

PRINCIPLES OF HARMONY

David Cadman

From a talk at 'The Harmony Debates', a conference at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter 2 March 2017

I SPEAK TO YOU TODAY AS one of your Harmony Professors of Practice. My proposition is this: it would seem that all human societies seek to describe their relationships with each other and with that of which they feel themselves to be a part in terms of some kind of order, a set of relationships which govern them, and one attempt to do this is to speak of harmony, and within this task one attempt is to look at harmony as it is expressed in nature to try and discern nature's principles of harmony.

Within nature there are a number of characteristics qualities or principles that speak of harmony. I say a number, but by that I do not mean to presume that the number is limited by that which I have observed. That is why I speak of principles of harmony and not *the* principles of harmony. I do not presume to have discovered the defining set of principles, only to have observed what I take to be some of those principles. Nature is more wonderful than we can possibly imagine. The principles I have observed include wholeness, connection, interdependence, diversity within wholeness, cycles of time and season, patterns, rhythms, reciprocity and mutuality and justice and lawfulness, and I accept that what I have found may have been what I was looking for and others would find something else.

Nevertheless, what I have seen suggests a systemic order of intertwined and entangled patterns and rhythms that might constitute a form of governance that, if followed, would align us with that which is good for us and good for the Earth; and I propose this not simply by way of detached intellectual enquiry but also by way of 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 this must surely be so, for, as the Buddha made clear in the opening stanzas of the Dhammapada, it is with our thoughts that we make the world.¹ And in my own work I claim that the governing principle of this order is Love. Not love as virtue or romantic sentiment, although there's nothing wrong with either virtue

or romance, but love as being of the essence, of shaping all that is. And in this I am encouraged by the work of the social biologist, Humberto Maturana, and the psychologist, Gerda Verden-Zöller, who come from South America. For in their book, *The Origins of Humanness in the Biology of Love*, which I recommend to you, they claim that we are by ancient nature a loving species, *homo sapiens amans*.²

The idea that we make the world according to our thoughts seems to me to be correct when I look at the world that we have already created, for there I find that it too has been shaped by a particular set of beliefs, in this case a set of principles framed within the lexicon of economy and most especially within the frame of what is termed the neo-liberal economy governed by assumptions of free markets, unbridled consumption, unlimited wealth, the requirement for unlimited growth and the notion of no such thing as society. Is it possible, do you think, that this dominant creed is wrong? And, if it is, is it then possible that a proposition of governance according to principles of harmony, including diversity within wholeness, might be more appropriate or at least worth exploring.

As I come to an end I've been asked to do one other thing, and that is to say something about the relationship between harmony and sustainability. I'll do my best, but again this is only my view. Harmony embodies broad and all-embracing principles about the nature of the cosmos and our relationship with it or, rather, our relationships within it, for we are a part of and not apart from, and this enquiry is timeless and is not instrumental. 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.

Sustainability, in the way in which the term has now come to be used, describes relationships between environment, society and economy that can be sustained and nourished over long periods of time for mutual benefit. It tends towards being instrumental and the problem is that, for many, the broad matter of sustainability has been reduced to the more narrow 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. An example of the broad definition of sustainability relevant here, not least because it is used in the 2015 Wellbeing of Future Generations Wales Act, is this: sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales by taking action in accordance with the sustainable development principle aimed at achieving wellbeing goals.³ Again, you can see the instrumental intent of this definition, achieving and im-

proving the wellbeing of Wales defined in terms of equality, communal cohesion, health, resilience, prosperity, responsibility and culture and language.

So, is harmony a tool of sustainability or does sustainability sit within principles of harmony? My view is that sustainability, in either its wider or more narrow form, cannot be explored other than in the context of harmony. It is a circle within a circle. I was hoping to bring clarity, but I fear I may have only brought more confusion and, if this is so, perhaps this is something we should explore together. Perhaps this is what universities are for. Perhaps this is what Harmony Professors of Practice are for.

NOTES

1. Eknath Easwaran, *The Dhammapada* (Nigiri Press, 2007), I.1-2.
2. Humberto Maturana and Gerda Verden-Zöllner, *The Origins of Humanness in the Biology of Love* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2008).
3. Wellbeing of Future Generations Wales Act ‘The Sustainable Development principle’ <http://futuregenerations.wales/about-us/future-generations-act/> [accessed 2 March 2016].