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Philosophy and Education for the Future

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EDITORIAL

Recently I have been pondering the ability to perceive beauty and meaning. In order to perceive anything it is necessary to develop organs of perception. In order to see we needed to develop eyes. Without ears, sound waves would be non-existent for us. If someone talked to us about fragrance and smells we wouldn't know what they were talking about if we didn't have a nose.

However, at some point it is also necessary to develop what could be called 'inner senses'. In order to appreciate the beauty of a piece of music, the ears alone are not enough. Cats and dogs have even better organs of hearing but presumably they don't appreciate the beauty of music as much as some humans (although a recent article on the BBC science page reported experiments that indicated that cats are amenable to classical music and seem particularly partial to Handel).

But in any case, our appreciation of beauty and our ability to perceive meaning differs from human being to human being and I don't think that there is any doubt that our inner perceptions grow and develop over time, especially if we practise using them. As the speaker at a recent talk on homeopathy put it, "intuition grows with time." Likewise, when I studied the violin and the piano at university I obviously appreciated music and spent hours every day with it. But over the years I have come to appreciate it even more and am receptive to the beauty of pieces now that did not touch me so much in my youth. It seems that while our physical ability to see and hear diminishes with age, our inner senses grow and we are able to see more with our heart and with the eyes of our mind.

In this way, our ability to perceive beauty and truth is not dependent on those qualities themselves, but on the development of our inner senses. Can we therefore judge with certainty what exists and what does not? The Theosophist C.W. Leadbeater once said: "It is one of the commonest of mistakes to consider that the limit of our power of perception is also the limit of all there is to perceive." How much more will there be to discover? And who knows, we might even develop a sixth sense!

Sabine Leitner

About Us

NEW ACROPOLIS is an international organization working in the fields of philosophy, culture and volunteering. Our aim is to revive philosophy as a means of renewal and transformation and to offer a holistic education that can develop both our human potential as well as the practical skills needed in order to meet the challenges of today and to create a better society for the next generation.

For further details please visit : WWW.NEWACROPOLISUK.ORG

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What is Soul?

Last summer we were privileged to host a talk at our centre on the subject of ‘Soul’ by Matthew Del Nevo, a visiting philosopher from Australia. Matthew is Associate Professor in Philosophy at the Catholic Institute of Sydney, where he lectures mainly in the area of the history of ideas and modern continental philosophy. He is also the author of several books, including his latest publication “The Metaphysics of Night”. He will be speaking again on this topic in June (see Upcoming Events).

Everyone instinctively knows what soul means. We talk about a soulful person, or soulful music, or on the other hand a soulless institution or a soulless performance. Soul is in fact what makes us eminently human. We appreciate or “know” soulfulness by our sensibility. Sensibility marks the level of connection between “inner” and “outer”. Sensibility cultivated is the source of culture. And the soul is not just within us in this regard, but all about us: the Anima Mundi or World Soul.

The poet Keats came up with a metaphor of the world as a “vale of soul-making”. The Valley Way of the Soul – the title of one of Del Nevo’s books – is a verdant valley from which one can perceive the spirit. If you want to make the ascent up the spiritual mountain, you have to start in the valley and explore it. It is a theme well known in literature and music. In fact the Mount Carmel of the spirit is best seen from the valley, rather than being up it.

How can we get more in touch with our soul? Matthew suggested the technique of ‘attunement’. This is to be aware of what touches us, sensitizes us and makes us sensible: the work of sensibility is receptive, repetitive and reflective. We start with our attunements: what draws us. It might be a historical figure, an ancestor, a poet, a type of music or art – everyone has their attunements. After discovering them, we need to explore them further in order to strengthen them. So if we feel attuned to a particular writer or composer, we should find out more about their life and work. By developing a personal relationship with that figure, we also come closer to our own soul. We approach our own vocation.

It is also important to recognize that our attunements will be contradictory. Our eccentricities are very important. We

have to be able to handle our contradictions and not expect ourselves or others to be totally uniform and rational. Matthew mentioned the Slovenian philosopher Zizek as an example of an intellectual who is soulfully attuned. People criticize him for being “all over the place”, but that is his genius, to which, unlike a lot of us, he is attuned.



Cupid and Psyche

It is a mistake, in Del Nevo’s view, to try to get into spirituality before working with soul. Soul needs to be prepared before it can receive the grace of spirit. In fact, spirit does not need to be developed, it will come to you once the soul is prepared. Spiritual development is in a way a misnomer. Developing our attunements is a way to prepare for spirit.

Matthew also touched upon the concept of ‘melancholy’. Melancholy is a primary ground mood of the soul for the work of opening our personality to our attunements. It is not the same as depression, which closes and imprisons us. Melancholy is midway between sadness and joy. Keats’ Ode on Melancholy perfectly explains the state. There are other ground-moods of the soul, and “art music” can be a great way to get in touch with them, as music explores these regions without words, what Del Nevo calls *Melos* beyond *Logos*. Melody beyond words.

Culture Creatives and the Wisdom Culture

Many recent thinkers have spoken of the troubled times our world is going through and the picture that is emerging resembles more and more the central piece of Hieronymus Bosch's triptych *The Last Judgment*. In it we see in vibrant colors the chaotic scenes of anarchy and depravation while society dances and sings to the beat of the drums of limbo (hell). We are in the midst of epochal changes, being threatened by all sort of planetary crises – ecological, demographic, economic, etc. In psychological terms we could say that our culture (Western culture in particular) is facing a mid-life crisis or, more constructively, that it is going through a rite of passage, which if acknowledged should take us from the stage of adolescence to that of maturity.

In line with those thinkers, I also believe that we could be heading towards the edge of an abyss, but I am also aware that there are many individuals out there who want to contribute to a more hopeful future and work towards a transition to a new, saner and wiser civilization. Perhaps their only weakness is that they think that they are few and far between. But is this true?

In his book, *The Culture Creatives – How 50 Million People are Changing the World*, the sociologist Paul H. Ray argues that when this growing 'sub-culture', which he calls the Culture Creatives, will realize its numbers and its potentials, it will have an enormous impact on those critical issues the world is now facing. So, who are the Culture Creatives? They are an emerging group of people, which grew out of the social and consciousness movements of the late 1950s and since then have made a comprehensive shift in their worldview, values, and ways of life.

This sub-culture was identified after thirty years of survey research

studies on over 150,000 people, 500 focus groups and many in-depth interviews. Instead of the usual demographic or individual predictors, the surveys used values predictors. Values are better predictors of how people want to live their lives, what are their inner motivations and to what they want to commit their future. In the words of Paul Ray, "the Culture Creatives are people who care deeply about ecology and saving the planet, about relationships, social justice, authenticity, self-actualization and spirituality. They tend to oppose corporate globalization and big business interests and favor women's issues, consciousness issues, national health care, national education etc. They are both inner-directed and socially concerned, they are activists, volunteers and contributors to good causes".

Another major influence for their growth has been the new information revolution. The Culture Creatives tend to be people who consume a lot of information but unlike the average 'modern' Westerner, who is overwhelmed by and unable to assimilate all this data, they know how to discriminate and synthesize information. They also have an eclectic approach to learning, want to look at the world from different angles and value strongly cooperation and cultural dialogue.

Paul Ray claims that in America, Europe and Japan, the Culture Creatives now account for 35% of the population but he adds that "most of them never see the face of their sub-culture in the mainstream media and when they go to work, they have to check their values at the door. So they rationally conclude – it's just me and a few of my friends."

In reality there are lots of people who are longing to contribute to a new culture – a Wisdom Culture. A culture which could be enduring because it values

long term perspectives and what's good for everybody's children and grandchildren. A culture which can learn from all spiritual traditions, which has the willingness to learn from all kinds of people and be concerned about humans and nature alike. Lastly, a wisdom culture which is the result of a concerted effort of co-creation and shared visions.

The bleak image in Hieronymus Bosch's painting, which I presented at the beginning, can surely be transformed into Raphael's *School of Athens* and the reassuring thing remains the fact that both painters, in their contrasting styles, became heralds of a new renaissance. Let us therefore remind ourselves again of what Paul Rays said: "You are not alone. You have lots of company on ways of making a better future".

Agostino Dominici



Alchemy

Alchemy has a reputation from the Middle Ages. We can imagine obscure medieval laboratories with alchemists driving themselves to madness by spending years trying to achieve the impossible – the transmutation of lead into gold. This is one side of the story...

In fact, alchemy has been around for thousands of years. It was not only a medieval underground movement, but the royal science (*ars regia*) in the ancient world from Egypt to India and China. It has always been closely connected with medicine and astrology. The alchemist's main object of enquiry was Nature and its unchanging laws which govern the whole of the universe. To find and to understand those laws ultimately implies an inward journey, which means that alchemy is in the first place a spiritual discipline, while knowledge and scientific research come as secondary. The urge to inner transmutation comes from within each human being. This is where the fire burns and transforms. In a sense alchemy follows one of the maxims of ancient Greek philosophy: "Know thyself... and then you will know the universe and the gods." Psychologically, the process starts with directing oneself to find self-knowledge. "Visit the interior of the earth, and by rectifying you will find the hidden stone which is the true medicine." (giving the Latin acronym VITRIOLUM).

In the inward journey the alchemist goes through a purification. As in Buddhism or any other spiritual practices it is recommended to start by purifying oneself from egotistical tendencies which distance man from his eternal nature. In alchemy this is depicted as entering the deep earth, symbolically speaking being buried: to die and be put into the ground. "Everything that has life dies; everything that is dead putrefies and finds a new life," said Antoine-Joseph Pernety.

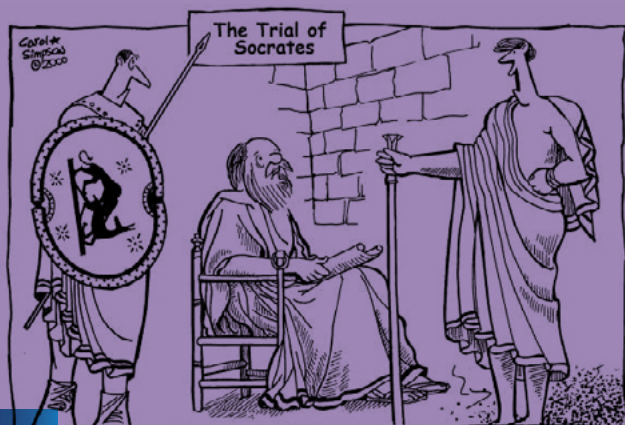


When one has mastered one's personality *i.e.* killed the dragon, one has started the Great Work, resulting in a new 'birth' or new state of consciousness. In some traditions they would call this yoga (from the Sanskrit *jug*, union). In alchemy they speak of the Divine Marriage and obtaining the philosopher's stone.

*As there is oil in sesame seed
and a spark in flint
thus your Beloved is in your body.
Wake it if you can.
As the pupil is in the eye
so is the creator in the body.
The fool does not know this secret
and runs outside
looking for it in vain.
That what you seek
is in the four corners of the earth.
It is inside,
you do not see it,
because it lives behind the veils of illusion.* (Kabir Sahib)

Miha Kosir

PHILOSOPHICAL HUMOR



Some inspiring quotes

"In all things of nature, there is something of the marvelous."
Aristotle

"I am afraid we must make the world honest before we can honestly say to our children that honesty is the best policy." -
George Bernard Shaw

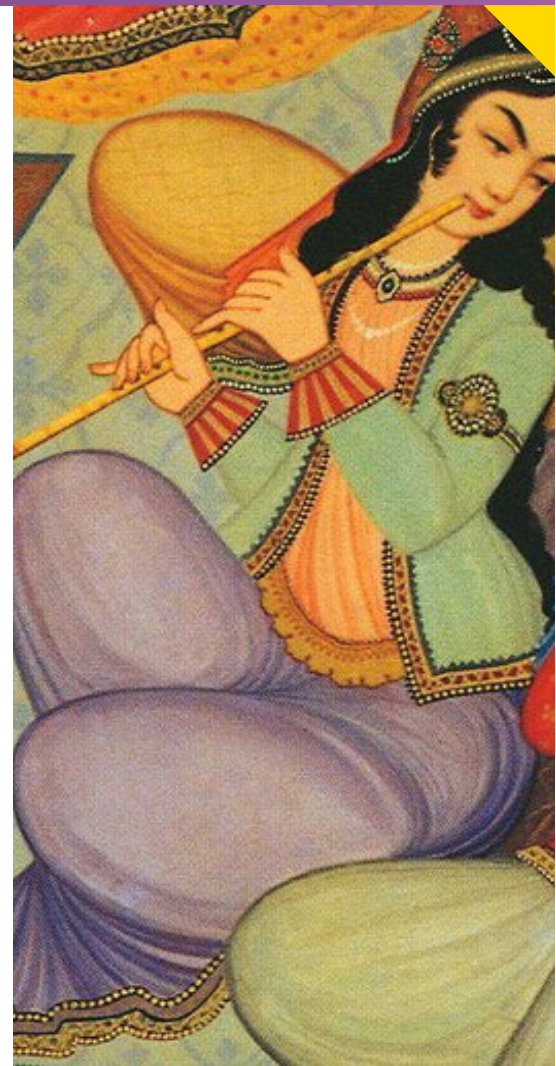
"I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand."
- Confucius

The Reed Flute in Sufism

The flute as an instrument is perhaps as old as any civilization. It has been used in music both for ritualistic and entertainment purposes in ancient Egypt, Greece, the Hindu culture and in Sufism.

The reed flute (called ney) is one of the main instruments in Sufism. It has been played for 4500-5000 years and is now popular in the Middle East. Although there are different types of ney, in Sufism the ney has 7 holes and symbolised the human being. It is used in rituals as it is believed that the sound of the ney helps to attain the consciousness of God. Rumi, the great poet of Persia, often speaks about the ney and his great work Masnavi opens with the words "listen to the ney". He says the pains and sorrows the soul experiences through life are like holes made in a reed flute, and it is by making these holes that a player makes the flute out of a reed. This means that the heart of man is first a reed and the sufferings and pains it goes through make it a flute which can then be used by God as the instrument for the music that He constantly wishes to produce. It was on the model of the heart of man that the first musical instrument was made, and no earthly instrument can produce that music which the heart produces, raising the mortal soul to immortality.

Pinar Akhan



The true power of water

Made of 70% of it we all know that water is crucial to our own survival as we can't live without it, literally. It will only take a couple of days for our body to stop functioning properly without drinking water. But the importance that water plays in our bodies goes beyond the simply physiological, as Mr. Masaru Emoto discovered 20 years ago while looking at the crystallization of water molecules.

Mr. Emoto realized that the shape of water crystals is

directly related to the level of purity of the water. Meaning that the purer the water is the more beautiful and developed the crystal is. But he also discovered that the crystals differ when an emotion or intention is transferred to the water. Once again the more beautiful the emotion/message is, the more beautiful the crystal is. Through many experimentations Mr. Emoto discovered that the "purity" of water can easily be modified, whether by our emotions, words and of course the

environment, such as music or even electromagnetic waves emitted by electronic devices (mobile phones, computers, microwaves...).

If true, this discovery means that water is a strong, effective and very sensitive messenger. It can convey powerful and beautiful messages that can help healing the human body but also our environment. So I invite you to think twice before you drink your daily ration of water as it won't just hydrate you but also heal you...

Florimond Krins

Festival of Beltane

Fires, Druids and festivity, the Festival of Beltane marked the beginning of summer for the ancient Celtic peoples of Scotland and Ireland. Approximately half way between the Spring Equinox and the Summer Solstice, the Festival of Beltane was (and still is) celebrated on 30th April or sometimes 1st May.

It was a festival of optimism and fertility celebrated at a time when herdsman drove their cattle out into the pastures. These people had a pastoral way of life more dependent on livestock than crop-growing, which naturally placed an importance on fertility and the growth of nature. Druids presided over rituals that would protect the livestock, crops and people from both natural and supernatural threats. Gaelic folklore included fairy-like creatures called the "aos si" that were particularly active at this time, and depending on how they were treated could be either malevolent or benevolent. Harmful human witches were also popular in the folklore of the time and protection needed to be provided against them.

Fire was the symbol of protection, with ceremonial bonfires being lit on top of hills and mountains. Cattle were made to walk around the fire so that they could be protected by the sacred flames. The fire, smoke and ash were believed to have protective properties for the cattle and people and also to encourage crop growth. Sometimes people leapt over the fire themselves and cattle were made to jump over the dying embers of the fires.

The Beltane Fire Festival is still celebrated in Edinburgh on April 30th every year.



Gurpreet Virdee

The burning of the Wicker Man forms part of the Beltane festival

Tuning to Nature

In the ancient civilizations there was an approach to nature in which all beings were considered to be connected in a harmonious way. Stones, plants, animals, humans and divine beings were all part of Creation and the awareness of the thread that united them was more present in the minds of those who lived in those times. The acknowledgement of certain hidden properties in plants, the use of nature as a powerful symbolic language and even a belief in guiding spirits that were like the manifestation of a 'soul' within the vegetable kingdom weren't considered foolish ideas. I wonder how much of that we still share today in our society and, if very little, I wonder how long it will take us to realise the wisdom that is concealed in the world that surrounds us. Mythologies often address the power of nature, showing somehow the early human

interest in protecting the environment.

A few weeks ago it was the Spring Equinox, which is one of the manifestations of the law of cycles. But it is also an invitation to be reborn. The ancient Egyptians venerated the sun god Ra, who was thought to journey across the sky during the day and sail through the underworld during night time. And every morning, the sun emerged in a kind of resurrection after its battles with the forces of darkness.

Nowadays many are the species that are declared extinct; many are the news reports about natural disasters around the world that encourage us to become activists in ecological issues. Sadly we have forgotten that we are part of nature itself, but let us not forget that we can also be reborn, like the sun, to shine more brightly and generously, and to awaken the great potential that is unknown to most of us.

Natalia Lema

Chivalry

Today, the terms *chivalry* and *chivalrous* are used to describe unusually courteous behaviour, especially that of men towards women. At the mention of chivalry, many women will sigh that “chivalry is dead” and lament the declining opportunities of being rescued by the fabled “knight in shining armour”. However, what do most of us truly know these days of what chivalry is and has been?

The term chivalry originated in the Middle Ages in reference to the mounted knight and comes from the original French word *chevalier* (mounted knight) and the Latin *ceballarius* (horseman). Heavily influenced by Christianity and wedded to the Church through knightly involvement in the Crusades, chivalry came to be understood as a moral, religious and social code of knightly conduct.

Whether the case in reality or not, the chivalrous knight was idealised as brave but fair in battle, loyal to his king and God, and willing to sacrifice himself for the greater good. Towards his fellow Christians and countrymen, at least, the knight was expected to be merciful, humble, and courteous. Towards ladies above all, the knight was to be gracious and gentle.

Although the mediaeval-style knight eventually disappeared, the moral codes of knightly chivalry - the value of a man's honour, respect for women and a concern for those less fortunate - were to gain unprecedented popularity many centuries later in Britain when chivalric practice reached its zenith. It was from the medieval knightly ideal that the Victorian gentleman's code of behaviour derived. This code has had a wide-ranging effect on Britain's cultural attitudes and informed popular codes in use still today, such as the idea of gentlemanly or sportsmanlike behaviour, manners and etiquette and charitable giving.

One of the most famous and fervent proponents of the new chivalry, Kenelm Henry Digby (c. 1800 – 1880), attacked ‘that principle, the curse of modern times, which leads men to idolise the reason and understanding, and to neglect and even despise the virtues of the heart’. True knights and honourable gentlemen instinctively recognised what was right through ‘the wisdom of the heart’ and pursued it regardless of self-interest.

Digby saw himself as a Platonist who believed in “absolute standards of good, right and beauty.” He believed that while the word ‘chivalry’ and the romantic stories surrounding its practice sprang from

the Middle Ages, the notion of a higher moral code of heroic behaviour for men actually originated in ancient Greece and Rome. Digby's mission, in encouraging a return to chivalry through his writings, was to “revive the principles of loyalty and generosity and honour that were almost extinct amongst mankind.”

That such philosophical ideas captured the public imagination to the extent that they did in Victorian Britain may seem quite incredible to us now, but Britain and its institutions would have taken a wholly different form were it not for the widespread revival of chivalry as a moral code and society's ensuing ideal for all men to aspire to become: the gentleman.

The well-known description of events surrounding the sinking of the Titanic depicts the essence of chivalric ideals so universally admired in 19th and early 20th century Britain: “Gentlemen escorted ladies to the



A knight being armed by his lady in the Codex Manesse (14th Century)

boats as though to their carriages, and helped them courteously in... When the last boat had gone the men who were left behind waited calmly for the end... The stewards were unfailingly courteous and helpful... The band went on playing... The redeeming feature of the disaster, it was generally agreed, was the chivalry shown by the men, both passengers and crew.”¹

¹ Girouard, Mark. *The Return to Camelot. Chivalry and the English Gentleman*. Yale University Press, 1981

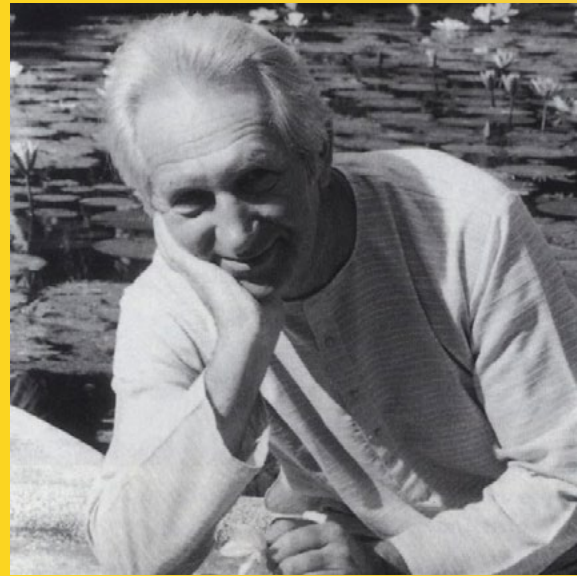
IN THE NEXT ISSUE

The Eco-Philosophy of Henryk Skolimowski by Istvan Orban

The World is a Sanctuary – according to Henryk Skolimowski, a contemporary Polish philosopher regarded as the father of eco-philosophy – and not a Machine, as Newton proclaimed. Skolimowski studied at Oxford, where he received his PhD, then went on to teach philosophy for many years in the United States.

Skolimowski's eco-philosophy goes against the mainstream philosophical worldviews, especially the mechanistic ones, which originated in the 17th century. Newtonian theory regarded nature as a clock-like mechanism, within which we are little cogs and wheels, and this has allowed humanity to abuse and destroy the planet. Skolimowski also criticizes the analytical-linguistic approach of philosophy, as being too abstract and too inadequate to answer the challenges of our time.

However, Skolimowski's proposed solutions to these problems are based on the key idea that the world is something unique, precious and sacred. He says that reverence for life has to be our guiding value. Man on the Earth is just a guest, not an owner, so we shouldn't behave like a conquistador, but a



steward. The Earth is just a temporary dwelling, of which we must take the utmost care. To acquire such a level of consciousness, it is important to forget the traditional idiom in which man asserts himself against 'out there' and switch instead to the idiom in which man will mesh himself with the things 'out there'. He called this Ecological Humanism. This approach involves a deeper understanding of people by people and cohesion between people and the rest of creation.

Read more in our next issue...

Upcoming Events

See our website for more details.
www.newacropolisuk.org

Wed 13 May at 7.30 pm

Talk: *Alchemy - the journey of transformation*

Speaker: Miha Kosir - ADMISSION £5 (£3 concs.)

Tues 19 May at 7.00 pm

Seminar: *Martin Buber and the I-Thou concept.*

Knowing where you are going and respecting where you are

Guest Speaker: Simon Cole - ADMISSION £10 (£5 concs.)

Mon 08 June at 7.30 pm

Talk: *Spirit, Soul and Personality - Harmonising the Three Worlds*

Guest Speaker: Dr. Matthew Del Nevo

Sat/Sun 13/14 June from 10 am to 5 pm

Open Garden Square Weekend

Please see website for more details and admission costs

Wed 17 June at 7.30 pm

Talk: *A history of philosophy through garden design*

Speaker: Miha Kosir - ADMISSION £5 (£3 concs.)

I and Thou

