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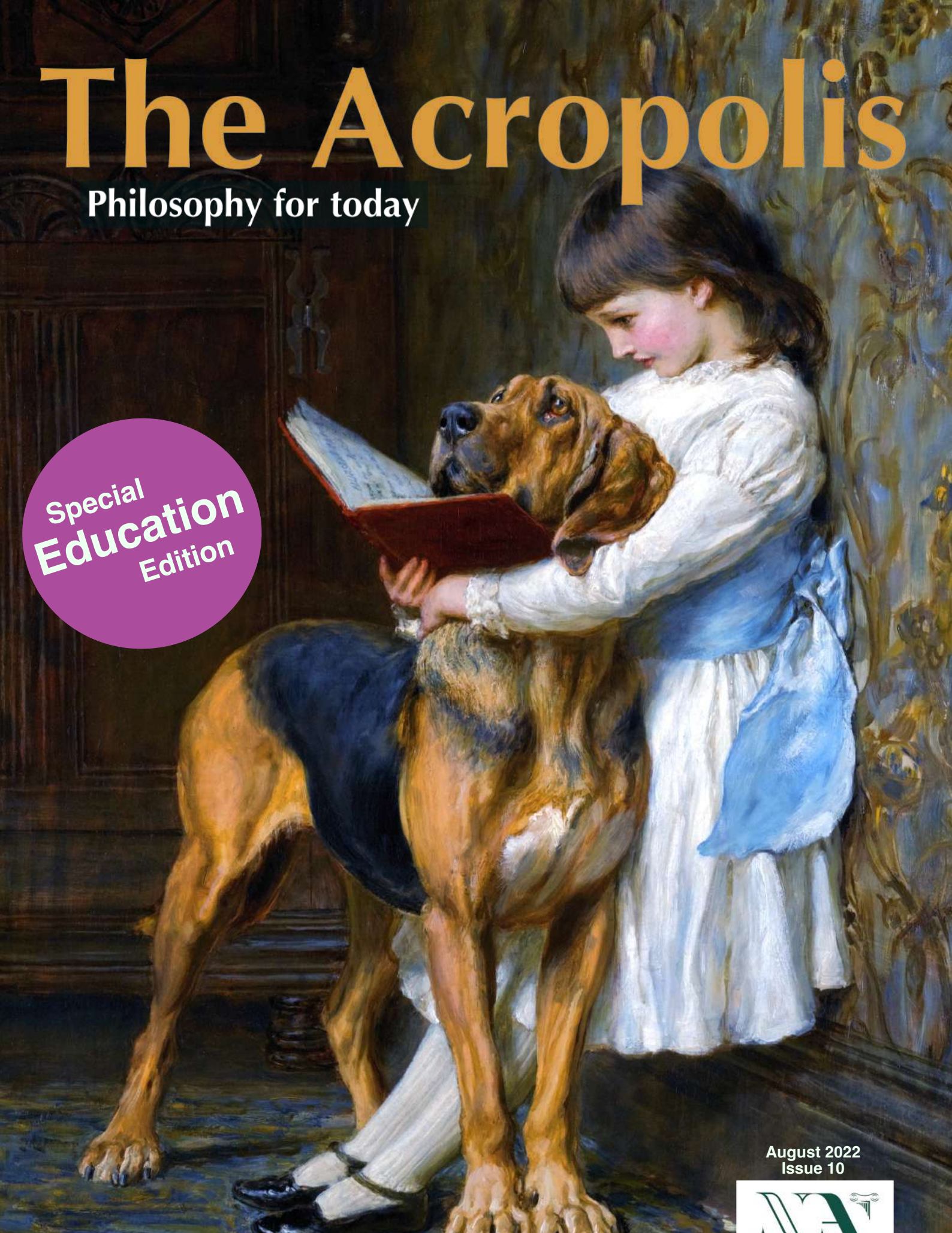
Special Education Edition



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Autumn Edition Back to School Special: Philosophy, History, Culture, Education and more!

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PHILOSOPHY A Way of Life

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 Two Poles of Education

As we are looking at education in this edition, I was inspired by what the director of our school in the UK wrote about in her editorial on the subject, which I share here with you.

Alain Impellizzeri
Director New Acropolis Ireland

Education is, has been and always will be of the utmost importance. According to Nelson Mandela it is "the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." And according to Plato, the "direction in which education starts a man will determine his future in life." Although the concept of education is universal and has probably been practised since the beginnings of humanity (simply by transmitting skills and experience to the next generation), our view of education has always been subject to huge variations and has often been the subject of strong disagreements.

The type of education we give to our young people is definitely a mirror of the values and views we hold and is intimately intertwined with our worldview. The word education is actually derived from two different Latin verbs: educere and educare. Like everything in this world, education also has two different poles that complement each other and need each other, and that it would be wrong to emphasise only one pole at the expense of the other.

Educere is the currently preferred one. It means 'to draw out' or 'to lead forth' and it is about the 'drawing out' of the inherent potential in a human being. An education based on the idea of educere will aim to give love, inspiration and encouragement and try to be completely 'non-judgmental' as to what 'comes out' of the child. Everything is good, okay, acceptable, 'wonderful'. It is all about a process of awakening, of inner development, of becoming.

Educare is currently the problematic one. So many people have only experienced it in its 'shadow expression' and felt they had to rebel against it that they now have an almost allergic reaction to it. Educare means 'to train' and 'to mould'. It carries the idea that the educator acts upon the learner to shape them into a form determined by the educator. It conjures up memories of the worst type of education during the industrial/Victorian age, where schools were almost considered like factories where children go in as raw materials, are beaten, shaped and moulded and come out as forms fit for the machinery of society.

We are still 'reeling' from this dehumanising type of education. However, we might be throwing the baby out with the bathwater. If educere and educare really are two sides of the same coin, or, in other words, a polarity or an interdependent pair, then they must both be valued and integrated. One positive aspect of educare is the assurance of quality and high standards. We all want our doctors, nurses, teachers, pilots, lawyers, electricians, builders, hairdressers, etc. to be well qualified.

But through educere alone, we will not be able to arrive at the necessary level of qualification. And if we think about some of the often-heard complaints about young people today: 'they can't spell, they lack certain literacy and numeracy skills, they are rude, they are unreliable, they lack resilience', etc., then it seems that these are due to a lack of educare rather than educere.

There is no doubt that we live in very polarized and polarizing times and that the topic of education continues to be fiercely debated. However, polarities are inevitable and cannot be solved by giving value only to one side and condemning the other. The 'law of polarity' states that both poles have their value, and both can be expressed either in a beneficial way or in their 'shadow' aspect. C.G. Jung observed correctly that 'there is no energy unless there is a tension of opposites'. One thing we probably all need to learn more is to move from an either/or mentality to a both/and thinking, so that we can harness the power of synthesis.

Sabine Leitner
Director New Acropolis UK

Martial Arts & Education

Seeking peace through the inner battle

One of the most iconic scenes in the movie “The Last Samurai” was a dialogue under a blossoming cherry tree between two protagonists: Katsumoto, the leader of samurai, and Nathan Algren, a former cavalry captain. “The perfect blossom is a rare thing.” said Katsumoto, “You could spend your life looking for one, and it would not be a wasted life”. In all its simplicity this scene seizes the spirit of martial arts, a timeless striving of a human being for perfection, for an ideal, for inner liberation. Before continuing, it’s necessary to understand what martial arts actually are. The name itself suggests that the practice of martial arts requires us to master two disciplines, one of warfare and another of art. In reality, they are not two but one.

If a practice contains only fighting, its purpose and objective is not anymore one of the martial arts. Instead this practice becomes a martial sport or self-defence. If a practice focuses only on a pursuit of elegance and beauty of the techniques, this is not anymore a martial practice, without which we cannot build our capacity to effectively defend ourselves or others. The martial arts are not simply seeking to master a technique, but more profoundly to improve ourselves until our behaviours and actions faithfully reflect our higher ideals and values. At its essence, the martial arts propose an educational path of inner transformation - teaching us a way of life.

This educational purpose in martial arts was considered so important in Japan, that they changed the name of martial arts to include “Budo” (in Japanese “martial path, martial way of life”). Formerly they used “Bujutsu” for martial arts, which meant “martial craft” or “the science of war”. Original names such as Jujutsu, Aikijutsu or Kenjutsu were changed to Judo, Aikido and Kendo to emphasise the importance of “Do” or “path”. This practice of “Do” is what teaches us to go beyond mere martial technique, and discover “Life in every breath”.

This is not simply to develop physical discipline or stamina, or being able to defend ourselves, which in themselves are positive. But rather, the path teaches to reach that presence of the self and heightened concentration which means we don’t need a technique to defend ourselves. Through a technique they taught an ancient art of perfecting one's own character so one can act in a conscious and balanced way in the world.

This attitude comes from their connection with philosophical teachings. All martial arts began in some philosophy, which allowed them to transcend their practice into a path, a way of life. Eastern martial arts are rooted in Buddhism, Zen Buddhism or Taoism. One is educated through combat, which symbolically represents

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tests of life. In a fight we repeatedly have an opportunity to practice ourselves, until we can face our opponent (and you guessed right, symbolically he or she represents a natural adversity of life) with serenity and confidence.

Why choose this way to educate someone, you may ask? Because they understood well that we can only learn through experience. If we can learn to face our adversary non-violently and with composure in combat, indifferent to whether we win or lose, but committed to fight justly, we can do so in our lives too. What we truly want to learn is to know and master ourselves, so we can live with others peacefully. This is only possible if we develop a moral life.

Is this not counterintuitive, might be another question? In all martial arts the true question is not how to win one over another, but rather how to live a good life. Buddha famously said “Greater in battle than the man who would conquer a thousand men, is he who would conquer just one—himself. Better to conquer yourself than others. When you've trained yourself, living in constant self-control, [not even Gods] could turn that triumph back into defeat.”

> Greater in battle than the man who would conquer a thousand men, is he who would conquer just one—himself.
>
> - The Buddha

Here we find an aspect of art in the martial arts, in their pursuit of beauty of inner values (such as gentleness, rhythm, courage, resilience, love, kindness, modesty, and so on). Great masters of martial arts were without exception also great examples of an ardent morality, who sought perfection in the smallest actions in daily life. Nothing was trivial, nothing insignificant, because every action requires presence. If in a fight we violate these values of life and become violent, destructive, unfair, we have lost this fight regardless of an external result.

When we fight, we ought to fight with our inner opponents, fears, aggressions, frustrations, doubts, cowardice, violence, hesitation, recklessness; all these instincts of self-preservation. An external opponent is a friend, although it is sometimes challenging to see it this way, someone who puts us to the test so we can practice ourselves. That person doesn’t need to reciprocate this attitude. What matters is how we chose to conduct ourselves in a fight.

In a fight the first principle is centredness, so we can overcome our instincts of self-preservation with our intelligence, love and will. Miyamoto Musashi, today considered to be the most famous samurai of all times, once explained “At the sight of the raised sword, one trembles in hell, yet move straight towards it, and you will find the land of serenity”. A martial artist understands the naturalness of conflict, and a necessity for a human being to face adversity in life in order to learn and overcome. Therefore he or she joyfully welcomes this challenge. Because without facing our challenges in life we can’t reach what we are seeking for: inner truth.

In the ancient book of wisdom from China, I Ching, there is a symbol representing this inner reality or truth. This symbol is a hexagram Chung Fu. It is an image of a wind gently stirring the surface of the lake, representing gentleness and joy. What it suggests is that when our actions (the stirred surface of the water) are rooted in and therefore moved by the inner ideals (gentleness of the wind), we find joy. Joy is a consequence of a heart free of prejudice and open to truth. It is also an inner attitude that allows us to give birth to something new within ourselves, to be reborn.

So step by step we can give birth to that which we chose to become and if we can learn one thing from martial arts, it would be that we can build upon those ideals we strive for even in the smallest actions of life. This is where the “battlefield of life” is often in reality. And as Katsumoto reminds us at the beginning, this “rare thing” we search for is not a wasted life.

Ivona Ward

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STOICISM

Timeless Wisdom, more relevant than ever…

In modern usage, the word “stoic” suggests someone who does not express their emotions, someone who is indifferent to grief, joy, pain or pleasure. But stoic has another meaning: being a “Stoic” refers to a follower of the philosophy called Stoicism.

Stoicism was founded in 301 BC by Zeno of Citium, Cyprus, who was a successful and wealthy merchant. During a voyage in the eastern Mediterranean, Zeno's boat and cargo were lost in a storm but fortunately he managed to survive. Shortly after he made his way to Athens, where he discovered a bookshop containing philosophical books of that time. A book of Socratic dialogues called Memorabilia captured his imagination. Zeno soon became a student of Crates of Thebes, a leading teacher of Cynic philosophy, as well as several other teachers, with whom he studied Plato. He quickly started teaching, using a porch-like building called the Stoa Poikile in the Agora in Athens. Zeno’s philosophical teachings became known as Stoicism.

Schools of Stoic philosophy flourished in Greece in the following years. Greek philosophers brought Stoic teachings to Rome, where the new philosophy gained a significant following, especially amongst the educated and political elites. Stoicism flourished for several hundred years. However, during the early Medieval period, formal Stoic schooling declined, especially so when Christianity became the state religion of Rome in the 4th century AD. Christianity borrowed many of the teachings of Stoicism, especially in the area of ethics, and added them to its Christian doctrine.

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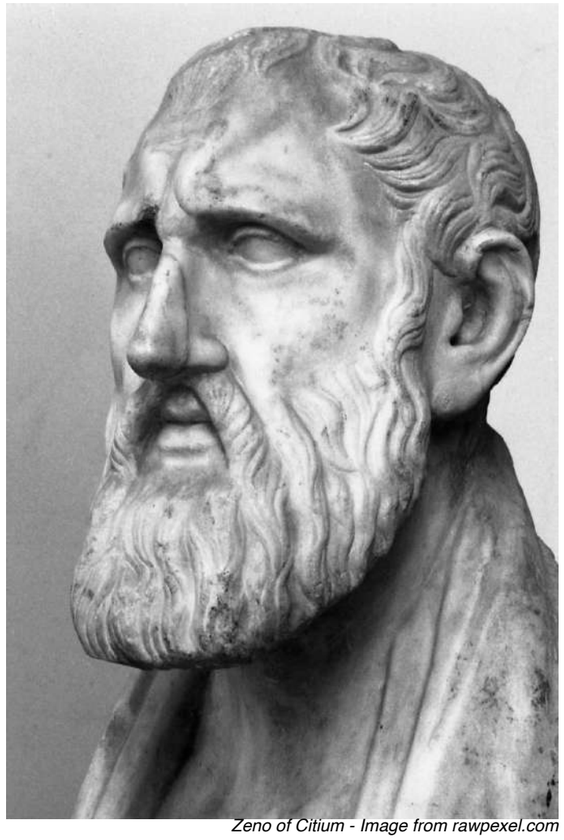


Zeno of Citium - Image from rawpexel.com

Stoic Principles

Stoicism aims to enable its followers to live a good, moral life by achieving a state of being that the ancient Greeks called eudaimonia, loosely meaning wellness, or human flourishing. Eudaimonia means living in accordance with nature. Nature in this instance means both the nature of the universe, and the human nature of those who live in it. Living in accordance with nature can only be achieved by rationally understanding nature, and using reason to fit the flow of one’s life around it. Stoics believe that leading a life of virtue (moral excellence) is necessary to achieve eudaimonia.

Stoics differentiate between what we can and cannot control in our lives. We should not waste time and energy on emotional reactions to what we cannot control, and focus instead on taking moral action in the areas where we can. Rather than expecting the world to suit us, we should accept the world as it is. This is acceptance, not avoidance, not ‘burying our heads in the sand’, so to speak.

How we view and interpret events that affect us is another key aspect of Stoicism. The Greek Stoic philosopher Epictetus said:

“It isn’t the events themselves that disturb people, but only their judgements about them.”

These judgements come from beliefs and assumptions that we hold about the world, which can be deep-rooted. If we can change our perspective, we can open our eyes and see the world more clearly, and choose to react (or not) to events in a calmer, more serene way.

The Stoic philosophy that Zeno founded was divided into three major fields of study, generally known as the “3 Pillars of Stoicism”, namely Ethics, Logic and Physics.

Ethics

Ethics are the moral principles that govern behaviour, that guide people in how to live their lives. Moral virtue is the central goal of Stoic ethics, through the use of reason, wisdom and self-control. Ethics is the central teaching of Stoicism.

Logic

Logic is concerned with how to reason about the world. Stoics believe that in order to live a worthwhile life, a life of happiness, we need to be able to reason correctly. Stoic Logic has a wide scope and includes argument, rhetoric, grammar, propositions, perception, and the nature of language and thought.

Physics

In Zeno’s time, Physics had a broader meaning, encompassing everything about how the world works, including Nature (i.e. Science), metaphysics and aspects of theology.

Stoicism teaches that to live a life of virtue, through Ethics, you have to first know how the world works, through Physics, and you have to be able to reason correctly, through Logic.

Virtue

The concept of virtue is also central to Stoic life. A virtue is a quality or trait that leads to behaviour consistent with high moral standards. In his book The Republic, the Greek philosopher Plato identified 4 Cardinal Virtues of classical philosophy: Wisdom, Temperance, Justice and Courage:

- Wisdom is the ability to know the right course of action to take when faced with a decision, using logic and knowledge.
- Temperance is the practice of self-control, to moderate or restrain human desires.
- Justice is the quality of being fair and impartial in all dealings with others.
- Courage is the ability to confront fear, through strength and endurance.

To a committed Stoic, the practice of the philosophy is much more than a hobby or a diverting passtime. And being a Stoic means more than just adopting a set of

beliefs or ethics. It is a way of life, involving training and practice on an ongoing basis. Stoic practices include:

- Logical thinking practices
- Introspection - looking within oneself
- Acceptance that death is inevitable
- Attention practices, such as remaining in the present moment, a form of mindfulness with the aim of achieving Ataraxia, a classical Greek word meaning serenity or tranquillity.
- Daily reflection on life's challenges and solutions
- Daily journaling (writing a diary) and self reminding.

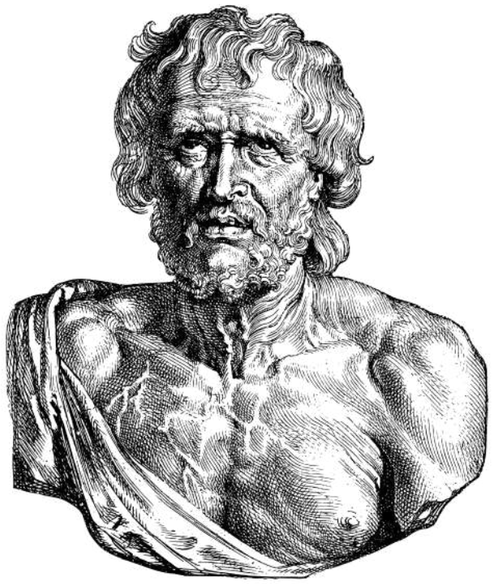
Influential Stoics

While Stoicism began with Zeno around 301 BC, few complete documents on the teachings have survived, until we get to what's called the 'Late Stoa' period (1 AD - 200 AD) during Roman imperial times. During this period, Stoic writers ranged from a dramatist, a freed slave and a Roman emperor, illustrating the diverse range of followers drawn to Stoicism.

Lucius Annaeus Seneca was a Roman dramatist, statesman and Stoic philosopher who was born in Hispania (modern day Spain) circa 4 AD. He became a tutor and adviser to Emperor Nero. He wrote many essays and letters dealing with moral issues, which form an important body of work in Roman Stoicism. Much of his work is concerned with destructive 'passions' or emotions, such as anger and grief, and using reason to eliminate them, or at least to manage them. Seneca's writings on Stoic morality and ethics found favour with the early Christian church, who adopted many of his ideas as their own. His writings became widely read and studied in universities from the Renaissance period onward.

Epictetus was a Greek Stoic philosopher who lived between circa 50 AD and 135 AD. He was born into slavery in Phrygia, in modern day Turkey. He was brought to Rome as a slave in his youth, where he was allowed to study philosophy. He soon became free, and started to teach philosophy, which he continued for twenty five years. However, the Roman Emperor banished all philosophers from Rome, so Epictetus moved to Nicopolis, Greece, where he founded his own school. One of his students, Arrian, wrote down Epictetus's teachings, in a book called The Discourses of Epictetus.

Marcus Aurelius was Roman Emperor from 160-180 AD, as well as being a Stoic philosopher. While leading his armies on military campaigns, he would retire to his tent in the evenings to contemplate. He wrote his philosophical reflections in a personal diary, in which he tried to understand himself and make sense of the universe. Unknowingly, he created one of the greatest works of philosophy, a timeless reference called



Seneca - Image from rawpexel.com

Meditations, that has since been read by millions of people around the world. Nelson Mandela was guided and inspired by the Meditations while he was imprisoned for 27 years. After his release, Mandela sought reconciliation with his former oppressors, rather than taking revenge.

"The happiness of your life depends upon the quality of your thoughts" - Marcus Aurelius

A revival of Stoicism, called Neo-Stoicism, occurred during the Renaissance, in the late 16th century. Flemish humanist and Christian Justus Lipsius, wrote extensively in an effort towards a synthesis of Christianity and Stoicism, to 'iron out' differences between the two traditions. His writings were influential across Europe for two centuries.

Stoicism has had a great influence on modern-day psychology. The therapeutic discipline of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is used to treat conditions such anxiety, depression and substance abuse. The development of CBT was influenced by classical philosophical teachings, and especially by Stoic ideas. Logical thinking, acceptance of our circumstances and differentiation between what we can and cannot control are all core tenets of both CBT and Stoicism.

Would Zeno be happy if he knew the influence that Stoic teachings have had in the past two thousand years? Probably not, he would just be stoic.

Tim Leahy

Photo by Pierre Tribhou

The Chester Beatty Library

A wondrous treasure lies nestled in Dublin Castle - explore with us a true cultural jewel

Situated in the heart of the city centre, within the historic grounds of Dublin Castle, the Chester Beatty Library is one of Dublin's cultural gems. It is a museum and library established in 1950 to house the collections of mining magnate, Sir Alfred Chester Beatty. With free admission, it has been described as not just the best museum in Dublin, but one of the best in Europe.

It has exhibitions and world class collections that are immensely valuable to all the lovers of humanity's cultural legacy, regardless of ethnicity or religious backgrounds. In addition, it offers dynamic learning and well-being programmes for all age-groups, such as Qi Gong, drop-in drawing for visitors and dementia-friendly conversations.

The aim of this article is to showcase a few of the hundreds of objects and manuscripts displayed in the museum, as an invitation to experience this opportunity to engage with, and get inspired by, the timeless heritage of mankind.

Firstly, one could ask oneself how such a collection was put together, and why it landed in Dublin. Such questions bring us to the life of Sir Alfred Chester Beatty (7 February 1875 – 19 January 1968), who was an American mining magnate, philanthropist and one of the most successful businessmen of his generation. He became a naturalised British citizen in 1933, knighted in 1954 and made an honorary citizen of Ireland in 1957.

He was a collector of African, Asian, European and Middle Eastern manuscripts, rare printed books, prints and art objects. Upon his move to Dublin in 1950 he established the Chester Beatty Library on Shrewsbury Road to house his collection; it opened to the public in 1954. His second wife, Edith Dunn, also established herself as a serious collector in her own right, and the two spent decades travelling the globe and acquiring masterpieces for their unique collections.

While she was buying Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings and French furniture, Beatty was acquiring important Islamic material, including an exceptional collection of illuminated copies of the Quran, and Mughal, Turkish and Persian manuscripts. His Western holdings were enhanced by acquisitions of Coptic, Syriac, Armenian and Greek manuscripts. To his Asian holdings he added Tibetan, Thai, Burmese and Sumatran manuscripts. His eye was drawn to richly illustrated material, fine bindings and beautiful calligraphy, but he was also deeply committed to preserving texts for their historic value. He concerned himself only with works of the finest quality, and this became the hallmark of his collection.

Double frontispiece from the Treasure of the Khwarazmshah (Zakhira-yi Khwarazmshahi), by Zayn al-Din al-Jurjani

Khan Dawran in a White and Gold Jama and Turban, Leaning on a Staff, ca. 1650, by Hashim

Yogini with a Mynah Bird, by the painter Bijapur, early 17th century

Illuminated Armenian Gospel, 4-Gospel by Spahan, 1655

In 1950, at the age of 75, Chester Beatty handed over the reins of the Selection Trust to his son Chester Jr and relocated to Dublin, taking many by surprise. The reason often cited is Beatty's growing frustration with post-war Britain, not least the defeat of the Conservative party in the 1945 general election. Having committed himself to the Allied war effort during the Second World War and served on a number of Churchill's committees, he was shocked by the Labour party victory.

There were other, personal, considerations, however. His son had bought a home in County Kildare in 1948, which probably prompted Beatty to look favourably on Ireland as a home, especially given his Irish roots: both his paternal grandparents were born in Ireland. Beatty was also seriously considering long-term plans for his collection. Concerned that it would be dispersed if he were to leave it to a large institution, he found another solution. His purpose-built library on Shrewsbury Road in a suburb of Dublin opened in 1953, first for researchers and later to the public.

One suggested approach to engage with the vast collection is to do so by themes such as places or world religions. Join us in this quick introductory tour…

India

The Indian collection is remarkable, with over 700 manuscripts, albums and single-page paintings. This includes splendid artwork made for the Mughal emperors, and for many other courts and centres throughout the subcontinent.

Moreover, this collection includes a significant number of richly illuminated Jain manuscripts from the 15th and 16th centuries. Founded in the 6th century BC, Jainism is one of India's three ancient religions, alongside Hinduism and Buddhism. One could admire a hanging scroll with a cosmographical painting (representation of the universe), painted in colours on cotton in India, possibly during the 18th century. In the Jain tradition, the universe is divided into three worlds: the upper heavenly world, the middle mortal world, and the lower world of the damned. This painting is a representation of the world of the mortals. Paintings of the mortal world have remained popular with the devout as it is within this world that liberation from the chain of rebirth is possible.

Egypt

The papyrus manuscripts include prose and poetry, sacred writings, private and official letters, business jottings and educational texts written in Egyptian—Hieroglyphs, Hieratic and Demotic scripts, and later the Coptic alphabet—Greek, Latin and Arabic.

One could get a glimpse, for instance, into the mysteries of the Manichaean religion, founded in Mesopotamia in the third century by the prophet Mani. Once a thriving religion, the prophet Mani proclaimed his revelation of a cosmic struggle between the kingdoms of light and darkness. He gained the support of a Sasanian ruler, whose vast empire covered Iran, Iraq, northwest Arabia and central Asia. The Manichaean mysteries emphasised the role of Jesus in the salvation of the light, imprisoned in the material world. He also saw Zarathustra and Buddha as his predecessors.

Using beautifully written and illustrated books, multilingual missionaries carried the religion west from Mesopotamia across the empire. Although Manichaeism was severely persecuted and disappeared from the Roman and Byzantine Empires by the 7th century, the last believers in this faith practiced in southern China into the 17th century, where their traditions were heavily influenced by Buddhism.

Another highlight from the ancient Egyptian beliefs is the famous “Judgement of the Deceased” papyrus, aka Papyrus of Ani, from the Book of the Dead. It’s a highly profound symbolic representation of the human experience. The scene is the Hall of Judgement. Centrally placed is a scale, holding in its two pans Ani's heart (on the left) and a feather (on the right) representing Maat, the divine personification of truth and order. If the human heart is lighter than a feather, it doesn’t need to reincarnate anymore and is free to join the House of the Gods. Otherwise, it still requires a great deal of purification, triggering the new birth.

Western traditions

The French collection contains, for instance, a parchment codex known as the Garden of Knowledge (Viridarium), a medieval encyclopaedia edited and illuminated by jurist Jean Reynaud between 1386-1425 probably in Avignon (France). It was based on an earlier work by Thomas de Cantimpré called On the Nature of Things, compiled between 1230-1245, and purported to contain all the natural history knowledge of his time, including information on anthropology, zoology, botany, mineralogy, astronomy, astrology and meteorology.

It’s truly a privilege to have close to us a place housing so many testimonies to the multifaceted expressions of human culture, throughout the centuries and the globe. May it long be a place to educate and inspire all lovers of wisdom, whether living on, or passing through our beloved Irish soil.

Lilian Salaber

Education for a Good Life

The Ethical and Political dimension of Education according to Aristotle

Aristotle, famously known as Alexander the Great's preceptor, was Plato's disciple at the Academy of Athens. He was familiar with, and shared, the concept of philosophical education developed in the Republic. Moreover, he was immersed in a culture which valued the ideal of scholê, the Greek word from which the English school derives. It was a time deeply influenced by the example set by Socrates, educator of the youth, who was regarded as a model of excellence by all philosophers of Ancient Greece.

In valuing truth above his own life (he died by drinking hemlock while under arrest), Socrates established a high calling (and responsibility) of all educators. Education was considered then an important matter by post-Socratic philosophers, exemplified by the two most known among them, Plato and Aristotle. They went on to widely explore and propose models that were imbued in Hellenic culture but also have a universal and timeless relevance to all future generations.

The concept of scholê is often superficially translated with "leisure". According to Plato, human beings need to attend to their body's needs, which results in busyness, ascholia in Greek – the opposite of scholê – and this is why they are left with little time for inquiry. Scholê is time spent not being busy with the needs of the body, but time spent gazing into the true nature of things. It is a form of purification or catharsis from the body's chains. Philosophising, searching for the Truth, entails the activity of Nous, often translated as mind or intelligence.

Socrates describes it as "the cause of everything" and that which, "in producing order, arranges everything and puts each individual thing in whatever way is best [for it]". Scholê is then a condition in which humans experience the best that is possible within themselves. Because it's related to Nous, scholê belongs to the free person who chooses to engage in it. This element of freedom implies a moral dimension that will be developed also by Aristotle's philosophy of education.

According to Aristotle, the general goal of education is to help individuals develop and fulfil their potential. The human being is made up of body, with its "desiring" appendix, and soul, where the "higher part" resides. Education is a developmental process which begins with the education of the body, proceeds to the training of the "appetite" and culminates in the education of the soul. The stages of body and desire education, although important in themselves, are meant to prepare and sustain the reaching of the final goal, which is the development of the "higher part." The physical body should be "educated" only for the sake of the soul's development.

In fact, according to Aristotle, everything in nature has an end, a purpose (telos) to fulfil.

The end is present potentially in the beginning, and growth is the progressive realisation of this potential. If the telos of a seed is to become a plant, the telos of a man is to live a "life worth living" (eudaimon), an idea already put forth by Socrates's famous question: "What type of life is worth living?" Eudaimonia, often translated as happiness, fulfilment, is the telos that Aristotle identifies for human beings and is to be found in man's development or inner growth.

"All man's happiness depends on two things: one is the right choice of [...] the end to which actions should tend; the other lies in finding the actions that lead to that end". Eudaimonia is realised in connection to what is natural to human beings, which is Nous. To live "excellently" in harmony with Nous, is to live a good life. Happiness belongs to those who have cultivated their soul to the greatest extent and practised moderation in the acquisition of external goods (and the cultivation of the body).

"Happiness, then, is obviously something complete and self-sufficient, in that it is the end of what is done." Happiness, as the highest good and, therefore, the goal of the human being, is also the goal of education; it is an activity of the Soul in accordance with virtues, which are acquired by exercising them through education.

Aristotle claims that there are two forms of virtues: "Virtue of thought and virtue of character. Virtue of thought arises and grows mostly from teaching, and hence needs experience and time. Virtue of character [ethike] results from habit [ethos]; hence its name 'ethical'".

> Men become builders by building and lyre players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts.
>
> - Aristotle

Bust of Aristotle in the 'Long Room', the famous library of Trinity College Dublin - Image courtesy of Wiki Commons Media

The path of a good and virtuous life is to mesos, a middle way between two extremes. Virtue is "a state that decides, consisting in a mean, the mean relative to us, which is defined by reference to reason - the reason by reference to which the prudent person [the person with phronesis] would define it". Phronesis - variously translated as "prudence", "practical wisdom", "intelligence and foresight in action", "moral discernment" - is defined by Aristotle as the "eye of the soul". It is a form of practical wisdom that becomes "second skin" to us as well as, importantly, right conduct in social situations. It is a strength of character that is developed through intellectual activity, action but also emotions. Intellectual and moral virtues, or strengths, are interdependent and they cannot operate without one another.

"If a life consists solely of philosophical contemplations or there is no place for philosophy at all, it is not a good life. A life focused solely on seeking enjoyment or on the ascetic denial of any enjoyment is not a good life either."

Inner growth is promoted through experience in two ways: the practice of virtues and a shared life.

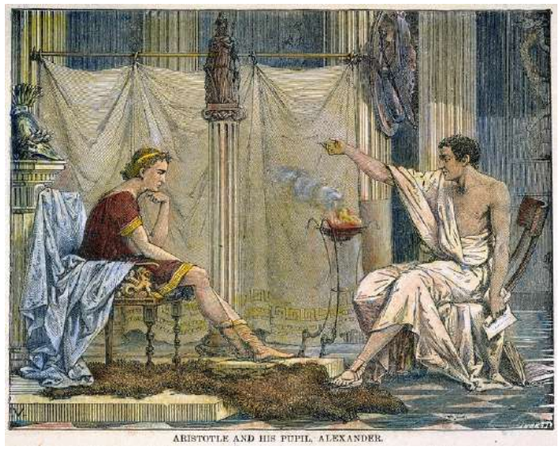
"Men become builders by building and lyre players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts ... . For if this were not so, there would have been no need of a teacher, but all men would have been born good or bad at their craft …"

For Aristotle, "doing" is not mindless, but is shaped and refined through time, allowing the individual to act from their accumulated reflection on experience. Reflection refines understanding, which informs practise the next time round. Memory plays a fundamental role in this cycle of growth: "It is from memory that men acquire experience, because the numerous memories of the same thing eventually produce the effect of a single experience."

Aristotle understands education as lasting a lifetime and entailing the idea of responsibility. One of the conditions of virtuous action is knowing what is chosen: "An act is not performed justly or with self-control if the act itself is of a certain kind, but only if [...] the agent know[s] what he is doing; [...] choose[s] to act the way he does, and [...] choose[s] it for its own sake; [...]" An action is virtuous when the person understands why the action is good, and chooses to do it with control over his or her own behaviour. Music, physics, or philosophy if conducted for pleasure, career, or profit and disconnected from nous as its moral purpose do not qualify as scholê, according to Aristotle.

Secondly, a good life is also a shared life. In a shared life virtue is learned through a community. Aristotle, then, doesn't propose a "self-help approach": inner growth is intrinsically collective. What is known of Aristotle's education of Alexander reveals that in the school at ancient Mieza, Alexander was not the only student. Education always has society as a reference point.

Man is by nature "political" because man by nature uses reason and can articulate what is good and just. A political community that is truly a community must have higher concerns than simply protecting the life, and material goods of each member. It must care about the



ARISTOTLE AND HIS PUPIL ALEXANDER.

Illustration by Charles Laplante, 1866.

good life: it must be concerned with the virtue and the moral education of its members. A political community is not just the collection of its members. It is a shared way of life sustained by the character of its members, a character formed by education.

Only through the realisation and exercise of virtues (happiness) can plurality be made into a unity. And it is unity, the polis, which provides the greatest opportunity for the attainment of happiness.

According to Aristotle, "political friendship", that which keeps the republic together, is a collective awareness of the common good, and cannot be separated from the realisation of the highest in the human being.

Even if the community is in a way responsible for the individual's education, this does not absolve the individual from their own responsibility for the development of their own character. According to Aristotle it is the power to wonder that drives human beings to find the causes of things, what is essential in them and therefore the best. As mentioned in the beginning, scholê is a sign of true freedom and is available to all citizens - except when it is deformed, something which Aristotle shows occurs often in tyrannies.

In much of Aristotle's theory and practice of education, such as in Plato's before him, we can find a timeless value, especially in the light of the challenges of today's world. They both warned us that education must be built upon the solid foundation of a philosophy of life. Education in this sense is not reduced to assisting students acquiring skills or titles. It is not something imposed from the outside.

We learn by doing and not by being forced to learn nor by simply listening to teachers. Human beings have the responsibility of forming their own individual and collective destinies. Education is an ethical activity: its goal is the transformation of human beings into virtuous individuals able to participate together, as citizens, in the governance of their collectivity. And together build a culture in which the highest and best part of the human being can flourish.

Giulia Giacco

Volunteering

an Education of the Citizen

What does it mean to volunteer? We associate it mostly with charitable acts, to do something positive, for which we receive nothing in return and that those actions should, in theory, help others. It is a valid perspective in itself but perhaps a little limited. If we are to look at volunteering in the philosophical sense we can uncover a whole other dimension of the concept and activity.

Firstly, the word itself has the most important key to understanding volunteering. Voluntas in Latin means Will, which tells us volunteering is an act of will. Indeed, a voluntary action should be, by its nature, something done by choice. So what motivates that choice? To what end do we act when we volunteer? Many ancient cultures suggested that Will was in fact the summit of human consciousness. The highest form of action is something that we choose to do because we think it is the right thing to do. Even better if it is something not only for us, but for the common good.

New Acropolis volunteers at the Portobello Canal, Dublin

In Hinduism they explained, thousands of years ago, the importance of Karma Yoga, also known as Right Action. To choose to act in accordance with timeless values (such as courage, generosity, compassion), regardless of how it may affect our personal comforts. This is deemed an essential element of our development and evolution. Without daring to do what we consider right, we will remain passive and easily swayed by the whims of the world around us.

Thus, such a practice of willing ourselves into action gives the human being a tremendous platform for experiencing life; adversity, testing our limits, being seemingly defeated but learning that we can be victorious. All by asserting our will over our instincts and desires, namely the desire for a comfortable life with no problems. It is this very desire that weakens us over time and leaves us fragile, dependent on externals to define and validate us. Philosophical volunteering increases confidence in ourselves and others.

For this reason, when we talk about volunteering, we shouldn't make the mistake of assuming we get nothing out of it. But more than just a warm and fuzzy feeling of being useful (which is nice, don't get me wrong) we gain something infinitely more valuable – we discover what we're made of. Entering into life willingly and doing things that are unfamiliar, uncomfortable and challenging enriches us with experiences we would have otherwise missed through unconscious conservativism. So it is antithetical to say volunteering needs to be selfless. Yes we should give without expectation but what are giving if not of the self? And how can we continue to be generous if we don't nurture and strengthen that inner self which we wish to share with the world?

This is how volunteering becomes educational. A true, holistic education should start to bring out the latent potential of a person, awakening the dormant abilities we aren't even aware of. This makes us better individuals, capable of contributing to a better world. Volunteering is an education of the citizen, an active member of the collective who is interested not only in their own development but in that of others around them. So education should always be practical, taking the theory of the classroom and applying it to the laboratory of life.

As an ethical practice, volunteering allows people to reinforce their timeless values and give meaning to their lives. Collectively, it improves human relations as we learn to live together better. In the historical context, the

citizen is a protagonist, a figure who takes responsibility for the times in which they live, and works actively in building the future. All this strengthens our commitments, something which, like responsibility, is often reviled today but which, we see more and more, is essential in the building of stable and happy lives.

The ancient Romans described a citizen as an individual capable of understanding and living their responsibility, one conscious of the collective and who can act for the common good. Being a citizen is more than just a status of naturalisation, it is a mindset, an attitude of how we treat each other and the world around us. We are citizens of our communities, of our countries, of the world and of nature itself. Volunteering should help us to connect with that mindset and the corresponding sentiment of unity. Karma Yoga is understood as an act of service, to make ourselves available for others and whatever needs to be done.

Karma Yoga is also referred to as intelligent action. In order to choose to put ourselves at the service of something we have to choose wisely. To help others, we have to see clearly the need and what can be done to help effectively, not just in a way that is convenient or appealing. Much charitable work now is unwittingly wrapped up in appearance, in the perception of doing good more than the quiet reality of doing something truly useful. Our material age places a high value on fundraising as the main avenue of meaningful contribution, so much so that an industry has risen up around trying to help others.

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New Acropolis volunteers on a Homeless Outreach in Dublin city

While money is clearly a useful criteria, alone it serves only a utilitarian function. At a human level we can offer more than cash. More than money, we need to be generous with our time. To stop and truly listen to each other. To give a moment to a stranger or a friend when we feel we haven't a second to spare. To give a kind word of encouragement to one who needs reassurance can be just as valid an act of Karma Yoga as any amount of material support. In some ways the material part is easier, the human part requires more effort, more presence, more consideration. That is what we can learn by being volunteers. We choose to be at the service of others, we Will ourselves into the world and challenge ourselves to be better, for ourselves and others.

As a school of philosophy in the classical tradition, this is the relationship New Acropolis has with volunteering. Being a non-profit, material solutions are not easily sourced but being an educational organisation modelled in the methods of the ancient schools, volunteering is practised as a means of discovering the best in ourselves by helping those who need it. Our worldwide network of volunteers, united by common values, engage in a vast range of activities; from ecological, to social, to cultural and civil protection.

New Acropolis volunteers planting trees in Co Leitrim

In New Acropolis Ireland we have developed a Homeless Outreach activity which is commissioned regularly, to fulfil a need sorely lacking – human contact. There's no denying that many good people are working tirelessly to provide material and psychological support for those living in our streets, the marginalised and the ignored. It remains the case however that the need is so great that any encounter between the homeless and most volunteers is fleeting. One homeless woman we encountered in our earliest outing explained, 'There's no danger of starving in the streets, but we're lonely.'

So to mobilise as a group we decided to not try and match the efforts of so many that are keeping those on the streets clothed and fed and instead, to simply visit the streets with some tea and coffee and see if we could visit with some homeless people for a chat. The remarkable thing that never ceases to amaze participants in this exercise is how grateful people are to just not be ignored, to be treated with dignity and spoken with as fellow human beings.

In theory it doesn't take much. A couple thermoses of tea and coffee, a few simple sandwiches just to break the ice. But to sit and meet with people in such dire circumstances is shocking to many who live comfortable and even pretty sheltered lives. To encounter such human suffering, to hear their stories and to not judge, nor to try and fix them but simply to be there and to listen with an open heart, is truly not an easy thing. But it's an incredibly important exercise to help us learn to listen without judgement and to connect with people from all walks of life. The citizen is capable of going beyond apparent barriers, seeing the distinctions we rely on as mostly appearance and illusion.

New Acropolis does not currently openly promote this activity, not out of any false humility but simply because it is not a promotional event. We do it as a voluntary action, with no expectation of a result. All our actions in the school, from the instructors giving classes to the students cleaning up their own classrooms afterwards, are an expression of this quality of the citizen - an active and dynamic spirit of service. It is not a result but a means which allows us to achieve more than we often think is possible. So what does it mean to volunteer? It means making a free and voluntary commitment to help those in need, where needed as an expression of solidarity, to relieve suffering and restore human dignity.

Aidan Murphy

The Philosophy of Education

In pursuit of the Wisdom in Education

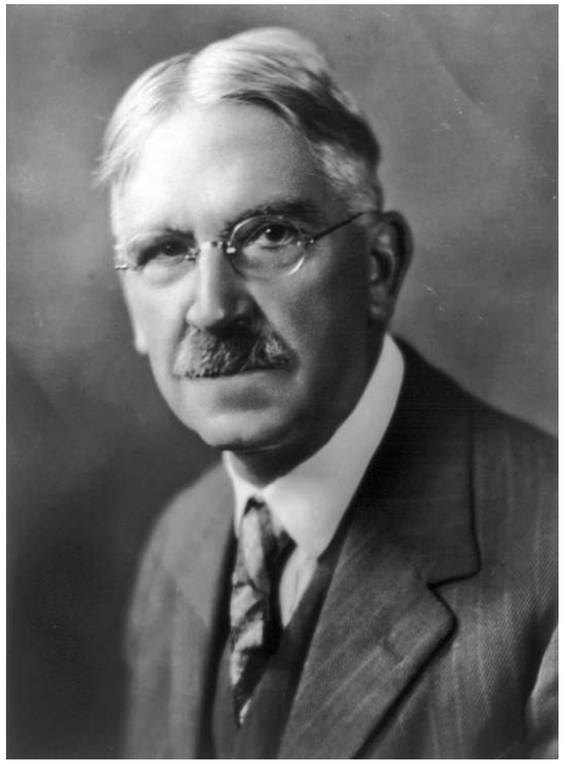
Napoleon once declared, “Of all political questions, education is perhaps the most important.” Undoubtedly, education is important from a political perspective because it has a major effect on the development of the citizen. But what about its value for the individual? Perhaps both of these facets are equally important and, as Aristotle pointed out, ethics is intrinsically linked to politics and vice versa.

What is education? Although the modern tendency is to focus on the technical and vocational aspects of learning, such a utilitarian goal is surely insufficient, since the human being is far more than a person who performs a job. What, then, is an educated person? Is it simply someone who has a lot of knowledge, or is there an ethical aspect to education? It is interesting that in the Spanish language ‘una persona educada’ means a polite person. So there is a cultural aspect to education as well, an aspect related to ‘character’ and also to morality.

For Confucius, there were four aspects in which a person should be educated: culture, moral conduct, wholehearted sincerity, and truthfulness. What is meant here by culture is two-fold: on the one hand, the intellectual aspect of learning, which broadens the mind and deepens the understanding; and on the other hand, the rules and customs of the society in which one lives. But for Confucius, culture without moral conduct is worth little or nothing, because it is moral conduct that defines the human being. Sincerity is a ‘heart virtue’, hence the epithet ‘wholehearted’: it is to be open, frank and authentic, the opposite of duplicitous, crafty and hypocritical. Finally, truthfulness implies a love of truth and therefore a deep-seated integrity.

In Confucius’s approach to education, one can see that not so much importance is given to practical knowledge. In one of the short conversations recorded in The Analects one of his students expressed an interest in learning farming, to which Confucius replied ‘I am not as good as an old farmer’. This shows Confucius’s humility, but also indicates that this was not a field of primary concern for his teaching. It is not that he despised practical knowledge, far from it, but for him the fundamental aspects of education are cultural, moral and philosophical.

If these are lacking, nothing will go right. A discerning and ethical intelligence must be our guide and the technical aspect will follow. What is the use of technical know-how if it is used for immoral purposes? There are countless examples in the modern world of technology being used for evil ends. This is well illustrated by the following letter which the head teacher of an American



John Dewey (1859-1952) was an American philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer.

high school used to send out to all his teachers at the beginning of each academic year:

Dear Teacher,

I am a concentration camp survivor.

My eyes have seen what no man ought to see:

Gas chambers built by educated engineers.

Children poisoned by trained doctors.

Babies killed by qualified nurses.

Women and babies executed and burnt by people with college diplomas and university degrees.

I do not trust education.

My request is as follows: help your pupils to become human beings. Your efforts must never produce trained monsters, qualified psychopaths or educated Eichmanns.

Reading, writing and arithmetic are only important if they help to make our children more human.

(Published in Le Monde – 29 April 1995)

> ...culture without moral conduct is worth little or nothing, because it is moral conduct that defines the human being... fundamental aspects of education are cultural, moral and philosophical. If these are lacking, nothing will go right.

For the American educationalist John Dewey, the social aspect of education is extremely important. The school should be a miniature community where the future citizen is prepared to become an active and committed citizen. We find a similar theme in some ancient writers, such as Plato, who also maintained (in The Republic) that a large part of what we now call primary and secondary education should be dedicated to the training of character.

However, Plato did not limit himself to the social aspect of education. He saw education as a progressive process that would lead to the unfolding of the best potentials within the human being. In his famous Allegory of the Cave, he suggested that the aim of human life is to emerge from the darkness of ignorance into the light of true knowledge; or, in his own words, ‘from a kind of twilight to true daylight’ (The Republic 521).

It is a reorientation of the mind towards what is most ‘utterly real’ (the Platonic ‘ideas’ or ‘forms’). In the Indian Upanishads, there is a similar phrase: “From delusion lead me to Truth. From darkness lead me to Light. From death lead me to immortality.” (Brihadāranyaka Upanishad ch. 1, pt. 3, v. 28).

In this view, education must rise above utilitarianism and

Image by rawpixel.com

lead the human being to spiritual realization. But in order to reach such a high goal, young people need to receive training in qualities such as self-control and appropriate self-expression. In Plato’s Republic a lot of emphasis is placed on physical training as a meaning of strengthening the character, while at the same time opening up the soul by exposure to the sciences and arts, which will develop gentleness of character and a love of truth, beauty and goodness.

To sum up, education is an art which should aim at the harmonious development of every side of human nature – physical, emotional, moral, intellectual and spiritual. While lip service is paid to this in many of our schools today, the reality is that the focus is on exam results (and future career prospects).

It is very difficult to change an entire educational system, but it is possible to introduce new models on a small-scale, like our own school of philosophy, where a more humanistic education, including character building, is valued more highly than academic grades, while at the same time giving the proper value to study and research as a way of broadening our minds, deepening our understanding and providing a never-ending inspiration on the path of life.

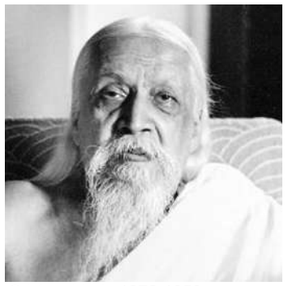
Julian Scott

Integral Education

An historical perspective of some recent challenges to the education status quo

Integral education is a popular term covering educational systems that focus not only on cognitive skills, but also on physical, vital, spiritual and psychological abilities. The idea of integral education is to provide a complex structure that can help to develop all aspects and all levels of the human being. Students who learn in this way are equipped with abilities that can be applied throughout their lives, no matter what kind of challenges they have to face.

Many integral schools are connected to Aurobindo Ghose and his collaborator, Mirra Alfassa (who was called 'The Mother'). Aurobindo, or Sri Aurobindo as his followers called him, was an Indian yogi and spiritual philosopher. He developed a spiritual practice called integral or supramental yoga, which was based on the idea that the Spirit manifests itself in a process of involution, in which it forgets its origin, followed by the reverse process, which is evolution. During human evolution, the spirit unfolds itself and yoga is a good support to aid this evolution since it makes it quicker. With the help of integral yoga it becomes possible to be aware of the Divine, and to integrate all aspects of the human being, from the physical to the spiritual level. This concept was described in his books The Synthesis of Yoga and The Life Divine.



Sri Aurobindo 1872-1950

Aurobindo used the term integral education in two ways: integral means the various aspects of the human being as mentioned above, but it also means the evolution of a nation or of humanity itself, which contains unity in diversity. In the West, where the focus in the educational systems is on mental and physical skills, the spiritual aspect is missing. To remedy this, the schools that use integral education give space to activities connected to all aspects of the human being.

They promote learning by doing and teaching by play instead of using just the 'classroom and chalk' method. The focus is on the potential and personal interest of the student, as each soul is a unique being with an evolutionary purpose. It develops original thinking so the student will be prepared for the upcoming challenges. It provides freedom for the students who are different in terms of background, learning abilities, etc.

There are also other systems of integral education apart from Aurobindo's. Rudolf Steiner's Waldorf schools and the Montessori schools also differ from mainstream educational institutions. While mainstream schools are based on a materialistic and mechanistic worldview, Steiner's and Montessori's pedagogic method is based on humanistic and spiritual roots. In North America, more integral approaches were championed by Dewey and Kilpatrick, while in Asia there were the value-based Indian methods, including the approaches of Aurobindo, Tagore or Vivekananda; in Europe, Steiner and Montessori were the pioneers of the integral or progressive pedagogies.

Maria Montessori 1870-1952

Steiner and Montessori were inspired by Theosophy, a 19th century movement founded by Helena Blavatsky, which aimed to unite the wisdom of East and West. Steiner's movement, which was called Anthroposophy, was founded in the 20th century and focused on the human aspect and the comprehensible spiritual world.

For this reason, in Steiner's Waldorf schools, imagination, intuition and inspiration are emphasised as tools which can be used to promote inner development and better understand spiritual experiences. According to

Mainstream education hasn't fundamentally changed in the past hundred years but some have brought new ways of engaging students and awakening human potential, rather than simply helping them pass exams. (Image by Wikimedia)

Steiner, the results of spiritual research should be expressed in the same way as the results of scientific research, because they are equally important and relevant. He positioned his movement and educational system between mysticism, which transcends rational and exact knowledge, and natural science, which only accepts that which can be perceived, so both have their own limits.

Steiner's approach towards the human is very similar to that of Aurobindo. He regarded the human being as a complex structure of the physical, etheric, astral and mental bodies and built into his system the concept of karma and reincarnation. Nowadays, there are more than 1,000 Waldorf schools around the world, in 60 countries.

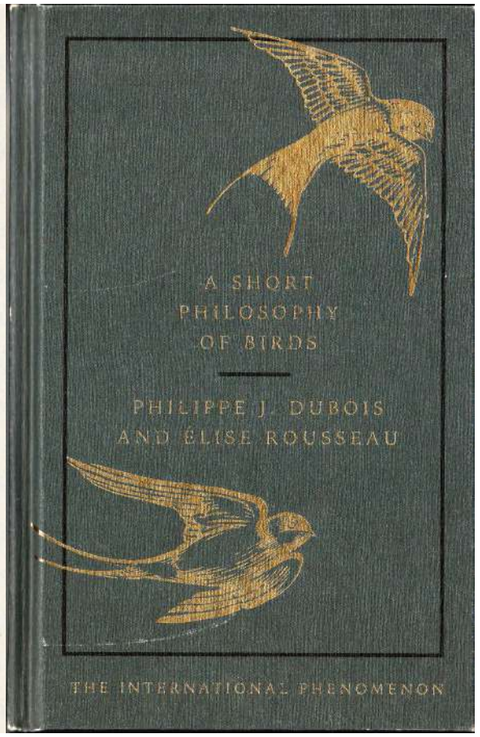
The Montessori school was founded by Maria Montessori and builds on the child's natural interests, emphasising their independence. In Montessori schools, there are mixed age groups, like 0-3, 3-6, 9-12, or 12-15. A class can be three hours long, so the students can become deeply involved in an activity and there is no rush. They often work with materials, such as wood, so they gain first-hand experience and practical skills as well as conceptual knowledge. In Montessori schools, the attitude, abilities and characteristics of the student are more important than the results.

Despite the growing number of alternative schools and the fact that these new methods have been in existence for over 100 years, mainstream schools haven't changed much in the above respects over the last century. And most schools are still using the old techniques to prepare the next generation for life. In these schools, the main goal is still results-based and concerned with the acquisition of the necessary skills and knowledge to become part of the utilitarian world we are living in today. However, as we progress into the 21st century, there are signs that this materialistic and very old-fashioned way of life is not sustainable. To build a different world, where people are in harmony with themselves and nature, of which they are a part, a different, more holistic approach is needed, and this gap can perhaps be filled by integral education.

Istvan Orban

Rudolph Steiner 1861 - 1925

Birds are perfectly in tune with the rhythms of nature, but how often are we aware of life's rhythms?



A Short Philosophy of Birds

By Elise Rousseau and Philippe J. Dubois

"In the twenty-first century, what lessons can birds still teach us? These creatures of the sky can guide us in all sorts of ways, helping us to reflect on our own lives, if only we take the time to observe theirs."

So reads the back blurb of 'A Short Philosophy of Birds' by Philippe J. Dubious and Élise Rousseau and there is much this book has to tell us through a collection of 22 short chapters about the world of birds seen through a philosophical landscape. Big mountainous torrains of morality, death, courage, love, beauty and sex are covered through the aerial (or flightless and grounded) views of the Avian experience and this allows the authors (one a ornithologist and writer, the other a philosopher and journalist) to bring fresh perspectives to our own human experience.

There are plenty of memorable insights into a species many will know little about or assume we have little in common with. The authors give reverend respect to the 'carpe diem' chicken with its ability to 'be in the moment' and enjoy the simple pleasure of a dust bath or to the vulnerable mallard duck, which each year becomes temporarily flightless during a period of moulting its feathers and must spend time hiding away from the world. With many of these stimulating anecdotes we are shown a world much more relatable to our own than we would have imagined.

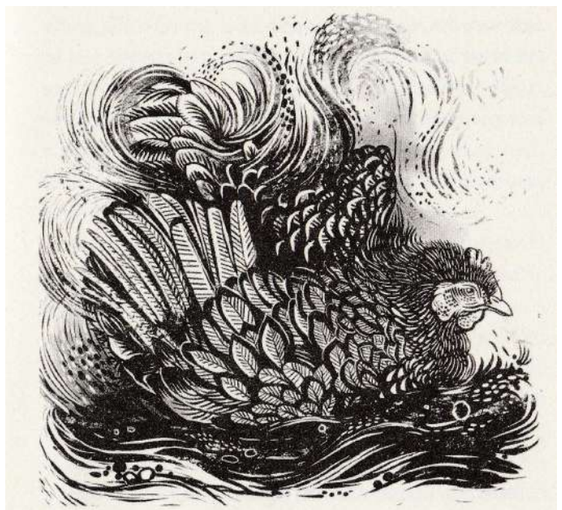
Perhaps those seeking dense philosophical musings or perhaps more detailed ornithological insight may be disappointed as what the book delivers feels more anecdotal than weighty investigation. This is not to take away from the book's impact (or research) as the lighter delivery and condensing down of complex philosophical themes and ornithology in order to let the reader reflect rather than intellectualise is the real success.

Self reflection really is the key to this book, as very quickly the reader realises that the metaphorical binoculars are not focused on the trees or hedgerows but on us as humans and how we act in relation to ourselves and the world around us. A point that pops up a few times within the book and saves it from too much flight of fancy is that birds don't care for philosophy and it is only us humans that are burdened with the mind to do so.They highlight that; 'Living in the moment as they do, they have little need to achieve self-control and renounce

Self reflection really is the key to this book, as very quickly the reader realises that the metaphorical binoculars are not focused on the trees or hedgerows but on us as humans and how we act in relation to ourselves and the world around us.

desire' or 'birds don't think about their death, they have the good luck to not be able to conceive of it and intellectualise'. This does not mean, as the book also points out, that they do not know when their time has come, telling us that birds often find a quiet place in order to die and thus show us a poignant example of the humble acceptance of nature's cycles and laws.

Keeping the reflection also grounded in the book is the authors' awareness that even though we may see many virtues within some bird behaviour for philosophical inspiration, what is ultimately at play is evolution and its more utilitarian approach in which they state; 'In the animal kingdom the ultimate aim is to produce as many descendants as possible, and to expend as little energy as possible doing so.' This reminder of nature's more



Chickens know a thing or two about the simple pleasures of basking in the moment.

By molting its feathers each year, the duck shows us how to embrace our vulnerability.

systematic character however strengthens their defence of the machiavellian pursuits of the Cuckoo, where by not 'laying its eggs in one basket' they mitigate against predators wiping out their batch of eggs in one go thus increasing the offspring's chance of survival. They continue by pointing out that the 'laws of nature operate outside any judgement of what is good or evil.' Thus birds can help us to question some of our assumptions about what we consider to be right or wrong.

And it's man's responsibility of what is right in which we are brought back to in the end. The book ominously points out that we have our foot on the accelerator in terms of mass extinction of both birds and humans alike if we do not learn to live within the overall ecosystem of mother nature. Through evolution we have been gifted greater intellects but ironically this has often led us away from intelligent behaviour towards those desires of the ego we find hard to self control or renounce ourselves.

This brings to mind the film director Werner Herzog who infamously says in an interview that 'when you try to look a chicken in the eye… the intensity of stupidity that is looking back at you is just amazing'. Perhaps Philippe J. Dubious and Élise Rousseau may argue that if the acceleration continues to the point of ecological collapse, one may not have to look at a chicken to come face to face with stupidity.

Paul Savage

**Illustrations pictured in this article feature throughout the book and are by Joanna Lisowiec.*

Advertisement

Philosophy for Living Course

Philosophy means love of wisdom (philo-sophia) and is an active attitude of awareness towards life. In this sense, we are all born philosophers, with an innate need to ask questions and with the intuition that there are answers to be found. Every civilisation has passed on to us its experience and understanding of life. However, most of us have had little opportunity to learn about the vast heritage of ideas that have inspired and guided humanity throughout history. 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. This 16 week course will introduce you to major concepts of Eastern and Western Philosophy and explore their relevance and practical application for our lives.

Course Framework

Ethics: Understanding Yourself

Ethics enquires about moral principles and the impact of individuals on their environment. But also related to happiness, as it helps us to find the right "inner attitude" to deal with different life situations in ways that are beneficial to ourselves and others.

Sociopolitics: To live with others in solidarity

Relationships in society, both between the individuals and between the individual and the group. Finding principles by which we can create harmonious communities where everyone can flourish.

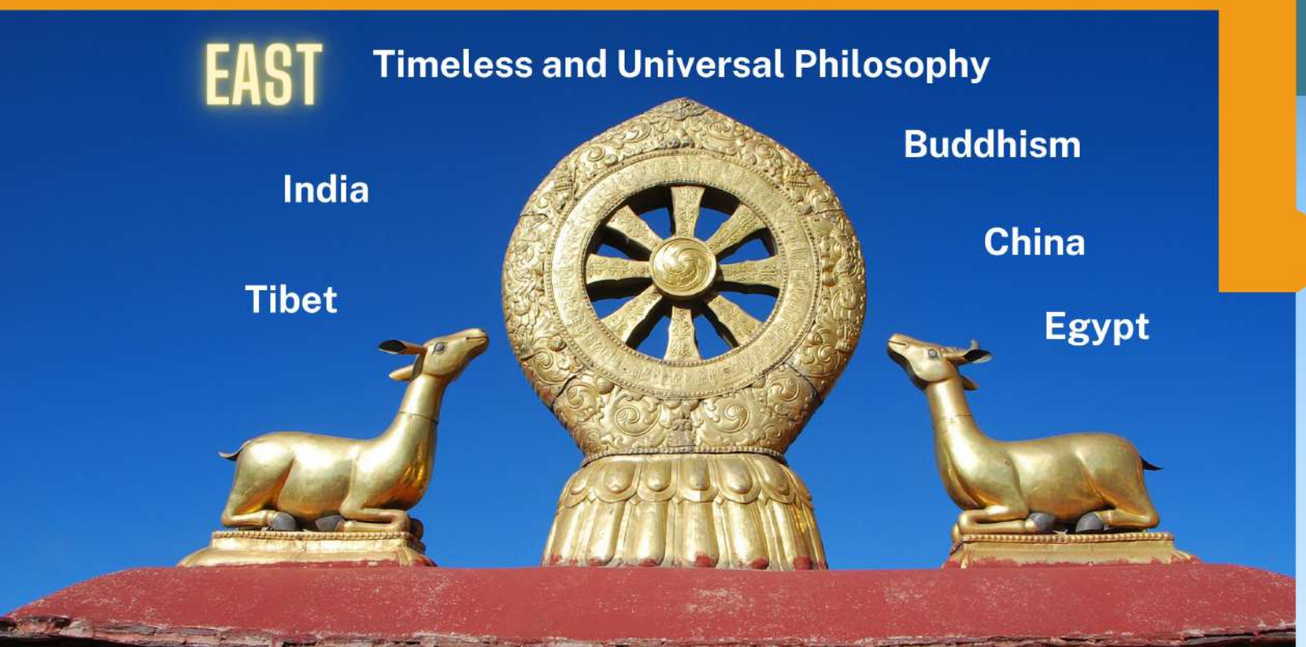
Philosophy of History: Building the future

We are all products of history and at the same time we all contribute to making history. Philosophy of History seeks wisdom in the study of the past and how to apply the lessons of history to the present.

Philosophy for Living: Practical Application

What is the value of thinking without action? Action is the real measurement of what we are, theory and practice inform each other. Each course evening will explore the practical relevance of philosophy and its potential to transform ourselves and society.

Course Framework



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