Sīla and Soul (Part 1)

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 1:46:10

Alright, so I would like to speak about ethics—the loose translation of the Pali *sīla*. Ethics and morality.

Perhaps the first thing to say is that I think it's an endless subject. So this talk certainly will end, I hope, and I'm sure you hope. But in itself, I don't think humanity will ever get to the end of its exploration, consideration, and inquiry into ethics and that whole subject. It will never be finished for us, complete, all figured out. In that way, it's a subject like, for example, emotions—human emotion—which I've said before I also don't think humanity will ever reach a complete, final understanding of. Or a subject like healing, or psychology in general, or certain philosophical subjects like ontology.

These unfathomably deep and rich domains of our concern open themselves up endlessly. They're endlessly fecund for exploration, endlessly complex, endlessly open to different and competing perspectives and interpretations, views and opinions, theories, frameworks. There are all kinds of problems involved, all kinds of difficulties and challenges. But at least the way I relate to those kinds of subjects and that endlessness which they seem to open out to or contain within themselves is that rather than walking away from the complexity, the problematic, the endlessness of it, it actually invites us onward. We have a certain calling or duty or destiny to take those explorations further, as much as we can, in our generation.

So it's important to talk about these subjects because they need us, in a way, to keep progressing the discourse, the consideration, the problematic inquiry—to keep wrestling, to keep experimenting. It's not easy, but it's endlessly fertile.

One implication of this is that whatever I offer here in this talk is going to be incomplete. It's incomplete because of what I've just said about the nature of the subject. So it's appropriate that it's incomplete. I mean, it's also incomplete because of lots of other reasons, but there's a fundamental reason why it's incomplete, and it's completely appropriate that it's incomplete, because that's, I think, the nature of this subject, of this realm of inquiry, this realm of concern.

Okay, so ethics. I should say right at the beginning that I'm going to use the words *ethical* and *moral* interchangeably. I know some people make distinctions in how they use those words, but for the purposes of this talk, I'm going to use them interchangeably, at random. They mean the same thing, as far as I'm concerned, for now.

What I want to go into is, a little bit at least, and open out for reflection, for consideration, for possible avenues of practice and conceiving: the relationship of soul and ethics, soul and *sīla*, soul-making dharma

and imaginal practice and ethics, and Buddha Dharma and the wider range of Buddha Dharma in its relationship with ethics. And then even wider—the wider culture, our contemporary, practically global culture now and ethics. I want to include particularly the need, I think, for a sort of expansion of our ethical thinking to consider our ethical relationship with the Earth, with the planet that we come from and that we live on, that is our home, and with regard to such pressing issues as climate change and species extinction.

A big subject, and way too big really, but let's see what we can do.

I should point out that tonight is really just an introduction to this larger talk on ethics—just the introductory part. So many of the pieces I touch on tonight I will hopefully pick up later as we go through on future evenings.

To begin, let me repeat a few things I've said before regarding the wider culture, our wider cultural inheritance around morality, and Buddha Dharma. Just a few brief things. Generally I don't like repeating, otherwise the talks would really go on forever. But I've said this before—I can't remember where, perhaps in *Necessity of Fancy*, perhaps a few other places.

In the West, in the modern West, we have a complex inheritance, a complex heritage flowing down to us from the Judeo-Christian outlook on morality, on ethics, and even more the Islamic outlook—the Abrahamic religions. Their view with regard to morality seems to most people to have the flavor of good and evil, right and wrong. There is in all that a fear of punishment, a fear of everlasting punishment from God, and a kind of guilt that accrues with that.

Actually, I think there's a lot that's extremely beautiful in those traditions. I'm just pulling out some salient features for our purposes right now, in a grossly oversimplified way—apologies for that. But a kind of dualism between good and evil, right and wrong: it's framed that way. And with that can go this fear of punishment, which in many cases can be really quite severe, and guilt that can also be really painful.

Of course, as individuals, how this complex heritage from the Abrahamic religions filters down into each individual life or the context of each individual life varies widely, depending on all kinds of conditions and factors in upbringing and personality and situation and education. But as a society, that's there in the soup, in the mix.

By contrast, to a certain extent, Buddha Dharma—and if you know Buddha Dharma, especially from the insight meditation tradition, but really right from the start—the Buddha framed his ethical teachings more in terms of what's *kusala* and *akusala*: either skillful or unskillful. Sometimes it can be translated as wholesome or unwholesome. But basically what that means is what leads to suffering, what perpetuates suffering, and what alleviates suffering.

So the whole thrust of the ethics and the ethical training in the sila is in the service of alleviating suffering, and is less cast in terms of good, evil, right and wrong.

Even that statement, even that contrast, is actually not so black-and-white true. But generally speaking, most people who come to Buddha Dharma—if they've had a painful history with notions of good and evil, right and wrong from the Abrahamic religious heritage, and the fear of punishment and guilt—find some more spaciousness and softness, some comfort and relief, in the Buddha Dharma's presentation of it as we inherit it in the West, but certainly also from the beginning with the Buddha.

Coupled with this is the fact that Western Buddha Dharma, a lot of Western Buddha Dharma—certainly the Insight Meditation tradition—has a large component of its offering that tries to address and alleviate self-judgment, the pandemic of self-judgment in our Western culture. So both the emphasis away from good and evil, right and wrong, onto the relief of suffering or the complication of suffering, and the softening of self-judgment, means that for many people the approach to ethics, the way it's presented and laid out in the Buddha Dharma as they come to it, is more spacious and palatable.

Not for everyone. In fact, as I said, it's not that simple, because if you take on board the Buddha's teachings of rebirth and karma, then if you do something in this life, you can pay karmically. I wouldn't call it a punishment—that's not the way karma is thought of—but it has karmic effects that are effectively similar to a kind of punishment, except they may not be eternal. They may still last a long time. But since a lot of modern Western Buddhism doesn't really buy into that whole paradigm of rebirth and the karmic consequences there, most modern Western Buddhism just focuses on attention to and interest in how we compound suffering in the moment, in our lives, as patterns of psychology and behavior—action, speech, and thought—and how we can alleviate that. And the ethics is generally set within that framework.

But right from the beginning, the intention of the sila, of ethical training, was really in the service of simplifying, calming and simplifying the mind. Even the third hindrance, restlessness and worry—one of the meanings implicit in that is the putting down, the release, of the kind of worry and restlessness that arises in the mind, in a being, when they're worrying about what they've done wrong, about who will find out what they've done wrong, or regret, or remorse, or guilt.

So even that, in the context of the Buddha's threefold training, the sila has this thrust toward enabling a simplifying of the mind, enabling a relative amount of peace, which then opens the doorway for deeper samadhi, for jhana, which serves insight, which delivers liberation and the end of rebirth.

The five precepts, as they've come to us over history—five precepts for lay practitioners—are in a way in the service of simplifying. They're a minimum. And one way of approaching them is not to think about it much. Just keep the precepts and then don't worry about it. The whole purpose is not to worry. So if you keep within the parameters of those five precepts, then just forget about it. Don't really trouble the mind and trouble the being wrestling with complex ethical issues, because the function of the ethics is to simplify and to calm. They serve as a kind of minimum. Certainly in the presentations of Theravada, one isn't really invited into a kind of deep pondering and grappling with ethical issues in one's life.

In some modern presentations—I'm thinking now of Thich Nhat Hanh—the Buddhist ethical precepts, the

five precepts, are expanded to include their positive manifestations. So not taking what is not given extends to include practicing generosity. Again, that's something I'll come back to—the practice of virtues. Some people within the Buddha Dharma still are drawn to or feel compelled to grapple with complex ethical issues. So there's a sort of minimum given the five precepts, there's a sort of extra when we add the positive manifestations and the positive directions that Thich Nhat Hanh points to, and then some percentage of people is drawn to really ponder and grapple with these issues.

As Western Buddhists, if you like, we receive a very complex inheritance around ethics. Because even if we may have never been subject to heavy-duty presentations of Abrahamic religion in our personal lives, in our family, in our upbringing and education, it still, as I said, filters into the culture and forms part of the fabric—the sort of, I think, almost fraying fabric—of Western cultural thinking and feeling around ethics. We carry that inheritance with us to some degree or other. And then we also have this inheritance from the Buddha Dharma and this other way of thinking. They're mixed. These two are mixed together. I think it's hard for anyone in the West to completely remove themselves from that Abrahamic inheritance. So we get this mixture somewhere in our psyche, in our minds—the mixture of what we've received from Buddha Dharma and the Abrahamic religions.

Throw into that mix the rising modernist inclination, the tendency of individualism—that I can think what I want, I can do what I want, I can choose what I want—which also extends to some extent into the choices and opinions about right and wrong. But this culture of individualism, for the most part in our culture, and maybe it's a necessary evolutionary step—I think it is—but in its more immature aspects, which to some extent one has to decide how widespread you think that is, in some of its immature aspects, one can wonder how deep and authentic is a person's autonomy here. How widespread is it? Are we talking about most people? I don't know.

Is it just my right to pursue pleasure? And that's my individualism and my autonomy? Actually, it's not really autonomous at all. I'm just pulled like a puppet on a string toward pleasure. And I now have enough elbow room in society's thinking to insist on my right to pursue that pleasure, no matter what—or as far as I can until the law stops me, or it just seems outrageous in terms of its effects on other people.

So we've got this double inheritance from the Abrahamic religions and Buddha Dharma, and then the emphasis also in modern Western Buddha Dharma on letting go of self-judgment.

They're mixed. Throw into that mix a kind of individualism and a sort of invitation to think for oneself. One questions how deep and autonomous that thinking actually is. One also has to throw into the mix the flip side—the shadow side, if you like, maybe that's not the best word—the flip side of the kind of individualism that is for the most part prevalent in the wider society.

And that flip side is the inner critic. Living in a world where we conceive ourselves individually and less communally, despite some of the rhetoric that goes in newspapers, where there is this emphasis on "you can choose, you can have what you want," and all this array of choice in so many areas, with a degree of

alienation from community, from earth—the flip side of this individualism is the inner critic, and the pain that it can bring. Some of that can attach to anything in one's being, but some of it can attach regarding ethics, and of course that can hook up with the heritage of the tendency to a kind of narrow and unhelpful guilt that we get from the Abrahamic religions. Actually, I'll come back to guilt in later talks, because I think guilt is interesting and not so simple.

But the inner critic can often be, is often, the flip side of a kind of individualism. And at its worst, it can actually be quite incapacitating, quite debilitating and limiting in what it does to our ethical capacity, our ethical sensitivity, our ethical range and courage. We can become too self-preoccupied, and the inner critic is a state of self-preoccupation, self-anxiety. That can block our ethical sensitivity, which becomes too concerned with our self and our own pain, too contracted that way.

So you've got all these factors in the mix. I can throw in a couple more. On the one hand, you've got a wider culture that celebrates a certain level of individualism, which we might say, certainly from the perspective of Soulmaking Dharma, is still a kind of immature individualism, an immaturely enchanted individualism. And at the same time, what you've got in some, maybe most Dharma circles, Buddha Dharma circles, is a kind of anti-individualism, because there's all this talk about the emptiness of the self. Again, we get a little confused about what that means. Am I trying to tone down my personality, or erode it, or hide, or not stick out like a sore thumb, or not be too colourful?

So you get these conflicting heritages all mixed together as part of our collective inheritance, impacting each of us very uniquely and differently. But this is all in the mix, and to some extent, all of it will impact all of us.

And then lastly—and again, I've pointed all this out before—what you have is an inheritance in the Buddha Dharma, certainly in Theravādan Buddha Dharma and the Insight Meditation tradition: certain images, stories of a certain archetype of what awakening looks like, that tends to be quite limited in its range, and is not recognized as an archetype, as a fantasy, as an image, and therefore has a kind of insidious power over us. Because the Buddha statues are there, the stories are there, the tone is there, the presentation styles are there. Something is communicated: this is what awakening looks like, feels like, how it expresses itself. And the archetype of that is quite limited. It looks peaceful, equanimous, unemotional, except for perhaps some measure of compassion. It doesn't have a lot of wrestling with complex issues or difficult moral problems and situations. There is this simplicity of being that's part of the archetype. And there isn't, for instance, the ferocious warrior, certainly not in the Theravāda and Insight Meditation traditions.

So all that is part of the heritage we receive, in that case less verbally—or as much non-verbally as verbally. I do think, even in recent months, certainly in England, that this is beginning to change. There's a wider exploration of archetypal expressions, which I think is wonderful.

So, as I said, I may come back to all of this, but the point now is just how complex this inheritance is, how

multi-directional, how self-contradictory it is. And there are other issues that I haven't perhaps touched on as much that I want to begin to open up.

In regard to our contemporary culture, it's worth pointing out something about the trajectory of our relationship—if you like, our collective relationship, because there's always going to be individual variations—our collective relationship with morality, with ethics. Borrowing again from Alasdair MacIntyre and his book *After Virtue*, which I mentioned in one of the recent talks, he looks at the history of the word *moral*. Interestingly, he says *moral* is the etymological descendant of *moralis* from the Latin, but *moralis*, like its Greek predecessor *ethikos*—from which we get the word *ethical*—means "pertaining to character." It came into the Latin from the Greek. So *ethos* is the character, the flavour of either a person's character, or the character of an institution, or the character of a society. We talk about the ethos, and that's where we get the word *ethical*. And the word *moralis* from Latin, from which we get the word *moral* , also means "pertaining to character."

MacIntyre writes that a person's character is nothing other than their set of dispositions to behave systematically in one way rather than another, to lead one particular kind of life. So it's really the quality, flavour, tenor, character of the whole set of dispositions that pertain to a person or an institution or a society.

But he goes on, and this I think is interesting, to trace a kind of narrowing of the meaning of the word *mor al*. It is in the late seventeenth century, he writes, that it is used for the first time in its most restricted sense of all—that in which it has to do primarily with sexual behaviour. So there's a word that was quite wide and then somehow got squeezed tighter and tighter and ended up having to do mostly with sexual behaviour. He asks: how could it come about that being "immoral" could be equated, even as a special idiom, with being sexually lax?

One of the important points is that with the Western Enlightenment, there was a divorce of morality from theology, aesthetics, and law. This was part of the separation of religious concerns and issues and concepts and assumptions from other concerns that were more based on the Western Enlightenment, the Scientific Revolution, and so forth. And because morality as a sphere of concern got separated out from religion and theological concerns, it needed its own justification. It was no longer justified with regard to divine law or religious proposition. So the attempts to provide a rational justification for morality in that historical period—and he traces it from around 1630 to 1850, that period of the Western Enlightenment and the beginnings of modernity—

That's when it acquired a sense at once general and specific, he said. In that period, morality became the name for that particular sphere in which rules of conduct—which are neither theological nor legal nor aesthetic—are allowed a cultural space of their own. It is only in the later seventeenth century and the eighteenth century, when this distinguishing of the moral from the theological, the legal, and the aesthetic has become a received doctrine, that the project of an independent rational justification of morality

becomes not merely the concern of individual thinkers but central to Northern European culture.

In other words, with the Western Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution, and to some extent the Renaissance, there arose this endeavour to remove the dominance and infiltration of religious dogma, assertions, and assumptions—to separate that out from the rest of human life and inquiry, from society, science, law, and morality. Religion was separated out from morality, and morality was separated out from religion. And because it was now separated out, it needed its own rational justification. Rational justification was exactly what the Western Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution were about. So this sphere, now distinct, required its own rational foundation.

And so enter the different philosophers: Hume and Locke, Hobbes and J.S. Mill and Jeremy Bentham, Immanuel Kant and later G.E. Moore. What is interesting is that this project—to deduce or derive or elucidate a rational justification for morality—was attempted by all this series of great Western minds, and they failed. There was no answer that was completely satisfying to everyone in terms of rationally justifying morality. So the project of modernity with regard to ethics had, in a way, a very shaky foundation. Foundations were attempted, were built, but they never really got built very well.

And as time went on and modernity segued, or disintegrated, into postmodernity—if we can even use those terms—it became more explicitly voiced by some thinkers that actually any insistence on a unifying morality, on a universal morality, was inappropriate, impossible, for the same reasons we talked about when we discussed postmodernism the other day.

Now, of course, this is only one sector of thinkers, and of course, in many respects, despite all this, you could say that in some respects there has been—if we can even say it—great progress morally over the last few hundred years. There has also been completely not. One only has to look at the twentieth century, or look around us these days, to see the gaps, the problems, the shakiness, the uncertainties, the confusion and contradictions. But some postmodern thinkers at least ruled out the possibility of any kind of universal ethics. And so what entered the field was a sort of relativism with regard to ethics and morality.

Now, that wasn't received without a sense of problem. People said, this is a problem, somehow we need to fix this. But it seems very unclear how to actually move out of that kind of confusion and quagmire—where it's kind of taboo to insist on a universal morality, and yet complete moral relativism is also felt by many people to be problematic. So again, we're in a kind of conundrum at the present, in a cauldron of mixed pulls in different directions, of confusions, of gaps and contradictions.

And it may be that we can look around us and say what we have now—and I'm thinking of UK society and the US—is, to a certain extent, a very confused state of affairs with regard to ethics. In some respects we have law, a system of law that is in many ways supposed to be based on ethics, but has actually been divorced from ethics. Or another way of stating the problem: the law is supposed to apply to everyone, supposed to be universal. Everyone is subject to the same law, allegedly. But underpinning that, or supposedly underpinning that, is ethics—and there is not a universal agreement on a universal ethics. So

there is a mismatch.

And to some extent from that mismatch, the law unmoors itself from an underpinning in ethics. It exists as something to respect, to preserve supposedly the stability and integrity of society. But in many ways it's not always rooted in concern for ethics or in something deeper. Obviously it's not a complete divorce between law and ethics; much, I'm sure, of the original intention behind laws, and how they get updated in legislation, is related to ethics. But there is a partial divorce, a partial disconnection, because there isn't the universal agreement on the ethical foundation of law. There's supposed to be, and sometimes it's assumed that there is, but actually it's not completely congruent.

Two things about that. One: I'm thinking now of the Extinction Rebellion protests and the clamour of objection and opposition to protesters. Some voices would say, "Don't you care about law and order? You're throwing that out the window by disrupting with your protests." But that kind of statement presupposes, implicit in it, that law and order in themselves are ultimately valuable, or more valuable than some ethical consideration—which to me is ridiculous. One only need go back to certain societies: South Africa, Nazi Germany, and you could mention many others, where law and order might have held sway, been kept in place very well by the government and most members of society, either directly or indirectly complicit. And yet it was holding up, was part of the fabric and structure of a fundamentally unethical system—apartheid, Nazism.

And the second thing in this confusion is that, in a way, what we have as part of the situation now is strident ethical cries from different perspectives that often conflict with each other, but carry this very strident tone.

So you often only need to read headlines in some newspapers, whatever, and in some areas or from some perspectives shouting very loud with a sort of presumption of moral righteousness, and at the very same time, huge areas of complete lack of concern or sympathy around other moral issues. All this is part of the mix of confusion, the confusing mix in our contemporary cauldron.

I mentioned Richard Rorty the other day and sort of used his thinking as an example of some of the lacunae, some of what's missing in our contemporary thinking about all this coming out of postmodernism. He used to often repeat that the most important thing is to keep the conversation going—that we should prioritize, over epistemological and ontological inquiries and approaches, continuing "the conversation of the West," as he phrased it. This was part of his concern with what he called solidarity and morality.

Now, as far as I know, he didn't actually write much about morality, and part of the reason, I think, is because his approach left him with very little to say about it. We could ask: why is it good or important to keep the conversation—whatever that means, "the conversation of the West"—going? Why is it good or important? Surely such a question leads, perhaps via more questions, to some assertion, some belief in some fundamental principle or principles which need dogmatic allegiance or some epistemological or

ontological support. In a way, his philosophy was a refusal of any inquiry into ontology and epistemology apart from deconstructing it, and yet there was this insistence on keeping the conversation going. But when you start to ask why, there's nothing underneath.

As I said, I don't know his writings encyclopedically at all, but from what I've delved into a little bit, he does seem to have very little to say regarding ethics and values. The question I have is: do those areas regarding ethics and morality need some kind of underpinning and orientation? An underpinning at another level to explain, to give us a sense of their import? An orientation to what we call higher or more fundamental ideas, principles, values, psychologies? Could it be that the reason someone like Richard Rorty seems to have so little to say about ethics is because he absolutely refuses any kind of underpinning at a deeper level, any dimensionality, any orientation to a sense of what is higher?

I'll come back to that in a moment, but we might also ask again: what if this conversation that he's referring to gets really silly, or becomes a waste of time, or is itself a distraction from other issues and demands? And when does, for example, hate speech and stupid conversation—what do we do with that? There's this problem of the question of free speech, and so forth.

But principally, as I said, his insistence, his project and his insistence within his project on what he calls—he wants to get rid of what he calls "numinous notions." Numinous is another word for divine notions. Any notions of some other deeper dimensions, some higher sense of things—he wants to get rid of that. So he just wants to say morality simply *is*. "We need to think of our distinctive moral status as just that, rather than as grounded on our possession of"—and then he gives a whole list of other things. "All these numinous notions are just expressions of our awareness that we are members of a moral community, phrased in one or another pseudo-explanatory jargon. This awareness is something which cannot be further grounded. It is simply taking a certain point of view on our fellow humans. The question of whether it is an objective point of view is not to any point."

So he really has this insistence on removing any kind of deeper level of grounding or anchoring or dimensionality. We might say he absolutely refuses it. I guess part of what I want to say through these talks on ethics is: is that not exactly what we need? Without a sense of dimensionality and reference to something higher, a sense of something higher in which to ground our ethics, we're just at sea in this quagmire of potential relativism.

Again, what you sometimes find in Richard Rorty's writings are these slips where his language kind of betrays him. He talks, for instance, about how "we hope by acting this way in a certain situation to decrease our chances of acting badly." But the question is unexplained: what does "badly" mean, and why is such an act a bad act? Where does he get the moral rules from? On what are they grounded? He's insisting on not grounding morality on anything, and yet he's insisting on morality—but what morality? Where does it get its sense of import? Where can we even find a passion in relation to morality?

Similarly, when he talks more generally in epistemological terms, he says someone might have "a good

account" of why they think this or believe that, why they explain their own ethical behavior this way or that way. They might have a good account, or they might not. But again, what does he mean by "a good account"? If he's refusing any inquiry into epistemology apart from a deconstruction of it, any inquiry into ontology, what do these words "good" and "bad" mean? How do we decide what's good and bad? They slip into the writing, and again, to me this indicates, it betrays gaps, lacunae, a lack of consideration, a lack of adequate explanation and adequate grounding.

Just one more quote from him: "There is no inferential connection between the disappearance of the transcendental subject—of the human being as something having a nature which society can repress or understand—and the disappearance of human solidarity." In other words, his idea is that any kind of depth to a human being in the sense of dimensionality, which could be understood or which could be blocked or repressed by society—any notion of that, the disappearance of this notion of a human being having those transcendental dimensions—there's no inferential connection, he says, between that disappearance in our time and the disappearance of human solidarity.

So solidarity is the word he uses a lot, overlapping with morality. And then he writes, "Bourgeois liberalism seems to me the best example of the solidarity we have yet achieved." I'm not sure about his phrase "bourgeois liberalism" — he uses it quite a lot, and my suspicion is that he uses it slightly provocatively. But I don't know. Can bourgeois liberalism, whatever exactly he means by that, be separated from capitalism and democracy?

One of the things I think is problematic right now is capitalism. I'll return to that in a moment. But the other thing that's happened with postmodernity is this separating out of ethics from law and theology — the sort of atrophying of theology — and from aesthetics and from other concerns. With the postmodern objection to, and hesitancy about, coming up with a universal moral code or understanding of morality, what also goes with that is a kind of suspicion of power structures, a suspicion of hegemony in terms of who's deciding what is moral and what isn't. This suspicion is, to some extent, well grounded in the history of abuse from religious institutions over the years.

With that goes then the promise of democracy as a sort of equalizing force, where everyone with their different opinions can have their say. And of course, that's a very wonderful thing in democratic countries — a real evolution in humanity. But recently, in the last few years, much as I'm a believer in and lover of democracy, I sometimes wonder whether I still believe in it any longer. I mean, I do really, but I have some questions. I doubt I'm the only one.

I'm not sure that I believe in the immunity of the people to various forms of manipulation, whether gross or subtle — manipulation by those in power, manipulation by those with wealth and certainly excessive wealth, by the interests of corporations, by the runaway juggernaut of corporate interest. Or simply whether the people are immune to manipulation by the popular dominant view of things, of values and ethics. Let alone manipulation by Russian cyber hackers and so on.

And also what we've been reading in the news in the last few years about social media — the fact of infiltration in social media, but also the kind of closed social media circle. You tend to get feeds into your Facebook or whatever it is that are selected based on what you like to look at. And someone with very different politics, very different views, will get a similarly closed feed and be involved in a similarly closed social media circle — but espousing very different views, very divergent versions of the news. So people are seeing and receiving and sharing quite different versions of reality.

Democracy is then trying to function in a world where all these problematic issues of manipulation and distortion and alienation are coming in — through power, through wealth, through corporate interest, through just the dominant view that has its entrenched sort of power and influence. Heaven knows what's happening with Russia and all that. And then this strange phenomenon of divergent closed social media circles, where we receive and share pictures of the world, implicit in which are values and ethical systems that are really quite divergent, without much actual dialogue or meeting or opening out of views there.

In that whole quagmire, that confusion, that whole mess, democracy is trying to function, and it's pulled a couple of pegs down from the ideal of what democracy can be. So when Rorty talks about bourgeois liberalism, can that be separated from capitalism and democracy — and democracy now with fake news and all the rest, as I've just been discussing?

If we linger on the situation in our contemporary civilization, our contemporary societies, there is this issue from the beginnings of modernity — stretching through quite a while — tracing the history of the attempt to ground and make sense of and make rational justifications of morality in different ways, and how those attempts have failed. There's the opening up of the postmodern sort of anti-universalism and anti-truth, if you like, and the danger of the quicksand of total relativism there. And this appeal to democracy, wonderful and yet increasingly evident that it's also problematic these days.

In all of that, we live as well — we're considering our contemporary situation — we live in an increasingly globalized world, a globalized society. So when we consider ethics, the immediate thing that should hopefully be obvious is simply that our actions have consequences today; our actions locally have consequences globally. What we buy on the high street — certainly, you know — or what we buy from the internet, how we get our energy and heat our houses, all this has consequences across the globe.

We can no longer, as did the Buddha in his time, think of ethics as just pertaining to me and whoever it obviously involves — these two parties. If I lie to this person, if I cheat this person of something, if I harm them in some way, it affects me and it affects them. But we are living in a globalized society, and that makes the whole ethical consideration almost infinitely more sensitive a system. What we do here has repercussions that we're beginning to learn more and more about, but even that understanding is only a drop in the ocean of the actual repercussions. There's an immense complexity in that. It's very challenging.

Part of globalization is also globalized capitalist thinking, a globalized economy based on a capitalist

economy, with all the problems of the idea of infinite economic growth on a finite planet with finite resources. There's also the problem with globalization of a decrease in diversity — diversities of all kinds, in fact. The ethos of Western free market capitalism, and all the fashions and aspirations that pertain to that culture, that way of life — increasingly this has been globalized as well. So there's a displacement, a disappearance of more traditional cultures, traditional values, traditional ways of life, traditional outlooks and aspirations. All kinds of decreases in diversity go with that globalization, because what gets globalized is a certain outlook on life, a certain way of going about life, a certain ethos. And with that, a certain ethics.

All this implies that humanity needs to rethink and perhaps expand and deepen our moral considerations. Or try to. I don't think that's easy at all. And some of that might involve looking at ontological considerations, because I don't feel, for example, that what Richard Rorty has written or said on the subject has done much at all, really, to help things. So it might involve further considerations of ontology.

If we linger just a little bit longer on our contemporary predicament in the wider culture, one of the things that's interesting to me is that at some point along the way, we seem to have lost the ideal of moral education. The development of character, especially in relation to moral values and aspirations, has disappeared, it seems, mostly from Western society. You see it in religions and spiritual institutions and schools, and only there is it deemed okay to instruct or direct or reprimand or encourage a person above, say, eighteen years old. There seems to be this cutoff point around eighteen years where you can subject someone to the order of the law, you can put them in prison or whatever, but there's not really this idea of moral education.

As I said, law has, in some respects, trumped or replaced ethics as a foundation. But what is the law founded on? Partly it's founded on ethics, but partly it becomes this free-floating thing that is its own raison d'être. And something happens around eighteen years where it's considered a bit taboo to educate someone outside a very specific context. To direct or reprimand, instruct, or encourage a person above about eighteen years on the path towards what we might call higher and nobler and fuller and more sensitive and wise values and aspirations—somehow it's not okay.

It's okay, perhaps, where there's some agreed-upon goal or aim to strive for. If you're in a football team, for example, or if you listen to how football team managers talk about their players or the players talk about each other, or in a military unit—there, the whole idea of character is something whose development is encouraged. Remember that the word "character" is related to the words "moral" and "ethical." So talk about giving everything for the team, or courage, or "ran his heart out" and all this. Only in these enclosed circles where there's a very specific goal or aim is it understood: if you're in this team, if you're in this military unit, this is what we're trying to do, and therefore we can use ethical language, we can use moral language, we can value people dependent on their development in those moral areas, and we can instruct and reprimand and so forth.

But in those limited contexts, ethical development is only really encouraged or spoken about to the degree of breadth, height, and depth that reflects the conception of the goal. If it's a football team, it's just about the football.

Even prisons, as far as I can tell—and I'm not really in that world—but even prisons, certainly in the UK and the US, don't seem to prioritize moral development. There's punishment, and there's maybe the opportunity to educate oneself in different ways. But the idea of moral development doesn't seem to be on the agenda. I could be wrong here, but there seems to be some kind of taboo around it that relates to this confusion around morality and the reluctance to impose any moral system, even in an educative way, on someone else.

Part of the wider confusion: some people do pass judgment on others' lack of moral sensitivity or moral refinement, evolution, and aspirations. And other people would view that judgment or opinion as snobbish. But as a society, we don't really have anything other than the law to indirectly, and only hopefully, teach and encourage moral values. This is part of the lacuna and paralysis left by postmodernism, or really the drift into postmodernism from the incompleteness and failings of modernity. And all of that is part, of course, of why some people turn to religious fundamentalism. What they fear and abhor is this lack of moral concern, this drift into ungrounded relativism, and the absence of what we could call the nobility and uprightness of moral education.

There are all kinds of other gaps in our moral outlook, specifically with regard to the earth and nature and species, which I want to come back to later.

If you're listening to this talk, you're probably already involved in the wider tradition and context of the Dharma, where we do talk about ethics and values and what's noble, and about developing the citta—developing the mind and the heart and the soul and the sensibility. But in the wider culture, it seems something of a taboo.

In fact, even in the Insight Meditation tradition—one of my teachers was teaching on the West Coast, I think, somewhere in the States. I heard this secondhand, but they gave a Dharma talk one evening and made a comment about how the car park at the retreat center was full of SUVs, with their gas-guzzling and diesel emissions. That was woven into the Dharma talk, and then my teacher received an angry note from a retreatant saying, "I came here to learn to meditate. I didn't come here to be lectured about this," or something to that effect—which I'm sure got an answer in no uncertain terms. But since the Insight Meditation world is an open world where anyone can walk in and walk out, what they think they're walking into or signing up for may be much more limited than what is actually on offer, or part of the deal as I would see it.

So I wonder about this possibility of lifelong development—of sensitivity, of aspiration, of attunement, of consideration with regard to ethics and values and virtues.

And it might still be, of course—and here again may be a very politically incorrect thing to say—but it might also be that there are differences between human beings. Differences in what we talk about as soul style. Maybe the moral character of souls also differs. I realize that's perhaps a very unfashionable thing to say, politically incorrect to say it at the moment.

So it may be that even if we have an idea of what might be involved in opening up this notion of open-ended development through one's life—of the moral sensibility, the moral courage, the moral discernment, and all that—if that's there, and at the same time, like in any other endeavor of training, whether football or music or whatever, we recognize that people also have different capacities. Of course, that gets very dangerous. What does that then imply about things like democracy?

Again, I'm not involved in the Dharma world, so I don't know quite where it's at now and what sort of regulations have come in. But there was, just a few years ago, some concern among Dharma teachers who were involved in that world, and concern from others as well, that mindfulness was being taught in a way that was really uncoupled from its basis and root in sīla, in ethical concern and action. There were some examples of mindfulness for soldiers—in the job of killing people, how can that be done more mindfully and to make that more efficient? People were trumpeting mindfulness as a kind of solution for all kinds of problems, but in a way that was really trying to shave off as much as possible of anything that had to do certainly with Buddhism, but also the wider concerns and teachings such as ethics.

That might be different now; I don't know. But I remember thinking back then, you know, I'd rather somehow we taught about Jesus in schools rather than mindfulness. Of course, that's going to land in a funny way, potentially, but there's a kind of—there are stories there, if we take that example of Jesus. It doesn't have to be Jesus, of course, but stories that illustrate radical goodness and compassion, that teach and touch the being through those kinds of narratives.

But that's not really possible, certainly not with Jesus. Religion, or imposing any kind of religious education like that—again, it doesn't seem very PC, and it would lack credibility these days. Christianity is kind of old hat. In mainstream society, it's lost any of its capacity to shake things up, to be vital, a vital infusion, to stimulate a vital reconsideration. And as I said, we can't actually teach ethics, or it seems like we can't, because there's no agreement on its basis.

But sometimes I wonder, in the sort of dominance of non-religious secular outlooks, if something is also lost ethically.

I really don't want to make generalizations here, but Nietzsche, when he was writing just before the turn of the twentieth century, poking fun at and deconstructing what had become then a sort of empty Christian morality—part of his objection, at least, was that people were just doing what they were told without considering it morally, keeping a moral code that was more about manners and appearances. It was empty of any real vitality or life of consideration deep in the being. And so he poked fun at the vacuousness of that, and with that, the shallow morality, the lack of courage, the lack of independent

thinking.

But sometimes I wonder if the objects of ridicule and complaint that he found there in the superficial religiosity that was dominant at that time—and it really was superficial, because by then modernity was well along in its secularizing of things—I wonder sometimes whether those kinds of objections actually apply now less to people who are religious, in the sense that they really have chosen religion and it means something to them. Because religion is now not dominant, one actually has to choose it, to enter into it, to make a connection with it, to actively aspire to something there and find something important—as opposed to it being just given by the culture, by the family, where one simply trembles along in this appearance of propriety.

So I wonder whether actually now the people who have chosen religion may have more among their ranks of those who are actually passionate about morals, who live morality, who live more radically on fire in relation to ethics. And conversely, whether those who have inherited and go along with the atheism and secularism of modernity have among their ranks more of those who share the characteristics that Nietzsche was poking fun at: the shallow morality, the lack of courage, the lack of independent thinking.

Sometimes, just coming across people and the whole way they might relate to moral questions, or even questions of life and death—which of course are not divorced from moral questions—it sounds so flaccid, so flabby, so lacking in depth and passion and integrity and oomph and vitality. There's something just a bit bleh about the whole thing. Or on the other hand, they might be very bold and strident in their rhetoric of secularism, but somehow when you look at the life, it's not very inspiring. It's not very noble. It's not very beautiful.

So somehow it could be that this pervasive secularism has just replaced the pervasive and somewhat lifeless pseudo-religious, superficial religiosity that used to be there. But again, I want to be careful about making generalizations here. This is partly tied into the larger point I hope to make over these talks.

It seems to me, to some extent—or to a large extent—there's this loss of the ideal of moral education. Certainly, even in schools. I don't remember in my secondary school ever being taught anything about moral living or nobility or anything like that. And that loss of the ideal of moral education is part of our wider conundrum, the difficulty of our wider situation.

The word vinaya that some of you will know—the Pali word vinaya—is the word for the monastic discipline, the set of rules, the precepts that the monks and nuns keep specifically. And actually its etymology: vinaya means to lead away from, or lead apart. So it's very much...

Related to our word "education," Vinaya—the monastic discipline—is itself an education. *Educare* in Latin: *ducere* means "to lead," and *e-* means "out of." So they have very similar roots. It's an education. And for the monks, that Vinaya is a part of their larger moral education. So it's there in the tradition, this idea of the possibility of moral education. We seem to have lost it.

Anyway, in these talks, I just want to try a little bit to open up, to have a look at this wider situation. I don't think there are any easy answers, and I certainly don't have any, nor any simple prescriptions. I'm aware—and you've probably heard it already, I feel conscious of it already—that at times I may sound like an old fuddy-duddy. I may sound somewhat judgmental about some of these things. I may even sound conservative, which is somewhat surprising to me. And I may sound elitist. That last one, I can't hide the fact: I unabashedly admit that I am an elitist in all kinds of ways.

But I'm going to take that risk. I do think it important just to start a widening of this conversation. Hopefully others will pick up these larger considerations around ethics, soul and ethics, and the wider global situations. So I'm going to take that risk just in terms of stimulating some conversation.

Actually, maybe the first thing to do before we continue is just to clear a little space with regard to the imaginal, imaginal practice, and ethics. As I remember, much more particularly at the beginning—it doesn't seem to happen much now, but that could be I'm just not hearing from certain people—but certainly at the beginning of my teaching of the imaginal, a number of people voiced concerns. They were attracted to the imaginal but quite ambivalent, voicing concerns about the seemingly problematic ethical implications that might be wrapped up in imaginal practice.

So I'll just take a little time. It's probably not necessary at this point, but I will take a little time anyway to do this. Or it may not be necessary for most of you, but some of you will be in conversations with other people, or someone else might hear something. So it's worth addressing, because the imaginal, for me, is certainly not immoral, and neither is it amoral in the sense that it doesn't have any regard for morality or any connection with morality. It is neither immoral nor amoral.

Someone asked me, really at the beginning of my teaching in the imaginal—she was quite taken with it and had quite a few experiences, but kept struggling with different kinds of ambivalence, one of which was with regard to ethics. She said to me, "Well, you know, a lot of what you say about the imaginal could refer very easily to some kind of fundamentalist religious terrorist or something. So, what about that?"

Let's just pause for a little bit and address some of those concerns and issues. We have these teachings of the nodes of the lattice, the elemental aspects of the imaginal. And we can look at that and say: with regard to elements like duty and trust and other aspects of the imaginal, we could actually discern several crucial differences between a practitioner practicing with the imaginal and, say, a religious fundamentalist terrorist.

This terrorist conceives God as separate from themselves and therefore as an objective reality. In contrast, the way we talk about divinity in the paradigm of soulmaking and the imaginal is not as separate from ourselves—certainly not completely separate from ourselves—and not as objective, because we participate in the creation of the divine. We've talked about this. So that would be one difference, and that's a really significant difference.

We could add more. By engaging, for example, in a terrorist action, that terrorist might believe or think they are participating in "God's plan," but they don't conceive or sense that they are participating in God's *being*. Do you understand? There's a big, big difference there. "I'm participating in God's plan, who wants the whole world to be this religion and other religions to be eradicated and non-believers to be killed," or whatever it is. And that's "God's plan"—so the story goes, so the belief goes. But they're not participating in God's being. There is also no sense or conception of being involved in creating the sense of divinity. And that is not separate from that. So there are very different ontologies going on.

There is no unfathomability and no meaningfulness or mystery. On the contrary, this terrorist person is certain. They know and are clear about what their duty is: "My duty is to kill these people, blow up such and such," whatever it is. There's a single meaning—not meaningfulness, not this infinity of potential meanings, but a single meaning, or at best a small finite number of very clear meanings, rather than meaningfulness.

And we could continue if we consider the elements. The boundaries of self, other, and divine are not soft-edged and elastic at all. These things have hard boundaries—self and other, divinity.

And there's no concertina of images. There's just a single image, whatever that is, of the divine, of my role, and so forth. And it's regarded as reality—regarded as a reality, rather than the imaginary middle way.

The sense of duty there is not refracted in any way. It's just literalized. The echoing, the mirroring—again, it's all very literalized. So there are many differences there. We can point out more when we just slow down and consider.

Many of you will know Viktor Frankl, who was the founder of logotherapy. You probably know him more from dharma talks, actually, where sometimes I and other teachers have quoted a beautiful passage from his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, which is partly a chronicle of his time in Auschwitz concentration camp. He was imprisoned as a Jew, survived, and came up with this kind of psychotherapy that he called logotherapy—which is basically, he would say, healing through the making of meaning, giving your life a meaning. So it's a meaning-making therapy.

It got questioned on a number of fronts. One was whether it was actually—he said that, the quote that you probably know is something like, "We who lived through the camps can remember those who were able to choose their own way, to give away their last piece of bread," for example. He said it much more beautifully. And his conclusion was: this is testimony, we bear witness, and they bear testimony to the fact that you can take everything from a person except their right and their capacity to make meaning and to choose their own way. He said that the people in the camps who tended to survive the ordeal and torment and tribulations were people who had some meaning, something worth living for that was meaningful to them. And so he said the camp was the crucible in which he came up with this logotherapy, this idea of meaning-making therapy.

Afterwards, over the years, decades later, it was questioned and attacked on a couple of grounds. One was whether he hadn't actually come up with this theory beforehand rather than in the camps, and whether his report of what he saw wasn't actually true in terms of who survived and who didn't. But secondly, several people pointed out, well, that's actually an amoral therapy. There's no morality there. This meaning-making could be equally applied to, say, the Nazis, who found meaning in exterminating Jews and homosexuals and gypsies and communists and political opponents.

So again, there can be this concern, and it's an understandable concern, that if you put something like the imaginal or soulmaking to the fore, what about ethics? Or if you put meaning-making to the fore, what happens to morality? Does the meaning-making trump the moral? Does it make it irrelevant? If I just find meaning in something, does that mean I can do whatever I want without any regard for morality? If I have some image, does that mean I can then disregard morality?

But again, there's a not-full understanding or not-full consideration of what we would mean by those elements, an inclusion of what we would mean by those elements of the imaginal. So there are twenty-eight elements, or maybe more, depending on how you count them. When they're taken into consideration, you start to see that when I'm following an image, working with an image, inspired by an image, receiving a duty from an image—all those elements together make it very different than this idea that anything goes, for example a Nazi finding meaning in exterminating Jews and homosexuals. That's not going to have those twenty-eight elements illuminated and ignited. It's simply not.

So I don't know about Viktor Frankl, but if we just take it at a sort of simple explanation—all you need to do to find fulfillment in life is find a meaning, make a meaning, and then follow that meaning—just that as a simple strap line would not include the depth and richness and other aspects of, for instance, the imaginal that we've talked about.

So we have concerns as human beings. Obviously we have ethical concerns, and most practitioners, of course, should and will have concerns ethically about their behavior. How to discern what to choose, what to do. How can I trust this desire? I want this—is it okay ethically? Can I trust it? How do I know?

Sometimes I ask people in dharma talks, different dharma talks over time, I might ask, "What do you want? What is it that you really want?" And someone was saying to me that she was listening and moved by the question, just by me asking. In that context, the question went very deep in her. It touched her very deeply, but it brought some agitation and confusion as well, because she wondered: how does one discern? I have this want or this desire or this eros or whatever—how do I discern what is conditioning and what is indoctrination or what is just ego?

We were talking about it, and I suggested that it might be better to look at, rather than trying to discern where it's coming from—oh, can I see that it's coming from ego, or from conditioning or indoctrination—that might be very hard to discern. But what you can look at is the effect. For example, the effect on the sense of soulmaking of different desires, or different answers to that question of what I want.

So if I just drop that question into a meditative space – I can't remember the exact context she was speaking about – and then perhaps I get an answer like, "I want to be rich," for example. But that answer, if I look at the effects, the resonances in the being, rather than trying to find whether it's just conditioning, just ego, or fear, and actually trying to discern where it came from – what's easier to observe and probably more helpful in discerning is the effects on the resonances in the soul, in the being, and the effects on the sense of soul-making.

So, "I want to be rich," if that comes as an answer – she didn't say that, but it's just an example – that may not feel as deep, as soul-making, as opening of the devotional sense, as rich in the soul sense, as beautiful, as moving, as another desire might. So what do I trust in terms of discerning between what may be more petty, more self-concerned, more fear-driven, more just an indoctrination and therefore not so authentic, more just conditioning? It may be that in looking at the effects in the being of the sense of soul-making, I start to get a feel for what are the deeper currents of my soul and my being, what are the deeper soul desires.

And those currents – there will be the encouragement from me, I would say, to trust in that soul-making sense and the fullness and the multidimensionality and the beauty of what that means to the being. And I trust that ethics will be implicit in that, partly because, remember, values, which includes ethical values, are an implicit element of the soul-making dynamic, an implicit element of the imaginal. The imaginal middle way is there, so there's not this tendency to just literalize, concretize, reify in that way. There's also the fullness of intention as one of the elements. And so again, it's not just about me and what I can get. There's a fuller intention there. All of these elements and aspects tend to not just safeguard ethics and preserve it, but actually enrich the ethical soil of what is happening, what is involved, and what's moving in the soul.

And of course there's the energy body as well. We talked about that. We could go through it in a lot more detail than I'm doing right now. We talked about how the energy body can be a guide, or what to trust as well. Again, I don't think the energy body will open up with that same beauty and same harmonization and energization as it will if the ethics aren't there. It's one of the reasons the Buddha said he doesn't teach jhāna with an unskillful object. I can't remember the exact words, but he might also have said he can't teach jhāna with an unskillful object because the mind doesn't tend to settle down, the energy body doesn't tend to open up in the same way when something's really unskillful, when there's craving. When there's craving in that way, as we've talked about, it agitates and closes and contracts the energy body, it ties it in knots. And some things are unskillful ethically – it's all related. So the energy body opening, harmonizing, aligning, being part of the imaginal – it's also a safeguard of the implicit ethics, the implicit beauty of values there.

Still, sometimes people get nervous. It hasn't happened recently – people haven't asked me this for a while – but back a few years ago: "Isn't imaginal Dharma crazy or dangerous? What about ethics? Shouldn't you place ethics first? Shouldn't they be given priority? And then you can have imagery – just safeguard the

ethics first, and then have your imaginal, or whatever."

But as I've just said, because values are an element of the image, ethics are included in an image, implicitly or explicitly, and in imaginal practice, and in the duty that comes out of it. Also, I have to say – and this is partly what I want to elaborate on in these talks – placing ethics as primary, as this person wanted or was concerned about, saying, "Why don't you put that first?" – putting ethics as primary is a deceptively simple idea. Because despite the kind of soul-stirring allegiances that ethical talk and talking about those kinds of things can stimulate in us, the actuality of moral life entails all sorts of confusions and difficulties, antinomies – meaning pulls in different directions. I want to care for this ethical value, but at the same time in this particular situation I'm also pulled toward this other ethical value, and my choices offer me a contradiction. I either preserve this one or preserve that one. I either emphasize this one or I emphasize that one. I'm going to elaborate on this, hopefully, as the talks go on.

But that's the actuality of our moral life in all kinds of ways. So placing ethics as primary, as I said, is deceptively simple. It doesn't tell us or instruct us or guide us with regard to these kinds of difficulties, challenges, confusions, antinomies, incompletenesses, and also ultimate impossibilities. I cannot fulfill, I cannot care for this ethical value and that ethical value in this situation. It's actually impossible, because I can only choose one thing. All those complexities and confusions and impossibilities and contradictions and incompletenesses – they are unavoidably part of moral life and choice, especially today. And in a way, that's mirrored in what Hillman would call the polytheistic psyche, the multiplicity of images which also pull our life in different directions toward different imaginal characters and their particular beauties, their particular domains and concerns, and their particular duties as well.

So it's understandable that people, some years ago, voiced these ethical concerns when they first started to hear about imaginal practice. But it's more complex, I think, than those initial concerns really understood.

Just to repeat before we go further: I would say soul-making and imaginal practice are ethically oriented, and not just because values are an element of the imaginal, but also because of aspects like cosmopoiesis and the sensing with soul – sensing self, other, world, eros, all these things more and more conceived and sensed, actually sensed and felt, as sacred, divine, worthy of our reverence.

So as we've explained with the soul-making dynamic, that's part of what happens. Not just because values are an element—they are an element—but when there's the cosmopoiesis, when there's a sensing with soul of the self, of other human beings, of the world around me and the world of nature, even of my desire, then the very way that I sense and conceive and think of those aspects of being, those aspects of existence, my relationship with them becomes very different. It becomes sacralized. It becomes imbued with the sense of holiness, the sense of reverence implicit there. And out of that, we start to have a different relationship. We start to live and choose differently. And of course, it comes with that respect and care, all of which are foundational and implicit in ethics.

There are also other ways, of course—and I've touched on these and will return to them—in which

soul-making is ethical, and even, I would say, an expansion of our typical range of ethical practice and perspectives. In those talks I mentioned the other day, *The Meditator as Revolutionary* and *The Necessity of Fantasy*, I was speaking about the range of archetypal models that we receive through the Dharma being a little bit limited. The Buddha—not so much an activist, quite given to equanimity and inwardness, and with a kind of danger of letting the world burn, so to speak. The range of archetypal characters of response is quite limited by what we receive through image and story and modelling from teachers and other students in the Dharma world, or certainly in the Insight Meditation world.

So there is a certain unwitting limitation on the scope of what moral care and expression looks like. Through expanding the self-sense and the imaginal sense, being open to more images, receiving imaginal images, we discover how they open up the scope and range of what our moral care and expression may look like—the fantasies of how that might be embodied, how it might express itself, look, and sound.

In addition to all that, it might also be that we can—and I'll come back to this later—talk about soul-making itself being a kind of moral value. Perhaps even a kind of relatively new moral value.

But I want to expand and elaborate and consider a lot of this further, particularly the lacunae, the gaps and holes in the fabric of our conceptual framework of morality nowadays. What are some of the needs there? What's the relationship between soul-making and all that? I want to explore the notion of values and virtues, and something of the psychology and philosophy that might be wrapped up in all of this.

Okay, let's stop there now, just for an introduction. Thank you for listening.

Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.