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NewAcropolis

Philosophy and Education for the Future Newsletter

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I am writing this on the day Nelson Mandela was laid to rest. For a few days the world reverberated with the celebration of his life and the gloomy news from around the world was lit up by the commemoration of his thoughts and actions. He reminded us that one man can very well change the course of history.

Like Martin Luther King, his dream was not about himself but for others, for the world to be a better place, and maybe this is the secret of those who really make a difference with their lives. "What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived", he said. "It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead."

His own superhuman ability to forgive was the catalyst that enabled a country deeply wounded by apartheid to heal. "Resentment is a method of self-harm. Having resentment against someone is like drinking poison and thinking it will kill your enemy."

"May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears", is another of his quotes. What a powerful motto for 2014. If we act out of our fears we will defend, retaliate, build walls to protect ourselves and maintain the vicious circle. If we are motivated by our hopes, then we will create a world that reflects our dreams. It is not a naive hope but the trust that "deep down in every human heart, there is mercy and generosity". Your inner cynic is saying that this is impossible? He would reply: "It always seems impossible until it's done."

Sabine Leitner



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Confucius, the wise man of the East

He was a great teacher, philosopher, politician and compiler of ancient works, such as the I Ching, or «Book of Changes». He didn't think of himself as the creator of a new way, but as one who followed the old traditions and wisdom.

While Confucius (or Fu-Tze) lived more than 2,500 years ago (551-479 BC), his heritage still influences the way people live today. He came from an aristocratic family (as did Plato) and stood out from his contemporaries due to his remarkable learning skills. He later said that all the mistakes people make (the so-called six causes of obscurity and confusion) have their root in not valuing study. Like Plato, he disagreed with the idea that the philosopher should keep away from political life, and as a young man he held a number of different government posts. The highest rank he attained was that of Minister of Justice in his native state, Lu. In this capacity, he helped the ruling prince greatly and the state flourished. Confucius became well-known for his morality and authority.

After his enemies ousted the ruler, he left court and went into voluntary exile. During this time, his followers went with him and they travelled throughout ancient China, as Confucius taught in many places. He taught that the basis of morality is clear-headed discernment. He compared the way of the gentleman (or superior man) to that of the ordinary (or inferior) man. According to this, those who seek profits and material gains and encourage bad habits in others are not gentlemen. But those who strive

to be helpful and unselfish are gentlemen, and these people can be pioneers, counsellors and effective rulers. He stated that nobility does not derive from birth, but from the development of character and the regulation of the personality.

Five ancient books are associated with him, which he collected and commented upon. These are the



A statue of Confucius

Five Classics: the Shih-ching (Book of Songs), the Li Chi (Record of Rites), the Shu-king (Book of Documents or Book of Politics), the I Ching (Book of Changes or Book of Wisdom), and the Spring and Autumn Annals, which is a historical book about Lu, where he grew up and lived. With these books and his teachings, subsequent rulers could rule their states according to principles of justice and wisdom.

Istvan Orban

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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The Crisis of Western Education

Due to the global nature of today's society and the dominance of Western culture over the last few centuries, the crisis of 'Western' education actually implies a crisis of education worldwide and is therefore something that concerns us all.

Many great philosophers and statesmen have recognized the central importance of education in society. Plato dedicates a substantial part of his 'Republic' to the theme and Napoleon said: "Of all political questions, education is perhaps the most important".

Education is not just about learning facts and figures. Nor is it merely about learning a skill that will enable us to get a job. It is also about the transmission of the essential values of a culture from one generation to the next, as well as bringing out the best qualities in the human being (from the Latin 'educere').

If we look at education in this light, we will realise that our focus should not be on the technical side of education but upon its aims.

We can analyse the aims of education into a number of different functions:

1) The function of forming good citizens. In ancient Greece, education was seen as a means of preparing citizens to play their part as free men in a democracy, so key subjects (apart from reading and writing) would be history, rhetoric, philosophy, poetry, etc., which they could use when debating, making speeches, decision-making and so on. This was the origin of the tradition of the "liberal arts" (liberal meaning 'pertaining to free human beings'), which continued in the Western higher education system almost until our own times.

2) A less recognized function, but one which perhaps holds the key to education, is that of guiding the human being towards the realization of a higher spiritual goal. In the Western tradition,

this approach comes from Plato. After the collapse of the Greco-Roman world, Christianity replaced this Platonic tradition with biblical and theological learning. But what happened when the Western world became secularized from the 18th century onwards? Evidently, when religion disappeared from education, spirituality disappeared too.

3) There is no denying that education also needs to have a technical function, which takes the form of scientific specialisation and vocational learning. Specialists in all sorts of disciplines can help to make life better for everyone. But they can also make it worse. If scientists or lawyers have no ethics, they will work for whoever pays the most, rather than for social improvement or justice.

The dominance of technical and vocational education today is largely due to the 19th century philosophy of Utilitarianism. One of its results can be seen in the way that university courses that are not well enough attended (and therefore not profitable) are being regularly closed down, even if they may be unique and valuable from a technical or vocational point of view.

These tendencies of modern education are potentially and actually disastrous and many educators are aware of it. But what can be done?

Firstly, a spiritual element should be reintroduced into modern education, not by forcing people into a religious way of thinking, but by exposing students to the great spiritual heritage of humanity in the form of the history of religious and philosophical ideas. So many students who attend our 16-week course on philosophy lament the fact that they were not introduced to these inspiring ideas at school.

Secondly, education should be broader and

less specialist, giving rise to better educated human beings in the classical sense.

A number of objections may rise up in the reader's mind, the main one being economic pressure - "we need to compete with aggressive foreign markets", etc. All of this is true, and it is probably unrealistic to reform the entire educational system. But private educational initiatives like New Acropolis can lead the way and be pioneers in this field. The Renaissance did not begin in the medieval universities, but in private 'academies' of scholars and enthusiasts. Most of the great movements for change did not begin within the established system but outside it. This fact can give us hope and the will to leave the world a better place than we found it, at least in some respects.

Bibliography: Dawson, Christopher *The Crisis of Western Education* CUA Press 2010



Dane Rudhyar's Philosophy of Wholeness

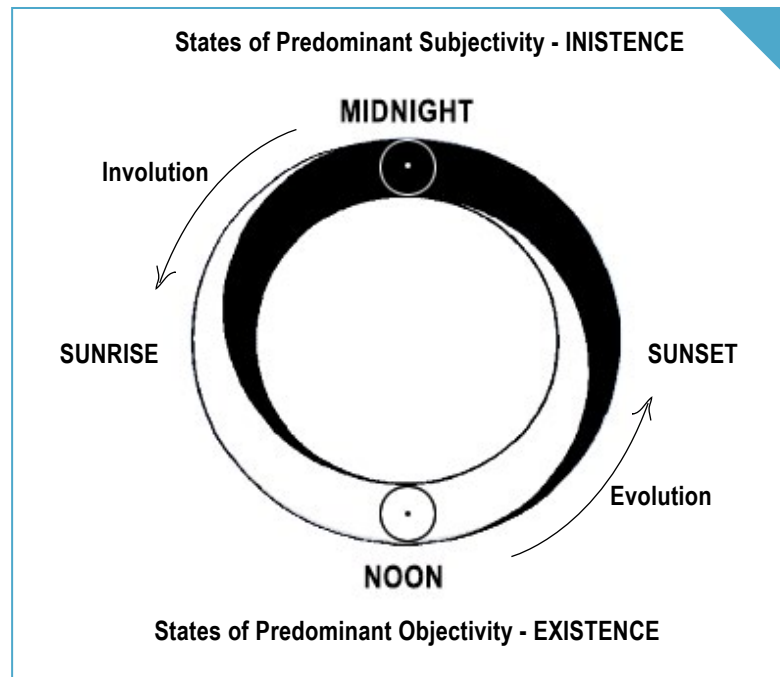
Dane Rudhyar (1895-1985) who through his multi-faceted talents earned himself the epithet “Renaissance man”, is today best known for his extensive work in the astrological field. Ironically, such a successful career in what for today’s establishment and the modern high priests of knowledge is not a relevant field, has contributed to the fact that Rudhyar’s philosophical views have been completely overlooked.

Rudhyar believed that his Philosophy of Wholeness can provide us with ‘new’ ways of seeing and understanding the universe and humanity, and can offer us a meaningful and all-inclusive view of what human and cosmic existence is. Rudhyar’s philosophy is rooted in metaphysics, which is the study of first principles and the endeavour to formulate a coherent, consistent and orderly interpretation of experience and existence.

He once remarked, “what is true is simple...” and he might have added, “...and it belongs to the realm of synthesis”. In his writings, it is not hard to recognize an elegance and simplicity quite unparalleled by many modern philosophers. His ability to synthesize and reduce to their essentials even the most abstruse subjects was quite unique, and the formulation of his holistic vision is the result of these abilities. A few highlights of the main tenets of the Philosophy of Wholeness are as follows:

- 1) The capitalized word Wholeness is the all-inclusive metacosmic principle. This is what in esoteric and occult traditions has been hidden beneath glamorous terms such as “the Absolute”, “the Causeless Cause”, “Ultimate Reality”, “Parabrahman”, etc.
- 2) Wholeness is not a being, but Beness. It is neither finite nor infinite, it operates through all levels and modes of being (whether subjective or objective), activity and consciousness.
 - Wholeness is the all-inclusive, dynamic and ever-changing relatedness of all that is, was and ever can be. It is relatedness considered as the supreme, all-inclusive reality of being.

3) Wholeness is everpresent, operating always, everywhere. Wholeness always is and it can never “not be” or “unmanifest”, because it is what Rudhyar terms “the total affirmation of being”. The Philosophy of Wholeness does not devalue or negate objective states as “unreal” while positing “the one changeless, ultimate reality” beyond all relationship to the objective world. Reality is neither Unity nor Multiplicity, neither spirit nor matter, neither subjectivity nor objectivity – alone or separately.



Wholeness in operation through the ceaseless movement of the Cycle of Being or the eternal motion of the Great Breath (i.e. Pralayas and Manvantaras)

4) A whole (whether macrocosmic or microcosmic) is a finite quantum of Wholeness in operation, dynamically realizing and experiencing its qualities and potentialities through cycles of transformation. At whatever level it operates, a whole may experience Wholeness according to its place within the Movement of Wholeness and its Cycle of Being here symbolically depicted (see image above).

Agostino Dominici

PHILOSOPHICAL HUMOR



KEEP IT DOWN, WE DON'T WANT THE RIOT SQUAD IN!

Some inspiring quotes

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world. – Nelson Mandela

The miracle is not to fly in the air, or to walk on the water, but to walk on the earth. – Chinese Proverb

The unexamined life is not worth living. – Socrates

Plato's Theory of Art

Plato has sometimes been called the 'supreme enemy of art' because of the criticism he levelled at certain forms of art and literature in his *Republic*. But is this true?

To find out we need to remember that for Plato the physical world was a reflection of non-material forms or ideas (today we might call them archetypes). An example of his theory is that any *particular* triangle is a reflection of the *universal* idea of the triangle. True knowledge for Plato was not about knowing many particular things, but the universal ideas from which they originate. Ideas are unchanging, timeless and therefore *real*, whereas the physical world is *unreal* since it is constantly changing.

Plato did not think highly of artists who only imitated what they saw in the natural world. Since the natural world is a reflection (or copy) of the ideas, their works of art were nothing more than copies of a copy, leading us further away from reality. But he thought that artists could also be divinely inspired by the ideas themselves. In such cases they would be able to capture the essence of the idea and create things that would be closer to the *Real* than may be found in nature and ordinary life.

Since Plato thought that art exerted a very powerful influence on the human being, he believed that it was in the best interests of society to carefully select the art that young people were exposed to. Although he thought that bad art could corrupt, he was certainly a great lover of an art that would help us ascend to the perception of eternal Beauty, Truth, the Good and Justice itself.

Plato's thoughts on art have exerted a profound influence on history, and indeed on art itself, as in the Renaissance. Do they still resonate today?

Sabine Leitner

Detail from Raphael's School of Athens



Mathematics - a key to understanding Nature

Mathematics has been practised since the times of the world's earliest civilizations, such as ancient Egypt and China and, of course, Greece in the age of Pythagoras and Plato. The early form of Mathematics, Geometry, is often considered primitive, but contains far more than its shapes and curves. Geometry is the art of proportions and symmetries. It was also considered necessary for every philosopher to understand and practise it - mostly because it was a wonderful tool for understanding Nature.

Great figures of the past and

present, from the architect of the Great Pyramids, through Pythagoras, Descartes, Kepler, Newton and many more, down to our modern physicists, have used mathematics in its different forms to unfold the mysteries of our universe. It takes great minds to attain the world of Ideas, as Plato calls it, and then to bring those Ideas down to the intelligible plane under its purest form: Mathematics.

Nowadays, the complex development of arithmetic, the later form of mathematics, can make it harder for people to see the beauty and the idea behind an equation like this one :

$$U_n + U_{n+1} = U_{n+1}^2$$

Some people will only see random letters and numbers, while others will see the idea behind them, which is one of the proportions of nature, the Golden Ratio.

So I would like to take you on a journey, in the following scientific articles, unfolding some of the ancient and modern mathematical concepts, unveiling at the same time some of the most wonderful mysteries of Nature.

Florimond Krins

The story of Vasilisa and Baba Iaga

In Slavic mythology, belief in the “Other World” plays an important role which has been often characterised by going into a deep dark forest and facing some trials. We can see many of these events in traditional fairy tales where the main character is given a task or many tasks to fulfil in order to be liberated or to obtain something. Vasilisa is the story of an innocent girl who is sent by an ugly stepmother into the forest to bring the fire back home. During her journey she awakens the power of intuition within her, represented by a small doll given by her mother before she died. The doll is kept inside her pocket, telling Vasilisa what to do when she is struggling with a decision. “Just touching this doll, I feel better” says the girl. The story tells us about the encounter of this girl with Baba Iaga, a powerful witch who looks like a skeleton, for which reason she is also known as “Bonylegs”. She is apparently guarding the gates to the Other World. Vasilisa manages to visit her and to follow her instructions, pleasing the witch by performing some household chores. Washing clothes, cooking, cleaning, working in silence are all symbolical tasks that require discernment, concentration and other faculties. By listening to the doll and overcoming inner conflict, Vasilisa is able to receive the flame again. This light symbolises the awakening of intuition as a direct messenger of the soul. To her surprise, when she returns home, the stepfamily has died and she is free.

Natalia Lema



Vasilisa by Silvan Yakovlevich Bilibin (1876–1942)

The Mystery of Animal Migration

One of the great unsolved mysteries of biology is how animals are able to migrate over thousands of miles without getting lost, as if they had an inbuilt GPS system.

There are countless examples of this phenomenon, from many different species: turtles, swallows and arctic terns, salmon and butterflies, all of whom travel over immense distances and back, often to their exact point of origin.

The hypothesis currently accepted by most biologists is that these migrating animals have an innate genetic program which directs them along a certain route using the orientation provided by the sun, moon and stars, a magnetic sense and, in some cases, the sense of smell.

However, as David Attenborough points out in his book *Life on Earth*, none of these hypotheses answers all the questions raised. “There seems to be no single answer: they use many methods. Some we are beginning to understand; some mystify us; and there may be some

that depend on abilities we have not yet suspected.”

Humans also have this highly developed navigational ability, but it has become generally atrophied, except in some so-called “primitive” people. When Captain Cook sailed on his voyage of exploration he invited a chief and navigator from an island near Tahiti to travel on board *The Endeavour*. Over a journey of more than 6,000 miles, this man was able to point to Tahiti at any time, in spite of the fact that they followed a very circuitous route.

Some scientists like to believe there is a rational explanation for everything, and they may be right. But perhaps we have to extend the concept of ‘rational’ to embrace powers in animals and humans that today are classified as ‘parapsychological’.

Further reading: Sheldrake, R. *Dogs that know when their owners are coming home and other unexplained powers of animals* Arrow Books, 2000 .

Mark Kingfisher

The Power of Rituals according to Confucius

Rituals are a form of language that allow us to connect with the divine. One of the purposes of rituals is to connect with the invisible forms of nature and to remember our higher potentials as human beings. Rituals are more than just a way of expressing our religious feelings. Through rituals we can have access to our intuition and understand the forms in nature which our mind is not able to grasp.

According to Confucius, the performance of rituals plays an important role in society, as they enable one to connect with the higher self and act accordingly.

His teachings about rituals and ceremonies were not based on religious dogmas; instead he put great importance on studying and understanding ancient symbols and customs.

Confucius maintained that rulers have the power and the responsibility to educate society and encourage citizens to become better human beings. If the rulers act in accordance with tradition and are examples of virtues, then the society will follow them willingly.

One of the important qualities of a ruler is to be able to understand and transmit customs and ceremonies. In order to have an impact on the development of others, one must have the power to develop one's own nature. If a ruler has this power, he can rule the society well and through his work of transforming and nourishing he would be playing a role as a channel between heaven and earth, in other words, between the higher and lower levels in the universe.

On the other hand, Confucius pointed out that dedicating oneself only to spiritual activities would not be sufficient. It is more important to serve men than to serve the spirits, he said.

Learning the correct practice of rituals and customs helps one to become a virtuous person, according to Confucius. However, this is not easy, as performing rituals is neither just emotionally engaging nor a matter of acting mechanically. It is about becoming a channel to be able to connect with the power released through the ritual. Every piece of correct action performed during a ritual would allow one to have access to the power released by the

ritual. And this access is the most important thing in any ceremony, as it serves the aim of the ritual itself.

Confucius gives an example of the philosopher king Shun: "He simply stood there, gravely and reverently, with his face turned toward the south (the ritual posture of sovereigns) and that was all." As this quote shows, there are not many actions required during a ritual. It could simply be standing, as the connection is more important than the action itself.

"To govern by virtue is as if one were the Pole Star: one remains in place while all other stars circle around in homage."



Chinese scholars take part in a traditional ritual to celebrate Confucius's birthday

In *The Analects* Confucius presents himself as a transmitter who invented nothing. His reforms for a better and happier society included knowing and practising rituals in the correct form. He emphasized the importance of rituals as a way of connecting with one's own higher powers, as he believed that the cosmos and society are governed by the same powers that are active in man.

Bibliography: Eliade, Mircea *A History of Religious Ideas*, Vol. 2 University of Chicago Press 1984

Pinar Akhan

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

The Everlasting Flame – Zoroastrianism in History and Imagination

by Julian Scott

This was the title of a wonderful exhibition at the Brunei Gallery in London which I visited with a study group from New Acropolis in December 2013.

Incorporating a replica Zoroastrian temple, artefacts from the Hermitage Museum in Russia and schematic representations of the Zoroastrian creation myth, the exhibition clarified many aspects of one of the world's least known religions.

The roots of Zoroastrianism go back to the second millennium BCE when the Iranians came from Central Asia and settled in the Zagros Mountains. But the origins of the focus of its worship – fire – are even older and can be traced to the hearth fire that was the household divinity in the earliest Indo-Iranian settlements. This fire cult can also be found in India and Greece (amongst other cultures). In Rome a sacred flame was kept permanently alight by the Vestal Virgins.

The founder of the religion, Zoroaster, is generally



believed to have lived between 700 and 600 BCE, although other sources claim that he lived around 1500 BCE. Mythologically, like many religious founders, he is attributed with a miraculous birth. He received revelations directly from God, who in this tradition is called Ahura Mazda, and recorded them in a series of sacred texts collectively known as the Avesta.

[Read more in the next issue.](#)

Upcoming Events

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

Wed 22 Jan, 7.30 pm

TALK: Astrology and the 7 Hermetic Principles

Speaker: Israel Ajose D. Psych. Astrol.

Sat 25 - Sun 26 Jan

SEMINAR: Ayurveda and the Mind

Leader: Dr Eduardo Cardona.

Wed 29 Jan, 7 pm

COURSE: Timeless Philosophy

16-week course, first evening free.

Thurs 6, 13, 20 Feb, 7 pm

SHORT COURSE: Mind – best friend or worst enemy?

3 Thursday evenings exploring the mind and mind-related topics.

Thurs 27 Feb, 7 pm

COURSE: Timeless Philosophy

16-week course, first evening free.

Fri 14, 21, 28 March, 7 pm

3 evenings on the Foundations of Platonic Philosophy

Speaker: Tim Addey.

