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NewAcropolis

Philosophy and Education for the Future

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AND MORE

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

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What's Inside

Cooperation, laws and myth – the cornerstones of civilization

According to Yuval Harari, the author of *Sapiens*, *Homo Deus* and other bestselling books, the reason why human beings came to dominate the planet was not because we were more intelligent, but because we learnt how to cooperate.

In order to cooperate, we need rules (or laws) that we all accept and adhere to. We would not even be able to play football with each other if we didn't accept the same rules. However, despite having better information technology than ever before, Harari says that "we can't agree on the most basic facts. Something is broken." And if we look at the current divisions and polarizations – whether between groups within countries or between countries – we can see that he has a strong point.

At the same time, the institutions that express, uphold and enshrine the values that have 'built' our civilizations, are being frequently attacked and undermined, with the result that people are completely losing trust in any kind of 'system' and retreating more and more into individualism, echo chambers and their own little 'bubble'. There is no doubt that a lot of criticism is justified, that we do have systemic failures, that certain people seem to be 'above the rules', that so many 'promises' were broken and that our faith in progress has become shattered. But where shall we go from here?

No one can 'fix' this situation anymore. However, we must never underestimate our own ability to make a difference and to become part of the solution rather than being part of the problem. We need to shift from thinking most of the time about ourselves to thinking much more about 'all of us', from our obsession with our 'rights' to a concern with our responsibilities, from being a 'passive receiver' of the benefits of systems that were created by previous generations to becoming an 'active builder' of sustainable systems for future generations. We have to come out of our bubbles and realize that we have to learn to cooperate again, not with the people from our bubble but with the people we disagree with, those who seem like 'aliens' to us!

We have been encouraged for so long to do only what we 'like' that it is hard for most of us now to do things that we don't 'like'. But there is no other way. We cannot continue to run away from all that is unpleasant, difficult, requiring an effort, etc. We need to learn to become more resilient on all levels and understand that life contains both pleasure and pain and that there will always be different opinions and ways of looking at the same thing.

And we have to change our attitude to rules and laws and realize that they are the key to cooperation and, according to the British philosopher A.C. Grayling: 'one of the things most conducive to civilization, and one of the things potentially most important for the safety, liberty and flourishing of human individuals. (…) If there is one thing that draws the line between civilization and barbarism, it is the rule of the law. It is a bulwark against arbitrary power, it provides remedies for the injured, its due processes are a safeguard – imperfectly so, but far better than none at all – against injustice and miscarriage."

How did humans manage to overcome divides and achieve cohesion and union in the past? According to Yuval Harari, we used language and myths about religion and nationhood that bound us together. In his most recent book *'Unstoppable Us'*, which is aimed at young people, he describes storytelling as humanity's 'superpower'.

Maybe Tolkien was onto something when he said that myth seemed to be the best way to communicate morality and that one of his goals in writing *Lord of the Rings* was to write a 'myth' for the English. A myth is not just fantasy and is much more profound than the simple 'narratives' of football, fashion, money, etc., which are all based on stories we tell ourselves. A true myth enables us to connect to a timeless reality, to meaning and purpose and to our souls. So, let us pay due respect to myths, cooperation and laws, because they have always been cornerstones of civilization and we might have to start again!

Sabine Leitner

Destiny, Fate and Free Will

In the current mainstream world view, the concepts of destiny and fate are thought of as outdated superstitions and anyone who speaks of these matters is likely to be ridiculed. At the same time, free will is denied by a majority of scientists and philosophers today. So in the prevalent modern view there is neither destiny, fate nor free will.

However, for many people, these topics continue to be of interest, as they always have been throughout the history of mankind. Many psychologists, anthropologists and historians of ideas, such as Jung, Viktor Frankl[1], Laurens Van Der Post and Mircea Eliade have stressed the human being's inherent need for meaning.

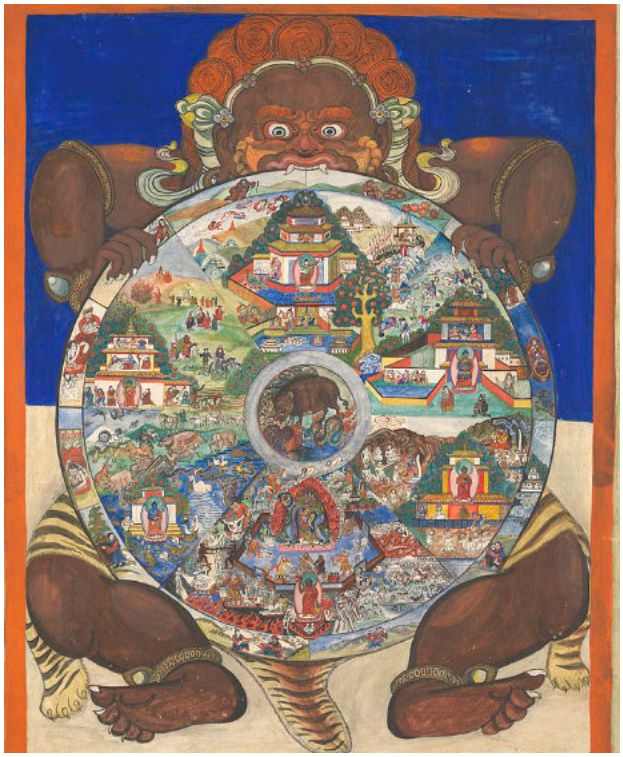
The word 'Destiny' is associated with the word 'destination'. In other words, it is about where we are going. In ancient Greece, the Cosmos itself was believed to have a destiny. It was thought of as an ordered whole, guided by a great intelligence. Likewise, the word 'universe' means 'combined into one whole' and also has the sense of something that is moving in the same direction (uni-verse).

1. Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*. Beacon Press. 2006.

Hubble view of the expanding galaxy cluster Abell 1689.

Plato and the Neoplatonists said that at the root of the world is a Divine Mind or World of Archetypal Ideas, on which the physical universe is based. This Divine Mind contains the model or archetype of what the future universe will be. The universe is therefore evolving into as perfect as possible a reflection of its heavenly model.

In this view, Humanity, which is part of the Cosmos, also has a destiny, which is the 'archetype' that we are moving towards – what we could call 'the perfected or fully realized human being'. In this sense, the whole of history could be seen as a cyclical movement towards that perfection.



Yama holding the Bhavacakra or *Wheel of life*

History is a very interesting field in which to study destiny. People speak of "men of destiny" in history, such as Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar or Winston Churchill, to cite some Western examples. These people had a sense that they were born for an important collective purpose, and there is often an element of precognition in their lives. According to one of Churchill's former classmates, the young Winston told him he 'knew' that one day he would save his country from a great peril.

There are also many cases in history where a nation was 'miraculously' saved from destruction or disaster by some apparently 'divine intervention': Japan was saved by a 'divine wind' (*kami kaze*) which sank the invading Chinese fleet in the 13th century, and the Spanish Armada was wrecked by storms when it attempted to invade England in the 16th century.

Modern historians point out that in both cases the invasions were badly mismanaged, and no doubt this was an important contributing factor. But had it not been for these acts of 'divine intervention', both invading forces would probably have been successful and the history of both countries would have been very different. Was destiny at work?

In order to understand the concept of Individual Destiny, it will be helpful to look at the Indian concepts of Dharma and Karma. Dharma means cosmic law and order, and is similar to the heavenly model, archetype or destiny towards which everything is tending. In the case of individual beings, each one has their own unique destiny, which they are striving, over many lives, to attain. In each particular life, individuals will have their particular dharma. But they will also have their karma.

Karma means action, so it refers to all the actions we do to realize our dharma. Let us imagine an architect's model of a great building. This is the Dharma. Karma is all the actions that need to be taken in order to build it in reality: gathering materials, shaping them, putting them in place, testing them, finishing them, etc. But along the way we are bound to make mistakes, most of them due to our ignorance of what our dharma, or model, is. These mistakes, or wrong turnings, have to be corrected, so that we can find our way back to our dharma. It is also important to understand that dharma is not something outside ourselves. In the same way that the universal dharma arises from the nature of the universe, so our individual dharma arises from our own nature. To be true to one's dharma is to be true to oneself.

Karma is in many ways similar to the concept of fate, but it is not as fatalistic as many people believe. Some events are believed to be predetermined, but not all. In particular, one is not predestined to be bad or good, as that is always a

matter for our free will, no matter how difficult. Moreover, helping others is not an interference in their karma, but an exercise of our free will to do good.

In order to understand this better, let us look at three types of karma described in a textbook on Hindu philosophy[2]:

1) So-called 'ripe' karma – the fruits of previous actions and choices that are going to be reaped in this life. These fruits may be pleasant or painful, depending on actions in previous lives. But they are said to be unavoidable, because they are the effects of their causes. The advice given for dealing with this type of karma is to "take it as it comes… and work it out contentedly and patiently. In it we are paying our past debts."

2) Accumulated karma – this is seen particularly in our character, our capacities, the qualities and defects we are born with and which develop over time. However, these can be modified. We can improve our character in one lifetime and we can develop skills that we were not born with – through effort.

3) Karma which we are creating now. Every action is either in accordance with dharma or not, and depending on this we are constantly generating so-called good and bad karma, which we will have to deal with in the immediate or distant future, in this life or another. The karma is not separate from the action, but part of it. Karma is simply the inherent consequence of the action.

This brings us naturally to the question of fate. Generally, though not always, this word has a negative connotation, whereas 'destiny' often has a positive connotation. In this sense we could equate the Western concept of fate with the Eastern concept of 'bad karma'. As we have seen in the above discussion of karma, most bad karma is due to our own actions in the past. But it is not always so, firstly because we are part of a collective – humanity, our country, family, etc. – so we are affected by other people's karma, and partly because there are some reactions that arise not because of any mistake of our own, but because of a natural conflict with our environment, a clash of consciousness. Think of any great reformer, such as Jesus or Martin Luther King. They undergo great trials, but their suffering is not due to their own wrongdoing but to the reaction of their environment to the new message they are bringing.

Mythology can also give us some interesting insights into this subject.

The cosmological tree *Yggdrasil*, Friedrich Wilhelm Heine (1886)

Norse mythology speaks of the three *Norns*, three very wise women who rule the course of time and guard the fountain of youth at the root of the world tree (Yggdrasil). Like the Greek and Roman *Fates*, they spin the destinies of human beings, give them blessings or curses and dictate their allotted spans of life.

In view of this, the idea of Fate seems to contain the notion of predestination. However, we have seen from the above explanation of karma that, although many things may be predetermined by our past actions, there is also a large scope for free will. In an essay about Sophocles's play *Oedipus Rex*, the Oxford classicist E.R. Dodds explained that while oracles predict the future, they do not dictate it. He draws a comparison with Jesus's prophecy at the Last Supper that Peter would deny him three times.

2.*Sanatana Dharma, an Advanced Textbook of Hindu Religion and Ethics.* The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, 1974

Jesus *knows* that Peter will do this, but we as readers would in no way suggest that Peter was a puppet of fate being forced to deny Christ.

In this way, the actions of human beings are not predetermined, and yet the gods and sages know what they will do, because they have a larger knowledge of their character and all the karmic factors involved – they can see the future because they are wise. As seers, they can see the past, the present and the future as one, simultaneously.

Another concept in Norse mythology is *Ragnarök*, the end of the world. The god Odin knows that this will come, and yet he continues with his duty (dharma) of maintaining the world order until the last moment. He is a good example of combining

Odin throws his spear at the Vanir host in an illustration by Lorenz Frølich (1895)

fate with free will. He does not let 'cruel fate' alter his actions. He keeps fighting until the end. And in the myth, after the destruction of the old world, a new and better world will come to replace it, governed by Odin's son, Balder the Pure.

The story of Odysseus, as told by Homer in *The Odyssey*, can also shed some light on the questions of destiny, fate and free will and how they are interrelated. For myths and legends are not only entertaining stories, they also contain symbols of philosophical and metaphysical truths.

Odysseus was a king of the island of Ithaca who had to go and fight in the Trojan War. After the war had ended he set sail for his homeland with 12 ships and 700 men, but was delayed by a series of difficulties (which became his 'adventures'). Very briefly, Ithaca can be interpreted as his destiny, his Ideal, while the difficulties he encounters represent his fate or karmic adventures along the way. If we relate this to the explanation of karma above, we can see that many of the trials he has to go through are caused by the foolishness, greed or brutality of his men. Perhaps his 'men' represent lower aspects of himself (Odysseus, as the hero, would represent the Higher Self). By the end of his 10-year journey, all of these 'men' have perished, and he arrives at his destiny alone.

To sum up, we could say that Destiny is Dharma modified by Karma, much of which we build with our own hands. Our actions are not predetermined, but we are inclined to act in a certain way by our past choices. However, we are always ultimately free to act in the way we believe to be right and we are morally responsible for all our actions.

Although Freud believed that the "deeply rooted belief in psychic freedom and choice [is] quite unscientific, and it must give ground before the claims of a determinism which governs even mental life,"[3] Plotinus (a Neoplatonist) argued that we only doubt our own free will because we are beset by "compulsions, violent assaults of passion crushing the soul, feeling ourselves mastered by these experiences, going where they lead, being like slaves to them… So we doubt whether we are anything at all and have power over anything."[4]

In the light of this, perhaps the only way to know whether or not we have free will is to master ourselves and be able to say, like the poet, "I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul."[5].

Julian Scott

3. *Great Books of the Western World, 2. The Great Ideas: I – Fate.* Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc. Chicago. 1987.
4. Plotinus, *The Enneads*, VI.8.I. Penguin Classics, 1991.
5. From *Invictus* by William Ernest Henley.

Queen Elizabeth II
and the Role of the Monarch

The recently deceased British monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, was the longest serving monarch in the history of the United Kingdom, and a great example to observe what is the role of the monarch in our times. Despite the fact that the world of kings and queens is now more symbolic than actual in Western countries, when she died, hundreds of thousands of people rushed to London to queue up and bid farewell to the Queen lying in state. So why was she so popular not only among Anglo-Saxon nations, but in other countries as well?

Elizabeth, who was born in Mayfair, London, in 1926, was the daughter of the Duke and Duchess of York, later George VI and Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother. In that year the world was still recovering from the First World War, General Francisco Franco became the Leader of Spain, coal miners were striking in Britain, A. A. Milne published his iconic book, Winnie the Pooh, and in Japan, Emperor Hirohito began his 53-year-long reign. There were no mobile phones, no internet, no microwaves, no atomic bombs, not even television; BBC radio had only been launched four years earlier, and the population of the whole world was just 2 billion people (about 45 million of whom lived in Great Britain).

Photo by Annie Spratt on Unsplash

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, 1952 Royal Photograph, Internet www.archive

Although the young princess was not expected to be a queen later, she got the finest private education, like other children from wealthy families at that time. She grew up together with her sister, Princess Margaret. When her grandfather, George V died in 1936, his eldest son succeeded to the throne and was crowned as King Edward VIII. But, as everyone knows, the new king abdicated to marry Mrs Wallis Simpson, a divorced American woman, so Elizabeth's father became the successor and his eldest daughter, Elizabeth, the heir presumptive. From that point on, Elizabeth was trained to become a ruler. She received tuition not only from her father, but also from the Vice-Provost of Eton and the Archbishop of Canterbury. She learnt French, history, art, horse-riding and swimming. So, she was prepared on all levels, from the physical to the mental, as was recommended by ancient writers, such as Plato. In World War II, the education of Elizabeth and her sister continued, but along with the rest of the country, they actively took part in the defence of the country. Elizabeth was a volunteer in the British Army. After the war, she married Philip Mountbatten at the age of 21, and later gave birth to four children. The couple stayed together for 73 years, until Philip's death in 2021.

When her father died in 1952, Elizabeth became Queen of the Commonwealth countries: the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Pakistan, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), as well as the Head of the Commonwealth. On the eve of her Coronation, before she took her formal oath at Westminster Abbey, Elizabeth gave a radio broadcast speech, in which she said: "Throughout all my life and with all my heart I shall strive to be worthy of your trust." This pledge was more than just a promise, for in the coming decades the Queen devoted herself to her duty. Elizabeth's coronation was the first in history to be broadcast on television.

During her long reign, Queen Elizabeth made a great effort to pull together what is called the Commonwealth, which grew from 7 nations to 56, and spanned the globe, representing different nations with different cultures. She was the head of the Commonwealth, in which many nations became independent during her 70-year-long reign. She considered it very important that, despite their differences, these nations should communicate with each other. As she said: "Not only are there tremendous rewards for this cooperation, but through

Photo by Samuel Regan-Asante on Unsplash

dialogue we protect ourselves against the dangers that can so easily arise from a failure to talk or to see the other person's point of view." Queen Elizabeth II initiated many programmes and funds to support communities in the Commonwealth countries, especially in education and

PRESS ASSOCIATION / Danny Lawson

healthcare. She was also Patron of over 500 organizations, including charities and military organizations. She had a special relationship with the military, not only because she had served in the War, but because she thought the UK owed a great debt to the people of the armed forces who had sacrificed their lives for their country and its people to keep the peace.

The Queen also regarded religion as a way of reaching peace. She was inspired many times by the teachings of the Bible. Though she was a committed Christian, she accepted all faiths and religions. Once she said: "For me, the life of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, whose birth we celebrate today, is an inspiration and an anchor in my life. A role model of reconciliation and forgiveness, he stretched out his hands in love, acceptance and healing. Christ's example has taught me to seek to respect and value all people, of whatever faith or none." While many people met the Queen in a formal way, such as when she appointed new prime ministers (under her rule, 15 people were appointed), or when she sent messages to the nation, she was also known for her hobbies and her love of horses and dogs. She was a great horse-rider and fan of horse races, and supported the survival of rare breeds of horses and ponies in her breeding programme. She was famous for the Corgis too: in her lifetime, she had 30 Corgis and Dorgis (Corgis crossed with Dachshunds).

When Queen Elizabeth II died, many of the people who queued to pay their respects to her spoke of their admiration for the Queen because she represented stability and was an example of dedication and service. She embodied not only Britain and the Commonwealth, but something more subtle. She was the personification of a fading tradition and all the values connected with that tradition: chivalry, loyalty, unity, modesty, sincerity, and gratitude. Moral virtues. Many philosophers throughout the centuries have emphasized the importance of the virtues, which are the foundation of the good and just state. In this world, where there are fewer and fewer advocates of the virtues, the Queen was one of them and her life was an example that it is possible to live accordingly.

Istvan Orban

The Mystery of the ZODIAC

The Zodiac, the greatest pillar of astrological lore, has so much to offer to the student of esotericism. Its origins are lost in the mists of time, while its wealth of symbolism escapes human imagination. Because of its universal, mythological and symbolic nature, the zodiac has lent itself to many astrological and philosophical interpretations. Some have seen in it the process of cosmic creation while others have spoken of this process as the human soul's journey towards self-realisation.

I have gathered here a few possible interpretations which I have found meaningful and profound. In doing so, I wish to emphasis first, that the Zodiac and all the other elements that form the astrological language, should not be taken solely as objects which exist in some far-off place in space. Instead, they should be seen as archetypical symbols which exist everywhere, within us as well as within everything else.

The starry sky and the zodiac in particular are the symbols of a metaphysical reality which exist both within and without the human being. This reality is the realm of the archetypes. They are the immutable and eternal laws of creation, the metaphysical causes and sources of what happens in the world, the familiar gods and goddesses of classical mythology. They constantly shape not only matter but also the ideas that manifest in the human mind.

Before trying to shed some light on the nature and meaning of the *Zodiac*, it is important to clarify a misconception which is recurrent even among some students of astrology.

The zodiac spoken of in the Western astrological system which, is now popular all over the globe, is not the same as the *Sidereal Zodiac* (also known as *Zodiac of Constellations*).

In fact, the 'sun signs' columns found in newspapers do not refer to any star-groupings in the sky but to the so-called *Tropical Zodiac*. This is a belt-shaped region of the sky that extends approximately 8° above and below the ecliptic, the apparent path of the sun across the celestial sphere over the course of the year (see Figure 1). This belt is divided into 12 equal sections, which are the so called *signs of the zodiac*. The *Tropical Zodiac* is not based on any

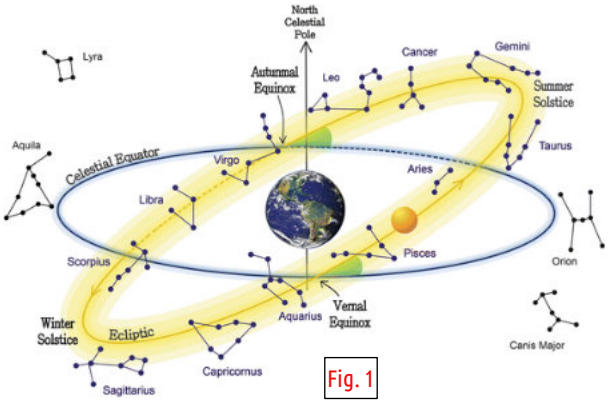


Fig. 1

star-groups but on the orientation of the Earth to the Sun and their vital relationship.

The four seasons mark the four cardinal points of this *Tropical Zodiac*. The *Tropical Zodiac* begins with the sun's place at the vernal equinox, which it designates as the beginning of the sign *Aries*. While the *Tropics of Cancer* and *Capricorn* denote the places of the sun at the summer and winter solstices.

The *Sidereal* or *Constellational Zodiac* is a 12-fold division of the *Sphere of the Fixed Stars* in a band along the ecliptic (Figure A). The division of this band of stars is somewhat arbitrary because each grouping of stars varies in size. The confusion between the two zodiacs arises because of the similarities of the names used to denote the signs of the zodiac and the 12 star-groupings (also called *asterisms* or *constellations*).

To be fair, in the mind of the astrologers of old, there was always a sort of correspondence between the two zodiacs. And we know, for instance, that thanks to the astronomical phenomenon of the *precession of the equinoxes*, which takes place every 26,000 years (approximately), the two zodiacs actually coincide.

The term *Zodiac* comes from the Latin *zodiacus* and the Greek *zōdiakòs*, etymologically connected to the word *zoon*. All these terms refer to the idea of 'life' and 'living beings'. The images of animals depicted in ancient and modern *Zodiacs* all over the world convey well the idea of a sentient cosmos pulsating with life, and antique constellation maps still bear witness to this ancient vision of the cosmos.

The Zodiac as the abode of Creative Hierarchies of Life

The Fixed Stars have been grouped for ages so as to form constellations. Because they were "fixed" and not "wanderers" (*planet* etymologically means a *wanderer*), it seemed evident to men, awed and bewildered by a world of constant change, that they must belong to a much higher level of being than the planets.

Thus we know that the constellations became the symbols and the very centres of operation of great *Creative Hierarchies of Beings*, the invisible builders of material and spiritual worlds. Within our solar system, it was the Sun which released their formative energies as, each month, it became the focal point for the operation of one of these Hierarchies.

Detail from an old constellation map

These Creative Hierarchies also became the abode of human souls. Ancient teachings[1] speak of the starry origin of the human soul and the interconnection of the Zodiacal belt and the Milky Way. Souls were believed to pass through heavenly portals (i.e. the two solstitial gates of *Cancer* and *Capricorn*) when going from the sky to the earth and returning from the earth to the sky.

Interestingly enough, Vedic astrology (called *Jyotisha* which means 'light') sees the *Constellational Zodiac* as a kind of harmonic division of the light coming from the centre of our galaxy. This energy which is emanated from this invisible 'galactic sun' reaches the Earth via the fixed stars of Sagittarius and 'enters' our solar system through the planet Jupiter.

1. See for instance, Plato's *Timaeus* or Macrobius's *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio.*

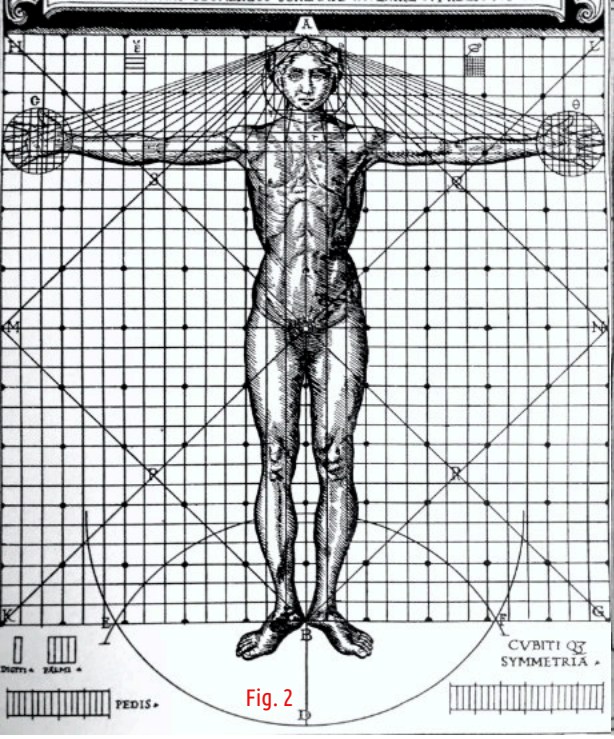


Fig. 2

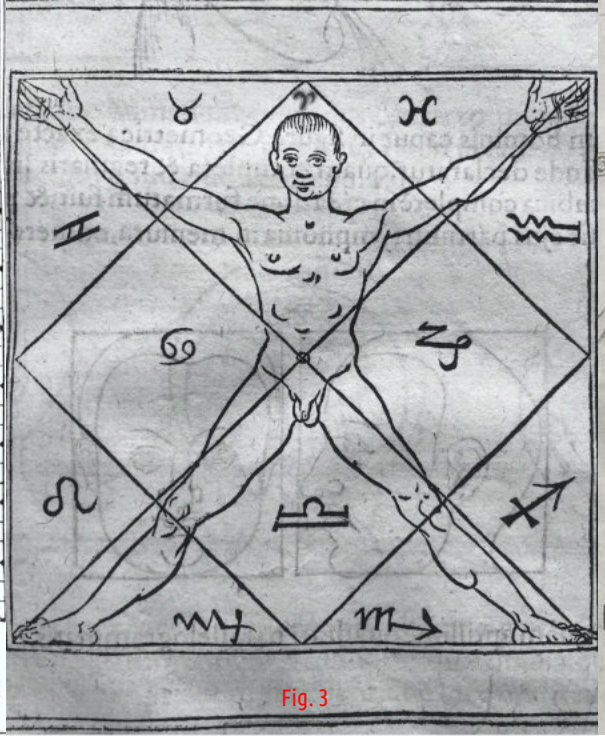


Fig. 3

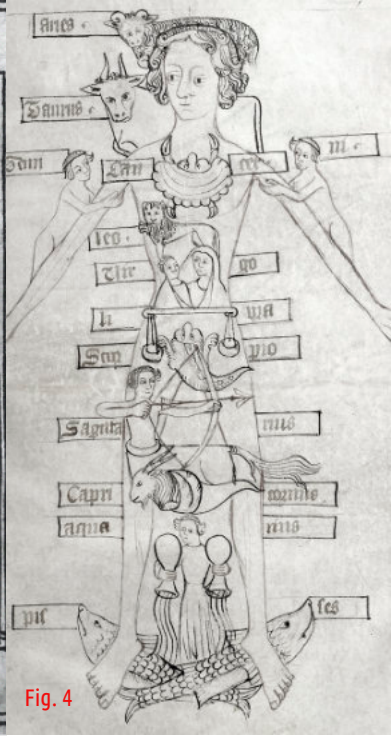


Fig. 4

Fig. 2 The Macrocosm, Cesariano's edition of Vitruvius - Fig. 3 'Man' the Microcosm under Zodiacal influences, Robert Fludd (1574-1637) - Fig. 4 The Zodiacal/Melothesic Man.

The Zodiac as the Celestial or Heavenly Man

As we have said above, the zodiac is symbolic of the formative powers of the universe, which are focused upon Earth and within human beings. For this reason, the zodiac as a whole has also been described as being representative of the *Macrocosm* (Figure 2) or the *Heavenly Man* of which the Earth is a part. By following the hermetic axiom, *as above so below*, the human being (the *Microcosm*, Fig. 3), or more precisely the human soul, becomes the reflected image of this *Heavenly Man* (also called *Melothesic Man*). The zodiac therefore becomes the key to unlock the mystery of the human being, to unfold his universal potential and manifest his archetypal powers.

We can find scattered remains of these teachings both in medical astrology and in various alchemical texts from the Middle Ages. In them we find the curious image of a human being with the zodiacal signs superimposed on the parts of the anatomy they are traditionally said to rule (Figure 4).

In a similar manner, Vedic astrology speaks of the *Kala Purusha* as a kind of *Cosmic Man* who is the personification of *Time* before the manifestation of the universe. He is the link between the Individual and the Absolute All, the One and the Many. The creative energy and will of this *Kala Purusha* flow through the signs of the zodiac to reach all manifested beings. As with the *Ouroborus*, the serpent swallowing its tail, the *Kala Purusha* described in Hindu astrological works is depicted as a circular being with his feet touching his head and constellation signs painted on his body (Figure 5).

The Zodiac as a Cyclic process of Transformation

As mentioned before, the *Tropical Zodiac* is seen as a way of plotting the yearly course of the Sun along the ecliptic. The 12 signs of the zodiac mark the rhythm of nature and the seasons by representing different types of solar power. The sun is, of course, the ultimate symbol of life in our system. As each of these portions of the ecliptic channel different types of solar energy, they become the symbols of the essential qualities with which each thing is endowed at its birth. The zodiacal sequence along the ecliptic also reveals the influences caused by the cyclic interplay of light and darkness and the changes in the electromagnetic field upon the Earth.

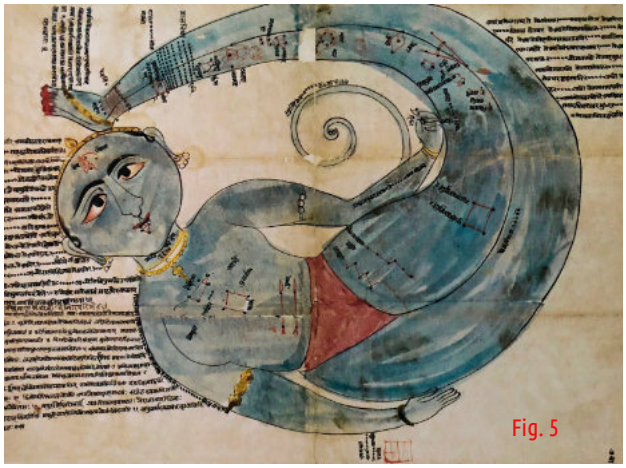


Fig. 5

An image of Kala Purusha

In this interpretation, one of the essential things about the zodiac is the connection with the human experience of change. By studying the movement of the sun throughout the zodiac we try to understand our own seasons of change and inner transformation – our cycles of birth, growth, fullness, decay, endings and rebirth. The spring signs (Aries to Gemini) represent the sprouting of the seeds, the process of plant germination, putting out roots, stems and branches. The summer signs (Cancer to Virgo), represent the growth of flowers and fruits. During the autumnal signs (Libra to Sagittarius) the plant's leaves wither and fall to the ground and become humus for future cycles while the fruits release seeds which will remain dormant in the ground. During the winter signs (Capricorn to Pisces) there is anticipation of the future and expectancy. These physical and karmic seeds or potentialities will eventually germinate or reawaken in the springtime.

The Zodiac as the Universal Matrix

Students of astrology and alchemy are familiar with the division of the 12 signs of the zodiac into four groups corresponding with the four elements (Fire, Air, Water and Earth). These four elements should be seen as the different degrees of matter (or substance) with which each living being, in differing proportions, is composed. From the most dense (physical matter proper) to the most subtle (which can be called mental or psychic matter) matter, the whole of space is filled with this 'living substance'. In this sense, the Zodiac can be interpreted as a kind of "aura", or electromagnetic spheroid, surrounding the Earth, each sign representing a section of this 'aura'. This kind of space, which, as it were, envelops our planet, is a kind of 'matrix', a field upon which formative powers are focused.

The zodiac is also seen as a web of forces, the electromagnetic field of the Earth, building and recreating throughout the millennia this vast planetary organism. This 'aura' is a *living substance*, the very *crucible of life* from which every living organism (i.e. every vehicle of consciousness), visible and invisible, will be built.

The Earth is surrounded by this 'zodiacal aura', which remains constantly attached to it, while its 'emanations' beat down constantly upon individual and collective humanity. In this interpretation, the zodiac therefore becomes the very substance of the so-called 'astrological influences'. While the planets themselves, through their movements, activate these zodiacal 'emanations'.

Agostino Dominici

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Genius of the Northern Renaissance

The Life and Works of Albrecht Dürer

If you were asked to name an artist of the Renaissance who was a superb painter, draughtsman, and skilled in science and mathematics, you would most likely think of Leonardo da Vinci. But there were others, and foremost among them was a German artist named Albrecht Dürer. Dürer was the leading artist of what is now called the 'Northern Renaissance', meaning north of the Alps, as distinct from the Italian Renaissance, south of the Alps.

Dürer was born in 1471 in Nuremberg, Germany, at a time when Germany was part of the Holy Roman Empire. As a young teenager he was trained initially in metal craft and drawing under his father, a well known goldsmith. However, his precocious talent in drawing brought about his apprenticeship to the leading artist in Nuremberg. After graduating, Dürer spent a number of years travelling and learning his trade in artists' workshops in cities throughout northern Europe.

In 1494, at the age of 23 he made his first of two trips across the Alps to Venice, Italy, one of the leading centres of art at that time. Dürer learnt much about Italian Renaissance art during his trip, and was hugely influenced by it. On his return to Nuremberg, he opened his own art workshop. As well as an artist, he proved to be a skilled businessman, and his art came to the attention of

The Four Horsemen, from The Apocalypse, by Albrecht Dürer, 1498

Maximilian I, the Holy Roman Emperor, who became Dürer's leading patron. During the Renaissance, most artists made a living from wealthy patrons, such as clergy and political leaders, who commissioned them to create art. Those artworks often hung on walls in private residences, and were only seen by a privileged few.

Dürer's workshop was most successful in making high quality 'woodcut' prints. Woodcut printing dates as far back as 7th century China. The image to be printed is incised or cut into a wooden block. Ink is applied, and the block is pressed onto the paper to transfer the image.

Self-Portrait, by Albrecht Dürer, 1500

Hundreds of copies could be printed in this way. Prints were cheaper to make and sell, easy to transport, and multiple copies of the same original artwork could be made.

A new interest in collecting and appreciating printed artwork was created, especially among the prosperous middle classes in Europe. Making and selling prints proved a reliable source of income for Dürer. The superb quality and detail of his woodcut prints made him a celebrity across Europe, in a way that had never been achieved by an artist before.

Some have called Dürer 'the Andy Warhol of the Renaissance'. Dürer signed almost all his works with a unique monogram of his initials, in the form of a capital letter A containing inside it the capital letter D. He was one of the first artists to 'brand' or identify his work in this way.

Dürer's work was wide-ranging, including portraits, selfportraits, drawings, altarpiece paintings, prints and books.

Self-portraits

Dürer painted a series of self-portraits during his twenties, the most famous of which is called "Self Portrait at Age 28". In this painting, he portrays himself in a classic image of Jesus Christ, looking directly at the viewer, right hand conveying a blessing. As a Christian,

Dürer may have wanted to convey that his skills were God given. He may also have wanted to portray himself as a confident and successful artist.

Drawings

One of his most famous works is a simple pen and ink sketch called "Praying Hands". The image drawn is the hands of an apostle in prayer, made in preparation for a large oil painting or altarpiece, to be displayed behind a church altar. The altarpiece was subsequently destroyed by fire, but the Praying Hands sketch survived, and became famous as an international symbol of piety.

Altarpiece Paintings

An altarpiece is a set of artworks, usually large format paintings, displayed on the wall behind the altar in a Christian church. Dürer completed a number of such commissions, one of which was named the 'Adoration of the Magi', for All Saints' Church in Wittenberg, Germany, completed in 1505. Dürer styled the painting as a combination of northern naturalism with Italian use of perspective, ideal proportions and colour.

Prints

Dürer became famous mainly because of the high quality of his woodcut prints. In 1498 he produced a series of prints called the Apocalypse, depicting scenes from the Bible's Book of Revelations. The

most famous of these is 'The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse', the four riders representing Death, Famine, War and Plague. A biblical prophecy foretelling that the end of the world would occur in the year 1500 was widely believed by Christians at the time. The Apocalypse print series proved to be hugely successful for Dürer.

Books

Dürer wrote a number of books on theoretical subjects ranging from geometry, perspective drawing, human proportions, and aesthetics. Much of his learnings in these areas were acquired on his visits to Italy. He did not invent novel ideas, as such, but instead brought a scientific discipline to the subjects he wrote about.

What inspired Albrecht Dürer to create such a vast 'oeuvre', or body of artistic work?

Many Renaissance artists took inspiration from the divine, from God. Dürer wrote: "Why has God given me such magnificent talent? It is a curse as well as a great blessing".

His self portrait in the image of Jesus Christ is perhaps an example of such inspiration.

Dürer may have been inspired by Humanism, as he was known to be a follower. Humanism at the time of the Renaissance meant the revival of the study of Greco- Roman classical antiquity, bypassing the Middle Ages. Areas studied included grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry, and moral philosophy, subjects that may have influenced his art.

Dürer may have been driven by the spirit of competition with artists of the Italian Renaissance, in particular with Leonardo da Vinci. While in Venice, Dürer corresponded by letters with da Vinci, and had seen some of his work.

Dürer also wrote books on theoretical subjects, as did da Vinci.

Albrecht Dürer died in 1528, aged 56. His legacy is vast, not just in terms of the volume of paintings, drawings and prints that survive in museums and private collections today. Dürer was perhaps the first European artist entrepreneur, a master of self promotion and branding, before brands were even known. His monogram, like a trademark, became familiar across Europe. In doing so, Dürer brought artistic beauty and realism to a much wider audience.

Praying Hands by Albrecht Dürer, 1508

The quality of Dürer's paintings, prints and drawings were an inspiration to other artists across much of Europe, even in Renaissance Italy. However, many aspiring Dürers found that they were unable to achieve the quality and detail of the master himself. His time spent in Italy enabled Dürer to bring the classical artistic motifs of the Italian Renaissance to Northern art. These motifs included perspective, ideal proportions, and geometry. In turn, his work, especially his prints, influenced Italian art for many years after his death.

Whatever his inspiration, Dürer left a legacy that has influenced European art down through the centuries. He truly was the genius of the Northern Renaissance!

Tim Leahy

To Live like an Animal

Upon first inspection it is difficult for the human mind to make sense of life. Each of us are a brief spark between two infinite points of darkness. Within this spark life is not all good. True, there are great pleasures in life, but the more we are sensitive to it the more vulnerable we are to pain. To feel nothing is not an answer, since it too is a sort of agony. And so, it is hard then not to feel one is trapped in life. It seems so absurd, so we feel there must be some meaning to all of this. And so, most of us think of our lives as a story with some ending. For spiritual or religious people, it may be in the afterlife or enlightenment. Those of a secular nature might find meaning in wealth, fame or a political cause.

Animals have no need for such things. "They suffer and die but they do not seem to make a problem of it" Alan Watts writes. One might say this is because they lack the capacity for rationality, self-awareness

Photo by Hans-Jurgen Mager on Unsplash

and mental time travel. Yet, even those animals that possess these qualities, such as apes, cetaceans and corvids, do not, as many humans do, re-orient their whole lives for some future goal.

The advantage of living in such a way can be seen in the story of Meo – a cat rescued from the horrors of the Vietnam war. After being rescued, Meo, lived a life of constant displacement – moving from Hue to Saigon to Connecticut to Manhattan and finally

Photo by Karsten Winegeart on Unsplash

to London. Along the way he shattered his shoulder in a traffic accident and had two bouts of pneumonia, the last of which proved fatal. Yet, while the American journalists involved in the war, including his rescuer, dealt with Vietnam through drugs and alcohol, Meo, 'seemed wise' and 'flourished wherever he found himself'. Unlike his human companions, Meo took the pains and pleasures of life as they came, so was not haunted by what he experienced. For humans our life must make sense and so we constantly try to fit our experience into a story which we can understand. The consequence is that, due to the inevitable turmoils of life, these stories often break, shattering the meaning they bring to us.

For animals, however, each moment is meaningful in itself. One of the most powerful examples of this is in Mark Rowlands' book "The Philosopher and the Wolf", where he recounts his experience of running for the last time with his pet wolf, Brenin. By then Brenin had cancer, leaving him weak and weary as he approached the last days of his life. Yet, one day he underwent 'a strange transformation' where it seemed rest was the last thing on his mind. This prompted Rowland to take Brenin for a run. In doing so he saw the 'Brenin of old' return who 'ghosted effortlessly over the ground' as he ran. Later reflecting on this moment of brief rejuvenation Rowland observes how 'For Brenin cancer was an affliction of the moment. One moment he would feel fine. But another moment, an hour later he would feel ill' whereas for humans 'The horror of cancer – of any serious human illness – is the fact it is spread out through time.' For us, the moment forever escapes us as its significance is determined by other moments. For other animals, each moment is whole in itself unperturbed by the past and potential future.

Roman portrait fresco of a young man with a papyrus scroll, from Herculaneum,

"To live like an animal", then, is not such a simple task. One may assume it simply requires us to descend to our baser instincts, but actually it involves a resignation that life cannot be fully apprehended by the mind. Such a resignation may be too much for us, but in attempting to do so we can lighten the load of being human. For such a purpose animals are wise teachers.

Adhiyan Jeevathol

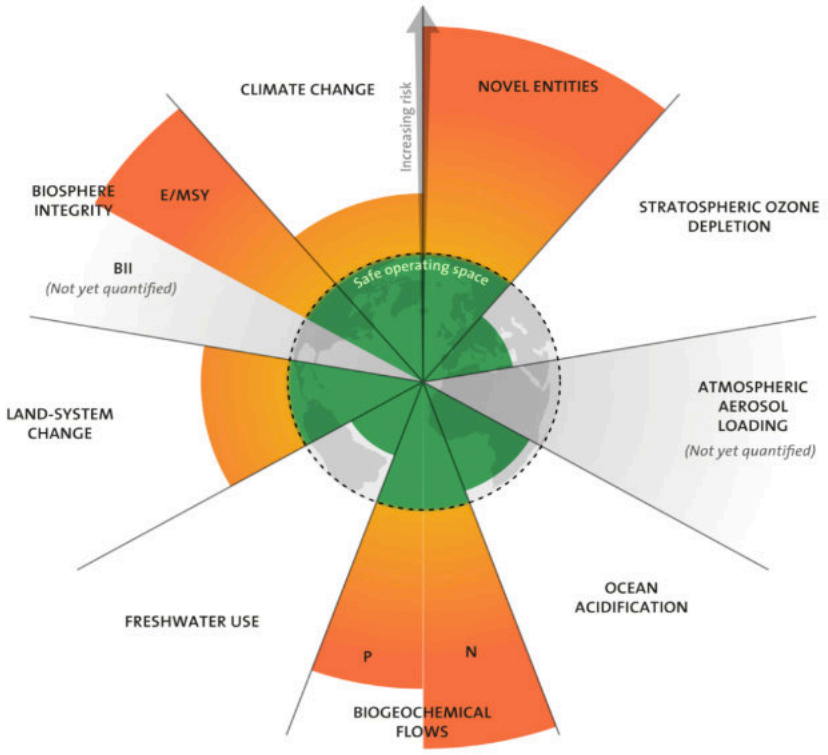
Mining, the underbelly of the industrial age

Since the dawn of civilization, mankind has been mining for precious metals to make beautiful and sacred ornaments, useful tools and destructive weapons. Metals have played such a vital role that we even named Ages after them (e.g. Bronze and Iron). But their use was relatively limited until the advent of the industrial age, when mankind progressively distanced itself from Nature in order to exploit it.

Metals are never found in their pure form, but in rocks and ores, where the metal itself is bonded with other elements (mostly oxygen), such as Magnetite for iron or Chalcocite for copper. If some metals are relatively common in the Earth's crust (e.g. Aluminium, Iron, Titanium, Magnesium and Manganese), most of them are found in concentrations that are below one percent, and for some of them, like gold and platinum, only a few grams per ton.

Most of the mining process involves the excavation of millions of tons of earth and rocks in order to crush and grind it to a thin flour-like consistency. This way the metal can be separated more easily from the ore through chemical processes. This means that mining is about creating waste, as in most cases ninety-nine percent of the excavated earth is useless, and this earth is now mixed with lots of fresh water and toxic chemical agents

Rosia Poieni copper mine in Romania, where a mountain used to be. The little dots on the left side of the mine are huge excavators and trucks.



Planetary boundaries diagram: orange sections indicate "overshoot" of boundaries, green sections indicate a "safe" state within the boundaries (data for 2022). Source Wikipedia

(sulphuric acid, caustic soda, cyanide, mercury…). Mine wastes or tailings are usually not properly treated and instead stored in large fields surrounded by dykes or dams. Most disastrous and lethal accidents happen when those dykes collapse, and for economic reasons they eventually do[1].

For reasons of efficiency, more than half of mines today are open pits. They represent more than three quarters of the metal output. These mines are just giant holes where you could easily hide a couple of Great Pyramids. They require giant excavating machines and huge trucks to transport the material to the grinder, where eighty percent of the energy consumption of the mine happens. Speaking of energy consumption, your average open-pit mine consumes enough of it to power a mid-size city. And that energy often comes from fossil fuels.

As we dug for more metals, in order to create more machines, we discovered new ores and elements that opened the way for new machines, that helped us dig even deeper, in even more remote and unspoiled places, for those ever so precious metals. A vicious cycle that has brought us here, at a crossroads where we must decide to go either business as usual and keep on digging to feed our needs, or we just step back and reset.

Because if our switch to renewable energies is supposed to reduce our CO2 output and mitigate climate change, it increases the damage to our environment in other aspects (land use, freshwater use, disturbance to ecosystems…). According to the Stockholm Resilience Centre there are nine known planetary boundaries[2], and we have now overstepped six of them.

The issue with metals, on top of all that we have seen above, is that they are used in all our modern gadgets (mobile phones, TVs and tablets), domestic appliances and means of transport, from cars to planes. One metal in particular, copper, is vital to the renewable energy transition and increased electrification. But the concentrations of copper in modern mines are getting lower and lower, as can be seen at the Rosia Poieni open-pit mine in Romania, where copper concentration is less than one percent. Knowing the actual cost of extraction, we need to ask ourselves if where we are currently heading is actually helping.

Maybe we need to think outside the box, or should I say outside the mine, and realise how disconnected we are from our environment that we are ready to destroy it in order to save it.

Maybe it is time to slow down, even stop, to take a breath and get a bit more re-connected, a bit more re-enchanted with Nature.

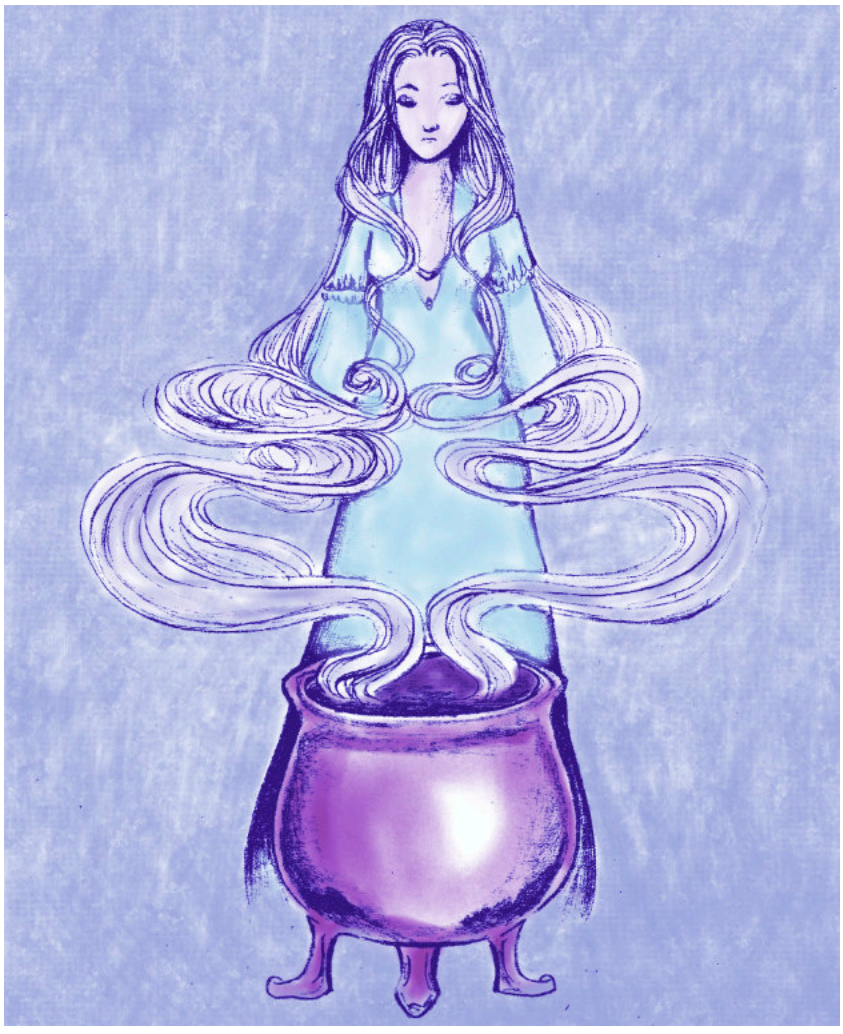
Florimond Krins

1. Mine Tailing Storage: Safety is no Accident https://www.grida.no/publications/383

2. https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries/the-nine-planetary-boundaries.html

Keridwen's Cauldron

Celtic Myth of Transformation



The story of Keridwen and her cauldron comes to us from the ancient Druidic traditions and has a particular connection to the Welsh or 'Bardic Tradition'. The myth discusses the journey of transformation and perhaps offers some keys to the Celtic understanding of initiation (Spence, 1928).

The story begins beneath Llyn Tegid (Lake Bala) in Snowdonia, where the Goddess Keridwen resides. She is troubled on account of her son Avagddu, who was so ugly and hopelessly without talent she despaired of what to do with him. One day Keridwen determined to make a magical brew that would confer upon Avagddu the sum total of divine knowledge and inspiration… To make this magical mixture the Goddess set her cauldron upon a sacred fire to burn for a year and a day. During

this time she gathered various herbs and plants according to the hours of the planets and celestial bodies before adding them to the elixir. Keridwen appointed a little boy called Gwion to help keep an eye on the cauldron whilst she was away. At one moment (accidentally or not) three drops from the magical cauldron splash onto Gwion's hand, he draws the drops to his mouth and tastes the magical brew… Immediately he gains the sum total of divine knowledge and inspiration, the past and future become clear to him and simultaneously Keridwen has understood what has happened – that Gwion has taken what was intended for her son Avagddu (Evans,1906).

Gwion flees, first transforming himself into a hare, he flits like a flash over the landscape but Keridwen transforms herself into a greyhound and pounding the earth she closes in on him. Gwion then dives into the river, transforming himself into a fish but Keridwen transforms herself into an otter and tracks Gwion along the riverbank. Gwion then leaps into the air and transforms himself into a bird but still Keridwen pursues him, this time as a hawk. Finally Gwion spies a pile of grain on the ground and falls towards it, transforming himself into a single grain of wheat but Keridwen then transforms herself into a hen and eats the grain…Gwion is gestated within her body for nine months until she gives birth to a baby boy but the Goddess doesn't acknowledge him and ties him up in a leather bag, casting the baby into the sea. Upon being found after being brought in with the tide, the baby is able to speak in rhyme and verse and is the poet Taliesin (Evans,1906).

The Bard, engraved by John Hall and Samuel Middiman (18th c.).

This is a mysterious myth with several keys of interpretation. The Bardic cosmovision saw all of creation as existing within three circles. Abred, Gywnvydd and Ceugant. Abred being the circle of graduation from evil to a balance of good which the human being crowns in a state of liberty, having the propensity to choose what portion of good or evil they attach themselves to in life. Gywnvydd is also a circle of graduation but only of good leading to ever more perfected states of good. Ceugant is the circle of God only. The myth could be describing the shift in conscious between Abred and Gwynvydd, a mastery of the human being who no longer does evil and enters into the circle of the heroes and gods. In addition to these three circles, the tradition also speaks of Annwn which might be considered as the invisible side of Abred or earthly life. The psychic consciousness or

soul where things first stir to then emerge and have their existence in Abred. The myth might describe the relationship of the consciousness to Annwn, the invisible world where divine inspiration must be sought and is first received as the three drops or three apples that fall from the divinity – love, knowledge and truth.

Siobhan Farrar

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