

RESTORATION OF THE WORLD SOUL or COSMOPOLIS ACCORDING TO FIDELER

David Fideler launches new book *Reclaiming the Soul of the World: Our Living Connection to Nature's Intelligence* in a heartfelt conversation with my old acquaintance, Buddhist Joan Harcourt-Smith*.



Their views, as can be understood, are very close. David Fideler is a very famous scientist, philosopher, and researcher of religions. He covers not centuries, but millennia with his worldview and shows the changes and results of humanity's worldview. It is a pity that the books of this author have not yet been translated into Lithuanian. It is precisely such books, like a breath of fresh air, that are sorely lacking for the weary of this world. So, Joana Harcourt-Smith raises the questions:

Does the World still have a soul?

David Fideler. The traditional Greek view of the world and the cosmos persisted in the history of Western culture for about eight hundred years and it was a tradition to think that our planet and the entire cosmos are a living soul, a living being and a manifestation of intelligence. At present, the Cartesian view of the World still prevails. Talking about the intelligence of nature is still bold and strange for some, and after all, in ancient times, the Greeks understood this idea of the intelligence and soul of nature in the word *psyche*. Word *psyche* meant life. Observing the world, the Greeks saw all sorts of repeating patterns in the development of plants and various organisms. They all – patterns or forms – emerged from the natural world. Where there is form, there is a strategy for solving some problem. Where there is strategy, there is intelligence. So, for the Greeks, the idea of the World Soul meant an active power-generating form present in the world. This was a common view of the cosmos and our planet at that time, and with the beginning of the scientific revolution, people began to model the Universe as a machine. And, as you well know, this had disastrous consequences for our relationship with the Earth.

I like to analyze both points of view, because there were some good things that came out of the mechanistic worldview. And one of those good things was a person's increasing sense of independence, which, in my opinion, is positive. Individuals have developed psychologically, have become more independent, but unfortunately, that good thing has taken them too far. The mechanistic worldview The worldview was useful in a way, but also quite harmful. We are now in a situation where many people do not feel like they are part of the living world. We call nature "environment". It is a very cold, sterile, almost medical term: as if we live in this environment. It is a clinical state. People no longer feel like they live in Nature... At least most people do.



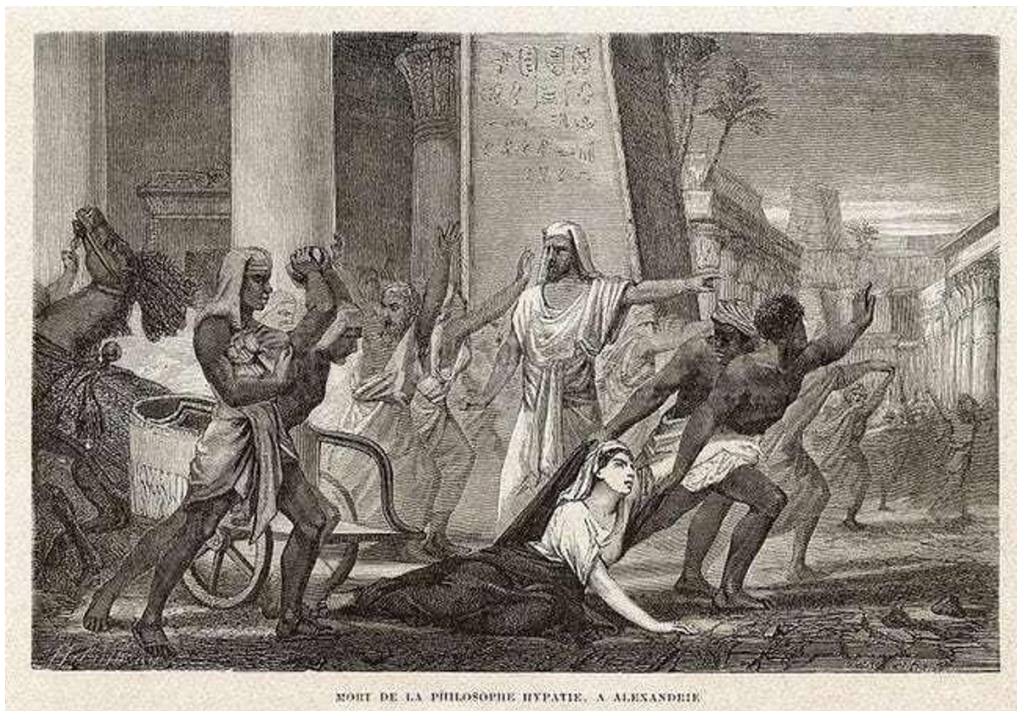
What does the murder of Hypatia show?

David Fideler. The murder of Hypatia* was an attempt to suppress ancient knowledge...Plato was the first to use the term "World Soul", and in Greek it meant *The soul of space*. Plato said that the Universe is "one living being that contains all living beings." It was "one whole." So, in a way, it was a very modern idea, because now science is talking about the idea of holistic philosophy or the philosophy of the organism. We know that organisms function holistically. Plato looked at the world in exactly the same way.

Unfortunately, almost 2000 years later, Descartes said his word: "I have described this earth and indeed the entire visible world as a machine." These are his words. So you can compare the two views: Plato's and Descartes'. Two different views of the World. Going back to the Greek philosophers who considered the world as an intelligent organism, we need to remember another school – the atomists. From them we get the term "atom." Atomists viewed the world as a collection of tiny particles that somehow came together, and when the particles came together, life came into being. When the mechanistic worldview was born during the Scientific Revolution, it actually went back to the ancient idea of atomism. In a sense, it was a revival of atomism. Indeed, "there is nothing new under the sun," and that's true.

For Plato and the Pythagoreans, the beauty of the cosmos was of particular importance. When we observe the beauty of nature, it tells us something. The very word *space* reminds us of Pythagoras, who called the Universe Cosmos because the Universe is beautiful. The word "kosmos" means "ornament"

or "beauty." The word comes from its *cosmetics*. So, the idea that the world is beautiful was a very important thing.

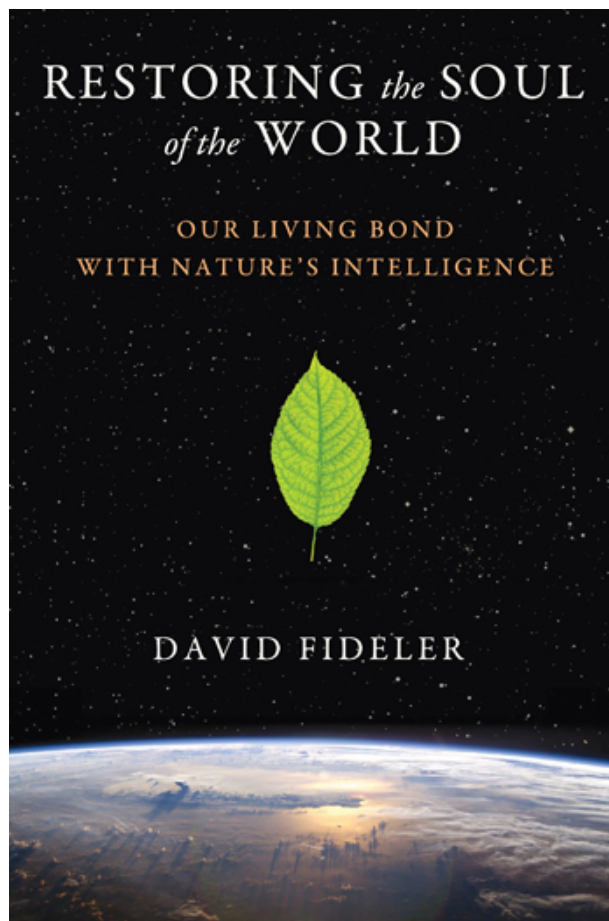


Until now, the world has had a two-fold truth view of the Universe: on the one hand, we have science, and on the other, the world of values. Science ignores the value view. Science says: "We are dealing with empirical phenomena, and there are no values." But the old idea of the Cosmos, I think, was not wrong: the worlds of facts and values cannot be separated, because beauty itself is a value. This is not some invention. It is a feature of the cosmic model. When we experience and perceive that beauty, we feel a unity with the greater cosmic order of which we are a part. When we destroy the beauty of nature, say, in the name of economic progress or something else, it is very dangerous. In this way, we destroy one of the deepest connections that we have with the natural order.

Goodness, empathy, are very much related to the experience of beauty. Compassion and empathy mean "to feel together". I think that the sense of beauty opens up the sense of compassion and empathy to the larger world. I was lucky to have lived in nature as a child, among trees, animals and starry nights. That is why I was very interested in astronomy. Socrates was right: "wonder is the beginning of all philosophy". Plato said that observing the stars at night inspires us to a deeper understanding of the order of the world and the universe.

I studied ancient philosophy, ancient Greek religion, and things like that at the University of Pennsylvania. Growing up, I got into reading books, I was very interested in what we talked about earlier... about Pythagoras, who said that there is a beautiful order in the cosmos... Later, I read a lot about the mechanistic worldview and the scientific revolution. Why I decided to write this work is because this whole idea of the Soul of the World and the intelligence of nature comes from the Greek philosophical tradition. I studied it in depth and saw what the consequences of the mechanistic worldview were. So I felt that I had to

to take personal responsibility and write the book "Rebuilding the Soul of the World", which traces the idea of living nature and the intelligence of nature from ancient times to the present day.



It all starts with starlight?

David Fideler. That's the first sentence of my book, because it comes from a childhood memory, "when I was walking down the road at night and I saw all the stars, and what a fantastic experience it was." In the book, he talks about looking into the heart of the Milky Way galaxy, ...being in a place where it's so dark that you can actually see the earth lit up by millions and millions of stars. In my book, I talk about an experience when I got interested in astronomy in my thirties. I had a fantastic computerized telescope and I would find myself ... under a completely dark sky. Then I would look into the heart of the Milky Way galaxy ...

The idea that "everything begins with starlight" came from intuition, because when I went back to the oldest civilizations, I discovered that all science and philosophy actually came from the contemplation of the sky. And I call this phenomenon the cosmological impulse, which came from our desire to understand our place in the Universe. And it inspired me to study philosophy, religion, and the birth of science, because in their earliest forms, all of those things were united. They all spoke of man's desire to understand his place in the Universe.

What has individualization led to?

David Fideler. There were also some good things that came out of the mechanistic worldview. For example, this conversation wouldn't be happening if it weren't for this amazing new technology (*video form*). I was influenced by a scientist and thinker, Richard Tarn*, the author of *The Passion of the Western Mind*. He was my doctoral advisor. His book inspired me to take on this work. One thing Richard Tarn realized is that there are strong connections between the psychological patterns we see in human development in terms of individuals, and those patterns are reflected in the larger timescales of cultural development. We go through stages of consciousness development as we go from child to adult. Similar changes have occurred in the psychological states of humanity on a larger scale. People who lived thousands of years ago did not have the well-developed Cartesian ego that we do today. Richard Tarn believes that if we look at earlier cultures, we will see that they actually had an incredible connection to nature, but at the same time they operated unconsciously. Their relationship with the natural world was mystical, because there were no firm dividing lines between the psyche and the larger world. And then, as people individuate, the development of the ego begins, we feel separated from the world. Now we see the world as an object. This stage was necessary so that you could reconnect with the depth of the world.

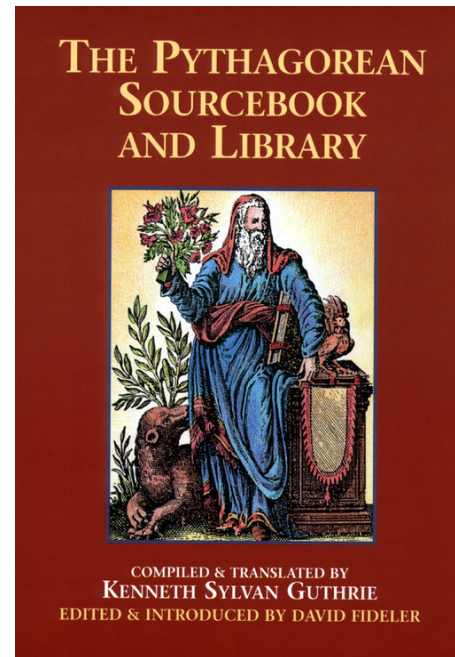
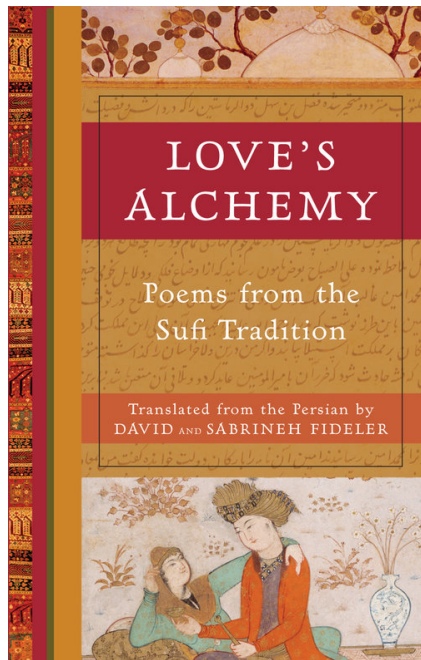
Richard Tarn noticed those periods of Western history and the patterns of consciousness that are reflected in them. I believe that too. I think it's a very beautiful idea. So if you look at it from that angle, you will see that we are living in a midlife crisis (laughs), in terms of our civilization. We had to separate ourselves from the world in order to understand the world more deeply, so that at some point in the future we could re-integrate our lives into the Cosmos. Let's hope that happens.

Reintegration into the natural world and the realization of developed personalities that we are part of everything is a beautiful idea.

David Fideler. There is a chapter in my book where I talk about looking through a telescope and observing the stars. I saw this thanks to technology and science. So, there are two sides to everything. We have certainly done a lot of damage to the world with our technology. But we have also been able to understand the physical world much more deeply and accurately than anyone before. In fact, everything we know about the large-scale structure of the Universe has only been learned in the last hundred and fifty years. In that time, we have learned more than all previous generations of people combined. So, hopefully, we will have the wisdom to learn from nature in a way that does not destroy it. Richard Tarn argues that "our civilization is just beginning"...we are seeing something new being born. He admits that he is very interested in studying worldviews. We look at the world unconsciously, our worldview influences our relationships with other people and Nature. Our worldview shapes our culture. So, in a sense, we are products of our worldview... Many people have a very hard time thinking about their worldview because it is so close to them that it remains unconscious. It is like water in which fish swim. They are surrounded by water and they cannot see it.

In earlier cultures, temples were built to align with the stars in the sky, and this was one way of aligning one's life with the life of the World and the Cosmos. I found it very useful to go back and look at the worldviews of earlier cultures. The stars, myths, and culture were connected in terms of an integrated worldview. Temple sites were like scientific observatories in the modern sense, but also instruments that the culture used for rituals or magic, in order to align the culture with the greater World."

Tell us about the Cosmopolio project.



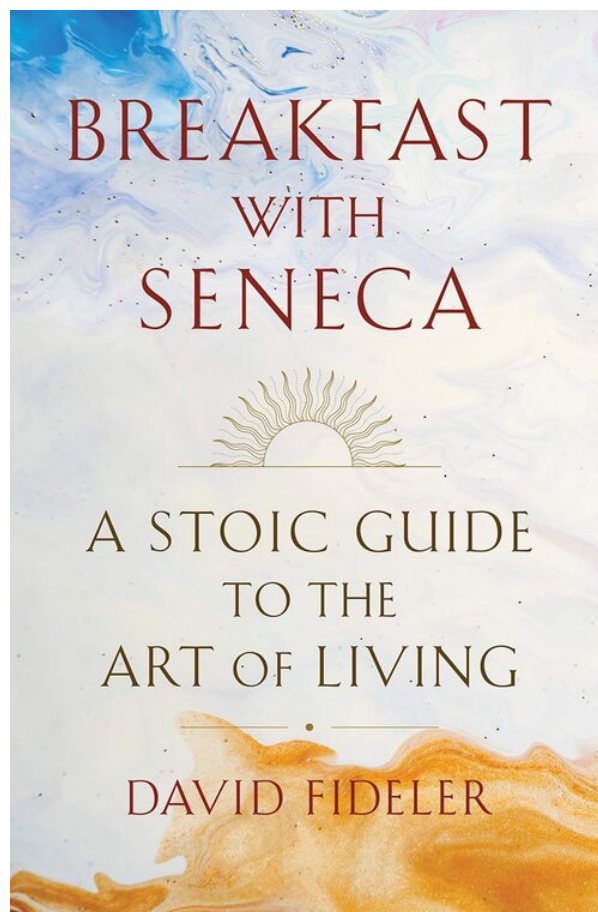
David Fideler. I have a website called Cosmopolis Project, which is the result of various research projects I have conducted. I have a great passion for the humanities and I am interested in spreading the ideas of the humanities into life and society. I feel that the humanities have gone down the wrong path: the original purpose of the humanities was to help us become global citizens, culturally literate, to live meaningful lives, to develop as human beings. However, due to many things that have happened in academia, that vision of the humanities has been largely lost. A friend and I organized a small symposium that took place in Athens. The theme of the symposium was "The Humanities, Transcendental Experience, and the Future of Education."

Word *transcendent* has different meanings, but we use it in its simplest sense, meaning **the experience of belonging to a reality that is greater than ourselves**. This was especially important for the Stoics and other philosophers. I think it's very important for us today that we belong to a reality that goes beyond our limited "I" and includes the whole world or the whole planet, which forms a living community. Because if we didn't have a belonging *for a greater sense of reality*, we couldn't really call ourselves ethical people.

The Stoics said that we belong to a global community - a cosmopolis that extends beyond us - a common intelligence that unites people because we love other people and the rest of the world. So I really think that's the main idea. If we are to be ethical people, as well as good cosmic citizens here on Earth, we have to understand that we belong to *for someone*, which is greater than ourselves.

What does ethics mean to a philosopher?

David Fideler. The world of philosophy is strange because philosophers come up with definitions of different things with complicated terms. Then they ask you, "Are you X, Y, or Z? Which category do you fall into and what belief system do you follow?" To me, ethics is much simpler: it's our basic relationship with the world and the realization that we belong to a larger reality and the conscious pursuit of goodness and virtue.



The Greeks had an idea of human flourishing – *eudaimonia*. For me, human flourishing also means living in a flourishing world. Because if we live in a dead world, we don't really flourish as humans. So that's how I look at ethics. And I believe that there's something similar to what Plato believed, that there's something similar to Good... And I think that's reflected in the structure [and functioning] of living organisms.

This shows once again that the worlds of facts and values are not separate from each other – in fact, they are connected, because if we look at the structures of living organisms, they embody patterns of goodness and harmony that allow them to function in the best possible ways. Ancient philosophers and other writers emphasized that organisms that embody these patterns of goodness and harmony

patterns of harmony, making them beautiful. This brings us back to the idea of the Beauty of the world.

The problem with ethics is that it is difficult in practice; and even if you believe in the archetype of goodness, as Plato believed, making individual ethical decisions is often difficult even when you know the essential nature of goodness. But when it comes to specific situations and ethical decisions, they become complex. So you can't always be sure that you are making the best decision.

What is your attitude towards religion, or rather, towards the Abrahamic religion...

David Fideler. When I was in school, I studied the origins of Christianity because I was interested in Gnosticism and I found it very interesting how Christianity was formed historically. I went to the University of Pennsylvania, where we could study it as history. There was no theology or anything like that, which was very nice that Michigan didn't have that. I studied mysticism in the Christian and Islamic traditions.

Word *religion* etymologically means "*connect from n*" So, I think that religion itself is something valuable because its idea is *to be connected to space* or *have a sense of belonging to a larger reality*, which I think is very important for us as humans to develop. Religion is interpreted in all sorts of strange and unusual ways - and sometimes it doesn't lead to very pleasant results. *[Laughs]*

Speaking of Abrahamic religions, my book has a chapter on monotheistic and polytheistic imagination. It's interesting that all the monotheistic religions of the Western world, you could say the Abrahamic tradition itself, originated in a desert environment. There, there's a tendency not to be surrounded by abundant vegetation. In the desert, everything is very simple: there's the sky and the earth that you walk on, and at night, the stars. I think that living in such an environment gives birth to a certain image of God.

What is imagination?

David Fideler. We imagine God in different ways. And I think there are some good aspects to the monotheistic imagination. But if you look at it historically, there was a lot of psychological fragmentation in that tradition. So there were a lot of pairs of opposites that led to violence. And you can see that in those traditions.

I think that helps to summarize. We see this not only in the Islamic tradition, but in all monotheistic traditions. The basic idea of the Islamic tradition is *monotheism* or *divine unity*. And this is pure monotheism. But the problem is that the Islamic tradition has been in a huge crisis that has been going on for centuries, because there are two completely different interpretations of divine unity. And they produce two completely different results.

One interpretation of divine unity in the Islamic tradition is that there is a divine unity that encompasses the whole world and all of creation. And this is reflected in Sufism, which takes the view that there is a divine unity in the world and that it encompasses us. I think this is the original meaning of the Islamic tradition, because there are verses in the Quran that confirm it. For example, there is a very beautiful verse that says: "Where

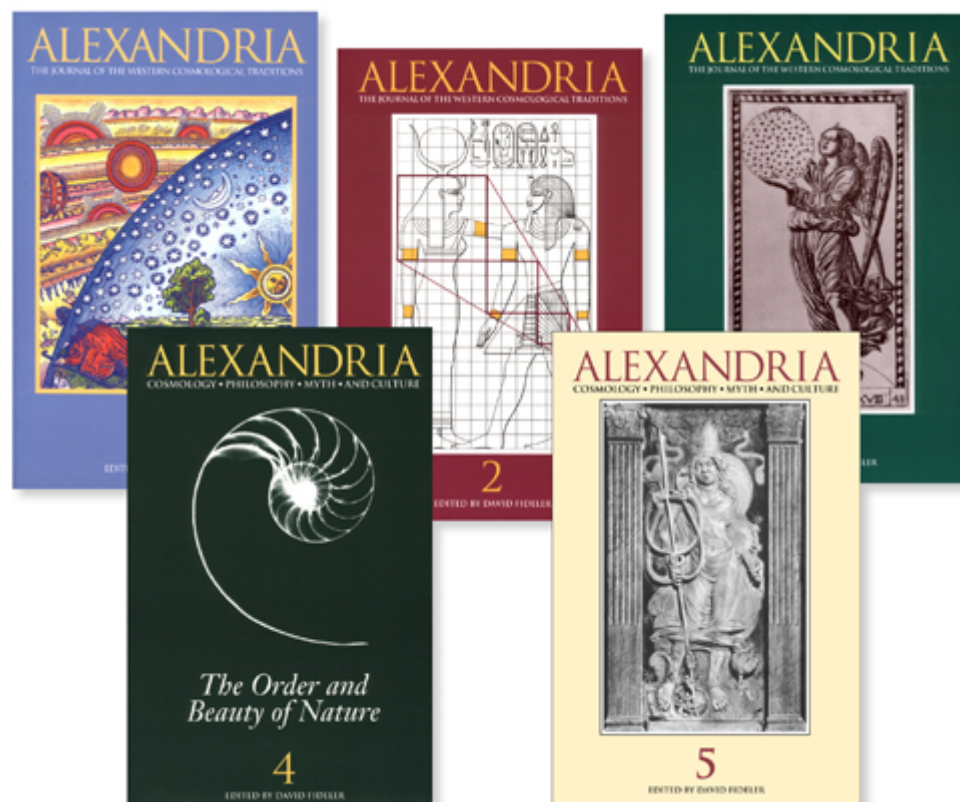
"You turn around, there is the face of God." That's very beautiful. There are other ideas in the Quran, for example, that the world is full of divinity.

However, there is also a completely different interpretation of divine unity: "since God is one, God is completely separate from the Universe." And in that, later interpretation, there is no direct contact, relationship, or connection with God – only through a system of laws.

You see how different those two views are! They lead to two completely different social consequences, because one interpretation creates a legal system where people say what you can and can't do, what is *halal and haram*, which allows people to be punished. Another view is that divinity encompasses the entire Universe and is Here. It leads to an interpretation of the peaceful monotheistic tradition.

That basic dichotomy, I think, you'll definitely find in Judaism and Christianity. So that's how the same religion can produce completely different results. It's hard for people in the current Islamic tradition to understand which interpretation is correct because [in Islam] there's no central authority to tell people what's correct.

This is reflected in my book. Although I didn't write about it, there is a structural similarity between one interpretation of Islam, the extremist Wahhabi view, where divinity is not part of the universe, and the mechanistic worldview of the Scientific Revolution. In it, God was also not part of the Universe. He was separate. You could only have a relationship with God through the Islamic legal system, and the Scientific Revolution was based on the discovery of mathematical laws of nature that were believed to exist in the mind of God. This is a direct parallel between those two structures.



So, it is enough to grasp the idea of divine separation or separation from the world, and it is no longer in the world, which inevitably leads to some kind of violence. You can see this in the Western tradition, for example, in the writings of F. Bacon*, which I discuss in the book. He preached that we must become “masters and governors of nature”, “torture the secrets” of nature and turn nature into “the slaves of humanity” – these are very cruel words. This way of thinking has given rise to the myth of progress. There has been an unconscious war between humanity and the natural world of which we are a part.

In the last chapter of the book, I talk about what a new worldview might look like, and I return to the earlier idea of humans engaging in therapeutic and collaborative relationships with the natural world to bring the world’s fruits closer together. I believe we need to see ourselves not as “masters and stewards of nature,” but as collaborators with nature. While the idea of learning from nature is a very, very old one, the idea of collaborating with nature is also part of our Western tradition. All living things embody intelligence and can heal themselves. If we can collaborate with nature’s intelligence, we can help restore the Earth’s living systems.

I don't think there are any technological, quick fixes to the problems that arise. But all living things embody intelligence and can heal themselves. If we can collaborate with nature's intelligence, we can help restore the Earth's living systems. In the last chapter of the book, I talk about some of the people who are working in this direction. It's incredibly fascinating, because they are working with living organisms to clean up polluted water bodies and remove carcinogens...**The only thing we have learned in the last three hundred years since the beginning of the scientific revolution is that we have no solution to the ecological crisis** If we can listen to the Earth and work with nature's intelligence, we can help the world regain its fertility.

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* **Joan Harcourt-Smith** – There is a lot of information about it on Wikipedia.

* Full interview – cosmopolisproject.org

* **Richard Theodore Servant** (1950) is a Swiss-born cultural historian and astrologer, known for his books *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas That Shaped Our Worldview* and *Cosmos and Psyche: Hints of a New Worldview*. Tarnos is a professor of philosophy and psychology at the California Institute for Integral Studies and the founder of its Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness Studies program.

* **Hypatia and the Greeks** considered the world as an organism. Did this conflict with the Christian view of creation? Absolutely not. Christian theologians saw danger in this and, driven by fear, began to destroy everything that was connected with the pagan past and...they themselves contributed to the destruction of God's creation. **Hypatia** (about 370 AD - 415 AD in Alexandria) - an ancient Greek scientist, astronomer and Neoplatonic philosopher. Considered the first female mathematician. Wrote commentaries on the works of Plato, Aristotle and other Greek philosophers, astronomers, mathematicians. Little is known about Hypatia's life. She was born into the family of the mathematician Theon, who was a teacher at the Alexandrian school, who probably also taught his daughter. She was brutally murdered by a mob of Coptic Christian fanatics.

* **The ancient Greek philosopher Plato lived from 422-347 BC.**

*** F. Bacon ***-Pioneer of modern empiricism and experimental science, English philosopher
(1561-1626)