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The Neo-Platonic Christianity of C. S. Lewis

Richard L. W. Clarke

> [T]o lose what I owe to Plato and Aristotle would be like the amputation of a limb.[1]

> 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. I still think this a very natural road, but I now know that it is a road very rarely trodden.[2]

It is certainly no secret that C. S. Lewis was an avowed Christian. It has often been noted, too, that he was a Platonist. However, what has not been explored sufficiently, if at all, are the precise ways in which the Christian and Platonic elements of his thinking intersect to form a unique, powerful, and persuasive worldview that marries religious belief with philosophical critique. In what follows, I shall attempt to show how Lewis's fusion of Platonism with Christianity gives rise to his belief, metaphysically speaking, that the physical universe is not all there is but, rather, "transposes" (as he terms it) a greater non-physical or spiritual reality and is, as such, part of a divinely-ordained, orderly, and purposeful scheme of things.[3] I shall

[1] C. S. Lewis, *Rehabilitations and Other Essays* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 64.

[2] C. S. Lewis, Preface to the Third Edition, in *The Pilgrim's Regress* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1958), 8.

[3] E. J. Lowe defines *metaphysics* as the branch of philosophy devoted to investigating

also argue that for Lewis, epistemologically speaking, knowledge of this grand design and the place of humans therein is conveyed not through the human senses, at least as these are conventionally conceived, but, rather, through our *higher* reason, which is capable of objective insight into the true nature of reality.[4] I shall conclude by contending that Lewis believes, from an ethical, social, and political point of view, that well-doing and well-being at both the individual and collective levels are attained through a combination of wisdom as to the true nature of things, the courage to act in accordance with this knowledge, the moderation of self-interest in the form of the surrender of one's individual will to God's, and, last but not least, justice in the form of a hierarchy of functions both within the soul and without.[5]

Lewis was deeply influenced particularly, though not exclusively, by the works of Plato's so-called "middle period," not least *The Republic*.[6] (No one knows for sure in what order the dialogues were written, but their division by scholars into at least three phases, early, middle, and late, is not

the "fundamental structure of reality as a whole" (3). In other words, it seeks to grasp the nature of "being," that is, those properties common to all things which may be said to "be" or exist. Metaphysics is, accordingly, a pursuit that "goes beyond" (hence, the prefix *meta-*) the object studied by any particular empirical science, not least physics. Lowe argues that at the heart of metaphysics lies the sub-field of *ontology*, which he defines as the "study of what categories of entities there are and how they are related to one another" (14). See E. J. Lowe, *A Survey of Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). For some students of metaphysics, though not necessarily Lowe, there are two other inter-related sub-fields, cosmology and cosmogony, which are devoted to exploring the origin, nature, and *raison d'être* of the universe.

[4] *Epistemology*, or theory of knowledge, is the branch of philosophy devoted to exploring the nature, the sources, and the limits of knowledge, that is, to answering the questions: "What is knowledge?"; "How do we obtain it?"; and "Is certitude possible?". See Louis P. Pojman, *What Can We Know? An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1995).

[5] *Ethics* is, according to Harry Gensler, a synonym for moral philosophy, which is the branch of philosophy devoted to exploring questions of right and wrong as well as the values we ascribe to objects and events. Ethics is normally divided into two main sub-field: "metaethics" studies the "nature and methodology of moral judgments" (4), while "normative ethics" explores the principles informing "how we ought to live" (4). See Harry Gensler, *Ethics: A Contemporary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1998).

[6] Plato, *The Republic*, trans. by Francis Macdonald Cornford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971). See also Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. by John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).

without some justification, as Kraut argues.)[7] As is well known, *The Republic* is a dialogue ultimately concerned with theorizing the ideal form of justice and the organization of the state that ought to be established in accordance with this ideal. However, as is also well known, before these ethical, social, and political ideals can be stipulated, Plato believes that certain epistemological and ontological issues must be addressed. To put this another way, before we can know how we ought to live together with others, we need to understand the true nature of reality and, to this end, whether objective knowledge is at all possible.

Plato's Theory of Knowledge

The Republic certainly foregrounds the problem of knowledge, not least in the celebrated episode that has come to be called the "allegory of the cave."[8] Allan Silverman offers a concise summary:

> Seated prisoners, chained so that they cannot move their heads, stare at a cave wall on which are projected images. These images are cast from carved figures illuminated by a fire and carried by people on a parapet above and behind the prisoners. A prisoner is loosed from his chains. First he sees the carved images and the fire. Then he is led out of the cave into "the real" world. Blinded by the light of the sun, he cannot look at the trees, rocks and animals around him, but instead looks at the shadows and reflections (in water) cast by those objects. As he becomes acclimatized, he turns his gaze to those objects and finally, fully acclimatized, he looks to the source of illumination, the sun itself.[9]

Few, if any, Plato scholars would deny that this is clearly an epistemological parable designed to illustrate Plato's theory of knowledge and, in particular, his notion of the so-called "dividing line" separating empirical from rational forms of knowledge. Empirical knowledge is derived from what our *senses* (and especially our eyes) report about the ever-changing physical world of

[7] Richard Kraut, "Plato," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2015 edition), ed. by Edward N. Zalta, n.p. (http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/plato/), 21 March 2016.

[8] Plato, *The Republic*, chapter 25 "The Allegory of the Cave." 227–35

[9] Allan Silverman, "Plato's Middle Period Metaphysics and Epistemology," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2014 edition), ed. by Edward N. Zalta, n.p. (http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/plato-metaphysics/), 18 March 2016

appearances (this is the realm of *becoming*, as it were) and is made possible, in the case of the sense of sight especially, by the light shone by the sun. Rational knowledge is generated by our reason, which ultimately provides insight into the unchanging non-physical world of ideas and ideals (the realm of *being*, as such) and is made possible by the figurative "light" shed thereon by what Plato terms, at least in Francis Cornford's translation, the "Good" (*agathon*).[10] The Good evidently performs a role in the *intelligible* world analogous to that of the sun in the (primarily) *visible* world.

Plato outlines a clearly hierarchical model of knowledge in which rational modes are elevated over empirical modes of knowledge. At the bottom of the scale, the physical senses (and, in particular, the eyes) provide at best knowledge only of the appearances of objects in the physical world and even this knowledge has its limitations. There are, in fact, two kinds of empirical knowledge, one superior to the other. At the lower level is the kind of pseudo-knowledge or illusion (Plato's term for this is *eikasia*, which is difficult to render into English) provided by our perception not of the objects themselves but of images of objects, that is, their shadows, reflections, representations, etc. The prisoners with their heads immobilized in such a way that they are allowed to see only the shadows of objects cast by the firelight on the wall are trapped at this level of knowledge. *Eikasia* is less reliable than *pistis*, to be precise, the common-sense beliefs derived from directly sensing physical objects themselves. However, Plato stresses that the beliefs acquired in this way are themselves often erroneous because the senses cannot be trusted to always report the way things actually are. For example, a stick that is in fact straight may only *appear* to be crooked under water. This level of knowledge is represented by the prisoner who, once freed of his chains, turns his head and, this time, notices the existence not only of the real objects, which are the source of the shadows cast, but also of the firelight which makes vision possible and, thus, performs a role analogous to that of the sun.

Empirical knowledge is, Plato argues, inferior to knowledge generated by the use of one's reason. Rational knowledge is concerned, in the final analysis, not with the imperfect things of this world but the perfect ideas on which they are based, from which they are derived and of which they are

[10] Plato, *The Republic*, chapter 24 "Four Stages of Cognition. The Line." 221–26.

flawed replicas. There are also two levels of rational knowledge. The lower of these consists in what Plato terms *dianoia*, ordinarily translated simply as "thought" or "thinking" but which means here something closer to what we might call "reasoning" or "logic" of the sort epitomized by the field of mathematics. He has in mind in particular the use of geometrical diagrams and models (the rendering, for example, of a perfect circle which cannot in fact exist in reality) as well as the theorems associated therewith, such as the deduction of mathematical propositions (that are not immediately self-evident) from prior mathematical axioms (that is, propositions that are assumed to be true) via a chain of reasoning. In other words, *dianoia* is concerned with the logical demonstration of fresh truths on the basis of prior, already accepted truths. It should be stressed that this level of reasoning is far from a complete mode of knowledge because it merely engages in processes of inference without questioning the veracity of either the propositions given or those inferred, far less than subjecting the entire process of reasoning to metacritical scrutiny. This level of knowledge is represented by the prisoner's escape from the confines of the cave into the outside world where, blinded by sunlight, his vision is restricted to the shadows and reflections (for example, in water) of the actual objects around him (such as trees).

However, the higher form of reasoning, which Plato terms *nous*, questions all propositions with a view, ultimately, to establish the absolute truth on any and all topics once and for all. To this end, it makes use less of syllogistic reasoning (of the sort described above) than of the so-called Socratic method of question and answer or cross-examination (*elenchus*) that Plato terms the "dialectic." Synthesizing truth-claim (thesis) with counterclaim (antithesis), the higher mode of reason attains objective knowledge (*episteme*) of the true nature of all things, both tangible (such as a bed) and intangible (for example, happiness), by intuitively grasping the ideal forms (*eidos*, idea) thereof. Plato's primary focus in many of his dialogues, it should be noted, is often moral in nature. His goal in each such case is not merely to grasp the ideal form of the virtue in question, such as justice in *The Republic*, but also in the final analysis, more importantly, to intuit the supreme form itself, that foundational principle that Plato terms the "Good," from which all lesser forms are derived, on which they consequently depend, and without which moral knowledge would be impos-

sible. (The Good clearly performs a role in the intelligible world analogous to that of the sun in the visible without which vision would be impossible.) For Plato, the ultimate aim of all philosophizing is to gain a perfect understanding of the "Good," that is, of the rational coherence and providential nature of the universe.

Plato's Metaphysics

It should be obvious from the foregoing that Plato is an ontological idealist.[11] He believes that the physical world is not all there is, and beyond which there exists a non-physical reality to which the former is connected. To be precise, Plato is of the view that the physical world and all the various, ever-changing, and imperfect things therein, both tangible and intangible, are a reflection of the so-called "world of ideal forms," that is, a world consisting of the unchanging, perfect ideas, the ideal forms or essences, of all things. This world is an *ideal* world in both senses of this word; that is, it is a world that consists of ideas rather than matter, as well as being a perfect world. Plato reasons that this perfect world must exist, even though no evidence of its existence is reported by our senses, because the ideals and the ideas of perfection possessed by human beings simply could not be derived from the imperfect world which they inhabit. The key principle informing Plato's metaphysics is the concept of *mimesis* (meaning "reflection" or "imitation"), the dominant or root metaphor used to this end being that of the mirror.[12] Accordingly, the many and varied physical objects of this world, both natural and artificial, such as trees, tables, etc., as well as key mathematical concepts such as size, quantity, and so on are at best necessarily flawed imitations or *reflections* of the corresponding ideal forms (which might be termed something like "treeness," "tableness," and

[11] An ontological idealist believes that something non-material in nature, often conceived as akin to a mind or consciousness, that is, something other than matter, constitutes the ultimate foundation of all things, or at least is an indispensable aspect thereof.

[12] See Stephen C. Pepper, *World Hypotheses: A Study in Evidence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1942), for his theory of the "root-metaphors" by means of which humans make sense of reality. For more on the centrality of the concept of mimesis both to ancient ontology and classical literary theory, see also Richard McKeon, "Literary Criticism and the Concept of Imitation in Antiquity," in *Modern Philology* 34 (1936), 1–35.

so on) to be found in the world beyond. It should be noted in this regard that the multiplicity and diversity synonymous with the world of becoming are reduced to unity and singleness in the world of being where the truths behind appearances exists. Hence, for example, the *single* concept of "bedness" in the world of ideal forms of which the *many* different beds of this world are but imperfect replicas. All this is particularly true on the moral front. We can at best only act on earth in various ways that approximate perfection, and there are no utopias in which social and political justice reign, our imperfect notions of the various virtues being at best inadequate and unsatisfactory reflections of the ideals of individual behavior, social organization, and political order found only in the world beyond.

It cannot be stressed enough that, in Plato's schema, it is the ideal world that is the true reality and, thus, the standard by which this illusory world is to be measured. Kraut summarizes Plato's bifurcated vision of the universe in this way:

> The world that appears to our senses is in some way defective and filled with error, but there is a more real and perfect realm, populated by entities (called "forms" or "ideas") that are eternal, changeless, and in some sense paradigmatic for the structure and character of the world presented to our senses. Among the most important of these abstract objects (as they are now called, because they are not located in space or time) are goodness, beauty, equality, bigness, likeness, unity, being, sameness, difference, change, and changelessness . . . The most fundamental distinction in Plato's philosophy is between the many observable objects that appear beautiful (good, just, unified, equal, big) and the one object that is what beauty (goodness, justice, unity) really is, from which those many beautiful (good, just, unified, equal, big) things receive their names and their corresponding characteristics. Nearly every major work of Plato is, in some way, devoted to or dependent on this distinction.[13]

Plato's conception of the material world as synonymous with diversity, change and, thus, imperfection (a flawed world of multiplicity and becoming, in short) is hugely indebted to the pre-Socratic Heraclitus, just as his understanding of the spiritual world as one synonymous with oneness, permanence, and perfection (a world of unity and being) is undoubtedly

[13] Kraut, "Plato," n.p.

inspired by Parmenides.[14]

Plato expresses his metaphysical views not only in *The Republic* but also in other dialogues that are thought to be roughly contemporaneous therewith, such as the *Phaedo*.[15] Whatever the subtle differences between the perspectives expressed in specific dialogues, Plato's metaphysical views are characterized by certain common traits that Mark Balaguer sums up under the rubric "Platonism" in this way:

> Platonism is the view that there exist abstract (that is, non-spatial, non-temporal) objects . . . Because abstract objects are wholly non-spatiotemporal, it follows that they are also entirely non-physical (they do not exist in the physical world and are not made of physical stuff) and non-mental (they are not minds or ideas in minds; they are not disembodied souls, or Gods, or anything else along these lines). In addition, they are unchanging and entirely causally inert – that is, they cannot be involved in cause-and-effect relationships with other objects.[16]

Plato seems content in many works of his middle period merely to describe what, in Aristotelian terms, might be described as the *material* and *formal* causes of a bifurcated universe.[17]

However, it is in an arguably late dialogue, the *Timaeus*, that Plato proceeds from ontology to cosmology/cosmogony in order to offer an explanation of how the universe came to exist.[18] It is here, according to Donald

[14] See Philip Wheelwright, ed., *The Pre-Socratics* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1966).

[15] Plato, "Phaedo," trans. by G. M. A Grube, in *Complete Works*, ed. by John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis: Hackett 1997), 49–100.

[16] Mark Balaguer, "Platonism in Metaphysics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2016 edition), ed. by Edward N. Zalta, n.p. (http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/platonism/), 15 March 2016.

[17] For his account of the so-called "four causes" that explain the existence of all things, see Aristotle, "Physics," in *Aristotle: Selections*, ed. and trans. by Terence Irwin and Gail Fine (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), 83–145. The "material cause" refers to the material of which something is made (for example, plastic), the "formal cause" to the form which an object takes (for example, what differentiates a plastic knife from a plastic bag are their respective forms), the "efficient cause" to the principle which brings something into existence (for example, the worker or the manufacturing process responsible for the production of plastic items), and the "final cause" to the purpose for which something exists (for example, all knives, plastic or not, exist to cut things).

[18] Plato, "Timaeus," trans. Donald J. Zeyl, in *Complete Works*, ed. by John M.

Zeyl, that

> Plato presents an elaborately wrought account of the formation of the universe. Plato is deeply impressed with the order and beauty he observes in the universe, and his project in the dialogue is to explain that order and beauty. The universe, he proposes, is the product of rational, purposive, and beneficent agency. It is the handiwork of a divine Craftsman ("Demiurge," *dēmiourgos*, 28a6), who, imitating an unchanging and eternal model, imposes mathematical order on a preexistent chaos to generate the ordered universe (*kosmos*). The governing explanatory principle of the account is teleological: the universe as a whole as well as its various parts are so arranged as to produce a vast array of good effects. It strikes Plato strongly that this arrangement is not fortuitous, but the outcome of the deliberate intent of Intellect (*nous*), anthropomorphically represented by the figure of the Craftsman who plans and constructs a world that is as excellent as its nature permits it to be.
>
> As Plato tells it, the beautiful orderliness of the universe is not only the manifestation of Intellect; it is also the model for rational souls to understand and to emulate. Such understanding and emulation restore those souls to their original state of excellence, a state that was lost in their embodiment. There is, then, an explicit ethical and religious dimension to the discourse.[19]

In the *Timaeus*, in short, Plato's focus is on exploring the *efficient* and *final* causes of the universe, the theological appeal of which to the Christian in C. S. Lewis is not difficult to grasp.

Lewis's Theory of Knowledge

Lewis believes that the truth concerning the true nature of reality can be known. However, he does entertain, even if only to dismiss them in the final analysis like Descartes, the kind of doubts articulated by skeptics from Sextus Empiricus onwards that threaten to undermine the whole epistemological enterprise.[20] Like Plato, he has reservations about the reliability of

Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 1224–91.

[19] Donald Zeyl, "Plato's *Timaeus*," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 edition), ed. by Edward N. Zalta, n.p. (http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/plato-timaeus/), 16 March 2016.

[20] See René Descartes, "Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's

the senses. Moreover, he is aware that logic itself is not without its deficiencies. All the same, he repeatedly acknowledges that the data reported by the senses is the foundation on which, with the aid subsequently of logic, the entire edifice of knowledge is built: everything "I know is an inference from sensation," he writes, and similarly, "[a]ll our knowledge of the universe beyond our immediate experiences depends on inferences from these experiences."[21] Lewis says little per se about the reliability of the senses, though he seems to take it for granted, like Plato, that they can mislead us. However, he is at pains to underscore another, potentially more important epistemological problem: to be precise, the fact that the bulk of our "knowledge depends on our certainty about axioms and inferences."[22] In other words, for Lewis, the reasoning process itself is not immune to error for any number of reasons: "through inattention or fatigue we often make false inferences and while we make them they feel as certain as the sound ones."[23] Nothing, he stresses, is

> more obvious than that we frequently make false inferences: from ignorance of some of the factors involved, from inattention, from inefficiencies in the system of symbols (linguistic or otherwise) which we are using, from the secret influence of our unconscious wishes and fears.[24]

The problem is, in short, that however reliable our sense-impressions may be, the conclusions drawn from sensory experiences, whether these are in fact true or not, often come to be widely accepted as true. These conclusions function in turn as premises from which further conclusions are

Reason and Seeking the Truth in the Sciences," *Selected Philosophical Writings*, trans. by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 20–56. See also *Sextus Empiricus: Selections from the Major Writings on Scepticism, Man, and God*, ed. by Philip P. Hallie, Sanford G. Etheridge, and Donald R. Morrison (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985). For a useful overview of skepticism, see Richard Popkin, *The History of Skepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

[21] C. S. Lewis, "Bulverism," in *Undeceptions: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. by Walter Hooper (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1971), 226.

[22] Lewis, "Bulverism," 227.

[23] C. S. Lewis, "*De Futilitate*," in *Christian Reflections*, ed. by Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdamns, 1995), 63.

[24] Lewis, "*De Futilitate*," 67–8.

derived, and so on. Our claims to certitude hinge, therefore, on the degree to which both our assumptions about reality, derived initially at least from our sensory experiences, are in fact true and the inferential processes that build thereon free from fallacies.

Acknowledging that fallacies are "always corrigible by further reasoning," Lewis asserts that the real danger lies in the possibility that "inference itself, even apart from accidental errors," may be a "merely subjective phenomenon" that is, as such, "irrelevant to the real universe."[25] In other words, if "thought has no father but thought," then the relationship between thought and reality may be at best asymptotic and the entire edifice of knowledge ultimately founded on air.[26] Lewis puts it this way: the "material or external world in general is an inferred world" and even scientific "experiments, far from taking us out of the magic circle of inference into some supposed direct contact with reality, are themselves evidential only as parts of that great inference."[27] If "all knowledge whatever depends on the validity of inference," if

> in principle, the feeling of certainty we have when we say "Because A is B therefore C must be D" is an illusion, if it reveals only how our cortex has to work and not how realities external to us must really be, then we can know nothing whatever.[28]

The very real possibility remains, in short, that "human thought is *not* true, not a reflection of reality."[29]

Lewis, however, ultimately skewers skepticism on the grounds that even the claim that the truth is unknowable "is itself a thought" as a result of which "if all thoughts are untrue, then this thought is untrue" also.[30] In other words, there can be

> no question of a total scepticism about human thought. We are always prevented from accepting total scepticism because it can be formulated only by making a tacit exception in favour of the thought we

[25] Lewis, "*De Futilitate*," 63.
[26] Lewis, "Bulverism," 227.
[27] Lewis, "*De Futilitate*," 62.
[28] Lewis, "*De Futilitate*," 62–3.
[29] Lewis, "*De Futilitate*," 61.
[30] Lewis, "*De Futilitate*," 61.

> are thinking at the moment.[31]

To put this another way, the very claim that the truth is unknowable is itself a claim to truth. He concludes, therefore, that thought

> cannot be subjective and irrelevant to the real universe for unless thought is valid we have no reason to believe in the real universe. We reach our knowledge of the universe only by inference. The very object to which our thought is supposed to be irrelevant depends on the relevance of our thought. A universe whose only claim to be believed in rests on the validity of inference must not start telling us that inference is invalid. That would really be a bit too nonsensical. I conclude then that logic is a real insight into the way in which real things have to exist.[32]

Hence, for Lewis, the "laws of thought are also the laws of things."[33] Admitting in a Kantian vein that we are necessarily more familiar with the processes that occur within our minds than the material universe without, Lewis claims that thought is "what we start from: the simple, intimate, immediate datum" whereas "[m]atter is the inferred thing, the mystery." Lewis explains that to

> understand that logic must be valid is to see at once that this thing we all know, this thought, this mind, cannot in fact be really alien to the nature of the universe. Or, putting it the other way round, the nature of the universe cannot be really alien to Reason. We find that matter always obeys the same laws which our logic obeys. When logic says a thing must be so, Nature always agrees. . . . The laws whereby logic obliges us to think turn out to be the laws according to which every event in space and time must happen.[34]

In other words, the laws of reasoning are not divorced from but are, in fact, in sync with those of nature. Moreover, rationality is not something peculiar to the human species, a feature solely of the human mind. Rath-

[31] Lewis, "*De Futilitate*," 61.

[32] Lewis, "*De Futilitate*," 63.

[33] Lewis, "*De Futilitate*," 63.

[34] Lewis, "*De Futilitate*," 64. For Kant's distinction between *phenoumena* and *noumena*, that is, between things as they *appear* to our consciousness and the things in themselves which may very well remain unknowable, see Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929).

er, it necessarily transcends the workings of any individual mind precisely because it inheres in the very nature of the universe as a whole. To put this another way, Lewis argues in an almost Hegelian fashion that the very fabric of the cosmos is rational.[35] He writes: where

> thought is strictly rational it must be, in some odd sense, not ours, but cosmic or super-cosmic. It must be something not shut up inside our heads but already "out there" – in the universe or behind the universe: either as objective or material Nature or more objective still. Unless all that we take to be knowledge is an illusion, we must hold that in thinking we are not reading rationality into an irrational universe but responding to a rationality with which the universe has always been saturated.[36]

In the final analysis, Lewis concludes, not only does our reason correspond to, precisely because it is an inherent part of, a rational and purposeful cosmos, but it also provides an objective understanding of the universe.

With all this in mind, Lewis differentiates, as does Plato, between a lower and a higher form of reason. The lower form of reason, although subject to certain deficiencies, is capable of understanding the physical universe which we inhabit. The higher form of reason, however, is able to intuit the existence of another, non-physical realm of being. He refers in this regard to the medieval distinction between the *ratio* (which functions in a manner similar to Plato's *dianoia*) and the *intellectus* (which functions analogously to Plato's *nous*).[37] He cites the distinction made by Thomas Aquinas on this score: the

> "intellect (*intelligere*) is the simple (i.e. indivisible, uncompounded) grasp of an intelligible truth, whereas reasoning (*ratiocinari*) is the progression towards an intelligible truth by going from one understood (*intellecto*) point to another. . . ." We are enjoying *intellectus* when we just "see" a self-evident truth; we are exercising *ratio* when we proceed step by step to prove a truth which is not self-evident.[38]

[35] See G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J. B. Baillie (London, 1910) and *Science of Logic*, trans. by A. V. Miller (Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 1969).

[36] Lewis, "*De Futilitate*," 65.

[37] C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 157.

[38] Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 157.

In other words, the *ratio*, warts and all, is the "power by which man deduces one proposition from another," that is, "proceeds from premises to conclusions"[39] about the world we live in, while the *intellectus* has the capacity to intuit higher and universal truths grounded, as we shall see, not in the here and now but, ultimately, the great beyond.

Lewis's Metaphysics

Lewis contends that metaphysics (embracing both ontology and cosmology/cosmogony) is an age-old human pursuit: "[e]ver since men were able to think, they have been wondering what the universe really is and how it came to be there."[40] Lewis suggests that there are two fundamentally opposed camps. He reserves the term "Naturalists" for those "who believe that nothing exists except Nature" and "Supernaturalists" for those who think that "besides Nature, there exists something else."[41] Naturalists equate Nature with what Lewis terms the "ultimate Fact, the thing you can't go beyond," which is a

> vast process in space and time which is *going on of its own accord*. Inside that total system every particular event . . . happens because some other event has happened; in the long run, because the Total Event is happening. Each particular thing . . . is what it is because other things are what they are; and so, eventually, because the whole system is what it is. All the things are so complex and interlocked that no one of them can claim the slightest independence from "the whole show."[42]

He explains that the naturalist believes that a

> great process, or "becoming," exists "on its own" in space and time, and that nothing else exists – what we call particular things and events being only the parts into which we analyse the great process or the shapes which this process takes at given moments and given points in space. This single total reality he calls Nature.[43]

[39] This is Samuel Johnson's definition of "reason." Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (London: A Millar, 1818), n.p. (https://archive.org/details/dictionaryofengl02johnuoft), accessed 10 October 2017.

[40] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 31.

[41] C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (Glasgow: Geoffrey Bles, 1947), 9.

[42] Lewis, *Miracles*, 10.

[43] Lewis, *Miracles*, 13.

The "materialist view" is, accordingly, that "matter and space just happened to exist, and always existed, nobody knows why; and . . . this matter, behaving in certain fixed ways, has just happened, by a sort of fluke, to produce creatures like ourselves who are able to think."[44]

By contrast, according to Lewis, the supernaturalist does not disagree that

> there must be something which exists in its own right; some basic Fact whose existence it would be nonsensical to try to explain because this Fact is itself the ground or starting-point of all explanations. But he does not identify this fact with "the whole show." He thinks that things fall into two classes. In the first class we find either things or (more probably) One Thing which is basic and original, which exists on its own. In the second we find things which are merely derivative from that One Thing. The one basic Thing has caused all the other things to be. It exists on its own; they exist because it exists. They will cease to exist if it ever ceases to maintain them in existence; they will be altered if it ever alters them.[45]

The supernaturalist believes, in other words, that this "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"; Lewis labels this "framework, and this filling," "Nature," and the "One Self-existent Thing," "God."[46] If God has any human-like qualities, he argues once more in quasi-Hegelian fashion, it consists in the possession of what appears to be something similar to the "minds" found in human beings, albeit in a superior form and on a vaster scale.[47] According to the "religious view,"

> what is behind the universe is more like a mind than it is like anything else we know. That is to say, it is conscious, and has purposes, and prefers one thing to another. And on this view, it made the universe, partly for purposes we do not know, but partly, at any rate, in order to produce creatures like itself.[48]

Although God has something that seems similar to the mind of a human

[44] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 31.
[45] Lewis, *Miracles*, 11.
[46] Lewis, *Miracles*, 13 and 12.
[47] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 32.
[48] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 32.

being, He is a "being that is beyond personality," at least of the sort which we normally associate with humans.[49] He is a "being" who is, paradoxically, "three Persons while remaining one Being" and, as such, "something super-personal – something more than a person."[50] He is, to be precise, what Lewis terms, somewhat unusually, a "three-personal God."[51]

Lewis devotes much energy to explicating the nature of God. To this end, he frequently compares God to an author, artist, or musical composer. Christians, he argues, believe that "God invented and made the universe – like a man making a picture or composing a tune."[52] All the various facets of the physical universe, "space and time, heat and cold, and all the colors and tastes, and all the animals and vegetables, are things that God 'made up out of His head' as a man makes up a story."[53] Lewis insists that the Creator is "separate from the world" that He has created: drawing a distinction between "begetting" and "creating," Lewis contends that "[w]hat God begets is God," in the form of Jesus Christ, whereas "[w]hat God creates is not God; just as what man makes is not man."[54] He is at pains to stress that God must not be confused with the material objects that he has created:

> Everything God has made has some *likeness* to Himself. Space is *like* Him in its hugeness: not that space is the *same kind* as God's, but it is a sort of *symbol* of it, a *translation* of it in non-spiritual terms. Matter is *like* God in having energy: though again, of course, physical energy is *a different kind* of thing from the power of God. The vegetable world is *like* Him because it is alive, and He is the "living God." But life, in this biological sense, is *not the same as* the life there is in God: it is only a kind of *symbol* or *shadow* of it.[55]

To put this another way, every aspect of the world resembles, albeit in necessarily inferior form, but is not the same as some corresponding feature of God. The vastness of physical space, for example, is only an echo of God's immeasurable immensity; the energy that infuses matter is similar to but not identical with that dynamism with which God is synonymous; while

[49] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 141.
[50] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 143.
[51] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 142.
[52] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 44.
[53] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 45.
[54] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 45 and 138.
[55] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 139 (emphases added).

organic "life" in many ways resembles, but is at best a poor substitute for, the "life there is in God."

Temporally speaking, Lewis asserts that "God is outside and above the time-line" and, thus, has "no history."[56] For us, by contrast,

> life comes to us moment by moment. One moment disappears before the next comes along . . . That is what Time is like. And of course you and I tend to take it for granted that this Time series – this arrangement of past, present and future – is not simply the way life comes to us but the way all things really exist. We tend to assume that the whole universe and God Himself are always moving from past to future just as we do.[57]

He explains that, for humans,

> to have a history means losing part of your reality (because it has already slipped away into the past) and not yet having another part (because it is still in the future); in fact, having nothing but the tiny little present, which has gone before you can speak about it.[58]

By contrast to us earth-bound creatures subject to the constraints of time, "God is not in time. His life does not consist of moments following one another."[59] He does "not live in a Time-series at all. His life is not dribbled out moment by moment like ours" as a result of which "with Him it is, so to speak, still 1920 and already 1960."[60] He is, accordingly, "not hurried along the Time-stream of this universe any more than an author is hurried along in the imaginary time of his own novel."[61]

Because he is not trapped within time, God is always already aware of what the future will bring, even if humans are not. To illustrate this point, Lewis compares God's relationship to linear time with that which exists between a page (representing God) and a line drawn thereon (the passage of time): if

> you picture Time as a straight line along which we have to travel, then

[56] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 149.
[57] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 147.
[58] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 149.
[59] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 147.
[60] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 148.
[61] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 147.

> you must picture God as the whole page on which the line is drawn. We come to the parts of the line one by one: we have to leave A behind before we get to B and cannot reach C until we leave B behind. God, from above or outside or all round, contains the whole line and sees it all.[62]

This is why what

> we call "tomorrow" is visible to Him in just the same way as what you call "today." All the days are "Now" for Him. He does not remember you doing things yesterday; He simply sees you doing them: because though you have lost yesterday, He has not. He does not "foresee" you doing things tomorrow: He simply sees you doing them: because though tomorrow is not yet there for you, it is for Him . . . He knows your tomorrow's actions . . . because He is already in tomorrow and can simply watch you. In a sense, He does not know your action till you have done it: but then the moment at which you have done it is already "Now" for Him.[63]

As a result, as we shall see, He knows who will be naughty and who will be nice, who will choose to disobey His will and who will choose the opposite, but also how, ultimately, out of evil will come good.

For Lewis, the crucial "problem" posed by the supernatural/religious model of reality concerns the "obvious *continuity* between things which are admittedly natural and things which, it is claimed, are spiritual."[64] In other words, the precise nature of the relationship linking nature to the supernatural is a question that demands an answer. He points out that natural processes are most often used to explain away seemingly spiritual phenomena: all the "same old elements which make up our natural life" (such as the act of conversing or eating or taking revenge or the experiencing of physical sensations) are often thought as a result to merely resurface "in what professes to be our supernatural life" (such as speaking in tongues or the holy sacrament of communion or justice or the feeling of certain emotions).[65] In each such case, what Lewis terms the "richer" experience (such as the ideal

[62] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 148.

[63] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 149.

[64] C. S. Lewis, "Transposition," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: Macmillian, 1949), 94 (emphasis added).

[65] Lewis, "Transposition," 94.

of justice or the experience of love) is understood in terms of and thus reduced to a "poorer" one (for example, the taking of revenge or sexual lust).[66]

Lewis argues, however, that we should not conceive of the relationship between these two systems, the supernatural and the natural, in terms of a "one-for-one correspondence" whereby "*A* in the one system is represented by *a* in the other."[67] Moreover, it is wrong to believe that supernatural phenomena are explicable by reducing them to natural processes. Rather, he suggests, it is better to think in terms of the "*transposition* of the richer into the poorer."[68] He explains that if the "richer is to be represented in the poorer at all, this can only be by giving each element in the poorer system more than one meaning."[69] This is the case, for example, when you translate a more complex language into another less complex one, as a result of which, in the latter, one "must be allowed to use several words in more than one sense"; or when you "seek to represent a three-dimensional world on a flat sheet of paper," to which end the same lines, shading, and so on are repeatedly used but to depict different things.[70] However, in this and all other such cases, Lewis is at pains to stress that the "lower medium can be understood only if we [already] know the higher."[71] In other words, for example, "we understand pictures only because we know and inhabit the three-dimensional world,"[72] something denied to, for instance, some imaginary creature capable of perceiving only two dimensions and who must therefore accept entirely on trust that often very similar marks on a piece of paper can represent many different realities. The example offered by Lewis in this instance is that of the fundamental resemblance that exists between the lines used to draw a triangle and those used to draw a road and between which we can distinguish precisely because of our own prior familiarity with the differing realities that they stand for.

Lewis favors the term "transposition" to denote the relationship between higher and lower, richer and poorer realities, between the supernatural and the natural. "Transposition occurs whenever the higher repro-

[66] Lewis, "Transposition," 99.
[67] Lewis, "Transposition," 99.
[68] Lewis, "Transposition," 99 (emphasis added).
[69] Lewis, "Transposition," 99.
[70] Lewis, "Transposition," 99.
[71] Lewis, "Transposition," 100.
[72] Lewis, "Transposition," 101.

duces itself in the lower," Lewis argues. It is to be differentiated, he suggests, from mere "symbolism," as the latter is conventionally understood.[73] An example of symbolism is the relationship that exists between speech and writing, which is not one of "resemblance" because the one (writing) is merely a "*sign* of the other" (speech), which it "signifies by convention."[74] This is not, however, the case with the relationship between the visual arts and the visible world because pictures are

> part of the visible world themselves and represent it only by being part of it. Their visibility has the same source. The suns and lamps in pictures seem to shine only because real suns or lamps shine on them; that is, they seem to shine a great deal because they really shine a little in reflecting their archetypes. The sunlight in pictures is therefore not related to real sunlight simply as written words are to spoken. It is a sign, but also something more than a sign, and only a sign because it is more than a sign, because in it the thing signified is really in a certain mode present.[75]

To put this a slightly different way, for Lewis, the "lower reality" is "[i]n varying degrees . . . drawn into the higher" precisely because it is "part of it."[76] Lewis proclaims that, were he forced to choose another term to describe this relation, it would be "not symbolic but sacramental" (in the sense, for example, of the holy sacrament of communion).[77]

Notwithstanding his quibbles concerning the use of particular names, Lewis uses the terms "transposition," "symbolism," and "sacramentalism" in overlapping and interchangeable ways in order to conceptualize the precise nature of the relationship whereby the supernatural is "reproduced" in/by the natural.[78] He explains

> our material world . . . is the copy of an invisible world. As the god Amor and his figurative garden are to the actual passions of men, so perhaps we ourselves and our "real" world are to something else. The

[73] Lewis, "Transposition," 103 and 102.
[74] Lewis, "Transposition," 102.
[75] Lewis, "Transposition," 102.
[76] Lewis, "Transposition," 113.
[77] Lewis, "Transposition," 102.
[78] C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1936), 45.

> attempt to read that something else through its sensible imitations, to see the archetype in the copy, is what I mean by symbolism or sacramentalism.[79]

Transposition or sacramentalism or symbolism

> leaves the given to find that which is more real. . . . [F]or the symbolist [and the "transpositionalist" and the "sacramentalist"] it is we who are the allegory. We are the frigid "personifications"; the heavens above us are the "shadowy abstractions"; the world which we mistake for reality is the flat outline of that which elsewhere veritably is. . . .[80]

The most important condition necessary for transposition/sacramentalism/symbolism is mimesis, that is, a relationship of imitation or resemblance or, as he puts it, the "pre-existing *similitudo* between the material element and the spiritual reality."[81]

Significantly, Lewis stresses that our conception of this relationship, however conceived and named, "comes to us from Greece" where it "makes its first effective appearance in European thought with the dialogues of Plato," for whom the "Sun is the copy of the Good," "Time is the moving image of eternity," and all "visible things exist just in so far as they succeed in imitating the Forms."[82] Plato's views were later passed on in the form of a "diffused Platonism or Neoplatonism," Lewis argues, to subsequent ages mainly via the work of Plotinus and St. Augustine.[83]

To illustrate the transpositional/sacramental/symbolic relationship that links the spiritual and natural worlds, Lewis offers an obvious adaptation of Plato's "allegory of the cave." He describes a woman imprisoned in a dungeon who gives birth to and rears a son who has never seen the world outside. To teach him about this other world, she draws pictures that have an unintended effect: he assumes, until corrected, that the pencil marks themselves comprise, rather than correspond to (or, in Lewis's lexicon, "transpose" or "symbolize" or "sacramentalize"), reality. When he realizes

[79] Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, 45.
[80] Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, 45.
[81] Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, 46.
[82] Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, 45.
[83] Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, 46. See, too, John Dillon and Lloyd P. Gerson, eds., *Neoplatonic Philosophy: Introductory Readings* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), passim.

that this is not in fact the case, his illusions are shattered and the result is sheer incomprehensibility:

> instantly his whole notion of the outer world becomes a blank. For the lines, by which alone he was imagining it, have now been denied of it. He has no idea of that which will exclude and dispense with the lines, that of which the lines were merely a transposition – the waving treetops, the light dancing on the weir, the coloured three-dimensional realities which are not enclosed in lines but define their own shapes at every moment, with a delicacy and multiplicity that no drawing could ever achieve. The child will get the idea that the real world is somehow less visible than his mother's pictures. In reality it lacks lines because it is incomparably more visible.[84]

The boy, in short, is tragically unaware that marks on a page (this is the poorer or lower reality) are a "transposition" of the real world (the richer or higher reality). Lewis's anecdote is evidently intended, like Plato's "allegory of the cave," to represent a higher abstract truth by means of a lower concrete experience: the boy's illusion that a drawing is consubstantial with reality is analogous to our own collective hallucination that this physical world in which we live, move, and have our being is the true, and only, reality whereas, in fact, it "reproduces" or "embodies," in other words, "transposes" a higher spiritual reality.

Lewis contends that all our earthly and, thus, sensory experiences are, when rightly viewed through the lens of the *intellectus*, ultimately "transpositions" of spiritual, otherworldly experiences that transcend physical existence: "[h]owever great the difference between Spirit and Nature . . . between reality and picture," he avers, there is "no experience of the spirit so transcendent and supernatural, no vision of Deity himself so close and so far beyond all images and emotions, that to it there cannot be an appropriate correspondence on the sensory level," not "by a new sense but by the incredible flooding of those very sensations we now have with a meaning, a transvaluation, of which we have here no faintest guess."[85] To get this idea across, he makes use of an image of a candle, the light of which is not extinguished, merely "outshone," in broad daylight: our

[84] Lewis, "Transposition," 110.
[85] Lewis, "Transposition," 115.

> natural experiences (sensory, emotional, imaginative) are only like the drawing, like pencilled lines on flat paper . . . [T]hey will vanish only as pencil lines vanish from the real landscape; not as a candle flame that is put out but as a candle flame which becomes invisible because someone has pulled up the blind . . . and let in the blaze of the risen sun.[86]

Just as the candlelight is subsumed into the sunlight, so too are our earthly experiences subsumed into spiritual ones. There is, thus, a far deeper significance to seemingly *ordinary* physical experiences, which point beyond themselves to an *extra-ordinary* realm of non-physical experience, than we have been taught to believe. To put this yet another way, supernatural significations are necessarily *embodied* in our everyday, natural experiences whether or not we are aware that this is the case:

> You can say that by Transposition our humanity, senses and all, can be made the vehicle of beatitude. Or you can say that the heavenly bounties by Transposition are embodied during this life in our temporal experience. But the second way is the better.[87]

It is the spiritual world which is, accordingly, the true reality, one more real and more substantial than the physical world which we have wrongly misidentified all along with reality and with substance:

> It is the present life which is the diminution, the symbol, the etiolated, the "vegetarian" substitute. If flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom, that is not because they are too solid, too gross, too distinct, too "illustrious with being." They are [rather] too flimsy, too transitory, too phantasmal.[88]

Hence, Lewis's suspicion that the "life of the risen man . . . will differ from the life we know here, not as emptiness differs from water or water from wine, but as a flower differs from a bulb or a cathedral from an architect's drawing."[89]

[86] Lewis, "Transposition," 111.
[87] Lewis, "Transposition," 111.
[88] Lewis, "Transposition," 111.
[89] Lewis, "Transposition," 109.

Plato's Moral Philosophy

Like his theory of knowledge and his metaphysics, Lewis's moral philosophy draws its inspiration as much from Platonic as it does from Christian sources. Plato's ethics, like ancient ethics in general, has often been described as a virtue-based eudaemonism.[90] What is translated variously as "human well-being," "living well," or "doing well" (*eudaemonia*) is or ought to be the goal of all human activity. *Eudaemonia* is sometimes translated as "happiness," but the Greek term is perhaps best rendered less as a state of mind or emotion that one experiences than as a kind of activity in which one engages and from which one derives a certain measure of satisfaction or contentment in doing it well. The ancients claimed that to do something well one must possess the requisite "virtues" or, literally, "excellences" (*aretē*), that is, the skills and dispositions necessary to that end. The virtue of good horsemanship, for example, consists in the ability to ride horses skillfully and successfully. Some excellences are specifically moral in nature, that is, they consist in certain qualities of character that allow not only the bearer of these qualities but also persons other than him/herself to "live well." To put this another way, Richard Parry argues that virtues are moral insofar as they are not merely "self-regarding" but "other-regarding."[91]

For Plato, the four cardinal virtues are wisdom (*sophia*), which consists in the capacity to know right from wrong (for example, that to kill in self-defense is not necessarily murder); courage (*andreia*), that is, responding to a given situation without giving into one's fears (for instance, resisting a bully); moderation (*sôphrosunē*), which refers to limiting or subordinating self-interest for the sake of the greater good (for example, resisting a bully, whatever the personal cost, so that others may be spared); and, last but not least, justice (*dikaiosunē*), which is synonymous with the hierarchical order (*kosmos*) and harmony (*harmonia*) that results from the application

[90] Useful overviews of ancient ethics in general and Plato's views in particular may be found in Richard Parry, "Ancient Ethical Theory," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2014 edition), ed. by Edward N. Zalta, n.p. (http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/ethics-ancient/), 13 March 2016, and Dorothea Frede, "Plato's Ethics: An Overview," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2013 edition), ed. by Edward N. Zalta, n.p. (http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/plato-ethics/), 13 March 2016.

[91] Parry, "Ancient Ethical Theory," n.p.

of wisdom, courage, and moderation.

Where modern ethical theory tends to be "action-centered" (in other words, the focus is on determining the morality of specific *actions* such as abortion), ancient moral philosophy tended to be "agent-centered" (that is, its focus was on the "moral agent," to be precise, "what constitutes . . . a just person": one's "state of mind and character," "values," "attitudes to oneself and to others," and "conception of one's own place in the common life of a community").[92] Hence, the predication of Plato's moral philosophy on what might be described as a "moral psychology." Plato offers, in *The Republic*, a tripartite model of the soul (*psuchē*). He identifies three constituent "parts" or, perhaps more accurately, "functions," each of which is conflated with a particular part of the body: the cognitive faculty or reason (*logistokon*), associated with the head; the affective faculty or passions (*thumoeides*), what Francis Cornford translates as the "spirited element," synonymous with the chest and the heart in particular; and the "physical appetites" (*épithumetikon*), associated with the stomach and the genitals. The reason evinces wisdom, the capacity to apprehend eternal truths not only of a mathematical but also, perhaps more importantly, of a moral nature. This means that reason is capable of grasping the ideal forms of the virtues discussed above and even, beyond these, the supreme form of "goodness" itself that constitutes the very fabric of a providential universe and from which all the subsidiary virtues derive. The spirited element evinces courage in particular, which is the fearlessness necessary at times to defend one's own or others' interests against threats posed thereto, sometimes even by oneself. The appetites, synonymous with bodily desires for food, drink, and sex, can be moderated or tempered, though this does not occur of their own volition; in other words, they can be *forced* to acquiesce to the superior wisdom of the reason, a process which is at times aided and abetted by the intervention of the spirited element.[93]

Plato suggests that conflict can occur between these three constituent elements, for which reason the soul is potentially divided. For example, the appetites in their constant quest for self-satisfaction may urge one to act in a way that the reason recognizes as unwise (as when the body yearns

[92] Parry, "Ancient Ethical Theory," n.p.

[93] Plato, *The Republic*, chapters 13 "The Three Parts of the Soul" and 14 "The Virtues in the Individual."

for alcohol). The spirited element often, though not always, acts in tandem with and in support of the reason (as when the reason's opposition to alcohol is reinforced by a courageous determination to quit drinking). On other occasions, however, the spirited element may work against the reason (as when one takes pride in one's ability to drink a lot). Both the non-rational parts of the soul, that is, the spirited and appetitive elements, simply cannot *know*, by virtue of their differing natures (affective and volitional, respectively), what is best both for oneself and for others, as the reason does. Hence, Plato's view that reason is superior to and therefore ought to hold sway over the other parts of the soul, keeping a tight rein on the threat that they both potentially pose to one's own and others' well-being by instilling in them a certain docility or obedience (moderation, in the sense discussed earlier) and, thus, habituating them to behavior that fosters, rather than hinders, one's own as well as others' well-being. When reason prevails within the soul in this way, the result is an inner order and harmony conducive to what might be described as a kind of *psychological* justice (in the sense discussed earlier).

Plato's Social and Political Philosophy

Plato's moral psychology lays the foundation not only for his ethics but also his social and political philosophy, which some, in more recent and more egalitarian times, have deemed dangerously autocratic. His is an argument by analogy: what is true at the level of the individual ought to hold true at the collective level since a society is nothing more than an agglomeration of persons. Hence, his analogy between the justice in the form of a hierarchy that exists *microcosmically* within a virtuous soul, on the one hand, and that which exists *macrocosmically* in the ideal state, on the other. Plato identifies at least three kinds (*genē*) or, *classes* of inhabitants in his ideal republic, each of which not only correlates to a particular part of the soul but also performs solely the function(s) for which it is expressly and uniquely equipped by both nature and nurture. At the top, the ruling class (at the apex of which is the so-called "philosopher-king") is analogous to reason in its possession of the wisdom that ensures the welfare of the state as a whole. In the middle are the so-called "warriors" who, like the spirited element, demonstrate courage in their defense of the state against aggression from without and insurrection from within. At the bottom of

the hierarchy may be found what, for want of a better term, might be called the "ruled class" consisting of farmers, merchants, artisans, and so on, that is, all those engaged in the production of food, commerce, the manufacture of crafts and other artefacts, etc. It is this class which, in the ideal state, must demonstrate moderation, that is, acceptance of its prescribed role in society and, thus, their subordinate status, if social justice, once more in the form of a hierarchy, is to be attained.[94]

Lewis's Moral Philosophy

For Lewis, much like Plato, "[m]orality" is

> concerned with three things. Firstly, with fair play and harmony between individuals. Secondly, with what might be called tidying up or harmonising things inside each individual. Thirdly, with the general purpose of human life as a whole: what man was made for.[95]

Lewis believes that there is an objective "Law of Right and Wrong," which a "man could choose to obey . . . or to disobey," but is "something above and beyond the facts of human behaviour"; it is a "real law which we did not invent and which we know we ought to obey."[96] Like Plato, he is of the view that the universe is fundamentally and entirely good rather than morally dualistic. He defines moral "[d]ualism" as the "belief that there are two equal and independent powers at the back of everything, one of them good and the other bad, and that this universe is the battlefield in which they fight out an endless war."[97] Lewis flirts with but is ultimately opposed to this notion, arguing that the universe is not comprised of opposed but ontologically equal moral essences. The reason for this is that

> you are putting into the universe a third thing in addition to the two Powers: some law or standard or rule of good which one of the powers conforms to and the other fails to conform to. But since the two powers are judged by this standard, then this standard, or the Being who made this standard, is farther back and higher up than either of them, and He will be the real God.[98]

[94] Plato, *The Republic*, chapter 12 "The Virtues in the State."
[95] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 71.
[96] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 18 and 31.
[97] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 48 and 48–9.
[98] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 49.

By calling one good and the other bad, it turns out that "one of them is in a right relation to the real ultimate God and the other in a wrong relation to Him."[99] In other words, a universe in which good and evil both constitute original and equally-balanced powers in their own right would be a contradiction in terms. This is because to put evil on an equal footing with good is to imply the existence of a third, different, and higher moral essence that would function, as such, as the standard in relation to which both good and evil must be judged.

Lewis believes that evil is, rather, a distortion or corruption of the good which exists prior to it and from which it is derived: "evil," Lewis stresses, is a "parasite, not an original thing" and "badness [is] . . . only spoiled goodness"[100] The result is that some inhabitants of the universe have strayed from the path of goodness: the Devil is merely a "fallen angel" and wickedness the "pursuit of some good" but "in the wrong way."[101] This is, thus, no "war between independent powers" but, rather, a "civil war, a rebellion" as a result of which "we are living in a part of the universe occupied by the rebel": "Enemy-occupied territory – that is what this world is."[102] In short, for Lewis, evil is best understood not as an inherent aspect of being independent of and in conflict with goodness, but as a kind of action that goes against the grain of the way things inherently are and which is the result of an erroneous choice.

The terrain on which this struggle between good and evil is fought is, Lewis believes, the soul of human beings. Distinguishing, like ancient ethicists, "between doing some just or temperate action and being a just or temperate man," he defines "virtue" as a "certain quality of character."[103] He identifies four "cardinal" or "pivotal" virtues the resemblance of which to Plato's is unmistakable.[104] What Lewis calls "prudence" corresponds to Plato's "wisdom" and means "practical common sense."[105] "Fortitude" evidently corresponds to Plato's "courage."[106] "Temperance," a synonym of

[99] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 49.
[100] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 51 and 50.
[101] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 50.
[102] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 51.
[103] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 77.
[104] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 74.
[105] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 74.
[106] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 74.

"moderation," means not the restriction of pleasures but "going the right length and no further," while "justice" is the "old name for everything we would now call 'fairness'; it includes honesty, give and take, truthfulness, keeping promises and all that side of life."[107]

Lewis's conception of the self is undoubtedly Platonic and, thus, hierarchical. Evidently familiar with Cornford's seminal translation of *The Republic*, Lewis argues that

> [r]eason in man must rule the mere appetites by means of the "spirited" element. The head rules the belly through the chest – the seat of emotions organised by trained habit into stable sentiments. The Chest – Magnanimity – Sentiment – these are the indispensable liaison officers between cerebral man and visceral man . . . [B]y this middle element . . . man is man: for by his intellect he is mere spirit and by his appetite mere animal.[108]

Lewis makes clear that where man's appetites reduce him to the level of an animal and accordingly need to be tempered, his reason is the seat of prudence that not only constitutes his link to the realm of the spiritual but also provides a practical guide as to how to behave. (Lewis's "prudence" seems to have more in common with "practical wisdom," that is, knowledge concerning how we should act, signified by the Greek term *phronesis*, as opposed to "theoretical wisdom," which is the theoretical knowledge concerning the nature of things synonymous with *sophia*.) What makes man distinctively human is the "middle" or "spirited element," the "seat of the emotions," which liaises between man's "cerebral" and "visceral" tendencies, that is, his rational and his carnal inclinations, and demonstrates above all fortitude in helping the former to keep the latter in check. Lewis advocates, accordingly, the existence, ideally, of a psychological hierarchy: the head must, with the aid of the heart, prevail over the animal appetites if there is to be order and equanimity, in short, justice within the soul, rather than chaos and turbulence.

Lewis believes that the choice between good and evil is fundamental to human identity, the center of his being consisting precisely of the capacity for "moral choice": Lewis proclaims that "when his body dies . . . the real

[107] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 74, 76, 74 and 76.
[108] C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 34.

central man, the thing that chose, that made the best or worst out of this material, will stand naked."[109] Lewis alludes to the Platonic virtue of moderation/temperance when he speaks, in this regard, of the "real, free choice of the man, on the material presented to him, either to put his own advantage first or put it last. And this free choice is the only thing that morality is concerned with."[110]

Moral choice evidently hinges on the capacity to distinguish between right and wrong, that is, moral knowledge. Lewis argues that the "belief that to recognize a duty was to perceive a truth . . . had roots in antiquity": it was Plato in particular who "preserved the Socratic idea that morality was an affair of knowledge; bad men were bad because they did not know what was good," not because they were inherently evil.[111] In other words, people do wrong only because they are ignorant of what is right. The good news is, thus, that through education humans can learn to differentiate good from evil. The senses, however, are insufficient to this end. Lewis points out that "nearly all moralists before the eighteenth century regarded Reason as the organ of morality" and "believed the fundamental moral maxims were *intellectually* grasped."[112] Reasoning (by the *ratio*) about morality is a vital step in this direction but, for Lewis, ultimately inferior to the *intellectus* which allows one to intuit the ideal forms of the virtues and, in the final analysis, of goodness itself.

Our reason is aided in so doing by the "spirited element." Lewis applies the term "the Tao" to the "doctrine of objective *value*, the belief that certain *attitudes* are really true, and others really false, to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are."[113] The poison of subjectivism consists, he argues, precisely in the opposite view as a result of which the "world of facts, without one trace of value, and the world of feelings, without one trace of truth or falsehood, justice or injustice, confront one another, and no rapprochement is possible."[114] To put this another way, moral skepticism and relativism reign supreme when there is a divorce between

[109] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 85 and 71.
[110] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 71.
[111] Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 160.
[112] Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 158.
[113] Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 29 (emphases added).
[114] Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 33.

the head and the heart, between knowledge and values, between, in short, the pursuit of truth and the experience of the appropriate attitudes and feelings which, ideally, culminate in the taking of the necessary actions.

Lewis laments that by inculcating an erroneous subjectivism that robs humans of an objective understanding of the true nature of reality and the moral law that prevails therein, modern education has opened the way ultimately for political exploitation by persons ignorant, deliberately or otherwise, of the fact that this moral law applies to both the rulers and the ruled. The choice, to Lewis, is clear:

> Either we are rational spirit obliged for ever to obey the absolute values of the Tao, or else we are mere nature to be kneaded and cut into new shapes for the pleasures of masters who must, by hypothesis, have no motive but their own "natural" impulses. Only the Tao provides a common law of human action which can overarch rulers and ruled alike.[115]

Whereas in the "older systems both the kind of man the teachers wished to produce and their motives for producing him were prescribed by the Tao," nowadays the "ultimate springs of human action are no longer . . . something given." Rather, those he characterizes as the self-appointed guardians of humanity (Lewis seems almost certainly to be taking aim here at Jean-Paul Sartre) have taken upon themselves the "task of deciding what "Humanity" shall henceforth mean": their products are "not men at all: they are artefacts" as a result of which, ironically, "Man's final conquest has proved to be the abolition of man."[116]

Lewis's point is that our true identity, which is fixed rather than malleable, a given rather than a construct, is obtained only via the loss of that which we have wrongly identified as our self. In other words, paradoxically, we find our (true) self only by losing our (false) self. This new identity is to be found by following the path laid down by Christ, by tempering our own selfish interests and submitting ourselves to the will of God just as He did: to

[115] Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 85.

[116] Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 73, 74, 76, and 77. For a popular introduction to Sartrean Existentialism, see Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, trans. by Philip Mairet (London Methuen, 1948).

> become new men means losing what we call "ourselves." Out of ourselves, into Christ, we must go . . . The more that we get what we now call "ourselves" out of the way and let him take over, the more truly ourselves we become . . . It is when I turn to Christ, when I give myself up to His Personality, that I first begin to have a personality of my own.[117]

The old Adam must be sacrificed if the new Adam is to be found. This is accomplished by means of what Lewis terms "repentance," which consists not merely of admitting and asking for forgiveness for past wrong-doing, as is commonly assumed, but also, more importantly, of the surrender of one's independence and, thus, "willing submission" to God.[118] God, it should be noted, performs an active role in this transformation in that we do not earn His love through our benevolent acts. Rather, it is His love which makes us do good: He "will not love us because we are good, we will be good because God loves us – God will make us good."[119]

Pride, Lewis stresses, is the key vice which must at all costs be avoided in this regard for it represents the "complete anti-God state of mind."[120] It is different from the other vices which "come from the Devil working on us through our animal nature," that is, by inciting our physical appetites.[121] Pride, by contrast, is "purely spiritual" in nature: it is what prevents us from abandoning our own selfish will and surrendering ourselves to God, interposing itself between our current self and the new self that we will find in Christ.[122]

Lewis argues that the free will possessed by human beings is, also paradoxically, "in accordance with God's will" precisely because "He wants to give us the chance to join His side freely."[123] Satan tempts men to disobey and to feel that they "could be like gods . . . be their own masters – invent some sort of happiness for themselves outside God, apart from God"; the history of humankind has consequently been tragic, nothing less than the "long terrible story of man trying to find something other than God which

[117] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 189.
[118] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 60.
[119] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 64.
[120] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 110.
[121] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 112.
[122] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 112.
[123] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 52 and 65.

will make him happy."[124] Clearly, the ideal human conduct is to behave in accordance with the will of God. The greater good that God offers arises precisely from obedience. The choice to obey, however, must be made willingly.

Lewis's Social and Political Philosophy

Lewis offers a hierarchical social and political philosophy that derives from the moral philosophy outlined above. It is somewhat ironic, Lewis maintains, that those he calls naturalists or materialists do not ultimately believe in "free will," as the supernaturalist does, for "free would mean that human beings have the power of doing something more or other than what was involved by the total series of events" that they equate with nature or the material world.[125] Nevertheless, naturalism/materialism does offer in the final analysis what Lewis terms a "democratic" or egalitarian vision of reality because "one thing or event is as good as another . . . all equally dependent on the total system of things."[126] Lewis contends that those who adhere to what he calls supernaturalism or the religious view share, on the other hand, a "monarchical picture of reality" predicated on the assumption that "privilege belongs to some things or (more probably) One Thing and not others."[127] To be precise, "One original or self-existent thing is on a different level from, and more important than, all other things."[128] According to this "Hierarchical conception" of the universe, Lewis argues,

> 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 inferiors. 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 . . . [F]or by stepping out of its place in the system . . . it has made the very nature of things its enemy.[129]

[124] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 54.
[125] Lewis, *Miracles*, 11.
[126] Lewis, *Miracles*, 11.
[127] Lewis, *Miracles*, 11.
[128] Lewis, *Miracles*, 12.
[129] C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942), 73 and 73–4.

Each individual, indeed, every created thing, must discover and, more importantly, consent to his/her/its allotted place in this grand order of things. In so doing, social and political justice, that is, well-being at the collective level, is assured.

Over the preceding pages, I have attempted to show that Lewis's Christian vision of the world was deeply influenced by Plato's views on the nature of knowledge, the fundamental structure of reality, questions of right and wrong, and the ideal social and political order. I have argued that a detailed understanding of Platonism accordingly sheds much light on Lewis's interpretation of Christianity. In the companion essay to this piece that follows, I turn my attention away from Lewis the philosopher of religion and towards Lewis the literary writer with a view to showing how his novel *Perelandra* in particular is deeply imbued with and, accordingly, best understood in the light of that Neoplatonic brand of Christianity that is the hallmark of Lewis's thinking.