

A Second Earth

Barfield's Concept of Equity

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Given that my topic is *A Second Earth, Owen Barfield's Concept of Equity*¹ and that of the conference is *Owen Barfield and the Redemption of the Western Mind*, how are they connected? An obvious link is to Steiner's lectures on Thomism – published in English as *The Redemption of Thinking* no less!² – to which Barfield makes explicit reference in *Saving the Appearances* (STA).³ By 'saving' Barfield means salvation, overcoming error. Finding the way out of the earthly into which we have 'fallen':

"Nothing is easier for us [today], than to grasp a purely literal meaning; and if we are capable at all of grasping, in addition, a symbolical or 'fancy' meaning, as we do in poetry, we are in no danger of confusing the one with the other. Before the scientific revolution, on the other hand, it was the concept of the 'merely literal' that was difficult. And therefore the writer who is referred to as Dionysius the Areopagite, and Thomas Aquinas and others after him, emphasized the importance of using the humblest and most banal images, as symbols for purely spiritual truths or beings. For only in this way could a representation be safely polarized into symbol and symbolized, into literal and metaphorical." (STA 75)

In Rudolf Steiner's treatment of this topic, he speaks of how Dionysius the Areopagite had to understand that if he would perceive the godhead, if he would experience the divine, he must recognise there are two paths. One is the path of the nameless, the other the path of superlatives. So God is that which thou shalt not name, that is one path; and God as that which is the best, the highest, the superlative, is the other. Normally one would choose one or the other, but what Dionysius the Areopagite had to learn was not to choose either but to follow both to their end, so that when one follows both paths, not preferring one or the other, one then has the experience of being met by the Godhead coming towards one. Thereby one can be redeemed but also redeem, the kingdoms of nature as also oneself.

A second link, albeit one of my own devising, is that a clear understanding of English equity, especially as regards property rights (e.g. ownership) may well entail such redemption. But now by 'redemption' I mean 'thinking again' or having 'second thoughts', understanding these terms in a Barfieldian sense. To begin with, one can stand within the 'original participation' and look forwards to the events that then unfolded through which, for example, property rights emerged as an instrument whereby – much as, after Goethe, the eye was created by the light for the light – the individual can take hold of the earth, uniting his being with it and in that sense 'owning' (or, in equity terms, enjoying exclusive right of use of) the thing concerned. But one can also stand at the point of such non-participation⁴ and, looking forwards to 'final participation', realise that what one does on the basis of individualised property rights has, as it were, to be endorsed by and even be of benefit to those thereby excluded. Those in fact who impliedly granted and continue to grant one exclusive use.

From this preamble, I conclude that my topic is germane on two grounds. Firstly, the Western mind needs to review its assumptions, to think again. This in fact means it will have to do the very thing it has sought these past

¹ The idea of a second earth, which to my chagrin in the programme I erroneously attributed to Rudolf Steiner, was expressed by Owen Barfield in his 1932 essay on equity, where he wrote of "...a sort of second earth. By that I mean, an earth which is not the physical earth at all but is compacted of the personal relations of human beings with one another and of the uneasy ghosts and decaying relics of such relations ... [yet] an earth whose destiny it is to become increasingly one of light." (OBE)

² *The Redemption of Thinking*, Rudolf Steiner. Hodder and Stoughton, London 1956.

³ Acronyms explained in bibliography.

⁴ Expressed from the godhead in order to discover the *I Am* within, man had to pass from original (that is, unconscious) participation to final (conscious) participation. On expression, he perceived and thereby named the worlds of which he was previously unconscious (because an integral part). What he thus named were in the first place experiences, the word fitting the event as a silk glove. Later the name and the event parted company so that one risked losing sight and understanding of the process one was within. Thereby, too, the 'appearances' risked becoming lost and thus had to be 'saved'. It amounts, on one level, to making sure we do not dupe ourselves as we explain our existence to ourselves. The midpoint between the two is what I mean by 'non participation'. The term is my invention but the inspiration I owe to Barfield.

two hundred years to avoid doing, namely think about thinking. In other words, return to what one might call the Coleridgean incision.

Secondly, Barfield's idea of a second earth is a way, if not *the* way, of doing this because it requires a review not only of the way we understand the relationship between rights life and economic life, but also of how we understand both and how we behave at their interface – there where equity obtains. To reiterate his concept: “[a] second earth ... compacted of the personal relations of human beings with one another and of the uneasy ghosts and decaying relics of such relations ... [yet] an earth whose destiny it is to become increasingly one of light.”

Barfield wrote his essay on equity from a twin point of view. On the one hand, he wrote as a practising solicitor, thus his focus was on equity in England, rather than the Continent or the US, or even Scotland. On the other, he wrote as an avid student of Rudolf Steiner's work, generally known as anthroposophy. The former gives to his perspective and style of writing a precision that pays huge dividends because it habituates the modern mind to the somewhat archaic, but nonetheless actual, foundations of English equity (with its roots, according to Barfield, in the Icelandic sagas). The latter, though by no means a generally accepted worldview – consider, for example, Steiner's concept of history divided into post-Atlantean periods! – nevertheless affords insights into 'normal' history that have a certain allure. For instance, the image of equity born of relationships between two or more people refers us, according to Barfield, to the Christian saying, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I among them.” (Matt 18:20)

Barfield transposes this idea into the entire world of human relationships built out of twosomes: “The history of equity (I mean in English jurisprudence, where the development has been quite peculiar) is precisely the history of the recognition of this relation between two persons by the Courts. Equity begins as soon as the “relation between two persons” begins to be recognised as a thing, as an object no less 'real' in fact though not in name than a piece of land.” (OBE)

Thus, or so it would seem, humanity weaves a web of interpersonal relationships that overlays those of an economic nature linked to the fact that we live on earth. This web, however, is born of the recognition of the divine in each human being, something that in fact underlies the attribution of human status to one another, through the according to one another of a persona (or mask)⁵ enabling us to begin and eventually complete the long journey to true and total universal suffrage.

As human beings recognise each other's divinity, they 'lift' themselves out of relations linking them to the earth (the blood, the past, Gabriel) – inheritance, feudalism, and so on – and in that sense create a “second earth” (predicated on Christ, the future, Michael). In other words, they underpin themselves with a quite new ground for social life.

It is this development that informs English equity, giving rise to a spectrum of rights that ranges from the earth-related to the divine- or spirit-related. More than this, the spirit pole enables humanity to emancipate itself from the earthly, but not in order to be rid of it or to lead an abstract spiritual existence; but in order to take hold of and transform the earth. To spiritualise it.

In essence, therefore, 'equity' refers to the divine origin of human beings and their ability to make this the conscious basis of social life, instead of the assumed (or embedded) relationships of old. It is this that underpins humanity's rights life – the fact that we accord others the recognition we would ourselves expect to be accorded.

This is not to be confused with 'human rights', which arise where in effect the true rights life is not recognised. It is a failure to recognise the innate divinity of the human being that leads to the kind of abuses that in turn by way

⁵ The development of the persona dates from Greco-Roman times, about which Barfield says: “Now, just as the Hebraic 'Law' was much more of a command than a law, as we understand it, so the Greek law, as the word *nomos* suggests, was rather in the nature of what we understand by 'custom' or 'tradition'. It is only in the Roman *lex*, with its etymological derivation from 'binding' (*ob-lig*-ation, etc.), that the modern meaning really begins to appear in human consciousness at all. Here at last, distilled as it were from the formidably practical activity of generations of Roman soldiers and statesmen, we have the true legal conception of a relation between human beings, not based on blood or affection or religion, but upon a purely abstract something which is 'binding' on them.” (RCA 49)

of a remedy give rise to 'human rights'. To speak thus is not to denigrate 'human rights', but to warn against statist surrogates that can never be a true match for what Rudolf Steiner meant by 'rights life'.

Likewise, from the point of view of English equity, one should beware codification, such as a bill of rights. Britain's unwritten constitution is linked in gesture and inner logic to the image Rudolf Steiner gives of rights as precepts born of our sense of right. Recognising the divinity in a human being is in the first place a spiritual event. It then informs *the sense of right* (for example, that a child should not be sent up a chimney) which precedes the expression or enactment of this sense by way of legislation (once described by Steiner as 'crystallised feeling'⁶). The causality is from our higher into our lower natures, therefore. We take hold of our behaviour from a standpoint independent of it and therefore able to transform or enable it. This causality cannot be reversed. Laws do not beget spiritual experience – anymore than, having taken a horse to water, one can make it drink.⁷

This, at any rate, is how I interpret Barfield's "some sort of second earth." But the idea has a further dimension which needs to be brought to our attention, namely, the relationship between English equity and modern economic life, especially, trade.

Trade is always a matter between two people, embedded in or presupposing mutual trust, which in turn will not be forthcoming unless preceded by recognition of the human being. One needs to be attentive, therefore, to two trends in our times.

- 1) the idea of displacing the unwritten element of English equity with prescription and codification, rather than fighting for recognition of the divinity of the human being.
- 2) the effect, whether intended or not, of wresting trade from its link to English equity (as it is, in my view, in such contrivances as the EU and the WTO) rather than resting it on conscious relationships of trust between human beings, i.e.: associative economics.

So far, I have been content to state or assert certain ideas. Next I would like to illustrate or support them through the medium of Barfield's own words (my editorial choices and biases notwithstanding). I am not slave to Barfield's terminology, however. I cite it because Barfield does not "smudge his vocabulary".⁸ I use it also to ask the following question: Is Barfield's a Western mind redeemed? That is to say, did he enter into and even beneath the earthly in his domain (of literature and law) in order to prove that one can become conversant with it without being 'captured' by it?

As regards equity, is there something about his way of proceeding that, as it were, comes up within an anthroposophical (one might also say Coleridgean) worldview, thus obviating the need to import it into English culture by way of literal or other translations whose role, no matter how good and necessary they are, can perhaps be likened to that of a cross channel ferry?

In *History in English Words*, we find the following concerning Rome:

"Rome not only extended her jurisdiction over all Europe; she was responsible for the birth of a new idea in men's minds – the idea that 'authority', as such, based on an abstraction called 'law' and irrespective of real ties of blood or affection, of sympathy or antipathy, of religion or ownership, can exist as a relation between human beings." (HEW 35)

"...our useful distinction between *law* and *right* was once geographical rather than semantic, the two words covering roughly the eastern and the western halves of England. Appropriately enough, it is a distinction which

⁶ *The Social Future*, Rudolf Steiner. Anthroposophic Press, Hudson, New York, 1945.

⁷ This is why one needs to proceed with extreme caution when contemplating, as some do, the introduction of a written bill of rights. It has to be a question here whether Barfield's idea of a second earth can survive such a development.

⁸ My notes suggest I found this accolade in G W Tennyson's foreword to *History, Guilt and Habit*, but I have been unable to find it there since.

is much less clear in the German, and perhaps in other European languages than it is in our own. ‘Recht’, for example, covers both *law* and *right* in some contexts where we are obliged to choose one word or the other. The course of events, and the genius of the English language, seem together to have taken early cognizance of the fact that a separate name would be required for the thing peculiar to those who speak it, namely a rule of conduct which is enforceable by the Courts before it has been enacted by the legislature – a common or ‘unwritten’ *law*.” (HEW 49)

“Rome had spent herself in building up the external, visible framework on which European civilization was to hang; and this fact, observable in the word-relics of her military and political exploits, is observable still more intimately in the character and history of that great institution, our common law. Dignified vocables like *justice*, *jurisdiction*, *jurisprudence*, speak for themselves the lasting influence of the great Roman conception of ‘jus’ – that abstract ideal of the relation between one free human being and another in so far as it is expressed in their actions. It is not that in any sense we took over the Roman system; lawyers as well as poets are keen to insist that we built up our own. But as freedom slowly broadened down from precedent to precedent, there was always before the early English kings and judges a sort of pattern – more than that, a vital principle which had outlived one body and was waiting to be clothed with another. It was the spirit of Roman law living on in her language.” (HEW 55)

Concerning economic life we find:

“That the seventeenth century saw the true genesis of many of our commercial and financial institutions is suggested by the fact that their names first appear at this time. Such are *capital*, which is a doublet of *cattle* – the very oldest Aryan form of wealth – *commercial*, *discount*, *dividend*, *insurance*, *investment*, and lastly the modern meaning of *bank*, which, like the names of so many protective and responsible institutions – the *Assizes*, the *Bench*, the *Consulate*, the *Council*, the *Chair* at a public meeting, a *Seat* in Parliament, and the *Throne* – is based etymologically on what may well be one of the oldest and safest of human occupations. The old Teutonic word which subsequently became modern English *bench* was adopted into Italian, probably from the Teutonic Lombards of northern Italy, in the form ‘banco’. It soon acquired the special sense of a moneychanger’s ‘bench’ or table and found its way, together with the object it represents, into most of the countries of Europe. Thus, like the name *Lombard Street*, the little word carries us back with it to the origin of banking in northern Italy and to Edward I’s substitution of Italian *bankers* for Jewish moneylenders.

“*Bankruptcy*, *currency*, and *remittance* appeared in the first half of the eighteenth century, and in the second *bonus*, *capitalist*, *consols*, and *finance*. The history of *finance* is again interesting. The word goes right back to the Latin ‘fins’ (end). When it first appeared in English, it had the sense of a ‘fine’ or forfeit, but its modern significance was developed in eighteenth-century France among the tax-farmers or ‘financiers’, as they were called, to whom the king delegated the duty of collecting his taxes. As time went on, these shrewd individuals amalgamated into a sort of limited company, which by a judicious application of the principles of usury, gradually gained more and more control over the revenue, until ‘toutes les finances du royaume’, as Voltaire says, ‘dependirent d’une compagnie de commerce’. In England the phrase *Bank of England* first appears in 1694, describing a body of individuals associated for the purpose of lending money to the Government; and about thirty years later this still⁹ outstanding loan began to be known as the *National Debt*.” (HEW 70)

Finally, concerning Arabism:

“Reference has already been made to the wave of Arabic civilization which surged into Europe early in the Dark Ages. It was a civilization in every sense of the word; for in the ninth century learning had developed under the Caliphs of Baghdad to a degree unparalleled elsewhere in the world, and *rapprochements* between the two races and civilizations, which had already begun in the world of philosophy, were soon strengthened and increased by those great medieval experiments, the Crusades. Now Arabic scholars were, if anything, more enthusiastic Aristotelians than the scholars of Europe. The curious word *arabesque*, and the fact that words like *algebra*, *cipher*, *zero* ... are among the few Arabic words which reached our language before the fourteenth century, are both symptomatic of a certain peculiarity of the Arabic mind which we may perhaps call the tendency to abstraction. The Arab seems to have possessed something of that combination of materialism on the one hand and excessive intellectual abstraction on the other which we have already noticed in the later stages of Roman mythology. Just as he made Mohammedanism out of the Jewish sacred traditions, so he made Nominalism out of Greek philosophy. The influence upon Christian thought of great Arabic philosophers like Averroes and Avicenna is one of the most astonishing chapters in its history. But it is not difficult to see how it occurred. The

⁹ Today in 2009, as also when Barfield wrote in 1953. – chb.

learning of the middle Ages was founded entirely on translations, and this was an activity in which, as far as Aristotle's works were concerned, the Arabs had got in first. According to Renan, some of the current versions of Aristotle were 'Latin translations from a Hebrew translation of a Commentary of Averroes made on an Arabic translation of a Syriac translation of a Greek text'." (HEW 131)

The purpose of these lengthy citations, for which reason I make no apology for them, is to feel in Barfield's own words his own sense of how the second earth, humanity's dim sense of its deepest purpose, emerges by way of an unfolding evolution of consciousness, rather than, for example, the imposition of a theory. He quotes Shakespeare:

*And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.*

English equity, like the English language, is born of this process. Just so, says Barfield in *Saving the Appearances*, "[the poet] is one who 'maketh a new Nature and so maketh himself as it were a new God'." (STA 128)

To paraphrase Barfield (WCT 37), the lesson to be learned and the sign that the Western mind has redeemed itself is to realise that though not embodied something can be material. In short, we need to know, as a matter of experience, that while we may be in the earth we are not of it.

I would like to pose one last and hopefully original question: Can one speak of the redemption of finance?

This question has three dimensions. Firstly, can one glean anything about finance from the history of words? Secondly, can this provide clues as to how the further process of financial evolution – so material yet immaterial, as also so immaterial yet material – will unfold? Thirdly, a thesis which, if it held water, would be wonderful to behold, salvatory in its implications, and an important key to the redemption of the Western mind. I refer to the link between English literature and a kind of financial literacy which if developed would enable, as perhaps it alone can, the Anglo-Saxon mind to overcome, but in its own terms, its boxing in of finance, that is to say, the embedding of it in the brain its relationship to which should be one of touching but not capture by.

As to the first dimension, in addition to the earlier citations, in *Poetic Diction* Barfield writes, "The financial mysteries of 'inflation' and 'deflation' may likewise be said to 'interest' the practising merchant. But that interest is, for the most part, of a limited sort. Since money is the very basis of all his operations, he has, I think it can be said, an instinctive distaste for the mere possibility that money-units themselves should be found to have only an arbitrary 'subjective' value – that they should prove to be simply cross-sections of an endless process taking place in time. If that is true, all is lost. The dykes are opened. Like magic, he sees shrewd practical maxims turning into rarefied academic theories, and a comparatively simple and intelligible system of acknowledged *facts* ('the economic verities') having to be rigged with all sorts of super-subtle reservations and *ceteris paribus*'s, before it will bear the faintest relation to contemporary realities." (PDN 61)

This is a comment on money as perceived by its social representation at the historical moment of non-participation. Do we theorise about its meaning and purposes, which have now both become abstract compared to their earlier embeddedness in social life? Or do we sense our further evolution – our journey on to final participation in terms of which money, now become very abstract, will become concrete again? But concrete in the sense that "the time-honoured 'subjective-objective' dichotomy vanishes in the light of concrete thinking; and the word *concrete* can perhaps best be defined as 'that which is neither objective nor subjective'." (PDN 210)

In this sense, Barfield writes, "What money is to the conservative economist, words are to the conservative philosopher. For the conception of money as a 'symbol of barter' and the conception of words as the 'names of things' are, both alike, not so much untrue as 'out of date'; and for the same reason: not because the advance of

science has revealed avoidable ancient errors, but because the facts themselves have changed. Once upon a time money really was an immediate substitute for barter, and once upon a time words could really be the expression on the face of concrete reality. Error – or, at best, waste of energy – is in both cases the fruit of unwillingness to recognize essential change. The spell of the immediate past proves too strong; and, just as the stubborn economist, with his eyes fixed on that past, turns his back on all new-fangled nonsense and nails his colours stoutly to the mast of stabilization, so the philosopher waves aside the study of meaning and still maintains a desperate faith in the ancient system of *definitions...*” (PDN 61)

As to the second dimension, Barfield comments that “Purely abstract thinking, carried to its logical conclusion, is ... counting; as was realized by Hobbes, who described all thinking as addition and subtraction, and by Leibnitz who, regarding perception itself as a kind of imperfect thought, described it as ‘unconscious numeration’.”(PDN 185) This is an important clue, though its significance may have to be identified, which one can readily do, however, when one ‘listens’ to the gesture of Rudolf Steiner’s observation that arithmetic is a vestige of clairvoyance.¹⁰ That is a backwards-looking reference to ancient wisdom; looking forwards it means, surely, that arithmetic is an intimation of clairvoyance, the means for perceiving the wisdom of the future. This takes us to the edge of space, as it were, and beyond the remit I have given myself. Reference can however be made to various texts¹¹ which detail research on this very topic, and especially Marc Desaules’¹² idea of shared accounting as humanity’s ‘social brain’, the means whereby we can link, as it were, and thus overcome our individual brains.

Finally, as to the thesis concerning financial literacy, the clue is again in a word, ‘literacy’. What are we reading? And if we are reading, we must also be speaking and writing. What, in other words, is the language of finance? Of course, it is accounting, but accounting-become-money / money-become-accounting, as Steiner might have put it.¹³

Why is this a language? How can it be literature? Because it lifts our thinking beyond the material become physical, to the unembodied that can also be material. To the level of imagination – not yet in the specific anthroposophical sense requiring a capital I, but a kind of thinking of which, were one to ask Coleridge, the Western mind is quite capable but from which it shrinks.

It is this very possibility that Barfield never lets out of his sights. He knows, or at least believes, that this is water which, once tasted or even just scented, those who have been brought to it will drink of plentifully. It is this perfectly possible kind of thinking that the Western mind is just short of, just beneath. More because of indolence or bad historical timing than intent or absoluteness in genetic make-up. It is this that an anthroposophical understanding of life also relies on being present and active but cannot itself instil. It is the step beyond faith, the step towards Christ that the redemption of the Western mind presupposes.

In conclusion, this is why Barfield writes that, “...economic life is today the real bond of the civilised world. The world is held together not by political or religious harmony, but by economic interdependence; and here again there is the same antithesis. Economic theory is bound hand and foot by the static, abstract character of modern thought. On the one hand, everything to do with *industry* and the possibility of substituting human labour by machinery has reached an unexampled pitch of perfection. But when it is a question of *distributing* this potential wealth, when it is demanded of us, therefore, that we think in terms of flow and rate of flow, we cannot even begin to rise to it. The result is that our ‘labour-saving’ machinery produces, not leisure, but its ghastly caricature, unemployment, while nearly every civilised and half-civilised nation of the world sits helplessly watching the steady growth within itself of a malignant tumour of social discontent. And this increasingly rancorous discontent is fed above all things by a cramping penury, a shortage of the means of livelihood, which arises, not out of the realities of nature, but out of abstract, inelastic thoughts about money!” (RCA 64)

With this timely comment (timely because it was made in 1932 in circumstances to which some would have us believe we are returning), I hope I have given some sense of how, following Barfield’s example, the development of concrete because elastic thoughts about money is identical with the redemption of the Western

¹⁰ See *Gospel of St Matthew*, Lecture 3, 3 September 1910, Berne, Switzerland.

¹¹ *Step into Another World*, Associative Economics Institute, Neuchatel and Canterbury 12008; *El Yo y la Economia (The I in Economics)*, Editorial Rudolf Steiner, Madrid, 2009.

¹² Marc Desaules, entrepreneur and treasurer of Swiss Anthroposophical Society.

¹³ *Economics – The World as One Economy*, Rudolf Steiner. New Economy Publications, Canterbury 1996. L14, p.168.

mind. Fascinating indeed is the prospect that the occasion of and even a vehicle for such a transformation might be today's, in that event aptly named, 'credit crunch'.

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