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ARTICLE

LESSONS FROM SUFFERING: HOW SOCIAL JUSTICE INFORMS SPIRITUALITY

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[The] need to face and understand our suffering, and to change toward new values, is perhaps the basic spiritual narrative—the common core of world spirituality.

—Roger Gottlieb¹

“We are all caught up in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever effects one directly effects all indirectly.”

—The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.²

I. INTRODUCTION

Much of the literature that discusses the relationship between social justice and spirituality has focused on how *spirituality* has been used to inform and inspire social justice work. There is very little attention paid to how *social justice* might inform the practice and development of spirituality. It is this latter concern that will be the central focus of this article. I will make two central assertions in this direction. The first is that suffering is a central concern of social justice as well as one of the foundations animating spirituality. The second claim is that not only is there a relationship between spirituality and social justice but that this is a recursive relationship that runs in both directions.

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1. Roger S. Gottlieb, *Joining Hands: Politics and Religion Together for Social Change* 205 (Westview Perseus Press 2002).

2. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* (Apr. 16, 1963) in *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches That Changed the World* (James Melvin Washington ed., Harper-SanFrancisco 1992).

In exploring this first point, I will discuss both spiritual suffering and social suffering. Spiritual suffering can be thought of as ontological or existential suffering. Existential suffering deals with the sense of lack and disillusionment that is inherent in phenomenological existence and in the presence of consciousness, particularly self-consciousness. We all grow old and we all die. Things, including the self, fall apart. The insubstantial nature of the self cut off from a more substantial source and its final demise is the heart of spiritual suffering.³ Social suffering can be thought of as a secular, or surplus, of suffering. Unlike ontological suffering, social suffering is not inherent in being but is largely the result of our social arrangements; therefore it is surplus to the inherent suffering of life. Importantly, this suffering is the result of social arrangements and as a result, it can be made better or worse by these arrangements. Social practices currently institutionalize power which causes subjugation and suffering that need not exist.⁴ While all of us are subject to existential suffering, social suffering is visited on different people to varying degrees.

Of course there are types of suffering that lie outside both of these categories that can be implicated in how we relate to spiritual and social suffering. For example, I get a stomachache or suffer pain that is not caused by social arrangement nor necessarily implicates my sense of self. One may object to calling ontological or existential suffering spiritual, in that much of philosophy addresses such suffering without looking at these concerns through a religious frame. But the premise of most of the philosophical ruminations on existential suffering, at least historically, is founded on religious values and understandings.⁵

Further, the causes of suffering have often been understood primarily in individualistic and human terms. One person beats up or kills another. Or a group of people discriminate against another group. This has led some to assume that any effort to address suffering must also be on individualistic or human terms. But both of these assumptions are false. A substantial amount—if not the majority of—surplus suffering that occurs in society is not caused by individuals directly, but by structures and institutional arrangements.⁶ If one of the foci of spirituality is to engage suffering and its causes, this suggests that spirituality must also be concerned with how insti-

3. See David R. Loy, *A Buddhist History of the West: Studies in Lack* (St. U. N.Y. Press 2002) (for an excellent discussion of lack and suffering). Loy asserts that the sense of lack is the heart of spiritual question that profoundly impacts both our spiritual and secular suffering.

4. See *id.* Loy argues that many of the social arrangements that create social suffering are driven by our existential sense of lack.

5. See *id.* Loy asserts that not only our philosophy concerns, but also our economic and social concerns, are not only derivative of our religious history, but they continue to be defined by religious questions.

6. John Rawls makes a similar assessment in focusing on basic intuition in *A Theory of Justice* (rev. ed., Belknap Press of Harvard U. Press 1999). He notes that individual wants and desires are themselves a product of one's situatedness and background institutions. To put it differently, one cannot address justice by just looking at the individual.

tutions and structures function in society. This view could offer a more critical and transformative dimension to spirituality and redefine the spaces between spirituality and social justice.

This brings us to the second point, that is, what is the relationship between social suffering and spiritual suffering? And more pointedly, does surplus suffering inform spiritual suffering? Many assume the answer to this question is no. So that if there is a relationship at all between the two domains, it only runs in one direction: spirituality is relevant for addressing social justice and the surplus suffering caused by social injustice, but that social justice is not relevant for addressing spiritual suffering. This assumption is wrong. Much of the social suffering that we visit on each other is indeed spiritual at its base. We are greedy and jealous of each other. We deny each others' humanity because of our flawed spiritual understandings. Therefore if we correct our spiritual understanding, we would do less social harm to each other. But equally important, spirituality requires that we engage in something larger than ourselves. The failure to do so not only implicates what is happening in the social secular world, but limits our ability to address our spiritual concerns.

On the other hand, ontological suffering, unlike surplus suffering, is caused by the very nature of being alive and self-conscious. This suggests that such suffering cannot be avoided by changes in physical or social circumstances. Therefore what we do or fail to do in the physical world has no bearing on our spiritual well-being. If there is an obligation to be concerned with the spiritual suffering of others, it does not entail being concerned about their corporeal circumstances. This article is written to explore and challenge this position. But it also goes further. I am asserting that caring about others' suffering is not just about relieving their suffering—it is also about one's own spiritual development and relieving the suffering of the spiritual actor.

There are compelling reasons to reject the notion that these two forms of suffering are radically separate or that spirituality should only be concerned with ontological suffering. Social justice as I define it in this article is focused primarily on ameliorating social or surplus suffering.⁷ I say "primarily" because these concerns will naturally reach into other areas, such as physical suffering that is neither the result of social arrangements nor existentialist suffering and spirituality. Spirituality is based on a deeper concern. But this does not and cannot mean that one is not concerned about what is thought of as the nonspiritual, whatever that is. The examination of

7. I am aware that there are many different ways of defining social justice. Rawls defines justice as fairness. *See id.* MacIntyre asserts that justice only takes on meaning within a political historical context. *See* Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (U. of Notre Dame Press 1988). In this article, I am defining social justice as being focused on ameliorating social suffering. This definition is different and similar to the way Rawls and others write about social justice.

social suffering and existential suffering is really about the relationship between spirituality and social justice. It is also about the relationship between the secular and the spiritual.

II. RECLAIMING THE SPIRITUAL IN SOCIAL JUSTICE

There is a rich history of spiritual traditions addressing issues of social justice. There are stories in the Bible, Koran, and many other sacred writings that focus not just on ontological suffering but also on elements of secular suffering such as hunger, poverty, and physical illness. We can look at the effort to end slavery in the United States or the more recent civil rights movement as examples of spirituality's role within struggles for social justice. The Rev. Dr. King's articles of faith were profoundly influential in his call for civil rights. This is apparent in his "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," his "I Have a Dream" speech, and his speech about Vietnam, "A Time to Break Silence."⁸ Dr. King did not believe that the racial apartheid he was challenging was only unjust in a civil or secular sense; he believed that it was in violation of spiritual concerns. Even though Dr. King came from a rich black Baptist tradition, he refused to limit his concern to followers of the Abrahamic religions as exemplified in "A Time to Break Silence," in which he expresses concern for Buddhist and other traditions. He was not just religious, but spiritual. Notably, Dr. King was greatly influenced by the life, work, and spiritual practices of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (Mahatma).

Gandhi's work and life are probably the most prominent examples of a combination of social activism and spirituality. His work, first in South Africa and later in India, continues to be an inspiring example of combining spirituality and social justice. He was deeply committed to nonviolence and achieving just outcomes in the secular world. His social justice work drew much of its power from his spiritual foundation. He asserted that people who thought social justice was different than spirituality did not understand either. Gandhi stated that he was blessed to have a chance to work with those in poverty and the downtrodden in order to lift up his own spirit, intimating that he was not just using a spiritual base to do social justice work, but that the social justice work helped to inform and deepen his spirituality.

If social justice is the focus or concern in addressing social suffering, what is meant by the term spirituality? The word "spirituality" is sometimes used as coterminous with the word "religious." Others treat the two concepts as completely distinct. There is clearly a relationship between how we think about being religious and spirituality. Yet there are important differences. Part of the complexity related to addressing questions about

8. These works can be found in the compilation *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches That Changed the World*, *supra* n. 2.

the definition of spirituality and defining the relationship between spirituality and being religious is the multiple ways we use both terms.

III. EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGION

Ken Wilber has identified several different and often conflicting ways the term "religious" is used.⁹ Wilber's definitions range from what he calls nonrational engagement, to religion as extremely meaningful (or integrative engagement), to religion as an immortality project, and authentic religion. In Wilber's assessment, religions can be irrational, rational, or transrational. But he believes that all involve bringing meaning and reducing suffering in either existing structures or helping one transcend to a higher structure. Wilber states that religion can be validated on two scales. One scale, the transitive scale, helps the adherent adapt and make meaning on a horizontal or existing level. By this Wilber means helping one to adjust and make meaning within the existing structures and arrangement in one's life, or learning to live with things as they are. The other is the transformative scale, which helps the adherent move to a higher level and to change existing arrangements.

One way of thinking about the difference between Wilber's scales is to think about what makes exchanges in a life system work well and have meaning within current arrangements. Wilber refers to this process as translation. These exchanges can be on a physical or nonphysical level. When the needs are such that the exchanges in the current system can no longer make meaning, there is a call for a change to a higher systems. Wilber refers to this as a transformative exchange that is transcendental. But what is transcended and why? Wilber states that it is the fear of death and suffering which give birth to the need to transcend. "Wherever there is self, there is trembling, wherever there is other, there is fear."¹⁰ According to Wilber, until the problem of separation and death is addressed, there will be pain (suffering). This is a restatement of what I have referred to as existentialist suffering and what Loy refers to as lack. Wilber evaluates religions on how they deal with this suffering and resolve this spiritual need. In the context of this article, I will use the term religion to suggest an organized or institutionalized set of practices that are designed to support and effectuate a spiritual life and address spiritual suffering.

Roberto Unger uses a different typology to discuss the terms religious and spirituality. He begins by asserting that we are pursuing the meaning of our life as well as a place in the world, and that this pursuit is an existentialist project. Unger also rejects the assumption existential philosophical questions can be separated from religious questions. "The most significant

9. Ken Wilber, *A Sociable God* 55-65 (New Sci. Lib. 1984).

10. *Id.* at 50.

articulation of existential projects can be found in the major religions and religiously inspired ethics of world history.”¹¹ Unger believes that this project deals with our death and how we engage with each other and the world. It is our effort to find a place for ourselves in a strange world with others that gives rise to this project.

[We] must go out into a nature and a society that are not [ours] to understand more than a little or to control hardly at all. [We have] to learn that [we are] not the center, that [we] will soon be nothingwhen [we] stagger out into a world that is not [our] own, [we] discover that the people in it live in mutual longing and jeopardy.¹²

But interpersonal engagement centers on a preoccupation with dread and possible salvation. We experience both mutual need and mutual fear of the other. Within such engagement, we are exposed to power and disillusionment. We have a deep longing and need for the other. This need for the other is not just for the realization of what we want—but also for who we are. The other is necessary both for the constitution of our being and for the realization of self-expression and growth. And yet, engagement with the other threatens the self in its constitution and its wants. “For effort at self assertion—at marking out a sustainable presence in the world—may be undermined both in the lack of social involvement and by these involvements themselves.”¹³ The tension is worked out by our relationship to the other and to our context, the world. Because we need the other and are threatened by the other, there is a play of love and hate.

But even our most interpersonal longings and fears are only partially worked out directly between individuals, because individuals’ relations to each other and even one relation to oneself is mediated and partially constituted through structural and institutional arrangements. Unger discusses these structures and arrangements as context. According to Unger, some contexts make it more difficult to advance this existential project because of heightened vulnerability and an extraordinary threat of subjection. For Unger then, the existential project is also about transcending and remaking our context to constantly afford and support richer engagement with the self and other humans in the world.¹⁴ For Unger, there is no natural context. They are all made by our collective work and imagination.¹⁵

Motivated by fear and danger of engagement with others as well as the constant threat of death and disappointment in life, Unger asserts that some attempt to address these issues by becoming invulnerable, by remaining de-

11. Roberto M. Unger, *Passion: An Essay on Personality* 47 (The Free Press 1984).

12. *Id.* at 95.

13. *Id.* at 21.

14. *See generally id.*

15. *Id.* at 5-18; *see also* Roberto Unger, *False Necessity: Anti-Necessitarian Social Theory in The Service of Radical Democracy* (Cambridge U. Press 1987).

tached from human engagement and the phenomenal world in favor of a transcendental merger. Like the project of engagement and context transformation, suffering animates this project of merger. But instead of engaging with the phenomenal world and other selves who are also in a state of disillusionment, the subject responds to the instability of the world and others by trying to merge with the unconditional. Unger cites Hinduism and Buddhism as the primary religions that institutionalize this form of transcendental escape, although he acknowledges that there are mystics within the Abrahamic religions that adhere to the same approach.¹⁶ What Unger is rejecting is a transcendental space that denies or is cut off from the immanent—or a spirituality that is not impacted by the secular.

From Unger's perspective, these efforts to avoid suffering by removing oneself from the phenomenal world and merging with the impersonal divine are all flawed forms of escape. These projects of escape fail not only to address the suffering and disquiet in the phenomenal world, but also create spiritual suffering by moving us toward a spiritual narcissism and social conservatism that defeat their efforts in both domains. Instead of liberation, these efforts become a religion of resignation and acceptance of the status quo.

The devotee of the impersonal absolute finds himself constantly nagged or threatened by the irrepressible demands of the real embodied person, the person who has an unlimited craving for other people's help and the acceptance even of their bodies. To be sure, he may achieve a measure of success in his attempt to find serenity through disengagement. But he can do so only by maintaining a distance from the others that deprives him of the chief means with which to experiment with own character.¹⁷

While Unger's project is deeply religious, he is critical of religious and philosophical efforts that would detach us from the world and our embodied phenomenal self.¹⁸ This is not just because Unger is concerned with the world in a secular sense, it is also because he believes that our religious existential project can only be worked out through engagement with others by constantly remaking our context in response to our demands for engagement as embodied spiritual beings. It is not enough to remake ourselves; we must remake the world so that our selves can more appropriately think of the world as a provisional home. Unger asks the question, what type of institutional and social arrangements would support self-assertion and love? He, like most of the religious thinkers, believes that love is the positive value that heals the breach of separation, the angst of being strangers and

16. See Unger, *supra* n. 11.

17. *Id.* at 61.

18. Unger is particularly critical of the mystical tradition in Islam, Judaism, Christianity as well as the traditions in Buddhism and Hinduism that attempt to merge with the unconditional to escape the phenomenal world. See *id.*

homeless in the world. Love then plays a central role in addressing our existential suffering, or lack.

In examining Unger's critique of major religions that encourage escape, there are important differences between Hinduism and Buddhism that are significant for this paper. While Hinduism may assert that the world of phenomena is not real, it is not indifferent to this world. In fact, much of Hinduism was used to justify rigid social hierarchy in the material world, including the caste system as divinely preordained. In some sense then, Hinduism has been closely associated with a particular set of arrangements in the phenomenal world. This is hardly otherworldly. There is not the separation between the secular and the spiritual in Hinduism that is so important in modern Western cultures.

Buddhism has been cited as the most otherworldly of the major religions.¹⁹ Yet even Buddhism clearly challenged the existing social order in India and rejected the claims of the ordained nature of social hierarchy. While Ken Jones would take issue with Unger's description of Buddhism as simply an attempt to escape suffering by retreating to a private transcendental relationship with the divine, he does recognize this danger. "Of all religions Buddhism has long been associated with this quietism, this flight from the world and the institutionally embedded conservatism that commonly accompanies it. . . . At worst such a perspective can become an accessory to social injustice."²⁰ But there is also a history of social engagement in Buddhism that is not often present in its Western reiteration. Buddhism in India challenged the caste system. It recognized that satisfaction of material needs was a precondition for moral development and its absence a cause of moral decay.²¹ This is often one of the reasons cited for the substantial rejection of Buddhism in India.²²

What I am suggesting here is similar but with an important twist. I am suggesting that those who are indifferent to or benefit from social suffering are the cause of spiritual decay.²³ It is worth recognizing that throughout much of history, until the birth of modern democracy, the social order, including the role of the king and priest, was often based on a belief in a

19. Some have challenged the claim that Buddhism is a religion. Many Buddhist themselves assert that Buddhism is not a religion. See e.g. Ven. Master Chin Kung, *Buddhism Is An Education, Not A Religion*, www.amtb.org.tw/e-bud/releases/educati.htm (accessed March 2, 2004). I will not try to address this claim in this article.

20. Ken Jones, *The New Social Face of Buddhism: A Call to Action* 12 (Wisdom Publ. 2003).

21. *Id.* at 19.

22. See Johanna Macy, *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory: The Dharma of Natural System* (St. U. N.Y. Press 1991).

23. There is a substantial body of literature that suggests the failure to deal with our existential angst in a constructive way, a spiritual way, is one of the reasons that we produce so much social suffering in the secular world. See Norman Oliver Brown, *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* (Wesleyan U. Press 1985); Jones, *supra* n. 20; Unger, *supra* n. 11; Wilber, *supra* n. 9.

divine order that used a justification not dissimilar to Hinduism in India. One of the great questions in much of premodern history was that of the relationship between the divine and the secular. In modern liberal society we have assumed to know the answer.²⁴ Our answer has been one of separation, where the spiritual concerns are a private matter concerned with a private internal world. But this arrangement and the assumption behind it have increasingly been called into question.²⁵ Indeed this is a central part of Unger's critique of transcendental approach: that is cut off from the phenomenal world. That is, the effort to find our spiritual salvation in a private internal world. This may seem particularly odd as we often think of spiritual practices as both private and internal. Unger asserts that this is often spiritual narcissism. For Unger, like many late modernists, "there is no self in a private world without the social world." "We cannot obtain the categories that allow us to describe our situation and to reflect about ourselves unless we share in specific, historically conditioned traditions of discourse that none of us authored individually."²⁶

One may expect Unger's criticism given his stance on Buddhism and Hinduism, both known for quietism. But we find an even more insightful challenge to this notion of private salvage interior spaces cut off from the world from Loy, who is clearly a Buddhism practitioner. Loy cites Weber with approval for the proposition that the effort to retreat to the private in reactions to a disenchanted world is a self defeating move.²⁷ The more we withdraw from the world, the more disenchanted it becomes, requiring still farther withdrawal. For those who believe that the secular world is radically separate from the spiritual world, this may appear as heresy. But the assumption of this separation is just what Loy rejects. He reminds us that until relatively recently, there was a clear acceptance in most of the world that the secular and the spiritual were one. While adroitly citing the move in Western society to create this separation, he argues all such efforts have and indeed must fail. Loy characterizes secularism as religion without God or, in Weber's language, means without ends. The spiritual need and foundation has not gone away according to Loy, it has been driving into the unconscious.²⁸ For Loy, when spiritual needs are pushed into the unconscious and cut off from their goal, they risk becoming demonic.

Loy would start to resolve this unhealthy split by inviting back into consciousness our spiritual need and rejecting the duality of the spiritual and secular. Unger's resolution to this problem is to add love to the mix.

24. For a good discussion of this assumption and the problem with it, see Jones, *supra* n. 20, at 66-83.

25. See Karen Armstrong, *The Battle For God* (Ballantine Books 2000); Steven L. Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion* (Basic Books 1993).

26. Unger, *supra* n. 11, at 20-21.

27. See Loy, *supra* n. 3.

28. See *id.*

He is not talking about the type of love that is dominant in society today, which is characterized as narcissistic love, but rather a love that embraces that situatedness of the other. For Unger this love is central to our existentialist project and our spiritual yearning. This love should not be confused with altruism. He explains that love requires that we fully engage with the embodied self instead of with the removed and distanced space suggested by altruism. Love requires engagement with the other in their otherness and their situated embodiedness. It is not enough to care for someone just as a spiritual being. Nor can there be a resignation to simply what is; the project is to make our physical habitation more open to our spiritual yearning, which is self-assertion and connection or love. Unger is particularly drawn to Christianity because of its commitment to address the need of maintaining a bridge between the transcendental spiritual and the physical world. It is our disease or suffering in the world that pushes us to search for the transcendental, the unconditional; but for Unger this search can only bear fruit if we open up to other homeless persons. He does not believe there is a final answer but that this movement is itself a part of what allows us to become ethical humans. Buddhist teachings instruct us not to flee, or try to fill up our emptiness or lack. Unger reads Christianity as instructing us not to flee the conditional.

Unger then believes that we must engage the world not to save it but to save ourselves—or perhaps more accurately to become ourselves. Our authentic self is both unconditional and conditional, universal and particular, corporeal and spiritual. We advance in self-understanding and goodness by opening ourselves up to the whole life of personal encounter rather than by seeking communion with an impersonal, nonhuman reality. We make partial peace with this world we inhabit as homeless strangers by deep engagement with other homeless humans.²⁹ And we engage the divine in our life and in this world by making “our worldly habitation more open to love.”³⁰ Such an effort means for Unger that we must reject those institutions and structures that limit and frustrate our multiple evolving ways to embrace love, hope, and charity in our routine human relations—for Unger and Loy, believing that the world cannot be other than what it is—accepting that false naturalness and necessity of our existing context.³¹ Unger asserts that this understanding and project is part of the Christian romantic tradition. Loy sees it as central to Buddhism. And this is also part of the other great Abrahamic religions, but that the heart of it does not depend on any particular religion at all. Rather, this is a spiritual journey requiring that we open ourselves up to the whole of human for engagement.

29. Some would not limit this engagement to just humans. Some would extend the connection, family to all being and some would include the planet. See Jones, *supra* n. 20.

30. See Unger, *supra* n. 11.

31. See *id.*; Loy, *supra* n. 3.

IV. SPIRITUALITY AND ONTOLOGICAL SUFFERING

With this understanding in mind, it is now possible to better articulate what is meant by spirituality as I use it in this article. Spirituality is the practice of addressing ontological suffering by relating to something more authentic or larger than the egoistic self. Spirituality, then, is informed by suffering, particularly but not exclusively, ontological suffering, on the one hand, and love on the other. This connection is sometimes discussed in terms of our true or deeper self. This self is not the same as the egoistic self. Indeed, the heart of Buddhism is the insight that the separate permanent self—ego, which is so important in the secular West—is a fiction. And the false belief in such a permanent self is one of the main sources of suffering. The egoistic self is not only fiction, it is a source of suffering in both the secular social domain and the spiritual domain, because of how this constructed self asserts our separateness.

Spirituality addresses how we link ourselves to our deeper self, or no self, which is connected to something beyond the egotist self. There are a number of ways of thinking about what this connection is. How we think about our connectedness has important implications for our spiritual and social practices and the way we imagine our structural arrangements.³² One way to think about connection is to think of being connected to God or the divine that is above and separate. Indeed, early Christians often saw sin or hell as the separation from God. This could be thought of as a vertical connection. If this separate God is unconcerned with the phenomenal world, then those who adhere to such beliefs are likely to be less concerned with the world. Some may think of the God of the Abrahamic religions as being separate and above. Yet, it has been pointed out that this God is very much concerned with the physical world. Another way to think of being connected is to think of being connected to each other, or life, or the world itself.³³ Joanna R. Macy captures this latter thought in her book, *World as Lover and World as Self*.³⁴ It is worth noting that while there is an apparent difference in the way different religious and spiritual practices deal with connection, there is agreement that the lack of connection, or more accurately, the lack of the awareness of connection, is one of the major causes of suffering in both the ontological sense as well as the secular sense.³⁵

32. Robin West has stated that it is our fear of others and relationship that informs the law's obsession with relationship and the need to protect a fictitious autonomous individual. See generally Robin West, *Jurisprudence & Gender*, 55 U. Chi. L. Rev. 1 (1988).

33. Those we share a connection with are also in the sphere of our concern. Those outside of the connection are in danger of being less and subject to the infliction of suffering and indifference.

34. See Joanna R. Macy & Thich Nhat Hahn, *World as Lover and World as Self* (Parallax Press 1991).

35. When I asked my father, a deeply religious man who was an elder in a Christian church for many decades what is hell, he replied, "it is the separation from God."

If spirituality is about connection, the question of what it means to think of spirituality in private terms can be revisited. One may object and assert that it is still possible to have a private, vertical relationship with God that does not involve others. But this approach is difficult to sustain for at least two reasons. First of all, one must believe that God is not concerned with others and does not call on one to have engagement with others. This certainly seems inconsistent with much of the teaching from the Abrahamic religions. But there is another reason that this private approach may not be accessible and it has to do with the nature of the self. It is not clear that a self that is totally disconnected, not just from a transcended God, but from other selves, could exist. I have already raised this issue from the Buddhist perspective, but the insubstantial nature of the self is also increasingly being raised within Western culture. For example, this insight has gained currency in the language of late and postmodernism. This self as described in late modernism has a "constituted" or situated nature. This self is relational and saturated with other selves.³⁶ A radical egotistic self that is cut off from her community is also cut off from what constitutes and sustains it. Such a self not only suffers but may very well cease to exist. One of the readings of the death of Socrates is that he refused to be cut off from the political community because he understood that outside of this community he was already dead. Orlando Patterson, in his important work about the meaning of slavery, demonstrates that slavery is outside of the political community and that this displacement is one that imposes a social death on the slave.³⁷ This socially dead self, while biologically alive, suffers constantly because one is still conscious and yet not able to constitute a self.

One may object to the notion of the constituted and relational self of late modernism. But what should take its place? What we find is that the autonomous disembodied self whose privacy we wish to protect is a self of early modernity. And the rise of the private relationship with God in the Western tradition was in part founded on the rise of the private self in early modernity. This suggests two things. One is that if modernity can no longer support the existence of an already given autonomous private self, it may have important implications for the private relation that came from Protestantism as a result of modernity.³⁸ Secondly, this insight suggests that there may be a very strong relationship between what is happening in the larger social phenomenal world and how we think of ourselves and our spirituality.³⁹ Our spiritual and social self may be more strongly related than assumed.

36. See John A. Powell, *The Multiple Self: Exploring Between and Beyond Modernity and Postmodernity*, 81 Minn. L. Rev. 1481 (1997).

37. See Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Harvard U. Press 1982).

38. See Armstrong, *supra* n. 25.

39. See *id.*

The suffering that comes from separation from the other is profound and cannot be easily healed at the level of the individual. A self that is constituted through relationship is constantly in the process of being cocreated. The project is both personal and social. The distinction between the personal and the social must be interactive and porous. In addition, this process is mediated through language, culture, and structures. The individual self and even the interactive self are never just given. Rather, it is embedded in a social interactive, in context of a web of culture and institutional arrangements, and always in process. Indeed, what is needed to constitute oneself is institutional and arranged. This means that to address our being, to heal our suffering, we must be willing to engage the institutional and structural arrangement that causes this breach.

In the context of spirituality, there is recognition that what is necessary to support the spiritual self is beyond just the political and secular community. Spirituality entails something larger and other. It moves in a different direction than the satisfaction of the ego. One can imagine an experience or an insight that would connect one more strongly with the divine but not necessarily to other humans or life expressions. In this situation, one might describe a personal relationship with the divine and a distant relationship with others. One could also imagine an approach that would extend the connectedness to some select others and exclude a connection to those who are not in this select group. At the other end of the spectrum, one can imagine a deep connection with other life forms without invoking the divine. Again, this connection could be extended to some select few and not to others or be extended not just to other humans but to other life and non-life forms.

Smith captures the inadequacy of basing a search to end suffering on the individualistic self.⁴⁰ He notes that the self is too small and too private to meet our needs and bring happiness. The wants of this small separate self, i.e. the ego, are unstable and insatiable. Pursuit of them is always incomplete, leaving us wanting, little more than hungry ghosts. This self is born in sin or lack and cannot be fulfilled. Indeed, it is this effort in the phenomenal world that creates institutionalized "lack" and institutional surplus suffering.⁴¹ Smith believes that "true religion begins with the quest of meaning and value beyond self-centeredness. It renounces the ego's claim to finality."⁴² Therefore, it is difficult to imagine a sense of spirituality where the egoistic self remains largely self-contained. So, spirituality suggests that wherever one draws the boundary of connectedness, one is cut off by way of those nonconnections in a deep existentialist suffering.

40. Huston Smith, *The Illustrated World's Religions: A Guide to Our Great Wisdom Traditions* 19 (HarperSanFrancisco 1991).

41. *Id.*

42. *Id.*

Even if one accepts that the egoist separate self is too small, and indeed false, lacking in substance, there still may be good reasons to remain ambivalent about the relationship between spirituality and social justice. I will try to anticipate and briefly discuss at least two of the concerns relevant to this article. The first I have already raised. It is that spirituality is something that can inform social justice or at least individual suffering but that such a practice does not inform spiritual work. Caring for others' nonspiritual well being is a service the already spiritual person provides to others. This work does not inform spirituality and is not required for spirituality. It may be desirable, but it is not necessary. The second reason is practical and based on fear and history. It is different from the arguments based on the insight of late modernism. This position is that spiritual or, more accurately, religious concerns, when brought into the public square may cause great harm and suffering. Therefore spiritual/religious values should only be expressed in private with a few limited exceptions.

I will take up the prior assumption first. Many of the reasons for rejecting the position that might be concerned with social issues out of charity by it is not required for spiritual work have already been developed in the article, so I will only touch on some of the key points here. Despite there being a strong tradition of spiritual followers being involved in social justice work, it has been largely understood as having a weak relationship to spiritual development. Even when acknowledged that there is a place for those engaged in spiritual practice to be concerned about the poor, this is often presented as a permissive value rather than something that is either affirmatively required or that will affirmatively deepen the spiritual practice itself. The assumption about the life of Gandhi, Mother Theresa, and Dr. King is that they were deeply religious people. And as a result of that they extended themselves to the poor and that is a good thing. But there is no assumption that their engagement with the poor informed their spiritual development—even when they themselves suggested that their social justice work was not just a reflection of their practice already perfected, but was essential to their spiritual practice. Unger's writing helps us to see the limitation of viewing the poor only as beneficiaries of spiritual beings—by suggesting that it is not enough that we feed them, we must also open up to them. We are called upon to be vulnerable to them as embodied interbeings, not as abstract beings to be pitied, but as aspects of ourselves, the other and the divine. As Unger suggests, if we are cut off from them and only related through rigid social structures, they as the needy and we as those there to help, the entire relationship is distorted.

Consider the recorded life of Buddha, father of the "otherworldly" religion I discussed earlier. What motivated him to pursue a spiritual path was his concern for the suffering of others. One could say that that the suffering he saw in others was both his and their suffering. But the point is, he was not concerned with just how to make things good or easy for him.

They already were. And of course the related motivation was that of love. It is not surprising that love and compassion lie at the heart of his teaching, e.g, having enough compassion to suffer with others. The second observation about the recorded life of Buddha on this point is that despite a practice to deny the phenomenal world and the desires associated with it, it was not until he attended to his physical body that he was able to achieve enlightenment.

From the perspective of social justice, there is a similar set of concerns. While some welcome a spiritual foundation for social justice, others worry that such a foundation is narrow and closed. The decision is then made that in secular society it is better to base social justice on nonreligious/spiritual concerns. But what is the foundation of values, ethics, and morals if they do not stem from spiritual concerns about connectedness? The enlightenment project from the West has attempted to answer this call for the bases of morality free from spirituality and religion. It is not entirely clear that this has been a successful endeavor.

This brings me to the assumption that there is a great danger of bringing spirituality into the public space. It may appear to be very different than the assumption above, but it is not. They both assume that spiritual concerns can be separated and in the latter case should be separated from social concerns. Indeed, liberal modernity is partially an outgrowth of religious wars. The development of separation of church and state is based on the experiential history that there is a serious danger when there is state orthodoxy on matters of faith. This position needs not be, and indeed is not, antispirituality or antireligious, but assumes that the forceful power of the state can best be used to create an environment where religious freedom is exercised in the context of a neutral separated state.⁴³

Neutrality, especially in our nation's context, is also associated with the freedom to exercise faith. But this is neutrality of the state, not of the citizenry. The arrangement that is part of this country's history and founding documents is an effort to support religious pluralism. The concern is not with religion per se but with a state orthodoxy that would disfavor the nonorthodox. The pluralism is implemented by respecting the rights of the individual over the group and by refusing to allow state sponsored religion. But the value of state neutrality is frequently confused and difficult, if not

43. The concern as reflected in our constitution was not that religion would influence the state, but that the state would be coercive in matters of religion. The separation of church and state at least historically was not a mandate to keep religious values private, but to promote space for religious values. Carter, *supra* n. 25, at 105-123. While there is undoubtedly a danger of improperly conflating the church and the state, there is also a danger in improperly, unconsciously, separating the spiritual from the secular. Curtis White brings our attention to this danger by examining the rationale for the response to 9/11. Citing the work of Hegel and Derrida, White notes that our response can only be understood in religion terms but unconsciously. See Curtis White, *The Middle Mind: Why American Don't Think for Themselves* 172-177 (HarperCollins 2003).

impossible to maintain. There are a number of reasons for this. One is that many of the values that some consider bedrock secular values are clearly based on specific religious values. Consider the current controversy about marriage and the nature of the family. Although there is an effort to ground this value in secular terms, there is little doubt that our concept of marriage and the family are not only religious in origin but also originate from a particular set of religious beliefs.

Of course, there is a tension with respecting the religious values of pluralistic communities and asserting that we must all be tolerant. What if one's religious values call for positions inconsistent with tolerance? It is simply false that values are largely or primarily about private matters. If I believe someone is about to commit a grave injustice, sin, wrong or what have you, it is not clear that the appropriate response is that it is none of my business and I must necessarily respect the privacy and autonomy of others. This may be an important liberal ideal, but it may also be in sharp contrast with religious ideas. The abortion/choice issue comes to mind. This issue is also that of when life officially starts for religious purposes, as opposed to when life starts for legal purposes. How should the state reflect concern for the unborn fetus in relation to concern for the pregnant woman? One of the ways we try to resolve this is by making values a private matter. But it may be that we are using privacy as a way of resolving public issues by simply consigning them to a quasi-private sphere. But many of these pressing matters are certainly something that the public is and should be interested in. But this does not define the role of government. Maybe by calling something private, we are not claiming that the public should not be interested, but that this is a way for the public to manage certain difficult issues. But the ability to draw a distinction as to the public and private sphere has been appropriately called into question.⁴⁴

V. SPIRITUAL AND RELIGIOUS VALUES ARE NOT JUST PRIVATE, INDIVIDUAL CONCERNS

The apparent solution to eradicating, easing, dissolving this tension between religious values and our public secular space is radical, unstable, and incoherent. There are a number of reasons for this. They are made clear by looking more closely at the proposed solution to this conflict. One solution is to have a plurality of religious doctrines but to make issues of private concern not open to public debate. This effort to closet religion and wall it off from public space solves the problem by distorting religion, limiting it, and making it trivial. If religious or spiritual values are of great importance to us, it is unrealistic to suggest they only relate to matters of personal or private concern. There are a number of similar reasons to be skeptical of this arrangement. I have already explained two of these assumptions turned

44. See Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton U. Press 1990).

arrangements, which I will restate, and then offer a third. The first two can be restated as such: first, we can easily distinguish between the public and private; and second, religious values are properly consigned to the private sphere.

The third assumption is that the role of the state is to protect the individual autonomy—and that this is accomplished by being neutral in public matters, allowing the individual to choose her own value or religious tenets. This can be thought of as a secular restatement of the establishment clause, but extended to all values. This arrangement is only possible if the law can be neutral. Even the way the law conceives of and moves to protect the rights of the autonomous individual raises very serious concerns about the feasibility of such a stance. But the nature of the individual and her relations to other individuals is a very contested issue with deep religious foundations. Loy states that, “Hobbes’s state of nature is a secularized version of Calvin’s ‘natural man’ without God. Socialist critiques of private property originated in allegorical interpretations of Adam’s Fall and God’s curse upon him. John Locke’s theory of individual rights is rooted in a Protestant understanding of man’s relationship with God.”⁴⁵ The nature of this individual to herself and to the group is not just a postmodernist issue, but also an issue that implicates a number of religious tenements. It may be that there is an important recursive relationship between the notion of the individual in law and the nature of the individual in Christian Protestantism as opposed to Catholicism, for example. It may be more than a coincidence that Protestants move toward its members having a personal relationship with God, while Catholics are more likely to have relationship with God mediated by the church. The ideology of individualism should not be confused with an entailment for respect or freedom. One only has to consider how the concept of individuality was used to dispossess native people in the United States and elsewhere of their land.⁴⁶

Even if one could step away from religion, there is still no clear concept of the individual. For example, the ideal of respect for the individual, which is one of the bedrock values in this secular democratic state, has been seriously called into question by many late and postmodernists as well as many students of religion. They challenge the assumption of the organic, essential nature of the individual and the artificial and arbitrary nature of community. But what if the self is constituted through community and relationship?⁴⁷ This challenge of the priority of the individual would seriously disturb the claim of neutrality.

But there is another reason why one might be skeptical about trying to build a wall between spiritual values and public space. What if the arrange-

45. Loy, *supra* n. 3, at 127.

46. See e.g. *Johnson v. M’Intosh*, 21 U.S. 543 (1823); *Tee-Hit-ton Indians v. U.S.*, 348 U.S. 272 (1955).

47. See Powell, *supra* n. 36.

ment of public space not only impacted suffering in the phenomenal world, but also had an impact on our ability to pursue a spiritual life? Then much of the argument for trying to keep these domains separate would be called into question. But that is much of what I have been asserting in this article—that the way we arrange our space does just that. This is also one of the central claims of Unger, Jones, and others.⁴⁸ Our context matters. The lack of basic needs or oppressive arrangements can and do affect our spiritual development. While it may not completely deny such development, it can make such development more difficult. Similarly, the lack of having a spiritual and moral foundation can undermine the well being of the secular world. While there has been recognition of some relationship between these two realms, there is little recognition of institutional and structural arrangements that can be important to both. There are a number of reasons for this lacking. According to Ken Jones, one reason is that many of the world religions came into being before complex social structures that we inherit today and before a social theory about society was available. In addition, we live in a time where the ideology of individuality blinds us to the way that structures and institutions help shape and form what we call our inner and outer life.⁴⁹ Until this correction is made, we will continue to misunderstand the role of society as well as the nature of the individual that we wish to rescue from secular and existential suffering.⁵⁰

The story of the Garden of Eden reflects the insight that separation is the suffering generating loss, which we as spiritual beings struggle most to overcome. It is the separation from God that cast man and woman out in the world as aliens to suffer. Redemption is a return to God. But Adam and Eve were also alienated from each other and from themselves as their shame indicates, so redemption is also about recapturing right relationships at these levels as well.⁵¹ In other teachings, some of which are non-theistic, it is our lack of awareness that causes us to believe in our separateness and to suffer as our institutional arrangement impacts us.

The belief that we are separate is no small matter. We cannot go back and should not go back to premodern times before such separation occurred. There is not just a problem with tolerance, the modern self is not the same self or premodern times. There is also an issue with different methods in different spheres. The schematic way of describing this difference has been captured by Karen Armstrong in her work, *The Battle for*

48. There are those who argue for bring spiritual concerns out of the closet. But it is usually because the person with the concern has a conviction that has social implications. See Carter, *supra* n. 25. I am making a different point, that social arrangements have spiritual implications in a developmental way.

49. See Jones, *supra* n. 20.

50. See Powell, *supra* n. 36.

51. Wilber asserts that the original fall was the creation itself because it marked the illusionary separation of all things from Spirit. Ken Wilber, *Up From Eden: A Transpersonal View of Human Evolution* 326 (rev. ed., The Theosophical Publ. H. 1996).

God. In it, Armstrong describes religious and spiritual practices as being based on myth, while modernity and public space are based on logic. When the two are inappropriately mixed, it is often disastrous.⁵² The solution has been to think of the two as separate instead of different but complimentary. There is a danger in conflating these two spheres. Yet, the solution that we have adopted may be based on a misunderstanding of the problem, and therefore is an unworkable solution. I cited Loy earlier for the proposition that secular society is already defined and driven by spiritual need but unconsciously. I have also suggested that the problem may be with orthodoxy more than with spirituality. But these issues and problems are not limited to what we formally call religion. As we think deeply about these issues, we are forced to think about our context and indeed the nature of the self. Consider the public self that is to live in the public space of early modernity. This self is not only not religious in public space, but it is largely devoid of passion. But how are we to reason without passion and spiritual grounding? It is this very fear of passion and religion that causes liberal society to attempt to closet these domains. It is clear these domains are not the same, yet their difference may be overstated and misunderstood. It is less clear that they do not and cannot inform each other. Do we get the meaning of our life from our reason or from our religious beliefs? When we look closely at reason, it becomes clear that there is no singular concept called reason and that reason cannot be devoid of feeling or passions, that is that reasoning cannot operate as early modernist had hoped.⁵³ More importantly for this article, reason cannot by itself address the insubstantiality that drives our secular and spiritual quest. These questions of meaning cannot be resolved in private and certainly not in the unconscious.

VI. ORTHODOXY PREVENTING INTERBEING

Part of the way to think about this is to go back to my statement of the problem. I posited that when the state adopts an orthodox religious perspective, it is likely to be coercive and violent. But the problem may be more and less than what this statement suggests. It is not necessarily the spiritual or religious value that is the problem, but the orthodoxy itself. I have referred to Unger often in this article and will go back to him again for insight into this point. In his writing against context that cannot be transformed, or false necessities, he is writing against orthodoxy which Loy refers to as idolatry.⁵⁴ It is not the religious or spiritual nature of the value that is at issue, but its orthodoxy. Wilber notes that there are indeed reli-

52. See Armstrong, *supra* n. 25.

53. Hegel was one of the first modern philosophers to articulate that reason was contextual and ahistoric. Weber distinguished between instrumental reasoning and substantive reasoning. George W.F. Hegel, *Reason in History: A General Introduction to the Philosophy of History* 31-34 (Robert S. Hartman trans., Liberal Arts Press 1953).

54. Loy, *supra* n. 3, at 121-24; see Unger, *supra* n. 11.

gions that are irrational, but he also asserts that there are religions and spiritual practices that are transrational.⁵⁵ It seems to me that orthodoxy is easier to maintain if one does not have to engage the other as an interbeing.

The suffering I have been describing can be thought of as the suffering that is endemic to a self-conscious life. Ego consciousness is born with separation and suffering. This suffering seems unavoidable short of redemption and/or enlightenment. But there is also what we might call surplus suffering. It is the suffering that we inflict on each other that is not necessarily part of the human condition. Spousal abuse, racism, and war are examples of surplus suffering. Whereas getting sick, losing a loved one or losing one's self are part of the human condition.

What I am positing is that spirituality is animated by suffering and therefore must be cognizant of both ontological and surplus, or social, suffering. The greater we see our scope of interconnectedness, the greater our scope of empathy and compassion for those suffering. If we see someone or something as outside of the select group of connectedness, the less likely one will extend the concerns regarding suffering to such a being, or nonbeing. (There are those who believe that we are not only connected to the earth, but that the earth can also suffer.) Unger suggests that the world be divided into two categories, one's self and everyone else.⁵⁶ Sometimes that sense of self is extended to family, village, race, or tribe. The care for self is different than the care for others. But this separate self is both the cause and object of both forms of suffering. Institutions and structures are critical to understanding the self and the suffering experienced by the self. In the Eastern tradition, it is not the liberation of the self that is at issue, but the liberation from the self.

Indeed the divide between the self and the other in this term also tells us more. Wherever there is self there is fear, wherever there is other there is terror. Part of our condition of dis-ease is the tragic play of self and others. Yet this does not entail either a radical separation of others that has largely informed the early liberal modernist approach to this dilemma or the merging of self with others. It has been suggested that we may need to become aware of our separateness before we become aware of our connectedness. It also may suggest that not all connectedness is the same.

VII. THE CALL TO HEAL THE SEPARATION THROUGH LOVE

I have talked about the need to address suffering that is both ontologically based as well as socially based. But there is another important dimension to spirituality. We are not only pushed by suffering to something deeper and larger than the egoistic self, we are also pulled. What pulls us is love. Love gives us the hope and the reality of reconnecting. It heals the

55. See Wilber, *supra* n. 51.

56. See Unger, *supra* n. 11.

sense of loss and separation that haunts the egoistic self. And for love to be realized, the ego is called beyond itself. The very self-containment of the ego limits it to a narcissistic love that can never move beyond itself and is therefore always trapped in separation. It is for this reason that virtually all spiritual practices require one moving beyond the self. We are pushed out of the prison of separation by the suffering of isolation. We are pulled out by the hope of love. It is no wonder that love plays such an important role in all major religions. In a world that is unjust, hard, and rigid, there is not only a great deal of surplus suffering; there is also little space for love.

There is a clear relationship between existential suffering and the lack of love. Existential suffering is about being separate from the God, the divine, of what we feel at home, atonement. It is being disconnected from what supports our authentic being. But why is this suffering existential or ontological? The reason is that in our very being, in our very sense of self, we experience our separateness, we experience a sense of loss and emptiness. For Christians this loss is the separation from God. For a child it is the separation from its biological mother. For all of us, this loss may include the separation from our other mother, Earth. But it is also self-consciousness. In our consciousness the self is existential, but so is suffering. We are haunted by the primal loss of connection and the pending loss of death. Our very consciousness gives birth to our sense of separation. Our project is not to return to the primal pre-consciousness where we are merged and undifferentiated, but to a higher conscious that recognizes our relative separateness and our profound connectedness.

If one rejects the first part of my assertion that the suffering of an individual is a cause for concern and engagement, then there is no reason to engage the role of institutions and structures in producing suffering. I have been asserting that the issue of suffering, even in the secular space, is a fundamental spiritual concern. And therefore one must be cognizant of the source of that suffering. It is particularly troublesome when one is actively or passively the beneficiary of such suffering. What does owning a slave do to the spiritual development of the slave master as well as the slave? This has been explored by Hegel and Fanon, who address the relationship between the master and the servant.⁵⁷ But the question needs to be enlarged. To focus on the relationship between the master and the slave still looks at the relationship in individualistic terms. Slavery in the United States was a peculiar institution that affected the entire society including non-slave holding whites and free blacks. What I am asserting is that this institutional arrangement affects the spirit of the nation and all those in it. What does the institution of slavery do with all that inhabit that wall, the structures of that institution— not just in physical terms, but what does it do

57. See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (Charles Lam Markmann trans., Grove Press, Inc. 1967); Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, *supra* n. 53, at 111.

to us in spiritual terms? How does it affect the way we think of ourselves as spiritual beings? These concerns entail extending our focus beyond just relationships between the slave and the master, but between the institutional arrangements themselves. In more recent times, one can think of how apartheid in South Africa cannot be understood or reduced to personal relationship and cannot be adequately addressed simply on a personal level.

There are many more examples we can consider, such as the institutional and systematic subordination of females or the disabled. To take a slightly different example, consider the injury to the earth resulting in the hole in the ozone layer. Clearly, this issue cannot be understood or addressed simply on an individual level. It is equally clear that the arrangement of our society is causing both injury to the earth as well as injury and suffering to various lifeforms, including humans. These examples have physical implications, but they also have spiritual implications.

In any meaningful sense of the term, the question is not simply whether we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, but whether we are our brothers' and sisters' brother and sister. Such an inquiry necessarily raises the question of what is the relationship between the self and the other. The failure to recognize our common humanity and our interbeing has had profound impact in both secular and spiritual domains. It is clear from many texts that there is a problem with our alienation from each other while assuming that we can be close to God or the divine: from the social death of the slave as written about by Orlando Patterson,⁵⁸ to the debates about whether there is a single and multiple human species in relation to white and nonwhites, to the inability of Europeans to imagine Aborigines as fully human in a social sense that would accord considerations extended to those considered part of the human and social community. Even when one is considered part of the community for a limited purpose, there may be other ways to withhold mutual respect and dignity from the other—but only by denying something in oneself. One only has to consider the ambivalent role many societies have created and continue to have about women. They are certainly part of society, but they have a place prescribed to them by men for men.

It is not surprising that all of the effort to reify the other has called on religious and spiritual values for its justification and understanding. What is of particular interest is the need to frame this culture of social distance with all of the suffering attended to it in religious and spiritual terms. It may be equally necessary to conceive of our spiritual selves in social terms. As used in this article, things and structures that separate us could be called antispiritual because they deny our interconnectedness. As we imagine God, the soul, salvation, redemption, the fall, et cetera, all of these concepts are interrelated with how we imagine each other and our society. But these

58. See Patterson, *supra* n. 37.

relationships are not just personal. They are deeply embedded in the way our institutions, cultures, and structures are arranged. It is difficult to imagine the creation and maintenance of these structures without reference to our religious and spiritual values.

There is reason to suggest that as we deny the other or use structure to do the work of social distancing and denial, that we deny our selves and our spiritual lives suffer. Then what is our spiritual relationship to these self-denying structures when they are already in place? The answer to this is captured in Cardinal George's statement that the way we organize our metropolitan areas is spatial racism and is a sin.⁵⁹ This suggests that there is a spiritual obligation to address this not simply as a question of doing service to others. A number of the stories in the Bible and the Koran are about work related to caring for others and to rescuing the spiritually dead from the failure of recognizing our interconnection. There is much in religious and spiritual teaching that suggests that we approach the divide by how we treat the least among us. The engagement with the suffering of others is not just a matter of service for an always otherwise spiritual being but a way to know and claim our own spirituality.

If spirituality is the engagement with the deeper sense of self, the divine or God, the narrow engagement with the egoistic self is the lack of spirituality. The suffering then that is caused by the separation cannot be healed by this small self. And it is this same self and the institutional arrangement that it collectively bring into being that cause suffering in the social world.

When we look at some of the great atrocities in the secular world, they have been predicated on the flawed understanding that some group is outside our circle of concern, outside of the human family. Consider *Dred Scot*.⁶⁰ In many ways, this continues to define what is the central issue in our nation's political and spiritual life. Who do we as a nation consider part of our political community? Even the issue of nationhood is called into question. Are those not in the national boundaries rightfully outside of our human connection? One of the problems then with racism is that we deny a mutual human relationship with the other, except for the purpose of our personal exploitation or ego. In doing so, we not only deny the other person's humanity and interconnectedness, but also we must cut ourselves off from a large part of our own humanity. The issue of self, in-group, and other and out-group is central for social justice and spirituality. Some have extended the approach not just to other humans but to other others such as the animals and the environment.

59. See Frances Cardinal George, OMI, Archbishop of Chicago, *Dwell in My Love: A Pastoral Letter on Racism* (Apr. 4, 2001) (available at http://www.archdiocese-chgo.org/cardinal/dwellinmylove/dwellinmylove_2.shtml) (accessed March 2, 2004).

60. *Dred Scot v. Sanford*, 60 U.S. 393 (1856).

One of the core messages of the world religions is that our ontological suffering cannot be adequately addressed by pursuing our secular or egoistic desires. This has caused some to argue for a sharp distinction between the world of spirit and the phenomenological world. I have already discussed some of the concerns with the effort to withdraw from the phenomenal world in pursuit of a spiritual world. But that is not my concern here. The reality is that most of us have not withdrawn from the world. We live in the world, taking advantage of our cars, homes, education, healthcare and other collective manifestations of our physical and social needs. Can we do this in a way that causes suffering to others without it having implication for our spiritual well being and the spiritual well being of others? And if the answer is no, then does the answer change if we are passively allowing suffering to be imposed on others for our benefit? It should be clear that I think there are very substantial reasons why the answer to both of these questions is no.

If one asserts that the matters of this phenomenal world are unimportant, then an obvious question is what is the basis for maintaining one's own advantage in the phenomenal world, especially if it entails subjecting others to surplus suffering? I have written about ego needs. These needs are not necessarily the same as physical and emotional needs. I need food and shelter for my physical well-being. I need love and engagement for my emotional well-being. But when I try to address my fear of death and lack of permanency by the house I acquire, it becomes a distortion that simply cannot be satisfied through such a project. It is this latter effort that reflects the egoistic needs. In addition, the ego is inclined to level its needs above all others and easily moves toward having others pay for its gratification. It is this that allows or even calls for surplus suffering. This project is, as I have been discussing it, fundamentally antispiritual. Its design is to maintain and enhance the ego and its needs and wants at others' expense. It denies not only our interconnectedness, but also the equality of other selves.

While the nature of this relationship may not be settled, it is clear that there is a relation. And clearly most of the world religions are both animated by the concern for suffering as well as by requiring the followers to both administer to those suffering in the secular world and to not unnecessarily cause suffering.

I am suggesting that spirituality is animated by suffering and, therefore, necessarily must respond to suffering. We are not only moving away from one thing in this spiritual quest, we are moving toward something else. How can we engage spiritual concerns, however defined, with suffering at both a personal and institutional level and be sensitive to the difference between the sacred and the secular?

I offer the idea that while compartmentalizing the world has its utility, it cannot be easily or appropriately sustained. For various reasons, including what Rawls calls our reasonable pluralism, we cannot treat these do-

mains as unitary. There is a coercive nature to the state that is ameliorated by democracy and tolerance.⁶¹ There can also be a coercive nature to spiritual truths that are not subject to the mediating processes of otherness and love. Can we respond to leaders like Jesus, Buddha, Gandhi, Muhammad, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who were bold enough to prophetically proclaim that they not only challenged secular and spiritual suffering, they challenged the institutions that supported suffering?

This is not a call for the end of the separation of the church and the state. Nor is this a call for a continuation of the separation of the church and state as we know it. There are different domains with different methods and purposes; but done right and with the right institutions, they can support human flourishing, human spirit and body while ameliorating the spiritual and social. To call for an end to the separation of church and state at this time would be to be inflicted with idealism of the worst order. To call for simply the maintenance of the separation would be a sign of rigidity based on resignation and skepticism. The project I have been suggesting in this article is neither idealistic nor resigned to what is.

Throughout this article, I have been using concepts that might appear to be outside of the domain of secular society and even utopian. I have asserted that the work to bridge the spiritual and the secular has to be informed by suffering and love. I have also asserted that spirituality calls us to move beyond the egoistic self to something deeper, more intimate, and authentic, but less private. Finally, I have asserted the need for recognition of our interconnectedness and our interbeing. It would be easy to assume that this call is otherworldly and idealistic; but properly understood it is neither. The call for having this project be informed by love requires a love that is engaged in our situatedness with all its imperfections. It is not calling for an idealistic love. Instead this is a call for what Habermas refers to as a regulative idea,⁶² which is an idea that orients the vision and the direction of this project but is grounded in concrete reality. This idea can save us from being lost in a means without a sense of an end. But we must hold these ideas or ends open to revision. This requires that we create our structures necessary to support these ideas. It also requires that the ideas are recursively related to the reality we are cocreating. We have not created much space to recognize our interbeing. To act as if we had would not only prevent us from pragmatically moving in that direction based on where we are and our current practical imagination of something better. It would also

61. Although there is a need for tolerance, we should not overvalue the concept. Much of the tolerance that is in public space is built on the thinness of values. We may be more and more tolerant of less and less. This is the point that both Carter, *supra* n. 25, and Loy make. Loy observes that religious tolerance became acceptable because religion became private. Loy, *supra* n. 3, at 142. Of course tolerance may be better than intolerance but it is thin compared to understanding.

62. Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* 296-300 (William Rehg trans., MIT Press 1996).

cause us to ignore the need to safeguard the world as it is. We can only move toward this idea with experimentation that is grounded in our current institutional arrangements but with a vision that is not blinded by only what is. We cannot simply reject where we are in hope of being someplace different. We have to create the precondition for guarding against orthodoxy and the space for our shared humanity. This space cannot be created just by goodwill. It requires structural and institutional support. But we can be intentional in reconsidering and building toward this imagined future

This is a call to enhance love. This is a call to intentionally support the creation of these structures informed by and informing our sense of social justice and spirituality. This is a call to become responsible for the institutional structures we inhabit and inhabit us. This is call for self and world-making and the bridge between them, as well as recognition that the world is deeply spiritual and deeply secular. This is a call to create and live the predicate for a beloved community. As quoted in 1 John 4:20, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for anyone who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen."⁶³

63. 1 John 4:20 (NIV).