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# NewAcropolis

Philosophy and Education for the Future Bi-monthly

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### Editorial

A reporter once asked Gandhi what he thought about Western civilization. Gandhi replied: "I think it would be a good idea". We might call ourselves civilized, but are we truly behaving in a civilized manner? It depends what we understand by civilization.

In his Schumacher Lecture in 2004 Satish Kumar<sup>1</sup> said: "The modern, consumerist culture built on unfair, unjust and unsustainable economic institutions cannot be considered to be civilized. [...] A civilization without spiritual foundation is no civilization at all."

This made me think about the meaning of civilization and its root – culture. The general idea is that culture comes first, while civilization is its later material manifestation. Culture is mostly intangible – it consists of ideals, values, thoughts and feelings, and can be compared to the soul of an individual. Civilization, on the other hand, consists of forms of government, institutions, technology, buildings, etc., and could be likened to the body of an individual. It has been said that culture is what we *are* and civilization is what we *have*.

Culture can exist in itself but a civilization cannot exist without culture. A civilization will become empty if the culture that gave rise to it diminishes and gets lost. This seems to be happening now. We have an abundance of technology and means, but are very confused about our values and ends.

There is a growing understanding that what we need is a renewal of culture. The sociologist Paul Ray calls people who are aware of this and who hold elements of a new emerging worldview "cultural creatives".

They are characterised by a love of nature, strong awareness of planet-wide issues, a proactive attitude, readiness to volunteer, optimism towards the future and a strong interest in spiritual and psychological development.

Chances are, you are one of them!

*Sabine Leitner*

<sup>1</sup>Editor of Resurgence Magazine since 1973 and co-founder of Schumacher College in Devon.



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## Concentration and the practice of philosophy

The practice of concentration has always been an important part of practical philosophy. In the East it has always been believed that deep concentration opens the way to Wisdom.

Tibetan Buddhism has a clear example of this in an engraving made by Tibetan Master Blo-bzang Don-yod<sup>1</sup> in the 17th century. This image shows a path divided into stages, a sort of inner journey that requires a voluntary change of attitude and the development of virtues at each turn of the road. Briefly, those stages start with the seeker's need to find his true identity and making the decision to transform himself. Once that memory has been regained, his mastery over distraction gradually increases and the awareness of the inner being is experienced. Concentration becomes powerful and he encounters fewer distractions because he has developed effective tools of memory and attention. Finally the seeker reaches a stage of spontaneous concentration and, out of love for humanity, decides to return and teach the Path to others.

The Buddhist tradition refers to the process of calming the mind as Samatha. Its main exercise is single-pointed meditation achieved through mindfulness of your own breathing. Those who have ever tried it know how difficult it is to concentrate, as our human nature provides us with plenty of distractions. Interestingly, many of the difficulties don't necessarily come from outside. We might be in a quiet room, far away from the city and the noise, even hidden in a cave, but that

is no guarantee of success. The major obstacles to be overcome are: the tendency of our body to seek pleasure and comfort, the uncontrolled passions and a confused mind. In the engraving, the mind, which is represented by an elephant, can be powerful and obedient or destructive and uncontrolled. It all depends on the one who is



Detail from an engraving by Tibetan Master Blo-bzang Don-yod

seeking and the gradual ability to perceive things in their unity. By deep concentration we can go through the gate to true knowledge and leave behind own projections and judgements.

Natalia Lema

<sup>1</sup>For a detailed interpretation of this image, see F. Schwarz, *Concentration and Inner Awakening*, available from our website at [www.newacropolisuk.org](http://www.newacropolisuk.org)

## 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)

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Sabine Leitner - Director

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Natalia Lema - Public Relations



## Education and human aspiration

In recent times, more and more emphasis has been placed on the way we approach education. In all developed cultures, the welfare of society's future has always been intimately connected to the issue of the upbringing and formation of the younger generations. In times of uncertainty when social unrest, economic crisis and environmental catastrophes make up most of the headlines, it is natural to start questioning the validity of the educational system on which tomorrow's life may depend.

This issue has already been much discussed at the political, economic and managerial level and therefore I will only tackle it from a philosophical perspective. For me, the first thing which needs consideration is the "human factor". The mindset which the age of industry and technology has created in us has definitely created a situation in which even society is seen as a gigantic machine. In this context, schools are factories where children go in as raw materials. They are beaten, shaped and moulded into forms fit for the machinery of society. As with any factory, there is an assembly line, a mass teaching, a mass examination to find out if a certain piece is fit for purpose, and if it is not, it must be rejected. I am presenting such a crude picture to emphasize a dehumanizing process, the traces of which can still be found everywhere.

When I read the wise teachings of East and West, from Buddha to Plato, a very different picture seems to emerge. A human being, far from being a cog in a machine is, since his birth, a core of beauty, truth, love and freedom. This, which is the real human essence, is already there in potential and it is his destiny to make it manifest. In the

child, what he has to become and to express is there from the start. We could even say that there is nothing that the child has to take from outside. What is added from outside are the living experiences, which are the means to draw out from within what is already there.

When education is geared towards this realization, to draw outward that which naturally belongs to man, its priceless function is suddenly revealed. From this analysis, we can infer that the first principle of education is that nothing can be taught. All learning is more like an unveiling of this inner core and the teacher is like a midwife assisting and guiding this unfoldment process. The teacher doesn't plug in or hammer in any knowledge into the child's mind, he only shows where that core of wisdom lies and how it can be made to rise to the surface. A second principle of teaching can be deduced from the first: the mind has to be consulted in its own growth. The child must be induced to expand in accordance with his own nature and not moulded into the shape desired by parents or society. The teacher's role is, then, to observe and support the child's deepest aspirations, his natural tendencies, his unique qualities and lines of development.

A third principle is to work from the near to the far and from that which is to that which will be. Like the blossoming of a flower, what is in latency can only develop in stages. Evolution, cosmic or human, follows a natural sequence of unfoldment. As the human foundation is biological, the child first focuses on developing his sensory organs, then he starts engaging emotionally and finally develops his capacity for abstract thought. He relates, first with his immediate surroundings and then as

he expands in consciousness, he finds his sense of belonging shifting from the local to the national and eventually to the planetary level. The teacher's task is to engage the child only at the level on which he is ready to respond, paying attention to the current stage of development of his brain and psyche.

Human aspiration should culminate in the total fulfilment of man's innate potentials. The greater the contribution that education can make towards this goal, the greater the rewards that our future society will reap.

*Agostino Dominici*

(This article was partly inspired by Sraddhalu Ranade's talk on Integral Education)



## The London Stone

London's history, in which we live and which we continue to shape, goes back a long way and preserves many mysteries and symbols.

One such symbol is the London Stone, which you can find at 111 Cannon Street in the City of London, although it is difficult to spot unless you know what you're looking for. Its history is obscure, but the Stone is distinguished by its persistent reappearance in every historical period as a symbolical object of great significance.

Archaeologists describe it as being made of limestone, of a type first used for buildings and sculptures in Roman times. The stone, now of the same size as it was around 1700, is believed to be the uppermost part of the original stone pillar or monument that was possibly erected in the centre of the Roman provincial governor's palace. William Camden, in his *Britannia* (1586), states that the Stone was the Roman milliarium – a central stone from which all distances in Roman Britain were measured, analogous to the Milliarium Aureum in Rome near the Temple of Saturn.

In post-Roman era, after Viking attacks had destroyed Saxon London, the Stone possibly continued to have quite a similar function, as it was located at the centre of the grid of new streets laid out when King Alfred re-established the city in 886.

Later, in about 1100, its name appeared for the first time in an official record – a list of London properties belonging to Canterbury Cathedral. It was given to the Cathedral by Aethelwine (Ailwin) 'of London Stone', the father of the very first

mayor of London, Henry Fitz-Ailwin. Edward III made it the centre of the axis of the city's trade in 1328. By the time of Queen Elizabeth I the London Stone was a famous landmark, shown on maps. 18th century prints show it being kept in an elegant stone casing. Victorian police guarded the stone when it was set into the wall of St Swithin's.

Throughout its history it was considered the centre of London and/or an important ceremonial stone. Symbolically, it became the Stone of Brutus (after the mythical founder of the capital) at the centre



of Golgonooza, William Blake's mystical city of London, a place where justice is delivered, the foundation stone upon which a new and better city must be built.

*Nataliya Petlevych*

## PHILOSOPHICAL HUMOUR



*"Just when I begin to think life is totally meaningless, football starts again."*

## Some inspiring quotes

*"We should be taught not to wait for inspiration to start a thing. Action always generates inspiration. Inspiration seldom generates action." -Frank Tibolt*

*"We are what we think. All that we are arises with our thoughts; with our thoughts, we create our world." - The Buddha*

*"The real problem is not whether machines think but whether men do." - Dr. Thomas Fuller*

## London's Sacred Architecture

The sacred needs form through which to express itself and architecture is one medium through which this can happen. When architecture uses eternal and universal principles it expresses LIFE, and with that it becomes sacred architecture.

"An art that has life does not restore the works of the past: it continues them", said the French sculptor Rodin. This is another aspect of the sacred, it brings renewal.

One of London's major renewals came after the Great Fire of London in 1666 when most of the City within the London Wall was destroyed in a fire that lasted four days. A new creativity and vision were needed. Sir Christopher Wren (1632-1723) played an important role in this and is today most well known for his creation of St Paul's Cathedral.

This was London's fifth St. Paul's Cathedral since 604 A.D, all having been built on the same site. The foundation stone of the new cathedral was probably laid on 21<sup>st</sup> June 1675, a moment that would have been carefully chosen for astrological and astronomical reasons, in this case the summer solstice.

On the south pediment, looking towards the river, Wren placed the image of a phoenix rising from the flames, accompanied by a Latin inscription *Resurgam* – "I shall rise again" – which had been found amongst the ruins of an earlier Roman temple. The renewal came from the ashes of the old, bringing back life in a new form, transcending the particular and touching the universal.

*Miha Kosir*



## Quantum Physics - the metaphysical challenge

The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century went through a major crisis on a scientific level, as we started to look closely at the infinitely small (Quantum Physics). It was the first time we couldn't actually see what we were studying, as the measuring equipment was still very basic.

Consequently, the theories had to be created before they could be verified and materially explained and proven. As you can imagine, this created tensions and conflicts between scientists. It took great men and

women, like Einstein, Planck, Heisenberg or Curie to see and explain reality mostly through mathematical equations. It was a leap forward that they had to take and they had to have some faith in their predictions. It took years, if not decades, for most of those theories to be materially proven, and some are still waiting for a proof...

But in the meantime those same theories were used as a foundation to build and expand quantum physics. And this created paradoxes such as the definition of light: 19th

century scientists explained it as an electromagnetic wave; but quantum physicists see it as photons (nanoscopic particles) moving at the speed of light. Both are "true", as they were proven, but they are still very different explanations based on very different theories. Which brings us to the greatest challenge for the scientific community: the unification of the laws of physics.

*Florimond Krins*

## Isis in London

Isis is one of the most famous Goddesses of Ancient Egypt and was known as a life-giver. She discovered and reunited the pieces of her dead husband's - Osiris's - body, and through her divine power Osiris came back to life again. She was invoked in all forms of illness to cure the sick and to give life.

Her name is the Greek form of the ancient Egyptian hieroglyph (Ah-set)- Aset) meaning "throne". She was certainly related with kingship as she was the mother of Horus, who represented the pharaoh. Another interpretation of her name is "Is-Is", meaning "step-step", giving the idea of a staircase, the power which helps the human consciousness to ascend towards the spiritual realms.

After the Romans inherited Alexandrian Egypt, Isis became a highly important goddess in the Roman Empire. When the Romans came to Britain, they also built temples here in London. One of the proofs of this is a discovery of a Roman altar stone in the mid-1970s at St Peter's Hill, near St Paul's which states "In tribute, a gift donated by Marcus Martiannus Pulcher, most honourable of men, Pro-Praetorian Legate of the Emperors, who restored this temple to Isis, which had collapsed through old age and lay in ruins". Prior to this discovery a wine jug was found in Tooley Street in Southwark which states "LONDINI AD FANVM ISIDIS" or "From London at/to the temple of Isis". Both objects can be seen at the Museum of London.

*Pinar Akhan*



Isis in black and white marble (Roman, 2nd century CE)

## NATURE AND US

### Why do Bees Swarm?

Bees swarm in order to create a new colony and spread to a new area. It is the way they have been reproducing themselves for the last 50 million years (until human beings started drastically interfering with this process over the last 100 years or so).

Another trigger for swarming could be that their space (the hive or a cavity in the wild) becomes too overcrowded so there is no more potential for them to grow as a colony. In other cases, a sudden lack of food or maybe too much interference from outside may cause a so-called emergency swarm.

When swarming, the old and experienced queen will move out with about half the hive, leaving the remaining bees with a series of sealed queen cells that will hatch a few days later. The first queen to hatch will usually kill

the other queens in their cells as there can only be one queen in the hive. This new queen has everything she needs at the start: plenty of honey already in the hive, court bees that will feed her and worker bees that will carry on doing their work.

In order to become fully mature, however, the virgin queen needs to get mated. On one of the next sunny days, she will go on her one and only flight (unless she leads a swarm in another year), when she will be mated by up to 20 drones, who will die in the process. After about ten minutes she will return to the hive, with millions of sperms inside her that will last her a lifetime. From now on her task is to lay eggs (up to 1500 in 24 hours at the height of summer) and to produce a pheromone that will give the hive its identity and cohesion. Her natural life span will be up to 5 years.

*Sabine Leitner*

## Mysteries of the Afterlife

One of the most fascinating aspects of Egypt for most people, from schoolchildren to cinemagoers and academics, is the ancient Egyptian conception of the afterlife. We have the *Book of the Dead*, the mummies in their bandages inscribed with magic spells, the extraordinarily complex funerary ritual and the beautiful painted sarcophagi. But what do we really understand about all this? And the wider question is, how can we understand ancient Egypt when the keys to Egyptian symbolism were never written down by the Egyptians themselves?

It is possible that a purely academic approach to ancient Egypt is inadequate for enabling us to reach a true understanding of this culture. This statement could perhaps be extended to many other fields, especially where there is a mystical or magical element. For example, can Plato be understood by analysing his writings in a merely logical manner, when he himself makes many references to “the mysteries”?

**“There is only One Life, which glides along on its two feet, life and death”. J.A. Livraga**

In such areas I believe we must open our minds (and hearts and souls?) to other approaches. This does not mean abandoning our reasoning faculties, but combining them with other faculties such as the spiritual intuition.

In a recent interview I was privileged to have with the International Director of New Acropolis, Delia S. Guzmán, she told me that when she used to travel to Egypt every year with the founder of New Acropolis, J.A. Livraga, he seemed to have a familiarity with the place that had no “rational” explanation. Could he have had a “past life memory” of Egypt? Nowadays in the West, we tend to dismiss such things as nonsense. But in other cultures the idea of reincarnation has been mainstream. It is not an illogical idea, merely out of fashion.

However, the book that Prof. Livraga wrote about Thebes did not rely on such unprovable sources; it was extremely well researched in all its details; but when we come to issues like the purpose of mummification, where academic theories are very inadequate and often illogical, a more intuitive

approach is probably more useful. Thus, Prof. Livraga tells us in his book that the purpose of the funerary ritual was to help the soul in its ascent through the invisible worlds and that the priests of Thebes were specialists in this Occult Science. The tombs, he says, were “not cemeteries in the modern sense”, but “launching pads for the souls of the good” and “the coffin or sarcophagus [was] like a ship for plying the psychic space which separates life from death. It [was] a protective casing against the winds of what modern “occultists” call the *Astral World*, avoiding contact with larvae and evil spirits.”

What fascinated the author most of all about Egypt, however, was not that it was a magical, “initiativ” civilization, but that it managed to combine its high spiritual knowledge with a well-run, socially harmonious and basically happy



Detail from the entrance of Luxor Temple in Egypt

society – they had 105 festival days per year, a tax system which offered effective protection against starvation due to drought and flooding, and birth control measures that ensured that the population of the country remained stable (for example, around 90,000 inhabitants in Thebes) throughout its history.

*Julian Scott*

Copies of *Thebes* by J.A. Livraga can be ordered online from [www.newacropolisuk.org](http://www.newacropolisuk.org)

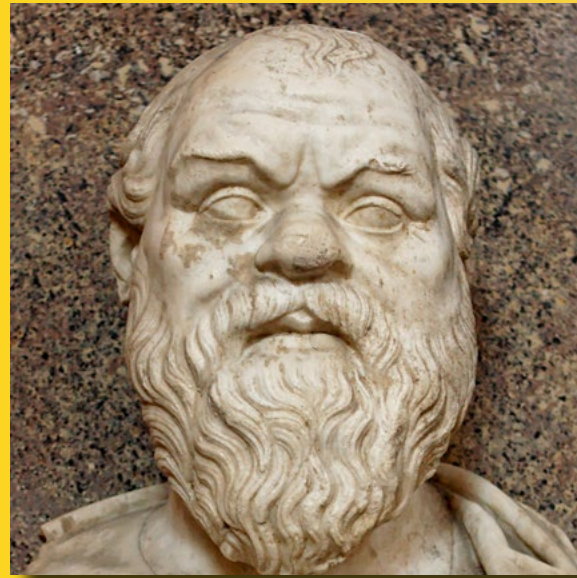
## IN THE NEXT ISSUE

# Philosophy Survey

by Julian Scott

In the next issue we will be publishing the results of a survey we have been conducting on “Attitudes to Philosophy in Islington”. In the process of asking people questions such as “What does the word philosophy mean to you?” I have been asking myself the same, and it occurred to me that philosophy is a deeply felt need to answer certain profound questions about life; and the philosopher is someone who passionately throws him or herself into the quest to discover answers.

Three examples of such philosophers sprang immediately to mind: Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha) who realized that the world is full of suffering and would not rest until he had found its root cause and hence its ‘cure’; H.P. Blavatsky, who asked herself when very young “Is there such a thing as an immortal soul?” and “Does God really exist?” – and, not content with simply believing or not believing, went in quest of actual



*knowledge* about such matters; and Socrates, who, according to eye-witness accounts, would stop in his tracks whenever any such question came to his mind and search for the answer through a process of inner dialogue, sometimes remaining on the same spot for hours at a time until finally discovering the answer deep within himself.

**Read the results of our survey in the next issue...**

# Upcoming Events

See our website for more details.  
[www.newacropolisuk.org](http://www.newacropolisuk.org)

**Sat 12 July, 10 am – 1 pm**  
Volunteering Day in Compton Terrace Gardens

**Wed 16 July at 7.30 pm**  
Talk: The Mysticism of Tibet  
An introduction to Tibetan Buddhism and its Symbols

**Mon-Thurs 18-21 Aug at 7.00 pm**  
London Week  
A series of 20 short talks on different aspects of London

**Wed 24 Sept, at 7 pm**  
16 week course: Discover Philosophy  
Get inspired by the great philosophical ideas that have stood the test of time

TALK

## TIBETAN BUDDHISM

AN INTRODUCTION TO TIBETAN BUDDHISM AND ITS SYMBOLS



**16 JULY AT 7.30 PM - ADMISSION £5 (£3 CONCS.)**