

Issue No. 32

JAN-FEB

2019

NewAcropolis

Philosophy and Education for the Future

Bi-Monthly Magazine

SOCIETY

The Masses in
Modern Philosophy

SCIENCE

Science and the Media

ESOTERICA

Chinese Alchemy
and Immortality

PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy of History –
a Key to the Past, the Present
and the Future





NEW ACROPOLIS

Philosophy and Education for the Future

About Us

NEW ACROPOLIS is an international organization working in the fields of philosophy, culture and volunteering. Our aim is to revive philosophy as a means of renewal and transformation and to offer a holistic education that can develop both our human potential as well as the practical skills needed in order to meet the challenges of today and to create a better society for the next generation.

For further details please visit :
WWW.NEWACROPOLISUK.ORG

Editorial Team

Sabine Leitner - Director

Julian Scott - Editor

Agostino Dominici - Project
Manager and Designer

Natalia Lema - Public Relations

 **Philosophy
Culture
Volunteering**
NEW ACROPOLIS

What's Inside

EDITORIAL 04



PHILOSOPHY
Philosophy of
History - a Key
to the Past,
the Present and
the Future

05



ESOTERICA 11
Chinese Alchemy
and Immortality



SOCIETY 09
The Masses
in Modern
Philosophy



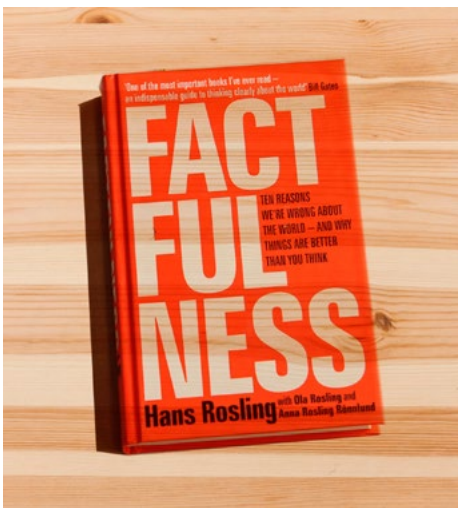
ART 13
Anglo-Saxon
Kingdoms
Art & Sacred
Work in the
English
Middle Ages

13



CULTURE 15
Ashurbanipal
and his Library

15



SCIENCE & NATURE 17
Science and
the Media

17

MYTHS OF THE WORLD 19
The Kalevala

19



Editorial

Equality and excellence

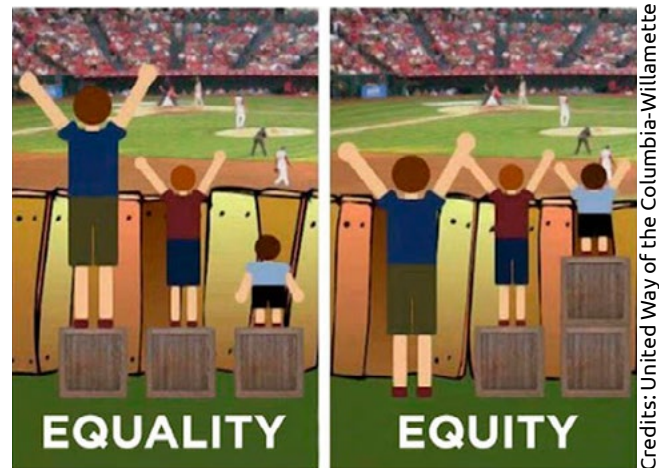
Imagine you were in charge of a school where students come from a wide range of backgrounds, with some academically highly gifted students and some who are educationally disadvantaged. You were given some extra funding for your students and you need to make a decision as to how to use these funds in their best interest.

In the name of equality, you could make sure that every student receives the same benefit. However, this would not help to 'level the playing field' for those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds because it would do nothing to reduce the gap between their achievements and those of the gifted and talented. Alternatively, you could in the name of equality of opportunity give the money to the educationally disadvantaged to make up for their unequal starting points. However, this would not take into consideration the needs of the gifted and talented, who also need more resources in order to reach their full potential.

Whichever way you decided (and there are of course many more possibilities), your decision would always reflect a certain world view and the preference of certain values over others. This is unavoidable, but we should be aware that whenever we give importance to one value, other values often become unconsciously suppressed. For example, a society that values courage highly, might frown upon the expression of fear.

Since we value equality highly, excellence is often (unintentionally) not encouraged, since it seems to create more differences. An example would be the widespread practice of giving every child a medal for participating in a sports event, not just those who excelled. However, these good intentions might stifle the gifted and talented children to strive for more.

The danger of levelling everything and reducing it to a common denominator (in the above case the simple participation in a sports event and the effort thereby shown) was already recognised almost 200 years ago by the French historian Alexis de Tocqueville who travelled the United States extensively and wrote



about his observations: "Uncritical egalitarianism poses a threat to excellence, seen by democratic man as an easily removable cause of envy and exclusion."

It is very important that we understand that equality is not about making everyone the same or treating everyone in the same way. In fact, there are no two things in the world that are absolutely 'the same' and treating different things in the same way can create enormous injustice. If I gave exactly the same amount of water to all my house plants, I would have killed half of them by now. It seems to me that our quest for equality is actually a quest for equity, which is fairness and justice. And justice in the classical sense is about giving everyone what they need in order to flourish. But this also implies that justice is therefore determined by our nature (a cactus needs less water than other plants) and not by opinion (as Cicero already observed more than 2000 years ago).

In order to be truly just, it is necessary to see and understand the nature of the whole human being, recognise the individual's unique inner excellence and try to support their 'becoming' in the world. A popular quote (wrongly attributed to Albert Einstein) says that "Everyone is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid." In the example of the school above: EVERY child should receive what it needs in order to flourish. But not all children have to learn how to climb a tree, fly through the air or swim in the sea (although they have a right to do so).

Sabine Leitner

Philosophy of HISTORY

a Key to the Past, the Present and the Future

There is an old Eastern saying which states: “The Past Time is the Present Time, as also the Future, which, though it has not come into existence, still is.” In the Eastern view of time, reality exists beyond the temporal realm and what we experience as separate stages are actually part of a simultaneous reality. This is an interesting concept, implying that the past still exists, the

present is but a fleeting moment and the future already exists in the blueprint of nature. It would be one way of explaining the many instances of prophecy that have been recorded in history.

In the West, Philosophy of History is a more methodical discipline that studies the significance of human history, if any, and asks whether it has any purpose or meaning. It raises questions such as, are there any general



principles, laws and patterns in history? Is there a direction or meaning in history? Can we use history to predict the future? What lessons can we learn from history? Let us look at these questions one by one.

Are there any general principles, laws and patterns in history?

We can start with the principle of unpredictability: in other words, figures arise or events occur at certain times in history and have a tremendous effect, but their appearance is rarely predicted. One example of this was the appearance of fascism in the 1930s. Surprisingly for us today, almost no political commentators saw it coming, and everyone was taken aback by its mass appeal. A similar case is that of certain outstanding historical figures, such as Alexander the Great or Napoleon. Who would have guessed that the ruler of a small Macedonian kingdom would have set out to conquer the world at the age of 18 and, by the time he died at the age of 33, had taken his campaigns as far as India? Or that an obscure Corsican would be crowned Emperor of France and bring havoc to Europe with his 'Napoleonic Wars'?

At the same time, however, there is a logic to history. Things do happen for a reason, or rather, for a variety of reasons. It is the multiplicity of factors that makes history difficult to interpret and predict. Among the factors that influence the development of events are geography and climate (e.g. the presence of rivers is conducive to stable civilizations, while icy wastes or deserts are not), economics, philosophy and religion, to name but a few. How can we understand the development of Islamic civilization, for example, if we ignore the religious factor which was at the heart of its expansion?

Another principle is that of cyclicity. There are cycles of civilization which follow one another and grow out of one another. No civilization is permanent. In Europe, practically every nation has had its day

of glory: the Spanish, the Austrians and Hungarians, the British... but then they were eclipsed by others.

What causes civilizations to die?

This is another natural law. It is partly due to 'time' which erodes all things. But it is also partly due to the loss of values, in particular spiritual values, since a sense of transcendent meaning is what gives a human being, and



therefore also a civilization its sense of purpose. If these values are lost, then the civilization will lose its *raison d'être* and, like a plant deprived of sunlight, will eventually wither and die.

Is there a direction or meaning in history?

Are there forces at work that are driving history?

Most people in the past believed this, but it is an unfashionable idea today. Such forces have been called gods, providence, destiny, fate, karma... Today, they are often called 'economics'.

However, the belief in higher powers influencing human events is not an irrational one, because there are many events in history that could make us think there is some higher force other than chance at work. One example of this was

when China had decided to invade Japan and an enormous fleet set sail which would certainly have defeated the Japanese. But a great storm unexpectedly blew up and sank almost the entire Chinese fleet. The Japanese called it the Kami Kaze, or Divine Wind (Kami are spirits in Japanese religion).

Today we tend to reject this possibility, not because it is illogical, but because, collectively, we do not believe in gods or spirits and we believe, on the other hand, that everything happens by

What generally happens in history is that many elements are lost, later to be replaced by very different forms.

As an example, we can look at the civilizations of Greece and Rome. The power of Greece collapsed when it was eclipsed by Alexander the Great in the fourth century BC. But it did not disappear completely. Many of its cultural elements, such as its art and religion, were passed to Rome, which incorporated them into its own life.



chance. In antiquity, the belief in chance ruling all was generally regarded by its most eminent philosophers, such as Plotinus, as absurd.

Returning to the Eastern concept of time mentioned at the beginning of this article, if in some way the future already exists – in the archetypal world – then there would be forces guiding human history towards the fulfilment of those archetypes in time.

Can we use history to predict the future?

Will the global civilization of today survive the present crises (ecological, economic, demographic, spiritual, etc.)?

Rome suffered a similar fate: when it fell, in the 5th-6th centuries AD, some of its forms (philosophical, cultural, institutional, etc.) were taken over by Christians in the West, and later by Muslims in the East. Some of these forms survived right up until the early 20th century or even later, such as architecture, law and systems of government and administration.

As for our own civilization, we could speculate that, unless everything is destroyed in some nuclear or natural catastrophe, some of the scientific and cultural elements of our present civilization will be transferred to a new civilization that will gradually take its place,

but that new civilization will be based on a very different set of values.

We tend to think that the future will be an extension of the present, but history shows that this is never the case. Rome was very different from Greece. Medieval Europe was very different from Rome. And our technological civilization could not be more different from that of the Middle Ages. We could imagine that in the future people might entirely lose interest in gadgets and technology and become fascinated by parapsychology and mysticism – something almost unthinkable today – but if we study history we will see that outlooks do change in such radical ways.

What lessons can we learn from history?

There are many lessons to be learned from the study of history. It is full of instruction about human nature, destiny, politics... Will and Ariel Durant, in their book *The Lessons of History*, suggest that one tendency we can see in history is for wealth to become concentrated in the hands of a few, to the extent that the many become increasingly poor and a risk of a destructive revolution arises. We can see it happening right now on a global scale, with the gap between rich and poor growing every year. This has happened many times before in history and occasionally the situation has been rectified before it was too late. In many other cases, like the French and Russian revolutions, the forces of violence took over and caused widespread destruction and loss of life.

Another lesson of history is the hope and inspiration we can gain from it. Often people have the view that history is a catalogue of disasters, or (as Shakespeare's Macbeth says about life) 'a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing'. But there are figures in history who clearly work for the common good, rather than out of self-interest, even though sometimes their reforms are undone by people with vested interests. What we can learn from this is that while the wicked are powerful in the world and perhaps always have

been, there are also those who selflessly fight against evil and strive, with some success, to re-establish the good.

Even in the case of military conquerors of whom we may not approve today, people like Alexander the Great or Napoleon, we can learn from them their spirit of 'nothing is impossible'. The famous battle of Crécy, in the Middle Ages, for example, was won by Edward III despite the fact that he was numerically outnumbered by the French by



five to one and most of his commanders advised him to turn back. Often such conquerors are undone in the end, and this would be another lesson to learn, the lesson that there are limits to human achievements in this world and that the great danger in such situations is 'hubris' or pride.

Beyond all the lessons of history, however, philosophy of history is about understanding the nature and destiny of humanity, and this implies going back to the philosophical question of the nature and destiny of the human being.

Julian Scott

The **MASSSES** in Modern Philosophy

In the last century, the role of the masses grew immensely in importance and affected both culture and politics. Philosophy has been using the term masses and mass societies since the 19th century, but we can find statements about masses of people earlier, even in the works of the classical Greek thinkers like Plato. He argued against the rule of the people as, in his view, it leads to chaos and anarchy. The members of the masses are all equal and they demand equality, which he believes is not possible to reach in reality, as there are differences between us. For Plato, the best approach is to pursue justice so that everyone gets what they need and deserve.

Agreeing with Plato, the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) argued against the rule of the masses too. He believed that society is a dynamic unity of a minority of people who

have inner standards and specific qualities and the masses which are made up of ordinary people, who just go with the flow and have no specific aims or values. Though the masses are usually thought of as consisting of people from the 'lower' classes, especially the working class, Ortega y Gasset says that they come every class of society, regardless of socio-economic or other type of background.

Technical development boosts the power of the masses, but they are not aware of how much power they have. "Today, by the very fact that everything seems possible to us, we have a feeling that the worst of all is possible: retrogression, barbarism, decadence" – he wrote ten years before the Second World War. The rise of the many in politics he calls the revolt of the masses. Ortega y Gasset states that mass societies do not really care about where prosperity comes from; they are just looking



for comfort. But prosperity comes from constant effort, planning and imagination. Hence the masses need aims and management, otherwise they easily become disorganized and can fall back into anarchy.

Against this very elitist perspective, left-wingers, such as Marxists, have regarded the masses as the main source of transformation in societies. They believed that the time had arrived for the oppressed class to seize power, take control of the means of production and redistribute the wealth that had previously been appropriated by the oppressive classes. This alternative believes in the self-awareness of the working class, which they called the proletariat.

According to Elias Canetti, although the masses may seem spontaneous, there is always a core around which they gather. People feel safe and unlimited within the crowd, even though they lose their own personality and act as part of the unity. In a mass, responsibility is divided among the many, so there is no one who can be blamed. Even the leaders of the masses are just members of the unknown, faceless crowd, which means they can be quickly replaced. The individual does not count in the mass, only the number of people; hence quantity is worth more in mass societies than

Ultimately, masses are passive and they need an active force to grow and move.

quality. Ultimately, masses are passive and they need an active force to grow and move. This role is taken by the elites that diverge from the crowd and

form a separate sphere within society.

Hannah Arendt, who wrote on the masses in relation to totalitarianism, says that because the masses do not hold any specific values, it is easier to motivate them against something than for something. In a disillusioned and often changing world, propaganda was able to address clear and coherent messages to the masses, with the result that they backed the ideologies and became the supporters of populist movements. Arendt claims that the masses



tend to believe in an imaginative world based on conspiracy theories, rather than the evidence of their own eyes and the reality around them. As a result, masses can be easily misled and they quickly become the base of totalitarianism.

Nowadays, when populist movements are rising again and people are being manipulated by all sides, including TV, radio, the internet or billboards, it is important to distinguish within ourselves when our thoughts or behaviour are mass-like and against all our values and ethics. One of the most important messages of the past century is that it is easy to leave one's conscience behind and become part of an unconscious mass.

Istvan Orban

CHINESE ALCHEMY AND IMMORTALITY

Chinese alchemy has two main branches: ‘external alchemy’ (*Waidan*) and ‘internal alchemy’ (*Naidan*). Both words are related to the word *dan* (elixir), which evolves from a root-meaning of ‘essence’ (the true nature and quality of an entity). In this brief introduction, I am going to concentrate on the tradition of external alchemy or *Waidan*.

The mythical origins of *Waidan* are related to beliefs about the existence of natural elixirs and medicines of immortality found in remote places inhabited by divine beings. *Waidan*’s origins are also linked to the enigmatic figures of the *fangshi* (‘masters of the esoteric methods’) who specialised in astrology, divination, alchemy, etc. The *fangshi* advised and taught members of the Chinese royal family.

The imperial patronage of alchemy is very old and in fact, during most of Chinese history, the emperors hosted exponents of religious or esoteric doctrines, including alchemy, at their courts. The *Yellow Emperor*, considered the first in the succession of human rulers, became immortal and ascended to heaven thanks to the preparation and the ingestion of an elixir. The alchemical preparations were also among the gifts that ‘heaven’ sent to virtuous rulers, and were therefore regarded as ‘objects’ that legitimised and protected the temporal power. Interestingly enough, we find similar parallels in western esotericism, where alchemy took the name of ‘royal art’.

External alchemy shares various features with



Chinese medicine and pharmacology and is also characterised by religious and speculative elements. On the one hand, it presents itself as a way of communicating with the deities, while on the other its purpose is to acquire knowledge of metaphysical and cosmological principles.

Waidan is aimed at the preparation of elixirs through the manipulation of natural substances (lead, mercury, etc.), which are heated and combined together in a crucible. Great importance is given to their ingestion as well as to their symbolic meanings. The preparation and ingestion of the elixirs is not only for the attainment of longevity or immortality, but also for communication with beneficent deities and for the removal of, or protection from, evil spirits.

The preparation of an elixir is part of a process consisting of various phases, each of which is marked by the performance of rites and



ceremonies. The alchemical practice consists of this entire process, not only of the work at the furnace.

Much of the Chinese alchemical tradition is based on the same cosmological conceptions that are found in Daoism (in the *Daode jing* and in *The Book of Zhuangzi*) and in the *Book of Changes* (the *Yijing*). The Dao first establishes itself as *Unity*, which then divides itself into the active and the passive principles (*Yang* and *Yin*). The

re-conjunction of these principles gives birth to all the entities and phenomena in the world.

In this cosmological conception, each *Yang* entity harbours *True Yin*, and vice versa. The world is *Yin* in relation to the Dao (which is *Yang*), but conceals its *One Breath* (i.e. the essence of the Dao), which is *True Yang*. The alchemical process consists in gradually tracing the stages of the generative process of the cosmos in a reverse sequence, in order to recover the *One Breath*. This process is performed in an alchemical laboratory. In practical-alchemical terms, the initial ingredients (native cinnabar = *Yang* and native lead = *Yin*) are separately refined, so that cinnabar produces *True Mercury*, which is *True Yin*, and lead produces *True Lead*, which is *True Yang*. When the two refined substances are conjoined, one obtains an elixir which, when ingested, 'gives' immortality.

The alchemical crucible is the place which allows the ingredients of the elixir to 'revert' back to their original state (*True Yin* or *True Yang*). Here, the main work includes the preparation of a 'substance' with which to seal the crucible, called 'mud of the six and one'. The term 'six and one' refers to the seven ingredients of the mud. The number seven has a symbolic meaning which is related to the cosmogonic process that occurs in seven stages.

The refined matter or 'essence' (the *elixir*) produced inside the crucible is equated to the seed that generates the cosmos and enables the self-manifestation of the Dao. This *prima materia* can be transmuted into *alchemical gold*. Gold, being a metal which doesn't age (doesn't tarnish), stands for the very symbol of immortality.

In summary, the Dao is the origin of all things and its primordial energy (the *One Breath*) is the source of life. As nature renews itself by following the principles of the Dao, mortals, too, can renew themselves and attain immortality by following and living these principles. And for the practitioner of *Waidan*, his alchemical work starts by retracing these principles in the heart of material substances. By finding that 'essence' which animates matter, he also discovers his own 'essence' or Being.

Agostino Dominici

ANGLO-SAXON KINGDOMS

Art & Sacred Work in the English Middle Ages

Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms: Art, Word, War is an exhibition currently running at the British Library and represents a comprehensive exhibit of significant Anglo-Saxon books and precious artefacts. It opens with an extraordinary funerary artefact from the 5th century, the Loveden Hill Urn. Upon the lid of the urn sits an ancient figure, known as the Spong Man, with elbows on knees and holding his head in his hands, as his gaze searches into a mysterious distance, stuck with a strange expression that speaks simply of human struggle, of life and death. The inner world of the potter,

still ringing somehow through the eyes of this clay man...

We shortly arrive nearly 200 years later in the 7th century as Christianity is becoming firmly established with the arrival of Saint Augustine and his conversion of the Saxon King, Æthelberht of Kent. During this 7th century, ignited by the first impulse of the early Christian monks, the fertile island rich with the influences of many traditions gives rise to a little known golden age in the north of England - the 'Northumbrian Renaissance'. This flowering of activity centred around the dual monasteries of



Monkwearmouth-Jarrow and a few notable bishops and monks, amongst them the Benedictine monk and historian, the Venerable Bede.

The term Renaissance literally means 'rebirth' or 'reawakening' and in Celtic Monasticism we see a merging of styles, with a 'reawakening' of ideas from Egypt via the influence of the Christian Desert Fathers, Rome and Celtic Britain. According to experts, there are many similarities between the Celtic Monasteries and Coptic churches of the distant Egyptian desert. The Egyptian ancestry of the Celtic church was also acknowledged by contemporaries: in a letter to Charlemagne, the English scholar-monk Alcuin described the Celtic Culdees (meaning Christian communities) as *pueri Egyptiaci* (Children of Egypt)...

**"This house full of delight
Is built on the rock
And indeed the true vine
Transplanted out of Egypt."
- Antiphony of the Irish
monastery of Bangor**

On the intricately patterned carpet pages of the great gospel books, notably the Book of Durrow (probably created at Lindisfarne), one glimpses a truly magnificent and profound metaphysical vision. There is a sensation of being transported both upwards and within as your gaze is carried away by the magical drawings. The writer and expert Michelle Brown describes these pages as "portals of prayer" and goes on to say that the "act of copying and transmitting the Gospels was to glimpse the divine... [Just as] St Cuthbert struggled with his demons on the Farne Islands on behalf of all humanity, so the monks who produced the gospel book performed a sustained feat of spiritual and physical endurance".

The visual timbre of these works transcends culture; it amalgamates, opens up and synthesizes something new arising from the consciousness of the Celtic Middle Ages. The decoration appears at times Islamic, or Tibetan, Egyptian and Roman, then overall becoming gradually distilled into what became the signature Christian style in Europe.

It is somewhat strange to think of England exporting bibles and culture to Rome but during that time, this did indeed happen. Scribes from all over would learn their trade in the monastic colleges of England; notably Canterbury, Winchester and Northumbria.

This exhibition shows the crucial role played by the Anglo-Saxon Britons. With the influence of many traditions they synthesized and defined the sacred art of the incipient new world.

**"This precious stone, set in the silver
sea, this sceptered isle . . . This
blessed plot, this earth, this realm,
this England"
- Shakespeare (Richard II)**

Siobhan Cait Farrar



Ashurbanipal and his Library

“The discovery of his library is considered to be one of the most important archaeological finds of the 19th century.”



There is an exhibition currently running at the British Museum about Ashurbanipal, King of Assyria. It would not be not surprising if you have never heard of his name, as neither the king nor the Assyrian culture is familiar to most of us in the West.

Ashurbanipal was the last king of the Assyrian Empire, which was the largest of its age (7th century BCE). He is known for his victories in expanding the Empire, being ruthless with his enemies, but also for his scholarship and for building a great library. The discovery of his library is considered to be one of the most important archaeological finds of the 19th century.

Whenever we study any event or figure in history, it is important to understand the culture, belief systems and values of the society at the

“Apart from his title as a lion-hunter and a warrior, he was also considered to be a great scholar.”

time, in order to be able to see the subject we are studying in its full context and so give it its true value. This is especially necessary when the subject is alien to our own culture.

One of the outstanding relics depicted in the exhibition is the king fighting with lions. For a modern audience, this might be seen as violence and cruelty. However, an ancient Assyrian would have a different view on this. Lions, which are a popular symbol in Assyrian culture, represent the earthly, raw, wild part of Nature. An Assyrian King would be expected to prove himself able to control this raw, wild part of Nature and protect his people against all that was wild and dangerous in the world. Lion hunting was performed as a ritual rather than for pleasure or enjoyment. In most cases, the king himself could be vulnerable to injury or even death.

Apart from his title as a lion-hunter and a warrior, he was also considered to be a great scholar. In fact, what we know about the Assyrians today comes from the cuneiform tablets found in his library.

Ashurbanipal's library contained about 30,000 tablets on history, literature, hymns, prayers, magic, medicine and legal documents.

One of the lasting legacies of Assyria and other Mesopotamian cultures was their ability in administration and law. Examples of contracts, mortgages and temple accounts were found in Ashurbanipal's library. He also learnt how to read and write on the tablets and was soon able to read any cuneiform tablet, no matter how old it was, as well as being able to read in other languages.

Among the texts found in his library were some sacred writings such as the Enuma Elish (Creation Myth)

and the Myth of Gilgamesh (a great epic about the human journey and the meaning of life).

His library also contained books on the deeds of kings, omens, instructions for rituals, prayers, magic and medicine. His father, Esarhaddon, employed astrologers who wrote reports on the appearance of the sun, moon and constellations, which were kept in Ashurbanipal's library. Thanks to these tablets, we have access to some of the earliest records on astronomy and astrology.

Ashurbanipal's interest in knowledge continued throughout his reign. While he was expanding the empire, recognising the importance of preserving the past, he sent envoys to every point of all the lands under his control and had them retrieve or copy the books of that city or town, bringing everything back to Nineveh for the royal library.

The tablets were discovered in the ruins of the city of Nineveh (now northern Iraq), once capital of the Assyrian empire. As happened to most of the ancient libraries, it was at one point consumed by fire. However, unlike with paper or parchment scrolls, the clay tablets were in most cases baked harder, making them better preserved as documents.

It is widely believed that Alexander the Great visited the Royal Library of Ashurbanipal and that this gave him an idea that would later become the Great Library of Alexandria.

Considering the variety of texts contained in the library and the importance he gave to knowledge, we can say with certainty that Ashurbanipal wasn't only a powerful and ruthless king, but also a great scholar and promoter of knowledge.

Pinar Akhan

SCIENCE AND THE MEDIA

For the scientifically and non-scientifically minded alike, the news media provide a commonly used way of getting in touch with new scientific discoveries. Many news media now include a specific science section to keep readers informed of the latest research findings. However, although it is great that many media outlets present such topics, they shouldn't be our only source of information, for various reasons.

Just as it's not a good idea to stick to only one type of media outlet for news, if we want to keep a diverse, fact-based and open-minded view of the world around us, the same goes for scientific news. To be biased, or subjective, is a natural human tendency, but for ethical reasons it should not be promoted.

Except for a few "hardcore" or old-fashioned news readers, most people have migrated, at

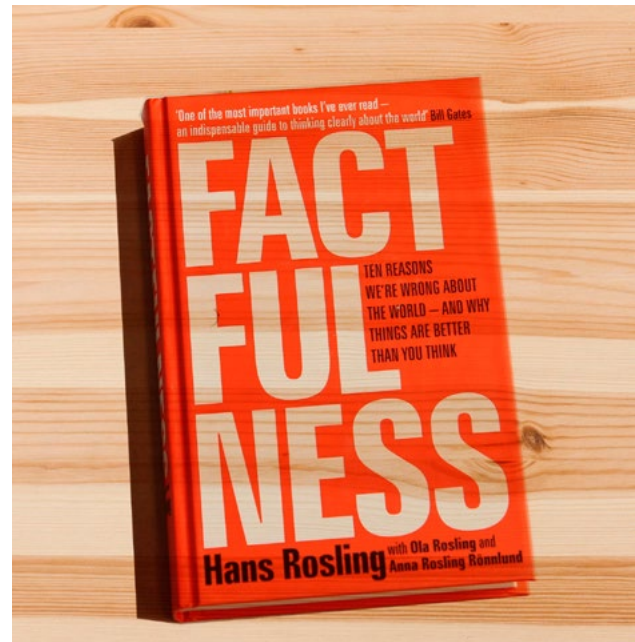


least partially, to the paperless or digital news platforms. These media platforms are almost always free, if you are not too bothered by the avalanche of advertising. And some of them work on click-bait style articles to attract readers, with outlandish, misleading and sometimes false titles. So, if you don't know any better you can be easily misled into believing things that are not true or, should I say, 'alternative facts'.

For example, in 2017 many newspapers came out saying that a landmark research paper on climate change authored by various scientists was exaggerated and founded on 'unverified' data. They claimed that we had been duped into investing billions into global warming research. This story was in fact false, mainly because the newspaper writers misinterpreted the scientific language used, which, as always in such reports, presented a range of data from best to worst case scenarios. However, the journalists only presented the few predictive models that fitted in with their desired headline, ignoring the rest, because while some models may have shown a very mild warming, most showed an aggravated warming and a real risk to our existence and survival in the decades to come.

We cannot only blame journalists for spreading misleading, incomplete or even wrong information, as they themselves may not be well enough informed, whether due to a lack of time or resources to check facts or go deeper in their topics, or due a lack of scientific background. Or they may be driven by their bosses to generate attractive articles (although all journalists presumably sign up to a code of ethics).

In this situation we also have a responsibility to look for the right sources, to do our own research, which would start with looking at recognized scientific journals. As an engineer, I look at specific websites, journals or books when doing research for my work, but I also do this for my own scientific learning. It is important to note that the more technical a paper is the more expensive it can be, as it requires professional



research by leading scientists. However, for the science enthusiast or even beginner there are many papers or magazines that are designed to keep everyone properly informed.

When faced with the vast quantities of information swirling around us every day, we need to apply our own intelligence and discernment to select the useful from the useless, the good from the bad, the wrong from the right. In his last book, *Factfulness*, the late Dr. Hans Rosling gives us some tools for looking at our world view in a more fact-based way. He encourages us to question our opinions about the world and gives us some tips for overcoming some of our instinctual responses which have unfortunately distorted our perspective on reality.

It is fair to say that humanity has never been faced with so much data and information about the world, which means we have more choices to make on a daily basis. It is our responsibility to look for correct, ethical and just answers to the many questions which face us and this starts with knowing where to look.

Florimond Krins

THE KALEVALA



Statue of Väinämöinen
by Robert Stigell (1888),
Finland.

The Kalevala is a truly beautiful Finnish epic, in which words weave ancient stories of the world, its cycles of life and its heroes. Sung and passed on by word of mouth for centuries, it was recorded only in the 19th century by Elias Lönnrot.

The word “Kalevala” means ‘land of heroes’, the abode of Kaleva, a mythical ancestor.

The Kalevala’s picturesque verses are full of adventures, mostly of the eternal sage, shaman and singer Väinämöinen, and of the eternal blacksmith Ilmarinen, who hammered down the lid of the heavens.

It was Väinämöinen who was the first man on earth, born out of his own efforts from the water-mother, the maiden of the air, after praying to the Sun, the Moon and the Great Bear. Born already wise, he created the land and brought nature to life by sowing the seeds of everything.

Väinämöinen journeyed through the world and beyond, and undertook various magical quests and impossible tasks. When building a boat of magic by his power of song, he realised he could not finish the job as there were three words missing. He therefore embarked on a quest to find the words of power, but those he found were useless. So, the wonder-worker bravely went to Tuonela, the abode of the dead. Only with great magical skill was he, the old man of calm waters, able to escape unharmed. Upon his return he brought moral teachings

to young people to enable them to win joy eternal and not to go to the dark Tuonela, full of suffering and pain.

In spite of all his trials, Väinämöinen was unable to find the missing words in the land of the dead. So, he decided to seek out an ancient sorcerer, Antero Vipunen. However, the magical bard had died ages ago and his giant body had become part of the world.

To help his friend and brother Väinämöinen with such an impossible task, the skilful smith Ilmarinen forged a special suit of armour.

The old and wise Väinämöinen woke Antero from his eternal sleep and entered his body through the mouth. At first, the bard was not bothered by such an intrusion. But Väinämöinen transformed himself into a smith and started a forge inside the stomach of Antero. After a battle of words and persistent forging, Vipunen opened his word-chest and shared the ancient wisdom. Thus, the missing words of power were discovered. Väinämöinen learned the secrets of nature and finished making his magic boat.

Other songs of the Kalevala tell the story of the Sampo, a mysterious object that brings wealth and prosperity. The mighty Ilmarinen made the Sampo at Väinämöinen's request for the land of the far north, which was ruled by Louhi, a woman of great magical power. Later, the sons of Kalevala realised the importance of the Sampo and asked Louhi to share it. But she refused, so the heroes decided to steal it. Their plan almost succeeded, but Louhi caught up with them in the sea and started a fierce battle. As a result, the Sampo was broken into pieces. Väinämöinen found those pieces and brought them back to Kalevala. It turned out that the pieces preserved

enough potency to provide goodness for all the land.

There were many more adventures, many more songs and enchantments... until a child was born from a virgin called Marjatta, who became a new king of the land of Kaleva. Väinämöinen had to leave the mortal realms with a promise to return when he would be needed again. He departed in the evening "to the higher-

The Forging of the Sampo by Gallen Kallela (1893), Finland.



landed regions, to the lower verge of heaven", and left for us here his magical instruments and his songs and wisdom-sayings to keep the memory of the heroic times, because out of the memory of the past comes the future.

Nataliya Petlevych



Philosophies of East and West

Philosophy means love of wisdom (philo-sophia) and it is essentially an active attitude of awareness towards life. In this sense, we are all born philosophers, with an innate need to ask questions and with the intuition that there are answers to be found.

Every civilization has passed on to us its experience and understanding of life. However, most of us have had little opportunity to learn about the vast heritage of ideas that have inspired and guided humanity throughout history.

This 16-week course will introduce you to the major concepts of Eastern and Western Philosophy and explore their relevance and practical application for our lives.

Course Framework

Ethics: Understanding Yourself

Ethics enquires about moral principles and the impact of individuals on their environment. But it is also related to happiness, as it helps us to find the right 'inner attitude' to deal with different life situations in ways that are beneficial to ourselves and to others.

Sociopolitics: Living Together in Harmony with Others

Sociopolitics looks at relationships in society, both between individuals and between the individual and the group. It is concerned with finding principles by which we can create harmonious communities where everyone can flourish..

Philosophy of History: Being Part of Something Greater

We are all products of history and at the same time we all contribute to making history. Philosophy of History seeks wisdom in the study of the past and how to apply the lessons of history to the present.

Philosophy for Living: Practical Application

What is the value of thinking without action? Action is the real measure of what we are, and theory and practice inform each other. Each course evening will explore the practical relevance of philosophy and its potential to transform ourselves and society.

Course Fee: £190 (£130 concessions)

16-week course

PHILOSOPHIES of EAST and WEST

Starting dates

Wed 6 Feb at 7 pm
Tues 5 March at 7 pm
(First Evening Free)

Visit us on: www.philosophiesofeastandwest.org

Upcoming Events

Fri 25 Jan, 7 pm

The Philosophy of Upcycling

'Upcycling' is the art of transforming old or waste items/materials into something new, adding value through creativity and design. This lively and practical talk by Barley Massey, owner of *Fabrications* in Broadway Market, will connect this modern-day practice of upcycling to timeless philosophical ideas of transformation and alchemy.

- Admission: £5 (£3 concs.)

Thurs 24 Jan, 7 pm

Artificial Intelligence: between Myth and Reality

We often hear the claim that Artificial Intelligence (AI) will outsmart human intelligence and take over the world. Is this true, or is it just science fiction? This talk, by computer expert Dr. Catarina Moreira, will clarify the meaning of AI and its implications for humanity, describing how and why it developed. The speaker will also draw a distinction between the threat (or non-threat) of machines and the real issue, which is the ethical risk associated with uncontrolled technical development with no thought for the consequences.

- Admission: £5 (£3 concs.)

Tues 5, 12, 19 and 26 Feb (all at 7 pm)

The Power of Myth II : 4-week course

Over thousands of years, myths have helped human beings to understand aspects of life that the rational mind finds difficult to grasp (love, death, mystery...). Still today, we find the archetypal patterns of myth in books like *Lord of the Rings* or films like *Star Wars*.

This 4-week course (4 evenings over a month) will introduce you to the archetypal structure of mythology and its important role in promoting our spiritual and psychological well-being.

TOPICS OF THE 4 EVENINGS

- 1) Myths, Symbols and Rituals as means of access to the Sacred and as tools for understanding and facing the trials of life.
- 2) The *Kalevala* (meaning 'Land of Heroes'), a Finnish national epic compiled from ancient oral traditions and a rich source for gaining a deeper understanding of religion, magic and shamanism.
- 3) *Lógos*: The Myth beyond the Language. A performance by *The Temple London Theatre Company*, adapted from Norse and Greek mythology. There will be an introduction to the mythological material presented and a discussion afterwards.
- 4) The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is considered to be the oldest story in the world, dating back as far as four thousand years. This evening aims to explore the myth from a philosophical perspective, dealing with topics such as duality in human nature, the quest for immortality and the call to adventure.

- Course fee: £15 for each evening (£12 concs.) or £50 if booked together in advance (£40 concs.). Please see our website for more information.

Find us on:

Instagram: @newacropolisuk

Facebook: New Acropolis UK

Twitter: @NewAcropolisLDN

Meetup: Practical Philosophy of East and West

Address:

19 Compton Terrace, Islington,
London, N1 2UN

Tel. 0207 359 0059

www.newacropolisuk.org

