Any research group devoted to “sacred sites” presupposes, among other things, the recognition of sacredness, holiness, sanctity, inviolability, *et similia*, i.e., the logical and dialogical admissibility of spiritual and/or religious value, which is one among the many forms that value can have. Think, say, of ethical value (e.g., “war is wrong”), aesthetic value (e.g., “war is horrible”), existential value (e.g., “war dehumanises its victims”), sentimental value (e.g., “this watch is a memento of my son, fallen on the battlefield”), ecological value (e.g., “we must prevent a radioactive catastrophe, which would render this region barren for millennia”), biological value (e.g., “prolonged exposure to radioactivity causes terrible tumours”), etc. Economic value is one of them, e.g., “it is time to invest in the shares of arms manufacturers amid surging demand for new anti-tank equipment in Eastern Europe”. (At the time of writing, Russian armed forces are in the process of attacking Ukraine.)

Nevertheless, under today’s prevailing socio-cultural conditions, economic value tends to be the only type of value that is publicly recognised, institutionally endorsed and forcefully promoted on an almost daily basis, as signalled by the all-pervasive notions of: “growth” *qua* ultimate end of administrative agency at its highest levels; “net worth” as the defining key-feature of each person, even on some dating websites; “success” and “loss” as something to be measured by and within “the market”; “usefulness” as a matter of either “employability” or “profitability”; “happiness” as reflected in the disposable income by which one can buy the newest technological gadgets or the most applauded Veblen goods of the day (e.g., Russian oligarchs’ mega-yachts and Anglo-American billionaires’ space-rocket trips). I could cite countless examples and manifestations of this phenomenon, which is certainly a major feature of “Western” civilisation at large, in the sense of ‘liberal’ or ‘capitalist’ (cynicism, monasticism, socialism, anarchism and communism are also “Western” creations; hence the need for my clarification concerning “Western”).

Equally, I could cite several instances of awareness and criticism of this axiological monism. To be concise, I shall mention only one, i.e., the Catholic British humourist G.K. Chesterton, who quipped on this point:

“In all normal civilisations the trader existed and must exist. But in all normal civilisations the trader was the exception; certainly, he was never the rule; and most certainly he was never the ruler. The predominance which he has gained in the modern world is the cause of all the disasters of the modern world.” (“Reflections on a Rotten Apple.” In *The Well and the*

Shallows, 163–170. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006/1935, 168).

The debates and the discussions that I have witnessed as a participant in our pan-Arctic research group on explicitly stated "sacred sites" are a token of such a line of criticism, as well as a further exemplification and manifestation of this modern socio-cultural "predominance", as Chesterton would dub it. That is, our debates and discussions have invariably revealed the unbalanced pre-eminence of economic value over other values—religious and/or spiritual one included, if not *in primis*. As a matter of fact, the "sacred sites" at issue in our group's research have been repeatedly described as being in danger because of activities such as mining, tourism, salmon farming, railroad construction, hydroelectric power production, and the like. Without a single exception, the threat to these sacred sites has emerged in each and every case as the offshoot of some for-profit endeavour guided by the "money-value sequence" that contemporary life-value onto-axiology (LVOA) identifies and juxtaposes to the "life-value sequence" (for a thorough exposition and explanation of LVOA, see John McMurtry (ed.), *Philosophy and World Problems*, Paris & Oxford: EOLSS/UNESCO, 2011).

A money-value sequence is an economic transaction, or set thereof, whereby pecuniary value is invested so as to generate returns of the same kind. All of this being done whether or while other domains of value are also affected and/or depleted in the processes of surveying, extraction, transformation, transportation, consumption and/or disposal that are required for the eventual maximisation of the initial pecuniary—i.e., money-based and money-measured—investment. Unless there occur controlling recognitions, considerations and impositions of values that are other than the economic one (e.g., human rights and public health), then these transactions are allowed to go on unabated and unimpeded, if not even facilitated and promoted, because they are believed to be good as well as just. (LVOA takes very good care of providing the fundamental criteria allowing us to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad'; hence, I refer the reader to it and, as cited, to McMurtry's work for UNESCO.)

As far as justice is concerned, this sort of positive belief comes about because, basically, it is generally presumed that if someone has something to sell, and someone else has something to buy, and the two of them can agree on a price to be paid for this mutual exchange or commutation, then they should go ahead with their plans and do it. Why not? This intuitive

logic is at the very core of the contractual model of human relations that is presupposed by our socio-economic order, much of its constitutional-legal architecture, the social sciences (especially economics), and even our culture at large. Once again, I could mention countless examples and manifestations of this contractual approach to human affairs, as well as several instances of criticism of the same. However, for brevity's sake, I shall merely refer to an older entry in *Nordicum-Mediterraneum*.

This entry is the 2016 reasoned synopsis of *Wirtschaftsethik*, or *Economic Ethics*, a book penned in the 1990s by the Swiss philosopher and theologian Arthur Fridolin Utz. Utz was one of the few *fin-de-siècle* Dominican commentators who noted explicitly how that same "Western" civilisation that glorifies "the trader", as Chesterton would write, does also tend and try incessantly to reduce all human relations to contractual relations. Put differently, Utz highlighted how the Western liberal-capitalist mindset conceives of all justice as commutative justice, which is that one type of particular justice applicable to exchanges between a person and another (e.g., Peter and Paul), or an economic entity and another (e.g., Eimskip and the Coca-Cola corporation). In this transactional way, as Roman law and the medieval Canonists had long enshrined in our culture, each person is rendered that which is due to him/her ("*suum cuique tribuere*", as *per* Justinian's *Institutiones* 1.1.3–4).

However, as the medieval Canonists and Utz were well aware of, justice possesses more facets than the commutative one alone. And it is to such facets that I devote my remaining philosophical remarks, for which I make use of a very old work of art. Should you ever visit the beautiful Public Palace of Siena, in Italy, you will find therein Ambrogio Lorenzetti's (1290–1348) fresco entitled "The Allegory of Good Government" (or "Governance"; 1338–1339; fig.1). Much more concisely than any written text, Lorenzetti's fresco captures visually the diverse facets of justice.

FIG.1 Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Allegoria del buon governo*

To begin with, the fresco depicts justice ("*iustitia*") in the shape of an enthroned mighty woman (left third, top two-thirds), who is crowned and inspired by an angelic, suitably winged, representation of Divine Wisdom. Leaving aside the thorny issue of whether and how we can tap into such a blessed wisdom, the depiction of such a 'special relationship' means that justice ought to be the ruler in a community wishing to be good or, to cast the same idea in other words, rulers are legitimate if and only if they are just. Should they be unjust, then the citizens would have good reasons to question the same rulers' continued staying in power. (It may be worth recalling the age-old theme of "tyrannicide", which the Scholastic political thinkers inspiring Lorenzetti's artistry were debating back then as a matter of rational and natural jurisprudence, not of confessional belief.).

The enthroned female personification of justice is general justice (aka "legal" or "social", depending on specific authors; Utz himself opted for "social"). General justice is the justice that each citizen owes to the community at large, i.e., the legitimate institutions, both tangible and intangible, upon which the community relies for its own existence, functioning and self-maintenance. For illustration's sake, we may list: accepting the rule of law and its attendant laws; speaking the common tongue in a way that is consistent with the prevailing rules of grammar; a certain level of personal probity (e.g., being honest and trustworthy)

and/or moral integrity (e.g., aiming at virtuous conduct rather than vicious behaviour); a commitment to the spirit of the laws and not just their letter; keeping one's own petty interests separate from the general law-making processes and aims; the willingness to defend the country if attacked; the availability of each citizen to offer assistance in case of natural disasters; respecting other people's spiritual beliefs; and accepting a modicum of taxation *qua* precondition for associated living. (As Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. famously stated in a 1927 dissenting opinion: "Taxes are what we pay for civilized society".)

Out of general justice, as visible in the fresco, emanate two distinct forms of particular justice. These being the smaller angelic personifications set under the inscriptions "*distributiva*" and "*comutativa*", and standing on the dishes of the scale held by general justice (scales being a traditional Western symbol of fairness, impartiality and/or equity). The former angelic personification is busy crowning a person and, yes, beheading another. It represents the justice that is owed by the community at large to each citizen, depending on how the citizen has behaved, i.e., such as deserving positive recognition (e.g., a new professional title, a public commendation, a tax exemption) or punitive retribution (e.g., a fine, a suspension, incarceration). The latter angelic personification is that form of particular justice that economists and business leaders have generally been assuming, as it was intimated, to be the only extant form of justice, i.e., uncoerced contractual agreement between two parties. It is the justice that one person owes to another. (In the fresco, incidentally, commutative justice is depicted as two merchants receiving fair measuring tools, by means of which they are to conduct fair businesses—or so are they expected and encouraged to do. If they do not, then the other 'angelic' particular justice may come into play with its sharp sword…)

Another message is implied yet blatant, as *per* the personifications' mutual proportions; general justice being much bigger than either particular justice. Essentially, general justice takes priority over particular justice, which emanates from, and depends upon, the former, whether as distributive or commutative. Particular justice, in other words, cannot be given if general justice is absent. For instance, if the laws at play are skewed, biased or unfair, then the punishments and rewards will be distributed to the wrong recipients and/or in the wrong way, e.g., the crooked rich who can afford shrewd lawyers can go scot-free, while the innocent destitute are wrongfully imprisoned. Similarly, general justice failing or being absent, the market exchanges will not be truly equitable, genuinely consensual and/or

effectively uncoerced; e.g., a starving parent will accept any job as long as it can help him/her to put bread on his/her table for him/her and his/her starving family. (Medieval thinkers, who knew one thing or two about hunger and famines, duly developed the doctrine of the "just price", which we cannot discuss here but only mention.)

The reasons for the failure or absence of general justice may be found elsewhere in the fresco. Justice, in fact, appears once more in Lorenzetti's allegory: at the right end of it, to be precise, and on the same vertical level as general justice. Once again, "*iustitia*" is depicted as a female personification and, this time, it is a cardinal virtue alongside five others: peace, fortitude, prudence, magnanimity and temperance. These being rather nice-to-have traits of character that any and every half-decent citizen ought to cultivate in his/her life, no matter how imperfectly and/or haphazardly. A good society is a society where people strive to be amicable, dependable, considerate, forgiving, clearheaded and fair. They may not always succeed, for we are all imperfect, but at least they should try to succeed, to some serious extent. (Medieval Christianity knew very well that we are all capable of sin, if and when we are tempted, whether we are kings or peasants; but it was also generally believed that we would normally try to resist temptation and, not unfrequently, succeed in this attempt. We may, must and can be good in our lives, more often than not, if we *will* it in the first place.)

Justice, then, is a personal virtue too; i.e., it is an important trait of character. In the fresco, justice and her sister-virtues are sitting beside a male personification of the ruling institutions of the community (the only tall, big and white-bearded character in the allegory). The meaning of the compositional order being that these virtues ought to be possessed, or at least be actively cultivated, by all those persons who are entrusted with the governing of the polity. Without personal virtues, in fact, no institutional arrangement is safe. Bad individuals can betray good principles, corrupt good laws, ruin well-designed administrations, and pervert sensible institutions. The body politic is bound to be as good as the people assigned to its care.

To sum up, we can then state that there are four "justices":

(1) Justice as a virtue or positive trait of character (i.e., ultimately intra-personal);

(2) Commutative justice as fair trade (i.e., inter-personal *par excellence*);

(3) Distributive justice *qua* receiving deserved praise and/or penalties under the laws of the community (i.e., directed from society towards each person); and

(4) General justice, which (2) and (3) presuppose, i.e., the civic loyalty that each citizen must have *vis-à-vis* his/her community, its public institutions, and the common good that they are mandated to pursue. (As was stated, this prior and pivotal justice is directed from each person towards the whole social body.)

Acknowledging the presence and significance of the many values whereby the members of our society and its assorted institutions lead their lives is also part of general justice, which ultimately determines the spheres, the entities and the agencies whereby economic commutations can lawfully take place, i.e., in light of these diverse values (e.g., by prohibiting slavery, facilitating surrogate motherhood, banning carcinogenic man-made chemicals and/or permitting prostitution). How each society makes these ultimate determinations is a very complex matter that I cannot tackle here—and that I can resolve nowhere, to be frank, for it is just too complex. Lorenzetti, for his part, thought that Divine Wisdom itself could lend us a hand. (Given the sorry mess that we all seem to be mired in, I pray to God that Lorenzetti's optimism be warranted…)

Logically, the recognition that something may be sacred and therefore deserving of protection from outright commodification (i.e., reduction to economic value alone) stands, even if a specific individual may not attribute any such value to it. Indeed, it may still stand, logically, even if only a minority of people believe that such a protection ought to be so extended. For example, the specific individual at issue could be an atheist living among religious persons, who do not want to turn churches into more 'efficient' granaries and/or 'profitable' museums. Or s/he could be a single-minded pragmatic businessman facing a small elite of cultured and vocal persons, who wish to fund 'costly' opera and ballet *via* the tax-funded public purse because of their immense cultural significance and inherent aesthetic exquisiteness. (Sometimes, something and/or someone has got to give, but making changes and sacrifices complicated to achieve means facilitating compromises, moderation and gradualism. Protection is a conservative endeavour, not a revolutionary one, at least *prima facie*.)

The same realisation and implications stand also when and if there may be some or even many individuals who are willing to pay a very hefty price, so as to have access to this protected 'something' and/or turn it *ipso facto* into something efficient and/or profitable. Under this respect, we should then notice that, inside our prosaic price-tagging market logic whereby scarcity pushes up prices, the 'things' that we shelter from an otherwise almost-universal condition of thorough commodification are bound to become, potentially, the most profitable of all. Like rhinoceros' horns, uncontaminated woodlands, non-processed meals, habitable sites safe from the unfolding climate crisis and Iceland's pristine glaciers, their being harder-and-harder to get by works actually *against* their preservation. Protecting a sacred site, in a global order infused with liberal or capitalist institutions, means in fact turning the site into a totally new and untapped 'opportunity', which is yet to be squeezed dry of all the profits that it could generate, whether for a short period of time or for a longer one. (Let's not forget that the history of liberalism goes hand-in-hand with the history of conquering 'new markets', i.e., non-commodified geo-cultural spaces, including in the originally 'virgin' Arctic regions.)

Unless, however, we make the sacred sites so incredibly valuable that they turn out to be "priceless" or "beyond comparison", i.e., irreducible to economic value alone. Cultural, legal and political means can all be unleashed, and variously combined, so as to obtain such a result, which must then be defended from successive assaults by the money-value forces that are or that will be. (Given human volatility, today's businessmen may be tomorrow's conservationists; and *vice versa*.) Whatever we do, if we wish to protect that which is sacred, we must let it escape from the grasp of the pecuniary market logic.

This is the case because this entire market logic is based on an all-flattening axiological presumption allowing for very different realities, i.e., the so-called "goods" of standard economics (e.g., bread, cigars, assault rifles, plots of rainforest), to be compared with one another and attributed prices according to how much demand they command (needless to say, the more money an economic agent has got, the more demand s/he commands). An impoverished population's sacred site can thus be transformed into a billionaire's golf course because the latter commands more demand than the former. As *passé* as it may sound, value boundaries and axiological hierarchies must be established and defended, lest the ancient sin of simony finds an eerie modern reflection in highway billboards, stock-exchange indexes and YouTube commercials.