The Philosophical Christianity of C. S. Lewis: Its Sources, Content and Formation

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A. J. Ayer, one of the leaders of Logical Positivism in Britain, recounts an exchange he once had with C. S. Lewis:

While the analytic movement, in one form or another took increasing control of the English philosophical scene, there were some pockets of resistance to it. One of those who fought a rearguard action against it in Oxford was the English scholar C. S. Lewis, who had once had the ambition to become a tutor in philosophy and still took a lively interest in the subject. He presided over the Socratic Club, which then drew a large audience to meetings at which the principal speakers usually struck a religious note. At one of these meetings, not long after my return to Oxford, I undertook a reply to a paper by Michael Foster, who had spent part of the war as an officer in Northern Ireland and had come back strengthened in his Puritanism. I dealt with his paper rather harshly, and when he made little effort to defend it, C. S. Lewis took over from him. Lewis and I then engaged in a flashy debate, which entertained the audience but did neither of us much credit, while Foster sat by, suffering in silence.¹

This passage is interesting because it shows C. S. Lewis, a man generally perceived as a literary critic, fantasy writer and / or lay theologian, engaged in a philosophical debate with one of the twentieth century’s most influential philosophers. And this was not just a one-time occurrence: over the course of his life, Lewis crossed paths with many great

philosophers such as Gilbert Ryle, Antony Flew, C. E. M. Joad, Fredrick Copleston, Basil Mitchell, and George Grant. If one thinks about it for a moment, these philosophical debates point to a dimension of Lewis – a philosophical dimension – which has been largely overlooked.

And this brings me to the motivation behind this dissertation. By and large it seems as though friends and critics alike have been content with reducing any discussion of Lewis’s philosophical thoughts, if they mention it at all, to his apologetics. I find this lack of attention given to Lewis’s larger philosophical interests both saddening because it robs “Lewis of the philosophic insights that constitute the very texture of his apologetic,” and surprising given the vast outpouring of publications about Lewis every year. It is lamentable that, for instance, during the Christmas 2005 holiday season alone, more than twenty books were written about The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, none of which

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told us anything new about Lewis (“a shelf-full of mediocrity,”9 as one critic put it). Of course there have been a few attempts at drawing attention to Lewis philosophical thoughts, notably: the recently released collection of essays on Lewis’s understanding of Truth, Beauty and Goodness (which is nicely titled *C. S. Lewis as Philosopher*),10 another recently released collection of essays on *The Chronicles of Narnia* and philosophy,11 Erik Wielenberg’s new book which discusses the views of Lewis, Russell and Hume largely on natural theology,12 French philosopher Iréne Fernandez’s book on Lewis’s theory of reason and myth,13 the third volume of Bruce Edward’s *C. S. Lewis: Life, Works, and Legacy*,14 Owen Barfield’s and Lionel Adey’s insight into Lewis’s “Great War” with Owen Barfield,15 Peter Kreeft’s selected essays on Lewis’s argument for Joy and Natural Law,16 Victor Reppert’s books and essays on Lewis’s argument from reason,17 Richard

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10 David Baggett, Gary Habermas and Jerry Walls, eds., *C. S. Lewis as Philosopher: Truth, Goodness, and Beauty* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008). Let me extend my gratitude to David Baggett, who graciously provided me with all the chapters to this book before it was published.
11 Gregory Bassham and Jerry L. Walls, eds., *The Chronicles of Narnia and Philosophy: The Lion, the Witch, and the Worldview* (Chicago: Open Court, 2005).
Purtill’s philosophical insights into Lewis’s theological project, Peter Schakel’s discussion on reason and the imagination, James Patrick’s essays on Lewis and Idealism, Basil Mitchell’s papers about Lewis and ethics, Christopher Mitchell’s essay on Lewis and the Socratic Club, John Beversluis’s attack on Lewis’s rational religion, and selected essays by prominent Catholic theologians like Avery Cardinal Dulles, who said Lewis was “competent in philosophy,” and Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI), who spoke of Lewis as “the English author and philosopher.” Nevertheless, for the most part, these books and essays only partially discuss Lewis’s larger philosophical views, and when they do discuss his larger philosophical views, none of them do an adequate job of detailing Lewis’s philosophical formation, for most of these books and


Peter Schakel, Reason and Imagination in C. S. Lewis: A Study of Till We Have Faces (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984).


John Beversluis, C. S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985). It should be noted that while a second, revised edition of this book was released in 2007, I have not made use of it since all of the basic arguments – with their respective theses and conclusions – are basically unchanged.


Joseph Ratzinger, “Consumer Materialism and Christian Hope,” http://www.catholic-ew.org.uk/resource/toff/ratzinger.html (accessed August 4, 2005). Cf. “I think one of the most illuminating comments I have ever heard about Lewis was from someone who hadn’t met him but who could understand human motivation very well and who also was a writer, and that was the Pope. I met him in 1984, and as I understand it the meeting was at his suggestion because he was the one who wanted to talk about Lewis. John Paul had been reading the works of Lewis at least since the fifties. Anyway, it was a great moment for me when I had the talk with him and he began by asking me, ‘Do you still love your old friend C. S. Lewis?’ I said, ‘Yes, Holy Father, both storge and philia,’ and he said, ‘Ah, you knew I liked The Four Loves!’ But at the end of the interview he then made a comment about Lewis. He said, ‘C. S. Lewis knew what his apostolate was.’ There was a long pause, then he said, ‘And he did it!’” Walter Hooper, “Tolkien and C. S. Lewis: An Interview with Walter Hooper,” in Tolkein: A Celebration, ed. Joseph Pearce, 190-8 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001), 194.
essays are ultimately concerned with, as I said before, explaining Lewis’s natural theology and thus, in turn, his apologetics. Consequently, not one of these books or essays has properly dealt with the complexity of Lewis’s philosophical formation and how this formation ultimately relates to Lewis’s larger Christian thought; that is, nothing has yet been written that sufficiently discusses how Lewis’s philosophical views shaped, and were shaped by, his views on literature and theology and how all of these came together in Lewis’s mature Christian beliefs. Thus, in this dissertation, which I have entitled “The Philosophical Christianity of C. S. Lewis,” I would like to rectify this situation by focusing on Lewis’s philosophical formation and how this formation, by complex interaction with literature and theology, ultimately gave birth to Lewis’s mature Christian views. As a result, I will not focus on Lewis’s arguments in natural theology and apologetics; rather, I will only discuss these arguments if they become necessary to elucidate Lewis’s philosophical formation.

Yet this title – “The Philosophical Christianity of C. S. Lewis” – by itself is incomplete, for Lewis’s philosophical Christianity was largely motivated by classical and medieval philosophical, literary and theological ideas, and in this regard two things are important to keep in mind. First, although Lewis was primarily an interdisciplinary, eclectic thinker, his major influence – I do not say his only influence – in terms of philosophical, theological and literary content is a generous Christian Neoplatonism, a body of philosophical, theological and literary works which attempts to synchronize, as well as it can, the best of Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics and Pagan religion with Christianity. Second, Lewis understood the purpose of philosophy – which for him was inextricably tied to theology and literature – to be the complete transformation of life or a radical
combination of theory and practice and not simply theory partially informing, or worse yet, completely divorced from, practice. In this regard he is largely in agreement with the philosophers of antiquity, who, according to Pierre Hadot, understood philosophy to be “a method of spiritual progress which demanded a radical conversion and transformation of the individual’s way of being.”

To this Lewis would only add that the truly philosophical life will utilize not only reason but also the imagination and indeed all of man’s faculties to probe physical, metaphysical and mythological reality for answers as to how one ought to live.

Hence, it is my view that if one understands philosophy in the classical sense, as a way of life or a process by which one seeks after wisdom and then attempts to live in accordance with it, Lewis may be justly called a philosophical Christian. Vector Reppert, although he formulates it differently than I, agrees:

Lewis was a thinker with what I believe to be outstanding philosophical instincts.

. . . It is sometimes presupposed by those who are familiar with the technical side of a discipline like philosophy that no one who is not similarly a ‘professional’ has anything serious to say. But of course ‘professionalism’ in philosophy is a rather recent development: the majority of those who have made significant contributions to philosophy over the past twenty-five centuries would not qualify as ‘professional’ philosophers in the contemporary sense.

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28 Reppert, *C. S. Lewis’s Dangerous Idea*, 12, 15. Cf. “Technically, [Lewis] was throughout most of his adult life a professor of literature. But really, he was a philosopher. Philosophy is the love of wisdom, along with an unending desire to find it, understand it, put it into action, and pass it on to others. Lewis brought a
Nevertheless, while I will attempt to show throughout this dissertation that Lewis is an interdisciplinary Christian thinker of impressive philosophical merit, let me strongly emphasize that I have no intention of turning a blind eye (as so many Lewis scholars do) to Lewis’s philosophical and theological shortcomings, nor do I intend to prove in any way that Lewis is a “serious” or “professional” philosopher or theologian if by this we mean, as Hadot does when he speaks of the modern understanding of the philosopher, someone who strives “in turn to invent . . . a new construction, systematic and abstract, intended to somehow or other to explain the universe, or at the least . . . elaborate a new discourse about language.”29 It would be odd indeed if after lamenting the poor state of Lewis scholarship, I would then proceed to commit the most common of all mistakes in regard to Lewis scholarship – to oversimplify him and then hail him as infallible.

Methodologically, I will be using a combination of a problem-centered approach (how do we solve this apparent inconsistency?) and a genealogical approach (what came before this?) to reconstruct, and of course evaluate, Lewis’s philosophical Christianity. And while these two approaches can provide a fairly accurate picture of what is going on, historical reconstruction is no straightforward matter as the meaning of terms and concepts change from philosopher to philosopher and theologian to theologian. And even

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29 Pierre Hadot, What is Ancient Philosophy? trans. Michael Chase (1995 reprint from the French; Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 2. Hence, I agree with Scott Burson and Jerry Walls when they write, “So the first thing we should realize is that when we come to Lewis . . . we should not come expecting the philosophical rigor of a Plantinga or Swinburne. Those who come with such expectations are sure to be disappointed.” Scott Burson and Jerry Walls, C. S. Lewis & Francis Schaeffer: Lessons for a New Century from the Most Influential Apologists of Our Time (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 240.
this would not be so difficult were Lewis not so well-read and eclectic, for the huge diversity of philosophical positions that he took over the years, culminating in Christian Neoplatonism, make getting at the meaning of such apparently simple words as “idealism,” “reason” or “imagination” extremely difficult. The point is that all of this requires a lot of finesse and gap-filling, an activity which Lewis himself – particularly in regard to literature – was often skeptical of despite being an eminent student of history and the evolution of ideas: “There is a moral here for all of us as critics. I wonder how much Quellenforschung in our studies of older literature seems solid only because those who knew the facts are dead and cannot contradict it?”30

As for the structure of this dissertation, I have divided it into five main chapters. In the first chapter, I attempt to set the stage for understanding Lewis’s philosophical Christianity by discussing the classical root of Lewis’s orientation to philosophy: philosophy as a way of life. In the second chapter, I attempt to relate this understanding of philosophy to Lewis himself, and I do so by focusing on the most important elements in philosophy as a way of life: rational analysis and action / conversion. In the third chapter, I argue that Lewis’s philosophical Christianity is inextricably tied up with the notion of heavenly desire. In the fourth chapter, I endeavor to show that rational discourse and heavenly desire ultimately point to the most crucial element in Lewis’s philosophical Christianity: Myth. Finally, in the fifth chapter, I complete my discussion of Lewis’s philosophical Christianity by showing how his philosophical, literary and theological thought all culminate in his cultural identity as an “Old Western Man” – an interdisciplinary man well-grounded in classical and medieval Christian Neoplatonism.

Chapter One:
Philosophy as a Way of Life

Lewis’s orientation to philosophy “as a way of life” was not his own; rather, as I mentioned in the introduction, it belonged to antiquity. Consequently, before Lewis’s philosophical Christianity can even be discussed, it is crucial that we first examine some of the most important philosophies of antiquity in order to get a clearer idea of this definition. Furthermore, since I have taken the phrase “philosophy as a way of life” from Pierre Hadot, I propose to start by examining his criteria for philosophy as a way of life and then proceed to investigate the primary sources of antiquity themselves to defend my two-part claim – to be dealt in this chapter and the next – that ancient philosophy was considered a complete way of life and that Lewis – at least the mature Lewis – understood philosophy similarly.

I: Ancient Philosophy as a Way of Life

In his 1987 book *Exercices Spirituels et Philosophie Antique* – which was later expanded and translated into English as *Philosophy as a Way of Life* – Pierre Hadot roughly defined ancient philosophy as “a method of spiritual progress which demanded radical conversion and transformation of the individual’s way of being.”

Years later, in his 1995 book, *Qu’est-ce que la Philosophie Antique?*, Hadot refined his definition, claiming that ancient philosophy, at least since the time of Socrates, began as “a choice of life and an existential option” attained in “a complex interrelation with critical reaction to other existential attitudes, with global vision of a certain way of living and of seeing the world,

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and with voluntary decision itself;”\footnote{Hadot, \textit{What is Ancient Philosophy?} 3.} furthermore, Hadot insisted, the ancient philosopher, desiring to live a certain way, joined a philosophical “school,” which subsequently helped him, through \textit{askēsis} – disciplined training or the practice of spiritual exercises, such as fasting, meditating, reading, etc. – change his entire way of being as he was expected to live in accordance with the school’s philosophy or “vision of the world,” which had been revealed by rational, theoretical discourse.\footnote{Ibid.} Combining these two general descriptions, Hadot appears to understand ancient philosophy (as well as a few other types of modern philosophy, such as Marxism) as generally (1) a choice (2) made in a cultural context (3) to follow a certain group of people who (4) had a certain take on life which (5) demanded training – be it “physical,” “discursive” or “intuitive”\footnote{Ibid., 6.} – which (6) was, importantly, the result of rational discourse, and which (7) would ultimately lead to a fully converted life.

While I think this characterization of ancient philosophy is excellent, it is possible that Hadot overemphasizes the importance of (3) and (4) since Socrates, for instance, does not appear to have belonged to a philosophical “school” like that of the Pythagoreans, Platonists, Aristotelians or Stoics. Furthermore, when we come to Lewis, we shall see that although the Oxford don clearly subscribed to (1), (2), (5), (6) and (7) and although there is a strong case for his having admitted (3) and (4), particularly when he was under the guidance of Kirkpatrick, Lewis, like Socrates, was as much a lone thinker as he was a member of a particular school.

However, this later comment is peripheral, and I would now like to test Hadot’s characterization of ancient philosophy in order to demonstrate its relative accuracy.
II: Plato

Although philosophy began before Socrates and Plato, it was Plato, following Pythagoras, who popularized the idea of philosophy or *philo-sophia* as “the love of wisdom.” According to Plato, the philosopher is a lover who is attracted by, and drawn to, the beauty that is present in speculative wisdom and truth. It is only by pursuing the glimmers of wisdom and truth that one comes to understand one’s place in the cosmos and how one is then to live. What such wisdom partially reveals is that one is made to contemplate “what lies outside the heavens,” the eternal, immaterial Ideas or Forms, for the soul, which is physical but immortal, fell from the heavens, where it had previously enjoyed the purely intellectual activity of thinking about the perfect, unchangeable Forms. The soul’s fall from its pure vision of the Forms was caused by a turn toward the even-more-physical, mortal, ever-changing world. Hence, the return to happiness, the return to heavenly contemplation, is accomplished by following the knowledge roadmap that the immortal soul has innate within. By remembering or recollecting through the use of dialectic its true home and by following what it learns, the soul can eventually return home.

Thus, while purely theoretical knowledge, contemplation and speculative wisdom may be understood as the highest form of happiness in itself, purely theoretical knowledge is not good enough in this world of flux: the soul must recover its true self through the

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35 Plato *Symposium* 204d.  
36 Ibid., 200e; Plato *Phaedrus* 230.  
37 Ibid., 247.  
38 Plato *Phaedrus* 248.  
39 Plato *Phaedo* 72b.
exercise of both practical wisdom and dietary, meditative and discursive askēsis.\textsuperscript{40} The result of this exercise is the development of virtue, which in turn leads to eminently rational actions in this life.\textsuperscript{41} Hence, Hadot rightly tells us: “for Plato, knowledge is never purely theoretical. It is the transformation of our being; it is virtue.”\textsuperscript{42}

In short, good men are wise men and it is they and they alone who can eventually escape from the horrible cycle of reincarnation that plagues all “fallen” souls; thus, “the philosopher’s soul is ahead of all the rest.”\textsuperscript{43}

III: Aristotle

After Plato came Aristotle and the peripatetics. While it must be admitted at the onset that they certainly differ from Plato in emphasis, they nevertheless agree with Plato and his Academy by insisting that the truly happy man must not only be a lover of speculative wisdom, but also that speculative wisdom via practical wisdom must produce fruit in the individual. This concept is often easy to overlook because Aristotle is far more systematic than Plato and he is often accused of being too theoretical. Yet as we have seen with Plato, it is not impossible to maintain the superiority of the contemplative life, theoretical knowledge and speculative wisdom over and against the practical life and practical wisdom and knowledge \textit{if} one remembers that Aristotle, as much as Plato, thinks that when action is called for – and it is always called for in one form or another since that is what life is – it must be done in virtue, from wisdom. Aristotle himself explains:

\textsuperscript{40} Plato \textit{Laws} 673-4, 728. Of course, by not differentiating between the different periods of Plato’s writings – early, middle and late – I am aware that I am presenting a Plato that appears more systematic that he actually was. Since my intention in this chapter is merely to show that Plato and the other ancient thinkers understood philosophy to be a way of life and not to go into great detail about their philosophies, perhaps I will be forgive for presenting a somewhat two-dimensional Plato.

\textsuperscript{41} Plato \textit{Protagoras} 323d. Plato \textit{Gorgias} 507c.

\textsuperscript{42} Hadot, \textit{What is Ancient Philosophy?} 70.

\textsuperscript{43} Plato \textit{Phaedo} 65c.
If we are right in our view, and happiness is assumed to be acting well, the active life will be the best, both for every city collectively, and for individuals. Not that a life of action must necessarily have relation to others, as some persons think, nor are those ideas only to be regarded as practical which are pursued for the sake of practical results, but much more the thoughts and contemplations which are independent and complete in themselves; since acting well, and therefore a certain kind of action, is an end, and even in the case of external actions the directing mind is most truly said to act.\(^{44}\)

Thus, while Aristotle certainly emphasizes theoretical knowledge, recommending, for instance, the philosopher restrict his job to advising political leaders as opposed to Plato’s recommendation that the philosopher become a political leader, Aristotle agrees with Plato that philosophy implies a way of life and is not a purely contemplative affair, for the pursuit of wisdom – firstly speculative and secondly practical – and the following of its dictates (i.e. developing virtues) is the key to happiness, which is the goal of life.\(^{45}\)

IV: Cynicism, Skepticism, Epicureanism and Stoicism

Cynicism, founded by Antisthenes and continued by Diogenes the Cynic, developed parallel to Platonism. Antisthenes was a follower of Socrates who strongly emphasized that virtue is sufficient for happiness. His follower Diogenes the Cynic was called “Socrates gone mad” by Plato, for Diogenes denounced the life of argument and teaching for the life genuinely lived in accordance with nature, which for him meant that which

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\(^{44}\) Aristotle *Politics* 1325b15-20.

\(^{45}\) Aristotle *Ethics* 1097b20-1098a22.
was minimally required for human life. The Cynics would have agreed that philosophy is a way of life, for while their philosophy does not emphasize teaching others, it does emphasize the life lived in accordance with their philosophy and as such is achieved only through *askēsis* or the practice of spiritual exercises such as walking barefoot in the snow or eating whatever can be found, which are, of course, concrete ways of reinforcing that the happy life is the simple life.

Pyrrho of Elis, the founder of Pyrrhonism, and Sextus Empiricus, the one who developed Pyrrhonism into Skepticism, would also have accepted the definition of philosophy as a way of life. According to them, the philosopher develops arguments to set up opposition between all beliefs to demonstrate that all judgments (the cause of much fear and pain) must be suspended, the result of which is relative freedom from anxiety, which is the closest thing Skeptics have to happiness: “Skepticism is an ability to set up an opposition of appearances and thoughts, in any way at all, an ability from which we come, through the equal force of the opposing statements and states of affairs, first into suspension and after that into freedom from disturbance.”

Epicurus founded the school of Epicureanism, which teaches that the goal of life is pleasure. At first glance it might seem that they are an exception to our definition of philosophy, but it is not so; for the Epicureans, philosophy is to be lived just as much as it is for all the other schools we have looked at. Everything, therefore, seems to turn on what the Epicureans call “pleasure.” According to them, pleasure is chiefly found in freedom from fear – fear of death, the gods, etc: “We do what we do to avoid suffering

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46 Diogenes Laertius *Lives of the Philosophers* 6.54.
48 Sextus Empiricus *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 1.8.
and fear.” Epicurus demonstrates how philosophy is a way of life by insisting that through the use of reason one can come to understand that the soul is mortal and that the gods are made of material atoms (like all of the cosmos) and are perfectly good (i.e. unconcerned with judging us). Philosophy, therefore, is therapeutic; it is a life that trains the philosopher not to desire or pursue things that are either unnecessary but natural (e.g. sex) or unnecessary and unnatural (e.g. fame and power). The pursuit of things that can only cause more anxiety and pain are bad, for pleasure is found in peace and harmony.

Perhaps the least controversial when it comes to understanding philosophy as implying a way of life is Stoicism, founded by Zeno of Citium. Zeno was hugely influenced by the ethics (but not the metaphysics and epistemology) of Socrates and Plato. In particular, the Stoics agree that all men desire the good, and that the good is happiness. Happiness and the good, which are to be identified with tranquility and self-sufficiency, are achieved by living in accordance with reason, which is to say that it consists in right action and the development of virtue. The philosopher’s duty is to transform souls through reason and askēsis, not to waste time solely with logical puzzles. As Seneca tells us: “There is no time for playing around. . . . You have promised to bring help to the shipwrecked, the imprisoned, the sick, the needy, to those whose heads are under the poised axe. Where are you deflecting your attention? What are you doing?”

V: Neoplatonism

49 Epicurus Letter to Menoeceus §128.
50 Ibid.
51 After Lewis became a Christian, he charged the Epicureans with loving comfort more than truth; if so, this would problematize the Epicurean stance. Nevertheless, there is nothing in Epicurus himself, at least, that suggests he was disingenuous in claiming comfort was the result of the love of truth (i.e. rational inquiry) and not vice versa.
52 Seneca Letters to Lucilius 48.8.
Neoplatonism is the accumulation of classical philosophy, and although no Neoplatonist identified himself as anything other than a Platonist (Plotinus, for instance, was adamant about his orthodox Platonism\(^{53}\)), the Neoplatonic “school” is clearly a syncretism of Platonism (early and Middle), Aristotelianism, Stoicism and pagan *cultus* or the wisdom of the priests. Now while many modern philosophers are uncomfortable with an intimate relationship between philosophy and cultus, it was not (always) so in the ancient world. The spiritual exercises practiced in the Pythagorean school, for instance, owed a lot to Orphism and Egyptian cultus, and although Socrates was accused of corrupting the youth – using philosophy to critique the traditional understanding of the Olympian gods – he, nevertheless, spoke reverently about the gods, claiming that philosophy helped him be more pious.\(^{54}\) However, while ancient philosophy often borrowed from cultus, and while most of the ancient philosophers generally thought that discursive reason was able to critique or at least exegete such divine revelations, the relationship between philosophy, which makes rational inquiry primary, and cultus, which makes non-rational, supra-rational or mythical revelation primary,\(^{55}\) in regard to Neoplatonism has often been contested.

On the one hand, Neoplatonism – particularly Plotinus’s Neoplatonism – appears to have been more of a philosophy than a cultus since (1) Neoplatonists like Plotinus always identified themselves as philosophers, indeed, as Platonists; (2) Plotinus’s *Enneads*, for

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\(^{53}\) Plotinus *Enneads* 5.1.8. Moreover, as Karamanolis points out, to have called Neoplatonists anything but Platonists – indeed, even to have called them “eclectics or syncretists” – would have been “largely pejorative.” Karamanolis, *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement? Platonists on Aristotle from Antiochus to Porphyry*, 24.

\(^{54}\) Plato *Phaedrus* 279.

\(^{55}\) I have attempted to give a basic definition of cultus, particularly as it is distinct from philosophy, although I agree with Peterson et al. that such a task is a “notoriously difficult” one since any definition is “subject to counterexamples.” Michael Peterson et al., *Reason & Religious Belief*, 3\(^{rd}\) ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 6.
instance, generally emphasize philosophical matters;\textsuperscript{56} and (3) Neoplatonism in general was in complete agreement with the ancient understanding of philosophy as a transformative method by which the soul, through reason, spiritual exercises and virtuous living, can move upward through what later thinkers called “the Great Chain of Being” and eventually attain happiness.\textsuperscript{57} On the other hand, Neoplatonism could also be viewed as a philosophical cultus since on top of its interest in rituals and theurgy, it insists that through supra-rational means the soul can ultimately attain mystical union with the One.

In my opinion, I think Neoplatonism – at least that of Plotinus – should be considered a philosophy with heavy cultic influences since (1) much of Plotinus’s, and therefore Neoplatonism’s, emphasis on the mystical nature of the One comes, importantly, from philosophical sources such as Plato’s \textit{Parmenides} and \textit{Republic}; and (2) Plotinus’s insistence on the value of discursive reason at preliminary stages throughout the souls’ assent toward the One implies that it is discursive reason itself that informs the soul about the value of mystical experience. Consequently, I do not see the Neoplatonic emphasis on the mystical union with the One as something strongly distinct from philosophy but rather as something that is affirmed on the basis of rational consideration. Discursive reason, in other words, just as much for the Neoplatonists as for the other ancient philosophers, is the judge of divine revelation and mystical practices, but it judges in a way that often points to its own inadequacies and so endorses the rationality of accepting the mystical insights of cultus.\textsuperscript{58}


\textsuperscript{57} “Plotinus, [being] devoted to himself, was never relaxed, except during sleep; but he was prevented from sleeping because he ate so little (often he did not even eat bread) and because he constantly oriented his thought toward spirit.” Porphyry \textit{Life of Plotinus} 8.20.

VI: Early Christianity

However, if the border between philosophy and cultus in Neoplatonism is difficult to discern, it is nearly as much so with early Christianity. On the one hand, Christianity was primarily presented as a non-rational or even irrational cultus, which made claims, such as the triune nature of God, which *prima facie* seemed absurd (as many Manicheans and Platonists, such as Celsus and Porphyry, observed). On the other hand, Christianity was not, as was usually the case with pagan cultus, something that was incredible for the rational man to accept without allegory or other literary devices; Jesus’s miracles, for instance, were not primarily understood as allegories for some deeper spiritual truth, but rather were thought to be literal *evidence* of His divinity;\(^5^9\) moreover, despite Paul’s warning to the Colossians to be careful of “hollow and deceptive philosophers,”\(^6^0\) he himself argued both with Jewish religious leaders about *evidence* for Jesus in the Bible and with Greek philosophers about the “Unknown God.”\(^6^1\)

Nevertheless, while acknowledging the historical tension between Christianity’s revealed and philosophical aspects, it is important to realize that the majority of early church leaders and thinkers soon came to endorse a basic compatibility between rationality and Christianity by claiming that the cultic foundation of Christianity was not at all incompatible with rational discourse; hence, Justin the Martyr called Christianity “the definitive philosophy,”\(^6^2\) and St. Augustine wrote, “Now if wisdom is identical with

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\(^{60}\) Colossians 2:8.


\(^{62}\) Justin Martyr *Apology* 1.46.
God, by whom all things were made, as we are assured by divine authority and divine truth, then the true philosopher is the lover of God;”\(^{63}\) Thus, Hadot speaks truly when he says that “from its very beginnings – that is, from the second century AD on – Christianity had presented itself as a philosophy: the Christian way of life.”\(^{64}\) Consequently, I believe that the majority of early Christian thinkers can justly be seen as philosophers in the ancient sense of the word since firstly they accepted Christianity because its cultic aspects were not repugnant to the rational mind and secondly such men and women were subsequently schooled in Christianity in the Church, which demanded not only that they practice various spiritual exercises to strengthen their faith (penance, praying, etc.) but also that their actions flow from their knowledge and faith to form a fully converted life.

VII: The Continuation of Philosophy as a Way of Life

Now over the centuries and millennia, many people kept alive the ancient understanding of philosophy as a way of life. Thus, the seventeenth century Anglican priest Thomas Traherne could still echo Justin the Martyr and Augustine, saying, “Philosophers are not those that speak but do great things. . . . Every man therefore according to his degree, so far as he is a Christian, is a Philosopher.”\(^{65}\) Indeed, it is not hard to see a Christian philosopher like Descartes, with his method of doubt, strongly endorsing the idea of

\(^{63}\) Augustine *City of God* 7.1.

\(^{64}\) Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 269.

\(^{65}\) Thomas Traherne, *Centuries of Meditation*, ed. Bertram Dobell (London: Robert Stockwell, 1950), 229, 232 [4.2, 4.5]. Very likely because of men like Traherne, Lewis had Screwtape the devil remark: “It sounds as if you supposed that argument was the way to keep [your patient] out of the Enemy’s clutches. That might have been so if he had lived a few centuries earlier. At that time the humans still knew pretty well when a thing was proved and when it was not; and if it was proved they really believed it. They still connected thinking with doing and were prepared to alter their way of life as the result of a chain of reasoning.” C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, in *C. S. Lewis: Selected Books* [Long Edition] (1942 reprint; London: HarperCollins, 1999), 741.
philosophy as a way of life.\textsuperscript{66} And so, while it is true that the dominance of the university from the Middle Ages onward sometimes threatened to reduce philosophy to a mere academic discipline or tool instead of a way of life,\textsuperscript{67} for the most part the spirit of ancient philosophy lived on such that when C. S. Lewis first started his schooling in the twentieth century, this is the understanding of philosophy – as we shall see – which he inherited and made his own.

\textsuperscript{66} That Descartes held to the classical understanding philosophy is somewhat apparent in quotation like this, “But I admit that long exercise is needed as well as frequently repeated meditation, in order to become accustomed to looking at everything from this point of view;” or this, “I had met with such extreme contentment since the time I had begun to make use of this method.” Rene Descartes, \textit{Discourse on Method}, trans. Donald Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1998), 15 [3.26-27].

\textsuperscript{67} While Hadot exaggerates considerably, he is right that the medieval university did start to see philosophy a bit different than the ancient academy: “If we disregard, for the moment, the monastic usage of the word \textit{philosophia}, we can say that philosophy in the Middle Ages had become purely theoretical and abstract activity. . . . One of the characteristics of the university is that it is made up of professors who train professors, or professionals training professionals. Education was thus no longer directed toward people who were to be educated with a view to becoming fully developed human beings, but to specialists, in order that they might learn how to train other specialists, in order that they might learn how to train other specialists. This is the danger of ‘Scholasticism,’ that philosophical tendency which began to be sketched at the end of antiquity, developed in the Middle Ages, and whose presence is still recognizable in philosophy today.” Hadot, \textit{Philosophy as a Way of Life}, 270.
Chapter Two:
“Practicing True Philosophy;” or, Lewis’s Philosophical Journey

Whenever Lewis was asked to write about his conversion to Christianity, he always pointed out that his, like Justin Martyr’s, was “almost [a] purely philosophical [conversion]” which came about as the result of a philosophical journey; thus, to one inquirer, he wrote, “My own history was so mixed up with technical philosophy as to be useless to the general [public],” and to another, “The details of my own conversion were so technically philosophical on one side, and so intimate on the other that they can’t be used in the way you suggest.” However, despite the central role philosophy played in Lewis’s conversion, the Oxford don felt he had to downplay it in his conversion narrative Surprised by Joy for the sake of his audience. This is extremely unfortunate since most people – Lewis scholars included – now have a very poor understanding of Lewis’s definition of philosophy, which informed, and was informed by, his philosophical journey.

Nevertheless, those interested in Lewis’s philosophical journey have a small concession, for prior to both Surprised by Joy and the inquiries about his conversion, Lewis had written a semi-autobiography, The Pilgrim’s Regress, in the preface to the third edition of which he gave us a synopsis of his philosophical journey and conversion:

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68 Justin always wore a philosopher’s robe and passed from the Peripatetic school to the Pythagorean, Stoic and Platonic schools before eventually finding Truth in Christ and the prophets of the Old Testament.
69 “I gave up Christianity at about fourteen. Came back to it when getting on for thirty. Not an emotional conversion: almost purely philosophical.” C. S. Lewis, “Autobiographical Note,” prepared by the Macmillian Company in 1946 (The Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College), 1.
71 Ibid., 575 [May 20, 1943].
72 “In this preface the autobiographical element in John has had to be stressed because the source of the obscurities lay there. But you must not assume that everything in the book is autobiographical. I was attempting to generalise, not to tell people about my life.” C. S. Lewis, the preface to the third edition of The Pilgrim’s Regress, in C. S. Lewis: Selected Books [Short Edition] (1933 reprint; London: HarperCollins, 2002), 12.
“On the intellectual side my own progress had been from ‘popular realism’ to
Philosophical Idealism; from Idealism to Pantheism; from Pantheism to Theism; and
from Theism to Christianity.” 73 While it must be admitted that Lewis’s outline in The
Pilgrim’s Regress was intended as a non-technical sketch, I still think that it is useful for
a more technical exploration of the Oxford don’s all-important philosophical journey.
Moreover, while a sympathetic reading of any author is necessary in order to understand
his or her ideas, a historian, in particular, a historian of philosophy, must be able to
separate himself from his subject in order to see things that the author / subject may not
have been able to see. Thus, in the case of Lewis, I have found at least six things that
need to be added to his outline and subsequently addressed in the body of this chapter.

First, it needs to be pointed out that Lewis’s outline omits the fact that he was baptized
at birth and lived the first eleven years of his life as a Christian; while he may not have
thought of this as “on the intellectual side” of his philosophical growth, this must be
mentioned – even if only here – in order to give context to his return to Christianity.

Second, “popular realism” will need to be clarified. This word itself is not used by
professional philosophers; however, given the great battle at Oxford in the first half of the
twentieth century between what philosophers like F. H. Bradley and A. J. Ayer called
“realism and idealism,” 74 we may assume that Lewis’s “popular realism” was actually
“metaphysical realism,” which maintains the existence of real, spatiotemporal objects that
exist separately from people’s knowledge of them and which have properties and enter
into relations independently of the concepts by which people understand them. Moreover,
in another outline, Lewis’s “popular realism” is simply referred to as metaphysical

73 Ibid., 5.
materialism: “I went from materialism to idealism, idealism to pantheism, from pantheism to theism, and from theism to Christianity.”

Thus, throughout this and subsequent chapters, we must be careful with Lewis’s language because while Lewis the metaphysical materialist / metaphysical realist was also an epistemological realist, Lewis the Christian still remained an epistemological realist.

Third, I will need to address a metaphysical dualist phase that Lewis underwent in 1918, but which he failed to mention in his outline.

Fourth, I will need to distinguish between two different materialist positions Lewis held: Lucretian materialism (1909-1917) and Stoical materialism (1920-1923).

Fifth, I will need to clarify Lewis’s understanding of idealism and pantheism, for not only did the Oxford don, at different times, subscribe to two different types of idealism (subjective idealism and absolute idealism), but he also seemed to have equated one of these idealisms (absolute idealism) with pantheism.

And sixth, it must also be pointed out that Lewis’s outline gives us no indication of his repeated repositioning – a pendulum-like movement of probably two swings back and forth – between absolute idealism (1923-1924 and 1927-1929) and subjective idealism (1924-1926 and possibly 1929), all of which occurred in the space of about six years.

Nevertheless, even though Lewis was not always clear about the details of his own philosophical journey and conversion, he did provide us – as we shall see – with an example of a man who slowly, eventually came to understand philosophy in the ancient sense of the word: as a way of life, or (1) a choice (2) made in a cultural context (3) to follow wholeheartedly a certain group of people who (4) had a certain take on life which (5) demanded training which (6) was the result of rational discourse, and which (7) would

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ultimately lead to a fully converted life. Of course, since the task of mapping out Lewis’s philosophical journey is too complex for just one chapter, what begins in this chapter – Lewis’s philosophical journey qua rational discourse and training – will continue through to the end of chapter five.

I: Lucretian Materialism

In 1911, when C. S. Lewis was 13 years old, he started reading some of the classics at Cherbourg School, which he called “Chartres” in Surprised by Joy. He was sent there by his father, who was an “intelligent man” but one who “cared . . . little for metaphysics.” This separated the elder Lewis from the younger Lewis, for even at that early age, Lewis had read some of the classical philosophers and had digested them to a respectable degree. For instance, in his 1913 essay “Are Athletes Better than Scholars?” Lewis wrote things like, “No philosopher, however learned, has ever discovered what we exactly mean by the word ‘good’” and “But while allowing that the pursuit of athletics is a wholesale – nay, a necessary pastime – one cannot lose sight of the mistakes and wrong ideas arising from an exaggerated estimation of their value.” Moreover, a few months after having written “Are Athletes Better than Scholars,” Lewis gained a Classical

76 Lewis, Surprised by Joy, 1276. The name “Chartres” is a reference to the alleged early medieval School of Chartres, which focused on reconciling, through literary techniques, Platonism and Scripture. Lewis was quite fond of this school and he made use of many of their ideas. For instance, in Out of the Silent Planet, Lewis mentioned Oyarses, which he read about in Bernardus Silvestris’s Cosmographia, and in Perelandra, there is an allusion to Jean de Hanville’s Architrenius.
77 Ibid., 1247.
Entrance Scholarship to Malvern College ("Wyvern"), where we are told explicitly that he had to read at least one dialogue by Plato.\textsuperscript{79}

However, whatever Plato’s influence may have been on the early teenage Lewis, we do know that even before Lewis wrote “Are Athletes Better than Scholars?” – by 1909 or 1910 – he had read, and shortly after largely accepted, the philosophy of Lucretius, the author of \textit{On the Nature of Things}. Indeed, Lucretius’s Epicurean materialism had been one of the important factors that predisposed Lewis for his loss of faith in Christianity: an event which occurred in 1911.\textsuperscript{80}

Lewis’s attraction to Lucretius’s Epicureanism was the comfort that it offered in the form of dispelling the fear of God. Prior to his loss of faith, Lewis told us that he came to perceive God wholly in terms of judgment and damnation due to his earliest years living and studying in England under a severe Anglo-Catholicism: “if in my books I have spoken too much of Hell, and if critics want a historical explanation of the fact, they must seek it not in the supposed Puritanism of my Ulster childhood but in the Anglo-Catholicism of the church at Belsen.”\textsuperscript{81} This fear of God is reflected by John of \textit{The Pilgrim’s Regress}, a resident of “Puritania” who lives in fear of the “Landlord” who makes all the rules and who “was quite extraordinarily kind and good to his tenants, and would certainly torture most of them to death the moment he had the slightest pretext.”\textsuperscript{82}

As an Epicurean, Lucretius believed that through the use of reason a person could find peace by realizing that creation could never have occurred – for “nothing ever springs


\textsuperscript{80} Lewis, \textit{Surprised by Joy}, 1281.

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 1262.

\textsuperscript{82} Lewis, \textit{The Pilgrim’s Regress}, 21.
miraculously out of nothing” – and so while the gods do exist, they are completely made up of atoms like the rest of the cosmos and are not at all concerned with judgment and rules. Hence, partly inspired by Lucretius’s reduction of the gods, and partly by the pseudo-Darwinian philosophy that abounded in the early twentieth century, Lewis began to identify himself as an atheist – though he probably should have called himself an agnostic – who endorsed what he called “The Argument from Undesign” (“Had God designed the world, it would not be a world so frail and faulty as we see”).

Now while it would be far from wrong to call Lewis an Epicurean materialist, perhaps it would be better to call him a Lucretian materialist since Lewis – probably misunderstanding Lucretius’s therapeutic purpose in working through the rage of the passions in *On the Nature of Things* – likely came to identify his own bitter pessimism and promethean anger towards God with the cathartic rage poetry of Lucretius and not the tranquil maxims of Epicurus. Consequently, while it is fair to say Lewis’s adolescent acceptance of Lucretian materialism was more an “emotional need” than a

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83 Lucretius *On the Nature of Things* 1.150.
84 Lewis claims he “became an atheist at the age of fourteen.” Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III*, 1551 [June 9, 1944]. However, he is probably best understood as an agnostic, for in a 1916 letter, we read: “Of course, mind you, I am not laying down as a certainty that there is nothing outside the material world: considering the discoveries that are always being made, this would be foolish. Anything MAY exist: but until we know that it does, we can’t make any assumptions. The universe is an absolute mystery.” Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume I*, 231 [October 12, 1916].
87 “I was at this time living, like so many Atheists or Antitheists, in a whirl of contradictions. I maintained that God did not exist. I was also very angry with God for not existing. I was equally angry with him for creating a world.” Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 1310. I will examine this pessimism and anger more in chapter three, but suffice to say it is very evident in Lewis’s 1912-1913 poem, *Loki Bound*, which was inspired by Lucretius’s *On the Nature of Things*, Aeschylus’s *Prometheus Bound* and Norse mythology.
88 The only place that Lewis talked directly about Epicurus himself is in *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, where Lewis had Drudge, the caretaker of Mr. Sensible’s house, say of Epicurus: “‘Mr Epicurus was the first [to live in the house]. Mental case he was, poor gentleman: he had a chronic fear of the black hole [i.e. Hell]. Something dreadful. I never had a better employer, though. Nice, kind, quiet-spoken sort of man.’” Lewis, *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, 101.
well-reasoned philosophical conclusion\textsuperscript{89} – witness Dymer’s passionate escape from the Platonic Republic-like school in Lewis’s canto one of \textit{Dymer} – it would be wrong to overlook the philosophizing that occurred, for long after Lewis converted to Christianity, he still found the argument from design unconvincing, preferring Percy Shelley’s diatribe against God for not existing over William Paley’s clockmaker argument: “There is something holier about the atheism of a Shelley than about the theism of Paley.”\textsuperscript{90} Furthermore, when Lewis spoke of atheism as “boy[’]s philosophy,”\textsuperscript{91} he was not trying to set up a straw man, but rather spoke of it as such because for him, atheism, or rather agnosticism, was the philosophy that he accepted when he was a boy and as such was fairly simplistic.

Lewis’s materialism, however, did not begin and end with Lucretius. For another ten years, he developed his agnostic philosophy through a variety of sources. Yet before I mention these, it is important to remind ourselves of two things. First, from his earliest days onward, Lewis was deeply steeped in the classics: they were his main academic pursuit from secondary school through to university. Second, Lewis felt an internal struggle between his agnosticism on the one hand and his romantic longings and attraction to mythology on the other. This latter point I will discuss more in chapter four, but for now I want to keep the former point, Lewis’s continual classical training, in mind as we examine his Lucretian materialism.

\textsuperscript{89} Long after his conversion, Lewis said he held onto popular realism “partly [because it] satisfied an emotional need.” Lewis, \textit{Surprised by Joy}, 1365.


After what may have been an early attempt at honest atheism, Lewis’s embryonic philosophical integrity seems to have been compromised a bit. He tells us that at Malvern College he started to become an intellectual prig or highbrow due to his increasing pride,\(^{92}\) which, Lewis confessed, was his besetting sin for more than half his life.\(^{93}\)

Nevertheless, while this intellectual snobbery stayed with Lewis for some time, it slowly (the key word here) began to weaken in 1914, when he went to Great Bookham to be tutored by Kirkpatrick, “an Atheist . . . [and] ‘Rationalist’ of the old, high and dry nineteenth-century type.”\(^{94}\) Lewis started to regain his interest in philosophy because he was so impressed by Kirkpatrick’s great emphasis on dialectic and the Socratic dictum of only saying what you mean; indeed, Lewis remarked, “Yet though I could never have been a scientist, I had scientific as well as imaginative impulses, and I loved ratiocination. Kirk excited and satisfied one side of me.”\(^{95}\) Moreover, while Kirkpatrick should probably be understood as a typical proponent of philosophy as mere rational discourse and not as a way of life (“if ever a man came near to being a purely logical entity, that man was Kirk. Born a little later, he would have been a Logical Positivist”\(^{96}\)), Kirkpatrick, who Lewis called “an honest clear-headed sceptic like J. S. Mill,”\(^{97}\) had at least one virtue of the ancient philosophers: intellectual integrity and an unswerving fidelity to rational discourse. The evidence for this is found in two places.

First, in *That Hideous Strength*, the third book in Lewis’s Cosmic Trilogy, Lewis makes it clear that he modeled the character of MacPhee on Kirkpatrick: both are skeptics

\(^{92}\) Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 1301.
\(^{94}\) Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 1324.
\(^{95}\) Ibid., 1322-3.
\(^{96}\) Ibid., 1322.
and both are utterly devoted to logic. For instance, Lewis tells us a story in *Surprised by Joy* where Kirkpatrick is talking to a certain individual who tells him that they differ in opinion, to which Kirkpatrick replied, “‘Good heavens! I have no opinions on any subject whatsoever.’” And in *That Hideous Strength*, MacPhee tells Jane Studdock the same thing: “‘Mrs. Studdock, I have no opinions – on any subject in the world. I state the facts and exhibit the implications. If everyone indulged in fewer opinions . . . ‘there’d be less silly talking and printing in the world.’” This connection between Kirkpatrick and MacPhee is important because despite being a skeptic, MacPhee is ultimately on the right side in the battle between good and evil. Ransom, the leader of St. Anne’s (modeled on the early Christian community and Augustine’s City of God), clearly shows his support for MacPhee when he tells Jane: “‘He is our sceptic; a very important office . . . I want you to like him if you can. He’s one of my oldest friends. And he’ll be about our best man if we’re going to be defeated. You couldn’t have a better man at your side in a losing battle.’”

Second, Lewis said explicitly that because of Kirkpatrick’s insistence on intellectual consistency, he himself started to become more self-aware:

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98 It is also possible to see the professor in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* as modelled on Kirkpatrick, although my own feeling is that the professor is based on Lewis himself. Whatever the case, the professor does love logical thinking: “‘Logic!’ said the Professor half to himself. ‘Why don’t they teach logic at these schools?’” C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950 reprint; London: Fontana, 1985), 47.


102 This support, however, is not totally unqualified, and though MacPhee is part of the group, he is clearly seen, to put it in Pauline language (1 Corinthians 3:1), as a spiritual infant: “‘It is no good, MacPhee,’ said the Director, ‘you can’t go. For one thing you don’t know the language. And for another – it’s time for frankness – you have never put yourself under the protection of Maledil [God] . . . ‘I will not send you. It would be like sending a three-year old child to fight a tank.’” Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 584.

103 Ibid., 539.
The materialist universe had one great, negative attraction to offer me. It had no
other. And this had to be accepted; one had to look out on a meaningless dance of
atoms (remember, I was reading Lucretius), to realize that all the apparent beauty
was a subjective phosphorescence, and to relegate everything one valued to the
world of mirage. That price I tried loyally to pay. For I had learned something
from Kirk about the honour of the intellect and the shame of voluntary
inconsistency.104

Thus under the honest skepticism of Kirkpatrick, Lewis’s dialectical abilities greatly
increased; indeed, upon hearing the news that Lewis had been accepted into Oxford,
Kirkpatrick told Lewis’s father: “As a dialectician, an intellectual disputant, I shall miss
him, and he will have no successor. Clive [C. S. Lewis] can hold his own in any
discussion, and the higher the range of the conversation, the more he feels himself at
home.”105 Lewis himself even went so far as to tell us that the time he spent at
Kirkpatrick’s – reading, walking and philosophizing – were some of the best years of his
life: “Such is my ideal, and such then (almost) was the reality, of ‘settled, calm,
Epicurean life.’”106 During that time, Lewis read for pleasure works by Bacon,107
Rousseau,108 and Kirkpatrick’s favorite, Schopenhauer.109 However, it is imperative to
keep in mind that Lewis was not formally studying skepticism and materialist
philosophy, but was largely submerged in the classics in preparation for Oxford. In

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104 Lewis, Surprised by Joy, 1343.
106 Lewis, Surprised by Joy, 1326.
108 Lewis, Surprised by Joy, 1351.
109 “I have also been reading in library copies, Schopenhauer’s ‘Will and Idea’ [The World as Will and
Idea]. . . . Schopenhauer is abstruse and depressing, but has some very interesting remarks on the theory of
music and poetry. . . . Kirk, I need hardly say, is strong on him, and will talk on the subject for hours.”
Joy, 1324.
another letter to Lewis’s father, Kirkpatrick wrote: “Since Clive came, our reading has been almost exclusively Classical. The ancient Classics are no drudgery to him. On the contrary, they are a source of entertainment and delight. He is one of the rare exceptions among boys, who ought to be learning the Classics.”

Of the important classics that Lewis, who was then beginning “to think in Greek,” read in regard to his philosophical development were Aristotle’s *Ethics* (1917) and Plato’s *Phaedrus* (1915), *Phaedo* (1915), *Meno* (probably 1915), and *Republic* (which he had read before 1916, for that is the year in which he started his epic poem *Dymer*, which he confessed was in many ways a reaction to the education system in Plato’s masterpiece: “The Platonic and totalitarian state from which Dymer escapes in Canto I was a natural invention for one who detested the state in Plato’s *Republic* as much as he liked everything else in Plato”.

Nevertheless, although none of these works by Plato and Aristotle had yet to bear fruit in Lewis’s hungry mind – “I . . . believe[d] in nothing but atoms and evolution” – the seeds were planted.

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115 The exact date of when Lewis read Plato’s *Meno* is not clear; however, because Lewis read Plato’s *Republic* sometime before 1916 (see the following footnote) and since there is an annotation in Lewis’s edition of *Republic* which mentions *Meno* (“Cf. *Meno*”), it is very possible that Lewis made this annotation when he first read *Republic* and it is likely that when he did so he had already read *Meno*. Hence, it is very possible that Lewis read *Meno* in 1915 or 1916. C. S. Lewis, marginalia in his edition of *RES PVBLICA*, by Plato, ed. Ioannes Burnet (Oxonii: E Typographeo Clarendoniano, n.d.; The Rare Book Collection, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), 506c.
116 “I can see my way clear to the end of ‘Dymer’ now and will let you have an instalment next Sunday: three more will finish him.” Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume I*, 269 [January 28, 1917]. Nevertheless, it must be noted that while Lewis started the poem in 1916, he did not publish it until 1926, meaning that it is possible that he could have completely changed some of the themes of the poem, including his tirade against Plato’s educational system. But this scenario, at least concerning the first canto, I find unlikely.
II: Pseudo-Manichean Dualism

Lewis’s Lucretian materialism, which upon reflection he said was founded on “a glib and shallow ‘rationalism,’” continued past his time with Kirkpatrick and into WWI, when Lucretius was still “among [his] serious books” and Schopenhauerian pessimism continued to haunt him. Yet, he soon became exposed to new philosophy, and it was during the year that he fought in WWI that his love affair with metaphysics, aesthetics, and ethics really seized him. Like all love affairs, his was turbulent, exciting and emotional.

The books that shook Lewis up during that time were Plato’s books that touched on aesthetics (namely, *Phaedrus*, *Phaedo* and *Republic*), George Berkeley’s *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, Henri Bergson’s *Creative Evolution*, and a book about William Morris (*William Morris: His Work and Influence*). Of course Lewis was reading other philosophy during WWI, notably Schopenhauer, Locke, and Hume, but Plato, Berkeley, Bergson and the Morris book were the important ones.

Even though Lewis the Lucretian materialist had rejected many aspects of Plato’s philosophy, we can see that his interest in Platonic aesthetics grew over time. Thus,

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118 Ibid., 1342.
119 Lewis, preface to the 1950 edition of *Dymer*, 5.
120 Walter Hooper, preface to *Spirits in Bondage*, by C. S. Lewis (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company), xxxi-ii. When I asked Hooper about his source for his claim that Lewis read Locke during this time – for I could find nothing in Lewis’s own words that indicated that he had done so – Hooper told me the following: “I don’t find any evidence that Lewis was reading John Locke’s *Essay* as far back as 1918. Why did I mention it in the Preface to *Spirits in Bondage*? That was written some years ago, but I don’t think I’d have said what I did without good reason. I think it may have been because it is clear from some of Lewis’s war-time letters, and certainly from his diary (All My Road Before Me) that he was keen to read in advance all the texts mentioned in the Oxford syllabus for Honour Moderations and Greats. And Locke’s *Essay* was part of the required reading.” Walter Hooper, “Private Letter to Adam Barkman: May 31, 2007.”
during WWI, he endlessly debated the nature of Beauty,\textsuperscript{122} and appears to have followed Plato – though with some help from other sources, as we shall see – in asserting not only that Beauty is objective, but also that Beauty should be associated with the immaterial and not the material. This latter assertion, of course, indicates an enormous change in Lewis’s metaphysics; however, this change was not so much the doing of Plato as it was of other sources.

Berkeley, the eighteenth-century founder of subjective idealism (or “immaterialism” as he called it), is possibly the most underrated philosophical influence on Lewis. Nevertheless, during WWI what Lewis gained from Berkeley was not a specific doctrine, such as “\textit{Esse est percipi},”\textsuperscript{123} but rather he acquired a general interest in metaphysical questions:

This week I have been reading the works of Bishop Berkeley, an eighteenth century country man of ours, & philosopher. Published under the title of ‘Principles of Human Knowledge etc’ in the Everyman. The part I have been reading is 3 dialogues written to prove the existence of God – which he does by disproving the existence of matter. The reasoning is very subtle but not difficult. Look here, oh my Galahad, philosophy is a subject I am just arriving at, so why shouldn’t we start abreast & read it side by side. What do you say? Expend 1/- on Berkeley and have a go on those 3 Dialogues!\textsuperscript{124}

And a few months later he added:

\textsuperscript{122} Lewis, \textit{Surprised by Joy}, 1354.
\textsuperscript{124} Lewis, \textit{The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume 1}, 330-1 [July 24, 1917].
But philosophy or metaphysics is my great find at present: all other questions really seem irrelevant till its ones are solved. I think you should take it up – its probing would at least save you from the intellectual stagnation that usually awaits a man who has found complete satisfaction in some traditional religious system.¹²⁵

Berkeley’s idealist metaphysics provided the materialist Lewis with an important challenge: how can we know that matter has existence independent of mind? Moved by the force of Berkeley’s arguments against matter (which we will examine later), Lewis started to see that his simplistic materialism was flawed and was in need of the spiritual; years later, in *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, Lewis said that the problem he had had with Lucretian / Epicurean materialism was that because its arguments against the spiritual fail, it really is – mark this well – more concerned with comfort than Truth. Mr. Sensible, who served John “the bread, the salt, and the apples [that] had been left by Epicurus,” says,

‘Sense is easy, Reason is hard. Sense knows where to stop with gracious inconsistency, while Reason slavishly follows an abstract logic whither she knows not. The one seeks comfort and finds it, the other seeks truth and is still seeking. . . . Philosophy should be our mistress, not our master. . . . We go to the Porch [Aristotle’s school] and the Academy to be spectators, not partisans.’¹²⁶

Nevertheless, even though Lewis felt rationally compelled to give up his simplistic Lucretian materialism, he did not immediately convert to idealism, for he had another important metaphysical encounter: Bergson.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 342 [November 4, 1917].
Lewis credited Bergson with three things: (1) teaching him (later on, in 1920) that “the materiality is the intelligibility,”¹²⁷ (2) dispelling his pessimism about life due to a sense that he got from *Creative Evolution* that life is necessary¹²⁸ (odd as it may sound¹²⁹), and (3) giving him a new appreciation for the beauty and vitality of life.¹³⁰ This latter point especially is important as it is in many ways a metaphysical counterpart to romanticism and mythology, which Lewis was drawn to at the time (and which we will talk about more in chapters three and four).¹³¹

Yet, what is significant is that Lewis combined his romantic tendencies with his experiences as a solider, Plato’s aesthetics, Berkeley’s language of Spirit and Bergson’s quasi-dualism¹³² of the biological and the “spiritual” *élan vital* (that mysterious element which, by guiding biological evolution, impels life to overcome the downward entropic

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¹³⁰ “The other momentous experience [during WWI] was that of reading Bergson in a Convalescent Camp on Salisbury Plain. Intellectually this taught me to avoid the snares that lurk about the word *Nothing*. But it also had a revolutionary effect on my emotional outlook. Hitherto my whole bent had been towards things pale, remote, and evanescent; the water-colour world of Morris, the leafy recesses of Malory, the twilight of Yeats. The word ‘life’ had for me pretty much the same associations it had for Shelley in *The Triumph of Life*. I would not have understood what Goethe meant by *des Lebens goldens Baum*. Bergson showed me. He did not abolish my old loves, but he gave me a new one. From him I first learned to relish energy, fertility, and urgency; the resource, the triumphs, and even the insolence, of things that grow.” Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 1358-9.


¹³² Many, like James Patrick, believe Bergson is a monist. Patrick, “C. S. Lewis and Idealism,” 164. But it is unclear to us, as it was for Lewis, whether Bergson was a dualist or a monist; as Lewis wrote: “If Evolution is an abstract H.C.F. [“Highest Common Factor”] of all biological chances (as sphericity of all spherical objects) of course it is not an entity in addition to particular organisms. That is the view I’d take. My point was that Butler, Bergson, Shaw, D. H. Lawrence etc. keep on talking as if it were a thing (a Platonic έίδος [“Form”] or daemon! They call it *Life*. But *life* (H.C.F.) can’t be alive any more than *speed* can move quickly!” Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III*, 1269 [May 21, 1961]. Cf. Ibid., 628 [July 4, 1955].
drift of matter\textsuperscript{133}). The result of this romantic, violent, incoherent combination is a kind of Manicheanism or Gnostic dualism wherein “nature is wholly diabolical & malevolent and that God, if he exists, is outside of and in opposition to the cosmic arrangements;”\textsuperscript{134} as Lewis explained further:

You will be surprised and I expect, not a little amused to hear that my views at present are getting almost monastic about all the lusts of the flesh. They seem to me to extend the dominion of matter over us: and, out here, where I see spirit continually dodging matter (shells, bullets, animal fears, animal pains) I have formulated my equation Matter=Nature=Satan. And on the other side Beauty, the only spiritual & not-natural thing that I have yet found. . . . You see the conviction is gaining ground on me that after all Spirit does exist; and that we come in contact with the spiritual element by means of these ‘thrills’ [i.e. the mysterious connection between an individual and an object of beauty, like a tree]. I fancy that there is Something right outside time & place, which did not create matter, as the Christians say, but is matter’s great enemy: and that Beauty is the call of the spirit in that something to the spirit in us. You see how frankly I admit my views have changed.\textsuperscript{135}

While Lewis’s metaphysical and aesthetic views were shifting due to Plato, Berkeley, Bergson and the Romantics, his ethical theory was also developing, for during WWI

\textsuperscript{133} Bergson, \textit{Creative Evolution}, 239.
\textsuperscript{134} Lewis, \textit{The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume I}, 397 [September 12, 1918].
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 371 [May 23, 1918], 374 [May 29, 1918]. Lewis’s poem “Satan Speaks” also demonstrates this philosophy: ‘I am Nature, the Mighty Mother, / I am the law: ye have none other. / I am the flower and the dewdrop fresh, / I am the lust in your itching flesh.” Lewis, \textit{Spirits in Bondage}, 3 [1.1]. Years later, Lewis pointed out that “\textit{Contemptus mundi} is dangerous and may lead to Manicheanism.” Lewis, \textit{The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume II}, 392 [April 16, 1940].
Lewis read *William Morris: His Work and Influence*, which, though not strictly a philosophical book, was important for his understanding of morality:

Hitherto I had always thought there were only two possible views of morals: either, if you believed in a religion, that they were a god-imposed law; or, if you did not, that they were merely rules for convenience – ‘The rules of our prison-house’ as Blake called them. This man [William Morris] gives a third possibility which is very interesting – regarding them as a kind of art, an object to be pursued for its own beauty.\(^{136}\)

Lewis went on to say that the book was neither exciting nor original (remember he had probably read, or was in the stages of reading, Aristotle’s *Ethics*), yet he credited it with changing his view of morality. And this book, along with a few moral friends,\(^{137}\) likely provided Lewis – who now appears to have taken his first steps in connecting theory and practice – with “his first explicitly moral experience,”\(^{138}\) which he allegorically represented by the character Vertue in *The Pilgrim’s Regress* (a figure likely derived from Martianus Capella’s *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*\(^ {139}\)); thus, as John of *The Pilgrim’s Regress* was far from Christianity when Vertue first joined him, so too was Lewis the pseudo-Manichean dualist far from Christianity when he strove to be more virtuous. And this moral resolve, as was consistent with a growing desire to live his philosophy, was further strengthened when Lewis amazingly kept his promise to his


\(^{137}\) Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 1360.


\(^{139}\) Lewis would have read *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury* before he wrote *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, for Lewis began researching *The Allegory of Love*, in which *The Marriage* is mentioned, in 1928, four years before he began to write *The Pilgrim’s Regress*. In *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, Lewis would have read about how Mercury sets out to find a bride, yet cannot make progress in his journey without Virtue accompanying him: “Then, as usual, he [Mercury] gave his caduceus to Virtue, so that she could penetrate the secret parts of the world with him, and with equal swiftness could break into the more remote quarters of heaven.” Martianus Capella *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury* 1.9.
friend Paddy Moore to take care of Paddy’s mother, Mrs. Moore, if Paddy died in the war.\textsuperscript{140}

III: Stoical Materialism

Lewis’s dualism, which apparently he thought was still “materialism” if we follow his own description of his philosophical journey, continued into his first year at Oxford, where he began reading for a degree in Classical Honour Moderations (“Honours Mods”), “the most searching examination in Latin and Greek in any university in the world.”\textsuperscript{141}

It was at this time that Lewis took on what he called his “New Look,” which in essence was a complete rejection of pessimism (thanks to Bergson) and supernaturalism / romanticism (thanks to the new psychology, of which we will speak more in chapter four).\textsuperscript{142} The philosophy of his “New Look,” which Lewis claimed to have held from about 1919-1923 and which was, no doubt, encouraged by his realist philosophy tutor, E. F. Carritt, was “a sort of Stoical Monism,” which he identified with the universe and not God.\textsuperscript{143} However, if Lewis’s self-confessed monism (meaning that there is really only one metaphysical substance) was identified with the universe, then what happened to Lewis’s previous dualism of Spirit and Nature and his enthusiasm for Spirit? It is possible to say that Lewis reduced the apparent dual substances of Spirit and Nature into the single substance “universe” in manner similar to those who interpret Bergson’s \textit{élan vital} as the highest common factor of the biological (material monism) and not as a totally

\textsuperscript{142} Lewis, \textit{Surprised by Joy}, 1362.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 1362.
different substance (dualism). The problem with this view, however, is that exactly during this time, in 1920, Lewis postulated the existence of a “Spirit” or “God”:

You will be interested to hear that in the course of my philosophy – on the existence of matter – I have had to postulate some sort of God as the least objectionable theory: but of course we know nothing. At any rate we don’t know what the real Good is, and consequently I have stopped defying heaven: it can’t know less than I, so perhaps things really are alright.

There seem to be only three ways to understand this: either (1) Lewis thought “God” was likely but did not think His existence mattered metaphysically at all; hence, for all intents and purposes, he considered himself an agnostic materialist; (2) this reference to God is the dregs of Lewis’s dualism, which we would then have to say ended in 1920, thus marking the monistic, material universe as the starting of Lewis’s “New Look,” which subsequently began in late 1920 or early 1921; or (3) following the rather incoherent metaphysics of the Stoics, Lewis thought that the Cosmos was itself intelligent – in other words, the Cosmos, being the sum of more than its parts, was divine. Whatever the case may have been, however, we know that by 1921 Lewis was once again a strict materialist.

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144 In *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis said his “New Look” began when he entered Oxford, which was in 1919, and seems to have lasted (1) at least until Owen Barfield became an Anthroposophist, which we know from Lewis’s diary occurred in 1923, and (2) until he became an idealist, which occurred during Lewis’s Great War with Owen Barfield, which again did not begin until late 1922 or 1923. Ibid., 1363. Lewis, *All My Road Before Me*, 254 [July 7, 1923].


147 In a letter dated June 17, 1921, Lewis wrote that he “already regret[s] one or two things in *Spirits in Bondage*” (his collection of poems written during his pseudo-Manichean dualist phase). Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume I*, 551 [June 17, 1921]. Likely what he regretted was his flirtation with the spiritual. Indeed, Owen Barfield seems to confirm this, for he said that during his Great War with Lewis, which started in 1922 or 1923, “[Lewis] was philosophically a materialist. He didn’t believe that any access to the spiritual or supernatural world was possible for the human mind.” Owen Barfield, “C. S.
As to the nature of Lewis’s Stoical (materialist) monism, we know that it caused him to assume a position of neither pessimism nor optimism.\(^\text{148}\) He called his attitude “Stoical Monism” because he felt, like the Stoics and the Bertrand Russell of “A Free Man’s Worship,”\(^\text{149}\) that everything is necessary and all the real philosopher – the man who lives according to his beliefs\(^\text{150}\) – can do is staunchly will what we want, even though what we want is necessary; or, as Russell put it:

The Stoic freedom in which wisdom consists is found in the submission of our desires but not of our thoughts. From the submission of our desires springs the virtue of resignation; from the freedom of our thoughts springs the whole world of art and philosophy, and the vision of beauty by which, at last, we half reconquer the reluctant world.\(^\text{151}\)

This outlook was so much the ethos of Lewis’s “New Look,” that in 1921 he won the Chancellor’s English Essay Prize for a paper he wrote called “Optimism,” which, though lost, seems to have reflected the philosophy of his “New Look”:

Some of the insolent passages may amuse you: I hope you will like the way I dealt with the difficulty of ‘God or no God.’ To admit that person’s existence would have upset my whole applecart: to deny it seemed inadvisable, on the off chance of there being a Christian among my examiners. I therefore adopted the more Kirkian alternative of proving – at any rate to my own satisfaction – that it


\(^{149}\) Ibid.

\(^{150}\) In a debate with a philosopher friend, Lewis expressed frustration that his friend did not even attempt to align his beliefs with his actions: “Fasnacht was once more proof how little purely intellectual powers avail to make a big man. I thought that he had not \textit{lived} a single one of his theories: he had worked them with his brain but not with his blood.” Lewis, \textit{All My Road Before Me}, 150 [December 5, 1922].

‘really made no difference whatsoever’ whether there was such a person or no.

The second part of my essay you may use as a mild test whether you are ever likely to come to metaphysics or not.\footnote{Lewis, \textit{The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume I}, 557 [July 1, 1921]. Upon reading Matthew Arnold’s \textit{Empedocles on Etna}, Lewis said Empedocles’s first speech to Pausanias was “a very full expression of what I almost begin to call my own philosophy.” The lines he was referring to are “The Gods laugh in their sleeve / To watch man doubt and fear, / Who knows not what to believe / Since he sees nothing clear, / And dares stamp nothing false where he finds nothing sure.” Lewis, \textit{All My Road Before Me}, 159 [December 25, 1922].}

To Lewis’s credit, he did admit later on that the philosophy of his “New Look” was somewhat inconsistent, pointing out that his metaphysical materialism (i.e. “popular realism”) could in no way account for the immaterial phenomenon of reason: “We [Owen Barfield and Lewis] had been, in the technical sense of the term, ‘realists’; that is, we accepted as rock-bottom reality the universe revealed by the senses. But at the same time we continued to make for certain phenomena of consciousness all the claims that really went with a theistic or idealistic view.”\footnote{Lewis, \textit{Surprised by Joy}, 1364.} This said, I get ahead of myself since Lewis’s awareness of his inconsistency only came when he became an idealist. And before I can discuss Lewis’s idealism, two things need to be addressed.

First, in 1920, Lewis took a First in Honours Mods and began a two year degree in \textit{Litterae Humaniores} (“Greats”), which is a combination of classics, history and philosophy, and “is the oldest and is admitted on all hands the premier School in dignity and importance. It includes the greatest proportion of the ablest students, it covers the widest area of studies, it makes probably the severest demands, both on examiner and candidate, and it carries the most coveted distinction.”\footnote{Currie, “The Arts and Social Studies, 1914-1939,” 111. In his review of Hastings Rashdall’s \textit{Ideas and Ideals}, T. S. Eliot commented: “His philosophy is Greats philosophy. Of such was the salt of Oxford.” T. S. Eliot, review of \textit{Ideas and Ideals}, by Hastings Rashdall, \textit{Criterion} 8 (1928-1929): 757.} Since “Greats” focused more on
its philosophical component than anything else,\textsuperscript{155} it was Lewis’s intention to pursue a career as a philosophy professor upon graduation.\textsuperscript{156} Yet, it must be added that “Greats” was not like a degree in philosophy as we understand it today; it was concerned with preparing its future philosophers to be “generalists rather than specialists”\textsuperscript{157} – a point well worth remembering when assessing the pros and cons of Lewis’s philosophical project.

Second, during his “Honours Mods” and “Greats” years, Lewis read a lot of philosophy: Benedetto Croce’s \textit{Philosophy of the Practical: Economic and Ethic} and \textit{Essence of Aesthetic}, Descartes’ \textit{Discourse on Method}, Hume’s \textit{Treatise of Human Nature}, Horace Joseph’s \textit{An Introduction to Logic}, Locke’s \textit{Some Thoughts Concerning Education}, Plato’s \textit{Republic}, Kant’s \textit{Metaphysics of Morality}, Aristotle’s \textit{Ethics} and \textit{Politics}, William James’s \textit{Varieties of Religious Experience}, Cicero’s \textit{De Finibus}, Hobbes’s \textit{Leviathan}, Bernard Bosanquet’s \textit{The Philosophical Theory of the State}, Bradley’s \textit{Ethical Studies} and \textit{Appearance and Reality}, etc. While the seeds of Plato and Aristotle, whose \textit{Republic} and \textit{Ethics} were “the left and right lung of Oxford humanization,”\textsuperscript{158} were still far from sprouting – indeed, Lewis was known during these years as the man “who seems to think that Plato is always wrong”\textsuperscript{159} – the most influential philosophers Lewis was reading were Bosanquet and Bradley, the two most important British Idealists, both of whom, ironically, were greatly influenced by Plato.

\textsuperscript{155} Lewis, \textit{The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume I}, 438 [February 28, 1919].
\textsuperscript{156} Lewis turned down a classical lectureship at University College, Reading, because he not only wanted to do philosophy, but also was not interested in doing only classics: “As well, pure classics is not my line.” Ibid., 595 [July 20, 1922].
\textsuperscript{159} Lewis, \textit{All My Road Before Me}, 53 [June 21, 1922].
IV: Subjective Idealism

After taking another First, this time in “Greats” (with an “A” in philosophy, an “AB” in ancient history, a “B” in other histories and a “B” in classics\(^{160}\)), Lewis decided to pursue a third degree, in English, in hopes of bolstering his chances of getting a fellowship at Oxford. The year was 1922. It must be stressed that all along he still hoped to become a philosophy professor due to his excellent showing in “Greats” and his ever-growing interest in philosophical discourse (even though one of his professors felt, not totally unjustified if one understands philosophy to be strictly philosophical discourse, that Lewis was “not a real philosopher, but quite brilliant”\(^{161}\)).

Near the end of his time in the English School, Lewis’s relationship with Owen Barfield, whom he had met back in 1919, began to evolve into an all-out philosophical bout, which Lewis called “The Great War.” This Great War spanned from 1922 or 1923 until 1931, when Lewis became a Christian.\(^ {162}\) The immediate cause of The Great War was Lewis the materialist’s horror at Barfield’s (and his friend, Cecil Harwood’s) conversion to Anthroposophy, the philosophy founded by Rudolf Steiner, which emphasizes occult-science and, especially in the case of Barfield (a Coleridgian), the centrality of the imagination.\(^ {163}\)

Lewis’s attack on Anthroposophy was connected to his growing interest in psychoanalyzing spiritual and romantic experiences: “That’s what the Great War is about,” writes Barfield, “whether imagination is a vehicle for truth or whether it is simply a

\(^{160}\) Ibid., 83 [August 8, 1922].

\(^{161}\) Ibid.

\(^{162}\) Lewis is often unclear about his dates. That is, although he says in one place that the “Great War” began in the summer of 1922, when he finished “Greats,” he says in another that it began when Barfield converted to Anthroposophy, which happened in 1923. Since the “War” was largely the result of the disagreement between Lewis and Barfield concerning Anthroposophy, it seems likely that it began in 1923. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 1367.

\(^{163}\) Ibid., 1364.
highly desirable and pleasurable experience of the human soul.” Since Lewis thought that romanticism and the imagination were the latter, Barfield was, according to him, like the Dwarfs in *The Last Battle*, “being taken in” by man-made delusions and fantasies. But behind this interest in psychology is something far more important for our immediate concern: Lewis rejected the solace of Anthroposophy, much like the security of Epicureanism, because he thought they were false; he wrote, “The comfort [Barfield and Harwood] got from [Steiner] (apart from the sugar plum of promised immortality, which is really the bait with which he caught Harwood) seemed something I could get much better without him” – sentiments echoed by Vertue in *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, who, we recall, represented Lewis’s ethical integrity: “‘I meant to choose things because I chose to choose them – not because I was paid for it. Do you think I am a child to be scared with rods and baited with sugar plums?’” Of course as we will discuss in subsequent chapters, desiring heaven (and its “sugar plums”) is far from mere wish-fulfillment.

However, before we continue with our discussion about The Great War, I want to direct our focus to two factors which occurred during The Great War and which, combined with The Great War, helped Lewis move from materialism to idealism.

The first is the books Lewis was reading while he was studying English. At that time, Lewis became familiar with many important classical-medieval Christian writers, who may have softened him toward the spiritual. The most important of these writers was Boethius, who Lewis likely read in or before 1922, and whose *Consolation of Philosophy* is listed as one of the top ten influences on Lewis’s “vocational attitude and . . .

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166 Lewis, *All My Road Before Me*, 254 [July 7, 1923].
168 Lewis, *All My Road Before Me*, 134 [November 9, 1922].
philosophy of life.”

Although the importance of The Consolation of Philosophy was minimal at this point, it is important to remember that this book (along with works of Plato and Aristotle) was probably simmering in the back of Lewis’s mind during The Great War.

The second is that in January 1924, about half a year after Lewis took another First, this time in English, he began to research the seventeenth-century Cambridge Platonist Henry More with the thought of doing a D.Phil. in philosophy. Although Walter Hooper thinks Lewis chose More as his research topic because of Lewis’s interest in ethics, this does not seem correct. It is true that Lewis was deeply interested in ethics at the time: witness his paper “The Promethean Fallacy in Ethics,” which he read to Philosophical Society in March 1924, and the two sets of lectures he gave half a year later, the first entitled “The Good – Its Place Among the Values,” which was a historical account of the Good, examining the theories of Locke, Hume, Leibniz, Kant and Berkeley (beginning on October 14, 1924), and the second entitled “Moral Good – Its Place Among Values,” likely focusing on the ethical theories of Spinoza, Leibniz, Hume, Kant and Mill (beginning on January 11, 1925). Yet despite this, the notes that Lewis

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170 Lewis, All My Road Before Me, n280. Ultimately Lewis gave up on the D.Phil. idea because it was “a fool’s errand,” meaning that he thought it would only cause his classics and philosophy (oddly, considering More was a philosopher) to rot. Ibid., n297. Wheaton College still has the notes Lewis took when he was contemplating doing his D. Phil on More. See C. S. Lewis, “Henry More” (Unpublished notes [1924]; The Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College).
171 Lewis, All My Road Before Me, 283 [January 9, 1924]. Lewis’s interest in ethics is also apparent in his essay “Hegemony of Moral Values,” which he tried to publish in the reputed philosophy journal Mind. Ibid., 298 [March 6, 1924].
172 Ibid., 348. Prior to these lectures, Lewis read Nietzsche’s Beyond Good and Evil (April 11, 1924), Leibniz’s Monadology and New System (May 6, 1924), Berkeley’s Principles of Human Knowledge (June 12-13, 1924) and Hume’s A Treatise of Human Nature (August 16, 1924).
173 Ibid., n348. Probably in preparation for these lectures, Lewis read Green’s Prolegomena to Ethics (December 1924), Kant’s The Metaphysics of Morals and Critique of Practical Reason (February 6-7, 1925), Mill’s Utilitarianism, Liberty and Representative Government and Principle of Political Economy with Some of Their Applications to Social Philosophy, (February 9, 1925), Hume’s Concerning An Enquiry
made as he was reading through More do not reveal any interest in ethics; rather, they suggest an interest in More’s Platonic metaphysics, to which Lewis was increasingly drawn. Indeed, without getting ahead of myself, it seems likely that around the time of his research on More, Lewis was, if not already an idealist, at least very near to becoming one.

Now as for The Great War proper, Barfield’s interest in the imagination and epistemology, along with Samuel Alexander’s distinction between “Enjoyment” and “Contemplation” (which we will return to in chapter four), helped Lewis the philosopher develop in two ways.

First, Barfield’s (and later, Lewis’s friend Nevill Coghill’s) love of the past and all its spiritual peculiarities helped rid Lewis of his chronological snobbery, the attitude that uses “the names of earlier periods as terms of abuse,” which, of course, entails the idea that because something was written in the past, it must be useless or of no worth. Incidentally, it is interesting to compare Lewis’s first reaction to Barfield’s occult-sciences (“‘Why – damn it – it’s medieval’” to Lewis’s much later self-identification as an “Old Western Man” (we will return to this in chapter five).

Second, Barfield pointed out that Lewis’s assumptions in logic, morality and aesthetics required some kind of spiritual metaphysics since Lewis could not properly

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*Concerning the Principle of Morals in Enquiries* (February 9, 1925), Leibniz’s *Monadology* and New System (February 11, 1925), Russell’s *Problems of Philosophy* (February 17, 1925), Spinoza’s *Ethics* (February 17, 1925) and G. E. Moore’s *Philosophical Studies* (February 18-20, 1925). On top of these, Lewis was reading a lot of logic in 1925, for instance, Bradley’s *The Principles of Logic* and Mill’s *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive*.

174 Lewis was also re-reading Plato’s *Phaedrus*, and discussing his *Philebus*, at the time. Ibid., 284 [January 17-20, 1924], 293 [February 29, 1924].

175 Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 1370.

176 Ibid., 1367.

177 Ibid., 1363.

178 Ibid.
maintain his belief in the objectivity of reason, morality and art with his combination of
Stoical materialism and epistemological realism. As a result of both Barfield’s comments
and Lewis’s previous readings in Berkeley, Bradley and Bosanquet, we are told by
Lewis:

I was therefore compelled to give up realism. I had been trying to defend it ever
since I began reading philosophy. Partly, no doubt, this was mere ‘cussedness.’
Idealism was then the dominant philosophy at Oxford and I was by nature
‘against Government.’ But partly, too, realism satisfied an emotional need. I
wanted Nature to be quite independent of our observation; something other,
indifferent, self-existing. . . . But now, it seemed to me, I had to give that up.
Unless I were to accept an unbelievable alternative, I must admit that mind was
no late-come epiphenomena; that the whole universe was, in the last resort,
mental; that our logic was participation in a cosmic Logos.\(^{179}\)

This marked Lewis’s conversion to idealism, which, broadly-speaking, is the
philosophical doctrine that says Reality is mind-coordinated or that the intelligibility of
the objects constituting the “external world” is not independent of minds, but exist only
correlatively to mental operations. However, there is a problem here: although the
evidence, pace James Patrick,\(^ {180}\) suggests that Lewis became an idealist around late 1923
to early 1924 (based on his critique of Russell and some comments – which will be

\(^{179}\) Ibid., 1364-5.
\(^{180}\) Patrick thinks that Lewis became an idealist in 1922. This seems unlikely because the best evidence
shows that during The Great War, which likely only began in 1923, Lewis became an idealist. Patrick, The
Magdalen Metaphysicals, 115.
mentioned shortly – concerning Berkeley\textsuperscript{181}, it is unclear what kind of idealism Lewis had in mind when he converted.\textsuperscript{182} I suggest the following.

For about a year into his conversion to idealism (from 1923 or 1924 to about 1924 or 1925), Lewis was a confused supporter of the absolute idealism of the British Idealists (Green, Bradley and Bosanquet) as evidenced by his confession of his “watered down Hegelianism.”\textsuperscript{183} His attraction to this kind of idealism, which claims that the Absolute or Reality is the sum total of all Appearances or experiences,\textsuperscript{184} had to do with the quasi-religious feeling he got when reading about the hidden glory of Reality behind the veil of all Appearances; or, as Bradley rather platonically put it:

> It may come from a failure in my metaphysics, or from a weakness of the flesh which continues to blind me, but the notion that existence could be the same as understanding strikes as cold and ghost-like as the dreariest materialism. That the glory of this world in the end is appearance leaves the world more glorious, if we feel it is a show of some fuller splendour; but the sensuous curtain is a deception and cheat, if it hides some colourless movement of atoms, some spectral woof of impalpable abstractions, or unearthly ballet of bloodless categories.\textsuperscript{185}

This great sense of the hidden glory of things, Lewis wrote, “had much of the quality of Heaven,” and so was an experience that he “should be very sorry not to have passed through.”\textsuperscript{186} Indeed, it was a fundamental building block in his philosophical journey, for

\textsuperscript{181} Lewis, \textit{Surprised by Joy}, 1373.
\textsuperscript{182} “[Lewis] gave no name to the idealism that influenced him when he came to Magdalen in 1925.” Patrick, \textit{The Magdalen Metaphysicals}, xxix.
\textsuperscript{183} Lewis, \textit{Surprised by Joy}, 1373.
\textsuperscript{184} F. H. Bradley, \textit{Appearance and Reality}, 455.
\textsuperscript{186} Lewis, \textit{Surprised by Joy}, 1363.
it taught him that “it is more important that Heaven should exist than that any of us should reach it.”\(^{187}\)

But Lewis did not initially dwell long in the tents of the British Idealists because their doctrine, Lewis originally felt, was confusing; for example, in 1922, just before Lewis became an idealist, we read: “After lunch I read Bradley’s *Appearance and Reality* – the chapter on Reality. It is most difficult: he seems to do the very thing he protests against, namely, pass from the necessary consistency of the Absolute for *thought* to its harmony for *feeling*, using the word ‘inharmonious’ in an ambiguous sense. But probably I do not understand him;”\(^{188}\) and in 1924, just after Lewis became an idealist, we read again: “Went into town shopping in the morning and sat for a long time in the Union reading Bosanquet’s *Suggestions in Ethics* wh[ich] I brought out for the sake of the beautiful passage about the Absolute eating out of your hand. Bosanquet has apparently the right point of view about most things . . . but a little bit woolly.”\(^{189}\)

As a result of this confusion, Lewis turned to the more lucid subjective idealism of Berkeley, which claims (1) “there is no other substance than *spirit*”\(^{190}\) because there is nothing behind spirit / mind and its perceptions,\(^{191}\) and (2) since “God” is the perfect Spirit, He must perceive all.\(^{192}\) What resurrected Lewis’s interest in Berkeley – what reminded him of the Bishop’s clarity – is an extremely important episode in itself.

During the academic year of 1924-1925, Lewis got his first professorship, a temporary position teaching philosophy (his life long ambition) at University College, Oxford, and

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\(^{187}\) Ibid.
\(^{188}\) Lewis, *All My Road Before Me*, 74 [July 23, 1922].
\(^{189}\) Ibid., 323 [May 15, 1924].
\(^{191}\) Ibid., 90 [1.3].
\(^{192}\) Berkeley, *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, 203 [2.213].
in the following year, in 1925-1926, he got his second professorship, a fellowship teaching English at Magdalen College, Oxford. Of this important change, Lewis wrote at length to his father:

As to the other change – from Philosophy to English . . . I am rather glad of the change. I have come to think that if I had the mind, I have not the brain and nerves for a life of pure philosophy. A continued search among the abstract roots of things, a perpetual questioning of all that plain men take for granted, a chewing the cud for fifty years over inevitable ignorance and a constant frontier watch on the little tidy lighted conventional world of science and daily life – is this the best life for temperaments such as ours? Is it the way of health or even of sanity? There is a certain type of man, bull necked and self satisfied in his ‘pot bellied equanimity’ who urgently needs that bleak and questioning atmosphere. But what is a tonic to the Saxon may be a debauch to us Celts. And it certainly is to the Hindoos. . . . I am not condemning philosophy. Indeed in turning from it to literary history and criticism, I am conscious of a descent: and if the air on the heights did not suit me, still I have brought back something of value. It will be a comfort to me all my life to know that the scientist and the materialist have not the last word: that Darwin and [Herbert] Spencer undermining ancestral beliefs stand themselves on a foundation of sand; of gigantic assumptions and irreconcilable contradictions an inch below the surface. It leaves the whole things rich in possibilities: and if it dashes the shallow optimisms it does the same for the shallow pessimisms. But having once seen all this ‘darkness,’ a darkness full of promise, it is perhaps best to shut the trap door and come back to ordinary life:

193 Lewis, Surprised by Joy, 1369.
unless you are one of the really great who can get into it a little way – and I was not. . . . At any rate I escape with joy from one definite drawback of philosophy – its solitude. I was beginning to feel that your first year carries you out of the reach of all save other professionals. No one sympathises with your adventures in that subject because no one understands them: and if you struck treasure trove no one would be able to use it. But perhaps this is enough on the subject.  

While Lewis was happy on the whole with his move to English, it must be emphasized that this neither marked the end of his philosophical interests – for, we must remember, Lewis did not think of philosophy chiefly as a discourse and profession – nor did it even mark the end of his philosophy teaching since part of the reason that Magdalen College gave Lewis the fellowship was because he could teach English and philosophy: “Lewis had to be always ready to ‘fill in’ with a philosophy tutorial or lecture if required. Of the sixteen pupils Lewis had in 1926 only five were reading English.”

To relate this, then, to Lewis’s renewed interest in Berkeley, we know that when he was teaching at University College, he lectured on the modern philosophers, one of whom was Berkeley, but on top of this, at both University College and Magdalen College, Lewis gave weekly tutorials to philosophy students, which meant, according to him, that he “needed a [philosophical] position of [his] own as a basis from which to criticise [his] pupils’ essays.” As a result, the philosophical position that Lewis assumed in 1924 or 1925 was Berkeleyan subjective idealism (with a twist):

197 In many ways, Lewis was like philosopher R. G. Collingwood, who was teaching philosophy at Magdalen College, Oxford, at the time: “[There was] no ready-made class into which you could put a philosopher who, after a thorough training in ‘realism’ had revolted against it and arrived at conclusions of
I was now teaching philosophy (I suspect very badly) as well as English. And my watered down Hegelianism wouldn’t serve for tutorial purposes. A tutor must make things clear. Now the Absolute cannot be made clear. Do you mean Nobody-knows-what, or do you mean a superhuman mind and therefore (as we may as well admit) a Person? After all, did Hegel and Bradley and all the rest of them ever do more than add mystifications to the simple, workable, theistic idealism of Berkeley? I thought not. And didn’t Berkeley’s ‘God’ do all the same work as the Absolute, with the added advantage that we had at least some notion of what we meant by Him. I thought he did. So I was driven back into something like Berkeleyianism; but Berkeleyianism with a few top-dressings of my own. I distinguished this philosophical ‘God’ very sharply (or so I said) from ‘the God of popular religion.’ There was, I explained, no possibility of being in a personal relation with Him. For I thought He projected us as a dramatist projects his characters, and I could no more ‘meet’ Him, than Hamlet could meet Shakespeare. I didn’t call Him ‘God’ either; I called Him ‘Spirit.’ One fights for remaining comforts.  

IV: Absolute Idealism

Nevertheless, Lewis’s subjective idealism did not last long. His move from absolute idealism to subjective idealism was a pendulum that swung back and forth, for Lewis revisited both positions in turn under the names “pantheism” and “theism” over the next few years.

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For instance, in a 1928 Great War letter, Lewis spoke of the danger of “[r]elapse into extreme subjective idealism.” Since Lewis’s subjective idealism came after his initial hiatus with absolute idealism, the implication is that Lewis was a pantheist at this time as pantheism follows idealism in The Pilgrim’s Regress outline; and the “pantheism” that Lewis referred to in his outline and which he subscribed to in 1928 (and earlier, as we will see), moreover, appears to be none other than the absolute idealism of the British Idealists, whom Lewis had rejected earlier on. As evidence for this, we need to recall that the philosophy of the British Idealists – or more accurately, that of Bradley, with whom Lewis was the most acquainted (and whose nephew Lewis tutored in philosophy!) – teaches that there is one all-encompassing Absolute Reality that in some sense forms a coherent and all-inclusive system (of every experience or Appearance); in other words, save for emphasis (for which we may once again chastise Lewis for his imprecise use of language), Bradley’s absolute idealism, which focuses on the conditions for an intelligible world, is really no different than pantheism, which focuses on religion, since both doctrines would agree that everything is God. And this should come as no surprise because while Bradley rejected many things from the absolute idealism of Hegel, it is likely that he borrowed Hegel’s pantheistic doctrine that the totality of all beings is God. Indeed, because Lewis later identified the absolute idealism of Hegel with pantheism, and since there is a strong link between Hegel and Bradley (Lewis called him a “British Hegelian”), I would say that while Lewis specifically called the British

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200 Lewis, All My Road Before Me, 350 [February 10, 1925].
202 Lewis, The Pilgrim’s Regress, 151.
203 Lewis, Surprised by Joy, 1365.
Idealists “Idealists,” he actually meant that they, and in particular, Bradley, represented the pantheism mentioned in his outline in *The Pilgrim’s Regress*. Nonetheless, while it is clear that Lewis moved from subjective idealism (i.e. “Idealism”) to absolute idealism (i.e. “Pantheism”), it remains to be determined when this transition happened and what motivated it.

Since Lewis converted to idealism in either 1923 or 1924 and seems to have maintained this doctrine while he was teaching philosophy at Oxford (which was for about three years in total, including his year as a full-time adjunct), the most reasonable date for Lewis’s move back to absolute idealism is around 1926-1927. But while we can date this conversion fairly accurately, it is harder to say why Lewis rejected “the simple, workable, theistic idealism of Berkeley” in favour of absolute idealism, for Lewis himself mentioned that one of the reasons why he chose Berkeleyanism as his philosophy of choice when giving tutorials was because it was better than his “watered down Hegelianism” – i.e. absolute idealism or pantheism.

I believe that as Lewis began to develop as an idealist, he started to make more sense of Bradley and the others, and consequently found their answer to the problem of how we can know other finite spirits more convincing than Berkeley’s pseudo-solipsism. Most likely what helped Lewis better understand the absolute idealist position is the many discussions he had had not only with Barfield, but also with the members of the “Philosopher’s Tea” or “Wee Teas” (an exclusive philosophy club of only six members,

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204 Lewis saw a nominal difference between British Idealism and pantheism, referring to his conversion from idealism to pantheism on the same page as he mentioned the British Idealists: “Idealism itself went out of fashion. The dynasty of Green, Bradley, and Bosanquet fell.” Lewis, preface to the third edition of *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, 5.
including the celebrated philosopher Gilbert Ryle) and the members of the Oxford Philosophical Society, which, importantly, was largely made up of absolute idealists:

Oxford Philosophy, as we found it, was completely inbred. It had practically no contacts with Cambridge, or the Continent, or America. The traditional doctrine was Hegelian idealism, filtered through the great Scottish prophets, [Edward] Caird, [Andrew Seth] Pringle-Pattison, [Andrew] Seth, [David George] Ritchie and [William] Wallace, and our own T. H. Green, [Bernard] Bosanquet and [F. H.] Bradley.

Moreover, when Lewis went to Magdalen College in 1925, he spent a lot of time walking, breakfasting and “drift[ing] into philosophical conversation” with two important resident absolute idealists, Clement Charles Julian Webb and John Alexander Smith.

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205 “Our seniors had an institution called ‘The Philosopher’s Teas.’ They met on Thursdays at 4 o’clock. Anyone present could raise a point for discussion. We juniors were invited to join and we found the occasions friendly and unstuffy (again the genuine democracy of the faculty could be clearly felt). But, as a forum for discussion, they were not a success. . . . Tea-time is not a philosophic hour: and, by the time the crumpets had gone round, it would be 4.15 or 4.30. We juniors were under such tutorial pressure that we had to teach daily from 5 to 7 o’clock, so we had to leave at 4.50 to get back to our Colleges. . . . We juniors established a group built on our experience of the ‘Teas.’ We agreed that evening is the time for thought. . . . Membership should be limited to the number ideal for a discussion, which we agreed to be six. To avoid competitive luxury, dinners were to be three-course, and with beer not wine. (This was not pedantically maintained). Our original membership was: Gilbert Ryle, Henry Price, Frank Hardie, C. S. Lewis, T. D. Weldon and myself. C. S. Lewis soon seceded from philosophy to English literature, popular theology and science fiction; but not before he had assisted in a happy contribution to our proceedings. . . . It was understood that opening remarks need not be finished papers but rather flying kites (even in note form if desired). We knew each other so well that our basic methods and interests could be taken for granted, and our growing points exposed straightway to lively, frank and friendly scrutiny. . . . I am sure that everything any of us published would have been considerably less well-argued but for running this gauntlet. . . . Quite apart from its value to our philosophy, I count my membership as, apart from my marriage, the happiest and most refreshing experience of my life.” John Mabbott, Oxford Memories (Oxford: Thornton’s, 1986), 77-8.

206 Ibid., 73.

207 Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume I, 899 [June 1, 1930].

208 Adam Fox, also a fellow at Magdalen College at the time of Lewis, recounts Lewis’s relationship with Smith: “But Lewis was a philosopher as well as a man of letters, and as such able to bring out J. A. much better and make him show his paces. He asked him enticing questions and chaffed him not a little in an affectionate way.” Adam Fox, “At the Breakfast Table,” in C. S. Lewis at the Breakfast Table and Other Reminiscences, ed. James Como, 89-95, revised ed. (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1992), 92.
to whom Lewis acknowledged his intellectual debts: 209 “The philosophy shared by Webb, Lewis [and] Smith . . . would without hesitation have been identified by their university contemporaries as [absolute] idealism.” 210

V: Theism

As we have seen throughout all of Lewis’s philosophical phases, conversion is not a straightforward procedure; for example in 1927, when Lewis was “officially” an absolute idealist, he wrote:

Was thinking about imagination and intellect and the unholy muddle I am in about them at present: undigested scraps of anthroposophy and psychoanalysis jostling with orthodox idealism over a background of good old Kirkian rationalism. Lord what a mess! And all the time (with me) there’s the danger of falling back into most childish superstitions, or of running into dogmatic materialism to escape them. 211

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that Lewis’s move from absolute idealism to theism was not a clear-cut issue.

From about 1928-1929, for instance, Lewis slowly began to phase out the pantheistic word “Absolute” and replace it, once again, with the more Berkeleyan – though also to a lesser extent, Bradleayan or Crocean – term, “Spirit,” which in turn was interchanged with

209 “The worst is that I must leave undescribed many men whom I love and to whom I am deeply in debt: G. H. Stevenson and E. F. Carritt, my tutors, the Fark (but who could paint him anyway?), and five great Magdalen men who enlarged my very idea of what a learned life should be – P. V. M. Benecke, C. C. J. Webb, J. A. Smith, F. E. Brightman, and C. T. Onions. Except for Oldie, I have always been blessed both in my official and my unofficial teachers.” Lewis, Surprised by Joy, 1369.


211 Lewis, All My Road Before Me, 431-2 [January 18, 1927].
“God” for a time before becoming simply “God.” Although it might be confusing why Lewis began to revert back to more Berkeleyan terms after he had abandoned them for pantheistic ones only a few years earlier, the answer is quite simple: Lewis started to use “Spirit” instead of “Absolute” because Berkeley’s idealism, subjective idealism, was also known as theistic idealism, and so it made sense for Lewis, who was on the road to theism, returning to the belief in the separateness of finite spirits and Spirit, to once again use the term “Spirit.” In fact, the theism of Berkeley was likely important in acting as a bridge between idealism and more platonic, dualistic theism, for when he was asked what ultimately brought him back to Christianity, the first thing Lewis mentioned was “philosophy” and then added, “I still think Berkeley is unanswerable.” We are in great danger of misunderstanding Lewis if the impact of Berkeley’s theistic idealism is overlooked.

However, while this linguistic consideration shows that Lewis was returning to theism, it does not say why he was doing so. What began to convince Lewis of the truth of theism was in large part the books he was reading and lecturing on at the time. That is, while Lewis was teaching philosophy and English, he became intimately aware of, and increasingly drawn to, the greatest philosophers (and poets) of antiquity and the Middle Ages: Plato, Aristotle, Boethius, Hooker et al., all of whom Lewis interpreted as either

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212 Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 1381. Of course, this transition was far from a black and white thing. For example in a letter dated December 26, 1929, Lewis, then technically a theist, referred to the Creator as “the Absolute.” Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume I*, 845 [December 26, 1929].

213 Moreover, in many of the later Great War documents, such as *De Bono et Malo*, Lewis made constant reference to the “Christian myth” to make philosophical points. C. S. Lewis, *De Bono et Malo* (Unpublished “Great War” document [1929?]; The Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College), 2.


215 Although I would consider Hooker a man of the late Middle Ages, some would say that he properly belongs to the Renaissance. For my part, I am inclined to agree with Lewis that the division between the Middle Ages and Renaissance is vague at best (see chapter five).
dualists with theistic leanings (Plato and Aristotle)\textsuperscript{216} or theists proper (Boethius and Hooker). For instance, when Lewis taught philosophy at University College (1924-1925), his interest in Plato’s ethics, especially as presented in \textit{Philebus} and \textit{Republic},\textsuperscript{217} was apparent; indeed, it is not unimportant that Lewis’s take on the moral law as presented in “Hegemony of Moral Value,” written in 1922 and revised in 1924, probably approximated to his take on the universal moral law as found in \textit{The Abolition of Man}, written ten years after he became a Christian. Furthermore, when Lewis taught both philosophy and English at Magdalen College (1924-1927), he read, taught and enjoyed the \textit{Theaetetus},\textsuperscript{218} \textit{Statesman},\textsuperscript{219} and \textit{Erastae} of Plato,\textsuperscript{220} the \textit{Ethics} and \textit{Politics} of Aristotle,\textsuperscript{221} \textit{Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity} by Richard Hooker (who Lewis called “a great man”\textsuperscript{222}) and \textit{The Consolation of Philosophy} by Boethius.\textsuperscript{223} Finally, when Lewis taught English at Magdalen College (1928), he said he was “deep in medieval things,”\textsuperscript{224} not only because he was teaching a great deal of medieval literature but also because he chose, as his first academic book, to write about medieval allegory, which would later become \textit{The Allegory of Love}, a book overflowing with Neoplatonic, theistic philosophy.

\textsuperscript{216} Strictly speaking, it is simply wrong to call Plato and Aristotle theists. Plato’s “Good,” which is “beyond being,” cannot literally be spoken of and so it is not clear whether “the Good” is “God” or not, nor is Plato’s “Demiurge,” the lesser god who created the world, enough like God to justify calling Plato a theist. Furthermore, although Aristotle’s “Unmoved Mover” is often thought of as “God,” a careful reading of Aristotle reveals that he thought there were many such “Intelligences.” Hence, Plato and Aristotle should probably be understood more as polytheists and dualists than theists. Lewis himself was unclear as to what he thought of Plato and Aristotle, yet he did rightly, though anachronistically, speak of “the almost miraculous avoidance of the Pantheistic swamp by Plato and (still more) by Aristotle.” Lewis, \textit{The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume II}, 771 [April 15, 1947].

\textsuperscript{217} Patrick, \textit{The Magdalen Metaphysicals}, 127.

\textsuperscript{218} Lewis, \textit{All My Road Before Me}, 453 [February 17, 1927].

\textsuperscript{219} Ibid., 449 [February 8, 1927].

\textsuperscript{220} Ibid., 456 [February 27, 1927].

\textsuperscript{221} Ibid., 383 [May 1, 1926], 384 [May 2, 1926], 385 [May 3, 1926], 397 [May 17, 1926], 434 [January 22, 1927].

\textsuperscript{222} Ibid., 406 [June 4, 1926].

\textsuperscript{223} Lewis, \textit{The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume I}, 740 [December 12, 1927].

\textsuperscript{224} Ibid., 754 [April 24, 1928].
Hence, because of Lewis’s increasing focus on classical-medieval philosophy and literature, the seeds of a Neoplatonic, theistic worldview — which had long been planted, beginning with Plato and Aristotle — slowly began to choke out the weeds (or lesser plants, at least) of absolute idealism: “The fox had been dislodged from Hegelian Wood and was now running in the open, ‘with all the wo in the world,’ bedraggled and weary, hounds barely a field behind. And nearly everyone now (one way or another) in pack; Plato, Dante . . . Everyone and everything had joined the other side.”

However, what finally pushed Lewis from idealism to theism is a factor much more important than books: livability. Perhaps due to the lack of moral absolutes in absolute idealism, Lewis realized that “[Absolute] Idealism can be talked, and even felt; it cannot be lived.” Yet the Oxford don did not simply drop idealism and remain in a vacuum, for through a deep appreciation for classical and medieval philosophy and literature, he came to see that theism could be lived; as he would later say in The Abolition of Man: “For the wise men of old the cardinal problem had been how to

225 Lewis always acknowledged his philosophical debt to idealism, and so it would be wrong to consider it a totally false philosophy. Moreover, idealism owed much to older sources, such as Plato, Aristotle and Christianity. In The Pilgrim’s Regress, Lewis said of Bosanquet: “Another of the family [Mr. Wisdom’s family], Bernard by name, was in radiant health. John had seen him drinking Mother Kirk’s [the Church’s] wine with great relish and refreshment by moonlight: but the waking Bernard maintained that Mother Kirk’s wine was merely a bad, early attempt at the admirable barley-water which his father sometimes brought out on birthdays and great occasions; and ‘to this barley-water,’ he said, ‘I owe my health.’” Lewis, The Pilgrim’s Regress, 145.

226 Lewis, Surprised by Joy, 1374.

227 Even back in 1926, Lewis was aware of the moral difficulty of absolute idealism. Writing to a friend, he asked, “Again, in your pantheistic conclusion, should you not show that you are aware of some of the moral difficulties? I mean, if the spirit grows in the grass etc, and in the cancer and the murderer, if it does everything, must it not be simply the neutral background of good and evil?” Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III, 1500 [1926].

228 Lewis, Surprised by Joy, 1375. Because Lewis converted from idealism to theism (and then Christianity) and because idealism was not livable, Leanne Payne is only partially right when she says, “It was, in fact, the experience of the ‘living presence’ of God that eventually brought Lewis from a form of philosophical idealism . . . to a supernatural knowledge of a personal God.” Leanne Payne, Real Presence: The Christian Worldview of C. S. Lewis as Incarnational Reality (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988), 14.
conform the soul to reality, and the solution had been knowledge, self-discipline, and virtue.”

Indeed, these events coincided with another event which finally forced Lewis to define philosophy as it ought to be defined:

Once, when [Dom Bede Griffiths] and Barfield were lunching in my room, I happened to refer to philosophy as ‘a subject.’ ‘It wasn’t a subject to Plato,’ said Barfield, ‘it was a way.’ The quiet but fervent agreement of Griffiths, and the quick glance of understanding between these two, revealed to me my own frivolity. Enough had been thought, and said, and felt, and imagined. It was about time that something should be done.

The significance of both Lewis’s move toward theism because of livability and his conviction that philosophy is not merely an academic discourse cannot be understated. More than either his philosophical training or his stint as a philosophy professor at Oxford, the aforementioned events – along with the fact that he now belonged to a community of men like Barfield and Griffith which held him accountable to its common love of truth – make it clear that at this point, Lewis certainly understood philosophy to

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230 Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 1374. Barfield’s account of this story is even more illuminating as it reminds us that the understanding of philosophy as a way of life was not a new concept to Lewis even at that time: “What enabled him to have patience with my ignorant blunderings was the fact I have alluded to that he himself was constitutionally incapable of treating philosophy as a merely academic exercise. Oddly enough, on page 212 of the English edition of *Surprised by Joy* he accuses himself of that very failing, that is, of treating philosophy as an academic exercise. Referring to an occasion when a man named Griffiths and I were lunching with him, he says ‘I happened to refer to philosophy as a ‘subject.’ ‘It was not a subject to Plato,’ said Barfield, ‘it was a way.’ The quiet but fervent agreement of Griffith and the quick glance of understanding between these two revealed to me my own frivolity.’ Well, flattering as that passage may be to my self-esteem, I am bound to say, and I am rather glad to have this opportunity of saying it, that it is, as far as my recollection goes, pure applesauce, unless of course Lewis is using the word *frivolity* in a highly specialized and limited sense. . . . Lewis could not help trying to live by what he thought. ‘Idealism,’ he says in the same book, ‘can be talked and even felt. It cannot be lived.’ And that was why he gave it up.” Barfield, *Owen Barfield on C. S. Lewis*, 10.
be a way of life; indeed, shortly after these events, Lewis admitted that living according to reason required him both to make “an attempt at complete virtue”\textsuperscript{231} and practice spiritual exercises, among which he humorously included “Calvinistic exercises;”\textsuperscript{232} and quite seriously, though odd for a non-theist, \textit{prayer}; in fact, Lewis’s situation was in many ways reflected in Orual’s in \textit{Till We Have Faces} when she says, “But if I practiced true philosophy, as Socrates meant it, I should change my ugly soul into a fair one. And this, the gods helping me, I would do.”\textsuperscript{233} Consequently, what Lewis found when he started living his philosophy – when he started praying and “the gods” started helping him – was that “idealism turned out, when you took it seriously, to be disguised Theism.”\textsuperscript{234} And so being “allowed to play at philosophy no longer,”\textsuperscript{235} Lewis, in the Trinity Term of 1929, finally admitted “that God was God” and became a theist.\textsuperscript{236}

VI: Christian Neoplatonism

The final move in Lewis’s philosophical journey is from theism to Christianity (concerning which Lewis once remarked, “[I]n our Western civilization we are obligated

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{231}{Lewis, \textit{Surprised by Joy}, 1374.}
\footnotetext{232}{As we know, Lewis was raised in Protestant Ireland, and as such was surrounded by Calvinists and Puritans. Thus, it is little surprise that Lewis had many inside jokes about such people, particularly in regard to their severity. For instance, Lewis once joked with his father, saying: “As I have probably told you before, every group of Awarders consists of one Oxford and one Cambridge man, and they shift them about from year to year. This time I have lost my Cambridge colleague with whom I have worked very pleasantly for the last four years, and getting instead a man whom everyone has warned me against. . . . He has quarrelled with every previous colleague he has had and it remains to see whether I shall fare better. He is old too, which makes the matter worse: it is easier to stand ones rights to contemporaries without the appearance of insolence. Can you suggest any spiritual exercises – perhaps our old friend ‘Calvinistic exercises’ would do – suitable as a prophylactic against loss of temper in trying circumstances?” Lewis, \textit{The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume 1}, 799-800 [July 7, 1929].}
\footnotetext{235}{Lewis, \textit{Surprised by Joy}, 1375.}
\footnotetext{236}{Ibid., 1376.}
\end{footnotes}
both morally and intellectually to come to grips with Jesus Christ; if we refuse to do so we are guilty of being bad philosophers and bad thinkers.”

Now at this point, some may protest about my terminology, maintaining that since the destination is a religion and not a philosophy, I should now speak of Lewis’s religious journey. Perhaps so, but since, as we shall see, Lewis endorsed Christianity because he thought it the most probable explanation of all the evidence presented – or, in other words, since Lewis came to Christianity out of obedience to reason (from which faith later followed) – I would maintain that Lewis was on a philosophical journey from theism to Christianity.

Moreover, although Lewis’s conversion to Christianity was the most important conversion of his life, much of what needs to be said about Christianity will be deferred until later chapters due to its intimate connection with two key concepts: heavenly desire and Myth. For my immediate purpose, I want to draw attention to the more “purely” philosophical things that led to Lewis’s conversion.

In 1926, when Lewis was undergoing his second transition between subjective idealism and absolute idealism, he read the hugely influential *Everlasting Man* by G. K. Chesterton. And although *The Everlasting Man* did not, like so many books in Lewis’s philosophical journey, make an immediate impact on him, when Lewis became a theist, Chesterton’s account of Christianity started to look increasingly more plausible.

And this plausibility was enormously enhanced by “increasing knowledge of medieval literature,” for, Lewis insisted, “It became harder & harder to think that all those great

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238 See Appendix A.

239 See Appendix B.
poets & philosophers were wrong.”  And of the medieval philosophers or philosophical-poets Lewis had in mind, Augustine, Boethius and Dante were the most prominent.

Augustine’s impact on Lewis in his early years as a theist is difficult to gauge, but his later influence on Lewis is nearly impossible to overstate; indeed, save for a few minor criticisms, it is possible to see Augustine as Lewis’s pre-eminent philosopher during Lewis’s Christian phase, not only because the saint’s golden touch is evident on nearly every branch of Lewis’s thought, but also because Lewis himself confesses his debt to the Bishop of Hippo, describing himself as one “who loved Balder before Christ and Plato before St. Augustine.” Although we do not know exactly when Lewis read Augustine, he must have read Confessions sometime before 1932, for in that year Lewis wrote The Pilgrim’s Regress, in which Augustine is quoted. Since it is likely that Lewis, searching for philosophical influences on the English writers he was researching during the late 1920s, read Augustine when he was still a theist, it is probable that the saint’s philosophical journey, his Christian Neoplatonism and his love of truth appealed to Lewis, who shared many of the same experiences and values; in fact, in the final book of Surprised by Joy, which deals with Lewis’s conversion from theism to Christianity,

241 The only two criticisms Lewis had of Augustine are the Saint’s view that it is better not to love things too much in this life because they hurt you too much when they die, and the explicitly devotional aspects of Confessions. Lewis, The Four Loves, 76. Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume II, 190 [April 34, 1936].
243 “I myself was first led into reading the Christian classics, almost accidentally, as a result of my English studies. Some, such as Hooker, Herbert, Traherne, Taylor and Bunyan, I read because they are themselves great English writers; others, such as Boethius, St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and Dante, because they were ‘influences.’” C. S. Lewis, “On the Reading of Old Books,” in C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection & Other Short Pieces, ed. Lesley Walmsley (1944 essay reprint; London: HarperCollins, 2000), 440.
Lewis quotes Augustine approvingly in regard to philosophy as a way of life: “For it is one thing to see the land of peace from a wooded ridge . . . and another to tread the road that leads up to it.”

Boethius I have spoken of before and I need only add that his Christian Neoplatonism and his blend of reason and poetry, primarily as found in The Consolation of Philosophy, was perfectly suited to Lewis the poet-philosopher; in fact, Lewis even went so far as to claim that Boethius’s account of time and eternity is even clearer than Plato’s, and Lewis’s metaphysics, epistemology, ethics and literary style all owe much to the Last of the Romans.

Finally, Dante, whom Lewis had read with little benefit back in his Lucretian materialist days at Great Bookham, had a wonderful effect on Lewis the theist, who, in 1930, was making “an attempt at religion.” On rereading Dante’s Paradiso, Lewis said, “[It] really opened a new world to me. . . . I should describe it as feeling more important than any poetry I have ever read . . . wheel within wheel, but wheels of glory, and the One radiated through the Many.” Indeed, the impact of Dante was so strongly felt that Lewis recommended his friend Arthur Greeves read The Divine Comedy – note this well – almost as a spiritual exercise:

Read a small daily portion, in rather a liturgical manner, letting the images and the purely intellectual conceptions sink well into the mind. I.e. I think what is important (or most important) here is to remember [to] say ‘The figures stand in

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244 Augustine Confessions, 8.21. Lewis, Surprised by Joy, 1377.
245 Speaking of the doctrine of God’s timelessness and eternity, Lewis wrote: “I have so ruthlessly condensed an argument of such importance, both historical and intrinsic, that the wise reader will go for it to the original. I cannot help thinking that Boethius has here expounded a Platonic conception more luminously than Plato ever did himself.” Lewis, The Discarded Image, 89-90.
247 Ibid.
these positions, coloured thus, and he is explaining about free will’ – rather as if one was remembering a philosophical ceremony. It is not really like any of the things we know.²⁴₈

Moreover, Dante’s philosophical, deeply religious poetry later greatly influenced Lewis’s own, for on one occasion, when a future biographer expressed his opinion that *Perelandra* owed much to Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Lewis replied, “Milton I think you possibly over-rate: it is difficult to distinguish him from Dante & St. Augustine.”²⁴⁹

But books were not Lewis’s only impetus to Christianity. *Askēsis*, the practice of spiritual exercises, was a crucial part of Lewis’s lived philosophy. In fact, the extent to which Lewis the theist made “an attempt at religion” is a true testimony to his classical-medieval philosophical heritage: he was in constant prayer (as John in *The Pilgrim’s Regress* did when “Philosophy . . . turn[ed] into Religion”²⁵⁰), and he even started going to chapel every morning: “I have started going to morning Chapel at 8. . . . My moral history of late has been deplorable. More and more clearly one sees how much of one’s philosophy & religion is mere talk: the boldest hope is that concealed somewhere within it there is some seed however small of the real thing.”²⁵¹ Lewis found that the more he really tried to live out his theism, the more difficult, but illuminating, things became:

I think the trouble with me is lack of faith. I have no rational ground for going back on the arguments that convinced me of God’s existence: but the irrational deadweight of my old skeptical habits, and the spirit of this age, and the cares of

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 876 [January 30, 1930].
²⁵⁰ Lewis, *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, 156. The more Lewis practiced true philosophy, the more personal God started to become: “Terrible things are happening to me. The ‘Spirit’ or ‘Real I’ is showing an alarming tendency to become much more personal and is taking the offensive, and behaving just like God. . . . You’d better come on Monday at the latest or I may have entered a monastery.” Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume I*, 882 [February 3, 1930].
²⁵¹ Ibid., 942 [October 29, 1930].
the day, steal away all my lively feeling of the truth, and often when I pray I wonder if I am not posting letters to a non-existent address. Mind you I don’t think so – the whole of my reasonable mind is convinced: but I often feel so. However, there is nothing to do but to peg away. . . . How well I talk about it: how little else I do. I wonder would it be better not to speak to one another of these things at all? Is the talking a substitute for the doing? 252

Like the ancient and medieval philosophers (not to mention a whole host of others), Lewis found that his emotions were constantly threatening his better judgment. Yet he held on. And as he did, he began to formulate his theism in a new way: perhaps, he thought, it is not so much man’s choice of God that matters, so much as God’s choice of man:

On my side there are changes perhaps bigger: you will be surprised to hear that my outlook is now definitely religious. It is not precisely Christianity, tho’ it may turn out that way in the end. I can’t express the change better than by saying that whereas once I would have said ‘Shall I adopt Christianity,’ I now wait to see whether it will adopt me: i.e. I now know there is another Party in the affair – that I’m playing Poker, not Patience, as I once supposed. 253

Nonetheless, although Lewis was then close to God, he still felt far from Christ. As a lover of reason, Lewis simply refused to abandon her dictates when it came to making sense of Christ: “In spite of my recent changes of view, I am still inclined to think that you can only get what you call ‘Christ’ out of the Gospels by picking & choosing, &

252 Ibid., 944-5 [December 24, 1930].
253 Ibid., 887 [March 21, 1930].
slurring over a good deal.” What finally convinced him of the truth of Christianity was, as we shall see more clearly in chapter four, J. R. R. Tolkien’s explanation of Christ as the “True Myth” or the ultimate fulfillment of both pagan mythologies and Jewish prophecies. Subsequently, Lewis felt that Christianity was the most probable belief system (“I recommended Christianity because I thought its affirmation to be objectively true”), and so recalling the words of Augustine (“Securus te projice”) and putting into practice the important spiritual lesson he learned about diving (the rational act of trust), he became a Christian in 1931, and consequently said with conviction: “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen not only because I see it but because by it I see everything else.”

Yet Lewis’s philosophical journey did not end there. Since Lewis came to Christianity because he thought it gave the best explanation of the totality of all the evidence presented, he never lost his interest in reason and rational discourse (though as we shall see over the next few chapters, he came to see reason as playing only one part in true

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254 Ibid., 862 [January 9, 1930].
255 C. S. Lewis, “Modern Man and His Categories of Thought,” in C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection & Other Short Pieces, ed. Lesley Walmsley (London: HarperCollins, 2000), 619. Cf. “We want the Faith wh[ich] is true not a Faith wh[ich] will historically survive. They are not necessarily the same (‘When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?’).” C. S. Lewis, marginalia in his edition of An Interpretation of Christian Ethics, by Reinhold Niebuhr (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1937; The Rare Book Collection, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), 44. Cf. “If Christianity is untrue, then no honest man will want to believe it, however helpful it might be: if it is true, every honest man will want to believe it, even if it gives him no help at all.” C. S. Lewis, “Man or Rabbit?” in C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection & Other Short Pieces, ed. Lesley Walmsley (1946 essay reprint; London: HarperCollins, 2000), 352. Cf. “What you say about [T. S.] Eliot’s ‘collapse into Anglo-Catholicism’ instead of ‘newer and stranger things’ . . . is profoundly disquieting. You don’t seem even to consider the hypothesis that he might have embraced this belief because he thought it true – that he might be looking for the truth, not the ‘new and strange’ (of course the two might turn out to coincide, but we’ve no right to assume that a priori, and the seeking of the former is a quite different activity from seeking the latter).” Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume II, 443 [September 12, 1940].
257 Concerning a time he went swimming with Barfield, Lewis wrote: “Here I learned to dive wh[ich] is a great change in my life & has important (religious) connections.” Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume I, 915 [July 8, 1930].
philosophy). For instance, over the years Lewis went on to write numerous apologetic works, which, though overly simplistic for professional philosophers, were written with the sole purpose of playing the mid-wife in the philosophical and theological development of laymen (for whom he was consciously writing, it must be added).

Furthermore, he also became the founding president of the Socratic Club, a philosophical club designed to examine the truth of Christianity, and remained in that position for twelve years (1942-1954): “Socrates had exhorted men to ‘follow the argument wherever it led them’: the Club came into existence to apply this principle to one particular subject-matter – the *pros* and *cons* of the Christian Religion.”

Lewis’s time in the Club (not to mention with another club, the Inklings, where “Platonic discussion[s]” sometimes took place) was invaluable in helping the Oxford don exercise his reason and use it to show others the rationality of Christian belief.

Nevertheless, there is one philosophical event in Lewis’s life that is constantly brought up among Lewis scholars as evidence that Lewis lost interest in philosophy and rational discourse, and such demands some commentary. The event, of course, is the so-called “Anscombe Legend,” which occurred at the Socratic Club on February 2, 1948. One year prior to this, Lewis had written *Miracles*, in which he argued that philosophical naturalism is self-refuting. His argument, based in some measure on Balfour’s *Theism and Humanism* (especially Appendix A), was a *reductio ad absurdum*, claiming that if

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261 This term is used by J. R. Lucas, “The Restoration of Man” (A Lecture Given in Durham on Thursday, October 22, 1992, [http://users.ox.ac.uk/~jlucas/lewis.html](http://users.ox.ac.uk/~jlucas/lewis.html)).


263 *Reason: Traditional*: The universe is the creation of Reason, and all things work together towards a reasonable end. *Naturalism*: So far as we can tell, reason is to be found neither in the beginning of things
everything came about as a matter of blind chance, then even our rational thoughts must be the by-product of blind chance, in which case there is no reason, quite literally, to think our thoughts are in anyway valid or can give us objective knowledge:

Thus, a strict materialism refutes itself for the reason given long ago by Professor Haldene: ‘If my mental processes are determined wholly by the motions of atoms in my brain, I have no reason to suppose that my beliefs are true. . . . And hence I have no reason for supposing my brain to be composed of atoms (Possible Worlds, p. 209). . . . But Naturalism, even if it is not purely materialistic, seems to me to involve the same difficulty, though in a less obvious form. It discredits our processes of reasoning or at least reduces their credit to such a humble level that it can no longer support Naturalism itself.  

Anscombe, a Catholic philosophy professor, disagreed with Lewis for a number of reasons, the most important of which was that in the first edition of Miracles, Lewis had carelessly claimed that according to naturalism, nature is the product of an irrational cause, whereas naturalism actually claims that nature is the result of a non-rational cause.  

Since here I am primarily concerned with how the Anscombe Legend effected Lewis’s philosophical formation, I will refer the details of this argument to other sources, such as

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265 Although I do not have a quotation to support Anscombe’s charge that Lewis originally held that nature was the result of an irrational cause, it is generally assumed that this charge is one of the reasons why Lewis later rewrote part of Miracles. And unfortunately because a first edition of Miracles is very hard to come by, I do not have a quotation from the original Miracles, in which Lewis allegedly declared nature to be the result of an irrational cause.
Victor Reppert’s *C. S. Lewis’s Dangerous Idea* and Erik Wielenberg’s *God and the Reach of Reason*. The important thing for our purpose here is that the result of Lewis’s debate with Anscombe has, until very recently, been extremely ambiguous: some arguing that Anscombe won (though not with any devastating finality if she did\(^\text{267}\)), and some that Lewis won\(^\text{268}\) (even if he did not necessarily feel he had been able to counter all of Anscombe’s attacks\(^\text{269}\)). This is to say, of course, that there have been so many claims on both sides of the debate as to who won (and who felt they won), that the question has been nearly impossible to answer. Scholars like Carpenter,\(^\text{270}\) Wilson,\(^\text{271}\) and Beversluis,\(^\text{272}\) who are largely hostile towards Lewis (in particular, towards his apologetics), have often been completely dismissed by defenders of Lewis, who insist that Lewis could do no wrong. But thanks to the third volume of *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, published in 2007, we now know that at least the sources of the claim that Lewis lost the Anscombe debate – the testimony of Anscombe, Antony Flew,\(^\text{273}\) and three

\(^{267}\) Ibid., 10.

\(^{268}\) “Lewis told me he did not lose the argument. A few years later when I met Miss Anscombe in the common room of Somerville College and asked what she remembered of the meeting, she removed her cigar from her mouth only long enough to say, ‘I won.'” Hooper, “Oxford’s Bonny Fighter,” 163.

\(^{269}\) George Sayer, a former student of Lewis, wrote: “[Lewis] told me that he had been proved wrong, that his argument for the existence of God had been demolished. . . . When told years later of the effect of the discussion on Jack, Professor Anscombe was surprised and upset. ‘Oh dear! I had no idea that he took it so seriously. As a matter of fact I don’t think I agree that I won.” Sayer, *Jack*, 307. This agrees with what another former student, Dom Bede Griffiths, wrote: “I remember Lewis saying to me that [Anscombe] had completely demolished his argument.” Dom Bede Griffiths, “The Adventure of Faith,” in *C. S. Lewis at the Breakfast Table and Other Reminiscences*, ed. James Como, 11-30 (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1992), 21.


\(^{273}\) Flew does not say that Lewis, whom he calls “the greatest Christian apologist of the last century,” lost the debate. Flew, *There is a God*, 4. However, Flew seems to indicate that Lewis thought he lost the debate: “Many of the leading atheists at Oxford locked horns with Lewis and his fellow Christians. By far the best-known encounter was the celebrated February 1948 debate between Lewis and Elizabeth Anscombe, which led Lewis to revise the third chapter of his book *Miracles*. I still remember being a member of a small group of friends returning together from that great debate, walking directly behind Elizabeth Anscombe and her party. She was exultant, and her friends were equally exultant. Immediately in front of this party, C. S.
of Lewis’s students: Sayer, Griffiths and Brewer (none of whom actually attended the debate, it should be added in defence of those who questioned the credibility of the sources against Lewis274) – agree with Lewis’s opinion of the matter, for in 1950 Lewis said of Anscombe, “Having obliterated me as an Apologist ought she not to succeed me?”275 Keeping in mind that Lewis understood philosophy to be a way of life, the very fact that he admitted defeat at the hands of Anscombe precisely disproves subsequent arguments by Carpenter, Wilson and Beversluis (who argue that Lewis realized Christianity was no longer rational and so became a fideist and retreated into the world of fiction276), for Lewis genuinely loved Truth and so was willing to admit Truth when he saw it; moreover, Lewis’s self-confessed defeat did not imply, as Wilson has argued, that “Lewis had been shown to have no competence to debate with a professional philosopher on her own terms,”277 for just two years before the debate, on October 14, 1946,278 Lewis had sparred with a philosopher of no lesser stature than A. J. Ayer, and, according to

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274 Derek Brewer wrote in his diary: “None of us were at first very cheerful. Lewis was obviously deeply disturbed by his encounter last Monday with Miss Anscombe, who had disproved some of the central theory of his philosophy about Christianity. I felt quite painfully for him. Dyson said – very well – that now he had lost everything and was come to the foot of the Cross – spoken with great sympathy.” Brewer added that the imagery Lewis used in describing the debate “was all of the fog of war, the retreat of infantry thrown back under heavy attack,” although Brewer himself (like Lewis’s other students George Sayer and Dom Bede Griffiths) admitted, “I missed Miss Anscombe’s evening.” Derek Brewer, “The Tutor: A Portrait,” in C. S. Lewis at the Breakfast Table and Other Reminiscences, ed. James Como, 41-67 (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1992), 59.


277 Wilson, C. S. Lewis: A Biography, 214. Basil Mitchell, incidentally, agrees with Wilson’s assessment: “I can’t remember the debate at all clearly. I don’t have the sense that anything decisive happened at that moment, although it is the case, as you say, that from that point onwards Lewis obviously concluded that he wasn’t equipped to cope with the professional philosophers.” Mitchell and Walker, “Reflections on C. S. Lewis, Apologetics, and the Moral Tradition,” 8-9.

Ayer’s own testimony, Lewis had kept pace with him;\textsuperscript{279} furthermore, in 1950, when Lewis was asked for his recommendation concerning who should speak at the Socratic Club during the Michaelmas Term, he recommended Ryle, Ayer and even Anscombe herself\textsuperscript{280} despite the fact that he freely admitted that philosophers like these often “wipe the floor with us.”\textsuperscript{281} Consequently, I wholeheartedly agree with Victor Reppert, who calls for the end of the Anscombe Legend: the false tale of Lewis’s \textit{retreat} from philosophy and rational discourse as a result of his encounter with Anscombe.\textsuperscript{282}

Yet, if it is false that Lewis was afraid of philosophical debates after his Anscombe encounter, it is true that as he got older, he began to feel both that he had said nearly all that he wanted in regard to apologetics \textit{per se} and that his argumentative abilities were waning: “like the fangless snake in \textit{The Jungle Book},” he wrote in 1951, “I’ve largely lost my dialectical power.”\textsuperscript{283} Indeed, after the Anscombe debate, Lewis apparently told Sayer that he could “never write another book” like \textit{Miracles},\textsuperscript{284} and subsequently, in 1954, Lewis resigned his post as the president of the Socratic Club, hoping they would find “a better and more active man as [his] successor.”\textsuperscript{285} Thus, while Lewis’s interest in

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\item \textsuperscript{279} Ayer, \textit{Part of My Life}, 296-7.
\item \textsuperscript{280} Lewis, \textit{The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III}, 33-5 [June 12, 1950].
\item \textsuperscript{281} Ibid., 462 [April 22, 1954].
\item \textsuperscript{283} Lewis, \textit{The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III}, 129 [July 10, 1951].
\item \textsuperscript{284} Sayer, \textit{Jack}, 308. Cf. “I wish your project heartily well but can’t write you articles. My thought and talent (such as they are) now flow in different, though I think not less Christian, channels, and I do not think I am at all likely to write more \textit{directly} theological pieces. The last work of that sort which I attempted had to be abandoned. If I am now good for anything it is for catching the reader unawares – through fiction and symbol. I have done what I could in the way of frontal attacks, but I now feel quite sure those days are over.” Lewis, \textit{The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III}, 651 [September 28, 1955].
\item \textsuperscript{285} Ibid., 400 [January 1, 1954].
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apologetics *per se* declined along with his years, it is erroneous to say, as Austin Farrer does, that Lewis’s “philosophical experience belonged to the time of his conversion,” or that Lewis lost the belief that Christianity is rational, for to say these things is to misunderstand Lewis’s entire approach to life itself; that is, as I have argued throughout, Lewis understood philosophy to be a way of life and as such believed in Christianity because he thought it is most probably *true*. There is absolutely no evidence to suggest Lewis thought otherwise, only the fallacy of the argument from silence, which points to Lewis’s lack of philosophical work after 1948 and the increase in his imaginative work thereafter. Yet even here, if one were to entertain a fallacy, one would find the spirit of an ancient philosopher, for Lewis not only continued to write letters of an apologetic nature throughout his life, but he also infused his philosophy into his imaginative work – for instance, he transplanted the Ontological Argument into his fifth Narnian book, *The Silver Chair* – and he even, as a testimony to his love of Truth and as vindication of Hooper’s claim that Lewis did not lose the debate with Anscombe, rewrote a section of *Miracles* in 1960, just three years before he died.

In sum, as Lewis got older I believe we should see his interest in philosophy gradually becoming wider and deeper to the point where it is not limited to, though it does not exclude, rational discourse. In other words, in addition to rational discourse, Lewis came to see true philosophy as embracing such things as heavenly desire, the imaginations and cultic practices all in attempt to understand life better. Thus, Lewis’s later shift from apologetics to fiction can actually be see as the result of a richer and deeper Christianity – a Christianity that becomes more itself through an alliance of philosophy, theology and

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literature – and in this way we could even say he became more genuinely philosophical in the ancient sense of the word, for Lewis, like Plato, did not think philosophy was limited to rational discourse.

As for the question as to what kind of philosophy Lewis held from his conversion until his death, this is one of the central foci of this dissertation and as such will be explored throughout. For the time being, suffice to say Lewis was familiar with many radically different types of philosophies, one of the results of which is that his philosophy always remained rather eclectic. Like the Schoolmen, who tried to reconcile Aristotle and Christianity, Lewis drew on, and tried to reconcile (because of his love of internal consistency), many different philosophical streams of thought in order to make what we would call “C. S. Lewis’s philosophical Christianity.” Nevertheless, while Lewis was neither fully able to escape Berkeley’s argument against matter nor banish the language Bradley uses when he speaks of the “glory” hidden behind Appearances, Mary Carman Rose is right when she labels Lewis’s eclectic philosophy “Christian Platonism,” for similar to Christian Neoplatonists such as Augustine and Boethius, Lewis was interested in reconciling the metaphysics and dialectic of Plato, the psychology, ethics and literary theory of Aristotle, the ethics of the Stoics (via Kant) and the myths of the pagans with Christianity, the embodiment of true myth and philosophy. In this way, Lewis’s major philosophers or philosophical-poets were Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Boethius and Dante, all of whom fit under the broad, though admittedly imprecise and problematic,

288 Although I am an Anglican, the two writers who helped me most to Christianity were a Presbyterian (George Macdonald) and a Papist (G. K. Chesterton) – I might add a third and a pagan, Plato.” Lewis, “Autobiographical Note,” 1.
umbrella that is “Neoplatonism.” And while it is true Lewis was ignorant of some of the finer points of disagreement between the philosophers – “On points at issue between Christian Platonism and Christian Aristotelianism I have not got a clear line” – he was able to appreciate many of their differences; indeed, “‘The very seas would lose their shores’ was a quotation from Ovid he was fond of, and . . . ‘Distinguo’ was a favorite word of warning.” Subsequently, whether through ignorance or awareness, Lewis, like the Neoplatonic philosophers he loved, preferred unity to division, desiring to see how differing philosophies could be unified under Christian truth and mystery.

Thus, with Lewis’s definition of philosophy clear and his philosophical journey qua rational analysis and conversion in place, I now turn to the affect that helped move Lewis to reason and subsequently convert to Christianity: heavenly desire.

290 “Such unambiguous statements of the neo-Platonic creed are not, however, very common. The men of that age were such inveterate syncretists, so much more anxious to reconcile authorities than to draw out their differences, that the Aristotelian and neo-Platonic views are not clearly opposed and compared, but are rather contaminated by each other and by many more influences as well. Aristotle himself was sometimes misinterpreted in a sense which brought him very close to Plotinus. Thus Fracastorius (1483-1553) in his Naugerius explains that while other writers give us the naked fact (rem), the poet gives us the form (ideam) clothed in all its beauties . . . ‘which Aristotle calleth the vniuersal.’ These ‘beauties’ however are not very relevant to Aristotle’s immanent universal – the general character in situations of a given kind, the ‘sort of thing that might happen;’ they have come in because Fracastorius is really thinking of a Platonic and transcendent form, a reality prior to, and exalted above, Nature. And Aristotle himself had unwittingly invited such a confusion when he allowed, in contexts which had nothing to do with poetry, that Nature often tends to or aims at . . . a greater perfection than the indeterminacy of matter allows her to achieve (De. Gen. Anim. 778a: Polit. 1255b).” Lewis, Poetry and Prose in the Sixteenth Century, 321.
Chapter Three:  
“Longing for the Island;” or, Lewis’s Theory of Heavenly Desire

In the previous chapter, I examined “the merely argued dialectic of [Lewis’s] philosophical progress;”\(^\text{292}\) that is, I was mainly concerned with Lewis’s love of God \textit{qua} Truth and his rational quest to find Him. Needless to say, such is only part of Lewis’s philosophical journey, for while we know Lewis came to believe in the existence of God and the supra-rational mainly because of rational arguments, his appreciation of the supra-rational, which ultimately led to his conversion to Christianity, was greatly enhanced on account of two things: an affect in the soul that thirsts for the heavenly, which I will call heavenly desire, and the deliberative or poetic imagination.

This is to say – and I will argue this more fully in the next chapter – throughout his first three philosophical phases, Lewis the \textit{narrow} rationalist was repeatedly forced to reduce or explain away heavenly desire and the mythical images haunting his mind as mere biological hiccups or worse. However, as he matured – which, perhaps not accidentally, coincided with his move from teaching philosophy to teaching literature – Lewis came to see the longing in his soul and the beautiful but confusing images in his imagination as pointers to the divine. That is, by rationally reflecting upon both heavenly desire and the mythical images in his poetic imagination, Lewis the \textit{wide} rational theist came to see both that particular things in this world are pointers to their perfections in the next world and that mythical images, largely derived from literature (in particular, though not limited to, the Bible), are in many cases indicators or reflections of a mysterious part

\(^{292}\) Lewis, preface to the third edition of \textit{The Pilgrim’s Regress}, 9.
of God’s nature, which Lewis simply labeled “Myth.” What is vital to keep in mind is that both heavenly desire and the poetic imagination provide important information to one’s reason – information which should not be reduced by reason (since the images in the poetic imagination, for instance, are supra-rational), but which can still be evaluated by reason in that they can be said to be either false insofar as they contradict what is already known of God, for instance, His perfect moral nature, or they can be said to be potentially true – in varying degrees – insofar as they do not contradict what is already known about God; hence, we recall that Lewis said, “I recommended Christianity because I thought its affirmation to be objectively true.” Since these two topics – heavenly desire and the mythical images in the imagination – are rich areas for investigation in regard to Lewis’s philosophical Christianity, I will discuss heavenly desire in this chapter and myth and imagination in the next.

As for the structure of this chapter, I propose to work through the various concepts Lewis used in regard to heavenly desire to give us an appreciation for not only the Oxford don’s eclecticism in regard to this concept, but also the value he put on the role of affect in his philosophy. The various concepts that make up, or at least are broadly related to,
heavenly desire will be looked at in roughly chronological order in regard to Lewis’s encounter with, or mention of, them, starting with Platonic *eros* and then moving on to “Romanticism,” the *numinous*, *Sehnsucht*, and “Joy.” Finally, I will conclude with a discussion about how these concepts tied into Lewis’s so-called Argument from Desire.

I: Platonic *Eros*

The first concept I want to examine in regard to heavenly desire is Platonic *eros*, or, as Lewis called it, “Eros Religion” or “spiritual *eros*.” My reason for beginning with this term is twofold. First, Plato was arguably the first to give a *philosophical* description of a phenomenon that Lewis would come to associate with heavenly desire. And second, despite the fact that Lewis’s first *feeling* of heavenly desire was when he was less than ten years old (when he saw his brother’s toy garden, an event we will talk more about in the next chapter), Lewis’s first *intellectual* encounter with a phenomenon related to heavenly desire was in Plato’s dialogues, which, we recall from chapter two, he started reading back in 1913 at the age of fifteen. Indeed, one of the best examples of Platonic

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295 Lewis mentioned this term in regard to Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*: “Arthur is an embodiment of what Professor Nygren calls ‘Eros Religion,’ the thirst of the soul for the Perfection beyond the created universe. . . . It is in that very nature of the Platonic quest and the Eros religion that the soul cannot know her true aim till she has achieved it. The seeker must advance, with the possibility at each step of error, beyond the false Florimells to the true, and beyond the true Florimell to the Glory. Only such an interpretation will explain the deep seriousness and the explicitly religious language of Arthur’s subsequent soliloquy (55-60).” Lewis, *Poetry and Prose in the Sixteenth Century*, 383.

296 Lewis used this term when he again spoke about *The Faerie Queene*: “This leads us on to the Platonic aspect of the poem. Platonically considered, Arthur is the purged philosophical soul, smitten with a spiritual *eros* for the One, the First Fair, and trying like Plotinus to make the flight alone into the alone. When at III, iv, 54, he wishes that Florimell were his Faerie Queen . . . Arthur is therefore not entirely on the wrong track. Indeed, he comes very near to voicing a prayer that sums up the whole tradition of affirmative theology; except that here the prayer ‘This also is Thou, neither is this Thou’ passes into ‘O that this were Thou, o that Thou were this.’ Unless Arthur only means ‘O that I were now really finding Thee,’ it is a dangerous sentiment. . . . But there is something like it in Plotinus: ‘Those to whom the divine *eros* is unknown may guess at it by the passions of earth, if they remember how great a joy the possession of a beloved person is, and also remember that these earthly beloveds are mortal and harmful and that our love of them is a wooing of images’ (Enneads VI, ix, 9).” C. S. Lewis, *Spenser’s Images of Life*, ed. Alastair Fowler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 133-4.

eros is found in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, which Lewis read in 1915 and reread many times over the course of his life, including during the time he was writing his first major works: *The Quest of Bleheris* and *Dymer*. And it is from *Phaedrus* that we read the following mythical account of Platonic eros.

Once, long ago, the soul dwelt in the upper heavens with the gods and together they were enraptured in the beatific vision: the contemplation of true Beauty and Reality – i.e. the eternal Forms. But one day the soul looked away from the world of the Forms due to its rational faculty exercising imperfect control over its passionate faculty. Consequently, when the soul looked away, it plunged further into the physical world, resulting in distorted knowledge and the loss of true happiness. Forgetfulness of its true home set in when the soul was incarnate; however, it was not total amnesia. The soul had the ability to remember its true home if it would only direct its attention to the knowledge innate within itself which would, in turn, point to its origin, the eternal Forms, the object the soul truly desired; or to put it another way, the soul needed to be possessed by a god, whose maddening love or eros for knowledge would propel the soul heavenward:

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298 In his 1916 novel *The Quest of Bleheris*, Lewis described how the hero of the novel, Bleheris, had a perfect life and yet still longed for something more: “‘What ails me now? Is it an evil thing that I shall wed with the love of my desire and all men have me in envy? Or shall a man long for drink, and then thrust away a cup that one giveth him?’ And he cursed himself, for the joy that would not grow in his heart. . . . [H]e too had his dreams, and thought that surely he should do great things in the world, and fight and love as mightily as the heroes of old song. But now it seemed that his life was but a short space, and [of] little worth: that he should marry and live at ease and beget sons to live also at ease, as others did before him, and at the latter end to [grow] old and die, with all his dreams yet hidden a soft jerkin that none might know him from another.” C. S. Lewis, *The Quest of Bleheris* (Unpublished novel [1916?]; The Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College), 10, 11.

299 In a rough draft of *Dymer*, Lewis wrote the following: “Because of this land only did we love / The horizon, when in earth. Our sweet disease / Of longing. Our huge hope we fabled of / Our Apple-islands and Hesperian trees / Were but the faint stir of the laden breeze / Soft blowing from this coast, and for one breath / Of that breeze men went mad and longed to death.” C. S. Lewis, “*Dymer Rough Draft,”* in “Henry More and Dymer, MS-170” (Unpublished draft [1924?]; The Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College), 160. Cf. Michael Slack, “Sehnsucht and the Platonic Eros in *Dymer,”* *CSL: The Bulletin of the New York C. S. Lewis Society* 11 (August 1980): 3-7.
This then is the fourth type of madness, which befalls when a man, reminded by the sight of beauty on earth of the true beauty, grows his wings and endeavours to fly upward, but in vain, exposing himself to the reproach of insanity because like a bird he fixes his gaze on the heights to the neglect of things below; and the conclusion to which our whole discourse points is that in itself and in its origin that is the best of all forms of divine possession, both for the subject himself and for his associate, and it is when he is touched with this madness that the man whose love is aroused by beauty in others is called a lover. As I have said, every human soul by its very nature has beheld true being – otherwise it would not have entered into the creature we call man – but it is not every soul that finds it easy to use its present experience as a means of recollecting the world of reality.\(^{300}\)

From this myth in *Phaedrus*, along with another myth in *Symposium* (a book Lewis said “to die without having read . . . would be ridiculous”\(^ {301}\)), we may draw the following conclusions. First, Platonic *eros* is the innate desire or appetite for Beauty (since love must always have an object\(^ {302}\)). Second, since Platonic *eros* or love is always for something it knows about but lacks, the soul has some knowledge of true Beauty but lacks complete knowledge of it; hence, Platonic *eros* is the son of Poverty (a mortal who is always wanting) and Contrivance (an immortal god who, in virtue of his immortality, lacks nothing, including knowledge).\(^ {303}\) Third, since “wisdom is one of the most beautiful things, and Love is love of Beauty, it follows that Love must be a lover of wisdom;”\(^ {304}\) that is, Platonic *eros* is a love of Truth because the Truth is beautiful; indeed, it is from

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\(^{300}\) Plato *Phaedrus* 249-50.  
\(^{302}\) Plato *Symposium* 199e.  
\(^{303}\) Ibid., 202a, 203b.  
\(^{304}\) Ibid., 204d.
this that we get the concept of the philosopher, who is a lover of Truth. Fourth, since what is good is the same as what is beautiful, the soul, lacking the Good, also desires it.\textsuperscript{305} Fifth, because without the Good, the soul cannot be happy, the soul, by desiring Goodness (and Beauty and Truth), also desires happiness: “‘And what will have been gained by the man who is in possession of the good?’ ‘I find that an easier question to answer; he will be happy.’”\textsuperscript{306} And sixth, while all people desire after Beauty, Goodness, and happiness, most fail to find these because they mistake images or copies of these Forms for the Forms themselves; indeed, instead of using the images or copies of the Forms in this world of flux as signposts that point beyond themselves to the Real World, most settle for loving the imperfect images. Only the true philosopher sees objects of beauty in the lower physical world as markers that help the soul remember true Beauty.

Now Lewis was familiar with all of this from very early on, but his knowledge of it grew considerably around 1922, when he, though still an atheist, first read Boethius’s \textit{Consolation of Philosophy}, which presented Platonic \textit{eros} proper in a Christianized form. Mythical elements aside, Boethius’s understanding of Platonic \textit{eros} and its relation to Beauty, Truth, Goodness, and happiness was virtually the same as Plato’s. However, there were two important differences: (1) Boethius accepted Plotinus’s assessment that “the soul in its nature loves the One and longs to be one with Him;”\textsuperscript{307} that is, Boethius agreed with the Father of Neoplatonism that the \textit{eros} in the soul is a desire not simply for knowledge of the One (Plato), but also union with the One (Plotinus); however, (2) while Plotinus’s doctrine of the soul’s mystical union with the One carried with it connotations that Christians were often uncomfortable with, Boethius knew that Jesus himself spoke in

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{305} Ibid., 200e.
\item \textsuperscript{306} Ibid., 204d.
\item \textsuperscript{307} Plotinus \textit{The Enneads} 6.9.9.
\end{itemize}}
similar terms (e.g. the union of the Father, Son and believers), and so, following
Augustine (and perhaps others), argued that the *eros* in the soul is a desire for Perfect
Happiness or Happiness That Never Fails, which also happens to be Perfect Goodness,
and since “nothing better than God can be conceived of,” Boethius equated God with
Perfect Goodness which in turn he equated with Perfect Happiness and the true Home of
the soul.  

Nevertheless, as Lewis himself confessed: even when he read Boethius’s Christian
account of Platonic *eros*, he, like Boethius’s “drunken man [who] cannot find by what
path he may return home,” did not immediately associate his own longings (which we
will talk about shortly) with Platonic *eros* and the desire for God. In fact, these explicit
connections only occurred when Lewis wrote *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, in which he quoted
approvingly from both Plato’s *Phaedo* and Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy* in
regard to what the Oxford don then called “Romanticism.”

II: “Romanticism”

In *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis said that throughout his childhood, and indeed, throughout his
entire life, neither of his parents “ever listened for the horns of elfland” – a phrase
which he borrowed from Tennyson’s poem *The Princess* and one which both he and J. R.
R. Tolkien thought captured an important aspect of the best sort of romanticism: not of
“‘[t]itanic characters,’” the macabre, revolution, dangerous adventures, egoism nor
nature, but of the preternatural:

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308 Boethius *The Consolation of Philosophy* 3.10.25-35.
309 Ibid., 3.55.
The marvelous is ‘romantic,’ provided it does not make part of the believed religion. Thus magicians, ghosts, fairies, witches, dragons, nymphs, and dwarfs are ‘romantic;’ angels, less so. Greek gods are ‘romantic’ in Mr James Stephens or Mr Maurice Hewlett; not so in Homer and Sophocles. In this sense Malory, Boiardo, Ariosto, Spenser, Tasso, Mrs Radcliffe, Shelley, Coleridge, William Morris, and Mr E. R. Eddison are ‘romantic’ authors.312

Nevertheless, while this is the kind of romantic literature Lewis liked best (both when he was young and old), it was not what he meant when he wrote a subscript under The Pilgrim’s Regress, which reads: “An allegorical apology for Christianity, Reason and Romanticism.”

What Lewis meant by “Romanticism” back in 1932, when he had just become a Christian and wrote The Pilgrim’s Regress, “was a particular recurrent experience which dominated [his] childhood and adolescence and which [he] hastily called ‘Romantic’ because inanimate nature and marvelous literature were among the things that evoked it.”313 This “recurrent experience,” Lewis said, is one of “intense longing,” 314 “immortal longings,” 315 or “strenuous longing.” 316 And while it is easy to see Romanticism as simply a synonym for Platonic eros, I believe that this is not completely correct. Certainly, the two concepts are related in that both are desires that lead the soul past false

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312 Lewis, preface to the third edition of The Pilgrim’s Regress, 6.
313 Ibid., 7.
314 Ibid.
315 Lewis, Surprised by Joy, 1341.
homes on to its true Home or “the Island;”\(^{317}\) however, they are also autonomous concepts since while Platonic \textit{eros} is the desire for Beauty, Romanticism was never explicitly linked to it. That is, while some beautiful objects, copies of true Beauty, ignited desire in Lewis, not all beautiful objects did; indeed, it seems that only objects that Lewis specifically identified as romantic (e.g. “the noise of falling waves” or “the title of \textit{The Well at the World’s End}\(^{318}\)”) and not other beautiful objects (e.g. a new car) stirred the Oxford don. It is clear, then, that while Lewis’s Romanticism may have been partly inspired by Platonic \textit{eros}, it was also the product of both his own personal experiences and, it can hardly be denied, the larger Romantic Movement (since he mentioned “the Blue Flower,” Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan” and other related sources in this regard\(^{319}\)). Yet as I have already said, both Platonic \textit{eros} and Romanticism should be seen as pieces in the greater collage that I have simply called heavenly desire. And it is to a third piece in this collage I now turn.

\section*{III: The Numinous}

In 1936, three years after Lewis first used the term “Romanticism” in regard to heavenly desire, he read Rudolf Otto’s \textit{The Idea of the Holy},\(^{320}\) one of the ten books that most influenced Lewis’s philosophy of life. In Otto’s work, Lewis read about “the \textit{Numen}” or

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Lewis, \textit{The Pilgrim’s Regress}, 22. Compare this to \textit{The Last Battle}, in which Jewel the unicorn says upon arriving in the New Narnia, “‘I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now. The reason why we loved the old Narnia is that it sometimes looked like this.’” Lewis, \textit{The Last Battle}, 162. Also, in \textit{The Boy and His Horse}, Shasta expresses this same sentiment: “‘Oh hurrah!’ said Shasta. ‘Then we’ll go North [to Narnia]. I’ve been longing to go to the North all my life.’ ‘Of course, you have,’ said the Horse. ‘That’s because of the blood that’s in you.’” C. S. Lewis, \textit{The Horse and His Boy} (1954 reprint; London: Fontana, 1985), 20.
\item Lewis, preface to the third edition of \textit{The Pilgrim’s Regress}, 9.
\item \textit{Ibid.}, 8-9.
\item “Congratulations to the ‘local printer’ on giving us a translation of Otto’s \textit{Das Heilige} at 3/6 – very nice.” Lewis, \textit{The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume II}, 203 [August 20, 1936].
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
“the Holy,” which is a technical word Otto used to describe the Sacred minus any moral or rational aspects.\textsuperscript{321} From the word \textit{Numen}, Otto derived the word “\textit{numinous},” from which he then spoke of a \textit{numinous} category of value which is always present when an individual is in a numinous state of mind. “This mental state,” Otto wrote, “is perfectly \textit{sui generis} and irreducible to any other; and therefore, like every absolutely primary and elementary datum, while it admits of being discussed, it cannot be strictly defined.”\textsuperscript{322} Nevertheless, despite Otto’s initial insistence that the \textit{numinous} is absolutely basic and unique, later on he conceded that the \textit{numinous} is intimately related to Kant’s Sublime, and it is this connection that Lewis would subsequently associate with heavenly desire. However, before any of these connections can be made, it is important to be clear about the nature of the \textit{numinous}.

According to Otto, the \textit{numinous} is the feeling that overcomes the mind when the individual “is submerged and overwhelmed by its own nothingness.”\textsuperscript{323} This feeling, in turn, is always accompanied by a sense of complete dependence on the Divine.\textsuperscript{324} However, this feeling of dependence is not merely a natural feeling of dependence, such as insufficiency resulting from a difficult circumstance; rather, it is a mystical sense of dependence, like the dependence Abraham felt when he pled with God for the men of Sodom: “Behold now, I, who am but dust and ash, have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord.”\textsuperscript{325} Otto called this kind of dependency the “\textit{creature-feeling}”\textsuperscript{326} and following him

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{322} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{323} Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{324} Ibid., 25.
\textsuperscript{325} Genesis 28:27.
\end{flushleft}
a few decades later, Lewis spoke of it as “the shame of being mortal.” Nevertheless, while the numinous is broadly identified with “creature-feeling” (or “shame”), Otto claimed that this can be divided into two key elements: (1) the feeling of mysterium tremendum, and (2) fascination. For the sake of systemization, I will begin with mysterium tremendum, and then move onto fascination.

When an individual experiences mysterium tremendum, he feels he is in the presence of something which is at once awful, august, majestic, overpowering, living, urgent, wholly different, pulsating and uncanny. The feeling of mysterium tremendum may “burst in sudden eruption up from the depths of the soul with spasms and convulsions, or lead to the strangest excitements, to intoxicated frenzy, to transport, and to ecstasy;” in itself, this feeling may be either demonic or angelic, something wild and grisly or beautiful and pure. Yet in whatever mode this feeling takes, it always makes the mind shutter and the individual think of himself as less than nothing since he feels himself to be in the presence of something that is non-natural, wholly other and yet pulsating with an energy and life more real than his own.

Lewis himself – as is evident by an underlining in his edition of The Idea of the Holy (not to mention by his 1952 essay “Is Theism Important?”) – was particularly interested in Otto’s idea that the feeling of mysterium tremendum can be “awful” and yet

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327 When Psyche met Cupid for the first time, she says: “‘When I saw the Westwind I was neither glad nor afraid (at first). I felt ashamed . . . Ashamed of looking like a mortal; ashamed of being a mortal. . . . This shame . . . It’s the being mortal; being, how shall I say it? . . . insufficient.” Lewis, Till We Have Faces, 910, 911. Also consider one of Lewis’s favorite quotations from Thomas Browne which reads: “I am not so much afraid of death as ashamed thereof.” Thomas Browne, Religio Medici, in The Harvard Classics, ed. Charles W. Elliot (New York: P. F. Collier & Sons, 1937), 291 [1.40]. Cf. Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume II, 763 [February 12, 1947]. Of course, neither Lewis nor Browne meant that a person should be ashamed – in our modern sense of the word – of being mortal; rather, what they meant is that a person is abashed at being the presence of He Who Is So Much Greater.


329 Ibid., 12-3.

“wholly distinct from that of being afraid.”³³¹ In fact, Lewis’s interest in this topic was not merely an academic interest, not only because he never thought of philosophy as such, but also because the Oxford don, some six years before reading Otto, had actually experienced this awfulness firsthand upon reading the mystic Jacob Boehme:

In the evening I started to read the Everyman volume of Jacob Boehme . . . the Signatura Rerum. . . . I saw, alas, that it was hopelessly beyond me: yet tantalising for I could just grasp enough to be quite sure that he was talking about something tremendously real, and not merely mystifying you. . . . I had two quite distinct experiences in reading it. (a) Certain sentences moved and excited me although I couldn’t understand them . . . ‘That the nothing is become an eternal life and has found itself, which cannot be, in the Stillness.’ – ‘The wrath extinguishes and the turning orb stands still, and instead of the turning a sound is caused in the essence.’ (b) At certain points a feeling of distress, and even of horror. I had always assumed, in my way, that if I could reach the things Boehme is here talking about, I should like them! . . . I wish to record that it has been about the biggest shaking up I’ve got from a book, since I first read Phantastes [by George MacDonald].³³²

This passage is important not only because it depicts Lewis’s experience with the awfulness of mysterium tremendum, but also because it shows his experience with the other part of mysterium tremendum: its eeriness.

Now the eeriness or uncanny nature of *mysterium tremendum* is a vital part of this concept since it points to the unlimited, non-natural and indeterminate nature of the *numinous*. Otto himself compared this element of the *numinous* to Kant’s Sublime, for while neither are concerned with Beauty, both are concerned with the mysterious, the maddening, the daunting, the unformed and the boundless\(^3\) (although, of course, Kant’s Sublime has to do with judgement in general, whereas Otto’s *numinous* is only focused on religion; hence, Otto thinks Kant’s Sublime is “a pale reflexion of” the *numinous*\(^4\). And these common elements in the *numinous* and the Sublime are also shared with Lewis’s Romanticism, for as we recall, Romanticism is not, as with Platonic *eros*, concerned with Beauty as such, but with the wonderful, the marvellous, the elusive and the haunting.\(^5\) Hence, both the *numinous* and Romanticism can be incited by things like romantic literature, fairy stories and myths; as Otto wrote: “But the fairy-story proper only comes into being with the element of the ‘wonderful,’ with miracle and miraculous events and consequences, i.e. by means of an infusion of the numinous. And the same holds good in an increased degree of *myth*.”\(^6\) While we will talk more about myth and fairy stories in the next chapter, one quotation from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is worth mentioning now as it shows the union of the *numinous* and Romanticism in Lewis’s thought; thus, consider the various sensations the four Pevensie

\(^{3}\) For Kant, emotion is irrelevant to Beauty, but not to the Sublime. Moreover, while Beauty has to do with quality, the formed, the finite and the natural, the Sublime has to do with quantity, the unformed, the infinite and the non-rational. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. H. Bernard (1790 reprint; New York: Hafner, 1961) [2.23]. It should be noted that the division between the Sublime and the Beautiful is not original with Kant, for Kant himself derived this idea from Edmund Burke’s *On the Sublime and Beautiful*. However, since Otto dealt with Kant and not Burke, I have restricted my comments to Kant. Cf. Edmund Burke, *On the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756 reprint; New York, P. F. Collier & Son, 1937), 101 [3.27].


children experience upon hearing the name “Aslan,” who, as we know, is a literary representation of Christ, the very Numen Himself:

And now a very curious thing happened. None of the children knew who Aslan was . . . but the moment the Beaver had spoken these words everyone felt quite different. Perhaps it has sometimes happened to you in a dream that someone says something which you don’t understand but in the dream it feels as if it had some enormous meaning – either a terrifying one which turns the whole dream into a nightmare or else a lovely meaning too lovely to put into words, which makes the dream so beautiful that you remember it all your life and are always wishing you could get into that dream again. It was like that now. At the name of Aslan each one of the children felt something jump in his inside. Edmund felt a sensation of mysterious horror. Peter felt suddenly brave and adventurous. Susan felt as if some delicious smell or some delightful strain of music had just floated by her. And Lucy got the feeling you have when you wake up in the morning and realize that it is the beginning of the holidays or the beginning of summer.

The second and final element in the numinous is fascination. This sensation occurs in the individual as a result of his experiencing the mysterious and unknown. Awe, it is true, brings the individual to his knees, but desire to see and understand the mystery – indeed,

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337 “But Laurence can’t really love Aslan more than Jesus, even if he feels that’s what he is doing. For the things he loves Aslan for doing or saying are simply the things Jesus really said did and said. So that when Laurence thinks he is loving Aslan, he is really loving Jesus: and perhaps loving Him more than he ever did before.” Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III, 603 [May 5, 1955].

338 Lewis, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, 65. This passage is in many ways similar to one that Lewis wrote in his 1916 unpublished romance, The Quest of Bleheris, in which he wrote, “‘In God’s name,’ said Bleheris, ‘speak to me plain, and riddle not.’ So the churl, looking yet once again at the dark stairway, put his haggard face close to the youth, and whispered so low that it was scarcely to be heard, ‘Bethrelladoom.’ At the sound of that word, Bleheris felt on a sudden strange terror come upon him: yet not in truth an honest fear, as he had felt towards the Lumpher of the Sunken Wood, but rather a shrinking awe as a savage might feel towards the frightful god of his imaginings.” Lewis, The Quest of Bleheris, 29. In addition to being the Numen, Christ is also Goodness itself; hence, “Goodness is either the great safety or the great danger – according to the way you react to it.” Lewis, Mere Christianity, 340.
fascination and “love” for the mystery\textsuperscript{339} – causes him to raise his eyes. And what he sees when he raises his eyes causes him to be overcome with a kind of madness, but it is the madness of the finite looking into the infinite,\textsuperscript{340} and in this sense, it bears some resemblance to Platonic eros, which speaks of the need for the soul to be possessed by divine eros in order to ascend into the heavens. Consequently, the individual who experiences the \textit{numinous} feels at once terrified of, and attracted to, the haunting mystery. He sees it, as the Priest in \textit{Till We Have Faces} does of the perfect sacrifice, as “both the best and the worst.”\textsuperscript{341}

Now as we have seen, the term \textit{numinous} is neither synonymous with Platonic eros, since it has nothing to do with Beauty, Truth, the Good, Happiness nor Home,\textsuperscript{342} nor is it synonymous with Romanticism, since the \textit{numinous} places much greater emphasis on the “creature-feeling.” However, all three concepts are united under the broad banner of heavenly desire in at least two ways: first, the individual is aware of his humble state in comparison to the Divine, and second, the individual subsequently becomes fascinated with, or desirous of, the Divine.

IV: \textit{Sehnsucht}

The fourth word Lewis used to describe heavenly desire is the German word \textit{Sehnsucht}. The origin of this word has been lost to time, but we know that it was a word that was in vogue in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries especially with the great Austrian and German composers, such as Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert, and the early and late

\textsuperscript{339} Otto, \textit{The Idea of the Holy}, 41.
\textsuperscript{340} Ibid., 29.
\textsuperscript{341} Lewis, \textit{Till We Have Faces}, 875.
\textsuperscript{342} Otto said that \textit{Numen} or “the Holy” is analogous to, but not synonymous with, Beauty and the Good. Otto, \textit{The Idea of the Holy}, 51.
German Romantic writers, such as Goethe, Schiller and Novalis.\(^{343}\) Now Lewis had read, or had tried to read, Goethe and Novalis in German while studying with Kirkpatrick between 1914-1917; however, given Lewis’s poor proficiency in German and relative neglect of the language throughout his life, it is just as likely as not that his appropriation of the word *Sehnsucht* came from sources other than the German romantics.\(^{344}\) For instance, we know Lewis encountered this word in William James’s *Varieties of Religious Experience*, which he read in 1922,\(^ {345}\) and it is very possible that Lewis’s first appropriation of this word came after a deeper study of English Romantics like Wordsworth or Coleridge (who were heavily influenced by Goethe) or George MacDonald (who was heavily influenced by Novalis and who, as we shall see, played a crucial role in “baptizing” Lewis’s imagination). Whatever the case may be, Lewis strongly believed that “poets have said more about it than philosophers.”\(^ {346}\)

Nevertheless, since Lewis himself did not begin to use the word (in print at least) until the 1940s (indeed, he did not use it at all in regard to Romanticism in the 1930s),\(^ {347}\) it is clear that *Sehnsucht*, despite having become the title of the newest peer-reviewed journal


\(^{344}\) “I . . . read a good deal in an English translation of Goethe’s *Dichtung und Wahrheit* – wh[ich] I began to read in the original with Kirk a long time ago.” Lewis, *All My Road Before Me*, 307 [March 28, 1924]. “I have again begun my German and do half an hour every morning before beginning my other work. I am still at Novalis – you will wonder how I have not finished it long ago, and even to myself I seem to have been reading it almost all my life. . . . Novalis is perhaps the greatest single influence on MacDonald.” Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume I*, 922 [August 13, 1930].

\(^{345}\) “Called at the Union . . . to take out W[illiam] James’s *Varieties of Religious Experience*. I have been reading this most of the afternoon, a capital book.” Lewis, *All My Road Before Me*, 48 [June 11, 1922]. “An excellent old German lady, who had done some traveling in her day, used to describe to me her *Sehnsucht* that she might yet visit ‘Philadelphia,’ whose wondrous name had always haunted her imagination.” William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, ed. Martin Marty (1902 reprint; Toronto: Penguin, 1982), 383.


dedicated solely to Lewis studies,\footnote{\textit{Sehnsucht} is a peer-reviewed journal started in 2007 by the Arizona C. S. Lewis Society.} was not the Oxford don’s preference when discussing heavenly desire.

Now as with Lewis’s Romanticism or Otto’s \textit{numinous}, the precise definition of \textit{Sehnsucht} is unclear. It has connotations of “seeing the sublimity of nature,” “longing for the unattainable” and “dreaming of fantasy worlds,” all of which it picked up from its association with “the Blue Flower” motif as found in the medieval Scandinavian ballads \textit{Längtans Bläa Blomma}\footnote{Corbin Scott Carnell, \textit{Bright Shadow of Reality: Spiritual Longing in C. S. Lewis} (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 22.} and German literature, especially Novalis’s \textit{Heinrich von Ofterdingen},\footnote{Novalis, \textit{Heinrich von Ofterdingen}, in \textit{The Collected Works of Novalis}, ed. Hans-Joachim Mähl, vol. I (Munich: Hanser, 1978), 237-413.} but it also has connotations of remembering the happy past, and so is generally translated as “nostalgia.” And while it is possible to see a connection between Platonic \textit{eros} and \textit{Sehnsucht}, any strong correlation would be hasty since, for example, Plato, and not the Germans, understood \textit{eros} in terms of the desire resulting from the soul’s pre-existent state in which the immortal soul contemplated Beauty and thus experienced a happiness it no longer possesses.

As for Lewis himself, he spoke of \textit{Sehnsucht} in many different ways, for instance, he talked about “\textit{sehnsucht}, awakened by the past, the remote, or the (imagined) supernatural,”\footnote{C. S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” in \textit{C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection & Other Short Pieces}, ed. Lesley Walmsley (1941 essay reprint; London: HarperCollins, 2000), 104.} and mentioned that a picture of an American landscape “raise[d] extreme \textit{Sehnsucht}.”\footnote{Lewis, \textit{The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III}, 199 [June 10, 1952].} However, usually the Oxford don referred to \textit{Sehnsucht} in terms of “our lifelong nostalgia;”\footnote{Lewis, “Christianity and Culture,” 80.} furthermore, the evidence seems to suggest he thought of this nostalgia more in terms of a Christianized Platonic \textit{eros} and less in terms of merely
remembering the past in this life: “Now, if we are made for heaven, the desire for our proper place will be already in us.”

Nonetheless, I hasten to add that despite being close friends with Barfield, a Christian Anthroposophist who believed in reincarnation and past lives, Lewis thought reincarnation incompatible with Christianity. Therefore, the Oxford don looked to orthodox Christians like Boethius and the mature Augustine, who offered Christian interpretations of the Platonic theory of the innate knowledge of Happiness by associating Happiness with God and substituting God-given knowledge for reincarnation. For example, Lewis underlined the following in his edition of Augustine’s Confessions:

If except in my memory I find you, I am unmindful of you. . . . How, then, do I seek Thee, O Lord? For when I seek Thee, my God, I seek a happy life. . . . But I ask whether the happy life be in the memory? For did we not know it, we should not love it. We hear the name, and we all acknowledge that we desire the thing; for we are not delighted with the sound only. For when a Greek hears it spoken in Latin, he does not feel delight, for he knows not what is spoken; but we are delighted, as he too would be if he heard it in Greek; because the thing itself is neither Greek nor Latin, which Greeks and Latins, and men of all other tongues, long so earnestly to obtain. It is then known to all, and could they with one voice be asked whether they wished to be happy, without a doubt they would all answer that they would. And this could not be unless the thing itself, of which it is the name, were retained in their memory.

354 Ibid., 98.
Lewis agreed with Augustine that people can find knowledge of God *qua* Happiness in their memories (and hence they can desire Him); however, despite John Randolph Willis’s insistence that Augustine’s desire for God (i.e. “Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee”) rested on the same principles as Lewis’s *Sehnsucht*, this is not always clear, for while Lewis definitely resembled the younger Augustine in regard to our natural knowledge of Happiness and God, Lewis – taking a less severe approach to the Fall – did not agree with the older Augustine that our *knowledge* of Happiness and God is purely the act of God’s grace.

To conclude this section we may say that while *Sehnsucht* emphasizes remembering more than the other members of heavenly desire, it, nevertheless, agrees with Platonic *eros*, Romanticism and the *numinous* in affirming at least the minimal requirements for heavenly desire, which are, once again, a feeling of loss or lack on the part of the individual in regard to something Distant and Profound, which, consequently, leads to longing for that Object.

V: “Joy”

The fifth term Lewis used in regard to heavenly desire is “Joy,” which he used in his 1924 poem “Joy” and then employed again in his 1955 autobiography, *Surprised by

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357 The younger Augustine was more Platonic in regard to free will and man’s natural desire for happiness. For instance, in Augustine’s first Catholic text, *The Happy Life*, the reference to, and subsequent argument surrounding, the phrase “flagrante caritate” or the “blazing love” the good man has for God was not merely Pauline but also owed a lot to Plato. John Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 150-1.
Joy, which in turn got its name from the poem “Surprised by Joy” by the romantic poet Wordsworth. Like Platonic eros, Romanticism, the numinous and Sehnsucht, Joy expresses the duality of loss (which results in pain) and desire: “It is that of an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction. I call it Joy, which is here a technical term and must be sharply distinguished from both Happiness and Pleasure. Joy (in my sense) has indeed one characteristic, and one only, in common with them; the fact that anyone who has experienced it will want it again.”

In this description of Joy, on top of seeing the basic positive similarities between Joy and the other concepts of heavenly desire, we can also see some of the negative similarities, which I have not yet mentioned. That is, already back in The Pilgrim’s Regress, Lewis was aware that Romanticism has a dark side (e.g. attraction to magic, the occult, etc.) and in a 1940 essay, “Christianity and Culture,” Lewis said frankly: “The dangers of romantic Sehnsucht are very great.” Thus, it is hardly new that in Surprised by Joy, Lewis also spoke of the addictive nature of Joy in Surprised by Joy in a way that mirrored his earlier discussion of Turkish Delight in The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe:

At last the Turkish Delight was all finished and Edmund was looking very hard at the empty box and wishing that she would ask him whether he would like some more. Probably the Queen knew quite well what he was thinking; for she knew, though Edmund did not, that this was enchanted Turkish Delight and that anyone

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360 Lewis, Surprised by Joy, 1253.
361 Ibid. During his absolute idealist phase, Lewis understood Joy to be the painful pleasure that arises as a result of at once desiring unity with Spirit and then realizing that such a unity can never take place since an Appearance must forever remain either an Appearance qua Spirit (and thus be separated from Spirit, which is Spirit qua the totality of all Appearances) or be dissolved into Spirit (and thus lose any individuality). C. S. Lewis, Clivi Hamiltonis Summae Metaphysice Contra Anthroposophos Libri II (November 1928 Unpublished “Great War” document; The Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College), 51.
362 Lewis, “Christianity and Culture,” 80.
who had once tasted it would want more and more of it, and would even, if they were allowed, go on eating it till they killed themselves.  

Nevertheless, it is crucial to see that Lewis stressed the danger of Joy and heavenly desire, not because they are bad, but because they are not ends in themselves. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, the Oxford don felt that Joy (to be specific now) is valuable only insofar as it leads us to its proper object, which is God *qua* Happiness; indeed, it is for this reason that Lewis distinguished between Joy and Happiness (“Joy . . . is a technical term and must be sharply distinguished from both Happiness and Pleasure”), for the former leads to the latter.

Now the connection between heavenly desire and Happiness is something which Joy analogously shares with Platonic *eros*. No doubt the desire for Happiness is in some way related to Romanticism and *Sehnsucht*, but it is more so with Joy, for the name is no accident in either Wordsworth’s poem or Lewis’s autobiography. Thus, Lewis had Joy or Platonic *eros* in mind when he spoke of people not having been given “an appetite for beatitude”[^364] “in vain,”[^365] and having been “made for infinite happiness.”[^366] Indeed, Happiness is so much the central focus of life that according to Lewis, God Himself, far

[^363]: Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 38.
[^365]: “I mean the pursuit of knowledge and beauty, in a sense, for their own sake, but in a sense which does not exclude their being for God’s sake. An appetite for these things exists in the human mind, and God makes no appetite in vain. . . . This is the teleological argument that the existence of the impulse and the faculty prove that they must have a proper function in God’s scheme — the argument by which Thomas Aquinas proves that sexuality would have existed even without the Fall.” C. S. Lewis, “Learning in Wartime,” in *C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection & Other Short Pieces*, ed. Lesley Walmsley (1939 essay reprint; London: HarperCollins, 2000), 583.
[^366]: C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, in *C. S. Lewis: Selected Books [Long Edition]* (1946 reprint; London: HarperCollins, 1999), 1057. Cf. “The process of being turned from a creature into a son would not have been difficult or painful if the human race had not turned away from God centuries ago. They were able to do this because He gave them free will: He gave them free will because a world of mere automata could never love and therefore know infinite happiness. The difficult part is this. All Christians are agreed that there is, in the full and original sense, only one ‘Son of God.’” Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 438.
from being in essence a lover of duty for duty’s sake, is “a hedonist at heart.” 367

Moreover, we see this emphasis on Happiness increasing in Lewis’s later works, such as in *Till We Have Faces*, where we read:

‘I have always – at least, ever since I can remember – had a kind of longing for death.’

‘Ah, Psyche,’ I said, ‘have I made you so little happy as that?’

‘No, no, no,’ she said. ‘You don’t understand. Not that kind of longing. It was when I was happiest that I longed most. It was on happy days when we were up there on the hills, the three of us, with the wind and the sunshine . . . where you couldn’t see Glome or the palace. Do you remember? The colour and the smell, and looking across at the Grey Mountain in the distance? And because it was so beautiful, it set me longing, always longing. Somewhere else there must be more of it. Everything seemed to be saying, Psyche come! But I couldn’t (not yet) come and I didn’t know where I was to come to. It almost hurt me. I felt like a bird in a cage when the other birds of its kind are flying home.’

. . .

‘– my country, the place where I ought to have been born. Do you think it all meant nothing, all the longing? The longing for home? For indeed it now feels not like going, but like going back. All my life the god of the Mountain has been wooing me.’ 368

Now Joy has roots both in the eudamonian ethics of the Greek philosophers and the teachings of the Bible: both Plato and Jesus give us incentives for doing what is right –

one says be virtuous because this is the way the soul can return to its heavenly home and
the other says do as I, the Standard of Right and Wrong, command and you will be with
Me in Paradise. Needless to say, Joy and happiness forced Lewis to reject the
deontological ethics of Kant, which maintains that doing a moral deed for the sake of
happiness always compromises ethical integrity: “If there lurks in most modern minds the
notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad
thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the
Christian faith.”369

Of course, here we are speaking of Lewis the Christian Neoplatonist, not Lewis of any
other philosophical phase, for the Oxford don’s thoughts on the relation between duty and
Joy shifted a lot over the years. For instance, in The Pilgrim’s Regress, which broadly
parallels the chronology of Lewis’s philosophical journey, we see the character “Vertue”
enter the story (i.e. after a few chapters) around the same time Lewis entered into his first
moral experience (i.e. 1917). Moreover, just as Lewis was schooled in Aristotle’s Ethics
from an early age, so too was Vertue “brought up on Aristotle,”370 and just as Lewis
passed from the eudemonism of Plato and Aristotle to the deontology of Kant – the
ethical theory which Lewis largely subscribed to during his metaphysical Stoical

369 Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” 96. Lewis owned a copy of the stoic philosopher Seneca’s Moral Essays,
and he likely knew the following passage from it: “There is a great difference between the Stoics and the
other schools of philosophy as there is between males and females. . . . Other philosophers, using gentle
and persuasive measures, are like the intimate family physician, who, commonly, tries to cure his patients,
not by the best and quickest method, but as he is allowed. The Stoics, having adopted the heroic course, are
not so much concerned in making it attractive to us who enter upon it, as in having it rescue us as soon as
possible and guide us to that lofty summit which rises so far beyond the reach of any missile as to tower
high above all fortune.” Seneca The Dialogues of Lucius Annaeus Seneca: Book II; To Serenus on the
Firmness of the Wise Man 1.1.
370 Lewis, The Pilgrim’s Regress, 96.
materialist phase (1919-1923)\textsuperscript{371} – so too did Vertue pass on to become an ethical Kantian.\textsuperscript{372} Furthermore, both Lewis the Kantian and Vertue the Kantian shared the same admirable devotion to duty ("I know that the rule is to be obeyed because it is a rule and not because it appeals to my feelings at the moment"\textsuperscript{373}), yet both of them saw this devotion to duty in opposition to Joy. Lewis psychoanalyzed, and subsequently discarded, all romantic and supernatural feelings, and then agreed with Kant when the German said that willingly obeying the imperative commands of the moral law simply because it is objective and absolute is the supreme good, better, even, than the desire for happiness;\textsuperscript{374} in fact, in his edition of Kant’s \textit{Critique of Practical Reason}, Lewis called the aforementioned argument a “Teleological Argument” because “practical reason is a bad means to happiness. Therefore it must be a means to something else.”\textsuperscript{375} Vertue the Kantian believed something similar, for he said:

‘Then there is the life I have been leading myself – marching on I don’t know where. I can’t see that there is any other good in it except the mere fact of imposing my will on my inclinations. And that seems to be good \textit{training}, but training for what? Suppose after all it was training for battle? Is it so absurd to think that that might be the thing we were born for? A fight in a narrow place, life

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\item We need to remember that none of the philosophical phases that Lewis passed through are identical with the system of any one thinker. Thus, for instance, Lewis’s Stoical materialist phase is a loose title that he gave to the general mood of that period of his life: it should not be understood to be a consistent and complete Stoical philosophy. Thus, on the one hand, people ought not to press Lewis’s philosophical phases too hard for perfect fidelity to a particular philosopher, but on the other hand, we should rightly criticize Lewis for speaking too rhetorically when he careless conflates distinct philosophies, such as Kantian deontology and Stoical eudemonism, in the name of a common mood, namely, ethical rigidness.\textsuperscript{372}

\item \textit{The Pilgrim’s Regress}, 218.\textsuperscript{ibid.}, 109.


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or death; – that must be the final act of will – the conquest of the deepest inclination of all.’

‘I think my heart will break,’ said John after he had gone many paces in silence. ‘I came to find my Island. I am not high-minded like you, Vertue: it was never anything but sweet desire that led me. . . .

Vertue sat down as one not noticing that he did it.

‘Don’t you see?’ he said. ‘Suppose there is anything East and West. How can that give me a motive for going on? Because there is something pleasant ahead? That is a bribe. Because there is something dreadful behind? That is a threat. I meant to be a free man. . . .

‘Vertue,’ said John, ‘give in. For once yield to desire. Have done with your choosing. Want something.’

As we can gather from chapter two, eventually Vertue, like Lewis, began to “want something,” thus reflecting Lewis’s Christian attitude that “if God were a Kantian, who would not have us till we came to Him from the purest and best motives, who could be saved?” Consequently, Lewis the Christian Neoplatonist found a way to reconcile Joy and duty when he declared: “A perfect man w[oul]d never act from sense of duty; he’d always want the right more than the wrong.”

While I could go into much greater detail in regard to Joy and duty, this will have to suffice for now. What is important for the moment is that on top of there being a peculiarly strong analogy between Joy and Platonic eros in regard to Happiness, Joy

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377 Lewis, The Problem of Pain, 521.
properly belongs in heavenly desire, for it bespeaks deep spiritual emptiness and profound longing for the Divine.

VI: The Argument from Desire

Drawing on insights from Platonic *eros*, “Romanticism,” the *numinous*, *Sehnsucht*, and Joy, Lewis gave the twentieth century a fresh taste of an old philosophical truth in his numerous writings about heavenly desire, particularly when formulated as an argument for the existence of Heaven and God. While the accolade for these writings has not always been universal (philosopher John Beversluis says “The pursuit of Joy is a childish thing”379), many have been impressed by it; indeed, philosopher Alvin Plantinga praised “C. S. Lewis’s Argument from Nostalgia”380 and philosopher Peter Kreeft, calling the same argument “C. S. Lewis’ Argument from Desire,”381 thinks, after Anselm’s Ontological Argument, that it is “the single most intriguing argument in the history of human thought.”382 But more to our purpose, since the Argument from Desire is so intimately connected with Lewis’s deepest feelings of Romanticism and Joy – since this argument is fundamental to Lewis’s philosophical and Christian formation – it is worth examining it in some detail.

However, while Lewis made use of the Argument from Desire on more than one occasion, Kreeft actually does a better job of stating Lewis’s argument in a clear syllogism. Kreeft sets it up like this: (1) Every natural and innate desire in us bespeaks a corresponding real object that can satisfy the desire (note: this is based on Lewis’s

381 Kreeft, “C. S. Lewis’ Argument from Desire,” 201.
382 Ibid., 210.
Aristotelian belief that “nature does nothing in vain,” and on his Platonic belief that every desire has an object); (2) There exists in us a desire which nothing in time, nothing on earth, no creature, can satisfy; (3) Therefore, there exists something outside of time, earth, and creatures which can satisfy this desire. As a side note, let me try to clarify what Kreeft and Lewis mean when they say that every natural desire has a corresponding real object. First, we must be cautious of the fallacy of affirming the consequent: just because a real object exists, it does not follow that the desire for that object was natural. For many desires can be satisfied by real objects, for instance the desire to steal that book, the desire to beat up that guy, the desire to sexually assault that man or woman. But the Argument from Desire does not allow one to conclude from this that these desires are therefore natural. The argument licenses the inference to the existence of the desired object only from a premise that states a natural desire. So when is a desire natural?

Broadly speaking a desire is natural when it is a desire that arises in a properly
functioning human being, in a human being that functions he ought to function. How exactly a human being ought to function, and so which desires are natural, is not something that can very easily be stated. But the distinction has some sort of intuitive appeal. And the force of the argument from desire depends on that appeal. This is not to say that this intuition cannot be further elaborated. But for now I will have to leave it at this. A second point is this: while some desires are unnatural while their objects do exist, some other desires are unnatural while their objects do not exist. For instance, I might desire to be Barak Obama. This desire, I take it, is unnatural because a properly functioning human being does not want to be another person. And the object of desire – the state of affairs consisting in my being Barak Obama does not exist (and cannot possibly exist). Of course, one could think it is natural to desire some of Obama’s attributes (e.g. rhetorical skills, power, elegance etc.), but that is something altogether different, for attributes allow for multiple instantiation. A final point is this: one’s natural desire for X, so the Argument from Desire goes, allows one to conclude that X exists. But it does not entail that X will be achieved, or enjoyed. The Argument from Desire endeavors to show that such an object exists, not that all who have a desire for that object will taste it: all might desire Heaven, and so Heaven’s existence might become more likely, but only few will actually taste Heaven since desiring is not the same as achieving.

Now as with any philosophical argument, the Argument from Desire has had its share of defenders, critics and counter-critics; consequently, for the sake of demonstrating the importance of, and controversy surrounding, Lewis’s most notable contribution to natural theology, I have tried to distill all that has been said about this argument into six points of contention.
The first point of contention simply denies the existence of heavenly desire. Kreeft voices this possible objection, but then he turns around and says that people who deny the existence of heavenly desire are guilty of playing the “stupidest wager in the world” and their words verge “on culpable dishonesty.” Lewis himself was generally more tolerant than Kreeft; indeed, instead of calling a man like John Stuart Mill “one of the shallowest minds in the history of human thought,” as Kreeft does, Lewis called Mill, as we recall from chapter two, “an honest skeptic.” Nevertheless, Lewis thought the Argument from Desire is logically valid and sound (and thus agrees with Kreeft) because – in addition to everything else – he thought all people have heavenly desire whether they are aware of it or not; in other words, he thought the argument is logically valid and sound even if some people, psychologically speaking, fail to realize their own heavenly desire.

The second point of contention is from Beversluis and Erik Wielenberg. Beversluis’s assertion is that Lewis confused grammar with, and so read grammar back into, reality: “All desires must have grammatical objects but they need not have real ones.” Although Kreeft exaggerates when he calls this “a typical Logical Positivist objection,” he makes a good point when he argues thus: “Lewis’ argument does not begin with a purely grammatical observation but with a metaphysical observation: that real desires really do have real objects. But he does not say that all desires do, only that all natural, innate, instinctive desires do. Desires for imaginary things, like Oz, are not innate. Desire for God is.” While Wielenberg disagrees with Kreeft that all natural and innate desires

386 Kreeft, “C. S. Lewis’ Argument from Desire,” 225.
387 Ibid.
388 Beversluis, C. S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion, 16.
can be satisfied,\textsuperscript{390} I think that the truth of Kreeft’s statement is apparent if we see that we have a natural desire, such as heavenly desire, for a supernatural object, such as God.

The third point of contention comes from Beversluis (again), who asks, “How could Lewis have known that every natural desire has a real object \textit{before} knowing that Joy has one?”\textsuperscript{391} Beversluis’s challenge is directed against (1), for he maintains that (1) can only be established by a posteriori knowledge and enumerative induction (i.e. knowing \textit{every} example of a given category, including the example given in the conclusion). Of course, what we should immediately recognize is that Beversluis’ objection is not aimed at the truth of (1); rather, it is merely stating that the \textit{knowledge} of the object of a natural desire must be attained through experience and interaction with the world and that we should not make absolute statements about matters that warrant probability at best. Consequently, Berversluis’ objection, though interesting, is not really an objection to the argument as such and hence does not need to be resolved here. However, for interest’s sake, let me say that on a few occasions Lewis could be interpreted as saying that some knowledge of God is innate in the soul and that such knowledge could act as the initial stimulus for heavenly desire; thus, he wrote things like, “The form of the desired is in the desire.”\textsuperscript{392} Nevertheless, in one unpublished manuscript, Lewis actually declared himself...

\textsuperscript{390} Wielenberg, \textit{God and the Reach of Reason: C. S. Lewis, David Hume and Bertrand Russell}, 111.
\textsuperscript{391} Beversluis, \textit{C. S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion}, 19.
\textsuperscript{392} Lewis, \textit{Surprised by Joy}, 1371.
“an empirical Theist,” saying with his usual rhetorical flair, “I have arrived at God by induction.”

The fourth point of contention is, yet again, from Beversluis, who again attacks (1) by simply denying that a natural desire proves that there is a natural object to satisfy it:

The phenomenon of hunger simply does not prove that man inhabits a world in which food exists. One might just as well claim that the fear that grips us when we walk through a dark graveyard proves that we have something to be afraid of. What proves that we inhabit a world in which food exists is the discovery that certain things are in fact ‘eatable’ and that they nourish and repair our bodies. The discovery of the existence of food comes not by way of an inference based on the inner state of hunger; it is, rather, an empirical discovery. . . . The desire in and of itself proves nothing, points to nothing.

Of all Beversluis’s objections to the Argument from Desire, this one is the most popular these days. Yet as with Beversluis’s previous objections, there is nothing that can force a person to accept, or reject, his claim. Thus, whereas Hugo Meynell gives “very little weight to the principle that ‘nature does nothing in vain,’” Kreeft thinks that to deny this principle is not only to reject the lessons of Nature, but also the authority of the Bible itself: “Only words are signs, things are not, to the Empiricist. In other words, the world is not full of the grandeur of God, and Paul must have been philosophically wrong . . . in

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394 C. S. Lewis, quoted in C. S. Lewis: A Biography, by Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper, 111.


saying, in effect, that the world is a sign and that we should be able to read it, that ‘the invisible things of God are known through the things that are made.’”\footnote{Kreeft, “C. S. Lewis’ Argument from Desire,” 230.} Admittedly a person can problematize the idea that “nature does nothing in vain” by pointing out examples of defects and mutations; however, I am inclined to agree with Kreeft (and Lewis, and Aristotle et al.) not simply that “nature does nothing in vain” but also that all defects are rightly called thus since a defect always presupposes a standard and set nature which dictate the proper function of the natural thing in question. Of course, many nowadays would bite the bullet and counter by saying that there are no such things as defects and mutations since there is no such thing as a set or fixed nature; thus, while I think a \textit{reductio ad absurdum} can be used to show the preference for things having fixed natures as opposed to an open natures, on this mark, there is nothing that can \textit{absolutely} move the argument in one way or the other.

The fifth point of contention centers around an apparent inconsistency, not in the Argument from Desire as such, but in the apparent contradictory way Lewis spoke about his own conversion to theism. That is, Beversluis thinks Lewis’s “dialectic of desire” is flawed because Lewis at once spoke of being attracted to God via heavenly desire and yet shrinking away from Him when he, “the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England,”\footnote{Lewis, \textit{Surprised by Joy}, 1376.} actually encountered Him; Beversluis writes, “Either God is the ultimate Object of desire or he is not. If he is, then it makes no sense to talk about shrinking from him the moment he is found. If he is not, then we will not find our heart’s desire by following Joy any more than mice will find theirs by pursuing the cat.”\footnote{Beversluis, \textit{C. S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion}, 21.} The obvious fallacy in this argument is not, as Beversluis tries to anticipate, that people lose interest in
the thing they were pursuing once they obtain it; rather, the fallacy is that people can at once desire something for one reason and in one way, and yet also feel frightened of it for another reason and in another way. Hence, a young girl may be excited to see her daddy after he has been away for awhile, and yet she may also feel shy when she actually sees him; or a young man may be excited about seeing his new wife on his wedding night, and yet he may feel terrified of what she will think of him.

The sixth and final point of contention is one that sees Beversluis and Douglas Hyatt arguing that an unfallen heavenly desire is incompatible with man’s sinful nature, on the one hand, and Kreeft and Meynall arguing against this, on the other.

The problem Beversluis and Hyatt see is that the Bible seems to speak of man’s desires as totally fallen; thus, they argue that heavenly desire – as a natural desire – can neither perfectly point us to, nor reliably lead us toward, God (Ephesians 2:3, Romans 1:24-32 and Galatians 5:17). Moreover, Hyatt uses both Augustine and Pascal to draw attention to the alleged hamartiological weakness of Lewis’s dialectic of desire, and Beversluis believes that heavenly desire (and thus the dialectic of desire) has its origin in Greek philosophy and not Christianity, and so it should be rejected in the context of this argument; hence, he says Lewis’s theory of attraction to, and fear of, God is “a philosophical hybrid, a conceptual mongrel that lacks the authentic pedigree of either parent.” Ultimately, their conclusion – though only Beversluis has the courage to say it – is that Lewis was either lying or mistaken about the precise workings of his

400 Ibid.
402 Beversluis, C. S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion, 22.
philosophical journey, for the Oxford don was convinced that heavenly desire played an important part in his own conversion.

Kreeft and Meynell reply to these charges in more or less the same way. They both assume that Platonism (at least) can be made compatible with Christianity: Kreeft, for instance, says, “Plato is eminently convertible, Christianizeable;” and Meynell insists, “The conviction that Platonism is in many respects closely allied to Christianity, for all its opposition to the tenets of classical Protestantism, has so much prevailed, among the enemies as well as the friends of Christianity, that it cannot easily be dismissed.” However, more importantly, both men believe that there is evidence in Scripture to support the idea of an unfallen heavenly desire: Kreeft quotes approvingly from Ecclesiastes 3:11 (“You have made everything fitting for its time, but you have also put eternity into man’s heart”), and Meynell argues, “If the idea of God as ultimate satisfaction of human longing were alleged all the same to be unscriptural, one might allude to several references in the Psalms to God’s beauty or desirableness; or for that matter to St. Paul’s remark that ‘our troubles are light and short-lived; and their outcome an eternal glory which outweighs them far.’”

While I agree with Kreeft and Meynell that heavenly desire is compatible with the fallen nature of man, I think they should have tried to explain why Lewis thought heavenly desire is compatible with a belief in man’s fallen state. They should have pointed out that Lewis understood heavenly desire to be something like the rational

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403 Kreeft, “C. S. Lewis’ Argument from Desire,” 214.
405 Kreeft, “C. S. Lewis’ Argument from Desire,” 213.
desire in the will, whose task is similar to Aquinas’s will qua “intellectual appetite” in that it is necessarily inclined toward the good and happiness as a general end; indeed, Kreeft and Meynell should have explained that Lewis thought that while reason and the will qua heavenly desire are incomplete, the non-rational desires (i.e. those mentioned by Paul) and the will qua the inclination to a particular way of accomplishing the general end are fallen. Of course, one could still object to all of this by saying that it is impossible to say for certain if an impulse is directed toward the good or if it is not already subject to the effects of the Fall. Although no argument can absolutely demolish such an objection, once again, I think a reductio ad absurdum can be used to show the general unacceptability of such a claim – namely, that no one can consistently live according to such a belief.

Now, while I do not want to go into this in more detail here, it is important to concede to Lewis’s critics that the Oxford don did not always speak clearly about these matters. Furthermore, it should be noted that Lewis was not, as some might fear, a triumphant Pelagian, for he was aware of both the seriousness of sin and the corruption of our particular inclinations toward goodness. On top of this, the Oxford don did not neglect God’s role in man coming to the point of confession, for he believed that God is constantly active in the world and aids man’s heavenly desire and reason in many ways.

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408 Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologica 1-11 q. 3, a. 4.
409 “As regards the Fall, I submit that the general tenor of scripture does not encourage us to believe that our knowledge of the Law has been depraved in the same degree as our power to fulfill it. . . . In that very chapter (Romans 7) where [Paul] asserts most strongly our inability to keep the moral law he also asserts most confidently that we perceive the Law’s goodness and rejoice in it according to the inward man. . . . A theology which goes about to represent our practical reason as radically unsound is heading for disaster.” C. S. Lewis, “The Poison of Subjectivism,” in C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection & Other Short Pieces, ed. Lesley Walmsley (1943 essay reprint; London: HarperCollins, 2000), 663.
410 Lewis, Surprised by Joy, 1374.
In conclusion, we have seen throughout that Lewis used many different concepts in regard to the affect which I have simply called “heavenly desire.” Each of these concepts – Platonic *eros*, “Romanticism,” the *numinous*, *Sehnsucht*, and “Joy” – have unique characteristics and foci, yet they also share a sense of loss, lack or alienation, which in turn causes the individual to feel desire or fascination for the Great Thing – Beauty, Happiness, the Good, Home, the Mysterious Other, God, etc. – which can ultimately satisfy him. Consequently, with the nature and importance of this concept (suitably) clear, I can now turn to investigate arguably the most important object of heavenly desire: the Mysterious Other or God *qua* Myth, for without Myth, Lewis’s philosophical journey would have taken him to mere theism, but no further.
Chapter Four:
“A Soldier Reality;” or, Lewis’s Understanding of Myth

So far, we have seen that Lewis understood philosophy to be a way of life. This means that he chose to follow reason and subsequently conformed his entire life, through training and other activities, to Truth. However, while reason was primary for Lewis throughout his philosophical journey, he believed that it needed motivation, and this, as we discussed in the previous chapter, was heavenly desire. Yet as we saw, heavenly desire has many objects, some of which do not specifically point to Christianity; thus, in order to explain how Lewis’s philosophical journey culminated in Christianity, we now need to investigate one particular object of heavenly desire – Myth or God qua the Mysterious Other – for Myth is the key to understanding Lewis’s most profound beliefs.

Yet a few things need to be mentioned first. To begin with, the structure and approach of this chapter is supposed to mirror chapter two, in which I focused more on the history of belief-formation than on the validity or soundness of particular beliefs (though these, of course, are important). My reason for this is simple: because Lewis’s engagement with Myth is as old as his engagement with strict rational discourse, I contemplated merging chapter two and four into a unified whole; however, for the sake of clear analysis, I temporarily disentangled them and divided my discussion of them into two – indeed, three – chapters since any detailed discussion of Myth also requires a detailed discussion of heavenly desire. Consequently, while the purpose of this chapter – like that of the previous chapter – is ultimately to explain Lewis’s philosophical Christianity and set the stage for his general Christian beliefs, such as we find in the next chapter, I felt that
tracing the history of Lewis’s struggle with Myth was the best way to contextualize his mature Christian beliefs on the subject.

Additionally, in order to discuss Myth properly, five important points need to be made at the outset. It should be noted that these five points are my schematization of what I believe is both explicit and implicit in Lewis’s Christian writings; in other words, readers should not get the impression that Lewis was as systematic – or even concerned with being as systematic – as I present him here, nor should readers think that these five points are reflective of his beliefs about Myth at any stage but his Christian one.

First, we must distinguish Myth from myth. On the one hand, Myth with a capital “M” is part of Reality itself; it is a true aspect of God’s concrete nature which, while rationally understood by God Himself (i.e. it is “supra-rational”411), is “opaque to the [human] intellect,”412 meaning that natural reason could never come to it by its own power; thus, for instance, God qua the dying-and-rising-god is Myth. On the other hand, myth with a lowercase “m” flows from Myth as an imperfect copy does from the perfect original; hence, a myth is a particular story or a series of stories (mythology) which prophets and poets capture in their imaginations and embody in literature and revelatory works. Both the first few chapters of Genesis and The Epic of Gilgamesh are myths in that they are both imperfect works which come from, and point to, some larger Myth; however, the

412 C. S. Lewis, Prayer: Letters to Malcolm, in C. S. Lewis: Selected Books [Short Edition] (1964 reprint; London: HarperCollins, 2002), 289. Because of the opaqueness of Myth, Mark Freshwater has compared the experience of Myth to that which a Zen Buddhist experiences when he creates a koan or paradoxical puzzle. Mark Freshwater, C. S. Lewis and the Truth of Myth (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988), 39. If this connection is taken loosely it is okay; however, strictly speaking, the Buddhist’s koan is supposed to point to the ultimate unintelligibility of reality, whereas Lewis’s myth is supposed to point to the supra-rationality of Ultimate Reality. Huston Smith, The Religions of Man (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 198.
difference between the mythical elements\textsuperscript{413} in scripture and the mythical elements in other stories is that scripture is a more accurate representation of the Myth being communicated since God Himself works in a more intimate way with the prophet than with the pagan poet. Nevertheless, the supra-rational, mythical elements in all religions and religious writings are what cause the Priest in \textit{Till We Have Faces} to say truly, “Holy places are dark places.”\textsuperscript{414}

Second, Myth should neither be confused with Jungian, Neokantian, or structuralist archetypes that exist solely in the mind,\textsuperscript{415} nor should they be identified with Platonic Forms or Divine Ideas (i.e. Platonic Forms in the Mind of God). While the former claim probably requires little explanation (i.e. Myths exist essentially in God, not man), the latter claim is more complicated; indeed, it is so much so that I have yet to see any Lewis scholar make this distinction, no doubt because very few appreciate the degree to which the Oxford don was influenced by absolute idealism, in particular, the concept of concrete universality.\textsuperscript{416} Now in order to distinguish Divine Ideas from Myth, we need to understand what they both are. On the one hand, I would say that the Divine Ideas can only be comprehended (in the scientific, Aristotelian sense of the word) by people as universals abstracted from particular exemplifications of that universal; for instance, the Divine Idea of “horseness” is an idea in the mind of God, out of which God creates

\textsuperscript{413} Not everything in scripture is mythical. Indeed, the majority of the Bible is non-mythical.
\textsuperscript{414} Lewis, \textit{Till We Have Faces}, 875.
\textsuperscript{416} Dabney Hart is a typical (misguided) Lewis scholar in this regard: “Lewis’s concept of the mythic form or Idea was Platonic, with emphasis on the universality of the form or Logos.” Dabney Hart, \textit{Through the Open Door: A New Look at C. S. Lewis} (N.p.: The University of Alabama Press, 1986), 18. Cf. “This Platonic view of myth being equal to Reality or Truth is worked out further in a Socratic exchange on appearance and reality between Ransom and the Oyarsa of Mars.” Marius Buning, “\textit{Perelandra} in the Light of Modern Allegorical Theory,” in \textit{Word and Story in C. S. Lewis}, ed. Peter Schakel and Charles Huttar, 277-98 (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1991), 288.
concrete particular horses, from which people abstract the universal “horse,” which
Corresponds to the Divine Idea “horseness” in the mind of God (God, of course, also
Understands every particular thing in its singularity as well as its universality). On the
Other hand, Myths can only be understood by people as particulars that express
Universality without abstraction; for instance, Myth is a mysterious aspect of God’s wider
Nature and not merely an idea, like the Divine Ideas, in the Mind of God; subsequently,
God qua Myth unveils Himself to the prophet and the poet, in whose imaginations Myth
Is processed as a myth or a concrete universal, which has the quality of all universals yet
In order for it to remain myth and not merely a universal, it must remain incarnate in a
Complex particular form (e.g. a story, a painting, etc.); thus, myths and concrete
Universals enrich man’s understanding insofar as they are reflections of the concrete,
“heavier-than-matter” Reality of God’s fuller self. Now this may sound odd and Myth
Qua “God’s fuller self” and “wider nature” may appear to be no different than the Divine
Ideas which are God (Who is the ultimate Mind and Spirit); nevertheless, I believe the
distinction between Myth and Divine Ideas should be seen as an attempt to express –
Using the language of idealism – an important metaphysical insight into unbounded,
mysterious, infinite nature of God, which is best expressed in the mysterious concrete
Universal Myth, Christ.

Third, Myth, which is a mysterious, supra-rational aspect of God, has no direct
Connection to mysticism if mysticism is defined as an immediate experience of the divine.
A mystic (corresponding to the aforementioned definition of mysticism) could have an
Experience of the Divine qua Myth (e.g. Moses was mystically inspired with the story of
the creation of the world), but this is not necessary. Thus, while the mythical refers to the
mysterious content in the imagination, the mystical refers to the mysterious way certain content – mythical or otherwise – enters the imagination.

Fourth, while Myth is a proper object of heavenly desire qua Romanticism, the numinous, Sehnsucht and Joy, it is not, strictly speaking, the proper object of heavenly desire qua Platonic eros since Romanticism, the numinous, Sehnsucht and Joy all have an element of desire for the Mysterious, whereas Platonic eros desires Beauty. Thus, while in many cases we are justified in speaking of heavenly desire in a general sense, in this chapter, I will use it in a sense that purposely excludes Platonic eros unless I say otherwise. Some may object and point out that Plato himself loved myth, but, as I will discuss herein, the Platonic and Neoplatonic interest in myth is either in creating new myths to explain some philosophical theory (Plato) or in allegorizing pagan myths to reveal rational truths behind the myth (Neoplatonists) instead of seeing myth as pointing to some larger, irreducible Myth (Lewis).

Fifth, since Myth is only one of the objects of heavenly desire, it is crucial that the boundaries of investigation in this chapter be set as firmly as possible in order to distinguish Myth as much as possible from things like Beauty. Thus, while it is impossible to discuss Myth without reference to the imagination, divine attributes and aesthetics, my intention is to focus on Myth and not these other factors. Nevertheless, because Lewis’s philosophical journey shows that he needed myths in order to understand Myth – just as Plato needed beautiful objects to follow in pursuit of Beauty itself – a large portion of this chapter will deal with literary matters. And this is quite

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419 For more on Lewis’s theory of Beauty, see Appendix C.
proper since even though myths, romances and fairy tales are not Myth itself, they are the bearers of Myth and as such give us knowledge and insight that cannot be attained any other way. Indeed, it is at this point that a narrowly defined philosophy – a philosophy that excludes the supernatural and its presentation in religious literature – would break down; but this was not the case for Lewis since as he meditated further on the classical and medieval understanding of philosophy, he came to see that myths (i.e. literature that presents the religious), though not sufficient in themselves, played an important role in genuine – broadly defined – philosophy; hence, of Christianity, the genuine philosophy, Lewis eventually came to say, “This is not ‘a religion’ [in the sense of excluding reason] nor ‘a philosophy’ [in the sense of excluding the mythical]. It is the summing up and actuality of them all.”  

I: Myth during the Lucretian Materialist Phase

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Lewis first experienced heavenly desire when he, a Christian boy of about ten years, saw a toy garden his brother had made. Importantly, that garden filled the young Lewis with a deep sense of the mythical, for he said that the garden carried with it the idea of Paradise, one of the most basic mythical concepts: “As long as I live my imagination of Paradise will retain something of my brother’s toy garden.”

Shortly after this, Lewis’s love of myth qua the ancient and mysterious began to deepen as he “developed a great taste for all the fiction [he] could get about the ancient

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421 Ibid., 1247.
world."

However, at the same time, he also began attending Cherbourg School, where his childhood Christian faith was badly damaged not only by Lucretius (as I mentioned in chapter two), but also by the school Matron, who opened Lewis’s eyes to the fact that people really believe in myths and religions other than Christianity:

Now it so happened that Miss C., who seemed old to me, was still in her spiritual immaturity, still hunting, with the eagerness of a soul that had a touch of angelic quality in it, for a truth and a way of life. . . . She was (as I should now put it) floundering in the mazes of Theosophy, Rosicrucianism, Spiritualism; the whole Anglo-American Occultist tradition. Nothing was further from her intention to destroy my faith; she could not tell that the room into which she brought this candle was full of gunpowder. I had never heard of such things before; never, except in a nightmare or a fairy tale, conceived of spirits other than God and men. I had loved to read of strange sights and other worlds and unknown modes of being, but never with the slightest belief.

Probably about one year after this, in 1911, Lewis first read Norse mythology and was profoundly moved by Henry Longfellow’s translation of Tegner’s Drapa, which began “I heard a voice that cried, / Balder the beautiful / Is dead, is dead”:

We are taught in the Prayer Book to ‘give thanks to God for His great glory,’ as if we owed Him more thanks for being what He necessarily is than for any particular benefit He confers upon us; and so indeed we do and to know God is to know this. But I had been far from any such experience; I came far nearer to

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422 Ibid., 1263.
423 Ibid., 1279-80.
feeling this about the Norse gods whom I disbelieved in than I had ever done about the true God while I believed.\textsuperscript{424}

More than any other mythology that of the Vikings moved Lewis, not to mention his oldest friend, Arthur Greeves, toward Myth: “I passed on from Wagner to everything else I could get hold of about Norse mythology, \textit{Myths of the Norsemen, Myths and Legends of the Teutonic Race}, Mallet’s \textit{Northern Antiquities}. I became knowledgeable. From these books again and again I received the stab of Joy.”\textsuperscript{425}

Indeed, Norse mythology was such an important influence on the young Lewis that in 1912, he began to write his first poem, entitled \textit{Loki Bound}, which combined Norse content with the structure, and some of the themes, of Greek drama. Although Lewis did not say it himself, \textit{Loki Bound} derived its name from two sources: (1) Loki, the clever but evil giant of Norse mythology who always plots against the gods; and (2) \textit{Prometheus Bound}, Aeschylus’s poem that depicts the usurping tyrant-god Zeus punishing Prometheus, the god who became the hero of men because he gave them intelligence and fire.\textsuperscript{426} Indeed so important were the influences of Loki and Prometheus, that Lewis soon came to identify himself with both,\textsuperscript{427} which, when he was at school, consequently hardened him into a proud and arrogant outsider who romantically imagined himself to be superior to his vulgar, athletic schoolmates, the “Bloods.”\textsuperscript{428}

And during this time, two more important events occurred.

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{424} Ibid., 1288. Years later, Lewis would speak of the Absolute in these terms and then finally the Christian God. Cf. “Appreciative love says: ‘We give thanks to thee for thy great glory.’” Lewis, \textit{The Four Loves}, 15. Cf. Lewis, \textit{Prayer: Letters to Malcolm}, 279.
\item \textsuperscript{425} Lewis, \textit{Surprised by Joy}, 1289.
\item \textsuperscript{426} Aeschylus \textit{Prometheus Bound} 444-500.
\item \textsuperscript{427} “Loki was a projection of myself.” Lewis, \textit{Surprised by Joy}, 1310.
\item \textsuperscript{428} Ibid., 1292.
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The first event was the *confirmation* of Lewis’s rejection of Christianity (which had been largely instigated by Lucretius and Lewis’s school Matron). This oddly came about vis-à-vis Lewis’s teachers’ rejection of *pagan* mythology. That is, when Lewis began reading classics in school, he, perhaps remembering his school Matron, found it difficult to understand why his teachers had no trouble dismissing pagan mythology as ridiculous, while at the same time finding Christian mythology perfectly believable:

Here, especially in Virgil, one was presented with a mass of religious ideas; and all teachers and editors took it for granted from the outset that these religious ideas were sheer illusion. No one ever attempted to show in what sense Christianity fulfilled Paganism or Paganism prefigured Christianity. The accepted position seemed to be that religions were normally a mere farrago of nonsense, though our own [Christianity], by a fortunate exception, was exactly true. The other religions were not even explained, in the earlier Christian fashion, as the work of the devils. That I might, conceivably, have been brought to believe. But the impression I got was that religion in general, though utterly false, was a natural growth, a kind of endemic nonsense into which humanity tended to blunder. In the midst of a thousand such religions stood our own, the thousand and first, labelled True. But on what grounds could I believe in this exception? It obviously was in some general sense the same kind of thing as all the rest. Why was it so differently treated? Need I, at any rate, continue to treat it differently? 429

The second event, which occurred in 1914, was Lewis the materialist’s attraction to the mythical poems of William Butler Yeats, who, Lewis told his friend Greeves, “[is] an author exactly after my own heart. . . . He writes plays and poems of rare spirit and

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429 Ibid., 1279-80.
beauty about our old Irish mythology." That is, despite writing beautiful mythological poetry, Yeats, whom many years later Lewis met and discovered was a real magician, was another factor that, while not allying itself with Lewis’s philosophical materialism, further propelled Lewis’s love of myth away from Myth and down toward the perverse mythology and magic of his school Matron. And this is crucial to keep in mind since Lewis’s philosophical journey was not simply an unemotional journey away from false propositions to true ones, but was also – and arguably primarily – a journey from the attractions of the occult to the mysteries of Christianity.

A few years after these events, Lewis began to study under the sceptic Kirkpatrick. At that time, he was exposed to James Frazer’s anthropological masterpiece, The Golden Bough, which was a favourite of Kirkpatrick, and which systematically put all mythologies, including Christianity (at least implicitly), on a level playing field. The result of Kirkpatrick’s teaching was an increased bifurcation of Lewis’s personality. On the one hand, he was a Lucretian materialist who thought that all mythologies were equally false and no gods were worthy of worship. On the other hand, he was a passionate romantic who not only loved to read myths (e.g. Spenser’s Faerie Queene, Morris’s Well at the World’s End and Apuleius’s The Golden Ass), but also loved to write

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431 Lewis met Yeats in 1921. Ibid., 525 [March 14, 1921]. In Dymer, published five years later, Lewis based his Magician on the Irish poet.
432 Lewis, Surprised by Joy, 132. Colin Duriez is certainly right that The Golden Bough did a lot of damage to Christianity simply by failing to ask whether any one myth mentioned in its thirteen volumes is truer than any other. Colin Duriez, “C. S. Lewis’s Theology of Fantasy,” in Behind the Veil of Familiarity: C. S. Lewis (1898-1998), ed. Margarita Carretero González and Encarnación Hidalgo Tenorio, 301-26 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2001), 317. Nevertheless, Frazer’s book was designed more as an anthropological encyclopaedia than as a critical work, and hence it probably does not deserve the scorn that many Christians have directed at it. Indeed, I would recommend Christians, and particularly Lewis scholars, read chapters 1, 2, 7, 12, 13, 24, 26, 33, 38, 42, 47, 50, 58 and 61.
them (e.g. *The Quest of Bleheris* and *Dymer*). Now as one can imagine, this bifurcation of Lewis’s personality had a few negative results.

To begin with, Lewis became emotionally addicted to mythology since he thought that by reading of lot of mythology, he would be able to recover the “thrill” that he once felt when he saw his brother’s garden and read Norse mythology; in retrospect and in form true to the language of philosophy as a way of life, Lewis spoke of this attempt as “a perverse *askēsis,*” for he recognized that he had been training himself to attain heavenly desire itself (the mean), and not Myth (the end).

Furthermore, Lewis likely felt a bit like a temple-desecrater or blasphemer since he used his “glib and shallow ‘rationalism’” to break any connection between myth and truth:

All religions, that is, all mythologies to give them their proper name are merely man’s own invention – Christ as much as Loki. Primitive man found himself surrounded by all sorts of terrible things he didn’t understand – thunder, pestilence, snakes etc: what more natural than to suppose that these were animated evil spirits trying to torture him. These he kept off by cringing to them, singing songs and making sacrifices etc. Gradually from being mere nature-spirits these supposed being[s] were elevated into more elaborate ideas, such as the old gods: and when man became more refined he pretended that these spirits were good as well as powerful. . . . Thus religion, that is to say, mythology, grew up . . .

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433 *The Quest of Bleheris* is an unfinished romance and it is in my opinion the best thing that Lewis wrote before he became a Christian (indeed, Lewis the Lucretian materialist’s use of Christian imagery in this novel is remarkably good and surprisingly free of priggery). *Dymer* is a finished poem that was published ten years later, in 1926. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume I*, 216 [July 18, 1916].

and so Christianity came into being – one mythology among many, but the one that we happen to have been brought up in.⁴³⁵

Nevertheless, in the middle of all this corruption (the occult) and / or destruction (Lucretian materialism) of myth, one myth, brightly reflective of true Myth, made an impression on Lewis: George MacDonald’s *Phantastes*. This romance was another of the top ten books Lewis listed as influencing his philosophy of life and it was the one myth which, according to him, had the taste of “Holiness.”⁴³⁶ As Lewis wrote:

I had already been waist-deep in Romanticism; and likely enough, at any moment, to flounder into its darker and more evil forms, slithering down the steep descent that leads from the love of strangeness to that of eccentricity and thence to that of perversity. Now *Phantastes* was romantic enough in all conscience; but there was a difference. . . . I was only aware that if this new world was strange, it was also homely and humble. . . . What it actually did to me was to convert, even to baptize . . . my imagination. It did nothing to my intellect nor (at that time) to my conscience. Their turn came far later and with the help of many other books and men.⁴³⁷

Moreover, one of the ways by which *Phantastes* “baptized” Lewis’s imagination was through its mythical and holy tone, which, Lewis said, “sounded like the voice of my mother or . . . nurse.”⁴³⁸ And this statement is important for us to keep in mind, for years later, the Christian Lewis insisted that one of the key means by which the mythical enters

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the imagination is through the instruction of honest, simple people like nurses, mothers and “old wives;” indeed, Narnia and Drum bear witness to this.\footnote{The nurse in \textit{Prince Caspian} is the person who Caspian loved best and who told him many wonderful stories about Old Narnia. C. S. Lewis, \textit{Prince Caspian: The Return to Narnia} (1951 reprint; London: Fontana, 1984), 42-4. And the Archbishop tells the Queen of Drum, “Hence, if you ask me of the way / Yonder, what can I do but say / Over again (as God’s own Son / Seems principally to have done) / The lessons of your nurse and mother?” C. S. Lewis, \textit{The Queen of Drum}, in \textit{Narrative Poems}, by C. S. Lewis, ed. Walter Hooper (London: HarperCollins, 1994), 151 [3.1.174-8]. Cf. Lewis, \textit{The Pilgrim’s Regress}, 87. Cf. C. S. Lewis, “On Ethics,” in \textit{C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection & Other Short Pieces}, ed. Lesley Walmsley (1998 essay reprint; London: HarperCollins, 2000), 307. Moreover, along with the figure of the nurse is the “old wife,” whose tales are usually dismissed as superstitious nonsense, but are in fact usually very close to the truth of the matter. For instance, of Bunyan, Lewis wrote: “My own guess is that the scheme of a journey with adventures suddenly reunited two things in Bunyan’s mind which had hitherto lain far apart. One was his present and lifelong preoccupation with the spiritual life. The other, further way and longer ago, left behind (he had supposed) in childhood, was his delight in old wives’ tales and such last remnants of chivalric romance as he had found in chap-books. The one fit the other like a glove. Now, as never before, the whole man was engaged.” C. S. Lewis, “The Vision of John Bunyan,” in \textit{Selected Literary Essays}, by C. S. Lewis, ed. Walter Hooper (1962 essay reprint; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 147. Cf. Lewis, \textit{The Magician’s Nephew}, 25.}

II: Myth during the Pseudo-Manichean Dualist Phase

While \textit{Phantastes} may have baptized Lewis’s imagination, it was the baptism of a parent forcing a child to submerge rather than an adult choosing to do it himself. In other words, like Lewis’s early readings in Plato, Aristotle and Boethius, \textit{Phantastes} was a seed planted in Lewis’s mind that took years to develop. Thus, we must remember that when Lewis finally left Kirkpatrick’s to go to Oxford and then to fight in WWI, he went as one torn between myth (and the occult), on the one hand, and Lucretian materialism, on the other.

Now during the war, the future don read little in the way of myth, preferring, as we recall from chapter two, to read books on philosophy instead. However, while one might think that this increased attention on philosophy would have finally swayed Lewis’s divided mind in favour of materialist philosophy (against myth), this was not at all the case as is evident in his 1919 poem “The Philosopher,” which reveals the desire for a
philosophy that can be reconciled to myth.\textsuperscript{440} Indeed, we should probably see Lewis’s love of myth as allied with his new interest in non-materialist philosophies in a struggle against his former materialism, the ultimate result of which was the formation of Lewis’s new philosophy, pseudo-Manichean dualism. As evidence for the importance of myth in Lewis’s pseudo-Manichean dualism, consider the following.

First, I believe that Lewis’s association of Satan with (material) Nature and Beauty with Spirit came not only from the anti-materialist philosophies he was reading (e.g. Plato and Berkeley) and his own wartime experience of seeing the carnage of physical Nature, but also from Norse mythology. My reason for thinking this is that in the Norse myths, the world (i.e. Nature) was created from the flesh of the evil frost giant Ymir\textsuperscript{441} (i.e. Satan), against whose children the heroic gods’ struggled (i.e. the beautiful Spirit struggled). In this way, the theomachy of Norse mythology would have provided Lewis with a concept of cosmic warfare that is correlated rhetorically with that of Manicheanism and his own real-life experience of warfare.

Second, Satan is a mythical figure on his own right and his existence in Lewis’s philosophy is a clear meshing of the mythical and the philosophical.

Third, Lewis’s mention of “Beauty” is significant. Although I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that Myth is not to be confused with Beauty, it would be wrong to say that there is no overlap between them, for while the desire for Beauty (Platonic \textit{eros}) and the desire for Myth (the \textit{numinous}, \textit{Sehnsucht}, etc.) are different, they are still both \textit{desires}, and all desires are for things that are attractive in \textit{some} way (indeed, one could say that the fascination for the Terrible that comes from one aspect of the \textit{numinous}

\textsuperscript{440} Don King, \textit{C. S. Lewis, Poet: The Legacy of His Poetic Impulse} (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2001), 88-9.

\textsuperscript{441} Snorri Sturluson \textit{Glyfaginning} 1.5-8.
is an attraction to the Terrible). Thus, I believe that when Lewis pitted Satan and Nature against Beauty and Spirit, he was using these pairs (in addition to other things) as metaphors for his own inner struggle between his Lucretian materialism (bad) and his love of myth (good).  

III: Myth during the Stoical Materialist Phase

Nevertheless, when Lewis returned to Oxford, his materialism struck back against his dualism and love of myth, causing him to make the radical separation between reason and imagination which was fundamental to the Stoical materialism of his “New Look.” While Lewis himself gave us four reasons why he assumed his New Look and demoted the mythical, I would add a fifth.

First, Lewis met “an old, dirty, gabbling, tragic, Irish parson who had long since lost his faith but retained his living.”443 This parson, upon whom Lewis later modelled the character Straik in That Hideous Strength, was interested in neither the Beatific Vision nor any other mythical or beautiful notion associated with religion or the spiritual; nevertheless, he was still obsessed with finding “assurance that something he would call ‘himself’ would, on almost any terms, last longer than his bodily life.”444 As a result of this experience, Lewis said “the whole question of immortality,” including any mythical hope that such is possible, “became rather disgusting to me.”445

442 Of course, given the brutal conditions of WWI, the opposition between Satan / Nature and Beauty / Spirit might also have been a metaphor for Germany vs. Britain. However, I seriously doubt this since Lewis was rarely political and never saw himself as anti-German qua the men or culture. Thus, I see Lewis’s pseudo-Manichean dualism as a philosophy grounded in rational inquiry (mostly concerning the war between materialism and myth) and bolstered by mythical, and then to a lesser extent, real-war, imagery.

443 Lewis, Surprised by Joy, 1360.

444 Ibid.

445 Ibid.
Second, on top of the mad parson, Lewis had firsthand experience of a doctor friend going mad as a result, or so Lewis believed at the time, of flirting with occult sciences. Subsequently, when the tormented doctor died, Lewis took this to be a warning that no good can come from taking the mythical too seriously.\footnote{Ibid., 1361.}

Third, Bergson gave Lewis the reassuring sense of the necessity of existence over and against both “the old haunting idea, Schopenhauer’s idea, that the world ‘might not have existed’”\footnote{Ibid., 1362.} and the frightening vagueness of the mythical. And this I find very interesting because combined with both Lewis’s disgust with the Irish parson and the horror he felt during the doctor’s madness, it shows that on the one hand, Lewis was becoming more consistent – i.e. his materialist philosophy was demoting myth – but on the other hand, it shows that Lewis’s \textit{motivations} for being so had just as much to do with uncontrolled emotion as it had to do with clear reasoning. This is important to note since when we actually arrive at Lewis’s conversion to Christianity, we see him converting \textit{despite} many of his emotions; indeed, converting – in one sense of the word – simply because he thought the mythical elements (not to mention the other elements) of Christianity probably true.

Fourth, Lewis was deeply interested in the “new Psychology” of Freud and Jung at the time,\footnote{Ibid., 1360-2. Annotations in Lewis’s edition of Aristotle’s \textit{Ethica Nicomachea} indicate that he was familiar with Freud already as far back as 1917. C. S. Lewis, marginalia in his edition of \textit{Ethica Nicomachea}, by Aristotelis, ed. I. Bywater (Oxonii: E Typographeo Calredioniano, n.d.; The Rare Book Collection, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), back of the book.} having read or skimmed six books on psychology in less than six weeks at one point: Freud’s \textit{Introductory Lectures} (June 3, 1922), James’s \textit{Varieties of Religious Experience} (June 11, 1922), Miller’s \textit{The New Psychology and the Teacher} (July 3,
1922), Jung’s *Analytical Psychology* (July 4, 1922), River’s *Instinct and the Subconscious* (July 5, 1922) and Hingley’s *Psychoanalysis* (July 16, 1922). Lewis’s interest in modern psychology is important, for once he became convinced that any serious belief in magic and the occult was a danger to his well-being (remember, Lewis had also just met Yeats, the mythmaker and magician, at this time), he needed a way to explain myth and its corresponding desire, heavenly desire. Accordingly, heavenly desire was identified as (simply) a valuable “aesthetic experience,” and any talk of taking myth seriously, resulted in myths being labelled “Christiana Dreams” or the product of “wishful thinking”: “No more Avalon, no more Hesperides. I had (this was very precisely the opposite of the truth) ‘seen through’ them. And I was never going to be taken in again.”

Fifth, as we can see from Lewis’s account of how his New Look took shape, his disgust, fear and in some measure, reason, forced a separation between the future don’s materialist philosophy, on the one hand, and his love of myth, on the other. However, what Lewis did not mention is that during this time, he also found strong arguments from aesthetic philosophers as to why myth should simply be seen as art and not as art pointing to Myth, for instance. Thus, from Benedetto Croce, Lewis learned that art, which includes

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450 This is the name which Lewis and others referred to concerning their romantic wishfulness and it is an epithet associated with Samuel Butler’s character Christiana Pontifex in *The Way of All Flesh*. Lewis, preface to the 1950 edition of *Dymer*, 4.
451 Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 1362. Phrases like “seen through” and “be taken in” are very common in Lewis’s corpus and are reflective of his attitude during his “New Look.” These phrases are used by both the prisoners of Sigismund Enlightenment in *The Pilgrim’s Regress* and the Dwarfs in *The Last Battle*. For instance, “‘It is one more wish-fulfilment dream it is one more wish-fulfilment dream. Don’t be taken in again.’” Lewis, *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, 73. And, “‘We haven’t let anyone take us in. The Dwarfs are for the Dwarfs.’” Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 141.
myth or “the purely fantastic,”\textsuperscript{452} is a “lyrical intuition” that can never be assessed by the intellect,\textsuperscript{453} meaning, of course, that no myth can be truer than any other myth; from George Santayana, Lewis discovered that “art is action which transcending the body makes the world a more congenial stimulus to the soul,”\textsuperscript{454} and while this sounded nice to Lewis at the time, it said nothing about myth reflecting transcendental Reality and giving us knowledge of the Divine; and from E. F. Carritt, Lewis’s philosophy supervisor and tutor, the future don was fed generous portions of both aforementioned philosophers, in particular, Croce, about whom Carritt, in his influential book \textit{The Theory of Beauty},\textsuperscript{455} wrote: “I believe that a greater amount of truth is contained in Croce’s \textit{Estetica} than in any other philosophy of beauty that I have read.”\textsuperscript{456} The ultimate result of Lewis’s Stoical materialism was a reduction of myth from a type of art that is supposed to act as a signpost pointing toward supra-rational knowledge of Myth to a type of art that is supposed to inspire people, through non-rational means, to become well-rounded individuals on humanistic terms.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{452} Benedetto Croce, \textit{Philosophy of the Practical: Economic and Ethic}, trans. Douglas Ainslie (London: MacMillian and Co., 1913), 267 [1.2.6].
\item \textsuperscript{453} “Again, with the definition of art as intuition, we deny that it has the character of \textit{conceptual knowledge}. Conceptual knowledge, in its true form, which is the philosophical, is always realistic, aiming at establishing reality against unreality, or at reducing unreality by including it in reality as a subordinate moment of reality itself. But intuition means, precisely, indistinction of reality and unreality, the image with its value as mere image, the pure ideality of the image; and opposing the intuitive or sensible knowledge to the conceptual or intelligible, the aesthetic to the noetic, it aims at claiming the autonomy of this more simple and elementary form of knowledge, which has been compared to the dream (the dream, and not the sleep) of the theoretic life, in respect to which philosophy would be the waking. . . . Artistic intuition, then, is always \textit{lyrical} intuition.” Benedetto Croce, \textit{The Essence of Aesthetic}, trans. Douglas Ainslie (London: William Heinemann, 1921), 16-7, 32. Lewis, \textit{All My Road Before Me}, 36 [May 17, 1922], 39 [May 23, 1922].
\item \textsuperscript{454} George Santayana, \textit{Reason in Art}, vol. 4, \textit{The Life of Reason} (1905 reprint; London: Dover, 1982), 15. Lewis, \textit{All My Road Before Me}, 182 [January 19, 1923], 224 [March 26, 1923], 281 [January 6, 1924].
\item \textsuperscript{455} Carritt actually published two well-received books about the philosophy of art: \textit{Theory of Beauty} and \textit{Philosophies of Beauty}.
\item \textsuperscript{456} E. F. Carritt, \textit{The Theory of Beauty} (1914 reprint; London: Methuen & Co., 1949), 281.
\end{itemize}
IV: Myth during the Idealist Phases

Now Lewis’s “New Look,” we recall, was damaged and eventually destroyed by conversations the Oxford don had with Owen Barfield. These conversations, known as “The Great War,” were chiefly about whether or not the imagination is a vehicle for Truth, which, for Lewis and Barfield, entailed the important question of whether or not the imagination gives us the ability to know mythical beings and spirits. Lewis, starting out as a Stoical materialist steeped in Aristotle, Freud and Croce, said “no” on both accounts, but Barfield, as an Anthroposophist and follower of romantic poet Coleridge, said “yes.” Needless to say, the question of the imagination was central to Lewis’s understanding of myth, and so The Great War was an extremely important phase in Lewis’s intellectual life. However, because The Great War occurred over a long stretch of time (1923-1931), both thinkers, but especially Lewis, underwent many changes throughout.

The first important change for Lewis (if we pass over his valuable re-reading of Euripides’s *Hippolytus*457) happened on March 8, 1924, when he read Samuel Alexander’s *Space, Time and Deity*, another book which the Oxford don listed as one of his top ten philosophical influences.458 *Space, Time and Deity*, or more specifically, the

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458 Lewis, *All My Road Before Me*, 301 [March 8, 1924]. As I mentioned in chapter two, Lewis’s chronology is not always perfect. For instance, in *Surprised by Joy*, he said that he had started working in the English Faculty at Magdalen College in 1925, yet he mentioned this after his “New Look” was destroyed, for which he gave Alexander some credit. This cannot be completely accurate because Lewis’s journal and letters indicate that Alexander had already made an impact on him when he first read him in 1924. I think the only way around this is to say, as we said before, that Lewis’s letters and journal are a more accurate account of the particulars of his life than *Surprised by Joy*. Of course, we could also say that while Lewis’s first reading of Alexander was extremely important, it simply took a year for it to sink in, and this would be perfectly consistent with the pattern of the books Lewis read and the philosophical phase that developed out of them; that is, it usually took about two years for the impact of a powerful book or books to stimulate Lewis’s change.
introduction to *Space, Time and Deity*, helped Lewis overcome some of the extreme reservations he had toward myth and heavenly desire as a result of his New Look.

In Alexander’s book (though ultimately from G. E. Moore’s essay “The Refutation of Idealism”459), Lewis read about the distinction between “Enjoyment” and “Contemplation” (or, as Lewis himself would call it later, “looking along” / *connaître* or “looking at” / *savoir*460), the former consisting in “the act of mind,” a singular event, and the latter consisting in “the object,” a dual event;461 for example, “When you see a table you ‘enjoy’ the act of seeing and ‘contemplate’ the table. Later, if you took up Optics and thought about Seeing itself, you would be contemplating seeing and enjoying the thought.”462 The value of Alexander’s distinction lay in the fact that Lewis realized he could not Contemplate heavenly desire and Enjoy its object, myth, simultaneously: “You cannot hope and also think about hoping at the same time; for in hope we look to hope’s object and we interrupt this by (so to speak) turning round to look at the hope itself.”463


460 “We must, on pain of idiocy, deny from the very outset the idea that looking *at* is, by its own nature, intrinsically truer or better than looking *along*. One must look both *along* and *at* everything. In particular cases we shall find reason for regarding the one or the other vision as inferior.” C. S. Lewis, “Meditation in a Toolshed,” in *C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection & Other Short Pieces*, ed. Lesley Walmsley (1945 essay reprint; London: HarperCollins, 2000), 609. Cf. “We can get no further than this in knowledge about (*savoir*) God: but we are vouchsafed some knowledge-by-acquaintance (*connaître*) of Him in our devotional and sacramental life.” Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III*, 1173 [July 19, 1960].


462 Ibid. Already back in 1924, Lewis employed Alexander’s distinction to help make sense of the philosophical problems he was dealing: “There is this truth in Berkeley: that when I try to find what is in my mind when thinking of a universal I always get either a picture or the words of a definition. I know, however, that neither of these is what I am really thinking of. (Is it that there is something wrong about this kind of test? For to ask ‘what is in my mind while I am thinking’ usually means to stop the real thinking and then ‘introspect’: and then I naturally find only the irrelevant pictures or words which, as a matter of psychological fact, do accompany the thinking. Perhaps the thinking, being an act, cannot be introspected – only the *παθήµατα* – [in the] same way will cannot be introspected. Does all introspection always leave out all the important things?).” C. S. Lewis, “The Moral Good – Its Place Among the Values” (Lecture Notes,
As a result of this, Lewis stopped thinking about heavenly desire and how he could recapture the “thrill” that it presented, understanding that it was not heavenly desire that was important, but the object toward which it was pointing – though, of course, Lewis did not yet understand this object to be God.

The second important change for Lewis during The Great War was that he became an idealist (the differences between subjective and absolute idealism are not important here). Lewis’s conversion to idealism impacted his theory of myth in many ways, but two are worth mentioning in this immediate context.

First of all, Lewis began to see how his desire for myth – i.e. heavenly desire – could be seen as an aesthetic experience with a quasi-spiritual twist, for according to Bradley, all people are subjective fragments or Appearances who – note the word – have “transcendent longings” for unity with Reality or the Absolute. Thus, Lewis wrote:

I saw that Joy, as I now understood it, would fit in. We mortals, seen as the sciences see us and as we commonly see one another, are mere ‘appearances.’ But appearances of the Absolute. In so far as we really are at all (which isn’t saying much) we have so to speak, a root in the Absolute, which is the utter reality. And

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A. The Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College), 31. It should be noted that although Wheaton College has labelled this document – or rather, these lecture notes – “The Moral Good – Its Place Among the Values” it should be labelled “The Good – Its Place Among the Values.” There are two reasons for this. First, the lecture notes that Wheaton has labelled “The Moral Good” are dated “1924,” but as Walter Hooper has indicated, the lectures that Lewis delivered in 1924 were “The Good” not “The Moral Good.” Second, the content of the lectures at Wheaton are not primarily concerned with ethics; hence, it is unlikely that they would be called “The Moral Good.” While it is clear, then, that Wheaton has mislabelled its set of lecture notes, I will follow Wheaton’s labelling system even though it should be clear that when I cite “The Moral Good – Its Place Among the Values,” I am talking about “The Good – Its Place Among the Values.”

464 “For resorting to the same object again, in the hope of repeating the same experience, they learn by disappointment that no object has by its mere nature the infallible power of evoking spiritual experience.” Lewis, *Clivi Hamiltonis Summae Metaphysices Contra Anthroposophos Libri II*, 55. Years later, in his Christian science-fiction novel *Out of the Silent Planet*, Lewis emphasized the danger of trying to repeat pleasures. C. S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, in *The Cosmic Trilogy*, by C. S. Lewis (1938 reprint; London: Pan Books, 1990), 63.

that is why we experience Joy: we yearn, rightly, for that unity which we can never reach except by ceasing to be the separate phenomenal beings called ‘we.’ Joy was not a deception. Its visitations were rather the moments of clearest consciousness we had, when we became aware of our fragmentary and phantasmal nature and ached for that impossible reunion which would annihilate us or that self-contradictory waking which would reveal, not that we had had, but that we were, a dream. . . . This new dovetailing of my desire-life with my philosophy foreshadowed the day, now fast approaching, when I should be forced to take my ‘philosophy’ more seriously than I ever intended.

Second of all, long after Lewis stopped being an absolute idealist, he still valued the emphasis idealism, and in particular, Bradley, put on the hidden glory of Reality behind all Appearances. Norse mythology had prepared Lewis for the sense of veiled, mythical glory, but it was Bradley who solidified this sense in him, for while Lewis had not believed in the Norse gods, he did believe in the Absolute. And I pause long enough here to suggest the Bradleyan sense of Reality (minus the pantheism) was perhaps one element Lewis had in mind when he, as a Christian, later referred to Myth as “Reality”: “What flows into you from the myth is not truth but reality (truth is always about something, but reality is that about which truth is), and, therefore every myth becomes the father of innumerable truths on the abstract level.”

The third important change for Lewis during The Great War was his actual dispute with Barfield concerning the imagination and subsequently the mythical and supernatural. Although the debate had been running for many years, it really began to

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466 Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 1372.
467 Ibid., 1366.
heat up in 1926. At that time, Lewis the absolute idealist believed the following things
about myth and the imagination: (1) in the tradition of Bradley, he thought “reason is
utterly inadequate to the richness and spirituality of real things: indeed this is itself a
deliverance of reason” – this, of course, potentially left room for a supra-rational
Reality (which Myth would later help fill); (2) he, importantly, acknowledged that the
imagination was capable of receiving super-intelligible symbols, but he rejected any
theory about how these symbols could enter the imagination (e.g. Christian theories about
the Holy Spirit inspiring prophets, demonology, etc.); (3) his definition of myth, though
not yet as his Christian self would understand it, was becoming more and more refined:
“A myth is a description or a story introducing supernatural personages or things,
determined not, or not only, by motives arising from events within the story, but by the
supposedly immutable relations of the personages or things; possessing unity: and not,
save accidentally, connected with any given place or time;” in other words, a myth is a
seamless or complete story which, at its heart, embodies timeless or archetypal truths;
and (4) Lewis adamantly denied that the imagination was capable of both knowing Truth
and communing with mythical beings or spirits, meaning that he thought the imagination
can have moments of revelation or inspiration, but it cannot account for how it got this
revelation; Lewis summarized (1), (2) and (4) quite well in a letter to Harwood:

Nor do I doubt the presence, even in us, of faculties embryonic or atrophied, that
lie in an indefinite margin around the little finite bit of focus which is intelligence

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469 “Fully to realize the existence of the Absolute is for finite beings impossible.” Bradley, Appearance and Reality, 159. Cf. “Agreed (by you and me, also by Kant, Coleridge, Bradley etc) that discursive reason always fails to apprehend reality, because it never grasps more than an abstract relational framework.” Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III, 1600 [1927, “The Great War Letters” Series I, Letter 1].


– faculties anticipating or remembering the possession of huge tracts of reality that slip through the meshes of the intellect. And, to be sure, I believe that the symbols presented by imagination at its height are the workings of that fringe and present to us as much of the super-intelligible reality as we can get while we retain our present form of consciousness. My skepticism begins when people offer me explicit accounts of the super-intelligible and in so doing use all the categories of the intellect. If the higher worlds have to be represented in terms of number, subject-and-attribute, time, space, causation etc (and thus they nearly always are represented by occultists and illuminati), the fact that knowledge of them had to come through the fringe remains inexplicable. It is more natural to suppose in such cases that the illuminati have done what all of us are tempted to do: – allowed their intellect to fasten on those hints that come from the fringe, and squeezing them, has made a hint (that was full of truth) into a mere false hard statement. Seeking to know (in the only way we can know) more, we know less. I, at any rate, am at present inclined to believe that we must be content to feel the highest truths ‘in our bones’: if we try to make them explicit, we really make them untruth. At all events if more knowledge is to come, it must be the wordless & thoughtless knowledge of the mystic: not the celestial statistics of Swedenborg, the Lemurian history of Steiner, or the demonology of the Platonists. All this seems to me merely an attempt to know the super-intelligible as if it were a new slice of the intelligible: as though man with a bad cold tried to get back smells with a microscope. Unless I greatly misunderstand you, you are (in my way) more
rationalist than I, for you would reject as mere ideology my ‘truths felt in the bones.’

Despite the certainty of Lewis’s tone in this letter, three months after writing it, the Oxford don said he was in “an unholy muddle” about reason and the imagination and was becoming increasingly more concerned about the Anthroposophist’s understanding of the imagination as a medium for communing with spirits and thereby gaining knowledge of Myth or “super-intelligible” reality. As a result, he took comfort in two things: (1) Wordsworth’s *Prelude*, which was another book Lewis listed in his top ten philosophical influences, and which tended to focus on nature and not Supernature, hence giving Lewis the impression that reality was free of “bogies;” and (2) Bergson’s doctrine of the necessity of existence (again), which, note the anti-MacDonaldian language, helped Lewis get “all the ‘nurse and grandma from my soul.’”

But mere comfort was not enough for Lewis, who, we must always remind ourselves, really was trying, though not always with perfect success as we saw, to live his philosophy: “I suddenly found myself thinking ‘What I won’t give up is the doctrine that what we get in the imagination at its highest is real in some way, tho[ugh], at this stage one can’t say how’: and then my intellectual conscience smote me for having got to that last pitch of sentiment – asserting what ‘I won’t do’ when I ought to be enquiring what I can know.” Consequently, Lewis “decided to work up the whole doctrine of

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475 Ibid. (emphasis mine).
476 Lewis, *All My Road Before Me*, 432 [January 19, 1927].
Imagination in Coleridge,” no doubt due to the recommendation of Barfield, whose theory of the imagination was part Anthroposophistic and part Coleridgean.

Now Coleridge understood the imagination to be twofold, consisting of a primary and a secondary imagination: the primary imagination is “the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the external act of creation in the infinite I AM,” while the secondary imagination is a mere “echo” of the primary imagination and as such is “identical with the primary in the kind of its operation;” and both types of imagination are distinguished from fancy, which is “a mode of memory” that “has no other counter to play but fixities and definites.”

Moreover, the imagination had such a prized place in Coleridge’s psychology that the romantic poet even went so far as to declare that it transcends reason in dignity and importance.

While impressed by much of what Coleridge and Barfield said about the imagination, Lewis, as one raised on the classics and as was typical of one growing increasingly more attracted to Neoplatonic ways of thinking, was a strong advocate of Aristotle’s *De Anima*; indeed, Lewis was the one who introduced Barfield to *De Anima*, a quotation from which was eventually placed at the front of Barfield’s *Poetic Diction* (the book that

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477 Ibid., 432 [January 19, 1927].
480 For the importance of Aristotle’s *De Anima* on Neoplatonism see A. C. Lloyd, “The Later Neoplatonists,” in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A. H. Armstrong, 272-322 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 302. For the influence of *De Anima* on Lewis’s thought consider the following: “I have also got the poetic and the other mind settled now. It all comes in Aristotle *De Anima* III v.2. There are two elements the *nous poietikos* [“the poetic mind”] and the *nous pathetikos* [“the pathetic mind”]. And one mind [the pathetic mind] corresponds in becoming everything; the other mind [the poetic mind] corresponds in making everything. The latter alone is immortal and ageless. But we do not remember because this is without emotion. The pathetic mind dies.” Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III*, 1507-8 [February 2, 1927].
in many ways was the key document in The Great War\textsuperscript{481}). Thus, in principle, but not always in practice, Lewis tended to follow the Aristotelian or scholastic threefold division of imagination, which consists of (1) the sensitive imagination, which is common to both animals and men and whose function is merely to receive the \textit{simple image} of a sensible thing when it is perceived (this is like Coleridge’s “fancy”), (2) what Albert the Great called “the phantasy,” which is also common to both animals and men and whose function is to connect or join simple images in the sensitive imagination to make more \textit{complex images}, the result of which is the image of a thing with a determinate size and shape, and as belonging to a particular time (this is like Coleridge’s “secondary imagination”),\textsuperscript{482} and (3) the deliberative imagination or, in more Lewisian terms, “the poetic imagination,”\textsuperscript{483} which is unique to rational creatures, and whose function is to work with the active intellect or “poetic” mind (the only faculty of the soul that actually makes anything\textsuperscript{484}) in the creation of art and other things (this is like Coleridge’s “primary imagination”).\textsuperscript{485} This latter type of imagination came to Lewis largely from Aristotle, yet because the Oxford don had also been influenced by the Romantics’

\textsuperscript{481} Adey, C. S. Lewis’s ‘Great War’ with Owen Barfield, 13.
\textsuperscript{482} Albert the Great maintained that there are four grades of abstraction in the soul, the first being common sense, which allows us to be aware of our external sense, the second being the imagination, which retains the images of sensible things when they are not long present, the third being phantasy, which is the sense power that allows us to play with things that in no way exist outside the mind, and the fourth being the (primary or active) intellect, which abstracts the universe from the particular phantasm. Albert the Great De Anima 2.3.1. Lewis actually touched on Albert the Great’s psychology in The Discarded Image, the book based on his popular lectures introducing the medieval world view: “The distinction between Phantasy and Imagination – (\textit{vis} phantastica) and (\textit{vis} imaginativa) – is not so simple. Phantasy is the higher of the two; here Coleridge has once more turned the nomenclature upside down. . . . According to Albertus, Imagination merely retains what has been perceived, and Phantasy deals with this \textit{componendo et dividendo}, separating and uniting.” Lewis, The Discarded Image, 162-3.
\textsuperscript{484} Aristotle Metaphysics 1049a1-35.
\textsuperscript{485} Aristotle De Anima 434a5.
exaltation of the imagination, not to mention Bergson’s concept of *homo faber*,\textsuperscript{486} the Oxford don’s language (which, as we know, was sometimes as much rhetorical as it was dialectical) was often imprecise. For example, he often slurred over the difference between phantasy and deliberative imagination, for while both of these faculties, strictly speaking, create meaning, this was not always apparent in Lewis’s writings: “B[arfield] and L[ewis] agree that there is a valuable activity called imagination – wh[ich] is not the same as *imaginatio, phantasia*, the image making faculty – the exercise of which is necessary for the connaissance of meaning.”\textsuperscript{487} Or again, while Lewis was usually quite good at separating the sensitive imagination and the other two types of imagination, it is not always clear – no doubt partly due to his trying to incorporate Aristotelian psychology into absolute idealism – what type of imagination he was speaking of. For instance, consider the following passage: “For human poets produce scenery by one kind of imagination, and characters by another. The characters the poet makes out of himself: The scenery out of images retained by memory from the surrounding world. The kind of imagination which thus constructs a raw material of memory images, I call Phantasy.” \textsuperscript{488} While likely the distinction here is between the sensitive imagination, which makes “scenery,” and phantasy / the deliberative imagination, which make “characters,” this is not perfectly lucid, for strictly speaking, “scenery,” being a complex image, should be created by phantasy, and “characters,” being a purely rational construct, should be created by the deliberative imagination. Many years later, Lewis demonstrated how often his earlier *language* – though not necessarily his *concepts* – differed from that of

\textsuperscript{487} Ibid., 1620 [1927? “The Great War Letters” Series I, Letter 5].
\textsuperscript{488} Lewis, *Clivi Hamiltonis Summae Metaphysices Contra Anthroposophos Libri II*, 33.
Aristotle and his commentators: “To the best of my knowledge no medieval author mentions either faculty [the sensitive imagination or phantasy] as a characteristic of poets.”

However, while Lewis’s philosophical inconsistencies must be noted, it cannot be stressed enough that the Oxford don strongly diverged from both Coleridge and Barfield in regard to the emphasis they placed on the primary imagination “half perceive[ing] . . . half create[ing]” the world, for to give so much prestige to the primary, or, in Aristotelian terms, deliberate, imagination is to make it a judge unto itself, which was totally unacceptable for Lewis since he insisted that reason, on account of its very nature, is the sole judge of the products of the imaginations, such as myth. Moreover, following Aristotle and others, Lewis thought that because both phantasy and deliberative imagination are concerned with rearranging simple images, these faculties, importantly, are capable of error, and therefore need to be ruled by reason or the faculty of judgment:

The relation between meaning and Truth seems to be this. A thing can’t be true or false unless it means something: but to find out what it means is not to find out whether it is true or false. Poetry can bring out the quality or whatness of the content of a hypothesis: but the truth of the hypothesis is known not by its content but by its connection with other concepts – by linking it with what is outside itself.

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492 Ibid.
Yet despite reason’s ability to judge the imaginations, Lewis believed, *pace* the most influential anthropologists of his day, Max Müller and James Frazer,\(^493\) that the abstract language associated with reason and logical thought – prosaic language – is inferior to poetic language, for while prosaic language can only express that-which-truth-is-about in a universal, abstract way, poetic language – Lewis said, using the language of absolute idealism – can express that-which-truth-is-about in both a universal *and* concrete way through the employment of things like metaphors: “Poetry, in its task of revivifying ‘counters’ – of establishing a gold currency – has to use every device . . . to bring the thing home to your business and bosom. In fact, it has to be more accurate and concrete (less ‘in the air’) than prose.”\(^494\) Hence, Lewis approved of Barfield’s statement that Plato’s language, for example, is better than Aristotle’s,\(^495\) as the former is more metaphorical, and therefore, richer in meaning, than the latter: “In other words,” wrote Lewis, “when you think of ‘The Lord’ as my ‘shepherd’ you get at once something of the real flavour of care and protection – a little bit of the whatness wh[ich] was merely symbolized in ‘benevolent superintendence.’”\(^496\)

Now Lewis’s theory of poetic language and the concrete universality of metaphors was intimately related to his theory of *myth*, but before this can be discussed, it must be seen, as with his theory of imagination, in comparison with Barfield’s theory of myth.

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\(^493\) Max Müller (1823-1900), who is generally regarded as the founder of comparative mythology, and James Frazer (1854-1941), who I mentioned earlier, both delighted in world mythology, yet both saw it as a primitive stage in the development of human history. Eric Csapo, *Theories of Mythology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 26, 38.


\(^495\) Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, 61.

which rested on the premise that there is an “ancient semantic unity”[497] in our minds, in which old words such as pneuma (“breath,” “spirit” AND “wind”) point past themselves to a time when there was real communion between mythical spirits and men, a time when concrete Myth as “a living Figure” walked the Earth:

It is these ‘footsteps of nature’ [i.e. old words like pneuma] whose noise we hear alike in primitive language and in the finest metaphors of poets. Men do not invent those mysterious relations between separate external objects [i.e. “spirit” “breath”], and between objects of feelings or ideas, which it is the function of poetry to reveal. These relations exist independently, not indeed of Thought, but of any individual thinker. And according to whether the footsteps are echoed in primitive language or, later on, in the made metaphors of poets, we hear after a different fashion and for different reasons. The language of primitive men reports them as direct perceptual experience. The speaker has observed a unity, and is not therefore himself conscious of relation. But we, in the development of consciousness, have lost the power to see this one as one. Our sophistication, like Odin’s, has cost us an eye; and now it is the language of poets, in so far as they create true metaphors, which must restore this unity conceptually, after it has been lost from perception. Thus, the ‘before-unapprehended’ relationships of which Shelley spoke, are in a sense ‘forgotten’ relationships. For though they were never yet apprehended, they were at one time seen. And imagination can see them again.[498]

[497] Ibid., 1509 [1928].
[498] Ibid., 86-7.
Even though Lewis the idealist agreed with Barfield that the higher imaginations have the power to create meaning (i.e. signification), which in turn can be expressed in metaphors, which in turn are used in myths, the Oxford don insisted that none of the imaginations can, or could, in any way commune with spirits or mythical creatures, who point to their source, Myth, and whose existence is necessary in order for Barfield’s “ancient semantic unity” to be probable or true.

The reason why Lewis rejected Barfield’s belief that we can commune with mythical beings and spirits lies in both the Oxford don’s Aristotelian psychology and his “vague and tentative idealism.” That is, Lewis believed that in order for something to be known to the (sensitive) imagination, it has to be something that is material (though of course as an idealist, Lewis believed that the entire material world is a thought imagined by Spirit). The material world provides boundaries, which, of course, mark distinctions, and so only material creatures can leave images or phantasms in the sensitive imagination – immaterial spirits can leave no image and thus we cannot commune with them, even though, take note, it is “very probable” that they exist. Thus, when Barfield asserted that his imagination can perceive the supernatural or, in the words of Kant, the supersensible, he was mistaken, for it was simply a matter of either his deliberative imagination or phantasy operating without an image derived from hylē or matter, the

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501 Ibid., 15.
502 Both Lewis and Barfield knew the major works of Kant, and while Aristotle’s influence is far greater on Lewis, the Oxford don made use of some Kantian concepts (more on this in chapter eight) and it is at times difficult to decide whether Lewis is thinking of Aristotle or Kant when he said that we cannot have knowledge of the supernatural, for both Aristotle and Kant would have said that we cannot have knowledge of anything that we do not first sense. For more on Kant, see Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 117 [BXXX].
result of which is the production of empty fantasies or “Pseudo object[s].” If souls could perceive spiritual beings, then it would imply that neither of them are restricted by matter, and so they would simply cease to be the distinction that is ‘soul’ and ‘spiritual being’ and the two of them would “relapse into Spirit” (the totality of all Appearances or individuals); Lewis’s idealist argument is that souls do not Enjoy each other in the Alexandrian sense, but rather “a soul contemplated is exactly what we mean by a body,” for to Enjoy another soul, an active subject, would be to treat my soul and the other soul as a singularity, as one subject – i.e. Spirit – whereas to Contemplate the other soul via its body, a passive object, is to treat myself and its bodies as a duality, as subject and object; thus,

let us suppose that my soul and my neighbour’s were deprived of the material world. Then either his soul will continue to appear to me or not. If not we are no longer compresent and I lose the representation ‘his soul’: and also, since I have no correlative ‘other,’ I lose the representation ‘myself.’ Souls therefore disappear altogether and I am pure Spirit.

For this reason, we should not look outward for spiritualist contact with mythical beings and the like, nor should we, like the mystics, “contemplate our own souls” – i.e. treat a subject as if it were an object – hoping we have some occult power to communicate with mythical beings, but we should “enjoy Spirit: which we do by contemplating the world, in art, philosophy, history or imagination,” for souls

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505 Ibid.
506 Ibid., 10. Concerning the time when he published *Dymer*, Lewis wrote: “I was an idealist, and for an idealist all supernaturalisms were equally illusions, all ‘spirits’ merely symbols of ‘Spirit’ in the metaphysical sense, futile and dangerous if mistaken for facts.” Lewis, preface to the 1950 edition of *Dymer*, 5.
who seek Spirit in their own souls are in danger of great reactions (the dark night of the soul), great folly (fantastic ascetic practices often verging on perversion) and great wickedness (antinomianism). Plotinus stands almost alone among the mystics in having escaped these dangers: but Plotinus was a philosopher. . . . It is therefore the touchstone of every seemingly spiritual activity to ask whether it looks outward, and hastens, like Spirit, to embody itself in matter.  

Consequently, in a highly questionable, quasi-positivist fashion, Lewis maintained that mythical visions are neither true nor false, for lacking a material form and hence a distinct image to impress on the sensitive imagination, myths cannot be empirically verified (as true or false). The only way for myths to be true is if spirits or mythical creatures manifest themselves materially; however, if they were to do so, their existence could be empirically verified and the resulting myth could be said to be true or false accordingly: “Occultism keeps [spirits] worldly but reduces them to regions within our world. Whether such regions exist becomes therefore purely a question of empirical evidence.”

Nevertheless, even though Lewis neither believed that the existence of mythical creatures could be verified nor took myths to be true, the Oxford don still cherished myths for their aesthetic value. Indeed, we can see that under the varying influences of Croce, Santayana, Bradley and Barfield, Lewis gave art and myth a high place in his

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507 Lewis, Clivi Hamiltonis Summae Metaphysices Contra Anthroposophos Libri II, 53-4.
509 Lewis, Clivi Hamiltonis Summae Metaphysices Contra Anthroposophos Libri II, 25.
philosophy, calling it “an image of spiritual life,” which is to say that the concrete universality of metaphors and myths were deemed by Lewis to give people an impression or a visual image of what Reality is like. And this is very significant, for it reveals an important step that Lewis took in the development of his Christian theory of myth, for myth as “an image of the spiritual life” is very similar to myth as a signpost pointing toward Myth.

Consequently, while Lewis borrowed some of Barfield’s ideas about the concrete universality of metaphors and myths, he strongly rejected any attempt to rationalize, Contemplate, or reduce myth *qua* image of the spiritual life. For instance, he not only criticized Barfield by insisting that “if all mythology were proven true, ‘the poets would throw it away and invent a new one, warranted untrue,’” but he also prepared the way for his rejection of any Neoplatonic attempt to “get behind” myths to discover hidden, secondary meanings:

[I] read the myth from [Plato’s] *Politicus* in Jowett’s crib, wh[ich] worried me by being so anthroposophical, till it occurred to me that of course Steiner must have read Plato. A pest on all this nonsense which has half spoiled so much beauty and wonder for me, degraded pure imagination into pretentious lying, and truths of the spirit into mere matters of *fact*, slimed everything over with the trail of its infernal mumbo-jumbo! How I w[oul]d have enjoyed this myth once: now behind Plato’s delightful *civilised* imagination I always have the picture of dark old traditions

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511 Lewis, *Clivi Hamiltonis Summae Metaphysices Contra Anthroposophos Libri II*, 45.
512 Ibid., 66. This idea can again be found in Lewis’s edition of Samuel Butler’s *God the Known and God the Unknown*, where Butler wrote, “It is only natural that we should be asked how such an idea has remained in the mind of so many . . . for so long a time if it was without foundation and a piece of dreamy mysticism only” — whereupon Lewis commented, “This man is a fool – mysticism points to a reality not yet real.” C. S. Lewis, marginalia in his edition of *God the Known and God the Unknown*, by Samuel Butler (London: A. C. Fields, 1909; The Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College), 49.
picked up from mumbling medicine-men, professing to be ‘private information’ about facts.\(^{513}\)

Obviously, then, Lewis believed that by denying the truth-value of myth – by “disenchanting” myth, as Santayana would have it\(^{514}\) – he was not abusing myth, but rather was allowing it to be “re-enchanted,” which is to say that when a myth is known to be simply a beautiful story (disenchanted), it can then have the power to communicate inspiring Beauty to us and which will neither enslave us nor cause us to idolize it (re-enchanted). Hence, Lewis insisted that Christians, for instance, were idolaters because they argue about the *truth* of a beautiful story, which is to fail to focus on the proper function of myth and art, which is to act as a beautiful aid to the spiritual life:

But the idolater having determined to treat an empirical value as a spiritual and refusing to despise that object as a worldly object, that is, refusing the disenchantment, is very far from the re-enchantment. For we must cease to live, or fear, or reverence any object empirically before we begin to apprehend it spiritually. Therefore even the debauchee is nearer to spiritual life than the idolater: for satiety or disease or age must sooner or later disenchant the objects which he loves, and it will then be possible that he may proceed to the spiritual point of view.\(^{515}\)

Thus, we can say that Lewis’s theory of myth during his idealist phases progressed a lot and played an increasingly important role in the Oxford don’s philosophical journey, particularly in regard to the idea that myths are concrete universal stories that are images

\(^{513}\) Lewis, *All My Road Before Me*, 449 [February 8, 1927].

\(^{514}\) Lewis, *Clivi Hamiltonis Summae Metaphysices Contra Anthroposophos Libri II*, 57.

\(^{515}\) Ibid. Cf. “For neither in the history of art nor in a rational estimate of its value can the aesthetic function of things be divorced from the practical and moral.” Santayana, *Reason in Art*, 16.
of the spiritual life. Nevertheless, Lewis’s interest in “the science of the nature of myths” or “mythologics” was still largely that of a man who understood myth to be imaginative fiction “unconsciously” (as opposed to symbolism, which is “consciously”) created by people who enjoy “imaginative vision of they-know-not-what.”

V: Myth during the Theist Phase

During the latter part of The Great War, from 1928 to 1930, Lewis gave many of his anti-Barfieldian treatises medieval names, such as *Clivi Hamiltonis Summae Metaphysices Contra Anthroposophos Libri II, Commentarium in Tractatum De Toto et Parte* and *De Bono et Malo*. Of course, the reason for this is the Oxford don was deeply immersed in medieval literature, in particular, medieval allegory, at the time. Indeed, he was giving weekly lectures and tutorials on classics of the Middle Ages, and doing research for *The Allegory of Love*, which he began in 1928, when he was an absolute idealist, and eventually published in 1936, five years after he became a Christian.

And this, of course, ought to remind us of the important role the medieval philosophers and poets had in Lewis’s conversion to both theism (1929) and Christianity (1931), and it should also cause us to ask what, if any, was the influence of the medieval philosophers and poets on Lewis’s theistic theory of myth? While many Lewis scholars would likely say, “a lot,” this, surprisingly, would be incorrect, for even though Lewis

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517 Lewis, *Clivi Hamiltonis Summae Metaphysices Contra Anthroposophos Libri II*, 60, 64. “In myth and symbolism then we enjoy imaginative experience together with the ignorance ‘of what.’” Ibid., 64.
518 During the Michaelmas Term 1926, Lewis gave a set of lectures entitled “Some Thinkers of the Renaissance (Elyot, Ascham, Hooker, Bacon).” Lewis repeated these lectures again in 1929 and 1930. But in-between these lectures, during the Michaelmas Term 1928, Lewis lectured on “The Romance of the Rose and its Successors,” and after this, in 1932, Lewis began his most important lectures, “Prolegomena to Medieval Poetry,” which would be repeated every year through to 1954 and would subsequently become the manuscript for *The Discarded Image*. Walter Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: Companion & Guide* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 524.
both learned a lot about *allegory* from medieval writers, and appropriated and later used a lot of medieval *facts* in his Christian writings, the Oxford don’s theory of myth was largely unchanged by the medieval writers (whose theories, admittedly, Lewis probably did not fully appreciate). In order to make this clear, we first need to see how these writers, who were mostly Neoplatonists of one kind or another, understood myth.

Now both pagan Neoplatonists of late antiquity and the Christian Neoplatonists of the early Middle Ages developed their theories of myth from two chief sources: Plato and the Stoics.\(^519\) Plato had said that because mythmakers and poets tell many lies about the gods,\(^520\) the divine-lover, the philosopher, is behooved to rationally dissect the myths that have been handed down in order to discover the truths latent in them (ironically when Socrates did this, he was killed for, among other things, “disbelieving in the gods”\(^521\); in addition, when Plato himself created myths, such as in the *Timaeus*, it is clear that he was more concerned about the rational truth behind the myth than he was about Enjoying the concrete universality of the myth itself (though Plato would say that you cannot get to the rational truth without first Enjoying the myth). As for the Stoics, they were the ones who popularized the practice of *hyponoia* or the unveiling of hidden meanings in myths; indeed, it was largely with them that this practice became known as *allegoriai* or allegorizing,\(^522\) which is when an individual discards the surface meaning of a text, for instance, “Ulysses’ ship,” for a deeper, spiritual meaning, such as “the human soul;” as Cicero said of the Stoics: “A great deal of... trouble was taken by Zeno [the Stoic], then

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\(^{519}\) To this the Christians might also add St. Paul.

\(^{520}\) “And we’ll deny the truth of the stories that [Achilles] dragged Hector around Patroclus’ tomb and slaughtered prisoners on his funeral pyre. And we won’t allow our citizens to believe that Achilles – the child of a goddess and of Peleus (who was himself a model of self-discipline and a grandson of Zeus) and tutored by the sage Cheiron – was so full of turmoil that he suffered from the two conflicting diseases of mean-spirited avarice and disdain for gods and men.” Plato *Republic* 391b-c.

\(^{521}\) Plato *Apology* 22e-24a.

\(^{522}\) Plutarch *Moralia* 19e-f.
Cleanthes and lastly by Chrysippus, to rationalize these purely fanciful myths and explain the reasons for the names by which the various deities are called.”

Subsequently, combining insights from Plato and the Stoics, the ancient and medieval Neoplatonists developed sophisticated theories about myth and its place in philosophy. For the purpose of comparing these Neoplatonic theories of myth with Lewis’s, I want to focus our attention on two theories of myth that Lewis would have been exposed to during his theist phase: (1) the theory belonging to the pagan Neoplatonist Macrobius, and (2) the theory belonging to the Christian Neoplatonic School of Chartres.

In his most famous work, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, Macrobius set out to write a Neoplatonic commentary on a section of Cicero’s *Republic*. The first part of *Commentary* largely revolves around the question of what kind of story is acceptable in philosophizing. Macrobius, following Porphyry, began by claiming that only the story with a didactic function should be used; this, interestingly, apparently eliminates many parts of Apuleius’s *Golden Ass*, a favorite of Lewis’s and the source of *Till We Have Faces*. Nevertheless, it is not just the story with a didactic purpose that is used in philosophy, but the story that “rests on a solid foundation of truth, which is treated in a

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524 C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in the Medieval Tradition* (1936 reprint; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 46. Although *The Discarded Image*, which dedicates ten pages to Macrobius, was published in 1964, its content was based on Lewis’s lectures on medieval literature that he gave when he was at Oxford.
526 “Fables – the very word acknowledges their falsity – serve two purposes: either merely to gratify the ear or to encourage the reader to good works. They delight the ear as do the comedies of Menander and his imitators, or the narratives replete with imaginary doings of lovers in which Petronius Arbiter so freely indulged and with which *Apuleius*, astonishingly, sometimes amused himself.” Macrobius *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* 1.2.7-8 (emphasis mine). Commenting on this passage, William Stahl wrote: “The reference is undoubtedly to Apuleius’s great work, the *Golden Ass*, which abounds in romance and adventure. It is not surprising to find Macrobius expressing astonishment over such literary extravagances of Apuleius, for the latter was an eminent Platonist.”
fictitious style;” this kind of story is called a narratio fabulosa to distinguish it from
ordinary, fictitious fabulae or fables like Aesop’s. Now narrationes fabulosae are
concerned with communicating certain dimensions of the spiritual life (namely, those
having to do with the World Soul, spirits and gods) to people in the form of sacred rituals
and, importantly, ancient myths. However, while all myths apparently have some
foundation in truth, not all of them are fit or appropriate for philosophy, for some of the
myths – and here we catch a glimpse of Plato in the Republic – tell lies about the gods
and show them doing immoral or base things, such as Cronos cutting off Uranus’s privy
parts. Hence, the myths acceptable to philosophy are those that are the truest, those that
show the gods doing moral things in a dignified manner, and these, Lewis would have
read, were myths with some grounding in truth and, importantly, hidden behind “a
modest veil of allegory.” Finally, no story or myth is appropriate for a philosophical
discussion of the two highest hypostases in the Neoplatonic Trinity, the One and Nous,
for these in no way touch the world of imperfection (our world and the world of the gods)
and so these hypostases shun both the imagination, which is a lesser faculty than speech
and reason; consequently, the One and Nous can only be spoken of analogically or
metaphorically as Plato did when he spoke of the “Good” as the “Sun” (and even then it
seems impossible, for if the “Good” is “beyond Being” then how can we say anything of
it?).

527 Ibid., 1.2.9.
528 Ibid., 1.2.11.
529 When the Platonic soul fell from its original abode, the first tunic or covering it took on was the
imagination, which is, of course, the image-making faculty of the person. The farther the soul fell from its
original home, the more coverings it took on until it finally was completely covered with a physical body.
In Platonic thought, there is a strong connection between the imagination, the material world and clothing
on the one hand, and reason, the immaterial world and nakedness on the other.
The new humanism of Neoplatonic Christians, in particular, those of the School of Chartres, went even further than the pagan philosophers in rejecting the literal or historical interpretation of the pagan myths. While two of the key figures in the School of Chartres, William of Conches and Thierry of Chartres, were largely unknown to Lewis, the Oxford don was well acquainted with the ideas of Bernardus Silvestris and, to a lesser extent, Alain de Lille and Jean de Hanville (indeed, Lewis used ideas from both the former and the latter in Out of the Silent Planet); moreover, Lewis’s very interest in writing The Allegory of Love, The Romance of the Rose, was co-written by a man, Jean de Meun, who was deeply influenced by Chartrian approaches to myth and allegory. While it is always a danger to speak in generalizations, it may be fair to speak broadly of a Chartrian approach to myth and allegory, for all of those associated with the School believed in the following things. First, a fabula or fable was more or less a synonym for “myth;” this was not so much due to the pagan Macrobius, who still revered the ancient gods, as to the Christian Augustine, who either disbelieved the pagan myths or thought they were true stories about real demons. Second, fables were often spoken of as integumenta, involucra and / or allegoriae, which are myths with particular emphasis on their hidden or inner meanings; in other words, they indicate that the myth is a “covering” or “wrapping” for a deeper, more philosophical significatio or meaning.

Third, since all myths are fables and as such are not meant to be taken as literally true, the

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533 Augustine The City of God 6.6.
534 Peter Dronke, Fabula: Explorations into the Uses of Myth in Medieval Platonism (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 5, 45.
535 Wetherbee, Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century, 42. Dronke, Fabula, 119.
536 Bernardus Silvestris Commentum Super Sex Libros Eneidos Virgili 11.18-20.
Chartrians had no trouble rejecting Macrobius’s restrictions on only using dignified myths for philosophy, for the Christian Chartrians thought all pagan myths were equally false if taken literally, and equally true if taken metaphorically;\textsuperscript{537} in this way, even a story like Cronos cutting off his father’s privy parts can be interpreted allegorically to the benefit of the reader.\textsuperscript{538}

Now after having examined a few different theories of myth which Lewis would have been exposed to during his theist phase, we can see that although the Oxford don’s love and understanding of \textit{allegory} was clearly enriched by his interaction with philosophers like Macrobius and Bernardus Silvestris, his theory of myth was not. That is, whereas the Neoplatonists said, for instance, that Sibyl’s discourse with the gods in Virgil’s \textit{Aeneid} was a matter of \textit{obscuris vera involvens} (“wrapping truth in dark sayings”), the Oxford don denied that the “dark sayings” of Sibyl, not to mention all of the pagan and Christian myths, could be known to be \textit{true} – a stance slightly different than what he said during his idealist phase, where he said myths could not be true or false period – since in order for something to be known to be \textit{true}, it has to be verifiable and myths can never be verified; indeed, this is why Lewis considered himself a \textit{theist} at the time and \textit{not} a Christian (i.e. God’s existence could be verified or argued for, but the specifically mythical elements in Christianity could not be). Consequently, Lionel Adey misunderstands Lewis the theist when he says the Oxford don “approached Christianity via a Platonism tinged with Stoicism, tolerating popular mythology like an eighteenth-century aristocratic deist,”\textsuperscript{539} for Lewis had at once a far \textit{more} generous, and far \textit{less} generous, attitude toward mythology than either the Stoics or the deists – far less

\textsuperscript{537} Wetherbee, \textit{Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century}, 46.  
\textsuperscript{538} Dronke, \textit{Fabula}, 28.  
\textsuperscript{539} Adey, \textit{C. S. Lewis’s ‘Great War’ with Owen Barfield}, 66.
generous because he thought that poetry should not be diminished by rational interpretation (via allegory), and far more generous because while poetry can only be judged true or false by reason, it cannot be interpreted in a meaningful way by reason alone. In sum, then, Lewis the theist agreed with Chesterton (whom, we recall, the Oxford don had read during the latter part of The Great War) when the journalist said bluntly: “Myths are not allegories.”

Nevertheless, in fairness to the Neoplatonic theories of myth which I just discussed, it is almost certain that Lewis did not fully appreciate some of their subtler nuances, and without a doubt Lewis’s simplistic – one to one correspondence – theory of allegory was not as sophisticated as the Neoplatonic understanding of allegoresis, which in many cases would have had shades of Lewis’s theory of myth qua concrete particularity; however, for whatever reason, Lewis did not notice these shades.

VI: Myth during the Christian Neoplatonic Phase

When Lewis the absolute idealist was simultaneously engaged in The Great War with Barfield and teaching medieval approaches to myth at Oxford, one of the most important events of his life happened: he met J. R. R. Tolkien, a fellow colleague and English professor at Oxford and a great lover of both George MacDonald (who we remember helped “baptize” Lewis’s imagination) and Norse mythology. Beginning in 1926 or 1927, Lewis started attending the Kólbitar, a club dedicated to reading Norse literature, at the invitation of Tolkien, who founded the club and whose interest in Norse mythology

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540 Chesterton, The Everlasting Man, 104.
would later bare fruit in the form of *The Hobbit, The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*.\(^{542}\)

Now on top of encouraging Lewis’s pre-existing love of Norse mythology, Tolkien did far more than this, for it was he, along with their mutual friend Dyson, who eventually convinced Lewis, who had just become a theist, that *all* mythologies, far from being beautiful stories disengaged from Truth or “lies breathed in silver” are actually examples of “*praeparatio evangelica*”\(^{543}\) or copies which prepare people for the True Myth, Christ:

Now what Dyson and Tolkien showed me was this: that if I met the idea of sacrifice in a Pagan story I didn’t mind it at all: again, that if I met the idea of a god sacrificing himself to himself . . . I liked it very much and was mysteriously moved by it: again, that the idea of the dying and reviving god (Balder, Adonis, Bacchus) similarly moved me provided that I met it anywhere *except* in the Gospels. The reason was that in Pagan stories I was prepared to feel the myth as profound and suggestive of meanings beyond my grasp even tho[ugh] I could not say in cold prose ‘what it meant.’

Now the story of Christ is simply a true myth: a myth working on us in the same way as the others, but with this tremendous difference that *it really happened*: and one must be content to accept it in the same way, remembering that it is God’s myth where the others are men’s myths: i.e. the Pagan stories are God expressing Himself through the minds of poets, using such images as he found there, while Christianity is God expressing Himself through what we call

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‘real things.’ Therefore it is true, not in the sense of being a ‘description’ of God (that no finite mind could take in) but in the sense of being the way in which God chooses to (or can) appear to our faculties. The ‘doctrines’ we get out of the true myth are of course less true: they are translations into our concepts and ideas of that which God has already expressed in a language more adequate, namely the actual incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection.\textsuperscript{544}

Tolkien’s theory of myth, then, was crucial to Lewis’s rational conversion to Christianity, for it provided the Oxford don with intellectually satisfying reasons for becoming a Christian (we recall that when Lewis was a schoolboy, no one bothered to explain to him how Christianity fulfilled pagan myths: his teachers just dismissed pagan myths as mere stories); indeed, the explanation of Christ as the True Myth satisfied not only Lewis’s Kirkian mind but also his imaginations and heavenly desire since reason, imagination and desire are all complete in Christ: “This is not ‘a religion,’ nor ‘a philosophy.’ It is the summing up and actuality of them all.”\textsuperscript{545} Indeed, as two of Lewis’s mentors – G. K. Chesterton and Henry More – had said even earlier, “The Catholic faith is the reconciliation because it is the realisation both of mythology and philosophy,”\textsuperscript{546} and, “Christianity fulfils not only the law of Moses but all that was good in Paganism.”\textsuperscript{547}

However, Lewis’s understanding of myth did not end with his conversion. In The Pilgrim’s Regress, for instance, Lewis developed Tolkien’s theory of myth by arguing that “the Landlord” (God) gave “the Shepherd people” (the Jews) “Rules” and the

\textsuperscript{545} Lewis, Surprised by Joy, 1380.
\textsuperscript{546} Chesterton, The Everlasting Man, 246.
\textsuperscript{547} Lewis, “Henry More,” 96.
“Pagans” “Pictures” in order to keep them on the “Road” (to Heaven).548 According to Lewis, the pagan “Pictures” or myths, contain a “divine call” that brings light if rightly understood and followed:

The resemblance between these myths and the Christian truth is no more accidental than the resemblance between the sun and the sun’s reflection in a pond, or that between a historical fact and the somewhat garbled version of it which lives in popular report, or between the trees and hills of the real world and the trees and hills in our dreams. . . . [W]hen I meditate on the Passion while reading Plato’s picture of the Righteous One, or on the Resurrection while reading about Adonis or Balder . . . [t]here is a real connection between what Plato and the myth-makers most deeply were and meant and what I believe to be the truth. I know that connection and they do not. But it is really there. It is not an arbitrary fancy of my own thrust upon the old words. One can, without any absurdity, imagine Plato or the myth-makers if they learned the truth, saying, ‘I see . . . so that was what I was really talking about. Of course. That is what my words really meant, and I never knew it.’549

Furthermore, these pagan myths are comparable to parts of the Old Testament as they both are types of revelation from God, and both are ultimately superseded or fulfilled by Christ, the Original Myth.

Now one of the implications of all this is that Lewis believed, much to the vexation of fundamentalists, the Old Testament, and indeed, the entire Bible, contains elements that

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549 C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, in *C. S. Lewis: Selected Books* [Short Edition] (1958 reprint; London: HarperCollins, 2002), 367. And Mother Kirk asks John, “‘Have you not heard among the Pagans the story of Semele? Or was there any age in any land when men did not know that corn and wine were the blood and body of a dying and yet living God?’” Lewis, *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, 190.
are mythical and non-historical: “Of course I believe the composition, presentation and
selection for inclusion in the Bible, of all the works to have been guided by the Holy
Ghost. But I think He means us to have sacred myth & sacred fiction as well as sacred
history.”\textsuperscript{550} On top of this, Lewis asserted that just as pagan mythology can be in error, so
also can the Bible,\textsuperscript{551} for scripture is the joint creation of fallible, human prophets and an
infallible God. In this way, the Oxford don rejected both “The Dictation Theory,” which
states that God literally dictated every word in the Bible to His prophets, and “The
Plenary Verbal Inspiration Theory,” which states that God’s inspiration extends
completely to every historical detail and every word the prophets chose.\textsuperscript{552} Nevertheless,
granted there are trivial errors in Holy Writ, Lewis strongly felt the Bible was the most
unique expression of God’s revelation to us and if a person reads it with the right heart,
looking for God’s intended meaning, it usually can be found. Michael Christensen
explains:

Lewis would admonish us to receive the message of Scripture in the same way
that we catch ‘the sacred Fish.’ The net required is ‘love’ – an affirmative attitude
toward the Word of God in Scripture. The mesh needed is ‘a man’s whole heart’ –
a baptized literary embrace of the biblical images which allows us to taste reality
and be transformed. . . . An affirmative literary embrace of the message of
Scripture would not negate, in Lewis’s opinion, Paul’s teaching on the submission
of a wife to her husband, for example. An honest reading of Scripture would

[November 8, 1952].
\textsuperscript{551} In his early years, Lewis was influenced by higher critics like Ernest Renan, who attempted to reduce
the Bible to a mere work of literature. Lewis, \textit{The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume I}, 309 [May 27,
1917]. Some of this influence – for better or for worse – remained with Lewis throughout his life.
\textsuperscript{552} Bill T. Arnold and Bryan E. Beyer, \textit{Encountering the Old Testament: A Christian Survey} (Grand Rapids,
attempt to get behind Paul’s culturally conditioned language to the divine principle of submission being conveyed. To reject Paul’s hierarchical view in principle as culturally relative and accept egalitarian feminism is not to embrace with loving affirmation the intended message of the Bible. It is one thing to look beyond the words of Scripture to its embodied message, yet quite another to dismiss its intended meaning.\footnote{553}

Therefore, if Lewis’s approach to scripture must be given a label, his would be “The Limited Inspiration Theory,” which admits the presence of human errors, but insists on God’s inspiration permeating every book.\footnote{554}

Now while I myself happen to agree with something like the aforementioned theory, a person could seriously press Lewis – and not enough people have – as to whether he was too uncritical in his belief that pagan myths are compatible, even if in a very limited way, with Christianity; indeed, it is hard not to feel he went too far when he said of his trip to Greece: “At Daphni it was hard not to pray to Apollo the Healer. But somehow one didn’t feel it w[oul]d have been very wrong – w[oul]d have only been addressing Christ sub specie Apollinis.”\footnote{555} Lewis’s extreme sympathy with paganism, of course, is due to his classical upbringing and identity with Old Western Culture, which ultimately provoked his claim that he was “a converted Pagan”\footnote{556} (more on this in the next chapter); nevertheless, Lewis’s attitude toward paganism is in stark contrast with Elijah’s, for instance, who seemed \textit{utterly} opposed to the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel!\footnote{557}

\footnote{554} Arnold, \textit{Encountering the Old Testament}, 25.
\footnote{556} Lewis, \textit{Surprised by Joy}, 1283.
\footnote{557} 1 Kings 18:16-46.
moreover, while we tolerate (and even enjoy, in my case) Disney’s Hercules, it is hard to imagine a Christian parent taking his children to see a cartoon version of The Baal Cycle. Thus, while I do not feel that Lewis is completely wrong to value paganism as he did – after all his cultural context was different than Elijah’s – I think that we have to remember that Lewis, like any man, needs to be scrutinized as, of course, Lewis the philosophical Christian would have us do.

Moving on from this, we see that along with his new understanding of myth qua revelation, Lewis needed to give a fuller account of how myth fits into his theory of the imaginations. Thus, he wrote:

I think we have to distinguish (1.) The mere image-making faculty of the ‘mind’s eye’ (also its nose, ear etc.) wh[ich] ought to be called imagination if we literary meddlers hadn’t spoiled the word for its plain sense. (2.) The uses (or abuses) of this (a) By the Holy Ghost in visions proprement dites [“as such”]. (b) By the body and the unconscious to produce dreams (c) By our (waking) starved wishes or suppressed fears to produce reverie in wish-fulfillment or fear-fulfillment. (d) By pathological agencies to produce hallucinations. (e) By I-don’t-know-what, call it Muse, to produce (with or without our conscious volition) figments (‘I thought of Mr. Pickwick’).

Now distinct from all these we have the plastic, inventive, or constructive power, homo faber. This wants to make things out of any plastic material, whether within the mind or without; stone, metals, clay, wood, cloth, memory, &
imagination. It will take from imagination any of the materials I’ve enumerated.558

Though this summary of the imaginations is a popular, and not a philosophical, one, the only major difference between Lewis’s Great War theory of the imaginations and his Christian one is the additional belief that the imaginations can, though not necessarily will, have real communion with mythical beings and spirits.559 Hence, in regard to the relationship between myth qua revelation and the imaginations, Lewis believed that first the Holy Spirit mystically (a problematic word in Lewis’s vocabulary560) inspires (another difficult word561) the imagination, and then the human author, using his deliberative imagination, writes down what he has been inspired with. And this, of course, requires a certain kind of language.

Now the language of scripture and religion, like the language of pagan mythology, is largely poetic language, the power of which is “[to] communicate more Reality to us”562

559 “I am glad you never read my Summa [i.e. Clivi Hamiltonis Summae Metaphysics Contra Anthroposophos Libri II], for all that is dead mutton to me now: and the points chiefly at issue between the Anthroposophists and me then were precisely the points on which anthroposophy is certainly right – i.e. the claim that it is possible for man, here and now, in the phenomenal world, to have commerce with the world beyond – which is what I was denying.” Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume II, 107 [March 28, 1933]. Cf. Robert Holyer, “C. S. Lewis on the Epistemic Significance of the Imagination,” Soundings 74, no. 1 and 2 (1991): 217-18.
560 “I have not made up my mind about Mysticism. Two things give me pause. 1. That the similarity between Christian and non-Christian mysticism is strong I by no means conclude from this that it is un-Christian in the sense of being incompatible with Christianity; but I am inclined to think that it is not specifically Christian. . . . 2. I am struck by the absence of much mysticism from the New Testament.” Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume II, 201 [July 28, 1936]. On account of Lewis’s skeptical or hesitant approach to mysticism, I found David Downing’s book Into the Region of Awe: Mysticism in C. S. Lewis unconvincing, for Downing is searching for “the overlooked Lewis,” who is, in my opinion, a phantom. David Downing, Into the Region of Awe: Mysticism in C. S. Lewis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 11.
561 Concerning Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress, Lewis wrote: “‘For having now my Method by the end; Still as I pull’d, it came.’ It came. I doubt if we shall ever know more of the process called ‘inspiration’ than those two monosyllables tell us.” Lewis, “The Vision of John Bunyan,” 147.
562 “Mythologies and religions are products of imagination in the sense that their content is imaginative. The more imaginative ones are ‘nearer the mark’ in the sense that they communicate more Reality to us. Poetry ‘creates life’ in the sense that its products are something more than fictions occurring in human
or “to convey to us the quality of experiences which we have not had, or perhaps can never have, to use factors within our experience so that they become pointers to something outside our experience – as two or more roads on a map show us where a town that is off the map must lie.” That is, religion uses poetic language because, as we saw earlier, such language is the most metaphorical and therefore the most meaningful as it can convey a sense of concrete universality:

But open your Plato, and you will find yourself among the great creators of metaphor, and therefore among the masters of meaning. If we turn to Theology – or rather to the literature of religion – the result will be more surprising still; for unless our whole argument is wrong, we shall have to admit that a man who says *heaven* and thinks of the visible sky is pretty sure to mean more than a man who tells us that heaven is a state of mind. . . . It will have escaped no one that in such a scale of writers the poets will take the highest place; and among the poets those who have at once the tenderest care for old words and the surest instinct for the creation of new metaphors.

Of course, this approach to religious language, meaning and metaphor, as I said, did not entail Lewis creating a radically new theory of the imagination. Thus, even though the Oxford don did concede that the deliberative imagination has a “kind of psycho-

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physical parallelism in the universe”\textsuperscript{565} – i.e. a certain sensitivity to the mysterious connection between things, which in turn accounts for the creation of metaphors\textsuperscript{566} – Lewis still firmly believed that neither type of imagination could know Truth since only reason could do so: “I am a rationalist,” he wrote, “for me, reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning. Imagination, producing new metaphors or revivifying old, is not the cause of truth, but its condition.”\textsuperscript{567} While I need to mention that by “rationalism” Lewis meant “the determined practice of reason” and not “the name given in the nineteenth century to the school of thought which denied the supernatural,”\textsuperscript{568} I must insist that Lewis, as one who believed philosophy is a way of life, was firmly convinced – for his entire Christian life – that it is the job of reason to scrutinize every proposition, including those pertaining to myth, for it is reason, dwelling “on the soul’s acropolis,”\textsuperscript{569} that distinguishes the man-made lies in mythology (“The Pictures alone are dangerous”\textsuperscript{570}) from the god-inspired elements; as Lewis had learned from Henry More, “take away Reason and all Religions are alike true.”\textsuperscript{571} However, this leads to the next point.

\textsuperscript{565} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{566} As Lyle Smith Jr. has pointed out, to expect a detailed theory from Lewis of how metaphors are made is unreasonable: “When [Lewis] does talk about metaphor, he is concerned with what it does, rather than with how it works. If we read Lewis for a clearly articulated theory of metaphor, such as those of I. A. Richards, Max Black, Monroe Beardsley, Douglas Berggren, Marcus Hester, Philip Wheelwright or Paul Ricoeur, we shall not find it. It would be surprising if we did, for Lewis was . . . not a linguist or a rhetorician.” Lyle Smith Jr, “C. S. Lewis and the Making of Metaphor,” in \textit{Word and Story in C. S. Lewis}, ed. Peter Schakel and Charles Huttar, 11-28 (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1991), 11.
\textsuperscript{570} Lewis, \textit{The Pilgrim’s Regress}, 168.
\textsuperscript{571} Cf. “Reason must never be forsaken for inspiration, wh[ich] may not come, and if it did, w[oul]d be according to reason.” Ibid., 26.
In keeping with his dual insistence that the prosaic language of philosophy is *inferior* to the poetic language of myth and that the faculty of reason is *superior* to the imaginations, Lewis maintained that as with Neoplatonic allegorical interpretations of pagan myths, abstract theological interpretations of biblical myths are often dangerous; indeed, he believed that “there is some death” in such attempts.\(^{572}\) Thus, he thought that people were better off simply Enjoying a myth, “simply swallowing the story,” rather than Contemplating the myth and “trying to find an allegorical, separable *significatio.*”\(^{573}\) Consequently, Lewis had little sympathy with modernist interpretations of Scripture – “Stoic allegorisations of the myths standing to the original cult rather as Modernism to Christianity”\(^{574}\) – because he insisted that by totally Contemplating or allegorizing myths, something inexplicable and mysterious is actually lost,\(^{575}\) for while *all* myths can be interpreted allegorically – where you are given, at least according to Lewis’s narrow view of allegory,\(^{576}\) “one thing in terms of another”\(^{577}\) – myths, at their best, resist being

\(^{572}\) Lewis, “The Language of Religion,” 262.
\(^{574}\) Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III*, 830 [February 10, 1957]. Also consider the fact that in *Till We Have Faces*, Lewis made the Fox a person who represents Stoicism: “The Fox expresses *neither* Anthroposophy nor my views, but Stoicism.” Ibid., 1419 [March 26, 1963]. And then later Lewis said the Stoic Fox is an embodiment of a “shallow ‘enlightenment,’” much like modernist demythologizing of the Bible. Ibid., 1382 [November 1962].
\(^{576}\) “There is enough evidence to suggest that Lewis entertained a narrow view of allegory. He is mainly concerned with “naïve” and “continuous” allegory in which the relation between the two levels is predetermined and overly systematized, with little or no freedom for the reader to make up his or her own mind. This is the case, for instance, in Prudentius’ *Psychomachia*, which Lewis takes to be the archetype of all allegories, and in his own *The Pilgrim’s Regress* . . . Of the latter work it can only be said that it epitomizes naïve, frigid inferior allegory, with its tedious abstractions and bloodless personifications.” Buning, “*Perelandra* in the Light of Modern Allegorical Theory,” 281. Buning is not alone in finding Lewis’s one-to-one correspondence theory of allegory overly simplistic. Paul Piehler, for instance, calls *The Allegory of Love* a “leaky vessel” because of its inadequate treatment of allegory. Paul Piehler, “Visions and Revisions: C. S. Lewis’s Contributions to the Theory of Allegory,” in *The Taste of the Pineapple: Essays on C. S. Lewis as Reader, Critic, and Imaginative Writer*, ed. Bruce Edwards, 79-91 (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1988), 90. While I certainly agree with both Buning and Piehler that Lewis’s theory of allegory is inadequate, we must remember that the
put in strict “conceptual terms”\(^{578}\): “But it remains true that wherever the symbols are best, the key is least adequate. For when allegory is at its best, it approaches myth, which must be grasped with the imagination, not with the intellect. . . . It is the sort of thing you cannot learn from definition: you must rather get to know it;”\(^{579}\) this is to say that myth points to an essentially non-abstract, supra-rational thing: “In poetry the words are the body and the ‘theme’ or ‘content’ is the soul. But in myth the imagined events are the body and something *inexpressible* is the soul.”\(^{580}\) As a result of their elusive, supra-rational nature, myths, like “manna” (which “is to each man a different dish and to each the dish he needs”),\(^{581}\) are often opened to a variety of readings, whereas allegories are not: “A good myth (i.e. a story out of which ever varying meanings will grow for different readers and in different ages) is a higher thing than an allegory (into which *one* meaning has been put). In an allegory a man can put only what he already knows: in a

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\(^{577}\) Lewis, “The Vision of John Bunyan,” 148. In this same essay Lewis went on to explain how an allegory should be used: “We ought to be thinking ‘This green valley, where the shepherd boy is singing, represents humility;’ we ought to be discovering, as we read, that humility is like that green valley. That way, moving always into the book, not out of it, form the concept to the image, enriches the concept. And that is what allegory is for.” Ibid., 149.

\(^{578}\) Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume II*, 438 [August 18, 1940].

\(^{579}\) Lewis, preface to the third edition of *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, 12. Cf. “The mere fact that you can allegorise the work before you is of itself no proof that it is an allegory. Of course you can allegorise it. You can allegorise anything, whether in art or real life.” C. S. Lewis, “On Criticism,” in *C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection & Other Short Pieces*, ed. Lesley Walmsley (London: HarperCollins, 2000), 550. This is an incomplete essay that appears to have been written fairly late in Lewis’s life.

\(^{580}\) Lewis, “The Language of Religion,” 262 (emphasis mine). Cf. “A really fine work of folk-lore, like *The Golden Bough*, will leave too many readers with the idea, for instance, that this or that story of a giant’s or wizard’s heart in a casket or a cave only ‘means’ some stupid and static superstition called ‘the external soul.’ But we do not know what these things mean, simply because we do not know what we ourselves mean when we are moved by them.” Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, 105.

\(^{581}\) C. S. Lewis, “Shelley, Dryden and Mr. Eliot,” in *Selected Literary Essays*, by C. S. Lewis, ed. Walter Hooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 205. This idea may owe something to Santayana, who wrote: “The poet who creates a symbol must do so without knowing what significance it may eventually acquire, and conscious at best only of the emotional background from which it emerged.” Santayana, *Reason in Art*, 90-1.
myth he puts what he does not yet know and could not come to know in any other way.”

Hence, Lewis came to believe that far from being simply a didactic allegory, myth as Myth “does not essentially exist in words at all;” indeed, it is “extra-literary.” And so owing much to Barfield’s “ancient semantic unity,” which, we recall, stressed the real presence of mythical beings that the ancients experienced first hand (i.e. the Myth of the gods dwelling among us – God walking with Adam in the Garden, etc.), and Bradley’s Hegelian doctrine of the “concrete universal,” which we have already discussed in relation to metaphor, Lewis insisted that the experience of Myth is to “taste a universal principle,” “to see,” as he said of symbolism, “the archetype in the copy,” or to enjoy or experience in a concrete way a profound reality that cannot be fully explained:

In the enjoying of a great myth we come nearest to experiencing as a concrete what can otherwise be understood only as an abstraction. At this moment, for example, I am trying to understand something very abstract indeed – the fading, vanishing of tasted reality as we try to grasp it with the discursive reason. . . . If I remind you, instead, of Orpheus and Eurydice, how he was suffered to lead her by

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582 Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III, 789-90 [September 22, 1956]. Cf. “‘Rough male taste’ is, of course, a metaphor. It still seems to me the right one – but of course all metaphors are touch-and-go and don’t appeal equally to all imaginations.” Ibid., 146 [December 1, 1951]. Moreover, the interpretive freedom in regard to myth is apparent when one considers the various Chartrian interpretations of the Vulcan, Venus and Mars myth, for instance. Wetherbee, Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century, 118.
583 Lewis, George MacDonald: An Anthology, xxvii.
584 Lewis, An Experiment in Criticism, 43.
585 Bradley, Ethical Studies, 176.
586 Lewis, The Allegory of Love, 45. However, it must be added that Lewis thought Myth is more than a Jungian archetype: “I have no answer to the question Jung has raised. I can only say – indulging once more in the same primordial image – that the mystery of primordial images is deeper, their origin more remote, their cave more hid, their fountain less accessible than those suspect who have yet dug deepest, sounded with the longest cord, or journeyed farthest in the wilderness.” C. S. Lewis, “Psycho-Analysis and Literary Criticism,” in Selected Literary Essays, by C. S. Lewis, ed. Walter Hooper (1942 essay reprint; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 300.
the hand but, when he turned round to look at her, she disappeared, what was merely a principle becomes imaginable. You may reply that you never till this moment attached that ‘meaning’ to that myth. Of course not. You are not looking for an abstract ‘meaning’ at all. . . . You were not knowing, but tasting; but what you were tasting turns out to be a universal principle. The moment we state this principle, we are admittedly back in the world of abstraction. It is only while receiving the myth as a story that you experience the principle concretely. When we translate we get abstraction – or rather, dozens of abstractions. What flows into you from the myth is not truth but reality (truth is always about something, but reality is that about which truth is), and, therefore, every myth becomes the father of innumerable truths on the abstract level. Myth is the mountain whence all the different streams arise which become truths down here in the valley. . . . Or, if you prefer, myth is the isthmus which connects the peninsular world of thought with the vast continent we really belong to. It is not, like truth, abstract; nor is it, like direct experience, bound to the particular.587

Thus, as I said before, if myth cannot be completely reduced to allegory, then the mythical elements in the Bible, as a reflection of Myth, ought not to be completely demythologized, for to explain away mythical elements like the Atonement, the divinity of the heavens or the Sonship of Christ is to reduce the Bible, shockingly, and to modern minds, paradoxically, to a mere human construct.588 That is, while it is not wrong for

588 Thus, when James Patrick says Lewis thought the Incarnation is the ‘‘allegory of allegories,’’ Patrick gets it completely wrong, for an allegory is a less real thing – it is a copy or a shadow of something higher – while a Myth is something transcendent and real. Patrick, “C. S. Lewis and Idealism,” 170. Indeed, “Grammatically, the things we say of Him are ‘metaphorical’: but in a deeper sense it is our physical and psychic energies that are mere ‘metaphors’ of the real Life which is God.” Lewis, Miracles, 1168
theologians to try to explain the Atonement, they are always on dangerous ground, according to Lewis, because how Christ’s death takes away sin is not so important as that it does; it is for this reason that while most who read The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe probably get the impression Lewis is being perfectly Anselmian in regard to Aslan’s sacrifice for Edmund, these same people are often surprised when they read Lewis’s letters and discover that he wavered unconcernedly between the Anselmian model and the Christus Victor model,\textsuperscript{589} the Oxford don regulating the how of Christ’s death, which is the theological question, as subordinate to the that – “the Deep Magic,” the mythical, transcendent fact.\textsuperscript{590} Similarly, in The Voyage of the Dawn Treader when Eustace says a star “is a huge ball of flaming gas,” he plays the demythologizing theologian, for he (unlike Schiller of “The Gods of Greece”\textsuperscript{591}) fails to understand the mythical nature of a star: “‘Even in your world, my son, that is not what a star is but only what it is made of.’”\textsuperscript{592} Finally, when Jesus is called the Son of God, this word, according to Lewis, was chosen not so much for anthropomorphic reasons but because it depicts a


\textsuperscript{591} In his poem “The Gods of Greece,” the romantic philosopher-poet Schiller blamed Christianity for allowing modern science to develop, which in turn reduced the sun to simply a fiery globe instead of something more: “Where lifeless – fixed afar, / A flaming ball to our dull sense is given, / Phoebus Apollo, in his golden car, / In silent glory swept the fields of heaven!” (3.1-4).

reality that cannot be better described with any other word: “The theologian will describe it as ‘analogical,’ drawing our minds at once away from the subtle and sensitive exploitations of imagination and emotion with which poetry works to the clear-cut but clumsy analogies of the lecture-room.”\textsuperscript{593}

Naturally, none of what has been said is to deny the truth in Negative Theology, which states that all creatures or copies as creatures or copies are imperfect and therefore cannot fully grasp Perfection (God), for Lewis was too familiar with Edwyn Bevan’s \textit{Symbolism and Belief} and Martin Buber’s \textit{I and Thou} to deny the danger in anthropomorphism – the danger of idolatry, making God in our image;\textsuperscript{594} as Lewis said in his poem “Footnote to all Prayers”:

\begin{quotation}
He whom I bow to only knows to whom I bow

When I attempt the ineffable Name, murmuring \textit{Thou},

And dream of Pheidian fancies and embrace in heart

Symbols (I know) which cannot be the thing Thou art.

\ldots

Worshipping with frail images a folk-lore dream,

\ldots

And all men are idolators, crying unheard

To a deaf idol, if Thou take them at their word.

\ldots

Take not, oh Lord, our literal sense. Lord, in Thy great,
\end{quotation}

\textsuperscript{593} Lewis, “The Language of Religion,” 262.
\textsuperscript{594} See Edwyn Bevan, \textit{Symbolism and Belief} (1938 reprint; Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), 313-5. Despite being a book that Lewis recommended to people, \textit{Symbolism and Belief} is in many ways opposed to Lewis’s approach to myth, for Bevan believed that prosaic or scientific language is superior to poetic or metaphorical language.
Unbroken speech our limping metaphor translate.\(^{595}\)

Nevertheless, Lewis’s theory of myth suggests he felt anthropomorphism was far less a danger than agnosticism, which often results from continual abstraction and allegorization: “What a bugbear ‘anthropomorphism’ used to be! How long it repelled me from the truth! Yet now that one has submitted to it how easy is the burden, how light the yoke. Odd too, that the very things we thought proofs of our humility while we were philosophers, now turn out to be forms of pride.”\(^{596}\)

In many ways, then, myth \textit{qua} an irreducible, profoundly meaningful, concrete universal has much in common with other supra-rational phenomena such as \textit{glossolalia} (“speaking in tongues”) or the sacraments, for Myth \textit{bearing} myth along with tongues and the sacraments are all examples of “transposition,” or “the adaptation from a richer to a poorer medium.”\(^{597}\) That is, just as Myth as transposition indicates the mythical reality of God Himself descending into our imaginations, so too does sacrament as transposition point to the Real Presence of God descending in a special way into ordinary human experience. Since this connection between transposition, sacrament and Myth \textit{bearing} myth is so strong, it should not surprised us that Lewis, despite a lot of imprecision in his vocabulary, came extremely close to speaking of Myth \textit{bearing} myth as sacramental.\(^{598}\)

\(^{596}\) Lewis, \textit{The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume II}, 189 [April 24, 1936].
\(^{598}\) In \textit{The Allegory of Love}, published in 1936, Lewis equated “sacramentalism or symbolism” over and against allegory and he defined the former as “to see the archetype in the copy.” Lewis, \textit{The Allegory of Love}, 45. He then went on to give Plato’s metaphor of the Sun as a copy of the Good as an example of this. Yet later on and to his credit, Lewis tightened up his understanding of sacrament and Myth and so discontinued using symbolism as equivalent to sacrament; indeed, in his 1962 essay “Transposition,” Lewis explicitly said that sacrament is something more than symbolism: speaking about the mythical quality that transcends conventional signs, the Oxford don wrote: “If I had to name the relation I should call it not
Indeed, in one of his last books *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm*, Lewis even called the Holy Communion “magic” and defined it as “‘objective efficacy which cannot be further analysed.’” The magical element in the sacrament, like the magical element in myth, is an essential feature and one of the *differentia* of Christianity, and as such serves a unique and important purpose:

Now the value, for me, of the magical element in Christianity is this. It is a permanent witness that the heavenly realm, certainly no less than the natural universe and perhaps very much more, is a realm of objective facts – hard, determinate facts, not to be constructed *a priori*, and not to be dissolved into maxims, ideals, values, and the like. One cannot conceive a more completely ‘given,’ or, if you like, a more ‘magical,’ fact than the existence of God as *causa sui*. Therefore, just as the Stoics and others go too far in reducing all myths to allegories, and modernists go too far in eliminating anthropomorphic language for God, so too do many theologians attempt to dispense with the “magical” elements in Christianity; however, in doing so they underestimate the supra-rational:

Enlightened people want to get rid of this magical element in favour of what they would call the ‘spiritual’ element. But the spiritual, conceived as something thus antithetical to ‘magical,’ seems to become merely the psychological or ethical. And neither that by itself, nor the magical by itself, is a religion. I am not going to lay down rules as to the share – quantitatively considered – which the magical


600 Ibid.
should have in anyone’s religious life. Individual differences may be permissible.

What I insist on is that it can never be reduced to zero. If it is, what remains is
only morality, or culture, or philosophy.\textsuperscript{601}

Now in our discussion of Lewis’s Christian theory of myth, we have seen that there is
a descent of Myth from the mysterious aspect of God Himself, to the Incarnation and
finally to revelation and, to a lesser extent, pagan mythology. Yet there is still one aspect
of myth left to discuss: myth as non-revelatory literature, as popular romance or epic.

And so, as we already know from Lewis’s idealist days, his approach to myth and
literature was “a neo-Aristotelian theory of literature . . . which \textit{inter alia} . . . re-affirm[s]
the romantic doctrine of the imagination as a truth-bearing faculty, though not quite as
the romantics understood it.”\textsuperscript{602} Moreover, Lewis’s Neoaristotelian theory of the
imagination was also “a ‘Realistic’ theory . . . in the sense of Plato not of Zola.”\textsuperscript{603} This,
of course, is not to say that myth and literature are bad things because they are copies of
Reality, but rather that they, like everything else, are good things because they are
“designed” and “significant.”\textsuperscript{604} In addition to the Aristotelian and Platonic elements in
Lewis’s theory of myth \textit{qua} non-revelatory literature, the Oxford don’s theory could also
be called Tolkienian, for Lewis – no doubt softened by his Aristotelian understanding of
the deliberative imagination and Bergsonian understanding of \textit{homo faber} – largely
endorsed Tolkien’s belief that the poet or myth-maker is a “sub-creator” to God’s
“Creator;” the divine image in man, in other words, is not just man’s intellect, reason and

\textsuperscript{601} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{602} Lewis, \textit{The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III}, 1523 [June 2, 1931].
Beauty}, 75.
\textsuperscript{604} C. S. Lewis and E. M. W. Tillyard, \textit{The Personal Heresy} (1939 reprint; London: Oxford University
Press, 1965), 21. Sections of this book were previously published in \textit{Essays and Studies} (1934, 1935,
1936).
free will, but also his deliberative imagination; as Tolkien said, “We make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a maker.” Yet despite all these influences, one should probably just call Lewis’s theory of myth *qua* non-revelatory literature a Christianized Neoplatonic theory not only because his Aristotelian psychology and approach to invention was absorbed by the Neoplatonists, but also because Tolkien’s doctrine of a “sub-creator” was not a new one; indeed, it went back to the Neoplatonists themselves: “[Sidney’s] central doctrine, that the poet is a second Creator producing a second Nature, is taken from Scalinger . . . [and] behind Scalinger, as we have seen, lies Plotinus.”

Subsequently, Lewis the Neoplatonic “sub-creator” said there are six essential elements to keep in mind when writing myth: (1) Myth is “extra-literary” – this is the most important aspect as we already know; (2) myth does not depend “on such usual narrative attractions as suspense or surprise;” (3) myth does not elicit the projection of the self into the story (hence it cannot be reduced to Freud’s “fantasy”); (4) myth usually deals with the “fantastic” – something which Lewis had always believed (and which he found himself at odds with his friend Charles Williams about, for Williams was interested in romance and myth *qua* ladies, whereas Lewis was interested in myth *qua* gods); (5) myth is usually “grave” (which is why Lewis hated T. H. White’s *The King*.)

607 Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, 43.
608 Ibid.
609 Ibid., 44.
610 “But [Freud] makes it clear that we enjoy [art] as a fantasy – that reading, as well as writing, is wish-fulfillment. Indeed it is obvious that he believes all imagining or day-dreaming to be of a single kind – that in which the dreamer pretends that he is a famous man, or a millionaire, or an irresistible lady-killer, while in reality he is no such thing.” Lewis, “Psycho-Analysis and Literary Criticism,” 287.
611 Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, 44.
Sword in the Stone\textsuperscript{614} and loved Paradise Lost\textsuperscript{615}; and (6) myth is “awe-inspiring” as it has to do heavenly desire, in particular, the numinous.\textsuperscript{616}

In this way, it is not hard to see that most of Lewis’s fiction would fall under the category of myth. For example, concerning his Cosmic Trilogy, Lewis said that he “like[d] the whole interplanetary idea as a mythology.”\textsuperscript{617} Moreover, the Oxford don explicitly denied that The Chronicles of Narnia is an allegory, preferring to label it a “supposition,”\textsuperscript{618} which is a mythical story that is full of “truth” but should not be dissected in the search “for a ‘point’”\textsuperscript{619}: it is a story that says “suppose that there were a land like Narnia and that the Son of God, as He became a Man in our world, became a Lion there.”\textsuperscript{620} And finally, Lewis adamantly maintained that Till We Have Faces “isn’t allegory,” for, he insisted, “I was [just] trying to tell a story;”\textsuperscript{621} and indeed the story that Lewis was trying to tell was, interestingly, a reinterpretation of the Psyche and Cupid myth.

Now in addition to all this, we ought to keep in mind that Lewis’s theory of mythical literature was heavily influenced by Tolkien’s essay “On Fairy-Stories,” in which Tolkien listed three key elements in the Christian construction of myth and fantasy: (1) Recovery,

\textsuperscript{613} Lewis, An Experiment in Criticism, 44.
\textsuperscript{614} Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume II, 456 [December 11, 1940].
\textsuperscript{615} C. S. Lewis, A Preface to Paradise Lost (1942 reprint; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 17.
\textsuperscript{616} Lewis, An Experiment in Criticism, 44.
\textsuperscript{617} Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume II, 236 [December 28, 1938]. Cf. Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III, 87 [January 14, 1951]. Also, in the introduction to Perelandra, Lewis wrote: “This story can be read by itself but is also a sequel to Out of the Silent Planet in which some account was given of Ransom’s adventures on Mars – or, as its inhabitants call it, Malacandra. All the human characters in this book are purely fictitious and none of them is allegorical.”
\textsuperscript{618} Speaking of Narnia and Perelandra, Lewis said: “This is not an allegory at all. . . . This also works out a supposition. . . . Allegory and such supposals differ because they mix the real and the unreal in different ways.” Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III, 1004 [December 29, 1958].
\textsuperscript{619} Ibid., 388 [December 18, 1953].
\textsuperscript{621} Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III, 1090 [September 24, 1959].
which has to do with recovering “a clear view” of creation, (2) Escape, which has to do
with escaping from the prison of worldly concepts to a place which portrays the world as
it ought to be, and (3) Consolation, which has to do with happy endings on account of the
Real Happy Ending being secured by the victory of the True Myth, Christ. Lewis, of
course, agreed with Tolkien’s list, and indeed took Tolkien’s idea of recovering a clear
view of creation in myth-making to a new level when he claimed that such an activity is a
philosophical askēsis. Concerning a boy who reads fairy-tales, Lewis wrote:

Does anyone suppose that he really and prosaically longs for all the dangers and
discomforts of a fairy tale? – really wants dragons in contemporary England? It is
not so. It would be much truer to say that fairy land arouses a longing for he
knows not what. It stirs and troubles him (to his life-long enrichment) with the
dim sense of something beyond his reach and, far from dulling or emptying the
actual world, gives it a new dimension of depth. He does not despise real woods
because he has read of enchanted woods: this reading makes all real woods a little
enchanted. . . . [Now] there are two kinds of longing. The one is an askēsis, a
spiritual exercise, and the other is a disease [Freudian wish-fulfillment].

Thus, Tolkien’s “Recovery,” which Lewis the absolute idealist called “the highest form
of the spiritual life” and Lewis the Christian called “The Beatrician Experience” (in

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view, is (a) To help us to understand other people (b) To respond to, and, some of us, to produce, art. But it
has also a bad use: to provide for us, in a shadowy form, a substitute for virtues, successes, distinctions etc.
which ought to be sought outside in the real world – e.g. picturing all I’d do if I were rich instead of earning
and saving. Masturbation involves this abuse of imagination in erotic matters.” Lewis, The Collected
Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III, 759 [June 3, 1956].
624 Concerning the highest form of the spiritual life, Lewis the absolute idealist wrote: “Others feel that
what seemed dead things are charged with life, and people the hills and trees with vague personality: nor
are they wrong, for we share the life of the Spirit which knows itself alive beneath all its vesture. But all
alike know that such moments are our highest life. For their continuation would be the redemption of the
honor of Charles Williams and Dante\textsuperscript{625}, is a \textit{spiritual exercise} that fosters heavenly desire in individuals when they meditate on Myth through myth and mythmaking. The result of this meditation is that individuals – indeed, philosophers, \textit{pace} Richard Dawkins\textsuperscript{626} – bring a bit of Heaven to Earth, which in turn transforms the Earth and helps the individuals to see it as it is, as a place alive with spiritual energy and divine concern:

‘But why,’ (some ask), ‘why, if you have a serious comment to make on the real life of men, must you do it by talking about a phantasmagoric never-never land of your own?’ Because, I take it, one of the main things the author wants to say is that the real life of men is of that mythical and heroic quality. . . . Imagined beings have their insides on the outside; they are visible souls. And Man as whole, Man pitted against the universe, have we seen him at all till we see that he is like a hero in a fairy tale? In the book Eomer rashly contrasts ‘the green earth’ with ‘legends.’ Aragorn replies that the green earth itself is ‘a mighty matter of legend.’ . . . The value of myth is that it takes all the things we know and restores to them the rich significance which has been hidden by ‘the veil of familiarity.’

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{625} C. S. Lewis, \textit{Clivi Hamiltonis Summae Metaphysices Contra Anthroposophos Libri II}, 51. \textsuperscript{625} “The Beatrician experience may be defined as the recovery (in respect to one human being) of that vision of reality which would have been common to all men in respect to all things if Man had never fallen . . . The lover sees the Lady as the Adam saw all things before they foolishly chose to experience good as evil. . . . [In] the Beatrician experience . . . the glory is temporary. . . . But a transitory vision is not necessarily a vision of the transitory. . . . It has in fact been a glimpse of what is eternally real. The phenomenal Beatrice – Beatrice as she is in this fallen world – has for an instant been identical with the real Beatrice – Beatrice as she (and all things) will be seen to be, and always to have been, when we reach the throne-room at Byzantium. The precise moment at which the phenomenal Beatrice loses her identity with the real one is a repetition of the Fall, as Palomides discovers in a later poem when ‘division stretched between / The Queen’s identity and the Queen.’” C. S. Lewis, \textit{The Arthurian Torso: Containing the Posthumous Fragment of ‘The Figure of Arthur’ by Charles Williams and a Commentary on the Arthurian Poems of Charles Williams} (1948 reprint; London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 116-7.
  \item \textsuperscript{626} “Isn’t it enough to see that a garden is beautiful without having to believe that there are fairies at the bottom of it too?” Richard Dawkins, \textit{The God Delusion} (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006). While Lewis may or may not have believed in fairies, he certainly thought that because belief in the supernatural is the most rational belief, the inability to see, or attempt to see through the imagination, the supernatural was an impoverishment.
The child enjoys his cold meat (otherwise dull to him) by pretending it is buffalo, just killed with his own bow and arrow. And the child is wise. The real meat comes back to him more savoury for having been dipped in a story; you might say that only then it is the real meat. If you are tired of the landscape, look at it in a mirror. By putting bread, gold, horse, apple, or the very roads into a myth, we do not retreat from reality: we rediscover it.627

What, therefore, would Lewis and Tolkien say to the charge of escapism? How would they answer modernist intellectuals and Freudian “Jailors,” who say lovers of myth are “escapists” or “wishful-fillers?”628 How did John answer Mr. Humanist, who annoyingly asked, “Do you take me for an escapist?”629 And what could the myth-lover say to the “practical” Orual,630 the practical Uncle Andrew,631 the practical White Witch, Shasta’s practical uncle,632 the practical Nikabrik,633 the practical Busby,634 the practical Susan,635

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628 “Our Jailor (well he may) prefers / Our thoughts should keep a narrower range. / ‘The proper study of prisoners / Is prison,’ he tells us. Is it strange? / And if old freedom in our glance / Betrays itself, he calls it names / ‘Dope’ – ‘Wishful thinking’ – or ‘Romance,’ / Till tireless propaganda tames. / All but the strong whose hearts they break, / All but the few whose faith is whole. / Stone walls cannot a prison make / Half so secure as rigmarole.” C. S. Lewis, “The Prudent Jailor,” in *Poems*, by C. S. Lewis, ed. Walter Hooper (1947 poem reprint; San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1964), 77 [13-24]. Cf. “That is perhaps why people are so ready with the charge of ‘escape.’ I never fully understood it till my friend Professor Tolkien asked me the very simple question, ‘What class of men would you expect to be preoccupied with, and most hostile to, the idea of escape?’ and gave the obvious answer: jailers. The charge of Fascism is, to be sure, mere mud-slinging. Fascists, as well as Communists, are jailers; both would assure us that the proper study of prisoners is prison.” C. S. Lewis, “On Science Fiction,” in *C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection & Other Short Pieces*, ed. Lesley Walmsley (1955 essay reprint; London: HarperCollins, 2000), 456.
631 Explaining why Uncle Andrew does not hear the animals talking when everyone does, Lewis wrote: “He watched them very hard of course; but he wasn’t really interested in seeing what they were doing, only in seeing whether they were going to make a rush at him. Like the [White] Witch, he was dreadfully practical.” C. S. Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew* (1955 reprint; London: Fontana, 1985), 116.
632 Shasta’s Uncle “didn’t know what lay to the North. Neither did he care. He had a very practical mind.” Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy*, 12.
633 “And anyway,” Nikabrik continued, ‘what came of the Kings and their reign? They faded too. But it’s very different with the Witch. They say she ruled for a hundred years: a hundred years of winter. There’s power, if you like. There’s something practical.’ ‘But, heaven and earth!’ said the King, ‘haven’t we always
and the practical reader who “uses” books instead of “receiving” them?\textsuperscript{636} The answer is
simple: it is not a question of escape being good or bad in itself, so much as what a
person escapes to, for if people were made for Heaven and if myths are true copies of
heavenly Myths,\textsuperscript{637} which beckon people through heavenly desire, then the sanest man in
the world, indeed, the true philosopher, is he who practices “thoughtful wishing.”\textsuperscript{638}.

Finally, what shall we say about the stigma of ‘escapism’? . . . Now there is a
sense in which all reading whatever is an escape. . . . All such escape is from the
same thing; immediate, concrete actuality. The important question is what we
escape to. . . . Escape, then, is common to many good and bad kinds of reading.

By adding –\textit{ism} to it, we suggest, I suppose, a confirmed habit of escaping too
often, or for too long, or into the wrong things, or using escape as a substitute for
action where action is appropriate, and thus neglecting real opportunities and
evading real obligations. If so, we must judge each case on its merits. Escape is
not necessarily joined to escapism. The authors who lead us furthest into
impossible regions – Sidney, Spenser, and Morris – were men active and stirring

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{634} Lewis, \textit{That Hideous Strength}, 381.
\textsuperscript{635} Lewis spoke of “the practical Susan,” who later, in \textit{The Last Battle}, failed to enter the New Narnia
because she was too taken up with fashion and the immediate concerns of the world. Lewis, \textit{Prince Caspian}, 107.
\textsuperscript{636} Lewis, \textit{An Experiment in Criticism}, 25.
\textsuperscript{637} It probably goes without saying that Lewis really believed that even in sub-created myths, the image of
Myth is still present. In this way, he is like St. Basil, who said “honour rendered to the image passes to the
prototype,” for Lewis said that Mark in \textit{That Hideous Strength} refused to trample on, and insult, a large
 crucifix because “to insult even a carved image of such agony seemed an abominable act.” Lewis, \textit{That
much? Was not a certain sort of boy in a certain sort of home wasting his time just as badly in other ways
before they were invented? It annoys me when parents who read nothing but the newspapers themselves –
i.e. nothing but lies, libels, poppycock, propaganda, and pornography – complain of their children reading
Comics! Upon my soul I think the children’s diet is healthier than their parents’.” Lewis, \textit{The Collected
Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III}, 1178 [August 18, 1960].
\end{flushright}
in the real world. The Renaissance and our own nineteenth century, periods prolific in literary fantasy, were periods of great energy. . . . Since the charge of escapism against a very unrealistic work is sometimes varied or reinforced with that of childishness. . . . Two points need to be made. . . . Most of the great fantasies and fairy-tales were not addressed to children at all, but to everyone. . . . Secondly, if we are to use the words childish or infantile as terms of disapproval, we must make sure that they refer only to those characteristics of childhood which we become better and happier by outgrowing; not to those which every sane man would keep if he could and which some are fortunate for keeping.  

Now as we have seen throughout this chapter, myths – “gleams of celestial strength and beauty” – played an extremely important role in Lewis’s philosophical journey; initially, as we know, Lewis the narrow rationalist reduced all myths to fun, but ultimately, valueless, stories. However, overtime, Lewis’s rationalism widened, allowing him to see that certain myths reflect, and subsequently give our minds special knowledge or revelation about, God’s wider, irreducible nature; nevertheless, Lewis was no mystic, for he insisted that reason is able to declare some myths false insofar as they contradict other aspects about God, such as His moral nature, and is able to declare other myths as being potentially true reflections of God on account of various factors; thus, while the

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639 Lewis, An Experiment in Criticism, 68, 69, 70, 71. Cf. “We have had enough, once and for all, of Hedonism – the gloomy philosophy which says that Pleasure is the only good. But we have hardly yet begun what may be called Hedonics, the science or philosophy of Pleasure. . . . [The realist jailor] accuses all myth and fantasy and romance or wishful thinking: the way to silence him is to be more realist than he – to lay our ears closer to the murmur of life as it actually flows through us at every moment and to discover there all that quivering and wonder and (in a sense) infinity which the literature that he calls realistic omits. For the story which gives us the experiences most like the experiences of living is not necessarily the story whose events are most like those in a biography or a newspaper.” C. S. Lewis, “Hedonics,” in C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection & Other Short Pieces, ed. Lesley Walmsley (1945 essay reprint; London: HarperCollins, 2000), 688.

640 Lewis, Perelandra, 328.
majority of mythical images are supra-rational to the human mind (meaning that they cannot be reduced to other concepts, not that they cannot be judged to be potentially true or false), they are perfectly rational to *Logos* Himself.

In addition to all this, we also saw that Lewis viewed myth-making as an important spiritual exercise; indeed, one that the true philosopher ought not to neglect. However, it is unfortunate that despite his love of the classical and medieval philosophers and poets, Lewis did not make much conscious use of their theories of myth *qua* reflection of Myth, for his simplistic understanding of allegory caused him to differentiate too sharply in places between allegory and myth and hence he disclaimed many potential sources of agreement and support. Yet with this said, because of this potential agreement about myth *qua* reflection of Myth and because of Lewis’s explicit Christianized Neoplatonic theory of myth *qua* non-revelatory literature, the Oxford don was still largely in agreement with the classical and medieval Christian Neoplatonic tradition which he loved, and it is with this love of this tradition, that I now turn to the final chapter of this dissertation, in which I attempt to show how this general tradition played an important part in the formation of Lewis’s cultural identity as an “Old Western Man” – an identity which we should see as a summation of Lewis’s philosophical Christianity.
Chapter Five:
“Old Western Culture;” or, Lewis’s Cultural Ideal and Identity

Over the course of the last four chapters, we have seen that throughout his philosophical journey, Lewis was a man who, though constantly slipping and sliding, ultimately proved his love of Truth and dedication to understanding mythical Reality; indeed, it was because of the Oxford don’s love of Truth that he came to see that heavenly desire was more than an aesthetic experience and that many mythical instances point to supra-rational Reality. Moreover, Lewis’s rational beliefs were not merely theoretical, for out of them flowed a number of different spiritual exercises, such as prayer, chapel attendance and myth-making, all of which were set in place for the explicit purpose of putting into practice what he believed. The result of this, then, was a life that was remarkably holistic, nicely blending philosophical, literary and theological insights in what can only be called a philosophical Christianity.

Nevertheless, there is one important thing I have thus far neglected: Lewis’s general cultural ideal and identity. As we saw in chapter one, philosophy as a way of life states that every choice to follow reason and a given philosophy is a choice made in a particular cultural context. Of course to say this is not to nullify the power of reason to critique culture; in fact, the philosophical Christian is precisely the man whose mind is so awake that he can turn his rational gaze onto his own particular context. Nonetheless, one cannot deny that culture is an important factor in philosophy, for it provides the philosopher with – for better or for worse – a unique experience-set with which he has to grapple.

And Lewis was no different. He was a straight, white, middle-class, Irish, Anglican, Oxford don, who was unmarried for most of his life, traveled little, had almost no interest
in day-to-day politics, shunned technological advances, and, most importantly, was deeply steeped in classical and medieval thought throughout his entire life. However, to Lewis’s credit, he was fairly self-aware; indeed, it is for this reason that after more than fifty years of self, and cultural, analysis, he came to identify himself as “an Old Western Man.” Consequently, in this final chapter, I want to see how Lewis’s cultural situation – particularly his reading in classical and medieval philosophy, theology and literature – and his own philosophically and mythically oriented mind conceived of the idea of “Old Western Culture” and what he meant when he called himself an “Old Western Man.” Moreover, this cultural ideal and identity should be seen as a summation of Lewis’s philosophical Christianity, for all of the ideas discussed in this chapter represent Lewis’s mature Christian beliefs, the extrapolation of which is the central thrust behind this dissertation as a whole.

However, in order to even begin to engage Lewis’s cultural ideal and identity and his mature Christian beliefs, two things must be established. First, I need to demonstrate that despite the Oxford don’s romanticizing tendencies, which some people might think is at the root of his self-identification as an Old Western Man, he was historically-sensitive and valued cultural particulars. Second, I need to show that Lewis’s philosophical Christianity could account for the necessary metaphysical tools needed to discuss cultural ideals. Once these preliminary issues have been dealt with, then I will be in a position to discuss Lewis’s actual cultural ideal and identity vis-à-vis a combination of the Oxford don’s own writings and a study of the cultural movements of his day.

I: Concerning Particulars

For many with an appreciation for history, the first thing that comes to mind when they hear Lewis refer to himself as an Old Western Man is that he was a deluded, romantic prisoner to the past, for how, they ask, could the Oxford don be so historically irresponsible by speaking in such broad cultural generalizations and referring to such a problematic cultural ideal? Indeed, they insist, it is hard enough to say what an American or a Canadian is, much less a person who presumably spans a period of two thousand years dwelling in over twenty countries and speaking even more languages.

Yet while there is some truth in this reaction, it is largely unwarranted, and indeed, dispelled by the facts.

First of all, we must remember that it was not Lewis the Christian who was insensitive to the particulars of time, but rather Lewis the Stoical materialist, for it was he, like many fashionable academics in the 1920s, who exercised “chronological snobbery” towards the Middle Ages, believing that philosophy jumped from antiquity to the Enlightenment, skipping a thousand years of medieval philosophy in between; indeed, Lewis’s Greats philosophy, which was largely the product of First Humanism, emphasized just this:

At this time the name of St. Thomas was scarcely known in Oxford. His philosophy was not studied in any of the schools and he had no place in the curriculum. Even the Metaphysics of Aristotle was scarcely known to the ordinary student. In Greats the Ethics was studied but not the Metaphysics and as a result

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642 Although it is debatable, many believe that there are three distinct humanisms which developed over the years: First Humanism, which is what Lewis understood by Humanism, was associated with Erasmus during the Renaissance; Second Humanism was associated with Goethe in the eighteenth-century; and Third Humanism was associated in turn with Werner Jaeger in the nineteenth-century.
the whole of the system of philosophy which had been the foundation of the studies of medieval Oxford was practically unknown. We were still living by the light of that Renaissance humanism, to which Cicero was of more importance than St. Thomas and Descartes of more value than St. Augustine.  

Yet as we recall, Barfield showed Lewis the value of all time periods, and another friend, Jenkins, taught the Oxford don to relish the “quiddity of each thing.”

Second of all, as a trained historian and renowned medieval scholar, not to mention a lover of dialectic and a man whose favorite word was “distinguo,” Lewis constantly stressed the importance of cultural and historical particulars. For instance, in The Discarded Image, he criticized the “astonishing failure or refusal” of medieval man “to distinguish – in practice, though not always in theory – between books of different sorts;” and in Poetry and Prose in the Sixteenth Century, he reminded us that “the ancients were not ancient, nor the men of the Middle Ages middle, from their point of view;” and finally, in an unpublished essay entitled “On Bolshevism,” he reinforced the significance of difference, writing:

A Pagan contemporary of S[t]. Paul or of S[t]. Augustine must have been surprised when he first looked into Christian writings at the extent to which these authors are pre-occupied with polemics, not against Paganism, but against other

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644 Lewis, Surprised by Joy, 1359. When Lewis became a subjective idealist, he was certainly aware that Berkeley denied the existence of universals: “The greatest source of error,” wrote Lewis, summarizing Berkeley, “is the belief that the mind ‘hath a power of framing abstract ideas or notions of things.’ I find I have no such power. I can have no idea of colour, only of particular colours: no idea of Man, only of particular men.” Lewis, “The Moral Good – Its Place Among the Values,” 31. Nevertheless, as we shall see, the best evidence suggests that Lewis the subjective idealist still rejected Berkeley’s nominalism.
sects of Christianity. He would have learned with amazement that a group of
cognate movements which he had hitherto classed together was involved in
violent internal dissension. He would have realized, for the first time, the
eagerness of the orthodox teachers not only to establish their doctrine as against
prevalent philosophies of ancient civilisation but also to distinguish it and
disentangle it as clearly as possible from all those other doctrines which bore a
superficial resemblance to it. . . . It is natural for a movement to wish to be itself
and no difference is too small for men who believe that vital principles are
involved. 647

Thus, as a lover of dissimilarity, Lewis went on famously to claim that the Renaissance –
that great cultural ideal – for instance, never even occurred, saying in one place, “My
hope is to kill some popular mythology about that fabulous monster called ‘the
Renaissance,’” 648 and in another, “My line is to define the Renaissance as ‘an imaginary
entity responsible for anything a modern writer happens to approve in the Fifteenth or
Sixteenth Century.’” 649 Of course, while this claim was fairly radical for its time, it was

647 C. S. Lewis, “On Bolshevism,” in “The Moral Good – Its Place Among the Values” (Lecture notes
[1920-1925?]; The Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College), 66, 67. For some reason, “On Bolshevism”
is found, preceded by a considerable amount of poetry, at the back of the manuscript containing Lewis’s
“The Moral Good – Its Place Among the Values.” While we do not know when this essay was written, it
could have been written somewhere around 1924-1925 since that is when the other documents in the folio
were composed. We know that as late as 1939 Lewis taught his political science students about Lenin, who
this essay is about; however, internal evidence suggests that this essay was written by a neophyte, which, if
this is the case, would mean that it was likely written by Lewis when he was a student in “Greats” – thus,
somewhere between 1920-1922. Cf. “I studied history at Magdalen from 1935 to 1938. Lewis taught, not
only the students of English, but also the historians, students of political science – Aristotle to Lenin, more
or less all the way.” W. R. Fryer, “Disappointment at Cambridge?” in In Search of C. S. Lewis, ed. Stephen


Prose in the Sixteenth Century, 55.
not something wholly original, for in his edition of Chesterton’s *St. Thomas Aquinas*, Lewis underlined the following: “the Renaissance might be called the Relapse.”

As a result of all this, it ought to be apparent that Lewis felt all cultural ideals are problematic to some degree. Consequently, he recommended that people “clean the lens and remove the stain” from their modern perspectives “so that the real past can be seen better.” Naturally, the result of this *spiritual exercise* is that people can see that the real past is not something that they create – though of course it is impossible for them to completely put themselves in the shoes of their fathers – rather, the past is a mixture of things people are comfortable with and things they are uncomfortable with, things people like and things they dislike, things people value and things they disvalue. For this reason, while Lewis praised many particular qualities of the past, claiming, for instance, “I like the *Bacchae* because it’s exciting, not because it is – loathsome word! – ‘cultured,’” he was also not afraid of critiquing the past or at least past thinkers. For instance, he said that Plato’s “tittering” about pederasty was a blindness that belonged to the Greeks, and Aristotle’s concept of Magnanimity was nothing more than pride; he believed that

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650 Lewis, underlining in his edition of *St. Thomas Aquinas*, by G. K. Chesterton, 41.
652 Ibid.
654 “Those loved authors, so civilised, tolerant, humane, and enlightened, every now and then reveal that they are divided from us by a gulf. Hence the eternal, roguish tittering about pederasty in Plato or the hard pride that makes Aristotle’s *Ethics* in places almost comic.” C. S. Lewis, “The Psalms,” in *C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection & Other Short Pieces*, ed. Lesley Walmsley (1958 essay reprint; London: HarperCollins, 2000), 220. Cf. “Self-renunciation is thought to be, and indeed is, very near the core of Christian ethics. When Aristotle writes in praise of a certain kind of self-love, we may feel, despite the careful distinctions which he draws between the legitimate and the illegitimate *Philautia*, that here we strike something essentially sub-Christian [N.E. bk 9, ch. 8].” C. S. Lewis, “Two Ways with the Self,” in *C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection & Other Short Pieces*, ed. Lesley Walmsley (1940 essay reprint; London: HarperCollins, 2000), 297.
Calvin emphasized the Fall too much, and Hooker did not emphasize it enough; he thought Dante was inclined to hatred, Shakespeare to “the ethical tomfoolery of honour and revenge,” and Homer to barbarity; he insisted that the medieval model of the universe was false in its totality, and pagan mythology was not identical with Christian revelation. In other words, if one looks close enough, one finds not only that Lewis could “Enjoy” the past and delight in its quiddity, but he could also “Contemplate” it and critique its flaws.

Nevertheless, one might still claim that Lewis was culturally and historically insensitive by pointing out that the Oxford don’s writings (not to mention his readings) bespeak a romanticizing tendency to pave over cultural and historical differentia, a tendency which indicates a retreat into the past – possible as a result of his alleged defeat at the hands of Anscombe. In reply, I suggest we need to keep two things in mind.

First, Lewis never denied he was influenced by, nay, he spoke approvingly of, the medievalism and romanticized classicism of men like Morris, Spenser and Tolkien. But unlike most historians, Lewis was also philosophically and mythically inclined; consequently, as we discussed in the previous chapter, he was more than willing to provide justification for his interest in medievalism and romanticized classicism.

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656 “In reading Hooker we are reminded sometimes of Tyndale, often of Traherne’s Centuries. Sometimes a suspicion crosses our mind that the doctrine of the Fall did not loom quite large enough in his universe.” Lewis, Poetry and Prose in the Sixteenth Century, 461.
657 Concerning the flaws of Spenser, Lewis wrote: “But they must be set beside the barbarity of Homer, the hatreds of Dante, the pride of Milton – and perhaps we may add, Shakespeare’s apparently contented acquiescence in the ethical tomfoolery of honour and revenge.” Lewis, The Allegory of Love, 357.
658 Lewis, The Discarded Image, 216.
That is, Lewis said that history is valuable not only for its assistance in avoiding the mistakes of the past and contextualizing the Spirit of the Age, but also, indeed, more so, for its latent mythical qualities, which need to be recognized and then transformed by the deliberative imagination into myths and stories that point to a Reality greater than history – the truth of the mythical products of the imagination, of course, cannot always be readily known, though ultimately reason, through the totality of all the evidence, must decide whether certain myths are truer than others (something, incidentally, which Lewis did not go into as much detail as one would like); indeed, this process recognizing the mythical and then creating myths ties directly into the spiritual exercise of myth-making which we discussed in chapter four. Moreover, it also shows that Lewis agreed with Aristotle in declaring poetry, which is about universals, more philosophical than history, which merely is about particulars (though Lewis would add that the universals exhibited in poetry are concrete universals, as we have already discussed). The medievalism and classicism that Lewis incorporated in his myth-making, therefore, is not antithetical to the real history of the Middle Ages and antiquity, but rather are the mythical dust in these time periods, which only the poet – and especially the Christian poet – can see; consequently, to desire the abolition of medievalism or romanticized classicism is, in

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660 Aristotle Poetics 1451b.5-7.
661 Concerning William Morris, Lewis wrote: “Still less does he understand the Christian and sacramental view of such things [love]. He is the most irreligious of all our poets – anima naturaliter pagana. . . . To see this is, of course, to see that his medievalism is a kind of accident. The real interests of the Middle Ages – Christian mysticism, Aristotelian philosophy, Courtly Love – mean nothing to him. . . . Morris chose to build up his imaginary world on hints furnished by the Middle and Dark Ages as these existed in the imagination of his own time and his own circle in particular. With that circle he doubtless shared many historical errors. But his choice was poetically right simply because that misconception of the Middle Ages (for reasons which go far back into the time of Percy and the Wartons) already existed, and existed poetically, in the public imagination. It was, and to some extent still is, part of our mythology.” C. S. Lewis, “William Morris,” in Selected Literary Essays, by C. S. Lewis, ed. Walter Hooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 223. Originally presented to the Martlets on November 5, 1937.
some small measure, to revile Reality itself.\textsuperscript{662} Speaking of his early childhood readings of Homer and making reference to the Tolkienian / Christianized Neoplatonic theory of myth, which we examined in the previous chapter, Lewis wrote:

Of course my appreciation was very romanticized – the appreciation of a boy soaked in William Morris. But this slight error saved me from that far deeper error of ‘classicism’ with which the Humanists have hoodwinked half the world. I cannot therefore deeply regret the days when I called Circe a ‘wise-wife’ and every marriage a ‘high-tide.’ That has all burned itself out and left no snuff, and I can now enjoy the \textit{Odyssey} in a maturer way. The wanderings mean as much as ever they did; the great moment of ‘eucatastrophe’ (as Professor Tolkien would call it) when Odysseus strips off his rags and bends the bow, means more.\textsuperscript{663}

Hence, it is clear Lewis had little sympathy for either “pure” historians, who, to use a contemporary example, dislike \textit{Braveheart} because the Battle of Stirling was fought in a field instead of on a bridge, or Humanists, whose classicism and love for antiquity resulted in both a hatred of anything medieval – be it historical or imaginative – and a false equivocation (\textit{a lá} Mr. Humanist\textsuperscript{664}) between heavenly desire and the desire for the halcyon days of yore: “I am,” wrote Lewis, “solidly anti-Humanist: i.e. tho[ugh] I love the classics I loathe classicism.”\textsuperscript{665} This, of course, explains Lewis’s often-questioned hostility towards “the Humanist prison”\textsuperscript{666} of men like Erasmus, who “would forbid a

\textsuperscript{662} Of course, Lewis would also agree that to desire the abolition of the true aspects of the modern world is also to revile Reality.
\textsuperscript{663} Lewis, \textit{Surprised by Joy}, 1327.
\textsuperscript{664} Lewis, \textit{The Pilgrim’s Regress}, 9, 109-14.
young prince to read ‘Arthurs and Lancelots,’” and T. S. Eliot, whose “constant profession of humanism and his claim to be a ‘classicist’ may not be consciously insincere, but they are erroneous. . . . He shows no love of any disciplined and magnanimous writer save Dante. Of Homer, Sophocles, Virgil . . . he has nothing to say.” Nevertheless, none of what has been said is to affirm that medievalism and romanticized classicism are history qua fact: they are not; and it is the duty of every historian, Lewis himself insisted, to point this out: “The real temper of those ages was not romantic. The Arthurian stories represent, perhaps, a truancy or escape from habitual concerns. . . . Characteristically, medieval man was not a dreamer nor a spiritual adventurer; he was an organizer, a codifier, a man of system.”

Second, apart from the spiritual exercise inherent in medievalism and romanticized classicism, it is unconvincing to say Lewis had an unhealthy attachment to the past – that he saw the past as a place of comfort and escape from the harsh reality of Anscombian analytic philosophy that had, for a time, un-sworded him. Lewis – at least the mature Lewis – was no such coward, for he believed that heavenly desire is a desire for Heaven, not for the earthly past. Indeed, as a careful reader of Dante, Lewis knew that in the Inferno it is the lost souls, not the saved ones, who are constantly looking to the past.

Lewis himself took this to be a profound theological and psychological truth and made it one of the themes in The Great Divorce, wherein we read of a theologian who preferred to search the temporary past for answers about God instead of embracing His Eternally

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667 Lewis, Poetry and Prose in the Sixteenth Century, 29.
Present Reality face to face in Heaven. In other words, Lewis thought that with heavenly desire and the theological virtue of hope, the Christian becomes the ultimate lover of the future (or more correctly, the Eternal Now) who, at the same time, still finds great value in the past in order to transform the present.

Thus, it ought to be clear that Lewis not only appreciated the particularities of culture and history but also was far from being an escapist in the negative sense of the word when reading and writing romanticized history. Nonetheless, I still have to show that Lewis’s philosophical Christianity could account for the necessary metaphysical tools needed to be justified in speaking of the cultural ideal “Old Western Culture.”

II: Concerning Universals

Although Lewis the subjective idealist ought to have followed Berkeley in denying the existence of universals, the Oxford don did not do so. Indeed, in his 1924 “Provisional Critique of Berkeley,” the Oxford don expressed his doubts about Berkeley’s nominalism, saying,

According to Berkeley a particular idea becomes general by being made to stand for all others ‘of the same sort.’ Now if we know that it stands not for any ideas whatsoever but for ideas ‘of the same sort,’ we must admit that there are ideas of the same sort and that we know which they are. This implies that we can perceive the (relevant) similarities between them: which must mean some common quality = a universal. Berkeley says that in geometry we have only the idea of ‘this Δ’ and we make it universal by using in the proof nothing which is peculiar to ‘this Δ.’ But, in order to do so, we must know that there are some properties of this Δ

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which we may use in the proof and others which we may not: that is, we must know that there are some properties peculiar to this ∆, and some others common to all ∆s. But these common qualities are just the universal. Berkeley’s difficulty depends on his contention that we have no ‘idea’ of a ∆ which is not particular: and by idea he means ‘picture.’ And it is certainly true that we have no ‘picture’ of Colour, Humanity or Triangularity. But, whether we can explain it or not, we must have concepts of them, for, as a matter of fact, we use them.672

From this critique, we can see that Lewis was convinced not only that universals are absolutely necessary for the explanation of such obvious universal objects as numbers and logical truths, but also for nearly673 everything else since similarity is actually (sortal) identity,674 and (sortal) identity presupposes universals, which, according to him, are those things which have existence in, and also independent of, their particular exemplifications: “Nothing except a universal can be common to different particulars. . . . We could not attend to such common elements or universals if they were not there.”675

672 “The Provisional Critique of Berkeley” is part of Lewis, “The Moral Good – Its Place Among the Values,” 37.
673 Despite having been written when Lewis just converted to idealism, Lewis’s essay “The Whole” indicates that the Oxford don was willing to admit that nominalism can explain a few things: “Now the problem which essence is introduced to answer is the problem of hypothetical judgment. Some of the uses of essence are otiose and may be disregarded. Thus for the centaur, whom I mentioned a minute or two ago, a nominalistic explanation will suffice.” Lewis, “The Whole,” 110.
674 When Lewis says that similarity is identity, he means sortal identity, not numerical identity. For instance, two numerically different trees can be similar and thus have sortal identity; or again, the Evening Star and the Morning Star are numerically identical, but are described by two different words.
675 Lewis, “The Moral Good – Its Place Among the Values,” 37. 26. It should be noted that Lewis’s realist argument for universals is primarily directed against the nominalism of Berkeley and not against any other formulation, such as Ockham’s or Buridan’s (despite being well-read in medieval literature, Lewis was poorly read in medieval scholastic philosophy). Berkeley’s nominalism is grounded in his anti-realist epistemology, which maintains that since God presents everyone with direct perceptions of particular things, there is no reason to postulate universals in terms of real things – i.e. not merely terms or concepts – independent of particular exemplifications. Lewis’s argument is that even if anti-realist epistemology is true, people still need universals to make sense of real (not merely conceptual or linguistic) similarity, for real similarity is in fact real identity, and real identity demands a real universal. While Lewis’s argument could be directed against other forms of nominalism, it would have to address objections other than those Berkeley raised. For instance, Ockham’s nominalism is grounded in the belief that universals are not only
That is, the Oxford don believed that when we speak of metaphysical participation or unity-in-likeness, it follows that this unity must be a real, ontological unity and not merely a linguistic or conceptual one; for example, while Peter and Paul are two particular men, they are also identical, and not merely similar, to each other qua their natures as men: if this were not the case, Lewis the Platonist felt, then we would not be able to recognize the nature of each man as a man (and hence be “left with a chaos of absolutely unrelateable ideas”). Furthermore, the Oxford don believed that any similarity we can think, or speak, of, be it metaphor or, pace Aquinas, analogy, must have some univocity (i.e. actual identity), or else it would be impossible to speak of similarity.

Now if Lewis was justified in believing in universals, which require strong ontological commitment, a fortiori, how much more so was he justified in believing in mere generalizations, which require little ontological commitment? Yet it was not just because Lewis was justified in believing in generalizations that he made use of them, for he felt that finite minds can rarely do better than generalize when trying to understand the phenomena around them; hence, he wrote, “‘To generalize is to be an idiot,’ said Blake.

unnecessary in accounting for facts (as Berkeley believed) but also internally contradictory. That is, Ockham believed that it is contradictory to say that a given substance is at once the same (really participates in a given universal) and not the same (is not totally that universal); hence, Ockham would have said that Peter and Paul do not really share in the same nature qua Man. Although we can only speculate about what Lewis would have said to Ockham, it is likely that on top of maintaining the necessity of universals, the Oxford don would have followed a line of argument similar to that of Marilyn McCord Adams, who denies Ockhams’s claim that belief in real universals are contradictory. Marilyn McCord Adams, William Ockham, vol. 1, 2nd revised ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 31-3.

676 That is, Lewis the Christian believed both that there are transcendental or Platonic universals (i.e. the Ideas in the mind of God) and immanent or Aristotelian universals (e.g. the universal shared by the particular men Peter and Paul); however, Lewis did think that it is difficult to explain how immanent universals can exist in two different people: “It would certain[ly] be ‘convenient’ to say that universals etc subsist if one could attach any clear meaning to the word subsist? Can one?” Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III, 1351 [June 15, 1962].

677 “I will indeed confess that some desultory investigation of the problem of the Universal has left me with a certain respect for the solution . . . which Plato inclined to in the dialogues of his middle period.” Lewis, The Personal Heresy, 51.

Perhaps he went too far. But to generalize is to be a finite mind. Generalities are the lenses with which our intellects have to manage.\textsuperscript{679} Nevertheless, the Oxford don never naively maintained that generalizations – in our case, cultural generalizations – somehow reveal an essence or a universal, for he rightly thought that all cultural generalizations and ideals falsify insofar as they speak of different objects; thus, Lewis wrote, “Is there a homogeneous ‘West’? I doubt it.”\textsuperscript{680} And so keeping in mind that generalizations are helpful but imperfect, I now turn to investigate Lewis’s actual cultural ideal – Old Western Culture – and subsequently his cultural identity as an Old Western Man, who, on my reading, demonstrates the pinnacle of Lewis’s philosophical Christianity.

III: Old Western Man

In 1898, Lewis was born in Belfast, the largest city in “Ulster” or Northern Ireland. Ulster had been under English rule since it had been defeated by Elizabeth I at the end of the Nine Years War in 1603. As a result of the war, the English settled many Englishmen, Scots and Welshmen – most of whom were Protestant – in Ulster. Yet the native Ultonians, most of whom were Catholic, resented these new Protestant settlers, and so slaughtered thousands of them in revolt (an event, it must be noted, that remained strong in Ulster Protestant folk-memory even in Lewis’s day). Ethno-religious wars ensued and strongly divided many communities in Northern Ireland, but with the ascendancy of William of Orange, British and Protestant supremacy was secure in Ireland; however, even though Scottish Presbyterians became the majority in Ulster, they did not share the same political rights as Anglican Protestants, most of whom descended from English

settlers. Consequently, Ulster was torn by a twofold tension between an alliance of Catholic and Presbyterian republicans against Anglican loyalists, on the one hand, and between Catholics and Protestants, in particular, those who belonged to the Church of Ireland (Irish Anglican), on the other. The tension between the Presbyterian republicans and Anglican loyalists largely dissipated in 1801, when the Act of Union, which abolished official religious discrimination, was passed, but the tension between Catholics and Protestants (who had by then formed the Orange Order) largely remained. Indeed, in the nineteenth century, sectarian divisions hardened into the political categories of “unionist,” who were (mainly Protestant) supporters of union with Britain, and “nationalists,” who were (mostly Catholic) supporters of Irish self-government and Home Rule (though of course some unionists and some British politicians, such as the liberal Prime Minister William Gladstone, supported Irish Home Rule). During WWI, the Irish were initially exempt from fighting; however, in the midst of the war in Europe, Irish nationalists staged the Easter Rising (1916), which ultimately culminated in the Anglo-Irish War (1919-1921). The fighting largely ceased with the signing of the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty, which ended in the partition of the Irish Free States (which in 1949 became the Republic of Ireland) and Northern Ireland or six of Ulster’s nine counties, including Lewis’s Belfast and County Down.

Albert Lewis, C. S. Lewis’s father, was a Church of Ireland man, a lawyer greatly interested in politics, and a unionist, and so would have been a supporter of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), who were opposed to the Irish Republican Army (IRA). In all

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likelihood, Albert’s unionism is what eventually softened him to the idea of sending his two young sons, Warren and Clive (C. S. Lewis), to boarding schools in England.

As for C. S. Lewis, he supported Home Rule (like his grandmother Hamilton⁶⁸³), and probably never became a unionist like his father.⁶⁸⁴ Indeed, the younger Lewis never spoke well of British colonialism, for he loved the particularity of each particular nation – in this case, Ireland – so much. Yet despite Lewis’s Irish identity, he was not patriotic when that meant mixing religion and politics as the Orange Order did: “We have learned from the political sphere that committees of public safety, witch-hunters, Ku Klux Klans, Orangemen, Macarthyites *et hoc genus omne* can become dangers as great as those they were formed to combat.”⁶⁸⁵ Furthermore, although Lewis’s affection for Ulster never ceased, he spent most of his life in England, first as a student and later as a professor, and so became deeply attached to the English way of life, particularly as was found in the university towns of Oxford and Cambridge: “Hitherto there has always been something not so much in the landscape as in every single visual impression (say a cloud, a robin, or a ditch) in Ireland, which I lacked in England: something for which homeliness is an inadequate word. This something I find I am now getting in England – the feeling of connectedness, of being part of it.”⁶⁸⁶ I suggest that these loyalties and loves formed in Lewis a dual identity, which is certainly what caused him to define Heaven as “Oxford lifted and placed in the middle of the County Down.”⁶⁸⁷ Given this, it is small wonder that Lewis’s Irish identity is so little-known among his readers; indeed, many share the

⁶⁸⁵ Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, 127.
sentiments of the Irish Nobel Prize Winner Seamus Heaney when he said he thinks of Lewis as “unlocalized.” Thus, although far from being a complete explanation of the Oxford don’s practice of speaking broadly about western culture, it seems likely that the national ecumenism of Lewis’s later years had at least a small part to play in his subsequent belief that there is a general unity called Old Western Culture:

Here I must indulge my love of preaching by warning you [Arthur Greeves] not to get too much bound up in a cult. Between your other penchant . . . and the Irish school you might get into a sort of little by-way of the intellectual world, off the main track and lose yourself there. Remember that the great minds, Milton, Scott, Mozart and so on, are always sane before all and keep in the broad highway of thought and feel what can be felt by all men, not only a few. . . . It is partly through this feeling that I have not begun by sending my M. S. [of *Spirits in Bondage*] to Maunsels [i.e. an Irish publisher].

Now using “*De Descriptione Temporum*” and “Modern Man and His Categories of Thought” as a very rough guide, I have assembled eight elements which partly constitute Lewis’s cultural ideal of an Old Western Man: (1) an Old Western Man identifies with western culture, which is to say that he is a person who relates to the conglomerate that is Judaic, European Pagan, Christian thought, though, of course, Judaic thought obviously has its roots in Asia and even European paganism has been influenced by Egypt and the Middle East; (2) an Old Western Man is either a pre-Christian or a Christian, but not a post-Christian; (3) it follows, then, that an Old Western Man, though called “old,” does not suggest only dead Europeans; rather, it indicates the person described in (1) of any

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time period – past, present or future – who happens to identify with the culture we are now defining; (4) an Old Western Man is one who respects tradition and history; (5) consequently, an Old Western Man, while he may believe in teleology and even biological evolution, rejects the grand evolutionary myth of progress in the form of such theories as Hegelian historicism or Darwinianism; (6) one of the key elements in tradition and history that an Old Western Man endorses is a hierarchical, not an egalitarian, conception of existence in some form or another (politically, ecclesiastically and / or socially); (7) an Old Western Man, as a lover of Nature, does not overvalue or worship technology and machinery; and (8) yet, an Old Western Man neither doubts the power of reason to apprehend objective Truth nor is skeptical of objective values in ethics and aesthetics.

Subsequently, with Lewis’s general understanding of an Old Western Man and Old Western Culture in place, I now turn to investigate each particular component of this ideal. However, it should be remembered that my intention herein is not exhaustively to examine and critique Lewis’s views on all the issues that arise; rather, it is to provide the reader with a basic understanding of the Oxford don’s cultural ideal and identity vis-à-vis the culture of his day and his writings – particularly his writings having to do with classical and medieval philosophy, literature and theology.

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According to Lewis – the Irish Oxonian – an Old Western Man is a man or woman of western, not eastern, culture. Lewis seemed to identify this largely with European culture (be it in Ireland, England etc.), which is in many ways the product of religious thought: it
is a European pagan-Christian synthesis wherein the paganism, as we discussed in the previous chapter, prefigured, or anticipated *a lā* Plato or Virgil, the advent of Christianity. This, of course, is not to deny that the same phenomena happened in Africa or the East when Christianity replaced paganism in many countries such as Kenya or Korea, but only to say that this was a phenomenon especially close to Europe. Nevertheless, it must be added that European culture is fairly opaque since it has been greatly influenced by the culture of the Middle East (e.g. Judaic and Egyptian religion, Babylonian astronomy, Arabic numbers and philosophical commentaries etc.). Now, precisely because Lewis *chose* to identify himself with European culture, which has often been slow to recognize the influence of other continents and races, some critics have wondered whether or not he was (1) a racist and (2) a reviler of non-European culture.

As for (1) – whether or not Lewis was a racist – Wesley Kort argues that “racism appears in [Lewis’s] work. The most troubling instance is his depiction of the evil Calormenes in *The Last Battle* in terms consistent with the longstanding English disdain toward darker-skinned Mediterranean peoples. Lewis seems unaware of his racism, and it is particularly troubling that it appears in one of the Narnia Chronicles.”690 While Kort’s assertion is clearly representative of the first impression of many casual readers of Lewis, it is both unscholarly and erroneous.

That is, the Calormenes in *The Chronicles of Narnia* are always contrasted with the Narnians, *not* because of their skin colour, but because of their religion: skin colour, in other words, is *accidental* to physical location wherein there is a specific religion.

Flowing from his deep attachment to medieval Christian Europe, which saw the West as the land of Christianity and the East as the land of infidels, Lewis made the medievalish

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Calormenes the symbolic enemies of the true faith, which is represented by the medievalish Narnians; hence, for Lewis the medieval scholar (and one who lived during the re-conquest of the Holy Land\(^{691}\)), the parallel would have been between the European Christians and the Middle Eastern Muslims (this also explains the title of chapter nine in *That Hideous Strength*, “The Saracen’s Head”),\(^{692}\) indeed, Islam was always seen as the perfect anti-Christian symbol, not only because Muslims attacked Christian lands (a fact that sparked wars which, admittedly, were not simply religiously motivated), but mostly because they, perhaps more than anyone else, denied the central teaching of Christianity: the divinity of Christ. Lewis’s comments on Charles Williams’s Arthurian poems drive this home:

Islam was for Williams the symbol (as it is certainly the greatest historical expression) of something which is eternally the opposite of Sarras and Carbonek. Islam denies the Incarnation. . . . It stands for all religions that are afraid of matter and afraid of mystery, for all misplaced reverences and misplaced purities that repudiate the body and shrink back from the glowing materialism of the Grail.\(^{693}\)

Nevertheless, even in regard to the Crusades Lewis spoke of them in a mixed voice, blaming *both* the Turks and the Norman barbarians for destroying Byzantium.\(^{694}\)

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\(^{691}\) On November 5, 1914, the British declared war on the Ottoman Empire as the result of the Ottoman Turks siding with the Germans in WWI. The Turks responded to the British declaration of war by declaring a military jihad. On December 11, 1917, General Edmund Allenby conquered Jerusalem and most of the Holy Land.

\(^{692}\) That the Calormenes represent Islam in a very general sense is seen not only by comments about their unbelief, their skin colour and their historical hatred of Narnia, but also by their poetry, for just as Europeans have been taken with romance, Middle Easterners have been taken with short maxims and proverbs; as the servant of the Calormene Tisroc says in *The Horse and His Boy*: “For the gods have withheld from the barbarians the light of discretion, as that their poetry is not, like ours, full of choice apothegms and useful maxims, but is all of love and war.” Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy*, 101.

\(^{693}\) Lewis, *The Arthurian Torso*, 124-5. Needless to say, Lewis’s commentary on William’s poem should be taken as pointing to a general truth and not as making a universal statement, for the mystical literature of Sufism often speaks mysteriously about the unity of material creation and God.

Moreover, since Aslan’s Land or Paradise is actually located in the East, not the West, and Narnia herself is in the North, not the West (though admittedly in medieval Spain the North represented Christianity, while the South represented Islam), these locations were surely intentional for the symbolically-minded Oxford don, possibly because he was trying to avoid the false representation of the West as perfectly good and the East (which contains the Holy Land) and elsewhere as perfectly bad. On top of this, it is clear that race was not the issue in Narnia since it is in *The Last Battle*, the very book that Kort calls racist, in which Lewis actually has a dark-skinned Calormene who *denied* Aslan enter the New Narnia because the Calormene, Emeth, which is Hebrew for “truth,” was faithful and true to the only god he knew and such faithfulness and devotion could only be offered to the source of all Faithfulness and Truth, Aslan. Thus, the dark-skinned Calormene is saved despite rejecting Aslan *per se*, which clearly shows not only that the Oxford don was far from being a clear-cut proponent of the “demonisation of Islam,” as one critic put, but also he was not being racist in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. And if this is not enough, we know from Lewis’s letters that he hated Nazi race theory and was actually invited by philosopher John Orth Riedl to attend the Nürnberg trials to help the High Commission in its reorientation work. Moreover, he expressed outrage toward the racism a certain Chinese woman faced in the United States, saying: “I’m shocked to

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696 Of course, one could argue that the symbolic importance of the East is precisely an intrinsic part of Western ethno-centrism, and so Lewis was not really being fair-minded in placing Aslan’s Land in the East; however, I am not sure why we cannot say that the recognition of the Holy Land in the East (or the Center, as they would have said) is precisely a western recognition of the good inherent in the East.


698 Although Lewis believed Islam to be the perfect anti-Christian symbol, he was far from rejecting any positive value in Islam, much less exercising total “demonisation of Islam,” as Andrew Blake believes the Oxford don did. Andrew Blake, “Of More than Academic Interest: C. S. Lewis and the Golden Age,” in *Behind the Veil of Familiarity: C. S. Lewis (1898-1998)*, ed. Margarita Carretero González and Encarnación Hidalgo Tenorio, 47-60 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2001), 51.

find that a shop wouldn’t serve a Chinese. But I have long known that the talk about
Brotherhood, wherever it occurs, in America or here, is hypocrisy. Or rather, the man
who talks it means ‘I have no superiors’: he does not mean ‘I have no inferiors.’ How
loathsome it all is!”

Finally, had Kort done his homework, he would have come across Lewis’s point-blank rejection of racism, where he wrote, “I am very glad they should get
over the colour bar.”

Yet, if Lewis was not a racist, was he not, some may press, (2): a reviler of non-
European culture, in particular, the East? This is a more complicated question than the
question of racism. Chronologically speaking, it seems undeniable that if the early Lewis
did not dislike the East, he, as a typical early twentieth-century Oxonian, had few good
things to say about. Indeed, on his Scholarship Examination to enter Malvern College,
Lewis chose, out of three possible topics, to write on “West is West, and East is East, and
never the twain shall meet;” moreover, not only did eastern things not suit him, as is
demonstrated by his comments about Buddhism upon reading *The Gospel of Buddha
According to the Old Records* (i.e. in 1921, the atheistic Lewis spoke of atheistic

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702 A sense ranging from mere discomfort with “the other” to blatant racism dominated Oxford and Lewis’s
own college, Magdalen, in the early nineteenth-century: “College harmony was threatened by nationality as
well as by social status. Between the wars 6 per cent of junior members came from the Commonwealth and
5 per cent from elsewhere overseas. Some colleges rejected Indians or wanted them assigned a college of
their own. . . . President Gordon in 1934, warding off the possibility of an Indian applicant to Magdalen,
told a Harrow schoolmaster in confidence that ‘the College is very English in its atmosphere, and, with the
best will in the world, seems unable to absorb anything quite so foreign.” Brian Harrison, “College Life,
1918-1939,” in *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume VIII; The Twentieth Century*, ed. Brian
703 Colin Duriez, *The C. S. Lewis Chronicles: The Indispensable Biography of the Creator of Narnia Full of
Little-Known Facts, Events and Miscellany* (New York: BlueBridge, 2005), 46.
Buddhism’s “inferiority to Christianity”\(^\text{704}\), but Lewis, even as a Christian, entertained the idea that the East was more severely fallen than the West:

I have played with the idea that Christianity was never intended for Asia – even that Buddha is the form in which Christ appears to the Eastern mind. But I don’t think this will really work. When I have tried to rule out all my prejudices I still can’t help thinking that the Christian world is (partially) ‘saved’ in a sense in which the East is not. We may be hypocrites, but there is a sort of unashamed and reigning iniquity of temple prostitution and infanticide and torture and political corruption and obscene imagination in the East, which really does suggest that they are off the rails – that some necessary part of the human machine, restored to us, is still missing with them.\(^\text{705}\)

Of course, this need not necessitate a strong distaste for eastern culture so much as an assertion of the inadequacy of their religions; indeed, Buddhism’s Nirvana, which is the absence of individuality and therefore of all desires, is precisely the opposite of Christianity’s Heaven, wherein a person attains real individuality and the overflowing of Joy; this difference, Lewis believed, was “at the bottom irreconcilable.”\(^\text{706}\) Moreover, Hinduism, as Lewis understood it from his friend Dom Bede Griffiths, the Bhaghavad Gita,\(^\text{707}\) and other sources, is not so much sub-Christian, as traditional European


\(^{705}\) Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume II*, 70 [April 8, 1932].

\(^{706}\) “The gulf between the Christian ideal of love, and the ideals of Buddha, Schopenhauer and Tolstoi, which means the destruction of the individual, is at the bottom irreconcilable.” C. S. Lewis, underlining in his edition of *Studies of Political Thought from Gerson to Grotius 1414-1625*, by John Neville Figgis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923; Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College), 81.

\(^{707}\) Although we do not know if Lewis read any Hindu scriptures, he favorably alluded to one in his Great War documents: “No doubt a man may make both yielding and repentance too easy by reflecting that his action will in any case ‘produce good.’ But this comes from a false moral philosophy which placed the
paganism was (which Lewis was fond of), so much as a purely natural religion: “i.e. [Hinduism] displays the natural trend of the speculative intellect sibi relictus [‘left to itself’] – the line it will always follow when it escapes savagery and does not receive Grace.”\footnote{Lewis, \textit{The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume II}, 771 [April 15, 1947].} Furthermore, as a purely natural religion, Lewis thought Hinduism is “far further from the true Faith than the semi-barbarous pagan religions” of Europe,\footnote{Ibid., 770 [April 15, 1947].} not only because it is far harder for a Hindu to convert to Christianity than a European pagan, but also because the relationship between God and man in Hinduism\footnote{“For my own part, I have sometimes told my audience that the only two things really worth considering are Christianity and Hinduism. (Islam is only the greatest of the Christian heresies, Buddhism only the greatest of the Hindu heresies. Real Paganism is dead. All that was best in Judaism and Platonism survives in Christianity).” C. S. Lewis, “Christian Apologetics,” in \textit{C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection & Other Short Pieces} (1945 essay reprint; London: HarperCollins, 2000), 158. Cf. Lewis, \textit{The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume II}, 225 [April 29, 1938], 770 [April 15, 1947].} is precisely the \textit{opposite} of the relationship between God and man in Christianity:

I even feel that the kind of union (with God) wh[ich] [the Hindus] are seeking is precisely the opposite to that which He intends for us. We all once existed potentially in Him and in that sense were not other than He. And even now inorganic matter has a sort of unity with Him that we lack. To what end was creation except to separate us in order that we may be reunited to Him in that unity of love wh[ich] is utterly different from mere numerical unity and indeed presupposes that lover & beloved be distinct? . . . Thus the whole Indian aim seems to me to be \textit{backward} towards a sort of unity wh[ich] God deliberately rejected and not onward to the true one. If mere unity (as to union) is the aim all Creation seems otiose.\footnote{Lewis, \textit{The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume II}, 880 [September 27, 1948].}
Eastern religions, then, were understood by Lewis to be something largely (though not completely) incompatible with Christianity.

Now even if we grant that some of Lewis’s comments about the East were written informally in letters to friends, it seems to me indisputable that Lewis demonstrated some prejudice for the West that degraded the East, for the West and its religions were not totally free of the atrocities he attributed to the East, and it is hard to imagine how Lewis failed to appreciate the introspection of Hinduism or the ethics of Buddhism, both of which are surely pre-Christian in at least some sense. However, I suspect that part of the reason why he spoke so strongly against eastern religions is not only because his friend Dom Bede Griffiths was greatly attracted to Hinduism and Lewis wanted to keep his friend on the correct path, but also because Lewis himself had come through pantheism qua absolute idealism and was particularly aware of its flaws; indeed, one of Lewis’s favorite idealists, Bradley, had been influenced by Hinduism and it is possible to see this influence transferred to Lewis’s fiction, for the worldly, appearances-minded Orual in Till We Have Faces, who is also called “Maia,” is likely a representation of the Hindu “Maya” or “Appearances.”

Thus, while Lewis certainly deserves some chastisement in regard to his view of eastern religions, it must be pointed out that he actually valued some eastern philosophy, in particular The Analects of Confucius and certain elements of Taoist philosophy (not to mention some of the proverbs and allegorized myths of Egypt and Mesopotamia);

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712 Lewis, Till We Have Faces, 888. Lewis also encountered the idea of “Maya” in William James. See James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, 386.
713 There are quite a few ancient Egyptian and Babylonian proverbs mentioned in the appendix of The Abolition of Man, and, as I alluded to in the previous chapter, due largely to Frazer’s Golden Bough, Chesterton’s Everlasting Man, Apuleius’s Golden Ass, Martianus Capella’s Marriage of Mercury and Philology and Lang’s Myth, Ritual and Religion, Lewis was acquainted with Egyptian mythology, in particular, the idea of Osiris as a pagan-Christ.
indeed, already back in 1940, Lewis read about the similarity between the Tao and the Stoical / Pauline Natural Law in Gore’s *The Philosophy of the Good Life*:

Thus the traditional wisdom of China finds at the basis of all things a divine principle or law – Tao [the Way] – closely akin to what the Stoics described as Nature, to which all things in heaven and earth must conform, and to which human nature is akin; so that for man the highest knowledge is to know the Tao and the highest wisdom is to live by it. In the Chinese Classics the Rites, religious and social, of the Chinese tradition are regarded as the will of ‘Heaven,’ which is the name for the Supreme Power ruling the affairs of men as an omnipotent and omniscient righteousness.\(^{714}\)

Shortly after reading Gore’s book, Lewis went on to read *The Analects* itself and ended up using the word “Tao” instead of “Natural Law” in *The Abolition of Man*, no doubt, to demonstrate that Goodness and Truth do not belong exclusively to the West. Moreover, due largely to his semi-interest in China and her philosophy, Lewis became sensitive towards some differences with the East: “Of course we must beware of thinking of ‘the East’ as if it were homogeneous. I suppose the Indian and the Chinese *ethos* are as alien to each other as either is to us.”\(^{715}\)

What, then, should one conclude about Lewis’s attitude towards the East? Did his identity as an Old Western Man imply a hatred of the East? I believe that in his early days, this, at least implicitly, was the case. Yet, as he got older, I believe he came to see that patriotism is a mixed bag:

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I turn now to the love of one’s country. Here there is no need to labour M. de Rougemont’s maxim; we all know now that this love becomes a demon when it becomes a god. Some begin to suspect that it is never anything but a demon. But then they have to reject half the high poetry and half the heroic action our race has achieved. We cannot keep even Christ’s lament over Jerusalem. He too exhibits love for His country.\footnote{716}{C. S. Lewis, \textit{The Four Loves}, in \textit{C. S. Lewis: Selected Books [Long Edition]} (1960 reprint; London: HarperCollins, 1999), 18.}

That is, as a mature Christian, Lewis believed that patriotism is a virtue and as such, for instance, men of the West ought to “reverence the ancient Greeks;”\footnote{717}{Lewis, \textit{The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III}, 119 [May 25, 1951].} nevertheless, this patriotism is a dangerous thing and can easily turn universal truths into provincial lies. Hence, in Lewis’s early writings, such as \textit{The Pilgrim’s Regress} and “The Landing,” Lewis longed for the West (and also the North), but in his later writings, such as \textit{The Voyage of the Dawn Treader}, he longed for the East; moreover, it is with this sensitivity towards the abuse of patriotism in mind that Lewis repeatedly emphasized an admiration for the true believer of all religions, convinced that \textit{integrity} was a universal loved by God:

I believe that, in the present divided state of Christendom, those who are at the heart of each division are all closer to one another than those who are at the fringes. I would even carry this beyond the borders of Christianity: how much more one has in common with a \textit{real} Jew or Muslim than with a wretched liberalizing, occidentalised specimen of the same categories: it is perhaps the only form of ‘work for re-union’ which never does anything but good.\footnote{718}{Ibid., 249 [November 10, 1952].}
Nevertheless, Lewis believed that pagans of both the East and West are “poor dears” who need Christian revelation, which, subsequently, he believed was available to all: “Christianity is for all men, not simply for modern Western Europeans.”

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As for the second part of Lewis’s understanding of an Old Western Man – that such a person will be either a pre-Christian or Christian but not a post-Christian – most of this has already been discussed. For instance, we know Lewis felt the pagans (with their “Pictures”) and the Jews (with their “Rules”) were like “virgins” who had the right elements needed for an easy conversion to “married” life, Christianity. However, what has not yet been discussed is (1) what Lewis thought of Christians who reverted to paganism or Judaism (or any other religion for that matter) and (2) what he meant by a “post-Christian.”

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, alternative forms of religion began springing up around Europe due to the weakening of Christianity (as we will discuss shortly). In the 1850s, there was renewed interest in Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) and spiritualism, which is the practice of communicating with the dead. At the same time, Swedenborg and spiritualism...

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719 Ibid., 776 [August 3, 1956].
720 Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume II, 393 [April 18, 1940].
721 Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III, 365 [September 15, 1953]. Lewis thought that Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy* is a wonderful example of pre-Christian thought *qua* natural theology, while Boethius’s *Concerning the Faith* is a wonderful example of Christian thought *per se*: “[The Consolation of Philosophy’s] philosophy is a profoundly religious philosophy. It might be described as prolegomena to any of the great religions; it teaches the insufficiency of the world and points on the Eternal – after that the various religions can have their say as to the nature of the Eternal and the means of approaching it. We need not doubt that Boethius passed through this philosophy preliminary and reached that particular religion described in his *De Fide.*” C. S. Lewis, review of Boethius: Some Aspects of His Times and Works, by Helen Barrett, *Medium Aevum* 10, no. 1 (February 1941): 33.
occultism, in particular the Theosophical Society, headed by Madame Blavatsky (1831-1891), the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, the London branch of which was founded by A. E. Waite (1857-1942), and the Anthroposophical Society, which started as an offshoot of Theosophy by Rudolf Steiner (1862-1925), were attracting many prominent artists and writers, such as William Butler Yeats, Ezra Pound, Charles Williams and Owen Barfield. Since some of these pagans later became orthodox Christians (e.g. Charles Williams\textsuperscript{722}) and others remained at a fairly high-level of noble paganism (e.g. Yeats and Barfield), not to mention the fact that one of Lewis’s own stepsons reverted to Judaism (David Gresham\textsuperscript{723}), Lewis generally thought that even Christians who became pagans or Jews were in a better place than those who rejected all forms of the supernatural. Hence, he did not distinguish between pre-Christians (i.e. those before Christianity was known) and sub-Christians in general (i.e. those before Christianity was known and those who knew of Christianity and rejected it for paganism or some other religion). I think that Lewis’s failure to make this distinction is culturally telling, for although the Bible clearly condemns all manner of magic, witchcraft and false religion, Lewis, as a man of the early twentieth century, believed that Christianity was faced with threats far more sinister than occultism and spiritualism: modernity.

\textsuperscript{722} When Williams, Lewis’s best friend, left the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, he founded a society of Christians called “The Companions of the Co-inherence,” whose members were “enjoined to orient their lives towards their functions as members of one another; to draw together in prayer and recollections; and to live as members of the co-inherent Body of Christ.” Glen Cavaliero sees the foundation of this society as a sign of Williams’s “ultimate rejection of the exclusiveness of gnosticism and magic.” Glen Cavaliero, \textit{Charles Williams: Poet of Theology} (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 5.

Thus, if the pre-Christians – pagans and Jews (and presumably Christians who reverted back to paganism, Judaism etc.) – are like virgins, and Christians are like married women, then the post-Christians are like “widows,” 724 “divorcees,” 725 or “adulteresses” 726 – those who have completely forsaken the good qua supernaturalism and Christianity. The post-Christian, in other words, is the modernist who hates, at least insofar as they make a claim on him, pre-Christian or Christian elements. 727 In and around Lewis’s time, the predominant post-Christians would have been philosophers like Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, whose *Communist Manifesto* (1847) maintained that religion is merely a tool the bourgeoisie use to exercise economic control over people; scientists like Charles Darwin, whose *Origin of Species* (1859) gave atheism a scientific foundation; higher critics like Ernest Renan, whose *Life of Jesus* (1861) presented Jesus completely in human terms; and psychoanalysts like Sigmund Freud, whose *Interpreting Dreams* (1899) reduced religion to merely childhood neurosis.

Now if we combine the fact that we are living in a post-Christian era with Lewis’s comment to Nathan Starr that “it is a terrible thing to live in a post-civilized world,” 728 then we get the conclusion not only that Lewis believed we are living in the most godless age in history, but also that the Oxford don’s identification with Old Western Culture is an identification with the days when pagan mythology and philosophy were treated with respect and assimilated into the greater revelation, Christianity; subsequently, Lewis’s Old Western Man is in many ways like a typical medieval man, who

727 “Would it not be equally true to say, more shortly, ‘Moderns of every kind have one characteristic in common: they hate?’ The matter deserves, perhaps, more attention than it has received.” Ibid., 1539 [November 1940].
728 Ibid., 121 [May 29, 1951].
find[s] it hard to believe that anything an old auctour has said is simply untrue. And [he] inherit[s] a very heterogeneous collection of books; Judaic, Pagan, Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoical, Primitive Christian, Patristic. . . . Obviously [his] auctours will contradict one another. . . . [Yet] all the apparent contradictions must be harmonized.729

Indeed, without a doubt this Old Western method of harmonization was intimately connected with Lewis’s Neoplatonism – with his comment that “to lose what I owe to Plato and Aristotle would be like the amputation of a limb”730 or his disagreement that there is a large gap between Plato and Aristotle731 – because of all the philosophies the western world has known, it is Christian Neoplatonism, according to Lewis, that has been able to assimilate the best elements of the pre-Christians with a unified Christian philosophy. This, however, is not to argue that Lewis believed such a philosophy is always coherent or consistent: it is only to say that he thought it the best way of philosophizing:

The last, and neo-Platonic, wave of Paganism which had gathered up into itself much from the preceding waves, Aristotelian, Platonic, Stoic, and what not, came far inland and made brackish lakes which have, perhaps, never been drained. Not all Christians at all times have detected them or admitted their existence: and among those who have done so there have always been two attitudes. There was

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731 In *Poetic Diction*, Barfield wrote: “Thus the old, instinctive consciousness of single meanings, which comes down to us as the Greek myths, is already fighting for its life by Plato’s time as the doctrine of Platonic Ideas (not ‘abstract,’ though this word is often erroneously used in English translations); Aristotle’s logic and his Categories, *as interpreted by his followers*, then tend to concentrate attention exclusively on the *abstract* universals, and so to destroy the balance.” Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, 95. To this Lewis replied: “Of course I disagree with your account of Plato and Aristotle and may have to explode it in a footnote some day.” Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III*, 1498 [January 24, 1926].
then, and is still, a Christian ‘left,’ eager to detect and anxious to banish every
Pagan element; but also a Christian ‘right’ who, like St. Augustine, could find the
doctrine of the Trinity foreshadowed in the *Platonic* *i*, or could claim
triumphantly, like Justin Martyr, ‘Whatever things have been well said by all men
belong to us Christians.’

Inevitably, this way of thinking has elicited a lot of comparison between Lewis’s
approach to history, philosophy and Christianity and that of the Neoscholastics, who
beckoned people to return to the medieval philosophy and theology of Aquinas, for “St.
Thomas,” wrote Pope Pius IX, the major figure in the revival of Neoscholasticism, “has
refuted by himself the errors of preceding times, and has provided invincible weapons for
the refutation of errors that were to be ever springing up in days to come.” Yet
surprisingly Lewis did not like Neoscholasticism (“there is no section of religious opinion
with which I feel less sympathy”), questioning the Catholic Church’s official
endorsement of it, considering it too “antagonistic to Idealism,” and viewing it as a
“fad” or “fashion” amongst intellectuals. While it is easy to understand both Lewis’s
Anglican distrust of papal recommendations and, given his philosophical journey, his
anger toward Neoscholastic anti-idealism, it is difficult to see why Lewis thought

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the character “Neo-Angular” is a Neoscholastic figure based on T. S. Eliot and Jacques Maritain. Lewis,
736 Ibid., 134 [April 4, 1934].
737 Ibid.
738 Ibid., 176 [January 8, 1936].
739 Neoscholasticism’s anti-idealism dates back to the early part of the nineteenth century, when Joseph
Kleutgen came to Scholastic philosophy: “Strongly opposed to all forms of idealism, [Kleutgen] wrote a
defence of traditional theology against it . . . For Kleutgen, what matters most is a defence of objectivity in
knowledge against idealism, and the first half of [*Die Philosophie der Vorzeit verteidigt*] is entirely
cconcerned with epistemology. His preoccupations made him see the scholastic revival in a way that many
Neoscholasticism was a fad, for while it is true that such philosophy was foreign to Oxford and “Greats” philosophy, Neoscholasticism is simply the harmonization of the past with an eye toward present-day application; indeed, when Lewis said he rejected the *philosophia perennis* of Thomism, it is hard not to see him contradicting his own approach to philosophy vis-à-vis Christian Neoplatonism. The one difference, I suppose, is that while Lewis felt his Christian Neoplatonism can be mistaken, he doubted whether the Neoscholastics would confess to error, especially if they were sanctioned by the Pope:

About Scholastics, I must have expressed myself very badly if you thought I held that one system of philosophy was as good as another or that pure reason was mutable. All I meant was that no philosophy is perfect: nor can be, since, whatever is true of Reason herself, in the human process of reasoning there is always error and even what is right, in solving one problem, always poses another. I therefore reject the idea of any real *philosophia perennis*.\(^{740}\)

Lewis, of course, was mistaken in thinking that Catholics view the *philosophia perennis* of Neoscholasticism as infallible; nevertheless, what is important is something that is quite easy to miss: Lewis’s humble regard for the limits of philosophy, for against the confident Neoscholastic Dom Bede Griffiths, Lewis, a great lover of reason, asserted: “We have no abiding city even in philosophy: all passes, except the Word.”\(^{741}\)

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\(^{740}\) Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume II*, 188 [April 24, 1936].

\(^{741}\) Ibid., 176 [January 8, 1936].
The third constituent in Lewis’s understanding of an Old Western Man states that such a man need not be one who only lived in the past. What this means is that while an Old Western Man is not a modernist, he could be a modern. In “De Descriptione Temporum,” for instance, Lewis spoke of Old Western Culture as “that whole thing, from its Greek or pre-Greek beginnings down to the day before yesterday,” which explains how Lewis qua a modern can claim to belong to this culture: “I myself belong far more to that Old Western order than to yours.” Consequently, although Lewis was influenced by some modern thinkers, such as Bradley and Freud, the elements that he took from these thinkers into his Old Western worldview were not elements that he thought incompatible with the ideal (which was largely the product of ancient and medieval thought); hence, Bradley’s understanding of freedom and Freud’s unconscious, for instance, represent, for Lewis, a proper development or growth of Old Western Culture.

In addition, while Lewis certainly can be criticized for his lack of knowledge about contemporary affairs (he hated newspapers) and modern literature (“You have no idea how many books written this century are unknown to me”), which may, incidentally, have been partly pathological (“I am conscious of a partly pathological hostility to what is fashionable, of which I think I could give the causes if it were necessary”), what I have not shown or discussed is Lewis’s firm belief that “Enjoying,” or being part of, Old Western Culture is actually an aid to understanding it.

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742 Lewis, “De Descriptione Temporum,” 12 (emphasis mine).
743 Ibid., 13.
744 Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III, 1985 [September 6, 1959]. Cf. “You pay a wholly undeserved compliment to my erudition by supposing that my debts to modern theologians might be too complicated to sort out! There are hardly any such debts at all; I am not sufficiently well read.” Ibid., 878 [October 13, 1958].
That is, love knows what love is because by Enjoying its object, love gains a knowledge that it could not gain by only Contemplating it; likewise, Lewis felt not only that he, as a self-proclaimed “dinosaur,” could be studied as a specimen of Old Western Culture, but also that he, as a genuine (Old Western) Christian, could help his readers understand, for example, Milton’s (Old Western) Christian epic Paradise Lost better:

In order to take no unfair advantage I should warn the reader that I am a Christian, and that some (by no means all) of the things which the atheist reader must ‘try to feel as if he believed’ I actually, in cold prose, do believe. But for the student of Milton my Christianity is an advantage. What would you not give to have a real, live Epicurean at your elbow while reading Lucretius?747

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The fourth part of Lewis’s understanding of an Old Western Man has to do with respect for history and tradition. This, too, has already been touched on, yet it is important to emphasize it, for as an Anglican (who were the majority at Oxford in first part of the

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747 Lewis, A Preface to Paradise Lost, 65. Cf. “It has been assumed without discussion that if you want the true account of religion you must go, not to religious people, but to anthropologists; that if you want the true account of sexual love you must go, not to lovers, but to psychologists; that if you want to understand some ‘ideology’ (such as medieval chivalry or the nineteenth-century idea of a ‘gentleman’), you must not listen to those who lived inside it, but to sociologists. . . . The people who look at things have had it all their own way; the people who look along things have simply been brow-beaten. It has even come to be taken for granted that he external account of a things somehow refutes or ‘debunks’ the account given from inside. . . . That, in fact, is the whole basis of the specifically ‘modern’ type of thought. . . . We must, on pain of idiocy, deny from the very outset the idea that looking at is, by its own nature, intrinsically truer or better than looking along. One must look both along and at everything.” Lewis, “Meditation in a Toolshed,” 608, 609.
During Lewis’s time at Oxford, the university’s formal links to the Church of England were very strong as seventeen of the sixty-nine heads of the colleges were ordained Anglican ministers. Harrison, “College Life, 1918-1939,” 82.


“You will observe that I begin with classical authors. This is a point I would press on anyone dealing with the Middle Ages, that the first essential is to read the relevant classics over and over: the key to everything – allegory, courtly love etc – is there.” Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume II, 141 [June 7, 1934].

(and therefore to a whole course of Medieval and Italian studies). That, after all, is how every educated person’s development has actually come about.

The sort of culture one can get from the 100 or 1000 Best Books read in isolation from the societies and literature that begot them seems to me like the sort of knowledge of Europe I sh[ould] get from staying at big hotels in Paris, Berlin, Rome, etc. It w[ould] be far better to know intimately one little district, going from village to village, getting to know the local politics, jokes, wines, and cheeses. Or so it seems to me.\footnote{Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III, 1082-3 [August 25, 1959]. Compare this to what Lewis wrote when he was a younger man: "I have not yet exhausted the horrors of the place. I was glad to see a book case in the lounge. All the books were uniformly bound, and I was surprised to see such unlikely tidbits as the Ethics of Aristotle and the works of the Persian epic poet Firdausi. I solved the mystery by finding out that they were a uniform series of Lubbock’s HUNDRED BEST BOOKS!!! How I abominate such culture for the many, such tastes ready made, such standardization of the brain. To substitute for the infinite wandering of the true reader through the byways of the country he discovers, a char-a-banc tour." Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume I, 581 [August 7, 1921]. As we can see from both the quotation in the body of this page and the previous quotation, Lewis – both pre-Greats and post-Greats, both pre-Christian and post-Christian – disliked the idea of the 100 Best Books.}

Second, the Oxford don advised that “after reading a new book, never . . . allow yourself another new one till you have read an old one in between;”\footnote{Lewis, “On the Reading of Old Books,” 439.} in other words, Lewis believed that the \textit{spiritual exercise} of reading old books (along with talking to wise men, traveling, partaking in rituals etc.) is one of the most useful correctives for historical ignorance and the loss of tradition:

Every age has its own outlook. It is specially good at seeing certain truths and specially liable to make certain mistakes. We all, therefore, need the books that will correct the characteristic mistakes of our own period. And that means the old
books. All contemporary writers share to some extent the contemporary outlook – even those, like myself, who seem most opposed to it.\textsuperscript{755}

Of course, being a lover of history, tradition and old books (in context) does not mean that an Old Western Man cannot critique these; on the contrary, he is one of a few who can, for he is one of a few who understands his subject matter enough to comment on it: “To study the past does indeed liberate us from the present, from the idols of our own market-place. But I think it liberates from the past too. I think no class of men are less enslaved to the past than historians. The unhistorical are usually, without knowing it, enslaved to a fairly recent past.”\textsuperscript{756}

Now in Lewis’s day, despite “progress” being the Spirit of the Age, there were many calls to return to tradition – be it literary, religious etc. Werner Jaeger’s Third Humanism \textit{(Der Dritte Humanismus)},\textsuperscript{757} Catholic “\textit{Ressourcement},”\textsuperscript{758} and Protestant interest in the Patristics (characterized by the founding of the International Conference on Patristic Studies at Oxford)\textsuperscript{759} are all examples of twentieth-century traditionalism. However,

\textsuperscript{755} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{756} Lewis, “\textit{De Descriptione Temporum},” 12.
\textsuperscript{757} Werner Jaeger (1888-1961), the founder of what is sometimes known as Third Humanism, was almost an exact contemporary of Lewis (1898-1963). Jaeger was a German classicist who helped develop what is known as the Nazi reading of Plato (i.e. Plato chiefly as a political philosopher). Yet despite Hitler’s attraction to some of Jaeger’s classical theories, Jaeger fled to American out of concern for his (second) wife, a Jewess (interestingly, Lewis’s wife was also Jewish). Jaeger’s humanism, which started in the 1920s, centered around the belief that a renewed interest in classical languages, education and culture \textit{(paideia)} would restore a decadent early twentieth-century Europe to the values of its Hellenic origins. Werner Jaeger, \textit{Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture}, vol. 1, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed., trans. Gilbert Highet (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), xxv, xxvii.
\textsuperscript{758} The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) has been understood in two differing, but not necessarily contradictory, ways. The first way has been to see Catholicism in need of “\textit{Aggiornamento}” or “updating,” which conveys the need for the Church to adjust itself to historical change and to make evangelization more effective by understanding the needs of the modern world. The second way has been to see Catholicism in need of “\textit{Ressourcement}” or “a return to the sources,” which sees Catholic reform in terms of recovering the earliest roots of the Faith by judging later developments by the criterion of authoritative early teachings, in particular, the Bible.
\textsuperscript{759} The International Conferences on Patristic Studies, which are the most important conferences having to do with Patristic revival, started to meet at four-year intervals at Oxford beginning in 1951, when Lewis
Lewis himself did not fit snugly into any of these. On the one hand, he would have agreed with Jaeger in emphasizing the importance of the classics, with the Catholic *Ressourcement*’s desire to return to the Bible and earlier sources, and with Anglican interest in Patristics. On the other hand, the Oxford don would not have been sympathetic with Jaeger’s insistence on the contemporary value of Greek political totalitarianism (which often characterized Third Humanism and sometimes linked it to Nazism), nor did he have any real interest in any of the non-Latin Fathers. And so while Lewis would have seen all of these movements as part of Old Western Culture, he would have seen them as strands different from his own.

And this is important to keep in mind, for although Lewis often spoke about tradition and its importance to Old Western Culture, he himself did not clarify how his own tradition fit into this larger cultural ideal. For instance, he did not say that his tradition in terms of classicism was that of a Renaissance humanism (e.g. *Litterae Humaniores*) which was modified by medieval literature and Romanticism; nor did he make great efforts to emphasize that his Christianity was an Anglicanism which, much like the Oxford Movement of the early part of the nineteenth century,760 made every effort to connect itself to the historical Church.

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760 The Oxford Movement was a movement in the Church of England, originating at Oxford University in 1833, which sought to link the Anglican Church more closely to the Roman Catholic Church. The Movement wished to do so because it wanted to defend the Church of England as a divine institution against the threats of liberal theology and government interference. Ultimately, the Movement culminated in the formation of Anglo-Catholicism or, as it had popularly historically been called, “High” Anglicanism, as opposed to “Low” (more Protestant) or “Broad” Anglicanism. Although Lewis shared in the Anglo-Catholic love of ritual, its wariness of liberal theology and its respect for tradition, not to mention the fact that the Oxford don was a regular contributor to the High Anglican newspaper *The Guardian*, Lewis said that he was “not especially ‘high’ nor especially ‘low’ [church],” Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 313.
And this, incidentally, is one of the reasons why Lewis the Anglican (pace Pierce,761 Derrick,762 and Hooper763) did not convert to Catholicism: he believed that Catholic doctrines like the infallibility of the papal office and the Immaculate Conception represented a disunity with Christian tradition and orthodoxy (particularly as understood by Anglicans): “By the time I had really explained my objection to certain doctrines which differentiate you [a Catholic] from us [Anglicans] (and also in my opinion from the Apostolic and even the Medieval Church), you would like me less.”764 That is, while Lewis felt that Protestants were inclined to distort tradition by stripping away whatever appears superfluous – usually meaning ritual and tradition – he felt Catholics tend to distort tradition by adding too much to it: “You see in Protestantism the Faith dying out

761 Pierce is the harshest of Lewis’s Catholic critics, for not only does he think Lewis, as an Anglican, is out of line with tradition, but he also strongly denounces Lewis’s mere Christianity as “deficient,” claiming it is “less Christian than the Church” etc. Joseph Pierce, C. S. Lewis and the Church of Rome (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 168.

762 While Derrick would agree with Pierce that Lewis’s Anglicanism is out of line with Catholic, and therefore correct, tradition, Derrick was a friend of Lewis’s and preferred to critique Lewis in a more generous way: “Why didn’t [Lewis] become a Roman Catholic?” Lewis intensely disliked any raising of that question, or of any similarly ‘denominational’ question; and having known him well, I have no doubt at all that during his lifetime, he would have disapproved most strongly of this present book.” Christopher Derrick, C. S. Lewis and the Church of Rome: A Study in Proto-Ecumenism (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981), 15-6.

763 Like Derrick, Hooper was a personal friend of, and has an enormous respect for, Lewis; nevertheless, I believe Hooper’s own conversion from Anglicanism to Catholicism caused him to misstep when he said that were Lewis alive today, he would convert to Catholicism: “One of the last papers that [Lewis] wrote was to Anglican seminarians in Cambridge. And in that well-known paper – called Fern-seed and Elephants – he points out that, if they continue to talk that sort of liberalism that they were then talking – and increasingly more now – he said that their readers and hearers would leave the Anglican church and become either atheists or Roman Catholics. I think he would probably have had to include himself in that group.” Walter Hooper, “Interview,” Crisis (July-August 1994). Hooper’s argument fails (and I say with the utmost respect for the man) not only because Lewis did not include himself among the liberal Anglicans he was addressing (and hence would not have been forced in to a false dilemma between atheism and Catholicism), but also Lewis, though he did not like to talk about it, had a distrust of the dogmatism of Rome (among other things), which accounted for his fear that his brother would convert to Catholicism when he was being treated for alcoholism by some admittedly “charming nuns.” Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume II, 790 [July 6, 1947]. And if this were not enough, Lewis himself explicitly denied having any inclination towards Rome; thus, he told a certain lady: “I believe we are very near to one another, but not because I am at all on the Rome-ward frontier of my own communion.” Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III, 249 [November 10, 1952].

764 Ibid., 106 [March 1951]. This also should answer Peter Milward, who thinks that Lewis’s neglect of the Virgin Mary is a sign that he was outside of the real Christian tradition. Peter Milward, A Challenge to C. S. Lewis (London: Associated University Presses, 1995), 62-3.
in a desert: we see in Rome the Faith smothered in a jungle.” In other words, both
Protestants and Catholics can pervert the Christian tradition, but they do so in different
ways. Ultimately, Lewis believed that an Old Western Man needs to attain a deep respect
for the past, but not, of course, one that denies his inner philosopher a healthy critique of
historical development and his own cultural milieu.

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The fifth part of Lewis’s description of an Old Western Man states that an Old Western
Man puts no faith in historicism as understood by the grand myth of evolutionary
development.

Pointing to Lewis’s essay “Historicism,” Barfield claimed that Lewis failed to
appreciate historical development and the idea of progressive revelation, the result of
which, Barfield contested, is that Lewis overemphasized the transcendence of God to the
detriment of God’s immanence. While it is easy to see how Barfield, an
Anthroposophist who believed in progressive revelation and developmentalism, could
feel that Lewis did not do these areas enough justice, I think Barfield gets Lewis wrong
since Lewis wrote some of his most admirable essays and literature – *The Chronicles of
Narnia* not the least of which – precisely about God’s immanence and His purpose in

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765 C. S. Lewis “Christian Reunion: An Anglican Speaks to Roman Catholics,” in *C. S. Lewis: Essay
Collection & Other Short Pieces*, ed. Lesley Walmsley (London: HarperCollins, 2000), 396. This essay was
probably written around 1944. Cf. “When Catholicism goes bad it becomes the world-old, world-wide
religio of amulets and holy places and priestcraft: Protestantism, in its corresponding decay, becomes a
vague mist of ethical platitudes. Catholicism is accused of being much too like all the other religions;
Protestantism of being insufficiently like a religion at all. Hence Plato, with his transcendent Forms, is the
doctor of Protestants; Aristotle, with his immanent Forms, the doctor of Catholics.” Lewis, *The Allegory of
Love*, 323.

766 Barfield, *Owen Barfield on C. S. Lewis*, 78.
Creation (think Aslan); moreover, Lewis clearly had an idea of what development should be like as we can see when he wrote the following about fairy tales:

The modern view seems to involve a false conception of growth. They accuse us of arrested development because we have not lost a taste we had in childhood. But surely arrested development consists not in refusing to lose old things but in failing to add new things? I now like hock, which I am sure I should not have liked as a child. But I still like lemon-squash. I call this growth or development because I have been enriched: where I formerly had only one pleasure, I now have two. But if I had to lose the taste for lemon-squash before I acquired the taste for hock that would not be growth but simple change. I now enjoy Tolstoy and Jane Austen and Trollope as well as fairy tales and I call that growth: if I had to lose the fairy tales in order to acquire the novelists, I would not say that I have grown but only that I had changed. A tree grows because it adds rings: a train doesn’t grow by leaving one station behind and puffing on to the next.\footnote{Lewis, “On Three Ways of Writing for Children,” 508.}

Thus, when Lewis denied Historicism – “the belief that men can, by the use of their natural powers, discover an inner meaning in the historical process”\footnote{C. S. Lewis, “Historicism,” in \textit{C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection & Other Short Pieces}, ed. Lesley Walmsley (1950 essay reprint; London: HarperCollins, 2000), 621.} – he was simply denying that we can know the meaning of all historical events, not that there is no purpose to the events or genuine development within history (we must remember Lewis loved Chesterton’s \textit{Everlasting Man}, a book about the history of Christianity \textit{qua} the history of the World). In this, Lewis agreed with Boethius, who thought that while
everything looks like Fortune from man’s perspective, from God’s perspective, everything is Providence.\textsuperscript{769}

Moreover, according to Lewis \textit{qua} Old Western Man, just because creation and history have a purpose, it does not follow that they are “growing” – as opposed to merely “changing;” indeed, the history of creation – \textit{contra} Hegelians, Marxists and Darwinians – seems to be more a matter of “New Learning and New Ignorance” than anything else,\textsuperscript{770} for while Lewis believed that the twentieth century “grew” in regard to technology and “more social conscience than there has ever been before,” he thought it merely “changed” in regard to morality, rationality, art etc.\textsuperscript{771}

Thus, even though Lewis conceded that biological life \textit{may} be evolving, he did not think that this meant that things are getting better, for “things” are not merely biological, but are also spiritual and spiritual matters entail freedom of choice, which in turn entails good and bad results; therefore, the Oxford don believed that an Old Western Man is a person who is aware of Darwin’s confession of spiritual and metaphysical ignorance – “My power to follow along a purely abstract train of thought is very limited; and therefore I could never have succeeded with metaphysics or mathematics”\textsuperscript{772} – and he resists importing a biological theory which may be true, and therefore compatible with Old Western Culture, into the spiritual or metaphysical realm: “Again, for the scientist

\textsuperscript{769} Boethius \textit{The Consolation of Philosophy} 4.4-5.
\textsuperscript{770} This is the title of the introduction to Lewis’s \textit{Poetry and Prose in the Sixteenth Century}.
\textsuperscript{771} Lewis, “Modern Man and His Categories of Thought,” 620. Cf. “Progress means not just changing, but changing for the better. . . . We all want progress. But progress means getting nearer to the place where you want to be. And if you have taken a wrong turning, then to go forward does not get you any nearer. If you are on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road; and in that case the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive man.” Lewis, \textit{Mere Christianity}, 329, 338. Cf. “I do not think that all who choose wrong roads perish; but their rescue consists in being put back on the right road. A sum can be put right: but only by going back till you find the error and working it afresh from that point, never by simply going on.” Lewis, \textit{The Great Divorce}, 1025.
Evolution is a purely biological theorem. It takes over organic life on this planet as a going concern and tries to explain certain changes within that field. It makes no cosmic statements, no metaphysical statements, no eschatological statements.”

Moreover, Lewis thought that political structures, contra Hegel and Marx, in no way demonstrate inevitable development or improvement, for such are largely made by people: creatures of mixed spiritual motives. Accordingly, while Lewis believed that an Old Western Man need not agree with the medieval philosophy of history – “The nearest we get to a widespread ‘philosophy of history’ in the Middle Ages is . . . the frequent assertion that things were once better than they are now” – Lewis thought that he should be neither a pessimist nor an optimist in regard to the history, for while such a man (in his Christian form) knows that ultimately Christ will return and save the day (hence Tolkien’s “Eucatastrophe” or mythical happy ending), until then, the world remains a varied place. As Lewis told Tolkien, “All my philosophy of history hangs upon a sentence of your own ‘Deeds were done which were not wholly in vain.’”

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The sixth component in Lewis’s portrayal of an Old Western Man is that he (or she), must acknowledge that the universe is ultimately hierarchical. From Moses to St. Paul, from Plotinus to Bernardus Silvestris, from Milton to Johnson, Old Western Men have

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always believed that all of existence is a “Chain of Being.”\textsuperscript{776} This means that everything has its proper place in an absolute ontological hierarchy, entailing, of course, that Aristotle is right when he said, “Justice means equality for equals, and inequality for unequals;”\textsuperscript{777} moreover, belief in a Great Chain of Being involves the conviction that when an individual acts justly – i.e. according to his nature and place in the hierarchy – then he will be happy:

According to this conception degrees of value are objectively present in the universe. Everything except God has some natural superior; everything except unformed matter has some natural inferior. The goodness, happiness, and dignity of every being consists in obeying its natural superior and ruling its natural inferior. When it fails in either part of this twofold task we have disease or monstrosity in the scheme of things until the peccant being is either destroyed or corrected.\textsuperscript{778}

Critics of Old Western Culture will very naturally ask if this metaphysical hierarchy entails political, social and ecclesiastical hierarchy – if democracy, feminism and anti-clericalism, in other words, are incompatible with Old Western Culture.

First, Lewis agreed with Robert Filmer that if Adam and Eve had not fallen, then “patriarchal monarchy would be the sole lawful government.”\textsuperscript{779} Democracy, as a result, would have been incompatible with Old Western Culture were people not fallen, but since people are fallen, democracy is the best political structure they have, for it minimizes the abuse that comes from absolute rulers:

\textsuperscript{776} Lewis, “Christianity and Culture,” 77.
\textsuperscript{779} Lewis, A Preface to Paradise Lost, 73-4.
I believe in political equality. But there are two opposite reasons for being a democrat. You may think all men so good that they deserve a share in the government of the commonwealth, and so wise that the commonwealth needs their advice. That is, in my opinion, the false, romantic doctrine of democracy. On the other hand, you may believe fallen men to be so wicked that not one of them can be trusted with any irresponsible power over his fellows.780

Hierarchy in politics, therefore, is a danger according to Lewis, yet two things should be kept in mind. Firstly, Lewis believed that politicians of his day, in particular those belonging to the Labour Party781 and its Welfare State,782 were concerned with “Goverture” or “government by advertisement,”783 which was largely possible thanks to the rise of public radio, television and cheap daily newspapers in the twentieth

780 Ibid., 336-7.
781 On July 22, 1901, the Taff Vale Railway Company successfully sued the trade union Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants for the costs of industrial action taken by its members. The Labour Representative Committee, which was a socialist federation formed in 1900, convinced the trade unions that the political representation of labour was now necessary. This organization later became the Labour Party. About thirty years later, on May 30, 1929, the Labour Party won its first general election. The party went on to win three more general elections during Lewis’s lifetime. Duncan Tanner, “Electing the Governors / the Governance of the Elect,” in The British Isles: 1901-1951, ed. Keith Robbins, 43-72 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 47, 50, 67-71. Of the Labour Party’s 1950 government, Lewis said to his American friend Warfield Firor: “Have you any parallel to their imbecility? All rulers lie: but did you ever meet such bad liars?” Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III, 67 [December 6, 1950].
782 In November 1942, Sir William Beveridge’s report Social Security and National Insurance gave a summary of principles aimed at banishing poverty from Britain, including a system of social security that would be operated by the government, and would come into effect at the end of WWII. Beveridge argued that the war gave Britain a unique opportunity to make revolutionary changes. Berveridge’s recommendations for the creation of a Welfare State, including the creation of the National Health Service, were implemented by Labour Prime Minster Clement Attlee after the war. Marwick, A History of the Modern British Isles, 1914-1999, 178-84. In a 1944 letter to The Society for the Prevention of Progress, Lewis humorously wrote: “While feeling I was born a member of your Society, I am nevertheless honoured to receive the outward seal of membership. I shall hope by continued orthodoxy and unremitting practice of Reaction, Obstruction, and Stagnation to give you no reason for repenting your favour.” Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume II, 613-4 [May 1944]. Later, in 1958, Lewis wrote an essay called “Willing Slaves of the Welfare State,” in which he critiqued Beveridge’s hadwork, even though he approved of the National Health Service. Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III, 914 [January 14, 1958], 1064 [July 7, 1959], 1429 [June 10, 1963].
The Oxford don thought that political elections were more about political charisma and keenness (indicated by “appeals,” “drives” and “campaigns”) than they were about justice. Naturally, Lewis thought this is contrary to Old Western Culture, for while politicians of all ages have been corrupt, the majority of those in the past (and some in the present, we must remember) were not as concerned about image, for in the past they did not fear the popular vote as much. Secondly, even in a democracy, Lewis believed that a nation such as England should not completely eliminate its symbolical monarchy, for the concept of the King is full of deep spiritual and mythical significance as it communicates to people the hierarchical nature of Reality:

We Britons should rejoice that we have contrived to reach much legal democracy (we still need more of the economic) without losing our ceremonial Monarchy. For there, right in the midst of our lives, is that which satisfies the craving for inequality, and acts as a permanent reminder that medicine is not good. Hence a man’s reaction to Monarchy is a kind of test. Monarchy can easily be ‘debunked,’ but watch the faces, and mark well the accents, of the debunkers. These are the men whose tap-root in Eden has been cut: whom no rumour of the polyphony, the dance, can reach – men to whom pebbles laid in a row are more beautiful than an arch.

Second, even in a fallen world, Lewis did not believe that feminism, the doctrine that states the sexes are equal, is true or compatible with Old Western Culture except insofar

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784 The Daily Herald, for instance, was founded on May 13, 1912, and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) was granted a Royal Charter in 1927. In addition, the first public demonstration of television was given on January 26, 1926, although TV did not become widely available until after WWII. Justin Phillips, C. S. Lewis at the BBC: Messages of Hope in the Darkness of War (London: HarperCollins, 2002), 18.


as women ought to have equal political rights in the democracies of a fallen world (hence, such rights are “legal fiction”\textsuperscript{787} or “egalitarian fiction”\textsuperscript{788}). Lewis thought that scripture’s insistence on the subordination of wives to husbands was neither a fallen teaching nor merely the product of a patriarchal culture; rather, he believed that familial hierarchy, as with ceremonial monarchy, is a \textit{mythical} representation of Reality itself. Yet we ought to keep in mind that although Lewis’s reasons for granting women political rights were different than those of the prominent feminists of his day, such as Millicent Fawcett,\textsuperscript{789} Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst,\textsuperscript{790} Emily Davison,\textsuperscript{791} and Nancy Astor,\textsuperscript{792} he was still in agreement with them about \textit{the fact} that they ought to be given the right to vote, own property and get an education. Indeed, given the extreme anti-feminist, old-boy

\textsuperscript{787} Lewis, “Priestesses in the Church?” 401.
\textsuperscript{788} Lewis, “Membership,” 337.
\textsuperscript{789} Although pinpointing an exact date is impossible, it is reasonable to see Olympia de Gouges as the first modern feminist. In 1791, she wrote \textit{A Declaration of the Rights of Women and of Female Citizens}, which argues that women are citizens as much as men – that if women have the right to go to the scaffold, then they should also have the right to go to Parliament; ironically, she was sent to the guillotine two years later. In 1792, England witnessed her first modern feminist: Mary Wollstonecraft. In her \textit{Vindication of the Rights of Woman}, she fought for the right to vote and for equal education opportunities. Wollstonecraft’s book was followed about a hundred years later by John Stuart Mill’s \textit{Subjection of Women} (1861), which argued for “complete equality in all legal, political, social and domestic relations” between men and women. John Stuart Mill, \textit{The Subjection of Women} (1861 reprint; Mineola, NY: Dover Publication, 1997), 102. This led to the first British petition for women’s suffrage (1867), which was followed in 1870 with a bill passed in Parliament that gave women limited rights to retain their property after marriage. This act was amended in 1883, giving women the right to acquire and retain any property deemed separate from that of their husbands’. However, the modern feminist movement picked up the pace in 1897, when the National Central Society for Women’s Suffrage and the Central Committee for Women’s Suffrage merged into the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). Under the leadership of its president, Millicent Fawcett, the NUWSS coordinated a range of law-abiding regional activities.

\textsuperscript{790} On October 10, 1904, the Woman’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) was founded by six women, the most famous of whom were Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst. Frustrated by the NUWSS’s lack of success in obtaining women’s rights, the WSPU became increasingly more confrontational to the point where Emmeline was eventually imprisoned. Marwick, \textit{A History of the Modern British Isles, 1914-1999}, 43-53.

\textsuperscript{791} On June 4, 1913, Emily Davidson, a WSPU suffragette, was trampled to death by the king’s horse when she threw herself in front of the animal in protest. Although this activity did little for women’s rights, on February 16, 1918, a limited number of women – only propertied women over the age of thirty – were given the historical opportunity to vote for the first time.

\textsuperscript{792} On December 1, 1919, Lady Nancy Astor became the first British MP to take her seat in the House of Parliament. In the same month, the Sex Disqualification Removal Act made it illegal for women to be excluded from most jobs, and allowed them to hold judicial office and enter the professions. Women could then become magistrates, solicitors and barristers. About ten years later, on May 7, 1928, all women over the age of twenty-one were given the right to vote on the same terms as men.
culture of both Oxford, which only began granting degrees to women in 1920,\textsuperscript{793} and Cambridge, whose Magdalene College, Lewis’s college, only started admitting women in 1988.\textsuperscript{794} Lewis could arguably be seen as a fairly generous-minded conservative, especially considering the fact that he likely tutored more female students than the average Oxonian don (i.e. relative to the female population at Oxford\textsuperscript{795}). Yet as I say, Lewis was no feminist, and his reasons for not being one were at least as much the product of deliberate philosophizing as an unthinking cultural bias – despite what most of his critics say.\textsuperscript{796}

Third, although Lewis could not be clearly identified as either a high or a low churchman, he did believe that the Church was a hierarchy and so laymen ought to practice the \textit{spiritual exercise} of proper subordination to their spiritual elders. It should be the delight of laymen, Lewis argued, to kneel when they accept the Eucharist, kiss the cross, and pray,\textsuperscript{797} and it is helpful, as Lewis himself found out through practice, to

\begin{itemize}
\item Academic halls for women were first established at Oxford in the nineteenth century, yet although women had been able to attend degree level courses, they could not receive degrees until 1920.
\item Magdalene College, Cambridge, which offered Lewis the Chair of Medieval and Renaissance Literature, was “the last college in Cambridge (as well as Oxford) to admit female students.” Peter Sager, \textit{Oxford & Cambridge: An Uncommon History} (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 296.
\item During the 1913-1914 school year, of the seventy women enrolled at Oxford, 36\% of them chose to specialize in English; this percentage would stay more or less the same despite the tenfold increase of women over the next ten years. Currie, “The Arts and Social Studies, 1914-1939,” 110. While most of the female students at Oxford were tutored by female dons in their own halls, it was not uncommon for male dons to tutor female students. Janet Howarth, “Women,” in \textit{The History of the University of Oxford: Volume VIII; The Twentieth Century}, ed. Brian Harrison, 345-76 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 346. Since Lewis was an English tutor, he would have received a higher percentage of female students for tutorials than most of the other tutors at Oxford.
\item “It delights me that there should be moments in the services of my own Church when the priest stands and I kneel.” Lewis, “Membership,” 338. Cf. Lewis, \textit{The Screwtape Letters}, 747. Although Lewis felt that
\end{itemize}
confess one’s sins to a priest, for while the priest does not forgive by his own power, he, according to grand tradition of Christianity, acts as God’s representative on Earth and thus should be respected: “I am going to make my first confession next week, wh[ich] will seem odd to you, but I wasn’t brought up to that kind of thing. It’s an odd experience. The decision to do so was one of the hardest I have ever made. . . . However, quod ubique quod ab omnibus!” The Church, supported by a mostly true tradition, is the witness to Myth and so, Lewis believed, it should demonstrate the mythical truth inherent in hierarchy, which means, for instance, that women, as subordinate to men, should not be permitted to act as priestesses (as Lewis wrote in his 1948 essay “Priestesses in the Church?” which was directed against the 1944 ordination of Li Tim Oi, who became the first Anglican priestess), for while Christ called all people to be priests in the sense that all are worthy to come before Him, only men can mythically or symbolically represent the masculinity of God’s truest nature:

One of the ends for which sex was created was to symbolize to us the hidden things of God. One of the functions of human marriage is to express the nature of the union between Christ and the Church. We have no authority to take the living and seminal figures which God has painted on the canvas of our nature and shift them about as if they were mere geometrical figures. . . . This is what common sense will call ‘mystical.’ Exactly. The Church claims to be the bearer of

all laymen benefit from the spiritual exercise of kneeling when they pray, he did not think that spiritually mature people – and people too old physically to do so – need to worry about the position of the body so long as the mind and heart are right. Lewis, Prayer: Letters to Malcolm, 234.

798 This is an abbreviation of Id teneamus, quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est (‘Let us hold on to that which has been believed everywhere, always, by everyone’). Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume II, 452 [October 24, 1940].

revelation. If that claim is false then we want not to make priestesses but to abolish priests. If it is true, then we would expect to find in the Church an element which unbelievers will call irrational and which believers will call suprarational. Subsequently, Lewis agreed with St. Paul, who said Christians should see themselves as members of differing dignity in a common body ("By members (μέλη) [St. Paul] meant what we should call organs, things essentially different from, and complementary to, one another: things differing not only in structure and function but also in dignity") and Lewis agreed with Chalcidius, a fifth-century Christian Platonist, from whom Lewis borrowed the idea that all of existence is, or ought to be, a grand celestial dance consisting of harmonious motions of justice and love:

‘It is loaded with justice as a tree bows down with fruit. All is righteousness and there is no equality. Not as stones lie side by side, but as when stones support and are supported in an arch, such is His order; rule and obedience, begetting and bearing, heat glancing down, life growing up. Blessed be He!’ . . . ‘In the plan of the Great Dance plans without number interlock, and each movement becomes in

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800 Lewis, “Membership,” 334.
801 Walter Hooper thinks that Lewis borrowed the idea of the celestial dance from Chalcidius (and not, presumably, some older source). Hooper, Companion & Guide, 531. However, Will Vaus thinks Lewis got the idea from St. Gregory of Nazianzus. Will Vaus, Mere Theology: A Guide to the Thought of C. S. Lewis (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 16. And Jaime Vidal, who does even bother trying to trace the origin of this idea, thinks it is from St. Bonaventure, Jaime Vidal, “The Ubiquitous Center in Bonaventure and Lewis with Application to The Great Dance on Perelandra,” CSL: The Bulletin of the New York C. S. Lewis Society 6, no. 5 (March 1975): 1-4. Hooper, no doubt, is correct, not only because there is neither evidence that Lewis knew St. Gregory of Nazianzus (Lewis was poorly read in the Greek Fathers) nor that he cared for Bonaventure (who certainly did not originate the idea of the Celestial Dance), but also because Lewis used the Latin name for the celestial dance – "caelestis chorea" (literally "a dance belonging to heaven") – indicating that he was more familiar with the Latin Chalcidius than the Greek St. Gregory. And of course, even more tellingly, Lewis actually linked Chalcidius and the celestial dance explicitly in many places; hence, we read: “Thus, for Chalcidius, the geocentric universe is not in the least anthropocentric. If we ask why, nevertheless, the Earth is central, he has a very unexpected answer. It is so placed in order that the celestial dance may have a centre to revolve about.” Lewis, The Discarded Image, 55. And, “In actual fact what Spenser has done is to make an image of the whole of life, a hymn to the universe that he and his contemporaries believed themselves to inhabit. . . . For the universe, as they conceived it, is a great dance or ceremony or society. It is Chalcidius’ caelestis chorea and Alanus’ cosmic city of which Earth is a suburb.” Lewis, Spenser’s Images of Life, 96.
its season the breaking into flower of the whole design to which all else had been
directed. Thus each is equally at the centre and none are there by being equals, but
some by giving place and some by receiving it, the small things by their smallness
and the great by their greatness, and all the patterns linked and looped together by
the unions of a kneeling with a sceptered love.” 802

This notion of “each . . . equally at the centre and none . . . there by being equals” is an
idea that Lewis likely got from Charles Williams, who wrote: “Hierarchic, republican, the
glory of Logres,” which Lewis took to mean: “As willed necessity is freedom, so willed
hierarchy becomes equality.” 803 That is, the only true equality in ontological or spiritual
terms is that which comes from love, the equal amount of love, for instance, that a ruler
has for his subject and a subject has for his master; it is a proportionate equality grounded
in Augustine’s definition of virtue as “properly ordered loves,” loving each according to
its place. 804 For example, a husband and wife may be equal in their love for each other,
yet it is precisely in this equal love that there is a radical hierarchy, for the husband loves
his wife by ruling her well, and the wife loves her husband by obeying him well. To
reject the equality of love which results in radical hierarchy is ultimately – and not just in
our families and at Church – to reject one of the most fundamental principles of Old
Western Culture: “Now if once the conception of Hierarchy is fully grasped, we see that
order can be destroyed in two ways: (1) By ruling or obeying natural equals, that is by

802 Lewis, Perelandra, 340-1, 343.
803 Lewis, The Arthurian Torso, 142.
804 Augustine The City of God 15.22. Cf. “We must aim at what St. Augustine (is it?) called ‘ordinate
loves.’ Our deepest concern should be for first things, and our next deepest for second things, and so on
Tyranny or Servility. (2) By failing to obey a natural superior or to rule a natural inferior – that is, by Rebellion or Remissness.”

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The seventh element in Lewis’s understanding of an Old Western man is that such a man, as a lover of Nature, will have both a healthy balance of trust in, and distrust of, technology and industry, for while technology *per se* (i.e. insofar as it is the product of reason) is not bad, its abuse has done a lot of harm, fueling, among other things, the false myth of developmentalism – in particular, the belief that everything is getting better simply because our technology has been improving.

Now Lewis’s belief that Old Western Men are those who are wary of technology and industry and the economics that drive these must be understood in its proper context. From his earliest years in Belfast watching the “unsinkable” Titanic being built to experiencing firsthand the application of technology in WWI, from reading about the Nazis’ abuse of genetics to the creation of the A-bomb, Lewis felt that the progress

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806 Lewis, “De Descriptione Temporum,” 10. Hadot distinguishes these two attitudes towards technology as “Promethean” (i.e. the belief that we should use technology to rule Nature) and “Orphic” (i.e. the belief that we should use technology to live in harmony with Nature). Hadot, *The Veil of Isis*, 97.
808 “Homer’s war was nothing akin to Lewis’s war – except in that humans died.” K. J. Gilchrist, *A Morning After War: C. S. Lewis and WWI* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 71.
809 The “science” practiced in Lewis’s *That Hideous Strength* is largely modeled on that which he heard was happening in Nazi Germany. However, the Oxford don also warned that eugenics and the abuse of genetics could easily become a reality in England and the rest of the world.
810 In December 1945, Lewis wrote the poem “On the Atomic Bomb: Metrical Experiment,” which reads:

So; you have found an engine
Of injury that angels
Might dread. The world plunges,
Shies, snorts, and curvets like a horse in danger.
of science, which began in the Enlightenment and moved through the Industrial Revolution and Second Industrial Revolution, was a movement that, left unchecked, would ultimately result in “the abolition of man.”

Lewis feared that Old Western Man’s link to Nature, which is pre-Watt, was increasingly being severed by the siren-call of power and money that came with mechanization. Moreover, the Oxford don believed that the modern industrialized West tempts people – often unintentionally,

Then comfort her with fondlings,
With kindly word and handling,
But do not believe blindly
This way or that. Both fears and hopes are swindlers.

What’s here to dread? For mortals
Both hurt and death were certain
Already; our light-hearted
Hopes from the first sentenced to final thwarting.

This marks no huge advance in
The dance of Death. His pincers
Were grim before with chances
Of cold, fire, suffocation, Ogpu, cancer.

Nor hope that his last blunder
Will end our woes by rending
Tellus herself asunder –
All gone in one bright flash like driest tinder.

As if your puny gadget
Could dodge the terrible logic
Of history! No; the tragic
Road will go on, new generations trudge it.

Narrow and long it stretches,
Wretched for one who marches
Eyes front. He never catches
A glimpse of the fields each side, the happy orchards.

811 This is the title of one of Lewis’s books.
812 Although it is impossible to say exactly when the Industrial Revolution began, Lewis saw James Watt’s creation of a new type of steam engine in 1769 as the beginning of the end for Old Western Man’s connection with Nature. Lewis, “De Descriptione Temporum,” 10. Of course, as I have already mentioned, Lewis believed that Old Western Men continued to exist after the eighteenth century, but in regard to Nature, fewer and fewer remained. Of those who did remain, Lewis identified most closely with the Romantic poets, such as Wordsworth and Blake, who were wary of the Industrial Revolution.
though Anthroposophists think otherwise\textsuperscript{813} – with its machines and miracle-cures into viewing the pastoral, non-mechanized days of old as backward and foolish:

Between Jane Austen and us, but not between her and Shakespeare, Chaucer, Alfred, Virgil, Homer, or the Pharaohs, comes the birth of the machine. This lifts us at once into a region of change far above all that we have hitherto considered.

\ldots How has it come about that we use the high emotive word ‘stagnation,’ with all its malodorous and malarial overtones, for what other ages would have called ‘permanence?’ Why does the word ‘primitive’ at once suggest to us clumsiness, inefficiency, barbarity? \ldots Why does ‘latest’ in advertisements mean ‘best?’\textsuperscript{814}

The most astounding example of this is how most moderns now perceive Adam in the Garden of Eden: from a god-like king who lived a thousand years, Adam has been reduced to a mere monkey; from the father of this world, who could see into the essence of animals and bring out their names, Adam, God’s greatest earthly creation, has been diminished to an ignorant Neanderthal.\textsuperscript{815}

To rectify this false glamorization of technology at the expense of the pastoral past (which can also be over-glamorized as we saw earlier), Lewis made the first king of Narnia, King Frank, a technologically-ignorant man, a friend of the animals (perhaps

\textsuperscript{813} Although both Lewis and Barfield agreed that the rise of “technological materialism” was a bad thing, Barfield, following Steiner, thought it was the work of “Luciferic” or “Ahrimanic powers.” Adey, C. S. Lewis’s ‘Great War’ with Owen Barfield, 29.

\textsuperscript{814} Lewis, “De Descriptione Temporum,” 10.

\textsuperscript{815} “Adam was, from the first, a man in knowledge as well as in stature. He alone of all men ‘has been in Eden, in the garden of God: he has walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire.’ He was endowed, says Athanasius, with ‘a vision of God so far-reaching that he could contemplate the eternity of the Divine Essence and the cosmic operations of His Word.’ He was ‘a heavenly being,’ according to St. Ambrose, who breathed the aether, and was accustomed to converse with God ‘face to face.’ ‘His mental powers,’ says St. Augustine, ‘surpassed those of the most brilliant philosopher as much as the speed of a bird surpasses that of a tortoise.’” Lewis, A Preface to Paradise Lost, 117. However, it should be noted that not all the Fathers believed Adam to be so august; Irenaeus, for instance, saw Our First Father as a child who needed to fall in order to grow.
partly inspired by Lewis’ reading of Henry More\(^{816}\) and a man who can “use a spade
and a plough.”\(^{817}\) Yet it is precisely because King Frank ruled well – i.e. remembered his
place in the hierarchy, obeying Aslan and governing his subjects, including Nature, well
– that he is paid such great homage in *The Last Battle*;\(^{818}\) indeed, the homage that he is
given reflects – said Lewis, speaking of *Paradise Lost* – what it would have been like for
Adam had he not fallen:

Adam would have been alive in Paradise, and to that ‘capital seat’ all generations
‘from all the ends of the Earth’ would have come periodically to do their homage
(XI, 342). To you or to me, once in a lifetime perhaps, would have fallen the
almost terrifying honour of coming at last, after long journeys and ritual
preparations and slow ceremonial approaches, into the very presence of the great
Father, Priest, and Emperor of the planet Tellus; a thing to be remembered all our
lives.\(^{819}\)

Subsequently, just as King Frank was called to be a guardian of Nature, which, of
course, entailed controlling the mad dash of technology, the natural kings and queens of
Narnia that followed him, we are told by Lewis, “saved good trees from being
unnecessarily cut down,” among other noble deeds.\(^{820}\) And just as all the kings of Narnia
imitated the first king in his respect for Nature, so too Old Western Men are called to

\(^{816}\) “I did a good deal of work on Henry More once: a beautiful man of whom it was said ‘He was often so
drunk with happiness that he had much ado to keep himself from falling down & kissing the very stones on
the path.’ He is also one of the earliest people to mention kindness to animals as a duty.” Lewis, *The

\(^{817}\) Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew*, 129.

\(^{818}\) Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 169.

\(^{819}\) Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, 118.

\(^{820}\) Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 166. Cf. Margarita Carretero-González, “Sons of Adam,
Daughters of Eve, and Children of Aslan: An Environmentalist Perspective on *The Chronicles of Narnia*,”
(Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007).
imitate pre-fallen Adam in his noble appointment as protector of God’s Earth, to be governors who are not afraid of technology and the product of reason, yet will not allow mechanization and industry to run amok.

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that Lewis himself – the romantic Oxonian – was both an animal lover (he had dogs, cats and even rabbits for most of his life) and a Nature lover; thus, he wrote letters to newspapers protesting the elimination of open-deck ships between England and Ireland, for example, and delighted in taking walks, like the Romantic poets, in the English countryside; in fact, the Oxford don enjoyed the latter so much so, that Tolkien, though not only for this reason, based the character of Treebeard – the leader of the Ents, the tree-people in The Lord of the Rings – on Lewis. And this suggests to me that there was at least some affinity between Treebeard’s attitude toward the Orc-induced genocide of trees in The Two Towers, and Lewis’s attitude toward the destruction of Nature by industrial England. Moreover, I believe that this is also connected to one further point: both Lewis and Tolkien, to return to the point I raised a moment ago, saw a strong, mythical link between the just rule of a king (people) and trees (Nature) flourishing. In Return of the King, for instance, the Tree of the King remained withered until Aragorn returned to the throne, and in The Magician’s Nephew and “Young King Cole” the wise kings planted, or became, trees that warded off evil. Finally, Lewis (though not Tolkien) felt neither an inclination to buy a car nor when

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blackouts were enforced during WWII did he feel inconvenienced without electricity or modern “necessities.”

Nevertheless, it is one thing to denounce the abuse of technology and it is another to give an account of how such an abuse came about. Lewis, following Augustine and the Christian tradition in general, believed that the Fall was the result of pride – man loving himself inordinately, loving himself above God: “This sin has been described by Saint Augustine as the result of Pride, of the movement whereby a creature (that is, an essentially dependent being whose principle of existence lies not in itself but in another) tries to set up on its own, to exist for itself.” The result of this love, Augustine said (and Lewis underlined in his edition of The City of God), is self love, not love of God: “We see then that the two cities were created by two kinds of love: the earthly city was created by self-love reaching the point of contempt for God, the Heavenly City by the love of God carried as far as contempt of self.” Fallen man, in other words, loves things in improper ways: his self-love leads to the unjust use of things around him.

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824 Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume II, 413 [May 9, 1940].
825 Of course, I am aware that not all the Fathers believed pride to be the arch sin. Irenaeus, Cyprian, Pseudo-Cyprian, Orientius and even Basil, to mention a few, believed Satan fell through envy, not pride. Neil Adkin, “Pride or Envy?” Augustiniana 34 (1984): 350. Moreover, Augustine was not even the first to formulate the theory that pride was the arch sin. Athenagoras, Origen, Athanasius, Ambrose, Jerome and Chrysostom all spoke loosely of pride being the arch sin, and there is also evidence to suggest that Homer (e.g. Achilles), Hesiod (e.g. Narcissus), Solon, Plato (e.g. “injustice”) and especially Plotinus (e.g. tolma) thought something similar. William Green, Initium Omnis Peccati Superbia: Augustine on Pride as the First Sin (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1949), 415. History speaks of “Augustinian pride” only because “Augustine,” whom we must remember started out as a Platonist, “alone seems to have been aware of the incongruity [between the Fathers] and felt the need to solve it.” Adkin, “Pride or Envy?” 350. Cf. Frank Riga, “Augustinian Pride and the Work of C. S. Lewis,” Augustinian Studies 16 (1984): 129-36. Cf. Frank Riga, “Self-Love in Augustine and C. S. Lewis,” Cithara: Essays in the Judeo-Christian Tradition 26, no.2 (May 1987): 20-30. Cf. Katherine Rogers, “Augustinian Evil in C. S. Lewis’s Perelandra,” in The Transcendent Adventure: Studies of Religion in Science Fiction/Fantasy, ed. Robert Reilly, 83-99 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985).
827 C. S. Lewis, underlining in his edition of De Civitate Dei, by Sancti Aurelii Augustini, 2 vols. (Lipsiae: in aedibus B. G. Teubneri, MCMIX; The Rare Book Collection, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), [14.28].
Subsequently, Lewis, applying Augustinian theology, saw magic during the Renaissance
as a prime example of self love, of man trying to control Nature for his own selfish end,
an end incompatible with God’s hierarchy and order. Although magic by and large left
the stage after the Renaissance, Lewis believed that the spirit behind magic – man’s
pride, his self love – was the same spirit in much of modern science and technology:
“Magic and ‘science’ are twins et pour cause, for the magician and the scientist both
stand together, and in contrast to the Christian, Stoic, or the Humanist, in so far as both
make Power their aim, believe Power to be attainable by a technique, and in the practice
of that technique are ready to defy ordinary morality.”

Not, of course, as Lewis constantly insisted, that science itself is bad, but that the desire to control and dominate
things in an improper way is wicked (hence Lewis was opposed to vivisection, and the
villains in That Hideous Strength, not to mention Uncle Andrew, are largely a group of
power-hungry, materialistic scientists willing to move vivisection to its ‘logical’
conclusion and experiment on people):

The physical sciences, good and innocent in themselves, had already, even in
Ransom’s own time, begun to be warped, had been subtly manoeuvred in a
certain direction. Despair of objective truth had been increasingly insinuated into
the scientists; indifference to it, and a concentration upon mere power had been
the result. Babble about the élan vital and flirtation with panpsychism were

829 Defending That Hideous Strength against the claim that it is “anti-science,” Lewis wrote: “That Hideous
Strength [Professor Haldane] has almost completely misunder
stood. The ‘good’ scientist is put in precisely
to show that ‘scientists’ as such are not my target” C. S. Lewis, “A Reply to Professor Haldane,” in Of This
830 C. S. Lewis, “Vivisection,” in C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection & Other Short Pieces, ed. Lesley Walmsley
831 Uncle Andrew is in many ways the archetypal evil scientist / magician. He cruelly experiments on
guinea-pigs and sees animals only as something to exploit. Lewis, The Magician’s Nephew, 26, 101.
bidding fair to restore the *Anima Mundi* of the magicians. Dreams of far future
destiny of man were dragging up from its shallow and unquiet grave the old
dream of Man as God.\(^{832}\)

One of the reasons that this movement towards science has become so perversely
prominent in the modern era is, according to Lewis (who witnessed it firsthand at
Oxford\(^{833}\)), the shift from classical education, which grounded society in Old Western
Culture,\(^{834}\) to scientific and economic education, which detaches man from the arts and
theology, which are the subjects that focus on the soul of man under God instead of on
man and his power over Nature. As Lewis said in *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, one of whose
“contentions is that the decay of our old classical learning is a contributory cause of
atheism,”\(^{835}\)

I remember that they passed Ignorantia some miles beyond her sister Superbia and
that led the pilgrims to question their Guide as to whether the Ignorance of the
Tough-minded and the Clevers would some day be cured. He said there was less
chance of that now than there had ever been: for till recently the Northern people

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\(^{832}\) Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, 560. In his review of *That Hideous Strength*, George Orwell spoke truly
of Lewis’s “horror of modern machine civilization.” George Orwell, “The Scientist Takes Over,” review of

\(^{833}\) When Lewis started studying at Oxford, Greek and Latin were mandatory for all students. However,
“From 1900 onward the Headmasters’ Conference fought an increasingly bitter battle over compulsory
Greek against a well organized Greek Defence Committee which was only finally defeated in Congregation
in March 1920.” Currie, “The Arts and Social Studies, 1914-1939,” 111. Moreover, coinciding with the
defeat of mandatory Greek was the rise of a “new modern-side Greats,” which focused on “the study of the
foundations of nineteenth-century and present-day civilization in its three branches of philosophy, science
and political economic and social development.” Ibid., 112. The advent of the new “Greats” slowly
reduced the prestige of the old “Greats” (i.e. *Litterae Humaniores*), which meant that Greek and Latin
literature, history and philosophy became more and more specialized disciplines instead of providing a
broad understanding of the essentials of Old Western Culture. Finally, in 1960, compulsory Latin for
scientists was eliminated all together. Jose Harris, “The Arts and Social Sciences, 1939-1970,” in *The
History of the University of Oxford: Volume VIII; The Twentieth Century*, ed. Brian Harrison, 217-50

\(^{834}\) Lewis, “Modern Man and His Categories of Thought,” 617.

\(^{835}\) Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume II*, 93 [December 17, 1932].
had been made to learn the language of Pagus ‘and that meant,’ said the Guide, ‘that at least they started no further from the light than the old Pagans themselves and had therefore the chance to come at last to Mother Kirk. But now they are cutting themselves off even from that roundabout route.’ . . . Their slaves are escaping further north and becoming dwarfs, and therefore the masters are turning all their attention to machinery, by which they hope to be able to lead their old life without slaves. And this seems to them so important that they are suppressing every kind of knowledge except mechanical knowledge.836

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The eighth and final component in Lewis’s understanding of an Old Western Man is that such a man will neither be skeptical of the power of reason nor distrustful of objective values in ethics and the arts.

To begin with, we must remember that one of Lewis’s most cherished beliefs is that people should not submit to anything against their better judgment. In Lewis’s own case, this did not mean that he thought everything in Christianity, for instance, can be verified with Cartesian certainty a lá logical positivism; rather, it meant that he believed in Christianity because he thought it the most probable religion. Thus, Lewis maintained that this attitude – this trust in reason – is the one that best represents the wisdom of Old Western Culture, for it avoids two opposing dangers.

836 Lewis, The Pilgrim’s Regress, 207.
The first danger in regard to reason is that of “those plaguey philosophers whom we call Logical Positivists.” These were one of the early schools of modern analytic philosophy, and their claim was grounded in a radical empiricism and focus on linguistic meaning, asserting that nothing should be believed or accepted without verification; thus, for instance, they claimed metaphysical and theological assertions should not be believed since they cannot be verified in the manner of scientific inquiry. Although it is undeniable that Lewis felt somewhat intimidated by the jargon of “these modern linguistic birds,” he could not see why the principle of verification should be accepted. Yet, as a product of the Spirit of the Age, this principle loomed large, and it was not until after Lewis’s death that this principle was finally exposed for the sham that it was. Nevertheless, there is indication, even as far back as The Allegory of Love, that, following Etienne Gilson, Lewis believed the scientific, anti-metaphysical mindset of logical positivism (not to mention, behaviorism) could be traced back through various elements in the Enlightenment to Aquinas’s rather innocent separation of faith and reason:

In dealing with the Middle Ages we are often tricked by our imagination. We think of plate armour and Aristotelianism. But the end of the Middle Ages is already in sight when these attractive things appear. And just as the lobster shell

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841 “Of scholastic philosophy and theology you probably know much more than I do. If by any chance you don’t, stick to Gilson as a guide and beware of the people (Maritain in your Church, and T. S. Eliot of mine) who are at present running what they call ‘neo-scholasticism’ as a fad.” Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume II, 142 [June 7, 1934].
of steel gave to the warrior, along with the security, something of the inertia, of the crustacean, so it is possible, without disrespect to the great philosophical panoply in which Dante and Aquinas walked complete, to hint that those who wore it necessarily lost some of the grace and freedom of their forebears. The recovery of Aristotle’s text dates from the second half of the twelfth century: the dominance of his doctrine soon followed. Aristotle is, before all, the philosopher of divisions. His effect on his greatest disciple, as M. Gilson has traced it, was to dig new chasms between God and the world, between human knowledge and reality, between faith and reason. Heaven began, under this dispensation, to seem farther off. The danger of Pantheism grew less: the danger of mechanical Deism came a step nearer. It is almost as if the first, faint shadow of Descartes, or even of ‘our present discontents’ had fallen across the scene.842

Consequently, against the reductive nature of logical positivism, Lewis asked: “Surely the gap between Professor Ryle and Thomas Browne is far wider than that between Gregory the Great and Virgil? Surely Seneca and Dr. Johnson are closer together than Burton and Freud?”843

The second danger in regard to reason is that of the existentialists. As a self-confessed rationalist (but not of the narrow, nineteenth century sort), it should come as no surprise that Lewis had little sympathy for existentialism and its denial that reason can discover objective Truth: “What ‘existentially’ means – unless it means ‘melodramatically’ or ‘ostentatiously’ or ‘making no end of a fuss about it’ – I have never been able to find

Indeed, when Lewis was asked to help start-up a new periodical, he proposed it be within the parameters of Old Western Culture, and the first thing he stated to this effect was that the periodical “would definitely and always exclude . . . Total Scepticism: i.e. attacks on reason and natural morality.”

Existentialism, therefore, was something that Lewis felt was deeply opposed to Old Western Culture as a philosophy, yet his attitude toward the movement was not completely negative: he appreciated some insights of theistic existentialists like Martin Buber, Gabriel Marcel and Helmut Kuhn.

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846 In 1942, Lewis picked up a copy of Martin Buber’s I and Thou, and about ten years later, he wrote, “Buber made one point well, but with some exaggeration” – that point being a typical existential theistic emphasis on the Pseudo-Dionysian Way of Negation or the separateness of God and man: “As Buber might say God is most fully real to us as Thou, less so as He, least so as It. We must worship the Thou, not the He in our own minds, which is just as much an image (therefore a possible idol) as a figure of wood or stone.” Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III, 979 [October 13, 1958], 1173 [July 19, 1960]. Indeed, it is a tribute to Lewis’s broadmindedness that he could see into a philosophy he was largely antithetical to and find the truth within; hence, in Prayer: Letters to Malcolm, Lewis the rationalist exclaimed: “How good Buber is!” Lewis, Prayer: Letters to Malcolm, 236. Nevertheless, one truth is hardly enough to make it compatible with the Old Western view of reason, and so Lewis thought it “rather rot” overall. Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume II, 528 [August 1, 1942]. That is, he complained of three major weakness: “I thought that [Buber] ignored (1.) The Incarnation. He is a Jew. Our Lord, besides being the divine Thou is also a historical character, who must be considered also as He. Indeed this is the essence of our faith ‘Crucified under Pontius Pilate’ – date, & signature of civil servant & all, crude, historical event. . . . (2.) The Ye or You (Plural) experience. One’s two best friends, or one’s parents, or one’s wife and daughter, at times are v[ery] distinctly neither Thou nor They but ‘You two.’ . . . What I had not yet thought about was your objection, that he ignores the Me. You are probably right. He might even have said that just as the Thou is deeper than the Me, so the I is deeper than the Me. For I believe self consciousness to be full of deception and that the object I call me and think about (both in my moments of pride and in my moments of humility) is v[ery] different from the I who thinks about it.” Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III, 631-2 [July 11, 1955].
847 A couple years after reading the atheistic Sartre, Lewis heard the Christian existentialist Gabriel Marcel give a talk on existentialism, about which Lewis initially commented, “It is definitely not my philosophy.” Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume II, 954 [July 5, 1949]. However, some years later, Lewis added, “To see him is to love him: but it appeared to me that his thesis if taken seriously, sh[oul]d reduce him and us to perfect silence – as the philosophy of Heraclitus did his disciples. The same holds of Buber. What they mean by calling Aquinas and Augustine Existentialists I can’t understand: nor do I much like such labels.” Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III, 24 [April 9, 1950]. Cf. Ibid., 979-80 [October 13, 1958].
848 In 1949, Lewis was asked by Dorothy Sayers if he would be willing to write a preface to Helmut Kuhn’s Encounter with Nothingness: An Essay on Existentialism, to which Lewis promptly replied: “No – I know (and care) little about the Existentialist nonsense. I wouldn’t dream of writing a preface. I think it is mainly philosophical melodrama.” Lewis, The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume II, 995 [November 9, 1949]. However, twelve days after refusing to write the preface, Lewis actually read Kuhn’s book and really enjoyed parts of it. Ibid., 999 [November 21, 1949]. Indeed, Lewis himself soon after became friends
(though not Kierkegaard\textsuperscript{849}), and he thought that existentialism and subjectivism in general often had some \textit{literary} merit; hence, he called Sartre “a great rhetorician,”\textsuperscript{850} and insisted that “Nietzsche was a better poet than a philosopher.”\textsuperscript{851}

with Kuhn, who, interestingly enough, actually translated Lewis’s \textit{Great Divorce} into German. Lewis, \textit{The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III}, 582 [March 18, 1955].

\textsuperscript{849} Even though Lewis was able to find some value in existentialism, in particular, the theistic variety, he was still largely opposed to it; hence, while a Christian existentialist like Kierkegaard (whose philosophy was intended largely as a corrective to Hegelianism) would have agreed with Lewis when the Oxford don complained about logical positivism – “Our intellectuals have surrendered first to the slave-philosophy of Hegel, then to Marx, finally to the linguistic analysts” – there would have been little else in common between the two philosophers. C. S. Lewis, “Willing Slaves of the Welfare State,” in \textit{C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection & Other Short Pieces}, ed. Lesley Walmsley (1958 essay reprint; London: HarperCollins, 2000), 748. Naturally, insofar as Kierkegaard – the father of existentialism and all that is best in Buber, Marcel and Kuhn – was a Christian, Lewis did not wish to criticize him too much, saying, at first, “I can’t read [him] myself, but some find him useful,” and then later admitting that since Charles Williams liked the Dane, “there must be a lot in him.” Lewis, \textit{The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III}, 1449 [June 8, 1962]. Cf. Ibid., 1273 [June 5, 1961]. However, when push came to shove, Lewis stated without hesitation: “Kierkegaard still means almost nothing to me.” Ibid. 979 [October 13, 1958]. In fact, Corbin Scott Carnell says Lewis thought that reading Kierkegaard is “like walking in sawdust.” Corbin Scott Carnell, \textit{Bright Shadow of Reality}, 67.

\textsuperscript{850} Lewis, \textit{The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III}, 1238 [February 13, 1961]. In 1947, five years after Lewis’s first encounter with existentialism, he read Sartre’s \textit{Existentialism is a Humanism}, “[which] seemed, if pressed.” Lewis jokingly commented, “to be the Berkeleyian metaphysic in the mind of an atheist with a bad liver!” Ibid., 24 [April 9, 1950]. Sartre’s philosophy of “existence precedes essence” (i.e. that “there is no [objective] human nature because there is no God to conceive of it”) had become prominent in Lewis’s day. Jean-Paul Sartre, \textit{Existentialism is a Humanism}, trans. Carol Macomber, ed. John Kulka (1947 reprint; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 22. Consequently, as a lover of Truth, Lewis recommended that Sartrian philosophy be discussed at the Socratic Club. Lewis, \textit{The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III}, 33 [June 12, 1950]. In fact, not only did he recommend Sartrian philosophy be discussed at the Socratic Club, but he himself wrote a critique entitled “A First Glance at Sartre,” in which he expressed his objections to Sartre, arguing, as the Socratic Club secretary has recorded it, that Sartre’s claim of total freedom is an illusion: “Mr. Lewis said: firstly, that to speak of Man collectively or in the plural, implies an essence in any case: secondly, that I cannot be committing others to my choice, unless I know them to be beings of the same essence as myself: thirdly, that to define man’s end as liberty is very like assuming a universal form of right conduct. These parts of Sartre seemed to Mr. Lewis to be undigested lumps of Kant; all the agony which Sartre, paradoxically, would have us accept leads us back only to the old principles of political liberty. Such an argument typifies the modern habit of exaggeration. What Sartre really hates is the idea of goodness as conformity, and he is a moral fanatic like Robespierre. Mr. Lewis then explained his view that conformity to a rule is not the essence, but only the accident of goodness. Thus there \textit{can} be a measure of inventiveness, and freedom, in some moral actions. Sartre’s illusion is his claim of total freedom, which leaves us in the dark at an endless trial, without a judge.” Hooper, “Oxford’s Bonny Fighter,” 160-1.

\textsuperscript{851} Lewis, \textit{The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume III}, 1420 [March 27, 1963]. Although Lewis may have come to this conclusion through his own reading of Nietzsche’s \textit{Beyond Good and Evil} (the only Nietzschean work that we know Lewis read), it is just as likely that Lewis got this idea from Douglas Ainslie’s preface to Benedetto Croce’s \textit{Philosophy of the Practical: Economic and Ethic}, in which Lewis would have read: “Friedrich Nietzsche, whose spasmodic paragraphs, full of genius but often empty of philosophy, show him to have been far more of a poet than a philosopher.” Douglas Ainslie, preface to \textit{Philosophy of the Practical: Economic and Ethic}, by Benedetto Croce (London: MacMillian, 1913), x-xi.
And just as an Old Western Man is one who asserts the power of reason to discover objective Truth, he is also one who believes in the ability of the individual to discern objective value. Hence, in *The Abolition of Man*, which was recently voted the seventh most important work of non-fiction of the past century,\(^{852}\) Lewis laid the ground work for Old Western axiology, particularly in regard to ethical and aesthetic value.

As for ethical value, Lewis endorsed the traditional doctrine of the existence of a universal moral law that communicates to people objective moral principles.\(^{853}\) Consequently, the Oxford don disagreed with (1) the relativism of Social Darwinists, such as Herbert Spencer,\(^{854}\) (2) ethicists inspired by Einstein’s physical theory,\(^{855}\) (3) Freudians who reduce all morality to sexual instinct, and (4) divine command ethicists like Karl Barth, who think man so utterly depraved that even his natural knowledge of right and wrong are fallen and can not act as a reliable guide.\(^{856}\)

As for aesthetic value, Lewis felt the trends of the nineteenth and twentieth century were utterly contrary to the relatively stable artistic expression in Old Western Culture, at least insofar as the arts reflect, or at least should reflect, objective norms. Borrowing I. A. Richards’ term,\(^{857}\) Lewis said that Old Western artistic norms should elicit “stock responses,” which consist in

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\(^{853}\) Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 417.

\(^{854}\) Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) tried to base his ethics on the theory of evolution.

\(^{855}\) Although Einstein said nothing about ethics, many philosophers, such as Bertrand Russell, thought Einstein’s General Theory of Relativity had important philosophical implications.

\(^{856}\) Concerning the local followers of Barth, Lewis wrote: “They don’t think human reason or human conscience of any value at all: they maintain, as stoutly as Calvin, that there’s no reason why God’s dealings should appear just (let alone, merciful) to us.” Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Volume II*, 351 [February 18, 1940].

a deliberately organized attitude which is substituted for ‘the direct free play of experience.’ In my opinion such deliberate organization is one of the first necessities of human life, and one of the main functions of art is to assist it. All that we describe as constancy in love or friendship, as loyalty in political life, or, in general, as perseverance – all solid virtues and stable pleasure – depends on organizing chosen attitudes and maintaining them against the eternal flux (or ‘direct free play’) of mere immediate experience.858

Thus, for instance, in the visual arts, Lewis strongly denounced the cubists,859 dadaists,860 surrealists861 and Picasso, all of whom thrived on the abnormal:

I am also working on a book sent me to review, *Le Mystere de la Poesie* by a professor at Dijon, of which my feeling is ‘If this is typical of modern France, nothing that has happened in the last three months [i.e. the beginning of WWII]

859 Cubism developed in France between 1907 and the early 1920’s. The name “cubism” comes from an insult by another artist, Henri Matisse. He called a painting by Georges Braque: “petits cubes” or little cubes. Since the Renaissance, many artists believed perception and space were best shown with linear perspective, a mathematical system used to imitate Nature. Artists using these ideas show a fix point of view. Cubists, on the other hand, show more than one view at a time. A cubist painting may show the front of a face and the side of a face at the same time (e.g. Picasso’s *Girl with Dark Hair*). Picasso and Braque were two cubists who showed how space could be cut-up, distorted and transformed into different planes and views. H. H. Arnason et al., *History of Modern Art*, 4th ed. (Singapore: Prentice Hall, 1998), 181-216. Because of this distortion, Lewis felt Cubism did not bring out stock responses.
860 “Dada,” which is the French word for “hobbyhorse,” was chosen randomly as the name for this art movement. During a meeting of young artists and war resisters in 1916 in Zurich, they stuck a paper knife into a French-German dictionary and selected the word it pointed to. They felt “dada” was a good fit for their art movement, which emphasized protest activities, despair regarding WWI, and distaste for what they thought were the bourgeois values of the art of the time. Dada art was nihilistic, anti-aesthetic and a reaction to the rationalization, rules and conventions of mainstream art. Ibid., 254-5. Because dadaists considered their work to be anti-art or art that defied reason, Lewis believed their movement was in conflict with Old Western Culture.
861 Surrealism is an invented word – “sur” means beyond or farther than, so “surreal” means to go beyond real. It was named this because surrealist art derives much of its meaning from Freud’s theory of the unconscious. Surrealism grew out of the dada movement and flourished in Europe between WWI and WWII. Surrealism tried to meld the conscious and unconscious, the world of dreams and fantasy along with reality so that the line between these ideas was completely blurred. Maurice Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1989), 240-1. This blurring of reality and subsequent distortion of the normal, not to mention surrealism’s manifesto declaring a revolution in art, caused Lewis to strongly denounce the movement.
surprises me’ – such a mess of Dadaists, Surrealists, nonsense, blasphemy and
decadence, as I could hardly have conceived possible. But one ought to have
known for, now that I come to think of it, all the beastliest traits of our
intelligentsia have come to them from France.862

And in the literary arts, Lewis targeted literary critics, such as I. A. Richards, F. R. Leavis
and E. M. Tillyard, and writers such as the early T. S. Eliot863 and “the Steins and Pounds
and hoc genus omne, the Parisian riff-raff of denationalized Irishmen and Americans who
have perhaps given Western Europe her death wound.”864

As a result, Lewis believed that Old Western Culture demands, not only in the arts,
but also in ethics and rationality, the universal, the normal and the stable; as the Oxford
don wrote in his anti-modernist poem “A Confession”:

I am so coarse, the things the poets see
Are obstinately invisible to me.
For twenty years I’ve stared my level best
To see if evening – any evening – would suggest
A patient etherized upon a table
In vain. I simply wasn’t able.

... 

I’m like that odd man Wordsworth knew, to whom
A primrose was a yellow primrose, one whose doom
Keeps him forever in the list of dunces,

863 Although Lewis had no use for the early T. S. Eliot, the he came to love the man later on in life when
Compelled to live on stock responses,

Making the poor best that I can

Of dull things . . . peacocks, honey, the Great Wall, Aldebaran,

Silver weirs, new-cut grass, wave on the beach, hard gem,

The shapes of horse and women, Athens, Troy, Jerusalem. 865

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Although many of the issues raised in this chapter remain undeveloped, I trust that readers have a fairly clear idea not only of the culture Lewis was writing in – e.g. modernist, Darwinian, anti-classical, post-Christian etc. – but also how Lewis’s education and writings, particularly in the classical and medieval tradition, helped form his own cultural ideal of Old Western Culture and his own cultural identity as an Old Western Man. Additionally, I trust that I have shown that the majority of beliefs Lewis, as an Old Western Man, held were held for good reasons or at least were held consistent with his understanding of philosophy as a way of life. If all of this has been satisfactorily shown, then I think that coupled with his specific beliefs about heavenly desire and Myth, Lewis’s identification with Old Western Culture is also identification with a unique and important kind of philosophical Christianity.

The motivation behind this dissertation was that nothing had been written that sufficiently discussed how C. S. Lewis’s philosophical views shaped, and were shaped by, his views on literature and theology and how all of these came together in his mature Christian thought. Consequently, I set out to elucidate “The Philosophical Christianity of C. S. Lewis.”

To this end, I began by claiming that ultimately Lewis understood philosophy as the ancients did: as a way of life. Thus, in chapter one, I laid out the general criteria of philosophy as a way of life, which is (1) a choice (2) made in a cultural context (3) to follow wholeheartedly a certain group of people who (4) have a certain take on life which (5) demands training which (6) is the result of rational discourse, and which (7) ultimately leads to a fully converted life.

Once this understanding of philosophy was in place, I was then in a position, in chapter two, to show how, throughout seven different philosophical phases, Lewis eventually came to see philosophy as a way of life. This belief-formation, however, was not something that perfectly evolved each step of the way; rather, in each of Lewis’s philosophical phases, I tried to find examples of things that may have compelled him toward his ultimate belief that philosophy is a way of life – the understanding of philosophy that he, as a Christian, held. For instance, during his Lucretian materialist phase, Lewis was tutored by Kirkpatrick, who instilled in Lewis a love of reason and logical consistency; during his Pseudo-Manichean dualist phase, Lewis had his first ethical experience; during his Stoical materialist phase, Lewis, who was then studying at
Oxford, delved deeper into the classical philosophers, who, as I said before, believed that philosophy is a way of life; during his subjective and absolute idealist phases, Lewis began teaching philosophy at Oxford, which had the beneficial effect of bringing him into greater community with likeminded men; during his theistic phase, Lewis began to exercise his philosophical beliefs in concrete ways, such as through prayer; and finally, during his Christian Neoplatonic phase, Lewis came to fully embrace the idea of philosophy as a way of life.

However, like Plato and others before him, Lewis knew from firsthand experience that without desire, reason is impotent to move man from false images and philosophies to truer ones. Thus, the Oxford don devoted much of his writings – and I devoted chapter three – to exploring the nature of that important affect in the soul called heavenly desire, a term which I coined to unify all the other words Lewis used to describe this effect, such as Platonic eros, “Romanticism,” the numinous, sehnsucht, and “Joy.” Additionally, since heavenly desire was so central to Lewis’s philosophical formation and, ultimately, his philosophical Christianity, I spent some extra time discussing the natural theological argument related to heavenly desire, Lewis’s Argument from Desire.

Yet as I said, heavenly desire is a blanket word for many different desires that have many different, though broadly related, objects. My argument in chapter four, therefore, was to show how one object of heavenly desire, Myth, which is a mysterious and suprarational aspect of God’s fuller nature, entered Lewis’s poetic imagination via mythical literature, whose mythical images, in turn, were evaluated by Lewis’s reason (i.e. as being potentially true or false) and subsequently became vital facts in Lewis’s decision to
convert to Christianity. Hence, the true philosophy – Christianity – is the proper unity of myth and reason.

Finally, in order to tie all this together, I needed to put Lewis into his cultural context and then engage with his cultural ideal and his cultural identity that flowed from this. This was crucial not only to help us understand the content of Lewis’s Christian Neoplatonism \textit{qua} Old Western Culture, but also to shed some light both on the Oxford don’s irrational cultural biases, such as his attitude toward eastern religions, and on the degree to which his multi-faceted mind was able to process and critique the culture of his day.

What I concluded from these five chapters is that it is undeniable that Lewis should be called a philosophical Christian, for like the ancient philosophers before him, Lewis made a choice in a certain cultural context (twentieth century Oxford) to follow wholeheartedly a certain group of beliefs (Christian Neoplatonism) which demanded training (prayer, mythmaking, reading etc.) which was the result of submission to reason, all of which ultimately led to a fully converted life – a life which I believe is perfectly summarized by Walter Hooper, who writes,

\begin{quote}
I am sure [Lewis] was aware of his shortcomings, but to me he seemed closer to God than I had even imagined a man could be. Most Christians seem to have two kinds of lives, their so-called ‘real’ life and their so-called ‘religious’ one. Not Lewis. The barrier so many of us find between the visible and the invisible was just not there for Lewis. No one ever had less of a split personality.\footnote{Walter Hooper, “C. S. Lewis: Oxford’s Literary Chameleon of Letters,” in \textit{Behind the Veil of Familiarity: C. S. Lewis (1898-1998)}, ed. Margarita Carretero González and Encarnación Hidalgo Tenorio, 23-46 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2001), 25.}
\end{quote}
Appendix A:  
Lewis on Different Connotations of Reason

Lewis usually spoke of the rational faculty in the soul as *reason* (as opposed to the intellect, which the ancients called it): “[B]y *Reason* I meant ‘the faculty whereby we recognize or attain necessary truths’ or ‘the faculty of grasping self-evident truths or logically deducing those which are not self-evident.’” However, loosely following Aristotle, Boethius and others, Lewis sometimes made a division in this faculty between rational intuition, which grasps truths in a simple, intuitive way, and ratiocination, which reasons from the truths of the intellect to discover new truths.

Rational intuition is the greatest aspect of the faculty of reason, and, as we shall see, the highest part of the rational soul according to Lewis, for it is the rational intuition that grasps self-evident truths, without which all our thoughts would be in vain: “If nothing is self-evident, nothing can be proved.”

Ratiocination is less dignified than rational intuition, for it does not immediately see objective truths, but must work from the self-evident truths seen by the intellect in order to attain new truths. As Lewis said to Barfield already back in 1927: “Agreed (by you and me, also by Kant, Coleridge, Bradley etc) that discursive reason always fails to apprehend reality, because it never grasps more than an abstract relational framework.”

Closely connected with the faculty of reason (remember this is Lewis’s terminology, not anyone else’s) is the conscience or moral intelligence. Indeed, reason and conscience

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868 In chapter six of *Miracles*, Lewis quoted from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* in regard to rational intuition and self-evident truths: “For as bats’ eyes are to daylight so is our intellectual eye to those truths which are, in their own nature, the most obvious of all.” Lewis, *Miracles*, 1129.
are so closely connected that Lewis, and certain trends in Old Western Culture, often collapsed them into one.\textsuperscript{872} The reason for the intimacy between these two is, as Lewis explained in \textit{Studies in Words}, largely etymological:

Greek \textit{oida} and Latin \textit{scio} mean ‘I know.’ . . . \textit{Suneidesis} [related to \textit{oida}] and \textit{conscientia} [related to \textit{scio}] could be either the state (or act) of sharing knowledge or else simply knowledge, awareness, apprehension – even something like mind or thought. . . . When Tertullian speaks of convictions lodged in our ‘innate \textit{conscientia}’ or Lactantius of what is ‘clear to our \textit{conscientia}’ some sense like ‘mind’ or ‘understanding’ is required. . . . In its new sense \textit{conscience} is the inner lawgiver: a man’s judgement of good and evil. It speaks in the imperative, commanding and forbidding. But, as so often, the new sense does not replace the old. The old lives on and the new is added to it, so that conscience now has more than one meaning. . . . Theologians and scholars are aware of this and draw the necessary distinctions. Aquinas, who claims to be conforming to the ‘common use of language,’ says that \textit{conscientia} is an application of our knowledge to our own acts, and that this application occurs in three ways. (1) We judge that we have done this or that. (2) We judge that something ought, or ought not to be done. (3) We judge that our past act was good or bad. The first is conscire in the classical sense. The second, which really includes the third (\textit{syteresis} or \textit{synderesis}) is something quite different; something which will be named, according to the system we employ, practical reason, moral sense, reflection, the Categorical

\textsuperscript{872} Notice how Lewis used the same Argument from Reason for the existence of God to defend not only logical reasoning but also moral reasoning: “If we are to continue to make moral judgements . . . then we must believe that the conscience of man is not a product of Nature [i.e. material, matter]. It can be valid only if it is an offshoot of some absolute moral wisdom, a moral wisdom which exists absolutely ‘on its own’ and is not a product of non-moral, non-rational Nature.” Lewis, \textit{Miracles}, 1128.
Imperative, or the super-ego. *Conscientia* in this second sense can be said to ‘bind’ and ‘impel’ (*instigare*), and can of course be obeyed or disobeyed” [ST. Ia, lxi, art. 13]. . . . [Jeremy Taylor, following Aquinas, said] under the name conscience we must also include ‘that which is called *synteresis*, or the general repository of moral principles.’

This is to say that conscience belonged to reason (on Lewis’s terminology anyway) because both were concerned with reasoning; as Lewis wrote:

But when we turn to practical reason the ruinous effects are found operating in full force. By practical reason I mean our judgement of good and evil. . . . Until modern times no thinker of the first rank ever doubted that our judgements of value were rational judgements or that what they discovered was objective. It was taken for granted that in temptation passion was opposed, not to sentiment, but to reason. Thus Plato, thought, thus Aristotle, thus Hooker, Butler and Doctor Johnson.

Lewis’s own language in regard to conscience and reason was influenced by Aristotle, but it was also sufficiently blended with the language of St. Paul, Kant, George McDonald, and others to the point where the faculty of reason was divided into rational intuition and ratiocination, both of which, in different ways, pertained strictly to

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876 George MacDonald, whom Lewis made no secret was his master, preferred to speak of “conscience” rather than reason in regard to morality: “She was sorely troubled with what is, by huge discourtesy, called a bad conscience -- being in reality a conscience doing its duty so well that it makes the whole house uncomfortable.” George MacDonald quoted in C. S. Lewis, *George MacDonald: An Anthology* (1947 reprint; London: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 133.
matters of truth and falsity, and theoretical and practical reason, again both in different ways, came to be identified with the conscience, which dealt strictly with matters of right and wrong: “He has provided a rich, beautiful world for people to live in,” wrote Lewis of God, “He has given them intelligence to show them how it can be used, and conscience to show them how it ought to be used.” Consequently, according to Lewis, theoretical reason is to the conscience what rational intuition is to reason (they have to do with self-evident and universal truths: either of logic or Natural Law / Tao), and practical reason, which Lewis confusingly sometimes simply called “Conscience,” is to the conscience what ratiocination is to reason (they have to do with argument from self-evident and universal truths). The disparity between conscience and reason is rarely emphasized in Lewis’s writings, but in his essay “Why I’m not a Pacifist,” the Oxford don made it clear that the difference between these two faculties is most clearly marked in regard to temptation and man’s fallen nature:

The main difference between Reason and Conscience is an alarming one. It is thus: that while the unarguable intuitions on which all depend are liable to be corrupted by passion when we are considering truth and falsehood, they are much more liable, they are almost certain to be corrupted when we are considering good

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877 Note the language Lewis used in regard to value and morality: “An open mind, in questions that are not ultimate, is useful. But an open mind about the ultimate foundations either of Theoretical or of Practical Reason is idiocy. If a man’s mind is open on these things, let his mouth at least be shut. He can say nothing to the purpose. Outside the Tao there is no ground for criticizing the Tao or anything else.” Lewis, The Abolition of Man, 416-7. However, sometimes Lewis, following Aristotle, spoke of theoretical reason in regard to non-moral matters: “As long as this dethronement refers only to the theoretical reason, it cannot be wholehearted. The scientist has to assume the validity of his own logic . . . even in order to prove that it is merely subjective.” Lewis, “The Poison of Subjectivism,” 657.


and evil. For then we are concerned with some action to be here and now done or left undone by ourselves. And we should not be considering that action at all unless we had some wish either to do or not do it, so that in this sphere we are bribed from the very beginning.\(^{880}\)

On top of the difference both between reason and conscience and within conscience between theoretical and practical reason, Lewis also spoke of an element in conscience distinct from merely knowing right and wrong (theoretical reason) and merely applying the principles of right and wrong to real situations in the world (practical reason). This third element in the faculty of conscience is what Socrates identified with a daemon and Paul identified as the inner workings of the Holy Spirit; it is, in Lewis’s words, “the thing that moves us to do right [and] has absolute authority.”\(^{881}\) And it is precisely this third “element” in the conscience that marks Lewis not only as one who understood the intricacies of secular ethics (even though he often mashed his terms together) but was also able to combine these intricacies with Christian psychology; hence, Lewis insisted: “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain.”\(^{882}\)


\(^{881}\) Ibid., 284.

\(^{882}\) Lewis, \textit{The Problem of Pain}, 518 (emphasis mine). In regard to the Holy Spirit working through conscience, consider the following sub-headings that Lewis put in his revised edition of \textit{The Pilgrim’s Regress}: “John decides to live virtuously but at once meets an obstacle – Conscience tells him he can and must pass it by his own efforts – Traditional Christianity says he cannot” and “Fear is too suspicious, and the natural conscience too proud.” Lewis, \textit{The Pilgrim’s Regress}, 85, 91.
Appendix B: Lewis and Faith

In his essay “Is Theism Important?” Lewis carefully distinguished between two types of faith: “[Faith] may mean (a) a settled intellectual assent. In that sense faith (or ‘belief’) in God hardly differs from faith in the uniformity of nature or in the consciousness of other people. . . . (b) a trust, or confidence, in the God whose existence is thus assented to. This involves an attitude of the will. It is more like our confidence in a friend.”\(^883\)

Faith-A, in other words, is not some secret knowledge to which we must blindly cling, but is really the type of faith that is the result of reason proving certain things about God, such as His existence, His timelessness, etc. It is valuable as a kind of natural knowledge of God, and as such is often the first step toward Christianity: “But here, as in everything else,” the devil Screwtape advised his nephew, “the way must be prepared for your moral assault by darkening [your patient’s] intellect.”\(^884\) However, while this type of faith is very valuable, it is simply the child of reason, not having been implemented in action via the will; consequently, it is not a complete faith: “Correct thinking will not make good men of bad ones; but a purely theoretical error may remove ordinary checks to evil and deprive good intentions of their natural support.”\(^885\)

Faith-B, however, is a more complete faith as it flows from reason, into the will and finally into correct moral action, the performance of which eventually causes the development of virtue. Faith-B is a rational endurance in a true belief or a reasonable trust in a person who you already know with Faith-A; thus, Faith-B “moves us from the logic of speculative thought into what might perhaps be called the logic of personal

\(^{883}\) Lewis, “Is Theism Important?” 54.  
\(^{884}\) Lewis, The Screwtape Letters, 791.  
relations;”886 it is “the art of holding on to things your reason has once accepted, in spite of your changing moods;”887 “it is the power of continuing to believe what we once honestly thought to be true until cogent reasons for honestly changing our minds are brought before us.”888 Men at once have to “train”889 this faith by consciously willing Truth, and yet because they are weak and sinful, it must also be a “gift”890 by the “motive power”891 of God, grace:

When we exhort people to Faith as a virtue, to the settled intention of continuing to believe certain things, we are not exhorting them to fight against reason. The intention of continuing to believe is required because, though Reason is divine, human reasoners are not. When once passion takes part in the game, the human reason, unassisted by Grace, has about as much chance of retaining its consistency in the mouth of a blast furnace. . . . Reason may win truths; without Faith she will retain them just so long as Satan pleases. . . . If we wish to be rational, not now and then, but constantly, we must pray for the gift of Faith, for the power to go on believing not in the teeth of reason but in the teeth of lust and terror and jealousy

886 Lewis, “On Obstinacy in Belief,” 215. Cf. “The saying ‘Blessed are those that have not seen and have believed’ has nothing to do with our original assent to the Christian propositions. It was not addressed to a philosopher inquiring whether God exists. It was addressed to a man who already believed that, who already had a long acquaintance with a particular Person, and evidence that that Person could do very odd things, and who then refused to believe one odd thing more, often predicted by that Person and vouched for by all his closest friends. It is a rebuke not to skepticism in the philosophic sense but to the psychological quality of being ‘suspicious.’ It says in effect, ‘You should have known me better.’” Ibid.

887 Lewis, Mere Christianity, 410.


889 Lewis, Mere Christianity, 410.

890 “I doubt whether religious people have ever suppose that Faith-B follows automatically on the acquisition of Faith-A. It is described as a ‘gift’ (e.g. I Corinthians 12:1-II; Ephesians 2:8). As soon as we have Faith-A in the existence of God, we are instructed to ask from God Himself the gift of Faith-B.” Lewis, “Is Theism Important?” 55.

and boredom and indifference that which reason, authority, or experience, or all three, have once delivered to us for truth.\textsuperscript{892}

\textsuperscript{892} Lewis, “Religion: Reality or Substitute?” 137-8.
Appendix C:
A Brief Description of Lewis’s Theory of Beauty

From previous chapters, we know both that the “first beauty” Lewis ever experienced was his brother’s toy garden, and that he knew his experience of Beauty in the garden was something more than a subconscious erotic impulse. Moreover, while Lewis’s earliest aesthetic experiences were intensely mythical and sublime (hence, his love of Norse mythology and the “sublimity” of Lucretius), Lewis the Lucretian materialist largely understood these experiences to be those of Beauty.

And for the most part, this understanding continued into Lewis’s pseudo-Manichean dualist phase, wherein thanks to Plato, Berkeley and others, he came to see Beauty as objective and as a synonym for Spirit; however, while Plato would have said that (material) Nature is beautiful insofar as it reflects (spiritual) Beauty, Lewis was deeply engrossed with Berkeleyan replies to Lockean epistemology, and so concluded that since we cannot know how sensations from the physical world can enter our minds, we have no right attributing any Beauty whatsoever to Nature:

The thing in your last letter with which I most want to disagree is the remark about Beauty and nature; apparently I did not make myself very clear. You say that nature is beautiful, and that is the view we all start with. But let us see what we mean. If you take a tree, for instance, you call it beautiful because of its shape, colour and motions, and perhaps a little because of association. Now these colours etc are sensations in my eye, produced by vibrations on the aether between me

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and the tree: the real tree is something quite different – a combination of
colourless, shapeless, invisible atoms. It follows then that neither the tree, nor any
other material object can be beautiful in itself: I can never see them as they are,
and if I could it would give me no delight. The beauty therefore is not in matter at
all, but is something purely spiritual, arising mysteriously out of the relation
between me & the tree: or perhaps as I suggest in my Song, out of some
indwelling spirit behind the matter of the tree – the Dryad in fact [“Atoms dead
could never thus / Wake the human heart of us, / Unless the beauty that we see /
Part of endless beauty be, / Thronged with spirits that have trod / Where the bright
foot-prints of God / Lie fresh upon the heavenly sod.”]. . . . You see the
conviction is gaining ground on me . . . that Beauty is the call of the spirit in that
something to the spirit in us.

This is to say that largely because of his antirealism in regard to secondary qualities,
Lewis denied the beauty of Nature; and because he was relatively humble, he denied that
he himself was the cause of Beauty. Thus, he attributed the idea of Beauty neither to
Nature nor to himself but to Spirit or some relation between spirits.

Consequently, supported by such an elevated view of Beauty, Lewis’s WWI art, i.e.
his WWI poetry, was not overly-focused on ugliness, instability and despair, unlike most
of the art produced around WWI – art such as Eliot’s “Waste land,” Stravinsky’s The Rite
of Spring or Duchamp’s “Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2).” Moreover, Lewis’s
wartime art was further bolstered against ugliness and despair by his habit of reading
older, more tried-and-true works of literature:

896 Ibid., 374 [May 29, 1918].
897 Ibid., 377 [June 3, 1918].
Both [Johnson] and all the other literary people whom I have met since I left home for Oxford, have made me feel how deep is my ignorance of modern, that is to say, *contemporary*, literature, especially poetry. I have often sat in amazed silence amid glib talk of Rupert Brooke, Masefield, Chesterton, Bottomley etc. But after all I suppose our steady nibbling at older works is a safe-guard against ‘crazes’ – deadly things that arise so easily about a new writer.  

Now when Lewis returned to Oxford after the war and converted to Stoical materialism, his theory of Beauty underwent two important changes. First, no longer committed to believing that Beauty is purely a spiritual quality, Lewis the materialist–partly due to Bergson’s stress on the vitality and energy of life in general – was able to rescue his romantic, pre-war love of Nature; hence, he said later, “Nature never taught me that there exists a God of glory and of infinite majesty. I had to learn that in other ways. But nature gave the word *glory* a meaning for me.” Second, Lewis’s appreciation of Nature’s beauty was further honed by the lesson he learned from Jenkin (and Aristotle) that one must always try to relish the quiddity or essence of each thing and, insofar as it is just, treat each particular as an end in itself. As a result of these important changes, Lewis’s aesthetic theory stressed six things: (1) Beauty is *not* simply expression, for what is expressed is important; (2) beautiful things do not appear to us as simple impressions, but are, in fact, a union of impressions; (3) Plato is right that beautiful things are often reminders of other beautiful things, and Wordsworth is right that the beauty remembered might perfect the beauty of a particular thing; (4) there is also a purely sensuous element in Beauty, for certain musical notes, for instance, satisfy certain nerves; (5) Beauty is not 

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898 Ibid., 342 [November 4, 1917].
merely contemplative or theoretical, but is mostly an emotional stirring and an invitation to who-knows-what; and (6) Beauty must be objective, but it is unclear how it can be so; thus we read:

I wonder what has to be done about your question of Beauty? The popular theory among contemporaries is that Beauty is simply expression: as soon as a shape or a sound becomes a means by which I find the expression or ‘objectification’ of myself, it is beautiful. That is why (they say) that even things ‘uncomely & broken’ find their aesthetic value in the right place. Not satisfied with this view myself: for it makes it indifferent what is expressed. E. g. a face that expressed cruelty, stupidity or greed would be beautiful if only it expressed them thoroughly. They w[oul]d probably say that greed etc are themselves ‘inexpressive’ of the idea of the individual – the thing he is tending to be, his potential completeness. To me it seems that a great many different emotions are united in the perception of beauty: it may turn out to be not a simple thing but a result of unions. For one thing nearly all beautiful sights are to me chiefly important as reminders of other beautiful sights: without memory it would be a poor affair. The process presumably has a beginning but once going it grows like a snowball. Could it be the joy remembered (‘Which now is sad because it has been sweet’) is a necessary element in Beauty? There is too, I think, a purely sensuous element: that such and such notes or tints (in themselves – not in their combinations) just happen to satisfy our nerves of hearing & sight – as certain foods satisfy those of tastes. This w[oul]d be rather a condition of beauty, perhaps, than an element in it. One thing is plain, that the statements continually
made about Beauty’s being pure contemplation, stirring no impulse, being the antithesis of the practical or energizing side of us, are wrong. On the contrary beauty seems to me to be always an invitation of some sort & usually an invitation to we don’t know what. A wood seen as ‘picturesque’ by a fool (who’d like a frame round it) may be purely contemplated: seen as ‘beautiful’ it seems rather to say ‘come into me.’ But this is getting away from your point – much more important – whether its objective & has a real right & wrong apart from our opinions. One always feels that it has. But I don’t understand: it must be objective & yet how can it?900

Piecing this all together we may say that while Lewis had no metaphysical grounds for asserting the objectivity of Beauty (this may have been a relic from his pseudo-Manichean dualist phase), he believed that the work of art itself – be it natural or man-made – contains a unique essence or quality that is in itself either beautiful or ugly but always meaningful and whose beauty, which has the power to move man, can be recognized and given greater appreciation by man’s reflection upon it. Consequently, this theory convinced Lewis the Stoical materialist that Beauty is actually able to elevate the individual to a more perfect mode of existence, for “aesthetic experience [is] not merely pleasing but ‘valuable.’”901

Now immediately prior to his conversion to idealism, Lewis’s interest in aesthetics peaked. This was largely due to Barfield, who was Lewis’s interlocutor during The Great War, and Lewis’s philosophy tutor and renowned philosopher of art, E. F. Carritt, who

901 Lewis, Surprised by Joy, 1364.
pushed Lewis to read many aesthetic theories, such as those by Benedetto Croce and George Santayana. All of these men and their philosophies of Beauty fortified Lewis’s belief that aesthetic experience is valuable, which, of course, resulted in Lewis’s idealist belief that art is an image of the spiritual life.

However, Lewis did not agree with all that the aforementioned philosophers – or others – had to say. For instance, part of the reason why Lewis became an idealist in the first place was because he disagreed with Carritt, who claimed that materialism can make sense of Beauty. In addition, Lewis deviated from many at Oxford who insisted that Beauty and moral Goodness are nearly synonymous (“I couldn’t make [Herbert] Paton [a professor of philosophy at Oxford] admit any difference between art and virtue”). And while Lewis agreed with Barfield in saying that the poetic should not be reduced to the prosaic, Lewis disagreed with Barfield, who claimed that the imagination produces truth rather than (even profound) meaning; hence, Lewis wrote,

Have you so exhausted in your survey the horizons of the spiritual world that you are sure that there can be no other value than that one of Truth with which you seem at present most concerned, and that you can therefore affirm that if Beauty

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902 “Carritt made some interesting remarks on Croce’s theory of universals. The true concepts (Truth, Beauty, etc.) are immanent, transcendent: the mathematical are only transcendent – that is, they have no particulars: the pseudo-concepts are only immanent, that is they are mere arbitrary groupings of particulars. He also drew my attention to the difference between Kant’s early and later views of Noumena, which I must look up.” Lewis, *All My Road Before Me*, 36 [May 17, 1922]. “[I] took Croce’s *Essence of Aesthetic* out of Union. . . . I finished Croce: a difficult and provocative book. The different activities of the spirits apparently grow out of one another in a cycle. Emotion leads to image, and when we have made the image we want to understand: from understanding we turn to action which leads to new emotion and the cycle repeats. He assumes the unreality of matter, regarding it as we regard the news Queen Anne is dead.” Ibid., 39 [May 23, 1922].

903 “I read Santayana’s *Reason in Art* for an hour: very pugnacious and bracing and mostly true.” Ibid., 182 [January 19, 1923].

904 Cf. “Beauty is no negligible or superfluous appendage to any man’s life, but an aspect in which he must value his whole world. It is no luxury, but often an exacting and severe ideal. It is the salt without which life would be savourless.” Carritt, *The Theory of Beauty*, 17.

905 Ibid., 21.

906 Lewis, *All My Road Before Me*, 356 [February 26, 1925].
will not be taken in as a door keeper to Truth, or as Truth’s domino, her occupation must be gone? . . . From what you have said at various times I gather that your real reason is a fear lest, if the value we find in beauty cannot be claimed as a kind of Truth, it will turn out to be nothing but pleasure under a pompous name.  

Nevertheless, while Lewis believed that his idealism, in particular, his absolute idealism, could preserve his belief in the objectivity of Beauty and the distinctions between moral Goodness, Beauty and Truth, the logical incoherence of absolute idealism ultimately forced Lewis to recognize that in the long run, absolute idealism could preserve the objectivity of neither Truth, Goodness nor Beauty.

As a result, Lewis converted to theism and then to Christianity. Subsequently, he followed the Christian Neoplatonic tradition in maintaining that God is identical to Beauty and that “Beauty descends from God into nature;” thus, in The Magician’s Nephew, Lewis envisioned Aslan singing a heartbreakingly beautiful song to create the world of Narnia: “There were no words. There was hardly even a tune. But it was, beyond comparison, the most beautiful noise [Digory] had ever heard. It was so beautiful he could hardly bear it.” Moreover, following Plato in the Phaedrus, Lewis believed

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909 Lewis, The Magician’s Nephew, 93. While the idea of God or the gods creating the world through music is ancient, it is interesting to note that Lewis’s friend Tolkien also used this idea in his work: “There was Eru, the One, who in Arda is called Iluvatar; and he made first the Ainur, the Holy Ones, that were the offspring of his thought, and they were with him before aught else was made. And he spoke to them, propounding to them themes of music; and they sang before him, and he was glad.” J. R. R. Tolkien, The Silmarillion, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1989), 15.
that while some things in Nature are more beautiful than others\textsuperscript{910} (even though all things are fallen\textsuperscript{911}), the beauty of each thing is only fully realizable when it is appreciated as a reflection of “eternal Beauty;”\textsuperscript{912} hence, in \textit{The Problem of Pain}, Lewis insisted that “each of the redeemed shall forever know and praise some one aspect of the Divine beauty better than any other creature can,”\textsuperscript{913} and in \textit{Perelandra}, Lewis wrote, “[T]he very beauty of [the King] lay in the certainty that [he] was a copy, like and not the same, an echo, a rhyme, an exquisite reverberation of the uncreated music prolonged in a created medium.”\textsuperscript{914} Consequently, this leads to two important points about aesthetic justice.

First, since God both gave quiddity, definition and meaning to all natural things and designed man such that he can recognize the nature and beauty of such things, man shows aesthetic justice when he relishes the particularity of all things – firstly as God has created them (Nature) and secondly as man justly rearranges what God has made (art). Needless to say, this aesthetic justice entails a doctrine of objective aesthetic value,\textsuperscript{915} and it also leads to the Platonic-Aristotelian pedagogical theory of Beauty, which states that training people to be aesthetically just – helping people to acquire proper habits or “stock

\textsuperscript{910} “Beauty is not democratic; she reveals herself more to the few than the many, more to the persistent and disciplined seekers than to the careless.” Lewis, “Democratic Education,” 598. Cf. “The idea that some preferences in art are really better than others cannot be got rid of.” C. S. Lewis, “Different Tastes in Literature,” in \textit{C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection & Other Short Pieces}, ed. Lesley Walmsley (1946 essay reprint; London: HarperCollins, 2000), 466.
\textsuperscript{911} “It is enough to say there that Nature, like us but in her different way, is much alienated from her Creator, though in her, as in us, gleams of the old beauty remain.” Lewis, “On Living in an Atomic Age,” 365.
\textsuperscript{912} “[A]n author should never conceive himself as bringing into existence beauty or wisdom which did not exist before, but simply and solely as trying to embody in terms of his own art some reflection of eternal Beauty and Wisdom.” Lewis, “Christianity and Literature,” 416.
\textsuperscript{913} Lewis, \textit{The Problem of Pain}, 551.
\textsuperscript{914} Lewis, \textit{Perelandra}, 332.
\textsuperscript{915} Lewis, \textit{The Personal Heresy}, 104.
responses” to things (e.g. “pain is black”\textsuperscript{916}) – is fundamental not only because it leads to true aesthetic judgment, but also because true aesthetic judgment often leads to true moral judgment:

That elementary rectitude of human response, at which we are so ready to fling the unkind epithets of ‘stock,’ ‘crude,’ ‘bourgeois,’ and ‘conventional,’ so far from being ‘given’ is a delicate balance of trained habits, laboriously acquired and easily lost, on the maintenance of which depends both our virtues and our pleasures and even, perhaps, the survival of our species.\textsuperscript{917}

Second, if people try to establish any created thing – be it God-made or man-made – as the highest Beauty, they act aesthetically (and morally) unjustly, for while true Beauty, i.e. God, calls us through beautiful things, He warns us not to rest in beautiful things:

“The books or music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not in them, it only came through them.”\textsuperscript{918} Indeed, going beyond this and most aesthetic theories, Lewis insisted that true Beauty is not something that we merely want to ponder; rather, it is something that we long to be surrounded and filled by: “We do not merely want to see beauty, though, God knows even that is bounty enough. We want something else which can hardly be put into words – to be united with

\textsuperscript{916} “What is good or happy has always been high like the heavens and bright like the sun. Evil and misery were deep and dark from the first. Pain is black in Homer, and goodness is a middle point for Alfred no less than for Aristotle. To ask how these married pairs of sensibles and insensibles first came together would be great folly; the real question is how they ever came apart, and to answer that question is beyond the province of a mere historian.” Lewis, \textit{The Allegory of Love}, 44. Cf. “I am misrepresented. From that sentence a reader would gather that in my \textit{Preface to Paradise Lost} I included the maxims ‘Honesty is the best policy’ and ‘War is horrible’ among the maxims with which I wished men to be habitually indoctrinated. This is not so. I wrote not ‘Honesty is the best policy’ but ‘Virtue is lovely’: not ‘War is horrible’ but ‘Death is bitter.’ I have no wish to defend my maxims at this point against those which have been substituted for them: my point is that they are different and indeed involve a difference of outlook which is fundamental.” C. S. Lewis, “A Difference of Outlook,” \textit{The Guardian} (June 27, 1947): 283. Cf. Lewis, \textit{That Hideous Strength}, 701.

\textsuperscript{917} Lewis, \textit{A Preface to Paradise Lost}, 56-7.

\textsuperscript{918} Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” 98.
the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part
of it.”

Because of Lewis’s Christian Neoplatonic theory of Beauty – i.e. God is Beauty,
Creation participates in Beauty, and man has a heavenly desire for, among other things,
God *qua* Beauty – many scholars, such as Philip Tallon, Peter Kreeft, and Philip
Harrold have recognized that Beauty plays an important role in Lewis’s philosophy,
particularly in the various theodicies he constructs. It is true, of course, that few of these
philosophers have stressed Lewis’s important distinction between Myth and Beauty:
while myth is an art, its value does not lie in its aesthetic nature (Beauty) but in its ability
to communicate concrete universality (Myth), however, most of these philosophers
have rightly recognized Lewis’s very orthodox insistence that all distinctions in God – be
it between Truth, Goodness, Myth, or Beauty – are merely formal distinctions, which do
not actually obtain in God’s indivisible nature.

919 Ibid., 104.
920 Philip Tallon, “Evil and the Cosmic Dance: C. S. Lewis and Beauty’s Place in Theodicy,” in *C. S. Lewis
as Philosopher: Truth, Goodness, and Beauty*, ed. David Baggett, Gary Habermas and Jerry Walls
(Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008).
921 Peter Kreeft, “Lewis’s Philosophy of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty,” in *C. S. Lewis as Philosopher: Truth,
Goodness, and Beauty*, ed. David Baggett, Gary Habermas and Jerry Walls (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity
Press, 2008).
922 Despite being completely wrong when he says that “Lewis was certainly aware of the social
construction of knowledge [and] the inaccessibility of pure objectivity,” Philip Harrold is right that Lewis’s
aesthetics played an important role in this philosophy and theology, particularly in regard to smuggling
important truths “past the watchful dragons.” Philip Harrold, “Stealing Past the Watchful Dragons: C. S.
Lewis’s Incarnational Aesthetics and Today’s Emerging Imagination,” in *Apologist, Philosopher, &
923 While in earlier chapters I made some connection between Myth and the Sublime, those connections,
such as between the *numinous*, Myth and the Sublime, were not formally made by Lewis. Additionally, it
would be misleading to say that Lewis made any formal distinction between the Sublime and Beauty.
Aeschylus *Prometheus Bound*

Albert the Great *De Anima*

Anselm *Proslogion*

Aristotle *De Anima*

—– *Ethics*

—– *Metaphysics*

—– *Poetics*

—– *Politics*

Augustine *The City of God*

—– *Confessions*

—– *The Trinity*

Basil *Concerning the Holy Spirit*

Bernardus Silvestris *Commentum Super Sex Libros Eneidos Virgilii*

—– *Cosmographia*

Bible

Boethius *The Consolation of Philosophy*

Cicero *On the Nature of the Gods*

Diogenes Laertius *Lives of the Philosophers*

Epicurus *Letter to Menoeceus*

Justin Martyr *Apology*

Lucretius *On the Nature of Things*

Macrobius *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*
Martianus Capella *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*

Plato *Gorgias*

———. *Laws*

———. *Phaedo*

———. *Phaedrus*

———. *Republic*

———. *Symposium*

———. *Timaeus*

Plotinus *Enneads*

Plutarch *Moralia*

Porphyry *Life of Plotinus*

Pseudo-Dionysius *The Mystical Theology*

Seneca *The Dialogues of Lucius Annaeus Seneca: Book II; To Serenus on the Firmness of the Wise Man*

———. *Letters to Lucilius*

Sextus Empiricus *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*

Snorri Sturluson *Glyfaginning*

Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica*


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Edited by Lesley Walmsley. London: HarperCollins, 2000. This interview originally appeared as “I was Decided Upon” and “Heaven, Earth and Outer Space” in Decision 2 (September and October 1963).


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“Man or Rabbit?” In *C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection & Other Short Pieces*. Edited by Lesley Walmsley. London: HarperCollins, 2000. This essay was originally published as a pamphlet by the Student Christian Movement in Schools in 1946.


———. “The Moral Good – Its Place Among the Values.” 1924-1925. Lecture Notes. The Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College. It should be noted that while Wheaton has named this set of lecture notes (MS-76) “The Moral Good – Its Place Among the Values,” they are almost certainly mislabelled, for as I have argued in chapter four, the Wade Center’s set of lecture notes are actually “The Good – Its Place Among the Values.”


———. “On Bolshevism.” In “The Moral Good – Its Place among the Values.” Unpublished essay. The Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College. This essay, which the Wade Center did not separate from Lewis’s 1924-1925 lecture notes, is difficult to date. It could have been written somewhere around 1924-1925 since that is when the other documents in the folio were composed. We know that as late as 1939 Lewis taught his political science students about Lenin, who this essay is about; however, internal evidence suggests that this essay was written by a neophyte, which, if this is the case, would mean that it was likely written by Lewis when he was a student in “Greats” – thus, somewhere between 1920-1922.


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This thesis first began to take shape when I noticed that C. S. Lewis, a man who studied and taught philosophy at Oxford University and who sparred with the best philosophers of his day both in person and in writing, is almost completely ignored in philosophical circles and the few who do discuss Lewis and philosophy usually do so only in regard to his natural theology and apologetics. The result of this is a dearth of knowledge concerning Lewis’s philosophical formation and how this formation relates to Lewis’s larger Christian thought. Consequently, in “The Philosophical Christianity of C. S. Lewis,” I attempt to rectify this situation by focusing on Lewis’s philosophical formation and how this formation, by complex interaction with literature and theology, ultimately gave birth to Lewis’s mature Christian views.

To accomplish this, I begin by claiming that ultimately Lewis understood philosophy as the ancients did: as a complete way of life. Thus, in chapter one, drawing on French philosopher Pierre Hadot and many of the classical philosophers, such as Plato, Aristotle and others, I claim that philosophy as a way of life means (1) a choice (2) made in a cultural context (3) to follow wholeheartedly a certain group of people who (4) have a
certain take on life which (5) demands training which (6) is the result of rational discourse, and which (7) ultimately leads to a fully converted life.

With this understanding of philosophy in place, I am then positioned, in chapter two, to show how Lewis eventually came to see philosophy as a way of life via seven different philosophical phases: Lucretian materialism, pseudo-Manichean dualism, Stoical materialism, subjective idealism, absolute idealism, theism, and Christian Neoplatonism. As one can guess, Lewis’s belief-formation is not something that perfectly evolved each step of the way; rather, in each of his philosophical phases, I endeavour to find examples of things that may have compelled him toward his ultimate belief that philosophy is a way of life – the understanding of philosophy that he, as a Christian, held. For instance, during his Lucretian materialist phase, Lewis was tutored by W. T. Kirkpatrick, who instilled in Lewis a love of reason and logical consistency; during his pseudo-Manichean dualist phase, Lewis had his first ethical experience; during his Stoical materialist phase, Lewis, who was then studying at Oxford University, delved deeper into the classical philosophers, who believed that philosophy is a way of life; during his subjective and absolute idealist phases, Lewis began teaching philosophy at Oxford University, which had the beneficial effect of bringing him into greater community with likeminded men; during his theist phase, Lewis began to exercise his philosophical beliefs in concrete ways, such as through prayer; and finally, during his Christian Neoplatonist phase, Lewis came to fully embrace the idea of philosophy as a way of life.

However, like Plato, Augustine and others before him, Lewis knew from firsthand experience that without desire, reason is impotent to move man from false images and philosophies to truer ones. Hence, Lewis devoted a lot of his time – and I devote chapter
three – to exploring the nature of that important affect in the soul called “heavenly desire,” a term which I coin in order to unify all the other words Lewis used to describe this effect, such as Platonic eros, “Romanticism,” the numinous, sehnsucht, and “Joy.” Additionally, since heavenly desire is so central to Lewis’s philosophical formation and, ultimately, his philosophical Christianity, I spend some extra time discussing the natural theological argument related to heavenly desire, Lewis’s Argument from Desire.

Yet as I say, heavenly desire is a blanket word for many different desires that have many different, though broadly related, objects. My argument in chapter four, therefore, is to show how Lewis eventually came to understand that one object of heavenly desire in particular, Myth, which is a mysterious and supra-rational aspect of God’s fuller nature, enters the poetic imagination via mythical literature, whose mythical images, in turn, are evaluated by reason (i.e. as being potentially true or false) and subsequently become vital facts to understand, and compel conversion to, Christianity. Hence, for Lewis, the true philosophy – Christianity – is the proper unity of myth and reason.

Finally, in order to tie all this together, I need to put Lewis into his cultural context and then engage with his cultural ideal and his cultural identity that flowed from this. My conclusion is that Lewis the Christian Neoplatonist saw himself as an Old Western Man, which, through some complex assembly, I claim has eight elements: (1) an Old Western Man identifies with western culture, which is to say that he is a person who relates to the conglomerate that is Judaic-European pagan-Christian thought, though, of course, Judaic thought obviously has its roots in Asia and even European paganism has been influenced by Egypt and the Middle East; (2) an Old Western Man is either a pre-Christian or a Christian, but not a post-Christian; (3) it follows, then, that an Old Western Man, though
called “old,” does not suggest only dead Europeans; rather, it indicates the person described in (1) of any time period – past, present or future – who happens to identify with the culture we are now defining; (4) an Old Western Man is one who respects tradition and history; (5) consequently, an Old Western Man, while he may believe in teleology and even biological evolution, rejects the grand evolutionary myth of progress in the form of such theories as Hegelian historicism or Darwinianism; (6) one of the key elements in tradition and history that an Old Western Man endorses is a hierarchical, not an egalitarian, conception of existence in some form or another (politically, ecclesiastically and / or socially); (7) an Old Western Man, as a lover of Nature, does not overvalue or worship technology and machinery; and (8) yet, an Old Western Man neither doubts the power of reason to apprehend objective truth nor is skeptical of objective values in ethics and aesthetics.

What I conclude from these five chapters is that it is undeniable that Lewis should be called a philosophical Christian, for like the ancient philosophers before him, Lewis made a choice in a certain cultural context (twentieth century Oxford) to follow wholeheartedly a certain group of beliefs (Christian Neoplatonism qua Old Western Culture) which demanded training (prayer, mythmaking, reading etc.) which was the result of submission to reason, all of which ultimately led to a fully converted life.
Dit proefschrift begon voor het eerst vaste vormen aan te nemen toen het me opviel dat C.S. Lewis, een man die filosofie studeerde en doceerde aan Oxford University en die zich schaarde bij de beste filosofen van zijn tijd, zowel door zijn persoonlijkheid als door zijn werk, bijna compleet genegeerd wordt in filosofische kringen. De enkeling die wel handelt over Lewis en filosofie richt zich doorgaans alleen op zijn natuurlijke theologie en apologetiek. Het gevolg hiervan is een gebrek aan kennis van Lewis’ filosofische ideeën alsmede van hoe deze zich verhouden tot Lewis’ bredere Christelijk denken. In “Het filosofische christendom van C.S. Lewis” doe ik een poging om deze situatie recht te zetten, door Lewis’ filosofische ontwikkeling te belichten en te laten zien hoe deze door een complexe wisselwerking met literatuur en theologie uiteindelijk leidden tot Lewis’ gerijpte christelijke opvattingen.

Om dit te bereiken begin ik met de stelling dat juist Lewis filosofie zag zoals de klassieken dat deden: als levenswijze. Ik claim in hoofdstuk één, met behulp van de Franse filosoof Pierre Hadot en vele klassieke filosofen zoals Plato en Aristoteles, dat filosofie als levenswijze het volgende inhoudt: het is (1) een keuze, (2) gemaakt in een culturele context, (3) om van ganser harte een bepaalde groep mensen te volgen die (4)
een bepaalde levenswijze hebben die (5) oefening vergt, die (6) het resultaat is van een rationele overwegingen en gesprek en (7) uiteindelijk leidt tot een volledig bekeerd leven.

In hoofdstuk twee belicht ik hoe Lewis er uiteindelijk toe kwam om via zeven fasen filosofie te gaan beschouwen als een manier van leven: materialisme in de stijl van Lucretius, pseudo-Manicheïstisch dualisme, Stoïcijns materialisme, subjectief idealisme, theïsme, en christelijk neoplatonisme. Uiteraard is Lewis’ geloofsweg er niet een die zich gaandeweg perfect evolueerde. Voor elk van de door Lewis’ doorlopen filosofische fases zoek ik naar voorbeelden van zaken die hem in de richting van zijn uiteindelijke inzicht, dat filosofie een levenswijze is, hebben geleid – een inzicht waaraan ook de Christen Lewis vasthield. Om een voorbeeld te geven, in de fase waarin hij zich bezighield met het materialisme in de stijl van Lucretius, had Lewis een tutor, W.T. Kirkpatrick, die in Lewis een liefde voor redeneren en logische consistentie aanwakkerde; tijdens zijn pseudo-Manicheïstische fase had Lewis zijn eerste ethische ervaring; tijdens zijn Stoïcijns materialistische fase verdiepte Lewis, toentertijd student aan Oxford University, zich in de klassieke filosofen, die geloven dat filosofie een levenswijze is; tijdens zijn subjectieve en absolute ideologische fasen begon Lewis te doceren in Oxford, wat het voordeel had dat hij deel uit ging maken van een grotere gemeenschap bestaande uit gelijkgestemde mensen; tijdens zijn theïstische fase begon Lewis zijn filosofische opvattingen te concretiseren door te bidden; en tenslotte, tijdens zijn christelijke Neoplatonese fase kwam Lewis er toe om het idee van filosofie als levenswijze volledig te accepteren.

Echter, net als Plato, Augustinus en anderen, wist ook Lewis door eigen ervaring dat het verstand zonder verlangen niet in staat is de mens van onware inzichten en filosofieën

Zoals gezegd is “hemels verlangen” een overkoppelingste term voor veel verschillende verlangens die verwante objecten hebben. Mijn argument in hoofdstuk vier is er daarom op gericht aan te tonen hoe Lewis uiteindelijk tot de opvatting komt dat één object in het bijzonder, namelijk Mythe, wat een mysterieus en boven-ratieseel aspect is van Gods natuur, de poëtische verbeelding binnendringt via mythische literatuur, waarvan de mythische denkbeelden vervolgens worden beoordeeld door de rede (nl. als in potentie waar dan wel niet waar) en die daarom een cruciale rol spelen bij het begrijpen van en de bekering tot het christendom. Dus, voor Lewis is de ware filosofie, het christendom, een eenheid van mythe en verstand.

Tot slot plaats ik, in een poging alles samen te binden, Lewis in zijn culturele context en verdiep ik me vervolgens in zijn culturele ideaal en zijn culturele identiteit die hieruit voortvloeit. Mijn conclusie is dat Lewis, de christelijke neoplatonist, zichzelf zag als een Oude Westerse Mens. Ik claim dat deze Mens acht elementen bezit: (1) een Oude Westerse Mens identificeert zichzelf met Westerse cultuur, wat inhoudt dat hij zich relateert aan het conglomeraat van Joods-Europees en heidens-Christelijk gedachtegoed, al is het natuurlijk zo dat het Jodendom zijn oorsprong heeft in Azië en zelfs het Europese
heidendom beïnvloed is door Egypte en het Midden-Oosten; (2) een Oude Westerse Mens is of pre-christelijk of christelijk, maar niet post-christelijk; (3) hieruit volgt dat met een Oude Westerse Mens, ondanks dat hij “oud” genoemd wordt, niet per definitie een dode Europeaan is; aangeduid is de persoon die in (1) beschreven is, ongeacht het moment waarop deze leeft; (4) een Oude Westerse Mens is er één die traditie en geschiedenis respecteert; (5) derhalve staat een Oude Westerse Mens, hoewel hij wellicht gelooft in teleologie en biologische evolutie, afwijzend tegenover de grote evolutionaire mythe van vooruitgang zoals die vorm heeft gekregen in het Hegeliaanse historicisme of het Darwinisme; (6) een van de essentiële elementen in traditie en geschiedenis die een Oude Westerse Mens onderschrijft is een hiërarchische, niet een egalitaristische opvatting over het bestaan in enige vorm (politic, ecclesiologisch, en /of sociaal); (7) een Oude Westerse Mens, als een liefhebber van de Natuur, heeft geen overwaardering voor technologie en machinerie; en (8) toch twijfelt een Oude Westerse Man nooit aan de kracht van het verstand om objectieve waarheid te begrijpen, noch heeft hij een sceptische houding ten opzichte van objectieve ethische en esthetische waarden.

Wat ik concludeer uit deze vijf hoofdstukken is dat Lewis onmiskenbaar een filosofische christen genoemd kan worden, omdat hij, net als de klassieke filosofen die hem voorgingen, in een bepaalde culturele context (het Oxford in de twintigste eeuw) de keuze maakte om van ganser harte een bepaald gedachtegoed aan te hangen (Christelijk neoplatonisme), hetgeen oefening vergde (gebed, vorming van mythes, lezen, etc.), wat het gevolg was van een onderwerping aan het verstand, met als uiteindelijk resultaat een volledig bekeerd leven.