Undergraduate Coursework in Contemplative Science and Secular Ethics

Contemplative science is an interdisciplinary field that investigates the phenomenological experiences of contemplative practices and their physiological, mental, and behavioral effects. Using methods from neuroscience, psychology, anthropology, sociology, and medicine, contemplative science seeks to understand the range of factors that contribute to well-being -- personally, socially, and globally -- and how to cultivate them.

Secular ethics, a framework proposed by the Dalai Lama and advanced by many experts in social, emotional and ethical development, seeks to describe an ethical mindset, whereby ethical decisions originate internally, effortlessly, and spontaneously. This approach is grounded in scientific research, shared human experience, and common sense. Compassion, for example, is a capacity central to secular ethics because: a) scientific studies of compassion training interventions have found positive physiological and psychological outcomes; b) it is central to shared human experience (it is considered a positive capacity by many of humanity’s major religions and the nonreligious alike); and c) it is grounded in common sense (it is such a primary phenomenon that infants naturally show preference toward compassionate agents).

Undergraduate coursework engages students in the theory and practice of contemplative science and secular ethics. Secular ethics asks, what contributes to an ethical mindset? Contemplative science asks, how are beneficial capacities cultivated? These two complementary questions are investigated by asking how one cultivates the analytical skills and compassionate perspectives that contribute to an ethical mindset, and by exploring the personal, social, and global impacts of positive change across those three levels of inquiry.
Undergraduate courses currently offered include:

- Principles of Secular Ethics: The Dalai Lama’s Approach
- Religion and Meditation
- Mind-Body Sciences Summer Abroad Program

Other undergraduate opportunities include directed study research focused on research around the SEE Learning K-12 program, or CBCT® as an intervention. The CCSCBE is currently developing an undergraduate Minor in Contemplative Science and Secular Ethics.

Graduate and Professional Programs

Currently, the center has a formal collaboration with the Emory School of Medicine through the CBCT® program and works with others graduate level schools and programs on an ad hoc basis. This may take the form of guest lecturing on secular ethics in existing courses (e.g. Goizueta Business School), offering CBCT® courses (e.g. Emory School of Law), or facilitating research around contemplative science.

Contemplative Science Seminar Series

The Center for Contemplative Science and Compassion-Based Ethics offers a monthly seminar where an interdisciplinary group of Emory faculty, postdocs, staff, and students meet to discuss and investigate topics relevant to emerging work in the fields of contemplative science and secular ethics. The three primary areas of focus for this seminar series will include research, education, and clinical application. The Contemplative Science Seminar provides a space where the Emory community can explore research pertaining to the education of heart and mind. Leaders in this field will regularly be invited to present and facilitate group discussion.