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Philosophy and Education for the Future

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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 Team

Sabine Leitner - Director
Julian Scott - Editor
Agostino Dominici - Project Manager and Designer
Natalia Lema - Public Relations



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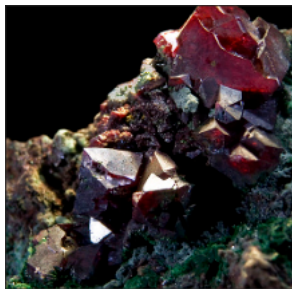


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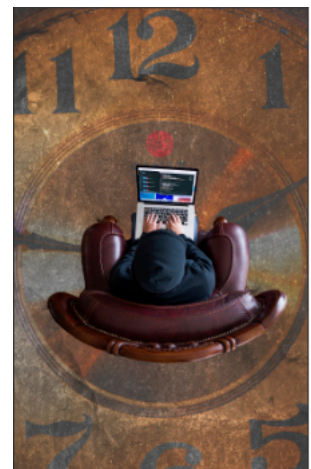


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Editorial

The Importance of Context

"They were locked into a room without food or water, and they did not know how they would be able to get out again." – Do you find this sentence alarming? Well, it might sound scary, especially if we imagine it was done by an employer to their employees or by a terrorist organization to their hostages. But if this sentence simply describes the situation of one of the popular 'escape rooms', then it takes on an entirely different meaning. People do it for fun, they not only put themselves into this situation voluntarily, they even pay for it.

Or what about people being made to drink blood, have spiders, cockroaches and other insects put into their mouths and being forced to endure snakebites? In most cases, this would be considered torture. However, in the context of bushtucker trials on the show 'I'm a celebrity, get me out of here' it is considered entertainment. Equally, many Coming of Age Rituals in tribal cultures might seem very harsh or cruel in a modern context, but on the other hand, they have prepared young people for life for thousands of years, enabled them to connect with their own inner resources and take on new responsibilities, and this ultimately guaranteed the survival of the whole.

Philosophers and social scientists agree that human action can only be fully understood by relating it to the context in which it takes place. Nothing can be understood in isolation from its context, and nothing even exists without a context. It is always the context that gives meaning to what we think and do, and explains why we do what we do.

However, we all know that 'shocking' material sells much better and gets many more clicks. It is not surprising that in our current world, with all the powerful means available, there is an 'epidemic' of taking things out of context in order to get money or attention. But it is a dangerous path that contributes a lot to conflict and tensions between groups, can seriously harm individuals and can divide and polarize societies.

This can be seen very clearly in politics, where sound bites are taken out of context to create a narrative that may not reflect the true

intentions of the speaker. Here is a political example, which I found on the internet. The following sentence by a very well-known politician was widely quoted in the media and used against them: "We're going to put a lot of coal miners and coal companies out of business."

But here is the full quote: "Now we've got to move away from coal and all the other fossil fuels, but I don't want to move away from the people who did the best they could to produce the energy that we relied on. So, for example, I'm the only candidate which has a policy about how to bring economic opportunity using clean renewable energy as the key into coal country. Because we're going to put a lot of coal miners and coal companies out of business, right? And we're going to make it clear that we don't want to forget those people. Those people laboured in those mines for generations, losing their health, often losing their lives to turn on our lights and power our factories."

Another nice example is a famous commercial by the English newspaper *The Guardian* from 1986. It features a skinhead apparently 'on the run'. In the second scene he appears to be wrestling a briefcase from the hands of a suited businessman. In the last cut the viewer sees that he is in fact trying to rescue the man from falling bricks. The award-winning advert was titled 'Points of View' and wanted to demonstrate the importance of seeing the whole picture. It also showed how easily we form an opinion based on first impressions and how quickly we might jump to conclusions.

It is not easy to establish the whole picture and modern technologies make it also increasingly more difficult to know what is true. Especially if there are certain interests to present something in a particular light. In addition to that, the world is not a unified 'whole' where all human beings share the same context. There are many different parallel realities and what appears as 'good' or 'bad' in one context, might be the opposite in another context. It seems more important than ever to be guided by the values of philosophy, which are a love of truth, of fairness, and of goodness, and to develop our own discernment. May the inner philosopher that is in every human being rise up to meet these challenging times where truth seems to be one of the many casualties.

Sabine Leitner

Unselfing and the Pursuit of Perfection

The Unique Contribution of Iris Murdoch to Moral Philosophy in the 20th Century

English philosophy has been generally characterized as empirical and anti-metaphysical. However, the 20th century was marked by a diversity in ideas and approaches, which had the effect of enriching philosophical discourse. A unique place in this development belongs to Iris Murdoch.

She revived the importance of metaphysics and moral philosophy, brought back the notion of inner life as a necessary dimension of a philosopher, and suggested that a moral agent could be understood as an individual who is growing into the Good, albeit recognising all the limitations of human nature.

The prevailing perception of morality that Murdoch challenged emphasized the will as the most

important aspect of a moral agent and was based on a materialistic worldview that discarded spiritual reality. In the development of moral philosophy, will according to Murdoch became the last remnant of transcendence penetrating a world of physical cause and effect, a special isolated power difficult to understand and detectable only in its manifestation: when one makes a choice. Stepping away from “neutral logical analysis”, she pointed out that moral life “is something that goes on continually, not something that is switched off in between the occurrence of explicit moral choices”, and it is also something that refers to the whole of our being, not only to a particular volition or reflection. Thus, our



moral formation is an ongoing process that shapes our inner fabric and influences every situation of choice.

In her philosophical works and novels, Murdoch painted a picture of the human being in the fullness of his or her experiences, a moral being with inner life reflected in outer actions. Focusing on that inner life, she described the challenges an individual faces in their egoistic tendencies and the fantasies which trap one's mind and preclude seeing the reality of the other. However, challenges are not the only characteristic of our inner processes. What truly moves us is the idea of perfection. And in the



process of moving towards it, we discover it, growing deeper into the concept of value. Murdoch notes that this movement is not neurotic, as a psychologist might object. "The idea of perfection moves, and possibly changes, us (as artist, worker, agent) because it inspires love, in the part of us that is most worthy."

For Murdoch, the idea of perfection is intimately connected with the concept of the Good in the Platonic tradition. On the one hand, it is indefinable, on another, it is what is known when we have moral knowledge, and what is sought and loved. It is analogous to a light that illuminates our perception and enables us to recognize goodness in particular things. To comprehend this concept, we need to recognize and appreciate the goodness in specific things, including people, art, nature, and ideas. By

doing so, we can gradually progress towards a deeper understanding of the Good itself, in a process that Murdoch frequently describes as an "ascending" - a metaphor borrowed from Plato.

The pursuit of perfection and the attainment of the Good involves a process of "unselfing," or transcending one's own egocentric perspective to recognize and see the others and the world justly and lovingly. "the central concept of morality is 'the individual' thought of as knowable by love, thought of in the light of the command, 'Be ye therefore perfect'."

Murdoch believed that we need to reinstate the importance of love in morality. Drawing inspiration from Simone Weil, she emphasizes the crucial role of "attention", which refers to a loving and just perception of reality. Implicit in this notion is the idea that we cannot act well unless we have a clear understanding of the situation and are not influenced by our own ego. Hence, the need for unselfing which requires a sustained effort and attention "to see justly, to overcome prejudice, to avoid temptations, to control and curb imagination [fantasy], to direct reflection". Our moral sensibilities are shaped by what we focus our attention on. Recognizing the Good as a transcendent and guiding principle, we can reorient our attention, which releases new energies within ourselves. Through inner work, we can cultivate a moral sensitivity that allows us to act with clarity, love, and virtue and thus participate in reality in a more fulfilled way.

Iris Murdoch developed a distinctive and compelling vision of what it means to live a good life, and how we can navigate the complex moral terrain of the world around us. Ultimately, for Murdoch, moral philosophy is not an intellectual pursuit, but a practical and existential challenge that demands our attention and engagement.

Nataliya Petlevych

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Adam Smith v. Plato: on the Division of Labour

In Book II of Plato's *Republic*, Socrates imagines how a typical society might develop from simple beginnings into a more complex and organized entity. He speculates that, initially, everyone might do everything for themselves, such as building their own houses, making their own clothes and growing their own food.



Photo by Carter Yocham on Unsplash

But soon, he says, people would realize that it would be much more efficient if certain members of the group were to specialize in certain trades. In this way, housebuilders, tailors and farmers would arise as masters of specialized skills that could be exchanged with other members of the group for goods, services or money.

More than 2,000 years later the Scottish philosopher and economist Adam Smith came up

with the same idea but took it much further, indeed, one could say, he took it to extremes. In his book 'The Wealth of Nations', Smith takes the example of the manufacture of pins to illustrate his ideas on the division of labour.

"A workman not educated to this business... nor acquainted with the use of the machinery employed in it could scarce, perhaps, with his utmost industry, make one pin in a day, and certainly could not make twenty... But in the way in which this business is now carried on... one man draws out the wire, another straightens it, a third cuts it, a fourth points it, a fifth grinds it at the top for receiving the head... and the important business of making a pin is, in this manner, divided into about eighteen distinct operations".

Being an economist, Smith then goes into some very detailed calculations of how many pins can be made by ten men using only basic equipment: each of them will be able to make about 4,800 pins in a day. "But if they had all wrought separately and independently, and without any of them having been educated to this peculiar business, they certainly could not each of them have made twenty, perhaps not one pin in a day..."

Smith then proceeds to talk about the process of making nails and how the best solution is for individual workers to spend their whole lives making only nail heads, for example; again with many detailed calculations.

The overriding impression I received from reading all this was that Smith was quite obsessed with productivity and saw these unfortunate workers

only in that light; he didn't consider how this over-specialization might stunt their intellectual growth, lead to boredom and despair. He is thinking of the good of 'society' as a whole, or more specifically, in his own phrase, 'the wealth of nations' – but at what cost?

Plato, on the other hand, despite the criticisms made of his ideas by the likes of Karl Popper, was interested in the development of the individual. Because the basic premise of his work *The Republic* is that the purpose of politics is to lead citizens out of the 'cave' of ignorance, towards the 'sunlight' of truth and goodness. The division of labour is not only about producing wealth, which for Plato is not an 'end in itself', but exists for the purpose of developing a rational, ordered society in which the human being can flourish – as an individual and as part of a collective. In fact, he is as much against excessive wealth as he is against poverty, because both can lead to the degradation of human beings.

Another aspect of Adam Smith's theories is Free Trade and the so-called 'Invisible Hand' of market forces. His belief, which still very much persists today at the heart of capitalistic thought, is that market forces (triggered by individuals pursuing their self-interest) will even everything out in the end, bringing greater economic growth and societal benefits. A current example is that of renters being forced out of London due to rocketing prices. In a way, this might be considered a good thing,



because it will help achieve a more balanced spread of the population across the country, but at what human cost for those so displaced? And what about the loss of teachers, nurses and shop workers who can no longer afford to live in the capital?

Justice is one of the great losers in this game of market forces, because the market regulates itself through the amoral principle of supply and demand (but also through the immoral greed of those who exploit these factors). A recent example was the £3.3 billion profits of one of the UK gas companies, while many people freeze in their homes...

Once again, we find a very different approach in *The Republic*, where the most important criterion for society is, in Plato's view, precisely Justice. When justice departs, he says, the society will inevitably fall apart.

Both Plato in Greece, and Confucius in China decided that the best way to improve politics for everyone was to train 'philosopher-politicians' for the future – for a time when humanity as a whole would come to realize the value of wisdom and benevolence in guiding societies, rather than self-interest. A medium to long term solution, perhaps, to an age-old problem.

Julian Scott



The Wonders of the Mineral World

The mineral world, and more specifically the world of precious stones and metals, has always been invested with an aura of awe and mystery. Throughout the ages, kings, magicians, priests and alchemists have often surrounded themselves with special objects born from the mineral world. Objects like magic rings and swords, sacred statues and amulets have always accompanied the characters of legends and myths, endowing them with unusual powers and virtues. All of these objects came from the hidden world of minerals,



a world in which life takes its peculiar form. A world of 'solid matter'. A world in which the universal substance of the alchemists, the Prima Materia, has reached its highest state of condensation.

Many sages and philosophers have pointed out that even the densest state of matter shows signs of life and activity and wherever there is activity, motion,

vibration, there is also consciousness. In short, they tell us that, there is only 'one life' which expresses itself through various forms (or degrees of substance). In this sense, the minerals are also animated 'beings'. In them life manifests itself in a passiveness and resistance which is their chief characteristic. The mineral kingdom is also connected to the phenomenon of 'radioactivity'.

What is, for instance, the intrinsic value of a gem? It is its power of radiance, its radiation. Its degree and quality of radiation seems to be connected to its evolutionary condition. Something that can be deduced by looking at their atomic structure. The amazing ability of a diamond to reflect light is the witness to this evolutionary process in which its inner structure has reached a kind of geometric perfection.

We find the same type of symbolism in the metal gold, in which we observe its great power to radiate light. Gold represents a perfected state of metallic nature. We could call it a transcendental state, because if we take the view that solar light is just the visible reflection of a corresponding invisible 'spiritual light', we can compare gold to a coagulated state of spiritual energy. With this idea in mind, we can understand better why there has always been a feverish search to find and possess gold. And also why in antiquity, gold has always been used for making the most sacred artefacts and tools.

Gold is a good starting point to introduce another important element in the life of minerals: the connection between microcosm and macrocosm. It is said that the characteristics and qualities found in precious stones and metals arise from their connection with the heavenly bodies. From late

antiquity until the mid-eighteenth century, the number of metals known and recognised as such was the same as the number of planets used in traditional astrology.

The planet-metal correspondences are as follows: Saturn-lead, Jupiter-tin, Mars-iron, Sun-gold, Venus-copper, Mercury-mercury and Moon-silver. Belief in a linkage of these 'seven planets' with the 'seven metals' reaches back into prehistory. There was no age when silver was not associated with the moon or gold with the sun. These links defined the identities of the metals. Only at the beginning of the eighteenth century did the character of the metals cease to be explained in terms of their cosmic origins and instead started to be explained in terms of their underlying atomic structure. As presented in Wilhelm Pelikan's book, *The Secrets of Metals*, these correspondences are not only symbolic but have a scientific base as well.

Metals in particular were said to embody the purest planetary qualities. This also explains why the operative side of alchemy has always been linked to metallurgy. In alchemy we find the very ancient idea that in the womb of the Earth there is a constant process of gestation which gives birth to the metals. 'Mother' Earth keeps these metals in her womb to allow them, after a long period of time, to mature. The extraction and use of metals had a religious-sacred dimension. The metallurgist-chemist's function was to deliver into the world the metallic fruits hidden in the belly of the Earth. Therefore, by extracting, transforming, shaping and refining their properties, he contributed to accelerating and perfecting this evolutionary process, which was proper of Nature.

Turning now our attention to stones and gems, we discover that since the remotest times, their special characteristics and properties were studied and even kept secret. We find, for instance, stories of ancient people who knew how to make stones malleable like clay or knew where to erect a megalith so that it would naturally be charged with telluric and cosmic currents. Many natural stones were considered sacred and endowed with life. Some of these stones, called Baetylus, were said to summon a vision of a god or goddess and increase fertility.

Stories which relate sacred stones with mystery cults and creation myths also abound. We could mention the *Benben Stone* of pharaonic Egypt, the *Omphalos* of Delphi, the *Foundation Stone* in the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, the *Lapis Niger* of archaic Rome and the *Kaaba* at Mecca.

In India, since pre-Vedic times, precious stones were used in an uncut form for healing as well as for religious purposes. And even nowadays, there are Ayurvedic doctors and astrologers who prescribe



precious stones, cast on rings, to be used as protective amulets or to balance the subtle energies in the body. The use of precious stones in breastplates and necklaces are also connected to this type of 'magical' usage.

In the strange times in which we live, ruled by greed for natural resources, the Earth, deprived of its most hidden fruits, seems to stand still in horror. One day, perhaps, gems, metals and gnomes (the spirits of nature said to be in charge of the mineral world) will return to enchant the world as they once did, but for now, they seem ready to pack up their luggage and leave.

Agostino Dominici

Time and Identity in Virginia Woolf's Work

One could say that most Western writers from the beginning of the 20th century have pondered upon questions of time and identity. Many authors, arguably inspired by technological developments and by the social impacts of the First World War, began to consider how the changes of the turn of the century mirrored onto individuals and their personal relationships. As Virginia Woolf remarks in her essay *Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown*, 1924, “all human relations have shifted – those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature”.

In England, the end of the Victorian Era also marked a rupture with decades of conservative tradition. The feeling of liberation merged into a sense of uprootedness, and the aesthetic innovations of the modernist movement were a natural reaction to the pressures and transformations of the period. The new and fluid perception of reality needed an original means of expression. Virginia Woolf pursued and perfected a narrative device that could convey the human mind and the “whole of human life”, as she describes in her diary.

Born in London in 1882, Woolf is considered one of the most important modernist writers of her time. Her works depict perfectly this mixture of adventurous experimentation and melancholic tone. Almost all the elements of her prose are presented as a reflection of her characters' consciousness. Places, actions and dialogues are described through the stream of consciousness of her protagonists and minor characters. Woolf tries to reach an objective reality by capturing transient perceptions, memories and thoughts of all her characters. With this, the author also draws attention to the subtle changes that occur over time, both within ourselves and in the world around us.

By diving into her characters' minds and blurring the boundaries between past, present, and future, Woolf reveals how inseparable our identity is from time. Her narrative often captures the fleeting and elusive quality of time and, paradoxically, creates a sense of timelessness.

For Virginia Woolf, time was a constant source of fascination, a force that shaped and reshaped our



Photograph of Virginia Woolf, Harvard Theater Collection

world in ways both subtle and profound. On the one hand, she was acutely aware of the fleeting nature of time, of the way in which it could slip through our fingers like sand. On the other she also understood the power of the present moment.

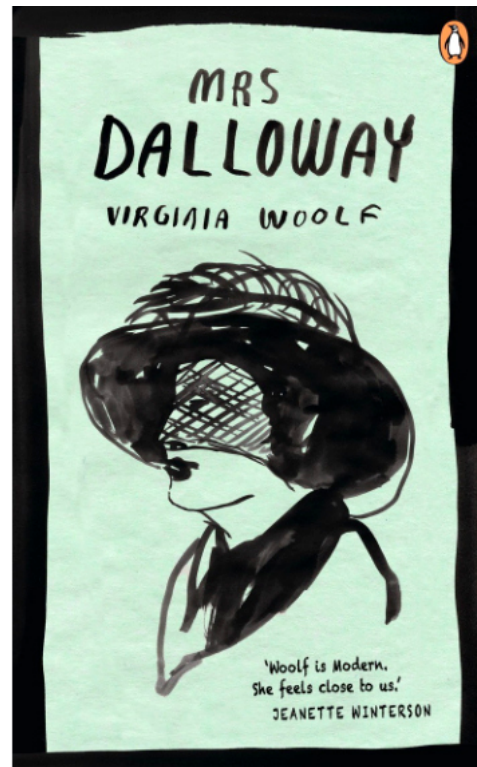
In her essay *Modern Fiction* she proposes: “Let us not take it for granted that life exists more in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small”. This is the foundation of all of Woolf’s work. By registering a series of impressions upon the conscious mind she praises details of the transient moment. Internal shifts, which some would call small or insignificant, rise to our attention and are established as more important than exterior circumstances in her work. As she seeks to capture “life itself going on”, the author always tries to reach the centre of what lies beneath everyday life, a hidden truth linked to the meaning of being human.

Woolf explores the fluidity of time in the context of a single day in *Mrs. Dalloway*. The novel follows the protagonist, Clarissa Dalloway, as she prepares for a party she is hosting that evening. As she goes about her day, she reflects on her past, her present, and the future that lies ahead. Throughout the novel, the passing of time is underscored by Big Ben’s rings. So, it is revealing that the working title of *Mrs. Dalloway* was *The Hours*, as the novel displays time as a personal experience, a constant flow, interrupted by the chronological time hammered by the clock.

Chronological and psychological time are also counterposed in her following novel, *To The Lighthouse*. The book is divided into three sections – “The Window”, “Time Passes” and “The Lighthouse” – and each of them takes place in the same house but at different points in time. While the first and the third sections are longer and delve into minute details of a single day, the intervening chapters of part two compress an entire decade, during which the First World War begins and ends, into twenty pages. Here, the external, material world – where a sense of absence and decay is linked to the relentless passage of time – is entwined with

a primarily intuitive and subjective understanding of the world.

In these novels, Virginia Woolf conveys the general through the particular, society through the individual, a whole life through the course of a single day. She continuously investigates the meaning of identity throughout all of her work.



With this, the boundaries of time and space are mostly surpassed in view of a broader sense of being human.

Both Clarissa Dalloway and Mrs Ramsey, from *To the Lighthouse*, symbolise this state of being which Virginia Woolf tries to capture. They seem to be attuned to “a general sense of the poetry of existence”, as Woolf describes in her diary, the “moments of being”.

Virginia Woolf can serve as a lighthouse to all of us who know that the subjective and intangible is as important as and, perhaps, more enduring than the concrete and material reality. Simply by directing our attention to minute details of day-to-day life, she inspires us to lift the passing moment out of the flow of time and make it permanent as a piece of art.

Ana Luisa Lellis

The Mystery of Time in Various Cultures

Part 1: Individual Perception of Time

Why is the phenomenon of time a mystery? It is easy to understand the idea of time taken as a norm to measure the passing minutes and hours, which we do with atomic precision, but when we start questioning the nature of time, it all starts to change.

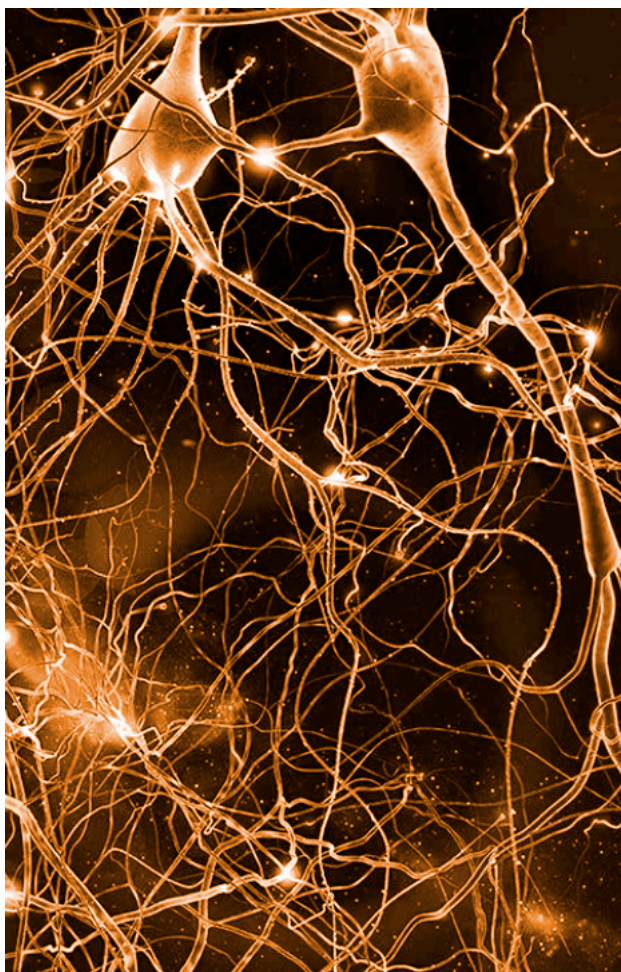
Many questions arise: can we perceive time as such or are we only aware of the events that pass through time? Are future and past part of time or are they only mental abstractions? How do other

living beings perceive time and, if differently, what is the reality? If time as such exists, does it have a beginning and consequently an end? Can time exist without memory? Is there something beyond time?

We can look at the subject on two levels: first how we perceive time as individuals and secondly how we do so on a cultural level. In this article I will look at the individual perception of time. In order to explore this, we can look at today's



behavioural neuroscience or study of the brain, which is trying to understand what kind of a process is taking place when perception of time occurs. Researchers describe a highly complex pathway of nerves, neurotransmitters and different parts of the brain forming a mechanism that is still not entirely understood. In all this research different theories have been put forward and different conclusions reached. The main idea is that our perception of time is the outcome of the information received by our sensory organs



and reconstructed in our brain, which means that we are not experiencing time itself, but it is a projection of our mind. It is like a movie, impressions on a celluloid film, appearing as something continuous, but otherwise made of many individual bits of information. Traditions like Buddhism or Hinduism already spoke of this. Not only time, but everything that we perceive through our senses is filtered through our personal lenses, and it is illusory, because it is not the thing itself: they called it Maya.

The perception of time also changes according to the situation we are experiencing. It is well known to all of us how time goes much slower when we are experiencing something that we don't like, and how 'time flies when we are having a good time', or as Pliny the Younger put it: "The happier the time, the shorter it seems."

Some practical advice is not to extend time by being unhappy and miserable, because we can increase perception of time in a different way. When we do something new, we automatically pay more attention to the novelties and collect more information, hence the notion of time seems longer. When we do things out of routine, like an autopilot, without much awareness, time just disappears, as if we were not present, which is true, because our mind and consciousness are somewhere else.

If our experience is linked to our consciousness, that is, where the attention is, it would be beneficial for the consistency of awareness if we were able to fix the attention and still the mind. This would help us to perceive the present moment in a more pure and undisturbed way and to experience reality more objectively. The 'power of now' gives us a full experience from which we learn and thrive. It is not an easy task, but it can be developed with practice. Yoga, mindfulness, meditation, contemplation, reflections are not only spiritual practices, they are very basic preliminary stages of personal development. Every moment of time carries in it a full spiritual potential, no matter how trivial and mundane it appears. We are never really separated from our spiritual nature, and hence we are essentially spiritual beings, except that we are not aware of it in our daily routine.

How the timeline and sequence of events can be completely lost is well known in the therapeutic world. The mind distorts the reality of the present moment and reconstructs a reality based on past experience. This has been well documented through the research of trauma. A great illustration of this work is the book *Waking the Tiger* by Peter Levine. The negative experience of a past event which has not been resolved is

stored in the body. The experience reoccurs over and over again, as if it were happening in the present moment again – this is trauma. It can also be seen as an energetic blockage, which obstructs the natural flow and harmony and eventually causes illnesses.

This information also supports the idea of the complexity of human beings. The human being is a multi-layered being. As individuals we have many different ‘bodies’ apart from the physical, which is another reason why time is not always perceived equally; it relates to the dimension where the experience is happening. When we dream, we do not usually perceive our physical dimension, but the so-called astral plane, where time also moves differently. The same also happens on the mental level. There are people who experience a transcendent or blissful state of being, where there is no awareness of time, and not even an awareness of self either. Plato writes in *The Symposium* of an account of Socrates being spotted standing motionlessly from one morning until the next dawn. During the evening people gathered close to him sleeping on the mats to see if he would stay there motionless during the whole night, which to their amazement he did, and in the morning continued the day as normal. And if we look again towards the East, we will encounter numerous yogis who spend months and years in continuous meditation, sometimes even without food and water. Their consciousness has moved above the senses and physical reality. Because we do not master our mental body, we don’t really know how to use these tools with their full potential. But it is important to understand that we have them and that they are available when we are ready.

Plato wrote in the *Timaieus* that ‘Time is a moving image of eternity’. The ancient Greeks understood that time has to do with movement and change, and that everything in this manifested universe is subject to time. Time itself is not a measure, but motion itself, which reflects eternity, while eternity itself is unchanging and the cause of change. Similarly, as we learn from the philosophies of the East, our senses can only perceive changing reality.

But our mind, using intellect or intuition, can rise above the senses and experience no-time or eternity, which offers a glimpse of that blissful state.

What, then, makes time so special? The notion of time is not only a physiological fact, but its experience essentially relates to the mind faculty, and the mind is everyone’s own responsibility. And leaving psychology aside, time becomes very personal to all of us, as we all have our allotted



time and we can remind ourselves that time is limited. If life was given to us, we have an opportunity to develop our higher faculties to experience greater reality. In that sense time is precious and priceless. But unfortunately, for most of the time we are not aware of it, as the tentacles of Maya run deep. As the Stoic philosopher Seneca said: “It is not that we have a short life to live, but that we waste much of it.”

Miha Kosir

Risk and Technology: the cost of progress

The introduction of new technologies has always brought many debates and controversies until they were finally accepted and became an integral part of societies. It is natural to oppose some kind of resistance when habits and lifestyles are suddenly changed by new ways, especially when it is hard to predict if their outcome will be beneficial in the long or medium term.

In his book *“l’Apocalypse Joyeuse”*, translated literally as ‘the Happy Apocalypse’, the French scientist and historian Jean-Baptiste Fressoz tells of the introduction of new medical procedures in the 18th and 19th centuries to decrease the death rate from

certain viruses like smallpox. The resistance from the population to this new approach for treating viruses was mostly due to religious beliefs and the fact that the new techniques were not always successful as experience was lacking. It took centuries for the process of vaccination to bear fruit and for its side effects and risks to be mitigated.

J-B Fressoz then goes on to the development of chemical and coal industries at the end of the 18th century and the similar resistance these industries faced at the start. The main complaint from the population was about the pollution such as smoke, acid clouds and bad smells coming from the





factories. Police and other government forces were often involved in dealing with the issues, forcing the factories to move outside of cities. Industries were forced to pay damages to neighbouring farms and residents, hoping that fines would be a strong enough incentive to improve their processes and reduce pollution. Unfortunately, lobbying of politicians and the economic benefits of industries outweighed the costs enforced for damages.

Often new techniques, even if they improve our quality of life, bring new dangers as they can push us to want to go further and enter unknown territories. For example, the introduction of new and better ways of navigating the oceans allowed us to circumnavigate the globe, develop trade and discover new continents. But it also had the consequence of infecting the new populations with viruses and parasites against which they were defenceless and probably were responsible for the death of tens of millions of individuals.

The development of industries and new forms of transport brought economic wealth to the few that were in power fairly quickly, while the quality of life of the masses took time and many revolts to improve. And even if our lives, in the more technologically developed countries, has improved, we have been exposed to new dangers and risks

that constantly need to be understood and controlled or at least mitigated. Some of those risks have been such an integral part of our lives that we call them “the cost of doing business” or “the cost of progress”. It is then not a coincidence that the creation and now proliferation of insurance businesses started in the 19th century and are present in all aspects of our modern life.

As industry grew, risks increased and the costs related to such risks followed, businesses found ways to avoid the repercussions and costs by moving to cheaper and less regulated places. But as time passed and these loopholes were repeated again and again, we have now come full circle, or should I say, full globe, as the effect of industries on the other side of the planet can be felt at home. As we neglected the natural side effects of industries and have continued to expand always beyond our environment, we are bound to feel the effects and consequences of our actions, until the day we consider and implement the real cost of doing business.

Florimond Krins

The Symbolism of Renewal



As we approach the Vernal or Spring Equinox (First Day of Spring) once more, human beings today and over millennia have found various ways to note and celebrate the renewal of Nature's cycle. The Spring Equinox in the Northern Hemisphere takes place every year on or around 21 March. In 2023, the Spring Equinox will take place on 20 March at 9.24pm (Greenwich Mean Time). The seasons on Earth change because the planet is tilted on its axis as it travels around the sun. At the time of the Equinox, the sun crosses the Earth's equator from south to north producing the equal duration of day and night. Vernal (from the Latin *ver* meaning Spring) means "of the Spring" and "new" and "fresh", like Spring itself, and Equinox is derived from the Latin, *aequus* meaning "equal" and *nox* meaning "night".

The meaning of the word 'symbol' derives from ancient Greek and literally means "to put together", "token used in comparison to

determine if something is genuine" and "sign". In English, the word 'sign' is often used in its exoteric sense to describe a mark or shape that always has a particular meaning, for example in mathematics or music, or to indicate directions to a specific place. The word 'symbol' can be used exoterically too to refer to, for instance, mathematical or musical symbols, but it can also mean a thing that represents or stands for something, often a material object representing an abstract and ineffable idea or ideas. Symbols can be objects, characters or colours which are used to represent abstract ideas in order to comprehend the essence of something and the invisible or spiritual world.

From a symbologist's point of view, Spring symbolizes Rebirth, since Spring is when plants sprout, flowers bloom, birds lay eggs and animals give birth or, in other words, Nature is reborn. It is seen as Nature's way of coaxing humanity to renew itself and initiate new projects and fresh

ideas. Love symbolizes Spring since the weather grows warmer and lighter and people can go out and interact freely with festivities taking place. Animals feel the change in weather and procreate. Youth is a symbol of Spring because everything is new, strong and young. Spring also symbolizes spiritual rejuvenation and many religions have ceremonies that encourage the adoption of a fresh, motivated outlook on faith. For instance, Christianity and the Easter holiday, and the Baha'is who see Spring as a time for rejuvenation and intense rapture.

Our culture's main symbols of Spring are baby rabbits, baby chicks, lambs, eggs and flowers, which are rooted in Christian symbolism and, it is believed, in pre-Christian pagan fertility festivals. One theory is that the symbol of the rabbit stems from pagan tradition, specifically the festival of Eostre – a goddess of fertility whose animal symbol was a rabbit or hare. Rabbits are known for their energetic



Photo by Jeremy Hynes on Unsplash

breeding and traditionally have symbolized fertility and new life.

All over the world and in different civilizations, such as the Mayan culture of the first millennium C.E. and eighteenth-century China, the rabbit and the moon are often linked as symbols of the cyclical nature of life, the ever-recurring conjunction of darkness and light and death and rebirth. In all life, a duality is present and when considering the idea of renewal or rebirth, neither can exist without death. Every month the moon becomes invisible only to become a shining, full moon again. The rabbits, in their turn, live in the shadow of death since they are prey to many animals but continue to survive primarily because of their exceptional birthing capacity. The ancient Greeks considered the rabbit to be a token of love and depicted rabbits around the Goddess of love and beauty, Aphrodite.

At Easter, Christianity honours the resurrection or revival of Jesus Christ three days after his death by crucifixion. In death and in resurrection, Jesus redeemed humanity from sin and conquered death. Through his sacrifice in taking the sins of mankind upon himself and dying on the cross, he freed human beings from the power of the Devil so we could be redeemed and spiritually renewed in our relationship with God.

The Baha'i faith was founded in nineteenth century Persia – now Iran – and grew out of the Shi'ite



branch of the Muslim faith. The Baha'i Festival of Naw-Ruz (meaning New Day) starts the Baha'i year on the first day of Spring. For Baha'is, the Naw Ruz is sacred, suffused with the symbolism of spiritual renewal or humanity's "spiritual springtime". The Naw-Ruz coincides with the Spring equinox and the Baha'is celebrate it with prayer and a feast of hospitality and rejoicing, sharing their hopes and aspirations for the forthcoming year. They regard the Naw-Ruz as a transformation of the Spring equinox into a universal celebration of the oneness of humanity.

The Naw-Ruz is and has been celebrated by the Zoroastrians as New Year's Day for over 3,000 years in Iran and the Persian diaspora. It is celebrated as a feast day and the arrival of Spring is seen as a victory over darkness or a victory of good over evil and life over death.

The word 'myth' derives from the ancient Greek word *mythos*, meaning 'story' or 'speech'. It

refers to stories that human beings orally handed down prior to the stories being recorded in writing. However, myths are not just stories, but serve a deeper purpose in ancient and modern cultures. Myths explain the world and man's experience of it and are as relevant to us today as to our ancient ancestors. Myths answer timeless questions and act as a compass to each generation. They may teach human beings to understand the mysteries of Nature and their relationship with it, the reason behind creation, the moral virtues and right from wrong. Myths contain many symbols and those symbols are a vehicle for communicating reality through an idea or ideas.

In ancient Greek myth, Persephone was the daughter of Zeus, King of the Gods, and Demeter, the Goddess of harvest and fertility. When Persephone grew up, she attracted the attention of many Gods and protective Demeter kept all Gods away from her daughter. One of the most persistent suitors was Hades, the middle-aged and dark God of the Underworld, who immediately fell in love with Persephone's youth and beauty. Hades went to his brother, Zeus, and told him that he wanted to marry Persephone and Zeus obliged but knew that Demeter would never let Persephone marry Hades. The brothers planned for Hades to abduct Persephone when she and Demeter descended to Earth and whilst Demeter was tending to her earthly duties: providing

mortals with food and teaching them to cultivate wheat. The plan was successfully carried out. When Demeter discovered her daughter's abduction, she was distraught and neglected her duties and caused the Earth to wither and die.

Zeus knew he had to intervene to save a starving humanity and sent Hermes, the messenger of the Gods, to retrieve Persephone



from the Underworld and find out whether she stayed with Hades against her will. When Hermes arrived, he met with a radiant Queen of the Underworld. Hades had treated her with respect and compassion and gradually, Persephone had fallen in love with Hades.

Hermes requested Persephone to return with him to her mother and Persephone was conflicted between the love for her mother and for her husband. Hades craftily ensured that Persephone ate a few seeds of a pomegranate, which was the food of the

Underworld, before she left. In Greek mythology, it was believed that if someone ate food given to them by their captor, they would always return. Persephone returned with Hermes to Mount Olympus and Zeus asked her where she would like to live. Persephone said she wanted to return to her husband in the Underworld. Demeter was infuriated and made it clear that if Persephone did not return to her, Demeter would not tend the Earth again. Zeus therefore decided that Persephone should spend six months with her mother and six months in the Underworld with Hades. When Persephone was with her husband and away from her mother, this time of year became autumn and winter. When Persephone returned to her mother, this signalled a renewal of hope and the Earth enjoyed the seasons of spring and summer. Her return represented the rebirth of splendour and abundance and Earth once again became fertile and fruitful. Thus, Persephone became Goddess of Spring but also Queen of the Underworld, thereby symbolizing the duality of life and death. The myth of Persephone explains the eternal cycle of Nature's death and rebirth or renewal.

So when you catch yourself admiring some fresh bloom or blossom in the days ahead, consider the universality of human experience and myth and reflect on the timeless symbols of renewal.

Jean Grunfeld



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