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Environmentalism and the Politics of Contemplative Inquiry

Paul Wapner
American University

Many are familiar with the ways contemplative practice enhances outer engagement. Meditation, yoga, journaling, and so forth provide techniques for settling the mind, heightening concentration, clarifying values, and otherwise preparing one for conscious teaching, political activism, and professional work. Less familiar is how outer engagements inform contemplative life. This article explores the ways political activism can provide a route toward spiritual awakening. Specifically, it examines how wrestling with environmental issues opens new chambers of the heart, deepens one compassion, and offers concrete opportunities to “go within.” Originally delivered as the inaugural Arthur Zajonc Lecture on Contemplative Education, the article uses insights from Zajonc’s scholarship to illuminate the productive interface between internal and external experience.

Delivering the Arthur Zajonc Lecture on Contemplative Education is a huge honor for me. I have been a member of the Center for Contemplative Mind (CMind) community for close to two decades. It entered my life at a crucial time and set me, like many of us, on a course of teaching and research that allows the integration of our spiritual and professional lives. In addition to being grateful to CMind, I also owe much to our honoree, Arthur Zajonc. Arthur has been inspirational to so many of us. For me personally, his work has opened whole new areas of thought and contemplative practice, and his record of achievement—which includes founding a Waldorf school, establishing a biodynamic farm, serving in leadership roles of the Fetzer Institute, CMind, and the Mind and Life Institute, and working as Professor of Physics at Amherst—remains a model of translating knowledge into generosity. Through his writings and personal interactions, he sets a very high bar for what it means to be a human being. I feel blessed to be in his orbit. Thank you, Arthur, and thanks to CMind for inviting me to offer this inaugural lecture.

I want to start by drawing attention to Arthur’s 1993 book *Catching the Light*. Arthur begins by telling the story of a young boy who was born with cataracts and thus was essentially blind since birth. When the boy turned eight years old (in 1910), physicians removed the cataracts with the expectation that the boy would be able to see. Much to the physicians’ surprise, this did not happen—at least at first. Instead, the boy kept using touch, smell, and hearing to navigate the world. His eyes seemed to remain blind. It was as if the gates had been opened but the internal mechanics were unable to translate

luminosity into sight. As Arthur put it, “the light of day beckoned, but no light of mind replied” (Zajonc, 1993, p. 2). It was only over time, as the boy was taught how to use his now-unclouded eyes, that he could begin to see. The conclusion Arthur draws from this is that sight involves not simply external light but also internal facility. As he writes, “vision requires far more than a functioning physical organ. Without an inner light, without formative visual imagination, we are blind” (Zajonc, 1993, p. 5).

This insight captures so much of Arthur’s work and the work of CMind. It points to the necessary link between our interior lives and outer engagements. Unless an inner light can meet the outer one, our capacities to perceive, comprehend, and act meaningfully are compromised and we live less fully as human beings.

In the following, I want to focus on the interface between the interior and the exterior. I want to do so, however, in a particular way. Usually, we talk about cultivating interiority or contemplative practice as a prerequisite to more skillful engagement in the world. For instance, contemplative practice enhances our ability to produce more expressive art, find greater authenticity in personal relationships, and work more effectively in our vocational efforts. CMind emphasizes this by encouraging interior reflection and practice as a way to enhance pedagogy and, as a consequence, student learning. That is what contemplative education is all about. Indeed, many of us have experienced how mindfulness and other forms of self-reflectiveness help steady the mind and allow us to approach the world with a more compassionate heart—thus making us better teachers, activists, and awake citizens.

Less familiar to many of us is how the relationship works in the other direction. As I hope to explain, outer engagements can provide a path to internal growth. They themselves can be sources for turning on or at least providing greater intensity for the inner light. Indeed, they may have a unique character in such illumination. They may be able to open us in ways that are inaccessible to more conventional, interior spiritual work. As the tradition of yoga makes clear, in addition to *raja*, *bakti*, and the other branches that cultivate inner light, *karma yoga*—the path of selfless action—can provide an essential route to deepened spiritual awareness. Too often, many of us forget that the “way in” may be in the form of outer effort. In the following, I want to explore this channel of spiritual growth. I wish to delineate and underline the interior virtues of political work.

I teach Global Environmental Politics at American University in Washington, DC. The discipline is about trying to understand and respond meaningfully to contemporary ecological and social realities. If there’s a question that sits at the heart of this discipline, it’s this: how do we hold the environmentally-challenged world? How do we hold it personally (sleep at night cognizant of contemporary dilemmas), politically (actively respond as concerned citizens), and pedagogically (apprentice students into this age of environmental intensification)?

Contemplative practices are incredibly important to answering this set of questions. For instance, it is well known that contemplative practices assist in self-care and thus offer ways of personally coming to terms with contemporary realities. They build

interior muscle tone—psychological, philosophical, and spiritual—to help us personally make sense of the many horrific elements of contemporary environmental affairs. In this sense, they represent a way to find some solace in a world careening out of control.

Contemplative practices also assist politically. There are many causes of environmental harm: for example, we can point to the greed and actions of irresponsible corporations, the self-interested actions of countries, the corrosive consequences of patriarchy and capitalism, or the myopic view of anthropocentrism. Contemplative practices allow us to dig deeper, as it were, to the more granular level of these causes. For instance, certain mindfulness practices can awaken us to parts of ourselves that hanker, are reflexively drawn to material things, or simply animate our consumptive appetites. Put differently, contemplation, as a form of concentration and inquiry, can help us notice and potentially manage initial impulses. It can allow us to unpack and, at times, diffuse our own contribution to material desire and, by consequence, environmental degradation. This is important since excessive consumption represents the capillary driver of problems like climate change, loss of biological diversity, and fresh-water scarcity.

Connected with such introspection is the way we then choose to respond to these challenges. Often, we find ourselves reacting unreflectively to the latest environmental assaults. In so doing, sometimes we actually exacerbate the politics around such assaults as we lash out, demonize, and draw unhelpful battle lines. Contemplative practices can help in this regard by moving us from polarization and reactivity to compassionate, deliberate engagement. They can create space or, to mix metaphors, a pause, and in this gap we become more considered in our response. This doesn't mean that our actions will somehow be "enlightened" or solve environmental issues. It simply suggests that we approach environmental dilemmas with a fuller set of resources. Contemplation assists politics.

Finally, contemplative practices enhance pedagogical efforts by enabling us as professors to open to the broader conditions of environmental harm (that is, to contextualize current affairs in a larger arc of significance) and reveal discursive assumptions that often shape how we present material. In this latter regard, contemplative practice can help to surface attitudes—like corrosive cynicism or starry-eyed utopianism—in us and our students. It can dislodge presumptive certainty. Another way to say this is that contemplative practices can turn environmental issues and our own (and our students') relationship to them into forms of inquiry. It can release what Arthur calls *the inner light* and allow this light to reveal the profundity of environmental challenges.

In his book *Meditation as Contemplative Inquiry: When Knowing Becomes Love*, Arthur captures these benefits of contemplative practice when he writes, "Having strengthened and balanced our inner lives, we are better able to carry the illnesses and conflicts that affect all our lives. We are more resilient human beings, more capable because we bring more of who we really are into life" (Zajonc, 2009, p. 207). Bringing more of who we really are to the environmental crisis is central to holding the world we are presently living in.

Many are familiar with this understanding. Those associated with CMind have actually devoted much of their lives to this. Less well known to some of us is how it goes in the other direction—that is to say, not necessarily cultivating interior life and applying it to the outside world but engaging the external world as a form of internal work. It is this dimension that I'd like to explore throughout the rest of this article.

I mentioned that I teach Global Environmental Politics. Sadly, these days politics tends to get a bad rap. It brings to mind intolerant partisanship, sleazy horse-trading, or simply crude politicking. I say *sadly* because this obscures a broader understanding that has informed the history of political thought and been demonstrated in practice for centuries: namely, the noble aspect of political life. Politics is about focusing on the whole—the problems that arise and virtues that are possible when people live together. It involves recognizing the unescapable fact of power in human affairs and wrestling with conflicting interests in the service of fairness and communal well-being. When I talk to my students, I often remind them that political engagement is an essential ingredient to living a holistic life. In the same way that students take psychology courses and learn about the mind and behavior, or take physical education courses and get to know their bodies in a more intimate way, they take politics courses and engage in political affairs as a way to exercise the political dimension of their lives and thus fill out their humanness. Aristotle called human beings the political animal. Scholars have wrestled over exactly what he meant but almost all agree that Aristotle saw politics as something that can be exercised and failing to do so as making one not fully human. In a very cryptic phrase, he said that those who don't practice politics are either beasts or gods; they're not humans (Pol. 1.1253a).

In this vein, I would suggest that engaging in environmental politics, especially at this time of environmental intensification, is requisite for living more fully. These days, to not know, care, or actively work in the service of environmental well-being is somehow to miss out on an opportunity to grow as a political animal. It is to live with one less limb, as it were. To be sure, environmental issues do not and should not monopolize our political efforts. One can easily say that ignoring war, human rights abuses, racial tensions, immigration, sexism, or intersectionality would also limit one's political growth. To turn our heads away from any of these would be to live less fully than we possibly can. Nonetheless, I highlight an essential place for environmental affairs because they have taken on particular poignancy at this unique historical moment.

At a higher level of abstraction, I am proposing that we see political engagement as a form of spiritual practice. This hypothesis, if you will, brings to mind a comment attributed to the Rabbi Israel Salanter: "The material needs of my neighbor are my spiritual needs" (Levinas, 1990, p. 99). Or, in a quote by Dag Hammarskjöld that Arthur uses in at least two books: "In our era, the road to holiness necessarily passes through the world of action" (qtd. in Zajonc, 2009, p. 14). Devoting ourselves to public concerns offers its own unique form of inner development.

So the question arises: how does this work? How does one embrace political life as spiritual practice? How does one work on environmental and other issues to grow one's interiority? To start with, and again drawing from the environmental field, we can use our awakened understanding and utilize our efforts in confronting environmental issues to investigate and experience hitherto hidden parts of the self. Think for a moment about the scale and type of ecological destruction we are currently witnessing and our species' role in such biological unraveling. Bring to mind climate change, massive extinction, freshwater scarcity, deforestation, and other global ecological disruptions. In doing so, ponder the larger arc of history and even cosmology within which these are taking place. Indeed, don't simply think about such things, but feel them, and allow them to penetrate the deep recesses of our consciousness. We may find that doing so stirs unrecognized places in us. In fact, it may reveal chambers of the heart that have never before been opened. That is to say, as we fully realize and work against, what can accurately be called, global ecocide—or, in Rachel Carson's (1962) words, humanity's "war with life" (p. 99)—we may be feeling historically novel emotions, generating completely new insights, and sensing what it means to be human in a previously unknown way. Humanity has never before faced the unique phenomenon of climate injustice, nor has it confronted the possibility of our species seriously undermining the Earth's ability to support life. Recognizing, reflecting upon, and genuinely experiencing these realities can crack open as-yet-undisclosed parts of the self.

It is the same thing with the kind of hyperextractivism that's presently taking place and in which we are implicated. Today, we are not simply stripping the Earth of its ecological functionality and abundance; we are stripping each other of much dignity. This is especially the case as the privileged among us (of which I consider myself a part) exploit the poor, politically marginalized, or otherwise voiceless to live comfortable and often fairly consumptive lives. Wrestling with such extractivism—recognizing and taking action to minimize it within ourselves and the world—offers an opportunity to electrify our interiority and open new spaces within which the self can be more alive.

Arthur suggests as much in his book *Meditation as Contemplative Inquiry*. He quotes Goethe as saying, "Every object well contemplated, opens a new organ of perception in us" (qtd. in Zajonc, 2009, pp. 182-183). Arthur calls this *organ formation*, suggesting that we can grow new interior components through reflective engagement. I take this to mean that our inner lives can develop when we genuinely open to the external world.

It is hard to put a label on this aspect of exterior-interior relations. Many of us have heard the phrase "sacred activism." It denotes sanctifying our political efforts or, more simply, bringing holiness to activism. This is what people like Martin Luther King, Jr. or Doris Day thought they were doing as they infused their faith into political involvement. Working off this, one might say that when we do the opposite—when we infuse our spiritual life through public engagement—we practice something that could be called "active sacredism." The world of action, to use Hammarskjöld's phrase, becomes the

route to spiritual wakefulness. Admittedly, this is an awkward phrase, and it probably won't travel beyond these pages, but it captures, at least in broad outline, the kind of outer-to-inner possibility I'm trying to explore.

Let me give an example of this through a course I often teach called Environmental Ethics. One of the things we learn is that human beings rarely *solve* environmental problems so much as *displace* them. We may minimize toxic waste, reduce energy consumption, or substitute one pollutant for another, but we almost never fully get rid of environmental problems. More often than not, we simply move them around; we take them from one place and put them in another. And, as I will explain in a moment, there is an ethical dimension to doing so.

Take solid waste. Whether we send it to landfills or burn it in incinerators (the two most likely methods of disposal), we don't get rid of it so much as move it away. We send it downstream, as it were. This means that other people—those living near landfills or incinerators—must now deal with the problem. As you can imagine, many of these people are nonwhite, economically challenged, or otherwise living less privileged lives than those generating the majority of the trash. This is an example of shifting environmental harm across space. Others must suffer with the harms we ourselves, the privileged, don't want to address.

We also displace environmental dilemmas across time. Think about nuclear waste. We have no idea how to dispose of it. It lasts, essentially, forever and thus will always pose danger. Instead of restricting our use of nuclear technology, we (again the privileged) enjoy the benefits of nuclear power and medicine but throw the costs of doing so to the future. To be sure, we justify this with complicated notions of "discounting the future" and assuring ourselves that future generations will be smarter, wealthier, and more technologically advanced and thus better able to deal with such waste. But this is simply a sophisticated way of kicking the can down the road. We basically take the problem, push it into the future, and say good luck.

The final place to which we displace environmental problems is onto other species, the more-than-human world. When we pull resources from or dispose waste into the Earth, we compromise and often undermine the lives of other creatures. Today, we are poisoning, eroding, and otherwise destroying the habitats of countless species. This is leading to unprecedented biological diminishment and, in the extreme, mass extinction. This is happening because of our inability or unwillingness to deal with our own environmental challenges. Easier to shift them into the nonhuman world than pay the full costs of our actions.

If we ask ourselves what those living downstream, future generations, and nonhuman creatures have in common, we find that they all lack a strong political voice. They are the poor, marginalized, and powerless. As such, they serve as the perfect object of exploitation, the safety valve for the privileged. They are, as Mike Davis (2006) calls them, the "global residuum" (p. 72). When we treat the less-privileged this way, we engage in a type of moral blindness wherein we implicitly designate those on the receiv-

ing end of environmental harm as less deserving of moral consideration. Put differently, displacement involves the ethical denigration of others. Whether it is unconscious, simply hidden in the long commodity chains of contemporary economies, or deliberate, the way we deal with environmental challenges always ends up winning environmental protection for some at the expense of others.

I bring all this up—providing perhaps too much detail—to illustrate ways in which dealing with environmental harm can be a form of spiritual practice. In my class, we do an exercise where we try to get inside and inhabit environmental displacement. We do so by refusing to throw anything away for a week. Rather than throw trash in a receptacle or even a recycling bin, we place our refuse in bags and carry them around with us for an entire week. (Carrying the bags everywhere is important because confronting displacement is a public act and having the bags invites others to ask about the exercise.) When we meet, we bring our bags to class, examine our trash, and try to live through the act of disposal. This involves first opening the bags and viewing our consumptive lives through the material. We notice the kinds of things we tend to buy, how much packaging surrounds products, and the paths of our material footsteps. We also assess how much happiness (if any) we derived from consumption as we recollect the act of purchasing and the sensations we experienced at the time. We imagine the sources of the products and packaging—the natural resources and the many human hands involved—and the economic exchanges and probable injustices that accompany the mining, manufacturing, transportation, and sales of what we purchased.

Then we turn to what is now going to happen to our trash. We have already studied American University's trash procedures and identified the communities that will receive it: area landfills, recycling centers, and incinerators. We bring them to mind. We imagine faces, families, and the work involved. (We have also studied the global dimension of this by learning about children and adults in developing countries who dismantle computers, scavenge waste sites for resellable material, and otherwise stand at the receiving end of the international waste trade.) While we recognize that many working in the industry have respectable jobs, we also note how economic challenges often force workers and communities to accept refuse as a matter of financial necessity. Along with this, we discuss the fact that receiving communities rarely know the people who generate the trash and thus find themselves accepting anonymous refuse, as well as the social dynamics—including, importantly, the racial and class dimensions—of who produces and who is left dealing with garbage.

The end of the exercise involves bringing to mind an imagined person who handles the refuse at some point along the disposal chain: a janitor, waste hauler, recycling separator, incinerator feeder. Then we write a letter to this person. The letter can express anything that feels appropriate. Some write thank you notes; others offer words of solidarity; still others explain the problem with long commodity chains and the inescapable ignorance they have as consumers. Here is an excerpt from a typical letter:

So, overall, this letter is an apology. I want to apologize for not being more reflective in my actions. I apologize for how I've acted, but more importantly I want to apologize for how I know I am likely to act in the

future. I'm sure I'll continue generating and throwing away trash. For the little that it's worth, I plan to at least acknowledge you when I act in ways that take advantage of you. And I hope that as I continue reflecting on you, I may begin to make changes in my life. I hope this letter provides you with at least a modicum of hope in knowing that you are not completely forgotten.

After writing such letters, we undertake a deep listening exercise where partners read their letters and others respond as if they are the receivers. We then sit quietly.

What we're trying to get out of this exercise is, first, to develop a critical perspective towards displacement—to recognize the practice, the moral elements involved, and our own implication. Additionally, we see what happens when we try to open our hearts to the nameless who, usually unfairly, process trash. We try to feel the other. In the end, we don't wish away the problem or belittle the complex economic, social, and political dynamics involved. Rather, like the letter-writer above expresses, we hold the complexities and tensions in a non-resolving way. We let them simply touch us. Arthur captures the intent of this exercise when he explains that contemplative practice can help us hold "conflict in a far more generous pair of hands" (Zajonc, 2009, p. 29). This notion of "more generous hands" is key. It suggests that, when we open to public challenges, we can grow larger. We can expand and deepen our compassion and magnanimity. In doing so, we discover and become intimate with new interiorities.

We can see the same thing, perhaps more easily, with regard to intersectionality. All of us are gaining an education these days in the interlocking systems of power that enforce privilege. We are recognizing the interwoven quality of class, race, sexual orientation, disability, and gender and how they deepen social stratification and produce or at least reinforce structural aggressions. Wrestling with intersectionality is important because it offers both a route to social justice and one to internal realization and liberation. It encourages people like me to ask how my privilege blinds me to the parts of my experience that are being cut off because of my privilege. Exposing the conceptual circumscriptions that animate my thinking and behavior allows me to grow more fully as a human being or, in Arthur's words, to cultivate more generous hands. (This doesn't mean that the sole object of working on intersectionality is my own spiritual growth; I simply note the opportunity for this aspect.)

We can feel this cultivation as we consider the nature of political work. Take a moment and bring to mind a public effort to which we commit our energies. It can be the #MeToo movement, antiracism, climate justice, or any other social movement. Imagine the feelings that emerge when we think about taking action in the service of such issues. For some of us, there may be a sense of sadness, grief, or perhaps a feeling of being overwhelmed. (The mountains to be scaled often seem too onerous for our own capabilities.) We may experience this through a tightening in the body, a fogging of the mind, or a darkening of our mood. For the moment, just acknowledge such sensations. Fully feel the weight of our political commitments.

Now let us look beyond the burden, beyond the billboards that are screaming for our attention and our work. What's beyond? Perhaps, with more generous hands, we

might notice what actually excites us about this work. Perhaps we've met dear friends in our social justice actions; perhaps we've cultivated virtues or gotten a deeper sense of care for the world; perhaps we feel we might be fighting a losing battle but experiencing new things in our lives. Whatever comes to mind, let's dwell on it; feel it; let it wash over us. As we get a taste of what is beyond the weight of political engagement, we may experience a sense of thriving, of being more fully alive. This is as much a part of political work as is the feeling of being overwhelmed. I would suggest that this "space" or sensitivity is part of the contemplative life. Like the adjustments we make inside to accommodate the sadness, grief, and feeling of being overwhelmed, the sense of thriving also denotes a type of digging in, activating, and expanding of our hearts and minds.

This experience, this route to spiritual enhancement, is what I think is behind the motivation of many students. In social science, researchers often refer to environmental challenges as "wicked problems." This means that environmental issues arise from complex causes, have many stakeholders, and reveal no easy routes toward resolution (partly because, as mentioned, we tend not to solve environmental dilemmas so much as displace them). Wicked problems are thus not puzzles in search of singular solutions but deep challenges that question political, technological, social, cultural, and even existential assumptions. (When dilemmas are particularly nasty, researchers call them "super wicked problems.")

Now, I don't know about you, but when my undergraduate students, who are usually between 17 and 22 years old, hear the word "wicked," they have a particular reaction: rather than words such as *complex*, *grave*, or *nasty*, my students associate "wicked" with *awesome*. Wicked problems, like climate change, are breathtaking, astounding, and thus, paradoxically, enlivening. For instance, many students see climate change as a civilizational challenge. As such, it is not simply something on society's to-do list but a profound opportunity to rethink established institutions and mindsets and find new ways of thinking and acting in the world. In this sense, climate change feeds a deep existential sensitivity and allows one not only to be of service to planetary protection but to experience and actuate the innermost parts of the self. This is what I mean by "active sacredism." Active sacredism entails engaging politically so that the external world becomes grist for the spiritual mill. One's inner life expands as one tries to understand and make a difference in collective life.

A final question revolves around how best to practice active sacredism. What virtues, sensitivities, and attitudes can help us reap the sacred aspects of our activism? How can we grow within by encountering the outside world? Wisdom traditions have long wrestled with this question (although perhaps in a different formulation); moreover, social thinkers have long reflected on the relationship between political action and the state of one's psychological and philosophical constitution. At the expense of cheapening the question, I want to highlight one way of being that welcomes or opens oneself up to active sacredism. I will do so in a deliberately prosaic way.

My 21-year-old son, Zeke, has a dear friend; I'll call him Jacob. I once asked Zeke why he likes Jacob. I wanted to explore the quality of friendship and, admittedly, also to gossip with my son. In addition to casting a skeptical eye to my question—as if I was trying to disabuse him of his affection for Jacob or draw divisions between different kinds of friends—Zeke replied that what he most likes is Jacob's ability to be "unapologetically himself." He loves that Jacob thinks and acts at the sheer edge of his skin; Jacob hides nothing. Now, this may ring unremarkably of late adolescent admiration, but there is something important in the characterization. It speaks of the virtue of being an undivided self, of not overly demarcating an internal sense and external expression.

When I was in graduate school, I studied with the international legal scholar Richard Falk. Richard served as my mentor and we have grown to be dear friends over the years. As I was embarking on my dissertation, Richard encouraged me to apply for a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship. To do so, I needed three letters of recommendation plus a research proposal. I wrote a proposal that expressed exactly what I wanted to do, then circulated it among my letter writers before submitting it to the Foundation. About a week before the deadline, I got cold feet. My proposal described a fairly radical form of inquiry, and I started to convince myself that MacArthur would reject it out of hand. In a moment of panic, I rewrote the proposal and advanced a very mainstream project that I thought MacArthur would be more interested in. In my application, I explained that the recommendation letters would refer to an earlier draft of my proposal but that I was committed to the one included in my final application.

This took place before email, so after submitting my application I waited a number of months for a response. One day, I received one of those large manila envelopes with a letter congratulating me on receiving the fellowship. I was, of course, over the moon. It explained that the award provided two years of funding and, of course, carried with it the MacArthur imprimatur.

Immediately, I faced a problem. I reread the proposal that I submitted and realized that it didn't reflect my deepest interests. Shaping it to be, what I thought was, acceptable to others, the proposal described a mundane research project that was very far from my heart. I felt that I betrayed myself when I substituted the proposal for my initial effort.

I went to Richard Falk to explain the situation and asked him what I should do. He told me to return the money. More accurately, he said to write MacArthur a letter, explain the situation, and voluntarily decline the fellowship. I remember wiggling in my seat and wondering about the wisdom of asking his advice. It would be hard turning down thousands of dollars in funding and giving up the opportunity to list the fellowship on my resume. Then he explained:

You just made the first mistake that many academics make. They choose their dissertation topic based on what they think others want rather than what they themselves think is truly important. They do this to attract funding and land their first job. Then, they write their first book also on a topic far from their genuine interests because they

want to get tenure. Then, they continue following disciplinary trends because they want to get promoted, gain prestige, and be admired by one's colleagues. If you accept the Fellowship and follow a similar track, you're going to be sixty years old before you produce anything you think is of worth. You have to return the money. (R. Falk, personal communication, n.d.)

So, hesitantly, I followed Richard's advice. I wrote MacArthur and explained the situation. I made clear that the proposal didn't reflect my real interests, apologized, and offered to decline the fellowship.

A week or so later, I received a reply: MacArthur wrote, essentially, "Keep the money." They said they were, frankly, unimpressed by the proposal and had awarded the fellowship based on the letters of recommendation and my general academic achievements!

I will never forget this experience. I feel so lucky to have worked with someone who had the courage to tell me to go for it—to pursue my own dreams—despite possible hardships.

I relate this story because it speaks to the concept of the undivided self. The MacArthur experience forced me to open the gates that had been dividing my deep-seated concerns and my professional work. It taught me the benefits of being unapologetically myself. To be sure, I have not mastered this and still posture toward the world in too many ways. But I also feel that I was gifted an experience that put the challenge in clear terms and underlined the value of pursuing it.

I want to finish with a perhaps-familiar quote from Howard Thurman: "Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive and then go do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive" (quoted in Bailie, 1996, p. xv). For me, coming alive involves relaxing the borders between our interior self and the world. This allows us to deploy contemplative practice in all our efforts and enjoy the benefits as they course through our professional lives. It also invites us to right social wrongs, otherwise improve social conditions, *and* allow that effort to penetrate our souls. It makes clear that spiritual work doesn't begin and end on the cushion, yoga mat, pew, or dance studio. Rather, it includes reaching out—delving into the messiness of public affairs—and using such experience to grow our souls. It involves using everything as a means of coming alive.

Arthur models what it is like to come alive. His radical wakefulness—related in his books, lectures, and interactions—makes him not simply a wonderful person and gifted teacher, but also someone who frees us of our own circumscriptions. To put it differently, he wears his interiority on his sleeve and reaches into the deep, wide world both to help others and to grow his remarkable self. We are fortunate to be his students.

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