

**Here is an essay on Auden's "Our Bias" (page 211) which I found useful. I hope this is also useful for you. Chris**

Our notion of time appears to be a rather abstract concept having no usefulness in itself or standing in any kind of meaningful relation to the existing natural world. In this sense it is a concept by and for human beings only.

This general notion also seems to be raised by Auden in *Our Bias* (1939). Here he elaborates even more on the meaning of time for our species. This is a very interesting topic to me and therefore I would like to go a bit more into this even though it is not really related to our discussion on the relation between arts and sciences. However, if we understand 'time' as a scientific concept or the mechanical realization of time as being the practical result of scientific insights, the discussion of Auden's notion of time, visible in his poems, makes sense.

So, in the first stanza Auden defines time related technologies in contrast to the natural world. In this sense the hour-glass whispers to the lion (the so-called 'king' of the animal kingdom), clock-towers tell the natural environment when it is night and when it is day; as such our idea of time with its technical realization dominates the natural world, it is always right in its distinctions.

In the first part of the second stanza Auden continues evoking an image of time that is powerful: the loud and deep chimes of our clock-towers can be heard all over the country, comparable to 'falling torrent flows' nobody can escape their imposed influence. However, in the second part of the second stanza Auden begins to question this overall influence of the concept of time on all living beings. As such, the order of clock-towers chimes never actually hindered or stopped the most powerful being in the animal kingdom in his movement and accordingly it never broke a rose's haughtiness in that it keeps staying straight, no matter if it is day or night. In this sense our human concept of time has no truly visible influence on the flora and the animal kingdom; they do not even seem to care about it.

However, in the third and fourth stanza this clear picture becomes a bit more complicated and I am not sure if I understand it properly. For, in the third stanza Auden says that lions and roses as most powerful representatives of the animal kingdom and the flora seem to just not bother about our idea of time (this is clear); but then in the same sentence he says that roses and lions instead care for 'success'. I am not sure whether I understand the meaning of this word here properly. For in the following Auden does not seem to elaborate more on the character of this kind of success. He merely describes our human understanding of 'success' by referring to words and, in the fourth stanza, comes back to the concept of time. In this context he seems to argue that for us as human beings' success is connected to words which are regarded successful not because of their actual content but because of their (rather abstract?) sound. In this sense our manner in turning a problem we are confronted with into some kind of success we go an 'awkward' or complicated path. This notion would also fit to his claim, as raised in natural Linguistics, that we should use the language of gesture more than the language of words as this is clearer in meaning.

This awkward character of words also applies to our concept of time: In the course of history one can see that it always was a centrally important concept, but, as Auden ends: "(...) When have we not preferred some going round / To going straight to where we are?". Now this means, in

regard to his explanation of the abstract or not clear-cut meaning of words we use, that our concept of time is characterized by a comparable complexity. As such, our human bias is to not go straight in order to achieve some kind success (whatever this means in the concrete sense) but to rather 'go round' things.

From this Auden seems to derive a certain demand or invitation to learn a lesson from the natural environment: We should not purely rely on abstract concepts such as our notion of time or language because they have no direct connection to the real world (at least to the animal kingdom and the flora). In this sense any success to solve a problem is hindered by our human bias to not go straight but to complicate things. However, the question remaining in this context is: How can we ever overcome this bias? And more importantly, are our characteristically human traits, our sense of time and language, merely useless in the context of real life.