

The Wednesday

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Editorial

Philosophy in a Fragmented World

The world is going through a turbulent time. Wars, death and destructions are all around. These are issues of great importance and should be discussed, however this is not my topic. I am interested here in the feeling of a loss of meaning and a sense of fragmentation in the modern world. This is an aspect that used to be written and talked about in novels, poetry, films and all cultural media. But all this disappeared from the conscious level to, possibly, the subconscious level. It maybe that the individual has fallen in a state of despondency and bad consciousness. It is also the fact that the entertainment industry, what Adorno called 'mass culture', dominated by big interests and powerful organisations, has created a sense of normality and acceptance of the status quo. Individuals no more senses that there is a crisis in their situation and have forgotten to ask questions of meaning and directions in their life.

However, I will refer to two distinct schools of thought that are still in touch with the reality of the present situation and still asking questions in this direction. First the spiritualists are very much alerted to modern fragmentation, because they believe that there is a uniting reality behind the fragmented world. This reality is universal and not limited by geographical areas or historical periods. I had this understanding from reading Robin (E.) Waterfield's book *René Guénon and the future of the West*, a book by a spiritually inclined author about a French mystic. Guénon was aware of the fragmentation of Western life and thought and searched for a permanent reality, a spiritual reality. His search took him to different regions of the world, physically, intellectually and religiously, until he settled in Egypt, became a Muslim and changed his name to Abdul-Wahid (Servant of the One)! In this journey, he studied and wrote about Indian and Chinese religions, languages and cultures. He seems finally to have reached his destination in Egypt and Islam. Maybe he was impressed by the idea of Unity (Tawhid) which he selected for his adopted name.

The second school of thought is that of Marxism which did provide a theory that could go beyond the empirical to a global theory capable of explaining different aspect of society and history. In his book *The Necessity of Art*, Ernst Fisher gives a detailed criticism of modern culture, particularly literature,

and shows the crisis of the individual. Fisher analysis of modern literature and its relation to the economic system in the chapter on art and capitalism. There, he finds that the characteristic of modern novels (of the twentieth century) and poetry are alienation, dehumanisation, nihilism, fragmentation and mystification. He attributes the ills of the modern world to the capitalist system and sees socialism as the solution. He sees the fragmentation 'closely bound up with the tremendous mechanisation and specialisation of the modern world, with the overwhelming power of anonymous machines, and with the fact that most of us are caught up in jobs which are only a tiny part of much bigger process neither the meaning nor the functioning of which we are in a position to understand' (P.93). I would say the situation got worse since these words were written and the crisis got worse, especially with the loss of privacy and the increase of control and manipulation.

I brought up these two examples not because of a particular interest or support on my part, but to show that both had a point of view or a theory that is capable of giving meaning to fragmentation in the world and a way of transcending or changing it. But my question is where does contemporary philosophy stands on the problem of fragmentation? I will dare to say that it does not recognise the problem and has nothing to offer for its solution. That is because this question belongs to a metaphysic of sort, either in the transcendent religious sense or immanent but not empirical sense, such as in ideology. Philosophy, for the last century or more turned its back on any kind of metaphysic, and the more time advances the more the attempt in philosophical circles to concern themselves with what is given empirically, following in the footsteps of science and its method and abandoning the speculative side of philosophy that tries to search for meaning and direction in life. However, the problem discussed here is not connected with the given, but with a vision. The human does not just live in and for the moment but looks for the future. If human beings are future oriented beings, then the question of meaning belongs to philosophy, and science will not provide the answer, neither a philosophy that tries to imitate science.

The Editor

Cosmology And Ontology

Early in the twentieth century Relativity and Quantum Mechanics undermined accepted ideas of a stable mechanistic universe, yet very few understood this new physics or its significance. But Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947), a senior lecturer at Trinity College, Cambridge, from 1884 –1910, constructed a cosmology to incorporate the new physics, and expressed his ideas in a series of Gifford lectures between 1927-8, published as: *Process and Reality* (1929).

WILLIAM BISHOP

What is the difference between ‘to be’ or ‘not to be’? Not to be is not to be, and that is the end of the matter, but ‘to be’, as an entity, is to be included within a web of being, because ‘to be’ requires a support system. But what is this support system? That is the question cosmology tries to answer.

Alfred North Whitehead refers to two major cosmologies in the tradition of Western philosophy: that described in Plato’s *Timaeus*, and one devised by Galileo, Descartes, and Newton in the 17th century. However, with theories of relativity and quantum mechanics arising in the early 20th century, he decided to construct a cosmology to incorporate them. For the previous two centuries philosophers had considered separate topics, but a complete cosmology was needed to replace static stuff (substance) with flux (fluent energy). Whitehead’s ‘Process Philosophy’ therefore contradicts much of the 17th century mechanistic cosmology but resembles Plato’s *Timaeus*, which Whitehead believed to be true as an *allegory*. His own cosmology extended Platonism, and unsurprisingly he thought of Western philosophy to be footnotes to Plato.

To be is one ‘thing’ (as language would have us say), and *to know* is another. But language can obscure comprehension! For example, ‘to be’ is *verbal* – it consists in action, so in this sense it is not a ‘thing’, unless we can call motion a thing. (Arguably ancient Greek, with its dominance by the verb, influenced people to sense life as dynamic, in distinction to our own noun culture suited to seeing the world as separated objects.) Being, knowing, and language are inextricably related. What is ‘it’ that knows? By what means does the knower know? And what is ‘there’ to know? We can say: “I think”, yet what is this ‘I’? We take it for granted that we know what we

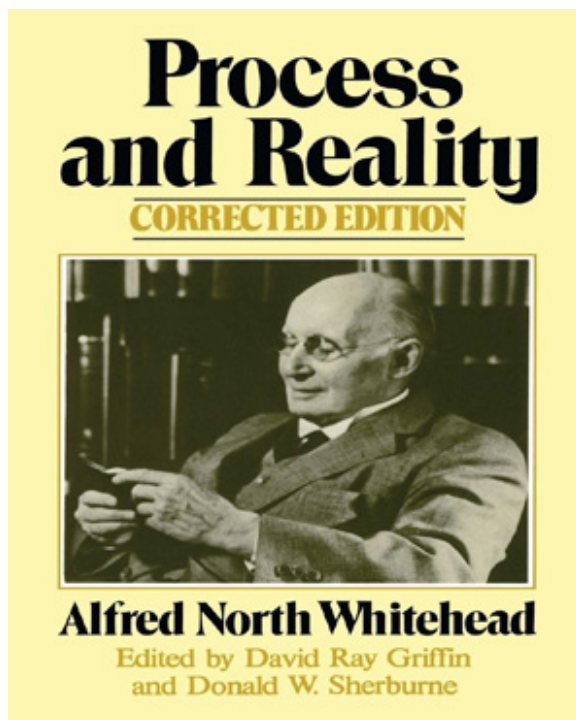
are talking about. Yet can it be that our knowledge is merely suited to survival within a given environment? Yet human aspiration demands more, hence the quest for knowledge (with its power).

Cosmology is relevant because it affects our viewpoint of what is real so that we think and act accordingly. ‘Our’ cosmology can also affect our feelings and general mood. Whitehead’s Process philosophy therefore has contemporary relevance in displacing the centrality of the mechanistic point of view. Indeed his ‘organic’ cosmology is based on facts of *experience*. A fundamental drop of experience is described as an ‘actual occasion’ (of experience). This event, or entity, involves interacting mental and physical poles - conveniently pictured in the Tao symbol, in which light and dark interact within union as a whole. ‘Actual occasions’ build and fill the spatiotemporal universe by combining into ‘societies’, creating actual entities, and societies increase in complexity creating societies within societies to construct the world as we know it. ‘All actual things are subjects, each *prehending* (absorbing) the universe from which it arises’. Whitehead mentions four grades of entities. At the basic level is the process involved in the propagation of an electromagnetic wave. The second is the *object* stage, which is the overlapping of actual occasions of experience; the third is that of *living organisms*; and the fourth stage is ‘*presentational immediacy*’, which involves *conscious experience* (of qualia).

Whitehead says: ‘*The actual entity is the product of the interplay of physical pole with mental pole. In this way, potentiality passes into actuality, and extensive relations mould qualitative content and objectifications of other particulars into a coherent finite experience*’. The self-functioning internal



A. N. Whitehead



constitution is the *immediacy* of the actual entity. An actual entity is called the *subject* of its own immediacy. The self-creation of an actual entity involves ‘prehension’ of another actual entity or ‘ingression’ of an ‘eternal object’ (a potential or mental Form). The final act in the actual entity’s self-creation (concrescence) is a complex feeling called the ‘satisfaction’. The subjective aim results in ‘conceptual feeling’, which relates to intensity of feeling in *immediacy* and a relevant future. Feeling therefore plays a critical and vital creative role in the process.

Cell Theory

Whitehead also calls his cosmology a ‘cell theory’. A cell appropriates for its own existence the various elements of the universe out of which it arises. Each appropriation is a *prehension*. In Process philosophy the *Primordial* ‘One’ informs the actual entities which contribute to and constitute the *Consequent* ‘One’. Creativity operates within the ‘actual occasions’ of experience, and the *being* of an actual entity is constituted by its *becoming*. The consequent world of becoming therefore depends upon the *potential* in the ideal world, as well as the availability of actual entities for prehension. In this respect ‘God’ is dipolar: Primordial and Consequent (transcendent and immanent). The ideal world of Forms provides *infinite* potential for *actual*

becoming and the universe is continually growing in complexity as new entities extend into the extensive temporal continuum. The principle of relativity ensures that every *item* in its universe is involved in each concrescence, so it belongs to the nature of an actual entity that it is a potential for every becoming. Consider a stone thrown into a pond and observe the ripples extending as concentric circles through time and space. At the centre is a basic ‘actual occasion’. Then each outer ring is a ‘society’ of ‘actual entities’, gaining in complexity with societies within societies continually extending the periphery. Sentience increases from the initial actual entity up to the outer circle (comprised of all the inner circles). This overall cosmic sentience can be considered to be God in Consequent (immanent) form.

Each immediate completion of an actual entity is a *concrescence*, which includes the addition of novelty. In dying into the sequence of time it becomes ‘objective’ and available to prehension by other actual entities. These objective (preserved) entities add to the actual whole, which is the consequent actuality of ‘God’. God is like an actual entity, except that the Primordial nature of God is eternal and God’s consequent nature is immanent within the spatiotemporal continuum. As Whitehead says: ‘God’s immanence in the world in respect to his primordial nature is an urge towards the future

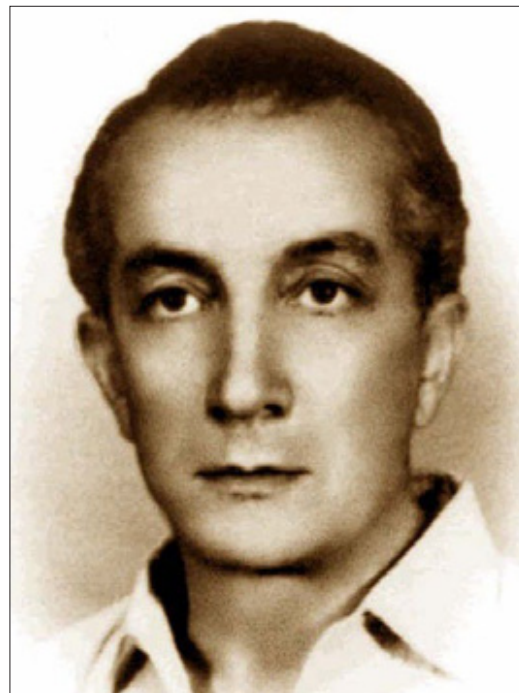
Philosophy

based upon an appetite in the present. God is the infinite ground of all mentality and each temporal entity, in one sense, originates from its mental pole, analogously to God himself. An actual entity derives its basic conceptual aim relevant to its actual world from God.'

Spiritual Science

Returning to *experience*, this can be objective, subjective, or transpersonal, and can apply at different levels, such as *physical body*, *psyche*, or *spirit* (assuming the 'I' is spirit). Mechanistic Cosmology excludes participation by living beings, which creates problems for locating mentality. Whitehead's 'organic' cosmology, on the other hand (in all its detail), while presenting a process of transformation of fluent energy into a familiar world, includes morality, aesthetics (Art), religion, and the living *subject* within the context of natural science. If proven inadequate, Whitehead was open to its modification. But there is another cosmology that chimes with Plato's *Timaeus* and process philosophy, which was presented by someone born in the same year as Whitehead. 'Spiritual Science' introduced by Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) locates reality in beings and their relationships. Its similarity to process philosophy is remarkable but a striking difference lies in beings active behind phenomena and energy flows. Whitehead's experience comes from the level of a highly intelligent mentality and sensibility, while Steiner's *experience* comes essentially from the level of the spirit. Where Whitehead's scheme allows potential for cognitive development right up to the level of God imminent in the spatiotemporal universe, Spiritual Science similarly accepts such an evolutionary progression.

It has been wisely said that there are known unknowns and unknown unknowns. What is unknown today may become known in due time with cognitive development. In the case of Spiritual Science, what seems to be unknown today has been partially known in past phases of evolution through a different cognitive organization. Platonism itself reveals evidence of our loss of past knowledge due to subsequent development of intellectual faculties suppressing the dominance of a sentient sensibility inclined to clairvoyance. Spiritual Science speaks of *experience* of reality at a level of insight not widely attained (of the spirit, or level of the 'I'). But, lacking such a cognitive faculty at present, it is still possible to judge the 'findings' with healthy 'common sense'.



Massimo Scaligeri

What appears unknown at present may become common knowledge in the future. Indeed humanity in its present state of development leaves much to be desired, particularly at the level of morality and emotion.

Correspondences

In Plato's *Timaeus* the Pythagorean, Timaeus, speaks of the Demiurge (divine craftsman) creating the world from fire, air, water and earth and sending down a soul to blend with these earthly elements. This soul has left its home in the living intelligent world of archetypes to enter a spatiotemporal world of becoming. For Spiritual Science this is not *allegorical* but factual. In the case of the allegory of Plato's cave, which implies that the living soul inhabits an earthly world of shadows and the real world is the source from where the light comes; this parallels Spiritual Science where the incarnated and evolving 'I' is as a projected shadow from the eternal world where the real 'I' remains (in the ideal world of the Forms). A similar spiral-like circularity in evolutionary development applies to both Process Philosophy and Spiritual Science. In Whitehead's cosmology an actual entity derives an impulse (or 'lure') from 'Primordial God' and achieves 'conrescence' in the present moment and then dies into past instances of its conrescences (becoming



Rudolf Steiner

objective), thus enabling movement into the future with a subsequent concrescence with novelty, maintaining continuity with its overlapping instances. The actual entity's addition to the whole contributes further consciousness to the consequential God, which then relates consciousness to the 'unconscious' primordial aspect of God. Likewise with Spiritual Science a spiritual (human) form incarnates into a spatiotemporal world to develop, and on completion of an organic cycle, 'dies' to enable return to the spiritual world.

An actual entity gains its movement in time through its non-spatial mentality and gains extension in space through its physical pole. Similarly, for Spiritual Science, in *The Secrets of Space and Time*, Massimo Scaligeri remarks: '*Each entity can be intuited as a timeless density of time, as a spatial form of time, in which its own being is already truly complete. Only an earthly appearance must be divided into points and moments for human perception. [...] By reflecting the soul, our corporeal being sections off its timeless life into a succession of time. As a result, the soul thinks it ages and dies*'. Time is like a garment for the soul; what we potentially are, in an eternal state, we have yet to develop in a sequential fashion through time. As Timaeus informs us, *time is a moving image of eternity*. The present is a 'concrescence', a meeting

of future and past, a slice (cross section) in constant movement. In Process Philosophy, an actual entity achieves 'everlasting life' through objectification in the consequent God.

It might seem intrusive to bring Spiritual Science into a philosophical forum, except that Rudolf Steiner believed Western philosophy (he was referring to German Idealism) was leading towards Spiritual Science and that science would eventually incorporate its findings. However, 'Theosophy' (divine wisdom) predates philosophy (love of wisdom) although it was later included within philosophy before its ejection in the Modern period. But whatever may be the view of the world expressed in different religions, the actual (or metaphysical) reality remains unaltered in its 'objectivity'. Spiritual Science relates itself to the 'perennial philosophy' but what particularly distinguishes it is the notion of evolution, including the evolution of consciousness. It accepts the tradition of Dionysius (the Areopagite) with its hierarchy of angelic beings (later featured in Dante's *Divine Comedy*) and acknowledges the critical role in human evolution of the Divine being we know as Christ (Whitehead also nods in this direction with his Consequent God). While presently findings from Spiritual Science might not seem to make sense, this is because they often refer to what is supersensible. For example, regarding spiritual beings that surround us as creative powers and pervade the world, Steiner said: 'All that surrounds us has arisen through these creative beings and to see them is indeed the meaning of knowledge.'

It is said that 'seeing is believing'. Believing without 'seeing' requires faith, but Steiner, like Whitehead, sought knowledge supported by facts of *experience*. To participate in Mind an incarnated human being needs a brain (supported by a body). Likewise, an eye is necessary in order to see, and so a supersensible organ is required to *know* the world beyond what is given to the physical senses. Mathematics ventures into the supersensible, but for the everyday person, seeing is believing. Knowledge is said to be 'reasonable true belief'. Its corollary is 'false belief is an illusion of knowledge'. Maybe at present we try to see through a glass of dark matter, but eventually new knowledge will enlighten the matter for us to see further. As humans, in the 'human predicament', we can only hope for greater insight into light's entanglement with its dark 'twin' in our world of becoming.

Issues of Method in Philosophical Investigation

CHRIS GAAL

We may wish in philosophy, to probe or question the framework assumptions implicit in an assertion. This seems to me particularly germane to philosophical discussion, which often seeks to take a step back from simply arguing for or against particular statements to consider what are the underlying concepts governing the terms of the debate, and to consider how adequate or inadequate they may be.

Those who favour relying on formal logical methods of investigation from foundational observations, definitions and axioms argue that a strict logical method is the only reliable way of reaching certainty. In a formal argument we can check whether the premises of the argument support the conclusion, and we can expose inadequacy in our premises if they do not logically support a conclusion or if they to contradictions. I can see two big problems with this position.

The first is that if we restrict philosophic discussion to this method, then discussion can only get started once we have reached a point where we think we have sufficient intellectual clarity and conviction to put forward a set of propositions leading to a conclusion we wish to prove. Such clarity and conviction is more likely to be the end point of philosophic reflection, if it is reached at all, than its starting point. Developing a formal argument requires that we already have a way of framing and understanding the issue. Forwarding discussion through this kind of formal advocacy may therefore hinder the important task of keeping one's thinking as exploratory, open minded and free of unconscious personal and/or cultural bias as possible. It seems a method more suited to persuasion once one is already convinced, rather than to exploration.

A related second big problem with this position, is that it underestimates the difficulty of spotting inadequate or hidden framework assumptions. If I may use an analogy from a rather different context, take the various mathematical models proposed in astronomy to account for the observed motion of the planets, during the time when the Ptolemaic view of the planetary system as earth-centred was regarded as true. The plausibility and validity of any of these models could be tested by examining their internal mathematical consistency on the one hand, and their compatibility with observations on the other. What none of them attempted to do, was to justify the assumption that the earth was indeed

the centre of the planetary system. This was so taken for granted, that it was not even recognised as an assumption in need of stating, questioning and proving to be true. It was simply the starting perspective from which the whole enterprise was conducted, setting the scene for both how the problem was understood and how the solution was understood. It took a huge paradigm shift in human understanding, to look at the problem differently. The need for this shift in perspective could not have been deduced from any examination of the logical steps in the arguments put forward by these Ptolemaic astronomers. Similar points can be made about the shift in perspective from Newton to Einstein.

A more philosophical example would be Descartes starting position with his *cogito ergo sum*, his belief that he could know and understand himself as a self-contained entity in complete isolation and abstraction from any wider temporal or physical context such as his own body or the world he grew up in, or the society in which he learned to think and speak the words which now lead him to deny them as doubtful and inessential.

There are at least two framework assumptions here. The first is that anything that we can logically doubt, we can existentially do without. So, because we can logically doubt whether the physical world and our own bodies exist, we must understand ourselves to be a purely mental and immaterial substance capable of existing independently of such things, even should it prove that we are not currently acting independently of such things.

The second assumption is linked to this, and it is an assumption of method - the correct method to get at truth. Where we today see the path to truth as the path of empirical investigation, his method was to find simple ideas which could not be doubted, which would be foundational to knowledge. So instead of asking an empirical question - what does it take to bring into existence a living human being like myself capable of philosophical reflection - a question which would need to bring in for its answer a whole list of things: a living planet, human society which could bring up children and teach them to speak and think, educational establishments to make them sufficiently sophisticated and knowledgeable in spheres like philosophy and logic, to give them the conceptual tools in which to reflect etc. Instead of all that which would have come



The Ptolemaic view of the planetary system

into a question posed in that way, he asked the different question - what can I not conceivably doubt - and came up with his own existence as a disembodied mind.

Within the terms of Descartes premises, his conclusion about himself does logically follow. One can construct any number of logically deductive arguments and 'prove' from them any number of inferences which will be logically consistent with the premises of the argument. But this method of putting forward ideas is, in my view, extremely unwieldy and unhelpful for exploring and questioning the perspective from which the premises themselves have been formulated, and for exploring such things as ambiguities in their wording or misleading limitations in the concepts they are employing.

One could conceive of framework assumptions as hidden premises. But I prefer to keep them distinct. It is hard for a framework assumption to appear as a premiss in a formal argument. A framework assumption for someone is the perspective through which they are

looking at an issue. It is not something they see as such - anymore than when we look at a scene, what we see first and up front, are our own eyes. We do not see our eyes at all when we look out on the world. They are simply the perspective from which our field of vision looks at thing. Similarly, when thinkers come up with a train of thought, they are looking at an issue from a certain perspective, and that perspective is rarely captured in explicit statements in the opening premises of a deductive argument. If we approach that thinker's arguments through the lens of seeing whether her arguments are logically consistent, and logically imply her conclusions, then we are missing altogether the possibility of questioning how she is looking at the problem in the first place. This kind of questioning is much harder to do if we are presented with a whole logical schema which we are asked to assess as an integrated whole for its logical robustness and consistency, when what we may most need to question, is the underlying perspective which is providing the intellectual ground on which this whole logical edifice has been built.

The Mind of Shelley

In the quiet shadow of the past,
Where thoughts collide and reason sows,
A young mind wrestles, stark and fast,
With heavy truths that ebb and flow.

Godwin's chains held tight the world,
Necessity, a grim parade,
But Shelley's heart itself unfurled,
Whispered change, and doubt decayed.

He sought the light of pure ideals,
Anarchic dreams that lifted high,
To chase the truth that surely heals,
Like murmurs from the endless sky.

In *Hymn to Beauty*, ink and breath
Converge on forms of hidden grace,
Where shadows of a certain death
Give way to something we can face.

Yet ideals falter, wield their sword,
In *Prometheus* hope resounds,
A fleeting spark that's never bored,
A rebel's heart where wisdom bounds.

And through it all, the truth does gleam,
Synthesis in word and thought,
The dance of faith, a fragile dream,
Yet - it is reason that he sought.

But turning pages, time unfolds,
In *Hellas* faced with ruin's core,
The once bright ideal, tarnished gold,
A bitter taste, a closing door.

What quality resides within,
The mind of Shelley, fierce and bold?
To sketch the battle, truth and sin,
A tale of hearts where love took hold.

In ages past and futures wide,
The tapestry of thinking reign -
Romantic flames, the fire we bide,
In echo chambers, love and pain.



For here we stand, with echoes clear,
The conflicts rise, they touch our skin,
In voices low, the past we hear,
As Shelley dreamed, we dare to win.

We try to learn from thoughts once spun,
In webs of words and time's embrace,
In search of beauty, now begun,
Let passion drive us to that place.

Where hearts and minds with arms extended,
Reach for the stars, the boundless sky,
In freedom's name, forever splendid,
Ideals take flight and never die.

Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

(Poster credit:
PZNS – Deviant Art)



Through The Looking Glass: Time, Entropy, and Parallel Universes in Fringe

DR. ALAN XUEREB

In the realms of speculative fiction and theoretical physics, few concepts are as intellectually compelling as parallel universes and the nature of time. Drawing inspiration from the television series *Fringe*, as well as relatively recent theoretical models suggesting that gravity, rather than thermodynamics, governs the arrow of time, this article explores both philosophical and scientific perspectives on time's directionality, entropy, and the possibility of universes where time flows in reverse. It also engages with the enigmatic Observers in *Fringe*, who perceive time differently from ordinary humans. The article examines the profound implications of a cosmological scenario in which the Big Bang might have given rise to two or many parallel universes, each with its own distinct temporal progression, and considers a mode of perception that transcends the temporal constraints of human experience.

The Two Universes of *Fringe* and Physics

Fringe, though in my opinion heavily underrated, captivated viewers with its portrayal of parallel universes, weaving together alternate dimensions, timelines, and divergent realities. Central to its narrative were two coexisting worlds, each with different trajectories, and enigmatic figures known as the Observers, who perceive time as a totality rather than in a linear sequence. Intriguingly, a recent scientific breakthrough suggests that parallel universes may not be confined to science fiction. Physicists, through a Big Bang simulation, proposed that our universe's forward flow of time could have a mirror universe where time flows backward. These findings challenge conventional

theories of entropy as the sole determinant of time's direction, suggesting instead that gravity may govern time's flow.

This notion, echoed in *Fringe*'s exploration of interdimensional travel and altered temporal perception, opens up fascinating philosophical avenues. What would it mean to exist in a universe where the 'arrow of time' points both forward and backward? How does time shape consciousness, and what might it mean to see beyond its confines, as the Observers seem able to do?

Entropy, Time, and the Arrow of the Big Bang

For decades, entropy, a measure of disorder within a system, has been central to explaining the unidirectional flow of time. Thermodynamics posits that systems move toward disorder, orienting time's 'arrow'. However, some physicists now argue that gravity might be the deeper force directing time. In a ground-breaking experiment, they simulated a miniature universe of 1,000 particles under Newtonian gravity. Despite various starting points, these particles spontaneously organized into densely packed formations, expanding outward under gravitational influence rather than entropic increase.

This experiment hints at a universe where time's progression is not tied to entropy. The implication? Our universe might not need the low-entropy start we associate with the Big Bang to dictate the flow of time. Instead, time could be an emergent property arising from gravity itself. In *Fringe*, this concept aligns with

the dualities of parallel worlds—two mirrored realities governed by different causal chains.

The Observers and the Mirror Universe

In *Fringe*, the Observers are time-travellers and dimensional overseers who perceive past, present, and future simultaneously. While ordinary beings experience time in a strictly forward progression, the Observers exist ‘outside’ of time’s constraints, perceiving all events as part of an integrated whole. This ability to transcend time’s direction may mirror the implications of a backward-flowing universe. If time flows forward in our universe and backward in another, could there exist entities capable of perceiving both as part of a unified temporal landscape?

To the Observers, time is not an arrow but a canvas — a property that aligns with Kant’s idea of time as a construct imposed by the human mind rather than a fundamental aspect of reality.

In the parallel universe hypothesis, each reality might have its arrow of time, yet to the Observers, both are simply two different manifestations of the same phenomenon. This invites speculation on the nature of causality: if time can be perceived as non-linear, then the events we consider irreversible might, to an entity like an Observer, be no different than a sequence in a book that can be revisited, re-examined, and, potentially, altered.

Gravity as the New Guide to Time’s Arrow

The recent hypothesis elevates gravity as the primary mechanism behind time’s arrow. By stepping away from entropy, this theory suggests that time emerges from gravitational interactions alone, freeing it from thermodynamic preconditions. Thus, two universes with divergent time arrows could coexist, evolving as natural consequences of the Big Bang.

The Observers in *Fringe*, by existing outside of a single temporal framework, suggest an alternate way of engaging with time — perhaps similar to how gravity, rather than entropy, might direct time’s arrow. If we envision gravity as shaping time’s flow in a manner akin to spatial dimension, then time’s directionality might be subject to a type of malleability and observation that resembles the Observers’ unique perspective. Like the Observers, who manipulate events to prevent catastrophic outcomes, a gravitational understanding of time might allow for interventions that transcend a single timeline or temporal direction.

Philosophical Implications

Philosophically, the existence of a backward-flowing universe and entities like the Observers raises questions of identity and causality. In *Fringe*, characters face alternate selves and timelines, encountering versions of

themselves who have made different choices yet remain fundamentally connected. Similarly, these mirror universes challenge our understanding of self: are we defined by the temporal progression we inhabit, or could our identity transcend linear time if we experienced it as the Observers do?

Moreover, the Observers’ ability to perceive multiple temporal outcomes brings forth the ‘observer effect’ — the idea that observation itself can alter the outcome. If time is governed by gravity, not entropy, and if observers within or outside a temporal structure can influence it, then causality becomes flexible, subject to the influence of those who see beyond its apparent direction. Time is no longer a simple chain of events but a dynamic force, responsive to those with the capacity to perceive its totality.

Observing Time Beyond The Arrow

The recent findings on gravity and the direction of time echo the haunting vision of *Fringe*, where the fabric of reality itself is not fixed but fluid, and the Observers — those enigmatic beings who experience time as a malleable, multidimensional force — force us to confront the terrifying possibility that time may not be the immutable constant we believe it to be. If gravity indeed governs time’s flow, our universe could be but one facet of a far more complex, multidimensional structure, where the very rules of causality and temporal progression are not set in stone, but are instead shaped by forces and entities that lie beyond the reach of time’s linear constraints.

Fringe challenges us to reconsider not only our perception of time but the very nature of reality itself. It suggests that the boundaries of our universe may be far more porous than we ever imagined, with the Observers embodying a chilling vision of freedom—witnessing and manipulating events outside the relentless forward march of time. In this unsettling view, time is not a deterministic force bound by thermodynamic laws, but a dynamic and malleable field influenced by gravity, where the past, present, and future are far more entangled and vulnerable to manipulation than we ever dared to believe.

As we grapple with the implications of this gravitational model and the existence of the Observers, we are forced to confront a terrifying truth: the reality we know may be only a fragment of something far vaster and more incomprehensible. The mystery of time’s arrow, now intertwined with parallel worlds and entities that transcend time’s linearity, hints at a universe both bewilderingly strange and deeply interconnected — a universe in which the very nature of time is as elusive and unfathomable as the Observers who watch it unfold from the shadows, untouched by its passage.

Beloveds

This poem is a first-person monologue imagined as spoken by the aging Thomas Hardy about some of the most significant women in his life. They include his first and belatedly cherished wife Emma, his second wife Florence, his cousin Tryphena Sparks ('Phena'), his childhood nurse Julia Martin, the teenage Gertrude Bugler who played the doomed heroine in a local production of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, and Eliza Nicholls who turned up after his death with the youthful Hardy's engagement-ring and rather flummoxed the Hardy biographers. It also involves the eminent Victorian men-of-letters Edmund Gosse and A.C. Benson who visited Hardy at his home Max Gate during the novelist's later, poetry-devoted years.

My verse-essay touches on some aspects of his psycho-sexual make-up that have drawn the attention of various biographers and critics, among them notably Robert Gittings. It uses a verse-form and rhyme-scheme that Hardy deployed more than once and that is typical of his way with uncommon – even nonce – poetic structures that none the less most often come across as conversational, down-to-earth, or ballad-related. If the poem has a predominant 'theme' it is the occasional confusion in Hardy's mind between those flesh-and-blood women in his life and fictive women – like Bathsheba Everdene and, principally, Tess Durbeyfield – with whom they shared certain features, physical and psychological. For reasons that emerge toward the close my poem takes its title from *The Well-Beloved*, a late Hardy novel long regarded as somewhat eccentric – 'unrealistic' – but latterly acclaimed by deconstructionist critics on just those grounds.



CHRIS NORRIS



Thomas Hardy

Many they were, the women who
Traversed my life or crossed my page,
So many that I scarcely knew,
As memory showed first signs of age,
Which of them had indeed
Lives of their own to lead
And which lived only on my fictive stage.

Tryphena, cousin, she of hair
So brown it glowed, whose eyes sent sparks
(What's in a name?) beneath a pair
Of matchless brows – she'd all the marks,
I tell myself, of owing
No trait to my bestowing,
But all to life and laughter, locks and larks!

Yet then upon the vagrant eye
Of memory there comes a scene
Where she takes over, on the sly,
My own Bathsheba Everdene,
And finds me sadly vexed
To know what's life, what's text,
And whose the bones I've not picked clean.

She saw it in me, Emma, she
Whom I thought, foolishly, to fool
Yet who once, briefly, feared in me
A Crippen-type, a very ghoul,
One ever poised to relish
Those scenes I'd soon embellish
With details fit to have the monster drool.



A scene from *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*

I know it, know the never-quelled
 Desire to feel them both, the joys
 Of Eros, Tess as I beheld
 Her first in my mind's eye, her poise
 So artless, pure, unspoiled,
 And then that vision foiled
 By each new deadly twist my plot deploys.

They creep up on her till Stonehenge
 Seems almost the predestined spot
 In which the gods', or my, revenge
 Must now be felt to drive the plot
 Whose mock-Aeschylan reckoning
 Has all along been beckoning
 You all to help secure the hangman's knot.

How then deny the thing goes deep,
 That thing that has me so desire
 Her victim body, laid asleep
 On those cold slabs, and then require
 That the Immortals sport
 With her no more, cut short
 The life whose glory drew their jealous fire.

Still it returns, that early scene with Tess,
 White curtain-bonneted milk-maid,
 The patient beast, and her pink dress,
 As if by their decree displayed
 Most aptly when contrasted
 With the cursed life that lasted
 Until her guiltless penalty was paid.

The dread biographers will seek
 It out, that keen, that vibrant nerve
 That women's deaths could tweak
 Like nothing else, and even serve –
 As witness my poor Tess –
 By their doomed loveliness
 To make so dark a tale my late *chef d'oeuvre*.

And then Sue Brideshead, she who spoke
 So bravely of the miseries borne
 By brides new-wed when they awoke
 And asked themselves, the morrow morn,
 What 'given away' could mean
 If not their having been
 Forced buyers of some male pig-in-a-poke.



Hardy and his second wife

For so they are, most often; yet I sense,
 In what I wrote, a sharp disgust,
 A visceral recoil whose violence
 Exceeds the passion for more just
 Or equitable laws
 Of marriage since its cause
 Goes deep into mixed seams of grief and lust.

I have her use the word ‘respect’
 Of Phillotson, her husband, loathed
 By her yet with a loathing checked,
 So long as both stayed fully clothed,
 By thinking ‘worthy man,
 This schoolmaster who can
 Pass muster well enough as my betrothed’.

The mere name, ‘Phillotson’, seems lewd,
 Obscene, insinuating, each
 Time I recall it, and how Jude
 Must then have suffered it, their breach
 Now a fixed gulf that yawns
 The wider since it spawns
 Desires that naught but thwarted joys can teach.

Then there’s that novelistic twist
 That had me fall so strangely back
 In love with one, that ‘woman much missed’,
 When she was gone and I, for lack
 Of her so long scarce-noted
 Company, at last devoted
 Myself to poems, each a mourner’s plaque.



Tryphena Sparks, Hardy's cousin

Emma, whom first I loved, then lost
To no-one but myself, received
Far less from me, when our paths crossed
Around the house, than I, bereaved
 Of all but her pale shade,
 Now speak lest she should fade
And I then haunt her haunts for whom I grieved.

Yet whence this maudlin yearning, this
Pathetic need that she be gone
Beyond recall and I should miss
Her dearly, like the lovelorn swan
 Of legend, before I'd
 At long last cast aside
The shoal of days my feelings foundered on.

My secretary Florence, 'Flo',
Soon followed Emma to my bed
With 'scarcely decent haste', although,
Aged eighty, and with Emma dead
 Some years, the gossips felt
 That maybe I'd been dealt
A rotten hand and earned the right to wed.

And yet, again, how comprehend
The situation as it stood
With us three while she lived and penned
That diary, wrote those things that would,
 When chanced on, call in doubt
 All my beliefs about
Her whose remove no poetry could mend.

For still I do it – conjure that,
At best, Narcissus-like rapport
Whose echoes sound death's caveat,
'She comes no more, no more, no more!'
 As if I'd thought for one
 Brief moment to have done
What fools enough had thought to do before.

And how explain, how justify
My 'falling for' (please give that phrase
Its tone of pitying fondness!) my
Old eye's last apple, she who plays
 My Tess so well I've brushed
 Aside a tear and hushed,
Lest people guess, her rapt creator's cry.

A touching tale, you'll maybe feel,
But then ask 'Gertrude Bugler?', and,
Should my biographer reveal
'Late teens', perhaps not understand
 Or stretch broad views so far
 That suchlike things won't jar
And warn me 'find some other helping hand'.

'Tess's embodiment', I wrote,
And heard that wondrous sound again
As Gertrude's silks began to float,
Brush gently, and revive it – bane
 Or blessing! – that peculiar
 Deep thrill when my nurse Julia
Drew her soft sleeve across my counterpane.

I heard it too – the thought appals
Me now – when, as a boy, I'd scale
Some mound close by the outer walls
That looked into our county gaol
 And watch them hang, the poor,
 The Tess-like folk whose score
With destiny now dropped them off the scale.

For one there was, a woman, clad
In such fine clothing for her last
Public appearance that it had
The same effect and fixed it fast,
 That sound, that 'frou-frou' noise,
 Whose susurrus enjoys,
Alas!, such salience from times long past.

And one day they, the scholar-sleuths
Who track 'Tom Hardy, womanizer',
Will end their list of dug-up truths
With one last name, that of Eliza
 Nicholls, I think who'll bring,
 As proof, the engagement-ring,
And see what short-lived fame it buys her.

No stout denials, story-spinning,
Or vain attempts to play the part
Of one more sinned-against than sinning
Who'd often used the novelist's art
 To show how women bore
 Those sufferings you ignore,
You moralists of the bleeding heart!

Rather, I've tried to work it through,
Give shape to it in fictive guise,
See what a curious plot can do
(*The Well-Beloved* – that's no surprise!)
 To help me get a grip
 On how my authorship,
Right through from *A Pair of Blue Eyes*,

Had always been somehow in thrall
To repetition, plots that hinge
On déjà vu, or scenes that call
For readings stationed at the fringe
 Of realism's *clair-*
 Obscur creating where
All things take on that other-worldly tinge.

Just think: should one man take to wife,
Or wish to, 'the same woman' three
Times over, fashion 'from the life'
The mother, daughter, and – as he,
 The sculptor-Platonist,
 Believes – have them exist
In some idealist eternity

Of art, how then might that transpire
For one whose love of women took
Forms – yes – more sensual, more afire
With lusts that 'public taste' won't brook,
 But who, so women say,
 Knew well those things that stay,
For other men, leaves in a tight-closed book.

That's what they missed, those visitors
And old-time friends, Benson and Gosse,
Though now like gossips (or inquisitors)
Who thought 'he's stuck there, gathering moss'
 And travelled to Max Gate
 To check on it, my state
Of body, mind, or marriage and my loss

(Or so they thought) of all that went
To give my novels what it lacked,
That life of mine, one chiefly spent
(Their view again) in a vain pact
 With fate to let me write
 Those books and lift the blight,
The body-blow it regularly packed.

But it's their own imaginings here,
Their wish to find me Emma-hexed,
Life-weary, listless, and – they fear –
Too old and modern-times perplexed
 For any hope of some
 Great fictive work to come,
Or sign of writer's muscles newly flexed.

Still, that's the critic's stock-in-trade,
To take the artist's visions, turn
Them back on him, and see they're made
To play out badly in his life so stern-
 Faced moralists can advise
 We emulate God's spies
And not, *pace* St. Paul, both wed *and* burn.

Not meant for them, this piece, like those
'Late poems' of mine whose tone
They'll scarcely grasp because it goes
To depths of grief by them unknown,
 My friends not false but true
 To some modern taboo
On loss and pain so raw and rarely shown.

How could they know, well-swaddled as
They are, those men, by umpteen layers
Of public pride, what power it has
To cast me down when evil-sayers
 Talk spitefully, condemn
 My 'treatment' of poor Em,
Like the worst kiss-and-tell purveyors.

For love takes many forms, perdures
Though muted, troubled, tempest-tossed,
And may elude a gaze like yours,
My quondam friends who glibly glossed
 Our – my and Emma's – spells
 Of silence as farewells
To love, not interludes while love matures.

And yet, and yet . . . Might it not be
That I've long fooled myself, that ours
Was no such thing, no mystery
Unfit for their declining powers
 Of grasp, but just what struck
 Those canny friends: mixed luck
In wedlock, then what routine soon devours.

Emma Gifford,
Hardy's first wife



She jested: 'Not for naught called 'Hardy',
Us old survivors', but the jest
Rang true to me, a trifle tardy,
When first I started on the quest
 For all that I'd long sought
 In her yet never thought
Was there each time I woke or lay to rest.

Now they process in single file,
Those women, through my waking dreams,
The fictive and the few who smile
Or not as recollection teems
 With living episodes
 Or nagging conscience goads
And pricks my self-deceiving fictive schemes.

Merely I say: no praise or blame
Is truly warranted, not praise
For made-up narratives that came
To me by unthought, unsought ways,
 Nor blame since what you'd count
 Vices or sins amount,
In truth, to some close-kindred soul-malaise

That scarce has room for such ideas,
The stuff of quarterly reviewers,
But finds, once their assurance clears,
A Wessex roamed by those wrongdoers
 Who plead no guilty case
 Save that which finds its place
In the fate-fixed decree of their pursuers.

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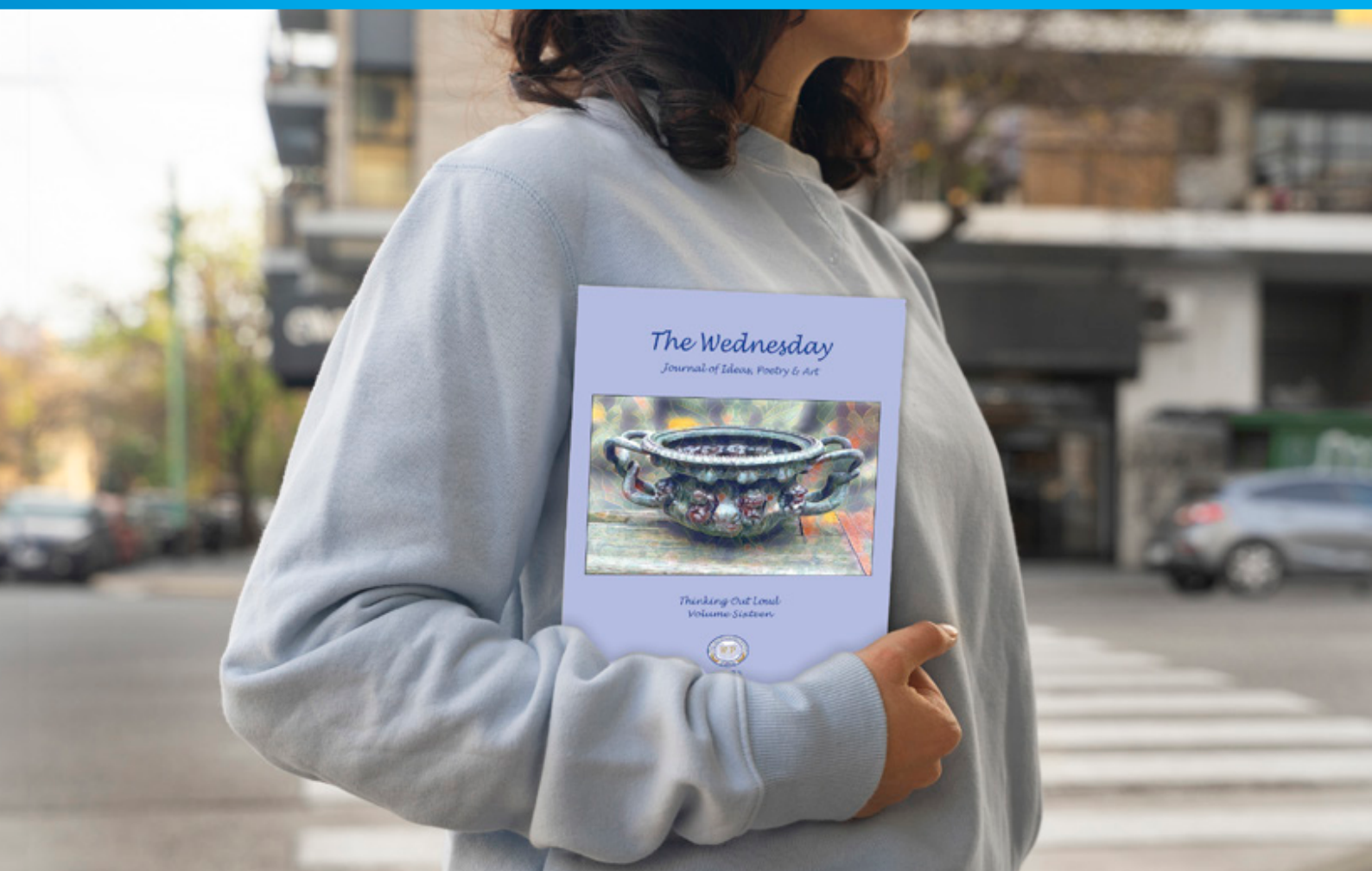
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