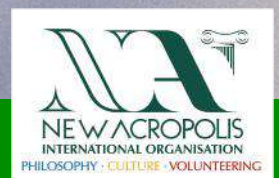


The Acropolis

Philosophy for today



Sept 2021
Issue 7



Autumn Edition Art - History - Anthropology - Philosophy - Reviews and more

Photograph by Junior Ferreira

A photograph of the Parthenon on the Acropolis in Athens, Greece, showing its iconic Doric columns and pediment under a clear blue sky. A large blue circle is overlaid on the lower half of the image, containing text.

What is The Acropolis?

In ancient Athens the Acropolis, literally meaning the High City, was the place which supported the highest ideals of the people. The founder of New Acropolis International, Professor George Livraga, chose this name to capture the key objective of philosophy; that we as individuals build a new high city within, that we discover the heights of our own potential, so that we may externally build a new high city, a new and better world, together. The Acropolis magazine is motivated by this objective and aims to share inspiring content, combining all the major endeavours of philosophy, art, science, education and culture.

About Us

New Acropolis is an international organisation 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 further details please visit: www.acropolis.ie



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Editorial: Power to the Imagination - an Education for Change

Historically, societies have lived through various crises that have led people to revise their vision of the world. Each time, people generated a necessary transition to better experience the change. The 20th and 21st centuries are no exception. The question is how to achieve this turning point?

We are living in an era of multiple changes: the appearance of the digital universe, social networks, climate change, energy transitions, new forms of production, a love for nature....The new generations are forcing us to rethink the way we educate.

We are witnessing several simultaneous crises, but the mother of all crises - as mentioned by many authors - is that of relationships and connections.

There is a crisis when there is a rupture or breakdown. The ecological crisis is that of the breakdown in the relationship with Nature which we abuse. The repeated economic crises remind us of the breakdown between justice and the way we share; of geopolitical crises accelerated by the clash of civilisations.

The break between the spiritual inspirations of human beings and societies that have become too materialistic has caused a crisis of meaning that has not been seen for a long time.

The knowledge crisis, which is of particular interest to us as philosophers, is the result of the break-up of knowledge into compartmentalised specialties and the lack of communication between scientific, humanistic and spiritual visions of the world.

All this leads us to realise that we are living in a time of transition, between a known world and another that is yet to be known and for which each of us is responsible.

A transition is a passage, an intermediate state between two states, two ideas, two situations, from one development to another. The culture of transition and change is not just about renewable energy. It also involves changing internally, adopting a new state of mind. It becomes important to know for what purpose and for what reason we are living.

In the face of uncertainties and contradictions, a positive vision is essential and that begins with education: by learning to bring out what is essential and positive in ourselves and to make it real. Life's adversities lead us to step out of our comfort zone, by bringing out the best in us, and to self-realise.

Education should lead individuals and communities to greater resilience. It should prepare young people for a world less abundant in energy and train them in various skills such as gardening, cooking, woodworking and working the land ... not just to regain a connection with nature but to learn from it.

The key to a successful education in a world of transition is to understand that change does not happen all at once. It begins with the awareness of the need to change oneself, the application of great moral force, followed by actions, at an individual and collective level. These actions must then be integrated into daily life.

Whatever the changes, it is essential to be mentored to better experience the progression or avoid regressing to a previous stage. This education for change requires developing the patience and confidence to maintain the effort in the long term.

If we have difficulty changing individually and collectively, it is because we have become too accustomed to the world as it is, even though we know it is dysfunctional and believe it is impossible to do it differently.

At every epoch of history, crises have occurred, spawning transitions allowing the emergence of new worldviews. Why not in the 21st century?

In 1968 a slogan was launched: “Power to the Imagination”. Fifty years later, it is undoubtedly time to embrace it in order to become, paradoxically, creators of the impossible.

Alain Impellizzeri
Director New Acropolis Ireland

<https://www.acropolis.ie/philosophy-living/>

Ideas that Changed the World

The world we live in today is the product of the history of ideas, in whatever field of research or area – from astronomy to the economy, from our personal struggles to the way we interact in society. Those ideas were someone’s answers to specific questions and questions are the natural consequence of searching, of pursuing knowledge and wisdom.

That brings us right to the etymological meaning of the word “philosophy”: “love of wisdom”, which can be also understood as the search of the Truth.

Following this trail of thought, the history of mankind is nothing but the unfolding of our questions and answers – whether they turn out to be right or wrong. What if we dare to once more ask ourselves questions for answers that we, as a society, have long taken for granted?

In consideration of this, the Acropolis team invites you on a journey through some of the ideas that changed the world and, perhaps, a reflection on different perspectives which can aid in our search for wisdom.

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Gutenberg Bible of the New York Public Library.

The Gutenberg Printing Press

Take a journey through the history of the printing press, the story of how some great historical figures brought the written word to the masses and changed the world forever.

The world before the printing press arrived was very different to the one we know today. There were very limited printing capabilities in Europe and China, such as woodblock printing. These early methods required skilled craftspeople, were very slow and costly, and consequently did not flourish. There were few books, no publishers, no newspapers, no bookshops, and no Amazon (except for the river). Most existing books and pamphlets were manuscripts, painstakingly hand copied, which could take months or even years to complete.

Books were expensive and rare. In the 14th century, a manuscript book cost the same as the price of a house. The largest library in Europe at the time was in Paris, and contained only 300 manuscripts. The vast majority of the public were illiterate. As a result, only a wealthy, elite minority, such as church clergy, could read and write, and usually only in Latin. There were no newspapers. Information and ideas were communicated largely by

spoken word, within small local groups. As a result, news often did not travel far outside the locality.

Under these conditions, suppression of dissenting voices by those in positions of power was commonplace. Censorship and other means were used to control the spread of ideas that were seen to be in conflict with the accepted norms of the day. For example, in 496 AD the Roman Catholic Pope Gelasius I issued a list of prohibited books that were deemed to be contrary to morality. Catholics were forbidden to read them.

The Game Changer

Towards the end of the Middle Ages, and the beginning of the Renaissance, a young man from Mainz, Germany was about to change everything. In 1440, Johannes Gutenberg invented the metal Moveable Type Printing Press. Gutenberg was a skilled goldsmith and

entrepreneur. He combined several innovations to design his new printing process. These innovations included cast metal type (print characters), oil based ink, a modified screw press, and an efficient industrial process. Gutenberg borrowed money and by 1450 he was printing Christian religious pamphlets and books. He printed about 200 copies of a 1286 page bible that is now known as the Gutenberg Bible.

This massive effort over several years cost Gutenberg his business, as a result of a legal dispute with his investors. However, though his business venture failed, his new printing press was a success, and his printing process was copied by others. In the following years, printing businesses flourished across Europe. The Gutenberg printing press made printing much faster and much more affordable than previous methods. Distribution channels for books did not previously exist, so centres of trade such as port cities became the centres of printing. Venice, a thriving city state, became the heart of printing in Europe.

In time, the ability to print rapidly at low cost resulted in the founding of the newspaper publishing industry, now known as “the press” after the printing press. From the early 1600’s, newspapers started to appear all across Europe, helping drive the growth of literacy and access to information for ordinary people. The concept of book authorship, or creator’s rights, became important, and in time copyright laws were enacted to protect authors against piracy and plagiarism.

A New Era Begins

The printing press changed books from being rare and expensive items in small libraries and monasteries, in the hands of an elite few who could read Latin, to becoming widely available and more affordable, in many languages. Printing facilitated the exchange of information and ideas, and powered periods of great social change in Europe, including the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution. Printing and distribution of books and pamphlets enabled information and ideas to be spread widely and rapidly. This had a democratising effect on European society. The censorship or stifling of ideas, such as by churches or political elites, became much more difficult.

An example of this was the event that led to the Reformation. In 1517 Martin Luther challenged the Roman Catholic Church, and started the Reformation movement when he posted his “Ninety-Five Theses” on the door of Wittenberg church in Germany. The Theses document was afterwards translated, printed and distributed throughout Europe. Luther went on to publish a translation of the bible in a dialect of German which was understood throughout Germany. The widespread distribution of these and other printed documents that challenged the existing Christian church resulted in a split that created the new church of Protestantism.



Photo by Andrew Plumb

A Welcome Revival

During the late Middle Ages (13th and 14th centuries) and continuing into the European Renaissance (15th and 16th centuries) European scholars experienced a reawakened desire to learn about Greek and Roman culture. However, few manuscripts were available in Western Europe. Great efforts were made to locate and translate those “long lost” manuscripts. The texts came primarily from two sources: texts in Arabic from the Islamic world, and texts in Greek from the Christian Byzantine Empire. During the Middle Ages, Greek manuscripts were brought to the Islamic world and translated into Arabic. These were later brought back to Europe, such as by the Muslim Moors who migrated to the Iberian Peninsula (now Spain & Portugal). After the defeat of the Moors, the Arabic texts were translated into Latin. A wealth of classical philosophical, cultural and historical writings was made available for translation and printing.

The European Renaissance was a period of great social change in Europe in culture, the arts, politics and economics. It has been characterised as a “rebirth” after many centuries of the Middle Ages period. The reawakened desire for knowledge and learning of the classical Greek and Roman texts was accelerated by the printing press. While the Renaissance predated it, the arrival of the printing press accelerated the change by making translated copies of manuscripts more available and affordable.



Translation of texts from ancient Greek or Arabic to Latin played an important role. In 1439, a movement called the Neoplatonic Florentine Academy was founded in Florence. It was sponsored by the Cosimo de' Medici, a banker and politician, and head of the wealthy and powerful banking and political Medici dynasty. The Academy's goal was to bring the classical philosophy teachings of Plato to the Europe of the Renaissance period. The Academy modelled itself on Plato's Academy, a school of philosophy founded by Plato in Athens.

The Academy was led by Marcilio Ficino, a brilliant Neoplatonist philosopher, physician, scholar and translator. Ficino acquired all of Plato's works from the Byzantine Empire via the Medicis, and translated them from ancient Greek into Latin. The translated works were printed and published in 1484, thus bringing the ideas of Plato to a much wider world. The works published included the Dialogues, where Plato uses conversations between two or more speakers to explore philosophical issues. Ficino also published commentaries on Plato's works, in his role as a philosopher.

Aldus Manutius founded a printing house called Aldine Press in Venice in 1494. Between 1495 and 1505, Aldine Press printed more than one hundred classic Greek, Roman and other Italian texts. Manutius said that the reason for his efforts was "for the abundance of good books which, we hope, will finally put to flight all ignorance."

A Book For Every Occasion

Today, books are very affordable and accessible for most people, thanks to efficient printing processes. Most people can read - worldwide literacy levels are

approaching ninety per cent. The challenge in today's globally connected world is finding the time in our busy lives to read and learn from quality books. Work, commuting, family life, entertainment, and our smartphones are some of the myriad things that demand our attention and draw from our finite resources of energy and time.

An additional challenge today is the desire for an instant solution to our questions - how often do we "just google it"? We may ask why we should spend hours reading a book, when we might find the answer online in minutes?

Devoting the time and attention to reading a quality book is a rewarding experience. The many benefits of reading good books are known to include improved literacy and vocabulary, and better attention span. Reading also improves learning skills, provides us with knowledge, and opens us up to other points of view. It stimulates the imagination as we visualise while reading, creating the world from the page in our own mind's eye. It takes a little time and effort to read a book, and the discipline to silence that smartphone, but the rewards are lasting.

The old saying goes that "the pen is mightier than the sword". But is the printing press mightier than the pen? Perhaps one could argue that the pen and the printing press together have opened up a world of knowledge and ideas, ranging from classical Greece and Rome, to today's vast array of books on many subjects. We have Johannes Gutenberg, and many others, to thank for that achievement.

Tim Leahy

Political Ideas of Ancient Greece

Modern democracy is often attributed to the ancient Greeks but the original political ideas of some of Greece's greatest leaders may surprise you....

A question we can reflect upon is whether we have achieved the best we can in terms of social form of organization. We've been told democracy is the apex of social development, and we've given up challenging this paradigm. The purpose of this article is to shed some light on different answers to that same question, drawing on the experiences from different peoples in ancient times that would perhaps frown upon our contemporary way of living, as a society – beyond the labels of East, West, capitalism, socialism, right or left-wing.

Great Statesmen

From ancient Greece, we can draw on Plutarch's "Lives" to cite at least two men who went to great lengths to fight injustice and establish governments as harmonious as possible: Solon in Athens and Lycurgus in Sparta. Pursuing different methods and devising completely different constitutions for their cities, both had one common goal: to bring out the best in their citizens. Let us start with Sparta and its legendary legislator: Lycurgus. Before he ascended to this role, he travelled to other countries, seeking to observe and learn from different legal systems.



Relief of Lycurgus in the US House of Representatives

His first destination was Crete, and he was struck with admiration of some of the laws from Minos. From Crete, Lycurgus went to Asia Minor, with the aim to compare the Ionian luxury with the Cretan frugality and hard diet; just as physicians compare bodies that are weak with the healthy and robust. He journeyed then to Egypt and, finally, according to some writers, he went to Libya, Spain and India, where he would have conversed with the Gymnosophists (priests and philosophers who led a very frugal life in the woods and had an aversion to idleness).

It turns out the Lacedemonians of Sparta deeply regretted Lycurgus' departure and sent many ambassadors to entreat him to return. For they perceived their kings didn't

differ from the multitude, apart from their external ornaments, whereas Lycurgus was naturally capable to guide the government and draw the hearts of men to him. On the other hand, the kings also consented to his return, as they hoped that in his presence, they should experience less insolence amongst the people.

Living Spartan

Returning to a city thus disposed, Lycurgus immediately applied himself to alter the whole constitution. One of his boldest political enterprises was a new division of the lands, to address the huge inequality. He persuaded land owners to cancel all former divisions of land and to make new ones, in such a manner that they might be perfectly equal in their possessions and way of living. Hence, if they were ambitious of distinction they might seek it in virtue, as no other differences were left between them. His proposal was put in practice, and he made nine thousand lots for Sparta, which he distributed among the citizens.

After this, he attempted to also divide their furniture and smaller items, to take away all appearance of inequality, but he soon perceived they could not bear to have their goods directly taken from them, and therefore took another method. First, he stopped the currency of the gold and silver coin and ordered that they should use iron money only. Secondly, he assigned a very small value for a great quantity and weight of this; so that to lay up a considerable amount a whole room was required, and to transport it, nothing less than a yoke of oxen. When this became current, many kinds of injustice ceased in Sparta. Who would take a bribe or steal, when he could not conceal the booty and be dignified by its possession?

His next strategy was to lay off superfluous trades such as sophists, wandering fortune tellers, dealers of gold and silver trinkets and brothels. If he had not done this, they would have died out anyway, after the new currency was introduced. Their iron coin was not only not accepted in the rest of Greece – it was ridiculed and despised. As such, the Spartans had no means of purchasing any foreign manufactures; nor did any merchant ship unload in their harbors.



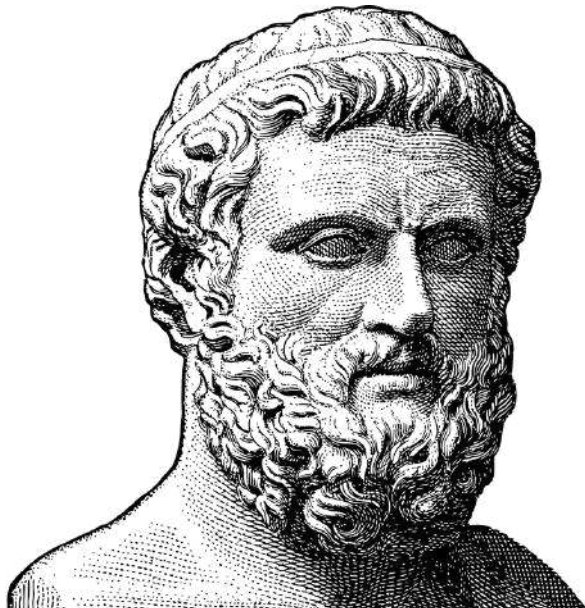
Lycurgus of Sparta by Jacques-Louis David (1791)

Consequently, luxury lost by degrees the means that supported it and died out: even those who had great possessions had no advantage from them, since they could not be displayed in public, but must lie useless, in disregarded repositories. Above all, Lycurgus dedicated himself to passing laws for the education of youth, which he looked upon as being the greatest and most glorious work of a lawgiver.

An Athenian Golden Age

Athens, on the other hand, took its first steps toward democracy when its laws were reformed by Solon in 594 B.C. At later stages, Cleisthenes and his great-nephew Pericles helped to steer the ship of state through its golden years of political, intellectual and artistic achievement.

Solon rose to the role of legislator in similar circumstances as Lycurgus. The citizens of Athens, having again fallen in old disputes that divided them, cast their eyes upon Solon, for he was the man least obnoxious to all parties. Solon had not engaged in oppressions with the rich, nor entangled in the pleadings of the poor. "Equality causes no war" was, apparently, a saying of his that was then much repeated.



Solon

At first, Solon refused to take on the role, nonetheless he was nominated arbitrator and lawgiver. Not satisfied, the different parties entreated him to become king and yield absolute power, but he vehemently turned down such a proposal, contenting himself with enacting new laws. He did not make any concessions on behalf of the powerful classes, nor indulge in pleasing the moods of the lower ones. Hence it was, that having the question put to him afterwards, "whether he had provided the best of laws for the Athenians", he answered, "the best they were capable of receiving".

His first decree cancelled people's previous debts, and he was the first to comply with it. In the same breath, he

"In the ideal State, laws are few and simple, because they have been derived from certainties. In the corrupt State, laws are many and confused, because they have been derived from uncertainties." – Solon

moderated the interests and decreed that no man, moving forward, should be held by his debtors. He also enlarged the measures and the value of money so that, as new debts were made, the same amount was paid, but in much less weight of gold and silver.

However, observing that the people, now discharged from their debts, grew insolent and imperious, he proceeded to constitute a council or senate of four hundred members, a hundred out of each tribe. He ordered that no matter should be presented to the people (represented by the "Ekklesia" or the assembly), before their previous consent. This council was chosen by lot and helped to supervise the administration of the assembly, prepare its agenda and take minor decisions. The council's members changed annually, and no one could serve in it for more than two years.

One could say the most peculiar and surprising of his other laws were those aimed at fostering the citizens' compassion towards one another. One decree established that a man would be considered infamous if he remained indifferent, in times of social unrest and sedition, just because his personal interests were unaffected and safe. Another resolution defined that if a person was assaulted, or suffered any damage or violence, any other able and willing man could prosecute the offender. Thus, Solon accustomed the citizens to feel and resent one another's misfortunes - as members of one body.

As we can see, History does unveil, to the inquisitive mind, clear examples of men and women who truly had the common good in sight when passing laws and ruling the society they lived in. Their actions speak for themselves: they were not perfect, but were idealists who were unafraid to face all odds to concretely build a more just society.

Lilian Salaber



The Universe as an Answer

Founder of New Acropolis Jorge Angel Livraga (1930-1991) invites you on an exploration of the great enigmas of life and how the very Universe itself may already hold the key...

We often speak about the stars, the planets, the animals, the sky, the Earth, water or snow and we forget the real sense and meaning of the word Universe. Man asks himself questions about the whole of Nature, of which he himself is a part, but he tends to lose the central idea to which it refers.

'Universe' means that which is going in a single direction, so what we must discover is where it is going. This was perhaps one of the first approaches that humanity had. All the ancient civilisations asked themselves, through their religions, their metaphysics and their philosophies, where the universe is going and why; but the new materialistic-type ways of seeing things, especially in the post-Cartesian age, present us with a different point of view, and then man begins to analyse the characteristics of the universe, its size, form and weight.

Man claims to know the universe, because he has given names to the stars and measured the distance from the Earth to the Moon; or because he knows the list of chemical elements and the characteristics of the physical forces, and yet, in that detailed kind of knowledge, although there has been a specialisation of knowledge in

each of the areas, these areas have become increasingly separate from one another.

In mineralogy, for example, we are taught the different characteristics of the rocks and the orogenic movements that have brought about changes to the Earth's surface; but we are not taught about the fundamental meaning of material things.

Let us suppose that we pick up any object and drop it suddenly; we will see that it falls and always looks for the lowest place; there is always a natural attraction between this little piece of matter and that big piece of matter where we are. This material attraction is untiring.

What can we extract, then, from the nature of the mineral world? We can extract a tenacity, a search for destiny; and which of us can say that we share with the stones that search for destiny? In general, when we meet a difficulty, we tend to fight it for a while, and if the difficulty does not give way, we give way. The things of Nature, the stones, for example, have the tenacity of being beyond time and of always looking for their final destination.

Our children are taught the different characteristics of plants, about the process of photosynthesis, but it is not mentioned that, beyond every phenomenon of light absorption and conversion into energy, exists the capacity of the plant to know how to wait and to know how to grow. A little seed, buried in the earth in winter, under the snow, patiently awaits the advent of spring. When it arrives, that little seed rises up and seeks the air and the sun. It is another teaching of tenacity, of verticality and from a philosophical point of view, we are interested in the final meaning of the action of things.

We also have water; wherever we pour it, water will run off in search of the sea and there, in the sea, it evaporates, rises up again, condenses and becomes part of a great cycle again. The universe has a purpose.

Obviously, in the new characteristics of the recent centuries, alienated by material things, with a psychology of production and consumption, Man has forgotten the natural elements and how to interpret them. The ancients did not ask themselves so efficiently, perhaps, about the distance between the Earth and the Moon, but they tried to understand what the Moon signifies in the Universe. Through ancient sciences like astrology and others, they tried to interpret the natural phenomena and see in what way they were connected with this phenomenon which is called Man. And that gave the man of antiquity the sensation of being accompanied by intelligent beings, and of being himself an intelligent being.

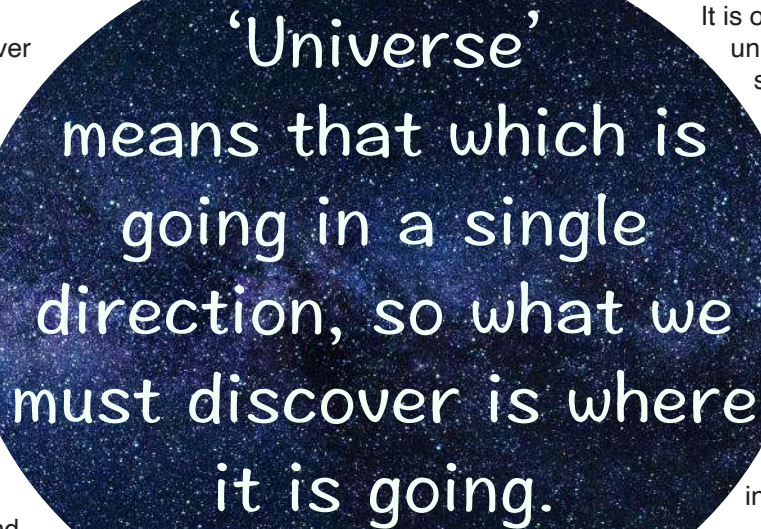
Our present problem is that we feel isolated in the midst of the universe, in other words, since we are so much in contact with artificial elements, we have lost the ability to seek a purpose in things, and the dramatic part of this is that we have lost the possibility of finding a purpose in our own lives. As we live only from instant to instant, we have lost a teleological sense of life, of our ancestral roots and of the purpose that life has. And in this way we become beings of a moment, subject to time, feeling certain that we have been created by chance and that we are going to disappear at any moment; and this subconscious thought overwhelms us and damages us. Instead of trying to interpret Nature, we try to create a series of intermediary elements which are absolutely artificial.

The leaves of trees have their respiratory pores on the lower part; why not on the upper part? Simply because the dust would cover them. By being on the lower part, they are saved and can breathe. Is this chance?

Is it chance that the colour of butterflies' wings blends in

with the flowers and the foliage so that the birds cannot catch them? Is it chance that the tips of owls' wings are smooth, so that they do not make any noise in their nocturnal flight and are thus able to catch the rabbits by surprise? Is it chance that those rodents have their ears pointing backwards, so they can capture the slightest sound of any predators that might be coming in their pursuit? Is the number of colours into which the spectrum is divided when it is touched by white light also chance?

Is the way in which we classify sounds also by chance?



'Universe'
means that which is
going in a single
direction, so what we
must discover is where
it is going.

It is obvious that the entire universe is co-ordinated in such a way that it has a wholeness about it, a kind of pyramidal sense of existence, where things, even though they are multiple, are going in search of a single end; they are all going towards the encounter of a single thing and they are all governed by a single intelligence.

In the Second World War, aviators understood that it was good to fly their planes in the V formation, whereby the plane at the front is replaced from time to time by those at the back; it has been demonstrated that this increases the speed of the squadron. Ducks and geese fly all together in the form of a great V, which works in such a way that the strongest is the one which is in the middle and the others are benefited by its slipstream.

We cannot think that all of this happens by chance. It took Man centuries to be able to understand it. We could give many examples showing how nature is designed. We cannot assert that the sum of all these incidents is mere chance, on the contrary, we have to recognise that the universal intelligence has planned everything. And if we accept this universal planning, we would have to ask ourselves why, for what purpose? It is inconceivable that everything is planned for no reason, it is more logical to think that it has been designed for a purpose; and if it has been designed, it is good to try to discover what answer the universe can give us, for what purpose it was designed, where we are all headed, where we come from and where we are going.

There are seven principles or seven fundamental laws, in accordance with the natural divisions of the whole universe.

1. Unity

The first principle, the highest of all the principles of Nature, is the principle of unity. The whole of Nature is co-ordinated, in other words, it forms a vital unity and

nothing is excluded from it. When things are alive, they do not destroy others, but make possible the life of all. When the wolf pursues the deer on the steppe, it does not catch the youngest, but the oldest, the sick one, the one which could transmit its illness to the rest of the herd. In other words, even what seem to us to be acts of destruction, what might seem to be acts of cruelty, are made in such a way that the species can be perpetuated.

There are no doubts in Nature, no dialogues of oppositions. Everything is given perfect expression and is going in a single direction.

2. Illumination

The second principle is that of illumination; all things in Nature have that principle, whether it is a physical or a spiritual illumination. The realities exist, but they need an intellectual or spiritual light to enable us to distinguish them, and when we sometimes say that there are no truths, that there is nothing on which we can rely, that we are alone, it is because we are in darkness and we need to rediscover the principle of illumination.

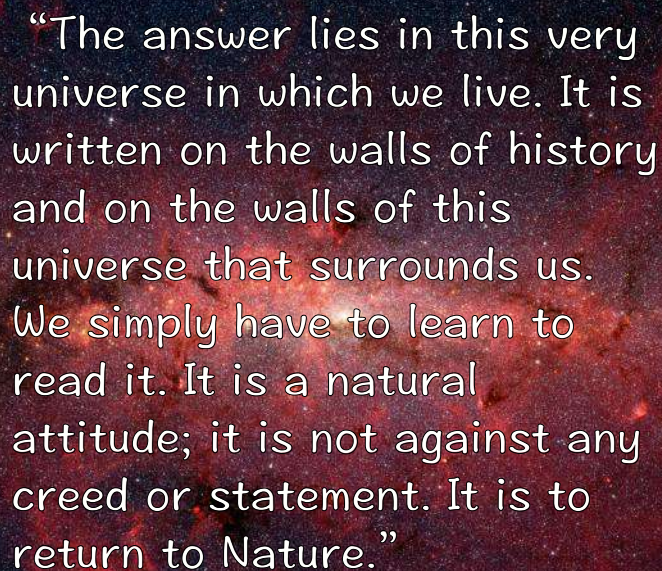
3. Differentiation

The principle of Illumination creates as a consequence the third one, which is differentiation. All things in Nature are differentiated. There are no two things that are absolutely equal, or the same. This principle exists even though sometimes we may not see it; all things are different; even the grains of sand that we step on on the beach and that seem to be all the same are not the same. If we look at them attentively with a magnifying glass, we will see that each of them has its little difference, its little characteristic. Hence, we have to be careful when using the words sameness or equality. We can be equivalent, but not equal; we can be similar, but not equal; and that does not separate or divide, it does not destroy human beings; it enriches them, like a mosaic of different colours which can have similar tones, but are never exactly the same. The concept of equality is a human invention; in Nature equality does not exist.

4. Organisation

The fourth principle is the principle of organisation. Things are organised; we all see a tree, a solid trunk that rises above the earth and supports a tree-top full of branches and birds' nests; but we do not see another inverse tree-top which lies beneath the earth and which also with its wooden branches supports all the rest and sinks deep into the earth; and although it has no birds, it has worms and insects, and nourishes everything. In other words, everything is perfectly organised, everything is designed in such a way that there is support and cooperation between one thing and another. And the mistakes we humans tend to make are due to a lack of organisation.

Organisation is not a massification, it is not the imposition of some people over others; organisation is supportiveness. The hands are opposite and yet they organise themselves to pick something up; if we had the



“The answer lies in this very universe in which we live. It is written on the walls of history and on the walls of this universe that surrounds us. We simply have to learn to read it. It is a natural attitude; it is not against any creed or statement. It is to return to Nature.”

two hands on the same side, we would have difficulty in picking anything up. So, it is necessary to recognise this principle of organisation, even when we are opposed in something. This principle allows us all to work together, without ceasing to be who we are; this is something we should apply in our lives, in the here and now.

5. Causality

There is a fifth principle, the principle of causality: all things are the cause of something that follows them and the effect of what went before them, all of us descend from something and give rise to something: anything, taken at any point, is the result of something and the cause of something else, even apparently inanimate things. Nothing is only a cause or only an effect, they are linked together. From day comes night, from night comes day.

6. Vitality

The sixth principle, that of vitality, tells us that all things are alive. Absolutely everything. Until the 19th century and the first half of the 20th, people used to speak about living beings and inanimate objects. Still today, due to inertia, we continue to repeat this because we say that something is alive when it moves or when it flies or when it grows. Since the beginning of the world things have not only been alive when they act, they are also alive when they resist. All things are in constant movement, even if we cannot see the molecules or the atoms revolving in the air, which make up our hands, our bones. Everything is penetrated by vitality; this vitality which in the East is called “prana”, a life that enters into all things, that never stops, so that even the things which we call dead are not dead, they have simply changed condition, shape, or way of living.

7. Periodicity

Finally we have the principle of periodicity. Since we were born we have noticed that in Nature there is an alternation between night and day, summer and winter, and so many other states which in this way oppose one



another and alternate with one another; and yet, we do not realise until we read Plato, until someone teaches us or until we ourselves awaken to that reality that we, too, are within that periodicity. All these cycles include a great cycle which we call human life. But why stop there? Why not understand that this human life is a short day of being awake within a great life? That after this physical life there is a spiritual life and that it is like a dream, and that then we will have a physical life and a spiritual life.

The law of cycles embraces all things and never stops, everything is cyclic: the planets revolve cyclically in the sky, and the tiny particles also move within the atoms.

This periodicity allows life to be continuous and pulsating. We have to try to take from Nature what is not easily destructible. We have to look after something, not only our physical part, but the other parts, too. Because, to what extent do we look after our psychological part? To what extent do we give food to our mind, every day? To what extent do we have spiritual food? We have to look after our dreams. We have reached such a point of materiality that we take care that a jug or a car does not get broken, but what about a dream, a hope, an effort? What happens with the crystal birds of our dreams when they are broken? They are smashed to pieces and injure our hands.

We have to have the courage to pulverise our broken dreams, and with that glass dust of our dreams, to create new birds. It is time that we understood that we do not just have to drag ourselves through the world as if we were tortoises or snakes, but we have to learn to fly with the power of wings.

Philosophy is not mere speculation; it is not to sit in a corner and watch life pass by, nor is it a discipline of sorrows and withdrawal. Philosophy is to have a strong attitude in front of life, it is to understand the spirit of things, it is to be able to conquer the fear within ourselves, to conquer death, to be able to connect with others, with the deeper part of everyone. Because we do not see each other; sometimes it is said that when Man dies, he passes into the invisible world; however, Man is

always invisible; he is behind the things that he does, behind his own body, his own words, his own acts. Man is a great question, a great enigma.

The answer lies in this very universe in which we live. It is written on the walls of history and on the walls of this universe that surrounds us. We simply have to learn to read it. It is a natural attitude; it is not against any creed or statement. It is to return to Nature.

We have discernment and yet we lack it in many things; who wants a car that only works from time to time? No one. And yet we accept ideas that are sometimes good and other times not, principles that apply sometimes and sometimes not, honesty which applies sometimes and sometimes not. We have to go back to having that common sense that we use on the physical level. In the spiritual part we have to go back to requiring from ourselves, from the world around us, absolute values that are easy to understand, to handle, to assimilate, that allow us to have an exact understanding of the universe.

We need a new science, a science that will move away from the vice of vested interests, a science in which there is no sense of violence. We need art that will allow us to be united once more with beauty, which is not based on anguish, but on true investigation. We need a politics that can lead men to live together in harmony and to be elevated, rather than leading us into conflicts or artificial coexistence. We need, in short, a New World. But this world already exists: it is the universe itself, it is Nature. The only thing we have to do is to live intensely the moments which destiny has offered us. To be like a key which is inserted into the lock of the universe and springs open the door of history, to pass to another dimension, to pass into that world which is awaiting us, that world which must be not only new, but better.

Jorge Angel Livraga

The Centre of the Universe

From geocentric to heliocentric and into the unknown...

Philosophy explains that there are ways of understanding timeless ideas, or archetypes, as unchanging principles that have characteristics of unity and permanence. When ideas are manifested in the world however they are subject to the laws of time and space and so they can become corrupted or decayed. Manifested ideas are also subject to cyclicity and so we observe the ebb and flow of concepts, superficially coming in and out of fashion or having wider spans of historical impact.

Things we may take for granted now were not always so certain. And can we say that they will be forever a mainstay in agreed thought? Fanaticism of all kinds is driving us into increasingly narrow corridors or extreme thought, or lack thereof, and the realm of objective truth continues to be eroded by cynical doubt.

As always, history can be a great teacher here. We should recall the difficulty with which some ideas were born, unwelcome to hostile environments, stuck in their dogmatic view of life and the universe. Before the commonly understood view of heliocentrism, espousing that the planets of our solar system are in orbit around the sun, the geocentric model was dominant. This theory maintained that the earth was in fact the centre of the universe and all else revolved around it, if indeed, anything was moving at all.

You are likely familiar with the name Copernicus but even centuries before he rocked the status quo of renaissance era astronomy, the question of the stars and the activity of the heavenly bodies was being addressed by various philosophers. In ancient times, the popularly held view of the spherical globe called Earth was indeed of a static nature but a fully developed heliocentric model was developed by famed mathematician and astronomer Aristarchus of Samos. Many of his concepts held their foundation in Pythagorean thought, showing a vein of ideas going back even further.





Tracing the Line

Aristarchus was one of many notable figures from the 3rd century BCE who lived in the great city of Alexandria, a vibrant laboratory of scientific enquiry. Like Eratosthenes, Aristarchus also calculated the circumference of the Earth to an impressive degree of accuracy. Though his writings on the heliocentric model are lost, another noteworthy contemporary, Archimedes, mentions Aristarchus' theory. He posited that, while the sun and the stars remain fixed, the Earth is rotating around the sun in a circular circumference.

Though references to his work are vague and more narrative than scientific, it must have been a prominent feature of Aristarchus' work as the discussion survived him, paving the way for future astronomers and philosophers to elaborate. One such figure was Seleucus who may have used trigonometry and geometric modelling to track the progress of the planets in the sky. It is believed he also expressed a theory about the relationship between the ebb and flow of the tide and the influence of the moon over the Earth.

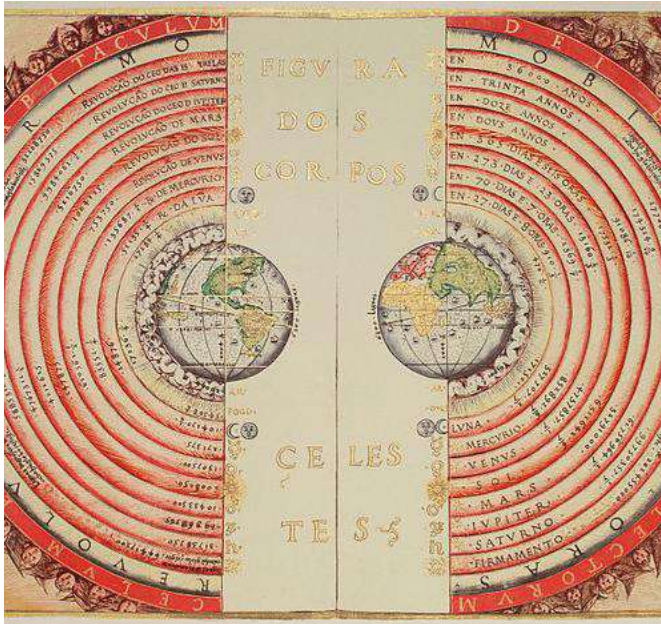


Figure of the heavenly bodies — An illustration of the Ptolemaic geocentric system by Portuguese cosmographer and cartographer Bartolomeu Velho, 1568 (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris)

Arabian Nights

The largely accepted geocentric model, known in antiquity as the Ptolemaic model, remained relatively unchallenged through to the middle ages but in the Islamic world, Muslim astronomers of the 10th century began to have their doubts. While not explicitly heliocentric in essence, investigation into the possibility of the Earth rotating on an axis became more common. By the 12th century astronomers, such as Nur ad-Din al-Bitruji, popularised less traditional heliocentric models which sparked debate all across Europe from the 13th-16th centuries.

The Arabic influence in European astronomy seems undeniable, tools and techniques from the Maragheh

observatory (established in 1259 CE in modern day Azerbaijan) made their way to Europe through the waning Byzantine empire and by the 1470s the Vienna school of astronomy was already making notable observations that suggested the proposal of a heliocentric model would have been inevitable.

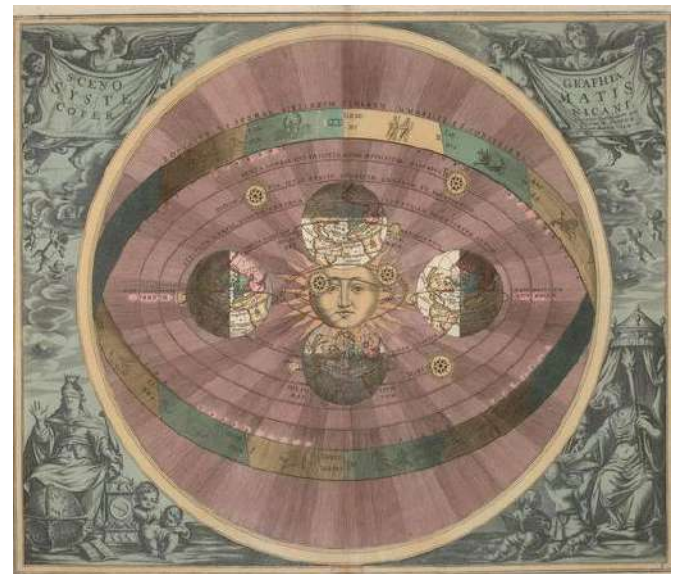
The Brave and the Persecuted

Copernicus was born in 1473, somewhat propitiously in the time of these ideas flourishing around the zeitgeist of Renaissance Europe. His own contributions to the discussion arrived from 1514 but while he worked on his theories he didn't publish them in full until 1543, the year of his death. While living it was clear that the ideas were garnering controversy, particularly in the spotlight of Christian analysis.

The seminal work of this great thinker, "De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium" (On the Revolution of the Heavenly Spheres) was dedicated to Pope Paul III and contained a preface with a disclaimer that the hypothesis of heliocentrism contained therein was not necessarily true. This caution on the part of Copernicus safeguarded the ideas, allowing them to circulate with little debate for the next 60 or so years.

Other figures would not be able to avoid the ire of the church. Giordano Bruno was burnt at the stake for his 'heretical' views, including heliocentrism, but the savagery of the act seemed to impact its orchestrator, Cardinal Robert Bellarmine of the Inquisition. Later, when Galileo Galilei was facing the Inquisition under similar charges, Bellarmine showed clemency and allowed the astronomer to pass away under house arrest.

Despite the persecution of those daring to spread the idea, which was rapidly becoming a scientific truth, the momentum of the theory had become unstoppable. The supportive writings of Johannes Kepler was hugely influential and by 1686 it had developed popular traction outside of astronomy and scholarly academia. Some have described it as one of the first great popularisations of science.



Andreas Cellarius's illustration of the Copernican system, from the Harmonia Macrocosmica (1708)

All of this laid the groundwork for the world-changing revelations of Isaac Newton's laws of motion which he published in 1687, adding to the works of Copernicus and Kepler with the concept of universal gravitation. By this time the Catholic church, while still opposed to the heliocentric model, was adopting more and more astronomical principles in order to maintain its Gregorian calendar which was installed in 1582. By the mid 18th century, the church's opposition began to fade.

Then, Now and Yet to be Known

Through the 18th and 19th centuries the principle became more widespread and less controversial. By the 20th century its common acceptance led to new discoveries and revelations about the nature of the universe as a collection of galaxies, housing billions of solar systems, like ours.

The nature of truth and discovery of ideas, the resistance to those discoveries and the courage demonstrated in the face of dogmatism are all underlying lessons we can extract from the evolution of heliocentrism. And our understanding of the universe continues to evolve, as we now know that nothing is static in the universe. Not only do the planets of our solar system rotate and follow an elliptical orbit around the sun but the sun itself is moving and the whole system with it, at a speed 720,000 km per hour. The fundamental mystery remains unanswered, for now – where are we going?

The ideas we hold as true should not be taken for granted. History ebbs and flows like the tide itself and consensus is fickle. With increased polarisation and extreme opinions in the world we may see some ideas we assumed unchallengeable be brought into question. Perhaps rightly out of a need to go deeper, perhaps dubiously out of a swell of ignorance and superstition. All we can do is hold on to the search for truth, as many great figures have done before, and have the courage to follow it through.

Aidan Murphy



Statue of Giordano Bruno in Campo de' Fiori, site of his execution by the Inquisition in 1600 for heresy.

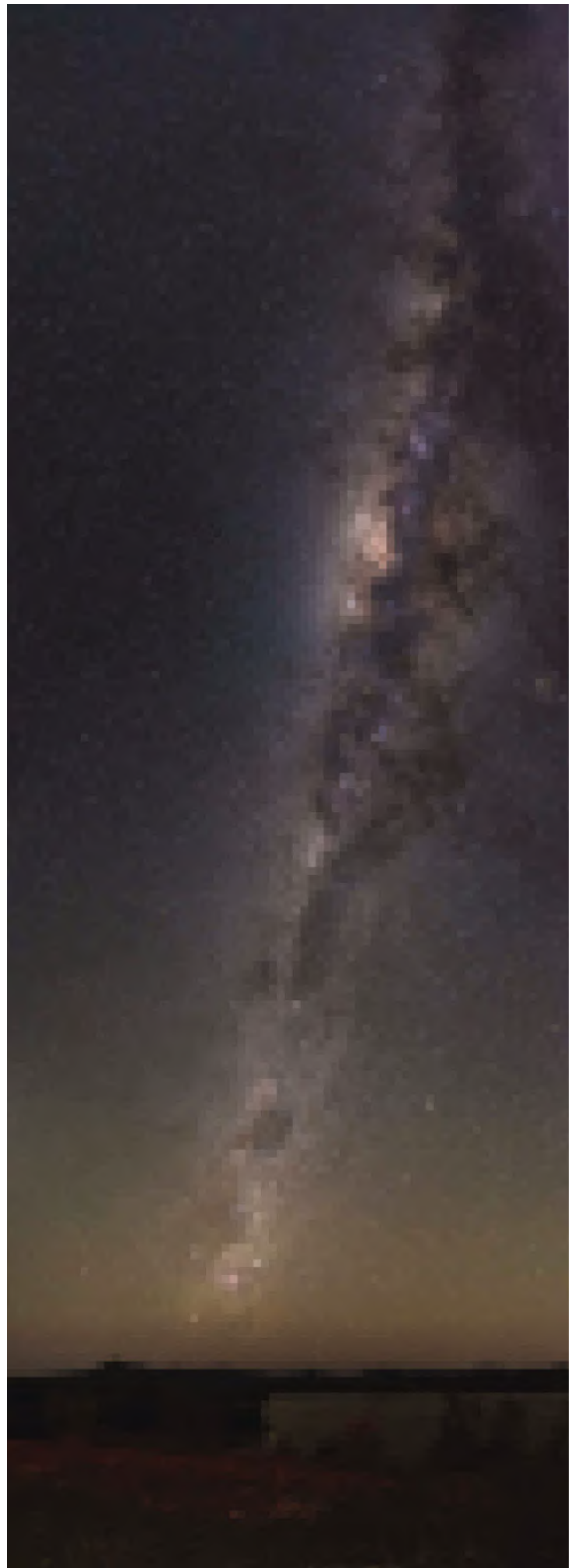


Photo of the Milky Way by Rob Musson



Calm Within the Storm

Advice for stability in times of crisis.

It might seem that the crisis which is shaking our present civilization throughout the world and on so many fronts is something typical of our time and of enormous magnitude. However, if we look carefully, we will find crises at any time in history, and we will discover that philosophers have always examined their deeper meaning.

The repeated and superficial use of words makes them lose their intrinsic value. Today crisis is interpreted to mean a painful rupture, related with suffering and loss in general. But the most authentic meaning of the word crisis is “change”.

Sometimes it is a sudden change, which modifies situations of very different kinds: material, moral, historical or spiritual. It is unusual that only one aspect of life is altered in a crisis; normally, before a major turning point in history, many changes occur simultaneously.

If we don't appreciate this multifaceted reality, Stability – if it existed before – is very likely to fall down; or we may not be able to construct it if we need to. Stability must be built or maintained on all aspects of human life and in all the factors that make up a civilisation.

On the level of civilisation, to look for material solutions when the moral, intellectual and spiritual values are declining is like preparing a banquet while volcanoes and storms are raging all around. On the human level, to fight for the preservation of physical

subsistence while neglecting the importance of a temperate psyche, a refined mind and a high degree of sensitivity to the sacred, is like keeping a body fed but empty of soul.

It is in times of crisis that stability becomes an indispensable tool, not only to enable us to pass through a more or less dark period, but to recover the positive experiences that constantly arise from history. The scientist, artist and philosopher, Albert Einstein, said:

“A crisis can be a real blessing to any person, to any nation. For all crises bring progress. Creativity is born from anguish, just as day is born from the dark night. It is in crises that inventiveness, discoveries and great strategies are born. He who overcomes crisis overcomes himself without being ‘overcome’.”

Crisis, then, requires particular degrees of stability which need to be cultivated with patience and perseverance.

Let us mention some of the companions of that quality.

In Times of Crisis You Need Serenity

When everything is collapsing and it becomes difficult to find firm footholds, when it seems that the historical hurricane will sweep away everything that exists, we cannot allow ourselves to be dragged along like an aimless log in a river.

Serenity builds a little circle of tranquillity in which to think and of light from which to see a way out of the crossroads. It creates an island of calm in the middle of the storm. It moderates passion and clarifies thought.

In Times of Crisis You Need Imagination

Yes, imagination, not fantasy. Fantasy feeds on false images with no other content or aim than momentary satisfaction. Imagination is not satisfied by forgetting or running away from problems, as fantasy is. Imagination is about seeking, just as philosophy seeks wisdom. It seeks and finds the permanent ideas which have saved societies and individuals in the worst circumstances.

In Times of Crisis You Need Creativity

There is no need to invent anything, it is about finding a new way of using the things we have stopped making use of due to a lack of intelligence. When human intelligence fails, systems fail. And when systems fail, the tools which were designed to support life become murderous weapons.

It is not a matter of throwing a knife out of the window because it is useless, but of restoring to the knife its true practical function. True creativity, which is genuine inspiration, re-establishes the rules of creation and brings us closer to the laws of nature instead of leading us away from them.

In Times of Crisis You Need Initiative

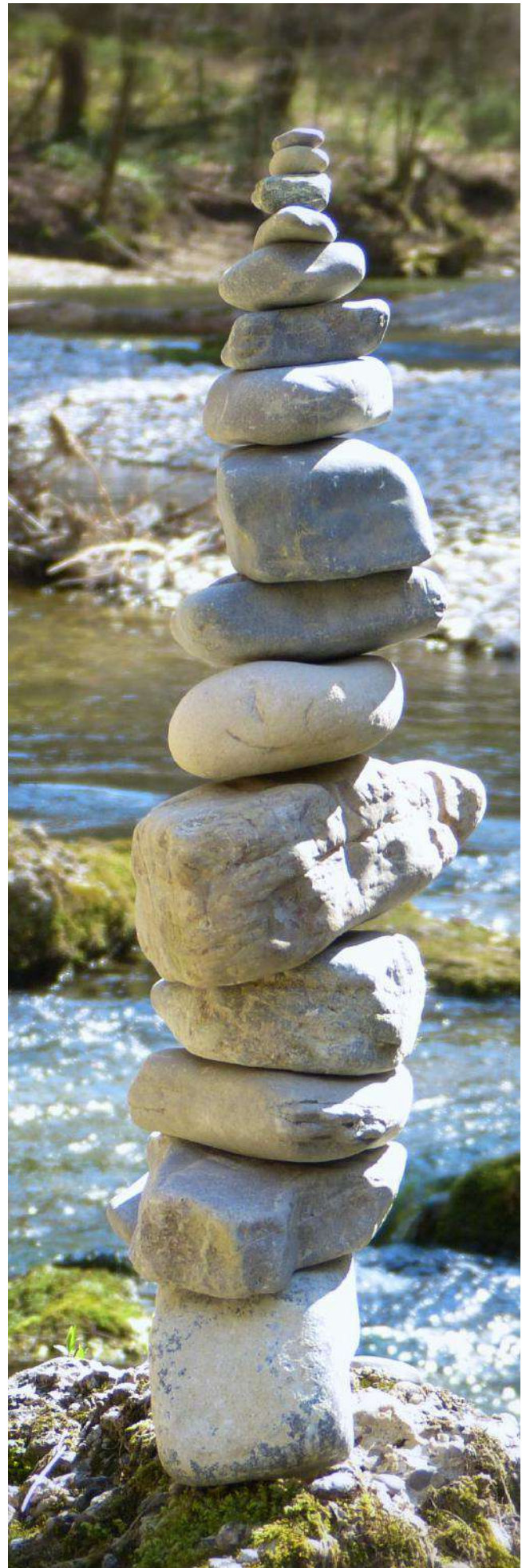
Although it might appear to be in contradiction with serenity, initiative, like action, is the immediate response to inner peace. In times of crisis one cannot be inactive. On the contrary, we need to use serenity, imagination and creativity to be always moving forward, to avoid inertia, the paralysis of fear.

Unfortunately, initiative is often confused with dominance, abuse, force and aggression; those are the qualities of the “enterprising man” which, to judge by the facts, have led us to this historical crisis... Let us stop to reflect on initiative as courage, in the sense of not giving up under any circumstances, being the first to serve others, never losing our sense of morality and, on the other hand, gaining confidence with each step we take.

A stable solution for every type of crisis.

A solution for a profound and real change.

Delia Steinberg Guzmán





The World of the Aztecs

Explore the remnants of a brief but once great civilisation.

The Aztecs – or rather the “people from Aztlan”, a translation from the Nahuatl word ‘aztecatl’ – are largely still a mystery for us. Their strong and determined character, their practical sense and the value they ascribed to the strength of will enabled this people to develop a highly advanced culture and conquer vast parts of Central America.

The Aztec Empire began to rise in the 13th century and centred around Tenochtitlan (today Mexico City). At the time, Tenochtitlan was the biggest and most important city in the world with around 500,000 to 1,000,000 inhabitants – comparatively much bigger than Paris at the same time, with its 70,000 inhabitants. It was said to be a green oasis, a city full of gardens and flowers, floating on a big lake. The sacred was a very important aspect for the Aztecs, which was mirrored in the geography of their cities: temples were to be found everywhere as they wanted to accommodate the gods as guests on Earth.

The myth goes that before settling down, the Aztec people had wandered for 157 years in search of the right place to build this city. It was not until they detected the sign they had been searching for (an eagle picking up a snake from a cactus) that they decided to come to rest. This symbol can still be found in the national flag of Mexico today.

Every civilisation adopts part of its knowledge and traditions from the previous civilisation in the same place. This was also the case for the Aztecs, who got parts of their knowledge from the Toltecs – about whom we know even less.

Huitzilopochtli, the god of warfare, was their principle deity, which was reflected in their character. However, war has to be understood in a twofold sense: on the one hand it is about the external war we know, conquering peoples and territory. On the other hand, and just as – if not more – important, the internal war, which refers to the conquering of oneself, the triumph of the soul over matter.

For an Aztec, to be a warrior was an attitude and a mindset, a posture vis-à-vis life rather than a mere act of death and destruction. The warrior is an enemy of comfort and slowness, of those vices that keep us from developing and moving forward. And at

the same time he is a friend of courage, endurance and drive, pushing to develop the values of the soul. The Aztecs had a strong belief in the immortality of the soul, which explains why minimal value was given to material life. The sacred and the invisible were always more important. This also demonstrates how they integrated Huitzilopochtli as their principle deity into their everyday life. The other two most important gods were Tetzcatlipoca (the god of the smoking mirror) and Quetzalcoatl (the feathered serpent).

Nature, signs in nature and dreams played an important role in the way the Aztecs decided to lead their lives. They drew much of their knowledge from nature itself, thus developing a highly elaborate calendar system which was split into a solar calendar of 360 + 5 days and a ritual calendar of 260 days. Within this, they had a clear vision of the task human beings have to fulfill on earth.

The Aztecs have left us with a fascinating heritage and knowing how little we have really discovered and understood about it leaves us wondering how much more there is to explore....

Elena Löber



Aztec sun stone - Field Museum, Chicago.
Photo by Luis Domenech

Photo by Aleksander Vlad



Becoming Gods

A review of the work of Yuval Noah Harari

The first book in this series - Sapiens - A brief history of humankind - blew me away. Yuval Noah Harari is a history lecturer in Israel and this book grew out of the class notes he assembled for his first year students. His intent was to give the students an overview of all of human history from the first humans to the present day, quite an ambitious scope. To his initial surprise, soon non-history students and others were surreptitiously making copies and sharing the lecture notes.

Harari brings you on a familiar journey; Neanderthals, the first farmers, the Romans, the Renaissance, ... but he does so with such clarity and insight, that it feels like you are understanding it for the very first time. With simple text, all encompassing concepts are very simply laid bare before you and the result is an awe of history, of mankind and amazement that a single human collated this in one book.

I raved about this book to friends and family, and then learned that this book had a sequel, Homo Deus, A brief history of Tomorrow. Enthusiastically I requested this from my local library, but I was very sceptical that the first book could ever be topped. This author was an historian, 'A brief history of Humankind' was surely his life's work. What does 'A brief history of tomorrow' even mean?

Dumbfounded, I learned that Harari gathered the strands of evidence that are before us today, knitted them together in the patterns history has taught us, and laid before us several imagined possibilities for the future.

Harari entered my world of computers, science, big data, artificial intelligence ... and outlined where it may lead. The pictures drawn are not pretty, indeed are difficult for us mere mortals to fully comprehend, but Harari is persuasive in his low-key presentation of the immense power unleashed by data. Technical concepts are laid bare with empathy. He illustrates the fact that we have created something that knows us much better than we can ever know ourselves by describing the fridge that orders and presents what we want before we've even thought of it.

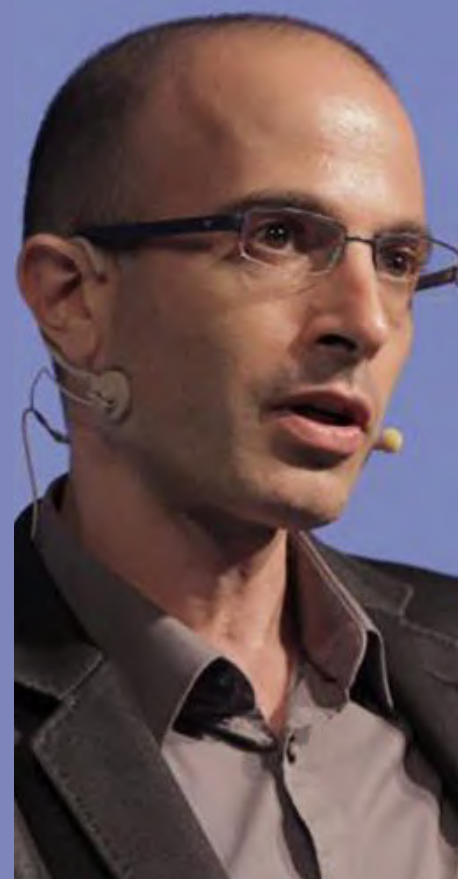
A little more ominously, by sharing his own story, he lifts a curtain on how this may not necessarily be a good thing, in ways that make us uneasy. Harari grew up, not understanding his own sexuality, eventually learning enough about himself to understand he is gay, and came out. Today, eye-tracking software can, with a high degree of accuracy, identify the sexuality of teens/adults long before they know it themselves, by simply comparing eye-tracking metrics (where we look, and for how long) with patterns from other humans.

The reader recognises that this future is imminent, that humans have created something more powerful than themselves and are in the precarious predicament of needing to know what to do with this knowledge. Like Frankenstein's monster, once created, it is very difficult to go back.

My embarrassing adulation of Harari only grew when I

“History began when humans invented gods and will end when humans become gods.”

- Yuval Noah Harari



watched several youtube interviews and learned that this historian is also a philosopher (not at all surprisingly) and an advocate for Vipassanna, (silent meditation). Indeed, he credits spending two months of every year in silent meditation, without which he claims he would never have been able to distill the thoughts necessary to clearly articulate his insights in these books.

I confess I've not yet finished the third in the series, '21 Lessons for the 21st century'. Here, Harari cautions politicians, citizens, business, whoever will listen ... regarding the choices we are making and the impact they will have. Climate Change, Big Data, Democracy, ... are some of the topics addressed. There is a socratic dialogue at play here. Harari never states outright what needs to be done, but presents the facts and poses the tough questions and let's the reader do the hard work of drawing their own conclusions. This is far more effective in involving the reader in the necessity of taking action. Indeed, it is probably why I have put this book down on several occasions. The enormity of the challenge before us and our own responsibility to respond and rise to the challenge is onerous to take on board.

Finally, his latest offering breaks from the traditional book format. Challenged with making his big ideas accessible, Harari has partnered with a creative team to recreate Sapiens in graphic book format, suitable for audiences who may never pick up a heavy tome. The graphic format is also very amenable to being released as YouTube shorts. Recountings of the why and how he did this are

fascinating; indeed, the graphic format sparked even more questions, and enabled Harari to dig deeper into the subject matter, so if you're a fan of this approach, certainly check it out.

To conclude, I highly recommend the first book, Sapiens. I expect it changes most reader's views of the world forever. And, if you like Sapiens, and are up to facing head-on the Pandora's box Big Data and artificial intelligence enable, Harari's other books are an informed guide to the imminent dilemma facing humankind... can we succeed in harnessing our own powers and become gods, or will we succumb and become the mere playthings of the very technologies we unleash?

Fionnuala Callan

Books Reviewed (UK editions)

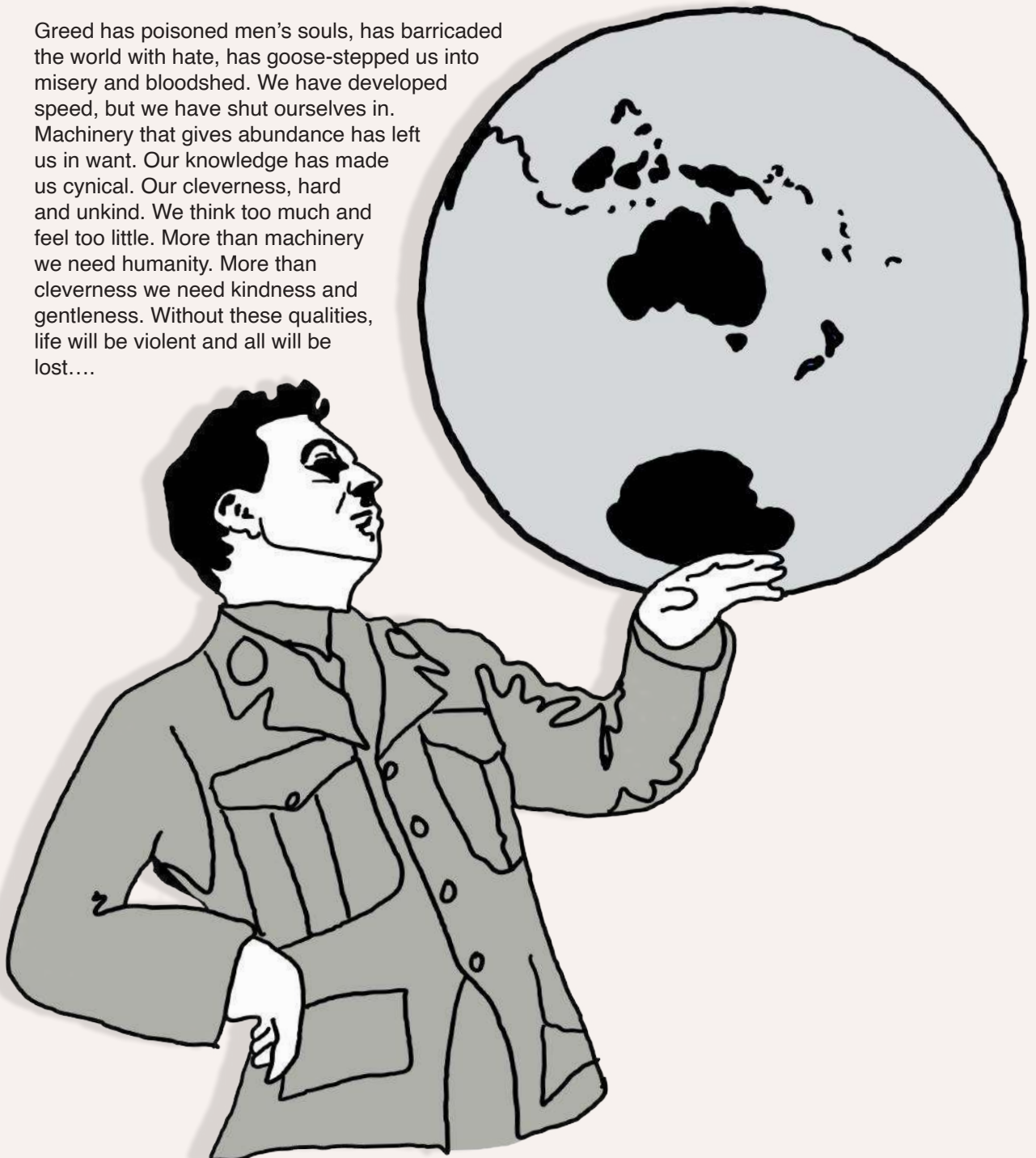
- Yuval Noah Harari, **Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind** (Harvill Secker, 2014)
- Yuval Noah Harari, **Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow** (Harvill Secker, 2016)
- Yuval Yuval Noah Harari, **21 Lessons for the 21st Century** (Jonathan Cape, 2018)
- Noah Harari, David Vandermeulen, Daniel Casanave, **Sapiens: A Graphic History, Volume 1 – The Birth of Humankind** (Jonathan Cape, 2020)

Charlie Chaplin

Extract from the final speech of the film: The Great Dictator

I don't want to rule or conquer anyone. I should like to help everyone - if possible - Jew, Gentile - black man - white. We all want to help one another. Human beings are like that. We want to live by each other's happiness - not by each other's misery. We don't want to hate and despise one another. In this world there is room for everyone. And the good earth is rich and can provide for everyone. The way of life can be free and beautiful, but we have lost the way.

Greed has poisoned men's souls, has barricaded the world with hate, has goose-stepped us into misery and bloodshed. We have developed speed, but we have shut ourselves in. Machinery that gives abundance has left us in want. Our knowledge has made us cynical. Our cleverness, hard and unkind. We think too much and feel too little. More than machinery we need humanity. More than cleverness we need kindness and gentleness. Without these qualities, life will be violent and all will be lost....



14 Week course

Philosophy for Living

Inspired by philosophies of East & West



