The Image of Ethics (Part 4)

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Let's continue our exploration, inquiry, and unpacking of what soul-making dharma and the practice of sensing the soul might bring to the whole domain of ethics—how we think about ethics, how we relate to ethics and our ethical choices, our ethical life. How can soul-making dharma really include ethics and support our notion of ethics, our idea of ethical life, perhaps in ways that it needs supporting these days?

Indeed, that's where we began with this idea that perhaps there are some needs we can identify. We listed seven or eight needs that any approach to ethics, any system of ethics, might have to incorporate somehow these days—at least that's how I would think of it. We've explored a few of these needs, and they're all completely interrelated, implying each other, involving each other.

Today I'd like to explore the need related to the sense and idea of what a human is, what a human being is, and what a human being can be. How we think about ethics and how we approach ethics must somehow impinge and affect, hopefully in a helpful way, the sense and notion of what a human being is and what a human being can be. That whole idea and sense of our humanity is very much—and should be very much—tied in with our sense of ethics, so that the two, our sense of ethics and our sense of our humanity, should imply each other, should feed each other, should support each other, should be congruent with each other.

Just to make sure that all this doesn't sound like a very abstract exercise in philosophy or worse, a history of Western society or Western philosophy, I wonder if we can really ground what we're talking about today in a real lived sense, in a real experiential feel for: "Oh yes, this is what we're talking about and this matters."

Perhaps most people listening to this talk have had enough experience with soul-making dharma practice that they've had even just a couple of images that have really touched them deeply. The whole experience of the way the imaginal opened up and how pertinent it was to the particulars of their life and situation, and the sense of beyonds there, the sense of the other elements: duty and beauty and eros and loving and being loved and eternality and reverence and grace and all of that.

Most people listening, hopefully, will have had at least one or two experiences where the soul has been really impacted. In that—as we say—because when an imaginal image is allowed to do its thing, when the soul-making dynamic is not interrupted, not blocked, there is the image as an erotic imaginal object, so to speak, and then the self will also become imaginable.

So hopefully most people listening will have had that kind of experience, maybe even once or twice,

where the whole imaginal constellation has begun to subsume the sense of self. The self becomes sensed with soul, imaginal, so to speak. If you can remember back to those experiences and the profundity of them, and the sense of: "Oh, wow, wow, wow, this is really another order of sense of things than I'm used to, a different order of a sense of self than I'm used to"—different even than emptiness or dissolving in jhāna or mettā or whatever it is.

If you can just get a sense of that—is it possible to remember that? You don't have to invoke it completely, but just remember a little bit about it right now.

Perhaps we can delineate a spectrum. At one end of this spectrum, you have such an experience of your humanity. Not just a sense of yourself—what I want to point to is your sense of your humanity. In that experience, when the self was brought in and involved in the soul-making dynamic, when the self became imaginal and the self was sensed with soul, yes, there's a different sense of self, but with that too, there's a different sense of your humanity, your depths, who you are, your relationship with divinity or Buddha-nature and the cosmos and all of that.

So you can remember the sense of your humanity there, the sense and the logos also of your humanity there as part of the sense of self that was there when you were sensing yourself with soul. Maybe that's at one end of a spectrum.

At the other end is just the normal, perhaps, sense of humanity that we—most people—walk around with and move around with today in our culture of Western secular modernity. Just the normal sense of what the human being is, the normal feel of that, the normal idea of that. Of course we could go further—when someone's full of self-hatred, etc.—but let's just stay with that norm, that norm of Western modernity. So that norm of Western modernity, that sense of your humanity, of our humanity at one end, and at the other end, this sense of humanity when the self is sensed with soul, part of an imaginal constellation: self, other, world.

Maybe in the middle, for some, there's a continuum where, depending on what circles you move in, there may be a prevalence of new age ideas about angels and being shamans or witches and that sort of identification, and maybe even practices and rituals. Also maybe the sense of your humanity that you might have had if you take seriously the Bodhisattva vow, or if you're in a ceremony of taking the Bodhisattva vows and feeling the self as bodhisattva with that aspiration—perhaps that affected the sense of your humanity in some way, or the idea of having Buddha-nature or being Buddha-nature. There are many possibilities.

At the risk of being contentious, let's put that in the middle. What I'm pointing to is more just when there's a kind of idea of something, and maybe a kind of practice, but it hasn't really turned the soil and ignited in the way that you know soul-making practice can. So there's a kind of something, a kind of different ideation that's supported by the people around you. Maybe there are ceremonies and rituals and certain language. Maybe certain practices, maybe a change in experience, but it's not quite of the order of what

we're talking about when soul-making practice really ignites and the imaginal really gets going, the authentic imaginal.

So we have this spectrum: the norms of secular modernity, this middle ground where certain ideas are doing something in the psyche—maybe certain practices, certain rituals, certain ceremonies, certain communities and languages—and then the soul-making sense of one's humanity.

Can you linger with that spectrum, either the two ends or the whole spectrum, and just compare? Compare the senses of humanity, the ideas, but also the very sense of one's humanity. This is what I'm talking about. It's not abstract.

We're really talking about something that's not just in the realm of ideas or philosophy or history. It really has to do with that, and that degree of import and impact to the human being, to you, to me.

And then I wonder, as we go through the talk tonight, if you can hold that remembered sense or those remembered senses—the remembered sense of the normal human sense of your humanity, or that contemporarily normal sense of that, and also alternating with your remembered sense of your humanity when you were profoundly touched by an imaginal practice or soul-making sense or sensing with soul.

Just lightly, in the back of your mind, in the back of the citta, as a kind of reference, or references, throughout this talk, throughout the listening. Just to really make sure, as I said, that it's anchored in a sense of the import, in a realization, a palpable realization of the import of what we're talking about. We're not talking abstractly here.

So just as much as possible, very lightly in the background, I wonder if that might help digest and assimilate and empower, really, the listening.

So this is the wish list item I want to look at today: a sense and the idea of what it is to be human and what a human being can be.

Last time we talked about dimensionality. We gave out these four ways that sort of dimensionalize ethics, or provide something or other in another dimension to secure, to found, to root, to ground the ethical thinking and the ethical justifications. There were four ways, principal ways in which that was sort of given in history, and we looked at how soul-making Dharma kind of could modify them or what it would have to say about them.

One of them was actually a non-dimensionalizing: a utilitarian, or commonly for some people a kind of Buddhist notion, just decreasing suffering. That's the most important thing. That's the primary issue and the primary purpose. Decreasing suffering or increasing pleasure or happiness. And without really spending any time differentiating between the different kinds of suffering.

When we talk about differentiating between different kinds of suffering, I'm not talking about, for instance, your child getting upset in the supermarket when they see some candy that they want and you

say no, and they start crying, and they're suffering. And in your mind, it's like, "Well, they're suffering now, but I'm saving their teeth later, and their metabolism, and possibly their brain from deteriorating into ADHD." We're not talking about that kind of comparison of suffering. We're not talking about, as I think it was Ajahn Chah who said—we're not talking about the suffering now comparing a suffering now that just ripens in more suffering compared to a suffering now that brings about or enables less suffering in the future. We're not talking about that kind of comparison.

We're talking about more things like the examples I gave the other day, or have given examples of in the past. Like why chemo was so difficult for me. Going into a certain chemo ward in a certain hospital felt very, very difficult. And I pinpointed it—it was a soul suffering more than a body suffering. Body sufferings, there were plenty of body sufferings wrapped up with chemo. But something caused a suffering in my soul that was really, really difficult to deal with, the hardest thing for me to deal with.

So then I was trying to explain—we had set up this ritual with Catherine when I was going back to chemo, just trying to find the right soul orientation to it. I had this little crucible and was cutting fingernails and bits of hair and pricking myself with bits of blood, bodily elements in there, giving them up. And the question of whether giving is a part of soulful ritual, a necessary part of soulful ritual.

But there was something—which I actually can't remember—I was thinking about my eyes and my ears and the mind and what that has to encounter in there, that that feels like a wounding to the soul. So there was something in the ritual which I just can't remember now that captured the soul suffering and the suffering for the mind, for tomorrow's mind that would go into the chemo tomorrow. This giving up, this giving of elements of my body today. There was something for the mind, I can't remember.

But anyway, what we're really talking about is different kinds of suffering. There's a way of approaching ethics that just ignores any difference between different kinds of suffering. Soul suffering, for example, versus bodily suffering. Sufferings of meaninglessness versus physical pain.

What I want to say now is that refusing to make a differentiation between different kinds of suffering, refusing any hierarchy of sufferings—that they're actually sufferings of a different level in the being—and that refusal in utilitarian ethics or ethics in some kind of, for some people, their Buddhist-based ethics that is just about reducing suffering... In utilitarian ethics, just about increasing pleasure and happiness and reducing unpleasantness, reducing suffering, reducing pain.

What I want to say is that refusal of differentiating and hierarchizing suffering corresponds with a flattening of the human being—a refusal to acknowledge and to conceive and to sense that a human being also has dimensions. And these different kinds of suffering are, if you like, wounds at different levels of, or different dimensions of the human being.

If we talk about that other potential dimensionalizing, which is an attempt to dimensionalize in what's called voluntarism—just that God said so—usually that's conceived with the human being quite flatly

conceived. And it goes very much with a post-Reformation theology without intermediaries, and the human is just flatly conceived. The dimensionality comes in the radical duality and the huge distance between the human being and God. But the human being themselves, or humanity themselves, is actually quite flatly conceived, usually in that voluntarist philosophical basis for ethics.

If we take the attempt to provide dimension for ethics in the cosmic order, then the vertical cosmic order, the hierarchical cosmic order, usually always goes with a sense of the dimensionality of a human being. A human being in themselves, or is themselves, a kind of being that is characterized by having different dimensions, different levels of our being, different levels of our soul.

Whereas the horizontal cosmic order, which came to prevail and predominate historically much more over a notion of a vertical cosmic order, that horizontal cosmic order, again, unsurprisingly...

brought with it, concomitant with that, was a notion of the human being—a flat notion of a human being, much more in common with aspects of our contemporary notion of human being. Not completely, because there are other complications historically. For instance, our interiority and things that came later have a long history as well. But generally speaking, we can say there's a flattening, in the sense that I want to talk about, of the human being.

If we try to offer rationality as a possible dimension in which to ground our ethics, then it depends on the metaphysics that goes with the whole idea of rationality. For Kant, for Hegel, certainly for Plato, rationality implied dimensionality of the human. For Plato and Hegel it certainly implied a kind of dimensionality of the cosmos—in very different ways between Plato and Hegel, but they're implied in that idea of rationality.

Again, there's a correspondence of the human being to the cosmic order. And to open to the cosmic order, and then to set one's life up erotically in correspondence with that order—that's rational human behavior and rational human thinking in the largest sense of the word for Plato. For Kant, the rationality had a kind of numinosity to it, because it was part of our essential nature, part of what God had given us, part of what it means to be made in the image of God.

But with our current dominant use of what we mean by rationality—just what's called procedural rationality—again, at first it might have been conceived as God-given, this capacity as God-given. But now, over time and through history and with increasing secularization, I'm not sure how different people view rationality and how capable it is of providing that other dimension that ethics needs. And it almost never really does. No one would ever really claim that, for example.

Say this is where a human being's dignity lies—in their rationality. Because then someone who's brain damaged or has impaired mental functioning in terms of their logical, rational capabilities... if a person was strict with the view that rationality provided that dimension, then we would treat them with much less respect, which is generally not what we do in Western courts in terms of human rights.

But the question here, again, what I want to focus on today is: what do all these different ideas and attempts at dimensionality, how do they influence our sense of what a human being is?

We looked too briefly at the history of the Protestant Reformation and their rejection of any intermediaries between humanity and God, and that meant a rejection of angels as well—angels as intermediaries. Which means, in our language, no images, no devas to refract the divine attributes.

If you think of a kind of pure, bright, intense white light, and it reaches a prism, and then it refracts into different colors, all coming out at different angles—different wavelengths, different frequencies coming out at different angles. Maybe that's one way of understanding this pure, white, undifferentiated light of God. It has all these different attributes, all these different colors and wavelengths in it, but the prism refracts them differently. The angelic world refracts them differently, so we can separate them out, so we can digest them more, see their beauty more.

So the white light is definitely beautiful, but then this rainbow of other colors—we see more the beauty of the divine, the Buddha nature, and we see it in a bigger way. We spread it out through the prism. Perhaps that's a way of thinking of what the world of the angels does, and what images do. But in the Protestant Reformation, there was this refusal of intermediaries, therefore refusal of angels, therefore refusal of a dimension that refracted the divine attributes, and a refusal then of seeing ourselves also as in turn reflecting and refracting those divine attributes through a sort of ladder from the divine, from the Buddha nature, into the world of devas and angels, and into human being.

So this rejection had a lot of influence in history regarding what a human is—a lot of impact on the notion, the sense of what a human being is and on their relationship to God and on their relationship to the cosmic order or the cosmos.

So what is a human being? If we talk again, tying in with something like species extinction and the crime of species extinction... So yes, of course, that's a crime against the individual animals—uncountable numbers, uncountable suffering of individual animals. And yes, of course, it's a crime against the species. If we can say, can there be a crime against a species? We talked about Polly Higgins and the crime of ecocide, hopefully making it into international law. So yes, yes.

And then is species extinction a crime against animals? Yes. Is it a crime against a species? Yes. Is it a crime against the cosmic order, or even the planetary order, the order of life on Earth? Yes. But is it not—I feel it is also, or can it be regarded as—a crime against humanity too?

Species extinction is a crime against humanity too, not just because we are probably biologically dependent on many of these species and the way they work in the ecosystem. What I want to focus on more now, right now, is because of our potential soul connection with other species and with ecosystems. Ecosystem is such a cold, scientific sounding word. Let's say with forests, for example, with coral reefs, with oceans.

One way of understanding what a human being is, is that they're profoundly connected. Our soul, as a human being, is profoundly connected with other species, other ecosystems. They are theophanies that we are called to witness, to open to, to sense with soul, to know their beauty, to know their depth, to know their divinity. And that potential soul connection—because of course it's often really not realized, that potential. We don't feel these things as a crime against humanity, or not enough people do, not enough human beings do.

But maybe that very potential soul connection—that capability to sense with soul and feel species and ecosystems that way—is whatever you want to call it, deep or high, part of our humanity. It's an aspect of our soul, a dimension of our soul.

Or even consider light pollution—the fact that it's so difficult now to find a place in the northern hemisphere, in the western world, where one can truly see the stars well. To lie down on the earth at night and open up to the magnificence of the heavens, the mystery, the sheer scale of it, the radiance, the depth of it. Is the fact that there are fewer and fewer places where one can actually see that many stars also a crime against humanity?

Or noise pollution—there are so few places outside where the dominant sound is not mostly some kind of internal combustion engine burning fossil fuels loudly, as opposed to the sound of birdsong or wind in trees. Are these too crimes against our humanity?

What does it mean to be a human being? What is a human being? What can it mean to be a human being? What should it mean to be a human being? To me, these are really important questions.

We've talked about the Protestant Reformation. I certainly don't want to vilify it, because a great deal of good came out of it, despite the difficulties—the wars and other problems, and the historical threads we're tracing that had their origins there.

Martin Luther, in instigating the Protestant Reformation, held a very pessimistic and impoverished view of the human being. So poor that the human being was totally reliant on divine grace in Luther's view, in the Protestant view. There was very little a human being could do to work toward or ensure their own salvation. There was total reliance on the free will of God to save us.

The corollary of this, which we touched on the other day, is that there's very little place for the cultivation of ethical virtue. That loses its place as anything that might move you closer to God or open up the sense of the divine for you. Any kind of extra striving on behalf of monks or nuns becomes pointless. Ethical virtue itself, the whole notion of the virtues, gets undermined. The cultivation of and aspiration to the virtues gets undermined in terms of salvation, as does any notion of ritual or sacrament or other extraordinary activity.

There's very little place, then, for the *lava*, the *eros*—for that extra reaching that souls are capable of, that *super ire*, that going beyond.

At the time of the Renaissance, you had people like Nicholas of Cusa, Marsilio Ficino, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola—they held and promoted a more exalted view of the human being. Pico wrote a very beautiful text about that. Luther was really moving in the opposite direction.

He emphasized the fall—Adam and Eve eating the apple, getting expelled from the garden. That was central to his theology. Of course, the fall and expulsion from Eden was always present in Christianity and Judaism. Even when people espoused a more exalted and exalting view of the human being, there was still always some mention of the fall. But Martin Luther insisted on placing it very centrally, and that human nature was completely corrupted by original sin. Why? Because the flip side of that is the necessity of total dependence on redemption through God, through Christ. Salvation only comes through God. There's nothing in us that we can rely on, develop, work on.

Paraphrasing the historian Jill Kraye: humanity was therefore unable to make any contribution to one's own salvation. It's all up to God. In Protestant thought, the spiritual impotence and depravity of post-lapsarian man—that means post-fall, post-expulsion from the Garden of Eden, which is simply how we are now—the spiritual impotence and depravity of post-lapsarian man became a central doctrine.

Calvin, who was very central in this Protestant movement, believed that man's high opinion of himself had to be deflated. He had to be convinced of his own corruption and debility. For only then would man realize he was lost and helpless without divine grace.

We mentioned the other day Michel de Montaigne. Though he was a Catholic and not a Protestant, he similarly set about taking humanity down a good few rungs in one's self-assessment. Kraye writes: "Montaigne was concerned to destroy man's presumption and lower his excessive estimate of his own worth."

One of the upshots of this for ethics was very significant, because Protestantism brought much less place and regard for ethics and virtue cultivation. It's all dependent on God.

Later, I want to read you something from Melanchthon, a reformist thinker who again stressed the fall, the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. But he did something very interesting...

almost separated out the realm of ethics, in fact he did separate out the realm of ethics from the realm of religion, theology. This came as part of a movement of Protestant theology—a separating out. First there's no place for ethics, and then ethics comes back in, but it's separated from any connection with religion, real connection with divinity or divine aspiration.

This separation came from Melanchthon. As Jill Cray writes, ethics had nothing to do with the will of God or the remission of sins. It was exclusively concerned with rules governing external action and civil society. Conversely, theology had nothing to do with these ethical rules. You can see how this recourse to dimensionalizing ethics by placing it in relationship to divinity gets totally shattered here as they are pulled apart. Ethics has nothing to do with God, nothing to do with religious aspiration, nothing to do with

salvation even.

By delineating these two different spheres of influence, Melanchthon was effectively applying Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms to ethics. Luther had this idea: there's a kingdom of Christ, and there's a secular kingdom. They coexist—not in different places or times so much as they coexist. Yes, we live in civil society, but that's not the kingdom of Christ. The kingdom of Christ can be something constituted by some members of civil society, but it exists among them and in their relationship to each other and to God.

Luther distinguished between the sacred kingdom, in which true Christians are ruled by Christ through the Holy Spirit, and the secular kingdom, in which non-Christians are ruled by political authorities through laws and coercion. Since the secular kingdom is also established by God and is necessary to preserve society, Christians must obey its authority, provided it doesn't impinge on their higher loyalty to God by interfering in matters of faith.

There's a separation saying yes, you have to follow the laws and even the coercion of the ruler of your society. But that's only to preserve society because God said that's good too. It has nothing to do with that whole realm of ethics. The whole realm of ethics has nothing to do with your relationship with God. Nothing to do with theology.

Luther had really objected to scholastic theology and the influence of Aristotle, particularly Aristotle's Ethics. He regarded it as the worst enemy of grace. You get this polarizing: if you want to totally prioritize grace, divine grace, and dependence on divine grace, then you totally dismiss any place for ethics. And if you give a central place to ethics and ethical aspiration and virtues—perhaps even a road to growing into God, to theosis, to divinification—then you're shrinking the power of God and the place for God's grace.

Luther was very anti-Aristotle and anti-Aristotelian influence in the Middle Ages and scholastic theology, because of how he saw it compromising and limiting our dependence on divine grace. Whereas Melanchthon came in and completely separated ethics and theology, then was able to reclaim a place for even the ancient pagan philosophers like Aristotle—separate from one's relationship with God.

So ethics and that kind of ethical philosophy governed the external actions of those who had not yet been enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and simply helped to preserve the peace and order of civil society. This divorce of ethical from religious questions is extremely significant—the dimensionality rooting the ethical sense is lost, and only rationality steps in, in the procedural sense, in the flat sense.

In a way, the whole Western Enlightenment and secularism partly had its roots in the very Protestant Reformation. It didn't start as secular at all. It started as an attempt at increasing religiosity. But there were seed ideas there that, when they grew and their consequences were extrapolated over time, had enormous consequences both for religion in general and the religious sensibility, but also on society and on ethics.

Interestingly, Melanchthon hated Plato because with Plato there's this teaching that one can

purify—there's this kind of ladder, rational order to the universe, and one's sense of the virtues and values corresponds to that ladder, a bit like Augustine. One can climb up this ladder by purifying the virtues and moving closer to God, closer to a vision of God. Melanchthon thought that was literally the invention of the devil—as if you could live by that kind of rationality alone, without Christianity and without divine grace.

But Melanchthon's sharp delineation, splitting between ethics and theology, allowed even Aristotelian moral philosophy to become reintegrated into standard Protestant education. Enormous, enormous consequences of all this played out gradually over quite a while.

This emphasis in the Protestant Reformation—the emphasis on the fall, on the expulsion from Eden, on original sin, and the rejection of mediation by priests, by any elite, rejection of the sacraments and the sacred—all meaning that salvation is completely and only dependent on divine grace. All this, in terms of what it means for humanity, wraps up in a total and radical duality of God and human. God is completely and utterly different, and that's that.

There's no ladder in between. There are no dimensions of our being. There's no possible way of moving closer. There are no intermediaries that refract and reflect and function as theophanies in the world. It's all dependent on divine grace.

So again, if we bring soul-making dharma here, we have grace as an element of the imaginal. But in soul-making dharma, in contrast to this Protestant teaching where everything is dependent on divine grace—that's all there is, you can't do anything—we have something different. In soul-making dharma, interestingly, if you reflect on this, we have grace as an element of the imaginal, this sense of inexplicable gift. I've been given this image or this sense of things, and I couldn't really engineer it. I'm not the master of it. It's an inexplicable gift from the divine.

But that element is balanced by other elements. We need to develop energy body awareness—this is something we can do. The very idea that an image is a way of looking implies that there are ways of looking we can play with. It's dependent on us. Those two elements or nodes of the lattice. Also the autonomy, not just of the image, but of the self—that we have to assent, that we participate. In fact, the node of create-discover, the emphasis on creation and not just discovery. All of these balance the node of the element of grace.

Do you understand? Instead of the Protestant view where it's all grace, you get this much more balanced, fluid network.

And if we entertain the idea that soul-making gives us the sense that our eros—our eros—my eros right now is divine. Maybe my psyche, the image, my capacity to have images, my soul, the logos, the thoughts I have, the insights, the conceptions. Either entertaining that idea or actually having those senses and ideas arise naturally through soul-making practice—it is divine and it's from the divine.

And again, either entertaining the idea or it arising naturally from soul-making practice that our egoic and

neurotic shapes are kind of impoverished echoes or impoverished reflections of divinity, of angel, of image. These ideas and these senses very much provide a counterweight to a reliance on grace, on the guru, on whatever it is, on the divine completely. It's not totally up to me either. It's not just a matter of me becoming a master of soul-making technique, imaginal technique, practice technique.

But of course, we have to point out that those ideas and those perspectives—that my eros is divine, comes from the divine, that my egoic neurotic shapes are really just slightly distorted, impoverished reflections of the divine, of the angel, of the daemon, the image—could be corrupted. They can be corrupted, they can be faked, we can be mistaken about that. Just like there were corrupt priests in the Catholic Church at the time of the Protestant Reformation, and the Protestant Reformation was pointing fingers and objecting to that.

But actually, as I think I said the other day, that wasn't the main point of the Protestant Reformation. It wasn't an attempt to weed out corrupt priests—let's have a whole overhaul while we're doing that. Actually, the fundamental idea was theological. The fundamental point was a theological revolution, reformation. And that was this emphasis on the total power of God, on not imprisoning God's total freedom and power.

Just so, in soul-making, the fundamental point is on the possibility—through disciplined practice and sensitivity—to create and discover as sacred and as divine, as rooted in divine and as divinizable, with a conception of ontic roots in divine, with lived possibilities of human being. The fundamental point of soul-making is the possibility, through disciplined practice and the kind of sensitivity that goes with disciplined practice, to create, discover anything as sacred and divine, especially including human beings.

We're emphasizing this today because the sense of human being has, through modernity and even through humanism and secular humanism, become flattened. First it was divorced from a radically different God, as we said in the Protestant Reformation. And then, with the gradual rise of atheistic secularism through different stages—many stages including deism, as some of you probably know—it was simply flattened. Not even just divorced from God, because God became non-existent, so divorce from God made no sense. It was simply a flat view of the human being.

All this has enormous effects on how we feel, sense and think of ourselves and our humanity. And we've used several times over the past four or five years this idea of telos—to think theologically or to conceive theologically the telos of the human being. For instance, the angel out ahead calling me.

In Plato, there's a kind of idea of telos, of the human moving towards, rising towards, if you like, the world of what's called the intelligences, the world of ideas, the realm of ideas, which is talked about in the *Sila and Sol* talks, the realm of forms. In some versions of Platonism, Neo-Platonism, there's an idea of humanity in general, but in others there's also included the idea of your individual form, the ideal version of you. We talked about that on *Sila and Sol*.

And there's this—that's there in the whole metaphysic and cosmology of Platonism. And again, to be rational meant to see that, to acknowledge it, to feel it, and to be drawn naturally through seeing it and through love of it and through eros for it, towards moving towards it. So there's a certain telos, there's a certain natural movement of humanity. This is our destiny, if you like. It's another word for telos.

When Aristotle came along after Plato, he had a different idea of telos. More eventually biological, if you like, but really, there's an Aristotelian telos as well, the idea of a natural inclination or a goal of our nature.

We naturally move towards. These whole ideas—that we naturally move towards the angel, we naturally move towards God, that we're built for this, that this is the natural inclination, the natural way we will grow if we don't distort that—these ideas were decimated, severed, beginning really with William of Ockham and others.

Often this transformation is presented as a kind of argument between what's called nominalists and realists, as if it's a philosophical argument about universals and particulars. Are universals real? "Table," as opposed to "this table." This table is clearly a real thing—but "table" as a universal, is it not a real thing? It's presented these days as if all the fuss was about some kind of pretty abstract-sounding philosophical argument.

Actually, it was fundamentally a theological argument again. And again, it had to do with refusing to limit God's power, God's fiat. Fiat means "let it be"—"let there be light" in Latin—God's ability to just, through God's will, decide what happens whenever, wherever, however. So the theological idea was nothing should limit that infinite and endless possibility and power of God's fiat, the enaction of God's will.

If there's a natural telos for the human being—how human beings naturally grow if things don't block it—that's actually a limit to God's fiat. Because then their growth, their salvation, their liberation, their nirvana, whatever you want to call it, their realization, their awakening, is something that's not entirely dependent on God, if there's a human telos.

Do you hear how significant this is? It came from a theological argument about not wanting to limit God's power. And then eventually, over time, that very idea became the seed for this mechanistic universe, because it was only a kind of flat and mechanistic universe that was compatible, really fully compatible, with this sort of endless and infinite freedom of God's fiat, of God's power.

It's complex—I'm oversimplifying—because with the idea of the mechanistic universe came also the encouragement for humans to exercise their power and technology. And we talked about Locke and the instrumental stance and human control, human fear. So it's complex. But still, there was something in the seed idea that had all kinds of implications and consequences about our sense of our humanity, our sense of ourselves, our sense of our souls.

No more possible the telos of the soul, the calling of the soul. This idea of an angel out ahead, completely

ruled out. There's a radical duality between God and the human soul. Can't have—in that view, this idea we have that the angel is me and it's not me, ruled out. Or that there's a spark of divinity in me, or there's a natural inclining, natural inclination, growth, natural reach to the divine. All these would be impossible views.

So again, in soul-making dharma, what we've done, or there's an attempt to do, is to rehabilitate, to redeem notions like telos, and also ethics, obviously, but again, with a different ontology and epistemology. We need a different ontology and epistemology in order to make sense of these ideas. We can't just go back to the Middle Ages or ancient Greece. So the different ontology and epistemology, and with practice, and with the subtleties and sophistications of practice and what that opens up and the senses that that opens up in the being—with practice, with care and practice, the eros opens up the psyche and the logos, the ideation as well, the idea of things and the idea of human being.

If we just linger—so there was this pessimism, that's the right word, regarding morality and human nature that came with, or that grew with, the Protestant Reformation. And then, historically, jumping forward some hundreds of years, there was even more of this pessimism regarding morality and human nature that came with Freud. We touched on that the other day. The influence of Freud's ideas in Western culture were quite pervasive.

And then getting into the twentieth century—World War I, World War II, the Holocaust, Stalin—there has been a kind of trend of pessimism regarding morality and human nature. That's one of the trends. There's also been a pessimism, if we want to use that word, regarding the human being's capacity for ontology and epistemology and what we can hope for there.

In a way, starting with Kant—I mean, it goes way before Kant really, but he, in many ways, what he did philosophically really started to undermine, in a way that became much more popular, the belief that we could really know things as they are, or know reality, and have a kind of pure knowledge of things. And since Kant, it's grown even more with postmodernity and other thinkers and lots of things.

So again, soul-making dharma comes in, is born in that kind of crucible, in that kind of soup, in that kind of opening of historical contingency. Part of what soul-making dharma says is not that it's possible to prove absolute truths about ethics or about ontology or about epistemology, about human nature, but what is possible through soul-making dharma is that we can, in practice and in concept, conceptually, relate to these areas—ethics, ontology, epistemology—so that they are fruitful, so that they are meaning-making, and so that they make possible for us a real sense of a genuine ethical nobility and beauty, without one fixed view or truth either.

This is the way things are: neither totally objective nor subjective, but participatory.

Through soul-making dharma and practice, it becomes possible to have this sense of dimensionality—a dimensionality that's potent and trustworthy, offering a genuine sense of nobility. While the history of

Buddhadharma is probably most relevant to us as practitioners, perhaps even more impactful on how we sense our existence, the cosmos, and our humanity is the history of Western theology.

With all good intentions, the secularization of ethics brought about a view that there are no dimensional or transcendent principles, values, or virtues. What's more, it established the idea that there's no possibility of knowing any such dimensions or values. This becomes almost axiomatic. Then the question becomes: How do we organize society so that each person can pursue what they want and protect their right to do that—to pursue what they want and decide what it is they want—without causing civil war or social breakdown?

Starting with good intentions, this secularization removed dimensionality and the possibility of knowing such dimensionality, or even refused to believe such dimensions exist. Ethics then gets transposed into organizing society to prevent chaos and mutual destruction. Eventually this goes so far as to become game theory approaches to society—it's not even ethics anymore.

Consider the prisoner's dilemma: If I want to get what I want, should I trust other people, knowing they want to get what they want, which probably conflicts with what I want? Should I believe them? Should I trust them? Should I team up with them? This is now how people think about society and our social predicament.

Or consider explanations of altruism like Richard Dawkins' selfish gene theory, so popular in the 1980s. In that view, what looks like altruism is actually an illusion—merely biological evolutionary strategies for survival of the gene, not even the human being. The nobility of human altruism doesn't really exist; what's really happening is the gene trying to ensure its own survival through its own selfishness. This whole evolution of thinking ends up with such ideas applied to game theory, ethics, society, and economics.

Going back to Descartes, Locke, and Kant—for them, rationality and the capacity for rationality was part of what conferred and secured human dignity. The Western Enlightenment implied: let's not put our belief in superstitions about gods; let's realize our own dignity as human beings.

As time went by, however, the notion of human beings as having intrinsic dignity, or even of most human beings acting in a dignified way most of the time, seemed to get very thin, especially moving into the twentieth century. Perhaps the idea of innate human dignity was seen to fail or seemed to be an illusion.

Can we provide, find, create, or discover another basis for human nobility, human possibility, human essence and depth, and our sense of place in the cosmos? This is very much part of what soul-making dharma and practice does—it's one possibility, one way of opening up, deepening, and rescuing the sense of human being.

But it's tricky. We need only look in the newspaper or turn on the news, and it's hard to reconcile dignity, nobility, and human possibility with what we see of depravity. This brings us back to that question of shame we touched on the other day, which I want to revisit now.

We talked about naming and shaming and how it's often looked down upon in spiritual circles—certainly in some spiritual circles, at least the ones I move in. But when we read what the Buddha has to say about hiri and ottappa, it's clear they have a social dimension. His emphasis on them very much draws on our place in society and our connection with others in the community, with hiri and ottappa very much connected to that social fabric.

And it might be, just reflecting on this a little bit more, that naming and shaming may be a part of what keeps a society or community or culture healthy and ethically healthy. When there's naming and shaming, we are clear that this is wrong and that you have done wrong. It's clear and we're making it clear for everyone to see. It's part of making the ethics clear. So it has a function, and it's also a sign that the ethics is clear, perhaps.

Conversely, our shying away from naming and shaming may be due in part to our postmodern barring of a unanimous ethical view—partly a sign of our ethical confusion and lack of basis. I don't know. Maybe in terms of society and community, naming and shaming have their place or can have a place. But again, you just have to hear or read or sometimes witness how that can move over into something that's completely horrific—a naming and shaming that has become completely abusive and run away with itself. It's tricky.

But as was implied in our wish list for ethics, there needs to be a place for shame and guilt. As the Buddha said, for hiri and ottappa, the guardians of the world, he called them. So we need a place for shame and guilt, yet to me, it needs to not be everything. It's not everything about ethics.

So I was slightly taken aback to read the Buddha said all virtuous deeds spring from hiri and ottappa—spring from shame and moral dread—all virtuous deeds, leaving no place for eros, for our eros for virtues and values, or indirectly through an imaginal figure. So I would say we need place too for love and eros, as I've said before, with respect to virtues and values and ethics. There needs to be a place for shame and guilt, but it's not everything. It doesn't take up the whole space.

Can we integrate shame and guilt into our soul-making dharma conceptual framework, into our view, as soul questions, as soul issues? See them, feel them, work with them as soul questions and soul issues. Can the whole of ethics be approached with soul first? With an idea and a conception of soul first? And the scope of that.

So is what I called the other day superficial shame—I mean, it may not feel or seem superficial at all; it may feel like it goes to the core of one's being, so deep, the shame—but from our language, is that superficial shame, because it doesn't seem, it seems deep, but actually doesn't involve soul? Is that superficial shame an impoverished reflection of a soul shame? It's an important question, because it might be, but I don't know. Probably not always. It's still important to ask.

And I think I used the phrase "healthy shame," again drawing on Hartman and others. But I didn't mean to make a distinction between healthy shame and soul shame. I'd say healthy shame is soul shame. If we

really open up what we mean by soul-making dharma to include, to incorporate ethics, and if we really approach ethics in a way that soul-making dharma is really integrated into that approach, then healthy shame means soul shame. In other words, it has a sense of the dimensionality and divinity and of our duty to images, to our images. Healthy shame is soul shame.

Anytime we feel shame that is healthy, what we mean by healthy is it's a soul shame because it's got this dimensionality, divinity, and sense of duty to images. And healthy guilt is soul guilt because, again, it's got this sense of dimensionality, divinity, of eros, of duty to values and virtues as ideational images.

So sure, we can approach all this area of ethics and shame and guilt without soul-making conception, soul-making practice. But what if we actually bring it right in, really incorporate it, really embrace that whole domain with the soul-making dharma conception? And healthy shame is soul shame. It will have that sense and that feel to it. There's dimensionality and divinity here and duty that I've let down. And healthy guilt is soul guilt—dimensionality, duty, divinity, eros to these ideational images, to these ideas, values, virtues.

And again, when I said the other day, sometimes people who are a bit more engaged in psychological work and spiritual work and work on their psycho-spiritual process and a bit more conscious—what they call conscious living—there can be, of course, included in that very naturally is, to some extent, an orientation and a devotion to virtues and values. But it's limited without a person even realizing it because their whole conceptual framework doesn't involve a sense of dimensionality. It doesn't invoke, it doesn't incorporate a sense of dimensionality. Or the eros is blocked and the eros is limited.

So yeah, this is warm and kind and not arrogant, whatever else I said. But it's somehow just—it's not really on fire. It's not really full. The soul is not really stretched that way. The eros is not really ignited.

It's not really soulful. And it's because the conceptual framework that's being entertained doesn't have an integrated and central place for dimensionality. And maybe the eros is blocked or limited in some way. This prevents the ethos and prevents the whole sense of ethics from its fullness. Prevents the ethics from its fullness.

Now I don't know how that sounds. Does it sound stern or strict or judgmental or forbidding? We have these puritanical associations with even just the word and the area of ethics. So I don't know how that sounds. But what I really mean is that ethics and the ethos is prevented from its full beauty—from its full beauty, from its sense of divinity, from its unfathomability, from its mystery. Because it's not seen as integrated with soul. It's not seen as part of soul. It's not in-souled.

So this question: what is the image of ethics? What is the image of ethics that we are operating with, that we are living our life with? Something kind of necessary? It's necessary to care about ethics. It's necessary to talk about them and have a good solid basis. Something necessary but kind of boring, maybe stern, maybe punitive. Something that has to limit. It limits us by its nature. That's what ethics does. It limits

what we can do and say and all the rest of it. And itself, it's kind of limited in its scope. Or it's a kind of preliminary basis—sīla, okay, taking care of that, then samādhi and paññā, for example. So is it that? What's the image of ethics?

Or is it something soulful, something beautiful, something infinite in its reaches and its callings? Something we love, something we have eros for, something soul-making.

What does the word magnanimity mean? I'm not sure. It probably means different things, and it has meant different things at different times, and maybe means different things to different people. Magnanimity. Sometimes it just means generosity. It can mean other things as well. But the etymology: magna animus—a big soul.

What supports a human being to grow into magnanimity? Big soul means more than a big heart. Big-hearted. This person, that person—oh, they've got a big heart. What does it mean to have a big soul? What might it mean to have a big soul?

I wonder whether to fully honor human life, for it to have deep dignity, for our sense of our humanity as well to be deeply honored, it must include a kind of love and eros for something that's more than my human life—certainly more than my survival, something of a different order. Again, something I'm willing even to sacrifice my life for. Again, we have that etymology of the word sacrifice: to make sacred.

To me, if there's something that I'm willing to sacrifice my pleasure, my well-being, my happiness even, my life for—my actual, the prolongation of my life—this is part of the realization of that, the sense of that, the love and commitment for that, whatever that is. But it's another dimension other than just my life. That's part of what it means to fully honor human life, I'm wondering. For life to have deep dignity.

But you know, that love and that passion—again, that love and that willingness to sacrifice—it's like when we talked about passion. It depends on what the thing is. Just to be willing to sacrifice for some cause—well, it depends what the cause is. Just to be willing to sacrifice for some sense of this or that—it depends what the this or that are, and the sense of it is.

This is related to everything we're talking about—dimensionality and the other wish list elements and other list of needs about ethics, and related to what a human being is, what a human being can be, what a human being should be.

In ancient times, they had what at some point came to be called the honor ethic. This, in a way, only applied to a certain stratum of society—warriors, perhaps knights and rulers—whose lives were oriented to, centered on, and governed by this honor ethic concerning honor and glory. The central element was a willingness to risk one's own life for the sake of honor.

Within the honor ethic, there existed a hierarchy that regarded someone living this way, bound by this kind of honor ethic, as having a life at a different level than others who were concerned only with their

ordinary life and prolonging it. Hannah Arendt wrote about this and modified it, discussing the citizen ethic in modern society as a kind of parallel to the honor ethic relative to work and labor.

She and others have argued that modern culture is really defined by this turning upside down, this dismissal of the honor ethic and a kind of leveling out—a demolition of that hierarchy. So again, we see this flattening of a hierarchical view and the affirmation of ordinary life: work, production, family, spouse and children. Higher aims and strivings are criticized.

Yesterday we pointed out the historical contingency of our taken-for-granted sense of ordinary life and its importance. Before the eighteenth century, this wasn't really seen, felt, and thought of in the ways that we typically do now, ways that most people kind of agree on.

You've probably come across this sort of thing—I'm sure most people have. When looking at alternative cancer treatments, on different websites where people discuss such things, sometimes they say: "I've got cancer and how much I want to live." It's very, very common to hear something like: "I so want to live. I want to be here. I want to survive to hear my daughter's first words, my baby daughter's first words, or see her take her first steps." There's often fear: "I'm scared that I won't be there," or grief: "It grieves me that I might not be able to be there for that."

Or her first day of school, or her graduation from college, or her marriage, or her children—my grandchildren—I won't see them. It's very common to hear this sort of thing offered as a justification, as a reason for why "I want to live longer," even though the so-called quality of life—which usually means the relative ratio of pleasant to unpleasant—is poor.

But that thing is important. That thing—seeing ordinary life, witnessing ordinary life in my family—is more important. That this was given such import, put forward as a reason to live, as something that made life worthwhile, that qualified as an orientation and a wish, that qualified as the worthy life, a kind of worthy life—this was not thought before sometime in the eighteenth century.

We have to understand: this wasn't the case that everyone secretly felt that way and saw things that way, and only until the oppression of the church was lifted could they then admit it. It wasn't that all this time they were actually feeling that way, viewing their existence that way, viewing what was most important that way, but just couldn't admit it out loud, so they hid it and kept it secret. That wasn't the case. They actually didn't think that way. People actually didn't think that way.

It didn't qualify as something of that import, as something that would qualify as the good life, the beautiful life—"This is something that makes life worthwhile. This qualifies as me living a life that's worthwhile." This view of life or existence, in terms of what was most important, what qualified as making life worthwhile—this is a historically contingent development.

It's hard for us, or for many of us, to even grasp, to even stand outside that view. It's so taken for granted. This affirmation, elevation of ordinary life has become so pervasive, so entrenched.

I'm pointing out its historical contingency, but what does the fact of its historical contingency imply? What does it actually imply? What we take it to imply actually depends on our view of history, our view of the process of history. That's another question I've gone into in other talks in recent years. But still, it's worth acknowledging this. It's worth realizing this fact of historical contingency. How we interpret it is another matter, but I think it's important to be aware of it.

As I said, at a certain point, or over time, there evolved a demolition or flattening of hierarchies—hierarchy of values, hierarchy of strivings—actually an inversion of hierarchy. It was the affirmation then of ordinary life, work, production, family life, and an inversion because higher aims and strivings were put down, were criticized. To some extent a flattening, and to some extent an inversion evolved of that original hierarchy, that original hierarchy of values.

In Francis Bacon, in a way one of the founders of the scientific revolution, science was not the higher pursuit of knowledge, the higher quest to penetrate the mysteries of the universe, of the cosmos. Science was for the sake of technological power over nature in the service of ordinary life.

So all these trends and movements and developments in history, or through history, made it less possible to have, conceive of, feel a certain way towards something higher or more important than life, than preserving one's life, than ordinary existence, work, production, family.

And again, the question I have is: what does that do to our sense and our idea of human being, of our humanity?

And again, with soul-making Dharma, what does that offer us or open out in terms of possibility for what we might sense and feel and conceive of as higher or larger or more important than, say, having a long life or surviving physically or having more pleasant than unpleasant sensations or reducing pain or whatever?

Soul-making Dharma should, if one's practicing right, go right to the heart of that question, and it should open out a sense of that. For me, very, very potently and clearly, it should. In what soul-making Dharma practice opens, that should be one of the things that it opens: the sense of something or things—or whatever you're going to call them, dimensions or directions—that are higher, larger, more important than my living a long life, than my survival, more important than my not being in pain or reducing pain or whatever.

So this question—we talk about providing different dimensions, or attempting to provide different dimensions, or not providing any dimensions—and the question today is: what is the result of any of those dimensions, or the refusal to provide dimensions? What's the result with respect to what we might call anthropology, our idea of what it means to be a human being, what we've been talking about today?

What is the result? Also, of course, for theology, for our sense of divinity or Buddha nature. What's the result for our sense of existence? The different ideas of dimensions, or the refusal of dimension, will

influence and have an impact on our theologies and sense of existence, and also on our understanding of human being. Of course, it works the other way as well. Different senses of human being, or theology, will provide or disallow certain dimensions and non-dimensions for ethics.

I haven't talked much about Aristotle in this series of talks—I've mentioned him briefly in the Sīla and Soul talks—but Aristotelian virtue ethics were, as far as I understand, grounded in a notion of the common good of the polis, the city-state. A virtue had to be something which contributed, or at least didn't take away from, the common good of the city-state. Actually, he left out slaves and other strata of that society, so it was an even smaller view. But it's curious—is the dimensionality there in lateral number, in how many people, or in service of the nation or city-state, as if that's a kind of transcendent object in itself that provides the dimensionality? Is that related to the citizen ethic that Hannah Arendt was talking about? The question is: what does this do to our sense of human being and our humanity?

If we think about the Pali Canon and Buddha-Dharma with its cosmology of karma and rebirth, the rationale for simplification gives reasons for ethics: if you act unethically, you'll get a bad rebirth and reap bad karma. If you act ethically, you'll reap good karma. Moreover, if you act ethically, the complexities of your life and the agitations and busyness of your mind will simplify. That simplification allows practice—samādhi, then paññā, then liberation. You can see how the purpose of ethics is revealing something here as well.

In this way of understanding the Pali Canon, there's a pragmatic reason for ethics, a practical reason for sīla in concern for one's karma within that cosmological notion, and also because it allows meditation, insight, and liberation. So it's practical, but there's no ontological dimensionality or grounding for the ethics there.

You get something similar in John Locke—a kind of grounding in rational, pragmatic hedonism that many people objected to. In a way, you find this in Epicureanism too: just follow the pleasure. In good, charitable interpretations of Epicureanism, it's like the Pali Canon Buddhism—following the jhānas. I'll take this pleasure over the pleasure of the senses, then the second jhāna as a better kind of pleasure than the first, and so on. One goes up the rungs of the ladder, letting go of what has come before because one has found a better pleasure, until one actually lets go completely, having reached the highest kind of pleasure. Then one lets go into the so-called pleasure of nibbāna.

So there's a kind of rational pragmatic hedonism—which people vilify John Locke for, and Epicurus for Epicureanism—that has its parallels in Pali Canon Buddhism. But the grounding is pragmatic rather than what we could call ontological. There's no sense of the Good or this higher order that gives us our ethics through some kind of participation. We might say rebirth in a Brahmā realm is a kind of deification that becomes ontological, but that would be stretching it a little.

Again, if we take the dimensionality of rationality—rationality as a dimension—people think of this in very different ways. For some of the German idealists like Kant, our capacity for rationality might have

had this quasi-numinous, quasi-holy character. It's a kind of divine faculty, or divinely given faculty. Rationality itself was almost potentially, in our words, a kind of erotic-imaginative object.

What do all these ideas do—these ideas about dimensions and non-dimensions—for our sense of human being, of humanity, of our humanity?

In Platonic ethics and cosmology, almost every level of being is refracting and reflecting somehow the Good, the divine. It's existing in an analogous way. The world is analogy; the world is sign; the world is partial expression, is refraction, reflection in a hierarchical order of the divine, of the Good, of the ultimately Good. We can approach that. We can climb that ladder. We can read the cosmos, if you like.

That reading of the cosmos, that soul resonating with the theophanies, with the signs and the forms and the refractions and reflections of the Good, the divine, allows us to draw closer to the divine. We ourselves can become analogies of our image, or our angel, or our daimon, and in that way reflect and refract the divine, grow towards the divine. So there's also this eros and inexhaustibility of this transcendent Good, this transcendent divine, where, as human beings, we're connected intimately in our being with that divinity, with that Buddha-nature, Dharmakāya. But we're also separate from it. We're separate and not separate. We're in the image and likeness.

And we are, in our very essence, analogy. My life, if I live it with soul, becomes an analogy to my angel—a reflection of my angel which reflects God, which reflects the Buddha nature, which expresses an attribute of the Dharmakaya.

So there exists both: we are separate and not separate. We are connected in this most intimate way, by analogy, or potentially by analogy, in our very being. And there opens this possibility of direction, of growth, towards the divine—of theosis, as we call it in the Orthodox Church.

You can hear how this entire way of thinking about dimensionality serves as a grounding for ethics, construing the human being and our humanity in quite a powerful way that remains consistent, or relatively consistent—much more similar to what we encounter in the soul-making dharma, to what can possibly open for us in soul-making dharma and practice. The senses we can have that open, rather than the ideas we start from—the senses that can open through practice. Again, it is a phenomenological approach, rather than starting with metaphysics.

When we look at all this, whatever valid reason or support or dimension for ethics one tries to provide, it tends to be related to the conceived purpose of ethics, certainly, but also to the conceived purpose of life. Consider the Pali Canon Buddha Dharma: the purpose of life, the purpose of ethics, the given reasons for ethics are intimately connected with what we understand as the purpose of life, the purpose of existence—which is to reach Nibbana. And so it is in these other systems as well.

There has been this divorce of ethics from law, but the way we think about ethics—certainly related to the conceived purpose of ethics—the way we try to provide dimensionality for ethics connects intimately with

the conceived purpose of ethics and the conceived purpose of our existence. What does this imply about how we set up law, the purpose of law, and how we conceive of law? All this is connected.

Depending on how we think through this connection, which remains whole, it follows through to how we think of life, how we think of ethics, what dimensionality we give—then how we think of what the law is actually trying to accomplish, what the legal system is trying to accomplish. All is connected.

Again, if we simply ask this question: what is possible? Not just what is possible for us as human beings, but what is possible in terms of viable, valuable, and tenable ways we can conceive of and sense our humanity? What is possible there? What viable, tenable, and valuable ways exist for us to conceive of and to sense our human being today, now?

So much will depend on that—whether we feel blessed, whether our sense of existence is blessed, whether the sense of the cosmos is blessed. All depends on these questions, depends on these directions and decisions, these orientations.

If I want to live with a sense of blessedness, how can I support that possibility really, genuinely, deeply, robustly?

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