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NewAcropolis

Philosophy and Education for the Future

**The Philosophy of
Benevolence**

The Tarot and its Use

**Art and Philosophical
Ideals**

The Power of Sound

**PHILOSOPHY
CULTURE
SOCIETY
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AND MORE



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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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Editorial

An Ethic of Service

The passing away of Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, a few weeks ago produced a flurry of obituaries, articles and videos about his long and varied life. One characteristic that was mentioned again and again was his 'ethic of service'. In a similar vein, Queen Elizabeth II gave a speech on her twenty-first birthday in 1947 (when still a princess) in which she declared that she would devote her whole life, whether long or short, to the service of the people of the Commonwealth.

We don't seem to talk much about the concept of service any more. Having taught for 30 years in mainstream education, I cannot remember that the value of 'service' has ever been mentioned or considered to be something that teachers should instil in their students. So, is service still a value for us today? Or will it die out with the last representatives of that generation? Has the idea of service become reduced to the concept of 'customer service', or does it still stir something in our hearts?

The responses to Prince Philip's legacy seem to indicate that we still honour a life of service. But there is also no doubt that modern values are more about pursuing one's own success and happiness. Slogans like "Have fun!", "Treat yourself!" and "Because you're worth it!" have become much more the guiding principles of our actions than helping others, especially when we might not even receive any reward or thanks.

And yet, the ideal of service has been one of the lasting values throughout history and I think it will come back to life again as a guiding principle, because without it, it would be almost impossible to form strong communities that will be able to overcome the challenges we currently face. Albert Einstein also expressed the view that the fate of humanity depended on individuals choosing public service over private gain in an essay from 1954.

The guiding principle of 'having fun' will not suffice for the creation of a better way of life that

is just, sustainable, harmonious and life-increasing rather than life-destroying. Although, having said that, there need not be a juxtaposition. In the words of Rabindranath Tagore: "I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy."

All values depend on our ability to appreciate and esteem them. If I haven't developed a sense of beauty, beauty will not be of great importance to me. If I haven't developed empathy, the suffering of others will not move me to actions that will alleviate their condition. If I believe that the right thing to do is to put my own interests above anyone else's, I will not be able to see a reason to consider others. In times of relentless advertising when businesses influence a lot of our 'values' (as in the slogans quoted above), because it is a way of creating monetary 'value' for them, it is difficult to see the timeless values clearly.

However, perhaps the reason why timeless values are so enduring is that they reflect the inherent potential in every human being to appreciate them. I imagine that an authentic 'ethic of service' is born out of an inner awareness of our essential unity with others. And out of a world view that recognises the interconnectedness and interdependence of all life. There is a nice allegory about heaven and hell: in both, humans are seated at a long table full of delicious food, forced to eat with spoons that have impossibly long handles. In hell, people cannot cooperate and starve. In heaven, they feed each other and thrive...

Service is a form of love, and in all of us lies an enormous potential to love. Service is also maybe the most noble path to develop our potential. Spiritual wisdom has always maintained that self-realization is not possible without selflessness: "Our own progress takes place best when we least think of ourselves" (Sri Ram). And Mahatma Gandhi said: "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." I cannot imagine a life better lived than a life of service.

Sabine Leitner

The Philosophy of Benevolence

I am referring with this title to the life and work of a Chinese philosopher called Mengzi, or Mencius, as the latinized version of his name is written. Born in Zou province around 371 BC, he lived in a period known as 'The Warring States', which lasted from 481 to 221 BC. It was probably as a result of seeing much cruelty and much suffering among the people of the time that Mencius promoted his philosophy of benevolence.

Mencius was a devoted follower of Confucius, and while the concept of benevolence (*ren* or *jen*) is a key part of Confucius's teachings, it takes on particular importance in the philosophy of Mencius. Two of his sayings give us an idea of this: 'The benevolent man has no match.' And, 'All that is expected of a gentleman is benevolence.' Seeing the injustices of the time, he comes to the same conclusion as his master: if the rulers were model examples of what a human being should be, 'the whole world would follow', as Confucius poetically puts it in the *Analects*.

There are four factors in the make up of the model human being in Confucianism: Benevolence (*ren*), Rightness (*yi*), Propriety (*li*) and Moral Wisdom (*zhi*). However, in the *Mencius*, there is a particular emphasis on the first two: 'All that matters is that there should be benevolence and rightness.'

Benevolence is also translated as 'human-heartedness' and Mencius often refers to the 'true heart', which could be said to be a combination of benevolence and rightness. Having a true heart, one

naturally feels compassion for others. He gives as an example of how this is innate in human beings, saying that anyone who found a child who had fallen into a well would naturally try to rescue him. Secondly, having a true heart, one does not stray from oneself, by which he means one's inherent sense of right and wrong. These qualities are instilled in us since birth by 'Heaven' (*Tian*), which is roughly equivalent to the Western concept of God.

Importantly, Mencius, like Confucius, believed that the human being is essentially good. He counteracts the argument of another philosopher, Kao-tzu or Gaozi, who declared: 'Men's nature is like a current of water. If you open a channel for the current to the east, it will flow east. If you open a channel to the west, it will flow west. Men's nature makes no distinction between the good and the not good, just as water makes no distinction between east and west.' Master Meng (Mencius) replied, 'Water can be trusted not to make a distinction between east and west; but is this so in relation to up and down? Men's natural tendency towards goodness is like the water's tendency to find the lower level. Now if, for example, you strike the water and make it leap up, it is possible to force it over your head... But this surely is not the nature of water, and it is only if force is applied that it acts in this way. That men can be made to do evil is due to their nature also being like this.'¹

1. Chinese Philosophy in Classical Times, edited and translated by E.R. Hughes

However, Mencius concedes that most people, if deprived of basic necessities, will forget about rightness and benevolence and try to save themselves. The ‘gentleman’, however – the *Junzi* or person of noble and cultivated character – will continue to adhere to the good, even in the most difficult circumstances. In one of the many conversations that make up the *Mencius* – the book containing a record of conversations with the philosopher – the sage puts it like this: ‘Those who make an effort only when there is a King Wen [one of China’s most venerated kings, 1100–1050 BC] are ordinary men. Outstanding men make the effort even without a King Wen.’

Mencius was from a noble family and could easily (as was also the case with Plato) have entered politics as a career. However, apart from a brief period serving as an official in the state of Ch’i, he spent most of his time travelling, offering wise advice to various rulers on government by *ren* (human-heartedness). Although he was championing an unpopular cause, he was fearless in speaking his mind to men of power and was regarded with great respect at many Chinese courts. In one of the conversations recorded in the *Mencius*, for example, he criticizes a ruler for taking pity on an ox being led to sacrifice and yet fails to take pity on people suffering injustice in his kingdom.

Here are some example of the advice he gave to princes on humane government:

‘Practise benevolent government towards the people, reduce punishment and taxation...’.

Summing up his teachings on this matter, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* states: ‘He worked out a definite program to attain economic sufficiency for the common people. He also advocated light taxes, free trade, conservation of natural resources, welfare measures for the old and disadvantaged, and more nearly equal sharing of wealth.’²

One ruler asked him:

‘Through what can the Empire be united?’

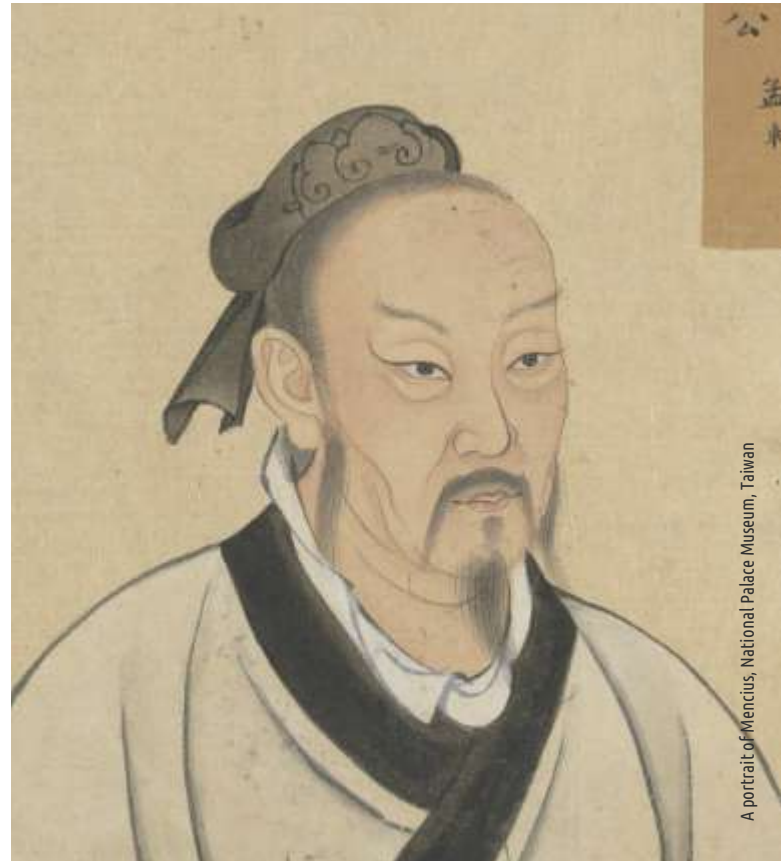
Mencius: ‘Through unity.’

‘Who can unite it?’

Mencius: ‘One who is not fond of killing can unite it.’

And, in another conversation:

‘How virtuous must a man be before he can become a true king?’



A portrait of Mencius, National Palace Museum, Taiwan

Mencius: ‘He becomes a true king by bringing peace to the people... If you shared your enjoyment [parks, music, etc.] with the people, you would be a true king.’

And finally:

‘When good and wise men are in high office and able men are employed, a ruler [should] take advantage of times of peace to explain the laws to the people... [But] a ruler who takes advantage of times of peace to indulge in pleasure and indolence is courting disaster.’³

2. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mencius-Chinese-philosopher>

3. These quotations are taken from the Penguin Classics edition of *Mencius*, translated by D.C. Lau.



Photo by wallpaperaces.com

All this comes down to Mencius's view that the function of the ruler is to serve the people, and not the other way round. 'The people are the most important element in a nation; the spirits of the land and grain come next; the sovereign counts for the least.'

If, on the other hand, people think in terms of profit, then everything is doomed from the outset, because in the end, everyone from the ruler downwards will put themselves first and no one will think of the good of the whole.

Unfortunately, however, the advice of Mencius fell on deaf ears, and other more cynical or simplistic philosophies found greater favour with the ruling princes. As a result, following the example of his master, Confucius, he became disappointed with 'preaching in the desert' and devoted his last years to the instruction of his pupils.

Remarkably, his efforts finally gave fruit – more than 1,000 years later – when his work was given 'canonical' status by the Neo-Confucianists of the Song dynasty (AD 960-1279) and, 'for the last 1,000 years, Mencius has been revered among the

Chinese people as the cofounder of Confucianism, second only to Confucius himself.'⁴

Mencius was criticised by some thinkers of his time as an idealist, and in politics, as in philosophy, there always seems to be an oscillation between those who have little faith in human nature and those who have too much – like Hobbes and Rousseau in Western philosophy. Mencius took a middle position: firmly believing in the essential goodness of the human being, he nevertheless accepted that most people do not always practise that goodness, but are led astray by their lower nature and also, in many cases, by the competitive nature of society itself. But, like Confucius, he believed there was a solution to this dichotomy: to cultivate benevolence and rightness in oneself, and to persuade others to do the same. Sooner or later, this benevolent and wise attitude will manifest among the rulers of one society or another and will lead to a cultural, social and spiritual renaissance, as happened several times in China and has occurred repeatedly in the history of all nations, in those ages of splendour which are like bright and sunny days after a storm.

Julian Scott

4. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mencius-Chinese-philosopher>

Doughnut Economics:

A new paradigm that claims to be able to stop climate breakdown and ecological collapse, while reducing glaring social inequalities

The Covid-19 pandemic is a huge, unprecedented simultaneous demand and supply-side shock. It has left a legacy of millions of deaths and vast human suffering, as well as sharp social inequalities for minorities, and between the



Photo by Thomas de LUZE on Unsplash

global North vs. the global South. In rich OECD countries, billionaires' wealth rose by over 2 trillion dollars in 2020; while millions lost their jobs or homes. In the global South, where basic public health care systems have often collapsed, the World Bank estimates that Covid-19 may add 150 million extreme poor in 2021.

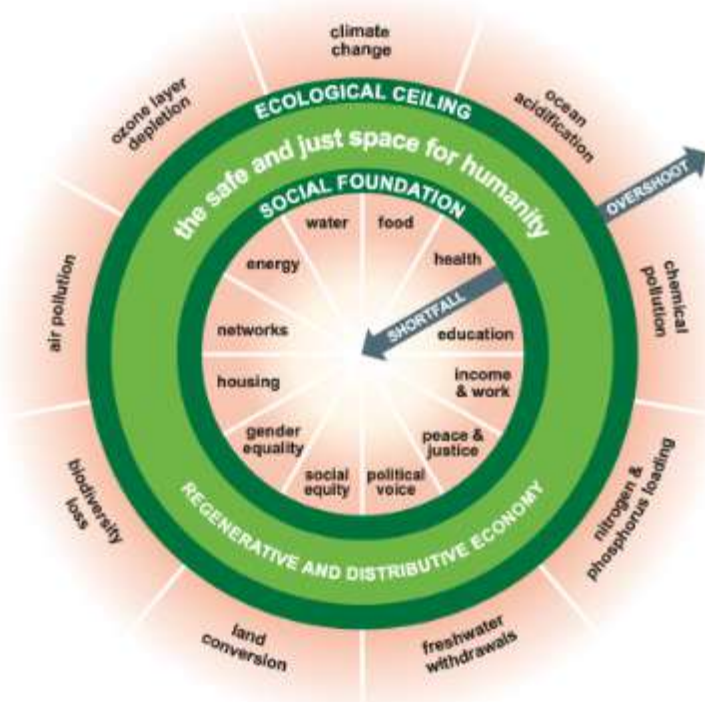
Paradoxically, rich countries can now see light at the end of the tunnel, as access to vaccines and vaccinations gathers pace and stock-markets flirt with record highs. Against this bizarre backdrop, policy discussions here are centred on sustaining the current economic recovery. A first question is how to gradually reduce record government deficits and unprecedented central bank monetary creation. These are the necessary first steps to stabilise economies and save jobs. The second step is to get the unemployed back into gainful employment. But, a badly needed, neglected third step would be to waive patent rights on Covid vaccines and forgive foreign debt repayments of the poor global south, to provide them with breathing-space.

That said, the key question today is where do we go from here? Three options are possible:

- Boosting economic growth – i.e., targeting unending rapid growth à la Walter W. Rostow¹ or “business as usual”;
- To build-back better – by seizing this rare opportunity to build a “greener rapidly growing economy” à la Rostow;
- Or, to adopt the “Doughnut Economy”: based on innovative local measures to reduce exposure to future supply-side shocks, by creating a “regenerative, redistributive society – that provides “basic social standards for all”.

What is Doughnut Economics?

This approach developed by British economist Kate Raworth² argues that current economic systems sacrifice both people and the environment, at a time when global warming and rising sea levels are



The Doughnut of social and planetary boundaries

unprecedented in nature. The aim of Doughnut economics is to “act as a compass for human progress,” by turning the last century’s exploitative economy into the 21st century’s regenerative one.

The compass is a doughnut, with a hole in the middle (see diagram below). Its goal is to ensure that everyone has access to essentials, such as food and water, social equity and a political voice, while ensuring that the Earth’s critical life support systems remain intact – i.e. a stable climate and fertile soils. The *outer ring is the Earth’s environmental ceiling* – a place where excessive collective use of resources has already had a huge adverse impact on climate change. The *inner ring represents internationally agreed minimum social standards for human decency*. The space in between, is “*humanity’s sweet spot*,” i.e. the doughnut (the safe and just space for humanity).

Amsterdam was the first city to formally implement doughnut economics in April 2020. Brussels followed in September and Nanaimo (Canada) in December 2020. Pope Francis has also commended this “fresh thinking” approach. Interest is growing rapidly in numerous countries and cities³; and Kate Raworth believes that it is simply a matter of time before the concept will be adopted at a national level.

The Doughnut Economics Action Lab (DEAL) started working with Amsterdam policymakers in 2019 to move from a global approach to a doughnut city model, which was formally adopted on April 8, 2020. Despite early doubts, the deputy mayor Marieke van Doorninck noted that, “it turned out that people were longing for ideas to rebuild our economy after the crisis. Our circular strategy is a tool to ensure we don’t go back to ‘business as usual’ but look forward to a way to shape our economy differently.”

Reshaping Amsterdam’s doughnut strategy was successful in large part because multiple initiatives can be embraced in an overarching strategy. The city’s strategy is largely focused on areas where local government “can make a difference”. These include food and organic waste systems, consumer goods and the environment. Amsterdam’s target is a 50% reduction in food waste by 2030, using measures to make it easier for residents to consume less (establishing easily accessible and well-

1. W.W. Rostow, “The Stages of Economic Growth: a non-communist manifesto”, Cambridge University Press, 1960.

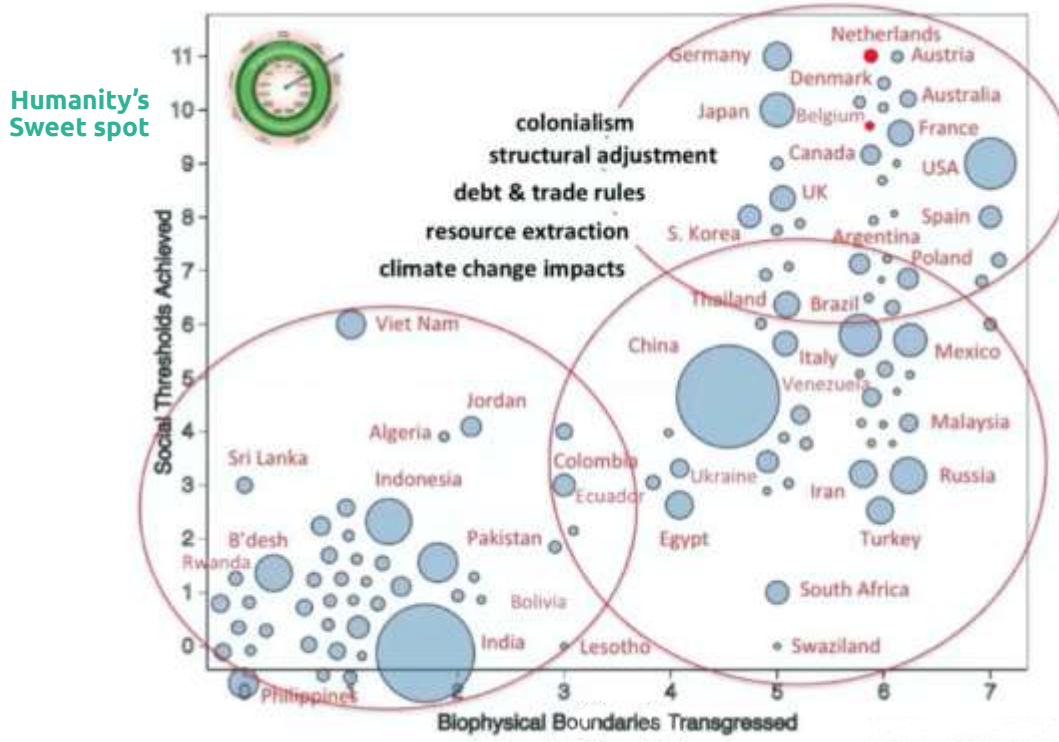
2. Raworth Kate, “Doughnut Economics : Seven ways to think like a 21st century economist », Cornerstone, U.K., pp. 384, 2018.

3. See, Doughnut Economics Action Lab, “Discover the Community” -- <https://doughnuteconomics.org/>

functioning second-hand shops and repair services (3,500 old and broken laptops were repaired and distributed to those in need in 2020), and regulations to encourage construction companies to build with sustainable materials.

The key to Amsterdam's success, however, has been the integration and encouragement of small, innovative community actions, as well as active

sustainable economy – owing to its “deeply participatory dynamics”. Dunedin, New Zealand and Nanaimo (Canada) followed in September and December 2020. Currently, DEAL is in contact with numerous towns and cities, such as Portland, Oregon and has established working partnerships with Brazil, Costa Rica, India, Bangladesh, Zambia, Barbados and many others. And



support for local businesses that boost local employment⁴. These include the “true-price initiative” on grocery items to include the costs of carbon footprints, land deprivation and fair pay for workers, which are largely unknown to the public⁵. Its massive infrastructure projects and affordable housing initiatives include stringent social and environmental standards⁶, with new government regulations and contracts designed to achieve these ends. Some 400 local residents and organisations have also set up the “Amsterdam Doughnut Coalition” to run their own programmes at a grassroots level. These are some of the innovative first steps that target the goal of a fully circular economy by 2050.

Brussels embraced the doughnut model just 5 months after Amsterdam, citing the latter as a portrait of a city's transition to a thriving and

Costa Rica is on a path to its target of being a totally regenerative country by a total rethink of its agricultural and tourism sectors by 2050⁷. In conclusion, the Doughnut model of “Think Global - Act Local” can be a genuine game changer in a rapidly changing world looking for inspiration and direction.

James Chan-Lee

4. Amsterdam's initiatives are outlined in the Webinar « Doughnut Economy », with Kate Raworth, Barbata Trachte (Brussels), Marieke Van Doorninck (Amsterdam), moderator Dirk Holeman, Oikos, Green Green European Foundation. Posted Feb. 16, 2021 by DEAL Team on YouTube.

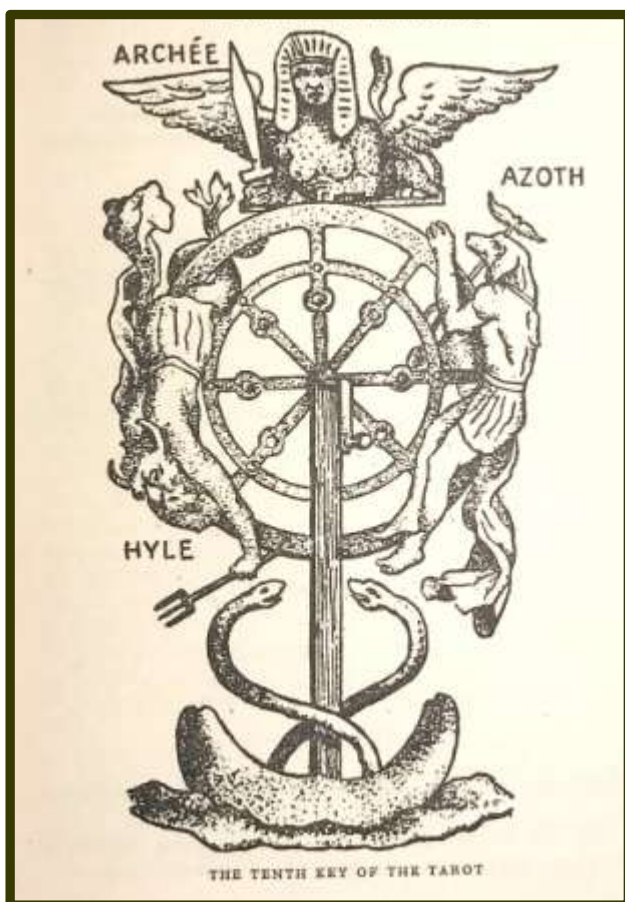
5. For example, for courgettes their carbon footprint is 6¢ a kg; land deprivation 5¢ and fair pay 4¢ a kg.

6. Its flagship construction project Strandeiland (Beach Island) is built on reclaimed land from the sea, with sand carried by low-emission boats. The foundations were laid while protecting local wildlife, and future residents from rising sea-levels. Future neighbourhoods are designed to produce zero emissions, and to prioritize social housing with access to nature. See, Ciara Nugent, « Amsterdam is Embracing a Radical New Economic Theory to Help Save the Environment. Could it Also Replace Capitalism ? » *Time Magazine*, 22 January 2021.

7. See, interview with Secretary of State Eduard Muller « Regenerate Costa Rica and the Doughnut » 23/9/20 ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KvJNcLa523w>.

The Tarot

and its Use



The 'Tenth Arcana' of the Tarot. From Eliphas Levi's book *The Key to the Great Mysteries*.

It is not easy to define what the Tarot really is. The recent research undertaken by those scholars who have tried to unravel its historical origins is still inconclusive. I also believe that, even if one day we would find the ultimate 'scientific proof' for when those images were first committed to paper, it would still be a partial answer. It is evident that the rich and profound teachings which the Tarot images seek to reveal cannot really be dated, as they belong more to the inner than the outer 'Man'. If it were otherwise we would not be able to justify Eliphas Levi's assertion : "A prisoner devoid of books, had he only a Tarot of which he knew how to make use, could, in a few years, acquire a universal science, and converse with an unequalled doctrine and inexhaustible eloquence."¹

In a general sense, we can say that the Tarot is like a depository of ageless wisdom. It is a kind of 'book of wisdom'. However it is a special kind of book, not quite like any other, because the language in which it is written is a symbolic language. Symbolism is a magical language. Magical in the sense that it has the power to transform those who

(1) *Transcendental Magic: Its Doctrine and Ritual* by Eliphas Levi

have learned 'how to use' it. The Tarot therefore, not only contains 'wisdom teachings' but it also has this transformative power.

The Tarot has not only a theoretical but also a practical dimension. It can aid the practice and application of those teachings which have as their objective the spiritual transformation of the human being and the unfoldment of our latent faculties. By reaching into the archetypal essence which resides in each human being, the Tarot tries to awaken in us this process of inner transformation. For those who have learned to master the symbolic language, the world of archetypes becomes a living reality and the 'book of nature' opens up before them.

Scholars tell us that the symbolic and emblematic images which make up the Tarot have come down to us as a pack of playing cards. But it is worth remembering that games have always had a very important function in the inner life of the human being. It is said that to play is a social as well as a recreational human "need". But this "need" does not have to be confined within the dimension of mundane life only. As Hindu metaphysics teaches us, the universe itself is a great play (*Lila* in Sanskrit) which implies the presence of a cosmogenetic "need". In playing games, two major factors seem to coexist: the factor of skill and the factor of fate or chance. The first can be related to what is 'known' and to the 'mastery of oneself' and the second to what is 'unknown' and beyond our control (what is, so to speak, in the hands of the gods). As we delve deeper and deeper into the meaning of certain games, we find that they contain both an initiatory quality - related to self-transformation and the unfoldment of spiritual qualities - and a divinatory dimension, in which the casting of lots is an integral part of man's attempt to 'disclose' the will of the gods. The Tarot, like many other 'special games', also possesses both an 'initiatory' and a divinatory quality.

The Tarot consists of 78 cards divided into two sets: one made of 22 *trumps* or illustrated cards and the other made of 16 court cards and 40 pip cards

numbered 1 to 10, in 4 suits. The two sets have been called the *Major* and *Minor Arcana*, thus emphasising their sacred and occult character. Paracelsus reminds us that *arcana* "... have the power of transmuting, altering and restoring us, and are to be compared to the secrets of God..."²

Especially in the *Major Arcana*, we can detect the presence of a type of teaching which relates both to



The Magician, from the Rider-Waite tarot deck

initiation and the Mystery Tradition as well as to *divination* (the power to foresee by being divinely inspired). Hidden behind its long history, in which a multitude of symbols have been woven into countless Tarot decks, we can still detect the presence of teachings of a special kind. As we delve into the symbolism of the 22 *Major Arcana*, we discover traces of Hermeticism, Gnosticism, Kabbalah, Astrology and Numerology. Its symbolism also abounds with references to the Mysteries of Isis, the Dionysian Mysteries,

2. Paracelsus, *Archidoxies* Book V.

Pythagorean doctrines, Neoplatonic teachings, Rosicrucian and Alchemical symbolism as well as Masonic initiatory rituals.

The esoteric knowledge that has been encapsulated into these images is truly vast. Even though today, the majority of people use the Tarot cards as a divinatory tool, we shouldn't underestimate their role as a 'philosophical guide' of some kind. In summary, the Tarot should be seen both as an instrument to preserve and transmit esoteric teachings³, and as a practical device to evoke specific mystical and intellectual responses from the student who has been taught how 'to look' at those images.

The first documented Tarot packs were recorded in Italy between 1440 and 1450. Around this time the allegorical trump illustrations were added to the common four-suit pack of playing cards. During its 600 years of existence the main structure of the Tarot has remained virtually unchanged, even though various symbolic and esoteric elements have been exchanged or omitted, resulting in much confusion.

There is no evidence as to when the complete set of Tarot cards was first used as a divination tool. We know that in Europe the use of the Tarot for divination goes back to at least 1540 (in *Le Sorti* by Francesco Marcolini), but 'playing cards' had already made their appearance in the late 1300s and their use as oracles must go back to that time.

Divination, through various methods, has always had its special place in human life. And we can see how, especially in times of collective crisis, man's search for answers to an uncertain future has pushed him in the direction of divination. But one has to wonder if the divination (literally a divine action) practised by priests and diviners of antiquity has anything to do with the kind of fortune telling found on YouTube nowadays. If the Tarot images are seen as a hierophany (i.e. a manifestation of the sacred) which can potentially put us into contact with a certain flow of 'higher forces', then they



Image taken from the divination manual *Le sorti* by Francesco Marcolino, 1540. (Typ 525.40.558, Houghton Library, Harvard University).

should be handled with greater responsibility and should command respect by those who use them. In my opinion, man's trivial businesses and curiosities should never enter into this type of oracular relationships. Divination is aimed at fulfilling a relationship which exists between human and divine realities. And as such, it makes more sense to use it to give direction, guidance and support to man's inner life and assist him along his spiritual journey. Only then can the higher purpose of divining with the Tarot really be fulfilled.

Agostino Dominici

3. Teachings pertaining to the inner and invisible side of Nature

Art and Philosophical Ideals

Art has the ability to elevate us. In equal measure it can provoke, disturb, and challenge us. Art can do many things, but perhaps at its best it can connect us not only to each other, but also to something higher, a more perfect ideal beyond the realm of the material. There are many lenses with which we can view and attempt to understand a work of art. We can look for a story through the prism of history and myths. We can examine technique, style and

aesthetic; and we can certainly ask, does this piece of art invite us to think differently?

I would argue that a masterpiece is more often than not an amalgamation of all of those things: story, technique, style, aesthetic, and a symbol that travels from the artist to the viewer, traversing time and culture. 'The Death of Socrates' by the French painter Jacques-Louis David is certainly one such masterpiece.



The painting takes us back to 399 BC, to the execution of Socrates. Accused of corrupting the youth of Athens and failing to honour the city's gods, Socrates was sentenced to death by poisonous hemlock. Prior to that, Socrates spent much of his time dissuading fellow Athenians from pursuing material ambitions and urging them to focus their attention on moral perfection. His life, and subsequently his death, became an exemplar for challenging what we think we know and striving to know ourselves and our soul more truthfully. It was during his trial that he famously professed, "the unexamined life is not worth living".



David has taken some liberties with history, for at the time of the execution, Socrates would have been 70 years old and unlikely to have been quite as fit and muscular as he appears in this representation. The artist has also added in a few characters that were not present at the execution. Plato, one of his most loyal students, for example, is seated head down at the far left of the painting and Socrates'

wife, who weeps in the background by which she is engulfed.

'The Death of Socrates' is a defining piece in the neoclassical movement, which emerged in the late 1700s. Unlike the theatrical Rococo style that was prevalent at the time, David opted for a more subdued style, relying heavily on straight lines, smooth surfaces and a less varied palette of vivid colours. The use of light in the foreground against a dark background and the careful balance of the executioner in red with Socrates in white, enhance the stark crispness and simplicity of the piece.

David's technique, aesthetic and style alone are not what make 'The Death of Socrates' a work of genius, for it would be shallow not to attempt to uncover the vital meaning and symbolism that are inherent within this work of art. The piece has become timeless in its ability to communicate a commitment to an ideal. In David's painting, Socrates is epitomized by his ability to be guided by ideals rather than passions. He is painted as a man of angular geometry, situated upright in comparison to his companions who are curved and arched, symbolising weaknesses and passions of the lower self. Both his physique and the gesture of his hand elevate him above the scene and setting that he inhabits, thus pulled upwards by his higher principles.

The anguish on the face of his fellow companions is contrasted with the calm and self-composed look on Socrates' face, conveying the strength of his mind and conviction. Indeed, the final moments of Socrates' life, as depicted by David, connect us with the universal, philosophical tenet that living in accordance with a higher ideal can help us face life and death more bravely.

Rasha Kawar

The Power of Sound



Paying attention to what you hear is a way to relax. The sounds of nature provide a great deal of meditational calmness, such as listening to the rolling of ocean waves or bird song in the garden.

Our ancestors strived to achieve entering altered states of mind by making sounds. They did this by chanting and beating drums or by playing delicate melodies of the flute and harp. But one instrument that stands out as having the most immediate impact on relaxation and at a deep level is the gong.

With the surge of Well-being becoming more common nowadays, the gongs feature alongside yoga and meditational

practices. When played exclusively, the term is called a 'Gong Bath', coined by the famous practitioner Don Conreau in the late 1960s. It has little to do with taking your clothes off and getting into the water but essentially means being bathed in sounds.

A gong is a circular metallic instrument, and generally sizes range between twenty to sixty inches across. They can be as small as six inches or as large as 16 feet in diameter. You will find small gongs performed in Indonesian Gamelan orchestras. A gong at 16.8 feet in diameter was the largest ever made and was produced in China within the Shanxi Province. It weighed in at over half a tonne.

Historically there is only anecdotal evidence of the gong's origins. Historians date it to 6th century China while other estimates go as far back as 334 BC with Alexander the Great's invasion of the Persian Empire, which began in what is now modern-day Turkey. The conquerors smelted bronzes from the tributes of war and made them into gongs and other ornaments.

All gongs are composed of either bronze or brass; a mixture of copper and tin makes bronze, while an alloy of copper and zinc produces brass. The introduction of other metals such as nickel affects the quality of the sonics produced.

Depending on how a gong is shaped, either from a single sheet of metal or cast, it will produce two distinct acoustic effects. The first is a crashing wave-like sound that usually builds up quickly with many overtones, sometimes sounding shrill or like angels singing. The second is the vibrational tones with sounds that range from very low and deep up to the highest pitches but tend to be more tuned. They are also more drone-like and sustained and create an expansive sense of space. All these instruments produce vibrato, resonances and binaural beats in particular circumstances. Gongs vibrate off an intense sonorous loudness but can reveal the

faintest echoey whispers if played with utmost delicacy.

You might ask yourself why you would want to go to a Gong Bath or Sound Journey as some practitioners prefer to call it.

It is not just a performance; it is a meditational practice with many self-healing benefits. By

fully conscious Alpha state of mind into a Theta state.

Theta brainwaves occur most often just before sleep and waking but are also present in deep meditation. In this state, the external world diminishes, the senses withdraw to the inner self. This state is where archetypal imagery takes on a new focus. In



participating, you learn how to wind down or tune into your physiology and use it to guide inner work. The facilitator will put you into the right state of mind by getting you to limber your body and make you remain in the present. Additional breath work and visualisations will fully prepare you for the gongs.

The gongs have virtue because they induce the most immediate and deepest state of relaxation that you can ever experience. Science has proven that the gongs can put anyone from a

this personal space, you can access and work on your shadow self, control unconscious habits and past traumas as well as any other dis-ease one needs to face and clear.

As a performer myself, I would recommend a Gong Bath to everyone, at least once, to experience and feel the power of vibrations as a way to healing and self-discovery.

Paul Cummings

The Art of Healing and Evidence Based Medicine

Healing practices have been recorded for millennia across cultures and geographies. Ever since sickness has existed, human beings have developed many different methods and systems to try and facilitate healing, many of them differing in their understanding, approaches and aims.

Medicine has always been considered partly science and partly art. Part of medicine deals with the scientific knowledge of the body and disease, and the technical methods and equipment used to treat disease. The 'artistic' aspect of medicine is perhaps the ability to see the patient as a whole and to be able to connect with him or her.

Over the last century, great material progress has been made by humanity – a greater understanding of

the laws and principles of nature, as well as the development of a number of technologies which aim to make our lives easier and more comfortable.

However, comfort and pleasure can create cravings for greater comforts and pleasures, diminish stoic values and lessen the use of inherent human capabilities, leading to a loss of human potential and ultimately to a loss of confidence in human nature. This downward spiral gets reflected externally as a lack of faith and crisis of mental and spiritual health, breakdown in trust in societal roles, a sense of confusion and ultimately can lead to anarchy in society.

Along this journey of technological advances, there have also been changes in the way doctors are taught and a shift from a moral to a legal and regulatory basis for medical education and training. This has resulted in the view of the practice of medicine more as a profession than a vocation and the consequent prioritization of efficiency over service. Also, the industrialization and strategic competition among providers of healthcare and allied fields such as pharmaceuticals have led to larger and larger organizations, in which the stakes for survival are constantly growing and high-pressured business decisions are made far away from the bedsides of suffering patients. Such factors have spread internationally and led to a breakdown of trust in doctor-patient relationships across the world. This has consequently led to greater regulation of medical practitioners and an attempt to impose transparency



and standardization on clinical practice through the practice of Evidence Based Medicine (EBM), a rational though limited solution.

EBM is meant to be the conscientious, explicit and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients. However, although this definition invokes rigour and attention to detail, it makes no reference to compassion or even healing, which is ultimately the aim of all care.

EBM is based on an order of levels of evidence, with level I considered the highest and level VII considered the lowest levels of evidence. In a nutshell, the data and conclusions from well-designed randomised controlled trials and their systematic reviews and meta-analyses are meant to constitute higher levels of evidence, while information from smaller qualitative studies and the opinions of recognized experts are meant to constitute lowest levels of evidence. In practice, approval and funding decisions of a number of policy-making and advisory bodies are based on the quality of such evidence.

The process of obtaining and recording such evidence is meant to be rigorous in technique and involves significant resources and expense, which limits what can be studied in such a way. However, the interpretation and reporting of such evidence can be more subjective and even self-interested. Philosophically, objectivity is never absolute, but it needs a great sense of openness, humility and wisdom to accept this. EBM can lead to an emphasis on 'cold statistics', away from ambiguity of application in the real world – the bedside of sufferers.

Thus, though EBM can be a tool to try and ascertain the value of certain medical treatments, there are a number of questions around its validity and scope of use as an overarching and almost exclusive medical paradigm, which is the case today. For example, is the whole truth to be found in numbers? Can we really know a tree just by counting its leaves? Might there not be multiple levels of causation and correspondingly multiple levels of understanding?

As Albert Einstein said, "Not everything that can be counted counts and not everything that counts can be counted". Though one can only go by one's current perceptions, would it not be wise to acknowledge that our present understanding is not necessarily a perfect one and that a different way of looking at things may be possible?

For example, does the lack of validation by randomised controlled trials make the use of some



treatments from the so-called 'alternative' forms of medicine such as homeopathy, less valid? For that matter, even some of the 'common sense' and intuitive 'grandma's remedies' for minor ailments may not be supported by evidence, but are commonly used and surely their health benefits in individual cases cannot be doubted.

Although established with good intentions, the EBM culture has put an enormous strain on doctors and seems to prioritise the 'objective' science of medicine over the intuitive and more relational art of healing. The time has perhaps come for medicine to recognize that scientific objectivity is not the only basis for its practice, and to find ways in which its compassionate spirit, which is surely at the very origin of medicine, can be placed on at least an equal footing with the prevailing EBM culture.

S. Goodall

Ferocious Deities of Japan



Among the benevolent and peace- and goodness-emanating deities of Japanese Buddhism, one might be surprised to encounter the ferocious and mighty Myōō, the Wisdom Kings. Their appearance is mesmerising: faces filled with astonishing power and determination, clearly visible fangs and bulging eyes, impressive postures of true warriors equipped with different weapons to combat evil. The traditional surrounding mandorla of flames enhances their presence.

The impactful depiction of the Myōō reflects the ideas they convey. The Wisdom Kings combine at first sight contradictory powers – they are beneficent and instructive, and at

the same time wrathful and frightening. Exoterically speaking, they are protectors of the Dharma and fearsome enemies of evil, who frighten away evil spirits and force lost souls to return to the path of salvation. From the esoteric point of view, as active manifestations of Buddhas and ultimately of the one supreme Buddha, they represent the inner power of the disciple, developed through many challenges and through perseverance in inner work, as well as the power of still unrealized potential. Their wrath portrays the formidable effort it takes to overcome evil, the root of which is ignorance, greed and ill will. They embody a transformation of unruly passions and weaknesses into the

constructive steps on the path to enlightenment.

The origins of the Myōō can be found in the Hindu Vidyaraja. The Sanskrit word *vidya* or the Japanese myō means “mantra”, “esoteric knowledge”, “light”, or “wisdom”. The Sanskrit raja means “king” and correlates with the Japanese o-. Hence, Myōō are Kings of Wisdom, Illuminating Kings, Kings of Light. They are mostly venerated in Japan’s Tendai and Shingon schools of Buddhism, and are considered to have been brought to Japan from



China by the Japanese Buddhist masters Saichō and Kūkai in the early 9th century.

The most prominent of all the kings is Fudo, the Immovable One, also known as Acala. He is an envoy of the primordial Buddha Dainichi Nyorai. He sits firmly or stands on a rock symbolising his adamant and

invincible strength. His intense gaze pierces the heart and reaches the deepest corners of a disciple’s inner world. Fudo holds a sword in his right hand and a lasso in his left. Usually, the hilt of his sword is in the form of the vajra, symbolising a thunderbolt. It is the sword of wisdom which cuts through ignorance in its many forms, even the most stubborn. His lasso binds all inner obstacles to awakening, even the most uncontrollable passions. Thus, he represents the active force of self-mastery and the immovable strength of virtue which is attained in the process.

Fudo is also featured in many folk tales, in which he always answers the pleas of those who persistently seek his help. His main temple is in Narita. It was established in 940 to commemorate the victory over a revolt by the powerful regional samurai. It is said that a Shingon priest took the image of Fudo, made by the great master Kūkai, to the area of insurrection and performed there a sacred fire ritual for three weeks. On the last day of the ritual, the revolt was subdued. Fudo helped to overcome the forces of chaos and establish peace. His image also grew so heavy that it was impossible to move it back, so a new temple was founded to house the victorious and immovable King of Wisdom.



Statue of Fudo Myōō, Kamakura Period, Japan.

Fudo empowers and inspires righteous strength. To visualise him is to identify with his powers to vanquish illusions. His “glare stills the wind of karma that turns the wheel of samsara”¹. In that moment of stillness, it is possible to connect with the virtue of wisdom to master oneself and clear the path to enlightenment.

Nataliya Petlevych

1. Kūkai: *Major Works translated, with an account of his life and a study of his thought*, by Yoshito S. Hakeda. Columbia University Press. New York. – p.160

