Poetic Diction and Participation in Being: Barfield and Gadamer on the Inner Word

Douglas Hedley

Reason, Proportion, communicable Intelligibility intelligent and communicant, the Word -which last expression strikes me as the profoundest and most comprehensive Energy of the human Mind, if indeed it be not is some distinct sense energeia theoparadoton (God given energy) …[T] he moment we conceive the divine energy, that moment we co-conceive the Logos;…the redeemed and sanctified become finally themselves Words of the Word—even as articulate sounds are made by the Reason to represent Forms, in the mind, and Forms are a language of the notions.[1]

IT MAY SEEM ODD TO COMPARE THE WRITINGS of the British 'inkling' Owen Barfield (1898—1997) and the eminent German philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer (1900-2002). Yet both men shared more in common than might otherwise appear to be the case. Gadamer and Barfield were men of vast erudition and penetrating intellect. Both had a keen sense of the intellectual crisis of philosophy after the disintegration of the high Romantic synthesis of Post-Kantian thought, and the crisis of confidence in European culture in the wake of the savage internecine European wars. They were near contemporaries; they were born and died within a few years of each other: the opus magnum of both men appeared quite late in their respective careers, and their intellectual eminence was rather late emerging. *Saving the Appearances* (henceforth *SA*) was published in 1957, *Truth and Method* appeared in 1960 (henceforth *WM / TM*).[2] Barfield spent most of his career as London solicitor, and was lecturing in the US in his latter part of his career. Gadamer was a teacher of philosophy, but became an important name in European thought only after the publication of *Truth and Method*. Both exist in the shadow of another towering figure. Gadamer was the pupil of Martin Heidegger; Barfield the friendly antagonist of C.S. Lewis.

Philology was at the core of their concerns. Barfield went to up Oxford to reads Mods and Greats, and the changed to the fledgeling subject of English literature. Gadamer was a student and then teacher of philosopher, but he was an accomplished philologist and much of his professional work as a philosopher was exegesis of ancient Greek philosophy and, as we shall stress, Plato. While both are philosophers, poetry is of great significance to their systems of thought. Their theories of poetic diction are theories of knowledge. Both Barfield and Gadamer are deeply pre-occupied with the role of the humanities in an age dominated by science. Such concerns are very close to the central project of Gadamer's hermeneutics. Gadamer oeuvre is fiercely opposed to the identification of knowledge with the testing measures of the natural science, a methodology that ignores the role of judgement and tradition

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[1] Reference mislaid—probably in the Notebooks. If discovered please let author and editor know.

[2] Owen Barfield, *Saving the Appearances*, London: Faber and Faber, 1957. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1960. Translated as *Truth and Method*, trs. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, Bloomsbury: London, 2019.

in the *Geisteswissenschaften,* the German term that was originally a translation of the English 'moral sciences'. The title of Gadamer's work *Truth and Method* is a gauntlet thrown to the philosophers who identify knowledge with the techniques of the laboratory, and some wits have observed that *Truth or Method* would have been a more fitting, if a more provocative, title for the work! If Truth is placed at the mercy of an empiricist model of mirroring facts through propositions, then the humanities become merely explorations of sentiment or edifices of artistic ornament. Richard Rorty in his seminal and influential work *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* highlighted some of the pivotal problems that are linked to the correspondence theory of truth.[3] Cursory reflection upon the theory points to some severe difficulties. How can negative facts (i.e. the genuine absence of an item or a property) or counterfactuals (i.e. what if x had been the case) be accommodated in the classic Empiricist model of truth as a correspondence or representation of facts? Rorty presents a radical pragmatist response to the collapse of the classical Empiricist model of knowledge as a static mirroring of facts. Rorty's alternative, like other pragmatists, relies upon the social function or utility of truth. It is not what makes a sentence true but rather the practices that count. Gadamer is then enlisted as an edifying philosopher rather than a thinker bound to the dated foundationalist vision of philosophy as furnishing a mirror of nature. Richard Rorty invoked Gadamer as a paradigm for his own critique of Platonic universalism and presents Gadamer's hermeneutics as an instance of the assertion of the inherently historical and linguistic nature of human rationality. With Gadamer, according to Rorty, philosophy becomes therapeutic and edifiying. On this view, Gadamer's hermeneutic is the explicit and programmatic disavowal of metaphysics.

If one follows Rorty's celebrated portrayal of Gadamer as a proto-Postmodernist, then any parallel with Barfield seems quixotic. However, Rorty's reading of Gadamer is, while characteristically brilliant, rather superficial. Our reflection upon the notion of the inner word reveals a deeper kinship between Barfield and Gadamer, one that emerges out of their common Platonic inheritance. Yet it also reveals the difference between the two. Barfield is much explicit is his avowal of Platonic contrasts between inner and outer experience.

Defence of the Humanities

Gadamer and Barfield share a concern with the status of the humanities in the modern technocratic world. Clearly, the knowledge of the humanities has its rules and content. Mastery of a body of literature is a form of knowledge even if it is rather unlike knowledge of the physical world. Gadamer argues that the success of the natural sciences has generated a positivism that has been most damaging for the humanities. Aspects of knowledge in the humanities defy the principles of knowing in the hard sciences; and Gadamer is keen to stress the

[3] R. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979.

significance of prejudice in the humanities. To be induced into the study of literature or philosophy is to be introduced to a canon of thought, and the student is encouraged to try to understand the perspective and assumptions of the genre and the period. In order to do this, one is brought into contact with a tradition of thought; in the West this is a world shaped by Latin, Greek and Hebrew, the history of Christendom and its internal and external conflicts. Gadamer insisted that doing philosophy is to be tied to a tradition of thought, *nolens volens*. Conversely, to understand the history of philosophy is to cast a philosophical eye upon the text, and appreciate the kind the kind of questions raised within the text.

Similarly, Barfield has some scathing words for the pedants who fail to appreciate the tradition to which they belong, and takes the interpretation of Greek philosophy by modern Europeans as a striking example.

> Such an one can read Plato and Aristotle through from end to end, he can even write books expounding their philosophy, and all without understanding a single sentence. Unless he has enough imagination, and enough power of detachment from the established meanings or thought-forms of his own civilization, to enable him to grasp the meanings of fundamental terms—unless, in fact, he has the power not only of thinking, but of *unthinking*, he will simply re-interpret everything they say in terms of subsequent thought.[4]

What Barfield is intent upon saying is quite close to Gadamer's notion of the two horizons, as the integration of the other realm of the text being studied from the perspective of a specific historic and cultural context. To study Plato, say, with care is to engage with the ancient Athenian from within a specific context. Both the horizon of the text and the horizon of the interpreter are fused in the hermeneutical process. This process cannot be construed properly and accurately as a technique or a method. Gadamer's idea of a *wirkunggeschichtliches Bewussteins* or a historically-effected consciousness is in part a critique of the *Substanzmetaphysik* of Classical Western metaphysics. It is form of humanism influenced by Heidegger's critique of metaphysics. It elaborates the principle stresses the hybris of a dominant form of metaphysical philosophising in the West that neglects the finitude of human experience in history. Yet this does not mean that Gadamer's thought lacks a metaphysical component. Gadamer is keen to reject both a misplaced scientism and a radical subjectivism or relativism. He is clearly intent upon producing an alternative to either a sloppy 'anything goes' relativism whereby all facts are merely interpretations or a rigid scientism. One recent commentator observes: 'We simply cannot make sense of human knowledge in all of its relativity to this historically conditioned, linguistically constituted, value-laden standpoints, if we do not see these standpoints as in principle compatible with and in contact

[4] Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning*, Faber and Faber: London, 19522. Rep. Barfield Press: Oxford, 2010, p.219. Henceforth PD.

with the intelligibility of the world' [5]

Barfield shares Gadamer's concerns about an undue reliance upon notions of method:

> But to imagine that this tells us anything about the *nature* of knowledge; to speak of method as though it were a way of testing, this is- instead of looking dispassionately at the historical fact—to wear it like a pair of blinkers. (*PD* 136)

Barfield is particularly critical of the anti-poetical effect of scientific rationalism, especially the legacy of Hume and Russell, which Barfield characterises as

> the haphazard pull-and-push ignorance which claims in public the name of science and admits in private that it knows nothing; which, when it turns inward to the mind of the Knower, finds there a nothingness within, to match the nothingness without…Reflection on the poetic activity teaches us that the same imagination which created that kind of habit can both disturb it and create new ones. (*PD* 23)

Indeed, Barfield stresses the rational dimension of the poetic vocation. Were not Dante, Shakespeare and Goethe men who thought deeply about the world? Barfield writes:

> It has already been emphasized that the rational principle must be strongly developed in the great poet. Is it necessary to add to this that the scientist, if he has 'discovered' anything must have discovered it by the right interaction of the rational and poetic principles. Really, there is no distinction between Poetry and Science, as kinds of knowing, at all. There's is only a distinction between bad poetry and bad science.
>
> (*PD* 135)

In a striking image, Barfield presents contemporary Western culture as partially blind: 'Our sophistication, like Odin's, has cost us an eye; and now it is the language of poets, in so far as they create true metaphors, which must *restore* this unity conceptually, after it has been lost from perception' (*PD*79). What is required, according to Barfield, is a Platonic model of reason, one in which reason is bound to an awareness of transcendent reality: 'The world, like Dionysus, is torn to pieces by pure intellect; but the poet is Zeus; he has swallowed the heart of the world; and he can reproduce it as a living body' (*PD* 81). For Barfield, the poet is summoned to heal the rift generated by the alienation of mankind from nature, and this metaphysic of renewed participation in the Divine is buttressed by a speculative Christian theology in which the incarnation is not merely a moral cipher but a decisive moment in the evolution of human consciousness. Barfield describes the evolution of consciousness as the 'ascending rational principle and the descending poetic

[5] Brice Wachterhauser, 'Getting It Right: Relativism, Realism and Truth', in *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, ed. by Robert Dostal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 52–78 (p. 76).

principle' (*PD* 87).

Barfield stresses the fact that the poet has a special access to truth, and the Englishman presses home the Romantic perspective: 'how much, how very much, is possible to the human imagination, once it has begun to drink, with fuller consciousness, from the primal source of Meaning' (*PD* 148). The Neoplatonic tradition, with which Barfield clearly identifies, is 'Platonism plus the concept of genius' (*PD* 221). He notes that his reader 'might well go on to consider the re-emergence at intervals of certain particular streams of living meaning, such as that contained in Greek myth itself—Platonism—Esoteric Christianity; and the way in which poetry has blossomed afresh and in different places, every time they have broken through.' (*PD* 178). This is deeply Coleridgean: for Coleridge the artwork reconciles the inner and the outer, the conscious and the unconscious in that the artist dwells upon and is the instrument of the *natura naturans*, the productive spirit of nature. At the same time, the unconscious creative power of the artist is 'the genius in the man of genius'.

Gadamer too presents a humanism that integrates the Christian inheritance. And when asked, Gadamer described himself as a Platonist. This may seem rather odd, given Gadamer's deep debt to Heidegger and the latter's radical critique of Platonism. Given the vehemence of Heidegger's critique of Plato, it seems deeply ironic that the most important pupil of the Black Forest sage should be a Platonist! Gadamer published a number of individual studies of Plato's philosophy, and *Truth and Method* is built upon the paradigm of Platonic dialectic. Gadamer's Hermeneutics considers the history of Western philosophy from the perspective of certain texts, and the consciousness created by a particular intellectual tradition. Neutrality is simply not possible. The engagement with the tradition is necessarily an involvement from a perspective, one of rational prejudice. The endorsement of tradition and prejudice might be seen as a Romantic dimension of Gadamer's thought: a critique of the bogus objectivity and neutrality of the Enlightenment. This avowal of tradition and prejudice does not, of course, amount to an assertion of dogmatism. It is at this point that Platonic dialectic plays a constitutive role for Gadamer. It constitutes a model of inquiry and dialogue. Plato's choice of the dialogue form assumes particular significance for Gadamer, since Plato was acutely aware of the limitations of the written form. One might view Gadamer's philosophy as a Platonism divorced from the metaphysics that Nietzsche and Heidegger diagnosed as the central problem of Platonism. Rather, for Gadamer Platonism becomes a paradigm of a conversational nature of Understanding (*Verstehen*). From this vantage point, hermeneutics seems to replace metaphysics.

The gap between the red-blooded visionary metaphysics of Barfield's Coleridge-inspired Neoplatonism and the rather manicured post metaphysical Platonising hermeneutics of Gadamer seems great indeed. Barfield is explicit about the tradition upon which he draws, grounded in 'that stream of thought, which first became articulate about the third century of our era—and which is

often loosely classified as Neoplatonism. You will hear it again in 'the writings of our Cambridge Platonists in the seventeenth century … Men like Cudworth and Henry More. And then, after a shorter interval this time, you see it enjoying the open air and sunshine of a wider appeal in that great movement in art and literature which dominated the aesthetic experience of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—in the so called Romantic movement. One thinks, in our own country, of names like Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge and others (*RCA* 301).[6]

This, however, is not the entire story. One of the works that exerted a deep influence upon Gadamer was *The Origin of the Art Work*. In this essay Heidegger presents an essentially Schellingian-Neoplatonic theory of the artwork as a vehicle and repository of truth, as the revelation of being. Habermas wrote about Gadamer urbanising Heidegger, but Gadamer held fast to some of the key aspects of Heidegger's legacy. The end of *Truth and Method* is most revealing of Gadamer's residual Platonism. The metaphysical crux of Platonism is the participation of appearances in the transcendent idea: it is no accident that Gadamer's final section of *Truth and Method* is concerned with the idea of beauty and particularly its Platonic provenance.[7] Yet there is a distinct difference of emphasis. Gadamer is bound to a critique of what he perceives as the inadequacy of the Romantic-Kantian legacy, with its subjectivism and cult of genius: 'to start with subjectivity is to miss the point' (*TM* 115). Or in another passage in *Truth and Method,* 'Understanding is to be thought less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition'. Such passages belong to Gadamer's assessment of what he perceives as the subjectisation of aesthetics that comes to a climax with Kant's Third Critique. While the critique of subjectivity differentiates Gadamer from Barfield, in part in is motivated by adjacent concerns, not least the repudiation of any marginalisation of aesthetic, and especially poetic, experience in a technocratic culture.

The presence of theology in Gadamer's thought is signally by the very term hermeneutics. The term has its origins in the rules of the interpretation of Christian Scripture, going back to Antiquity, the Renaissance and the Reformers, and reaching a high point in the work of Schleiermacher, coincidentally one of the greatest Plato scholars of the modern period. Gadamer's use of the term 'hermeneutics' is drawing upon the term as broadened by Wilhelm Dilthey into the critical study of historical texts. Yet we should not forget this theological dimension and provenance of the term 'hermeneutics', especially when we come to the key notion of the 'inner word'.

The Inner Word

Having noted certain similarities and differences between the two

[6] Owen Barfield, *Romanticism Comes of Age: Essays on the Creative Imagination*, Oxford:Barfield Press, 2012 301, henceforth *RCA*.

[7] Rik Van Nieuwenhove, 'Art, contemplation and intellectus Aquinas and Gadamer in conversation', Louise Nelstrop & Helen Appleton (eds), *Art and Mysticism: Interfaces in the Medieval and Modern Periods (Contemporary Theological Explorations in Mysticism)*. London: Routledge, 2018, ch. 3, p. 70-86.

philosophical positions, it is worth considering their respective treatment of the topic of the inner word. The notion of the inner word is essentially the creation of Saint Augustine. There are precedents in Stoic thought, especially the distinction between the *logos prophorikos* (the uttered word) and the *logos endiathetos* (internal word), whereby the expressed word constitutes the vehicle that dispatches work of internal reason to the outside world. The link between knowledge and the verbal is profound for Augustine's teacher Ambrose, but the explicit idea of the *verbum interius* or even the word of the heart (*verbum cordis*) comes from Augustine and was again deployed in the Middle Ages by Aquinas. In the *Confessions*, Augustine remarks that he encountered 'some books of the Platonists translated from Greek to Latin' (*Confessions*, VII, 9,13) in which he found the Word of John's Prologue. 'Being instructed by these books to return to myself, I entered into my inmost being, under your guidance' (Loc. cit). Augustine's claim to have discovered the Word of St John's Prologue in the books of the pagan Platonists is frankly astonishing!

Was not Augustine's African predecessor Origen, in relying on a Platonic rather than on the Stoic understanding of logos, committed to implied inferiority between the Father and the Son? Is Augustine identifying the One with Deus and the Intellect of the Neoplatonists with Verbum? The difficulty lies in the aforementioned subordinationism of the kind found in Origen. Logos for Plotinus and other Neoplatonists suggests a power at a lower level. The Intellect can be conceived of as the logos of the One, or Soul might be seen as the logos of the soul. Language has its source in God and is the power that leads back to transcendent truth. Augustine is drawing upon Trinitarian structure of God as otherness and yet sameness: difference and identity. Barfield writes in *Saving the Appearances:* 'Not to realize to the uttermost the otherness of God from ourselves is to deny the Father. But equally, not to strive to realize the sameness—to renege from the Supreme Identity—is to deny the Holy Spirit' (*SA* 165-166).

Theologically the Son is the utterance of the Father, and in the West the Spirit proceeds from both. Indeed, in a sense all of creation is the speech of God. Yet the word made flesh or incarnate remains with God the Father just as the human word abides in the intellect of the speaker when spoken.

Augustine was intrigued, as he tells us in book one of the *Confessions*, by the phenomenon of language. His training was in rhetoric and his experience of the preaching of St Ambrose. In his early work *de Magistro* Augustine explores the question of language and meaning and presents a Platonic-Neoplatonic theory of an inner teacher. Augustine uses the term *verbum mentis* for the soul's self-knowledge. It is in *De Trinitate* that Augustine develops his characteristic theory of the inner word, with reference to the Prologue of John's Gospel. The basic analogy is that of the intentional principle that precedes the utterance of the sound of a word or a sign. Just as the spoken word proceeds while grounded in the intellectual intention stored in memory, so the Son proceeds from the Father, while remaining inextricably bound to His source. This inner word is the basis of particular languages such as Latin, Greek or Hebrew, and

yet cannot be identified with any specific language. Aquinas draws upon this theory in two short works*, De Differentia Divini Verbi et Humani* and *De Natura Verbi Intellectus*.

In both Gadamer and Barfield the notion of the 'inner word' in Augustine and Aquinas assumes profound significance. Yet this is intriguing. The idea of the inner word is a rather arcane and alien theme for twentieth century reflection on language, and yet both thinkers draw upon it. The eminent German philosopher devotes a substantial section of his masterpiece *Truth and Method* to the notion of the Inner Word. He stresses the epochal significance of the translation of Logos into ratio and verbum. Plato becomes the source of the dislocation of language and object. Whereas for Plato words are transient, and it is the immortal soul that has access to eternal truths; for Augustine (and in his footsteps Aquinas) language is not merely the representation of the object but is substantially continuous with the object. Broadly, Plato stands for the origin of the instrumentalising approach to language in the West, whereby words are just tools. Augustine, Aquinas (perhaps also Luther?) stand for an alternative tradition of the inherent significance and dignity of the word: 'there is an idea that is not Greek which does more justice to the being of language, and so prevented the forgetfulness of language in Western thought from being complete. This is the idea of Christian '*incarnation'* (*TM* 436).

If what emerges as a word in speech was already as Verbum, thought and language are inextricably linked: medium and content are inextricably linked. The inner Word, for Gadamer, becomes part of an appeal to what he calls *Sprachlichlichkeit*. This ugly word might be translated into an equally unlovely 'linguisticality'. The development of linguistic articulation is not a diminishment of the being of the thing; on the contrary it is its realization. For Gadamer the true being of entities becomes accessible through their emergence in language. For Gadamer the recognition of finitude means the appreciation of the force of language, which the Cartesian tradition through Kant to Husserl tended to ignore or obfuscate.

Gadamer's claim seems *prima facie* odd: in his arguments for the inner word Augustine places little weight upon the incarnation of the Word; instead he relies upon the Platonic contrast between the noetic and the sensible worlds, the internal and the external. On his model, language employs the sensible to communicate the external, the *verbum cordis* precedes the *verbum vocis*. Moreover, the word verbum is used by Augustine in the singular. Hardly just a word or a concept but more like a judgement, i.e. the active power of the mind, which is inextricably bound to the *memoria hominis*, and its capacity to draw upon intelligible realities such as wisdom, unity, equality.

Indeed, Barfield writes: 'the extraordinarily intimate connection between language and thought (the Greek word logos combined, as we should say, both meanings) might lead one to expect that the philosophers at least would have turned their attention to the subject long ago' (*PD* 52). Moreover, in *Saving the Appearances*, Barfield writes:

For Aquinas, as for Augustine, there are, anterior to the uttered, the

> intellect-word (*verbum intellectus, verbum cordis, verbum memoriae*). The human word proceeds from the memory, as the Divine Word proceeds from the Father. Proceeds from it, yet remains one with it. For the world is the thought of God realized through His Word. (*SA* 85)

The mysterious consubstantiality of Father and Son comes to shape the appreciation of the relation between language and thought. Barfield dwells on the abiding theological significance of this notion:

> The psychology in question differs from modern linguistics in the sense that it begins its investigation into the word at a much earlier stage in its life, or even just before its birth. The spoken or uttered word is seen as the conclusion of an interior process, during which it first took form as an "inner" word (*verbum interius*), an entity not yet belonging or clothed in any sound, real or imagined. The exponents of this psychology speak of a "memory word," of a *verbum cordis* or "heart word," and finally of the "intellect word" that finds vent in actual utterance—*vox*, the voice or sounded word.[8]

Barfield is correct to note that Augustine is not so much producing a theory of language as much as the transcendent source of language, not so much the 'what' of language as its 'why'! The source of language is linked to the question of the intelligibility of the cosmos. Barfield continues in this theological mode:

> Rather strangely perhaps, I have come to the conclusion that in our day this analogy, or more than analogy, between the divine Word and the human can be more helpful in the inverse direction: that is, beginning with the divine Word, the Logos at the root of all creation, and passing thence to the mystery of language. I do not, of course, mean by that that the Christian mystery of the Son proceeding from the Father, and yet remaining with the Father, is the easier one to grasp—only that in contemplating it we are at least forced to realize that we *are* confronting a mystery: the primary mystery of the unmanifest being made manifest. (*MRT*)

The concept of the Logos or the Divine Word is grounded in theories about the creative relationship between God and world. The Inner Word is, for Barfield, linked to the theory of participation as he develops it in *Saving the Appearances*. Here Barfield challenges the view the language emerged out of the use of signs for physical objects, which then obtain metaphorical meanings. For example, 'Spirit' means primarily breath and then by addition comes to mean mind or soul. Drawing upon Coleridge's sense of language as the 'heirloom of the human race', Barfield holds in such words we find fossils of a lost experience, that within which subjective and objective, inner and outer, were intertwined. Barfield calls this phase 'original participation'. It was part of

[8] Owen Barfield, 'Meaning, Revelation and Tradition in Language and Religion', The Missouri Review 5.3 (Summer 1982): 117-28. See the link https://www.owenbarfield.org/read-online/articles/meaning-revelation-and-tradition/. Henceforth MRT.

the development of human consciousness that these aspects are rent asunder. Barfield thinks rather meaning in the universe is grounded in its divine source: 'We may think of cosmic wisdom as related to the appearances rather as, in men, the inner, unspoken word (the verbum cordis, verbum intellectus, of which Aquinas wrote) is related to the word (vox) that is actually vocalized' (*SA* 154).

This is why Barfield considers that 'words are only themselves by being more than themselves. Perhaps the same is true of human beings'.[9] In this memorable sentence, Barfield means that just as the vocation of human is to be the vehicle of higher principle, so too the utterance of the mouth or the sign on the paper is the instrument of a meaning that is grounded in the transcendent Divine Word. Through its intimate bond to the Divine Word, the human mind obtains access to otherwise hidden structures of reality. The study of language is not an exercise in ornament or persuasion, although these are noble aims of a liberal education, but constitutes an education into the 'nature' of things. In that words have meaning, they can illuminate reality. This why in the works of 'living poets', 'in whose verses one feels moving the breath of the Creative Word, the breath of the Logos, and of a deep human response to the Logos, the breath that is alone the true breath of poetry' (*RCA* 301).

Speculation

The contemporary academy has been deeply influenced by the extreme relativism based on Nietzsche and his French epigones. On this view, that there are no facts but just interpretations. Moreover, Gadamer is implacably opposed to the Nietzschean view of language as a form of constraint. On the contrary, for Gadamer, the mind is 'winged' through *Sprachlichkeit*. Gadamer notes of Hegel:

> What he calls dialectic and what Plato calls dialectic depends, in fact, on subordinating language to the "statement". The concept of the statement, dialectically accentuated to the point of contradiction, however, is antithetical to the nature of hermeneutical experience and the verbal nature of human experience of the world. (*TM* 484; *WM* 472)

Gadamer develops this critique of the propositional model of language in terms of what he calls the speculative dimension of language. This part of *Truth and Method* is dense, and sometimes opaque, but in its outlines Gadamer's concerns are strikingly close to those of Barfield. The propositional paradigm distorts the philosophical description of language by being unduly narrow. There are a range of uses of language, from the prosaic to the poetic, which cannot be captured by the simple picturing model of the statement. Human beings know intuitively that spoken or written utterances may convey an array of meanings that are linked to context, or implication or imagination, whether in a law court, in a poem, or in quotidian discourse:

[9] Barfield, *The Rediscovery of Meaning*, Barfield Press: 2010, 132-3

> If we now use the word "speculative", as it was coined by philosophers around 1800 and say, for example, that someone a speculative mind or that a thought is rather speculative, behind this usage lies the notion of reflection in a mirror. Speculative means the opposite of the dogmatism of everyday experience. A Speculative person is someone who does not immediately abandon themself to the tangibility of the appearances or to the fixed determinateness of the meant, but who is able to reflect—or to put it in Hegelian terms, who sees that the 'in-itself' is a 'for-me'.
>
> And a thought is speculative if the relationship it asserts is not conceived as a quality unambiguously assigned of a to a subject, of a property to a given thing, but must be thought of as a mirroring , in which mirroring itself is nothing but the pure appearance of what is reflected, just as the one is the one of the other and the other the other of the one (*TM* 482).

This is a dense passage. Gadamer is hostile to a conception of language as essentially composed of propositional parts. Rather, the meaning of specific statements relies upon the intelligibility of a whole, and the reciprocity of mind and world. Knowledge on this model is not merely cognition of independent facts but re-cognition within the whole, a mirroring process, and thus a speculative movement, where everything that is language has a 'speculative unity it contains a distinction, that between its being and its presentations of itself, but this is a distinction that is really not a distinction at all' (*TM* 491).

Gadamer writes:

> Language itself, however, has something speculative about it in a quite different sense—not only in the sense Hegel intends, as an instinctive prefiguring of logical reflection—but, rather, as the realization of meaning, as the event of speech of mediation, of coming to an understanding. Such a realization is speculative in that the finite possibilities of the word are orientated toward the sense intended as toward the infinite. (*TM* 484; *WM* 472-3)

and

> To say what one means, on the other hand—to make oneself understood—means to hold what is said together with an infinity of what is not said in one unified meaning and to ensure that it is understood in this way…someone who speaks is behaving speculatively when his words do not reflect beings but express a relation to the whole of Being … All this is epitomized in the poetic word. (*TM* 485; *WM* 473)

The significance of the poetic word lies in revealing the "speculative totality" of language, which is to say that far from language being a limitation, a prison house as in Nietzsche's image, language affords a fecundity of significance, indeed in Gadamer's explicit terminology - an *infinity* of meaning. And not as unlimited possibilities of a combinatorial recursive system, but the infinite variety afforded by genial poetic expression. While discussing Hölderlin

Gadamer notes that 'As a successful work and creation, the poem is not the ideal but the spirit awakened from infinite life' (*TM* 486). Moreover, 'The poetic statement is speculative inasmuch as it does not reflect an existent reality, does not reproduce the appearance of the species (Lat.) in the order of essence in the imaginary medium of poetic invention' (*TM* 486).

Participation

Gadamer's positive use of the term 'speculative' is striking. As Gadamer notes, it is a term associated with German Idealism, especially Hegel, and the mystical tradition. The roots of the term lie in the latin 'speculum': mirror, and a fusion of St Paul's reflections on the mind as a 'dark glass' and Platonic imagery of the mirror going back to the exposition of the Delphic Know Thyself in the 1st Alcibiades. Hegel's positive appropriation of Eckhart's eye 'The eye with which God sees me is the eye with which I see him', i.e. the dialectical relation between finite and infinite. The principle act of consciousness embodies the dialectical relation of self and other, human and divine to explore the inside of the whole world rather the facts mirrored by a set of propositions, as on the Empiricist model. The favourable use of the term 'speculative' by Gadamer suggests a much more positive appraisal of that tradition of philosophy than Rorty or his Postmodern acolytes could envisage:

> The Christian doctrine of the word, the verbum creans, which we have considered at some length above, follows the Platonic and Neoplatonic metaphysics of light. We have described the ontological structure of the beautiful as the mode of appearing that causes things to emerge in their proportions and their outline, and the same holds for the realm of the intelligible. The light that causes everything to emerge in such a way that it is evident and comprehensible in itself is the light of the word.
>
> (*TM* 499; *WM* 487)

The link between the Word and the Light is Augustinian and Johannine, and it conveys the link between semantic and cosmic meaning, a bond between the meaning within a specific language and the capacity of the cosmos to generate the fact of meaning per se. While rejecting any naïve identity between word and object, the capacity of language to shed light on Being.

The translation is, however, misleading because the 'word' is of course the Word, i.e. the Logos or Verbum. German nouns are capitalized as a matter of grammar, but here the Word is the Divine logos rather than a specific contingent utterance. Yet Gadamer for all his interest in, and deep sympathy for, the Platonic tradition is somewhat ambiguous. In particular, his section on the inner word is puzzling because it insists so adamantly upon the inextricability of thought and language.

The key notion is that of participation. The Platonic notion of participation is immensely complex and myriad in its forms, but it rests upon a central metaphysical claim about the status of the physical cosmos to the effect that it depends upon, and points back towards, a transcendent intelligible realm.

Gadamer writes:

> Through the anagogical function of the beautiful, which Plato has described in unforgettable terms, a structural characteristic of the being of the beautiful becomes visible, and with it an element of the structure of being in general. Obviously what distinguishes the beautiful from the good is that the beautiful of itself presents itself, that its being is such that it makes itself immediately evident (einleuchtend). This means that beauty has the most important ontological function: that of mediating between idea and appearance. This is the metaphysical crux of Platonism. It finds its concrete form in the concept of participation (methexis) and concerns both the relation of the appearance to the idea and the relation of the ideas to one another. (*TM* 497; *WM* 485)

The German word 'einleuchtend' which is translated as 'evident' strictly means 'enlightening' and Gadamer is clearly engaging with the Platonic metaphysics of light, and the structure of participation that the metaphysics of light presupposes.

Gadamer is ambiguous about participation in the Divine whereas Barfield is quite decisive. Gadamer is describing the crux of Platonism without, as it were, pledging any allegiance. However, he is far from denying some element of truth in the Platonic account, not least in endorsing the notion of the radiance of the beautiful while attempting free the notion from any substance metaphysics (*TM* 497).

The theological dimension to Gadamer is opaque whereas in Barfield it is limpid. Gadamer hints that aesthetic experience and language itself points to theology, a primordial encounter with truth as un-concealment. While 'truth' is in the title of Gadamer's magnum opus, it is not clear quite what model of truth is being deployed. It is certainly *not* Nietzsche's

> A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins.[10]

On the contrary, the theory of hermeneutics, whether we judge it successful or not, is a riposte to any scepticism about truth of Nietzschean provenance.

But it could the theological resonance of Truth and Method just be a legacy of Gadamer's own residual/cultural Lutheranism or a product of the abiding influence of Heidegger's crypto-Neoplatonic theology. For Barfield the task of philosophy is to re-awaken the urgency of reciprocal participation whose prime

[10] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lie in an extra Moral Sense', in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans Walter Kaufmann (New York:Penguin books, 1982), pp.46-47.

agent is poetry in the broadest sense, and the arts more generally. The inner word for Barfield is the same Word that is with God and is God. Meaning is not the product of human subjects, but has its source in the Divine word. Individual words mirror and reflect the Divine word.

The ambiguity in Gadamer emerges also from his polemic against the subject, a theme that he resumes in his discussion of Romanticism and the idea of genius. Barfield, by contrast, concentrates upon the integration of 'inwardness' with the experience of nature and God. Whereas Gadamer follows his teacher Heidegger in refusing to develop a theory of subjectivity, Barfield insists upon the ineluctable significance of inwardness. In the preface to *Poetic Diction* Barfield states his fierce critique of his contemporaries in Oxford philosophy, especially Gilbert Ryle:

> The persistent notion which men have entertained of the mind as a somewhat in itself, as an autonomous agent, distinguishable from the body—or, as Professor Ryle himself puts it, as 'the ghost in the machine'—is an illusion based on a confusion arising from men's misunderstanding of the 'rules' of the very language which they themselves have made…

Barfield is evidently vexed by Ryle's critique of inwardness: 'The author criticizes the use of such words as experience and consciousness as smacking of this illusion and denies altogether, and with irony, "the hallowed antithesis between the public, physical world and the private mental world". It is not of course merely the metaphorical use of the word *world* which he quarrels with. His concern is to deny that there is such a thing as private experience at all' (*PD* 10-11). At the time of Ryle's seminal and iconoclastic *The Concept of Mind*, published in 1949, his critique of the idea of the mind as a quasi arena where mental images are received and processed fitted well into the general philosophical climate in Oxford, one of tracing systematic ambiguity and detecting hypostatisation of capacities into special entities. Ryle, like J L Austin, commended the analysis of ordinary use as a means of exposing and deflating bogus philosophical problems. Just as science proceeds by cautious and methodical experiment and critique, Ryle and Austin thought that the mistakes of previous philosophers could be skirted by detailed and rigorous attention to semantics and grammar.

The influence of the Vienna Circle, especially Carnap via A J Ayer was also powerful in Oxford in the mid twentieth century. Barfield regarded this programme of anti-metaphysical reductionism and philosophical deflationism as highly questionable, and in particular he regarded the quasi-behaviourism of Ryle as indefensible: 'Language has preserved for us the inner, living history of man's soul. It reveals the evolution of consciousness'.[11] Language is not a substitute for an appeal to inwardness. On the contrary, it is an index of subjectivity, or rather inter-subjectivity. The experience of the human spirit

[11] Barfield, *History in English Words*, Lindisfarne Press: Gt Barrington, MA 2002, 18

develops pari passu with evolution of language.

The philosophical context of Gadamer was quite different. Notwithstanding the vigour of the Vienna Circle, positivism did not have the influence in Germany that it exerted in Britain in the wake of the collapse of Idealism. The dominant schools in Gadamer's formative years were Neo-Kantianism, Phenomenology and *Lebensphilosophie* (especially Nietzsche and Dilthey). Hence for Gadamer, radical positivism was less of a target than the residual Cartesianism in Neo-Kantian, Phenomenological and even some vitalist (i.e. drawing upon Lebensphilosophie) projects. In this critique of the Cartesian subject, Gadamer was following in the path of Heidegger. In a quasi-Heideggerian manner, Gadamer presents a vision of the history of Western thought in which Christian theology offers a corrective to Plato's subordination of words to ideas.

For Barfield the significance of the inner word is quite different, the 'creative activity alike in nature and in man, to which was given the name of Logos or Word' SA 169. Moreover: 'And since Mind existed, as Life, and Meaning, before it became conscious of itself, as knowledge, not only the activity of great poets, but mere lapse of time may sometimes be a sufficient cause of this archetypal strangeness' (*PD* 176-7). Indeed, poetry has a privileged role in this: 'Great poetry is the progressive incarnation of life in consciousness'. This fits, of course, with Barfield's Coleridgean thesis that a great poet must be a profound philosopher. Art on this model becomes a mode of participation. It is only when we have risen from beholding the creature into beholding creation that our mortality catches for a moment the music of the turning spheres (*PD* 179). It is at the point of contemplating imaginatively the created order in the light of its Divine source, perhaps aided by a great poet like Dante, Shakespeare Goethe, that the human spirit can re-connect and participate in the Divine.

Conclusion

Gadamer and Barfield were caught up in the midst of the much vaunted 'linguistic turn', that phase in modern philosophy where thinkers of varied stripes started to ask 'how do we use words?' rather than 'how do we know the world?' Yet Barfield and Gadamer were asking, 'how do we know the Word?', with its association with the Logos and the word of Scripture.

I have argued that it is misleading to view Gadamer's hermeneutics as straightforwardly a truncated version of Platonism divorced from the metaphysics of Plato that vexed Nietzsche and Heidegger. In its stead, a conversational nature of Understanding (Verstehen), the vaunted hermeneutics, ousts metaphysics. The contrast with Barfield's Coleridge inspired Neoplatonism and the post metaphysical hermeneutics of Gadamer appears prodigious. Upon reflection, however, the parallels between these two seminal thinkers should be evident. Not only do both offer a timely and penetrating defence of the humanities for a technocratic age, but both philosophers furnish a powerful defence of the speculative function of poetry

in the humanities, as a uniquely powerful mirror of consciousness. Both writers evince a fascination for theology. Neither could be designated a theologian per se, but both draw upon theology and both stress the deep significance of theology for Western philosophy. The evident fascination with the notion of the 'inner word' is both an index of the debt of both men to the Platonic tradition, but also sheds light on significant differences between these two immensely fertile and potent minds.