FROM THE EDITORS

# IN SEARCH OF HARMONY
## From Uncritical Exaltation to the Discovery of Sophisticated Beauty

Greek mythology portrays Harmonia as a goddess embodying order, tidiness, symmetry, and agreement. Harmonia was designated to marry Kadmos, a hero. They married and made an exemplary couple who raised six children. Having lived long and happy lives, Harmonia and Kadmos were turned by gods into two benign serpents that were transferred by Zeus himself to Elysium, a section of Hades designated for the souls of good people. The attribute of Harmonia is a serpent. She is the patron of authentic love.[1]

An opposite symbolism of the serpent can be found in the Book of Genesis. The serpent is the Temptor, the foe of God and the embodiment of evil. In the subsequent books of the Bible, he is called Satan, Devil, or evil spirit (see, e.g., Job 1:6, Wis 2:24, John 8:44, Rev 12:9, 20:2). The first humans are assured by the serpent they will be equal to God in deciding what is morally good or evil. The real outcome of Satan's promptings is man's fall and degradation of the world. Paradise turns into a space devoid of harmony, order, consistency, and beauty.

There has always been a strong tendency to consider this emblematic description as a natural history account. Even now, in the time of well-developed biblical hermeneutics,[2] we come across claims that up to a certain point the world was a place without imperfections, pain, and suffering, but became a realm of drama, struggle, and hardship only later. Such an interpretation can be found even in some school textbooks for religious instruction, recently published in Poland, with some of their authors declaring their knowledge of the Catholic Church doctrine in this respect.[3]

---

[1] See "Harmonia", Theoi: Greek Mythology, https://www.theoi.com/Ouranios/Harmonia.html; see also Vojtech Z a m a r o v s k y, s.v. "Harmonia," in Zamarvosky, *Słownik mitologii greckiej i rzymskiej*, trans. Jacek Illg, Lucyna Spyrka, and Joanna Wania (Katowice: Videograf II, 2006), 259.

[2] See, e.g., Dariusz D z i a d o s z, *Tak było na początku: Izrael opowiada swoje dzieje* (Przemyśl: Wydawnictwo Archidiecezji Przemyskiej, 2011).

[3] See Marek S ł o m k a, "Antyewolucyjny kreacjonizm we współczesnej Polsce i jego wpływ na edukację religijną," *Roczniki Filozoficzne* 68, no. 4 (2020): 133–68.

In one of such textbooks, in a chapter entitled "Universe—Divine Order," we can read of the Divine Creator: "What he created was made perfectly. His work is structured, it bears no signs of disorder, anarchy or randomness. Every element is finely crafted and in harmony with another."[4] In another book, in the section "God's Plan for Man: We Were Created to Be Happy", we read: "In the primeval state, man was not so much after happiness, but he was already happy."[5] The implication of the latter message leaves students thoroughly convinced that once there was a perfect environment in which humans existed. "Considering, for example, that the garden itself, with its plants and numerous springs of water, was already a symbol of wealth and a happy life for Eastern people, we can see that God, in his benevolence, created a perfect place for man. This is where man could be with his Maker, the source of all good, love, and happiness."[6] A suggestion about the existence of the physical state of absolute harmony is conveyed (in spite of the title) by the chapter entitled "A Poem about the Creation of the World", in still another textbook: "In creating, God is guided by wisdom, lending order and harmony to the world—all its elements are connected and benefit one another."[7]

Not only do these excerpts exemplify a literal reading of the first chapters of the Book of Genesis, which is at conflict with the doctrine of the Catholic Church,[8] but they also reveal a departure from theistic ontology, which inherently draws a distinction between the imperfection of the world and the perfection of God. Classical metaphysics underscores that the world is radically different from God: it is imperfect, volatile, spatiotemporal, and contingent. There is a fundamental ontic difference and a peculiar "distance" between the world and God. The act of creation means imparting existence to a being completely different from God.[9]

The assertion that the world is imperfect implies that at any stage of its development so far it is not (was not and will not be) perfect. The world history knows no time without physical (natural) evil. There is no rational justification

---

[4] *Być świadkiem Zmartwychwstałego w świecie: Podręcznik do nauki religii dla II klasy liceum i technikum*, ed. Piotr Pierzchała (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Katechetyczne, 2013), 52. Unless otherwise noted, translations are mine.

[5] *Aby nie ustać w drodze*: *Podręcznik do nauki religii dla II klasy gimnazjum*, ed. Jan Szpet and Danuta Jackowiak (Poznań: Wydawnictwo św. Wojciecha, 2013), 10.

[6] Ibidem, 11.

[7] *Na drogach wiary*: *Podręcznik do nauki religii dla II klasy liceum i technikum*, ed. Jarosław Czerkawski, Elżbieta Kondrak, and Bogusław Nosek (Kielce: Jedność, 2013), 18.

[8] See The Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church: Address of John Paul II and Document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission* (Sherbrooke, Quebec: Paulines, 1994).

[9] See Jacek W o j t y s i a k, *Między ukryciem a jawnością: Esej z filozofii religii i teologii filozoficznej* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2023), 102, 183.

for representing the world history as comprised of two stages: the first filled with unalloyed harmony and beauty and the second marred by gradual decay and disorder, as if slipping out of God's control. It is groundless to claim that the world has transited from a state of perfection to a state of imperfection, for example, as a result of a human act. The world has never been ideal. In this sense, it has never been a paradise.[10]

Now, is it worthwhile to seek harmony in the world if our longing for the state that had been in existence only for a short time and passed once and for all demonstrates our naivety? An ideal harmony is not possible in the physical world, naturally encumbered with imperfection. Nevertheless, we have many opportunities to discern and admire the real, albeit relative, harmony in the world: in nature, culture, or human attitudes. Inquiry into these phenomena requires a nuanced approach to capture the subtle manifestations of beauty and order without simplifying things.

Contrary to appearances, uncritical judgements about harmony in the world were popular not only before the emergence of natural sciences.[11] In certain milieus, it was believed that the progress of science undeniably proved that the world was ordered. This is very well illustrated by nineteenth-century discussions around the significance of the conservation of energy principle, which was regarded—not without enthusiasm—as a conceptual umbrella embracing all natural phenomena. Some authors wrote suggestively that both mechanical and chemical or biological phenomena involved the conversion of kinetic energy into heat. This conviction led theists to put forward a thesis that the world is imbued with God-given harmony. "Thus it is," says James Joule, "nothing is deranged, nothing ever lost, but the entire machinery, complicated as it is, works smoothly and harmoniously. And though, as in the awful vision of Ezekiel, 'wheel may be in the middle of wheel,' and everything may appear complicated and involved in the apparent confusion and intricacy of an almost endless variety of causes, conversions, and arrangements, yet is the most perfect regularity preserved—the whole being governed by the sovereign will of God."[12]

---

[10] See Marek S ł o m k a, "Chrześcijańska koncepcja stworzenia i jej implikacje w perspektywie problematyki 'Deus absconditus—Deus revelatus,'" *Roczniki Filozoficzne* 71, no. 4 (2023): 179–98.

[11] For example, in the context of the so-called arguments from the design proving God's existence (see Olaf P e d e r s e n, *Historical Notes on Some Interactions between Natural Science and Theology*, ed. George V. Coyne, S.J., and Tadeusz Sierotowicz (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

[12] James P. J o u l e, *Matter, Living Force, and Heat: The Scientific Papers of James Prescott Joule* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1884), vol. 1, 273. See also Marek S ł o m k a, *God's Action in the World: A New Philosophical Analysis*, New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2021), 131.

At a congress held in Kraków in 1973, on the 500th anniversary of Nicolaus Copernicus' birth, in a reflection on the workings of nature, Brandon Carter formulated the so-called anthropic principle, which still draws a great many and highly varied reactions from researchers. It emerged that for life to appear in the form known to us specific conditions must occur and crucial physical parameters must be fine-tuned with great precision. The fundamental physical constants (e.g., Planck's constant, speed of light in a vacuum, or the gravitational constant) and the so-called initial and boundary conditions of the universe exhibit peculiar coincidences. The probability of there occurring a harmonious and well-timed arrangement of these parameters is infinitesimal. Minute changes in these quantities would have prevented the biogenesis that ultimately led to the emergence of humankind nonetheless.[13] How can we explain this fine-tuning?

In recent years, numerous answers to this question have been given, including two extreme ones. On the one hand, the momentousness of this discovery has been variously trivialized—it was claimed that life just "happened" in world history. The attunement of the parameters would not appear so extraordinary if we considered that the development of nature before life emerged had taken a relatively long time, and the known world is, possibly, one of many that exist. On the other hand, our admiration for the amazing convergence of physical properties that produced life engendered teleological interpretations implying that such a scenario was meticulously drawn when the world began so that the emergence and evolution of life would then lead to the genesis of man—the crown of creation. Teleological interpretations naturally gave rise to theological reflections evoking God as a watchmaker who takes the utmost care that the world's clockwork runs like a Swiss watch, aligning its hands precisely at noon.[14]

There is a grain of truth to be found in both the extremes described above. The most rational option seems, however, to seek the third way, in which the value of fine-tuning is accentuated without absolutizing the outcomes of observations that are subject to diverse interpretations, evolving along with scientific progress. Moreover, the discovery of natural causes of occurrences associated with the harmony of nature need not mean that our admiration for the beauty

[13] See S ł o m k a, *God's Action in the World*, 83; see also P. C. W. D a v i e s, *Cosmic Jackpot: Why Our Universe Is Just Right for Life* (London: Penguin, 2006).

[14] See Zenon E. R o s k a l, *Wyjaśnianie celowościowe (teleologiczne) w fizyce*, in *Spór o cel: Problematyka celu i celowościowego wyjaśniania*, ed. Andrzej Maryniarczyk, Katarzyna Stępień, and Paweł Gondek (Lublin: Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu 2008), 377–87; Zbigniew W r ó b l e w s k i, *Współczesne próby rehabilitacji teleologii w praktycznej filozofii przyrody*, in *Filozofia przyrody współcześnie*, ed. Mariola Kuszyk-Bytniewska and Andrzej Łukasik (Kraków: Universitas, 2010), 247–64.

of this world should cease. Although the physical processes leading to the formation of the northern lights or the night of the Perseids are known in detail, there is no point thinking that people who watch these fascinating phenomena childishly waste their time or sacrifice their night rest unreasonably.

We encounter a similar situation in music as it inherently evokes images of harmony and attunement (and—contrary to appearances—shares a lot with the rational reflection on the world, practiced by eminent thinkers since antiquity[15]). Without an elementary sensitivity to the art of music, instead of marveling at the mastery of the composer, singer, instrumentalist, conductor, and orchestra members, we may go no further than reflecting on the structure of Henryk Wieniawski's brain, the muscular operation of Herbert von Karajan's hands or the physical aspects of rubbing horsehair on polyamides. This is not to say that a knowledge of these things is of no importance; likewise, we cannot rule out that the key to the uniqueness of Stradivari's violins and cellos lies in the components of the varnish. The beauty of timeless compositions, however, cannot be reduced to asking about the chemical makeup of the resonance box or the notation system. Chopin's Piano Sonata in B-flat minor, op. 35, or Beethoven's Fate Symphony in C-minor, op. 67, are genuine examples of brilliant imagination and multicolored harmony.

The ordering of structures inherently depends on their complexity, and music provides a perfect example of that. The harmony of the sound depends on the score and the competence of the musicians. Performances of grand musical forms, such as the Fate Symphony just mentioned, require exceptional skills. If the four-movement structure is grounded in tradition and overall it does not appear too complicated, a closer look, even at the first movement, reveals the complexity of the whole work. The presentation of the main themes in the initial phase involves a sophisticated development and multiple key changes. After the first four bars, the composer employs imitations and sequences to develop the theme; they overlap with one another with rhythmic regularity. Then, a short link takes us to the second theme in the parallel major key. The epilogue, in turn, is based on the initial motif. Then comes the development based on modulation, sequencing, and imitation. After a brief solo oboe passage and a link in the bassoon reprise, *Allegro con brio* culminates in a massive coda. The wealth of instrumentation further demonstrates the beauty of multiplicity. The instrumentation includes a piccolo flute, two transverse flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, contrabassoon, two horns, two trumpets,

[15] The theory of numbers created by the Pythagoreans originates probably in their acoustic studies, which were based on experiments with string and wind instruments. Pythagoras is considered to have discovered the numerical relations between sounds in harmonic intervals. The ratio is 4:3 for a quarter, 3:2 for a fifth, and 2:1 for an octave (see P e d e r s e n, *The Two Books*).

three trombones, timpani and a string orchestra (first violins, second violins, violas, cellos, double basses).

Harmonious sound is achieved by observing the musical rules, both when composing and performing. The end result would not be satisfactory were it not for the expert preparation and precise reading of the score, the skillful exposition and tuning of the individual instruments, plus the skills and diligent work of the individual musicians led by an experienced conductor. However, the successful outcome does not only follow from rigid adherence to the plan, where humans turn into playback machines. Harmony is never an enemy to spontaneity, through which the performer or director manifests her original ways of interpretation, so that the significance of the musical piece is enhanced, not diminished. The brilliant Martha Argerich remains a symbol of how to combine intensive education from early childhood (she started learning to play the piano at the age of three and trained with masters in Vienna and Geneva; she was taught, among others, by Stefan Askenazy) with exceptional talent and creative musical imagination. Argerich was open to non-standard interpretations, a trait she manifested by withdrawing from the jury of the International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition for many years after Ivo Pogorelić had been eliminated from the final battle for victory in 1980.

There is no universal paradigm of harmony, even though each of its variants should avoid chaos. In this issue of *Ethos*, we present articles on the art of music, so that our Readers can get acquainted in some detail with various examples of harmonious beauty preserved in the works of the greatest composers. In the previous issues, we have presented—and this is what we intend to do also in future issues—texts by fine theorists and practitioners of music who give prominence to the contribution of great Poles to the world's cultural heritage. My sincere thanks go to Dr. Teresa Księska-Falger for supporting this project. I am happy that this year we can commemorate the famous organ tablature of Jan of Lublin, the eminent holders of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin honorary doctorates, Henryk Mikołaj Górecki and Krzysztof Penderecki, as well as the unforgettable *Letter to Artists*[16] by John Paul II.

*Rev. Marek Słomka*

[16] See J o h n P a u l II, *Letter to Artists* (April 4, 1999), https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_23041999_artists.html.