

Bruce Charlton's Notions


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Bruce Charlton

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Thursday 7 December 2017

Positivism (which rules modernity) is death-by-definition

The Oxford English Dictionary definition of Positivism is a philosophical system recognising only that which can be *scientifically verified* or which is *capable of logical or mathematical proof*, and therefore *rejecting metaphysics and theism*.

To be more exact - Positivism *is itself a metaphysical assumption* - and that assumption is as above. This despite that Positivism explicitly denies the meaningfulness and/or validity of metaphysics. In sum, that denial of metaphysics and its 'replacement' by science/ logic/ mathematics, is itself *precisely* a metaphysical (not scientific, not logical, not mathematical) assumption.

On this clear and deadly contradiction is built modernity.

Positivism *is* modernity - in essence; it is what underpins and drives the modern way of thinking as it developed from ? the 1600s and which came to dominate by the late 1800s; and Positivism is solidly in place and totalitarian in all 'Western' developed societies.

The *dangers* of Positivism have been explicitly known since the Romantic era - for example in the works of William Blake and ST Coleridge. They knew, they predicted, exactly where it would lead, exactly the nature of the modern malaise. (Where they, and everyone else, fell short was in imagining the size, pervasiveness, addictiveness and influence of [the mass media](#).)

Why is Positivism so dangerous? Because Positivism is anti-God, it is sin; it is indeed death... Literally - Positivism implies a *necessarily* dead world.

It is literally death because *Positivism is a denial (and indeed ridicule) of the idea of reality as alive, conscious and purposive* - thus Positivism is also the assumption that everything is dead; in

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the sense that there is asserted to be no *real* or significant difference between what is generally regarded as alive and what is 'known' to be dead.

For instance; Cosmology, Physics, Mathematics are abstract and they concern dead (that is un-alive/ non-conscious) phenomena. However, under Positivism; Biology, Psychology, Consciousness all *ultimately* reduce to Physics: therefore Biology, Psychology and Consciousness are concerned with dead phenomena.

So, what we conventionally regard as Life is actually (by assumption) an arrangement of dead things, and Consciousness is an illusion (just yet another arrangement of dead things). This is standard, mainstream public discourse - and is Positivist.

Positivism is death and Abstraction is death - when abstraction is assumed to be 'true' rather than a *model* of truth.

Yet our spontaneous (built-in) assumption is of universal life and consciousness. In our childhood origins, and in the belief of the earliest known civilisations, the assumption is that everything-is-alive - we inhabit an animated, conscious reality.

However, these assumptions are not articulated, nor analysed, nor defended - they are simply taken for granted: life is based-on them.

So - over history (and through our personal development) *we went from dwelling in an animated-conscious universe to regarding ourselves as dead things inhabiting a dead/ meaningless/ purposeless reality*. Our task is to return to animism but with full consciousness.

In sum: God's work of creation is a work of animation - it is a bringing to life and consciousness of the stuff of reality.

We used to experience this, but not know it; we currently deny and do-not-experience it...

Our task is to *re-learn* the reality of God's creation, to *explain* how and why reality is animate and conscious; to *attain* the level of consciousness in-which the consciousness, life, personification of reality becomes apparent.

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(To use Owen Barfield's terminology - our task is to understand, choose and experience Final Participation.)

Posted by [Bruce Charlton](#) at [Thursday, December 07, 2017](#)



2 comments:

Unknown said...

"Our task is to return to animism but with full consciousness."

Very interesting, Bruce.

It isn't clear to me what being animistic with full consciousness would *add* to being animistic naturally, as an assumption.

In what way would be superior.

I can see how it may simply be necessary for us now, because to regain what is lost obviously requires conscious effort, but that is a different thing.

That being said, is returning to animism really our religious task? I have always understood religion as being about connecting with ultimate reality beyond the familiar everyday world.

Maybe animism is your way of expressing that same concept?

That we are accessing a living, vital reality beyond the familiar everyday world?

If so, we should keep in mind that traditional religion says if we want direct access to such a reality we must cultivate a faculty that transcends consciousness, and that consciousness is only an intermediate stage and by no means the highest experienced by man.

7 December 2017 at 18:55

Chiu ChunLing said...

I think that "animism" is being used in the specific sense of acknowledging that all aspects of the natural world are alive, and having a higher consciousness ourselves of the implications this has for the true significance of our actions and experiences as a result. It does not at all mean reducing our own consciousness to the level that we see in non-human and even non-animal aspects of the workings of nature.

I find especially cogent the charge that Positivism makes the metaphysical assumption that everything is essentially dead, including ourselves. In that view, we are "philosophical zombies", not just uncertain that *others* experience the qualia of conscious

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thought and emotion (which is indeed uncertain unless we are willing to assume it), but certain that *our own experience* of qualia is an illusion arising from the epi-phenomenal interaction of our neural capacity for organizing learned behavior with the imaginative faculty which allows simulation of behaviors based on predictive modeling. And darned if I can explain what that all even means, if our consciousness is an illusion.

It truly is a metaphysical assumption that not only the world around us, but our very selves, are essentially dead inside.

I find it an utter affront to the cold logic of merciless law. That logic finds unambiguously that the *sustained* appearance of life cannot be produced from meaningless physical processes. All such ephemera are strictly temporary and vanish immediately...more to the point, they cannot be perceived at all if there is no person to witness and assign some significance to them.

This is illustrated by the Boltzmann Brain paradox, which is commonly misunderstood. The implication is that *if* our consciousness is a kind of illusion resulting from blind physical processes, then it is overwhelmingly likely that our memories of sensory experiences and prior thoughts are as well, and we are in reality just a momentary flash of random quantum interactions bearing an accidental resemblance to the electrical state of a brain, a phenomenon that has no significant duration at all.

9 December 2017 at 14:52

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