

Towards a psychology of homo habitans:

A reflection on the nature of *cosmos* and *universe*

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“The sages tell us, Callicles, that heaven and earth and gods and men are held together by community (koinōnia), by friendship (philiā), by orderliness (kosmiotēs), temperance, and justice; that is why they call the whole of this world by the name of order (kosmos)”

Gorgias, 508a.

Abstract

Traditionally psychology has sought to emulate the natural sciences by understanding and describing the human world and the human person as mere aspects of an all-encompassing natural and material universe. Where astronomers would observe stars and biologist frogs and bees, psychologists would scientifically study a particular biological species called *Homo sapiens*. In last instance these astronomical, biological, geological and psychological studies all were meant to contribute to the study and mastery of a natural and material universe.

It remains always possible, however, to conceive of psychology in a very different way as a discipline that takes as its ultimate object, not a natural and material universe, but the lived world or cosmos, understood as the ultimate horizon against which *homo habitans* reveals itself.

Within that perspective we would come to understand natural science and the study of the material universe as one particular way of inhabiting a human and divine cosmos.

In following this train of thought we would come to think of the natural sciences as chiefly associated with the workaday world, understood as the domain where *homo habitans* pushes back the limits imposed on it by a natural and material universe.

By contrast, it is only festive encounters that can reveal the true range and variety of the cosmic world and its inhabitants.

Where the workaday world brings us natural science and technology, it is the world of festive encounters that gives birth to poetry, film, music, dance and thought.

A psychology that allies itself with the natural sciences will pursue the goal of mastering a material universe and empowering the workaday world. But only a psychology that draws its inspiration from festive encounters and that allies itself with the arts and the humanities will be able to fully explore a human and divine cosmos and attend to the festive appearance of *homo habitans*.

Introduction

All psychological questions ask implicitly about the genesis of a human world and our response to that fundamental question will frame our understanding of ourselves and our world. A natural scientific psychology understands the human world as a mere fragment contained within what it supposes to be a more original and more encompassing material universe. It similarly understands questions about our humanity and the human world as part of a larger natural scientific inquiry whose ultimate object is a scientific and technological understanding of a material universe. Within this perspective, the ultimate aim of such disciplines as psychology, sociology or anthropology is to restrict that inquiry to those aspects of human reality that can be linked directly to the functioning of a natural scientific universe.

All natural and human sciences are thus accorded their respective object of study: botany takes plant life as its object and zoology that of animal life. Sociology takes human societies as its scientific object while psychology is accorded the franchise on individual and group behavior. All these different objects are viewed as forming part of the one ultimate object of all the sciences, namely the natural and physical universe revealed and described by physics and astronomy.

These studies all presume that the cosmos, or the human and divine world in which we are born, live and die, forms not only a small but also a mostly misunderstood and therefore distorted part of the larger, more encompassing natural universe revealed by the natural sciences. It follows that within this scientific worldview our own common, everyday experience of the human and divine cosmos can lay claim to real

knowledge only insofar as it is possible to directly link that experience to natural scientific revelations. This naturalistic belief system excludes from the start any systematic inquiry into a uniquely *human* world that as such is irreducible to, and ontologically distinct from the universal and material world revealed by biology, physics and astronomy.

It is important to realize that this scientific understanding of human reality made its entry into modern life not as the result of a profound insight or conviction, but rather in imitation of a research strategy that had been highly successful in the natural sciences. Human scientists thought to repeat the triumphs of physics and astronomy by learning to regard human beings as material objects and the human world as a minor province in the kingdom of a material universe. Human scientists aspired to look at all things human the way astronomers taught us to look at stars and chemists recommended us to look at salt or water.

There is no reason to discredit this naturalistic approach to understanding our world and all that it contains, nor is there any reason to assume that it should be restricted to the natural sciences. This way of regarding and understanding is as old as mankind and can be credited with easing the burdens of labor and helping us achieve greater control over our natural environment. Nor can we maintain that it cannot lead to important discoveries in the human sciences or that it cannot improve our understanding of a human world.

A scientific and materialistic investigative strategy becomes harmful to the human sciences, and to our collective intellectual and cultural life, only when it de-legitimizes and atrophies other ways of regarding and thinking about the human world.

We have proposed that all psychological questions grow out of a particular understanding or pre-understanding of the genesis of a human world. The pre-understanding that guides the present inquiry maintains that our humanity is born with the building and inhabitation of a first human abode. Being human represents a certain distinctive way of inhabiting the earth. Humanity is bonded to the earth in a distinctive way that differs profoundly from the ways birds are attached to their nests or bees to their hives. Human beings move from one place to another in ways that are radically distinct, not only from stars moving in the sky or clouds drifting across the landscape; but also from animals moving away from or towards their shelter.

The distinguishing trait of human habitation is that it establishes and honors thresholds that are distinguished from natural or artificial barriers. The latter can be mastered by brute force or intelligent planning; the former can be crossed only by mutual agreement between a host and a guest. The threshold therefore represents a symbolic relationship that as such has distanced itself from a world of instinct, appetite and brute force. The threshold separates the human world from the animal world and opens a horizon of neighborly dwelling. As such it opens a world of dialogue, of prayer and sacrifice as well as of love and friendship. The threshold draws human beings away from the purely instrumental world of physics and the natural and instinctual worlds of plants and animals and opens to us a specifically human or cosmic world that is held together by myriad forms of conversation.

It remains always possible to refuse to honor a threshold and to treat it as mere challenge to our strength or wit. The threshold opens a world of good and evil, of obeying the law

of the threshold and of refusing to honor it. With dwelling arrives trespass and transgression; human vice finds no echo in the natural world.

A threshold embodies the typical and unique ways human beings are linked, both to the earth and the heavens, and to their earthly and heavenly neighbors. It represents a limit that all at once separates and binds human beings to what surrounds, undergirds and overarches their existence. Approached this way the threshold constitutes the ultimate foundation of a human world reflected in all building projects from the most primitive cave or hut to the most magnificent palace or city. We might even consider these buildings themselves as mere variations on the theme of the threshold, whose essential function is to hold separate and distinct worlds together.

This same threshold that separates us from and that binds us to the earth and heaven also governs our relationships to others. This insight is reflected in the Judaic and Christian cosmogonic myths in which Adam and Eve make their entrance into a specifically *human* world at the moment when they began to cultivate the Garden and thereby bound themselves to the earth without becoming wholly part of it, while at the same time binding themselves in truth to each other and to their Divine Creator.

They understood that to become human means to bind oneself in a specifically human way to what surrounds, overarches and support our life. It is this bond that, permitting neither fusion nor complete separation, gives access to a human way of dwelling on earth.

The birth of our humanity is therefore inadequately represented by the image of a first, ape-like creature assuming the upright position, or by a biological mutation that results in the development of an opposable thumb. Nor is it fully captured by a biological

capacity to perform work or to fashion tools. A human being is not first and foremost a *homo erectus*, a *homo ergaster* or a *homo faber*, but he is first and foremost a *homo habitans*, a “being that became human by virtue of dwelling on earth.”

It would be incomprehensible to suppose that the place where *homo habitans* took the first steps, spoke the first words and entered for the first time into specifically neighborly relationship, could have been a natural and material universe. Such a universe is governed exclusively by the laws of nature and as such cannot make place for a threshold and hence for a human body, a home, a temple or a city. Mankind’s native habitat should be thought of as a *cosmos*, understood here as a unique and hospitable site that is made coherent, not merely by natural law, but by the law of the threshold that governs all human and divine relations.

If we understand the cosmos as the home of divinity and the birthplace of humanity, we come to understand the natural universe as a partial and imperfect reflection of that larger cosmos. Within that context we come to think of natural science as itself a particular, ascetic form of dwelling that gives us an abstract and partial vision of the cosmos in the form of a natural universe. This universe highlights certain, otherwise invisible aspects of the cosmos, while it necessarily obscures others. It is one of the peculiarities of a natural scientific perspective that the objective observer, who adopts it and becomes absorbed in it, loses sight of the larger “cosmic” world that gives context and meaning to his explorations. Natural science therefore mistakenly represents the natural universe as *sui generis* and as the absolute and ultimate source and foundation of all that is.

It appears that the universe of science can be made to appear in all its clarity only at the moment when the observer has drawn a veil over his own life and distanced himself completely from the inhabited world in which he lives and works. The universe he discovers appears then as wholly independent of the lived world. Yet the complete autonomy and absolute self-sufficiency of the physical universe is belied by the fact that it can be made to appear only to observers who inhabit a more encompassing human and divine cosmos. Every observation of the natural universe and every measurement and interpretation of a scientific fact presupposes an inhabited cosmos and silently evokes the miracle of its creation. If we understand natural science as the emergence of a natural, material and autonomous universe against the obscured background of a human and divine cosmos, we may understand phenomenology as the reappearance of that cosmos against the darkened horizon of an isolated, modern natural universe.

What does it mean to dwell?

We think of a cosmos as an inhabited world that is shaped and ordered by customary limits and divided by hospitable thresholds in such a way that human and divine encounters become possible. The fundamental order of the cosmos is therefore a *moral* order, guided by custom and ritual and governed by a threshold that both separates and symbolically unites human and divine neighbors.

As we have maintained above, all inhabitable structures, from homes to temples to cities, have the hospitable thresholds as their ultimate foundation and they reflect thereby a specifically cosmic rather than a merely universal order. This cosmic order separates and joins the sexes, the generations, and heaven and earth in such a way that

they remain distinct and yet form a meaningful whole. We may therefore think of man and woman, of heaven and earth and of past, present and future generations as *all* related to each other in the manner of neighbors.

To be a *neigh-bor* means “to dwell” (*buan*) “nearby” (*neah*) the other in such a way that one has to cross a threshold and perform the proper ritual to come into the presence of one’s “near-dweller”. As we have seen, the cosmos, understood as a *neighborly* world, is reflected or replicated in all inhabitable structures. A house, a temple or a city is not only marked by a threshold; it also shows an absolute and material limit that is made manifest in the foundations, the roof and the walls.

We may think of the walls that separate one house or one town from the next as representing a painful, original division that cannot ever be completely healed or forgotten. Yet this division must be accepted as a condition for building a human life and dwelling in a human way.

We are reminded here of the birth of an infant, understood as a first and painful separation from an all-providing mother. We think here also of the Genesis myth of Eve’s creation out of a rib taken forcibly from Adam’s chest and of the story of Adam and Eve being banished from Paradise. We find this theme of a fateful, original separation also elaborated in the Aristophanic myth as it is told in Plato’s *Banquet*. This myth represents the birth of mankind as the result of a punishment meted out to an earlier non-human race of arrogant giants who were incapable of maintaining neighborly relations with the gods or even with each other. To curb their arrogance and render them human Zeus cut each of them in half, thereby making them dependent upon and responsive to both the gods and to each other. This operation was at first unsuccessful because the separated halves did

not know how to interact with each other and thereby build an inhabitable world together. As a result they turned melancholy and succumbed to loneliness and despair.

The gods then reshaped the halves so they could face, talk and make love to each other. It then became possible for these new creatures to dwell together and to relate to each other in the manner of neighbors. It is in this way, so tells us the myth, that the first human beings were born.

Myths about the genesis of humanity are at the same time cosmogonic myths that tell about the creation of a divine and human cosmos. In the light of the Biblical and Platonic myths we come to understand the building of walls and the construction of houses, domains and cities as acts of concrete and material affirmation of the original, divine act of separation that broke a “perfect” world apart and prepared the way for a divided and yet neighborly cosmos.

If walls express consent to separation, we may think of thresholds as places where the absolute separation of walls can be overcome by human and divine encounters. Thresholds thereby give access to love and friendship and become the birthplace of human community. Approached this way we come to understand the building of an inhabitable domain as repeating a cosmogonic narrative that tells of the coming into being of a human world marked by neighborly relations. Every threshold that guards an inhabited domain repeats the myth of a primordial and perfect unity that preceded the building of walls and the creation of individual human beings. The walls speak of the disturbance of that unity, while the threshold speaks of a subsequent miracle that made possible a ritual passage and that opened the prospect of religious worship and human carnal and spiritual love. It was this sacred interruption of the wall that gave birth to

conversation, that initiated conversation and that brought heaven and earth together, that reunited separate beings and made them neighbors and permitted them to build a human world.

We should note here that a cosmic, understood as an inhabitable space, always presents a time and a space that is inherently dual or plural for the simple reason that an inhabitable world is necessarily a *neighborly* one. Within a house or a city we are never totally enclosed since the walls are interrupted, not only by doorways and thresholds, but also by windows and doorways. An inhabitable domain therefore inevitably evokes actual or potential neighboring worlds with which it forms a symbolic whole or cosmos. To inhabit a home means to inhabit at the same time a neighborhood, a city and a world.

An ancient Greek proverb boldly proclaims that it is not possible to be human in isolation from other human beings. “*Eis aner oudeis aner*” can be translated as “one man, detached from his relationships to others, cannot be considered fully human.” If we extend the logic of that proverb we reach the conclusion that a house that offers no pathways to other houses, and that therefore lacks neighbors, is not a place fit for human habitation. That same logic also reminds us that if the earth were to become completely detached and isolated from the heavens, it would no longer be able to shelter human beings in a human way.

The essential dynamic of a cosmos concerns ongoing relationships between what we might call cosmic or *neighboring* pairs. The first of such a cosmic pair would be the earth, understood as the dwelling place of mere mortals, and the heavens, understood as the dwelling place of divine and immortal beings. The relationship between heaven and

earth would thereafter be recreated in the bond that holds together man and woman, host and guest, native and stranger and mortal and immortal beings.

When the living sever their ties to the dead or when mortals no longer recognize what is divine, or when lovers and neighbors cease to have any interest in each other, the human world necessarily returns to an archaic and uninhabitable state. That archaic state can be symbolized by a house without windows or doors that remains shut to both familiars and strangers. To confine one's life to such a house would mean to surrender one's humanity.

Cosmic order refers to the order of *co*-habitation. This order makes it possible for divine and mortal beings, for the living and the dead, for strangers and the native-born, for men and women and for members of succeeding generations to find common ground amidst proliferating differences. Such a cosmic order opens to us a world in which we live our individual and separate lives while yet being joined to others by means of hospitable thresholds.

The antithesis of a cosmic order comes about with the destruction of thresholds and with the rise of barbarous societies that cannot bridge differences or interact in a fruitful manner with their neighbors. Such destruction turns the human world into a hostile enclave of competing material bodies that obey only the laws of nature and that interact solely on the basis of brute force. Cosmic order stands thus in the sharpest of contrasts to the uninhabitable order of a natural universe; the first applies to a moral order that govern human and divine relations while the second refers to a very different logic of material forces.

The cosmos reveals itself most clearly in a festive reunion with those with whom we share a life together. The material universe reveals itself most clearly in the workaday world. This latter world isolates us from the times, places and practices that highlight the cosmos and draws us ever closer the abstract universal world revealed by the natural sciences. To enter the workaday world we turn away from revealing encounters and festive display; we to leave the supporting circle of family and friends and face a world that does not specifically welcome us and in which we survive and conquer only by our wits and by the sweat of our brow.

While we enter this indifferent world in the hope of mastering and improving it, we keep aloof and are careful to not to reveal our vulnerabilities. The world of work has become for us moderns mostly a world of stealth in which we advance by method and strategy on an indifferent, soulless nature.

Descartes, the father of the modern techno-scientific age, had as his Latin motto “*Larvatus prode*”, meaning: “*masked I advance*”. In assuming this stance he readied himself to enter hostile territory where disguise would be his best defense. Such an approach is fully adequate to the project of scientific discovery, but not to that of exploring a human and divine cosmos.

Modern scientists have adopted this masked strategy to explore the natural universe and it is possible that in doing so they not merely followed in the footsteps of Descartes, but repeat an age-old pattern of stealth and subterfuge associated with hunting and warfare.

Our modern scientists thereby show kinship with the first Neolithic hunters who left their

comfortable settlements to enter the natural worlds of primeval forests and savannahs in pursuit of their prey.

Scientific observations become clouded in the presence of an all too evident display of human interest and desire. The practice of science, like that of hunting, demands stealth and anonymity and leaves no place for personal disclosure or individual manifestations. To rightly observe a natural universe the observer must for the moment lay aside his personal life, his age, his language, his sex and his dearest held beliefs. Only masked and skillful hunters know how to advance on their prey, and only anonymous scientists know how to wrest the secrets from a resisting natural and material universe.

We have established that thresholds are symbolic limits which embody the law governing human and divine relations. In contemplating a house, a temple or a city we note that portals and thresholds are places of vivid, personal interactions, while the walls evoke a silent world of fateful separations and separate destinies. Together they create a space of dwelling that fosters community while simultaneously bestowing on each person a separate life. The threshold not only separates and binds human beings; it also marries a private, intimate and personal realm to an outside, public and workaday world. The interior space of a home is like a harbor from which ships sail forth in all directions and to which they return to bring their gathered treasures.

The threshold that divides and then joins an “inside” to an “outside” sets in motion a dynamic of leave-taking and home-coming that inaugurates the temporal rhythm of work and play and of an active and contemplative life. This dynamic shows us that a home cannot exist apart from the path that leads from its doorsteps to the doorsteps

of another house or another realm. This pathway interconnects not only neighbor to neighbor, but it also creates a link between known and unknown worlds.

We reinforce and elaborate such a path when we leave the intimate supportive circle of family and friends to enter the workaday world, or to undertake voyages to foreign shores.

It appears therefore that an inhabited space, no matter whether it forms part of a house, a city or a cosmos links together separate and distinct worlds that thereby are transformed into a symbolic or cosmic whole. We speak here of a “symbolic” whole because its parts are all at once held apart and kept together by virtue of an interconnecting threshold. The word “symbol” originally referred to a “pledge” or “token” that usually took the form of a coin or a piece of pottery that was broken in pieces so that each of the contracting parties would be in possession of part of the original whole. Only an inhabited world that is divided and reunited by thresholds can produce and use symbols and create symbolic wholes.

From whatever angle we approach the house or the city, it reveals itself invariably as a cosmos, understood as a place where the original, absolute separation symbolized by walls, becomes humanized through the addition of windows and portals that grant it access to neighboring realms. A house and a city become inhabitable by virtue of having joined together an inside and an outside, a heaven and an earth and a self and another. Building a house, a city or a temple is therefore never solely a question of labor and technical skills. Neither should we understand an inhabitable structure solely as a technical instrument that protects us from the naked elements. The building of houses, temples and cities should first and foremost be understood as a poetic achievement that

repeats the genesis of a human world. As Mircea Eliade has so forcefully reminded us, a house is not, in the phrase of Le Corbusier, « une machine à vivre » but, on the contrary, “it forms a whole that imitates the exemplary creation of the gods, the cosmogony”. (1)

To enter a cosmos means to enter a world that cannot ever be fully encompassed by a single stance or point of view but requires exchanges with others. To disclose the cosmos we cannot remain stationary but must journey and accept a rhythm of coming and going, of entering and leaving, of living and dying. It is this temporal order that gives the hospitable cosmos its astonishing richness. This richness cannot be captured by violence and it is obscured by dreams of total possession and complete understanding. Persons and things make their true appearance only after we have renounced dreams of conquest and become reconciled to the fact that cosmic realities are destined to forever escape our categories and elude our absolute grasp. A human and divine cosmos cannot be encompassed or controlled; it can only embrace us as we embrace it in turn.

About the meaning of a modern universe and an ancient cosmos.

A close examination of the term “universe” reveals that it makes reference to unity (*unus*), and to a motion of spinning or turning (*versus*, past participle of L. *vertere*: “to turn”). Perhaps the original image was that of a unified world spinning around a central axis. It is thought that the Roman rhetorician Marcus Fabius Quintillianus introduced the adjective “*universalis*” as a way to Latinize the Greek “*katholikos*”.

The Greek concept makes no reference to turning or spinning, nor does it to any other mechanical action capable of unifying a world. It speaks instead of seeing a

particular thing or action in the light of a greater, preordained whole. If we translate “*katholikos*” syllable by syllable we come to understand it as a way of way of seeing or understanding something “according to” or “in the light of” or “in view of” (*kata*) “a whole” (*holos*). The Greek *holos* is etymologically related to the Latin *salvus*, for “saved”, “preserved” and “safe” (2). We are invited here to think of the whole that remains unchanged as we shift our focus and turn our attention from one thing or situation to another. The whole here referred to maintains its character and identity even when parts are added to it or subtracted from it. When we see a particular thing in the light of a larger and more stable whole (“*holos*”), we see it against the background of something that remains unchanged and that therefore is seen as something “preserved” or “saved”. It is clear that neither the Greek *katholikos*, nor its Latin translation *universalis* can be thought to refer to anything resembling a modern, natural scientific universe.

The concept of a modern natural universe was described by Husserl’s student, Alexandre Koyré as: “an open, indefinite and even infinite universe that is unified and governed everywhere by the same universal laws and in which all constituent parts belong to the same ontological level.” (3)

We already noted that the modern natural universe, understood as a completely self-sufficient, continuous and undivided world, leaves neither place nor time for a hospitable threshold. Such a universe encompasses a space and a time that *has ceased to refer beyond itself to another world*. It has become instead a space and time that can be observed and measured, but that can no longer be *inhabited*.

We may contemplate a universe, theorize at a distance about how it functions, probe it with our instruments and manipulate its substance in our scientific and

technological laboratories. But all these probes and investigations cannot transform it into a place of dwelling. We can live a human life only within a time and space divided by thresholds. Within that space and time every door and portal is guarded by the god Janus who sits astride its lintel and looks in two directions at once. We can only live in a world that manifestly points to other worlds.

We think here of a child looking up from the intimate space of his bedroom to the starry heavens above. These stars evoke mythic narratives and poetic reflections that create a bridge between a comfortable personal world and a wondrous and distant *other* world. That same child may later discover the stars that guide sailors on their journeys, or that announce the seasons and determine the rhythms of public life. It is only much later, when the child has learned to take distance from the intimate space of home and hearth and mustered the courage to move beyond the paths and trails of public space and time, that he will be able to discover the mute and passive stars of astronomy and take delight in exploring the strange coherence of a material universe. But the stars of astronomy and the material logic of a natural universe can manifest itself only to someone who will return home after having explored the uninhabitable wilderness of a natural universe. To delight in the stars of astronomy is a privilege that is accorded only to those who continue to have access to the stars of myth and poetry.

If we are to understand *homo habitans* and are resolved to describe a lived human world in which it becomes possible to practice astronomy we are compelled to look beyond the natural universe and beyond the techno-scientific concepts and principles that were developed to explore and manipulate it. This cannot mean that we should ignore the natural universe or remove it from our intellectual horizon. It rather means that we should

find a place for that universe and for the particular disciplines devoted to its exploration within the larger horizon of an inhabited human world. It will then no longer be the case that psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists feel compelled to search for a “legitimate” place for the lived and inhabited human world within the abstract universe of natural science. They will instead develop a different conception of the human sciences by seeking a viable, appropriate place for the modern natural scientific universe *within* the wider and more encompassing cosmic horizon of *homo habitans*.

About the meaning of the Greek “Kosmos”

We should also explore the different ways we come to understand unity and order as these apply to a natural universe and a human cosmos. The unity of a natural universe is so absolute that it cannot support ontological distinction between an inside and an outside, or between a self and another. Yet, the unity of a cosmos is based entirely on such a distinction since its order issues from a threshold that divides and joins neighbors. The unity of a natural universe constitutes an inalterable and literal fact that cannot be modified or destroyed by human actions. By contrast, the unity of a cosmos is the fruit of human and divine interactions that, like love and friendship, must be maintained in order to endure.

When T.S. Eliot in “The Wasteland” quotes the famous line of Yeats, “Things fall apart, the center cannot hold,” he is not describing a natural event but refers to a human, “cosmic” failure. The center that holds represents the cultural labor of an entire generation just as its falling apart testifies to the debacle of an entire civilization. It

would appear, therefore, that the most important cultural and spiritual task of *homo habitans* is not the conquest of a natural and material universe, but concerns rather the preservation and strengthening of an inhabitable cosmos.

It is for this reason that our Greek ancestors thought of their political and social arrangements as “*kosmoumena*”, that is, as belonging to and conforming to the order of the cosmos. It is in the same sense that they spoke of public decorum and propriety as “*kosmiotes*”, that is, as reflecting the order of an inhabited world or cosmos.

In the ancient world the idea of a cosmic order stood in direct opposition to the disorder of chaos, in the same way that a pleasing and welcoming human world represented the converse of an uninhabitable and disorderly wilderness.

The Greek verb *kosmeoo* can be generally translated by verbs such as “to order”, “to line up”, “to array”, or “to beautify” that all can be used to describe festive and revealing human and divine encounters. The verb was used to describe the actions of a general “arraying” “ordering” or “lining up” his troops so as to bring them into readiness for a parade or for an encounter with the enemy. The Greeks thought of combat and competition as a revealing activity that could bring out the beauty, the force and the exemplary character of the combatants. Homer’s poetry concentrates almost exclusively on what combat and the struggle against adversity reveals about a human and divine world.

The verb *kosmeoo* was also used to describe the activities of a host or hostess as they busied themselves getting their house in the proper order to receive their friends.

If we follow these indications we come to think of the cosmos (*kosmos*) as a place that is ordered (*kosmeoo*) in such a way that it will support and make place for festive and meaningful encounters.

Such “cosmic ordering” extended also into the personal realm of bathing, grooming and embellishing, all understood here as ways to prepare oneself for festive and revealing encounters. Hesiod used the verb when he described how Pallas Athena groomed and outfitted Pandora for her meeting with Epimetheus:

The goddess grey-eyed Athena dressed and arrayed her;
the Graces,
who are goddesses, put necklaces of gold upon her body, while the Seasons,
with glorious tresses,
put upon her head a coronal of spring flowers,
and Pallas Athena put all décor upon her body. (4)

To this day we still use the word “cosmetics” for grooming aids, thereby unconsciously repeating the ancient idea that to embellish and to beautify oneself means to ready oneself for a festive meeting with family, friends and neighbors. Such beautifying invokes a specifically *cosmic* order in which heaven and earth, self and other, native and stranger are brought together and encouraged to reveal themselves to each other. In doing so they strengthen and embellish a specifically human or cosmic world.

It remains ever possible to subvert the cosmological meaning of beautification and to use it instead as a way of masking rather than revealing oneself. This allows us to speak of

“cosmetic” changes to point to activities that mask rather than reveal the truth of something or the reality of somebody.

But we think in a more positive sense of showering, dressing and grooming as being necessary preparations for festive encounters. We think here of Socrates as he is described by Apollodorus at the beginning of *The Banquet*:

I met Socrates looking very spruce after his bath, with a pair of nice shoes on although, as you know, he generally goes barefoot. So I asked him where he was going, cutting such a dash. “I am going to dinner with Agathon”, he said. (5)

Within this ancient sphere of thought the idea of ordering and embellishing cannot be detached from the idea that human and divine encounters create the bonds by which a cosmic world is held together. Beauty in this instance is not a merely ephemeral moment that answers to superfluous aesthetic sensibilities. It answers to the fundamental order of a human world understood as a place of revealing human and divine encounters. Beauty forms an essential aspect of an inhabitable, cosmic world.

This ancient order of the Greek cosmos continues to manifest itself in certain common expressions that are still in use today. We still commonly speak of “getting our house in order” when we clean and tidy up our living quarters in anticipation of the arrival of guests. Such “ordering” does not refer to the abstract natural order of a material universe, but evokes instead that of an inhabitable human and divine world. Such cleaning and ordering can be understood as “creating cosmos”, if we understand by

“cosmos” a place of meeting whose beauty and order inspire hosts and guests to open their hearts and minds to one another. House cleaning and ordering literally transform an unattractive, uninhabitable place, where the guests would withdraw defensively within their own selves, into an inviting and festive site that inspires open conversation and revealing insights.

The creation of such a festive place of meeting reminds us of ancient cosmogonic myths, such as the one told in the *Theognis* of Hesiod or in our own *Genesis*, and that tell of the miracle of creation that transformed an uninhabitable chaos into a welcoming cosmos.

Something similar occurs when we “order” or “array” (*kosmeoo*) our thoughts and ideas while writing an essay or preparing for a public lecture. Beginning such a task always places us before a chaotic tangle of half-understood, confused and mutually incompatible images and ideas that must be disentangled and properly arrayed before we can find a place for them within the “cosmic” whole of a lucid essay or speech. This labor of tidying, ordering and embellishing serves the purpose of making our thought accessible to our readers or listeners, who enter our text or speech the way our guests enter a properly ordered and welcoming home. Writing or speaking in an intelligible and orderly fashion can thus be understood as a creative, welcoming act that derives its ultimate inspiration from creation myths that tell of the “ordering” and the coming into being of a human world.

We should note here that the cleaning of an office building or a factory floor constitutes a fundamentally different task from ordering, cleaning and beautifying a home in preparation for a feast. We clean an industrial building to promote the health and safety

of the workers. We put obstacles out of the way to prevent accidents and to assure that the ongoing industrial, commercial or scientific work that takes place there can proceed without undue interruptions. It is within this same framework that we clean our garage or tool shed with the resolve to put it in readiness for future use. A purely functional space encourages us to confront a natural and universal world and to transform it by our labor. A welcoming and festive space, on the other hands, encourages us to cease our labors and to open ourselves to our surroundings. It invites us to reflect on what surrounds us while it encourages us to bond with others and thereby to create a more coherent cosmos. For us moderns work has become an unrelenting struggle with a natural universe while the effort to create cosmos has become devalued as mere entertainment or relaxation.

When we clean and embellish a place to make it ready for a festive meeting we participate in the order of the ancient cosmos. But when we clean and rationalize a space allotted to workaday, commercial, industrial or scientific pursuits we invoke the very different, abstract rational and functional order of a modern universe. We might characterize the order of the cosmos as fundamentally a *festive* order, understood here as an order that creates a time and space for meeting friends and neighbors. By contrast, we come to understand the order of a scientific and technical universe as a *workaday order* that permits us to interact fruitfully with an indifferent natural and material world.

We want to conclude this meditation on the meaning of “*kosmos*” with a fragment by the pre-Socratic philosopher Gorgias. Wheelwright translates the keyword “*kosmos*” by “bright jewel”:

The bright jewel (*kosmos*) of a city is courage;

of a human body it is beauty,
of the soul, wisdom,
of human action, virtue. (6)

For contemporary readers the connection between civic order and a bright jewel is not immediately evident. We think of civic order in functional, workaday terms rather than in those associated with a festive order. We consider a well-run state or city to be one in which jewels can be effectively produced, bought and sold, not one in which they are well displayed and worn. Civic order makes us think of sound government, of fair and equitable law, of disease control and sanitary conditions. All these are of prime importance to us because together they form the basis of a sound economy that is able to support a prosperous population. To our modern sensibilities civic order is akin to the order of a natural universe, understood as the ultimate, rational and material basis for all life on earth.

But Gorgias is thinking about the very different underlying order of a cosmos that makes possible human encounters and festive gatherings. At such gatherings jewels are worn and displayed rather than made, bought and sold. Jewels fulfill their ultimate purpose in radiating outward and illuminating a festive world. Such a world finds its ultimate meaning in revealing encounters, radiant beauty and sparkling conversation. Here even inanimate things come alive and are endowed with speech. As they speak, jewels do not proclaim their own beauty but sing the praises of the women who wear them and of the festive occasions that give meaning to a human world.

We cannot know exactly what Gorgias meant by courage, but we know that Plato in the *Republic* thought of it in terms of a steadfast rejection of corruption. He described it as “the universal, saving power of true opinion in conformity with the law.”(7) If we lend this thought to Gorgias, we would conclude that the most appealing quality of a city, and one that would attract the admiring glances of its neighbors, would be that of lawfulness and resistance to corruption.

Again, it is easy to misunderstand Gorgias as recommending these virtues on the basis of their utility and their positive effects on commerce and industry. But the poetry of Gorgias is not concerned in this instance with an instrumental or universal order but addresses a specifically cosmic, jewel-like, festive order that brings people together and encourages them to shine. In this context, civic virtue also serves the cause of festive disclosure and not solely that of a sound economy. The jewel-like courage resists corruption, subterfuge and double-dealing because these hide the truth and darken the world and thereby harm the human encounters that form the bedrock of the city.

Can a modern natural universe replace the ancient Cosmos?

We have maintained that the most pressing tasks faced by the arts, the humanities and the human sciences is to find a fitting place for the modern natural scientific universe within the larger context of an inhabited, human and divine cosmos. Modernity is particularly marked by its disastrous attempt to disconnect itself from its Greco-Roman, Jewish and Christian heritage and to replace the ancient cosmos with a modern naturalistic and materialist universe. It ceased at the same time to think of cultural activity as maintaining

and building a cosmos and sought to redefine it as a progressive conquest of a natural universe.

As we have pointed out, the hospitable threshold constitutes the founding principle of a mortal, human world. This threshold lays down the essential conditions for human life predicated upon festive and revealing encounters between neighbors. Humanity can prosper only within a time and place that allows for fruitful exchanges between heaven and earth, man and woman, mother and child, native and stranger.

A fundamental trait of the modern, material universe is its radical “universal” unity that permits no reference to neighboring worlds and that cannot make place for cosmic thresholds or for human and divine encounters. Had we succeeded in fully actualizing this modernist project and had we been able to completely replace our festive and inhabitable cosmos with a natural scientific universe, we would have made both heaven and earth uninhabitable and made *homo habitans* an extinct species.

We cannot turn back from this disastrous modernist project and return to an earlier way of inhabiting our cosmos. There is no way back from lost innocence and we can therefore not escape the daunting cultural task of integrating the powerful modernist conception of a natural and material universe within the larger whole of an inhabitable cosmic world.

We have understood the threshold to be the founding principle of the cosmos and of all inhabited places, including the home, the temple and the city. It is the principle that separates and binds neighbors and institutes between them ways of interacting that are specifically and uniquely human. A hut or a home separates and unites families, a temple holds separate and unites heaven and earth, a gravestone traces a threshold between the

living and the dead. It is in the same way that the gates that lead towards and away from the city all at once separate and bind together an intramural and an extramural world.

A fundamental and irreducible aspect of an inhabited, cosmic world is that it permits the formation of pathways that lead from one threshold to another. This permits us to visit neighbors, to undertake pilgrimages, to transact commerce and to explore and discover neighboring worlds. Such visits and journeys inaugurate an entirely novel dynamic of leave-taking and home-coming that mobilizes all facets of our cultural life. In all our reflections about our personal and communal life we should never lose sight of the fact that of all the creatures that live on earth, *homo habitans* is the sole one that is able to cross thresholds and thereby link together in various ways the many domains of an inhabitable world.

The primordial dual dynamic initiated by the threshold is reflected in various cultural activities that accord prominence to either leave-taking or homecoming. We think here of the practices of the natural sciences as essentially leave-taken or *progressive* practices, while art, music, literature and thought can be understood as essentially conserving and homebound practices.

To hunt for game or to look for treasure we must leave the comforts of a familiar world and be willing to enter unwelcoming and hostile territories. The same is true when we engage in combat or seek to explore and conquer part of a natural universe. We may think of the hunter, the warrior, the scientist, together with the adventurer and the revolutionary, as masters in the art of leaving behind what is familiar and comfortable and as eager to take up the challenges of the road.

To leave the homestead we must be willing to fight fatigue, to suffer heat and cold, hunger and thirst, and to forge ahead despite many drawbacks and defeats.

In preparing for the outbound journey the warrior sharpens his sword or cleans his guns, the explorer trains his body so as to be able to climb mountains and cross rivers. The hunter practices the art of setting traps, of stalking and shooting, while the scientist rehearses the strategies that will advance his explorations of the natural universe. All of these outbound adventurers hone their skills and train their minds and bodies so as to be able to subdue the natural world and make it yield its hidden treasures. The homebound journey serves here only to safely transport the conquered treasures: the hunter brings home his quarry, the adventurer his gold, the merchant his cash or his bartered goods, the warrior his bounty. The scientist brings home a treasure trove of mathematically elaborated observations that thereafter become a rich source for technological and material progress. The ultimate object of all these progressive, outbound journeys is to materially enrich and to physically empower the homestead and the city.

We conclude that the journeys of warfare, hunting, science and commerce all are marked by an active outbound phase in which the requisite skills and defining attitudes are employed and during which the essential purpose of the journey is achieved. It is during this outbound phase of the journey that the warrior pursues his enemy, the hunter his quarry and the scientist makes his measurements and his observations. The homebound journey appears here as less eventful and demanding since it serves only to safely transport the treasures that were won during the outbound journey.

The journey of the poet, the artist, the thinker and the priest is quite differently construed. The most crucial phase of their travel concerns not the outbound but the

homebound journey, understood as that part of the journey when they compose their songs, formulate their thoughts and clarify the images inspired by the journey. They do so in anticipation of their return home when they must answer questions about their journey and hope to regale their family, friends and neighbors with lively poems, stories and images. During this phase of the voyage they seek out forceful metaphors, effective gestures, strong images and evocative songs whereby to build a bridge between the hometown and the farther ends of the world. By building this cultural bridge the adventurers of the human spirit strengthen the cosmos by situating the activities of the hometown within the context of a larger world.

The outbound journeys of the hunter, the warrior and the scientist add to the power and wealth of the city, but it is the homebound journeys of poets, musicians, painters, actors, priests and thinkers that transform the city into a place of festive meeting where it becomes possible to live a fully human life. These latter journeys place the city not just in opposition to a natural and uninhabited world, but situate it within the larger landscape of a cosmos. It is these journeys that bestow identity and endow the life of the city with purpose and meaning.

It is perhaps for this reason that artistic and musical performances often take the form of an ancient ritual that reenacts the welcoming of a hero as he returns home from his journeys abroad. That ritual casts the actor, the musician or the poet in the role of the returning hero and the admiring, applauding audience in the role of the hometown crowd eager to hear the tales and to listen to the songs.

We have noted that works of art, literature and poetry serve as a threshold that enable two different and distinct worlds to enter into a fruitful dialogue with one another.

Such a dialogue can take place only within a festive atmosphere in which the participants fully open their hearts and minds to each other. By contrast, we see the spoils of war, of the hunt and of natural scientific explorations as forming part of a distinctly workaday world, in which we see *homo habitans* in his role of combating obstacles and seeking victory over resisting natural objects and forces.

We may think of a place of dwelling as a harbor from which we set sail to foreign lands and to which we return bearing the material and spiritual fruits of our journeys. Without such a harbor there can be no journeys and without journeys there can be no human place of dwelling. Only a world in which we are truly anchored and have found our home can stir in us the spirit of adventure. Only a deeply beloved home and country can move us to explore a cosmos or a universe and awaken in us the thirst for outbound and homebound journeys.

The world of *homo habitans* presents us with a strange paradox that links mortality and human limits to human freedom. The paradox tells us that it is only by committing our life to a particular place and time that we gain the freedom to explore and understand our world. The cosmos does not reveal itself to a universal or abstract mind and it remains inaccessible from the standpoint of the natural sciences. The cosmos reveals itself only to incarnate human beings as they engage in festive encounters.

It would appear therefore that our emotional, intellectual and spiritual life can come to fruition only by a loyal, loving attachment to particular places and particular persons. We can gain access to the cosmos only by entrusting our life to what is fleeting and mortal.

On the other hand, we gain access to a natural universe only by temporarily detaching ourselves from the persons and things we love and by donning masks and removing all identifying marks and signs from our person. We advance here in stealth upon a nature that we have come to confront, to conquer and to bend to our will.

It is for this reason that we come to inhabit, explore, love and understand a cosmos, while we can only calculate and mathematically infer the realities of a natural universe.

The academic psychologist who studies human beings insofar as they form part and parcel of a natural universe is required to place himself at the same disciplinary distance from his subject as does the astronomer who calculates and measures heavenly bodies, or the biologist who observes the natural processes of animate bodies. There is no doubt that such a distancing, calculating and measuring perspective permits us to discover useful and interesting chemical, anatomical or biological facts about human and animal life. There is also no doubt that these scientific and technological perspectives have greatly enhanced the material quality of our life. But it is also true that this approach can reveal our humanity only as a natural thing among other natural things.

Moreover, such scientific revelations entirely obscure the standpoint *from which* it was possible to observe measure and calculate a natural universe. That standpoint, understood as the very source from which springs natural science, is located, not in a natural universe, but in the human and divine cosmos that is the home of *homo habitans*.

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