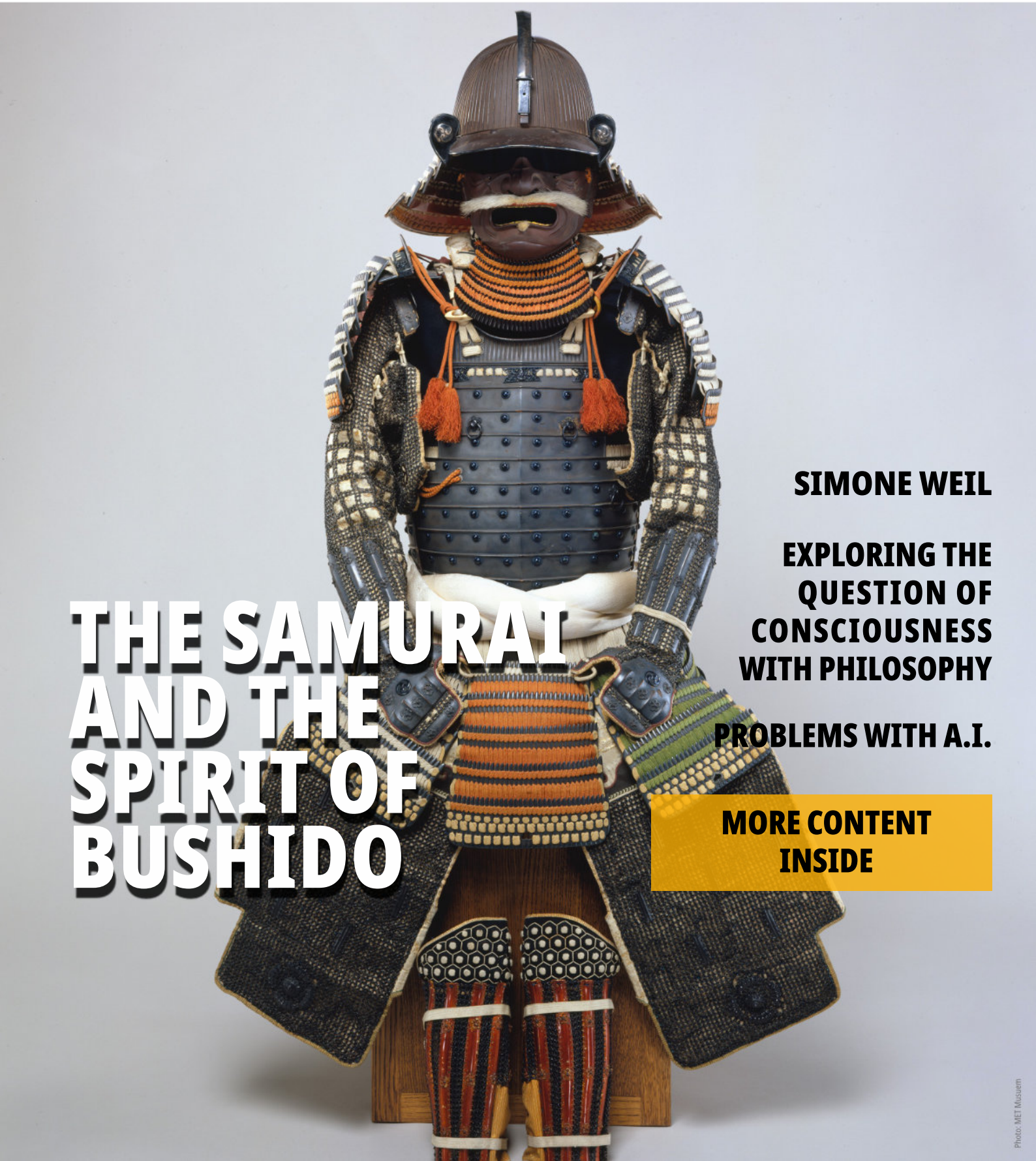
NEW ACROPOLIS

ISSUE 74 /MAY - JUNE 2026

MAGAZINE



THE SAMURAI AND THE SPIRIT OF BUSHIDO

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Photo: MET Museum

NEW ACROPOLIS

PHILOSOPHY AND EDUCATION FOR THE FUTURE

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NEW ACROPOLIS is a School of Philosophy that promotes culture and practises volunteering. Its 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

BY
SABINE LEITNER

Photo courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Are Wars Necessary?

As if we did not already have enough wars, the year 2026 has brought an explosion of further conflicts: millions more people displaced; homes, hospitals and vital infrastructure reduced to rubble; an economic impact that will probably be felt for years; not even mentioning the death of innocent civilians, amongst them many children. Why are we humans doing this to each other? Has humanity learnt nothing from all the atrocities we ourselves unleashed?

There are people who say that wars will always exist because of the way human beings are, with our competitive spirit, desires, ego-attachments, fears, destructive impulses, etc. And there are others who believe that a future without wars is possible because we humans can evolve and reach a stage where we will be able to solve our conflicts in a mature way. I believe both views are right.

As human beings we all carry two competing tendencies within ourselves: an instinctual side (our limbic system) that impels us to act out of self-interest, and a rational side (the prefrontal cortex) that allows us to project ourselves into the future, have a sense of morality and act from values. It is not so utopian to say that as a self-conscious species we have the potential to create a peaceful future where we will live in harmony with others and with nature.

Collectively, both these human sides are simultaneously at work. On the one hand we invent ever more dangerous ways to cause destruction; on the other hand, we are developing international laws on war and human rights, institutions like the United Nations, and we make real and sincere efforts towards diplomacy, conflict mediation and post-war reconciliation between former enemies. These last examples didn't exist, or weren't as developed, in previous times. So, there is progress!

It is the human condition to be torn between these two sides within ourselves, a tension which Goethe's Faust immortalized as: "Two souls, alas! reside within my breast." And possibly the most famous text about this internal battle is the Bhagavad Gita, which is widely understood as an allegory for the human psyche and its two warring factions of the 'Higher Self' and the 'Lower Self'.

So, are wars necessary? Strictly speaking, 'no'. They are not inevitable because they are caused by us and could therefore be prevented. However, from a different perspective, it seems that we are destined to repeat our errors until the lessons we need to learn are fully integrated into our character.

Why do addicts continue with their addictive behaviour despite knowing that it is not only very harmful to them but also their families? Why do we all sometimes 'overdo' things (eating, drinking, spending money, wasting time, etc.) when we actually know the consequences?

It is like the scenario in the film *Groundhog Day*. As long as we are caught in the loop of acting from our lower self, things won't change. It is only when we will be able to replace our egocentricity and our reactive impulses with the wisdom of the higher self – i.e. forethought, long-term thinking, empathy, impulse control, etc. – that we will be able to get out of the loop, and then 'a new day' will finally dawn.

Consider this analogy: children often respond to conflict by hitting each other because they haven't yet developed better ways to manage disagreement. We recognize this as a temporary developmental stage, which will gradually be replaced by more mature forms of conflict resolution. But at the level of societies and nations, it seems we have not yet overcome this stage. Our collective ethical 'tools' are by far less developed than our technology, and we still rely on force to solve conflicts.

Outer wars are, in this analogy, the 'macro' version of the 'micro' struggle between the higher and lower tendencies within individuals. The current state of our world is the result of billions of people (myself included) who have not fully mastered their own egos living together on this planet and competing for finite resources. In the long term, we won't be able to overcome outer wars without addressing our inner condition as individuals. Of course, individual maturity will not immediately produce collective maturity, but a coherent minority – a kind of critical mass – could generate the momentum needed to move humanity forward. In that sense, each of us has a role to play.

Ervin Laszlo, the American philosopher of science, systems theorist and classical pianist, writes in his 2023 book *The Survival Imperative*: "We have reached a critical juncture in our evolution on the planet. Now we face a survival challenge: evolve or perish."

The long-term future of humanity will lie in the outcome of our own inner battle...

Sabine Leitner is the Director of New Acropolis UK.

PHILOSOPHY

BY
JULIAN POWE

SIMONE WEIL
ATTENTION, COMPASSION AND THE POWER OF FORCE

Photo by Sydney Moore on Unsplash

"Throughout her life her extraordinary intelligence kept close company with the philosophers of ancient and modern times."

"A philosopher and interested in humanity" were among Simone Weil's last words, responding to her doctor's inquiry about who she was and what she did for a living. She had been laid low in Ashford sanatorium in England by her exhausting efforts in service of de Gaulle's Free French, her tuberculosis, her history of poor health and her commitment to eat no more than the 900-calorie ration in occupied France. Weil died of heart failure on 24 August 1943, aged 34, and is buried in Ashford cemetery. To the consternation of her biographers, the local coroner concluded that she "slayed herself". Richard Rees writes: "As for her death, whatever explanation one may give it will amount in the end to saying she died of love."[1]

As in death, so in life. Simone Weil's vigorous, uncompromising and radically compassionate engagement with the world arced through a Europe riven by economic dislocation, polarization, the rise of totalitarianism and two world wars. In her French childhood, Weil joined protest marches and organized labour activities; in early adulthood, she came first in the prestigious entrance exams for the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* (Simone de Beauvoir came second), and throughout her life her extraordinary intelligence kept close company with the philosophers, writers, mathematicians and historians of ancient and modern times; she taught in three lycées, often a thorn in the side of their administration, and formed the habit of teaching in workers' night schools; having told her pupils "I need to engage the real world", she worked on the production line in several factories, lived and worked on farms and went to sea on trawlers; she joined an anarchist column in the Spanish Civil War; and as global conflict enveloped the world, she settled her parents in New York and made her way to the Free French in London. She was loved and admired by many she encountered (a very few felt patronized), and enjoyed a tender rapport with her parents, with no evidence of any other personal, intimate relationship. One of her French resistance comrades in Marseille, the poet Jean Tortel, found Weil to be "rather formidable, and fearsome…Through her glasses, she looked at you (when she did look)…with an intensity and, also, a

1. Rees, R. *Simone Weil: A Sketch for a Portrait* (Southern Illinois Press, 1966)

kind of inquisitive greediness that I have never experienced with others...[her gaze] was nearly insupportable. In her presence, lies were simply excluded."

Weil's 'Vita Contemplativa' and 'Vita Activa' were symbiotically connected. As she thought, so she acted; as she acted, so she thought. She wrote constantly in her journals with a surge in the Second World War (90% of them were written between 1940 and 1943); covering pages in Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, mathematical equations and geometrical diagrams; tearing out and rearranging pages; reflecting on what she was attending to; exhorting self ("Never surrender to the flow of time!"), and only very rarely referring to private events and feelings. "There is probably not a single fundamental problem of our age, in any domain, that is not resolutely faced and examined somewhere in these pages." (Richard Rees). Having published rarely in her lifetime, the main body of her work reached the world posthumously. 800 pages of her notes and policy proposals found their way to Albert Camus who, at the end of the war, became editor of Gallimard. In contact with Weil's mother, Selma, he published several of her works under the label *L'Espoir* (*Hope*).

In accepting the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1957, Camus named Weil as one of two primary influences. He described her as "The only great spirit of our time... Her life and philosophy were one and the same... She held to uncompromising ethical commitments... Frivolity was the only thing of which she was incapable." A recent biographer, Robert Zaretsky, places her firmly in the classical tradition of philosophy, taking her models of development and growth from the Hellenistic schools. He captures beautifully the multi-faceted and paradoxical constellation of Weil's contributions in her short life – "An anarchist who espoused conservative ideals, a pacifist who fought in the Spanish Civil War, a saint who refused baptism, a mystic who was a labour militant, a French Jew who was buried in the Catholic section of an English cemetery, a teacher who dismissed the importance of solving a problem, the most wilful of individuals who advocated the extinction of the self: here are but a few of her paradoxes... She was convincing but subversive, eloquent yet abrasive, and practical yet persuasive."[2] And in *The Long History of Heroism*, Rory Stewart[3] called Weil "One of my genuine heroes... A towering intellect allied with her radical compassion, fierce integrity and spiritual depth. She lived every moment as if truth and justice were the most urgent matters of her soul." Indeed, Simone Weil carries the character of a modern-day Antigone.

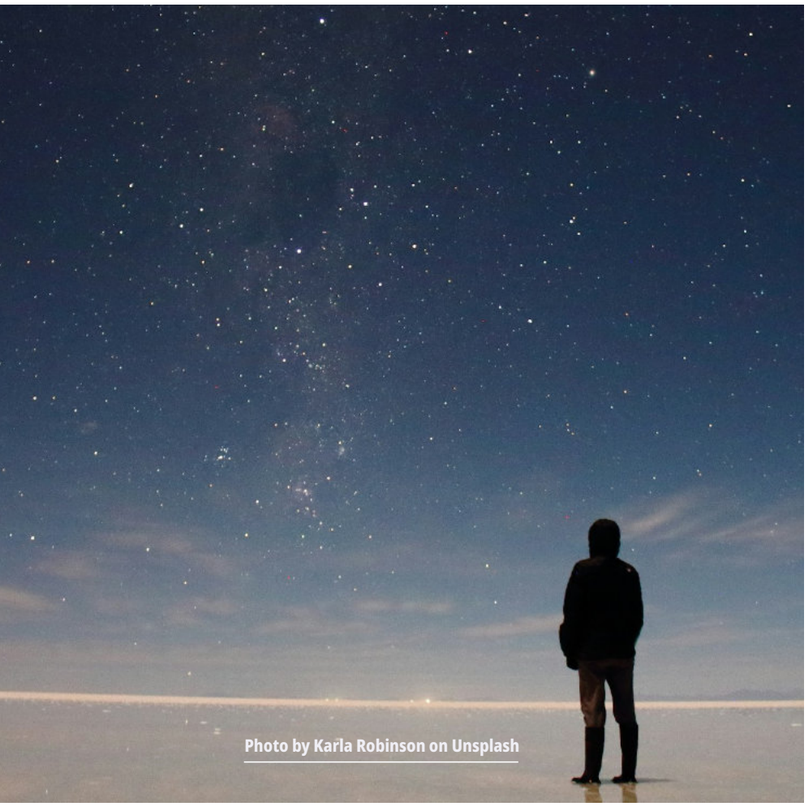

Photo by Karla Robinson on Unsplash

2. Zaretsky, R. *The Subversive Simone Weil: A Life in Five Ideas* (University of Chicago Press, 2021)

3. Stewart, R. *The Long History of Heroism, Episode 3* (BBC Sounds, 2025)

A photo of Simone Weil in 1943. Wikimedia

"For Weil, the effort and the strengthening of the habit of attention was more important than the end result."

Emanating from the torn humanity of the 1930s and 1940s, Weil's philosophy inspires our own search for renewal in our challenged 2020s – in her framing of 'attention', in her strident warnings about untethered power, in her advocacy of rootedness and our obligations to each other, and in the example she set of her philosophy in action.

One of Simone Weil's lycée students in Roanne, Anne Reynaud, described how she took her class outdoors to sit under a tall tree "not to find the answer but to seek problems in geometry". In her writings and her standing in the thick of the world, Weil developed a very expansive approach to 'attention', not the muscular, scrutinising exercise of controlled body language and eye contact, but a kind of letting go, opening oneself up to another person or to a problem, allowing the object of our attention to enter us, to manifest its complexity and to become the subject of contemplation over time (and perhaps never to be 'solved'; for Weil, the effort and the strengthening of the habit of attention was more important than the end result). She urges relentless attachment to the truth – "Refuse to be an accomplice. Don't lie – don't keep your eyes shut." And she guides us away from the self towards deep acknowledgement and respect of the other, "to see others as they are related to themselves, and not to me", peering through and beyond the meanings and projections we lazily attribute to our environment, "to contemplate what cannot be contemplated (the affliction of the other) without running away and to contemplate the desirable without approaching – that which is beautiful"[4].

Do we not hear echoes of Immanuel Kant's notion of reverence, 'Achtung', being bowled over by the embodiment of moral law in another human being; of Martin Buber's advocacy of I-Thou not I-It, offering us the rich possibility of deep communion with the other; and of the Gestalt theorists' frame of patiently and attentively waiting for the 'figure' to emerge from the 'ground'? And do we not hear guidance on how we might all attend more effectively to the complexity of our 21st century world in Weil's beautiful exposition of how to hold oneself and our preciously acquired knowledge in respectful abeyance, to slow our thinking down?

Weil opens *The Iliad, or The Poem of Force* in typically trenchant style (for Zarestsky, she does not 'argue', she 'posits') – "The true hero, the true subject, the centre of the Iliad is

4. Weil. S. (Tr. Ed. Rees, R.) *First and Last Notebooks* (Oxford University Press, 1970)

force. Force employed by man, force that enslaves man, force before which man's flesh shrinks away."

After completing in 1940, with her parents and several million people, the exodus from northern France and Belgium, reaching Marseille in the French free zone and connecting with local resistance groups, Weil turns to her beloved *Iliad* to reflect on the eternal nature of 'force', under the anagrammatic pseudonym of Emile Novis (antisemitic rules now forbade any publications by Jewish people; and we should not forget that Weil was questioned by the police at this time). For Weil, 'force' is present in all our lives, it controls us, even though we sometimes believe that we control it.

> **...Force is as pitiless to the man who possesses it, or thinks he does, as it is to its victims; the second it crushes, the first it intoxicates. The truth is nobody really possesses it...**
>
> **...The preservation of power is a vital necessity for the powerful, since it is their power that provides their sustenance.**[5]

Such a rich parable for our current times, assailed as we are by frequent examples of brutal force, untethered by moral anchors and a sense of compassionate duty to others. Weil, of course, does not just see 'force' expressed on the battlefield, albeit a metaphor for the affairs of man. She bears witness to it in the economic spheres in which she stands, a sense of affliction ('la malheur') that robs her and her fellow workers of the essence of being human, the capacity to think – "The effect of exhaustion makes it almost impossible for me to overcome the strongest temptation that this life entails; that of not thinking any more, which is the one and only way of not suffering from it".

In her work on regeneration and renewal, and independent thinker that she was in the 1930s and early 1940s, Weil abhors the moves to the totalitarianism of the right and left and eschews the notion of revolution; on the grounds that it produces new and even more oppressive hierarchies of power. "The word 'revolution' is a word for which you kill, for which you die, for which you send the labouring masses to their death, but which does not possess any content."


Photo by Birmingham Museums Trust on Unsplash

Instead, she turned to remedies for the up-rootedness she saw all around her - in industrialization, in colonialism, in mass deportations; explaining for her the sudden defeat of France in 1940 ("A tree whose roots are almost entirely eaten away falls at the first blow."). Weil advocated re-connection with our roots – with a community's deeply engrained way of life; with a sense of partnership between the living, the dead and those to be born; with the treasures and imperfections of culture and history; with education, to root in the individual the capacity fundamentally to change their lives; with a profound sense of obligation and duty towards each other; with our very soul.

The Need for Roots was Weil's 1942-43 oeuvre in response to the Free French question about how to regenerate France after the war. Its sub-title is *Prelude to a Declaration of Obligations towards the Human Being*. She grounds her advocacy of rootedness in an exposition of meeting the needs of the soul (liberty, freedom of opinion, honour are among the fourteen needs she identifies) – "Duty toward the human being as such – that is eternal." And she jumps in her first sentences into an attachment to the primacy of obligations over rights – this in the decade of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) – aligning herself with the notion of a human self 'embedded' in a web of social and spiritual obligations and duties, as opposed to an 'inviolable' self, prone to definition in differentiation to others.

> **The concept of obligations takes precedence over that of rights, which are subordinate and relative to it. A right is not effective on its own, but solely in relation to the obligation to which it corresponds.**[6]

Weil's champion, Albert Camus, channels this sense of obligation and duty through the character of Doctor Rieux in *The Plague* (1947). The doctor's courageous moral obligation is to reject resignation in favour of communal defiance of pestilence, real and metaphorical – "The thing was to do your job as it should be done... It is a matter of common decency. That's an idea that might make some people smile but the only way of fighting a plague is – common decency... A fight must be put up and there must be no bowing down."[7]

"By the end of her life, Simone Weil carried a profound faith in God."

Camus and Rieux were both atheists. By the end of her life, Simone Weil carried a profound faith in God. She had several mystical experiences in her life and during her time in Marseille held transformative conversations and correspondence with Father Perrin, a priest and resistance activist, resulting in her *Waiting on God*.[8] Zaretsky describes her relationship with God as complex and "punishing." At its core is the notion of 'decreation'. Just as God has expressed love for humanity by folding in on himself to allow the world to be created, so should human beings decreate themselves to allow God to return to the world. Iris Murdoch, a great admirer of Weil, transmutes this into the challenging idea of "unselfing", "dethronement of the self", reducing the constraints of our "fat, relentless ego", to make space for unencumbered attention to others and to meet Weil's exhortation to truly "attend to the world as it is." Simone Weil is often described as a 'saint' and a 'hero', labels she would certainly have disdained in her horror of our addiction to telling fine stories about ourselves. There is much of the 'saintly hero' in her life and work – sacrifice, negation of the self in compassionate service of others, a stretching of human possibilities, a sense of noble purpose, a legacy. And her presence inspires a mix of personal discomfort and aspiration – for Zaretsky, "both revelation and reproach"; for Iris Murdoch, a sense of high standards; for me, a determination to be more actively compassionate in the world, whilst embracing the glories of this terrestrial life a little while longer!

There is another paradox about Simone Weil. Albeit with the tender support of her parents, and the admiration of many, she conducted herself mainly in tenacious solitude; and yet, her message to us is primarily about connection, community, compassion and a collective, rooted consciousness embracing all of humanity – at a level that seems way beyond us at present. Camus might have been right to call Weil "the only great spirit of our time". But perhaps she is also a great spirit of some future time, heralding a path towards a collective consciousness that has love and wisdom truly at its core.

> [Compassion]... is able, without hindrance, to cross frontiers, extend itself over all countries in misfortune, all countries without exception; for all peoples are subject to the wretchedness of our human condition. (*The Need for Roots*).

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THE SAMURAI AND THE SPIRIT OF BUSHIDO

Photo from metmuseum.org

CULTURE

BY
JULIAN SCOTT

I was inspired to write this article after visiting an exhibition on the samurai at the British Museum. Paradoxically for an exhibition about warriors, and much to my surprise, I emerged with a strong feeling of joyful peace and serenity, effects which I attribute to the sheer beauty of some of the paintings and artefacts on display, along with the often heroic stories that accompanied them, because real heroism (as opposed to bravado) is a form of beauty finer than any painting.

I mention my surprise because in one of the main rooms of the exhibition a video was playing with a soundtrack of soldiers shouting, along with images of others being pierced with lances or decapitated with the legendary Japanese swords.

As I stood in rapt contemplation of a scroll painting of two birds on a flowering branch, I found myself thinking how it was that these people who dedicated themselves to warfare could at the same time have such a capacity for producing and appreciating beautiful art.

One explanation could be that most of the art on display was produced during the Edo or Tokugawa era (1603-1867), which included a 250-year period of almost uninterrupted peace, broken only by occasional rebellions and skirmishes. Quite an impressive achievement in terms of world history.

But the history of the samurai goes back to earlier ages when warfare was a daily reality, from the late 9th century according to some or the 12th century according to others.

And even during the Edo period, when the samurai came to form part of a highly organized administration, they continued to identify as warriors and were trained in battle skills and a warrior mentality.

So I think that a more comprehensive explanation of the way in which war and aesthetics were able to be harmoniously combined in the samurai mind is to be found in the warrior code known as *Bushido* (Bu-shi-do = military-knight-ways) and in the religious and philosophical background of Zen Buddhism and Confucianism.

One example of this contrast was a beautiful grey-blue armour surcoat displayed at the exhibition, which depicts a legendary scene from Japanese history: the hero, Minamoto no Yoshi-ie (1039-1106), is shown on his horse, pausing to write a poem on his way back from a battle, inspired by the poignant sight of flowering cherry blossom.

This reminded me of a famous quote by Lenin, who said that he had to stop listening to Beethoven's *Appassionata* Sonata because it filled him with tender feelings, which were incompatible with the revolutionary necessity of "beating people's little heads". In a similar vein, I read in a document about the First World War an anecdote about a soldier on leave who went to a concert of classical music but decided never to go again because the tender feelings it evoked were so incompatible with the fighting he had to do in the trenches.

So how and why were the Japanese samurai so different? How did they reconcile these apparent opposites – the tenderness evoked by beauty and the need to fight?

One way of answering this is by reference to Zen Buddhism, the favoured religion of the samurai. To attempt to describe what Zen Buddhism is would be presumptuous on my part, but I can say very briefly that it tries to

The Thirty-Six Poetic Immortals.
Photo metmuseum.org

penetrate the essence of Life as it is. This is why the '*koan*' or paradoxical anecdote is at the heart of Zen teaching. Life is inherently paradoxical and in order to penetrate its essence one must learn to transcend the apparent opposites and integrate them into an undivided whole. The samurai who follows the Zen way is therefore not perturbed by the apparent dichotomy of warfare and poetry. He (or she, for there were women samurai as well) sees only Life as it is in the moment. In battle he is the fiercest of warriors; contemplating the cherry blossom or the bird on the branch, he is the tenderest of poets, the most sensitive of artists.

Today, many people speak of compassion as the highest of virtues. Is it conceivable that the samurai warriors had compassion? According to Inazo Nitobe, author of the classic work *Bushido, the Soul of Japan*[1], there is a specific term for this in Japanese: '*Bushi no nasaké*' – meaning the tenderness of a warrior. Alongside Zen Buddhism, the teachings of Confucius, and particularly those of his follower Mencius, were at the heart of Bushido. Confucius and Mencius spoke of "benevolence" as a core virtue. Mencius wrote that "the feeling of distress is the root of benevolence"; therefore, says Nitobe, "a benevolent man is ever mindful of those who are suffering and in distress."

In this way, the best of the samurai, the true followers of the Bushido code, were tender-hearted, yet at the same time capable of decisive military action. The cultivation of tender feelings through the arts, "breeds considerate regard for the suffering of others" (Nitobe).

Another thought that occurred to me as I wandered through the exhibition was how the samurai learned to face pain and death with apparent equanimity. Part of it was down to their education and upbringing. Rather like the Spartans of ancient Greece, children were taught by their mothers to endure hardship without complaint. They would be made to walk barefoot through the snow to their teacher's house. If they cried at falling down and grazing their knee, their mother might say, "What are you crying about? What would you do if your arm was cut off in a battle?"

The Japanese are well known for the suppression of emotion, but we have already seen that they were experts in the expression of the tenderest and most refined feelings, especially through the arts. And the aim of such cultivation was the development of benevolence towards those who suffer. As an old samurai maxim goes: "It becometh not the fowler to slay the bird which takes refuge in his bosom."

Another aid to their bravery in the face of death and pain was surely their Buddhist beliefs, for as Buddha says in the *Dhammapada*, the body is like a bubble of froth, the foam of a wave, a painted chariot. Why, then, be attached to it? Not that they would rashly throw away their lives, for that is not true courage. But for them, more important than mere physical existence was a life lived with dignity and honour – "metaphysical goods", as the philosopher and anthropologist Fernand Schwarz has called them. This is why the cherry blossom is an iconic symbol in Japan, because it flowers briefly and beautifully, and then is gone – an apt symbol for the beauty and transience of existence, and the need to appreciate each moment.

It is said, too, that the sword is the soul of the samurai. In truth, most samurai led austere lives and had few possessions: their clothes, their armour and above all their sword. The manufacture of a sword was a magical act as well as an art and technique taken to the highest limits. It was a living being, with which the samurai became identified. It symbolized his own essence and his own honour.

One of the surprising statements in the exhibition was that "50% of samurai were women." This assertion has caused some controversy, as it seemed to imply that all samurai women were warriors. Well, they were in a way because they were well versed in the martial arts of swordsmanship and archery, as they had to teach these skills and the warrior mindset to their children. But it was also not infrequent for women samurai to take part in battles and even to be involved in strategy and tactics. One of the most famous female warriors was Tomue Gozen (1157-1247), a prominent figure

Photo from metmuseum.org

"The manufacture of a sword was a magical act as well as an art and technique taken to the highest limits."

1. This work was published in New York in 1905. It has received its fair share of criticism, but as the author of a recent research paper (2018) has stated: "Despite much modern criticism of his work, it seems that Nitobe was not the politically motivated commentator which modern history has made him, but an accurate assessor of the ethics of the bushi class." (Christian Etzrodt, International College of Liberal Arts, Yamanashi Gakuin University, Japan)

in the Genpei war between the Taira and Minamoto clans. After retiring from military life, she married and had a son, and after her son's death she became a nun. Another notable figure was Masako (1156-1225), wife of the Shogun Minamoto no Yoritomo. As the exhibition guide explains, Masako took command of political matters after her husband's death. In one of the images on display she is shown receiving a battle report, suggesting her role directing tactics during the civil wars. She was famed for her morality and exceptional leadership.
On a more mundane level, samurai women served as firefighters in the capital city Edo, and the exhibition features some beautiful red firefighting costumes. This marriage of aesthetics and practicality was one of the recurring features of the exhibition. Nowadays, we tend to go for functionality, but psychologists such as James Hillman[2] have pointed out how important beauty is to give meaning, purpose and joy to our existence. To turn existence into Life. In this art the samurai, some of whom were notable poets and painters, were true masters.

2. C*ity and Soul* (Spring Publications, 2006)

Photo metmuseum.org

We cannot, of course, ignore the shadow side of the samurai ideal, which made itself felt in the part Japan played in the Second World War. Every ideal has its shadow side just as every person does, so the noble human being must always be watchful to ensure that the shadow does not overpower the one who casts it.
The samurai also give us a possible answer to the question: how can we apply heroism in times of peace? For this is exactly what they did in the Edo period. They applied their loyalty and efficiency to the just administration of the State for the benefit of all.
This period of peace and prosperity ended with the coming of the American fleet under Commodore Perry in 1854, which brought Japan out of its isolation and into the orbit of the Western world.
According to Nitobe, although the samurai were disbanded as a social class in 1876, Bushido continued to exist through the ethic of service that enabled Japan to find its own place in this new world.

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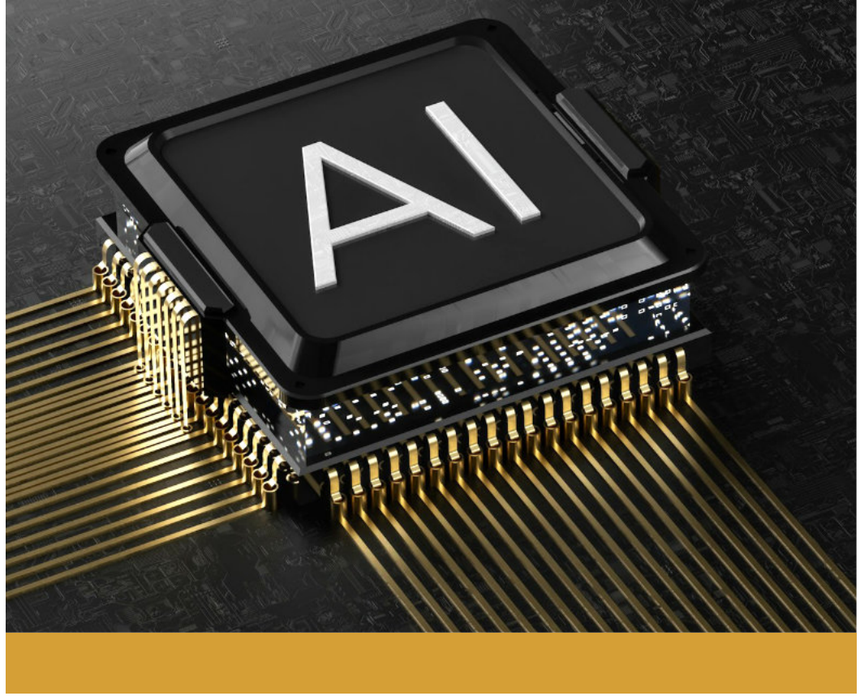


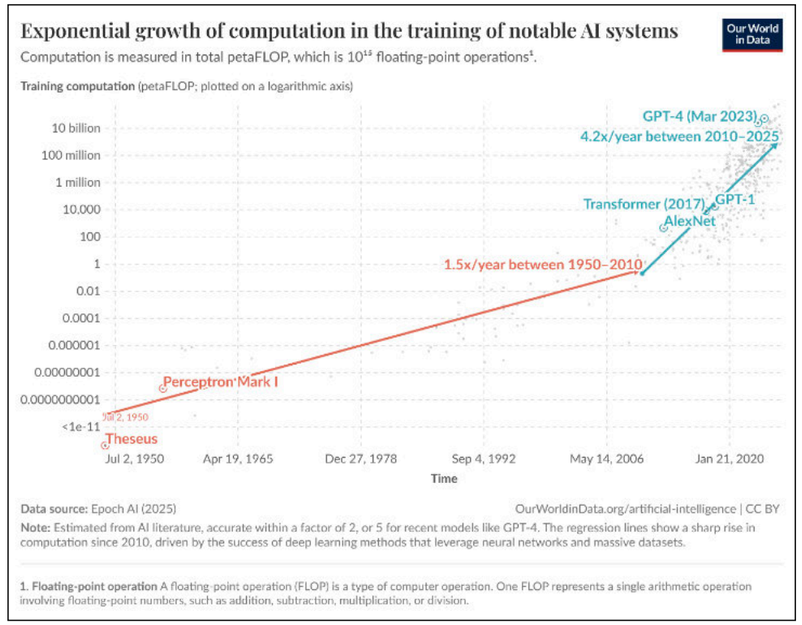
PROBLEMS WITH ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

SCIENCE

BY FLORIMOND KRINS

Artificial Intelligence is an umbrella term. It groups together various types of computing and algorithmic models. There are three types of AI: the Weak or Narrow AI; Artificial General Intelligence or Strong AI; and Super or Self-aware AI. So far only the first one has concrete applications and the last two are strictly theoretical. All the so-called AI applications and algorithms available on the internet are Narrow or Weak AI models. And they are not new. They have just become more sophisticated as the processing power of integrated circuits has been increasing exponentially over the past 75 years.
The exponential trend turned a corner in the 2010s with the development of artificial neural networks models and parallel processing. Since then, the number of AI applications has soared, from Siri in 2012 (Reactive AI model) to the latest Large Language Models (LLM) like ChatGPT (Generative AI

model). Some of the most recent AI models have required billions of petaFLOPs for their training, a FLOP being a floating-point operation or a single arithmetic operation such as addition, subtraction, multiplication or division. And a petaFLOP is a quadrillion (1015) FLOPs. Such is the scale of computation required by modern AI models.
So as you have probably figured out by now, the number of microprocessors needed for all those applications has also been increasing exponentially. All these microprocessors are gathered in large data centres that are commonly called the Cloud, a term that invites you to imagine something light and almost immaterial, but this is far from being the case. It requires land, steel, concrete, copper, aluminium, rare earth metals, and a constant supply of energy and water. All of which create an additional stress on the already gigantic demand for all these resources and of course has a significant impact on the environment.
If you thought living near a chemical plant or wind farm was a problem, you wouldn't want to live near a data centre, where the constant hum of the climate control units and the polluting fumes of the diesel generators has become a growing concern. The use of water for the cooling systems and the electricity demands are also a growing issue for local farmers and residents.
And finally, the actual human cost – ranging from the exploitation of cheap labour required to train the AI models with astronomical amounts of data, which have often been taken from the web without the consent of their creators – to the flooding of social media and internet platforms with meaningless AI slop, misinformation and porn, is also very high.
All that being said, AI in itself is not the issue, and the same goes for most technology which, if used ethically, will be in the best interests of humanity in the medium to long term. However, we can see that this is not generally the case today, apart for some scientific and research purposes. Knowing, for example, that using an LLM such as ChatGPT for a simple question will use ten times more energy than a basic Google search, what can we do? Such is the case with any technology, we could ask ourselves: Do I **need** to use it? Could I use something else with less footprint?
The easy access to technology in general makes it hard not to use, especially if it makes our life easier. And it can be easy to forget the actual cost of using those things. This is not me trying to chastise anyone tempted to use various technologies, as I do the same. But it might be a good reminder to dial it back when we see how dependent and existential a piece of technology, such as AI, has become. Going back to simpler ways, even if it can be sometimes less convenient, can be a way to reconnect with others, nature and especially ourselves.



EXPLORING THE QUESTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS WITH PHILOSOPHY

PHILOSOPHY

BY
SIOBHAN FARRAR

Our questions and the answers we receive are dependent on one another. It is not possible to gain an answer to a question that we've never asked. We remain ignorant until we awaken to the possibility that our understanding is somewhat limited.
Currently, definitive answers to the question 'what is consciousness?' are out of reach. Perhaps one day it will be possible for different theories to contribute to a holistic understanding, but as of today, we simply do not know.


Photo by Andrea Piacquadio. Pexels.com

Our questions are the keys with which we unlock doors to various paths in life and unlock the mysteries of nature. For the physicist, the key is mathematics, for the biologist the key is DNA, for the devotee of any faith, the key is God. Whatever we find behind the doors we have opened becomes the knowledge that informs our decision-making and actions.

If we were to select a 'master key' for the philosopher we might call this 'inclusion' – the ability to relate different things together. The philosopher (in the general sense of one who seeks wisdom, wherever it may be found) is able to make use of many different approaches and methods under the master key of inclusion. The philosopher seeks states of consciousness that have the qualities of height and depth, and the relationship of seeming opposites held together opens up new spaces of experience that bring this possibility. For example, imagining 'what if life and death are not opposite but together?' Heaven and earth, past and future, temporal and eternal, pleasure and pain, spirit and matter, me and the other – all are apparent opposites capable of being harmonized. Uniting within oneself a pair of opposites is one key for moving out of assumptions, black and white thinking and dogmas to elevate our thoughts towards different possibilities.

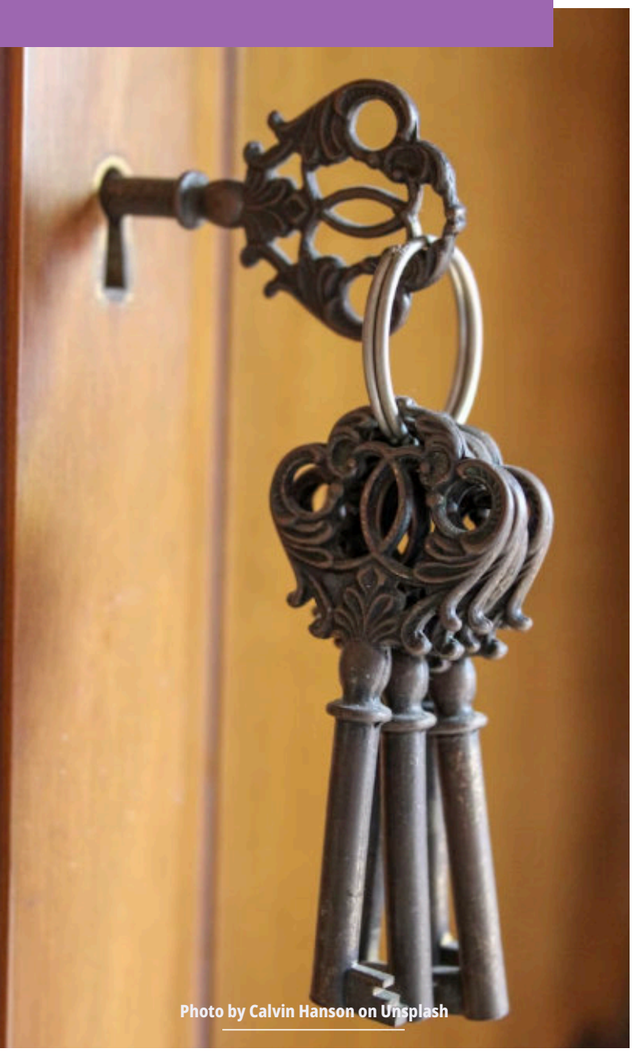


Photo by Calvin Hanson on Unsplash

As we can't currently answer the question 'what is consciousness' directly, we can use our philosopher's master key to look at what consciousness relates to and so illuminate the path of our enquiry. To begin with, consciousness is certainly related to life and what it means to exist. Both life and consciousness are also related to time. Considering how life and time act, what might we learn about consciousness? First suggestion: movement – life and time are both perpetually moving and the processes of life occur within time. Second suggestion: growth and transformations – life seeks to unfold and expand from the latent to the potent, from the invisible to the visible. Third suggestion: cyclical – whilst life is linear in terms of chronological time it is also cyclical and seeks a return, like the seasons, and also a movement back to the invisible which we might call 'death'. Now relating these observations to consciousness, we might ask, 'can it move?' Yes, consciousness seems to move from place to place and back again. Does it change and transform? Yes, this also seems correct, it changes and transforms with various life events, and different kinds of art and music also change our consciousness. Does it grow, unfold and expand? Again, yes it seems so, in our own lives the growth and expansion we experience physically and mentally is reflected in our consciousness. Does it end? Both life and time extend to infinity, so then why not also our consciousness? It is a reasonable question even if we can't confirm an answer.

How might we live and work with our consciousness? With our use of time, it is necessary to make decisions; how we spend it, what job we have, what relationship we commit to, where we place our love. Could it also be possible to 'choose' our state of consciousness? We could see consciousness as way of being that can be decided upon rather than a by-product of other factors. In whatever we are doing, in which direction is our consciousness pointed and can we notice differences depending on the direction we choose? Can I feel lighter and less frustrated? Can I experience greater peace and ease? We could explore these directions as 'spaces' for our consciousness to move in. For example, is my consciousness currently within my 'space of self-interest' or within my 'space of what is best for the other'? Is my consciousness currently within the 'space of my permanent values' or within the 'space of my impulse for satisfaction'? Whenever we find ourselves in a space of consciousness that is uncomfortable and testing, we can use the philosopher's key of inclusion to look for something more positive to relate to it, knowing that ultimately hot and cold, night and day, light and dark are bound together, just like our weaknesses and strengths. Asking what the related strength to our problem is, we can make an experiment to more our consciousness there, into a more virtuous space, and see what happens, what new ideas ways of being in the moment we can discover.

Image from Pixabay

> **" Is my consciousness currently within the 'space of my permanent values' or within the 'space of my impulse for satisfaction'?"**

When choosing any space to be in, whether physical or otherwise, consciousness requires freedom, and remembering our innate freedom is essential for a philosopher. We are free to have questions and explore unusual pairings of ideas. We are free to open up new space for height and depth, and free to go forward and to change our state of consciousness to find more peace in life, even though circumstances may be difficult. Our freedom, our life, our time and our consciousness are shaped by the questions we have, the keys we use, the answers we find and the ways we act. We could call the question of consciousness a question of inner evolution, which it is our freedom to explore and discover new paths along which our consciousness can travel.

PACHAMAMA

GODDESS OF THE EARTH, THE UNIVERSE, THE ALL

MYTH

BY
NATALIA LEMA

Image from www.easy-peasy.ai

These days, I often hear about the need to go back to our roots and reconnect with nature. It feels as though we have allowed speed and productivity to take over our daily lives. In recent years and knowing I grew up in a city, I have started to shift from simply observing nature's beauty to feeling part of it, rather than standing outside of it. It makes a difference whether we see nature as something to control and manage, or as a living presence we are part of.

I first heard the name Pachamama in primary school, when learning about different cultures and their deities. She was introduced as a figure of great importance in the Andean tradition. The Andes, the longest continental mountain range in the world, have always felt familiar to me, as I grew up in Colombia. There, the Andes are not just a single range, but a rich and biodiverse system that shapes the country's geography and life.

Pachamama is often translated as "Mother Earth," but this translation only captures part of her meaning. The word *pacha* can also refer to the world, the universe, space, time, or even an entire era. In this sense, Pachamama can be understood as "Mother of the cosmos," a concept that already invites a deeper reflection on how reality itself is perceived. Pachamama does not have an origin story like many other myths do. As I searched for the story of creation behind her, what I found was more a way of understanding reality and seeing how nature is sacred and always alive.

In Inca cosmology, Pachamama is a mother goddess and a life giving force that sustains and connects all existence. She is often depicted as a fertile woman carrying harvests such as potatoes or coca leaves, symbols of nourishment and abundance. At the same time, she is considered the origin of fundamental elements such as water, earth, sun and moon. Through this, she becomes not only a symbol of fertility, but of the very structure of the cosmos. She is portrayed as loving and generous, yet she can also be destructive. Earthquakes or landslides are sometimes understood as expressions of her being neglected. This dual nature, the ability to both give and take away, is not unique to Andean belief. Many mythologies recognize this balance. In ancient Egypt, for example, the goddess Sekhmet embodied destruction and war, while Bastet represented protection and care. These opposites are not contradictions, but complementary forces. Perhaps this reflects something within us as well, as we also carry opposing energies.

From an Andean worldview, Pachamama is present

" Pachamama is a mother goddess and a life giving force that sustains and connects all existence."

everywhere and in everything. This suggests a deep sense of interconnectedness between all living beings. It is a way of seeing the world that many of us may have forgotten, and perhaps that is why there is now a growing desire to return to it not just intellectually, but through experience.

What I found especially meaningful is how this belief is still alive today. In countries such as Peru and Bolivia, Pachamama continues to shape daily life, traditions and even travel experiences. People honour her through rituals, offerings and festivals, particularly during the month of August. Communities gather to express gratitude by offering food, objects or symbolic items to the earth. These acts are not just tradition; they are a way of maintaining a relationship, of staying connected and of asking for protection.

One idea that particularly stayed with me is the practice of "paying" the earth. Before important moments such as starting a journey, beginning a business or moving into a new home, people hold small ceremonies where offerings are made. On the surface, this may seem like a simple gesture, but it carries a deep meaning. It reminds us that we are not acting alone, and that every step we take is supported by something larger. We do require humility to accept the participation of something divine and to find ways to connect with it has always drawn my attention. How do we

"She fertilizes the fields, ensures abundance, and supports the well-being of communities."

embrace the profane and the sacred in the things we do? Although the Incas had other important deities, such as Inti, the Sun God, Pachamama holds a unique place as the nurturing mother who sustains all life. She fertilizes the fields, ensures abundance, and supports the well-being of communities. Through her, nature is not just a resource, but a relationship. And a relationship, as we know, requires care, respect and balance. Reflecting on Pachamama, she invites us to reconsider how we relate to the world around us and hopefully reconnect with nature by remembering something we have always been part of.

Pachamama ritual during the first week of August, Cusco, Peru. Wikimedia

Image from Wikimedia

CULTURE

BY
STJEPAN PALAJSA

EMPEROR JULIAN: APOSTATE OR HERO OF PHILOSOPHY?

PART 2

Editor's note: In the last issue we saw the biography of this extraordinary but forgotten figure of Roman history. This article concludes with an examination of Julian's philosophical ideas and inner life.

A soul incapable of feeling fear

Julian followed the great philosophical ideas under the guidance of his teachers, with a particular focus on ethical ideas. These taught him to completely control his body and psyche. He led a simple, almost ascetic life, hard on himself and gentle towards others. He always slept on a simple straw mattress in a cold room, so it was easy for him to endure the winters of the northern territories. He rarely overate. His food was frugal and without seasoning; he rarely ate meat, and if he did, it was only during official celebrations. He disdained wealth and avoided all kinds of luxury, not allowing himself to give in to desires and passions. He stoically endured whatever life placed before him. He was never mastered by anger, bad moods or revenge. He always tried to develop and improve himself. He would not allow others to treat him as a master, because no free man could be the master of another human being. He disdained those who went to temples only to see the Emperor rather than to pray. He demanded that deities be worshipped, not men.

Once he was sure of something, it was difficult to make him abandon his idea unless he was honestly convinced that he was wrong. Some considered this a difficult character trait, while others simply saw it as consistency. He did not allow merchants to sell their goods at exorbitant prices and he purged the administration of corrupt officials.

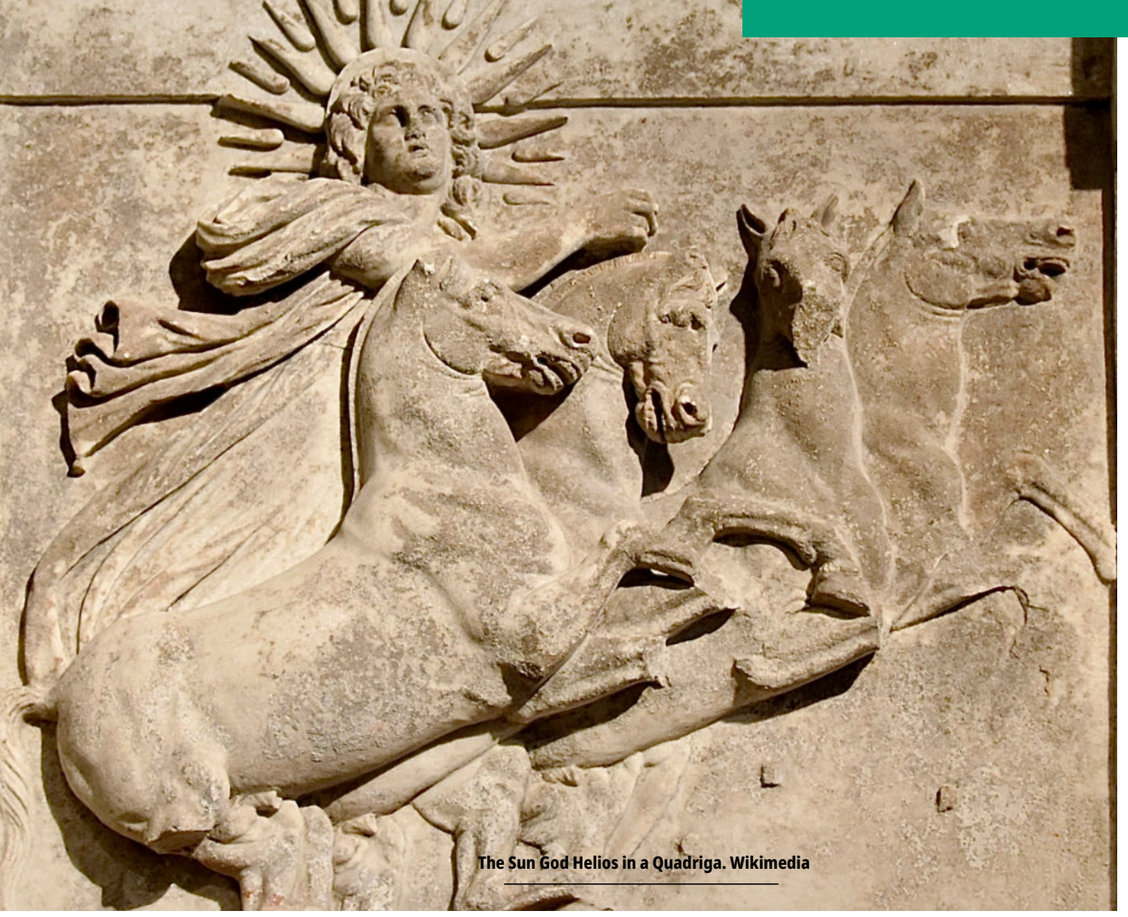
He spoke concretely and openly. Rather than the pleasures of secular life, he preferred for himself the ideals of the classical heroes and philosophers. He himself said that he was given "a soul incapable of feeling fear". It is unlikely that in all of human history there have been many men of such upright and heroic spirit. In the entire Roman era, only Marcus Aurelius can be compared to him in terms of moral integrity. However, despite all his greatness, he considered himself only a humble disciple of his teacher.

"Once he was sure of something, it was difficult to make him abandon his idea unless he was honestly convinced that he was wrong."

Photo by Antonio Filigno. www.pexels.com

The son of Helios

Julian was initiated into the Mysteries of Helios-Mithras, the deity of the Sun. With his initiation, he also assumed the responsibility of not



The Sun God Helios in a Quadriga. Wikimedia

revealing the knowledge of the mystery to the uninitiated.

For him, Helios was not only the visible Sun. He was also, in a way, a living being who, like man, participates in the three planes of existence: intelligible (the plane of divine ideas or gods), intellectual (the realm of human reason) and material. Helios was also the incarnation of the Platonic Supreme Good, the solar *Logos*, the common Father of the souls of all human beings, since physical parents only give the body. Julian believed that everything he did served to direct his soul and the souls of those under his care towards that Supreme Good, so that they might finally be united with it.

"I am a follower of King Helios. And of this fact I possess within me, known to myself alone, proofs more certain than I can give." (Julian, *Hymn to King Helios*)

Requiescat in pacem (Rest in peace)

"The best of men has died, he who aspired to the perfect life. The honour of the good also died with him: here insolent bands of villainous and lawless people are already spreading... The restorer of sacred laws has died, he who established beauty in place of ugliness, brought life to our temples, raised altars, united the legions of priests once hidden in the shadows, erected the broken statues. ... He died too soon, when we had barely had time to feel the good he was capable of doing in the world, and we had not yet been able to take our fill of his spirit. For us, he was like the Phoenix, flying over all lands; but he did not tarry in fields or temples, so we human beings never caught a clear glimpse of him. And now, it is as if the happiness he gave us has vanished; nothing allows it to take root here, because I am convinced that evil has made up for its defeat by triumphing over good once again. It would have been better for us to continue living in this darkness, without knowing the harmony that comes from its sovereignty, than to fall back into the darkness of before, after the luminous example of his life." (Libanius, *Funeral Oration on the death of Emperor Julian*).

With Julian's death, the idea of the Roman Empire also died. The culture of antiquity, after experiencing its second twilight, entered into millennial darkness. Faith in reason and in man disappeared. Ethics, logic and dialectics were expelled forever from the sphere of Hellenic social life. Uniformity was preached and the richness of differences and the right to inner freedom of man were destroyed.

WORKS BY EMPEROR JULIAN

Hymn to King Helios

Against the Galileans

Misopogon (The Beard-Hater)

Letter to the Athenians

Several letters (e.g. to a priest, to Theodore, to Evagrius, etc.)

" Uniformity was preached and the richness of differences and the right to inner freedom of man were destroyed."

Image from Wikimedia

PHILOSOPHY

BY
SOFIA VENUTI

THE DEPTH OF COURAGE

Image by Sasin Tipchai from Pixabay

Courage is often imagined in the language of spectacle: the soldier charging into battle, the firefighter rushing into flame, the dissident standing before a hostile crowd. These images are vivid because they are visible. They lend themselves to narrative, to applause, to history. Yet there exists a quieter and more subtle form of courage – one that can happen much more frequently than these outwardly heroic acts, and yet rarely earns recognition despite often being more demanding than any outward act. It is the courage required to face oneself, the point where the 'inner battle' occurs.

"It is the courage required to face oneself, the point where the 'inner battle' occurs."

The inner battle is not merely metaphorical. Human beings are, in a profound sense, divided beings. We harbour conflicting desires, competing values and impulses that do not always align with our ideals. The ancient philosophers understood this well and often described the soul as a terrain of tension: reason striving for order, appetite pulling toward indulgence and our soul oscillating between the two.

Courage, in this inward domain, is about confronting the unsettling realization that the adversary is, in part, oneself.

This confrontation requires a particular kind of honesty. It demands that we look directly at our own vices or negative habits – not as abstract moral categories, but as living tendencies within us. Pride, envy, resentment, cowardice, self-betrayal: these are not merely words but patterns of thought and behaviour that shape our lives. It's difficult to admit to them, but useful to reflect on these patterns and see them as something that we human beings share. The difficulty lies in the fact that the mind is adept at concealment. We rationalize our actions, reinterpret our motives and construct narratives that preserve a flattering image of ourselves. To pierce through these defences is already an act of courage.

Why should such honesty be frightening? Because it destabilizes identity. Most of us carry an implicit sense of who we are: a coherent story that provides continuity and meaning. To acknowledge the presence of darker elements – like pettiness where we believed there was generosity, or fear where we imagined confidence – threatens this narrative. It introduces ambiguity and discomfort.

An artist's depiction of the epic clash between Rama, the blue-skinned hero, and Ravana, the ten-headed demon king. Wikimedia

"Pride, envy, resentment, cowardice, self-betrayal: these are not merely words but patterns of thought and behaviour that shape our lives. "

Courage, then, is not only the willingness to see the truth, but the willingness to endure the disorientation that follows.

Yet recognition alone is insufficient. The deeper challenge lies in transformation. To conquer one's vices or emotional and psychological habits in this lifetime might mean not to eliminate them entirely – a task that may be impossible – but to refuse their governance. This requires discipline, patience and a sustained effort to act against ingrained tendencies. Consider the person prone to anger, envy or arrogance. The courageous response is not simply to admit this trait, but to interrupt its habitual expression inside of oneself (not merely external expression, as that would simply be suppression): to pause, reflect, to see that millisecond moment as a threshold in the personal trial, an opportunity for intuitive discernment to choose to feel, be and act differently even when reaction feels inevitable. Such moments are rarely dramatic like the outwardly heroic acts. They occur in the privacy of our hearts, in the split second between impulse and action. In fact, the word courage comes from the Latin 'cor' (heart) and 'agere' (to act). What makes us act with courage isn't the heart of fleeting emotions, but, as Delia S. Guzman called it, the "heart which resonates with the harmony of the universe, which knows how to stand together with other hearts" and knows how to stand up to the ego and the mind of desire.

So, courage involves a form of integration, begun by understanding that our darkness arises from the same soil as our virtues. The capacity for anger, for instance, is linked to a sense of justice; arrogance is linked to the desire for recognition which can motivate achievement. Courage, therefore, is not about annihilating these traits, but of understanding and harmonizing them.

The inner battle is not a war of destruction of our emotions or ego, but a process of integration and alignment. The courageous individual does not deny the existence of conflicting drives but seeks to harmonize them under a guiding principle. This principle might be reason, conscience, a commitment to certain values, the belief in a higher self beyond the mind or the deep understanding of your being's unity with the universe on the path of evolution, oneness. Whatever its form, it provides a standard against which impulses can be understood and, when necessary, restrained and reshaped.

This restraint should not be confused with suppression. Suppression buries what is deemed unacceptable, driving it underground where it may re-emerge in distorted ways. Courageous restraint, by contrast, is conscious and deliberate. It acknowledges the impulse while choosing not to act upon it. This distinction is subtle but crucial. It preserves awareness and agency, rather than forsaking them.

The cultivation of this inner courage is a gradual process. It cannot be achieved through a single act of will. Instead, it

Photo by Maksym Kaharlytskyi on Unsplash

unfolds through repeated encounters with oneself. Each instance of self-examination, each moment of resisted temptation, contributes incrementally to a more integrated character. Over time, these small acts accumulate, shaping habits and reinforcing a sense of moral agency.

Importantly, failure is inevitable. No one consistently triumphs over their weaknesses. There will be lapses, falls and moments of failure. Here, too, courage plays a role. It is required not only to confront one's flaws but to persist in the face of imperfection, not surrender to defeat. Without this resilience, the project of self-mastery collapses into denial or despair. Courage allows for a middle path: an honest acknowledgment of failure coupled with a renewed commitment to improvement.

One might worry whether this inward focus risks becoming self-absorbed. Does the preoccupation with your own vices distract from engaging with the world? Well, if self-examination becomes an end in itself, it can indeed devolve into narcissism. But if it is understood as a means to ethical living, it acquires a broader significance. The person who has cultivated inner courage is better equipped to act with integrity, to resist harmful impulses and to respond thoughtfully to others. In this way, the private struggle has societal consequences.

Inner courage also underpins other forms of courage. The individual who cannot face their own fears, biases and limitations is unlikely to stand courageous in external crises, or even arguments with others. On the other hand, the one who has practised self-confrontation develops a kind of steadiness. They are less dependent on external validation, less swayed by fleeting emotions and more capable of acting in accordance with their principles. The visible acts of bravery that society celebrates often rest upon this invisible foundation.

In an age that prizes self-expression, there is a temptation to equate authenticity with the unfiltered expression of whatever one feels. But this conflates honesty with impulsivity. True authenticity requires discernment: the ability to distinguish between what arises within us and what deserves to be enacted, what harmonizes and aligns with our Natural Law, with our Dharma. Courage is essential to this process, for it enables us to resist the immediate pull of impulse (from our desires or fears) in favour of a response which comes from our Higher Self. This discernment is being able to see what is essential: in that moment, we have to filter out the distracting senses and personality to see what is essential for the path of our character and our soul. Exercises of concentration help us train our will and our attention so that we can better see what is essential for us to change in these moments.

Ultimately, the virtue of courage, when turned inward, reveals itself as a commitment to truth and transformation. It is the willingness to see oneself clearly, to accept the discomfort of that vision and to undertake the slow but determined work of change. It is neither glamorous nor easily recognized. It does not lend itself to grand narratives or public acclaim, as these could simply stroke the ego again. And yet, it is the most important form of courage we can cultivate, the one we find behind the veil in myths and fables.

Photo by Norbert Braun on Unsplash

For in facing the darkness within, we do not merely overcome vices; we reshape the very structure of our character so it can become a more aligned vehicle for our soul to flourish. We become, in a deeper sense, responsible for who we are, and in that responsibility lies a quiet but profound form of freedom – not from struggle or pain, but the freedom of the conscious Self.

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