

ABECEDARIUM PHILOSOPHICUM

By Owen Barfield and C.S. Lewis

A is the Absolute: none can express it.
The Absolute, Gentleman! Fill up! God bless it!

B is for Bergson who said: 'It's a crime!
They've been and forgotten that Time is Time!'

C is for Croce who said: 'Art's a stuff
That means what it says (and that's little enough)!'

And also for Cambridge, that kindest of nurses,
Where 'tissues' write essays and 'ganglia' verses.

D is for Descartes who said: 'God couldn't be
So complete if he weren't. So he is. Q.E.D.'

And also Democritus (Atoms and Void
Were the only two things the man really enjoyed).

E is for Ellis, where men lived and died.
They couldn't walk out of that town if they tried.

F is for Fichte, who tapped on the pane
And said: 'Come in, my dear, I'm just starting to rain!'

G is the Good. Now we say that a cup
Or a shoe or a ship may be good... Oh, shut up!
All right, then, for Godwin who earns what he eats
By hoodwinking all the Romantics but Keats.

H is for Hume who awoke Kant from nappin'.
He said: 'There's no causes for things. They just happen.'

I am transcendent and I am empirical;
I am a slave and I am a miracle.

J is for Judgment. Identity please!
S s are S s and P s will be P s.

K is for Kant who said: 'Things in themselves
Are no good till the forms of per
ception and judgment have
pickled and bottled and
labelled and sorted 'em
out into neat little
rows on the shelves.'

L is for Leibnitz who said: 'It's the best
Of all possible worlds. I've examined the rest.'
(He also invented a nice calculation
To pull up fast trains – like a portable station).

M is the Many, the Moral, the Body.
The Formless, the Female, the Thoroughly Shoddy.

N is Not-Being which sinks even deeper,
More formless, more female, more footling – and cheaper.

But it's O for the One. Hallelujah! Callay!
Glory be! (And see also above under A);
For the One is all round like an accurate sphere
And its function is simple, my son – to cohere.

P is for Plato who held that Ideas
Were snobs who would only leave cards on their peers.

Q is for Quality – otherwise 'Whatness' –
The gauntness of Ghent and the totness of Totness.

R was a Realist, having no doubt
That it's there in the Bank, though you can't draw it out.
And also the Rumpus they made, when they found
That it wasn't the Sun but the Earth that went round.

S is for Socrates. Glad, if he'd met
Santayana and Spengler and some of that set!

T is for St. Thomas who gave me a shock
When he danced like a lady and struck like a clock!

U is for Upstairs to the Ultimate Unity,
Where we'd all better go at the first opportunity.
But, pilgrims afflicted with weak Understandings,
Oh beware of the Un-Dings you meet on the landings!

V is for Vico whose Views were heretical;
He thought Pithecanthropus wise and poetical.

W stands for Water whence Thales
Derived the whole Cosmos, beginning with Whales,
And also for Wells, who thinks God is defensible,
If only he'd take his advice and be sensible.

X is for Xenophanes: 'Mouse is myolatrous,
Rhinoceroses are rhinocerotatrous,
Billy and Nanny-goats both are tragolatrous,
Therefore religion is auto-adolatrous!
(The first of a very long series of scimmages
As to which fashioned which after which of their images).

Y is for Yoga – the subtle askesis
Of taking deep breaths in (which then one releases).

And Z? For poor Zeno who often felt faint,
When he heard you deny that Nonentity ain't.