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EDITORIAL

History has often been described as a series of pendulum swings, and ideas and words can also oscillate between different meanings. This can be very confusing because we might refer to very different things when using the same word. For example, *individual* and *individualism* seem to have taken on rather different connotations over time.

In classical antiquity, many philosophers held the view that we are not born as individuals but that we become individuals by the gradual process of integrating all the different aspects of ourselves into a whole and enabling the best part of ourselves to guide our actions. This view was in many aspects reflected in C.G. Jung's idea of individuation.

In the Renaissance, the renewed interest in the concept of the individual redefined our relationship with the world. Instead of being a passive spectator of a static medieval world order, we became an active and co-creative participant in a dynamic world where every part was interconnected and every action therefore affected everything else. This awareness of the potential of the human being and the endeavour to develop this potential through education became the guiding spirit of the time. The goal was a new and better world, achieved through a new and better human being.

However, in modern times, we seem to have become rather confused about the notion of individual and it has given rise to about 22 different strands of individualism. Most of these boil down to one form or another of pure self-interest, for example: "Individualism as the right to serve his or her own interests, without taking the interests of society into consideration". It seems that nowadays being an individual means nothing more than having a big ego, an inflated sense of self-importance and no regard for the rest of society.

This would be incompatible with the original meaning. If we really developed our human potentials of love, compassion, justice and solidarity, then it would be impossible to remain self-centred and indifferent to the situation of others.

It seems that there are people of our times who promote a return to this latter view.

"We must stop thinking of the individual and start thinking about what is best for society."
– Hillary Clinton

"An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity." – Martin Luther King

And a last quote from Ove Arup, the ground-breaking Anglo-Danish engineer whose life will be explored in an exhibition at the Victoria & Albert Museum later this year: "[There are] two ways of looking at the pursuit of happiness: one is to go straight for the things you fancy without restraints, that is, without considering anybody else besides yourself. The other is to recognise that no man is an island, that our lives are inextricably mixed up with those of our fellow human beings, and that there can be no real happiness in isolation."

Let's hope that history will soon come full circle!

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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Is Morality Relative?

This is one of those philosophical questions that will probably always exist. There are no doubt many possible answers, but perhaps the best place to start is with the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804).

Kant's position on this question was unequivocal. In a world of relativities, there is only one thing that can be considered good without qualification: the good will. Talent, intelligence, wit, courage – none of these can be considered absolutely good unless they are guided by a good will.

The will always has to do with deliberate choice; so morality, if it arises from the good will, cannot be something automatic or habitual. If we will something, it is because we have decided it is good; we have chosen it freely.

But if morality is just a matter of using our reason and then deciding on the best course of action, why is it not more widespread? Because, according to Kant, human nature “is noble enough to impose duty on itself as a precept, but weak when it comes to following it.”

There is a way, though, for this situation to be improved. It is evident that the good will needs to be strengthened and, in Kant's view, this can be achieved by following a path of duty in one's life. He defines duty as “the necessity of action from respect for law.” By law, however, he is not referring to man-made laws, but the natural moral law that lives within us and arises from reason. It is a particular feature of the human being. Man is essentially a moral being.

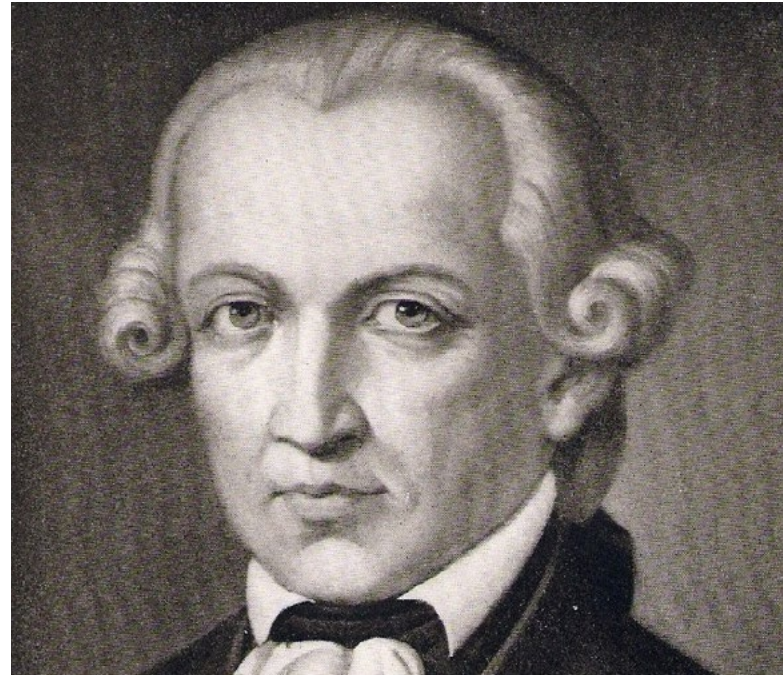
Now we come to what Kant regarded as his great discovery, something that would bring about, he hoped, a similar revolution in philosophy and ethics to that which had occurred in astronomy when Copernicus (re-)discovered that the earth revolves around the sun. Kant called this the “categorical imperative”. The categorical imperative is a command emanating from the reason that we should do or refrain from doing something; it is characterised by being unconditional, without regard to any possible benefit or detriment to ourselves.

This moral imperative has two formulations. The first is probably the most famous: “I must only act in such a way that my maxim can become a universal law.” To put it more simply, “what would happen if everyone did what I am proposing to do?” Could we make the principle of our action a universal law?

The second formulation of the categorical imperative is one that can be seen as the founding principle of the doctrine of human rights: “Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.”

It seems that it is not for a lack of brilliant ideas that the world continues to be mired in mostly human-created problems. Why has humanity not collectively adopted Kant's propositions and rushed to put them into practice?

Kant said that with increasing inner freedom would come a progressive reduction in the need for outer restraint (by governments, police, etc.). How true that is! That inner



“Two things fill me with ever-increasing admiration and awe, the longer and more earnestly I reflect on them: the starry heavens above and the moral law within.” - Immanuel Kant

freedom is the freely made decision to live in accordance with the moral law. But as so many other philosophers have said, from Buddha to Seneca, it is so much easier to conquer a thousand enemies than to conquer oneself. It is also so much easier to raise altars to ‘consumer choice’ or ‘freedom of information’ and quietly forget about the importance of moral choice – the choice and the freedom that truly correspond to the human being.

If we want to go beyond moral relativism, we can do so by cultivating the good will, which in Kant's formulation is as follows: “I can because I want what I ought”. In other words, the greatest freedom is to act in obedience to the natural moral law within.

Julian Scott

Saying it Right – Doing it Right

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me” was a little ditty chanted in the school playgrounds of the 1960s as a retort from one child to another after being teased or taunted. In truth, it should have been “...but words will really hurt me” – why? Because they can and they do!

Used well, words can heal, offer gentle care, understanding, show empathy and awareness, pacify a crying child and even bring peace. Conversely, language can also damage, cause pain and suffering, humiliate, foster hatred, incite violence and be a driver towards war. Too often words are used to take control, give commands, demand attention or perhaps seek supremacy over others.

With so much power to harm, it is unsurprising that Right Speech is one of the attributes of Buddha’s Fourth Noble Truth, the Eightfold Path that leads to the cessation of pain, which he found in his quest for enlightenment.

In the Tipitaka (Buddhist scripture) is found the Theragatha, a series of poems from several sources, some written during the lifetime of Buddha himself. The Subhasita, of which the following is one, are poems known for their moral and ethical advice, giving instructions in worldly wisdom and guidance to enable the making of choices towards righteous deeds.

Well-spoken

One should speak only that word by which one would not torment oneself nor harm others. That

word is indeed well spoken.

One should speak only pleasant words, words which are acceptable (to others). What one speaks without bringing evils to others is pleasant.

Truth is indeed the undying word; this is an ancient verity. Upon truth, the good say, the goal and the teaching are founded.

The sure word the Awakened One speaks for the attainment of nibbana (the Path), for making an end of suffering, is truly the best of words.

In exploring further the concept of Right Speech we can gain deeper insight into its meaning and perhaps implication for us today. The Eightfold Path uses the word "right," which is a translation from *samyanc*, a Sanskrit word meaning completion, or from *samma*, a Pali (a language native to the Indian subcontinent) word meaning perfect or ideal. Perhaps what Buddha is instructing is when speaking we must aim for Right Speech, recognising that this means it should be Complete and Perfect.

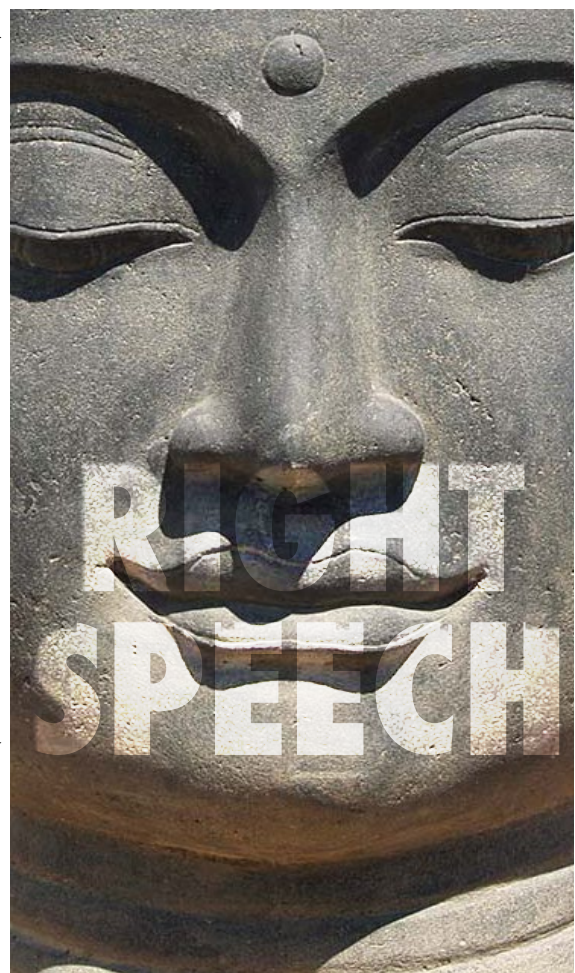
What does *complete* mean in this context? There seems to be a requirement to be honest and unambiguous, neither leaving the listener with any confusion about what we have said, nor with a sense that we have not told them everything. *Perfect* speech may be harder to achieve, as it involves responding to the sensitivities and feelings of others, ensuring that we do not cause hurt, distress or

harm with our words. How easy it is to talk without thinking, uncaring about how our words are received. Much harder is the task of Right Speech; talking with care and consideration for others.

It is incumbent upon us all to think carefully about the words we use and how we use them, ensuring honesty and unambiguity, whilst also being aware of other’s sensitivities. As each individual is unique it is even more important that we spend time to build relationships with those we communicate with, so we can better understand and respond to their sensitivities.

It is hard work treading carefully on the Path to Right Speech, but nevertheless this is one of our tasks.

Michael Lassman



The Chinese Dragon

The Chinese Dragon is the most ancient and most important mythological symbol of China and its origins are lost in the mists of time. In China, statues of dragons dating back to the fifth millennium BC have been unearthed and there are representations of dragons practically all over China. The most important of these are found in royal palaces, sculpted in temples or painted on silk robes worn by high priests and royalty. The symbol of the dragon (especially the Yellow Dragon) was the symbol of imperial authority, the emblem of the emperor. Legendary emperors like Huang Ti (Yellow Emperor) and Yan Ti were both closely related to 'Long' (a generic name for Chinese Dragon).

In the various alchemical, religious and philosophical writings of China, there are many references to Chinese sages who, after gaining immortality, became identified with the dragon and ascended to heaven (see image opposite). In the philosophy of the Yin and Yang, it is identified with Yang - the "positive" and active pole of life, the realm of spirit, heaven and the divine. In one form, it is seen coiled like the Ouroborus, the symbol of the eternal return and the totality of life. The Chinese dragon is related to the number 9, the most sacred number in China. 9 is the symbol of time and cyclicity. Legend speaks of 9 major types of dragon: the horned dragon, the winged dragon, the celestial dragon, the nature spirits dragon, the dragon of hidden treasures, the coiling dragon, the yellow dragon, the underground dragon and the dragon king. These nine are the offspring of the primordial dragon, the unknowable "mystery". Thus it becomes esoterically identified with the eternal and omnipresent TAO. This is why the dragon acquires an unlimited range of paranormal powers. It is said to be able to disguise itself as a silkworm, or become as large as our entire universe. Folktales speak of the dragon having all the attributes of the other 11 creatures of the zodiac, in other words, it contains within itself all the possible archetypes of existence. In the Tao Te Ching, the main metaphor used to describe the Tao is water. The dragon rules over lakes and seas and lives

in water. It also rules over the "four seas" which are related to the four corners of space. Like water, the dragon represents the matrix of life, the primordial ocean. But it is also seen periodically emerging from water. The form of the Chinese dragon comes from stylized depictions of existing animals, such as snakes, fishes or crocodiles. Interestingly enough, in Chinese Buddhism the dragons are analogues to the Nagas, the wise serpents, who are depicted



Chinese 'immortals' (Xian) riding dragons

emerging from the mouth of Makara (the mythical crocodile, vehicle of Varuna in the Vedic tradition). These symbols suggest the analogy between the mythical dragons of ancient China and the Initiates, teachers of mankind who, like fishes (see also Hindu, Assyrian and Babylonian Myths), emerge from the ocean (symbol of past evolutionary cycles) and, after having accomplished their "avatic" tasks, return into the sea.

Agostino Dominici

PHILOSOPHICAL HUMOR



Some inspiring quotes

"I will not let anyone walk through my mind with their dirty feet"
Mahatma Gandhi

"This above all: to thine own self be true"
William Shakespeare

"It is not enough to be compassionate, we must act."
Dalai Lama

Art for enlightenment

'Masterpieces of Tibetan art found in the private temple of the Dalai Lamas have been reproduced and displayed for the first time in a special exhibition at the Wellcome Collection in London. The Lukhang, or "Temple to the Serpent Spirits" was built in the late 17th century on a lake behind the Potala Palace in Tibet's capital city of Lhasa and it was used only by the Dalai Lamas as a place of meditation and spiritual retreat.

The Lukhang temple itself is a three-dimensional mandala harmonizing the cosmos and the human being. The temple has three storeys. The ground floor is built in Tibetan architectural style, the first floor in Chinese, and the top floor in Mongolian style. The top floor is actually a meditation chamber with painted murals indicating the path to enlightenment. Tibetan Buddhist art is sacred; its intention is to represent knowledge of the invisible world in visual form.

There are various yogas and meditation techniques, but the Lukhang murals reveal a system called Dzogchen, or 'Great Perfection', which was introduced into Tibet in the eighth century by Padmasambhava. This is one of the most secret practices in Tibetan tantric tradition. Padmasambhava described Dzogchen as "the mind looking directly into its own essence".

There are three principal murals. One depicts Tantric Buddhist masters known as Mahasiddhas, another mural shows yogic practices for opening subtle energy channels within the physical body, and the third mural illustrates visionary meditation practices for attaining a rainbow light body.

For the Dalai Lama the purpose of art is to inspire you to achieve enlightenment. If a work of art gives you the motivation to overcome ignorance, greed, and anger, then it is a great success.

Miha Kosir



Details from the Lukhang's northern mural

Lost Civilisations – The End of the Ice Age

Even if the scientific community agrees that our planet has lived through a great number of ice ages, there is still a debate regarding the reason behind the phenomenon and regarding the cause that ended the last one over 11,000 years ago.

It is known that the last ice age ended in a very brutal and dramatic way, bringing many species to extinction and causing severe difficulties to others, such as the human race. You might have heard of the thousands of mammoths found in Siberia, frozen in such a way that their flesh is still edible. It took just a few days for these mammoths to freeze to death. Such a violent change of temperature can only be explained in a cataclysmic way.

More than 12,000 years ago most of the Northern hemisphere was covered with a thick

layer of ice. Many theories have tried to explain the sudden change in our climate. For example a theory that has been debated for decades, called "crust displacement", claims that an unbalanced build-up of ice at the poles would create a quick shift of the crust, moving the ice closer to the equator. Another theory, supported by Graham Hancock, for which new concrete evidence has been found, proposes that an asteroid may have hit the northern hemisphere, on the two-mile thick ice cap, leaving no traces of a crater, but having the effect of melting the ice almost instantly. This would have resulted in great floods and earthquakes all over the globe.

Florimond Kris

Nemetona

Many hundreds of years ago when the Romans ruled over vast territories in Europe, a man from Treveri (Trier, Germany) named Peregrinus embarked on a long journey to Aquae Sulis (Bath). The gods were merciful to him and, upon arrival, thankful Peregrinus erected an altar stone to Nemetona and Loucetius Mars, to the Mistress of a Sacred Place and the Master who Brings Light. His ancient message preserved his reverence through time. No legend survived about this divine couple worshiped by Celts. However, many other altars and inscriptions dedicated to them were found mainly in northeastern Gaul.

Nemetona embodies the holiness of a sacred place. Her name is often translated as She of the Sacred Grove, because it is derived from the Celtic *nemeton* – ‘holy place’, more precisely a sanctuary of trees, as the Celts held their ceremonies in nature.

Nemetona is present on the British Isles in place-names as well: Aquae Arnemetiae "Spa of the Sacred Groves" (Buxton, Derbyshire); Nemetostatio "Outpost of the Sacred Grove" (North Tawton, Devon); and Vernemetum "Sacred Grove of Spring" (Willoughby, Nottinghamshire).

Loucetius Mars is identified with the Roman Mars, his name being derived from the proto Indo-European root *leuk* – ‘shine’. The Celtic Mars is not only a god of war, but also of protection, agriculture, and probably sovereignty. On some inscriptions Loucetius Mars is invoked alongside Victoria Nemetona. So, Nemetona may well be connected with victory. In order to reach truly a holy place, one must overcome obstacles both within and without, and a battle in either realm is not easy.

Nataliya Petlevych



Green cities mean healthy people

What we see around us can make us stronger or weaker. This was one of the key conclusions of researchers looking for evidence of the influence of ecology and the environment on human health and wellbeing. For example, if there is a park right next to where we live it can provide not only a nice view from our window or cleaner air, but also a good opportunity to take some exercise or play some sport, or just sit outside to enjoy the sunshine and relax listening to birdsong.

The root of human health is based on ecological foundations. Science has invented a term for that ecological health which can be used both for human health and the state of the environment. As biodiversity decreases and more and more species disappear from the planet, the stability and variety of the

whole system is being reduced, resulting in more diseases and an overall negative effect on human wellbeing.

There are several ongoing attempts to make the world more natural or more liveable, and to bring us closer to nature, such as organic farming, natural landscaping or sustainable agriculture. In some countries, such as France, after the government passed a decree last year, the roofs of industrial buildings must be covered by gardens or solar panels. This not only saves energy, but also provides an eco-healthy solution. Along similar lines, there is a great project in progress in London - the Garden Bridge. This 367 metre-long pedestrian bridge over the Thames will be built in the near future and, according to the plans, the whole structure will be covered by plants and trees.

Istvan Orban

Invisible Egypt

In our culture the word ‘invisible’ is often taken to mean ‘non-existent’. But for the ancient Egyptians, the invisible was the cause of the visible and therefore, in a sense, more important. They realised that the form of a person, what they wear and how they appear is only a reflection of something internal which we cannot see. And likewise that the things that are most important to us, such as life and death, justice, thoughts and feelings, are all invisible. So they dedicated their civilization to a profound investigation – and living experience – of the invisible side of life.

Each civilization has perhaps a distinguishing characteristic, something in which it excelled. I would suggest that in the case of Egypt that something was magic. In our times this word tends to have rather negative connotations: dabbling with dark forces, selling our soul to the evil side, power for power’s sake, or simply primitive superstition. But magic is actually a science, the science of cause and effect, not only on the physical level but above all on the invisible level: the relationship between the inner and the outer.

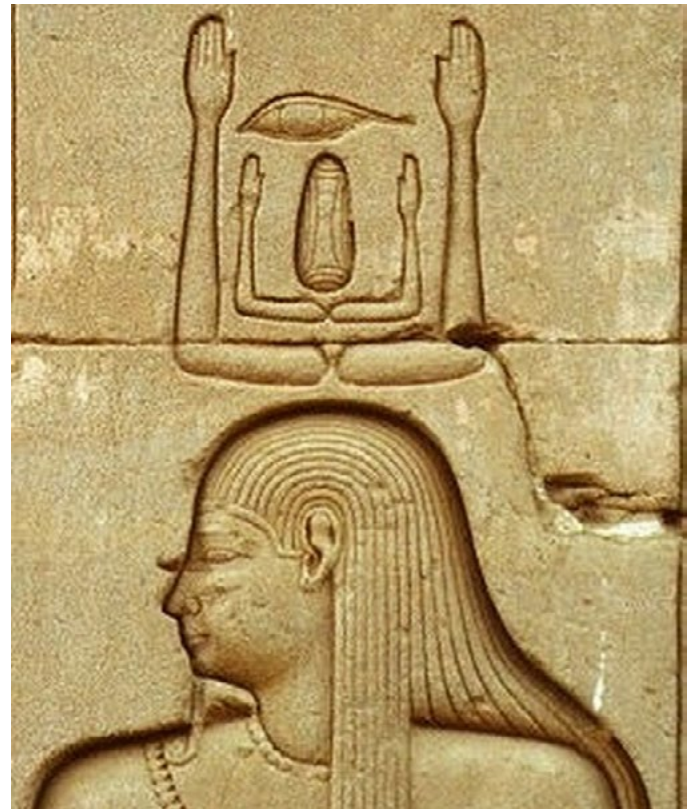
In Egypt they didn’t have a word for religion, but they did have a word for magic. This word was ‘heka’. It can be translated as a powerful energy, or as someone who masters this energy. It was understood that everything is based on a certain form of energy. Energy is all around us. One who masters that energy is one who knows heka.

Heka consists of two parts: ‘he’ and ‘ka’. ‘He’ is the word for knot and ‘Ka’ is what occultists call the ‘astral body’ or ‘double’. It is an energy that is around everything.

Why is the knot so important? Because a knot can join two things together. The knot symbolically links heaven and earth, and it can link the inner and the outer. So the knot is a part of understanding what magic is about. In order to produce this knot within yourself, you have to bring about that harmony and balance between the inner and the outer. You have to be conscious both within yourself and outside yourself. You have to be on

a threshold, looking at both inside and outside. Then you become the knot. And in that moment, because of the knot, the energy starts flowing. Now that there is a link, energies can go through, whereas before they were separated.

I mentioned at the beginning that each civilization excels in one particular thing, but I think it is also important to realize that when that culture dies, its work is not lost. What it has developed or discovered becomes part of the heritage of humanity. So by studying ancient Egypt and immersing ourselves in its symbols we can reconnect with its magical spirit and live it in some form today. Not in exactly the same form,



In Egyptian art, the ka was represented as a pair of open arms, held upwards.

but by capturing its spirit, which is the idea of the knot – heka – the idea of joining everything together, so that the energy of life can flow. In our times we are witnessing a lot of divisiveness and separateness geopolitically. What better way to begin to counteract this than by cultivating the spirit of the knot? This would be a wonderful magic for today.

Sabine Leitner

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Maypole Dancing

by Pinar Akhan

This May, there will be celebrations across small villages in Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire, Worcestershire and many other places around England with folk dances, local food, communities coming together and marking the time of spring being established and moving into summer. Most of the May Day celebrations in England have their roots in Celtic traditions. Maypole dancing is one of the May Day celebrations which is still performed not only in England but also in Germany, Austria, Spain, Scandinavian countries, the United States and perhaps in other places that we may not know about. It is usually performed during spring celebrations, but might also be performed at other times with some modifications. Traditionally, the preparations would start with finding a tall wooden pole for use as a maypole. In some cases the maypole is a permanent feature that is only utilised during the festival, in other cases it is erected specifically for the purpose before being taken down again. Then the pole would be decorated with garlands of flowers and leaves. These



were known as ribbon-less maypoles and dancers simply circled the maypole in time with the music, which was often provided by pipe and tabor, fiddle and any other instruments that could be found. Later, ribbons were attached to the top of the maypole and dancers wound in different directions around the maypole holding a ribbon each to create a complex pattern of colours. These dances were said to be performed to ensure fertility as part of spring rituals..

Read more in our next issue...

Upcoming Events

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

Wed 2nd March at 7 pm

16-week course: *Philosophies of East & West*

First Evening Free

Thurs 17 March: 7.30 pm

Talk: *Lost Civilisation - Myth or Reality?*

Speaker: Florimond Krins - ADMISSION £5 (£3 concs.)

Mon 18 April: 7 pm – 9.30 pm

Talk: *Living with Whole Intelligence*

Speaker: Malcolm Parlett - ADMISSION £5 (£3 concs.)

Sat 23 April from 3 pm to 7 pm

Mindful Kitchen, a vegan cooking and eating workshop.

ADMISSION £18 (£12 concs.)

For more details see our website - www.newacropolisuk.org

Philosophies OF East & West

16-week course introducing the major systems
of thought of East and West



First Evening Free