

Thesis #3

Corrupted power must be tamed if humanity is to progress to the next phase of evolution. Early humans engaged with the divine life to arm themselves with the moral code that made it possible to create their social galaxy within the natural universe. Today, the Covenant with God, married to quantum physics, offers a cosmology that would restore the discipline needed to trigger further evolution. First, we must renegotiate the social contract to establish an authentic people's democracy.

Divine Right & Betrayal of the Covenant

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GOD can fall asleep, according to Pope Benedict XVI. The pontiff advanced this proposition in Rome on the occasion of his retirement.

Could that explain the existential crises facing humanity? Or does responsibility fall on the three Abrahamic religions which no longer honour the founding Covenant on which monotheism was based? Someone or something must be responsible, because our societies are out of control.

The challenges we face include economic cannibalism, globalised poverty, abuse of Earth's eco-systems and conflicts over resources in other people's territories. Might these have been avoided if the three faiths had remained committed to the founding Covenant? That Covenant was a land deal: God gifted land in return for the promise to honour a moral code of conduct.

Alternatively, should responsibility be directed at scientific materialism? The secular approach to public policy has prevailed for three centuries. Forget Jesus, declaims Lawrence Krauss, the professor of theoretical physics at Arizona State University: "The stars died so that you could be here today" (Krauss 2009). The atoms in our bodies came from exploding stars. We originated as stardust, rather than as twinkles in God's eye. So forget Jesus, and learn about carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, and iron – all the elements that were created in the nuclear furnaces of stars that exploded in the universe, and initiated life on Earth. But

as a tool for aligning our relationships with each other and with the natural world, scientific materialism has been found wanting. What is missing from the secular approach to life? To answer that question we need the anthropological context: we must return to the beginning.

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Metaphysics empowered pre-civilised humans to evolve self-consciousness, develop their physiques, deepen their understanding of natural habitats and refine the rules for organising communities. The core of that metaphysics was a reverence for the divine, infused with the mystery of the universe. The key issue was one of *relationship* – to Earth, and to each other. Relationships had to come with meaning, which emerged through the stories that were recounted to make sense of life. Deities were at the heart of the narratives. Thus, humans were guided by their gods through time and space. In populating a divine world with deities, our ancestors revealed their pragmatic wisdom.

This device served two purposes.

1. Ownership of the planet was assigned to the deities: this removed land as an asset over which people might otherwise kill. Everyone would be treated as equal in relation to natural resources. Prosperity depended on sharing nature's riches, not cheating by depriving others.
2. Rules attributed to divine authority provided feedback mechanisms to create harmony. The Jubilee, for example, was an early practical device for securing social stability.

When gods ceased to be of service they were replaced. Finally, in the contest of the gods, one deity offered a deal that was too good to refuse: a new narrative of creation was born.

The Covenant with God

The way in which a wandering people entered into a deal with Yahweh in the 6th century BCE reveals how the sacred and secular worlds were fused. The Israelites acknowledged one God in return for land. That land was owned by God (“all the earth is mine”: Exodus 19:5), and gifted at a price: compliance with a moral code (the Ten Commandments: Exodus 20).

Narratives which emerged out of that deal continued the traditions of the civilisations of antiquity, including the Jubilee (Leviticus 25): land was periodically restored to those who had lost it (because of drought, for example). Debts were cancelled. Households were sustained.

Thus, monotheism emerged as an arrangement in which relationships were built around a property right. Land was gifted by God to serve the common good. The Covenant stipulated that “Moreover the profit of the earth is for all” (Ecclesiastes 5:9), a provision that was not being honoured in the time of Jesus. The priests had become oppressors (Myers 2012: 52).

Jesus instructed through stories called parables. He affirmed the Jubilee as the Year of the Lord (Luke 4:19), and affirmed the debt cancellation practice in the Lord’s Prayer: “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matthew 6:12). He stressed that the rent of land was sacred. It was the Lord’s and not those who tilled the land, and it must be collected and devoted for the benefit of all (Mark 12:1-9).

The sanctity of rent was the cornerstone of the scripture (Mark 12:10; Psalm 118: 22-23). Ezekiel (47:14): “And they shall not sell of it, neither exchange, nor alienate the first fruits of the land; for it is holy unto the Lord”. Those first fruits were what we now call economic rent. Two thousand

years ago, they were being pocketed by the urban elites. Jesus deployed the parable of the vineyard as “a metaphor for an oppressive agrarian political economy...The liberation of the people depends utterly upon the liberation of the land itself” (Myers 2001: 339).

The parable described how a vineyard was provisioned by “the lord of the vineyard” (Mark 12:9). Tenants were expected to pay rent. They decided that they would keep the rents. They killed the people who were sent to collect the rents.

The “lord of the vineyard” decided that, “Having yet therefore one son, his well-beloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son” (Mark 12:6). The tenants plotted: “This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours” (Mark 12:9). They *did* kill him. So the “lord of the vineyard” had no choice but to “come and destroy the husbandmen” and transfer the vineyard to others.

Who was the “lord of the vineyard”? God alone could claim to be owner, according to Genesis and the Mosaic law. Who was the “one son” sent to persuade the tenants to pay the rents? Jesus!

This teaching offended “the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders”. They “knew that he had spoken the parable against them” (Mark 12:12). They were abusing the rents that were the Gift from God to the whole community. That these community leaders associated the parable with taxation is revealed by their next question: “Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?” (Mark 12:14). Jesus knew that the rent-seekers wanted to trick him into making a treasonous statement. He gave a non-committal answer: “Render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s”.

Beware, Jesus warned, “the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplaces; and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts; *Which devour widows’ houses...*” (Mark 12: 38-40). The community’s leaders were not honouring

God's rule. In fact, they were taking the land from the widows, leaving them homeless. By exposing the way in which rent was being monopolised for the self-centred benefit of the few, Jesus sealed his fate. What followed became the tragedy of the crucifixion.

Silence of the Priests

The financial injustice that pervaded the Roman world in the time of Jesus has also corrupted our society. So why are the three monotheistic religions failing to censure the abuse of rents which, according to the theology of the land, are sacred and should be reserved for the common good? Unravelling that mystery may empower us to deal with the existential threat to our civilisation.

One of the duplicitous claims of the Enlightenment is the proposition that, for the sake of modernisation, religion must be separated from the state. Knowledge can best be accumulated through science, so we must set aside the unprovable beliefs of religion.

- ❖ Was this doctrine a cover for people who did not have other people's best interests at heart? Was the case for science hijacked by privilege seekers who survive by schooling others into a blind secular faith? Why did it not prove possible to synthesise the spiritual and scientific realms into a new metaphysics?

History reveals that when a breakthrough became possible, the statecraft of greed (Thesis #1) intervened to protect the privileges of rent-seekers.

A World of Atoms

When the disciple Paul arrived in Athens to spread the words of Jesus, he observed

how the Greeks had hedged their bets. In their pantheon of deities was an altar reserved for THE UNKNOWN GOD (Acts 17:23), in case it became expedient to switch loyalties. That day came when Paul arrived in their midst. He was engaged in debate by philosophers who called themselves Epicureans (Acts 17:18). Here was the first opportunity to synchronise the Covenant with the new physics.

- ❖ Paul explained that the Unknown God was Yahweh.
- ❖ The Epicureans explained that the world was composed of atoms that fused without the benefit of design by a creator.

The philosophy of science, as a method for exploring the natural universe, was born in the speculations of a Greek philosopher. Epicurus (341-270 BCE) sought the happy life based on peace and freedom from fear, and from the absence of pain. Pleasure and pain were the measures of good and evil; gods do not reward or punish humans. For Epicurus, the universe was infinite and eternal, and constructed on the interaction of atoms. There was no prior grand design by a supernatural intelligence. The way to knowledge was through observation and logical deduction. The objective was the maximisation of happiness.

Epicurus was central to what we now call the Axial Age (800-200 BCE). Similar advances in thinking surfaced in China, India and the Near East. His philosophy was recovered by Lucretius (c. 99 – c. 55 BCE), a Roman poet who captured the Epicurean doctrine in a poem, *De rerum natura* (*On the Nature of Things*).

Why should the doctrine of a universe composed of atoms lead humans into a state of happiness? Might an existence without order or meaning lead to a state of

melancholy? Early humans *needed* their world to be structured and predictable, so that they might face the threats that would challenge the one species that sought self-consciousness. It was that order which humans, with the aid of their deities, infused into their social galaxy.

The natural universe had to be understood on its own terms. A methodology was needed to interrogate the facts in a way that yielded the clearest understanding of how the universe worked. That knowledge would enable humans to integrate their social galaxy within the universe on harmonious terms. By using their imagination, early humans were able to gradually distance themselves from nature; but only on the basis of laws which made co-existence with nature possible. Thus, they developed the 1st Law of Social Dynamics (Harrison 2012: Ch.2). This required that all the other life forms within nature should be respected, and that humans would share the riches of nature in the spirit of cooperation that made their own evolution possible.

But the evolutionary progress that might have been made, by combining the Covenant with the new physics, was not to be. Rent-seeking in the Roman Empire intruded. Christian bishops did attempt to warn the rulers in Rome that their land grabs and rent privatisation was degrading culture and creating a sub-class of dispossessed people, but their interventions failed (Harrison 2012: 8-9). Rent-seeking, which fosters a culture of decadence, meant that Rome would one day fall and drag down civilisation with it. Europe collapsed into a Dark Age.

Rule by Divine Right

A thousand years later, the Epicurean theory was retrieved to become part of the Renaissance. This was a second chance at evolving a metaphysics that fused

theology with physics. What happened may be illustrated by the fate of Sir Thomas More (1478-1535 CE), an English lawyer and committed Catholic who became Henry VIII's Lord Chancellor.

More had absorbed the Epicurean thesis through *On the Nature of Things*. He believed the Epicurean philosophy would help to liberate mankind from abject misery. His knowledge of the Covenant contributed to his vision of the ideal society in a land called *Utopia*. Professor Stephen Greenblatt of Harvard University has summarised how More censured conditions that prevailed in England.

“Utopia begins with a searing indictment of England as a land where noblemen, living idly off the labour of others, bleed their tenants white by constantly raising their rents, where land enclosures for sheep-raising throw untold thousands of poor people into an existence of starvation or crime, and where the cities are ringed by gibbets on which thieves are hanged by the score” (Greenblatt 2012: 228).

Thomas More's fictional world was inspired by the discovery of America and the pleasurable life of the indigenous peoples. The Utopians, More wrote, are inclined to believe “that no kind of pleasure is forbidden, provided no harm comes of it”. *Utopia* was a blueprint for a reformed society that would meet all needs “from public housing to universal health care, from child care centres to religious toleration to the six-hour work day” (Greenblatt 2012: 230). The fabled life would begin by abolishing private property, to prevent the onset of the unequal conditions that cause misery, resentment and crime.

If More and the scholars of 16th century England had been free to explore the collaborative potential of the theology of the land with the emerging scientific method, a peaceful breakthrough in culture was possible. It was not to be, however, thanks to the King of England.

For a metaphysics that secured the welfare of all the king's subjects, one that united sacred scripture with secular authority, would have hindered Henry's aspirations. When More and Henry clashed, More's fate was sealed: he was beheaded in 1535. The course of English history, and much of the rest of the world, was diverted away from a synthesis of sacred and secular wisdom.

Henry's breach with Rome was opportunistic. He wanted to fulfil his sexual and dynastic desires. To do so, he demolished the monasteries, grabbed their land and created a market in the green acres of England. He proclaimed himself head of a new Anglican Church.

Now, there was no prospect of priests drawing on sacred texts to censure the corpulent king's earthly misdeeds. Far from separating the state and religion, Henry united them in a single statecraft based on his claim to rule by divine right.

England's spiritual leaders were muted, barred from invoking theology as a check on secular authority. England's peasants, and the indigenous peoples of the colonies, could not invoke scripture to censure the land grabbing actions of the state. God was silenced, co-opted into the Tudor state with seats in the House of Lords reserved for bishops.

During Henry's reign, 72,000 people were hanged as thieves. The biggest thief of them all grew fat on his throne.

America's Social Contract

European migrants dreamed of a new beginning in the New World. Was this a new chance to develop a viable way of life based on a new metaphysics? It was not to be. Settlers were granted a secular contract which gave them qualified right to life and liberty. This deprivation was

achieved by negating the Covenant with God. Each person's equal right of access to nature was replaced by the right to happiness. The central figure in this misuse of the Covenant and the Epicurean philosophy was Thomas Jefferson, the land and slave owner from Virginia.

Jefferson was an Epicurean. He owned five Latin editions of *On the Nature of Things*. When he crafted the declaration that sealed the break with Britain, he ensured that the people of an independent America would enjoy "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" (Greenblatt 2012: 262-263). This trilogy of rights merged – one might say twisted – the doctrines of John Locke and Epicurus.

Locke's formula for freedom in civil society was based on the natural rights doctrine of "life, liberty, and estate". The word *estate* was the English term for land. Jefferson dropped it in favour of "happiness". So the first comers, the English aristocrats who established their landed estates in Virginia, retained control of their properties along with the power to make the laws of the land. The peasants driven out of their homelands in Europe by the enclosures that dispossessed them of their traditional access to common land would have to submit to the laws of the land lords. Outcome: a population atomised, individuals alienated in the pursuit of an elusive happiness, coerced by secular myths that cynically exploited the language of the divine to secure compliance with a declaration of independence and a constitution that incubated the pathologies that blighted the Old World.

It could have been different, if the spirit of the Covenant was written into the foundation texts of the new republic. But Jefferson was acting in the best interests of the land lords. His attitude was revealed some years later when, while in Paris, he unsuccessfully tried to have deleted the word *property* from the list of inalienable rights in the French Declaration of the Rights of Man (Miller 1988: 201, n.140).

The threat from Political Economy

While Jefferson and the patrician land owners of America were embedding Henrician pathologies in the New World, something exciting was emerging in the Old World. Moral philosophers were integrating scientific rigour with the values derived from the theology of the land in a new social discipline: political economy. The French Physiocrats and Adam Smith explained that rent *ought* to be paid to the state that provided benefits to those who occupied land.

Elaboration of the rent thesis was undertaken in the 19th century by David Ricardo and John Stuart Mill in England, Johann von Thünen in Germany and Henry George in America. Their work became a threat to the rent-seekers. Something had to be done, because Henry George was equipping the masses around the world with the knowledge of political economy.

A number of Catholic bishops mobilised themselves against George. He had successfully combined the science of economics with Christian beliefs. The bishops wanted the Vatican to ban his book. The Inquisition subjected *Progress and Poverty* (1879) to critical study. On February 6, 1889, the Holy Office deemed the book

“worthy of condemnation. The members of the Congregation...decided to abstain from making known publicly their disapproval. But they are confident that all local bishops, as far as land is concerned, will stick to the perpetual Catholic doctrine on private property, as defined repeatedly and as stressed most recently in the encyclical letters Qui pluribus of Pope Pius IX and Quod Apostolici muneris of Pope Leo XIII. They are confident, too, that the local bishops will beware of the wrong theories which Henry George tries to sell thereon”.¹

¹ Communication from Cardinal Simeoni to Cardinal Gibbons. The Latin original is quoted in John Tracy Ellis, *The Life of James Cardinal*

By their actions, the bishops rejected the Covenant as elaborated by Jesus. Leo XIII followed up with *Rerum novarum* (1891), the encyclical that attacked Henry George’s version of the Parable of the Vineyard. Emboldened, the secular experts eviscerated *land* and *rent* from their economic models, to create post-classical economics (Gaffney 1994).

All the Christian denominations, *and* custodians of the Islamic faith, disqualified themselves as champions of right living on planet Earth. Rent-seekers were free to wreck their societies all the way through the 20th century, and inflict collateral damage on nature, without fear of censure from the monotheistic religions.

Quantum Theology

We now live in a world in which political choices are validated by reference to “the science”. And yet, despite a century’s worth of efforts to abolish poverty, smooth out trade cycles and diminish the rape of nature, we endure ever-deepening crises.

Mason Gaffney, a professor of economics at the University of California, has shown that, in the past, major advances in social policy were *preceded* by spiritual Great Awakenings (Gaffney 2010). Is a new engagement between the secular and the sacred possible in our age of extreme materialism? Efforts have been made to integrate faith and reason (see John Paul II’s encyclical *Faith and Reason*). They are resisted by atheist scientists (examples: Krauss [2012] and Dawkins [1995]). *They seek to lock humanity into a natural universe devoid of meaning, which is an impossible state for human beings*. Ours is a species that cannot follow exclusively the laws that confine existence to that

Gibbons, I (Milwaukee, 1952: 584). The English translation is cited in Michael Silagi, *Henry George and Europe*, NY: Schalkenbach Foundation, 2000:150.

experienced by shoals of fish, herds of elephants and flocks of parakeets.

The problem for those who wish to rely exclusively on the scientific paradigm is highlighted by the proposition that you cannot derive an “ought” from an “is”. Judgements based on moral precepts are disallowed by the secular method. Empiricism can measure deforestation or the extinction of species, and can propose logical strategies for preventing the damage. But it cannot logically choose between two conflicting options if the decision rests on judgements based on values. For example, Option A would yield the same outcome as Option B. But Option A entails revision to property rights to amend behaviour, while Option B entails taxation of the population to achieve the same result. If the choice rests on what is “fair”, science is silent. We have to fall back on moral precepts, which originated in the realm of the divine. If we have to qualify judgements of reason with values derived from moral sensibilities, we are confronted with an awkward situation: those sensibilities were schooled into our collective consciousness by our ancestors’ engagement with the realm of the divine.

So are we now free to progress a metaphysics that credibly synthesises the natural and spiritual worlds? Physics is yielding knowledge (and identifying yawning gaps in knowledge, voids of uncertainty) that may be the key to a new compact between theology and science. One approach is offered by an Irish priest based in London who is a member of the Sacred Heart Missionary Order. In his book *Quantum Theology: Spiritual implications of the New Physics*, Diarmuid O’Murchu sets out the principles for what he believes can be a fusing of the creative energy of the universe with the power of the human spirit to create a new way of engaging in the world. He stresses that biblical narratives are stories such as the parables of Jesus, which were not meant to be taken literally, but as ways of illuminating important truths. He writes: “The parables are transitional stories that are intended to disturb and challenge the

hearers and motivate them to move into a radically new way of engaging with the world and the call of the times” (O’Murchu 2004: 121). His attempt at a new metaphysics is controversial both for physicists and theologians, but it demonstrates how the two disciplines can be made to cohere in a way which enables us to combine the best in both disciplines to address the seemingly intractable crises of the modern age. Consider, for example, the problem of who is entitled to possess the Holy Land.

Contesting the Holy Land

Our world now hangs on a doctrine called “human rights” which, as Paul Farmer puts it, “are, of course, exhortatory and largely unenforceable” (2005: xxv). The practical problem with the foundation texts of the human rights doctrine is that those texts omit every person’s equal right of access to the flow of income that represents the services provided by nature and society. Without that equal right, people must remain locked into a culture that impoverishes the lives of everyone.

The fervent missionaries of secular science like Richard Dawkins have one effective way to resolve their dispute with the leaders of faith. They could challenge the guardians of all three Abrahamic religions with this question: *Can you derive from your holy texts the guidance needed to resolve the territorial dispute that blights the Holy Land, to resolve an injustice that has defeated diplomats despatched to the Middle East by the United Nations?*

The two-state solution to the struggle between Palestinians and Israelis is the only option on the table. Ultimately, it rests on the brutal secular doctrine that “possession is nine-tenths of the law”. Can the secular deadlock over the fate of the Holy Land be resolved by praying in aid the terms of the Covenant with God?

Co-existence based on a federal model, constructed on the pooling of the rents of the territories occupied by Jews and Moslems, is described by Fred Foldvary, a professor of economics (Foldvary 1991-2001). This honours the spirit of the Covenant. It unites people of all faiths without significantly disturbing existing settlements. Cultural diversity would be preserved in local communities.

1. Tenure rights would affirm secure possession of land by users, so that people may live and work to fulfil their needs.
2. Rent, shared by people of all faiths, would fund services shared in common. Taxes on labour incomes would be abolished.
3. Decision-making authority would be devolved to local administrations, promoting cultural diversity based on mutual respect.
4. Issues of common interest to all communities such as territorial defence would be under the jurisdiction of the federal authority.

In this federation, sharing the Holy Lands' rents would heal the wounds of past injustices. You have taken my land, but you are now paying the rent of that land into the pot which funds the health and education of my children. This nurtures empathy and cooperation that would accelerate the mutual growth of communities of all faiths. This model could serve to resolve similar territorial conflicts in places like Kashmir and Cyprus.

The Humanist Problem

Sustained empirical research originated with the ancient Greeks, but since then science has endured a precarious status. Our world cannot now exist without that methodology, but its practitioners do need to be humble. Empiricism can still derive the clues it needs from religion (see Box 1). The point is this: for early humans to evolve out of nature, they had to deploy their intelligence as best they could to

define their relationship to the planet. They cultivated the capacity for asking awkward questions – the first step in the scientific method – about empirical facts which they wanted to understand. Their thought processes, framed in the language and vision of divine life, yielded knowledge that made intuitive sense (McCauley 2011). Those early humans could not wait around for spontaneous combustion to produce the scientific mode of reasoning; had they done so, our species would have fallen victim to the Neanderthals.

To resolve the hostility that ruptures science from religion, choices have to be made. An understanding of one kind or another must be reached if we are to avoid another Dark Age.

Box 1

Babylonian Creation Myths

Science relies on clues that might eventually shape hypotheses that can be tested in the laboratory. Take the case of the origins of humans. Tablets excavated from Mesopotamian city sites recount various versions of Babylonian creation stories, in which deities mixed blood with clay to form people. In the second chapter of Genesis, the narrative is recounted in these terms: “And the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground...” (Heidel 1942: 118-119). Now, according to experiments by Cornell University biological engineers, clay might have been the birthplace of life on Earth (reported in the journal *Scientific Reports*, November 7, 2013).

Humanists are free to pronounce the divine life as redundant. But that does not relieve them of the need to search the heavens in wonder and ask the questions posed by our ancestors: what is the nature of the universe? And, to facilitate further social evolution, they would still be confronted with the primary question about the land on which our social galaxy rests: who owns it? *If you are the lord of the land, then I am your servant; and that negates the notion of equality.*

Our social galaxy is inextricably bound up with the natural universe, which is why we cannot avoid the issue of property rights posed in Genesis and elaborated on by Jesus. The intersection is materialised through the medium of economic rent. That stream of value is composed of the services provided by nature and by our communities. Community services are composed of all the investments of past generations, including language, morality, the physical infrastructure that underpins settlements, the arts...they all combine to create a value that merges with the value we assign to the riches of nature. That composite value is assessed at each and every location occupied by every person on Earth.

We are born into the natural universe as atoms, but we are converted into social beings through access to the legacy inherited from our ancestors. If we abuse that legacy by monopolising it – to exclude others – we trigger the decadence that terminates the human project.

Can humanism come up with the correct answers to who owns that value (the composite of nature and society)? Can humanism deploy the psycho-social tools needed to enforce compliance without the rituals of religion (rituals for reaffirming the Covenant are recounted in Deuteronomy: Dowley, n.d.: §16)? So far, such exercises (notably the communist experiments of the 20th century) have failed.

Learn, or Lament?

Once upon a time, the key texts of what we now call the Bible were known as the Book of the Covenant. The name-change suited those who wished to sterilise the power of God. As Dutch Reformed pastor Conrad Boerma noted, the Book of the Covenant dealt with “the most important point of all, the question of property...It is one which the church will not be able to avoid much longer” (1979: 33).

A new generation of religious leaders, including Pope Francis in Rome and the

Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, wish to champion the interests of people who are excluded from the riches of society. They have yet to declare their position on the ownership of the riches of nature. An important first step would be the publication by Pope Francis of an *Encyclical on the Economics of the Covenant* that sets aside the heresy in Pope Leo’s *Rerum novarum*.

While the world’s attention is mostly directed at suffering in low- and medium-income countries, the peoples of the trans-Atlantic nations are also in deep trouble. Their traumas could be rectified, for they stem directly from two dysfunctional realities: toleration of rent-seeking, and the pathologies of a tax system that protects the interests of rent-seekers. This was not intended by the founders of the modern Welfare State.

- ❖ A British Liberal Government, through its People’s Budget (1909), initiated the first steps towards the Welfare State. It prescribed a tax on resource rents to fund old age pensions and unemployment benefits.
- ❖ Consolidation of the Welfare State in the 1940s was guided by William Temple, the Archbishop of Canterbury who published *Christianity and Social Order* in 1942. He wrote: “[A] great deal of what is amiss alike in rural and in urban areas could be remedied by the taxation of the value of sites as distinct from the buildings erected upon them” (Temple 1976:113).

An ecumenical approach to public finance that united Jewish, Christian and Islamic communities is possible precisely because of their tradition in relation to the ownership of land and the special status ascribed to rent. The correct diagnosis of the pathologies that disfigure our traumatised civilisation, employing the prism of rent as a social (for some, a sacred) flow of revenue, would unify spiritual and secular authorities.

- ❖ The Prophet Mohammed affirmed the social possession of nature (Sultaniyya Hadith 26; Sait and Lim [2006: 90]). And a thousand years before the advent of classical economics in Europe, Islamic scholars, starting with Abu Zakariya Yahya b. Adam al-Qarashi (d.818 CE), applied reason to advocate Land Taxation (Azmi [2002], Katbi [2010]).
- ❖ The science that affirms the soundness of rent as public revenue was explained by sundry Nobel Prize economists in the 20th century, including William Vickrey, Joseph Stiglitz, Franco Modigliani, Robert Solow, James Tobin and Sir James Mirrlees. See, especially, the Open Letter to Mikhail Gorbachev (Noyes 1991).

The prophetic teachers of eastern faiths (Buddhism, Hinduism and the Tao) drew from the cosmic order the insights into the wise way of living, aligning the laws of nature with rules for the right way to live on Earth. Their teachings are in harmony with the Covenant that founded the Abrahamic faiths. United on this one principle, spiritual leaders could formulate an agenda for earthly reforms that would initially be resisted by secular power. That is the challenge for people who wish to create an authentic democracy: the need to face down the rent-seekers.

The social contract must be re-negotiated if we wish to embark on the next phase in the evolution of our social galaxy. Social evolution was stalled three millennia ago, when city civilisations collapsed under the burden of rent-seeking.

If a new social contract can be re-negotiated *and sustained* on purely humanist terms, so be it. But if it is needed, strength can be drawn from the Covenant to arm people with the power to create a place on Earth that would be truly wonderful to live in.

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