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NewAcropolis

Philosophy and Education for the Future Bi-Monthly

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We need more activism... and philosophy!

It is often said that by changing ourselves, we can change the world, and I believe that is true. However, is individual change sufficient? Is it enough to try to behave in a responsible and conscious way in order to bring about the collective change that is so urgently needed?

Let's look at some examples: does my paying my taxes stop big corporations from evading theirs? Does my sacrifice of not having a bath stop the enormous amount of water being wasted, let's say on golf courses? Does my use of energy-saving light bulbs stop huge office buildings from leaving their buildings fully lit all night? Do fanatics or criminals cease to exist because I am trying to be a tolerant and trustworthy human being?

According to an article by Derrick Jensen, if every American citizen would implement everything suggested in the film *An inconvenient truth*, this would reduce CO2 emissions in the United States by only 22%. But to make a real difference, according to scientists, CO2 emissions need to be reduced by at least 75%. Similar figures apply to other areas: only 3% of all waste is produced by individuals, only 10% of water is used by individuals, and only 25% of energy is consumed by individuals. Even if individuals did everything they could, their impact would only be very small in comparison with business, industry, agriculture and the military.

This does not mean to say that individuals should not continue to act responsibly – far from it! It just means that individual actions alone are not enough. There is also a need for activists, people with the courage to change the cultural values, attitudes, norms, systems and structures in our societies.

However, activism needs to be based on creating something new, not just tearing down what exists. If it is only 'reactionary' or 'revolutionary', it won't last. Building something new and better requires wisdom, an understanding of human nature and discernment about which aims are actually worth striving for in the long-term.

Collective change needs activism and, to be effective, activism needs philosophy. Because in order to know the direction to follow we need wisdom, and the way to wisdom is philosophy.

Sabine Leitner



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What's Easy and What's Difficult?

By Delia Steinberg Guzmán, International Director of New Acropolis

We usually follow what is easy for us or what we master. However, Seneca argues: "It is not because things are difficult that we do not dare, it is because we do not dare that they are difficult". In order to grow, we have to face the unknown. Why wait?

There is no such thing as "easy" in itself. If we ask people what they consider to be difficult, everyone will have a different answer.

What we have already learned to do is easy, because that is what we have mastered and can perform comfortably. What has been learned and assimilated can be done easily and confidently.

Similarly, there is no such thing as "difficult" in itself. It depends on the person and his or her accumulated knowledge. What we do not know and is new to us wears the mask of difficulty.

In order avoid facing a situation, we may continue to label something as "difficult" for many years. But that something is not so much unknown or new as repeated and feared, a situation that has not been truly confronted and experienced.

The experience of fearing something new prevents us from mastering what is difficult. But it is by not succumbing to fear that we will be able to overcome difficulties in life.

It is natural to have plenty of difficulties in life. We have all come into this world to learn, to acquire new knowledge,

and to help our souls awaken and open up to wisdom. If at some point everything becomes easy, we should take it as a warning: either we have become stuck in our learning process, or we have become so forgetful of our purpose that we can't even recognize the next steps on our upward path.



What is difficult is what confronts us at our current stage of spiritual evolution and also what we need to acquire at this moment in our personal development. We find it challenging, but it is an indispensable exercise to ensure that our experiences reach our consciousness and do not just touch us superficially.

What is easy already belongs to us. What is difficult is what we need to develop.

About Us

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

For further details please visit : WWW.NEWACROPOLISUK.ORG

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Education and Technology

Whether you think it's good, bad or ugly, education has become irrevocably entwined with technology. No classroom is complete without the ubiquitous digital projector and every self-respecting educationalist has a trusty laser-pointer. Arguably, PowerPoint is the application of choice used to spread enthrallment and tedium in equal measure. Online maps, interactive videos, "gamification" (computers games designed for more than entertainment) have all become an integral part of any "learning journey". It sounds great but like everything in life, there are positives, negatives and something interesting about all of the technology used.

The Great Library of Alexandria in Egypt once contained the largest collection of knowledge in the (then) known world. We know that scientists and philosophers such as Euclid, Hypatia and Archimedes, not to mention Buddhists and Persian astrologers, came from far and wide to teach, learn and share their knowledge. Alexandria was for hundreds of years a great cultural centre where the knowledge of different cultures came together in a great eclectic synthesis of philosophy, science, religion and art.

But in spite of this, information in those times was not as widely available as it is today, when the collective knowledge of human accomplishment is available to anyone with a device capable of connecting to the Internet. Want to know how to get to Llandudno? Face it; you'd be lost without Google maps! Geography teachers across the world must surely turn their eyes and palms upwards in thanks. Think music, art, history, science, horticulture, languages, construction – in every field there is a webpage, podcast, interactive game and video that is available to further the knowledge of the seeker.

Schools seem the most obvious place to have technology and it

has had enormous benefits in stimulating young people. All of the things mentioned above have made knowledge come to life. It has also, arguably, reduced patience amongst some of the young and made them have unreasonable expectations about how quickly they should be learning. Whilst I would like to say "It is the responsibility of the learner to learn", education is more of an unequal partnership. Learners need to use their imagination and effort to push the knowledge and understanding of others into their own heads. Technology does not necessarily make learning easier or the comprehension of any subject matter quicker.

In addition, those who teach with technology must keep up-to-date with it and this means that the delivery of their information must also be altered. This all takes time and every teacher will tell you it is the one thing they need more of, especially for themselves. While change is constant in the world, constant change in any type of teaching system is counter-productive for its students.

Lastly, communication has been greatly enhanced in recent years with smartphones that can receive emails, tweets and Facebook messages. However, any child over the age of 11 who admits to not having a smartphone must feel profoundly awkward. This is troubling, but the greater concern is if young people start to find face-to-face interaction increasingly difficult. Or, if they are absorbed by technology while out in nature, their capacity to experience its great and subtle moments may be dimmed. Perhaps then, with great mental stimulation comes the need to regularly disconnect from the outside world and quietly reflect on what has actually been learnt and experienced.

However, a number of questions still remain: do machines make us

better educated? What is the aim of education and what is an educated person?

The Greek philosopher Plato held that education was not about putting knowledge into the mind of the student, but drawing out or educating the wisdom we all inherently have within us.

In a similar vein, the great Indologist Heinrich Zimmer once said that while for the West knowledge is about information, in the East it is about transformation. Perhaps it is time to incorporate a more transformative approach into Western education, whereby success is seen in terms of a more rounded, happy, truly educated and therefore free human being. If technology can assist in this cause, all well and good. But it is a mistake to see it as the driving force. Real education is something more difficult, more challenging, and more truly human.

Gurpreet Virdee



The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying

Life and death are two sides of the same coin. However, we spend most of our time dealing with life and rejecting or denying somehow the natural aspect of death, perhaps because we might see it as a final end. Death is commonly related to pain, suffering, loss and uncertainty. Ancient civilizations like that of Tibet had a different approach and were able to accept death naturally, almost inspired by the analogy of changing clothes when those we are wearing become old or worn out. But because death carries a mysterious element and is an unpredictable event, it is difficult but perhaps not impossible to understand.

Death is a fact we will all have to face one day. So to discover the real meaning of life and death is a quest that can be philosophically explored while we dive into the ocean of suffering that Buddhists call 'Samsara'. We are trapped in a cycle of birth and death, and the path that has been given to us is to realise the nature of our mind. The Tibetans suggest three elements for actualizing the nature of our mind – or also called three 'authentics' – a Master, a devoted student and teachings that belong to a lineage of transmission. Because it is the mind, according to Buddhism, that experiences life and death, happiness and pain, heat and cold, and so on; it is the mind that creates and reveals all the variety of experiences. So if one understands the nature of it, the nature of things and existence can be understood too.

Interestingly, Tibetans use the word 'lu' to refer to the body and it means 'something you leave behind'. This is the same idea of changing clothes and accepting we are travellers in a temporary experience which has roots in a divine realm. Asking oneself "What if I were to die tonight?" is an invitation to look inwards and meditate on the quality of life we are currently choosing to live, while accepting the reality in which we are transient beings.



Bhavacakra or the Wheel of Cyclic Existence

Achieving this approach comes from the exercise of meditation or reflection, which becomes a tool for discovering who we truly are and helps us overcome the ignorance of our true nature.

Natalia Lema

PHILOSOPHICAL HUMOR



"How do you expect me to write with this? It doesn't even have a USB port for a keyboard"



couldn't do my homework because my computer has a virus and so do all my pencils and pens."

Some inspiring quotes

"To live a life of virtue, you have to become consistent, even when it isn't convenient, comfortable, or easy."

- Epictetus

"Though you may travel the world to find the beautiful, you must have it within you or you will find it not." - Ralph Waldo Emerson

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." - Martin Luther King

Beauty in stone – The Greek Miracle

I have just learned that in the next few weeks the British Museum will be launching a major exhibition on Greek art – *Beauty in the human form*. Why is it that, despite the passage of twenty-five centuries, the beauty of Greek sculpture still commands so much attention?

In what is sometimes called the Greek miracle, many 'currents' of thought converged together – the philosophical, the aesthetic, the humanistic, the metaphysical, etc. And like the beads of a necklace, all these currents are held together by a single thread: BEAUTY.

Especially during the idealism of the Classical Period (from approximately 480 to 323 B.C.) and through the Platonic teachings, Greek sculpture underwent a fundamental change. The human body became the reflection of an ideal form, the form of Beauty itself seen as a divine archetype. A transcendental meaning was given to beautiful marble forms, so that through art man could be reminded of a divine realm and his own divine origins.

The beautiful forms sculpted in stone also served to keep man in contact with a dimension of order and 'measure', instilling in him a sense of peace, inner security and moral integrity. At the same time, all the contradictory elements which are part and parcel of the human condition were balanced into forms portraying dynamic but harmonious movements. The beauty of the whole depended on the harmony and integration of its parts, thus stimulating man's inner quest to know himself.

Agostino Dominici



Morphic Fields or the Habits of Nature

Some years ago, the biologist Rupert Sheldrake presented a new concept of evolution through what he calls "Morphic Resonance". His ideas were inspired by a concept studied by Charles Darwin, namely the habits of plants and different organisms. The theory tries to explain the transmission of habits between organisms (animals, plants, unicellular beings). Modern scientists explain evolution through the transmission of the genetic codes of living beings as a law of nature, something we trivially call the survival of the fittest.

Rupert Sheldrake, on the other hand, explains the transmission of habits by what he calls morphic fields. These fields emanate from all living beings, such as a magnetic field emanating from a magnet. Through these fields habits are transmitted like data through a wireless network. Habits are not transmitted automatically or following a law, according to Dr Sheldrake, but probabilistically. When this happens, what he calls a "morphic resonance" takes place. It happens when two organisms are literally on the same "wave length". For more complex organisms like

mammals or even human beings, Rupert Sheldrake describes it as a form of telepathy... Even if the scientific community has not agreed with Dr Sheldrake, it does not mean that his theory is not true or does not contain some elements of truth. All we can say is that his theory needs to be proven scientifically and thoroughly. It must also be expressed in a mathematical and rational language. In the meantime, his probabilistic morphic resonance behaviour can be regarded as an "unexplained" law of nature.

Florimond Krins

Eostre and Easter

As we approach Easter, the representations of this festivity are increasingly appearing all around us; bunnies, painted eggs and rabbit icons which are all the traces of an ancient celebration dedicated to the Goddess Eostre. St. Bede – a lifelong monk who studied history, theology, chronology and poetry and dedicated himself to understanding the Anglo Saxons and the Christianisation of Britain – said that the month of April was known as “Eostremoth”, the month of beginning attributed to a celebration of Eostre.

The Egg and the rabbit symbols were in fact representations of fertility, which is a quality of Eostre. The celebrations in honour of the goddess took place in spring in a pagan festival called “Ostara”, which is another name for Eostre in the Germanic languages. According to Jacob Grimm, who was a German philologist, “ostar” is an expression used for the movement towards the rising sun. Ostara was the divinity of the radiant dawn, of upspringing light that brings joy and blessings.

Welcoming the first Sun in the spring was one of the ancient celebrations which still takes place today. Eostre or Ostara time is a time of spring when we see the change of the season, the warming of the earth and a renewal and rebirth in nature. Hence, it may lead us to feel an urge to start a new process of change in ourselves or to rejuvenate our homes.

Pinar Akhan



Ostara or Eostre. Engraving by Johannes Gehrts, 1884

NATURE AND US

The Wisdom of Geese

There is an old saying that goes: “What’s good for the goose is good for the gander”, meaning that what is good for one person is good for another. If we look a little closer at the behaviour of geese, we can find many more things we can learn from them. Particularly their amazing spirit of cooperation and teamwork.

Have you noticed, for example, that when a flock of geese flies across the sky, they use a “V” formation? By doing so the whole flock adds 71% greater flying range than if each bird flew alone.

If one goose falls out of formation, it feels the drag and resistance of flying alone; that’s why it quickly moves back into the formation and takes advantage of the lifting power of the bird in front of it.

When the lead goose tires, it naturally rotates back into formation and another goose flies to the point position. In this way, by seamless cooperation, they can travel for hundreds of miles a day.

But it’s not all about efficiency. There’s compassion too. When a goose gets sick or wounded, two other geese drop out of formation and follow it down to help and protect it.

Contrary to the old idea that “nature is red in tooth and claw”, scientists are now aware of another mechanism other than competition in nature: cooperation. You can see it in geese and you can see it in penguins. There are many examples that if beings work as a team, they can achieve more and better things, with less effort, simply by utilizing the laws of nature and working together. Does this not also apply to human beings, who are part of nature too?

Istvan Orban

The Mandate of Heaven

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

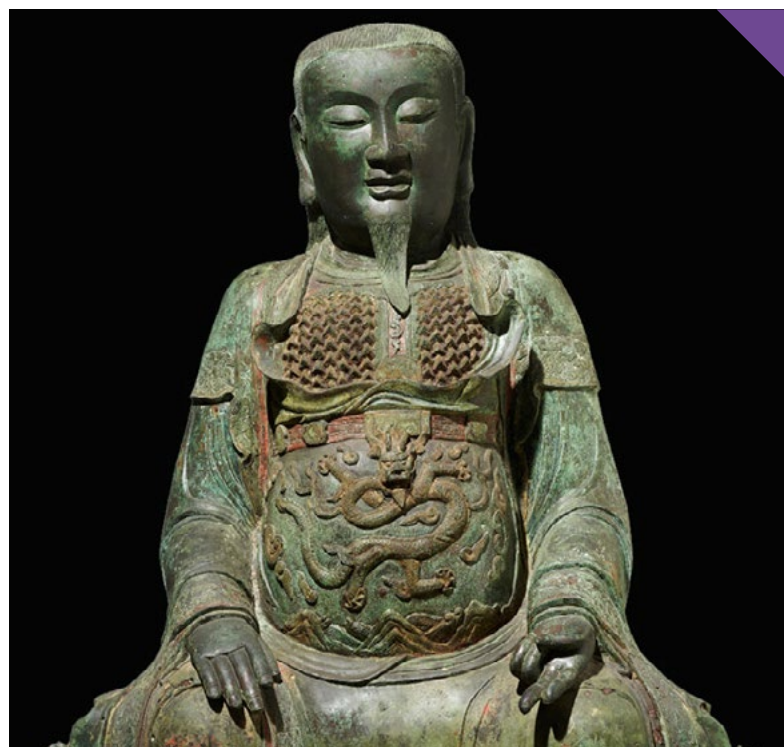
The Ming Dynasty (1386 – 1644) was an interval of native Chinese rule following the Mongol Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), which was so named by its founder, Kublai Khan, after a phrase from the I Ching: *da zai qian yuan*, meaning “great is the primal-ness of Heaven”. This speaks of the right to rule, but if it is not done justly and well, the Mandate of Heaven is lost.

Kublai Khan was the grandson of Genghis Khan, founder of one of the biggest empires in the world, the Mongol Empire. At its peak it extended from the Sea of Japan to Eastern Europe, with its furthest boundaries in Korea at one end and Hungary at the other. This vast unified and later safe area, known as *Pax Mongolica*, provided an economic opportunity and connected the Eastern and Western worlds through a trade route known as the Silk Road. With the establishment of Yassa (Great Law) the Mongols could regulate peaceful trading and travelling while also allowing complete religious freedom, allowing Buddhism, Islam and Christianity to spread around the new areas.

At the end of the 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. An ethnic group, the Han Chinese were organized through the group called the Red Turbans, which were affiliated with the White Lotus, a Buddhist secret society. The most prominent rebel was Zhu Yuanzhang, a descendant of a peasant family and educated by Buddhist monks. He led the overthrow of the Yuan Dynasty and in 1368 became the founder of a new dynasty, the Ming.

The Ming Dynasty is considered to be one of the more stable Chinese dynasties. With the Yongle Emperor, meaning ‘perpetual happiness’, the new

capital was established in Beijing with its new palace, the ‘Forbidden City’. It was built in 14 years with the labour of one million workers. Trade had already existed, but now it expanded on a different scale. Over the course of 30 years, admiral and diplomat Zhen He, trading with a fleet of 62 large ships, escorted by more than 200 smaller ships, carrying 26,000 men, helped to extend Chinese maritime and commercial influence as far as East Africa. Between 1405 and 1408 the Yongle Emperor also commissioned a team of 2,169 scholars to compile *The Yongle Encyclopedia*, covering subjects ranging from astronomy to medicine and yin-yang theory. The complete text exceeded 3.7 billion words. The dominant philosophy in China had become the Neo-Confucianism of Chu Hsi (1130-1200), who argued that there was an immaterial principle *Li*, which gave



Bronze statue of Zhenwu, God of War. Ming Dynasty, about 1416-39 CE.

form and essence to things, and a critical study of all things would reveal this single, underlying principle.

It was 1644 and corruption and conspiracy had been taking over the court. The peasants from the north were climbing over the Great Wall - it was time for a new dynasty, the mandate of heaven had been lost again.

Miha Kosir

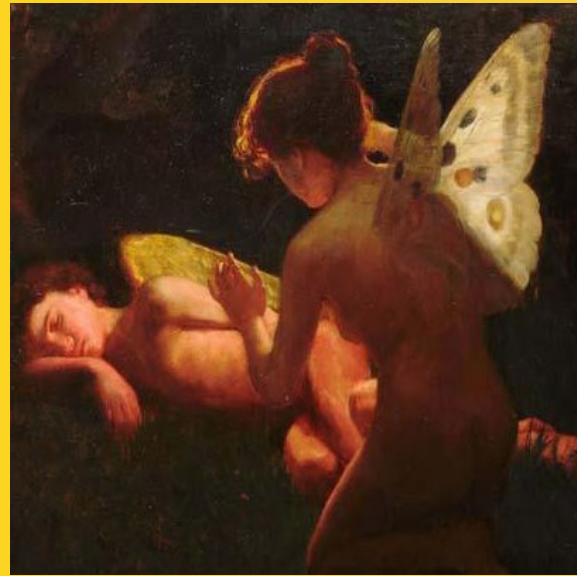
IN THE NEXT ISSUE

What is Soul? by Julian Scott

Last summer we were privileged to host a talk at our centre on the subject of 'Soul' by Matthew Del Nevo, a visiting philosopher from Australia. Matthew is Associate Professor in Philosophy at the Catholic Institute of Sydney, where he lectures mainly in the area of the history of ideas and modern continental philosophy. He is also the author of several books, including his latest publication "The Metaphysics of Night".

Though a common topic in the past, 'Soul' is not spoken about much today. The terms 'Self' and 'Spirituality' are much more frequently used. However, soul is vital as it occupies a position midway between the personality and the divine. Everyone instinctively knows what soul means. We talk about a soulful person, or soulful music, or on the other hand a soulless institution or a soulless performance. Soul is in fact what makes us eminently human.

Again, people talk of self-development, self-esteem and self-confidence, but a highly developed



personality does not necessarily mean a developed soul. One can have a big personality and a small soul, or vice versa.

And what of spirit? Many spiritual practices in the world of spirituality today are actually based on the self, on personality. Jung spoke about 'spiritual inflation', which is effectively self-inflation in a spiritual guise....

Read more in our next issue...

Upcoming Events

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

Starting Dates for our 16-week Philosophy Course:

Get Inspired – Discover Philosophy

Tues 03 March, 7 pm

First evening free - Please see website for details

Fri 06 March, 7.30 pm

Talk: *Plato's Republic and the Fable of Erus*

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

Fri 20 March at 7.30 pm

Talk: *Plato's Philebus and the Myth of Prometheus*

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

Thurs 23 April at 7.30 pm

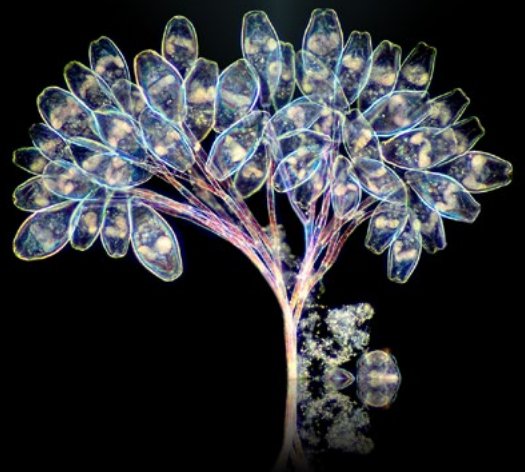
Talk: *Shedding light on homeopathy*

Guest Speaker: Elizabeth Adalian - ADMISSION £5 (£3 concs.)

Please see website for details

Get Inspired...

Discover Philosophy



16-week course - First Evening free