NEW ACROPOLIS

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MAGAZINE



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THE CHALLENGE OF COMPLEXITY: EDGAR MORIN

GUARDIANS OF THE INNER FLAME: HOW TO STAY HUMAN IN THE AGE OF NOISE

THE SYMBOLISM OF MINERALS, PLANTS AND ANIMALS

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NEW ACROPOLIS



PHILOSOPHY AND EDUCATION FOR THE FUTURE

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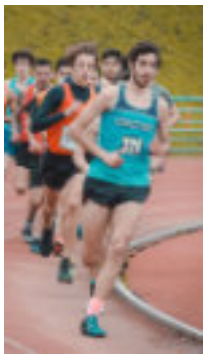
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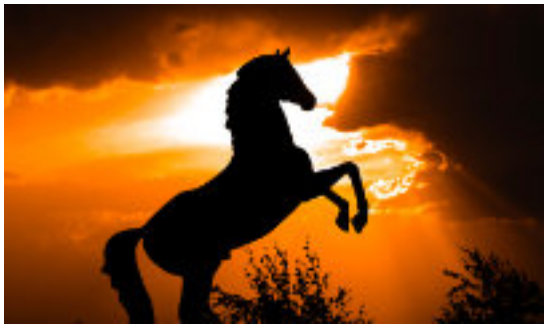
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EDITORIAL

BY
SABINE LEITNER

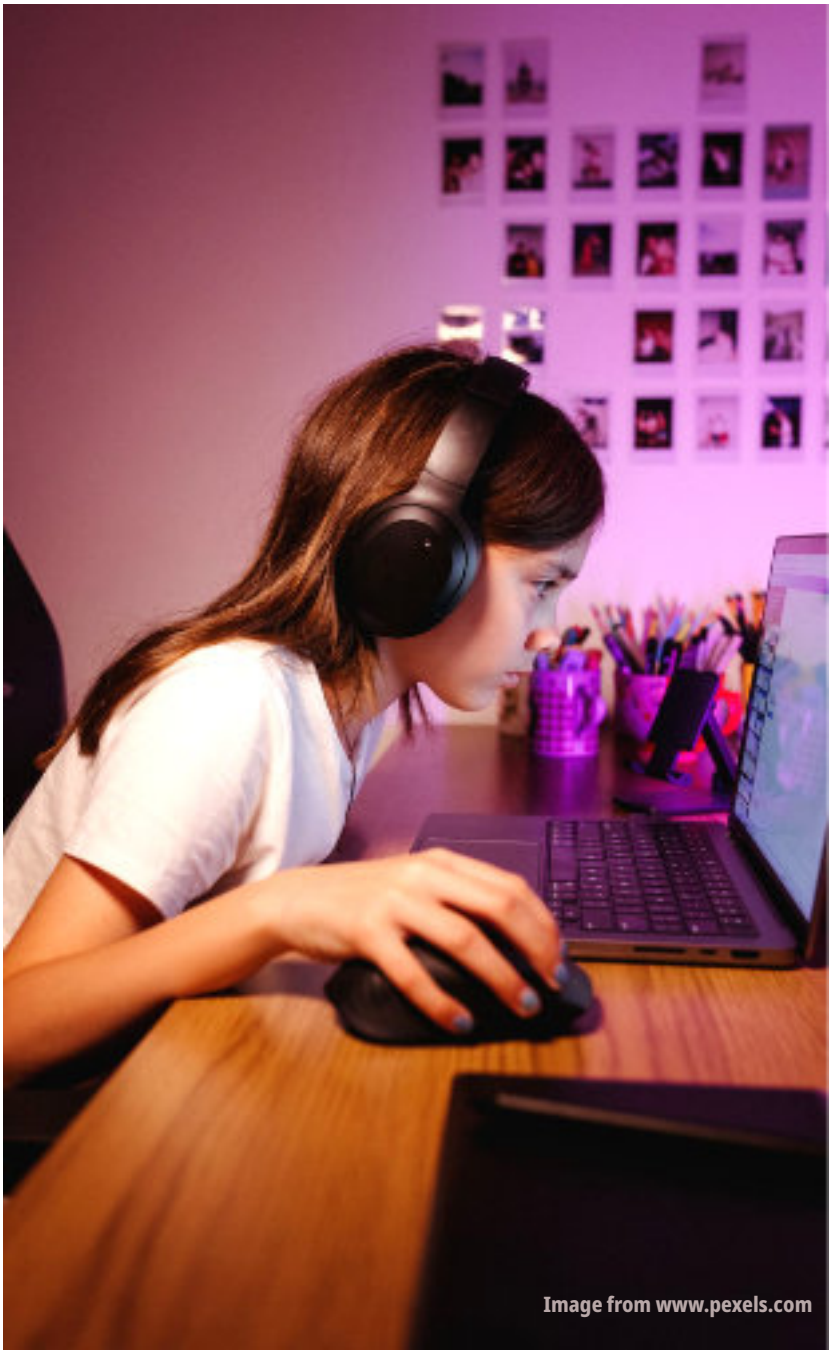


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Now or Later? The Need for 'Cathedral Thinking'

For a baby, only the now exists. The brain region that is responsible for imagining the future, long-term planning and self-control – the prefrontal cortex – hardly exists at birth, and it takes roughly 25 years to develop it fully and for humans to learn to delay gratification. We could say that adulthood and maturity are reached when we have the strength to master our impulses and to foresee and understand the long-term consequences of our actions.

Humanity survived and evolved exactly because of this ability. Already 2.5 million years ago we demonstrated thinking ahead by creating tools like hand axes that required us to walk for many miles to find the specific type of flint or obsidian, and then countless hours to shape and graft it. We also invented different methods to store food for the winter months.

But today we live in a world that often consciously tries to sabotage our impulse control and regress us to a less mature childhood stage. Targeted algorithmic adverts constantly flood us with things that it knows we are attracted to, and we are relentlessly manipulated to click, buy and scroll. Messages like "Buy Now, Pay later", 1–Click purchasing, "Only 2 items left!" are designed to trigger our

short-term survival instincts and inhibit our prefrontal cortex. The philosopher Roman Krznaric, author of *The good Ancestor*, thinks that this "traps us in the present" and "crowds out the possibilities of tomorrow." Like a baby that is trapped in the present moment because it cannot yet understand the concept of future, our attention gets trapped in the present because the 'now' completely takes over our thinking, feeling and acting.

Yet the times we live in require more long-term thinking than ever before in human history. Why? Because the technology we have developed has greater, more powerful and more long-term consequences than any other human action in the past. To use an analogy: the faster we drive a car, the further we have to be able to look ahead on the road. We are creating an ever-accelerating technology that no one can control anymore, and we turn a blind eye to even those consequences that we can foresee.

In addition to that, we have also created systems that favour short-termism over long-term outcomes. Just think of our short election cycles where politicians are under pressure to deliver visible and measurable results before the next vote. These measures don't address the root of the problem and often cause even more long-term problems, which are then passed on to future generations. Our deficits are rising because the introduction of unpopular measures would certainly result in not being elected. We continue to overuse antibiotics in medicine and agriculture although we know that we are just creating superbugs. We need more housing, industrial farming and more AI datacentres *NOW*, even if this will probably lead to severe local water shortages and possible sudden land collapse in the future.

There are noteworthy counter-movements. In 2016, Wales introduced the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act which requires public bodies to assess the impact of current policy on citizens 30 years on. And the *Future Design Movement* in Japan requires public infrastructure planners in some towns to represent the citizens of the year 2060 by wearing ceremonial robes. It is also clear that short-term thinking is entirely valid in certain places and at certain times: in A&E, doctors won't focus on cholesterol levels but on keeping someone alive. But if we all, including politicians and our institutions, are only focused on firefighting current problems, we will not only live our lives dictated by circumstances but also create much bigger problems ahead. To survive and flourish, we need both long-term and short-term thinking. However, long-term thinking is currently severely inhibited and undermined.

It is true that long-term thinking requires trust – the belief that there will be a future and that it will be worth the sacrifices of today. The current decline in long-term thinking also reflects that we don't believe in a better or even stable future anymore. That's why the abovementioned philosopher Roman Krznaric advocates 'cathedral thinking': the stone masons of the gothic cathedrals knew they were building something that they would never see finished.

Are we humans mature enough yet to withstand short-term and short-lived benefits in favour of long-term ones? And would we be able to do this not only for ourselves but for future generations we will never know? Gaylord Nelson, the founder of Earth Day, said: "The ultimate test of a man's conscience may be his willingness to sacrifice something today for future generations whose thankful cries will not be heard."

Sabine Leitner is the Director of New Acropolis UK.

GUARDIANS OF THE INNER FLAME:

HOW TO STAY HUMAN IN THE AGE OF NOISE

PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIETY

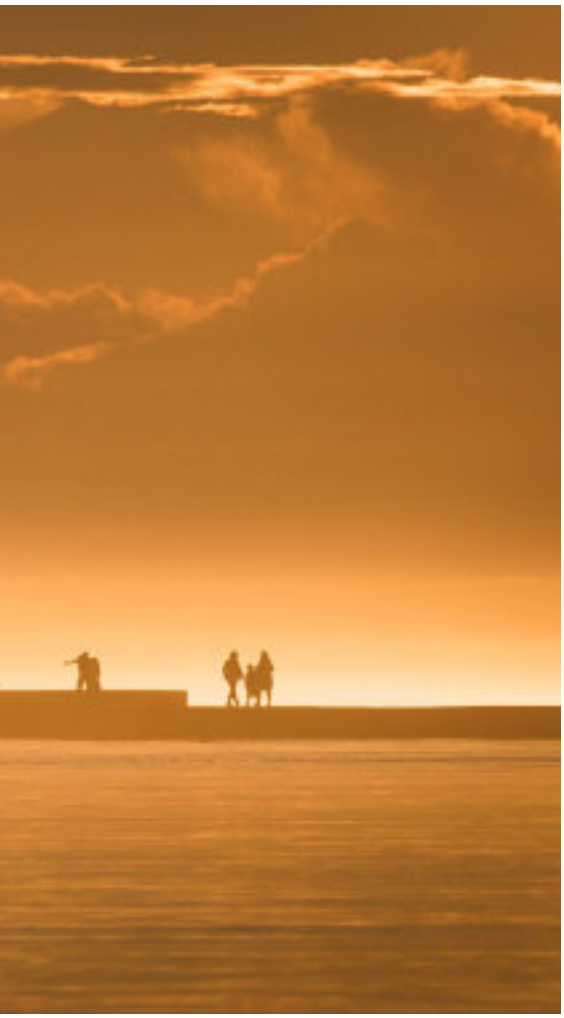
BY
LASZLO BALIZS



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In April 1887, *The Times*, a highly respected British newspaper, published a letter that claimed to be from Charles Stewart Parnell, the Irish nationalist leader. The letter expressed sympathy for those behind the Phoenix Park assassinations of 1882. This accusation was a serious setback. Parnell, one of the most influential political figures in Britain and Ireland, was suddenly seen as someone who supported political violence.
But there was a major problem. The letter turned out to be a fake.
It took almost two years for the truth to come out. In 1889, during a judicial inquiry, journalist Richard

We have many more ways to share our thoughts, but are we better at listening?



Pigott, who had provided the forged letter, was exposed. His lie unravelled partly because he always spelled "hesitency" instead of "hesitancy."

It's remarkable, really. One man's reputation was damaged, public opinion shifted and a leading newspaper published something untrue. Yet the truth was hidden in a single misspelled word. This whole story reminds us of an uncomfortable truth about ourselves: we often believe things not because they are true, but because they match what we already want to believe.

Now, more than a hundred years later, information travels around the world in seconds. Knowledge that once took years to find is now available instantly on your phone. But I wonder if we are wiser, even though we have more information. We have many more ways to share our thoughts, but are we better at listening? We've figured out how to connect almost everything. But maybe we still haven't learned how to connect with ourselves.

More than two thousand years ago, in Book VII of his *Republic*, Plato described a group of prisoners chained inside a cave, watching shadows projected upon a wall. Having never experienced anything else, they mistake those shadows for reality. One prisoner eventually breaks free and discovers the world outside the cave. At first, the light hurts his eyes. He struggles to adjust. Slowly, he starts to see that what he thought was reality was only its appearance. The allegory is familiar, but what it means is still unsettling.

What if the cave is not just a place of ignorance, but a state of mind? What if the chains are our attachments to opinions, identities and easy explanations? And what if the shadows are not just the information we get, but also the stories we tell ourselves?

Today, our cave has a much better technology. Its walls are lit by screens, its shadows

come through algorithms and its prisoners can argue with each other across the world. We have even learned to carry the cave around in our pockets. But Plato's main question is still the same: how do we tell what only seems true from what is true? The philosopher does not leave the cave by becoming more opinionated. He escapes by questioning his own assumptions, looking at his motives and patiently turning toward something greater than himself. This is uncomfortable. Truth often challenges our identity, our loyalties and our need to belong. But maybe real freedom starts when our need to be right ends.

There's another question to consider. If we manage to escape our own cave, what responsibility do we have to those who are still inside? History teaches that great injustices are rarely caused by powerful individuals acting alone. Institutions, fear, obedience and the slow willingness of ordinary people to give up their own judgement can also keep these injustices going. We see this attitude in phrases we often hear:

I was only following instructions... Everyone else was doing it... There was nothing I could do.

These phrases show us something uncomfortable about ourselves. When people keep passing responsibility to others, it can eventually vanish. Obedience can turn into indifference and silence can slowly become acceptance. Of course, we must think about responsibility together with freedom and the situation someone is in. A person who risks punishment for resisting should not be judged as if they had endless options. Still, this brings up a question that goes beyond any one time in history: at what point does our participation in a system become a surrender of our conscience?

We often think that governments, institutions and powerful people are the main forces shaping civilization. But civilization is also built from countless everyday decisions that people make quietly. And maybe this is where our real responsibility starts? Not just in questioning the world, but in having the courage to question ourselves.

In 1927, the French philosopher Julien Benda published *The Treason of the Intellectuals*, warning that intellectuals were abandoning universal values in favour of nationalism, political passions and ideological loyalties. His concern was not a lack of education, but the separation of intelligence from moral responsibility. A person can



The 'Weighing of the Heart'. Image from Wikipedia

Obedience can turn into indifference and silence can slowly become acceptance.



be very intelligent and still lack wisdom. Someone may have impressive qualifications and make strong arguments, but still not see the humanity in those they disagree with. Intelligence can sometimes make prejudice more dangerous because it gives it the look of reason.

Plato understood this distinction. In *The Republic*, he argued that those entrusted with governing must cultivate justice, self-mastery and an understanding of the Good. For him, the main question was not just who should have power, but what kind of person could be trusted to use it? We often debate which leaders should run society. We rarely ask what qualities should guide ourselves. And yet, how can we expect justice from our institutions if we don't work to build justice in our own hearts?

The ancient Egyptians approached human responsibility through Ma'at, the principle of truth, justice, balance and harmony.

The ancient Egyptians approached human responsibility through Ma'at, the principle of truth, justice, balance and harmony. Ma'at represented more than social order. It expressed an ideal relationship between the individual, society and the cosmos. In Egyptian religious symbolism, the heart of the deceased was weighed against the feather of Ma'at. It's an extraordinary image. It wasn't wealth, achievements, social status, or reputation that was weighed, but the heart itself.

We don't have to take this image literally to see its deeper meaning. It invites us to look at the weight of our actions, the honesty of our intentions, and the link between our inner life and the world we create.

What is left of our character when no one is watching? What guides our choices when honesty is inconvenient? Technology, ideology, or social approval can't answer these questions. They require something much harder: facing ourselves.

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, one of the founders of the Theosophical Society, placed the spiritual unity of humanity at the centre of her philosophical vision. The first object of the Theosophical Society was to form a nucleus of universal brotherhood, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour. Whatever we think about Theosophy's deeper teachings, this ethical goal deserves our attention. It suggests that beneath our cultural, political and social differences, there is a deeper human connection that asks for recognition, not just tolerance.

But universal brotherhood is not just a nice idea. It is a practice. It asks us to see the dignity in people we disagree with, to show compassion when anger would be easier and to seek understanding without giving up our principles. It's much easier to talk about humanity than to stay humane during an argument.

Here, several philosophical traditions may come together.

Plato challenges us to seek truth. Ma'at reminds us to cultivate balance. Blavatsky emphasizes human unity. Benda demands that we retain our conscience within the collective. Their teachings are different, but together they invite us to consider one idea:
the transformation of society cannot be separated from the transformation of the human being. It's tempting, especially when we look at the world today, to become cynical. We see political division, armed conflict, social fragmentation and technologies developing faster than our ability to understand their consequences.
Young people are repeatedly told that the world is in crisis and that their generation must somehow repair it.
That's a lot to ask of someone who is still trying to understand themselves, find meaningful work and maybe afford a home. But I do not believe despair is the answer. Nor do we need another generation simply angry at everything. Anger may wake us up to injustice, but on its own, it can't teach us how to build something better.
For that, we need character.
We need the courage to question our own beliefs, not just those of others. We need the patience to listen before judging and the discipline to tell information from knowledge and knowledge from wisdom. Most of all, we need to rediscover the value of service.
Young people today often feel pressure to pick a side.
Political movements, protests and social campaigns appeal to our sense of justice, compassion and belonging.
While it is natural to want to stand up against suffering and injustice, it is important not to mistake taking a side for truly understanding an issue.
Before joining a movement or repeating its slogans, we should ask ourselves:
Do I really know what I am supporting?
Have I listened to people who disagree?
Am I acting from my conscience, or just from anger, fear or the wish to fit in?
The world is usually more complicated than the banners we hold or the slogans we chant. We can recognize suffering without needing to hate anyone, question injustice without

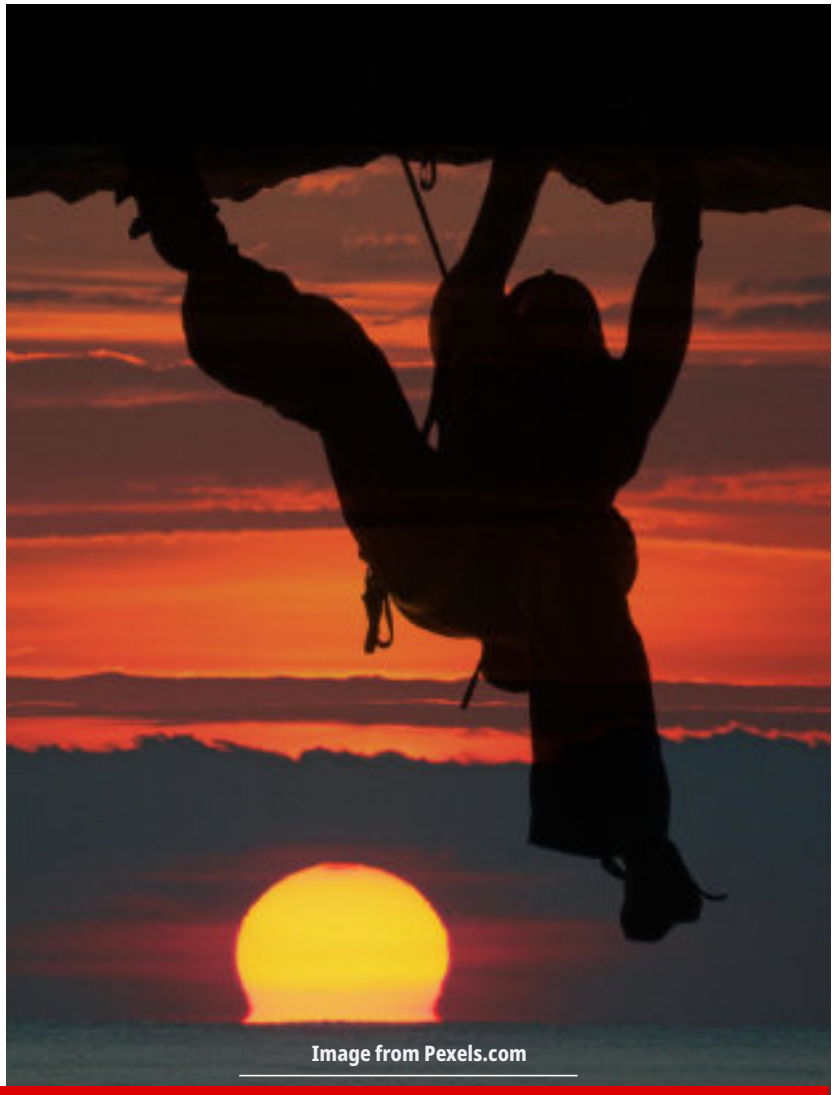


Image from Pexels.com

losing our compassion and stand up for our beliefs without giving up our own judgement to the crowd. Sometimes courage means speaking out, but other times it means not just repeating what everyone else is saying.

We should also remember that caring about others is not limited to demonstrations. It can be shown in helping someone in need, serving our community, learning more, making friends with people who are different from us and taking responsibility for the world around us. What matters most is not just which side we are on, but whether we have thought about why we are there and if our actions match the values we say we believe in. True independence may not mean staying out of the world but being able to take part in it without losing who we are.

Throughout history, civilizations have risen and fallen. Institutions have changed, monuments have crumbled and political certainties have given way to new ones. Yet something has always been passed from one generation to the next – not merely knowledge, but the human search for truth, beauty, justice and meaning.

We might picture this inheritance as a small flame. It's a flame carried by philosophers who questioned accepted beliefs, teachers who kept wisdom alive, people who resisted injustice and ordinary people who chose decency when it would have been easier not to. It belongs to no nation, religion or political movement. It belongs to humanity.



Image from Unsplash.com

Protecting this inner flame doesn't mean pulling away from the world or thinking we're better than others. It means taking part in the world without letting its confusion become our own. It means staying politically aware without getting trapped by ideology, defending truth without losing compassion and seeking justice without giving in to hatred.

We cannot control every event of our time or correct every injustice. But we can look at our own thoughts, take responsibility for what we do, and refuse to dehumanize others. Maybe this is what our time needs most. Not more noise, but more clarity. Not more powerful personalities, but stronger character. The flame has survived far darker periods of human history.

The question is whether we will have the courage to carry it forward.

The future is shaped not only by those with the most power, the latest technology or the loudest voices. It is also shaped by those who remember what it means to be human.



St Margaret of Antioch . Wikimedia

THE MYSTICAL AND THE EVERYDAY:

THE PAINTINGS OF FRANCISCO DE ZURBARAN

ART

BY
SIAN PHILLIPS

Seville, 1614: the young artist Francisco de Zurbaran (1598-1664) arrives from his hometown of Fuente de Cantos in Extremadura to continue his artistic training. Seville at the beginning of the 17th century is a beautiful, bustling and wealthy city. Spain had been a colonial power for over 100 years, having colonized much of South America in the preceding decades. Seville was awarded the royal monopoly and, as such, was the only port permitted to trade with the Spanish Americas, receiving the vast riches that flowed from the 'New World' (silver being the most prized commodity). Coupled with this commercial energy, the mood in Seville was one of strong counter-reformation feeling. Spain had strongly supported and rallied behind the decrees of the Council of Trent. Held by the Catholic

church in Northern Italy between 1545 and 1563, the Council issued key statements and clarifications of the Church's doctrine and teachings, as a way of countering the increasing influence of the Protestant Reformation in Europe. The Council's decrees covered everything from scripture, the biblical canon, sacred tradition, original sin, justification, salvation, the sacraments, the Mass, and the veneration of saints. All of this would have been taken up by the many religious orders that existed in Seville at the time of Zurbaran's arrival in the city. The convents and monasteries of Seville received visits from bishops and clergy, who, as Ignacio Cono Rivero writes: "...were appointed to ensure full compliance with the dictates of the Council of Trent, leading to a new focus on sincerity in religion and a strong acceptance of mysticism."

This is the world in which Zurbaran worked, an environment of vast material riches, alongside a sense of intense religious devotion, with practices that promoted direct, personal encounters with God. The major exhibition of Zurbaran's work taking place at the Louvre in Paris this autumn (and shown until recently at the National Gallery in London) transports us to this world, which is so different from our current lives, and amply demonstrates the artist's ability to create visions of supreme devotion. Although less well known than his contemporary Diego Velasquez, Zurbaran's paintings are incredibly beautiful. They convey a sense of the mystical and are rich in symbolism.

Although less well known than his contemporary Diego Velasquez, Zurbaran's paintings are incredibly beautiful.

At the centre of the exhibition is a room dedicated to Zurbaran's paintings of individual saints. Particularly arresting are the individual paintings of virgin saints depicted as if they are real women, wearing clothes associated with contemporary fashion. This is very much Zurbaran's own vision: depicting an incredible richness of dress, against a blank background, the saints are both of this world and not. The richness of their dress grounds them in the material world of the human senses, but the blank backgrounds highlight them



Still life with lemons. Image from Wikimedia

as objects of devotion; they are sacred figures beyond time and space.

The paintings were created as objects of private devotion and would have been contemplated during periods of prayer. The saints are visions of Christian virtue, using symbolism to convey their divine qualities to the viewer. In three of the paintings: 'Saint Apollonia, c.1636-40', 'Saint Catherine of Alexandria, c.1640' and 'Saint Elizabeth of Thuringia, c.1640', the saints are all shown holding a palm frond. Originating in the Near East and Mediterranean world, the palm is an ancient symbol of victory, triumph, peace and eternal life. In Ancient Egypt the palm had a multifaceted symbolic meaning, representing life, rebirth and divine protection in funerary practices. In Ancient Greece the palm was presented to victorious athletes. In the Christian world, Jesus is greeted by crowds waving palms as he enters the city of Jerusalem in triumph on Palm Sunday. As for Zurbaran's paintings, the images of Saint Apollonia and Saint Catherine of Alexandria specifically show them holding the martyrs' palm, which symbolizes the triumph of the spirit over flesh. The palm is a resilient plant, bending but not breaking during intense storms, which, in a spiritual context, represents the ability to endure extreme physical hardship by remaining rooted in faith. They demonstrate to the devotee that this is the ultimate victory: the triumph of the soul over worldly suffering and physical mortality.

This idea of spiritual victory comes to the fore in another of the paintings, one of Zurbaran's great masterpieces: 'Saint Margaret of Antioch, c.1630-4'. The story of Saint Margaret is a particularly fantastical one: according to the *Golden Legend*, a medieval compilation of saints' biographies, she was cast out by her pagan father when she converted to Christianity, where she turned to working as a shepherdess (hence the incredible costume she is wearing in Zurbaran's painting). Whilst working in the fields she catches the eye of Olybrius, a Roman prefect who proposes marriage, but she refuses to renounce her faith. This leads to her torture, where, at one point, she is swallowed by Satan in the shape of a dragon, from which she escapes alive when the cross she carries irritates the dragon's innards. Symbolically, much like Jonah emerging from the belly of the whale, or Theseus defeating the Minotaur in the Labyrinth, she emerges victorious from the darkness of the unconscious (as represented by the dragon), her soul unscathed by matter.





St. Apollonia, 1636. Image from Wikimedia

The painting beautifully conveys this: the dragon can be seen at Saint Margaret's feet, skulking in the darkness, overcome by the Saint, who is shown fully lit and luminous. All the female saints painted by Zurbaran appear serene in their martyrdom, confident in their spiritual victory, which would have no doubt been inspiring to their devotees. But it is not just images of saints that Zurbaran imbues with a sense of the mystical and the symbolic. His still lives are some of the most exquisite ever created. His 'Still Life with Lemons, Oranges and a Rose, 1633' shows everyday objects elevated to inspire deep meditation. As with the images of the saints, the items are shown against a dark background. This invites quiet contemplation and allows the viewer to appreciate the beauty of light reflecting on the different surfaces. The ceramic cup of water with delicately curved handles sitting at the right of the composition is particularly beautiful. It is shown resting on a shiny metal plate, made of pewter or silver. A rose in full bloom balances on the plate's edge. Viewers in the 17th century would have immediately recognized its religious significance: these are all symbols of the Virgin Mary. The water and cup symbolize her purity. The rose itself is thornless, which is believed to signify the Immaculate Conception. According to the third-century saint, Ambrose, the roses in the Garden of Eden only grew thorns after Adam and Eve had sinned. Even when painting everyday objects, Zurbaran invites devotees to contemplate the profound mysteries of the Christian faith.

Zurbaran's paintings are visions of beauty that speak to us from across the centuries. They have an incredible material richness which is easy to admire, be it the fantastical shepherdess costume of Saint Margaret of Antioch or the simple everyday objects like the ceramic cup in his still lives. But, if we allow ourselves to enter into the world of 17th century Spain, we can perhaps connect with that sense of intense devotion and begin to understand these paintings on a deeper level. We can become aware of the symbolic attributes contained within them, all of which hold profound meaning. Through contemplating these symbols, perhaps we can access our own sense of devotion and maybe even feel something of our own spiritual victory.



Photo from Pexels.com

ESOTERICA

BY
Michael Lassman

THE SYMBOLIC AND ESOTERIC ASPECT OF SPORT

Across two decades on the rugby pitch, the moment the two packs engage in the game's first scrum remains etched in my memory. It is a threshold of profound intensity – a quiet reservoir of raw, internal power that suddenly detonates into kinetic force. Sixteen bodies lock into a single, straining entity, translating unseen resolve into visceral physical presence. Experiences like these revealed to me that sport can sometimes be far more than a mere physical contest or mundane recreation; at its core, it can even border on the sacred. Though my rugby days are sadly far behind me, continuing to play other sports and observing from the sidelines keeps that original spark alive. It is this lifelong journey that has shaped my view of sport as an inherently transformative experience.

Sport can be understood in a way that reaches far beyond entertainment or competition, as it remains one of the last arenas in modern life where ritual, myth and transformation unfold in full public view. In a world that increasingly prizes speed, distraction and superficial engagement, sport continues to offer moments of depth, intensity and shared

Beneath the surface of physical performance lie hidden layers: ritual structures, mythic storytelling and spiritual discipline..



Photo from Pexels.com

meaning. If we look at sport through the lens of esoteric philosophy[1], it can be seen as a living spiritual practice, a doorway into deeper human understanding and a place where the inner life and the outer world meet. To approach sport esoterically is to recognize that it contains a symbolic language, expressing our desires and fears, archetypes and our longing for transcendence. As I hope to show in this article, beneath the surface of physical performance lie hidden layers: ritual structures, mythic storytelling and spiritual discipline. Sport then becomes a mirror in which the human soul can see itself reflected, sometimes clearly, sometimes distorted, but always revealing something of our essence. It is a theatre of human possibility, where we witness not only what bodies can do, but what spirits can endure.

The ritual element

A match or race can be understood as a ritual. It has a beginning, middle and end; a narrative arc that mirrors the structure of ancient ceremonies. It is governed by rules that act as sacred boundaries, creating a container for the drama. These rules are not merely regulations; they are the invisible architecture that allows deeper meaning to

1. The word 'esoteric' is much misunderstood. I use it here in its original meaning of 'going inwards'. So by 'esoteric philosophy' I mean a philosophy that tries to discover the inner meaning and causes of phenomena.

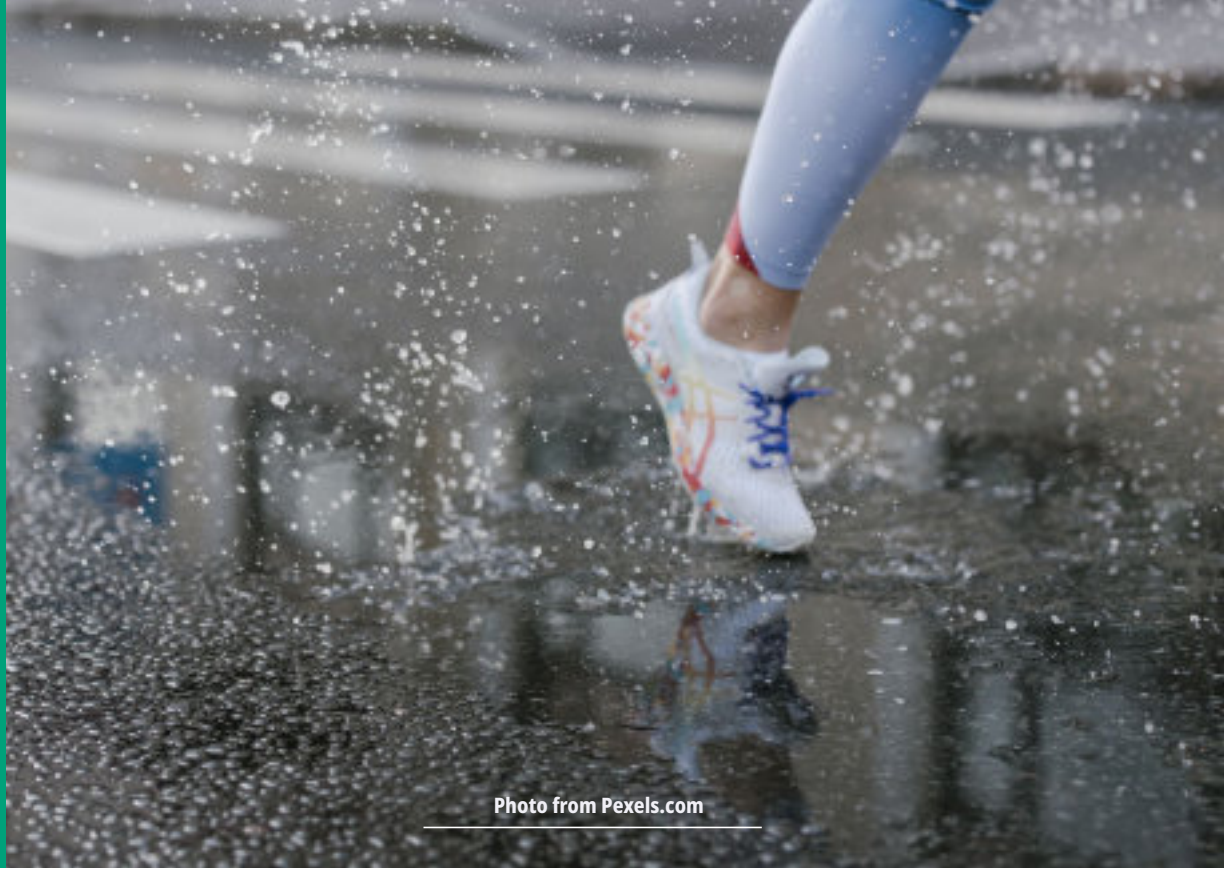


Photo from Pexels.com

emerge. Uniforms function as ritual garments, transforming ordinary individuals into symbolic figures who carry the hopes, fears and projections of those who watch them. The stadium becomes a modern temple, a place where thousands gather to witness a shared narrative, to participate in a collective emotional experience. Sport is ritual disguised as spectacle, a continuation of ancient human practices in contemporary form. Thousands gather to witness a drama older than civilization itself. Joseph Campbell reminds us that "Ritual is the reenactment of myth." Perhaps then, sport is myth enacted in real time.

The initiatory element in sport

Within this ritual, the athlete stands as a 'candidate for initiation'. Training becomes purification; discipline becomes devotion. A season resembles a hero's journey, marked by trials, setbacks, breakthroughs and moments of revelation. Devotion to development of body and spirit are essential elements as the athlete confronts adversity, learns resilience and discovers capacities they did not know they possessed. The Roman Stoic, Gaius Musonius Rufus said, "We will train both soul and body when we accustom ourselves to cold, heat, thirst, hunger, scarcity of food, hardness of bed, abstaining from pleasures and enduring pains." Perhaps these represent some of the demands placed on today's successful athletes.

The opponent is not solely the enemy; in this guise they are only there to be beaten. They are also the initiator, a force that compels growth, much like the great figures of epic literature who reveal the hero's true nature, a Minotaur or Medusa. In this sense, every contest is a meeting with oneself, mediated through another. Furthermore, we acknowledge that there is an enemy within. The Bhagavad Gita warns that "The Self can be the friend and also the enemy of the self". Surely, we can see this play out in the sportspeople we know so well.

Some esoteric traditions teach that the body is a sacred instrument, both a temple and a laboratory. Athletes understand this intuitively. Breath becomes spirit; pain becomes teacher; movement becomes prayer. The body is not merely a machine but a vessel for transformation, revealing truths long before the mind catches up. Through repetition, strain and refinement, athletes learn to listen to the body's wisdom to understand its limits and its potential. In

In these moments, the ego dissolves, time shifts and action become effortless.

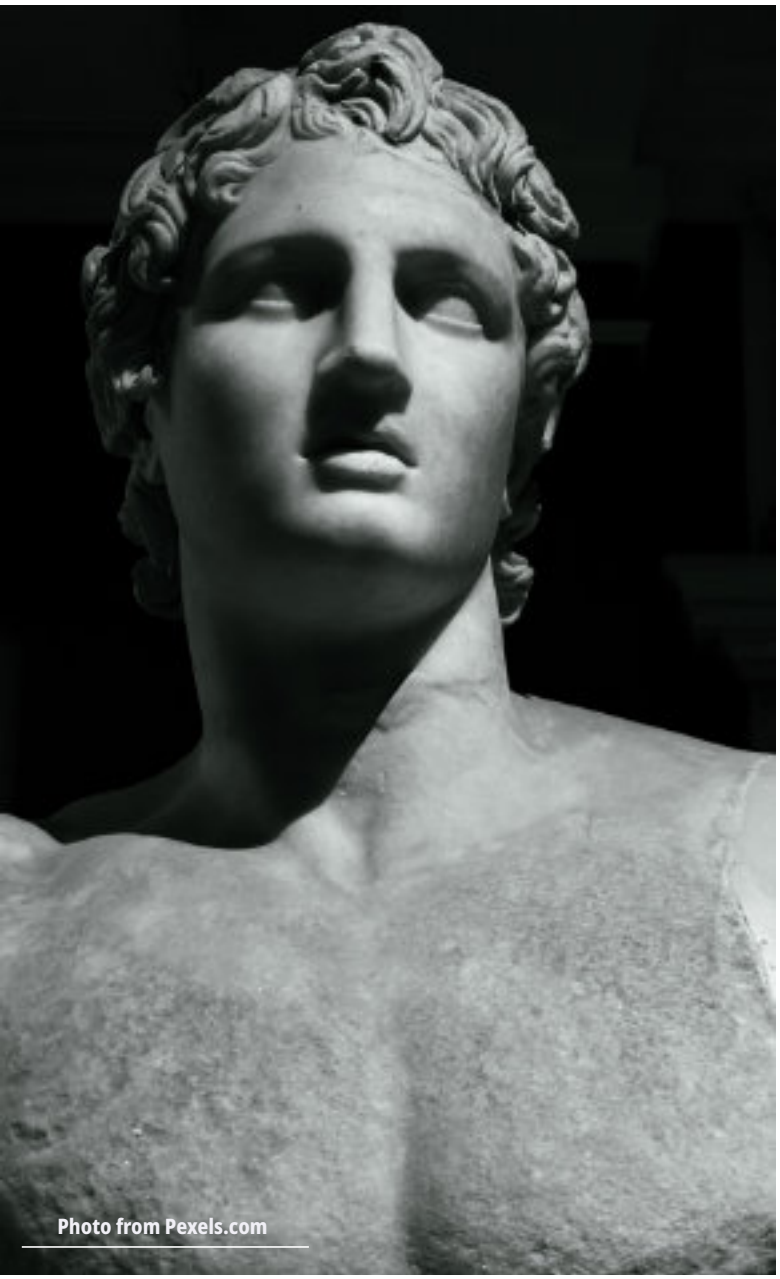


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doing so, they participate in an ancient concept of embodied knowledge.

The magic of flow and the alchemy of transformation

Flow state, familiar to many athletes, is one of the most accessible mystical experiences in contemporary life. In these moments, the ego dissolves, time shifts and action become effortless. Athletes describe it in language akin to meditation or trance, where the boundary between self and world becomes thin, sometimes dissolving entirely. This state is not accidental; it arises from the union of skill, focus and surrender, a faint glimpse of what mystics have long described as a moment of unity and clarity with a profound presence.

Within sport we also recognize the echo of ancient alchemy. Not the transformation of base matter into gold, but the transformation of the self. Fatigue gives rise to strength, whilst inner chaos demands mastery and raw potential, refined skill. The athlete is both alchemist and substance, undergoing continual change in pursuit of incremental gains. Their journey resembles the path toward inner discovery, where each step is both physical and metaphysical, each challenge an invitation to deeper understanding.

Archetypes in sport

Archetypes animate sport at every level. The Warrior embodies courage, confrontation and sacrifice, teaching us to face challenges directly, while warning against the shadow of aggression. The Strategist represents intelligence, pattern recognition and foresight, reminding us that clarity of mind is a form of power. The Hermit, found in endurance athletes, embodies solitude, patience and inner stillness, revealing the meditative dimension of repetition. The Trickster brings creativity, unpredictability and play, reminding us that sport is also joy, imagination and humour, though its shadow is chaos without purpose. These archetypes appear across cultures and eras and each of us

resonates with certain patterns more strongly than others. When we watch sport, we are not only observing individuals; we are witnessing archetypal energies in motion.

Today the stadia where crowds gather can be compared to sacred spaces. They are containers of collective emotion. When thousands focus on the same moment, the atmosphere becomes charged. The boundary between performer and audience dissolves and the stadium evolves into a single living organism. The energy of the crowd shapes the event, lifting athletes to extraordinary heights or weighing them down with expectation. Symbols and ceremonies reinforce this sacred quality. Event opening ceremonies are like invocations, team colours form tribal identities, chants mimic magical incantations and trophies play the part of sacred objects, the holy grail of individual or team achievement. These elements connect sport to something older and deeper than the game itself, reminding us that humans have always gathered to witness feats of courage, skill and endurance.

Beyond victory and defeat

Competition, viewed from a more esoteric point of view, is not about defeating another person but about revealing the self. The opponent exposes weaknesses and fears. Victory expands the ego, even as defeat dissolves it. Both are necessary and both serve as initiations. Sport can become a training ground for inner life, a place where character is tested and shaped. The lessons learned on the field or track have the potential to echo far beyond it, influencing how individuals navigate relationships, work and personal challenges.

Through this process, sport can be a tool for learning emotional mastery. It can help to cultivate resilience, humility, surrender and



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Simple actions – tying shoelaces, chalking hands, stepping onto a pitch – become rituals through repetition and intention.

the acceptance of limitation. It teaches how to remain centred in chaos and how to recover from disappointment: lessons that are embodied rather than abstract, lived rather than theorized. Athletes learn to regulate emotion under pressure and transform frustration into focus. They learn to meet failure with curiosity rather than despair. These are spiritual skills as much as psychological ones and are perhaps a lesson for us all, athlete or not.

The crowd as a collective consciousness

At times, sport generates a 'collective soul'. When a crowd moves as one cheering or chanting, a temporary collective consciousness forms. People with nothing else in common become one organism. This is the true nature of what has become "home advantage", not psychological but a raw energetic force. The crowd has the ability to shape reality, a field of intention that can and does influence performance. In these moments, sport reveals its capacity to unite, to dissolve boundaries and to create shared meaning (though like a religion it can also divide people into rival factions).

Sport as ritual, myth and spiritual practice

Every match creates a new myth. Our athletes rise as heroes and fall as villains. Their ordeal becomes ours as we, the spectators, assume the emotions that the honed athlete seems immune from. Miraculous comebacks and tragic collapses give us a safe space to experience the full spectrum of human emotion. Commentators often name events in ways that echo past legends – "The Miracle of Istanbul" for example – reinforcing sport's mythic continuity. These stories become part of cultural memory, passed down through generations, shaping identity and belonging.

Even ordinary things take on a ritual aspect. Simple actions – tying shoelaces, chalking hands, stepping onto a pitch – become rituals through repetition and intention. Sport reminds us that meaning often arises not from the extraordinary but from showing up again and again. These small acts anchor athletes in the present, preparing them for the intensity to come. The historian of religious ideas, Mircea Eliade, said that "The sacred is manifested in the world through hierophanies (any moment, object, place, or gesture through which the sacred breaks through into everyday reality)." Perhaps the athletes' ritualistic actions are imitations of such hierophanies, moments of the sacred witnessed by all.

Seen in this light, sport is ritual, myth and spiritual practice. Whether athlete, coach or spectator, it reveals something of who we are and who we are seeking to become. The next time you watch or play, look for the hidden layers: the archetypes, the rituals, the transformations. Allow yourself to be part of this journey, to see sport not only with the eyes but with the inner sense that recognizes meaning beneath the surface.



THE CHALLENGE OF COMPLEXITY: EDGAR MORIN

PHILOSPHY

BY
JULIAN POWE

In a moment of good fortune, Edgar Morin introduced himself to me in the form of a footnote while I was helping translate Fernand Schwarz's *Egypt, Mirror of Heaven* last winter. Attached to a passage outlining Morin's theories of complexity, the footnote read- "Edgar Morin (b. 1921) is a French philosopher, sociologist and cultural theorist." Born in 1921 and still alive? How could I not know about him? In looking into his life and work, especially at the time of his death in May of this year, at the age of 104, I learnt that Edgar Morin was no mere footnote – he is a Colossus of a thinker, of no fixed disciplinary abode, carrying a hugely important message for humanity in the 21st century. He is the author or co-author of some 120 works on a dizzying and dazzling range of topics (too few are translated into English); he is widely followed in the Mediterranean and Latin American worlds; he was a constant voice and presence on France's intellectual stage; university research centres are named after him; and he received the Légion d'Honneur, the most prestigious award in France, and no less than 38 honorary doctorates from universities

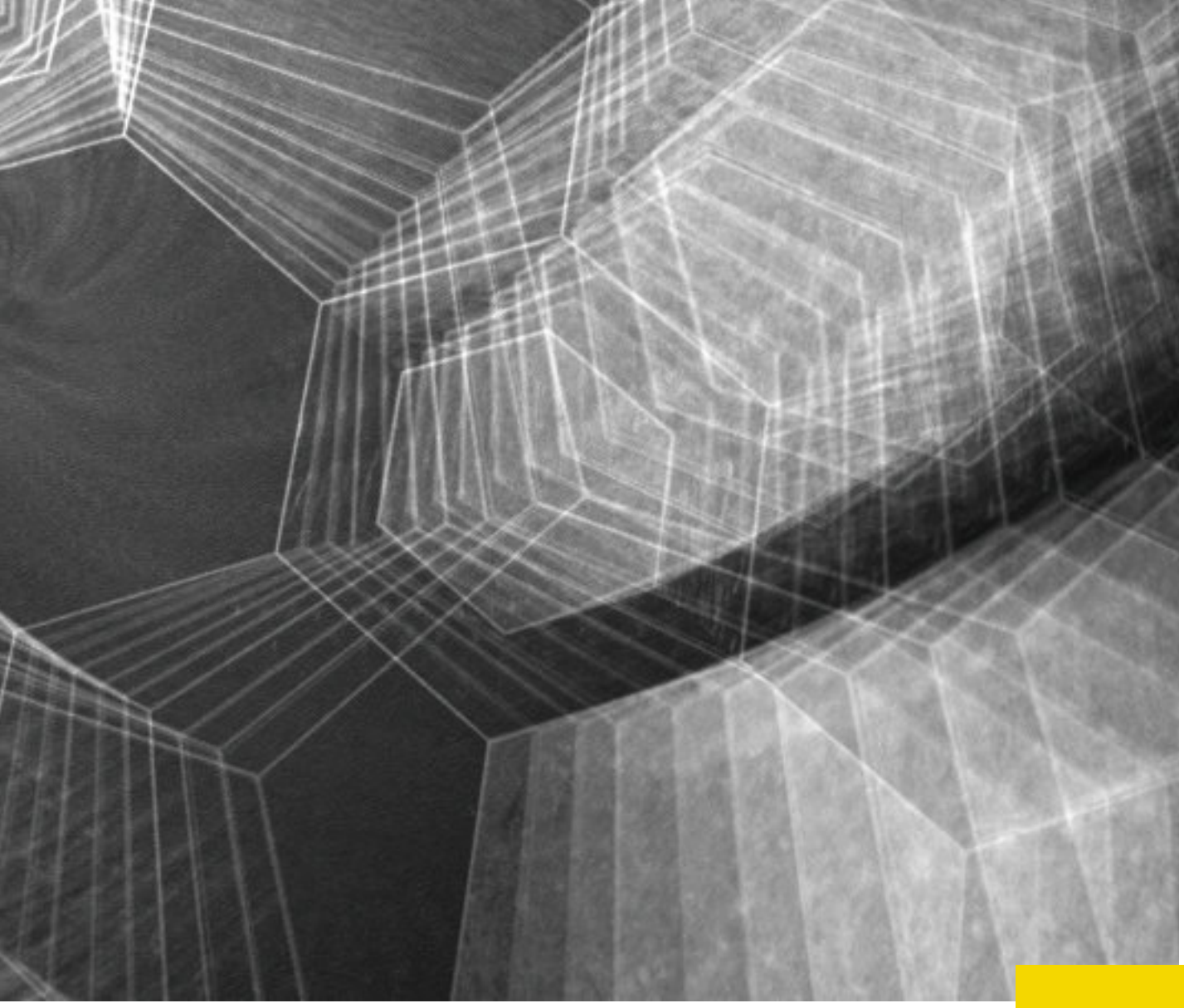


Photo by Gustavo Fring by www.pexels.com

around the world. On his 100th birthday, *Libération* acclaimed him as "the grandfather of all the French, the memory of the previous century". In announcing his death, President Macron described him as a "soldier of the Resistance, fighter and free spirit, a defender of nature and humanity... humanism personified."

How to link together elements that are a *priori* irreconcilable.

The 'Method'

Morin's magnum opus, which took him over 25 years to complete, was called 'The Method' (*La Méthode*). He also referred to it as 'the way' and likened it to the Tao. It proposed a method for interlinking approaches and disciplines. One of the central themes of this work was the idea of 'complex thought', in his words: "how to link together elements that are *a priori* irreconcilable, how to decompartmentalize forms of knowledge that are naturally linked in nature." A salient example of this that he gives is the fragmentation of the knowledge of the human being into 'human sciences' and 'social sciences'. He defined complexity based on the Latin word *complexus* – 'that



Edgar Morin (1921-2026).Image from Wikimedia

which is woven together'. Morin was fond of the words of the Spanish philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset: "We do not know what is happening to us, and that is exactly what is happening." He forged his path in the shadow of "a crisis of the future", referring to what he called a 'polycrisis' of environmental, social, economic and political crises compounding and worsening each other as they interact. Just as humanity needs to respond to polycrisis in a spirit of interconnection and interdependency, so do we embrace even more tightly a "paradigm of simplicity" that, in Morin's view, has strangled Western thought since the 17th century. Polarization, simplification and fundamentalism gather their strength at a time of profound need for thinking that can allow for interdependence, disorder and uncertainty.

"The risks of simplification are amplified in periods of collective hysteria, crisis and war", he writes. "We find ourselves in such a period, and therefore there is an increased need for both complex thinking and a complex ethics."

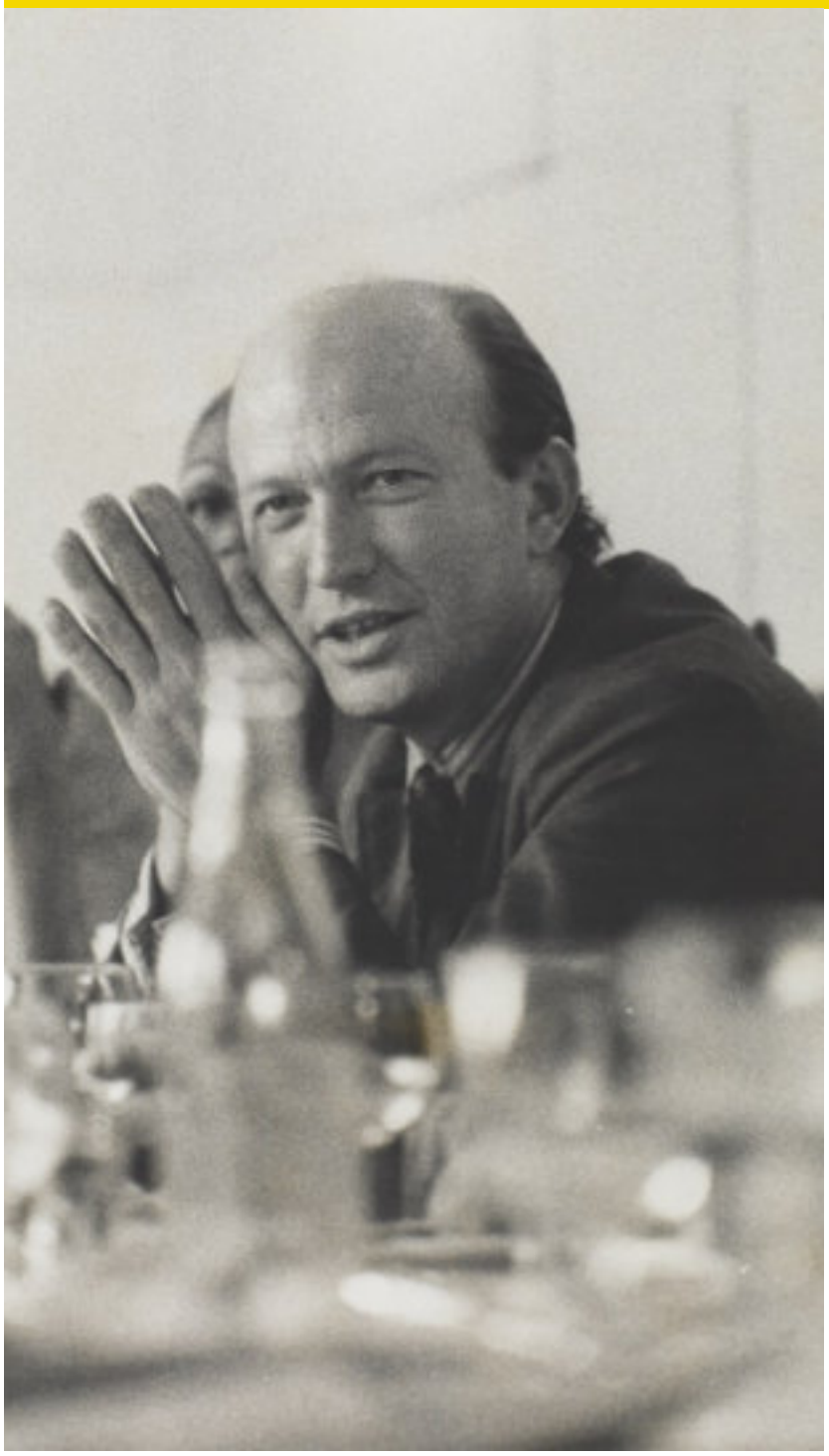
At the same time, he clarified that "the enemy of complexity is not simplicity, it is mutilation." His first work – *Germany's Year Zero* (1946), written when in Germany with the French army, documenting the devastation of one of Europe's most sophisticated and cultural countries and how it had been overtaken by the horrors of the Nazi era – was marked by Morin's refusal to over-simplify, to 'mutilate' (a favourite Morin word), by reducing Germany's culture and people to the level of the worst characteristics displayed by the Nazis. "Mutilation can take the form of one-dimensional or reductive conceptions. Mutilation comes when one denies all reality and all meaning to what one has eliminated..."

As Fernand Schwarz wrote in his tribute to Edgar Morin

following his death: [Morin] "recalled at the same time that we have the potential to be fraternal, to reject a mutilated view of the other, which consists in seeing only faults and defects in the other, while attributing all qualities to ourselves."

An interdisciplinary thinker

It is no exaggeration to state that Morin railed against the fragmentation of knowledge that had resulted from the ever-greater specialization of disciplines that are too closed off from each other; the separations of the human from nature, of science from the humanities; and the splitting up of the whole into the smallest possible parts. He regularly quotes Blaise Pascal: "All is held together by a natural and imperceptible bond, which unites things most distant and most different. I consider it impossible to know the parts without knowing the whole or to know the whole without knowing the parts." Morin's path steps decisively away from the post-17th century Western, Newtonian view of a mechanically ordered cosmos to the notion of 'Chaosmos'. He posits that the universe, ecosystems, societies and human beings develop not in a linear way but in a continuous dynamic loop that brings 'order' (stability, laws, regulations) into dialogic interaction with 'disorder' (chaos, chance,



Edgar Morin in Rio de Janeiro, 1972. Wikipedia

"All is held together by a natural and imperceptible bond, which unites things most distant and most different." – Blaise Pascal



Image from www.pexels.com

error) to generate new 'organization' with structures that the individual parts did not previously possess, before re-embarking on the generative loop.

And he leaves us in no doubt of the revolutionary and imperative character of this search. In his powerful words: "The reductionist approach, which consists in relying on a single series of factors to regulate the totality of problems associated with the multiform crisis we are currently in the middle of, is less a solution than the problem itself... It has become the bearer of death.... We need a kind of thinking that relinks that which is disjointed and compartmentalized, that respects diversity as it recognises unity, and that tries to discern interdependencies. We need a radical thinking (that gets to the root of the problems), a multi-dimensional thinking, and an organizational or systemic thinking... This [reform of thinking] implies a mental revolution of considerably greater proportions than the Copernican revolution. Never before in the history of humanity have the responsibilities of thinking weighed so crushingly on us."

"A Politics of Civilization"

For Morin, intellectual ideas should lead to a change in the world and a change in oneself. In his autobiography, *A Century of Life*, he wrote: "Ever since I was a teenager, my humanistic culture gave me a concern for the destiny of humanity... I devoted myself to my studies, not in order to have a profession, but to know what human destiny was made of." And later he wrote: "We still lack the consciousness of a community of earthly destiny."

In his youth, he turned towards philosophers in search of a third way, like Simone Weil or Emmanuel Mounier. He resisted belonging to any ideology, and was one of the first French intellectuals to criticize the Stalinist line of the French communist party of which he had been a member, leading to his expulsion in 1951. He turned more towards a "politics of civilization" which sought "to place the human being at the centre of politics and to promote 'well-living' instead of 'well-being'."

Just as Morin saw the creation of connections as the essence of complex thought, so did he see the development of solidarity in a globalized world, the

construction of a bulwark against fragmentation and individualization, as humanity's path through the "crisis of the future".

"We must foster the growth of a kind of human solidarity based on a uterine link between people, for instance the idea of an earth-motherland." To survive, and "to convert the human race to humanity", we need to abandon our predilection for standing above nature; and instead enact a vision of complex interdependence both with nature and with each other – "To change lives ...in terms of the quality and poetry in life... love and understanding are the most important properties for human beings and... what is most important is to live poetically; that is to say, to develop ourselves in an ardent spirit of communion."

Morin travelled through his life in a spirit of resistance, from his youth when he was active in the French Resistance ('Morin' was originally his Resistance pseudonym; he was born Edgar Nahoum, son of a Jewish immigrant from Thessaloniki) to his late age when, in the words of his Guardian obituary, he "continued to speak out against populism, totalitarianism, nationalism, colonialism, the hegemony of profit, inequality, hate, and the ubiquitous monster, stupidity."

Edgar Morin's path through life was certainly characterized by love and understanding. An embodiment of complexity himself, he lived poetically, in a spirit of hope, awe, curiosity and connection. Fernand Schwarz, in the tribute quoted above, notes that "his lucid criticism of the tragic age we are living in did not prevent him from having hope." In Morin's words: "The course of current probabilities is catastrophic. Today, regressive processes of all kinds are multiplying and the perils of destruction are growing. But when a system is incapable of dealing with its vital systems, either it disintegrates or it manages to give rise within itself to a metasystem capable of solving its problems. A metamorphosis then takes place. The great planetary crisis that we are living through heralds either the



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great regression, or the possible metamorphosis. Every metamorphosis is invisible before it occurs. But one can discern currents which are going in that direction."

Like a true philosopher, he explained that this metamorphosis could not occur without a metamorphosis of man himself: "It is not enough to resist external barbarism, where cruelty and hate coming from the depths of history ally themsleves with the chilling barbarity of calculation, or technology, which is tending to impose itself in our society; it is also necessary to resist the inner barbarism in each of us. We must practise a truly psychological culture that includes self-examination and self-criticism, resistance to the egocentric tendency to justify oneself and attribute evil to others."

Let us leave him the last word, beckoning us on to the future: "We must abandon the best of all worlds, but hope in the possibility of a better world. I have always believed in the improbable, in the realization of the improbable in human history... We are at the beginning of a new adventure. Every innovation, every creation begins with an extremely marginal deviation, sometimes concentrated in a single individual, which, if it manages to protect itself and spread, ends by becoming a force of history."

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The quotations in this article were taken from the above sources.

THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR AND THE SECRET TO A LONG LIFE

CULTURE

BY
ISTVAN ORBAN

In the Middle Ages, it was rare for anyone to reach the age of 50 or 60. Most people – if they survived childhood – lived only until the age of 35 or 40 due to poor hygiene and dietary habits. One of the few exceptions were the Knights Templar. What did they know that others did not?



Knights Templar. Source Pixabay

The Knights Templar were a Christian military Order, founded in 1118 to defend pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem. The founder, Hugues de Payns, was a Frankish knight from the County of Champagne and the Order's first Grand Master, who established the Order together with eight companions. He drew up the Templars' rule with the assistance of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. On January 13, 1128, at the Council of Troyes, Pope Honorius II approved the founding of the Knights Templar. They called themselves the Poor Knights of Christ, a reference to their initial poverty and their calling. The knights were taken under the patronage of Baldwin II, King of Jerusalem, who granted them a wing of the former Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. They were named the Knights of the Temple after their residence.

They were named the Knights of the Temple after their residence.

The order first found supporters in the Kingdom of France, then in England, and later spread to German and Spanish territories as well. Thanks to papal authorization and the privileges they subsequently received, by the middle of the 13th century they had concentrated unprecedented financial and political power in their hands and became the bankers of Europe. They are credited with the invention of money transfers, as pilgrims



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Image of Jacques de Molay. Wikimedia

no longer had to carry money with them on their long and dangerous journey to the Holy Land; instead, they paid their travel expenses at the nearest Templar commandery, for which they received a certificate, which they could then cash in at any Templar monastery along the way or in the Holy Land, so the monasteries functioned as a kind of early-modern bank branch or ATM.

The Knights Templar reached the peak of their power in the second half of the 13th century, when they had 15,000 to 20,000 members, though only one-tenth of them were knights. They were present in nearly every country in Europe, and their wealth rivalled that of kings. Thanks to their privileges, they were exempt from the supervision of both secular and ecclesiastical authorities; only the reigning pope could command them. Wherever their houses and estates were located across Europe and the Middle East, they operated everywhere as a sort of "state within a state."

They were present in nearly every country in Europe, and their wealth rivalled that of kings.

Their fate was sealed during the reign of King Philip IV or Philip the Fair (1285–1314): the French king was constantly short of money and resorted to drastic measures to remedy the situation. Philip confiscated the estates and property of the Jews – thus beginning the first persecution of Jews in France – and taxed the wealth of Lombard merchants and bankers. Next, it was the Templars' turn. In 1307, the king issued a decree arresting every member of the Order within France; they were then convicted in show trials, and many were executed. Pope Clement V dissolved the Order at the Council of Vienne in 1312. Grand Master Jacques de Molay and several members of the Order were burned

at the stake on March 19, 1314. It is said that Molay cried out from the flames that the pope and the French king would follow them to their deaths within a year. And so it came to pass.

The last Grand Master of the Knights Templar was 70 years old when he was burned at the stake, and this age was not uncommon among the Knights Templar. Although a Templar knight endured severe physical hardships throughout his life, he lived forty years longer than the average person of that time. As doctors and historians have discovered, this was mainly due to the knights' hygiene, diet and physical activity. According to British historian Piers Paul Read, the Knights Templar trained extensively with weapons, rode horses and, of course, fought when the situation called for it. Their equipment and armour weighed approximately 30 - 40 kilograms. Although the medieval diet was rich in fat and calories, and members of the upper classes consumed a lot of meat – which made gout one of the most common diseases – problems like obesity and cardiovascular problems were not typical among the Knights Templar.



Their rule governing their meals was compiled in the early 12th century by Bernard of Clairvaux, a French abbot, based on the writings of St. Benedict and St. Augustine. Meat was allowed only three times a week. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays, members of the Order typically ate bread along with two or three servings of vegetable dishes, while Fridays were reserved for fasting. In a study on the subject, Francesco Franceschi, director of the emergency department at Rome's Gemelli Clinic, suggested that the Order's members could be seen as early practitioners of what we now call the Mediterranean diet. Their meals contained little meat but a large amount of legumes – eaten about three times a week – which are

Their wine, consumed in moderation, was sometimes blended with aloe vera pulp.



rarely consumed as often today despite their strong probiotic benefits. They also mixed orange juice with their drinking water. Their wine, consumed in moderation, was sometimes blended with aloe vera pulp. Aloe vera, known for its antiseptic and antifungal qualities, is particularly useful in hot desert climates. This mixture even had its own name: the "Elixir of Jerusalem". Fish and seafood were also common in their diet, providing omega-3 fatty acids and antioxidants. In addition, they regularly ate cheese, fresh fruits such as figs, almonds and pomegranates, and used olive oil. Overall, this diet supported healthy gut flora and was far healthier than the typical medieval diet. Moderation was also emphasized. Knights ate in pairs and were encouraged to watch one another carefully to ensure that neither consumed more food than the other.

In addition to meals and exercise, there was also hygiene: handwashing was mandatory before eating and praying, which suggests Muslim influences. As does the fact that Templar doctors were the most knowledgeable in the Christian world, having learned much from their Arab colleagues. They even explained the importance of personal hygiene: this rule was introduced to prevent infections in an era when nothing was known about bacteria and viruses.

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SYMBOLISM AND MYTHOLOGY

BY
JULIAN SCOTT

THE SYMBOLISM OF MINERALS, PLANTS AND ANIMALS



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In the worldview of traditional societies, everything is connected.

If we are looking for a symbolic view of Nature, we have to consider what are known as 'traditional societies' (of past and present), because the modern technological world, based on empiricism and rationalism, has largely rejected that symbolic 'cosmovision'.

In the worldview of traditional societies, everything is connected, because everything comes from the same source, like a spring welling up to produce a great river and its tributaries. This gives rise to the 'law of correspondence' whereby every being, every

aspect of life is related to certain archetypal forces, often represented by the sun, the moon and the planets. For example, in the animal kingdom the **lion** is a 'solar animal', the metal **silver** is related to the Moon. In Greece, the **oak tree** was dedicated to Zeus (Jupiter). Related to this is the idea that there is only One Life, a universal essence that manifests in an infinite variety of different forms. This is why most traditional societies, such as ancient Rome or Egypt, did not even have concepts of racism or religious sectarianism, as they saw an underlying unity which was not contradicted by the fact of diversity.

A third principle of this 'cosmovision' is that the visible always ultimately comes from the invisible. Our life, as Buddha said, is the creation of our mind. Look around at all the products of civilization – the roads, data centres, etc. – they were all born in the invisible world of thought. In the same way, the whole cosmos was seen as the creation of a 'divine mind'. Like an iceberg, reality is more invisible than visible. Hence the belief in traditional societies in nature spirits, gods, angels, etc. – the invisible forces behind the visible phenomena.

Symbols in the mineral world

In the symbolism of alchemy, the 'man of lead' (associated



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A third principle of this 'cosmovision' is that the visible always ultimately comes from the invisible.



Image by Pexels





with Saturn) is a person through whom the light of the divine does not shine. This is where we begin in our human condition: the unawakened consciousness. But the human being is not only material; we also have a divine element. In order to bring this out we need to work on ourselves, like inner alchemists, to transform our 'lead' into 'gold'.

What is the gold? Gold is a metal which is both luminous and incorruptible; it does not tarnish like silver or rust like iron, it always shines, like the sun. So it represents the fully realized human being who has organized their personality and their life in such a way that the light of their spirit always shines through. Alchemy teaches that in order to effect this transmutation we must go through a long and difficult process of distilling out the impurities of our lower nature and harmonizing the opposites within ourselves, until we become a pure channel of light.

In the world of precious stones, the equivalent of gold is diamond, which is also associated with the sun. In the Natural History Museum in London you can find a display case where a diamond is exhibited alongside a piece of graphite. They are both made of atoms of the same element: carbon. But in the case of diamond the atoms are structured in such a way that light shines through them, whereas the atomic structure of graphite makes it opaque.

In the case of a human being, how do we 'arrange our atoms' so that we let in more light? It is not merely about 'organizing our life', we have to organize it around our 'solar' centre, which is our divine Self. Which means, in the words of Plotinus, 'making ourselves more godlike', becoming full of virtues, like the facets of a diamond.

Symbols in the world of plants

The archetypal symbol in the plant world is the tree, which symbolizes life in general and the cycles of growth, decline and renewal. In the Nordic traditions they imagined the world as a tree called Yggdrasill, whose branches

stretch up to heaven. In between heaven and earth was the *axis mundi* – the world axis symbolized by the trunk, by which one ascends to the world of true knowledge and reality (heaven). From the beginning of the world, a malicious dragon (Nidhogg) has been gnawing at the roots of the tree until eventually it falls, resulting in the chaos of the 'end of the world', called Ragnarok. But when one world ends, another better world begins. As in the myth of the Great Flood, there are some human survivors and humanity begins again, purified and renewed.

The tree is also associated with the Four Elements – Earth, Water, Air and Fire.

The tree is a great symbol for life, because a tree not only follows its own law of development but also provides a habitat for many creatures and shade for animals and humans, or protection from the rain. From its wood we make houses, ships, furniture, musical instruments, and we also use it to make fire. It really is a great provider! Not to mention the fact that trees produce oxygen and consume CO2, as well as producing food in the form of fruit and nuts.



Image by Pexels

The tree is also associated with the Four Elements – Earth, Water, Air and Fire: the roots are related with Earth, the trunk with Water, the leaves with Air and the flowers with Fire. In this way, we can take lessons from the tree for our own life: we must be grounded in the Earth, allow the energy of life to flow through us, be open to the 'winds of life' (movement, change, ideas) and produce moral flowers (virtues) and the 'fruits of our labours' (concrete results of our inner efforts).

In the East, the lotus symbolizes the spiritual growth of the human being 'from darkness to light', as the *Upanishads*[1] say. Its life begins in the mud at the bottom of the pond and ends by opening its flower to the light of the sun. It is the symbol of the

inner journey: the human being begins in the mud of his material passions, struggles through the trials of emotional and mental conflicts and finally opens up to the light the Sun, which symbolizes the Spirit.
In ancient Greece, different trees had associations with different deities, such as the laurel with Apollo and the olive with Athena. The laurel symbolized victory, which was seen as the culmination of many inner victories. The olive symbolized peace, which is the result of the battle to conquer oneself (Athena being the goddess of war and wisdom). The Oak tree was dedicated to Zeus, representing power and majesty, and corresponds to the planet Jupiter. At the sanctuary of Zeus at Dodona, there was a 'tree oracle', where people would come to ask questions about their lives, and the priests and priestesses of the sanctuary would give them answers based on the sounds made by the wind in the leaves of the tree, which they interpreted.



Emblem VIII from the *Atalanta Fugiens*. Wikimedia

Symbols in the animal kingdom

The word 'animal' comes from the Latin '*anima*' which means 'soul' or 'life'. Animals are 'animated' beings, full of life and movement, who can move from place to place, unlike plants which are 'rooted to the spot'.
One of the key symbols of the animal kingdom is the egg, which, like the seed in the plant world, symbolizes the potential of everything that will come into being. There is often the concept of a 'world egg' from which the entire cosmos comes, sometimes laid by a mysterious goose on the primordial waters of chaos (as in the Finnish saga, the *Kalevala*), before earth and heaven were separated.
The animal kingdom is an extremely rich field of symbolism which appears in every culture, in all places and times. Animals have always inspired human beings with their unique qualities and

1. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.3.28*: "Lead us from the unreal to the real. Lead us from darkness to light. Lead us from death to immortality."

ways of being, which evoke an intuitive understanding of similar qualities within ourselves. Let us look at some examples.

Crow or Raven
Because of the colour black, crows have been associated with beginnings, based on the idea that life arises out of the darkness. Being a carrion bird it is also associated with death and the underworld, but curiously it mostly has a positive symbolism. It is sometimes believed to be a messenger from the otherworld, and is often associated with prophecy, sacred to all-seeing Apollo. In London there is a legend that if the ravens leave the Tower of London, the kingdom will fall. In Greece and Rome, specialist priests intepreted the croaks of crows as a form of divination. Among both the Inuit and Native Americans of North America, Raven is the creator of the visible world and the great civilizer or teacher of mankind.

Deer
On the one hand, the deer is a symbol of purity and the spiritual quest. The stag, because of its antlers which renew themselves every year, is a symbol of regeneration and growth. A white stag ('white hart') appears to King Arthur and his Knights, and initiates their quest for the Holy Grail. In this capacity it is seen as a messenger of God. In general the deer symbolizes gentleness, spirituality, beauty, grace and agility. The stag, additionally, symbolizes strength and nobility.

Lion and Unicorn
In the royal coat of arms of Great Britain, these two complementary animals may be seen to symbolize the union of temporal and spiritual power, the two qualities needed for the archetype of the good ruler. According to the historical version, however, the chained Silver Unicorn is the symbol of Scotland as part of the Union, while the Golden Lion represents England. But in the light of the planetary symbolism of the sun and moon (solar power and intelligence symbolized by the golden lion and lunar intuition and mystery symbolized by the silver unicorn), we can see here a good symbol for the harmonization of opposites.

Salmon
In Celtic mythology, the salmon was the symbol of wisdom, intuitive knowledge and ancient memory, partly because it lives in the water – the symbol of life itself – and masters that element completely. It is like the king of the water world. And also because it knows its way home and perseveres until reaching its destination, the breeding grounds. It is an analogy for the wise person who combines spiritual vision with the perseverance and determination needed to attain it.

Harmonizing the symbolic and scientific worldviews

If we look at Nature in a purely scientific way, it can be inspiring to see how everything works – 'the Miracle of Nature'. Some scientists get very excited simply by observing and understanding Nature or the wonders of the universe. Other people will find archetypes, ideas and teachings in Nature that can guide them on the



On the one hand, the deer is a symbol of purity and the spiritual quest.

journey of life, based on the idea that human beings are part of Nature and the same timeless laws – such as the law of cycles – govern everything. A symbolic view of Nature can help to re-enchant the world: to imagine, for example, as some traditions tell us, that in the night sky there are forests of trees full of blossoming flowers which are the stars, and that the flowers on earth are also like stars, the culmination of the essence of the plant; to look at a diamond and see not just its beauty but understand that its beauty is precisely due to its ordered atomic structure, and that we too can become like diamonds, pure and at the same time very strong, able to endure. Watching the salmon making their way up the river, overcoming all obstacles, leaping up weirs and waterfalls, until they reach their destination, can inspire us to persevere through all difficulties on the way to wisdom and enlightenment. I think that these two sources of wonder and inspiration can be combined; there is no reason why one should exclude the other. The two ways are the rational-empirical way and the way of the intuitive imagination, the objective and the subjective, both of which have their value and their reality. For many philosophers, particularly from the East, the material world is only the shadow of the spiritual world and spirit is more real than matter. In recent centuries, we have gone to the other extreme and seen the material world as real and the spiritual world as a pure illusion. Perhaps the time has come again to see the two worlds as part of one reality: spirit-matter, the father-mother of all things.



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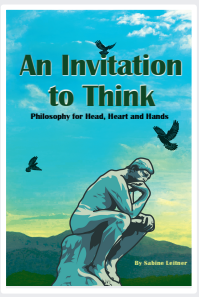
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