



NEXUS - BIOPHILIA

Patrick Shirvington

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A discussion with Phil Shirvington:

Discussion with Phil has taken place over years as I have sought insights into the meaning of certain questions and experiences in our life's journey. Phil's initial step was in the academic pursuit of science (geology) and education followed by studies in Integral psychology, researched by Ken Wilber and more recently a postgraduate study in Theology. My artistic path has taken me through the backstreets to some of the art garrets of Europe, drawing school in Paris and occasional meetings with fellow artists observing our journey as "artists". From texts, diaries and letters of the masters, I came to realise true art is a spiritual experience as distinct from a mere technical or draftsman-like exercise. As mentioned in the abstract "Through my collaboration I aim to develop a greater understanding of Biophilia, beyond the scientific template."

Art always the daughter of the divine, has become estranged from her parent. If it finds its way back to its origins and again is accepted by the divine, then it will become what it should within civilisation, within world-wide culture; a boon for mankind." Steiner 1923



Fig 1. Beppe Assenza In the Light, Watercolour 15 x 20 cm.

Science, in its common usage has come to be associated with the one and only way that data is gathered and tested. This is probably because the word was originally derived from the Latin word, "scientia", meaning knowledge or understanding! We

need to remember that when we use the word science in the context of gaining knowledge, we are generally referring to a particular approach or scientific method. Likewise when the word religion is used it is generally thought to mean a set of beliefs and rituals that are not subject to any verification process. This is too simplistic in both cases!

Firstly let's look at the scientific method of investigation. When we physically observe something, we are using our senses, termed eye of flesh, or when using a telescope, the extension of our senses; however we are only observing through sensory or monological experience. This monological way of looking doesn't have the ability to explain the aesthetics or mood of what we are seeing, this vision must then include a dialogical or eye of mind lens i.e. one that utilizes our imagination, exploring the seen with most of our mental capacity. The third way of seeing is termed translogical which is knowledge gained through contemplation. Just as reason transcends flesh, so contemplation transcends reason. Where the eye of reason is trans-empirical, the eye of contemplation is trans-rational, trans-logical and trans-mental. This is the *causal* realm and the knowing that develops, is sometimes described as *gnosis*, or knowledge of the spiritual realm.

In all three cases there are rigid steps and requirements for the 'seeing' to be described as real, valid and verifiable. All need an injunction or a set of skills and expertise in order to be able "to see". Without an understanding of how an electron microscope works, nothing of meaning will be revealed. Great painters first need to know how to paint! The discovery or revelation that is now available to the skilled artist is known as the illumination. This is the experience or the empirical data. This data is now made available for verification to and by the 'language community'. Confirmation of the findings may follow. Of course, it would be pointless to have a scientific community adjudicate on the artistic beauty of a pen and ink drawing or the experience of biophilia. To attempt such an investigation will inevitably commit a category error. It is the trap of reductionism or scientific materialism.

It could be said that the first two experiences, through the eye of flesh and the eye of mind, act in similar ways, as they refer to the seer and the seen and the felt life, which allows them both to be declared as object and able to be explained. The third 'translogical' experience as mentioned is only gained through contemplation. In his book The new Man, Thomas Merton described contemplation as – "*the perfection of love and knowledge*". In a similar way to the physical body achieving a natural state of health through constant awareness, nutrition and exercise, so to the higher spiritual level is achieved by exercising the mind through contemplation, meditation and silence.

It is important to say something about the so-called laws that govern the realm of spirit. The laws of physics and the realm in which they operate are well known and

so too the laws of logic, for example, that govern the realm of the mind or the rational. The laws of the spirit transcend the 'either/or' rules of the rational. The 'both/and' law becomes evident; even though it has always been there! The implications for this realization, this recognition, are profound, to say the least. Suddenly we and the world are not objective and distinct realities being observed by our subjective selves. We are *both* object *and* subject at the same time! "I am both one and not one!" "I am the pencil and the bush and the artist!" This is a developmental process and it has been possible for more than two thousand years, as the wisdom of the various religious faiths attest. The writings of all the major religions disclose this 'law' but only if one has completed the injunctions required in order to see!

If we now look at some of the work of Jean Piaget a 20th century Swiss psychologist and philosopher who worked with cognitive development in children. *"Piaget observed a toddler playing with a ball, when the ball rolled under a table where the child could still see it, the child retrieved the ball and continued playing. However when the ball rolled under the lounge out of sight, the child began looking for the ball where he had last seen it, a reaction that struck Piaget as irrational. Based on this observation, Piaget came to believe that children lack what he referred to as the object concept - the knowledge that objects are separate and distinct from both the individual and the individual's perception of that object."* Kendra Cherry.

Piaget also realised that children move through a hierarchy of cognitive abilities, from pre-operational to concrete and finally to the ability to reason abstractly. The aim of education and teachers, in general, is to facilitate this development. Taking these studies further, Ken Wilber speaks of the 'Great Nest', *"a holarchy of being and knowledge levels of reality and levels of knowing those levels.... The basic levels of the Great Nest are the basic waves of that unfolding matter to body to mind to soul to spirit."* Wilber (2000).

When we return to the original basis of this document *"I aim to develop a greater understanding of Biophilia, beyond the scientific template "*. We can begin to take the discussion out of the monological and dialogical frame and enter the translogical terms of reference as Kelly Cartwright comments *"cognitive development is what mediates the understanding of the relationship between mortals and the Eternal, even though environment plays a role (Cartwright 2001). Cartwright adds, "it is suggested that an individual's level of cognitive development constrains their understanding of this relation".* Cartwright (2001).

Like Piaget's studies of cognition in children, it is now recognised that higher levels of cognition develop throughout our entire life, Ken Wilber describes the levels in tiers that are represented in colours:

First Tier

Beige	Survival sense.....	100,000 years ago.....	<10% population
Purple.....	Tribal order.....	50,000 years ago.....	20%
Red.....	Power self.....	10,000 years ago.....	20%
Blue.....	Absolute order....	5,000 years ago.....	40%
Orange.....	Enterprising self....	1000 years ago.....	20%
Green.....	Egalitarian order....	150 years ago.....	10%

Second Tier

Yellow.....	Integrated self.....	50 years ago.....	1%
Turquoise....	Global order.....	30 years ago.....	1%

Wilber recognises “*that most educated adults are capable of a teal or turquoise level of cognition*” Wilber (2006) which sees the world as a single, dynamic organism with its own collective mind integrating with spiritual bonds inviting overall health of the universe through interlocking forces. In his book Integral life Practice, Wilber states that Turquoise level “*sees that the universal Christ consciousness can be found everywhere, in everyone and in every perspective*”. Wilber (2008).

Once we perceive the world or appreciate the world can be viewed at different levels of consciousness, we can immediately take up the discussion again that a higher soul/spiritual consciousness is accessible through contemplation. William Law comments “*Though GOD is everywhere present, yet He is only present to thee in the deepest and most central part of thy soul. The natural senses cannot possess God or unite thee to Him; nay, thy inward faculties of understanding, will and memory can only reach after God, but cannot be the place of His habitation in thee.*” Law (1939). Through contemplation we are able to view the natural world through all of our senses evoking a deeper spiritual awareness, arousing a sense of veneration , from the smallest seed to the beautiful sight of a rock outcrop exhibiting a timelessness against the symphonic sound of the ever present singing birds. The words of Elizabeth Johnson echo this belief, “*Religious contemplation rachets up what is at stake because it sees the world thus appreciated as God’s handiwork, a place of encounter with the divine.*” Johnson (2014). Elizabeth’s book Ask the beasts was an enquiry into the old testament book of Job 12:7-10

⁷ “*But ask the beasts, and they will teach you;*

the birds of the heavens, and they will tell you;

⁸ *or the bushes of the earth,^[a] and they will teach you;*
and the fish of the sea will declare to you.

⁹ *Who among all these does not know*
that the hand of the LORD has done this?

¹⁰ *In his hand is the life of every living thing*
and the breath of all mankind.”

Approaching biophilia in light of higher consciousness may be beyond explanation, however it clarifies a presence that otherwise would remain a mystery. Returning to the natural landscape with pencil and paper in hand, sitting still awaiting in the silence of contemplation.

"The artist must be blind to distinctions between 'recognised' or 'unrecognised' convention of form, deaf to the transitory teaching and demands of his particular age. He must watch only the trend of the inner need, and hearken to its words alone." Wassily Kandinsky 1914



Fig 2. Wassily Kandinsky.

I hope this has opened doors for further engagement and discussion on what biophilia may be, allowing the natural world to speak to us, with a sense of serenity, requesting a reply with reverence.

Images:

Fig 1. Beppe Assenza. In the Light, Watercolour 15 x 20 cm. Rudolf Steiner Press, London. P33

Wassily Kandinsky. Composition VII, 1913. oil on canvas, 200 x 300 cm. Moscow, State Tretjakov Gallery. Benediki Taschen Verlag GmbH 1993. P52.

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I would also like to thank Phil, for the knowledge gleaned throughout this paper.