

ISSUE No. 11

JULY - AUG

2015

NewAcropolis

Philosophy and Education for the Future

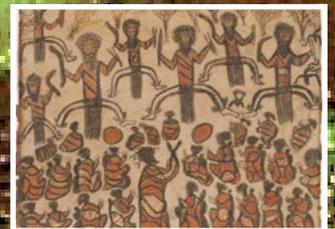
Bi-Monthly Magazine



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EDITORIAL

'Culture' is an interesting word. Initially, the term does not look very exciting and seems so broad that its meaning appears diluted. We even might jump to the conclusion that it must therefore not be a very important concept. However, when looking at it in more depth, it starts to offer rich insights and leads to the realization that it is something absolutely vital to our human species and that we neglect it at our own peril.

Looking at its etymology shows its many facets of meaning: it comes from the verb 'colere' which means "to tend, guard, cultivate, till" but also "to ennoble, to sift or to sieve and to honour, worship and keep sacred". It is obviously connected to agriculture but also to *cult* (in the sense of worship of a god) and to *colony*. It evokes the idea of gently cultivating and guarding tender plants in order to help them reach their potential, which is maybe a form of honouring the potential in each of them. It is easy to see how it lends itself as an analogy to human nurturing and its figurative sense of "cultivation through education" is attested since the Middle Ages.

In its broadest sense, culture signifies everything that is produced creatively by man, in contrast to being produced by nature. It is nurture in contrast to nature. It is widely acknowledged that man is the only living creature who really has culture. Animals are generally not known for possessing culture and being able to pass on abilities to future generations other than in a genetic way. But humans have the ability to transmit immaterial concepts in a non-genetic way. Thus, we can pass on knowledge, values and ideas that not only help us to survive but also enable us to master our environment with increasing sophistication.

For some people, culture carries a negative, divisive meaning; culture can create divides, class wars, clashes of civilization... On the other hand, most people would agree that culture can create a shared identity or vision. So, culture can divide and unite at the same time.

The solution to this dilemma might be to see culture not as an end but as a means. It is not about the predominance of one culture over another, or about finding the 'best' culture. Rather, culture is a means to enable human beings to unfold their potential and different cultures will bring out different facets of our many-sided nature. We need different cultures in order to cultivate different aspects of our nature. As Thomas Carlyle put it, "*Culture is a process by which a person becomes all that they were created capable of being.*"

Sabine Leitner

About Us

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

For further details please visit : WWW.NEWACROPOLISUK.ORG

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 Philosophy
Culture
NEW ACROPOLIS Volunteering

The Eco-Philosophy of Henryk Skolimowski

The World is a Sanctuary – according to Henryk Skolimowski, a contemporary Polish philosopher regarded as the father of eco-philosophy – and not a Machine, as Newton proclaimed. Skolimowski studied at Oxford, where he received his PhD, then went on to teach philosophy for many years in the United States.

Skolimowski's eco-philosophy goes against the mainstream philosophical worldviews, especially the mechanistic ones, which originated in the 17th century. Newtonian theory regarded nature as a clock-like mechanism, within which we are little cogs and wheels, and this has allowed humanity to abuse and destroy the planet. Skolimowski also criticizes the analytical-linguistic approach of philosophy, as being too abstract and too inadequate to answer the challenges of our time.

However, Skolimowski's proposed solutions to these problems are based on the key idea that the world is something unique, precious and sacred. He says that reverence for life has to be our guiding value. Man on the Earth is just a guest, not an owner, so we shouldn't behave like a conquistador, but a steward. The Earth is just a temporary dwelling, of which we must take the utmost care. He called this Ecological Humanism.

He also writes about the Benevolent Cosmos, an idea which comes from ancient times, where – like Plato in his work *Timaeus* – the World (Cosmos) was regarded as a living being. This Cosmos came into existence to generate life and then to bring about human life. One of the main attributes of the Cosmos is creativity, because it is moving towards self-realization. As the Cosmos is physical and at the same time transcendent, it is ruled both by physical and by trans-physical laws.

Skolimowski regards humans as cosmic beings. As we emerged from the soup of evolution and developed imagination and creativity, so we became able to remake the shapes of the universe and ourselves. In common with some of the Eastern philosophies, he thinks that we incorporate all stages of the evolution of the Cosmos within our blood and in our brains. But we are more than that, as we can think, love and create, so we are like the eyes, minds and loving arms of the Cosmos.

He points out the great paradox of the Western world: while we are acquiring more and more developed technology, we are degrading and forgetting culture, seeing it as an anachronism of the pre-modern era. Culture, however, which provides a set of dynamic structures for living, is much more than just memories from the past, it is an inherent



Henryk Skolimowski

part of the human being's strategies for survival and well-being. And at the same time, it gives meaning to life. Today, although we have more comfort and skills, thanks to the machines we have built and surrounded ourselves with, we have no clue about the meaning of life. We do not find meaning in consumption, entertainment or technology.

But we still need a larger purpose. For this we need a transcendent dimension to our life, which is often, but not always, connected to religions. But transcendent goals do not mean a religious agenda and they should not be mistaken for a religious belief. And it should not be a secular agenda either, as instead of providing us with happiness and fulfilment, this deprives us of these at a deeper level. Skolimowski is very optimistic about the future, saying "a wonderful journey lies ahead of us as we seek to actualize the cosmic meaning which resides in us, to help the universe and all its creatures in the journey of self-actualization and in the process of healing the earth and making it blossom again."

Results of our Survey on "What is Culture?"

Over the last couple of months, volunteers from New Acropolis have been conducting a survey in Islington to find out what people who live or work in the borough think about the word "Culture". As an educational charity working in the fields of philosophy, culture and volunteering, we have a natural interest in connecting with people on the theme of culture and entering into a dialogue about its value and role in society.

In order to reach a wide group of respondents, we mainly adopted the strategy of interviewing people at random in Islington's parks. It was a philosophical opportunity for us to overcome our fears of approaching strangers and a welcome discovery to find that the people of Islington are generally very open to philosophical matters. Most people who were approached were happy to spend 10 minutes answering the questions and some of them then entered into interesting conversations afterwards, welcoming the opportunity to discuss the issues the survey raised.

So what do the people of Islington think about culture?

Generally we found a positive view: culture was seen in the first place as something that enriches our understanding, while secondly it was seen as a means of transmitting values and then a form of education. The role of culture was mostly seen as "to help us to understand life better", followed by "to increase our knowledge" and then "to pass on values".

The top five words associated with culture reflect this, the top one being art(s) (around 35%), followed by education (17.5%), music and values (16.5%), and people, religion and understanding (all at around 12.5%). Around 200 different words associated with culture were listed, including "the Smurfs"

(unsurprisingly only one entry).

All of the above seem to reinforce the idea that, on the whole, people understand culture in the two-fold sense of 1) the arts and 2) an inherited value system, and generally attribute to it a positive and educational value.

Question 4 asked people to rank the concepts of culture, the economy, technological development, education and health in order of importance. It was interesting to see that the economy came out in a lowly fourth place, whereas education and health were ranked in more or less equal first place, with technological development in the last position and culture in the middle.

As a school of philosophy we wanted to find out whether people saw any connection between philosophy and culture. The top score showed that people think that "culture arises from a people's philosophy of life" and in the second place they believe that "philosophy links different aspects of culture".

In answer to the question of how culture is related to education, the role of these two functions was perceived as similar. It was interesting that the statement "culture and education both help to develop human potential" received almost unanimous agreement (99%).

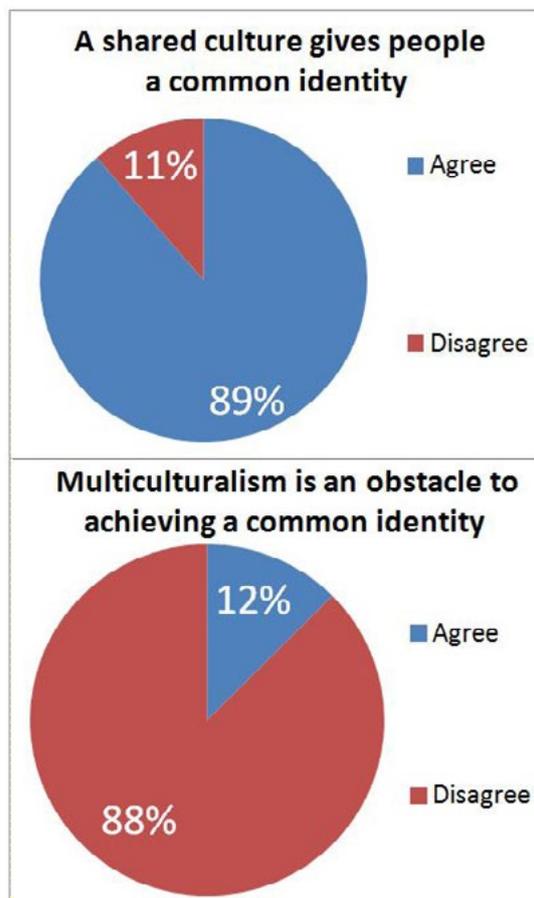
In a borough characterised by enormous cultural diversity, it is not surprising that most people (88%) disagreed with the statement that "multiculturalism is an obstacle to achieving a common identity." It was fascinating to find that almost exactly the same proportion (89%) agreed with the statement that "a shared culture gives people a common identity". This highlights an apparent contradiction which I leave you to think about. The most "agrees" in this section were given

to the statement "an appreciation of culture can lead to a wider sense of identity", which perhaps helps to bridge this gap.

The statement that "cultural identity is a useful foundation for finding one's individual identity" was not agreed with by everyone – 22% disagreed. As one respondent commented, "cultural identity can also obscure one's own identity".

It was a great pleasure to find that residents of Islington were so willing to enter into this complex dialogue and give value to a topic which is often relegated to a secondary role in our society. If you would like to see a full version of the survey responses, please email me at julian@acropolis.org. On the Upcoming Events page you can find details of a talk on the value of culture which I will be giving on 14th July. A big thank you to all who participated!

Julian Scott



The Hermetic message of Dante

Dante Alighieri is very well known in the world of art and literature, but not many people are aware of the hermetic and occult teachings he purposely disseminated throughout his works.

Despite current historical misconceptions, Dante's time, the so-called "Middle Ages", was a time of great spiritual vitality, in spite of its contradictions (such as the cruelties of the Inquisition). Thanks to the Crusades, there were many intellectual and spiritual exchanges taking place between East and West. Many of the teachings of classical antiquity together with the Christian mysteries were being circulated through various 'underground' movements. We can for instance see how a single spiritual thread runs through the Knights Templar, the mysterious builders of the cathedrals, the authors of the Grail Cycle and the medieval Alchemists.

Dante was himself affiliated to secret organizations like *La Fede Santa* (the Sacred Faith) a tertiary order of the Templars, and a mysterious group of 'poets' known in literature as the *Fideli D'Amore* (the faithful to Love). There are many traces of a hermetic language employed by these 'poets' to communicate the existence of initiatic doctrines as well as that of a 'brotherhood' serving these doctrines. One of the main themes promoted through the lyrics of the authors of the "*dolce stil'nuovo*" (a sweet new poetic style) was the mysteries of Love as a vehicle for ascending to the divine. The "beloved" woman appearing in their literary works under various feminine names (Rosa, Beatrice, Silvia, Savage, etc.) was always the symbol of Transcendent Knowledge or Wisdom and what Dante himself had undertaken was this inner journey towards *Sophia*.

Dante's Initiate life and his relationship with *Wisdom* and its followers probably started at the time when he

wrote the *Vita Nuova* (the New Life) and culminated during the time he composed the *Divine Comedy*. In the *Inferno* section (IX, 61) Dante explicitly says "O you possessed of sturdy intellects, observe the teaching which is hidden here beneath the veil of verses so obscure" and then he goes on to describe his spiritual journey starting with the descent into the centre of the Earth (alchemical Black phase) and



La Divina Commedia di Dante by Domenico di Michelino

the climbing of the mountain of *Purgatory* (White phase) to reach the stars and the vision of God (his higher self). As he enters *Paradise* (Red phase) he says: "I was within the heaven that receives more of His light; and I saw things that he who from that height descends, forgets or cannot tell". I leave you with these beautiful verses, which at once conceal and reveal the majesty of Dante's hermetic message.

Agostino Dominici

PHILOSOPHICAL HUMOR



Some inspiring quotes

"The mind without love cannot understand; the mind without intelligence cannot love"
Nicholas of Cusa

"We are not going in circles, we are going upwards. The path is a spiral; we have already climbed many steps." -
Hermann Hesse

"Beauty awakens the soul to act." - Dante Alighieri

The Philosophical Beauty of Chinese Calligraphy

The word "calligraphy" is derived from a Greek word meaning beautiful writing. And in the East Chinese calligraphy (Shufa) is valued as "high art". Throughout the history of China, leaders, scholars and people from all walks of life have practised calligraphy.

Calligraphy and Tao: The essence of calligraphy is to express the innermost beauty of one's soul and spirit. Tao is the law of nature and also a concept containing deep, perennial laws and principles. In art, calligraphy is Tao incarnate, an embodiment of the divine law. Therefore, calligraphy creates a close relationship with nature.

Writing a Painting: Ever since the birth of calligraphy the brush has been the instrument that unifies calligraphy and painting. The practitioner of both arts handles his brushes and manipulates the ink in the same way. There are two words used to describe what a painter does: Hua hua means "to paint a picture" and xie hua means "to write a picture." Many artists prefer the latter. So it is quite common for a Chinese painter to say that he is "writing a painting".

Beauty: In Chinese calligraphy there are two types of beauty. First, the beauty in the heart - aesthetics - the immediate connection with the physical form of the characters. The second is to look at the hidden beauty, the poetry and harmonious content unveiled behind the calligrapher's thoughts and emotions.

The Power of Calligraphy - Uniqueness: Every calligraphic creation is a manifestation of the mind of the person who created it. Henry Ward Beecher once said that "Every artist dips his brush in his own soul, and paints his own nature into his pictures". The same character written by two people will speak differently and have its own uniqueness. As Li Fu-Kwang said, "Every twig of a living tree is alive, and so every tiny stroke of a piece of fine calligraphy, inspired by some natural object, has the energy of a living thing". *Jim Pang*



Psychoneuroimmunobiology

Psychoneuroimmunobiology is a science that explores the concept that the immune system is influenced by non-immunological physiological systems and the interplay between "mind" and "body". According to Dr. Mario Alonso Puig, a Fellow of the Harvard University Medical School, "today we know that self-confidence, enthusiasm and hope have the ability to promote higher brain functions. The pre-frontal area of the brain, where the most advanced thinking takes place... is hugely influenced by the limbic system, which is our emotional brain. So what the heart wants to feel, the mind will

eventually show".

Several studies have shown that one minute spent entertaining a negative thought leaves the immune system in a delicate situation for six hours. Stress, that sense of being permanently overwhelmed, produces some surprising changes in the functioning of the brain and hormone constellation. It has the ability to damage memory and learning neurons located in the hippocampus. And it affects our intellectual capacity because it prevents the blood supply from reaching those areas of the brain that are most needed to make sound decisions.

Words are a form of vital

energy. Using positron emission tomography, it has been possible to photograph how people who decided talk to themselves in a more positive way, specifically people with mental disorders, managed to physically reshape their brain structure, to alter the circuits that generated these diseases in them.

Fear prevents us from going outside our comfort zone. We tend to cling to the security of the known, and that attitude prevents us from realizing our potential.

(Extracted from an interview with Dr. Mario Alonso Puig in *La Vanguardia Digital*)

The Summer Solstice

The period between the 20th and the 22nd of June is the Summer Solstice. "Solstice" is Latin for "sun stands still". In the Northern hemisphere the sun reaches its most northerly position and we experience the longest day and the shortest night. The summer solstice is often associated with change, nature and new beginnings, a time when people celebrate the Sun and life. Many cultures throughout the ages have celebrated this day with feasts, bonfires, picnics, and traditional songs and dances.

Some of these celebratory festivals included Litha, Midsummer or St John's Day, Kronia and Vestalia. In ancient China the summer solstice represented the "yin". In ancient Egypt, it preceded the appearance of the star Sirius, heralding the beginning of their new year, just before the season of the Nile's flooding. In Greece the festival that coincided with the solstice was called *Kronia*, and honoured Cronus the god of agriculture. In Rome, this period coincided with the festival of Vestalia, which honoured Vesta, the goddess who guarded virginity and was considered the patron of the domestic sphere. In ancient Gaul the celebrations were called the Feast of Epona, named after a mare goddess who personified fertility and protected horses. In ancient Europe during Litha they used to roll giant wheels that had been set on fire into bodies of water to symbolize the balance between fire and water. Finally, Stonehenge is believed to have been erected to establish the date of the Summer Solstice, and the Teotihuacan Temple in Mexico is also orientated according to the sun's passage.

Matina Karastatira



St. John's Fire Celebration

Welcome to London National Park City

With over 300 languages spoken, 170 museums, four UNESCO World Heritage Sites and one of Britain's National Trails, the Greater London National Park is open for you to explore. This is how former geography teacher Daniel Raven-Ellison promotes his campaign to turn London into the first national park city in the world.

Think of it, Greater London covers almost 600 square miles, an area about the size of South Yorkshire. Overall, 47 per cent of London is green space, and 60 per cent is classified as open space, which consists of 3,000 parks, 30,000 allotments, three million gardens and two National Nature Reserves. London is one of the biggest European cities and holds the title of being the greenest capital city in Europe. It is most likely the world's largest urban forest. There are as many trees as people, around eight million trees. But it

is estimated the population will grow to eleven million by 2050, which means the urban sprawl will take over the natural spaces.

Ideas such as turning the city into a national park may seem unrealistic, but great ideas often start like that. Imagine the consequences of people living in a national park city. It would boost the green communities, create more interest and shared space for other species and set an example for urbanisation around the globe.

The growth we are going through needs more sustainable directives for the benefit of nature and ourselves. We have to look into the future and work with new generations of children who are just coming up and being educated. If they were to grow up in the National Park City they would become our future decision makers who could see the solutions for living with nature in a more respectful way.

Link: <http://www.greaterlondonnationalpark.org.uk/>

Miha Kosir

Australian aborigines

Australia is the sixth largest country in the world, with an area of 7.6 million km². It is a developed country and one of the wealthiest in the world. Its aborigines arrived 40,000 – 60,000 years ago, probably travellers from Asia who had a great ability to adapt to new circumstances. Europeans came later on in the 17th century, including Dutch, English and French, because until then, Australia was an unexplored land. Somehow it managed to keep isolated, away from external influence, while developing and evolving a rich culture that was clearly in a harmonious relationship with nature. Studying the aboriginal culture can be a source of inspiration for broadening the Western mentality and its particular approach to the use of natural resources, relationship with animals and the Earth, and even the way we design buildings and wear clothes.

Although the population has been greatly reduced, the culture is still very much alive. It retains its practices and rituals, and continues to produce art and literature. Australian aborigines are moved by spiritual values which are an essential element in their daily life and social interactions. Myths have been transmitted and shared amongst communities, trying to preserve the sacred celebrations and rites. They believe that things such as caves, mountains, lakes and trees were created by their ancestors; ancestors who were in appearance half human and half animal and who moved around, hunted, had rituals, laughed and by doing all these things the Earth started to take shape. Some particular locations are seen as meaningful to the community due to totemic qualities attributed by the ancestors. People participate actively in ceremonies and elderly people are well respected because of their wisdom.

Interestingly, all sorts of things are considered to hold the presence of a spirit and in the case of human beings, this spirit returns to its source when the person dies. One of the most outstanding ideas is the strong connection they have established with nature, understanding that humans aren't superior but part of a greater manifestation which has a superior essence. Perhaps because people were exposed when harvesting or hunting, an appreciation and respect were born naturally and the fact that there is a dependency on nature also made them look after it with gratitude. Food was not taken for granted but seen as an opportunity for developing

gratitude. People didn't celebrate birthdays but instead celebrations were held when someone wanted to share an improvement, an inner or outer achievement. Their different and higher state of consciousness was reflected in their behaviour towards stones, animals, plants and invisible entities. They used senses like smell, hearing and sight, and the perception of more subtle vibrations or communication through telepathy were realities for them.

People who have interacted with these communities have been touched by the attitude of the Australian aborigines towards accepting the trials of life, and the way they were able to detach themselves from objects and mindsets, keep up their ceremonies in order to bond with nature and embrace the idea of 'karma' through the analogy of the boomerang. Whatever we do will come back to us. Telling the



Bradshaw rock paintings found in Kimberley region, Western Australia

truth, realising the power of thoughts and the energy that is channelled in whatever we do are other examples that are universally applicable today. We might not be in Australia, but in every part of the world principles like the ones mentioned can definitely make a difference to the way we live and project our existence.

Natalia Lema

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

The World of the Aztecs by

Elena Löber

The Aztecs - or rather "people from Aztlan", a translation from the Nahuatl word 'aztecatl' - are largely still a mystery for us. Their strong and determined character, their practical sense and the value they ascribed to the strength of will enabled this people to develop a highly advanced culture and conquer vast parts of Central America.

The Aztec Empire began to rise in the 13th century and centred around Tenochtitlan (today Mexico City). Huiztilopochtli, the god of warfare, was their principle deity, which was reflected in their character. However, war has to be understood in a twofold sense: on the one hand it is about the external war we know, conquering peoples and territory. On the other hand, and just as - if not more - important, the internal war, which refers to the conquering of oneself, to the triumph of the soul over matter. For an Aztec, to be a warrior was an attitude and a mindset, a posture vis-à-vis life rather than a mere act of death and destruction.



The Aztecs had a strong belief in the immortality of the soul, which explains why minimal value was given to material life. Their highly elaborated calendar system was split into a solar calendar of 360 + 5 days and a ritual calendar of 260 days. Within this, they had a clear vision of the task the human being has to fulfil on earth... .

Read more in our next issue...

Upcoming Events

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

Tues 14 July at 7.30 pm

Talk: Culture Heroes: The value of culture for transforming self and society

Is culture merely a luxury item for prosperous societies, or does it have a more profound role? This talk will look at the different meanings of the word 'culture' and explore their relevance for today and what effect cultural expressions such as art have on the way we think, feel and act.

Speaker: Julian Scott - ADMISSION £5 (£3 concs.)

Tues 29 Sept / Thurs 8 Oct / Wed 14 Oct at 7.00 pm

16-week course "Get Inspired - Discover Philosophy"

For more details see our website - www.newacropolisuk.org



**THE VALUE OF CULTURE FOR
TRANSFORMING SELF AND SOCIETY**