13
2.3.1 Petrarch’s Animi Cura	15
2.4 Petrarch and Augustine	19
2.5 The Cartesian Move	21
2.5.1 Self-Generated Truths	23
2.6 New England Beginnings	25
2.7 Humboldt’s Legacy.....	27
2.8 Inwardness and Humanities	30
Chapter 3: Existential Explorations, Objective Truth, and the Humanities	32
3.1 Secular Humanism	32

3.2	Humboldt's Bildung as Research and Specialization	35
3.3	Humanities and Politics	37
3.3.1	Freedom and Meaning	42
Chapter 4: Ontological Insecurity, Nihilism, and Ideology		43
4.1	Meaning Structures and Emerging Adulthood	46
4.2	Ontological Insecurity.....	49
4.2.1	Defense and Compensatory Mechanisms	51
4.3	Creative Relationships Versus Rigidity	55
4.4	Normalization of Ontological Insecurity	60
4.5	The Authoritarian Character	67
4.6	Ontological Insecurity in Higher Education and the Intersubjective Nature	72
4.6.1	Contemplative Pedagogical Possibilities	74
Chapter 5: History and Discourses of Contemplative Pedagogy.....		76
5.1	Vipassanā and Laicization	79
5.2	Mindfulness in North America	82
5.3	Scientific-Psychological Mindfulness	87
5.4	Transpersonal Mindfulness.....	92
5.5	Contemplative Pedagogy and Education	99
5.5.1	Scientific-Psychological Mindfulness in Pedagogical Practice	102
5.5.2	Transpersonal Mindfulness in Pedagogical Practice	104
Chapter 6: Toward an Intersubjective-based Contemplative Pedagogy.....		108
6.1	Horizonal Limit.....	109
6.2	Intersubjectivity	113

6.3	Experiential Theravāda Ethics	122
6.4	Customs and Rules in the Khandhaka	124
6.5	Experience and Reflections.....	127
6.6	Dependent Co-Arising	130
6.7	Formation of Horizontal Limit and Dependent Co-Arising.....	134
Conclusion		141
Bibliography		146

List of Abbreviations

ACMHE	<i>Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education</i>
BFAJCS	<i>Bachelor of Fine Arts in Jazz and Contemplative Studies</i>
CCMIS	<i>Center for Contemplative Mind in Society</i>
CIIS	<i>California Institute of Integral Studies</i>
HERI	<i>The Higher Education Research Institute</i>
MBCT	<i>Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy</i>
OI	<i>Open Intersubjectivity</i>
SI	<i>Secondary Intersubjectivity</i>
WGCMS	<i>Working Group on Contemplative Mind in Society</i>

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis is driven by three fundamental questions. First, why does higher education neglect the existential dimensions of its students? That is, why does it neglect the process of the student's formation of personal narratives of meaning, morality, and stability in the sense of identity? Second, what are the psychological and social consequences of such negligence in higher education? And third, how can the educational approach of contemplative pedagogy address such negligence?

In recent decades, many have deemed North American higher education to be a setting that does not sufficiently address the spiritual and existential explorations of its students (Kronman, 2007). The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI)¹ (2003) reports that students often “place great value on their college enhancing their self-understanding, helping them develop personal values, and encouraging their expression of spirituality” (p. 3). What the HERI report demonstrates is that the conventional student, an emerging adult² on the road to professional entry, is burdened with the confusion of identity, meaning, ethics, and spirituality precisely due to their emerging adulthood. Psychologist J.J. Arnett (2001) states that students in post-secondary education occupy the life stage of “identity exploration,” where questions regarding who they are, how the world operates, and the relationship between the two are in the midst of becoming articulated. Yet despite the demand and need for meaning during the stage of “identity exploration,” an indifference pervades the culture of higher education -- as HERI

¹ The HERI (2003) research project is described as follows: “...a major, multi-year research project to examine the spiritual development of undergraduate students during their college years” (para. 1), and “This report summarizes findings from a survey of 112,232 entering first-year students attending 236 diverse colleges and universities across the country” (para. 2).

² In psychology literature, this is considered to be from ages 18-25 (Arnett, 2000).

(2005) reports: “Most college juniors report that their professors have never encouraged discussion of spiritual and religious matters, and never provided the opportunities to discuss the meaning or purpose of life” (p. 9).

Educational scholar Jared D. Kass (2017) states that the life stage of identity exploration is often characterized by *ontological insecurity*, which is experienced as a “lack of coherence and existential meaning in modern society” (p. 45). In *The Divided Self*, R.D. Laing (1969) expands on the notion of ontological insecurity as a sense of the self as constantly at the brink of its own dissolution. It is a self that does not experience the safety of a stable and continuous foundation of its own existence, thereby perceiving the world and others as unbearably threatening. Julie S. Jones and Jane Raisborough (2007) argue that the condition of ontological insecurity associated with emerging adulthood has been exacerbated by socioeconomic conditions. Emerging adults are increasingly confronted with precarious employment, delayed entry into the professional world, marriage, and parenthood -- all of which culturally signify mature adulthood. The precarious socioeconomic conditions only extend and worsen the “typical ontological insecurities of young (emerging) adult” already experiences (p. 114).

Kass (2017) argues that the meager “psychospiritual mentoring” in education reflects a serious neglect of the potential psychological and behavioural consequences of ontological insecurity— “binge drinking to blackout, sexual victimization, social media bullying, social anxiety, social isolation, depression...and suicide” (p.45). Ontological insecurity can have detrimental consequences for individuals, but can also translate into broader social malaise and destructive group behaviours. Ontological insecurity as a social phenomenon can cause, for example, extreme group behaviours reflective of rigid ideological extremism. Both Erich Fromm’s *Escape from Freedom* (1941) and Irving Yalom’s *Existential Psychotherapy* (1980)

represent insightful discussions of ontological insecurity at the group level. From the existential-psychological perspective, ideological extremism is adopted out of the need to preserve a sense of stability and security in one's identity. Ideology thus alleviates the experience of meaninglessness and anxiety associated with conditions of uncertainty and instability.

I argue that higher educational culture has *normalized* the experience of ontological insecurity. This is not mere negligence, but the pervasive belief that ontological insecurity is an intrinsic condition of our being, rather than a problem that demands a solution. I believe this normalization is a consequence of the historical evolution of the intellectual, pedagogical, and institutional culture of higher education. It has evolved to embrace and celebrate *the independent self* in ways that ejected the self from transcendent ideals of truth and morality. Anthony Kronman (2007) describes this history as a continuous distancing from not only its Christian origins but also from the belief in objective moral, aesthetic and epistemological truths. It is the gradual distancing from the notions of objective truths that the emerging adults succumb to an existential experience that “lacks the structure, certainties, traditions and meanings of the past” (Jones & Raisborough, 2007, p. 114).

Kass's concerns and advocacy for the educational engagement with the “psychospiritual” dimensions of learning are being increasingly addressed by the approach known as *contemplative pedagogy*. Arthur Zajonc³ (2013) has examined an increasing integration of contemplative pedagogy in recent decades, which he describes as a “revolution of the spirit” (p. 90) in higher education. Interest in contemplative pedagogy represents the degree to which educators are

³ Zajonc has written extensively on the topic of contemplative pedagogy and mindfulness meditation, publishing two books: *Meditation as Contemplative Inquiry* (2008) and *The Heart of Higher Education* (2010).

attempting to bring psychospiritual engagements into learning. For instance, the *Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education* a multidisciplinary organization that has continuously provided the platform for research and educational integrations of contemplative pedagogy, seeks to enrich the learning process of a wide variety of university subjects.

Contemplative pedagogy involves learning through practices of meditation, introspection, and experiential-based processes in order for students to “...incorporate who they are and to understand how they are changed by what they learn” (Contemplative Pedagogy Network). Contemplative pedagogy supplements the transmission of knowledge in the classroom by connecting that knowledge with the experiences and identity of the learner. For instance, students may learn to employ mindful awareness on the process of painting and playing music such that every movement is felt in terms of its somatic elements. Mindfulness has also been integrated into the classroom on the basis that it promotes cognitive focus and psychological wellbeing. As such, it can be applied to various disciplines and classroom environments due to its potential as a cognitive and psychological training tool.

The cognitive and psychological benefits of contemplative pedagogy have been repeatedly demonstrated by psychological research.⁴ Despite this, scholars maintain their skepticism. Hyland notes that the scientific and psychological epistemological position risks decontextualizing its grounding in traditional Buddhist philosophy and ethics (Hyland, 2016). Without an ethical context, the scientific-psychological framing turns mindfulness into a simple

⁴ For instance, research has demonstrated neuroplastic changes in white-matter (Laneri et al., 2015). It is positively correlated with the capacity to sustain attention (Herndon, 2008), with psychological traits of empathy (Dekeyser, Raes, Leijssen, Leysen & Dewulf, 2008), self-esteem (Rasmussen & Pidgeon, 2011), conscientiousness (Giluk, 2009), and negatively correlated with depressive-symptoms (Cash & Whittingham, 2010), social anxiety (Dekeyser et al., 2008), cognitive reactivity (Raes, Dewulf, Van Heeringen & Williams, 2009),

cognitive and psychological *tool* that is largely stripped of its transformative *ethical* potential. This deprives students of the philosophical and ethical grounding that, in Buddhism, allows the cultivation of insight into the nature of their subjectivity, identity, and other significant dimensions of the experience of emerging adulthood. Further, mindfulness may simply exacerbate dysfunctional psychological and social behaviours. For instance, psychologist John Welwood (2000) argues that meditative practices can be used to justify excessive isolation and aloofness. Without caution, it can act as a convenient *spiritual bypass* (p. 209) that diverts one from the one's personal and interpersonal difficulties as one is lost in blissful states of "transcendence."

However, contemplative pedagogy, I argue, *does* contain the relevant philosophical discourse and practices whereby issues related to ontological insecurity can be addressed. Contemplative pedagogy can address the issues of ontological insecurity through the phenomenological and traditional Theravāda Buddhist understanding of intersubjectivity. This approach also addresses both the limitations and risks of the current dominant philosophical and practice orientations of contemplative pedagogy. Ultimately, my aim is to propose an *intersubjective contemplative pedagogy* that experientially sensitizes its practitioners to the fundamental connections between their intersubjective nature, ethical conduct, and formation of meaning and identity in life.

1.1 Structure

Broadly speaking, I will explore the historical, clinical, and contemplative dimensions related to the problem of ontological insecurity in higher education. In the second and third chapters, I

examine the historical evolution of the philosophy of higher education, particularly its connection to the Christian worldview and notions of the self.

Major educational historical periods will be covered such as medieval Scholasticism, Renaissance Humanism, the Enlightenment, secular Humanism, and the higher education culture of the 21st century. Such a history is immense and I focus narrowly the major changes of educational curriculum and its surrounding intellectual culture that relate specifically to ontological insecurity experienced by students today. These changes increasingly enshrined an *inwardness* of the self, an inclination towards the internal private self as the fundamental source of truth and ethics. This, in turn, brought radical institutional, intellectual, and pedagogical changes in higher education, resulting in the neglect of students' existential situations. In the course of this discussion, I will reference major philosophical figures such as Petrarch (1304-1384), Augustine (354-430), René Descartes (1596-1650), and Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835). In chapter three, I argue that such inwardness is pushed further within the humanities as a result of certain changes in its intellectual and pedagogical framework during the early to mid 20th century.

The progressive enshrinement of inwardness leads to specific psychological and social consequences, which I take up in chapter four. I begin with an overview of the emerging adulthood (age 18-25)⁵ in relation to the process of establishing a sense of meaning and direction in life. I then connect the discussion with the concept of *ontological insecurity* (on both individual and group levels) through the perspectives of R.D. Laing (1927-1989), D.W. Winnicott (1896-1971), Erich Fromm (1900-1980), Shaun Gallagher, and Carlos Cornejo. Next,

⁵ Arnett, 2001.

I discuss ontological insecurity in the context of higher education, particularly in the humanities. I rely on Karen Carr's notion of the "banalization of nihilism," which I see within the discourse of the humanities, where ontological insecurity becomes reinforced pedagogically. I will argue that the inwardness facilitated in the humanities exacerbates ontological insecurity.

I then turn to the topic of contemplative pedagogy in chapter five. After presenting a short historical overview of mindfulness meditation that today forms part of contemplative pedagogy, I will discuss potential issues in mindfulness with regard to ontological insecurity. I identify two major philosophical orientations in mindfulness. The first, I refer to as *scientific-psychological mindfulness* and, the second, *transpersonal mindfulness*. I argue that both are inadequate for addressing ontological insecurity. Scientific-psychological mindfulness does not engage sufficiently with students' ethical development, which is crucial for the formation of meaning. Transpersonal mindfulness risks reinforcing the inwardness of its students to the degree where ontological insecurity is worsened.

In chapter six, I propose an *intersubjective contemplative pedagogy* by drawing from the philosophical perspectives of both Theravāda Buddhism and phenomenology. I argue this proposition is adequate for addressing issues of ontological insecurity in higher education. Specifically, I will present a *philosophical* argument for an intersubjective contemplative pedagogy. I hold that engagement with Theravāda doctrine allows the formation of ontological security. Together with a phenomenological understanding of intersubjectivity, such a pedagogy promotes an *outwardness* into the social world as a source of meaning, which reverses the dysfunctional consequences of inwardness. I argue that Theravāda notions of "dependent co-

arising”⁶ (Pāli, *paṭicca-samuppāda*) and the cultivation of ethical conduct through “precepts” (Pāli, *sīla*) are consistent with an intersubjective contemplative pedagogical practice in which one’s existential situation is inseparable from one’s ethical relationship with other people. Essentially, the intersubjective contemplative pedagogy rests upon a philosophical discourse that propels the students into an experiential sensitivity to the fact that their intersubjective and ethical nature is *fundamental* to their sense of meaning, identity, hence, ontological security.

What I hope to illuminate through this thesis is the importance of ontological security. The risks of ontological insecurity in education is a structural problem, the outcome of a historical sedimentation towards the normalization of dismissiveness, rather than the fault of dismissive instructors. Contemplative pedagogy could address this structural problem, yet, for it to be effective, it must integrate of the notion of intersubjectivity. Ultimately, an intersubjective contemplative pedagogy has the potential to guide students towards an ontologically secure adulthood.

⁶ *Paṭicca-samuppāda* understood as “dependent co-arising” is derived from Joanna Macy’s (1979) discussion of its relation to Buddhist ethics.

Chapter 2: Soul and Reason

The intellectual and pedagogical environment of higher education has shifted dramatically over the last few centuries, changing the conceptual relation between the self and knowledge. Higher education, to the extent that it has relied on Christian metaphysics and scientific epistemology, has facilitated this shift. The notion of the self shifted from a conformation to external sources of truth and ethics rooted in Christian metaphysics to an *internal* model in which truth and ethics are found within the self. This is what I refer to as the process of *inwardness*. It is an inclination to go within the self rather than outside of it for the understanding of reality. It is not a psychological inwardness as much as a philosophical one, where the *independent private* self represents the *source* of truth and ethics.

The enshrinement of inwardness was facilitated by the philosophy of education and curricula in higher education. In turn, this inwardness contributed to significant *institutional, philosophical, and political* changes in higher education that led to the neglect of students' existential situation as emerging adults. In this chapter, I discuss the major philosophical and educational figures that promoted the educational enshrinement of inwardness, as well as specific curricular and institutional structures that accommodated such enshrinement. In all, I will examine the influences of Scholasticism and its shift towards Humanism under the influence of Petrarch-Augustinianism, the subsequent influences of Cartesianism, and the Humboldtian concept of the university.

2.1 The Start of Higher Education

Although there are no clear records on the precise date for the start of Western higher education, the rough estimate of its conception rests within the range of the early 1200s to early 1300s (Axtell, 2016). It is during this time that the formation of institutions such as the University of Cambridge, Oxford, Bologna, and Paris began to take place (Axtell, 2016). Under the cultural and political reign of Roman Catholicism, the first formal educational facilities were constructed to address the limitations of cathedral schools and monasteries, and to provide advanced training for a growing class of higher ranking priests (Woods, 2005). A separate institution focused on delivering education and religious training was created to compensate the increasing bureaucratic demands of the expanding Church. Schools operated with the permission of the Church, and the Pope permitted the awarding of degrees and recognition of universities (*Studium Generale*) by decree (Woods, 2005).

Yet as the universities began to settle in their formal institutional roles throughout the rest of the 14th-15th century, their function shifted from being the exclusive enclave for the upkeep of the religious order and the elite clerical class to providing scholarships to the sons of the deserving poor. By the 16th-17th centuries, almost half of the undergraduate population was composed of the sons of lower to middle class families in northern universities (Oxford and Cambridge) (Axtell, 2016). The university gradually developed curricula aimed to satisfy the increasing demand for urban professional classes and skills such as medicine, law, engineering, and rhetoric (de Ridder-Symoens & Rüegg, 1992).

The educational process was informed by a soteriology rooted in Christian ethics during the 14th-15th centuries. This can be observed from the manner in which its curriculum was structured and delivered. Medieval university curriculum at its core consisted of two main

categories of subjects, the trivium (grammar, rhetoric, and logic), and the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy) (Joseph, 2002). The trivium had been held in high regard in the culture of northern universities such as Oxford and Cambridge (Axtell, 2016). The popularity of Latin translations of the works of Aristotle during the early 13th century consolidated Aristotelian logic as a primary university subject (Kittelsohn & Transue 1984), driven too by its perceived role as a pedagogical tool that cultivated a skillful capacity to grasp the divine order and virtue of Christian theology (Axtell, 2016).

2.2 Scholasticism

Scholasticism is the name given to the medieval educational philosophy that used logic to reconcile the theological assertions of Christianity (Leclercq, 1982). Scholasticism emphasized the significance of logic in dialectical disputations and hermeneutic analyses (Perreiah, 1982). Scholars and students would engage in the exchange of oppositions of ideas (oscillations between deliveries of thesis and anti-thesis) either through vocalized disputations or annotated critiques and analyses of texts as to arrive at a synthesis (Jordan, 2001). It was a process that allowed the formal assessment of students' academic competence based on the quality of their deliveries. Popular topics in disputation remained theological: "any master who posed a question having to do with the 'faith and philosophy' was expected to 'settle it in favor of the faith in his concluding determination'" (Axtell, 2016, p. 26).

Education at this point was largely driven by Aristotelian dialectics as a way to confirm Christian theology. One of the major proponents of Scholasticism was Roger Bacon (1214-1292). Bacon explicitly warned against the educational risk of neglecting logic and the derived practical sciences of its applications such as in alchemy, mathematics, experimental science, and

optics (Antolic-Piper, n.d.) because he held that logic and science supported the ultimate Christian soteriological goal –union with God (Masih, 2013). For Bacon, the science of Christianity itself was superior to the natural sciences, although he held them in high regard. Bacon understood Christianity as defined by the practical goal of salvation (Antolic-Piper, n.d.). Logical analyses should not be indulged in, but used to support ethical conformity with Christian doctrine (Antolic-Piper, n.d.). Logic can be used to reveal the rational order of the divine law of Christianity through its applications in sciences, mathematics, and dialectical disputation. Ultimately, the educational process consisted of conforming the individual to the *external* structures of metaphysical reality rooted in Christian doctrine. Aristotelian dialectics in disputation served as the process in which the self orients towards the Christian faith.

Later, philosophical opposition to the scholastic emphasis on the utility of logic to confirm theology would emerge. As early as the 14th century, a philosophical and an educational movement called “Humanism” sought to revive the perspectives of Greek and Roman antiquity (Hughes, 2005). They suspected the scholastic emphasis on logic and dialectical disputations of being excessively pedantic and irrelevant to the practical and moral dimensions of the civic and ethical life (Hughes, 2005). Instead of using logic to attain ethical clarity, they saw its scholastic application as wastefully paraded under the guise of trivial scholarly competitiveness and impractical indulgences in metaphysical esoterica (Casini, n.d.). What was needed was a to return of “to the sources” (Latin, *ad fontes*) (Axtell, 2016, p. 78) rooted firmly in primary sources and reproductions of Greek and Latin philosophy instead of Medieval secondary commentarial texts.

The cultural impulse to return to the classics led to a radical educational transformation. The humanist movement changed the curriculum in higher education in ways that placed *more*

emphasis on the development of virtue *within* the individual which facilitated the reorientation of the role of reason. Instead of understanding reason as a faculty that revealed the rational order of the external divine world through logic, it was an *introspective* force conducive for the cultivation of virtue. In other words, the soteriological project was no longer simply about an alignment of the self to an external order through logic, but also about a reorientation *within* the self. Such change of emphasis can be implied from the curricular reforms that celebrated humanities subjects during the Renaissance. Christian faith remained important in Humanism, but its demonstration became more contingent upon the *inner* dimensions of the self as opposed to the display of disputational logic. In other words, the demonstration of faith was now connected to an inward disposition.

2.3 Humanism

The main way Humanism reformed Scholasticism was its committed emphasis on a return to the language and philosophy of antiquity. The curriculum was radically reformed under a revival of the “liberal arts” (Latin, *artes liberales*) from antiquity from the 14th century onwards (Axtell, 2016). Originating from Italy, this revival reformed the scholastic curriculum, which emphasized logic through the trivium, so that logic became one subject amongst Greek, poetry, history, and moral philosophy, in a new educational curriculum called “studies of humanities” (Latin, *studia humanitatis*) (Axtell, 2016). Logic was transformed from a “prescriptive and deductive ‘science’ to a more discourse-friendly art” (Axtell, 2016, p. 80) that “sought to use [...] eloquent speech, and diverse arts of persuasion to improve discourses of every kind” (p. 80).

The eventual spread of educational Humanism from Italy to the rest of the northern universities naturally resulted in curriculum change. Several universities readjusted their

admission standards and assessment measures to include classical knowledge of and eloquence in Greek and Latin (Axtell, 2016). University pedagogical approaches toward theology were no longer performed in an environment of pure Aristotelian dialectics, but began to emphasize the ethical and existential situation of students, their lived experiences, through “scripture, preaching and practical piety” (Axtell, 2016, p. 76).

The urge to shift away from Scholasticism is understandable given the historical context. Nearing the end of the 14th century, Europe was experiencing the aftermaths of traumatic events⁷ as described by Bouwsma (1990):

the constant menace of famine and pestilence, urban disorders and endemic warfare in the countryside, incessant conflict among individuals, families, and social groups, a growing social mobility that left a substantial proportion of the urban population rootless and insecure, above all the terrible anxieties of a life in which the familiar conventions of a close and traditional human community had given way to a relentless struggle for a survival in a totally unpredictable and threatening world. (p. 30)

The “unpredictable and threatening world” was accompanied by a change in the fundamental meaning and experience of time and its relation to the self (Zak, 2010). Along with time, the meaning and role of the citizen changed accordingly, moving away from circular agricultural routines to the linearity of professional schedules in a growing urban bureaucracy⁸ (Zak, 2010). Notions of temporal finitude emerged in relation to the fundamental understanding of self, mortality and social relationships. Urbanization made time into a commodity, a resource that measured potential productivity or wastefulness and which could determine one’s future social

⁷ The Black Death (1348), fall of Constantinople (1453), Avignon Captivity (1334-42), Great Schism (1378-1417) (Armstrong, 1993, p. 272).

⁸ Clocks began to be built in cities and incorporated in city planning (Zak, 2010).

mobility. With the ongoing stress of famine, wars, disease and uncertain social mobility, one's existence was repeatedly exposed in its futile finitude. Linear time had ethical implications, where wastefulness was deserving of shame and attribution of sin⁹ (Zak, 2010). Linear time thus induced a paralyzing condition of fear and anxiety regarding the inevitable finitude in one's productive potential and one's distance from death. In such an environment, Scholasticism appeared increasingly remote from the existential and ethical complexities of urban society (Bouwsma, 1990).

2.3.1 Petrarch's *Animi Cura*

The Italian poet Petrarch¹⁰ (1304-1374), is one major figures that contributed to Humanism as well as its educational expression (Casini, n.d.). Arguably, Petrarch's philosophy influenced education towards a greater inwardness and attention to the self of the student. He aptly articulated the issues of the fragmentation of the self and the disconnect between the nature of

⁹ Theological assertions celebrated the productive use of time (Zak, p. 7).

¹⁰ I discuss Petrarch because of the influence of Cicero (106 BC-43 BC), St. Augustine (354-430), and Quintilian (35-100) on his philosophy. All of these thinkers had a tremendous influence on the humanist educational curriculum as well as represented much of the fundamental values of Humanism. Petrarch's rediscovery of Quintilian texts led to the foundation of one of the first humanist curricula in southern universities by Guarino Veronese (1374-1406) and Vittorino da Feltre (1373-1446), which eventually spread into northern universities which focused focusing on Latin and Greek texts, grammar and rhetoric as part of the core curricula (Hooker, 1996; Axtell, 2016). Petrarch highly valued the Quintilian notion of education, viewing Quintilian "as a fulfillment of the ideal towards which Cicero had pointed" (Lee, 2012). Namely, Cicero wrote the following educational defense for *studia humanitatis* in *Pro Archia*: "These studies sustain youth and entertain old age, they enhance prosperity, and offer a refuge and solace in adversity; they delight us when we are at home without hindering us in the wider world, and are with us at night, when we travel and when we visit the countryside" (para. 16). Additionally, Petrarch's *Secretum* reveals the influence of Augustine on the importance of introspection and his position regarding the conditions of the body in relation to the divine. Petrarch connects these Augustinian concepts to his Ciceronian and Quintilian views on the value of classical language (Latin) and eloquence for the sake of solitary study, and thus, the cultivation of virtue. Petrarch brought these authors back into educational discourse. His philosophy comprehensively amalgamates many philosophers to illuminate the general purpose of the humanist curriculum and the type of "educated person" that such curriculum sought to produce.

infinity and finitude. Petrarch believed that the nature of the transiency and temporal linearity of the self in contrast to the “eternity and indivisibility of God” as “the source of suffering that dominates the human condition” (Zak, 2010, p. 26). The self is experienced as fragmented within the contradictory present, pulled between the nostalgia of the past and the romance of the future. In Petrarch’s perspective, Medieval urbanization allowed for a greater recognition of finitude. The reflective lamentations around the notion of time are expressed by many of Petrarch’s literary works, such as Poem 272 in “*In morte di Laura*.”¹¹

From the perspective of Petrarch, the issue of the fragmented self is resolved through *animi cura*, which means curing the soul by taking care of the soul (Zak, 2010). It is from here that we can observe his philosophical justification for promoting a greater attention to the inner lives of individuals. The process of *animi cura* directs one to revive the wholeness of their soul through the return to their “true self” under the practice of and reflection on virtue (McClure, 1991). Wholeness can be achieved in the solitude of the soul through the act of writing. Writing mirrored the condition of the soul for Petrarch, who wrote: "There lies my pen which at present rebels everywhere I go and refuses my orders, because I am preoccupied with burdensome matters" (Petrarch, cited in Zak, 2010, p.4). For Petrarch, the act of writing leads to the mastery of memory, rhetorical eloquence, and language, which then facilitates the formation of an ordered and virtuous mind freed from the sins that perpetuate the fragmentation of the soul (Zak, 2010). Writing offered path to a “well-ordered mind [...] of an undisturbed serenity” (*Letter on Familiar Matters*, 1:47, Petrarch, Translated by Bernardo, 2005). It is through writing that the

¹¹ “Life flees and does not stop an hour, and death comes faster by great stages: and present and past things make war on me, and future things also, and remembering and expecting both weight down my heart now on this side, now on that, so that in truth, except that I take pity on myself, I would already be beyond these thoughts” (Petrarch, Translated by Durling, 1976, Poem 272. p. 450).

soul may be transported back into the memories of the wholeness of antiquity, temporarily liberated from the pressures and complexities of the fragmented present self¹² (Stock, 2013).

Petrarch elevated the mind over the body, giving further importance to the faculty of reason. The untamed passions of our bodies lead us astray into the realm of unfulfilled desires. Our souls are “imprisoned” (used by Petrarch to describe the body in *Secretum*¹³ through the interlocutor, Augustine) through attachment to the material world. Compared with the Scholasticism, Petrarch’s Humanism re-orientated reason away from metaphysical disputations and toward the lived ethical and existential conditions of suffering and self-fragmentation. The exercise of reason was not solely for the purposes of engaging in abstract theology, it was also an individual and introspective tool for ethical development. Virtue, cultivated through writing, reading, and language – under reason - cures the fragmented and contaminated soul. Petrarch regarded such an introspective journey as a process of “speaking with himself.”¹⁴ Here, explicitly, we see virtue and truth found in private interiority.

In the philosophical context of education, *artes liberales* directed students to derive solace from the process of writing and reading, escaping from the chaos of the external world to the solitude of our private reason. In a letter to Severo Apennincola (*Letter on Familiar Matters*,

¹² This can be observed from his writing in *Letter on Familiar Matters*, 1:314-15: “while I write I become eagerly engaged with our greatest writers in whatever way I can [...] and to flee from these I concentrate all my strength following the ancients instead” (Petrarch, translated by Bernardo, 2005).

¹³ Specifically, in *Secretum*’s “First Dialogue” where Petrarch expresses through Augustine: “Then listen. It was from Heaven your soul came forth: never will I assert a lower origin than that. But in its contact with the flesh, wherein it is imprisoned, it has lost much of its first splendour. Have no doubt of this in your mind. And not only is it so, but by reason of the length of time it has in a manner fallen asleep; and, if one may so express it, forgotten its own beginning and its heavenly Creator” (Petrarch, Translated by Draper, 2015)

¹⁴ Petrarch expressed his position regarding introspection in *Letter on Familiar Matters*, 1:84: “But if you choose to consult yourself and to speak with yourself rather than with others, I would never stop expecting great things from you and would call you most happy since you serve as your own judge, and I would consider you worthy of envy rather than pity” (Petrarch, Translated by Bernardo, 2005).

1:84-5, Petrarch, translated by Bernardo, 2005), Petrarch speaks to the importance of the caring of the soul through study of language, philosophy, and history of antiquity. The knowledge of the past is treated by Petrarch as a *fortification against the corruption of the present*. When one internalizes such knowledge and language, one becomes protected from the contamination of the external world. Petrarch referred to such knowledge as the “philosophy of liberal studies”:

I speak of liberal studies and especially that part of the philosophy which is the teacher of life. You had never removed these entirely from your mind although for a little while involvements in civil matters kept you from them. Now devote yourself completely since nothing prevents it, and give yourself over to the better auspices of a new life by keeping your mind busy with such activities. Read again the history of antiquity. (Familiar Letters, 1:84-5; Translated by Bernardo, 2005)

The curriculum of *studia humanitatis* promoted eloquence of classical languages, rhetoric, and writing, and built upon Petrarch’s philosophical foundation of *animi cura*. It is the educational approach of exercising reason over the passions of the body through the mastery of language so that the soul may be cured of its sins and awakened to the pursuit of virtue. Petrarch’s humanist solution for the malaise of its society rested in a form of personal responsibility as exercised through moral purity and self-mastery. It offered an independent soteriology found within the inner private life of the individual, and a new appraisal of the past as a way to resist the external conditions of the present (by delving into the past of antiquity). Essentially, reason became a more *personal and private endeavor*. It was not only a source of disputational logic,

but also became a source of the *inner* protection against the external world of the material body, diseased society, and even finite and linear time¹⁵.

2.4 Petrarch and Augustine

Petrarch's assertion that a pathway towards virtue and God as an inward retreat into the true self strongly reflects an Augustinian sentiment. In some ways, Petrarch helped revive Augustinian spirituality. Similar to Petrarch, Augustine (354-430AD) proposes a dualism between the body and the soul and sees the soul as a pathway towards God: "Do not go outward; return within yourself. In the inward man dwells truth" (Taylor, 1989, p. 129). God in this sense is not only a transcendent entity outside of ourselves situated somewhere in a divine universe, but is also the very source and activity that drives our personal consciousness. Charles Taylor (1989) describes the Augustinian relation to God as "God is not just what we long to see, but what powers the eye which sees" (p. 129).

This Augustinian inward turn represented a change in the fundamental manner in which the self is experienced and understood. Taylor (1989) terms the Augustinian position of the self to be a "radical reflexivity" (p. 131), describing it as a new level of inward engagement that was

¹⁵ However, the inwardness emphasized by Petrarch should be distinguished from Romanticism, where the interiority of the individual in its creative emotional experiences are celebrated. For Petrarch, the journey of the inwardness is very much contingent upon the curriculum of the studia humanitatis. In other words, the self does not carry inherent sources of truth (as in the internal intuitive forces of the artists as promoted by Romantic proponents) if not equipped with the active deliberations of the knowledge of antiquity as a facilitative medium for "speaking with himself". Yet despite their differences, Petrarch's contribution to the humanist reforms may mark a radical shift upon the definition of the "educated". Curriculum moves from the designed conformation to metaphysical conclusions in disputations to the cultivation of the individual self as a separate presence from its time and surrounding world. Writing and reading are not only skills for scholastic metaphysical confirmations but also serve to liberate the individual from their own temporal and cultural place to derive solace within themselves privately. Such curriculum may not produce the inwardness as reflected in the sentiments of Romanticism, but it was certainly a progression towards the celebration of the individual as radically separate from their surrounding world.

absent before his time. What is radical about Augustine's reflexivity is that it takes the revolutionary step towards adopting a first-personal perspective, "where I make *my* experience my object" (p. 131). It is the relationship to one's self where internal experiences are consciously revealed as objects of introspective investigation and inquiry, and that this process remains fully a private and solitary endeavor. It is through this inward investigation of our experiences and thoughts that the presence of God is revealed to us.

The Augustinian inward revealing of God is nonetheless driven by the faculty of reason itself. Reason, Augustine argues, is the highest faculty of human beings because it distinguishes us from that which exists (material objects) and those that live (non-human species) (Lee, 2012). It is through our faculty of reason that we are able to become aware of our perceptions and to pass judgements upon their value and legitimacy (Taylor, 1989). Reason ultimately allows us to recognize the existence of transcendent truths and concepts that are independent of our personal judgements. For Augustine, the very recognition of a transcendent truth through reason is itself a demonstration of that which is higher than reason itself – God.

Augustine greatly influenced early medieval educational culture. Yet I believe the transformative nature of his discourse on inwardness and development of self through radical reflexivity was not implemented in medieval Scholasticism. His legacy was overshadowed by the prominence of Aristotelian texts in the scholastic curricula (Armstrong, 1993). Augustinian philosophy would lay in silent slumber until Petrarch's humanist reforms (Hooker, 1996). Southern and northern European higher educational curricula were heavily influenced by this revived Augustinian inwardness throughout the Renaissance and into the Enlightenment, as Taylor (1989) describes: "...those two centuries, the sixteenth and seventeenth, can be seen as an

immense flowering of Augustinian spirituality across all confessional differences, one which continued in its own way into the Enlightenment,” (p. 141). As Karen Armstrong (1993) writes: “Instead of expressing their faith in eternal, collective ways, the people of Europe were beginning to explore the more interior consequences of religion” (p. 276).

2.5 The Cartesian Move

After the humanist reforms, universities gradually changed their pedagogical approaches and curricula during the 16th century, moving away from *studia humanitatis*. Scientific and mathematical subjects rose in prominence. Both Oxford and Cambridge universities began to incorporate mathematics into its core curriculum and basic admission requirements, as the general educational culture anticipated a professional and academic world heavily informed by natural sciences (Axtell, 2016). Students would be unable to graduate with a B.A. without basic aptitude in mathematics, specifically in arithmetic. Disputations took up scientific and mathematic discoveries instead of matters related to Christian metaphysics (Laird, 2008). Curricula based on field studies and the use of physical scientific devices became the norm as more universities were equipped with telescopes, dials, and compasses (Feingold, 1984). As well, universities began to construct libraries specifically dedicated to books on mathematics and the natural sciences.

Science would displace the scholastic remnants of Aristotelian metaphysical philosophy, especially at Oxford and Cambridge. The shift from the humanist curricula to scientific and mathematical knowledge reflects a transition from reason in Petrarchan-Augustinianism to a notion of reason developed by René Descartes (1596-1650). The rising influence of the “avatars of New Science” (Axtell, 2016, p.82) such as Descartes, was first met with suspicion and even resistance during early 17th century as it was considered to “undermine the propaedeutic role of

philosophy with respect to theology" (Feingold & Broadie, 2017, ch. 8, p.3). Cartesian physics concerned itself with the mechanistic conception of the universe, where the material world was "no longer deemed to be composed of two distinct substances, matter and form, but of matter alone" (Brockliss, 2006, p. 54). By the 1650s, Cartesianism was entering into the curricula of various universities such as the University of Utrecht, University of Geneva and French Protestant Academies (Gellera, 2015). Eventually, most academic communities and universities accepted the basic Cartesian concept that "the universe was a *plenum*" (a universe composed only of matter) (Brockliss, 2006, p.57).

The role of language in the forms of writing and reading under *studia humanitatis* framed reason as a faculty that recognizes that which transcends finitude. The purpose of studying classical languages, rhetoric, and philosophy of antiquity was to equip oneself with the skills of eloquence and knowledge of the past into order to heal self-fragmentation.¹⁶ Petrarch's *Secretum* clearly expresses his view that the solution to self-fragmentation is to be found in directing reason towards the contemplation of finitude and mortality itself.¹⁷ The presence of God and the divine realm is illuminated by the deliberate recognition (through reason) of our mortal and transient bodies. Infinity is contrasted from finitude, divinity from mortality, perfected virtues from primal bodily passions. In other words, our souls ascend upward by *going inward* through

¹⁶ The self-fragmentation addressed by Petrarch as the conflict between finitude and infinity, and mortality and imprisonment of the body and transcendence of God and virtue. In *Secretum*: "When all these passions are extinguished, then, and not till then, will desire be full and free. For when the soul is uplifted on one side to heaven by its own nobility, and on the other dragged down to earth by the weight of the flesh and the seductions of the world, so that it both desires to rise and also to sink at one and the same time, then, drawn contrary ways, you find you arrive nowhither" (Petrarch, Translated by Draper, 2015).

¹⁷ When Petrarch asks Augustine for the answer for the transcendence of the soul: "What, then, would you say a man must do for his soul to break the fetters of the world, and mount up perfect and entire to the realms above?" Augustine answers: "What leads to this goal is, as I said in the first instance, the practice of meditation on death and the perpetual recollection of our mortal nature". (Petrarch, Translated by Draper, 2015). *Secretum* demonstrates the Petrarchan interpretation of the Augustinian notion of reason as a gateway towards God.

reflection on our limitations. Yet such humanist framing of reason as displaced by Cartesian influence, in which the source of knowledge is situated within reason itself. If the Augustinian turn towards the inward self could be conceived as “radical,” the inwardness promoted by Descartes takes on a new magnitude of radicalism. Taylor (1989) describes Descartes as turning towards a “disengaged reason” (p. 144).

2.5.1 Self-Generated Truths

Previously, reason depended upon its alignment with the divine order. Yet Descartes redefined reason as dependent upon inward qualities of certainty and evidence as exclusively processed and validated by the inner system of rationality (Taylor, 1989). True understanding of the world did not rest on the rational order of the outside, but instead on a specific cognitive model of rationality that one adopts internally such that certainty and knowledge were "self-generated" (Taylor, 1989, p. 157). The ultimate source of knowledge was no longer derived from the vision that sees God, but is exclusively from the individual private rational cognition which qualifies the knowledge of God as an insight of that rational cognition itself:

What has happened is rather that God's existence has become a stage in my progress towards science through the methodical ordering of evident insight. God's existence is a theorem in my system of perfect science. The centre of gravity has decisively shifted. (Taylor, 1989, p. 157)

Knowledge is not revealed to me through the recognition of something greater than my finitude, rather, it is generated by *my* methodology of rational certainty. Reason reveals truth not by the recognition of its own limitation, but through the certitude and dignity of its capacity to understand. For Descartes, however, the certainty of reason to know is still a step towards the recognition of God. But the process and conclusion of how such recognition comes to be are

framed as a feat of the "theorem in *my* system of perfect science" as opposed to having God inherent in my capacity to reason the distinctions between infinity and finitude (Taylor, 1989, p. 157). In other words, knowledge was the feat of one's reason *first* that held the *implications* for a Christian metaphysical reality second, rather than one's reason being the consequential outcome of the primary force of God's will and wisdom. Cartesian curricula taught a notion of reason that had differed from both Petrarch-Augustinianism and Aristotelian Scholasticism. The assumption that the universe is a *plenum* opened the world to control but closed it as a source of ethics, as Taylor (1989) writes:

instead of speculative philosophy which is taught in the Schools, we may find a practical philosophy by means of which, knowing the force and the action of fire, water, air, the stars, heavens and all other bodies that environ us, as distinctly as we know the different crafts of our artisans, we can in the same way employ them in all those uses to which they are adapted, and thus render ourselves the masters and possessors of nature. (p. 149)

Both the Petrarchan and Cartesian movements resulted in radical educational shifts towards inwardness of the self. The humanist reforms enshrined the inwardness of the self in its faculty of reason as a source of refuge. The mind was understood as transcendent of its local temporal and cultural landscape in *studia humanitatis* education, where knowledge of antiquity can fortify the self against the chaos of the surrounding world. Inwardness was then pushed even further in its radical solitude by Descartes. Knowledge of ethics and truth became generated from the *certainty of one's own reason*, rather than revealed through God by the reflection of our finitude *enabled by reason*. The self in its private faculty of reason is not only transcendent of its temporal and cultural landscape under *studia humanitatis*, but is also pushed into further *metaphysical* separation from the Cartesian influence. Ultimately, what is meant to be "educated" changed during the historical progression from Scholasticism to Cartesianism. In

particular, how one ought to perceive Christian metaphysics evolved from the educated person demonstrating an alignment with Christian metaphysics through logic, to students prepared to cultivate a faculty of reason that increasingly situated the sources of truth and ethics within the self.

2.6 New England Beginnings

American colleges displayed a similar shift away from Christian metaphysics. With curricula and pedagogy increasingly emphasizing natural sciences and mathematics, rooted in Cartesian foundations, American higher education began to define the educational process as one enshrining the inner faculty of reason in the same way as its European counterpart.

American (At the time, “New England”) colleges began their official formative journeys from the mid-17th to 18th centuries, with “Harvard College”¹⁸ established in 1636 (Morison, 2013). Harvard College had a theological focus, inherited from Europe, and was the dominant institution that trained and certified ministers. Almost half of its total graduates took on ministerial roles during the 17th century (Gengel & Benson, 2002). Students were required to learn all three biblical languages: Hebrew, Chaldee and Syriac (Morgan, 1986)—the only curricular difference between Harvard and its English counterparts. Contemporary English universities had prioritized the natural sciences and mathematics over theology. American colleges such as Harvard were committed to a “godly learning” (Axtell, 2016, p. 117) in order to produce graduates “of godly life and conversation” (p. 117).

¹⁸ Until the 18th century, Harvard College served as the only higher educational facility available in the British colonies (Axtell, 2016). Its establishment and continued presence only increased its importance and impact as surrounding colonies called for more professionals with advanced educational training, such as physicians, lawyers, teachers, merchants, and so forth (Axtell, 2016).

Despite the strong denominational origins and intentions that carried the pedagogical directions of American colleges, their curriculum was susceptible to the intellectual reverberations of the European Enlightenment culture (and its Cartesian philosophy). American curricula would eventually discard Aristotelian metaphysical foundations in the 18th century in favor of the trendy discoveries of natural sciences and mathematics (Rudolph, 1991). By the 1760s, the majority of American colleges (at the time, six out of eight) integrated mathematics and natural sciences (or "natural philosophy" as it was known) as part of their core curriculum (Rudolph, 1991). Almost half of the curriculum was devoted to science and math at colleges such as Harvard (Axtell, 2016). Also, pedagogical styles and classroom organization were made compatible with scientific learning: including equipment such as the orrery, telescopes, air pumps, and so on (Elliott & Rossiter, 1992).

The educational turn towards science and math fundamentally repositioned human beings in relation to God as well as the moral framework derived from Christian theology. American colleges abandoned pedagogy based on memorization of Christian deontology in favor of deliberative philosophical reflections of morality. Students were expected to analyze the theological moral framework and connect scriptural commandments to pragmatic affairs of economics and politics and “duties of man” (Axtell, 2011, p.140). Scriptural directives declined in the study of ethics and metaphysics, as Axtell (2016) aptly states:

the eighteenth-century colleges sought to lead their students from the Study of Nature to the knowledge of themselves, and of the God of Nature. This new sequence of goals signaled a decline in the American Protestant belief in the efficacy of faith over works as a means of salvation, and entailed a turn away from the Bible as the sole guide to human conduct. (p. 139)

2.7 Humboldt's Legacy

American colleges further distanced themselves from the theologically steeped curricula under the formation of the modern research-based universities in Germany during the 19th century. One of the major forces that contributed to the formation of the model of the modern research university is rooted in the educational philosophy and reforms by Wilhelm Humboldt (1767-1835). In 1809, philosopher Wilhelm Humboldt was assigned as the Minister of Education under the period of Prussian reform, which allowed him the freedom to institute fundamental structural at that time (Backhaus, 2015).

Humboldt's ideal university was one that prioritized individual freedom in research, teaching, learning. Rather than expecting the students to conform to a preset curriculum reflective of religious and political ideologies, the resources of education ought to fully support the desires and needs of the *individual* (Anderson, 2004). In other words, this educational mode enshrined the absolute freedom of both students and professors. Students were self-driven, with the unobstructed ability to choose elective courses (Axtell, 2016, p. 264). Professors were able to directly teach their research interests and in manner they saw fit – which was a freedom that was protected by the state educational ministries. Many universities were also furnished with advanced laboratory equipment and scientific apparatuses, with the purpose of seeking truths not necessarily given by Christianity theology but characterized originality and innovation (Elliott & Rossiter, 1992).

With the promotion of individualized education, the model of the “German university” became popular in America.¹⁹ Many American students and scholars during the 19th century sought opportunities to study in Germany to learn from its innovative pedagogy and productive research conditions (Diehl, 1978). This trendy exchange inevitably allowed the German principles to reverberate across the Atlantic as scholars and graduates eagerly proceeded to dispense the inspiration and experiences of their foreign reach.

American colleges did not, however, seek to mimic the German model. Instead, they took specific elements (Howard, 2006). For instance, recitation in American colleges, where students practiced memorization drills to master the foundational subjects in classical languages and mathematics, were increasingly replaced by lectures where *new* knowledge was the main topic of learning (Axtell, 2016). Memorization was deprioritized in favor of critical analysis and the generation of individual original ideas (Howard, 2006). Professors who lectured had the opportunity to share their original ideas with students. The notion of seminars was also developed in graduate and undergraduate level training where professors and students could have more intimate educational experiences (Roberts & Turner, 2000). Small groups allowed for close critical analysis of primary sources which in turn prompted original ideas as well as mutual critique. By the late 1800s, schools such as Harvard, Cornell, and Stanford had largely dropped

¹⁹ It should be noted that despite the popularity of the German model, they also had their weaknesses. The mostly self-driven elective-based curriculum contained the risk of being completely directionless where foundational skills and knowledge can be easily missed by the students (Axtell, 2016). Americans have recognized this, as the fundamental qualities of the German universities and American colleges were quite different. German universities were set up in ways where students can engage the studies to complete an examination specific to a profession that was planned to be pursued at the beginning of their education (Ely, 2013). American colleges, on the other hand, had built on the foundation of a curriculum of breadth, especially upon the sciences and Christian ethics/Biblical languages (Morgan, 1986).

the requirement of the prescribed curriculum for a more elective-heavy structure, with students taking between 60-80% of their courses as electives (Rudolph, 1977).

Both German universities and American colleges gradually but surely drifted away from Christian educational prescriptions. Curricula were structured in ways that students and professors were encouraged to produce *new* knowledge and operate *independently* through elective courses for the sake of scientific and philosophical innovation. Education now encouraged the derivation of truth and knowledge *within* the individual. It was now the *individual* that drove original and innovative research rather than a prevailing metaphysics that demanded conformity²⁰.

The educational enshrinement of inwardness impacted higher education on multiple levels— the institutional, pedagogical, and intellectual. Institutionally, universities and colleges gradually accrued their credibility as research-based environments fully protected in their freedom to delve into new territories of knowledge. Pedagogically, curricula began to integrate more electives where students could partake in smaller seminars and engage with professors teaching their specialized research. Intellectually, this meant greater openness to innovative knowledge in natural sciences, mathematics, and speculative philosophy (hence, greater distance from Christianity). Universities and colleges stood upon the engine of the *individual* for their power to produce knowledge, for the emphasis on the individual marked a divergence from the Christian tradition in education. In other words, with the enshrinement of the individual also

²⁰ One example; Wilhelm Wundt and his American student James Cattell both expressed skepticism against the supernaturalism, mysticism, metaphysics of the soul/spirit, and miracles in psychology. Instead, they proposed more of a scientifically-based (specifically, evolutionarily-based) conditions for explaining ethics and subjectivity (Kippenberg, 2002).

comes the enshrinement of the *personal freedom* to exercise inward powers of producing *new* knowledge and engage with self-directed education and research

2.8 Inwardness and Humanities

These changes overshadowed a general education that demanded students to internalize a holistic metaphysical and ethical philosophy. Although the notion of general education was not entirely abandoned, it had changed from a necessary to an *optional* undertaking. Educational curricula and programs designed for specialization, therefore, produce the "educated" as defined by their sharply specific expertise (aided by the availability of electives). It may be true that scholastic and humanistic education also produced "experts" defined by specific technical and disciplinary proficiency, yet their production nevertheless rested upon the shared prescribed curricular foundation of the *trivium*, *quadrivium*, and *studia humanitatis*.

Yet the enshrinement of the individual and inward self has additional consequences in higher education: it radically changes manner in which the humanities is intellectually and educationally conducted. In the sciences, the inward self is connected to an objective reality, where the internal faculty of reason operated to reveal the external truths. Specialized and original knowledge are educationally produced when students and faculty have the absolute freedom to exercise their reason. Yet, in the humanities, the inward self became more radically enshrined as the locus of truth and ethics in a way that replaced the certitude in the existence of an external objective reality. This also results in specialization and the production of original

knowledge that can be detached from the belief in objective reality and truths.²¹ This change was definitively more pronounced in the humanities and arts-based disciplines than the sciences (or any other research driven by the scientific method).

Instead of the Cartesian assumption that truth and ethics represent a feat of one's inner rationality and reason, truth and ethics are given based upon the *existence* of one's inner reality, period. In the first case, the laws of an external, objective world set the standard for reason. In the second case, the internal model is prioritized as revealing an objective world based on the condition of its existence as a philosophical position in itself. Yet without the source of truth and ethics being rooted in the conviction in the objective reality, the existential inquiries of the students become philosophically difficult and even politically risky.

²¹ Although this is largely derived from a different type of knowledge – specifically, interpretive knowledge rather than experimental and observational conclusions. I elaborate further on this in both chapter 3 (see 3.2) and 4 (see 4.4).

Chapter 3: Existential Explorations, Objective Truth, and the Humanities

Despite the fading educational relevance of Christianity, the enshrinement of inwardness did not result in a *total neglect* of moral cultivation in American colleges. Moral cultivation remained possible insofar as the intellectual “faith” in the validity of objectivism and philosophical realism was intact. In the humanities, however, such a faith would be undermined and replaced by a persistent skepticism and even political suspicion. This skepticism rendered moral cultivation and an existential search for meaning and identity nearly impossible as a pedagogical and educational (institutionally speaking) undertaking.

This problem in the humanities emerged during the shift from general humanistic education towards the modern reforms in humanities disciplines during the 19th to 20th centuries. Namely, relativism was accepted as a theoretical standpoint through the increasing disciplinary specialization that propounded its pervasion. In this chapter, I will elaborate on Humboldt’s notion of *Bildung* and how it relates to the role of specialization and research in the university. It is through the impacts of both the humanities and specialization, I will argue, that resulted in the minimal existential engagements that afflict the current universities.

3.1 Secular Humanism

American colleges during the early 1900s entered a period of what Anthony Kronman (2007) called “secular Humanism” (p. 74). Secular Humanism was not necessarily an explicit pedagogical discourse and methodology as much as an unspoken purpose that drove the educational culture of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was constituted by the general belief in the importance of moral education anchored in the conviction of *secular* objective truths in reality, morality, and meaning. It represented a brief historical educational moment where the

salvage of objectivism remained intact from the ruins of a fading Christianity. Its curricula included the study of philosophy, literature, and history (Kronman, 2007). Several colleges had full curricula that could be described as being secular humanist, such as Columbia's Contemporary Civilization Course in 1919, and Reed College's Humanities Course in 1924, Harvard's General Education Program in 1946 (Callahan & Bok, 1980). All were required core curricula which produced a common base of knowledge and shared educational experience among its students. All of these programs were designed to teach *secular* ethical development through knowledge of classical philosophy, literature, and history (Kors, Zajonc & Scribner, 2010).

The development of humanities core curricula was in part a reaction against the proliferation of elective curricula across the American college system (influenced by the German universities). Many feared that elective curricula led to fragmentation through disciplinary specialization and to loss of the common humanities knowledge believed necessary for ethical development (Russell, 2002). In other words, elective curricula had framed the notion of the "educated" person as a specialized expert instead of a generally knowledgeable person who is civically engaged and ethically good. Woodrow Wilson was an early critic of specialization and, at Chicago World's Fair 1893, advocated for a return to general education rooted in humanities in order to combat the "disease of specialization by which we are now so sorely afflicted" (*Public Papers, I*, p. 223-230; From Link, 1947, p. 29). During the secular humanist period of the early 20th century, which saw the revival of general education, students were trained to be professional experts *and* possess the humanities knowledge of what constitutes a "good life." Reed's first president, William T. Foster, strongly advocated for the humanities as a way to reinforce the intellectual standards of the masses (Russell, 2002). Columbia's Contemporary

Civilization course was built on the proposition that “there is a certain minimum of our intellectual and spiritual tradition which a man must experience and understand if he is to be called educated” (Rudolph, 1977, p. 237).

Secular humanistic programs and curricula were also a reaction against the increasingly industrial and technological societies of the 19th to 20th centuries (Russell, 2002). The study of poetry and literature was regarded as the “antidote to the spiritual ills of the university and, indeed, of society” (Russell, 2002, p. 170). The humanistic curriculum cultivated the skill and knowledge for poetic expression that allowed a “lifting of humanity out of the fact-filled scientific age into a higher realm of permanent values and true freedom” (p. 169). History was also an integral part of the humanistic curriculum, described in Wilson’s address at Princeton in 1894 as the “common experiences, the common thoughts and struggles, the old triumphs and defeats of [...] men [...] in the past” (*The Forum*, XVIII, 1894, p. 110-111; From Link, 1947, p. 29). The general humanistic curriculum consisting of literature, classical studies, history, and philosophy was regarded as “a last-ditch defense of liberal humanism against the chaos and depersonalization of mass society in the scientific age” (p. 170).

Secular Humanism attempted to provide students with a set of common knowledge that could answer questions of truth, ethics, and meaning in an increasingly industrialized society. It did so by promulgating values viewed as *permanent and objective* yet also freed of religious underpinnings (Palmer, Zajonc & Scribner, 2010). However, secular humanism would eventually be deemed inappropriate or even dangerous by academic and educational environment into the early to mid 20th century. Two major factors contributed to such shifts.

3.2 Humboldt's *Bildung* as Research and Specialization

The first factor is related to the institutional role of the modern university as becoming defined by its capacity for research as well as the professionalization that is involved in such research (Kronman, 2007; Russel, 2002). American colleges were influenced by the German model of universities, which strongly emphasized specialized research (Simpson, 2013). The idea of specialized research in German universities was based on a reformed notion of *Bildung*, an educational philosophy that enshrined such scholarly exercise as a moral virtue (Kronman, 2007). This was largely derived from the educational reforms of Humboldt (Mak, 2009).

Humboldt promoted a version of *Bildung* that rested heavily on the principles of *individual freedom, expression, and originality* (Silijander, Kivela & Sutinen, 2012). For Humboldt, it is the unique and personal conditions of the individual self that can act as a refuge in the midst of unreliable external institutional structures: “If everything around us is faltering, then the only safe refuge is in our innermost self” (Silijander, Kivela & Sutinen, 2012, p. 114). It is through this innermost self and its individual powers that *Bildung* seeks to realize as a moral endeavor: “In the center [of *Bildung*] is man, who without any specific intention, only wishes to invigorate and increase the powers of his own nature, only wishes to give his being worth and permanence” (p. 113). *Bildung* framed education as the moral duty to develop the *self*, expressed as the autonomy and self-determination in study, teaching, and research. The self-determination of research provided the foundation for more elective curricula and the production of original knowledge through specialized research²².

²² This does not necessarily mean, however, that Humboldt's educational ideal aimed to solely actualize and liberate the individual without any considerations of other dimensions. He explicitly stated that “self-education can only be continued...in the wider context of development of the world” (GS op, cit, VII, p. 33); understanding that

However, producing original and innovative knowledge runs counter to the philosophy of the secular humanist curriculum. Disciplines associated with scientific research continuously rose in educational value during the early-mid 20th century. The American government incentivized innovative research for technological advancement through legislation, such as the National Defense Act (1958) which directed approximately one billion dollars be invested in improving science-based curriculum and academic research in higher education (Jolly, 2009).

The pressure exerted by the demand for original and innovative research in the sciences pushed secular Humanism into its own reform where “the old paternalism, sectarianism, and dogmatic philosophy had to go” (Russell, 2002, p. 171). The humanities as traditionally understood as the study of a stable body of knowledge and expressive technique, was then vulnerable to the suspicion of its own relevance and credibility in a university increasingly defined as a specialized research institution (Kronman, 2007). Humanities departments began to

“education of the individual requires his incorporation into society and involves his links with society at large” (ibid, XIV, p. 155). Even within the solitude of self-education lies a fundamental condition of an involvement with the broader social world. The educational ideal does not mean deriving knowledge and virtue from the isolated space within the individual. Knowledge and virtue cannot be derived solely from one’s inner model of reality, but must first be equipped and enriched by what already exists from the outside world. He writes that the educated are ones whom: “absorb the great mass of material offered to him by the world around him and by his inner existence, using all the possibilities of his receptiveness; he must then reshape that material with all the energies of his own activity and appropriate it to himself so as to create an interaction between his own personality and nature in a most general, active and harmonious form” (GS, II, p. 117). For Humboldt, the internal model of reality in rationality and reason works in tandem with the reception of knowledge and involvement of the world *around the self*. However, the “harmonious form” is nevertheless discussed as an *individual endeavor* that produces knowledge that is *original to the individual*, insofar as it reflects a “reshaping” of the material received from the world. Connected with Humboldt’s understanding of *Bildung*, the individual endeavor of the harmonious form can then be understood to serve as the “refuge” of the “innermost self” in the face of a “faltering” world. Translated into educational and academic conditions, Humboldt’s framing of the inward self then becomes a promotion for the autonomy and independence for study, learning, and researching for the sake of “reshaping” current knowledge into something different. It is not to shape oneself into pre-existing knowledge like the scholastics (and to some degree the humanists). Rather, it is to combine with one’s inner dispositions to reshape into different, hence, *new* knowledge. Hence, the values of innovation and originality became expressed as virtues within the educational and academic landscape, consolidating an institutional definition of the university as increasingly research-focused in its specialized disciplines, particularly in the sciences initially and later in the humanities (starting from the 20th century) (Kronman, 2007).

replace the curriculum around the classical languages (Latin and Greek) and literature with modern literature in English and French (Proctor, 1998). Instead of the preservation and transmission of classical philosophy and the permanent values they represented, there was momentum in the humanities to provide original and innovative knowledge through critical interpretation even more so than previous curricula (Russell, 2013). Humanities professors spent more time teaching within their research specialty rather than the multidisciplinary knowledge and ethics of the previous general humanistic curriculum (Crooks, 1979). The reform of the humanities aligned with the broader atmosphere of individualism, innovation, and skepticism of traditional values in Christianity and secular Humanism (Palmer, Zajonc & Scribner, 2010).

By the latter half of the 20th century, humanities were no longer part of a core curriculum, but were repositioned as elective courses (Crooks, 1979). The role of the humanities, as a way to preserve and transmit objective moral facts, was overshadowed by the move towards more original critical interpretive works. No longer were the humanities perceived as the “last ditch defense...against the chaos and depersonalization of mass society...” (*The Forum*, XVIII, 1894, p. 170). Instead, the notion of humanistic education shifts from the production of the generally educated person *equipped with an expertise* to the specialized expert who *may or may not be* generally educated.

3.3 Humanities and Politics

The second factor leading to the decline of secular Humanism in the American university was the involvement of humanities disciplines in the political discussions of values and equality. By the 20th century, the notion of “cultural relativism” had risen in political discourse (Gairdner, 2008). Cultural relativism is the assertion that one cannot establish objective criteria for judging

the practices, ethics, values and truth claims of any culture or society. Instead, the understanding of a culture ought to engage with the systems of that culture itself (Gairdner, 2008). In other words, cultures cannot be judged from the outside as that represents the imposition of one's own cultural standards upon the other. The notion of cultural relativism naturally attracted its intellectual proponents within the American political contexts of the early 20th century. It was a useful ideological defense against oppressive regimes backed by discriminatory moral objectivism throughout the American landscape, such as the widespread eugenics programs and racially discriminatory policies (Bloom, 1987).

The State of California passed the sterilization law in 1909, which enforced sterilization upon individuals deemed to be “unfit” by government assessment (Jasanoff, 2011). Eugenics policy and the sterilization law aimed at controlling the “unfit” population as defined by their poverty, criminality and psychological pathologies. Yet such poor living conditions were a product of structural racism and classism, and only served to encourage acts of discrimination under a government mandate. The notion of cultural relativism represented a readily available way to disarm the presumptuous objectivism that fueled the bigotry of American and racial elitism (Gairdner, 2008).

Social historian Carl Degler (1991) argues that the anthropologist Franz Boas (1858-1942) was crucial in the emergence of the notion of cultural relativism. Although Boas did not personally coin the term, his foundational ideas are strikingly similar. During a debate in 1887 with American anthropologists on the topic of museum organization, Boas argued that “civilization is not something absolute, but that it is *relative*, and that our ideas and conceptions are true only so far as our civilization goes” (Boas, 1887, p. 589). Ideas are relative to their civilizational and cultural confines, which themselves are relative to proximate surrounding

environmental and temporal conditions or, as Boas (1974) writes, “how far each and every civilization is the outcome of its geographical and historical surroundings” (p. 66). Degler (1991) argues that Boas’s advocacy for such a perspective reflected a deep ideological and political commitment to combat racism:

Boas did not arrive at that position from a disinterested scientific inquiry into a vexed if controversial question. Instead his idea derived from an ideological commitment...he had a deep interest in collecting evidence and designing arguments that would rebut or refute an ideological outlook – racism [and this resulted in] a persistent interest in pressing his social values upon the profession and the public. (p. 82)

The formation of the Boasian school of anthropological thought starting from the 20th century signified a jump towards an ideological attack on the principles of white supremacy, as Hitchens (1994) writes:

the Boas school attacked the fundamental tenets of white supremacy by showing with solid empirical studies that race, language and culture were not coextensive entities and that there was no innate racial inheritance guaranteeing the white man’s natural right to rule. (p. 237)

The demonstration of the ideological entanglement of Boas’s ideas of cultural relativism is not an argument against its philosophical soundness. Rather, it is to demonstrate that the notion of cultural relativism (however sound or unsound it may be) was utilized (and arguably brought forth) as an ideological tool to, quite understandably, obstruct the eugenic and general discriminatory force in the American landscape.

However, cultural relativism in both academic and public contexts only furthered the decline of the ideals of a general humanistic education. It led to the recognition of many notions of human nature and goodness relative to a multitude of cultural attitudes rather than the unified, transcendent ethical values of secular humanist pedagogy. By the mid-20th century, the American

educational landscape was becoming increasingly pluralistic and impacted by the civil rights movement. General humanistic education was, therefore, perceived as an outdated curricula structure that hung on a narrow set of principles and sources--it did not necessarily reflect the identities and interests of other cultural, gender, and ethnic groups. Pedagogy in the humanities came to understand the student and the function of their education differently. Instead of having students “internalize models of conduct [...] they could bring to bear on public problems” (Russell, 2002, p. 173), students were pedagogically repositioned as the source of ethics and truths themselves in the form of producing original “estimate of their aesthetic value, or to offer original critical interpretations” (p. 173).

Lynne Cheney's 1992 report on the state of the humanities in higher education (on behalf of National Endowment for the Humanities, NFAH) stated that its educational role has admittedly shifted from preservation of traditional values to engagement in political change. Cheney argues that a large portion of the humanities curriculum held an intentional political agenda to promote values of diversity and multiculturalism, which implicitly opposes any notion of objective standards. Rita Kramer's (2000) *Ed Schools Follies* provides the direct depiction of Cheney's report on humanities. Kramer, based on year-long immersive research, interviews with students and professors, as well as taking part in courses at various university teacher-training programs, reveals the extent to which pedagogy stands on the political legacy of relativism. Her interviews with professors and analyses of curricula show that there is a consistent resistance to objectivism and its proponents. Various professors promote the idea of relativism in its *extreme form* (no objective truths) as an ethical viewpoint. A professor at Columbia University asserts:

Relativism is a *good* thing. Our aim should be to involve as many people with their multiple voices as possible. Let everyone be heard from. There are no objective standards, there is no such thing as objective norms. (Kramer, 2000, p. 29)

Humanities curricula have evolved to accommodate the plurality of truths and ethics, which has made it a popular topic of discussion on both the political left and right. The left believes pluralism indicates a progressive stance in which problems of power and oppression can be brought to the forefront of scholarly and public consciousness. It represents a virtuous trend, continuing the civil rights legacy of the mid 20th century and moving away from the narrow-mindedness of Eurocentrism. The right argues that the students of such educational landscape are turned into “willing consumers of a politics of victimization” (Kors & Silvergate, 1998, p. 2), where the accommodation of multiple voices unproductively fuels the emergence of destructive identity politics. Whatever the consequences may be, it is undeniable that the humanities has gained now fame (or notoriety) for its resistance to the belief in objective truths or ethics.

The decline of the general and secular humanistic education marks a reframed inwardness. Its curricula shifted from required participation to an optional interest which no longer retains the conviction in objectivism. Instead, cultural relativism rises in the intellectual priority during the mid-20th century, enshrining one’s independent internal model of reality as valid in itself. Inwardness today possesses a philosophical and political confidence that truth and ethics are *represented* by one’s inner system of understanding. No external and transcendent order exists but rather a plurality of individual systems of truths, ethics, meaning, and identities. In this educational culture, *general* education inevitably loses its credibility and its potential to address the existential situation of students is lost.

3.3.1 Freedom and Meaning

One of the main insights that can be derived from the historical trajectory of higher education is the progressive enshrinement of an internal model of truth and ethics, and later, a reframed version of the internal model where the existence of objective reality is questioned.

The educational ideology of the humanities, placing value on freedom and skepticism, may provoke a directionless malaise that can burden many of the young adults in higher education. The enshrinement of inwardness, and its values of skepticism, freedom, and specialization, does not respond to the existential thirst for *objective certainty* in moral values, meaning, and sense of self amongst the students (Damon, 2009). An existential pursuit of objectivity, truth, and ethics that is shared with others is rendered institutionally irrelevant by specialized research, as well as potentially philosophically and politically contentious. As such, students' existential desires for security remain untended. The existential need for the objective and holistic is pitted against the intellectual norm of skepticism and specialization, with the latter prevailing in its dominance. This is despite the fact that higher education student demographics are overwhelmingly emerging adults, situated in the life stage where anxieties regarding one's identity, meaning, and morality are at their peak (Arnett, 2000; 2014). If the experience of existential uncertainty remains unresolved, students may be inclined to resort to behaviours that further exacerbate their psychological and social problems. I believe the experience of existential uncertainty and its respective destructive behaviours can be further elaborated through the concept of *ontological insecurity*.

Chapter 4: Ontological Insecurity, Nihilism, and Ideology

Many of the emerging adults (age 18-25) entering into higher education occupy the life stage of what J.J. Arnett (2001) describes as *identity exploration*. During this stage, emerging adults are exploring different possibilities, such as what kind of person they may become and what worldviews they can commit to (Arnett, 2000). It is a process of continuous ambiguity and uncertainty as one begins to acknowledge the total solitary state of their emerging independence (Arnett, 2014). This stage offers both freedom and isolation, which can be experienced as an isolating burden of anxiety and an eager curiosity. Yet the historical progression of higher education has rendered the educational task of addressing such issues to be near impossible.

The experiences of emerging adulthood in higher education can be associated with the destabilization of fundamental beliefs (Arnett, 2000). This leads to a compensatory cognitive mechanism that seeks to re-stabilize one's *meaning structures* so that epistemic equilibrium may be regained (Keltner & Haidt, 2003). I follow Jack Mezirow's (1994) understanding of "meaning structures" which he defines as the "broad sets of predispositions resulting from psychocultural assumptions which determine the horizons of our expectations" (p. 223), "significantly shaping sensation and delimiting perception, feelings, and cognition" (p. 223). The content of these meaning structures can be aptly summed up by what Anthony Giddens (1991) refers to as the fundamental *existential answers* to issues around our existence, finitude, the experience of others, and continuity of self-identity. As Giddens (1991) writes: "To be ontologically secure is to possess, on the level of the unconscious and practical consciousness, 'answers' to fundamental existential questions which all human life in some way addresses" (p. 48). Meaning structures provide us with internal stability and continuity so that one can tolerantly engage with the

external world. Without them, the external world would appear to be ambiguous, inducing anxiety as we attempted to navigate it and interact with it (Garfinkel, 1963).

The introduction of novel information throws preexisting meaning structures off-balance, where one is left within a state of epistemic ambiguity. Cognitive psychology describes the resolution of the state of epistemic ambiguity as either assimilation or accommodation (Reynolds & Fletcher-Janzen, 2007). When novel information is registered as having low epistemic threat²³ to preexisting meaning structures, it is simply assimilated into them with little to no modification to its integrity. But when novel information and experiences are registered as having high epistemically threat, preexisting meaning structures can undergo a radical transformation or a negation of their own integrity in order to accommodate the novel information. For the emerging adult at the stage of identity exploration, the threshold for epistemic threat is low and new information is likely to cause radical transformations and negation, resulting in a frequent vulnerability to the sometimes-destabilizing consequences of accommodation (Uçar, 2016).

If a student experiencing a state of epistemic ambiguity in fundamental meaning structures is left in silent confusion within the educational environment, then that student may be left with a lingering uncertainty that can manifest as a prolonged sense of anxiety (Bar-Tal, Shrira & Keinan, 2013). Anxiety may then contribute to further stressors, motivating the individual to pursue other means to achieve the experience of certainty and stability (Bar-Tal, Shrira & Keinan, 2013). William Damon (2009) argues that the educational setting at both

²³ In this discussion, the term epistemic threat can be defined as any knowledge and experience that destabilizes one's fundamental meaning structures.

secondary and post-secondary levels should actively encourage discussions and reflections upon existential questions regarding meaning and identity precisely to resolve this ambiguity:

if we never give them occasions for reflecting on their own searches and encourage them to ask the essential questions..., we risk raising a generation that enters adulthood without direction—or, worse yet, hesitates to enter adulthood at all. (p. 145)

Students are often “mystified about the relevance of their school work” (Damon, 2009, p. 146) to grander existential and moral conundrums inherent within emerging adulthood. If the formation of the self, personality, and social connectedness remains in a prolonged state of ambiguity, one’s psyche inevitably resorts to certain compensatory defenses to mitigate distress in ways detrimental on both individual and group levels. An individual may experience an array of psychological and social difficulties, ranging from clinical diagnoses to a sense of purposelessness in life. For a group, the absence of stable meaning structure can even translate into ideological rigidity and extremism.

In this chapter, I begin with the psychological and social conditions of the emerging adults in current North American society. Then I discuss such conditions through the notion of “ontological insecurity” (p. 41) as described by psychiatrist R.D. Laing (1969) on the individual level of analysis and connect its consequences to Erich Fromm’s (1941) notion of the “authoritarian character” (p. 191).²⁴ This discussion will then be contextualized under the pedagogical and intellectual environment of higher education (especially concerning the learning processes related to studying the humanities). Specifically, I will argue that higher education does not only neglect the students’ existential dimensions but also risks in *normalizing* such

²⁴ Along these discussions, I will also employ the perspectives of psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott (1896-1971) along with phenomenologists Shaun Gallagher, and Carlos Cornejo.

neglect (hence, their ontological insecurity). In relation to the last two chapters, I believe this is connected to educational enshrinement of inwardness, where it may reinforce the negative social and psychological consequences of existential uncertainty and confusion

4.1 Meaning Structures and Emerging Adulthood

Emerging adults are situated between the life stages of adolescence and mature adulthood (Arnett, 2014). Susan Pickard (2016) argues that the length of emerging adulthood in contemporary society has extended to worrying degrees due to unreliable socioeconomic conditions. In contrast to previous generations, current emerging adults in North America spend more time pursuing education, are confronted with more precarious job opportunities, and take longer to enter into the workforce (Mortimer, Kim, Staff & Vuolo, 2016). These extend into other areas, delaying property ownership, savings for retirement, being debt-free, getting married and having children--many of which represent formal points of entry into mature adulthood (Santacrose, 2013; Jones & Raisborough, 2007). The current socioeconomic landscape propels what Julie S. Jones and Jayne Raisborough (2007) described as a “deferred adulthood” (p. 15).

Emerging adults are forced “to seek out ways to construct meanings that are increasingly reliant on the self as a source of meaning” (p. 16). Without the experience of external stability and certainty, individuals retreat into themselves to create meaning structures as discussed by Jones and Raisborough (2007). Specifically, the precarious conditions of deferred adulthood deprive individuals of the opportunities to become involved in externally stable commitments and responsibilities, which are necessary for a meaningful life. The current unsettling conditions of emerging adulthood are “much more problematic, contested and inherently risky than any

previous era...” (Jones & Raisborough, 2007, p. 114). Jared D. Kass (2017) describes the experience of existential uncertainty and emptiness in emerging adulthood as leading to “binge drinking to blackout, sexual victimization, social media bullying, intellectual competitiveness, social anxiety, social isolation, depression, eating disorders, and suicide” (p. 45).

Anthony Giddens (1991) argues that one of the fundamental protections against the anguish of existential uncertainty and emptiness is participation in *personal routines and traditions*. Routines and traditions act as *embodied processes* (through our actions and interactions with the world) where the ambiguous possibilities of reality can be reduced to a manageable level. When the possibilities are too numerous, they represent “chaos” that causes “the loss of a sense of the very reality of things that of other persons” (p. 37). Even performing the most basic activities in life “demands the bracketing of a potentially infinite range of possibilities open to the individual” (p. 37). In the absence of routines and traditions, chaos emerges, and the individual experiences a “flooding in of anxiety” (p. 38).

Our daily routines are not simple actions based on immediate motivations. Rather, they are intricately enmeshed with core fundamental meaning structures. These meaning structures can be understood as composed of the basic existential answers regarding the nature of existence, finitude, the experience of others, and continuity of self-identity (Giddens, 1991). Kronman (2007) describes such connections between our daily routines and core meaning structures as a pyramid. On the base of the pyramid lies a wide array of small commitments that logistically structure the flow of our daily experiences. Yet all of them converge upwards to the apex of a small number of fundamental meaning structures. And it is the apex of the pyramid that provides the continuity and justification for the existence of our daily routine and commitments:

For the most part, the question of the purpose and value of life lies in the unnoticed background of the many, smaller questions I face and decide each day. But I know it is there. I know that even my smallest decisions are hinged on a set of ascending commitments to increasingly important values, each dependent on commitments and values of still greater importance. I know that the smallest units of meaning in my life are held in place by larger and larger units, reaching up, at their apex, to some conception of what living itself is for—unexpressed, perhaps inexpressible, but foundational. I know that my most ordinary and inconsequential decisions are saved from meaninglessness only because they rest upon this hierarchy of commitments. (p. 20)

In other words, the very structure that protects us from the anguish and insecurity of limitless possibilities in existential uncertainty is supported by the apex of our core meaning structures. They are our personal and limited representation of reality that serves to establish a stable and continuous sense of self, free of the distress of chaos and ambiguous existential possibilities.

Our core meaning structures, however, do not reflect abstracted cognitive theories of the world. Rather, they are derived from embodied participation in the social world through sustained habits and routines.²⁵ Many of these derive from the one's engagement in responsibilities of work, family, and various other social and community involvements. As Jones and Raisborough (2007) write, it is the “series of communal and social solidarities and identities... [that help] the individual to impose meaning on the social world” (p. 16), and which helped them achieve “some degree of ontological security” (p. 16). Yet for emerging adults whose responsibilities are “deferred,” opportunities to participate in long-term embodied routines

²⁵ I will elaborate on this further in section 4.3.

through the establishment of a family and continuous professional roles are less available.

Instead, emerging adults resort to an *inward* journey to construct meaning within themselves²⁶.

Disengagement from the external world as an embodied source of meaning represents a vicious cycle of existential anguish that reinforces the psychological and social issues listed by Kass (2017) above. These destructive consequences are aptly captured in Laing's category of "ontological insecurity." The formation of one's ontological security can be further understood with reference to D.W. Winnicott's discussions regarding the importance of social relationships.

4.2 Ontological Insecurity

R.D. Laing (1969) describes the absence of stable and continuous meaning structures as a condition of ontological insecurity. Specifically, ontological insecurity is the condition of self where it is not felt as firmly real and alive. It is a self that is constantly on the brink of its own dissolution, unable to participate in the world without fixating on the preservation of its own existence on the ontological level.²⁷ For the self to be ontologically secure, it must have "an inner consistency, substantiality, genuineness, and worth" (Laing, 1969, p. 41), which is founded upon solid meaning structures. Without such inner foundations, the external world is experienced as a place where the self is always exposed to the risks of falling into a state of "non-being" (p. 77).

²⁶ This inwardness is not exactly the same as the educational iteration of inwardness as discussed in chapters two and three. The educational inwardness is an intellectual and philosophical orientation that may or may not imply an existential and psychological component. It is one thing to derive understanding of reality through the certitude in one's own inner system of rationality, it is another to construct *fundamental meaning and purpose* through one's inner experiences. One is intellectually-based whereas the other is existentially-based (containing psychological consequences). Intellectual inwardness is existentially possible whereas existential inwardness is not, hence resulting in problematic psychological and social behaviours if left untended. The main issue is – especially for emerging adults in higher education – when the intellectual inwardness becomes co-opted as a rationale justifying existential inwardness. This is something I will further elaborate throughout this chapter.

²⁷ The fixation is *not* simply the pursuit of psychological comfort, but a deep striving *for being*.

In social relationships, the ontological insecure person may experience what Laing (1969) terms “engulfment,” which occurs when the attention of social others threatens to completely overwhelm the existence of their self. Laing (1969) gives an example of engulfment by quoting one of his patients: “I can’t go on. You are arguing in order to have the pleasure of triumphing over me. At best you win an argument. At worst you lose an argument. I am arguing in order to preserve my existence” (p. 43).

The causes of ontological insecurity can be traced to the conditions of one’s close relationships, which can be strongly connected to one’s developmental process. Child psychologist D.W. Winnicott (1989) theorized the notion of “holding” to be a crucial condition for the formation of a kind of security: an “inner-depth or creativity in the self” (p. 208) for “discovering her own personal life” (p. 208). Winnicott’s notion of holding may be understood as the experience of “being held” in both physical and psychological ways, referring to the child’s experience of safety and stability. During the developmental process, the child often experiences the distress of separation and helplessness, in which they recognize the conflict between their desires rooted in safety, comfort, and basic physical needs and the uncontrollable outcomes of the external world (Winnicott, 1965). According to Mahler, Pine, and Bergman (1975), the developing awareness of separation starts around the first and second years of age. Caregivers are increasingly recognized as separate agents with their own minds that are incapable of perfectly satisfying demands of the child at all times (Nussbaum, 2001). As such, the child confronts their dependent nature in relation to the care they receive from the environment. The child may progress to perceive their dependent nature varyingly, depending on how caregivers respond to their needs.

For Winnicott, the significance of holding for the child lies in its power to “provide protection from impingement” (Stark, 2002, p. 135) caused by the distressing experience of instability. Holding allows the child to experience an “uninterrupted continuity of being” (p. 135) that becomes internalized as an inner stability for the formation of a substantial and continuous self. If the caregiver responds to the child’s expression of dependency with consistent holding, where they are physically held and socially attended to with care, the child will eventually internalize the repeated experiences as an internal stability.

Essentially, what Winnicott’s discussion points to is the fundamental nature of the human experience and reality as *socially constituted*. That is, the social constitution of human experiences and reality precedes much of the formation of higher-order cognition, psychological, and social complexity and maturity. The formation of meaningful identity, inner substantiality, and continuity through embodied social relationships is not a learned behaviour but *an existential necessity intrinsic to the fact of being human*. The developmental foundation for a reliable sense of self and reality originates in the very fundamental condition of our sense of security in the presence of our caregivers. It is to have the experience of being “held” even in the absence of literal holding.

4.2.1 Defense and Compensatory Mechanisms

Inconsistent or minimal holding can lead a child to frame their dependence as negative, associating it with a lack of stability and certainty. The child then develops a fixation upon preserving their own inner substantiality, bypassing holding as a source of self and meaning formation. Meaning structures regarding the self, others, world, and their relations are disrupted,

resulting in a discontinuity that easily becomes a destabilization. This discontinuity may persist into adulthood, especially if the opportunities to resolve epistemic ambiguities through social holding are inadequate or entirely absent. This may occur either through the absence of developmental stability, the precarious conditions of emerging (or deferred) adulthood, or both. In either case, if ontological insecurity remains unresolved, an individual may engage in defensive mechanisms that can exacerbate the situation.

Defensive mechanisms operate to temporarily restore internal stability and substantiality even in the absence of social holding and its derived embodied meaning. Laing (1969) identifies two major defensive mechanisms, “isolation” and “depersonalization.” When the self is completely isolated, it is freed from the fluctuating uncertainties in the social world that threaten to dissolve the self into non-being. Habitual and prolonged isolation is seen as necessary by the ontologically insecure in order to avoid the distress of dissolution brought on by social participation. Isolation does not exclusively refer to physical isolation, it may also refer to the tendency of the individual to hide authentic expressions of their personalities or beliefs through the adoption of various personas.

An instance of isolation and its consequences is demonstrated by one of Laing’s (1969) patients, James, in *The Divided Self*. James engaged in social interactions by adopting personas that hid expressions of dependency from others. This manifested as being incredibly compliant with others’ beliefs and thoughts without the imposition of his own position. Consequently, James would often complain that he “was becoming more and more a ‘mythical person.’ He felt he “had no weight, no substance of his own” (p. 48) and that he was only a “response to other people” with “no identity of my own” (p. 47). James experienced social others as an overbearing,

“solid, decisive, emphatic, and substantial,” which threatened to shatter his “light weight, uncertainty, and insubstantiality” (p. 48). In other words, James’ defensive mechanism of isolation was not sustainable. It further reinforced a feeling of inner insubstantiality as he withdrew himself to be authentically a part of the social world (which provides the opportunities of *holding* his dependent nature into a state of inner stability and substantiality in the first place).

The self can also depersonalize others into “things,” which become deprived of any independent and intentional subjectivity of their own. If others are reduced into things, then the self remains safely guarded against any incoming threats of engulfment. This does not necessarily entail physical domination as much a *private perceptual* erasure of others’ subjectivity and agency. This defensive mechanism is also demonstrated by James when he discusses his relationship with his wife. James repeatedly regarded his wife as an “it,” and saw her actions to be indicative of outcomes of mere behavioural conditioning resembling a “robot-like” (p. 49) nature. Without assigning any subjective agency to another, James “robbed the other of his power to crush him” (p. 48). In either case of isolation and depersonalization, the self is preserved because it evades the dialectical reciprocity in relationships with others and the world.

Both isolation and depersonalization are driven by the desire to preserve one’s inner sense of stability and continuity. In a way, both mechanisms direct the individual to attain a sense of omnipotence where independent invincibility replaces social dependency as Laing (1969) describes:

in one sense is trying to be omnipotent by enclosing within his own being, without recourse to a creative relationship with others, modes of relationship that require the effective presence to him of other people and of the outer world. (p. 75)

However, inner substantiality and continuity is derived from the creative relationships with others. The creative relationship is one without rigid control. It thrives on interactions that are embodied and spontaneous (lacking the necessity of a script or cognitive planning). It is these embodied and spontaneous exchanges that loosen the fortification of omnipotence such that the self's dependence and imperfections are openly exposed to one another. The relationship becomes a site for the formation of meaning, substantiality, and continuity through a mutual *holding* of each other's exposed "authentic self."²⁸

The formation of inner continuity and substantiality protects the self from the external uncertainties of the world. One becomes capable of standing on firm ground, confident in their continuous and stable existence even in the face of the uncertain and fluctuating nature of others and the world. Without this foundation, one encloses "within his own being" (p. 75), such that creative relationships and transformative dependency within them are eliminated for their distressing risks. The self is preserved in an isolated perfection either in the company of others or in solitude. One bypasses their existential requirements as a social being by committing to the creation of meaning and self-identity solely within the self. A rigid omnipotence and total control is maintained, expressed as a pathological personality that is necessarily formed by the heavy pressure of neglecting its fundamental nature as a *social being*.

The consequences of inwardness as a defensive mechanism are, as Laing (1969) describes: "safety for the true self, isolation and hence freedom from others, self-sufficiency, and control" (p. 75). On the other hand, however, its disadvantages are the destructive cycle of perpetual

²⁸ The "authentic self" here is described in psychological terms based on Laing, where the fixation on omnipotence is loosened such that creative relationships become possible.

ontological insecurity caused by the inability “to be enriched by outer experience, and so the whole inner world comes to be more and more impoverished, until the individual may come to feel he is merely a vacuum” (p. 75). The social being becomes deprived of her vitality by continuously neglecting that which constitutes her fact of being – social and creative relationships. The vacuity and futility then cause the world and others to appear to be intimidatingly distressing, forcing the individual to perpetually maintain defensive mechanisms for an unresolved ontological insecurity.

4.3 Creative Relationships Versus Rigidity

The absence of creative relationships and the continuous fixation on the preservation of one’s omnipotence can manifest as highly rigid behaviours. This can be illustrated by both Laing’s patient David in *The Divided Self* and Winnicott’s (1989) description of “Patient B” in *Holding and Interpretation*. David is described as being attached to the expressions of pre-scripted identities in the social world that left no room for spontaneity. In social situations, David presented himself in manners that reflected a strict vigilance and control over his actions and expressions. To be spontaneous was a risky disposition, “It was simply putting oneself at other people’s mercy” (p.72). Winnicott’s (1989) “Patient B” also exhibited similar behaviours of extreme self-control and vigilance that extinguished any degree of spontaneity. Unless a specific role or identity within a professional or formal setting was assigned to him, Patient B would be frozen in a “lifeless persona...by constant vigilance over language and thought” (p. 194). Patient B was unable “to be spontaneous or express any personal thought,” and Winnicott writes that the “petrified and lifeless persona he presented to others was an attempt to maintain omnipotent

control over his inner world” (p. 78). Their adoption of the rigid personas served to protect them from the distress of their own vulnerable dependent nature. Enforcing control through rigidity, therefore, is to reduce the experience of anxiety in a world that does not feel stable, certain and reliable.

Both Laing’s (1969) and Winnicott’s (1989) case examples demonstrate psychological difficulties related to the idea of freedom that are reminiscent of the existentialist position of Jean-Paul Sartre (1957) in *Being and Nothingness*. David and Patient B demonstrated behaviours that closely resemble what Sartre (1957) terms “bad faith” (p. 89). One has bad faith when one forgoes his existential freedom in exchange for pre-established meaning structures. In Sartre’s view, human beings are not exclusively defined by pre-determined meaning structures, such as religion, politics, how others perceive us, the roles that we are assigned in society, or even the manner in which we perceive ourselves. Rather, our subjectivity does not need to be defined by external sources of belief. Subjectivity exists as nothingness in itself, and as such, it has the capacity to confront freedom. The open possibilities of such freedom are felt as the distress of instability and uncertainty, which an individual of bad faith attempts to mitigate through conformity to pre-determined meaning structures.

The Sartrean understanding of freedom and bad faith arguably resembles the case descriptions provided by both Laing and Winnicott. Without an internal foundation of meaning structures, one confronts the nothingness of subjectivity. The nothingness of subjectivity is experienced as the chaotic and ambiguous possibilities in which an internal meaning structure that narrows these possibilities down to a tolerable degree is absent. This absence leads to the negation of possibilities (bad faith) through rigidity and pursuit of omnipotence, which results in

“having no substance of his own” (p. 48) in the case of David and the “lifeless persona” in the case of Patient B. Sartre’s (1957) description of bad faith through the example of his observations of a waiter further illuminates the connections between existentialist and clinical discourses²⁹:

Let us consider this waiter in the café. His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid...trying to imitate in his walk the inflexible stiffness of some kind of automaton...All his behaviours seem to us a game. He applies himself to chaining his movements as if they were mechanisms, the one regulating the other; his gestures and even his voice seem to be mechanisms...He is playing...he is playing at being a waiter in a café. (p. 101-102)

Being a waiter automatically provides him the readied scripts, directions and purpose. Creative relationships with others are not necessary for his sense of stability and certainty. Laing’s (1969) David indulged in his profession as an actor to take on personas as a defense against his sense of extreme vulnerability. He was unable to truly express himself in the social world without the continuous adoption of his impersonations. His impersonations meant that he could “be master of the situation, in entire conscious control of his expression and actions, calculating with precision their effects on others” (Laing, 1969, p. 72). Impersonation, therefore, represented a calculable and controllable certainty, where the distress of instability of the world could be averted.

In the extreme clinical cases, the individual commits so much to their rigid impersonations that their lives begin to feel vacuous. They no longer experience the world,

²⁹ Although Sartre is not explicitly discussing the experience of bad faith on a psychiatric level, it is undeniable that the aspect of *existential freedom* is significant in the psychiatric conditions that Laing describes. Sartre’s waiter may not be debilitated at the psychiatric level, but his state of being is nevertheless intrinsic to the psychiatric extremes described by Laing. In other words, the psychiatric conditions discussed by Laing and Winnicott have a dimension that is inevitably *existential* in a manner that is Sartrean – that is, the struggle with the tension between freedom and fixed-identity. My inclusion of Sartrean discourse is not to necessarily equate his position with Laing and Winnicott but to extend the discourse from the psychiatric to the existential in order to establish a connection.

others and themselves as real, because they have lost themselves in the “game” of the roles of the actor or the waiter. They retreat into what Laing (1969) terms a “false-self” (p. 69). The inauthentic false-self is essentially deprived of the life of others. For the game of roles and personas never allow true contact with others so one is never held by others’ presence. The self shrivels inside the citadel of protective inauthenticity and false-self, as it is never truly addressed and brought forth within creative relationship and holding with others.

The pursuit of omnipotence deprives the individual of creative relationships where internal stability and continuity may be cultivated from embodied meaning. Martha Nussbaum (2001) discusses the notion of creative “subtle interplays” (p. 196), where interactions are driven by spontaneous expressions of play between “imperfect beings” (p. 196). It is a form of what Debra Dudek (2017) refers to as “reciprocal, mutual love” (p. 13), where the fixation on rigid control and omnipotence of both parties are loosened for the sake of recognizing dependency upon each other. This represents a risky situation in which one’s vulnerable, dependent nature may be rejected and may induce the distress of instability. Yet it is through the trust of the other to hold and accept one’s dependency that one begins to eliminate their fear of instability and, hence, their fear of dissolution. If one never relaxes the persona of rigid omnipotence and perfection, creative exchange in subtle interplay becomes impossible, barring possibilities for internal self-formation (Laing, 1969).

Shaun Gallagher (2014) argues that “One’s *own* existence is something that one experiences in the kinds of pragmatic projects that one shares with others” (p. 2). Inner-depth of the self then emerges based on the manner that others respond to us such that we internalize their attention to us as a base for our own self-existence. Interacting with others requires a coordinated dance between two parties and the referential object of interest that anchors the attention of both

parties in between. As such, the self is brought into the world as an entity participating in spatial and temporal relation to social others and shared objects of communicative interest. This is what Carlos Corenjo (2008) refers to as a “minimal communicative situation” (p.172), composed of “Subject-Other-Shared Object.” It provides the basis for comprehension of and relation to the world. As Corenjo writes:

comprehension is produced if and only if a common experiencing exists. Consequently, intersubjectivity is here defined as the space when we are being-in-the-world-with-others. It requires the triadic convergence among a shared phenomenological experiencing between two persons on a common world. (p. 174)

The self is brought into a meaningful existence only in the intersubjective space shared with others in the form of the minimal communicative situation. Others serve as a perceptual anchor through which we are brought into the world as meaningful entities. We take the cues of others’ attention to our presence as a perceptual foundation that informs our recognition of our self as substantially meaningful, in the sense that the self is felt as real instead of the insubstantial lifelessness experienced by David or Patient B. In other words, self-formation of stable meaning structures occurs by the attending of others attending to us.

For the ontologically insecure, the minimum communicative situation represents potential engulfment. To be brought forth into the world by others’ attention is synonymous with “putting oneself at other people’s mercy” (Laing, 1969, p. 72). The responses of the others in communicative exchanges are not taken to be direct reflections of one’s authentic self, rather, they are received as strengthening the false-self. The false-self is not attended to as to be situated in relation to the shared communicative object of the world. Instead, the authentic self remains perpetually in deterioration, as its realness is not cultivated by others. One’s attending to the world involves only the inauthentic game of the false-self. Both the sense of self and sense of the

world then begin to dissolve into “merely a vacuum” (p. 75), as demonstrated in David’s case. Ontologically security, Giddens (1991) argues, requires one to possess the “answers to fundamental existential questions” (p. 48). These answers are derived from the creative relationships rooted in the subtle interplay with others in the communicative situation, where our sense of self, the world, and our relation between the two can be brought forth as meaningfully substantial.

4.4 Normalization of Ontological Insecurity

Students in higher education are frequently ontologically insecure due to pre-existing combinations of developmental history and the precarious stage of emerging (deferred) adulthood. The problem is the way that higher education has evolved to *normalize* the experience of ontological insecurity. This normalization reframes ontological insecurity - it is not viewed as a problem but as an inherent characteristic of human experience. I believe this condition of normalization is more prevalent in the philosophical and pedagogical environment of the humanities than elsewhere in higher education.

Michael Gibbons (1994) in his book *New Productions of Knowledge* identifies the manner in which the humanities produce knowledge through the process of reflexivity. Gibbons (1994) defines reflexivity as the “process by which individuals involved in knowledge production try to operate from the standpoint of all actors involved” (p. 168). Knowledge production within the humanities does not consist of the observational distance to the same degree as implicated by social and hard sciences. Instead, knowledge and meaning are understood as contextualized within the participation of the observer. It is to avoid the epistemological traps of the presumed objectivity of the intellectual distance emphasized in other

disciplines. Gibbons argues that reflexivity holds the danger of “a demoralizing relativism” (p. 102) that leads to “ontological insecurity” (p. 103) resulting in an “institutionalization of doubt” (p. 103) if not handled with critical intellectual care and rigor. Fixed truths and meanings are never given in this reflexive practice, as Gibbons writes:

All givens must be mistrusted because they represent the treacherous reassurances of tradition which inhibit reflexivity. All utopian prescriptions must be denied – because they foreclose future reflexivity which, by definition, must be endlessly open-ended. Even science, even Reason are suspect. Proof, after all, is terminal. (p. 103)

This description resembles Kramer’s (2000) observations that humanities professors and curricula promoted a reflexive discourse in which truth is epistemologically rooted in everyone’s voice such that the abstracted objectivity ceases to exist. This reflexivity does not necessarily induce ontological insecurity as much as normalize it as an intrinsic condition. Namely, the existential striving of students for objective truths and meaning can be trivially as misdirected in its hope for objectivity at all.

An educational environment of potentially unbounded relativism and reflexive practice, can be described using Karen Carr’s (1992) category of “banalized nihilism”— a fairly recent discourse where nihilism is repositioned from a historical to an ahistorical condition. For instance, Friedrich Nietzsche (1968) portrayed nihilism as a historical process that resulted in the collapse of the fundamental meaning and moral structures of his culture. Nietzschean nihilism is meant to be a temporary stage in a process of liberation and not an inherent condition to be embraced as an end in itself. Nietzsche (1968) in *Will to Power* specifically argues that “Nihilism represents a pathological transitional stage” (p. 13), and continues with “what is pathological, is the tremendous generalization, the inference that there is no meaning at all” (p. 13). Carr (1992) argues that Nietzschean nihilism has been gradually reframed as an ahistorical

intrinsic nature of reality itself throughout the recent 20th century. In the humanities, the absence of objective truths can be accepted as normal. Pedagogical approaches do not necessarily reject the pursuit for truths as much as they accept that *there were none* to begin with.

In the humanities, an ahistorical, normalized nihilism can be linked to the deconstructionist position, a major theoretical movement and a form of literary and philosophical analysis based on the work of Jacques Derrida (1930-2004). Deconstructionist philosophy and pedagogical engagements were widely dispersed throughout various disciplines such as philosophy, literature, history, feminism, gender studies, and so on (Holland n.d.).

Deconstruction examines the derivation of meaning from texts through the analysis of the nature of textual language itself. In this approach, textual meaning is not directly represented by the language, but by the relations that exist between linguistic forms. This process underlies what Derrida refers to as “différance” (or deferral of meaning), where there is no fundamental objective meaning represented by the linguistic forms in the text (Wood & Bernasconi, 1988, p. 31). As philosopher Stephen Hicks (2011) writes: “Language is an “internal,” self-referential system, and there is no way to get “external” to it—although even to speak of “internal” and “external” is also meaningless on postmodern grounds. There is no non-linguistic standard to which to relate language, so there can be no standard by which to distinguish between the literal and the metaphorical, the true and the false” (p. 175-176). Malcolm Bradbury (1991) states that throughout “the 70’s the seminar rooms on American campuses – and the campuses worldwide – became workshops in deconstructionist practice” (para. 7).

Deconstruction was accused of being nihilistic, due to its rejection of any objective truth and morality beyond the confines of particular discourses or cultural values. J. Hillis Miller (1991) addressed these charges against deconstruction through the reframing of nihilism as a

condition inherent within metaphysics: “nihilism is the latent ghost encrypted within any expression of a logocentric system” (p. 151). It is through the affirmation of metaphysics as the main doctrine for philosophical and cultural discourse, that its absence also emerges as significant. Miller (1991) regards the emergence of nihilism as “parasitic” (p. 447) resting latently as an inevitable possibility in the “host” (p. 441) of metaphysics.

Deconstruction, Miller (1991) argues, "is not nihilism nor metaphysics but simply interpretation as such, the untangling of inherence of metaphysics in nihilism and of nihilism in metaphysics by way of the close reading of texts" (p. 153). In other words, nihilism is only problematic if the host of metaphysics is supported philosophically. Deconstruction, therefore, stands outside the affirmation of metaphysics (and nihilism) through what Miller refers to as a “reversal” (p. 446). If metaphysics is understood to be intrinsically empty, then its absence is not a condition of deterioration, but an insight into what has always been the case. It is to abandon the validity of metaphysics entirely so that its absence is no longer affirmed as a parasite in the first place. Miller’s (1991) move is not to necessarily reject the conditions of nihilism in deconstruction, but it is to reframe what nihilism is so that it no longer poses a problem to deconstruction. The end result is that nihilism is reframed as an intrinsic condition which deconstruction only observes and untangles from metaphysics. Deconstruction is not nihilistic, rather, it reveals the inherent condition of our experience.

Richard Rorty (1982) reframes nihilism, which he views as an opportunity to bolster the bonds we have in our particular culture and communities rather than a condition of loss of the security within the transcendent realm of truth and meaning. When individuals are exposed to the finitude of their knowledge and existence, “with no links to something Beyond” (p. xlii-xliii), we

are also provided with the opportunity to commit to the value of our local communities. Rorty (1982) writes about the transition from Truth to small-case “truth” rooted in the community:

Christians have hoped it might be attained by becoming attuned to the voice of God in the heart, and Cartesians that it might be fulfilled by emptying the mind and seeking the indubitable [...] philosophers have hoped that it might be fulfilled by finding the a priori structure of any possible inquiry, or language, or form of social life. If we give up this hope, we shall lose what Nietzsche called ‘metaphysical comfort,’ but *we may gain a renewed sense of community*.³⁰ Our identification with our community – our society, our political tradition, our intellectual heritage – is heightened when we see this community ours rather than nature’s, shaped rather than found, one among many which men have made. (p. 166)

The source of “truth” is brought down from the metaphysical heavens or away from the scientific presumption of objectivity and into the mundane realm of our own communities. Yet it should be kept in mind (for my discussion in the later sections) that Rorty’s (1982) middle way is not necessarily freed from the potential issues of relativism³¹. If it is within the community that we may derive the conditions for truth and meaning, then the arbitrariness charged at individual subjectivism is just as problematic as it is for communally-based truths. The middle way does not appeal to a greater objective framework to which the moral and epistemological expressions of each community can be judged. Conditions for truth and morality remain sound internally within the community, yet an unresolved relativism arises externally between communities. Truth then becomes justified relativism in lieu of the integrity and preferences of the group instead.

³⁰ My italics.

³¹ It should be noted that Rorty rejects the label relativism. Instead, he referred to his perspective as “ethnocentrism.” He argues that relativists claim that all truths are equally good and/or true, which he rejects. Instead, what is considered “good” or “true” is derived from one’s communal solidarity. Such a position has remained contentious insofar as he attempts to avoid being a relativist at all, as argued by both Putnam (1999) and Boghossian (2006). (Carter & Baghrarian, 2015).

What both Miller and Rorty philosophically contributed to is a banalization of nihilism where nihilism becomes an ahistorical inherency. They do not see it as a cause for concern, but as a revelation of the way things have always been. Banalized nihilism in practices such as deconstruction then normalizes the experiences of ontological insecurity (often in the experience of meaninglessness). Arthur Zajonc (2010) in *The Heart of Higher Education* reveals his experiences with the outcome of banalized nihilism in pedagogical discourse:

some of Amherst College's brightest students who, having mastered the philosophy and techniques of deconstruction [...] lamented the subsequent loss of meaning and sought ways to regain the value of the texts themselves and a purpose to their lives. (p. 63)

This is not to argue against deconstructionism's philosophical soundness as much as to illuminate the existential consequences expressed as psychological and social difficulties by the students.

The danger of such banalization of nihilism is what Carr (1992) regards as the "aestheticization of preferences" (p. 168), where morally unhinged ideologies become justified. If there are no absolute objective truths, then what remains is the voice and will of the community. The community provides both the philosophical authority for objectivity and existential solace for "truth" and meaning. Communication between communities, therefore, must resort to negotiation of different and conflicting truths rather than being based on common principles. Without common principles, communication is more thoroughly affected by power. The community no longer represents a means to achieve the end goal of truth, for it now is the end in itself. Without its attachment to transcendent and objective truths, its ideological positions fall under the whim of short-sighted communal urges and preferences. In concert with the communicative conditions of power between groups, the aestheticization of preferences

represents a risky prospect that “fosters a blind dogmatism that neither knows nor can know its limits” (p. 171). Such understanding of the notion of objective truths replaced the general humanistic conception of education with one that “converted truth to power...” (Kronman, 2007, p. 89).

Carr (1992) presumes that the loss of transcendent truths leads to dogmatism. She implicitly assumes that all people need some transcendent form of truth. However, I argue it is more likely the case that the degree of the *rigid* attachment³² to transcendent truths reflects the degree of ontological insecurity that drives it. In other words, dogmatic behaviours are not intrinsic to the extent that ontological insecurity is not intrinsic. It is a reaction to the unfulfilled demands of our existential nature, which I argue is not entirely contingent upon the presence of absolute transcendent truths as much as the presence of *embodied truths derived from social relationships*.

The danger of banalized nihilism is its potential to reinforce the latent inclination for dogmatism in the already ontologically insecure, such as emerging adult students. This is the reason why the normalizing of ontological insecurity in higher education from especially the humanities represents a problematic risk. Yet ontological insecurity does not only represent experiences of existential distress but is also an opportunity for transformation into something better³³. For the instability and discontinuity of the self presents opportunities for radical and positive transformative learning. However, normalization causes ontological insecurity to lose

³² Jost et al. (2007) conducted three studies which showed that the rigid attachment to political views and ideology are significantly related to the psychological function of the management of existential threats and uncertainty.

³³ The instability and uncertainty of fundamental meaning structures can often times act as the catalyst for transformative learning. This is known as the stage of “disorienting dilemma” (1994, p. 224) under Jack Mezirow’s model of transformative learning.

“its potentially transformative and redemptive power, and becomes instead simply a banal characterization of the human situation” (Carr, 1992, p. 12). Transformation is halted without the prospect to re-establish meaningful continuity and stability. One remains in a limbo of uncertainty thought “normal” without explicit prospects for its resolution.

Without the possibility of redemptive transformation, what remains are the defensive mechanisms necessary to cope with ontological insecurity. It is here that Rorty’s communally-based middle way seems to bend towards ideological extremism and rigidity. It is risky insofar as it becomes a safe refuge against the distressing yet banalized reality of absolute nothingness. Commitment to one’s communal identity and ideology as a source of relief from the distress of ontological insecurity represents an exceedingly convenient coping mechanism – where tendencies of depersonalization may very well overshadow the prospects of creative relationships. Given the opportunities of banalized nihilism and ethnocentrism, it is certainly easier to simply depersonalize instead of actively confronting the risks of creative relationships (even though this is the fundamental source of meaning and embodied truths), especially in the absence of a pedagogy that addresses this tendency.

4.5 The Authoritarian Character

The ease with which individuals can depersonalize others is captured by Erich Fromm’s (1941) discussion of the “authoritarian character” (p. 191) in *Escape from Freedom*. Fromm (1941) explains the consequences of “individuation” (p. 21), where the individual develops into their own independent sense of self separate from their caregivers (as an infant) and from the rest of the world (as an adult). In relation to ontological insecurity, individuation does reflect a substantial self as much as a sense of existential aloneness (which may point to an

insubstantiality of the self). Namely, it consists of the immense experiences of “powerlessness and anxiety” (p. 54), as “When one has become an individual, one stands alone and faces the world in all its perilous and overpowering aspects”. (p. 24). When this happens at a group level, ideological conservatism rises as a coping mechanism where a sense of security may be restored: “If the individual finds cultural patterns that satisfy these [...] strivings, he gains some security by finding himself united with millions of others who share these feelings” (p. 131). Fromm terms such a personality as a “somasochistic character” (p. 140).

Fromm’s (1941) somasochistic character is not a sexual category. Rather, it is the personality that inclines towards both the *elimination and enlargement of itself*. They aim to submit the freedom and power of their self to a greater authority (ideology, leader, or specific group values) to “overcome the awareness of my separateness as an individual” (p. 131) and to be “saved from the doubt of what the meaning of his life is or who ‘he’ is” (p. 134). Yet at the same time, they endeavor to enlarge their sense of self through the imposition of control by making “the object a will-less instrument” (p. 135) as to make “another being part of myself and thereby I gain the strength I lack as an independent self” (p. 137). Authoritarianism provides the ideal environment for the somasochist character, where individuals may “admire authority, but at the same time...be an authority [...] and have others submit” (p. 141) to them. It allows the individual to submit to a supreme power of ideological authority as well as enforce absolute control over others as a proxy for the regime.

I believe Fromm’s (1941) somasochistic character is the group level iteration of Laing’s description of defensive mechanisms of the false-self. Namely, the defenses of the false-self satisfy the conditions of the somasochistic character. For one, the false-self represents a rigid superstructure that one submits to in order to avert the experience of engulfment. In the

Laing's (1969) case of David in *The Divided Self*, he has adopted various personas, each of which are equipped with preloaded scripts and directives for behaviours and reactions as a way to ease the threat of being engulfed and dissolved. From Fromm's perspective, David demonstrated a *masochistic* disposition where his self was willingly submitted to the rigid superstructure of his false-selves. However, it may also appear that Fromm and Laing emphasize different dimensions of the process of self-submission. Laing (1969) describes the adoption of a false-self as a defense against the "dissolution into non-being," whereas Fromm appears to claim the opposite by saying that self-submission is itself a willingness to dissolve into non-being. Yet perhaps their apparent difference rests on different levels of analysis.

Fromm (1941) describes an individuated self as being burdened by the experiences of powerlessness and anxiety. This is comparable to Laing's notion of the ontologically insecure self. Both conditions of the self are afflicted by distress. The individuated self is distressed by the anguish of its existential freedom, and the ontologically insecure self is distressed by the potential of being devoured by the external social world. Both experiences of anguish and fear of being devoured reflect a debilitating sense of discontinuity and instability of the self. In order to remove the burdening distress of the self, one may adopt the masochistic character to reduce it to being "merely forgotten" (Fromm, 1941, p. 135) under a superstructure. Similarly, the ontologically insecure self adopts a false-self so that it "feels safe...in hiding, and isolated" (Laing, 1969, p. 76). In both cases, the self is entirely removed from the social world and from any possibilities of the creative social holding of subtle interplay. The masochistic character neglects the self whereas the false-self protects it. If the masochistic neglect of the self under the submission of a superstructure serves to ease the distress, the superstructure that subsumes the self implicitly represents a protective function that provides a sense of security. On the other

hand, the false-self isolates and hides the self in manners that it is neglected to be any part of the social world, resulting in its own impoverishment, “until the individual may come to feel he is merely a vacuum” (p. 75). In a sense, self-protection comes through self-neglect because the self is removed as a creative participant in the threatening social world.

Returning to the connections between Fromm and Laing, the false-self also demonstrates a sadist component. Fromm (1941) describes the sadist character as reducing the social other to a “will-less instrument” (p. 136) so that one may freely expand their strength as a self. Such a process is reminiscent of the false-self in its tendency to depersonalize others into a “thing” that “has no subjectivity of its own, and hence can have no reciprocal intentions” (Laing, 1969, p. 76). Depersonalization serves as a protective mechanism because if the others are reduced into a thing, then the self cannot be engulfed by the attention of others. Laing (1969) writes: “He tries therefore to forestall his own petrification by turning others into stones. By doing this he feels he can achieve some measure of safety” (p. 76). Fromm’s description of the sadist appears to be similar. By enforcing absolute control and power over another, the sadist enlarges their sense of self in its strength and substantiality. The false-self’s depersonalization seeks to protect the self by objectifying others, yet the sadist seeks to actively absorb others into one’s self to attain a sense of symbiosis.³⁴ Their differences, however, do not represent conflicts against each other, for the element of depersonalization is *already implicit* within the sadist character. Laing’s depersonalization describes a private attitude or “inner intellectual Medusa’s head” (Laing, 1969, p. 48) in which Fromm’s sadist character behaviourally expresses through the exercise of

³⁴ A psychoanalytic term associated with the experience of union, especially as a concept to describe early infancy and their relationships with primary caregivers (Tissaw, 2000). Fromm’s (1941) notion of individuation represents an experience where the symbiotic union is lost and that the self confronts the world with full aloneness.

physical and ideological power. The sadist absorption of the others is an additional step after of an already-depersonalized other.

The connections of Laing's false-self with Fromm's sadomasochistic character illuminate a continuum between the level of the individual and the group. The presence of an ideology carried by communal solidarity then provides a platform reinforcing the coping mechanisms of the false-self. It allows both the safety of a false-self and the power of depersonalization. Fromm (1941) argues that authoritarianism is driven by sadomasochistic dispositions:

the essence of the authoritarian character has been described as the simultaneous presence of sadistic and masochistic drives. Sadism was understood as aiming at unrestricted power over another person more or less mixed with destructiveness; masochism as aiming at dissolving oneself in an overwhelmingly strong power and participating in its strength and glory. (p. 191)

The potential to mitigate sadomasochism lies in creative relationships. According to Fromm (1941), it is through the ability to “express what one genuinely feels and thinks” (p. 225) and the prevention of presenting a “pseudo self to others and oneself” (p. 225) that the self becomes “stronger and more solidified” (p. 225). In Laing's terms, it is to abandon the total control and omnipotence of a false-self in social relationships. It is to allow one's dependent nature to be exposed in its spontaneous and embodied manner. This means the self becomes vulnerable to engulfment and objectification, but this vulnerability is precisely what allows others to enrich the self into substantiality and continuity. The self is felt as substantial and continuous because it is charged with the stable foundation of embodied existential truths and meaning structures through others. The embodied existential truths as fundamental meaning structures then serve to anchor the authentic self's daily routines, which in turn prevent the anguish of existential freedom from driving one towards sadomasochism in the first place.

Sadomasochism in ideological attachments, therefore, reflects an unfulfilled existential condition in which the social others are denied as the sources of embodied truth and meaning.

Grand ideologies serve to limit the existential possibilities to a tolerable degree by deliberately adopting scripted and pre-existing meaning structures. Dogmatic meaning structures, therefore, are *not* gradually forged and sustained through the embodied routines of creative interplays, but *appropriated* as one's own (as a shared false self). The meaning structures are gained but conveniently without the risk of engulfment. However, appropriated meaning structures lack the substantiality that allows what Winnicott (1965) describes as the "inner depth and creativity in the self" (p. 208). Through the shared false-self of appropriated ideology, the private "Medusa's heads" (Laing, 1941, p. 48) then becomes "freed" from the burden of responsibility³⁵ and the risks of engulfment. It is legitimized in its opportunities to maximize the benefits of depersonalization. What results is the sadomasochistic authoritarian character who blindly adopts dogma, which reinforces the defensive mechanisms used to stave off the distress of ontological insecurity.

4.6 Ontological Insecurity in Higher Education and the Intersubjective Nature

Higher education is uniquely positioned to address ontological insecurity, as it can be highly involved in the stage of emerging adulthood (now viewed as the deferred) of the present day. Yet, due to banalized nihilism, iterated through various extreme reflexive and deconstructionist-based discourses, ontological insecurity becomes normalized. This holds the possibility of

³⁵ Consisting of the burden of reducing possibilities down to a tolerable level and ensuring that such possibilities are ethically sound. It is a burden insofar as the degree of ambiguous and open possibilities and ethical consequences may produce unbearable distress, especially for the ontologically insecure.

normalizing the malaise of ontological insecurity in manners that fuel the risks for ideological extremity and blind dogmatism. Defenses of depersonalization and rigid ideological attachments serve to maintain ontological insecurity, feeding into the cycle of that demands further defenses³⁶.

Current humanities pedagogy risks exacerbating the inward disposition of its students - where truth, meaning and ethics are solely derived from the self rather than mutually forged through social relationships in the external world. This does not mean that students become more introverted per se, rather, it is the manner in which the *existential condition* that they occupy *becomes severed* from opportunities for embodied meaning formation through creative interplay in intersubjectivity. To derive meaning from solely the isolated internal self is to *fundamentally oppose* our existential nature as intersubjective beings. By denying our fundamental existential nature, we risk experiencing our lives as “merely a vacuum” (Laing, 1969, p. 75). To be intersubjective is to be aligned with our fundamental existential condition where meaning (of the world) is forged and sustained through our involvement with others. It is an implicit existential condition and not an actively deliberated behaviour. Without intersubjective creative interplay, meaning structures do not form and sustain the self, or provide substantiality and continuity to the degree necessary for ontological security.

³⁶ One may argue that ideological attachments in the form of group affiliations represent an intersubjective opportunity where meaning structures may be formed. In other words, group affiliation is *not* an inward attitude, rather, they derive truth from the outside (namely, from the ideology that unifies the group). However, the group affiliation under the ideological rigidity and extremism presents a condition where truth, meaning, and ethics are *not* formed and sustained through creative interplay with others over time. Rather, they are *adopted* instead of formed, appropriated as one’s own rather than cultivated and sustained through others. In other words, it is still an *inward* disposition insofar as it is a process where one gains a sense of meaning where the creative relationship with others is fundamentally *absent*. Meaning is instead derived from a symbolic base (represented by ideology) without the necessity of *risky* creative interplay (as perceived by the ontologically insecure), as it is an existentially solitary endeavor that occurs through a group affiliation. In this case, one is *socially* engaged yet *existentially* isolated.

In higher education, this occurs as the intellectual position of inwardness (deriving truth and ethics from the internal model of understanding) *also becomes reinforced as a psychological defensive mechanism* (deriving meaning, omnipotence, and control within oneself) in response to an unresolved ontological insecurity. In other words, intellectual inwardness becomes transposed into an *existential and psychological* inwardness.³⁷ The divorce of such system from objectivist and realist notions of truth, ethics, and meaning (as discussed in the previous chapter), therefore, stimulates an unbending fixation on one's individual identity and voice as not only a philosophical stance, but also a preservation of one's being (hence, psychological health). What is urgently concerning, therefore, is *not solely* the fact that existential issues are not being sufficiently addressed in education, but also that one may be led to opposes their *fundamental intersubjective nature as a source of meaning* under the intellectual and pedagogical environment of education. My critique focuses not on what education is missing but what it changes for the worse: a reframing of the relation to truth and ethics such that it promotes an *existential isolation* inclined towards ideological rigidity and extremism.

4.6.1 Contemplative Pedagogical Possibilities

One of the dominant approaches that addresses the existential situation of students in higher education is contemplative pedagogy (Zajonc, 2013). Specifically, contemplative pedagogy consists of exercises that seek to integrate the experiential and personal facets of students into their learning process through practices such as meditation and personal reflection (Roth, 2016).

³⁷ Existential in the sense of being severed from intersubjectivity as a source of meaning and ontology, and psychological in the sense of behaving socially and privately towards isolation for emotional ease.

Despite its potential, contemplative pedagogical approaches and philosophies still harbour risks of worsening the issues of ontological insecurity. I believe their approaches reinforce the existential isolation of the inwardness of students, where their intersubjective nature is neglected. The emergence of the dominant philosophical foundations of contemplative pedagogy is rooted in the *mindfulness movement* in North American as well as *transpersonal discourse* in psychology and education. In the next two chapters, I will argue that contemplative pedagogy requires an alternate philosophical direction.

Specifically, I recommend a contemplative pedagogy that 1). acknowledges the importance of objective truth and meaning structures as providing the existential anchorage that stabilizes an individual's sense of self and that 2). truth and meaning are fundamentally formed *intersubjectively*. By emphasizing this intersubjectivity through contemplative pedagogy, students are sensitized into an *outwardness* necessary for ontological security. I will argue that a contemplative pedagogy that emphasizes intersubjectivity informed by the discourses of phenomenology and the traditional Theravāda Buddhist doctrine can accomplish this.

Chapter 5: History and Discourses of Contemplative Pedagogy

An increasingly popular educational approach that acknowledges the importance of existential truth and meaning is contemplative pedagogy. Contemplative pedagogy differs from its traditional educational counterpart in its emphasis on “first-personal learning.” Harold Roth, a religious studies scholar who founded the Contemplative Studies Initiative at Brown University, describes first-personal learning as an attempt to respond to the problem of alienation caused by the “neutrality” of third-personal approaches in traditional learning formats (Bush, 2011).

Traditional learning presumes that educational knowledge and a students’ personal experiences are separate. Knowledge is presented as objective and neutral, rather than subjective and evaluative (Roth, 2016). Roth argues that the subjective experiences of students are crucial to the learning process itself. Various scholars and instructors of higher education, such as Roth, advocate supplementing traditional learning with a first-personal approach rooted in contemplative practices such as mindfulness meditation.³⁸ Students learn mindful practices in order to establish greater awareness of their physical, emotional, and cognitive situation. This allows them to enhance their personal connection to the subject of study by bringing by bringing in first-personal experiences.

Arthur Zajonc describes first-personal learning through contemplative pedagogy as a “quiet revolution of the spirit” (2013, p. 90) in higher education. Yet despite its popularity, I believe contemplative pedagogy has the potential to exacerbate the issues of ontological insecurity. This problem is found in the two dominant philosophies of contemplative pedagogy

³⁸ Such mindfulness activities are heavily informed by the Buddhist practice rooted in *vipassanā* (meaning insight or clear seeing).

that inform mindfulness practices in the classroom. The first is *scientific-psychological mindfulness* and the second is *transpersonal mindfulness*. In my view, both philosophies fail to prevent the dangerous outcomes of ontological insecurity amongst emerging adults. In the case of scientific-psychological mindfulness, there is a lack of attention to the formation of ethical character, and in the case of transpersonal mindfulness, there is an excessive emphasis on special meditative peak states.

Although derived from Buddhism, mindfulness today does not necessarily reflect a strict adherence to traditional Buddhist discourse as much as it does an amalgamation of reinterpretations, heavily informed by clinical psychotherapy, neuroscience, and psychological research. This focus on science (in what I label scientific-psychological mindfulness) has lead mindfulness-based pedagogy to be dismissive of Buddhist ethical frameworks. Without an adherence to the moral dimensions of contemplative pedagogical engagements, a student may be deprived of the opportunity to establish and sustain ontological security.³⁹

Mindfulness-based pedagogy can also reflect the influences of transpersonal psychology (what I label transpersonal mindfulness) which presents the risk of what Welwood (2000) terms “spiritual bypassing” (p. 209). In the philosophy of transpersonal psychology, the goal of education is to actualize the potential of the individual student. The highest potential of the student, transpersonalists argue, is to be found in the experiences of transcendent spiritual states. The notion of spiritual states in transpersonal psychology can arguably be traced to psychologist Abraham Maslow’s understanding of the experience of self-transcending individuals, where they

³⁹ In this case, the condition of ontological security implicitly involves a moral dimension where the social others are regarded as a source of intersubjective meaning. The relation between the moral dimension and ontological security will be further elaborated in the subsequent chapter.

are “rare, exciting, oceanic, deeply moving, exhilarating, elevating experiences that generate an advanced form of perceiving reality, and are even mystic and magical in their effect upon the experiment” (Craighead & Nemeroff, 2001, p. 1156). In transpersonal mindfulness, the transpersonal influences can manifest as a preoccupation with spiritual experiences at the expense of neglecting the social world. Neglect of the social world, I argue, risks perpetuating ontological insecurity.

In this chapter, I will discuss the genealogy of mindfulness-based pedagogy, and the risks of both scientific-psychological and transpersonal mindfulness. In the following chapter, I will present a possible alternative that stresses *intersubjectivity* by drawing upon Theravāda Buddhism, particularly its theories of ontology and causation, through the doctrine of “dependent co-arising” (Pali: *paṭicca-samuppāda*). I will argue that a re-contextualization of specific Theravāda Buddhist notions of intersubjectivity, with attention to contemporary phenomenological and existential philosophy, can structure a mindfulness-based pedagogy that acknowledges and overcomes the dangers of ontological insecurity.

In order to elaborate upon the two dominant philosophies of both scientific-psychological and transpersonal mindfulness, I will first present the history of their emergence and involvement in contemplative pedagogy. This will involve the outlining of the laicization process of meditation and its growing accessibility to the North American public, facilitated by key figures amongst the Southeast Asian Theravāda monastic community, lay American meditation teachers, transpersonalistic-based educators, as well as therapeutic and scientific experts.

5.1 Vipassanā and Laicization

The North American interest in and perception of Buddhism did not always demonstrate a ready recognition of its practical psychological benefits for the laity. Prior to the 20th century, the notion of mindfulness in its current definition, as a psychological tool to cultivate awareness on one's thoughts or emotions, was absent in the North American intellectual lexicon (Wilson, 2014). The Pali Buddhist term *sati* was first translated as “mindfulness” or “thoughtfulness” in the late 19th century (Thomas William Rhys David's translated publication of *The Questions of Kind Milinda* in 1890 and Albert J. Edmund's translation of the *Dhammapada* in 1902) (Wilson, 2014, p. 17). Other early translations of *sati* included “memory” or “remembrance” (Grossman & Van Dam, 2011, 0. 219). *Sati* is part of the Noble Eightfold Path, a broader, interconnected framework for Buddhist practice, where it is technically termed as *sammā-sati*,⁴⁰ or “Right Mindfulness.” The Noble Eightfold Path is designed to lead to *nibbāna*, which refers to the “blowing out,” or “extinguishing” of a fire, which is a metaphor for the process of liberation from the cycle of rebirth and the cessation of suffering (Collins, 1998, p. 96).

As above, “mindfulness” was only one of many translations for *sati* in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Early American popularizers of Buddhism, such as Henry Steel Olcott and Paul Carus, used different words. Olcott discussed *sati* as “right memory” in *Buddhist Catechism According to the Canon of the Southern School* (1881, p. 10), and Carus would later describe *sati* as “right self-discipline” in *The Dharma, The Religion of Enlightenment* (1907, p. 25). Buddhist

⁴⁰ *Sammā-sati* is part of a greater system, consisting of 6 other sections of “right” practices, such as *sammā-diṭṭhi* (“right view”), *sammā-sankappa* (“right intention”), *sammā-vācā* (“right speech”), *sammā-kammanta* (“right action”), *sammā-ājīva* (“right livelihood”), *sammā-vāyāma* (“right effort”), and *sammā-samādhi* (“right concentration”) (Bodhi, 1999)

practice, meditation, and the specific cultivation of mindfulness were not widely known or engaged in until well into the 20th century. It was not until the late 20th century that the understanding of mindfulness as a central feature of—and arguably the most prominent aspect of—Buddhism within the North American landscape. What began as an obscure translation of a Pāli Buddhist term has evolved throughout the 20th century to become a decontextualized technique, separated from the larger system of Noble Eightfold Path, and psychological tool verified by science and psychotherapy.

One strand of contemporary mindfulness developed from the laicization of the *vipassanā* (“insight” or “clear seeing”) meditation practice (Thanissaro, 1997, para. 1). One of the leading figures in this laicization was Mahāsi Sayādaw (1904-1982). Mahāsi was a Burmese Theravāda Buddhist monk who significantly contributed to the popularization of the *vipassanā* meditation throughout Southeast Asia, Europe, and North America (Cheah, 2011). Mahāsi reframed Buddhist discourse in a way that allowed greater accessibility to the practice of meditation for the laity. Meditation was no longer perceived to be the exclusive practice of monastics, requiring a commitment to long and arduous training (Cheah, 2011). One way he did that was by arguing that *samatha*⁴¹ (“meditative absorption” or “tranquility”) is no longer a necessary preliminary to *vipassanā*, and thus, *nibbāna* (“liberation”). Mahāsi simplified meditation. Such a shift marks a radical departure from traditional Theravāda Buddhism, where *samatha* is a required foundation for *vipassanā* (Thanissaro, 2011). *Samatha* practice consisted of the cultivation of the first four *jhanas* (“deep concentrations” or “absorptions”) (Gunaratana, 1995, p. 33). Once the first four

⁴¹ *Samatha* is the practice of calming of the mind into concentration and tranquility. Within the Theravāda tradition, it is the preliminary condition of the calmed and concentrated mind that allows for the development of *vipassanā* (insight or clear seeing). (Thanissaro, 1997)

jhanas have been cultivated, the mind is equipped with sufficient powers of concentration and tranquility such that *vipassanā* will lead to liberation. Yet, according to Mahāsi, only the first *jhana* is required and *samatha* practice is not needed to achieve it. Instead, Mahāsi states that *vipassanā* practice alone can lead to the first *jhana* (Lewis, 2014).

By circumventing the requirement of *samatha*, *vipassanā*-based meditation emerges as a simple and immediate pathway towards liberation. In contrast to notions of *nibbāna* rarely achieved and only after lengthy practice (Lewis, 2014), Mahāsi's *The Satipatthana Meditation* describes *vipassanā* as requiring a radically shorter period of time: "It will not take long...but possibly in a month, or 20 days, or 15 days, or on rare occasion even seven days for a selected few" (1971, p. 70). Mahāsi's promotion of a *vipassanā*-based meditation that leads to the quick attainment of liberation presents a discourse that shifts the focus from monastic exclusivity to lay accessibility. The soteriological goal does not have to be confined to the world of monastics, or lengthy time commitments, but is readily accessible in a direct, simple, and quick way to the lay community.

Mahāsi's form of *vipassanā* was further spread by the establishment of urban meditation centres in Burma. The first prime minister of independent Burma, U Nu, appointed Mahāsi as the abbot for a state-sponsored meditation centre in 1949, known as the Mahāsi Thatana Yeiktha Centre (Cheah, 2011). This and other centres provided easy access to lay people wishing to meditate because they provided both the facilities as well as simple methods for *vipassanā* practice. Within a few decades, Mahāsi-style *vipassanā* spread throughout Burma and overseas to North America (Cheah, 2011). Networks of retreat centres were formed that welcomed both local and foreign laity to practice alongside monastics. In other words, more lay people gained

access to streamlined practices and more monks began to visit European countries to teach these meditation practices (Lewis, 2014).

Mahāsi's radical simplification of meditation provided a necessary component for what would become the mindfulness movement in North America. Mindfulness stood upon the *vipassanā* movement's legacy in which *samatha* was downplayed. In other words, the development of concentration or absorption was of lower priority than the development of *sati*, which appears in translations of Mahāsi's work as "awareness." For instance, Mahāsi promoted sustained *sati* through the practice of continuous active observation and discernment of the movements of the abdomen as well as making mental notes on any processes in one's behaviours, thoughts, physical sensations, and so on (such as mentally labelling the experience of hunger as "hunger" or the action of eating as "eating" or the experience of distraction as "distracted") (Mahāsi, Wheeler & Vivekananda 2006). The *vipassanā* movement also shifted more emphasis towards the laity in terms of meditation practices, in such a way that connecting meditation to ordinary lay experience was considered a relevant and important dimension of practice. Mindfulness in North America builds upon *sati* received as part of the *vipassanā* movement and further stresses the connections to ordinary lay life. Of course, however, this transformation came at the cost of simplifying or omitting the larger doctrinal and practice context of Theravāda Buddhism.

5.2 Mindfulness in North America

Although laicized meditation practice grew during the early to mid 20th century throughout Southeast Asia and North America, meditation was still understood as a practice that should be undertaken with reference to traditional Theravāda texts and with the guidance of expert

meditators who had monastic training (Wilson, 2014). Meditation was still understood as rooted in the Buddhist soteriological project of attaining the liberation of *nibbāna*. An example of this framing of meditation and mindfulness can be observed from Soma Thera's *The Way of Mindfulness*, where he states that meditation "is strenuous whole-time work [...] could hope to pursue it to the end, the attainment of arahantship"⁴² (1998, p. 2).

Later in the 20th century, the connection to Buddhist soteriology begins to weaken. A key figure in this shift was Nyanaponika Thera (1901-1994). A student of Mahāsi's, Nyanaponika emphasized the benefits of meditation, especially the practice of "Right Mindfulness" (*sammā-sati*), in ordinary lay life. For Nyanaponika, meditation practices helped to alleviate the difficulties associated with ordinary daily living but still held a connection to an ultimate Buddhist soteriological goal. In Nyanaponika's (2014) *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, he states:

Right Mindfulness as taught by the Buddha [...] still provides the most simple and direct, the most thorough and effective, method for training and developing the mind for its daily tasks.
(p. 7)

and that it is a practice that can be:

everywhere, at any time, for everyone. It has a vital message for all: not only for the confirmed follower of the Buddha [...] but for all who endeavor to master the mind that is so hard to control, and who earnestly wish to develop its latent faculties of greater strength and greater happiness. (, p. xiv)

⁴² Arahantship is the condition where one has attained *nibbāna* in Theravāda Buddhism.

By framing meditation and mindfulness this way, they are no longer strictly confined to traditional Buddhist discourse but are made widely accessible to those who may not be connected to Buddhism in any way.

While Mahāsi kept Buddhist soteriology as a central goal, Nyanaponika's teaching, on the other hand, interpreted mindfulness in a way accessible to Buddhist and non-Buddhist people, and emphasized benefits of mindfulness that do not strictly relate to the soteriological goal. Although Nyanaponika retained language about the “highest aim” of meditation as the elimination of “Greed, Hatred, and Delusion”⁴³ (2014, p. 7). His discourse reflected a major turning point in which Theravāda Buddhist practice was communicated on a practical basis that did not necessarily involve a soteriological goal.

Nyanaponika's framing of meditation conformed to the lifestyle and demands of the lay community and reflected a continuous direction in which meditation was increasingly connected to the lay community. This direction of the meditation discourse was arguably continued by a generation of lay meditation teachers during the 1970s in America that opened meditation retreat centres and provided classes and retreats throughout the country. These teachers were still connected to the traditional Theravādan discourse, as many of them received direct training in Asia, and were heavily influenced by the *vipassanā* movement under Mahāsi's legacy (Wilson, 2014). Individuals such as Jack Kornfield and Joseph Goldstein both received training from teachers such as Dipa Ma and Munindra (who were themselves trained by Mahāsi), as well as from Mahāsi himself. Not only was *sati* continuously promoted by the American generation of

⁴³ Also known as the “Three Poisons” or “Three Unwholesome Roots”, which is translated from the Pali: *akusala-mūla*. Theravāda Buddhism perceives the presence of *akusala-mūla* to be the cause for one's entrapment within the realm of rebirth. (Webster, 2005)

lay teachers, Mahāsi's technique was also transmitted directly through Goldstein's meditation instructions (Wilson, 2014). Goldstein's writing displays the central feature of Mahāsi's meditation instruction: an emphasis on the awareness on the movements of the abdomen as well as making mental notes as one's experiences arise (Kornfield, 2010). In Goldstein's *The Experience of Insight*, he advises the meditator to "merely stay attentive to the rising, falling movement of the abdomen," and that it "is helpful in the beginning of practice to make mental notes..." (1976, p. 4).

Local retreat centres and classes led by the American lay teachers eventually began to loosen their association with the Buddhist tradition and its understanding of metaphysics and soteriology (Wilson, 2014). The role of the meditation expert shifted from one displaying the personal history of training under monastics, to one of possessing psychological and psychotherapeutic expertise. For example, Kornfield held a doctorate in clinical psychology and had extensive training in mediation. This overlap allowed him to bridge meditation and a familiar psychological lexicon for his American audience. Meditation classes and retreats began to increasingly invite teachers like Kornfield, who blended psychological and meditative expertise, where the relevance of psychological or psychotherapeutic expertise became more and more prominent.

With the introduction of psychological and psychotherapeutic perspectives, the soteriological importance became further downplayed in favour of practical psychological benefits. Practical psychological benefits were no longer a secondary, fortunate by-product of the pursuit of *nibbāna*, but became the primary goal of meditation. For instance, Kornfield's (1993) *Path with a Heart* reflects a strong implicit connection between meditation and the psychotherapeutic sentiments of self-acceptance and self-judgement:

We can learn to forgive others, ourselves, and life for its physical pain [...] In this, we discover a remarkable truth: Much of spiritual life is self-acceptance, maybe all of it. (p. 47)

Kornfield then connected meditation with a reduction in “negative self-judgement”:

Genuine spiritual practice requires us to learn how to *stop the war* [...] When we struggle to change ourselves we, in fact, only continue the patterns of self-judgement and aggression. We keep the war against ourselves alive. (p. 25)

Kornfield also states that the psychotherapeutic goals and benefits derived from meditation are fundamentally rooted in a scientific understanding of our psychology, and he explicitly references to the Dalai Lama’s support of science in *The Wise Heart*, stating: “Buddhist teachings are not a religion, they are a science of mind” (2008, p. xi).

The most important figure that strengthened connections between meditation, psychotherapy, and science is Jon Kabat-Zinn. Kabat-Zinn encountered Buddhism during his studies at MIT in molecular biology in the 1970s (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). His exposure to Buddhism motivated him to train under the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh⁴⁴ as well as eventually the American lay teachers such as Goldstein and Kornfield (Dryden & Still, 2006). Kabat-Zinn founded the Stress Reduction Clinic in 1979, where he created the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program. This eight-week program taught its participants basic mindfulness

⁴⁴ It should be noted, however, that Thich Nhat Hanh comes from an entirely different branch of traditional Buddhism than Mahasi. As Wilson (2014) writes: “Hanh represents a different branch of Buddhism than the one the vipassana teachers drew from. Like most Vietnamese Buddhists, he is associated with the Mahayana form of Buddhism. Usually referred to in English as Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, he is a lineage-holder in the Thien tradition, which shares common roots with Japanese Zen. Thien is not fully identical with Zen in the Japanese mode, however, and one of the most important differences is the relative influence from Theravāda traditions. Vietnam is a border area between Mahayana East Asia and Theravāda Southeast Asia and thus draws on both regions. The Theravāda influence on Hanh appears specifically in the attention that he gives to mindfulness exercises such as those found in the Satipatthana Sutta. One might say that he tends to emphasize Theravāda -type mindfulness exercises, but with a Mahayana, especially Zen, interpretation” (p. 26-27). Thich Nhat Hanh also significantly emphasizes (and coined the term) “engaged Buddhism”; advocating for the social and political connections to meditation (p. 26).

techniques such as moment-by-moment awareness of thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations (Dryden & Still, 2006). The program was designed by Kabat-Zinn to utilize mindfulness to help relieve physical pain and its associated psychological stressors. As a scientist, Kabat-Zinn frames the goal and implications of mindfulness within a scientific epistemology. In an interview by *Thrive Global* conducted by Baer (2017, April 12th), Kabat-Zinn states:

“mindfulness would have a tremendous impact if the science said that it had been clinically successful at the medical center where I was starting MBSR. Then, because of its impact on mainstream medicine and neuroscience and health care, it would move out into society.
(para. 4)

Kabat-Zinn’s couching of meditation in scientific terms would provide a major foundation in which its practice and philosophy move into the discourse of a “science of mind.”

5.3 Scientific-Psychological Mindfulness

Meditation became increasingly described as a psychotherapeutic and cognitive tool that is empirically researchable through clinical trials, psychological surveys, and so on. A significant portion of research on mindfulness has been conducted to investigate its outcomes in different settings and for various applications. For instance, research has examined the effects of mindfulness as a supplementary psychological and cognitive tool to the learning process in all levels of education and as a therapeutic tool in concert to medical and psychiatric interventions (Keng, Smoski & Robins, 2011). Specific findings have demonstrated that mindfulness practice alters cognitive capacities such as the executive functioning of the prefrontal cortex and induces neuroplastic changes in white-matter (Laner et al., 2015). It is positively correlated with the

capacity to sustain attention (Herndon, 2008), with psychological traits of empathy (Dekeyser, Raes, Leijssen, Leysen & Dewulf, 2008), self-esteem (Rasmussen & Pidgeon, 2011), conscientiousness (Giluk, 2009), and negatively correlated with depressive-symptoms (Cash & Whittingham, 2010), social anxiety (Dekeyser et al., 2008), cognitive reactivity (Raes, Dewulf, Van Heeringen & Williams, 2009), and so on. In all, there is ample scientific evidence demonstrating the practical psychological and cognitive benefits of meditation within educational, medical, and therapeutic settings.

The abundant meditation research further reinforces its involvement in the scientific and psychological epistemology. The manner in which meditation is perceived, analyzed, and communicated becomes rooted in the methods of measurement and definition that such research depends upon. Mindfulness is measured by various psychological research scales and surveys. For instance, the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) (Van Dam, Earleywine & Borders, 2010) is structured in a way that mostly examines the “general tendency to be attentive to and aware of experiences in daily life” (Keng, Smoski & Robins, 2011, p. 1045), and the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills (KIMS) looks at participants’ ability to be non-judgmental, to be in bare-awareness, and to describe one’s experiences (Baer, Smith & Allen, 2004). Such scales are then used as the empirical foundation for claims about mindfulness’ impact on psychology, cognition, and neurology. In this epistemology, mindfulness is only a psychological and cognitive practice with psychological and cognitive consequences. No longer does mindfulness represent the path of “Right Mindfulness” (*sammā-sati*) - an unquestionably important facet of *the larger complex system* of the Noble Eightfold Path designed for the Theravādan soteriological goal.

The process of psychological research reflects holds the risk of inadvertently perpetuating a specific definition of mindfulness when applied in settings such as contemplative-based education. The research conclusions then provide the philosophical foundations for evidence-based pedagogical practice where the psychologized iteration of mindfulness is retained. Mindfulness operates within preset boundaries of measurable models, which consequently reinforces its own status as a measurable notion (Sharf, 2015). Concerned with only the regulation of observable psychological variables of emotional and cognitive processes, mindfulness is reified as a process defined by a deliberate heightened awareness of the present moment. In other words, mindfulness loses the extended meaning it had as *sammā-sati* (as part of the broader system of Noble Eightfold Path) and becomes predominantly a tool for cognitive and emotional benefits such as enhanced focus and stress-reduction.

In its traditional understanding, the beneficial potential of mindfulness largely resides in its role as a preliminary condition for further developments of insights and skillful qualities for the end of suffering, rather than as an end in of itself. This is explicitly stated by Thanissaro Bhikkhu (2012) in his elaboration on the notion of mindfulness (which is described as “right sati”, which is the translation of “*sammā-sati*”) as the preliminary condition for further development:

right sati, as a factor in the path to the end of suffering and stress, brings memories from the past to bear on a clear alertness of events and actions in the present with the purpose of abandoning unskillful qualities and developing skillful ones both in the present and on into the future...right sati points not only in one direction, to the past, but to all three directions of time at once: past, present, and future. (p. 15)

Mindfulness, as contextualized within the roots of *sammā-sati*, is a practice that is *instrumental* for the further development of insight on the causal relationship between the past,

present, and the future as a way to cultivate skillful qualities and to abandon unskillful ones. Such a discourse reflects a connection of mindfulness to the ethical implications for the cultivation of skillful qualities. Yet the scientific-psychological mindfulness reframes the preliminary stages of mindfulness as ends themselves for the function of emotional and cognitive regulation (Hyland, 2016). In other words, mindfulness then becomes one of the wide array of stress-reduction tools that no longer holds the potential to elicit transformative learning and moral development of its practitioners.

The historical progression starting from Mahāsi's contribution illuminates a radical but gradual shift in how mindfulness is conceptualized and communicated. Over time, its philosophy and practice gained considerable accessibility to the laity. A stronger connection between meditation and the laity was established through reframing the *vipassanā* practice towards easier access to the soteriological goal of *nibbāna*. Nyanaponika then strengthened the connections by appealing to the non-Buddhist laity with the practical psychological benefits of meditation. American generation lay teachers then pushed such appeal to even wider circles where the practical benefits began to overshadow the soteriological goal under psychotherapeutic sentiments. The underplaying the soteriological goal and traditional Buddhist discourse continues to be reinforced by the involvement of scientifically-inclined experts such as Kabat-Zinn, whose vision of a scientifically credible mindfulness prompted a great deal of empirical research on the efficacy of its practices. Mindfulness emerges as an autonomous cognitive and psychological tool due to the gradual erosion of its strong connection to Buddhism. It becomes increasingly communicated and utilized as a practice that can be applied to enhance the activities of ordinary life – from eating, golf, learning, work, taking care of children, and so on. (Wilson, 2014).

Scientific-psychological mindfulness as rooted in the epistemology of research measurements and implications, it becomes an *areligious* concept translated into an *amoral* practice. It is severed not only from its original soteriology but also from its traditional system of ethical development. Jeff Wilson (2014) in *Mindful America* writes:

Mindfulness in many works comes to be presented in a basically amoral manner, denuded of context and thus available for application to simple tasks: to eat mindfully, have mindful sex, use mindfulness to deal with depression, or play the guitar in a mindful manner is simply to carry out such activities with greater attention. (p. 14).

What this demonstrates is a radical shift of mindfulness in its reorientation towards the individual's lifestyle needs. Instead of the individual conforming to a complex system of practices and ethics for the sake of a soteriological goal, a portion of the system is extracted to conform to the individual's needs, personal choices, and activities. Consequently, the potential of the cultivation of deeper insights regarding the nature of experiences and ethical development of *sammā-sati* are minimally engaged under the psychologized and therapeutized discourse of mindfulness. Without the contemplative involvement of the ethical dimensions of practice, I believe the issues of ontological insecurity remains worryingly neglected. The cultivation of ontological security, in other words, also inherently involves the cultivation of and engagement with the moral dimension of interacting with the world. The relation between morality and ontological security will be elaborated in the subsequent chapter. For now, I will proceed to elaborate on the philosophy and history of transpersonal mindfulness and its involvement in contemplative pedagogy.

5.4 Transpersonal Mindfulness

In addition to Buddhist ideas of meditation, contemplative pedagogy is also heavily influenced by transpersonal psychology (Morgan, 2014). Transpersonal psychology emphasizes the spiritual states or experiences as the individual's highest potential. This emphasis is strongly contributed by psychologist Abraham Maslow's (1908-1970) notion of the hierarchy of needs (Grof, 2008). The hierarchy of needs represents a series of needs in which each need provides a base for the satisfaction of higher needs. For Maslow (1954), they are ordered from the lowest to highest levels of needs as follows: physiological requirements, safety, social connectedness, esteem of the self, and finally self-actualization on the very top. Self-actualization manifests as the aspiration and confidence to fully commit to directions of achievement and mastery of one's fundamental life projects, such as one's profession, parental roles, creative expressions, and so on.

Transpersonal psychology emerged from Maslow's revision of his own model of hierarchy, where he later added a higher level termed "self-transcendence" (Grof, 2008). Self-transcendence is the stage that is related to spiritual needs and experiences of the individual, which Maslow (1971) in *Farther Reaches of Human Nature* states to be the "very highest and most inclusive or holistic levels of human consciousness, as ends rather than means, to oneself, to significant others, to human beings general, to other species, to nature, and to the cosmos" (p. 269). While self-actualization refers to the mastery and completion of the projects related to the ambitions of the *self*, self-transcendence is ultimately about moving away from the self through experiences where the self is dissolved (often in spiritual experiences).

Transpersonal psychology rose out of the attempt to expand the paradigmatic scope of the psyche to be more inclusive of spiritual needs and experiences during mid- to late-20th century

(Grof, 1985). It was an attempt to radically shift the discourse on spiritual experiences from the perspective contributed by Freudianism and other mainstream clinical psychology such as psychosomatic medicine that perceived its presence as reflective of psychopathology⁴⁵. Psychoanalyst and the founder of psychosomatics Franz Alexander (1891-1964) described Buddhist meditative states as an “artificial catatonia” and a display of psychosis in his paper in the *Psychoanalytic Review* in 1931 (Cooper, 2011). Namely, Alexander (1931) wrote: “it is clear that Buddhist self-absorption is a libidinal, narcissistic turning of the urge for knowing inward, a sort of artificial schizophrenia with complete withdrawal of libidinal interest in the outside world” (p. 130). Similarly, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) argued that spiritual experiences demonstrated a destructive regressive protection of an infantilized state of symbiosis. It is a return to the blissful states of union of the infant prior to the experience of separation between the infant and the caregiver and the awareness that the world does not entirely revolve around their needs. Spiritual experiences, therefore, is the regression into an infantilized state and an unwillingness or inability to confront the fallacy of one’s narcissism (Fauteux, 1994).

⁴⁵ The emergence of transpersonal psychology in its philosophical influence is recent, beginning in the mid-20th century trend in which humanistic psychology resisted behaviorism and Freudianism. Transpersonal psychology rode on the momentum of humanistic psychology in its efforts to establish a more holistic paradigm of the human psyche. Humanistic psychology was in large part a reaction against the limitations of behaviorism and Freudianism (Grof, 2008). The behaviorist understanding of the psyche depended on notions of conditioning, punishments, and reinforcements derived from the insights of animal experimentations (Grof, 1985). However, behaviorism was charged with excessively reducing human experience to simple causal mechanisms reinforced by external factors of influence. The psyche risked being understood under the sentiments of cold determinism, largely deprived of the considerations of the complexity of consciousness and subjective experiences more exclusive to human beings. Freudianism, on the other hand, restricted the conclusion about the psyche mostly to psychopathological conclusions and rooted much of the etiological source in the unconscious libidinal instincts (Grof, 1985). Freudianism was suspected of overgeneralization as its conclusions were dependent on only the “pathological” segment of the population, defined mostly within the limiting ideas related (as argued by Maslow) to libidinal instincts (Grof, 2008). Humanistic psychology, therefore, sought to expand the discourse of the psyche into a more holistic inclusion of the multifaceted human experience through the hierarchy of needs.

The transpersonalistic hierarchy can be observed in various contemplative pedagogy theorists. Spiritual experiences are not only included but also enshrined as the educational end. Music and contemplative pedagogy theorist Ed Sarath (2003) argues that contemplative practices such as meditation provide a “trans-traditional” framework that is “more disposed toward acknowledging common ground among traditions because it is grounded in the transpersonal [...] core where all traditions intersect” (p. 229), and that the “peak experiences reported by jazz improvisers or athletes are not fundamentally different than the transcendent experience invoked in meditation; these are simply different versions of the inherent capacity [...] for transformed consciousness” (p. 229). Sarath’s framework demonstrates a strong transpersonal and perennial sentiment, where the diversity of religions, spiritual practices, and even areligious creative pursuits can be unified upon a shared principle that is rooted in the *experiences* of “transformed consciousness”. Implicit within Sarath framework is also the enshrinement of the peak experiences as an important educational goal over other experiences, as he writes: “they promote the development [...] in a way that [...] most other experiences generally cannot match” (p. 219), and that they are a “means for enriching whatever activities one pursues” (p. 219).

Similarly, contemplative pedagogy theorists Olen Gunnlaugson and Daniel Vokey (2013) describes the utility of evolving and integrating a public conceptual language of spirituality for transforming academic life. One of the primary concepts that Gunnlaugson and Vokey promote is what they term as “developmental lines” (p. 439), a trajectory of development of the individual that is more inclusive of different dimensions of the individual than traditional stage-based

developmental theories⁴⁶. The recognition of developmental lines allows for a “holistic curriculum design” (p. 440) and promotes “instructional approaches that foster awareness of different respective human potentials [...]” (p. 440). Yet despite rooting their position in the notion of the *holistic*, Gunnlaugson and Vokey ultimately conclude that the “highest developmental levels of any of these developmental lines tend to give rise to different forms of peak experiences that are regarded as spiritual” (p. 440). Gunnlaugson and Vokey’s framework appears to demonstrate a similar move to that of Maslow’s and Sarath’s, where the holistic expansion of the understanding of the human psyche holds implicitly spiritual experiences as the highest human potential.

Evidence of such transpersonal mindfulness in contemplative pedagogical discourse is explicitly observable from the curriculum provided by various higher education programs throughout the US. Naropa University is famously known for its educational programs that integrate Buddhist and mindfulness discourse with counselling and psychology frameworks. Its bachelor’s degree in Contemplative Psychology allows students to pursue the *concentration in transpersonal psychology* where they are taught “the recognition of spiritual longing for wholeness as essential to psychological growth [...]” (Naropa University, Bachelor’s Degree in Contemplative Psychology, 2018). California Institute of Integral Studies’ (CIIS) Ph.D. program in Integral and Transpersonal Psychology requires its students to develop an expertise in both transpersonal psychology and contemplative neuroscience, as a way to “advance understandings of the human mind, of experiences associated with mysticism and spirituality, and of

⁴⁶ Gunnlaugson and Vokey argue against traditional developmental theories that are often limited to a single dimension of human capacity, such as cognitive development, moral development, or attachment development and the fact that they are rarely entirely integrated into each other.

consciousness itself” (CIIS, Integral and Transpersonal Psychology Ph.D. Program, 2018). Sofia University has a Master of Arts in Transpersonal Psychology that appeals to students who find value in “creative expression, transpersonal practice, contemplative reflection, and scholarly thinking [...]” (Sofia University, MATP, n.d.).

What such programs demonstrate is that the philosophy of transpersonal psychology and contemplative practices are often involved with each other, and perhaps conflated into an umbrella category of “spirituality”. When such contemplative pedagogy displays the philosophical influence of transpersonal mindfulness, the primary educational end goals become defined as the promotion of spiritual experiences, or at least the awareness of its important status on the transpersonal hierarchy.

The transpersonal emphasis on the peak states of self-transcendence or the transformed consciousness of spiritual experiences is a position that has been criticized as neglecting other aspects of the human experience to the detriment of the practitioners themselves⁴⁷. If the discourse disproportionately elevates the importance of peak states over other experiences and engagements, then the defensive mechanisms of ontological insecurity may become reinforced. The individual can withdraw into the spiritual experiences to bypass the necessity of intersubjective involvement. The defensive mechanism of isolation becomes justified and reinforced through the guise of spiritual nobility and pleasant meditative experiences. Psychologist John Welwood (2000) has echoed such concerns of contemplative practices as being utilized to “rationalize...aloofness, impersonality, and disengagement” (p. 207). Welwood

⁴⁷ This was a criticism made by existential psychologist Rollo May, as discussed by Hartelius, Caplan, and Rardin (2007): “He criticized the pursuit of transcendent states to evade the struggles of a personal level” (p. 148).

refers to this as a contemplative justification for the “schizoid defense (resorting to isolation and withdrawal because the interpersonal realm feels threatening)” (p. 206). Such concerns are also acknowledged by Hartelius, Caplan, and Rardin (2007), where the condition of the transpersonal contained the risk of being used to leap “over of the personal in order to avoid its difficulties” (p. 148)⁴⁸.

The remedy of meditative peak states may allow the self to be willingly dissolved into nothingness. This is reminiscent of Fromm’s (1941) description of the masochistic character, where the self aims to rid of the malaise of the ontological insecurity and individuation through the attainment of absolute unity under political and ideological attachments. Yet Fromm (1941) also asserts that the masochistic character does not only emerge under political and ideological attachments but can also be part of the condition of religious experiences. For instance, Fromm argues that Friedrich Schleiermacher’s (1768-1834) notion of religious experience provides a direct example of masochism. Schleiermacher’s 1799 (*trans.* Crouter, 1996) *On Religion* stated that religion is rooted primarily within the religious experiences of the individual, where all religious doctrines, practices, and institutions are derived from “an intuition and a feeling” (p. 173). Such religious experiences of intuition and feeling are further specified in *The Christian Faith* in 1830 (*trans.* Nimmo, 2016) as the “feeling of absolute dependence” (p. 32). The notion of absolute dependence is then elaborated through the position that “Every religious and Christian self-consciousness presupposes and thus also contains the immediate feeling of

⁴⁸ It should also be noted that although the transpersonal discourse of self-transcendence and peak states was significantly contributed by Maslow, he also demonstrated reservations about the consequences of the strict pursuit of peak states. Specifically, Maslow (1962) writes: “Peaks come unexpectedly, suddenly they happen to us. You can’t count on them. And, hunting them is a little like hunting happiness. It’s best not done directly” (p. 4; from Cleary & Shapiro, 1995).

absolute dependence, as the only way in which...one's own being and the infinite being of God can be one..." (p. 32). The religious individual is conceived as experientially having the "taste for the Infinite" (p. 39) as described in *On Religion* and participating in the "absolute undivided unity" (p.132) in *The Christian Faith*.

However, the recognition of Fromm's analysis of religious experiences does not necessarily equate the complete acceptance of his insight. For the risk of an overly generalized psychological reductionism looms in the background of his discussions. "*Escape from Freedom*" offers a direct monolithic psychological judgement of Schleiermacher without any lengthened elaborations of the various nuanced functions and intentions that may be observed from religious experiences. Yet Fromm's likely unqualified overgeneralization does not need to be entirely accepted for the soundness of his position to be justified. Just because it is more likely that the nuanced possibilities of religious experiences do not solely serve the purpose of Fromm's masochistic conditions, it nevertheless does not negate the possibility that religious experiences *can be* understood as such. It is under such acknowledgements that Fromm's insights can be extended into religious experiences related to the meditatively facilitated peak states within contemplative educational goals. The transpersonal enshrinement of peak states of self-transcendence in contemplative pedagogy, therefore, *can* be a platform where the masochistic tendency is supported⁴⁹. It *can* justify the defensive desire to fully dissolve the self as to eliminate the distress of ontological insecurity associated with its individuation, supported by the philosophical influence of transpersonal mindfulness in contemplative pedagogy. Theorists and

⁴⁹ Similarly, Christopher Lasch (1979) argues that the contemporary culture of contemplative spirituality can be utilized to deny the "reality of the material world" (p. 245), which progresses "to the re-creation of a primary sense of wholeness and equilibrium – the return to Nirvana" (p. 246).

instructors such as Sarath (2003) demonstrate this influence in describing the contemplative process as “pure consciousness [...] transcendence, no self” (p. 218).

Welwood (2000) echoes Fromm’s idea of the masochistic character in the discussion of what he terms as the “spiritual bypassing” (p. 209). Individuals may outwardly appear to be committedly diligent as practitioners, yet utilize certain aspects of the contemplative process to simply escape the psychological and interpersonal difficulties that they experience. Welwood (2000) states: “Such students are often attracted to the teachings about *selflessness* and *ultimate states*, which seem to provide a rationale for not dealing with their own psychological wounding” (p. 209). In connection to Fromm’s assessment of Schleiermacher’s absolute dependence, the peak experiences of self-transcendence of contemplative processes (where the self is dissolved into a unity with the world) can be utilized as a masochistic mechanism to evade the distress of intersubjective involvements (related to Welwood’s discussion on “interpersonal difficulties”). If the self is completely absent, then it is also removed from the threatening external social world and the burden of its own existential freedom of individuation.

5.5 Contemplative Pedagogy and Education

Two major examples of the emergence of contemplative pedagogy are the establishment of Naropa University in 1974 and the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) in 1968. Prior to the start of the 21st century, contemplative pedagogy took place mostly within Naropa University and CIIS (Repetti, 2010). More dialogues on the possibilities of its integration into higher education curriculum began to emerge under the popular influence of the scientific and transpersonal understanding of mindfulness. No longer was contemplative pedagogy mostly confined to Naropa and CIIS, but scholars and instructors started to form discussions on

widening its pedagogical practices into more schools. In 1994, Charles Halpern and Robert Lehman established the Working Group on Contemplative Mind in Society (WGCMS) which provided scholars and instructors a platform where the possibilities of contemplative pedagogy in higher education can be discussed (Bush, 2011). For instance, scholars such as Robert Thurman (1994) contributed to WGCMS⁵⁰ through his paper *Meditation and Education*, in which he writes:

wisdom is the ultimate cause of awakening, of liberation from ignorance [...] these disciplines and practices are educational in the classical sense [...] Meditation fits in the traditional inner science curriculum at the highest level of the cultivation of wisdom: first learning wisdom, then reflective wisdom, then contemplative wisdom [...] The question then for academic, especially liberal arts, institutions, is not a question of adding a desirable frill to their vast smorgasbord of offerings. It is a matter of their effectively fulfilling their duty to provide a liberal, that is, a liberating and empowering, education. (p. 8)

Ultimately, the discussions in WGCMS demonstrate the increasing openness to integrating contemplative methods for a variety of educational goals. Specifically, contemplative pedagogy can be framed as a supplemental educational process that supports and enhances pre-existing educational goals defined by the dominant subject matter of the discipline and/or curriculum.

⁵⁰ Other authors include the former dean of Middlebury College, Steven C. Rockefeller (1994), who contributed his piece named *Meditation, Social Change, and Undergraduate Education* to WGCMS: “in a democratic ecological society that affirms life in the world and values social action and community, the practice of meditation can help to shape the direction of social action, contributing to an integration of the ethical and the political, the spiritual and the practical. The undergraduate college is one place where these issues should be thoughtfully explored” (p. 10). Brian Stock (1994) contributed the piece titled *The Contemplative Life and the Teaching of the Humanities*, which argues for the integration of contemplative methods of approaching humanities, especially during the process of engaging with classical texts: “If contemplative activity contributes to their sense of well-being and if it helps to put them in a frame of mind that enhances their ability to cope with a range of issues [...], then presumably contemplative traditions should have a larger place in educational programs [...] they have to be instructed in reading meditative literature, not as they would read modern poems, plays or novels, but as contemplative read them, using texts as a means to an end and not considering them, as is the fashion in contemporary literary practice, as ends in themselves” (p. 4).

The WGCMS eventually became more popular in higher education and was re-established as the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society (CCMIS) in 1997 (Bush, 2011; Morgan, 2015). The CCMIS started to provide “Contemplative Practice Fellowships” to scholars and instructors that aim to integrate contemplative pedagogy into their curricula. According to CCMIS reports in 2010, 158 fellowships have been provided for more than 100 higher educational institutions, with a significant portion of such curricula heavily laden with mindfulness-based practices designed to enhance learning (Bush, 2011). The establishment of CCMIS has arguably been the dominant recent catalyst (during the start of the 21st century) that contributed to the popularization of contemplative pedagogy in higher education (Repetti, 2010).

Since the establishment of CCMIS, contemplative pedagogy has widened its impact throughout higher education through new programs and advocacy groups. Brown University, under the sponsor Harold Roth, established a Contemplative Studies Initiative in 2005, where a diverse group of Brown faculty gathered together to examine the educational, psychological, and philosophical implications of contemplative engagements (Roth, 2006). CCMIS presented the first *Symposium on Contemplative Practice and Higher Education* at Amherst College in 2003. In 2008, CCMIS created a branch organization called the Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education (ACMHE) that seeks to “advocate for contemplative practice in higher education; to encourage new forms of inquiry and imaginative thinking; and to educate active citizens who will support a more just and compassionate direction for society” (ACMHE, 2015).

ACMHE provides its members with a syllabus archive full of examples of contemplatively-based curricula, and access to the *Journal of Contemplative Inquiry*. In 2000, University of Michigan started to offer a BFA in Jazz and Contemplative Studies, where students combine “a solid grounding in jazz and improvised music study with courses which involve

meditative practices” (Bachelor of Fine Arts in Jazz and Contemplative Studies, 2018). In 2014, Simon Fraser University provided the first graduate in North America rooted in contemplative pedagogy - an M.Ed. program named Contemplative Inquiry (Straight.com, Johnson, 2014, January 22nd). Contemplative Inquiry was designed for teaching and managerial professionals within the educational field, with the aim to not only develop “mindful awareness but also compassion, resilience, empathy, and emotional intelligence, along with enhanced teaching and learning skills” (Johnson, 2014, para. 12).

The pedagogical integrations of contemplative engagements hold observable influences from either scientific-psychological mindfulness or transpersonal mindfulness or both. Mirabai Bush (2011) states that the majority of the recipients of the Contemplative Practice Fellowships have “adopted a definition of mindfulness inspired by Jon Kabat-Zinn: a way of being in which one is highly aware and focused on the reality of the present moment, accepting and acknowledging it” (p. 187-188). The influence of Kabat-Zinn in contemplative pedagogy points to a significant involvement with the scientific, psychological, and therapeutic discourse upon its educational integration.

5.5.1 Scientific-Psychological Mindfulness in Pedagogical Practice

Instructors integrate and utilize contemplative pedagogy in a wide variety of ways. Yet much of their differences share a common discourse rooted in cognitive and psychological training – one that is heavily informed by Kabat-Zinn. For instance, the professor of Studio Art at New York State University, Amy Cheng, claims that the integration of contemplative practice would “help us tap the intuitive creative functions of the right brain: to think in complex images rather than in sequential order” (Bush, 2011, p. 189). A professor of psychology, Al Kaszniak at the University

of Arizona, leads his students through 20 minutes of mindfulness meditation on the breath. The meditation sessions are then discussed in a way that is integrated into the learning of the psychological theories on the development and role of empathy (Moniz, Eshleman, Henry, Slutzk & Moniz, 2015). David Levy at the University of Washington integrates contemplative practices in order to combat the negative consequences of technological and informational overload in the classroom, particularly through the honing of one's ability of concentration (UW News, Kelley, 2016). What the contemplatively-based instructors demonstrate is a common discourse rooted in the educational goal for cognitive and psychosocial training. Meditation is utilized as a way to enhance one's ability for empathy, concentration, and nonlinear cognitive processing, which are ultimately conducive for educational success.

Other instructors and courses may root contemplative pedagogy in more therapeutic frameworks, reminiscent of the blended expertise of Buddhist psychotherapy promoted by the lay American meditation teachers such as Kornfield. Specifically, its psychotherapeutic sentiments are strongly reminiscent of the discourse of Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), where its participants are taught to apply mindfulness to cultivate attitudes of “non-striving, acceptance and a genuine interest in experience” (Crane, 2009, p. 5) as to “*befriend* our experience and by ‘acknowledging’ and ‘letting be’” (p. 61). It is a philosophy that is laden with the notions of “self-acceptance” and “self-friendliness” and situates the practice of mindfulness as promoting such attitudes. Anne Beffel at Syracuse University stresses the notion of being “unconditionally friendly to oneself” (Bush, 2011, p. 189) and the state of nonjudgement in her contemplative pedagogy. Students, therefore, perceive such contemplative processes as therapeutically healing: “I had a hard time staying in the present moment and allowing myself to

relax [...] In this course [...] I didn't notice the judgmental opinions of others and simply did art for myself – connected and accepting” (p. 190).

Contemplative pedagogy as rooted in the discourse of the “therapeutically healing” is also demonstrated by Light Carruyo at Vassar College, whose contemplative pedagogy is described as a “healing form of critical inquiry” (p. 193). Specifically, mindfulness is used to heal the internal distress of learning about social injustice and one’s implicated social position in it (Bush, 2011). Ultimately, what the above examples demonstrate is that contemplative pedagogy in higher education is significantly – and perhaps *mostly* – informed by the philosophy of scientific-psychological mindfulness.

5.5.2 Transpersonal Mindfulness in Pedagogical Practice

On the other hand, various educators also demonstrate a transpersonal emphasis in their contemplative pedagogy. For these educators, the transpersonal dimension is often time regarded as a distinct priority, particularly as a higher condition of development that should not be conflated with “mere” cognitive and psychosocial training reflective of scientific-psychological mindfulness. From the transpersonal perspective, the higher condition of development refers to the peak states of experiences of self-transcendence. As Patricia Fay Morgan (2015) describes: “what most directly links transpersonalism and contemplative education is contemplative theorist/practitioners’ theoretical and experiential engagement with transpersonal or contemplative states of consciousness” (p. 202-203).

Ed Sarath of University of Michigan, for instance, formed a Curriculum Advisory Committee for the B.F.A in Jazz and Contemplative Studies (BFAJCS) program, where the requirement includes a 25 out of 120 course credits dedicated to taking courses on contemplative

learning and knowledge – which includes course titles such as Psychology and Spiritual Experience, Introduction to Buddhist Thought, and etc. (Sarath, 2003). The curriculum as a whole integrates a strong contemplative component in the form of meditation and also guides students to participate in community meditation centers to deepen their practice. A Curriculum Advisory Committee is present where such recommendations to appropriate meditation practices, contemplative-based courses, and meditation centers can be made by a multidisciplinary team of Michigan faculty.

Its educational goal is described to be concerned with the *experiential* dimension of spiritual engagement in the form of “heightened” or “transformed or heightened consciousness” (Sarath, 2003, p. 217), or “transcendence” (a useful parallel to Maslow’s “self-transcendence”) (p. 218). Such experiences of transcendence are then enshrined as an *end*. It is preceded by the realization of other capacities such as optimal cognitive and/or psychosocial functioning (presumably “lower” processes that lead to spiritual transcendence), and that this end need not be confined to meditative practice, but it can be extended into daily living. This transpersonal discourse is explicitly demonstrated in Sarath’s (2003) position: “the curriculum provides a framework in which this practice can connect to conventional types of investigation (e.g. reading, writing, and discussion) into religious and spiritual experiences, from a trans-traditional perspective” (p. 228). Although Sarath’s position explicitly promotes the spiritual and religious experiences, it does not dismiss the more practical benefits derived from contemplative pedagogy in the forms of cognitive and psychosocial training. Instead, Sarath includes the practical benefits, yet within his inclusion, they are arranged conceptually as a “precursor” and

as the “more mundane benefits”⁵¹ that may lead to the “more mystical, spiritual kinds of developments” (p. 229).

Similarly, John P. Miller’s (2014) course “Spirituality in Education” at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education describes the meditative process to be as an “energy [...] through the body” and that this “energy” is then connected to the notion of “soul” in education. For Miller, the soul is described through his quote of Moore’s (1990) statement in *Care of the Soul*: “not a thing, but a quality or dimension of experiencing life and ourselves. It has to do with depth, value, relatedness, heart and personal substance” (p. 6; in Miller, 2014, p. 70). Miller then connects such an idea of the soul to Maslow’s notion of the peak experience: “When Abe Maslow talked about peak experience I believe that these experiences could also be referred to as soul experiences where we feel this energy and sometimes a connection to something beyond ourselves” (p. 70). The soul experiences are then accessed through contemplative knowing under the practice of mindfulness, which “provides space for the soul to come forth” (p. 73) as described by Miller. In other words, through mindfulness meditation, students are directed to reconnect with the peak experiences of their soul, which can be “truly transformative” (p. 77). Similar to Sarath, Miller’s framework is explicitly demonstrative of a transpersonal hierarchy, with peak experiences being the educational end.

Contemplative pedagogy has gradually but consistently gained more popularity amongst a wide disciplinary range of scholars and instructors in numerous schools. Under the

⁵¹ Sarath (2003) writes: “if contemplative practice is undertaken without explicitly spiritual goals (e.g. oneness with universe, overflowing compassion and love for creation, mystical experiences) but simply to relieve stress and perhaps enhance mental clarity and focus, these results still represent important benefits to the educational process [...] it could be argued that more mundane benefits can be precursors to the more mystical, spiritual kinds of developments that can unfold with practice” (p. 228).

acknowledgement of its two major philosophies, I believe that an alternate understanding of contemplative pedagogy is possible and should be promoted as to enrich the theoretical diversity of its discourse and practices. An alternate understanding of contemplative pedagogy would represent an attempt to mitigate the amorality of scientific-psychological mindfulness and the fixation on peak states of transpersonal mindfulness. Specifically, such alternate contemplative pedagogy is connected to the phenomenological understanding of intersubjectivity and their relation to the traditional Theravādan doctrine on ethics and *paṭicca-samuppāda* (dependent co-arising). By preventing the risks of the two major philosophies through intersubjectivity, I believe it then becomes capable of addressing the issues of ontological insecurity in higher education.

Chapter 6: Toward an Intersubjective-based Contemplative Pedagogy

In this chapter, I argue that a contemplative pedagogy that allows students to cultivate a healthy sensitivity of their intersubjectivity provides the best protection against issues related to ontological insecurity in emerging adults. In the context of higher education, this pedagogy would avoid both the limitations of the amoral scientific-psychological mindfulness and the risks in the fixation on ‘peak states’ from transpersonal mindfulness. Instead, this pedagogy emphasizes an *ethical outwardness* into social relationships and the shared world.

As previously discussed, scientific-psychological mindfulness is decontextualized; it is removed from its traditional setting as part of the Theravāda Buddhist worldview, path of practice, and ethics. Without an ethical component, issues related to ontological insecurity remains unaddressed insofar as the solution lies within the *ethically-dependent outwardness* of engaged social relationships (as I will elaborate in this chapter). Transpersonal mindfulness, on the other hand, risks exacerbating inwardness. In this case, the dangers of ontological insecurity in which the student’s defensive mechanisms of depersonalization and isolation are perpetuated and even justified. An intersubjectively-based contemplative pedagogy can nurture an ethical outwardness because it can *experientially sensitize* the individual to the nature of their existential sociality, where fundamental meaning structures⁵² are forged and sustained with others. Such an emphasis on intersubjectivity resonates with Theravāda Buddhism, particularly in its understanding of the effect of abiding by ethical rules and its process ontology, “dependent co-

⁵² I define meaning structures as the existential answers to questions of meaning, of ourselves, others, the world, and the relation between each modality. Such answers are forged and sustained through embodied practical enactments toward the world with others.

arising” (*paṭicca-samuppāda*⁵³), as constituting the nature of reality and the self. I will articulate an intersubjectively-based contemplative pedagogy by drawing selectively on the Theravāda Buddhist and phenomenological understanding of intersubjectivity.

6.1 Horizontal Limit

By “intersubjectivity” here, I do not mean to imply a merely psychological disposition towards extraversion in social interactions. Rather, it refers to a particular way of understanding the connection between how we exist in the world and how we form fundamental meaning structures, ethical dispositions, and social relationships. Through contemplative techniques, a student learns at the experiential level to acknowledge the social and ethical nature of her existence and confrontation with the world. In other words, contemplative practices can *experientially* sensitize a student into the fact of his existential sociality, where the fundamental manner in which the world is experienced as meaningful is constituted intersubjectively. To elaborate upon the connections between intersubjectivity and contemplative pedagogy, I employ the notion of what I term as the *horizontal limit*.

The idea of horizontal limit is inspired by J.J. Valberg’s (2007) idea of the “personal horizon” in *Dream, Death, and the Self* (p. 14). Valberg (2007) describes the personal horizon as the field of nothingness in which the world itself is revealed. Valberg (2007) writes: “The horizon [...] tends to remain out of view not just because of our preoccupation with the world but because of its own nature, its peculiar nothingness” (p. 14). The fact that the world appears to

⁵³ Macy translates *paṭicca-samuppāda* as “dependent co-arising” and considers it foundational to Theravāda Buddhist ethics (1979).

us at all is a matter of the personal horizon constituting itself with what emerges as the world, as Valberg (2007) continues: “[...] there is such a thing only insofar as something is present/appears from within it and thus figures from within it as demonstratively given: as *this* being” (p. 14). The personal horizon is not a cognitive process but the unique existential structure defined by the specific meaningful relationships with the world such that the world emerges at all. As Valberg (2007) describes: “that which is active (that which wills, which constitutes itself) is not the horizon, which is nothing in itself, but the one at the center of the horizon, the subject” (p. 15).

The emergence of the world within our personal horizon is not a matter of neutral and objective cognitive and sensorial conclusions about the world. Instead, the emergence of our experience of the world is fundamentally rooted in our “practical, purposive” (Ratcliffe, et al., 2009, p. 6) entanglements with it. Matthew Ratcliffe (2009) argues that “we experience people, objects, events, and situations in the world in terms of different kinds of significant possibility, different ways of *matter*ing” (p. 7). In other words, the world is sensorially available to us as potential experience. However, it would be impossible for us to experience everything that is available to our senses. This is because experience is not simply perception, but a complex composition of memory, imagination, and successful sense perception. A person only experiences the world to the extent that this complex composition is present. The condition of the complex composition is what constitutes a *meaningful relation* to the world, hence, the meaningful emergence of the world. We may go through a day where certain phenomena are simply not attended to despite the fact that they are available to our senses as a potentiality. Therefore, our experiences (as meaningful relation to the world) only emerge from a *limited* scope of such potentiality from our senses. *Horizontal limit*, therefore, is the *existential condition*

where potentiality of meaningful relations with the world is *reduced* to a degree such that the meaningful world emerges at all.

For example, in order to experience a particular chair in a room, its possibilities as a meaningful phenomenon must be limited. Without a *sufficiently* limited horizon, the chair loses its purposive emergence as a chair in relation to the desire to sit (concerning the future) or the memory of sitting (concerning the past). It can be sensorially perceived as a chair, but without our desire to relate to it meaningfully, the registration of in our experience is weak and it eventually fades. If we do not have the need to sit or think about any matters related to chairs and sitting, the presence of chairs simply does not emerge as meaningful phenomena in our horizon. Without the meaningful relationship, it also does not emerge in the temporality of our consciousness. Namely, the consciousness of the “present” consists of the integration of memory and imagined projection of the future. The structure of experience of the meaningful present, therefore, is a seamless weave between memory and imagination.⁵⁴ Therefore, without a meaningful relationship with the chair, it simply does not emerge as a sufficiently significant object to be registered within the temporal structure of our consciousness. As philosopher John Russon (2003) writes: “We experience objects as demanding of us that we develop our situation toward a *specific future*” (p. 16).

Inherent in the notion of horizontal limit is the idea that a reduction of the world’s possibilities to those that are manageable and are focused into specific meaningful relations with the world *is good*. In other words, the horizontal limit refers to experience in which a *coherent*

⁵⁴ Just as the formation of the meaningful gestalt of a musical melody is only possible under the simultaneous engagement with the memory of the previous notes and the imagination of the future notes; melodic progression is not perceptible if understood as one note at a time (Lampert & Robinson, 2010, p. 108-110).

reality manifests as a meaningful engagement *specific* to the individual characterized by an ethical outwardness. To put this in the context of previous discussions (regarding Laing and Fromm), it is the *existential condition of ontological security* that is the outcome of what Giddens (1991) describes as our embodied routines and habits.⁵⁵ Essentially, ontological security is characterized by a *sufficient degree* of limitedness and specificity. While all experience depends on the existential condition where possibilities of relation to with the world are reduced to the degree that the meaningful world emerges, the possibilities confronted by a person who is ontologically *insecure* are too chaotic and too ambiguous, hence, *insufficiently limited*. The horizontal limit is implicit in the experience of meaningful relations with the world yet the degree of meaningful relations that one can have with the world relies on the *degree of limitedness* of that horizon – this is what, in my view, distinguishes ontological security from ontological insecurity.

Ontologically insecurity has a personal horizon wherein the world emerges and meaningful relations to it are formed by the experiencing subject, yet they lack specificity and sufficient limitedness. In other words, possibilities are chaotic and not reduced towards a sharper certainty, where the world is experienced as a meaningful engagement insofar as it is manageable (as limited possibilities) for ontological security. As Giddens (1991) writes:

On the other side of what might appear to be quite trivial aspects of day-to-day action and discourse, chaos lurks. And this chaos is not just disorganization, but the loss of a sense of the very reality of things and of other persons...To answer even the simplest everyday query, or respond to the most cursory remark, demands the bracketing of a potentially almost

⁵⁵ Giddens (1991) argues that embodied routines and habits serve to reduce ambiguous and open possibilities into a manageable degree as to prevent the “flooding in of anxiety” (p. 38).

infinite range of possibilities open to the individual...A sense of the shared reality of people and things is simultaneously sturdy and fragile. (p. 37)

Essentially, without the focus of a horizontal limit, one's being is experienced as a sense of "uncertainty, and insubstantiality" (Laing, 1969, p. 48) and a sense of "powerlessness" (Fromm, 1941, p. 24).

The degree of the horizontal limit is fundamentally constituted by intersubjectivity. Essentially, we exist intersubjectively, as subjects who exist in relation to other subjects in a shared world. The intersubjective involvements are not engaged through higher order reasoning as much as an embodied process constituting socially facilitated habits and routines. In other words, the horizontal limit is gradually formed in an embodied and relational manner. The goal of the intersubjective contemplative pedagogy, then, is to experientially sensitize the students of the connections between their horizontal limit and the social relationships that they engage in. I believe that an intersubjective contemplative pedagogy can be established on the basis of the phenomenological elaboration of intersubjectivity as well as its connections to the traditional Theravādan doctrine of ethics and dependent co-arising. It is useful to examine the phenomenology of intersubjectivity as a starting point.

6.2 Intersubjectivity

Intersubjectivity forges and sustains the horizontal limit, which is the existential condition of ontological security. The involvement with intersubjectivity is driven by practical actions that occur within the triadic foundation of what Cornejo (2008) describes to be the *minimum communicative situation* (p. 172). The minimum communicative situation is triadic in its composition of the subject, other, and shared object. It is only under the triadic foundation that

the world can be meaningfully perceived, as Cornejo (2008) states: “comprehension is produced if and only if a common experiencing exists [...] It requires the triadic convergence among a shared phenomenological experiencing [...] on a common world” (p. 174). The triadic foundation is rooted in what Cornejo (2008) describes to be a “co-phenomenology (p. 175), where we come to establish fundamental meaning structures of reality through the shared expressions with each other. In other words, it is by the position of us attending to the other attending to our presence as objects, that our horizon is then signaled to reveal the self as situated meaningfully within the spatial-temporal world. My “self” is revealed to me in its meaningful relationship to the world, others, and myself under the attendance of others in situating us within the world⁵⁶.

The formation of the horizontal limit through the triadic foundation is described as “Secondary Intersubjectivity” (SI) by Colwyn Trevarthen (1998). SI is termed under the consideration of the discourse of developmental phenomenology regarding the formation of the sense of self and meaning structures in infancy. SI builds on the developmental condition of “Primary Intersubjectivity” (PI), where social engagements are mostly confined to a dyadic coordination and developmentally restricted from more complex meaning structure formations

⁵⁶ This is reminiscent of George Herbert Mead’s (1934) social theory regarding the emergent self and its meaningful relation to the world. Mead recognizes two fundamental developmental dimensions of the nature of the self and its relations to the world. First, the self is naturally equipped with a pre-reflective awareness bounded within the individual as recognized as a “bare thereness of the world” (p. 135). Yet the pre-reflective awareness within Mead’s theory does not explicitly indicate any traces of the notions of self. It is instead treated as a preliminary condition which the self gradually develops through. Second, the self is then formed through self-objectification as they experience the recognition of their “self” under the attention of others, where the self is situated in spatial-temporal relation to the world of objects. As others continuously attend to us, we also gradually discover our “self” and its relation to the world through our participation in the relationship with others. This process of objectification, therefore, consists of the triadic foundation that forges and sustains the horizontal limit in its narrowed scope of possibilities. An ontologically secured relation to the world can then emerge for our practical and purposive dispositions to be enacted without existential confusion and uncertainty.

around objects (prior to 6 months of age) (Reddy, 2008)⁵⁷. SI, on the other hand, builds upon the dyadic structure and proceeds into a triadic process where the meaning structure of the world itself is formed through the mutual synchronized reciprocity around the shared object of perceptual interest.

SI as a process does not only represent a developmental phase but also a retained sensitivity to social cues and participatory meaning structure making through relationships. Infants under SI do not merely mimic as much as progressively develop their “own competence in those same activities” (Bower, 2014, p. 467). Behavioural cues and references of the other act as sources of information as well as outcomes of one’s expressions. Such processes of joint attention and behaviours serve as interpersonal anchors that then allow referentially-based formations (from others’ expressions and gestures towards one’s own expressions and points of shared perceptual interest within the triadic interaction) of certain meanings of one’s behaviours, attitude as well as the objects of their enactments. The social engagement and coordination with others, therefore, provide a “source of attitudes toward the things and events that are happening within the shared surroundings” (Hobson, 2002, p. 93). In an important way, SI and PI represent the fundamental phenomenological processes of the developmental foundation of how one derives inner substantiality and continuity through the creative interplay with others. In other

⁵⁷ PI describes the phenomenal recognition of the intentionality of other minds from the infant’s perspective, where the meaning structure of others can be referentially established from the co-participated cues of “grasping, moving towards, nodding, gazing” (Gallagher, 2010, p. 115). Young infants understand other minds through a pre-reflective disposition (without higher order cognition that is actively deliberated and calculated), through the synchronization of gestural movements, vocal intonations, and facial expressions of the proximate other (Gergely, 2001). This does not mean mimicry as much as an attuned response to others, such that the co-participation of mutual responses creates a mutual understanding of the intentionality of distinct minds.

words, the Winnicottian description of “internalized holding” is then contingent upon our existential nature as intersubjective beings and the phenomenological processes intrinsic to it.

The triadic coordinative process is not a higher-order cognitive deliberation as much as a lower level pre-reflective automaticity that is deeply rooted in embodied affectivity (primary emotions in relation to direct physical experiences). Perceptual processing of the environment and social relationships are, therefore, anchored by the emotional expressions of the others as a way to direct and orient the process to “modulate their own behaviour toward novel and ambiguous objects” (Gergely, Egyed & Király, 2007, p.140). Therefore, perceptual processing of the environment is largely facilitated and informed by iterations of pre-reflective affectively-based triadic coordination. As such, engagements with the world reflect an underlying sensitivity to the presence of co-phenomenology that pervades in the activities and objects, where “The world they are faced with therefore has the sense of a world acted upon jointly or first by others” (Bower, 2014, p. 469).

Given that the perception of the objective world is limited to the position of our immediate sensorial processing, we are inevitably confronted with incomplete and imperfect profiles of any objects or entities within the world (Zahavi, 2014). As such, objects are firstly sensorily given on a partial basis on a pre-reflective level and supplemented with additional perceptual perspectives to ensure a more complete profile of the perceived entity⁵⁸. The

⁵⁸ In order to conceive the complete perceptual grasp of any entity, we are engaged in a process as to transcend the pre-reflectively given absence as to arrive at the subsequent supplemented version of presence (Zahavi, 2014). Therefore, all perceptual conclusions of anything within the world are the result of partial interpretation or “*Hinausdeutung*” (Zahavi, 2014, ch.10, p. 24) to transcend absence. Yet such process of transcendence (fill in the blanks of the incomplete profile) is not possible through only the solitary efforts of memory and imagination of the individual. If attempts were made to transcend the absence of entities in the world through either additive decoration of memory or imagination, such processes would imply some form of temporal incompatibility with immediate

incomplete profile of the perceptual grasp of any entity reflects an insufficient limited horizon. This occurs from the lack of continuous sustenance from the triadic foundation where the meaningful relation between the self and the world can be revealed to oneself. Incomplete profile of the entity is resolved through an embodied co-phenomenology for a meaningful and specific action toward and (hence) relationship with the world.

The incomplete profile under the insufficiently limited horizon marks the existential condition of ontological insecurity. It is insufficient insofar as one engages with an incomplete triadic foundation. In other words, fundamental meaning structures of the world can begin to shatter if the intersubjective conditions in which they emerge from are incomplete to sustain them continuously. After all, as Giddens (1991) writes on the condition of ontological security: “Its robustness is conveyed by the high level of reliability of the contexts of day-to-day social interaction, as these are produced and reproduced by lay agents” (p. 37). A familiar and useful example in demonstrating this is the experience of grief, particularly its depressive-related symptoms.

Grief occurs when the triadic foundation constituting Self-Other-Shared object loses the Other as an anchor that signals one’s horizontal limit. Matthew Ratcliffe (2016) states the experience of grief as a specific *and* generalized loss. It is the loss of a specific close Other, and along with it, the loss of a generalized meaning structure that brings forth the world, or the “loss of a system of possibilities” (p. 4) as described by Ratcliffe (2018). Ratcliffe (2016) elaborates

perceptual experience (Bower, 2014). Both memory and imagination lack the phenomenal quality of the immediacy and present-ness of direct perception, therefore, are inadequate cases for perceptual transcendence. Ultimately, what is left as a sufficient source of perceptual transcendence that is temporally compatible with the presentness of perceptual processing would only remain to be the “vantage points for other possible subjects” (Bower, 2015, p. 259).

on the phenomenology of grief to be “an all-enveloping shift in how the world is experienced and how one relates to it” (p. 205) caused by the loss of “an elaborate system of practical meanings that were previously experienced as integral to it (experience of the world)” (p. 206). The experience of grief demonstrates the intersubjective foundation of our horizontal limit through the consequences of the loss of the basic triadic formula. Ratcliffe (2018) writes: “In the event of a particular person’s death, a system of possibilities that operated as a backdrop to meaningful activity is lost and the world is profoundly different” (p. 5). The loss of possibilities is also eloquently described by Oates (2011): “Without meaning, the world is *things*. And these things multiplied to infinity” (p. 176). Without the emergence of meaning, the world appears as an estranged place that fails to pull us into practical and purposive relations with it. Things may be sensorially available, yet meaningfully absent as undefined by a focused scope of horizontal limit. The insufficiently limited horizon renders any specific emergence of possibilities as *mere arbitrary* in the presence of all the other possibilities. The arbitrariness is then experienced as the absence of any possibilities at all *for me*⁵⁹.

⁵⁹ Another example that illuminates the importance of the triadic foundation in informing the horizontal limit and the meaningful relations to the world (hence, the emergence of the meaningful world itself) is the experience of solitary confinement. Gallagher (2014) describes the experience of the inmates of solitary confinement to be constituted by a sense of de-realization and self-dissolution. Fundamental perceptual grasp of the world becomes debilitated as the solitary confinement undermines “their relation to the world. Thus, the experience of object boundaries becomes uncertain” (Gallagher, 2014, p. 410). A testimony of solitary confinement reveals that “It becomes difficult to tell what is real and what is only my imagination playing tricks on me [...] the wire mesh on [the] door begins to vibrate or the surface of the wall seems to bulge” (Gallagher, 2014, citing Grassian, 1983). Without any presence of the triadic foundation for the opportunities for a co-phenomenological participation, the conditions for secondary intersubjectivity (SI) is entirely absent along with “participatory sense making, undermining the capacity to sustain meaning” (p. 410). Gallagher (2014) also describes solitary confinement as disruptive of the “relational self by disrupting primary and secondary intersubjectivity [...] essential to social interaction” (p. 410). Solitary confinement, Gallagher argues, is contingent upon an erroneous conception of the self as a standalone entity in the first place, where the condition of absolute solitude is presumed to enable a productive introspective inwardness. The individual is assumed to be fully equipped with some form of independent meaning making and perceptual processing apparatus. However, instead of a formation of productive introspective insights, the opposite occurs in the form of the loss of capacity to establish meaning structures and perceptual conclusions about the world. Without

However, the inadequacy of the triadic foundation to form a horizontal limit does not exclusively entail the *literal* absence of the Other. Even if physical conditions for the triadic foundation are satisfied, it still fails to form a horizontal limit if obstructed by the defensive mechanisms of ontological insecurity. Despite the triadic foundation being the fundamental condition for the formation of the horizontal limit, it is still risk of engulfment for the ontologically insecure⁶⁰. While the incomplete triadic foundation presents as a profound deprivation for those in grieving, it is an opportune relief for the ontologically insecure. This can either be done through physical isolation or the private maneuver of depersonalization while remaining socially engaged⁶¹.

The ontologically insecure seek to evade the process of objectification from the Other⁶². For the power of the Other to situate them in the spatial-temporal world represents a risk of engulfment; of devouring their already unstable and frail meaning structures into dissolution. As a result, the ontologically insecure retains the disproportionate power to objectify others while denying the others the power to do the same (which can be externally expressed as the sadist character described by Fromm, as previously discussed). Without the conditions for mutual objectification, creative interplay is entirely absent. The ontologically insecure, therefore, is

the basic triadic ingredients for PI and SI, the self becomes unable to secure a social reference to establish and sustain a horizontal limit for the formation of a meaningful relationship with the world.

⁶⁰ As discussed in chapter four, the power of the Other to objectify us into the spatial-temporal world can also be an experience where the already unstable and discontinuous self is engulfed into nothingness under the “emphatic, and substantial” (Laing, 1969, p. 48) weight of the Other.

⁶¹ Laing’s patient, James, had adopted a psychological strategy of depersonalization in order to prevent the consequence of the absolute engulfment of his sense of stable and continuous self. Laing described such a strategy to be inhabiting “an inner intellectual Medusa’s head” (p. 48) that seeks to destroy “in his own eyes, the other person as a person” (p. 48), therefore, robbing “the other of his power to crush him” (p. 48). By depriving the other of their humanity within one’s private psychology, they no longer serve as the necessary triadic ingredient of the “Other” that allows for mutual objectification.

⁶² From the Meadian understanding (regarding the formation of the self and meaning structures from the internalization of self-objectification).

unable to derive the formation of their horizontal limit from the intersubjective participation despite a physical presence in such a circumstance. This is described by Laing as a “shut-up self” (p. 75) and “being isolated, is unable to be enriched by outer experience, and so the whole inner world comes to be more and more impoverished, until the individual may come to feel he is merely a vacuum” (p. 75).

The triadic foundation for the intersubjective formation of the horizontal limit must be present both as a *circumstance* of social opportunities and the *willingness* to participate in mutual self-objectification of creative interplay with the Other. The participation in the creative interplay leads to an ongoing cycle. The triadic structure provides the foundation for ontological security, which then allows one to be fully able to participate in the triadic structure in the first place without the defenses of depersonalization or isolation. Yet the conditions of ontological insecurity can also present a cycle where the defenses prevent the formation of a sufficiently limited horizon. The concern for contemplative pedagogy, therefore, is to allow the individual to be sensitized to the necessary connections between the triadic foundation and their horizontal limit. It is to shift the *inwardness* of both depersonalization and isolation⁶³ (where the participation with the Other of the triadic structure is absent) into an *outwardness* where the

⁶³ Depersonalization and isolation present conditions of inwardness, in the sense that the basic ingredient of the Other of the triadic structure is missing either physically, psychologically, or both. This is previously elaborated through the comparison between Fromm’s sadomasochistic character and Laing’s description of the ontologically insecure. Both cases retreat from the external world of creative interplays, where mutual objectification is engaged. Instead, one either becomes physically isolated from social relationships, or deliberately depersonalizes the other to drain their powers of objectification. Inwardness as a term here is not used to describe a psychological disposition where one is introverted or introspectively engaged. Rather, it is an existential condition (the manner in which one exists in meaningful relation with the world) where the social Other is removed from the basic conditions that forge meaning structures of the world. Outwardness, then, by the same account, does not mean extraversion as much as the acknowledgement of and involvement with the social Other as part of the triadic foundation that is necessary to forge and sustain meaning structures. For example, one can be introverted as a personality yet outward in existential condition – one is not inclined to participate socially, yet derive meaning from the triadic structure because one does not isolate or depersonalize the Other as a basic ingredient.

Other is fully acknowledged and engaged with as a necessary meaning forming process. In other words, it is to shift from the neglect to an inclusion of the Other as part of the formation of the horizontal limit.

The goal is to provide an intersubjective base in the discourse to address the potential downsides transpersonalism in its risk of justifying what Welwood (2000) terms as the “schizoid defense” (p. 206) of isolation and disengagement and what Fromm (1941) describes as the masochism of self-dissolution. The emphasis of peak states of contemplative processes can serve to justify the removal of the self from the triadic foundation, depriving one of the opportunity to form the horizontal limit. It is justified on the basis as an educational end of pleasant and deeply meaningful experiences. Yet it is its very nature of being alluringly pleasant due to the state of “self-transcendence” that it can be conveniently used as an escape from the risks of confronting one’s intersubjective nature. Therefore, the intersubjective emphasis can shift the inwardness of transpersonalism to the outward alignment with our intrinsic existential sociality.

The intersubjectively-based contemplative pedagogy can be rooted in the traditional discourse of Theravāda Buddhism, particularly in its discussions of ethical principles and *paṭicca-samuppāda* (dependent arising). The Theravāda discourse is compatible with the process of the horizontal limit, providing a contemplative philosophical and practice framework for the phenomenology of intersubjectivity. In other words, Theravāda discourse does not have to remain within psychotherapeutic concerns and transpersonal aspirations. It can also begin to be accompanied by a phenomenological understanding intersubjectivity as part of our existential nature and our experience of ontological security.

6.3 Experiential Theravāda Ethics

There are two conditions of the Theravāda ethical framework that allows for an alignment with the phenomenological intersubjectivity. I will briefly introduce these conditions before delving into more elaborations. Firstly, the Theravāda ethical framework is rooted in the idea of the process of causality, where actions and reactions towards the world are causally connected to the states of our minds, and vice versa. Such Theravāda framing of ethics as rooted within the process of causality can be paralleled to the causality between the formation of our personal horizontal limit and the circumstances of the triadic foundation. The circumstances of the triadic foundation as well as our actions and reactions toward it inevitably connect to our horizontal limit, hence, the degree of our ontological security. Secondly, the ethical framework is experientially-based. Ethical abidance does not reflect some internalization of moral obligations as much as a reflective process upon the consequences of certain behaviours on the states of our mind. In connection to the Theravāda discourse, the formation of the horizontal limit from the triadic structure can also be one that is rooted in an experiential acknowledgement through contemplative processes. One may develop an *experiential sensitivity* to the value of the triadic foundation in its capacity to forge and sustain the horizontal limit. In other words, Theravāda discourse supports an *experientially-based sensitivity* to the causality between one's ontological security as derived from a triadic foundation.

It is through the Theravāda discourse that one is guided to develop both theoretical and experiential understanding of the causal conditions of one's subjectivity and interactions with the external world. And it is precisely under the experiential understanding of causality that one develops the sensitivity to the implications of their interactions to the triadic foundation on the formation of their horizontal limit, hence, the meaningful relation to the world. In order to

establish such connections, I will first elaborate upon the experiential dimension of Theravāda ethics.

The notion of ethical development represents a crucial principle throughout the Theravāda discourse. The ethical frameworks do not exclusively represent deontological structures⁶⁴ as much as an experiential-based ethical cultivation rooted in the recognition of the process of causality. Their presentation is nested within a broader system of practice in the form of the Noble Eightfold Path, where ethical abidance is connected to the concerns of the experiences within the mind as well as the development of insight into the nature of causality. Ethical abidance, in this sense, is presented as both an outcome of and contributor to the recognition of causality. Namely, ethical abidance contributes to the cultivation of particular qualities of the mind that allows it to be more capable to develop insights into the nature of causality. The insight of causality, as a result, then sustains an ethical abidance as one understands the causal connections between one's actions and mental qualities. The relation of ethical abidance to the experiential recognition of causality can be elaborated by connecting discourses between the *Sūta Piṭaka*⁶⁵ and the *Khandhaka*⁶⁶ of the *Vinaya Piṭaka* ("Baskets of Discipline"), which primarily details all of the monastic rules for monks and nuns.

In order to establish the connections between ethical abidance and the experiential recognition of causality, I will briefly discuss the ethical conducts as detailed from the *Khandhaka*. My exploration of monastic rules does not imply to argue for the relevance of

⁶⁴ Keown (2006) argues that Buddhist ethics arguably demonstrate the closest resemblance to the system of virtue ethics, and the most dissimilar to deontology and utilitarianisticutilitarianist based ethics.

⁶⁵ *Sūta Piṭaka* is the second division of the Pali Canon (which is largely the scriptural source of Theravāda Buddhism).

⁶⁶ *Khandhaka* is the second book of *Vinaya Piṭaka*.

monastic ethical codes in contemplative pedagogical discourse. Rather, it is an attempt to track the specific connections between ethical abidance and the experiential recognition of causality starting from the details of particular rules. It is to present through a specific example that demonstrates the nesting of the ethical abidance within a broader system of practice related to the cultivation of the experiential recognition of causality. Scriptures and books of the Pali Canon, therefore, intersect with each other to form a holistically connected system of practice. Such a holistic system of practice should then inform the intersubjectively-based contemplative pedagogy rooted the phenomenological discourse of intersubjectivity.

6.4 Customs and Rules in the Khandhaka

The book of *Khandhaka* is examined as it dedicates a great portion to describe the specific manners in which ethical conducts are to be carried out (as listed in the *Pātimokkha*⁶⁷ book of the *Vinaya*). The descriptions of the appropriate monastic conduct revolve around numerous activities within the training process, such as how to treat senior monastics, how to brush teeth, how to treat certain illnesses, and so on. Although the details are systematically listed within the *Khandhaka*, these texts are also implicitly connected with the *Sūtta Piṭaka* in their narrative origins. Therefore, it is useful and important to engage the *Khandhaka* through the narrative context of the *Sūtta Piṭaka* in order to reveal its connections to a broader system of practice.

⁶⁷ *Pātimokkha* lists the basic code of monastic rules for both monks and nuns.

Therefore, I will first detail specific rules and continue with further elaborations from the *Sūṭṭa Piṭaka*⁶⁸.

One of the main focusses of the customs within the *Khandhaka* revolves around the monastics' robes and its cloth materials. Explicit details are provided regarding the manner in which robes are to be cut, sewn and repaired in manners that are designed to emphasize a particular monastic lifestyle and habit of mind. For instance: "One should not wear robes that have not been cut up. Whoever should wear one: an offense of wrongdoing" (Thanissaro, 2013, Mahāvagga 8.11.2) and "One should not wear fancy waistbands—those with many strands, those like a watersnake head, those braided like tambourine frames, those like chains. Whoever should wear one: an offense of wrong doing. I allow two kinds of waistbands: cloth strips and 'pig entrails'" (Thanissaro, 2013, Cullavagga 5.29.2). When one observes such passages, it is safe to conclude that the required conduct promotes austerity, practicality and mental training. For instance, by cutting up the robes into smaller portions, the robe itself is then reduced from a single material of high costs to simply numerous patches of lower costs (Thanissaro, 2013). Such a practice prevents the potential cases of theft as well as the attachment to the optimal state of the material as a single piece. Additionally, the restrictions of waistband to only cloth strips and pig entrails are to inspire the abandonment of worldly concerns, such as social positions based on the aesthetics of particular garments as well as its associated pride. Ultimately, such rules are designed to at least partially counteract one of the main mental defilements - greed; whether for material things or for fame.

⁶⁸ This structure will consist of only presenting key *sūṭṭa* phrases that underlie main argumentative points. There will also be other related *sūṭṭa* that offer additional background information and more comprehensive engagements that will instead remain in the footnotes section.

The conclusion for such intentions behind the aforementioned rules can be observably connected to the passage within *Sabbāsava Sūta* in its passages on the process of “Fermentation”⁶⁹. The term “fermentation” within such context would most likely imply the potential for growth or erosion of particular mental habits or psychological orientation because one’s tendencies for their developments. In other words, the Buddha has described a normative paradigm of cognitive malleability in which there are “right” and “wrong” ways to develop the mind. The specific normative framework is described as: “And what are the ideas unfit for attention that he attends to? Whatever ideas such that [...] the unarisen fermentation of sensuality arises in him [...] fermentation of becoming arises in him [...] unarisen fermentation of ignorance arises in him [...]” (Thanissaro, 2008, Majjhima Nikāya 2.1). The *sūta* then continues to specify the manner where such defilements are abandoned through the practical emphasis on robes: “And what are the fermentations to be abandoned by using? There is the case where a monk, reflecting appropriately, uses the robe simply to counteract cold [...] heat [...] flies, mosquitoes [...] simply for the purpose of covering the parts of the body that cause shame” (Thanissaro, 2008, Majjhima Nikāya 2.3).

The transformative intention of the idea of “appropriate” or “inappropriate” attention is also further reiterated through certain passages of the *Dhammapada*: “Preceded by perception are mental states, for them perception is supreme, having sprung from perception. If one speaks or acts with inappropriate perception, then suffering follows as a wheel the draught ox’s foot” (Carter & Paliawadana, 1998, p. 89). Essentially, the *sūttas* provide a narratively-grounded

⁶⁹“The Blessed One said, “Monks, the ending of the fermentations is for one who knows & sees [...] Appropriate attention & inappropriate attention. When a monk attends inappropriately, unarisen fermentations arise, and arisen fermentations increase. When a monk attends appropriately, unarisen fermentations do not arise, and arisen fermentations are abandoned” (Majjhima Nikāya 2, Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 1997).

context for the practice of the *Khandhaka* instructions for conduct regarding clothing and other customs. Such conducts are driven by a soteriological intention to abandon the *kilesas*⁷⁰ associated with greed and pride, which causes suffering. One cultivates wholesome mental states by regarding material possessions such as the robes as mere sources of practicality through being content with basic material conditions and minimal possessions. As demonstrated by passages in *Dhammapada*, *Vinaya*, *Sūta Piṭaka*, one can begin to observe a holistic system of practice that recognizes the condition of causality as connecting the processes of ethical conducts to perception, perception to mental states, mental states to *kilesas*, and *kilesas* to suffering.

6.5 Experience and Reflections

The rules are not necessarily intended to form *automatic* habits (in the form of behavioural muscle memory). Rather, the ethical conducts are contingent upon an experientially-based learning process for the understanding of the causality. The practice of relating to one's robes, for example, is rooted in the broader system of the Noble Eightfold Path of cultivating "right view": "When a disciple [...] discerns what is unskillful, [...] the root of what is unskillful, [...] what is skillful, and discerns the root of what is skillful, [...] he is a person of right view" (Thanissaro, 2008, Majjhima Nikāya 9)⁷¹. The *sūta* then continues to specify what is considered skillful and unskillful defined by ethical and unethical behaviours:

⁷⁰ May be translated as mental hindrances, unwholesome states, defilements, and craving. This can be observed from phrases such as "*cittasse'so upakkilesa*" (Samyutta Nikāya, 27.1, Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 1994) which can be translated as defilements of the mind.

⁷¹ Essentially, right view implies the discernment of the *kilesas* from its wholesome counterpart: "*And what are the roots of what is unskillful? Greed is a root of what is unskillful, aversion is a root of what is unskillful, delusion is a root of what is unskillful. These are termed the roots of what is unskillful*" (Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 2008, Majjhima Nikāya 9).

Now what is unskillful? Taking life is unskillful, taking what is not given [...] sexual misconduct [...] lying [...] abusive speech [...] divisive tale-bearing [...] idle chatter is unskillful. Covetousness [...] ill will [...] wrong views are unskillful. These things are termed unskillful. (Majjhima Nikāya 9, Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 2008)

And what is skillful? Abstaining from taking life is skillful, abstaining from taking what is not given [...] from sexual misconduct [...] from lying [...] from abusive speech [...] from divisive tale-bearing [...] abstaining from idle chatter is skillful. Lack of covetousness [...] lack of ill will [...] right views are skillful. These things are termed skillful. (Majjhima Nikāya 9, Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 2008)

The discernment of right view is not exclusively left as a purely cognitive exercise of judgement or memory, but further elaborated as having an experiential base. For instance, within the *Cetana Sūtta*, the discourse of ethics and virtuous behaviours is rooted within an experiential consequence of remorse, joy, pleasure, rapture, and serenity:

For a person endowed with virtue, consummate in virtue, there is no need for an act of will, 'May freedom from remorse arise in me.' It is in the nature of things that freedom from remorse arises in a person endowed with virtue, consummate in virtue. For a person free from remorse, there is no need for an act of will, 'May joy arise in me.' It is in the nature of things that joy arises in a person free from remorse. For a joyful person, there is no need for an act of will, 'May rapture arise in me.' It is in the nature of things that rapture arises in a joyful person. For a rapturous person, there is no need for an act of will, 'May my body be serene.' It is in the nature of things that a rapturous person grows serene in body. For a person serene in body, there is no need for an act of will, 'May I experience pleasure.' It is in the nature of things that a person serene in body experiences pleasure. (Anguttara Nikāya 11.2, Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 1997).

It is through such experiences that the mind attains states of concentration where “[...] I know & see things as they actually are.’ It is in the nature of things that a person whose mind is concentrated knows & sees things as they actually are” (Thanissaro, 1997, Anguttara Nikāya 11.2). The clear seeing mind develops particular insights regarding the nature of reality within

Buddhist metaphysics, as stated in *Anguttara Nikāya*: “[...] Concentration has knowledge & vision of things as they actually are as its purpose, knowledge & vision of things as they actually are as its reward [...]” (*Anguttara Nikāya* 11.2, Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 1997). Namely, one of the fundamental insights that is cultivated from such conditions of mind is *paccaya pariggaha ñāṇa* or the knowledge of conditionality, where causal conditions between body and mind are experientially understood as to inform the approach to abandon *kilesas* (Mahāsi, 1994, p. 10-12). The serenity allows the mind to grasp the causality between external circumstances, their actions, and the outcome of their states of mind. *Kilesas* are, therefore, abandoned as one understands the preceding factors to mental states such as serenity, joy, and so on. Therefore, a cycle is presented where ethical abidance is both the contributor to and outcome of the experiential recognition of causality.

The Theravāda discourse frames the “right” pathway of development as to be directed towards the understanding of causality, as demonstrated by *Upanisā Sutta* in *Samyutta Nikāya*: “conviction has stress & suffering as its prerequisite, joy has conviction as its prerequisite, rapture has joy as its prerequisite, serenity has rapture as its prerequisite, [...] concentration has pleasure as its prerequisite, knowledge & vision of things as they actually are present has concentration as its prerequisite” (*Samyutta Nikāya* 12.23, Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 1997). And when right knowledge of causality is cultivated, one naturally understands (reinforcing right view in discerning wrong from right prerequisites) the prerequisites to the sequential expressions in virtue, joy, concentration, and finally to right knowledge in a circular fashion. Therefore, ethical abiding consists of a cyclically reflective process where all actions (both thoughts and behaviours) are *experienced* as consequences in a causal network.

6.6 Dependent Co-Arising

The connection between ethical abidance and the experiential recognition of causality as a reflection of “right knowledge” is fundamentally connected to its understanding of the notion of the self. The condition of the self is presented to be a part of the causal process of the *paṭicca-samuppāda* or dependent co-arising. The process of *paṭicca-samuppāda* demonstrates the co-arising of both the causes and effects of multiple factors for the emergence of particular phenomena, such as the self. The emergence of the self is then simultaneously the cause for the arising of some other phenomena as it is informed by it. In other words, *paṭicca-samuppāda* presents causes and effects as an interdependent process rather than a linear consequence. Ethical abidance, therefore, would belong to the holistic process of *paṭicca-samuppāda*, where it is both a cause and effect toward the experiential cultivation of “right knowledge” of *paṭicca-samuppāda*.

Through the process of *paṭicca-samuppāda*, the nature of the self and its subjective experiences are derived from the relation between the external world and the manner in which the self responds to it. Joanna Rogers Macy (1979) describes the process of our perceptual experiences under the notion of *paṭicca-samuppāda* as “a two-way street, a mutual process involving the convergence of sensory signal with attention and sense organ, and the mental constructs imposed by the perceiver” (p. 43). The self and its perceptual experiences of the world do not exist as an independent entity capable of a “passive registering of stimuli” (p. 43) at a distance from the world itself. Instead, Macy writes that “perception is a highly interpretive process and thinking itself a contributing factor in the arising of phenomena. We create our worlds, but do not do so unilaterally, for consciousness is coloured by that on which it feeds” (p. 43). The nature of the self and the world is defined by the meaningful relation that exists in

between them instead of either materialism (independently existing material realm) or idealism (world emerges from projected inner cognition).

The nature of the self as reflective of *paṭicca-samuppāda* is elaborated in the Theravāda discourse regarding *nāmarūpa* (translated into “name-form”). *Nāmarūpa* represents the Theravāda understanding of subjective experiences: “Touch, feeling, perception, intention, attention: this is *nāma* (name). The four great elements and the forms derived from those elements: this is *rūpa* (form). So name and form together are *nāmarūpa*”⁷² (Bodhi, 2000, *Samyutta Nikāya* 12.2, p. 535). Stephen Bachelor (2015) argues that the discourse of *nāmarūpa* communicates the understanding of subjective experiences as “always a condition of contact, of being-in-touch, which further undermines the dualistic idea of...mind” (p. 190). Formation of subjective experiences is rooted in the *paṭicca-samuppāda* process as an interactive relationship between bodily engagements with the world and the emergence of mental qualities: “with the arising of touch, there is the arising of feeling, with the arising of touch, there is the arising of perception, with the arising of touch, there is the arising of inclination” (p. 191). The world emerges from the point of contact of our touch which leads to the formation of subjective experiences that allows the world to emerge as a perceptually graspable phenomenon in the first place.

Nāmarūpa, however, is elaborated as a distinct phenomenon from consciousness. Yet its distinction from consciousness does not exclude its role in informing its emergence. Rather, the relationship described between *nāmarūpa* and consciousness is reflective of the process of *paṭicca-samuppāda*, where “consciousness with name-form (*nāmarūpa*) as its condition, and

⁷²The four great elements that qualify as *rūpa* are specified to be earth, water, fire, and air.

name-form with consciousness as its condition” (Bodhi, 2000, *Samyutta Nikāya* 12.65, p. 601).

The formation of consciousness is simultaneously distinct from yet contingent upon the constituents of *nāmarūpa*. The contact with the world through the *nāmarūpa*’s constituent of touch does not by itself constitute consciousness. Rather, it is the aftermath of the co-arising of all of the constituents of *nāmarūpa* as holistically integrated into a unified subjective experience. The distinction between *nāmarūpa* and consciousness marks the difference between a perceptual reception of the world through the senses and the phenomenal quality of experiencing such perceptions in a meaningful and coherent manner. As Bachelor (2015) writes: “any experience – is simultaneously unified *and* highly differentiated; it is both a single, coherent whole *and* a mass of whiling, contrasting detail [...] Name-form without consciousness would be chaos. Consciousness without name-form would be meaningless” (p. 194).

The relationship between *nāmarūpa* and consciousness demonstrates that the nature of our subjective experiences as directly contingent upon the conditions in which they participate in. Consciousness is the distinct meaningful and coherent whole of the constituents of *nāmarūpa* in its interactions with the world. Without the primary conditions of contact with the world, consciousness ceases to emerge as meaningful, as demonstrated in the *Mahatanhasankhaya Sūtta* when the Buddha attempts to argue against the unconditional status of consciousness: “have I not stated in many ways consciousness to be dependently arisen, since without a condition there is no origination of consciousness?” (Bodhi & Ñāṇamoli, 1995, *Majjhima Nikāya* 38.5, para. 13). The Buddha then goes into more specific examples where he describes the arising of consciousness to be directly informed by the type of sensorial contact we have with the world: “When consciousness arises dependent on the eye and forms, it is reckoned as eye-consciousness [...] when consciousness arises dependent on the tongue and flavours, it is reckoned as tongue-

consciousness [...]” (Bodhi & Ñāṇamoli, 1995, *Majjhima Nikāya* 38.8, para. 20). In the end, the Buddha analogizes the conditionality of consciousness to that of a fiery log, where the fire of consciousness only burns upon the log fuel of *nāmarūpa* and its interactions with the surrounding environment. (Bodhi & Ñāṇamoli, 1995, *Majjhima Nikāya* 38.8, para. 20). What the discourse demonstrates is a notion of the formation of self and consciousness that cannot be separated from its surrounding environment as well as the interactions that take place between them. Coherent experiences and grasp of the world are derived from a meaningful interaction between the phenomena of our sensorial contact and the consciousness that conditionally forms from it.

Because of the fact that the formation of self and consciousness is rooted in the process of *paṭicca-samuppāda* through the contact with the external world, the implications for ethical conduct then emerge as highly relevant. How we behaviourally interact with the external world as expressed by *nāmarūpa* can now be understood to provide *the fundamental conditions* in which our consciousness of the world is to be formed. For consciousness and the world do not exist separately, but only emerges through the meaningful relations that exist between them. As Macy (1979) writes: “Because the self is a process formed through sensory, affected and cognitive interaction with the world, it cannot be abstracted from its social context” (p. 47). And due to its embeddedness within the social context, our contact with and understanding of the world are “neither ‘objective’ nor value-free, but relative constructs which bear our moral responsibility” (p. 44). The moral implications of our consciousness as embedded within the social world then translate into the abidance to ethical conducts where mental qualities, the development of insight, and our behavioural engagement with the world are all interdependent upon each other.

6.7 Formation of Horizontal Limit and Dependent Co-Arising

The dangerous potential of ontological insecurity can be addressed through a contemplative pedagogy informed by a phenomenological intersubjectivity. There are clear parallels between the phenomenological intersubjectivity and the Theravāda doctrine of dependent co-arising and ethics. It is through such parallels that an intersubjective contemplative pedagogy can be forwarded for the sake of addressing the conditions of ontological insecurity.

Theravāda Buddhism promotes an experiential recognition of causality through meditative practice. The meditator becomes aware of the causal processes of dependent co-arising (*paṭicca-samuppāda*) in a way that cultivates a compassionate intersubjectivity. To bring this back into phenomenological terms, Theravāda Buddhism provides an ontology and practice that allows a healthy, creative, and sustainable awareness of one's horizontal limit and its connection to intersubjectivity. Theravādan subjectivity is also based on a triadic foundation. Mindfulness in today's contemplative pedagogy has been shorn of this larger, ethical and intersubjective context. It is a narrow appropriation of this Theravāda tradition. Either the notion of *sati* (as an extracted practice of mindfulness, separate from its holistic Noble Eightfold Path) has been made the predominant practice (as in scientific-psychological mindfulness) or the notion of self-transcendence (often times similar to the experiences of *samatha*, or meditative absorption) has been made the predominant practice (as in transpersonal mindfulness). If instead, mindfulness as a contemplative pedagogy engages selectively with Theravāda tradition to include practices of abiding by ethical rules and contemplating *paṭicca-samuppāda* for the formation of consciousness and self, many of the issues of scientific-psychology mindfulness and transpersonal mindfulness could be avoided.

One important similarity between *paṭicca-samuppāda* and phenomenological intersubjectivity is that, in both, the relation between cause and effect are defined by their mutual participation in each other. The dependent co-arising occurs as it presents “consciousness with name-form as its condition, and name-form with consciousness as its condition” (Bodhi, 2000, *Samyutta Nikāya* 12.65, p. 601)⁷³. The dependent co-arising between consciousness, world, and embodiment gives rise to a meaningful world. Consciousness as an emergent coherent form of *nāmarūpa* can be compared to the formation of one’s meaning structure (basic existential answers) that inform one’s horizontal limit.

The meaning structure as defined by basic existential answers is forged through our participation in the triadic foundation as we internalize the mutual objectification engaged with the Other. The formation process of the meaning structure is not intellectually-based as much as they are an embodied habit; it is driven by persistent habitual synchronicity with the social expressions of the Other. In other words, the embodied habits of primary and secondary intersubjectivity (PI and SI) can be comparable to bundles of perceptual experiences that are bodily based (or “contact” based in relation to the Theravāda discourse). Through continuous habits of PI and SI, a coherent and unified gestalt of the meaning structure is forged and sustained through the maintained engagement with the triadic foundation. Just as the distinct consciousness is formed from the conditions of *nāmarūpa*, the fundamental meaning structure forms its coherent gestalt from the conditions of the habitual embodied participation with the

⁷³ Specifically, the emergence of both consciousness (the coherent subjective experience) and the world in which it experiences depend upon their relation, which is meaningful to the individual. Sensory contact with the world presents the embodied self (that bundle of perceptual experiences of *nāmarūpa*) that manifests as the organized gestalt of a distinct consciousness. The world then emerges as a meaningfully coherent phenomenon under our unified consciousness, which then serves as an experiential base for further interactions through our perceptual contacts.

triadic foundation. The meaning structure then informs a horizontal limit that narrows the specific possibilities of meaningful relations that one may have with the world, such that they emerge as meaningful at all. The horizontal limit, therefore, is itself a *distinct formation* from the triadic foundation, yet its formation is nevertheless contingent upon the bodily-based synchronicity from the participation in the triadic foundation.

The sufficiently limited horizon provides an ontological security that allows the world to emerge in a meaningful manner that is specific in its practical and embodied⁷⁴ relations to the individual. Without the distress of the chaos of ambiguous possibilities from an insufficiently limited horizon, the individual can engage in creative interplay. Horizontal limit, therefore, is forged and sustained by the interplay with the triadic foundation, yet such interplay is made possible with a sufficiently limited horizon in the first place. In other words, the relation between the horizontal limit and the embodied participation with the triadic foundation is one that is comparable to dependent co-arising. The gestalt of both consciousness and the horizontal limit are the coherent and stable entity that is both *distinct from and dependent upon nāmarūpa* in its contact with the world and the embodied habitual relations with the triadic foundation, respectively. The world does not emerge as a meaningful if not graspable by consciousness or a sufficiently limited horizon, nor are consciousness and the horizontal limit able to emerge if not participating in the contact with the external social world⁷⁵ in the first place. Without the coherency of the gestalt of consciousness or horizontal limit, one is left with the ambiguous bombardments of fluctuating and disconnected sensorial information and existential possibilities

⁷⁴ Such that the individual is not laden with the uncertainty as to how to behaviourally engage with and navigate through the world.

⁷⁵ As Macy (1979) states, *paṭicca-samuppāda* demonstrates that the self “cannot be abstracted from its social context” (p. 47).

(Thompson, 2015). The gestalt of consciousness and the horizontal limit is derived from connecting the seemingly separate sensorial information and possibilities into a limited scope of meaningful relations.

The parallels between *paṭicca-samuppāda* and the phenomenology of intersubjectivity extend into morality. Namely, the formation of the meaningful relations with the world is inherently involved in our interactions with the *social* world. Creative interplay with the Other is absent in the psychological maneuver of depersonalization. The Other is deprived of their power to situate one in a meaningful relation to the world, hence, unable to participate in the formation of a horizontal limit that provides ontological security. Depersonalization as a psychological disposition can then manifest as an externalized behaviour consisting of the characteristics of Fromm's sadist. Without the sufficiently limited horizon, ontological insecurity continuously reinforces depersonalization and sadism as defensive mechanisms.

The formation of the horizontal limit, therefore, contains the moral implication of sustaining the Other in their powers to objectify us into a meaningful relation with the world. The ethical conduct of sustaining the Other within the triadic structure leads one to act in accordance to the nature of their horizontal limit as *fundamentally intersubjectively informed*. The moral implication of the horizontal limit can be comparable to the ethical conduct rooted in the process of *paṭicca-samuppāda*.

The embeddedness of our consciousness within the social context implies reverberating effects from the particular actions that we take upon the world on mental qualities. Consciousness as meaningful experiences of the self, therefore, is the unified "self-organizing process shaped by the flow of experience and the choices that condition this flow" (Macy, 1979, p. 42). The process in which consciousness forms is contingent *upon the particular ethical*

condition of our choices responding to the perceptual ingredients constitutive of *nāmarūpa*. Consciousness as connected to ethical conducts can be shaped by the choices that are either considered “skillful” or “unskillful”⁷⁶ under the Theravāda discourse. The Anguttara Nikāya⁷⁷ describes those who participate in skillful ethical conducts to shape the formation of their consciousness towards qualities such as joy, freedom from remorse, rapture, serenity, and pleasure. Such mental qualities then lead to the cultivation of the insight into *paṭicca-samuppāda*, which then further reinforces one’s abidance to the skillful ethical conducts. What the Theravāda discourse demonstrates is, as Macy states, “what we *choose* [...] bears a recoil effect upon us – creating tendencies and dispositions, forming and perpetuating habits” (p. 44).

The recoil effects of the ethical conducts upon the formation of our consciousness can be elaborated further by the phenomenology of intersubjectivity. “Positive” mental qualities such as serenity, joy, and pleasure, can be understood as to rise in its stable and continuous forms through *ontological security*. Ontological security is derived from the *skillful* ethical conducts with the Other as maintaining their powers of objectification in the triadic structure through

⁷⁶ The characteristicscharacteristic of skillfulskillfull and unskillful actions are elaborated as follows in the Majjhima Nikāya: “Now what is unskillful? Taking life is unskillful, taking what is not given... sexual misconduct... lying... abusive speech... divisive tale-bearing... idle chatter is unskillful. Covetousness... ill will... wrong views are unskillful. These things are termed unskillful [...] And what is skillful? Abstaining from taking life is skillful, abstaining from taking what is not given... from sexual misconduct... from lying... from abusive speech... from divisive tale-bearing... abstaining from idle chatter is skillful. Lack of covetousness... lack of ill will... right views are skillful. These things are termed skillful” (Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 2008, Majjhima Nikāya 9).

⁷⁷ “For a person endowed with virtue, consummate in virtue, there is no need for an act of will, ‘May freedom from remorse arise in me.’ It is in the nature of things that freedom from remorse arises in a person endowed with virtue, consummate in virtue. For a person free from remorse, there is no need for an act of will, ‘May joy arise in me.’ It is in the nature of things that joy arises in a person free from remorse. For a joyful person, there is no need for an act of will, ‘May rapture arise in me.’ It is in the nature of things that rapture arises in a joyful person. For a rapturous person, there is no need for an act of will, ‘May my body be serene.’ It is in the nature of things that a rapturous person grows serene in body. For a person serene in body, there is no need for an act of will, ‘May I experience pleasure.’ It is in the nature of things that a person serene in body experiences pleasure. (Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 1997, Anguttara Nikāya 11.2).

creative interplay. It is not to depersonalize the Other through unskillful acts such as lying, abusive speech, killing, ill will, and so on. Rather, one commits to a trust of the Other to allow the Other to objectify oneself into a meaningful relationship with the world, thereby allowing a temporary power over oneself as a *mutual exchange* of powers with the Other. Without the ontological insecurity of the insufficient triadic foundation, one can be freed from the distress of an insufficiently limited horizon. Therefore, unskillful acts against the others contain tremendous implications that are *existential*⁷⁸ in nature and psychological in its outcome. Morality is intrinsic to our existential condition and vice versa. A moral neglect of the Other translates into an existential neglect of ourselves, where the formation of our very horizontal limit (hence, the meaningful world itself) is deprived of the core ingredients for its stability and continuity (such that it continues to be sufficiently limited).

Ultimately, what the parallels between the two discourses illuminate is the possibility of contemplative pedagogy addressing the issues related to ontological insecurity. This can be engaged through the potential of an intersubjective contemplative pedagogy, where its theoretical and practical applications are rooted in the integration between the Theravāda doctrine and phenomenology of intersubjectivity. Exercises such as meditation and reflections upon one's ethical conducts can be connected to the notions of dependent co-arising as an experiential exploration into and (ultimately) *sensitization* of the formation of one's horizontal limit. It is to sensitize the individual to the intersubjective nature of the emergence of the meaningful world so that one is inclined to an *outwardness* towards creative interplay rather than an inwardness of

⁷⁸ Existential in the sense that it is regarding the formation of meaningful relations between the self and the world, such that they emerge as experienced reality at all.

depersonalization and isolation. Defensive mechanisms as justified by contemplative conditions such as peak states can be avoided under the discourse where the pedagogical goal enshrines an *intersubjectivity* rather than a transcendent subjectivity. The issues of de-contextualization of mindfulness-based frameworks of contemplative pedagogy, on the other hand, can shift toward a more integrated direction where notions of ethical conducts and dependent co-arising gain more emphasis through the combined phenomenological and Theravāden elaboration of intersubjectivity.

Conclusion

An intersubjective contemplative pedagogy would allow the possibility to address the pervasive issue of ontological insecurity. The intersection between the educational culture in its post-secular humanistic ideals and the continuing precarious socioeconomic conditions for the emerging adults can not only worsen a pre-existing ontological insecurity inherent in its life stage, but also normalizes its condition without additional guidance. The normalized ontological insecurity reflects an underlying nihilism that can be conveniently propelled by the philosophical and experiential conditions of contemplative pedagogy. Rather than attaining contemplative transformation towards our ontological security, we may utilize its practices to further isolate ourselves, maintaining the disconnection from our own existential sociality. This form of isolation may not appear as physical aloneness as much as being inadequately sustained by a complete triadic foundation where the Other is fully met in their powers of objectification in creative interplay. I believe higher education perpetuates an isolation on the level of the *existential* in so far as it neglects its reported needs.

The neglect of the existential dimension of students can be attributed to a gradual historical shift that enshrines the inwardness of the individual as a source of refuge. The enshrinement of the inwardness of the individual as a source of truth and ethics manifests as the broader philosophical evolution towards the skepticism against objectivism, political caution against moral grand-narratives, and institutional fixation on specialized research rooted in the principles of Humboldtian *Bildung*. Such educational climate led to the decline of the general humanistic format of education, rendering the existential explorations of students as philosophically disputable, politically suspicious, and institutionally irrelevant.

The shift from Scholasticism to Petrarchan-Augustinian Humanism stimulated a major step towards a redefinition of the educated rooted in the principles of *studia humanitatis* for *animi cura*. The isolated condition of introspection through writing as to understand the self and its relation to the Christian metaphysical world was enshrined as an intellectual and (therefore) religious virtue. The enshrinement of one's inward reason as a source of understanding and meaning was further reinforced by the philosophical evolution during Enlightenment, where Cartesianism began to replace Aristotelian metaphysics. The Enlightenment philosophical reverberations led to the increasing emphasis of scientifically-based curricula. This contained a deeper conviction in the generation of knowledge and meaning within the independent and internal faculty of reason itself. Higher education gradually shifted away from its Christian paradigms during the secularly-based Humanism in early- to mid 20th century. The distance between the individual reason and external structures of truth and meaning was then further pushed when notions of Nietzschean nihilism was reframed from a historical phase to an ahistorical condition. This then entails that the external world is deprived of any innate meaning and truth, thus, reframing the role of the isolated reason not as a revealer of truth and meaning, but as rooted in an unavoidable condition of interpretation.

The ambiguity and uncertainty of ontological insecurity do not emerge as a worrying problem under the atmosphere of a reframed nihilism, one that Karen Carr (1992) refers to as the “banalization of nihilism”. Discussions on notions of fundamental truths and meaning within such educational environment remains minimally engaged as evidenced by the HERI reports⁷⁹

⁷⁹The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) (2003) have reported that students often times “place great value on their college enhancing their self-understanding, helping them develop personal values, and encouraging their expression of spirituality” (p. 3). And that “Most college juniors report that their professors have never encouraged

despite students expressing significant demands for them. The emerging adults in higher education are naturally situated within a life stage where their horizons are insufficiently limited as to reveal specific meaningful possibilities to them personally. It is a life stage that is blessed with the opportunity of freedom yet simultaneously afflicted with the burden of its uncertainty. The demands for such discussions are reportedly high as the emerging adults seek a fundamental meaning structure that is stable and continuous, where basic existential answers of the world, themselves and the moral relation in between are solidly known and practiced.

The historical progression of higher education does not necessarily instill an ontological insecurity in emerging adults directly as much as a worrying dismissal of its condition as a problem in the first place. Such dismissal is inadvertent as the banalization of nihilism refers to the intellectual adoption of a *philosophical* uncertainty, where claims of objectivism or realism remain unconvincing on a philosophical basis. Yet the promotion of the philosophical uncertainty arrives as a convenient catalyst for an *existential* uncertainty of the students. In other words, they wish to define the world not as a philosophical conclusion alone but also (perhaps more fundamentally) as an existential certainty. This may then bring into the question of the differing intentions between the philosophical trend of higher education through history and the fundamental needs of its students on the existential level. Higher education (particularly the humanities) may be interested in illuminating its students on the insights of philosophical uncertainty and the fallacy of objectivism and realism, yet it is received by those encumbered with the need for objectivism and realism on an existential level.

discussion of spiritual and religious matters, and never provided the opportunities to discuss the meaning or purpose of life” (HERI, 2005, p. 9).

The inwardness implicit within philosophical uncertainty from the evolution of higher education history reinforces the inwardness (as a psychological defensive mechanism) for the ontologically insecure. In other words, inwardness does not only mean an intellectual position regarding the source of truths and ethics, but can also act as a *psychological* defensive mechanism for the distress of ontological insecurity. The self as enshrined as an independent and separate source of truth and meaning on a philosophical basis *is essentially unsustainable on an existential level*. Ontological insecurity, therefore, remains unresolved under the educational prominence of philosophical uncertainty and is further reinforced toward inwardness. Its unsustainable nature corners the self into a perpetuated pathology where the extreme circumstance of inner vacuity enlists the destructive defenses to the same degree.

I believe an important way in which the problems of ontological insecurity can be addressed is through the engagement of contemplative pedagogy that is rooted in the emphasis of intersubjectivity. The intersubjective discourse reveals a necessary outwardness towards the triadic structure that can be experientially facilitated through contemplative pedagogical approaches. The importance of intersubjectivity is implicit within the Theravāda discourse itself, particularly under the notion of *paṭicca-samuppāda* and its relation to the implications of ethical conducts. An intersubjectively-based contemplative pedagogy would allow one to prevent the worsening of ontological insecurity through developing an experiential sensitivity to the dependent co-arising of one's horizontal limit, the participation in the triadic structure, and the emergence of the meaningful world. The experiential sensitivity to the co-arising of the intersubjective process translates into a moral orientation committed to maintaining the status of the Other in the triadic structure.

The resolution of ontological insecurity, therefore, does not lie necessarily in the elimination of ambiguous and open possibilities exclusively (from one's insufficiently limited horizon). Ideological rigidity and extremism of the authoritarian sentiment serve as accessible forms of a temporary horizontal limit, where possibilities are limited to a meaningful degree where navigation and interaction with the world become existentially certain. Yet such horizontal limit does not necessarily point to the presence a triadic foundation. The ideological character finds it all too convenient to simply run on an incomplete triadic structure – by depersonalizing and neglecting the Other as a core ingredient instead of confronting the risks of objectification (hence, engulfment). The horizontal limit of ideological rigidity and extremism is not gradually forged, sustained, and internalized through creative interplay as much as simply being borrowed as one's own. It is without the anchor and the internalization of habit rooted in an embodied synchronicity with the interactions with others. Therefore, the horizontal limit can be adopted accessibly through ideological attachments, yet to ensure its continuity and stability for an ontological security, it is the triadic structure that one must participate in. It is to participate in an outwardness where there is an *experiential recognition* in the importance of others as the fundamental condition in which the world itself emerges meaningfully for us.

Ultimately, education has both the opportunity and potential role to address the very fundamental structure of our existential nature. It is not only to intellectually transmit the necessary knowledge for technical and conceptual expertise, but also to ensure that our very way of being fulfills the demands of our existential sociality. This is not a mere intellectual recognition as much as an *experiential sensitization* to this fundamental existential fact. This is where contemplative pedagogy must lend its conceptual and practical support - for the sake of a transformative learning towards the possibility of an outwardly meaningful existence.

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