ESSAYS AND ARTICLES

Social Justice and Human Caring: A Model of Caring Science as a Hopeful Paradigm for Moral Justice for Humanity

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The only true standard of greatness of any civilization is our sense of social and moral responsibility in translating material wealth to human values and achieving our full potential as a caring society.

—The Right Honorable Norman Kirk, Former Prime Minister of New Zealand

The haunting refrain from Maya Angelou’s (1993) On the Pulse of Morning offers a message of social justice, caring, and healing:

... do not hide your face

Rather, lift up your faces ... there is a piercing need

... we are arriving on a nightmare, praying for a dream.

At a time when there is no hiding place for social injustice and noncaring, at a time when “we are arriving on a nightmare, praying for a dream,” how is one—how are we—to make sense of the phenomenon of social injustice, in a world that is turned upside down and inside out with its violations of justice and caring? In a world that is hiding its face from the other? In a world that still believes in war as a solution to peace, a world that is spending close to $600 billion in a war on terrorism and little or nothing to combat poverty and provide basic child health care for its citizens?

Former Vice President Al Gore’s recent comments upon receiving the Nobel Prize for his work on awakening the world to issues of survival of planet Earth remind us that these matters are not just political. They are moral, spiritual matters facing all of humanity. The survival of humans and our planet is now up close and personal as never before, and there is no place to hide.

Singer–songwriter Tracy Chapman’s lyrics of social injustices that are up closer and personal echo with the lingering refrain of her piercing revolutionary singing on the streets of Manhattan in the 1980s and 1990s. Her lyrics can be heard still, blaring from shops in places as distant as Calle Florida in Buenos Aires, or O’Higgins Boulevard in Santiago, as easily and soulfully in the Alfama district of Lisbon or...
the Rambla in Barcelona as on 42nd Street in Manhattan or the Pearl Street Mall in Boulder, Colorado, or even Kellogg Boulevard in St. Paul. Tracy Chapman's and Maya Angelou's timeless lyrical questions face us continually today, perhaps more so than ever.

For example, Chapman asks:

Why do the babies starve when there's enough food to feed the world? Why, when there're so many of us, are there people still alone? Why are the missiles called peacekeepers, when they're aimed to kill? Why is a woman still not safe when she's in her home?

She continues:

... don't you know they're talkin' about a revolution? It sounds like a whisper. Don't you know they're talkin' about a revolution... sounds like a whisper...?

Other haunting questions about social injustice continue from the daughter of a student of mine, used with her permission. I quote Emily Susan Johnson:

It is now the twenty-first year of my life. I live in the city of R. ... and observe quietly its harsh, yet honest realities ... the poor man, the drug user, the mentally handicapped person peddling for money beside the rich and middle class, ignorant of the random fate that landed them here ... (personal communication, May 8, 2007)

Similar messages are found in the words of Van Jones, attorney and social activist in California (Jones, 2007):

College boys "are experimenting with drugs"; the black ghetto kids are "dealers and pushers." The first get treatment and rehabilitation, even sent to Europe for time-out and healing, whereas the ghetto kids go to jail.

We can offer pages of statistics and graphs depicting these disparities in the United States and around the globe. I have many that could accompany this article but omitted them as too impersonal and empty of the faces behind the numbers. However, it gets up close and personal when, for example, the disparities by race for infant mortality and number of people uninsured for basic health care in my own state of Colorado are so alarming. Worldwide, 94% of income goes to 40% of the population, while 60% of people live on only 6% of world income. Now we see the inextricable connection between poverty, health, caring, justice, and peace.

And underneath the outer manifestation of poverty, mortality rates, disease, and suffering is another story. In the field of bioethics these matters are often framed as issues of race, ethnicity, and power. From a moral/ethical perspective, we witness a worldview in which the other is viewed as separate—as different, often as the enemy or as less than fully human—allowing us to reduce another human being to the status of an object, whereby we can justify doing things to him or her that we would never do to a fully functioning human.

However, we know from our shared life experiences, as well as from the wisdom of sages and traditions across time, that one person's level of humanity reflects back on the other and that we are all connected through our shared humanity (Watson, 1999b, 2005a, 2005b). Maya Angelou in her address quoting Terrence, "I am a Human Being and nothing Human is alien to me." Therefore, if
When we are guided by values that reward conquest, exploitation, and domination, the very survival of our species and our environment is threatened.

I reduce a person to the moral status of an object, I am reduced to an object as well. Likewise, if the other person’s human spirit is lifted up, so is mine.

In the field of economics, these social justice/human spirit matters are excluded because of a power-domination/conquest/exploitation model that ignores humanity, caring connections and relations, and seeks to control others as well as Mother Earth’s resources to serve the few. We do not see the human face in the current social injustice mindset.

However, Riane Eisler’s (2007) book, The Real Wealth of Nations, makes a case for “caring economics,” highlighting the real people and the real circumstances that are in our midst and that face us around the globe. She states that we need a “caring revolution.” When we are guided by values that reward conquest, exploitation, and domination, the very survival of our species and our environment is threatened.

From another point of view, caring ethics scholar and educator Nel Noddings proposes that the household and the classroom—the human-to-human caring relationships for self and other and community—are the core, the real heart of economic productivity that can bring social justice and caring together for world survival.

Recently, editors of international journals agreed to devote entire issues to the topic of global poverty, emphasizing the fact that poverty, health, and human welfare have to be linked. As Eisler reminds us, it is only from the human capital of people and caring that other economic activities are possible (Eisler, 2007). Thus caring, poverty, and economics and social justice merge.

So, multiple voices in the diverse fields of economics, bioethics, philosophy, education, and social sciences, poets and street singers alike, along with both historic and contemporary writers and scholars in nursing and caring science acknowledge the phenomenon of social injustice as a crisis of values, which I refer to as the moral failure of the patriarchy (Watson, 1990). All of these converging views acknowledge the real ethical, moral, and philosophical consequences for society, for civilization, for humanity, and for the survival of our planet when our values do not address social/moral justice for humankind but instead perpetuate a noncaring ethos.

Parker Palmer reminds us that our values can either form or deform our humanity. He frames this value deformation as a form of violence, not in the sense of violence of terrorism, war, and bombs but in violence toward each other—toward another, unlike us, who is other than us (Palmer, 2004). The other often becomes the enemy—the one from whom we turn our face away, in the words of French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1969).

Violence and cruelty associated with injustice involves violating the identity and integrity or the belief systems of the other—the status of his or her human dignity. These violations constitute a failure to honor the spirit-filled person. They occur in acts small and large ones, from humiliating a child to “turning our face away” from others who threaten our comfort.

**SACRED ACTIVISM: NURSING AND CARING SCIENCE AS AN OLD/NEW ETHIC FOR SOCIAL/MORAL JUSTICE**

This awakening motivates us to move beyond social injustice to moral justice—to consider precepts of a moral, caring justice (Watson, 2005a). We must accept the invitation—even the mandate—to enter into an old/new morality that sustains caring for humans and for the earth in instances where their survival is threatened. This takes us back to our roots within nursing as an ideal of what has been framed as
sacred activism, exemplified by the work of Florence Nightingale. Society and the nursing profession have been inspired for more than 100 years by her dedication and forthright politics in addressing social injustices and sustaining caring with an orientation toward humanitarianism; social policy; and institutional, public, and community health reform. Nightingale scholar Barbara Dossey emphasized Nightingale's work as global, in which she envisioned what a healthy world might be. Her integral philosophy and visionary capacity to think, plan, implement, and evaluate gave her work an impact that has extended far into the future (Dossey, Selander, Beck, & Attewell, 2005).

The work of Nightingale and other early nursing leaders, including Katharine Densford, can be framed as social moral action that clearly articulated the science, art, and caring ethic of an integral worldview for nursing, health care, and humanity. In today's sense of urgency, nursing's past and current social moral action to address these issues (including leaders such as Andrew Harvey in his work with the United Nations) can be referred to as sacred activism, the fusion of the deepest spiritual knowledge with radical action in the world. This is nursing's history: radical caring action in the world. We are the witnesses to this work from the sages in our profession, but many in our midst are doing this work at many different levels of committed sacred activism to serve humanity. This is what nursing has always brought to communities, to humanity, to the world, as its highest ethical commitment.

In order to grasp this larger cosmology of sacred activism and moral justice, I offer an expanded caring science as a sacred science worldview and deeper ethic for our consideration (Watson, 2005b, 2008).

CARING SCIENCE AS A CONTEXT FOR AN ETHIC OF BELONGING AND AN ETHIC OF FACE

These moral criteria guiding nursing and its commitment to caring, health, and social justice have historically gone unnamed but can be understood within Levinas' concepts of “Ethic of Belonging” and “Ethic of Face,” in which we face our own and the other's shared humanity (Levinas, 1969; Watson, 2003, 2005a, 2005b). When we enlarge our worldview to face the depth of our humanity and to look into the face of the other, both literally and metaphorically, we establish a primordial basis for our caring and our shared humanity. This is the only way to sustain humanity at this point in human history—to look into the face of the other, not as a different other, but as a reflection of each of us.

Caring and peace are related. All we need do is look at faces across the globe. Somewhere along the way, society has detoured from moral social action informed by deep spiritual values that address our shared humanity and human disparities, poverty, and suffering—the values that are evident in nursing's history of compassionate human service and reform. We literally and metaphorically hold others' lives in our hands and are the source for sustaining our own and others' humanity. In our midst this kind of action takes place on a daily basis, sometimes quietly behind the scenes: creating sacred space to listen, to hold another person's story. At another level we have global action in our midst. Led by the dynamic and tireless energy and passion of Barbara Dossey and others, the Nightingale Declaration for Global Health Initiative is going around the world. This initiative is a collective endeavor between and among nurses and citizens worldwide to construct...
We nurses literally and metaphorically hold others' lives in our hands.

A moral community, a healthy and caring society for all. As nurses and the public embrace the timeless yet pressing need for global health tied to social justice, we can articulate a legacy of hope and health for all, modeling Nightingale for a new era. We are all called to give voice to Nightingale's visionary leadership during a time of tremendous need for our society's and our world's health.

A social justice moral basis embedded in nursing, framed within a context of caring science, offers another way to address this need. While issues of social injustice, evident in statistics of economic, gender, racial, cultural, geographic, political, and health care disparities in the United States and around the world could be the focus, I choose to refocus on a deeper level that transcends these outer manifestations of our plight in the world. Such a shift allows us to broaden our worldview and is an opportunity to engage in a deeper realization of what is present and what is emerging around the world, what must emerge in order to ensure our collective survival.

A model of caring science that goes beyond an intellectualization of the topic invites us into a timeless yet timely space to revisit this perennial phenomenon of the human condition. When one posits knowledgeable human caring as a mandate for survival, this caring can be seen as the highest form of ethical commitment to patients, families, communities, society, civilization, and planet Earth. A caring science model is based on a deeply relational worldview that includes human-to-human relationships as well as human-to-environment relationships. This caring science seeks to honor the depth, humility, connection, compassion, responsibility, and concern for human welfare and optimal human development/evolution. It is a model that honors the paradox of differences and similarities that unite rather than separate our existence and experiences (Watson, 2005b, 2008).

This view transcends convention. It includes starting where we are, in creation of caring/healing environments within our inner selves, our homes, schools, businesses, communities, health care settings, governments, and institutions. A model of caring science informs a caring economics as well, in that it gives value, visibility, and a formal structure and orientation to informed caring.

The awakening of this “Ethic of Belonging” (Levinas, 1969; Watson, 2005) is upon us. We share connections across humanity, time, and space. This awakening is inherent in a model of caring science and is congruent with many historic and contemporary nursing scholars. From the early work of caring theorists such as Madeline Leininger, Patricia Benner, Anne Boykin, Savenia Schoenhofer, Sister Simone Roache, Jean Watson, and many others, to the current work of the International Association of Human Caring, we see the most contemporary nursing theorists embracing caring.

Many others, including Mary Jo Kreitzer and her colleagues at the University of Minnesota Center for Spirituality and Healing, and the University of Florida Center for Health and Spirituality are opening new doors of scholarship in what I would frame as caring science.

Other examples include the Fetzer Institute projects on spirituality, love, and caring relationships; the newly established Institute for Research in Unlimited Love at Case Western Reserve University; the new Center for Study of Science of Gratitude at University of California, Davis; the work of HeartMath; and the transformative work of Creative Health Care Management noetic sciences, and others.
New initiatives such as the nonprofit Watson Caring Science Institute, with its focus on bringing caring and love (caritas) back into caring-healing, are helping to make connections between human values of caring, economics, and social justice (Watson, 2008). In addition, the current scientific focus on poverty and health care reflects our human evolution, shining light on the dark side of our humanity and our actions (or lack thereof), revealing our worldview, our values, and our ethics (Watson, 2005a).

We hear again the wisdom of Maya Angelou (1993):

... come and face your distant destiny ... I will give you no more hiding place down here.
... do not hide your face.
... Lift us your faces, you have a piercing need ...

Speak to humankind today

Such a deeply ethical social justice model of caring science emerges from nursing and its timeless values and worldview, which guide caring practices to all the people, all the time, transcending differences, whether they be biological, physical, economic, geographic, religious, political, or social. At this time in our lives, when there is no more hiding place, from our faces of social injustices and noncaring, at a time when there are those of us who are longing to respond, can we find hope from within our midst?

In Maya Angelou’s words again (1993):

There is a true yearning to respond ...
So say the Asian, the Hispanic, the Jew,
The African, the Native American, the Sioux,
The Catholic, the Muslim, the French, the Greek,
The Irish, the Rabbi, the Priest, the Sheik,
The Gay, the Straight, the Preacher,
The privileged, the homeless, the Teacher.
They hear. They all hear.

No matter how hard we try to set ourselves apart, we know that at the common human level, “I cannot disentangle myself from my relationship with Other . . . .” No matter how much we attempt to turn our faces away we know that one person’s level of humanity reflects on the other, so if one person is experiencing social injustice, so are we all (Watson, 2005). The humanist educator Maxine Greene, in an article titled “Toward Possibility: Expanding the Range of Literacy,” put it this way:

Change can be learned as persons begin to move toward one another, appearing to one another, articulating different perspectives, becoming concerned . . . it is only in our intersubjectivity, our coming together that we create social space for caring, for values literacy, where transformation can occur. (Greene, 1986, pp. 231–232)
A model of caring science, emerging from nursing's timeless values and actions in the world, is grounded in an ethic and moral action of belonging (Levinas, 1969). It comes from both an old and a new worldview that invites new policies, politics, practices, and ethics that fulfill human needs. Andrew Harvey calls this sacred work entering into the fires of humanity (Harvey, 2007). The fires of humanity are the mystics whom, he suggests, see the vision of possibilities. This vision converges with Maya Angelou’s great vision for the pulse of the morning. Sages such as Florence Nightingale and Maya Angelou (1993) who already knew the truth

... when you yet knew you still
Knew nothing.
The River sang and sings on.
Yet

There is a true yearning to respond to The Singing River, and the wise Rock.

(Angelou, 1993)

This mystic view is increasingly the person who works from the open heart, radiating a new consciousness into our evolved humanity, fusing the heart and the mind. This primordial fusion for sacred action invites a new story of humanity and our infinite responsibility to the whole.

The second fire in our journey into caring and social justice is the fire of sacred activism, seeking, longing for a moral community that includes all the people, all the time. This fire involves an awakened human heart and mind, what is referred to as the “Intelligent Heart” (Childre & Martin, 2000)—the evolved human working more from the heart, acknowledging that the heart-brain is one organ, that the heart sends messages to the brain (Childre & Martin, 2000).

These fires of our humanity guide us toward new forms of informed sacred moral caring acts in the world, whether small acts of kindness and love or grand acts of being and doing in the world through programs of social justice. Whether it means facing the depth of our own pain and the shadow side of our own human frailties, we can acknowledge that another's story of pain and injustice could be my story, or anyone's story—uniting us with our shared belonging, no longer turning our face away.

We return to the heart and light of our humanity and make new connections between our light and peace in the world, with an ancient Chinese proverb:

If there is light in the soul, there is beauty in the person.
If there is beauty in the person, there is harmony in the house [or society or system].
If there is harmony in the house, there is order in the nation.
If there is order in the nation, there will be peace in the world. (Anonymous, quoted in Watson, 1999b, p. 269)

So take your light and go in peace as you and we gain the courage to look up and out and into the eyes of our sisters and brothers as we face a new order in our world.
REFERENCES


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