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# NewAcropolis

Philosophy and Education for the Future Bi-Monthly

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### The dark side of freedom

Freedom is one of those words that are usually perceived as 100% positive. Who does not want to be free? Free from any form of outer coercion or restraint, free to do whatever we want. But is the concept of freedom really so simple? What if we don't use our freedom wisely?

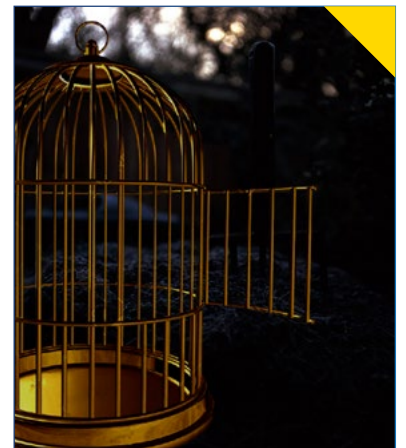
Imagine a fridge full of things you like: you are free to choose to eat whatever you fancy. However, you are actually addicted to unhealthy food and binge eating. Are you therefore really free? Your outer freedom (i.e. lack of coercion) is not matched by inner freedom (i.e. free will). You are not free to choose what and how much you want to eat because inside you are driven by forces stronger than your rational mind. You know that eating too much of this kind of stuff is going to seriously affect your health in the long run, but you are a slave of your desires and no longer able to act in your own best interest.

There is another aspect of freedom: we will never be free from the consequences of our actions. We might have both inner and outer freedom to choose a career, for example. But whatever our choice, it will have consequences. Every action causes a reaction. Innocent ignorance will not protect us from having to reap what we have sown.

The problem with freedom is that, like power, it can be misused. Whether driven by irrational forces or simply because of a lack of wisdom, we can use our freedom in a way that can cause long-term consequences we do not want.

This is the 'dark side' of freedom and one of the biggest problems in modern democratic societies. There are thousands of things that are both legal and socially acceptable and yet in the long-term, they will have negative and destructive consequences and affect the future of humanity. If we only destroyed our own health most people would say 'fair enough, it's your choice'. But if we seriously harm our planet and all that lives on it, if the exercise of our individual freedom causes collective destruction – do we still have a right to 'do whatever we want'?

Sabine Leitner



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By Julian Scott



# The Practice of Philosophy

By Fernando Schwarz, Coordinator of New Acropolis in Northern Europe

Philosophy, or love of wisdom, is not something abstract. It's about how to understand life better and therefore how to live better, individually and collectively.

We all have something deep within ourselves, but sometimes we're afraid to look for it. It's like diving within yourself to look for the inner gold. You need courage to dive into the water, because there are many fears: the fear of drowning, of strong currents, of dangerous fish, and so on.

The practice of philosophy is to go within, but also to act outside. Philosophy has to be practised, internally and externally, in order to become real. As with any art, whether it be music, gardening, or anything else, in order to learn anything, you have to practise.

### Key Principles

The practice of philosophy is based on certain key principles:

- The progressive development and mastery of oneself, which comes about through practice. The deeper we go, the calmer we become. Self-knowledge leads to self-confidence, because if we know who we are we become more stable, more natural and less defensive.
- A real concern for humanity. We can cultivate this concern by a number of methods: first by realising that we are not unique, then by thinking about the challenges facing humanity. We need to see that there are others and that they are mirrors for us, even when no words are used. We can understand that other people also have fears and aggression due to a lack of self-confidence, due to the need to be loved. We are all part of a human family.

- Seeing beyond appearances. The philosopher tries to establish contact with the being of others and the being of the universe, with people, with countries; to find the identity of things and people, what makes them different, what is best about each person.

The first objective of philosophy should be to develop



**"In order to learn anything, you have to practice".**

self-confidence, which implies accepting the conflicts of life and dealing with them. You can't give someone confidence, there is no 'confidence pill'. That pill is made by your own inner laboratory, but you have to use that laboratory.

As the founder of New Acropolis, Jorge Livraga, once said: "The application of a teaching depends on ourselves and not on the person who is teaching us."

## About Us

NEW ACROPOLIS is an international organization working in the fields of philosophy, culture and volunteering. Our aim is to revive philosophy as a means of renewal and transformation and to offer a holistic education that can develop both our human potential as well as the practical skills needed in order to meet the challenges of today and to create a better society for the next generation.

For further details please visit : [WWW.NEWACROPOLISUK.ORG](http://WWW.NEWACROPOLISUK.ORG)

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## Tolerance and Fundamentalism

It seems strange that fundamentalism and fanaticism should be growing stronger in the 21st century when, according to past predictions, we should be entering an age of enlightened progress and rational understanding. But the rise of fundamentalism is due in part to the failure of rationalism to cater for humanity's deeper spiritual needs.

Fundamentalists have always existed. In a text from ancient India - the Bhagavad Gita - we find a phrase which sums up this attitude: "There are men who have no vision, and yet they speak many words. They follow the letter of the Vedas, and they say: 'there is nothing but this'. Their soul is warped with selfish desires, and their heaven is a selfish desire".

The reason that fundamentalism is growing stronger today is perhaps because people are looking for certainty in an uncertain world. The secular society produces instability. By breaking down traditional beliefs and not replacing them with new ones, it opens the way to the breakdown of society and the disorientation of individuals. However, fundamentalism is not a real solution to this problem. On the contrary, it actually accelerates the process of disintegration, by promoting hostility and warfare.

Tolerance is a far better approach, but what is meant by tolerance? It cannot just mean to tolerate everything, because that would include tolerating all kinds of evils. Rather, it is about accepting 'the other'; accepting that people are different and allowing them to be so. A tolerant person can even see something valid in fundamentalism, which is the search for stability and unity (necessary factors in life, but not the only ones), while strongly criticising the route it takes towards those aims.

It is not the case, as some people

suggest, that religions are by nature dogmatic and exclusive. In ancient Egypt or in Rome, for example, many different religions happily co-existed. History shows that it is possible to be religious and not fanatical.

But it is also important to practise certain timeless and universal values, which we can discover in many different systems of thought. For example:

*Hate is not overcome by hate. Hate is overcome by love. This is a law eternal. (Buddha);*

*Do not do to others what you would not like others to do to you. (Confucius);*

*As you sow, so shall you reap (Jesus) - identical to the Eastern doctrine of Karma;*

*Do not resort to violence, do not be greedy (Egyptian & Jewish traditions).*

As the Renaissance philosopher Giordano Bruno said, it is ultimately more important to practise what we preach than to believe in articles of faith.

However, to try to make a 'secular religion' out of such values does not work. It makes no appeal to the imagination, to the symbolic consciousness of the human being. It was tried in France at the time of the Revolution, with a 'Temple to Reason', and signally failed.

Another important step would be to try to restore healthy customs, as these act as a stabilising influence in society and create an atmosphere of mutual respect and solidarity. Such principles as moderation in eating and drinking, politeness, cleanliness, respect between the generations and the sexes, and honesty in commerce and public office would help prevent people from looking for more drastic, fundamentalist, revolutionary or

reactionary solutions.

But again, such rules are inadequate on their own. The human being needs to be inspired by higher ideals of a common spiritual root of humanity, a divine spark or a soul that we all share in common. Reason and common sense, while extremely important, are not enough.

In times when fundamentalism and fanaticism are on the rise, it is necessary for philosophical and tolerant attitudes to increase in order to counterbalance this negative trend. Even if, realistically, we cannot stop the wave of intolerance right now, because it has already been set in motion, we can lay the bases for a more enlightened tomorrow, just as certain medieval and renaissance thinkers created the foundations for the modern world.

Julian Scott



## Images of Enlightenment – The Buddhist Mandala

Because many colourful collections of mandalas are easily accessible nowadays in public art museums as well as in digital art galleries, it is easy to fall into common misconceptions. These peculiar ‘objects’, which can easily be mistaken for some kind of ‘art-form’, are actually among the finest remnants of the practical occultism found in the East.

The mandalas belong to a most sacred form of art, the function of which is to represent symbolically and sacramentally a transcendental reality. In this instance, this reality is nothing less than that state of nirvanic beatitude which is the summit of the Buddhist quest. The Indo-Tibetan canon of pictorial representations attributes the origins of painting to the Buddha himself and the images of Buddha are said to be sacred crystallizations of the superhuman virtue of Enlightenment.

The Sanskrit term *Mandala* is often translated as ‘circle of symbolic forms’. The basic Buddhist Mandala design has five symbolic forms (the five Dhyani Buddhas, see Fig.1). Each of these is an archetypal image: the central one is ‘Reality’ itself and the other four represent principal aspects of that reality.

The mandala can also be understood as a sacred realm containing symbols and images that depict aspects of the enlightened psycho-physical ‘personality’ of the Buddha. It is a pictorial aid for those who want to gain ritual access to those aspects (‘powers’) of the Enlightened Mind. They are instruments of communication, which are still used today, to impart profound truths.

The greatest mandalas are those created and held

in the mind of the practitioner during meditation. These types of visualizations, the prototypes of which were recorded (i.e. objectified in pictorial forms) by the Siddhas (those who had gained extraordinary mind powers) take the name of Sadhanas. The mandala images which spring forth during these Sadhanas come from a level of consciousness that cannot be reached by the ordinary process of thought. Their function is to ‘create’ bridges between ‘normal’ everyday states of consciousness and super-

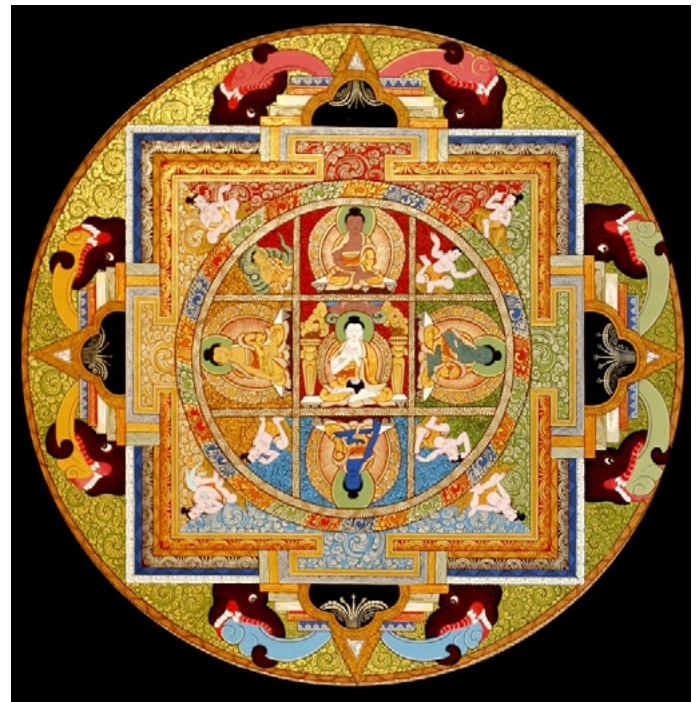


Fig.1 - Five Buddhas Mandala

conscious states. Through these visualizations, the practitioner is invited to imagine his future state of being, the Buddha state, and by imagining it, to become that state.

Agostino Dominici

## PHILOSOPHICAL HUMOR



## Some inspiring quotes

“When every situation which life can offer is turned to the profit of spiritual growth, no situation can really be a bad one.”

Paul Brunton

“Be at war with your vices, at peace with your neighbors, and let every new year find you a better man.” - Benjamin Franklin

“If you asked me for my New Year Resolution, it would be to find out who I am.” - Cyril Cusack

## The Art of Creative Writing

It is a common belief that writing is only for those who possess a talent and that creativity is something that some people have and others don't. However, another way of looking at it is to see creativity as one of our human characteristics, and writing as a unique opportunity to nurture our mind and heart by allowing the authentic expression of our being. Writing is almost like a relationship we establish with ourselves, a meeting point between our thoughts, our emotions and the pen.

Not many of us choose to have a private space and time to let this creativity come through. So an important first step on the journey of writing is just to allow yourself that time so that your own style can unfold and your skills can develop. It is recommended to write as much as you can as a daily practice and to use all the emotions you experience as sources of inspiration.

It is good to let your voice and hand lead the process. It is like freeing a bird from a cage, but not necessarily showing it where to go, because having no instructions is what enhances creativity. But to wait for inspiration is also a misconception, because that special moment doesn't come when we wait passively. Instead, it happens when we can look around and see what we have always seen, but with different eyes.

*Natalia Lema*



## Ultraviolet - the invisible light

Produced by the sun and invisible to the naked eye, ultraviolet light can cause sunburn and skin cancer by damaging the genetic material in our skin cells. However, its effects are not only negative, as it kills many of the bacteria and viruses in the atmosphere. It also induces the production of vitamin D in the skin, which helps regulate the calcium metabolism and prevent bone deformities.

The Earth's stratosphere deflects most of it, especially the most dangerous rays, and only admits the necessary

amount for life to exist and for most airborne bacteria to be killed. This is why barbers used to disinfect their razor blades and combs by exposing them to direct sunlight, and why hanging your washing out to dry in the sun is in principle more hygienic than simply using a drying machine or central heating.

But if some ultraviolet rays, such as UVA and UVB, can benefit your health, prolonged and unprotected exposure can be very harmful. On the other hand, shorter wavelength UV rays like UVC, which are

found at higher altitudes, can be very dangerous.

On a historical note, although modern science only differentiated UV light from the light spectrum in 1801, it seems to have been known well before then, as can be seen from remains of the alchemically treated stained glass of the great gothic cathedral of Chartres (13th century), which was found to have acted as a filter for UV light.

*Florimond Krins*

## JANUS

As we move into the New Year, it is interesting to reflect on why the first month has been given the name of January. January is a time of new beginnings, a transition between the old and the new, the past and the future. In Ancient Rome this concept was encapsulated in the form of a deity called Janus and it is after him that an early King of Rome, Numa, designated the first month of the year Januarius.

Janus is most regularly depicted as a human male form with two heads back to back, gazing in opposite directions. Originally one face was bearded and one not, probably representing the old and the young. His principal temple, in the Roman Forum, had doors facing east and west to mark the beginning and end of the day. Between the doors stood his statue gazing in opposite directions. Later, another structure dedicated to Janus named the *Ianus geminus* was also erected in the Forum. Its door would be ritually opened in time of war and closed in peacetime.

Janus was also frequently used to symbolize change and transition from one condition to another, one vision to another and the movement of one universe to another. On a more mundane level, his presence protected passageways, doors to the home, gates and bridges.

May this figure of the two-headed god inspire us to gather the experience of the past year and move forward with a fresh spirit into the new.

*Julie Tortora*



Statue of Janus

## NATURE AND US

### Recycling the planet Earth

The recently released Hollywood sci-fi blockbuster, *Interstellar*, which is about the possible future of mankind, has a strong premise that staying on the Earth is senseless, because natural disasters will make it impossible to sustain life here. So the heroes of the film set off to find another galaxy where humanity can carry on (presumably with a lifestyle similar to the one we have now). It seems that the filmmakers cannot imagine that life on Earth for mankind has a future. But is there any option?

As we face growing problems, such as global warming and rising sea levels, due in part to overpopulation and consumer societies, more and more people – especially the young – are protesting against the corruption of the political and economic system and remonstrating with governments about the lack of eco-friendly policies. Many of these people, like the British comedian, Russell Brand,

who became a spokesman for the case, show anger and impatience, and want to destroy the present system and build something completely new.

The Earth is constantly teaching us to see the world as a whole. Oceans, atmosphere, forests and mankind are not independent entities, but part of a greater system, where everything has an effect on everything else. If we intervene in one place, the effect will appear somewhere else. If mankind poisons a river, the fish will die not only in that part of the river, but all along it, until the end. Or just think of those nuclear catastrophes where the explosion of a power plant made it impossible to live on a large area of land. The best way to recycle the Earth is if we let it recover and not intervene, otherwise we will just continue to destroy the natural resources and the diversity which is the key to our future and the future of the planet. Then we won't need to look for another planet in order to survive.

*Istvan Orban*

## The Roman Legacy

Why does the Roman legacy continue to endure in the modern world? It is because their inventions, constructions and social apparatus are subtly part of our everyday lives. Public announcements, cats as pets, public baths, the use of Roman numerals and an incalculable influence on European languages are enduring reminders that every sphere of life has been touched by the transforming ideas of this imperial civilisation. An exhaustive account of the whole of the Roman influence would be impossible in this short article so I have chosen to highlight some of the less obvious things that we have come to inherit.

Romans were civilisation builders. Some of their social structures will be described later but let us first focus on their architectural constructions. One of the most crucial and enduring developments that the Romans left us was concrete. The ability to turn stone into a liquid, have it take up a desired form and then turn itself back into stone is major achievement. As their empire expanded, the development of concrete enabled the Romans to rapidly construct buildings in new locations that were structurally sound. Many famous structures in ancient Rome such as the Coliseum and the sewage systems were built with concrete. Impressively, they still stand to this day.

Hypocausts were early forms of underfloor heating usually used in villas or public baths. Layers of ceramic tiles and concrete were used to create a floor that was raised on pillars and heated underneath. Materials like straw and charcoal were burned in a furnace with the heat and the smoke being directed through a set of pipes under the floor and up and out of a chimney. This ingenious piece of design heated up a room without polluting it with smoke way back in 1 CE/AD. Underfloor heating has only recently (2000 years later) started to be widely used in modern British homes.

Around 100 CE, Rome is thought to have had a population of just over 1 million people. For this to have been possible, the ability to manage water, both clean and dirty, would have been paramount. Aqueducts provided water for the growing population and for crop irrigation, thereby increasing food sources close to the city. Sewers aided public sanitation and reduced mortality by aiding hygiene.

Other inventions of note were: modern day candles, the 365-day calendar divided into 12 months, glass-blowing and harvesting machines enabling large amounts of food to be harvested quickly. These are just a few of the many inventions that were created by the Romans and are still used today.

Ancient Roman thinking also had a significant impact on modern western civilisation by implementing institutions of government and social order. The Roman Emperor Augustus is credited with creating a system of welfare that gave grain to those who could not afford to buy food. The Romans also had a very sophisticated and complicated legal system in which many laws were written down. Travel (aided by conquest) created commerce and many of the Roman laws revolved around transactions. This



**Roman Baths of Bath Spa, England**

made Roman laws useful for managing economic activities like owning and transferring property. The legal system of many European countries and their former colonies are directly or indirectly influenced by ancient Roman laws. Words such as subpoena, habeas corpus, pro bono and affidavit are still used in many legal systems to this day.

*Gurpreet Virdee*

## IN THE NEXT ISSUE

### The Mandate of Heaven by Miha Kosir

The world is changing fast and countries are like other living beings: being born, growing, and even dying. A good illustration of this can be seen at a well-prepared exhibition at the British Museum called *Ming Dynasty: 50 years that changed China*.

The Ming Dynasty was a successor to the Yuan Dynasty, which was named by its founder, Kublai Khan (the grandson of Genghis Khan), after a phrase from the *I Ching*: *da zai qian yuan*, meaning *great is the primal-ness of Heaven*. This speaks of the right to rule, but if it is not done justly and well, the Mandate of Heaven is lost.

At the end of Yuan Dynasty China was going through epidemics, droughts, flooding and discrimination against the Han people. At one point the Yuan court ordered 150,000 peasants to go and work on the embankment of the Yellow River. Around the empire a prophecy was spread: 'A stone man with one eye will provoke the Yellow River against China.' Workers uncovered



the one-eyed statue and the revolution began. The most prominent rebel Zhu Yuanzhang, a descendant of a peasant family and educated by Buddhist monks, led the overthrow of the Yuan Dynasty and in 1368 became the founder of a new dynasty, the Ming. And he was thinking big...

**Read more in our next issue...**

# Upcoming Events

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

Starting Dates for our 16-week Philosophy Course:

*Get Inspired – Discover Philosophy*

**Wed 28 Jan, 7 pm**

**Mon 16 Feb, 7 pm**

**Tues 03 March, 7 pm**

First evening free - Please see website for details

**Wed 21 Jan, 7.30 pm**

Talk: *The Astrology of Love and Relationships*

Guest Speaker: Israel Ajose - ADMISSION £5 (£3 concs.)

**Fri 30 Jan, Fri 6 Feb, Fri 13 Feb, 7.00 - 9.30 pm**

Short course - *MIND, Best Friend or Worst Enemy ?*

Please see website for details

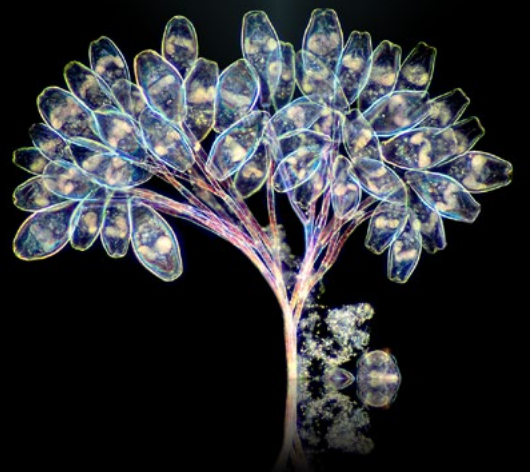
**Fri 27 Feb at 7.30 pm**

Talk: *Plato's Phaedo and the Myth of Theseus and the Minotaur*

Guest Speaker: Tim Addey - ADMISSION £5 (£3 concs.)

Get Inspired...

## Discover Philosophy



16-week course - First Evening free