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NewAcropolis

Philosophy and Education for the Future

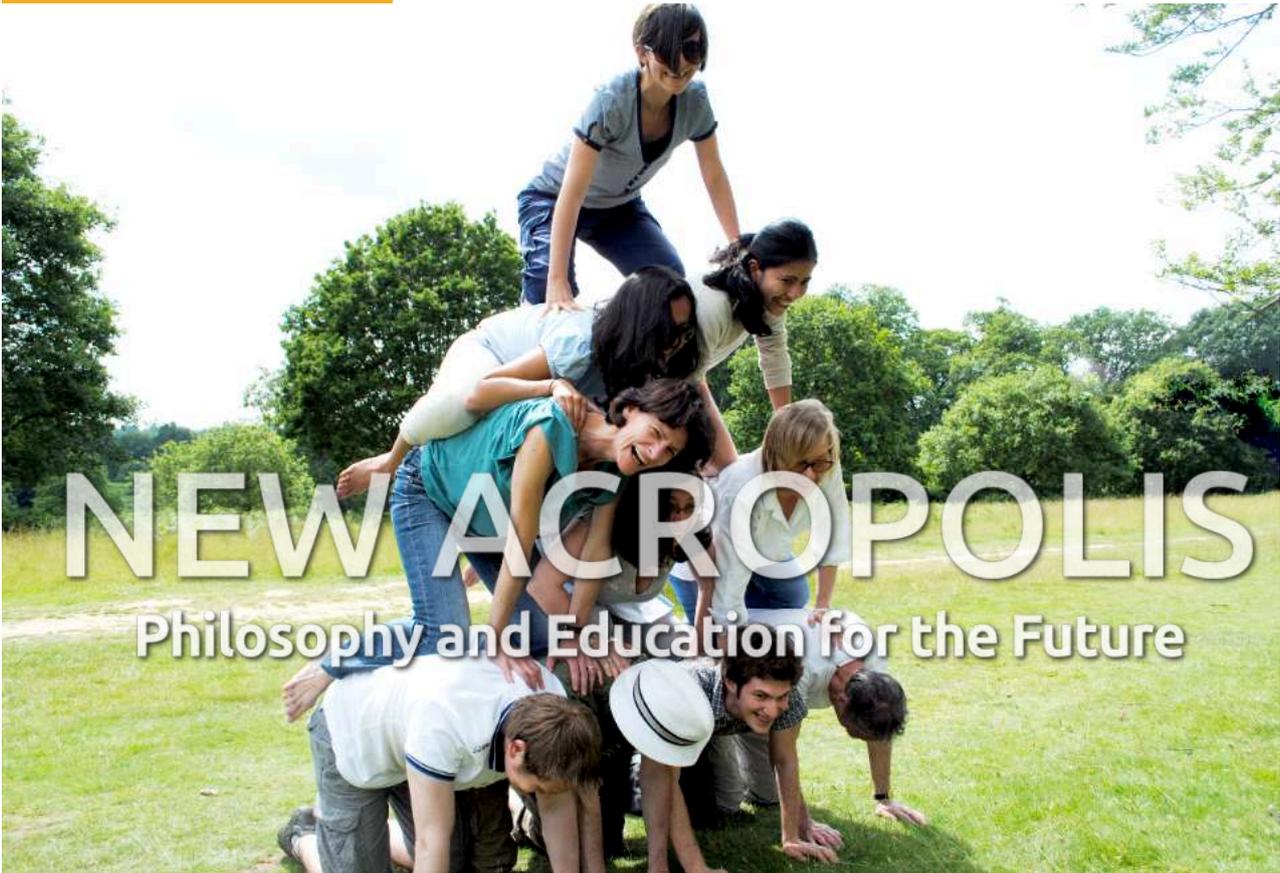
The Theory of the Imprisoned Soul

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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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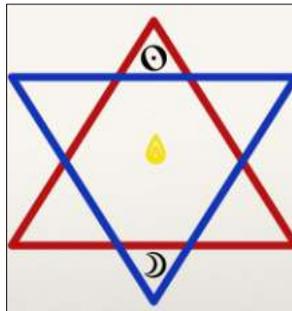
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Editorial

“DMC” - A Remedy for our Times?

I have just discovered the acronym of DMC and I am quite excited about it. DMC stands for Deep Meaningful Conversation. It seems to have been in use since 2017 and became more popular through TV shows like Love Island. There are about 450 different meanings of the letters DMC in the dictionary but 'Deep and Meaningful Conversation' is the most common definition for it on Snapchat, Whatsapp, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

It has often been said that slang words and abbreviations of popular culture are an expression of the 'spirit' of the time in which they are coined and used. There is always a reason why new words come into being and they often reveal deeper currents of feelings, thoughts and needs. The fact that a new acronym 'catches on' shows that people relate to its meaning and resonate with its message.

It is not surprising that many of us long for the deep connection and the thought-provoking and insightful stimulation that a good conversation provides. We are left unsatisfied by superficial interactions, by the social awkwardness produced by giving too much importance to externals and by the empty promises of happiness that our consumer society has been unable to fulfil. According to a survey from May 2020, only 14% of Americans said that they were very happy – down from 31% in 2018 who said the same.

I think that surveys like this, chat words like DMC, the ubiquity of depression and addiction and the shocking rise of suicides are signs that point to another, deeper pandemic – the pandemic of meaninglessness. Viktor Frankl, psychiatrist, philosopher, Holocaust survivor and author of 32 books, referred to this lack of meaning and values as the 'poverty of the West'. In his classic *Man's Search for Meaning* (which has been translated into 23 languages) he wrote: "People have enough to live by but nothing to live for. They have the means but no meaning". He also wrote more than 50 years ago that 30% of his patients applying for therapy

suffered from a lack of meaning. C.G. Jung put the number for his patients even higher.

Both Frankl and Jung understood that our search for meaning is what makes us human and that a lack of meaning can make us ill. Frankl: "Suffering from meaninglessness is not a case of pathology but rather a proof of one's humanness. But although it is not caused by anything pathological, it is potentially pathogenic." For him, the search for meaning constitutes the primary motivational force of humanity and if we lack meaning we start wasting away, in one way or another.

This quest for meaning will inevitably lead us to existential questions. And this is where DMC and philosophy meet. Philosophy not as an intellectual conversation with lots of name dropping and convoluted sentences, but as a 'love of wisdom', as an awareness of our deep questions and as the intuition (as in science) that there are answers to be found and underlying principles to be discovered. Philosophy is both the driving force and the product of our search for meaning. Philosophy, combined with listening skills, empathy, a genuine interest in the 'other', openness and authenticity will surely be the foundation of any Deep Meaningful Conversation.

The reason why I found the concept of DMC so uplifting was because I see it as an indicator that we are beginning to understand what we are lacking and actually looking for. If we can see the problem, we will be able to search for a solution. If we realize the value of deep and meaningful conversations, it means that we want to go deeper, really engage with one another, dare to ask the big questions and not just numb them by keeping ourselves pathologically busy or taking addictive substances.

One of the greatest gifts we can give each other is to have time for a good conversation. It always makes us feel better and more energised. We connect, we transcend our differences and we discover that we are not alone in a meaningless universe but part of the human family that has been able, time and again, to find meaning in human experiences and in our suffering. I believe that deep and meaningful conversations can be a universal remedy for many ills of our times and I hope you will have plenty of them in the coming months.

Sabine Leitner



The Theory of the Imprisoned Soul

The ‘theory of the imprisoned soul’ is an idea that we can find in the writings of Plato, in particular in his Dialogues *Phaedo*, *Cratylus* and *Republic*. It is the idea that the soul – the immortal principle in the human being – is confined within a narrow prison which is the body. This idea, as Plato himself suggests, comes from the Orphic mysteries of ancient Greece, whose motto was ‘*soma sema*’, which can be translated as ‘the body is a tomb’. The meaning of this phrase is that there is an immortal principle in us which is free and unlimited, all-knowing and wise. But when it exists in the body it is limited in its expression and freedom.

We can illustrate this idea with the example of Beethoven and his deafness, which was like a prison for his musical being. And yet, despite this enormous obstacle he was able to compose magnificent music. This is why he has been described as truly heroic. Perhaps it is precisely these restrictions, all the trials and difficulties of life, that allow us to discover our soul. The fact that we are in a body does not condemn us to a ‘life sentence’ of not being able to express our true inner nature.

Before we examine further the theory of the imprisoned soul, let us try to understand the concept of Soul itself. Our word ‘soul’ comes from the Old English ‘Sawol’, which, like the Greek word for soul - ‘*psyche*’ - and the Latin word - ‘*anima*’ - has several meanings: ‘the spiritual and emotional part of a person’, ‘animate existence’, ‘life’, or ‘living being’. But the core meaning, and the one which is most relevant for this topic is ‘the immortal principle in the human being’.

Does the soul exist? This is a long-debated question throughout the history of philosophy. There have always been some philosophers who believed that everything is material (even in ancient cultures such as India, China, Greece and Rome), others who believed that matter itself is an illusion (not only in India, but also in Western philosophy, as is the case of Berkeley), and others (a majority) who believed in the existence of an immortal soul.

Aristotle said that “to attain any assured knowledge about the soul is one of the most difficult things in the world.” Kant went even further and affirmed that it is absolutely impossible for us to reach any

sound theoretical conclusions about the soul's existence, although in one of his writings he states: "I confess I am much disposed to assert the existence of Immaterial natures in the world, and to place my own soul in the class of these beings." Perhaps the existence of the soul can only be proven by inner experience. According to Plato, it is possible to attain such knowledge of immaterial realities, by freeing oneself from the limits of the senses and ascending in one's consciousness to a higher dimension of reality.

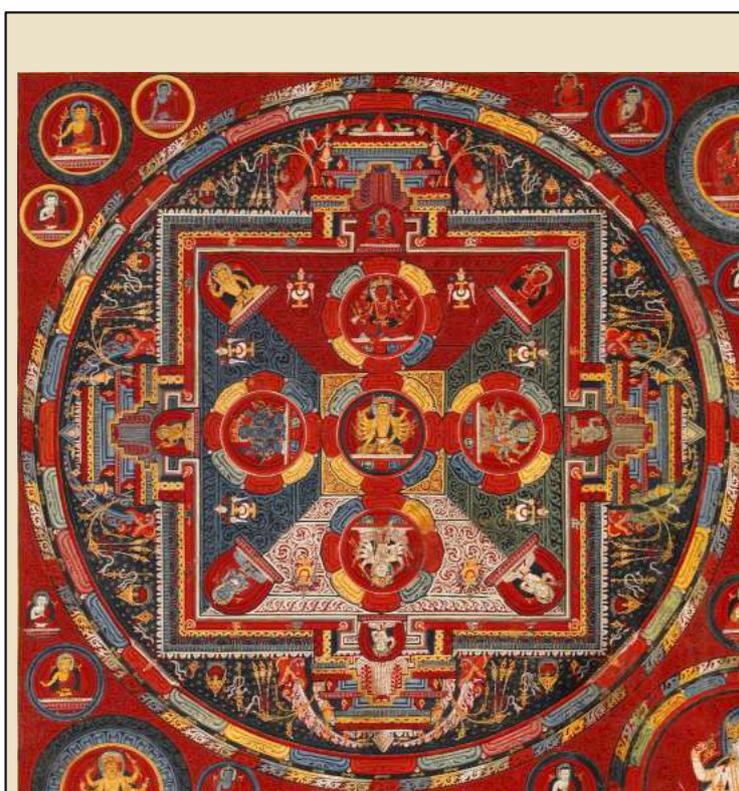
The Roman philosopher Plotinus, a Neoplatonist, explains with a myth how the soul came to become imprisoned in the body: originally, the soul lived in heaven, but one day, looking down from its heavenly abode it saw a most beautiful being. Falling in love with it, the soul flew down from heaven into its arms, only to find itself enmeshed in matter, because what the soul had seen was only an image of itself, reflected in the mirror of matter, the 'mirror of Bacchus'. Thus the soul came into the body and became identified with it, giving rise to what Plotinus calls 'the animate', i.e. the soul imprisoned in the body.

In this state, the soul forgot its true identity and became identified with the body, with its desires and fears. However, Plotinus continues, there is always a call from the soul to remember itself, and when a human being begins to heed this call, he tries to return to his soul nature, his true being. But he finds it difficult to free himself from his attachment to the world, to which he is so accustomed. It is as if we were entangled in matter, inextricably bound up in it.

A part of us is happy to be in the body. We are afraid to lose this body and its comforts, we are afraid to die. But, as Plato says in the *Phaedo*, "true philosophers are ever seeking to release the soul...[and] are always occupied in the practice of dying." By which he means that, recognising the inevitability of death, the philosopher will accustom himself to that idea and try to release himself from the body, not by physically dying, but by 'dying to the world', i.e. by practising becoming indifferent to material things, sensations and desires.

TYPES OF PRISON

There are many ways of describing the types of prisons we construct for ourselves, but one way of doing so is to use the image of the 'five poisons' described in Tibetan Buddhism: Ignorance, Anger, Pride, Passion and Envy. These can all be transformed into different kinds of wisdom: ignorance can be transformed into understanding, anger into 'mirror-like wisdom', pride into seeing the essential equality of all beings, passion into discernment and envy into the accomplishment of right actions.



A Tibetan mandala depicting some aspects of the 'Five Wisdom Buddhas' and their associated mental energies.

The key to liberation is therefore wisdom, because the prison is ultimately built out of ignorance. But wisdom is not only theoretical understanding, it is an understanding which has become part of one's being. We may know theoretically that something is bad for us, but we keep on doing it because we don't truly know it.

Plato discusses precisely this point in his dialogue *Protagoras*. He asks: why don't people always act in accordance with their knowledge? It is the phenomenon known in Greek as *Akrasia*, meaning weakness of will. The common explanation is that we don't do what we consider good, or we do what we consider bad, because we are overcome by pleasure or pain, fear or desire.

But Plato disagrees with the commonly held belief that desires are stronger than reason and holds that



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the real underlying cause for acting against one's knowledge is not a weakness of will but a weakness of knowledge. We are deceived by an appearance into believing that it is something good, and we make an error of judgement when we see only the short term and not the long term pleasure or pain that will result from an action – like someone who sees clearly what is in front of him, but only sees indistinctly something far away. The cure for this

weakness of knowledge would then be to consider things more thoughtfully and develop discernment; to look at something that seems pleasant or painful at first sight and to think whether it really is so in the long term, or whether, on the other hand, the long term benefits outweigh the short term pain, or the long term pain outweighs the short term pleasure. This would be true knowledge and would lead to right action.

Plato also speaks about the importance of education in helping us to gain freedom, in the sense that living in a society which is geared to 'bringing out the potential of each individual' would help the soul to return to itself. A seed not only needs to be of good quality, it also needs good soil, sunlight and water. So a human soul in this world needs a good cultural environment to thrive. Our present society tends in the opposite direction, encouraging us to consume, to accumulate possessions, to seek safety for the body, in other words, to become more and more attached to the material world.

In conclusion, we do not escape from the 'prison' of the body by dying, but by living in harmony with our soul while continuing to live in the body. In this way, as the 17th century poet Richard Lovelace wrote:

*Stone walls do not a prison make
Nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
That for an Hermitage.*

From which we may draw the conclusion that the real prison is not actually the body, but the mind. If our minds can become 'innocent and quiet', the 'prison' of the body becomes a pleasant home.

Julian Scott

How Social Media and Content Sharing Platforms have Affected our Attention

Attention is an important cognitive process where the mind is focused on selected information. As we deal with hundreds of thousands of pieces of information daily, the mind has the capability to narrow down the circle of the amount of information it needs. It is a vital skill, as survival can depend on what we are focused on. Think about a life-threatening situation when a crucial decision has to be made in a split second. We need the right information at the right time to make the right choice.

Nowadays, one of the greatest challenges to our focus is the smartphone and the applications (apps) that are running on it. As in a case of a driver who is using his smartphone while driving, his attention is split between the road and the phone, so an accident becomes very likely. But our attention is not only targeted in situations like that. We receive many demands on our attention through our phones and their apps, which can change our habits, tastes, or our relationships with ourselves or others. Since we encountered smartphones about a decade ago, they quickly became an important part of our lives, and now we can hardly imagine living without them. We use them for multiple purposes: for calls, chats, taking pictures, organizing our daily routines, etc. But some of the apps that are running on them

demand more and more of our attention. If we don't use them, we may feel we are missing out.

Although smartphones and social media apps are not so old, the attention economy is a 50-year-old term coined by Herbert A. Simon. He stated that we are living in an information-rich world, but we are suffering from a reduced attention span and feel

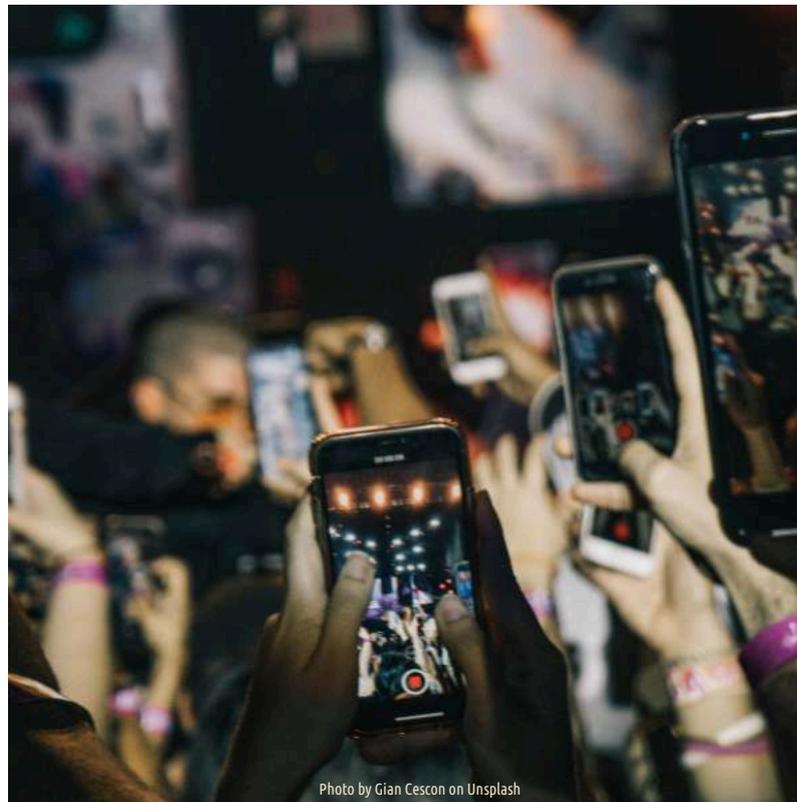


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impelled to allocate our shortened attention inefficiently. Since 1971, when this correlation was discovered, the amount of information has multiplied. Catching someone's attention became value and money, and companies are aware of this.

The "free" social media and content sharing platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or YouTube use algorithms that are based on people's social behaviours, and they are tuned to keep their attention in front of the screens by providing different curiosities and information based on their preferences. While users are texting, watching videos, and so on, they are encountering ads at every minute, as the platforms put ads into the content. But the main profit for the platforms are

popularity of the social media platforms remain unbroken.

The winners from this change are the celebrities and companies who can use these tools for their profits. When a popular singer shares a video on a social media platform, the followers who like the content will re-share it, making the video well-known around the globe. At the same time, the products connected with the singer or the video (for example, food, drink, or clothes) become popular and sell well. The celebrities who are paid by companies to promote their products can earn thousands of pounds for their show. But the companies earn more.

The losers in this process are not only the people who cannot make money from these platforms, but most of the users, who spend time and energy watching the video of the celebrity and then sharing it. In 2013, an average user spent 2.5 hours a day on their smartphone, checking social platforms every 5-10 minutes. In the last eight years, this rate has got worse. When someone checks their Facebook, they will not just watch one post, but many, or if they watch a YouTube video, probably they will watch one more, then another one. Getting back to the disrupted activity or work consumes extra time and will be disrupted next time more easily. As a result, attention becomes more and more fragmented and people cannot concentrate any more on one thing for a long time. Not only do they spend less time on work during working hours, but the quality of their work is degrading as well. This is a sign of the crisis of attention. People feel the urge to check their phones all the time in case they miss something.

But where there is a sickness, there is a remedy too. Listening only to one thing at a time or practising mindfulness (conscious presence) in our daily routine can be the solution to this problem. The other is very simple: just log off from these platforms or mute them from time to time. Because taking back our attention is important not just for our safety, but for our sanity as well.

Istvan Orban



Photo by Sara Kurfeß on Unsplash

the data of the users, which are sold to third parties, who invest money to reach or expand their markets. Even after scandals like that of Facebook-Cambridge Analytica, when Facebook users' preferences were sold to political parties, and with this, political elections were influenced, the



Astrology for Spiritual Transformation

The teachings of astrology are rooted in a basic and profound experience, the experience of the starry sky. Through this fundamental 'human' experience, which modern man has nearly forgotten, astrology establishes its main objectives: 1) The study of the meaningful connection between the wider cosmos and the inner and outer world of human consciousness and action; 2) The study of the cyclic nature of existence. Using the sky and its planetary movements as a mirror, astrology tries to reveal the quality of time with which every cycle of human existence has been imprinted since its birth.

What the astrologer observes in the sky are not mere objective phenomena but powerful symbols, symbols of universal principles and functions that exist and pervade everything. They have an archetypal and universal character, but the astrologer studies their symbolic meaning in terms of human life. To give an example: Saturn symbolises the principle of boundaries, contraction, coldness etc. These principles exist everywhere, but the astrologer interprets them in relation to human consciousness and experience.

Because we are dealing with symbols which are multivalent, the astrological language has been used in different ways. Nowadays the approach that is most prevalent in the West is that of psychological astrology. This type of astrology helps us to define a sense of purpose and identity in our lives so that we can 'learn to know' ourselves.

In this approach, the birth-chart is seen as a symbolic picture which reveals one's unique psychological reality, including personal strengths and limitations. Psychologically speaking, we are all made of contrasting and conflicting elements. We all have these different 'voices' within us which have to be harmonised and integrated towards a centre. The birth chart also shows us the various tools, inner drives, aspirations and talents we have at our disposal in order to build this inner centre (our individual identity). In this system of astrology the emphasis is put on self-actualisation and the process of individuation, as presented by C.G.Jung and his followers.

In a philosophical sense, self-actualisation also implies the unfoldment of the latent powers in the human being. However, there can be no self-actualisation without self-transformation – that is, the breaking down of an 'old' form (or persona), and the construction of a 'new' one, which can serve as a better vehicle for 'greater' (more harmonious) living. Actually, one's entire life can be seen as a process of transformation.

As stated by the great astrologer Dane Rudhyar: "The basic realization a man or woman can have, is that birth gives to a human being the possibility to consider his or her whole life as a process of transformation; and then sooner or later, more or less consciously and deliberately, to live that personal life-span as such a process. A process is a series of interrelated motions and changes which

have one source and one purpose to be fulfilled. A man or woman can perform this basic process (which the human condition constitutes) consciously and deliberately. This is human destiny, Man's dharma.”

When astrology is used as a tool to bring this process of self-actualisation and self-transformation into people’s awareness, it is no longer a matter of fate and destiny, it is about emphasising choice, action and free-will.

In speaking of this process, we have to keep in mind the complexity of the human being, the human experience and needs. Human beings can operate at different levels of consciousness and activity. According to Rudhyar, the human being can and should function at four different levels: the biological, the socio-cultural, the individual and the transpersonal.

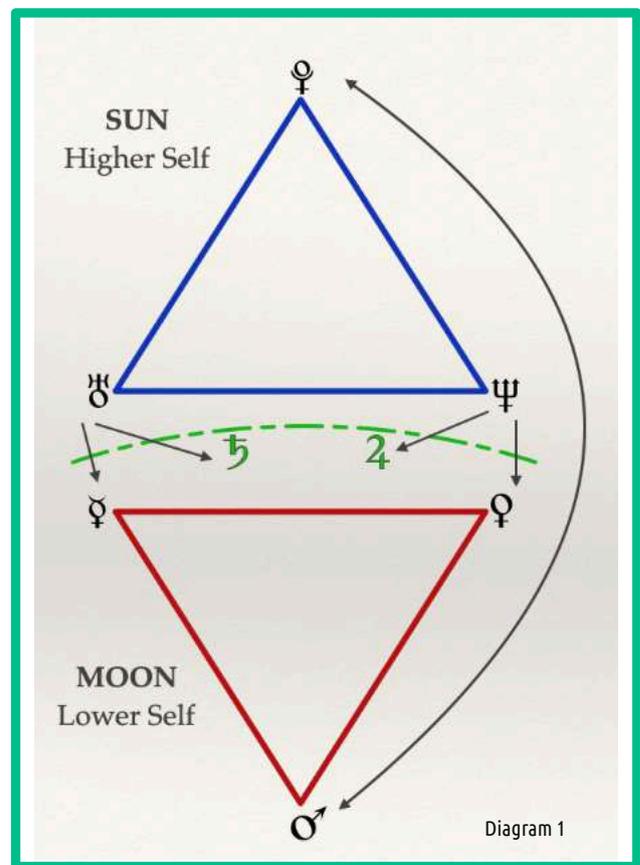
We are all born within a culture which has its own world-view, its psychic environment, a specific language and ancestral past. All these collective factors are already there before any individual is born. Through the process of self-actualisation and self-transformation the human being should be able to detach himself from these collective ‘influences’ and learn to operate as a truly autonomous individual.

The discovery of one’s own unique identity (as discussed earlier on) and the ability to function as a relatively independent individual can bring great personal happiness. But this is not the end of the process. As Rudhyar reminds us: “Individualism in itself is a stage that we have to outgrow... as we discover a wider frame of reference. We feel an urge to transcend, not only the safe, secure realms of socio-cultural conventions but also the limited circumference of individual selfhood.”

Therefore, at the next level (transpersonal level), we start perceiving our individual destinies as connected to something greater than ourselves. We perhaps start with our community, or country, and eventually embrace an active participation for the welfare of humanity as a whole. Whatever our path, we align with the needs of a larger whole.

I will now try to illustrate the main stages of the process which I have so far outlined, by using the symbolism of astrology.

In diagram 1 we see two triangles. I have associated the upper triangle with the three trans-Saturnian planets Uranus, Neptune and Pluto. These planets symbolise revolutionary, transformative and transcendent forces. Collectively they are the symbols of the acceleration of time in which we live (especially since Pluto’s discovery in 1930). They represent undeveloped faculties latent within us. They ‘show’ us the stages along the path of spiritual transformation



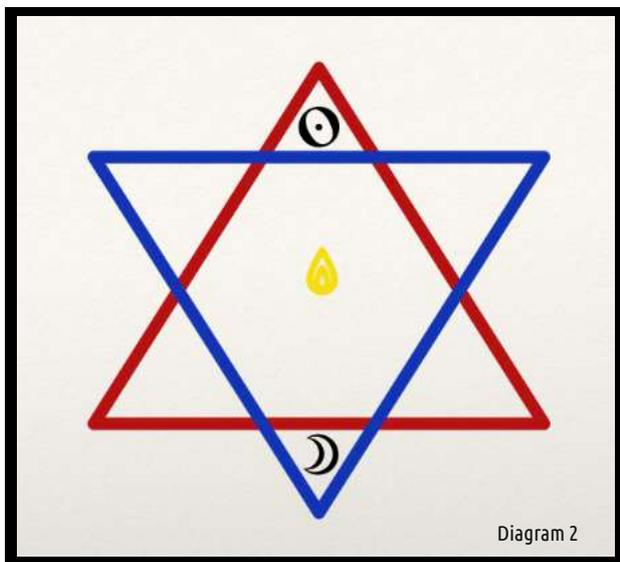
and the next steps in human evolution.

I have called this triangle the ‘higher self’ and have associated it with the Sun (which symbolises the dimension of the starry sky, the realm of the Gods, the spiritual dimension and an ‘ideal state’ which still lies ahead).

I have called the other triangle the ‘lower self’. I have linked it to Mercury, Venus and Mars, which are all under the sway of the Moon (the symbol of

earthly living and the 'past'). Mercury is the 'logical' mind, which cogitates, analyses and dissects. Venus is associated with our emotional and desire nature, also to what gives us pleasure and brings attachments. Mars is the planet of action. An often compulsive and reactive type of action, dictated by survival instincts and personal ambitions. Mars is also the self-assertion which more often than not results in aggressive and violent actions.

Finally, we have the 'social' planets, Jupiter and Saturn. In a negative sense they symbolise social



programming and conventions, the dominant mentality and preoccupations of one's culture, and the 'greedy syndrome' which is eating up the planet.

Uranus, as the 'awakener', is the principle of freedom, liberation, unconventional thinking, internal and external revolutions. Uranus seeks to transform both Saturn and Mercury. When acting through Saturn, Uranus tends to break up any old structures (including our ego structure!). When there is an astrological transit of Uranus, it can be a good moment to transform those things in our life which are rigid, heavy, slow, blocked and which have been strongly conditioned by the past. With these transits, old concepts and ways of thinking receive a shock and we gain access to greater vistas. Suddenly we experience a broadening of our ordinary mind (Mercury), we become inspired by great ideas and our mental horizons expand.

Neptune symbolises the imaginative dimension of life, the longing for what transcends the temporal and material, universality and non-possessiveness. Neptune works mainly through Venus (and Jupiter). Transiting Neptune relates to all that concerns unconditional and universal love, it is the planet of the 'opening of the heart'. Neptune transits correspond to a period when we need to learn to open up to something at the level of compassion or universal love. It expands and de-personalises our sense of love (which is often too possessive and exclusive). It also expands and universalises our sense of value and what gives us pleasure.

Thanks to the work of Uranus and Neptune, the 'social' planets acquire a new meaning, giving support to the transformative process; Jupiter through expansion, higher learning and 'faith' in a higher dimension, and Saturn through discipline, order, perseverance, social cooperation and responsibility.

Finally, we come to Pluto, the symbol of the cosmic will. At the present level of collective evolution Pluto's action should be understood as mainly destructive. Pluto is linked to the process of death and rebirth, the possibility of regeneration and redemption. It relates to cathartic and purifying experiences.

Pluto works through Mars, because Mars is the planet of courage and action. It is the inner warrior in us which embraces the 'inner battle' without holding anything back. Pluto tends to purify those martial impulses and desires which otherwise would lead to hate and the illusion of separateness. The transits of Pluto ask us to "let go" of all that is not important, that hinders or inhibits our progress on the road to wisdom.

In short, Pluto symbolises the last stage in this process in which the 'lower self' has become the reflection of the 'higher self' (diagram 2). Individuality is not transcended but it is refined (and redefined) so that it can become a channel for the expression of archetypal and spiritual needs.

Agostino Dominici

Bibliography: This article is based on Dane Rudhyar's works, which can be found at www.khaldea.com

Is True Poetry a Kind of Alchemy?

As with all the important things in life, poetry is difficult to define. In the first place, poetry is an art. *The Dictionary of the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language*¹ defines it as: “The manifestation of beauty or aesthetic feeling through the medium of the word, in verse or in prose.” As this definition indicates, the fundamental elements of poetry are rhythm and the WORD.

There is an inner word that designates the essence of each thing. There is a magical and deep meaning in words that transcends their grammatical meaning and brings us closer to the soul of things. The poet must discover that hidden spirit, that magical past contained in the word, and make it a bridge across which ideas, feelings and values



¹ Translator's note: This article was originally written in Spanish, so we have kept this definition from the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language, which is more 'Platonic' and wider than the definition found in the Oxford Dictionary of the English Language.

proper to the human being can pass, beyond epochs and fashions.

In a way, poetry has neither past nor future, it is the created and creative word, which came into being at the dawn of humanity. Its purpose is to bridge the gap that lies between what we see and what we imagine. Poets create outside the world that exists; they create what ought to exist and they try to express what is inexpressible. Poetry is the language of creation, the language of those who attempt to decipher our journey through the world. It is the language of those who want to listen to the



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heartbeat of existence, who are trying to discover the intrinsic sound of the universe. Through the song of the poet, the universe speaks and beauty finds its most intimate expression.

The poet perceives the subtle connections between all things, hears the secret voices of the heart and combines words that express apparently opposite realities, removing the veils that separate them.

When language becomes a ceremony and appears bearing the light of its initial purity, divested of the superficial coverings that have no true ideas beneath them, the poet becomes the Master who takes us by the hand and leads us beyond truth and falsehood, beyond reason and fantasy, beyond life and death, beyond space and time, beyond the ultimate horizon, beyond spirit and matter, beyond the highest point of the pyramid. There, the poet's eyes contemplate a more sublime reality, which is translated into words of living fire. Leaving aside reasonings and speculative arguments, that burning flame of the inner word opens up the human soul and gives it wings, transporting it to a higher plane. It is then that we find ourselves in the presence of "true poetry", which is transcendent, transparent and beautiful.

If we return to the Platonic idea that poetry is related to "the beautiful" and is a radiance of "the true", it can become a kind of alchemy that can not only transform, but also transmute² the reality of the awakened human being. For all these reasons, poetry is a challenge to reason, because through it we are capable of going beyond the physical meaning of words, we are capable of projecting our gaze towards the soul of words; and it is then that the act of alchemy takes place, leading us from understanding to SEEING, bringing us naturally closer to the First Ideas, to the Archetypes.

I would like conclude by invoking the words one of the finest poets of the Spanish language, Juan Ramón Jiménez, who, in his book *Eternities*, presents poetry as a search for the essence of life:

**Grant me, Intelligence, the knowledge
of the exact names of things!
... So that my word may be
the thing itself,
created anew by my soul...**

*María Dolores Gómez
(Translated from the Spanish by Julian Scott)*

² To transform is to change the form, whereas to transmute is to produce a real mutation, an irreversible change.

Media and Pop Culture Phenomena



Photo by Samuel Regan-Asante on Unplash

Pop culture is a phenomenon that can emerge globally, disseminating homogeneous themes whilst also existing as exclusive themes within innumerable and varied denominations of subcultures. It is an amalgamation of relative ideas catalysed via media, influencing the likes of: music taste, speech, fashion sense, dietary choices, friends, relationships, political decisions, values, identity, aspirations, perception and so on. It diffuses through the collective psyche unequivocally, and by default, a lot of us are unknowingly and indefensibly influenced by the 'pop' permeability.

Prior to the internet, mainstream media vehicles such as print, television and newspapers were breeding grounds for popular trends, due to their ubiquitous reach (and still are to a degree),

but in comparison to the Web, with its content exposure and interacting options, they are immensely limited.

Ironically, the media vehicles themselves, such as mobile phones and computers, are fashioned as trends in society prior to being a necessity. They are first marketed with a desirous and convenient appeal, with the idea increasingly latching on, until eventually the likes of Joe Bloggs and the Joneses next door have one, and the only way to "keep up" and avoid "old fogey" status, is to get one yourself.

The late Canadian philosopher of communication, Marshall McLuhan, a savant of media, notable for his book 'Understanding Media', coined the phrase "the medium is the message". In the 1960s McLuhan foretold the psychological effects

of electronic media. He postulated the attributes of media devices themselves, and the way they consume and shape a person's experience, and have a more momentous effect on the individual than the content they project.

Prior to the revolutionary invention of print in the mid-15th century, media was limited to oral tradition, religious texts and biographies of political and religious figures. The introduction of print (the dawn of mass media) radicalised the distribution and accessibility of literature on other topics, popularising different ideas and the authorship of scientists, astrologers, philosophers, novelists and artists. Later on in the 19th and 20th centuries, a television, film and radio generation paved the way for the likes of celebrity actors, singers, personalities and athletes. The last three decades have brought the rise of the internet, unparalleled by anything before, which has the propensity to render all prior mediums obsolete, creating an instant accessibility of mass information on almost anything, and introducing new levels of pop culture influencers, where anyone can become instantaneously famous with a single upload.

Each form of pioneering media, at its respective time in history, has altered the collective experience with new forms of popular themes. McLuhan lived in the time of the telegraph, telephone, television and radio. He proposed that these technologies (which

can be said for the internet too) were unifying people in an interactive way, and at the same time supporting an increased conformity amongst their participants.

The internet certainly marks a watershed in human technological achievement, pioneering advanced models of social engagement, applications and broadcasting. In the same light, it may also be



worth noting the words of the American inventor and systems theorist R. Buckminster Fuller, who said: "humanity is acquiring all the right technology for all the wrong reasons."

The media is a seedbed for popularising anything, and what becomes popular isn't necessarily by virtue of merit. It can simply gain its pulling power through shrewd salesmanship and marketing. The money flows where our attention goes, and this can raise concerns. Many popular themes today are becoming progressively dubious and dumbing down, and when precarious themes become the

dominant trends, it can further encourage the imperative to jump on the bandwagon.

Trends are capable of manifesting into societal norms, moulding our view on the world, who we are, and what we do, evidently risking tighter constraints on our freedom of expression. Einstein is quoted as saying, "it has become appallingly obvious that our technology has exceeded our

humanity", and this was said long before people commuted to work gawking at their phones instead of watching their steps!

Technology is a tool, like money and language, for example, a force for good or bad. A thought worth considering may be to evaluate our own participation in how we engage with the media, not only focusing on how we can influence and consume ourselves via the mediums, but also, how the medium and its message consumes us.

Gareth Kinsella

The Real Dangers behind 5G

What is 5G?

Far from any conspiracy theory, the new 5G network is an evolution from the current so-called 4G network (LTE-A: Long Term Evolution Advanced), which was itself an upgrade of the 3G network (LTE: Long Term Evolution). 5G is using existing channels with allocated frequency bandwidth from 450MHz to 6000MHz (or 6GHz).

These frequencies were chosen as they are ideal for transmission in an urban environment and the antennas' sizes (to transmit and receive the signal) can be fitted into mobile and portable devices.

What does 5G mean compared to the existing 3G and 4G?

The evolution from the original and still used phone signals 1G (900MHz) and 2G (1800MHz) to the



LTE 3G and 4G, was to allow an increase in size, speed and accuracy of transmission of data. While today's 4G allows up to 1Gb per second in data transmission, 5G is said to increase it up to 20Gb per second. 5G should decrease latency (or time delay) to 1 millisecond, as opposed to the 10 milliseconds of 4G. Other design features are said to increase accuracy of transmission (less loss of signal when transitioning from one relay to another) and upload speed.

smartphones will increase dramatically.

What is the necessity of 5G?

One of the arguments for 5G is the improvement of internet coverage, increasing the possibilities of remote tasks. Whether it is a necessity or not is another question when you know that other systems such as fibre optics and the existing LTE network are doing a good job.

But the capabilities of the new 5G are only following the trend which began in the 1990s with

“rebound effect”). It also requires new transmitting (antennas and relays) and receiving (smartphones and modems) systems to work. Which means an additional environmental cost, as the high tech used in the smart phones and electronics has a large footprint in terms of mining rare earth metals necessary for the battery and integrated circuits.

What about those electromagnetic waves?

5G uses the same frequencies used for the past 20-30 years. The regulations in place to protect the public from long term exposure to certain electromagnetic waves have their levels set relatively high. This protects from short term effects which could induce a current strong enough to generate muscular spasms or even heart failures for pacemaker holders. But those levels of electromagnetic exposure do not mention any medium to long term effects, as there have been no proper scientific studies done on the matter.

5G will not change the level of exposure. It's clear that more scientific research is needed on the long-term effects.

5G is another example of not considering the actual impact we put on the environment. We need to put a value on our priceless environment, one that weighs the real cost of what bringing in this new infrastructure does.

Florimond Krins



Photo by Glenn Carstens-Peters on Unsp

What are the technical implications of 5G?

All the improvements brought by 5G to the existing network are said to open the possibilities of having the already fast internet that you have at home (with fibre optics) but on a mobile device. With the new release of mobile phones increasingly packed with high resolution screens and cameras, the amount of data transmitted onto our

the internet and high-tech and mobile phone companies. In the past couple of decades, the amount of data transmitted has doubled every 18 to 24 months.

What is the real cost of 5G?

The cost here is not only financial, it is environmental. Even if 5G is more efficient, hence consuming less energy to transmit the same amount of data, it is meant to transmit much more data, therefore consuming more (also called

Sacred Creatures of Hindu Mythology

Animals and birds have always played a significant role in Hindu mythology. In ancient times, the importance of these creatures in daily lives was understood and they were given an immortal place as mythological gods or as deities known as “Vahanas”.

Vahana or animal vehicle – the Sanskrit word Vaha translates as "that which carries, that which pulls" – is also a reference to a stream or a flow. Hence, a river is known as Vahini. The Vahanas may wear a saddle upon which the deity rides or they may pull a chariot driven by the deity. They are sometimes depicted walking alongside the deity.

The relationship between the deity and the Vahana is not merely that of a master and servant. Outwardly they may appear as two entities, but internally they are united and

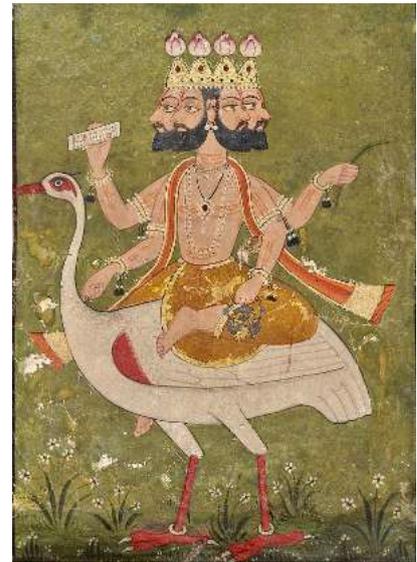
share the same consciousness. The Vahana cannot be considered mere animals or creatures, because they are endowed with the knowledge and power of the deity.

Let's have a look at 7 popular Vahanas, their corresponding deities and symbolism.

BIRDS

Lord Brahma's vehicle is 'Hamsa', the Swan. Hamsa means 'pure'. He is also shown riding a chariot drawn by seven swans, representing the seven worlds. His wife, the goddess Saraswati, also chose the Swan as her mount. The royal swan is famed for its ability to separate milk from water, denoting the ability to separate the truth of the atma.

The vehicle of Vishnu, Krishna and Vaishnavi is 'Garuda',



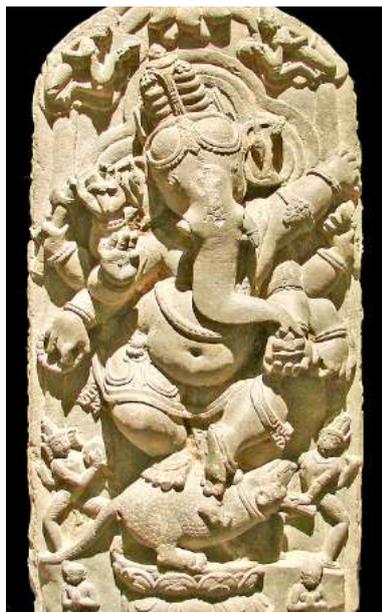
The god Brahma on the hamsa bird.

known as the 'eagle king' – a large mythical entity often depicted as having a shiny, golden body, red wings, white face, a sharp, eagle's beak and a man's body. He is a powerful, large creature, full of energy – an iconic symbol of the king's duty and power, an insignia of royalty or dharma.

Lakshmi, goddess of fortune, dispenses both material and spiritual riches from her mount, 'Uluka' the owl. The owl is a creature that treats night as day, and day as night. In the Bhagavad Gita, the owl is likened to an enlightened 'Sthitaprajna' - one who is firm in wisdom and unwavering in any situation.

MOUSE

Ganesh's carrier, a mouse called 'Mushika', may appear small and timid but can crawl into the smallest crevice; alternatively, it is 'Akhuketana' the rat, who can



An image of Ganesh standing on a mouse

survive just about anywhere and can assist Ganesh to overcome the greatest obstacles.

LION

Shiva's consort, Parvati, Durga or Kali, rides on a lion, which represents the qualities of a fierce determination, courage and unswerving will to penetrate

the veil of Maya or ignorance of the true Self.

RAM

Agni is shown as riding the ram which signifies power, strength and vitality. A climber of mountains, the ram has symbolically the ability to climb to the higher ground. The vibrancy of Agni is also reflected in the vehicle he chose for himself.

ELEPHANT

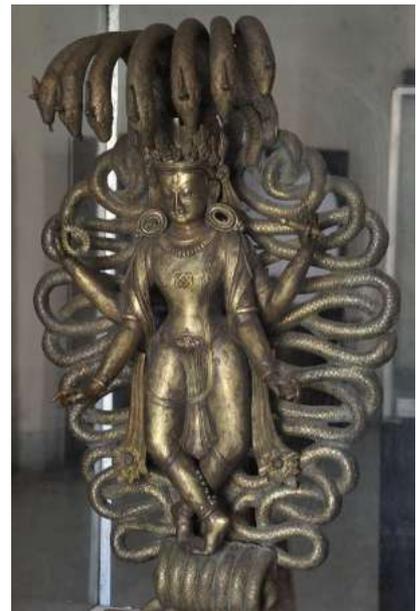
'Airavata', a huge, ten tusked white elephant, is Indra's vehicle. His tusks resemble a sacred mountain. He is also sometimes portrayed with five trunks. One of his names means "the one who knits or binds the clouds", since myth has it that these elephants are capable of producing clouds.

BULL

Shiva rides the 'Nandi' bull. The Sanskrit word nandi has the meaning of happy, joy, and satisfaction. Lord Shiva is also known as 'Vrishabanath', meaning Lord of Bulls. The bull is considered to represent knowledge, scholarship, devotion, surrender, renunciation, obedience, strength, and virility.

SNAKE

Hindu mythology says that Lord Shiva wears an Indian cobra called 'Vasuki' around his neck. Vasuki is not just any cobra, but the king of the divine serpents called 'naga'. Another important 'naga' is 'Shesha', the snake that carries the universe on its body



A Nepalese bronze statue of Vishnu and the serpent Shesha

and forms Vishnu's bed. The primal serpent represents the desire for consciousness in humankind. Snakes, nagas, have high status in Hindu mythology. The snake primarily represents rebirth, death and immortality, due to its casting off its skin and being symbolically "reborn". Snakes, especially cobras, are considered calm and very pure by nature and never cause any harm to people unless provoked.

These mythological creatures teach us to love and have reverence for all creatures. Each and every being is important and has its own language (symbolic or otherwise) and is connected to and an expression of the many aspects of the one divine source.

Barley Massey

