

Metaphor, Meaning, and Mind: Knowledge and Imagination in Owen Barfield

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Owen Barfield (1898-1997) wore many hats, among these were philosopher, philologist, and interlocutor to some of the most prominent minds of the twentieth century. A great mind himself, Barfield was principally a dreamer. Secondly, he was a critic. As an advocate for the power of imagination, Barfield dreamed of a future of human consciousness that allowed humankind to both participate in and know the depths of the natural world. This dream put him at odds with dominant Enlightenment rationalism. Barfield's analysis of knowledge and imagination formed a critique of the modern condition, lamenting how modern modes of empiricism put his dream for a holistic, integrated epistemology at risk.

First, this chapter outlines Barfield's biography, demonstrating his ongoing intellectual development. A three-part exploration of Barfield's central contributions follows. These are categorized at metaphor, meaning, and mind. For our purposes, this organizes a sprawling body of thought, and it provides a structured narrative path, that ultimately leads readers to his critique of rationalism and advocacy for imagination. After introducing his work on language in the section on metaphor, this chapter addresses the problem of meaning prompted by these linguistic investigations. The section on mind turns to human cognition. Building on metaphor, meaning, and mind, the chapter concludes by examining his critique of rationalism.

Barfield's contributions are often overshadowed by the mammoth reputations of other members of the Inklings, the Oxford literary group of the 1930s and 1940s that

included such giants as J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. Inklings scholarship accounts for Barfield's impact, but his status is less assured outside particular academic circles. Additionally, Barfield's critique of enlightenment rationalism may be obvious among his intellectual biographers and literary enthusiasts. However, this chapter introduces Barfield to readers concerned with the principal conversation of this volume and situates his thought within a larger context. Barfield's eclecticism bespeaks his concern to approach the social world from diverse angles, and his thought – from his advocacy for anthroposophy to his poetry – points to his aspiration to elevate consciousness and knowledge to address the limits of rationalism, among other problems characterizing the modern condition, such as alienation and meaninglessness. Barfield's thought was a unique contribution among the diversity of reactions to enlightenment rationalism.

Possibly, Barfield's reputation has been downplayed due to his reliance upon "occult or esoteric thought".¹ How can we codify such an odd, eccentric thinker? How can we explain his faithful adherence to Rudolf Steiner, Austrian esotericist, self-purported clairvoyant, and founder of anthroposophy, a doctrine that espoused a spiritual science that supposedly made the spiritual world knowable? Perhaps, Barfield's apparent eccentricity warrants attention, rather than skepticism. This chapter touches on his dedication to this philosophy where it intersects with our themes of metaphor, meaning, and mind.

Though obscure compared to his Oxford companions, Barfield has been influential in philosophical and literary circles. A strong, if niche, tradition of scholarship has worked to preserve and dissect Barfield's thought since his later life and following his death. Most prominent has been the scholarship of G. B. Tennyson and Michael Vincent Di Fuccia. A

¹ J. G. Bradbury, "Poetic Vision: Owen Barfield and Charles Williams," *Renascence* 63, no. 1 (2010): 13.

friend of Barfield, Tennyson has written on Barfield and edited the essential volume *A Barfield Reader*.² Di Fuccia's 2016 book provided an extensive analysis of Barfield's poetic philosophy, filling a longstanding scholarly gap.³ Barfield also appears in other prominent studies, but among a cast of characters, such as in the Zaleskis' *The Fellowship*, R.J. Reilly's *Romantic Religion*, and Roberts Avens' *Imagination is Reality*.⁴

Much scholarship attempts to place this baffling figure into more familiar contexts or to associate him with more famous thinkers. This longstanding feature of Barfield scholarship often produces very focused studies. In 1989, Francis Morris and Ronald Wendling analyzed the tension between Lewis and Barfield, using the work of Coleridge as a focal point for their two intellectual biographies.⁵ The following year, Stephen Thorson's article compared the perspectives of Lewis and Barfield on imagination.⁶ Similarly, in her 1996 article, Doris Meyers compared the storytelling of Barfield to that of C.S. Lewis and E.M. Forster to highlight shared themes.⁷ This mode of comparisons continues in the scholarship, drawing on wider traditions. In 2012, Giovanni Maddalena argued that Barfield's intellectual contribution ought to be linked to C.S. Peirce and pragmatism.⁸

² G.B. Tennyson, "Owen Barfield and the Rebirth of Meaning," *Southern Review* 5 (1969): 42–57; G.B. Tennyson, "Owen Barfield: First and Last Inklings," *The World & I*, April 1990, 540–55; G.B. Tennyson, "The Rebirth of Wonder," *The Catholic World Report*, June 1997, 35–36; Owen Barfield, "Selections from Poetic Diction," in *A Barfield Reader: Selections from the Writings of Owen Barfield*, ed. G.B. Tennyson (Wesleyan University Press, 1999), 5–32.

³ Michael Vincent Di Fuccia, *Owen Barfield: Philosophy, Poetry, and Theology*, Veritas 20 (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2016).

⁴ Roberts Avens, *Imagination Is Reality: Western Nirvana in Jung, Hillman, Barfield, and Cassirer* (Spring Publications, 2020); R. J. Reilly, *Romantic Religion* (Lindisfarne Books, 2006); Philip Zaleski and Carol Zaleski, *The Fellowship: The Literary Lives of the Inklings: J.R.R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, Owen Barfield, Charles Williams* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015).

⁵ Francis J. Morris and Ronald C. Wendling, "Coleridge and 'The Great Divide' Between C.S. Lewis and Owen Barfield," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 22, no. 2 (1989): 149–59.

⁶ Stephen Thorson, "Lewis and Barfield on Imagination," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature* 17, no. 2 (1990): 12–32.

⁷ Doris Meyers, "Breaking Free: The Closed Universe Theme in E.M. Forster, Owen Barfield, and C.S. Lewis," *Mythlore* 21, no. 3 (81) (1996): 7–11.

⁸ Giovanni Maddalena, "Pragmatic Diction: Owen Barfield, the Inklings and Pragmatism," *Journal of Inklings Studies* 2, no. 2 (2012): 67–88.

Zachary Brown's 2018 article compared Barfield with Jean Gebser and Gottfried Richter, exploring their theories of the evolution of consciousness.⁹ Most recently, Jamin Hubner has examined the links between Barfield and the Neo-Calvinist tradition.¹⁰

Some articles address Barfield independently. For example, in 1982, Patrick Grant examined the relationship between Barfield's literary criticism and his anthroposophy, an esoteric philosophy that posits the idea of an accessible, objective, and intelligible spiritual world or realm.¹¹ Elsewhere, in her 1984 article, Jeanne Clayton Hunter looked to Barfield's Christianity, present in all Barfield's endeavors, from poetry and fiction to philology and law. She highlighted Barfield's concern for the future of scientific knowledge and its reckoning with the incarnation of the Word (meaning he expected modern physics to arrive at descriptions of the universe that mirrored Christian descriptions).¹²

Though his disdain for the rationalism of modernity is evident throughout his writing, Barfield is often classified as a literary scholar, innovative philologist, or simply an eccentric polymath, rather than as a prominent critic of post-Enlightenment rationalism. Two prominent articles, however, do touch on this theme. In his 1993 article, Howard Fulweiler addressed Barfield's conception of the scientific imagination, highlighting how Barfield demonstrated that great thinkers throughout history conceived of the world as alive and spiritually animated and only recently have prominent thinkers abandoned this idea in favor of understanding humans as uniquely intelligent and alive and the material world as

⁹ Zachary Brown, "Art and the Evolution of Consciousness: A Look at the Work of Owen Barfield, Jean Gebser, and Gottfried Richter," *Journal of Conscious Evolution* 12, no. 12 (2018).

¹⁰ Jamin Hubner, "Anti-Reductionist Christian Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: Owen Barfield and the Neo-Calvinists," *Pro Rege* 49, no. 3 (2021): 25–40.

¹¹ Patrick Grant, "The Quality of Thinking: Owen Barfield as Literary Man and Anthroposophist," *VII: Journal of the Marion E. Wade Center* 3 (1982): 113–25.

¹² Jeanne Clayton Hunter, "Owen Barfield: Christian Apologist," *Renascence* 36, no. 3 (1984): 171–79.

manipulable, exploitable, and dead.¹³ Later, in 2010, J. G. Bradbury raised how Barfield sought "more holistic mode of human engagement" than was offered by the prevailing post-Enlightenment empiricism.¹⁴ This chapter continues this effort, demonstrating how Barfield's project undergirded his critique of modern rationalism.

Life & Times

C.S. Lewis named Barfield "the wisest and best of my unofficial teachers", saying he "towers above us all".¹⁵ This thinker, who towered above the likes of Lewis and Tolkien, began life in ordinary middle class circumstances in London, as the youngest of four.¹⁶ His family life was defined by intellectual and artistic pursuits; and though he seemed to consider himself some variety of Christian as a child (notable from his shift towards agnosticism before he arrived at Oxford), he was not baptized, nor did his parents observe religious formalities.¹⁷ He attended Highgate, where he became friends with Alfred Cecil Harwood, who later became a fellow acolyte of Steiner.¹⁸ Both excelled at Highgate, such that in December 1916 both were awarded classics scholarships to Oxford. Following a delay due to his military service in Belgium, Barfield arrived in Oxford in 1919 and transferred to English literature.¹⁹

¹³ Howard W. Fulweiler, "The Other Missing Link: Owen Barfield and the Scientific Imagination," *Renascence* 46, no. 1 (1993): 39–54.

¹⁴ Bradbury, "Poetic Vision," 13.

¹⁵ Quoted in: Di Fuccia, *Barfield*, 1.

¹⁶ G.B. Tennyson, "Introduction," in *A Barfield Reader: Selections from the Writings of Owen Barfield* (Wesleyan University Press, 1999), xiii.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, xiii–xv.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, xvi.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, xv–xiv.

In 1919, Barfield met C.S. Lewis, and their friendship continued until the death of Lewis in 1963.²⁰ From about 1923 until 1931, Barfield and Lewis engaged in a tussle concerning, broadly, the meaning of life, that was dubbed the "Great War", and their battlefields were varied: from letters, prose, and poetry to private chats and group discussions, both in their homes and on walking holidays.²¹ Partly, this debate was instigated by Barfield's interest in anthroposophy and Rudolf Steiner. Lewis, then an atheist, did not understand this fascination.²² For all the dreamy drama of anthroposophy, Barfield's commitment to Steiner appears to have been largely intellectual. The accord between his own philological theory and Steiner's theory of the evolution of consciousness fascinated him. Thus, even when he joined the Church of England in 1949, he did not forgo anthroposophy.²³

Around the start of the "Great War", Barfield also took up more pacific hobbies. He and his friend Harwood became members of the English Folk Dancing Society, and they both met their wives through dance.²⁴ He married Maud Douie in 1923, and by 1925, they had returned to London, so that Barfield could cultivate his literary calling, working for the journal *Truth* and developing his own craft.²⁵ The *Silver Trumpet* appeared in 1925, a fairy tale. The following year, Barfield's *History in English Words* was published, and in 1928 *Poetic Diction* continued in the same vein. Though these works are "characteristic of what we think of as Barfield's lifetime achievement", to quote Barfield's friend Tennyson, they were not sufficient to launch a sustainable writing career, and financial and parental

²⁰ *Ibid.*, xvi.

²¹ Zaleski and Zaleski, *Fellowship*, 113.

²² Tennyson, "Introduction," 1999, xvii.

²³ Di Fuccia, *Barfield*, 21.

²⁴ Tennyson, "Introduction," 1999, xvii–xviii.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, xviii.

pressures led him to join his family's firm in 1929.²⁶ He remained a solicitor for thirty years, while writing in his spare time.²⁷ He stayed in touch with his Oxford friends.²⁸ In London, he attended a lunch group, which was also frequented by T.S. Eliot.²⁹ In 1949, much to Lewis' delight, Barfield converted to Anglicanism.³⁰

In the 1950s, Barfield finally retired from the law and took up again his primary interests.³¹ In 1971, by then in his seventies, Barfield distinguished himself, making an impact on Coleridge scholarship with *What Coleridge Thought*. As Carol and Philip Zaleski write, with this contribution, he "sailed out of the backwaters of Anthroposophical argumentation and philological-historical analysis into the mainstream of English literary criticism, establishing himself as a serious, astute analyst of one of Romanticism's most enigmatic poets and essayists".³² After prioritizing his legal career for thirty years, Barfield enjoyed a late blossoming of his intellectual life, while maintaining a common thread to his earliest observations and philological theories, refined by debate with Lewis in the "Great War" and published in his early works in the 1920s. In later life and finally at the retirement home where he died, Barfield was attended by several American and British acolytes.³³ He died in 1997 at the towering age of 99.

Metaphor

²⁶ Ibid., xix.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., xx.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ See: Owen Barfield, *The Rediscovery of Meaning, and Other Essays* (Barfield Press UK, 2013), 7. His conversion reinforced his original framework for thinking about humankind, life, and nature

³¹ Tennyson, "Introduction," 1999, xx.

³² Zaleski and Zaleski, *Fellowship*, 494.

³³ Tennyson, "Introduction," 1999, xxi.

Metaphor is the heart of Barfield's body of thought. Barfield's innovations in philology hinged upon his observations of metaphor, and his contributions more broadly hinged upon his concern for the experience of knowing, the epistemic framework, that metaphor provides. Therefore, Barfield's preoccupation with metaphor, fossilized in our languages and alive in our poetic creations, is the cornerstone of his thought, and ultimately, his critique of rationalism.

Readers may confuse metaphor here to mean a narrow analogy or simile used to describe one phenomenon with reference to another, perhaps more familiar, phenomenon. For Barfield, metaphor was more. Metaphor was analogy and simile, and the monumental, remarkable fact that analogy and simile can generate new meanings, born of other meanings.³⁴ For Barfield, metaphor is a means to expand our consciousness and to expand meaning, and meaning is not made through reason, but rather meaning is primordial.³⁵ Metaphor is essential to discovering meaning, to sense-making, for Barfield. Thus, metaphor, and the participatory unity between spirit and matter that metaphor signifies, is crucial to knowing, studying, and relating to the natural world. The rational empiricists whom Barfield opposes lack this understanding of metaphor.

In an essay entitled "Poetic Diction and Legal fiction", Barfield offers an illustration of what he meant by metaphor. Metaphor possesses "a wider sense"; the term metaphor can be used "to cover the whole gamut of figurative language including simile and symbol".³⁶ He gloried in the metaphors that exist in modern language, and attributed them to the genius of earlier peoples. Barfield stated that the "tropes and metaphors embedded in

³⁴ Ibid., xxvii.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Barfield, *Rediscovery*, 65.

language" are due "to the fact that somebody at some time had the wit to say one thing and mean another, and that somebody else had the wit to tumble to the new meaning".³⁷ While he admitted that poetry "has always been in a high degree figurative", and "it is always illustrating or expressing what it wishes to put before us by comparing that with something else", he ultimately hoped to convince readers that much of ordinary language is shaped by metaphor.³⁸ He said that "metaphor is something more than a piece of the technique of one of the fine arts"³⁹ In claiming this, Barfield reminded readers of the ordinary words and concepts that were "once metaphorical", and he asked "[a]re they still metaphors?".⁴⁰ This question prompts his audience to consider how language contains an echo of an earlier way of relating to the world. If these words are still metaphors, then the meaning we can access is broad and rich, generated between two reference points. If they are no longer metaphorical, then meaning is narrower, more clinical. This problem of meaning is taken up again in the following section, after a closer look at the metaphorical origins of language.

Barfield's study of language supported his larger contribution concerning the evolution of consciousness. In 1926, Barfield published his earliest analysis concerning language and its implications for the development of human consciousness, *History in English Words*. The Zaleskis, scholars of the Inklings, call this work a "philosophico-philological treatise", and they remind us to pause to consider the preposition in the title and reflect that the history of the English language was not his purpose.⁴¹ Rather, this work

³⁷ Ibid., 72–73.

³⁸ Ibid., 64.

³⁹ Ibid., 84.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 85.

⁴¹ Zaleski and Zaleski, *Fellowship*, 115.

investigates "how words capture history".⁴² His thesis that our language can be excavated in order to understand the evolution of human consciousness was extended in 1928 in *Poetic Diction*, in which he aimed to develop a theory of knowledge from his theories of poetry.⁴³

Barfield noted that modern languages seem to contain a "tissue of dead, or petrified, metaphors", words that connoted, during an earlier period of human development "a solid, sensible object, or some animal (probably human) activity".⁴⁴ These words now have abstract meanings, but once contained meaning via metaphor. A useful example is "understanding", which once meant "standing under". Barfield also highlights "right" and "wrong", which related historically to "straight" and "sour", respectively.⁴⁵ Consider that "expression" denoted once "what is squeezed out," "connect" meant "weave together," and "rudimentary" meant "in the rough state".⁴⁶ What are we to make of these observations?

Barfield countered commonplace explanations. Traditionally, philologists assumed metaphors "faded", suggested by the fact that we do not engage with a "mental image of 'standing beneath', when we use the word understand, or of a physical 'pressing out', when we speak of expressing a sentiment or an idea".⁴⁷ We moved from metaphor to trope to "the ordinary straightforward 'meaning'".⁴⁸ He said that supposedly language consists of "faded or dead metaphors".⁴⁹ Max Müller, who bears the brunt of Barfield's criticism, and his fellow nineteenth-century philologists thought that metaphor entered language by way of a creative act, an innovation, in which the actor expresses meaning with reference to readily

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 118.

⁴⁴ Barfield, "Poetic Diction," 7.

⁴⁵ Owen Barfield, "Selections from Saving the Appearances," in *A Barfield Reader: Selections from the Writings of Owen Barfield*, ed. G.B. Tennyson (Wesleyan University Press, 1999), 106.

⁴⁶ Avens, *Imagination*, Chapter V, para. 4.

⁴⁷ Barfield, "Saving," 107.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

accessible words. They thought that for "primitive man", these accessible words would be "literal", material, or physical words, referring to discrete items or activities—the simple, concrete realities of primitive life.⁵⁰ Barfield demurred. He thought the etymological archaeology indicates that "we find language growing more and more metaphorical, the further back we go into the past", so Barfield asked: "what possible justification can there be for assuming a still earlier time when it was not metaphorical at all?"⁵¹ For Barfield, Müller's thesis related more to Darwinian evolution, rather than careful etymological investigation.⁵² Barfield considered this view of metaphor to be imposing modern logic onto "a pre-logical age".⁵³

Perhaps, Müller's explanation is inadequate. The question remained, though, "How did it come about that a very high proportion of the words in any modern language do refer (or appear to refer) to matters and events which are not part of the world accessible to our senses?"⁵⁴ Put differently, "How did it come about that the shapes and objects of the outside world could be employed, and were employed, by man to express the inner world of his thought?"⁵⁵ Barfield concluded that they were not a result of a creative speaker using readily accessible referents, but they were descriptive of a *different experience* of the natural world, a different perception of reality. Our "first metaphors were not artificial but natural".⁵⁶ Shedding modern "positivist assumptions", when we observe the history of

⁵⁰ Reilly, *Romantic*, 20.

⁵¹ Barfield, "Saving," 108.

⁵² Reilly, *Romantic*, 21.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Barfield, *Rediscovery*, 18.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

language, "we must conclude that this symbolic significance is inherent in the forms of the outer world themselves".⁵⁷

Consider an abstract discussion of something as "wrong"; this once denoted "sour", a chemical phenomenon, sometimes related to, for example, the spoiling of food, such as milk. (When we exclaim "there's something wrong with this milk!", usually, it is sour). For Barfield, careful study of language suggests that ancient peoples regarded and participated in the natural world—the world of material environments and physical practices—as if there were no disjuncture between "material and immaterial imports".⁵⁸ For example, for ancient peoples, "wind" and "spirit" were the same word because they conceived of them as unified.⁵⁹ Thus his answer was: the language of earlier peoples is more metaphorical because the *consciousness* of earlier peoples was more metaphorical, in the sense that their perception was broader and encompassed more layered meanings.

From this account, Barfield developed an "evolutionary anthropology", based on the theories of Lévy-Bruhl, in order to suggest a cleavage between how earlier peoples and "civilized" peoples conceived of themselves.⁶⁰ Modern peoples are more individualist, and ancient societies were more collectivist, but this version of collectivism was not just a socio-political framework, it also encompassed the idea that the self (and interior existence) extended past the corporeal to include family, community, and environment. Barfield greatly admired this capacity of earlier peoples to account for a metaphysics of relationships, and he went on to argue that Platonic and early Christian philosophies made a

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Max Leyf Treinen, "Owen Barfield & the Evolution of Consciousness," *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 16, no. 1 (2020): 59.

⁵⁹ Tennyson, "Introduction," 1999, xxv.

⁶⁰ Di Fuccia, *Barfield*, 102.

case for "relationships between subjects and objects and humans and society" that reflected this type of "primitive" perception.⁶¹

Thus, Barfield arrived at metaphysics from the study of metaphor. He thought human consciousness had evolved, steadily eliminating "the participatory aesthetic" demonstrated by metaphor in primitive languages.⁶² Barfield wrote: "I have reached the conclusion that the natural world can only be understood in depth as a series of images symbolizing concepts; further, that it was out of man's rich awareness of this meaningful relation between himself and nature that language originally came to birth".⁶³ This understanding of a natural symbolic and immaterial reality, knowable through recurring, circular, participatory meaning making, related to Barfield's interest in anthroposophy. Steiner's anthroposophy and his evolution of consciousness seemed to map neatly on to Barfield's instincts about the evolution of language.⁶⁴

Barfield's preoccupation with metaphor led him to fascinating theories, contributing an alternative philological account and a philosophical framework for thinking about the historical development of human consciousness. However, beyond this, much was at stake for Barfield. If his theories were correct, dead metaphor and the misunderstanding of how mankind once possessed a different type of consciousness were problems for our modern pursuit of knowledge. Poetry is akin to original language; poets use metaphor and demonstrate what Reilly calls "the ancient unity of thought and perception".⁶⁵ But, was poetry enough? Metaphor generates meaning, and therefore knowledge. The following

⁶¹ Ibid., 118.

⁶² Ibid., 158–59.

⁶³ Barfield, *Rediscovery*, 20.

⁶⁴ Di Fuccia, *Barfield*, 21.

⁶⁵ Reilly, *Romantic*, 24.

sections delve further into the problem of meaning that Barfield confronted and his hopes for meaning-making.

Meaning

In his study of metaphor, Barfield found a problem of meaning. He noticed this both internally within language, as language is decreasingly metaphorical. He also noticed this problem of meaning externally, observing the social world around him and finding what he called "the growing general sense of meaninglessness" the most dreadful of "all the menacing signs that surround us in the middle of this twentieth century".⁶⁶ In the same essay, "The Rediscovery of Meaning", he wondered: "How is it that the more able man becomes to manipulate the world to his advantage, the less he can perceive any meaning in it?"⁶⁷

For Barfield, this separation of mankind from meaning could be explained by his theory of the evolution of consciousness, mentioned in the previous section. In his 1957 book *Saving the Appearances*, Barfield explained that "the evolution of consciousness hitherto can best be understood as a more or less continuous progress from a vague but immediate awareness of the 'meaning' of phenomena towards an increasing preoccupation with the phenomena themselves".⁶⁸ For Barfield, this prior consciousness "involved experiencing the phenomena as representations" and participating in a fluid dynamic of meaning-making between observer and observed.⁶⁹ Our modern condition experiences phenomena "as objects in their own right, existing independently of human

⁶⁶ Barfield, *Rediscovery*, 13.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Barfield, "Saving," 123.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

consciousness".⁷⁰ Barfield called this idolatry, which presented this problem of meaning. For Barfield, eliminating participatory relationships, diminishing this earlier experience of the world, would lead to erasing "all meaning and all coherence from the cosmos".⁷¹

Barfield arrived at this anxiety from his study of language, of course, but he also offered a related analytical account of the changing nature of science, or the study of the natural world. Mutually reinforcing, his perspective on science in turn rested upon his philological account. Di Fuccia summarizes: "Barfield suggests that the division of man (as subject) and nature (as object) upon which modern science rests is a result of the gradual sundering of subjective and objective language, which one finds in the evolutionary history of words".⁷² Barfield referred to our "mindscape" as the framework in which we make meaning, and he believed that our modern mindscape originated during the scientific revolution. Before this, as he explained in his 1974 essay "The Coming Trauma of Materialism", an "Aristotelian" mindscape predominated, which was marked by unity and "which assumed intercommunion between man (the microcosm) and nature (the macrocosm) not limited to the mode of passive sensation and active manipulation".⁷³ For example, medieval science and medicine spoke of atmosphere, disposition, humors, and temperaments that indicated profound links between the physical body, spiritual self, and the natural world.⁷⁴ Certainly not suggesting a return to medieval medicine, Barfield hoped to demonstrate, through etymology, how differently medieval students of physical sciences

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 124.

⁷² Di Fuccia, *Barfield*, 12.

⁷³ Barfield, *Rediscovery*, 279.

⁷⁴ Reilly, *Romantic*, 11.

thought about the world, not because of bumbling ignorance, but rather because of a different type of knowledge, accessed by a different type of mindscape.

The seventeenth century marked a break from this unified perspective. Changes in language evince this. In the seventeenth century, words emerged that signified a sense of historical perspective-taking, like "progressive, antiquated, century, decade, epoch, out-of-date, primeval".⁷⁵ These words indicated yet another sundering: ancient from modern. Additionally, Barfield noted that following the Reformation words containing "self" followed by hyphenation started to emerge: "self-conceit, self-confidence, self-contempt, self-pity".⁷⁶ For Barfield, this indicated further division and dislocation; humanity was withdrawing from phenomena and turning towards the self.⁷⁷ Particularly, Descartes encapsulated for Barfield the modern mindscape in which meaning-making suffered from the divorcement of observer from observed. Philosophy since Descartes has largely followed him, as Reilly says, "moving from the mind outward rather than from phenomena to the mind".⁷⁸ Barfield explained in "The Coming Trauma of Materialism" that we moderns operate in a Cartesian mindscape, not because Descartes "invented" it, "but because he was the thinker, fairly near its beginning, who most competently formulated the felt alienation of matter from mind, and this of nature from humanity, of which it consists".⁷⁹ In another 1974 essay "Matter, Imagination, and Spirit", Barfield commented that "[m]ere perception", that is "perception without imagination", divided "spirit and matter", and he credited Descartes again with articulating the "partition of all being into the

⁷⁵ Ibid., 14.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Barfield, *Rediscovery*, 279.

two mutually exclusive categories of extended substance and thinking substance", that is "matter and spirit".⁸⁰

This great sundering or "sword thrust between spirit and matter" or "trauma", entrenched modes of understanding.⁸¹ The tenets of modern meaning-making are: first, "that nature is an objective system which man can only affect by manipulation from without", second, "that each individual man is a separate part of that kind of nature," and third "that one mind can only communicate with another through the medium of physical processes".⁸² This was alarming for Barfield, who thought that true meaning was found in participatory and relational observation and experience of nature. This participatory experience, however, is not possible within a Cartesian, traumatized mindscape in which the scientists study tangible "objective facts" while poets deal in imagination.⁸³ Beyond this division of "fact and meaning", the scientist's approach to understanding becomes favored, apparent in how our modern lexicon of words divorced from metaphor favors "literal" and "objective" language over "metaphorical" and "subjective" language.⁸⁴

Furthermore, this way of seeking meaning encourages a bias towards materialism and contains within it "a powerful impulse no longer to deny the spirit but to impound it, or rather no longer to doubt it but to deny it".⁸⁵ This mindscape aims to "materialize", that is make material, that which is immaterial, by explaining in material terms immaterial phenomena, such as matters of morality, cognition, or imagination.⁸⁶ In "The Coming Trauma of Materialism", Barfield used a curious, perhaps now outdated example, to

⁸⁰ Ibid., 218.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 283–84.

⁸³ Di Fuccia, *Barfield*, 4.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Barfield, *Rediscovery*, 296.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

illustrate this. He noted that scientific investigation of "psi phenomena of all kinds, but particularly psychokinesis" was funded by governments. This was a far cry from discounting this area "as reactionary mysticism", but the scientists maintained "strictly technological" standards geared towards "operational not cognitive" analysis.⁸⁷ Barfield lamented that "the nature and highest function of mental energy" is not deemed worthy of study, but rather "the problem of quantifying it as manipulable 'psychotrons'" is the object of study. Stripped of meaning, dissected, and laid bare, this phenomenon was "incidentally disinfected of all philosophical and moral implications".⁸⁸ For Barfield, this disinfecting, that results from a mindscape devoid of metaphor and representation, was traumatic for mankind's search for meaning.

Barfield's grim picture for meaning in the modern world did not stop there. He thought that this pattern found in language, consciousness, and meaning-making was also found in large scale social phenomena— how societies conceive of themselves, and how they manifest this self-conception in social norms.⁸⁹ For Barfield, the decline of metaphor, marked by the cleavage between subjects and objects, related to an increase in individualism and atomization.⁹⁰ Thus, words become alienated from subjective meanings; matter becomes alienated from spirit; observer becomes alienated from observed. Finally, individual selves become alienated from each other.⁹¹ From a loss of metaphor, Barfield suggested a loss of meaning not only in our experience of the natural world or our study of the physical sciences, but also a loss of meaning in our societies writ large.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Di Fuccia, *Barfield*, 5, 99.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 12.

⁹¹ Ibid., 12, 99.

Barfield wrote in "Matter, Imagination, and Spirit" that even though we operate under the conditions of "that Cartesian sword-thrust between matter and spirit", we do not live in one realm of matter or alternatively in spirit, but rather, as "free beings", "we live in that abrupt gap between matter and spirit".⁹² He wrote that though free, life in the gap "makes us feel lamentably isolated".⁹³ For Barfield, the "self-conscious" is "like a small helpless creature caught in a trap between the two" (matter and spirit).⁹⁴ The theme of dread and meaninglessness is pervasive in Barfield writings, but he did suggest a way forward.

According to Barfield, imagination could serve us in the recovery of meaning. Imagination also exists in this gap between matter and spirit, but less precariously than the self-conscious. Barfield offered a metaphor: imagination is not a "helpless creature" in the gap, but instead it is "a rainbow spanning the two precipices and linking them harmoniously together".⁹⁵ This is because imagination is not concerned with "mere matter nor with pure spirit"; imagination is "a psychic, or psychosomatic, activity".⁹⁶ As a force, it exists between matter and spirit, and therefore it can serve in the rescue of the self-conscious. Barfield warned that the championing of the imagination did not amount to an arcane preoccupation with the paranormal, like communing with the deceased or disembodied entities.⁹⁷ He thought that a focus on this area was comparable "to an attempt to botanize, or to cultivate, a love and understanding of nature by investigating fungi".⁹⁸ He concluded that "if we became so obsessed with fungi that we could no longer conceive of any other

⁹² Barfield, *Rediscovery*, 219.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 225.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

approach to natural history", it would be detrimental to broader meaning and understanding.⁹⁹

For Barfield, imagination offers much more. In the "Rediscover of Meaning", he explained that "[p]enetration to the meaning of a thing or process, as distinct from the ability to describe it exactly, involves a participation by the knower in the known".¹⁰⁰ This participatory entering into meaning is made possible by imagination.¹⁰¹ This is why the Romantics fascinated and delighted Barfield. The Romantics encouraged the imaginative participatory principle that allowed for the experience of true meaning. Barfield wrote that "[o]ut of the whole development of the Romantic Movement in Europe at the turn of the eighteenth century and in the nineteenth a conviction arose in these circles that man's creative imagination can be applied, not only in the creation and contemplation of art but also in the contemplation of nature herself".¹⁰² In his 1944 work *Romanticism Comes of Age*, he lauded "the very essence of the Romantic Inspiration" as possessing "a reciprocal relation between the spirit of man the spirit of nature".¹⁰³ This relation could be developed by imagination, and finally recover meaning that had been lost to Descartes' "sword-thrust". Imagination could return us to a unified understanding of parts and wholes. In *What Coleridge Thought*, his principal contribution to the study of Romanticism, Barfield stated that "[w]e cannot comprehend nature without first having grasped that the whole may be 'in' each part, besides being composed of all its parts".¹⁰⁴ This means that Barfield considered

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 24.

¹⁰¹ See: Tennyson, "Introduction," 1999, xxvii.

¹⁰² Barfield, *Rediscovery*, 25–26.

¹⁰³ Owen Barfield, "Selections from Romanticism Comes of Age," in *A Barfield Reader: Selections from the Writings of Owen Barfield*, ed. G.B. Tennyson (Wesleyan University Press, 1999), 152.

¹⁰⁴ Owen Barfield, "Selections from What Coleridge Thought," in *A Barfield Reader: Selections from the Writings of Owen Barfield*, ed. G.B. Tennyson (Wesleyan University Press, 1999), 153.

nature unknowable and meaningless, if examined and experienced through the Cartesian mindscape. Poetry and imagination offer an alternative. They provide access to a unified knowing and richer understanding of the physical world.¹⁰⁵

Having discovered that the key to the problem of meaning was imagination, Barfield became interested in, as Reilly says, "the systematic training of the imagination", and his preoccupations took a mystical turn, developing religious interests in meditative exercise and inward reflection.¹⁰⁶ Barfield's mystical solutions to the problem of meaning, of course, dovetailed with anthroposophy. In 1970, he translated an edited selection of Steiner's essays in *The Case for Anthroposophy*. This volume elucidated several anthroposophical themes, including the nature of spiritual perception, that is how to access spiritual experiences through rigorous training of psychic and mental activities.¹⁰⁷ Barfield endorsed the practices developed by Steiner, who began his work in the late nineteenth century as a scholar of Goethe, another Romantic. After involvement with the Theosophical Society of Helena Blavatsky, Steiner pivoted to form his own Anthroposophical Society, which formulated a "Spiritual Science" that promised access to the spiritual sphere.¹⁰⁸ Though perhaps eccentric to modern readers, Steiner's thought was, for Barfield, largely concerned with epistemology and also very traditional. Steiner's thought rests on understanding thought processes (physic and mental occurrences) themselves, rather than the outputs of these events.¹⁰⁹ His thought was also traditional by virtue of centering God within his system, and by virtue of acknowledging the Christian Incarnation as a major

¹⁰⁵ See: Di Fuccia, *Barfield*, 3.

¹⁰⁶ Reilly, *Romantic*, 8.

¹⁰⁷ Owen Barfield, "Selections from The Case for Anthroposophy," in *A Barfield Reader: Selections from the Writings of Owen Barfield*, ed. G.B. Tennyson (Wesleyan University Press, 1999), 151.

¹⁰⁸ Zaleski and Zaleski, *Fellowship*, 108.

¹⁰⁹ Reilly, *Romantic*, location 387.

world historical moment.¹¹⁰ From this basis, Steiner buildt his bridge toward meaning, from an alienating materialism to a knowable spirituality.

According to Barfield, Coleridge "anglicized the German philosophical inspiration".¹¹¹ Barfield aimed to do the same for Steiner, extending the Romantic legacy in order to preserve and promote imagination as means to the recovery of meaning. For Barfield, the Romantics' approach to imagination was the solution, but it had not been rigorously defended until Steiner. Steiner had captured Barfield's theory as well as Romanticism itself; it was "Romanticism grown up".¹¹² With this grown up Romanticism, Barfield discovered a solution to modern alienation from meaning. The next section examines Barfield's understanding of human cognition, and his hopes that humanity could return to something akin to our original metaphorical, participatory, and meaningful experience of the world.

Mind

As we have seen, Barfield presented, via his study of the evolution of words, a theory of the evolution of consciousness. He discovered in words the human consciousness evolving from unity to fracturing and distinction.¹¹³ Barfield concluded that early humans perceived the natural, exterior world differently from us, and this led him to a theory of consciousness and cognition, and a plan for escape from our current condition.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Barfield, "Saving," xxviii.

¹¹¹ Quoted in: *Ibid.*, xxviii–xxix.

¹¹² Owen Barfield, *Romanticism Comes of Age* (Wesleyan University Press, 1967), 14.

¹¹³ Tennyson, "Introduction," 1999, xxvi.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Before examining Barfield's three-part theory of the evolution of consciousness, Tennyson's glossary offers a Barfieldian definition of the mind:

"Not the human brain, which is however a necessary physical agent and receptor for human beings, but a pre-existent, immaterial entity from which meaning is derived. The Greek "Logos," meaning both "Mind" and "word," is much the same in Barfield's concept of Mind. "I don't think the mind is something that goes on in the brain. I think the brain was originally formed by the mind, or by Mind—not any particular component of Mind—and then used the brain to produce the subjective picture of the world in which we live".¹¹⁵

This definition serves as context because it is important to situate Barfield's discussion of thought processes, which we do typically locate as occurring in the brain, within his wider belief that these matters are linked to an immaterial, deity-like source of meaning. As observed by Barfield himself, this runs counter to our modern intuitions, so readers ought to remember that, for Barfield, cognition did not happen simply between our ears.

Barfield posited that the evolution of consciousness could be categorized into three great acts, and we moderns are in the second act. His theory centers on the concept of participation, (often expressed by the presence of alive metaphor within language). Barfield's participation, as identified by Tennyson, is how "individual or collective minds take part in the universal Mind".¹¹⁶ This means that participation is how we experience meaning. As we have seen, metaphor is a vehicle for a participatory experience of the natural world.

¹¹⁵ G.B. Tennyson, "A Barfield Glossary," in *A Barfield Reader: Selections from the Writings of Owen Barfield* (Wesleyan University Press, 1999), xxxii.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, xxxiii.

The first of these great acts within Barfield's theory of the evolution of consciousness involved "original participation". In "The Rediscovery of meaning," Barfield explained that "[e]arly man did not observe nature in our detached way".¹¹⁷ Instead, this "early man" did not observe from afar, but rather "participated mentally and physically in her inner and outer process".¹¹⁸ To aid understanding, Barfield reminded his audience that moderns "still have something of this older relation to nature when we are asleep", and this relational knowledge offers "suprarational wisdom which many psychoanalysts detect in dreams".¹¹⁹ Original participation is defined by Tennyson, who quotes Barfield, as "the mode of imaginative interaction between man and nature that 'people took for granted as happening. That is why they were able to perceive mythical beings in tree and animals'".¹²⁰ The relational unity of original participation was possible, according to Barfield, because, as Brown puts it, "there exists in nature, and all phenomena, an animating force behind everything, that is at the same time the animating and perceiving force of the human being".¹²¹ Consciousness once, long ago, "participated" in the natural world, and this made this consciousness vibrant, flourishing, and dazzling, but, importantly, this consciousness was not yet self-conscious, not yet entirely self-recognizing.¹²² Indeed, as a participant in community with fellows and nature, selfhood is necessarily less accessible. Barfield spoke of "primitive", or early, civilizations, but original participation could still be found in indigenous peoples, who have preserved this participatory mode while removed from the dominant modes of modern perception.¹²³

¹¹⁷ Barfield, *Rediscovery*, 23.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Tennyson, "Introduction," 1999, xxxiii.

¹²¹ Brown, "Art," 2.

¹²² Zaleski and Zaleski, *Fellowship*, 107.

¹²³ Brown, "Art," 2.

Act two of this theory follows Descartes' "sword-thrust". Here, we reside. Our modern consciousness operates completely differently. Barfield wrote that the "individual, sharpened, spatially determined consciousness of today" developed from this dynamic "nature-linked collective consciousness", far wiser than the "alert, blank stare of incomprehension" that we might suppose belong to early man.¹²⁴ As noted, this shift, according to Barfield, is reflected in our transforming language, which maps the evolution of the consciousnesses employing that language.¹²⁵ This second act involves "onlooker consciousness," which denotes the distance between the perceiving individual and that which is perceived. Concomitant with this distance is self-awareness. Divorced from the spiritual, human beings are self-defining and atomized.¹²⁶ The modern consciousness can self-contemplate, but is depleted, joyless, and confronted with the meaninglessness of materialism, rationalism, and atheism.¹²⁷

Barfield termed the cognitive process of making sense of the world "figuration", which is "the mental activity necessary to transform sense perception into a representation or a 'thing' in the familiar world".¹²⁸ In the time of the onlooker consciousness, figuration is marked by alpha-thinking, a way of thinking that approaches all representations, phenomena, and sensory material with critical, scientific distance.¹²⁹ The exterior world is discrete from our minds, and we experience and observe the world clinically, but also unthinkingly, in that we do not consider the cognitive process that allows for figuration, or sensory meaning-making.¹³⁰ While we may observe carefully, we do not carefully observe

¹²⁴ Barfield, *Rediscovery*, 23.

¹²⁵ Treinen, "Evolution," 52.

¹²⁶ Di Fuccia, *Barfield*, 27.

¹²⁷ Zaleski and Zaleski, *Fellowship*, 107.

¹²⁸ Tennyson, "Introduction," 1999, xxxi.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Treinen, "Evolution," 62.

how we observe. This independence gives rise to idolatry, the concept noted in the previous section. Idolatry is the scientific disposition that narrows the field of vision such that all spiritual or immaterial responses to phenomena are impossible, and thus phenomena are not experienced or known as fully as they ought to be¹³¹ The analogy to a traditional understanding of idolatry is clear: it is a fetichism that narrows the human experience. Consider, for example, the lover of religious icons who forgets they are a means to meditate upon the divine. Beta-thinking, for Barfield, was thinking about thinking and thinking about perception. In particular, this rare beta-thinking is valuable because it accustoms the thinker to the notion that phenomena are not, in fact, entirely exterior and distinct from the thinking mind.¹³²

This reunification of mind and matter constitutes the third act in the evolution of consciousness, which we have not yet achieved. Barfield thought a renaissance of consciousness would allow us to remain self-aware as well to return to primitive participation and rich vitality.¹³³ Recall the example in the previous section of the "helpless creature", enjoying the freedom of self-awareness, but unmoored from meaning. This act involves "final participation," and, with the help of imagination, resolves that creature's woes.

Final participation requires the training of the imagination of the kind noted in the previous section. This stage of the evolution of consciousness will be achieved by concerted effort. Original participation was instinctual and involuntary, whereas final participation will be active, considered work.¹³⁴ It is the work of repairing a wound, and the

¹³¹ Brown, "Art," 2; Di Fuccia, *Barfield*, 27.

¹³² Reilly, *Romantic*, location 955.

¹³³ Zaleski and Zaleski, *Fellowship*, 107.

¹³⁴ Brown, "Art," 2.

scar will linger. Barfield wrote "our islanded consciousness of to-day" can only experience true participation "by special exertion".¹³⁵ For Barfield, our "islanded" minds can evolve the next stage to maintain self-awareness and recover meaning, if we cultivate imagination. Imagination can be fostered by poetry and metaphor, as Barfield learned from the Romantics. Building on the legacy of Romanticism, Barfield posited that metaphor is integral to a theory of mind. As a great meaning-maker, metaphor is a mode of cognition.¹³⁶

Knowledge & Imagination

Barfield's critique of Enlightenment rationalism has been implicit in previous sections, and this section explores further Barfield's polemic against modern science and his suggestion that imagination is needed to recover true knowledge. Because imagination offers humanity hope for the next stage in the evolution of consciousness and the recovery of meaning, imagination necessarily had a bearing on scientific knowledge and discovery. Barfield made use of his philological argument to develop his critique of modern science and its reductive practices, from atomism and empiricism to mechanism and positivism.¹³⁷ In particular, he worried that the Cartesian "sword thrust" had so separated mankind from nature, subject from object, that the pursuit of unified knowledge would be threatened, and mankind's rapine dominance of nature would become inevitable.

His critique of modern science pervades his many essays and works, including his eccentric 1965 novel *Unancestral Voice*, which offered a fictionalized account of Barfield's criticism and his hope. Before this novel, in 1957, Barfield noted that "medieval man"

¹³⁵ Barfield, "Saving," 102.

¹³⁶ Zaleski and Zaleski, *Fellowship*, 119.

¹³⁷ Di Fuccia, *Barfield*, 4.

understood the world differently, seeing "the universe was a kind of theophany, in which he participated at different levels, in being, in thinking, in speaking or naming, and in knowing".¹³⁸ This experience of the world contrasts the story of the chasm between individual and nature, subject and object, that defines modern science and ultimately casts humanity as above and in opposition to nature.¹³⁹ Barfield wrote that "[b]efore the scientific revolution the world was more like a garment men wore about them than a stage on which they moved".¹⁴⁰ Barfield's critique was not solely metaphysical or philosophical though. He was profoundly concerned with the ecological and environmental consequences of modern science and technological advancement. Treating the world as our stage, rather than our garment, leads to deforestation, poor air quality, and deleterious agricultural practices.¹⁴¹

More broadly, Barfield worried about the "unity of knowledge". He despaired that our current scientific approach leads to "an accelerating increase in that pigeon holed knowledge by individuals of more and more about less and less".¹⁴² With no reference to a cosmic whole, modern science divides, not only our academic disciplines, but our *reality* into increasingly minute objects of study, "smaller and smaller units of hormones, neurons, genes, molecules, atoms, etc.". ¹⁴³ The long-term consequences of this are a lack of interdisciplinary spirit in our universities, but also a fracturing of meaning into "private" meanings, and ultimately "there will in the end be no means of communication between one intelligence and another".¹⁴⁴ The social is downstream from the scientific. The Aristotelian scientific perspective, noted above, instead insisted upon "a very subtle and complex one of

¹³⁸ Barfield, "Saving," 103.

¹³⁹ Di Fuccia, *Barfield*, 133.

¹⁴⁰ Barfield, "Saving," 105.

¹⁴¹ Di Fuccia, *Barfield*, 164.

¹⁴² Barfield, "Saving," 125.

¹⁴³ Di Fuccia, *Barfield*, 167.

¹⁴⁴ Barfield, "Saving," 125.

man as a little world, a microcosm, imbedded as it were, in the macrocosm".¹⁴⁵ The reference to the larger whole was nested within this earlier scientific approach.

Barfield thought that "[s]cientific investigation asks questions of nature and awaits her replies".¹⁴⁶ How we ask our questions matters. If we approach nature with increasing reductionism and positivism, the answers we receive will hardly express the poetic unity of the cosmos; we will receive only weights and measures of constituent units. In *Poetic Diction*, Barfield used an analogy of a "motor-car called the Universe," and some people decided to study "the invisibles like internal combustion," while others (modern scientists) chose "to push and pull levers and find out by trial and error what happened".¹⁴⁷ This was not so dire until the latter group claimed that "[p]ushing, pulling and seeing what happens" are not in service of knowledge, instead "they are knowledge".¹⁴⁸

Barfield conceded, perhaps sardonically, two victories to modern science: technological advancement and, the consequent victory, rooting its supremacy in the minds of regular people.¹⁴⁹ The aim of technological efficacy requires a lens that approaches "both nature and man as mechanisms", which Barfield thought effectively supported this aim while it narrowed the scientific perspective.¹⁵⁰ The approach is comprehensible among ordinary citizens because of its evident functioning; according to Barfield the "Everyman" perpetuates this consensus and thinks: "Science must be true, because it works".¹⁵¹ The rarified position of science becomes an absurd paradox: science is "neutral" and because of its supposedly trustworthy objectivity it is then also "more than neutral" and worthy of

¹⁴⁵ Barfield, *Rediscovery*, 261.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 262.

¹⁴⁷ Barfield, "Poetic Diction," 154–55.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹⁴⁹ Barfield, *Rediscovery*, 270.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

additional praise.¹⁵² Barfield disputed both parts of this paradoxical claim. He thought that modern science was not as objective as purported. He suggested this by noting what Di Fuccia has called "a latent poetic element" in its less concrete practices, such as the creative practices of theorizing, hypothesizing, and identifying causal relationships.¹⁵³ Additionally, he observed in "Science and Quality" that the ephemeral, immaterial qualities discounted or deleted from nature by modern science eventually "had to go somewhere," and the modern disposition has assigned them to "the human psyche".¹⁵⁴ Here, even "occult" features are not "altogether taboo" in the study of the psyche, with its mystery that is more acceptable to the scientific disposition.¹⁵⁵ Barfield said that the majority of people "concede to the psyche that 'inwardness' which they deny to nature, and they call it the unconscious mind".¹⁵⁶ Seeming to suggest hypocrisy here, he hoped that we would admit that this inwardness, acceptable in matters of the mind, is present in nature.¹⁵⁷ This problem was at a breaking point for Barfield. He thought that the strength of science (i.e. approaching "both nature and man as mechanisms" to offer effective technological solutions) was "becoming its weakness" because modern science is increasingly confronting the reality "that neither man nor nature is only mechanism".¹⁵⁸ He wrote in the "Rediscovery of Meaning" that, detached from nature, we have a "marvellous power of manipulative control" but little else.¹⁵⁹ He explained in "Science and Quality" that mechanism deals with the "whole as resulting, by aggregation, from its parts" and organicism deals with "the parts as resulting, by

¹⁵² Hubner, "Anti-Reductionist," 31.

¹⁵³ Di Fuccia, *Barfield*, 100.

¹⁵⁴ Barfield, *Rediscovery*, 268.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 270.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

progressive development and individuation, from an antecedent whole".¹⁶⁰ According to Barfield, advancement of technology can proceed relying solely on the former, but advancement of knowledge depended on both.¹⁶¹

In "The Rediscovery of Meaning," Barfield wrote that positivism was "a dogmatic belief," but he acknowledged that "it has been so thoroughly absorbed into the thought stream of Western humanity that it has come to be regarded, not as a dogma, but as a scientifically established fact".¹⁶² He thought the internal logic of positivism was faulty because it sought justification simply through its use.¹⁶³ He stated "if physical objects and physical causes and effects are all that we can know", then positivism implies "that man himself can be known only to the extent that he is a physical object among physical objects".¹⁶⁴ This means that positivism suggests that "that man can never really know anything about his specifically human self — his own inner being".¹⁶⁵ This seemed suspect to Barfield. Even those who oppose materialism attempt to siphon off "spiritual values" into a separate mysterious category.¹⁶⁶ The modern scientific disposition, when confronted with the spiritual, discounts it by way of relegation to a separate (implicitly: lesser) type of truth. He thought modernity allows for two truths: "the scientific kind which can be demonstrated experimentally and which is limited to the physical world and, on the other side, the "truths" of mystical intuition and revelation, which can be felt and suggested but never known or scientifically stated".¹⁶⁷ Accordingly, far from resolving the tensions within

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 270–71.

¹⁶¹ See: Di Fuccia, *Barfield*, 163.

¹⁶² Barfield, *Rediscovery*, 14.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 15.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

positivism, this created "a precarious equilibrium" balancing "a meaningless and mechanical world of physical events" and an "ulterior spiritual significance".¹⁶⁸ This thrust Descartes' sword deeper.

Barfield's complained that whereas "older positivism" kept to itself, claiming "that man could never know anything except the physical world-mechanism accessible to his senses", a modern form of positivism heralded the invasion of positivism into language and meaning.¹⁶⁹ He named "logical positivism," "linguistic analysis," and "the philosophy of science" as culprits in promoting the idea that not only can nothing be known except the materially sensed and the mechanically observed, but also "nothing can even be said about anything else".¹⁷⁰ Barfield considered this loss of meaning to be dire for the inner life of the individual and claims about morality.

In "The Rediscovery of Meaning", Barfield made an analogy to reading a book, and hoped that science would read nature in a way that acknowledged the generative relationships between parts and wholes. When we read, "the meaning of the whole is articulated from the meaning of each part", e.g. "chapters form sentences" and so forth.¹⁷¹ This inability to "to read the book of nature in this way" did not worry Barfield if it had been exclusive to mechanics and physics, but he stated that "man looks more and more to science for guidance on all subjects".¹⁷² We look to the scientific mode, and concurrently the scientific mode pervades other disciplines.¹⁷³ In *Saving the Appearances*, Barfield marked out Darwin's theory of evolution as the most "striking example" of "borrowing

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 16. See: Reilly, *Romantic*, location 748.

¹⁷⁰ Barfield, *Rediscovery*, 16.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 27.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid. See also: Hubner, "Anti-Reductionist," 33.

from the experimental by the non-experimental sciences", suggesting that "astronomy and physics has taught men that the business of science is to find hypotheses to save appearances" and thus confronting the "lack the regularity" in nature, Darwin suggested "chance variation" as the hypothesis.¹⁷⁴ Barfield scoffed at this: "the concept of chance is precisely what a hypothesis is devised to save us from".¹⁷⁵ According to Barfield, Darwinian evolution is peculiar because it supposes that "matter" evolved into "mind", which is entirely dissimilar to matter—it indicates an unlikely disjuncture. For Barfield, a more reasonable theory (1) suggests mind and spirit exist ceaselessly and (2) rests on metamorphosis, not Darwinian "substitution".¹⁷⁶ While this criticism may seem odd to us today, it indicates Barfield's alternative perspective and how far he stood outside mainstream rationalist accounts.

His solution was, of course, imagination. He asked, "can science ever learn to supplement its weighing, measuring, and statistics with the systematic use of imagination?"¹⁷⁷ Hope lay in the latent creativity implicit in parts of the scientific process, but the future of science seemed unclear to Barfield who wondered if "scientific man must inevitably continue in the same direction, so that he becomes more and more a mere onlooker, measuring with greater and greater precision and manipulating more and more cleverly an earth to which he grows spiritually more and more a stranger".¹⁷⁸ The method required to bridge the Cartesian gap had to "be one that turns its face inward as well as outward", and, in "Science and Quality", Barfield used the study of the mind as an

¹⁷⁴ Barfield, "Saving," 155.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Reilly, *Romantic*, location 555.

¹⁷⁷ Barfield, *Rediscovery*, 27.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 24.

example.¹⁷⁹ He thought that if we wish to study the mind we cannot simply run experiments on the brain or test animals; we must recognize "that the source of what comes from within can only be found by looking within".¹⁸⁰ This required imagination, which, as noted, Barfield considered a cognitive faculty that allowed special access to knowledge. Barfield suggested in "The Rediscovery of Meaning" that Goethe had asserted that parts of nature were knowable through "a perceptive faculty" well-trained in "creative thoughts".¹⁸¹ Goethe, in fact, "played a significant part in the development of the (then quite new) concept of evolution", but Barfield lamented that with "the spectacles of positivism", Goethe's true contribution has been overlooked.¹⁸²

Science must move "beyond present positivist limitations" because the ultimate result is the disintegration of the object of study.¹⁸³ Without an imaginative capacity to comprehend and see the whole, the furtherance of science is merely continued reduction to constituents.¹⁸⁴ It is because Barfield cared so much for science, the pursuit of knowledge of nature, that he criticized it.

He did not want imagination to replace the scientific process, much as he did not suggest a return to primitive original participation. We need not sacrifice "the ability which we have won to experience and love nature as objective and independent of ourselves".¹⁸⁵ We must broaden our view, rather than replace "the spectacles of positivism" with those of imagination. He defined his hopes for imagination in modern science as a balance: "To be able to experience the representations as idols, and then to be able to perform the act of

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 263.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 28.

¹⁸² Ibid., 28–29.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 29.

¹⁸⁴ See: Di Fuccia, *Barfield*, 167.

¹⁸⁵ Barfield, "Saving," 126.

figuration consciously, so as to experience them as participated; that is imagination".¹⁸⁶ This would undo some of the assumptions contained in modern science, but not obliterate our objective stance. Barfield distanced himself from those who advocated for "organicism". He chided that we must not "forget that both nature and physical man are also mechanism".¹⁸⁷ Both perspectives are needed. Creativity and the imaginative capacity to apprehend the unity of objects as well as objectivity and the technical capacity to dissect objects are necessary.¹⁸⁸

Again, this insistence on imagination in science accorded with Barfield's anthroposophy because anthroposophy offered him a philosophical account, which cherished the imagination and united it with a seemingly scientific perspective.¹⁸⁹ Steiner had hoped to demonstrate the limitations of science, while also suggesting an alternative spiritual theory of evolution.¹⁹⁰ The word "occult" put readers off Steiner's works, Barfield considered, but he held that "occult" simply signified "hidden" or that which is "not even in theory observable by the senses".¹⁹¹ The occultism of Steiner referred to the supersensible phenomena that Barfield wanted to preserve in the face of scientism. For Barfield, Steiner simply codified and updated the insight of the Romantics who understood the importance of imagination in cognition. "Spiritual Science" was Romanticism that could be offered to the scientific community.

In his long career, Barfield studied metaphor, meaning, and the mind, and each of these themes had a bearing on his critique of Enlightenment rationalism. His critique,

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Barfield, *Rediscovery*, 271–72.

¹⁸⁸ Barfield, "Saving," 126.

¹⁸⁹ See: Thorson, "Lewis and Barfield on Imagination," 1.

¹⁹⁰ See: Di Fuccia, *Barfield*, 25.

¹⁹¹ Barfield, *Rediscovery*, 259.

however, was not born of a disdain for science itself or the pursuit of knowledge. It was part of his decades-long quest to restore and repair meaning— to repair the damage he had found by studying language. He hoped to serve the pursuit of knowledge by lamenting the myopia of modern science and by offering an alternative that broadened the scope for perception and meaning-making. Formalized in anthroposophy, imagination was his battle shield in his quest to repair the great wound left by the Cartesian "sword thrust" and to encourage knowledge, science, and human consciousness itself to evolve.