

Issue No. 25 NOV-DEC 2017

NewAcropolis

Philosophy and Education for the Future

Bi-Monthly Magazine

SOCIETY

Volunteering: it's an enjoyable thing to do

SCIENCE

The Dawn and Decline of Technological Man

ART

Philosophy and Art: a natural concord

PHILOSOPHY

The World of Machiavelli





NEW ACROPOLIS

Philosophy and Education for the Future

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

Editorial Team

Sabine Leitner - Director

Julian Scott - Editor

Agostino Dominici - Project
Manager and Designer

Natalia Lema - Public Relations

 **Philosophy
Culture
Volunteering**
NEW ACROPOLIS

What's Inside

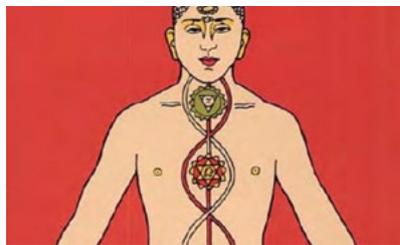
EDITORIAL 04



PHILOSOPHY 05
The World of Machiavelli



ESOTERICA 09
Chakras: A Journey
From East to West



SOCIETY 07
Volunteering:
it's an enjoyable
thing to do



ART 11
Philosophy and
Art: a natural
concord

CULTURE 13
Reflections on
the
Orkney Islands



SCIENCE & NATURE 15
The Dawn and
Decline of
Technological Man

MYTHS OF THE WORLD 18
Dionysus



Editorial

A Different Kind of Awareness

It is relatively recently that self-awareness and mindfulness have become such widespread concepts, not only in self-development but also in education and even in business. Numerous scientific studies based on large populations have established their usefulness for mental health, general well-being and better leadership. But very often self-awareness only looks within, at how the outside world impacts on us, how we feel, what we think, how we behave and how we can understand ourselves better. Although there is no doubt that these practices are very important and can really help us to live life in a better way, I would like to emphasize another aspect of self-awareness which is in my experience as important but tends to be more neglected: the awareness of our impact on others.

If we look around us we will quickly notice that most people seem to be very unaware of their impact on others. Stereotypical examples might include a group of young people screaming and talking so loudly as if the world just belonged to them; the person who promises to return your call and doesn't, the person who cancels plans in the last minute, the person who is always late, etc.

More often than not it is about what people say and even what they don't say but express non-verbally. How aware are teachers about the impact of their words on their students? How aware is your boss about how he or she makes you and your colleagues feel? How aware

are parents, colleagues, partners and sometimes even friends?

Our impact on others even includes future generations. The Swiss philosopher and economist Dominic Roser, who co-authored the book "Climate Justice – an Introduction", writes that according to estimates¹ the average American is likely to kill 1 to 2 future human beings through the greenhouse gas emissions they produce in their lives. In a German interview, he puts the impact of our life-style on the future humanity this way: "A single flight can heat up the planet more than driving your car and heating your house with oil for a year. A plane is like a rocket pointed at future human beings."

Obviously, we have to start with ourselves. How aware are we about our impact on others? We tend to exaggerate our positive impact and play down our negative impact. Do we really know how others perceive us? Do we dare to ask? Do we actually want to make the effort to adjust our behaviour (if appropriate and necessary) or do we prefer not to know because it would just be too much effort?

According to another study², it is estimated that the average person interacts with about 80,000 people over their lifetime. Imagine what it would be like if you had a positive impact on 80,000 people and the 80,000 you met in your life had a positive impact on you as well...

(1) <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/21550085.2011.561584>

(2) <https://www.quora.com/How-many-people-does-the-average-person-physically-meet-in-a-lifetime>

Sabine Leitner



The World of Machiavelli

In 1513, in a remote place near Florence, an experienced diplomat in exile wrote a very straightforward discourse about how to win power and keep it. This work later became known as *The Prince*, one of the most controversial books of modern philosophy.

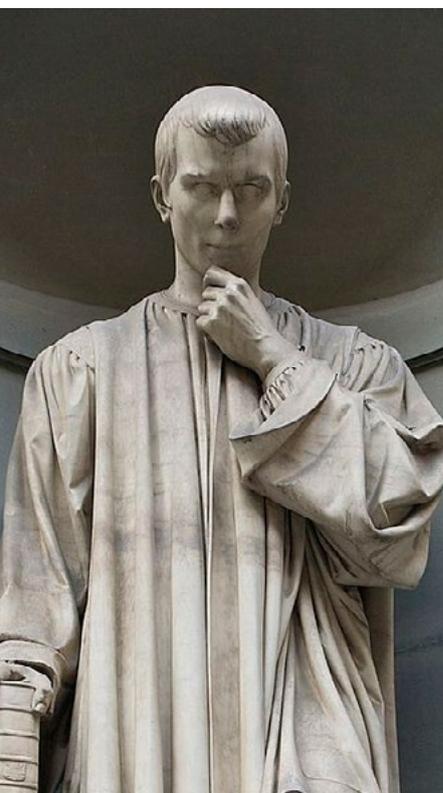
Niccolò di Bernardo dei Machiavelli was born in a turbulent period of Italian history, when city-states were constantly at war. After 1494,

“The Prince is a practical guide to power, with several case studies and theoretical discussions.”

when the Medicis were expelled from Florence and Savonarola, the Dominican preacher, was executed, Florence restored its republic and Machiavelli became a hotshot. As the son of a lawyer he had no difficulty in entering public service. He began working for the *Signoria*, the governing authority, as a

secretary, then undertook diplomatic missions to Rome, France and Spain. He saw how contemporary rulers built their states and eliminated their enemies. Probably the biggest impression was made on him by Cesare Borgia, Pope Alexander VI's son, the *condottiero* who was infamous for his cruelty. Back in Florence, Machiavelli was put in charge of the Florentine military and managed to defend his hometown against Pisa. But fortune doesn't last forever. When the Medicis took back control of Florence, Machiavelli was accused of conspiracy, imprisoned and tortured. After he had been granted amnesty and released, he retired to his estate, where he completed his works.

The Prince is a practical guide to power, with several case studies and theoretical discussions. It was dedicated to the son of Lorenzo the Magnificent, in the hope that the young ruler would bring the author back into office, but this didn't happen. According to the book, a state could be a republic or an autarchy and in *The Prince*, he looks particularly at the latter. Moreover – because kingdoms could be both inherited and won – he wrote particularly about those autarchies



that needed to be set up from scratch. A new ruler must get rid of the opponents or keep them away from power. He must be obeyed and feared, but also loved. The problem is that love and fear seldom exist together, so “if we must choose between them, it is far safer to be feared than loved.” He said that most people are fickle, selfish and greedy, looking for profit. Therefore, “it is necessary for a ruler to maintain his position and learn how to not be good.”

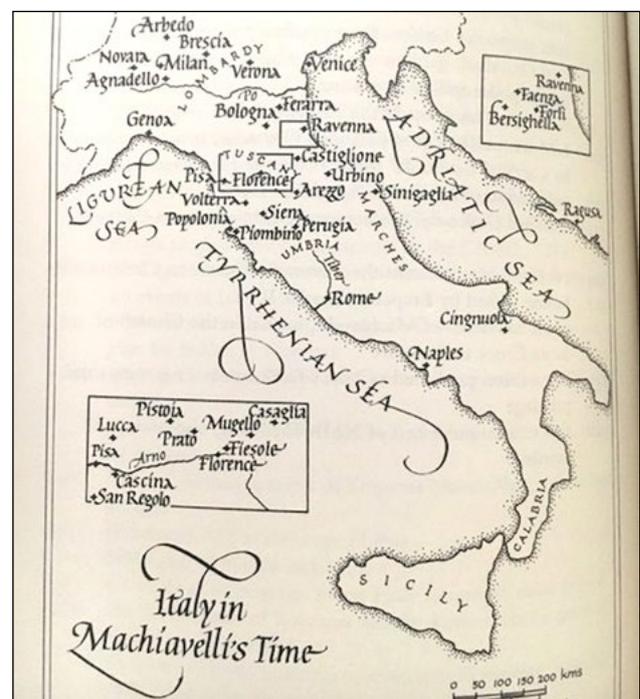
In the often cited 18th chapter that stunned his era and still sounds shocking today, he reflects on the necessity of being dishonest and cunning. He said that experience revealed that those princes who had done great things had managed to get their way through cheating. So the prince must be lion and fox at the same time. The phrase “the end justifies the means” has been attributed to him, although he never wrote or said this. But he said that for the sake of the state the ruler must sometimes do terrible things. If the motivation was good, then it excuses the perpetrator.

However, nobody could escape the power of the luck or *Fortuna*, represented as a blind woman who can destroy empires within a short time. The counterpart of *Fortuna* is *virtù*, which means knowing which strategies and techniques are appropriate to which circumstances. *Virtù* is about mastering power and *Fortuna*. Whoever possesses this skill can respond to fortune at any time and in any way that is necessary. It may seem that Machiavelli’s Prince is a cruel, interest-driven cheat, who is only interested in power and influence, but in reality, the ruler is a Renaissance man, an artist of politics. He has to have talent, versatility, and must be committed and adaptable at the same time. While he shapes the society, he has to shape himself as well. With *virtù*, he evokes a well-known Roman civic and military skill that made Rome the base of the Roman Empire.

The book was so disturbing in his time that the Church banned it and it was not published until 1532, five years after his death. There are still ongoing debates about Machiavelli’s legacy.

Some philosophers, like Leo Strauss, said he was immoral, while others, like Benedetto Croce, said he was a pure pragmatist. Rousseau admired Machiavelli. He broke up the unity of politics and ethics that had existed since antiquity (e.g. according to Aristotle, politics and the political community must play a part in bringing about the virtuous life in the citizenry). He didn’t look for the ideal state based upon ethical laws, but regarded the starting point as what exists in reality.

Machiavelli’s desire was to unite Italy at a devastating time, when city states were divided and



vulnerable because of foreign attacks and different interests. He said a strong, sometimes even cruel leader is needed to build a strong, united, peaceful country. Though he was a republican, as shown in his book *The Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livy*, he became better known as the author of *The Prince*, in which he portrayed a charismatic, absolute monarch. Charles V, Louis XIV and Napoleon praised him and regarded *The Prince* as a schoolbook. Although the actors and systems have changed over the past centuries, the nature of power is still the same as it was 500 years ago. That is why Machiavelli’s book is still of interest and never goes out of fashion.

Istvan Orban

VOLUNTEERING

It's an enjoyable thing to do

The essence of volunteering is giving freely of your time and energy to help others. It's an expression of social solidarity, whether with other human beings, plants, animals or the planet as a whole. It's an expression of the natural generosity that exists in all human beings.

Without volunteers, many public services would grind to a halt – charity shops, for example. Volunteers also provide valuable support to many social, health and educational services, such as hospitals, community centres, public gardens, soup kitchens, free legal and citizens advice centres, as well as tutoring, mentoring and sports coaching, or friendship and support to elderly people.

Interestingly, however, it is not only the recipients of volunteering activities who benefit from them. Arguably, it is the volunteers themselves who

“As human beings we have a duty of care to look after one another, especially those who are less fortunate or in need. It's very rewarding to make positive changes in someone's life”

Comment on volunteering by one of the respondents in our survey

benefit even more. I would suggest that when we volunteer, the best part of the human being is activated, that part which does not act motivated by self-interest, but out of altruism or natural generosity. There are different theories as to what constitutes the essence of a human being, but if our core is altruistic, then when we activate that part we feel better within ourselves, simply because we are being true to our essential human nature.

In August and September of this year, a group of interviewers (students and teachers at New Acropolis School of Philosophy in London) went out into the parks of our local borough of Islington to ask people for their views on volunteering. We had designed a questionnaire aimed at discovering whether people had a positive or negative attitude to volunteering, what types of volunteering people found most attractive and what percentage of people in the borough actually do volunteering. As the survey only covered 110 respondents, 41% of whom were in the 20-29 age range, it cannot be considered as statistically conclusive, but it does indicate some general trends.

Main conclusions of the survey

- People almost unanimously see volunteering as something enjoyable (98%).
- People don't primarily volunteer out of self-interest (e.g. to learn new skills, meet people or enhance their CV), but to make a difference, either by contributing to their local community (1st choice) or in order to bring about a change in the world (2nd choice).
- The most popular types of volunteering were, in the first place **social** (e.g. helping the homeless, elderly people, children) and in the second place **educational** (e.g. help with reading). These achieved much higher scores than **ecological/ environmental**, which was the third choice, followed by **cultural** in the fourth place and **political** in the fifth.
- The percentage of people who do volunteer was 49%, as against 51% who don't.

If 98% of respondents see volunteering as something enjoyable, then we might ask why only about half actually do volunteering. You can probably guess the answer to this question... TIME! Or rather, the lack of it, a common

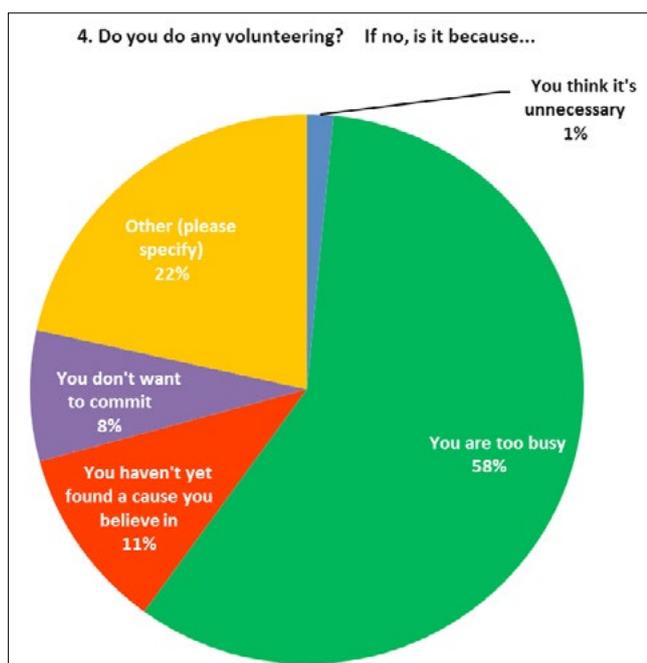
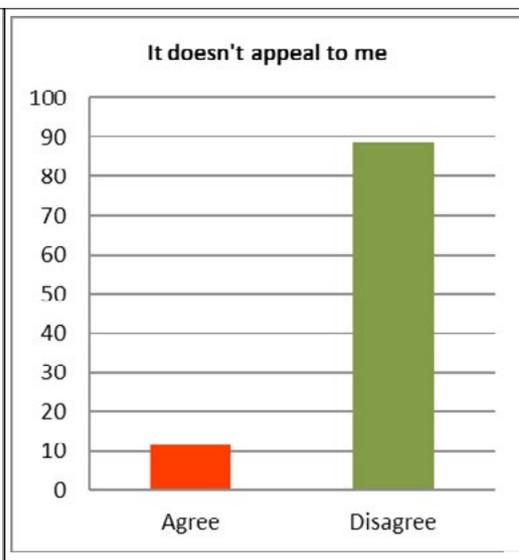
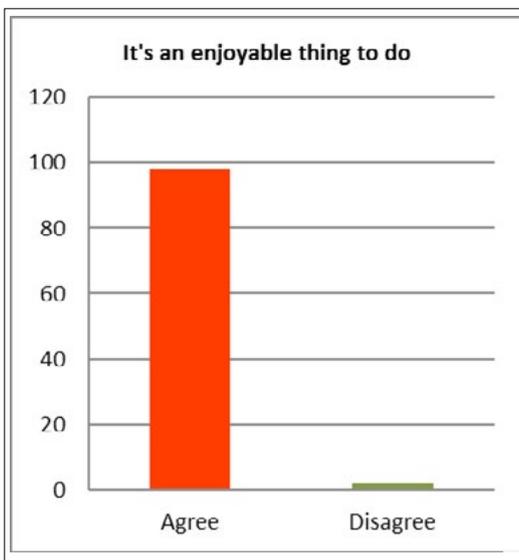
complaint among Londoners. In an earlier conversation on the subject of volunteering, one of the participants put it very succinctly: “Your work demands another two hours of you (i.e. beyond the standard 8-hour day), there’s no time to cook, no time to eat, and you only see your friends once every three weeks.” Another participant added, “so it’s easier to pay other people to do volunteering for you by donating to charity.” This was not reflected in the answers to our survey, where 35% said that ‘volunteering yourself’ was more important than ‘giving money to

“Volunteering is something I choose to do, so I can say that for a short period of time in my life I can be completely free.”
 Reflection on volunteering by one of our volunteer interviewers

charity’, which was selected by only 9% of respondents. However, the largest percentage was given to the statement ‘they are equally important’ (55%), with one respondent stating that he gave 10% of his income to charity and also volunteered. One respondent commented in this section that there are mutual benefits from volunteering, because you are giving to someone else and at the same time often learning from the other person. It is a non-commercial and very human exchange.

Speaking from personal experience,

I can confirm that, although it sometimes requires an extra effort (not forgetting that the word ‘volunteering’ originates from the Latin ‘voluntas’ meaning ‘will’), volunteering nearly always gives me a boost of energy. Just the fact of doing something without the burden of wanting to get something



out of it is a liberating and peaceful experience. One of our respondents – a psychologist – said that economic research has shown that if people would get money for the things they like doing, they would probably stop doing them. Another reason could be that we actually have an ‘altruistic gene’ and if this is diverted into becoming a monetary transaction, we subconsciously feel deprived of something deeply human: the desire to become part of a community, to express solidarity with the other beings with whom we share this world.

Julian Scott

CHAKRAS

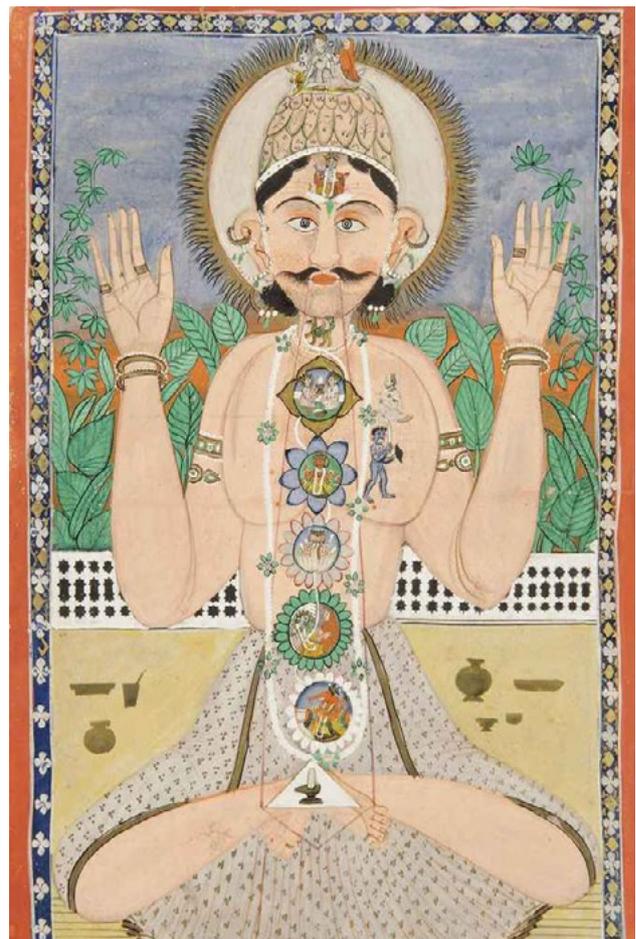
A Journey from East to West

For many years now the topic of chakras has been a staple of modern spiritual seekers as well as New Age bookstores. I was aware of this phenomenon but to my astonishment, I only recently got to know the extent of its developments. Today one can go to YouTube and watch an 18-year-old girl 'teaching' her viewers how to balance their chakras. Kids can also watch cartoons that explain how the chakras work and, if their parents are into meditation, there are plenty of children's chakra books. An Amazon book review reads: 'When I read it to my children, they wanted to know more and they were impressed how easily they could figure out if their chakras are in balance or not.' Really!!! I had thought that these topics formed part of some esoteric teachings, which, in the East, are imparted after many years of training only to the most qualified and resilient students. But suddenly they are on everybody's lips or bookshelves.

Various questions suddenly arose in my mind. What are the sources of the modern chakra system? Does it differ from 'indigenous Eastern (Hindu) systems'? How did it get mixed up with polarity therapy, psychotherapy, self-help, healthy diets, colour healing and bodywork of all types? Let's trace some steps on that journey which marked the transition from the 'Eastern' to the 'Western' chakra system.

The popularisation of the theory of the subtle body and its energy centres called *chakras* (or *padmas*) has its sources in the Tantric tradition. The main objective of the Tantric adept was to seek to reverse the process of creation (as described in the *Tattva* system of Tantric metaphysics) in order to achieve liberation from the phenomenal world and become godlike. This process also included the awakening of Kundalini (a mysterious force which is said to be asleep at the base

of the human spine). During the 11th century, aspects of Tantric practice were codified into the *Hatha Yoga* system (this early system bore little resemblance to what goes by the same name today). Basically, all the recent yoga systems, which discuss chakras and kundalini, derive from it. Because of the knowledge they brought and the danger of being misused, these teachings were



The Subtle Body and the Chakras, Punjab Hills, Indian School, (opaque pigments on paper, 18th C.).

PHILOSOPHY and ART

A NATURAL CONCORD

The terms Philosophy and Art both share something of the ineffable about them. Whilst we may all agree that philosophy literally means 'love of wisdom', when it comes to actually *knowing* what it means to love *wisdom*, this is far more elusive.



In a similar way, no doubt each one of us could call to mind an example which we consider well represents the term *Art*, but an honest *knowing* of what actually makes something Art can easily wrestle free from our grasp. As for a natural concord between the two, one is typically understood in terms of its material qualities - Art - while the other - Philosophy - is typically understood in terms of the quality of its ideas. Yet curiously, by exploring each of these at the opposite pole, we find their potential meanings quite transformed.

Bringing philosophy out of the intelligible and into the material, what is philosophy in practice? In life, *love of wisdom* becomes living a moral life. And what of art brought out of its material or commercial constituent parts? What of art aligned with an idea? It has the potential to describe the aspects of life that lie beyond words, beyond the mundane.

“Each evening we see the sun set. We know that the Earth is turning away from it. Yet the knowledge, the explanation, never quite fits the sight.” *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger

A dissatisfaction with the explanation of the world as we find it may inspire both artistic and philosophical interests. John Berger in the above quotation says how explanation ‘never quite fits the sight’, suggesting a sort of universal cognition that there is more to be understood than explanations alone can encapsulate.

“The artwork is indeed a thing that is made, but it says something other than the mere thing itself... In the artwork something other is brought into conjunction with the thing that is made...The work is a symbol.” *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Martin Heidegger

According to the Neo-Platonist view, art is ‘the authentic reflection of an Idea’, Idea being understood as belonging to the permanent, unchanging realm of Ideas, of Beauty, Justice and Truth.

“The mind of the painter takes on the semblance of the divine mind.” Leonardo da Vinci

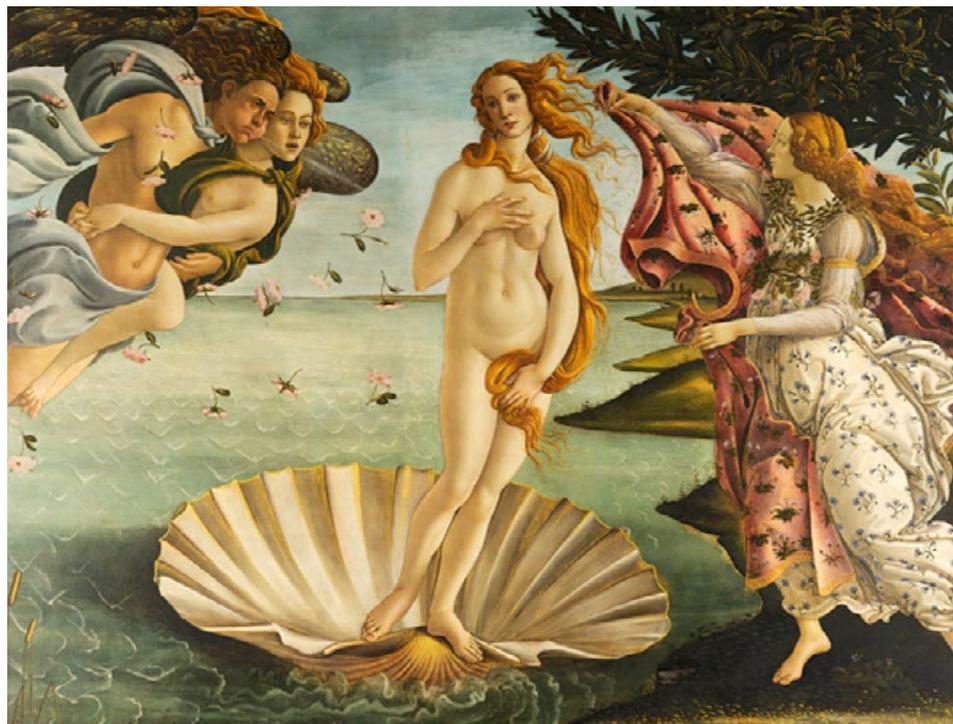
Art originating more from an Aristotelian spirit can be described as a visual

“Each evening we see the sun set. We know that the Earth is turning away from it. Yet the knowledge, the explanation, never quite fits the sight.”

representation of an abstract concept, but it wouldn’t necessarily be related to the realm of Ideas. The representation could be of a moral nature, of virtues and of vices.

“The question of the origin of the artwork asks something about the source of its nature... ‘the work praises the master’... The artist is the origin of the work. The work is the origin of the artist.” Martin Heidegger

In the above quotation, Heidegger is describing a type of infinity loop occurring between artist and artwork. Comparatively this also exists in the life of a philosopher, who may act based upon on how he thinks but only *truly* discovers how to think through his actions. Actions make the philosopher. An artist who believes the nature of art to be unrelated to ideas is unlikely to find any reflected back in his work and a philosopher who believes that



Details from *The Birth of Venus*, Sandro Botticelli, 1445–1510.

philosophy is unrelated to his actions is unlikely to find wisdom in his life.

It may not be for every philosopher or artist to accept a natural concord between philosophy and art, but for those to whom a natural concordance appears, then a comparative interest provides a rich enhancement of understanding.

Siobhan Farrar

REFLECTIONS ON THE Orkney Islands

“The islands are unique, as they hide a treasure that immediately puts them on the map of the most significant prehistoric spots in the world.”



The Orkney Islands are a remote archipelago in the Northern Isles of Scotland. Despite being situated only ten miles off the north coast of Great Britain, they feel very distinct and detached from the rest of the country. The islands are unique, as they hide a treasure that immediately puts them on the map of the most significant prehistoric spots in the world. These tiny isles are home to a great number of megalithic structures comparable in their importance and enigma to the Pyramids of Giza, the Moai Statues of Rapa Nui (the Easter Island) or the mysterious temples of Malta and Gozo. So why not have a closer look at what is right there on our doorstep?

It seems that people first explored Orkney some 13,000 years ago, though the islands were probably first occupied around 9,000 years ago. With the dawn of the great Neolithic Revolution and the adoption of farming around 6,000 years ago, new settlers came to Orkney from the Scottish mainland, bringing domesticated animals and seeds. It is generally believed that these people were the first to settle in permanent villages and build lasting monuments.

The sites that form the heart of Neolithic Orkney are only the tip of the iceberg. An extensive archaeological landscape survives beneath and between the visible monuments that include stone-age villages (Skara Brae, Barnhouse Village and the recently discovered Ness of Brodgar), ceremonial sites marked by gigantic standing stone circles (the Ring of Brodgar and the Stones of Stenness) and burial mounds purposefully aligned with the apparent trajectory of the Sun (Maeshowe and the Tomb of the Eagles). The association with other monuments built on the same principle springs to mind, e.g. megalithic tombs in Meath (Ireland): Newgrange, Knowth, Dowth and Tara, or the Maltese temples: Hagar Qim, Mnajdra and Ggantija.

Ring of Brodgar (Orkney)

Another striking similarity is the evidence of the worship of a female divinity, the Great Goddess. Could the Neolithic Revolution be the reason for seeing a female as a personification of the Earth or the Universe, the cosmic nurturing force? The figurines of a woman, especially a pregnant woman, often presented as a fat lady, probably refer to the life-giving aspect of femininity. Perhaps, there is even

more to it. The shape of some houses in Skara Brae resembles the shape of the Maltese temples. The outline of these could be taken for a shape of an abundant female. In any case, the entrance to a temple or a house would curiously correspond to the vulva. We may only hypothesize about it but, in my personal view, there is a link between the ray of midwinter sun entering a temple through the entrance and its actual location in terms of the entire structure. After all, isn't winter solstice a moment of yet another solar rebirth and hence a new conception of life?

An interesting difference, however, is the size of the monuments. Maltese structures are at least twice the size of their Orcadian counterparts. The residents of Gozo openly talk about giants as the builders of the temples. After all, the name Ggantija derives from the word Ggant, Maltese for giant. The houses in Skara Brae, despite having a similar layout and almost identical dressers, are minute. Obviously, the builders must have been of rather small stature... What could we call a race like this? Hobbits?

After leaving the Orkney islands, I was left to reflect on many things I saw and experienced there. My overriding impression was that the inhabitants had created a far-reaching peaceful civilization where they had time and space to improve their techniques of farming as well as deepen the knowledge of themselves as part of a much greater picture. They were astronomers and artists at the same time, farmers and priests... While accepting the inevitability of change, they managed to create a stable and successful society that created a wonderful legacy and left it for posterity to re-discover.

Ania Hajost



From top to bottom: an areal view of the Ring of Brodgar, a megalithic temple in Hagar Qui (Malta) and stone buildings in Skara Brae (Orkney islands, Scotland).

The Dawn and Decline of

TECHNOLOGICAL MAN

"Today we find ourselves engaged in a cult to technology, such that we judge the quality and excellence of civilizations by their higher or lower levels of technical advancement."

How important has technology been to the development of Humanity? By definition, technology relates to the means by which man attempts to rule over matter. However, technical elements alone are not enough to measure progress. Today we find ourselves engaged in a cult to technology, such that we judge the quality and excellence of civilizations by their higher or lower levels of technical advancement. And we see everything from the point of view of our own way of life. When we visit monuments belonging to civilizations from antiquity, we are more impressed by their similarities with our own technology than by their religious or metaphysical achievements.



Ancient Chinese
Compass (3rd C. BC.).



Frontal view of Chartres
Cathedral, France
(constructed between
1194 and 1220).



From a philosophical point of view, technology is not the only expression of human culture. It is but one of many expressions. Moreover, there are many forms of technology.

For example, in the second millennium B.C., the ancient Chinese, and the Phoenicians, employed a kind of compass. In the last century, however, although they were exhibited in museums, they were not recognized as compasses, simply because they did not resemble the compasses we use today.

How did technology originate in humanity? Man has developed in various ways in the realm of self-knowledge and in different ways of exercising power over matter and nature. Not all civilizations gave the same degree of importance to technology; it is therefore a mistake for us to observe the different civilizations from the point of view of technical development alone.

Mainstream science dates the dawn of technology to the Palaeolithic or Neolithic eras when man began to work with stone. But this science made its different classifications only in terms of what those human groups produced, not considering the human beings themselves. Consequently, it is difficult to ascertain the causes behind such works. Generally, we see only the most superficial aspects of antiquity; we do not look deeper.

In his nine-volume work entitled *The Histories*, for example, Herodotus gives detailed descriptions of religious life and places of worship. And yet, he mentions only in passing that the first king of the Ptolemies had a type of boat which had up to eleven banks of oars. He also refers to a large clock in Alexandria that displayed one of twelve figures every hour, denoting the labours of Hercules.

These civilizations certainly had elements of advanced technology, but they did not give them as much importance as we do now. Instead they channelled their knowledge and imagination in other directions; they applied them to different fields...

Let us ask ourselves, could we build gothic cathedrals today with the technology that we possess? Of course, but we do not build them, because we do not see any point in doing so.

Technology in some form or other has existed since the beginning of humanity. It is important to consider the psychological repercussions of technology on ourselves as well as our own concern with technology.

We need to ask ourselves: to what extent is our advanced technology reflecting an inner materialism? To what extent does the exaggerated development of technology affect us, making us ever more materialistic? As the human being becomes excessively identified with technology he becomes dependent on those material

elements, and thus begins that vicious circle in which the human being makes technology and technology makes the human being.

The attraction to technology, and the need to escape from it, is demonstrated by the many times we have made discoveries, and the many times we have forgotten them, as if man was afraid of them. This demonstrates the cyclical viewpoints of the human being; that man does not always think in the same way; that he searches for different facets of knowledge, and employs different approaches.

In the last century, the Positivists resolved the problem of history by proposing the theory of historical



materialism, which represented man's evolution by an ascending curve starting with his most savage state. According to this theory, in the beginning man had a magical mentality and explained everything by means of magic; then came the religious man who communicated that obscure magic, and from there the philosophical man who extracted a series of symbols and abstract concepts in order to explain nature. Finally, the scientific man arrived, who demonstrated and knew things.

But this materialistic theory is now refuted by the discovery of archaeological layers which show that it is not necessarily true that beneath one culture, there lay another, always of inferior development. Today, in

Central and South America, we see beside the huge, precision-built monuments the poor man of today who resorts to earning some money by taking pictures of tourists in front of the ruins...

Thus, seen from the philosophical point of view, man individually and collectively, ascends and descends through his evolution.

Today we seem to be on the verge of a leap into the void with regard to technology. We are entering a phase in which our world no longer feels satisfied by technology. It does not answer all our questions.

At the beginning of the era of mass-production, man was dazzled by assembly lines. Today, however, we are once again beginning to feel inclined towards man-made products. It is a matter of giving things a human touch.

Once more man is feeling the thirst for differentiation, the thirst for humanism and the thirst for becoming reunited with himself.

We are tired of the great machine of massification.

We are advancing towards something which is already within ourselves, but which we do not want to accept; the hour of technology has passed, and a new humanism is knocking at the gates of the future.

Man is returning to the old sources. Today everything that is exclusively based on the material is doomed to fail, whether in the political, economic, religious or social fields. The individual is being reborn in every man, who feels suffocated by the massifying atmosphere.

Paradoxically, an organization like New Acropolis, which proposes a philosophical approach to tackle man's problems, is very up-to-date, very necessary and very practical. Today humanity has a need for ideology, for mutual understanding, for comprehension. By satisfying that thirst, we will be fulfilling our historical destiny.

We have to learn to free our hands from matter, even if only little by little; we need to create a laboratory where we can manufacture a new and necessary humanism, an elixir of life. And everything that wants to make us part of the mass, that wants to make us all the same, is something of the past, not something of the future.

Jorge Ángel Livraga (1931-1991)
Founder of New Acropolis International

DIONYSUS



After more than a century of research into comparative religion, Dionysus still remains an enigma, according to the renowned scholar of comparative religion, Mircea Eliade. This may not be surprising as he is known as the god of wine, rituals and ecstasy, full of mysterious qualities. His unusual characteristics start with his birth. Dionysus was the son of Zeus and princess Semele. Moved by jealousy, Zeus' wife Hera set a trap for Semele, encouraging her to ask Zeus to let her see him in his true form of a celestial god. Unable to endure the dazzling brilliance of her divine lover, Semele was consumed by the flames which emanated from Zeus and, as a result, the child she was carrying in her womb was born prematurely. Zeus then gathered up the infant and, as it was not ready to be born, he enclosed it in his thigh. When the time came, Dionysus was born into the world, resulting in his epithet "twice-born". On the one hand, he was considered to be a god, having been born from Zeus at his second birth, while on the other hand he is merely semi-divine, as Semele was mortal. This is the paradox of his being.

According to Walter Otto, Dionysus also had a third birth. During his childhood, he was dismembered, cut up and fed to the gods. He was rescued by Athena and reconstructed. This can be seen as an 'alchemical' birth, requiring sacrifice and transmutation. We can see the similarities with the Osiris myth, when the Egyptian god was cut into pieces and reconstructed by Isis.

Dionysus was at first depicted as a bearded man of mature age, generally crowned with ivy. Later he appears as a beardless youth of a rather effeminate aspect. Sometimes he wears a long robe and his curly hair is crowned with vine leaves and bunches of grapes.

His association with grapes and wine is well known. The symbol of grapes transformed into wine carries significant symbols. Fruit is related to the idea of fertility and rebirth at many levels, while wine is related to sacrifice. The transformation is also an alchemical process which is irreversible.

According to Mircea Eliade, Dionysus is a god who shows himself suddenly and then disappears mysteriously. His

unexpected manifestations and disappearances in a way reflect the appearance and occultation of life, the alternation of life and death and also their unity; he is related to the totality of life.

There is also a rather mysterious side to Dionysus which is mentioned in *The Bacchae* of Euripides. He performed miracles such as turning water into wine. The rites took place in mountains or forests at night, and through them his devotees aimed to unite with the god. This ecstatic state was possible by surpassing the human condition, obtaining a freedom and spontaneity which is not accessible to human beings.

After all, Dionysus is also the god of enthusiasm (from *en-theos* = god in man); so, in a way, uniting with Dionysus is the union with god in man.

Dionysus is also considered to be a solar god and has many similarities with Osiris and Christ. He was born around the winter solstice, performed miracles, his own blood was sacrificed and he was resurrected after death, to give some examples. This can perhaps remind us once again of the recurring universal principles or elements in the symbolism of different civilizations.

Pinar Akhan



UPCOMING EVENT

Mon 13th November at 7pm

CELEBRATING WORLD PHILOSOPHY DAY: PHILOSOPHY IN THE ARTS

“Philosophy is inherent in all human activity.”

If this statement is true, then the arts can also be seen as an expression of our thinking and as a quest for the universal archetypes that govern our lives. This year we would like to dedicate our contribution to UNESCO’s World Philosophy Day to the wisdom that can be found in many different artistic creations. After a brief introduction, 4 different speakers will offer their reflections on this topic in short presentations and during the break and after the event there will be buffet-style refreshments and time for philosophical conversation.

Admission £8 (concs. £5) - refreshments included.

