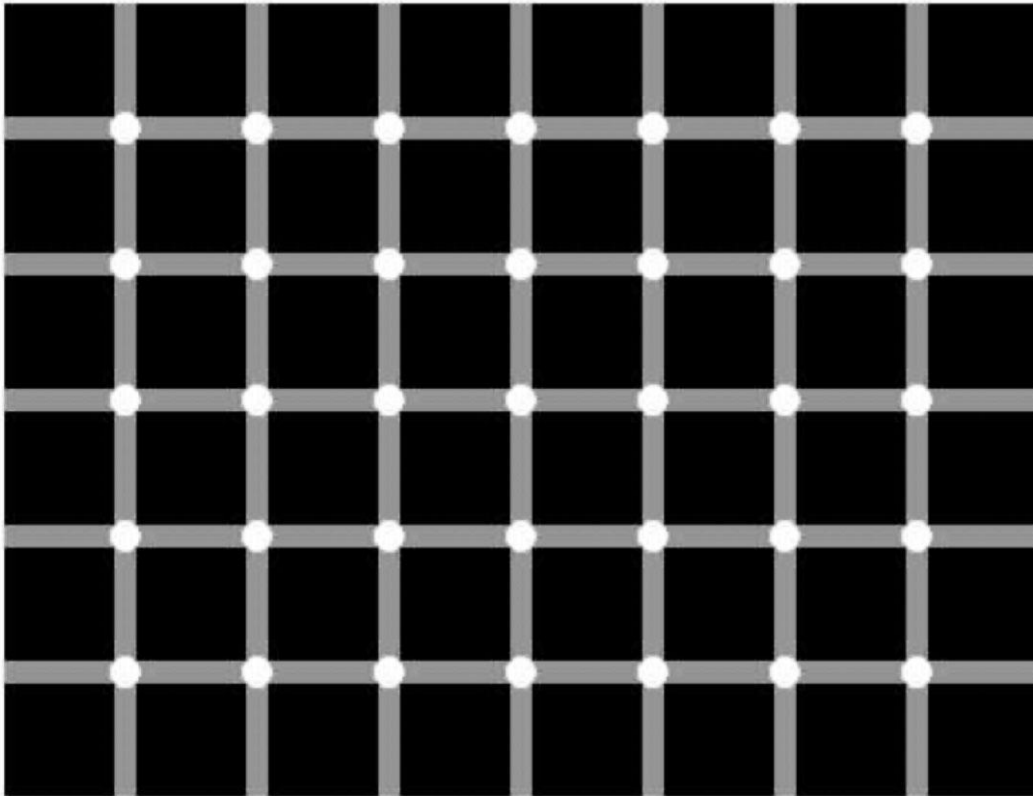


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VALERIO DI VINCENZO



Praticare l'impermanenza per conquistare la libertà

La ricerca di un approccio etico ed ecologico
alla paura di morire



Practicing Impermanence as a key to acquire freedom

Searching for an ethical and ecological approach to the fear of dying

A

First, let's examine the title. Then, I invite you to capture your subjective impression by looking at the cover image [...].

Have you thought it through enough?

I would like to invite the readers to share their impressions.

From the author's point of view, the title aims to evoke both

a) the idea of *Death*– the main subject of the work –but almost without naming it;

b) “Change” and “Adaptation”. Both the processes are intended as the quintessence of the dynamics of life and as the expression of its health condition; they are the cornerstones of learning and evolution. They constitute the distinctive properties of systemic dynamics in biology. The ability to shape – and possibly to anticipate and predict – any disturbance in the flow of these processes constitutes the core of the existential problem that human beings have to cope with. In order to deal with these essential conditions and to achieve tangible results, the working premise is to train, to strengthen oneself, to practice.

It has been known for millennia that discipline and psychophysical exercise allow you to achieve awareness, balance, duration, resilience and that, if well orchestrated and guided by a clear ethical approach, they allow you to increase your cognitive adaptation and self-regulation abilities.

Those abilities fully contribute to tracing the parable of the impermanence of life (of every living being dealing with health disorders; of every ecosystem and its “Pathocenosis”). This has an impact on the individual, social and evolutionary time;

c) The exercise of temperament and attitudes converges in a virtuous dimension that causes the ordered explosion of freedom (freedom is understood as an inner virtue from which a social value can reverberate).

d) Regarding the subtitle, the ethical approach indicates a way to search for an ecological epistemology for which no doctrine is proposed but the outline for carrying out an investigation, an intriguing hint to be explored.

Through an "ecological" frame we are enabled to map out the complexity of the reference to the phenomenology of the "things of nature", to the social dynamics and to the existential uniqueness of each person. This, not in detail but for large "buoys" and through "regulatory genes" that condition the navigation towards a learning that can form or change certain beliefs.

The ethical and ecological approach does not intend to assign to philosophy alone, or to systemic theories alone, the task of addressing the question individually and collectively raised by the fear of dying. In fact, the thesis here is that everyone is connected with the life and death of all the others. Everyone can do a search and internalize the results on a cognitive, visceral, physical, moral, social and environmental level. The front cover graphic causes an optical illusion. Just as it is not possible to count the black points in the grid, the dimension of Impermanence and the Worry of Death are immanent in the life of each of us.

B)

*“Not knowing where Death awaits us, let’s
await it everywhere.*

*The premeditation of Death is the
premeditation of freedom.*

*Those who have learned to die have
unlearned to serve.”*

Life and *Death*, separately, cannot be perceived, interpreted, symbolized, nor can they "say" or "see" each other.

This does not affect the achievement of a "wise" vision that occupies existence through the practice of a training impacting on the bio-psycho-social and environmental awareness.

These are the pillars on which the intimate, adaptable and autonomous identity of the Ego, that maintains ethically and ecologically regulated relationships with Us and Them, is based.

The practice of detachment from temporality is useful to people and to society to enhance the tools of knowledge and practice coming from different cultures. Getting rid of the pressure of death means to incorporate and to metabolize its extraneousness, its exteriority; it means to open the doors to an intrusive guest, who can teach us a lot, even to give the right weight to what we have, so to gain freedom from attachment to the materiality of *Life*.

C)



The picture shows a sketch by Edvard Munch about a topic he later developed in the famous painting entitled *The Scream*.

An emerging contemporary factor is the increase of the collective sensitivity towards the "loss of future"; towards the "shitty life" which is associated with uncertainty and job insecurity; towards the hardness of showing confidence in an alienating, gerontocratic society which is frozen by immovable **incomes and benefits** from immovable positions; to the growing inequalities that penalize growing segments of the population, even in affluent societies.

Needless to say, the under 35s are the most affected by this condition. Women and those belonging to the middle and lower middle classes; those who are discriminated for sexual orientation or for supremacist delirium; the individuals who denote abandonment; the ones who suffer the lack of Solidarity and social inclusion deriving from the origin of actualizations of various types of *Existential Suburbs*.

These "mutilations", although they represent destabilizing and painful experiences, have until now developed "weak thoughts". One of the reasons is that they do not base their consistency on strong philosophical and modeling elaborations.

In this scenario, however, there is a sense of impending *Death* (individual, social, environmental). This evidence, however, does not provide a coherent, consequential, epistemic model of knowledge to develop rational strategies that could free us from an uncontrollable fear. The *Liquid Society* in which we live is so noisy and dazzling that it makes us lose the *sense of becoming that fills every moment between our birth and our death*.

In this context, stories have been spreading for millennia. In the language of symbols euphemisms have been developed to avoid the crude comparison with the ineluctable concreteness of *Death*.

These are terms such as: disappearance, expiration, loss, departure, oblivion, transit, passing away, end of life; or terms that are used for specific applications such as: obitus, cessation of vital functions, brain death.

In the field of medicine, since the time of Herophilus of Chalcedon and his colleague Erasistratus of Chios (they were "anatomists" who lived in Alexandria between the 4th and 3rd centuries BC and founders of the School of Medicine established in this city under the Ptolemaic dynasty) in general the assignment of a name is an indication of a well-established knowledge.

This study has neither the task nor the ambition to provide an erudite definition of the concept of *Death*.

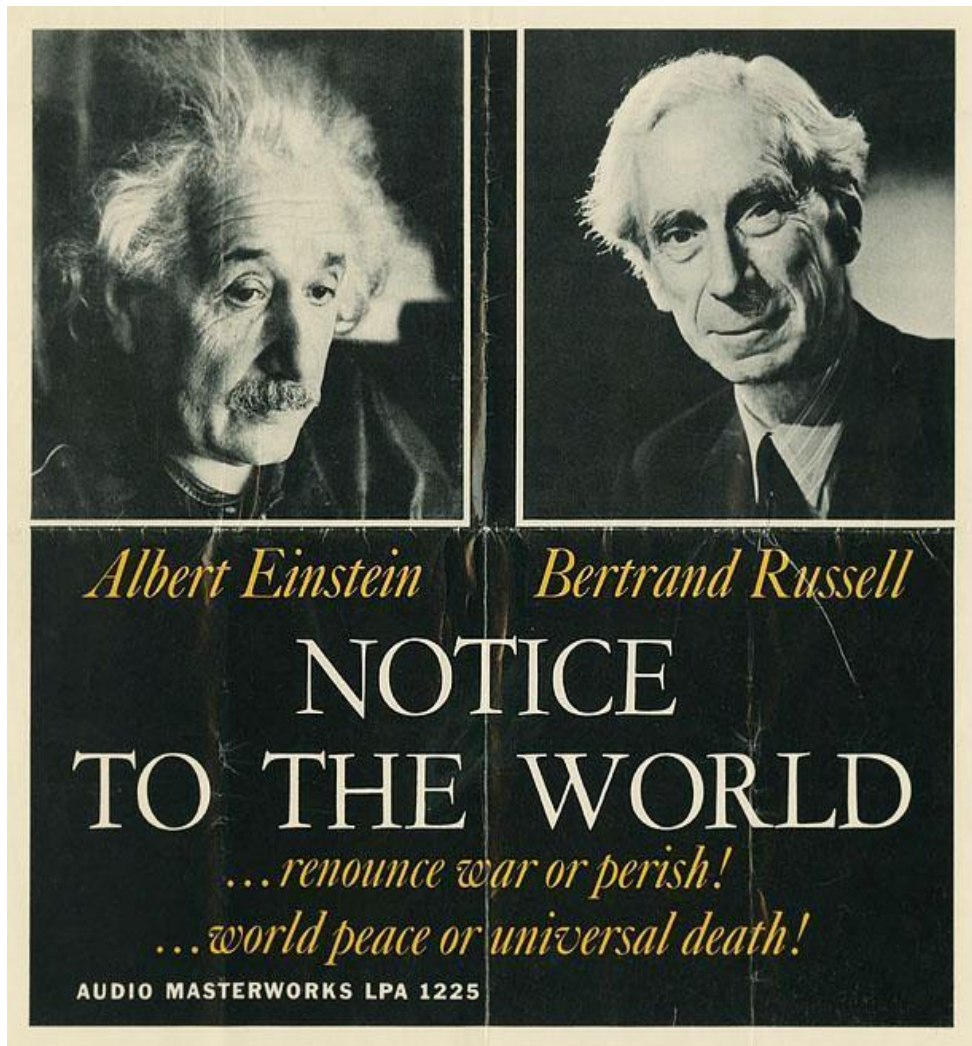
Otherwise, it aims to provide reasoned arguments and concrete examples of where *Death* shows itself and how it is treated by the living.

Its emergence can take place by assuming dramatic, philosophical, subtle, temporary, ambiguous, selective, or even comic and religious traits.

De Montaigne's phrase is categorical. It tells us in a direct way that if we let *Death* act on our attitudes while we are dominated by a form of ambivalence, if we do not expect it everywhere, if we do not foresee our liberation from the worry of dying, we will never be free to self-determine ourself.

Having said this, it is clear that *Impermanence* is the theme to work on every day, by applying to a continuous training process aimed at enhancing the explanatory and "creative" power of specific practices. These singularly human attitudes, integrated into a systemic dimension, are to be found in a condition of social interdependence and are a constituent part of the dynamics dictated by the economy, the environment and the territory.

D)



We are experiencing a global crisis which manifests its destabilizing effects at all levels. These are not to be considered separate phenomena. The *Anthropocene* is a model that at

present continues to acquire value by consuming, destroying, exterminating, accumulating concentrations of wealth and power following an absurd social criterion based on inequalities.

What must worry us is that the global growth of the population and of consumption relies on a systemic complexity of which few constituent elements are actually known, and the dynamics that bring them into play are hardly even conjectured.

In this context, a culture that denies *Death* dominates and affects the popular mentality towards a sort of hedonistic distraction without responsibility. It leaves the many people who are unable to express autonomous critical thinking with a total cognitive disability. The stresses that dominate the cognitive and relational horizon elude the need to dedicate to study and exercise in order to obtain feedback in the empowerment of individuals with solid ethical, social and cultural orientations.

A very broad theme opens up in this regard which concerns, among other things, the theory of decisions, pedagogical styles, techniques aimed at helping people to change, and other important elaborations from which the most refined tools of knowledge can be drawn. These are to be found in texts of extreme interest and, in some ways, unsurpassed in their specificity and completeness. Therefore it was decided not to go into detail on these issues.

E)



At this point, we are ready for a brief historical excursus that I will briefly present to you through four images.

A message which has been passed down for at least 4 centuries and has represented the *leitmotif* of an iconography that began before the discovery of printing and continued, in different forms, at least until the end of the eighteenth century.

During the Middle Ages, the time the elegant miniature was created, there have been pictorial compositions in which death danced with the poor and the rich, with devotees and

fearfuls of God, along with unrepentant people positioned at all levels of the *Scala Naturae*. The theme of "vanity" appears on miniatures, frescoes, and large paintings. In the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries in Europe you could not own a large land property, a great "fortune", if you did not ask to the painter on duty to be represented next to a skull, to a rotting fruit, to symbols of impermanence, of the seasons of life, of decay, of putrefaction and of the evanescence of material goods.

On all this, the only essential thought at the time was that every earthly event derives from the divine will.

This came alongside a granite-like and monotone *Heteronomous Strategy to address the worry of death*.

This strategy still exists today in many religions and cultural traditions and still represents the orientation followed by the majority of the world population.

F)



Michel_Serre-Peste-Cours_Belsunce

The symbolism that dominates this image represents the dramatic and, in some ways, reassuring way in which the organized society, the nation or the homeland (for those who had it) and – in any case – the organization and the Legal Institutions appear on the horizon of the social imaginary.

They intend to be a reliable alternative to the transience of individual existence.

The consistency of reason and artifacts, of the different roles of the assisted sick and of the rescuers, acts as a support for vulnerability and individual finitude. People die for an uncertain and imponderable reason, but they live forever, both because they are believers and because they are citizens and "patriots".

These representations present to the masses the *heteronomous-autonomous strategy* for dealing with the worry of death. In a symbolic meaning, they are superimposed on tombstones

or monuments to the fallen that enumerate the punctuality of *Death* hitting individuals who have lost their lives due to fratricidal wars in every remote European country.

G)



Ivo Saliger. Physician fights against death.

This picture introduces, in the arsenal of strategies for dealing with the fear of dying, a change indicating a step into the direction of modernity.

Until almost the beginning of the twentieth century, medicine was not capable of indicating reliable diagnostic models, as well as therapies that – apart from a few luminous examples – were less damaging than the remedies adopted. Pseudoscientific medicines had no alternatives.

With this orientation, beliefs and entire epistemological approaches dating back to Galenic Hippocratic medicine – and a few other models of *Traditional* or so-called *Unconventional Medicine* – were perpetuated. The problem was not the origin but the lack of reliable theoretical references, the impossibility of building generalizable causal chains in terms of *in vivo diagnosis*, therapy and prognosis. Now, because I would not be able to deepen the subject I must say that the characteristic common to all Pseudoscientific Medicines is to be non-deterministic. This point of view is the proper one for holistic, animistic, vitalistic and founded on pure empiricism methods and epistemologies.

These assumptions are in some ways opposed to the reductionist, physicalist and deterministic ones that are the basis of experimental medicine based on systems of rating

evidence through clinical trials. The issue is that there is no dialogue between them.

An equally incontrovertible fact, in my opinion, is that the "firepower" offered by the very significant solutions to health problems that the Western world has endowed itself with (relying on public initiatives and funds, as well as on huge private investments by the private initiative that we call the *Industrial Medical Complex*) pushes even those who rely, for example, on Homeopathy, or the Naturopathic Model, not to give up life-saving therapies (for example: insulin, dialysis, pacemakers, the same vaccines).

These therapies often represent the ultimate expression of the combination of causal knowledge of phenomena, technology, and therapies that science provided evidence for.

Similarly, those who ideologically refuse to contribute to the fight against the spread of the Covid-19 infection, when unfortunately affected by a severe form of pneumonia, or vasculitis, rely without question on the most modern resuscitation technologies, in hopes of surviving. By the way, vaccines currently distributed are preparations with an absolute low risk of adverse effects and which represent one of the most effective formulation ever known of a preparation capable of activating the immune response for a preventive purpose.

Moreover, it is useful to add that in China, or in India (geographical areas where millenary cultures and traditions have been preserved and handed down up to the present day) for some reason a scientific approach to the explanation of natural phenomena has not been developed independently.

In these cultures we are witnessing forms of integration between the models of Traditional Medicine and those based on the Biomedical Model. I will not go into detail, but it should be noted that the times and methods of dispensing the services offered by Traditional Medicines, regardless of other value and health issues, require long execution times.

Therefore and for example, one wonders when they should be applied where the disorder affects people forced to work 14 hours a day, 6 days a week. In other words, it is clear from the sector's turnover that Traditional Medicines are Medicines-Without-Alternatives as far as they are provided to disadvantaged social groups (for example, in India, China or Madagascar).

Otherwise, the more advantaged social classes can easily deal with that, but by choice. In fact, those who have economic availability, in case of need, can still turn to the modern aids deriving from the Biomedical Model and its exuberant diagnostic and curative services.

A reflection in this regard is that through an "Oriental" epistemological dimension (François Julien calls it language-thought), which admits the coincidence of opposites and which creates space to incorporate a *terzium* in the existential dialectic (which we Europeans are denied access from the Aristotelian logic), one has a higher capability to develop "organic" strategies to face the fear of dying. These generally assume the characteristics of a *Heteronomous-Autonomous Strategy*.

The thing is that believing that credible models of natural phenomena can be built (mathematical, physiological and pathological, in this case) has given impetus to *Interventional Medicine* which "rescue the patient from the clutches of death".

The reproduced image is important because it also represents postmodernity.

However, the dramatic and mythical representation of the social role (the doctor) who faces evil with resources dictated by reason has not yet solved several problems. In my opinion, this happens because Salinger draws a strenuous struggle in which the patient appears clinging to hope and the doctor embraces her, distancing *Death*.

Death is held on its knees by a hero-doctor. His gaze and posture are not casual and transmit the energy and power of an attitude measured and trained for the purpose. My reflection is that we are once again in front of a message that propagates a *Heteronomous-Autonomous Strategy*, in which the "medical profession", paternalistically provided to the sick "suppliant", stands out as a bulwark against the onslaught of diseases. Meanwhile the feelings of compassion, empathy and solidarity, of which today seems to be a lot of demand and little supply, are more nuanced.

H)



In the image the expressed question is rhetorical, but the pacifist movements that developed in the 1960s posed a timeless question under the pressure of hundreds of thousands young Americans who were conscripted to fight in Vietnam, of more than 58,000 dead, of more than 153,000 wounded among the Americans and ten times as much among the Vietnamese (the total number of victims among the alignments and civilians are by far higher, and they are available https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guerra_del_Vietnam).

In fact, the important question to me is: if *Death* is going to end our lives anyway, who and what assigns the *Value to Life*, Health, physical integrity, and how is the end or sacrifice justified? We must admit that this question has been answered up to now mostly by following a *heteronomous* or, at most, *heteronomous-autonomous strategy*.

Unfortunately, these are strategies that nowadays sound extremely ambiguous, and are often ineffective. Also for this reason, the question constitutes an essential prerequisite for starting an *Ethical and Ecological Research* aimed at consolidating an *autonomous strategy for the fear of dying*.

When the COVID-19 pandemic forces the public debate into a tragic daily narrative of suffering and death, a debate arises that could "take advantage" of its invasive presence not only to feed fear, or manipulate the political opinions of people, but also to treasure them.

Surely, for the populations enjoying a prolonged absence of wars, the COVID-19 pandemic has represented and still constitutes a constant and unusual reference to the transience of certainties, to the volatility of consolidated living conditions, to the "finitude" of beliefs and habits of consolidated life, to the confidence in "progress" without space-time limits.

"Nothing will ever be the same", a sentence which is still rumored to give form to a future as uncertain as ever. "Yes, however", one could object, "who will bear the damned responsibility of at least acknowledging that the complexity and the emergency nature of some environmental

and social evidence must provoke (now!) a proportional reaction to the risks involved? "

To me, the regressive and authoritarian plan of those who reassure us by foreshadowing a *Final Solution*, of those who delay the understanding of phenomena and are content to benumb or to appease the masses, appears very clear.

This condition is also underlined by the fact that the experts of the scientific technical committees have carefully marginalized the ethical and ecological aspects of the problem.

And the reason, perhaps, is because they know one *should not mention death in the house of the hanged*. In fact, they have showered us with every consideration on viruses, vaccines, technologies, hygiene, disinfectants, epidemics, masks-yes masks-no, on Rt numbers and indices, advances in science and therapies, etc. This avalanche, in my opinion, has deluded us, confused us, "domesticated us", and this is true even where it was moved by good intentions. The fact is that a distorted infodemic in a predominantly negative sense (according to Isaiah Berlin: *Freedom from constraints and coercion*) and without authoritative instruments of regulation (rather than constraints and coercions deliberating organisms) feeds a weak, paradoxical, wavering thought that becomes easy prey for those who deliberately provoke the polarization of consensus and reactionary policies.

These relevant arguments, in addition, were not accompanied by focus and support to the concomitant disorientation, pain, grief; to neurosis or psychosis, and so on.

In fact, educating and guiding the younger generations and all citizens to the *Functions and Capacities* that prioritize *Freedom in a positive sense of Being and Doing*; practicing awareness and critical thinking towards impermanence and the uncertainty of existence, also have the task of preparing citizens for the next disasters of the near future, making them *responsible*.

Furthermore and above all, providing the tools of knowledge to act in the present means being able to prevent or mitigate the irreparably destructive effects of the *Anthropocene*.

In this scenario, it is a matter of reflecting on the individual and collective conditions referable to *Moral Values*; one should reflect on how and why people care for one another, join together and suffer when they are separated, sacrifice themselves for professional duty, cry and "demand" a dignified farewell to their missed loved ones. In short, there has been no talk about *Ethics*, and the appeals to responsibility fell on a ground which was dried up by the superficiality of the arguments, by infodemic and exhaustion.

At a closer look, in all the cases mentioned above the whole thing was about "partial deaths" or sometimes - to quote Leopardi - "death-in-life" whose impact, on the whole, is strengthened by the unpreparedness to elaborate every form of bereavement. This is a theme that hardly anyone knows how to improvise.

I)



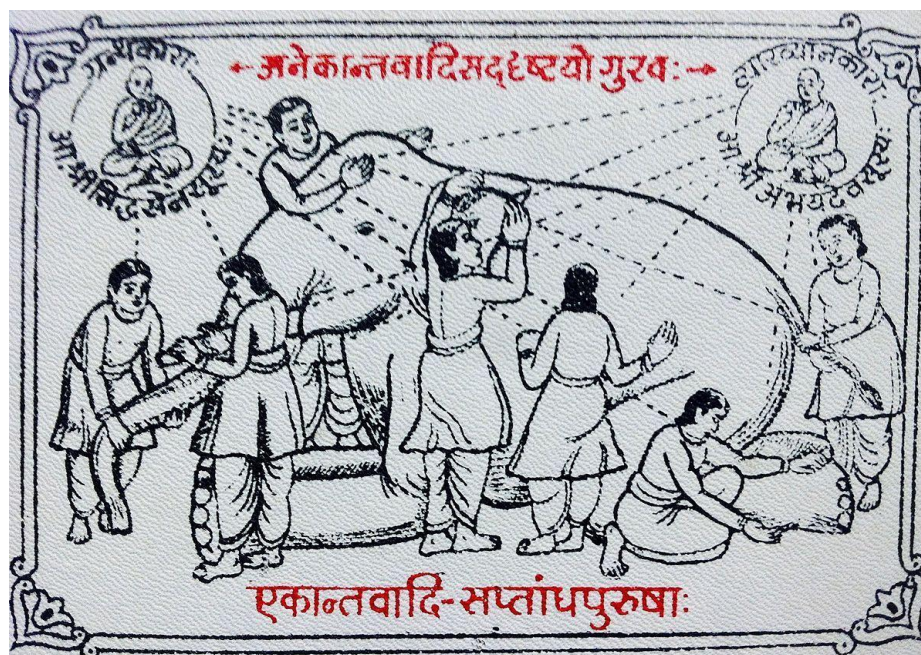
At this point let's expand the topic, starting from the conquests of Alexander the Great (356 - 323 BC) and examining the picture that outlines the land and sea routes that contributed to create the structural and infrastructural conditions through which the mutual contamination of Mediterranean and Oriental cultures became wider and deeper.

The relations established between the Mediterranean and Asian peoples over a period of several millennia, which certainly did not stop during the so-called "dark ages", were also linked to the dissemination and prosperity enjoyed by the cities founded by Alexander the Great along the journey of his conquests.

Through commercial traffic, skills, beliefs, myths, trades, knowledge, technologies, practices, medicines, music, expressive methods in art and clothing were also conveyed, and much more.

As far as we know, the Taoists' worldview has considerable affinities with certain *Philosophies* that originated in India and Europe, with those handed down to us by the so-called "Hellenistic" thought. In this context, in particular the Epicurean and Stoic schools and the proto-science that grew in Alexandria between the fourth and second centuries BC are highlighted.

L)



The texts dealing with Jainism (as well as, in a similar way, Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhist and Hindu doctrines) focus on the limits of human perception and on the importance of configuring a *complete* context when one wishes to reach the universal knowledge (intuition, immediate knowledge of the One).

This condition becomes possible by the time of liberation and enlightenment of the adept. At the same time, *Non-Absolutism* (also called relative pluralism) offers a practical approach that is structured as a *Skeptical thinking* about *Religious Philosophies and Doctrines*. In fact, this theory affirms that *Truth* (or *Reality*) is perceived by human beings differently, due to the different points of view and that none of these – separately – represents it in its unity.

In particular, the allegory to which the image refers explains the *Theory of Non-absolutism* (or, also of "multiplicity", or of "many punctualities"; *anekantavada* in Sanskrit). The parable referred to occurs in many different Indian versions. Basically, it is about a group of blind people, who in view of the arrival in the country of a strange animal called "Elephant", and of which no one had any notion, try to understand what it is. Seven blind people, taken by curiosity, were convinced that they should inspect the animal and get to know it by touching it.

First they approached the elephant separately, then they gathered to discuss their impressions together. The first person, who had felt the trunk, argued that the being resembled a large snake; for the second, which had touched the ear, it resembled a large fan; the third blind person, who had placed his hand on his hip, said that the elephant was a wall; the fourth, who touched the tail, described it as a rope; the fifth, who had felt the tusk, was convinced that the elephant was a hard, smooth and elongated thing, like a spear [...].

The position of *Gautama Buddha* (4th century BC), with respect to some questions regarding the destinies of human beings and the universe, seems to be comparable to that of Greek *Skepticism*, in particular for the *Suspension of Judgment* that unites them. The references to eschatological questions are different, but they are questions to which – since it is impossible to give a not dogmatic answer – the Buddha invites us to avoid formulating an answer.

This would be the result of a unwise reflection on topics that lead to an erroneous attachment to metaphysical points of view.

For this reason, some commentators argue that Buddhism was born and expressed as a

medicine whose purpose is healing.

In a nutshell, this conception expresses two instances: Diagnosis is suffering; therapy is the cessation of suffering.

The universality of suffering pushes for change and supports the adept to work firsthand under the guidance of three paradigms: the first and priority one is *Ethics* (word, action, subsistence). A spiral process is triggered, like an endless screw in which *Contemplation* (concentration, awareness) and *Knowledge* (vision, intention) participate.

M)



Graphic representations referable to *Mandalas* are to be found in the symbology of many populations, across all continents. It is believed that they developed them on their own. The only symbolism that can combine such a metaphysical orientation with the complex and non-dichotomous nature of the world is the *Swastika*. I avoid even treating this symbol for brevity's sake.

In each case the represented configurations access a common substratum, a symbology of the "great primordial thought" in which *Microcosm* and *Macrocosm* are not separate but interdependent entities, and they are connected to each other. Thus we observe a *Coincidence of Opposites* which, among other things, denies the Aristotelian logic of the *tertium non datur*.

At the center of the composition I reproduced a Mandala designed by Giordano Bruno which I allow myself to atypically comment on. In particular, the intention is to create an imaginatively fundamental aspect of the human thought deriving from the *Metaphysical Doctrines and Philosophies* which have matured in the East and West over the millennia.

The original meaning of the term *Maṇḍala* is explained in Sanskrit by "(magic) circle", "center", "philosophical eye" or "mirror of wisdom". In Indian Philosophy it designates circular figures built around a central point.

The concept has expanded to indicate both "the center and its periphery." Mandala is the pictorial representation of the process of descent (or devolution; *descenso* in the terminology

developed by Giordano Bruno) which, from the Supreme Consciousness (the Principle, the One) leads – step by step, level by level – to the creation of the multitude of forms. Inside it also includes the journey in the opposite direction, that is the process of growth of awareness that proceeds until reaching Illumination, *Nirvana* (that is, the path of *ascent* offered to initiates, in Brunian terms).

The same process is interpreted in the form of disintegration/reintegration in a *Coincidence of Opposites* which, at the end of a *Growth Cycle*, has no alternatives to the development of a *Degrowth Cycle*; each cycle of *Birth* cannot ignore a cycle of *Death* which rejoins the first one.

N)



The reproduced painting shows the DeaKālī walking on Śhiva's body lying on a pyre, as if it were a corpse before cremation. Kālī stands proud and threatening above the body of Śhiva who seems astonished, motionless and with his penis in a state of erection. Śhiva symbolizes the destructive and regenerating energy of time that flows from God, an image also reinforced by the animals all around that feed on corpses. After having danced on Shiva's body, Kālī recognizes her husband and, reassured, she grants him his powers. It must be said that, among other things, the problem of "*Life and Death*" often recurs in *Taoist* writings. Universal existence is nothing more than a perpetual succession of transformations and phenomena: the clearest evidence of this concept is the continuous and eternal alternation of existence and cessation of it. Life unfolds in an *Eternal Present* in which the *Coincidence of Opposites* is expressed in nature in the reciprocal exercise of influences, in the play of relationships and in the dance of the parts that determines a cyclical, polar and complementary confrontation of opposite flows of *Yin and Yang* .

Simultaneously with Laozi, a theory similar to the cyclical interaction of these two *Conceptual Archetypes* was developed in Greece, by Pythagoras (about 580-495 BC) and

Heraclitus of Ephesus (535- 475 BC).

In particular, the concept of change ("the way up and down" traveled by the pairs of opposites that make up the unit) or the well-known *Panta Rei* (translated as "everything flows") show that, similarly to Heraclitus, Laozi meant the opposites as: *actualizations of polar and dynamically interacting phenomena, to form a single whole*.

The most modern quantum theories, or those dealing with complexity, have built mathematical models that operate on abstractions and logics similar to those introduced with these statements.

O)



Kyoto. Cherry blossom tree tunnel

The so-called Eastern *Language-Thought-* is not unique. However, in short, it can be said that *Taoism*, *Hinduism* and *Buddhism* are also able to draw on non-monotonic logics and, in particular, this is expressed through the formulation of the so-called *Middle Way*, the path that according to those doctrines leads to cessation of illusions and suffering.

Japan has grown culturally over the millennia by drawing on these elaborations, and this is understandable if we remove the habit (which has settled in Europe) of considering religion as a distinct domain from philosophy, ethics and aesthetics or, also, from the art of war and the promotion of health.

The image shows the "Philosophers' Path" in spring, when the cherry trees flood the small stream and the adjacent walkways with color and petals.

The scene evokes, using the words of François Jullien, a *synaesthetic Emotion*, a *Sound Outcrop* favored by the light of dawn and the surrounding silence.

In Europe, our conception of effectiveness in history is linked to individual events rather than to the lines of force and development of processes.

Therefore, history is told through the enhancement of the act and thus of the "spectacular" and the heroic.

In Japan – on the other hand – "wonder" prevails, contemplation, breathing and immersion/incorporation towards the unfolding of processes. This attitude evokes the *Tao*, the road of viability, the ineffable tastelessness that reveals the infinity that is hidden in every event of nature and, at the same time, the impermanence of the notes and colors that characterize the seasons of life.

P)



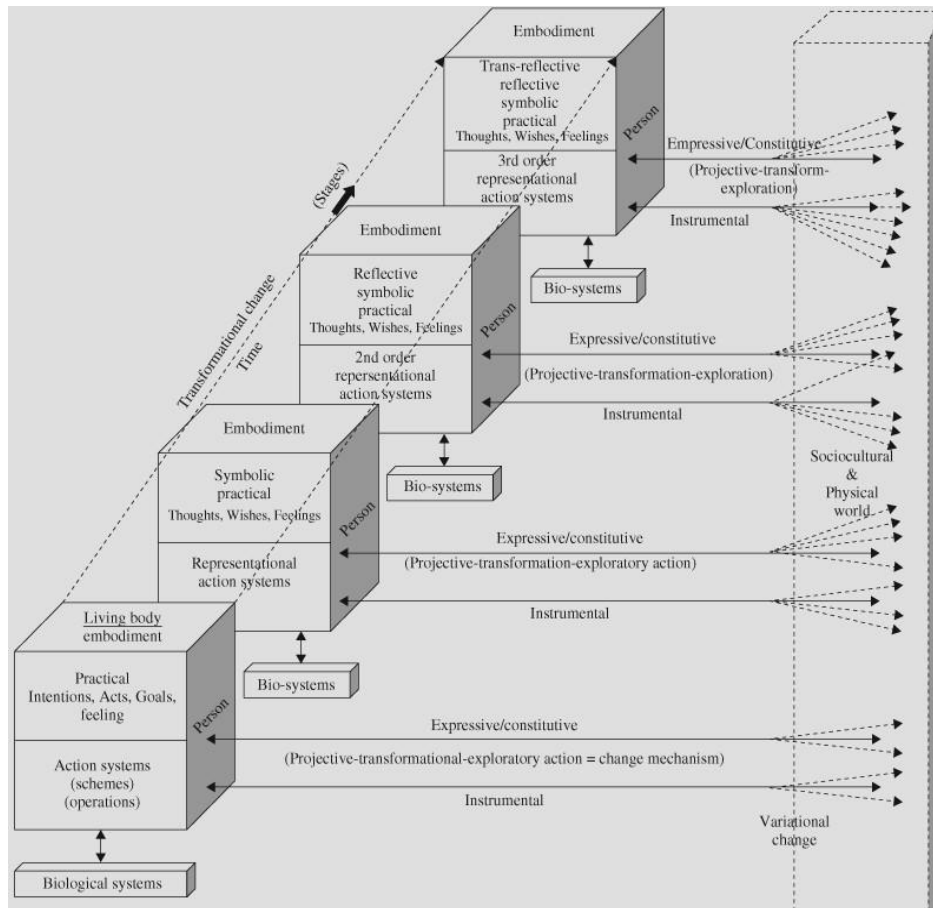
If the "Philosophers' Path" has generated "wow" sensations and a plunge into a spiritual vibration, the rational study of the *profound dimension of human Being and Doing* in relationship with nature and with society requires tools of knowledge (of epistemologies) suitable for the purpose.

These are models, systems and methods capable of qualitatively catching the anthropological, ethical, aesthetic and cognitive dimensions of human behavior and relationships, together with quantitatively measurable aspects.

The experiences that Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson have done together denote a curious and methodical "eclectic humanism", to the point of obsession. Mead integrated into Bateson's life for a period. The ordering influence of the first was merged with the extraordinary analytical skills, with the explosive – and in some ways, disordered – intellectual exuberance of the second. During the anthropological studies that Mead conducted with Bateson or after the divorce from him, the couple has gathered a collection of multimedia material in whose catalog more than 500,000 items can be found.

Bateson, in his book "*Towards an Ecology of the Mind*", analyzes what he defines as "the meeting area between very abstract and formal philosophical thought on the one hand and the natural history of man and other creatures on the other" (from which, an *Ecological Anthropology*). His method of investigation can be understood by modeling the man/nature relationship in a *Natural Logical-Cybernetic System*. In this vision every *System* – every *Mind*, every *Epistemology* – being conceivable as a *Cybernetic System*, can only be described as a whole.

Q)



The conception of the *enactment* (*incorporation of the experience of acting*) is the process that takes value from the *Connectionist Theory*. **Through that process**, the *Cognitive Sciences* have been enriched, and will further evolve.

The theory of the *Enactment* starts from the assumption that the *Mind* can be traced back, not to a sort of *homunculus* that lives there and that intervenes between the internal interpretation and the external perception, operating as a *black box*.

In the context of a systemic logic, *Mind* is considered as an emergent property of the Objective/Subjective System characterized by a network of *Relations* (these, for example, can be elaborated using the mathematical principles of topology, as the psychologist Kurt Lewin wrote influencing Bateson's ecological theories).

Such an orientation highlights the fact that, by operating on nature and human behavior, we act in a dynamic context dominated by uncertainty in which the rules of complexity apply. An important aspect of this vision is that the focus shifts from the analysis of the individual isolated components of the system (made static and "objectified") to a systemic modeling of the parameters involved, of the dynamic interactions.

This is manifested in the organization, in the interdependencies, in the weight that comes with the presence and action of each element, in the systemic effects that this entity and intersubjectivity determine.

In particular, the "disturbances" that circulate in the system do so through the flow of information, and these modify the state and behavior of the recipient. In an ecological context, say the Authors of *Pragmatics of Human Communication* – the book that spread the Palo Alto

Approach in psychotherapy throughout the world – it is impossible not to communicate. Therefore, the system learns and changes due to the work of the agents, but it is however also affected by those who "refrain from making a decision".

R)



Collettivo FX-Nemo's-LuogoComune-Andrea Casciu-il Baro

According to Bateson, *Ecological Systems* are "congenitally" stable and self-regenerating as long as they can maintain *Homeostasis* at a level close to equilibrium, and that the cornerstone of survival in the evolutionary process is the organism together with its vital environment.

When systemic behavior moves away from the equilibrium that dynamically stabilizes it over time Bateson, by collecting epistemological stimuli from various parts, develops the concepts of *Schismogenesis Process* and *Double Bind*.

A typical *Schismogenetic Process* is the envelope of relationships that is established in the form of *Paradoxical Communication*.

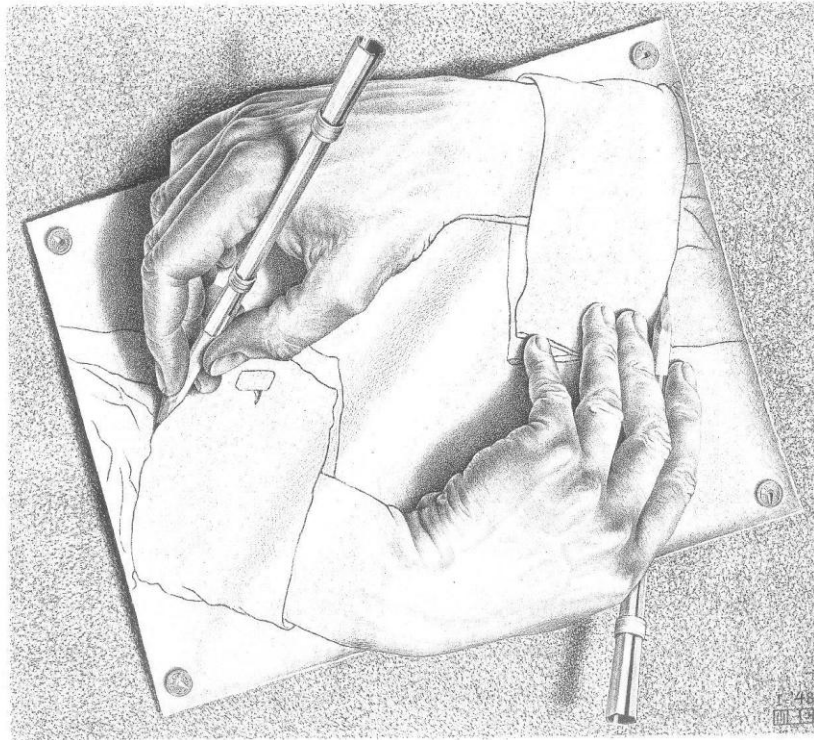
In particular, the *Pragmatic Paradoxes* offer a path to understand how, differently from what everyone would like, we are surrounded by meaningless or, in any case, undecidable assertions and – under certain conditions – these make us "baffle".

Some situations and relationships, in which communication loses the transfer of information dictated by transparent criteria and shared by the interlocutors, can give rise to irreconcilable conflicts. These are fueled by persistent and recursive processes of *Schismogenesis*, which involve the actors of the relations in what Bateson calls *Double Bind*.

This type of communication disorders occur more frequently among the members of a family or of highly structured groups, such as in the military field. These concepts can be translated into different relational contexts and feed, among other things, the approach and theories

developed by Bateson and Colleagues and which have been applied in the clinical field (for example, by the School of Psychiatry founded in Palo Alto, California, by which the so-called School of Milan, in Italy, was influenced).

S)



Francisco Varela and colleagues have developed a model that represents the organism as an *Autopoietic System* and which, as such, incorporates the dynamics of an *Open System*.

By definition this system – in the context of its structural completeness and structural coupling – exchanges energy and information with the environment.

An extraordinary pictorial suggestion, attributable to an *Autopoietic Process*, was given to us by the lithography of the Dutch artist Maurits Cornelis Escher.

In fact, the idea it evokes speaks to us of a continuous interdependent evolution that produces the actors of Being and Doing. The redundancy and effectiveness of the relationship determines the reality represented.

Behavior (in Marvin Minsky's words) is the description that an observer gives of changes in the state of a system, with respect to the environment with which that system interacts over time. Obviously, the behavior cannot be assimilated to an industrial process that transforms polyethylene balls into a plastic tub.

The difference with industrial chemistry is that the brain uses processes that transform it as they proceed and, therefore, the processes are not distinguishable from the products.

The *Mind* loses the physiognomy of a computer and – to put it in a different prose – it becomes the flame that feeds itself with experiences, which continually changes due to self-adaptive processes: the world becomes the place where the events happen, that the *Mind* observes, experiences, interprets as a *Phenomenology of the world*.

T)



The image shows, in order of appearance from the left: Upper row: Adelaide Antici (1778-1857); Monaldo Leopardi (1776-1847); again Adelaide Antici. Lower row: Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837); Carlo Leopardi (1799-1878); Paolina Leopardi (1800-1869); Pierfrancesco Leopardi (1813-1851).

I anticipate that, in this study, I have tried to maintain an analytical and professional point of view regarding what I express towards the Antici-Leopardi family. Far from me to intend to be offensive. The countless testimonies that describe this case, the writings, the letters, the poems, the thoughts and the commentaries outline an anthropological framework and, in some ways, of "archaeopsychiatry", from which it is possible to carry out very accurate investigations on the character and experience of the personages.

In my opinion, it is a question of focusing attention not on "vertical psychologies", but on the relationships between interacting and interdependent subjects.

Applying the quoted teachings, among other things from the aforementioned *Palo Alto Approach*, it seems to me even pathetic to speak today of "cosmic pessimism" as a distinctive mark of Leopardi's poetics.

For example, the "melancholy founded on the sense of guilt" (together with other amenities of the Freudian school) is supported by several literary critics and literary historians to give credit to the posthumous diagnosis of a manic-depressive pathology of "idiopathic" origin, which would be at the origin of the evolution that Leopardi's awareness has matured during his short life.

My reconstruction does not claim to use diagnostic and explanatory models developed by psychiatry or psychoanalysis; nor can it aspire to anything more than the attempt to formulate a plausible and instructive path of Giacomo Leopardi's intellectual production. Rather, it is expressed in an independent investigation based on "fact checking" and by plausible reconstructions and proposals for discussion due to their originality.

With this image, I not only anticipate a broad and perhaps unusual discussion about Leopardi's thought, but I finally get at the crucial element of this study.

Through the chapters, a typical process of family relationship is explained that responds in a surprising way to the models of "ecological epistemology" developed by Bateson and to the approach of Palo Alto. These lead to the fact that the type of paradoxical communication established in the Antici-Leopardi family context is the same type of conditioning (learning) that the authors who developed the theory believe are at the origin of *Schismogenetic Processes*.

These, within the frame of *Double Binds* – if they exceed individual and group "thresholds" and "modalities" that go beyond the system's ability to regulate – are associated with adaptations of verbal and non-verbal language, of "punctuation" and behavior capable of determining devastating influences on the psychological stability of interdependent individuals in a given social group. Inside this there is always someone who attracts the lightning of an ambient electricity. Generally – according to this vision – those who "freak out" find no other way out than madness as a defensive/offensive reaction in an asphyxiating and unbearable situation. At the same time, this madness takes on the characteristics of a self-fulfilling prophecy and at the origin of this prediction are the conditioning that paradoxically weighs on the "predestined victim".

U)

Our regeneration depends, so to speak, on an ultraphilosophy that brings us closer to nature by exploring the entirety and the interior of things. And this ought to be the fruit of the extraordinarily enlightened men of this century

Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone di pensieri* (1820)

The discipline of naturalized reason, the new expanded philosophy, is what Leopardi calls "ultraphilosophy". Since reason cannot reverse its development and become primitive again, it has to exceed its own limits and transcend itself. In other words, since reason has eliminated the possibility of reviving the ancient faith in the illusions.

The concept of *Ultraphilosophy* represents a very current hyperbole and, at the same time, very ancient.

However, even in this case, what matters is the whole, the systemic nature, the logical organization of the journey, of the interactions, of the fluctuations of space-time in which this *Ultraphilosophy* appears, develops and finally matures in Leopardi's thought.

It should be noted that the date of 1820 shown on the quote corresponds to a period in which Leopardi still had an enormous personal and intellectual path to follow. In those days – unfortunately for him – freedom was denied him both by the imprisonment in his father's house and by the denial of his doing and his will to act. At that time, *L'Infinito* in all its forms had already been written by Leopardi, but not yet internalized as, according to my reconstruction, it will happen in the last years of his short life.

This happened despite the method and orientation being structured, which would lead him to get rid of most of the burdens imposed on him by family traditions and aspirations. To these

were added the narrowness of the Recanatese perspective which *many sides of the distant horizon hides from view* (“*tanta parte dell'ultimo orizzonte il guardo esclude*”) and the unfolding of a kind of "extraordinarily enlightenment " that did not give the desired results (this, probably, precisely due to an excess of "self-esteem of reason").

In addition and above all, when we find ourselves describing a human path that develops from birth to death, it is important to understand if, how and – perhaps – why, *Ultraphilosophy* represents an endpoint of the existential curve of the great European poet and philosopher.

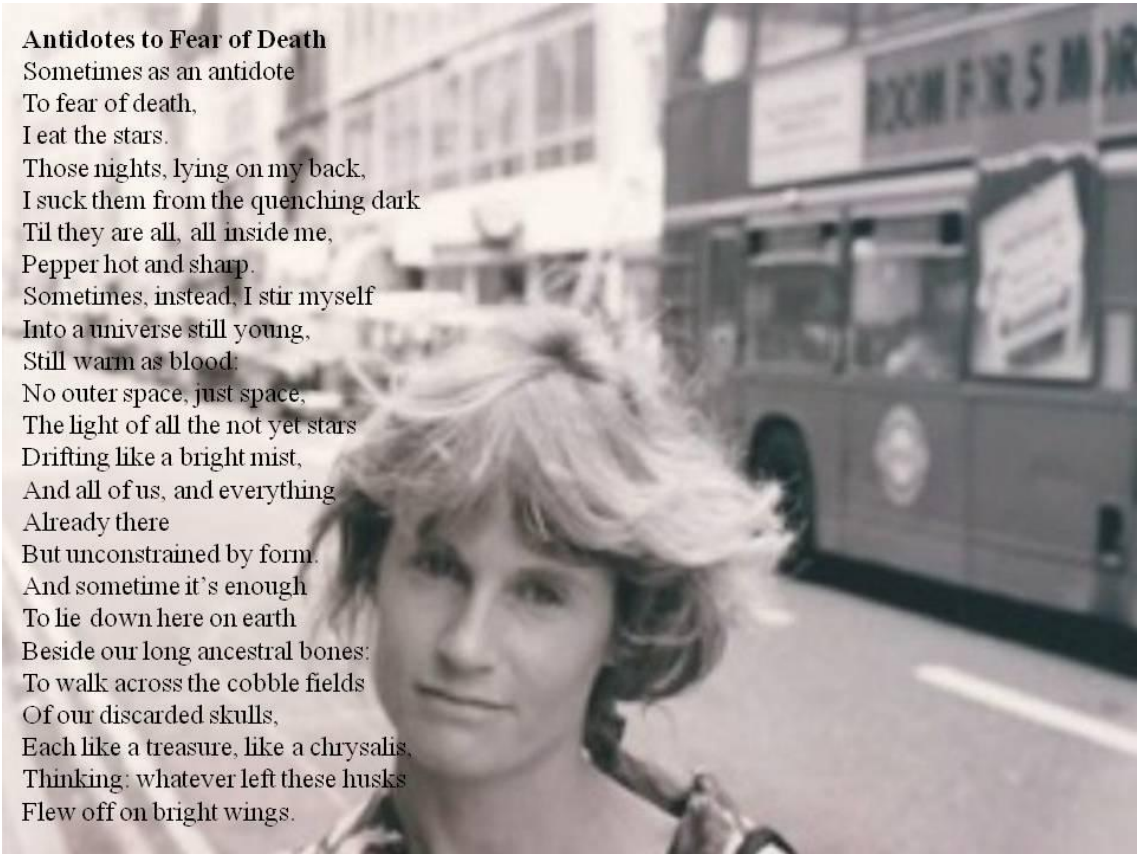
With this geographical attribute I intend to point out that the stature of his anticipations, in my opinion, has also exceeded the interpretative skills of European philosophers who preceded him, who were contemporary with him and who followed his tracks, sometimes without even knowing it, that is, denying the true authorship of their arguments.

Furthermore, a question to be explored is how much the in-depth study of Stoicism transformed Leopardi's worldview. Or, a piece of news that has not yet found clear elucidations is: on which texts, and for what purpose, the extraordinary Giacomo learned to read the original texts in Sanskrit?

V)

I conclude with a poem by Rebecca Elson (1960-1999) from the collection entitled: *A Responsibility to Awe*. Oxford Poets (2001).

Antidotes to Fear of Death



Sometimes as an antidote
To fear of death,
I eat the stars.
Those nights, lying on my back,
I suck them from the quenching dark
Til they are all, all inside me,
Pepper hot and sharp.
Sometimes, instead, I stir myself
Into a universe still young,
Still warm as blood:
No outer space, just space,
The light of all the not yet stars
Drifting like a bright mist,
And all of us, and everything
Already there
But unconstrained by form.
And sometime it's enough
To lie down here on earth
Beside our long ancestral bones:
To walk across the cobble fields
Of our discarded skulls,
Each like a treasure, like a chrysalis,
Thinking: whatever left these husks
Flew off on bright wings.