



Contemplative Education and the Development of Ethics

Dr Sāgaradevī Barratt
University of Essex

Outline

- What is Contemplative Education?
- The relevance of enaction
- Wisdom-informed approach to contemplative education
- Ethical implications of contemplative practice
- Deepening ethical sensitivity





What is contemplative education?

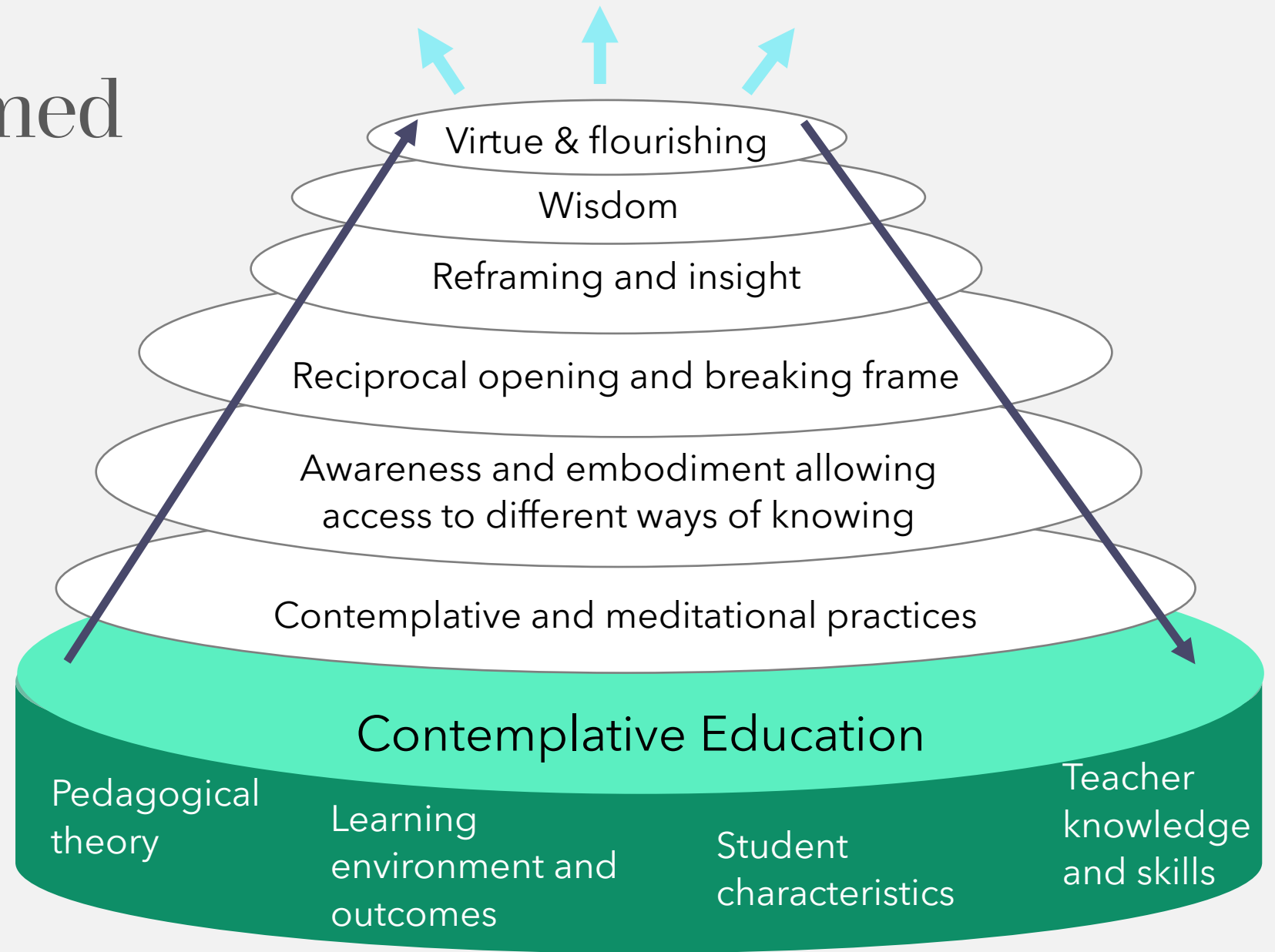
- Hard to define!
- Contemplative practices used in educational settings
- 1st and 2nd person perspectives - being and being with
- Embracing different ways of knowing
- Contemplation as important in educator development
- Connecting with wider pedagogical theory
- Safety, ethics, appropriateness
- Mind and Life Europe Community of Contemplative Education and Contemplative Pedagogy Network



The relevance of enaction

- Groundlessness - Participatory epistemology and process/relational ontology
- Understanding of self-world that questions dualistic assumptions
- Cognition and meaning making embedded within embodied experience
- Importance of the experience of being

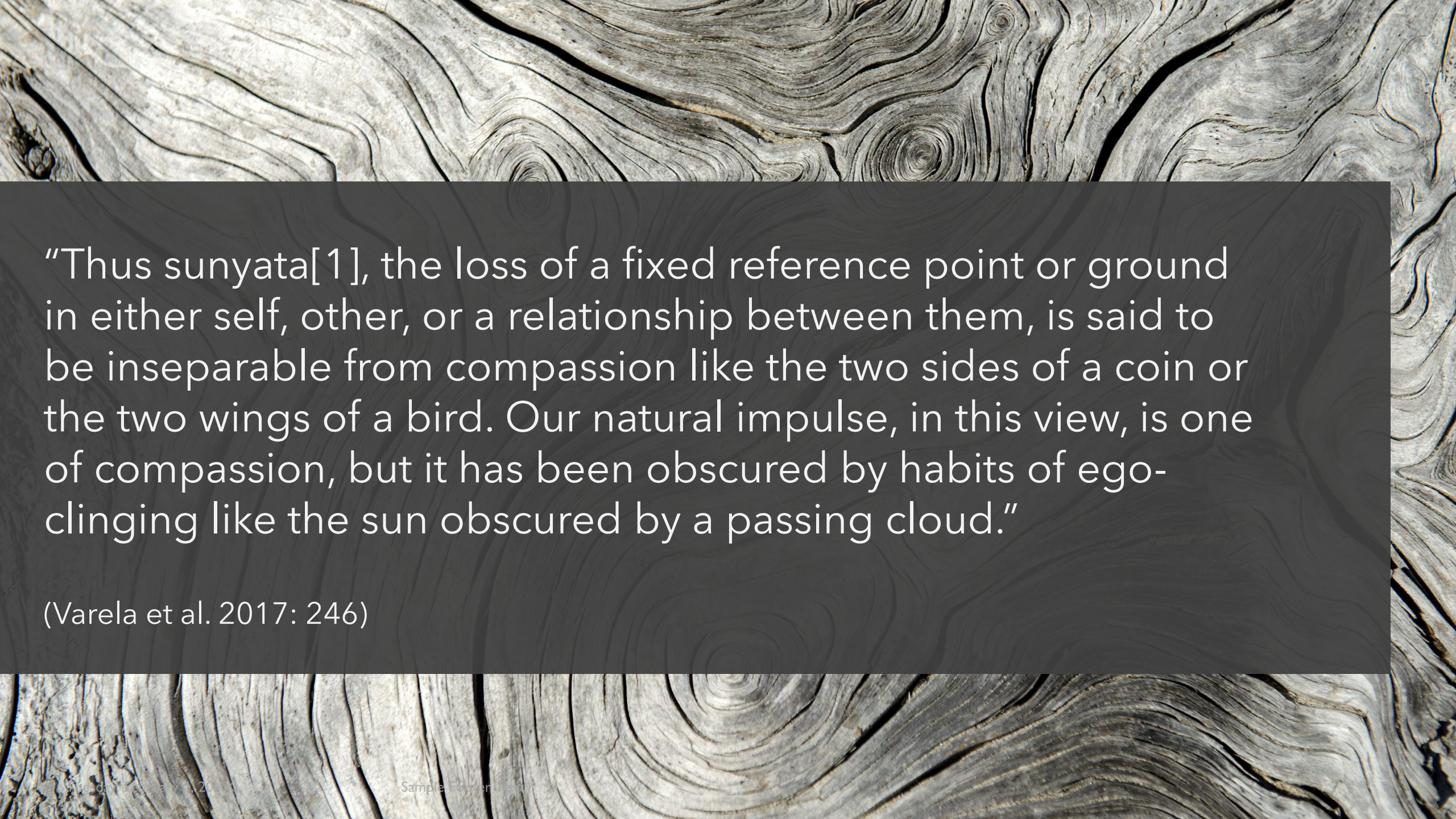
Wisdom-informed approach to contemplative education



Ethical implications

Why does our understanding of ourselves, each other and the world have an impact on our ethical behaviour?





"Thus sunyata[1], the loss of a fixed reference point or ground in either self, other, or a relationship between them, is said to be inseparable from compassion like the two sides of a coin or the two wings of a bird. Our natural impulse, in this view, is one of compassion, but it has been obscured by habits of ego-clinging like the sun obscured by a passing cloud."

(Varela et al. 2017: 246)



Deepening Ethical Sensitivity

- Through contemplative practice that we gain insight and understand self and world differently
- Not just about new propositional knowledge but deep experiential shifts of being
- Seeing the self-world as groundless, continual becoming allows for a move away from certainty towards awe and wonder
- Sense of separation, power and goal that makes unethical behaviour possible
- See the roots of where unethical behaviour comes from – can't just layer over by 'being better' being the underlying causes of our lack of ethics
- Reciprocal relationship between contemplative practice, ethics and wisdom



References and further reading

[Community of Contemplative Education](#)

[Contemplative Pedagogy Network](#)

Grossmann I, Weststrate NM, Ardel M, et al. (2020) The Science of Wisdom in a Polarized World: Knowns and Unknowns. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1047840X.2020.1750917>. DOI: 1750917.

Meling D (2021) Knowing Groundlessness: An Enactive Approach to a Shift From Cognition to Non-Dual Awareness. *Frontiers in psychology* 12.

Riedl A and Vervaeke J (2022) Rationality and Relevance Realization.

Varela FJ, Thompson E, Rosch E, et al. (2017) The embodied mind. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Vervaeke J (2022) How a philosophy of meditation can explore the deep connections between mindfulness and contemplative wisdom. *Routledge Handbook on the Philosophy of Meditation*. Routledge, pp.192-208.

Vervaeke J and Ferraro L (2013) Relevance, Meaning and the Cognitive Science of Wisdom. In: Ferrari M and Weststrate NM (eds) *The Scientific Study of Personal Wisdom: From Contemplative Traditions to Neuroscience*. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, pp.21-51.

Zajonc A (2013) Contemplative pedagogy: A quiet revolution in higher education. *New directions for teaching and learning* 134: 83-94



Contemplative Education and the Development of Ethics

Dr Sāgaradevī Barratt
University of Essex