

# Something tremendously real

How C. S. Lewis solved  
“the intellectual problem raised by suffering”

Arend Smilde

When C. S. Lewis became a Fellow and Tutor of English at Magdalen College, Oxford, it was the beginning of a long career; but at the same time it was the end of a short one. What ended, at this juncture in 1925, was a six-year period of study and job-hunting primarily aimed at an academic career in Philosophy.<sup>1</sup> In terms of academic career-making Lewis's efforts had brought him nothing better than a temporary job as a substitute for his old philosophy tutor. When the opportunity arose for Lewis to change a supposed side-track into his main road, he seized it. He switched from Philosophy to English. The move turned out to be a success: more than half a century after his death, C. S. Lewis still ranks as a star in the field of Medieval and Renaissance literary scholarship.

What the world has lost by his defection from Philosophy is harder to say. Nevertheless, for anyone interested in Lewis's work it may be important to remember that, as his biographers Green and Hooper have noted, “the philosophical training was not wasted”. Not only was that training one reason why he was elected for the Magdalen fellowship, as the job was to involve a good deal of philosophy teaching for many subsequent years; Green and Hooper further suggest that “Lewis's philosophical training also gave weight to his later theological writings”.<sup>2</sup>

That is a reasonable suggestion. But can it be substantiated? The question here is not whether Lewis was an important philosopher in disguise. Nor is it whether he was a great theologian. Rather, the question is whether at least part of the merit which many people have found in his theological writings can be traced to his philosophical studies – and, we may add, to his further philosophical pursuits – of the 1920s. Green and Hooper seem to invite us here to recognize these writings as the work of someone who has successfully undergone one of the Western world's severest trainings in rationally coherent thinking and passed the severest test with the highest honours: for this is part of what it meant for an Oxford academic in those days to have obtained, as Lewis did in 1922, a “double First” in

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<sup>1</sup> In support of this view of Lewis's early academic career, see SMILDE 2021) for a detailed account of his job-hunting years 1922-25. For a ground-breaking survey of Lewis's general philosophical development during the 1920s see FEINENDEGEN 2018.

<sup>2</sup> GREEN & HOOPER 2002, 76.

“Greats”, or *Literae Humaniores*. I propose to take Green and Hooper’s statement as a challenge to try and find out whether it is true; and I will do so by discussing assorted passages from Lewis’s first work of popular theology, focussing on their intellectual quality and trying to pinpoint relevant bits of background in his philosophical development during the whole decade leading up to his conversions to Theism in 1930 and to Christianity in 1931.

A closer or exclusive focus on Lewis’s philosophical training in the stricter sense – his formal academic study of what he sometimes called “classics and philosophy” as an undergraduate in the years 1919-22 – would almost certainly yield further results. I must leave this to others, since it would require more knowledge of the Oxford philosophical scene and curriculum of the period than I can boast. Instead, I have taken from the examined theological book a sequence of such fragments as seem to invite a probing of their intellectual quality and philosophical underpinnings, while relevant biographical details will usually take the form of facts about Lewis’s whole philosophical pilgrimage of the 1920s. After all, Oxford’s honours degree in philosophy reflected not only a habit to learn at the feet of the great philosophers, but an ambition and ability to join their ranks.

Lewis’s first work of popular theology is *The Problem of Pain* (1940). Conveniently for our purpose, any doubts about the propriety of weighing the book’s purely intellectual merit are removed at the outset. In the first paragraph of the preface, Lewis points out that “the only purpose of the book is to solve the intellectual problem raised by suffering”. Obviously, given the magnitude of the total problem and the very different approach it usually demands, the idea to pick out and concentrate on the intellectual aspect may seem foolish and insensitive. Lewis observes a properly emphatic modesty: in the same breath with the statement of his intellectual focus, he describes himself as unqualified for “the far higher task of teaching fortitude and patience”. If we doubt, then, whether any good can come of an intellectual approach to the problem of pain, we may at least give Lewis the benefit of our doubt. As long as the lower task has not been exposed as plainly impossible, we are probably best advised not to play it off against that higher one. Indeed, we might in the end come to agree with another recent commentator on *The Problem of Pain* that “A point Lewis was fond of making with regard to the natural loves – that the highest does not stand without the lowest – is relevant here ... for in the final analysis, *the moral does not stand without the intellectual*.”<sup>3</sup> Also, given Lewis’s impressive credentials for intellectual work, we may start our investigation with a modicum of optimism.

Let me add that in writing up and listing my observations I have tried to avoid driving home the point either that Lewis’s philosophical training did or that it did not “give weight” to his theological writings, or how much weight. After all, this isn’t the kind of question that admits of a final answer. Such interest as the question holds for us must rather be expected to lie in the approach it invites and in our findings along the way towards an

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<sup>3</sup> Philip Tallon, “Reply to David L. O’Hara”, in BASSHAM 2015, 239. Lewis was citing the Latin phrase “Summum non stat sine infimo”, from the 15th-century religious tract *The Imitation of Christ*. He actually cited it in each of his last three theological books, with various applications.

answer. I have therefore allowed myself some freedom in selecting and presenting passages for consideration rather than being choosy about what may or may not serve the purpose of confirming or refuting Green and Hooper's suggestion.

In fact, trying to assess the philosophical "weight" of this theological work is not very different from simply heeding the terms in which the author presents it. More than seventy-five years after the book appeared, this approach may not seem very exciting. Yet, as I hope the following pages will show, in adopting that approach we may actually find ourselves shedding some received ideas, getting clearer than we used to be about both the author's strengths and his weaknesses, and expecting all the more profit and delight from our next re-reading.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTORY

CHAPTER|PARAGRAPH<sup>4</sup>

(PAGE NR. IN FIRST EDITION)

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1|15 Christianity ... is not a system into which we have to fit the awkward fact of pain: it is itself one of the awkward facts which have to be fitted into any system we make. (12)

» A very Chestertonian phrasing. This chapter seems to show Lewis's debt to G. K. Chesterton's *The Everlasting Man* (1925) as a book presenting "the whole Christian outline of history set out in a form that seemed to me to make sense" (*SbJ* 14|15). What Lewis adds to Chesterton's outline is Rudolf Otto's idea of "the Numinous" as found in *The Idea of the Holy* (1923).<sup>5</sup> His earliest surviving reference to Otto's book is in a letter of August 1936 (CL2, 204),<sup>6</sup> three years before he began writing *The Problem of Pain*.

1|16 ... reality, not made by us, or, indeed, for us, but hitting us in the face. (13)

» The opposition of "we" and "not-we" (or "I" and "not-I"), as envisaged here, became a defining characteristic of reality for Lewis in the late 1920s during the last stages of his so-called "Great War" with his Anthroposophical friend Owen Bar-

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<sup>4</sup> References to *The Problem of Pain* and to *Surprised by Joy* (or *SbJ*) usually take the form of chapter number and paragraph number separated by a vertical line. In the case of *The Problem of Pain*, this is usually followed by the relevant page number(s) in the British first edition, which is identical to the Fontana or Fount paperback edition first published in 1957. A further series of notes on Lewis's text, focusing on "quotations and allusions", is offered at [www.lewisiana.nl/painquotes](http://www.lewisiana.nl/painquotes).

<sup>5</sup> Originally published in German as *Das Heilige*, 1917.

<sup>6</sup> CL1, CL2 and CL3 refer to the three volumes of Lewis's *Collected Letters*, edited by Walter Hooper and published in 2000-2006.

field.<sup>7</sup> It was a major reason why their controversy ended with an armistice rather than with reconciliation and peace. Their friendship never flagged at all, but the dispute seems to have provided Lewis with a good deal of the motivation to work his way through a vaguely pantheistic, essentially monistic philosophical Idealism toward an ontological dualism which he then soon found to be indistinguishable from Theism.

## CHAPTER 2: DIVINE OMNIPOTENCE

2|9-12 The minimum condition of self-consciousness and freedom ... would be that the creature should apprehend God and, therefore, itself as distinct from God. ... Society, then, implies a common field or “world” in which its members meet ... [I]f matter is to serve as a neutral field it must have a fixed nature of its own. (17-19)

» Very much of Lewis’s philosophical discussions with Barfield in the 1920s took place in conversation. What has survived of them in writing reveals that the present chapter on Divine Omnipotence derives some of its key ideas from the Idealistic metaphysical system which Lewis expounded in the context of this controversy.<sup>8</sup> That system can be identified as what Lewis later called his “Berkeleyanism with a few top-dressings of my own”, in which he carefully avoided the word “God” and talked of “Spirit” instead (*SbJ* 14|14). He had made his first acquaintance with the Irish philosopher and bishop George Berkeley (1685-1753) as early as 1917, and the experience appears to have helped him to develop a taste for philosophy. A 1920 letter suggests that his earliest serious philosophical doubts about materialism were kindled by Berkeley.<sup>9</sup> The significance of Berkeley for Lewis’s further philosophical development is set out in some detail in his autobiographical writing of 1931, pub-

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<sup>7</sup> See BARFIELD & LEWIS 2015. While the nature and importance of this controversy has been neglected in almost all the general literature about C. S. Lewis to date, the *term* “Great War” for this episode has perhaps acquired more fame than it deserves; it seems to have been invented by Lewis in a 1949 letter to Barfield, when Lewis somewhat playfully suggested that this “war” was still going on and unlikely to end soon. The only other recorded instance of his using it is *Surprised by Joy* 13|16 and 14|1. The best and fullest account of this episode published to date is THORSON 2015.

<sup>8</sup> See the first few sections of his *Summae metaphysices contra Anthroposphos libri II*, part of BARFIELD & LEWIS 2015.

<sup>9</sup> CL1, 330-331, to Arthur Greeves 24 July 1917; CL1, 509, to Leo Baker, 25 September 1920. In the latter passage Berkeley is not mentioned explicitly, but Lewis’s reference to the issue of “the existence of matter” makes the association very plausible, and the more so when laid beside the 1917 letter.

lished in 2013 as “Early Prose Joy”; but the relevant passages are too dense for the general reader; they seem implicitly addressed to Lewis’s fellow “Greats” men.<sup>10</sup>

2|16 ... the single concept of Plurality, whereof “separation” and “togetherness” are only two aspects. (23)

» If “aspects” is read as “poles”, it might be interpreted as a nod to Barfield’s monistic view of reality as inspired by Coleridge. In fact, there is very little in Lewis’s and Barfield’s writings to suggest that either man ever undertook overtures toward philosophical reconciliation, least of all at this comparatively early date in Lewis’s public writing career; see comment on 3|8, below. In March 1936 Lewis wrote to his friend Bede Griffiths, “Rejoice with me – timidly, for it is only the first streak of dawn and may be false dawn – there are faint signs of a movement away from Anthroposophy in Barfield” (CL2, 195); yet, though a similar confidence to Griffiths followed in July of that year (CL2, 203), this “dawn” proved false. Barfield dedicated his 1928 book *Poetic Diction* to Lewis with the words (quoted from William Blake) “Opposition is true friendship”. As far as can be ascertained, their opposition ever remained as real as their friendship.

The words quoted above are immediately followed by the next quotation.

2|16 With every advance in our thought the unity of the creative act, and the impossibility of tinkering with the creation as though this or that element of it could have been removed, will become apparent. ... [God’s] own goodness is the root from which [all his acts] grow and His own omnipotence the air in which they all flower. (23)

» By “advance” of thought Lewis seems to mean steps toward unification of thought: operations such as the subsuming of two concepts of matter under the single concept of Plurality, proposed a moment ago. To grow in awareness of “the unity of the creative act” is itself an advance in our thought, or perhaps an aspect of every advance. However, an increase in awareness of the unity of the creative act is *not* an advance towards *monism* – as Barfield would have wished Lewis to recognize, in whatever terms. On the contrary, it is an increase in awareness (1) of God as Creator, and (2) of everything else as God’s creation. More particularly, the advance here is toward a *distinction* between God’s “freedom” and such freedom as creatures may have. The apparent nod to Barfield is, on closer inspection, a jab at Barfield.

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<sup>10</sup> See LEWIS 2013.

## CHAPTER 3: DIVINE GOODNESS

3|3 ... a process which, as it happens, I can describe fairly accurately, since I have undergone it. When I came first to the University I was as nearly without a moral conscience as a boy could be. ... By the mercy of God I fell among a set of young men (none of them, by the way, Christians) who were sufficiently close to me in intellect and imagination to secure immediate intimacy but who knew, and tried to obey, the moral law. (26)

» Surely Lewis's reference to his own inner spiritual development is here only a brief aside to the discussion of his real subject. Nevertheless – since he ascribes the process explicitly to “the mercy of God” and the phrase “as it happens” is therefore perhaps not perfectly apposite – it may be worth finding out in more detail what he is talking about. The point in time referred to could be the moment of Lewis's first arrival at Oxford in 1917, when he was soon immersed in his training and brief active service as an army officer. More likely, however, he is referring to 1919-1920 and the “set of young men” at least includes Cecil Harwood and Owen Barfield, who were to become Anthroposophists in 1923. Another good friend in these early Oxford years was Leo Baker, recipient of the 1920 letter mentioned in the comment on 2|9-12, above.

The point of attending to this snippet of autobiography is that Lewis repeatedly mentioned the growth of a moral conscience as a factor both in his own religious belief and in the entire history of religion as expounded in chapter 1 of *The Problem of Pain*. The importance of this factor is illustrated by the large role played by Vertue in *The Pilgrim's Regress* (1933), the allegorical and quasi autobiographical conversion story that was Lewis's first published prose work. Vertue's presence in the book seems all the more oddly prominent if it is compared with his widespread neglect by critics and scholars (Vertue goes unmentioned in Walter Hooper's 1996 summary of the book in *C. S. Lewis: A Companion & Guide*). Vertue's “meaning” appears to be captured in Lewis's *Mere Christianity*, III.12: “... in one sense, the road back to God is a road of moral effort, of trying harder and harder. But in another sense it is not trying that is ever going to bring us home”. Vertue's meaning in the general history of religion is perhaps rendered in the first chapter of *The Problem of Pain* (1|12, 10): “... the consciousness not merely of a moral law, but of a moral law at once approved and disobeyed.”

In so far as Vertue was modelled on specific individuals rather than on aspects of the Pilgrim, it would be nice to know who they were. Certainly, some of the passages about Vertue (like many another passage in *Regress*) are closely related to passages in the “Great War” writings.

3|8 The relation between Creator and creature is, of course, unique ... God is both further from us, and nearer to us, than any other being. (29)

» It appears that when Lewis became a Christian he soon decided to stop making further attempts to bridge the philosophical gap between himself and Barfield.<sup>11</sup> Yet perhaps he had his moments of weakening resolution, or rising hopes. One such moment seems to be reflected in the last book that Lewis wrote, *Letters to Malcolm* (1964), chapter 14. He does seem there to take up the above idea on God's simultaneous distance and nearness, and suggests a Barfieldian source for it:

If I ever see more clearly I will speak more surely. Meanwhile, I stick to Owen's view. All creatures, from the angel to the atom, are other than God with an otherness to which there is no parallel ... But also, no creature is other than He in the same way in which it is other than all the rest. ... Therefore of each creature we can say, "This also is Thou: neither is this Thou."

*Malcolm* is a semi-fictional book, but it is clear from the preceding "letter" that Lewis is actually referring to Barfield's *Saving the Appearances* (1957), chapter 23. On the other hand, it is precisely this chapter of Barfield's book in which Barfield comes closest to accommodating Lewis's position, and goes furthest in qualifying his own in that direction. And oddly enough, what Lewis quotes in conclusion ("This also is Thou" etc.) is quoted from Charles Williams, and was certainly known to Lewis since mid-1938 (CL2, 228, n. 21). One wonders whether Lewis, in 1963, would still have stuck to what he had written two decades earlier to another Anthroposophist friend, Daphne Harwood, in a letter of 25 March 1942 (CL2, 514): "I don't think the conception of *creatureliness* is part of your philosophy at all, and that your system is anthropocentric. That's the 'great divide'." Likely enough he would indeed have stuck to this view – if pressed.

## CHAPTER 4: HUMAN WICKEDNESS

4|1 Christianity now has to preach the diagnosis – in itself very bad news – before it can win a hearing for the cure. (43)

» This opening paragraph is a model of conciseness, precision and clarity. Many another author would need a chapter or a book to make the same point and even so would not equal Lewis or surpass him in subtlety of thought or in deftly anticipating various attacks – always assuming that the result succeeds in being readable at all.

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<sup>11</sup> In an undated letter of the late 1940s he alludes to his having "resolved" against "once more embarking on epistolary controversy" with Barfield (CL2, 870).

Indeed the advantage that longer treatises have over shorter ones may often be, not that they are more powerful, but that their weaknesses are harder to identify.

4|3 ... the effect of Psycho-analysis on the public mind. Whatever these doctrines really mean, the impression they have actually left on most people is that the sense of Shame is a dangerous and mischievous thing. ... even Pagan society has usually recognised “shamelessness” as the nadir of the soul. ... we have broken down one of the ramparts of the human spirit, madly exulting in the work ... (44)

» Scholarly restraint, cultural criticism, historical awareness and Screwtapean shrewdness are here brilliantly combined. However, Lewis’s two historical claims – about Paganism and about the effect of Psycho-analysis – are so large that he might have done well to provide a least a brief reference to some available evidence, or perhaps some authoritative study. On “pagan” valuations of shame he might, for example, have mentioned Plato’s *Laws*, 647b (although Plato would hardly be the perfect type of a “pagan” thinker). Ideas about the shame-destroying effects of Freudianism seem to underlie several of Lewis’s allusions to the 1920s or the period around the First World War, notably in *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, III.1-3.

4|10 ... we do not say that justice, mercy, fortitude, and temperance are of *no* value, but only that the local custom is as just, brave, temperate and merciful as can reasonably be expected. (51)

» In mentioning this set of four virtues twice in one sentence, why does Lewis not use the same order in each case? If the first sequence is numbered 1-2-3-4, the second is 1-3-4-2. – The answer might be that he was “writing with the ear, not the eye”, as he advised a young correspondent in 1958 (CL3, 1108); in terms of sound, Lewis *is* repeating the first sequence. In each instance the two shorter words are followed by the two longer ones. If there had been the least chance of obfuscation resulting from the changed order, he might have decided simply to repeat the same sequence (e.g. “...that the local custom embodies justice, mercy, fortitude, and temperance as truly as can be reasonably expected”). That, however, would perhaps have been hyper-clear rather than helpful. Lewis may well have found meaning and beauty in each arrangement even without giving the ear its due. The two nouns *Justice & Mercy* make as good a pair of poles as *Fortitude & Temperance*, and perhaps they are parallel pairs; but each pair of nouns is again reflected in the polarity suggested by the two pairs of adjectives – *Just & Brave* being one pole, *Temperate & Merciful* the other. Translating such fine prose with full justice to the original is almost as difficult as translating poetry.

N.B. If “prudence” is substituted for “mercy”, the four virtues mentioned here are the traditional four Cardinal Virtues: *iusititia, prudentia, fortitudo, temperantia*.<sup>12</sup>

4|10 It begins to look as if the neglected school rules even inside this bad school were connected with some larger world ... (51)

» Very likely one thing at the root of this passage is the experience described in 3|3 (see comment above) and in the Vertue episodes in *The Pilgrim’s Regress*. See also 4|7 (53), “The road to the promised land runs past Sinai.” Many years later Lewis made a brief reference to it in “The Seeing Eye” (1963):

I never had the experience of looking for God. ... He was the hunter (or so it seemed to me) and I was the deer. ... He stalked me like a redskin, took unerring aim, and fired. And ... it is significant that this long-evaded encounter happened at a time when I was making a serious effort to obey my conscience.<sup>13</sup>

## CHAPTER 5: THE FALL OF MAN

5|2 ... in the developed doctrine the inherent magic of the apple has quite dropped out of sight, and the story is simply one of disobedience. I have the deepest respect even for Pagan myths, still more for myths in Holy Scripture. ... But I assume that the Holy Spirit would not have allowed [the developed doctrine] to grow up in the Church ... unless it was also true and useful as far as it went. (59-60)

» Lewis seems curiously diffident in proposing to discuss the *doctrine* of the Fall of Man. He does proceed to do so, but not without coming close to apologizing for it – noting that “I am to give my readers not the best absolutely but the best I have.” Part of the idea behind this may have been, especially as regards his first theological book, that he couldn’t help being an Oxford don and by formal training a philosopher more than anything else. A merely doctrinal treatment might therefore have seemed to be “the best he had” to offer, even if he had to point out that it was not “the best absolutely”. Each of his Christian books of the 1940s originally had the description “Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford” added to his name on the title page.

Again, immediately after finishing this chapter’s part of the job (5|13, 74) he warns the reader once more that he has only been treating the subject on a “shallow” level since he has said “nothing about the trees of life and of knowledge which

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<sup>12</sup> There seems to be no fixed traditional order; Plato’s treatment of them in *Republic* 427-433 gives the sequence Prudence, Fortitude, Temperance, Justice; Lewis in *Mere Christianity* III.2 has Prudence, Temperance, Justice, Fortitude.

<sup>13</sup> LEWIS 1967, 169.

doubtless conceal some great mystery”, nor about our dying “in” Adam and living “in” Christ.

However, these reservations certainly don’t cover the whole of his actual treatment of the subject. At least on the subject of the Fall, contributing to the *mythology* was doubtless more deeply congenial to Lewis than expounding the doctrine. In spite of his protestations that a merely doctrinal approach was all he had to offer, a large part of this very chapter on “The Fall of Man” (5|6-10, 65-71) is devoted to what he introduces, indeed, as a “picture – a ‘myth’ in the Socratic sense, a not unlikely tale” (5|5, 64). On the other hand, he adds a note that this is “not to be confused with ‘myth’ in Dr. Niebuhr’s sense (*i.e.*, a symbolical representation of non-historical truth)”. Lewis’s “picture” is “an account of what *may have been* the historical fact” (64, note), while all the key passages are of an abstractly “doctrinal” or theological nature. For example:

This act of self-will on the part of the creature, which constitutes an utter falseness to its true creaturely position, is the only sin that can be conceived as the Fall. ... The turning from God to self ... is a sin possible even to Paradisal man ... it was a loss of status as a *species*.” (5|9-10, 68-70)

Nevertheless, several places in Lewis’s “Socratic myth” may remind the reader of passages in his science-fiction novels *Out of the Silent Planet* or *Perelandra* (published, respectively, two years before and two years after *The Problem of Pain*). The present book’s great question – whether a good and omnipotent God could and should have prevented or reversed the Fall – is here answered, not by any further statement or development of doctrine, but by “the symbol of a drama, a symphony, or a dance” (5|11, 72). It is also to be noted that part of the paragraph describing humanity’s “loss of status as a *species*” (5|10, 70) has an almost ballad-like quality: “Thus the organs ... And desires ... And the mind itself ... And the will, caught in the tidal wave of mere nature ...”

5|2 I have the deepest respect even for Pagan myths, still more for myths in Holy Scripture. (59)

Lewis’s reference to his respect for myths may remind readers of a passage almost at the end of *Surprised by Joy* (15|7) – his brief and rather out-of-the blue reference to “Barfield’s encouragement of a more respectful, if not more delighted, attitude to Pagan myth”. Earlier in that book (*SbJ* 13|17) Lewis defined two other influences from Barfield on his own thought, and those two are usually repeated in the literature on Lewis. Yet in fact, the respect for myths – or “respectful attitude” to “myth” – may have been both the single most important and most distinctively Barfieldian of the three positive influences thus identified. Precisely how and when Lewis developed this respect for “myth” as such is a story which is perhaps impossible to trace in much detail. But it is possible to identify at least one relevant point in his

“Great War” with Barfield. In one section of his reply to Lewis’s 1928 *Summa*, Barfield propounded an idea which can now rank as an Anthroposophical prototype of Lewis’s best-known idea on Myth: the concept of Myth becoming Fact. Lewis’s friends Dyson and Tolkien are usually credited with having proposed this idea to him in September 1931 and applying it to Christ. Likely enough it was about two and a half years earlier that Barfield wrote, for Lewis’s attention:

What if Spirit were of such a nature that, as time passed ... it chose ... to allow itself to be singly contemplated as One Man while still continuing to be diversely enjoyed as many men? We may at least say this: that if such were the case, ... [this One Man’s] whole life would have been both history and myth, both an event in time and symbol of the timeless. In an accurate biography of him the truth of fact and the truth of imagination would for once coincide.<sup>14</sup>

Lewis never was very explicit in mentioning Dyson and Tolkien as the friends who helped him see, once and for all, Jesus Christ as a “Myth become Fact”, but it seems altogether certain that they did play a big role here. What is rarely mentioned in accounts of Lewis’s life and thought is the precise manner in which he ascribed that role to Dyson and Tolkien in *Surprised by Joy*. All that Lewis says there is that they gave him “much help in getting over *the last stile*” (*SbJ* 14|6, emphasis added). Evidently a number of stiles had already been got over by that time, partly as a matter of his philosophical development in the 1920s.

- 5|3 The whole modern estimate of primitive man is based upon that idolatry of artefacts which is a great corporate sin of our own civilisation. We forget that our prehistoric ancestors made all the most useful discoveries, except that of chloroform ... (62)  
» There are echoes here both from Chesterton and from Barfield. Barfield scorned the modern philosopher’s fixation on “the startling and largely beneficent achievements of science in the practical business of manipulating matter and carting it to and fro” and the resulting attempts of mainstream mid-20th-century English philosophy “to justify the ways of science to man” (1952 Preface to *Poetic Diction*). Chesterton’s *Everlasting Man* (I.1, “The Man in the Cave”) obviously inspired Lewis to make fun of the Cave Man, “almost a brute yet somehow able to invent art, pottery, language, weapons, cookery and nearly everything else ... dragging his screaming mate by the hair (I do not exactly know why)” etc. (thus Lewis in “The Funeral of a Great Myth”, c. 1944).<sup>15</sup>

The gist of the meaning of such passages is that the crudeness of prehistoric artefacts (as compared with ours) does not justify the conclusion that there was a similar

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<sup>14</sup> Barfield, *Autem*, §12, in BARFIELD & LEWIS 2015, 119.

<sup>15</sup> LEWIS 1967, 87.

crudeness to *every* aspect of the lives and works and minds of prehistoric humanity. This critique of modern assumptions is surely valid. The possibility of something like stone-age gentlemen cannot be ruled out on grounds of subsequent technological progress at least as long as we cannot confidently rule out the possibility of high-tech barbarians. Nevertheless, it is hard to see how the critique can in the end be less speculative than the thing criticized. The reference to all sorts of prehistoric ingenuity is important, but how to reach agreement over what it proves?

5|10 “Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” The total organism which had been taken up into [man’s] spiritual life was allowed to fall back into the merely natural condition from which, at his making, it had been raised – just as, far earlier in the history of creation, God had raised vegetable life to become the vehicle of animality, and chemical process to be the vehicle of vegetation, and physical process to be the vehicle of chemical. Thus human spirit from being the master of human nature became a mere lodger in its own house, or even a prisoner ... (70-71)

» How is each of these modes of “raising” to be conceived in more detail? Lewis does not seem to have much to say on how it may have actually happened, how these developments can be, or why they must be, construed as the results of divine intervention, and whether the line between one level and the next might not prove extremely fuzzy if studied closely. If only because of his old delight in myths – which Owen Barfield had helped him to develop into philosophically grounded respect for “myth” as such – it is hard to imagine that Lewis could ever have been won over to a “Creationist” position of the Flood-geology type such as was increasingly being heard of during his lifetime. But it seems almost equally hard to invoke his authority for theories like Intelligent Design. It isn’t that Lewis implicitly rejected such theories; and perhaps indeed a Lewisian position could be construed from his work which is close to Theistic Evolution. The problem here, however, is that his work is curiously devoid of positive ideas in this field. As regards physics and astronomy, Lewis does appear to have made serious efforts, successful as far as they went, to keep himself informed about new developments. He certainly read and appreciated A. N. Whitehead’s *Science and the Modern World* (1925) and eminent popularising scientists like James Jeans and Arthur Eddington. As regards biology, it is hard to find out where he acquired his knowledge; he never recommends or even mentions a biological equivalent of Jeans and Eddington. This is not to say that Lewis misconstrued Darwin’s theory; yet it seems impossible to be sure, for example, that he was aware of the so-called Modern Synthesis in biology. When referring to figures like J. B. S. Haldane and Julian Huxley, which he rarely did, it was invariably to lambast their quasi-philosophical recommendations for the future of humanity.<sup>16</sup> When noting

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<sup>16</sup> In all of Lewis’s published writings the only reference to Julian Huxley is a scathing one in a 1959 letter (CL3, 1105). With Haldane he conducted a brief and spirited but somehow aborted

possible shortcomings of Darwin's actual theory, he took his cue from such criticisms as were current around 1900.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, references in his writings to Darwin's *Origin of Species* (an accessible book for anyone interested) are few and far between, and they were all made for the single purpose of pointing out that Keats's *Hyperion* was published earlier. Lewis appears to have considered Darwin's theory broadly acceptable but, curiously enough, it seems quite likely that he never read Darwin, and implausible to suggest that he was much interested in the details of natural selection.

As a writer on evolution and divine creation, Lewis seems in fact to have little to offer beyond three lines of thought:

- the myth of evolution preceded the science (Keats and Wagner preceded Darwin);
- science, like every human endeavour, has its limits and needs to observe them, if only because it will end up undermining its own credibility if it doesn't;
- the ideas of "Creative Evolution" (Bergson), "Life-Force" (Shaw) and "Emergent Evolution" (Lloyd Morgan, Alexander) are nonsense.

None of this gives any positive help in fleshing out his obviously "compatibilist" idea of evolution and creation.

Perhaps his one real contribution is available in details like the passage in the chapter on "Divine Goodness" (3|8, 29). Lewis asserts there that "The relation between Creator and creature is, of course, unique, and cannot be paralleled by any relations between one creature and another". He talks of "our tiny, *miraculous* power of free will" (emphasis added). Lewis is straightforward, clear and consistent in describing free will and Reason – never mind how weak they are – as *miraculous* powers. In this he was perhaps, more than anything else, Chesterton's disciple. Those who wish to invoke Lewis's authority for their own view of creation and evolution perhaps do best to ponder this single point, and reconcile themselves to the fact that he has little else to offer in this field.

5|10 ... rational consciousness became what it now is – a fitful spot-light resting on a small part of the cerebral motions. (71)

» This follows immediately on the previous passage quoted from 5|10. The way Lewis conceives rational consciousness is worth some close attention. The "spot-light" is not itself part of what goes on in the brain (or in any other physical organism): it is part of "human spirit" (without "the") as mentioned in the first half of the same sentence. A little further on, he characterizes "the spirit" as "not only a weak king but a bad one". But what is perhaps above all to be noted here is the consistent

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polemic; see [www.lewisiana.nl/haldane](http://www.lewisiana.nl/haldane). One rather late but real sign of interest for recent developments in biology, at least in animal behaviour as researched and described by Konrad Lorenz, is found in a 1952 letter of Lewis to Bede Griffiths; CL3, 195. See comment to 9|12, below.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. "Is Theology Poetry?" (1944), in LEWIS 1965, 55: "The Bergsonian critique of orthodox Darwinism is not easy to answer."

and unambiguous assertion of this spirit's supernatural character. As Lewis conceives it, the human spirit is one of the three elements that constitute the phenomenon called man, and it is the only supernatural element. The other two are body and soul, and both are natural. Every single action of the spirit, never mind how unimpressive, is *miraculous*; and any change occurring to this element is a change in the whole phenomenon called man. The historical change which this "human spirit" actually underwent is the one now called "the Fall of Man" (title and subject of the present chapter). It was "a loss of status as a *species*":

... the emergence of a new kind of man – a new species, never made by God, had sinned itself into existence. (5|10, 70-71)

This is no doubt a fine way to express the idea. Two things remain unclear, however: (1) How does Lewis conceive such changes of "status as a species" in general? Was the only conceivable change of status for man in fact a *loss* of status, and was the only conceivable loss one that resulted from changes in the *supernatural* element? (This is probably a rather technical question for which we do not strictly need an answer.)

(2) How or why does the change brought about by the first human "act of self-will" (as described in 5|8 and 5|9, 68-70) affect the rest of humanity – first those fellow men and women who lived at the time of that act, and then all later generations for the rest of human history? Lewis merely states, at this deeply mysterious juncture of his "Socratic myth":

This condition was transmitted by heredity to all later generations, for it was not simply what biologists call a variation; it was the emergence of a new kind of man ... etc. (5|10, 71)

If pressed to clarify these points, what might Lewis's answers have looked like? Regarding the first, he might have specified that

- a *loss* of status as a species was indeed the only conceivable *change* of status: not a climb-down to some lower level and unhappier position, but a change from having that status to no longer having it;
- this change was indeed one that could not have happened to any other species if it is true that no other species has or had this supernatural element;
- the possibility of this loss was inevitably attendant on God's *raising* humanity to its original status.

As a reply to such answers from Lewis, it could then be suggested that for him to call humanity as he defines it "a new species" is perhaps, in post-Darwinian times, misleading. For Darwin, "species" as such have their origin in *natural* selection, i.e. in a process defined by abundant procreation and limited chances of survival, and the modern biologist, even if he privately affirms the existence of a supernatural realm of spirits and any amount of traffic between it and nature, will put these beliefs on hold while professionally investigating the origin of the species called *homo sapiens*, just

as he does when he investigates the origin of any other species. For Lewis, investigating the origin of humankind must ultimately be a will o' the wisp if we rigorously ignore the supernatural element. It is, then, very much as if our picture will have to be either that of a "species" which is not human, or of a humanity which is not a "species". Calling humanity (or fallen humanity) "a new species" is perhaps in effect to obscure rather than to honour the difference.

It is harder to see what solution Lewis might have proposed for the second problem. He seems to have used an eclectic set of biological metaphors. He says the Fall is "not simply what biologists call a variation"; but the proposed way in which its results were transmitted to future generations *does* appear to be – "simply" or not – what biologists call "heredity". In fact the question about changes occurring to species as such is never whether they are "simply" variations; simple variations occur all the time, i.e. in each new member of every species, and by definition they are not changes in species; they are the raw material for such changes. The question is whether and how changes in species can be explained as the result of a circumstance-driven accumulation of usefully coinciding masses of variations over time – useful for mere survival. This question seems irrelevant as regards a supernatural spirit. As Lewis himself says earlier in this chapter: "Science has nothing to say either for or against the doctrine of the Fall" (5|4, 62).

As befits a myth, Lewis's "picture" teaches us *that*, but hardly *why*, least of all *how*, the result of this "first act of self-will" was transmitted to all humanity at the time of the Fall and for ever after.

5|10 ... sent down into the psycho-physical organism desires far worse than the organism sent up

(71)

» One wonders whether Owen Barfield shook his head in despair over such stark dualism while he read this – or what happened if he was present when Lewis read this passage aloud to the Inklings. What is more, the dualism expressed here between "the human spirit" and "the psycho-physical organism" is compounded in Lewis's thought by an equally stark dualism within the psycho-physical organism, i.e. between soul and body. He sometimes envisaged and expressed the latter dualism in a very similar way, as in chapter 3 of *Letters to Malcolm*:

The body ought to pray as well as the soul. Body and soul are both the better for it. Bless the body. Mine has led me into many scrapes, but I've led it into far more. If the imagination were obedient the appetites would give us very little trouble.

The same idea is also expressed in the third item of "Scraps", a very brief piece published in a church magazine in 1945.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> LEWIS 1970, 216-217.

Oddly, the only type of dualism which Lewis seems to have at last been willing to tone down a bit so as to accommodate some of Barfield's equally stark and all-pervading *monism*, is the dualism of Creator and creature: see comment on 3|8, above.

5|12 I call our present condition one of original Sin ... because our actual religious experience does not allow us to regard it in any other way. (73)

» If “our actual religious experience” seems a poor sort of authority, it must be remembered

– that Lewis regarded morality (i.e. “some kind of morality”) as “one of three strands or elements in all developed religion” (1|5), i.e. he took religious experience to include moral experience, and

– that he had himself experienced the reality and importance of this strand in the development of his own religious belief (see passage quoted from 3|3, above, and the figure of Vertue in *The Pilgrim's Regress*).

Thus it appears that what led him to call our present condition one of original Sin is not a theory of evil as punishment, nor any supposed discovery of a mechanism of heredity, nor in fact “our actual religious experience” in general or as a whole. As Lewis sees it, orthodox Christian thinking on this point is guided by that particular part of “our religious experience” which arises from human freedom and responsibility. He finds the basis of the doctrine of Original Sin in our “moral conscience”. The “very badly brought up boy” that “is introduced into a decent family” will, when starting to mend, feel shame not only for what he does or has done, but for what he is – or rather for “what he is just beginning to cease to be”. Factors like a bad upbringing do not simply cancel the fact of our *own* badness (5|12, 73-74).

There can be little doubt that here is another bit of universalized autobiography, as in 3|3. Whether or not Lewis was exaggerating his own lack of “moral consciousness” in retrospect, the kind of shame described and some of the reflections developed here must have occurred as a matter of his own spiritual development at some period, perhaps around 1920.

5|13 ... the Pauline statement that “as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive” ... lies behind the Patristic doctrine of our physical presence in Adam's loins and Anselm's doctrine of our inclusion, by legal fiction, in the suffering Christ. These theories may have done good in their day but they do no good to me, and I am not going to invent others. (74)

» Lewis's rejection of “chronological snobbery”<sup>19</sup> did not result in an all-out defence of traditional Christian doctrines. The present passage may be called a carefully

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<sup>19</sup> He defined “chronological snobbery” as “the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited”, and he traced his own shedding of this habit to Barfield's influence (*SbJ* 13|17).

considered admission that specific pre-modern ideas are now simply obsolete, at least as far as he is concerned. As befits Lewis he states his reason for discarding them:

... the difficulty of the Pauline formula turns on the word *in*, and ... this word, again and again in the New Testament, is used in senses we cannot fully understand.

As Lewis explains, this use of “in” in the New Testament “seems ... to imply” that “in absolute reality, ... some kind of ‘inter-inanimation’ of which we have no conception at all” serves as a counterweight to “the separateness ... which we discern between individuals” (5|13, 74-75). This New Testament “implication” is what leads him to postulate the *actual existence* of this unconceived counterweight to modern individualism. Or as he puts it more briefly a little further on: “there may be a tension between individuality and some other principle.” But since we have “no conception at all” of this “inter-inanimation” beyond its mere existence, which is itself merely implied rather than stated, there is no good in sticking to any theory about it, however old and venerable. Such mere implications and speculations may seem totally inadequate as an argument against the modern view of an atomized humanity, but presumably there are further and better arguments elsewhere. The point to note is that Lewis seems far from simply rejecting the moderns on the authority of the ancients.

In contrast, what follows is an important instance of Lewis’s alertness to the pitfalls of “chronological snobbery”. Mentioning the Old Testament’s habit of “ignoring our conception of the individual”, he notes that this habit might be due to the fact “that their social experience blinded the ancients to some truths which we perceive”; but he won’t admit this without at once pointing out that this same ancient social experience, more likely than not, “made *them* sensible of some truths to which *we* are blind” (emphasis added).

If we wonder how the Patristic and later doctrines can “have done good in their time”, part of the answer is that those doctrines were not then “felt to be so artificial as we now feel them to be” (end of 5|13, 76).

## CHAPTER 6: HUMAN PAIN

6|3 Now the proper good of a creature is to surrender itself to its Creator ... When it does so, it is good and happy. ... This [the life of God the Son as an eternal rendering back of the being that is eternally generated by the Father] is the pattern which man was made to imitate ... there, most undoubtedly, is Heaven, and there the Holy Ghost proceeds. In the world as we now know it, the problem is how to recover this self-surrender. (78-79)

» When it comes to weighing this book's intellectual merit, many a reader may feel, at the present point, that Lewis is too confident in making this sequence of assertions: "The proper good *is*... – ...it *is* good and happy... – This *is* the pattern... – This, most undoubtedly, *is* Heaven... – the problem *is*..." The quoted passage might have profited from one or two references back to previous chapters, notably to all passages featuring the word *surrender*. A closer look at them and their context will reveal most of the supports and reservations required to make the quoted string of assertions acceptable:

- \* In chapter 3, on "Divine Goodness", it is argued
  - that God's goodness "differs from ours, but it is not sheerly different" (3|3, 27);
  - that this different goodness must be more than mere kindness and is best understood as "inexorable" love (3|7, 29);
  - that analogies with human loves are useful and indispensable but will always fall short of the truth about the Creator's love for creatures (3|9-13, 30-35);
  - that "What we would here and now call our 'happiness' is not the end God chiefly has in view: but when we are such as God can love without impediment, we shall in fact be happy" (3|14, 36);
  - and that our human "antithesis between egoistic and altruistic love cannot be unambiguously applied to the love of God for His creatures", because "He can give good, but cannot need or get it" (3|16, 37-38).

From all this it follows that

Our highest activity must be response, not initiative. To experience the love of God in a true, and not an illusory form, is therefore to experience it as our *surrender* to His demand, our conformity to His desire: to experience it in the opposite way is, as it were, a solecism against the grammar of being. (3|16, 39, emphasis added)

- \* In chapter 5, "The Fall of Man", it is argued that an "act of self-will on the part of the creature, which constitutes an utter falseness to its true creaturely position, is the only sin that can be conceived as the Fall":

It is a sin possible even to Paradisal man, because the mere existence of a self – the mere fact that we call it "me" – includes, from the first, the danger of self-idolatry. Since I am I, I must make an act of self-*surrender*, however small or however easy, in living to God rather than to myself. ... the sin was very heinous, because the self which Paradisal man had to *surrender* contained no natural recalcitrancy to being *surrendered*. (5|9, 68-69, emphases added)

- \* The only other instances of the word "surrender" previous to chapter 6 are found in two passages that characterize the life of Christ as a model for human life (emphases added):

Paradisaal man ... was toen ... perfectie enacting in joy and ease of all the faculties and all the senses that filial self-*surrender* which Our Lord enacted in the agonies of the crucifixion. (5|6, 66-67)

A nobler analogy, sanctioned by the constant tenor of Our Lord's teaching, is that between God's love for man and a father's love for a son. ... [W]hat the conception of Fatherhood would have meant to Our Lord's first hearers ... will become even plainer if we consider how Our Lord ... regards His own Sonship, *surrendering* His will wholly to the paternal will ... (3|11, 32-33)

More on "surrender" in the comment on 6|12-15, below.

6|5 We can rest contentedly in our sins and in our stupidities ... But pain insists upon being attended to. ... it is [God's] megaphone to rouse a deaf world. (81)

» This "megaphone" metaphor has achieved more fame and blame than it deserves. The 1957 Dutch translation of *The Problem of Pain* went so far as using the phrase as the book's title (*Gods megafoon*). The resulting suggestion – that Lewis's overall message is captured in the phrase "Pain is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world" – is certainly an intolerable simplification. Admittedly the phrase is often quoted along with the full sentence which it concludes: "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains; it is His megaphone" etc. Even so, however, the statement cannot stand on its own, or not as a satisfying way to summarize Lewis's intellectual answer to the Christian problem of pain.

For one thing, while the sequence *Whispering–Speaking–Shouting* may by itself suggest an unchanging divine message about the need for free creatures "to surrender self-will" (6|5, 80), it is actually accompanied by the parallel sequence *Pleasures–Conscience–Pain*. And it is hard to think that Lewis would have his readers ignore any *qualitative* differences between pleasures, conscience, and pain. Likely enough, therefore, the sequence must connote more than is suggested by the mere amplification of sound; the things whispered through pleasures might be in themselves different from the things shouted through our pains, while conscience perhaps conveys a mix of the two. But in fact, any questions about *what* more is connoted are left unanswered here; and perhaps Lewis would have done better not to raise them. If seen in a slightly wider context, the allusion to the whispering pleasures and the speaking conscience appears to be merely an impressive curlicue rather than part of the main point Lewis makes at this juncture. Pain is contrasted, in fact, not so much with our pleasures and our conscience as with "our sins and our stupidities". The relevant distinction is between "masked evil" (sin and error) and "unmasked evil" (pain).

The wider context of the chapter provides two further reasons to be wary of parading the "megaphone" phrase, or even the full sentence, as a detachable piece of wisdom, let alone as this book's key idea. The first reason is that this sentence appears quite early in the chapter's central section, definable as 6|5-15 (80-92). This

central section as a whole is a review of three ways in which “mortification, though itself a pain, is made easier by the presence of pain in its context” (6|4, 80). Of these three ways, or three “operations of pain”, the Megaphone effect is only “the first and lowest” (6|8, 83), discussed in the first three paragraphs of this section (6|5-7). Nor does Lewis seem to prefer the metaphor of a megaphone to the image that concludes this sub-section: the “flag of truth within the fortress of a rebel soul”. When the point is resumed in chapter 8, on Hell, Lewis recalls the flag (VIII|5, 108 and 110), not the megaphone. Therefore, while it would probably be correct to see the two chapters on “Human Pain” as the book’s “central part” (as Lewis appears to label them in 6|18, 95), and so perhaps to see the central section of chapter 6 as the very heart of the book, it still remains highly questionable to fix on the megaphone as the absolutely central idea. To do so would be to stop halfway through the first of three proposed steps. (For the other two see comment on 6|12-15, below).

Rather, if the overall message of the book is to be captured by a single statement or catchphrase from this chapter, the best candidate can be shown to be the “vale of soul-making” (quoted from Keats) in the last paragraph:

If the world is indeed a “vale of soul making” it seems on the whole to be doing its work. (6|18, 96)

This sentence, if any, would seem to capture the chapter’s and the book’s central message. One reason to think so is that it could very properly have served as the chapter’s final sentence. It is actually rather odd that it doesn’t. It comes about two-thirds through the final paragraph, and what follows in the last third – about poverty and Marxism – seems quite misplaced: it belongs in the next chapter (see second comment on 6|18, below).

The other reason is in the two “principles” to be observed “in estimating the credibility” of the Christian doctrine about pain. Both principles or provisos, set out in the last two paragraphs of chapter 6, boil down to the important reminder that “pain, like pleasure”, can be “received” in very different ways: “of course, pain, like pleasure” and like “all that is given to a creature with free will”, must be “two-edged, not by the nature of the giver or of the gift, but by the nature of the recipient” (6|18, 95). The darkest implication of this fact is further explored in the chapter on “Hell”, and a clinical note on “the observed effects of pain” is given in the book’s Appendix. Indeed the “megaphone” passage itself is concluded by the observation that

No doubt Pain as God’s megaphone is a terrible instrument; it may lead to final and unrepented rebellion. But ... it plants the flag of truth within the fortress of a rebel soul. (6|7, 83)

The two-edged nature of pain, already indicated here and then expounded in the two “principles” at the end of the chapter, will at best remain underexposed as long as the image of “God’s megaphone”, rather than the “vale of soul-making”, is taken to convey the book’s central message.

The central position of the Keatsian phrase is further confirmed by passages in two of Lewis's published letters. His letter of 24 June 1936 to Leo Baker (CL2, 196) contains what is all but literally the "soul-making" statement of the 1940 book as quoted above:

... if this is a "vale of soul-making", it seems to [*sic*], by round and by large, to be working pretty well.

A very similar tone is struck in a quick answer to the problem of pain that Lewis gave as one of his "Answers to Questions on Christianity" during a meeting of factory workers in April 1944:

If you think of this world as a place intended simply for our happiness, you find it quite intolerable: think of it as a place of training and correction and it's not so bad.<sup>20</sup>

Even more tellingly, in a letter written to a reader of *The Problem of Pain* in April 1942 Lewis assures his correspondent that

... if you have "got as far as the Vale of Soul Making idea" that is about as far as my book asks you to go. All I did was to add details about souls and the Maker.<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, the value of the two central chapters 6 and 7 depends on the presence of a certain wry candour on the part of Lewis. The wryness is foreshadowed in the Preface ("This exhilarating programme I am now carrying out"). It is perhaps best expressed toward the end of chapter 6, after a harrowing 75-word evocation of the multifaceted thing called "pain" and just before Lewis states his two "principles", or reminders of ambiguity, (6|16, 93):

Pain hurts. That is what the word means. I am only trying to show that the old Christian doctrine of being made "perfect through suffering" is not incredible. To prove it palatable is beyond my design.

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<sup>20</sup> "Answers to Questions on Christianity", in LEWIS 1970, 52.

<sup>21</sup> CL2, 518. For the rest, the Keatsian phrase seems to have been at least moderately popular in Lewis's intellectual environment. Oxford philosopher Bernard Bosanquet mentioned "soul-making" and "a place of soul-making" in *The Principle of Individuality and Value* (1912), pp. xviii, 70 and 289; the poet and critic Hugh l'Anson Fausset, in reviewing Lewis's epic poem *Dymer* in 1926, talked of the hero's "arid places of his own soul-making" (quoted in ZALESKI & ZALESKI 2015, 155; the quotation by Hooper in CL1, 680 note 8, has "his own soul's making"); Anglican theologian W. R. Inge quoted the full Keatsian phrase in his *God and the Astronomers* (1933), 255, adding the ancient Christian terms *schola animarum* and *ψυχῶν διδασκαλεῖον*. Last but not least, Edwyn Bevan's *Symbolism and Belief* (1938), a book which Lewis quotes in chapter 8, has two references to "soul-making" including one that relates it to "this earthly vale" (Lecture VI, "Time", 113 and 116; or pp. 100 and 103 in the 1962 Fontana edition).

6|5-7 A bad man, happy, is a man without the least inkling that his actions do not “answer” ... Until the evil man finds evil unmistakably present ... he is enclosed in illusion. ... the only opportunity the bad man can have for amendment. (81-83)

» Lewis does not here define his terms “bad man” and “evil man”. Nevertheless his choice for these terms seems well-considered since they do not occur anywhere else in the book – except in the chapter on Hell. As noted above, the same is true for the image of pain as a “flag planted within the fortress of a rebel soul”. Indeed, the chapter on Hell, which starts from the point made at the present stage of chapter 6, almost provides a definition of what Lewis means by “the bad man”: see the quote from 8|7, below, on “lost souls” in von Hügel’s essay on Heaven and Hell. What the chapter on Hell also adds, at the very end, is a reminder that this category of “bad men” potentially includes “you and me” (8|13, 116).

6|10 ... now that I am thoroughly immersed in [the writing of this book], it has become a temptation rather than a duty. (87)

» Anyone attempting an overall interpretation of Lewis’s writing career should heed this odd passage. When Lewis wrote this book, he had been a Christian for about eight years; he had a well-developed, large and coherent body of clear and counter-cultural ideas, many of which had already found pithy (if dense) expression in *The Pilgrim’s Regress*; as a teacher and critic he must have long been aware of his extraordinary gifts of exposition. Nevertheless his career as a popular Christian apologist took off, as it seems, *against* his inclination, from a sense of duty, at a publisher’s request. Only then did Lewis gradually come to like the enterprise. However, several key ideas of *The Problem of Pain* already had found their way to his science-fiction novel *Out of the Silent Planet* and were soon further fictionalized in its sequel, *Perelandra*. In fact, while Lewis’s works of fiction, including theological fantasy, all seem to have been sparked by the vigorously spontaneous incandescence of his visual imagination, much of his career as a Christian apologist appears to have been a matter of external motivation:

- *The Pilgrim’s Regress* inspired a publisher, Ashley Sampson, to invite Lewis to write *The Problem of Pain* in 1939, a job he accepted as a “duty”.
- *The Problem of Pain* in turn inspired a BBC official, James Welch, in February 1941 to invite him to give the radio talks that were to become *Mere Christianity*.
- In March 1941 Lewis was first asked to lecture at RAF bases, which he went on to do for the rest of the war, and as Chad Walsh wrote in 1949, “the assignment was little to his taste ... but he stuck doggedly to it”; he felt “duty-bound” to do it.<sup>22</sup>
- The idea of the Oxford University Socratic Club was not conceived by him but by Stella Aldwinckle, in late 1941.

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<sup>22</sup> WALSH 1949, 9.

– Lewis at once found his role in the Club highly congenial, and developed many ideas there which found their way into *Miracles*; but even so, the idea to write that book was very likely suggested by Dorothy Sayers in a letter of March 1943 (CL3, 573, Hooper’s note 103).

In contrast to all this, while the war years must have been an extremely busy period of Lewis’s life, and nobody asked or expected him to write another science-fiction novel, he in fact wrote two sequels to *Out of the Silent Planet*, the second of which was longer than the previous two novels combined. *The Screwtape Letters* and *The Great Divorce*, too, apparently sprang from purely private motives.

The contrast may be illustrated by two passages from Lewis’s letters. Just before Christmas 1941 he wrote to his friend Arthur Greeves: “I’ve managed in spite of other work to do a little writing” – referring here to *The Screwtape Letters* and “a sequel to *The Silent Planet*” (CL2, 504).<sup>23</sup> In contrast, in a letter to Bede Griffiths of 16 April 1940 he wrote, “I’ve been busy this winter on a book called *The Problem of Pain* wh. I was asked to write for a thing called The Christian Challenge Series” (CL2, 392). Writing fiction is “writing” simply and is done “in spite of other work”; writing Christian apologetics is “busy”-ness; it is part of the “other work” which might or might not leave room for him “to do a little writing”.

These things are worth noting because they suggest a very different picture from that of a “shift to fiction” in Lewis’s writing career in the late 1940s – a picture offered both by Alister McGrath in his 2013 biography of Lewis and by A. N. Wilson in his 1990 biography. A further reason to question the reality of such a shift (except as being simply a shift to writing the seven Narnia books)<sup>24</sup> is provided by Chad Walsh’s *C. S. Lewis: Apostle to the Skeptics*, the first full-length book about Lewis, published in 1949. At that date there was no “Narnia” yet and, in terms of publicity, no “Tolkien” worth mentioning either. Walsh proposes a division of “the admirers of Lewis ... into two groups: those who have read the *Screwtape Letters*, and those who have read some of his other works in addition” (50). Lewis’s latest book at that juncture was *Transposition*, and Walsh notes that “the clergy and thoughtful layman ... live in fear that he will revert to writing scholarly books on literature. As they see it, a halt in his output of popular apologetics would be a disaster to Christianity in England.” Yet Walsh certainly doesn’t consider the fictional works as an underdeveloped

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<sup>23</sup> On *Out of the Silent Planet* see also letter to Don Giovanni Calabria of 13 September 1951 (CL3, 137).

<sup>24</sup> Lewis probably first began writing a story for and about children in the fall of 1939 when evacuated children from London entered his household, finished it in 1947, and destroyed it in the late summer of that year after what he called “the unanimous verdict of my friends”. Of the seven Narnia tales as we know them, published in yearly succession in 1950-1956, the first five were written between early 1949 and early 1951. The sixth was not finished until three years later and the last presumably followed soon. See HOOPER 2015.

area of Lewis's output. If anything, Walsh sets a higher estimate on this category than on any other. At the end of his chapter on the Ransom trilogy (chapter 5, "The Myth-Maker"), he submits that "the critics have treated the three novels all too casually" – and he "venture[s] the prophecy that the interplanetary trilogy will be one of the few myths of the century that will firmly grip the imagination of future writers and provide them with a treasure trove of symbols" (47).

Thus even before the alleged shift in the late 1940s, or perhaps while it ought to have been taking place, this early but uniquely well-informed<sup>25</sup> general survey of Lewis's work insisted on the prime importance of the "fictional" part of his output. Walsh is also clear about his own preference for the fiction over the popular theology, although he seems no more inclined to play off one against the other than, indeed, Lewis himself appears to have been at any stage of his career. What makes all this even more interesting is that Walsh's later and larger book about Lewis – reviewing Lewis's total published *oeuvre* in 1979, sixteen years after his death – offers essentially the same picture. Lewis did have his moments of doubt and fatigue regarding his capacities as defender of the faith, and more generally as a writer; yet there is not the least suggestion of a development in his practical preference or inclination as a writer over the years as regards a division of his work into fiction and non-fiction.

Equally relevant here is a testimony of Lewis himself from 1954 – when the "shift to fiction", if real, should at least have begun to enter his own consciousness. Commenting on a list of his own books in a letter to "The Milton Society of America", he wrote that the list

will, I fear, strike you as a very mixed bag. Since [your secretary] encourages me to "make a statement" about them, I may point out that there is a guiding thread. The imaginative man in me is older, more continuously operative, and in that sense more basic than either the religious writer or the critic. (CL3, 516-517)

This is reflected in the opening lines of chapter 4 of Walsh's 1979 book:

One half of Lewis's mind functions easily within the rational framework of exposition and argument. The other half turns to highly imaginative ways of saying things indirectly. The two halves present the same ultimate intuition of reality, but the strategies by which they storm the reader's guard are very different.

The imaginative Lewis is the older one. His earliest efforts ... (etc.)

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<sup>25</sup> Chad Walsh (1917-1991) began corresponding with Lewis in 1945, met him several times in 1948, became a friend, brought Joy Davidman Gresham in touch with Lewis, was the dedicatee of *The Four Loves* (1960), and wrote an afterword for *A Grief Observed* (1961).

In purely quantitative terms, the Ransom trilogy almost equals the Chronicles of Narnia (290,000 against 321,000 words). One wonders whether Lewis ever experienced the writing of fantasy as a “temptation” which he ought to try to resist.

6|12-15 In obeying, a rational creature consciously enacts its creaturely rôle, reverses the act by which we fell ... [T]here is one right act – that of self-surrender – which cannot be willed to the height by fallen creatures unless it is unpleasant ... If pain sometimes shatters the creature’s false self-sufficiency, yet in supreme “Trial” or “Sacrifice” it teaches him the self-sufficiency which really ought to be his ... [M]artyrdom always remains the supreme enacting and perfection of Christianity. This great action has been initiated for us, done on our behalf ... by Christ on Calvary. There ... the presence of the very Father to whom the sacrifice is made deserts the victim, and surrender to God does not falter though God “forsakes” it. ... [O]ur script need only be a “copy”, not an original. (89-91)

» On Lewis’s development of the “surrender” theme in previous chapters, see the comment on 6|3, above.

Perhaps nowhere else his debt as a Christian apologist to George Macdonald is more obvious than it is in the present four paragraphs. They do not seem to contain any direct quotations, but they do neatly reflect the book’s general epigraph – *The Son of God suffered unto the death, not that men might not suffer, but that their sufferings might be like His*. Surely this parallel is a strong reason to designate 6|12-15 as the really central, indeed “crucial” passage of the book. The general epigraph is taken from Macdonald’s *Unspoken Sermons* I.2, on God’s “inexorable love” as the “consuming fire” of Hebrews 12. As Lewis pointed out in the preface to his *George Macdonald Anthology* (1946):

... the title “Inexorable Love” which I have given to several individual extracts would serve for the whole collection ... [I]n Macdonald ... the demand for obedience ... is incessant ... I have never concealed the fact that I regarded him as my master ...

Also reflected in the present passage are items 31-39 of the *Anthology*, taken from *Unspoken Sermons* I.8, “The Eloi” (on Matthew 27:46), and item 140, taken from II.8, “Life” (on John 10:10).

Noting these things may help readers see the climax implied in the order in which Lewis discusses the three “ways” or “operations of pain” in the central section of this central chapter (see first comment on 6|5, above). The first two operations are ways to shatter illusions: first the illusion that “all is well” (here “God’s megaphone” and the “flag of truth” come in); then the illusion that, at least, all is well with *me* (self-will consistently mistaken for self-sufficiency). It is only in the third way – in “supreme ‘Trial’ or ‘Sacrifice’”, in martyrdom as “the supreme enacting and perfection of Christianity” – that suggestions of any positive results begin to emerge. These

suggestions include a rare instance of Lewis using the word *creative* to describe a *human* condition:

... then, in the absence of all merely natural motives and supports, [the creature] acts in that strength, and that alone, which God confers upon him through his subjected will. Human will becomes truly creative and truly our own when it is wholly God's, and this is one of the many senses in which he that loses his soul shall find it. In all other acts our will is fed through nature ... When we act from ourselves alone – that is, from God *in* ourselves – we are collaborators in, or live instruments of, creation: and that is why such an act undoes with “backward mutters of dissevering power” the uncreative spell which Adam laid upon his species. (6|14, 90)<sup>26</sup>

Further light on this third way appears in *Beyond Personality* (1944), chapter 10, “Nice People or New Men”. The distinction suggested in that chapter title is brought home in three ways, and the third of them resonates with the “third operation” as described in *The Problem of Pain*.

And now, let us go a little deeper ... It costs God nothing, so far as we know, to *create nice things*: but to *convert rebellious wills* cost Him the crucifixion. ... As long as Dick doesn't turn to God, he thinks his niceness is his own, and just as long as he thinks that, it isn't his own. It is when Dick realises that his niceness is not his own but a gift from God, and when he offers it back to God – it is just then that it begins to be really his own. For now Dick is beginning to take a share in his own creation.<sup>27</sup>

6|14 When we act from ourselves alone – that is, from God *in* ourselves – we are collaborators in, or live instruments of, creation ... (90)

» This passage may or may not have pleased Lewis's old intellectual sparring partner, Owen Barfield. On the one hand, the proposed equation of “ourselves” with “God *in* ourselves” may have seemed to hold out hopes for Barfield of bridging the theological gap between him and Lewis. On the other hand, he must have been aware that what made the gap unbridgeable was precisely Lewis's concept of creation. This is at least what it did from Lewis's point of view. Some twenty years after they wrote their surviving “Great War” letters and tracts, a brief resumption of their disputes partly

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<sup>26</sup> For “uncreative” it is perhaps better to read “uncreating”, as in chapter 8, where Lewis talks of “the uncreating rebellion of Adam” (8|6, 121). The “backward mutters” quote is from Milton's *Comus*.

<sup>27</sup> LEWIS 1944, 52-54, emphases as in the original 1944 text. This little book contains a revised and expanded version of Lewis's last series of BBC radio talks, delivered in February-April 1944. Chapter 10 was one of three chapters added in the published text, though parts of it had perhaps been included elsewhere in the spoken text. It was republished, with revisions, as Book IV of LEWIS 1952.

concerned this point, and Lewis wrote “I think we prob. differ about the meaning of *creation*” (CL2, 870; letter to Barfield of 19 August [1948?]). While this may seem a hesitating way of putting it, perhaps inspired by a fundamental reluctance on Lewis’s part to reopen the old debate, he made the same point in somewhat bolder terms in a 1942 letter to Daphne Harwood, another Anthroposophical friend. As quoted above in the comment on 3|8, Lewis characterized the issue of creation, along with the man-centred nature of Anthroposophy, as “the ‘great divide’” between these friends and himself.

The concept of “creatureliness” is, indeed, not only crucial for this key section (6|12-15) of *The Problem of Pain* and so for the book’s overall argument. Very likely, the emergence of this concept in Lewis’s thinking about God and man had been a “turning point” in his own philosophical and spiritual development and hence, inevitably, in the development of his friendship with Owen Barfield (cf. *SbJ* 13|16).

As regards the Barfield connection, a fascinatingly clear testimony to that moment is provided by some of the red-pencil corrections that Lewis made to his 1928 tract “against the Anthroposophists” some years after writing it. He may have made these corrections in 1936, or else perhaps between his Theistic conversion, which probably occurred in the early summer of 1930, and his Christian conversion in September 1931.<sup>28</sup>

As regards Lewis’s own development, his letters provide a notable piece of evidence with a rare degree of chronological definiteness. The moment and manner in which the notion of “creatureliness” struck Lewis as crucial and inescapable seems to be documented in letters of January 1930 to Arthur Greeves and Owen Barfield, telling them about his reading the early-17th-century German mystic Jakob Böhme:

I could see at once that I was reading the most serious attempt I had ever met to describe (not to explain, for he speaks as one who has seen and his description *is* his explanation) – to describe the very mystery of creation and to show you the differences actually coming into being out of the original One and making a world and souls and good and evil. Almost at the same time, I saw, alas, that it was hopelessly beyond me: yet tantalising for I could just grasp enough to be quite sure that he was talking about something tremendously real, and not merely mystifying you.<sup>29</sup>

Böhme was a mystic, and Lewis’s reading experience, as he described it to Greeves, was obviously itself a mystical experience. As with George Macdonald’s *Phantastes*,

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<sup>28</sup> The corrections are found as notes to the original text of his *Summa*, II.3-4, p. 85, notes 48-51. I agree with Norbert Feinendegen and Charlie Starr that 1936 is the likeliest date for these corrections (BARFIELD & LEWIS 2015, 30, 36); but Stephen Thorson in his slightly later publication sticks to 1930-31 (THORSON 2015, 62,77).

<sup>29</sup> CL1, 858-9, to Arthur Greeves, 5 January 1930. See also 863 (10 January), and CL3, 151, to Owen Barfield, 16 January 1930.

many a Lewis scholar who hopes to get things clear by simply reading the book in question may be in for a disappointment. Likely enough, clarity on this point is essentially impossible. It seems nevertheless fair to say that, in the story of Lewis's life and thought, the first half of January 1930 must rank as a crucial moment, perhaps *the* crucial moment, in his development as a *thinker*.

In theory, further evidence might yet be found for precisely how and when Lewis, "after God's *I*-ness, came to recognize his *Thou*-ness as well" – as Norbert Feinendegen has characterized Lewis's conversion to Theism.<sup>30</sup> But such further evidence is unlikely to come forth. It might have been available if Lewis's "copious correspondence" with Alan Griffiths of this period had survived; but it has not.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, the available sources do seem to provide some neglected evidence for the importance of the Böhme experience of early January 1930.

One of two signs of that importance is the fact that, at least in Lewis's published letters, early January 1930 appears to be the watershed moment after which he began to use – not yet consistently, but at least occasionally – the name "God" in places where he would in the preceding couple of years have been referring to "Spirit" or "the Spirit". The other sign, famous enough in itself but not perhaps in relation to the Böhme experience, is the brief note in which Lewis told Barfield that "Terrible things are happening to me. The 'spirit' or 'Real I' is showing an alarming tendency to become much more personal and is taking the offensive, and behaving just like God" (CL1, 882-3). The relevant evidence here is provided not so much by the note itself as by its date: February 1930, or 3 February 1930 to go by Hooper's conjecture.

None of this means that early or mid-January 1930 must now rank as the best guess at a precise date for Lewis's Theistic conversion. However, as noted above, it does suggest that it was a pivotal moment for Lewis's development as a *thinker*. Perhaps, too, what happened to him in early January 1930 is the chief ground for Lewis's barely explained statement in *Surprised by Joy* (13|16) that his "Great War" with Owen Barfield was "one of the turning points in my life". If it is, then this pivotal moment coincided with the turning point in his friendship with Barfield, that is, with the fixing of the gulf between them, the "great divide" between Lewis and the Anthroposophists. And while the pivot – actually Lewis's point of *no* return on the road to Theism – was perhaps a mystical experience, there is nevertheless ample reason to designate it as a major landmark on the road travelled by the *thinker* Lewis. Both his long way leading up to this experience and his development of it during his further journey appear to have had a large philosophical component: Lewis's "philosophical training" in the wider sense continued apace after he took his "double

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<sup>30</sup> Email, 24 February 2016. "Lewis' eigentliche Bekehrung zum Theismus hätte dann darin bestanden, dass Lewis nach dem Subjektsein oder *Ich-Sein Gottes* nun auch das *Du-Sein Gottes* anerkannt hätte."

<sup>31</sup> *SbJ* XV|7; see also Griffiths's "The Adventure of Faith", in *COMO* 1992, 11-12, 16.

First in Greats” in 1922. His shift from materialism and realism to idealism as an aspiring Oxford philosopher from the (very) early 1920s on, the notion accepted from “the Idealists” that “it is more important that Heaven should exist than that any of us should reach it” (*SbJ* 13|19), his moment of illumination in March 1924 when learning Samuel Alexander’s distinction between “enjoyment” and “contemplation”, his further musings as a young don on Berkeley’s theistic idealism, and his grand but failed attempt, on the basis of those musings, to beat “the Anthroposophists” with a devastatingly sound system of idealist metaphysics in 1928, can all in retrospect be plausibly construed as leading up to the Böhme experience, even if that experience itself hardly admitted, or admits, rational analysis. And Lewis’s subsequent journey after this landmark, too, features a good deal of rational development of the experience. It is, in retrospect, small wonder that his first attempt at Christian apologetics was to propose “the creaturely *rôle*” of “rational creatures” as a key element of his answer to the problem at hand – “the intellectual problem raised by suffering”.

In addition to the epithet *thinker*, then, Lewis appears to deserve the extended epithet *Christian thinker*. At least as regards the crucial concept of creatureliness, not only did he strive for rational consistency on his further journey after the mystical milestone and in developing the experience, but he had all along been thinking his way *towards* that landmark without knowing or wishing that a Christian conclusion lay ahead.<sup>32</sup>

As a further testimony to the centrality of this concept both in his life and in his thought, we may note that it is also central to the memorable description of Jane Studdock’s conversion in Lewis’s novel *That Hideous Strength*, chapter XIV.6.

... The name *me* was the name of a being whose existence she had never suspected, a being that did not yet fully exist but which was demanded. It was a person (not the person she had thought), yet also a thing, a made thing, made to please Another and in Him to please all others, a thing being made at this very moment, without its choice, in a shape it had never dreamed of. And the making went on amidst a kind of splendour or sorrow or both, whereof she could not tell whether it was in the moulding hands or in the kneaded lump.

6|18 If the world is indeed a “vale of soul-making” it seems on the whole to be doing its work. (96)

» As noted above in the first comment on 6|5, this sentence seems to make a perfect conclusion to this key chapter, and the quotation from Keats is a more plausible tag

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<sup>32</sup> If true, this account of the genesis of Lewis as a Christian thinker shows an interesting parallel to Étienne Gilson’s account of “Christian philosophy” in general; see his 1930-31 Gifford Lectures, published in English as *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* (Scribner, New York 1940), especially chapters 2, “The concept of Christian philosophy”, and 4, “Beings and their contingency”.

to capture the book's central message than the widely known phrase about "God's megaphone". As further argued there and in the comment on 6|12-15, this unrecognized conclusion marks the quiet climax of a carefully crafted sequence of three "operations of pain", and this sequence provides the overall structure for chapter 6. As argued below in the second comment on this final paragraph, the rest of 6|18 really belongs in chapter 7.

If the "vale of soul-making" is accepted as the book's key idea, it is interesting to note that the same can be said of John Hick's *Evil and the God of Love* (1966), where "soul-making" is the guiding idea of Part IV, "A Theology for Today". Unlike Lewis, Hick has duly identified the source of the phrase in a footnote:

The phrase "the vale of Soul-making" was coined by the poet John Keats in a letter written to his brother and sister in April 1819. He says, "The common cognomen of this world among the misguided and superstitious is 'a vale of tears' from which we are to be redeemed by a certain arbitrary interposition of God and taken to Heaven – What a little circumscribed straightened notion! Call the world if you Please 'The vale of Soul-making'." In this letter he sketches a teleological theodicy. "Do you not see", he asks, "how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a Soul?"<sup>33</sup>

While Hick obviously knew *The Problem of Pain*, as testified by two brief references, there are no indications that his own adoption of the Keatsian phrase was (consciously) inspired by Lewis. In fact, Hick does not seem to consider his own broadly "Irenaean" position in the ongoing theological debate to be particularly close to Lewis's broadly "Augustinian" position. At the same time Hick declares himself very willing to bring out and promote any "points of hidden agreement" (ch. XII.2, 1966 edition) between "the two historical types of Christian theodicy" (XII.1, opening paragraph).

The resemblance of Lewis's popular treatment to Hick's much longer scholarly treatment of the subject has been discussed by Mark S. M. Scott in a 2014 essay, "C. S. Lewis and John Hick: An Interface on Theodicy". Scott notes similarities in three areas: "their formulation of the problem, their basic theological insight, and, lastly, their terminology" (24). The formulations are similar in that both are fairly traditional; the shared basic theological insight is described as "the constructive spiritual value of pain"; and the shared terminology (only two examples are given) includes the reference to Keats's "vale of soul-making":

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<sup>33</sup> HICK 1966, 295, note to ch. XIII.3 (or 259, note to ch. XII.3 in the second edition), quoting Keats from *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. by M. B. Forman, 4th edition (1952), 334-335.

Lewis directly invokes the exact phrase from Keats ... to describe the potential spiritual benefits of pain, 26 years before Hick ... Lewis describes his theodicy with the tag-line Hick later makes famous.<sup>34</sup>

In the introductory and concluding sections as well as in the Abstract of his essay, Scott speaks of the parallels, or affinities, or interface, between “Lewis’s ‘megaphone theodicy’ and Hick’s ‘soul-making theodicy’” (19, 20-21, 30). However, if Hick and Lewis as Christian writers on the problem of God and Evil had a shared notion of “the constructive spiritual value of pain” as their “basic theological insight”, then it would seem obvious that what is being interfaced here is, actually, *Lewis’s soul-making theodicy* and *Hick’s soul-making theodicy* (see first comment on 6|5, above). Scott does not argue the aptness of his epithet, “Lewis’s ‘megaphone theodicy’”. In fact, as we saw, that metaphor is inadequate. The reason why Scott uses the epithet can only be conjectured. One likely explanation is the sheer power of habit.

6|18 Of poverty ... I would not dare to speak as from myself ... (96-97)

» As argued above (comment on 6|12-15), the previous sentence – submitting the idea of the world as a “vale of soul making” – seems to make the perfect concluding sentence for this chapter. It is extremely hard to see why Lewis did not incorporate the subsequent comments on poverty in chapter 7. There, it would seamlessly fit into any of the first three issues. Here, at the end of chapter 6, it would at the very least deserve the status of a separate paragraph. The lack of a paragraph division is indeed by itself odd enough to suggest that some mistake must have been made at this point.

## CHAPTER 8: HELL

EPIGR. ...this solitude through which we go / is I. ... Richard loves Richard; that is, I am I.

» This book’s last three chapters have two epigraphs each. Given Lewis’s choice for the present chapter, there is reason to wonder why he did not choose the quotation from George Macdonald’s *Unspoken Sermons* which he later used for chapter 14 of *Surprised by Joy*:

The one principle of hell is – “I am my own.”

Perhaps this quote simply did not occur to Lewis at the right moment. Or if it did, he may have considered one epigraph (and as we saw, Macdonald supplied the general epigraph) the maximum to take from one author in a single book. The words “I am I” from Shakespeare’s *Richard III* are useful in recalling the passage quoted from 5|9 in the comment to 6|3, above: “since I am I, I must make an act of self-surrender,” etc.

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<sup>34</sup> SCOTT 2014, 26.

Yet, given the central importance of Macdonald for this book, the absence of a Macdonald quote from the present chapter head may legitimately serve to remind us that the doctrine of Hell was one on which Lewis differed from the man he called “my master” and whose “religious teaching” he hoped to “spread”.<sup>35</sup>

8|1-4 ... [the doctrine of Hell] has the full support of Scripture and, specially, of Our Lord’s own words; it has always been held by Christendom; and it has the support of reason. ... [H]ere is the real problem: so much mercy, yet still there is Hell. ... I think the doctrine can be shown to be moral ... (106-108)

» As Lewis later told his readers in *Surprised by Joy* (15|3-4), his “training [as a Christian believer] was like that of the Jews”. That is, he came to believe in God some time before he came to believe in any sort of afterlife: “... the [Creator’s] *de jure* sovereignty was made known to me before the power, the right before the might. And for this I am thankful”. “Heaven and Hell come in”, or at any rate for Lewis they came in, only as a corollary of God’s nature and existence. He considered a pre-occupation with immortality dangerous unless it was coupled with belief in God.

In light of this, the first paragraph’s statement of reasons for accepting “the doctrine of Hell” – Scripture; Our Lord’s words; Christendom; reason – seems incomplete. Moreover, with regard to “Our Lord’s own words” the next paragraph seems to imply that their truth need not concern Christians as long as these words “rouse us into action”: they are “addressed to the conscience and the will, not to our intellectual curiosity” (8|2, 107; see also the chapter’s last paragraph). The only reason to discuss the subject at all, says Lewis, is the fact that it “is one of the chief grounds on which Christianity is attacked as barbarous, and the goodness of God is impugned.”

However, if “intellectual curiosity” is here to be deprecated, it becomes hard to see what business we have at all to try and solve “the intellectual problem raised by suffering”. As John Hick has noted, “misery which is eternal and therefore infinite would constitute the largest part of the problem of evil.”<sup>36</sup> After two pages, Lewis says his intention is in this chapter to point out how “the doctrine can be shown to be moral” (8|4, 108). This intention does not quite match the one stated in the concluding section of the book’s central chapter. There he said, “I am only trying to show that the old Christian doctrine of being made ‘perfect through suffering’ is *not incredible*” (6|16, 93; emphasis added). That, indeed, was the intellectual problem proposed at the beginning of the book. At the present point Lewis seems to get off course. Is he evading the question whether Hell exists? If so, he may be evading it for the good reason that he thought it wrong and dangerous to bring up that question in isolation. In that case, however, he might have done better to state this difficulty at the present point. Perhaps this is easier said than done; but in the opening paragraph

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<sup>35</sup> LEWIS 1946b, 18, 20.

<sup>36</sup> HICK 1966, ch. XVII.2, p. 377 (XVI.2, p. 341 in the second edition).

of the chapter on Heaven he does raise this factual issue – “either there is ‘pie in the sky’ or not” (10|1, 132). No parallel issue is raised regarding Hell.

Pending this question, and because Lewis proposes a “moral” question instead, we may consult a remarkable paper on the subject of Pacifism which he delivered around the time when this book was published. The paper opens with some general reflections on “how we decide what is good or evil”.<sup>37</sup> Here Lewis submits that, in questions of good and evil just as in questions of truth and falsehood, *authority* can serve, and very often actually must serve,

- as a substitute for *experience* in supplying “facts to reason about”, and
- as a substitute for *argument*, i.e. a substitute for the reasoning about facts and about intuitions.

In addition to experience and argument as the first and third elements involved in “any concrete train of reasoning”, Lewis recognizes *intuition* as the second element. Intuition is the direct perception of self-evident truth; it cannot be replaced by authority.

Showing the doctrine of Hell “to be moral” may mean showing that it is morally responsible to accept that doctrine. If this is what Lewis means, his 1940 protocol for moral questions is perhaps applicable to the present question. If we so use it, however, we find that the moral question soon brings us back to the factual: we need “facts to reason about”. It is hard to decide what must count as “facts”. Certainly there is no Experience that provides us with undisputed facts about the afterlife. The facts must therefore come from Authority only. Perhaps the doctrine is itself the one great fact; but this fact would seem to be something different from what Lewis had in mind when he asserted that authority often has to replace experience as a supplier of facts. What he actually proposes as the “facts to reason about” are five common *moral objections* to the doctrine of Hell: it is these objections on which our intuitions and reasoning are brought to bear.

Perhaps, then, the protocol is actually unsuitable for the question whether the doctrine of hell “is moral”; but then again, the question is perhaps not a good one. The phrasing is awkward: nowhere else in the book and indeed hardly anywhere in all his writings does Lewis use the adjective *moral* in this adverbial way.

Fortunately he does give a clear statement of “the real problem”. He formulates it as “so much mercy, yet still there is Hell” (8|3, 108, as quoted above). This would seem to be basically the old problem – how God can be both good and omnipotent

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<sup>37</sup> LEWIS 1940b. Walter Hooper notes in his preface to *Timeless at Heart* (1987) that this paper was “read to a pacifist society in Oxford in 1940”. Halfway through the text there is an intractable reference to “the sinking of the *Terris Bay*” which might in fact refer to HMS *Jervis Bay*, a British convoy escort sunk by a German battleship on 5 November 1940. If this conjecture is right, the paper may be dated to November or December 1940. *The Problem of Pain* appeared on 18 October of that year.

while there is so much evil. In the end, this turns out to be the problem addressed in the rest of the chapter. But Lewis is remarkably un-straightforward in stating it.

8|1 “All will be saved” ... But my reason retorts, “Without their will, or with it?” ... “How if they *will not* give in?” (107)

» This passage is a powerful first statement of the chapter’s real or main theme. It appears to involve a play on the double meaning of *will*. The final statement comes in the chapter’s penultimate paragraph (8|12, 116): “They will not be forgiven”, where *will not* apparently means *have not the will*. In between, there are the following related passages:

- Supposing he *will* not be converted, what destiny in the eternal world can you regard as proper for him? (8|5, 109; emphasis original)
- ... forgiveness needs to be accepted as well as offered if it is to be complete ... (8|6, 110)
- ... they certainly do not will even the first preliminary stages of that self-abandonment through which the soul can reach any good. (8|11, 115)

This theme perhaps represents the main point of divergence between Lewis’s conception of Hell and Macdonald’s. From his “Great War” with Owen Barfield in the 1920s, we know that Lewis’s belief in the “law of contradiction” was quite as firm as his later belief in God. This law (perhaps more commonly known as the law or principle of *non-contradiction*) indeed appears to have helped him work his way through philosophical idealism toward belief in God, and certainly helped to fix the gulf between Lewis and Barfield. After the forceful opening statements of chapter 5, this law of contradiction, as applied to the concepts of creation and of free will, left no room for Lewis to believe that fallen creatures could be saved against their *will*. To his mind, to be a fallen creature was to have a misdirected, self-centred will and the essence of salvation was a converting of the will. To talk of a person’s salvation without that person’s will was to suggest a conversion without a conversion: a logical impossibility, equivalent to  $A \neq A$ . For Macdonald, who certainly knew and respected “Our Lord’s own words”, to believe in ultimate salvation for all was a matter of “higher faith”: “To believe *what he has not said* is faith indeed, and blessed. For that comes of believing in HIM”<sup>38</sup> (italics added). Lewis admits – to an imaginary discussion partner whose role might have been filled by Macdonald – that “the ultimate loss of a single soul means the defeat of omnipotence” (8|10, 115). Yet, as Lewis then says, “What you call defeat, I call miracle: for to make things which are not Itself, and thus to become, in a sense, capable of being resisted by its own handiwork, is the most astonishing and unimaginable of all the feats we attribute to the Deity”. For Macdonald, the ultimate meaning of God’s “Inexorable Love” and “Consuming Fire”

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<sup>38</sup> MACDONALD 1879-89, I.3, “The Higher Faith” (on John 20:29), p. 42 in the one-volume Johannesen edition (1997).

is that of a universal Purgatory; “Punishment is for the sake of amendment and atonement.”<sup>39</sup> The “doctrine of being made ‘perfect through suffering’” which Lewis argued to be “not incredible” was certainly credible for Macdonald. As expounded by Lewis, it was indeed almost certainly inspired by Macdonald in no small measure. What Macdonald did find incredible was a doctrine of suffering without resulting perfection.

Lewis did not go along with his venerated master in softening what he expressly admitted to be an utterly “intolerable” and “detestable” doctrine. The motive for this refusal seems to boil down to his recognition that, in the end, the respect we owe to Reason outweighs any which we owe to even the most worthy Authority. It was a matter of philosophical integrity: a quality Lewis’s early training infused into all his theological writing.

Or so it seems at least in the present book, in the context of an intellectual problem. It remains to be seen whether Lewis’s non-contradictional view of free will can be brought in line with the comment on his own conversion to the Christian faith at the end of *Surprised by Joy* (15|8):

Freedom, or necessity? Or do they differ at their maximum? ... As for what we commonly call Will, and what we commonly call Emotion, I fancy these usually talk too loud, protest too much, to be quite believed, and we have a secret suspicion that the great passion or the iron resolution is partly a put-up job.

Likewise in this passage from a 1952 letter:

All that Calvinist question – Free Will & Predestination ... the fact [is] in *any concrete case* the question never arrives as a practical one. But I suspect it is really a *meaningless* question.<sup>40</sup>

8|7 The characteristic of lost souls is “their rejection of everything that is not simply themselves” ... von Hügel, *Essays and Addresses* (111)

» As will appear from the last four paragraphs of the final chapter (on Heaven), this definition of “lost souls” constitutes the chief link between the chapter on Hell and Lewis’s main argument. In terms of the book’s final paragraph, the problem of pain is the problem of our dealings with “the golden apple of selfhood” (10|11, 141-142). For free creatures, blessedness depends on “abdicating” selfhood. It is for the Creator alone to be blessed while having “no opposite” – these are the book’s last words.

As noted above, the absence of an epigraph from Macdonald for the present chapter is interesting; but so is the presence of Baron von Hügel as the source for this

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., III.7, “Justice” (on Psalm 62:12), 514.

<sup>40</sup> CL3, 237; to Mary Van Deusen, 20 October 1952. I owe this last point about a possible discrepancy between Lewis’s practical and theoretical views of free will to Larry Gilman.

definition of “lost souls”. The next page has one more explicit reference to him. Friedrich von Hügel (1852-1925), an Austrian-born English writer, was a Catholic religious thinker who sought to close the gap between modernism and tradition in theology. He was widely read in his day. The full title of the essay in question is “What do we mean by Heaven? And what do we mean by Hell?” With his insistence “upon the Abiding Consequences of certain full and persistent self-determinations of the soul”,<sup>41</sup> von Hügel likely enough put some weight into the balance, for Lewis, against Macdonald’s “universalism”.

Lewis’s earliest surviving reference to von Hügel is found in an unpublished diary fragment of 17 June 1924, the period when he was preparing for his temporary job as a lecturer in philosophy. The next reference comes in a letter of 28 August 1930 to Arthur Greeves, a few months after Lewis’s Theistic conversion. In Lewis’s reading as documented in his published letters, the year 1930 saw a great surge of Macdonald books and of Christian writings in general. Among C. S. Lewis scholars today, von Hügel hardly figures as a recognized “influence” on Lewis; nor did Lewis himself often refer to him in his own writings. The present reference is an important one, though, and von Hügel’s *Essays and Addresses* feature many more ideas which must strike any Lewis scholar as distinctly Lewisian. For example, the first passage quoted above from chapter 1 (1|15, 12) may reflect a debt not only to Chesterton but also to von Hügel’s 1916 essay on “Progress in Religion”. But it is hard to assess von Hügel’s overall importance for Lewis.

The more general point to note here is that it is probably impossible to get a reliable, balanced picture of the sources and backgrounds of Lewis’s intellectual development. Certainly his “philosophical training” in the formal sense was only part of that background.

8|9 Our Lord speaks of Hell under three symbols: first, that of punishment ... second, that of destruction ... and thirdly, that of privation, exclusion, or banishment into “the darkness outside” ... What can that be whereof all three images are equally proper symbols? ... [Is it] a state of *having been* a human soul? (112-113)

» The question is a good one because Lewis says “What *can* that be”. His answer in this chapter is incomplete if only because a further reflection on “Hell in its aspect of privation” is found in the chapter on Heaven (10|4, 136). The three images are more fully explored in Lewis’s fictional works. Punishment (self-inflicted) is illustrated by the fate of Professor Frost in *That Hideous Strength*; destruction by that of Weston in *Perelandra*, privation (etcetera) by Napoleon in *The Great Divorce*. Imagining a fusion of all three remains hard. It is also hard to see how or why “the state of *having been* a human soul” should be described as a “state” at all. A later attempt by Lewis to describe it is found in *The Great Divorce*: “that horrible thing which cannot be, yet

<sup>41</sup> VON HÜGEL 1921, xi; also 210-212.

somehow is”.<sup>42</sup> Although these words are, more or less, put into the mouth of the fictionalized George Macdonald, one wonders whether Lewis at such points was quite as keen as he usually was on respecting the law of (non-)contradiction. “To be or not to be” is a question no less formidable than “to will or not to will”. Perhaps the answer to Lewis’s question, “What can that be” etc., must be “Nothing can.”

## CHAPTER 9: ANIMAL PAIN

9|1 From the doctrine that God is good we may confidently deduce that the appearance of reckless divine cruelty in the animal kingdom is an illusion – and the fact that the only suffering we know at first hand (our own) turns out not to be a cruelty will make it easier to believe this. After that, everything is guesswork. (117-118)

» These two sentences conclude the chapter’s opening paragraph. The first and longest, taken by itself, might serve to illustrate the glibness, overconfidence and altogether unreliable quality of thought (in this case perhaps a certain circularity of argument) that some critics, Christian and non-Christian alike, discern in Lewis’s Christian apologetics. It seems, indeed, that more would be gained than lost if the word *confidently* were omitted; *fact* seems crude, and *turns out* lacks proper reservations.

- On a closer look, however, there can be little doubt
- which point Lewis is making in this paragraph, namely the one stated in its short last sentence.
- that this point requires a very brief summary of all the earlier chapters, which is what the long preceding sentence has actually provided, and
- that the point requires a peculiar degree of emphasis.

Lewis may thus be supposed to have been presented with a choice between maximum emphasis and a subtler summary, and opted for emphasis because the subtler summary would have blurred his real point – the “guesswork” status of the present chapter – while the cruder summary helped to bring it home by providing contrast.

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<sup>42</sup> LEWIS 1946a, 72 in the first edition, shortly before the section beginning “‘Whist, now!’ said my Teacher”. The Teacher is a fictionalized and idealized George Macdonald whose teachings are not always identical to those found in Macdonald’s writings. Lewis seems to admit as much when he puts the question of “universalism” before his Teacher: “‘*In your own books*, Sir’, said I, ‘you were a Universalist. You talked as if all men would be saved’” (emphasis added). The Teacher’s answer is eminently thought-provoking; but it appears to be an answer Lewis had found in Boethius and von Hügel rather than in Macdonald’s own books. When Lewis mentioned von Hügel in later years, it was usually to recommend his book *Eternal Life* (1912) along with the *Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius.

Nevertheless, ten years later a critique by C. E. M. Joad of the chapter on “Animal Pain” revealed that it still remained possible for a highly intelligent, overall sympathetic and grateful reader, who moreover was a fellow champion of clarity and plain language, to neglect Lewis’s one real point here.<sup>43</sup> The relevant question, then, is perhaps not whether Lewis was justified in opting for emphasis, or whether the result was emphatic enough, but whether he was wise to devote a whole chapter to sheer speculation. There are several indications that there simply was no audience for it – no demand to justify the supply. Shortly after Lewis’s death another intelligent and friendly critic, who had actually been among his closest friends and had himself published a book on the problem of evil,<sup>44</sup> singled out Lewis’s speculations about animal immortality in this chapter of *The Problem of Pain* as a case of “imagination ... slipped from the leash of reason” and as one of Lewis’s “foibles” as an apologist, which, “however secondary a part they play in his work, have been sufficient to cause irritation and estrangement”.<sup>45</sup>

Again, yet another early, friendly and generally astute critic, Chad Walsh, also neglected Lewis’s warning about the “guesswork”. He actually called the chapter on Animal Pain “of particular interest as betraying the limitations of viewpoint encouraged by the pleasant civilization of orderly Oxford”,<sup>46</sup> thought it a plausible case in point for those who would accuse Lewis of “patness, glibness, oversimplification”, and quoted a published 1941 letter from Evelyn Underhill to Lewis in support of his own view. Walsh’s general critique (in addition to praise) of Lewis’s theological popularization is that these works “do not allow him sufficient freedom for his mythopoeic imagination”.<sup>47</sup> In his larger book on Lewis, published thirty years later, Walsh was still suggesting that Lewis in chapter 9 of *The Problem of Pain* “goes on to discuss animal pain”, and never mentioned the distinction Lewis makes between this chapter of “guesswork” and the rest.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Joad’s critique, or “Inquiry”, was published along with Lewis’s reply in 1950 as “The Pains of Animals: A Problem in Theology”; the two pieces were reprinted in LEWIS 1970, 161-171.

<sup>44</sup> Austin Farrer, *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*. Doubleday, New York 1961 and Collins, London 1962. John Hick in the first edition of his *Evil and the God of Love* (1966) specially devoted a short paragraph (XII.4) to Farrer’s book, calling it “one of the best recent books on the problem of evil – perhaps the best”.

<sup>45</sup> FARRER 1965, 40.

<sup>46</sup> WALSH 1949, ch. 4, 33, and ch. 20, 164-165. Underhill’s letter is also quoted, at greater length, in CL2, 458-459.

<sup>47</sup> WALSH 1949, ch. 20, 159; cf. Walsh as quoted above in the comment on 6|10.

<sup>48</sup> *The Literary Legacy of C. S. Lewis* (1979), ch. 9, 220. One further example of a critic neglecting Lewis’s declared intention is found in John Hick’s section on “Animal Pain” (XV.5, or XIV.5 in the 1977 edition). Hick notes that “as a comparatively recent development within the broadly Augustinian tradition the suggestion has been made that either the fall of man or the prior fall of the angels has affected the natural order and perverted the realms of animal life, causing the various species to

With regard to the chapter on the Fall of Man, Walsh does note Lewis's reservation that the main section is a "Socratic myth" – and adds a clear and plausible critique:

The treatment needs to be either more tentative or more poetic.<sup>49</sup>

It would have been interesting to have Lewis's reply to this. What we do have is his answer to Underhill's objections to the chapter on Animal Pain, an answer which he wrote almost by return of post.<sup>50</sup>

If a case can be made, then, for the general viability of theological speculation on this subject, perhaps the only effective way for Lewis to make that case would have been to devote a whole chapter, or a whole book, not to the actual speculations but to justifying speculation as such, and explaining precisely what it is good for. As it is, he clearly failed to convince even some of his best and friendliest commentators. Perhaps it is at least partly a matter of taste and readers, once more, may do best to remember Lewis's own view that "the imaginative man" in him was more continuously operative than the religious writer or the critic. Also, the chapter on Animal Pain and the "Socratic myth" in chapter 5 may perhaps both be counted among the more overt ways in which Lewis showed himself to be a "dinosaur" – a living relic of an otherwise lost form of intellectual life. No wonder if this did not always work.<sup>51</sup>

Yet for all this, it would seem possible for the two-sentence passage quoted above from the end of the chapter's opening paragraph to be improved without getting very much longer. For one thing, if the notion of "confidence" is to be retained, what it seems to need is a brief reference back to the last few paragraphs of chapter 1, where the precise sort and degree and grounds of confidence are set out ("good assurance that ultimate reality is righteous and loving"; 1|12, 12). A different form for the matter contained in the long first sentence might also have helped. Lewis might have agreed to replace these two sentences by something like the following revised and expanded version:

From the doctrine that God is good, for which we found tolerable assurance even while this doctrine raised the problem of pain rather than solving it, we

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attack and devour one another", and in a footnote he mentions Lewis's *Problem of Pain*, p. 123 (i.e. 9|7) as one example of this development. He seems thus to ignore both Lewis's general reservations and his particular stipulation, on that page, that "[t]his hypothesis is not introduced as a general 'explanation of evil': it only gives a wider application to the principle that evil comes from the abuse of free-will."

<sup>49</sup> Walsh, *Literary Legacy*, ch. 9, p. 222-223.

<sup>50</sup> CL2, 459-460, 16 January 1941.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. David L. O'Hara, "Con: C. S. Lewis on Evil: At Best a Likely Story", in BASSHAM 2015, 232 : "In chapter 5 ... Lewis approaches the limits of his knowledge in a way that I argue is more ancient and more orthodox (and probably more Biblical, too) than the attempt to justify God in the face of suffering: he tells a story."

have deduced that the *appearance* of reckless divine cruelty inherent in the world He created must be an illusion. We then found that the only suffering we know at first hand (our own) is not in fact a cruelty. This, as far as it goes, is an encouraging result; but when we go on to investigate non-human suffering, we should realize from the outset that after this, everything is guesswork.

9|6 ... when He emptied Himself of His glory He also humbled Himself to share, as man, the current superstitions of His time. (122)

» This insight prompts the question where to invoke it and where to ignore it. Most notably, why not include the doctrine of Hell among these “current superstitions” if, as Lewis has suggested, a major support for that doctrine is provided by “Our Lord’s own words” (8|1, 106) and perhaps by little else? Lewis does not confront the question head-on. He does suggest something of an answer: any “scientific and historical statement” that is recorded as a saying of Christ Incarnate could be as untrue as any statement recorded of other men and women of those days. He does not add that all other recorded sayings or statements of Christ must be invariably true. To complicate matters, he added a note to this passage in the French edition, telling the reader that

*Actuellement, je considère la conception de l’Incarnation impliquée dans ce paragraphe, comme grossière et due à l’ignorance.*<sup>52</sup>

Anyone in search of a “Lewisian Christology” may therefore be well advised to skip this passage rather than try to distil anything positive from it. The chapter as a whole is explicitly speculative; and in the passage quoted, Lewis’s business is not to provide a criterion by which all those “statements” of Christ which somehow contradict modern ideas can be labelled as either having or lacking divine authority; he is merely *making room* for one particular “statement” (the story about Satan’s fall) as “a reasonable supposition” (9/7, 122) by arguing that this story is altogether outside the sphere of science and historical scholarship so that what it contradicts is only our modern “climate of opinion”. Whether the story is to be accepted as true is another question.

9|9 ... Christian revelation as a *système de la nature* answering all questions. ... [I]t is nothing of the sort: the curtain has been rent at one point, and at one point only, to reveal our immediate practical necessities and not to satisfy our intellectual curiosity.(125)

» One may wonder how to reconcile this with Lewis’s more famous words – “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else” – chosen in 2013 to adorn his memorial stone in Westminster Abbey. The present observation about a “curtain rent at one point” (or

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<sup>52</sup> “I now consider the conception of the Incarnation implied in this paragraph as gross and the result of ignorance.” *Le problème de la souffrance* (1950), 163; translation as in HOOPER 1996, 296.

some similar statement) would be less alluring to visitors of Poets' Corner. But this does not mean that the words actually chosen to be carved in stone do, on balance, more justice to Lewis's life and work.

No single quote of similar length could be indisputably superior to all rivals. Nevertheless, in weighing the "rising sun" against a seemingly opposite idea like the "rent curtain", it is hardly enough in defence of the "rising sun" to suggest that Lewis in saying "I see everything else" did not of course *really* mean *everything* else, or that he wasn't talking about a "system of nature" as envisaged by a French philosopher of the Radical Enlightenment. In fact, Lewis *was* talking (primarily) about that. If either of the two ideas – "sun" or "curtain" – can be said to suffer more than the other from the absence of original context, it is the "sun". The quotation is the concluding sentence of a 1944 paper read to the Oxford University Socratic Club, "Is Theology Poetry?". At issue there is the relative merit of "the scientific point of view" as compared with "the theological". In his usual Socratic way, Lewis was "turning the tables" on the "secularists" (as Chad Walsh put it),<sup>53</sup> arguing that

... in passing from the scientific point of view to the theological, I have passed from dream to waking. Christian theology can fit in science, art, morality, and the sub-Christian religions. The scientific point of view cannot fit in any of these things, not even science itself. I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen ... (etc.)<sup>54</sup>

9|11 Man is to be understood only in his relation to God. The beasts are to be understood only in their relation to man and, through man, to God. (126)

» Here is another possible example of "patness" in Lewis. But then he reminds the reader that the problem of pain is a Christian problem and he goes on to point out, on the same page, that

Man was appointed by God to have dominion over the beasts, and everything a man does to an animal is either a lawful exercise, or a sacrilegious abuse, of an authority by divine right.

The Christian framework thus provides a justification, and a clear instruction, for understanding animals only in their relation to man and hence to God. At the same time this is perhaps yet another passage in which Lewis would have done well to remind the reader of the chapter's "guesswork" status. He might have done so by expanding the second sentence quoted above, thus:

The beasts are to be understood, *in so far as we can hope to understand them at all*, only in their relation to ... (etc.)

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<sup>53</sup> WALSH 1949, ch. 13, "Reason and Intellectual Climate", 108.

<sup>54</sup> "Is Theology Poetry?", final paragraph; in LEWIS 1965, 58.

This would be in accordance with what he says in the chapter's last paragraph (9|14, 130): "if we cannot imagine even our own eternal life, much less can we imagine the life the beasts may have as our "members".

9|12 ... to obscure that difference between beast and man which is as sharp in the spiritual dimension as it is hazy and problematical in the biological. (128)

» A brief reminder of how this sharp spiritual contrast has to be conceived (with reference to the "Socratic myth" in 5|6-7) would have been welcome here. Later, in 1952, Lewis confessed in a letter to Griffiths that a book by Konrad Lorenz on animal behaviour had made him aware of "instincts I had never dreamed of: big with a promise of real morality. The wolf is a v. different creature from what we imagine" (see footnote to first comment on 5|10, above). It might have made a difference to some of Lewis's writing, both fiction and theology, if he had come across such literature earlier in life.

9|12 ... the derivative immortality suggested for [the beasts] is not a mere *amende* or compensation: it is part and parcel of the new heaven and new earth ... (129)

» Lewis is clearer in this paragraph than anywhere about the speculative character of his ideas. Nevertheless it seems justified to note here that he ignores the other side of immortality: if some beasts may be supposed to "go to heaven", then why shouldn't some "go to hell"? This is one of the questions actually raised by C. E. M. Joad in 1950. While Lewis's reply to Joad is altogether worth reading and re-reading for anyone who wants to quote from this chapter on Animal Pain, the fact is that Lewis, again, skipped precisely this item of Joad's inquiry.

9|14 I think the lion, when he has ceased to be dangerous, will still be awful ... There will still be something like the shaking of a golden mane: and often the good Duke will say, "Let him roar again." (130-131)

» In retrospect, it may seem obvious that this passage somehow foreshadows the figure of Aslan in the Chronicles of Narnia; and if the success of Lewis's theological speculation on Animal Pain is to be judged from its reception by Joad, Underhill, Walsh and Farrer, then his "shift to Narnia" must seem an unqualified win-win game. It is nevertheless worth asking whether these friendly critics, for all their friendliness, have been sufficiently receptive to a thing that would not fit into their preconceived categories. Walsh was happy to admit and celebrate the fact that *The Screwtape Letters* is "*sui generis*".<sup>55</sup> It is hard to see why he never considers allowing a similar status to the chapter on Animal Pain. But no doubt the failure is partly Lewis's. The chapter's final paragraph seems more effective than the first in setting the right tone, but final paragraphs are the wrong place for setting tones.

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<sup>55</sup> WALSH 1949, 158.

## CHAPTER 10: HEAVEN

10|2 You may think that there is another reason for our silence about heaven – namely, that we do not really desire it. (133)

» As in the chapter on Hell, Lewis takes a tortuous route toward what must in the end be identified as the real point of the last chapter. He begins by stating a somewhat bland reason for writing it: without “put[ting] the joys of heaven into the scale”, as “Scripture and tradition habitually” do, “no solution of the problem of pain ... can be called a Christian one” (10|1, 132); and then he goes on to deal with three supposedly familiar reasons for “our silence about heaven” rather than with reasons for disbelieving in heaven. The third reason is the one quoted above. Yet at the same time the opening paragraph does state what seems to emerge as the actual point at issue in the first few pages of this chapter – the question whether heaven exists: “either there is a ‘pie in the sky’ or not. If there is not, then Christianity is false”, etc. Today, part of the interest of the two paragraphs that follow (10|2-3) is that they present Lewis’s earliest discursive and published version of what has, decades after his death, come to be known as “the Lewisian argument from desire”.<sup>56</sup> In the end, however, it remains doubtful whether he is here actually trying to argue for the existence of heaven.

Getting clear about this unclarity is useful in that we will in the same movement be zooming in on the real point of this chapter. The point appears to be to give an account of heaven which (1) is credible in light of the solution for the problem of pain proposed in this book, and (2) itself lends further credibility to that solution. Lewis’s lack of clarity here may perhaps be explained from his deep distrust of any desire for eternal life unless it is inspired by better hopes than for mere survival. What seems to have driven him, in these opening pages of the chapter on Heaven, is a sense that he *must not* and yet *must* argue for the existence of heaven before he can (as he certainly must) bring up its meaning for the theme of this book. Again, as in the chapter on Hell, Lewis’s problem could perhaps have been solved by a paragraph or two in which he stated and explained his distrust of any desire for mere indefinite survival – and, in the present case, the need to see precisely how and why eternal life could be desirable. Indeed, he makes this point as the second reason for “our silence

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<sup>56</sup> This passage is one I overlooked while writing an essay on the subject (“Horrid Red Herrings: A New Look at the ‘Lewisian Argument from Desire’ – and beyond”, *Journal of Inklings Studies* 4/1, April 2014, 33-92). The oversight does not make a difference to my conclusions, which may be briefly summarized as follows. In so far as Lewis’s line of thought can be called an argument rather than a piece of autobiography, it is not an argument for the existence of *God*; as an argument for the existence of *heaven* it is addressed to Christian believers in God, not to philosophers as such. It is most unlikely that he would have read and defended a paper making this argument in the Oxford Socratic Club.

about heaven” (“Heaven offers nothing that a mercenary soul can desire”); but he does so only very briefly.

10|6 ... each of the redeemed shall forever know and praise some one aspect of the divine beauty better than any other creature can. ... For doubtless the continually successful, yet never completed, attempt by each soul to communicate its unique vision to all others ... is also among the ends for which the individual was created. (138)

» The previous paragraph, and the somewhat drifting first half of the chapter, ended with the words “... is almost the definition of the thing I am trying to describe”. The present paragraph may therefore be designated as the chapter’s central one. As the reader may see presently, Lewis’s real purpose in submitting his “opinion” about “our silence about heaven” (10|2) has been to supply the ingredients for a relevant description of heaven. Recalling his 1930 comment on Jakob Böhme (quoted above in the comment on 6|14), we may note that it is indeed a *description* of heaven – a view of what heaven is or must be, rather than an argument as to whether it exists. And, as is only fitting for the final chapter of Lewis’s book on the intellectual problem of pain, the relevance of the description is that it provides such final touches as he can give to his intellectual answer. He has combined his own experience of a “secret signature of each soul”, and of the way this signature reveals itself only as “the *want* of it”, with what Christian tradition tells him about “the joys of heaven”; and on this basis he submits that an essential feature of heaven (perhaps *the* essential feature) is “union between distincts”, or individuality in communion. The next two paragraphs then remind us that this type of union characterizes both the life of “the Holy One Himself” and the life of the human soul among “fellow creatures” (10|8, 139):

We need not suppose that the necessity for something analogous to self-conquest will ever be ended, or that eternal life will not also be eternal dying.

Nor, indeed, should we overlook the fact that Lewis’s business here still is to affirm and articulate the rules of what, one hundred pages earlier, he has called “the grammar of being” (3|16, 39).

The final two paragraphs may almost be read as a hymn. Yet even so, the details contributing to Lewis’s stated purpose of providing an answer to “the intellectual problem of suffering” are worth picking out (10|9-10, 140-141):

From the highest to the lowest, self exists to be abdicated and, by that abdication, becomes the more truly self ... What is outside the system of self-giving is not earth, nor nature, nor “ordinary life”, but simply and solely Hell. Yet even Hell derives from this law such reality as it has. ... To be found with [the golden apple of selfhood] in your hands is a fault: to cling to it, death. ... All pains and pleasures we have known on earth are early initiations in the movements of that dance: but the dance itself is strictly incomparable with the suf-

ferings of this present time. As we draw nearer to its uncreated rhythm, pain and pleasure sink almost out of sight.

If it were not too late to reprint *The Problem of Pain* under a different title, *A Vale of Soul-Making* might find serious rivals both in *The Grammar of Being* and in *The Golden Apple of Selfhood*. The latter title would have the advantage of highlighting the connection with *Beyond Personality* found in chapter 6, in addition to being euphonious and perhaps responsibly cheerful.

## Conclusions

As I argued in the introduction to this sequence of comments and mini-essays, testing Lewis's first theological book for its philosophical "weight" is, basically, merely to heed the way Lewis has described that book's purpose in the preface: "to solve the intellectual problem raised by suffering". I also promised four welcome results from this approach to the book. In conclusion, I will briefly recapitulate some of the points which I would count among those results.

First, by attending closely to Lewis's *argument* as such, we have found that the metaphor of "God's megaphone" does not deserve its unofficial and widely effective status as the book's central notion. This status is a received idea which appears to dominate the way many readers construe the book's overall message, or the way they tend to remember or reproduce that message even against their own better judgment. If any other single metaphor as found in the book deserves such a status at all, two obvious candidates would be the "vale of soul-making" and the "golden apple of selfhood".

Second, by attending more closely to the overall argument than to any detachable gems, supposed or otherwise, we may come to see more clearly what it means to be a *Christian thinker*, or at least what it meant in the case of C. S. Lewis, and to appreciate the degree of consistency he achieved in applying his own key religious experience of "creatureliness", of selfhood human and divine, and of free will, to the intellectual problem at hand – and in sketching a truly universal "grammar of being" that spans Heaven, Earth, and Hell, and doubtless Purgatory too.

Third, by approaching him as a thinker we seem to have put ourselves in a position to formulate some really relevant criticisms of this book, and avoid the fruitless sort of criticism that never gets beyond the question (settled on the book's first page) whether the intellectual problem raised by suffering deserves any attention at all. Three areas where the book appears to me to fall short of intellectual solidity are (1) the relation between the Fall of Man and biological evolution, (2) the integration of myth and speculation in a modern exposition of systematic thought, and (3) the doctrine of Hell. Regarding this last question, and in dialogue with his spiritual master Macdonald, Lewis seems to combine the characters

of a philosophical heavyweight and a philosophical lightweight in his staunch yet faltering commitment to the principle of non-contradiction.

Lastly, in taking our cue from Green & Hooper's suggestion and attending to such philosophical weight as we find in Lewis's first theological book, we may grow all the more convinced that the book deserves yet another rereading and, indeed, we may come to see more clearly why so much of Lewis's work remains worth reading and rereading. His readability is not just a matter of great "communicative skills". He actually has a lot to communicate. He has an enormous amount of important, intricately connected and mutually elucidating things to say: more than most readers can hope to take in or even be aware of after one or two readings. But somehow the density of meaning never becomes forbidding, offending or in any way obtrusive. This unobtrusive density, or deceptive brevity, even more than the matchless elegance of Lewis's style – unless it is precisely the secret of that elegance – is what makes the idea of many re-readings so attractive, and the practice so rewarding. He is "talking about something tremendously real, and not merely mystifying you."

## POSTSCRIPT

(December 2017)

I wrote the above reflections before I had a chance to see the essay Brian M. Williams, "C. S. Lewis & John Hick on Theodicy: Superficially Similar but Significantly Different" (*Journal of Inklings Studies*, Vol. 7, Nr. 1, April 2017, pp. 3-28). Williams's essay takes the form of a critique of that by Mark Scott, published in the same journal in 2014 and listed below among my references. I welcome Williams's piece as an interesting further contribution to a deeper understanding of *The Problem of Pain*.

Also, Williams provides at least implicit support for my own comment on Scott, found above in the sections on 6|18, 96. Taking up the comment on 6|5, 81, I argued that Lewis's dictum about pain as "God's megaphone" has acquired undue prominence in interpretations of *The Problem of Pain*; while Scott's proposes to compare "Lewis's 'megaphone theodicy' and Hick's 'soul-making theodicy'", I would advise instead to compare "*Lewis's soul-making theodicy* and *Hick's soul-making theodicy*".

Now Williams, too, appears to pay lip-service to the prominent status of the megaphone dictum when, at one point, he suggests that the passage in question (in 6|5) "is probably the most memorable line from Lewis' book" (11). Otherwise, however, his essay may effectively count as an attempt to carry out my program and simply compare two "soul-making theodicies".

While I am not perfectly happy about the scope and nature of the conclusions reached by Williams, his essay does seem to me helpful in steering discussions of Lewis's book towards a more fruitful area than has been usual for a long time.

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Posted at [www.lewisiana.nl/christianthinker](http://www.lewisiana.nl/christianthinker) on 12 April 2017  
 with thanks to Larry Gilman, Bruce Johnson, Paul Leopold and Judith Wolfe  
 for comment, encouragement and good ideas

**Revised edition**, with various non-essential improvements, January 2019; 1 April 2020