

The *Wednesday*



Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford

Editorial

Expanding the Philosophical Vision

Mary Midgley was trained as an analytical philosopher. She studied and taught within this school of thought but she was famous for taking issue with the limitation of propositional analysis, the narrow vision of the wider context of how language is used and the exclusion of metaphysics and meaning. She objected to reductionism and the scientific turn of philosophy, or more precisely, materialism, and insisted that life is more than what can be fitted into scientific description or philosophical, logical analysis. She thought the imagination plays a major role in human life, but also in science and philosophy. She looked for a multiplicity of methods and perspectives, including science, philosophy, poetry and art. I find this vision more inclusive and creative and far better than the one-sided views that were promoted by her opponents.

Midgley seems to have formed this vision very early in her life, perhaps when she was still at school. She had an interest in history and was influenced by a great philosopher of history, Collingwood. It was Collingwood's memoirs, *Autobiography*, that showed her the limitation of any philosophy that tends to do away with history. The book came out the same year that she went to Oxford, and is very critical of the trend of Oxford philosophy at that time, but it is not clear when she did read it. The new philosophy was, and still is, a problem-oriented philosophy. Possibly it was imitating science. In science and mathematics, you deal with problems and not with their history. Similarly, philosophy became reliant on the latest papers published and less concerned with historical development.

Midgley's background as the daughter of a churchman and her up-bringing gave her a bigger picture of reality and made her sensitive to the trend towards reductionism in the rising analytical philosophy, and later reductionist interpretations

of science, especially in her debate with Dawkins and his like. Perhaps she expected the attack on metaphysics from the science camp but not from philosophy. In her memoirs, *The Owl of Minerva*, she takes issue with a number of philosophers including Wittgenstein, Ayer, Ted Honderich and Colin McGinn who dismiss metaphysics as either beyond the limits of language and rational thought or empty and non-sensical. She accuses them of restricting philosophy only to a well-illuminated spot. She then gives the nice simile of the man who keeps looking for his car keys under the same lamp-post. Someone asks him, 'Is that where you dropped them?' 'No,' he replies, 'but it's much the easiest place to look.' It is for this reason that she called her memoirs, *The Owl of Minerva*, a phrase borrowed from Hegel.

Maybe the vision of Mary Midgley is worth considering. It is not that analytical philosophy is wrong, but it has been used in an ideological way to promote a certain conception of reality. This conception is as metaphysical as the view that it opposes. If old metaphysics, in the more extravagant claims, created problems, say in Meinong's ontology, the new conception had to deal with more complex issues. The eliminative trend, especially in the philosophy of mind, had created intractable problems. Sometimes it seems that if this trend is right, it is better to leave the issue to science all together and not to make philosophical knowledge claims about it. It will be philosophy dwarfed by science. However, it is not philosophy that is in the wrong but the vision that has become too entrenched and too limiting. The books that Midgley left behind are a wake-up call for new philosophers to expand their vision and become more inclusive.

The Editor

Conscious Participation

Owen Barfield describes the evolution of consciousness in a neutral way, but an implicit worldview can be detected. On first acquaintance, the evolution of consciousness may seem abstract and inconsequential, yet Barfield saw in it profound theological consequences for humanity.

WILLIAM BISHOP

The rich complexity of ideas and treatment in *Saving the Appearances: a study in idolatry* can deceive the reader into thinking the book proposes a complete metaphysical theory of reality. Its author became aware of this after reaction to its first edition in 1957. Consequently in the introduction to the Wesleyan edition published in 1988, Owen Barfield explained that he wanted to be neutral on views about reality but his actual intention was to evoke in the reader “a sustained acceptance of the relation assumed by physical science to exist between human consciousness and the world of which consciousness is aware”. Although the book’s subject is the evolution of consciousness, an implicit worldview can be detected. Indeed evoking a ‘sustained acceptance’ of the evolution of consciousness in the reader is a hard enough task in itself, given habitual unconscious assumptions that consciousness has remained constant since its first appearance. However since the 1960s Barfield detected “a change in the mental climate of the few interested in the nature of the world and the meaning of their life in it.”

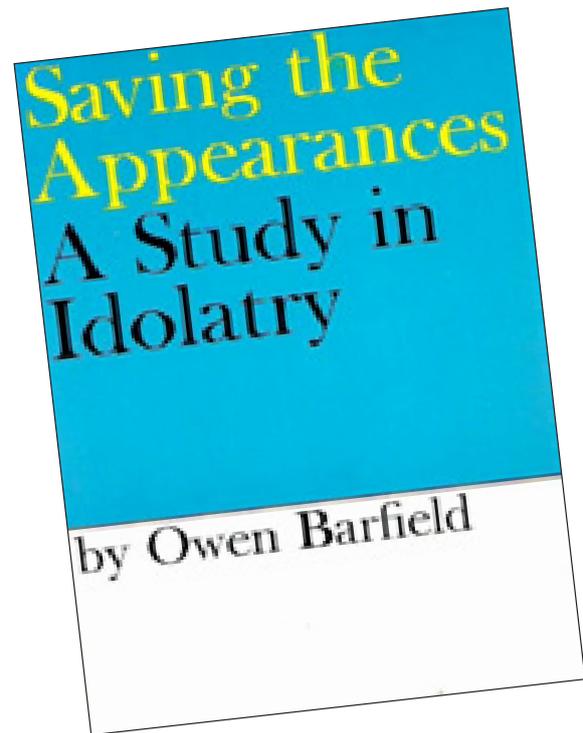
Owen Barfield (1898-1997) was a thinker, author and poet, and as a member of the Oxford ‘Inklings’ his Christian stance and evolutionary theory influenced both C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien. However, on first acquaintance, his evolution of consciousness may seem abstract and inconsequential, yet Barfield saw in it profound theological consequences for humanity. His book, *Saving the Appearances* claims that since the onset of the age of science, the West’s mode of knowledge represents idolatry. By using this expression he turns on its head its use by the original inspirer of our technological age, Francis Bacon (1561 – 1626), who applied the term, ‘idol’, to medieval knowledge.

To know, and to know that you know, are two different states of cognition within the evolution of consciousness. According to Barfield when man as a kind was breathed into being, an original unity was polarized into intelligence and appearance leaving a slender connecting thread of participating between original data appearances by means of intelligence. Unawareness of the mind’s participation in configuring basic ‘substance’ to form an image leads, according to Barfield, to taking phenomena literally. When this separated world of appearances of phenomena is then seen literally as phenomena (rather than as mediated appearances) this makes appearances into idols. It is necessary however to see this in the context of the evolution of consciousness from ‘original participation’ through to virtual loss of participation and then its reintroduction at a more developed level of ‘final participation’ utilizing imagination and intuition.

Barfield introduces his own terms for three different but connected forms of thinking. ‘Figuration’ is the creation of a representation; ‘alpha thinking’ thinks about representations, accepting their ‘outness’; while ‘beta thinking’ is reflective thinking about the nature of representations. Our current civilization is characterized largely by ‘alpha thinking’. In terms of thought in general Barfield accepted the idea that mind is the basic structure of the universe and this Creative Mind operates through the human being as a mind-bearing creature. Essentially humanity originally had a conscious relationship to a Divine Creator but this diminished over time with the evolution of consciousness, but this participatory relationship to the creative origin can be regained with a more evolved consciousness. If the connection is lost entirely then the consequence will be the loss of relationship to nature, with the attendant loss of meaning to life. Another way of putting things according to Barfield is that



Owen Barfield



the phenomenal world arises from the relation between a conscious and an unconscious, and evolution is the story of the changes that relation has undergone and is undergoing. We participate in the phenomena with the unconscious part of ourselves and the phenomena then become collective representations. Since nature and consciousness have evolved together knowledge is the experience of phenomena as representations.

‘Original participation’ persisted into medieval times when knowledge was the actual union with the represented behind the representation: ‘The knowledge of things that are, is the things. Nothing is known except truth, which is the same as Being.’ Knowledge then was the actualizing of the soul’s potential to become what it contemplates: a participation in God as the cause of all things. A formal or hierarchical structure of the universe was participated as names or emanations of God; the name *was* the thing. When later representations were experienced non-representationally as objects in their own right, this constituted idolatry. So with the expulsion of participation through ‘alpha thinking’ (begun by the Greeks) a direct soul relationship to nature became lost, potentially leading to loss of meaning. Appearances therefore needed to be saved from loss of meaning and this, according to Barfield,

becomes possible through ‘final participation’ which experiences representations as idols but through the use of imagination performs the act of figuration consciously in order to experience the representation as participated. This is exactly what Goethe was able to achieve with his methodology particularly in biology.

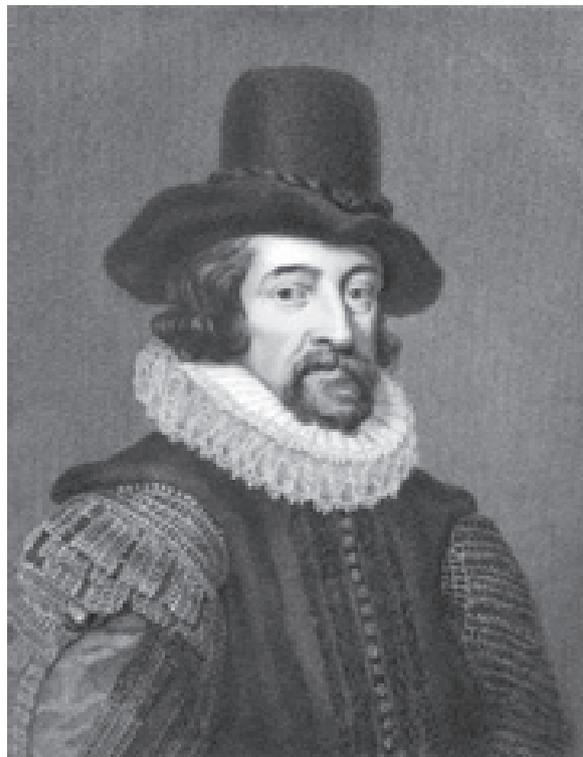
Barfield’s approach to his subject is bold and penetrating (as could be said of Goethe’s) for it might be construed that he is mixing religion with philosophy when he is actually taking a consistent approach to reality as he understands it. This includes a view of history, which starts with humanity’s connection with the divine, which then dips down into the mundane with virtual loss of connection to the divine world before meeting a turning point for gradual reconnection with the creative world of spirit. This turning point is the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ Jesus. This fact is made significant for the non-religious person when Barfield identifies the Christ as the Logos, or Word: a Being or active force. Indeed, language, as the carrier of the word, plays a vital role in historical evolution, not least in providing names for the ideas out of which phenomena are formed. Barfield explains that Nature and Language came into being alongside each other, and during the early days words expressed outer

Philosophy

and inner meaning within a single word. That is to say, the self did not distinguish between outer and inner until later on when self-consciousness arose, splitting outer from inner and creating the separation of subject and object. This separation created memory, which was able to recall appearances and with self-consciousness reproduce appearances in words. So in 'original participation' the soul and nature are bound together. This can be regarded as pantheism. Indeed Barfield states that the 'original participation' mode of consciousness was so unlike our own that we would hardly be able to identify with it or comprehend it.

The ancient Hebrew nation played a significant role in the evolution of consciousness. Barfield saw their mission as eradicating 'original participation' to prepare the way to the future where an enhanced, self-consciously directed 'final participation' could come about. A policy of zero tolerance of graven images (seen as idols) was instituted and what was initially sensed as an outer God became internalized and identified with the holy name of God: 'I Am'. But by the time of the incarnation of Christ Jesus this inwardness had been lost and the God of the Hebrews was again conceived by them (particularly the Pharisees) as other and outer. At this point in evolution it was the role of the incarnated Word to initiate the impulse toward a progressive evolution of consciousness. Barfield stresses that if the Creator is seen as other, as a phenomenon, then an idol is substituted for God. We perceive through our perceptive capacity, which has been created for us and in the sense of the evolution of humanity it is as though the Creator perceives through us: the I Am - a supreme identity with whom we identify. As Barfield says: 'The elimination of original participation involves a contraction of human consciousness from periphery to centre – a contraction of the cosmos of wisdom to something like purely brain activity – but by the same token it involves an *awakening* out of universal into self-consciousness.'

The term, 'saving the appearances' was originally associated with astronomy where a hypothesis was created to account for the apparent movements of the heavenly bodies. Barfield says that when Galileo presented his hypothesis of a heliocentric planetary system, the hypothesis was not the problem for the



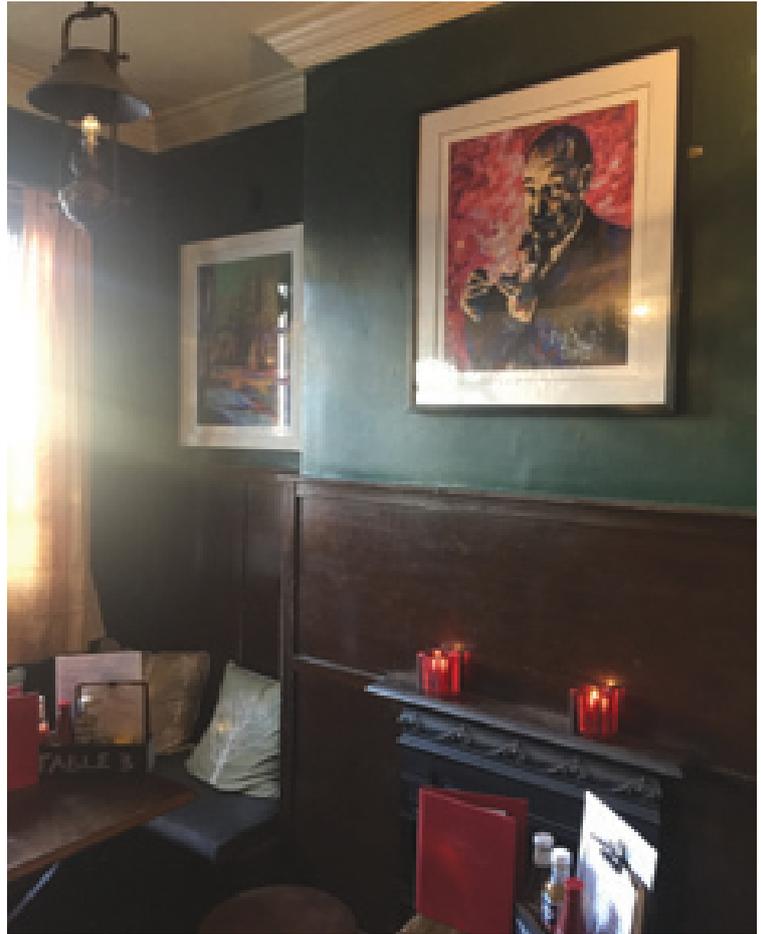
Francis Bacon

Church but the prospect that a hypothesis could later be seen as the true reality. The difficulty is that once a hypothesis is accepted as truth it becomes a collective representation, and this then forms the basis for our view of reality. Accounting for appearances, such as the apparent movements of bodies within the solar system and so 'saving the appearances' with a hypothesis or mathematical formula satisfies the mind but this should not be allowed to obscure the actual (divinely appointed) arrangement, or soul-relationship with the divine-living element underpinning the appearance. This involves participation where "God's view is the view of Mind as such, for it corresponds to the real structure of existence."

Barfield thought that 'final participation' would be able to regain 'inwardness' through the Pauline: 'Not I but Christ within', as the living Word. Participation is an extra-sensory connection with the represented, but when the connection is felt only through the senses phenomena become cognized as separate and independent, and as such, idols, since consciousness is correlative to phenomena. When therefore phenomena of nature are treated literally as objects with an evolution of their own,



J. R. R. Tolkien's portrait on the wall of Eagle and Child, Oxford



C. S. Lewis's portrait hanging in Eagle and Child pub, Oxford

this constitutes an evolution of idols. At our present stage in history we are still within the turning point towards 'final participation'. We love (and sometimes hate) our idols and manipulate them for our own ends, but idolatry comes at a price. The mood change around the time of the scientific revolution, with its impulse from Nominalism, marked a crucial stage in the evolution from 'original' to 'final participation', where evolution can be considered as the progressive incarnation of the cosmic intelligence – the Word.

Speaking of the pre-scientific medieval age, Barfield said, 'Its spiritual wealth can be, and indeed, if incalculable disaster is to be avoided, *must* be regained.' This 'spiritual wealth' includes awareness that knowledge is not the devising of hypotheses but is an act of union with the represented behind the representation. 'The word *is* the thing, and God's own knowledge is the cause of all things and identical with His substance and man participates in the being of God and it is only by virtue of that participation that he can claim to

have any being.' Barfield stresses that we cannot go back but must go forward with a new form of participation: 'What is needed is a different "slant"; a comparatively slight adjustment in our way of looking at things and ideas on which attention is already fixed.'

Owen Barfield's identification of the soul's participation in appearances has largely remained under the radar of our modern world, but there are signs this is changing under pressure from the predicaments in which humanity finds itself, not least the up and coming change in the balance of power between artificial and human intelligence. There is an urgent need to identify the positive and true nature of the human being and recognize that human freedom is delicately poised at a point of balance between opposing directions. Barfield's view of the human as a being in becoming, connected with a divine Creator (Cosmic Intelligence), is a powerful, civilizing contribution for us to ponder.

Poetry and Art

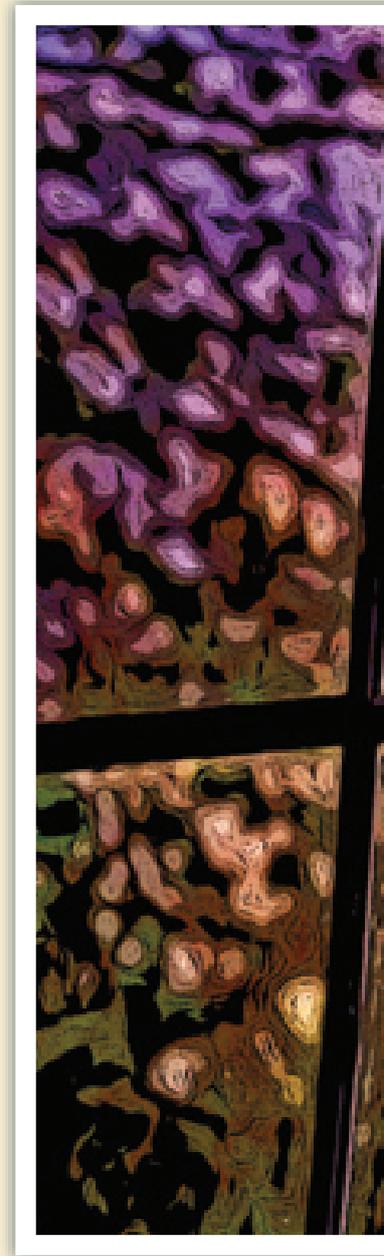
Rest, listen, feel and see

Resting, that's it. Only at rest can you look at
and feel the nature surging around you,
the enduring roads, the hills
with the stooped chestnuts, the trees of your childhood,
a reminder of your youth, long gone in the shadows,
lost in the songs of the wind or uphill,
on a winding path.

Listen to the splashing water and watch,
how it darkens, so slowly,
trembling in the swaying dusk,
and observe, how the hanging lantern
quietly swings through the endless twilight
in the breath of the fading hours.

Feel how the room embraces the dark
with increasing passion,
as the chairs slide deeper into invisibility,
how the beds collide and the headboards groan,
as if the sphere around them was moving
towards the high walls, the heavy arch of the entrance,
the walnut furniture, and the table.

See how slowly all things are dwarfed,
how in the darkness the burning love invades,
and the price you pay, so startled upon awakening,
because in your dream you died.





Go, rest in this chair, sit comfortably, be aware,
how the murmur of the forest is fading,
how a last birdcall falls silent,
how through the crack of the windowpane
the wind is still moaning.

Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

‘To Agree or not to Agree’ That is the Question

It is a common experience that when we find ourselves in agreement or in disagreement with others it often depends on imperceptible variables, such as our mood, for example our presumption to control the situation. It may also depend on how anxious we are, or the perception that something would be against our interests. Indeed, mood often happens to be able to generate whole groups of arguments in support of either agreement or disagreement.

LIVIO ROSSETTI

To agree or not to agree is a complex matter. We often seem to agree or disagree with others because of factors which are outside of the argument. This kind of behaviour is a bit strange. It is perhaps appropriate to ask how could one account for such factors. I would suggest that, at least in a sense, a promising answer is at hand. Just consider that, when we speak or write (or try to communicate in some other way, for example by whistling a musical motif), we often drastically simplify what we have in mind. We may not have time to enter into more details, or we may feel unable to do so, or we may presume that details (explanations, distinctions, definitions, discussion of possible objections, quotations, and so on) would be unnecessary, boring, or counter-productive. Indeed, it often seems that a long monologue would probably be less convincing than a short and incisive sentence. Whatever the reasons, only seldom do we have the time and ability to specify everything clearly. In a word: abridged communication is common practice, and not only in face-to-face exchanges. (Just think of the original version of Twitter.)

Because of a shared preference for short communication units, we usually omit innumerable details, hoping to be correctly understood despite our omissions. Besides, our interlocutors are usually able to detect a number of implicit details, and also some unstated arguments in support of a given claim. (For example: ‘I presume to know why you made this statement’). Besides, even the way we say ‘Hello’ when answering someone who is calling us on the phone is able to convey impressively many pieces of information on our behalf (primarily on the mood of the moment), as police investigators know very well. Let me just evoke Commissaire Maigret saying ‘Take your

cigarette out of your mouth’ to a policeman while this man was telling him something on the phone.

According to the French saying, ‘On n’est d’accord sur rien si on n’est pas d’accord sur tout,’ – ‘we do not agree on anything if (= as long as) we do not agree on everything’. This is also enlightening. Diplomats are often asked to devise formal agreements that hide countless points of potential disagreement. More generally, when we say ‘I agree’, we *choose* to say that we agree, but it remains to be seen why we took such a decision. Generally speaking, it depends on what we find important, and empathy and simplifications usually play a crucial role. Besides, our subconscious and/or our education are able to orientate our seemingly free evaluations with impressive efficacy.

All in all, whether or not we agree or disagree with others can be influenced by a number of reasons that are not pertinent: such as an opinion about what may be more elegant, or more prudent, or more rewarding, or less dangerous for the person who takes such a decision, and often the lack of time left to decide plays a pivotal role. Besides, assuming that it occurred to me to make a rather improper statement, I possibly feel obliged to multiply efforts in order to create a context suitable to redeem the unhappy statement I have made.

That said, let me concentrate on face-to-face oral exchanges in order to remind you that these exchanges are normally part of a much more comprehensive bundle of accompanying messages. They are meant to support, complete or at least colour any verbal message. Other than supporting – or even contradicting – individual statements, these accompanying messages may



A group of people in discussion

perform other sophisticated functions, although it is possible, say, to convey a certain message to the direct interlocutor and another, not stated, to third persons, or a message meant to put the other person in some distress, or to ensure that a certain statement will not be taken at face value without the help of further layers of signification. However, simple gestures (e.g. arm-and-hand gestures), the decision to suddenly start talking louder or softer than previously, or a smile, or tears, are bodily messages suitable to add further qualifications to what one is saying. So, the value to be attached to our statements may well depend on extra-textual factors, some of which are likely to escape the attention of one's interlocutor. Moreover, the context can be used to add features to what one is trying to communicate (e.g. what one knows about the person with whom one is talking, or the expected effects of one's words, taking into account any risks).

It is perhaps time to ask what may follow from the additional meanings that so often colour our words, and to which we so often attach a considerable importance. While a measure of universal scepticism or a doubt about our intellectual freedom, or about the attainability of truth, are only loosely related to the few remarks

given above, much more pertinent would be, I presume, to ask whether our best analytical tools are sufficiently well-equipped in order to account for so many complex features of our communication units. My tentative answer is that we still lack analytical tools able to account for their complexity. One could certainly look for some support from theories of argumentation as well as formal and informal logic, but these tools seem able to account for only some layers of a rather complex exchange to be taken into account: that is, only by greatly reducing their complexity.

What else? One could perhaps expect some help, rather, from rhetoric. But rhetoric is oriented towards the appropriateness and the efficacy of our attempts at communication, not towards its analysis. However, it is interesting to note that, from the masters in communication, we may learn not only how to reinforce our communication efforts, but also learn how other people proved able to maximise (or could have maximised) the efficacy of their own communication attempts. So, in a sense, they are really able to account for the complexity. And perhaps only these masters can do this. Or perhaps not?

Something to Say



CHRIS NORRIS

Oh Christ. I couldn't care less. ... I can't say I'm overwhelmed with surprise. I'm 88 years old and they can't give the Nobel to someone who's dead, so I think they were probably thinking they'd probably better give it to me now before I've popped off.

The Golden Notebook for some reason surprised people but it was no more than you would hear women say in their kitchens every day in any country I was really astounded that some people were shocked.

Doris Lessing

They door-stepped Doris Lessing, told her she'd
Just won the Nobel Prize: 'something to say?'
'Could you please hang on just a sec? I need
To sort out all this shopping. Then I may.'

Got it just right, I think; the press-release
Would be out soon, so no point missing a
Chance to clear up (besides, the prize for Peace
Once went to that arch-villain, Henry Kissinger).

Of course she could say 'stuff your prize', like Sartre,
The sort of thing that might have raised a cheer
In Paris, whether Rive Gauche or Montmartre,
But 'not my way of doing things, I fear'.

Else she might emulate the monkish Beckett,
Accept the thing but not turn up, and so
Win both ways: stash the cash (big money: check it!)
While fame accrues the more you let it go.

Then there's the well-known Harold Pinter play:
Judicious silences, no word *de trop*,
But use the Nobel status you enjoy
To chide the world and blast the status quo.

Who'll say her doorstep tactic lacked the clout,
The gravity, or 'sense of history's hand
Laid on your shoulder' that they talk about,
Those who require you spout at their command?





She'd got there first, changed lives, challenged the whole
Existing gender set-up, and so shown
How fiction could take on the prophet's role
In (happily) a God-forsaken zone.

'All very well', her words conveyed, 'this fuss
About the Prize, my "visionary power",
"Tough scepticism", "fire" and all the plus-
Points that, they say, made this my finest hour.

But that's old news; the writing's on the wall
For me, time-wise, and any good I've done
Was in my readers' lives and not at all
In clever twists or subtle tales I've spun.

That's where it goes off-track, the whole idea
Of literary prizes; how it stops
Us seeing that beyond the words may be a
Real Anna Wulf who writes but also shops.

Don't get me wrong: I've time for Henry James
And writing as a life-choice though my view,
Like hers, is that if writing only aims
That far then there's a whole lot more to do.

So maybe you'll forgive me if I duck
Your questions just for now, unpack this stuff,
And jot down some odd thoughts that may, with luck,
Find words high-toned and apposite enough.'

The famous Female Philosophers of Oxford

Notes on the Wednesday Meetings Held on 17th & 24th of October 2018

PAUL COCKBURN

We discussed the topic of women in philosophy, mainly five female philosophers Elizabeth Anscombe, Mary Midgley, Iris Murdoch, Philippa Foot and Mary Warnock, all of whom studied at Oxford during the Second World War. What is feminine about their philosophy? Should their work be read from the perspective of them being 'women' or 'philosophers'? Do they have special concerns in terms of aesthetics, religion, ethics, mind, science and poetry?

In discussion, it was noted that Iris Murdoch and Mary Warnock had interesting careers in terms of philosophy – but they did not have typical 'philosophical' careers. Murdoch was a famous novelist as well as a philosopher. Warnock delivered the Gifford lectures in 1992, but also chaired the Committee of Inquiry into Human Fertilization and Embryology. Her report gave rise to the Human Fertilization and Embryology Act of 1992. Midgley and Anscombe were quite combative in putting forward their views, they were not 'shrinking violets'. Anscombe debated with C. S. Lewis on whether naturalism was self-refuting, and Midgley disagreed strongly with Richard Dawkins book *The Selfish Gene* – 'how could a gene be selfish?' she asked, among other questions. Philippa Foot was more 'mainstream' – she became vice-principal of Somerville College at Oxford and later took up Visiting Professorship posts in America. She believed that ethical statements could be true or false and was one of the founders of 'virtue ethics'.

In terms of gender issues generally, the physical role of women in terms of the

possibility of having children was thought to influence what women think and do. It gives them a different perspective on life to men. There are many more women philosophers now. In Jungian terms, animus and anima (the masculine and feminine aspects of the psyche) are present in both men and women, so you cannot 'typecast' men as being more concerned with the rational, women with the emotional. Looking at the work of the five female philosophers considered above it seems clear they are of equal intelligence to any male philosopher. One view was that women add some vivacity to philosophy which is often rather heavy and dull.

The Cognitive Content of Art

We moved on to discuss the cognitive content of art. What is this cognitive content? How can it be shared with philosophy? Can we do philosophy through art or is art an alternative route to the truth? Is art a stage in the development of human thought that had been superseded by philosophy? Art is present everywhere in a way philosophy is not, but could art ever be an alternative to discursive thought? Is aesthetics as a branch of philosophy adequate to the production of art? If art or literary criticism is a meta-discourse on these activities, is philosophy even further removed from the process of artistic and literary creativity? Do different schools of philosophy deal differently with art?

We looked at a broad historical narrative which can be applied to European painting. Art was originally religious, and in medieval times was used by the church to illustrate religious themes and aid devotion. It then moved to



Philippa Foot

the wealthy patrons of art who commissioned paintings generally to increase their prestige. Artists were technicians rather than geniuses in these times. Art then moved into the psychological realm with the Romantics such as Caspar David Friedrich, and painters such as Turner. As artists were able to physically paint nature actually taking their easels into the great outdoors, Impressionism and then post-Impressionism took hold. Then art became more reflective, and also a vehicle for artists to express themselves, with Picasso for example breaking down things into geometric terms. Conceptual and abstract art developed, and a link with advertising was established.

We discussed novels and how they contrast with philosophical texts. A crime thriller is sometimes a bit like a philosophical puzzle, with formulaic, logical steps. We ask ourselves if we have missed something in the plot, and then the solution to the puzzle is presented in terms of a motive or the crucial evidence which we have missed. However,



Elizabeth Anscombe

good novels seem to open doors in our minds, coming upon us in a sideways manner rather than directly confronting us as we discover the characters and story in a non-analytic way. The story works on us in an unconscious way, we have to withdraw a bit and let the magic work on us so to speak as we read. In poetry perhaps emotions are expressed which lead into a story which is not written down, only guessed at. There is a revealing process going on with space created for impact, with our imagination and understanding engaged. Films are often too immersive, over-powering our imagination and understanding in a powerful sensory experience.

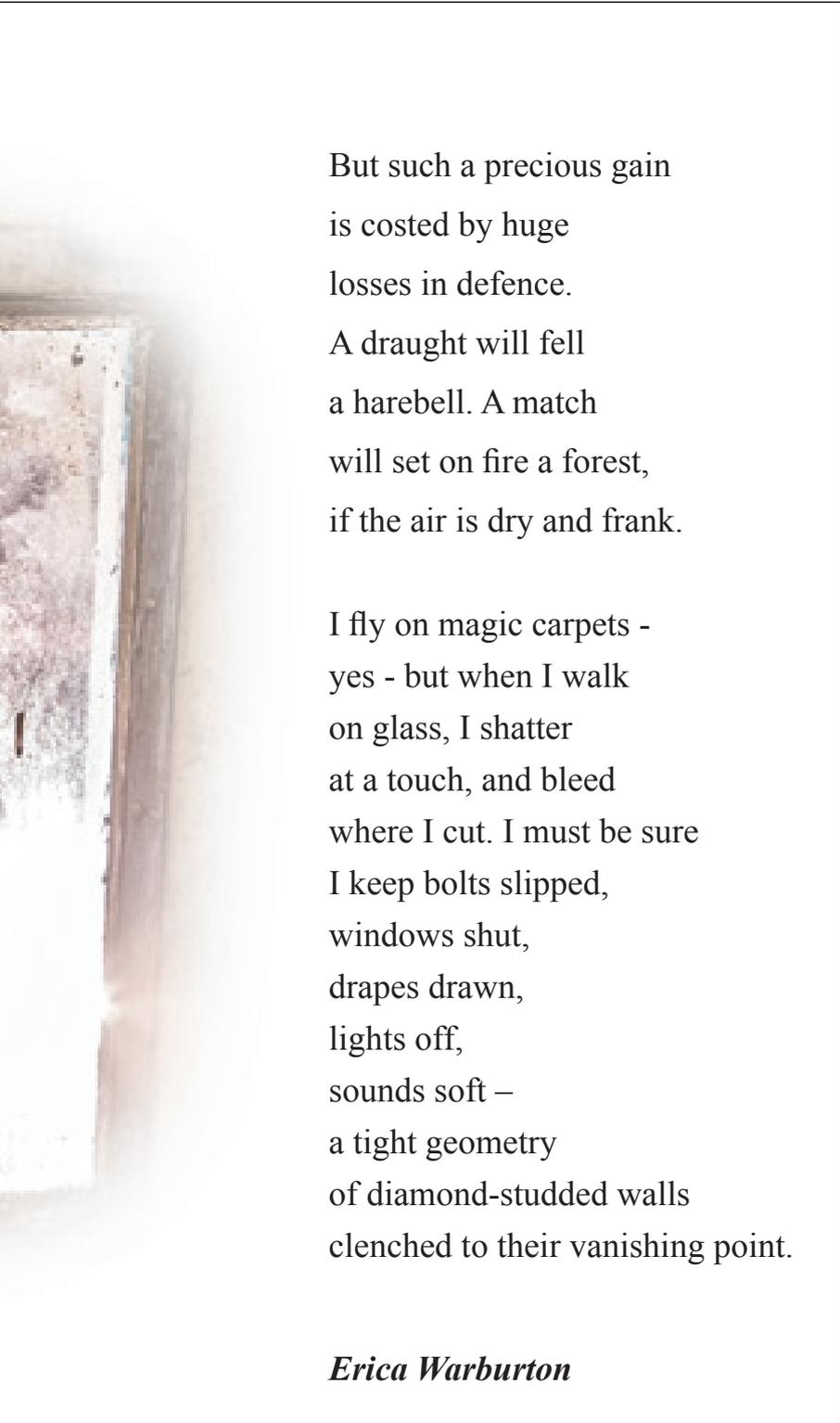
Does art have a purpose? If it does, what is it? It seems to have many dimensions. It is as if art shows us we are on a very winding path trying to understand ourselves and the world around us. But that purpose is not teleological in a technological way where perhaps clearer goals are set and the path is a clear straight line.

Changed Circumstances

I thought the hardest thing
would be the solitude:
the spare economy of one
knife and one fork,
the trouble saved
by a cold hearth
and empty corridor.

But, like all other art,
it happens that
life can say more
with fewer strokes.
Simplify! chides Thoreau.
And barefoot, I find that
I can fly on magic carpets.





But such a precious gain
is costed by huge
losses in defence.
A draught will fell
a harebell. A match
will set on fire a forest,
if the air is dry and frank.

I fly on magic carpets -
yes - but when I walk
on glass, I shatter
at a touch, and bleed
where I cut. I must be sure
I keep bolts slipped,
windows shut,
drapes drawn,
lights off,
sounds soft –
a tight geometry
of diamond-studded walls
clenched to their vanishing point.

Erica Warburton

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Website: Currently unavailable

Published by:

The Wednesday Press, Oxford

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The Solipsist



I think that every sight I see,
The world of touch and sight and sound,
Will not be present without me,
But vanish when I'm not around.

For, when I perish, so will all,
Experience is mine alone,
And death will see the curtain fall
On everything my dream has shown.

Some say that each idea that is
Lies present in God's mind Divine,
But am I an idea of his,
Or is he merely one of mine?

Edward Greenwood