4 The Forgotten Ground

Recollecting the Primordial Harmony

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In the old days, all living creatures, from the biggest animal to the tiniest bug, lived side by side with the People in total peace and friendship (Cherokee) (Kerven, 2018: 140).

THE PRIMORDIAL SENSE OF ORDER

Since most ancient times, the human race has pondered its place in the great order of things. The earliest written records are myths. These ancient myths tell of how at the beginning all the different creatures lived together in harmony. In one form or another, a great order ruled everywhere, either through a natural wisdom of all creatures or through divine beings who presided over the world. Other myths tell of how the world came into existence from a primordial being, such as the *Purusha* in the Hindu Vedas. In some myths, there was darkness and nothing before anything came into being; in some, there was perpetual ice; in some, there were gods in the heavens but no living creatures on earth till they made them; and in some, there was a great void or chasm out of which arose the world and all beings. The beginning time in some was a Golden Age, a time in which gods and the people lived in harmony and there was no vice and all the earth was shared in common.

Whether these ancient myths conceived the world as always existent in a primordial time, or whether the world arose or was made by divine beings, or from the breaking of the cosmic egg, or from the great ocean, or from the original void, or the progeny of the marriage of heaven and earth, they each give the cosmos a story, a narrative. As the philosopher Paul Ricoeur has shown, narrative understanding is foundational to human consciousness. We initially grasp the world as

an unfolding event, and through this, we situate ourselves and derive our own sense of being and meaning (Ricoeur, 1991: 99). At its simplest, narrative has two aspects, an empirical and a mythical. History seeks the ‘true’ relation of events, while story embodies ‘imaginative’ events. Yet ‘story’ can equally tell what is true, as Aristotle says of tragedy: ‘Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular’ (Aristotle, 1932).

ORDERS OF TRUTH

‘True’ has many dimensions of meaning, though there has been a tendency since the Enlightenment to grant ‘truth’ only to a single so-called ‘objective’ dimension. But this objective dimension is itself founded on a presupposed narrative comportment towards reality. Nevertheless, any approach to the world seeks to ‘tell it as it is’ and to be truth-bearing. And such ‘telling’, of putting into speech or representation, is rooted in narrative consciousness, and this cannot be circumvented. Every such speaking or representing is in some sense an act of bearing witness to the world. Human consciousness spontaneously seeks to give account of the world and reality, to bring what is seen before itself and to reflect on what is so and what is not so. This is the case whether it is the exchange of mere gossip or the elaboration of a scientific theory. In recounting these things, we express a fundamental characteristic of human nature – as the being who tells of things and who becomes a community through such telling of things. Human accounting and bearing witness situate us in society, and society in the cosmos. Thus, Aristotle distinguishes the human being from all other species as having language (*logos*), and it is this that makes the political being (Aristotle, 2012: 1253A: 10).

It is from this ‘mythic consciousness’, the fundamental intuition of the order of things, that Greek philosophy emerged. Plato’s famous quarrel with the poets was not because he held the accounts of Homer and Hesiod to be untrue, but because they spoke true things without a real understanding of them. They spoke ‘out of their minds’, possessed by a divine madness. This divine madness is perfectly legitimate, and the poet cannot make true poetry without it:

If anyone comes to the gates of poetry and expects to become an adequate poet by acquiring expert knowledge of the subject without the Muses’ madness, he will fail, and his self-controlled verses will be eclipsed by the poetry of men who have been driven out of their minds.

Plato (1997)

Granting that, it is part of the work of the philosopher to bring into reflection and articulation an order of truth that lies in the deepest memory of the soul, or which belongs to the nature of consciousness itself.

NARRATIVE CONSCIOUSNESS AND TELEOLOGY

The narrative consciousness is also grounded in a sense of the ‘whole’, or what we may call the ‘cosmic sense’. What unfolds in narrative, or in becoming, unfolds within a totality, embracing reality as a whole, so it is natural to seek the lawful order of things. Here, we may say that the scientist, the philosopher and the poet all work on the same ground, acknowledging universal laws and a coherence to the order of things – even if that coherence always remains beyond full grasp. What is important is that, for the ancient philosophers, the sense of a ‘whole’ and an order to things belongs to the nature of consciousness itself and this is presupposed by all enquiry into the nature of the order of things.¹

Two further factors arise from the sense of the whole which are held by the ancient philosophers: the intuition of a *teleological* order of nature and an *ethical* sense of our relation with the world

¹ For a detailed philosophical discussion of the human sense of cosmos, see Rémi Brague, *The Wisdom of the World: The Human Experience of the Universe in Western Thought* (2003).

(Blanchette, 1992). These two cannot be entirely separated. This is because it is assumed in ancient thought that the coming into existence of reality is both *purposeful* and essentially *good*. For Plato, the good precedes being and illuminates the truth of things. It is also what all things naturally seek in coming into being in the fullness of their potential. There is a teleological order to the universe as a totality, while each particular thing seeks its completeness within the total order and according to its own nature. As Collingwood observes in *The Idea of Nature*:

The world of nature is thus for Aristotle a world of self-moving things, as it is for the Ionians and for Plato. It is a living world: a world not characterised by inertia, like the world of the seventeenth-century matter, but by spontaneous movement. Nature as such is process, growth, change. This process is a development, i.e. the changing takes successive forms α , β , γ , ... in which each is the potentiality of its successor.

Collingwood (1960: 82)

Understanding nature in this manner, as self-moving, means that its efficient and final causes lie within itself:

And Aristotle arrives at this conception of an immaterial efficient cause by reflection on the fact of development: for development implies *nisus*, that is, a movement or process not merely oriented towards the realization in bodily form of something not yet realized, but actually motivated by the tendency towards such realization. The seed only grows at all because it is working at becoming a plant; hence the form of the plant is the cause not only of its growing in that way but of its growing at all, and is therefore the efficient cause as well as the final cause of its growth.

(ibid: 84)

This *nisus* or inclination of living things towards their natural ends is often assumed in practical experience, even if not theoretically. For example, we may see from experience that every living thing strives towards perfect health and maturity. Medicine remains founded on this principle, even if it is not theoretically acknowledged. It is unfortunate that this teleological understanding of nature was discarded in the seventeenth century in the attempts of the new sciences to escape scholastic Aristotelianism, owing to the rejection of the authority of the Church and the ancient philosophers and the rise of nominalism,² as, for example, we see in Bacon's *The New Atlantis*. This also meant the overthrow of any hierarchical or sacred conception of the order of nature. Human mastery over 'nature's secrets' became the new aim of knowledge. Later, as a more mechanistic view of nature took hold, any notion of 'purpose' or 'final causality' was entirely eliminated from scientific theory (Lear, 2011). The motion or activity of things was explained by the mechanical effects of one thing upon another, or through outside forces moving them, so that nothing possessed its own cause or moved from its own nature.³ The notion of 'purpose' or 'natural ends' was relegated to human subjectivity. And with the elimination of teleology, any ethical conception of the natural order of things becomes impossible. The so-called 'impartial' study of nature rendered nature itself impartial. The mechanistic theory projects itself *upon* the observed on the assumption it is disclosing the order of things.

THE ETHICAL RELATION WITH NATURE

However, even if nature is conceived as neither teleological nor tending to some good, the ethical relation of the human species with nature cannot so easily be set aside, least of all with climate change demanding both a rational and an ethical response. Just as human consciousness grasps

² For a detailed study of this shift in thinking, see Michael Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (2009).

³ For a detailed discussion of how the ancient notion of teleology was discarded in the Enlightenment, see Stephen G. Salkever, *Finding the Mean* (1990: 21–36).

reality narratively and is grounded in an intuition of wholeness, so also it has an ethical sense, a sense that a natural good belongs to everything and that human action is responsible to this. In the Middle Ages, this awareness was termed *synderesis* (Aquinas, 1920: 1a:79). This informed the practical reason, the reasoning that informs action, as distinct from the intellectual reason. All human action was understood to have an ethical aspect. When Aristotle defined human nature through language (*logos*), mentioned earlier, he also remarks that:

...speech is for disclosing what is advantageous and what is harmful, and so too what is just and what is unjust. For this is distinctive of human beings in relation to the other animals, to be alone in having a perception of good and bad, just and unjust, and the rest, and it is an association involving these things that makes a household and a city.

Aristotle (2012: 1253A: 10–19)

For Aristotle, as for Plato, human society arises through the sense of justice and injustice. It is this that makes the human animal both social and political. Hence, politics is concerned with law and jurisprudence. But also, and most important, for Aristotle human society is natural (Trott, 2014), as much a part of nature as any other part. One might almost say that society comes into being so that justice can be seen and said.⁴ It was Thomas Hobbes who first conceived of society as an ‘artificial’ creation and outside nature, although Hobbes derives his view from the ancient sophists who also held that ‘justice’ was a purely human construct with no foundation in nature. But for Plato and Aristotle, human beings are naturally just, in the sense that they are only truly human when just.

JUSTICE AND NATURE

For Plato and Aristotle, the question of the nature of justice is a foundational question, inseparable from the ontological question, not simply for philosophy, but for human existence as such. The question of justice goes beyond the social and political domains and extends to nature as a whole, more so if society is itself part of nature. The right way of human life is to live justly in relation to all things. This comes as a responsibility of the capacity to reflect upon all things. Human consciousness not only has a sense of the whole, but this sense of the whole situates human beings within the whole as their natural dwelling place. Seen in this way, it is clear that justice for the ancient Greeks was not merely a matter of individual opinion but rather something belonging to the entire order of the cosmos.⁵

NATURE AS INTELLIGENT

Plato views the cosmos as intelligent, rational and therefore intelligible. One way Plato demonstrates this is by showing a correspondence between human reason and the order of the heavens and how, by perceiving the rational order of the heavens, the human soul is brought into harmony with itself:

God invented and gave us sight to the end that we might behold the courses of intelligence in the heaven, and apply them to the courses of our own intelligence which are akin to them, the unperturbed to the perturbed; and that we, learning them and partaking of the natural truth of reason, might imitate the absolutely unerring courses of God and regulate our own vagaries. The same may be affirmed of speech and hearing: they have been given by the gods to the same end and for a like reason. For this is the principal end of speech, whereto it most contributes.

Plato, Timaeus (1937: 47c–d)

⁴ For a detailed discussion of the Greek conception of law founded in the unity of society, see Otto Gierke, *Association and Law: The Classical and Early Christian Stages* (1997).

⁵ For Plato’s refutation of the various false opinions of justice, see *Republic* Book 1.

That the human senses should be related to the nature of things is itself not so strange. But that there should be a purpose to perception that is related to the proper work of intelligence runs counter to the modern notion of the autonomy of human intelligence and the belief that it can stand, as it were, outside the world looking in.⁶ But as soon as it is acknowledged that the cosmos itself is rational and intelligent, then it is clear that human intelligence cannot dissociate itself from the cosmos any more than the body can dissociate itself from the biosphere. On the contrary, it has to be understood as in some sense participating in it, or as ‘partaking of the natural truth of reason’, as Plato puts it.⁷

The notion of applying the ‘courses of intelligence in the heaven’ to ‘the courses of our own intelligence’ is not simply a poetic manner of speaking. It indicates that human intelligence can align itself with the truth of things with which it has a direct kinship. That alignment goes beyond the capacity simply to give accurate descriptions of things. To align with the truth of things belongs as much to practical reason as to intellectual reason. It ‘regulates’ the intelligence by conforming it to the cosmic intelligence or reason. When ordered in this manner, the soul is brought into harmony with itself. According to Plato’s anthropology, that means that the rational, the spirited and the appetitive parts of the soul are brought into concord with one another and can therefore act truthfully and virtuously.⁸ Otherwise, disorder exists between the parts of the soul, what Plato calls ‘vagaries’.

THE NATURAL INCLINATION TO RESPONSIBLE KNOWLEDGE

Seen in this way, our natural inclination to the truth of things, our desire to enquire, arises from the rational relation of the soul with the rational order of reality itself. There is a continuum between nature and thought. Thus, Aristotle opens his *Metaphysics* with the observation that:

All human beings by nature stretch themselves out toward knowing. A sign of this is our love of the senses; for even apart from their use, they are loved on their own account, and above all the rest, the one through the eyes.

Aristotle (2002: 980a: 21)

And what the mind seeks through the senses is wisdom. Yet the mind must reach out of itself in order to be itself. When the order of things is apprehended, there is a correlation between outward perception and inward reflection. We might even say that, through being present and perceptible, nature confers the gift of self-reflection upon human intelligence. The Greek word for truth is *aletheia*, meaning ‘unconcealing’. Nature at once conceals and reveals itself. Truth cannot be taken by force, but offers itself to rightly oriented intelligence and reverential intention.⁹

This way of seeing the relation between human intelligence and the rational order of things raises the question of human responsibility towards nature as a whole. Aristotle poses the question: ‘One must also consider in which of the two ways the nature of the whole contains what is good and what is best, whether as something separate, itself by itself, or as the order of the whole of things’ (Aristotle, 2002: 1075a). That is to say, does the ‘good’ lie simply in the whole as such, or in some principle ordering the whole? Or are the ‘whole’ and its principle the same? For what can lie beyond the whole? In asking these questions, we are brought to consider how the ‘being’ and the ‘good’ of things are related, or if, ultimately, they are separate. Such metaphysical questions are more easily approached when the responsibilities of the human person are considered in relation to the whole.

⁶ For a philosophical discussion of why nature cannot be properly accounted for if consciousness is omitted, see Thomas Nagel, *Mind & Cosmos* (2012).

⁷ For a comprehensive study of Plato’s ethics and cosmology, see Gabriela Roxana Carone, *Plato’s Cosmology and Its Ethical Dimensions* (2005).

⁸ For Plato’s elaboration of the tripartite soul, see *Republic* IV: 435–442.

⁹ The consequences of seeking to take truth by force are famously captured in the story of building the tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1–9, and how this destroys the power of speech, the essential human characteristic.

Cicero, taking up this question from a Stoic perspective, conceives of this responsibility in a number of steps:

In order to have value, a thing must either be itself in harmony with nature or else be the means of procuring something which is so. All objects, then, that are in accordance with nature are relatively choiceworthy on their own account, while their opposites have negative value and call for rejection. The primary duty is that the creature should maintain itself in its natural constitution; next, that it should cleave to all that is in harmony with nature and spurn all that is not; and when once this principle of choice and rejection has been arrived at, the next stage is choice, conditioned by inchoate duty; next such a choice is exercised continuously; finally, it is rendered unwavering and in thorough agreement with nature; and at that stage the conception of what good really is begins to dawn within us and be understood.

Cicero, De Finibus, III, 20–21, in Hicks (2018: 80)

Contrary to the Enlightenment notion that ‘fact’ and ‘value’ cannot be related, Cicero here shows how the value of anything is to be judged by its integrity or coherence within itself or its harmony with nature as a whole. Every creature has a duty to maintain its integrity, and while the other creatures do this spontaneously through natural inclination, human nature must take up that obligation consciously and deliberately. To elect to ‘cleave to all that is in harmony with nature’ (Cicero, *ibid*) is a rational act of aligning thought and action to the greater whole. It is at once a moral and a rational act. Cicero considers holding to action of this kind to be the human duty, and only then can a true understanding of the good begin to be realised.

THE NATURAL VIRTUES

To live with this kind of resolution is to live virtuously. The virtues are the ancient ground of ethics, as distinct from modern deontological ethics. The virtues¹⁰ bring order to the inner being and enable right action. According to Zeno, they establish at once individual autonomy and the capacity to act in harmony with nature:

The goal of all these virtues is to live consistently with nature. Each one enables a human being to achieve this [goal] in his own way; for [a human] has from nature inclinations to discover what is appropriate and to stabilize his impulses and to stand firm and to distribute [fairly]. And each of the virtues does what is consonant [with these inclinations] and does its own job, thus enabling a human being to live consistently with nature.

Inwood and Gerson (2008: 26)

Just as the mind has an inclination to reach out to knowledge and understanding, as Aristotle says in the opening of his *Metaphysics*, so likewise it inclines to the good and to knowledge of the good. These are the ‘inclinations to discover what is appropriate’, as Zeno puts it. And again, as Aristotle says, the human being desires not only to live, but to live well (Aristotle, 2002. 1095a: 15–22).

NATURAL LAW

Gathering together our observations on the primordial sense of the whole, the narrative sense, the teleological order of nature, and the ethical sense and intuition of the good, we can trace how this integrated way of considering reality gave birth to the great tradition of Natural Law. This tradition shaped the thought and way of life in the Middle Ages until it finally succumbed to the mechanistic vision of the world in the seventeenth century. The break with the Natural Law tradition severed the relationship of the true and the good, the rational and the ethical, in both the sciences and politics.

¹⁰ Primarily, the four cardinal virtues of prudence, courage, justice and temperance.

The seminal text of Natural Law transmitted through the Middle Ages was from Cicero's *De Republica*:

There is indeed a law, right reason, which is in accordance with nature; existing in all, unchangeable, eternal. Commanding us to do what is right, forbidding us to do what is wrong. It has dominion over good men, but possesses no influence over bad ones. No other law can be substituted for it, no part of it can be taken away, nor can it be abrogated altogether. Neither the people nor the senate can absolve us from it. It wants no commentator or interpreter. It is not one thing at Rome, and another thing at Athens: one thing to-day, and another thing to-morrow; but it is a law eternal and immutable for all nations and for all time.

Cicero (2017: 33)

According to this tradition, all people have an innate knowledge of this immutable law. It is expressed in the universal desire for justice – justice in the sense of things being in harmony with truth and their proper ends. This conception of justice belongs to nature itself, ruling even the animals in their instinctual inclinations, and perceived by the human mind as the ‘reason’ inherent in nature. It is the ‘unwritten law’ behind any formulation of civil laws or codified legal system. Any manmade law is recognised as law only so far as it is in harmony with the Natural Law.

It is this law that informs human nature of its proper relation with society and with nature. And this in turn gave birth to the ancient understanding of ‘right use’ or appropriate ends of things. For Aristotle, the appropriate end of the polis is not simply living together, but living together well or beautifully. This is possible only when citizens are virtuous (Aristotle, 2012, 1278b: 20–30; 2002; 115b:12–13, 1122b: 6–7). Indeed, only the virtuous life may be regarded as forming citizenship since a citizen is one who has forethought for the common good. ‘For that which has the power to foresee by thinking is naturally ruling and naturally mastering’ (Aristotle, 2012: 1252a: 31). Such foresight is based on the perception that the whole has primacy over the parts: ‘And a city is more primary by nature than the household, and more primary than each of us, for the whole is necessarily more primary than its parts’ (Aristotle, 2012: 1253a: 12–21).

OWNERSHIP AND RIGHT USE

To live well or beautifully therefore means regarding all action and use of things in terms of the good of the whole. The question of right use therefore precedes the question of ownership. This applies to the proper use of wealth and directly to our human relationship with the land, the earth, and with the provisions of nature. Properly speaking, no part of nature may be ‘owned’ by anyone. The land is the free gift to all creatures just as the air, water and sunshine. The Roman poet Ovid laments how this wisdom was lost with the passing of the Golden Age:

The earth itself, which before had been, like air and sunshine,
A treasure for all to share, was now crisscrossed with lines
Men measured and marked with boundary posts and fences.

Ovid (2004: I/134–36)

The Stoic philosopher Seneca also wrote of the Golden Age before this was lost:

The social virtues had remained pure and inviolate before covetousness distracted society and introduced poverty, for men ceased to possess all things when they began to call anything their own ... How happy was the primitive age when the bounties of nature lay in common and were used freely; nor had avarice and luxury disunited mortals and made them prey upon one another. They enjoyed all nature in common, which thus gave them secure possession of public wealth. Why should I not think them the richest of all people, among whom was not to be found one poor man?

Seneca (2007: 90)

In the Middle Ages, property in land was understood to exist ‘legally’ but not according to Natural Law.

Community of goods is ascribed to the natural law, not that the natural law dictates that all things should be possessed in common and that nothing should be possessed as one’s own: but because the division of possessions is not according to the natural law, but rather arose from human agreement which belongs to positive law.

Aquinas (1920: IIa-IIae, q. lxvi, art. 2)

According to Natural Law, there can be no ownership of what nature provides freely for all. The legal arrangement was simply pragmatic. It assured that property would be cared for as an owner would wish to use it to advantage. But this was qualified by the concept of right use, which meant that all property, not only land, should be employed in such ways as contributed to the common good.

The second thing that is competent to man with regard to external things is their use. On this respect man ought to possess external things, not as his own, but as common, so that, to wit, he is ready to communicate them to others in their need.

(ibid)

This meant that, should anyone be destitute, they were free to take whatever they needed from those with sufficient. The law of theft was suspended and Natural Law re-established (*ibid*). The modern conception of ‘absolute ownership’, which allows an owner to dispose of private property however they please, even to destroy it, did not exist. There is a clue in the word ‘private’ which means to be separated from the whole, to be alienated, from which ‘privation’ is derived. Thus, private ownership implied separation of both property and person from society and from nature. In other words, law in the Middle Ages implied duties to the community and to nature, as distinct from rights which make claims open community and nature. Natural Law understands the human person as *already a participant* in the community, while modern rights law understands the human person as *contracting into* community.¹¹

THE RISE OF THE PROPRIETORIAL SELF

This ancient understanding seems to be natural to indigenous societies, such as the Kalahari Bushmen, the North American Indians or the Australian Aboriginals, for whom landownership has no meaning. The modern West has lost this natural relation to the world. With the rise of individualism, the sense of community has been eroded, and this has given rise to the ‘proprietary self’ – the self conceived in terms of extended ownership.¹² Almost the whole of modern economic theory is built upon the notion of ownership, of acquiring and consuming, rather than responsible use.¹³ Modern westerners define themselves in terms of self-ownership and the notion that ownership confers absolute right of disposal (Locke, 1969). The ancient prohibition against suicide, for example, was based on Natural Law which regarded the biosphere as outside ownership. Ownership can only ever be a legal arrangement, a part of positive law, but not of Natural Law.¹⁴

¹¹ For a discussion of the rise of ‘subjective rights’ to property in the late Middle Ages, see Annabel S. Brett *Liberty, Right and Nature* (1997).

¹² For a full discussion of this, see C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (2011).

¹³ For an illuminating discussion of medieval economic teaching, see Christopher Franks, *He Became Poor* (2009).

¹⁴ A powerful critique of Locke’s theory of private ownership of land is given in 1832 by Thomas Rutherforth in his *Institutes of Natural Law: Being the Substance of a Course of Lectures on Grotius de Jure Belli et Pacis* (2016: Chapter 3, X).

The modern proprietorial relationship with the land distorts our relationship with nature, reducing it to a mere 'economic resource', rather than our habitat shared with all other creatures (Leopold, 1949). This raises the question of extending ownership to minerals, plants or genetic material. It also raises the question of the proper relation of research to the community and the 'privatisation' of knowledge. Plato condemns the sophists for demanding payment for their teaching since learning or wisdom cannot be a private possession nor a means of exploitation. By its very nature, knowledge is infinitely distributable.

THE COMMODIFICATION OF NATURE

With the rise of economics as a discrete discipline in the seventeenth century, despite its early merits, there has been an ever-increasing tendency to view the world and society commercially. This has been reinforced by the reductive mechanistic worldview of the Enlightenment. In his seminal work, *The Great Transformation*, Karl Polanyi traces how the market economy gradually divided itself off from the medieval community and its traditions, where exchange of goods had been part of the social structure. This led to the commodification of land, labour and money (Polanyi, 2001). Thus, exchange became driven by profit-making and commerce became parasitic on community, rather than enhancing the social structure and serving the common good. The medieval understanding of right use of property vanished from economic theory, preserved now only in Catholic social teachings.¹⁵ The commodification of land, labour and money is a clear example of the separation of the ethical aspect of the community's relation with the natural order. Merchandising became the new narrative, while dwelling on the land became merely instrumental.¹⁶

Plato and Aristotle regard the reduction of life to 'money making' as corrosive of human character and destructive of community. 'The life of money making is a type of compulsory activity, and it is clear that wealth is not the good being sought, since it is instrumental for the sake of something else', says Aristotle (2002: 1096a: 1–10). And even more strongly Plato says 'thus, for the sake of money, they try utterly to destroy private individuals and whole households and cities' (Plato, 1980: 909b). What matters for the good of the *polis* is that its citizens value 'justice in the soul' above all other possessions:

...nor, again, should I take counsel about it with the so-called diviners, who in one way or another will advise me to take what was deposited in the earth. Because I would never benefit as much in money by taking the property as I would increase in substance as regards virtue of the soul and what is just by not taking it, I would thereby have acquired a better possession than that possession, and in a better part of me, by honoring the acquisition of justice in the soul before that of wealth in property.

Plato (1980: 913b)

RECOLLECTING THE PRIMORDIAL HARMONY

The order of the soul and the proper human relation to the earth are, as we have seen, bound together. Justice – the great measure which all societies in all ages recognise – has the peculiar character of being at once an inward virtue and an external virtue, relating human nature to itself and to the world. It follows from this that if a society adopts an unjust relation with the natural world, then citizens will suffer internal turmoil and discontent. Human fulfilment and living in harmony with nature are inextricably bound together. While the prevailing narrative fails to recognise this, most ordinary people do recognise that we are part of a 'great whole' and ought to live in harmony

¹⁵ See Pope Leo xiii *Rerum Novarum* (1891), the first encyclical to address the exploitation of labour, yet flawed with a contradictory mixture of Natural Law and Lockean economic theory. Nevertheless, later social encyclicals have preserved the concept of right use.

¹⁶ See Melissa Lane, *Eco-Republic: Ancient Thinking for a Green Age* (2011), for a discussion of how adopting a Platonic model of society can respond to the modern environmental crisis.

together and with nature. There is a kind of primordial memory awakened of the cosmic order and our place within it as expressed in the ancient myths. As Ricoeur says:

For it is only when it is threatened with destruction from without or from within that a society is compelled to return to the very roots of its identity; to that mythical nucleus which ultimately grounds and determines it.

Ricoeur (1991: 584)

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