NEW ACROPOLIS

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MAGAZINE

ALCHEMICAL MEDICINE AND SPAGYRIC REMEDIES

THE LEGACY OF KANT

THE GODDESSES OF PHILAE TEMPLE

HEVE WE REACHED THE END OF HISTORY?

MORE CONTENT INSIDE

NEW ACROPOLIS

PHILOSOPHY AND EDUCATION FOR THE FUTURE

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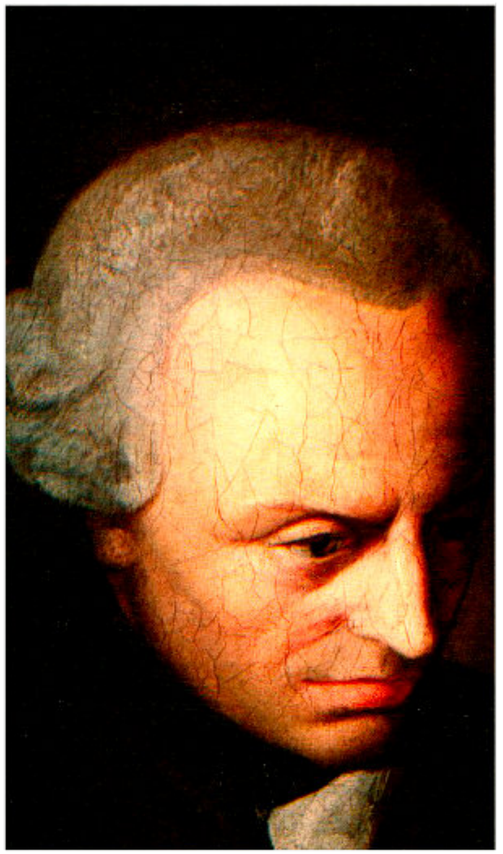
CONTENTS



EDITORIAL

BY
SABINE LEITNER

The Art of Happiness

"Are you happy?"
"Well, sort of happy."
"Would you like to be happier?"
"Hm, I don't have time to ask myself this question. What does happiness mean anyway?"
"Good question."

Do we mean by happiness this temporary moment of a pleasant day, a nice event or winning the lottery? Because even the happiness derived from gaining a large sum of money is temporary – apparently after one year, people are exactly as happy as they were before. In other words, do we mean by happiness something that depends on external things, like events, people, the weather, holidays, etc?

If yes, then we all know that these moments of exalted emotional happiness will inevitably pass, and then… what? Back to what we call our 'normal' life. And what if this life does not make us happy? Shall we then try to chase after these fleeting moments of happiness? It has often been said that the search for happiness is one of the main sources of unhappiness in the world.

But isn't happiness the goal of life? It depends. Aristotle, the Epicureans and the Utilitarians all agreed in some way that happiness was the goal or highest good in life. But they all understood different things by 'happiness'. For the Utilitarians it meant 'pleasure and absence of pain' but this is ultimately a passive state. If this passive kind of happiness would really make us happy, we could just pour a happiness-inducing drug into the world's water supplies and keep everyone 'happy'. But the fact that this 'solution' does not really appeal to us shows that this would ignore a very important aspect of our human nature: our need to strive, to grow, to improve, to discover and to create. Of course, not all our striving has brought us perhaps what we wanted, but we would not be able to live a truly human life without the freedom to explore, to learn, to make mistakes and – more often than not – achieve the intrinsic goods of knowledge, progress and wisdom.

For the Epicureans, happiness also included friendship, freedom from mental disturbance (*ataraxia*) and *autarky* (self-sufficiency) – inner states we can contribute to and practise, and which are ultimately within our control. And Aristotle said that every action we undertake (even doing the washing up) aims at some good, but that the highest good was *eudaimonia*. This is often translated as 'flourishing' but etymologically it consists of eu (good/well) and daimon (spirit/deity), which means literally 'a state of good spirit' or 'living with a good guardian spirit' or the feeling of being 'watched over by a good angel'. For Aristotle, *eudaimonia* is achieved when we live by using and developing our highest faculties and are in alignment with our values.

These last examples point to a happiness that is independent of outer circumstances and to something that can be practised and mastered. If we understand that everything in life needs to oscillate between two poles, otherwise life would disappear, and that we wouldn't even know what happiness was if we didn't know pain and discomfort; then we can accept that there has to be rain and sunshine, good and bad, success and failure, harmony *and* conflict. We can train ourselves to see the positive or meaningful side of things, we can practise reflecting on the timeless wisdom of Epictetus that 'good and bad are not in things but how we see them'. Through reflection and intentional thoughts, habits and actions we can reach a positive inner state that will contain, amongst other things, acceptance, gratitude, awareness and meaning.

We can either make the futile attempt to arrange the world to suit us, or we can train ourselves to attain the inner freedom to remain calm and steady within the world and not be overwhelmed by difficult circumstances.

This kind of happiness is not as intense as the exhilarating joy of a fun day out, but it is more stable and lasting and can even coexist with pain and suffering. It is about being at peace with life as it is and not trying to change life to how we wish it to be. The beautiful poem *At Peace* by the Mexican poet Amado Nervo expresses exactly this sentiment. He wrote it towards the end of his life, and its last two lines have become a real inspiration for my own inner practice of the art of happiness:

> "I loved, I was loved, the sun touched my face.
> Life, you owe me nothing. Life, we are at peace!"

Sabine Leitner is the Director of New Acropolis UK.

EMPEROR JULIAN: APOSTATE OR HERO OF PHILOSOPHY?

Photo from rawpixels.com

CULTURE

BY
STJEPAN PALAJSA
(DIRECTOR OF NA IN SLOVENIA)

The dust of oblivion has erased the memory of one of the greatest figures in European history, whose ideas and work left a profound mark on the world: the Roman Emperor Julian, named 'the Apostate' by the Christians to whom his memory was anathema.

By the 4th century AD, Rome had almost completely exhausted its spiritual energy. That immense social body was no longer animated by its former centralizing power, through which all differences were united in a living and functional entity. Now, instead of complementing each other as part of a harmonious whole, differences multiplied and caused friction along national, religious and ideological lines. The vision of the Empire, based on community and an essential equality, had almost disappeared.

In an attempt to reawaken that spirit and its pagan values, Julian searched the libraries and academies of antiquity, in order to immerse himself in their philosophy, ethics and logic and use them as a foundation for restoring the values that had made Rome what it once was.

BIOGRAPHY

Flavius Claudius Julianus was born in 331 AD in Constantinople (now Istanbul). His father, Julius Constantius, and the Emperor Constantine the Great were half-brothers on their father's side. After Constantine's death in 337 AD, the new emperor, his son Constantius II, fearing for his throne, had most of his close male relatives assassinated. Among them were Julius Constantius and his eldest son. The only ones who survived were Julian and his older brother, Galus, because they were only children at the time. However, Constantius exiled them to a remote estate in Cappadocia, where they had no contact with social life. There, in complete isolation, they lived out their childhood and youth. No one was allowed to approach them. They were educated among servants and slaves, under the strict supervision of their tutors. However, in his youth, secretly and under the influence of Neoplatonic teachers, Julian embraced his classical cultural heritage, completely rejecting his forcibly adopted Christian faith.

"May oblivion cover that darkness," he later wrote, referring to those times.

As the emperor Constantius had no children, in 351 AD he summoned Galus to court, where he gave him the title of Caesar of the western provinces, marrying him to his sister Constantina. Julian was then freed from his isolation and spent the following years travelling through Asia Minor and Greece, learning from the greatest Neoplatonic philosophers of the time: Edsius of Pergamon and Maximus of Ephesus, accepting the latter as his teacher and treating him with the utmost respect throughout his life.

Four years after his appointment as Caesar, driven by fear and envy, Constantius had Galus assassinated, and thus, of all his close male relatives, only Julian, whom Constantius had seen only once in his life, remained. Although Julian tried with all his might to distance himself from the court, where his life was in constant danger, a year later he was summoned to receive the title of Caesar in place of his brother. With the title, he was also given the

Julian the Apostate Presiding at a Conference of Sectarians by Edward Armitage. Wikimedia

hand of Helena, Constantius's second sister, in marriage. Remembering his brother's fate, Julian saw this as more of an elegant death sentence than a true rehabilitation and transfer of power. As he himself said, this title brought with it the most grievous and difficult slavery. Constantius surrounded him with spies and guards; everyone who had any contact with him was strictly controlled and under continuous surveillance.

With great effort, he managed to bring four of his former servants into his service. Only one of them knew the secret of his worship of the classical deities, and sometimes they performed rites in secret.

Determined to get rid of Julian, Constantius dressed him in a brilliant uniform and, in the middle of winter in 355 AD, with no military experience whatsoever, sent him to the northern provinces, to the land of the Celts. Constantius himself had practically abandoned these territories to the barbarians. The legions assigned to this area were tired, demoralized by constant fighting, had not been paid for months, and lacked food and weapons. Discipline was at an all-time low, and the mere mention of the barbarians was enough to terrify the soldiers. Such was the situation that Julian found when he arrived, not as commander, but subject to the local commanders. Julian's only duty was to wear Constantius's royal robes and carry his image among the soldiers.

However, Julian's reputation grew among the troops. His philosophical principles had taught him to endure any adverse circumstances.

Although he had no military training, he was always on the front line, as a simple soldier, sharing with the others the good and the bad, the cold and the hardships. From the time of his arrival, military actions began to be properly conducted and ended that year with success.

Driven by fear, Constantius began to suspect Marcellus, the commander of the army, and ordered him to be eliminated. Convinced that Julian was weak and incapable, he handed him complete command of the army in Gaul in 357 AD.

Despite having no military training, through his personal example and his quick and brilliant actions, he won the trust of the army and one victory followed another. More than forty cities that had been lost were returned to the Empire, and he restored the values of civilization, peace and security in them. He reduced the heavy taxes imposed by the administration and granted positions of responsibility to the most honourable and capable men. Events seemed to unfold in a miraculous aura, as if the deities he worshipped were responsible for shaping a part of history through their incarnation in Julian. Nothing seemed impossible.

The barbarians were expelled from Gaul. He brought two hundred ships from Britain and built another four hundred in less than ten months. He penetrated the Rhine River and established control over the surrounding territories. He also earned the respect of the barbarian peoples, not only by demonstrating his ingenuity, but also through numerous examples of honour and justice. All this time he faithfully served the murderer of his relatives, obeying his laws.

His unexpected success once again aroused Constantius's envy. That is why he gave him an order that was almost impossible to carry out.

Julian's best and bravest troops, without exception, were to leave Gaul and, in an incredibly short time, report to the border of Persia. The aim was to disarm Julian, and incidentally the whole of Gaul, leaving it at the mercy of the barbarians so that they could do his dirty work.

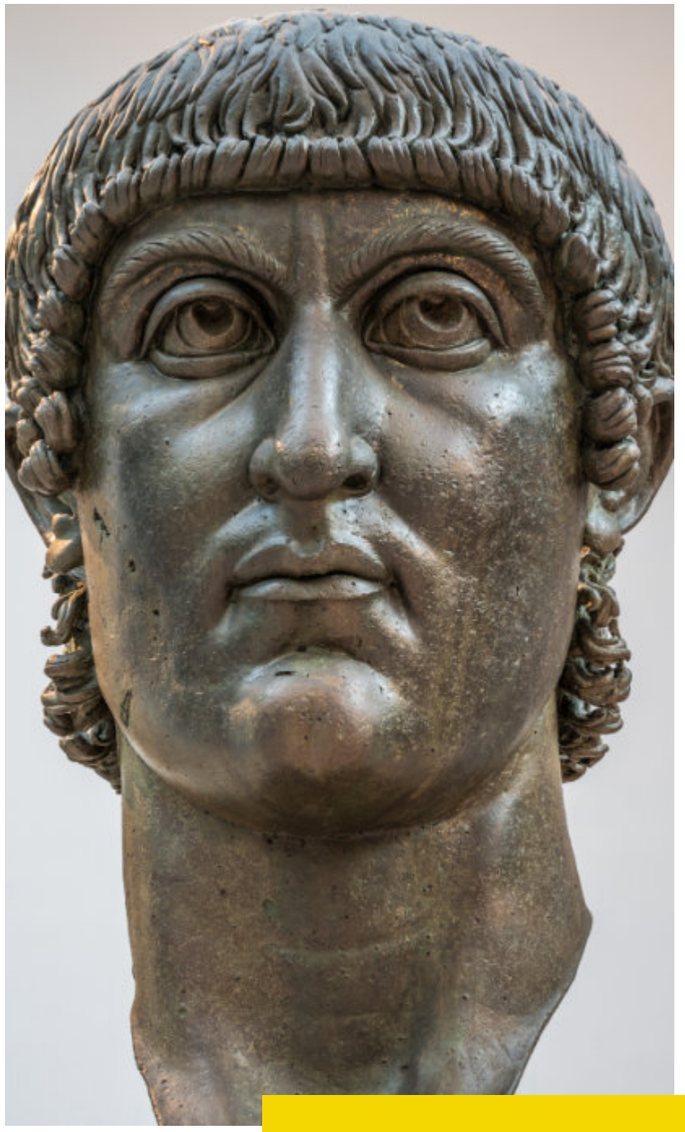
Julian prepared the legions for the journey, but at dusk, when they were due to leave, the army surrounded the place, rebelled against Constantius and demanded that Julian proclaim himself Emperor. However, Julian was reluctant to accept this role.

According to legend, the Genius of the Empire had to appear to him in a dream to demand that he accept the title. This occurred in 360 AD, near Lutetia, now Paris.

Even after this episode, Julian did not want to confront Constantius and did not consider himself Emperor. He only wanted to be allowed to remain peacefully with his army in Gaul. He asked all his legions to send a letter to Constantius in conciliatory terms.

But Constantius bribed the barbarians to make life difficult for Julian's army by attacking them continuously and keeping most of his soldiers busy. Meanwhile, he himself prepared to go to Gaul. When Julian, aided by prophetic signs, discovered this, he decided to take his army directly to Constantinople. "It is not only my own salvation that is at stake, but the welfare and freedom of all men, especially the Celtic people, who have already been betrayed twice by Constantius."

Accustomed to impossible missions, "travelling at breakneck speed and flying like the wind", his legions arrived in early winter 361 in Illyria, near Nissus (today Nis, in Serbia) and awaited the decisive confrontation



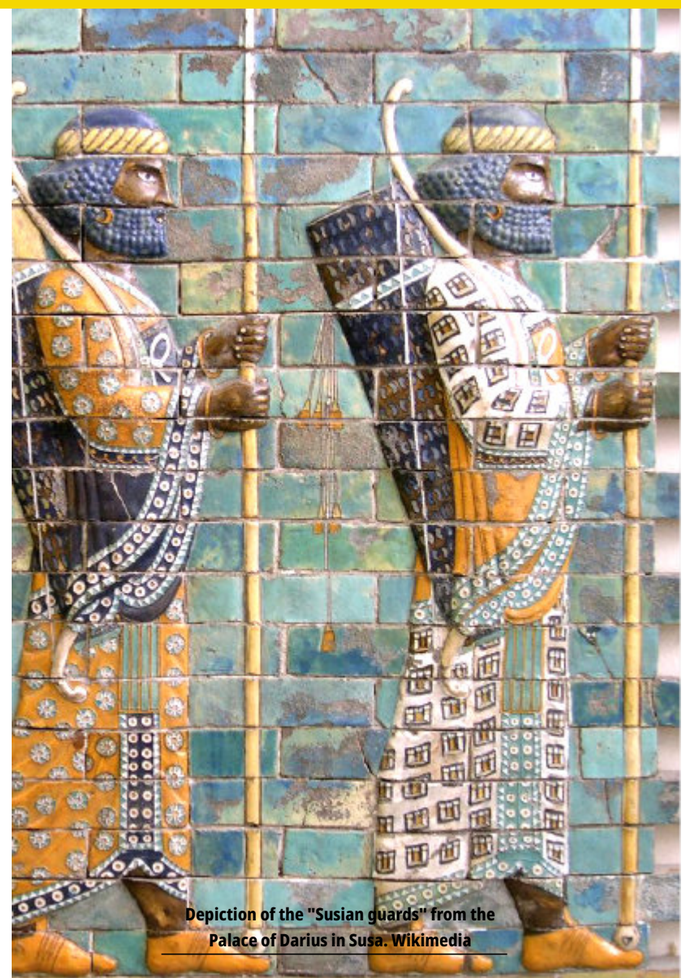
Head of a bronze colossus of Constantine. Wikimedia

"...It is not only my own salvation that is at stake, but the welfare and freedom of all men..."

"We see him acting in different roles: as emperor, high priest, legislator, judge, military commander..."

with Constantius. But that almost certain civil war was averted by the sudden death of Constantius.
Legally – and almost miraculously – becoming Emperor, Julian began working on the complete restoration of the Empire. It seems as if he felt that he did not have much time left and that before he left he had to resurrect the fallen giant. He worked tirelessly day and night.
The sacred idea of Rome as a place of peace and tolerance, where all peoples and all religions could exercise their rights and aspirations, was his guiding star through the chaotic labyrinth of his time.
We see him acting in different roles: as emperor, high priest, legislator, judge, military commander, economic reformer and simple soldier. His personal example was a model of behaviour. In his dreams, he was visited by the 'Genius' of the Empire, which encouraged him to continue his duties as emperor, whose sole mission was to look after the welfare of his subjects. He cleansed the institutions of swindlers, thieves, flatterers, conspirators and parasites. He restored tolerance and freedom of religious worship, even for those who did not accept it for others.
In the autumn of 362, Julian arrived in Antioch, where he planned to prepare his campaign against the Persians. There he experienced one of his greatest disappointments, as he became fully aware that the Hellenic spirit he had idealized was far removed from that which had existed in the times of Homer or Plato. The Hellenes no longer "preserve the image of ancient virtue", he says in a letter. Instead, he praised the Celts, Illyrians and Germans, whom he called his spiritual kinsmen. His letters continually reveal his nostalgia for that 'barbarian' Europe.
On his way to Persia, his small but brave army won battle after battle, but in the course of one battle Julian received a mortal wound to his chest. His last thoughts and prayers were directed to the deity to whom he felt devoted: Helios the Sun.

Don't miss Part 2 in the next issue!



Depiction of the "Susian guards" from the Palace of Darius in Susa. Wikimedia

THE GODDESSES OF PHILAE TEMPLE

EGYPTIAN ART AS A 'MAGICAL MACHINE'

ART

BY
SIAN PHILLIPS

Egypt. Say the name and a host of iconic images are brought forth in your mind's eye: The Great Pyramids, The Sphinx, King Tutankhamun's funeral mask, walls filled with hieroglyphs, to name but a few. All of these could be seen as expressions of Egyptian art and architecture, but really, they seem to go far beyond our modern conception of such things. For the Egyptians, art was always at the service of something far deeper, a 'magical machine' that influenced and affected the world. Beyond a mere expression of faith, art is a living, active, thing designed to cultivate and maintain life itself. Visiting Egypt today gives ample opportunity to observe this, particularly in the surviving temple complexes. One specific example is the Philae Temple at Aswan. Philae, like many of the remaining Ancient Egyptian sites, is dated to the Ptolemaic period of Egyptian history, when the Greeks ruled Egypt following the conquest by Alexander the Great in 332 BC.

The Ptolemaic pharaohs respected Egyptian culture, and the temples built during their reign still hold many of the ancient ideas and beliefs of the previous Egyptian dynasties. In fact, Philae was still in use well into the 4th century AD.
The main temple at Philae is dedicated to the goddess Isis, sister-wife of the god Osiris and mother of Horus. The depiction of Isis as a nurturing and maternal figure is easy for us to relate to, even across the span of over 2000 years. It can be seen very starkly at Philae in the decoration of the walls of the Mammisi (birth house), whose relief carvings illustrate the conception and birth of Horus. It is easy to associate these images with those of the Virgin Mary and Jesus in later Christian art.
This vision of the calm and nurturing side of the divine feminine continues elsewhere in the temple. The Inner Sanctum would have held the cult statue of Isis. As is typical for Egyptian temples, there are two chapels, one on either side of the sanctum, creating a trinity. The chapel on the left side continues with the depiction of the serene and fecund feminine with a depiction of Isis as Hathor. The two goddesses are often shown in a similar fashion, with a horned headdress holding a sun disk. Hathor is the goddess of joy, love, beauty, motherhood, and music, so it is easy to see how she fits in with the depiction of Isis as the divine mother.
Different facets of the divine feminine are shown in the chapel to the right of the inner sanctum. Here we see the fierce, aggressive and active side of the goddesses. There is Sekhmet, the lion headed goddess, known as both a destructive force, a goddess of war, and as a goddess of healing, a bringer of both life and death. She is shown being placated by the sounds of the sistrum – a sacred rattle – calming her destructive rage and restoring her to a state of peace. Thus the world is brought into harmony – a destructive force turned into a protective one. As if to emphasize this point, also shown in the chapel is Wadjet, the cobra headed goddess. She is a protective and vigilant force, thought to have helped defend the child Horus from his uncle, the god Set.
All the goddesses in both chapels are being presented with offerings, and the life of the temple would have revolved around daily rituals.
The question then arises: what function does all of this have? This is where thinking of the temple (and the art contained within it) as a 'magical machine' can be helpful. The different facets of the divine feminine work together like a machine to produce a particular effect. There is the life-giving, generative forces of the nurturing and mothering goddesses, but what is produced also needs protecting and defending in order for the process to continue. It is this active quality that supports life, a continual regeneration – something that is central to the worldview of the ancient Egyptians.
Of course, this is just a small part of a much larger 'machine'. The whole temple complex, from the site it is built on, the orientation of the buildings, to the stone used to construct it and the imagery shown on its walls – everything is designed to produce a very specific effect. Nothing is by chance. This is all part of the enduring mystery and appeal of ancient Egypt.

Photo by Wikimedia

THE LEGACY OF KANT

PHILOSOPHY

BY
JULIAN SCOTT

This article cannot possibly cover the entire legacy of the 18th century philosopher Immanuel Kant, as he had a profound effect on so many fields, but I will focus on one in particular: the legacy of doubt.

It all stems from what is known as Kant's "Copernican Revolution" in philosophy. Copernicus proposed that the Earth revolves around the sun and around its own axis, thus transforming the former geocentric world

Photo by Towfiqu barbhuiya on Unsplash

view into a heliocentric one. In a similar way, but on an intellectual level, Kant explained that the order we think we see in the world is not the actual order, but is imposed by our own mental structures. In this way he transformed the former God-centred worldview into a human-centred one.

In the 17th century philosophy had alternated between rationalism and empiricism: those who held that the world can be understood by the use of reason alone (such as Descartes), and those who claimed that we know reality through experience, specifically the experience gained through our senses and through scientific experiment. The 'Father of Empiricism', Francis Bacon, proposed that we can know reality simply by observing what we perceive without any assumptions. Kant argued, however, that "no human experience is pure, neutral, without unconscious assumptions or *a priori* orderings"[1]. As Richard Tarnas writes in his excellent history of Western philosophy, Kant "criticized Locke [another empiricist] for believing that sense impressions alone, without *a priori* concepts of understanding, could lead to knowledge. And he criticized Leibnitz [a rationalist] for believing that reason alone can calculate the universe."

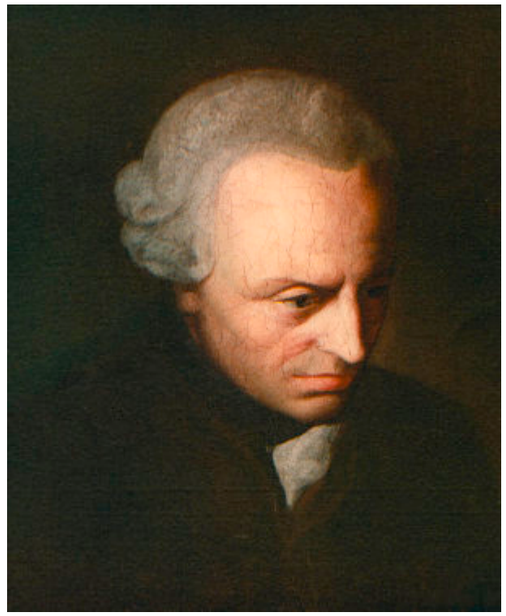
One of the central ideas of empiricism is that the only knowledge we can be sure of is that which we receive through our senses. But it is clear that we need reason to verify this knowledge. For example, our eyes tell us that the Sun rises and sets every day, but our reason allows us to deduce that this is an optical illusion. In reality the Sun is not moving in relation to the Earth: it is the Earth that rotates around the Sun, as well as around its own axis. This reasoning can then be verified by experiment. So in practice, rationalism and empiricism work together.

But Kant goes further than this: he claims that neither rationalism nor empiricism can know reality. Our reason can take logical steps within certain limits, but it cannot know the ultimate origin of things, nor their ultimate purpose. These are metaphysical factors which reason cannot know. Therefore, metaphysics is impossible, Kant said, because in metaphysics every argument has its counter-argument, every thesis its antithesis.

Empirical science cannot help us either in our search for reality, because science can only know 'phenomena', a word of ancient Greek origin which means 'appearances'. Science cannot know, for example, what a horse is in its essence, in its real being (if such exists); it can only analyze and describe its parts, functions, physical features, etc. To quote Tarnas again, "He [Kant] now recognized that man could know only the phenomenal and that any metaphysical conclusions about the nature of the

1.Tarnas, R. *The Passion of the Western Mind* (Pimlico, 1996)

Portrait of Francis Bacon. Wikimedia



Portrait of Immanuel Kant. Wikimedia

universe that went beyond his experience were unfounded. Metaphysics therefore went beyond the powers of human reason."

Where, then, does this leave us? And where did it leave Kant?

Kant accepts that there are some things that can be known about the world: 'phenomena' – as opposed to 'noumena', the real beings whose existence we cannot know. The phenomenal is the limited realm of science.

But even this knowledge is not certain, because we perceive things through certain structures in our mind. In the first place we perceive everything in time and space. But time and space are not, for Kant, things in themselves; they are what he calls "a priori forms of human sensibility." Things may not actually be in time and space, but this is how we perceive them: if we think of some event in our life, it is always related to some place; and every event is also associated with a time.

> **" The mind never experiences 'what is out there' in some clear undistorted mirroring of objective reality."**

Then there are the 'a priori categories' of the mind, of which there are 12 according to Kant, following the Aristotelian system. By way of example let us take the category of 'causality'. We believe that everything has a cause, but there is no actual evidence for this (as Hume pointed out), only probabilities and assumptions that this is the case. But this category of causality enables us to impose order on the world, which may or may not be ordered in itself (Kant suspends judgement on this point). As Tarnas explains: "The mind never experiences 'what is out there' in some clear undistorted mirroring of objective reality. Reality is of man's own making ... one can never know the world... Man perceives an order in the world grounded in his own mind."

These last words bring us with a bump into the world of the present. Most of us have been brought up in

this way of thinking and live with it for the rest of our lives – whether subconsciously, unconsciously, or occasionally consciously. It particularly applies to spiritual and metaphysical beliefs. We are told that belief in God, the soul, an afterlife, an ordered universe, are ways of coping with and not facing the absurdity of existence. We are imposing an order on life which is not there and is just the creation of our mind. And the same goes for all forms of knowledge: we impose an intellectual order on the chaos of events and call it 'history', or even worse, 'destiny'. We make countries from artificial orderings of geography. You can perhaps see where this is going: in the end, the human mind becomes a prey to doubt and begins to feel a philosophical *angst* resulting from the sense that life is meaningless in a meaningless universe.

Photo by Francisco Ghisletti on Unsplash

But let us pause for a moment and return to a more natural and less man-centred way of thinking. We think we are the only rational beings, the most evolved beings. But in antiquity people believed in 'gods', i.e. in higher, superhuman intelligences, more advanced than us in the great chain of being. And not only did they *believe*, some people actually conversed with them and knew them.

Plato, for one, said that we are like prisoners in a cave, discussing opinions in the dark. But outside the cave is a world of spiritual reality, which *can* be accessed, known and experienced by all human beings if they follow the necessary steps to achieve it. And this knowledge is real, not imagined.

Returning to Kant, Tarnas says: "The problem with his epistemology is that man cannot know if his understanding corresponds to a universal reality, or if it is just a human reality. This is called 'Kantian subjectivism'." And he continues: "Kant's penetrating critique had effectively pulled the rug out from under the human mind's pretensions to certain knowledge of things in themselves, eliminating in principle any human cognition of the ground of the world."

And returning to the 'Copernican Revolutions' – of Copernicus and Kant – he adds that "Both Revolutions awakened man to a more adventurous reality, yet both also radically displaced man – one from the centre of the cosmos, the other from genuine cognition of that cosmos. Cosmological alienation was therefore compounded by epistemological alienation."

How did Kant resolve this sense of alienation within himself?

After his damning critique which resulted in the conclusion that metaphysics is impossible, he added as a kind of postscript that there may be other ways leading to the 'objects of metaphysics' apart from the way of rational knowledge. He finds these ways in the 'moral conscience' of the human being (which he regards as real) and he calls this the way of the 'practical reason' (as opposed to the 'pure reason'). This led him to the concept of the Good Will, which acts out of duty and not by inclination. Morality for Kant is not to do good out of fear of punishment or desire for reward, but to do so for the sole reason that we believe it to be good. From this moral philosophy came Kant's famous axioms: "Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law" and "Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means but always at the same time as an end."
This is the other side of the coin of Kant's legacy, a legacy that gave rise to the legal concept of the inviolability of the person and the unconditional worth (dignity) of every rational being – the moral foundation of human rights.

Kant's love of true morality and his deep respect for the cosmos were perhaps what gave rise to one of his most famous sayings: "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and more steadily we reflect on them: the starry heavens above and the moral law within."

So, was the poet Heinrich Heine right when he compared "the little professor of Könisberg with the terrible Robespierre [architect of the French Revolution's Reign of Terror]? The latter had merely killed a king, and a few thousand Frenchmen... but Kant, said Heine, had killed God, had undermined the most precious arguments of theology."[2]

Or should we agree with Roger Scruton, who called Kant "the greatest modern philosopher"?[3]

Perhaps both are right in their own way, and we can see in Kant a great philosopher who helped form the world we live in today, with both its positive and negative aspects.

2. Durant, W., *The Story of Philosophy* (Pocket Books, 2012).
3. Scruton, R., *Kant* (Oxford Paperbacks, 1988)

Astronomer Copernicus, or Conversations with God, by Jan Matejko. Wikimedia

BEYOND THE ARROW OF TIME

QUANTUM PHYSICS, PHILOSOPHY AND THE COURAGE TO ALIGN

PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE

BY
LASZLO BALIZS

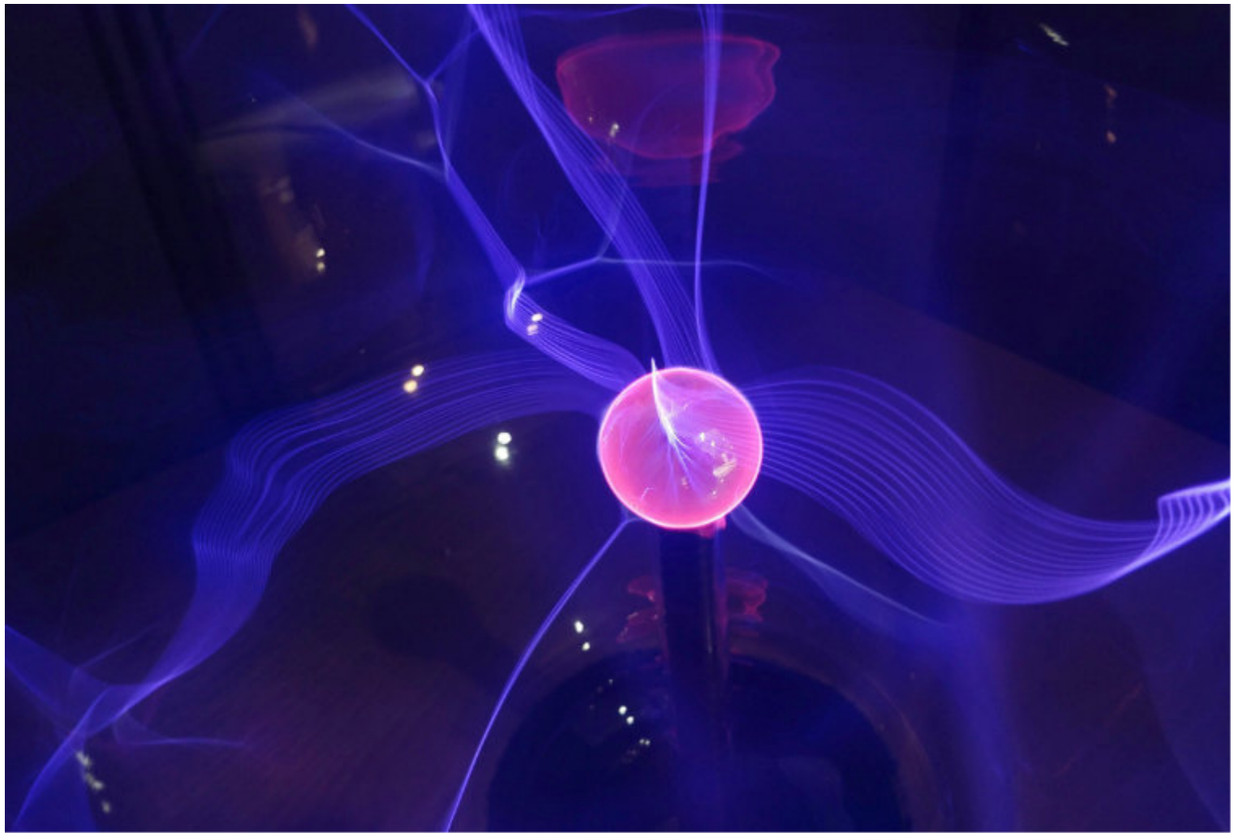


Photo by Fractal Hassan on Unsplash

Classical physics presents a world that feels reliably ordered: first comes the cause, then the effect. If you push something, it moves. Time flows forward like an arrow and reality unfolds step by step. This view shaped not only science but civilization itself. Law, responsibility, morality, planning and identity all follow the same pattern: past, present and future. We learn from the past, act in the present and look forward to the future. For centuries, this picture worked remarkably well. And then physics began to notice something odd.

At the quantum level, some experiments show that the usual 'first this, then that' order does not always hold. In delayed-choice and entanglement experiments, particles act in ways that seem to depend on how they will be measured later. When scientists choose how to measure a particle after it has already entered an experiment, that decision appears to affect how the particle acted before. It is important to note that this does not mean particles somehow 'know the future', or that we can send messages back in time. Physicists are cautious about these ideas and for good reason. What the experiments reveal is more subtle and even more puzzling: reality might not be fully explained as a series of separate moments marching forward through time.

A clear example of the tension between order and randomness is the delayed-choice experiment, first suggested by physicist John Archibald Wheeler[1]. In a modern version of this experiment, a single photon goes through a device where it can act like a wave, showing interference, or like a particle, showing a clear path. The key point is that the decision about how to measure the photon is made only after it has already entered the device.

" However, it suggests that linear time might just be an approximation, not the complete picture."

The observed outcomes are consistent with the later measurement choice. If the setup is made to detect wave behaviour, interference shows up. If it is set to detect particle behaviour, the photon acts as if it took only one path. What is unsettling about this experiment is not that the photon 'changes the past', but that its behaviour cannot be fully explained as having been decided earlier.

These experiments show that quantum events make the most sense when viewed as a whole. Some interpretations of quantum mechanics also suggest that events are part of one connected process, not just a series of separate causes and effects. From this point of view, time is less like a straight line and more like a whole, where how things are connected matters more than the order in which they occur.

This idea does not remove time from our daily lives. However, it suggests that linear time might just be an approximation, not the complete picture. Physics may not tell us how to live, but it does question the idea that time always moves in a single, straightforward direction. When we start to question that, philosophy can step in and ask a different question: if

1.Wheeler's Delayed-Choice Proposal

Wheeler, J.A., *"The 'Past' and the Delayed-Choice Double-Slit Experiment," in Mathematical Foundations of Quantum Theory*. Ed. A. R. Marlow (New York: Academic Press, 1978), 9–48.

time is not only horizontal, how should we think about it?

Another metaphor can help: vertical alignment.

Rather than seeing moments lined up one after another, we can picture layers of meaning, intention, memory and potential all existing together. We do not experience everything at the same time, but everything might be available all at once. In physics, this appears in time-symmetric descriptions and block-universe models. In philosophy, the idea has been around much longer.

Plotinus described time as not merely a physical dimension. In his *Enneads*, he states: "Time is the life of the soul in movement."[2] For him, eternity does not mean endless time. Instead, it is a state of wholeness: "A life that is at once whole and complete."

Time starts when that inner wholeness is stretched into a sequence, as we move from one desire to the next, from one fear to another, or from one distraction to the next. Simply put, the more divided we are inside, the more fragmented time feels. But when we become internally aligned, when our thoughts, values and actions start to agree with each other, something changes. We feel less scattered, less pulled by the past and less anxious about the future. Life feels more whole.

Augustine of Hippo[3] views time in his own way but arrives at a similar insight. He starts with honesty: "What then is time? If no one asks me, I know; if I wish to explain it, I know not." He points out something simple but powerful: the past no longer exists and the future has not yet arrived, yet both are present within us. The past lives as memory. The future lives as expectation. What we call 'time' is deeply tied to consciousness.

He describes time as a stretching of the soul. Regret pulls us backward and worry pulls us forward. We rarely find full rest in the present.

While modern physics explores new ideas through mathematics, philosophy has long been asking similar questions about existence. And psychology sits right at the crossroads of these two fields.

When people look back on tough moments from their past and give comfort, understanding or reassurance to their younger self, they are, in a real way, showing up across time. The adult self brings perspective, strength and compassion to a moment that once lacked these qualities.

Healing does not come from changing what happened, but from realizing that support was always available from within. Healing is not about returning to the past. It is about becoming whole in the present. This process works because the mind does not experience time in the same way that clocks do. Traumatic memories are not just 'in the past', they feel present whenever they come up.

Seen in this way, therapy shows that the present self can influence the meaning and emotional reality of the past. The event stays the same, but what changes is the story we tell ourselves, how we feel about it and even how our bodies react.

Modern psychology shows that memory is not a fixed recording. Instead, it is a dynamic process.

When we look back on an experience with new understanding, our internal view of that event changes. Once again, we see a connection with physics, not as proof, but as a parallel.

This does not mean that physics has confirmed any spiritual theory of time. Equations cannot tell us how to shape our inner lives. However, they suggest that viewing time as a series of separate moments might not be the whole story. When we let go of that strict view, philosophy and psychology can look into a deeper idea: maybe coherence matters more than sequence.

There is another side to this idea that people don't talk about much, but it's very practical. When people talk about 'being aligned', they usually mean that their values, actions and inner life match up. But

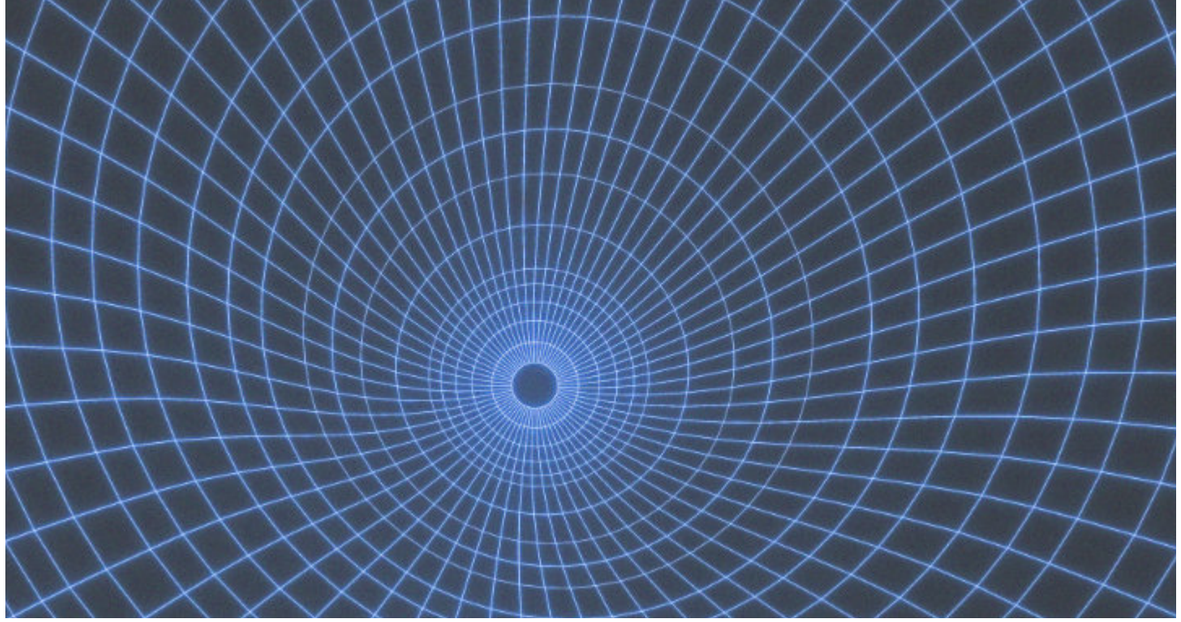


Photo by Logan Voss on Unsplash

"...the past no longer exists and the future has not yet arrived, yet both are present within us."

Photo by Mark Tegethoff on Unsplash

2. Plotinus, *Enneads, III.7* ("On Eternity and Time"), trans. A. H. Armstrong, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966).

3.Augustine, *Confessions*, Book XI, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

alignment is more than just being consistent with yourself. It brings up a deeper question: what are you aligning to?

In philosophy in the classical tradition, the answer is not simply 'to yourself', but to an Ideal. Plato described the Good as something above personal opinion. Plotinus saw unity as a return to what is whole. An Ideal is not just a fantasy. It is a direction... choosing truth over falsehood, courage over fear, justice over convenience and wholeness over fragmentation.

When we align with an Ideal, we guide our lives toward something steady. This helps reduce inner conflict, because our choices are based not only on what we like, but also on our principles.

Discipline here isn't about being rigid. It is about staying true to yourself over time and not doing things today that you will regret tomorrow. Sometimes, you have moments of clarity where it feels like your 'future self' is right there with you. Suddenly, you know what you need to do. The right choice is clear, even if it's hard. People often call this intuition, conscience or inner guidance.

From a scientific point of view, this is just your brain recognizing patterns over time and using your experiences. That makes sense. But if you look at it philosophically, there is another way to see it: the more integrated and honest your inner life becomes, the more future-oriented wisdom becomes available right now. It's not that the future is sending messages back to you. Instead, when you are aligned, the gap between who you are and who you want to be gets smaller.

With less inner conflict, your decisions become clearer and your present and future selves start to match up.

Photo by Evgeni Tcherkasski on Unsplash

"In philosophy in the classical tradition, the answer is not simply 'to yourself', but to an Ideal."

You don't have to give up science or believe in anything mystical to see this. Instead, it asks for something quieter and harder:

- cultivating an inner life,
- maintaining dialogue with oneself,
- being honest, disciplined and caring,
- not letting yourself become divided over time.

If everything in the world is more linked than we thought, then integrity is not just about being good. It is about being true to how things really are. Alignment is not just a self-help idea; it is a way of living that aligns with how the world actually works.

Modern physics doesn't tell us how to live, but it does challenge the idea that life is just a series of separate moments.

Perhaps the future cannot go back and change the past. What guides us may not be the future as a moment in time, but the Ideal as a direction. When we orient ourselves toward something greater than impulse, we do not need time to move backward. The axis is present now. If we pay attention, the best parts of who we are becoming may already be shaping the choices we make now.

And that, in itself, is extraordinary.

The Death of Caesar, Vincenzo Camuccini. Wikimedia

CULTURE

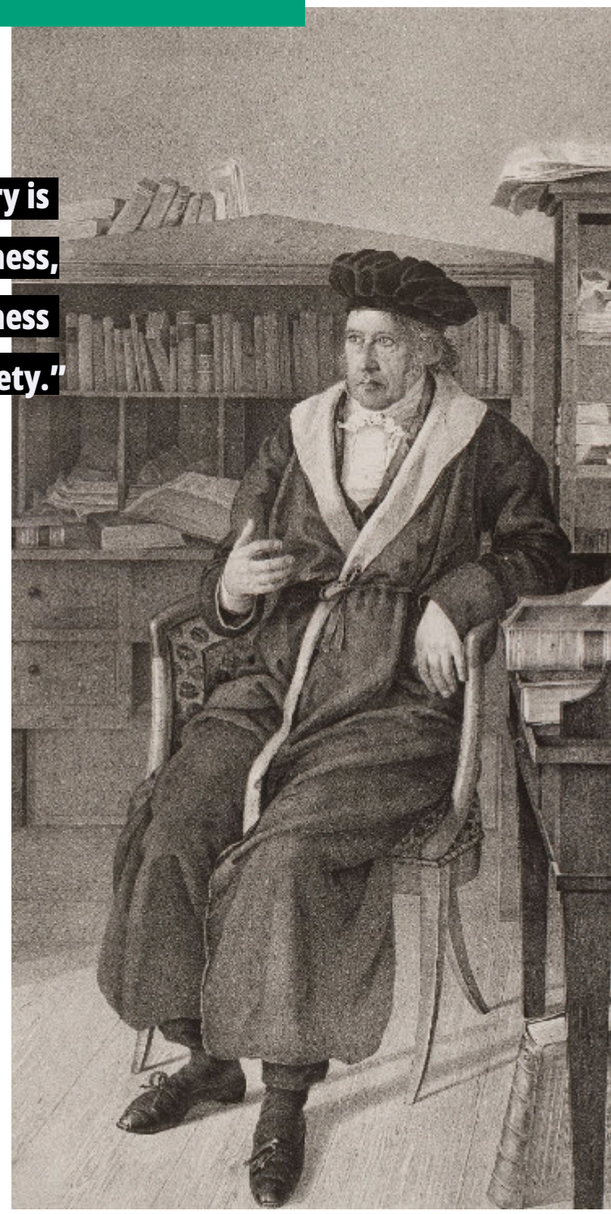
BY
ISTVAN ORBAN

HAVE WE REACHED THE END OF HISTORY?

In 1992, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the political philosopher Francis Fukuyama wrote a highly influential book, *The End of History and The Last Man*. He claimed that "what we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government." At that time, it seemed valid that liberal democracy was a victorious and sustainable form of government in the long-term. Fukuyama did not claim that events would stop occurring in the future, but no matter what happened, liberal democrary would be the prevalent system, even if totalitarianism reappeared.

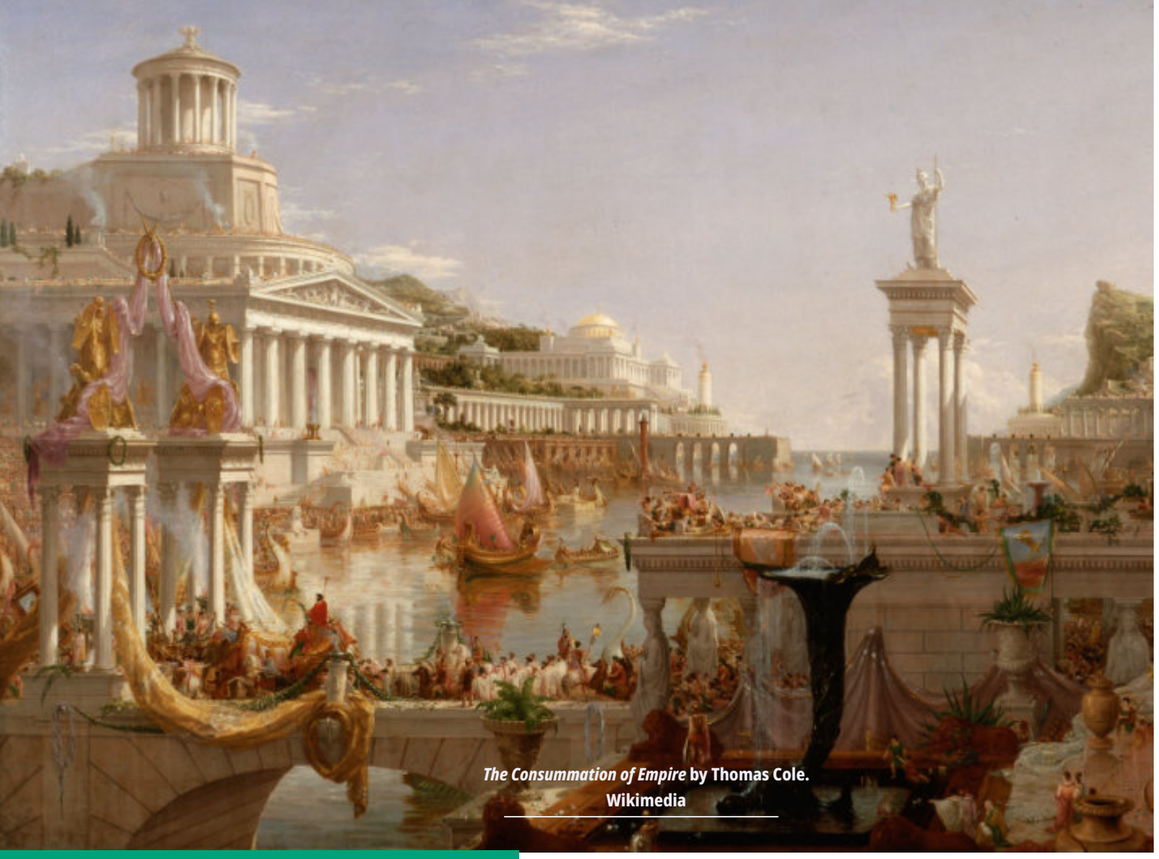
The 'End of History' concept was not his original idea, though; it was based on the ideologies of G.W.F. Hegel and Karl Marx, who thought that human history can be regarded as a linear progression, from one socioeconomic period to another, towards increasingly advanced levels. While Marx believed that history progresses purposefully through material forces and class conflict, culminating in a communist society that would resolve all contradictions, his predecessor, Hegel suggested that human history is a gradual evolution of awareness, where each level of consciousness produces a matching type of society – moving from tribal communities to slave systems, then religious states, and eventually modern democratic and egalitarian societies. Hegel believed that history culminates in an absolute moment – a moment in which a final, rational form of society and state becomes victorious. So while Hegel saw history as the unfolding of human freedom, Marx proposed that history progresses through class struggle toward communism.

"Hegel suggested that human history is a gradual evolution of awareness, where each level of consciousness produces a matching type of society."



***Portrait of Friedrich Hegel* by Julius Ludwig Sebbers. Wikimedia**

However, there were critics of their concept of history steadily advancing toward improvement or a final goal. Criticisms have come from philosophical, historical, religious and postmodern perspectives. For example, Friedrich Nietzsche rejected the idea that history moves toward moral or rational perfection. He argued that belief in progress is a secularized version of the Christian idea of salvation. Instead of this, he proposed the idea of eternal recurrence (a cyclical concept of time) and saw modern faith in progress as naive. Michel Foucault also rejected the grand narratives of historical



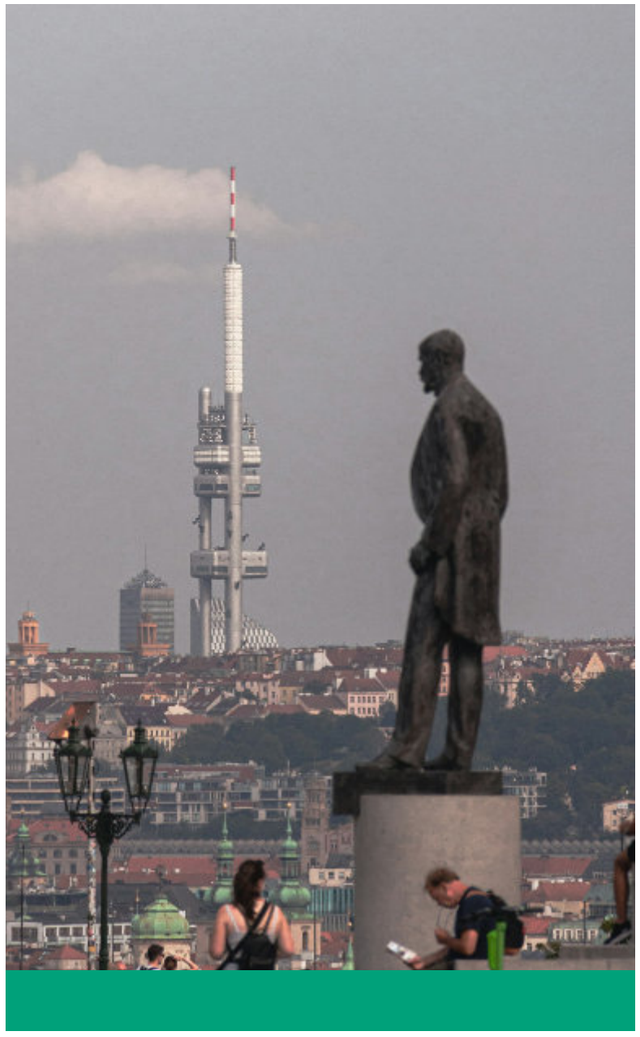
The Consummation of Empire by Thomas Cole. Wikimedia

progress. He argued that changes in history reflect shifts in power structures. The linear history concept was also challenged by Oswald Spengler and Arnold J. Toynbee, who argued that civilizations are organic and cyclical, and that history reveals a pattern of rise and fall of civilizations.

Fukuyama's concept was also swiftly challenged, as he did not take into account religious movements and other aspects, such as ethnic behaviour. One of his key critics was Samuel P. Huntington. He wrote an essay one year after Fukuyama's work, which soon became a whole book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. He said that after the Cold War, cultural and civilizational identities – not ideology or economics – would be the primary source of global conflicts. During the Cold War, the conflicts were ideological (capitalism vs. communism), but after the Cold War, the conflicts shifted to civilizational fault lines. He argues that wars will occur mainly between groups from different civilizations (like Western societies and Islamic societies). He believed that there will be a multipolar world, which is charaterized by civilizational blocs, increased cultural consciousness and the decline of Western dominance. His arguments were also challenged, as it was claimed that they simplify cultures and ignore internal diversity within civilizations. Huntington's critics also claimed that globalization increases cooperation, not just conflict.

Although after the September 11 terror attacks in 2001 in the United States many scholars declared that Fukuyama's view had been disproven, he still believed that in the end he remained right, as what he meant by the 'End of History' was the evolution of human political systems towards a liberal-democratic Western-style system. He also noted that his original thesis "does not imply a world free from conflict, nor the disappearance of culture as a distinguishing characteristic of societies". In 2008, Robert Kagan published a book *The Return of History and the End of Dreams*, which clearly and directly contradicted Fukuyama's book and the post-Cold War belief in the inevitable global spread of liberal democracy. Instead of entering a peaceful liberal world order as predicted, history has returned in the form of renewed great-power rivalry and ideological competition. Kagan said "the end of history was an illusion". Authoritarianism has not disappeared and rival political systems remain powerful and attractive. He gave as examples China and Russia, which promote alternatives to Western liberal democracy. Power politics – not universal harmony – continues to shape global affairs. According to Kagan, economic development does not automatically lead to democracy and globalization does not guarantee political liberalization. Authoritarian regimes can modernize without becoming democratic. The dream of a peaceful, unified liberal world order after the Cold War was overly optimistic.

" Power politics – not universal harmony – continues to shape global affairs."



"Spengler and Toynbee argued that civilizations are organic and cyclical, and that history reveals a pattern of rise and fall of civilizations."

Photo by Andre Morales Kalamar on Unsplash

ESOTERICA

BY
AGOSTINO DOMINICI

ALCHEMICAL MEDICINE

AND SPAGYRIC REMEDIES

Source image Wikimedia

"The teaching of alchemy has an age-old tradition that includes a mystical as well as a more practical dimension."

Despite many technological advances, our modern society has so far failed to address the all-important issue of health and harmony, both in the human being and on planet Earth. This situation has led to an increase of interest in the study of holistic medicine and herbal remedies in general. In the meantime, we have also witnessed a genuine interest in rediscovering lost esoteric teachings in various branches of knowledge. Among these esoteric disciplines, one that is going through a major revival is alchemy and its medical applications.

The teaching of alchemy has an age-old tradition that includes a mystical as well as a more practical dimension. Within this practical side we find the study of plant and mineral substances to be used for healing (both physical and psychological) and to increase longevity. In traditional systems of medicine of both East and West alchemical teachings pervaded their fundamental structures. Thus, whether we study TCM (Traditional Chinese medicine), Ayurveda, homeopathy or spagyric medicine, we encounter many ideas 'borrowed' from alchemical processes and principles. Concepts like transmutation, regeneration, purification, dissolution, etc., play an important role in the philosophical formulation of these systems of medicine. In this article I am going to look specifically into Spagyric medicine.

The Etymology of the term Spagyria

Spagyric medicine refers to a branch of alchemy which was systematized and popularized in medieval Europe by Paracelsus, a Swiss alchemist, physician, astrologer and philosopher. In his teachings he stated that the true purpose of alchemy was not for the vulgar purpose of making gold, but rather for the production of medicines[1].

Spagyric remedies are prepared in a unique way that captures the full therapeutic spectrum of plants, including the cosmic energies they constantly absorb. As plants lie constantly under the sky, this mysterious cosmic connection contributes to their healing qualities. By looking more closely at the etymology of the term spagyria, we can better understand

1.The reader should bear in mind the following distinction: spagyrics and alchemy, though related, pursue different aims. Spagyrics focuses on extracting a specific virtue or quality from a substance for therapeutic purposes and healing. Alchemy, by contrast, has the ultimate goal of regenerating that which is beginning to age. In other words, spagyrics seeks to correct what is becoming corrupted or diseased, whereas alchemy strives to turn back the clock of time, restoring a substance to its original, pristine state.

what is meant by 'capturing cosmic energies'.

The most popular derivation – attributed to the term coined by Paracelsus – claims that spagyria comes from the union of two Greek words: *spaō*, 'to separate' and *ageírō*, 'to reunite'. In this interpretation, the word would express the principle of *solve et coagula*, the well-known alchemical process of separating, purifying and then bringing a substance 'back together'. This etymology refers to important alchemical concepts to which we will return later. However, there are other, equally interesting linguistic interpretations that deserve our attention.

Greek dictionaries show that σπάω (spaō) does not really mean 'to separate', but rather 'to extract', 'to draw out', 'to pull forth' or 'to attract'. Furthermore, according to the rules for the formation of Greek-based neologisms, the second Greek word should be either γέρος (géros), 'very old', 'primordial' or ιερός (ierós), 'sacred' or 'divine'. Thus, the term *Spagyria* more likely means 'to extract what is divine', or 'to extract what is very old' – in the sense of primordial. And what is 'divine' and 'primordial'? Paracelsus would say, the *Archeus*, 'the archetypal principle', also called in Ancient Egyptian *Neter* (*nṯr*) 'the elder god'[2].

Source image Wikimedia

The Archetypal Power of a Spagyric Remedy

What the process of spagyric tries to do is to 'capture' precisely this cosmic 'ingredient', this archetypal principle, referred in the alchemical tradition as 'Universal Mercury' from which the 'Universal Medicine' is made. In every living being, there exists this Universal Mercury (also called 'Universal Intelligence'), although only one of its archetypal aspects will predominate in each individual being. These various aspects – expressions of the 'One Universal Mercury' – correspond to the seven classical planets[3] of traditional astrology, which therefore should be seen as the representatives of seven archetypal forces.

When we carefully observe the plant kingdom, we notice that the nourishment for the growth of plants comes from the 'Earth' – from air, soil and water, but the energy for their growth comes from the 'Sky' – the sun, moon and stars. Through spagyric methods, these two realms, Sky and Earth, are brought together to give birth to a remedy which is not just a conventional herbal medicine but something more complete and powerful[4].

From the above, we can deduce that the aim of the spagyrist is to create a remedy capable of

2. I am making references to Ancient Egypt because it is more than plausible that alchemy originated there. The prefix al- (as in the words: alembic, alcohol, alkaline) is derived from the Arabic language. While the word 'kimiya' is derived from the Greek khemeia, which means fusion or mixture, and which in turn comes from the Coptic Egyptian term kemi (from kemet), meaning the 'black soil of Egypt', the mixing of the fertile silt of the Nile with the arid sand of the desert.

3. Note that what is meant is not the visible planet itself but the Genius/Spirit of the Planet. But this is just one mode of expression of these seven archetypal forces which can manifest in various ways and at various levels of Reality.

4. This idea is very well represented by the pelican (circulation vessel). This alchemical apparatus in which two vessels are joined together, one inverted over the other, is used for the important operation of circulation. The structure of the pelican was intentionally designed to symbolize the union of macrocosm and microcosm.

Image by Wikimedia

"Spagyrics uses the signature to determine which archetypal force a plant embodies ..."

channelling these archetypal forces into the human system. Naturally, the goal is not to introduce just any archetypal force, but specifically the one that is deficient or unbalanced in the person who requires treatment. Here we enter the Hermetic logic of spagyrics which holds that every mineral or plant possesses its own *signatura rerum* (the 'signature of things') that expresses its archetypal essence and medicinal power.

This signature can appear in nature as form (resembling a body part or function), colour (associated with planetary/elementary qualities), smell-taste (revealing a dominant archetypal virtue), growth pattern (upright, crawling, expansive, etc.), habitat (sun-exposed, watery, nocturnal, volcanic, etc.) or planetary correspondence (its 'cosmic' imprint). Spagyrics uses the signature to determine which archetypal force a plant embodies (e.g. Jupiter, Mars, Venus, etc.) and therefore what energetic imbalance it can correct in a human being. Thus, a plant with a Jovian signature will help address a deficiency of the Jupiter archetype, while a Saturnian plant will serve to reinforce a lack of the Saturn archetype within the human system in question.

We may ask, how is the spagyric healer able to identify the signature of the plant or metal needed for the creation of the remedy? Nature itself acts as a guide, helping the healer's consciousness to 'perceive' the signatures (the essential principles) of the plant or mineral most suited to cure the illness. These 'signs' are not perceptible to ordinary senses, for the intelligent light of nature operates exclusively in the metaphysical domain. Their identification therefore occurs through a subtle relationship between the soul of the alchemist, the soul of the substance being worked upon and the regenerating soul of nature.

Furthermore, as with many traditional therapies, healing can occur only through an active interaction between the soul of the physician and the soul of the patient. Thus, the difference between conventional herbal medicine – often produced mechanically in industrial systems – and traditional spagyric preparations lies in the active involvement of the alchemist's spiritual intention. Through his 'art', the alchemist becomes a conduit, channeling universal life into the remedy and transmitting it to the patient.

The Preparation of Spagyric Remedies

As we said earlier, spagyric medicines are meant to capture the full therapeutic spectrum of plants, including their 'subtler realities'.

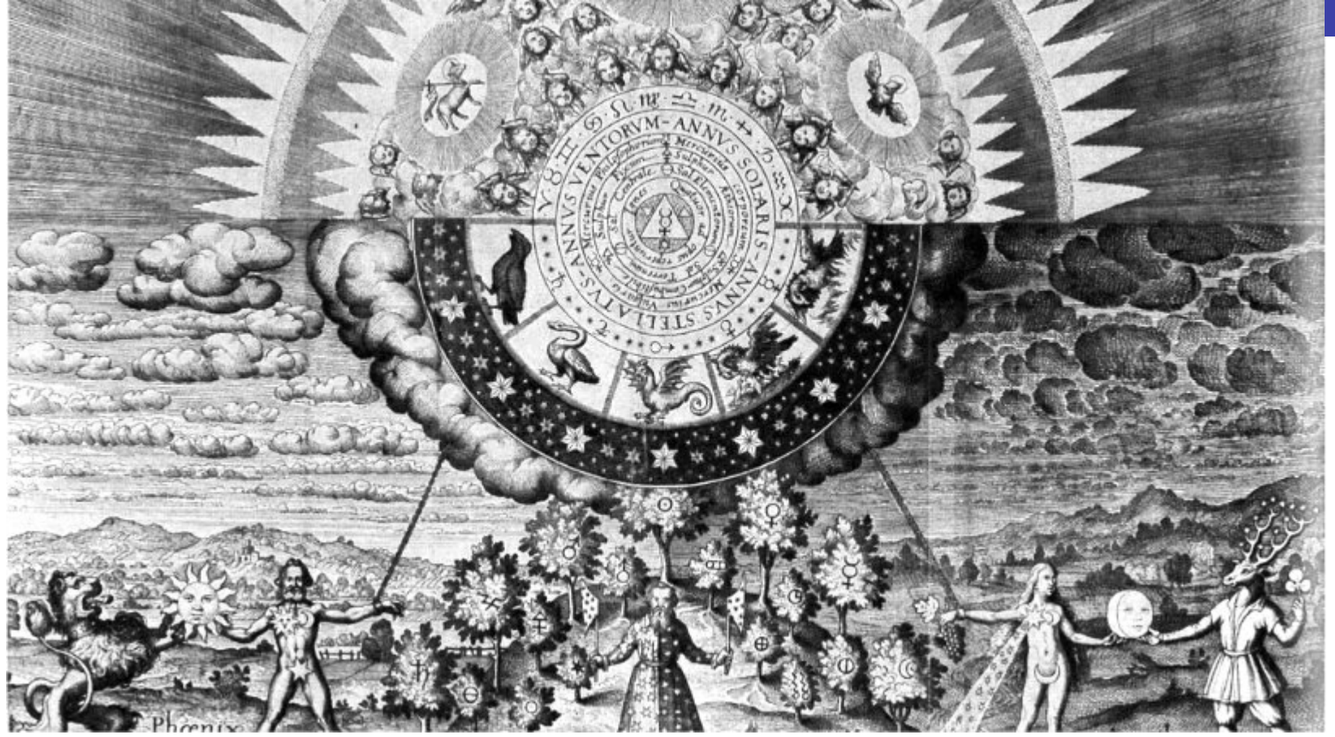


Photo by Lanju Fotografie on Unsplash

Therefore, the effect of the remedy is intended not only to be physiological, but also energetic – where 'energy' here is understood as an intermediate realm between the spiritual and the physical, capable of influencing both our vitality and psyche. Since all chronic and recurring conditions can be traced to an underlying energetic deficit, it is essential to understand the relationship between human health and energetic healing. Traditional medical systems have always sought to access this subtler energetic realm and we can find many examples in ancient China, India, and Egypt alike[5].

According to Paracelsus, the human body is like a system of 'chemical reactions' in which the traditional metaphysical principles of the alchemists – sulphur, mercury and salt – play a fundamental role. At the chemical level, these principles correspond to acidic, basic (or alkaline) and saline substances and at the physical level, to positive, negative and neutral electrical charges. For Paracelsus, the true origin of disease lay not in the disharmony of the humours[6] associated with the four elements, which is often only a secondary effect, but in the deeper imbalance between these three principles themselves[7].

Following on from the above, the spagyric method for preparing a remedy must also follow this 'triune division'. The method consists in separating therapeutic herbs into their constituent virtues corresponding to the three principles: soul (sulphur), spirit or vital force (mercury) and body (salt). The first principle is active and fiery, the second is receptive and watery and the third is fixed and solid. Through distillation the plant releases the essential oils (corresponding to sulphur-soul), while the alcohol (mercury-spirit) is extracted through fermentation. Calcination of the remaining plant, followed by filtration, leaves the specific water-soluble salts (salt-body). In accordance with the spagyric motto: *Solve et Coagula, et habebis magisterium* ("dissolve and coagulate and you will have the mastery"), after separating this *tria prima*, the three principles are recombined to produce a spagyric quintessence remedy.

When preparing a good spagyric remedy, it is also helpful to remember the analogy between the soil in which a plant grows – the humus – and the human being – the homo[8]. This connection helps guide the choice of herbs. For a remedy to work at its best, the plants should be collected in natural places with strong, healthy energies – such as areas near tectonic lines or positive geomagnetic points – and well away from polluted urban environments. In this way, the plants retain the full vitality, 'memory' and natural force of their species. Cultivated plants tend to have a weaker energetic field because they grow in environments that are unnatural to them, causing them to 'lose' part of their vegetative soul. Wild plants, by contrast, are stronger – and therefore more potent – because in order to survive in their native habitat, they must adapt to challenging conditions. Finally, the different parts of the fresh plant – root, leaf, seed or flower – must be collected at the plant's peak moment of vitality, which occurs at specific astrological times: certain seasons, days, and even hours that align with the planetary influence (the astrological signature) traditionally associated with that species. This timing ensures that the plant is gathered when its natural force is at its strongest and that from the very beginning of the spagiric process, the hermetic motto 'as above so below' is fully honoured.

"Cultivated plants tend to have a weaker energetic field because they grow in environments that are unnatural to them."

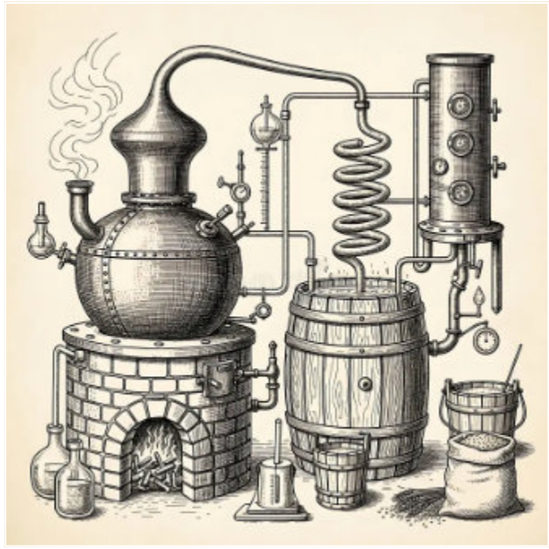


Image by Wikimedia

5. Note that what is meant is not the visible planet itself but the Genius/Spirit of the Planet. But this is just one mode of expression of these seven archetypal forces which can manifest in various ways and at various levels of Reality.

6. Paracelsus's methods departed from classical Galenic medicine which sought to cure ailments by balancing the four humours and their corresponding qualities and elements (Choleric-Fire-Hot, Sanguine-Air-Wet, Phlegmatic-Water-Cold, Melancholic-Earth-Dry).

7. Paracelsus's doctrine of disease is actually much more complex. He identifies five main causes of disease: the ens astrale (celestial influences), the ens veneni (poisons and toxins), the ens spirituale (inner disturbances of the soul or psyche), the ens naturale (physical-hereditary constitution), and the ens Dei (the mysterious action of divine providence, a kind of metaphysical destiny).

8. The two words, humus and homo are etymologically connected, coming from the same Proto-Indo-European root, meaning 'earth' or 'soil'. In Latin, homo literally means 'earthling' or 'the one made from the ground'. In alchemy, humus refers to the prima materia, and homo, to the being shaped from it, capable of being regenerated, returning to its origin.

MYTHS

BY
SOFIA VENUTI

THE MYTH OF OSIRIS

The Myth of Osiris occupies a central place in ancient Egyptian religion and theology, shaping concepts of kingship, afterlife, cosmic balance (*Ma'at*) and the cyclical renewal of life. Egyptian mythology did not present a unitary canonical text; rather, narrative strands emerged over millennia in Pyramid (funerary) Texts, Coffin Texts, temple reliefs and later classical accounts. At the core of this myth stands Osiris, originally a fertility and vegetation deity who became the paradigm of death and resurrection, the great judge of the dead in the Underworld or Afterlife (*Duat*), ensuring cosmic order and continuity beyond mortal existence. Most importantly, the Osiris myth is

"At the core of this myth stands Osiris, the paradigm of death and resurrection."

deeply connected with our human journey.
Nut is the goddess of the sky and vault of the heavens and is depicted as a woman arched over the earth god Geb, who is the physical support of the world and depicted as a man lying beneath her. Nut and Geb had the children Osiris, Set, Isis and Nepthys.

Osiris is a just and benevolent king, civilizing Egypt by teaching agriculture, religious rites, music, art and ethical governance. He embodies the proper ordering of life, death and regeneration. His rule is disrupted by the envy of his brother Set, a god associated with chaos, desert storms and destruction, who desires kingship. Set was so dangerous in fact, that his name was not spoken and it was often replaced by a protective amulet when it needed to be written. Set organizes a banquet where he presents a finely-crafted chest, promising to offer it to any guest who perfectly fits in it. The chest had been secretly made to the exact measurements of Osiris and fits no-one else; when Osiris lies in it, Set's accomplices seal it closed and cast it into the Nile, ending Osiris's earthly life. What does Osiris's death represent? Killed by Set (differentiation), it signifies the withdrawal of order from creation, the intrusion of chaos (*Isfet*) which disrupts justice, order, balance, divine law and truth (*Ma'at*). We see in many mythologies that divine crime is the impetus for restoration.

According to one version of the myth, Osiris's sister and wife, Isis, searches for his body restlessly in the form of a kite, finding it washed up on the shore of Byblos, Lebanon, where a tree had grown around it. Although

"Osiris is a just and benevolent king, civilizing Egypt by teaching agriculture, religious rites, music, art and ethical governance. "

the king of Byblos had used the trunk of the tree as support for his palace, Isis managed to have the chest with Osiris's body returned. Isis represents the universal mother and wife, she is connected to initiation, life and knowledge of healing and in fact we see throughout history that it is the mothers and wives who keep the knowledge of traditions across generations. While hunting by night, Set finds the chest and, recognizing Osiris, cuts the body into 14 pieces and scatters them across Egypt. With the help of her sister Nephtys, Isis manages to recover the dismembered body except his phallus, which Set threw into the Nile and was eaten by a fish.

The Opet Temple in Karnak (which was called "Ipet-isut" and was the monumental cult centre for Amun-Ra) depicts a scene from the Late Period illustrating a transfer of seed between the ithyphallic Ba bird of Amun-Ra and the ithyphallic Osiris who is lying on the lion couch during the mummification process, signifying the mystical union of these divine forces. Lions in ancient Egyptian thought represent strength, ferocity, regeneration and were in fact often linked to cosmic battles, so Osiris on the lion couch reinforces his triumph over death and chaos through divine agency. The phallus, which was lost to the Nile, denoting that Osiris's power to create went to the other world, becomes present in this important moment, symbolic of the return of life force after death. It is important to remember that ancient Egyptian gods and myths represent archetypes, ideals and transformative powers, and the myth of Osiris itself can be seen as an alchemical process. The transfer of seed resembles the circulation of divine vitality, where the regenerative forces of Amun-Ra's Ba knit with the resurrected Osiris to reaffirm cosmic continuity. This cultic symbolism was probably used in rites of initiation and renewal, especially during festivals when deity statues were ritually united and revitalized on the temple grounds.

Anubis, the jackal-headed god of funerary practices and guide in the afterlife, mummifies Osiris with Isis and also Nephthys, Thoth and Horus involved in the restoration of his body and the funerary rituals. The mummification ritual brings things back into unity and this was done over 70 days. This astral-funerary connection is very significant, mirroring the 70 days around May when Sirius disappears from the night sky as it approaches the sun, remaining invisible for approximately 70 days. The ancient Egyptians interpreted this as a time of death or travel through the *Duat*. The mummification ritual embodied the 70 days of 'purification' or 'death' that the star underwent, before reappearing in the eastern sky just before sunrise (the heliacal rising) in August – thus the star and the soul reawakening to the light. And of course, this is another cycle in Nature.

Touching her shoulder, the Ba bird then seeded Isis (the Egyptian immaculate conception) who gave birth to Horus. Born on 25th December, Horus, the *Sol Invictus* and sky god depicted as a falcon, is the aspirant who follows in the footsteps of the initiate Osiris. Once mature, he went into battle with Set to reclaim the reign and restore balance in the kingdom. In this battle, Horus injures one of Set's

Osiris, Isis, and Nephthys .Wikimedia

testicles, which removes his generative power, but Set injures Horus's left eye. Horus's eyes are celestial, the left often associated with the moon and its damage being associated with the waning and disappearance of the moon, while the right eye is solar. By injuring the left eye, Set impairs Horus's generating spiritual power, impacting the cosmic balance, bringing disharmony. The eye was restored by Thoth, god of wisdom, writing and magic who brought some mediation between Horus and Set, or in later versions by Hathor, the mother goddess in her nurturing and healing aspect; and these gods respectively used their powers and filled the eye with plants and mineral or gazelle milk, likening this healing period with the waxing of the moon. This is another important aspect of the myth related to our human journey: we all have an injured eye, our spiritual eye, which through wisdom, love and unity we must learn to use again. The *Wedjat*, the Horus Eye, became a symbol of Horus's constant presence and spiritual power, the parts of the Eye having mathematical significance and holding deep meaning which readers can further explore. In some traditions, Horus offered his restored eye to Osiris, another spiritual link in the cycle of their Kingdoms of the Living and the Dead.

Horus eventually wins the battle over Set and rises triumphant as the King of the Living, restoring divine order, harmony and Ma'at. We learn that this doesn't mean he killed Set, but rather gains control and power over him. Set in fact isn't at all destroyed but is eventually given a new position by the god Ra, which is to defend the divine barque for the crossing of the soul.

To conclude, we see that Osiris deeply represents duality, cyclicity, the continued journey of the soul beyond physical life, the necessity to harmonize the opposites; he is the first initiate as he is the one acquiring complete internal consciousness. Osiris becomes King of the Underworld, ruling beyond manifestation, wrapped in white linen cloth with his legs unified into one representing complete centredness to the spiritual axis, complete unity, holding the crook (*heka)* and flail (*nekhakha)* crossing over his chest symbolizing his harmonized powers of giving and receiving, guiding and keeping order. The colour of his skin is black or green, symbolic of fertility and regeneration. His crown combines the White Crown of Upper Egypt with two curly ostrich feathers, symbolic of truth and justice similarly to Maat, and is adorned with a small sun disk at the top and a uraeus serpent on the front, signifying his solar connection, divine authority and wisdom.

Osiris is the archetypical human being of Plato who is put to the test by Set, who is the power of bringing things into consciousness. Set in fact is not evil – he represents the dark side of life which is present in all our lives; he is destabilizing, he puts good to the test: when darkness comes, we must learn to control its power and channel it into a way we can use for our path. He destroys the transitory and uncovers the permanent, which is what our soul needs for its long journey. How can we control Set's power? Isis is the clue, the unifying principle, love. Love in its pure and archetypal wholeness and enveloping wisdom is the magic that can transform and transmute. If we learn to use our own Isis, our love and search for wisdom, we can control Set.

Osiris and the four sons of Horus Wikimedia

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