The Image of Ethics (Part 3)

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So again, we're looking at how soul-making dharma and soul-making practice can be used as an approach to ethics. Soul-making dharma both in terms of the philosophy, the conceptual framework, and also the nuts and bolts, sensitivities, sensibilities, and capabilities amassed and developed in soul-making practice—how all that can be brought to bear on the whole question of ethics.

We outlined at the beginning of these ethics talks seven or eight kinds of needs that I felt an ethical system should have—seven or eight items on a wish list for an ethical approach. One of them was dimensionality, and we've started to talk a little bit about it. I want to spend more time talking about that today: that particular need, the need to root ethics in some other sense, some other dimension, something deeper, higher, another level of being. The need to have recourse to some sense of dimensionality or some other level to justify, explain with regard to ethical choices, with regard to ethics as a whole—why ethics, why this ethics, why that choice.

One of the things that's happened historically is that a certain kind of dimensionality was provided by what we would call images, or what we have come to call images in soul-making dharma—imaginal images. A certain kind of dimensionality given historically by angels or daemons, or whatever one may call them, as we still call them as well: imaginal figures, angels, daemons. The kind of dimensionality they provide as being intermediate between human being and the transcendent, ineffable, completely beyond of the ultimate godhead, of the divinity, of the Buddha nature, of the Dharmakaya.

And that whole dimensionality that they provide just by being intermediate. We talked about how they reflect the attributes of God, of this otherwise completely transcendent being of whom one cannot ascribe any attributes. The angels, the daemons as refracting, reflecting, radiating those attributes of God. And our possibility as human beings, our birthright as human beings to be called by angels and to learn about and get closer to the attributes of God through the angels, and also to reflect and refract those attributes of the Dharmakaya.

Remember that etymology of the Dharmakaya: a body of dharmas, a body of qualities, a body of attributes of a Buddha, of a cosmic Buddha, one could say in the Mahayana. And that we can reflect, express, manifest that through our relationship with the angels.

But come the Protestant Reformation, with its central insistence on the ruling out of any intermediaries between human and God. And then come further the scientific revolution and the rise of secularism, the steady, slow rise of secularism. We are left in a position nowadays of needing to legitimize angels, images, daemons as teachers or guides of virtue, of value, of ethics.

So we've needed to put the whole thing in a new conceptual framework that takes into account and addresses everything that has come between the Middle Ages, medieval theology and thinking, the thinking at the time of the Buddha, and what we have now in contemporary Western societies.

So I can say, I can share, when I did share about a sense of praying to the angels, that has maybe quite a different sense than it might have had taken literally hundreds of years ago, perhaps. And I can share that and I can say that sometimes I can sense that I participate in the being of those angels. I'm being very careful with the language here. Sometimes I can sense that I participate in the being of those angels, but that likewise they participate in my being.

Looking more carefully, more closely, I can sometimes sense that I participate in their thought, in the thought of these angels. I participate in their sensing, in their action, in their speech. And again, likewise, they participate in my thinking. The angels participate in my thought—sometimes I can sense that. They participate in my sensing, especially when they're sensing the soul. The angels then are participating in my sensing, and I in theirs. They participate in my action, in my speech and communication. Sometimes I can sense all that.

And the whole thing has both a sense and a concept undergirded by the Imaginal Middle Way—neither real nor not real. So neither real nor not real, but yet I can pray, and yet it is still powerful. That prayer is powerful. So the ontology here and the epistemology here is different. And we've had to shape that because of everything that's come between, partly resting on a lot of what's come between.

I want to look a little further into this whole question of this whole area or element of our wish list—this item on our need list of dimensionality. I started outlining four ways that dimensionality might have been provided in the past, and I want to pick that up again.

The point here—just to be sure—this is definitely not a history lesson, but the question is more what can we learn here? What might we learn? And learn in the best sense. I mean learn in terms of what does it imply for our way forward? What might we take from that? What might we have to modify? And as well, what might soul-making dharma offer?

to these ways, to these possibilities of dimensionalizing, of providing some recourse to some sense of dimension? What ways might soul-making dharma and that whole conceptual framework modify some of these attempts or ways of providing dimension, dimensionality? So that's really the point.

We talked about these four approaches, and one of them was what has been called voluntarism. In other words, God commanded it. So why is this thing right or wrong to do? Because God commanded it. It's there in the Bible. And this is necessarily a dimension, it should be obvious, because God, by nature—his nature in this way of thinking—is a being of a different dimension. So if God commands it, the command of God, the word of God, is automatically something coming from a different dimension. That's kind of all the grounding you need, all the sense of dimensionality. Still, be clear, there's a very clear dimensionality

there.

Notice here the epistemology. God commanded it. How do you know? What's in the Bible? So the epistemological recourse—the authority about knowledge, remember what epistemology means, what knowledge can I trust—is a reliance on scripture.

Now, to some of us that sounds completely ridiculous or archaic, but it's very much there in the Buddhist tradition. If you look, there are plenty of Mahayana texts, certainly in Tibetan tradition, probably in the Indian Mahayana as well—I'm pretty sure, in fact almost certainly—there will be texts devoted just to epistemology. How do we, as I said, epistemology... we need to base our understanding of emptiness and our process with emptiness on an epistemology. Otherwise, how do you know? You had this meditation experience, something faded. If you're doing it that way, how do you know you can trust that knowledge? Or you used your logical, analytical meditation and you saw it must be empty—how do you know you can trust logic? These all need to be epistemologically grounded.

Always in these Mahayana texts on epistemology, there's one category of epistemology, one sort of category of valid knowledge, which is scripture. Which is, well, it's in a sutta. The Buddha said it. So that's always regarded that way. To some, this sounds, as I said, kind of completely archaic and a little even silly, but it's actually very, very common among most Western Buddhists—this recourse to what did the Buddha say, and finding something in a sutta, and it goes back to "the Buddha said."

I've touched on this elsewhere—it's a sensitive subject—but I just want to point out, in this voluntarism, what we're calling that, as trying to provide dimensionality, there is this epistemological basis in scripture. The Buddhist tradition has had that very strongly for hundreds and hundreds of years. It's still alive and well, certainly in Asian Buddhism, and actually very much in Western-born and Western Buddhists as well.

The ontology regarding God here is usually a kind of very simple, reified "God just is, definitely God exists." Sometimes it's a more sophisticated ontology in which God kind of exists more than anything else exists. Very occasionally, it's an extremely sophisticated ontology in the medieval—actually pre-ancient, going from Pseudo-Dionysius and Plato, in fact. Well, its roots are there. It wouldn't be... With Dionysius, you get this recourse to scripture as well, so it probably started around then—maybe Philo, actually even earlier, Philo of Alexandria. It doesn't matter anyway. The nature of God is beyond existing and not existing, and it's quite sophisticated, a sort of negative theology that's incorporated. But usually people who put a lot of emphasis on this just very simple voluntarism—God commanded it, end of story, about what's ethical and what's not—usually the ontology regarding God is very, very simple, almost startlingly, naively simplistic, usually.

But something's quite interesting about this voluntarism, because after the Middle Ages and from the start of the Protestant Reformation, something also was central in the thrust of the Protestant Reformation and what they insisted on. A lot of what they insisted on was based in a theology of God's total and totally free

sovereignty. In other words, God's sovereignty, God's power was completely unimpeded by anything at all. God was free to make the universe any old way, in a completely irrational way. God could have said it's ethical to kill and lie and cheat and steal and commit adultery and not respect your parents. He could have turned the Ten Commandments completely upside down, apart from the first one or two that are actually about God. So God is completely free.

What they were reacting to here was a tradition from Platonism and even Pythagoreanism—that there's a kind of order in the universe, a rational order, so that the whole creation, if you like, of the universe had to be ordered in a certain way. It was inevitably flowing or emanating from the very nature of God, so that the universe had to be a certain way. Within that, ethics and the good life and virtue, they all had to be a certain way.

The Protestant Reformation—a lot of what they were insisting on was really based in a sort of really strident reaction to that idea. God is not impelled or constrained or trammeled to create the universe in any way at all. There's no rational order that kind of flows out. It's completely God's will, and that's a totally free will, totally free power and sovereignty. So there's no rationality in the sense of a cosmic order or rational cosmic order in the first sense that I think we touched on the other day—I'll come back to that today. There's no cosmic order that implies or underlies ethics.

It's just God's will. And that's a completely free will. There's nothing at all in any way that limits or constrains God's power. And so the whole thinking of the Protestant Reformation was thinking partly from that very germ. We have to think of God this way—William of Ockham and people like that. Nothing at all to limit God's totally free sovereignty and power.

Which also meant, as we touched on the other day, there's no place then for ceremonies to make anything holy. There's no place for ceremonies to be in part unnecessary for our salvation. There's no place for sacraments. There's no place for intermediaries, as we touched on. There's also no place for human action and human development to bring about salvation.

Salvation is something completely God-given, completely dependent on the will or the whims of a totally free God. Nothing you can do as a human being to change that. And there are no intermediaries, no sacraments, no ceremonies that can help, no development of character, no development of virtues, etc. Nothing at all to limit the sense of God's power. Everything completely dependent on God's power.

And with that, as we touched on briefly, no ceremonies, no sacraments, etc. No intermediaries, no priests. And no special human action. So no development, no dedicated intense development in a monastery or anything like that made any sense. Salvation comes only from God.

And therefore with that, as a kind of corollary, there's this elevation of ordinary life. There's no longer a better kind of life. The really good life is if you can become a monk or a nun and give yourself completely to God, or be a priest, or it's the time in church, the time of the sacrament—that's the blessed space and

something else is not.

So there's this elevation then. With the wiping away of any place for ceremony, sacraments, intermediaries, human effort, human striving, human action—with the wiping away of any place for all that—then ordinary life necessarily expands. The place for ordinary life necessarily expands to fill that vacuum, if you like. So there's this elevation of ordinary life that comes with and after the Protestant Reformation.

These things don't happen overnight; they're gradual. But it was there from the start, right from the start. Luther cancelling his monastic celibacy vows and marrying, the whole Protestant work ethic—it's all tied into this.

Now the elevation of ordinary life might sound to us at first like, "Oh, that's really non-dual." Then you have a really kind of what we would in Dharma language call a non-dual approach or view, because everything becomes holy. Ordinary life becomes holy. It's very Zen almost—some schools of Zen.

But it's interesting. It might sound non-dual, but it's actually totally and radically dualistic in its theological origin. There's this infinitely powerful God, and then anything else, anything human beings can work to develop or strive to grow in themselves, is irrelevant. So it sounds non-dual, but actually it's coming from a radically dualistic theological origin.

And just to make a sort of side point: sometimes people think the Protestant Reformation was in objection to, or in reaction to, the corruption in the priesthood. But actually it wasn't primarily—that wasn't the main point. The main point was a theological point, going back to William of Ockham. It was about God's power and not wanting to limit God's power.

If we think about this idea of voluntarism today, there are people in the world who still think that way from different religious traditions. It's just right or it's just wrong because it's there in the scripture. And it's taken very simply and concretely like that. There's very little other thought about ethics or other grounding needed for ethics.

And of course, at the same time in our world today, there are billions probably of atheists. So atheism is very prevalent. Such an idea as voluntarism to ground ethics is completely not a viable, sustainable idea nowadays for many people. And as I said, when there is a voluntarism alive today, it's usually interpreted, again, through a kind of radical duality of human and God, and a kind of literalism.

And if you remember back, I must have been in the Sila and Soul talks, probably near the beginning, where I did a little exercise comparing someone who was a fundamentalist religious terrorist and their views, which on a very superficial hearing can sound like they're saying and thinking some of the similar things that soul-makers seem to say. I spent time debunking that by going and pointing out the differences there.

If you remember that—I'm not going to do it again—but if you remember that, two of the problems with that sort of fundamentalist stance and two of the differences from soul-making Dharma were exactly that: the kind of radical duality of human and God, which is not really entertained, or is very difficult to entertain within a soul-making Dharma context. I mean, you can, but even that's within a backdrop of it not being really radically dual. It's sort of temporarily entertaining something that's really hard to sustain within the bigger framework of participation and creation and discovery and dependent on ways of looking and all that. Radical duality between human and God and literalism are two of the main differences.

So I suppose this voluntarism could be reinvigorated through a soul-making dharma framework and reinvigorated imaginally with notions of duty and things like that, as there are elements of the imaginal in our imaginal. But again, you have to be really careful if one chooses to play with that, because it really needs all the elements of the imaginal—all the elements of the imaginal, neither real nor not real, which are not literalist, this participation, creation, discovery, humility. We ran through all that in those talks before on the Sila and Soul. And it really needs all the elements.

So maybe not impossible, but harder today. And certainly I would be a lot less nervous about it, as I think most people would be nervous about it perhaps, but I would be less so if it was within a soul-making Dharma framework with all the protection and the softening and the flexibility and the wisdom of the soul-making Dharma framework itself and all the elements in the imaginal.

Anyway, that's voluntarism, which we talked about. The second one we talked about—I'm taking them in a different order tonight than last night—was the cosmic order. And the cosmic order, the order of the cosmos being something that implied and guided our ethical stance, our ethical responses to life and our ethical direction and development of our ethos.

So you get this in Plato, you probably get it in Pythagoreanism—I don't know much about it—but certainly you get it in Plato. So the cosmic order itself, once we see it, we can't help but feel drawn towards the higher, using the lower elements of the order as kind of—not really rungs, but something like rungs—or they draw us up, let's put it that way, they draw us up to the higher, towards the higher.

So you get that very much in Plato and in Platonic philosophy. And then you come to someone like Augustine, St. Augustine of Hippo, and he's very much influenced by Platonic philosophy. His Christianity was a molding, his theology was a molding, really, of Platonic and Christian elements. And so he writes something—now talking about cosmic order as looking at the possibility of the notions of cosmic order providing a kind of dimensionality for ethics, providing a sense of other dimensions which can ground and inform our ethics.

So this is from Augustine from his *De Civitate Dei*. He says: "Bodily loveliness is made by God but is nevertheless temporal, carnal, and a lesser good. It is wrongly loved if it is loved above God, the eternal, inward, and lasting good. Just as the covetous man subordinates justice, the value of justice, to his love of

gold"—think of someone who doesn't care about justice, he just wants to steal gold or get rich or whatever it is—"Just as the covetous man subordinates justice to his love of gold, through no fault in the gold but in himself, so it is with all things. They are all good in themselves and capable of being loved either well or badly. They are loved well when the right order is kept, loved badly when this order is upset. Hence it seems to me that the briefest and truest definition of virtue is that it is the order of love."

There are two elements there that he's stressing: an order in the cosmos in terms of a ranking of what's higher or lower. So to rank the value of justice above gold, above money, above getting rich, is appropriate valuing. Hopefully most of us would tend to agree with that. To rank gold above justice, to love, pursue getting rich above justice—common in the world—is the wrong order. We're loving things not according to their order. So order and love, cosmic order and love go together. There's an order of things and there's an order of valuing that completely corresponds to that, and our love needs to be ordered with those scales of the cosmic order of things and their value that goes with it.

So one interesting exercise would be to consider how that compares and contrasts with Hartmann's scale of values. And for example, the transgressions that Hartmann talks about—transgressions of lower values being more grievous transgressions than the omission or neglect or failure in higher values. So that if we fail to stretch or aspire to some really high value, that's not such a big sin in Hartmann's thinking than it is to transgress a lower value, like steal or kill or whatever it is.

In Augustine, in just that little paragraph of Augustine—Augustine is a little too short because then we wonder again about things like how Augustine's conception would handle the possibilities of antinomies at the same level. What do we do with that in Augustine's conception? Because there will be certain values that exist at the same level, or maybe he's suggesting there aren't. Anyway, that's an interesting kind of exercise. I'm not going to go into elaborating on that. It might be interesting for some of you to explore.

So first of all, I just want to say: how do you hear that passage from Augustine? Do you hear the kind of beauty of the ideas there, or do you hear it as some kind of Christian oppression, anti-physical, anti-body, anti-sexual, etc.? I can certainly—I didn't grow up feeling oppressed by Christianity because I didn't grow up Christian, but I can hear the beauty in it.

There's something very beautiful there, very generous almost, very lovely in what he's trying to put out there—this ordered love for things corresponding to their place in the cosmic order and hierarchy, and therefore their value.

But how different is our modern conception? Just notice how different our modern conception and sense of the cosmos is, as only ordered by its meaningless and purposeless physical laws. We have a sense, most people these days, of living in an uncaring, purposeless and meaningless universe, without divinity or dimensions other than the physical laws.

Physical laws are a kind of dimension. I said the other day that the laws describing an electron's motion

under certain forces are a kind of dimension, or can be seen as another dimension. The mathematical laws that describe an electron's motion can be seen as another dimension other than the actual material thing of an electron, or a muon, or a gluon, or a pion, or whatever particle or quark. Physical laws can be discerned as another dimension. But that's all there is in terms of order and dimensionality.

So for us, citizens and children of modernity and post-modernity, the only order in the cosmos is really the physical laws. That's the only order in the cosmos. Tom Caputo, a philosopher, says science is all the metaphysics you're going to get, or you're allowed. I think his stance is very anti-metaphysical, as was popular until very recently. And this came or grew as a consequence—it developed as a consequence of Descartes and Galileo and others and their decision regarding what is real, what are real objects of knowledge. We touched on that. So when we said this is the only thing that's real, then it becomes: well, these are the only way in which the universe is ordered.

Understand they go together. If we just decide only these kinds of things are real, these kinds of things are secondary, these kinds of things are really, really tertiary—so even color was something secondary, because it's something the human perceives. Again, it's not an objective, independently existing reality like mass or length. And this was the thinking pre-relativity, pre-quantum mechanics. They decided what was real, and then you're just left with a flat universe only ordered according to physical laws.

But Augustine wants to put love and order together—love of virtue and order together, love of things and the cosmic order together. And with respect to love, we do have strong feelings. We have strong love and strong eros in relationship with what we sense as deep, high, holy, divine, as having another dimension.

So this initial marriage and correspondence that Augustine wants to make or emphasize—re-emphasize—is between our love for everything. We can love everything. We need to love it in the right order. Our love needs to be ordered, corresponding to its intrinsic value, which corresponds itself naturally to its place in the cosmic hierarchy, in the cosmic order, the hierarchical order of the cosmos.

Actually, even if just briefly as an aside, there seems to be an order in reading the Pali Canon and the sense of the cosmos there. The word cosmos means order, by the way, from the Greek. But reading the Pali Canon, getting a sense of the cosmos, it seems a very different cosmos than most Westerners, post-Enlightenment, would consider themselves, or feel themselves, sense themselves, take themselves seriously as living in. The Pali Canon cosmos seems to have different levels of being, divinities, and it seems to be ordered by karma and rebirth and transmigration between levels. You can be reborn in the Brahma heaven level and then in this hell or the hungry ghost realm or whatever it is. So these different levels, but still, there's a hierarchical order of a kind, but the whole thing is still kind of purposeless. The cosmos itself is kind of purposeless, and not basically or overall good.

And that would be a fundamental Augustinian and Platonic notion, I think—certainly Augustinian—that the cosmos is good, and its ordering is good. In the Pali Canon cosmos, there's some kind of order, there's

hierarchies, there's different levels of being, but the whole thing is essentially purposeless and not, as I said, fundamentally or taken overall, regarded as good. "The cosmos is good. God's work is good"—it's not really there.

So we've inherited, mostly from the West—we don't really inherit Pali Canon cosmos, most people, maybe some do, but most people in the West inherit this sense of order we have in the cosmos, this absence of hierarchy. It's no wonder it's hard for most of us these days to seriously entertain Augustine's sense of the ethical life. The ethical life is one that loves all things, but loves all things in an ordered way, according to where they are in the hierarchy, where the value is, and loves, values things, and loves the value in things, in a hierarchically ordered way. It's very hard to seriously entertain that whole conception.

So if we, in our modern and post-modern predicament, are not already sort of fallen into its abyss, we sort of teeter on the brink of postmodern nihilism, both in terms of metaphysics and in terms of ethics.

Because we don't have that kind of dimensionality. So thinking about this cosmic order as a possible dimensionalizing and rooting, a kind of guidance for ethics, support for ethics.

I think that even the vaguest sensing with soul, the slightest movement into sensing with soul with regard to nature and the things of nature—even the vaguest exploration of that—can get a sense that something like mass species extinction going on right now, species extermination, almost runaway climate change, that these are sins against the order of the cosmos. That sense would be there because even the vaguest sensing with soul brings some sense of the holiness of things and the dimensionality shading into divinity.

Species extinction, climate change—these would be felt as sins against the order of the cosmos, whatever words you want to choose. There's something greater than the sin against the possible uses for humanity—if this bacteria in the Amazon or this fungus found only in such a rainforest or ecosystem gets lost to humanity, or if humanity has less pasture land and less drinking water. Even greater, perhaps, than the sin to humanity of that loss, or the suffering for animals, there is a sense of a sin against the order of the cosmos, something that goes so deep as a kind of affront and pain to the soul.

Of course, all three concerns are there—the concern for the plight of humanity, particularly the poorest and marginalized, and the concern for the suffering of animals with their extinction and the way we treat them in industrial farming. Of course they're there. But there's something almost of a different order—this pain when we sense that we are implicated in this massive, imponderable transgression against the order of the cosmos.

We can have a sense of an ordered cosmos, ordered hierarchically in this way, and we can have that sense in sensing with soul. But in Soul-making Dharma practice, we can also deliberately move between entertaining different kinds of cosmologies—Augustine's cosmology, the flat modern and postmodern one, the Pali Canon one. The cosmopoiesis can come first. We can simply entertain a certain concept or vision of what the cosmos is and how it is ordered, then practice with it. We can move between different

cosmological ideas and see what opens up, see what happens to the actual sense of things.

With enough Soul-making Dharma practice and all the sensitivity, receptivity, and meditative skill developed there, we can actually move deliberately between different cosmoses and see what they do—what they do to us, to the heart, to the soul, to the very sense of things, the very sense of matter.

Returning to Augustine's example of bodily loveliness—in certain religious traditions, bodies are not holy. He's not quite saying that; he's placing them on a hierarchy. But with Soul-making Dharma, the question is whether this body, whatever body I'm speaking of—mine, my lover's, or someone attractive to me—is sensed with eros, sensed with soul. Remember, eros means far more than sexual attraction. I'm sensing this person's body with eros. There may be no sexual attraction whatsoever, but there's eros there, in our sense of the word.

In Soul-making Dharma, the question is whether this body is sensed with soul, sensed with eros. When it is, when there is eros in our sense, and that is allowed to ignite, instigate, catalyze the soul-making dynamic in psyche and logos, then there will be a sense of divinity in and through that body.

Here we have—and this is so important—a sense of ordering, and our love being commensurate and correspondent to that hierarchical ordering in the sense of divinity. But the position of something on that hierarchy does not rest in the thing itself alone, independently, inherently, intrinsically. It comes in participation. How am I relating to it? When I relate and sense with eros, when I sense with soul, then the divinity is right there in and through that body, and therefore it takes a high place on the hierarchy. It's not the thing itself. It's what's co-created, co-discovered in sensing with soul, in the relationship with the thing.

This is really key in terms of ontology and how Soul-making Dharma can approach this question of dimensionalizing and cosmic order—to open it up or shake it up in a different way, reorder the sense of order.

Let's linger with these questions of dimensionality and ontology. Grounding our ethics in the dimensionality of a cosmic hierarchy like Augustine's usually assumes, or subsumes within it, a naive ontology—an ontology that most people today still carry of independent objective existence. Most people today don't believe in any kind of cosmic hierarchy, but there's still a naive ontology assumed within us of independent objective existence. If we're talking about cosmic order, this hierarchy has independent objective existence.

With the scientific revolution and then the Western Enlightenment, that whole notion seems trashed, completely trashed. How can a person believe in such a hierarchical cosmic order as Augustine describes after the scientific revolution and Western Enlightenment became embedded in the culture?

However, as we've discussed many times, today, with developments in quantum physics, with our understanding of emptiness as I would understand it, with developments in Western philosophy over the

last fifty years or more—any one of those delivers or opens for us possibilities of ontologies that don't assume independent objective existence, but rather involve a more participatory ontology. We participate in creating, discovering reality.

John Wheeler, the great twentieth-century physicist at the forefront of so many developments in quantum physics, general relativity, and other areas of modern physics, spoke of a participatory universe.

This is the nature of our universe—it's participatory. And let me be really clear about what this means. It doesn't simply mean that we take part in the universe. Of course we participate in the universe just by existing and breathing. I breathe in the universe, I breathe it out. I eat it in, I excrete it out. I drink it in, I pee it out. We participate in society by expressing ourselves and voting. But that's not what Wheeler meant, and it's not what we mean here.

We're talking about something much more radical and fundamental. This subatomic particle, this so-called fundamental particle—this quark, this electron, this muon, this pion, this photon—where it is, what it is, whether it's a wave or a particle, whether it is a thing at all in any sense that we can meaningfully use the language of a real thing, how fast it goes, how much it weighs—its very beingness is dependent on the way we look, the way it's observed. It's dependent on the observer. We participate in the creation of the most fundamental constituents of the universe. That's why we call it the participatory universe.

So there's now the possibility of different, non-naive ontologies that don't assume independent objective existence, but rather assume participatory reality. Existence is participatory in this very deep sense.

Soul-making dharma practice both leads to and involves, I would say, loving order in this way—loving what is sensed as highest or divine or whatever words we might use in the cosmic order. And it recognizes that this sense of order, this sense of divinity, this sense of what is highest or deepest, is neither objective nor subjective. We've gone beyond such naive polarities of ontological thinking.

So it loves order, it loves the high and the deep and the divine and the dimensionalized, but it recognizes that this order is neither objective nor subjective. Soul-making dharma also provides the training to be able to sense in that way—to sense the divinity, to actually sense it, to really have that impact on the soul, to recognize it. It provides the techniques, the practices to do that, and also to feel, to sense, to open to and handle the eros that comes with it. All of that soul-making dharma allows and supports, both in philosophy and in practice.

And it doesn't need to only transcend the object—"this is just a material object, this is just form, I want the unformed, the unfabricated." Yes, that movement and that possibility is very much part of what we're including as soul-making dharma. But it doesn't only need to do that. That's not the only place where the highest resides—in the more unfabricated. I don't only need to transcend; it's just one of the possibilities. It certainly doesn't do away with transcendence and dimensionality and just flatten the cosmos or assume

the reality of a flat cosmos.

Very loosely, there's a kind of historical parallel to this with Eriugena—again, Platonically influenced, influenced by Pseudo-Dionysius. I think he was a monk, an Irish monk, and quite a radical, novel theologian. In his thought—and there's a very loose parallel here—humans are created in the image of God, which means that they can, so to speak, think God's thoughts. If we use our mind well, if we use our soul well, then the thoughts that we have will correspond to God's thoughts because we are made in God's image. And God's thoughts are the structure of the universe. This is a very Platonically influenced theology. So if we use the soul or use the mind well, the order we discover through using our soul and mind well in the universe is just the order that God created and intended. A very loose parallel.

With the sensibility of sensing with soul, what it does is open up our trust for our sense of the divinity in things, of the Buddha nature in things. And that trusting of our sense of the divinity that comes with sensing with soul automatically brings love and reverence towards that sense, towards what we sense as divine. Automatically comes ethics—a steering of the ethics, an ethical stance, and an ethical rooting in that sense of another dimension. But it's, again, neither objective nor subjective. It's participatory. There's a much more sophisticated ontology recognized here.

I remember—it must have been certainly in the last year—I was in the chemo ward getting chemo in the hospital. I was sitting next to a guy who also had pancreatic cancer, metastatic pancreatic cancer, and we talked a little bit while we were getting chemo. He was on a slightly different chemo drug than I was, but essentially the same. We both knew that we were in a process of dying. His process too was quite drawn out. And we both, of course, knew the debilitating and limiting effects of chemo on the body and on the life, really—limiting very much what's possible with the life.

But it was only in the 18th century that this affection for one's spouse and children began to be seen as something that could constitute the meaning of one's life, or be the basis of a meaningful life, or be what makes life worthwhile. Before that, it was just assumed that of course you love your spouse and children - that's natural and beautiful - but that's not what gives life meaning. Meaning came from something else, something beyond the domestic sphere.

Similarly, it was only in the modern period that romantic love began to be seen as something that could be the foundation of a meaningful existence. Before that, romantic love was certainly recognized and celebrated - think of the troubadours and courtly love traditions - but it wasn't seen as the thing that makes life worth living. It was understood to be one beautiful dimension of human experience among others, but not the ultimate source of meaning.

These shifts in what we consider to constitute a meaningful life are historically contingent. They're not universal truths about human nature or the good life. They're particular ways of seeing that have emerged in our culture at specific times. And once we recognize this historical contingency, we can begin to question whether our current assumptions about what makes life meaningful are actually serving the

soul.

This connects back to what I was saying about hierarchy and ordering. In our culture, we've largely flattened the hierarchy of values. We've said that all ways of finding meaning are equally valid, all pursuits are equally worthwhile. But this flattening can actually impoverish the soul. When we don't discriminate between different levels of meaning, different qualities of engagement with life, we can end up settling for something that doesn't actually nourish us at the deepest level.

This doesn't mean we need to go back to some pre-modern hierarchy that dismisses domestic life or romantic love as unimportant. Rather, it means we need to develop our capacity for discernment - our ability to sense into the different qualities of meaning that different activities and relationships offer, and to order our lives accordingly. We need to cultivate what we might call "vertical sensitivity" - the ability to sense when something is opening us to deeper dimensions of meaning and when something is keeping us on the surface.

There has been affection for spouses and children throughout human history—this affection was always present between family members, though not universally. But it was only beginning in the eighteenth century that such affection came to be considered truly important, truly one of the things that makes life worthy. It began to be seen as a significant constituent or qualification for a worthwhile life, a beautiful life. This shift arose from the elevation of ordinary life. But as I mentioned, we don't recognize this historical contingency. Something has become entrenched, and what has also become entrenched is this taboo against questioning what makes a worthwhile life—whether you or I are really living a worthwhile life, orienting our lives in that direction. It becomes socially taboo to suggest this, to bring it up, to question someone else in this way.

Historically, there was this long-standing idea from ancient times through the Middle Ages of a hierarchically ordered cosmos. Then with the scientific revolution and the Protestant Reformation, there was a collapse of this understanding—at least for large segments of the population who could no longer really entertain that idea. What emerged instead was an emphasis on order in the universe, but not hierarchical order as Plato and Augustine would have it.

Moral philosophers like Locke and Hutcheson also emphasized order—the order of the universe—but not hierarchical order. The order they invoked to support another dimension for ethics was a much more Cartesian order, deriving from Descartes. This was the idea of the universe as clockwork, interlocking parts designed by God to work together for the mutual preservation and flourishing of human beings. But again, I return to this question of what flourishing means—this too is very contingent on philosophy and our sense of dimensionality. All these things are tied together.

Essentially what we have here is an order that's horizontal and flat, not dimensional. There's no hierarchical order, just a flat order of the cosmos. With this comes an idea of good—of moral good, of the good life—as being only happiness or pleasant sensations. The good life and beautiful life is no longer one

directed toward the highest, oriented upward on the scale, on the rungs of the cosmic order's staircase. Instead, what is good becomes only pleasant sensations and happiness.

This was claimed to result from "natural" observation of biological and physical systems—this is what human beings want, perhaps animals too. Only happiness or pleasant sensations. Jeremy Bentham, regarded as the father of utilitarianism, embodied this philosophy. He wrote that wanting anything higher than simple, natural pleasant sensations of the body and happiness—wanting anything higher is just pride or comes from superstitious fear.

Again, we see Charles Taylor's observation that many such philosophies were parasitic. When Bentham claimed that wanting anything higher in life stems from pride—thinking you're better than you are, thinking human beings are better than they are—or from superstitious fear of divine punishment, Taylor points out that this rhetoric and judgment was actually parasitic on the Protestant Reformation's well-established ethic of ordinary life. This elevation and affirmation of ordinary life had already become established versus any kind of hierarchical ethics regarding virtues and values. Bentham could make such polemic statements because they rested on this well-established ethic of ordinary life. He would say: don't try to rise above gross sense pleasures.

So there's a shift in order from vertical to horizontal, and with this horizontal view comes a flattening of ethics' goal—what we need to care for in society and what we should aim for in ourselves. Nothing high, just pleasant sensations, just simple, natural happiness.

This is quite interesting. Post-Reformation, there was often really vitriolic rejection of asceticism and high moral goals—for example, those espoused by devoted religious or spiritual practitioners. There was scathing rejection of asceticism and high moral aims. Some of this related to the elevation and affirmation of ordinary life and the de-dimensionalizing of hierarchical cosmic order. But some of it, particularly from thinkers like Montaigne or Hume, came from a psychology of needing relief from high moral standards, from pushing oneself and striving to be good, striving toward high virtues.

The thrust in Montaigne and Hume was often: give me a break, don't be proud, get real about what a human being is and should strive for, about our capacities. This attitude remains very common today and can be heard in many Dharma voices as well.

And there's a kind—sometimes it goes with a kind of despising of what is lofty, a kind of despising of what is noble. I'm using the word "noble" here as in aspiring highly with the dignity of aspiring to high virtues and what's beyond reach. I'm not using noble right now in Hartman's way that we talked about in *Sila and Soul*.

So I wonder quite what's going on here. And I wonder if in fact that whole attitude reflects an anti-libidinal stance—reflects a refusal of eros. We talked about this, I'm pretty sure it was in the *Eros Unfettered* talks, but it might have been in another series. Is my philosophy, my dharma, my ethical

thinking, my ethical philosophy and practice, my whole life—is it actually driven by a refusal of eros and a kind of anti-libidinality? A fear of libidinality or imposition of a limit on it? Or is it held, this whole philosophy, in a very limited range of eros and libido?

Someone who holds this kind of view doesn't like the idea of very lofty striving, doesn't like the noble, despises it in some ways. More "give myself a break, get real, don't be proud." Sometimes such a person is very friendly, relatively warm. They enjoy socializing, they enjoy a glass of good wine with a good meal. But all of that—the friendliness, the relative warmth, enjoying socializing, the wine and the good meal—that's not what we call eros.

You can have all that, and it looks like the person's living, they're enjoying company and interaction with human beings, they're warm, and they're enjoying simple pleasures of life—food, good food, good wine, whatever, in moderation. But there can still be all that, and it's held within anti-libidinality.

The striving ascetic, who may be living in solitude or seeking out solitude, who doesn't go for the good wine, who seems a little aloof maybe—the striving ascetic may have much more eros, much more libido. So I wonder, sometimes at least, is it actually this that they're objecting to, that they're shrinking from, that they're uncomfortable with—the eros and the libido that go with lofty aspirations, moral aspirations, and the elevation of that, or the striving towards what is elevated? Is it actually an objection to, a recoiling from, a fear of the eros and the libido—a refusal of that that's driving things?

So that's to me a really important question. Again, what's the psychology, what's the soul-style that underlies, in this case, the ethical style? The picture of the dharma, the range of the dharma, the vision of awakening.

We talked about this before—something particular about anti-libidinal stances, anti-libidinal positions of soul, imprisonments of soul. Because if the soul loves soul-making, if that's a sort of axiomatic principle—the soul loves soul-making—it must love eros and be okay with eros in order to let the soul-making, in order for soul-making to happen, because soul-making needs eros. So an anti-libidinality is kind of a locking of the soul, preventing it or limiting the range of its soul-making, and therefore limiting the range of what it can sense, what it can view, how it can conceive, and how it conceives whatever—ethics, dharma, human existence, etc.

So that's one thing I'm wondering about. But also, the second thing, very importantly as well, is that with a soul-making dharma approach to ethics, then there isn't an insistence on an absolute material standard or demand regarding ethics and virtues. It's rather only a kind of—soul-making dharma really only gives us a kind of request or invitation to a process, to a practice, to a training in approaching questions of ethics and ethical situations.

And that training, I would say, is not more difficult than either Montaigne's or Hume's trainings in philosophy, in literature, in introspection. Some people regard both of them, or one of them, as great

introspectionists, masters of the art of introspection. So it's not that ethics imposes an absolute material standard or demand. It's an invitation to a process, a practice that brings a different relationship with the things of the world and different ethical interactions, virtues, etc.

But you can get a sense with all this of how there is perhaps a suppression, or at least the absence, the disallowing of eros and love—maybe the total suppression, or the partial suppressing of eros and love in relation to ethics, in relation to values and virtues.

If we think about Francis Bacon—he was, I think, a Puritan, certainly very influenced by Puritanism. And he's one of the philosophers who was really emphatic—we can see historically, he really emphasized this sort of instrumental stance. Science, knowledge needs to give us power—power over nature, power to do, power to make things work, technology.

And it's just worth pointing out that originally there was a real religious reasoning and motivation behind this instrumental stance. As I said, he was a Puritan, or certainly very influenced by that Puritan outlook. So science is, in this view, the correct and God-willed view and use of things, and also because it brings human dignity of having rational control—that rational control over things and in relation to things gives a human being dignity. But it's also the correct and God-willed view and use of the things of the world for our preservation and for our pleasure and happiness.

So the instrumental stance was seen as, initially, still religiously rooted. The instrumental stance—meaning how we approach the things of the world, how can we use them, make them part of our technology, technologize them—the instrumental stance originally was part of the way we serve God in creation, by preserving ourselves and by preserving God's horizontal order. And there's also the injunction there to treat things as instruments, not as ends in themselves.

So you can hear the kind of puritanical tenor of that. I want to briefly read something from Charles Taylor writing about this instrumental stance in modern culture:

"The instrumental stance in modern culture is supported not just by the new science, the scientific revolution, not just by the dignity attaching to disengaged rational control. It was also central to the ethic of ordinary life from its theological origins on. Affirming ordinary life has meant valuing the efficacious control of things by which it is preserved and enhanced, as well as valuing the detachment from purely personal enjoyments, which would blunt our dedication to its general flourishing."

As I'll explain, as time went by, the theological origins got forgotten and the whole theology got jettisoned from all this. But initially, this was the religious, puritanically influenced passage of the idea of the instrumental stance in relationship to the horizontal order that God designed.

But then what happens when the vertical order is abolished and a horizontal order takes primary place in the cosmology, in our view of things? That horizontal order is no longer an order of divine signs, of divine forms and ideas. Rather, we're talking about an order where things become parts of a machine. It's not

that this thing or that event or that person is a refraction of an angel, a sign, a theophany of an angel, an expression or manifestation of an attribute of God. That's all gone.

Rather, things become not diaphanous reflections and refractions of particular aspects of divinity, particular attributes of the Dharmakaya, the Buddha nature of the divine. Instead, they become parts of a machine whose parts work together to bring about God's plan. It's quite a different view.

This cosmic order is just one dimension—what we might call horizontal. It's a clockwork kind of ecosystem view. An ecosystem is still horizontal in the way most people think about it these days. It might have the top of the food chain as this animal or that, but there's no difference of dimensionality between the bottom and the top of the food chain. There's only a qualitative difference in terms of who eats whom and how much. So the whole thing's actually horizontal, the way we think about interconnectedness and ecosystems these days.

The cosmic order becomes this one-dimensional, horizontal kind of clockwork machine. If that's the view, then something like species extinction is not really a problem unless it affects the functioning of the ecosystem, unless it affects the functioning of the whole, unless the function of the whole is impaired, unless the working of the clock is affected in a way that is problematic enough for us as humans—because of our investment and our dependence—or is problematic for large other parts of the mechanism. In other words, the whole mechanism itself might be impaired.

The reverence there for order is not reverence in a soul or religious sense. It's a kind of marveling, perhaps, at the intricacy of the web of life, the horizontal order of the cosmos—whether that's regarded as being designed by God or just evolved purely materially without God. It's not reverence in the way we would use that term. It's the whole mechanism's functioning that is important, rather than each of the individual elements being holy just because they are, just because they're connected to the divine through their places in the order as they would be in a hierarchical cosmic order.

Each thing a sign, a theophany, a showing of one or other of the attributes of God. Each expressing an attribute, an aspect, a quality of the Buddha nature, of the Dharmakaya, of what in Platonic terms are the intelligences, the thoughts of God. Each thing a sign, a form, a refraction, an expression of that.

Think about species extinction and a horizontal view of the cosmos. It only matters if it affects us—when we lose that species like the bees, people often say, "Oh, if the bees go then the pollination will go and we'll go hungry." But isn't there something else about our care for the bees and the plight of the bees as a species—something of a sense of their necessity, their beauty, and that beauty has a dimensionality and depth, as we talked about before when we discussed beauty in other talks and series?

In a hierarchically ordered cosmos, each thing has its value, has its place, and it is a refraction of God, of the divine. But in a horizontal cosmos, we can lose this species, that species, and that whole thing, as long as it doesn't affect the whole ecosystem or us.

Note also how totally anthropocentric was the view and concern of those who promulgated this horizontalizing of the cosmic order when it first emerged and its relation with ethics. Adam Smith, John Locke, Jeremy Bentham—this idea of everyone's happiness being prioritized. But who's the everyone? It's very anthropocentric. Actually, it was even more circumscribed than that, I would say.

So there's voluntarism, there's the notion of cosmic order in different ways that can give dimensionality, underpinning to ethics. We talked about how soul-making dharma might come in and modify, support different versions of that. Rationality was another one we mentioned—rationality as a kind of dimensionality.

For someone like Kant, Immanuel Kant, rationality—which was very much connected, for him, with morality and our freedom—were just facets of the same thing. To be rational was more important than to be happy and to have pleasure. Right there, you sense he's establishing a dimensionality. Dimensionality and rationality. Rationality is more important than being happy or having pleasurable feelings. So rationality as an attempt, a way of providing dimensionality for ethics.

And an ability to... Again, what are we going to root our ethics in? What are we going to have recourse to? What is it going to be supported by? It needs to be made sense of in another dimension, by its relationship with another dimension, by the implications streaming from another dimension. And so one of them could be simply rationality, as it was for Kant.

Now, rationality in the usual way that we would understand it is just our ability to think clearly, our ability to make conclusions, deductions, and so forth—our ability to be logical. That as an underpinning of ethics, as a dimensionality of ethics, that human, well, presumably human, merely human capacity to do that.

But rationality as we conceive it in that way is actually a kind of skill. Unless we're just following a rule that's devised or discovered—a rational rule devised or discovered by someone else—then for us to be rational actually means we're relying on a skill that we have developed as human beings, something we've been taught in school and so forth.

And I think: that's interesting. If you want to make that a dimension, then comparing with soul-making practice, isn't discerning soulfulness, or discerning whether something is soul-making, whether this sense of virtue is more soul-making than that, that value is more soul-making than that, or discerning the soul-making, the soulfulness in regard to an image—isn't that also a skill?

I think most people would think, on first reaction to such a thought: "Yes, but soul-making—the skill in soul-making—is much, much harder to develop than a skill in logical thinking, in rationality." That was my first thought. But then I thought, well, maybe that's just because of what we've been taught, how we've been educated. That rationality is the norm, that we're taught from an early age... There's a great deal of emphasis in our culture placed on being able to think clearly, rationally, in that sense.

So that becomes the norm, and therefore that seems to us much... I'm not sure if this is right, but is it that it's just an educational thing? It seems much easier to use our rational intellect. In our culture, it seems much easier than learning all the subtleties and sophistications of soul-making Dharma practice. I'm not sure. It's really a question.

But it's interesting to note that John Locke was also sceptical. So he was a big promoter of human rationality, this capacity to function and use our thinking mind as a basis for ethics. He was one of the main promoters of that, but at the same time he was also sceptical of most humans' ability to be instrumentally rational regarding ethics. So he believed as well that God's law, as it was written in the Bible, as well as God's threat of eternal punishment or eternal reward in hell or heaven, was actually a help from God, a help to humans to make the right choices.

Because though he was principally promoting rationality, he was also sceptical of humans' ability to actually be rational in an instrumental way. So God, in God's mercy, seeing that, actually then put out these promises of eternal reward if you are ethical, and promises of eternal punishment if you're not, and that helped human beings make the right choices.

So that's very interesting. The point I also want to make is: here was a new idea to base ethics in the dimension of rationality, and even the instigator of that idea was saying, "I'm not sure if everyone can do this, actually. I think ideally everyone should be able to do this, but I'm actually not sure. So we have recourse to another idea."

Maybe also with a soul-making approach to ethics. It's like, yes, ideally it would be great if everyone could be taught soul-making dharma and soul-making practice and actually learn that. If the whole culture was so radically, extravagantly, wildly different that that was the case, and still have the thought: hmm, not sure, not sure that everyone would be able to do that. I don't know, it's a question.

So I think I mentioned this when we just introduced the notion of rationality as a dimension, as a possible dimension the other day. But again, drawing on Charles Taylor, he makes the distinction—I'm not sure it's his originally, but it might be—between two uses or two meanings of the word rational. There's what we might call procedural rationality and substantive rationality.

So I'll explain those briefly. Procedural is what I just referred to. It's the ability to use the mind, use the process of logic and clear rational thinking to deduce something, to decide something. There's a procedure. Rationality is a procedure, a way of using the mind—instrumental rationality.

On the other hand, substantive rationality is more what someone like Plato and people much earlier than John Locke really meant by rationality. It was really that there is an order to the cosmos, and human beings, to be rational, means to perceive that order, perceive that hierarchy, and to conform one's being, one's whole mind and soul and heart,

and eros in correspondence with that rational order of the cosmos. That's what it meant to be rational—to

perceive and to order one's life rationally meant living in correspondence with this cosmic order. So that's substantive rationality.

The word rationality has meant very different things and has come to be used in diverse ways. If we say rationality as a basis or dimension for ethics, it has come to be employed in vastly different ways.

For example, Philo of Alexandria is a very significant figure because he was the first person to combine Platonic philosophies with the Jewish religion. He was actually disregarded in the evolving stream of Jewish theology, but in Christian theology, he was absolutely seminal—the first person to integrate those two traditions, the Platonic and the Hebrew scriptures. Later people would incorporate the New Testament as well.

Philo believed that the human mind, because it's akin to God, is like God's mind. Eugena picks up on this idea much later, but its origins lie partly with Philo. The human mind is akin to God because it's made in the image of the divine logos. It's interesting that in the New Testament, John's Gospel begins, "In the beginning was the Logos, in the beginning was the Word." That idea of Logos actually comes from Platonic thinking and very much from Philo's influence.

This idea of human beings being made in the image of the divine Logos—which means the divine reason, the divine rationality—is rooted in the Old Testament, in Genesis, where it says that God made man in the image of God, in the image of the divine. Later, in medieval times, Maimonides interpreted this in what I think was a procedural way. In other words, we are given this rational functioning, and that's what it means to be made in the image of the divine—we can use our minds in this procedural, rational way.

With Philo, I think it probably meant something different. It meant we are made in the image of the divine logos, the divine reason, and therefore we have, to some degree, a capability to receive and discover the truth about realities beyond time and space—about what exists higher in the cosmic order: the angels, the intelligences, the levels of divinity. So Philo is using a more substantive notion of rationality there.

These are very different—procedural rationality and substantive rationality represent very different meanings of the term rationality. Yet through history, there are times when they're often used together.

When you think about Soulmaking Dharma practice as a sort of process or guide for ethics, it's primarily procedural in that language, because we're really talking about a practice or procedure, just like using our minds logically is a kind of procedure that we can be trained in. We have some innate capacity for logical thinking, for the rational procedure, but we can be trained. Some people become extraordinarily skilled in their ability to use the rational mind in a procedural way.

So when we think about Soulmaking Dharma practice as a process or guide to ethics, as an approach to ethics, it appears primarily procedural because you're doing this practice and using it to support, discriminate, or arrive at an ethical choice.

But Soulmaking Dharma practice could also be regarded as substantive, if we borrow Charles Taylor's terms. If we entertain a logos, a conceptual framework, that eros is epistemologically significant—that it has, in John Milbank's words, ontological disclosure. We talked about this the other day, and it's really, really important.

If we entertain the idea that truth is this journey rather than a final arriving point, and that together with other navigations, eros has epistemological significance because it can open up for us the levels of truth—it's the engine for that journey. And we're understanding truth in a participatory way, as something that's create-discovered rather than just discovered.

So if we entertain a conceptual framework that involves a different view of eros and gives it an important place in our ontology and epistemology, and if we think of truth in this way as more of a journey—an infinite journey into the truth of things—and we appreciate that it's create-discovered, that we participate in that, then we might also see Soulmaking Dharma as substantive, as related to something that's true. But the whole notion of truth and how that relation comes about is developed quite differently than we might usually think.

Origen was one of the great early Christian theologians, and he wrote something like this—I'm quoting now from someone writing about Origen, a scholar called Chadwick: "The soul of man has an intuitive longing for God." Origen was insistent that he won't believe that this yearning we have, this eros we have, can have been implanted in a human being's heart and soul unless it is capable of being satisfied. An interesting point: just as each faculty of our senses is related to a specific category of objects, so our nous—which we can translate as our soul knowing—is the corollary of God.

Continue beautifying this talk (part 14/18). Maintain the same tone and style as previous parts.

So we're set up to move into truth, and our eros is actually implanted by God, and it wouldn't be implanted as divine unless it was capable of being satisfied. So again, we can translate that into soul-making terms. Soul-making is never finally satisfied, but it gets satisfied on the journey—the infinite journey of soul-making, the infinite journey into truth.

And this, again, in what he's saying, we can have the sense, we will have the sense, as we develop soul-making practice, of our eros being divine, having its roots in the divine, being given to us by the Buddha nature, by the Dharmakaya, whatever words you like. And in the movements of soul-making, as the soul-making dynamic opens, further levels, aspects, beyonds, dimensions open. That eros is satisfied, and then it moves again. But there's something in the infinite movement that is not unsatisfying at a deep level, but profoundly satisfying.

So again, we take these ideas, and they have to be understood differently, modified through the understandings and the conceptual framework of soul-making dharma.

The procedural rationality—what Taylor calls the procedural rationality—that the Western Enlightenment

assumed, along with a throwing off of superstitions and being natural in terms of just what was natural human pleasure, being natural without imposing religious dogma and ideas on top, there was an assumption that that kind of rationality and naturality would bring pleasure, happiness, and would also bring the universal good.

And obviously there's some truth to that, definitely. A lot of moral progress came from the Western Enlightenment. But this kind of faith in that kind of rationality was shaken, I think, by Freud in terms of: is it actually possible for us—for that rationality to really rule in the psyche? The psyche full of other horrors and repressions and kind of bestial uncivilized impulses and movements and realities abiding in the id. So that started to question things a little bit.

By the time World War I was finished, the First World War was finished—absolute carnage and devastation and incredible loss of life there—people started to really question whether rationality itself, or rationality alone, was enough, and whether it would just deliver pleasure, happiness and the universal good.

In the Western Enlightenment thinking it was also assumed that a disengaged rationality, that sort of stance of the scientific method, that through that a person adopting a disengaged rationality towards their existence would obviously see the bigger picture. And in seeing the bigger picture of things they would let go of their selfish interest because they can see the bigger picture. Again, there may be some truth in that, but others said that no, the turning and tuning to nature is what allows us to see a bigger picture and let go of selfish interest.

I don't know. Maybe the bigger picture is only ever as big as the conceptual framework's big picture. Maybe what really will rule is the conceptual framework. And in the Enlightenment there was a certain conceptual framework of what the big picture of the universe was, and what human being's place in that universe was. So it's the conceptual framework that will limit what the big picture is. How big the big picture is depends on how big the big picture is in the conceptual framework, more than anything.

And then again, it's interesting: in the soul-making dharma we have this theory or idea that the soul-making dynamic, the dynamic of eros, psyche, logos, will mean that the conceptual framework, whatever conceptual framework we entertain, will—there will be a breaking of the vessels just through the expansion and the stretching that come with the soul-making dynamic, the stretching and the walls of the structures of the conceptual framework and the image and the idea of things through the expansion and deepening fertilization of psyche and logos and eros. There will be a breaking of the vessels, a stretching of the conceptual framework and maybe a breaking of the vessel of the conceptual framework, and a new conceptual framework has to be created-discovered. So that's in the soul-making dharma sort of meta-conceptual framework as well.

There were a lot of assumptions in the Western Enlightenment, some of them were borne out and some of them clearly, historically, seemed to be misplaced or only partially valid.

So, for Kant, for Immanuel Kant and others, human rationality was God-made, God-given and God-made, and was also, as I said, in the image of God. I think that's what Maimonides took that to mean. But for Kant it certainly was. And human rationality was also the same as our freedom. Our freedom was bound up with our being rational. We are moral, rational agents. That's our fundamental, true nature.

With Hegel, who came a little later, human thought and art and religious explorations and expansions of religions—human endeavor, in all that, is just an expression, a movement of expression of a larger progress or movement of what could be translated as reason, often is translated as reason. And that's a divine thing. So whether we take the Kantian view—human rationality is God-made as part of what it means to be made in the image of God—or the sort of bigger Hegelian view that human thought, human rationality, human art, human religion are expressions of a larger movement of kind of cosmic reason, developing itself, growing, expressing itself, and that is a kind of divinity. These were prevalent and very powerful views.

But then historically what happened was rationality was held up as important and offered and assumed as a dimension for ethics, as a supporting dimension for ethics, without any reference to God. So the God bit got jettisoned, got cut off. Similarly, the notion of hierarchical order was dismissed and replaced with an interconnected horizontal order that was designed by God, and then eventually just a horizontal order without any reference to God. There's a movement through history.

So just left with rationality, meaning instrumental rationality, what Taylor calls procedural rationality—our ability to think logically. Jean-Jacques Rousseau said, "Rationality which knows no principle will not raise me above the beasts." So there's this question—this is a very important question—is rationality, is our capacity to think logically and clearly and make deductions, is rationality sufficient as a dimension for ethics? As a soil for ethics? As a dimension that actually provides recourse for ethical thinking and practice? Is rationality sufficient?

We still have to decide what are the aims of rationality, what is rationality trying to judge. So is it that we're just, for example, trying to judge, as the utilitarians would say, just increase pleasure, increase something called happiness and decrease suffering, without trying to discriminate among all the varieties of happiness and suffering and put them in some order? And why? And if we say all human beings are worthy of respect, then why are we saying that?

That has to be grounded in another dimension. Why are all human beings worthy of respect? For Kant, it was because human beings are, in their true nature, rational beings. And that rationality was God-given, created in the image of God. Rationality itself possessed an almost semi-numinous quality—something almost holy, belonging to another dimension entirely.

So we need some kind of metaphysics. I wonder—would people hold that view of rationality today? That it contains a kind of divinity or divine dimension, or even exists as a higher dimension? Is our simple ability to be logical enough grounding for ethics?

Does ethics require a more sophisticated, powerful, or convincing metaphysics? For example, why are all human beings worthy of respect? Because of the spark of divinity within them? Because of the Buddha nature they embody, carry, and express? Because they are theophanies? The question I'm wrestling with is whether rationality alone suffices as a dimension.

Today we conceive of rationality differently than Kant and Hegel did. Even Locke, who conceived it more thinly than those who came after him, still maintained another level—that of God. If we've lost all that, don't we need a more robust metaphysics to justify why all human beings are worthy of respect? Why they are equally worthy of respect? How do we ground such claims?

As I mentioned in the Soul Talks, someone like Richard Rorty attempts to eliminate dimensions entirely—they're absolutely ruled out, flatly and explicitly. There's no recourse to any other level of explanation, meaning, or dimension. But he ends up talking in circles or betraying himself, because his writing slips and reveals these very recourses. It's impossible not to rely on them.

So I wonder—is rationality sufficient? I suspect we still need some kind of metaphysics, even if it's a metaphysics of the numinosity of rationality itself. But that implies a dimensionality that perhaps suggests another dimension altogether.

Again, soulmaking provides other metaphysics, other groundings, other dimensions—but in an ontologically novel way.

We've examined voluntarism, cosmic order, and rationality. The fourth approach grounds ethics simply in reducing suffering and increasing pleasure and happiness. This sounds very Buddhist, doesn't it? While voluntarism remains active for some people, cosmic order and rationality have largely fallen away. But many Buddhists hold this principle—reducing suffering—as paramount. This guides their ethics and provides the foundation for their ethical reasoning.

Let's examine this approach. There were certain assumptions underlying it. Adam Smith, regardless of being considered the father of modern economics or capitalist economics, along with others, assumed a potential harmony of interests. If everyone simply pursues their own happiness and pleasure, society and economy will naturally structure themselves in mutually beneficial ways, because of this inherent harmony of interest between human beings.

I'm not sure everyone agrees with that assumption. There are ways it could be true, though I wonder what Karl Marx would think. And we can observe ways this clearly doesn't work—sociologically, economically, politically speaking.

But what about ethics specifically? What about antinomies—defined as precisely not a harmony of interest, but conflicts of ethical pulls, conflicts between values? These occur within individuals, between people, or among groups. And what about hierarchical comparisons?

Even more important is this complete flattening that occurs with this kind of view—a flattening of any means to evaluate, discover, or create a sense of hierarchy and hierarchical comparison between different kinds of suffering, different kinds of pleasure, different kinds of happiness.

If we say that reducing suffering is the most important thing—that this is our compass, our purpose, our highest value, and all we need to think about in terms of ethics—many Buddhists, if you push them, would indeed say something like that. And I ask: why? Why is reducing suffering the highest value? Why is that the compass, the purpose, the most important thing?

As I pointed out in the last talk and previously in the Sīla and Soul talks, it depends on the view of suffering, which depends on ontologies and all kinds of things. For example, if I'm a staunch materialist, then actually it's hard for me to justify this idea that reducing suffering is important, because really what suffering is, is just a kind of movement—it has no reality in itself. It's just the movement of particles in the universe, just like anything else. So again, reducing suffering, making that the highest value, or increasing pleasure, increasing happiness—I have to base that in something else, in another level of ontology, another dimension. I have to justify it somehow.

It also doesn't really help. Reducing suffering seems simple—okay, that's really simple. That's my compass in life. That's what I do as a Buddhist, perhaps. That's how I decide things. But it often won't help very much at all in deciding what to do in a situation. If I do this, this much suffering will follow. If I do that, that much suffering will follow. But actually we need an infinite kind of arithmetic. Who the hell is going to know the full consequences as they play out in the web of existence? This affects that, and that condition affects that condition. And this incoming condition affects how that condition progresses or not, or what it affects. There's an infinite arithmetic required to discern which action in many, many cases.

And I think even more importantly, what about this question of hierarchy of suffering? There's certainly this infinite calculation that's needed that's kind of impossible. But what about this hierarchy of suffering? We still need to acknowledge a hierarchy. Even if it's just individually determined—this person's hierarchy—this suffering feels worse to bear, this suffering has not so much impact as that kind of suffering. Even if it's individually determined, we still need to acknowledge that there is a hierarchy, and somehow have a way of sorting through the various kinds of suffering.

What about the sufferings of meaninglessness? What about the suffering of a lack of soulfulness in life, of soullessness? What about the suffering of having a sense that I'm not really doing my duty—I have no idea what my duty is, or I do know what it is and I'm just not doing it? How does that measure up in the hierarchy with physical pain and suffering, or with dying early and having a relatively short life, or not being able to go on holiday? How do we demarcate, delineate, measure? There is hierarchy, even if it's personal.

So I think with this one, we really need to think a little harder if that's what we say—"It's just about reducing suffering." Jeremy Bentham, who promoted utilitarianism, held this idea: it's just about

maximizing happiness, pleasure, minimizing unpleasantness. That kind of idea—and it can be certain interpretations of Buddhadharma—is just about reducing suffering. It's just very, very simple like that.

That's the kind of view that's held and the answer that will be given, whether it's just self-suffering or self and others in a kind of more Mahāyāna, supposedly Mahāyāna kind of view. So the interpretations of what reducing suffering means and what the motivations are involved in reducing suffering—reducing the unpleasant—this is what human beings want: just reduce the unpleasant vedanā, reduce suffering, increase the pleasant vedanā.

This reflects a kind of small, flat psychology. It won't do—it's too impoverished. And the idea that we can somehow successfully compute massive totals of suffering from one choice versus another choice—this sort of vast, impossible project of one-dimensional arithmetic—simply doesn't stand up to scrutiny.

With the Western Enlightenment, there was a very strong current of "utility only"—the notion that people naturally desire pleasant pleasure and happiness and the absence of pain. Any conception of the cosmic order of things becomes completely irrelevant; only the consequences in terms of pleasure and pain matter. How can we maximize pleasure and something called happiness? How can we minimize pain and unpleasantness?

This entire philosophy, this whole ethical system, is actually an attempt at non-dimensionalizing. There's no dimensionality there. I'm not even sure I should have included it, since it's actually a form of non-dimensionalism—though I include it because many people think this way. But the very sense we have of a hierarchy of sufferings—even if it's individual, even if mine differs from yours—suggests, hints at, points toward some kind of dimensionality, some ordering of values. Utilitarianism completely ignores this, completely disregards any possible relative hierarchizing of values. When things exist in hierarchy, it's because they're rooted in, they somehow correspond to, a dimensionality. The sense of hierarchy of sufferings itself hints at, points to, suggests this deeper ordering.

You may have heard a teaching in the Buddha Dharma that's fairly common: You realize you're falling. You're falling without a parachute through space. Massive dukkha—falling! Then at some point you notice there's no ground. There's no ground. I'm just falling, but there's no ground. Therefore, there's no problem, because I'm not going to smash into something and die. So falling, but there's no ground.

This is often given as a teaching on emptiness or groundlessness, though when you examine what's actually being taught, it's more about impermanence. But either way, that doesn't matter for what I want to explore here.

What if the meaning—the highest meaning in life—was to recognize that there is no ground, so there is no problem, so there's no suffering? And perhaps, if you want, you could add helping and showing others this realization, so they too see there's no problem. That becomes the highest meaning in life: to recognize there's no ground, therefore no problem, therefore no suffering for yourself, and then to help others see

there's no ground, no problem, no suffering.

How does that sit with you?

Just imagine people falling through space, initially terrified, then realizing there's no ground and explaining this to each other. Eventually, everyone is simply falling through space without any sense of problem, without dukkha. Linger with this as the highest meaning of life, moving toward this vision as the ultimate purpose. Imagine these beings falling through empty space, none troubled by it. That's the goal.

How does that sit with you?

If you feel called to defend this view of life's meaning—reducing suffering and helping others reduce their suffering—I want to say: Look closer. Just look closer. Consider this goal of realizing there's nothing to do, nowhere to go, and then no suffering. We're just falling through space, but there's no problem. We help each other see there's no problem.

With this goal of not suffering, of helping others see no suffering, I want to ask: If you look closer, if you linger with it and examine more deeply, doesn't it have some other appeal too? For example, when we're not worrying about the falling, when we simply realize we're just falling—going nowhere, nothing to do, no problem—then we sense the beauty or the radiance or the Buddha nature or the holiness, the mystery.

The appeal of "less suffering and help others suffer less" has something hiding behind it, something that's not being articulated, something hidden.

So you might have to stay with that a little longer.

But this is one of the central contentions, insistencies, explorations, theses of soul-making Dharma. There's something often unexpressed, unarticulated, hiding behind the view we have, the conceptual framework we have of Buddhadharma—for example, the way we explain it to ourselves and to others—that's not quite fully illuminated, not even fully self-honest, let's say. And soul-making Dharma tries to expose that, point out there's something hiding behind it, there's something that's not being articulated here, usually. Or at least that it needs another level. It needs something more than the ending of suffering, even if that's the ending of suffering for all beings.

So this is one of the areas where soul-making Dharma comes in and tries to open things out, give more of what might be needed, offer more of what might be needed.

Okay. So voluntarism, sense of the order of the cosmos, rationality, decreasing suffering, increasing happiness—these are some of the ideas, some of the ways the dimensionality or rooting of ethics has been offered, and the varieties of them through history. And again, I'm just using them as a framework, really, to understand something, open something up, see what soul-making Dharma and practice can offer into this question of ethical philosophy and practice and the dimensionality that's needed there—dimensionality that we need to ground and root our ethics.

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