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# NewAcropolis

Philosophy and Education for the Future Newsletter

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### The worship of economic growth

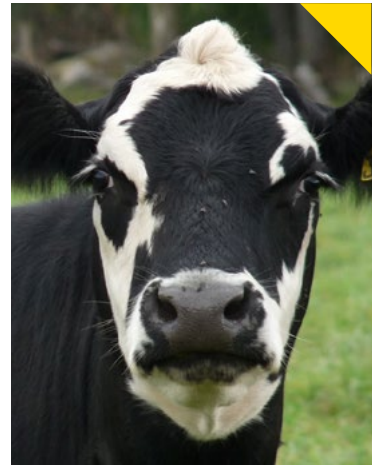
I have started to wonder whether the crimes we have committed in the name of economic profit in the last 100 years have started to outweigh all the crimes ever committed in the name of religion. True, no one has been burned at the stake for the sake of economic salvation but the amount of destruction, exploitation, and harm to life our greed has caused is on such an enormous scale that it makes everything seem pale in comparison.

I am reading Farmageddon at the moment, a book about factory farming, and it is just one of thousands of examples of how greed and the belief that 'bigger is better' are irreversibly damaging our countryside, our livestock and ultimately also our health: the book shows that half of all antibiotics used worldwide are routinely given to industrially farmed animals, thus contributing to the emergence of deadly antibiotic-resistant superbugs. A recent study in Germany showed that 50% of all packaged chicken sold in supermarkets contained MRSA bugs.

Add to this sweatshops, the fact that more than 17,500 Indian farmers a year killed themselves between 2002 and 2006 due to financial desperation, the destruction of rainforests, the ongoing manipulation by corporations to turn us into consumers who desire things we don't need and which will fill sooner or later our rubbish dumps while wasting finite resources and causing huge amounts of pollution by their production, etc. etc., and a horrendous picture of massive destruction is emerging.

All of these examples and thousands more are the direct result of a way of thinking that puts economic interests first. We have become the tragicomic victims of our own success: ever improving our means to make more money but none the wiser as to which ends are actually worth striving for. What else needs to happen before we start to rethink?

*Sabine Leitner*



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## French Personalism

The 20th century has known many schools of thought, but one of them in particular contributed to our understanding of the human being as a free, spiritual, creative and willing entity. This school of thought, known as Personalism, started at the end of the 19th century and developed in many countries, including USA, UK, France, Germany and Russia. The name 'Personalism' is derived not from the Ancient Greek word for 'mask', but from the Christian notion of a Godlike 'person'.

In the 1930s the main protagonist of French Personalism, Emmanuel Mounier, formulated the main problem of the time by saying that "it gets harder and harder to understand this world, while using it becomes easier and easier". Human beings had forgotten the meaning of their life and were completely determined by popular ideologies (capitalism or communism), inertia and the mechanical habits of a user, but not a responsible creator of the world. In the midst of economic and political crisis, Personalism called for "a new man and a new world", spiritual awakening and the social responsibility that it encompasses.

Mounier defined a person as "a living activity of self-creation, communication and connection with others". The person belongs to three worlds: of matter, of people, and of spirit. Each of them has a corresponding action.

In the spiritual dimension it is the discovery of and response to a calling. Mounier defines individual calling as a person's intrinsic 'unique code that indicates her place and responsibilities in the universal community'. Hence, a calling causes individual uniqueness, while at the same time bringing a person closer to the universal: through it she discovers unity with humanity.

In the social dimension it is involvement and connection

with others. Personalists were persistent in their notion of communal good. Without a community there is no person (as a higher level of individual self-realisation and freedom). "I exist to that extent to which I exist for the Other... To exist means to love" (Mounier).

In the material dimension it is a response to an individual calling - responsible action or realisation,



Emmanuel Mounier

active presence in the world of matter, but with a transcendent perspective.

Personalists witnessed a crisis and suggested a solution: awaken the human spirit and engage in the historical time in which people are living. Their movement included and influenced many prominent people, among them Gabriel Marcel, Paul Ricoeur, Jacques Maritain, Edmund Husserl, Max Scheler and Karol Wojtyla.

*Nataliya Petlevych*

## 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](http://WWW.NEWACROPOLISUK.ORG)

## Editorial Team

Sabine Leitner - Director

Julian Scott - Editor

Agostino Dominici - Project Manager and Designer

Natalia Lema - Public Relations



## Understanding and tackling the causes of crime

An interview with Cat Paul, a volunteer with Women in Prison (WIP)

**Q:** You are a volunteer at a charity called Women in Prison (WIP). Can you tell us why it was founded?

**A:** I think it can be summed up in a quotation from its founder, Chris Tchaikovsky, who had first-hand experience of the Criminal Justice System: "Taking the most hurt people out of society and punishing them in order to teach them how to live within society is, at best, futile. Whatever else a prisoner knows, she knows everything there is to know about punishment, because that is exactly what she has grown up with. Whether it's childhood sexual abuse, indifference, neglect, punishment is most familiar to her."

**Q:** So what she's saying is that most women who are in prison are people who've already been punished and hurt a lot in life?

**A:** In one way or another, yes.

**Q:** What kind of rehabilitation systems are there in prisons?

**A:** I think there are plenty of opportunities now available for prisoners. There's a prison in America, for example, located near Cornell University, where prisoners can do associate degrees, so the men there are leaving with a valuable qualification and I think that kind of opportunity makes a significant and positive impact on society. In this country there's the Prisoner Education Trust and their ethos is to enhance the chances of a better life.

**Q:** One of the phrases I've seen in one of your magazines is "Prison doesn't work". What alternatives does WIP propose for women offenders?

**A:** For those crimes which are of no great harm to society there are good alternatives such as custodial units (where prisoners have more freedom and are more involved in cooking, keeping their accommodation clean, etc.). There are also other options like Community Service and Day Release, which can work really well.

**Q:** What do you think are the root causes of crime among women?

**A:** Each case is different, but based on what I have seen, at the root of many cases there

is pain, hurt, loss and rejection, and I think these are the initial causes, whether it's from a family member, in childhood or from some relationship.

**Q:** So how can we tackle those issues?

**A:** I believe that education needs to start from quite a young age, not just formal education, but education in the sense of knowing oneself, and more teaching about confidence. In the case of adults who are already in prison, the education would be about helping the inmate to get some analytical skills, to develop some values and really to be able to think long-term about making decisions.

**Q:** What sort of help do you offer to women in prison and ex-offenders?

**A:** We go to all the women's prisons and meet the women who are on our case list. We discuss their current needs and what's happened since the last time they were seen and in general it's about their release. We also help them with practicalities when they come out of prison, because when people come out of prison they're usually in a very vulnerable state, so helping them with these little things just takes the pressure off and helps them focus on rebuilding their lives.

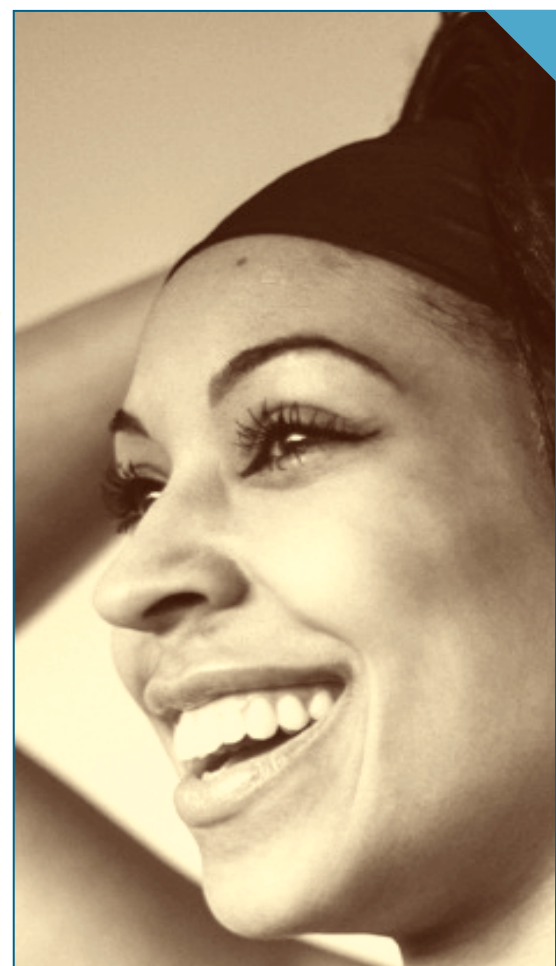
**Q:** How did you become involved in WIP?

**A:** It's an interest and a passion of mine, because these women can really get into a vicious circle and I think if there's any hope of them correcting themselves and living a better life, that's going to have an immediate effect on the community for us all to experience. If there were ten women out there who could look after their children a bit better than they are doing now... then that's a set of children on the street who, instead of modelling behaviours and being tempted to commit crimes, will have a better chance in life. And I believe it's possible. I believe that, if shown the right path and given the right opportunities to be in the right environment, a woman can strive to improve her situation.

**Q:** Would you agree that it's not only about having systems in place, but that what helps people to change the most is when someone is touched by the kindness of another human being?

**A:** Absolutely, I think I'd sooner sit with a person and help them than provide an App for them to be rehabilitated. That will probably be the next thing. But it's far more important for a prisoner to be able to sit with a person who just wants to listen to them. That really helps.

*"Taking the most hurt people out of society and punishing them in order to teach them how to live within society is, at best, futile. Whatever else a prisoner knows, she knows everything there is to know about punishment, because that is exactly what she has grown up with. Whether it's childhood sexual abuse, indifference, neglect, punishment is most familiar to her." – Chris Tchaikovsky, founder of WIP*



Cat Paul, a volunteer with WPI



## The Future of Astrology

Many definitions and labels have been given to what Astrology is or is not. Many attempts have been made to discredit and to sabotage the valuable contributions of its followers. Many times Astrology has risen in popularity only to fall back into obscurity, and yet its antiquity, its worldwide practice and unquestionable charm remain the guarantee for its survival into the distant future. A future which always holds new possibilities for growth and expansion in consciousness.

In the last hundred years, following the demographic and technological explosion, so many systems of thoughts, styles and techniques have been born, making this field of study undoubtedly more attractive, but also more confusing and shallow. The 'how to' syndrome, an outcome of an over-scientific mentality, has polluted the minds of students of various disciplines. As a result, in many astrological circles, people's attention has mainly been focused on techniques, easy memorizable keywords and recipes (this indicates that, etc.) and specialization. In its applications, an over-emphasis has been put on the psychological (which is often just synonymous with 'my personal issues'), the statistical (with endless chart comparisons) and the speculative (intellectual) aspect.

As modern man becomes more and more estranged from a concrete relationship with nature and its rhythms and as the livingness of the experience of the night sky disappears from his consciousness, the astrologer (or would be astrologer) is faced with the question:

what is the future of Astrology? As behind any astrologer or astrology there always stands Man, a more fundamental question arises: what is the future of Man? What can be envisioned and applied as future astrological knowledge can only be the result of what Man has become. If the 'new' Man becomes endowed with greater depth of thought, becomes able to bring greater meaning into his existence and begins to awaken and live more universal



values, a new astrology will be born. Astrology will then have gained a rightful and most useful place in the building of a transformed humanity.

*Agostino Dominici*

## PHILOSOPHICAL HUMOR



## Some inspiring quotes

"Whatever a man may be, there is a future to be forged, a virgin future before him." - Jean-Paul Sartre

"It is the peculiar quality of a fool to perceive the faults of others and to forget his own." - Cicero

"Beware the barrenness of a busy life." - Socrates

## Estonian Massed Choirs – a Singing Revolution

Estonia, a small Baltic republic on the Eastern border of the European Union has come through a lot of turmoil in the 20th century, from independence from the Russian Empire to being occupied by both the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany and finally regaining its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. One event, however, has survived throughout these difficult times: a tradition of song and dance festivals.

The first song festival was held in 1869 and became a point of unification for the Estonian national psyche. After the Soviet occupation, even the occupying power did not dare to ban the festival, but tried to transform it into a Soviet propaganda event, though with very little success.

In a recent article a social scientist, Marju Lauristin, described the rather atheistic Estonians as “song festival religious” people. She said that the event is not perceived as a concert or a show, but as a collective ritual expression of the national identity, bringing together over 100,000 people in a nation of just 1.3 million. One massed choir can consist of up to 35,000 singers.

In 1944 an Estonian composer, Gustav Ernesaks, composed a song “Mu Isamaa on minu arm” (My Fatherland is My Love), which became the cornerstone of silent resistance for the Estonian nation during the years of Soviet occupation. Although it was banned by the Soviet authorities in 1950, 1955 and 1960, the choir just started to sing it in unison on every occasion after the official programme was finished, without fear of the consequences.

**More info:** The next Song Festival in Tallinn this summer - <http://2014.laulupidu.ee/english/>  
Documentary about the singing revolution - <http://www.singingrevolution.com/>  
Mu isamaa on minu arm performed at the 2009 Song festival - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=34mYIYkzPVU>

Remi Kübar



## Mathematics (2): Plato Versus Aristotle

For someone to understand the importance of mathematics as a key for revealing the mysteries of the universe, one must read Plato, as he explains how reality is divided into two different worlds: the world of Ideas and the world of the senses. But which one is more real? Your touch and vision will tell you that the table you have in front of you is real. But your mind and reason will tell you that it is just one of many tables and it doesn't completely describe the concept of The table.

And this is where the division between Plato and Aristotle

happens. For Plato the ultimate reality is in the intelligible world and it can be perceived by reason through Mathematics, which will define the laws of physics. However, for Aristotle you can only define the reality through the senses which will build the laws of physics. Mathematics then becomes just an auxiliary. And it is this last concept that has defined modern science, through experimentation. Or has it?...

The great unifying laws defined by Newton, Maxwell or Einstein were not the product of experimentation, but of pure reason and intellect.

Einstein and Maxwell didn't have the tools to measure their predictions and, in the case of Maxwell, they were only experimentally proven after his death.

And even if empiricism ruled the 19th century, most of the mathematical equations used to describe experiments were then included and properly explained in the greater unifying laws.

(For a better understanding I recommend reading *The Eternal Law* by John Spencer).

Florimond Krins



## Plato's Myth of Er: the journey of the Soul

In Plato's Republic there is a legend told by Socrates to explain how important our choices in life are, and their consequences, not only in the present time, but also after death. A warrior called Er, who dies in battle and comes back to life 12 days later, shares with others what he was able to see in the other world.

That other dimension, which remains a mystery and a basis for reflection for many philosophers, has been a common theme across many cultures. Today, such events are referred to as near death experiences (NDE).

Er tells about the journey of the soul and of judges assigning to each soul its corresponding place according to the way it has lived. After seeing this and noticing the beautiful images of those who are in heaven and the pain and sorrow of those who aren't, Er is told to stay as an observer and return to the world in order to explain to mankind the existence of these 2 options.

Staying there for a short while, Er then follows a group of souls who are ready to return to Earth and, as they choose their next lives they are asked to drink from the River of Forgetfulness (Lethe). Their journey is completed when they are reborn but Er - who didn't drink that much - was able to remember and recall his experience.

Life and death are two sides of the same coin, sides that we can only grasp and understand by embracing them, by studying and becoming aware of the many answers that lie in front of our eyes.

*Natalia Lema*



Atropos cutting the thread of life

## NATURE AND US

### British Owls

There are seven types of native owls in the British Isles – the eagle owl, the barn owl, the tawny owl, the long-eared and short-eared owl, the little owl and, in the far north, the snowy owl. Fossil remains of the eagle owl have been found dating back at least 2 million years.

It is not strictly true that, with their huge eyes, owls can see in the dark, but they do see things 2.7 times brighter than we do. What gives them their great ability as hunters is in fact their hearing. Their ears, placed asymmetrically, enable them to judge the source of a sound with greater accuracy, while their 'facial disc' acts as a parabolic reflector, directing sound towards their ears and amplifying it. A mouse's squeak, for example, is amplified for the owl to ten times its natural volume.

The typical diet of owls consists of voles (their favourite food), mice and even rats. Long-eared owls occasionally eat bats, and tawny and short-eared owls also prey on other birds.

In their courtship rituals, the male offers gifts of food to the female and if they like each other, they start visiting potential nest sites together (although it is the female who always has the final choice). They court face-to-face, with swaying movements of the body and soft vocalisations or sighing sounds.

Owls have always been revered in human culture, right back to palaeolithic times when cavemen preserved their bodies and made carvings of them. Although they have sometimes been considered birds of ill-omen (because of their association with darkness), in Greece they were sacred to Athena, the goddess of wisdom.

*Mark Kingfisher*

## The Everlasting Flame – Zoroastrianism in History and Imagination

This was the title of an 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 (4 pillars topped by a dome, with a fire in the centre) 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 BC 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 found in practically every culture in history. The Zoroastrian temple is known as the House of Fire and before entering it one must ritually purify oneself in eight different ways. The fire ceremony itself also consists of a number of stages, beginning with an invitation to the deities to be present.

The founder of this religion, Zoroaster, is generally believed to have lived between 700 and 600 BC, although other sources claim that he lived around 1500 BC. Like many religious founders, he is attributed with a miraculous birth and is said to have received revelations directly from God (Ahura Mazda or Ohrmazd). Although some of its scriptures (known as the Avesta) remain, many of the texts and most of the commentaries on them were destroyed by the Seljuk Turks in the 11th century, making it a difficult religion to understand.

### The Story of Creation

In the beginning there was darkness. Then Ahura Mazda caused the spaces to be suffused with light. The duration of the created universe is 12,000 years, divided into 4 stages (12 being the symbol of a cosmic cycle, and 4 symbolising the basic structure of everything). The first creation is the world of thought; the second, the creation of the living in the world of thought, and its birth; the third, the battlefield between good and evil (“the mixture”); and the fourth, the return to the origins, without evil. The same ideas we can see reflected in Neoplatonic thought, which talks about an emanation from the world of Ideas (1) to the world-soul (2), and finally to the world of matter (3),

followed by a return to the original state of unity (4).

An important part of Zoroastrianism is its so-called Dualism. From the beginning there are two antagonistic forces, known either as Ahura Mazda and Ahriman, or Spenta Mainyu (the Wise Lord) and Angra Mainyu (Dark Lord). Whenever Ahura Mazda creates something good, Ahriman creates something evil (e.g. a snake or a poisonous plant). Plutarch described the legend of the ‘Zoroastrian Egg’, containing 24 gods, which had been made by Ahura Mazda. In order to destroy Ahura’s work, Ahriman pierced the egg and introduced 24 evil spirits – and this is why good and evil are mixed in this world.

A parallel version tells of seven creations, each presided over by one of the six life-giving



immortals (Ameshas Spentas), with Spenta Mainyu, the holy spirit of Ahura Mazda, making the seventh. These seven creations were: Sky, Water, Earth, Fire, Human Beings, Cattle and Plants. Each of the seven lords dwells in its particular creation, setting up a web of correspondences. Thus, cattle correspond to the virtue of Good Thought, Fire corresponds to Truth and Order, etc. – a principle also found in the Hermetic axiom “As above, so below”.

*Julian Scott*



## IN THE NEXT ISSUE

# A Philosopher from Anatolia, Nasreddin Hoca

by Pinar Akhan

**Nasreddin Hoca** is a wise man who is famous for his funny and insightful stories. He is considered as a philosopher as he transmits his wisdom through his stories and exhibits a different way of thinking from his fellows. He could also be considered as a mirror in which he shows people their own defects and their own narrow-mindedness with humour.

He lived in 13th century Anatolia, Turkey, where there was a lot of conflict at the time. The Seljuks were in their declining period, the Mongols had conquered Anatolia, riots were everywhere and the rulers were corrupt and thinking about their own wealth instead of the public good. In society, there was no unity; instead poverty and crime were increasing rapidly.

As we can see in other times of history, out of darkness the wise man appears in many ways to



show the light. Nasreddin Hoca (Hoca means teacher in Turkish) has been a great teacher, not only in his own time, but his stories have also been told in many Middle Eastern and even Western countries.

**An example of his wisdom with a story from Nasreddin Hoca will be published in our next issue...**

# Upcoming Events

See our website for more details.

[www.newacropolisuk.org](http://www.newacropolisuk.org)

**Sat 8 March, 10 am - 1 pm**

Volunteering Day in Compton Terrace Gardens

**Tues 11 March, 7 pm**

Philosophy Course: Know Thyself

16-week course, first evening free

**Fri 14 March, 7 pm**

Talk & discussion: Fundamentals of Platonic philosophy

Plato's Cave: What is reality?

**Fri 21 March, 7 pm**

Talk & discussion: Fundamentals of Platonic philosophy

Diotima's path of love: The philosophy of desire

**Fri 28 March, 7 pm**

Talk & discussion: Fundamentals of Platonic philosophy

Meno's slave: The power within

**Sat 5 April, 10 am - 1 pm**

Volunteering Day in Compton Terrace Gardens

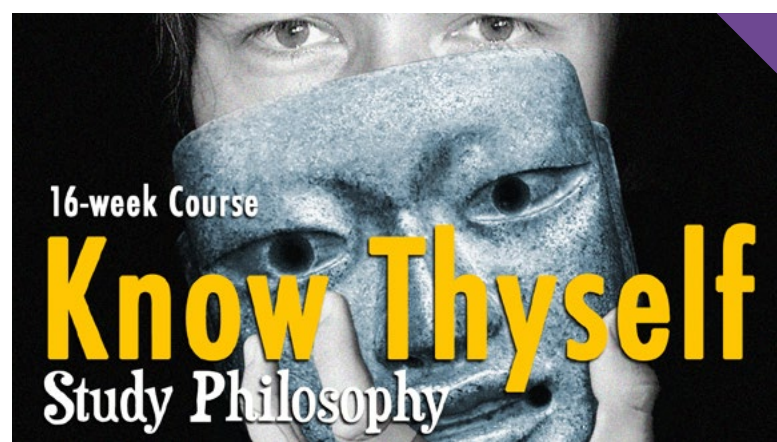
**Sat 3 May, 10 am - 1 pm**

Volunteering Day in Compton Terrace Gardens

**Sun 18 May, 10 am - 5 pm**

Workshop: Practical Voice Training

Is your voice the instrument you want it to be?



16-week Course

**Know Thyself**  
Study Philosophy