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# The Experience of Enchantment and the Sense of Wonder

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper begins by drawing on accounts of enchantment as wonder by three authors (Alain-Fournier, Aldous Huxley and J.R.R. Tolkien) to explore its basic characteristics and dynamics. It then draws a contrast with the disenchantment attending will and the will-to-power, noting the internal affinity of the latter with the project of modernity and its contrast with enchantment as a non-modern experience. It then proceeds to a critique of three influential philosophers' portrayals of enchantment (Philip Fisher, Jane Bennett and Akeel Bilgrami, as well as Charles Taylor), which it faults for not paying closer attention to the implications of the experience of enchantment. It closes with a plea for philosophy aligned with the humanities rather than sciences.

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## What enchantment Is

I shall first concentrate on three writers' accounts of enchantment, supplemented by a few others, linked through their salient 'family resemblances' (Wittgenstein 2001, 27$^{e}$-28$^{e}$). The idea is to relate them to some of the fundamental characteristics and dynamics of enchantment, but also to convey something of its quality: its flavour or scent, 'at once dazzling and dubious' (Jankélévitch 2003 [1961], 127). Then we shall turn to what enchantment is not: not only simple disenchantment but the programmatic version at the heart of the project of modernity. My penultimate section takes a critical look at how enchantment has fared at the hands of certain contemporary philosophers. I close with a few remarks about enchantment and the arts and humanities.

My goal throughout is understanding, which acknowledges and honours the phenomenon. (This actually accords with the classical meaning of theory, which was a journey to observe, and return to describe, the religious rituals of another people [Nightingale 2004].) I am therefore not interested in explanation, insofar as that involves the reduction of the phenomenon to something – a mere effect, even an epiphenomenon – generated by some other, more important and therefore more interesting cause. Description can include elaboration and amplification, but it renounces the imperialism of explanation supposedly licenced by scientific naturalism. Hence I agree with Ludwig Wittgenstein (2001, 40$^{e}$) that we should 'do away with all explanation, and description alone must take its place'.

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There are two kinds of reduction usually applied to enchantment. One is 'up', to God (or a proxy); the other is 'down', usually to neurophysiology. As we shall see, by reason of enchantment's peculiarly non-modern character this Procrustean apportioning to one or the other is particularly destructive. A third strategy is a 'sideways' displacement, conflating enchantment with something else such as the fantastic, the surreal, the Gothic, the uncanny, the sublime, Romanticism, or secularism, which then becomes the focus of interest. It is true that enchantment has some commonalities with some of these categories, but it is exhausted by none, and I believe we must attend, carefully and respectfully, to what makes it distinctive.

Asking 'What is enchantment?' has additional benefits. It more than compensates for its naivëté by encouraging a direct and comprehensive engagement with the subject, rather than quickly escaping into the sterile hinterlands of esoteric meta-level and hyper-discursive speculation. And 'comprehensive' must include the personal, as experience is nothing if not that, although it is never only that. Such consideration thereby brings to attention that dimension which, although inalienable, is too easily ignored, often even systematically suppressed, in the academy. Objectivity is not achieved by eliminating the personal, which is impossible, but only – albeit asymptotically – by paying passionate attention, which reflexively *includes* the personal.

For those who want a little more theoretical context at the start, we can say, minimally and safely, that the hallmark of enchantment – its fundamental family characteristic – is 'existential wonder' (Hepburn 1984, 140). The effects can vary in intensity from charm, through delight, to full-blown joy. We will mainly be concerned with the last, which I call 'radical enchantment.' Note that I don't describe it as 'pleasure', the quality of which differs. I could say 'awe' but the cognitive element is already too commonly emphasised – not to mention the unhelpful baggage of 'the sublime' – so the affective tone of 'joy' is preferable.

Wonder itself remains a primitive concept which cannot be further analysed; it is bedrock. Our sense of it can be sharpened, however, by its principal contrast-class: *will*, and especially any version of the will-to-power. Of course, enchantment is often entangled with will in various contexts. Nonetheless, the two remain distinct and indeed immiscible, like oil and water. If *making* something happen, or someone (including oneself) do something, is what is happening – or, in a secondary extension of the will, planning and arranging that – then wonder is absent; and vice versa.

Let's start with a paradigmatic experience of enchantment, namely falling deeply in love. Here is the eighteen-year-old Alain-Fournier (1986, 208, 210–12), in notes he wrote immediately after encountering Yvonne de Quiérecourt, one year younger, on the steps outside the Grand Palais, in Paris. It is the 1st of June 1905. They will continue to correspond occasionally, and even to meet, although the following year she will marry someone else. Nine years later, just after finishing his youthful masterpiece of adolescent enchantment and its end, *Le Grand Meulnes*, he will die on the Western Front.

> . . . all of a sudden, there SHE is coming out opposite me, walking quickly, gazing
>
> resolutely in front of her. I whisper to myself: Fate! The whole of my fate . . .
>
> is entering the omnibus office [with her] – where is she going?
>
> . . . I can still see her broad-brimmed pink hat through the window – less clearly her

> blonde, childish, expressive head. And haughty with it all as if slightly confused,
>
> making her seem nevertheless slender and tall and evoking the effect of pretty things
>
> which pretty though they are fail to give any idea of the slenderness and elegance
>
> of a body beyond all dreams . . ..
>
> [and] a tiny tear in the lower part of her brown skirt.

Here are all the lineaments of enchanted love: the inexpressible mystery, conveyed in the smallest concrete detail, of a being whose beauty evokes divinity; spirituality inseparable from carnality; the grandest setting become intimate as a village; later, the desolation when it withdraws; and fatefulness, which leaves nothing important unchanged.

Alain-Fournier's account brings out another fundamental fact concerning enchantment: it is relational, specifically an encounter across a gap separating two parties, two selves, which then transcends that difference. As W.H. Auden (2015, 343) puts it, 'for there to be one there must first be two'. The prerequisite is thus not union but difference, in order to create something new, a *tertium quid*: the relationship itself. Differences remain – in this case, he is still he, and she is still she – but they cease to dominate.

This is precisely Paul Ricoeur's (2003) understanding of metaphor, which is both evidenced by enchantment and illuminates it. Far from merely a literary device, nor simply epistemological, it is ontological. As he argues of metaphor more generally, what enchants is partly discovered and partly created. It usually takes the form of 'This is (also) that', or 'This is (also) not this'. A Classical example is the discovery that 'Achilles is a lion!' That is, Achilles is apprehended as a man who is also a lion. Therefore he is, but also is not, (only) a man.

Particularly as it becomes radical, enchantment entails paradox which defies, or simply ignores, the Aristotelian so-called laws of identity, non-contradiction and excluded middle. If metaphor is parsed as merely a simile, in order to observe the logical pieties ('Achilles is like a lion in certain specified respects'), enchantment is eliminated along with the full truth on offer, which concerns something not accidental but essential about Achilles; in those respects, he just *is* a lion. As D.W. Winnicott (1971, 7) says, in a closely-related context, 'By flight to split-off intellectual functioning, it is possible to resolve the paradox, but the price of this is the loss of the value of the paradox itself.'

In the case of falling in love, the paradox almost always takes the form of 'This human being is (also) a god or goddess.' ('The better class of gods,' as Terry Pratchett 2006 says. 'Not the ones with tentacles, obviously.') In other words, it becomes virtually impossible not to perceive the enchanting one as divine or mythic. But please note that this is not merely a 'projection' onto a passive recipient. That idea is one of the principal weapons in the armoury of modernist disenchantment, usually in the service of privileging the (human) mind, culture, and formerly, but sometimes still, spirit. The phenomenon I am talking about is not primarily cognitive, psychological or epistemological – all of which serve as strategies for preserving human exceptionalism and domination – nor, by extension, scientific.[1] It comprises a new reality, one partly created by the enchantment but equally and inseparably, a deep truth about the other. Its domain is ontological.

For the parties involved, it is virtually impossible to stand outside the relationship and evaluate it in a disinterested, dispassionate or 'objective' way. Given the mythicity or

divinity that accompanies this dynamic at its most intense, it is therefore not surprising that enchantment is (and not only feels) fateful. As Max Weber (1991, 348) observes with feeling, 'No consummated erotic communion will know itself to be founded in any way other than through a mysterious destination for one another: fate, in the highest sense of this word.' Indeed, even to refuse the enchantment (which is difficult, but possible) is fateful; it has already penetrated the citadel, so that refusal will become a turning-point in one's life no less than accepting it.

Despite what Pratchett implies, the enchanting party need not be another human being. He, she or it may well be another animal, or plant, or place, or any sight, sound, taste, smell or texture, or even an idea. (If the last, especially, seems challenging, let us recall Weber's relational definition of truth: 'only that which wants to be true for all those who want the truth' [Schaff 1989, 118].) In this process, the other party, no matter who or what, both becomes, and is realised as, another person: that is, a subject and agent constituted as a particular personality. In this connection, it has become urgent to free the concept of person from the death-grip of anthropocentrism; there are countless non-human persons who are potential participants in relationships, some of them enchanting, with human persons.

Now since particularity is inseparable from contingency, the enchanting one is necessarily vulnerable; but that vulnerability, rather than impugning their value, only increases it.[2] (Note the sharp contrast with Parmenidean and Platonic ideas of truth-value as just what doesn't change.) Conversely, whatever is generic, purely abstract or universal cannot enchant; not, that is, while remaining so. Furthermore, since the enchanting party is another subject, the enchanted person is apprehended as well as apprehending. As Rilke (1995, 67) found facing the archaic torso of Apollo in the Louvre, 'here there is no place that does not see you.' The statue even had a very specific message for him: 'You must change your life'.

By the same token, no one is in charge. That is what genuine relationship entails, as opposed to one-way domination. In a word (and this will have significant consequences for our understanding of re-enchantment), enchantment is wild. Being therefore unbiddable, it cannot be created at will, managed, or controlled. If that is happening then what you have is not enchantment but a simulacrum – pliable, useful, and often very profitable – which I call 'glamour'.

The second account I want to quote and explore is that of Aldous Huxley, describing his experiment with mescaline on the morning of 6 May 1953, in Los Angeles. What struck Huxley (1959, 17) was something usually quite ordinary – a rose, a carnation and an iris in a small glass vase – transformed into

> a bunch of flowers shining with their own inner light and all but quivering under the pressure of the significance with which they were charged … what rose and iris and carnation so intensely signified was nothing more, and nothing less, than what they
>
> were – a transience that was yet eternal life, a perpetual perishing that was at the
>
> same time pure Being …

Let's not be distracted by the issue of drugs. I myself think Huxley's motivation was crucial. He was not trying to attain, or recover, a desired and pre-determined condition. It was simply, if strongly, intellectual curiosity, allied to an unusually well-developed articulacy. But in any

case, a supplementary quotation from Hugo von Hofmannsthal (2005, 122) makes the same essential point. A watering-can, a harrow in a field, a dog in the sun – as Hofmannsthal notes,

> Any one of these objects, and thousands like them which the eye normally takes for granted and passes over with indifference, can suddenly, in a moment which I am quite powerless to call up at will, take on for me a sublime and moving aspect that all words seem too poor to express.[3]

What these two accounts point to is another fundamental attribute which Max Weber (1991, 282) termed 'concrete magic'. (It is also present in the amalgam of spirituality and carnality in Alain-Fournier's account: the impact of the tiny tear in his beloved's dress, for example.) What Weber means is that enchantment is fundamentally both 'concrete' – particular, contextual, embedded and embodied – *and* 'magic': inexhaustibly mysterious and ineffable, or, in a word, spiritual.

As such, enchantment is 'upstream' of our ingrained distinctions between subjective and objective, inner and outer, self and other.[4] It's not that these cannot be distinguished from each other; they can, but simply as contrasting qualities, without the foundational status they have long had in the dominant Western metaphysical tradition.

It follows that enchantment cannot be portioned out, without fatality, to either of our two dominant 'competing monisms' (Jonas 1982, 16) or 'two species of superstition' (Bateson and Bateson 1987, 151): supernaturalism, with culture and the mind as secular stand-ins for spirit, and mechanistic materialism. By virtue of its indissoluble concrete magic, enchantment is thus fundamentally non-modern.[5] (Not anti-modern, note; to be deliberately anti-modern is simply another programme, which is therefore easily co-opted and controlled by modernity, the acme of programmicity.) Any theorisation of enchantment which is faithful to its experience will itself therefore tend to fall outside of that tradition, whether its idealist or its materialist versions.

Huxley (1959, 17) comments that 'Plato seems to have made the enormous, the grotesque mistake of separating Being from becoming and identifying it with the mathematical abstraction of the Idea.' And enchantment *qua* concrete magic is indeed radically non-Platonic. Conversely, it is clear that Platonism and its modern heirs, including Cartesianism, are bitter enemies of enchantment. For good reason, Weber (1991, 139) identifies one of the principal weapons of disenchantment as the splitting of concrete magic 'into rational cognition and mastery of nature, on the one hand, and into "mystic" experiences, on the other'. Modern materialism merely inverts the dualism it inherited by hypervaluing rational mastery, leaving whatever cannot be measured, managed and mastered as (in Weber's [1991, 282] words) 'the only possible "beyond," added to the mechanism of a world robbed of gods'.

Let me add a corollary: enchantment is not a matter of psychology, in the sense of subjectivity, any more than it is one of brain physiology. As Wittgenstein (1961, 77e) remarks, life is neither merely physiological nor merely psychological: 'Life is the world'. Fittingly for an especially intense instance of life, when one is in an enchanted condition, the world is enchanted, and when the world is enchanted, so are you. It's both or neither: again, ontological (or ontic, if you prefer). We are decidedly not talking about mystical experience on some other plane or other altogether different place. As Wittgenstein

(1998, 10e) puts it, in decisively rejecting a fundamental Platonic metaphor, namely ascending a ladder: 'the place to which I really have to go is one I must already be at.'

My third account is by J.R.R. Tolkien, a serious scholar of enchantment as well as epic storyteller. He suggests (2005, 101) that enchantment is, finally, 'a love and respect for all things, "animate" and "inanimate," an unpossessive love of them as "other". This love will produce both ruth' – pity, empathy, compassion – 'and delight'. Ronald Hepburn (1984, 144) confirms the point: 'The attitude of wonder is notably and essentially other-acknowledging'.

The unimportance here of distinguishing between animate and inanimate echoes what I was just saying about personhood transcending those technical categories, while the emphasis on non-possessive love entails respecting the wildness, also already noted, of not only the other but of enchantment itself. Auden (1970, 149), another scholar of enchantment and a student of Tolkien's at Oxford, further develops that insight. True enchantment, he says, is wonder at the beloved other, and seeks only its continued existence and well-being. When we are falsely enchanted, on the other hand, 'we desire either to possess the enchanting being or be possessed by it'. Tolkien and Auden were clear that true enchantment itself is blameless; any pathology results from something we have brought to it. (Whether or not that is entirely avoidable is, of course, quite another matter.)

Tolkien 1988 [1964], 14) defines Faërie – his term for enchantment – as 'the realm or state in

which fairies have their being. [But] Faërie contains many things besides elves and fays . . . it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves . . . when we are enchanted'. Faërie is thus where you find yourself when you are enchanted, and it is what the place where you are then becomes and is discovered to be.

Tolkien's account (Tolkien 2012[1954-55], 349, 351, 373) is fictional but none the less personal for that. It describes Frodo's encounter with Lothlórien, the heart of enchantment in Middle-earth, personified (although not exhausted) by the Elf Galadriel:

> [I]t seemed to him that he had stepped over a bridge of time into a corner of the Elder Days, and was now walking in a world that was no more . . . . Frodo stood still, hearing
>
> far off great seas upon beaches that had long ago been washed away, and sea-birds crying whose race had perished from the earth . . . .

[Galadriel] seemed to him . . . present and yet remote, a living vision of that which

has already been left far behind by the flowing streams of Time.

Something strange is happening to time here. This world which, in one perspective (disenchanted) is long gone, is nonetheless, from another one (enchanted), still happening right now – in almost, but not quite, the same place. And that place is not, of course, any old world but one imbued with unfathomable and emotionally-charged meaning, with consequences for a future that has not yet happened: the one in which Frodo normally exists.[6] His experience thus involves two different times in the same place, and/or places at the same time. And like the narrator's famous *moments bienhereux* in Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, they are fundamentally metaphoric: this time and/or place is also that one, and therefore is but also isn't itself.

The challenge of this situation, both for the enchanted and the scholar, is not to cling to either reality and dismiss the other. We are back to paradoxical truth, and truthful paradox. If you dismiss the enchanted alternative, you retreat to a lifeless comfort-zone and lose the precious insight that the enchantment offers; if you dismiss the boring old quotidian alternative and cling only to the other, you court madness. And as Hepburn (1984, 113) points out, with typical acuity, 'it is because we remain aware of the temporally serial … that we experience delight and astonishment at the partial transcendence.'

Thus Lothlórien, even as an exemplar of enchantment, is still in Middle-earth, and so is Frodo. So although intensely wondrous ('magic'), the 'concrete' dimension, in all its contingency, will not be denied either. Because of it, we have the commonplace that when one is enchanted time radically slows, it doesn't altogether stop. Galadriel herself admits that one day, no matter what else happens, 'Lothlórien will fade, and the tides of Time will sweep it away' (Tolkien 2012[1954-55], 365). And in any case, we cannot live there, only visit and, perhaps, return, although never to stay; for we are not Elves but humans. To borrow from the elegant analysis of Jan Zwicky (1992), the instrumentalism that manifests as technology is as much a part of our nature as what characterises lyric enchantment, so we must actually live somewhere between the two.

One of the lessons in Tolkien's account is therefore that enchantment is always passing, or we are forever leaving it. Its end is inherent from the beginning. It is even possible to miss it while it is still happening, with a sort of pre-emptive nostalgia. 'Even in Kyōto,' says the poet Matsuo Bashō, 'hearing the cuckoo, I long for Kyōto'. Every hello of wonder is shadowed by a goodbye from which we hide our eyes; the wonder of childhood is continually becoming grown-up; wild nature is always falling to so-called development; the Elves are forever passing over the Sea, leaving us behind on the darkening shores of Middle-earth in (god help us) the Age of Men, now known as the Anthropocene.

The upshot, I think, is that enchantment, whose heart is wonder, is a place/condition inherent in being alive. But at the same time, it is permanently endangered, vanishing, even being wantonly destroyed. The combination was perfectly expressed by the artist Etel Adnan: 'vulnerable and indestructible'.[7] This is what gives enchantment its frequent, although not invariable, emotional tone of pathos, a bittersweet poignancy. (Hence too the unassuageable sadness underlying *The Lord of the Rings* which most of his critics, busy being Adult, have missed. The best that is on offer is, to quote Tolkien 2012[1954-55], 1029] again, 'a sadness that [is] yet blessed and without bitterness'.)[8]

This existential truth is also what presents us, when we are or have been enchanted, with our greatest challenge: to let go when needs must. Sometimes, of course, we cannot. Then it can happen as it did to Karen Blixen 1970 [1937], 381) – to whose work enchantment is central – as she watches from the departing ship: 'It was not I who was going away, I did not have it in my power to leave Africa, but it was the country that was slowly and gravely withdrawing from me, like the sea in ebb-tide'.

Hence the absurdity of the belief that enchantment requires or induces a weak sense of self or lack of boundaries. Quite the contrary: a healthy relationship with enchantment, able to resist futile grasping or searching, demands a strong and secure ego to cope with being back in what Alain-Fournier (1986, 212) calls 'harsh sordid reality', and Tolkien 2012[1954-55], 377) 'the grey and leafless world', without any useless grasping or demanding.

## What enchantment is not

Now drawing upon what we have just observed, it should be clear that enchantment is not modern. Beginning with wonder, with its mutually defining contrast with will, and proceeding through relationality, and *a fortiori* unpossessive love, the unity of spiritual/mental/cultural and physical/material/natural in concrete magic, and the acceptance of limits, including the ultimate limit of death, it is, in fact, constitutively non-modern. So having discussed enchantment, let us consider modernity.

The best as well as most pithy summary of the defining project of modernity is surely that of Val Plumwood (1993): 'the rational mastery of nature', including human nature. Building on Weber, the accounts of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (2002) as well as Steven Toulmin (1990), among others, support this view, highlighting the centrality of will, control, prediction and manipulation.

The contrast here suggests an elective affinity not only between enchantment and non-modern but between disenchantment and modernity. The important question concerning those last two is not their periodisation (about which we could argue indefinitely) but their sensibility. The question, as Leszek Kolakowski (1997, 7) puts it, is: 'What is the core – whether or not explicitly expressed – of our contemporary widespread *Unbehagen an der Kultur* [cultural unease]? . . . And the first answer that naturally comes to mind is summed up, of course, in the Weberian *Entzauberung* – disenchantment . . . '

Weber (1991, 155) famously opined, just over a century ago, that 'The fate of our times is characterised by rationalisation and intellectualisation and, above all, by the "disenchantment of the world"'. Weber was a wild Nietzschean, not the boring functionalist sociologist that American university departments turned him into, and this prophecy has a lot going for it. Certainly there is a powerfully disenchanting programme now at work, summed up in Lewis Mumford's (1964) term 'the Megamachine' – the will-to-power incarnate, as it were – in service of the rational mastery of nature.

The Megamachine has a strong interest in disenchantment, because the apprehension and love which enchantment enables of the other's intrinsic value obstructs the rule of instrumentalism, especially market value, which facilitates and protects the free flow of capital – putatively disembodied, disembedded, weightless and effortless, protected by the state, and serviced by technoscientific research. In this, of course, it is modelled on the single, universal truth of monotheism, but without the tiresome restraint of God as ultimate mystery. This time, it promises, all will be known, measured, packaged and sold. In a kind of parody of concrete magic, the pathological modern version of the spirit is thus accompanied every step of the way by a gross, deadening and equally inhumane materialism. But the contrast with enchantment, in all respects, should already be clear.

The Megamachine therefore sets about replacing wild and unbiddable enchantment, which it cannot control, with fake enchantment – what I call 'glamour' – which it can. Through the multi-billion pound industries of advertising, marketing and spin (and please let's remember that Google and Facebook are above all advertising companies), glamour is used to create false enchantment – the desire to possess or be possessed – which it then offers, for a price, to satisfy. Deliberately engineered addiction, plus the fact that what it offers doesn't really satisfy, is therefore integral to the business model.

The creed of this programme was also defined by Weber: 'the belief that . . . there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle,

master all things by calculation'. Note that all that is required for such disenchantment is a sufficiently widespread, institutionally and culturally rooted *belief* that that is so. And what is a search-engine but its very paradigm? The blandly brutal motto of the giant global consultancy firm McKinsey helpfully summarises the issue: 'Everything can be measured, and what gets measured gets managed'. The corollary is that whatever can't be measured doesn't matter or, to be on the safe side, doesn't even exist. (Parmenides, it seems, did not live in vain.)

And yet, if we look around we can see people still falling in love, finding deep solace in the natural world and with other animals, sensing divine presence in religious rituals, being inspired by art of all kinds, communing with and through food and drink, exhilarated by a sporting hero, and so on. Clearly, enchantment is still afoot. So Weber's point, along with that of Horkheimer and Adorno, is a powerful and important half-truth. To coin a phrase, we have never been, and cannot be, entirely modern, although that does not mean there is no programme to become so, with all its terrible effects.

In addition to the empirical fact of ongoing enchantment, let us grant that even after the critique of essentialism has done its utmost, there is still such a thing, to all intents and purposes, as human nature: in other words, a nature that is humanly-inflected. Then we can see that wonder is a potential indestructibly inherent in embodied, embedded, ecological life. It is, so to say, our birthright, which only needs reawakening; and in those moments, short but deep, all our millennia-long training in disenchantment falls away.

It follows that enchantment is a standing reminder of the limits of modernity as a project, which is why it is often feared, mocked and suppressed. And that reminder will remain true for as long as we are embodied, embedded, ecological, imperfect and finite creatures – the very thing, not coincidentally, that the transhumanists want to destroy in exchange for the serial death-in-life, posing as immortality, of one of Tolkien's spectral Ringwraiths.

There is at least one qualification which may seem called for. It follows from the undeniable fact that enchantment and will are thoroughly entangled in practice – especially, perhaps, in artistic practice and religious ritual, which often involve strenuous applications of the will, not only effort but skill and knowledge, in order to create the conditions of wonder to take place. But note that given enchantment's unbiddability, its presence still cannot be guaranteed. And the two things and their distinctive qualities remain distinct even so wonder is not will and vice-versa, even when they are entangled in practice.

It also follows – and I have found this to be a point that many good people find it hard to accept – that enchantment, or re-enchantment, cannot, upon pain of certain failure or betrayal, be made the goal of a system, a programme or a method. Even when the goal is good or progressive or spiritual! Wild enchantment cannot long survive an agenda, no matter what kind. So all that is possible is to have the intention to pay attention to it, keep the door open and invite it in, and learn what you can if you are blessed with its presence.

## Enchantment and the philosophers

I want to close with some cautionary remarks about the treatment of enchantment by contemporary philosophers. To an extent, doing so circles back to my opening section

and its lessons, because these are what place much current philosophical work on enchantment in question. My critique does not attempt to rule out theorising enchantment *en tout*, but it does have implications for how best to go about doing so.

In my study of enchantment I have consistently found work by poets, essayists, storytellers, literary critics and scholarly humanists (with considerable overlap among those communities) to be the richest source of wisdom, with that of scientists trailing well behind. Somewhere in the middle come philosophers. This placing is perhaps not surprising. On the one hand, the insights and their theorisation by such philosophers as Wittgenstein, Ricoeur, Merleau-Ponty, Zwicky, Hepburn and Weber have been indispensable. On the other hand, it is no coincidence that their work clearly belongs with the humanities. As such, it stands apart from the massive impact of scientific naturalism and materialism on academic philosophy; and it is in the dominance of the latter we find reasons to regard its construal of enchantment with circumspection.[9] To demonstrate this I will concentrate on three accounts, those by Philip Fisher, Jane Bennett, and Akeel Bilgrami (which last, to some extent, also includes Charles Taylor).

The first account is Philip Fisher's *Wonder, The Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences*. Fisher's (1998, 18, 131) treatment of wonder, which I have identified with true enchantment, starts out well enough, acknowledging that 'Wonder in its first moment stands outside the will' and recognising 'the moment of pure presence within wonder'. But he quickly engages in a series of displacements which take one in a very different direction. Wonder 'involves the aestheticization of delight, or of the pleasure principle . . . whose agent within the aesthetic experience is the sublime' (I count at least three biggish leaps there), while 'memory and narrative are antagonistic to an aesthetics of wonder', which are so 'fundamental to the narrative arts and, usually, music that wonder is ruled out . . . ' (Fisher 1998, 2, 6, 21) These moves culminate in what emerges as his true loyalty: to '[t]he clear authority of the visual and only the visual [which] is one of the great themes of the Cartesian method' (Fisher 1998, 23).

This extraordinary volte-face not only denies wonder to music and story, to say nothing of extra-artistic sources, but surrenders it to one of its greatest enemies of modern or any times. As Fisher himself (1998, 43) admits, Descartes wields explanation precisely to banish wonder, repeatedly commencing examples with *nec mirabimur* (it should not be found wonderous that) or *nec mirabimus* (no one should wonder that).

Let me turn to Jane Bennett's influential book *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics* (2001). One concern is her reduction of enchantment to its conditions. Thus Bennett rightly says that enchantment can result from modern artefacts, although even this observation needs qualification. To pick one of her own examples – Gap khaki pants (2001, ch. 6) – why would millions of dollars be poured into advertising them if the result wasn't, to some extent, at least, to induce a desire to possess them? Which is just Auden's (1970, 149) 'false enchantment', as distinct from true, whose *sine qua non* is rather astonished admiration mixed with an 'unpossessive love of the other as other'. And I doubt nanotechnology, another of her favoured examples and one which she 'endorses' (2001, 88), differs except in being much more dangerous. (Here Bennett joins Latour, whom she cites approvingly, in susceptibility to a distinctly uncritical technophilia.)

Certainly insofar as enchantment is an ineliminable possibility inherent in embodied and ecological life, it is possible to experience wonder as a result of an enchanted

apprehension of what might otherwise seem to be the artefactual detritus, banal or vulgar when not actually life-threatening, of modernity. But it does not follow that the experience of enchantment is itself therefore modern. Even in the instances she cites, the experience that results stands apart from the defining project of modernity and its nexus: mastery, whether personal or collective. In wonder, the will is suspended rather than engaged; one is 'fearlessly passive', in Adorno's phrase (Jay 1984, 73).

Bennett's use of the word 'nature' to denote the complete contrary of human-made artefacts is also interesting, for in another sense of the word, both are fully natural; ultimately, what else could they be? And since both senses are valid in their own way, both must be kept in mind. But notwithstanding its modern secular dress, Bennett's one-sided usage piggybacks on the older theistic redefinition of nature as *only* nature: something radically deficient – as in, merely material – which therefore needs a *super*natural supplement. And the work spirit used to do in this respect (and often still does) is now undertaken, in polite educated discourse, by culture. That keeps the focus firmly on 'us' clever, important, wonder-working, world-making humans – hardly a philosophical or ethical advance.

Another consequence of my argument affects Bennett's advocacy of enchantment as an ethical resource. Despite starting out by saying (2001, 5) that 'enchantment entails a state of wonder' in which one is 'both caught up and carried away' by 'a surprising encounter', her language quickly becomes strikingly instrumentalist and mechanical. For example (with my emphases): enchantment 'may be *valuable for* ethical life', because 'the affective *force* of those moments might be *deployed* to *propel* ethical generosity'. Thus 'enchantment can function as a positive *resource*," and "moments of joy … can *propel* ethics' (Bennett 2001, 3, 133) .

Metaphors, as ever, are significant, and these particular ones all entail not intrinsic but use-value. But just as nature properly so-called, being fully ecological, is wild, so too, being a lineament of relationship properly so-called, is enchantment. And given that enchantment is a moment of wonder at the world as concrete magic, which reveals the intrinsic value of the enchanting other as apprehended by a non-possessive love, it is most definitely not a resource, let alone a programme. It cannot be devised, tested, applied, rolled out or managed; there is no algorithm for it, nor an app, and there cannot be. Nor, by the same token, can there be a method to achieve it, let alone a methodology. Thus any attempt, such as Bennett wants, to manage, direct or control enchantment would not only eliminate it but also whatever spontaneous positive effects – insights, new understanding, moral revaluation – it might have actually had.

What we can do is use our will and skill to create the conditions for enchantment in whatever field we find ourselves, educational, artistic, political or whatever: conditions of openness which are carefully not over-controlled, managed or directed. And if it then graces us with its presence, we can let it do its work without any interference, and learn from it.

I turn last to Akeel Bilgrami's essay 'What is Enchantment?' There are also implications here for the work of Charles Taylor, to which Bilgrami attaches much of his own. I am sympathetic to his aims and some of his means, especially his relational construal of enchantment, as well as his critique of scientism and championing of the first-person point of view. There is a problem, however, which results from following Taylor in maintaining that disenchantment results, in important part, at least, from the flight or

absence of God. It is, frankly, an assumption of brazen parochialism to posit the God of Judaism, Christianity and/or Islam as the determining factor in a global narrative around a disenchanted 'ideological conceptual system' (Bilgrami 2010, 146). No matter how hegemonic that system has become, are we really to believe that non-theistic Buddhists, polytheistic Hindus, indigenous pagans and animists now lack enchantment in their lives because of that very particular God's disappearance from public discourse? Or that in His absence from their lives long before the so-called secular turn, they never had it in the first place?

It is another version of the same egregious idea that enchantment depends, or ever did, on a single unitary so-called supernatural sacred source. The implausibility attaches not least to the latter's monism, expressed here as monotheism, when the experience of enchantment is, in very principle, so clearly multiple. As Hepburn (1984, 143–44) argues, 'I doubt that there is a route of argument from wonder to God . . . . To be evocative of wonder, an object need not be seen as filtering the perfections of deity'.

The use of the term 'supernatural' is a related wrong turn, given that the experience of enchantment as concrete magic subverts the very assumption of a foundational difference between natural/material and supernatural/spiritual. Why, then, the tendentious requirement for something higher ('super') to be added the lives of embodied beings in the more-than-human world in order for enchantment to take place? To repeat Wittgenstein (1961, 77e), 'World and life are one. Physiological life is of course not "life." And neither is psychological life'. The same is true of spiritual life.

Not surprisingly, that false move also skews Bilgrami's account of transcendence and immanence. He uncritically accepts the modernist redefinition of immanent values as inhering solely in human beings rather than in the world (including humans). He does so, it seems, in order to arrive at a minimalist view of transcendence and thence 'a version of enchantment' (2010, 156) which rightly avoids Taylor's parochial theism. But this only succeeds by sacrificing any sense of enchantment as being, or integrally partaking of, the sacred. The experience of enchantment partakes of a sacrality which, commingling with its mythicity, presents itself as pure intrinsic value, both of the other and the experience itself. It therefore neither requires, nor is amenable to, further grounding, justification or explanation; so this sacrality does not need further grounding in a single universal deity, theism, theistic transcendence, or supernaturalism.

Bilgrami's treatment of enchantment thus builds on and extends the same disenchanting programme of modernism that he wants to oppose (as do I). The potential enchantment of nature – more-than-human nature, which therefore includes, but is far from limited to, humans – is indeed, *pace* Bilgrami (2010), 'self-standing', and it is so exactly in the terms he rightly embraces: a world of relationships. It is this world, to which we may try to stop our senses but which we have never left, that is the *fons et origo* of enchantment, and the experience of transcendence which often accompanies an enchanting encounter is entirely internal to it. Where else could it be? As Hepburn (1984, 182) says, 'There is no wholly-other paradise from which we are excluded; the only transcendence that can be real to us is an "immanent" one'.

It is disturbing that such eminent and respected philosophers could go so astray when they turn to enchantment. The moral, I think, is to treat its treatment by philosophers with caution, especially when it appears to have been enlisted as a pliant witness in support of a grand theory; and to resist philosophers who have themselves failed to resist the

fashionable intellectual hegemony of scientific naturalism. Indeed, as Wittgenstein saw so clearly, science, being a different order of enquiry from philosophy, has no valid place in it.[10] When it occupies such a place by confusing (and not always by sincere error) 'Why?', which invites a unique answer in the first person, with 'How?', which demands an abstract nomothetic answer in the third person, the result is scientism.[11]

More promising sources are practitioners in the broad field, or overlapping fields, in which the relative absence of system, programme and agenda (until recent decades, at least) has permitted a correspondingly greater awareness of enchantment, namely the arts and humanities – and such philosophers, including all those I have relied upon here, who are receptive to them.[12] After all, what are these disciplines, each in their way, but the long study of, and hard-won wisdom about, what it means to be human?

About the humanities I won't say much more; after all, as a kind of inquiry they are what this essay tries to exemplify. Respecting the arts there are, of course, many kinds and various values at play, but when it comes specifically to enchantment we can add a few quite definite things. Its non-modern wildness has direct relevance because insofar as artists care about wonder at all, they need to remember that they cannot call it up or command it to be present; nor will it survive being enlisted in a cause, however worthy. For artists who care, all that can be done – but this will take all their will, skill and knowledge – is to create the conditions that enchantment favours – ask, with humility, for it to attend – and honour it if it does.

Concerning the experience itself, I'm sure we've all had it. My own include falling into a painting so that I am somehow in it, while also still standing outside looking at it – being swept away by music, yet the somewhere else it takes me to is at the very heart of where I already am – and being so rapt in reading that while remaining in the room, I am also turning the page to find out what happens to me next in the story. All these are marked by the meaning of the word – *en-chantment*, to be in a song, or any narrative – and by the tensive truth which so often accompanies it.

That point may look tiny but in practice, as with all things enchanting, it is bigger on the inside. The paradox and its attendant liminality of being one person, in one set of circumstances, while simultaneously inhabiting the life of someone or something quite different, in theirs, is one of the glories of art and the humanities alike. It also has significant, even momentous, political and social implications. But these can only do their work if they are not *put* to work, but are instead allowed to unfold in their own ways and terms. That in turn requires the chief virtue ethic of enchantment: in the words of Freya Stark (2013, 107), 'fearless receptivity'. It's a lifelong lesson.

## Notes

1. See Viveiros De Castro (2004).
2. See Zwicky (1992) on 'radiant specificity'.
3. I have also borrowed from Hadot's (2006, 309) translation.
4. See (Bortoft 2012, 103).
5. See (Latour 1993).
6. For a strangely similar account by a very different sort of author, see Fermor (2004, 358, 355).
7. From a notice next to one of her paintings in an exhibition in Basle in 2017.
8. See (Drout 2013).
9. I except (Vasalou 2015) and (Lloyd 2018), but not, unfortunately, (Meijer and De Vriese 2020).

10. This is the burden of much of Wittgenstein (1998). See also my 2017b.
11. See e.g. Midgely 2001 and Nagel (2012).
12. E.g.Wittgenstein and music, Merleau-Ponty and painting, Zwicky and poetry.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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