

# NewAcropolis

Philosophy and Education for the Future

Bi-Monthly Magazine



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## EDITORIAL

Recently I went to Sicily and visited some of its ancient sites: the ruins of a temple or edifice in Cefalù built in the cyclopean style (see p. 6 for our article on cyclopean architecture) and the ancient cities of Agrigento and Selinunte.

Agrigento, now a UNESCO world heritage site, was one of the greatest cities in the ancient Mediterranean world with a population of about 200,000 people. Its *Valley of the Temples* is one of the most extraordinary monuments of Greek art and culture and has a magnificent collection of Doric temples. Just to give you an idea of its dimensions: the temple of Zeus is the largest ever Doric temple in Classical Greece and was once as high as a 10-storey building and as wide as a modern stadium.

The city was founded in 581 BCE and really started to flourish in 480 BCE - until 406 when the Carthaginians sacked it. What struck me most was how quickly the ancient Greeks were able to build this city and its many temples. In just over 170 years, starting from scratch, they built not only the city itself with houses, streets, a military defence system and enormous temples but also institutions and an infrastructure that could cope with the rapidly growing population. They achieved a surprising level of economic and social prosperity within a very short space of time. What an example of united effort, of skill and knowledge applied to a shared vision!

Agrigento's growth and rise raises many questions: who was the driving force behind it? Was it, as some have maintained, Presocratic philosophers like Pythagoras and Empedocles and their disciples? Where did their engineering skill and wisdom come from? What inspired their efforts? We don't really know. But the achievements of the past are an inspiration for the future. If they could do it then, it can be done again. Maybe we don't need to found new cities any more but there is an obvious need to renew the cultural foundations of our current societies.



*"Travel is more than the seeing of sights; it is a change that goes on, deep and permanent, in the ideas of living."*

Miriam Beard (American historian)

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](http://WWW.NEWACROPOLISUK.ORG)

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 Philosophy  
Culture  
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## Fear of Loneliness

By Jelena Sikirich, Director of New Acropolis Russia

Loneliness is like an iceberg. There is a small part which is clearly visible, and a much larger part which is submerged. The visible part of the iceberg is caused by difficulties in human relationships: a lack of contact with other human beings, due to circumstantial factors such as old age and isolation, or psychological factors such as shyness or social awkwardness. Or sometimes a series of emotional disappointments that have led someone to lose faith in other human beings and avoid contact with them so as not to be hurt. Others might feel alone because they haven't met the man or woman of their dreams, or because they feel misunderstood by their friends and family, whose values and aspirations are at odds with their own.

*"Problems with relationships are only consequences, but not the causes of loneliness."*

From this point of view, it would seem that our happiness depends not on ourselves, but on others. We depend on the reactions of others, their feelings towards us, their support and understanding. But if we don't get that, we lose our balance, our confidence and we feel weak and unsupported.

This approach to happiness is rather like betting everything on a single hand in a game of poker. If it turns out well, everything will be wonderful; if not, disaster strikes. But life is not a melodrama and maybe we should ask ourselves directly: what would happen if we were left alone, without our loved one, without children, friends, support or understanding? Would that mean our life is over? Would our possibilities of happiness have been extinguished forever?

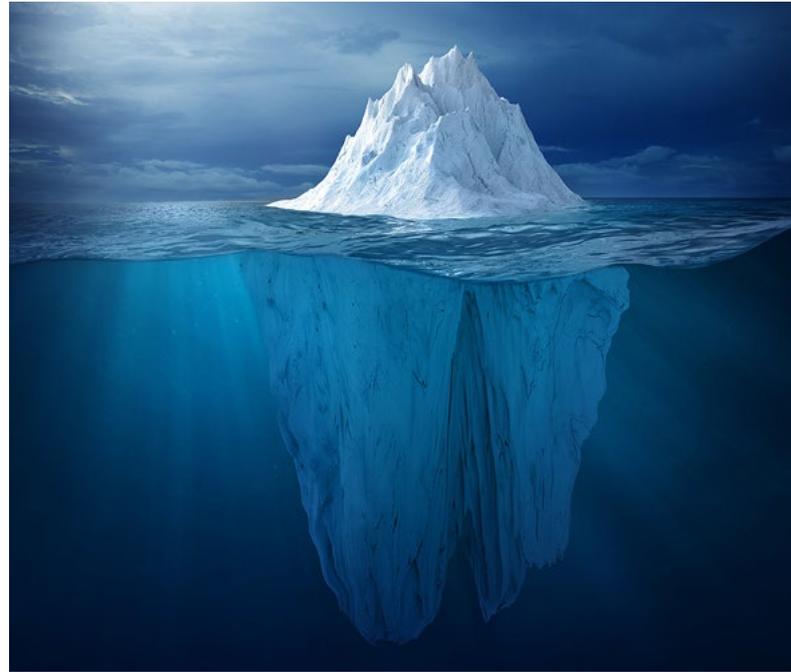
To answer this question, we need to take a look at the submerged part of the iceberg, and then we will see that loneliness is not only about a lack of relationships. *Problems with relationships are only consequences, but not the causes of loneliness.*

In order to find real love, friendship and happiness, we need to address deeper problems that come from a neglected part of the human being - what in previous times were referred to as "problems of the soul". By soul is meant that part of the human being which is concerned with beauty, truth, the sacred dimension of life, destiny, meaning and purpose, amongst others. In this approach, the roots of loneliness are to be found in the frustration of the soul's needs.

### The soul's needs as an answer to loneliness

Depriving the soul of its need for meaning and purpose and the concept of a sacred task - as much of modern

philosophy has attempted to do, from Locke to Sartre - has led to a deep-seated sense of loneliness in the human being, even when disguised under the more intellectual sounding term "alienation". In the eyes of the soul there is no room for chance. Everything bears the seal of destiny, if only we could see it. But the present indoctrination makes us see such a notion as childish, primitive and superstitious. The



soul needs sacred things in order to have a reminiscence of its own world. The soul also needs beauty and harmony to inspire it. If we surround ourselves with utilitarian or ugly objects and buildings, the soul feels alone.

The soul, too, has its fears of loneliness. But they are of a deeper kind. It fears the possibility of losing the ability to love and to give. For the soul, it is more important to love than to be loved. It aspires not only to have friends, but to become the friend of all.

When a human being loves and gives everything he has without demanding anything in return, he finds that he is no longer alone. Then, an unimaginable number of doors open before him. When he depends on the strength of his own heart, his mind and his creative imagination, destiny brings him into contact with those "twin souls" of which he has dreamed, real companions on his path. It seems that in order to have good relationships with others, it is first necessary to stop depending on them.

(Editor's note: this article is a summary of a much longer paper by the author, which had to be reduced in length due to the space constraints of this publication.)

## The New Middle Ages

Middle or medieval ages are a normal, natural phenomenon. In Ancient Egypt, there were three intermediate periods, lasting from 50 to 400 years each. When a civilization decays, this intermediate time comes, and the order and quality of life disappear on several levels. For example, during the Roman Empire more than 50,000 miles of stone roads were built, maintained and guarded, so that travelling was quite easy and safe. Later, during the European Middle Ages, nobody cared about the roads, which were ruined as people used the stones for their properties, and the rest became dangerous due to bandits and thieves. So before somebody went on a longer journey, he made his last will.

In the last 200-300 years we have seen a great transformation. Population growth, industrialization and mass production have generated a new kind of era - the modern age - where the importance of science, technology and material development were the determining factors. This has enabled us to build big cities, visit the Moon and enable people to live longer than ever before in human history. But this age now seems to be coming to an end. Climate change, due to heavy pollution, is a sign that humanity has crossed a threshold. Changes are occurring in human societies too. Wars and refugees, terrorism and corruption, the loss of ethics and values, rising individualism... these are attributes of the new intermediate or middle age.

According to Roman historians like Cicero, history is life's teacher, so let's take a look at what happened in the last Middle Ages in case we need to be prepared to face a new one.

In the first place, the life of most people was about surviving, so they had little extra time or energy to waste. Culture became just a privilege for a small circle. Ignorance was widespread and, as many people

couldn't even read or count, they could be easily deceived and believed in superstitions. Lack of knowledge led to a lack of hygiene. People were dirty and smelly during the Middle Ages, and they got used to it. Nutrition was also inadequate. There was not enough food and what there was was generally of very low quality. Villages and farms were self-supporting, so they had only what they produced themselves or what they managed to exchange for other products. Imagine if there was no international trade and everyone had to make what they eat and wear!

Not surprisingly, mortality was very high. Men in their thirties were considered old. Although lots of children were born, many of them died before reaching adulthood. As a result of the poor hygiene and nutrition, epidemics could cause huge devastation. Although agriculture was extremely important, conservation of the environment was not. Many forests disappeared during the Middle Ages, because trees were used to build houses or simply to produce heat during winter.

Products were made locally or came from outside by barter. Trading was carried out by vendors or merchants, who travelled to and from far-off countries and were highly prized. Other trades that satisfied the demands of the rich and were particularly sought after were jewellers, blacksmiths and soldiers. Monarchs also needed well-educated people, but only to further their own, individual aims.

The only technical tools and inventions that lasted were those that proved their practical value and didn't need any special expertise. So the hypocaust (floor heating) completely disappeared after the fall of the Roman Empire, but iron was highly valued due to its use in agriculture and warfare. During the Middle Ages, there were constant local wars between the small

kingdoms and principalities.

The re-use of materials was essential too. Nothing was regarded as rubbish and everything could be recycled. Unlike in our times, when we dump broken machines, in the Middle Ages people repaired them, because it was difficult or expensive to get a new one. And if someone bought a tool, it would be expected to last for more than a hundred years.

Looking at history as it is now developing, we can see how empires are collapsing, masses of people are leaving their lands and new borders are appearing not only between countries, but in the hearts of people. Prejudice and intolerance are growing, breeding aggression. In this age, which is dehumanizing humanity, it is brave to swim against the current and still be open, generous and strong in a spiritual and moral sense. But this is the key to the possibility of building a new society and a new civilisation after the Dark Ages.

*Istvan Orban*



## The Sacred Number Three in Buddhism

We have all heard of the proverb: 'All good things come in threes', while Aristotle himself remarked: 'A whole is that which has a beginning, middle and end'. Threefold divisions are among the most important classifications found in metaphysical, philosophical and religious systems and we should not be surprised to find them permeating Buddhist doctrines as well.

In Buddhism, one of the most well known threefold classifications is the *Tripitaka* or Three Baskets into which the earliest Pali Canon was divided. Another is the *Triratna* or Three Jewels (related to the Three Refuges). Although on a popular level the Three Jewels refer to the historical *Buddha*, his teaching (the *Dhamma*) and his early followers (known as the *Sangha* or community of monks and nuns), there is also a more esoteric interpretation of this classification, where *Buddha* refers to Universal Wisdom, *Dhamma* stands for its Doctrine or Law and the *Aryasangha* (or Noble Sangha) refers to the true exponents of the Dharma, the Arhats or Initiates.

There is also the *Triyana* division of Buddhism into *Hinayana* (Lesser Way), *Mahayana* (Greater Way) and *Vajrayana* (Adamantine Way), which mark the three stages of the historical unfoldment of Buddhist teachings. There are many more threefold classifications, but one which is very abstruse and worth mentioning is the *Trikaya* doctrine, often translated as 'Three Bodies or Forms' Doctrine.

The *Trikaya* doctrine was mainly prevalent during the Mahayana period, although traces of it are already found in the Pali scriptures. According to these teachings, the word *Buddha* refers to three separate

(and yet interconnected) 'realities'. It is as if the Buddha (the 'Awakened One') can function at three different levels in three different 'forms'. When functioning on the terrestrial or historical level 'he' would assume the *Nirmanakaya* 'form' and appear, as it were, in flesh and bone (i.e. Buddha Shakyamuni). When functioning on a mental or archetypal level 'he' would assume the



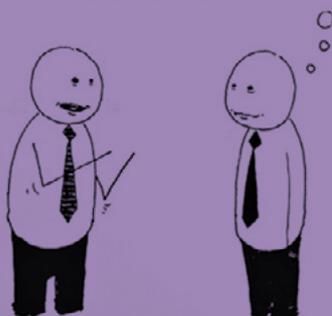
A representation of the trikaya in Vien Giac temple, Bodhgaya, India

*Sambhogakaya* 'form' and act as the ideal 'person'. And lastly, we find the *Dharmakaya*, which can be thought of as the principle of Enlightenment itself, which exists on the absolute or universal plane and which is referred to as the Truth 'body' assumed by a Buddha on the highest level of reality.

Agostino Dominici

## PHILOSOPHICAL HUMOR

MY GREATEST FEAR  
IS THAT ONE DAY I WILL GET CAUGHT  
PRETENDING TO LISTEN



## Some inspiring quotes

"Change your thoughts and you change your world"  
Norman Vincent Peale

"Each day provides its own gifts"  
Marcus Aurelius

"A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step"  
Laozi

## Art to bemuse

'Are you looking for an alternative to the soulless sugar-coated banality of the average family day out?'

An art exhibition or rather a show of world-renowned artist Banksy whose identity has never been revealed has come to an end. An amusement park situated in the worn down and forgotten seaside resort of Weston-super-Mare was presented to the visitors as 'Dismaland' – the UK's most disappointing new visitor attraction. No matter how organisers promoted the show, the event was sold out within minutes of tickets being released. The purpose of the show was not to amuse visitors, but to bemuse them and to make them think about social and political issues.

Some of the more obvious themes presented were war in Syria, Palestine and Israel, police oppression, political critique, the consumer mentality, etc. Overall it seems we could experience an amusement park as a caricature of a sleeping middle class in search of comfort without considering the price.

Has art taken on the role of activism, serving as a catalyst to awaken people to justice, or the lack of it? It could be that sometimes tragedy makes us realize where we are and where we are going and helps to put things back in a right order. Are we hearing the sound of some very old habits crumbling? Are we ready for the ashes from which a new form will arise, aspiring again towards beauty in a more just and better world? It is good to be critical and to recognise mistakes, but even better to offer solutions and show the light.

'Life isn't always a fairytale'.

*Miha Kosir*



## Cyclopean architecture

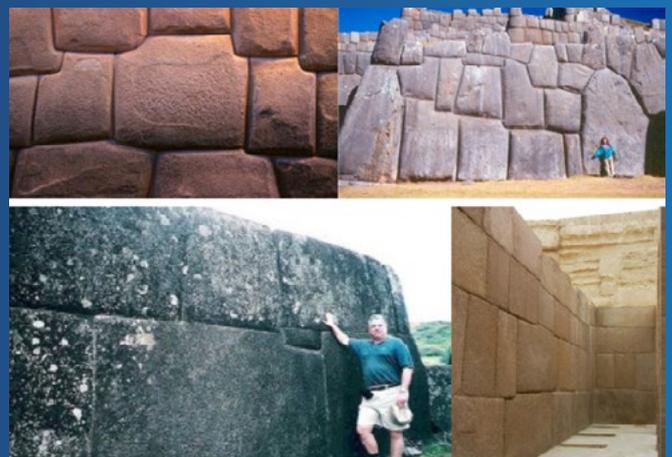
Cyclopean architecture, or masonry, is an expression describing a very ancient type of construction. Cyclopean structures are usually made of dry stones, without cement or binder, put together in a very complex way that makes them so sturdy that they are earthquake proof. The term cyclopean comes from the oldest Mycenaean structures, where the myth tells that those ancient buildings were built by "Cyclops" (one-eyed giants). However, examples of such structures are found all over the globe, such as in Egypt with the pyramids and some temples, in Peru with the sites of Cuzco, Ollantaytombo and Machu Picchu and also on Easter Island, to name just a few.

It is interesting to note that these structures are not just some of the oldest ever built; they are also the most complex, precise and solid. If some of them are still standing today, it is not only because they survived the test of time. They also survived earthquakes, storms and above all the destructive power of man. If these walls and buildings have remained intact it is because they are so difficult to demolish, due to the fact that the stones are extremely heavy, from a few tons to a hundred, and constructed with a precision that has baffled modern engineers. As an engineer myself, my question would be, how is it possible that

such "primitive" cultures and civilizations, from the point of view of their known tools and mathematical knowledge, were able to build such complex and enduring structures?

*Florimond Kris*

To find out more, come to my talk on the Mystery of the Great Pyramid on 12th November



Top left: Cuzco, Top right: Sacsayhuaman, Bottom left: Easter Island, Bottom right: Egypt

## Winter Solstice

It is that time of the year when we experience the dark, cold and death in nature, as well as looking forward to the celebrations, warmth and the joy of the Sun bringing light again!

The winter solstice has been celebrated throughout human history by many cultures who understood its symbolic meaning and importance. The word 'solstice' derives from the Latin sol (meaning sun) and statum (stand still), which reflects the sun's position standing still for a moment in time before beginning its journey in the opposite direction. Mircea Eliade describes the winter solstice as a different quality of time, a privileged time, a pause in the ineluctable ongoing flow of Chronos. This special time was also considered as a time of new birth. The person would go through the experience of the underworld, the darkest side of himself, returning with the experience of the Divine in himself and being born again of his own spirit through initiation. Finding divinity in oneself is considered as reaching enlightenment, a second birth. The birth of the Divine Power, the Light in oneself, is a reflection of rebirth on cosmic levels. This rebirth of hope and light on an individual level as well as on a macrocosmic level is celebrated through many traditions both esoterically and exoterically. From the Pagan celebrations of Yule to Christmas and from the Saturnalia celebrations of the Romans to the Yalda celebrations of Persian cultures, all are celebrations of this Divine Light. Perhaps this coming Christmas could be an opportunity for a rebirth, an awakening to new realities!

*Pinar Akhan*



Winter Solstice celebration at Stonehenge

## Ecotherapy: it's better outside

Going back to nature sounds like a very simple idea, but it has become the basis of a new approach to therapy that sees the great healing benefits of connecting with natural settings. So instead of using a room, people are encouraged to explore outdoor surroundings, achieving improvements in their mental health and well being. The origin of the term lies in an acknowledgement of the nurturing aspect of nature and the spontaneous reciprocal attitude between humans and nature. Ecotherapy covers a variety of therapies involving nature, animals, horticulture, wilderness, all inspired by an understanding of the strong connection we can experience with nature. And they are all based on the principle that nature influences the way humans perceive, feel, behave and process knowledge.

Ecotherapy believes that through reconnecting to nature we can reconnect to ourselves. And those who experience that opportunity are guided into

utilising natural environments to awaken the spark of interconnectedness which ancient civilizations claimed as essential. Open spaces, rivers, lakes, geese on the pond, a dry bush, squirrels climbing trees or even just sitting on the grass, are events seen with a deeper perspective; one that sees the relationship that the person establishes naturally. And it is with these kinds of encounters that emotions and thoughts are brought into attention. Recent studies have shown that people become not only more physically active by engaging with this therapy but also positively boost their own balance in life. In addition, communities develop more awareness of the conservation of green spaces. Perhaps nature works as a mirror and we are all on a seasonal journey where the changes in our existence are part of a process of transcending difficulties. Perhaps it is time to tackle the problem of the increase in mental health problems by spending more time outside.

*Natalia Lema*

## “Culture Heroes”: the value of culture for transforming self and society

“Culture hero” is a term referring to a mythological figure who brings something of great benefit to humanity, such as the discovery of fire or the institution of marriage.

The figure of Prometheus in Greek mythology is a good illustration of this. He stole fire from the gods to give it to mankind. From fire came cooking, heating systems, metals and pottery, amongst many other things. And fire also symbolises the mind.

But it is not these inventions alone that create a culture. A culture is also a particular way of looking at the world, which has its roots in certain mythological and historical figures. Ancient China, for example was a synthesis of the thought of Confucius, Lao Tse and Buddha, amongst others. These geniuses set their seal on the culture and could also be called “Culture Heroes”, although they too were the heirs of other earlier traditions that go back to mythical ancestors. From this ‘cosmivision’ came the cultural products of the culture, such as calligraphy, Ming vases or Sun Tzu’s *Art of War*.

So when we ask today - “What is the value of culture?” - we need to realise that culture is not only a product, such as the various art forms that exist. Nor is it just a system for perpetuating an existing form of culture. On the contrary, culture is a living being, which can be likened to a plant, as the cultural historian Christopher Dawson pointed out. The very word ‘culture’ is related to the word ‘cultivation’. Its purpose is to cultivate the human being and enable us to develop our fullest potential, individually and collectively. And in its turn, culture needs to be laboriously cultivated; it does not grow naturally, entirely of its own accord.

Another meaning of the root of the word culture is ‘sacred’, related with the word ‘cult’, in the sense of ‘worship’. Hence its connection with divine ancestors and a sacred gift. Thus, a culture which cuts itself off from the sacred, which denies all meaning to existence, itself becomes meaningless and is doomed to extinction.

There is a clear link between culture and education. Culture always wants to perpetuate itself, just as a plant has the urge to reproduce itself by spreading its seeds. In the same way, a culture endeavours to pass on its knowledge and values to the next generation in order to survive. Parents teach their children the

customs of their culture, craftsmen pass on their skills, and educators - formal or informal - pass on knowledge and values. So if we want to understand the value and role of culture we need to think about the role of education.

**“Every culture is like a plant. It must have its roots in the earth, and for sunlight it needs to be open to the spiritual. At the present moment we are busy cutting its roots and shutting out all light from above.”**

Christopher Dawson

Again, going back to the root of the word, we find that education comes from ‘educare’ which means ‘to draw out’. We can infer from this that the true



purpose of education is not to put knowledge into the student’s brain, but to draw out or ‘educare’ their full potential. As an example of culture as education, the tragedies of Aeschylus had a strong educational content. They contained philosophical teachings about the deep questions of life and existence, and this was why they had such a powerful effect on their audiences. So both culture and education, when they fulfil their true roles, help us to understand life better and more deeply, transforming individuals and society as a whole.

Julian Scott

## IN THE NEXT ISSUE

### The Celts: Our mysterious, silent ancestors

by Siobhan Farrar

Celtic culture will be familiar to many of us; we may even identify strongly with a sense of what it means to be Celtic or to have a Celtic heritage. Others will be at least familiar with the imagery and symbolism that have endured throughout the millennia. A lot of what we understand to define the Celts today arose from the Celtic revival when the term 'Celt' was rediscovered in the 15th century. This revival culminated during the 19th and 20th centuries when renewed fascination surrounded all things Celtic. Great poets and artists of the time were responsible for the trend. What was it that caught their interest and fuelled their imaginations? Why do we still see Celtic symbolism and imagery in modern culture today?

In fact, most Celtic peoples would not have been familiar with the term 'Celt' and would not have called themselves by this name. The word was a later development, which gained in significance when it became helpful to clearly distinguish oneself from the English or the French. However, despite being a hugely



diverse population of people spanning more than one continent, the ancient Celtic peoples did share many things in common, which is why it is still correct to talk about a Celtic culture. They all followed an oral tradition and didn't write down any teachings, religious or cultural beliefs. We need to look at their objects, art and impact in history to understand more about our mysterious, silent ancestors.

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

# Upcoming Events

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

## Thurs 12 November at 7.30 pm

### Talk: The Mystery of the Great Pyramid

Although conventional books on Egypt claim that there is no mystery about the construction of the Great Pyramid, an objective look at the evidence reveals quite the opposite. This talk looks at the engineering required to build this wonder of the world and suggests that the mystery is still very much alive.

**Speaker: Florimond Krins - ADMISSION £5 (£3 concs.)**

## Thurs 19 November at 7.00 pm

### World Philosophy Day 2015: Life lessons from Great Philosophers"

Every year on the 3rd Thursday of November, World Philosophy Day is celebrated around the globe.

This year we take five great philosophers from different cultures to show the practical value of philosophy to guide and inspire: Plato, Marcus Aurelius, Kant, Avicenna and Lao Tzu.

**Speaker: Various - ADMISSION £8 (£5 concs.) including refreshments.**

# The Mystery of the Great Pyramid

TALK  
Thurs 12 November at 7.30