

The Acropolis

Philosophy for today

March 2021
Issue 5

Spring Edition Culture - History - Photography - Psychology - Reviews and more





What is The Acropolis?

In ancient Athens the Acropolis, literally meaning the High City, was the place which supported the highest ideals of the people. The founder of New Acropolis International, Professor George Livraga, chose this name to capture the key objective of philosophy; that we as individuals build a new high city within, that we discover the heights of our own potential, so that we may externally build a new high city, a new and better world, together. The Acropolis magazine is motivated by this objective and aims to share inspiring content, combining all the major endeavours of philosophy, art, science, education and culture.

About Us

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

For further details please visit: www.acropolis.ie



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Editorial: The Art of Applying Stoicism Today

From Instagram to Twitter, YouTube to international best sellers, all across the world, the wisdom of the Stoics is once again inspiring countless people. Their message has clearly connected with something deep and fundamental in the zeitgeist. In a way, it is encouraging as Stoicism originated from a time of crisis, decadence and confusion and to see a resurgence of their sobering advice suggests that, once again, many are seeking answers and a direction towards a better way.

Why are they popular? Be it Marcus Aurelius, Seneca or Epictetus, they offer uplifting counsel; simple yet profound guidance to help us gain perspective and distil what is essential from the chaos of daily life. An inspiring and appealing prospect. But what do we do with it?

What do we really do with it? In a social media post that we like and share, is there sufficient reflection to extract the meaning of what is being proposed? Do we seek the challenge that the Stoics suggest, or passively absorb their words, soothing the soul yet leaving our limbs numbed by the inertia of our daily routine? Thus inspired, can we not take flight on their words and face the natural adversity of our everyday circumstances with serenity and a noble behaviour that depends only on us?

For what are they suggesting to us, in the end? That life is a struggle? Not only this. Life is challenging, yes, but there is a beauty to this challenge, a beauty in this effort. Their teachings lead us to an inner reflection that links us to life as a whole. There may be difficulty, but when we connect with life we enter into solidarity with all living things.

Stoicism is ultimately a practice of verticality. Like the old stoa columns from which Zeno of Citium derived the name for his teachings, Stoicism proposes an uprightness, a stability, an inner strength. Such verticality offers a new perspective - that we can truly see what lies within our sphere of influence. This leads to the famous stoic attitude, sometimes mistaken as coldness, but in reality, an ability to accept that over which we have no control.

Things like other people's opinions, our desires, the need to please, expectations of results, these all fall outside what we can control. Epictetus advises that what lies within our sphere of influence is our Will and our Reason, nothing else. Learning to accept that, we can focus on what we can change and begin to detach from the rest. This process frees up our inner potential, clarifies our perception of reality and allows us to calmly respond to adversity rather than be victims of circumstance.

It is to breathe life into all we do, to assume responsibility for the small details, the little things we often feel are unimportant. To be attentive to our daily behaviors, our reactions, developing gestures of kindness, cultivating open-mindedness, and practicing benevolence and patience in these challenging and uncertain times. In this way we can apply the art of Stoicism as a path to serenity and an authentic life.

Alain Impellizzeri
Director - New Acropolis Ireland



Welcoming Spring!

After many months of lockdown, the idea of a rejuvenating spring is more inspiring than ever. With the sentiment of welcoming a new cycle, of embracing the enthusiasm of renewed inner youth and of the age old practice of spring cleaning, The Acropolis magazine welcomes you and welcomes Spring!

In this issue we have another range of fascinating contributions from our members, from finding meaning in uncertain times, to the mysteries of gothic cathedrals, to the hidden life of trees.

To celebrate Spring we have also invited the members of our schools to contribute to a photography exhibition, capturing moments of Spring as it emerged from the long slumber of winter. The First Shoots of Spring is the result of that project and we hope you enjoy the beautiful scenes captured on camera.

So continue on, dear reader, stop and smell the roses. In these pages you may just find something to give you pause, a reflection to mull a little deeper, an insight to share with a friend, inspiration to do a bit of Spring cleaning yourself. Out with the old and in with the new.

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HALF TIME

THE SPRING EQUINOX

We all are cheered by days full of the renewing energy of spring – a beautiful time when nature awakens, the days become longer and everything living rejoices.

There is a special time in the year when the Sun is exactly above the equator, hence the Earth's axis neither points toward nor away from the Sun and day and night are approximately 12 hours long everywhere on Earth. This is known as the equinox, which comes from the Latin "aequus" – "equal" and "nox" – "night". There are two equinoxes: spring (between 19 and 21 of March) and autumn (between 21 and 23 of September). Astronomically, in the northern hemisphere, spring starts from the moment of the spring equinox, after which the Earth's axis tilts toward the Sun and the days start to get longer than the nights.

The spring equinox is also a special festivity connected to the yearly cycle of the Sun and the renewal of nature, as well as to spiritual resurrection. Traditionally, the equinox and spring mark the renewal of the world and of life. It is the time when a hero or a god overcomes the darkness of the underworld or death and comes out into the light of life.

Thus, the Persian New Year festival of Nowruz falls exactly on the Spring Equinox. It is an old festivity with Zoroastrian roots. At the New Year, the world that was created in mythological time is reborn. It transforms from an aged, worn out world into a new one and reclaims its characteristics of life, light, health and fertility, as well as its order in accordance with the principles of a Cosmic Order.

In ancient Rome, before the times of Julius Caesar, the new year started in March and, during the spring equinox, the ancient Romans celebrated the Quinquatria – old Etruscan festivities honouring the goddess of wisdom Minerva. The Roman poet Ovid tells us that it was a celebration of Minerva's birthday. Other authors mention that on that day in ancient times Minerva's temple on one of the sacred hills of Rome was consecrated.





In ancient Greece and Rome, there was another celebration connected precisely with the spring equinox – although it originally came from Phrygia – the mysteries of the Great Mother Cybele and her son Attis. The celebration lasted a whole week and it was on the spring equinox, Hilaria – the day of joy – that Attis was resurrected after his death.

According to Jewish tradition, God made the sun, moon and stars on the fourth day of creation. The Talmud explains that the Sun was created in its spring equinox position and returns to it every 28 years. There is a blessing that is recited every 28 years to express gratitude to the Creator for the Sun.

In Japan, at the time of both the spring and autumn equinoxes, Buddhist followers celebrate O-Higan. Etymologically, it means “the other shore” and is a reminder of the impermanence of everything in this manifested world, and the need to cross the river of existence and reach the Pure Land of Bliss. In this way, it is connected with the spiritual move from the world of suffering to the world of enlightenment.

There are many more festivities in spring, calculated on the basis of the spring equinox and the lunar calendar. Among others we can mention the Celtic Beltane, the Babylonian New Year, Passover, Easter, the Tamil New Year and the Latvian Lieldienas.

All the abovementioned celebrations and many more connected with spring include different beautiful rituals, especially of purification, that help to manifest the sacred time of the festivity and enable us to reconnect with the meaning of that celebration.

As living parts of nature ourselves, let us open our hearts to the spiritual sun and grow and blossom together with the spring.

Nataliya Petlevych

IN finding meaning UNCERTAIN TIMES

On the subject of his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl recounts how a journalist asked him how he felt about his book being a successful bestseller. He replied that he did not see this as a success or achievement but an indication of the lack of meaning in people's lives. This book was published over seventy years ago but the question of the meaning of life persists, where and how do we find it, is there meaning to life, and if there is how do we find it?

A person living in Europe during the Middle Ages had a shared belief system given by Christianity. This belief system offered a meaning to life, how to behave, why we are here and where we go after death. With the decline of religion and the rise of science during the Enlightenment another vision of life arose which was the scientific vision. It was very successful in explaining the physical world and how it works, resulting in great technological revolutions. Science explains well the 'how' of things but is relatively silent on the 'why' of things. The 'why' addresses the purpose and the meaning. As science became more successful and popular in the nineteenth century, some philosophers and writers saw the vacuum of meaning starting to emerge in society. Nietzsche famously said: "God is dead...and we have killed him". This is not a statement of victory but of concern: in the search for the means to develop better technology we are losing the meaning in life. A new 'ism' came about during this time called Nihilism, which is a view of life where everything is relative, there is no morality and there is no inherent meaning in life. This Nihilistic attitude in facing life is something that has not gone away. It has continued to spread and develop and is with us today in our society.

The Nihilistic view of life is not the only one. There is another view of life which is affirming, to accept that life is not perfect, that there are challenges, suffering, doubt, things go wrong, but within that there is an opportunity to grow individually and collectively through adversity. There is no inner growth without inner resistance, and the challenge of COVID-19 and others afford us the opportunity to put ourselves to the test like all the great heroes from mythology. There has never been a time where people did not face the unexpected; it is part and parcel of living. Finding meaning in the challenges and opportunities of daily life is one of the things that can help us.



What does the word 'meaning' mean? It is intimately related to purpose. The purpose is the aim, or end-goal, and having this purpose in sight gives meaning to experiences to reach the goal. Once the purpose of something is clear, it then gives a means or meaning to achieve the purpose. How does one find meaning or purpose in life? Some look for the ultimate purpose first, the large purpose so to imbue everyday life with meaning. The Greeks called them ideals, in India they called it Dharman and Carl Jung referred to Archetypes

of the Collective Unconsciousness. Another view is to find purpose in the small things of everyday life, which will help clarify and construct the large meaning and purpose in one's life. The best approach is to combine the two views at the same time. How can we find meaning in daily life?

A few keys offered from wise sages throughout humanity's long history can help:



Clarify Ideas

Life is abound with different opinions on what is right and wrong, what is beneficial and unwholesome, what is just and unjust. This can create uncertainty and doubt and stifle one's action. How does a craftsman decide if an idea for a design is good or not? The craftsman builds or manifests the design and tests it. The same with the ideas we have, to put them to the test, and observe them in action. If they are good for us and for others and promote a spirit of unity then we are going in the right direction. These ideas will give meaning to our actions.

Take Responsibility

Taking responsibility is not something typically promoted in our society today; instead society encourages us to be a passive observer in the events of life. When we are responsible for something, something bigger than ourselves, it gives our life a purpose and meaning. Responsibility takes us outside what is known and comfortable into the adventure of the unknown and uncomfortable so as to truly experience life.

Question with Courage

To find meaning is to explore the unknown territory of life, to let go of preconceived ideas and validate what we think we know. As Socrates said: "The unexamined life is not worth living". Are our current values and opinions elevating us or are they limiting us? These are not easy questions to ask oneself and it requires courage to face oneself and to be honest with oneself. This Socratic dialogue with oneself has a purifying effect, letting go of an old way of being to embrace a new way of being.

Be Patient in Action

Meaning may not appear immediately but takes time to discover. It is to have the patience to wait for the small mysteries of life to unveil themselves to us. When something is done well, with the right attention, with the right thought and efficiently then there is a sense of satisfaction. Through conscious repetition and observing oneself and life around us, daily actions give small pieces of wisdom. These aggregate pieces of daily wisdom give our actions a deeper dimension.

These keys are a partial list but will help to unlock some of the meaning that is inherent in yourself, others and life. In paraphrasing Viktor Frankl, man should not ask the meaning of his life but recognise that it is life that is asking him, that life is questioning him and to life he can only respond by being responsible.

Michael Ward

MOTIVATIONS

This subject can be looked at from two angles: being motivated or being unmotivated. Both are expressions that we hear about every day, on different occasions and in relation to many aspects of life.

Motivation or lack of motivation affect everyone, including those who have the teachings of a Philosophical Ideal available to them, but fail to maintain the sense of purpose to convert that Ideal into a happy and lasting mode of life.

What is motivation?

It is the motive, the cause that leads us to movement on one plane or another.

The body has quite evident motives to move itself, but the most interesting causes to look at are those that set in motion the emotions and the mind. In general, the emotions and the mind seek satisfaction and avoid worry: these are the two greatest and most illusory psychological motivations.

We say that we are motivated when there are things that we like, that stimulate us to obtain them, that give rise to a feeling of well-being, pleasure and, especially, the appreciation of others. To have achieved what we set out to achieve motivates us to continue with the action.

On the other hand, we say that we are unmotivated when there is no incentive that impels us to action, either because we do not see any immediate results or because we are demoralized by some failure.

Motivation and lack of motivation thus become the factors that determine our behaviour, our gestures, our way of speaking and even our approach to life.

Lack of motivation

This is expressed as discouragement, a sense of powerlessness in the face of difficulties, lack of energy to make decisions, loss of enthusiasm, despair about the future.

Although in the beginning there may have been great expectations, as time goes on and the fantasy-based

dreams become diluted and the will is thwarted by waiting for successes to come from outside, the causes of the motivations disappear.

In part, the societies in which we live suffer from a lack of motivation, precisely because they overuse false and superficial psychological stimuli, because they deceive people by suggesting that success comes from nothing more than by buying a certain brand of product, taking a wonder drug or being in fashion.

This results in the presence of many "indignant people" all over the world, partly irritated by the number of lies in which we have been enveloped, like a spell that is difficult to avoid, and partly disenchanted by a lack of opportunities, that is, of valid causes with which to face the difficulties of existence.



Those to blame for the lack of motivation

The false values that predominate mean that continuous effort is replaced by easy success; work by entertainment; healthy activity by stress; investigation by rumours; study by learning just enough to get by.

Today the immediate prevails over the important. We are incited to live in the present, but not with our consciousness present, but rather by taking refuge in the unconsciousness to avoid responsibilities and difficulties.

The past tends to be seen as a series of failures, and the future is not seen in a much better light...

This attitude encourages people to look for others to blame – not the real guilty parties, but whoever is closest to hand. So we blame the people around us, the state of the world in general, the lack of money, the evil of people... and so many other pretexts that lead to a destructive and pessimistic inaction, which we then try to transmit to others.

Inner and outer motivations

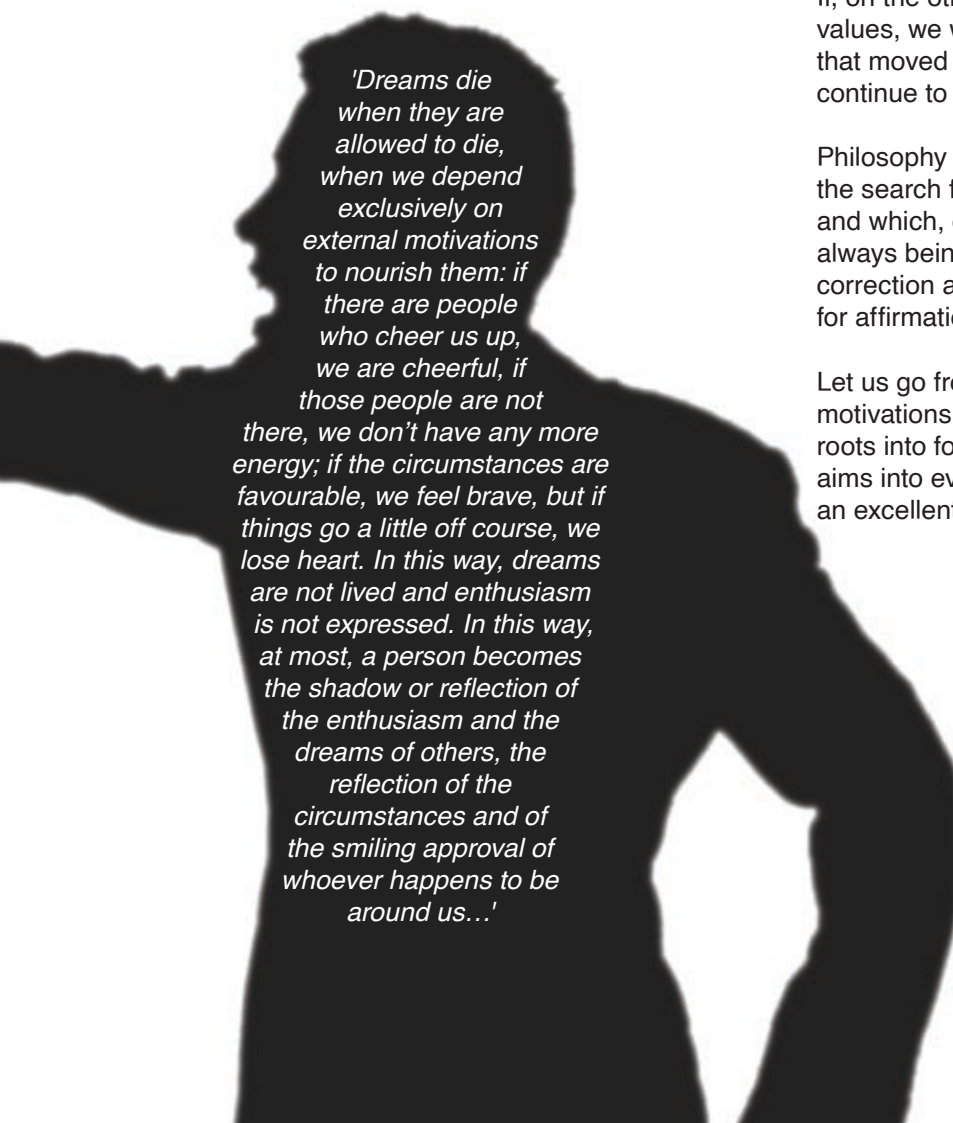
It is true that we all need a cause that can give a direction to life.

The key lies in looking for good causes and stable roots.

If the motives come from others and are external to us, we will live in a state of eternal dependence. The world around us will become an atmospheric phenomenon that will determine our sunny and stormy days, our joys and our anxieties. Not to mention our dependency on other people, who are considered as a motive and cause of our behaviour.

External motivations are, unfortunately, transient and unstable and are not useful as a basis for Life.

The founder of New Acropolis, Jorge A. Livraga said:



'Dreams die when they are allowed to die, when we depend exclusively on external motivations to nourish them: if there are people who cheer us up, we are cheerful, if those people are not there, we don't have any more energy; if the circumstances are favourable, we feel brave, but if things go a little off course, we lose heart. In this way, dreams are not lived and enthusiasm is not expressed. In this way, at most, a person becomes the shadow or reflection of the enthusiasm and the dreams of others, the reflection of the circumstances and of the smiling approval of whoever happens to be around us...'

Inner motivations arise from our ideas and feelings that we have chosen and assumed by a process of learning and decision-making, by experience and by looking towards the future.

They are states of consciousness that are not only based on the satisfaction of primary needs, but go beyond the instincts, the senses, the trivial emotions or the ideas that happen to be in fashion.

The best of motivations is an Ideal of Life which brings all our capacities into play, which occupies the whole of our being and offers us short-, medium- and long-term aims, giving a useful, powerful and efficient meaning to our actions.

Psychological motivations and philosophical motivations

Psychological motivations are of short duration because they depend on the instability and impermanence of the emotions, whether these be our own or those of others.

If we put the emphasis of our life on the emotions, it will very easily happen that, after a period of motivation, a period of demotivation may arise which, by its own negative weight, will leave deep traces in the personality.

If, on the other hand, we assume philosophical values, we will be able to understand the great ideas that moved history, that inspired the great figures who continue to be bright beacons on the path.

Philosophy is a permanent motivation, because the search for wisdom is a path that will never end and which, on the contrary, presents goals that are always being renewed, constant opportunities for correction and renewal, for learning and experience, for affirmation and happiness.

Let us go from the outer to the inner and turn the motivations into causes, the causes into roots, the roots into foundations, the foundations into aims, the aims into evolution. This is a true philosophical path, an excellent motive for living.

Delia Steinberg Guzmán

Confucius

Philosopher, leader, citizen

To the west, Confucius is often known as a wise man, with simple yet profound aphorisms that offer a deep source of self-reflection. Beyond this, what do we know of the man and his works? What his story and legacy tells us is that aside from memorable words of wisdom, Confucius put forth an enduring model of social order, manifesting in individual, ethical excellence. This high ideal came at a time when China's long standing feudal system was in decadence and in need of correction. Confucianism greatly influenced China for nearly two and a half thousand years reigning as the chief political, ethical and spiritual practice of the people until the rise of the communist party.



The historical account of Kong-Fuzi (known in the west as Confucius) is peppered with legendary embellishments highlighting his great standing in the annals of humanity's sages. Of noble birth and destined for greatness, a pair of dragons held vigil over his cot. Even as a child he was a wellspring of knowledge and held deep and complex discussions with the elders of his town. His precocious and evolved intelligence led to him reading and assimilating all the classical wisdom of his time so that it was said he had no masters, only disciples.

Historical details demonstrate his keen aptitude for and interest in politics. Being a public servant was the highest honour for him and to lead and shape his country's future was his greatest aspiration. At the age of 17 he had a senior position in local government and by 25 he founded his own school where philosophical teachings were available to all people, regardless of their class or status. For a feudal society this was revolutionary.

After a fabled meeting with the Master of Tao, Lao-Tzu, Confucius' own reputation spread far and wide. Where the Tao promotes an understanding of material life being insubstantial and that wisdom is achieved only through the transcendence of duality, Confucianism (while not dismissing the spiritual and ephemeral aspect of life) seeks a more practical path. Confucius believed the path to wisdom lay in order, ethics, politics and virtue and that the formation of the human being is here, in the world we live in. He believed we should seek to resolve the inner challenges preventing us from living in harmony with others before concerning ourselves too much with the mysteries of the universe. Or in his own words:

'Before you serve the Gods, concern yourself with serving those around you, making the noble, courageous, honest, just and virtuous; and once you accomplish this, devote yourself to the Gods.'

Later, Confucius rose through the ranks of political service in the capital of his state Lu, eventually serving as Minister for Justice, the highest political office outside of royalty. His methods helped to grow his region in prosperity and civil obedience. Lu became a shining beacon of morality as well as an economic powerhouse. Rival states grew jealous and plotted against Confucius, seeking to sow discord between him and the Prince of Lu, who had become his disciple. Despite Confucius' best efforts to instill in the Prince a noble and upright character, he was easily seduced by the lavish gifts and concubines sent to him by his clever enemies. Corruption soured the Prince towards his former master and Confucius was banished from his home.

Being a great and wise individual, Confucius took his crisis and converted it into a huge act of generosity, travelling the country and sharing his teachings with all. From kings to peasants, he advised all indiscriminately and when asked to stay and settle in any region he refused, assuring his requestors that his sacred duty was to be available to all. A champion of the people, an untiring reformer, Confucius died at the age of seventy-three, leaving a legacy of justice and fraternity that continues to inspire us to this day.

At the heart of Confucianism is the concept of Li, a rationalised order based on Natural or Universal Law, comparable to Dharma in India or Maat in Egypt. Li can be understood as a system of regulation and

evolution. When applied to the individual it is ethical development awakening the human beings' virtues of Justice and Goodness. In the political arena, Li is the harmonisation of these individuals so that, guided by virtue, people are united and verticalised towards a higher collective ideal, namely, the common good. In this way, Confucianism transcends the barriers between individual and society, between ethics and politics and marries them in a single ideal of living. For Confucius, these ideas were inseparable; ethical people would lead to a Just society and noble rulers would elevate the people to aspire to noble ideals.

'If you guide the people by governmental measures, and if you regulate them by threats of punishment, people will try to avoid prison, but they will lack a sense of honour. Guide the people by Virtue and regulate them by the Li, and people will have a sense of honour and of respect.'

Beyond the maxims captured in his Analects, which remain a tremendous source of wisdom, his political philosophy should also give us serious pause for thought and trigger a deep reflection on our current relationship between the individual and society.

Aidan Murphy



Confucius Says

Those who would perfect their work must first sharpen their tools.



*A person who has committed a mistake
and doesn't correct it is committing another mistake.*



I hear and I know. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.



It does not matter how slowly you go as long as you do not stop.



Real knowledge is to know the extent of one's ignorance.



To move a mountain, one begins by carrying away small stones.



*Plant a thought, reap an act. Plant an act, reap a habit.
Plant a habit, reap a character. Plant a character, reap a destiny.*



Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in getting up every time we do.

First shoots OF SPRING

To greet the new season, we invited members of the school to emerge from hibernation and get some new focus on the year ahead.

Enjoy and thanks to all that submitted!

Photographers:

Edon Novoselić	(1,3,8,12)
Michelle Doolan	(4,10)
Tim Leahy	(11)
Paul Savage	(9)
Martin McGranaghan	(6)
Laura Lorincz	(2, 5)
David Murtagh	(7)

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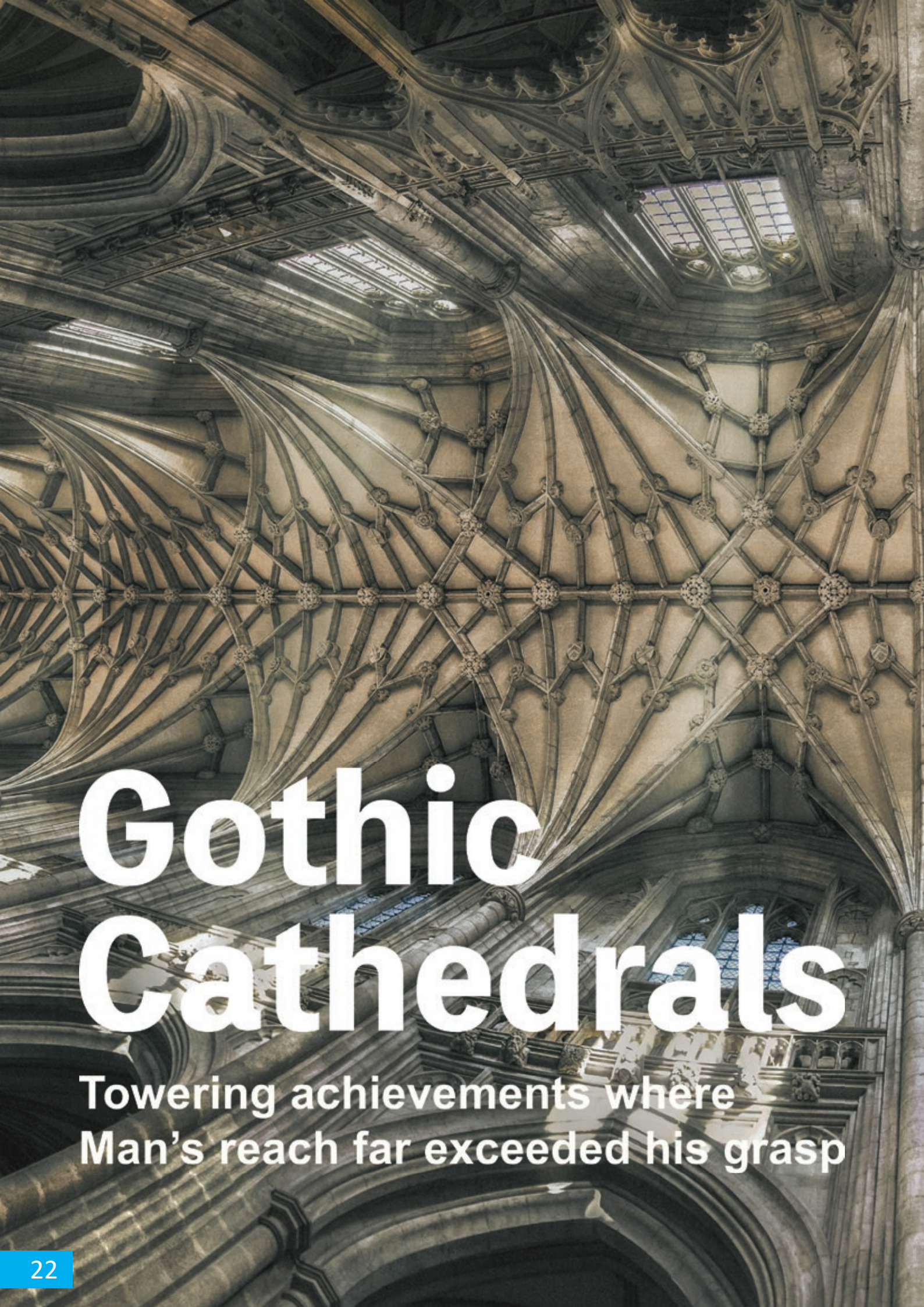












Gothic Cathedrals

Towering achievements where
Man's reach far exceeded his grasp



The architecture of the Gothic Cathedrals is one of the glories of European civilisation. It was an attempt to lift everyday life up to the heavens. It was also one of the most remarkable adventures in architecture. However, some mystery still surrounds its origins.

The term 'gothic' might be considered pejorative because many were unhappy with the change from the established Romanesque architecture. Some saw this new style as quite barbaric, hence the reference to the Visigoths, who were associated at that time with barbarism, much in the same way as we would use the word 'Cretan' today.

As for when Gothic began to emerge, we need to go back to 1000 CE to better understand its origins.

There was a fear of the year 1000: there were predictions that it would be the end of the world. There was a psychosis about the end of the world, the apocalypse that was mentioned in the bible. A lot of superstition prevailed, a bit like the year 2000 with fear of the Y2K bug, and a lot of unrealistic fears

around the turn of the first millennium. But, apart from the superstitions, there was also a real fear of invasions from the Saracens, Norsemen, and Vikings, having already suffered murderous attacks from the Hungarians.

It was a fearful time. Man was searching for stability within himself. There was no stability on the outside. So this fear was favourable for the development of a mystical mentality. Man began to look toward heaven for strength.

For centuries the monastic schools had been the centres of education. They favoured introspective education, but after 1100 CE they began to decline and withdraw into themselves and they stopped diffusing knowledge.

Education then took on a different style, it opened up again, moving from monasteries to cathedral schools. This was driven by a rebirth in trade, travel, more wealth, and growth in the population. Education changed from contemplative study to a more verbal,

dialectic type, open to knowledge outside of Latin Christianity. Around 1000 CE the mainstream of thought was Platonic, by 1100 CE Aristotelean thought became accepted, with the study of nature, which was considered a perfect reflection of God.

The Cistercian Order played a central role in the development of gothic architecture. They were an offshoot of the Benedictine Order at Cîteaux in France that rose to prominence after the arrival of St. Bernard of Clairvaux in 1113 CE who became the chief spiritual leader of Christianity for the next 40 years. He reorganised the Cistercian order by doing two things. First, he re-established self-discipline in the life of the monks. Second, he introduced new economic and social conditions. The monks of aristocratic origin were set to spiritual exercises, and the lay monks undertook the material maintenance of the community. By 1145 CE there were 350 Cistercian monasteries, all built by the Cistercians themselves.

St. Bernard was responsible for launching the crusades and also for the formation of the Knights Templar. The crusades brought contact with the East and a new way of perceiving God. The knights discovered the actual lands where Jesus was born and lived. Christ became human, the universe became more logical. So there was a big shift in the way man began to see the world and God. Mathematics and geometry were rediscovered. Arabian engineering was very advanced at this time. Western clerics began to conceive of buildings different to Romanesque which had favoured meditation and introspection.

Gothic appeared after the first crusade, particularly after the return of the original 9 Templar Knights, discovered by the Cistercians. The Benedictines and Cistercians were renowned builders of abbeys and monasteries.

Some scholars believe gothic was a natural progression from Romanesque, others that it is an entirely different school, that both operated side by side. Romanesque art and architecture were very sombre and bare, a development of the Roman basilica, which flourished from the 9th to the 13th century after Pope Leo 3rd appointed Charlemagne as holy roman emperor.

Romanesque architecture is typified by a cruciform plan, ambulatories (walkways around the apse), heavy stone vaults carried on huge columns, and extremely thick walls. It is also typified by its massive strength and solidity, fortress-like, with small windows, and most recognisable by its semicircular arches. It

was very consistent, with a slow development over centuries. The Romanesque is essentially static, steers forces that are directed downwards, the gothic channels forces that are directed upwards. Gothic is a system of building that rests on the pointed arch called the 'ogive'. The discovery of the ogive was capital, the physical and physiological action on man is extraordinary, beneath it man pulls himself together, stands upright. Telluric or other



currents can only enter man via a vertebral column that is straight and vertical. The human quality of the ogive was well known to the builders of that time, we see it in the shape and proportion of the ogive at Chartres Cathedral which is based on the traditional symbol of man, the 5-pointed star.

The crossed ogive

is built on the principle of the transformation of lateral into vertical thrust, the vault no longer weighs down but springs upwards under the lateral counterthrust of buttresses. The Gothic monument requires perfect adjustment between weight and thrust. The activity in the stone is in a constant state of tension which can be tuned like a musical instrument.

The flying buttress

was the device that allowed medieval masons to transfer weight away from cathedral walls. Using flying buttresses, the cathedral builders were able to construct very high and elaborate stone vaults and ever-bigger windows. Gradually the windows began to take over from the walls.

The stained glass window

is one of the most important aspects of Gothic. When Abbot Suger decided to rebuild the Church of Saint-Denis around 1137 CE, he designed a choir that would be suffused with light. To achieve this his masons drew on the several new features which had evolved; the pointed arch, the ribbed vault, and the flying buttresses, which enabled the insertion of large clerestory windows.

Abbot Suger had a Theory of Light, parsing three different Latin words for light; lux, lumen, and illumination. He understood lux, external light, as physical, coming from the sun and nature, especially light shining outside the cathedral. But once it entered through the window it was transformed into lumen, new metaphysical light because the glass; now both wall and sacred boundary functioned much like the ancient temenos threshold of a classical sanctuary or pomerium. On one, external, side it was ordinary and profane light that shone on everyone, even the heretic and the wicked, but on the other, internal, side the light was now consecrated and holy. In Suger's vision, light was the primary source of faith and divine inspiration. This light was one agency of a powerful benevolent grace that fed the soul.

The light inside the cathedral was mediated by the gemlike windows and this transformed light took a third route. Once it passed through the physical eye of the believer it was changed once again into illumination, now a spiritual light that elevated the mind and renewed the spirit within, as a metaphor for internal life-changing light.

So, it was the rebuilding of the church of St Denis, by Abbot Suger, that was considered to be the birth of Gothic in Europe.

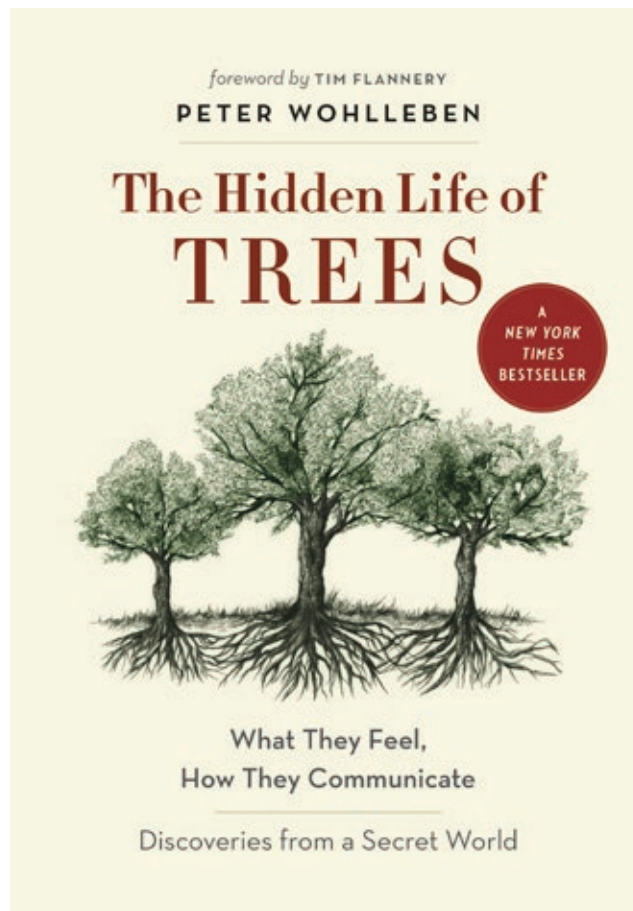
Gothic reflects the spirit of the 13th century, it was a small renaissance in itself. It was also a revolution, it was all about the verticality of man. Man became responsible for himself. We can say that Gothic equalled Enthusiasm, 'en theos' meaning 'God Within'.

As for the builders who sprang forth for this small renaissance, what were they trying to express? The builders were a part of brotherhoods, they travelled throughout Europe building cathedrals and churches. For them, it was a journey of growth, from man to individual, through action. Unity was the message of the builders, the building of cathedrals was an alchemical feat, the process of transforming lead into gold, within man.

They expressed the laws of nature through their work, all ideas need to be concretised, the mystery of creation shows that the spirit descends into something objective. The Cathedrals, therefore, are the representation of Heaven on Earth.

Sean O' Brien





“We read in fairy tales of trees with human faces, trees that can talk, and sometimes walk. This enchanted forest is the kind of place, I feel sure, that Peter Wohlleben inhabits. His deep understanding of the lives of trees, reached through decades of observation and study, reveals a world so astonishing that if you read this book, I believe that forests will become magical places for you, too.”

Foreword by Tim Flannery,
internationally acclaimed author, scientist and explorer.

Some time ago we came to the conclusion that fairy tales are the fruits of human fantasy, unable to rationally explain the mysterious world in which they live. We became enchanted by the positivistic and materialistic worldview and forgot our bonds with nature, visible and invisible, crumbling our imagination. Today our science begins to rediscover some of this profound wisdom safeguarded in the myths and legends of all people, that we live in a world animated by a limitless and beautiful intelligence beyond our comprehension. The science seems to give a voice to this knowledge, long forgotten, a reminiscence that we are part of a living macrocosm called nature, universe, cosmos or more.

This book talks about the hidden, unexpected life of trees. Peter Wohlleben skillfully presents the most recent scientific discoveries through enchantingly human analogies to help us understand the impact of these discoveries not only with our intellect, but with our heart. He is a commercial forester by trade. Through his work he got to know his forests more intimately, becoming an ambassador of natural forests and sustainable methods of forestry. An unlikely combination you may say? Perhaps it is, but the paradoxes of life often bring us to unexpected destinations. He came to discover a deeper reality of forests by trying to make them more productive, commercially, realising with time that a healthier and thus happier (i.e. more natural) forest is also more productive. He highlights the need to reject contemporary commercial forestry practices which he challenges as unnatural, disruptive and violent (such as girdling or ring-barking, i.e. the complete removal of the bark of a trunk, resulting in slow death) and to develop more natural approaches. One such project is in the Eifel Mountains in Germany, to rebuild a naturally-grown forest.

Discovering this book, the research and projects to reform forestry was quite fascinating to me, and hopefully you will feel the same. Yet I couldn't but wonder how little attention is given to this in mainstream science, education and media.

We have always known that the workings of nature are complex, and its genius never ceases to amaze us, but did you know that trees are social beings living in communities and raising families? Did you know that trees communicate in far more complex ways than we could have imagined? Did you know that trees had to become great organisers if they are to carry out tasks such as blossoming? Did you know that trees feel pain?

One of the fascinating things that Wohlleben explains is that the natural forests are large superorganisms, in which each tree plays a role and is closely connected to other trees. They are collaborators, supporting their own species as well as other species. Only a forest can provide a microclimate suitable for tree growth and sustenance. Trees don't follow the Darwinian

hypothesis "the survival of the fittest". Quite the opposite, we find in the original forests an astounding example of natural collaborators.

There are examples of beeches who kept a tree stump alive for centuries. The neighboring beeches nourished the stump with sugar through a fungal network around root tips to keep it alive. It was also found that stronger trees tend to support weaker or sick individuals by feeding them and as well as that they build affectionate relationships. A tree recognizes its parents. Great silver beech trees are reluctant to abandon their dead. Some trees develop such strong connections that they die at the same time.

Another discovery was that trees communicate in various ways, using a sense of smell, taste and sound. Trees are far slower than us humans, appearing motionless. But even with their snail-like tempo they still communicate. In African savannah, acacia trees would release gas to warn other trees of feeding giraffes, while releasing toxins to make its leaves inedible. A giraffe would walk 100 yards to feed on those acacia trees who were too far away to be warned. Trees use their root network supported by fungi which earned the name of "Wood Wide Web" in the scientific community. Trees also use a "voice" to broadcast news and "speak" at 220 Hz.

What is invisible to the eye is how much coordination is required for all trees to blossom at the same time. Like a Swiss clock. We are only now starting to grasp that this is not a product of chance.

The author has managed to open a door to the wonder-full world of forests - making us realise that our destinies are bound together. There are more living organisms in a handful of forest soil than human beings on the entire planet Earth. Isn't that amazing? While this book is fascinating, it is important to go beyond this mere fascination to arrive at true investigation and introspection. What would be one learning to take away? I would say unity and interdependency. Isn't it remarkable that our forests are examples of solidarity, altruism, collaboration, and partnership, reminding us of our own nature? After reading this book you will not see trees the same way, and hopefully, you won't see people the same way either. To the philosopher nature is a book of wisdom, if one chooses to learn from it. We can use the power of our intelligence and imagination to overcome illusory divisions and separation from others and nature.

Ivona Ward

THE LAST SAMURAI

Every now and then big-budget blockbusters can demonstrate some substance, with a story that has depth and inspiring characters that go beyond the action and explosions of their central set-pieces. One filmmaker who has a track record of delivering such heroic classics is Ed Zwick, director of *Glory*, *Defiance*, *Blood Diamond* and the focus of this review - *The Last Samurai*.

While I could happily recommend any of those movies, for many of the same reasons, *The Last Samurai* offers an additional dimension that warrants a philosophical reflection: that of 19th century Japanese samurai culture and bushido, the way of the warrior.

The hero of our tale begins at a low point. Nathan Algren, played by Tom Cruise (in a career highlight performance) is an American war veteran traumatised by the atrocities he committed during the American Indian Wars. Ravaged by his conscience, dulling his suffering with alcohol, Algren ekes out a living by parading as a 'war hero' mascot for a weapon's company.

His former commanding officer offers him a lucrative opportunity to gain employment as a military advisor to the Japanese army who are struggling to put down a local insurgency, and once again Algren is faced with wiping out an indigenous people under the twisted premises of progress and civilization. His conscience still numb, he takes the job.



What he encounters in Japan, however, is a journey of redemption that will rekindle his noble spirit and allow him to exorcise his personal demons on both the inner and outer battlefields. The first skirmish against the rebelling samurai ends with Algren being captured, only barely avoiding death, and he is taken prisoner by the enigmatic leader of the clan, Lord Katsumoto, played by Ken Watanabe. Katsumoto watches Algren fight for his life, killing an accomplished samurai warrior while defending himself, and profound visions trigger in the lord the decision to spare the invader's life.

As Algren recuperates from his wounds and simultaneously detoxes from his substance dependency, he goes through the first stage of his ultimate transformation. What he discovers later is that the woman nursing him back to health is Taka, the wife of the warrior he killed. The romantic subplot that develops between them is well paced and believable, her conflict centred around duty to her deceased husband and the sense of service demanded of her by her brother, Lord Katsumoto.

Algren's revelations of samurai culture continue as he regains strength, his observations of their dedication, discipline, simplicity and mastery of everything they do. The dignity of the samurai way of life starts to crack the carapace of bitter cynicism which was protecting his wounded soul.

Over the weeks of his captivity Algren is engaged in fruitful, though for him sometimes frustrating, dialogues with Katsumoto. The samurai challenges Algren's perception of war and the purpose of the warrior, exemplifying the need for beauty and poetry. The warrior is not a killer but a defender of the people, at the service of the emperor and the nation. Algren's concepts of life and death are rocked too as Katsumoto shares his understanding of dying with honour as being the highest prize for the samurai.

Algren is the perfect surrogate for the audience as our western minds and education have great difficulty accepting death as a natural part of life. The ritual of seppuku as an act of ending one's own life to maintain one's honour runs contrary to everything

we believe in relation to the sanctity of life. Yet for many cultures, to live in disgrace, without honour, was a fate worse than death. In a culture driven by externals where nothing is more important than material life, this is very difficult to understand. For Algren, who had lost his dignity and no longer wished to live, he finds an attitude to life and death that stirs him from the slumber of his trauma.

Embracing the way of the samurai, Algren rediscovers his identity as a warrior and a human being, disciplining his mind and conquering his vices. Seeing the necessity to protect this way of life, he joins forces with Katsumoto against his former employers to fight back against the crushing force of modernisation in the Meiji era of Japan. Though ultimately defeated in battle, Algren is victorious in regaining his honour and his humanity.



Lord Katsumoto (Watanabe) and his samurai warriors after the opening battle

What *The Last Samurai* achieves, with considerable skill, is a synthesis of the great alchemy of cinema - to transport us to another time and place and inspire our sentiments with ideals of courage, compassion and dignity. Algren's arc is uplifting and compelling as he discovers a better way to live and then dedicates himself to transforming accordingly. The warrior code of bushido is portrayed with sensitivity and maturity, neither sugarcoating the realities, nor glorifying the violence. Beyond the feelings the movie may evoke, a deeper reflection entices us. How can we embody the samurai warrior spirit today? Not as an act of aggression - the warrior is not aggressive - but as an act of vigilance, discipline, honour, generosity and above all, courage. How can we apply these values, that mindset, in our daily lives and in the world around us? For as Algren discovers from Katsumoto, the word samurai literally means 'to serve'.

Aidan Murphy

合気道

The Seven Principles of Bushido

JUSTICE

COURAGE

BENEVOLENCE

RESPECT

HONESTY

HONOUR

LOYALTY

SELF-CONTROL

Parting Thoughts



An Aesop's Fable: The Wind and the Sun

The Wind and the Sun were disputing which was the stronger.

Suddenly they saw a traveller coming down the road, and the Sun said, "I see a way to decide our dispute. Whichever of us can cause that traveller to take off his cloak shall be regarded as the stronger. You begin."

So the Sun retired behind a cloud, and the Wind began to blow as hard as it could upon the traveller. But the harder he blew the more closely did the traveller wrap his cloak round him, till at last the Wind had to give up in despair.

Then the Sun came out and shone in all his glory upon the traveller, who soon found it too hot to walk with his cloak on.

Kindness effects more than severity.



Philosophy Culture Volunteering



Philosophy

To be a philosopher is a way of life which is committed to the best aspirations of humanity.

Philosophy, when it is practical, is educational.

It helps us to know ourselves and to improve ourselves.

Culture

The practice of human values is the basis for a model of active and participative Culture, which brings out the qualities of each person, broadens the horizons of the mind and opens the human being up to all the expressions of the spirit.



Volunteering

Volunteering is the natural expression of a spirit of union with life and humanity, which manifests in the practice of values such as unselfishness, and a commitment to strive for the common good.

It is by practicing the universal values of philosophy that we can deeply transform ourselves and turn our ideas into action.

The practice of philosophy develops self-confidence, moral strength and resilience to face the difficulties and crises of life. It allows us to become an actor of change in our lives and around us.

Our introductory course in practical philosophy offers a series of theoretical and practical classes to progress in self-knowledge, to practice taking advantage of every circumstance in life without forgetting to develop solidarity with others.

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