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Philosophy and Education for the Future

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Titian - Combining the Sensual with the Divine

Plant Lore - the Mythology and Symbology of Plants

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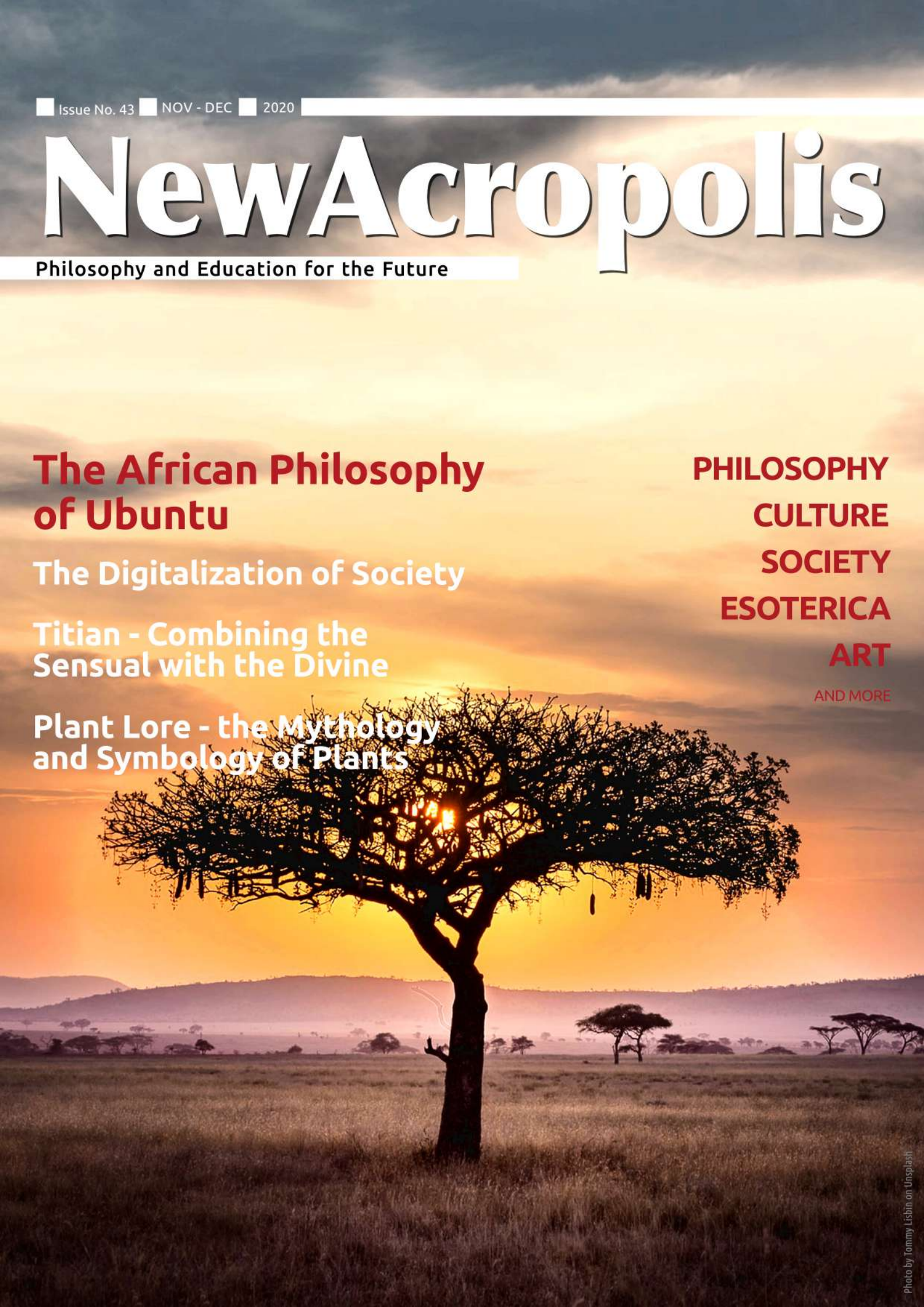

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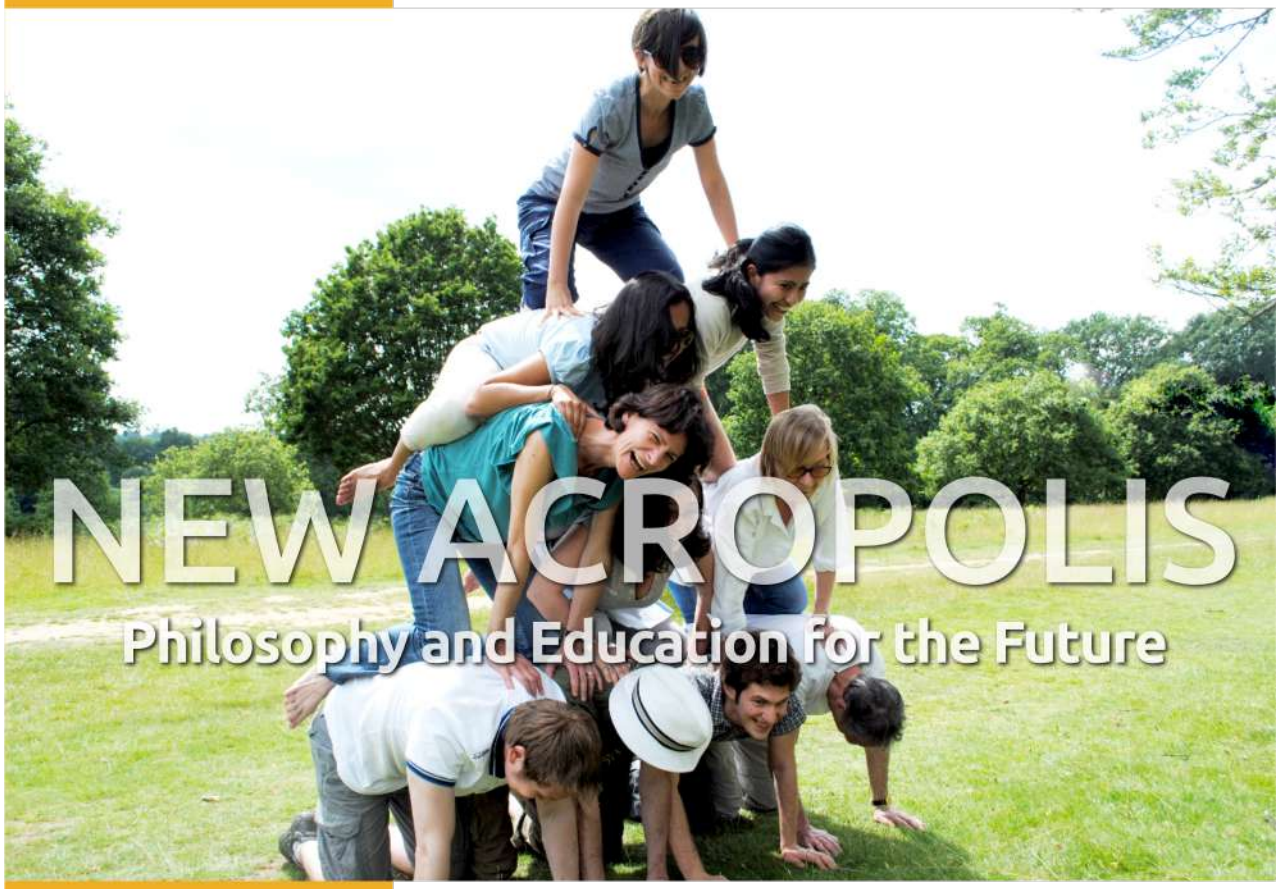

About Us

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.

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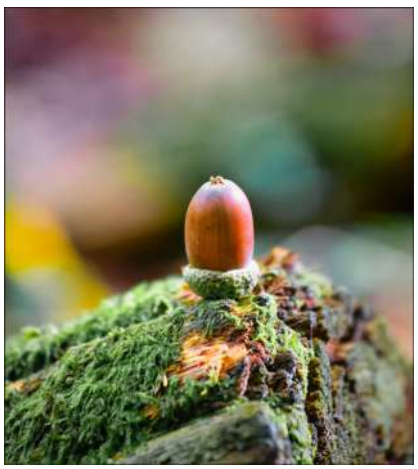

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Editorial

The Politicization of Spirituality

Does a circle have sides? - Not really. We can 'project' sides onto it but the fact is that there are no sides, only a circumference on which every single point has the same distance to the centre. Is spirituality left or right wing? Well, I also don't think that it makes sense to 'project' a fairly modern concept onto something that seems to be as old as humanity itself. However, there have been several articles recently about the 'Cosmic Right' and its 'dangerous rise', expounding the view that spirituality (and New Age, 'occultism', Eastern and Western religions, all sorts of 'wellness communities', Plato, Buddha, C.G. Jung, Joseph Campbell, JRR Tolkien, to name but a few that were mentioned) are right-wing.

It seems to me that this is just another example of the current tendency to polarise everything and to draw artificial lines of demarcation where none exist, unless, of course, one wants them to exist. Let's have a closer look at this particular phenomenon.

It might be useful to know that the concept of left-wing and right-wing goes back to the French Revolution. After the storming of the Bastille in 1789, a National Assembly came together with the goal of writing a new constitution. One of the main issues in the debate concerned the question of how much power the king should have. Those who thought he should have the right to an absolute veto (i.e. the more traditional ones) sat on the right of the president of the assembly and those who thought he should not (i.e. the more progressive ones) were seated on the left. However, since then, these two terms have become labels that can mean quite a range of different things at different times, in different countries and in different contexts.

The reason why spirituality seems to be given the right-wing label in the articles I mentioned is that the spiritual cosmovision tends to be 'hierarchical' and that this, apparently, leads 'naturally' to 'spiritual inequality' and 'authoritarian organizations'. I think these statements call for some reflection.
Yes, it is true that the concept of hierarchy (which literally means 'sacred rule' and originally referred to the orders of angels and heavenly beings) is an intrinsic part of a spiritual cosmovision. But a certain level of hierarchy in the ordinary sense exists in absolutely everything. A hospital, my body, my workplace – they are all organised hierarchically. Does this make them all right-wing? Whenever there is the principle of organisation and different levels of responsibilities, there will be the natural principle of hierarchy. Every political party, whether left or right, will have levels of hierarchy. All traditional doctrines, even the beliefs of shamanistic religions, are in agreement that the universe is ordered in different levels of existence. But in the case of the spiritual cosmovision, this hierarchy is based on the unity of all life that unfolds on different levels of existence, and not on partisan thinking.

What about 'spiritual inequality'? The word 'inequality' obviously carries a very negative charge. Yes, one could say that there are 'higher and lower levels of spiritual attainment'. But again, this is true of everything. In the case of any knowledge or skill, there will be an infinite range of levels of expertise. And every spiritual cosmovision has promoted compassion, generosity, even self-sacrifice, and the need for education to ensure that the same human potential that exists within all of us can gradually come to be realized.

Does a hierarchical cosmovision 'naturally' lead to authoritarian organizations? No. Although potentially it can, there is no compelling reason why it should 'naturally' lead to that result. No more than climbing up a tree would compel us to fall down. Or that driving a car would naturally lead to being involved in an accident. Every archetype can have its shadow expression. Generally, it depends on how something is used, to what purpose and with what intentions.

Duality exists on all levels in nature but it is futile to enter the game of polarization and make one side good and the other bad. We need to transcend all factions by seeing the whole and by understanding that both poles are necessary and one wouldn't exist without the other. Working for one part only is always detrimental to the whole. If spirituality teaches us the unity of life and that we are a part of a whole, then we need more of it.

Sabine Leitner

The African Philosophy of Ubuntu

What is Ubuntu? When someone says to you, 'you have Ubuntu', what do they mean? How does one explain a philosophy that isn't articulated as such but is imbued in the very land that you were a part of?

Unpacking the philosophies that shape our context is an important task for each of us. It helps us understand our conscious and unconscious biases. During these times where civil rights movements provide the momentum for unpacking, disentangling and articulating our thoughts and biases, this becomes a task all of us are prompted to undertake. Thus, the need for understanding the world from different socio-political contexts and understanding the world from an African perspective becomes important. The philosophy of Ubuntu then becomes apparent and shows us how Southern Africa understood and still understands the us, the world, the universe and the cosmos.

The philosophy of Ubuntu moved from Southern Africa along the Nile Meridian to Northern Africa, where it found its equivalent in the philosophy of Ma'at. Ubuntu or Botho is commonly understood as a philosophy of humanity or interrelatedness and interconnection. It is 'I am because you are, I am because we are'. In the Zulu language the saying 'Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu', means 'a person is a person through other persons'.

The concept of NTR in Kemet or Ancient Egypt (often written as 'Neter') refers to the 'All That Is', i.e. the undefined, formless, no-thingness that is simultaneously the underlying factor of all objects in the world. The Latin words 'natura', 'neutral', 'eternitus' and thus 'nature' originated from the concept of Neter (Amen, 1990). Emanating from NTR is NTU, which is is the causative, dynamic life force or power responsible for all of creation on Earth and in the Universe (Ngara, 2017). NTU is the spirit or being that

flows through everything in an interconnected, interrelated and interdependent manner.

Thus, when one recognises the philosophy of Ubuntu, it is also 'I am because we are, we are because I am, I am because it is, I am because they are.'

The understanding of Ubuntu is more complex than the interrelationship or interconnectedness of one human to another. NTU manifests in four forms in the Proto-Bantu language (Jahn, 1961; Kagame, 1970; Phillips, 1990). The principles that underpin Ubuntu thus include: 1) Mu-Ntu (plural Ba-Ntu), which means person or 'reasoned being', the human aspect of Ubuntu; 2) Ki-Ntu (plural Bi-Ntu), which is an inanimate thing acted upon by Muntu; 3) Ha-Ntu, the concept of time and space; and 4) Ku-Ntu, the principle of a modality – something intangible, that we feel or sense although we can't touch it or pick it up. All of these are aspects of Ntu. Thus, if one understands Ubuntu as the pinnacle of a pyramid, then Ba-Ntu, Ki-Ntu, Ha-Ntu and Ku-Ntu form the four corners at the base of the pyramid.

If one looks at what it means to be a reasoned being from an Ubuntu perspective or what makes a Ba-Ntu/ Mu-Ntu, then there are different forms of thinking that one applies. These are called: segregation, congregation, analysis and synthesis, all of these culminating in circumspection. In segregation one sees the outer differences in that which may be inwardly similar; in congregation the outer similarities in that which may be inwardly different; in analysis, the inner differences in that which may be outwardly similar; and in synthesis, the inner similarities in that which may be outwardly similar. The vision of all these together is called 'circumspection', which makes the pinnacle of the pyramid; one thus gets a circumspect view after applying these four forms of thinking.

MU-NTU/BA-NTU

Ntu manifests in human beings – reasoned beings – and this also includes the living, the unborn and the ancestors. There is a continuum between those who came before, those who are here now and those who will come in the future. It also includes deities and archetypal energies such as Oshun and Maat. All of these are aspects

of Mu-ntu – they are ways in which Ntu manifests as Mu-Ntu.

A non-human aspect of nature (NTR) that is also included in the category of Mu-Ntu is trees. While a tree is seemingly an unreasoned being, from an Bantu perspective the continuum between the roots, trunk and branches gives it a transcendental character. It is a continuum between past, present and future, inner and outer, below and above. A force that is endowed with intelligence. The fact that it links the underworld beneath the surface of the earth with the heavenly realms of the sun and sky is a metaphor for its ability to act as medium for different realms of being. It is thus through trees that ancestors travel in African cosmology.

KI-NTU/BI-NTU

Kintu or Bintu is a thing or an unreasoned being. This category includes forces that cannot act on themselves but can be acted on by the Muntu or Bantu, namely plants, animals, minerals and objects of customary usage. It even includes objects produced from other Ki-ntu, such cars. Trees, however, do not fall into this category since they are seen as the road travelled by ancestors to the living.

HA-NTU

Hantu means place and time, it localises every event and motion in space and time. All things have a 'where' and a 'when', and it thus expresses the unity of space and time. In Southern Africa there are place-names that often have prefixes such as 'Ga' or 'Ha'' (e.g. Ga-Modjadji, Ha-Maduwa) , as an indicator of the concept of Ha-Ntu. This naming refers to the time in history when a particular grouping of humans (Mu-Ntu / Ba-Ntu) arrived and settled at that particular location to become custodians of the place. This concept collapses time and space into one continuum.

Ubuntu is a locality, a time and a movement and includes the cycles of body and nature, as well as solar, stellar, and galactic cycles. The ancient African astronomers went within to study what was without. Non-separation and the principle of 'as above, so below' are fundamental principles of Ubuntu. Ubuntu is thus a quantum science.

KU-NTU

Kuntu is a modality – something we cannot touch, but something we can sense as an individual or as a collective. It includes modalities such as beauty or fear.

Within Ubuntu cosmology the individual is an indivisible modality. So I exist within my discrete self but my discrete self exists because you are and all that is, is. There is an indivisible duality, individually and collectively.

This is the beginning of the understanding of Ubuntu. However, it is only when someone embodies this and lives it, that we can say, 'this person has Ubuntu'. It is the manner in which one interacts with oneself, with others, with one's environment, with time and space – and seeing this all as one in the interaction with the whole. Ubuntu means being a part – not apart – from nature, or NTR, namely all that is.

Rutendo Ngara and Menaka Jayakody

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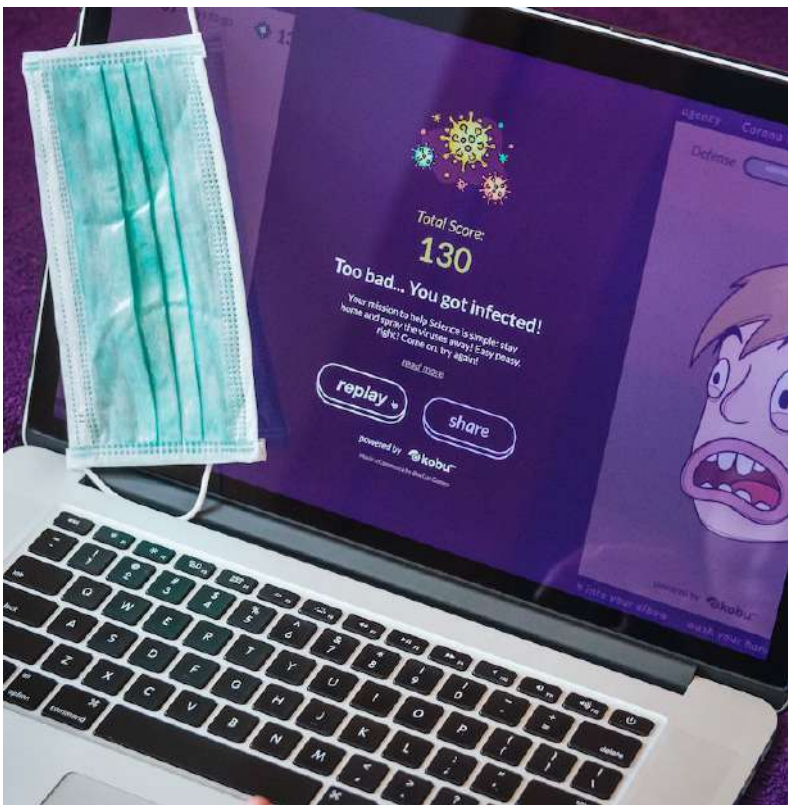
The DIGITALIZATION of Society

During the lockdown, some of you may have come across a short story by E.M. Forster called *The Machine Stops*, which made it into the news due to its extraordinary prescience. Written in 1909, five years before the cataclysmic event of the First World War, the author describes a future world in which people 'self-isolate', communicate with each other via screens and can control the environment of their individual cells by pressing buttons to give them lifelike sensations of sound, smell and colour.

All of this is not only very reminiscent of our shared lockdown experiences, but also of a more generalized phenomenon of 'digitalization' ("the way in which many domains of social life are restructured around digital communication and media infrastructures"[1]), which has merely been accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Since it began, practically everyone's world has become more digitalized: public events, family gatherings, university courses and even dinner parties routinely take place on Zoom or similar online platforms. As in Forster's story, we have contact with others, but it's not quite the same: "*I see something like you in this plate, but I do not see you. I hear something like you through this telephone, but I do not hear you.*"

Yet even before the pandemic, this phenomenon was well underway, especially among younger people, who live a lot of their lives on social media or playing computer games, and are increasingly



1.J. Scott Brennen and Daniel Kreiss, both of the University of North Carolina School of Media and Journalism.

less skilled in real human-to-human communication. Even before the internet, television had begun to erode the tradition of the family meal and, as technology progressed, it was common for each child to have a TV (now a computer with internet connection) in their own room.

In recent years, digitalization has started to become more and more sophisticated and complex, especially with the advent of artificial intelligence (AI). Apps are everywhere and for everything – dating, journey planning, banking, measuring your health and fitness... Many of them make life easier – everything is there, immediately accessible – and potentially more efficient and profitable for business. There are car insurance apps which analyse vehicle damage and decide on the value of the claim, without the need for an assessor in many cases; hospital apps are being developed to check up on patients, reducing the pressure on doctors and nurses to do their rounds.

All of this makes sense, but there are at least two dangers: dehumanisation and loss of privacy, as well as data security and 'controllability'. The latter is of extreme concern to some campaigners from within the digital industry, such as former Google employee Tristan Harris who featured in the 2020 documentary *The Social Dilemma*. This film shows how the algorithms used to maximise sales and expand markets can actually change and control the way people think. People who spend a lot of time online can easily get drawn into 'echo-chambers' and 'bubbles' where they only receive information that they will like and agree with, so they end up thinking that the way they see the world is the only way. This can then lead to polarisation and potentially to violence against those who dare to think differently.

The other danger is when governments have control of this technology and use it to control its citizens, something which has already started happening in China, where the phenomenon of 'social credit' has been tested in several areas. If you don't conform, your social credit score will decrease and it will become difficult for you to get a job, and you may become socially ostracised (another thing that happens in Forster's story, by the way). As with all technology, the problem does not lie in the technology itself, but in the use human beings make of it. And as in our present world 'money talks', there is a lack of morality in these matters.

Let's continue enjoying ourselves and saving time with our apps, but let's not forget the human aspect, because what makes life on Earth a heaven or a hell is precisely human beings and the choices we make.

Julian Scott

Photo by socialcut.com on Unsplash

AN ESOTERIC INTERPRETATION OF THE ARABIAN NIGHTS

When the breeze of a joyful dawn blew free
In the silken sail of infancy,
The tide of time flow'd back with me,
The forward-flowing tide of time;
And many a sheeny summer-morn,
Adown the Tigris I was borne,
By Bagdat's shrines of fretted gold,
High-walled gardens green and old;
True Mussulman was I and sworn,
For it was in the golden prime
Of good Haroun Alraschid.

Recollections of the Arabian Nights
BY ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON

In describing his childhood impressions of the Arabian Nights, the poet Tennyson reflects what most people experience when they come into contact with the famous *Tales of a Thousand and One Nights*. The tales seduce their readers with the exotic charm of the Islamic Golden Age of the 8th century when most of them were written down for posterity. We read about sultans, viziers, poor fishermen and rich merchants. The stories are full of beautiful and intelligent ladies ready to sacrifice their lives to save others, as well as obsessed and promiscuous men and women who would do anything to satisfy their appetites. Nevertheless, beneath the surface of human passions, aspirations, victories and failures, lies a hidden and deeper meaning to these tales, bringing back memories from a distant past when different races mixed together, when white and black magicians clashed in the eternal battle between good and evil, when the elemental forces could work with you or against you. Surely, as W.Q. Judge puts it, "with so much smoke there must have been some fire." [1]

So, what are the Arabian Nights? They are a collection of tales told by the beautiful Scheherazade, who is married to the bitter and cruel Sultan Schahriar. The Sultan, having been deceived by his previous wife, would marry a new wife every evening, and then have her strangled in the morning. The life of Scheherazade, the new bride, depended on her ability to produce stories night after night, leaving them carefully unfinished at appropriate points so as to be asked to complete them later. This is only a reflection of the oral tradition of story-telling in the Far East, India, Persia and Arabia, which later, through Egypt, reached Greece, and inspired the great works of ancient poets such as Homer. On closer inspection,

[1] "Are the Arabian Nights All Fiction?" by William Q. Judge. Published in THE THEOSOPHIST, October 1884

there appears to be a striking similarity of facts, figures and numbers. It is enough to compare the adventures of Odysseus and Sinbad to see the unmistakable link between the two mythical characters.

Could we see in the tales about giants, genies, magic seals and flying carpets references to the mythical Atlantis? According to traditions from around the world (the Indian *Mahabharata*, Plato's *Timaeus* and *Critias*, to name but two) there was a time in the far distant history of humanity when mankind combined advanced science and technology with magic – although magic is nothing more than science and technology applied to the invisible planes of nature. Arabia and Persia were both famed throughout the world for their Magi, men knowledgeable in science and magic.

As for the many references to genii, these are the *Jinn* of Arabian tradition and the *Elementals* of Western Esotericism – nature spirits who sometimes collaborate with human beings, sometimes work against them. The story of Aladdin and his lamp (incorporated later into the *Arabian Nights*) bears testimony to this. According to the interpretation of the theosophist W.Q. Judge, elementals play an important role in the Karma of humankind. Since they are unconscious and automatic, they simply reflect human behaviour. If they are hostile to humans, it is because people act in this way themselves. The only way to harmonise this relationship is to "cultivate brotherly feelings and charity towards the whole creation." Continuing with his interpretation of this tale, Judge claims that Allah's Din (Aladdin) means God's religion and the lamp represents the enlightened soul, which follows true wisdom, and as such attains wonderful powers to control nature or matter.

In conclusion, a new layer of meaning can be glimpsed in many of the tales of the *Arabian Nights*. The lamp can be ours if we only prove worthy of it.

Ania Hajost

Titian

Combining the Sensual with the Divine

Titian (c. 1488-1576) is arguably the greatest Venetian painter of the Italian Renaissance, who earned European-wide fame and recognition during his own lifetime. The collection of paintings referred to as his 'poesies' (a name he coined himself) delineate poetic pictures or poetry produced in painting and draw upon the Roman poet Ovid's classic epic, Metamorphoses (c. 20 BCE). Originally produced for Prince Philip of Spain (the future King Philip II), they have been brought together in London's National Gallery for the first time in 450 years.

Renaissance Humanism understood poetry, painting and philosophy as aspiring towards the same ineffable source. The gifted artist was considered to be in possession of unusual imaginative and intuitive capabilities, the gifted poet in possession of extraordinary powers of thought, the philosopher perhaps a modest combination of both… "It appears from this that

Diana and Actaeon 1556-1559 (wikimedia)

philosophers are also painters and poets, and poets are painters and philosophers" – Giordano Bruno.

The arts of the Renaissance, along with its philosophy, were characterised by a rediscovery of the great works and ideas of the classical world. It is easy to forget, but for some time following the fall of the Roman Empire, civilised Europe had all but ceased to exist. The inhabitants of its ruins believed the great temples and structures under which they dwelt to have been put there by mythical giants… Fortunately Europe steadied itself during the Middle Ages and then, with the further rediscovery of the classical world in the Renaissance, came a searing vitality and confidence, an attitude of exploration, innovation and mastery.

Titian was at the centre of the Renaissance Mediterranean world; he had access to the best materials and pigments via the Venetian merchant traders and composed in vivid colour upon the canvas. His innovative loose brush style has come to be seen as a precursor to later art movements such as impressionism and expressionism and he greatly influenced masters like Rubens and Bernini. Up-close the canvases are a sea of expressive colour and tactile brush work, but stepping a little further back the images reveal themselves in a magical transformation of luminescent clarity, where paint recedes and pools of water, glass, stone, and warm golden sunlight emerge.

Titian didn't construct designs in the same way as some of his Florentine contemporaries like Michelangelo would have done; rather he expressed, wrestled and reworked, lifting his forms out of a world of colour. Perhaps for these reasons Titian doesn't strictly adhere to the Platonic notion of art and poetry – as something which fully transcends sensuous passion, as undoubtedly in the women of Titian a palpable seduction and power is present. However, earthly power is not the aim or essence of the poetry in these paintings and they trace higher octaves in their contemplation of love, desire, transformation and death. In each, we are witness to an intimate scene from mythology, such as the conception of Perseus via the golden shower of Jupiter on the reclining Danae, or the transfiguration and death of Actaeon, devoured by his own hounds… Then beyond these scenes,

The Death of Actaeon, 1529

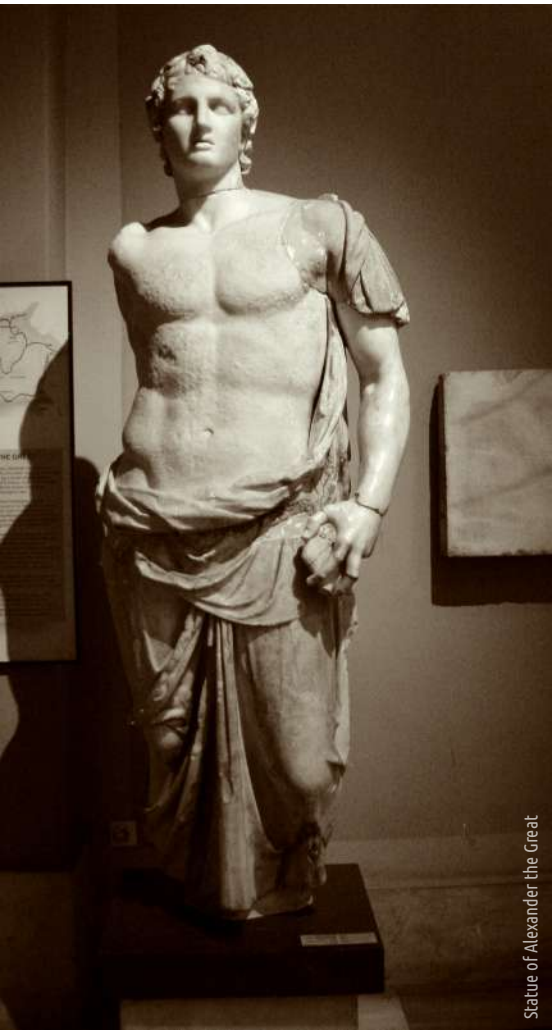
in the distant landscapes we glimpse the skyline of a civilisation that could easily belong to our own times. The transcendent scenes of heroes and goddesses look as though they could be taking place on our own horizons, continuously at any moment in history…

In Renaissance Humanism, where art, poetry, myth, intellect and the struggle of life coalesce, the scenes of mythology perhaps do take place at the shorelines of our own lives. Through the 'poesies' Titian appears as an artist wrestling and channelling the sensuous into the mythological and divine, drawing these worlds into one another as they are drawn together in human life.

Siobhan Farrar

Titian: love, life and death is on display at London's National Gallery until January 17, 2021

The Ancient City of Alexandria



Statue of Alexander the Great

Once there was a city known as "the greatest emporium in the whole world" (Strabo, *Geography*). For generation after generation it attracted the finest scholars, philosophers, poets and inventors. It was a truly international centre that brought together Egyptians, Greeks and Jews, as well as Babylonians, Persians, Gauls, Phoenicians and Romans. In a spirit of tolerance, they worked towards advances in the knowledge and culture of the ancient world, including mathematics, astronomy and astrology, alchemy, optics, medicine and anatomy, grammar and literature, geography, philosophy and theology.

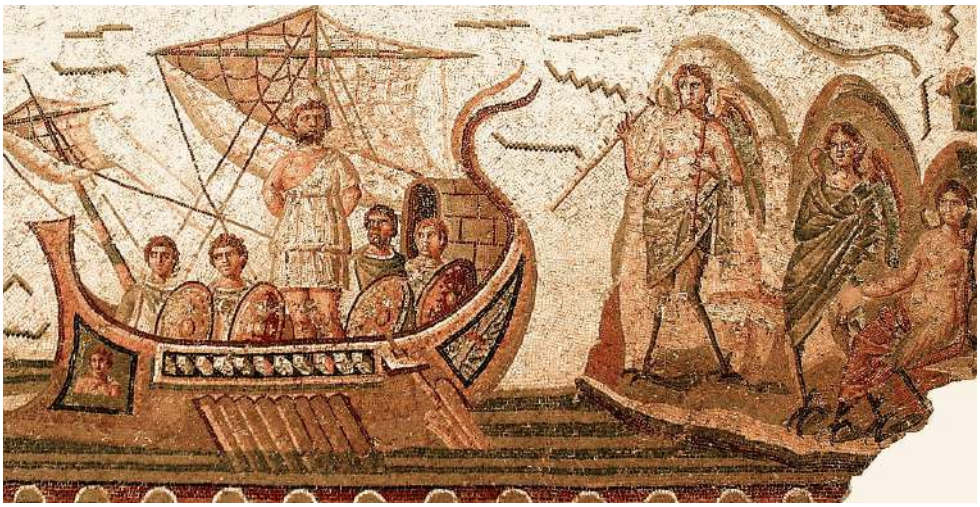
Its name was Alexandria and its glorious history started with the dream of one remarkable individual: Alexander the Great. Under Alexander's orders, its first outline was traced in the sand near the ancient settlement of Rhakotis on the Mediterranean coast in 331 BCE. However, the city's construction was carried out mainly under the direction of Alexander's childhood friend, confidant and senior general, Ptolemy, who became Ptolemy I Soter ("Saviour") of Egypt and the founder of the Ptolemaic dynasty that revived ancient Egypt for the last time and ensured the transition of its heritage into the new historic era. Alexandria became the capital of Egypt and the place where the Egyptian and Greek cultures fused and created something new and unique.

Ptolemy II Philadelphus (283-246 BCE) and Ptolemy III Euergetes (246–221 BCE) continued building and developing the great city. They managed to create such a powerful centre of administration

and commerce, a truly cosmopolitan cradle of wisdom and culture, that it continued to enrich the world for many centuries afterwards in spite of any political, economic or social turmoil. The heart of the cradle was the Alexandrian Museum and the Serapeum (temple of Serapis), both of which had libraries: the main Library of Alexandria being a part of the former, and a smaller "daughter" library part of the latter.

The Ptolemies intended to gather in their city all sacred, philosophical, scientific and literary works of the world (even Hindu and Buddhist texts from India could be found there). To that end, no cost or effort was ever spared. As a result, the library's contents have been estimated at around three-quarters of a million scrolls (1 scroll = 2000 lines). But its value lay not only in its contents. In addition to the grand collections of works, it had lecture halls, meeting rooms and gardens, and together with the Museum (a study and research institution) formed a veritable sanctuary of thought and home to the most famous thinkers of the ancient world.

The members of the Museum were provided with a large salary, free food and lodging, and exemption from taxes. It was here that in the 3rd century BCE Eratosthenes of Cyrene developed a method for finding prime numbers ("The Sieve of Eratosthenes"), calculated the circumference of the Earth with minor error, developed a method for drawing accurate maps of the world and wrote the first chronological history of Greece; Aristarchus of Samos theorised the heliocentric solar system; Archimedes possibly studied and invented the "Archimedean screw"; the father of geometry, Euclid of Alexandria, wrote his *Elements*; Zenodotus of Ephesus established the canonical texts for the Homeric poems and the early Greek lyric poets; and Callimachus produced his 120-volume *Pinakes*, the bibliographic survey of the contents of the Library. Later, during Roman times, many practical inventions were made on the basis of knowledge accumulated in the Library, including the first steam engine, a vending machine, and concrete, especially for use underwater.



Many other important works were conducted at the Museum, including numerous translations from Egyptian, Hebrew and other languages, philosophical studies that considerably influenced Christianity and also produced a school of Neoplatonists. The Museum truly implemented its symbolic meaning - a place where the muses, goddesses of literature, science and art, live and inspire the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom and make the flourishing of civilization possible.

The will, genius and generosity of the founder, the first rulers of Alexandria and all the members of the Museum extended the boundaries of knowledge and the possibilities of the human spirit. Sadly, much of its heritage was destroyed and had to be achieved again from the 16th century. What would the world look like now if tolerance and love of wisdom had prevailed and the transition from the ancient world had been allowed to take place without the destruction of the gifts of Alexandria?

Nataliya Petlevych

Understanding Human Personality: Nature, Nurture and the Possibility of Change

Nature is equipped with many ingenious ways of transforming and adapting to unexpected circumstances within its own natural system. A simple seed will become a complex tree under the minimum right conditions, in a dynamic relationship with its nature and the necessary nurture. Analogous to the seed, our personality is in interaction with the inner and the outer world; it may be the result of innate and acquired characteristics, influenced by genetics and culture, and developed in response to social exchanges and personal beliefs as well as inner resources. However, unlike the seed, which is complete in itself, personality is only one construct of the human being; it is a sort of psychological tool that enables us to manage ourselves in the world; or, to put it another way, our channel and armour [or our mask, as the ancients propose] through which we interact. As such, it needs to have the flexibility of changing and aligning itself with life events.

Photo by Ricardo Annandale on Unsplash

However personality arises, behavioural patterns are assumed to be reflections of it, and these patterns then become our personality traits, which go on to frame predictable life outcomes for individuals. The idea that personality is unchangeable has already been refuted by contemporary researchers, although some moderate stability can be found. There are two fundamental reasons motivating personality change: 1) genetic and evolutionary adaptation of behaviours to life stages, and 2) intentional behavioural redirection, which is an inherent capacity of the human being. The first can be seen as the manifestation of a natural, acquiescent and *unaware* process of our development, while the second reflects our capacity to be *aware* and *conscious* and to use our *willpower* to realign our personality, leading to a more beneficial version of ourselves.

The natural development of human personality has been associated with life experiences and age, and the degree of change would depend on individual differences. The maturational process due to changes in social role (such as work and parenthood) is one of the main causal mechanisms for a personality trait to change over time. For the average population, this would be translated as an increase in conscientiousness, emotional stability, agreeableness and social dominance, but a decrease in openness to experience and social vitality, as an individual grows older and undertakes different responsibilities in social interaction. The motivation of these patterns of change is driven by biogenetic properties of the organism and the individual's interaction and participation in social roles, and they both contribute to stability and change of personality. Work satisfaction, relationship stability, cultural and historical context as well as individual predisposition and cognitive ability are all in a dynamic interconnection and reinforce each other, contributing to the development of personality.

What are the forces driving us? Is there one ultimate shared determinant for the development of human personality? For Freud, the duality between the urges for survival and death is materialised as sexual impulses, which, he argues, drive our behaviours, and how these forces are controlled or satisfied portrays our personality. Freud concentrates his attention on our animalistic part with its fundamental purpose: survival through procreation. Is Freud alone in this view? Would it be too daring to draw a parallel between Freud's psychosexual theory and the evolutionary theory, which supports the idea that we are passively compelled by our genes' desire to replicate? We cannot deny that our biology is structural and decisive in our constitution; however, ignoring our subtle and ethereal dimensions would be to neglect an essential part of ourselves. Jung observes more elevated faculties of the human being, such as spirituality and intuition, and suggests that the constitution

of human personality and behaviour is shaped by transcendental experiences and unconscious archetypes, which would serve as a model on which to base our personality and its variability. What if this is a similar mechanism to the unconscious information passed through animal generations without any spoken communication, allowing animals to know what to eat, where to go and what to avoid?

These two iconic personality theorists essentially attribute the development and change of personality to our *mental interpretations* of life experiences. However, their greatest contribution may perhaps be their interpretation of disturbance and conflicts of the mind, and how these create symptoms in the personality, creating maladjusted behaviour.

Harsh conditions or an inhospitable environment may still provide the minimum right requirements for an apple seed to survive and perhaps grow into a plant, but it may not grow to full height or produce fruit. A distracted or lazy farmer might let nature take care of the process of the crop development, or can become aware of the necessary work to help the seed to thrive. Unlike a poorly cultivated plant, which may reach a stage of development when it is no longer possible to achieve its full potential, the capacity of the human being to change is believed to be preserved at all ages. The awareness of unfavourable aspects of the personality may trigger a desire for change, and purposeful intervention has been one of the instruments used to achieve it. Within a therapeutic relationship, therapist and patient develop awareness and explore the patient's self-concept, and from there, work towards a more accurate view of reality and acceptance. There are three different aspects that psychotherapy can focus on: feelings, thoughts and behaviours. Purposeful intervention would bring these aspects to awareness, and then intentionally change them, which would, through practice, become habit which would reinforce a change in the person's self-concept. A change in self-concept is claimed to be the ultimate factor that drives long-term change in personality, but two preconditions are required: being open to experience, and perceiving the self-aspects and personality as changeable.

If the seed represents our biology, the quality of the seed our inner resources, the soil our social environment, and the farmer the caregiver, we would be given an illustration of how all parts are in a dynamic relationship. It is not hard to visualise how a high-quality seed in a rich soil under the right weather conditions and an attentive farmer would grow into a fully developed and fruitful tree, and how one missing element would break the system.

It is not possible to understand and define what a tree is by focusing only on the leaves, so perhaps we need to be open to and integrate all personality theories to comprehend all the layers of human personality; perhaps we do not share one ultimate determinant of personality; perhaps our motivators of change vary according to the individual, reflecting nature's need for diversity.

Personality scientists seem to be still trying to understand and come to a consensus about the factors driving personality; however, we can take two approaches: we can just rely on our nature and benefit from the nurture we receive, and passively let the flow of nature guide our development, or we can become aware of any predicament and actively work on whatever deficient dimension is stopping us reaching our potential as a human being.

Daniela Origem

Plant Lore

A brief insight into the mythology and symbology of plants

"And just as speech is invention about objects and ideas, so myth is invention about truth."
Humphrey Carpenter

A depiction of the *Yggdrasil*, the world tree from Norse Mythology

You may not know it, but as a child, plant allegories may have left a bigger impact on you than first imagined. Vivid and captivating fables, like conceptual seeds that were sown in your mind through fairy tale and superstition.

Plant lore, like any other, has its roots in vague beginnings, and prior to any records it was reiterated in oral tradition, passed on by the predecessors to the next in line. Until scribes made these unwritten accounts noteworthy, the context of these stories would be susceptible to change, altering in the course of transmission.

Eventually, these iterations were literalised, plant themes inked into symbol and metaphor, laced into detail within the frameworks of paganism, religion, alchemy and art. Plants themes are ubiquitous, yet distinct in their motifs, underpinned by the region's peculiar flora, its characteristics and elicited effects. The Cacti in central America, Myrrh trees in Arabia, or Sausage trees in Africa, each native with individual myths.

Despite many plant species, there are also constants, like the constituents to what makes a tree a tree, which prompt similar themes. The Tree of Life is a universal archetype, detailing the unification of the underworld (roots) to the transcendental realms

(flowers), that can signify a map of our inner suffering and awakening. A popular example of this figurative tree is found in the Grimm's fairy tale, "Spirit in the Bottle," an alchemical concept where a boy encounters revelations after discovering the life spirit in a bottle, at the roots of a large Oak.

Mandalas are another theme, projecting a geometrical symmetry of symbols like that of a flower head, as used in Hindu, Christian and Mayan tradition. A Flower's bloom reflects the seasons like a salute, or a marker on nature's calendar. Spring flowers such as Iris symbolise fertility for its sensual appearance, and a rainbow for its gleaming iridescence. In a German folk tale, the snow used to have no colour, so the snow asked the flowers to share some of their vibrant hues, all of which stubbornly declined and were repelled by the snow. Only one showed pity with a drooping head: it was the 'Snowdrop,' who shared with the snow its pearly white splendour.

Various plants are eponymous of legends or epics in myth; the very term 'Flora' derives from the Roman deity Flora, a goddess of spring blossoms, fertility and vegetation. The Narcissus flower is another example, also known as the Daffodil. Greek myth has it that Narcissus paid no attention to his adorer Echo, as he was too busy being self-consumed, spellbound at his own reflection, eventually wasting away and morphed into a daffodil. Subsequently, the Narcissus flower has been known to symbolise a one-sided love relationship.

The Irish Druids, on the other hand, were named after their sacred tree of worship, the Oak, the life force of their Gods. Druid translates to 'Man of the Oak', and to catch a falling Oak leaf would signify good luck. So large was the Oak, it took the brunt of lightning strikes, and for each strike it took, it received a mistletoe from the Gods. It's a symbol of protection, as is the evergreen Holly tree through autumn and winter. Holly sprigs were used in divination and hung as wreaths in homes to ward off evil.

In ancient China, Xiwangmu, Queen mother of the west, feasted on the peaches of immortality, which took three thousand years to ripen in the paradise of Mount Kunlun, and invited other Taoist Gods to her divine banquet to indulge in the juicy immortal flesh. Taoist sorcerers were later known to possess wands made of peach wood to dispel danger, and used their petals to induce enchanting effects on men. To receive a peach in China is a blessing for longevity; peach blossoms are carried by brides as a token of prosperity and peach wood is woven into jewellery as an amulet.

The story of the Rudraksha (Sanskrit for Shiva's teardrops) is a Hindu folk tale of Shiva going into a deep meditative state, with his eyes shut for millennia. The meditation induced a state of supreme bliss, he cried elated tears that fell onto the Earth and manifested themselves as the seeds of the Rudraksha tree. Today, these particular seeds are made into a string of beads and worn like a necklace. They can be counted through the palm during contemplation and dangled over

Xiwangmu, Queen Mother of the West

food to signal whether you should eat or not, depending on their rotation.

These are just a few brief examples of countless tales and ideas that have rippled through history and lured us with wonder. Just as a honey bee transports pollen from one flower to the next, ensuring the plants will come again, so our ancestors have transported stories for their offspring to reap and sow.

Gareth Kinsella

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