

The Acropolis

Philosophy for today

Includes:
The Cynics
The Holy Grail
Göbekli Tepe
Marvin Gaye



Free please take

Art - Culture - History - Philosophy and more



April 2024 - Issue 17



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 century of the selfish self

“A hundred years ago a new theory about human nature was put forth by Sigmund Freud. He had discovered he said, primitive and sexual and aggressive forces hidden deep inside the minds of all human beings. Forces which if not controlled led individuals and societies to chaos and destruction.”

Freud's American nephew, Edward Bernays, took up his uncle's ideas in the 1920s and used them to manipulate the masses. For the first time, he showed American companies how to make people want things they didn't need, by linking mass-produced goods to their unconscious desires. From this emerged a new political idea of mass control. By satisfying people's selfish desires, we make them happy and therefore docile. This was the beginning of the all-consuming "I" that has come to dominate our world.

Thus, was born in the United States the consumer society that subsequently spread across the globe, regardless of the political ideology of individual countries.

Before the First World War, most people bought what they needed and looked for durable products. Bernays succeeded in convincing people that their desires had to take precedence over necessities in order to achieve greater well-being. Thus was born the consumer ego.

So, to sell a product, we don't appeal to the buyer's reason but make them feel better by owning a particular type of car, for example. The emotional connection to a product or service creates new needs. The product, promoted over time thanks to brands, allows the individual to express his character, his personality and thus become more attractive and more appealing. Initially, the aim was to control the population by convincing them to be like everyone else and to adapt to society's demands and mores.

In the 60s and 70s, new gurus such as Wilhelm Reich and the philosopher Herbert Marcuse appeared, challenging these rather conformist theories of society. They advocated expressing the ego, particularly through the libido, rather than repressing and controlling it to adapt to the outside world and follow its norms.

The concept of individualism is thus introduced, and everything converges towards personal satisfaction and well-being to the detriment of the collective interest. Paradoxically, individualism gives rise to an isolated ego that is even more vulnerable and greedy, and therefore even more manipulable. The self-complacent ego will emerge, where all moral judgement will be linked to personal satisfaction. The self becomes a slave to its desires but with the feeling of being free because it chooses what it consumes. The citizen becomes a consumer-actor.

As I wrote recently, this evolution has accelerated and increased with the explosion of social media, which have formatted the dispersed self in most of the population,

suppressing attention and bringing even more superficiality, hyperactivity and nomadism, particularly in the behaviour of new generations, but not only.

We have reached the peak of the cycle of the consumer society that shapes the personal egos of individuals, removing their awareness of the collective and the general interest. Everyone defends their beliefs, without seeking dialogue with those who don't think like them.

At the margins of this phenomenon are those seeking a paradigm shift back to what is really needed today: sobriety/moderation, cooperation, justice and education. These aspirations are becoming increasingly prevalent in all strata of society.

At all times of moral crisis and change, the Schools of Philosophy, as they have demonstrated in the past and throughout history, have been and still are extremely useful in reconciling human beings with themselves and returning to what is essential, which is, as anthropology has shown, to aspire to the true happiness of sharing with others, beyond differences.

Awakening the self of solidarity is the challenge of our time.

Fernand Schwarz
Founder of New Acropolis, France

Over the course of 2024, The Acropolis Magazine will publish and distribute four quarterly editions delving into many essential aspects of culture and society.

We believe a healthy society is one that is educated, diverse and open to ideas and timeless values. With this in mind, the magazine is a publication outlet for our members who wish to use this medium as an opportunity to research and explore various themes, topics and reflections in life.

All articles in the magazine are contributions by members of New Acropolis. Research and views expressed in each article are those of the individual authors and may not represent the collective views of New Acropolis.

We hope you enjoy!

Editorial Team

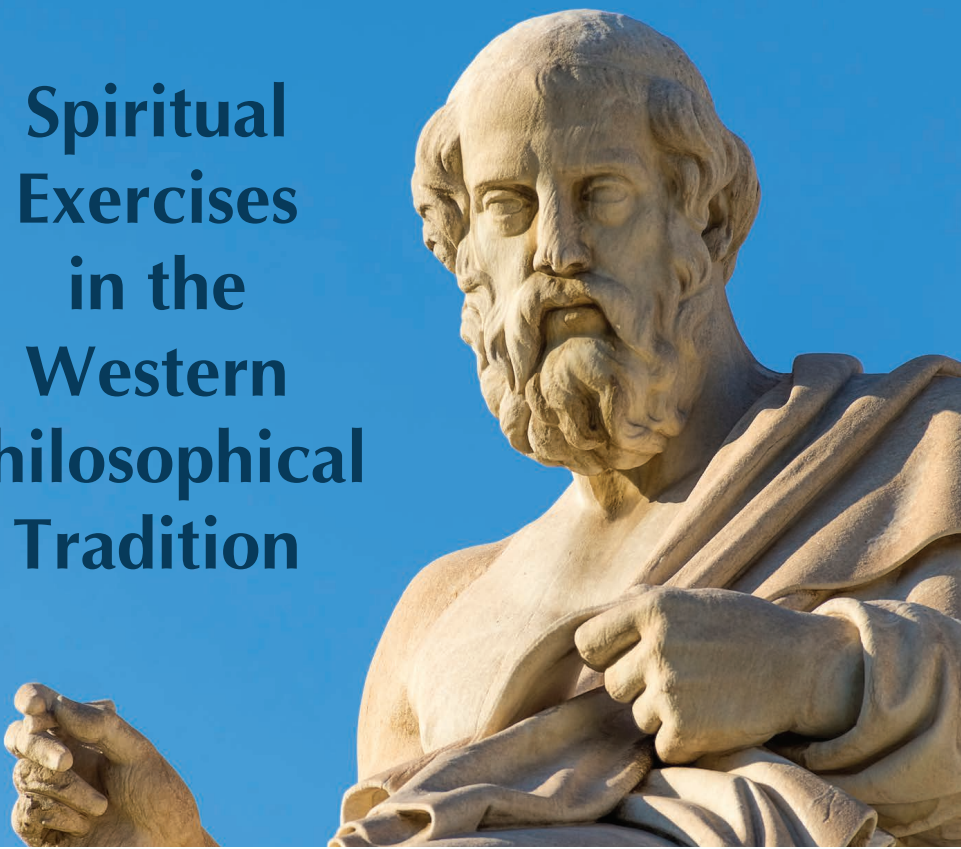
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Tim Leahy – Contributor

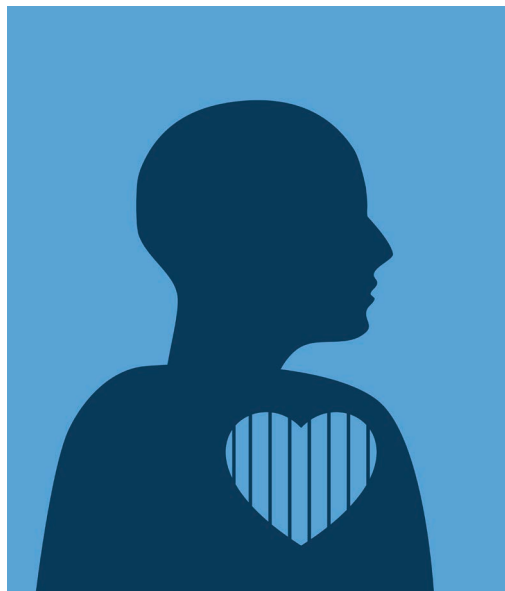
Spiritual Exercises in the Western Philosophical Tradition



Although modern philosophy is mainly an intellectual pursuit, it has had an immense impact on the shaping of our world. The philosophy of Francis Bacon (1561 – 1626) was largely responsible for the current scientific worldview and the explosion of technology; Auguste Comte (1798 – 1857) schematized the foundations of a theory of linear progress in history that has dominated the Western worldview since the 19th century to this day; and the philosophies of Hobbes (1588 – 1679) and Hume (1711 – 1776) promoted the idea of a lack of free will in human beings, whom they saw as being at the mercy of their passions, an idea which also continues to be prevalent nowadays.

But modern philosophy has not been seen as a method for the transformation of the human being; in other words, it cannot save us from our unruly passions and convert us into serene sages at one with ourselves and the universe. In the world of ancient Greece and Rome, however, this was precisely the goal of philosophy: not only the transformation of our vision of the world, but also the metamorphosis of our personality, as French philosopher Pierre Hadot has expressed. As such, a transformation is no easy matter, all the Greco-Roman philosophical schools had a series of what Hadot calls “spiritual exercises” to achieve this aim.

What is the meaning of spiritual exercises? The term probably originates in the exercitia spiritualia of St Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuit religious order in the 16th Century. But Ignatius himself developed these exercises on the basis of early Christian philosophy, which in turn derived from the exercises already existing in the philosophical schools of antiquity, where they were referred to under the general term askesis, from which we have the word “asceticism”. The Greek and Roman spiritual exercises were not exclusively “ascetic” in the modern sense, however, as we shall see. This modern meaning of the word ‘asceticism’ arose from a Christian, mainly monastic application of the concept.



One of the main exercises in all philosophical schools was therefore to practise “disidentifying” (to use a modern term) from our senses and freeing ourselves from what they called the “slavery of the desires”

So what were the spiritual exercises of the ancient philosophical schools, and would they still be useful for a spiritual seeker of today?

For the ancients, the chief cause of suffering and disorder in man and the world were the passions (anger, greed, lust, etc.). Consequently, philosophy was seen as a therapy for the passions and its aim was to bring about a state of calm in the human soul. Consequently, one of the main spiritual exercises was to cultivate this inner calm. How did they propose to achieve it? First of all, by transforming the way we see the world. Ordinarily, we give great importance to the acquisition of wealth and fame. Our society today is still based on such criteria. But as Socrates says in *The Apology* (Plato’s account of the trial and death of Socrates): “Are you not ashamed that you give your attention to acquiring as much money as possible, and similarly with reputation and honour, and give no attention or thought to truth or thought, or the perfection of your soul?”



Socrates remained calm, cheerful and even humorous, both in court and as he awaited death in his prison cell. The Death of Socrates, oil on canvas by Jacques-Louis David, 1787

To counteract this tendency in the human being, Plato proposed philosophy as a “training for death”. In other words, in the knowledge that we will all die some day, we should prepare ourselves to live without a body, and this would mean dedicating ourselves to the intangible things of the soul.

One of the main exercises in all philosophical schools was therefore to practise “disidentifying” (to use a modern term) from our senses and freeing ourselves from what they called the “slavery of the desires”, which forces us to act in ways we don’t actually want to. The Platonic exercise par excellence consisted in “separating the soul as much as possible from the body and accustoming itself to... concentrate itself until it is completely independent.” (Socrates himself was an excellent example of such detachment, showing an ability to withstand heat and cold, pleasure and pain, while he pursued his philosophical investigations within himself, as we find described in Plato’s Symposium).

A further fruit of this training is that it enables the philosopher to free himself from his subjective points of view (which result from his subjection to his personal likes and dislikes, fears and desires) and rise to a more objective and universal perspective. This also helps us to see things in proportion: if you realise that as individuals and even as humanity, we are only a tiny and fairly insignificant part of reality, then we will not be so fazed by all the joys, sorrows and vicissitudes of human existence.

This attitude results from another type of spiritual exercise, which is the meditation on the nature of reality and one’s own place in it. Unlike many of the modern philosophers, the ancients did not think of such meditation as a purely intellectual exercise, since it must also be practised in everyday situations in order to be

validated. These philosophers were not “armchair thinkers”: Socrates, for example, was tried in court and sentenced to death. He remained calm, cheerful and even humorous, both in court and as he awaited death in his prison cell. And Plato was once sold into slavery (but subsequently ransomed by a friend). None of them had an easy life, and philosophy was often compared to the training that athletes had to undergo in order to compete in the Olympic games. Indeed, in ancient Greece, philosophy was actually taught in the gymnasium.

Philo of Alexandria, a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher of the 1st century BC, made a list of different spiritual exercises used in the philosophical schools of his time. These included: thorough investigation, reading, meditations, listening, attention, self-mastery, indifference to indifferent things, therapies of the passions, remembrance of good things and accomplishment of duties.

The Stoic philosophers particularly recommended continuous vigilance and presence of mind, a self-awareness that never sleeps, and concentration on the present moment. They, and other schools before and after them, recommended reflecting at the beginning of the day on what awaited them and how they would respond to it; followed by an examination of conscience at the end of the day in order to pursue a path of continual self-improvement. Some schools also recommended examining one’s dreams, and even controlling them, as well as preparing oneself for sleep by calming the passions and awakening the rational faculty with “excellent discourses”.

In short, we can see that all these exercises were a natural part of “philosophy as a way of life”. They recognise the mind of man and its importance – the need to think things through for ourselves – as well as the need for regular practice and implementation of our moral values and principles, and the need to see ourselves as part of a greater whole which is governed by a “universal reason” or intelligence.

The Neoplatonist philosopher Plotinus (204/5 – 270 A.D.) described three stages of the philosophical path towards what he called The Good (the highest good that man can conceive): “We are instructed about it by analogies, negations... (the thinking-understanding process). We are led towards it by purifications, virtues... (virtue seen as a means of detaching ourselves from the senses) and ascents into the intelligible world” (the mystical states of ecstasy experienced by Plotinus himself).

These spiritual exercises are truly timeless and can definitely be practised with beneficial results today. They allow us to rise up to the “life of the objective spirit”, as Pierre Hadot puts it, while keeping our feet on the ground, improving ourselves day by day and maintaining an increasingly strong sense of connection with the rest of nature and the universe, of which we are a part.

Julian Scott

The Green Sahara



The Sahara Desert is renowned as the largest warm weather desert globally, characterised by its harsh and unforgiving environment. Ranking as the third largest desert overall, following the polar deserts of the Arctic and Antarctica, its vast expanse spans approximately 3.5 million square miles, nearly equivalent to the contiguous United States. Like all deserts, its borders fluctuate with the seasons, expanding during the dry summer months and contracting in the wetter winter season. Stretching from the Red Sea and the Mediterranean in the east and north respectively, to the Atlantic Ocean in the west, the Sahara Desert spans eleven countries: Algeria, Morocco, Chad, Egypt, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Sudan, Tunisia, and Western Sahara.

According to Martin Williams, author of *When The Sahara Was Green*, the Sahara we know today was once vastly different, resembling a green Savannah - a grassy plain with few trees. This transformation from Savannah to desert is attributed to the cyclical changes in the Earth's axis tilt occurring approximately every 20,000 years.

This climatic shift forced civilizations to migrate, leading to significant developments in the history of North Africa, particularly in Egypt.

A pivotal archaeological find in this region was made in Uan Muhuggiag, nestled in Libya's Acacus mountains. In 1958, excavations led by Dr. Fabrizio Mori of the University of Rome unearthed the mummified body of a two-and-a-half-year-old boy in a rock shelter which began known as the Tashwinat mummy. Contrary to common belief that mummification originated in Egypt, this discovery challenged that notion, with radiocarbon dating revealing the mummy to predate Egypt's earliest known mummies by a millennium.

Further analyses conducted in 1958-1959, encompassing anthropological, radiological, historical, and chemical assessments, identified the mummy as having Negroid features. Subsequent laboratory examinations in 2013 confirmed the child's dark complexion. Pathologist Antonio Ascenzi's research theorised that



The most noteworthy find at Uan Muhuggiag is the well-preserved mummy of a young boy of approximately 2+1/2 years old, known as the Tashwinat mummy. -Wikimedia

dating back to 7500-5000 BC indicates a wetter climate, with tropical plants expanding northward around 12,000 years ago.

In modern times, the Sahara faces accelerated desertification due to global warming, prompting initiatives like the Green Wall project. Launched in 2007 by the African Union, this ambitious endeavour aims to combat desertification by planting trees across an 8000-kilometre stretch from Dakar to Djibouti. As of 2023, about 18 million hectares or 18% of the target had been restored. The project seeks to reclaim millions of hectares of arid land, mitigate carbon emissions, and provide livelihoods for millions while fostering biodiversity. In the words of Irish president Michael D. Higgins

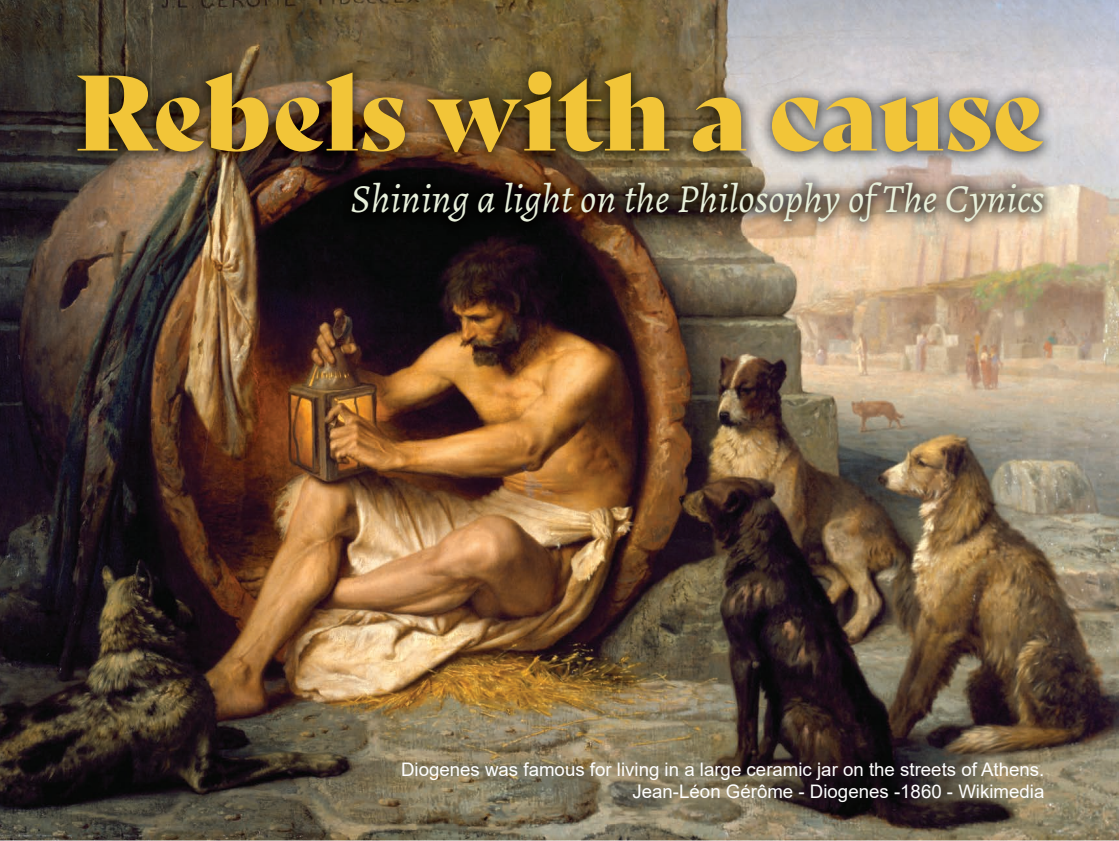
"With its capacity to unite nations and communities in solidarity, the Great Green Wall represents the best kind of international cooperation that will be required in this century."

If the project continues and with renewed global collective effort to reduce our carbon use, perhaps future generations will look upon a much changed and new green Sahara.

David Murtagh

Rebels with a cause

Shining a light on the Philosophy of The Cynics



Diogenes was famous for living in a large ceramic jar on the streets of Athens.
Jean-Léon Gérôme - Diogenes -1860 - Wikimedia

"I am a citizen of the world"

"Wealth consists not in having great possessions, but in having few wants."

Diogenes of Sinope

The Cynics have been described as philosopher rebels. Founded by Antisthenes in Athens, a disciple of Socrates, and further developed by Diogenes of Sinope, the Cynic school of philosophy challenged many societal norms and conventions of their time. However they did not rebel out of a juvenile response against authority but out of a concern for their fellow citizens, who they thought were living according to values that enslaved them rather than to awaken the best within them.

To understand the Cynics, we must place them in the context of their time, which was ancient Greece primarily flourishing during the 4th and 3rd centuries BCE. The Cynic school of philosophy emerged at a time when there was great social turmoil. In the book *Greek Praise of Poverty* by William D. Desmond, he describes this time as "an age of kings, fluctuating empires, mercenary warfare, exile and massive emigration to places as far as Afghanistan, and new exposure to a swarm

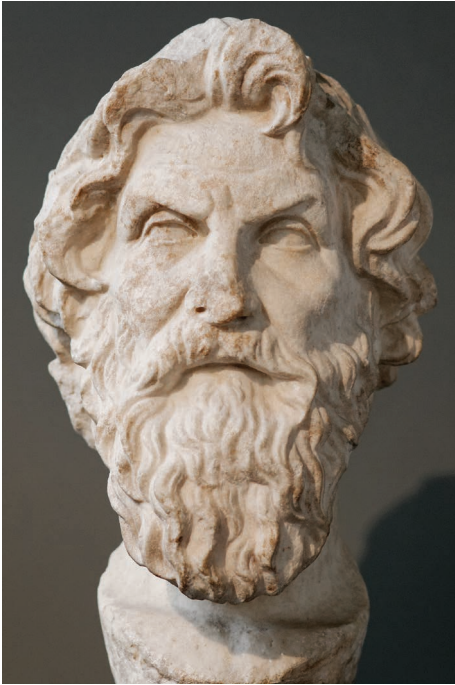
of foreign customs, beliefs and gods - in such conditions, the city-state lost its hold upon the individual". So the Cynic movement reacted against this destabilising force which caused a sense of alienation in the Greek polis. Desmond names another theory for the social turmoil, "where the commercial ethos has undermined tradition and even brought about the monetization of culture...the value of friendship, honour, patriotism and learning is measured in coin like any commodity and human relations are reduced to mere cash-relations." Oscar Wilde summaries this notion well in one of his quotes "Nowadays people know the price of everything and the value of nothing." During this time, the existing hierarchy of values were changing and focusing more on or exclusively on material wealth, social status and political power which were starting to undermine the social fabric of society. It was in this environment that the Cynics formulated their distinctive practical philosophy for life.

**"Nowadays
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Oscar Wilde

The word "cynic" originates from the ancient Greek word, which means "dog-like" or "of dogs." The term was first used to describe the followers of the Greek philosopher Antisthenes who lived a simple and ascetic lifestyle akin to that of dogs. They were seen as indifferent to luxury and material possessions and over time, the term "cynic" has come to refer to someone who is sceptical or critical of societal conventions and norms, often with a pessimistic outlook on human nature. Nevertheless the Cynics were not pessimistic about the inner nature of the human being which they thought could flourish when living a life in harmony with virtue.

Diogenes was famous for his statement, "I am a citizen of the world". What he meant by this was that he identified with humanity as a whole rather than any particular city or state. This statement reflects his philosophical stance of cosmopolitanism, which emphasises the idea of belonging to the entire world rather than being tied to one specific geographical or political entity. Diogenes lived in a time when Greek city-states were often in conflict with each other, and there was a strong sense of loyalty to one's own city or polis. By declaring himself a citizen of the world, he was rejecting narrow tribal loyalties and embracing a broader sense of kinship



Antisthenes, founder of the Cynic school. Marble, Roman copy after a lost Hellenistic original. Wikimedia

with all people, regardless of nationality or ethnicity. This philosophy reflects an early recognition of the common humanity shared by all individuals, regardless of their cultural or political differences. It is the ability to learn from each other and at the same time enrich ourselves from our differences that each group can bring to the whole.

The Cynics criticised the Greek civilisation but they did not advocate a return to a pre-civilised state or to abandon it. They thought that through their example they could inspire their fellow citizens to reflect on the nature of the good life. Through their use of satire, the Cynics aimed to provoke reflection and encourage people to question their assumptions about the nature of happiness, virtue and the good life. They sought to promote a simpler, more authentic way of living in accordance with nature. But what does it mean to live life in accordance with

nature? What the Cynics meant by this was to live life in harmony with the natural principles of life. The principles of life are those things that bring an underlying intelligent dynamic order to the cosmos, that brings a purpose and direction in life. In Indian philosophy it is called Dharma, in Chinese philosophy it is called the Tao and in the Greek world it is referred to as the Logos. Science looks at the physical manifestations of these principles but the Cynics were focused on how to live a life according to them, which was reflected in their ethical system. All ancient ethical systems had a telos in mind, a practical goal and the Cynics with many other schools of ancient philosophy agree that the goal was happiness (*eudaimonia*). By living in accord with virtues or timeless principles aided in the inner construction of character to face life. The virtues that the Cynics extolled were simplicity, self-sufficiency, endurance and freedom which were all connected and interdependent.

For them, simplicity was embracing a lifestyle devoid of superfluous material belongings, cravings, and dependencies, they spurned the quest for riches, opulence, and societal acclaim, perceiving them as impediments to the pursuit of genuine living. The Oracle at Delphi declared “*Nothing in excess*” but for the Cynics it was rather a deliberate choice to live minimally, their rejection of material possessions was rooted in their view that excessive attachment led to anxiety, distraction and discontentment. The Cynic Crates captures the sentiment well



An 18th century CE painting showing Diogenes of Sinope looking for an honest man (Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein - Nagel Auktionen)

when he said “It is better to have a little, and to be grateful for it, than to have a lot, and be discontented with it.” While some Cynics, like Diogenes of Sinope, lived in extreme poverty and simplicity, it wasn't a universal requirement of their philosophy. It was about finding the measure in life of what is proper to us and what dignifies us. It is about being more before wanting to have more.

Self-sufficiency, known as *autarkeia* in Greek, denoted individuals' capacity to depend on themselves for their well-being, irrespective of external factors or influences. This does not mean that they did not have a concern for others but that they did not depend on others for recognition or approval. This gives an inner freedom so that we are better able to respond to the needs of others.

To embrace the Cynic lifestyle, individuals needed to become accustomed to enduring the diverse physical as well as the mental challenges. This demanded a lifestyle of continual discipline, known as *askesis*. This term is a form of self-training which also denotes "exercise" or "practice," borrowed from athletic endeavours. Rather than conditioning the body solely for overall physical well-being, the Cynic undertook physical training with the soul's advancement as the primary objective. Cynic training offers numerous examples: Antisthenes extolled labour and adversity as virtues; Diogenes of Sinope traversed snow barefoot, embraced icy statues, and endured scorching summer sands within his barrel. Viktor Frankl, Austrian psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, proposed that suffering can be transformed into

By confronting and transcending suffering, individuals can discover profound insights about themselves and their place in the world.

a source of meaning if it is approached with a sense of purpose and resilience. By confronting and transcending suffering, individuals can discover profound insights about themselves and their place in the world. The Stoics and many other schools of philosophy explain that it is in the small challenges of daily life that we can learn and find the most meaning without having to resort to climbing Mount Everest or travelling the world. Just that they are small does not mean they can't be difficult. Why do we leave things to the last moment, avoid difficult conversations, allow the cold to affect our mood? and so on. All these daily experiences can reveal a great deal about who we are and these small challenges of daily life are the training ground to become more resilient.

With the development of simplicity, self-sufficiency and endurance, a state of freedom arises within. It was both a freedom from and a freedom to. It is the freedom from social conventions, material possessions, and desires that hinder one's ability to live in accordance with nature. It is also the freedom to invigorate ourselves to be ourselves. So their views on freedom was to live to be and not to live to have. They don't say not to have things, but not to place our sense of worth and value in them, as things come and go and are not lasting, they are not a sound foundation to build a meaningful life as to find meaning entails going beyond the physical and emotional impressions of things. It is not to disregard all social conventions either but to examine which ones have merit and which ones are a form of distraction, a distraction from ourselves.

Diogenes was famous for living in a large ceramic jar on the streets of Athens, an extreme expression of living a life of simplicity. We do not have to follow the radical example of Diogenes living in a jar on the streets of our cities or towns but the Cynics have valuable insights for life today. They suggest to question the values that we have inherited from our society today, are they making us happy, do they make us better or enslave us, have we lost our freedom without realising it, does our society make us stronger to face the natural adversity of daily life or to keep us in a psychological comfortable state of inertia? These are questions that the Cynics shout loud from the streets and they encourage us, and sometimes chastise us, to reflect and go beyond the superficial appearances of things.

Michael Ward

Knowing what must be done
does away with fear.

Rosa Parks





Into the mystic

Exploring the myth of the Holy Grail

The Grail, or Holy Grail, is one of the greatest mysteries in the history of the Western civilization. It emerged from apparently nowhere in the 12th century. It thrived until the 16th century with all its symbolic richness and power, in literary and artistic form, as part of the Arthurian mythos. It re-emerged again in modern times.

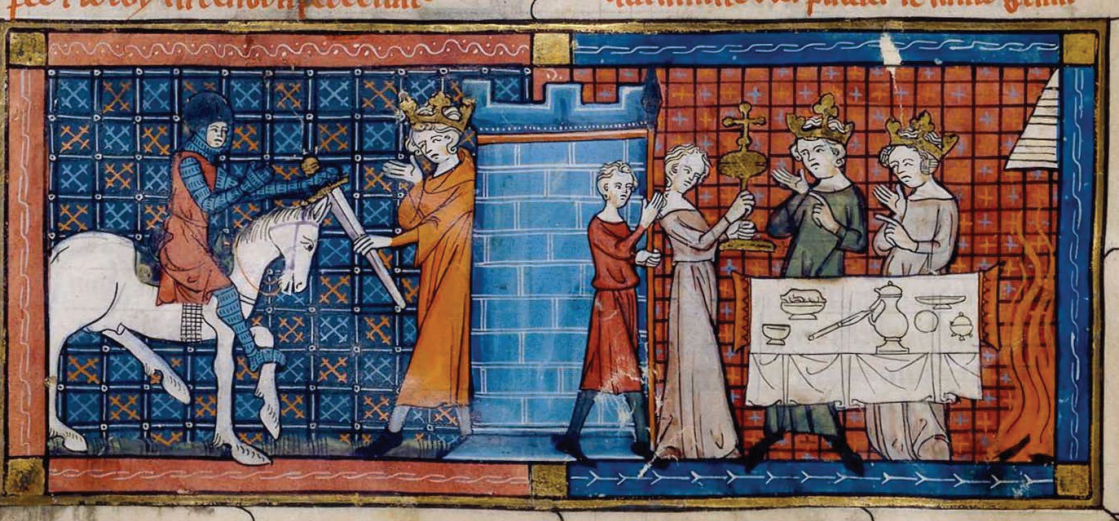
Most scholars trace the origins of the Grail legend to either Celtic and Welsh myths, Christian symbolism surrounding the Eucharist, eastern traditions, or a combination of these, and other sources. It is conceived or described as a chalice, cup or dish; as a precious stone, or a spear; it has also been identified with a special person or being, or a royal bloodline. It is understood as something or someone that can provide healing powers, immortality, eternal youth, unlimited nourishment. It's in essence a deep mystery, and the goal of a great quest - in literary, symbolic and philosophical sense - whose completion accords miraculous gifts to those who see the pursuit through to the end.

Etymologically, the word “grail” seems to derive from the Old French *grail*, connected to the Latin word *gradalis*, a cup or platter. The Latin word is borrowed from the ancient Greek *krater*, associated with a sort of container used to mix wine with water. Over time, *grail* was used to refer to a broad platter in which food was brought to the table at various stages to serve the next meal on the menu during feasts. Interestingly, the Latin word *gradale*, means “in stages, gradually”.

The famous French poet and troubadour Chretien de Troyes (c. 1135 – c. 1185) was the first to introduce and connect in literary form the grail to the Arthurian legend – the collection of tales revolving around the figure of King Arthur, his court, and his knights of the round table, emerging in the High Middle Ages. Chretien's *Perceval, or the Story of the Grail* introduces the first Grail Knight in the mythos. *Perceval* will be the first of those knights whose lives will come to be defined by the Grail Quest. It's interesting, again, to take the time to investigate the etymology of his name. It seems to derive from the Old French *per ce val* (“through this valley”) or *perce val* (“pierce the valley”). Both expressions convey the idea of journey, crossing, going through or penetrating.

In the poem, *Perceval of Wales* has been raised by his mother in the woods, in innocence and seclusion. One day, *Perceval* encounters a group of knights, and

The mysterious object, with its powers and the esoteric ritual surrounding it;...the Grail acquired even more magical and mysterious qualities, lying beyond the mere ability of rationality and of language to capture and describe it.



Perceval arrives at the Grail Castle to be greeted by the Fisher King in an illustration for a 1330 manuscript of Perceval, the Story of the Grail. - Wikimedia

is entranced by this vision. Discovering their identity and their chivalric calling, he immediately realises his own vocation and rides off to Camelot to seek his destiny. His mother, weeping in despair because chivalric combat had led to the death of her father and brothers, gives Perceval some personal and spiritual advice.

In his first attempts at becoming a knight, we discover that Perceval is quite self-centred, awkward, and tactless. He is concerned only with being immediately made a knight, caring very little for the suffering and dilemmas of those he encounters. However, Perceval trains consistently and displays an impressive natural talent. He kills the Red Knight who had been troubling King Arthur, takes the knight's vermilion armour, and sets out, looking for adventures.

On his travels, Perceval meets the Fisher King (Le Roi Pêcheur) by a river. The Fisher King belongs to a long line of protectors of the Grail. He has suffered a wound to his groin and has been rendered immobile and impotent. He is therefore incapable of carrying out his responsibilities or fathering a son to assume the task after him. The King's plight is also reflected in the tragic condition of his kingdom which has become an infertile and barren wasteland. The King can barely walk, so he spends his time fishing in the river near his castle, Corbenic, while he awaits a mysterious Grail Knight, a "chosen one" who can heal him and his realm. He invites Perceval to stay at his castle, which suddenly appears before his eyes.

Later, at dinner, Perceval witnesses a strange procession taking place: a young man appears carrying a bleeding lance, followed by two young attendants carrying candelabra; then a lady appears, bearing a beautifully decorated grail, emitting such a brilliant light that the lustre of the candles is dimmed. Finally, an older lady follows, carrying a silver carving platter. With each course, the grail – which Chrétien

refers to as “a grail”, without identifying it as a holy object - passes before Perceval. Through all of this, the Fisher King remains alone and suffering.

Meanwhile, Perceval is bemused but he recalls an advice given by his mentor at the Arthurian court to not talk too much and not ask too many questions. He remains silent during the whole ritual. In the morning Perceval wakes up alone; searching through the castle he finds nothing. He leaves, and the drawbridge is immediately raised after him. Bewildered, Perceval rides away, never to find the castle again.

In the continuation of his adventures Perceval will meet two women who will shed light on what happened in the castle. Firstly, on his way back to King Arthur's court, Perceval finds a weeping woman holding a headless dead man in her lap. She reproaches Perceval because he had not asked the right questions at the castle, and also she announces to him that his mother has died of grief. Once at Arthur's court, he is received with great celebrations until on the third day a damsel on a mule, holding a whip in her right hand, appears. The author depicts her as a grotesque hag: “there was never a creature so ugly even in the bowels of Hell” and immediately makes clear the purpose of her visit. She tells Perceval that the experience at the castle was a test, a test that he failed. The mysterious castle dinner was the solemn Grail Procession, and Perceval didn't take hold of fortune when presented with it: “You entered the castle of the Fisher King and saw the bleeding lance, but it was too much effort for you [to] ask why that drop of blood flowed from the tip of the white shaft! And you didn't ask what rich man was served from the grail you saw.” Overcoming fear and asking these transformative questions would have revealed him as the Grail Knight and the Fisher King and his realm would have been healed. Because of his passivity and lack of initiative in taking responsibility “ladies will lose their husbands, lands will be laid waste, and maidens will remain helpless as orphans; many a knight will die.”

The Hag addresses then King Arthur and his court, telling them of a grand tournament where great honour and riches can be won. Many knights will leave immediately to seek their fortune. But Perceval, devastated, vows to start, without distractions or diversions, a quest to find the truth of the Grail. He sets out on his journey, leaving the story and its many adventures. He'll reappear again five years after the events, lost and broken, having forgotten his vow while pursuing personal honour. After setting on many “unusual adventures” and defeating many knights, he is unable to find any meaning or value in knighthood. The costs have been high, and he now barely knows what day it is (Good Friday in the story). He's reprimanded by a group of knights and ladies he meets for travelling, armed, on that day. Eventually, he finds a hermit, and falls on his knees deeply shamed. He tells him that for five years he did not know what he was doing, and he wished indeed that he had died. The hermit, who turns out to be his uncle, explains to him why he failed the test and suffered many hardships.



The Holy Grail myth has been adapted and depicted in numerous guises over the centuries throughout literature and art. Here, Galahad, Bors and Percival achieve the Grail. Tapestry woven by Morris & Co. (19th century) - Wikimedia

His mother's death is the cause of his inner injury. Not because he had left her, but rather because of his lack of concern and for having disregarded her spiritual advice. For this reason, he was unable to ask about the Lance or the Grail. He relied on the chivalric code of knighthood, not understanding that it was not sufficient when faced with the higher realms of the grail. He observed a wonder with his eyes, without using the intelligence of his heart.

Perceval went on many misguided adventures, made wrong turns in the forests, and didn't ask the right questions. Her death – the death of his soul - represents his spiritual death. The bridge with that higher realm is broken, since only the soul-vessel makes God's activity perceptible. The hermit tells Perceval that by struggling with himself, he'll be able to come to an understanding of himself. He reminds him of the simple virtues and responsibilities required to carry oneself as a good man and whispers a mysterious message into his ear. The full content of this is not revealed. The readers are left wondering if this may be the Grail itself or the transmission of the knowledge necessary to grasp the ultimate nature of the Grail. Perceval, choosing the path of redemption, will take the Holy Communion - symbolising the idea of theosis or union with God - on Easter Sunday.

The story leaves Perceval but Chretien reassures us that he will tell us more about his quest. Which he will never do, adding to the story's mystery but also inviting others to complete it. Different poets created a series of continuations and elaborations which came to form part of the Arthurian mythos, whose origins lie in memory, myth, tales and accounts going back centuries. One of the main ancient, pre-Christian mythical motifs further associated with the Grail was importantly inspired by one of the four treasures of the Tuatha Dé Danann (People of the goddess Danu) in Celtic mythology. The Grail greatly resembles, especially in later continuations, the cauldron of plenty owned by the Celtic druid-god Dagda, which

could feed an entire army without becoming empty, and everyone of good character could nourish themselves from this magical, bottomless cauldron.

The Grail had a tremendous force and impact, and a potential that Chrétien had left latent. Other Grail tales, often of unknown authorship, appeared more or less at the same time, the most famous of which is probably the Lancelot-Grail Cycle (13th century). This material was transformed and enriched by authors in Britain, France, Germany, Scandinavia, etc. until Sir Thomas Malory (1416–70) wrote *Le Morte d'Arthur* (1485), synthesising the whole into a comprehensive work.

The mysterious object, with its powers and the esoteric ritual surrounding it; the quest to unveil its nature and truths, the promised healing, richness and revelations associated with the accomplishment of this quest: in subsequent works the Grail acquired even more magical and mysterious qualities, lying beyond the mere ability of rationality and of language to capture and describe it. The atmosphere surrounding the legends of the grail appear to remain “tantalisingly just outside the mind’s grasp, in the shadows beyond the edge of conscious awareness,” (Cavendish, *King Arthur and the Grail*, 1978).

The challenge was especially taken up in *Parzival*, a poem by the impoverished German knight-poet Wolfram von Eschenbach, regarded as one of the greatest poets of mediaeval German literature. Writing his poem in the early 13th century, he confirmed that one of the reasons why he had written *Parzival* was to better emphasise Perceval’s spiritual development and the role played in that by the Grail and the quest for it. And it’s with a synthesis of this version, considered as one of the most esoteric of all, that this overview of the Grail story and its interpretations will continue in the second part of this article.

Giulia Giacco



**The good life is inspired by love
and guided by knowledge.**

Bertrand Russell



Love many things, for
therein lies the true strength,
and whoever loves much
performs much,
and can accomplish much,
and what is done in love is
done well.

Vincent Van Gogh



As old as the hills

Göbekli Tepe - The Dawn of Civilisation?

Göbekli Tepe is a Neolithic archaeological site, nestled within the arid landscape of the Anatolia region of southeastern Turkey. The site is a marvel of archaeology that challenges the very foundations of our understanding of human history. Discovered in the 1960s by chance, its true significance was not recognised until the 1990s when Klaus Schmidt, a German archaeologist, began excavations that unveiled its extraordinary secrets. Dating back over 11,000 years to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic period (9500-8000 BCE), Göbekli Tepe predates settled agriculture and the advent of cities, contradicting conventional narratives of human development. It also predates Newgrange, Stonehenge and the Egyptian pyramids by thousands of years, and boasts the title of the world's oldest known megalithic site.

Göbekli Tepe means “Potbelly Hill” - a reference to the shape of the 15 m high artificial mound or “tell” sitting atop the surrounding flat plateau. As a result of its unassuming appearance, it was initially mistaken for a mediaeval cemetery. Göbekli Tepe's true significance emerged gradually as Schmidt and his team meticulously unearthed its monumental structures. The site consists of multiple circular and rectangular walled enclosures, some up to 30 m in width, containing

immense T-shaped standing pillars. Most of the pillars are embedded in the enclosure walls, with the two largest pillars facing one another in the centre. In some enclosures stone benches for seating are present. The pillars are decorated with bas-relief images depicting animals, humans, and abstract symbols. Gobekli Tepe isn't your typical settlement consisting of houses, pottery and bones.

Initially four circular enclosures were found. However, an underground geomagnetic survey of the site was completed which found evidence that the site contains at least 20 enclosures, containing about 200 pillars. Also revealed was the fact that the enclosures were built above one another, in three layers, each layer being buried some time later. Whether the layered enclosures were buried deliberately, or by landslides, is unclear. It may have been a combination of both. The enclosures may have been covered by roof structures in earlier times, but no evidence of them has survived. The building of Göbekli's structures is known to have spanned a period of 1,500 years, from circa 11,500 years ago to 10,000 years ago.



Pillar 43, Enclosure D: the "Vulture Stone"- Wikimedia

Today, the area of Turkey where Göbekli Tepe is located is an arid, brownish landscape. During the Pre-Pottery Neolithic period when Göbekli Tepe was built, the area represented the northern point of the Fertile Crescent, an arc-shaped area of the Middle-East stretching from Egypt in the west to the Persian Gulf in the east. At the time, 11,000 years ago, this area of Turkey was a steppe grassland, with mild climates, fertile lands and flowing rivers. It was populated by semi-sedentary hunter gatherer tribes, who lived in settlements or villages for at least part of the year. They hunted animals such as gazelle, aurochs (the ancestor of modern cattle), wild sheep and goats, ducks and geese, and gathered fruit, nuts and vegetables from the land. Crops of wild barley and wheat were abundant and were ground into flour for breadmaking.

The architectural capability in evidence at Göbekli Tepe is remarkable. Each T-shaped pillar, up to 5.5 m in height and weighing as much as 10 tonnes, was



meticulously carved from the local limestone plateau using Stone Age tools, such as flint axes. These massive pillars had to be transported uphill to the site, and placed in situ. This suggests a level of organisation and communal effort previously unseen in hunter-gatherer societies. The circular arrangement of these pillars within the round enclosures hints at a deliberate architectural plan, possibly serving as ceremonial or ritual spaces.

Graphical representations of human forms are almost completely absent at Göbekli. The T-shaped pillars are believed to represent stylised human forms, with the flat tops of the pillars representing the shoulders and heads. Some of the pillars have arms, belts and loincloths carved into the rock, confirming their human representation. The arrangement of the pillars in the round enclosures is intriguing. Most of the pillars are embedded in the enclosure walls, and appear to be facing inwards towards the centre, where the two largest pillars are facing one another. It has been suggested that this arrangement may represent a ceremony of veneration of, or devotion to recognised ancestors, by members of the community. The figures could also represent deities, or supernatural beings in anthropomorphic form.

The bas-relief carvings adorning the pillars of Göbekli provide tantalising glimpses into the beliefs and rituals of its creators. Animal motifs, including wild boars, foxes, snakes, gazelles, bears, scorpions, spiders and birds dominate the carvings, suggesting a close relationship with the natural world. Some scholars interpret these animals as totemic symbols or representations of mythical beings, possibly associated with early forms of shamanism or animistic beliefs. Additionally, the abstract symbols interspersed among the animal depictions remain a subject of debate, with interpretations ranging from astronomical calendars to symbolic representations of social hierarchy or cosmology.



Göbekli Tepe was once called “a Stone Age zoo” by its discoverer Klaus Schmidt. Each enclosure has one animal form that dominates the bas-relief imagery on that enclosure’s pillars:

- | | |
|--------------|--------|
| Enclosure A: | Snakes |
| Enclosure B: | Foxes |
| Enclosure C: | Boars |
| Enclosure D: | Birds |

This specialisation may suggest that each enclosure had a different purpose which was symbolically linked to the animal predominantly displayed in that enclosure. Of particular interest are the images displayed on pillar 43 in enclosure D, known as the “Vulture Stone” (see image). It depicts a disk shape on the wing of a vulture, and a headless human body at the base of the stone. There are various figures like cranes, ibis and scorpions around this figure. Much speculation has taken place about the meaning of this set of images. The disk-shaped object has been suggested to be the headless man's severed head, or the sun/moon, or the vulture's eggshell. No written language has been found at Göbekli. Nor has a ‘Rosetta Stone’ been



Pillar 10, Enclosure B: fox- Wikimedia

found to help decode the meaning of the symbols etched onto the pillars. The earliest known writing system, known as Cuneiform script, evolved in Mesopotamia about 5,000 years ago - at least 6,000 years later than when Göbekli was built.

The purpose of the site remains a mystery. Theories include a religious sanctuary, where communal rituals and ceremonies were conducted to appease supernatural forces or honour ancestral spirits. Some experts believe that the fierce and deadly creatures displayed in the iconography of Göbekli Tepe's enclosures suggests that the rituals performed there may be linked to male initiation rites. The hunt for fierce animals and the symbolic descent into an otherworld, symbolic death and rebirth as an initiate could have been one purpose of rituals at Göbekli. The elaborate animal carvings might have served as representations of spirits or deities, suggesting a developed belief system. The lack of many permanent dwellings implies that people gathered here periodically for specific purposes, perhaps for feasting, ceremonies, or astronomical observations. Others suggest it served as a hub for social interaction and trade among dispersed hunter-gatherer groups. The absence of many domestic structures challenges traditional interpretations of early settlement patterns, leading to ongoing debates within the archaeological community regarding the site's function and significance.

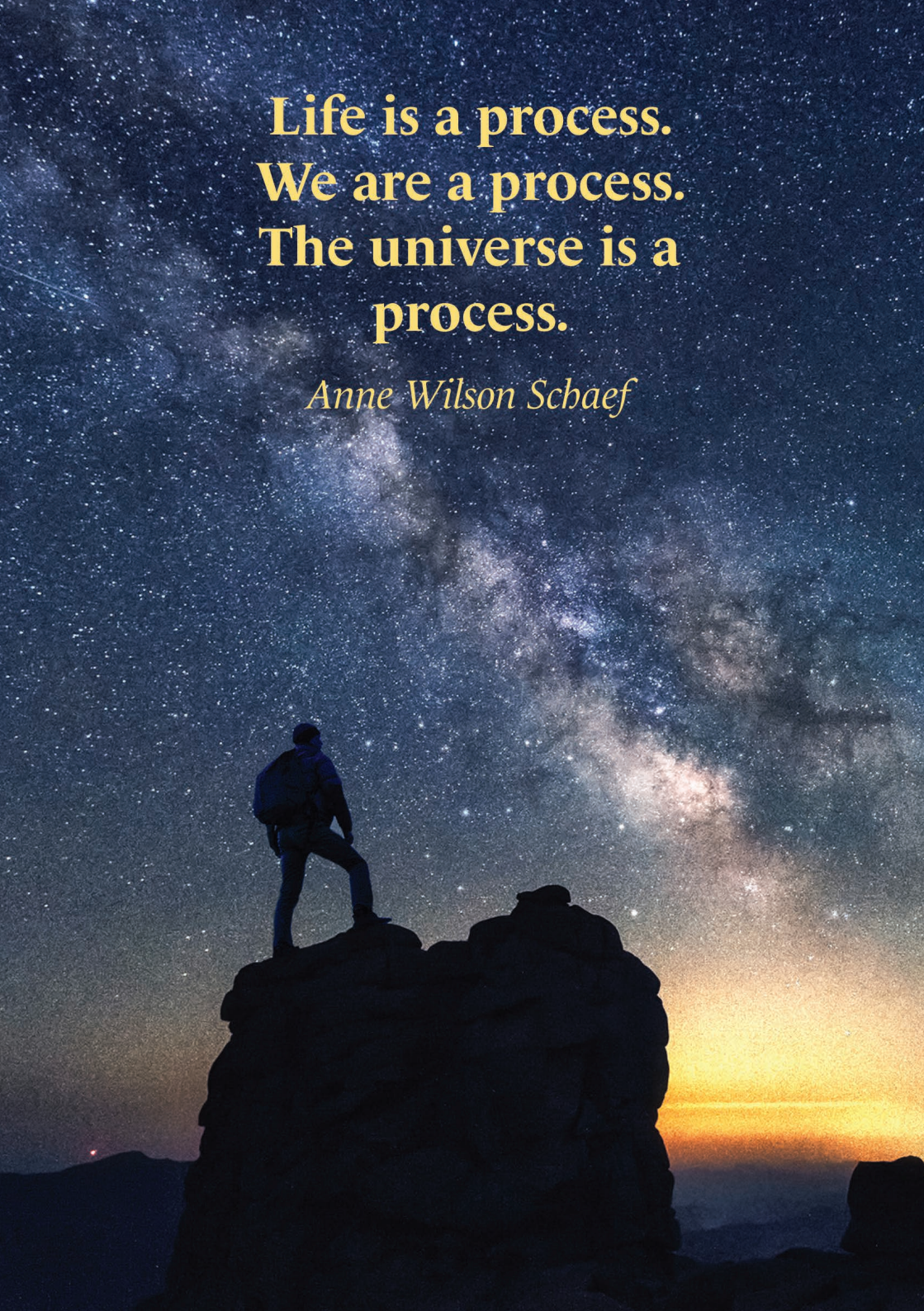
Göbekli Tepe suggests that hunter-gatherers possessed sophisticated social organisation, cooperation, and ritualistic practices previously attributed to later periods. It challenges traditional notions of how early humans organised their societies. The discovery of Göbekli requires a shift in our understanding of the origins of civilisation. Previously, the development of complex societies was thought to have been dependent upon the emergence of settled agriculture and urbanisation. However, Göbekli challenges this linear narrative, suggesting that complex social and religious practices may have preceded agricultural developments. Its existence raises profound questions about the relationship between monumental architecture, social organisation, and the emergence of civilisation, prompting scholars to reconsider long-held assumptions about human development.

Despite its cultural and historical significance, Göbekli faces numerous preservation challenges. Exposure to the elements, impact of tourism, and nearby development pose significant threats to its long-term survival. Efforts to preserve the site include measures such as protective coverings, visitor management strategies, and ongoing archaeological research. Balancing conservation with public access remains a delicate task, requiring careful stewardship to ensure the site's preservation for future generations. Göbekli Tepe was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2018, recognising its outstanding universal value as "one of the first manifestations of human-made monumental architecture". As of 2021, less than 5% of the site had been excavated, so there may be many more revelations to come...

Tim Leahy

**Life is a process.
We are a process.
The universe is a
process.**

Anne Wilson Schaef





THE
SOUL
OF THE
NATION

Marvin Gaye's classic album *What's Going On* still speaks to our social consciousness over half a century on.

Marvin Gaye was known as the *Prince of Motown* in the 1960s. Having enjoyed a string of hit singles and with a close personal connection to Berry Gordy, the founder of the legendary label, through his marriage to Gordy's sister, Anna, Gaye appeared to have the world at his feet.

However, Gaye had a frequently fractious relationship with Motown, railing against what he saw as Gordy's excessive control over his career and his refusal to allow Gaye any large degree of artistic freedom. In 1971, ten years after he signed for Motown, Gaye broke free of the label's creative strait jacket by releasing an album regarded as his masterpiece and one of the most important albums ever recorded. This article explores the songs on that album, *What's Going On* and the story behind the album.

Berry Gordy founded the Motown label in his native city of Detroit, Michigan in 1959. Taking its name from the motor car industry which was then flourishing in Detroit, Gordy's grand plan was to export Soul music to a mass audience. In 1961, the fledgling label would make its breakthrough when the single *Please Mr Postman* by the Marvlettes reached #2 on the US Billboard Chart. It would be the first of an incredible 79 Top 10 hits for the label. Over the next few years, Motown acts such as Smokey Robinson & the Miracles, Stevie Wonder, The Temptations, The Four Tops, The Supremes, Martha & the Vandellas, The Isley Brothers, Gladys Knight & the Pips, Mary Wells, Jimmy Ruffin and of course, Marvin Gaye would all become household names as they dominated charts at home and abroad. Such was the success of Motown that it was nicknamed 'Hitsville USA' and its musical output was called 'the sound of young America'. Its domination of the music scene throughout the 1960s remains unparalleled.

Marvin Gaye was born in Washington DC on 2nd April 1939. His father, Marvin Gay Senior was a church minister and his mother, Alberta, was a domestic worker. The young Marvin suffered a difficult upbringing at the hands of his domineering father. Gay Senior's hardline interpretation of Christianity meant that Marvin and his siblings were brought up to pay strict adherence to the Bible. Their father compounded this bleak situation with frequent acts of violence. At school, Marvin was at the receiving end of ridicule because of his surname. This would later prompt him to slightly alter its spelling. However, it may also have been a means of distancing himself from his father. Their relationship would remain troubled for years afterwards.

Having sung with a doo-wop group called the Moonglows, Gaye successfully auditioned for Motown as a solo performer in 1960. The following year, he released his debut album *The Soulful Moods of Marvin Gaye*. This album, which cast him as a crooner in the same vein as Nat 'King' Cole or Sammy Davis Jr, was not a success, but the following year, the more pop-oriented singles *Stubborn Kind of Fellow* and *Hitchhiker* were both minor hits. In 1963, he broke into the US Top 10 with 'Pride and Joy' giving him the hit single that he needed.



Gaye recorded the album at Motown's in-house studio Hitsville U.S.A. (since converted into a museum) - Wikimedia



A 1959 promotional picture of Harvey and the New Moonglows. Gaye is second from the right behind a seated Fuqua - Wikimedia

Over the next few years, he would have hits with singles such as *Can I Get a Witness?* (1963), *How Sweet It Is* (1964), *I'll Be Doggone*, *Ain't That Peculiar* (both 1965) and *Too Busy Thinking About My Baby* (1968). He also collaborated with other Motown artists such as Mary Wells on the 1964 album *Together*, Kim Weston on the 1966 hit *It Takes Two* and most memorably, Tammi Terrell. Their collaborations on tracks such as *Ain't No Mountain High Enough*, *If I Could Build My World Around You* (both 1967), *Ain't Nothing Like the Real Thing* and *You're All I Need to Get By* (both 1968) represent, in the humble opinion of this writer, not only the very best of Motown's awesome 60s output, they are possibly some of the best duets ever recorded.

In 1968, Gaye's solo career hit a new peak when he released his recording of the Barrett Strong/ Norman Whitfield song *I Heard it Through the Grapevine*. Previously a hit for labelmates Gladys Knight & the Pips, Gaye's version was an instant classic and a massive commercial success. Reaching #1 in both the US and the UK and became, at that time, Motown's best-selling single.

However despite all of this success, Gaye was deeply unhappy. His singing partner and close friend, Tammi Terrell had become seriously ill with a brain tumour and would die in 1970 aged only 24. He was also unhappy that Berry Gordy maintained final approval on any material released by Gaye. He craved the artistic freedom to make the music that he wished to create, he wanted to record his own material rather than the songs of other people and he had the vision to create a work that would



What's Going On is the eleventh studio album by American soul singer Marvin Gaye. It was released on May 21, 1971, by the Motown Records subsidiary label Tamla. - Wikimedia

take the pulse of America during one of the most turbulent periods in its recent history. The result of this vision was his album, *What's Going On*.

As the 1960s gave way to the 1970s, the USA was a country riven by divisions. The Civil Rights Movement had been devastated by the assassination of its leader, Martin Luther King, in 1968. The sense of despair which greeted Dr King's assassination was amplified by the disproportionate amount of poverty and unemployment endured by African Americans as hard drugs and gang warfare began to plague their neighbourhoods with the police frequently responding in a brutal, disproportionate manner. Abroad, the image of America continued to be tarnished by its involvement in the Vietnam War. The frequent anti-war protests which had been commonplace during the presidency of Lyndon Johnson continued apace after the election of his successor, Richard Nixon in 1968.

It was against this troubled background that Gaye conceived, wrote and recorded *What's Going On*. Opening with the title track which can be regarded as a state of the nation address. Gaye laments 'Mother mother, there's far too many of you crying' and 'brother, brother, brother, there's far too many of you dying'. However, rather than rage against the injustices and the oppression, he pleads for respect, equality and understanding in lines such as 'war is not the answer, for only love can conquer hate', 'picket lines and picket signs, don't punish me with brutality'. It is worth noting that Gaye is not asking the question what's going on? He is asking us to talk to him so that he can tell us what *is* going On. And therein is the theme of the album, a discussion on what is going on in the world and in America. For the time being, Gaye is optimistic as he sings 'we've got to find a way, to bring some loving here today'.

What's Going On immediately segues into second track *What's Happening Brother* which is sung from the point of view of a veteran returning from Vietnam. This was a situation which touched Gaye's family like so many other American families as his younger brother, Frankie, served in Vietnam and this song is based on his experience. In truth, the narrator in this song does not discuss the war much other than to say 'War is hell, when will it end? When will people start getting together again?' He has more immediate matters to attend to as he 'can't find no work, can't find no job...money is tighter than its ever been'. He can't understand 'what is going



Marvin Gaye performing in Belgium in 1972- Wikimedia

on across this land'. Yet, there is still some room for the nicer things in life as he wonders 'are they still getting down where we used to dance?' and 'will our ball club win the pennant? Do you think that they have a chance?' However, any sense of joy at being home is being severely compromised by being back in what seems a different country and one quite hostile to those who had served in a war that had become a national embarrassment.

What's Going On and *What's Happening Brother* effectively forms a five song suite with the next three tracks *Flyin' High in the Friendly Sky*, *Save the Children* and *God is Love* which respectively deal with the topics of drug abuse, child neglect and Gaye's religious faith.

Side 1 of the album concludes with *Mercy Mercy Me (the Ecology)*. Possibly one of the earliest tracks to decry the man-made destruction of the environment, Gaye recounts a litany of ecological horrors such as poison in 'the wind that blows from the north and south and east', 'oil wasted on our oceans and in our seas, fish full of mercury' and 'radiation underground and in the sky, animals and birds who live nearby die'. Gaye also asks the questions 'what about this over-crowded land? How much more abuse from man can she stand?', two questions which have become more and more potent in the half century since this song was written and recorded. There is no obvious solution offered by Gaye because there is no obvious solution to the dilemma that he presents. As Gaye sings, 'things ain't what they used to be' and it is not clear what will happen next.

The pessimism of this track is echoed by the album's closer, *Inner City Blue (Makes Me Wanna Holler)*. Gaye is examining the living conditions endured in the inner city ghettos of American cities and it is not a pretty picture. While fortunes are being spent on sending rockets to the moon, for so many working Americans, it is a case of 'money, we make it, before we see it, you take it'. Soaring inflation, bills and taxes increase the pinch while sons are being sent off to fight and die in Vietnam. Meanwhile at home, 'crime is increasing, trigger happy policing, panic is spreading, God knows where we're heading'. As the track heads towards a conclusion and an alto sax blows in the background, Gaye reprises the lines from *What's Going On*- 'Mother Mother, everybody thinks we're wrong, who are they to judge us simply because our hair is long?'

When released in May 1971, *What's Going On* was hailed as an instant classic. One of the first Soul albums to contain an overriding concept, it was a major evolution in Gaye's artistry and cemented him not only as a major heavyweight in the Soul genre, but in popular music. The album frequently features in 'best album' polls and both the British music magazine the *New Musical Express* and the American publication *Rolling Stone* both judged it the best album ever recorded. Over 50 years after its release, the themes of social and political discord, racism, cost of living issues and impending ecological catastrophe give tracks such as *What's Going On*, *Mercy Mercy Me* and *Inner City Blues* a piercing relevance in the third decade of the twenty first century.

However, not everybody was lavishing acclaim on this album. On hearing the title track, Berry Gordy was appalled and fearing that the political overtones of the song would alienate Gaye's fanbase, he initially declined to release it on single. Gaye responded by going on strike, forcing Gordy to relent and allow Gaye to continue to record the album in line with his creative vision. Even as late as Motown's 50th anniversary in 2009, Gordy was still expressing his bafflement with the album.

Ultimately, *What's Going On* pointed the direction in which Soul music would head in the 70s with more complex arrangements, socially conscious lyrics and the artist being allowed free reign to express themselves in whatever manner they deemed fit. Being part of the Motown family had been highly beneficial to Marvin Gaye throughout the 60s, but as the 70s began, he was looking to renegotiate his relationship and did so magnificently with *What's Going On*.

Andrew Hudson

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