

The Analytical Philosopher and the Writer

I

In philosophy the matter of the language which is its vehicle – which is a clumsy way of putting it, and immediately sets up a distinction which I want to question – is central in a way that would not be the case to the same extent in other disciplines. There is first of all the question of whether philosophy is best carried out through speech or in writing: a question to which Plato is often supposed to have given a definitive answer, both in the legend of the origins of writing in the *Phaedrus* (274b5 ff) and in his choice of the dialogue form. From this can be traced many elements of philosophy as it has been practised in Anglophone countries in modern times. There is for instance the idea that philosophy is most nearly itself in live argument and disputation, in which one interlocutor (a revealing term: one who takes part in a conversation) defends a claim while another attempts to reveal its flaws. This can be traced all the way to the traditional Oxford tutorial, where the undergraduate student reads aloud the essay that he or she has written and then attempts to justify its arguments against the criticisms of the tutor. Its influence lingers in the practice of submitting a conference paper (a *paper*, we call it) and then summarising it orally (which we call *speaking to it*) in the live conference session. Before going any further we might note that, in what may seem a contrast to this tradition, Plato's dialogues are written, and that they are carefully, even artfully, constructed; a point which is often conveniently forgotten.

This prejudice in favour of the oral is closely connected with a preference for, or commitment to, the analytic style of philosophy as against what is usually called the 'continental' style, that is to say the style favoured by non-Anglophone philosophers from continental Europe and those influenced by them. I say more about this distinction below. Here it is enough perhaps to characterise the analytic tradition as emerging from the logical positivism of the 1930s and 1940s, especially as mediated through such Anglophone philosophers as A.J. Ayer, and as constituting the standard approach to academic philosophy in the Anglophone countries for the last half century. Its practitioners see themselves as bringing clarity to replace muddle and confusion, and they aspire to clarity in their own writing and lecturing. Their prose style is by intention plain and unadorned. They may not always notice that this is a distinctive *style*, but it is not stylistically neutral. It has much in common with the style of ordinary conversation, and for the most part its devotees see themselves as eschewing the figurative and the poetic. These latter ways of writing, they might say, are often the source of philosophical confusion. It is thus related to their prose style that they are quick to spot common fallacies, such as an undistributed middle (all terriers are dogs, everyone in this room owns a dog, so everyone in this room owns a terrier) or a category mistake (such as supposing that all talk of the mind must be the same as talk of the brain). When philosophy of education started to establish itself as a subject area (or sub-discipline of philosophy: not much turns on the distinctions here, in my view) in the UK in the 1960s under the leadership of such figures as Richard Peters, Paul Hirst and Robert Dearden, it was analytical philosophy that it took as its model.

Robin Barrow of course places himself squarely in this tradition, as the title of one of his papers reminds us: 'The need for philosophical analysis in a postmodern era' (1999). Here he argues for the importance of a *specific* understanding of philosophical analysis' (p. 415, my

emphasis), but there is nothing, I think, in his understanding of it that other prominent followers of that tradition, whether in philosophy of education or in philosophy more widely, would take substantial issue with. Since I shall offer below some criticisms of philosophy practised exclusively in this tradition I begin by acknowledging some of its many strengths; and since many of those are displayed to virtuoso effect by Robin Barrow himself it is hard to do better than quote him at sufficient length to display some of the central features of his style. When in 2006 as founding editor of the journal *Ethics and Education* I sought to establish that this was to be a journal of some quality Barrow was one of the people I approached to contribute to the first issue. His article is called 'Moral education's modest agenda' and it was everything I hoped it would be. Here he is towards the end of the article making the classical move of distinguishing moral education from various practices which sometimes make false claims to the title.

The main task in moral education is to clear the ground of all the irrelevant and inappropriate practices and ideas that have hitherto been wished upon us. We have to throw out systems of behaviour modification, because to condition people to behave in certain ways is not to educate them and does not allow them to act freely nor, therefore, morally. We have to fight against the indoctrination that is still prevalent throughout the world, not least in fundamentalist Christian communities, which closes people's minds around an impoverished set of unprovable and exclusionary rules that, again, are not themselves moral and that prevent the development of a moral understanding. We have to chase values clarification, and all other programs that similarly suggest that the important things are being sincere and articulating one's views rather than holding coherent and rationally justifiable views, out of the schools. We have to challenge the contemporary tendency to impose remedies, such as therapy, drugs and counseling, on people, rather than tackling the causes of the problems. Moralizing, whether directly or indirectly by means, for example, of carefully censored texts, is anathema to a true moral education. Developmental theories, which are still a staple part of teacher education in North America, continue to contribute to a wholly misleading picture of what morality is and how one should morally educate the young, essentially because they treat people as physical entities with brains but without minds, and because they treat moral education as a matter of seizing upon and reinforcing allegedly natural stages of development. Similarly, one cannot overestimate the harm that has been and to some extent still is being done to the spread of true moral understanding by the insidious influence of political and moral correctness. (Barrow, 2006, pp. 12-13)

There is much to admire here. First, not to be underestimated and certainly not to be taken for granted on the part of academics working in the field of education, is the irreproachable grammar. Varied in its structures and with a fluency suggestive of speech, its qualities include a number of rhetorical devices (this by no means constitutes a criticism: I return to this below). We might note the simplicity and forcefulness of the opening sentence, which commands the reader's assent partly by suggesting that reader and writer will be at one in what they identify as 'inappropriate practices and ideas'. The second sentence is more complex, and just as the complexity builds towards the end it is cut short by the brevity of the assertion that not to act freely is to act non-morally. Something similar occurs in the fourth sentence, which ends 'out of the schools'. The next sentence contains a near-classic tricolon, 'therapy, drugs and counseling', any sense of glibness counteracted by avoiding the common device of having the terms increase in number of syllables (such as 'friends, Romans, countrymen'). The long sentence beginning 'Developmental theories' makes sophisticated points almost in passing: for example that it makes no sense to think of human beings as

purely physical beings ('with brains but without minds'), and that the supposedly 'natural stages of development' are not natural and are therefore not inevitable at all. The reader is here treated with respect, as one on whom these sketches of important theoretical ideas will not be wasted, and for whom the long and fairly demanding sentence in which they are set will not present an obstacle. The final sentence, when read aloud or vocalised internally, invites the inclusion of pauses, of an almost Churchillian nature, depending on just how Churchillian one can be without parody: after 'Similarly', at various points up to and including 'being done', after 'true moral understanding' and 'insidious influence'. Thus the paragraph concludes with a sentence of steady and magisterial force. I do not mean to imply that the rhetorical qualities here are contrived, or even deliberate. Rather they are, I would say, simply the way language naturally falls from the pen of someone with a traditional, literary and linguistic as well as philosophical (and in Barrow's case classical) education.

Admirable too, I would say, is the unmistakable presence here of *argument*. I say 'unmistakeable', yet I have come across readers of philosophy written in this style who complain that they are being presented with mere assertion – readers who thus miss both the compression of complex arguments at various points (such as the distinction Barrow makes between minds and brains) and the implicit invitation here to join in the discussion, to respond, to argue back. How different this is from what one might call the standard academic journal article on any aspect of education, where the writer cannot make the most banal point without supporting it with a string of citations. Barrow offers no detailed citations (although Kant, Hume and Mill are mentioned in passing, and Plato makes several appearances), and there is thus no list of References at the end. It is interesting to imagine the reaction of those refereeing for a standard academic journal. Barrow – would they perceive this? – has the courage to speak for himself, and we readers are implicitly invited to lay aside the devices by which we insulate ourselves from the uncomfortable business of engaging face to face, as it were, with an intelligent human being in argument about things that matter, and speak for ourselves in turn. We encounter someone with a profound concern for education, and stand to be educated by him.

This point about the absence of citation and reference is worth developing a little. Nicholas Burbules (2012) and others have argued that the academic conventions of citation carry particular and substantial implications for how we think of knowledge. For example, one of the standard functions of citation is to refer to an empirical study that sets out certain facts or at least what are claimed to be facts. If, say, in writing an article on equality in education I were to note that more equal societies do better for all their citizens on a range of indicators (better educational outcomes, less crime, greater mutual trust...), it would be natural to cite Wilkinson and Pickett's book, *The Spirit Level* (2009). However particular styles of citation, notably APA (American Psychological Association), which employ name of author(s) and date, 'become in standard use the documentation of a fact ... such usage reinforces the idea that research is about the examination and testing of empirical claims, and that citation is a process of buttressing those claims through referencing supporting studies' (Burbules). The citation of name and date even becomes identified with the familiar claim or fact that it is supposed to support, as is the case with Wilkinson and Pickett above. When we also see that the APA manual sets out how a research article should be formatted (Literature Review, Methods, Results, Discussion) it is clear that research which follows these conventions is being conceived essentially as empirical, even quasi-psychological, rather than as philosophical, conceptual or, as I want to say, argumentative and thoughtful. The discovery and reporting of facts and correlations has become hegemonic.

Thus Barrow's style here (and in a good deal of his other published writings) is not a side-issue. It is of a piece with his commitment to thoughtful argument. It constitutes an act of resistance to the increasing assumption that educational research that is not empirical is not really research. That assumption is steadily making itself at home, both in Anglophone universities and elsewhere. A colleague in a British university (not my own), a philosopher of education, heard his specialism described by his head of department at a departmental meeting as 'Alchemy, or whatever it is you do'. Another colleague in a different university was told by one of his department's 'managers' that his philosophical research was 'hobby research'. From a third university again, this time not a philosopher of education but a philosophically inclined social scientist, being interviewed for a Professorship, was asked by the Chair of the Appointing Committee: 'You have told us all about your ideas and theories. Now what about actual research?' No doubt there are other factors at work here: for instance it is rare for philosophical research to attract external funding, while this is relatively easy for even the most banal empirically-based educational research projects. Funding can be measured and becomes a proxy for quality. Psychology always looks as if it is bound to be at least relevant, and probably important, to education, even if its claims do not always survive critical scrutiny. Much more could be said about all this. Barrow himself has of course developed some of these points in his 1984 book, *Giving Teaching Back to Teachers*.

Finally, in the extract above I admire Barrow's steady assertion that there is such thing as 'true moral understanding', which I read less as part of a strategy to discover some Platonic Form, valid for all time, than as the insistence that for the things we value – education, justice, equality, friendship, for example – it is an endless and vital undertaking to distinguish the true from the false, the genuine from the fake, the false from the spurious. I called this above a 'classical' move, in the context of Barrow's distinction between true moral education and practices which only pretend or seem to be that. In the *Gorgias* Plato has Socrates investigate what Holland (1980, pp. 33-4) calls 'the problem of spurious semblances, of the difference between worthwhile pursuits and their time-serving substitutes'. For Plato (or Socrates: certainly for the 'Socrates' of the *Gorgias*) the difference is between *dialektiké*, which is, roughly, philosophy understood as an educational practice, and mere rhetoric, or persuasive speech-making. The latter is nothing more than snake-oil, an appeal – like certain forms of cookery – to what people like or can be got to like rather than to what is good for them.

The reason why rhetoric could not be a form of education was that it had nothing to do with knowledge, and the reason why it had nothing to do with knowledge was that it involved no criticism of received opinions, no putting of statements to the test, no insistence that an account be given of the nature of anything, no sifting the true from the false or distinguishing reality from appearance. Instead, success was its sole concern and efficacy its standard of excellence. (*ibid.*, p. 19).

This seems to me to catch the philosophical spirit of Robin Barrow as it runs through everything he has written. And how we need this kind of philosophical spirit in our time, as we always need it! The mark of a good school now, it seems, is that the children pass the tests and the school passes its inspection: success and efficacy are the sole standard of excellence, which is understood mainly or entirely as what moves it up the league tables. Undergraduate students of education and other students of social science in their first year are generally astonished – and usually delighted – to discover in my classes that education has from time to time been theorised in more exalted terms, as the widening of horizons, as the expanding of the mind, as learning to speak the Oakshottian 'conversations of mankind'. Even as they learn this, however, their degree courses are being rewritten to reduce the demand that students

acquire knowledge or criticise received opinions (to echo Holland's words above), including their own existing opinions: this is being done to make their courses easier, in the hope of better results in the National Student Satisfaction Survey. Universities in England are now becoming funded according to market principles, and accordingly sell themselves with videos in which young people leer at each other as they stroll across the thoroughly modern campus – just a little ivy and Georgian brickwork to add a touch of class – between coffee shops and up-to-the-minute IT facilities. In the market appearance *is* reality if it brings in the consumers, since the market admits no other criterion of quality than what appeals and can be sold. And since they are now consumers students must naturally be given what they want rather than what is good for them, their received opinions pandered to and flattered. This is to be the fate of the university. We should pause to register this extraordinary development. The university, generally until now thought of as a place dedicated to the pursuit and testing of knowledge, of 'putting of statements to the test' (Holland's words again), and still in the view of many one of the few places left among the beleaguered public services of England dedicated to 'sifting the true from the false or distinguishing reality from appearance', is apparently to give its customers what they want, as if it was just one more commercial outlet dealing in boutique clothing or electronic gadgets.

This is one reason why philosophy, and Barrow's way of doing philosophy, still matter.

II

The purpose of this second section is not to offer substantial criticisms of Barrow's way of doing philosophy, as if to balance the appreciation expressed in the first section. What is admirable in it is still to be admired. The purpose is rather to ask if the strengths of analytical philosophy, both in general and in the case of Robin's preferred version of it, cannot be achieved without drawbacks and limitations, just as there cannot be light without shadow. We might start with the idea of clarity. The demand for clarity is one corollary of the analytical philosopher's commitment to doing away with muddle, and Barrow names clarity as first among 'the criteria that govern the quality of a concept' (1999, p. 427), and thus by implication as foremost among the aims of conceptual analysis. I can see nothing to be said for muddle. However the idea of clarity is not as straightforward as it may seem, and repays investigation (repays philosophical analysis, one might say).

First, it is not always noticed that talk of clarity is metaphorical. In the case of water, from which the metaphor appears to derive, clarity consists in the fact that you can see through the water to rocks and fish below the surface, or to the coral beneath the surface of the sea. Thus clear language enables you to see down to the realities beneath. The clarity of the sentence 'the earth goes round the sun' lies in the way it allows you access to the truth that the earth does indeed go round the sun, that of the sentence 'Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas in 1963' similarly (though the reality of assassination as opposed to, say, simple murder makes for complications). Things become more difficult, though, with 'Today is Monday'. There is no such thing as a Monday, lurking beneath the limpid water. That today is Monday seems instead to be a matter of it being neither Sunday nor Tuesday nor any other of the days of the week. This simple point lies behind the idea that the meaning of language is constituted less by its accurate representation of how things are down there under the water than by systems of difference. Meaning and truth are, at least in significant part, a function less of the relationship between language and anything else such as the submarine 'reality' than of the endless and shifting web of language itself. If it is true that Kennedy was *assassinated*, rather

than simply *shot*, this is a matter of what the dictionary tells us about how the verb ‘to assassinate’ is used – it is used in the case of the illicit killing of statesmen and political leaders – and cannot be read off from some notional ideal video of ‘the events themselves’. (It is often noted that a dictionary offers an excellent image of how language has meaning: in an endless web where each definition consists of words, to be looked up where necessary in other parts of the dictionary). Some of course go so far as to complain that simplistic ideas of clarity are used to *fix* meaning: that the apparently unobjectionable securing of stability through the metaphor of seeing through the water to things that are as surely there as are the fish and the coral has a way of turning into a different kind of fix: in which meanings are nailed down in the way it suits particular power groups. (We might think of the difference between ‘Mau Mau terrorists killed many Kenyans and British settlers in the 1950s’ and the same sentence with ‘freedom fighters’ replacing ‘terrorists’. Of course ‘British settlers’ could be put differently too.)

The commitment to clarity has one particular and odd consequence. From its origins in logical positivism there seems to come the idea that language that is clear will be language of a certain kind. It turns its back against the figurative and the metaphorical, as I noted above – or it thinks it does, in the case of ‘clarity’ – and prefers what it thinks of as a plain and unadorned style. In doing this it frequently adopts the language and style of science, as if the best language for philosophical analysis was the language of a scientific report. Two examples from texts on the philosophy of education will help to make the point. In the first the writer is distinguishing love from other emotions, including hate:

The evaluations made by a man P who hates his neighbour Q are such as these: 1. He wants to avoid Q; he wishes to see him come to grief; when he meets him, he has an inclination to say rude things to him – and so on. And he does so, normally, because 2. He thinks or knows or assumes – ie apprehends – that Q has done something which P considers to be evil against him, or that Q as what P seems to be a despicable character, or something of the sort... (Pitcher, 1972, p. 383)

In the second example the writer is analysing the concept of teaching.

Even though teaching may not be intentional, we have argued that an important point of being able to say that B was taught X by A is to locate responsibility for B’s learning X. To say, ‘No one taught X to B’, is either to deny that anyone is to be held responsible for B’s learning X, or perhaps to suggest that B taught him/herself and is the only one to be held responsible. (Kleinig, 1982, p. 29)

To repeat: if the opposite of clarity is muddle and confusion then the value of clarity is self-evident (clear, one might say). But clarity all too readily becomes fetishized and one result of this is the adoption of a particular kind of writing style, an adoption which is not always conscious. It is typical of this style to aim for the elimination of metaphor, and to value what its adherents seem to think of as a tough-minded use of argumentation that imitates the unadorned style in which a scientific experiment might be written up and its results expressed. Here we might recall that another of the roots of analytic philosophy lies in the attempt undertaken by such philosophers as Frege and Russell to create an ideal notation that would free thought from the grip of ordinary language and the confusions to which it is prone. One outcome of this project, however, which is now widely regarded as having been ill-conceived, is the residue in the writings of analytical philosophers of quasi-scientific prose in which unacknowledged metaphors from mathematics and algebra are perhaps the most vivid evidence that a particular kind of rhetoric has made itself at home.¹ These roots go

deep: they can be traced back without difficulty at least as far as Descartes, for whom geometry supplied the model that all sound knowledge should aspire to, on the grounds that it attains the highest degree of certainty.

Along with this yearning for the tropes of science and mathematics analytical philosophers, especially those working in the field of education, are prone to a further commitment, tending at times to approach the status of dogma. This is to regard philosophical analysis as a body of skills and techniques, which can be brought to bear on statements and arguments from a wide range of literature, even where the philosopher is not particularly knowledgeable about the specific subject matter. Category mistakes, for instance, such as moving incautiously between talk of the mind and talk of the brain (see above), can often be identified in the writings of neuroscientists and sociobiologists. The fallacy of moving between claims about what is empirically the case and non-empirical claims about what *must be* the case can be found in much recent work on happiness and wellbeing ('Here are some of the things that make people happy: a sense of belonging, sufficient income to live on, opportunities for exercise and play ... if this woman commits herself to writing a novel in a garret, half-starved and in isolation, or this man risks his life to work among lepers, it *must be* because it makes them happy'). When British philosophy of education was at what some regard as its acme, some thirty years ago, conferences seemed to be patrolled by philosophers in search of such fallacies, eager to pounce on an incautious naturalistic fallacy (the so-called fallacy of deriving an 'ought' from an 'is': even then not obviously fallacious: see eg Frankena, 1939) or on a case of 'because it is trivially true it must be importantly true' (for instance, the idea that because it is true that children enjoy play therefore the whole of the curriculum should be based on play).

These are indeed fallacies and there are others, and people were right to draw attention to them. But there was one particularly unfortunate result of the fetishising of analytical philosophy in this style. The first was that it became seen in many quarters as an almost exclusively destructive discipline, putting forward no substantial theses of its own but concentrating on mounting a critique of the efforts of others. In this it was in many respects again the natural heir of earlier philosophy. Here is Wittgenstein, writing in the *Tractatus* (§ 6.53), whose decimal notation exemplifies the other legacy I noted above:

The right method of philosophy would be this: To say nothing except what can be said, *i.e.* the propositions of natural science, *i.e.* something that has nothing to do with philosophy: and then always, when someone else wished to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had given no meaning to certain signs in his propositions. This method would be unsatisfying to the other – he would not have the feeling that we were teaching him philosophy – but it would be the only strictly correct method.

A short example from Barrow himself, who is in my view usually one of the least of the offenders in this respect, will serve as an illustration. Here he is, in his critique of 'postmodernism', complaining that Jean-Francois Lyotard 'regards postmodernism as a theory that involves "an incredulity towards meta-narratives"' (Barrow 1999, p. 419; it is noticeable that this is the only place in the entire article where Barrow actually quotes one of the 'postmodernists' that he takes issue with). The problem here, Barrow thinks, is that 'Since, in his [Lyotard's] terms, "meta-narrative" is a synonym for "theory" and "incredulity" a *soi-disant* phrase for "denial", this means that this is a theory that denies theory'. But an attentive reading of Lyotard's text reveals that meta-narrative is not a synonym for theory in general. Metanarratives are those over-arching ideas (hence 'meta') that emerged from the Enlightenment and that we in the west have largely taken for granted: progress, capitalism,

the emancipation of the human spirit, the hegemony of science and scientific knowledge. Incidentally, ‘incredulity’ is not a synonym or elegant variation for ‘denial’. ‘Incredulity’ registers what Lyotard thinks we experience as the continual pull of these metanarratives even as we begin to lose our faith in, say, capitalism (even if Lyotard did not live to see the financial crises of recent years) or worry that the consequences of trying to export western notions of progress to the developing world have been mixed. To convict Lyotard of crudely asserting the equivalent of *p* and *not-p* is too simple and altogether too quick.

Many of the reservations I have expressed here about analytical philosophy can be brought together by observing that the analytical philosopher usually makes a sharp distinction between philosophy and other forms of writing, particularly rhetoric. There is, it is generally supposed, excellent warrant for this in Plato, who often represents Socrates as mounting a critique of rhetoric, in the person for instance of Lysias (in the *Phaedrus*) and Gorgias in the dialogue that bears his name (as noted above). Yet in the *Gorgias* Socrates observes a distinction between good rhetoric and bad. In the *Protagoras* Socrates says that Protagoras would justly make the kinds of criticism of him that he commonly makes of the sophists, the travelling salesman, as we have been taught to think of them, of the skills and tricks of rhetoric in classical Greece. The distinction between philosophy (hard-edged, rigorous, ‘scientific’ in its language) and more figurative forms of language, tending towards poetry at one extreme, is however hard to maintain in the face of the extended poetic passages and rhapsodic myths of the *Republic* (the myth of Er, and the analogies of Sun, Cave and Divided Line, are two of the more obvious examples) or of parts of, say, the *Phaedrus* (the story of the cicadas, the analogy of the charioteer, the story of Theuth and the invention of writing).

I have written elsewhere (Smith, 2008) about the extreme difficulty of giving any coherent account of the distinction between rhetoric and philosophy, and of the contradictions into which those philosophers who have addressed the subject tend to fall. Collingwood, for instance, writes that the philosopher should adopt a ‘plain and modest’ style, while at the same time he praises ‘the classical elegance of Descartes, the lapidary phrases of Spinoza, the tortured metaphor-ridden periods of Hegel’ (1933, p. 213). In one remarkable passage, which I also quoted in my 2008 paper, he writes:

The principles on which the philosopher uses language are those of poetry; but what he writes is not poetry but prose. From the point of view of literary form, this means that whereas the poet yields himself to every suggestion that his language makes, and so produces word-patterns whose beauty is a sufficient reason for their existence, the philosopher’s word-patterns are constructed only to reveal the thought which they express, and are valuable not in themselves but as a means to that end. The prose-writer’s art is an art that must conceal itself, and produce not a jewel that is looked at for its own beauty but a crystal in whose depths the thought can be seen without distortion or confusion; and the philosophical writer in especial follows the trade not of a jeweller but of a lens-grinder. He must never use metaphors or imagery in such a way that they attract to themselves the attention due to his thought; if he does that he is writing not prose, but, whether well or ill, poetry; but he must avoid this not by rejecting all use of metaphors and imagery, but by using them, poetic things themselves, in the domestication of prose: using them just so far as to reveal thought, and no further. (ibid., pp. 214-5)

The paradox of writing about the philosopher as jeweller or lens-grinder, while at the same time declaring that the philosopher ‘must never use metaphors or imagery in such a way that they attract to themselves the attention due to his thought’ is obvious enough. To bring this

paper round to one of the points with which I began it (in itself a familiar enough rhetorical device), Collingwood seems to be undone here by an ambition to separate language from thought, to distinguish writing philosophy from thinking it, explicitly referring to the search for a ‘principle which must be followed in learning to write philosophy, as distinct from learning to think it’ (1933, p. 213), in his commitment to the idea of a language that reveals thought rather than distorting it – as if there could be philosophical thought independently of language.

It should be clear now why I wrote above (p. 3) that to identify and describe Barrow’s *rhetoric* does not imply criticism. Far from it: all philosophical writing is rhetorical, in the sense that I have been using this word here, and Barrow’s rhetorical style – his writerly style, for those still uncomfortable with the idea of rhetoric – bears favourable comparison with many writers in the twentieth century analytical tradition, whether they write about education or other topics. A degree of self-consciousness of this on Barrow’s part might well have formed an obstruction in the deep well of fluent, classical prose that distinguishes him. On the other hand it might have given him more sympathy with writers in a different tradition, such as Jacques Derrida and Jean-François Lyotard, who have embraced this point with enthusiasm: who have released their readers a little to use language, as they do, with a degree of playfulness and irony that is itself a challenge to many of the current educational tendencies that Barrow would no doubt repudiate – the prevalence of the language of economics and neoliberalism, the assumption that all good educational research will be ‘scientific’, and the substitution of the demands of performativity for serious thought about the proper ends of education.

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Notes

¹ Barrow's writings are for the most part refreshingly free of this tendency. There are just a few examples in some of his earlier works, eg Barrow (1976), pp. 70-71, 82.