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You have probably heard it said many times that there is no meaning or purpose out there. The universe is just a vast, impersonal and indifferent void governed by chance, and the concepts of purpose and meaning are constructs of the human mind created to soothe our anxiety in the face of this existential emptiness.

But where do our spiritual intuitions, our appreciation of love and beauty, our ability to self-reflect come from? Are we a part of the universe or are we something entirely separate and outside it? If we are a part, can the part be so radically different from the whole? Is it really possible that the whole (i.e. the universe) utterly lacks qualities that are intrinsic in the part (the human being)?

Many people would argue that bestowing any meaning or purpose onto the universe is exactly the kind of anthropocentrism that needs to be overcome and that has no place in a scientific world view. However, as Richard Tarnas points out in his book *Cosmos and Psyche*, would this not be “an extraordinary act of human hubris [...] to assume that the exclusive source of *all meaning and purpose in the universe* is ultimately centred in the human mind, which is therefore absolutely unique and special and in this sense superior to the entire cosmos?”

Who decided “that whenever human beings perceive any patterns of psychological or spiritual significance in the nonhuman world, [...] any suggestion of purposefully coherent order and intelligible meaning, these *must* be understood as human constructions and projections, as ultimately rooted in the human mind and *never* in the world?” (Ibid.)

These are profound questions and they force us to consider whether we have based our entire worldview on shaky *a priori* assumptions. How is it that our deepest inner experience is so incoherent and discontinuous with the outer world as described by modern science? Maybe the real ‘constructs of our mind’ are the scientific paradigms which prevent us from seeing with our mind what our heart knows? Maybe meaning and purpose are inherent in the universe after all... .

Sabine Leitner



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The Myth of the Cave

In one of Plato's most well known works - *The Republic* - we find a short story known as the Myth of the Cave. Socrates asks his listeners to imagine a world under the ground where people live in chains, facing the end wall of a cave. Because they are chained they can't move or turn around to see the objects behind their backs or the fire which projects shadows onto the wall in front of them. As the 'prisoners' were born in such conditions, those flickering shadows are the only things they would ever see. Over time people start recognizing different shapes in the shadows, categorizing them and developing all their knowledge of the world out of them.

Plato doesn't say why some people manage to break their chains and turn round, beginning to see a whole new reality. But when they do so and get accustomed to the new conditions, they also start seeing a path ascending out of the cave. This speaks of yet another level of reality. The whole process is not easy at all as it requires a lot of effort and small inner transformations to be able to adapt to the new conditions and 'move' into a new state of being. For Plato true knowledge lies outside the cave (which symbolizes the world we perceive through our senses), where the eternal principles can be found. As the highest principle outside the cave is the sun, by analogy this is compared to the supreme Good. People who do manage to leave the cave eventually go back to help their fellow human beings to find

the path and break the chains and the darkness of ignorance.

What the story is really saying is that at the beginning it is very difficult to recognize the things we think we know but in fact we don't. Our wrong beliefs and



Plato's portrait, detail from *The School of Athens* by Raphael

opinions based upon the 'shadows' are imprisoning us. Maybe a bit of Socratic wisdom, by saying "I know that I know nothing", would help us to look at the world with eyes of wonder, which as Socrates said is the beginning of all wisdom. And if we add some love to it we can be called philosophers.

Miha Kosir

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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 Philosophy
Culture
Volunteering

FARMAGEDDON¹

Apologists of industrial farming often claim that this soulless and inhumane way of producing food for human consumption is the only viable way of feeding the world in these times of overpopulation.

However, although the deceptively named ‘green revolution’ (the conversion to industrial farming after the second world war based on pesticides, artificial fertilizers and mass production methods) got off to a hopeful start and initially boosted production levels, its success was short-lived. Soon farmers were going out of business and formerly fertile lands became transformed into dustbowls.

The more natural system of farming which existed previously was based on the mixed farm where different crops were rotated and the manure from farm animals was used to fertilize the soil. Insects and birds contributed to the pollination effort and the whole was relatively self-sustaining.

The temptation of the industrial farming concept was based on the fact that nature is unpredictable, so harvests may fail. By making agriculture less dependent on nature, so the argument went, agriculture could run as efficiently as a factory. What was not taken into account, however, was the enormous pollution produced by the intensive farming of animals, the destruction of pollinating insects by pesticides, the soil-depleting effects of monoculture, and the cruelty to the factory-farmed animals themselves.

Pollution from Factory Farms

A ‘mega-dairy’ housing 8,000 cows indoors produces a huge amount of concentrated animal waste, which pollutes rivers, lakes and groundwater, and the very air that people breathe. In Central Valley, California, low-paid local workers have to buy mineral water because the tap water is undrinkable, the rate of asthma among children is 20% and those who

live near factory farms have their lives shortened by a decade on average.

Effects of pesticides

The full effects on health are not yet known, but some researchers link the increasing rate of cancer (one in three people now get some form of the disease) to environmental factors, including pesticides.

The most evident victim of farm pesticides is wildlife. The British Beekeeping Association fears that Britain may lose all its bees in the next decade. Tree sparrows have decreased by 97% in the last 40 years and the population of farmland birds has halved since 1966.

Cruelty to animals

Those who object to farm animals being kept in confined and barren spaces with no access to the outdoors are often accused of having an ‘anthropomorphic’ attitude. The co-author of Farmageddon was once asked by a government vet: “how can you say that hens *suffer*?” In 2009 a spokesman for a company proposing to introduce a mega-dairy in Lincolnshire declared on the radio that “cows do not belong in fields”.

In the 17th century, Descartes and others put forward the idea that animals are mere automata, which simply react mechanically to stimuli and do not experience pleasure or pain. Unbelievable as it may seem, this view took hold and has held the scientific establishment in its grip until now. However, there is now so much evidence (if such were needed) that animals are sentient beings, that the EU has recognized their status as such in one of its Directives.

Doom and Gloom?

Does this mean that things are changing for the better? I believe that the situation is mixed, because on the one hand some sectors of Western society are becoming more aware of these issues, and there are farmers – in India, Mexico and the USA,

for example – who have reverted to mixed farming and found it not only morally satisfying, but also profitable. On the other hand there are countries like China where meat consumption is on the increase and animal welfare standards are horrendous. Battery cages of the old type have been banned in the EU, but ‘enriched cages’ (with perches) are still allowed. Consumers can help the process of change by making animal welfare and environmental choices when buying food. Even if these choices may not be immediately world-changing, it is a principle of moral philosophy, as Kant pointed out, to do what one believes to be right, as if it would become “a universal law”.

Julian Scott

(1) This article is based on a recent book with this title by Philip Lymbery and Isabel Oakeshott



Archetypal Astrology: re-enchanting the cosmos

In the last 50 years astrology has started to gain a level of intellectual respectability which would have been unthinkable before. This has been thanks to the recent contributions of many brilliant and open-minded thinkers who have come to embrace the teachings of this ancient discipline. A long time has passed since Voltaire defined astrology as “the mad daughter of a wise mother”. Since then, as many of the strongholds of materialistic science have begun to crumble and the ‘grandchildren’ of the Age of Enlightenment have started to loosen their grip, astrology has begun to build its own renaissance.

For me, this steady rise of the astrological outlook is helping to rebalance the ‘disenchanted’ worldview of the cosmos which modern man has decided to inhabit. In the last few centuries, philosophers and scientists have rendered the cosmos meaningless and inert, emptying it of all its intrinsic meaning and purpose, its symbolic and archetypal character, as well as its dimension of immanent order. As Richard Tarnas contends, it has perhaps been the task of astrology to bring about the transformation that the times demand: to show that the universe is not in fact lifeless and meaningless, but is profoundly meaningful, intelligent, permeated with mind, spiritual depth and mystery.

The essential features of this emerging astrological view are not based on the fatalistic and fortune telling approach which is still so popular. The focus of this ‘new’ approach is the study of the planetary archetypes that astrology uses. These archetypes can be understood as universal and ordering principles that have a defined range of general thematic meanings and qualities which underlie human existence. The archetypal principles associated with the planets reveal patterns of meaning

not only at an individual (or psychological) level but also at a cosmic level (like the Greek ‘Archai’- they are seen as cosmic, objective, primordial forms of a Universal Mind).

Archetypal astrology suggests that, by interpreting the meaning of the position of the planets in relationship to each other (their ‘geometrical relationship’ or ‘astrological aspects’), we can gain a deeper insight into the archetypal dynamics underlying human experience. We can also gain a greater understanding of the shifting dynamics of both cultural history and individual biography.



Helios on a relief from Ilion, early 4th-century BC

In brief, these are the fascinating glimpses which a revived astrology is bringing us and which in time could lead us out of the disenchanted cosmology of the modern era and back to a universe imbued with archetypal meaning, intelligence and significance.

Agostino Dominici

PHILOSOPHICAL HUMOR



“My report is about how important it is to save paper, electricity, and other resources. I’ll send it to you telepathically.”

Some inspiring quotes

“One machine can do the work of fifty ordinary men. No machine can do the work of one extraordinary man. - Elbert Hubbard

“The mind of a sage, even when angered, is never perturbed. Can a man heat the waters of the sea with a lighted straw?”
- Hitopadesha

“History, for better or worse, is made by those who never give up.”
- Stephen Kotkin

William Morris, a 19th century idealist

Although perhaps most famous as an English textile designer, William Morris (24 March 1834 – 3 October 1896) was also an artist, writer, translator and socialist activist. Inspired by the philosophy of John Ruskin (art critic and champion of the Pre-Raphaelites), Morris was against the tasteless industrial production of arts and promoted the hand-crafted art of artisans, whom he saw as artists. Interested in medieval history and architecture, he also appreciated the values of chivalry and the sense of community that he believed was missing in his time. Morris joined a 'Brotherhood' that later on gave birth to the Arts and Crafts Movement. Its ethos was that art should be affordable for all people and not only the elite.

He was also admired for his poems and novels. One of these tells the story of a young man who through knightly adventures sought the Well at the World's End, a well that has magic effects on those who drink from it. Interestingly, it is said that his writings influenced Tolkien. In his 40s Morris founded the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, the intention of which was to keep alive the historical element in ancient buildings and to repair rather than restore. Today this Society has to be notified of any changes to cultural heritage buildings.

The William Morris Society was founded in 1955. Exhibitions of his work can be found at Kelmscott House in Hammersmith, which was his house for 17 years until he died, and at the William Morris Gallery in Walthamstow.

Natalia Lema

William Morris, *La belle Iseult*, 1858.



Flu Pandemics

We have all experienced the flu at least once in our life. And even if the "common" flu kills between 250,000 and 500,000 people every year around the world, the media still warn us about the danger of flu pandemics such as swine flu (H1N1), which in 2009 killed around 9,000 people. So what is the big deal? Is it just a trick played by the media and pharmaceutical companies to scare us and make us buy the vaccines? Or is it a legitimate statement to make that a simple flu could kill millions of people?

I think there may be truth in both statements. We forget that in 1919 a flu pandemic known as Spanish Flu (also called H1N1) killed around 50 million people (3% of the world population). And it did not just kill "the old and the weak" but also plenty of young and strong men and women. Because the virus evolved and attacked the immune system, the stronger the immune system was, the more virulently the virus attacked. Hence the scientific community's fear of a rapidly evolving virus that can adapt

itself to vaccines and be transmitted easily (airborne). But history teaches us that whenever a city, a country or a civilisation's hygiene and/or way of life wasn't balanced, plagues (such as the Black Death) and other pandemics were easily propagated and had the effect of reducing the population. Such was the case of the above-mentioned Spanish flu, which was helped to propagate by the mass movement of troops and poor level of hygiene.

Florimond Krins

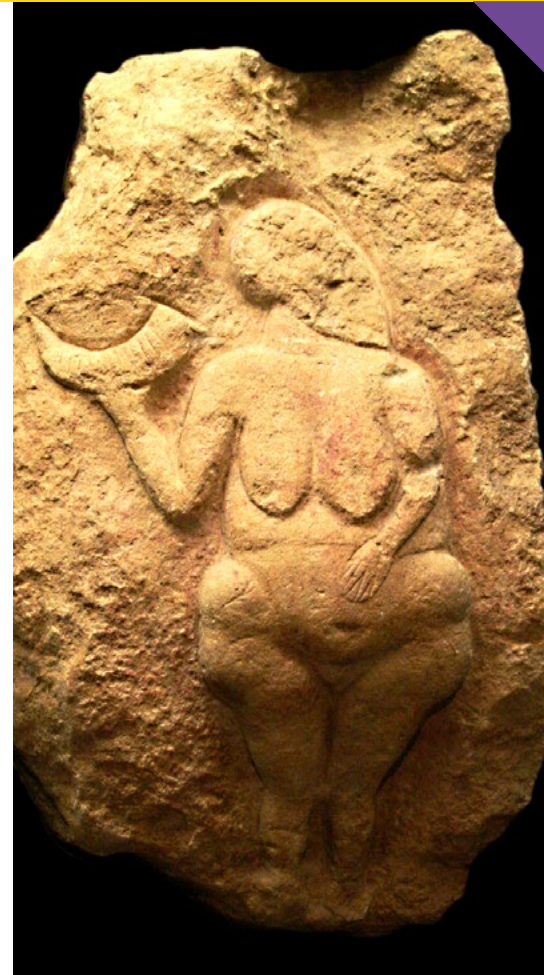
Gaia (Gaea), Mother Earth

In many cultures, the concept of Mother Earth, the Great Mother existed and was worshipped in various ways. In Egypt she was represented as Isis nursing Horus, in Mesopotamia as Cybele, a seated figure with a lion on each side of her and large breasts symbolising the fertility and protection of the harvest and grain; while in Rome, as Tellus or Terra Mater, she was known as Mother Earth.

In Greek Mythology, Gaia (Gaea) was known as the Mother Nature who provides the life force for all beings. She was the primal Earth Mother from whom all life came. According to Hesiod, in the beginning there was only Chaos and then broad-flanked Gaia (Earth) and Eros (primordial generative force) arose. Gaia brought forth her equal, Uranus (Sky). Then Titans and Titanides came into being, whence oceans, hills and all parts of the Earth arose. She was also an important Goddess in the second generation of Greek Gods and passed her powers to the second generation.

As an archetype, Gaia represents balance and harmony on the Earth and wholeness in the universe. Gaia is a symbol of the Earth where everything is connected and the living force of nature is maintained through the ecosystem. She rules over all the kingdoms, including minerals, plants, animals and humans, and she rules over the giving of Life.

Pinar Akhan



Venus of Laussel in the Bordeaux museum

The Anthropocene Age

More than 40 years have passed since the original report of The Club of Rome entitled *The Limits to Growth* was published by Meadows et al. The book demonstrated that an economy built on the continuous expansion of material consumption is not sustainable. It opened the eyes of many people to the environmental problems created by human activities. During the intervening four decades, several conferences and much research have confirmed the statements made in Meadows's book, but it seems that only minor changes have taken place.

Recently, the 33rd Report to The Club of Rome was published by Anders Wijkman and Johan Rockström. According to this, humanity is approaching a critical level in the consumption process: "we are very close to a saturation point, where the biosphere cannot handle additional stress... all signs reveal that our lifestyles and consumption patterns are on a violent

collision course with nature." The influence of human activity is having such a strong impact on the world that we may have entered a new geological age, called the Anthropocene. Major indicators of this are the higher level of CO₂ in the atmosphere, large dead zones in coastal areas, melting sea ice and permafrost, rising sea levels, ocean acidification, biodiversity loss, soil degradation, increasing consumption of water and energy by a growing population.

According to the new report, we need a more holistic approach to human development, which should be based on classical values like solidarity, fraternity and unselfishness. Otherwise, there will be more and more challenges that cause more and more pain and suffering. There is an old teaching that all the animals, plants and stones are the sisters and brothers of men. So why are we destroying our family and ourselves?

Istvan Orban

The Lord Mayor's Show

The Lord Mayor's Show is one of the best-known annual events in London as well as one of the longest-established, dating back to the 16th century. The 2014 show is on Saturday November 8th. Over the centuries this inconvenient journey became one of London's favourite rituals.

It all begins with the ancient and justified caution of King John in 1215. He tried to win London's support by allowing it to choose its own Mayor, but he insisted that immediately after election the Mayor must leave the safety of the City of London, travel upriver to distant Westminster and swear loyalty to the Crown. The 'Lord Mayor' after whom the show is named is the Lord Mayor of the City of London widely known informally as 'the Square Mile'.

It starts early at 8.30am with the river pageant. The original Lord Mayor's journey was always taken by river. The modern Lord Mayor celebrates that history by travelling to the City in a splendid flotilla of traditional Thames barges and small boats, including the famous QRB Gloriana. Tower Bridge opens in salute at 09.25 and the new Lord Mayor alights at HMS President ten minutes later.

The Lord Mayor's procession sets off from Mansion House. At 11.00am it leaves Mansion House, pauses at the Royal Courts while the Lord Mayor gives his oath and then returns up the Victoria Embankment at about 1pm and returns back to Mansion House just after 2.00pm. The parade involves over 7000 participants, 20 bands, 150 horses, hundreds of other carriages, carts, coaches and other vehicles including vintage cars, steam buses, tanks, tractors, ambulances, fire engines, unicycles, steamrollers, giant robots, helicopters, ships, penny farthings, beds and bathtubs and a gilded State Coach carrying the Lord Mayor himself.

Towards the head of the procession there are two stern but benevolent wicker giants, Gog and Magog, the traditional guardians of the City of London. They have been carried in the Lord Mayor's Show since the reign of Henry V. Gog and Magog, or sometimes Gogmagog and Corineus, are descended from mythical pagan giants and their origins lie in mediaeval legends of the early British Kings.

Nowadays Gog and Magog symbolize one of many links between the modern business institutions of the City and its ancient history. This is only the

most recent of many rebirths, which have long been symbolised by the phoenix on Magog's shield representing return after fire.

The custom of carrying effigies and images at festivals is sometimes explained as an echo of the days when the same festival would have revolved around a human sacrifice. The victim was replaced with a symbolic representation, and as the old rites were incorporated into the Church the sacrificial effigy became the saint who had made the sacrifice. The custom of carrying effigies at festivals was widespread in the middle ages both in England and on the continent, and the giants of myth were among them. The huge figures of Gog and Magog are the latest versions of pagan effigies that go back at least a thousand years.



Gog and Magog procession

To mark the end of the Lord Mayor's Show and the beginning of a new mayoral year, London's newly confirmed Lord Mayor launches a splendid fireworks display over the river Thames between Waterloo and Blackfriars at 5.15pm which last 10-15 minutes.

Excerpted from <http://lordmayorsshow.london> and http://www.londontown.com/London/London_Ceremonies_and_Traditions

Legacy of the Romans in Britain

by Gurpreet Virdee

Technology, architecture, language, government, town planning – even having feline pets: the extent of the Roman influence on the British Isles was such that it survives to this day, unmatched by any of the invading forces that followed them. The Saxons, Danes, Normans, Plantagenets, Tudors, Georgians and Victorians all aspired to have Britain part of a greater empire akin to the first imperialists. Along with the famously straight roads that cut their way through hills and across valleys came aqueducts, public libraries, cement and cats – yes, cats.

When the Romans retreated from the shores of Britain, they left behind a complex ordered society that had laws written in Latin, public notices and public baths, to name but a few things. Christianity also came to England with the Romans, as it was adopted as the state religion of the Roman Empire by the Emperor Constantine the Great in 380 AD. Even some of the foods that



are inextricably linked with Britain have their origins in the early Roman settlement. Items such as carrots, peas, turnips and pears all came from mighty Rome. So the next time you drink a glass of wine, pause and consider that grapes, wine and glass are a legacy of a formidable empire whose greatness continues to ripple into the future long after its demise.

Read more in our next issue...

Upcoming Events

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

Thu 20th November at 7 pm

The Wisdom of East and West in Stories and Myths

Enjoy a magical evening in support of UNESCO's World Philosophy Day, with philosophical treasures and food & drink. £8 (£5 conc.) Refreshments included.

Tue 25th November at 7:30 pm

Seminar: Mindfulness, Meditation and Living

Please, see website for more details.

Wed 21 Jan, 7.30 pm

Talk: The Astrology of Love and Relationships

Talk by Astrologer Israel Ajose. More details will be available on the website soon.

Fri 30 Jan, Fri 6 Feb, Fri 13 Feb, 7.00 – 9.30 pm

Mind – Best Friend or Worst Enemy?

This short course (3 Friday evenings) will explore the mind and mind-related topics such as consciousness, imagination, creativity and meditation.

**Starting dates for our 16-week
Philosophy Course:**

Wed 28 Jan, 7 pm

Mon 16 Feb, 7 pm

Tues 3 March, 7 pm

First Evening Free