Sīla and Soul (Part 2)

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 2:53:03

Let me pick up on something I mentioned in the talk the other evening about the fact that it seems to me, at least, that there's almost a lack, if not a kind of taboo, on moral education in our society, especially for people beyond eighteen years old. Even younger than that, it's rare to find an overt emphasis and thrust towards ethical education of human beings in our society.

Of course, there are paradigms and programs, visions and frameworks of personal, psychological, and spiritual development and growth that would pertain to adults, and traditions of that. As part of the whole consideration here, I wonder if we might look at a couple of those paradigms and examine the tremendous gifts they bring, how they support our growth, and how they potentially support our ethical growth, our growth in terms of our relationship with morality. We might also look at some of the potential lacunae, gaps, blind spots, and limits that such paradigms, traditions, and frameworks might have—lacunae and limits regarding the relationship with morality and moral development of the human being, but also, because it's related, how one conceives of and senses oneself, other human beings, and the world.

I don't want to replace such paradigms or declare them wrong. But in shining a light on them, or on certain aspects of them at least, is it possible that something can be added? What might be added to them? Perhaps we can consider some of the usual ways we think about and approach development—psychological, spiritual, and personal development—and where these are limited, and then what might be added, what might be complementary. Not so much replacing what's already there, but extending what's already available.

The two principal possibilities I want to offer through these talks for that sort of addition or extension will be, first, imaginal practice. We want to include imaginal practice as one possibility of potential extension. That includes how we sense the self, others, world, and also our desire—really the whole sensing with soul avenue.

And secondly, and related, something I'm not quite sure what to call, but something like the ideational-imaginal, or the ideological-imaginal, or imaginal ideas. I've touched on this briefly in the last few years, but I want to say a little more about it, particularly regarding the ideas of value and virtue—values and virtues—and their relationship with soul-making. So principally these two: imaginal practice as we've talked about it so far, and then also a kind of extension of imaginal practice into what we might call the ideational-imaginal, or imaginal ideas, or ideological-imaginal.

Now, all these strands or areas are not really separable. It would be nice to go through these talks and do a

chunk on this and then a separate chunk on that, but I don't think that's really possible. I'm going to try and separate them a little, but some interweaving is just inevitable, so that's part of the deal.

The two paradigms I would like to consider, very broadly speaking, are psychotherapy and Buddhadharma. Of course, these are two extremely broad categories. We're not talking about one thing when we talk about psychotherapy, nor are we talking about one thing when we talk about Buddhadharma. There are many different kinds. So in what I say in terms of considering the gifts and the limitations of what might be involved in those paradigms, there's a danger of generalization, and I apologize in advance for that. If I qualify everything, the talks will go on forever. But I hope you get the general drift and the soul's intention behind what I'm saying, and that this can be an inquiry grounded in love and care.

We're not really talking about either of these things as one thing—psychotherapy or Buddhadharma—and certainly there are many different kinds of each. And of course, there will be individual differences among people who are part of a certain sub-tradition of Buddhadharma or a certain kind of psychotherapy. There will be individual differences in how they digest, assimilate, respond to what they take or leave, how they relate to those particular teachings or invitations or trainings.

We can see, very broadly speaking, that psychotherapy at its best has the promise and potential to free a human being up from too much torment of the psyche and of the person—the kind of self-hatred or incapacitating inner critic, and so forth—and to open the heart and, in so doing, develop empathy and emotional skill and capacity of the heart, and also relational skills. All of that is possible. And in that freeing up, in that opening of the heart, in that development of empathy and emotional capacity and relational skill, this can open up and support the capacity and tendency for ethical care. So at its best, that would be a fruit of psychotherapy: it really works on the heart and the relationship and the being and the psyche in a way that makes it more possible to be more open with regard to ethics, to be more sensitive, more caring, more discerning, more courageous—all these things.

At its worst—and again, this is too general a statement—but at its worst, people can be in certain psychotherapies, or relate to certain psychotherapies, sometimes for many years, and it may be hard for them to realize it from the inside, but what can develop is a tendency to actually become a little more self-preoccupied than they were before. It can feed and form an ongoing state of being, of self-preoccupation. The gaze is turned inward, concerned with my process, my growth, my neurosis, my patterns, my family, my this, my that.

And there's a kind of contraction of the being and a lessening of the availability for ethical sensitivity and openness and care. The antennae are not so tuned that way because they're self-preoccupied primarily in certain ways. And perhaps also certain psychotherapies, or certain ways of relating to certain psychotherapies, may breed a kind of attitude of entitlement—that one looks at one's past or family or upbringing and feels, "I never got what I needed." And so one thinks one is justified in compensating for

that in one's life and in one's choices and in one's relationship to society. Again, that movement there may not allow so much of an opening and a care for ethics. So that would be at its worst, I suppose—some of what's possible in some kinds of psychotherapeutic paradigms and relationships or trainings.

When it's gifts, we can see that the Dharma would have similar potentials and promises: to free up the psyche from a kind of torment that incapacitates it in terms of its care for others and its ethical care and concern; to release from the inner critic; similarly, to open the heart and the capacities for empathy and the capacities of the heart in general. And there is, in addition, in the Dharma, of course, this emphasis on *sīla—sīla*, *samādhi*, *paññā*. And so the ethics is right there to some extent or other, right from the beginning. It's not ignored. Some psychotherapies will not even mention ethics unless it's a legal matter where the therapist then feels obliged to tell the police something or is torn in some way.

There's also in the Dharma the teachings of the emptiness of self, so at least theoretically there's the possibility of, or there's the restraining of the possibility of, endless self-preoccupation. And of course there's the encouragement and the teachings for the cultivation of *brahmavihāras*—of loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy.

But a few things about practices in general, whether it's the practice of psychotherapy as a client or as a therapist, or the practice of Dharma, is that practices can evolve in unforeseen ways. Once one gets into a practice, it's like sailing a boat—you start dealing with what's coming up in practice and what life throws at you and how practice says to respond to it through the lens of certain teachings or paradigms or frameworks. And the fact is, as one gets into practice and into that vocabulary and that way of looking at things and the techniques and the approaches, it can evolve in unforeseen ways, so that from inside of that practice, inside of that trajectory, we're not always clear—it's not always clear if we're off balance. We're dealing with all this stuff through whatever it is: this stuff coming up, this stuff from my past, this stuff in my family, in my situation, in my work—through certain lenses. And in the very close dealing with it through those lenses, sometimes we can get a little off balance. It's almost like the lenses are a bit like horses' blinkers. They are blinders. They may close our view in certain ways. And in that, we can get off balance in ways that we don't even realize. And the whole practice can evolve in unforeseen ways. And sometimes you step out and you think, "How on earth did I get there? How did I get there?"

In addition to that, it's really important to point out as a general point that any conceptual framework will bring limitations. Any conceptual framework—any idea, any concept, any *logos*, whether it's a Dharma logos or psychotherapy logos, whatever it is—brings with it automatically its own set of limitations. It sets us up to see and to ponder and to respond and to process things in certain ways. It opens the eyes to certain factors and closes them to others. It opens the consideration in the heart to certain things and closes them to others.

That inherent fact of limitations that go with conceptual framework also goes with the soul-making paradigm. Any conceptual framework. So I don't want to replace psychotherapy or Dharma with

soul-making at all—in part just because soul-making Dharma will also have its limitations and its blind spots and its dangers. But it's a really important point of wisdom and maturity that's necessary to emphasize: any conceptual framework, to do with anything, will bring its limitations.

So when we talk about psychotherapy or this psychotherapy or that kind of psychotherapy, or this kind of Dharma or that kind of Dharma, it will bring its limitations. And with that, there's the possibility of limited and inadequate views, responses, capacities—inadequate with respect to the kinds of moral challenges and situations that humanity faces today. So there is that possibility that some of these paradigms and trainings will be, or possibly that all of them will be, limited in some way. It kind of behooves us to have a look: What are the possible limitations? What do I need to look out for? When I see a possible limitation or inadequacy, how can I expand it? What might be possible?

The kinds of things we want to consider—they do not apply to everyone. And again, there's danger of overgeneralizing there. Of course they won't, because as I said, people will be within a certain—two people in the very same paradigm or teaching or training will take it in differently and respond and digest differently.

The second thing I should say, as a sort of caveat to all this, is that certainly from where I sit right now, everything seems to be changing very fast in the Dharma world. Now, I hardly go out anymore because of my illness, so I'm at home, I'm not out there talking to a lot of people. But it seems to me—and maybe it's just my friends and students I do still see and mix with and hear from—but it seems that there are very quick and sometimes surprising changes.

Sometimes I look at people who, for instance, with regard to climate change and species extinction, for years haven't seemed interested in that at all. And then very suddenly, on fire. On fire and deeply, deeply committed, investing a lot of time, energy, taking a lot of risks, working very hard in those areas. Something has happened, perhaps with the explosive growth of the Extinction Rebellion movement, particularly in England, and perhaps other factors. Some of those cases were really surprising to me, and it was a really pleasant surprise. I'm not sure how widespread it is, but certainly it's becoming much more widespread.

And in a way, what that indicates to me is that whatever I might say regarding ethics and Dharma—the need to consider expanding our Dharma to expand our ethical sense and deepen our ethical sensibility—whatever I might say here is only going to be one factor in the mix of what galvanises and supports and allows and opens that kind of expansion.

It might be, for instance, with the Extinction Rebellion movement, which in the UK has really taken off. I'm sure there are many people in our UK society who've never even heard of it, but for others it's really become a thing—mainstream news and so on. And it might be that one of the factors is just the fact that when more people are brought together and there's this kind of safety and support in numbers—something I want to return to—and the kind of platforms and mechanisms are made available,

then that kind of ethical stand becomes much more possible. Whereas if one was alone in that, without the supporting structures, then one would be just relying on one's own penetrative ethical alignment and devotion and discrimination, and that's a lot harder.

But anyway, what that very pleasant surprise and the suddenness of all that points to is that whatever I might say in these talks about ethics and Dharma and opening that up is just one piece, one factor.

And the third thing to say, related to what I started this ethics talk saying—that I regard ethics and this whole investigation as endless, potentially endless—a corollary of that is that there's always more growth possible in our relationship with ethics. Always more growth possible.

So if, in trying to open up this subject and elucidate, we look at this tradition or that kind of teaching or this paradigm, and we say, "Oh, that could be limited in this way, that could be limited in that way," that will always be the case. Because limitations will go with any conceptual framework, and there's also this endlessness. However unlimited we get, we can get even more unlimited—even more growth with regard to ethics, even more sensitivity, even more discernment, even more range and depth and height.

So that means, really, whoever—me or anyone else—saying, "Why don't we think about it this way, or we could think about it this way," there will still be more growth possible, and therefore considerations to point out: "What about this? What about that? Is it possible to do this?"

So let's consider a couple of things about psychotherapy.

I was talking a little while ago with a student in the States, and she was reporting to me that she was working with a therapist regularly and for a while. There was some situation—I can't remember exactly how it arose, but it might have had to do with where she was living in relationship to her workplace. At any rate, she was considering buying a second house or property, and she was starting that whole process of looking and investigating and going to see places.

At some point in this process, she became really concerned whether it was the right thing to do for ethical reasons. A second place would mean a lot more driving, and she was concerned about carbon emissions. Also the sort of just having to buy more stuff—more furniture, more clothes—if you've got two places. And she was talking about this dilemma and her feelings about it with her therapist.

Part of her process, woven into this whole consideration and difficulty, was also an image. She was beginning to explore a little bit of the imaginal, and one of the images that came was a monk, this imaginal monk character, who had as part of his mode and calling a movement towards renunciation. She was trying to explain to the therapist her feelings and her unsurenesses, her seriously considering giving up the whole idea of buying a second property and regarding it as an act of renunciation. She felt moved by that, and there was a sense of almost devotion tied in with this imaginal monk character.

The therapist, as she was trying to explain all this, just started shaking her head and tutting, and regarded

this whole movement as some kind of denial—that she was in denial about the pain of having to give up this second property idea, the denial kind of wanting to avoid feeling the grief.

So she dismissed the imaginal figure of the monk and the renunciate as not real, as delusional, as a delusional protective mechanism against this grief of not buying a second house. I can't remember exactly how it transpired—perhaps the client had already decided not to buy a second house, or was explaining the process. But basically the therapist heard it through a certain lens: this is a protective mechanism against grief, and all this monk business and the devotion about renunciation is just a kind of unreal, delusional, protective mechanism.

What's then clearly not on the psychotherapist's map at that point is the whole idea and territory of a kind of ethical passion—of the soul's care for virtue, for ethical virtues. Not on her psychological map of what it means to care for the self, of what it means to heal, of what human growth and purpose involves.

This struck my student very strongly, and it really didn't sit very well with her. We talked about it. I don't think this is an isolated case, and I wonder—I think part of my larger point is—do therapists and psychotherapeutic paradigms need to expand their vision and their logos to include the psychological trauma and pain of ecological decline, for example? And the psychological trauma and pain—I'm using those words deliberately, trauma and pain—of not choosing in one's life in line with loving the earth, or in line with what speaks to one's soul more nobly in terms of virtue? So that it may then become part of how people think and feel and choose and what they respect.

Psychological thinking, psychotherapeutic thinking, has a lot of clout in our culture. It has spread from the confines of Freud's couch in Vienna all those years ago to become woven into our normal ways of considering life, human being, self, and our relationship with existence.

Just as childhood trauma and the feeling that "my needs were not met in childhood" have become normalized in the wider culture through psychotherapeutic paradigms—through the normalization of these paradigms and their airing through media and all kinds of phenomena—they have become normal ideas. Childhood trauma wasn't a concept before. "My needs are unmet"—these are very specific contemporary cultural points of view, manifestations, ways of understanding and conceiving and sensing and feeling ourselves in life.

And just as self and self-expression, creativity of the self, the individuality of self—these too, partly through psychotherapeutic thinking, have become very normalized. They're part of what we consider our right to address and to heal and to include, part of what we consider as healthy visioning and sense of one's existence, our normally accepted goals in life.

Or again, human relational intimacy. It wasn't that normal a few hundred years ago to think about human intimate relationships in the way that we do now—the vision we have of them, the hope and the goal. "I want to work towards that kind of relationship, that kind of vision of intimacy." This has all come about

partly through various factors, but the way psychotherapeutic thinking spreads out from the counselling room into society means that in the wider culture, certain ideas with corresponding goals and rights become normalized.

So does there need to be an expanding of the psychotherapeutic paradigm to include, as I said, the whole realm of psychic trauma and grief and pain and rage at ecological decline, and also the grief and remorse of not choosing in line with that deep care—either deep care for the earth or deep care for one's ethical sensibilities?

Some of you will be familiar with the term "spiritual bypassing." This is quite a common accusation by psychotherapists, and it definitely has some ground, implying a kind of bypassing of psychological and emotional wounds through spiritual thought and practice. One gets involved in a spiritual practice and then starts having spiritual ideas and a spiritual paradigm and a spiritual outlook and practice. And wonderful as that can be, it can also be a kind of bypassing of what needs looking at in terms of one's psychological patterns and wounding.

What's also important to point out is that often what might also be bypassed are political, social, and environmental wounds and callings. So you can look at spiritual paradigms and say there can be spiritual bypassing of psychological wounds. There can also be political, social, and environmental factors and wounds and callings that are bypassed.

But as much as we talk about spiritual bypassing, is there not also the possibility of—what would we call it?—psychotherapeutic bypassing? That is, concentrating on one's personal psychological healing and wounds from certain perspectives. Everything is always from certain perspectives; I can't get away from that. Whatever I look at, whatever I relate to, whatever I try to heal is looked at through certain perspectives. They're either conscious and considered or they're not. But concentrating on one's personal psychological healing and wounds from certain perspectives may not be addressing or responding fully, or very much at all, to the soul, to the spirit, or to the social and environmental. So yes, you can talk about spiritual bypassing, but we need to add to that the possibility of psychological bypassing.

Not long ago, someone wrote me an email, a student I hadn't been in touch with for a few months. I think the last interview we'd had, there was a lot of anxiety and torment and real difficulty that they were experiencing. They wrote me recently and said, "By the way, a lot of that difficulty I was experiencing—I now realize I was not letting myself open to the magnitude and the depth of my torment and my feelings and my grief and my pain about the wider ecological devastation, climate change, the future even of the next few decades and how that hangs in the balance for humanity and for so many other species, the massive species loss and the toll, the impact that had on the psyche."

And he said, "I was trying so much to look for a personal reason, looking at my past, working in therapy, doing this and that. It was coming into my practice, and I was trying to understand it. I was looking at it through the lens of a certain paradigm, a certain narrow paradigm. And then I realized, actually, this is

something else. And in realizing it was something else, I could begin to open to it. I could give it its place and give it its due and begin allowing the heart to feel it, to respond to it, to care for that." He said, "It's a lot, but I feel much better. It's now not sabotaging me in ways that I just could not get a handle on and could not understand."

One more piece here, and it's not small but large—I'll just mention it briefly and I hope to return to it. I mentioned that we have what we might call a pandemic or epidemic of the inner critic in our culture. It partly goes with a culture of individualism, a culture where there's less community, more alienation from society, from each other, from wider social networks, from the earth, from society—and this emphasis on individualism in what I was calling an immature way. One of the flip sides of that, one of the shadow sides, one of the inevitable costs is a rise in the inner critic and the afflictions of that.

Sometimes that's a lot of what people will bring into not just a Dharma context, but a psychotherapeutic context as well. The inner critic—some people call it the superego, which is a word that Freud coined. And I'll just quote from Alasdair MacIntyre again, from *After Virtue*.

Important was Freud's presentation of the inherited conscience as superego, as an irrational part of ourselves whose commands we need, for the sake of our psychic health, to be freed from. Now, I actually think that's an oversimplification of Freud's views, but it serves for now. What Alasdair MacIntyre is saying is that Freud presented this sense of superego as a kind of irrational part of ourselves that we need, through psychoanalysis, to liberate ourselves from its oppression. It's not really something to be respected so much—and that's where I think MacIntyre is simplifying a little bit—but rather something for us to work through and be liberated from.

MacIntyre continues: Freud, of course, took himself to have made a discovery about morality as such, and not just about what morality had become in late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Europe. Again, this cultural and historical contingency. Freud was dealing with such a limited range of population at a certain time in Europe—northern Europe, in fact—and then generalizing from that subset of the population to make universal truths, not realizing the historical contingency. But actually, the point is more that morality then, in a way, gets relativized as something irrational. Conscience, rather, in a way, gets relativized. And that portion of morality that has to do with conscience gets undermined or put on shaky foundations when it's regarded as just an irrational part of ourselves, something oppressive that we need to get rid of.

What I want to ask, or throw into the mix here, is: now, at this time in our wider culture, what do Dharma practitioners and teachers, or Diamond Heart practitioners and teachers, or psychotherapists—either as those psychotherapists or their clients—believe and disseminate about conscience? It's not a word we hear that much anymore, is it? We certainly hear "inner critic," and if you're in, for example, the Ridhwan school, they talk about superego. But conscience is not a word we hear much anymore. At least, I don't hear it much.

So in other words, is that word "conscience" getting eclipsed, or put into the bag of our superego, our inner critic? And is there something that's actually necessary in our moral development, our moral capacity and sensibility, that's then getting regarded in ways that make it irrelevant? Do you understand? What does it do to our sense of morality when we lose that word "conscience"? When our only relationship with guilt is afflictive? And when things are just regarded in inner critic terms or superego terms?

Actually, maybe that word "afflictive" doesn't really capture what I'm trying to say. Perhaps a better word would be "immature," in the sense that if our relationship with guilt is immature, it might be trapped—either trapped in the whirlpool of self-recrimination, looking back at the past in a way that's very contracted, very solidified, very painful, not actually very helpful, not productive, and not orienting or leading onward in terms of future action. That would be one kind of immaturity. Or perhaps at other times, there's a kind of shunning of guilt, a refusal to feel it, an avoiding of it—just wanting to get rid of it. So there's nothing seen as positive or redeeming or helpful in guilt. That, too, would be a kind of immature relationship with guilt. Either on the one side or the other, the relationship with guilt can be immature. And maybe—we'll come back to this—maybe there can be other relationships with this whole notion of guilt and conscience that are more helpful.

Let me pause for a moment and recap what we're doing here. We're looking at the whole area of ethics, of course, and trying to open up an interest in the relationship of soul with ethics and ethics with soul. As part of that, we're shining a light, in a really over-generalized way but hopefully a little bit helpful, on some of the paradigms of growth and development that we encounter, that are around at the present time. We're seeing where they might have holes, gaps, blind spots, and in the process wondering what we can add to that. Beginning, as I go on, to add considerations and possibilities in terms of what we know of soul-making practice—sensing with soul up till now—and then perhaps there are others. As I said, when we talk more about values and virtues and other ways of thinking about ethics and so-called personal development, and the growth of our soul, that might augment the range of possibilities and perspectives.

So if we turn now to Dharma, to Buddha-Dharma and that wider tradition, and try to shine a light there... Again, just pausing briefly: it can be hard sometimes, for lots of different reasons, to shine this kind of spotlight on one's own tradition—if one feels one loves a tradition, or is identified with a tradition, with belonging to a certain tradition. It can be hard to critique it, to question it. It can be hard to even spot what's wrong, or admit that there may be something missing.

But maybe if we love a tradition, we have a duty of love to that tradition. And part of that duty is to care for it—like we care for, I don't know, a car or a musical instrument that needs repairing, that has a hole here or there, whatever it is. There's maybe a duty of love if we love a tradition and a body of teaching. That's part of what I was talking about earlier: What is it to be in dialogue with a tradition? Maybe, as Alasdair MacIntyre was saying in those passages we read about when we talked about tradition, for a tradition to be healthy, to be vital, it needs some strands of conflict, of argument, of debate, of dialogue—to keep it healthy. That's part of what a living tradition is. To be someone who is living a

tradition, I would say, should be in dialogue with that tradition.

Another reflection here that might be helpful: always to be aware that whatever light we shine on anything, whatever way we look at anything—if that's in the context of a practice and its paradigm—will tend to look at whatever it is, self and the elements of existence, from certain perspectives.

They frame it along certain lines, within a certain scope, in a conceptual framework. They look through certain lenses, shine light from certain directions. And that's part of what makes a body of teaching, or a tradition, or a practice what it is.

If you think in that sense, then there's always going to be shadow. Shadow will always be there. We will never get rid of shadow. And I'm using that word *shadow* in a very specific way. It's come to mean something quite narrow. I think Jung was the first one to introduce it, and it's come to mean something more and more narrow—just the sort of shunned parts of oneself, the ignored, the unconscious parts that are negative or destructive, usually rooted in some pain in childhood or in one's development.

I want to use it in a much broader sense. Imagine a light shining on an object, any object. That light shining on that object, that whole gestalt of light and object, will cause a shadow. On the opposite side of the object from the light, the side that's not being illuminated, there will be a shadow of that object. And if I turn the light, shine it from a different direction, a different angle, a different perspective, the shadow will be different. It will be shaped differently, or fall in a different area.

So basically, any time we shine a light on anything, any time we look in a certain way, any time we frame our vision and our gaze and our practice and our thinking and our conceiving in certain ways, there will be shadow associated with that. It's just the way consciousness works.

Again, it's not to single out this or that tradition or practice—psychotherapy or Buddhadharma, this kind of therapy or that kind of Dharma—and say, "Oh, that's bad or rubbish or incompetent." A more mature understanding is that whatever practice we do, whatever conceptual framework, whatever tradition we're in, it will have its shadows. And we're never going to get rid of shadows. As long as there is light, there is shadow. You understand?

So, for example, Jung, who coined the term *shadow* as far as I know, often gets critiqued for not including so much developmental psychology and ego psychology in his whole framework and paradigm. And then, of course, we can look at those who emphasize childhood wounding and the development of the child, and, as we've done already, touch on some of the ways there will be shadow cast from that: missing the socio-political, the economic, the environmental effects; missing soul or spirituality. And spirituality may have the shadow of spiritual bypassing. So wherever we shine the light, there will be a shadow. Whenever there's light, there's shadow.

Another related reflection, and we'll come back to this, is that part of the problem here in discussing ethics—if we put our finger on a central element of the diagnosis of the whole situation—is that all these

different traditions, you might say, shine light from different directions. But another way of saying it is that there are different weightings and prioritizings of different values between traditions, practices, and frameworks. In the whole range of different moral values, using that word "moral" really widely, we can emphasize this one or that one, this one above that one, this one to the extent of almost ignoring that one, and vice versa.

So partly what's happening here, and partly what happens in a lot of the superficial and often loud and strident arguments and hecklings in our society, is there's simply a discrepancy between the relative valuing of different moral values between two parties. We'll return to that. But all this is just to say, again, we're not singling out any one tradition for criticism. It's really part of the whole endeavor of looking at morals and moral considerations that these shadows and differences in valuing will be inevitable. As I say, it's part of the duty of love to look at that and to question. It's part of the honesty, part of the integrity, part of the rub of true relationship with the tradition, with the body of teaching that one loves, with the Logos.

So if we turn our gaze just briefly—and again, in too speedy and superficial a way—onto Buddhadharma and the different kinds of Buddhadharma, we can see where some might have gaps, lacunae, limitations with regards to the kinds of openings of morality I think are needed in our day and age.

When we look at traditional Theravāda Buddhadharma, I remember staying at a monastery for a while. It was wonderful in so many respects—the meditation teaching, the opportunity to practice undisturbed in a lovely setting. But one day I was struck. I was helping out in the kitchen, clearing some things, and I asked, "Where do you keep the recycling?" And the answer from the monk was, "We don't recycle here." I was kind of shocked. He said, "This is all just saṃsāra. All this is saṃsāra. Why bother with it?"

That pained me. I felt it was really an inadequate point of view. There were so many wonderful gifts from that monastery and the teachers there, but set in a very traditional context of Theravāda Buddhadharma, where the aim is to get off the wheel of rebirth, to get out of saṃsāra—saṃsāra being phenomenal existence, the experience of life and death, perception, experience, appearances. The whole thrust, the whole movement of meditation practice, is to sever that link, to not be born again. And what one's leaving behind is just saṃsāra. With it comes the sense that it's illusory.

You can see, if we tie that to what we were talking about in the talk on ontology and epistemology—where I laid out four worldviews, four ontological views—one of them was exactly this: only the unfabricated is really real; all this fabrication is not real, it's saṃsāra, it's worthless, and we're trying to get out of it.

And so, again, the shadow side of that is that we end up not caring, or it's possible that there's an attitude of simply a lack of care about this so-called samsaric realm, about the world, about the earth, and about, in this case, something like recycling. This would be an example of a kind of blindness coming out of shining the light in a certain direction.

Now, actually, nowadays that kind of orientation in the context of Buddhadharma is quite relatively uncommon. Not that many people are actually practicing that way—really trying to think in terms of rebirth and ending rebirth and severing that link, with the fabricated realm being, in that sense, illusory and to be relinquished. But rare as that is, and precious as it is for what it offers, it also has this inevitable lacuna in it, this inevitable limit, when it comes to relating to the world.

And then, if we just look briefly at this, we see certain teachings—I don't know if they're more pop teachings or what—where a practitioner has sort of got the idea that they're trying to move towards some kind of awakening that has no desire in it, that the eradication of desire is where they're headed and what they're aspiring to. We don't have to linger here very long, but what would a life like that even be like? How would I relate to the difficulties in the world and to what the world needs without some kind of desire there? So that kind of gross oversimplification of what one thinks one's doing often leaves a lot lacking, leaves a lot missing in terms of the larger life and the larger possibilities of ethical response.

Søren Kierkegaard, the philosopher, wrote a book called *Enten-Eller*. I'm mentioning this because, in a way, there's something he talks about there that bears a similarity to certain popular notions of mindfulness, or perhaps pop non-dual teachings, Advaita teachings—not really what I would say the fuller teachings there represent.

In this book, there are three characters. There's character A, who recommends what he calls the aesthetic way of life. There's character B, who recommends what he calls the ethical way of life. And then there's a third character called Victor Eremita, who sort of edits and writes notes on the papers, the academic papers, of both.

Alistair MacIntyre writes about this, so I'll read a short passage from him. He says: "The choice between the ethical and the aesthetic"—two styles of life—"is not the choice between good and evil. It is the choice whether or not to choose in terms of good and evil." A subtle difference, but really, really important.

"At the heart of the aesthetic way of life, as Kierkegaard characterizes it, is the attempt to lose the self in the immediacy of present experience."

Doesn't that sound familiar from certain kinds of teachings?

"The paradigm of aesthetic expression is the romantic lover who is immersed in his own passion. By contrast, the paradigm of the ethical is marriage"—a state of commitment and obligation through time in which the present is bound by the past and to the future.

So he says each of the two ways of life is informed by different concepts, incompatible attitudes, and rival premises.

Sometimes, when there's too much emphasis on living in the present and dissolving the self in the present, in the moment and in present experience, being one with what's happening—that sounds very

reminiscent of what Kierkegaard's calling the aesthetic way of life. And in its highlighting and emphasizing the present moment, the shadow there is that it misses the future and what's necessary in terms of commitment to the future. Where does that fit in for our soul, for our spirit, for our practice, for our conceptual framework?

This is one style of thinking about practice. It's quite popular. To me, it's a truncation of larger bodies of teaching. But there's something about future commitment that is really important and is missed. So I want to come back later and talk about soul-making and future commitment and how that relates—what their connection is, what's the notion of future commitment in soul-making.

If we look at my own tradition, the Insight Meditation tradition—and again, I want to say that it's changing very rapidly now, or it seems to me that things are changing quite quickly with regard, say, to something like climate change. A little while ago, some years ago, people might mention it, and some teachers and some people involved in Insight Meditation would say, "Well, that's a political issue. Climate change is a political issue and we don't do politics. We try and be apolitical, non-sectarian."

I think this is less common now, but it still bears mentioning and considering, again, if we're thinking about traditions and the life of traditions and what goes on for us in terms of our relationship with ethics and morality, and what goes on in our mind when our tradition and our commitment to a tradition meets the wider moral landscape.

Because one could say to that response that used to be relatively common, "Well, was the Holocaust a political issue or was it an ethical issue?" The Holocaust was perpetrated essentially by Nazis who were democratically elected in 1933. Therefore, you could say, "Well, the whole thing is just political, just a matter of policy—whether they want to exterminate Jews and gypsies and communists." Does that make it just a political issue? Or is it an ethical issue?

Well, that's different than something like climate change and what to do about climate change, because the Holocaust involved intentional murder. The concentration camps and extermination camps involved intentional murder. But actually, only some proportion of concentration camps were deliberate extermination camps, where they actually put people to death deliberately—like in Auschwitz, for example. Others, like Bergen-Belsen and the ghettos where they imprisoned Jews, there was just a level of deprivation and conditions that happened to result in many, many deaths, which the Nazis obviously didn't mind.

Now, that attitude of "well, that's just how it is for these people, and we're not actually deliberately killing them"—but in a way, one's setting up the conditions or not taking care of the conditions so that death becomes relatively inevitable—there's something like that attitude in many corporations' approach to climate change. It's all a kind of collateral damage.

So the notion that something like climate change is a political issue doesn't really fly. It's one of the ways

we can squirm out of opening up to, facing up to, a difficult moral situation and what it asks of us.

Or again, in some Buddhist circles, particularly in Insight Meditation, one used to come across this response with regard to something like climate change: "I don't have an opinion"—as if having an opinion about climate change or about what should change or what to do was all part of views and opinions, which are to be transcended, let go of, because they're a fetter. But to say "I don't have an opinion" and to live a life where, for example, one is flying an enormous amount and generating a huge amount of carbon emissions—way more than one person is entitled to—and not speaking about it, that's actually expressing an opinion, even if I'm saying I'm shunning opinions.

Again, what would it be, for example, in apartheid South Africa, or on the US slave plantations, or next to gypsies and homosexuals and Jews being deported or gassed to death, to say, "I don't have an opinion"?

So there's something in the situation with certain issues like climate change or species loss that allows us to distance ourselves, to use mental mechanisms that distance ourselves from any sense of engagement or culpability or moral responsibility. That it's political, that it's a matter of views and opinions. This is happening, thankfully, much less now. But I'm mentioning it partly because these are the kinds of things that can arise in tradition. Whenever there's the light of a tradition, the light of a practice, a conceptual framework, it will bring with it certain shadows and certain directions.

And again, sometimes in certain Buddhist circles, I wonder about the dominant ethos. Remember, the word *ethos* is related very closely to the word *ethics*—the flavour, the character, the personality, either of individuals, or prominent individuals, or of the whole sangha, or of the whole flow of a tradition. And so, again, sometimes with all the emphasis on non-harming and gentleness and kindness and softness—particularly nowadays in Western Buddhadharma, some Western Buddhadharma, particularly the Insight Meditation tradition with its emphasis on softness—sometimes one almost gets the sense that in the dominant ethos, the most important thing for a teacher or anyone else is not to offend anyone. That actually almost trumps anything else. And if challenging students or retreatants or people one's communicating with might be deemed by them offensive, then it's important not to challenge people, and one doesn't say something or backs off.

So this ethos of non-offending, which in itself has a certain moral value—but when that moral value trumps the necessity or the possibility of actually challenging people's behaviour or moral outlook or choices, getting them to think about it, it could be said something's gotten out of balance here from a certain perspective.

So again, I remember—I think I shared this already—Suvacho, a colleague, a Gaia House teacher, teaching a retreat at Gaia House and saying at some point to the yogis there, "Some of you—maybe even a lot of you—will be much better off taking in a refugee family into your home rather than coming on retreat." Quite a challenging thing to say, and perhaps it ruffled a few feathers. But sometimes this ethos of gentleness or non-judgmentalism—which again, with all the pain of the pandemic of the inner critic, has

become so emphasized in the teachings, and in a way importantly so, rightly so, helpfully so—but sometimes the question is, can they be overdone so that they begin to eclipse other considerations? They trump other considerations.

So there's always this need to be gentle, to be perceived as gentle, so that, for example, protests in the street are not considered gentle. People are shouting, or it's loud, or it's against the law, as all the XR protests were. And that contravenes a sort of unwritten law about gentleness, or the dominant ethos about gentleness. What's in charge here? How conscious are we about it? And how wide is the range of our consideration?

Or non-judgmentalism, as I mentioned. Again, that can have a shadow side when it's overemphasized. There is a difference between discernment on the one hand and judgment on the other, and it involves whether you're judging people or actions or speech or behaviour. But I read a passage the other day—a couple of passages—where the Buddha is really quite judgmental. There's enormous loving-kindness, enormous generosity and compassion coming out of the Buddha. And at times he sounds, or is, extremely judgmental, harsh, critical. The same with Jesus. Such mercy, such compassion, such beautiful love coming out of that heart and that being and that life and that sacrifice.

And at times, it's fire coming out of them now—the fire and the blade of judgment.

Another issue I think to look out for is just how easily—and it's related to what I just said—but how easily within a tradition or in a sangha or community there can be a kind of coalescence, a streamlining into a certain range of common behavior and common views. One is in the tradition, and so one goes along with that, even if one is not quite conscious of going along with it. One gets a little bit swept up in the stream of that tradition and contained within the family affiliation and loyalty of the community, and may not be conscious of it at all. And so one comes to act in certain ways or have certain views—or rather, certain ways of acting become the norm in that tradition and are just unquestionable. It's just what people do. Certain choices, certain ways of doing things and behaviors, certain views. And in that, there can be a loss of the individual's autonomy, making their own decisions about behavior and about views. Certain behaviors and certain views can become very normalized.

So I've talked in the past, I know, and written about, for example, how normal it is—and again, I hope this is beginning to change; there are signs that it might be—but how normal it is in the Insight Meditation tradition to really do lots of flying. This is just an example of a kind of behavior that can get very normalized, because it's what everyone around me is doing, and we kind of think that we're good people because we're Buddhists and we're interested in less suffering and we're spiritual people.

So the issue is not really about flying, and I've talked about that enough. Let's say the issue is really about, for example, how am I relating to my carbon emissions? And one way of thinking about climate ethics is to calculate—and people have done this—how much carbon emissions, even if we shared them equally, in order not to heat the planet over, let's say, 1.5 degrees or 2 degrees. Then you work backwards from that:

this is how we need to limit the carbon emissions, and that works out as such and such a quota, so many tons of carbon emissions per person per year. That would be one way of thinking about it. And in a way, that's a very reasonable way of thinking about it. It leaves aside climate justice and who owes what from the past, but just as a start, that's one approach.

So the issue really here is: how and when and why does it become normal for so many of us to blatantly and unthinkingly use up more than our fair share of carbon, and so add to the global warming and the misery that will come from that disproportionately? What's going on there? As I said, in certain traditions—I mean, the Insight Meditation tradition is just a reflection of the wider society, where it's very normal for people to fly loads and loads and not think about this potential way of contemplating climate ethics. Actually, it's only right that I have an equal share to everyone else. And what do I think I'm doing when I just extravagantly consume much more carbon, put into the atmosphere much more carbon?

So again, what gets normalized? In the wider society, absolutely, certainly. Just recently, Extinction Rebellion was planning a disruption of Heathrow Airport in protest of the planned building of a third runway. And it was pulled, retracted, the plan for this disruption. I don't know the ins and outs, but I wonder whether it was just because the public outcry would have been huge, because it's so normal to think, "I am entitled to fly on holiday. I'm entitled to fly somewhere for some pleasure, and maybe several times a year." And if that doesn't happen, it's an unthinkable state of affairs. I don't actually think this, but something gets normalized in the larger culture and also in the Insight Meditation culture, for example. I'm sure it happens in lots of other cultures—corporate cultures and all kinds of things. But something's getting normalized just because it's normal in the subculture, and it's normal in the subculture partly because it's normal in the wider culture.

So again, what's the responsibility of a tradition to really wrestle with—I mean really wrestle, really question—the dominant values in the wider culture when it's necessary to do so? You can pay very easy lip service to anti-consumerism: "Oh, that's greed, it's one of the kilesas," and so forth. But to really do that.

So if we think then about what's a fair share of carbon dioxide as one way of thinking about climate ethics, some of you will have heard of Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative. It's a kind of rational formula that he came up with for an egalitarian ethics—very much in line with what I'm just saying. We have to regard everyone equally. Everyone gets equal respect and equal share, so to speak. But this categorical imperative is a way of thinking about one's action and testing it by the standards of this rational idea, which says that one ought so to act as to be able to will that everyone should act so.

So what that means is, if I want to use up three or four times my fair share of carbon for the year, can I really wish, can I really will that everyone does so? Because I know that if everyone uses three or four times their share, then the whole ship sinks. If I use that measure, that rational measure, Kant's categorical imperative, it puts certain constraints on the choices I have to make. Maybe I do use three times my carbon share this year—somehow I have to justify that, or I have to offset it, and I don't just

mean planting trees somewhere. I have to consider whether there are cases where, in the larger scope of taking care of everyone equally, within this equalitarian ethics, it actually is justified, it does make sense.

So how do I decide? If, for example, I really feel that my flying—let's take flying, just because I can't think of anything else right now—that my flying back and forth, many flights a year, if I really think that there's so much good coming out of that, that it's so necessary, then maybe the balance of that good outweighs the harm of putting all that carbon into the atmosphere. How do I decide? It's not that easy.

When I used to talk about this and write about it, it was hard to make prescriptions. But at least what I wanted to feel and to see was that there was a wrestling with these issues, that they weren't just easy. Because as I said, when it gets normalised—when, for example, flying a lot to go on retreat, to teach a retreat, to visit a certain Buddhist tourist site—that last possibility gets much easier. If I'm flying a lot anyway to teach retreats, and I'm not really thinking about it too much, I'm not really wrestling with it, then that other flight to go on holiday or do something even if it looks vaguely Buddhist, it's part of just what gets swept up in the normality. It's just normalised.

What I was hoping for, I think, was a sense of people wrestling with these choices, which I really hear is beginning to happen nowadays, and I'm thankful for that. So again, two poles. One pole would just be the inner critic: "Oh, people will judge me if I fly a lot." And the other pole is just going ahead because it's normalised—I'm not afraid of judgment because the normality in my tradition or my culture is not to be judged, so I just do it. Can there be a middle way where there's actually a wrestling with it, a questioning—how do I decide? If I'm using Kant's categorical imperative, and I'm not suggesting that's the only way of doing things, how do I actually weigh up the relative amounts of suffering or the relative help, whether I fly or I don't fly, whether I take those emissions or I do fly and help whatever that situation is?

And again, swept up, caught up in the homogeneity, the stream of a tradition and its way of thinking and its accepted behaviours—what would it be to actually be more independent and wrestle more independently? Or together, the Sangha together, people within the Sangha actually really wrestling with these questions? There's something for me about the wrestling which shows an aliveness ethically. It shows I'm willing to not be peaceful. I'm willing to put up with the agitation of this and the lack of simplicity of it. Some of these choices are really not simple. There's something about assenting to and opening to and putting up with and confronting and entering into the difficulty, the wrestling. It's not peaceful. It's not simple. It doesn't fit that shrunken range of Buddhist archetypes of peacefulness and simplicity.

You can imagine if that way of thinking—from considering how we divide up a fair share of climate emissions per person, per year, for the whole of humanity, connected with Kant's categorical imperative—became normal. You can imagine saying to someone, "Oh, I'm going off here or there, I'm going for a holiday," and they say, "Really? Wow." Well, you can imagine having some kind of document, some need to justify it. The person asking, "Where's your LEAFSAJ?"

What's a LEAFSAJ? L-E-A-F-S-A-J: "Lethal Emissions in excess of your fair share Allowance Justification." LEAFSAJ. Or your HEAFSAJ: "Harmful Emissions in excess of your fair share Allowance Justification." That actually becomes the normal way of thinking about it. It's like, "Whoa, you're doing what?"

So a lot of this just is a matter of what's normal. Because when we talk about carbon and climate and also species loss—these related issues—the threads of cause and effect are so much more complex. It's not like stabbing someone to death, where it's very clear what's the cause, what's the effect, who's the culprit. With something like climate change and carbon emissions and seven-plus billion people, plus government policy and all that, it's actually quite hard to trace the threads of cause and effect.

But in a way, again, we can very easily let that complexity and the difficulty of tracing cause and effect obfuscate and eclipse our sense of moral responsibility. So it's not too far from that attitude of "I don't mind killing and stealing as long as no one finds out." No one's going to find out because the threads of cause and effect are too complex. These are hard issues, I think—hard to think through, hard to face up to.

I did hear about several—that's what I alluded to earlier—I did hear about several, I don't know what to call them, Buddhist sightseeing trips, really. They get billed as pilgrimages, but... flying to Bhutan or India or wherever to go to some Buddhist temples and such. And so again, what if we took, for example, Kant's categorical imperative or this idea of a fair share of carbon emissions? How would I justify that? What would I say on my HEEF SAG form? What would I say to that family in Bangladesh who have almost no food because of floods and no house? Or to those dying of dengue fever that has expanded its territory with climate change and global warming? Or those whose livelihoods, health, and homes have been destroyed because of years of drought? Already people are in that situation—human beings are in that situation—and in the future, because of these excess emissions. What would I say? To really actually contemplate that conversation. Imagine yourself, imagine myself there with them, or here with them.

If you make it simpler, sometimes it's easier to see. Imagine you're on a ship, I'm on a ship, with ten people or a hundred people even. And I have to, I want to explain to them why I'm allowed to eat more food than them, to shit on the deck, and they're not allowed. And maybe I'm a Dharma teacher and I'm explaining, and I give them a Dharma talk—that would be an interesting thing. My Dharma talk to these ten or a hundred people justifying why I deserve that special allowance, because I do very special work, you know.

Sometimes we have to, because of the complexity of the situation, actually make it a bit smaller and say, hold on, what actually is the difference? It's a difference of scale. But to be in that situation in the boat, in the middle of the ocean, with nothing else around, which is the situation of our planet, and then decide that I can emit more, not care about my waste, use up more resources—what am I really going to say to them? How am I going to justify that?

So again, what's normal? Imagine, if we take a different moral issue—I might slip out easily saying, "Oh yeah, I'm off to wherever it is to see some Buddhist temples, and I'm going to fly there, and then I'm going to fly here," whatever it is. What if I just mentioned to someone, "Oh yeah, well, my slaves are going to

help me out with that"? People would be like, "Your *what*? Your *slaves*?" It's just—it has become not normal. There's, you know, not to underestimate the power of just what becomes normalized through the body and the flow and the range of a tradition or subculture or wider culture. So if I... Everyone, I think, would object to slaves. And very few people would raise their voice around, say, using up more carbon. Or flying a lot.

I mean, that's partly being a little bit tongue-in-cheek. But if we're just talking now, before we even get on to the soul-making possibilities, just in terms of more mainstream meditative possibilities, it might be interesting to, in stepping up and opening out to the whole range of difficulty and depth and complexity of the moral challenge here, actually engage in certain meditative exercises—for example, to really let these issues go deeper. Because I think what can happen is that they don't really register in the heart and the soul and the being. There's a way they can kind of stay at arm's length. And so we're not really dealing with that.

So, for example, as I was a bit tongue-in-cheek before, but what about imagining a family in Bangladesh or Jakarta or in sub-Saharan Africa who find out that the floods there or the drought and the threat from these floods or drought or whatever to their lives are made worse and more probable through climate change, so that their house and fields and whatever it is become unworkable, uninhabitable? They become a refugee or die, or their relatives or family die. They're cast into abject poverty. Very little hope of getting out of that. And they learn somehow that this is related to something called climate change, and there's the education there. And they also learn that climate change is caused by CO2 emissions, mostly, and most of the CO2 emissions come from rich people. Most of whom, these rich people, know about climate change and its connection with CO2 emissions. And these people in this family in wherever it is—Bangladesh or Jakarta or somewhere in Africa—they hear about that. And they also hear that actually these people don't need to fly. These rich people don't need to fly. But they like to go on holiday or whatever it is because it's a pleasant experience.

Again, what would I actually say to them to justify my choice to fly on holiday, or to eat red meat, or to drive an SUV, or whatever it is? Or even just to choose a slightly cheaper energy company? Or even as a Dharma teacher, if I fly to teach a lot, again with the easy assumption that because I'm a Dharma teacher, my flight and my life and my efforts must be decreasing suffering. Would it be possible to actually have that imaginary conversation in meditation, to really be with the whole emotional range of it and the sensitivity and difficult feelings?

Within that, there's the possibility of cultivating a real sensitivity to discomfort, to when things feel out of alignment, but also when they feel in alignment and when there's a sense of integrity. These experiences are reflected in the heart and the energy body. They actually feel different. This might be an interesting practice—to use the imagination in meditation. Not imaginal practice, but imagination. Put yourself in relationship with those kinds of human beings whom we, in the rich West, don't often come into direct contact with. Actually have that imaginary conversation with all the availability of the heart and the

energy body, taking the time, listening to the mind, watching what the mind does, watching what's happening in the body, feeling it, and developing sensitivity to where things lack integrity in ourselves, where there's this kind of squirming, and where they are in integrity and in alignment—the whole range of emotion there.

Part of what ethical practice asks of us, and even more so nowadays with all this complexity and globalization and the situation of climate change and species loss and environmental degradation and destruction, is not just sensitivity in all these kinds of ways—sensitivity empathically, sensitivity to ethics and morals, which is something I'll return to. It also asks us for a great capacity emotionally. Actually, can I tolerate the grief here? Can I tolerate the remorse? Can I be with that? Can I let it be in a crucible so that something redemptive, helpful, onward-leading, ennobling comes out of it? It's asking quite a lot. But that might be an interesting exercise.

Sometimes what can happen is that certain priceless elements within a tradition or a teaching can actually become things we hide behind in certain ways. For example, the Four Noble Truths can become, at times, something of a delusional trope or delusional rhetoric. I'm off on a sightseeing trip to Tibet or Nepal or Bhutan or wherever, and it's kind of Buddhist. As a Buddhist practitioner, I feel myself, or I want to think of myself, as having this commitment to decreasing suffering, my own and the world's. And yet I know, or I should know, that making that choice—what's essentially an unnecessary trip—will increase suffering. How do I square my devotion to and commitment to the paradigm of the Four Noble Truths and decreasing suffering with the suffering that, although difficult to trace, will result from my choosing to go on that particular trip and fly?

What's interesting about that kind of thing is that one goes perhaps on these Buddhist pilgrimages or sightseeing trips, and you can sense from the soul-making perspective what's wrapped up in there—something inchoate as an image. It's potentially an image. Ladakh or Bhutan or Nepal or Tibet carries this whole sense, almost not quite imaginal, but there's the image of Tibetan history, Tibetan Buddhadharma history, and all the color and richness and beauty of that. That's a potentially imaginal image in the psyche. But if I don't have a way of relating to it where it actually becomes authentically imaginal, then the only way I can relate to it is as something concretized and literalized. I need to go there. Without the soul-making paradigm, without an actual imaginal practice understanding how there doesn't need to be literalization, any duty I have to that image has to be literalized. Without that soul-making paradigm, this incipient eros for this fantasy or non-imaginal image of Tibetan Buddhist history has to be concretized.

If one has practiced more with the imaginal and soul-making paradigms, I actually don't need to go there. I'm not going to get actual teachings there, or it's very unlikely I'm going to get actual teachings there that I wouldn't otherwise get if I stayed here and got on the internet or found them in a book or from a teacher here. I'm not going to get actual teachings there that would make a real difference to me or my teaching. I might, but it's pretty rare these days. With imaginal practice, it's actually possible to enter into an

erotic-imaginal relationship with that whole region, with that whole lineage, with that whole beauty. And it's just as alive and fecund in my soul and psyche, just as beautiful and rich and onward-leading and opening, just as soul-making—maybe more so than if I went there and actually concretized the whole thing.

What's the difference between a fixated image and an imaginal image? Without the imaginal sensibility, without a sense of what it means for something to be imaginal and how to practice, without the taste for it, things get concretized. And the concretization has a cost—to others and to myself.

As I said, there are possibilities here, and it's really not to say one tradition or practice is better than another. But there are possibilities to expand some of the ways we relate, or fail to relate, ethically. Some of the ways our ethical consideration and behavior fall short, our ethical vision and sensibility fall short—it's possible to expand from different perspectives. One of them is the soul-making paradigm as we've taught it, with image and all that.

If we think about what traditional Buddhadharma—and again, I'm mostly thinking of insight meditation Dharma, though it probably applies to other sub-traditions—what the typical limits on ethics and on ethos there might be, on the character or flavor of practitioners and how the whole thing gets shaped and limited, the whole tenor of that trajectory with regard to activism and the possibilities of activism, specifically activism around climate or species loss and mass extinction. If we analyze it for a few moments, in traditional insight meditation or Buddhadharma, there are certain limits on the ethics and on the ethos, because those two go together, and therefore on the possibility of activism, because there's limited possibility for the sense of different aspects of our existence. And oftentimes these limits are unconscious.

So, for example, with regard to the self, there's this inherited archetype of the peaceful, detached Buddha. This is what an awakening person looks like; this is the flavor, the ethos of their being. They're peaceful, they're simple, they're detached. They don't get upset, they don't shout in the street, they don't break the law.

So in terms of the scope of the ethos, and therefore the ethics of the self, and how it might be supported or not to engage in activism—and maybe even civil disobedience—there's a limit there because of the ethos, which isn't hardly recognized as something that's handed to us and makes an imprint on us. It's not talked about as an image. It's not talked about as an archetype. And because it's not talked about and recognized as such, it has more insidious clout. So in terms of the self, there would be one kind of limitation there.

In terms of other—so we can think about self, other, world, eros, and time, those five categories—in the way that I've just explained, with regard to others and other human beings, again there is perhaps a tendency to not want to create a duality, certainly through judgmentalism. There's no place for an image of war, of battle. We can't have opponents. There's not scope for it in terms of what we're given in terms of image and thinking. That's got to be on its way to hatred; the defilement of hatred is the usual assumption.

It's reified.

But can there be the theatre of war? The image, I mean, of war. The image of opponents. The image of battle. It's not reified, but in the theatre of things, it can have that power without it being reified into the defilement of hatred.

Bill McKibben, founder of 350.org and a long-term environmental activist—actually, I think he wrote the first ever book on climate change—at one point, a few years ago, he actually came out and said, "They are the enemy." Who? These big oil corporations, these big fossil fuel corporations. He actually started talking in those terms. Now yes, we can reify that and get into all kinds of problems and defilement, but we can also use that as an image. And the self can be cast as a warrior, for example—theatrically cast, imaginally cast as a warrior in relation to this enemy. So there's a limitation on self, limitation on other, on the sense of self and the sense of other.

The world too. Self, other, world. The world tends to be—if we just speak about Insight Meditation Dharma—tends to just receive the same view of the world as the dominant view in the culture. It's a flat world, so to speak. It's not dimensional. One subscribes to the scientific materialist view, maybe with a few magical notions bound in there or floating around. The world itself is, in many respects, just... it may be beautiful, but it's a kind of irrelevant and purposeless backdrop for the project of my own liberation, my practice.

Again, some of this is not conscious, but because it's the dominant worldview in the culture, it seeps into the subculture and just becomes part of it—unless it's actually questioned, unearthed, reworked, opened up, considered differently.

Self, other, world, eros. My passion, my love, my tears. So again, in traditional Buddhadharma, either they're mine—and that would be an unskillful way of looking at them—or they're not mine, they're anattā, and that would be a skillful way of looking at them. There's no other option. It's just either mine or not mine. My rage, my eros, my love, my grief.

Or in terms of time—self, other, world, eros, time. I'm putting those five together because they kind of go as a bundle of fabrication. They tend to get fabricated together: self and other and world and time and some kind of desire. And so how they get fabricated matters a great deal, as we've touched on in these talks and beforehand. They tend to get fabricated together as a kind of bundle—not always exactly in the same moment, but they're related.

So with the fifth one, with time, again the usual approach in the Insight Meditation tradition would be that we only have the notion of impermanence, that things are impermanent. That's the way we relate to time. Or that we can take practical measures for the future, of course, and those practical measures may either succeed or fail. What's missing there? It's impermanence and working practically for the future, and that future—whatever projects we have for the future, whatever hopes—may either succeed or fail. What's

missing there?

There's no eternality. There's no sense of the eternal life.

Let's linger on some of these a little while. In terms of the self, and also the attributes or the range of self-sense and self-expression, again, oftentimes what's missing – so the warrior is missing, but also the kind of place for wrath. We have it in the Tibetan deities; at least you have the image of it, the wrathful deities. But it's still somewhat problematic how that is supposed to translate into one's life. Is there a place for wrath? For righteous indignation, for moral indignation? Does that have a place in our moral life? Is there a need for that? Is there a maturity in allowing that place? Of course it goes with shadow. Of course it goes with potential dangers and misuse and delusion. But is there a place for that? Oftentimes, again, in the usual range of what we receive as the ethos, and therefore the ethics, of Buddhadharma, that has no place.

Nikolai Hartmann is a philosopher I've mentioned before in other talks, and I'm going to come back to him and talk quite a bit, I think, about some of his work. He pointed out, surveying classical ethics with Aristotle and Plato and the like, that Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* names the virtue of *praotēs*. At first sight, it seems to mean something like gentleness. So that's a moral value, a moral virtue. But when he looks into it closely, it actually seems to mean equable temper more than gentleness. What it really means is something between violent temper on the one hand, and on the other hand, an incapacity to feel righteous indignation.

So with regard to mildness of temper, with regard to this *praotēs*, a special merit lies in the view that not only easy excitability to anger, but also complete incapacity to feel wrath, is a moral defect. This is Nikolai Hartmann writing about Aristotle's ethics: "A special merit lies in the view that not only easy excitability to anger" – that's the one we'd all very easily recognize as what he calls a moral defect – "but also complete incapacity to feel wrath is a moral defect. The presupposition of this view is that anger in itself is something valuable, therefore indirectly that in general there is moral value in emotion. It is evident that here a far deeper appreciation of emotion is expressed than we find elsewhere among the ancients." He's talking about the Stoics and people like that.

And of course we can translate that to our contemporary age, just in terms of Buddhadharma, the subculture of Buddhadharma. Even within the Insight Meditation tradition, you see quite a range in the emphasis of different teachings on the importance of emotion and appreciation of emotion – what's the range of importance, what's the range of emotion to which importance and place is given. But here, this incapacity to feel wrath is a moral defect, as much as being too quick to temper and to anger. So again, we're talking about where things get limited, just by virtue of being in tradition, in the run of accepted ways, accepted modes of thinking and regarding.

If we come back to this point about time – I mentioned time as one of the elements there: self, other, world, eros, and time – in terms of this bundle that tends to get fabricated together in both conventional

perception and in imaginal perception. Altogether they go together as aspects of fabrication.

Sometimes when I'm talking to people who are trying to work towards solutions with regard to climate change, or they're activists, they use the word "story." We need a new story. We need a new narrative. And it can sound like we're talking about the same thing when we talk about image or fantasy – as if story and narrative are similar words, just interchangeable words for that. But when I listen to them, it's clear that we're actually talking about different things.

Yes, I think we do need a plan, or plans, about what we're going to do about climate change and halting species loss and that kind of thing. We need concrete plans and tools to implement those plans and legislation and all that. But some of these activists and people concerned, with a lot of care and heart – and again, it's not to say this is wrong, it's just to add to it – talk about story and narrative and the need for a wider story and narrative in regard to climate, and particularly how we will face the likely mayhem and catastrophes that many people consider likely in the face of climate and environmental breakdown.

The story and narrative as it's used by some of these activists – because it's a story, it brings a kind of binding to the future. It actually connects with that passage we read from Kierkegaard about not the aesthetic way of life, but the ethical way of life.

Marriage as the paradigm of that ethical life—marriage being a commitment in time to the future, through the past and into the future.

So this idea of a new story, a new narrative, or new stories and new narratives—they seem to bring, and may indeed bring, this binding to the future. But of course, what if that future does not turn out at all as the story hopes or plans? You can have a story for how we're going to build resilience or human community and cohesion, social cohesion, when there's food scarcity or water scarcity, or when disease is rampant and social breakdown occurs. But what if that future does not turn out at all as the story hopes?

An imaginal image, in contrast, in the way we're using that term—because it's eternal and timeless, as we've discussed, that being one of the elements of the imaginal—it seems not to imply a future binding. It's just eternal. So it seems, if it's not quite the aesthetic way of life, it's neither the ethical way of life as Kierkegaard was describing, because it doesn't have this binding to the future.

So it seems that because of the eternality element, the timelessness element... but actually it does bind us. It has a bond with and commitment to life. For example, an image of oneself as an activist or a warrior for the earth, a warrior for species, or whatever it may be—that image needs to be eternal partly because in being eternal it doesn't then depend on what happens. Whatever happens, that soldier will fight. There's a kind of endlessness to the problems we face and to what we need to address and what we need to combat.

So those images I used to share years ago—one of my recurrent images of this solitary soldier fighting. One of the things that's interesting is he's always fighting. And there's a kind of endlessness to him. He rests and then he gets up to fight. And then he rests and he gets up to fight. And there's not an end to that.

So there is actually a future bonding—as I said, a bond with a commitment to however that pans out, however that plays out, however that's refracted into life. A commitment to acting, speaking, expressing, fighting, seeding, giving birth in whatever ways are helpful or necessary or part of that whole duty of the image. Ongoingly, no matter what. It doesn't depend on achieving a specific outcome.

So certain movements of activism will go on forever. There won't be an end to them. The revolution, if you use that word, goes on forever. There's always something. And in a way, that part is wrapped up in a more imaginal way of sensing the whole thing. And there's of course the duty there, and the infinite mirroring and echoing as elements of the imaginal.

So that image, in our sense of imaginal image, is slightly different than story and narrative. And it does bring, if one has an image of oneself in that way—as an activist, as a warrior, or whatever it may be, perhaps a midwife, perhaps healing the planet—whatever the image is, it doesn't actually stop. Both the image in itself and also the reality of the situation is not going to stop. But there's duty coming through, refracted from the image into one's life, into one's action, speech, and more.

So if you go back to Kierkegaard and his distinction between the aesthetic way of life that has no commitment to the future and just wants to lose the self in the present moment, merge with the present moment—no self, just this moment—compared with the ethical way of life and its sober commitment to the future, what's missing in that distinction is the psychological awareness of what we might call soulfulness. Each of those modes, what he calls the aesthetic and the ethical, may have that quality. But the main point here in relation to time and the future is this: the allowing of more imaginal dimensions, more imaginal filling out of the ethos and of the possibilities and the ethical sensibility and the sense of self, other, world—in relation to time, we then get this whole other dimension of eternality. That eternality binds us to the future in a more endless way, not so tied to a certain outcome. So there's actually an extra duty there to a certain extent, but there's also a liberation, because we're not so tied to achieving this or that specific outcome. Yes, we want that. Yes, we hope for that. But on the imaginal level at least, it's endless, it's eternal. And there's a duty there, and that duty binds. It's like the duty of marriage, the bond, the commitment to that endless refraction in time of the life of that image, of the duty of that image.

Later, as I mentioned very briefly, I want to come back and talk about values and virtues as a different way of talking, both about ethics and about soul-making. I will hopefully say much more about that later, but just to see something now and to tie it to what we just discussed: if we think about virtues, human virtues and ethics, the development of those virtues becomes one possible way of thinking about the kind of moral education or moral development I was describing. There don't seem to be many programs for personal development beyond eighteen, let alone moral development. Thinking about the virtues is one way of approaching this. We'll come back to that. And that approach is open-ended—unlike the story or the narrative, the sense that we need a new story, a new narrative, that seems to...

Sometimes when I hear these friends and colleagues and other people—activists or people talking—it

seems to involve a trajectory in time that will arrive at a certain place. The story or this narrative that one tries to introduce into society ends in time, with the hope that there will be a collective buying into this story and narrative that will steer us all in a better direction.

If we regard the program of development or the invitation to develop human virtues, our moral virtues, as part of the possible development we can have as human beings—what we can cultivate—then that can actually be open-ended. It's never perfected. It's never ever finished. So there's a similarity in terms of the open-endedness that goes with imaginal ways of sensing one's relationship to the whole of ethical issues and with thinking about it in terms of virtues. We'll come back to virtues later.

If we just stay with what we know so far about the soul-making paradigm—and I probably don't need to say this, but I'll mention it anyway, just in case someone raises it as a question—the idea of theatre, or the idea of emptiness of reality, the imaginal middle way and all that, bears no similarity at all with what's recently been coined as post-truth politics and fake news and Donald Trump and others spinning fake news or turning stories on their heads and promulgating all that. It doesn't start with him, of course.

There's a very basic difference. If we say everything is empty or there's no ultimate truth or reality, that doesn't invite what I don't know what to call—this misdemeanor of post-truth politics and fake news. As we said, emptiness doesn't mean all things are ontologically the same, that everything's kind of untrue so therefore anything goes.

How should we put our finger on what's different here? One way is looking at the intention. What determines the choice of speech or action or view if there's no ultimate truth? In so-called post-truth politics, what's determining why a certain politician says this thing or presents a certain view which is clearly not the case and convinces people that it is? What's determining it? Well, it's things like ego and greed and fear. And the ego there, the self, is reified. So in this kind of "it's all whatever, truth has lost its place," actually there's a reification of the self, and certain objects get reified for the purposes of greed or in relationship to greed.

And also some art that's influenced by post-modernism—now thinking of art that's, I don't know what to say, at its worst—again, what's choosing, what's determining the choice of putting this out or presenting this or that? Sometimes it can be ego: the artist wants to be famous, wants to make money, wants to appear clever. And there's a reification of nihilism there, of meaninglessness.

In soul-making, rather, what determines our choice of what we put out there—of speech, of action, of view—if it's not some ultimate truth? Well, it's the sense of soul-making and all that that entails, including the fullness of intention, including beauty, including love, including reverence. All that is there. So if anyone gets nervous with these notions of emptiness and the imaginal middle way and the theatre-like quality and the possibility of using image—"but image isn't real"—it's very clear where the intention is coming from, what determines choices.

If we touch on the Four Noble Truths, again for the sake of asking: are there ways in which certain central paradigms, normalized paradigms, can actually unwittingly become limiting for our relationship with ethics and moral questions?

One area I think is quite enlightening to consider in this regard is litter. It strikes me as quite a good example of something which isn't obviously related as an issue to the Four Noble Truths, for the most part. Caring about removing litter—you can't really say that's going to lead to less suffering, except in some instances. It can't really be looked at convincingly in terms of the Four Noble Truths paradigm. And because the Four Noble Truths is so central and so determinative of the direction, and therefore the gaze and the outlook—the moral outlook and gaze and action or non-action within the Buddha Dharma—there may be limitations coming from that.

Whereas with the soul-making paradigm, we're actually including other ways of looking where the sense of soul-making, the sense of sacredness and beauty, are given weight—as much sometimes as a reduction in suffering. So that something like litter becomes part of a larger, let's call it a moral issue, and what we do about litter becomes part of ethical concern.

In itself, litter—yes, in some instances, of course, it's plastic in the oceans and the impact on marine life. That's becoming really broadcast as a problem just recently, in the last year or two, and more people are cottoning on to that. But there's still a difference in the reason for concern: "This turtle or these seabirds will die, and therefore there's concern for the suffering of those marine animals." There's a difference between that kind of concern and the concern that it's beauty being destroyed, or that it's literally trashing something sacred—the earth and the natural world. You understand? So the Four Noble Truths, when it becomes a normalized paradigm, can limit the range of our concern, of what goes into what we might call ethical concern in terms of how we live and how we relate to the earth.

Air pollution as well. In England and in certain countries, many countries, it's really a big issue, especially with burning diesel, diesel cars. But the focus is often on health—understandably, especially the health of children. That's obviously a real concern. But there's still a difference in the range of care and the actual object of what's cared about. I care for the health of my children—they might get asthma or some organic problem—and that's why I care about air pollution.

Versus, is there not just, from a certain perspective, from my soul, the sensitivity of my soul, there's just something *wrong* with air smelling that way—smelling of diesel fumes, smelling of coal fumes? There's something sacrosanct that is being tarnished, that is not being respected. Beauty—the beauty of just simple fresh air and the fragrances of life—is not being respected. It's a different concern.

And in England, I don't know if they're still around, but certainly I remember from my childhood the slogan "Keep Britain Tidy," asking people to pick up litter and put things in rubbish bins. I notice a couple of things about that. One, it doesn't say "Keep Britain Beautiful." There's not, in the larger culture, this kind of respect for beauty. Beauty doesn't have the same place, the same kind of depth that it could have—the

depth that it does in the soul-making paradigm, for example. And also, this is "Keep Britain Beautiful" as opposed to "Keep the Earth Beautiful." A slightly narrow, nationalistic view there.

So there are ways that—again, we're just talking about the insight meditation tradition right now, mostly, or Buddha-Dharma—there are ways that, with all the gifts and all the bounty and benefits that it can bring, it can also be limited, like any perspective, any tradition, any conceptual framework, any paradigm of practice can be limited, will be limited. And if we expand the scope of Dharma to include more soul-making Dharma ideas and perspectives and paradigms, then with that there's a corresponding expansion in many different ways, many possible different ways, of our ethical range, sensibility, concern, and action.

Let me point out another difference, or a few more differences actually. I used to talk a lot about the image being primary. People used to ask, "What do you mean when you say the image is primary?" So I was talking with someone the other day, and she had a very beautiful image, a very touching image for her, of just the feathery breast of a bird coming into contact with her heart and pressing up against her. There was a tremendous amount of compassion wrapped up in that image—very, very beautiful. And it opened the floodgates of love and some grief in a very healing way.

But she said to me that she realised the grief she had been feeling prior to that image—there was some grief, but she was saying, "Is it this? Is it that? What's the grief?" None of the reasons she was giving, that the mind was giving herself for what the grief was for, none of the explanations the mind was landing on, seemed quite adequate. And then she recognised that actually it was grief at being out of contact with this angel. So it wasn't caused by this or that in the life, or this or that happening, or being lost. There was actually, in the contact with this image, the recognition that the grief that had been there in her heart was grief at being out of contact with an angel.

In other words, the image is primary, and in this case, its absence is the primary cause, if you like, or condition for grief to arise, rather than something in the life. So our emotions, in this view, are coming more from the image. Our actions, our choices are coming more from an image. And sometimes we're not even quite conscious of what the image is. The image is what's primary. The image is what drives us. The image is not primary in time so much as primary in fundamental importance.

Again, we're not stating this as a kind of dogmatic assertion, as in some way finally or ultimately true. It's a way of looking, a way of conceiving. It's a certain logos that we can move in and out of. But actually it has a lot of both explanatory power and also soul-making power when we start to see our lives that way—not just our emotions, our minds, our inspirations, but as I said, our actions, choices, our sensibilities, our love. The image is primary.

I'm mentioning it now partly because this person was also relating to me, over a period of time, a great deal of concern—very beautiful concern—with different social justice issues. And sometimes she would feel herself really in a quandary, torn between: "How should I choose? How should I present this social

justice issue? What's my responsibility here? If I do this, then I'm failing on that. If I do that, I'm failing on this." Really trying to do the best that she could in relation to these difficult, ongoing, larger social justice issues.

And an image came to her of the Black Madonna, and this image was very connected with her care, her deep concern and commitment to working on social justice issues. And she started to realise, in working with this image, that her primary duty was to this Black Madonna.

And this Black Madonna, as I said—or let's put it this way—her dedication to social justice, to addressing issues of social justice and voicing them and working towards better solutions and opening them out, her dedication to social justice issues was an echo, was part of the infinite echoing and mirroring in her life of this Black Madonna image.

And in a way, what she came to realize was that her primary duty was to the Black Madonna, and the refraction of that primary duty into her life was the expression of her work on, her care about, these social justice issues. This is rather than the typical way of thinking, which is the other way around—that her primary commitment is to addressing this fact or that fact of a social situation, or this person or that person. In seeing it this way, that the actual primary duty was to the image, in this case the Black Madonna, that in some way encapsulated and echoed and held and illuminated and was related to with care these social justice issues—in realizing that the primary duty was to the Black Madonna, the kind of unhelpful agitation that she was feeling around what to choose in terms of how to act, how to speak, when to say this, what to do in this situation, around very specific things which you don't need to go into, her unhelpful agitation just subsided. Her whole relationship to that whole set of issues and what was coming up in the community context she was having to deal with became much more workable, much simpler. All the depth, all the passion, all the beauty of her involvement and commitment was still there, but without the kind of unhelpful agitation that went with it.

So again, we've been talking really about the ways that imaginal practice as we've discussed it so far can augment and expand and supplement the ways we already have of relating to ethical issues. If we keep going, another one I've already touched on, but I'll say it again because it's so important: Whose grief is it that I feel in my heart for the earth? For what we're doing to the earth—massive, massive changes on geological time scales. Whose grief is it? Whose rage? Whose outrage? Whose indignation? Whose love for the earth? Whose rage at species loss?

If I'm relating to the whole thing in a way where I'm sensing the whole thing with soul—sensing the situation, the plight of the earth, the plight of the species, the plight of humanity, and my heart and my emotions—if I can find a way to sense all that with soul, then what passes through my heart, whether it comes from an image, from an intrapsychic image, or comes more globally from sensing the whole situation with soul, I start to feel that those aspects of that whole situation that I call my emotions, that are my emotions, my heart—they start to be sensed as divine.

Whose grief? Whose rage? Whose love? Yes, it's mine, of course. Yes, it's anattā—it's not mine, of course. Both perspectives valuable. And a third one: it's the Buddha nature's. It's the divinities'. It's God's. It's coming through my heart. My heart, my grief, is an instrument of the divine care. And as such, the divine, the Buddha nature, needs me to feel this grief.

Sometimes that's what it can feel like—that the scope of the problems is so huge, just on a planetary scale, but also on a soul level. It's bigger than how we usually feel ourselves to be. The emotion there is bigger than mine.

Now again, of course there's the possibility of delusion with all that, especially if I take any of those—my rage or grief or eros—and I just rationalize it by calling it divine, and then that makes excuses for me to either indulge in it or sink in it or act out or whatever. Of course there's a possibility of delusional rationalization. But again, if we're talking about authentic sensing with soul, or at least moving more in that direction, the authentic imaginal, then this will be more authentic and genuine.

And it adds the whole dimensionality to the very organ, the very instrument of the heart, and to the very difficult feelings we're going through—whether they're grief or rage or whatever, moral indignation, that kind of passion. It adds the dimensionality and the divinity there, and that gives space, and it gives an anchoring in something beyond. It's enormously liberating and helpful and empowering and soul-making and beautiful.

It's in all these areas—self, other, world, eros, time, and other aspects, beauty. We talked about sacredness. We can expand them all with the help of soul-making dharma paradigms and what they bring in to flesh out and enrich and dimensionalize our sense of ethics and the whole movement of the moral life within us—what we respond to, what we see, what we care for, how we act, how we choose.

So I think there's a case to be made that the usual ways in our contemporary society and cultures that we conceive of and sense the self and also the world—both the self and the world—are not always, but for many of us, not quite adequate to the complexity and the difficulty and the demand of the challenges that we face, especially with regard to things like climate change and species loss and those kinds of huge moral issues. And it might also be, as I was saying, that even within certain subcultures like the Dharma or Insight Meditation tradition, the usual ways of sensing and conceiving of the self and of the world are not quite adequate—not for everyone, but for many people. They need some other ways to open out the sense of self and world, and those ways, those other ways, might become platforms of support for opening up the moral sensibility and the power to act, the capacity to act, the potential.

So it's interesting—if we talk about climate change and species extinction, it's hard to imagine a Hollywood movie about that which would really galvanize things, in terms of speaking to people. It's not really a personal story in that sense. You can get earthquake movies and volcano movies and so forth, and the focus is on the individual hero and maybe his or her family and what they go through, and it gets shrunk down to a personal—I don't know what they call it—action movie or catastrophe movie or

whatever. But something like climate change and species loss is much more than a personal story can ever really get hold of. It's not really on that level.

And yet in our society, because of the culture of individualism, that becomes a kind of dominant way that we think about things. It becomes the easiest way for people to get moved and galvanised and relate to something. But the contemporary sense of self may not be adequate. It's not personal in that way.

A worldview that all is one also may not be adequate. Or, say, a certain kind of dharmic practice where the story and the self is atomized into sensations and mind states—that kind of lens also won't be very helpful when I look at the whole issue of climate change. It's too microscopic. It's missing the bigger ethical issues there. I mean, it might be helpful in part in terms of navigating some emotions or getting clear about what the values are, as a stepping stone.

So in all kinds of ways—different self-sense, different world-sense, different emotional sense, sense of the emotions—in many cases these need to be brought in, need to be allowed and included to allow a more appropriate response. Do we need to expand our sense of self, our view of self, beyond what I call the immature individualism of our larger contemporary culture? Do we need an expanded worldview, given more dimension, given a different kind of ontology?

And these things are hard to shift. I don't know quite how they shift. It was interesting—I watched a video of an interview with Polly Higgins, who died recently. A very wonderful woman. She was a lawyer campaigning for many years. She was only forty-nine, I think, when she died. She was campaigning for many years to try and get ecocide—in other words, the destruction of ecosystems—recognised as a crime by the UN and by international law. That was her project as a lawyer. She was a really lovely woman, and she did tremendous work in that area. She died just a few months ago, in fact.

But I was watching this interview, and she was being interviewed by someone who was extremely sympathetic to what she was doing. What struck me was, as the interview went on—it wasn't that long—almost immediately the explanation of why it was important, why getting a law on ecocide was important, sort of slid. It slid from this idea that nature itself needs to be respected, that ecosystems are sacred and need to be respected and need to be given the same rights as we give humans legally, to a different rationalisation. The reasoning underpinning this attempt to get an ecocide law passed became that ecosystems support us—they support humanity, we rely on nature, we rely on the bees pollinating the plants and the flowers so that we can eat, we rely on the water to drink, all of that.

I'm pretty sure that wasn't the only reason, and maybe not even the main reason, why she was campaigning for it. But in the conversation—two sympathetic people who cared about this issue and wanted to support it—the dialogue slipped to a language that made human beings' practical needs for health and livelihood the most important ones. It struck me how it just slid like that, almost naturally.

But this whole movement that she was trying to support, to get a law passed by the UN against ecocide and

to actually frame it as a crime that people understood—it raises interesting ontological questions. We can't get away from ontology and metaphysics with all this. And I don't think there's a way of talking about ethics deeply without talking about ontologies, but we'll come back to that.

So this idea about an ecocide law via the UN raises, to me, interesting ontological questions as much as ethical ones. Because if you think about it, such a law and the ideas underpinning it would be different than a law for animal rights, for example. Or choices like vegetarianism because of reasons of compassion for the suffering of individual animals—I don't want to eat meat because that involves that animal suffering when it's slaughtered or how it's kept.

But when we talk about something like ecocide, we're talking about an ecosystem. That's not an individual animal. It's not even a collection of animals. It's not this animal, it's not that tree—it's the system. In a way it has life, I suppose, and you could even talk about it in the way that a system of cells in the body can be alive, even while maybe individual cells are dead or dying. But a system is something different. Caring for an ecosystem, recognising rights for an ecosystem, and then implementing in law rights for an ecosystem because we've recognised morally those rights—this implies a kind of respect and reverence for the order and harmony and integrity of nature's functioning, its life process. And inevitably, such an idea rests on or draws in a kind of cosmology, anthropology, and again, metaphysics.

So grief at species loss, or plummeting numbers—many bird species, for example, or insect species are hugely reduced in numbers, although the species itself is not technically critically endangered yet. But the grief, the heart's response to that—is it a different grief resting on a different sensibility? It's a particular ethical care that is different, though not contradictory to, a care for the suffering or death of an individual animal.

That orca mother carrying around her dead calf for days or weeks in the oceans—it was in the news a little while ago. A lot of clicks on that piece of news, because there's the empathy with that individual orca mother and her calf, the suffering there. But grief at species loss seems to me a different kind of sensibility. Something slightly different is happening in the heart, in the soul, actually. And as I said, it calls forth or involves or demands a different kind of ontology and metaphysics, an expanded ontology and metaphysics for us to actually respect that. So all these issues are tied together. They're not actually that simple.

Now, some of this is already changing. I don't know if you knew this, but a corporation actually, in law—in most countries, or even in international law—has the same status for legal purposes as a person. So a multinational corporation, ExxonMobil or whatever, these large corporations, technically and legally have the same status as a person, the same legal rights as a person. That's been the case for many, many years.

A river, for example, does not have legal personhood for the most part. But this is starting to change – or rather, there are a few instances where it's starting to change. If you just think about what's going on there, it again raises the point I made at the beginning of this talk: what's the relationship between law

and ethics? Originally there was supposed to be a very close, tightly-knit congruence there, but in many ways they seem to have drifted apart.

What are the ethics about the law that turns away refugee boats? I mean, it's a law. One can make a link with ethics, but it becomes increasingly tenuous. Or protecting corporate rights over their responsibility to take care of the environment – you can trace an ethical reason. You can rationalize that kind of law ethically, or that kind of limitation on law ethically. But the connection between law and ethics has, I think, become increasingly tenuous, increasingly divorced.

Some of this is starting to change. New Zealand, for instance – the Waikato River was given personhood legally, which is anyway how the indigenous Maori culture views it. They view it as a living being, as a person, because they sense it with soul. In some regards there are going to be differences, of course. And they say, "I am the river, and the river is me. How can the river look after me if I don't look after it?"

Also Mount Taranaki, in New Zealand, and the Whanganui River. Just recently, in the last couple of years. Mount Taranaki and the Whanganui River are both sacred to the indigenous peoples there. And actually earlier than that, in 2014, legal personhood was granted to the Te Urewera Forest and gave the local Maori tribes shared guardianship of that forest as part of their sensibility and their sense of duty and responsibility anyway.

In India, the Ganges and the Yamuna, partly legally stimulated by what happened in New Zealand, I think, because it's all Commonwealth and therefore bound by similar laws – there's some kind of legal structure that binds New Zealand and India as Commonwealth countries. The Ganges and the Yamuna were granted personhood status legally.

So there are the beginnings of changes here. And in Toledo, on Lake Erie, residents were petitioning to sue polluters on behalf of the lake and for that lake to be recognized with legal rights, as a person would be. I'm not sure if the argument in Toledo was again to do with the effects on humans and children's health from polluted lake water. So it's still really great and wonderful, but it's slightly different. Again, ontologically it's slightly different, or actually significantly different.

So there are the beginnings of change here, but really, what do we need? An expanded ontology, epistemology, metaphysics, cosmology, anthropology, self-sense – all of that. And again, not everyone is going to need this. It won't work for everyone. But for many people, that might be a really significant support, that kind of expansion.

Remember that Moscovici quote: questions of epistemology are also questions of social order. And therefore questions of ontology are also questions of social order. And it's increasingly and glaringly obvious now with the tragedies unfolding around us.

So how can we begin to sense and think and feel in different ways, in ways that do expand the ontology, the epistemology, the metaphysics, the cosmology, the anthropology, the sense of existence, the sense of

human being, the sense of the life and the being of the earth and nature and the species? Again, I wouldn't say it's the solution. It's one possibility. Sensing the soul is one possibility, one kind of paradigm that can open up that kind of expansion and change. And then on top of that change and expansion in the ontology of all that comes a change in sensibility, and therefore a change in view and action and law and human choices. One possibility.

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