

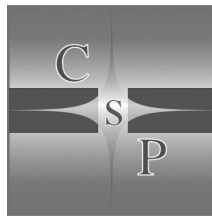
Truths Breathed Through Silver:
The Inklings' Moral and Mythopoeic Legacy

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Edited by

Jonathan B. Himes

with Joe R. Christopher and Salwa Khoddam



Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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Lewis had never underestimated the power of myth. Far from it, for one of his earliest loves had been the Norse myth of the dying god Balder. . . .

*But he still did not believe in the myths that delighted him. . . .
As he expressed it to Tolkien, myths are “lies and therefore worthless,
even though breathed through silver.”*

No, *said Tolkien*. They are not lies.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>CL</i>	<i>The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis</i>
<i>Curdie</i>	<i>The Princess and Curdie</i>
<i>DT</i>	<i>The Dark Tower</i>
<i>FOTR</i>	<i>The Fellowship of the Ring</i>
<i>Hoax</i>	<i>The C. S. Lewis Hoax</i>
<i>Letters of Lewis</i>	<i>Letters of C. S. Lewis</i>
<i>Letters of Tolkien</i>	<i>Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien: A Selection</i>
<i>Lilith: FF</i>	<i>Lilith: First and Final</i>
<i>Lilith: VE</i>	<i>Lilith: A Variorum Edition</i>
<i>Lost Road</i>	<i>The Lost Road and Other Writings: Language and Legend before “The Lord of the Rings”</i>
<i>Lost Tales I</i>	<i>The Book of Lost Tales, Part I</i>
<i>Lost Tales II</i>	<i>The Book of Lost Tales, Part II</i>
<i>LOTR</i>	<i>The Lord of the Rings</i>
<i>LWW</i>	<i>The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe</i>
<i>Mines</i>	<i>King Solomon’s Mines</i>
<i>Morgoth’s Ring</i>	<i>Morgoth’s Ring: The Later Silmarillion</i>
<i>OSP</i>	<i>Out of the Silent Planet</i>
<i>PL</i>	<i>Paradise Lost</i>
<i>PR</i>	<i>The Pilgrim’s Regress</i>
<i>ROTK</i>	<i>The Return of the King</i>
<i>Screwtape</i>	<i>The Screwtape Letters, with Screwtape Proposes a Toast</i>

<i>Sleuthing</i>	<i>Sleuthing C. S. Lewis: More Light in the Shadowlands</i>
<i>Studies</i>	<i>Studies in Words</i>
<i>TAL</i>	<i>Tree and Leaf</i>
<i>THS</i>	<i>That Hideous Strength</i>
<i>TR</i>	<i>The Tolkien Reader</i>
<i>TWHF</i>	<i>Till We Have Faces</i>
<i>Unfinished Tales</i>	<i>Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth</i>
<i>US</i>	<i>Unspoken Sermons</i>
<i>War</i>	<i>War of the Jewels</i>
<i>Worlds</i>	<i>Of This and Other Worlds</i>

INTRODUCTION

Representing a decade of scholarly activity within the C. S. Lewis & Inklings Society (CSLIS), this book stems from a conference at John Brown University in 2006 whose theme was the interrelationship of “Faith, Friendship, and Fiction” of the Oxford Inklings, primarily that of C. S. Lewis and his friends J. R. R. Tolkien and Charles Williams. The theme challenges one to examine the complex factors that shaped the theological perspectives, cultural concerns, and literary conventions in their works. One element that brought these writers together was a love for medieval and Victorian medievalist literature. They also shared a common political outlook and certain fundamentals of the faith, yet in some ways the Inklings differed in their approaches to poetry, to finer points of theology, and even to what they called *mythopoeia*, the making of mythic worlds out of existing world myths. The Inklings and their literary predecessors like George MacDonald and G. K. Chesterton not only clarified the role of myth in the development of Christian faith, but also composed their own works in that literary mode, creating new vistas for apprehending timeless truths.

Before writing his own tales in this vein, C. S. Lewis had struggled to accept Christianity. He knew that *myths* may be defined as humanity’s best attempts to explain the unexplainable, to come to grips with their bewildering place within a cosmos that seems at turns beautiful and comforting, inhospitable and even terrifying, or just utterly mysterious. Although he had a taste for the world’s great mythic traditions, especially those of the medieval North, he failed to see how Christ’s death and supposed resurrection two thousand years ago could have practical application to one’s life today. He feared that no matter how beautiful or poignant, these tales were simply “lies . . . breathed through silver.”¹ It was the famous series of conversations with J. R. R. Tolkien and Hugo Dyson late at night on Addison’s Walk that changed his mind, leading him to the conviction that the events of mythic profundity within the Gospels actually took place as history. In time, Lewis came to respect myths just as deeply as he esteemed rational argument as an avenue to truth.

Although they preferred tales of other times or worlds, the Inklings were heavily involved in the concerns of their own age. Most had served in the first world war and volunteered in various capacities during the

second, but instead of publishing bitter memoirs or poems detailing their harrowing wartime experiences from a perspective of detached irony, they dealt with the problem of overcoming evil in landscapes just as remote to the average reader today as the European trenches.²

The difficulty for the Inklings was that their preferred vehicle for artistic expression, long narrative poems in the epic mode, was obsolete, and their Judeo-Christian belief system was growing less viable for the intelligentsia of the early twentieth century. Yet Lewis wrote, “Christianity is a fighting religion,” and “We shall probably fail, but let us go down fighting for the right side.”³ These words, which might just as easily have come from an Anglo-Saxon chronicler or the poet of *The Battle of Maldon*, reflect the Inklings’ determination to preserve the literary traditions—both Northern and Christian—that had nurtured their own imaginations, even if it meant promoting that legacy in popular modes of fiction rather than in those modes deemed literary.

For Lewis, Tolkien, Williams, and other Inklings, romances and fairy-stories—or more broadly, the speculative kind of mythopoeic fiction they enjoyed and wrote themselves—put mortal humanity in contact with the immortal and the divine. Tolkien’s method was subtle, engaging readers with a feigned history of Middle-earth, whose wars for world domination have a resonance with our own. Lewis’s method was more direct with popular apologetics, science fiction, and fairy-stories bearing clear Christian parallels. Charles Williams’s method in fiction was to confront evil squarely, gazing steadily at the operations of ancient occultic powers in the modern world with his spiritual thrillers. Each of them thus dealt with the difficulty of maintaining old-world notions of heroism and faith in a post-war era that had led many of their contemporaries to adopt a bleak outlook of modernist disillusionment.

The Inklings believed that one value of literary fantasy is to sharpen one’s ability to distinguish the real from the imaginary. As Lewis noted in his inaugural address at Cambridge, “There is room both for an appreciation of the imagined past and an awareness of its difference from the real past; but if we want only the former, why come to a university?”⁴ A successful work of mythopoeia will reflect and borrow from the real world, so as to renew in readers a heightened sense of natural essences and proportions upon turning from their reading to their own lives. The Inklings believed there was still power in the old myths, and ultimately that there was still truth to fortify humanity in them. Their friendship and their fiction provided these men a forum for entertaining speculative and sometimes unorthodox answers to the complex realities of sacred tradition.

The chapters of this book explore the Inklings' mythopoeic terrain and their legacy of moral writings. As he explained in the essay "Christianity and Literature," Lewis believed that adhering to ancient standards, "trying to embody in terms of his own art some reflection of eternal Beauty and Wisdom,"⁵ was not only a better literary practice than self-consciously straining to be *avant-garde*—as in trying to discover some new value or "original" sentiment, or some startling mode of expression—but also a moral imperative with a biblical basis. By following closely the aesthetic principles of writers they admired from past ages rather than the dictates of the *literati*, the Inklings paradoxically attained a level of originality rare among twentieth-century authors.⁶ Today there is no lack of interest in Lewis and Tolkien, thanks to the latest revival sparked by film adaptations of the Middle-earth and Narnia books. The abundance of source compendia, biographies, and devotional materials offering glimpses "behind the wardrobe" addresses the contextual needs of a generation for whom the early twentieth-century Oxford world of the Inklings has passed into legend. Although such approaches—what Lewis early in his career labeled the "personal heresy"—provide important background on their works, more academic studies are needed beyond expository writing in the way of applying such literary and historical knowledge toward analysis of their *oeuvre*.

Clyde Kilby (who from 1932-1934 was the Superintendent of Education and an English instructor at my own institution, John Brown University) exhorted his fellow evangelical scholars and writers to do more than preach to the choir about Lewis and the Inklings in sentimental fashion. By establishing the annual Conference on Christianity and Literature in the 1950s, he paved the way for rigorous academic treatment of these and other writers, and the literature that inspired their works. The CSLIS is one of several regional groups in the U.S. that seeks to fulfill this charge. While encouraging the general public to study the literature in greater depth, at the same time we promote an active life of research and publishing among university faculty through our meetings and expanding activities. Over the past ten years, the Society has grown to include members hailing from private and state universities within half of the states in the country.

The first meeting of the Society's founders took place on February 21, 1998, a Saturday that turned out cold and gloomy. The morning news reported that all the main highways to Oklahoma City were covered with ice and snow. Dr. Salwa Khoddam, the professor of English at Oklahoma City University who had organized her institution's first one-day symposium on C. S. Lewis and his writings, wondered if anyone would

turn up. “As I entered the main conference room at 8:30 a.m.,” Salwa remembers, “I was surprised to see the room full of people milling around or already seated, ready for the events to begin. I was worried that Joe R. Christopher, the keynote speaker, wouldn’t be there due to the weather. Much to my joy and relief, I spotted him talking to the Provost. Joe had braved the treacherous conditions to make our modest conference happen. However, as time for the following panel approached, I began to worry again. What if the presenters from Oral Roberts University couldn’t make it from Tulsa? We would have to cancel the morning session. My fears were soon allayed as I saw Mark Hall and his group coming into the room a little late, slightly frazzled, but eager to present their panel, which turned out to be a great success with the audience. My gratitude to all the people who helped out that day is infinite.”

The forum was so successful, in fact, that participating faculty decided to have it as an annual event in the spring. The following year the meeting was hosted by Dr. Mark Hall and his colleagues at ORU, who have been stalwart supporters of the CSLIS from its beginnings. Undergraduate students also presented papers, which has since become an important tradition. Both of these initial conferences were funded in part by grants from the Oklahoma Foundation for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Humanities. The one-day symposium that was nearly snowed out at OCU ten years ago has flourished into an annual weekend conference featuring internationally known scholars and speakers, who officially incorporated The C. S. Lewis and Inklings Society (CSLIS) in 2004. Since then, panels of professors and college students have traveled from all over the continental United States and even from points as distant as Fukuoka, Japan to present their research.

The selection of papers in this volume, intended not only for experts but for undergraduates and general readers as well, testifies to the active and diverse community of scholars within the Society. Established scholars account for over half of the chapters with either the keynotes they delivered at various CSLIS meetings (Christopher, Hein, Neuhausser, Dearborn, Howard), or essays expanded from their session or panel presentations (Khoddam, Shippey). The rest of the papers represent the directions that emerging scholars have taken in recent years (Himes, Oberhelman, Fisher). The chapters proceed chronologically, including the first keynote in 1998 and the latest in 2007—presentations that examine the role of myth in the Christian tradition—but the book also unfolds thematically as the other essays analyze the mythopoeic method in particular Inklings works.

Leading the collection with the Society's first keynote speech, Joe R. Christopher interprets Lewis's three modes of knowing God (rational, moral, and, shall one say, mystical) as seen in major phases of his career both as a scholar of literature and philosophy and as an apologist for general readers, offering a relevant witness even for the twenty-first century. This essay clarifies why Lewis turned from rational apologetics to writing in other modes.

Drawing upon certain passages in MacDonald's *Lilith*, along with others from Chesterton, Lewis, and Tolkien, Rolland Hein clarifies the ways that mythic literature can attract readers with poignant beauty and then lead them to truths of human nature that lie deeper than purely empirical science can reach.

Salwa Khoddam's essay, containing an unpublished excerpt from "The Quest of Bleheris," analyzes the process by which Lewis used landscape motifs of ancient cities and paradisaical gardens in *The Magician's Nephew* to contrast tyrannical empires with divine healing, and how he drew upon modern fantasy mostly for the former; classical, medieval, and renaissance sources for the latter.

Turning to a more problematic text in the Lewis canon, my own paper (Jonathan B. Himes) addresses directly the most disturbing aspects of *The Dark Tower* to argue that although the edited text may need closer scrutiny, Lewis's point with all the obscene, nightmarish imagery was actually to relate a Christian allegory on the dangers of "solitary vice."

The next essay addresses a more legitimate passion—that of the bibliophile. David Oberhelman's study of libraries throughout the kingdoms of Middle-earth (Elf, Dwarf, Human, and Hobbit) demonstrates how Tolkien drew upon famous archives in actual history as models for the hoarding of knowledge in his subcreated world. The important work of preserving oral and written traditions, prone to decline as civilizations wane, eventually falls to the custodians and librarians of the Shire.

In another paper on Tolkien, Jason Fisher brings our attention to the concept of the *felix culpa*, revealing some telling points of divergence between Tolkien's Catholicism and the theology of his subcreated world. Many acts of goodness and heroism in Middle-earth appear not to have been possible without some prior, precipitating act of evil. In fact, evil itself is woven into the very design of the world before its physical creation. This alleviates certain problems of fictional invention while leaving some eschatological issues of Middle-earth unresolved.

Tom Shippey, expanding on his points from the final panel on the Inklings' moral and mythopoeic legacy at the 2006 JBU conference, explores the threat of moral corruption on the level of subtleties within

language, comparing Lewis's analysis of this process throughout *The Screwtape Letters* with that of George Orwell, F. R. Leavis, and other writers.

David Neuhouser offers a surprising look at the important role mathematics can play in the spiritual formation of a writer like George MacDonald, whose many novels make abundant reference to the beauty and utility of this discipline. Not only does math equip the mind for fine lines of reasoning in theology, but it also cultivates the imagination and trains one to obey laws first in order to fully understand them later. Lewis, Williams, and Dorothy Sayers also allude to the value of mathematics.

Kerry Dearborn challenges readers of Lewis, Tolkien, and MacDonald to observe the emphasis in their works on treating strangers with uncommon courtesy and compassion. The characters Ransom, Curdie, and also various companions in *FOTR* experience this blessing in their arduous quests, and those who confer it demonstrate its sacramental qualities, transforming both guest and host.

Thomas Howard's presentation, left in its form of an after-dinner speech, offers a fitting conclusion to the book's theme of the legacy of these writers, charting some of Howard's astute interpretations of their works on his own spiritual itinerary, along with accounts of the circumstances prompting Lewis to write him a response letter and Howard's personal visit to the Kilns years later.

In my role as editor, I must thank first of all the authors of these chapters for contributing their fine work to this collection and for their patience as it came together. Allow me next to acknowledge how greatly I am indebted to Joe R. Christopher and Salwa Khoddam, my assistant editors, who worked tirelessly with me on the selections and the suggested revisions for these papers. This project was truly a scholarly collaboration in which they served as mentors and critics, iron sharpening iron. It was their *noblesse oblige* that granted me executive powers of editing over this book as the CSLIS Secretary. Any errors that remain in this work belong to me.

I offer many thanks to my work-study/research assistant Mark Royes for his indefatigable and meticulous attention to an abundance of formatting issues and for his help on the front and back matter; to my other work-study Melissa Gute for tracking down references; to the JBU reference librarians Simone Schroder, Steve Paschold, and Brent Swearingen for ordering countless materials through interlibrary loan and helping me to locate some of the more obscure sources; to my colleagues in the JBU English department Gary Guinn, Charles Pastoor, Lisa Brandom, and Patty Kirk for their advice and support for the 2006

conference; to our administrative assistants Zula Graham and Lynnel Lein for their gifts of organization and constant aid; to JBU for two Shippis Scholars Grants that allowed me to work on this book during otherwise busy semesters of teaching; to my wife Amanda E. Himes, the scholar with whom I am honored to share my life; and to our son Logan Alexander Himes, who was born this summer, bringing great joy in the midst of books and papers stacked to the ceiling in our home office.

The Society would also like to thank the following people for their involvement over the years and for their dedication to Inklings scholarship. First, those who have organized and directed CSLIS conferences: Dr. Salwa Khoddam at OCU (1998, 2003); Dr. Mark Hall at ORU (1999, 2005); Dr. Bettie Joe Knight at University of Central Oklahoma (2000); Dr. Mike Bellah and Dr. Mary Dodson at Amarillo College (2002); Dr. Jim Watson and Dr. Martin Batts at LeTourneau University (2004); Dr. Jonathan B. Himes at JBU (2006); Dr. Larry E. Fink and Dr. Keith A. Waddle at Hardin-Simmons University (2007).

Next, we thank our keynote speakers: Dr. Joe R. Christopher (1998); Dr. Paul Vickery (1999); Dr. William Epperson (2000); Dr. Louis Markos and Dr. J. Stanley Mattson (2002); Dr. Rolland Hein and Dr. Don King (2003); Dr. Bruce Edwards and Dr. Louis Markos (2004); Dr. Ralph Wood and Dr. Christopher Mitchell (2005); Dr. Tom A. Shippey and Derick Bingham, Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts (2006); Dr. Rolland Hein, Dr. David Neuhouser, Dr. Thomas Howard, and Dr. Kerry Dearborn (2007).

Joe, Salwa, and I would like to thank the curators and staff of the Wade Collection at Wheaton and those at the Bodleian Library in Oxford for their prompt and able assistance to our queries on certain references; Alastair Fowler for his helpful letters and kind permission to quote from them; and the C. S. Lewis Co. for permission to use extracts from Lewis's work. Lastly, we thank our fellow readers of mythopoeic literature for so many insights shared at conferences and by correspondence over the years.

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Notes

¹ Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings: C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and their Friends* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), 43-44. Cf. the epigraph to this book, also taken from Carpenter (42-43), which further relates this famous exchange that led Tolkien to dedicate his poem “Mythopoeia” to Lewis.

² For an extended comparison between writers like Tolkien, who directly addressed the problem of evil in their writings, and their contemporaries, see Tom Shippey’s paper “Tolkien as a Post-War Writer,” in *Scholarship and Fantasy: The Tolkien Phenomenon*, ed. Keither J. Battarbee (Finland: University of Turku, 1993), 217-36.

³ Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings*, 218.

⁴ Qtd. in David Lyle Jeffrey, “Medieval Literature,” in *Reading the Classics with C. S. Lewis*. Ed. Thomas Martin. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 72-86 (82).

⁵ C. S. Lewis, “Christianity and Literature,” *Christian Reflections*, Ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: 1967), 1-11 (7).

⁶ For an explanation of the “mythical method” and why it put the Inklings (and Tolkien in particular) out of favor with certain critics while simultaneously winning over millions of readers, see Tom Shippey, *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), especially pp. 315-17.

CHAPTER ONE

C. S. LEWIS'S THREE PATHS TO GOD: A KEYNOTE ADDRESS FOR "C. S. LEWIS FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY"

JOE R. CHRISTOPHER,
PROFESSOR EMERITUS, TARLETON STATE UNIVERSITY

Introduction

This conference is titled "C. S. Lewis for the Twenty-first Century," a century that starts in three years. I must admit, as a long-time reader of science fiction, that I have vicariously experienced a number of twenty-first centuries. Further, I remember in the late 1960s being at the University of Chicago; my brother was working in a computer lab there, and my wife, my small children, and I visited the MANIAC, as their vacuum-tube-filled computer was called. It occupied the walls of a room, and my children played a computer game that some of the workers had designed: two spaceships, in outline, circled a planet at the start: each had a certain number of shots that could be fired from its nose at the other; besides guidance of the ships' directions, what made the competition exciting was that, before each game started, one could change the rules for the walls of the screen: shots could vanish harmlessly off the edges; or the edges could ricochet the shots, like banking shots on the side of a pool table; or the shots could go off one edge to come back onto the screen from the opposite side. My children found it terribly exciting.

Has anyone looked at a computer game recently—MYST, for example? The ones my grandchildren play are highly sophisticated in image and action.

Even the science fiction of my youth in the 1940s and 1950s has a certain quaintness. When Isaac Asimov wrote *Foundation*, the first of a

future history sequence, he projected no computers such as we know them today. In some of the later novels in the series, he quietly added them. Even odder is Henry Kuttner and C. L. Moore's "Baldy" series, as the stories were called, collected in a book called *Mutant*. Kuttner and Moore project a post-atomic-war future where beneficial mutations have produced bald, telepathic humans. An all-out atomic war has not happened, yet, but no such beneficial results occurred in Japan or, post Chernobyl, in Russia.

What am I saying? Two things, really. First, certain cultural aspects of our lives do change, and sometimes change extremely. The computer revolution has hardly begun. On the other hand, certain types of changes are extremely unlikely or even impossible daydreams.

I have used the example of favorable mutations from an atomic war, but the basic type of daydream I wish to dismiss is that of the religionless future. A recent version is found in Arthur C. Clarke's *3001: The Final Odyssey*. In Chapter 19, "The Madness of Mankind," one of the characters holds forth not on God—"Atheism is unprovable, so uninteresting" (138)—but on religious belief as psychopathology: "There's never been anything, however absurd, that myriads of people weren't prepared to believe, often so passionately that they'd fight to the death rather than abandon their illusions. To me, that's a good operational definition of insanity" (142). He includes anyone with strong, sincere religious beliefs as technically insane. Clarke's comments in his notes at the back of the book show that he agrees with this character's comments:

. . . I would like to assure my many Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, and Muslim friends that I am sincerely happy that the religion which Chance has given you has contributed to your peace of mind (and often, as Western medical science now reluctantly admits, to your physical well-being). Perhaps it is better to be un-sane and happy, than sane and unhappy. But it is best of all to be sane and happy. Whether our descendants can achieve that goal will be the greatest challenge of the future. Indeed, it may well decide whether we have any future. (274, paraphrasing omitted)

Chance (capitalized) seems to be the goddess Fortuna under a different name, but of course that is simply Clarke's joke. Many other science-fiction writers quietly assume a religionless future, without discussing it.

Mr. Wisdom's Identification of the Three Ways

I could go in several directions after my opening, but what I wish to

discuss today are C. S. Lewis's three arguments for the existence of God. I assume these arguments will be as valid and as meaningful in the twenty-first century as Lewis's readers have found them in the twentieth. I assume they (and other arguments of the type) assure there will be no religionless future. I will come back to this assumption, but let me begin this twenty-first century investigation by turning back to 1933, the year that Lewis published his first Christian book, *The Pilgrim's Regress*.

I do not know how many of Lewis's fans actually have read that book. Indeed, in a letter Lewis once said that he didn't know how to make things simple for his readers when he wrote the volume (*Letters of Lewis* 430). But it is a valuable book, for it shows many of Lewis's beliefs, already developed.

Specifically, in the latter part of this allegory there is an episode in which John (the protagonist) is in the House of Wisdom; there Mr. Wisdom discusses three things which exist by themselves, not made by mankind. In the allegory, these are the roads of the country (126), the laws (126-28), and the visions of a western island (128-130). One understands why Lewis uses the first two. In many places the roads have developed from earlier trails, and there cannot be a clearly established time when the roads first came into existence. Likewise, there are societies in which the laws are simply traditional practices. A reader may remember that Antigone, in Sophocles' play, speaks of the religious laws that have always existed. For the English reader of Lewis, the British Common Law may create the same feeling. The vision of a western island, of course, is not quite the same sort of thing. But one may recall that a number of myths project a western island: the Hesperides, in a few accounts, are located on a western island; Avalon, the isle of apples, is laid in the west, as is Tir-nan-og, or Hy-Breasail, in Celtic mythology. So the vision of this far-away island, lying out in the western ocean, may have some universal characteristics.

But the subtitle of Lewis's book begins *An Allegorical Apology*. If these roads, laws, and visions are in an allegory, they must be symbols. What do they stand for? From the headlines in the third edition of *PR* they can be identified. Lewis explains the roads as "logical categories" and the laws as "moral values" (126). The western island is identified as "the transcendent" (128). But it is important to remember that these three things were not created by men; they are eternal, built into the universe, so to speak.

The character Mr. Wisdom (sometimes just called Wisdom) has some limits in Lewis's book, but these three eternal truths, or qualities, or aspects of the universe, seem to be truly identified by Wisdom, for Lewis

returns to these ideas in his subsequent books. But he returns to them with a difference. Mr. Wisdom does not make them the basis of religious faith. Mr. Wisdom (by which Lewis must mean human wisdom) cannot make that decision by himself. For example, Wisdom tells John about John's visions: "Abandon hope: do not abandon desire" (129), by which he seems to mean that John's religious vision cannot be achieved but it should not therefore be denied. This is a tension on the edge of religious commitment, but not over the edge.

A parallel, although complicated by realistic development of character, is Lysias the Fox, a Greek slave and tutor in Lewis's last novel, *Till We Have Faces*. His philosophy, which seems to be a Stoicism, is partly summed up in his comments: "the divine nature . . . has no envy" (24); "the divine nature is without jealousy. Those gods—the sort of [revengeful] gods you are always thinking about—are all folly and lies of poets" (28). One of the characters sums up the Fox's beliefs: "He thought there were no gods, or else . . . that they were better than men" (71)—which is also a position of tension. His spirit later in the novel learns more about the gods (cf. 297), but that is beyond the level of human wisdom.

I would like to take up these three concepts one by one—the logical categories, the moral values, and the vision of the transcendent—and trace how Lewis uses them in his later books, how he reaches positions beyond that which Mr. Wisdom or the earlier Fox were able to find.

I should make it clear that I am not concerned here with reasons for Christian faith, just with theism. Although some arguments were involved in Lewis's Christian conversion, it was basically a matter of God's grace, not human reason. Here I am concerned, in biographical terms, with Lewis's conversion to theism in 1929, not to Christianity in 1931.

Logical Categories or Reason

The first of these concepts is "the logical categories" in Lewis's early, philosophical jargon. He later referred to it as reason. Perhaps the first thing to do is to consider the roads in *PR*. The people in the work do not comment on the roads very much, but certainly the roads lead to various dwellings—various positions, we might call them; such places as Claptrap, Thrill, and Eschropalis—and the people in the dwellings often argue that their views are correct. Perhaps Lewis is suggesting that the journeys to the various positions are ones of logic or illogic, and thus the symbolism of the roads is appropriate. At the end of the book, after John's conversion, there is only one road—which is certainly symbolic!

One of the few earlier comments on the roads is that made by Mr.

Enlightenment:

Why, they tell you in Puritania [John's home province] that the landlord [God] made all these roads. But that is quite impossible[,] for old people can remember the time when the roads were not nearly so good as they are now. And what is more, scientists have found all over the country the traces of old roads running in quite different directions. The inference is obvious. (36)

Mr. Enlightenment is being satirized in the passage, so the inference is *not* obvious. Mr. Enlightenment suggests that the roads are not eternal, that the logical categories vary with time. I suppose this is equivalent to saying that induction and deduction are variable in their validity; that once analogy was not the weakest form of argumentation. Actually, the old roads discovered by scientists only prove that once people argued about different topics than they do now, not that the roads or methods of arguments were different. Perhaps the old people's comments about the roads of their youth is one with the traditional statements about how far they walked to school in the snow in their youth: the elderly exaggerate the one-time difficulties. More certainly, the citation of the elderly's views of the old roads is one with Mr. Enlightenment's celebration of the modern, the up-to-date; with his chronological snobbery.

The book in which Lewis later developed his position about reason is *Miracles: A Preliminary Study*. Luckily, only Chapters 3 and 4 are necessary for the present purposes. Otherwise I would be speaking all morning. Chapter 3 is titled "The Self-Contradiction of the Naturalist." In it, Lewis argues from a definition of Naturalism that he developed in the second chapter: Naturalism is a belief that there is nothing beyond this universe and nothing beyond its laws (16-17, 19-20). In Chapter 3, Lewis develops an argument based on a rule he announces: "no thought is valid if it can be fully explained as the result of irrational causes" (27). Lewis gives a number of examples to support this generalization. Let me quote just one, in which Lewis appeals to the general experience of his readers:

When a sober man tells you that the house is full of rats or snakes, you attend to him: if you know that his belief in the rats or snakes is due to *delirium tremens*[,] you do not even bother to look for them. (27)

Although this type of popular induction might be challenged by a professional logician, for our purposes of seeing Lewis's three arguments it is clear enough. Lewis says in normal experience, if a position is proposed that is based on clearly non-rational support, on "irrational

causes,” the hearer or reader does not accept the position as true.

His next step is to apply this to Naturalism. If the Naturalistic belief is true, then the whole universe develops from non-rational causes. In current terms, post-dating *Miracles* in 1947, one could say that the universe began in a Big Bang of radiation and subatomic particles; there was no mind, no reason, behind it or in it, for Naturalism does not allow for anything beyond the universe and obviously no intelligence had yet developed within it. The universe then continued its process by cause and effect. When intelligence evolves in one species of primate on this earth, no thought of this primate can be valid, according to Lewis’s rule, for its thought processes are the results of irrational causes.

I remind you that this third chapter is titled “The Self-Contradiction of the Naturalist.” What Lewis is saying is that the Naturalist, assuming his own reasoning to be valid, argues that the universe has been produced by non-rational cause and effect. By his own theory, his own reason has been produced the same way; and hence, by his theory, he cannot be certain that his reason sees the truth, since that reason is the result of non-rational causes.

When one reads this argument, I think one remembers that Lewis was trained, originally, as a philosopher. It is a good intellectual argument, but I suspect that most Naturalists—at least most scientific Naturalists—are pragmatists. They cannot defend their reasoning in a philosophical way, but they would deny that a non-rational universe *cannot* produce beings who reason with some clarity—they would deny this because (in their own world view) it has. Lewis wants them to be logically consistent, and they reply, “No thanks.”

For our purposes, this disagreement with Lewis is not important—we are interested in Lewis’s positions. For example, I have omitted the second edition of *Miracles* in which Lewis revised the chapter I have just discussed. I will come back to this revision and the reasons for it in my conclusion, but for the present the simpler form will do. Both versions reach similar conclusions, and that is enough for now.

The fourth chapter is titled “Nature and Supernature.” It depends on a definition of the Supernatural back in the second chapter. Lewis limits his discussion to the religious belief in one God, and then he writes:

The Supernaturalist believes that one Thing exists on its own and has produced the framework of space and time and the procession of systematically connected events which fill them. This framework, and this filling, he calls Nature. (20)

In chapter four, Lewis continues his argument that Nature and Reason are

independent of each other:

We have seen [he writes] that rational thought is not part of the system of Nature. Within each man there must be an area (however small) of activity which is outside or independent of her. (35)

But, he asks, is this independent reason something which exists on its own in the individual human or is it part of “some (rational) cause” outside of the individual (35)? He answers, reason does not exist “on its own” in a human, for sleep and other activities interrupt it (36). Reason can only exist “on its own” if it is outside of mankind and outside of Nature (36). A reader notices that this discussion echoes Lewis’s description of what the Supernaturalist believes: “that one thing exists on its own”; this is the conclusion Lewis reaches:

Human minds . . . are not the only supernatural entities that exist. . . . Each has come into Nature from Supernature: each has its taproot in an eternal, self-existent, rational Being, whom we call God. (36-37)

The phrasing of this last statement, about minds being “supernatural entities,” is interesting. Reason, since it is outside of Nature, has to belong to at least a Heteronature—in Lewis’s terms, a Supernature. He assumes (perhaps too easily) that human reason, being intermittent, must belong to a larger, continuous Reason—that is, God. Although Lewis does not say so clearly, it seems obvious that he is assuming that, since mankind’s reason did not develop from Nature, it must have a source, which is a rational God. But his actual argument is not a cause-and-effect one, God being the cause and human reason being the effect; but rather a sustaining source and a dependent result—as if God were a pilot light and human minds were a series of connected furnaces that turned on and off. But the source of Reason must be there; the pilot light must be burning. Thus, God exists.

Moral Values or the Tao

If the roads in *PR* have been there forever, in some sense, then so also have the laws. At the first of *PR*, John is taught not to try to kill birds in the garden by being smacked by the cook and told it was against the Steward’s rules (the Steward stands for the local clergyman—or, in Lewis’s background, parish priest) (20). Later, John is taken for a talk with the Steward, who gives him a card with the Landlord’s rules on it—a very large number of items (21-22). The Steward does not take the rules with

complete seriousness, telling John in an aside to lie about not having broken any of them. This is, of course, part of a satire. John later finds a set of contradictory rules on the back of the card—these are the rules developed for living in this world, Lewis’s running headline suggests. However, the contradiction between God’s rules and worldly rules is an ancient story. More significant for the present purposes is a later episode. Mr. Enlightenment has told John that the landlord does not exist. John is very happy and exclaims a while later to a fellow journeyer:

“I can hardly believe it yet [that is, that there is no landlord, and hence]—that I need not obey the rules. There’s that robin again. To think I could have a shot at it if I liked and no one would interfere with me!”

“Do you want to?” [asks the other].

“I’m not sure that I do,” said John, fingering his sling. But when he looked round on the sunshine and remembered his great happiness and looked twice at the bird, he said, “No, I don’t. There is nothing I want less. Still—I could if I liked.” (39)

If this were a realistic fiction, a critic might say that John has internalized his earlier correction by the cook. But in this allegory John is having a moral experience (headline, 39): he has a choice, and he chooses not to be destructive of beauty for no reason. He does not understand his choice clearly yet, but nevertheless the circumstances of a choice are clearly set out.

This episode also suggests that the rules are not so much a matter of print on a card as an inward awareness. The whole situation is complicated in Lewis’s book where it turns out that John’s fellow journeyer, an allegorical figure named Vertue, not knowing the landlord’s rules, makes his own: one of them is to walk thirty miles a day. “I have made the best rules I can [he says]. If I find any better ones I shall adopt them. In the meantime, the great thing is to have rules of some sort and to keep them” (40). This stoicism is also a modern attitude, but explicit in this statement is a search for (or at least an openness to) moral laws of the best kind one can find.

This openness to morality is also shown by Mark Studdock in Lewis’s novel *That Hideous Strength*. When he finds himself in the Objective Room, he begins—in contrast to the training he is receiving—to conceive of what he considers “the Straight or Normal or Wholesome” (398). The Room itself is made up of slight irregularities—the arch over the door is slightly off the center, for example (351). It is only in contrast to this sort of off-patterning and the Room’s paintings—some of them of the Dadaesque style (352)—that Studdock finds morality (*THS* 14.1, 14.4, 15.4).

But this is not an approach to God, at least not directly (cf. 15.4).

This argument for a morality which can be discovered within as John does; or chosen in a more rigid way, as Vertue does; or discovered by contrast, as Mark Studdock does, also appears in Lewis's *The Abolition of Man*, which discusses what in the west has been called Natural Law (that is, a universal moral law). In *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis uses a term from Confucian philosophy, the Tao, meaning the Way, for this Natural Law.

None of these treatments by Lewis are a means to God—at least, not clearly. Lewis once said in a letter to Clyde S. Kilby that the Tao was simply Christ, seen from a particular perspective (Kilby 190). That is, I believe, a faith statement, not an argument. But Lewis *did* show how the Tao could lead to belief in his “Right and Wrong as a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe,” the first section (“book”) of *Mere Christianity*. In this discussion Lewis begins with an appeal to common experience: when people quarrel, they usually appeal to moral standards. “I was here first,” one might say (3). Although Lewis does not say so, I suppose that even when people are rationalizing their positions and shouting things like “It’s all your fault,” nevertheless the sheer idea of someone being at fault implies that a moral standard judges between the guilty and the innocent, the one at fault and the one not at fault. No doubt no one quarreling can claim to be innocent in the fullest sense, but that does not lessen the appeal to a moral standard.

Lewis’s next step is to say that no one lives up to the morality that he or she is aware of and argues from (6). Again, this is an appeal to experience. Lewis is not developing a position from revealed truth and mentioning mankind’s fallen nature, for example. The idea is the same, but the approach is different, as is befitting a discussion aimed at the general public. The third step in his argument is to suggest that mankind’s awareness of a moral law is an awareness of something beyond human nature:

The Moral Law, or Law of Human Nature, is not . . . a mere fancy, for we cannot get rid of the idea, and most of the things we say and think about men would be reduced to nonsense if we did. (16)

I suppose, although Lewis gives no example at this point, that he was thinking of such things as statements about the moral evil of the Nazis, for this part of his book was first published in 1942, during the Second World War. He concludes this step by saying:

It begins to look as if we shall have to admit that there is more than one

kind of reality; that, in this particular case, there is something above and beyond the ordinary facts of men's behavior, and yet quite definitely real—a real law, which none of us made, but which we find pressing in on us. (16)

This position about a moral law which man did not make is the position that Mr. Wisdom stated in *PR*.

Lewis's final step is to argue that the source of this moral law is God. Lewis was very good at disjunctions, and he sets up one here: either the universe is material or it has something behind it like a mind. He says that, in the one case which humans can investigate inwardly, themselves, they find a moral law that they did not make troubling them. This implies, Lewis says,

a Something which is directing the universe, and which appears in me as a law urging me to do right and making me feel responsible and uncomfortable when I do wrong. I think we have to assume it is more like a mind than it is like anything else we know[.] (20)

He does not here use the word God, but the concept is obvious. This argument through morality is Lewis's second path to God.

The Vision of the Transcendent or *Sehnsucht*

The third path is the vision of the western island. In *PR* it is made clear that this is not exactly a vision of an island. In the book, John's first experience comes as he looks through a window in a wall at a springtime wood:

There came to him from beyond the wood a sweetness and a pang so piercing that he forgot his father's house, and his mother, and the fear of the landlord, and the burden of the rules. . . . A moment later he found that he was sobbing . . . and what it was that had happened to him he could not quite remember. . . . It seemed to him that a mist which hung at the far end of the wood had parted for a moment, and through this rift he had seen a calm sea, and in the sea an island, where the smooth turf sloped down unbroken to the bays[;] and out of the thickets peeped the pale, small-breasted Oreads, wise like gods, unconscious of themselves like beasts[;] and tall enchanters, bearded to their feet, sat in green chairs among the forests. But even while he pictured these things[;] he knew with one part of his mind, that they were not like the things he had seen—nay, that what had befallen him was not seeing at all. (24)

This is a long quotation, but it is a useful beginning point. In the headline to this episode to *PR* it is said that John experiences “Sweet Desire” (24); later, as has been said, it is called the vision of the Transcendent. Lewis used other terms from time to time for the same idea: *Remembrance* in “The Queen of Drum” (153); *Romanticism* in the full subtitle of *The Pilgrim's Regress*; *glory* in his 1941 sermon “The Weight of Glory”; *immortal longings* (135n) and *desire for heaven* in *The Problem of Pain* (133-136); *hope* in a chapter on that theological virtue in *Mere Christianity*; *joy* in his autobiographical *Surprised by Joy*. The image that attracts its viewer varies in these and other works; one critic has noted that four things are most often used as images of the transcendent by Lewis: distant hills, an exotic garden, an island (often in the far east or far west), and sweet music, sometimes in combinations (Carnell 87-91). John, in what was quoted, saw an island; in his autobiography Lewis describes an experience from his childhood in Belfast, also of looking through a window:

Every day there were what we [his brother and he] called “the Green Hills”; that is, the low line of the Castlereagh Hills which we saw from the nursery windows. They were not very far off but they were, to children, quite unattainable. They taught me longing—*Sehnsucht*; made me for good or ill, and before I was six years old, a votary of the Blue Flower. (14)

Here, of course, with the German word *Sehnsucht* and with the reference to the *blaue Blume* of German Romanticism, Lewis has put this “Sweet Desire,” this “Joy,” into a literary context. Some of the English Romantics also wrote about it: Wordsworth, for example, when he speaks of “the joy and the dream” in “Ode: Intimations of Immortality.” This longing seems to be a type of low-grade mysticism, although Lewis never used that term for his experiences.

Or, at least, he never did with any directness. I have sometimes wondered if his argument in the first chapter of *The Problem of Pain*, where he says one of the basic strands of religion is a numinous awe, is not another way of referring to this same thing. There he speaks of the humans' reaction of awe, akin to fear, in the presence of the supernaturally mysterious, the Numinous (5-8). *Perhaps* Lewis is making a connection between John's experience that causes him to weep and this experience of awe. But it is nonetheless true that Lewis's feeling was more one of longing than of awe. In *Till We Have Faces*, Psyche reflects Lewis's experience of the Castlereagh Hills when she says,

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 [Psyche, her sister Orual, and the Fox], with the wind and the sunshine . . . where you couldn't see Glome [their small country] or the palace. Do you remember? The color and 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. (74)

This desire by Psyche—and the word *psyche* means the soul—this desire by the soul is not an argument for God. But Lewis also provides that.

In the preface to the third edition of *The Pilgrim's Regress*, Lewis writes, “There is a peculiar mystery about the *object* of this desire” (8). He lists a number of possible confusions: persons experiencing the call of *Sehnsucht* may think they are desiring the far-off hills, or experiences in their past, or fictional places, or “perfect beloved[s],” or the occult, or intellectual knowledge (8). Lewis testifies:

The sole merit I claim for this book is that it is written by one who has proved them all to be wrong. There is no room for vanity in the claim. I know them to be wrong not by intelligence but by experience, such experience as would not have come my way if my youth had been wiser, more virtuous, and less self-centered than it was. (8)

He goes on to make an intellectual argument for the falsity of these substitutions. For example, he says, “An easy experiment will show that by going to the far hillside you will get either nothing, or else a recurrence of the same desire which sent you thither” (9). Some of these false substitutes are acted out in the narrative of *PR*, such as the substitution of sex with the “perfect beloved” for *Sehnsucht*—these can be traced in the references to the brown girls (Bk. 1, Chs. 4-6 [probably referring to masturbation and its mental results]; Bk. 2, Chs. 5-6 [perhaps referring to an actual woman]). He also mentions in *Surprised by Joy* that a desire for the Occult was aroused in him by a matron at one of his schools (62); he was put off the Occult later, at least for a time, when he spent two weeks taking care of an Occultist who was—as we would say today—having a nervous breakdown, “hold[ing] him while he kicked and wallowed on the floor, screaming out that devils were tearing him” (192). Certainly the latter experience was not one of the Sweet Desire.

The last step in Lewis's argument in the preface is this: