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Nature's Universe, Morality, and the Global Political Culture

by

Barbara Baudot

Professor of Politics

Research Center Coordinator New

Hampshire Institute of Politics

Saint Anselm College, Manchester, N.H. 03102-1310(603)

222-4106

bbaudot@anselm.edu

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By Barbara Baudot¹

Human beings have a role to play, which each is free to play or not; each is a link in a chain and not a piece of straw to be carried away by a torrent. In the end, human dignity is not a word spoken in vain; by ignoring or refusing dignity human kind lowers itself to the level of the brute.

Lecomte du Nouy *L'Homme et Sa Destinée*

Postmodern society is both lamented and celebrated. Frederic Jameson describes the fragmented and chaotic world lurking beneath the thin veneer of the modern world's unprecedented opportunities—affluence, individual freedoms, and spectacular technological achievements. Postmodernism is the age of the consumer society, the media society, the information society, the electronic society; it is a period of sheer heterogeneity and random differences; a coexistence of a host of distinct forces whose effectiveness is undeterminable; a degraded and depthless cultural landscape of schlock and kitsch—its features marked by the reification of social relations, psychological squalor and overt expressions of social and political alienation. All of this is now received with complacency and even institutionalized—becoming the mode of the political and public culture of the Western society.²

Among those with more respect for the postmodern culture is, for instance, Robert Cooper, senior British diplomat, scholar, and adviser to British Prime Minister Tony Blair. Cooper sees the following characteristics in postmodernism: the irrelevance of territorial borders, the breaking down of the distinction between domestic and foreign affairs, the interference in traditional domestic affairs and mutual surveillance, the rejection of force for resolving disputes and the codification of rules of behavior. These elements exist in Western Europe and to a large extent in the US and for Cooper, the Postmodern state is more pluralist, more complex, and less centralized than the bureaucratic modern state, but not at all chaotic. Above all it values the individual. With the weakening of the state, forces such as the media, popular emotion, the interests of particular groups and regions, including transnational groups and corporations, have come into play as international forces.³

These diverging views of the modern globalized social milieu provide the backdrop against which dramatic challenges are unfolding. Numerous places bear the wounds of a rapidly deteriorating environment and of endemic poverty. State violence and international crime are on the rise. Societal imbalances are linked to the waves of international migrants and asylum seekers knocking at the doors of the rich regions of the world. Inequalities of all types are growing in most societies. A new cosmopolitan elite shaped by a culture of power, competition, and expansion coexists with masses that, even in democratic societies, have no say in decisions that affect their lives. The globalization of acquisitiveness, materialism, privilege, and license have shattered the fragile equilibrium that aforesaid existed within societies and between humanity and its natural environment. Hence the relevance of this momentous question: How can social harmony be promoted on a world scale and how can a balance between human activity and its global environment best be achieved that will permit human flourishing and maintain the integrity of the biosphere?

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Political formulation of eminently reasonable answers for the world and adoption of concrete measures to implement them took place in the United Nations in the course of a series of World Conferences organized during the last quarter of the 20th century. In 1992, the Conference on Environment and Development was held in Rio de Janeiro and adopted *Agenda 21* as a blue print for action.⁴ Ten years later, in Johannesburg, the Secretariat of the United Nations had to recognize that on the most important aspects of the protection of the environment—notably, the conservation of soils, the preservation of forests and of the seas, the quality and availability of potable water, and the maintenance of bio-diversity— regression rather than progress had taken place.⁵ In that ten year interlude, world leaders gathered in the year 2000 and adopted the *United Nations Millennium Declaration* in which they stated the following: “We recognize that, in addition to our separate responsibilities to our individual societies, we have a collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality, and equity at the global level.”⁶ Today, there is little evidence of any concrete implementation of such principles. It appears that the practices of the main actors on the world stage, corporations and states, are consistently dominated by acquisitiveness, selfishness, and neglect for the future.

How then to address the moral vacuity of the present age and its destructive impacts on societies and the environment?

Vaclav Havel enquires whether the essence of these crises is related to the loss of respect for the order of existence in which humankind is not the creator, but a mere component of its mysterious meaning or spirit. He also poses the question whether these crises are not the logical consequences of the conception of the world as a complex of phenomena controlled by certain scientifically identifiable laws: a “conception that does not question the meaning of existence and renounces any kind of metaphysics or any kind of metaphysical roots of its own.” He feels the only option for humankind is a change in the sphere of the human spirit. He writes: “Only humankind’s understanding of its place in the universe will allow the development of new models of behavior, scales of values, and objectives in life and through these means finally bind a new spirit and meaning to specific regulations, treaties, and institutions.”⁷

The apparent failure of efforts by states and other institutions to put in place programs to significantly arrest the degradation of the world’s social and natural environments cannot be ignored. It is an urgent call to stir the world’s market place of ideas with reconsiderations about the meaning of existence and the importance of virtue-based happiness. This implies appreciation of moral values and serious thinking about how these can come to play in policy making. It is the contention of this paper that an intellectual and moral renaissance is necessary for humankind to discover its common good. Effective protection of the environment and a real reduction of poverty, in all its forms, would be part of such a renaissance. This project is consistent with the aims of Eco-Ethica and its search for a new morality for the 21st century.

The quest to reestablish virtue, high meaning, and responsibility as relevant in public spheres, whether political, economic, or social, can be advanced by reexamining the dimensions of morality that have been variously introduced and discussed by philosophers and religious thinkers in many places around the globe over the course of history. Most common among these dimensions are human interactions, motivations, and a sense of meaning in life. For example, in the midst of the horrors of World War II, when asked to speak to soldiers on public morality, C.S. Lewis stated that morality, whether on the scale of the individual, the community, the nation, or the world, involved a combination of:

- Equity and harmony between actors;

- Inner virtues of the actors; and
- A sense of general purpose for humankind.

For Lewis, these three dimensions are interdependent and failure to recognize this hobbles even the best-intended actions or national policies. Initiatives, undertaken to ensure fair play and harmony in interpersonal or international relations cannot promote mutual respect or meet demands of an untoward situation if the agent's greed, cowardice, and/or self-conceit operate to prevent their actualization. And, without some sense of high purpose or vision, it is unlikely that the necessary changes in the motivational psyche can be easy or natural. Some sense of purpose for moral behavior is essential to the successful implementation of policies promoting the common good and respect for nature.⁸ This approach to morality provides a convenient framework for organizing the search for meaning and a renewed set and scale of values. It is explored below.

Equity and Harmony between the Actors

There is considerable agreement that the establishment of harmony and fair play in social intercourse and between humankind and nature is fundamental for human survival. Such acknowledgment is embodied in the moral codes of all prominent philosophies and religions. It is evident, for example, in the virtual universal recognition of the Golden Rule—"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."—expressed variously in the West and East. There is widespread awareness in religion and philosophy that flagrant inequalities and inequities in society are wrong. The need to seek social harmony is central to the social contract theories of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean Jacques Rousseau, albeit with political blueprints reflecting different visions of human nature.⁹ Similar aims and recognitions underlie the principles and axioms of national and international law, including the *Charter of the United Nations and the Conventions on Social and Economic and Political and Civil Rights*, and are latent in ongoing attempts to extend these laws to the most egregious problems confronting modern society.

What people and countries accept in principle is not always borne out in action. There are many problems on this dimension of morality that are unresolved—notably those demanding sacrifices, forbearance, and generosity. Whether morality can be said to actually play a significant role on this level or not, rides on answers, for example, to the following questions: Do public policies address the root causes of inequities and inequalities? Do they tend to redistribute income so as to reduce the enormous gap between the rich and the poor? And, do they tend to discourage the relentless squandering of natural resources by countries with advanced technology enabling them to do so?

For reasons fundamentally ideological, the answers to these questions in the prevailing global economy are rather negative. Centuries ago, Adam Smith proposed that social well being can best be achieved by the operations of an invisible hand in the market place. His theory is that individuals en masse operating according to the dictates of their self interest in the market place would bring about, as if guided by some invisible hand, most effectively and efficiently the common good of society. His prescriptions are buttressed by assumptions that governments would protect society from aberrations in his perfectly competitive market, from the culturally and individually altering impact of technology, and from moral softening, acquisitiveness, and greed. But in the intervening years spanning the industrial revolution, powerful forces have found it convenient to transform this benevolent and complex theory into a political-economic ideology favoring only those prescriptions advancing private wealth and power. In the wake of

this transformation, societal harmony has been challenged by the increasing ranks of poor on a world scale and by the growing chasm in income distribution.

These manifestations of social disintegration, accompanied as they are by environmental degradation, were inevitable. When democratic capitalism depends on the invisible hand of acquisitive individualism in a *laissez-faire* market that permits imperfect competition, social Darwinism, and unregulated consumption of scarce resources, Adam Smith's invisible hand, by definition alone, cannot bring about the common good. Nor can it internalize the costs of externalities in the production processes that blight the environment. Nor can it provide for the well-being of the masses excluded from the market as cost-efficient, labor-saving machinery, and electronic devices render them obsolete. Unquestioned faith in self-interest, coupled with support for the vices of aggressive egoism, threatens not only the same progress, reason, and industry that have brought society to its modern state, but also the natural environment.

In the dichotomy that persists between the appearance of sociability and compassion, and the cold reality of society's scientifically and economically calculated approach to human affairs, concern for preserving the natural environment is insignificant. Nature and its resources have little more than instrumental value. The meager efforts to promote respect for the natural environment in international forums are buried in thorny and mediocre issues of money and power such as the financial implications of technology transfer to the South and the exploitation of patent rights and know-how by these poor countries.¹⁰ As many textbooks on environmental policy making will substantiate, environmental security is rarely factored into the conscience of the market society unless human health is in jeopardy, business deems it prudent, or governments are under extreme pressure to do so.¹¹

There is another complication changing life in society and threatening to abandon humankind in a milieu of unfair play and social disequilibria. Modernity, in contributing to the conceit of the possessors of knowledge of modern science and technique, has prompted the transfer of power and control of society from "the people" to the groups or corporations with ownership claims and intellectual property rights to products, inventions, and technology. Bertrand Russell observed, as early as the 1940's, that many theories inspired by scientific technique are power theories and tend to regard everything non-human as mere raw material. Ends no longer considered, only the skillfulness of the process is valued.¹² Noting this change in modern society and in articulating his expanded morality for the 21st century, Tomonobu Imamichi emphasizes that time-honored ethics and morality must transcend their roots in prescriptions for individual behavior and be grafted on the decision makers of the present age. These include the corporate committees and groups and the public institutions that heretofore have escaped the constraints of individual morality and ethical behavior.¹³

Complicating this issue is the subtle detail that corporations have legal personality. With this status, enterprises lay claim to the same human rights and liberties possessed by individuals and share in the individual's tendency to understand freedoms and rights as unrestrained license so long as others do not object. As such, these liberties are dissociated from, or unencumbered by moral responsibilities. Thus, individuals, corporations, and public institutions ignore the many obligations that freedoms and rights impose on individuals in society. This perverted relation of ethics with the individual seems, judging from the current state of our world, to lead to many contemporary moral and political impasses.

Yet, common sense should inform the policy maker that harmonious social interaction does not evolve from morally flawed measures such as those falling short of equitable consideration of all members of the society. Nor does harmony evolve from measures failing to take into account the finitude of natural resources and the fragility of the biosphere. Only by adopting just regulations and providing public goods and services for all, can societies begin to effectively promote development and progress. Public goods and services must include education, opportunities for employment, and the protection of nature. Members of the world community should also share concern for the highest quality of these services.

Public services, however, are often imperfectly managed. Increasingly the trend is to solicit the private sector for management skills considered missing in the public sector. Little thought is commonly given to the reality that private interests serve a different set of values and objectives and that general welfare is a fortuitous by-product of their service.¹⁴ Partly in consideration of this imbalance, the question of corporate morality, called in United Nations circles, “corporate social responsibility” and also “corporate citizenship” is being addressed in an increasing number of business schools. Not so long ago, Kenneth Goodpaster, professor of ethics at Harvard Business School, posed and answered the question “*Can a Corporation have a Conscience?*” In his article, he considers that in some sense a corporation does have a conscience and it is incumbent on a corporation’s individual human parts to make it behave as would a morally responsible person.¹⁵

In summary, policies and actions to bring about fair play and harmony in societies as well as a sustainable relationship between humankind and nature require socially just and balanced consideration of the respective resources and needs of all the parties concerned. Without the esteem for the “other,” there is limited space for fruitful cooperation and for opportunity to make progress towards a “good society.” Yet, while most modern actors, institutions as well as individuals, recognize the need to avoid conflicts and to operate harmoniously at least for their profit and self-interest, their overall success in dealing with the global challenges remains lamentable.

Inner Virtues of the Actors

Lewis introduces this second dimension of morality by posing the question: what is the good of drawing up rules for social behavior, if we know greed, cowardice, or self-conceit are going to obstruct their actualization? He adds: “One must realize that only the courage and unselfishness of individuals are ever going to make any system work properly.”¹⁶ Renowned thinkers in the West and East have long regarded human virtue and personal character as major determinants of wise statecraft. Lewis’s observations, in fact echo ideas that Aristotle articulates. Aristotle holds that, if political actions appear to be right and just, it does not follow that they are done justly or temperately—the political actor or agent must be of excellent moral character when performing good works.

Actions are just and temperate when they are such as the just or temperate person would do.¹⁷ In the same vein, old and common wisdom stresses that one cannot make people good by law; and, without good people one cannot have a good society.

To go back to the thinking of Plato, Aristotle and, more than a thousand years later, Alan of Lille, a medieval scholar who draws heavily on Plato, is to get an intricate and insightful picture of the weight, meaning, and value of virtue for government, society, and the individual. Plato’s works address the issues of moral values in ways relevant to government, to the relationship of humanity to nature, as well as to the government of the inner person. In Plato’s view, justice in

the state consists in each of the three classes of citizens doing the work of its own class. This conception of justice is consistent with the appropriate functions of the parts of the soul: the principles of reason, emotion, and appetite. Reason proclaims the law and is the source of wisdom. The spirited principle, when not otherwise corrupted, is the natural subject and auxiliary of reason. The concupiscent principle is the largest part of the soul and by nature the most insatiable.

Without the effective guard of reason and spirit, "the concupiscent soul, waxing great and strong with bodily pleasures, no longer remains restrained and spills out of its own sphere."¹⁸

Strongly influenced by Plato's *Timaeus*, in which similar imagery is evoked in greater detail than in *The Republic*,¹⁹ Alan of Lille vividly incorporates the universe, nature, and politics in this image. The narrator of Alan's *Plainte of Nature*, is Nature herself. In her view of the government of the universe, God gives orders by magisterial authority, angels operate by administration, and humans obey by the mystery of regeneration. This metaphysical metaphor translates to the human being as follows: wisdom, residing in the citadel of the head gives orders; the heart, magnanimity in the middle of the earthly city, obeys the commands of wisdom and transmits them to the outer parts of the city or loins that impart desire to the body. Desires must be held in check by the joint efforts of reason and magnanimity. Each main organ of the body reflects objective images of the universe. Just as the heat of the sun has healing power, likewise the heart, by its heat enlivens and gladdens the other parts of the body. As in the universe, the moon is the mother of the humours, the liver sends comparable humors into its members. Just as the moon when robbed of light from the sun loses its vigor, likewise the liver, bereft of comfort from the heart, grows sluggish.²⁰

Emphasizing practical wisdom and prudence, Aristotle considers magnanimity the crown of virtues.²¹ Greatness in every virtue is characteristic of a proud or magnanimous man since it is impossible to be proud without nobility and goodness of character:

The proud man is concerned with honors, yet he will also bear himself with moderation towards wealth and power and good or evil fortune—whatever may befall him and will be neither overjoyed by good fortune nor overpained by evil. It is the mark of this virtue to ask for nothing or scarcely anything but to give help readily, and to be dignified towards people of high position and to good friends, but to be unassuming towards those of the middle class and humble classes—to be active when great work or great honor is at stake, to be a great man of fearless, great and noble deeds—he speaks the truth and acts openly. He is not given to admiration—for nothing to him is great—nor does he hold grudges—or is a gossip, an evil speaker. He will possess beautiful and profitless things rather than profitable and useful ones."²²

For Aristotle the way to build magnanimity is through appropriate education and training. In the western classical period and later in the scholastic age, the inculcation of moral values through education is essential to the well-being of society. Happiness derives from human flourishing—an activity of the soul in accord with rationality and virtue.

Excellence involves the unfolding of the full range of human virtues and of the wisdom essential to a good society. Aristotle's writings shed light on the education and

conditioning that is required to instill these values in human beings so that they become virtuous agents of their societies. To become proper agents or political actors, persons must have knowledge, they must choose good actions and choose them for their own sakes. Moreover, their actions must proceed from a firm and unchangeable character.²³

This inter-twined imagery of nature, politics, and virtues offers powerful lessons to the contemporary world. It demonstrates that education offering students neither the experience nor the discipline of studying revered classic literature; nor occasions to develop capacities to distinguish respectable characters and noble actions as models for emulation; nor paths to wise decision making; nor understanding of the principles of musical rhythms and harmonies and nature's other gifts cannot succeed in building the moral character that Aristotle and other philosophers consider essential to achieving happiness rooted in virtue. The failure to stress these forms of education may lie behind many of the problems facing society today.

This imagery also emphasizes that reason alone is insufficient to bridle humankind's insatiable material desires. To be recalled is Plato's observation that both reason and magnanimity must be nurtured to know their functions. Without the aid of magnanimity, the intellect is powerless against the animal nature.²⁴ C.S. Lewis designates those people in modern society who lack magnanimity as *human beings without chests* because, lacking in magnanimity, their metaphorical hearts are atrophied. Being of limited moral training and education, the individual's knowledge of good, compassion, and dignity is stunted, helpless to aid reason control the overflowing passions of material instincts. For Lewis, training that includes inculcation of good taste—the ability to draw distinctions between objective good and bad and between the beautiful and the tawdry are vital.

Failure in this area, in light of scientific and technological progress, leads to the abolition of humankind as thinking and reflecting beings.²⁵ Lewis considers such character training and the infusion of magnanimity in the hearts of humankind essential for the survival of modern civilization.

The trends in modern education are not in the directions of thinking of either Aristotle or Lewis, nor are they likely to become so. Where there are strong objections to taxation even to fund education, as are common in the richest market driven societies, insufficient resources result most frequently in cutting programs considered non essential such as language, music, art, and the humanities. These trends are not inconsistent with public attitudes towards non-material aspirations. The notion of moral virtue in democratic or authoritarian political and economic institutions is problematic, particularly since virtue is not a prerequisite for becoming elected, appointed, or self-appointed political officers or for becoming the heads of corporations and state enterprises. In fact, in line with Machiavellian principles and the ethos of the market, such virtues constitute handicaps to attaining power and profit in intensely competitive societies.

Yet, the postmodern society, fragmented and directionless for better or worse—may be well served, even saved, by a large injection of traditional virtues. Magnanimity would impart dignity and nobility and enlarge the heart and spirit of humankind. Concomitantly, prudence would take the trouble to look beyond numbers and percentages to the essential issues of life. Honesty would call for transparency in all dealings. Compassion would favor mutual understanding and provide needed sympathy. Humility, humanity, and honor would demand effectiveness by all measures of social justice. But such infusion of virtues is unlikely unless there is a change in the objectives societies seek in building the global culture, now valued for

consumption as well as opportunities for accumulating wealth and power. Society, if conscious of the need for a renewed sense of morality, can secure more virtuous agents by strengthening its traditional socializing institutions, in particular education, enabling them to more effectively impress on its members such civic values, as dignity, honor, and compassion.

Guiding Purpose and Meaning of Life

The third dimension of morality concerns the purpose and meaning of human life. To link his third part to the others, Lewis offers metaphorical comparisons. The first two dimensions are compared to a fleet of seaworthy ships sailing in parallel formation, thereby meeting the criteria of harmonious interaction and inner integrity, but to give reason to this activity the fleet needs a set course to follow. To switch metaphors, a band of instruments, all finely tuned and performing in synchronization, requires a song to play. Such is the function of guiding purpose or meaning of life in relation to moral acts and virtues.²⁶ Vaclav Havel implies a similar call for meaning, when he writes that only “humankind’s understanding of its place in the world will allow the development of new models of behavior, sets and scales of values, and objectives in life.”²⁷

There are many challenges to considering so weighty a topic in the wake the 20th century that has had its fill of large-scale social experiments. Nationalism, fascism, and communism are doctrines with precise beliefs and goals that have given sense to millions of people but have also bound the world in wars and massacres for the greatest part of that century. Moreover, the looming “clash of civilizations,” which threatens to engulf the 21st century in fear and terror in the names of Allah, Jehovah, and God is likely to drive reasonable and peace-loving people towards cold, rational, and atheist cultures.

Ideals and religion risk being identified with abuses and atrocities committed in the name of a cause or ideology.

The search for meaning and purpose, however, is not about grand ideologies or social experiments in the name of God. It is “simply” a quest for sense and direction that can inspire human flourishing, social harmony, and life in equilibrium with nature. It is not teleological: it is in its largest sense about “being.” The decisive obstacle to this effort is that the prevailing western culture, likely in response to the tumult of the past and present centuries and the revolutionary advances in science and technology, seems to have broken away from its human, spiritual, and moral moorings. Ironically, the postmodern culture may suffer from its bleak entanglement of senseless connections, without obvious means to liberate itself from the bonds of brute materiality. The appropriate response to this crisis is reunion not only between the self and the world, but also between the heart and the mind.

Seeking meaning and purpose is part of the quest to respond not only to the perceived gap between self and world, but also to break down the walls that isolate individuals in their radical subjectivity. It relates to the notion that morality shapes empathetic and sympathetic relationships to things and to other persons. The search for meaning is comparable to seeking passage to a different dimension of Truth, and therein a promising route to an enchanting perspective on Nature and Life. If the discovery has the inner consistency of reality and offers even a distant echo of divine grace in the sentient world, it will somehow expand the horizons of human hope and a fulfilled destiny.

It would be misleading, however, to imply that the postmodern society has no goals or purpose: its goals and purpose are circumscribed by access to capital, natural resources, science, and

technology. For Nature and many people, the dark side of western modernity is the perception that economic progress is the universal measure of well-being, the foundation for happiness, even implicitly the purpose of life. The success of a government is measured in terms of changing levels of economic activity. Good citizens do their duties to society by participating in the market, through buying, selling, and producing efficiently. Social well-being and happiness are assumed to derive from success in this competitive environment, wherein *Monsieur le Capital* and *Madame la Terre* promise fulfillment in material things.²⁸

Concomitantly, the prevailing trend in modern societies is to ask governments to assure only an orderly playing field for private interests and market forces, and, if called on, to provide security and social safety nets when the private sector is reluctant to act charitably or when outside forces challenge the security of the state. Moreover, it is fashionable to consider modern democratic governments much like economic systems with their resource inputs and outputs of goods and services. Political inputs are the aggregates of social and individual wants and the policy outputs are stated variously in terms of wealth, security, and deference; or in terms of the functions of extraction, distribution and regulation.

This current conception of the public sphere is a legacy of a particular interpretation of the western Enlightenment and is reflective of Machiavelli's consideration that effective governments are amoral, their leaders concerned with matters of power—how to get it and keep it. But the encountering of serious social inequities and life threatening environmental destruction along the way appears to affirm Plato's observation that reason requires the spirited, magnanimous heart to control the largest part of the soul.²⁹ Without magnanimity in its members, society's purpose is circumscribed by its material preoccupations and its future survival may be jeopardized.

In the classical period, the vision of government is quite different. Individualism is not a virtue. Individuals with their political natures are one with the substance of the *polis*. Aristotle, the father of comparative politics, having examined the workings of over a hundred constitutions, characterizes as good those governments that work selflessly for the happiness of all. In his idealistic conception of the *res-publica*, he considers life in the *polis* a fact of nature. "Political animals" are desirous of living with others according to their common interests, in proportion as they severally attain to any noble measure of well-being. What is best for the citizen coincides with what is best for the state.³⁰ The constituents of the best life are not the external things of wealth and power [though in moderation these are essential externalities,] but the virtues of intellect and character.³¹ The best state is happy and acts nobly. To be a human being is to strive to attain noble things; and there is no deed either of person or the city that is to be separated from virtue and prudence. The courage, justice, and prudence of the city have the same power and form as those virtues in individual human beings, who are called just, prudent, and sound. And, every citizen is given the opportunity to achieve excellence.³²

While there is no way to attain or to go back to an ideal form of government such as Aristotle designs, nor is it necessarily desirable given that his *polis* excludes women and slaves, who compose the bulk of the population. It remains unquestionable that the sense of meaning and purpose Aristotle attaches to life and government is instructive. It must be added that even modern political leaders have some inkling of the values and virtues of such just and ideal forms of government, judging from the sometimes noble and lofty language of their speeches.

The reality of modern political power and imagination, which makes difficult the quest for harmony between and within societies, as well as between humankind and the natural environment, has much to do with the state to which society has advanced in science and technology. Such focus seems to preclude realization of projects and solution to problems that require imaginative and transcendent thinking. Professor Imamichi addresses the problem of public purpose as one of means and ends captured within a framework circumscribed by technological possibilities.

According to Imamichi, the modern western culture has inverted the logical structuring of human intention. The classical form of this structuring is elaborated in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*: the major premise is the human aim or ideal, while the minor premise is the range of free choice of means to attain the aim. Following this structure, Imamichi notes that human goal-orientation has spurred technological progress to a position of primacy over other human aims. Thus, today, while the minor premise remains the optional choice of means, this minor premise has been elevated to the major premise in place of "the goal to be realized" now relegated to the minor position. Because of the inversion of means and ends in this syllogism, goals are no longer transcendent ideals—but are determined by the horizons of technological change and technological power.³³

Imamichi's views are corroborated by Steven Hawking who observes that philosophy has been overcome by advances of scientific theories. In his view, 18th century philosophers considered the whole of human knowledge, including science to be their field and freely discussed questions concerning the meaning and nature of the universe. Philosophers in the 19th and 20th centuries have vastly reduced the scope of their inquiries. This narrowing of inquiry has promoted the remark of Wittgenstein that "The sole remaining task for philosophy is the analysis of language." Hawking adds, "What a come down from the great tradition of philosophy from Aristotle to Kant!"³⁴

So where does this leave society? It leaves it in a strange and unhappy condition. Artists and scholars in a variety of depressing ways grotesquely portray these views. The imagery Roland Barthes offers in his critique of a classical Dutch painting captures human life in the postmodern era wherein all vestiges of its sacredness have faded away, to be replaced with humankind and its empire of things: "[Humankind] stands now, [their] feet upon the thousand objects of everyday life, triumphantly surrounded by their functions. Behold [them], then at the pinnacle of history, knowing no other fate than a gradual appropriation of matter."³⁵

Barthes characterization of humanity in this image evokes a postmodern version of the classic "Nobody," captured already in the 16th century, in Holbein's painting of the *Table Top*. This picture portrays the ubiquitous "Nobody," a sleeping creature surrounded by fragmentary things that are unrelated to each other and to everything else.³⁶ Such descriptions represent the phenomena of a particular time in history when "nobody" is seen to be responsible for the deterioration of the ordinary household, which by extension, evokes a disorderly social world where nobody's position is fixed.³⁷

Nobel Prizewinner in Physiology and Medicine (1965), biologist Jacques Monod, adds to this pessimistic vision: "the blind and disordered processes which lead to our origin looked toward nothing, were directed toward nothing, and were stumbling in the dark. Man, appears without purpose and without meaning."³⁸ It should be added that all these representations, impressions, and ideas bear the message that a purely material and vacuous

sense of life and of the universe leads to the belief that whatever occurs happens by chance and that “no body” is responsible for events predetermined by this unknown, undiscoverable, purely physical fate in which human values are relative and readily reduced to random insignificance.

Such observations as these provoked Lecomte de Nouy to point out that humanity had decided its own meaninglessness using the tools it had itself invented. He notes, in the introduction to his book *Human Destiny (L’Homme et sa Destinée)*, that the human ego and intelligence have deprived humankind of its meaning for being by destroying, in the name of science, the religious and philosophical doctrines that heretofore gave purpose to human efforts and actions. In so doing humankind has reduced itself to a vision of pulsating plasma.³⁹ With such destruction of meaning, notions of morality, spirituality, and hope vanish, leaving in their wake but a discouraging sentiment of total vacuousness.

Although human knowledge and interpretation of natural science can be blamed for catapulting the individual into a global, technological civilization under a regime of domineering materiality, this is not the whole picture. Physics and higher mathematics point to many more significant ideas concerning the realities of the universe and life that can remove the chains binding human intentions to material circumstances and aspirations. With the assistance of enlightened reason, high mathematics, and imagination, modern science can also lead humanity to a high sense of purpose that perceives value in wisdom and ecological harmony. Physicist Brian Greene’s view summarizes this standpoint:

To open our ideas to the true nature of the universe has always been one of physics’s primary purposes. It is hard to imagine a more mind stretching experience than learning, as we have over the last century that the reality we experience is but a glimmer of the reality that is.⁴⁰

The sublimity and order, which reveal themselves both in the spirit of Nature and in this world of thought, offer inspiration, possibilities, and purpose to those suffering the futility of material aims, desires, or necessities.

Physicists and high mathematicians invite seekers of meaning to journey on an ultra-microscopic trajectory to the precipice of infinity and void, which Albert Einstein calls the frontier of science and religion. Einstein defines this experience as a cosmic religious feeling which:

(. .) takes the form of a rapturous amazement at the harmony of natural law, which reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection.⁴¹

Einstein esteems this feeling to be the guiding principle of life and work, in so far as individuals succeed in keeping themselves free from selfish desire. He finds it akin to that feeling which has possessed the religious geniuses of all ages. Einstein is not alone in this discovery and its source of meaning and purpose.

Building on Einstein’s theories of relativity (1905, 1915), Max Planck’s quantum theory (1900), and Werner Heisenberg’s principle of uncertainty (1926), a group of scientists at Cambridge in the 1930’s, plumb the depths of physics and molecular biology and find the world to be inexplicable in material terms. In looking for the fine structure of molecules as to their atoms, one enters a region dominated by void. At the fine structure level, just when one might expect to find ultimate particles of matter, matter vanishes—only electrical and gravitational fields cavort in the void. Astronomer, Sir Arthur Eddington, concludes that: “The stuff of the world is

mind-stuff.”⁴² While Eddington agrees that there are two kinds of worlds—the familiar one of actuality and that of physics, their only connection is through the human mind, which can appreciate both the solidity of the object world and the metaphysics perceptible only to mathematics. Scientist, Sir James Jeans, concludes that if the universe is one of thought, then its creation must be an act of thought. As an act of imagination or the Logos, the universe is thought up into existence by the shaping of the void. This idea is validated by Einstein’s matter-tensor, which gives the mathematics whereby substance (mass-energy) can be accounted for by pure non- Euclidean geometry, i.e. the shaping of the void.⁴³

Nearly 75 years have passed, since the Cambridge club theorized the existence of the world as a function of mind. In the meantime many more sophisticated mathematical theories of the nature of the Universe have been presented. Super String Theory and M Theory, an advanced version of string theory, may successfully merge general relativity and quantum mechanics, and hold out the hope that humankind is closer now to really understanding the deepest laws of the universe, though actual experimentation to verify their findings is still beyond the pale of science. According to Greene, string theory holds that there is one fundamental building block of the multidimensional universe; that is the string.⁴⁴ The wealth of particle species simply reflects the different vibration patterns that a string can execute, just as a string on a violin or cello can vibrate in many different ways, producing a full range of sounds. Greene writes:

Metaphorically, the different notes that can be played by a single species of string would account for all of the different particles that have been detected. At the ultramicroscopic level, the universe would be akin to a string vibrating matter into existence.⁴⁵

M theory and super string theories have also identified branes of different dimensions as extended objects that arise with strings. Perhaps as today’s more controversial but promising Matrix theory suggests, zero branes are the ultimate building blocks.⁴⁶ This would not seem to change the latest theory that matter emerges from a series of vibration patterns, perhaps now shaped in the void by a master musician playing his cello, to build on the metaphor begun by Jeans, mentioned above.

There are many thoughts to be considered that seem related to this tour through science in search of meaning. Certain ideas might have a positive influence on postmodern society and its “nobodies,” by enticement towards a more meaningful sense of personhood. Some ideas follow directly from the most recent studies of the universe. Others derived from time honored wisdom gain modern relevance because of these discoveries. The humility that comes from recognizing that humankind’s material conception of the world is only a glimmer of reality, gives renewed validity to earlier views on the importance of transcendent thinking for society’s well-being and humankind’s flourishing. A few examples follow:

The wonders of the universe, in particular, the remarkable arrangements of carbon and oxygen nuclear resonance offer astronomer and historian, Owen Gingerich, evidence of some grand design and designer. He recognizes nevertheless that there will always be scientists who think science teaches that the universe itself suggests no point to existence and those detractors will say, when faced with the transcendent possibility; “since we are contemplating them, those details could be no other way.” For Gingerich it is not a matter of scientific proofs and demonstrations, but of making sense of the astonishing cosmic order that the sciences repeatedly reveal and even more so the remarkable evidences of design in the biological realm.

As Jeans did before, Gingerich concludes: "A common sense and satisfying interpretation of our world suggests the designing hand of a superintelligence. (...) in other words, the heavens do declare the glory of God," and bowing to the skeptics he adds: "but only to the prepared mind."⁴⁷

Gingerich further observes that humankind does its best to create a picture that makes sense when all the pieces of the puzzle are not at hand. He maintains that the same principle should hold for faith in a powerful Consciousness beyond the capacity for humankind to grasp, but for which nature gives astounding and ample evidence. In light of the rapidity with which modern society is consuming nature and its resources, Gingerich concludes that unless society learns the message of servanthood and sacrificial love that a transcendent belief in the meaning the cosmos conveys, humankind may be doomed as a species.

To those skeptics who fail to recognize that a deeper understanding of the universe can make life richer and more meaningful, Brian Greene offers his own experience. Comparing himself with Camus who chooses the hapless but courageous Sisyphus as his hero, Greene chooses the courageous scientists Newton, Einstein, Neils Bohr, and Richard Feynman to be his heroes. In so doing he begins a journey, the destination of which, would enable him to begin to assess life and the universe on all possible levels, not just those accessible to the frail human senses.⁴⁸

In this postmodern age of skepticism and non-truths, however, the world vainly seeks facts and then proofs. In science there are no such fixed facts and proofs on such subjects. Scientific thinking and instrumental rationality, as Albert Einstein reminds the world, have strong limitations. The whole of science is "nothing more than a refinement of everyday thinking (...) even the concept of the 'real external world' of everyday thinking rests exclusively on sense impressions."⁴⁹ Science is methodically directed toward finding regulative connections between our sensual experiences—bringing together by systematic thought, the perceptible phenomena of the world into as thorough going an association as possible. In the immediate it produces knowledge and indirectly, implies means of action. But, such empirical thinking is neither the way to determine the meaning in life, nor to identify the goals and values essential to social harmony, sustainable life-styles, and happiness. These can only be discovered through reason by way of philosophical or religious thinking.⁵⁰ The state of the art of thinking about the laws of the universe does not appear to alter these observations of Einstein.

Evidence of the existence and practical importance of higher meaning is to be found in the timeless import of religion as well as literary and philosophical work inspired by transcendent vision. For example Hinduism, an ancient faith practiced by nearly a billion people in India, emphasizes the separation of soul and body, the latter being ephemeral and mortal, while the soul is immortal, imperishable, and all pervading. The soul is the cause, the manifestation, as well as the support of the universe; changeless, and indestructible. Realizing the allness of soul as the causation of the universe is seen as the illumination of divine light inside of oneself. Such realization is the ultimate outcome of total immersion in spirit and meditation. The Vedas and Upanishads expound and clarify this as the ultimate "truth". The seer, perfecting his efforts, receives "enlightenment", by means of an inward journey, an experience recorded in many other religions over the centuries.⁵¹

Alexis de Tocqueville, reflecting on the materialist tendencies of the American culture in the 1820's, observes that while a belief in materialism is probably the most rational to the human

being, a belief in the super sensual and immortal principle is indispensable to humankind's greatness. However tenuous that belief might be, the body and its wants, consciously or unconsciously, become secondary to the immaterial nature of man.⁵² This conviction "would give a lofty cast to the believers' opinions and tastes, to bid them tend with no interested motive, as it were by impulse, to pure feelings and elevated thoughts." Tocqueville finds mere belief in the separation of soul and body—the former surviving the latter—, was enough to give Platonic philosophy the sublimity which distinguishes Plato's work, while the works of his professed materialist contemporaries, have not reached to the 19th century in meaningful form. Moreover, he observes that the greatest number of the most famous minds in literature and arts adhere to some doctrine of spiritual philosophy.⁵³

Tocqueville finds relevance in these observations for politicians as well. Decision makers are under obligation to behave as if they themselves believe and to scrupulously conform to moral principles in the management of public affairs, in order to teach the community at large to know and to observe individual and civic virtues.⁵⁴

The metaphorical reference to music in relation to the vibrations of the strings that constitute the universe in a strange way suggests a significant connection between the essential harmony of the universe and the prescription for building sound character essential to Aristotle's conception of Happiness, the ultimate purpose of life. Aristotle states that certain music transforms the soul in ways that ultimate in such "blessedness." Moreover, he observes that: "the young have a certain affinity for harmonies and rhythms; hence many of the wise assert either that the soul is a harmony or it involves harmony." He adds that the tunes of Olympus inspired souls and that inspiration is a passion of the soul-connected character. In rhythms and tunes, Aristotle finds likenesses akin to the genuine natures of anger and gentleness, of courage and cowardice, of moderation and excess.⁵⁵

A glimpse of reality is perhaps offered in the timelessness of transcending ideas. Aristotle's esteem for powers of music seems to be shared by certain contemporary scientists discovering the intellectually stimulating qualities of Mozart symphonies. Such discoveries, and others, bare out today what Aristotle surmised thousands of years ago, when human intelligence had a more instinctive sense of Nature. The human mind is altered by music, perhaps bringing it closer to the never-ending symphonies of the strings and branes of the universe lead by the baton of a master Consciousness.

Meaning and purpose in just "being" echoes in the music of nature, as revealed in a story of a small bird, told by Giuseppe Sermonti. "The bird, *Cyanosylvia svecica* (blue throat) delivers his most artistic song, objectively the most complex, when relaxed in the depth of its bush, poetizing to himself." The song changes when the bird seeks to secure his own interests, becoming a monotonous repetition of strong strophes and all grace is lost.⁵⁶

Concluding Remarks

Eco-Ethica, understood as the need for a new morality at the world level is both a dream and a necessity. It is a dream because it expresses a noble conception of humankind rooted in the wisdom of the great philosophies of the past and is responsive to the demands and challenges of today's global society. It is a necessity, given the evidence that current political trends are leading down a tragic path.

When there is no choice but to implement a dream, the first imperative is to strengthen idealism in the political discourse, as Lewis tried to do in the miserable depths of World War II. The subordination of transcendent ends to humankind's technological machinations, seen by Tomonobo Imamichi as a fundamental and perverse characteristic of modernity, would try to preclude the reflection on the meaning and purpose of human life and society that C.S. Lewis and many other thinkers before and after him consider to be necessary foundations of social morality. This logic embedded in the consciousness of modern society must be reversed.

The realization of cooperation, harmony, and morality depends on society ceasing to ascribe to greed driven ideologies and social behaviors that are building and shaping impersonal communities, ignoring inequitable social and economic conditions, and relentlessly consuming natural resources. Societies must be transformed in line with redefined concepts of the "good life" and by exchanging current policies that tend to stunt progress in the Art of living for those that place high value on ideals such as the realization of each individual's imaginative, creative, and expressive talents in the contexts of humane communities embellished with the riches of Nature. Such notions are utopian in today's society, but no less effort can meet the challenges that are threatening the world today.

Almost everything remains to be done, intellectually and politically, to explore the practical implications of this alternative vision. It demands serious reconsideration of values and concomitant shifts in lifestyles. In a democratic system such changes cannot be imposed but must arise from an expression of the majority will to implement them. Yet, with wisely inspired determination, it should be possible for humanity, through cooperative efforts, to reduce the glaring inequities and disparities that exist between the rich and the poor and to better maintain the integrity of the natural environment. At the same time, work must continue on the project of elaborating a vision of society and the "good life" that best reflects harmony with and respect for Nature's Universe.

¹ Barbara Baudot is Professor of Politics, Saint Anselm College Director of the New Hampshire Institute of Politics, Center for the Study of International Affairs Coordinator of the Triglav Circle, an NGO in Consultative Status with the United Nations.

² Frederic Jameson, *PostModernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2001.) 1-10.

³ Robert Cooper, *Postmodern State and the World Order* (London: Foreign Policy Center, 2000).

⁴ Earth Summit, *Agenda 2: The United Nations Programme of Action from Rio*, United Nations Publication, Sales no. E.93.1.11.

⁵ See *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development*, Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August-4 September, United Nations Publication, Sales no. E.03.II.A.1.

⁶ U.N. General Assembly Resolution, A/Res/55/2, 18 September 2000.

⁷ Vaclav Havel, "The Challenge of the World," *Is There a Purpose in Nature? How to Navigate Between the Scylla of Mechanism and the Charybdis of Teleology*, Ivan Havel, and Anton Markos eds. (Prague: Vesmir, 2002) 11-13.

- ⁸ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 2001) 69-75.
- ⁹ See Hobbes, *Leviathan (1651)*; John Locke's *Treatise on Government (1690)*; John Jacques Rousseau, *Social Contract (1762)*.
- ¹⁰ This issue is documented many times over in the reports and summary records of UN negotiations on environment issues, for example in the negotiations on the convention on climate change and subsequent discussions on the Kyoto Protocol.
- ¹¹ See for example Walter Rosenbaum, *Environment Politics and Policy*, (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1991) 80.
- ¹² Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1948) 514.
- ¹³ Tomonobu Imamichi, "The Concept of an Eco-Ethics and the Development of Moral Thoughts," *Man and Nature*, ed. George McLeon (New York: University Press of America, 1984), 213-14.
- ¹⁴ The discussions at the meeting of the UN Commission on Social Development 4-6 February, for example repeatedly stressed the importance of market tools in public policy making.
- ¹⁵ Kenneth E. Goodpaster, John B. Matthews, Jr., "Can a Corporation Have a Conscience," *Harvard Business Review*, January-February 1982: 132-142.
- ¹⁶ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 73.
- ¹⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans W.D. Ross trans in. *Introduction to Aristotle*, Richard McKeon ed. (New York: Modern Library, 1992). Book II Ch. 4: 1105.
- ¹⁸ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Peter Jowett, (New York: Vintage Books, 1991) Book IV, 442.
- ¹⁹ Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. Desmond Lee (New York: Penguin Books, 1977) 70. (pp. 97-98)
- ²⁰ Alan of Lille, *Plainte of Nature*, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1980) Prose 3: 121- 123.
- ²¹ According to Adam Smith, Aristotle's uses the term *proud* or *pride* to signify magnanimity. See Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, (Indianapolis, Liberty Fund, 1984) 258.
- ²² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book IV Ch. 3: 1124.
- ²³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II Ch. 4: 1105. 30.
- ²⁴ Plato, *The Republic*, 402a.
- ²⁵ C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 2001), 24.
- ²⁶ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 71-72.
- ²⁷ Vaclav Havel, "The Challenge of the World," 12.
- ²⁸ This expression is used by Karl Marx in the context of reification. See *Capital*, Vol III, 48.
- ²⁹ See discussion on Plato's view of the roles of the three parts of the soul above.
- ³⁰ Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans Carnes Lord, Book III, ch. 6, 1278 b. (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- ³¹ Aristotle, *The Politics*, Book VII, Ch. 1, 1323 a-1323 b.

- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Tomonobu Imamichi, "The Concept of an Eco-Ethics and the Development of Moral Thoughts," *Man and Nature*, ed. George McLeon (New York: University Press of America, 1984), 213-14.
- 34 Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1988) 190-191.
- 35 Roland Barthes, *A Barthes Reader* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 62-63.
- 36 *Hans Holbein D.J.: Des Meisters Gemälde in 252 Abbildungen*, herausgegeben von Paul Ganz, (Stuttgart und Leipzig: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1912) 6-7.
- 37 Rosalie Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966) 295-300.
- 38 Jacques Monod, *Le Hasard et la Necessite*, (Paris: Poche Collection Essais, 1973) cited in Giuseppe Sermonti, "Is There a Purpose in Nature?" in *Is There a Purpose in Nature*, ed. Ivan Havel et al, 33.
- 39 Lecomte du Nouy, *L'Homme et sa Destinée [Human Destiny]*, (Paris: La Colombe, Editions du Vieux Colombier, 1948) 15.
- 40 Brian Greene, *The Fabric of the Cosmos*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004) 12.
- 41 Albert Einstein, *Ideas and Opinions*, , based on *Mein Weltbild*, edited by Carl Seelig, and other sources (New York, Bonanza Books, 1984), p. 40.
- 42 David Foster, *The Philosophical Scientists*, (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1993) 2.
- 43 Ibid, 2-16.
- 44 Brian Greene, *The Fabric of the Cosmos*, 346-348. M theory holds that there are 11 dimensions to the Universe.
- 45 Ibid., 347.
- 46 Ibid., 489.
- 47 Owen Gingerich, "Do the Heavens Declare?" in *The Book of the Cosmos: Imagining the Universe from Heraclitus to Hawking*, D. Danielson ed. (Cambridge MA: Perseus Publishing 2001)522-528.
- 48 Brian Greene, *Fabric of the Cosmos*, 17.
- 49 Albert Einstein, *Ideas and Opinions* 290-1. See also remarks on Bertrand Russel's *Theory of Knowledge*, *ibid*, 22-23.
- 50 Einstein, *Ideas and Opinions*, 50.
- 51 Contribution from Rangaswami Krishnamurti, drawn from the following textual sources;
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Yatiswarananda, *Universal Prayers Selected from Sanskrit Religious Literature*, [including the vedas, Bhagavad Gita, Bhagavata, & several Upanishads], (Madras, India: Ramakrishna Math, 1977); William
E. Williams, *Unbounded Light-The Inward Journey: 15 Tales of the Inner Light*, [book drawn from ancient scriptures; the first tale of Nachiketa is from Katha Upanishad], (York Beach, ME: Nicolas- Hays. Inc, 1992); Swami Nityaswarpananda, *Astavakra Samhita*, [an exposition of advaita philosophy, i.e., monism, nondualism, abstract doctrine of self realization written

in Advaita Ashram, Mayavati Pithoragarh, Himalayas], (Calcutta, India: Indian Press Private Ltd., 1987).

⁵² As an example of how tenuous this belief had to be, De Tocqueville offered that belief that the soul passed into the head of a hog.

⁵³ De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, (New York: Everyman's Library, 1994) 146-147.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Aristotle, *The Politics*, 1339-1340.

⁵⁶ Giuseppe Sermonti, "Science With Meaning, Symbol, and Beauty," *Is There a Purpose in Nature*, ed. Ivan Havel, 168.

