

HARMONY & INTEGRATION

A paper to be presented by David Cadman to the UNESCO conference organised by the University of Wales TSD and the World Fellowship of Buddhists and the Kingdom of Thailand to be held in Paris 27th to 29th September 2017

We live in a time of division, and we live at a time when social, economic and environmental conditions world wide are being described as critical, in some places, catastrophic. We live in a time of disintegration and separation, a time of conceptual dryness and drought. At such a time, and especially amongst young people, there is a deep thirst for wholeness, integration and meaning. We have, therefore, an urgent need for disciplines and practices that draw us together, that enable us to see the world and ourselves as whole.

I want to propose that we may find this possibility of wholeness and connection in the discipline and practices of Harmony.

In making this proposition, I shall speak first of the need for integration, then of Nature's harmony, and finally of principles of Harmony.

1. The Need for Integration

We have become who we are because we have been told a story of who we are. And the story we have been told is one that tells us that we are by nature brutish, selfish and violent, *Homo sapiens-aggressans*. This story has dominated our lives for a very long time. It is the story that has brought about that rise of selfish individualism and consumerism which now plagues us. It is what Mrs Thatcher was telling us when she said there was "no such thing as society." And it is what is meant by those who point to neo-liberal economics as the rule book for reality. It is the story that has given us a widening

gap between those who have and those who do not, the loss of species, the degradation of soils and fish stocks, the crisis of climate change and the financial chaos and collapse of international banks in 2008 and 2009. All of these come from this damaging story, for it is the story of separation and division. And at the root of this story lies the proposition that the world is made up of separate parts, ever in competition one with another.

More recently, of course, we have been told another story, one that tells us that everything is apparently related, interconnected and whole. And yet, the old story persists, and we remain in a place where words of wholeness and integration struggle to be heard. Everywhere, the evidence of connection and relationship mounts, and yet we deny it. We continue to manage our lives, not least our forms of education, in silos, one subject or one activity seldom being connected to another. We study biology, physics, chemistry, philosophy, history, geography, language and literature, medicine, theology and economics within their long established boundaries; and we think nothing of it. But suppose this is no longer fit for purpose. Suppose that in the interconnected world that has been revealed to us we need something else, a new 'integrative' discipline that enables us to understand how things are *across* and not just *within* subject areas. A discipline that adds meaning to knowledge.

I want to propose that the name for that discipline is "Harmony." For Harmony speaks of balance, order and relationship. It is concerned with parts within, and only within, a whole, and of wholes within wholeness. The whole and its parts are always interconnected and related. One affects the other. Neither stands alone. And both are always in flow.

And please note that this Harmony is not the same as Sustainability. Sustainability is instrumental, posing questions about how we and our children's children may survive. By contrast, Harmony embodies broad and all-embracing principles about the nature of the cosmos and our

relationship with it, or rather our relationships within it, because we are “a part of” and not “apart from.” Its principles are timeless. It asks questions about ways of true being, the way things are, not the way we would like them to be – or might seek to manage them to be – for our own benefit.

And anyway, Sustainability is now often reduced to the narrower matter of environmental management, and within this to the even more limited matters of energy and waste. Turning off the lights and recycling. These are necessary, but not sufficient. Sustainability, especially within its narrow form, cannot be explored other than in the context of Harmony. It is a circle within a circle. The wider circle, the integrating principle, is Harmony.

2. Nature’s Harmony

Harmony is expressed by Nature and since Nature is ancient and endures, it provides us with teachings that we might do well to notice and to follow, or mimic.

It was, I think, Janine Benyus who first brought “biomimicry” to our attention some twenty years ago.¹ And since then, in her books and in her teachings² she has shown us that we can learn from Nature, and that what we learn can be applied in our everyday lives. We can take Nature’s best ideas and mimic them. The silk of spiders, the patterns of growth of prairie grass, and the shapes and consistency of sea shells show us forms that have come about over very long periods of time, forms that are enduring, beautiful and useful. And we can copy them. As Janine Benyus put it in 1997:

When we stare deeply into nature’s eyes, it takes our breath away, and in a good way, it bursts our bubble. We realize that all our inventions have already appeared in nature in a more elegant form and at a lot less cost to the planet. Our most clever architectural struts and beams are already featured in

¹ Janine Benyus, *Biomimicry: Innovation Inspired by Nature*, first published in 1997 by William Morrow

² See the Institute of Biomimicry, Montana, USA.

lily pads and bamboo stems. Our central heating and air-conditioning are bested by the termite towers steady 86 degrees F. Our most stealthy radar is hard of hearing compared to the bats multifrequency transmission.³

And beyond the ‘characteristics’ of Nature are Nature’s ‘processes,’ her ways of being, her ways of doing things. They, too, provide lessons of how to be part of an enduring and vital wholeness.⁴

When we look, we see that Nature expresses qualities such as wholeness, relationship, diversity, living within limits, cooperation, wastelessness, impermanence and thriftiness. However they are expressed, these qualities seem to arise again and again, the most frequently mentioned being wholeness, diversity and relatedness. Not the qualities of being, we might note, that lay behind the words “no such thing as society.” Indeed the very opposite. These qualities speak of community, belonging and even, perhaps of what the Buddha described as the four divine abidings – loving kindness, compassion, joy in and for others and equanimity.

So it is, perhaps, possible that rather than imposing upon Nature principles of our own making, we might do better to listen, listen attentively to that which Nature tells us. Look carefully at what Nature shows us and follow her.

3. Principles of Harmony

Taking Nature to be our teacher, and exploring natural systems, the patterns and rhythms of the cosmos, we can discover principles that express the essential qualities of Harmony. These include the following:

³ Janine Benyus, *Biomimicry: Innovation Inspired by Nature*, Harper Perennial, 2002, 6.

⁴ These principles are now being explored in fields such as economics, see for example John Fullerton’s *Regenerative Capitalism* on the website of the Capital Institute, capitalinstitute.org and in the organization and management of corporations, see for example Fausto Tazzi with Cinzia Rossi, *Biomimicry in Organizations*, 2016.

- Wholeness and relationship
- Limits and resistance
- Flow and self-healing

And then, perhaps more controversially, :

- Love
- Justice

Let me say a bit about each one of these.

Wholeness and Relationship

Perhaps the most evident principle of Harmony is “wholeness.” By contrast to the old story of separation, above all else wholeness provides the metaphor for a new story. We are *with* each other and *with* the Earth. We are in community. We belong.

And everything is connected, interconnected, entangled, intertwined. And these relationships are mutual and marked by reciprocity. There is a continuous movement betwixt and between. Relationship means diversity within a whole; and, as I shall explain in a moment, these are loving relationships.

Limits and Resistance

Nature understands limits, boundaries, edges and resistance.

We deny limits, seeking ever more growth in our economies and in our consumption. And we do this despite all the evidence that shows that this is not only false, but dangerous. In 2004, the thirty year update was published of *Limits to Growth*.⁵ Although the original publication had warned of the dangers of unlimited growth, its tone had been optimistic. We could change. Thirty years later, that optimism had gone. We had not changed. And it was clear that we had moved beyond

⁵ Donella Meadows, Jorgen Randers and Dennis Meadows, *Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update*, Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 2004

the carrying capacity of the Earth. If that was so in 2004, how much more is it so today?

And then there is resistance. In case any of you should suppose that Harmony is too 'soft' a notion, I suggest that it must embrace resistance. If wholeness, balance and order are lawful, so, too, is resistance. For it is by the law of resistance that new forms of Harmony may arise. It is by rubbing up against resistance, by pushing through the ground of resistance that new shoots of Harmony come into being. Resistance requires that we ask questions about our ways of being, look critically and afresh at what we are doing. It prevents complacency and dogma and keeps us alert.

Flow and Self-healing

All that is in Nature flows. It is in movement. Over less than a second or over thousands and millions of years. But flowing. Movement. Impermanence. As the Buddha said, "coming to be, coming to be, ceasing to be, ceasing to be." Everything is moving and transforming, including the very principles that we think, in a moment, we have observed. Furthermore, Nature heals herself from within. It is part of who she is.

And then come Love and Justice.

Love

That there is a systemic order of intertwined and entangled patterns and rhythms that constitute a form of governance that, if followed, would align us with that which is good for us and for the Earth, arises not simply by way of detached intellectual enquiry, but also by experience – by practice and participation. For I find that when I live as if my life is ordered by Harmony, harmonious relationships are inclined to manifest.

And I claim that the governing principle of this harmonious ordering is Love – not love as virtue or romantic sentiment (not that there is anything wrong with virtue or romance) –

but Love as being of the essence, of shaping all that is. Love is everywhere, expressed in the good relationships between all that is, including us. And it is evident. In any one day, there are many more actions of love than there are of acts of selfishness and violence. For most of us, in the everyday detail of our lives, love is a much more common experience than hatred or aggression. This is not to say that we do not know conflict, but that most often it is resolved within loving relationships.

And it is expressed in Nature. We now know that one tree within a forest nurtures not only its own kin but other trees, too, its roots sustaining and protecting. And the giving and the taking of life in Nature, when seen in terms of the whole, is also a form of love, a reciprocity. Everything, including you and me, is being eaten and, at its end returns itself to the ground. Sacrifice. We may not understand it, but it is there and we are part of it. This is Love at work. The seed that falls in Autumn and rests in the Winter ground before it shoots in Springtime, is Love at work. Where Love is not present, life cannot be. And that is surely the teaching of all of the great spiritual traditions.

From ancient times, we have lived by the telling of stories. And this telling has helped us know who we are and where we belong. We may have been told that we are brutal and selfish, but there are others who have said that we come from a loving people, not *Homo sapiens-aggressans* but *Homo sapiens-amans*, inclined to family and to caring for each other.⁶ We are, they say, innately loving. This is what I find to be true

Justice

When we are harmonious, we come together in the manner of right being. The order and proportion we express in this being is of necessity the order and proportion of Justice, right relationship, the proper relatingness of the parts to each other and to the whole.

⁶ Humberto Maturana Romesin and Gerda Verden-Zöeller, *The Origin of Humanness in the Biology of Love*, Imprint Academic, 2008.

We have come to assume that Justice is a man-made thing (and I use the word “man” here intentionally). But this is a modern notion and not what, for example, ancient Greek philosophers and Christian theologians of the Middle Ages thought it was.⁷ We have forgotten this. We think we make Justice in the making of laws and the giving of rights. We think it arises from what *we do*. This is not what the ancients thought. For them, Justice was innate in Nature. We may discover it and align ourselves with it, but we do not make it. It is already there waiting to be discovered, and can then be expressed in *our true being*.

For the ancients, the cosmos was conceived as *being lawful*, a lawful harmony of the parts. In that sense it was just. Indeed, Justice was said to be the first law of being. Harmony had to be just. There was no other way it could be if it was to be True. The two were inextricably intertwined. And if a society was not just, it could not be harmonious. Without Justice there could be no Harmony.

The ancients saw this in this way because they regarded the whole as being paramount. The common good was what mattered, not the separate well-being of the individual or individuals apart from the whole. So Justice was the law that connected each of us ethically with society and with all other things. It expressed a *truthful relation with reality*. And Justice was grounded in the Good. It was an inherent quality in all things, in the natural order of a good society. Thus, societies that are not just are an aberrant form and, therefore, will always bring harm to us. This is surely what we see today.

How then do we act justly? Not through our own will, but through our *right being*, by allowing principles of Justice to be expressed in our lives together. Justice has the same qualities as Harmony (how could it be otherwise?). So it is about our relationships one with another and with the Earth. It requires us to consider the well-being of the whole, the common good – common to all of us and to the Earth. It requires us to look at

⁷ Joseph Milne, “Justice and the Good, *Universalist*, No. 86, 2009.

the connections between one thing and another, and the affect of one thing upon the other. It is shaped by Love and a care for each other and the Earth. It is not complicated, but it is a challenge since it is, at present, counter-cultural. It cannot fit a model of reality described by neo-liberal economics. But, of course, that model is no more than something that some people have made, and is to be questioned. It is not innate and, I would say, it is not truly lawful. And if it is not lawful, it is not in accord with Nature, and cannot endure.

4. Conclusions: an integrative discipline

If these are, then, some of the principles of Harmony, what sort of discipline are they describing. I call it an “integrative discipline.” It is a discipline that offers us the possibility of discovering and understanding the relationships between diverse parts and a whole. It takes as a given a world that works within limits, a world ever in flux. It is rooted in Justice and Love. It adds meaning to knowledge. And it is more than a philosophy, because it is, and has to be, expressed in practice. The process and the outcome, the means and the end, are inextricably intertwined. There is no Harmony without being harmonious.

And so my friends, as I come to an end of these ramblings I ask you to ponder this. If we are to tackle the many and present difficulties of a divided world, may we, perhaps, find in principles of Harmony the necessary, and urgently needed, language and practice of integration? I think we may.