

## II. Relational

Need: Not to objectify, but to unify

How often do we hear or read about someone feeling “objectified”? Or something similar, like feeling “controlled”? It’s common, is it not, to hear of someone being treated “like an object” (“sex object”, etc.), or “like a cog in a machine” (as an employee can be treated by a boss)? Maybe you’ve felt that way yourself.

The usual answer given to resolve such situations is for us to be more understanding of one another, to view the other as a fellow human being, even, if possible, to ‘empathize’ i.e. “to walk around in another's shoes”. In other words, treat the other as your brother or sister.

And this is a good answer – indeed a very good answer – as we try to navigate the pitfalls of our everyday lives, in the world as we know it. It is a very good answer... as far as it goes. Unfortunately it doesn’t seem to go far enough. It doesn’t go far enough and it doesn’t go deep enough. And it doesn’t last. We may attempt it, and even if we succeed, we invariably fall back into old patterns, patterns of objectification, and have to repeat the process.

Barfield offers a different answer. One that goes farther... and deeper... and lasts longer. What if it were possible, not only not to view people as objects but not to view *objects* as objects! Barfield submits – and physics confirms (as we discovered in my Introduction) – that this is the truth of the matter, in any case. Objects are not objects. They are what we make of undifferentiated molecules and atoms and sub-atomic ‘particles’ that present themselves to our senses. And what we make of them is a world of

‘objects’... separate and apart from us... which naturally results in our fellow human beings being ‘objectified’.

To put it in a more intra-personal way, besides feeling like an object among other objects, we also often feel our own inner selves as objectified. We feel separate, isolated from our selves. Barfield simplifies this by calling it a feeling of “cut-offness”. In its extreme form it can lead to a clinical condition called ‘dissociative disorder’, even ‘schizophrenia’. It is caused, Barfield claims, by a false belief that besides being separate from and cut off from the world and others, we are separate and cut off from our very selves. Somehow, over time, we have created a false ‘self’ and then found that we have become isolated, even alienated, from it.

The remedy for this deception is of course first to recognize the truth: We are not objects that are separate and cut off from the world, nor do we have separate ‘selves’ from which we can feel cut off. “...what the self of each of us feels isolated from, cut off from,” Barfield tells us, “by its encapsulation in the ...reality presented to it by the common sense of contemporary culture, is its own existential source”. “The true Self of everyone remains united – not co-extensive but united – with its original source...” (*History, Guilt and Habit*, p.52). The nature of that source will be discussed in another component (“Religion”).

In the meantime, there is a different tack we can take, at this point, alleviating the feeling of self-isolation and also of objectification. And that is at the level of sensory input i.e. what is presented to our senses every day. What if there was a process, a ‘way’, that could take us beyond our senses and re-interpret, in effect re-make, the phenomenal world? What if instead of viewing the world, and people, as objects, we viewed – and

experienced – them as they are: beings that interpenetrate us, that indwell mutually with us? If this could happen, the result would be revolutionary, cataclysmic (in the positive sense of that word). Objectification would disappear and in its place would be a sense of harmony and unity that would permeate all of creation!

Barfield submits that it could happen – and should happen. He calls this process, this ‘way’ – ‘Participation’. Participation is a key concept in Barfield’s scheme. He defines it as “an extra-sensory link between man and the phenomena”, resulting in that interpenetration I just mentioned.

Now it is important to note that this is different from ‘participation’ as we normally understand it. It is not just doing things together, interacting with others, or being involved with – even immersed in – an activity, as pleasant as those things may be. Rather, it is a radical re-creating of things and people – from the inside out – via a change in our consciousness, which (you’ll recall) is “the inside of everything”. We normally say participation ‘in’ something, e.g. participation ‘in nature’; but Barfield’s ‘participation’ has no preposition. There is no ‘in’ there. With his understanding, we won’t participate ‘in’ nature, we will ‘participate Nature’. There would be a new immediacy in our relation to Nature and to other people.

This may sound complicated but at its core the idea shines with simplicity. It simply recognizes that the material world is nothing more than the immaterial thickened! We, in the course of our history – in the evolution of our consciousness – have thickened it. We have thickened it too much. But now, with our newly recognized agent of change – our consciousness – we can restore it to its original unitive essence. Then, when we look at the world it will not seem “other” to us but an essential “sameness” with us. When we

look at the other person, we will see not just our brother or sister, we will see our selves...  
our true Selves. As one writer put it, "That man is not your brother, he is you".

Objectification no more! But Unity!

(Discussion)