

The *Wednesday*

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Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford



Editorial

Who Is The Philosopher?

I wrote previously on philosophy and the genius (Issue 140). I traced the source of the idea of the genius in philosophy to Kant and then its rise to prominence in philosophy of the German Romantics, Schelling and Schopenhauer. Schelling saw the genius as being endowed with a special ability to grasp the truth through an intellectual intuition comparable to the aesthetic intuition in art. Truth is to be grasped not through abstract concepts, but through feeling and the imagination. The genius could go beyond the limitations of the understanding where contradictions and dualities are at work, to a realm of reconciling all through the imagination. In other words, the genius could grasp the Absolute.

The philosopher according to this conception is a member of an elite group of privileged individuals. Hegel objected to this elitist conception and insisted that philosophy is conceptual and not a matter of feeling and imagination. Karl Rosenkranz, who wrote the first biography of Hegel and knew him in Berlin (although not directly his student, as he was taught by Hegel's students) said that according to Hegel 'we should not merely have intuitive consciousness of the truth, but should comprehend it'. He also quoted Hegel's argument against elitism in philosophy, which ran as follows: 'We must note briefly that philosophy as the science of Reason is by its very nature meant for everyone because of its universal mode of being. Not everyone achieves it, but that is not to the point, any more than it is to the point that not every man gets to be a prince. The disturbing thing about some men being set over others only lies in this, that it might be assumed that they were distinct by nature and were essentially of another kind'.

Philosophy, for Hegel, is the outcome of a universal spirit of a people. 'Those who are called geniuses have acquired a certain type of special skill, by which they make the universal shapes of the people into their work just as others do other things [of universal

value]. What they produce is not their discovery, but a discovery by the people as a whole'. The so-called genius, according to Hegel, is the one who acquires certain skills and who comes at the end of a long chain of toil to put the finishing touch. 'He is like a man who finds himself among a gang of labourers building an arch of stone, for which the scaffolding is invisibly present as Idea. Everyone puts a stone in place, the artist too. It happens by chance that he is the last, and when he puts his stone in place, the arch can carry its own weight. He sees that because he has put this stone in place the whole work makes an arch, he says so and he counts as its discoverer'.

However, Rosenkranz tells us that Hegel seems to contradict himself when he talks about the genius in the context of art, or when he talks about the 'great man' during the transition periods of history, when 'the old ethical form of the peoples is wholly overcome by a new one'. But Hegel seems to me more consistent than first appears. The genius of art is guided by the Muse which represents the universal speaking consciousness of the people. Similarly, the great man is one who acquires the universality of philosophy, for example Alexander the great and his relation to Aristotle. He is not a private individual, but endowed with a universal character; a destiny.

Comparing this situation with the present day, the philosopher today is a talented individual who has acquired technical skills to the highest degree but lacks in most cases the vision of the imaginative genius, and so he is not a Schellingian genius. But he is also detached from the spirit of the people, and hence not a Hegelian philosopher. The philosopher now is a professional academic person, and this fits the age of specialisation in all aspects of knowledge. Perhaps, the spirit of the genius needs to be revived, in the hope that it will regenerate philosophy and make it relevant to the individual and society.

The Editor

Expanding Time

I have been working on some ideas of how concepts come about. This raised the question of our concepts of time and space, particularly as discussed by Immanuel Kant, so that seems like a good place to start.

PETER STIBRANY

We have an intuitive sense that space and time comprise a stage on which we live; they situate us, but we do not affect them. Philosophers argue about whether space and time are ‘substances in their own right’ (‘absolutism’) or whether ‘they depend for their existence on possible objects and relations, or perhaps ... space-time points do not exist’ (‘relationalism’) [Stanford Encyclopaedia (SEP): Kant’s Views on Space and Time]. But the SEP goes on to say that ‘... the view that space and time are *real* may mean that space and time are substances in their own right, rather than merely properties; yet within the context of the absolutism-relationalism debate, if space and time are *real*, they exist independently of all objects and relations’. [SEP]

This debate appears still to be framed by the physics of Newton and Leibniz. ‘Space and time seem distinct from substances because they are causally inert, causally inaccessible - their aspects or properties cannot be altered by interacting with any other substance - and imperceptible’. [SEP] And yet, however useful this conception of space and time is in negotiating everyday life, in fundamental terms, it is not correct. Modern physics tells us that space and time are fully linked to matter. General Relativity describes how matter curves space and time, the Standard Model saturates space with fields, the excitation of which creates matter, and the Uncertainty Principle allows for matter to arise spontaneously from these fields. The philosophical conundrum of one-way causality, where space and time influence matter but are themselves not influenced by matter, does not need to be solved.

As to how Kant conceived space and time: ‘... it will also not surprise the reader to learn that there is no consensus on how Kant’s conception of space and time ought to be characterized and explicated’ [SEP]. That said, the SEP goes on to note that: ‘Kant uses the

terms *real* and *ideal* to express views concerning the relation between space and time and the mind, leaving aside any views concerning objects and relations’. In Kant’s analysis of pure reason, he recognised that we arrange our thoughts spatially and temporally; we cannot help but frame our concepts that way. For example, the equations of physics are framed using time and space coordinates.

So, we have two radically different ideas using the same name: from Kant, we have space and time as the way we structure our thinking, and from physics, we have space and time (let’s call it spacetime) as the stuff of which we are made, the stuff out of which everything grows.

Time Is Not Just Time

Looking at the time aspect of spacetime, from a pragmatic perspective there are two necessary concomitants to time. First is activity: without something happening, time is either impossible or does not matter. Second, there is no way to define time other than by reference to pattern, by reference to something that repeats.

This is not an easy concept to consider. For example, we can imagine a universe with only gas molecules bouncing around with no pattern. Surely, we think, time must exist in such a universe. While this situation is conceivable, it is not possible. The molecules themselves are patterns, and gravity will create structure as it does in our universe. More radically, we can image a universe in which there is nothing at all except time and space. Again, this is conceivable but not possible given what we know of how the universe works.

Without activity there is no time and there are no patterns. Activity, patterns, and time are born together. I do not mean to say that activity and patterns are



Kant

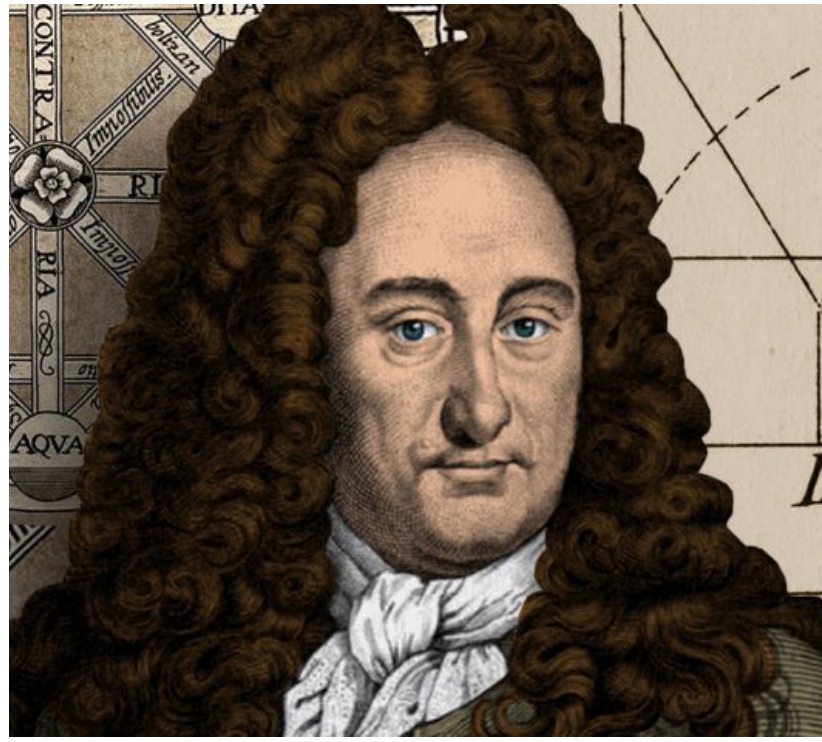
what define time. That would be the approach of Leibniz. According to SEP, ‘... for Leibniz, space and time are not to be thought of as containers in which bodies are literally located and through which they move, but rather as an abstract structure of relations in which actual (and even possible) bodies might be embedded’. I am not suggesting that space and time are purely abstract relations.

For want of a better way of saying it, what we interpret as activity, patterns, and time are all fruit of the same tree.

The Connection To The Past Hypothesis

Physicists have long wondered about the ‘arrow of time’. It is normal for us to scramble an egg into a frying pan and make breakfast. But according to the laws of motion and chemistry, it is perfectly possible for the scrambled egg bits to unfry and unscramble themselves, and leap back into the shell to become a whole egg again. The fact that we never see this happening asks for an explanation. There seems to be an arrow of time.

Ludwig Boltzmann wrestled with this problem, but his statistical mechanics and his derivation of the Second Law of Thermodynamics did not solve it. The Second Law states that the entropy of a closed system must increase with time, until it reaches a thermodynamic equilibrium. But on its own, this does not explain the



Leibniz

arrow of time because it does not say how it is that the universe is not in a thermodynamic equilibrium. Boltzmann speculated that perhaps the universe started in a very unlikely state (a state of very low entropy) and was therefore inevitably moving to a far more likely state (that is, to equilibrium). And indeed, cosmologists since Boltzmann’s time have determined independently that the universe must indeed have started in an extremely low entropy state. More recently, the physicist-philosopher David Albert named this the ‘past hypothesis’.

And Then There Is Value

I got thinking about Philip Goff’s idea that there is such a thing as ‘value’ in the universe. His proposal is that a cosmo-panpsychist universe values complexity and self-awareness. I find it hard to see how that might work.

But Goff’s idea made me realise the ‘past hypothesis’ does not just break symmetry to give an arrow to time, it also breaks the symmetry of indifference. It gives value to patterns that persist longer. Patterns that persist are more meaningful than ones that do not; at any given time, only what is present counts toward the future. It seems that persistence is a cardinal universal value that arises spontaneously with the emergence of the arrow time.



The Arrow of Time: Is It Reversible?

Does Persistence Correspond To Value?

We can say the more persistent something is, the more valuable it is to the universe because persistent patterns accumulate, and short-lived patterns die away. But does this definition of value apply to us and human culture? I believe it does. For example, I believe that moral dilemmas turn on the question of which persistence is to be maximized: the persistence of specific individuals, a way of life, groups, societies, nations, systems of governance, art, the human species, life in general, etc. I believe our feelings and instinctual judgements are tuned to enhance persistence.

In medical ethics, for example, it seems obviously better to give a heart transplant to a young woman than to an old one. The justification is that the young person will likely last longer than the old one. But what if we knew that the old person is somehow the only person in the world that will find the cure for some common deadly disease? We are now torn between the persistence of an individual, the young woman, and the persistence of a group, the people that will not die if the transplant is given to the old woman.

The above is a version of the Trolley problem, in which a person is asked to choose between allowing several people to die while one lives or intervening to kill the one person so that several other people live. Or the conundrum of killing a perfectly healthy person to

harvest their organs and save the lives of several other people. In each case, there are two levels of dilemma: the obvious consequences for the people involved in the choice, and the less obvious consequences for the chooser and the society in which they live.

On the obvious level, it makes sense to sacrifice one person to save many. But then there are the less obvious consequences to the chooser of killing someone, and of knowing they themselves might be killed by someone else. Kant's categorical imperative shines through here. We have a strong instinct to avoid killing people and to avoid living in a group that kills its people. It is easy to see how this instinct embodies the value of persistence. Moral conundrums rest on which entity or entities are to persist.

In the matter of crime, we intuitively define harm as that which shortens the persistence of the victim's pattern of life, or even life itself. We feel it is wrong to harm the innocent, but it's right for us collectively to harm someone guilty of crime (i.e. to commit against a criminal what would be a crime to commit against an innocent). It feels right for a guilty person to be less persistent, to spend less time in general society, to have a smaller influence on events, than an innocent one does. There is also the thorny issue of what actions are permissible to maximise persistence. Is harm allowed if the intention is to preserve life or to preserve a way of life? Wars are prosecuted with exactly this justification.



Ludwig Boltzmann

There may be moral values that cannot be framed in terms of the value of persistence, but I have not found them yet. Quizzing any moral justification to its roots leads inevitably to the principle of persistence.

What About The Butterfly Effect?

In summary, it seems there is a case for saying that we, what we value, and what the universe can be said to value are all inevitable consequences of the arrow of time. But we do value things that do not persist. We delight in the astonishingly ephemeral. How does that fit with the idea of valuing persistence?

The clue to this comes from the mathematics of complex patterns. These can persist only if they can withstand the inevitable jostling of their surroundings. A pattern becomes more robust when it either resist challenges or adjusts to be able to persist in the face of challenges. This is the essence of Nietzsche's idea that what does not kill us makes us stronger. Too much novelty destroys structure; too little makes structure vulnerable. Just the right amount allows a system to remain flexible and adapt to changes.

In mathematical terms, the outsized effect of the miniscule, ephemeral phenomenon is expressed in the Butterfly Effect. Some complex systems explosively amplify tiny differences. The mathematics of weather, for example, follows deterministic equations so sensitive that, in principle, the beat of a butterfly's wings in the Amazon can move the path

of a hurricane. The ideas of one person can create a revolutionary movement that changes an entire society. However, what is usually left out of this analogy is that the Amazon is full of butterflies and society is full of people with ideas. This noise creates a buzz of challenge to all patterns. It is also the fuel that drives change, as patterns adapt and survive.

Our ability to digest ephemeral effects and change accordingly are part of our pattern; they are why life survives. Butterflies are part of a balancing mechanism that keeps us persisting. They may also inevitably bring about the end of our pattern. The cell pattern of life may be 3.8 billion years old, but the average lifespan for a mammalian species is one million years. [Wikipedia on Background Extinction Rate] It is not obvious whether humans will last that long.

Summary

Immanuel Kant pointed out that we arrange our thoughts temporally, and that affects how we think. But that is not all there is to time. Time has an existence outside the way we think, and physics has connected this existence to space and matter. Time exists in activity and pattern. The arrow of time creates value that we recognise in our lives; time connects physics to moral philosophy. We intuit that we are made of matter, but physics connects matter with space and space with time. So, it may be that we are made of time.

Owen Barfield's *Poetic Diction*

Language and Consciousness

Owen Barfield's study of *Poetic Diction* identifies a developmental relationship between mind and language. In observing changes in the meaning of words over time Barfield discerned an evolution of consciousness, which to ignore, means to misunderstand meaning in ancient texts.

WILLIAM BISHOP

Language plays a vital role in life but the significance of poetry can be easily overlooked. So thought Owen Barfield who was born in North London in 1898 and attended Highgate School prior to becoming a wireless officer in Belgium during the First World War (which allowed him plenty of time for reading). After studying English at Oxford where he and C.S. Lewis became friends, he tried to make a living as a poet and writer and attended early meetings of the 'Inklings'. Subsequently he spent his working years as a lawyer, and it was only after retirement that he established his reputation as a lecturer and writer.

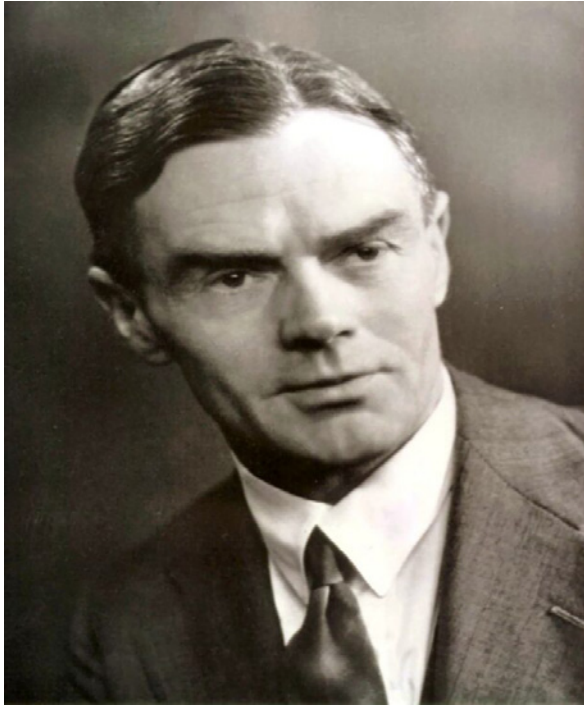
He is particularly noted for his theory of the evolution of consciousness, which came to him after noticing the changes in the meaning of words over time. It is ironic, however, that while Darwin's theory of evolution of species (which is questionable) seems almost universally accepted this is hardly the case for evolution of consciousness, as even today most people consistently view the ancient past through the lens of contemporary consciousness, believing this gives an accurate picture. Not so, says Barfield in his book *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning* (originally published in 1928).

Barfield's reflections on language helped him understand relationships between cognition, language, and consciousness, and to believe that poetic language is needed to maintain the human spirit against processes that might reduce humanity to automata. He thought language revealed the living history of the soul and that intuition and imagination are instrumental in bringing new words into being: in this creative process something that was *felt*, however vaguely, was grasped and articulated in a form similar to something already known. This drew upon figurative expression in the form of metaphor. Without Imagination there can be no knowledge. In this respect Barfield agreed with Coleridge that

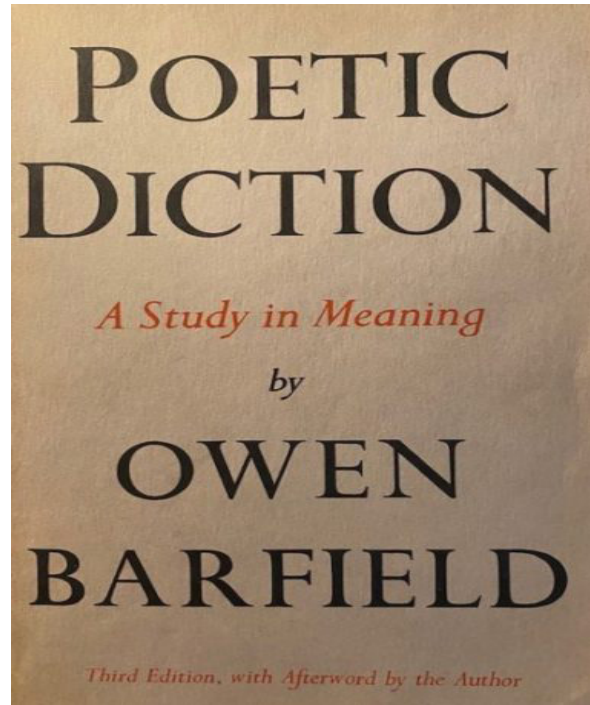
Imagination is the primary faculty of cognition. He also agreed with Wordsworth and Shelley that a proper study of 'poetic diction' is inseparable from the study of language as a whole: 'In the infancy of society (wrote Shelley) every author is necessarily a poet, because language itself is poetry . . . Every original language near its source is in itself the chaos of a cyclic poem'.

Barfield experienced literature as combining the head and heart, and poetic diction provided a particularly moving effect, which he called '*a felt change in consciousness*'. It seems that this experience of being moved by poetry provided the impulse for writing *Poetic Diction*, in which he quotes Coleridge's definition of poetry as: "the best words in the best order". This may sound trite, but in effect, particularly in the English language, word order can substantially change the meaning of a sentence, and it is this disruption to expectation that produces a felt change in consciousness, or an awakening to new meaning. An example given is of the difference between "poets old" and "old poets".

Barfield states that Mind existed, as Life, and Meaning, before it became conscious of itself as knowledge. So originally lived experience was its own meaning, which was 'unconscious' due to the mind's participation in Nature, and the development of self-consciousness brought about separation so that the mind became a subject that viewed Nature as something external. So in the development of consciousness initially things were seen in the visionary mode of the image, and then in language as single concrete (compound) concepts that later split into separate words with a single meaning. Today reality, which was once self-evident (pre-logical and not experienced conceptually), can now only be reached by the effort of the human mind, and it is this effort that creates the poetic metaphor which points to



Owen Barfield



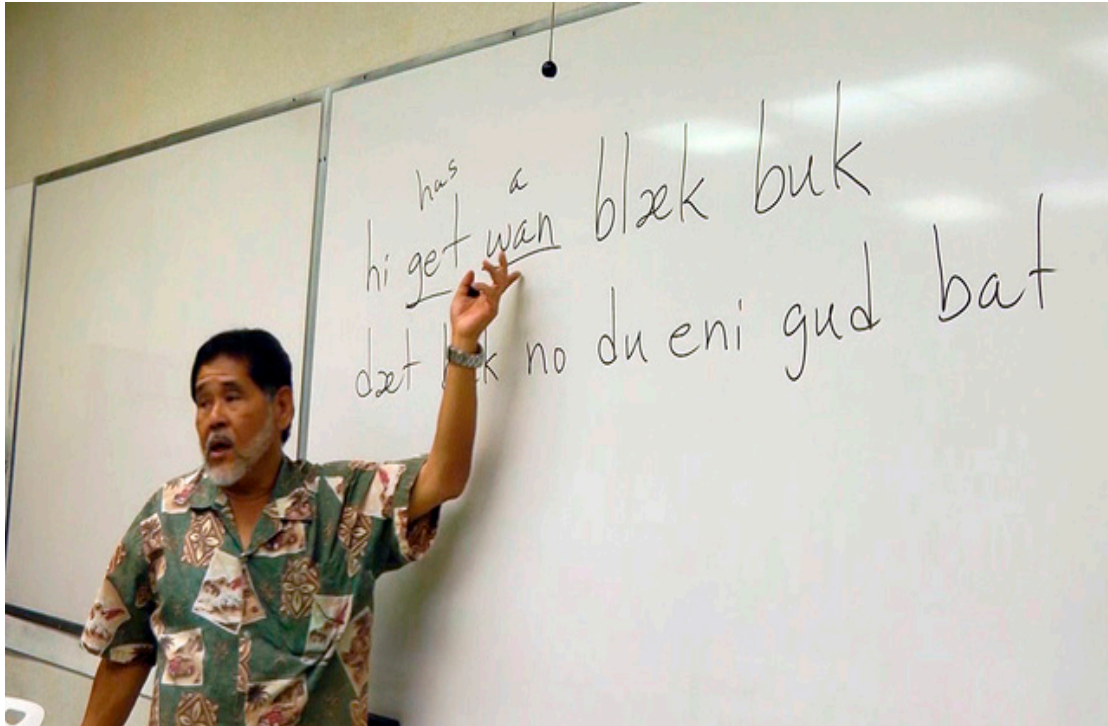
reality. So all meaning depends on the power to bring recognized resemblances and analogies to everyday experience (to the data). When in live action Barfield regards this as a 'a state of knowledge'.

What matter is as material for the sculptor, consciousness is for language and poetry, and according to Barfield great poetry reveals the progressive incarnation of life into consciousness, drawing upon wisdom. A single word is seen as a symbol of consciousness so that its change in meaning over time demonstrates an evolution of consciousness. This movement from a compound concept to a rationally reduced single meaning is exemplified in the concrete Greek word for 'pneuma', meaning jointly spirit and wind. Barfield thought that this development of a word into separate words with a single definable meaning transformed language into a prosaic utility suited to logic and science. In his view a history of language written, not from the logician's, but from the poet's point of view, would find the world's initial 'poetic diction' in the vocabulary left by mythology and earliest written records at the time of the Vedas in India and the Illiad and the Odyssey in Greece. These represent a stage where meaning was still pervaded by myth, and with Nature alive in human thinking. Here the gods could speak through human beings in inspiration.

Barfield regarded Nature as perpetually rhythmic and when myths lived on as fables after their real meaning had died, so the old rhythmic human consciousness of Nature lived on as the tradition of metrical form. We can only understand the origin of metre therefore by going back to the ages when people were conscious, not just in their heads, but in their beating heart and pulsing blood. This, says Barfield, was when thinking was not merely *of* Nature, but *was* Nature herself; and without the continued existence of poetry with its steady influx of new meaning into language, even the knowledge and wisdom which poetry has given in the past must wither away into 'a species of mechanical calculation'.

Barfield accepted the importance of aesthetic pleasure in appreciating poetry, but thought it also important to become aware of a progressive *movement* and not just its *results*. Accordingly appreciation of poetry requires participation whereby it becomes possible to experience a 'felt change of consciousness'. That is to say, through awareness of the movement from one state of consciousness to another. One example of such 'poetic diction' given by Barfield is:

'Thlee-piecee bamboo, Two-piecee puff-puff, walk inside, no-can-see'.



Pidgin English

This seems odd until it is revealed that this is Pidgin English for a three-masted screw steamer with two funnels. The difficulty in putting oneself in the mind of the Pidgin English speaker to see as they saw gives the movement necessary for a 'felt change in consciousness'. This is a case of strangeness as a quality of poetic diction. Another example is from a poem by Shelley:

'My soul is an enchanted boat, / Which, like a sleeping swan, doth float / Upon the silvery waves of thy sweet singing; / And thine doth like an angel sit / Beside a helm conducting it, / Whilst all the winds with melody are ringing . . .'

For Barfield the truth and beauty in this allows him see afresh the world around him; and since everyday experience depends on what a person brings to the sense data, absorption of metaphors such as these into one's imagination actually create and extend a faculty for recognizing significant resemblances and analogies.

In distinguishing between the poetic and the prosaic, Barfield relates 'prosaic' to words with established *fixed* meanings, as *results* (things become). These are universal terms suited to propositions in the function of logic to serve the purpose of elucidation and elimination of error. On the contrary the poetic can only manifest as fresh meaning operating within the individual term that it creates by means of new

combinations. Such fresh meaning is indirectly expressible and can only be suggested by metaphor or simile, because meaning cannot be conveyed directly from person to person.

Barfield thought that the old instinctive pre-logical consciousness that employed words with compound meanings continued up to the time of Plato. Ideas then still retained life (were not totally abstract), but then the followers of Aristotle tipped the balance by concentrating exclusively on abstract universals. Later the forms and entelechies of Aristotle were brought to life again in the poetry of Dante as the Heavenly Hierarchies. And then Nominalism redirected human vision to the abstract universals. Barfield therefore regarded Western philosophy from Aristotle onwards as the offspring of logic, which explains its neglect of poetic diction - apart from isolated examples like Heidegger with Hölderlin. However Barfield saw the rational principle as mostly responsible for producing self-consciousness, which shuts off the human ego from the *living meaning* within the outer world, enclosing it in a network of its own abstract thoughts; and in this result of shutting off the 'ego stirs and awakes to conscious existence'.

Barfield used the term, 'logomorphism' to describe the projection of logical thought back into a pre-logical age, and accused practically all writers on Plato of this, and accused Kant of psychological

logomorphism, pointing out that Kant's theory of knowledge implicitly accepts, as given, the subjectivity of the individual, which Barfield sees as a fallacy. Consequently in starting his theory of knowledge not from *thinking* but from *Kant thinks* (the 'synthetical unity of apperception') he therefore thinks with the understanding, which is the faculty of judging. Hence thinking is judging. According to Barfield, Kant identifies *idea* with *concept*, but an idea is a result, which the concept brings about by uniting with the percept. The idea stands between percept and concept and is the beginning of subjectivity. If idea is *thought* the concept is *thinking*. This distinction is crucial because thinking is not mere judging, although it includes it. The validity of knowledge gained through art and the humanities hangs on this distinction!

Due to a fashion for linguistic analysis, Barfield felt the need to defend his position. He proposed that twentieth-century science had abolished the 'thing' altogether and that part of contemporary philosophy which takes no account of *imagination* followed suit; and because it would be naïve to suppose that waves or something else (supposedly constituting the 'thing') actually existed, the philosophy of linguistic analysis assumed there was no 'referent', no substance underlying reality that is 'meant' by words. There are only descriptions, so that in seeking to penetrate the veil of naïve perception, science progresses towards the goal of nothing, because it doesn't accept that the mind first creates what it perceives as objects, but insists on the primacy of the 'data'. The data is the bare percept while the rest is imagination and therefore the world can only be known by imagination. So according to Barfield, the human mind must become increasingly aware of its own creative activity if it is to avoid loss of meaning.

In the preface to the second edition of 'Poetic Diction' (1952), Barfield refers to language as the storehouse of imagination, with the function of mediating transition from the non-individualized, dreaming spirit that carried the infancy of the world to the individualized human spirit, which has the future in its charge. His fear was that this rich resource might be converted, by logical positivists, into 'a species of algebra best adapted to indoctrination and empirical science' as a step towards the 'liquidation of the human spirit', because scientism takes for granted a detached human observer in an independent world devoid of human spirit. Consequently he recommends the study of



Coleridge

poetry and the poetic element in language for its vital role apart from any aesthetic pleasure derived from it. So the evolution of a poet starts from the condition of unconscious inspiration (possession by the Muses) to inspiration from a diminished self-consciousness, and on to full consciousness with responsibility for bringing to consciousness something that already exists in unconsciousness. This is possible because the same creative activity operating originally in meaning at an unconscious level is now within consciousness, enabling true creation of meaning (Nature, in a sense, having come inside). Here imagination is the truth teller.

In an afterword to a later edition of 'Poetic Diction' (1972), Barfield said that it may have been an advantage at the time of writing (1928) to have been unaware of books subsequently discovered that supported his general thesis, because he was then able to write more vigorously than usual in an academic study. Therefore he was enabled to erect a structure of thought on the basis of a difference between 'prosaic' and 'poetic' in recognition that the distinction shows human consciousness in process of evolution. Indeed, while the idealist and the materialist philosopher may seem a world apart, Barfield's focus emphasizes their dependent link. So while idealism and materialism may seem irreconcilable, poetic diction identifies the union of world and mind.

The Patient Owl: A Sonnet

The lazy moon moves ambling the skies,
when tiny birds are still one with the night,
blacked out by darkened treetops in disguise,
far from the preying owl, who flashes light

with amber eyes, fully awake and quick
to listen in the darkness for a sound.

Dawn paints the clouds with yellow and a lick
of orange dye between the sky and ground.

Yet night still lingers, has the upper hand
while bats are flying in a silent swarm.

The owl is waiting, fully in command
of its surroundings, any sound or form.

The little mice soon scurry up the tree
towards the moon, where owl waits patiently...

Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*



Berthe Morisot, 'Reading', 1873: Three Sestinas

The fashionable woman seated in the foreground is the artist's sister, Edma. Edma's white dress – the prime vehicle for Morisot's study of reflected light – is saturated with delicate lavender, blue, yellow, and rose tonalities. Deftly executed with quick brushstrokes, the painting resounds with a feeling of freshness, vibrancy, and delicate charm.

The Cleveland Museum of Art



Berthe Morisot

1

What else should Edma do but sit and read?
Why spare a glance for this, my chosen scene?
My sister chooses not to rest her gaze
On nature but, it seems, the printed page.
Tant pis! Hers the print-scanner's inward eye
While mine the deft scene-reader's sister-art.

Closed book to me, my sister Berthe's art!
I scan the pages lightly, more than read.
Surely she notes my inattentive eye
So often drawn from book to meadow-scene?
Perhaps my wandering passage down the page
Shares that much with her *distract* artist's gaze.

See how she looks down to avoid my gaze!
It strikes me we're both adepts of an art
That, whether on my canvas or her page,
Yields truths which only he who runs may read
Since only in a just-glimpsed, fleeting scene
Can either catch what fascinates the eye.

'Impressionist', they say, the gift of eye,
Brain, hand that's manifested in the gaze
Of one, like Berthe, who perceives this scene
Just as she paints it, not by tricks of 'art'
(A word she hates!) but as one just might read
A Zola paragraph, straight off the page.

She doesn't get it, quite: I turn the page
On old-style 'realism' which the eye
Of bourgeois viewers is induced to read
'Straight off' by bourgeois critics, or to gaze
Upon by the strait-gatekeepers of art
Who likewise regulate the social scene.

No, I don't get it, Berthe – not my scene,
Those dull (to me!) disputes that fill each page
Of posh art-journals till the room for art
Itself – works like your own – escapes the eye
And yields to the art-cataloguer's gaze
Of those, like me, who pose with books to read.

My art just now's what puts you in the scene,
Dear sister, as you read or skim the page
And painter's eye interprets reader's gaze.

12



CHRIS NORRIS

2

No plaudit they accord but cuts both ways,
Those critics, fellow-painters, they who'd seek
To praise me (so it seems) yet whose idea
Of praise is couched in terms so closely bound
To their idea of 'woman' that it means,
For me, male patronage, the mocker's touch.

'*Effleurer*' – to brush lightly, scarcely touch,
As if to paint in just the winsome ways
Of *peinture féminine*, the woman's means
To win male flattery or else to seek,
As it might be, a style or technique bound
To match that old male chauvinist idea.

'Elegance', 'lightness', 'let no big idea
Intrude to spoil that gentleness of touch' –
All terms that fix a male-appointed bound
To what should count as duly licensed ways
For women artists, decently, to seek
Both reputation and financial means.

'Virtuoso colorist' – what that one means
Is 'lacking structure, form, or some idea,
Some concept that she'd do best not to seek
But trust those 'small-scale', 'intimate' works to touch
The male-run art-establishment in ways
More bedroom-minded, less *grand-maitre*-bound.

'Loves white, or tinted-white' – that cliché's bound
To pop up soon enough, and what it means
Is, roughly: 'goes the woman's age-old ways
Around, since Eve, to disown all idea
That she might have about her the least touch
Of hankering for the truth that all men seek'.

Never quite sure just what it is I seek
In my artistic quest, though this I'm bound
To say: that if some work of mine should touch
That male nerve, whether to explore new means
Of insult or redress, then the idea
Is apt to pleasure me in sundry ways.

Yes, it's a light and gentle touch I seek,
Yet one that finds out ways to cross the bound
Where 'woman' means 'sans structure, form, idea'.

3

They've subtler, more suggestive ways to press
That message home, like saying '*en plein air*
She painted', then just hinting it was through
My having those thrice-blessed tubes of paint
That so enhanced our palette and that let
Us cub 'impressionists' get out-of-doors.

That's how they kept the *Académie* doors
Tight-closed so long against me while the press,
Even the arty press, declined to let
My works, my 'outdoors', breathe a different air
From those, say Renoir, who could likewise paint
En plein air and have nature's hues come through.

'*Non finito*' – they mean 'not carried through',
'Unfinished', 'should have kept it safe indoors,
Not shown it at the *Salon*', though to paint
As I do is to have my brushstrokes press
Against the nature-scenes those nose-in-air
Academicians treat like rooms to let.

That's when impressions crowd in – when I let
My unprimed canvases at times show through,
My edges turn quite porous, open-air,
And Edma sit there reading, though outdoors,
As if to say 'Dear sister, let's not press
Too hard on it, this *différence* you paint'.

It's why distinctions vanish when I paint,
Why there's no pleasure greater than to let
Those watercolours, oils and pastels press
Each other's claim to equal status through
My mixing them, so holding wide the doors
Of sense to hues and brushstrokes light as air.

It's they, not I, build castles in the air,
The academic types who over-paint
A natural scene as if to shut those doors
Against the sorts of humdrum stuff I've let
Slip in – like Edma's fan and brolly – through
A frame with no sharp border-lines to press.

In- or out-doors, I'll have you walk on air!
No hostile press whose jeers I can't out-paint.
Let go false guides, have nature see you through.



Bag End, Hobbiton, the comfortable underground dwelling of Bilbo and later Frodo Baggins, constructed for Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* film series: a perfect example of biophilic design. Credit: Pseudopanax at English Wikipedia

Reimagining Architecture for the Common Good

Dr. ALAN XUEREB

The genesis of this article traces back to the tumultuous period of the Covid-19 pandemic. Reflecting on my own experience of dwelling in the serene surroundings of the German village of Tawern, I pondered the disparity in living conditions and its impact on well-being. This introspection catalysed my exploration into the nexus of aesthetics, well-being, and the common good.

Evolution Of The Idea

Navigating through the labyrinth of philosophical thought, I found myself drawn to Heidegger's phenomenological conception of dwelling. Despite its cryptic nature, Heidegger's critique of modernity resonated deeply, prompting a re-evaluation of architecture's role in fostering authentic human experiences. Concurrently, John Finnis's framework of the common good provided a complementary

perspective, emphasizing the interconnectedness of individual and collective flourishing.

While Heidegger and Finnis stem from divergent philosophical traditions, their underlying goals converge on the pursuit of human flourishing. Both critique modern alienation and emphasize the significance of authentic existence within a community. Despite methodological disparities, they collectively challenge utilitarian notions of well-being, advocating for a more holistic understanding rooted in human dignity.

Two Perspective on Dwelling

Central to Heidegger's philosophy is the concept of dwelling, which transcends mere physical shelter to encompass a profound attunement to one's surroundings. Dwelling, in its essence, fosters a sense of belonging

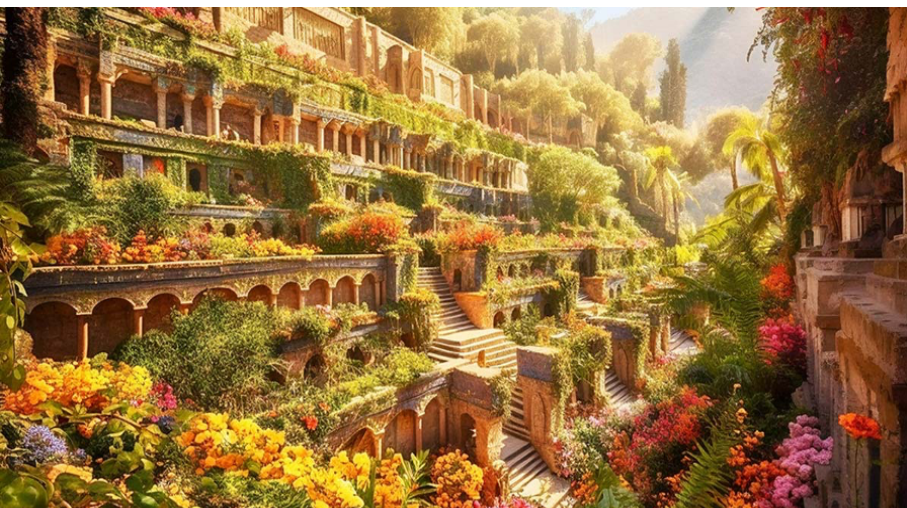
and poetic transformation, intertwining human existence with the fabric of the world. Through architecture, Heidegger envisions a harmonious synthesis between humanity and its environment, where buildings resonate with the *genius loci* of their surroundings.

In parallel, Finnis elucidates the notion of the common good as the harmonization of individual and collective well-being. Grounded in natural law theory, Finnis posits that human flourishing arises from the fulfilment of intrinsic goods, including aesthetic experience. Practical reasonableness emerges as a guiding principle, facilitating virtuous living conducive to the common good.

Turpification

However, amidst the pursuit of well-being lies the spectre of *turpification* – the degradation of built environments through uninspired design and urban encroachment. Turpification not only erodes individual well-being but also undermines communal harmony, perpetuating a cycle of alienation and disconnection.

Yet, hope emerges in the form of retro-novation and biophilic design. By revitalizing existing structures and integrating natural elements, architects can foster environments that nurture both human flourishing and ecological sustainability. Biophilic design, echoing Heidegger's vision, seeks to rekindle the innate connection between humanity and the natural world, forging a path towards architecture for the common good.



Representational image of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.
Source: Creative Digital Art / Adobe Stock

In conclusion, my own view endeavours to bridge the philosophical chasm between Heideggerian phenomenology and Finnis's natural law theory, envisioning architecture as a catalyst for authentic dwelling and communal flourishing. As we traverse from the garden of ancient Babylon to the modern metropolis, the ethos of the common good beckons us to reimagine architecture as a conduit for human well-being, transcending mere utility to embrace the poetry of existence.

The Wednesday

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Website:

www.thewednesdayoxford.com

Published by:

The Wednesday Press, Oxford

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c/o The Secretary,
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Account Number:

24042417

Sort Code:

09-01-29



Solar Eclipse Over New York, April 2024.
Photographed By *Virginia Khuri*