

Spirituality & Social Justice

A. Ka Tat Tsang
Thecla Damianakis
May 25, 2002

Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto
246 Bloor Street West, Toronto
Ontario, Canada M5S 1A1

Eamil: *k.tsang@utoronto.ca*
thecla.damianakis@utoronto.ca

Tel: 416-978-5817

Imagining Spirituality: Distinct Reality or Garbage pail?

- Ontological question: The nature of spirituality?
 - Additive dimension: Intersection and/or infusion?
 - All-encompassing construct
 - Compartmentalizing metaphysics versus simultaneous constructions
- Epistemological question: How do we know?
 - Empiricist parsimony or multiple construction
 - Articulation, language, and reality: Relevance and persuasiveness
- Transcendence and heteroglossia
 - The common-sense world and transcendence
 - Myth, parables, metaphors, rituals, arts, music, dance, and so on

Justice as an Idea in Social Work

- Social work recognizes that the profession is founded on a value premise
- Professional activities are purposive, guided by a set of values (deontological and/or utilitarian)

Social Workers as Subjects

- We believe that we make individual choices to champion and/or support specific agendas that are congruent with our understanding of justice
- We assume individual ethical responsibility, as implied by the professional code of conduct

Positionality and Justice

- Our idea of justice is conditioned by our social location and political position – e.g. September 11, Indo-Pakistan Conflict, the Middle East crisis
- Imagining the “other” position requires self-transcendence, compassion, and a different idea of community

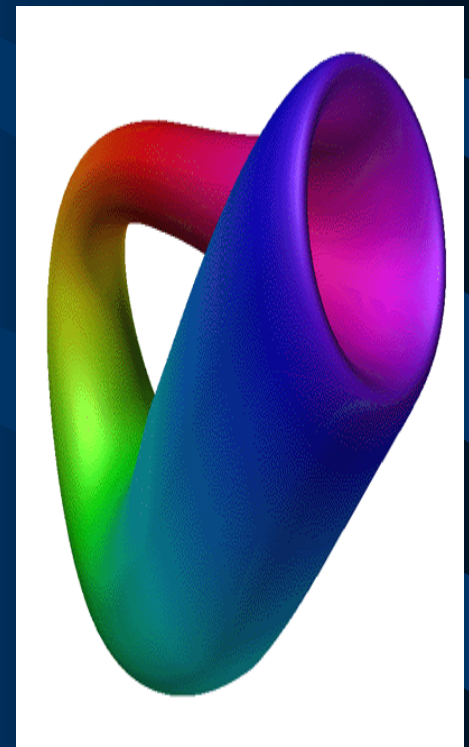
Compassion and Community as Conditions of Justice

- Assuming the position of the other requires the ability to transcend (literally, going beyond) oneself, including one's own need, perspective, and interest
- Justice requires the recognition of the shared humanity with the other – the Ground of Being (Image of God, Buddhahood)
- The practice of justice implies community building – a community of action that seeks to transform the community it interfaces with (e.g. the social work profession within a locality, an activist group interfacing with different locales)

Beyond the Personal and the Political

The Spiritual Dimension

- The practice of justice and personal motivation – self transcendence
- Beyond instrumental reason – from strategies of resistance to strategies of being
- Membership and connectedness
- Totality and the limits of language



Practice Implication

- Self reflection and self transcendence
- On means and ends
 - Spiritual orientation as pacifier, opium of the people
 - Adversarial process and the possibility of alternative strategies
 - Judgement and moral superiority
 - Change, subversion, resistance and revolution
- Social work as community – diverse practice and multiple agendas