The Ritualised Harmony: Does Archaic Magic Teach Us Sustainabilities?

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This paper compares the differences between the old magical worldviews and modern thinking in seeing the nature and the interaction between people and the natural surroundings. In magic people as well as nature’s spirits and other forces in the universe had their powers and spheres of influence. The principle of sustainability was woven into the idea of prevailing harmony between different forces of nature and human beings. After the bear killing the soul of the animal had to given back to the ancestrial realm of bears. It was a religious-like ritual and sacrifice for the animal world to appease its spirits.

Even though the consequences of human actions were rarely understood, the rule of harmony restricted rapid economic and social change. Often this also restricted inconsiderate exploiting of the local environment. The modern idea of human being as the lord of nature was impossible. The development of modern individualism (starting from the Middle Ages) changed the attitude. An essential element of new thinking was the Christian idea of human being as a unique product of the Creation, separated from natural history. This standpoint splendidly fitted in the modern scientific thinking which also saw Man (also literally) superior to other creatures.

Nature was seen as mere resource. Harmony was unnecessary; there are no other lords except the master humans. Modern individuals aspire the change for to subjugate the forces of nature and other people (hence the talk about competitiveness). In magic hardly anyone could have thought to possess all the favours of spiritual powers to challenge the forces of the nature or the social order and to act in one’s own self-interest.

This demonstrates the importance of the cultural framework in implementing policies of sustainability. The cultural canons in understanding one’s own environment can be centuries old, though unconscious mental idioms.

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