

## Darwin On The Wall: Cornford's Continuative Theory of Man as Neighbor

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In the study of the products of the critical thinking and the new logic of the PreSocratics, what is consequent to a methodology that aims to exclude their mythical background however this is possible, alleging this is precisely the appropriate direction evident in the Fragments? Francis MacDonald Cornford considers the question on the 'borrowing' and the 'influencing' mode so that the Fragments cannot be interpreted properly without reference to their corresponding mythical roots.

It appears that the PreSocratics were never original in the strict sense of the term and their speculations were either motivated, even in a negative manner, or influenced in the broad sense of the term by their past, e.g., their religion or their unconscious. As a consequence, Cornford's fundamental framework leaves itself open to the genetic elements of the mystery in the *ante hoc* condition of the Fragments and which *must* therefore be precluded in the interpretive task. The *continuative theory* which I coin, assumes this framework, which essentially flashbacks the critical importance of the Fragments' genetic origins in this task.

Seventy nine years after its first publication, F. M. Cornford's opus *From Religion To Philosophy*, (Princeton Univ. Press, 1991) is reissued. Now Cornford is back in circulation (Or, was he ever out of circulation in Ancient Philosophy scholarship?), ever old and ever new, to renew old

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acquaintances both friends and foes, and to continue the celebrated debate on the Greeks which he figured as major proponent of a distinct position.

### Neighboring is not othering

In the later years of the eighteenth century, Francis Macdonald Cornford was a name which students of ancient philosophy scholarship watched with mixed emotions. The name identified with Cambridge scholars evoked curiosity and respect, as the basal arguments of the current authoritative studies on the Greeks were being questioned by his motley group of researchers. The view popularized by Renaissance scholars, took as a *Given* that the Greeks were outright insulated from aboriginal influences despite the explicit similarities of the classical myths with their much later primitive counterparts discovered in the European colonies. The discovery threatened the considered view that the Greek society was indeed self-contained and whatever intellectual products they concocted out of their speculations were self-resourced.

With the kind of thematic of research which Cornford et al were undertaking, the interpretations of Greek religion and philosophy equation were never to be the same again, contrasting the conventional grounds they were understood before. The fundamental contention of Cornford's Cambridge Ritualists was some form of a continuative theory which believed otherwise that the Greeks were not at all a select population, in the sense of being invulnerable to external infusions of culture whether past or present. An osmotic exchange between cultures to say the least, was unavoidable. An outright negation of a natural process which was inevitable, even in the rawest form of common sense, was, in every sense, incomprehensible.

The Cambridge option meant an reinterpretation of the Greek sources through an altogether different light shed by, e.g. the Darwinian evolutionary anthropology, the French collectivist sociology which was applied to its implications in religion, and the encyclopedic works of J.G. Frazer which recognized and appreciated the influence of primitive customs and ideas on the Greeks.

The new thematic reintroduced Man as neighbor, not as an other; his ideas were intersecting moments of a global intellectual matrix which had its common ground, not as singular, atomary and discrete

units; and, historical periods were viewed as artificial human constructs which alone aimed to systematize but together fitted into a whole. In reality history was rather a set of continuous concentric interactives which spiraled towards a certain direction.

The PreSocratic thinker was a community man no matter how crude the community was, and it seemed absurd a methodology to reduce his mode of thinking into a set of synthetic diagrams or equations. The short histories on Thales, Anaximander, Xenophon, etc., reflected personalities that were certainly more than armchair. Cornford's mode created a reconstructive wave on the received theories previously held regarding the Greek tragedy at its apex in the sixth century B.C.

### **To match is to interpret**

When Nietzsche pioneered his philological revolution on the Greeks in 1871, dramatic discoveries were being excavated in Greece and the Middle East, and the findings provided scholars greater inspiration and impetus in broadening perspectives in their studies of ancient and biblical literature. Twenty years before, the publication of the *The Origin of Species* had prognosticated ominous events way beyond its empirical findings, that the history of ideas needed reformulation and rewriting.

Nietzsche, Darwin, and the archeologists, need not know each other at all. But the extrapolations of their respective achievements converged in marked parallels intersecting and forming a matching interpretive spirit. The existing canons of research were threatened and so was Nietzsche dismissed by the philological organization to which he belonged. Notwithstanding, the existing canonical products were similarly threatened and what was feared would happen took place. What appeared in the process was a grand scale dismantling of old paradigms and the emergence of different ones. No human construct was spared, no less the religious faith of the believer's inner sanctum, from the tentacles of the scientific revolution. Hereon, man was in fuller grasp of his situation by increasingly loosening his control, and indeed, by the ever changing parameters was he decisive of what he wanted to accomplish.

His interiority as well as his environs were to be reorganized and refurbished. If his language reflected his being, then he was indeed

going to be a Different Man. The succeeding events were beginning to form an inverted pyramid.

### **Truth is gathering-anew**

The points indicated above did not mean however that the new paradigms would altogether be new. There was no such thing as an original in the restricted sense of the term. It was not really a total unknown that they dealt with, but it involved the existing precipitates which were either overlooked, forgotten, or underestimated by the previous scholars. This time, it was a retrieval of the being-far-flung into a being-nearby. The permutative process was not to be centered solely on the rearrangement of what was explicit and stable givens so to say, but the new paradigms explicitated the imprecise and the vague.

This time, the myths were not to be excluded again. It was the unknown remote past that needed to be expressed in more certain terms towards a clearer and more organic interpretation. It was the articulation of the unspoken and the presencing of oblivion. If, as Heidegger is wont to believe that truth is gathering, the new paradigm meant a gathering-more. Much like the saying that there was wisdom in confusion, there too was truth in the opaque. But for one, Heidegger meant his words to refer to the Fragments alone, excluding Cornford's major thesis.

What would be considered new would be a rediscovery that the thinking of the Greeks of the 5th century needed a reconfiguration as a result of the enlargement of the cosmos of interpretation. This involved a more positive reconsideration of the Greek's prior philosophies and religious influences which the Presocratics were alleged to have used their geniuses to invalidate and extricate from their subsequent speculations.

### **Is authoring intending?**

While opposing their religious tradition seemed to be the intent of the postHomerian Greeks, it was altogether another thing for researchers to follow this same flow in interpreting their samples. The authorial intention so called, even if expressed by the majority of the cases should be handled with extreme caution and discernment. The choice of

methodologies can spell life or death for research. If the researcher pursued the matter in terms of a demarcated and bracketed rationalizing on the data of reason as allegedly exercised by the Greeks, this implied assundering philosophy from its roots which the Greeks apparently did not *fully* succeed. Consequently, philosophy was never totally severed from its living font and major pipeline, e.g., their religion. The assundered mode of interpretation was apparently done under the influence of the logic of the received scientific view, of a tradition in consonance with the accepted praxis of the current practitioners. This however was the wrong kind of interpretive model, Cornford asserted. Cornford tried to look at the other way where not many researchers were, for one reason or another, willing to pursue.

Cornford's "primitivization" of the Greek Mind meant the grand research work of restoration and beginning anew. A reexamination of the origins of the Greek Mind firmed up a different research output even if it meant inferencing the unexpected. This meant using new tools and adopting an entirely different perspective. This also meant that the previous questions which we were raising, and the answers we were satisfied with, were no longer tenable. Darwin's revolution created macrocosmic ripples not only in his vantage area but so too in the unexplored crevices of the psyche of modern man. What Darwin proved to be successful in evolutionary science, Cornford did not see any reason at all why a similar matrix should not work in the classics and philosophy. Cornford's principle of substitutionality led to the adoption of an approach that did not only mean going against the prevailing logic in dealing with the Greeks, for which he shared cogent reasons, but it meant going against the logic of the grooves of reason of his own samples.

### **The mothering of metaphors**

In the same line of thinking, any event that was viewed molecular and insulated was no longer to be taken as a reality but a fiction. There was no such thing as the Greek "age of religion" on one hand, and "an age of philosophy" on the other, except possibly in metaphor construction. But even this apology did not hold any ground anymore! Reality was the Mother of metaphors that tolerated the play of the puny logic of man to syllogize and formulate algorithmic explanations. Cornford's worldview treasured the idea that the thinker was always thinking *in* and expressing himself in a language *of* his times. He is inextricably a

product of his culture but which culture was never explicit about every belief it cherished nor of every argument it wished to pose. The silent may be inexplicable but this did not follow that it did not mean anything at all. The unstated may be difficultly translated, but this did not mean that it was untranslatable. The products of critical thinking of the PreSocratics were in fact social metaphors as they were expressed in terms of current thought and understanding.

All these may be referred to a series of interfacing concepts of reflection such as assumptions, the unwritten philosophy, the moral intuitions, the basic allegiances, the atmosphere of the mind, the unconscious presuppositions, the collective representations, the great issues; which were deemed equally existent and real as life itself. They were considered more indelible than the explicits of word and text, in fact more critical were they in the sense they implied and they were intervening without being questioned. The elusive nature of these components was critical in Cornford's worldview of the Greeks, and perhaps for this singular difficulty posed by the matter, Cornford's instincts sensed a goldmine.

### **The missing link**

What Cornford in effect revolutionized was the fact that we cannot anymore safely presume that we truly understand what we thought we understood, and therefore take them for granted, vis-a-vis the conventional underlying assumptions that grounded the Greek text. If these grounds were to mean anything at all now, these should reflect the organic life of the Greeks of the period which was a product of a sacred story transforming into a sacred text. The life of these people were anything but demarcated, so unlike ours, or so we seem. Cornford research drew attention to what appeared to him as the Darwinian "missing link" in his study of the Greeks.

Cornford succeeded to carve a unique school of thought that emphasized its privileged combinatory hermeneutical tools in the task of interpreting the Greeks. These tools appeared to be a singular reaction against the individualism of his times, against the tide of scientific positivism which refused to render credence to the unprovable by direct means such as the probable virtually existent. Cornford's worldview was not only inspired by Darwin. It found another articulate centerpoint in Durkheim's theory of collective representation. It is no

wonder then that the products of the PreSocratic thinking would innately be a gathering of social metaphors which were popular expressions of the thinking of the times.

### ***Nomos is ethos***

These social constructs possessed the virtues of being expressive vehicles of life, of its times, and even of its space. As vehicles and expression of life, they mirrored the strengths and weaknesses of the Greek, and illustrated his modes and content of social communications. More importantly perhaps were these metaphors cardinal in that they mirrored his indelible origins and his perceived destiny despite his conscious efforts to deflect these with his contrapuntal energies and march towards critical thinking. Modern man could never imagine a period such as the Greek times which engaged an intimate holistic relationship between custom (*nomos*) and nature (*physis*). The interpretive temptation that prevailed was to set them apart, to compartmentalize, and to distribute them to different academic turfs. While this seemed practical and specialized, in fact more scientific, the Cambridge option otherwise deemed it unrealistic and ill-advised. On all counts this was intellectually suffocating and disjuncting to the creative and the interdisciplinary which Cornford et al were.

Now we are told the view that Pythagoras and his company who considered philosophy as a way of life did not cease to inspire this kind of conviction in his company alone. Why should Parmenides theorize two worlds of which one was unreal and the other real? Why was the Greek soul so enchanted with Destiny (*moira*)?

As congenital (or reactionary?) metaphysicians, the Greeks had the material continuum which was the *physis* of life, of divinity, of God, and of the soul. It was a sensible which was endowed with the mythical. What we consider today as metaphysics of the Greeks was rootedly emotional in character; what we consider now as speculative was myth-based. Demythologization may have resulted from the rational inquiry by the colossal minds of a Parmenides, an Anaximander, a Heraklitus; but was this process thorough and entire as not to warrant some kind of an organic and combinatory tool to interpret them? Was the experience of Nature so anaesthetic as to exclude the slightest hint of ethical conjurations? Most of the Continental thinkers were inclined to focus their interpretations on the extant Fragments of the PreSocratics alone

influenced by the hermeneutical school which did not consider any other source other than an existing text produced by the writer. Cornford's insular origins thought otherwise.

### Beyond the Fragments

Guthrie in his voluminous works now used as the most popular textual readings by students and mentors was inclined to believe in Cornford's theory. But you will observe that he was Cornford's student.

Plato in his theory of the soul was a classic case of this underpinning which was mythical in influence (p.245ff). Still, he noted that the dropping of *Love and Strife* by the later followers of Empedocles resulted in an opinion which put them at the center of the scientific tradition (*Laws* 889Bff). Aristotle, the exemplar of the most rigorous kind of Greek speculation was neither totally immune from this culture on one hand, and when apparently he made attempts to distance himself from this element, he was noted to experience interpretive lapses in his commentary on the PreSocratics on account of his failure to connect with the relevant myth (p.241ff). In the long run, we recognize the fact that in more ways than one, the PreSocratic thinker explicitated unconscious vestiges of his religious background which appeared crucial towards the proper interpretation of his philosophy. The tenuous stretch between the religious origins and the emergence of the critical mind manifested by Greeks was the parameter which Cornford enlarged putting his genius on the former in order to better interpret the latter.

This meant the consequence that the study of the PreSocratics should go beneath the usage of the extant Fragments. Thinking and being engaged by these writers on their written texts demanded a study of antecedents which in one way or another fractured into the essentials of the text. The pen could do no less if the PreSocratic mind was still under such spell. The interpreter disabled himself when he linearly forced the text to fit into his preconceptions and tradition.

Nature as source of speculation did not only refer to the unconcealing present. Nature was not to be taken as some kind of a providential catalyst which unlocked the door to the mental storeroom of treasures which awaited the configuration commanded by the thinker. Neither was Nature a pre-formatted set objects which configuration was at the

mercy of the tool used by the interpreter. Would it then be a choice between the tools of psychology or of natural science?

Nature was a living, harmonious, and preordained order. The extrapolation that man's life should mirror such order which as *phusis* was evolving and; that Aristotle's God was self-contemplating, were abstractions which were not fully devoid of myth. This goes without saying that natural science with its algorithms which was the major influence of those who objected to Cornford's methodology must now take cognizance of the psychological antecedents that in fact entered into the unedited scientific reports.

### The escape to darkness

The theory set by Cornford may at this point in time, scandalize the scholar of our contemporary mix. It would be an interesting revelation to the reader if he peruses the works on the Presocratics by Taylor, Dodds, Barnes, Raven, Jaeger, Heidegger, Russell, Riceour, Levinas, and Gadamer. Or better still, it would be an interesting revelation to sample the digest of conference papers delivered at symposia on Plato and Aristotle. The issue may probably boil down to these more fundamental problems: Is philosophizing possible without history? Is history not more organic with anthropology and archeology? How does a conglomeration of disciplines affect the received view on scope and limitations required of a research project? Does scientific method mean the method of natural science?

But a similar thing would probably happen as when he first published in 1912. That his theory should continue to raise apprehensions today would have pleased him no end, not excluding the appearance of this reprint. For one, contentions are relative to intellectual positionings, or better said, underpinnings. Cornford could never imagine a philosophic act without its corresponding historicizing act to provide the internal structurings of the problematic.

In the tradition of the Cornfordian mind, religious history was not to be excluded from philosophy and the latter was impossible without the former. In the case of the PreSocratics, Cornford insisted that the better hands-on historian of the myths would probably have better chances of interpreting the Fragments. Quite clearly, Cornford's theory does not at all exclude the study of the Fragments. The Fragments-only

interpreters have no doubt accomplished a tremendous job. But such studies would certainly have more organic results if they involved the theologian and the philosopher. His was the mind that religious history in this context was not to be reduced to a set of events with predetermined limits of its scope of study. Nor was it to be limited to the cryptic and the mystical which philosophers no doubt will refuse to have any part with. The interpretation of the Fragments is unimaginable without its involved historical context which conversely provides the philosophical imagination the badly needed life to en flesh those parchments. This historical component is not limited to its localized immediate contacts. They included the very remote past still living in the present unconscious. The task of philosophizing and theologizing can no longer be held a monopoly of philosophers and theologians.

### **Beneath philosophizing**

Cornford was a staunch believer in the power of the poetic mind so called, as an important component of the philosophical act. The essential Greek mind was no less talented in this aspect. Their awesome talent to abstract and to craft lofty architectonics whether in theory or in sculpture proved this point. It was a mind cultured in symmetry, beauty, and the arts. The regions of the universals were more penetrable via the poetic imagery which according to him brought in the "prophetic gift of insight" (Guthrie, 1967: viii). This constituted the single guiding parable in the work of Cornford whether he wrote about Thucydides or Plato. There was a common frame which bonded the essential Modern man with the essential Greek mind however different and distanced their climates of thought. To support his contention, he quoted A. N. Whitehead (1925: 71): "When you are criticizing the philosophy of an epoch, do not chiefly direct your attention to those intellectual positions which its exponents feel it necessary explicitly to defend. There will be some fundamental assumptions which adherents of all the variant systems within the epoch unconsciously presuppose." It is then quite facile to lose sight of this singular element simply because they were seldom challenged, if at all.

It is equally facile to consider the philosophic concepts of say, substance, cause, etc, as mere abstractions without venturing into the inner forces and the implicits which configured them, and which made them more intelligible. Such positioning of seeking out the implicits

was quite typical of the works of Jung. It was too, the considered position of Cornford that the fruits of the speculative thought of the PreSocratics such as the 'water' of Thales, were in fact the mythical forms working behind their minds. The scientific achievements of the PreSocratics involved the removal of various layers of these accretions which have accumulated through eons of time but which roots remained. What the PreSocratics discovered were in fact a *rediscovery*. Yet, it is the singular merit of the Greeks to have constructed an elaborate logic which have persisted to our time.

Such achievements, in the mind of Cornford, were issues of an evolutionary process, of the intellect working on instinct, of the conscious nourishing on the unconscious, and, vice versa. As a scholar whose respect for the Fragments remained, but whose interpretation of the same insisted on archeological facts, Cornford always kept his doors open. What Cornford had appropriately immortalized was the bedrock of genuine scholarship that transcended the mere confines of the library and saw the wisdom of philosophy being further proven or disproven by fieldwork. It was the premium that he set on the living interrogative, whether it meant his questioning hallowed paradigms enthroned by existing dispensations, or whether it meant his arguments being submitted to questioning by his peers, both friends and foes, to whom he maintained consuming modesty.

Here was a thinker who recognized the capital importance of the mystical elements present in man's spirit, and thought they were neither irrational nor impertinent. They were an inextricable part that made his being. The divine or its mystery was not to be considered an obstacle to rationality even if reason failed to provide satisfactory justifications for his beliefs, scripted or oral. Reason by negating a part of its being may not easily succeed avoiding the self-inflicted danger of putting his speculated but constricted being ultimately in question. Without the divine he does not only err, he self-destructs.

Philosophy as a social theory can no longer evade such questions which does not only beg for meaning. Philosophy as a study of being human can no longer evade the mystical question which possibly holds the key to his understanding why he ought to be human in praxis. In this phase, Philosophy as text descends, in recognition of its innate mortality. Philosophy as life can only survive if it is allowed to live in the open frontiers and break the fetters of his own making, within which he had imprisoned himself.

In philosophy and in life, Cornford proved one aspect of a scholar that even his objectors must submit. The final verdict on the case of the Greeks have not been issued yet. To both parties and to the rest of their readers, the moral behind Cornford's stamina reads: The Greeks are not through in the presentation of their case. The hearing continues.