

Bruce Charlton's Notions


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Bruce Charlton

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Tuesday 2 January 2018

The opposite of Abstract is... Personal (*not* 'concrete')

This is the essence of what I am currently trying to get across - a break point with the usual way of considering things.

Abstraction (pretty much) IS Positivism... and Positivism is what we are trying to escape. This, at least, is the case when Positivism is reconsidered as meaning Abstraction.

We start out as Personal - when we are children. As human culture (so far as we know) started out as personal - animistic, anthropomorphic, everything alive, conscious, personal.

Abstraction was introduced by (?) the Ancient Greek philosophers, and it grew initially in and from a situation of unconscious and spontaneous personalism. Thus the AG's advocated abstraction, but they were (by our modern Western standards) very animistic in their thought, behaviour and *language* (this last being well attested by Owen Barfield in his 1928 book *Poetic Diction* and elsewhere).

Since then Western Culture has become more abstract and less personal until now public life is wholly abstract - to the point that even in the Mass Media the personal is wholly abstract... that is my interpretation of the identity politics which has taken-over in the past 50 years: even people are now wholly (abstractly) representative of the class/ sex/ non-sex, race, religion of whatever. (As in the foundational feminist phrase *The Personal Is Political*.)

OK, it may be agreed that modernity is too abstract - a matter of models and symbols... but most people would regard *The Concrete* as the Opposite of *The Abstract*; I'm here pointing out that it is the *Personal* which is opposite.

So we must apparently become *Personal* instead of *Abstract* - but, I would emphasise, *Not* by trying to go back to being unconsciously and spontaneously and passively *Personal*, like a child or a putative simple hunter gatherer...

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This times and in the future it much be a choice, a choice or decision that must be consciously and freely made. We need to decide that Personal is how things *Really* are: that deep-down and objectively things are ultimately Not abstract, but that they Are instead personal.

So we live in a reality, a universe, a world, where things are persons, things are beings - beings are persons... at bottom and root we have living and conscious beings.

This entails that mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology are not really real; these are (more or less use-full) simplified (= ultimately and always *false*) models.

(Same applies to the abstractions of managerialism - all those processes, measures, stats and targets - they aren't The Bottom Line they are plain *wrong*.)

It's a big change I am asking and advocating; but I think this is *exactly what* is demanded, what we need to do - by divine destiny. It's where we are all going, sooner (this mortal life) or later (after mortal life)... although we can, of course, always deny it; because we can (we are free to) deny *anything*...

Posted by [Bruce Charlton](#) at [Tuesday, January 02, 2018](#)



3 comments:

Adil said...

Ah, so this is where all the scapegoating of the Left comes from. Always externalizing personal agency and responsibility onto abstract impersonal symbols - such as "The Patriarchy", "Fascism", "The Jew", "The Rich", "The People" et cetera. Perhaps the concrete and the personal are in a sense the same thing then? You know, directly, what it is! Or perhaps you're saying the abstract/concrete is "out there", and the personal is "in here" - looking back at each other?

2 January 2018 at 23:57

e Chiu ChunLing said...

I like the focus on *Personal* as opposed to Abstract. But I would shy from saying that the Concrete is not also a more general opposite. The Concrete, by nature, is also immediate and specific. All individual instances and examples are Concrete rather than Abstract.

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The Personal is the *most* Concrete, Descarte said "Cogito ergo Sum" in answer to the epistemological problem that affects even the Concrete, where it exists *external* to our own Person. It is by and through the immediacy of our own Personal instance that we have any evidence for other Concrete existence, but all these perceptual objects are *dependent* for their degree of Concreteness on the assumption (or rather, the irrefutable premise) of our own Personal existence.

We know our own mind to exist through the *most* direct and unmediated intuition. We instinctively infer our body to exist as an explanation for our perceptions, and the world external to our body as revealed by sense data. While these things are all lumped together as "Concrete", there is a center.

Abstraction, on the other hand, ends up telling us that there is no such thing as a soul, and that our sense of having free will and personality is a delusion. Even before it tries to explain away the rest of the Concrete, it attacks our core intuition of personally existing.

3 January 2018 at 15:41

Bruce Charlton said...

What counts as the opposite of Abstract depends on the metaphysical framework being used.

3 January 2018 at 17:35

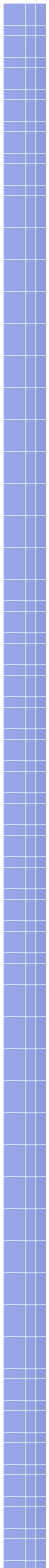
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