

The *Wednesday*

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Editorial

The View from Outside

The role of an outsider scholar or philosopher in altering an established perspective or way of thinking is rarely acknowledged, but it is a phenomenon that one finds throughout the history of thought. What I mean by an outsider is a thinker, philosopher or a poet who departs from norms and established views in order to introduce a new method or standard of thinking for example Descartes, in his *Meditations*, presented philosophers with the problem of how we know the external world and other minds. He started with his famous doubt and proceeded to prove his own existence, and through his thinking and existence, to prove the existence of God. It was in many ways a new method, although the doubt experiment was suggested centuries before by al-Ghazali, and the Ontological Argument was mentioned by St. Anselm of Canterbury. However, to make doubt a method for science and philosophy was perhaps Descartes' own innovation. Such innovation in method or vision is a challenge to the outsider himself and the community of scholars and philosophers he is going to argue against, because of the pressure of familiarity and the authority of established views. But what does it mean to be an outsider? And how is it related to established academic norms?

In the introduction to his impressive book *Black Athena: the Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, Martin Bernal presents a few methodological issues concerning the work of the scholar who is an outsider to an established academic field, based on his own experience. Bernal's expertise is in the field of Chinese language, and he wrote extensively on that. But he has taken a completely different topic in the above-mentioned book. The book deals with the Greek miracle – what are the roots of culture and philosophy of ancient Greece? The standard view since the nineteenth century is that the Greek genius is related to the people, their geographical and historical generation, plus what the Germans call 'the spirit of the time' (*Zeitgeist*). Bernal attributes these views to German philosophers, such as Kant, Fichte, Hegel and Schlegel. But according to Bernal's view the origin of Greek culture and thought have to be explained by the relation of Greece and Mediterranean societies and cultures, such as Egypt, Phoenician, and Semitic culture. It is black Africa and the middle East that gave Athena its alpha-beta, and contributed religion and ancient wisdom to it - although the author also admits north European influences.

Bernal was aware of the opposition to his view, and he amassed a huge list of evidence-s, and wrote a whole volume replying to his criticism. But all this is an old story, since the book came

out in 1987, and I am not reviewing it. What interests me here is his view of the outsider scholar. Bernal blames the lengthy training of students in a particular field for perpetuating the established view 'so that by the time they can see their field as a whole they have been so thoroughly imbued with conventional preconceptions and patterns of thought that they are extremely unlikely to be able to question its basic premises'. And although the professional should be better informed than the newcomer, the newcomer that I call an outsider, 'sometimes has the advantage of perspective; the ability to see the subject as a whole and to bring outside analogies to bear on it'.

Against the outsider spirit, there is the professionalism, or what I call 'the division of intellectual labour'. Edward Said in his excellent set of lectures *Representations of the Intellectual* – the 1993 Reith lectures broadcasted by the BBC - defines professionalism as 'thinking of your work as an intellectual as something you do for living... not straying outside the accepted paradigms or limits'.

This is almost the universal condition we live under, especially in academia. To counter that, the outsider keeps a spirit of undomesticated intellect, or what Edward Said calls 'amateurism', which he defines as 'an activity that is fuelled by care and affection rather than by profit, and selfish, narrow specialisation'. He describes amateurism as the intellectual activity that is motivated 'by love for and unquenchable interest in the larger picture, in making connections across lines and barriers, in refusing to be tied down to a speciality, in caring for ideas and values despite the restrictions of a profession'. What he objects to in specialisation is the 'increasing technical formalism, and less and less of historical sense of what real experiences...' are behind a given work of literature and philosophy. He adds that specialisation 'kills your sense of excitement and discovery'. Specialisation, in his opinion, is giving in to laziness, 'so you end up doing what others tell you, because that is your speciality after all'.

I am pleased that we in *The Wednesday* are free from such pressures, although some of our members are well-known in the academic field, a retired professor and lecturers. We meet every week to rejuvenate our thinking and express our views freely and help each other towards a better understanding and a creative thinking.

The Editor

On Representation

In an era where public trust in governmental institutions is approaching a nadir, it serves one well to revisit the origins and stated purposes of those who established them. In this paper, I will examine what is now seen as the foundations of social contract theory and examine whether they have thus far stood the test of time.

DAN MCARDLE

Just as swift social disruptions can transform the most ardent rivals into unlikely bedfellows, so we find ourselves, when considering the ideal structures of government, in company with the strange triumvirate of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. When the peoples of nations like England and France began to throw off the shackles of religious monarchy in the 17th and 18th centuries, they quickly found themselves in disagreement as to what should serve as its replacement.

The Triumvirate of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau

Thomas Hobbes begins our discussion with his unabashed royalist adoration of monarchy as an obvious admirer of King Charles I, and his *Leviathan* is replete with admonishments against both Cromwell and the Catholic Church. The work focuses equally on what he believes government should be, a total subservience to the sovereign power as concentrated in a single individual, and what it should not be. Whereas his compatriot Robert Filmer maintained justification of the monarch through divine right, Hobbes employed such attacks against Cardinal Bellarmine, one of the leading voices of the Counter-Reformation, that he found himself branded an atheist. This claim is unfounded: Hobbes clearly believed in the Kingdom of Christ, but argued Christ would be monarch only upon his return, leaving the authority of the current kingdom secular. With this, the source of authority was from the people; however, once granted to the sovereign, such power could not be reclaimed.

A similar but inverted approach comes from John Locke. With his *First Treatise on Government*,

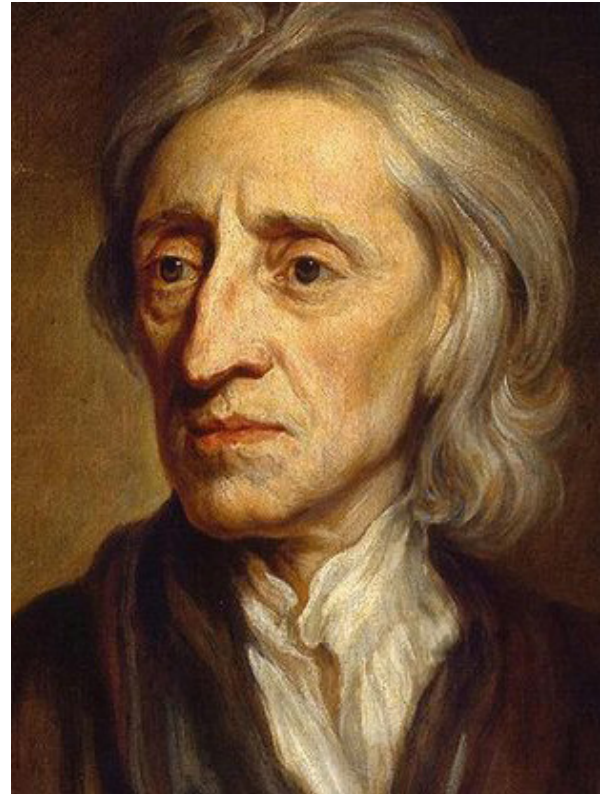
he dispensed with Filmer, and with his *Second*, he flipped Hobbes' narrative. Where Hobbes famously described life predating society and government as 'nasty, brutish, and short', Locke seemed to imagine an almost Eden-like state, where individuals, endowed by God with intrinsic natural rights and liberties, join together into a Commonwealth which, in exchange for abdication of the right to violence, grants protection. If we map the legislative commonwealth and the executive sovereign to their counterparts of Parliament and Monarchy, it becomes quite clear that these views reflect political allegiances during English Civil War. Hobbes places emphasis on the monarchy and downplays the importance of legislation as the annoying but necessary sidekick, and Locke exalts the lawmakers into prime positions, tacking on an executive counterpart as the mindful assistant.

In typical French fashion, Jean-Jacques Rousseau arrives at the end to tell everyone why they are wrong. In his famous work, *The Social Contract*, he takes direct aim at Montesquieu, who championed the now ever-present notion of separation of powers, and joins sides with Hobbes to point out that a weakened sovereign leads to an inability of government to function. However, his understanding of 'sovereign' is quite different: Hobbes viewed it as a monarch, while Rousseau saw it as the collected unity of all the peoples' desires, or as he put it, the general will.

Although at first the general will rings similar to Locke's commonwealth, it is quite different. First, Rousseau recognised that, while in an ideal society there is minimal difference between



Hobbes



Locke

the individual will of a citizen and the general will of the group, in reality, when disagreement strikes, the general will takes priority, which can lead to trouble. Second, the general will needs some kind of executive function to enforce its intentions, which leads Rousseau to construct a mathematical ratio system to both explain and warn of danger.

Assuming a given population has formed a commonwealth-like general will, there must be a governing body to carry it out. This governing body becomes a connective middle term, a fulcrum between the seesaw of the general and individual will, tasked with keeping a balance. This balance can be disrupted in at least two ways. First, the ratio of the population to the will. If we view the general will as a large pie of influence, then in a smaller population, each individual member gets a larger piece. In a small community, where we know, or at least know of, every person, we will have a significant influence over the general will and thus law of the land. As communities grow in size, our piece shrinks

more and more, to the point where we can barely taste it. This is important to note, because if people stop thinking the pie exists or matters, they disengage, and the general will becomes disconnected from the individual.

Second, the executive enforcement of the general will must be calibrated to best maintain it. As before, we have a ratio, but the direction is flipped. If the general will is a centralised source of power and influence granted to it by the people, then this power is split up according to how the governing structure is formulated. The more members of government, the smaller shares of power each has, and the weaker their ability to enforce the will. If we reduce the government to a single individual, it looks quite a lot like what Hobbes would envision.

Before moving on, we should step back and consider Aristotle's influence. In his *Posterior Analytics*, where he does a deep inspection on the syllogism, he emphasises the importance of the middle term. If we have a starting statement, such

Philosophy

as ‘All men are mortal’, and we use a middle term such as ‘man’ in the minor premise ‘Socrates is a man’, we then reach the conclusion that ‘Socrates is mortal’. In order for this to work, there must be given axioms, first principles, and then a way in which they are deductively compared and assessed before reaching the conclusion. In some sense, we can take it as a given that every individual will have a will, and the question becomes how to assess that will in order to reach a general will which best represents everyone’s interests.

Why Representation?

And now we return to our thesis question: what does it mean for an individual to be represented by government? Let’s begin to answer this by turning to the absolute bare minimum a person can do to participate: the vote. A vote is fundamentally a way for someone to express their will. Rousseau mentions that as population grows, the individual influence wanes, so what happens if the population shrinks to just a few people? If the entire population is reduced to two, where we are a citizen and the other person acts as government, does our vote serve to command orders, or merely to make suggestions? Is that other person a puppet whose strings we pull? What happens if we vote one way and they, as citizens, vote a different way? In Rousseau’s model, they, as government, would also represent the general will, and might override us. The same logic even applies to a population of one: how often have we faced a personal dilemma, and struggled to determine the best approach? There are clearly good reasons that the cover of *Leviathan* often depicts a sovereign comprised of a mosaic of smaller people.

Maybe we can try to answer this by raising the purpose of government in general. But even this begets issues: should government be structured to preserve a status quo, to ensure the people are safe, and that breaking the rules is punished properly? Or should it be aimed at raising the standard of life for everyone? Both of these approaches have problems. If we choose the former, it will mean that government also preserves certain natural imbalances, preventing things like social mobility. It also mandates certain restrictions

on dissent, and limits on personal freedom. For example, one way to ensure nobody makes a bomb is to ban all materials needed to build one, and forbid teaching about certain physics and chemistry topics. And if we want to raise the standard of living for everyone, then we need to agree on a means by which to do this. What standard do we want? How do we decide it? Political mantras like ‘two cars in every garage’ sounds appealing if we live in the suburbs, but not if we live on a busy city street. Should the standard be purely materialistic, or should we also control things like what topics children are taught in school?

And then we have the issue of time: what happens when one generation agrees upon a set of governing principles, and then a future generation disregards them? After all, this is the problem that faced the Israelites with a new Pharaoh’s generation who had never known Joseph, prompting Moses to lead them out of Egypt. And sometimes it doesn’t even take a generation: while Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments, the Israelites created a false idol, the golden calf, and began to worship it, even though they had literally just seen Moses part the Red Sea. As Hobbes argued, this is one of the reasons for keeping the Sabbath, to re-engage with and remind people about their Covenant on a weekly basis. One reason governments hold elections is to hold power in check, but another is to remind people that the process exists and they need to vote.

Population Growth

Rousseau brings up another important point that should not be overlooked: as a population grows, not only does the individual influence wane, but if the government which enforces the general will also grows accordingly in size, it will become less effective and prone to infighting and factions. The only way to support such size is to incorporate multi-leveled distributions of power, which will always lead to problems. Rousseau’s solution is to reduce the size of government until the point where it is concentrated in a single person. But is this really a solution? While it is true that a government that is overly complex and bogged down in bureaucracy will spend the majority of

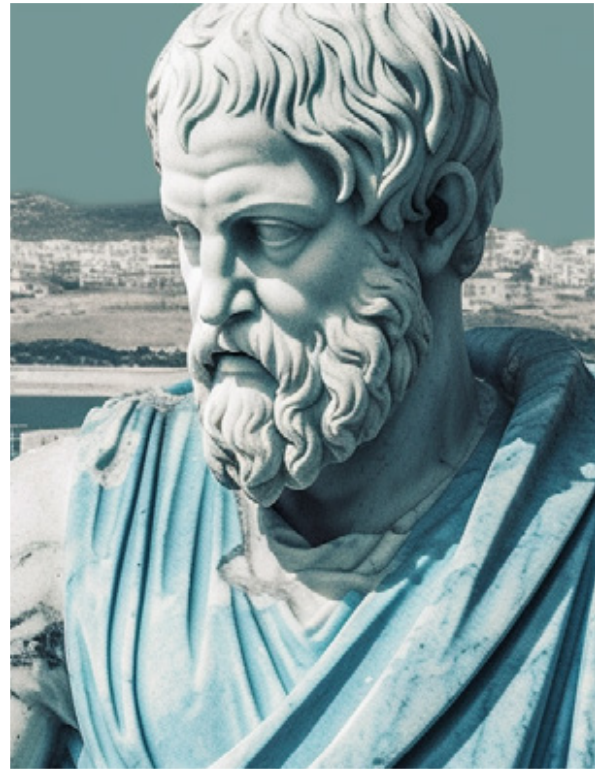


Rousseau

its time maintaining itself and often neglect the people whom it claims to represent, unless we get very lucky, a single sovereign leader will also be prey to abuses of power. For every Marcus Aurelius, there is also a Caligula.

More modern governments have tried to mitigate some of the above problems through structure. Rather than having ratio between people and the general will, many now employ a more pyramid style structure, with levels upon levels of representation. One of the ideas behind this is to allow people to focus at the local level, such as deciding who to elect as a local judge, while leaving larger scale issues, such as military deployment, to higher levels. However, this then leads to a schism between micro and macro levels, and a consequent power imbalance.

Some argue that this is because a government is effectively a corporation, and in a large company, low level employees usually have many levels of middle-management between themselves and the top levels. But this analogy does not work for several reasons. First, one must apply to work at a company, whereas one is born into citizenry.



Aristotle

Second, in a company, power is concentrated at the top, and employees serve at the mercy of the company. Although we might put someone in jail for breaking the law, we cannot fire a citizen for not voting. Third, in a government, at least according to Locke, power originates from below, from the people. Even Hobbes admits that the sovereign gets its power from the people, but unlike Locke, does not believe the power can be returned. These dynamics naturally break down when other interests, such as corporate shareholders or lobbyists enter the picture. In theory, a company makes decisions based on what the market will bear; in reality, decisions are made by what the shareholders want. In theory, a country will pass laws based on how the people vote; in reality, politicians are often bought off by lobbyists from rich corporations.

While this outlook seems pessimistic, we must remember that power feeds on more power, and if left alone, all human institutions become corrupted. This is why it is important for citizens to engage in the process, to ensure the general will stays in check. After all, what is the point of having a right if we do not exercise it?

The Best of All Possible Worlds

We are born into a particular milieu, but for what purpose? Are we in a universe sprung from chance and continuing by happenstance or is this a Creation with purpose, such as flourishing, wholeness, or evolution towards The Good? Our current secular western mainstream perspective provides us with a consumer society governed by organized power and the economics of self-interest and greed leading it seems to unsustainability with environmental and social devastation and war. Impossible utopias can be imagined as can dystopias worse than the present world, but is there the possibility of a better world?

WILLIAM BISHOP

Applying the 'Principle of Sufficient Reason', the German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646 – 1716) asserted that humanity lives in the best of all possible worlds. This thought was thoroughly ridiculed by Voltaire in France, while later in 1789 there arose in France a public revolution demanding freedom, equality and fraternity. If fully instituted these values could have led to a better world. It was in his best-selling novella, *Candide* (1759) that Voltaire criticized Leibniz's assertion, pointing, among other things, to the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 that killed more than 20,000 people. But even today anyone painfully ill or tortured or confronting a modern war is unlikely to accept that they live in the best of all possible worlds. And yet there is a ring of truth in Leibniz's statement and in my view this claim can only be valid if the 'world' is seen within a wide metaphysical context.

A finite world subject to apparent evil and real pain does not appear to be the best of all possible worlds. But imaginatively to take a creator-god's perspective: a single created world containing multiple 'worlds' within it can be the best of all possible worlds if it is infinite and in constant evolutionary development because in an infinite world all possibilities become possible and the point about an infinite world that Spinoza (1632-1677) proposed is that it is not a world of mere external appearances but has an interior or 'divine' dimension where the invisible and the visible relate in a non-dual manner, where the parts are

in the whole and an aspect of the whole is in the parts. This is the One and the Many relationship. For Spinoza there was one single 'substance', God or Nature, where mind and matter meet as two aspects of the same 'thing'. Spinoza could have been influenced by the ancient Indian view of Vedanta: a non-dual monism or *panentheism* where everything is in God, as the Absolute and (an aspect of) God is within everything as an enlivening consciousness. Spinoza maintained this view in his *Ethics*, published posthumously by his students due to its threat to the ruling dogmas of the day.

Within nature, which is subject to time and space, continuous development means that no condition remains static or permanent therefore what may seem evil or bad in one instance has to be related to a wider perspective of development within the whole. The argument is that a particular evil may be necessary in order eventually to achieve a greater good. The Good is understood to be the overall good for the parts that contribute to the being of the whole. The milieu of a particular geographical space and time may seem all-encompassing, as it was for the inhabitants of Plato's imaginary cave where shadows of real things defined their world. Yet a milieu is transient - it comes into being and passes away - while the Whole includes multiple such worlds, seemingly separate and yet interconnected and meaningfully related.



Leibniz



Voltaire

Thoughts from Spinoza

In her recent book, *Transcendence for Beginners* (2025), Clare Carlisle, Professor of Philosophy at King's College London, connects a stream of thought from Spinoza through three generations of Germans from Goethe and Romanticism to Idealism, which echoes ancient Indian Brahmanism. This stream also includes Coleridge, Carlyle and Emerson and the Transcendentalists, and continues with the Theosophists. But the prevailing mood in the West, conditioned by secularism and materialistic science, while brilliant within its own sphere, arguably lacks a comprehensive enough vision of life to adequately encompass the Whole. Philosophy, the humanities and art and religion can contribute here when not overly conditioned by a prevailing mood of scientific materialism.

Clare Carlisle's book relates to her *Gifford Lectures*, which in the past have given rise to William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* and Whitehead's *Process Philosophy*. Lord Adam Gifford endowed this lecture series in 1885 for the purpose of enquiry into Natural Theology, with an appeal to *experience* and *practice*, at a time when theology and religion was under rationalist scrutiny. Lord Gifford must have seen an appeal to experience as a means of countering the social trend towards disbelief and rejection of dogma; and this is where the best of all possible worlds comes in with regard to God and spiritual reality, which in turn raises

the question of Truth and illusion. Like the illumination given by a torch, we see that part of the whole available to us within its circle of light. We cannot logically say that anything out of range exists or does not exist. However, neither legitimately can we imaginatively populate an unseen world without considering Truth. But given evolution – physical and psychic-mental – it is not inconceivable that phenomena related to a divine or supersensible dimension was once *experienced* rather than theorized. So texts, such as the Vedas and Upanishads, could function as (sacred) records. It appears that later intellectual development has supplanted a previously naturally given 'clairvoyance'.

We live by stories and within stories and we each have our own life-story. So it is unsurprising that the biblical story of Creation and expulsion from Paradise, as a revelation, should inform us of our place within a temporal and spatial world subject to an eternal world of spirit. The story that we inhabit is, in a sense, the world we live in. However, in our present culture entertainment and illusion play such a prominent role that it is difficult to determine what is significant and fundamental reality. Origen, possibly a pupil with Plotinus in the school of Ammonius Saccas in Alexandria, spoke of the noble theory of a stairway of worlds superimposed on one another not in space but in time, leading in ascending grades of perfection to a consummation where 'God shall be all in all'. This view or understanding gives the world a real



Spinoza

history within a divine scheme without admitting progress or development to God.

Similarly Leibniz developed an idea that the world is not material, but consists of condensed spirit, populated by formations of spirit called monads. The mineral world is most intensely condensed spirit so has a trance-like consciousness, while plants are asleep, and the monads of animals exist in a dream state, while the centre of the monad of the human is only marginally condensed so is awake. The human being is motivated by its centre, or personality, and is a being that lives towards the future, forever becoming. The task is to raise natural consciousness to the point where it dissolves into divine consciousness. This world of monads is made of a single 'substance' (non-spatial mental entities) where the external world is mere appearance. Each monad has its own inbuilt history that develops where one quality succeeds another, and each monad has its own individual perspective on the world. These ideas find reflection in Whitehead's Process Philosophy where 'individual entities' resemble monads.

When we ask what a single life amounts to it is well to consider ancient Vedic texts that speak of reincarnation. If reincarnation is real then an individual self has an involved and ongoing relationship within the process of evolution, and *karma* introduces *Natural Morality* as the principle of cause and effect. Each separate individual life embodies a milieu, which affects motivation, while attraction to the Good or deviation from it carries its own destiny. The 'existentialist' Kierkegaard regarded a person's life as wasted if they went on living deceived by life's joys or sorrows so that they never became '*decisively and eternally conscious as spirit*'. For Kierkegaard faith was 'simultaneously to be out on 70,000 fathoms of water and yet be joyful'. Here imminence and transcendence join in unity.

The Panentheistic Vision

Surely the best of all possible worlds must be empowered by Wisdom and Goodness and yet allow for Freedom. But there can be no freedom of choice without the possibility of deviation from the Good. If Love is the overriding Power for determining motivation and meaning can there be a better world than this? And if the ideals of beauty, truth, and goodness could be achieved this would make for a better world. However this may be more aspirational than realizable in our current milieu and mindset. The panentheistic vision says we are all in this together; so if we see our self in our neighbour then cooperation would be the best course of action.

For Heraclitus *all flows*, while Parmenides's unity of the world as the existent One was interpreted by Anaxagoras as a world where everything is in everything, but where thought separates them from the Whole. And William Blake's point in writing '*Jerusalem*' was: "To open the Eternal Worlds, to open the immortal Eyes / Of Man inwards into the Worlds of Thought, into Eternity / Ever expanding in the Bosom of God, the Human Imagination." He goes on to say, "There is a Void outside existence, which if enter'd into / Englobes itself and becomes a Womb; such was Albion's Couch, / A pleasant Shadow of repose call'd Albion's Lovely Land." Here is a panentheist vision cast in an imaginative Christian perspective. And

relevant to our time is the statement by Robert McDermott in his introduction to *'The Bhagavad Gita and the West'*, lectures by Rudolf Steiner: "For Steiner, the present is a time of increasing opportunity for conscious spiritual knowledge within a larger context, and over against a rapidly increasing darkness of consciousness."

The best of all possible worlds must take into account the reality of Spirit. It appears that a contemporary darkening of spiritual consciousness accounts for the current direction of 'civilization' with its horrors. While this present phase will pass, effects of the present on the future cannot be dismissed. With increasing darkness comes increasing light, but will there be enough light within the darkness to 'open the immortal eyes of Man inwards into the worlds of thought, into eternity'?

Like participants in a stage play we may not be conscious of all of the contextual background necessary for the performance. Likewise we may be unaware that we are part of a complex process of vast developmental stages where the *human* is but one stage through which an identity passes in its ongoing development from its creation by intelligences (beings) far in advance within the 'world-making process' whereby an identity's form metamorphoses from phase to phase in its overall development. A further advanced stage for the spirit currently at the human stage would be liberation from the mineral body at the end of the Earth phase. This would entail becoming the tenth hierarchy, adding to the nine hierarchical intelligences enumerated by Dionysius the Areopagite. Such a 'system' of *Being* is one where all identities are seeded with spirit-being - 'I Am'. Paradoxically, this 'metaphysical system' develops within the bounds of an infinite Being, or God: the Eternal both bounding and interpenetrating the Temporal - an expanding universe?

The Kingdom of Light

The following thought experiment helps illuminate a concluding quotation from Plato. This calls for reflection on the connection between logos, light, thinking and being as spirit. Imagine you are a spiritual being undergoing an earthly incarnation.



Clare Carlisle

You have come from a 'kingdom of light' to a world of dark matter which is compressed light (a polarity within unity). Incarnation involves reduction of consciousness within a neural-sensory organism. This obscures awareness of one's origin, causing distance from compulsion from a spiritual world of light. This allows free choice and reveals an individual's moral compass.

In a spatial world of time with hindrances development becomes possible; in this case, freedom. Development happens over a lifetime. At the teenage stage there is potential for serious rebellion against *parental* influence. Humanity is at this developmental stage.

'Now there is only one way of taking care of things, and this is to give to each the food and motions natural to it. And the motions naturally akin to the divine principle within us are the thoughts and revolutions of the universe. These each one should follow, and by learning the harmonies and revolutions of the universe make the thinking being like unto thought, in accordance with the original nature, and thus attain to the perfect life which the gods have set before mankind, both for

I
For a promised letter I waited for weeks
from my friend, tired of life. Sad,
in his well-equipped home
with gadgets, computers, a drone.

His wife died 10 years ago; his heart hung
on his chest like a stone.
Now the piano sold, the vacuum cleaner gone
to the woman who had tidied his rooms.

In the rain it arrived, now all drenched.
A postwoman took it along
handed it in.
Some detective work she said
as the address was put wrong.

I unwrapped the small gift and found eight
of the tiniest elephants. A good bye -
Was he gone?

I let out a cry, I gathered them up, the white ones
some in silver, some brown. There was blood on my hand,
a touch of vermilion.

Next day, I heard, he had asked for more insulin,
the doctor straight took him in -
the hospital ward . A brief stay: I'm alive.

Back in the house, out of tune -
he tamped down his fears, went to bed.
He switched off the lamp.

He has shrunk
like a deflated balloon.



II

There is a herd of miniature elephants
in my cabinet of curiosities
walking in a circle
large, smaller, smallest.

When I look at them
I have to move them
One after the other
to make a row

A charm against enclosure
Lurking in the mind

A charm against an ending,
Murmurs in the dark

A charm against the elephant ghost
Carrying away my memories -

Poem and Artwork by Scharlie Meeuws

The House of Words

Recent discourse has placed Iran firmly in the register of geopolitics, conflict, and strategic anxiety. Yet this narrow framing risks obscuring something far older and more enduring: Iran as a civilisation. Long before the modern state, the Persian cultural world helped shape vast regions through literature, philosophy, science, and art, leaving a legacy that extends from Central Asia to Europe.

At the heart of this civilisational continuity lies the Persian language (Farsi)—a linguistic tradition with over two millennia of recorded history, serving not merely as a means of communication but as a carrier of memory, identity, and thought. For centuries, Persian functioned as a transregional language of culture and learning, connecting diverse peoples across political and ethnic boundaries.

This short reflection turns away from the immediacy of current events to consider Iran through a different lens: not as a problem to be managed, but as a linguistic and philosophical inheritance to be understood.

DR. ALAN XUEREB

It begins with a small shock of recognition: Persian dokhtar, German Tochter, English daughter. Across distance and centuries, the word seems to echo itself. This is no accident of resemblance. It is the trace of a single ancestral utterance, refracted through time by systematic sound shifts, yet still audible in the present. What appears as coincidence is, in fact, continuity.

That continuity unsettles a familiar assumption. If the linguistic sign is arbitrary, as structural linguistics maintains, why do the most intimate and primordial words - those of kinship, being, number - persist with such tenacity across languages? Why does language remember what theory insists it should forget?

When placed within the broader Indo-European lineage, these words begin to reveal something more enduring: not merely shared phonetic ancestry, but the persistence of conceptual forms across time. This persistence invites a philosophical question: is language fundamentally arbitrary, as structural linguistics would have it, or does it carry within it a deeper disclosure of meaning?

The structuralist position, most famously articulated by Saussure, insists on the arbitrariness of the sign. The bond between signifier (sound pattern) and signified (concept) is, in principle, contingent. There is nothing inherently 'maternal' in the sound mādar or Mutter. Language, on this

view, is a system of differences without positive terms—a self-contained network in which meaning arises relationally, not essentially.

And yet, the historical depth of Indo-European cognates complicates this claim. When Persian mādar, German Mutter, and Sanskrit mātṛ all trace back to a common root, we are confronted with a continuity that exceeds mere convention. These are not independent arbitrary assignments; they are transformations of a shared linguistic inheritance. The arbitrariness, if it exists, seems to be constrained by a kind of historical necessity.

Here, a different orientation emerges. Language is no longer merely a system of signs, but a medium in which the world is disclosed. Words are not labels affixed to pre-existing objects; they are the sites where meaning comes into presence. In this perspective, the persistence of cognates across languages is not accidental but indicative of a deeper continuity in how human beings inhabit and understand the world.

This point becomes sharper when one considers the reflection on dwelling in Building Dwelling Thinking. There, the German verb wohnen (to dwell) is traced etymologically not only to bauen (to build), but further back to Old High German buan. What is decisive is that buan originally meant 'to dwell', 'to remain', 'to stay in a place', and that it is intimately connected with the verb



Shiraz – Iran

‘to be’. To dwell, in this primordial sense, is not merely to occupy space; it is to abide, to be at peace, to remain. The human being is insofar as he dwells. Building, therefore, is not the ground of dwelling; it is already a mode of dwelling.

At this juncture, a striking philological resonance emerges. The Persian verb *budan* (‘to be’) appears - at least phonetically - remarkably close to Old High German *buan*. This is not a superficial similarity. Both forms can be traced back to a common Indo-European root, conventionally reconstructed as *bhuH* (‘to be’, ‘to become’, ‘to grow’). What is retrieved in one linguistic tradition as dwelling is preserved in another as being.

The convergence is philosophically suggestive. If *buan* and *budan* share not only a phonetic resemblance but a common ancestral root tied to Being, then the intuition that Being is fundamentally linked to dwelling may not be confined to a single linguistic horizon. Rather, it may reflect a deeper inheritance: a primordial understanding in which to be is to remain, to inhabit, to endure within a world.

This does not imply that Persian explicitly articulates the notion of dwelling in the same way as German. The semantic fields have diverged. Yet the shared root intimates a latent continuity: that Being is not sheer abstraction, but carries connotations of becoming, growing, and perhaps even settling into presence. The German path leads to *Wohnen*; the Persian preserves *budan*. Both gesture toward a more originary sense of Being than the flattened copula of modern usage.

Farsi and German, when placed in dialogue, thus reveal more than parallel vocabularies;

they disclose overlapping ontological intuitions sedimented in language. One makes explicit, through etymological retrieval, the link between Being and dwelling. The other preserves, more quietly, a trace of the same archaic root. The philosophical task is to attend to these echoes—not to collapse them into identity, but to recognize in them the persistence of an ancient horizon of intelligibility.

This does not refute the structuralist insight so much as delimit it. At the level of synchronic analysis - language as it functions at a given moment - the arbitrariness of the sign retains its explanatory force. But diachronically, across centuries and millennia, language reveals a different character. It becomes a repository of memory, a sedimentation of past meanings that continue to shape present understanding.

The tension, then, is not between arbitrariness and necessity, but between two dimensions of language: its structural contingency and its historical depth. One captures language as system; the other, language as inheritance. Between them lies a more nuanced view: language as both constructed and received, both differential and disclosive.

In this light, cognates are more than linguistic artifacts. They are traces of a shared human past, echoes of an original articulation of the world that continues to resonate, however faintly, in modern speech. To speak, whether in Farsi or German, is thus not only to participate in a system of signs, but to inhabit a history of meaning—one that binds us, across cultures and epochs, in a common linguistic dwelling.

Feigning: Some Drawbacks

Feign then what's by a decent tact believed,
And act that state is only so conceived,
And build an edifice of form
For house where phantoms may keep warm.

William Empson, 'This Last Pain'

The poem is not really very good, but it's true enough, as a matter of fact.

Empson, on his poem 'This Last Pain'.

A simple choice, you poets: good or true?
Say 'both', and it's a faker's creed you feign,
As if pretending hard enough will do.

Seemed later on you'd failed to think it through,
Let Oscar's dodgy gospel take the strain.
A simple choice, you poets: good or true?

If states conceived might just prove actual too
Then how should truth's wise reckoners count the gain?
As if pretending hard enough will do!

Vaihinger's fictions skip the reckoning due,
Make his 'as-ifs' the mark of lying Cain.
A simple choice, you poets: good or true?

It's she, the unconceived, undreamt-of 'you'
Whose phantom set this reverie in train.
As if pretending hard enough will do!



CHRIS NORRIS



Dream on, and lover's madness must ensue.
Heed Empson's late advice: abstain, abstain!
A simple choice, you poets: good or true?

Your tact might feign, then face that choice on cue:
Refuse once more, and then you'll choose in vain,
As if pretending hard enough will do.

Just harken to the love-lament that grew
More plangent with each villanelle-refrain.
A simple choice, you poets: good or true?

There's Keats's Grecian Urn, but best eschew
The pot that keeps those lovers rent in twain.
As if pretending hard enough will do!

Yours kept the music but required it screw
The thought-pitch up and reengage the brain.
A simple choice, you poets: good or true;
As if pretending hard enough will do!

The Spring Is Back



**The Spring the poets celebrate is back,
Gone is the winter cold,
The daisies reappear again
Now warmth has taken hold.**

**Sadly, I think of those who've gone
And never will return,
Leaving behind an empty hearth
And weeping hearts that yearn.**

**So many Springs we saw together
While we enjoyed the sun,
We walked to see the bluebells blooming,
But now those times are done.**

**What can I say on looking back
At so much that is past,
Only recall the intense delight
Of joys that did not last.**

Edward Greenwood



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