Sīla and Soul (Part 3)

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 1:50:48

I said that I would talk about two ways in which soul-making or imaginal practices can augment or expand our consideration of ethics. I briefly touched on how imaginal practice, in the ways that we've taught it so far, can come in and enrich, dimensionalize, give added range and also depth and strength and possibility to our ethical consideration, ethical action, and ethical stance in life.

I mentioned a second possibility in addition to the standard imaginal practice. I mentioned what I think I called the ideational imaginal, or the ideological imaginal, or imaginal ideas. So I'd like to talk a little bit about that, introduce it as a possibility, and there's probably much more that can be explored here.

I've touched on it in the past. I don't think I've used those words before, ideational imaginal. I think I've just mentioned it very briefly over the last few years. For instance, in the possibility of meditating or finding an opening in meditation from some sensible perception, for example, of beauty, or some inner image of something beautiful. I think I gave the example of some beautiful music that was playing in my mind, and sort of traveling from that to a more, if you like, pure essence of beauty in itself that is not so coupled with, hinged on, or related to an instance of beauty—this or that beautiful thing, music or object or whatever it is.

I think I've just mentioned it a couple of times. We haven't really amplified it and I don't remember if anyone's really picked up on it that much, but I want to talk about it a bit now. I want to talk about it in the context of discussing ethics, and particularly in the context of introducing the ideas of moral values and virtues. This is to do with a kind of ethics—sometimes people call it virtue ethics—a kind of approach to ethics that is one possible way of considering sīla, one possible way of considering ethics and how we weigh up what's important, what we prioritize, in our approach.

So, introducing the ideational imaginal in the context of introducing the ideas of moral values and virtues. There's ideational imaginal that doesn't so obviously overlap with this area of ethics, and of course there are ethical considerations that don't necessarily overlap with ideational imaginal. Some—in fact quite a lot—of where I draw my inspiration from in this regard is from the philosopher Nikolai Hartmann, who has a massive tome called *Ethics* that really touched me when I read it, in the way he opens this out and how he talks about it. I feel there's a lot of relevance to the soul there, and therefore to soul-making.

As we go through some of this material, I want to sometimes draw connections to Buddhadharma, and also to soul-making dharma, and also to draw out some of the implications in thinking of things these ways and approaching them these ways.

I might start with a more general introduction—just the idea of these ideas and the sort of theory of it a little bit. I really hope that you'll immediately see, even though I'm talking in generalities at first, that it won't feel abstract to you, that you can sense immediately in your heart and soul how these things matter to our lives, matter for society, and matter to the soul.

Values and virtues—let's start there. This word *value*, particularly with regard to moral values, is a word that in English has replaced what used to be the more common word of *the good*. *Bonum* in Latin. So we have this word *goods*. Goods—you're shipping goods here or there, you're paying for the goods, you're selling goods or whatever. So it's related. What's goods and good is a value. Something valuable.

Just for example, health is something valuable. Food, nutrition is something valuable, and property is something valuable. Happiness, consciousness, life—these are all kinds of values, in one sense. When we talk about values, and obviously there are many, many more, most values are valuable because they enable something else that is, if you like, more ultimately valuable. So for example, health is valuable in that it allows one to have the energy to live and to do and to experience this or that, or to do and experience more widely. So health in itself is valuable because it allows us to live and to do and experience.

We could also not stop there. Why is living or doing or experiencing—is it in itself valuable, or is it that doing is valuable and experiencing and doing are sometimes valuable if they're enabling something else, if they serve something else? So one question—we may come back to this, we will come back to this—is what are more ultimate values, if you like?

Just to point out that most values are valuable because they enable something else which is more ultimately valuable.

When we talk about specifically moral values, we mean something morally good, something morally valuable. So justice, for example, is a moral value. Honesty, courage, trustworthiness. We're talking about here in the larger things—institutions, actions, organizations, things in themselves, as well as inner attitude, dispositions, etc. Actually, we'll come back to that in a second.

When we speak of moral values, they pertain specifically to human beings—to our acts, personalities, and dispositions. Morality has to do with humanity. We judge human beings, human institutions, human actions, and human personalities in terms of their moral value, but not objects in themselves. A lamp or a carpet, for instance, possesses no inherent moral dimension.

When moral values become embodied as dispositions of a person—the dominant tendencies that constitute one's character—we use the word *virtue*. Remember, *ethos* means character: the essential set of dispositions that define a person. Virtue refers to this constellation of moral qualities that shape our being and guide our actions.

Let me offer two important observations about the nature of moral values. First, moral values often

depend on non-moral values in significant ways. Consider the precept not to steal, or its positive expression, the practice of generosity. These moral values depend upon and assume the worth of what might be stolen or given. The moral dimension only has meaning if there exists something of genuine value to be shared or protected. Similarly, the moral imperative not to harm another person assumes the inherent value of well-being, the value of health that enables other valuable activities, or simply that health itself possesses worth.

Second, and this you've likely encountered in Buddhist teachings on *sila*, the moral value of an action depends fundamentally on intention, just as virtue depends on disposition—not merely on results. The classic example illuminates this clearly: imagine two people who cut into another's flesh with knives, and in both cases, the person dies. One commits murder, perhaps motivated by theft. The other is a surgeon attempting to save a life, but the operation fails tragically. Identical outcome—death by knife—yet morally they couldn't be more different because the intentions were entirely different.

This principle reveals how moral values depend on intention, and virtues depend on disposition, not simply on outcomes. Yet even this raises fascinating complications. Practical wisdom itself—the keen discernment to anticipate the likely results of our actions—is itself a virtue. So while results aren't everything, attention to consequences isn't entirely irrelevant either.

When we speak of virtues as integral parts of one's *ethos*—those dominant tendencies that shape character—we can identify qualities like empathy, sensitivity, faith, loyalty, and what Hartmann calls different kinds of love: love of one's neighbor, love of the remote person far away in space and time. We might include self-control, courage, humility, wisdom, strength, nobility, gentleness, trustworthiness, generosity, and the capacity for self-sacrifice. The list could extend much further.

Naming, listing, and mapping these virtues proves to be an extraordinarily complex undertaking. Perhaps we'll return to explore that challenge more fully. But even from this limited selection I've mentioned, can you sense the profound effect that would follow from the higher development of these qualities? Can you feel the *ethos* that would emerge from dedicating oneself to cultivating empathy, sensitivity, the various forms of love, faith, loyalty, courage, generosity, the capacity for self-sacrifice, wisdom, strength, and nobility?

Consider this question: What arises for you when you hear the phrase "a beautiful life"? What range of phenomena would you consider meaningfully worthy of the term "beautiful"? We've explored beauty in other retreats and talks, but does it include the virtues? I used to speak of "beautiful qualities of heart."

Can you sense right now that a life lived with keen sensitivity to moral values—devoted to cultivating and expressing virtue, committed to these qualities, standing by them, making them a genuine priority—might be as beautiful, or perhaps even more beautiful, than other ways we typically consider a life beautiful?

What does it mean to live a beautiful life? And are we called as human beings to the possibility of a

beautiful life, of sculpting, of crafting, of making an art of our life into something beautiful? If so, what is the place of virtues—as we're talking about them now—and this sensitivity to moral value? Does the development of all that, the prioritizing of all that, the commitment to all that, have its place in creating beauty in our lives?

Can you get that sense? Or does something else arise for you?

This is complicated territory, and this whole conversation on ethics I realize is very touchy, very sensitive, and one has to be quite careful in wording. I was almost a bit reluctant to even start talking about ethics, as it can be loaded in all kinds of ways.

So what arises for you when we think about the meaning of what is a good life? What does it mean to lead a good life? "I'm living a good life"—what does that mean if we go deeper into the levels of possible meaning, into what that might actually look like and be? What does it mean to live and lead a beautiful life? What might it mean, and what arises for you just when you hear those words or when I put them in connection with this concept of moral values and virtues?

Now some of you who are familiar with your Buddhist lists will immediately perhaps think, "Ah, the ten paramitas," or sometimes what's called the ten perfections. In Theravada Buddhism, sometimes Mahayana Buddhism lists six, and Theravada Buddhism lists ten. Are those paramitas or paramis not virtues? Are we talking about the same thing here?

Yes, there's definite overlap. The ten Theravada Buddhist paramis are generosity, sila itself—ethical care—renunciation, wisdom or better insight, energy (sometimes translated as courage), patience, truthfulness, determination, metta (loving-kindness), and equanimity. In the Mahayana, they are generosity, sila, patience, energy, samadhi—meaning meditative depth and range and skill—and wisdom or better insight.

So there's a definite connection, parallel, overlap here. But there are also some important differences, at least in the way that I would like to open out the subject of virtues and values, and that territory of those lists of paramitas in Buddha Dharma.

Firstly, there are many more than ten. If we open out the consideration of virtues and values, there are more than ten—certainly more than six, more than ten. As I said, listing them, or even identifying all of them, and how you break up the list becomes quite a project, but certainly more than ten.

Second, and also very significant, is that the word parami, paramita, can be translated in two ways, and they're related. One, I think the most common, is perfection. So prajna paramita—the perfection of wisdom—is a translation. Paramita means perfection. It also can mean transcendent or transcending, which I'll come back to.

But if we just stay with this translation, this meaning of paramita as perfection—the Buddha's teaching is

that there are ten perfections, ten qualities you can perfect. But the word perfection implies that something, one can reach the end of a certain development. One can complete a process. That possibility is there to reach—"Right, I've completely achieved final excellence with patience or renunciation or whatever it is, truthfulness."

One of the important points I would like to make about the virtues is that they don't have an end. They're infinitely developable. They contain and unfold their own beyonds, their own infinite reaches of depth and flourishing and range. So there's a difference there.

Related to that is a third difference. The Buddha, somewhere in the Pali Canon—I don't know exactly where—says that all Dhammas converge in the deathless. All Dhammas converge in the deathless. Now Dhamma is one of those words that has at least two or three meanings in Buddhist teachings. But one of its meanings is teachings itself. So a dhamma is a teaching—a teaching on generosity, a teaching on the paramitas, a teaching on renunciation, a teaching on equanimity or whatever. It can also mean mental quality.

So again, the quality of patience, the quality of generosity—a kind of disposition, if you like. And so this phrase of the Buddha's, "all dhammas converge in the deathless," could mean that all the paramis and other qualities the Buddha referred to actually serve merely to help you transcend—to help you transcend the realm of fabrication, the realm of the formation of appearances, the realm of perception and experiences, the realm of birth and death of life itself—and transcend that to reach the unfabricated and to end rebirth.

So all dhammas converge in the deathless. They all point towards and lead to their fruition in this transcending and escaping from the realm of form and appearance and experience and perception. That would be one meaning of this "all dhammas converge in the deathless."

In other words, as I've said before, the whole thrust—as I read it—the whole traditional thrust of Pali Canon Buddhism is to get off the wheel of rebirth, of life and death, of birth and death, and to dissolve into, disappear into the unfabricated, beyond all appearance, beyond all experience. And so everything else in the Buddha's teachings, in the Dhamma of the Buddha, serves that end and supports that end and works together. All these factors—the wings of awakening, the paramitas and all that—they serve to support each other in a synergistic way that propels the being and aids their release. To use the Buddha's word: release and escape from samsara, from the wheel of rebirth, into not being reborn again, the end of the rebirth of experience, into the unfabricated.

But that phrase of the Buddha's, "all dhammas converge in the deathless," could actually have another meaning. The deathless there could mean the dharmakaya. So all dhammas converge in the dharmakaya.

Now dharmakaya is a word with a very interesting history in Buddha Dharma. One of its original meanings was really—kaya means a body, like in a way, like a body of water. So a collection of dharmas,

dharmakaya. Collection of dharmas means collection of qualities. Now dharmakaya is an aspect of Buddhahood, it's an aspect of Buddha nature. In the first teachings about, or expression of, what actually is a Buddha, what is Buddha nature, dharmakaya meant the collection of the Buddha's qualities—the collection of a Buddha's qualities, the mental qualities, including their virtues, the dispositions of a Buddha.

So "all dhammas converge in the deathless" could mean all dhammas lead to, all paramitas and all teachings and trainings lead to this collection of qualities that adhere in the Buddha mind, in the Buddha being, if you like, in the Buddha nature. But that actually is a more Mahayana idea.

So it's probable that when the Buddha said "all dhammas converge in the deathless," he meant this: they serve to support that traveling towards transcendence, towards release, escape, removal from the realm of fabrication, the realm of appearances, experiences, phenomena, and rebirth, and ending there.

So again, virtues as such, paramitas as such, in that teaching, take a secondary role. They are for the purpose of serving release. And this is one way of saying: What are they for? What's their worth? What's the worth of moral virtues?

But as Nikolai Hartmann points out—I'll read you a little quote from him—in the way he would read it, because it's not at all a life-transcending philosophy that he espouses. In some ways he's very not religious, in other ways I think he is religious without realizing it. "What is morally good is good in itself." It's not for the purpose of something, and certainly not for the purpose of removing oneself from the realm of appearances and experiences, perception and phenomena.

What I want to read to you is this from Nikolai Hartmann: "The useful is never the good in the ethical sense. We say that a thing is good for something, but that is not the moral meaning of the good. The moral meaning of the good reveals itself only when one inquires after that for which anything is good. If one traces the 'for which' back to what is no longer good for anything else but is good in itself, one has reached the good in the other sense, which contains its ethical meaning. The morally good is the good in itself. Therefore, not to be good for something else is of its very essence. According to its nature, it is never the useful."

I might qualify that a little bit and actually say the morally good is useful. It's useful for other people. Sometimes it's useful for ourselves. If I'm kind, maybe people are going to be kind back, or there's more chance that they'll be kind back. If I'm kind, my kindness is often useful to them. And if I'm generous, my generosity is often useful to them, and if I'm generous, maybe some people will be generous back, reciprocally or out of appreciation or whatever it is.

But I would qualify a little bit what he's saying, and say that in its deeper essence—well, there's a dimension, there's a level in which the morally good is not just useful for ourselves or for others. It's not good for something.

It's not useful. It's just good in itself.

And this, in a way, relates very much to what it means to live a beautiful life, to lead a beautiful life. It's something that's good in itself. It has no other purpose than because it's beautiful, because it's good, because it touches the soul in that way.

If we stay with Hartmann a little bit, he has a particular kind of ontology that he developed in his philosophy, which I find quite interesting and very thought-provoking. One question concerns the ontology of moral values. Do they have independent, inherent existence? Or are they, in a way, created by humanity or by a person or by a culture at a certain time? Are they dependent, contingent in that respect?

Now, he was writing mostly in the first half of the 20th century, and that book on ethics, I think, is from the 1920s. But already by that time, there was the awareness in philosophy, in moral philosophy, that ethics—what's considered valuable morally and the whole notion of ethics and what's ethical and what isn't—varies when we look at the history of different cultures and places. What is regarded as morally valuable varies with time, with place, with culture, with person. So it's quite individual as well.

But he makes the point that, yes, agreed, that's obvious, that's a fact historically, but that need not imply that they don't have independent existence, that moral values don't have independent existence. Because he says that what happens in the realm of moral values is that we tend to have movable fashions and a kind of partial blindness that goes with those fashions.

So this is akin to when we talked in this series on ontology and epistemology about ideas, for example, of the disco ball—those things that radiate light from different sides. You can't actually see it all at once, and you can't get the light reflecting from it all at once to your eyes. You have to look at it from a certain vantage point, from a certain angle, so you're only seeing part of it. Or when we talked about the different ways of creating maps—the cartographic and the polar—two different ways of creating maps that give different pictures in two dimensions of a really existing three-dimensional globe, so that the truth of things is somehow hard to grasp all at once. But when we look at it, we look at it partially or with a partial blindness.

So Hartmann talks about what he calls a value firmament—a value constellations in the sky of values. But he says we, at any time, are looking at it as if with a small beam of light, like with a torch. So our torch light can only illuminate certain areas of that value firmament, certain values. And when we do that, others slip from our consciousness. We don't notice them, or we relegate them, or we just don't consider them—we're oblivious to them.

So this is quite an interesting ontology and relates to some of what we said before. He does say values are still subjective in one sense, in that they are values only for human beings. But he says even that doesn't take away from their independent existence, because he points out that geometrical laws, for example, the laws of geometry, or mechanical laws—the laws of objects in motion, like footballs and cannonballs and

rockets—or physiological laws, the laws that living organisms are curtailed by and abide by, these only apply for limited categories of beings.

So geometrical laws are for spatial figures: triangles and squares and lines and points and polygons. Mechanical laws are for solid bodies. Physiological laws are for organisms. So it's subjective in that sense. And moral laws, moral values are only for humans. So it's subjective in that sense, that they're for humans. A moral law doesn't apply to a triangle, for example. So it's limited and subjective in that sense—it's for humans. But that doesn't imply, in his thinking, that they are therefore created or they can be done away with. They're just relative to certain kinds of being. All those four kinds of laws that I enumerated are each of them relative to a different kind of being. And he says that they are actually unconditional.

How do we know and perceive values? How do we get our sense of values? For him, it's not a cognitive process. It's not something we think about rationally and ponder and deduce from logic. Immanuel Kant is often labeled as someone who has that kind of idea of morality and the approach to morality, wanting to find a rational solution. But whether that's actually true of Immanuel Kant completely, I don't think so, based on the little that I know. I think it would be an oversimplification.

But Hartmann's point is that we have an intuitive sense and an emotional sense of moral value. It touches something, he would say, in the heart or the intuition. I would also say in the soul as well. And that's how we perceive values and we know values.

He also says—and again, this may be an unfashionable point these days, because of some of what I laid out in the earlier talks on ethics—

But he also says—and again, this may be an unfashionable point these days because of the reasons I laid out in the earlier talks on ethics—that not all persons have an equal capacity to perceive moral values, to know and sense moral values. There are differences there. There are differences in what has been developed. This person has developed that sense, that intuition, that feeling to perceive and know moral values more than this other person. Or this person has been educated in some way, helped, trained to become more sensitive to perceive and know moral values. And there might be just innate differences—aptitudes where this person was simply born with a kind of soul that was sensitive in the realm of moral values or sensitive to certain values. So there are differences there, and that has to be acknowledged. Again, that might be somehow a taboo thing to say, but he says actually it's just like insight into mathematics or the truths of mathematics or mathematical laws.

They are true. They are independent of whether two people, A and B, can both grasp that mathematical law. Perhaps person A has a particular aptitude with mathematics. Perhaps they have particular training with mathematics. And they can read some mathematical equation or formula or postulate or truth, and actually grasp it, understand it, know it, sense it, sense its validity. And person B just doesn't have that mathematical sensibility in their mind, in their soul, or they haven't been educated in that way. So he says

it's just like that. It's the same with moral values.

And he says something further that—and this, again, is very interesting, I think, in terms of how I want to link all this up to soul and soul-making. So as you're listening to this, there's partly all its implications for how we consider—implications for our consideration, our approach to ethics—and then there's also our consideration of how it impacts and what it implies for our consideration of souls and soul-making and all that.

A further thing he says is that values make the person. The person doesn't make the value. So again, this is still in the area of talking about their ontological status. Do they have independent existence or are they merely created by the person or by a culture? He says values make the person, not vice versa. And he gives as evidence for that the fact that when we feel guilt, we're actually feeling or sensing our own failure to live up to our values, to live up to our ideal self, if you like. And to him, this implies the *a priori* nature of values. In other words, they come first. Values make the person.

So a person has these values that exist in the value firmament. These ones are important to them. They have this kind of sensitivity to these values, less so to these values. And that sensitivity, derived from or in relationship to the values, makes the person, shapes the personality, as opposed to the person shaping and creating the values.

So I think that's a very interesting thought. To me, it's a little bit one-sided as an explanation, as a postulate. I'm not entirely convinced by that. And in fact, there's quite a lot in Hartmann that I'm not entirely convinced by, but I still find it very touching and very beautiful and very thought-provoking as a philosopher.

There might be more of a consideration of dependent origination and the various factors that contribute to make the person and contribute to make the values to which they are sensitive. So yes, we could say the person makes the values, absolutely, and the culture makes the values, and the culture makes the person who makes the values, in indirect and direct ways, and reactive ways, and proactive ways, and consonant ways, and dissonant ways—in opposition, in congruence, etc. But we can also say that the values make the person, along with Hartmann.

Or at least we can say, again, if we take one of the principles of soul-making, that we don't have to decide on an ultimate truth here, but we can entertain the idea, entertain the logos, put it in the soul for a while and see what it does if we entertain the idea that values make the person. The values kind of exist in some independent way, at some level where we can't completely grasp all that there is to know about them—their whole range, how they relate to each other, their hierarchy. We can't grasp all that. We get a one-sided, movable sense of them. But we can entertain the idea for a while, not as an ultimate truth, but entertain the idea that they do exist in that way. Not as a final position, but we entertain that. We play with that idea in a way that becomes powerful for the soul.

And I think that idea that values make the person, rather than the other way around—if we lean that way for a while—there could be a lot of soul-making coming out of that. I don't know if you can sense that as I'm mentioning it right now. And it also has many implications for our ethical life, and again how we approach, how we consider ethics, what we deem as important when we approach ethical situations, and the very lens through which we see all that.

But as I said, he was writing in the early twentieth century, and with the rise of modernism and certainly into so-called postmodernism, there was perhaps, I think, generally speaking, a kind of waning of interest in values and moral values as a way of understanding ethics. And especially with postmodernism in the sense of, well, how can you claim that they have independent, objective existence because nothing does?

Everything's culturally conditioned. And alongside this came a corollary waning and lack of interest and lack of esteem for the notion of virtues and that kind of understanding of humanity and approach to ethics.

For myself, I place these ideas about values and virtues into the realm of what I might call religious sensibility, in the larger sense. And so, because that too wanes very much with modernism and post-modernism, part of what occurs is a disennobling—a removal and depletion of the potential for what can serve to nurture and be part of a sense of nobility in human beings. This also is one of the losses of modernism and post-modernism: that whole conception becomes too close to the noble and the religious, and so it goes out of fashion.

I want to read you something from Alasdair MacIntyre in this regard. He's commenting on this development through modernity. He writes in *After Virtue*: "Without allusion to the place that justice and injustice, courage and cowardice play in human life, very little will be genuinely explicable. It follows that many of the explanatory projects of the modern social sciences—a methodological canon of which is the separation of 'the facts' from all evaluation—are bound to fail."

In other words, this idea that I can separate the facts out from any value, any evaluative statements or lenses I bring to bear on those facts—this is an idea you'll recognize from when we talked about the history of science and classical science. It's an axiomatic principle of the classical scientific method, or even the modern scientific method: one tries to remove any kind of evaluation or evaluative tendency that might distort or subjectivise the so-called objective facts.

With modernity comes the rise of this classical scientific method, and this spreads to domains other than the core sciences of physics, chemistry, and biology—into the modern social sciences. People try to apply that same kind of pared down, austere, supposedly objective scientific method to social sciences like sociology and psychology. But MacIntyre is saying that actually, if you take out notions of justice and injustice, courage and cowardice—in other words, values and virtues—it becomes very difficult to explain anything with just these so-called facts.

He writes: "For the fact that someone was or failed to be courageous or just cannot be recognised as a fact by those who accept that methodological canon based on classical science and its belief in the possibility of total objectivity." Do you understand? So that whole waning of interest and the progressive unesteeming—not completely, but for the most part—of that entire realm of values, moral values and virtues, actually accompanies modernity to a certain extent. Because it's intrinsically evaluative, and that's what we're trying to get rid of.

If we return to this question of how do we perceive values—and again, it's still related to perceiving moral values and still relating to their ontological status—in the English translation of Nikolai Hartman's book, there's a very good introduction by Andreas Kinneging. He writes something worth considering: "It is impossible to observe values empirically." In other words, you can't see a value itself. Only acts, things and events are perceived empirically, perceived with the senses. You can't see a value itself. You can't sense it directly.

"To know the value of what is observed empirically is possible only if one has already comprehended the relevant value in abstracto, in the abstract, and can use that knowledge as a standard to assess what has been realized. Knowledge of values is a priori knowledge"—like knowledge of mathematical and logical beings. In other words, we just have an intuitive knowledge of values. We have a kind of abstract knowledge, an inherent sense of what's good, what's kind.

It's not that we see certain acts—a hundred acts—and then deduce from those different acts some conclusion about generosity. We don't make an inductive conclusion about what constitutes generosity or kindness or courage based on empirical observations of a hundred acts of different people in different situations. Rather, we have an a priori knowledge, an intuitive, instinctive, inbuilt knowledge that corresponds, in the subjective domain, to their objective, independent existence. And it's with this that we measure an empirically observed act—we measure its correspondence with our intuitive sense, whether it tallies, whether it's congruent, whether it chimes with and fits our intuitive a priori sense of this or that value.

And again, to repeat what he said before: not everyone has the same capacity to sense values, and not everyone's capacity is equally well developed. Hartman writes: "There are such things as education and lack of education of the sense of values, talent and lack of talent for the discernment of them. It is here just as it is with mathematical insights. Not everyone is capable of it. Not everyone has the eye, the ethical maturity, the spiritual level for seeing the situation as it is."

Nevertheless, he continues, "the universality, necessity and objectivity of the valuational judgment hold good in abstracto. For this universality does not at all mean that everyone is capable of the valuational insight in question. It only means that whoever is capable of it—that is, whoever spiritually gets hold of its meaning—must necessarily feel and judge thus, and not otherwise."

And just read a little more of this, because he writes—this is Hartman now—he says value blindness is

quite a common phenomenon. So a sense of, or rather, a condition of just being insensitive to certain values. In extreme cases, it brings about a complete loss of meaning of life in the world. "He who stolidly passes by men and their fates, he whom the staggering does not stagger, nor the exalted exalt, for him life is in vain, he has no part of it. The world must be meaningless and life senseless to one who has no capacity to perceive the sense of life's relationships, the inexhaustible significance of persons and situations, or correlations and events. The outward emptiness and monotony of his life are the reflex of his inner emptiness and his moral blindness."

The real world in which he exists, the stream of human life which bears him up and carries him along, is not without manifold wealth of content. His poverty amidst abundance is due to his own failure to appreciate life. Hence, for the moral nature of man there is, besides the narrow actuality of action and ought-to-do—so we ought to act in line with certain virtues or moral values—for the moral nature of man, there is a second requirement: to participate in the fullness of life, to be receptive to the significant, to lie open to whatever has meaning and value.

I find that a beautiful passage, and a very important passage. One of the points there is that it's possible to be value-blind. Again, I want to come back to that later. But the sense of seeing values, of perceiving them, of intuiting them, is what he calls, in philosophical terms, a priori. It's an a priori judgment.

One more thing from Hartman, while we're there, if I can find it... So when he considers... He says there's something very interesting about the human capacity for moral action, for moral sensibility, to sense moral values and to bring them to bear and express them in one's life and to choose that way. He's adopting a certain framework of the world, where man—excuse me, let's say human being—in comparison with the whole of the cosmos, is a speck of dust, an ephemeral, a negligible phenomenon.

There's a certain cosmological context in which humanity, in the scope of things of the vast reaches of the universe and the vast spans of time, is really just an insignificant little speck. So the interesting thing about—well, one of the interesting things about ethics and humanity is—again, excuse the gender-biased language, he's writing back then—"Man, a vanishing quantity in the universe, is still in his own way stronger than it. He is the vehicle of a higher principle. He is the creator of a reality which possesses significance and value. He transmits to the real world a higher worth. Nature is bound down to its own laws. Man alone, humanity alone, carries in himself a higher law, whereby he, or more correctly, the law through him, creates in the world, or from non-being, from non-existence, brings forth into being, into existence, that which was prefigured in its ideality"—in other words, these ideals of moral values and virtues.

Despite being insignificant in the context of one's actual existence in the vast spans of space and time in the universe, human beings can do this thing where they can axiologically—in other words ethically, in terms of values—they can do something that's extremely significant. "We may name this rehabilitation of man the miracle of the ethical phenomenon. It is the sublime in him, that which verily lifts him up above

his own mere existence in the world."

Yes, physically and in terms of the transience of our existence, we're ephemeral and insignificant and small in the context of the large universe. But there's something amazing that we can do: bring forth from this kind of ideal realm of values, something from non-existence into existence, which, other than through us, cannot come into existence.

I don't know how all this lands, or how it really lands in your soul. I don't mean just whether you kind of agree or not agree—and there are many complications, some of which we'll pick up on and go into later. But I really mean in the soul, in the heart, how does all this land?

I've been talking quite generally now. But as I asked before, can you get a sense—perhaps, I don't know if you share this sense—that devotion to cultivating virtues, to expressing them in one's life, to standing in them and standing by them and standing up for them, a commitment to them, a prioritizing of them, constitute and form and be an essential part, perhaps the essential part, in what we might call a beautiful life?

And as such might be something for which we could say in soul-making Dharma terms, there is a telos—there is a calling to that. Yes, each in our individual particular ways, we create, discover what it is for me or you as a unique individual, our own, with our own soul if you like, what kind of beautiful life there is, what's the flavor of that beautiful life. But can you get—I don't know if you share that sense—of the beauty of this, the nobility of it, the calling of it, the possible logos that might regard that as a telos? This is what we're called towards. We're called towards a beautiful life, living a beautiful life, creating a beautiful life. And the place of virtue in that is central.

If we look into the etymology of that word virtue, I think it's quite interesting. The word itself is virtue, from the Latin virtus, which means manliness. But let's play with that a little bit. I should say humanity—i.e., being fully human in non-gender biased language. So to care for the virtues is to become fully human. The more we care for the virtues, the more fully human we become.

And if I don't, am I actually a human being? I might have DNA and I might have that form and two ears and a nose and eyes and a liver and a spleen and whatever. Am I human just because, you know? So it's related to that word, to being fully human.

Again, we could regard virtue more teleologically if that's helpful—as a movement, something we're called towards. We're called towards our full humanity, and the virtues are perhaps an integral part of that calling.

This relationship to humanity is also connected to the word courage. The Pali term *virya*, which can be translated as energy, can also be translated as courage, and it too has a relationship with the Latin *vir*, meaning man. So virtue is related to courage, to being fully human.

Virtuous also means efficacious and potent—that's a rather archaic meaning. And virtual comes from the Latin *virtualis*, which means effective. This too derives from *vir*, with its root meaning of man. So when we consider virtue, there's something about our efficacy, our potency—how efficacious our being and action and speech and ethos in the world are. This forms part of what it means to have virtue.

We also have the English word virtuoso, which also comes from the Latin root *vir*. To me, virtuoso captures the whole sense of virtue when we consider and open up the soul meaning, the soul sense of this area of virtues. Virtuoso implies something important: there's skill and art here. This whole consideration of virtue, of living a virtuous life, of living a beautiful life, of the sensibility and commitment to moral values—there's something of skill and art in that.

In fact, virtue (sometimes spelled with an "i," sometimes with an "r") also means a taste or love for works of fine art, connoisseurship, and the quality of being rare or beautiful. Can you sense how these different etymological components actually feed in organically to fill out a richness and multi-dimensionality, even multi-directionality, of what we mean? All these words are etymologically tied together.

But I don't want to stop there. There's a researcher named Paul Kugler who wrote a short book called *The Alchemy of Discourse* about twenty years ago. In that book, he explores a piece of research that Jung did early in his career. It's related to archetypes, but it concerns phonetic similarities, phonetic relationships between words that are different from etymological relationships.

Etymology means you can actually trace different words—like virtue and virtuous and virtuoso and virtual—back to a common root and see how meaning develops from that common root through history over time. But Paul Kugler, following Jung's early research (which Jung never really returned to, and as far as I know, no one else has really explored and developed—though I think there's tremendous potential here), suggests that words are connected not just etymologically, but phonetically. In other words, through relationships of similar sound.

Jung's original research is quite interesting. He gives examples of words that are not etymologically related—carnation (the flower), carnal, and carnage, for instance. What Kugler suggests is that, in Jungian terms, the unconscious puts those words together, associates them together. They touch the soul in similar ways, or hearing one word actually ignites for the soul a kind of intuitive, perhaps dim association or sense of those other words through sound. It's not related through etymology, through meaning, but through sound. The words have very different meanings, but there's a relationship through sound that stimulates in the unconscious a kind of archetypal complex through which all those words are related.

He gives another fascinating example with Latin words: *liberalitas* (generosity), *liberatio* (from which we get liberation, meaning setting free or deliverance), *liberi* (children), *libet* (it is pleasing, or I desire), *libido* (lustfulness or desire), *libation* (to pour or make an offering), *Libitina* (a burial goddess), and *library* (a case for books). Through their sound commonality, these words—many of which don't seem to have anything to do with each other—point to a common archetypal complex also related to Dionysus: libido

and desire and freedom, libation and drinking (since Dionysus is Bacchus, the god of wine), and his relationship with death (Libitina). Curiously, even books fit this pattern—we actually get our word "book" from the word Bacchus.

These words are phonetically related, connected through the deeper currents of sound and meaning that flow through the unconscious.

So these words are phonologically related and they speak to the soul that way - they trigger each other, they're related to each other, they're constellated together, they're ignited together for the soul. I'm partly mentioning that because it seems to me no one else has really picked up on that line of research - just a short book by Kugler. Maybe someone hearing this at some point will like to pursue, in a small way or a larger way, that kind of line of inquiry and exploration in terms of soul-making.

That's why I explained all that. But if we go back to this word virtue, and we talked about the etymology, what about phonetic virtue? Or perhaps archetypally tied to the word virtue - maybe the word vertical. It's a different root, or vertex. They're both from the Latin *vertex*, which means to turn around, like around a point or a place where planes or lines meet. Or in astronomy, it's a point in the sky towards which a star stream appears to move - the vertex - and vertical, and upright.

And so being upright is the name of Rev Anderson's book, I think, on ethics. And so uprightness and virtue and all that. There's rich, rich meanings and phonetic relationships in that word virtue. Really what I'm after here is the soul - filling out for the soul, amplifying for the soul the range, the meaning, the dimensionality of those words, of that word virtue, both through etymology and through this phonetic correspondence or association for the soul.

And it's interesting - again, something from Alasdair MacIntyre here - when we consider what we actually think virtues are in terms of our anthropology, what's our take on human nature. He makes a very interesting point regarding if we consider human beings as innately kind of selfish beings, then that places the whole idea of virtues, the whole teaching of virtues, in a certain light relative to that selfishness. If we think human beings are naturally, or deep down they are good, their true nature is good, then that casts a different light on what the virtues are.

Leading up to it, he talks about a specific Aristotelian understanding of virtue. But let's leave that for now and just take it from where he leaves that off. He writes, "...one distinctively new way open to understand the virtues once they have been severed from their traditional context in thought and practice is as dispositions related in either of two alternative ways to the psychology of that newly invented social institution, the individual."

Basically he's saying: look, in classical times, in the time of Aristotle, there was a very different understanding of things. The social context, the structure of society was very different, and the whole notion of virtue was bound up with that, in many ways, simpler society. And the idea of the individual

was also very different - although the self-sense, as I've pointed out, was very different. This is now - that whole traditional context is gone, and we've got this new prominence of this new notion, a new sense of ourselves as individuals, as selves, in this kind of modern sense that we feel intuitively. It's not just an idea.

So he writes: either the virtues, or some of them, could be understood as expressions of the natural passions of the individual, or they, or some of them, could be understood as dispositions necessary to curb and to limit the destructive effect of some of those natural passions. And then he continues, "It was in the 17th and 18th centuries that morality came generally to be understood as offering a solution to the problems posed by human egoism, and the content of morality came to be largely equated with altruism."

So you don't find that in Aristotle, for example - this idea of morality and altruism somehow being almost synonymous. You've got this idea that human beings are - there's this dangerous human ego, that idea rises to the fore, and with it this idea of morality and altruism. He continues, "For it was in that same period that men came to be thought of as in some dangerous measure egoistic by nature."

I wonder if that's true in the East. I've no idea. But it's interesting - if you read Śāntideva, who wrote in the 8th century in his *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, the Bodhisattva way of life, or however you want to translate it, it's there a little bit, this kind of intense suspicion of the human tendency of the self-sense in the human being, and of egotism and selfishness, therefore. You don't find it, as far as I know - I don't really find it in the Pali Canon. The Buddha doesn't really talk about self, but not really in this kind of way we've come almost to associate this danger of egotism and selfishness there. And nor, as far as I'm aware, do you read it in Nāgārjuna, who was writing in, let's say, the second century of the Common Era.

So I don't know if it's true in the East, but Alasdair MacIntyre is saying that about the West in the 17th and 18th centuries. And he writes, "And it is only once we think of mankind as by nature dangerously egoistic that altruism becomes at once socially necessary and yet apparently impossible, and if and when it occurs, inexplicable."

So the whole question of what are the virtues: are they natural things that are, if you like, our true nature, that just need to be supported and encouraged and nourished and expressed? Or are they rather qualities and elements of being that we can train and cultivate that actually, as he says, curb and limit our more natural passions, dispositions, which are more selfish and egoistical?

That distinction, or those two possibilities, mirror distinctions I think you can sometimes hear in, or read in Theravadan Dharma, where, for instance, in the Pali Canon, the Buddha often talks about three *kilesas* as being kind of natural to human beings: greed, aversion, and delusion. And much less does he talk about Buddha nature and your intrinsic goodness and that kind of thing, which we hear in the Mahāyāna and even more so in fact in a sort of modern Western spin on Mahāyāna teachings about Buddha nature. And this is very contemporary.

Again, is it a response, a reaction to the pain, the affliction of self-criticism, inner critic, etc., that we need to kind of promulgate and promote teachings that teach us about our inner goodness, our natural, deep-down inner goodness, versus teachings on original sin, or that basically you're just a fountain of three *kilesas*, and that's kind of your basic nature, which needs to be trained out of?

That's kind of interesting as to the nature of the virtues and how that relates to our anthropology - basically, our framing and view of what a human being is.

Either way, though, we could see them either way. We could see what the virtues are in relation to human nature in either of those ways. And either way can be supportive of our *sīla* and our ethical consideration, and can also be soul-making. So from a soul-making Dharma perspective, it actually doesn't matter too much. There'll probably be more of a leaning in time towards this intrinsic nature related to the divinity, etc. But actually it can go either way.

But again, I want to just linger with the sense of - I hope you get the sense that this is an abstraction - how important and how beautiful this notion of the virtues is, and how beautiful they are, and what that has to do with leading a beautiful life and our invitation, our calling to our *telos*, our destiny, if you like - a possible destiny if we choose it, if we support it - towards a really beautiful life, a profoundly and widely beautiful life.

Plato in his *Crito* says, "If you cannot live virtuously, there is nothing to be gained by staying alive."

Life itself has no value for you.

And Socrates somewhere said: "A person ought not to consider their chance of living or dying. They ought only to consider on a given occasion whether they are doing right or wrong."

Strong teachings, strong words. Again, I'm sure the Buddha somewhere says, "Better one day lived with sila, with moral virtue and uprightness, than a hundred years lived unethically, without sila."

So can you get a sense of the soul's love of moral values? And perhaps the soul's telos, our telos as human beings, our destiny, our calling—that towards which we are invited, the magnetic pull which we are potentially growing towards. We can just care for that growth.

In the context of talking about ethics, there are all kinds of systems of moral philosophy, all kinds of ways we can consider or approach the whole realm of ethics in our lives—how we think about it, how we look at it, what we consider a priority or important. Of course, we tend to think about efficacy. What's the result of a certain action? What's the result of my kindness or generosity? In regard to situations like climate change, we often tend to think about what's going to make a difference. That's really important, the efficacy.

But in a way, that's only half of ethics. The soul's love of values, love of virtues, the soul's telos, its calling, its invitation to become fully human, to live that beauty—this is perhaps the other half. So you have this

balance of efficacy and virtue.

There was a German theologian, a Lutheran theologian called Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He was born near the beginning of the twentieth century and lived in Germany, where he criticized outspokenly the Nazi philosophy and program, what they implemented and their acts. He remained completely outspoken in his criticism. He would not shut up. And he knew what this would cost him—that he would probably pay for it with his life. He could have, along with so many others, kept quiet. But he chose to just keep telling the truth as he saw it, standing in, standing by, standing for moral values, living and creating virtue, committed to it, prioritizing it—more important, as Socrates taught, than life or death.

Was his speaking—almost a lone voice, not quite, but almost a lone voice in Germany—was that ever going to change things? Was his speaking going to topple the Nazi regime? Were they going to say, "Oh yeah, Dietrich, you're right. How stupid we are. We'll change our ways"?

That outspokenness, that courage, that commitment, that firmness, that resolve, that purity, that boldness—it wasn't going to change things. He wasn't an idiot. It was unlikely to change things, and much more likely was that it would cost him his life.

So unlikely it was going to change things, but was it beautiful? His outspokenness, his courage, his speaking out, his standing in and for moral value, the good—was it beautiful? Was it noble? Was it brave? Was it inspiring? Does it remain a model to be respected and honored and aspired to, that he chose and acted and spoke as he did back then, even at the cost of his own life?

And in the end, that's what happened in 1945.

They hung him alive in a basement with six other people and executed him from a meat hook in 1945. But he had done the right thing, no matter what. Sometimes virtue matters more than efficacy.

I think of the Titanic when it was sinking. There weren't enough lifeboats for everyone on the ship, so the rich got priority first—women and children—then the remaining women and children. But there were still women and children and some men left on the ship as it tilted and went down into the icy waters, abandoned, knowing they were going to die. And they started singing hymns—hymns to God, hymns in praise of the divine.

What's the point? But to me there's something beautiful there for the soul, something noble, something of virtue and value for the soul. They were going to die anyway, so what was the point? Yet there's something that transcends mere efficacy.

In my talks on "An Ecology of Love," I've explored how there are different kinds of activism. One type is very focused on practical results—this is crucially important. But there's another kind that has to do with really doing the right thing, standing up for the right thing, saying the right thing. It may not be so focused on efficacy; it's more focused on what we might call the soul sense of things. One participates in an action,

stands up for something, takes a risk for something—really for the soul's sake. It's doing the right thing, embracing virtue, even if it doesn't lead to effective outcomes, even if its effects are limited.

Virtue and soul are not always synonymous, but there's a relationship. Just as on the sinking Titanic, there's something one does regardless of the outcome.

These two perspectives on ethics—virtue and efficacy—they're not separate. They're two ends of a spectrum of activism and ethical consideration. But as Alasdair MacIntyre points out, virtue has almost completely dwindled and been eclipsed by the efficacy approach in our modern culture's worldview and anthropology. Yet they're both important pieces of a larger puzzle.

At our current point in history, in our culture and wider society, there's a strong case for the resurrection of virtue as a primary consideration in our relationship with ethics, choice, and action.

Take climate change, for example. Many people involved in climate activism or research—looking directly at current scientific data, facts, and trends—feel like we've already gone off the edge of a cliff. What's the point? Humanity is likely already locked into three or four degrees of temperature rise, almost no matter what we do now. The likelihood of collectively curbing our carbon emissions or addressing these issues seems relatively slim.

Yet we can become too dualistic about climate change or species loss, as if it's simply black and white. Three degrees of warming is much better than eight degrees; two degrees is better than three. There's never a cliff beyond which everything becomes completely pointless. There are gradations of catastrophe. When we look closely at scientific data and larger socioeconomic trends, we can fall into despair and black-and-white thinking. But it's more nuanced—1.5 degrees is definitely better than 2 degrees, which is better than 3 degrees, which is far better than 8 degrees. All will be challenging, but there are degrees of difficulty.

But there's another consideration here regarding "what's the point"—one that has more to do with doing the right thing, with what is virtuous, with resonating with and aligning oneself with what has moral value. In this relationship, even if we are going off the edge of a cliff, even if we're all going down with the Titanic, even in tragic situations where nothing can be redeemed—this virtue ethics, this idea of doing the right thing regardless, introduces another dimension beyond practicality and measurable results.

It invites consideration of what we might call ideal values—and I want to return to that word "ideal." It opens us to divinity, to the ethos of human beauty and potential, to this invitation to the fully human being. It invites that whole other dimension regardless of the actual practical result.

I hope you're listening with your soul and hearing the implications for your soul in all this.

This applies not just to seemingly hopeless cases where our efficacy is very limited, but also where efficacy is uncertain or complex—when the effectiveness of our actions or choices is unclear or appears

diluted in the web of conditions and the effects of others' actions and choices. Climate change is again a perfect example.

What's the point of me choosing this or that difficult choice of renouncing whatever it is—eating meat or flying too much or whatever—what's the point of me doing that if all these other people are just going ahead anyway? My flight is going anyway even if I don't get on it. My contribution of emissions in the totality I can't trace, as we outlined in one of the previous talks on ethics. I can't actually trace my exact carbon emissions and what exact result that will have, unlike if I shoot someone with a gun where it's very obviously me that did that.

So exactly these situations where the efficacy of our actions is uncertain, of our choices, or is diluted in the whole complex web of conditions or of the effects of other actions—that might be also where the virtues aspect should be more prominent in our thinking and a guide to our moral choices.

If we just think in terms of efficacy, we think, yeah, the flight's going anyway. I only ate a little section of the butt of that cow, or whatever. The cow is going to be slaughtered anyway, etc. There's a whole other side to this, and that's the virtue perspective.

Now we should point out that while we're focusing on efficacy and virtue, there are other considerations as well. Let's just keep it at those two for now. Too much emphasis on virtue over and above efficacy of action wouldn't be a virtue, right? If I'm so unconcerned and unattuned to what has potential efficacy and I'm just focused on my own sense of virtue, that's going to be not very virtuous. That itself constitutes a kind of failing in terms of virtue. It's not a moral value to do that.

For example, someone might be extremely courageous in some situation—let's say soldiers at war defending something—and a soldier is extremely courageous and doing something gets themselves shot and killed, but not for any good purpose. It doesn't help his fellow soldiers. It doesn't protect anyone else. It doesn't have any effect in the larger scheme of things. They've just done something extremely courageous or brave without any consideration of the relative efficacy and how that weighs up in the larger equation. And if there were other choices where there was some efficacy of an action, then doing that extremely courageous action without efficacy—I don't even know if it qualifies as being courageous. It's not a virtue. Too much emphasis on virtue over and above efficacy is itself not a virtue.

Let's say a couple more things for now. Hartman makes a point that when we act virtuously, when we act in line with a moral value or aligned with or devoted to a moral value, we're actually not concerned with ourselves, so to speak. We're concerned with how that affects another person. So my kindness towards someone else is for that other person. I'm not thinking about me and kindness or generosity. I'm not thinking about me and how it affects me. I'm thinking about them and the effect on them.

But I wonder whether it's that simple, especially when we get conscious of this whole area, or when we've been exposed to certain teachings. I wonder whether ethical actions and intentions can actually be

regarded as kind of double intentions, having a double intentionality, contrary to what Nikolai Hartmann says.

So they are aimed at the good of another, or the good for another. My kindness, my generosity, my concern, my justice, my dispensing of justice if I'm in that position, is aimed definitely at the good of another, but also at one's own virtue, at one's own being resonant with and sensitive to one's own sense of virtue, one's own building of virtue, one's own telos as a human being, the demands of one's conscience. So there's a kind of double intentionality—towards the other, but also towards one's own being, towards one's own soul, towards one's heart and the development of one's life and that sense of fullness and the beauty of life.

So that double intentionality is actually, in a way, analogous to consciousness, which is aware of and directed to an object. That's how consciousness functions. It's directed to an object. It's aware of an object. But it's secondarily, if you like, aware of itself. Usually, there's a secondary awareness of awareness for itself. It's awareness of itself. It's not usually amplified to the subject. It can be amplified with practice though, and some of the emptiness teachings we've put out there involve amplifying that, getting a sense of the awareness of awareness.

It just goes naturally with any awareness. I'm aware of the clock, I'm aware of speaking, I'm aware of the words that I'm listening to, but I'm also aware that I'm aware. It's just implicitly bound up. It's part of what makes up awareness. And that sense of that can be amplified.

So it can be amplified with practice, with regard to awareness. But I wonder if awareness of virtues and an aspiration, a passion, a love for growing virtue can also be trained.

So I think, contrary to what Nikolai Hartmann says, there's a double intentionality there. We are concerned with our own soul and our own being. There's a kind of self-reflexive intention. Sometimes people talk about the self-reflexive nature of awareness, which just means that awareness is aware of itself while it is primarily aware of other objects. But that self-reflexive awareness that's intrinsically wrapped up and part of awareness can be amplified, as I say. There's a self-reflexive intention in ethical action as well, when we choose in this way.

So Hartman, let's just quote from Hartman then: "the object of the high-minded or loving person is not to be high-minded or loving, but that the other person to whom something is given or whom he makes glad may have the gift or the gladness."

In his inquiry, he distinguishes between the primary intention toward others' wellbeing and what seems to be absent - any consideration of our own moral development. "He gives out of love," Hartmann writes, "but not for the sake of being a loving person. He is concerned not at all with his own moral being, but with the being of the other person, and indeed by no means only with that other person's moral, but with his whole being. Bodily as well as mental. That is to say, with conditions that are valuable for that person."

But I wonder if this account is really complete or true. As I've suggested, is there not also a certain kind of joy or delight, a fulfillment, a sense of beauty in exercising virtues? And is this self-reflexive, self-directed strand of being virtuous perhaps akin to the self-reflexive nature of awareness, but also to the auto-eroticism we find in eros?

When we were unpacking the nature of eros, particularly in the Eros Unfettered talks, we explored how auto-eroticism is actually an aspect, a component, a dimension of eros itself. When we have eros for something else, we're also enjoying our own eros. More significantly, we become an erotic object for ourselves - ourself becomes an erotic object for ourself. This is perhaps clearer in sexual eros, where when we're finding another erotically attractive, when we're engaged in intimacy with someone, there's also this finding ourselves erotically attractive. And this is actually a necessary component - not egoistic, but a necessary part of how eros constellates.

So we see these parallels - a kind of self-reflexive intention operating within awareness, within eros, and within ethical action. All of these self-reflexive intentions or attitudes are usually relatively obscure to consciousness. They remain secondary, and we may not even notice them at first. And certainly, if any of them dominate too much over the more natural primary intentions - whether virtuous behavior toward others, awareness directed toward its objects, or eros toward an erotic object - they will create a kind of imbalanced self-centeredness, leaving us unattuned and insensitive to others and to the world.

If in sexual eros or lovemaking I'm more turned on by myself than by my partner, something is clearly out of balance. If I'm generally more aware of the awareness itself than of its objects - apart from specific practices moving in certain directions - that's not very helpful. Similarly, if I'm more concerned with my own moral development than with the actual effects of my kindness on this person, or the impact of my generosity, then something has shifted out of balance.

But still, these remain elements of our lives, of our minds, of our being. Don't we sometimes aim at the image of a beautiful life? Isn't this part of what calls to us? And again, with respect to climate change or species loss - situations where the effects of our choices and actions are largely invisible to us, where it's difficult to see the impact due to the complexity of globalization - isn't this love of virtue, this sense of our human telos toward the beautiful life, even more important than in other ethical situations or transactions?

With regard to soul-making and the importance of these considerations for soul, this double intentionality - this self-reflexive intention that forms part and parcel of our engagement with virtues and moral values - relates to our sense of the beauty of those virtues, to the potential for soul-making they contain, and to the eros we have for values themselves. This connection between eros and values is something I want to return to, as it opens yet another dimension of how our ethical life participates in the deepening and beautification of soul.

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