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WORLDS APART

The Dialogic Imagination of Owen Barfield

> But the moment of creation is the moment of communication. It is when the work has passed from mind to mind that it becomes a work of art.
>
> G. K. Chesterton

On the surface it seems that it is not easy to convey Owen Barfield's ideas about language, participation and history to a larger public, all the more so as his speculations about a final participation may well be another version of master narratives or ideologies denounced by postmodern thinkers. Yet the need for meaning persists and people desperately search for the larger picture into which their lives might fit. In this paper, I wish to show that central components of Barfield's thought are to be found in the textual forms he employs. They emphasize his thought as a process whose foundation is dialogical. Barfield's works as a whole is a series of dialogues with the real world, i. e. not merely with academics or anthroposophists or other insiders. If there are teleological elements in his thought, it is through dialogue that they are negotiated, questioned or challenged. This makes Barfield a truly contemporary thinker. In the second part of my essay, I would like to point out two areas in which Barfield's thought may become fruitful as dialogue: evolutionary neurology and the intercultural problems we are facing now. For Barfield, dialogue means engaging the reader both on an interdisciplinary and intercultural level.

Das Werk Owen Barfields ist einer größeren Öffentlichkeit nur schwer zu vermitteln, da es neben seinen sprachhistorischen und philosophischen Gedanken auch eine Teleologie suggeriert, nach der menschliche Geschichte sich auf eine final participation *zu bewege. Damit verfiele er dem Verdikt postmoderner Denker, die das Zeitalter der großen Erzählungen und Ideologien für beendet erklärt haben. Und doch suchen die Menschen nach Sinn,*

nach dem größeren Bild, in das ihr jeweiliges Leben hineinpasst. Bei dieser Suche kann uns Barfield helfen, weil sein Werk auf den Dialog ausgelegt ist. Es handelt sich um ein Denken im Prozess, das jeweils unterschiedliche Positionen durch die Form des offenen oder impliziten Dialogs einbezieht. Dadurch bleibt Barfield unser Zeitgenosse, denn sein Werk kann als Serie von Dialogen gesehen werden, die sich mit den Problemen der realen Welt, nicht nur von Akademikern, Anthroposophen oder anderen Insidern auseinander setzen. Im zweiten Teil des Artikels sollen interdisziplinäre und interkulturelle Anknüpfungspunkte für den Dialog gezeigt werden, und zwar am Beispiel der evolutionären Neurologie und des Problems der kulturell-religiösen Differenz.

1.

Discussing Barfield in class leads to some interesting questions. Seen within the framework of postmodernism, the problem raised is that Barfield is one of those thinkers who think in terms of the so-called master narratives. In this case the *maître penseur* has devised a story about history and the evolution of consciousness leading from "original participation" to modern scientific consciousness and from there to what he calls "final participation". It is a teleology with which few intellectuals can agree now. Nor can students. The world has become fuzzier, less predetermined, more chaotic and leaves little room for antiquated visions such as Spengler's decline of the West, Gebser's "diaphanous consciousness" or Teilhard de Chardin's ideas about an evolution toward a "Noosphere".

While in academia these visions meet with contempt and derision or are simply ignored, more and more people outside the universities keep looking for the larger syntheses because they feel a need for orientation and especially for the meaning of it all. What is the larger picture into which my life may fit, they ask themselves. Yet while schools and universities teach all kinds of competences, they have lost sight of meaning and contents. The less meaning is discussed in public, the more will we find people drifting into sects and fundamentalist groups. The human is the meaning-seeking animal, one might say with a reference to Victor Frankl, in whose psychology meaning and understanding are central.

It is for this reason that we should listen to Barfield again, for in the heyday of postmodernism he entitled one of his books *The Rediscovery of Meaning*. Postmodern thinkers welcomed the "death of the author" (Roland Barthes), and they were joined by Marxists in this project (Hans Magnus Enzensberger). They were, however, less concerned about the death of meaning or about the fact that people found it harder and harder to make sense of what they were experiencing. The Marxist answers were too primitive, and the postmodernists had none. Lyotard and his followers rejected the master narratives because of their totalitarian potential and the humanities followed suit in getting rid of the superfluous entity of spirit still to be found in such an old-fashioned term as German *Geisteswissenschaften*. I remember, e. g., a series of lectures in the early 1980s in Freiburg under the name of "Vertreibung des Geistes aus den Geisteswissenschaften?" which, in translation, would sound even more radical: "Excluding the human from the humanities."

These tendencies, incidentally, are not fashions but represent major mainstream developments, especially if we look at very popular neurological theories which leave aside all subjective qualities and experiential values. Barfield's call for a rediscovery of meaning may lead us back to everyday experiences and, concomitantly, to the use and abuse of words.

In this paper, I wish to point out some contemporary issues where Barfield's thought is either needed or can be corroborated by other types of research, and where it is contradicted or in need of expansion. In short, I should like to show where and how Barfield is still with us.

2.

In order to do this, I will look at his works from different angles. Let us first of all consider the form that his thought or rather thinking takes. So far, no one seems to have noticed the anomaly of these forms within the context of contemporary philosophy. If we take into account the genres in which he practised we encounter the first anomaly. Barfield, besides being a solicitor, wrote criticism, philoso-

phy, poetry, drama, stories and at least one novel. Yet one will find his philosophical insights spread across all these forms and genres, with different emphases obviously, but yet continuously at work, pulsating and informing. Poet-philosophers are exceptions in the history of thought, and names like Heraclitus or Nietzsche come to mind, but also, not least thanks to Barfield, Coleridge, Steiner and Goethe. What they seem to have in common is that their thought is a process, it takes on a life of its own like an organism, it has indeed corporeal qualities. Pattern, rhythm, image, movement complement the logical process, or rather embody it. Thus one could, to some extent at least, speak of embodied thought.

For Barfield, as for the Romantics, the bridge between body and spirit is the imagination. Much has been said about it, but I wonder whether anyone has commented on a specific aspect that may well escape the vision of grandeur and sublimity usually associated with the imagination.

As Barfield, working on Coleridge, has shown, the faculty of the imagination is inherently structured by the principle of polarity, a productive encounter of opposites. In the First World War, he tells us, he discovered the seeds for this concept of polarity in his special training as a wireless officer. He found out, for example, that "the negative pole was not merely receptive, but was itself a power source" (*Barfield Sampler* 174).

Polarity and evolution are seen to be inseparable, or put differently, there is a fundamental link between position and movement. No movement without the space defined by position, an insight that needed to be embodied for the dancer Barfield was planning to become. His ideas about polarity as the dynamic part of evolution are finally clarified in his study on Coleridge: "Polarity is dynamic, not abstract [...]. Where logical opposites are contradictory, polar opposites are generative of each other – and together generative of new product. [...] Moreover each quality or character is present *in* the other. We can and must distinguish, but there is no possibility of dividing them" (*Coleridge* 36). Today, in our orientalized world (the other side of globalization), this sounds very much like the definition of Yin and Yang in Chinese cosmology. Barfield indeed stresses

the generative side, thus taking a human or natural image to describe highly subtle processes. There is, in other words, a bodily element in his thought, and this is an important route to be pursued.

However, at this point, I only wish to point out that in his concept of the imagination there is this element of doubleness, of the *dialogos*. If at times, such as in the concluding chapter of *Saving the Appearances*, we might feel him becoming dogmatic, or simply metaphysical, there are many more instances in his works where he manifests this sense of dialogue. The essence of this dialogue or rather dialogism is that nothing can be taken for granted.

We subsume these different techniques and strategies of knowledge production under the label of *dialogue*, logos going aslant as it were, across topics and from person to person. The first seeds may already be found in the 'Great War' dialogue between Lewis and Barfield. But basically, this questioning in the form of dialogues subverts authoritarian thinking and dogmas that we find connected with dominant narratives such as communism, positivism, fascism or guruism. It is maybe no coincidence that Barfield wrote these dialogues when other thinkers, such as Martin Buber, Mikhael Bakhtin or Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, were groping similarly for new ways of mediation. What they have in common is that truth has to be negotiated and mediated in the modern world. Truth has a social and communal side if it is to be enacted in the real world, it is in other words simultaneously a communication and about communication.

Much of Barfield's thought is thinking in process and thus resorts to the form of dialogue. Even in *Saving the Appearances*, his language is at times more colloquial than that of contemporary philosophers, vide e. g. the thought experiments to which he invites his readers. A case in point would be his presentation of what a rainbow is and his asking the reader to join him in analysing this perception; or when he suggests approaches to understanding the medieval mind. But there are other works more explicitly related to the dialogue, or actually embedded in the very structure of dialogue. One could speak of the dramatic nature of his thought, and it is no coincidence that he also composed a play on Orpheus.

Take his short novel *This Ever Diverse Pair*, whose protagonists, two solicitors, are the opposing halves of the same persona, each the alter ego of the other, two characters who are also secret sharers and antipodes, or *Doppelgänger*. There is on the one hand Burgeon the philosopher, poet and idealist, and, on the other hand, Burden the down-to-earth pragmatist and businessman. Often they remind one of such famous couples as Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde or of Frankenstein and his monster. As Shirley Sugerman put it, quoting Barfield:

> We find in the characters of Burden/Burgeon the tension between those polar contraries, distinguishable but not divisible; we find it reconciled finally in Burgeon's awareness that both the prosaic and poetic aspects of his life are necessary. [...] 'The Poetic tends to expand infinitely to create new meanings, while the Prosaic strives to apprehend and to identify distinctions in that infinity.' (Sugerman 74)

There is obviously always the danger of schizophrenic discourse, when one part is disconnected from the other, and this is where dialogue becomes necessary. As a matter of fact, as Barfield confessed, writing this little book helped him avoid a mental breakdown. *This Ever Diverse Pair* can be seen as a twofold autobiography or should we call it a *polyautobiography*? The two characters appear in a setting reminiscent of Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener", Gogol's "The Overcoat", or James Joyce's Dublin clerks – the dry and dusty world of offices, lawyers, solicitors and the various ways in which they handle the legal questions of their clients. The setting is fictional – or is it? Prose keeps dissolving under the hand of the dramatist only to turn into fragments of dialogue. It is threatened by complete disruption, by the collapse of polarity which can become quite drastic, as in this row:

> "Very well", he said, "I won't kill you. But I'll emasculate you. You shall be my eunuch. You will do what you are told in the future. You will stop making suggestions of your own. And above all you will stop arguing."

> But by this time I knew I had gained the upper hand, and this silly threat hardly caused me a tremor.
> "I don't agree", I said. "If those are your terms, I shall commit *hara kiri.*"
> He gave in! (Barfield, *Diverse Pair* 114)

There is a similar complementarity of fictional setting and philosophical dialogue in *Worlds Apart – a Dialogue of the 1960s.* However, the dialogue of two slightly mad characters has been expanded into a dialogue between seven characters and the narrator who represent a great variety of sciences and professions. The narrator is introduced as a solicitor with philological interests, then there is a theologian, a rocket research engineer, a physicist, a retired schoolmaster by the name of Sanderson, furthermore a biologist, a linguist and a psychiatrist. The only part of humanity apparently missing is woman, certainly a limitation from today's perspective. Again dialogue alternates with prosaic description, though here the dialogical form is dominant. At one point, the characters remember the Platonic dialogue and start to imitate it consciously. They begin to dramatise philosophy, acting it like a play on the stage: "Which of you is to be Socrates?" (Barfield, *Worlds* 63). Interestingly, they tape this dialogue and the narrator when playing the tape is put off by his own "odiously self-conscious voice" (63). They decide to do this exercise because one of them, the young rocket researcher, is a bit slow in following their turns of thought. The anthroposophist seconds him when he says:

> The trouble today is, that we have all got very clever. I am not being sarcastic. We are no longer capable of thinking deeply, because we think too *quickly.* (57)

Discussing the form of the dialogue, in other words, leads one very soon into the depths of culture and hence into the contents of these dialogues. The form and the issues at stake are inextricably connected. In many ways, one can see this book as a continuation of his previous major work, *Saving the Appearances* (1957). *Worlds Apart* discusses very similar topics, from prehistory and epistemology to

linguistics and astronomy, but with one difference. By employing eight voices, the argument of *Saving the Appearances* is split up, it anticipates the criticism that might be levelled against it by having one character articulate this position and by having someone else reply to it. As Barfield put it in an interview I conducted with him in 1991:

> It [*Worlds Apart*] was essentially an attempt to refute criticisms. If I had written an exposition instead of a dialogue, I should have had to keep in hedging and inserting parentheses – "Oh, yes, I realize what your point of view is but" – It would have made it very long-winded and complicated. But once I had those points of view put by others, it made it simpler and also, I had a bit of fun! That was the idea, really. (Schenkel 33)

The symposium lasts no longer than three days when the men discuss language, history, nuclear physics, biology and religion, controversially at any rate. We are, whatever our own position, inevitably drawn into this network of questions and answers, queries, doubts, and misunderstandings and we discover much of our own condition in this type of communication. Philosophy thus returns to the everyday world, to the places in which we find ourselves. By the same token, it is no longer a neat package of thought, but is on the contrary characterised by eclecticism, hybridity, coincidence and contingency, by obscurity and fuzziness, in other words, it mirrors the differences between people and their variety. The work ends with the description of a dream by Hunter, the theologian. It is a strange, almost alchemical dream that shows three figures – the first carries on his shoulders, instead of a head, a round box with holes and probably a candle inside, the second is "an emblematic sort of lion", and the third, much like the Green Knight, without any head or substitute for it. These figures are associated with words: *Subjective Idealism*, *The Key of the Kingdom* and *The Kingdom*. The Platonic Dialogue seems to be ending in an esoteric dream, in a revelation resembling a "Horror Comic". Not quite, though. Barfield, fortunately, remains

British enough to counter this grotesque show with the characteristic British gesture towards nonsense. Hunter ends his letter to the narrator with these words:

> Don't tell Burrows [the psychiatrist], if you are seeing him. We all know what *he'd* make of a decapitation dream! As to yourself – as Humpty Dumpty said: 'There's glory for you!' (Barfield, *Worlds* 211)

Worlds Apart spans a wide range of genres, but centrally it is a dialogue. The need for dialogue arises in the narrator right at the beginning when he becomes depressed by reading the *Times Literary Supplement*. He finds that all the reviews in it are written by specialists in their field, which may be fair "but it conveys a disagreeable impression of watertight compartments" (*Worlds* 9). Four years before, C. P. Snow had published his famous critique of the division between the "Two Cultures", science and the humanities, which are unable to meet and communicate. This seems to be one level addressed by Barfield's work. The other one goes deeper, though. As the narrator points out, the reviews in the *TLS* are not only written by specialists, but these specialists are also conditioned by a system of beliefs: "Behind each review there lay a whole network of unspoken assumptions about the nature of life and the universe which were completely incompatible with the corresponding network behind the review on the next page" (*Worlds* 9). I think it would be fair to stress the word "unspoken" here, for it marks areas for a dialogue whose task it is to make people speak, to make them articulate what has not been articulated. Thus these reviews in a sense reflect a whole mountain of foregone dialogues, they epitomize the absence of communication.

Another type of communication is introduced in *Unancestral Voice* (1965). To the extent that it is more fictional, it is also more esoteric. The book is a kind of essay in biography of the protagonist and his interactions with a voice, the voice of the Meggid, an internal guide based on the revelations of a Jewish mystic, Joseph Karo. The Meggid has real authority and so it seems that this would be the end of all dialogue. But this is not the case. Burgeon, again the nar-

rator here, is engaged in his social life and participates in discussions of all kinds, but keeps paying attention to this inner voice. Whatever he learns from it, and some of it is quite baffling, he has to measure against his everyday experiences, which include a strong awareness of the state of his society. He questions the Meggid and doubts it and thus is not merely an obedient disciple to his guru. But there is also revelation at hand. Given the Meggid's high position in the spiritual hierarchy, it knows how to deal out knowledge in the right kind of package so it can be digested and applied. Truth is not a result, it is a process in the narrator's mind.

Again, this insight is supported by dialogues. Burgeon travels to South Africa and discusses history, time and perception with a Roman Catholic and a Buddhist on board the ship. He then learns directly from the Meggid about Christ, nature and science and the taboo of duality. Then there is a lecture by a physicist about the deep structure of matter. Again this book is not neatly or easily pigeonholed and thus has largely been ignored by those who prefer watertight compartments. Barfield strays in every direction, though not without a purpose. But he is also aware that "the dialogue-form is a kind of travesty of what actually passed between Burgeon and the Meggid" (*Voice* 150). What is exciting and sometimes breathtaking is the way their relationship changes. This very change is made a subject of discussion. The guide is not just to be followed thoughtlessly but rather raises the protagonist's own thought and stimulates his thinking about thought. While the Meggid teaches Burgeon about the two forces that make up history and the self, it also seems to be taking Barfield's literary method into account:

> The regular is the *finished* part of any process or organism [...] The irregular is the unfinished part – on which the possibility of change and transformation depends, and where change and transformation take place. (*Voice* 151f.)

The Meggid then gives him a picture of the two forces that work in this world by either preserving continuities or by substituting the

new for the old through destruction. It seems that both agents are dependent on a third entity, which to Burgeon and the reader will be closed for some time yet, and this third level or agency is the source of transformation itself. Duality thus is an essential structure of this world, according to the Meggid, and this makes dialogue as a form of communication between the two sides of this structure all the more necessary. That there is a third element behind this dialogue may be seen in the narrator's dismissal of the dialogue as a sort of 'travesty'. Dialogue, in the common understanding, is confined to "memory-thoughts", as the Meggid calls them, while from real understanding "creative thoughts" will emerge (*Voice* 162). They are paradoxical, to say the least, just as the Meggid has a voice "that was no voice" (*Voice* 162). Creative thoughts can be experienced only "by a hearing that is at the same time a speaking. Only as if they were at the same time communicated by another and uttered by himself" (*Voice* 162). This synthesis of hearing and speaking has, incidentally, been wonderfully captured in Chesterton's "the moment of creation is the moment of communication" (Chesterton 185).

We are entering deep and metaphysical waters here and it is no coincidence that the narrator now begins to call the Meggid his "Master". This master eventually discloses some of the hierarchy in which he or it is embedded: "Men have called me by many names; Batkhol, Daimon, Khochmah, and many more. But that was long ago. Men have also called me *Sophia*." Later it was called *theosophia*, and finally, *anthroposophia*, which "is the voice of each one's mind speaking from the depths within himself" (*Voice* 168). Thus what was dialogue has become an interior monologue, yet one that is spoken from the depths. This is all hard to understand for a modern person not versed in Gnosticism, Greek mystery cults, Madame Blavatsky and Rudolf Steiner – at least on the surface. What Barfield actually enjoins us to do is to start listening to our inner voice, which most of the time is simply stifled by noise, speed and business. But the second part of his message is that this voice has to be tested in everyday life, it has to be brought back into the public realm. This is what Burgeon does when he talks about his experiences with his friend, the quantum physicist Flume. Here dialogue becomes im-

portant again, as a democratic testing ground and as a touchstone with which to verify or falsify one's inner experience. No coincidence then that Flume mentions Popper's *Logic of Scientific Discovery*, where the principle of verification/ falsification is established (*Voice* 155).

Unancestral Voice is a strange book: a dialogue and a monologue, a story and a drama, but also akin to those spiritual thrillers like Carlos Castaneda's or Paulo Coelho's books, or Herrigel's *Zen in the Art of Archery* and its American sequel, Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, a book Barfield seems to have been particularly fond of. All these focus on modern Western individuals exposed to a master or guru. Their mental construction is constantly challenged, their individualism and Western liberalism under continuous barrage. Not so with Barfield. While Castaneda, Coelho and Herrigel are shunted back into an ancient, often non-European culture, Barfield remains within the Western setting and paradigm. The message of the Meggid is that individualism is our path which will lead us to revelation and that we are not yet really individualised. We are still individuals organised by ancestral feelings, but we have to become unancestral. But this message, esoteric as it might seem, is constantly discussed and questioned by Burgeon, which is part of the emerging individuality, or Jung's individuation. The individual has to go through long phases of 'dividuality' or dividedness before it becomes the one.

The novelist Saul Bellow, incidentally, got interested in Barfield's work by reading *Unancestral Voice*. The reason, it seems, is that this book combines a Jewish tradition, that of the Meggid, and anthroposophy, because Bellow as an American Jew was also interested in Rudolf Steiner. This interest is borne out by his novel *Humboldt's Gift*. Just after publishing it, he wrote to Barfield and subsequently paid him a visit in his Kent home (Meulen 168–199, cf. also Schenkel 32).

3.

Having shown to some extent how Barfield's strategies of communication are fundamental to his thought, I should now like to single out two areas amongst many others where we can take up a dialogue with Barfield today and where Barfield himself suggested dialogue should take place.

The first area is neurology in which groundbreaking research has been done over the last few years. The 1990s, as we might remember, were actually named the "decade of the brain". This decade has lasted and will last much longer than ten years and it may well be that some of the most stunning discoveries are still ahead.

What would neurologists be interested in when they read Barfield, what would he learn from them? They would be divided about the main issue: what is the mind? While they may point out different colourings when brain activities are scanned, they cannot say what consciousness is and how the synaptic activities correspond to what we think, dream, or feel, and what the physical basis of individuality really is (Greenfield 190). It is thought to be an inside produced by outside, the unmeasurable by what can be measured, the invisible by the visible. But is this the case? Barfield's point would be that the outside is produced by the inside; that what we see or hear has been produced or is being created by our thoughts, feelings and dreams – not in the sense of hallucination or sensory construction, but by some kind of mental or even spiritual activity developed during the long course of evolution. For Barfield, there is thinking taking place beyond the brain, beyond the visible organism – an idea only conceivable for the fringe kind of biology and psychology. Rupert Sheldrake's 'morphogenetic field' comes to mind, or Stanislav Grof, who experimented with drugs and spiritual states. It is no coincidence that one of his books was titled *Beyond the Brain* (1985).

But are there also convergences between recent neurology and Barfield's thoughts? I can only make references to neurology as a layman and have therefore to resort to popular accounts of recent finds. One of the most readable books for a general public are those by the Indian-American neurologist Ramachandran, who writes in

the tradition of Oliver Sacks's case studies. For Sacks and Ramachandran narrative is very important, both in the sense of the patient's narrative about his or her experiences and for the neurologists presenting their studies. Ramachandran has specialised on areas such as phantom body experience, synaesthesia and the evolution of language.

Let us briefly look at recent discoveries relating to synaesthesia, the capacity of some people to cross sensory boundaries and to link, say, a colour with a tactile feeling or a shape with a sound. Francis Galton, Darwin's cousin, was the first to document this phenomenon. Now statistics tell us that one in two hundred people manifest this ability – or is it a superfluous burden? What is striking is that synaesthesia occurs seven times more often with artists and writers. Ramachandran talks of some kind of "hyperconnectivity" in the brains of these people (Ramachandran 83) and diagnoses a clear disposition for metaphors. This connectivity, he argues, may have been essential to the survival and evolution of early humanity since it nurtured abstract thought such as the idea of numbers. When you use a number you relate something to something else that is very different, e. g. three strokes for three cows. The synaesthetic brain tells you that these two phenomena share a common feature, some abstract quality related to rhythm or to a sequence of movements, to repetition. The essence of number, and that would be my point, is repetition. This is, incidentally, according to Roman Jakobson, also one distinctive attribute of poetry, his term being 'parallelism'.

This is only one example of how two different phenomena are shown to be related in certain aspects. Ramachandran mentions a further experiment in synaesthesia which might topple some ingrained ideas about the arbitrariness of language. In recent experiments it has been shown that some 95 % of all humans, no matter from which culture or linguistic group, tend to associate certain types of geometrical figure to certain soundshapes. This may show that the brain at some primeval level works onomatopoetically, i. e. that its neurons 'imitate' the sensory experience. Obviously, any kind of linguistic motivation will disappear at more complex levels of

language. However, the message could be that synaesthesia is present at the origin of language. If we take metaphor to be a version of the synaesthetic experience, joining different worlds, this might corroborate the importance Barfield attributes to metaphorical thinking at all levels of history and language. Ramachandran goes on to say that a lot of research should be done on this area, since it may well be part of our anthropological inheritance.

This is why metaphor and the imagination are so important for Barfield as well: they constitute our human condition. Unless we use the imagination we are not fully human. Without it, we lack empathy and understanding, all of which are essential to our survival on this planet. But the imagination Barfield talks about is one he calls unancestral. The ancestral imagination is known for its dangers, its aggressiveness, its ethnic pride and its gender discrimination, as well as for its visions and prophecies, its spiritual powers and symbolic values. Barfield thinks of imagination come of age, i. e. a trained imagination that is informed by will (political, ethical will) and by thought. In other words, his unancestral imagination belongs to the world of the individual, it is a modern Western concept. And yet, imagination as such must never be discarded in the interests of security. That would entail our spiritual death. Imagination is also important because without it any dialogue with a Non-Western culture would be disrupted. Therefore, we have to learn more and more about how the imagination works, what kind of motivation it is driven by, how images are structured and instrumentalised. The power of the image is stronger than ever, especially at the beginning of this century when one culture that tries to suppress images is all the more intrigued and infuriated by those who use them. At the same time, another culture tries to impose its own idols and icons on a world with completely different traditions. Iconoclasm and idolatry are two extremes between which Barfield would situate the role of a trained imagination.

This leads me to my second application of Barfieldian thought, again related to the concept of dialogue. I think he is one of those who help us to bridge the gaps between East and West, if only by making us more conscious of our Western heritage.

In anthroposophy, a general dislike or criticism of some Eastern traditions can be found. Not that anthroposophists find very much wrong in the traditions themselves, but the fact that modern Western people seek orientation in Eastern traditions means that two types of upbringing and socio-psychology are mingled and confused. According to Steiner, the East keeps looking to the past, while the West is oriented towards the future. A Western spiritual tradition should incorporate values that have been discovered and implanted in the Western tradition. For Steiner, it is the freedom of the individual and individualism as such, but also thought that has been reared in a scientific culture, which should become the basis for a Western person's spiritual development. As Barfield put it in an interview:

> "[Steiner] says that in Yoga people were developing through breathing in the past. But Anthroposophy starts from thinking, which in a way could be expressed in saying: Yoga is an attempt to get back to original participation, whereas Steiner leads to final participation." (Schenkel 37)

He adds that he thinks people may get quite a lot out of it and "I don't say that Yoga is always wrong" (Schenkel 37). Barfield seems to be more relaxed about the Eastern impact than the anthroposophical movement as such. I think this is why people like Bellow, or young and rebellious anthroposophists like van der Meulen have been more interested in him. Barfield acknowledges the importance of both Eastern and Western paths to spiritual advancement and at times sees them on a par. There is something lacking in the Western mental make-up as there is in the Eastern. The best term describing this relationship would be *complementarity*. Both worlds, he says, are striving for "extraordinary consciousness", but while the Eastern tradition goes straight towards this type of consciousness by eliminating "ordinary consciousness", the Western path would incorporate the latter in order to reach the former (Barfield, *Rediscovery* 29). Barfield's is a plea for the "intermediate stages", which include a sense of history, an understanding and appreciation of science and

poetry, in brief, of the whole richness of the human mind as it has accumulated over the centuries. The faculty which encompasses all these values is, according to Barfield, the imagination (*Rediscovery* 30). Both traditions, however, as he points out in "Imagination and Inspiration", represent attitudes vis-à-vis the matter/mind divide. It is no coincidence that the Cartesian dichotomy began to be overcome, or at least questioned, in the Romantic age. Barfield suggests at least two important factors in his essay: the development of a concept called "imagination" and the impact of Eastern thought through the translation of Sanscrit texts by Sir William Jones and others (*Rediscovery* 120). Both have helped to undermine the notion of a clear-cut boundary between the material and the mental world. But again, Barfield stresses a difference between the two paths. In "The 'Son of God' and the 'Son of Man'", he states: "This indifference to history, and ultimately to time itself, seems to me to be a fundamentally Eastern approach" (*Rediscovery* 259). He suggests that the East begin to incorporate a consciousness of history into their path. But at the same time, the West will have to learn from the East that the "progress" of humanity will have to be linked to the "progress" of the individual:

> I hold it equally true that the West will only understand its own history – its own child, as it were – by learning to interpret it in terms of a 'progress,' somewhat resembling that Eastern 'path' of the individual soul from terrestrial to divine. (*Rediscovery* 259)

Another way of putting this complementarity is to say that Christianity and the other religions of the world share a pagan heritage or a reservoir of rather unconscious archetypes which should be made conscious and thus fruitful (*Rediscovery* 255).

The boundaries are melting, as Barfield saw it in the early 1990s, when he was reading up on the Sufism of Ibn Arabi and discovered a certain potential in esoteric Islam. Dialogue, however, only comes about when there are at least two people speaking and listening. The problem is that there is not only not one West, there is also not one

East. How different are cultures like China and Saudi Arabia, or India and Iran, Islam and Buddhism, Hinduism and Maoism? A sense of history certainly has entered Asian political thought, through the intervention of Marxism, but mostly with disastrous results: history without the individual must turn into nightmare. Teleologies such as Pol Pot's or Mao's which pay no attention to the actual and present living human, ended in mass murder on a gigantic scale.

While the West is losing a sense of community, the East – let us assume this for a moment to be the case for cultures ranging from Turkey to Indonesia – has to come to terms with the individual, who is nothing without his or her history. There are, however, philosophical movements in the East where history is taken account of in the path of salvation. The most important example is Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's concept of an evolutionary yoga that would encompass the actual state of the world and its history, but also the individual's involvement with history, as part of the revelation or descent of Spirit. Aurobindo was brought up in England and that may have helped him to integrate Western philosophy and Eastern yoga (Satprem 1984).

These are areas that have not really been explored and Barfield is, as always, a reliable guide who points out the necessities and possibilities of spiritual evolution. But since image and metaphor, in other words, the imagination, are the instruments with which to perceive these possibilities, one would do well to look at his own imaginative works. So let me conclude on the vision he elaborates in his short story "Night Operation", a deeply Gnostic tale about boys who live in the underworld and try to enter the real world of sunlight. Reading Barfield's works is very much such an attempt.

The best we can do is to further engage in dialogues as Barfield not only recommended but put into practice. Why not, for example, rewrite *Worlds Apart - a Dialogue of the 1960s* as a dialogue of the early 21st century?

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