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NewAcropolis

Philosophy and Education for the Future

Beethoven and the Sublime

The *Encyclopédie*, a Vision of the Enlightenment

Crime – Can We Do Something About It?

In Search of Harmony

PHILOSOPHY
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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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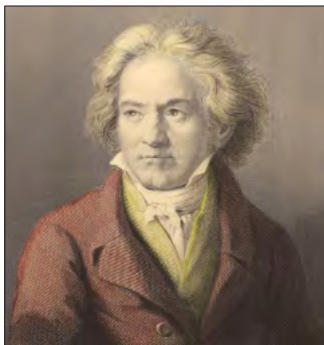
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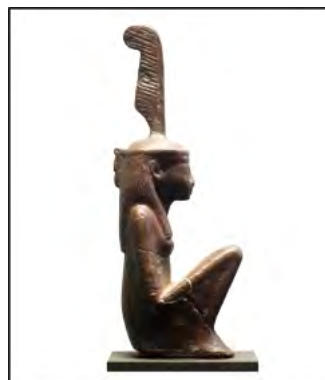
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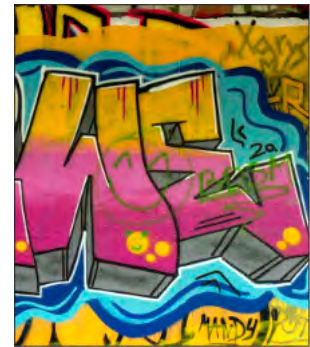
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Editorial

Reflections on Propaganda

In the 21st century, wars are not just fought on battlefields, but also in cyberspace and in our minds. Propaganda has probably been a tool in warfare since the beginning of time, but the rise of the internet and social media has taken it to unimaginable heights, allowing propagandists of all colours to reach millions instantly via disinformation campaigns, deepfake technology and algorithmic manipulation, to name but a few. And 'hybrid warfare', which combines military action with coordinated disinformation campaigns to destabilize and create confusion, is surely not only conducted by the Russians.

Governments, corporations, wealthy individuals and ideological groups around the world have adopted sophisticated techniques to serve their strategic interests and to further their geopolitical agendas. Billions of dollars are spent every year on digital propaganda operations which are designed to spread narratives to shape public opinion. Most states pump enormous sums into a multitude of initiatives, associations and officially non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that provide the public with ideological instructions. And 'perception management' the strategic process of influencing how individuals, groups or the public at large interpret and react to information, events, and organizations is widely used in business, politics, public relations, military operations and social influence campaigns.

Even if we think that we are immune against any form of propaganda, the state of the world proves otherwise and, as in every war, there are victims. The victims of these propaganda wars are, amongst many other things, unity (because they polarize and divide), truth (because it does not matter any more whether something is true or not), freedom of judgement (because no one knows whether information is true or not) and trust. And without these elements, stable, cohesive and harmonious societies are not possible.

What can be done? Ban all the 'bad' propaganda? The philosophical problem is that everything has two sides and what is true and good for some is the opposite for others. If we care about an issue, we would probably wholeheartedly back a campaign that 'informs' about it and would not call it 'propaganda', but 'advertising' or 'raising awareness'. But if others propagate views and beliefs that completely go against our values,

we refer to it with the more derogatory term 'propaganda'. Most of us would object to the propagation of ideologies which we don't agree with, yet find it perfectly legitimate to propagate our own ideas. It's a bit like the quote: "Most people hate advertising, until they lose their cat!"

The word propaganda comes from the Latin verb *propagare*, which means 'to spread, to reproduce, to disseminate'. In general, almost everything we do or say is a form of 'propaganda', because we express our views and want to 'propagate' them. In nature, every living being tries to propagate its species and maybe this not only expresses a universally shared instinct, but also even a right to propagate. This not only applies to our physical reproductive instinct, but also to our 'instinct' to teach what we believe to be valid.

But if we ban what we don't like and only want to see promoted what we do like, then we would all become dictators or producers of 'monocultures'. How can we solve this dilemma? Pondering on the questions of advertising and propaganda, the philosopher and founder of New Acropolis, Jorge A. Livraga, came to the conclusion: "Advertising is ethical when its purpose is ethical." And, as he also said elsewhere: "Ethical ends cannot be achieved with unethical means."

This then gives us a clear criterion: propaganda that deliberately and knowingly distorts facts, tries to divide in order to conquer, disseminates lies, fake news and fear, and even advertising that tries to manipulate us into buying things that we don't really need or to consume things that are in the long run bad for our health this type of propaganda and advertising is evidently inherently immoral. And the sad news is that this applies to the vast majority of the advertising and propaganda we are exposed to.

Unfortunately, we cannot stop this at the moment. The gulf between our external means and our inner freedom to act in alignment with moral values is immense. But we can try to stop falling prey to these divisive, fearmongering, manipulative forces and set out to rebuild unity, trust, integrity, a regard for truth and justice, understanding and dialogue. And consciously 'propagate' ideas and values that unite, bring out the best in people, inspire us to go in search of the true, the good, the just and the beautiful, and help us develop our inner potential.

Sabine Leitner

The *Encyclopédie*, a Vision of the Enlightenment

In our digital and information age, it is hard to imagine a time when knowledge was not so easy to access and only the most privileged had a right to a decent education. In the pre-industrial times of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, there had been many scholars and 'natural philosophers' who created great works that attempted to compile some of the knowledge of the time, a knowledge that was mostly confined within the walls of monasteries and the few universities. By the end of the 17th

century, the concept of sciences had become more mainstream and other non-religious institutions had been created, such as the Royal Academy of Science (1660 in Great Britain, 1666 in France).

An idea of a universal knowledge accessible to all was starting to bud in the minds of the natural philosophers of England and, by the beginning of the 18th century, the first universal dictionary of arts and sciences, or Cyclopaedia, was published in 1728 by Ephraim Chambers. These philosophers were part of a movement called the Enlightenment, "les Lumières" in France. The



In the Salon of Madame Geoffrin in 1755, by Anicet Charles Gabriel Lemonnier.
Wikimedia



works of the English philosophers of the late 1600s, such as Newton, Locke or Boyle, inspired the French philosophers, who continued the work of Chambers and his peers.

It was Diderot, d'Alembert and Condillac who, in 1751, published the first “Encyclopédie” (Encyclopaedia), or Classified Dictionary of Sciences, Arts and Trades, building on the publications of their predecessors and including all the crafts and techniques known of at the time. The idea behind such a work was to update the outdated scientific knowledge of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, including the latest discoveries and ideas. The Encyclopaedia was to be published on a regular basis and to be updated as the sciences and techniques progressed.

The Enlightenment was strongly opposed to traditional ways, pushing religion out of the natural philosophy community. In his introduction, Diderot says: “A court (...) condemned a famous astronomer for having supported the movement of the Earth around the Sun and was declared a heretic (...). Thus, the abuse of spiritual authority united with temporal authority forced reason into silence; and it was almost the case that humanity was forbidden to think.”

Soon after the first publication, it was opposed by the Church and State, which forbade the sale of the first two volumes; but thanks to Chrétien Malesherbes, Director of the Press and Chief Censor of Published Material, the publication was able to continue. Images and engravings depicting the various crafts and techniques were added in the following volumes, and after two decades of hard

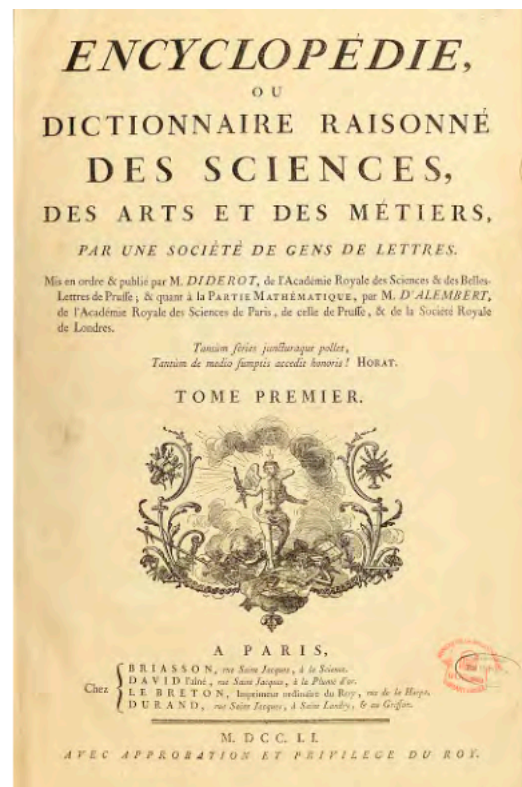
work and trials the last volume was published in 1772. By then the Encyclopaedia had 26 volumes.

But this was only the beginning of the Encyclopaedic adventure. Soon after in 1776 Panckoucke and Robinet bought the rights and extended the work with 5 more volumes. Other publications were made inside and outside of France, mostly without the original rights. And in 1799 Panckoucke sold the rights to English publishers. From 1782 to 1832 the Encyclopaedia kept growing to reach more than 200 volumes, including 50 volumes of engravings.

The Encyclopaedia carried with it the ideas of the Enlightenment: a universal knowledge for all, critical thinking and the freedom of thought and expression. It inspired the revolutionary movements of the 18th and 19th centuries, and helped precipitate the fall of absolute monarchies throughout Europe.

The story of the Encyclopaedia is there to remind us that access to knowledge is a human endeavour and a right that sometimes has to be fought for. In a world where misinformation and authoritarianism are trying hard to make a comeback, any respectable philosopher has the duty to protect and preserve the right to freedom of thought, freedom of expression and knowledge.

Florimond Krins



Crime

Can We Do Something About It?

There is a plague that is wreaking havoc in our cities these days, causing distress, pain, and fear. I'm not talking about COVID¹, but about the pestilence of crime. In the United States it has been a political issue for big city mayors for many decades, much thought and money has been thrown at the problem, and yet the solution does not seem to be any closer. This is a problem we have not yet

found a vaccine for, despite the seeming efforts made in that direction.

Perhaps the solution is not to invent some new method or reform, but rather to apply what we already know? When we cannot find solutions in the present, it is sometimes helpful to consult the experience of humanity, epitomized by the sages of history. The ideas of the Confucian philosopher,

1. This article was first published in June, 2022.

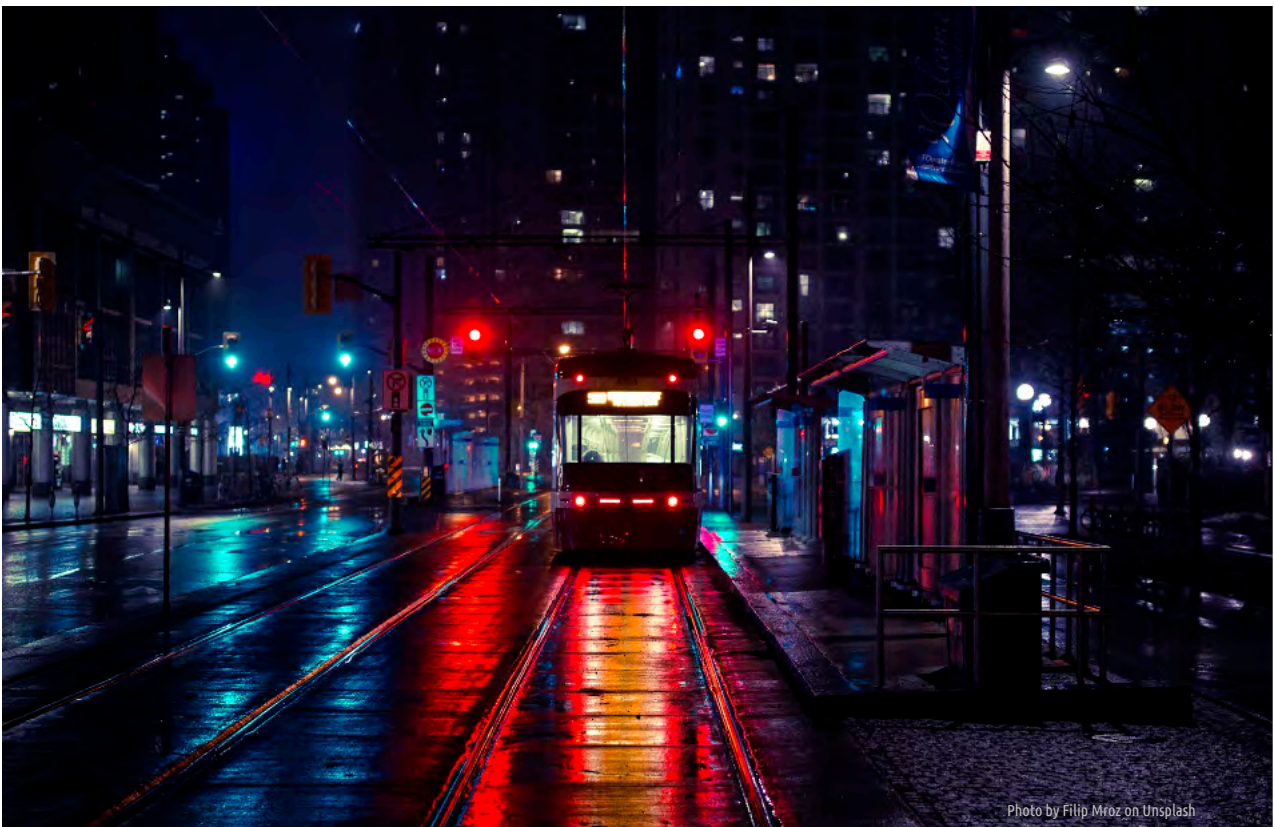


Photo by Filip Mroz on Unsplash

Mencius, for example, have a very interesting relevance to this topic.

Mencius (or Mengzi) was a Chinese philosopher who lived in the 4th century BCE, at the end of the Zhou dynasty, an era historians call “the Warring States period”. This period, as may be surmised by its name, was a period of constant conflicts between the different states that composed the Zhou kingdom. Those in power lived in constant fear of assassination and usurpation, and the common people lived under the constant burden of taxes, banditry, and warfare.

Mencius saw himself as a follower of Confucius, the great sage who lived a hundred years previously, saying: “*Ever since man came into this world, there has never been one greater than Confucius*” (2A2). He developed further an idea Confucius taught much about – benevolence or humaneness (*ren* 仁).

Despite the strife he must have witnessed throughout his life, Mencius believed that human beings are innately benevolent, and that within them there is a sprout of benevolence that needs to be nourished and extended so that it will grow into full fruition.

But if we are benevolent by nature, why do people resort to crime, according to Mencius?

It is of course difficult to generalize about crime, since there are different types of crime, and different types of criminals. Assuming, however, that we are discussing commonsense laws that aim to preserve the harmony of society (and not laws used as tools of repression), there are certain commonalities when it comes to the origins of crime.

First of all, people have basic needs – quality food, safe shelter, a social network, and so on. Most people will not have the inner means to overcome harsh circumstances of poverty and ignorance, and will turn to crime in situations where their survival is at stake. According to Mencius, if a person resorts to crime for these reasons, it is not entirely the criminal’s fault but the fault of those in charge who lack benevolence and do not comply with their duties.

“When people die, you simply say, ‘It is none of my doing.’ It is the fault of the harvest. In what way is that different from killing a man by running him through, while saying all the time, ‘It is none of my doing. It is the fault of the weapon.’ Is there any difference in killing him with a knife and killing him with misrule?” (1B 12)

Of course, there will always be individuals who can grow and prosper regardless of their circumstances. These are exceptional human beings who are like stubborn desert plants that can grow anywhere. Reality unfortunately demonstrates that these



Portrait of Mencius, Yuan dynasty (1279-1368), Wikimedia

people are a minority. Most people are like most plants, which require a resource-rich earth, balanced temperatures, and a supply of nutrients and water.

Nevertheless, even if one’s physical needs are satisfied, this is not enough. According to Mencius – “*The Way of the people is this: if they are full of food, have warm clothes, and live in comfort but are without instruction, then they come close to being animals*” (3A4).

For Mencius, human beings differ from animals since they have needs that transcend their biological cravings. In first world countries, for example, most people do not lack physical nourishment, but many lack emotional, intellectual, mental, and moral nourishment.



Education, however, is not just about imparting knowledge. *“To educate a person in the mind but not in morals is to educate a menace to society”*, as Theodore Roosevelt said. Education is also to teach self-mastery, coexistence, social harmony.

If the people have what they need but are uneducated, they will still resort to crime – out of boredom, laziness, or greed. That is the case of the “porch bandits”, who steal packages from porches.

If the people are only intellectually informed and not morally formed, crime will not end, but just become more sophisticated. That is the case of so-called white-collar crime.

People are not stealing packages or money laundering for the sake of survival, they are stealing because they lack self-control, and they are poisoned by greed.

While Mencius puts a lot of responsibility on society, he also speaks about the individual effort required by every citizen, and especially by those who have the responsibility of leading. These must make a constant effort of self-improvement and nourish the ‘sprouts’ of virtue within themselves.

Following the teachings of Confucius, Mencius sees the leader’s example of virtuous living as crucial, and therefore, not anyone could or should be a leader. Real leaders will bring more social harmony, greater striving by the people, and as a side effect, less crime.

Mencius, moreover, sees the ruler as a servant of the people. Governing is then an act of sacrifice, of putting one’s personal self aside in order to serve society.

“Of the first importance are the people, next comes the good of land and grains, and of the least importance is the ruler.” (Mencius, 7B:14)

Finally, the moral authority of the leader comes from being a supreme example of what they ask of the people. After all, how can leaders ask people to act better than they do?

In some way, Mencius is not telling us anything that we do not already know. While we cannot treat crime simplistically, there is no doubt that if all people would have their basic needs met and received quality education based on lasting human values, levels of crime would decline significantly.

The real question is not why there is crime, but why are these things not provided to all people when we have the means to do so...

What would it take to make it so?

Also, are the people in charge providing a moral example?

If not, what would it take to make it so?

Perhaps it is not that we don’t have a vaccine for crime, it is that we do not want to use it...

Gilad Sommer, Director of New Acropolis in Chicago, USA.

Graffiti

A Not So Modern Form of Self-Expression

Today, graffiti is an integral part of life in big cities. It is regarded as vandalism by some, while others think of it as a form of street art, a visual expression. Famous graffiti such as the works of Banksy that go viral quickly and can attract many viewers and visitors, often have deeper meanings, which reflect the issues of contemporary societies (e.g. war, solitude, corruption, etc.). But graffiti exists not only in modern or postmodern societies. If we look back in time, we can find many Banksies and graffiti makers, most of them anonymous.

People tend to leave marks that symbolize themselves. These traces can be simple, like leaving one's name on a wall. Lovers often carved their names into stones or trees with a heart, or people who reached a remote place left their monogram as proof that they had been there. The most ancient graffiti has been found in caves, alongside large scale mural paintings. In ancient Egypt, pyramid workers and tomb builders engraved their marks on the stones, but later visitors, like the Romans, left graffiti on the sites as well. They were a bit like an



ancient form of TripAdvisor, where people left remarks about what they liked and what they disliked about a place. Some graffiti in ancient Rome had political messages, some advertised products, others communicated miscellaneous information. Political graffiti would appear during times of conflict, criticizing notable politicians. According to Plutarch, Brutus was persuaded to assassinate Julius Caesar by such writings, and Suetonius records that the public began to hate Nero after they saw graffiti criticizing him. Of course, such political graffiti was punished by the government. However, graffiti was widely used as a



source of information. According to historian Peter Keegan¹, graffiti in ancient cities was left at busy places that were visited by many people, like temples, shops, arenas and brothels. The messages were mostly aimed at locals. Graffiti was also popular in the Middle Ages and sometimes these drawings tell us more about the people of the time than the official historical documents, because they reveal the voice of the public.

In modern times, graffiti has often been seen as an illegal or barbaric act. Gustave Flaubert, the French writer, regarded graffiti as barbarism or stupidity. When he visited Alexandria in the 1850s, he was horrified to find so much graffiti on ancient buildings and sculptures. Jean-Paul Sartre, who cited Flaubert in his book, *The Family Idiot*, said that graffiti is found all over the world, and those who use this technique are not interested in the monument, but in making their existence as famous as the monument, so that they can touch eternity.

But it is important to distinguish here between the graffiti of the period and later inscriptions. While contemporary graffiti tells us a lot about the age when a monument was built, enabling historians to learn from them, later graffiti, especially people's names or opinions, do not add much additional value. So, for example, if a piece of graffiti was made during Roman times, it can be regarded as a historical source, while the tourists from later centuries who write their names or put marks on the walls or statues to show that they were there, are just regarded as doodles.

In Jack London's novel, *The Road*, the author speaks about his wandering years when he travelled across the country and the hobos and bums left marks at railway stations to let others know about which places were friendly or unfriendly to them. So, graffiti was often used as a form of communication in times when there was no internet, television or mobile phones.

The modern graffiti that we know was born in Philadelphia in the 1960s, as Hal Marcovitz notes in his book, *The Art of Graffiti*. People used nicknames and symbols to mark that they had been there. Later, graffiti was used to symbolize the borders of gang territories. It seems that the desire to leave marks behind us is as old as mankind. And it is not connected to a particular culture, race or status. Rich and poor, educated and uneducated people, have all left traces behind them in all ages. Graffiti is a form of self-expression, a way of communicating feelings, thoughts, information or just the simple fact that someone lived and was there.

Istvan Orban

1. Peter Keegan, *Graffiti in Antiquity* (Routledge, 2014)

Beethoven and the Sublime

Reading about the life of Beethoven reminded me of what was said of the Sumerian hero Gilgamesh, that he was two-thirds divine and one-third human, and that his human part made him a very difficult character to live with. If you listen to Beethoven's music – the 'Eroica' (3rd) Symphony, the 'Emperor' (5th) Piano Concerto, the 'Pathétique', 'Appassionata' and 'Moonlight' sonatas, to mention but a few of his most famous works – you may be able to recognize that 'divine' part of the composer. And if you read John Suchet's trilogy on the life of Beethoven¹, or any biography of Beethoven, you

will see that human side which could at times be insufferable, even to his closest friends. In this article, I will look at both these aspects and consider what it tells us about art, the artist, idealism, humanity and life in general.

For those unfamiliar with the man and his music, here are a few details about his life and work.

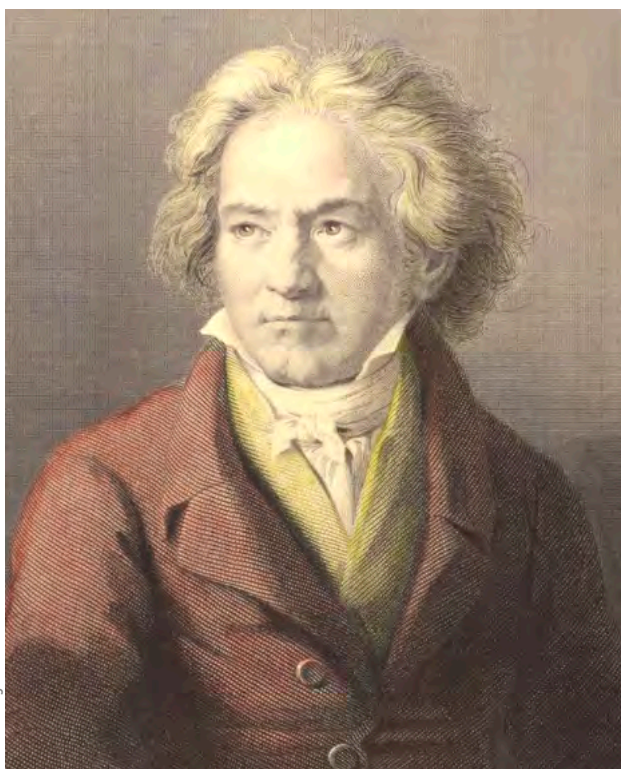
Ludwig van Beethoven was born in 1770 in Bonn, on the banks of the majestic River Rhine, and in the shadow of the Drachenfels mountain, where the legendary battle between Siegfried and the dragon

1. *The Last Master: a fictional biography of Ludwig van Beethoven*, by John Suchet. Warner Books, 2000.



is said to have taken place. From his earliest years, the young Beethoven was strangely attracted to it and admired its craggy and towering presence, perhaps in anticipation of the elemental power of the music he would later create.

He was a 'different' child, which his grandfather, also Ludwig, chief court musician (Kappelmeister) at Bonn, recognized as marking out a great musical destiny, but which disturbed his parents, especially his dissolute father, also a court musician, but one who wasted his talents in the local taverns. As he ran out of money, he decided to train his son as a child prodigy, like Mozart, and used to come home from the pub in the early hours of the morning,



Source image: Wikimedia.com

wake him up and force him to practise for hours on end. Ludwig also stood out as different at school and suffered on this account as well.

What helped him deal with all this adversity in childhood was a very determined, even obstinate, will, and the conviction that he was destined to become a great musician. He was also inspired throughout his life by the memory of his grandfather, who died when he was only three or four, but who treated him with special respect and affection.

He was equally determined not to be a court musician, but to make his own way, as Mozart had to some extent. As soon as he could, he managed to make it to Vienna, the musical capital of Europe at the time, where he had a brief meeting with Mozart, who taught him an unforgettable lesson: "the simple themes are the best". It is interesting to see how, if someone is receptive, a short meeting and a single teaching can accompany them for the rest of their life, becoming a lasting influence. You can hear an example of one of these simple themes in the Adagio (2nd movement) of his Pathétique sonata.

In Vienna, he began to receive the patronage of several aristocrats, such as Prince Lichnowsky, Prince Lobkowitz and Archduke Rudolph, the Emperor's brother.

He had a love of 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity' – the ideals of the French Revolution, and it was for this reason that he was initially a supporter of Napoleon, who at the time was conquering the rest of Europe. He saw the 'humble Corsican' as ushering in a new age that would sweep away the injustices of the class system and lead to a world where 'all men shall be brothers', as the lyrics of the Ode to Joy at the end of his 9th Symphony say. But when Napoleon had himself crowned emperor, Beethoven became disillusioned and withdrew the dedication of his 3rd Symphony to 'Bonaparte', dedicating it instead to Prince Lobkowitz.

He was always happiest in the company of musicians, with some of whom he would drink at a tavern called The Swan. Several of his friends helped him in his musical labours and in the practical aspects of his life, but he was often rude and overbearing both to them and to his long-suffering servants and landlords, whose tenants would often complain about his habit of playing the piano and stamping about in the middle of the night.

A turning point in Beethoven's life came when he was staying in Heiligenstadt, a small town outside Vienna, where he had gone to compose. It was there that he came to the realization that he was becoming increasingly deaf, a fact which plunged

him into despair, above all because of its implications for his music. Indeed, he soon became incapable of performing or conducting. But the worst did not happen: he could still compose because he could hear the music in his head and write it down. Eventually, he didn't even need the piano to compose any more.

In the depths of his despair he wrote his Last Will – the so-called Heiligenstadt Testament, most of which is not about the disposal of his meagre assets, but about his love of humanity, and how he was misunderstood as being a 'misanthrope' (a hater of mankind), which he attributed to his deafness, which made him avoid the company of others because he could not communicate with them.

I would now like to look at the contrast between his sublime music and his often dreadful character. I wondered several times while reading about his life why his friends and patrons put up with him and seemed not only to admire his music, but to have had a genuine love and affection for him, despite his frequent rudeness, unreasonableness and sometimes even cruelty. I came to the conclusion that it was because they could see that Beethoven's sublime music was a true expression of his own soul, a soul that was full of beauty and love for humanity. Knowing him well, they could see through his rough exterior to the better self within and so forgave him his many faults.

After meeting Beethoven, the poet Goethe wrote to his wife: "Today I met the composer Beethoven. A more ardent, spirited, profound artist I have never met. I can fully understand why the world marvels at him so." The next day, after a further meeting, he wrote again: "Beethoven's talent amazes me. He plays exquisitely. But unfortunately he has an absolutely uncontrolled personality. Admittedly he is not wrong in finding the world detestable, and yet by so doing he does not make it any more pleasant either for himself or for others. At the same time he deserves to be greatly forgiven and greatly pitied, for his deafness is increasing..."

I think Goethe expresses it well. Some geniuses, like Goethe himself and the composer Haydn, were very well-rounded individuals. Others, like

Beethoven, were not. Again, we come back to the 'two-thirds divine and one-third human'. Regarding the human part, some deal with it better than others, and some are faced with more difficult circumstances in life.

What did Beethoven think of his fellow genius, Goethe? Here is his somewhat scathing comment to his publisher, after he had seen Goethe bowing to the Empress (which he himself refused to do): "Goethe delights far too much in the court



Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Oil painting by Joseph Karl Stieler, 1828.. Wikimedia.

atmosphere, far more than is becoming for a poet. How can one criticize other virtuosi in this respect when even poets, who should be regarded as the foremost teachers of the nation, can forget everything else when confronted with that glitter?"

As regards his music, I have used the word 'sublime', because I think it encapsulates its quality. Beethoven had many troubles in his life apart from his deafness, from frustrated love affairs to family problems and many others. But in my view, none of this comes through into his music. Rather, when he was composing, he 'escaped' from his problems and his character. He went to be with his soul. He went to a 'musical heaven' where he heard the music which he then transposed into his works.



Thus we can hear in his music all kinds of emotions, but all of them are devoid of any baseness or impurity. There are heroic, noble emotions, there is beauty, mystery and even magic; there is tenderness, love in its highest sense, images of gentle streams or violent storms, and there is also joy, vigour and cheerfulness.

This music, which was offered as a gift for humanity from the higher part of Beethoven's soul, has indeed had a transformative effect on thousands, perhaps millions of human beings. At a certain point in his 5th Symphony (the one with the famous opening), a veteran old soldier stood up spontaneously, unable to contain himself, and cried out "Long live the Emperor!" (It was the time after the liberation of Vienna and the defeat of Napoleon). And many individuals have written about how Beethoven's music has literally saved their lives, because of its message of triumph over adversity.

The founder of New Acropolis, Jorge Livraga, once wrote that "art without a message is like an envelope without a letter". So what was Beethoven's message? In his own words, he said (according to Suchet): "my music teaches what life is about". This may seem a bit vague from a rationalist perspective, but it is really very profound. Life cannot be put in a box, but it IS, and it is everywhere and in everything. He was not just referring to physical life, or even energy. As John Suchet has Beethoven say at some point: "I am not describing nature, I am creating it in sound." And elsewhere he says: "It's

not just the notes themselves, it's what lies behind them." Similarly, life is not just physical nature, it is what lies behind it. So when he writes the 'Pastoral' Symphony (No. 6), for example, he is not imitating the sounds of birdsong with the flute or piccolo, he is transmitting to us what is behind those sounds. Plato criticized 'imitative art' and I think Beethoven would have agreed with him. He did not imitate, he created – with the help, as he himself admitted, of his 'muse' – one of those muses that the ancient Greeks pictured as the nine followers of Apollo, the great god of music and beauty, or the Hindus symbolized in the form of the heavenly Gandharvas.

None of us can compose music like Beethoven's, but thanks to his heroic efforts to give form to what was inside him, we can all travel to the land of the soul and experience the beauty, mystery, magic, glory and serene joy of that 'musical heaven'.

Julian Scott

Literature

Art or Entertainment?

A story, like anything in life really, is composed of its superficial aspect and its inner core or essence. This essence is what makes a story worth reading and a life worth living. Notwithstanding that, it seems that many people base their existence on the idea that surface is what matters most. In the art world, masses of people appreciate works that are clever, revolutionary, and that do something supposedly unseen before. The meaning is

important, but it doesn't matter much what it actually is, as long as maybe you can identify with it, or find it clever, revolutionary, and supposedly unseen before.

We are generalizing, but the idea is that we want to be amused, surprised, entertained or, at best, learn new things. And then we move on to whatever is next. It is similar to what Dostoevsky said, while talking about young men ready to die for a cause:



Photo by Mohit Khatri on Unsplash

These young men unhappily fail to understand that the sacrifice of life is, in many cases, the easiest of all sacrifices, and that to sacrifice, for instance, five or six years of their seething youth to hard and tedious study, if only to multiply tenfold their powers of serving the truth and the cause they have set before them as their goal – such a sacrifice is utterly beyond the strength of many of them.

How many stylish deaths we die every time we jump not only onto the next series or mystery novel but also the next spiritual book, clever teacher, or bite-sized cheat-code to improve our lives and so on and so forth? The pattern is the same.

But why is entertainment so popular? Can I please be made to understand why do I want to read another chapter instead of washing the dishes? To answer these important questions, we need to endeavour to understand what entertainment is. Entertainment is easy. It is the path of least resistance. It is style and perceived innovation, craftiness and craft, but at the service of what? It does most of the work for you and leaves you somewhat satisfied, craving for more, and ultimately empty. Pretty much like carbs.

While entertainment gives you transitory pleasure, a real story transforms you. Entertainment is hollow, and if we want to be a bit dramatic, we could say that it is the perfect pastime for a society that has alienated itself from what it means to be human, that doesn't care for what is true and beautiful, and that just loves to be addicted to the next exciting thing. Pay attention, entertainment is an experience that leaves you with nothing but an exciting memory that will fade, just as the part of you that enjoys it will.

But is there something wrong in just wanting to have a laugh or to be thrilled? Do we have to feel guilty for not spending all of our time in philosophical lucubrations? Do we really have to struggle in the mud for anything worthwhile in this life?

We set off looking for answers, and we are left with more questions. Look how I struggle, lost in this dichotomy. It sapped my energies, and now I just want to crawl into bed. But I'm already writing this from my bed! Perhaps the solution lies in finding some balance by introducing a mysterious third element.

The simple fact of the matter is that, if a brave character in a pulp novel inspires you to be better, the lowest entertainment will have changed your life, it will have transformed you. And that's the



Photo by Laura Barbato on Unsplash

double key of it. Entertainment gives you transitory pleasure, and a real story transforms you. The best stories? They do both. But the truth is that in any story, entertainment and true art are intertwined. Any play of shadow and light is ultimately a representation of the highest. But the middle point, the third element and ultimate arbiter of what entertains you and what transforms you, that is always you, the person who experiences the story.

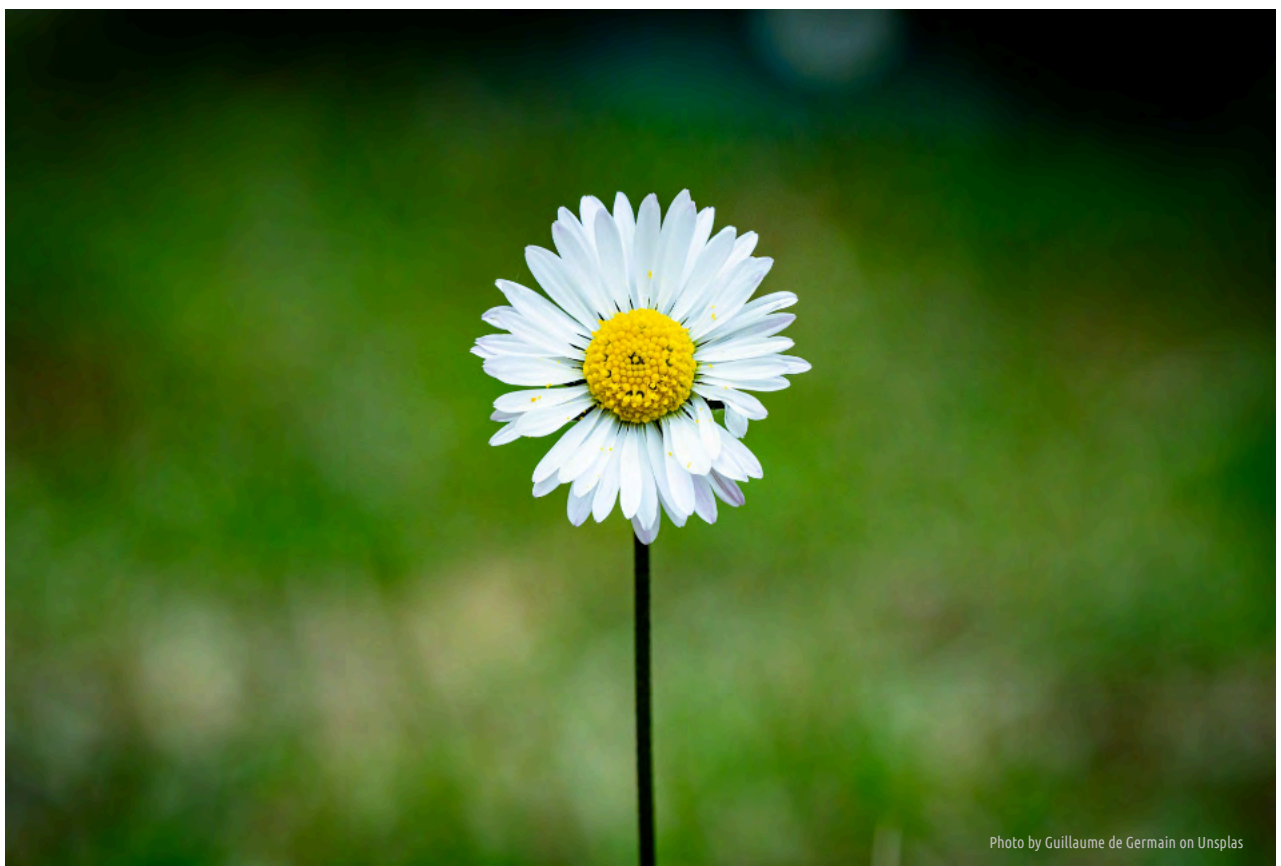
Mattia Miranda

Some Thoughts on Humility

Humility, is a virtue that I have come to understand as a great harmoniser, a golden lyre the soul can use to make life into an ever more beautiful music. Humility will cool down the harsh sounds of our ego and warm up the strings of our spiritual resonance. The magic of making inner steps emerges as we accept the ground on which we stand. In this sense we 'quit the evasions' (Epictetus) and we compose ourselves. With

humility, we have less need to wear masks because we can accept ourselves more fully 'as we are'. It may not be today, but tomorrow – why not? Through making contact with our weaknesses, genuine transformation becomes possible.

Less need to wear masks makes us less afraid, which brings the additional benefit of greater soul freedom. We pretend less, waste less time trying to maintain ourselves in postures we have already





outgrown. Humility helps to dissipate the superficial obstacles that adorn many areas of materialistic life. What we 'try to show' to others over time will 'matter less', not because we become 'care-less' but because our centre shifts away from prioritizing how we appear towards how we know ourselves internally to 'Be'. Humility moves us into our heart and into the benevolent inner atmosphere where we can behold ourselves naturally and openly.

With skilful use, humility can help us to adapt and counter the numerous forms of pride which ensnare us daily. Arrogance is a more-or-less obvious form but as a teacher of mine once wrote, there is another dangerous form which we could call 'delusions of uselessness'. In this form we may think ourselves truly humble because we have adopted a posture of 'I can't', but this is a false form of humility. We can recognize the inner posture as false when it denies us the freedom of conscious action. Under many circumstances conscious action can be biding our time and waiting, but the difference in attitude between conscious waiting and 'I can't' is inwardly very significant... We develop our potential step by step, sometimes our steps are small and sometimes we make impossible leaps forwards that defy reason. What matters most is the direction and the continuity of the direction.

As we gradually lose more masks and gradually gain more freedom, we become more accustomed to facing difficulties and having some internal victories too. As we understand our inner landscape better,

the terrain is less alien, but then, at some unsuspecting moment we are likely to be led to more difficult encounters. In particular I am thinking of those with Trust. Do I trust where it is all heading? Do I trust myself? Do I trust that I and all those whom I see suffering are held by life? The encounter with trust is for some, one of the hardest. When facing this abyss, humility will put us at the foot of the mountain, looking up at the mountain. The knowledge of where we've been before and the mystery ahead gently obliges us to go forwards. Humility will never turn us towards meaninglessness or set us apart from life. In those moments of deep despair, humility will return us to ourselves, which is to return us to the root of the mystery. The inner sound of consolation that says, 'whatever has happened, tomorrow we can do it better, the sun will rise again and so will we.'

I could summarize by saying that the virtue of humility is an antidote to isolation and to materialism, a virtue that when lived, puts things in perspective and by doing so restores us to our place in the whole. Plotinus said "Without virtue, God is only a word" and we could continue by saying that with virtue, 'God', the divine or spiritual resonance and our highest values, reveal themselves as a present reality within and around us.

Siobhan Farrar

In Search of Harmony: a Mythic Journey Across Cultures

***"Harmony is the source of
manifestation,
the cause of its existence, and
the medium between God and man."***

Hazrat Inayat Khan

Throughout history and across civilizations, harmony has been an eternal companion to humanity. No age or culture has existed without its presence. It has taken form as a goddess – Harmonia, Concordia – or has been present as a divinity of truth, order and justice – Ma'at, Asha,

Themis. Sometimes, it has been embodied in a nurturing force – Nuwa, Lakshmi, Saraswati – caring for the world and humanity, or as a civilizing deity or hero – Quetzalcoatl, Enki – establishing the foundations of order, giving knowledge and structures of life.

The myths weave the stories of the beginning, when the primordial forces set creation in motion. Before even time existed, law and truth were present in the nascent universe. Ancient Egyptian Ma'at, the embodiment of truth and harmony, ensured that life unfolded in a just and balanced flow, preventing



The Harmony of Spheres. Etching by Agostino Carracci, 1589. Wellcome collection

collapse into chaos. Asha, the Zoroastrian principle of divine order, inscribed righteousness into the fabric of existence, guiding creation toward the light of truth. Even when the order fractured, the power of life and balance restored it. Caring for her children, Chinese Nuwa repaired the broken pillars of heaven, crafting a world where equilibrium returned.

The immutable laws of nature were established, harmony reigned and existence thrived under its rhythm. The ancient Greek Titaness, Themis, provided Zeus with wise counsel to maintain the just order of the world, and her children, the Horai, ensured it for the whole of manifestation: each representing fair judgement and justice (Dike), good order (Eunomia) and peace (Eirene). The Sumerian Lord of the Earth, Enki, became the

to unravel the strands of justice. Druj, the whisperer of deceit, waged an unrelenting war against Asha's luminous order. Eris, the mischievous goddess of strife, accompanied many conflicts and cast her golden apple among the gods, igniting a fire of discord that ultimately led to the Trojan War.

Yet in this world of dualities, within the conflict of opposites lay a deeper revelation. Opposing forces move life and provide a choice to us of what to create, since harmony, like life is not static, but dynamic and requires renewal over numerous cycles of time. Harmony does not shy away from the conflict of opposites, but channels their energy to create a new order. As the ancient Greek myth tells us, Harmonia herself, born from the union of Ares and Aphrodite – war and love – embodied the truth that harmony is not the absence of struggle



Edward John Poynter - Horae Serenae, 1894. Wikimedia

keeper of Me – the gifts of civilization, a collection of divine laws governing the universe, society and humans that ensured harmony between all beings. Thus, the ancient wisdom taught that harmony is the force that holds the universe together, unseen but omnipresent.

But no order remains untouched by disruption and the wheel of time devours established balance. As life unfolded and humans populated the world, discord grew. Isfet, the adversary of Ma'at, sought

but its reconciliation. The myth contains another revelation: not all opposition ends in harmony. Ares and Aphrodite had other children – Phobos and Deimos – Panic and Terror. Harmony, then, is not a given – it must be sought, cultivated, and understood.

But how does one attain it? How does one receive its gifts?

Throughout history, civilizations have invoked harmony as the foundation of just rule and societal

well-being. In the courts of the Pharaohs, Ma'at was perceived as a living principle, the heart of governance and law. In the halls of Rome, the statesmen turned to Concordia. Her temple at the foot of the Capitoline Hill served as meeting place for the Roman Senate at the critical moments of history, embodying the aspiration for fairness and the possibility of reconciliation and unity in the face of divisions. Harmony intertwined with truth and justice was not a distant dream but a principle upon which the civilization could develop, like the universe at the beginning of time. It could nourish solidarity and reciprocity for the life of communities and the state to flourish. When its laws were honoured, prosperity followed; when abandoned, discord took root.

However, the true dwelling place for harmony is the human soul. The sages of old taught that the world's harmony must first be cultivated within. The wise knew that harmony was not an external gift but an individual achievement. The ancient Egyptian scales of justice weighed the heart of a deceased – a lifetime's worth of choices – against Maat's feather of truth. It was during life that a human being had a chance to work on themselves, on their weaknesses and impurities, and reconcile inner conflicts so that their heart would become a light abode of virtues, and their life a true manifestation of the harmony between their aspirations, thoughts, feelings and actions.



Statue of Maat. Wikimedia

The ancient Greeks tell another story of harmony earned through self-refinement – the story of Cadmus, a legendary founder of Thebes, who with the help of wisdom (Athena), after being initiated in the mysteries, was granted the right to marry Harmonia. And their wedding was an unsurpassable feast, with all the gods attending, rejoicing and bringing gifts. And their life afterwards was a glorious and happy union and adventure, culminating in their ascension to Elysium.

Harmony, though seemingly distant, never truly vanishes. It is hidden in the rhythms of nature, in the wisdom of ancient texts and myths, in the silent yearning of the human heart. Ever-present and elusive, it is calling, waiting to be remembered, to be reclaimed, to be restored again and again in our world.

Nataliya Petlevych

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Statue of Concordia by Ludwig von Hofer, 1863. Wikimedia



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