

Issue No. 49

JAN - FEB

2022

NewAcropolis

Philosophy and Education for the Future

**The Way of the Warrior -
Embracing the 'Inner Battle'**

**Racism, a Product of
Modernity**

Thought Forms

**The Myth of Atlantis
and the Universal Flood**

PHILOSOPHY

CULTURE

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ART

AND MORE



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

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Editorial

Other ways of 'thinking'

In recent years, philosophy has become more popular as a school subject because of its usefulness for teaching logic and reasoning. In some cases, the subject of philosophy has become almost completely reduced to the sole purpose of 'critical thinking'. Which is quite funny because, apparently (according to *AskPhilosophy*), philosophy had previously been avoided in schools as questioning the validity of everything 'encourages revolution'.

However, it is sad to see both philosophy and thinking being reduced to something very one-dimensional, when, in fact, they are both incredibly rich and multi-faceted. Albert Einstein, who is widely acknowledged as one of the greatest physicists of all time, made a wide range of statements about other ways of thinking. Regarding the importance we give to the rational mind he said: "The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honours the servant and has forgotten the gift."

Imagination is another very important cognitive ability and according to Einstein: "Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world." He also believed "in intuitions and inspirations" and spoke about a 'musical' way of thinking. When he was asked about his theory of relativity, he said: "It occurred to me by intuition, and music was the driving force behind that intuition. My discovery was the result of musical perception." He also said: "...I often think in music. Live my daydreams in music. I see my life in terms of music..."

There is also analogical thinking. Analogical thinking helps us to understand something unfamiliar by drawing parallels to something that is familiar to us. Analogies have enabled humanity for thousands of years to get a grasp of something that was beyond the reach of our senses. Analogies can take many forms, even a myth can be an analogy. Steve Jobs was said to be a huge proponent of analogy.

Does it matter how we think? Yes, because our thoughts shape the world we see and which

aspects of it we perceive. Imagine a tree and how many different ways there are of looking at it and thinking of it. If we were a timber merchant we might just see the monetary value of a tree on the market. As an artist we would look at the tree in a very different way and perceive many things that others might not notice. As a scientist we would look at a tree differently again, depending on our special interest. Now imagine standing in front of a tree in a state of poetic reverence – would this poetic kind of thinking not open both your heart and your mind?

Perhaps we have created many problems and a lot of unnecessary destruction by giving too much importance to logical or analytical thinking, without giving due consideration to other equally important ways of thinking. After all, the engineers of Auschwitz or the bombs that destroyed Hiroshima, etc., were probably very good at reasoning. But there is a polarity in everything that exists and I believe that purely rational thinking needs to be balanced out by a thinking with the heart...

Poetic thinking does exist, by the way, and there is even a Stanford University course on poetic thinking. Its value is beautifully described by these often quoted words of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry: "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye."

So, maybe it's time to understand philosophy and 'thinking' again in a much wider and deeper sense, as something that includes the rational and the intuitive, the logical, the analogical and the poetic. Something that enables us to become moral human beings and to get closer to wisdom and to the mystery of life. Plato writes in the *Theaetetus*: "Thinking is the conversation which the soul has with itself." And the philosopher Jorge Angel Livraga once said: "Philosophy is a music made by the soul in the silent dimension of the invisible." "What we think, we become", said the Buddha...

Sabine Leitner



The Way of the Warrior

Embracing the 'Inner Battle'

I am imagining depicted on a Renaissance tapestry the scene of a 'battle'. This tapestry is woven together by four threads or themes: *war* (and the warrior), *initiation*, *Kali Yuga* and *askesis*¹.

War and the warrior

Since the beginning of recorded history the theme of war has always occupied an important place in the minds of human beings. The figure of the warrior itself has been perceived and portrayed in many different ways. We find moments in history in which it has been exalted and other moments in which it has fallen into a state of anonymity.

1. A Greek word which refers to self-discipline practised as a means to spiritual growth. The equivalent in Sanskrit is *Sadhana*.

Let us try, therefore, to answer a few questions that may arise. How consonant is the figure of the warrior in our times? And what kind of effect does it have on people? Is it something with which we find ourselves out of sync? Is it something which disturbs us? Or does it force us to ask questions that touch us deeply?

By studying the spiritual and philosophical traditions of ancient peoples, I have discovered that "the way of the warrior" was just one of the many ways which led to wisdom and spiritual realisation. However, in order to rediscover the spiritual perspective of war, it must be first purified from all its negative and sinister elements. All those elements that pollute its authentically heroic



The Battle of Pavia, Tapestry by Bernard Van Orley (circa 1528).

features, which are synonymous with nobility, justice, mercifulness, magnanimity and luminosity. These martial² characteristics and virtues are incompatible with those deplorable manifestations of war (i.e. what is brutal, cruel, cynical, selfish, etc.) which have been growing strongly with modern warfare. Thanks to its sophisticated technology and a blind mechanisation, modern warfare has emphasised the most nefarious and negative aspects of war, thus distorting its symbolic, philosophical and sacred dimension.



The ancients saw war as the natural continuation of a metaphysical struggle which took place on an invisible plane. A metaphysical struggle between chaos and order, darkness and light, the untamed animal nature of man and its spiritual counterpart. And perhaps it is not a coincidence that in the past,

the combination of spiritual and martial perspectives has often been emphasised.

Why was a work like the Bhagavad Gita, which has inspired and guided spiritual seekers for centuries, set on a battlefield? Why are the early Buddhist writings replete with a language which could better befit a martial arts manual³? Why was the 'quest for the holy grail' undertaken by knights in armour? Here I could also mention the fruitful marriage between the 'way of the Samurai' and Zen Buddhism and also all those philosophers (such as Socrates, Xenophon, Antigonos, Marcus Aurelius, etc.) who served in or even commanded armies.

Evidently this topic has always lent itself well to a philosophical reflection. The philosophical aspect of war I want to highlight here is that of the 'inner battle' (also called 'the Greater or Just War'), the battle which the human being faces against his internal enemies. Enemies which prevent him from overcoming his animal or 'lower nature'. Many of these enemies can be identified with fear, the instinct of self-preservation, attachment to biological life, attachment to possessions, to the pleasures of the senses, to material comforts, etc. This type of 'war' has always accompanied us because the human being partakes of two 'opposite natures', what Plato and Aristotle called the *appetitive* and the *rational* soul.

Initiation

An important element which underlies the path of the 'warrior' is that of initiation. Whether we speak of initiation in a tribal or warrior context or in the tradition of the Ancient Mysteries, its fundamental message remains the same – a direct confrontation with death. Ancient initiations were always centred on an inner process of death and rebirth.

The two ancient Greek terms that best explain the concept of initiation are: *telein* (to complete) and *teleutan* (to die). Why is there such a close connection between 'initiation' and death? Why does Plato tell us that "in truth those who practise philosophy correctly practise dying"⁴. In the so-called tribal initiations (also known as *rites of*

2. Pertaining to war or combat and related to Mars, the Roman God of war.

3. See for instance the *Suttanipāta* or the *Majjhima Nikaya*. It is also interesting to note that an early title given to Shakyamuni Buddha was *jīna*: the *conqueror* or *victor*.

4. See Plato's *Phaedo*, 67e.

passage), the young teenager had to experience, in a kind of laboratory setting, the condition of death. But why such an extreme ordeal? By overcoming such a trial and enduring such an intense crisis, a 'germ' of immortality could manifest within him. The young boy (or girl) would for a moment come to the realisation that there is something within himself which transcends space and time. Something which cannot be touched by fear, pain, suffering. Like with a near-death-experience, this would have been such a radical experience that his whole life would have been turned upside down. His attitude to life and his ethical values would have acquired a new quality and a higher purpose.

Unfortunately, in today's world there are no initiations anymore. Any form of initiation has been forgotten and almost all possibilities for entering into a more direct relationship with one's existential reality has been systematically removed. Confrontation with one's own mortality has also become complete taboo but interestingly enough, extreme sports are on the increase!

Putting aside the idea of having to face death, what is the role of trials (or initiations)? What is their objective? A trial takes us away from our comfort zone, our familiar context, our repetitive pattern of behaviour. A trial makes us aware of our limitations but also our best virtues. It also gives us the opportunity to unfold our latent potentials and to make us grow. Finally, a trial brings us face to face with our existential condition. It helps us discover our deeper convictions and the meaning we give to life.

Kali Yuga

In an engaging essay titled *Is the Modern Psyche Undergoing a Rite of Passage?* The cultural historian Richard Tarnas entertains the idea that humanity as a whole is entering a stage of collective crisis on all fronts: ecological, economic, political, existential, spiritual. A kind of death-rebirth process similar to a rite of passage.

The possibility of an all-embracing crisis of inner transformation at the end of a historical period reminds me of an ancient teaching in which time and history were seen unfolding in cycles⁵. Each cycle has its own intrinsic quality and some cycles are more challenging than others. The last of a series of cycles has been known by various names: *Kali Yuga*, *Iron Age*, *the Age of the Wolf*, etc. This last cycle is characterised by a mood of universal destruction where everything seems to precipitate into a state of free fall and chaos. Time itself is compressed and the pace of life seems to increase exponentially. This situation brings greater uncertainty, collective fear and anxiety, a loss of inner balance and self-control. If we look at our current world situation, it seems to me that deep inside, humanity is really falling prey to a nameless fear, an increased sense of vulnerability but also a lack of meaning and direction to its existence. Are we really heading towards a collective *Dark night of the soul*?

Askesis

Ultimately, especially for the inner warrior, the *Kali Yuga* (or any other moment of collective crisis) represents a dimension of inner awareness and an opportunity for inner growth. Some individuals will live through challenging times with no awareness of their importance while others will perceive them as a propitious time for engaging, through the means of *askesis*, in an 'inner battle'.

Askesis, implies an active engagement with life's challenges and a martial attitude which is not afraid of facing difficult situations. *Askesis* is a constant practice directed towards mastering oneself, overcoming personal limitations and discovering one's inner strength. Mastering the mind, our most powerful tool, and protecting what is really precious in life, this is the 'way of the warrior'.

Agostino Dominici

5. Examples of this are the Hindu theory of the *Four Yugas*, Hesiod's *Five Ages*, Ovid's *Four Ages* and the *Ragnarök* stories in Norse Mythology.

Racism, a Product of Modernity

Racism can be expressed and experienced on different levels. The fact of not being able to appreciate another race or religion falls within an 'ethical' conception of racism. This is a relatively recent phenomenon, which appeared in the Renaissance and developed particularly in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The phenomenon of non-acceptance, on the other hand, has always existed; it can almost be regarded

as a constant in human behaviour, together with selfishness and narrow-mindedness, which can even appear within the same family. Not surprisingly, all the moral teachings of the world's philosophies and religions have promoted tolerance and a greater understanding of the other.

But notions of separateness and segregation existed in ancient times under very different forms to the ones we know today. Nevertheless, even if a people



or a human being were considered different, this notion never became a group ideology.

Thus, for the Romans, on the one hand there were those who were civilized, and on the other hand there were the barbarians, in other words, everyone else. But this segregation was neither ethnic nor religious: it was about whether the individuals or peoples in question were integrated into the civilization or not. In this sense, the barbarian was simply the foreigner, without any value judgement attached to this term. The barbarian, however, could be integrated and assimilated, and become a fully fledged Roman citizen. It was only at the fall of the



An image of Rome's first African Emperor, Septimius Severus (193-211) with his wife, and their two sons.

Roman Empire that the foreigner became "evil". In the 5th century barbarians invaded the empire and destroyed it. It was then that the term "barbarian" began to refer to a "destroyer", a meaning which had not been part of the original term.

In a coherent society, differences are considered as a source of dynamism, originality and harmony. In ancient Egyptian society, for example, there were nine ethnic groups living together in harmony, and the important thing was to be Egyptian. The difference was between those who were Egyptian and those who were not. The legal principles that governed the country made it a multiracial society and on this level the society was a success.

Rome had black African generals. The important thing was to be Roman rather than the colour of one's skin. The Roman Empire developed the idea of the "world citizen". After its fall, what happened to this great idea of a world where all races and all religions could move around and express themselves freely?

The human being has always been aware of differences; they are part of our daily existence. But are differences negative or are they, on the contrary, an expression of variety, and therefore enriching?

With the coming of the Middle Ages, religion and politics became indistinguishable and political and religious power became uniform. It was then that a new kind of difference, linked to the religious aspect, appeared. The attempt to homogenize the world resulted in the appearance of new differences, which made people very defensive of their own way of thinking, and from this overly narrow vision arose an inability to think that the other might also be right.

Religious or ethnic intolerance flourished and expanded in the 18th century, when all the techniques of scientific classification were developed. After classifying minerals, plants and animals, the human being also entered the inventory. The expansion of biology contributed to the development of racism based on physical differences. The fact of thinking that the differences of the other are congenital and therefore fixed gave rise to the idea that 'the other' could not evolve. This is how the West in the 18th century came to think that it was necessary to confine "savage" peoples to reservations or exterminate them. Diderot's Encyclopedia defined the word "savage" as "Barbarian peoples who live without laws,

without police, without religion and who have no fixed place of residence." It explained by etymology the use of the word, derived from *silvaticus* [*of the woods*], because, according to the Encyclopedia, savages generally lived in forests, giving America as an example, which was supposedly still largely populated by savage nations. No king, no faith, no law, and no fire or home. At first glance, a cascade of negatives connotes the savage state, that is, the natural state of society.

Indeed, the anthropology of the Age of Enlightenment was particularly significant because it sought to give a detailed description of the recently discovered existence of savage nations, in order to better contrast it with that of the civilized European world. What interested philosophers at that time was to discover the meaning of human history in relation to the development of the European nations. In doing so, they "confounded racial appearances with the sociological and psychological productions of human cultures" (Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Race and History*) and sought to place contemporary savage men among the historical ancestors of modern man. This historical order in turn created an order of values.

In 1739, the Comte de Buffon, in his *Natural History*, marked very clearly the separation between man and animal. He sought at the same time to explain the causes of variations in the human species. The criteria that Buffon recognized were skin colour, shape and size, in short, what he called the "natural" characteristics. While the first three criteria are physical and visible, the "natural" also includes the interpretation of cultural behaviours. But, in order to explain the variations deriving from the unity of the human phenomenon, it was necessary to believe that human beings gradually became distinguished from an original model by degenerating as they moved away from the temperate zone. "Because" – Buffon writes – "the model or the unit to which it is necessary to refer all the other parameters of colour and beauty is found in this climate." These are, then, according to Buffon, the accidental causes that cause the nations that populate the Earth to vary, thus widening the gulf between civilized Europe and the savage world.

Because of the progress displayed by civilized Europe, the savages must be persuaded, as Buffon said, to become part of the nature of man again.

Thus, in view of the degeneration of the savages, Europe wanted to take on the role of leading them to higher law. This became the excuse for the colonial conquests.



If Voltaire's goal was different, his conclusions echoed those of Buffon in that he placed Europe at the pinnacle of civilization. He saw among the peoples of the Earth such differences that he believed savage men to be of another species. On the basis of these different qualities, which seemed to vary so strangely, Voltaire proclaimed the superiority of the cultured nations and the logic of domination over the whole world. And if he protested against the atrocities of the conquerors, it was because he would like to have seen civilization triumph not by violence, but only by law and reason. The savage man is always the opposite of the civilized man, and very often reduced to the quality of primitive. Seen in this way, history placed savage peoples in the infancy of humanity and appointed Europe to be the missionary of civilization after having been the missionary of religion. It was in the



name of the superiority of the civilized man that progress and its order were imposed.

Appearance and realities of Western racism in the 20th century

Hidden behind the appearance of a great open-mindedness are some not very clear attitudes. Difference is apparently acknowledged and accepted as normal, but if a concrete problem arises, a real contact, then it becomes clear that there was actually a dormant feeling, momentarily suppressed: the difference was tolerated, that is, it was endured, but not accepted. In order to deal with this problem adequately, one must, above all, accept differences fully and not only tolerate them for the time being.

Racism arises as a result of the difficulty each person experiences in accepting the other, voluntarily or involuntarily refusing to open up to others.

Human beings easily fall into habits: routine, comfort, and a lazy unwillingness to question our ideas, limit us terribly. This burden of prejudices, of which we are not aware most of the time, is an obstacle to opening up to the other. Human beings breathe the same air, share the same planet, have the same origins, the same mother (Nature). Our physical, psychological and spiritual structures are shared in common. Our experiences have changed us, but our paths have not changed. It is true that

each human being is different because of their outer and inner goals and this can also be seen in their psychology, sensibility, tastes and objectives. It is no less true that there is a common denominator, which is humanity. This common root creates union, but the dynamism which is characteristic of life inevitably gives rise to differences. We must be cautious about homogenization, because it often involves disappearance and destruction. Does Claude Lévi-Strauss not insist on the fact that any tendency to homogenization inevitably entails annihilation? The diversity of experiences allows us to develop undeniable qualities of survival. All human groups have contributed something to the human experience. To develop a uniform culture would result in a planetary catastrophe. That is why certain international organizations try to promote difference but not segregation.

All systems that aim to homogenize a society make it lose its individual quality. This is the case of collective societies that do not allow the expansion of human potential; they deprive millions of human beings of the possibility of retaining a living memory of multiple possibilities. Their tendency is towards a rootless world, a blank slate.

Fernando Schwarz, Coordinator of New Acropolis in N-W Europe and Director of the International Hermes Institute of Human Sciences

THOUGHT FORMS

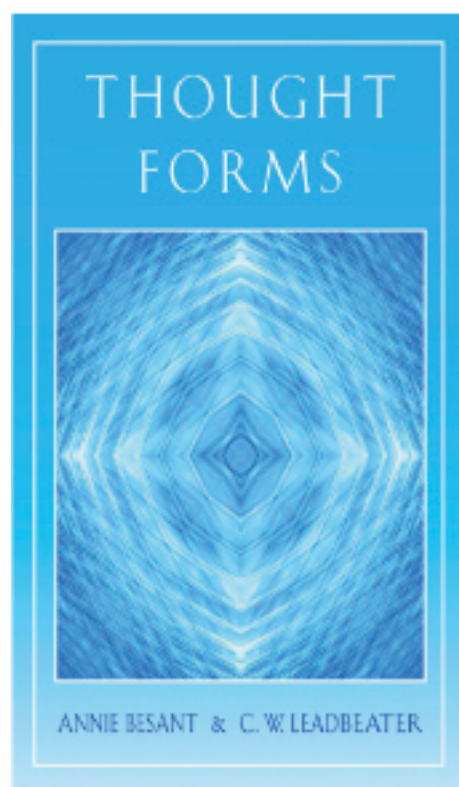
What is thought? From a materialistic point of view it is just an accidental result of biological evolution, the reaction of the brain to certain stimuli from the environment. But for many thinkers, such an explanation is inadequate, in view of the immense richness and complexity of human thought. An alternative explanation of the mysteries of thought comes from the world of 'occult' or esoteric studies: it is the concept of 'thought forms', a term popularised by two Theosophists of the early 20th century, C.W. Leadbeater and A. Besant.

In the esoteric conception of life, 'matter' not only refers to physical matter in all its aspects, from rocks to gases and from atoms to black holes. It also includes subtle states of matter such as energetic matter, astral matter and mental matter – "such stuff as dreams are made on", as Shakespeare put it.

In *The Kybalion*, one of the seven universal laws is "Everything vibrates". Just as light and sound are states of vibration, which travel through the air and produce perceptible effects, so thought is a vibration which also has its effects. And just as we know that the colour red vibrates at a slower rate than ultraviolet, which as a result cannot be seen by the human eye, so mental matter vibrates at a far higher speed than physical matter and also cannot be detected. So

we can picture the mental world as being made up of a very subtle kind of matter, which nevertheless has form, because all matter, however subtle, has form.

Another way of looking at it is through the lens of one of the other hermetic axioms from the *Kybalion*: "All is mind. The universe is mental." If we look at everything around us – our modern cities with their buildings, their systems of sanitation, communications,



hospitals and all forms of social and commercial organisation, what is all this but the production of the human mind, a concretisation of thought? And we could go further: if we look at Nature and the entire universe: would this not also be the concretisation of divine thought, the product of the Mind of God, as the Hermetic philosophers called it? And if we are surrounded by the materialized forms of thought, whether human or divine, will not the original thought forms that gave rise to them also exist on some plane not visible to the eye, but intelligible by the mind and perhaps even visible to those who have developed certain inner senses?

Let us now look at our own thought forms and what effects they can have, on ourselves and others.

According to the theosophical writers mentioned above, thought forms have three aspects: a form, which reflects its nature; colour, which conveys its quality; and a definiteness of shape or outline, which indicates its clarity. These forms arise from our 'mental body' itself, which emits a vibration. That vibration goes outside the mental body and causes the surrounding 'mental matter' to vibrate in accord with it, causing a mental form to arise. The final stage in this process is that the mental form is then inhabited by a 'temporary elemental'¹ which gives it life: it becomes a living being of sorts. If the original mental vibration is weak, then the thought form will soon dissolve into the mental atmosphere; but if it is strong, and its thinker continues to 'feed' it by repeatedly thinking about it and developing it, then this living thought form will become increasingly stronger.

One can easily see that this process can be potentially dangerous to the thought-producer,

because if the thought is not the product of his own free will and choice, but of his uncontrolled desires, passions or fantasies, the thought form can take on a life of its own and turn into a tormenting obsession.

However, if the thought is conscious and produced by the will of the thinker, then it can be used to create the mental world that we want. If we would like our mental world to be populated by lofty, beautiful, philanthropic thoughts, we can deliberately cultivate such thought forms by thinking along those lines and selecting the reading material, the films and videos we watch, the music or podcasts we listen to.

According to those who can perceive such forms directly, through clairvoyance, a pure thought form is a thing of exquisite beauty, in its form, colour and outline, whereas a thought such as greedy ambition, desire for revenge or



1. An elemental is defined in the *Mahatma Letters* as "one of the semi-intelligent forces of the kingdoms."



envy has a repellent appearance on the mental plane. In reality, we cannot speak in this case about the mental plane, but rather about the mental-astral plane, because such thoughts are more emotional than mental.

We are all subject to low thoughts, but by cultivating higher ones, the lower ones increasingly feel 'out of place' and give way to the higher, which are essentially stronger.

Another interesting aspect is the effects of one person's thoughts on others. Let us imagine that we have the privilege to be in the presence of a Master of wisdom, or at least a person at a higher stage of spiritual development than ourselves. Can their thoughts and vibrations affect us? Yes, as we have probably all experienced, and this is because there is something in the thought vibrations of our own mental world that responds to the thought vibrations sent out by the teacher. When this happens, then our whole consciousness vibrates in unison with their thought and we are lifted up temporarily to their level, or at least to that part of it that we can respond to. It would be different if in the audience there is someone in whom such vibrations have not yet been awakened, because they have not been cultivated. He would be, in the Buddha's words,

'like the spoon which does not taste the soup', even if it is immersed in it.

This can then be extended on a much larger scale, when a strong thinker, whether religious, scientific, artistic or political, gives out a message to the world. After being adopted by those who immediately resonate with it, the thought form grows stronger by being thought by its adherents and becomes a collective thought form which can sometimes affect millions of weaker minds who are influenced by it, just because it is so strong and makes them believe it must be true. We can see this in history (and in the present) for good and ill, depending on the quality of the original idea. It is the power of public opinion.

But just as a person whose mental body does not resonate with the vibrations of another person is therefore not affected by their thought forms, whether good or bad, so if we cultivate our own mental world we can avoid being influenced by public opinion if it does not accord with our own self-developed thinking. The most important thing is therefore to develop one's own thought forms and become 'Freethinkers' in the best sense of that term.

Julian Scott

The Gothic Cathedral

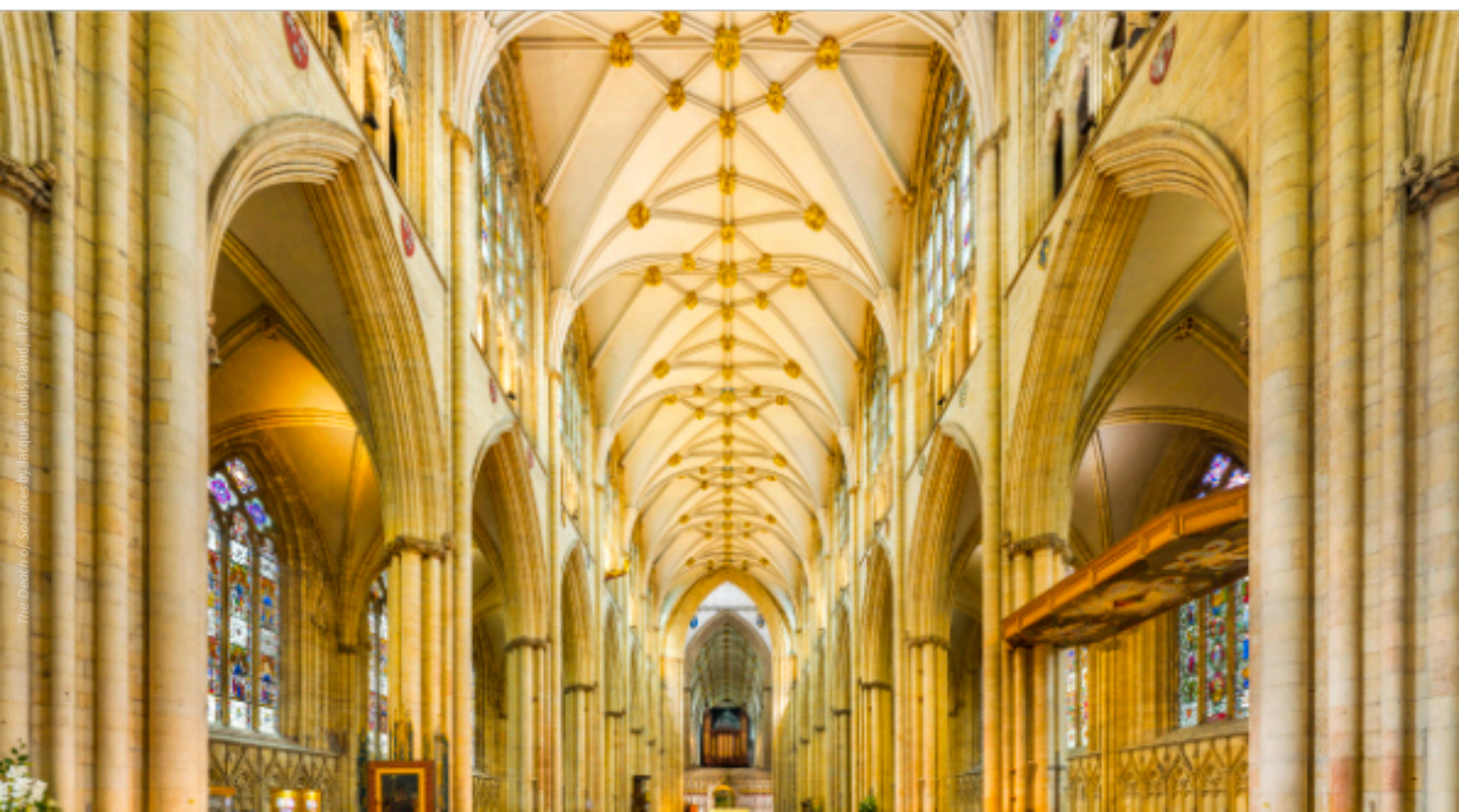
A Vessel of Light on Earth

The Gothic period started at the beginning of the 12th century - in 1128, to be precise - when 9 knights came back from Jerusalem after spending 10 years in the Temple of Solomon. They were the first Knights Templar (from the Temple of Solomon).

From that moment, in France and all over Europe, Gothic cathedrals and churches started to spring up like mushrooms. Many historians and architects think that the Gothic was an evolution of the Romanesque Style. In a way it was, but both those styles were being used simultaneously during the 12th and 13th Centuries, as they were the work of two different guilds.

So how is it that such magnificent buildings - the size of a stadium in some cases - started to appear out of nowhere, with a technology that had never been seen before in Europe? Who were those builders and what did they intend to achieve through those cathedrals?

The word Gothic seems to have different origins: from the Celtic "Ar-Goat", meaning built with wood; from the Greek "Goes - Goetis", meaning magic or sorcerer; or from the Kabala, in which Gothic Art would come from the "Argotic" (Ars Gotica) which would make the Cathedral an alchemical "Athanor" or furnace, a place of transmutation.



3 elements are key in the building of a Gothic cathedral:

1. The place was chosen carefully. It was normally the site of a former sacred temple (Roman) or sacred ground (Celtic). As an analogy, we can say that the cathedral was placed as strategically and carefully on the earth, as a Chinese doctor would insert a needle in an acupuncture point on the human body. It was built in an area of concentrated earth energies (Telluric forces). In France the main Cathedrals are positioned to replicate the astrological sign of Virgo (fig. 1). The Cathedral of Chartres, for example, is built on ancient ground with an ancient dolmen buried beneath it.

Fig. 1

From the heaven-earth axis, which gives the origins, and the primitive Circle, which gives the fundamental dimensions, the building of the cathedral could begin (fig. 2).

The last, but not least important element of the Gothic cathedral is its stained glass. The space created by the structure allowed for huge windows and hundreds of square metres of stained glass. In the True Gothic style, this is the only form of art allowed inside the cathedral. But this glass is more than art, it is a catalyst. As we know today, sunlight can be destructive with its UV rays, so the stained glass filters the light to create an alchemical cave, allowing the transmutation of human beings.

Florimond Krins



Iconology

the Magical World of Emblems

Iconology uses images and symbols to express a meaning or an idea. For many centuries, it helped to transmit religious and philosophical messages in an artistic way, when film or photography did not exist. Iconology is closely connected to iconography, which on the one hand is a branch of art history researching the interpretation of images and paintings, and on the other hand is the study of religious images, called icons. Icons, the sacred paintings in the Byzantine tradition and in the Orthodox Christian church, serve religious purposes, they are not just simply artworks.

Emblems and images are as old as mankind. Paintings of animals in caves, such as Chauvet or Lascaux, were made tens of thousands years ago and, without any text, their meanings can be identified and help researchers to understand better the life of the people in those ages. Later, in Egypt, symbols became a sophisticated language when hieroglyphs were developed. It was a formal writing system where images represented words and sounds. Egyptians also used logo techniques when they could enlarge or miniaturize an image by using grids. Meanwhile in China, calligraphy was



Robert Campin's *Mérode Altarpiece* of 1425-28 has a highly complex iconography that is still debated. Is Joseph (left panel) making a mousetrap, reflecting a remark of Saint Augustine that Christ's Incarnation was a trap to catch men's souls?

developed, combining visual art with literary meaning.

In Europe, during the Middle Ages, bestiaries (books of beasts) depicted the creatures of nature along with moral teachings. These books regarded the world as the manifestation of God, in which all creatures have their own place and goal. The bestiaries were very popular as they helped the reader to understand the world in its complexity. The texts were based on ancient books that were dedicated to the description of nature. The Aberdeen Bestiary from the 12th century was one of the most well-known books of that time. In the folios of this compendium, which starts with



Genesis, Adam names the animals, including mythical ones like the phoenix. Bestiaries influenced heraldry as well, giving ideas for making coat of arms.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, emblem books were published with the aim of collecting and explaining classical symbols and images. Although these books were largely based on the medieval bestiaries, they used ancient sources such as the Platonist writer Plutarch to explain an image. In their pages, there were three parts: the image or icon, a motto or wise

saying, and the explanation of the connection between the two. In the western part of Europe, dozens of emblem books were published, thanks to development of printing. One of them was the *Iconologia* by Cesare Ripa. Ripa was an Italian iconographer from Perugia and his work was published in 1593 without, and then in 1603, with illustrations. In England, it was first published in 1709. His book was influential in later centuries as well, as it was a summary of the knowledge of his time.

In the *Iconologia*, Ripa collected images of virtues, vices, passions, arts, humours, elements, and celestial bodies, and put the moral emblems into alphabetical order. He dedicated his book to orators and artists, such as poets and painters, to use as a handbook from which they could borrow ideas for their work. For example, Flattery (see opposite image) is portrayed by a woman who is playing on a flute. By her legs, there is a buck, and nearby, a beehive can be seen. In the explanation, he wrote: "A woman in an affected wanton habit, playing upon a flute, a buck at her feet falls asleep, with a beehive by her side. The buck denotes flattery, because he is so charmed by the music, that he lets himself be taken. The bees are a true emblem of it, carrying honey in their mouth, and a secret sting." In this way, Ripa grasps the essence of the emblem and provides a moral teaching as well.

Icons and emblems are all around us in contemporary societies as well, where they are used for practical as well as moral aims. Like the exit sign with a running man in a door, often in green colour, which expresses the escape route that has to be followed by people in case of emergency. Or the rules of the road are based on emblems that the drivers must be capable of understanding in order to drive safely. This proves that icons still play a vital role even nowadays.

Istvan Orban

HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT WE (THINK) WE KNOW?

This is a question that Etienne Klein¹ asked his students when they were mocking people who thought the earth was flat. We know that the earth is round, an almost perfect sphere, it is a scientific fact. And it is easier to say that now as we have been to space and seen it. It is a different issue when we can't see it physically and have to use our imagination. Looking at the curvature of the earth, observing the change of the sun's shadows at different latitudes, or the movements of the stars and planets throughout the seasons, will give us

1. Etienne Klein: French physicist and philosopher of science.

clues and allow us to build an idea, a model of our planet and its shape.

To start this process, we must ask ourselves questions, about our beliefs, our perceptions and habits. The things we do without thinking about them, the things our brain does almost effortlessly.

Gaston Bachelard² said that we must think against our brain, which sounds counter-intuitive. But what he means is that we must

2. Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962): French philosopher of science.

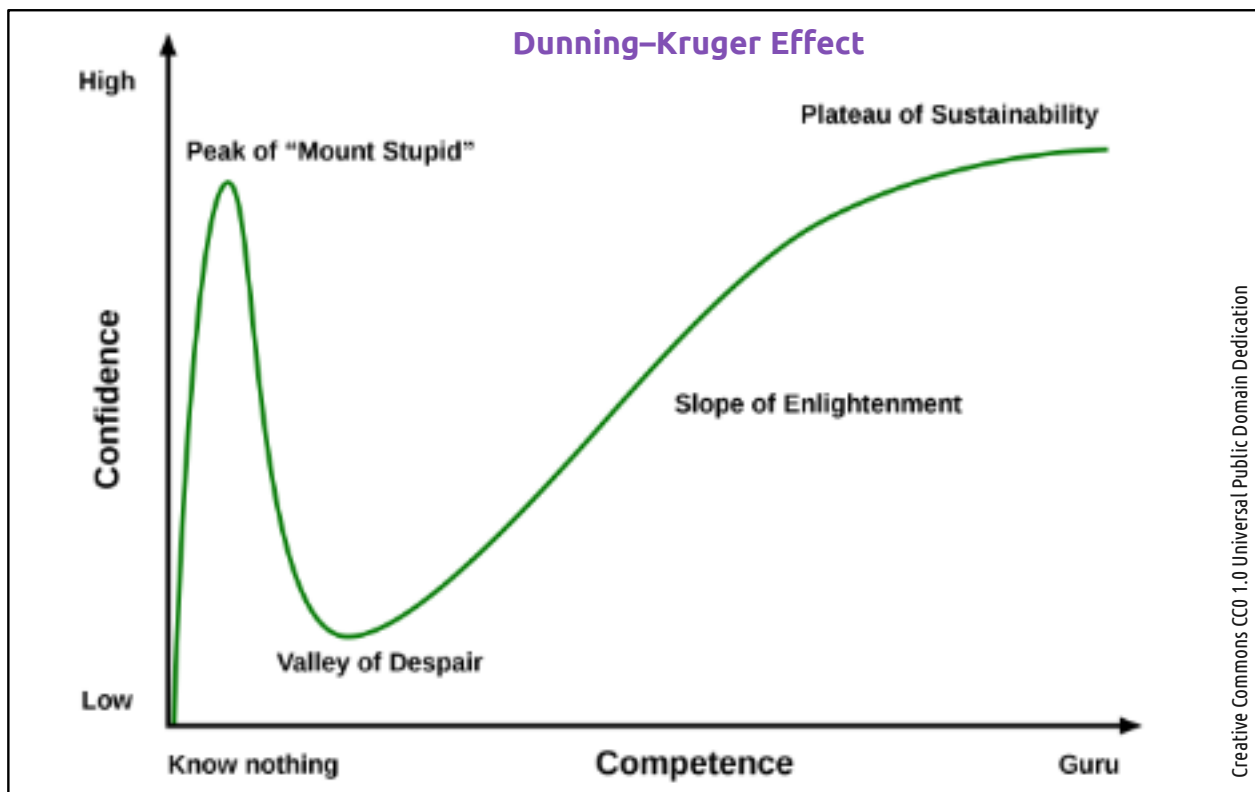
resist our first thoughts, the ones that come quickly and, one might say, without thinking.

For a lot of the stuff happening in our modern society, it is difficult to take the time to think and to study every subject. In most cases we listen to the words and thoughts of others, whom we call experts.

But not all experts are equal, and one can quickly fall into ultracrepidarianism³. When

the two psychologists who discovered this phenomenon.

The Dunning-Kruger effect fades away the more you study the subject, the more you realise, as Socrates did, that you know nothing. Here we are talking more about consciousness than knowledge. Our capacity to be aware of our limits, our strengths and our weaknesses is something that should be worked on.



someone says: "I'm not an expert, but...", everything that follows should be taken with a pinch of salt. The current pandemic is a good example of different people listening to a broad range of "experts" and "doing their own research". It shows that information is tricky, and hard to convert into knowledge without making a few mistakes along the way. Something can happen when we discover a subject and have the illusion that we know enough to have a strong opinion about it: it is called the Dunning-Kruger effect, named after

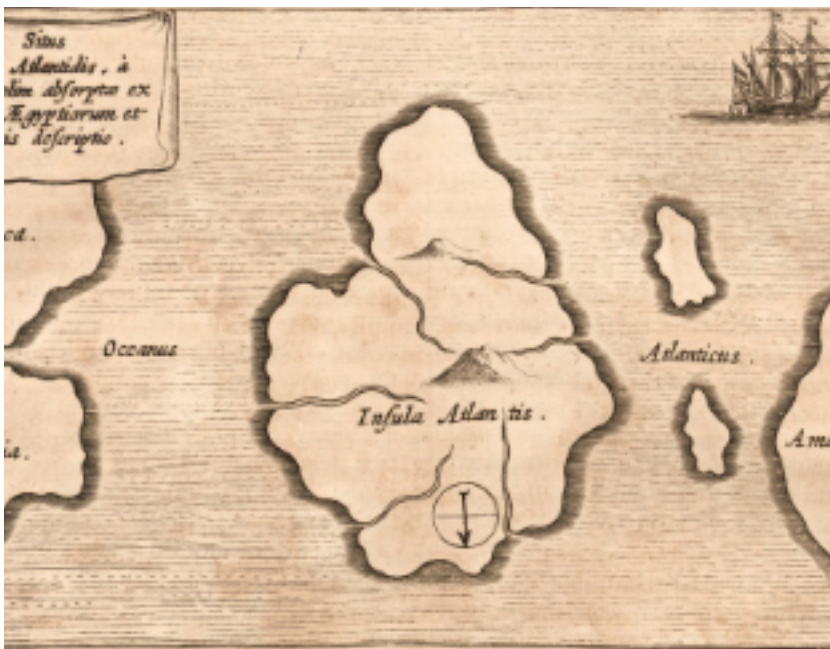
To be conscious of what we know and don't know is the responsibility of the philosopher. To ask ourselves from time to time "How do you know what you think you know?" keeps us on our toes. We can't possibly know all there is to know about everything, but we can have the humility to know when we are out of our depth. The quest for knowledge and our relation to it is a constant balance between conviction, doubt and faith. We have the right to ask any question and the power to make it our own journey. There is a true joy in discovering and unveiling the mysteries of Nature; it is what keeps us young at heart.

3. The habit of giving opinions and advice on matters outside of one's knowledge.

THE MYTH OF ATLANTIS

AND THE UNIVERSAL FLOOD

Athanasius Kircher's map of Atlantis, placing it in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, from *Mundus Subterraneus* 1669



The myth of Atlantis is one of the most famous and controversial myths of all time. Ever since the myth began – with the Greek philosopher Plato – people have been asking whether or not his story of a sunken continent was a historical fact.

It is fair to assume that Plato did intend his story (which appears in the two dialogues *Timaeus* and *Critias*) to be taken historically, because he plainly insists that it was absolutely true – and everybody knows the great importance that Plato and his

teacher, Socrates, attached to truth.

Plato claims that his account of Atlantis came from an Egyptian priest in the city of Sais (where there was a very important centre of historical studies), who told the story to Solon, the Athenian lawgiver and one of the seven sages of ancient Greece. This priest said that Atlantis was a large island situated in front of the Pillars of Hercules (in antiquity these were located on either side of the straits of Gibraltar). From there travellers could go on to other islands and from these islands to a much vaster continent to the west of Atlantis. Many people suggest that this much vaster continent was America, which does indeed meet this description.

Plato said that the sinking of Atlantis took place 9,000 years

before Solon, i.e. approximately 11,500 years ago, or about 9,500 B. C. This is very interesting because it is the same date as the end of the last ice age. Scientists claim that during the last ice age the sea level was 130 metres lower than at present, and enormous areas of land were inhabited by different people. They also say that the sea level rose very quickly, because the glaciers thawed very fast. At that time there was a series of climate changes that significantly altered the face of the Earth.



"The Deluge", frontispiece to Gustave Doré's illustrated edition of the Bible

The "Father of Western philosophy" gave us another relevant piece of information: he said that Atlantis was destroyed by a cataclysm and it is curious that almost all ancient peoples had a myth that spoke about the destruction of a humanity that lived before us by means of a flood. These flood myths have so many things in common that it suggests that they are related to the same story. Below, I have made an analysis of the different

traditions, highlighting their points in common. I have grouped the myths together in cultural or geographical areas, to make the summary shorter and more accessible. Many of the myths have been simplified for reasons of brevity.

A. Hindu Tradition

Indian myths about the flood are contained in the Shatapatha Brahmana (a Vedic commentary), the Mahabharata (a religious epic) and the Bhagavata Purana. Their main features are:

- The protagonist of the myth was a virtuous man called Manu who escaped from the flood.
- He was able to escape from the flood because he was advised by a god who took the form of a fish.
- The people, animals and plants that survived later repopulated the Earth.
- He was saved by building a ship.

B. Mesopotamian Tradition

In this culture the Flood was considered a completely historical event. Echoes of the Flood have come down to us through the epic stories of *Uta-Napishtim* (written about 1700 B.C and largely lost, only 13% survived) and Gilgamesh. Both have the following common characteristics:

- The gods wanted to destroy mankind by a flood because men were very noisy.
- A god, Enki, took pity on men and decided to save the best of



Enkidu, Gilgamesh's friend. From Ur, Iraq, 2027–1763 BCE

them all, whose name was Uta-Napishtim.

- This god instructed him to build a large boat according to a predetermined plan.
- The family of Uta-Napishtim and a group of farm animals were saved.

C. Judeo-Christian Tradition. The Bible

This has many similarities with the Mesopotamian traditions and many historians claim that it was based on the Mesopotamian myths. The myth contained in the Bible highlights the following:

- The Flood was produced by a divine decision to destroy mankind because of its great wickedness.
- God gave Noah instructions about how to build an ark.
- God gave indications about who should go into the ark: close family and two of each animal species, one male and one female.

Noah's ark on the Mount Ararat by Simone de Myle, 1570.



D. Book of Enoch

Enoch was the grandfather of Noah, or at least, so it appears in this book. It is an apocryphal book in the Christian religion, that is, it may be inspired by God but was not included in the biblical canon. The new features we find with respect to previous traditions are as follows:

- It stresses the wickedness (the evil) of men who, after discovering the powers of angels and demons, used them for evil ends.
- It mentions a great shining chariot that appeared in the sky,

and seems to be describing a comet or meteorite.

- It says that the stars changed their known courses or, what amounts to the same, the axis of the Earth was changed.

E. Chinese Tradition

There were several versions of great catastrophes. The most relevant are:

- There was no divine warning to a few chosen individuals, but there were two survivors: a brother and a sister, from whom a new humanity arose.
- The cataclysm is presented as the result of a clash, either

between great gods, or between gods and men.

- It makes reference to an alteration of the Earth's axis, with dramatic consequences.

F. Greek Traditions

Through the work of the Greek poet, Hesiod, "Works and Days" (a kind of history of humanity) and through Apollodorus, who completed the information, we have a story of the flood where humanity was destroyed, with the following main characteristics:

- A husband and wife, Deucalion and Pyrrha, were warned by Prometheus (the Titan who gave



fire to mankind, the symbol of intelligence) of the coming of a cataclysm that would be sent by Zeus to destroy mankind.

- Deucalion built a great ark or chest and stored everything essential in it.
- Zeus caused a terrible rain to fall and only a few people, who gathered together on the mountains of Thessaly, were saved. Then, the mountains of Thessaly were split asunder and the water covered everything.

G. American Traditions

America has the greatest number of myths and legends about the Flood. We can find them from the Arctic Circle to Chile. We can highlight the following:

- Men were most often saved by taking refuge on high mountain tops, rather than in boats.

- Most of these legends mention gigantic waves as the cause of the disaster.
- People are warned of the grave danger that awaits them by various miraculous animals, rather than by gods.
- The displeasure of the different gods towards mankind is frequently cited as a major reason for the punishment.
- The idea appears that some of the “pillars of heaven” were broken. Some Aztec myths seem to describe movements in “the axis of the earth”.

For most of the academic world today, the myth of Atlantis and the Great Flood have no historical value, mainly because this account conflicts at a fundamental level with the beliefs that are currently held. In the academic world there are a

series of established ideas and beliefs that have become so ingrained that they have become articles of faith, and anything that does not fit in with them is regarded as pure fantasy. However, there are many archaeological discoveries that do not fit in with the conventional theories, some of which are exhaustively detailed in an interesting book called *Forbidden Archeology: The Hidden History of the Human Race*. But such discoveries rarely come to the notice of the general public, because our society seems unwilling to accept that there might be gaps in our knowledge. Maybe this is the reason why Atlantis only interests a minority of people. But this is a dangerous tendency, because when a society thinks it knows everything, it begins to forget the little that it knows.

Antonio Belda

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