

## HORRID RED HERRINGS

A new look at the ‘Lewisian Argument from Desire’ – and beyond

**Arend Smilde**

**ABSTRACT** – In an attempt to make the English-speaking world aware of a major contribution to C. S. Lewis studies published in German by Norbert Feinendegen in 2008, this essay explores and supports the case made by Feinendegen, in one brief section of his book, for abandoning the widespread idea that Lewis accepted and promoted an explicit philosophical argument from the existence of human ‘natural desire’ to the existence of God. The case for revision is made from the conviction, and as part of the overall attempt to show, that any given passage in Lewis’s work can and should be read in the context of his total *oeuvre*. The fruitfulness of this approach with regard to the question of ‘Desire’ is found to lie in the way it restores to prominence an important and truly distinctive element both of Lewis’s life and of his work.

### **1. Norbert Feinendegen and the Argument from Desire**

Fifty years after the death of C. S. Lewis and some twenty-five years after the concept of a philosophical ‘argument from desire’ for the existence of God emerged in discussions of his work, this supposed argument now enjoys the status of a characteristic element in Lewis’s intellectual legacy. However, as I want to show, the very concept of such an argument as an authentic part of that legacy needs to be scrapped if the real and important elements concealed by it are to recapture the light they deserve. \34\

The point I will be making is essentially the point made by the German theologian and philosopher Norbert Feinendegen in one small section of his 600-page doctoral dissertation, *Denk-Weg zu Christus: C. S. Lewis als kritischer Denker der Moderne* (2008). What I will be adding to his point is mainly in the nature of further support and elaboration. My own subsidiary aim, indeed, is to salute this magnificent work, which seems otherwise doomed to remain little known outside the German-speaking world. The most effective and useful way to express my gratitude to Feinendegen seemed to be to offer English readers an actual

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\* This PDF version contains a few minor corrections to the published text.  
Original page numbers are inserted in \backslashes\.

taste rather than a common review of the book, followed by such further illumination as I gained from this single leg of my exciting journey from cover to cover.

This essay, therefore, is composed in the following way. This first section offers a straightforward summary of Feinendegen's sub-section III.1.3, 'Das "Argument from Desire" für die Existenz Gottes', preceded by a brief summary of the 200 pages leading up to that sub-section. While some details have been slightly rearranged with a view to my own subsequent comments, this part is strictly representative of the original German text and has been approved as such without reservations by Dr Feinendegen. The next section, the longest, is a further exploration of what I take to be the three pillars supporting his case, with notes on whether and how these pillars have been treated by other authors, and further evidence for the overall correctness of Feinendegen's view. The last two sections complete the negative task of dismantling the concept of this Lewisian 'argument from desire' and, finally, the positive one of recovering an unhindered view of the Lewisian convergence of faith and thought.

Feinendegen's book constitutes a grand attempt to demonstrate the coherence of the complete body of Lewis's thought and writing. It is composed of five chapters, organized on a scheme derived from Lewis's statement in his 1941 essay 'Religion: Reality or Substitute?': 'Authority, reason, experience; on these three, mixed in various proportions, all our knowledge depends.' The first chapter \35\ deals with Reason; the second and third with Experience; and the last two with Authority. Each chapter is divided into three or four sections, each of which has several sub-sections. The twelve-page sub-section (pp. 231-243) on the 'Argument from Desire for the Existence of God' is chapter III.1.3.

### 1.1. *Brief summary of Denk-Weg zu Christus, Chapters I, II, and III.1.1-2*

(Ch. I & II) Lewis's philosophical critique of modern thought led him to the conclusion that the universe must have a unifying dimension of structure, purpose and value – i.e. a meaning – which is not reducible to scientific knowledge yet accessible to human knowledge. Direct *experience* and hence the *imagination* play their ineluctable, vital and constitutive parts in any worldview beyond radical nominalism. While radical nominalism is clearly indefensible, the next question is whether and how an alternative can be defended. How to avoid sheer arbitrary fantasy in finding a meaning in the universe?

(Ch. III.1.1) First, humans need to be 'open' for the relevant sort of experience. This openness is mainly an affair of negative conditions, such as a habit of 'iconoclasm' and the absence of preconceived ideas. None of these conditions are a guarantee for any experience at all.

(Ch. III.1.2) Lewis took an old recurrent personal experience of unsatisfiable desire to be a pointer toward the 'unifying dimension'. While this dimension remained wholly unspecified, the 'dialectic' of his Desire had impelled Lewis to conclude that, at the very least, the dimension actually existed and could properly be called 'the Divine'. This conclusion

seems similar to the philosophical conclusions he had drawn from the existence of human reason and morality, i.e. the conclusions yielded by his so-called ‘argument from reason’ and ‘moral argument’. Hence a parallel ‘argument from desire’ may seem to be involved. However, the argumentative rank to be accorded to the ‘dialectic of Desire’ in Lewis’s mature Christian thought is different. This difference needs to be clarified if any real progress is to be made in the continuing debate on the subject.

1.2. ‘Das “Argument from Desire” für die Existenz Gottes’:  
a Summary of Feinendegen’s chapter III.1.3

The term ‘Argument from Desire’ was launched by John Beversluis in his book *C. S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion* (1985), chapter 2, ‘Desire’. This book was written from a conviction that Lewis’s thought is of a generally poor quality and that this poverty required unmasking; after an introductory chapter, the chapter on Desire is the opening move of this enterprise. It has not led to any agreement among commentators about the strength or even the precise scope and nature of what has, meanwhile, become more and more widely known as ‘Lewis’s argument from desire’.

To understand the nature of the supposed argument it should be noted that Lewis compared the relevant episode in his own life to the *ontological argument* for the existence of God. It should also be noted that Lewis agreed with the modern (Kantian) critique of the ontological argument: he agreed that the presence of an *abstract* concept in one’s mind never proves that – as Anselm and Descartes had submitted with regard to the concept of a Perfect Being – the thing conceived must exist outside the mind.

Lewis described his peculiar personal experience, in fact, as a ‘*sort of ontological proof*’ and as a ‘*lived dialectic*’,<sup>1</sup> to be distinguished from the ‘merely argued dialectic’ of his philosophical progress. The point of this phrasing and terminology is that while he denied that mere concepts could ever do the trick, he thought it quite possible for human *experiences* of a Perfect Being to be of such a nature that they cannot be purely subjective. The idea of God that results from such an experience is not an abstract idea *that He* exists, but an awareness of *what* or *who* God is.

Since this awareness is bound to include a conviction of God’s necessary existence, Lewis once suggested that it may indeed have been such an awareness – an idea of God resulting from ‘a real imaginative perception, i.e. an *experience*, of goodness or beauty’ and not wholly reducible to one’s own finite consciousness of contingent things – which had driven Anselm, and perhaps Descartes too, to propound their ontological arguments.

As regards his own experience, Lewis in his late twenties felt he had reached the end of (what he later called) this ‘lived dialectic’ or ‘the dialectic of Desire’: a life-long succession of failed attempts either to satisfy his old peculiar Desire or to explain it away. He had been

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<sup>1</sup> Emphasis added in both quotations.

left with the conviction that its object was a timeless, infinite reality properly called the Divine or God or, indeed, 'I am'. Along with all this, Lewis explained (in his 1943 Preface to *The Pilgrim's Regress*) that

this Desire was, in the soul, as the Siege Perilous in Arthur's castle – the chair in which only one could sit. And if nature makes nothing in vain, the One who can sit in this chair must exist.

The formula 'nature makes nothing in vain' in this passage has often been taken to mean that Lewis was arguing on the basis of a philosophically naive teleological view of nature, thus:

- all things in nature have a purpose;
- all natural desires must therefore have a real object;
- a natural human desire for God must therefore mean that God really exists.

Critics as well as defenders of this supposedly implied syllogism have almost invariably neglected the fact that Lewis was quoting an old, Aristotelian maxim and using it in the meaning it had acquired in recent centuries. This modern meaning can be properly described as Occam's rule. The maxim about nature occurs \38\ so often in writers from classical antiquity onward that it is impossible to say whether Lewis was thinking of any particular source while he wrote that passage. One source which he certainly knew and which seems relevant here is a passage (as quoted by Sir James Jeans in *The Mysterious Universe*, a popular science book of 1930), from Isaac Newton's *Principia* (second edition, 1713). The 'nature' phrase (*Natura nihil agit frustra*) is here evidently used in its modern meaning; the Newtonian passage may actually have done much to push this meaning into prominence. Ever since the days of Newton the phrase has been used as an alternative way to express 'Occam's Razor', i.e. the principle of parsimony or frugality in philosophy: comprehensive explanations with fewer assumptions must always have precedence over partial explanations with more assumptions. This appears to have been Lewis's meaning too, whether or not he was consciously remembering Newton.

What Lewis's brief and hidden allusion implies, then, is this: he concluded that 'the One who can sit in this chair must exist' because if he took the other line – i.e. if he maintained that such a One did *not* exist – he would be left with more assumptions and fewer things explained.

Along with this passage, two others elsewhere in Lewis's work have often been mentioned as sources for his supposed 'argument from desire'. One is in his sermon 'The Weight of Glory'; the other is in *Mere Christianity*, chapter III.10, 'Hope'. The context of these two passages, however, is crucially different from that of Lewis's point about Desire as a chair in which only One could sit. In the other two passages he is not arguing for the existence of God but, in fact, *from* the existence of God: he is explicitly talking on the assumption that his audience already believes in the Christian God. What he argues *for* is the reality of resurrection and the afterlife. He suggests that some of our desires should help to convince us of that reality; and he does so on the basis of a previously established convic-

tion that God exists, i.e. that the existence of such desires is much more plausibly accounted for, at least in part, by the existence \39\ of God as Creator than by the existence of any monistic sort of 'nature', and may therefore be trusted to have a real, if otherworldly, object.

What is more, to ascribe to the young Lewis a general philosophical assumption of purpose in Nature quite independent from his emerging belief in God, and to construe from his work a syllogism based on that assumption, is deeply contrary to his whole epistemology, which he slowly developed from an emphatic belief that the universe was 'a meaningless dance of atoms'.

Indeed, if we ask precisely *why* Lewis felt that the existence of God was the philosophically responsible conclusion from his 'lived dialectic', his real epistemology not only resists the wrong answer; it also provides the correct one. By the time he concluded that 'the One who can sit in this chair must exist', his so-called 'argument from Reason' and 'moral argument' had already reached their mature form. These two 'transcendental' arguments (239), as applications of the law of non-contradiction (240, n. 171), had destroyed his belief that the universe is a meaningless dance of atoms. He was philosophically convinced that the ultimate reality is timeless, supernatural and meaningful. Granted this conviction, the experience of a desire that was 'diligently followed' but remained consistently unsatisfied by anything in the world could, in the end, be reasonably supposed to point beyond itself, beyond the world, and toward that supernatural reality. Denying this would in itself be possible: Desire appeared to be a mere contingency, not a timeless thing like Reason and Morality. This is what constitutes the difference in argumentative status between, on the one hand, the arguments from reason and morality, and on the other, the alleged argument from desire. Nevertheless, to deny that the Desire pointed to a supernatural reality would be to charge the universe with a degree of absurdity, i.e. meaninglessness, which was implausible in light of Lewis's transcendental arguments.

In addition, if we define the object of this desire as Meaning, then the law of non-contradiction can be seen to apply to this \40\ object in the way Lewis applied it to Reason and Morality. Just as 'Reason is our starting point' (*Miracles*, ch. 3) even for attempts to deny its validity, and just as Morality is required even for noting a lack of it, so the search of Meaning, or even the lament over its absence, presupposes an objective criterion for meaning.

Lewis, then, decided to take the human desire for meaning seriously because a refusal to do so would go against Occam's Rule: a refusal would land him in absurdity or at any rate make matters very much worse philosophically. An 'acknowledgement of man's desire for meaning' (241) seemed definitely more plausible than explaining the desire away. It was this acknowledgement – and not a philosophically crude assumption of purpose in nature – which led him to believe that the metaphysical conclusion from his own 'lived dialectic' was plausible.

As Lewis noted, 'this lived dialectic [i.e. 'the dialectic of Desire'], and the merely argued dialectic of my philosophical progress, seemed to have converged on one goal'. The convergence may be said to have taken place the moment he decided to take his peculiar

desire seriously as a desire for meaning. He did so on the ground briefly alluded to by the phrase ‘if nature does nothing in vain.’ He claimed for his conclusion neither less nor more certainty than any scientist does in submitting a ‘best explanation’. That he did not claim *more* certainty is suggested by the conjunction ‘if’ (which most commentators have ignored): ‘...if nature makes nothing in vain...’

This interpretation of how Lewis here used the old *Natura* maxim is confirmed by the fact that he never repeated it, or repeated anything like the teleological argument which it is supposed to express, anywhere in either of his two published narrative accounts of his own philosophical and religious development. The plausibility of its conclusion is not a thing to be propounded, but to be lived through; a thing to be told, not argued.

‘In its interaction with the arguments that had led him to accept a philosophical idea of God, Lewis considered the assumption of something Divine as the object of his Desire as by far the best explanation for his recurring experience of that deep longing for a comprehensive meaning which he called Joy’ (243).

## 2. A closer look

If Feinendegen is right, then the phrase ‘argument from desire’ seems doomed to spend the rest of its life in quotation marks. On a closer inspection of Feinendegen’s main text, and of the much larger body of supporting quotations and other material in the footnotes, and various other relevant comments and sources, I have come to the conclusion that he *is* right. What is more, I think we may go one little step further than he does and decide that the concept of an ‘argument from desire’ as part of Lewis’s intellectual legacy had best be abandoned altogether.

I will now explore what I consider to be the three main ingredients or constitutive claims of the case presented by Feinendegen. Since they are likely to invite criticism, I hope to anticipate at least some of it. The issues are:

1. Lewis’s line of thought in the 1943 Preface to *The Pilgrim’s Regress* (PrPR) was crucially different from the one in the allegedly parallel passages in ‘The Weight of Glory’ and *Mere Christianity* III.10 (WG/MC).<sup>2</sup>
2. Lewis’s supposed argument must be understood as related, though certainly not identical, to the classical Ontological Argument for God’s existence. \42\
3. Lewis’s suggestion that ‘nature makes nothing in vain’ was simply a way of invoking Occam’s rule.

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<sup>2</sup> WG: ‘The Weight of Glory’, in: *Transposition* (1949), p. 25, ‘Do what they will, then,’ etc.; MC: *Mere Christianity* (1952), chapter III.10, ‘Hope’, p. 108, ‘(3) The Christian Way’, etc. Both texts are publicly accessible on the internet. All references to Lewis’s works are to first, usually British editions unless stated otherwise; for details see the exhaustive Lewis bibliography in Hooper 1996, pp. 799-883, or the updated version in *Remembering C. S. Lewis: Recollections of Those Who Knew Him*, ed. James Como (Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2005), a re-issue of Como’s *C. S. Lewis at the Breakfast Table* (1979; new edition HBJ, San Diego etc. 1992).

Each issue will be introduced by a very brief account of what (if anything) has been said on the subject by other commentators.

### 2.1. *Arguing for and arguing from God's existence*

Feinendegen is correct to emphasize that the context of the 'desire' passages in WG/MC is different from PrPR and that, accordingly, the proposed lines of thought about 'desire' are different too. In WG/MC Lewis addresses an audience which he explicitly assumes to have accepted a Christian belief in God; it is *from* this belief that he argues that earthly glimpses of heaven and a desire for the afterlife may in an important sense be realistic. PrPR, on the other hand, in so far as anything is actually argued there at all, would seem to suggest an argument *for* God's existence.

The distinction seems to have been barely noticed by any other of the authors I have consulted on the subject. HOLYER 1988 (62) and COOK 2001 do seem to recognize it and so does LOVELL 2003 (140-141, *but* see also 171). BARKMAN 2009 (93) actually rejects the distinction along with the rest of Cook's view, and explicitly equates God and Heaven as the objects of any argument from desire. BASSHAM 2010 in effect takes the same view as he envisages two 'versions' of the same argument rather than any relevant distinction. HALDANE 2010 notes the distinction only to deny it: he argues that Heaven is 'essentially God-involving' (72-73); however, Haldane is comparing the Lewis of WG/MC with other authors and does not seem to know either *The Pilgrim's Regress* or *Surprised by Joy*.

It is surely relevant to notice the kind of context provided by WG/MC – 'The Weight of Glory' was actually a sermon;<sup>3</sup> but \43\ Feinendegen could have further strengthened his case by highlighting one or two facts about the PrPR context as well. Ten years after *The Pilgrim's Regress: An Allegorical Apology, for Reason, Romanticism and Christianity* was first published, and about eleven years after he had converted from a general Theism to explicit Christian belief, Lewis had risen from total public nonentity to national renown as a writer and speaker. His main concern in presenting a re-issue of the book in 1943 was to mitigate the abstruseness of this allegorical exercise in spiritual autobiography. To this end he wrote a ten-page Preface and provided running headlines to explain the allegory item by item. The main subject of the Preface was to explain (and to apologize for) his use of the word 'Romanticism' in the subtitle. It is in this context that he described, after ten years, his own state of mind in relation to some circumstances at the time of writing the book, and described the part played in his personal development by 'a particular recurrent experience'. He first calls this experience 'one of intense longing', then a 'desire', then 'this sweet

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<sup>3</sup> While WG and MC indeed appear to be the places most quoted in this context, another candidate could certainly be a passage in Lewis's 1939 essay 'Learning in War-time' (in *Transposition* 1949, par. 9, p. 50), where he actually alludes to the maxim 'nature does nothing in vain' as he writes 'God makes no appetite in vain' and explicitly adds that 'this is the teleological argument' used by Thomas Aquinas. For purposes of the present discussion, however, this passage can be simply equated with WG/MC; the 'Learning' essay also originated as a sermon.

Desire’, then ‘this Desire’, ‘the Desire’, and finally ‘Desire’, in the phrase ‘the dialectic of Desire’.<sup>4</sup> This is the thing referred to by ‘Romanticism’. This whole passage on ‘desire’ is written in the past tense as an additional piece of autobiography needed to remove some of the book’s difficulty. There is very little to suggest philosophical pretensions; in so far as Lewis may here be thought to provide grounds for universal insights, they would seem to be at best anecdotal or, in philosophical terms, ‘contingent’.

How this personal and past-tense nature of Lewis’s account in PrPR has been ignored is illustrated by one telling misquotation in Peter Kreeft’s influential essay on the subject published in 1989. The crucial paragraph in Lewis’s preface begins with a past tense: \44\

It *appeared* to me therefore that if a man diligently followed this desire, pursuing the false objects until their falsity appeared (...), he must come out at last into the clear knowledge that the human soul was made to enjoy some object that is never fully given (...)<sup>5</sup>

In Kreeft’s quotation, *appeared* is changed into *appears*.<sup>6</sup> The inadvertency, small as it may seem, makes a big difference. It has presumably helped to convince both Kreeft and his readers over the decades that Lewis was doing philosophy here – that Lewis was submitting a universal insight about human nature to the effect that one element in human nature has to be recognized as a clear pointer to the reality of ‘what people call God, and Heaven’.<sup>7</sup>

However, as soon as we stop either opposing or defending this alleged argument, anyone familiar with Lewis’s writings will realize that his own contribution to the debate, if he were here to join us, would be to put an end to it. He certainly thought that no natural impulse by itself would ever serve as a compelling or even moderately effective pointer to *any* truth, let alone the truth of God’s existence, unless the possibility of this kind of function had been suggested from some other quarter. In any case this is how he described his own case. It may be permissible in some contexts to use *Heaven* as a near-synonym for *God*; but not so while we are considering the border traffic between religious belief and unbelief, as Lewis so often did, where Heaven will not usually be understood as the realm of God but, rather, for good or ill, as an object of human desire involving life after death. Lewis was perhaps exceptionally keen to maintain a clear distinction between God and Heaven and relegate Heaven to a position of subsidiary importance; and again, this is at any rate how he described his own case; more about this anon.

As Feinendegen points out, to suggest that Lewis was taking \45\ merely natural impulses as pointers to God is deeply contrary to the whole way of thinking from which his Christian belief emerged. The point is indeed overwhelmingly clear. Lewis opened his very first public performance in Christian apologetics, *The Problem of Pain*, with a quotation

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<sup>4</sup> *The Pilgrim’s Regress* (new and revised edition, 1943), Preface, pp. 7-8. As noted above, this Preface is further referred to as PrPR.

<sup>5</sup> PrPR, p. 10; emphasis added.

<sup>6</sup> Kreeft 1989, p. 255.

<sup>7</sup> Kreeft 1989, p. 250.

from Pascal's *Pensées*, serving as the epigraph to the introductory chapter; and his choice for precisely this quotation at this place might suffice to put an end to the matter:

I wonder at the hardihood with which such persons undertake to talk about God. In a treatise addressed to infidels they begin with a chapter proving the existence of God from the works of Nature (...) this only gives their readers grounds for thinking that the proofs of our religion are very weak (...) It is a remarkable fact that no canonical writer has ever used Nature to prove God.

The introductory chapter that follows is an elaboration of this point with special reference to belief in God as a good and wise Creator. Thus:

At all times (...) an inference from the course of events in this world to the goodness and wisdom of the Creator would have been equally preposterous; and it was never made.

To which Lewis adds in a footnote (*italics original*):

*I.e., never made at the beginnings of a religion. After a belief in God has been accepted, 'theodicies' explaining, or explaining away, the miseries of life, will naturally appear often enough.*<sup>8</sup>

If the issue of pain and goodness threatens to confuse matters, we may turn to another famous piece of Lewisian apologetics, his Socratic paper on the question 'Is Theology Poetry?' (*emphasis added*):

Long before I believed Theology to be true I had already decided that the popular scientific picture at any rate was false. One absolutely central inconsistency ruins it (...) [W]hatever else may be true, the popular scientific cosmology at any rate is certainly not. *I left that ship not at the call of poetry but because I thought it could not keep afloat.* Something like philosophical idealism or Theism must, at the very worst be less untrue than that.<sup>9</sup>

In other words, he thinks that 'poetry' (much as he had known and loved it all his life) is not what 'called' him away from atheism; it was the philosophical inadequacy of atheism which pushed him away from it. Before he had reached that stage, and indeed until 'long' after that, he never followed any perceived call of poetry towards actual belief in God. This is how Lewis described his own case; and although his powers and perception as a spiritual autobiographer may always remain a legitimate subject of debate, in light of this it is at best tricky to construe his apologetics as an invitation to heed 'the call of poetry'.

Like so many elements in Lewis's thought, the same view of how 'sweet Desire' may or may not point toward God pops up in very different parts of his work, including his scholarly work. Thus in *The Discarded Image* on the ancient Christian writer Boethius. When arguing, says Lewis, that our dim ideas of the Perfect Good are actually pointers to God, Boethius 'slips in, as axiomatic, the remark that all perfect things are prior to all imperfect

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<sup>8</sup> *The Problem of Pain* (1940), p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> 'Is Theology Poetry?' (1944), in *Screwtape Proposes a Toast* (1965), pp. 54-55, 57.

things'. Lewis adds that this is no longer axiomatic for modern readers; and this difference between modern and pre-modern thought 'perhaps leaves no area and no level of consciousness unaffected.'<sup>10</sup> We may here further add that Boethius's argument is thus unlikely to succeed in our day unless some variety of the 'axiom' is somehow recovered. At any rate this is, as we saw Lewis claim elsewhere, what had happened to himself before any effective 'call of poetry' could come in. There is a similar passage about Edmund Spenser \47\ in his large work on 16th-century English literature. The 'formless longings', says Lewis, which a modern creative-evolution monger like Bernard Shaw must regard as 'a horrible form of dram-drinking', may to a Christian Platonist like Spenser

logically appear as among the sanest and most fruitful experiences we have; for their object really exists and really draws us to itself.<sup>11</sup>

The remark is too casual for Lewis here to go into details; yet all the same we may conclude from it that in modern times it is no use trying to argue 'from desire' unless the ground for such an attempt – a ground lost to modern man including the young Lewis – has been laid; after that, 'desire' might serve as an argument, although by itself it would still hardly invite argumentation.

Even so, there is the question of Heaven and the afterlife in Lewis's thought. In addition to the difference in context between PrPR and WG/MC, several other things may be noted which confirm that, if Lewis was ever arguing from desire at all, it was not for God's existence but *from* it, and *to* belief in the afterlife. If the intellectual move from 'desire' to God's existence was implausible in light of Lewis's original epistemology, the move to eternal life would, if anything, have been even less congenial to him. In retrospect, as he confesses in *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis felt privileged to have been 'permitted for several months, perhaps for a year, to know God and to attempt obedience without even raising [the] question' of 'belief in a future life'. He noted that his 'training was like that of the Jews', who after centuries of serving and praising God were still hardly aware of anything worth hoping for beyond the grave. Lewis admitted and indeed insisted, of course, that there are many different roads into Jerusalem (and out of it), but –

for my own part I have never seen how a preoccupation with that subject at the outset could fail to corrupt the whole thing.<sup>12</sup> \48\

The strong language of 'corruption' is no doubt partly explained by an earlier and rather uncharitable passage in the same book which is also worth quoting here – an episode from the days just before Lewis began to feel uncertain about his atheism. As he writes,

I had recently come to know an old, dirty, gabbling, tragic, Irish parson who had long since lost his faith but retained his living. By the time I met him his only interest was the search for evidence of 'human survival'. (...) What was especially shocking was that (...) [h]e was not seeking the Beatific Vision and did not even

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<sup>10</sup> See *The Discarded Image* (1964), ch. 4/D, pp. 75-90, especially 84-85.

<sup>11</sup> *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* (1954), p. 357.

<sup>12</sup> *Surprised by Joy* (1955), pp. 217-218 (ch. 15, par. 3).

believe in God (...) All he wanted was the assurance that something he could call 'himself' would, on almost any terms, last longer than his bodily life.<sup>13</sup>

The revulsion recorded if not expressed here, more than three decades after the event, can be seen in full bloom in Lewis's published diaries of the mid-1920s, starting with the first account of an exchange with this Iris parson, the Rev. Dr. F. W. Macran, or 'Cranny', on 18 April 1922.<sup>14</sup>

If only for such rather private and psychological reasons, then, it would seem inadvisable for any interpreter of Lewis's thought to slur over the profound difference Lewis would have perceived in arguing for the existence of God and arguing for the existence of Heaven. Perhaps we see here one unfortunate aspect of the power of concepts. Beversluis's powerful phrase, in focusing critical thought on what Lewis seemed to be arguing *from*, may have deflected attention away from what he was arguing *for*. All this, however, is only to confirm what may be clear enough from a simple comparison of the context provided by PrPR on the one hand and WG/MC on the other, as Feinendegen suggested.

One more passage might be cited, though, by those who would maintain the idea of a truly Lewisian argument from 'desire' for God's existence. It is a passage of just over 400 words<sup>15</sup> in a long letter Lewis wrote to his brother on 24 October 1931 – less than four weeks after their now famous ride to the newly opened Whipsnade Zoo during which Lewis took the final step in his conversion to Christianity, and almost a year before he wrote *The Pilgrim's Regress*. This is the period referred to in that book's preface (i.e. PrPR) eleven years later. It can hardly be doubted that at the time of writing this 1931 letter he was not 'raising the question of belief in a future life' yet; and he is here actually using the phrases *it is arguable* and *can be argued* with direct reference to the question of God's existence. Perhaps nowhere else, then, has Lewis come closer to formulating explicit ideas about the possibility of real argumentation about this question on the basis of what he calls, here, 'the "idea of God" in *some* minds' and 'a vague "something" which has been suggested to one's mind as desirable'. All this, however, clearly has not convinced Feinendegen that arguments for God's existence and arguments for Heaven's existence in Lewis are really chips of the same block after all. Feinendegen quotes this passage nearly in full, divided over four footnotes, and uses phrases from it in crucial passages of his main text, notably the words 'a real imaginative perception of goodness or beauty' (included in my summary, above). What is more, none of the other authors whom I consulted on the subject, excepting Purtil (who wrote before the term 'argument from desire' was floated) have referred to this letter, although it has been available in print since 1966, with new editions in 1988 and 2002. I recommend a re-reading of it to anyone interested in the matter, and would suggest the following interpretation. If (as I think) *this* is how Lewis comes closest to explicitly arguing

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<sup>13</sup> *Surprised by Joy*, p. 191 (ch. 13, par. 8).

<sup>14</sup> *All My Road Before Me: The Diary of C. S. Lewis, 1922-1927*, ed. Walter Hooper (1991), p. 22; see the book's index for further accounts of 'Cranny'.

<sup>15</sup> First published in *Letters of C. S. Lewis*, edited by his brother, W. H. Lewis (1966), pp. 143-144; then reprinted in Walter Hooper's enlarged edition (1988), pp. 290-291; then in the *Collected Letters II* (2002), pp. 7-8. The complete letter was only published in the last collection.

from ‘desire’ to the existence of God, then we must face the fact that he has never come close at all. The thoughts expressed are extremely tentative, and the \50\ final sentence of the passage, which is the only one not quoted by Feinendegen, clearly serves to avoid any misunderstanding on this point and to underscore this tentative character:

Of course I am not suggesting that these vague ideas of something we want and haven’t got, wh. occur in the Pagan period of individuals and of races (hence mythology) are anything more than the first and most rudimentary forms of ‘the idea of God’.<sup>16</sup>

Add to this that Lewis, in a rambling letter of over 3,000 words written in October 1931, calls this 400-word passage ‘a longer digression than I had intended’, and the conclusion becomes inevitable that the idea of a Lewisian philosophical argument from ‘desire’ for the existence of God is a chimera. The reason why I have not found this passage cited as evidence or illustration by promoters of that idea or indeed of that argument is, presumably, that it would be counterproductive. This extremely shaky and in fact counterproductive example of Lewis actually setting out the supposed argument is, I think, all we have – unless we mean an argument (found elsewhere) not *for*, but *from* the existence of God, or an argument from ‘desire’ for the existence, not of God, but of the future life with which Lewis was not initially concerned at all.<sup>17</sup> \51\

## 2.2. *Ontological Proof and Lived Dialectic*

To suggest that Lewis in fact never seriously ‘argued’ from ‘desire’ to the existence of God is, of course, not to deny that the thing he called ‘desire’ was greatly important to him. In the subtitle of his first published attempt at spiritual autobiography he mentioned the experience as ‘Romanticism’; ten years later, in his new preface for the book, he apologized for that word but still characterized the experience referred to as being ‘of immense importance’;<sup>18</sup> and more than another decade later it returned, prominently, as ‘Joy’ in the title of his final autobiography. If Lewis was not arguing from ‘desire’ – or was not arguing for God, in the days when he wasn’t concerned with Heaven yet – then how *did* he understand the immense importance of ‘desire’ for his own belief in God, and perhaps for humanity at

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<sup>16</sup> *Collected Letters II*, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> While I write this, Alister McGrath’s new biography of C. S. Lewis comes into my possession. In the chapter on Lewis’s conversion to theism and then to Christianity, there are two consecutive notes referring to Lewis’s letter of 24 October 1931 (ch. 6, notes 55 and 56). Neither note relates it to the ‘desire’ question, or not explicitly, or even draws attention to the passage about arguments for God; McGrath’s only comment relevant for our present purpose is that the letter ‘suggests that Lewis has not yet resolved certain theological issues (note 55).’ This, for what it is worth, seems to confirm the impression that Lewis’s brief and tentative attempt to argue from desire to God’s existence – in so far as it actually deserves the name of such an attempt – was no more than a very minor, forgivable and forgettable sort of blind alley. As McGrath says in his discussion of *Mere Christianity*: ‘Lewis argues that the Christian faith interprets this longing as a clue to the true goal of human nature’ (ch. 9, p. 224).

<sup>18</sup> PrPR, p. 7.

large in its relation to God? Feinendegen suggests that the first thing to note here is Lewis's brief allusion, in PrPR, to the old 'ontological argument' for God's existence *and* to note that this argument is not quite what Lewis is propounding.

References to the ontological argument are not wholly absent in my secondary literature on the subject, but they are never very prominent. CARNELL 1974 (120, 139) is the most explicit on this point; but he is the least interested in Lewis as a philosopher. Others who mention it are PURTILL 1981 (14), KREEFT 1989 (249, 271), LOVELL 2003 (ch. 6, note 37) and BARKMAN 2009 (87, 90, and in a passage only found in the original PhD thesis, p. 80).

Lewis's allusion to the 'ontological argument' is indeed very brief:

The dialectic of Desire, faithfully followed, would retrieve all mistakes, head you off from all false paths, and force you not to propound, but to live through, a sort of ontological proof.<sup>19</sup>

\52\ And Feinendegen is surely right to point out that Lewis kept a good deal of distance from the classical versions of the argument as found in St. Anselm and Descartes. Perhaps the distance is further confirmed by Lewis's choice for the word *proof* rather than *argument*. This might be over-subtle: likely enough the 'proof' variant was simply the standard phrase for Lewis. Also, in some respects *proof* would seem to be a stronger word than *argument*. Yet in other respects *proof* as compared with *argument* is not only at some removes from the idea of actual arguing, i.e. the reasoning from premises to a conclusion, but closer to the idea of 'tasting'. This would seem to fit in nicely with Lewis's slightly earlier explanation that *The Pilgrim's Regress* was

written by one who has proved them [i.e. all false objects of Desire] wrong. (...) I know them to be wrong not by intelligence but by experience (...). [It] is no matter for boasting: it is fools, they say, who learn by experience.<sup>20</sup>

That is why I submit that, in the first of the two above quotations, it is hard to think that Lewis could have written *argument* instead of *proof*; or that, if *ontological argument* had been the standard phrase for him, he would have chosen to make the allusion at all. But to think of Lewis as having a standard way to refer to the ontological proof or argument would be an exaggeration. In all his published works including the *Collected Letters* I have found just three such direct references – two with *proof*<sup>21</sup> and one with *argument*. The latter serves in a context, at the end of his essay 'The Language of Religion' (1960), where Lewis suggests that the classical ontological argument for God's existence might 'arise as a partially unsuccessful translation of an experience without concept or words':<sup>22</sup> in \53\ effect, he

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<sup>19</sup> PrPR, p. 10.

<sup>20</sup> PrPR, p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> *Proof*: 'Is Theism Important?' (1952), in: *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (1970), par. 3, and in a letter to Nancy Warner, 26 October 1963 (cf. note 48, below). One further instance with 'proof' was never published until recently; see Postscript (5).

<sup>22</sup> 'The Language of Religion' (1960), in: *Christian Reflections* (1967), last paragraph. This important essay has not survived in its entirety; however, the manuscript's lost part is not the last part, so that the last paragraph is really the last.

suggests here that ‘argument’ is a partially misleading word. There is therefore some food for thought in the fact that the standard phrase in all the comments I have consulted clearly appears to be *ontological argument*, not *proof*, while Lewis’s modifying phrase ‘a sort of’ usually seems to be consumed in the heat of the supposed argument.

The passage from ‘The Language of Religion’ just mentioned figures prominently in Feinendegen’s treatment of the subject. This is surely right. At the same time it makes me doubt whether Feinendegen might not himself, as a philosopher in search of philosophy, have retained too strong an element of actual argumentation in the account he hopes to substitute for the widespread idea of a Lewisian ‘argument from desire’. Lewis ‘situates his argument in the context of the *Ontological Proof for God’s existence*’, says Feinendegen;<sup>23</sup> and further on: Lewis had found himself compelled to scrap his philosophical materialism ‘some time before the development of an “Argument from Desire”’ (here presumably to be conceived as an argument for God’s existence); and, in conclusion: ‘What is presupposed by this argument is not nature’s purposiveness, but the *acknowledgement of man’s desire for meaning*.’<sup>24</sup>

Thus an argument, of sorts, is still considered to come in; and it would seem that in order to save this appearance of an argument we need to think that Lewis acknowledged the human desire for meaning and then, from the need to acknowledge this desire, concluded that the thing desired, i.e. meaning, is also to be acknowledged. It is not that I would deny that such a line of thought may have indeed crossed Lewis’s mind more than once \54\ and played its part in pulling or prodding him on; but as I said, I would propose to go one little step further than Feinendegen and abandon the idea that such a line of thought deserves the full status of an ‘argument’ and of a major ingredient in Lewis’s personal development or public Christian apologetics. For one thing it would seem that, in so far as the distinction is relevant and possible, the line might as often as not have been followed in the opposite direction – the acknowledgement of meaning resulting in an acknowledgement of the desire for meaning. To highlight Lewis’s rare and perhaps tricky remark about ‘a sort of ontological proof’ is a good idea because it has received little attention so far. On the other hand I think Feinendegen has not quite escaped the danger of overrating its importance and, perhaps because of this, failed to make one further step – the one I propose, while thanking him for effectively inviting me to do so.<sup>25</sup> I would propose to stop supposing that the relation between ‘desire’ and belief in God’s existence is one of philosophical argumentation at all.

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<sup>23</sup> Feinendegen, p. 232. ‘Er stellt sein Argument in den Kontext des *Ontologischen Gottesbeweises*.’ Emphasis and capital O original.

<sup>24</sup> Feinendegen, p. 241. ‘Denn nun ist es nicht die Zweckmäßigkeit der Natur, welche in diesem Argument vorausgesetzt wird, sondern die *Anerkennung des Sinnwunsches* des Menschen.’

<sup>25</sup> The correctness of Feinendegen’s emphasis has been further confirmed by the recent publication of Lewis’s ‘Early Prose Joy’ (probably written in early 1931); see Postscript as referred to in note 21.

Nevertheless a relation between ‘desire’ and belief in God is certainly what Lewis is talking about. In a theological or philosophical dissertation, and given the manner in which the topic has usually been discussed in the past few decades, it is perhaps inevitable that Feinendegen’s treatment in a way serves to push the subject even further up and further into the field of academic philosophy. This does not seem to be where Lewis hoped to get us while he made his brief remark about ‘a sort of ontological proof’. In the passage where that phrase appears, and in the somewhat wider context of the paragraph in question, his topic is what he calls ‘the dialectic of Desire’; and his point is that this was a ‘lived dialectic’, to be distinguished from ‘a merely argued’ one. In fact, this is where \55\ Feinendegen also hopes to get us in the end. Having disposed of a major philosophical red herring of many previous discussions of the subject, namely the phrase ‘nature makes nothing in vain’ (on which more in section 2.3), he submits that the reason why this phrase never appears in either of Lewis’s two autobiographies is that the dialectic of Desire is not an syllogism which occurred to Lewis at any particular stage, but a *lived dialectic* – a ‘proof’ which he had been forced ‘not to propound, but to live through’. As the hermit History tells John in an advanced stage of his pilgrimage: ‘you have *lived* the proof’ (emphasis original).<sup>26</sup>

The generally ‘lived’ character of Lewis’s philosophy is highlighted in the very title of BARKMAN 2009, *C. S. Lewis and Philosophy as a Way of Life*, but it is inexplicably neglected, of all places, in Barkman’s treatment of the present subject: the book’s focus on Lewis’s ‘philosophical thoughts’ (suggested by the subtitle) appears to have produced a view of the ‘lived dialectic’ simply as one more philosophical thought – which is how most authors view it. CARNELL 1974, while repeatedly mentioning both the ontological argument and the lived dialectic, is at the other extreme from Barkman: Carnell is hardly interested in, nor very impressed by, Lewis as a philosopher. As he opines that ‘the ontological argument, *like all the arguments for God’s existence*, must be lived through’ (141, emphasis added), he does not seem to have grasped Lewis’s meaning in the phrase ‘lived dialectic’.

So although Feinendegen, in the end, certainly makes this crucial point about the ‘lived’ character of the dialectic of Desire, it still seems useful to give it a little more support and emphasis than he provides. This is easy. Lewis in PrPR clearly distinguishes the ‘lived dialectic’ of Desire from ‘the merely argued dialectic’ of his philosophical progress. If only for this reason it would seem odd for commentators to jump to every semblance of an occasion to treat the ‘lived’ dialectic as just another element in the ‘argued’ \56\ sort.<sup>27</sup> Lewis further tells us here that he had ‘tried to put them *both* into my allegory which thus became a defence of Romanticism (in my peculiar sense) *as well as* of Reason and Christianity’ (emphases added). He is of course referring to the book’s subtitle, elucidating what that sub-

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<sup>26</sup> *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, Book VIII, chapter 10.

<sup>27</sup> For an exhaustive account of the ‘argued dialectic’ – i.e. Lewis’s philosophical emergence from his materialistic ‘New Look’ of the early 1920s into his subsequent ‘Idealism’ in its alternately ‘Absolute’ and ‘Subjectivist’ guises and hence to Theism and Neoplatonic Christianity – there is perhaps no better place to go than Adam Barkman’s treatment of it chapter 2 of his book (2009). At the beginning of chapter 3, Barkman actually refers back to it with Lewis’s words about the ‘merely argued’ part of his philosophical progress.

title was meant to elucidate. He further tells us, in the same long sentence, that the two sorts of dialectic ‘seemed to have converged on one goal’. This convergence is best understood, I think, as a metaphor parallel to Lewis’s later talk, in *Surprised by Joy*, about a new ‘centripetal movement’ of ‘considerations arising from quite different parts of my experience’.<sup>28</sup> The image appears to be of the two sorts of dialectic converging on their one goal as two armies, presumably from different directions as in a pincer movement, converge on a city. Each advance by either will in some way help the cause of both; but still one army’s advance must not be confused with, or construed as, the other army’s advance.

It is usually rewarding to attend very carefully to Lewis’s images and choice of words. For that reason, although he could hardly have been clearer than he actually was in distinguishing the two sorts of dialectic and highlighting their difference, it may still be asked precisely why Lewis talked of a ‘dialectic’ at all when talking of this Desire. After all, ‘dialectic’ is a term bound up with the great tradition of explicit rational argument ever since the ancient Greeks. ‘The dialectic of Desire’ as a term or concept may indeed be compared to, say, ‘the romance of Reason’. I don’t presume to know the answer to that question. Perhaps it was precisely Lewis’s intention to stress the contrast between the two sorts of dialectic which led him to choose one word for both. No doubt he could have made his point in a different way. John Haldane in his 2010 essay ‘The Restless Heart: Philosophy and the meaning of Theism’, cites a distinction proposed by Charles S. Peirce between ‘argument’ and ‘argumentation’.<sup>29</sup> Alvin Plantinga, in a chapter on the argument from Design (not Desire) in his recent book on ‘Science, Religion, and Naturalism’, makes a distinction between beliefs formed by way of ‘argument’ (i.e. what Peirce called ‘argumentation’) and beliefs formed in what he calls ‘the basic way’.<sup>30</sup> For all I see, either scheme or some similar one might have served Lewis’s purpose. Meanwhile the fact is that in PrPR he talked of a ‘dialectic of desire’ and used the phrase once more in *Surprised by Joy* – the same book in which he pays tribute to his old teacher Kirkpatrick who ‘taught me Dialectic’.<sup>31</sup> To make absolutely sure that Lewis was not, after all, implying some real piece of syllogistic inference from Desire to the existence of God, we must ask how he might himself have actually presented that syllogism. I can see no plausible answer. What I do see, on re-reading the passage just referred to in *Surprised by Joy*, is that Lewis talked there of ‘the inherent dialectic of desire itself’ which had ‘in a way already shown me’ the thing he now discovered through a ‘tool of thought’.<sup>32</sup> Thus more than two decades after he wrote *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, and more than a decade after he added the Preface, the distinction between ‘lived’

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<sup>28</sup> *Surprised by Joy*, p. 209: the third ‘move’ in the metaphorical game of chess which provides much of the scheme of chapter 14.

<sup>29</sup> Haldane 2010, p. 69, referring to Peirce’s essay ‘A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God’ as published in the latter’s *Collected Papers*, Vol. VI (1965).

<sup>30</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion and Naturalism* (Oxford U.P. 2011), pp. 240-248, ch. 8, section III, ‘Design argument vs. design discourse’.

<sup>31</sup> *Surprised by Joy*, p. 207, about the second ‘move’ (ch. 14, par. 11); p. 141 (ch. 9, last par.).

<sup>32</sup> *Surprised by Joy*, pp. 206-207 (ch. 14, par. 10).

and ‘argued’ dialectic had for him an undiminished validity – whether or not, in retrospect, it was a good idea for Lewis to use the word ‘dialectic’ for both developments.

To sum up: in being forced to ‘live through a sort of ontological \58\ proof’ Lewis was forced, not to develop a syllogism, but to accumulate, over the years, an ever-growing mass of what in the end appeared to be more or less univocal experience of an intractable thing imperiously present among his conscious thoughts; and what forced him was this thing’s ‘dialectic’, its habit of alternately inviting and refusing identification with some other thing in the external or even internal world. Had Lewis been more willing to go with the flow of modern jargon, he might perhaps have spoken, not of the dialectic, but of the *dynamic* of desire.

### 2.3. *Natura nihil agit frustra*

One nut remains to be cracked. In PrPR, Lewis briefly mentions the idea that ‘nature makes nothing in vain’ and seems to use this maxim in support of the idea that natural desires cannot have been made in vain either. This very brief passage appears to have done more than anything to foster the idea of a Lewisian ‘argument from desire’. Feinendegen submits that virtually all commentators, both friend and foe of the alleged argument, have failed to consider the intellectual-historical background and development of that allusion and thus failed to see its true meaning – a very different meaning from the one they perceived. Can Feinendegen be right?

In any case it seems true that almost none of the authors I consulted has attended to any background of Lewis’s remark about ‘nature’ at all. One exception is BARKMAN 2009, who briefly and parenthetically mentions ‘Aristotle et al.’;<sup>33</sup> but he does not otherwise stand out from the rest on this point. BEVERSLUIS 1985 is the most generous supplier of historical background, mentioning ‘the Natural law tradition’ and four great names from the history of philosophy and theology, including Aristotle. Nevertheless the great majority of commentators since 1985 seems, in effect, to have simply accepted Beversluis’s bold statement about Lewis: ‘His claim \59\ is that *Nature does nothing in vain*.’<sup>34</sup>

Feinendegen, as we saw, submits that Lewis was *not* saying nature does nothing in vain; he was really just invoking Occam’s rule. Lewis often invoked that rule. But in PrPR he chose to do so, not with one of the phrases usually ascribed to Occam, nor by mentioning

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<sup>33</sup> Barkman 2009, p. 96.

<sup>34</sup> Beversluis 1985, p. 17. Emphasis original; the sentence quoted is one complete sentence. Admittedly, there is what could perhaps be construed as one instance of Lewis quoting, and approving, the *Natura* phrase in its ancient meaning. In a 1943 letter to fellow fantasy writer E. R. Eddison, Lewis quotes it when defending the sexless nature of the *eldila*, the bodiless creatures in his own science fiction trilogy: ‘if these be creatures that do not die to what end shd. they breed?’ (*Collected Letters* II, p. 570). What Lewis actually appeals to is a literary *tradition*, ‘backed up by a sound principle in philosophy, *natura nil agit frustra*’. Seeing that Lewis in the same trilogy was also for literary purposes carrying on the (19th-century) tradition of ‘canals’ on the planet Mars while knowing that there are no canals there, it is hard to see that the letter to Eddison provides the required kind or amount of support for Beversluis’s statement.

Occam, as he normally did, but with a much more ancient phrase as used in modern times – used, that is, precisely to invoke Occam’s rule. This modern use, says Feinendegen, was perhaps launched and is in any case exemplified in Isaac Newton’s *Principia Mathematica*; and if Lewis cannot be supposed to have worked his way through that landmark in the development of modern physics and astronomy, he certainly knew Sir James Jeans’s popular science book of 1930 in which the relevant passage is quoted.

All this may seem far-fetched. What cannot be doubted, however, is that the ‘nature’ phrase as used by Newton actually serves, in a most direct and emphatic way, to invoke Occam’s rule. Newton’s original Latin (not consulted by Feinendegen) is an even better guide here than the translated passage in Jeans’s popular book:

Dicunt utique philosophi: Natura nihil agit frustra, & frustra fit per plura quod fieri potest per pauciora. Natura enim simplex est & rerum causis superfluis non luxuriat.<sup>35</sup>

\60\ The words to note here are *frustra fit per plura quod fieri potest per pauciora*. They immediately follow the *Natura nihil agit frustra* which is our ‘nature’ phrase as quoted by Beversluis and alluded to by Lewis;<sup>36</sup> and they (i.e. the words *frustra fit* etc.) are a literal quotation of one of the ways in which William Occam, in the 14th century, phrased the famous ‘rule’ named after him.

As an aside, it is interesting to note that Occam never used the phrase now commonly considered to be his rule or ‘razor’ – *Entia non sunt multiplicantur sine necessitate* (or *praeter necessitatem*). That phrase dates from the 17th century and Newton may not have known it. The ‘rule’ in question, although Occam certainly used and endorsed it, was never considered to have an especially close connection with Occam’s name and thought until the 19th century, when the name and the rule were also lumped together with the ‘razor’ idea, launched as *rasoir des nominaux* by Condillac in the 18th century.<sup>37</sup> All this, however, like the much longer history of the *Natura* phrase, while making for fascinating intellectual history, must not detain us here. The point for us to note is that Feinendegen’s idea can be seen to be even more plausible than he suspected; and further considerations only help to confirm it.

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<sup>35</sup> Newton, *Principia*, ed. 1713, Liber III, Regula I (second half). ‘To this purpose the philosophers say that Nature does nothing in vain, and more is in vain when less will serve, for Nature is pleased with simplicity, and affects not the pomp of superfluous causes.’ Translation as found in James Jeans, *The Mysterious Universe*, second edition (1931), Cambridge U.P. 1948, p. 83. The new translation of Newton by Cohen & Whitman (1999) has: ‘As the philosophers say: Nature does nothing in vain, and more causes are in vain when fewer suffice. For nature is simple and does not indulge in the luxury of superfluous causes.’

<sup>36</sup> In PrPR Lewis actually wrote ‘if nature *makes* nothing in vain’, not *does*. In Latin, the phrase usually has *agit*, not *facit*, so that Beversluis can be said to have perhaps unwittingly improved Lewis. As the variant used in ‘Learning in War-time’ (see note 3) also has *makes*, and since *makes* perhaps suggests a slightly more ‘personal’ idea of nature, Lewis’s use of it might betray, after all, a quasi Spinozist shading of nature into God. However, such speculations have not seemed to me worth pursuing. Likely enough Lewis would have considered *makes* and *does* exchangeable.

<sup>37</sup> Thorburn 1918.

It is perhaps impossible to determine the part played by James Jeans's book. In 1931 Lewis wrote in a letter that he was 'unlikely' to read it because 'there are so many things I want to read more'. In 1940, however, he quoted from it in *The Problem of Pain*.<sup>38</sup> In subsequent years he occasionally mentioned *The Mysterious Universe* or James Jeans in letters to several correspondents. If he read it in the late 1930s, a memory of the Newtonian passage may indeed have lingered in his mind when he wrote the new preface for *The Pilgrim's Regress* in 1943. It would be interesting to consult Lewis's copy of *The Mysterious Universe* and see how his pencil dealt with the passage in question but, alas, the 'C. S. Lewis Library' in the Wade Center at Wheaton, Illinois, does not appear to include this book.<sup>39</sup>

Still, when all has been said about possible precise references for Lewis's use of the *Natura* phrase in PrPR, the mere possibility of interpreting it as a version of Occam's rule seems enough in light of the strong circumstantial evidence for this interpretation, and of the perhaps even stronger evidence against the alternative. Indeed, Occam's rule itself compels us here to understand Lewis as invoking Occam's rule. For in the first place, Lewis very much endorsed this rule, often applying and citing it; and secondly, as Feinendegen rightly suggests, to think of Lewis as expressing a wholly premodern teleology of nature quite independent from any sort of Theism is extremely implausible.

Readers who are still suspicious about the unfamiliar appearance of Isaac Newton in a discussion of Lewis's thought may note that Lewis himself on one occasion indirectly cited Newton in connection with Occam's rule and the part it played in the history of cosmology and astronomy. He did so in chapter 2 of *The Discarded Image*. Further, seeing that Lewis picks up the theme again in that book's Epilogue, although he mentions neither Occam nor Newton there, we may note that both here and in the earlier chapter he refers to the ancient notion of 'saving the appearances'. To judge from Google, this phrase in our day seems to owe its continued life chiefly to *Saving the Appearances* (1957), the book by Lewis's great friend and intellectual sparring partner Owen Barfield; but Lewis's reference is certainly also in line with Newton's use of the *Natura* phrase. The Latin quotation from Newton, above, is a comment immediately following Newton's 'Rule I'. The actual rule is:

No more causes of natural things should be admitted than are both true and sufficient to explain their phenomena.<sup>40</sup>

As a further confirmation of what both Lewis and Newton had in mind when suggesting that nature does nothing in vain, here is the passage from the Epilogue of *The Discarded Image*:

...the human mind will not long endure such ever-increasing complications if once it has seen that some simpler conception can 'save the appearances'.

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<sup>38</sup> *Collected Letters I* (2000), p. 953, letter to Arthur Greeves, 1 February 1931; *The Problem of Pain*, last footnote to chapter 5.

<sup>39</sup> Catalogue available at <http://www.wheaton.edu/wadecenter/Collections-and-Services>.

<sup>40</sup> *Causas rerum naturalium non plures admitti debere, quam quæ & veræ sint & earum phaenomenis explicandis sufficientis*. Translation from the 1999 Cohen & Whitman edition.

Neither theological prejudice nor vested interests can permanently keep in favour a Model which is seen to be grossly uneconomical. The new astronomy triumphed not because the case for the old became desperate, but because the new was a better tool; once this was grasped, our ingrained conviction that Nature herself is thrifty did the rest.<sup>41</sup>

I don't propose here to explore the precise relations between the ancient and medieval maxim *Natura nihil agit frustra* and the comparatively modern, 'Occamist' rule of parsimony or frugality in philosophy and science; I can only offer a few guesses about conclusions to be gained from such an inquiry. One is that Aristotle's idea is a prefiguration of Occam's, or Occam's idea a development of Aristotle's. Another is that Occam's rule was perhaps a major factor in the parting of the ways between theology and philosophy.<sup>42</sup> The point to note about Lewis's allusion to the \63\ *Natura* phrase in PrPR is that he must be understood here, for good or ill, as indulging the habit of rich and breezy allusiveness which he had developed as the voracious reader, the prolific letter-writer and the learned literary historian he was. After he wrote *The Pilgrim's Regress* in 1932, he answered a comment on the huge number of quotations in that book: 'I hadn't realised that they were so numerous as you apparently found them.'<sup>43</sup> A similar comment and answer could have been given, I think, on most of his writings.

What Lewis once called 'the clean sea breeze of the centuries'<sup>44</sup> surely has free play in his work and is one of its great attractions; but a warning is perhaps in order that things blowing in the wind may not always get neatly laid out for the reader. In other words, my impression is that Lewis's usual clarity has failed him in the case at hand. In choosing to invoke Occam's rule not by mentioning Occam, nor in some altogether more homely way, but through a quick allusion to the ancient *Natura* maxim, Lewis may well have felt his meaning somehow reverberating with old meanings and perhaps liked it that way. My hunch is that his unusual choice for that maxim was inspired by almost purely literary and imaginative considerations – by its further intimation of a 'vanity' of nature or, in modern terms, universal absurdity. At the junction described, in the late 1920s, Lewis would have had to acknowledge absurdity as the last word if he had still refused to go where the dialectic of Desire seemed to land him; and this would have been doubly absurd since as a matter of 'argued dialectic' he had already ceased to believe in this absurdity. This is what Feinendegen submits when he identifies 'the acknowledgement of the human desire for meaning' as the heart of the 'argument'. To acknowledge meaning (and hence to acknowledge the desire for it) is to disown absurdity; \64\ or reversely, to disown absurdity is to acknowledge meaning.

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<sup>41</sup> *The Discarded Image*, 219-220.

<sup>42</sup> I found this speculation confirmed in a brilliantly clear and engaging short book on medieval Scholasticism by Josef Pieper (1904-1997), a German philosopher whose thought was deeply akin to Lewis's. *Scholasticism: Personalities and Problems of Medieval Philosophy* was first published in English in 1960 and reprinted in 2001 (St. Augustine's Press, Notre Dame, Indiana).

<sup>43</sup> Letter to Arthur Greeves, 17 December 1932, *Collected Letters II*, p. 93.

<sup>44</sup> 'On the Reading of Old Books' (1944), par. 4, in *God in the Dock*, p. 202.

But all this remains implicit, and the *Natura* phrase as it stands appears to have in fact caused a good deal of misunderstanding by friend and foe alike. Had Lewis suspected that his work was to be the subject of philosophical attacks, defences and dissertations many decades after his death, he would perhaps have been more careful, in places, when allowing the sea breeze of the centuries to blow through his and our minds. As it is, we have no choice but to allow for a peculiar sort of breeziness in Lewis if we are to avoid some interpretative traps.

As regards the question at hand, I think he made it abundantly clear that in the paragraph containing the *Natura* maxim he was describing a past episode in his own spiritual development – describing, as he tells us, how things ‘appeared to [him]’ at the time; I further think that both *The Pilgrim’s Regress* and all the rest of Lewis’s work make it abundantly clear that it is neither charitable nor uncharitable, but crass error, to think he could ever have meant to propose a timeless philosophical argument for God’s existence from the purposiveness of mere ‘nature’ (the ‘major premise’ in syllogisms of the sort mentioned in section 2, above) and hence from merely natural Desire. As Feinendegen notes, neither of Lewis’s autobiographical writings mentions any moment of philosophical enlightenment about mere nature, and the references in his apologetic writings to what might perhaps be termed ‘natural desires’ are all addressed to Christian believers in God: ‘Hope’, unlike the arguments from reason or morality, is offered ‘the Christian Way’.<sup>45</sup> What is more, on the very rare occasions when Lewis actually talks of ‘natural desire’ *and* considers its meaning for our view of life, he describes natural desire as a literally hopeless affair of ‘hithering and thithering’.<sup>46</sup>

For the rest, I would submit that Lewis’s writing at this point in \65\ PrPR is indeed too carelessly dense and allusive. He must have meant something like Occam’s rule, but precisely how that rule comes in remains unspecified; and while the absence of such explications may seem only natural in any account of a ‘lived dialectic’, on the other hand his choice for the *Natura* phrase seems to suggest Lewis was hoping to blend in one or two further notions besides the rule of parsimony, perhaps already suggesting the ‘convergence on one goal’ with his ‘argued dialectic’, mentioned four sentences further on. But this, too, remains unspecified. Readers are left with the otherwise blank idea that, indeed, something of an *argument* is being suggested.

And yet to construe an argument at all is to misconstrue it. While I think that a bold statement like the one made by Beversluis (‘His claim is that *Nature makes nothing in vain*’) is simply wrongheaded and inexcusable, readers may be forgiven if they are puzzled by the phrase. I, for one, have always found it puzzling until it was explained, along with the rest, by Feinendegen.

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<sup>45</sup> See note 2, above.

<sup>46</sup> See Postscript (4), on William Morris; and a letter of 23 May 1936 to Bede Griffiths, *Collected Letters II*, p. 194.

### 3. Goodbye to Beversluis

One of the most illuminating points made by Feinendegen about ‘the Argument from Desire for the Existence of God’ was, for me, a very simple one right at the beginning. In a subordinate clause of his opening sentence, he notes that the concept of an ‘Argument from Desire’ was introduced by John Beversluis. I had never realized this, and never wondered about it, but it is easy to check and undeniable. What is more, Beversluis also launched the phrase ‘Argument from Reason’. The latter concept, for all I see, has by and large been helpful in shaping subsequent thinking and writing about Lewis. The alleged argument from desire, however, appears to have panned out as a remarkably insidious sort of red herring which perhaps has been all the more effective because its origin was soon forgotten. \66\

I will now briefly recount what I have found out about the history of this idea since it was launched in 1985, and point out how Beversluis’s powerful piece of misunderstanding has affected many subsequent views and debates on the subject of Lewis’s ‘lived dialectic’ or ‘sweet Desire’ in relation to his conversion to belief in God. After that, I will check one valuable point made by Beversluis which seems to be rarely made: the affinities between Lewis and the 16th-century theologian Richard Hooker in evaluating the meaning of human desire. While Lewis certainly held Hooker in high esteem, we will find that the affinity precisely at this point turns out to be conspicuous by absence – just like every other evidence of a Lewisian Argument from Desire for the existence of God.

#### 3.1. *A brief history of a wrong idea*

Perhaps no one ever talked about an argument from desire before Beversluis. Carnell’s book *Bright Shadow of Reality: C. S. Lewis and the Feeling Intellect* (1974), based on a doctoral dissertation of 1960, can be reckoned to be one place where evidence ought to be found of at least some sort of prefiguration of Beversluis’s concept if it were at all plausible for post-humous interpreters of Lewis to develop it. Admittedly, as I noted above, Carnell lacked interest in Lewis as a philosopher; but in so far as his views of Romanticism and *Sehnsucht* in Lewis in relation to belief in God allow comparison with Beversluis’s, the conclusion must be that Carnell implicitly rejects all teleology of the sort alleged by Beversluis.<sup>47</sup> Another book to be consulted is Richard Purtill’s *C. S. Lewis’ Case for the Christian Faith* (1981). Purtill is so far from recognizing the concept of an ‘argument from desire’ that, in his chapter on ‘Reasons for Belief in God’, he first talks of Lewis’s version of the ‘ontological \67\ argument’ (chiefly referring to Lewis’s letter of 24 October 1931 and to a

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. Carnell 1974, p. 146; ‘I do not mean to suggest (...) that the Christian understanding of *Sehnsucht* is thereby vindicated. Presuppositions and “faith principles” are still involved. (...) I only go on record that Lewis’ theological explanation seems most convincing to me.’

famous episode illustrating that argument in the Narnian story *The Silver Chair*),<sup>48</sup> then of the Cosmological and Moral arguments, and only then of what he calls ‘the argument from religious experience’, first discussing mystical experience and then, more briefly, the passage we have been referring to as MC. Finally he discusses what is announced as ‘Lewis’s version of the argument from design’, praising it as such for its originality and noting that in 1980 *Time* magazine had dubbed this argument ‘The Mental Proof’; he means the argument known since Beversluis as the ‘argument from Reason’.<sup>49</sup>

Clearly Beversluis has helped to shape critical thought about C. S. Lewis. The remarkable thing is that, as far as I know, only one response to Beversluis – the earliest I know, barring two reviews – has been properly suspicious of the way he went about this job with regard to our present topic. I mean an essay published in January 1988 by Robert Holyer in *Faith and Philosophy*, titled ‘The Argument from Desire’. It opens as follows:

In his critical discussion of C. S. Lewis’s case for Christianity, John Beversluis extracts from Lewis’s writings something he calls the argument from desire.<sup>50</sup>

Holyer’s essay still seems to me one of the best replies to Beversluis given so far on our topic; but even this early and keenly sceptical response may have helped to establish Beversluis’s concept. For one thing, the essay’s title gives added currency to the phrase. What is more, in criticizing point by point the thing ‘extracted’ by Beversluis, Holyer endorses in effect, if not perhaps by intention, the general scheme of a syllogism as a way to talk about Lewis’s ‘lived dialectic’ – neglecting the overall careful and consistent way Lewis distinguished it from his ‘argued dialectic’.

What happened next was the publication of Peter Kreeft’s essay ‘C. S. Lewis’s Argument from Desire’ in 1989, which opens thus:

This essay is about a single argument. Next to Anselm’s famous ‘ontological argument’, I think it is the single most intriguing argument in the history of human thought.<sup>51</sup>

Kreeft then quickly goes on to state ‘the major premise of the argument’, ‘the minor premise’, and ‘the conclusion’, and to point out that the thing whose existence is thus established is ‘God, and Heaven’. There is nothing in the essay to suggest that the idea, the syllogistic scheme and the name of the supposed argument had been introduced only four years earlier by Beversluis; Beversluis is not mentioned until the essay’s last section, which is a list of replies to objections – as if he had only objected to the ‘argument’ and not himself construed it. To explain my idea of what has happened here, I must ask the reader to picture Beversluis as Don Quixote and the Argument from Desire as a *fancied* windmill – a windmill of the mind – attacked as if it were an evil giant. Now it appears that Kreeft, in-

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<sup>48</sup> Less than a month before his death Lewis wrote a letter in which he explicitly said that this passage in *The Silver Chair*, ch. 12, was ‘the “Ontological Proof” in a form suitable for children’. *Collected Letters III* (2006), p. 1472 (to Nancy Warner, 26 October 1963).

<sup>49</sup> Purtill 1981 (Ignatius Press reprint 2004), chapter 2, especially pp. 29-32 and 35-39.

<sup>50</sup> Holyer 1988, p. 61.

<sup>51</sup> Kreeft 1989, p. 249, opening sentence.

stead of removing this windmill by pointing out that it is a fancy, has not only built a real one precisely where Beversluis perceived it, but went on to praise and defend it as perhaps the finest single item in all of C. S. Lewis's spiritual and intellectual legacy. Attack and defence have both continued to the present day.<sup>52</sup>

In 1991 another reply to Beversluis followed in *Faith and Philosophy*, now by Hugo Meynell. This is a general response and our topic only appears toward the end as one of two 'subsidiary points', introduced as 'the so-called "argument from desire"'.<sup>53</sup> Neither Kreeft nor Holyer are mentioned. Holyer's reply to Beversluis, in fact, appears to have soon fallen into an undeserved oblivion among most subsequent authors on the subject; it is absent even from Feinendegen's fifteen-page list of *Sekundärliteratur*. Not so Kreeft. A piece published by Douglas T. Hyatt in 1997 is illustrative of what seems to me the long-term combined effect of Beversluis's extraction of an 'argument from desire' from Lewis's writings, and Kreeft's way of processing this very crude material. The subtitle of Hyatt's essay speaks of 'Lewis's Argument from Desire'; the opening paragraph has it that '[t]here can be no doubt that Lewis attached a great deal of significance to the argument from desire for belief in God'; Beversluis appears as the chief opponent of the argument but in no way as the originator of the concept, and Kreeft appears as Lewis's chief defender. An essay on 'Lewis, Beversluis and the Argument from Desire' by Edward M. Cook, published on the internet in 2001, does not mention Kreeft but, like Kreeft and Meynell and Hyatt, assumes that there *is* an argument from desire and, in the end, suggests that it has to be defended against the attack from Beversluis; '[i]t is better to stand with Lewis in his Argument from Desire'.

It would be an exaggeration to say that every writer on C. S. Lewis or even most of those who have written on the subject of Desire and 'Joy' since Kreeft have shown themselves to be deeply convinced of the existence and importance of a 'Lewisian argument from desire' for the existence of God or Heaven or both. The 2010 *Cambridge Companion to C. S. Lewis*, for example, on a quick inspection, does not appear to contain a word about it, and the index does not mention either Kreeft or Beversluis, although the latter's book (revised) is included in the bibliography. Yet it can hardly be doubted that the idea of an 'argument from desire' as an authentic and central Lewisian notion has gained a firm foothold in the literature about Lewis and beyond; that Kreeft appears as Lewis's chief and often only spokesman on this issue; and that Beversluis's crucial contribution, in spite of a revised version of his book published in 2007, seems to be following its first and best critic, Holyer, into oblivion. This is borne out, for example, by Wielenberg's critical chapter on the subject in his book on Lewis, Hume and Russell (2008); Bassham's review (2010) of that book; Barkman's treatment of the subject in his great book on Lewis's philosophy (2009); and Haldane's essay in *Reasonable Faith* (2010).<sup>54</sup> Further illustrations of this may be found both in very prominent and, no less telling, in very obscure places. One prominent place

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<sup>52</sup> See Postscript (1), on Puckett.

<sup>53</sup> Meynell 1991, p. 313.

<sup>54</sup> Wielenberg 2007, ch. 2.4; Bassham 2010; Barkman 2009, ch. 3.7 (pp. 87-99); Haldane 2010.

surely is the large, four-volume, multi-author general overview of Lewis's 'life, work and legacy' edited by Bruce Edwards and published in 2007. Kreeft is presented here as the originator of the idea of an Argument from Desire and *praised* as such,<sup>55</sup> while no other author on the subject is mentioned; Beversluis is only mentioned elsewhere in connection with the Argument from Reason. Edwards concludes the last chapter of this massive publication with what we have been calling MC – the passage from the 'Hope' chapter in *Mere Christianity* which has often been invoked as evidence for Lewis's alleged argument from desire. Although there is in fact no chapter explicitly devoted to the Argument, it all adds up to what I would call a triumph for Kreeft. On the other end of the spectrum of publicity, while writing this I read an online contribution to a Prosblogion debate on 'Aesthetic reasons for religious faith' where 'the Lewisian argument from desire' is mentioned and discussed without further ado about its precise nature or its actual degree of Lewisianity.<sup>56</sup>

A lot of thinking and writing has been done, then, on a subject that would hardly seem to invite or bear it. Certainly my inquiry \71\ into it has been incomplete and my account of that inquiry only the sketch of a sketch. For one thing I haven't read the revised edition of Beversluis's book. Barkman tells me of it that 'all of the basic arguments (...) are basically unchanged',<sup>57</sup> and the revision appeared just too late for Feinendegen to take note of it. Others tell me the changes are considerable;<sup>58</sup> but with regard to our present topic the revision appears, with all due respect for Beversluis's responsiveness to his critics, to have neither more nor less significance for my present purposes than that of any other rejection or refinement of an idea which never was really eligible for either.

Meanwhile, on the basis of what I have seen of this little episode in the history of ideas, I am happy to admit that some good may have come from it. In stressing that 'natural desires' in themselves do not 'argue' the existence of God, Beversluis may in the end have helped to raise awareness of what, perhaps, they *do* argue, and under which conditions. Thus Bassham (2010):

Lewis's argument must be seen – as it was almost certainly intended – as part of [a] cumulative case for the Christian faith.

And Alister McGrath in his 2010 book *Mere Apologetics*:

Lewis (...) contends that Christian apologetics must engage with this fundamental human experience of 'longing' for something of ultimate significance. The Christian faith interprets this as a clue toward grasping the true goal of human nature.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Edwards 2007, Vol. 1, p. 35; Vol. 3, p. 86; Vol. 4, p. 311.

<sup>56</sup> A topic started by Helen De Cruz on 19 August 2012, [http://prosblogion.ektopos.com/archives/2012/08/aesthetic\\_reaso.html](http://prosblogion.ektopos.com/archives/2012/08/aesthetic_reaso.html). The post in question (by De Cruz) is dated 23 August and has it that '[t]he Lewisian argument from desire tries to take this problem away (...) But the argument from desire faces other problems. It relies on the rather controversial premise that whatever we have a desire for will have a real-world object as a target of that desire (e.g., desire for food, sexual partners).'

<sup>57</sup> Barkman 2009, p. 4 n. 23.

<sup>58</sup> Gregory Bassham in an unpublished paper 'The Argument from Desire: Beversluis's Reply to His Critics', whose main points can be found in his 2010 review of Wielenberg; Williams 2009.

<sup>59</sup> McGrath 2010, p. 111.

And in the new biography of C. S. Lewis which appears while I am writing this:

What Lewis describes in *Surprised by Joy* is not a process \72\ of logical deduction (...) It is much more like a process of crystallisation, by which things that were hitherto disconnected and unrelated are suddenly seen to fit into a great scheme of things, which both affirms their validity and indicates their interconnectedness. Things fall into place. (...)

Christianity, Lewis realized, allowed him to affirm the importance of longing and yearning within a reasonable account of reality.<sup>60</sup>

The snag, however, is that talk about an ‘argument from desire’ as a Lewisian idea may remain rampant, both prolonging and being prolonged by a general failure to distinguish between God and Heaven as the thing argued for. Thus Bassham in the final sentence of an unpublished paper on the ‘argument from desire’ as presented in the revised Beversluis book:

As a stand-alone argument for theism or a heavenly afterlife, Lewis’s argument from desire is not successful.<sup>61</sup>

And in his review of Wielenberg:

... [Lewis’s] three leading arguments for God’s existence (the moral argument, the argument from reason, and the argument from desire) ...<sup>62</sup>

Thus also McGrath:

Lewis then develops an ‘argument from desire’, suggesting that every natural desire has a corresponding object ... [He] argues that the Christian faith interprets this longing as a clue to the true goal of human nature. God is the ultimate end of the human soul, the only source of human happiness and joy. (...) Like right and wrong, this sense of longing is thus a ‘clue’ to the meaning of the universe.<sup>63</sup>

\73\ If my stress on the importance of the distinction between God and Heaven here seems excessive, I may remind the reader once more of the importance it had at least for Lewis personally; for the rest, I will come back to this in the last section.

The peculiar type of misguidedness which I see displayed by Beversluis, at least in his original and influential work on Lewis, is illustrated by his statement that

Lewis characterizes the Argument from Desire as empirical, based on experience<sup>64</sup>

In so far as Lewis did anything of the sort, it rather was the reverse: *he characterized an experience as an argument*. He did so inadvertently, it seems, and on just a single occasion,

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<sup>60</sup> McGrath 2013, pp. 136 and 151.

<sup>61</sup> Bassham n.d., last sentence.

<sup>62</sup> Bassham 2010, fifth paragraph.

<sup>63</sup> McGrath 2013, p. 224. McGrath indeed elevates the issue of longing (i.e. Desire) to the status of ‘the second line of argument’ in *Mere Christianity*, morality being the first, and the total number of these lines apparently being two. To my mind, this is a surprising and questionable move.

<sup>64</sup> Beversluis 1985, p. 15.

in one breezily allusive turn of phrase which, indeed, is not a happy one but whose correct interpretation cannot be in doubt in almost any original Lewisian context.

Meanwhile, as I noted, there may well be a growing consensus among all participants in the debate. Perhaps they will all agree in the end that such eternal meaning as can be found in natural human desire is only found on the basis of some sort of pre-established belief in God. If that is agreed, then the misguidedness of Beversluis's approach is immediately visible in the mere fact that he *began* his presentation of Lewis's rational thought with a chapter on Desire. Desire – Morality – Reason: these were the titles, respectively, of his first three chapters after the introduction. Not only would this seem to be precisely the wrong order, but the very presentation as a trio of equals, in whichever order, has surely spread more darkness than light.

### 3.2 *The argument from Hooker*

My proposed goodbye to Beversluis only involves what he wrote \74\ about 'Desire' in 1985: I am saying nothing here about the rest of his work on Lewis, in so far as the rest is unaffected by that opening move. And to do Beversluis full justice on this topic it should be recognized that he, unlike most of those who wrote on the subject after him, does consider some historical background to what he calls Lewis's 'claim that *Nature does nothing in vain*'. Indeed, the particular piece of background he points out seems a very much more plausible one than that proposed by Feinendegen. To suggest an influence from Isaac Newton on Lewis is odd; to suggest an influence from Richard Hooker, as Beversluis does, can be almost blindly accepted as a better idea.

Lewis first read Hooker (1554-1600), the founding father of Anglican theology and ecclesiology, in 1926 and soon wrote in his diary that '[he] is certainly a great man.'<sup>65</sup> That was about half a decade before Lewis became a Christian. By and large, he appears to have maintained a high regard for Hooker throughout his life and to have reckoned him among his main teachers of the Christian faith and favourite English prose writers.<sup>66</sup> It is therefore surely to be noted that Book I of *The Pilgrim's Regress* features as one of its epigraphs the following passage from Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity*, describing what may well be called the dialectic of Desire:

Somewhat it [viz. reason] seeketh, and what that is directly it knoweth not, yet very intente desire thereof doth so incite it, that all other known delights and pleasures are laid aside, they give place to the search of this but only suspected desire.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> *All My Road Before Me* (1992), p. 407 (5 June 1926).

<sup>66</sup> See, for example, the references to Hooker in *Collected Letters* II, pp. 476, 528, 647; and III, pp. 978, 1227, 1437. In addition to a glowing literary portrait in *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, pp. 451-463, there are also many references to Hooker in Lewis's *Studies in Words* (1960, 1967).

<sup>67</sup> Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Book I, XI.4. Walten/Keble edition, revised by Church & Paget (1888).

This is probably best understood as mere description, or \75\ phenomenology, not argumentation for the actual existence of the ‘Somewhat’, let alone an assertion that it can be found this way; but if we look up the chapter in Hooker where Lewis found the passage, other passages are soon found which certainly look like attempts at actual argumentation from desire to the existence of God:

[S]omething there must be desired for itself simply and for no other. (...) Nothing may be infinitely desired but that good which indeed is infinite (...) if any thing desirable may be infinite, that must needs be the highest of all things that are desired. (...) Then we are happy therefore when fully we enjoy God, as an object wherein the powers of our souls are satisfied even with everlasting delight (...) Happiness therefore is that estate whereby we attain, so far as possibly may be attained, the full possession of that which simply for itself is to be desired (...)<sup>68</sup>

Hooker also alludes to the *Natura* maxim: ‘It is an axiom of nature that natural desire cannot utterly be frustrate’, and a footnote refers the reader to Thomas Aquinas.<sup>69</sup>

If Lewis was, secretly or openly, expounding these ideas, then I suppose something properly called an Argument from Desire for the existence of God must be reckoned to be part of his intellectual legacy. But then it must be asked if he was. More specifically it must be asked why – if that argument was such an important part of this legacy as to deserve the front position in Beversluis’s attack on it and the all-out defence supplied by Kreeft – Lewis never cited Hooker in support, and why on the single occasion when he did cite Hooker on this topic Lewis failed to cite the argumentative part and chose precisely the descriptive passage. Arguments from silence are tricky; but one other telling case of silence can be mentioned. When asked, late in life, which books \76\ had done most to shape his ‘vocational attitude and philosophy of life’, Lewis mentioned ten books, including one which he had hardly ever mentioned anywhere in his work and letters, but which is unambiguously an important source both for his ‘argument from reason’ and his ‘moral argument’: Balfour’s *Theism and Humanism*. As regards backgrounds for a supposed argument from desire, the only candidates included in the list are Boethius and Rudolf Otto. He does not mention Hooker.<sup>70</sup>

If this is still a shaky piece of evidence, we may consider the passage in Lewis’s work that comes nearest to citing Hooker for a piece of natural theology. This happens in his 1940 essay ‘Why I am Not Pacifist’. It turns out that Lewis cites Hooker here not in support of his own position but, for once, precisely to note his disagreement: Lewis rejects Hooker’s idea that ‘the voice of the people is the voice of God’, *vox populi vox Dei*. Admittedly this is a different question from the one about Desire. But returning then to Hooker’s treatment of this question, we must note that if Lewis wished to advance a philosophical argument from

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<sup>68</sup> Hooker, Book I, XI.1-3.

<sup>69</sup> Hooker, Book I, XI.4, referring to Thomas Aquinas, ‘Comment. in Proem. ii. Metaph.’

<sup>70</sup> Hooper 1996, p. 752. As for Balfour, Lewis’s earliest and almost only known response to him seems to be a rejection of the ‘moral argument’ which he later came to adopt: see *All My Road Before Me*, p. 283 (9 January 1924).

desire, he would at least once in his writing career have mentioned, and mentioned with some degree of approval, Hooker's argument in *Ecclesiastical Polity* – just as he cited, for example, Boethius for his view of time and freewill.<sup>71</sup> The fact is that he never made any recommending sort of reference to these passages in Hooker, except for the purely descriptive passage quoted as a motto in *The Pilgrim's Regress*. The conclusion must be that Lewis did not here, or anywhere, subscribe to Hooker's attempts at argumentation. The reference to Hooker, with all due thanks to Beversluis for providing this background, thus \77\ only serves to reinforce a conviction that Lewis did not endorse this line of thought at all.

What is finally worth noting here is that Hooker *himself* has, for all practical purposes, deflated such 'transcendental' arguments from desire as he developed:

The light of nature is never able to find out any way of obtaining the reward of bliss, but by performing exactly the duties and works of righteousness.<sup>72</sup>

When it comes to finding evidence for a Lewisian argument from desire for the existence of God, the problem of absence appears indeed to have been recognized more than once, notwithstanding Kreeft's assertion that 'There are three places in C. S. Lewis's work where the argument from desire is stated at length.'<sup>73</sup> Thus Joe Christopher in the article 'Joy' of the *C. S. Lewis Reader's Encyclopedia* (1998): in PrPR, Lewis's 'statement that the Desire ultimately leads one to the presence of God was obscured with much jargon. Perhaps the reason for this way of expressing the idea was that Lewis did not want to give away one of the main points of his book in his introduction' (a curious prefiguration of Feinendegen's better analysis at the end of his account of the matter). Perhaps more to the point, Gregory Bassham notes in his 2010 review of Wielenberg that 'Nowhere (...) is the argument [from Desire] stated in detail.'<sup>74</sup> Best of all, however, which in the present context means nearest to Feinendegen, remains Holyer's early reply to Beversluis, given in 1988 but ignored by most of those who wrote after him:

[P]erhaps one of the reasons Lewis never presented the argument from desire as a philosophical proof was that he \78\ recognized that a crucial part of it could not be established argumentatively.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> *The Discarded Image*, pp. 33-89 ('I cannot help thinking that Boethius has here expounded a Platonic conception more luminously than Plato ever did himself') in conjunction with the brief allusion in *The Screwtape Letters* (1942), XVII ('some meddlesome human writers, notably Boethius, have let this secret out').

<sup>72</sup> Hooker, Book I, X.5

<sup>73</sup> Kreeft 1989, p. 252. Kreeft means *Surprised by Joy, Mere Christianity* and the 1943 Preface to *The Pilgrim's Regress*, but also mentions 'The Weight of Glory' as showing best of all how 'Sehnsucht itself seeps out from many a page of Lewis'.

<sup>74</sup> Bassham 2010, twelfth paragraph.

<sup>75</sup> Holyer 1988, p. 67. See also Morris 1988, p. 320, in the same issue of *Faith and Philosophy*: 'Some of the main lines of thought Lewis produced as indicating the truth of a theistic worldview, Beversluis treats as deductive arguments meant to prove the proposition that there is a God. This in itself is, I think, a mistake.'

## 4. Convergence

What is wrong with the world, said Chesterton, is that we do not ask what is right. However, what is wrong with ‘the Lewisian argument from desire’ for the existence of God appears to be that there is no such argument: hardly an invitation to ask what is right about it. Nevertheless, we may still ask which positive and perhaps inspiring ideas have given rise to the allegation of an argument or have been concealed by it. This, after all, would not only give the finishing touch to our picture of what is wrong, but also provide the ultimate positive reason for attending to the negative question.

We have explored what is wrong under three headings. I will briefly recapitulate them in reverse order, which I consider to be one of rising importance. The issue of Occam’s razor in the guise of the much older maxim *Natura nihil agit frustra* (section 2.3) is interesting as a piece of intellectual history, but perhaps not otherwise very weighty beyond the need to eliminate one mainspring of misunderstanding – a confusion for which it seems we must hold Lewis partly responsible. The issue of Lewis’s ‘lived dialectic’ or ‘dialectic of Desire’ (2.2) is crucial for a full (or the fullest achievable) understanding of the process he went through in developing from a modern atheist into a believer in God and Christ; what we found to be wrong in several interpretations of his account of this process is that two important features are neglected: its autobiographical character, and the clear distinction between ‘lived’ and ‘argued’ dialectic. The issue of precisely what Lewis is supposed to have argued *for* (2.1) may seem in danger of drifting into over-subtlety, but in the end it appears to be crucial for a correct understanding, not only of his life, but of his work. In that sense this issue is perhaps the only really important one. In any case it is almost certainly the only one which Lewis would have liked posterity to spend much energy on. And we’ll have to spend one more little dose of negative energy to set matters really straight here and, as I hope, safely reach the final and positive part of our project.

As I suggested above on the basis of quotations from Bassham and McGrath, a consensus may well emerge sooner or later, among those interested in the affair, that the ‘argument from desire’ is really part of a cumulative argument. It will then be seen as part of a process whereby, as McGrath describes it, things crystallise or fall into place, or at least did so in Lewis’s case. As an account both of what happened to Lewis and of what he would teach his readers on the subject of ‘desire’, this is undeniably an improvement on the misguided attempt to extract from his writings a self-contained syllogistic piece of reasoning on the basis of a supposedly ‘natural’ human desire. However, such a consensus still seems to me to be insufficiently fool-proof and thus to require further improvement. I can still see, quite distinctly, a snake in the grass here which is perhaps unlikely to disappear unless the grass is quite pulled out. There is a catch in the phrase ‘argument from desire’ which is likely to remain with us as long as this catchphrase is not ostracized – condemned to a branding by perennial quotation marks.

To see this, first consider the conclusion of Holyer’s 1988 reply to Beversluis. Holyer was sceptical about the very idea of an ‘argument’. What he concluded, in these early days

of the ‘argument from desire’, is that its second premise or sub-argument, as he construed it without much enthusiasm,<sup>76</sup> was the crucial one. This second premise (barring some refinements proposed by Holyer) is the claim that the Joy or Desire considered by Lewis is ‘not a desire for any finite object, since no finite object satisfies it.’ Any successful refutation of the ‘argument from desire’, Holyer submitted in conclusion, is likely to come in the form of ‘a significantly different interpretation of the experience of Joy, one that denied it any theological force whatsoever.’<sup>77</sup>

I think Holyer was in an important and ominous way right here. As long as we ascribe an ‘argument from desire’ to Lewis (as both Beversluis and Kreeft have done), Lewis is indeed unlikely to be taken seriously as a ‘critical thinker of modernity’ (as Feinendegen does take him)<sup>78</sup> because ‘different interpretations of the experience of Joy’ are easy to give and, what is more, easy to believe for a wide modern public. Apart from the waste of time, the regrettable thing about this is that, a quarter century on, such easy criticisms are still being felt to reveal a considerable flaw in Lewis’s thinking, and thus are apt to conceal or to muddy or to neutralise the insight and inspiration that might come from the way he actually dealt with ‘Desire’ – or, for that matter, the way Desire dealt with him. Thus Bassham in a combined discussion of Beversluis’s revised ‘Desire’ chapter of 2007 and Wielenberg’s 2008 treatment of the same subject:

[T]here is no reason to think that all, or even most, natural fantasies have objects that can satisfy them. Why then, should we think that our wishful desire for ultimate happiness has an object that can satisfy it? (...) Beversluis has indeed put his finger on the fundamental flaw of Lewis’s argument: Either Joy is not a ‘natural’ human desire at all or it’s a natural desire of a type that we have no good reason to think can be satisfied.<sup>79</sup>

In addition to professional philosophers agreeing or disagreeing among themselves in the pages of *Faith and Philosophy* and similar venues, however, there is a wider world, now perhaps presenting itself to the eye chiefly through Google and weblogs, where more talk of a ‘Lewisian argument from desire’ is going on. I have already referred to the 2012 Prosblogion post by Helen De Cruz where the existence of this argument and its Lewisian origin is fully taken for granted and the argument itself, predictably, is considered to fail. While I

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<sup>76</sup> To be sure, as Holyer reaches a conclusion and states a way in which ‘the argument from desire may survive’, he no longer seems to mean a survival of the idea of extracting an argument from Lewis’s writings, but survival of the extracted thing – of the alleged argument as such. However, we need no longer be detained now by this queer power of the mere *idea* of an argument to impress itself as a *reality* even on its keenest critics.

<sup>77</sup> Holyer 1988, p. 70. I am not perfectly sure that Holyer didn’t mean *teleological* rather than *theological*, and the less sure since an evident mistake on page 63 (‘dissatisfied’ for ‘satisfied’ in sub-argument 1’) has not been corrected.

<sup>78</sup> Feinendegen has dedicated his dissertation to ‘Dr. Friedrich Hoh (1929-1993) (...) my first teacher in philosophy, who taught me to take C. S. Lewis seriously as a thinker’.

<sup>79</sup> Bassham n.d., passage shortly before the Conclusion. His review of Wielenberg (Bassham 2010) makes substantially the same claims, but happened to offer slightly less convenient passages for quotation. Bassham published a new essay called ‘Beversluis on the Argument from Desire’ online at [www.academia.edu/Documents/in/C.S.\\_Lewis](http://www.academia.edu/Documents/in/C.S._Lewis) in March 2014.

write the present paragraph, a Google search for ‘argument from desire’ yields as the first hit a short Wikipedia article under that title, beginning with the statement that

The argument from desire is an argument for the existence of God. It is most known in recent times through the writings of C. S. Lewis, for whom it played [a] pivotal role in his own conversion to theism and thence to Christianity.<sup>80</sup>

Beverluis is not mentioned; the only ‘External link’ given is to a brief recent version of Peter Kreeft’s essay; and of the two ‘References’ one is to Thomas Aquinas and the other, tellingly, to Freud’s *Future of an Illusion*. In 2009 a blogger called ‘Wm Jas Tychonievich’ posted a fairly extended and serious response to Kreeft and to Cook’s 2001 blog on the subject. Tychonievich is actually aware that the name of the argument does not come from Lewis, and he takes MC, the *Mere Christianity* passage on ‘the Christian Way’, to be a summary of it. Further on he states, apparently as a matter of truth universally acknowledged, that

[d]esires, after all, do not exist to be satisfied; they exist to motivate behaviour. (...) Take for example the proverbial method of motivating a donkey to move by dangling a carrot in front of it (...). Creating a desire serves to make the donkey move; satisfying the desire serves to make it stop. (Of course this is a highly artificial example, but in principle there’s nothing to stop nature from doing something similar.) (...) So long as we keep chasing the carrot of eternal life, pulling our wagonload of selfish genes behind us, the desire serves its purpose, even if satisfaction remains forever out of reach.<sup>81</sup>

We may note in passing how cynicism shows itself to be so domesticated in contemporary thought that it is presented without any show or apparent awareness or intention of cynicism, and may further note that an allusion is made to Richard Dawkins’s concept of the ‘selfish gene’ as the secret of life, dating from 1976; what is relevant to note for our present purpose, however, is the curious way in which this view is put forward in relation to Lewis. It is assumed that Lewis must have ignored or forgotten or otherwise have been unaware of this view of nature when he spoke of Joy and sweet Desire; or if he was aware of it, that he must have hoped that his readers would forget or ignore it while he conveyed his ‘argument from desire’.

It is easy to see that this is starkly implausible if we remember things like Lewis’s early conviction about the universe as a ‘meaningless dance of atoms’,<sup>82</sup> or the opening motto and first pages of his first public attempt at Christian apologetics, *The Problem of Pain*. In fact, of course, Lewis would have heartily agreed with this blogger that ‘in principle there is nothing to stop nature from doing’ things like treating us all like donkeys and dangling carrots in front of us. But then it is daft to ignore that, for Lewis, nature’s principle was not the whole story, and daft to ignore the reasons – actual arguments – why he chose ‘to

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<sup>80</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Argument\\_from\\_desire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Argument_from_desire).

<sup>81</sup> Tychonievich 2009.

<sup>82</sup> *Surprised by Joy*, p. 163 (ch. 11, par. 8).

acknowledge the human desire for meaning', as Feinendegen says. And yet to see and remember these evident and important truths about Lewis appears to become difficult for friend and foe whenever the idea of the 'argument from desire' comes up for discussion, as it keeps doing. The difficulty as I see it is caused in two ways. First, there is the general attractiveness, strong enough to defy obvious incongruity, of the idea of an 'argument' as a means to shape critical thought – all the stronger, perhaps, when it may serve to complete a trio of arguments (reason, morality, desire). Second, and crucially, there is a fatal and inoperable confusion over what the supposed argument argues *for*.

This, as I said, might seem an undue subtlety. After all, whether one argues for God or for Heaven or an afterlife, it may all be said to be in the same direction – away from 'absurdity' and towards 'meaning'; and if the 'argument from desire' is perhaps not quite the first step, or not quite an argument for God's existence, then at any rate it is part of a cumulative process, perhaps of a three-stage rocket consisting of the Argument from Reason, the Moral Argument and the Argument from Desire, in that order. But the fact is Lewis never argued from Desire to the actual existence of God; or if and when he argued for the existence of God, it was not from Desire. What his *lived* dialectic of Desire did, in its own way and by its own means, was to 'converge on one goal' with his *argued* dialectic. There seems to have been no discernible 'order of salvation' here, no pre-eminence for one or the other of the converging forces. While reason may seem rock-bottom basic at times, on the other hand so does 'Joy'; but if left to its own devices Joy would be helpless. But then again, of the four 'moves' described in chapter 14 of *Surprised by Joy*, the first is a wave of sheer Desire without which, presumably, the rational moves would have lacked persuasiveness.<sup>83</sup> There is argument; there is desire; and I dare say \84\ there is more; but if we are to believe that there is an 'argument from desire', then we may as well feel justified to talk of a 'desirous argument'. If the latter concept would seem to mix up matters, and to do no justice to Lewis since desirous argumentation would only be another term for wishful thinking, and if all this would seem to ignore the distinction Lewis made between lived and argued dialectic and leave each in a disreputable state, then we shall see an excellent reason to reject the concept of an 'argument from desire'.

Further, if it was only on the basis of pre-established belief in God that Lewis 'argued' from desire to Heaven and the afterlife, as he may be said to do in WG/MC, and elsewhere, and indeed implicitly 'on many a page of Lewis', as Kreeft suggests on good grounds, then it should be asked whether it is wise to insist on talking of an 'argument'. Admittedly, given a rational and loving God as the ground of the universe, the desire in question 'argues' the possibility and indeed the likeliness of fulfilment. Likewise any person's general reliability 'argues' the probability that they are going to keep a promise once made. But why present this elevating idea as a syllogism, even if that is technically viable?

There is thus no good reason for talk about a 'Lewisian argument from desire' for the existence of Heaven, even if Lewis more or less seemed to speak in such terms on one or

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<sup>83</sup> *Surprised by Joy*, p. 205 (ch. 14, par. 8).

two inspiring occasions; but it must be added that there *is* a good reason to *avoid* talk of such an argument for the existence of *God*. Any talk of this supposed argument with reference to Lewis is apt to make hay of his crucial idea of a ‘convergence’ of different forces: it implies that the Desire somehow is in fact another piece of ‘merely argued dialectic’ – a piece that puts an undeserved slur on Lewis’s reputation as a thinker. Even if there may be felt to be some justification for talking of an ‘argument from desire’ for Heaven and the afterlife, it would still seem advisable not to do so, for the practical reason that such talk is prone to shade and drift into talk about the desire as an argument for God’s existence. I can only guess exactly how or why this happens: perhaps it usually happens when the idea of \85\ argumentation, once it has become overblown, instead of deflating itself seeks to save its own appearance by broadening its scope.

What would be won by the recovery of an undiluted Lewisian idea of ‘convergence’ is a truer idea of his importance as a thinker. There would be a better chance for him to be (or to get) known as the truly ‘critical thinker of modernity’ he was – as the author of *The Abolition of Man*, or of things like ‘The Empty Universe’, a brief and brilliant piece, unabatedly trenchant after more than sixty years but perhaps hardly known even among many declared Lewisians:

[J]ust as we have been broken of our bad habit of personifying trees, so we must now be broken of our bad habit of personifying men (...). If we lament the discovery that our friends have no ‘selves’ in the old sense, we shall be behaving like a man who shed bitter tears at being unable to find his ‘self’ anywhere on the dressing table or even underneath it.

And thus we arrive at a result uncommonly like zero. While we were reducing the world to almost nothing we deceived ourselves with the fancy that all its lost qualities were being kept safe (in a somewhat humbled condition) as ‘things in our own mind’. Apparently we had no mind of the sort required. The Subject is as empty as the Object. (...)

(...) [W]e find it impossible to keep our minds, even for ten seconds at a stretch, twisted into the shape that this philosophy demands. (...) If there should, after all, turn out to be any alternative to a philosophy that can be supported only by repeated (and presumably increasing) doses of backgammon, I suppose that most people would be glad to hear of it.

I suppose many people who are glad to have heard of Lewis are glad partly for the reason specified here. Their number might increase. It should be noted that this was written in 1951,<sup>84</sup> with the DNA revolution barely launched and no doubt unknown to Lewis, well before the days of modern brain science, of evolutionary \86\ psychology, and even of socio-biology and the ‘selfish gene’. While the ‘argument from desire’ has never been a good idea, some of Lewis’s real ideas have always been good and have seemed only to be gaining relevance rather than losing it after his death. While he never tried to make a name in

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<sup>84</sup> *Collected Letters III*, p. 144 n. 150.

philosophy, and was very probably right in considering ‘the imaginative man’ an ‘older, more continuously operative and in that sense more basic’ part of his personality,<sup>85</sup> yet his philosophical ‘intuition’ or ‘instincts’, as is sometimes recognized, were acute.<sup>86</sup> Meanwhile our blogger about the donkey and the carrot can be forgiven for not suspecting this. He ought to have been served better than by talk of a Lewisian ‘argument from desire’. We may remember here Pascal’s words, ‘this only gives their readers grounds for thinking that the proofs of our religion are very weak...’

Also, but perhaps less urgently needed, Lewis’s imaginative work and generally imaginative way of writing might be better understood and even better loved when it is seen to converge, rather than merge, with his argumentative work. The heart, as Pascal said, has reasons which Reason doesn’t know; but to go by Lewis and perhaps by Pascal himself, there is no escaping the additional view that, on the other hand, Reason has its reasons which the heart doesn’t know. The dialectic of Desire may at some stage seem to come to a head, of sorts; but Lewis did not believe, and certainly would not have us believe, that this dialectic in itself it would lead to anything beyond a ‘vague something’, a ‘hithering and thithering’. In order for it to get us any further it needs encouragement and endorsement from a rational conviction that ‘meaning’ is in the end a much more plausible ground of reality than absurdity. But then in order for rational certainty to get a foothold it may need such substance and colouring and general encouragement as Desire provides. Lewis’s achievement on the latter point is clearly the main thing, if not the only thing, for most of his readers worldwide, and presumably they would have his blessing if he knew. It does not, however, detract in any way from his achievement as a thinker, anymore than his intellectual work detracts from his imaginative work. To think so would be to merge things – truth and meaning – which in Lewis converge: it would be to see the one as a mere disguise of the other and so distort both.

Not, of course, that our human cognitive faculties are fully and definitively described as a two-part system of Reason and Desire. For one thing, limiting ourselves now to Lewis for further suggestions, Morality or Practical Reason too has its reasons which the others don’t know. The point is that if we hope to get wiser from reading Lewis, and describe an idea as Lewisian, then we had better begin by attending to the distinctions he makes. Neither Reason nor ‘Romanticism’, as he called Desire in his earlier days, is helped by attempts to see one as a form of the other. Neither need in itself be suspicious to the others; all may converge on one goal. In the end, there could follow what Lewis called the beginning.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> *Collected Letters* III, p. 516 (undated letter to the Milton Society of America, October 1954).

<sup>86</sup> Victor Reppert, *C. S. Lewis’s Dangerous Idea* (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove 2003), p. 12: ‘.. a thinker with what I believe to be outstanding philosophical instincts.’ Uwe Meixner, ‘Die Nichtnaturalisierbarkeit der menschlichen Vernunft’, in *Wahrheit und Selbstüberschreitung: C. S. Lewis und Josef Pieper über den Menschen* (Schöningh, Paderborn 2010), p. 70: ‘Die philosophische Intuition von Lewis – einem philosophischen Amateur – ist allerdings eine bemerkenswert richtige’ (followed by some reservations).

<sup>87</sup> Cf. *Surprised by Joy*, last chapter’s title, ‘The Beginning’.

There are those to whom the beauty and order of nature appears as the intrusion into nature of a realm of beauty and order beyond it. There are those who believe themselves or others to be enriched by moments of direct access to the divine. Now (...) those who so interpret [our experience] need not be so inexpert in logic as to suppose that there is anything of the nature of a deductive or inductive argument which leads from a premiss asserting the existence of the area of experience in question to a conclusion expressing belief in God. (...) All that is necessary is that he should be honestly convinced that, in interpreting them, as he does, \88\ theistically, he is in some sense facing them more honestly, bringing out more of what they contain or involve than could be done by interpreting them in any other way.<sup>88</sup>

This is not a passage from Lewis, nor from Feinendegen, but from Ian Crombie, a kindred spirit and philosopher who spoke in the Socratic Club on several occasions. Here he was speaking about ‘Theology and Falsification’, a reply to the rising atheist star Antony Flew in the early 1950s. It suggests, as I like to think, that a view of ‘Desire’ as a non-argumentative but welcome thing may after all be the obvious one even among philosophers. I will end by quoting a well-crafted paragraph from Lewis which was not among the materials originally collected for use in this essay. I only rediscovered it in an advanced stage of writing it. This seemed the perfect conclusion; it is the penultimate paragraph of a paper called ‘Is Theism Important?’,<sup>89</sup> published in the same *Socratic Digest* issue as Crombie’s piece quoted above. When I checked whether and where Norbert Feinendegen had used this passage in his dissertation, I found that it serves as the book’s general epigraph:

Thus we must admit that Faith, as we know it, does not flow from philosophical argument alone; nor from experience of the Numinous alone; nor from moral experience alone; nor from history alone; but from historical events which at once fulfil and transcend the moral category, which link \89\ themselves with the most numinous elements in Paganism, and which (as it seems to us) demand as their presupposition the existence of a Being who is more, but not less, than the God whom many reputable philosophers think they can establish.

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<sup>88</sup> ‘Theology and Falsification’, in Heck 2012, p. 203. Crombie’s paper originally appeared in the fifth and last issue of the *Socratic Digest* (1949-52). Since it is not mentioned in Walter Hooper’s survey of ‘Papers and Speakers at the Oxford University Socratic Club’ for 1942-1954, in *C. S. Lewis at the Breakfast Table* (cf. note 2), pp. 174-185, it was perhaps never read to the Club; it was reprinted in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre (SCM, London 1955), pp. 109-130, where Crombie explains in a note that it ‘was composed to be read to a non-philosophical audience’ and that he had ‘filched shamelessly (and shamefully no doubt distorted) some unpublished utterances of Dr. A. M. Farrer’s’.

<sup>89</sup> Heck 2012, pp. 229-231. Also in *God in the Dock*, pp. 172-176, and in other collections. The paper was a reply to H. H. Price during a ‘Socratic’ meeting in late 1951, also absent from Hooper’s survey (see previous note).

## Postscript, April 2014

This essay was written and accepted just too early for several relevant new publications to be taken on board. Rather than recasting the essay to incorporate them, I will mention each of them with a very brief note on what has appeared to me to be its relevance to my treatment of the subject.

(1) Joe Puckett Jr., *The Apologetics of Joy: A Case for the Existence of God from C. S. Lewis's Argument from Desire* (Lutterworth Press, Cambridge 2012). As the title truthfully reflects, this book's chief meaning for me has been to confirm the need for a 'new look' as proposed in the present essay.

(2) Peter S. Williams, *C. S. Lewis and the New Atheists* (Paternoster, Milton Keynes 2013), chapter 3, 'A Desire for Divinity?'. Like Puckett's book, this is essentially another contribution to the Desire question in what I have argued to be its unreal mode.

(3) Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual World of C. S. Lewis* (Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester 2013), chapter 5, 'Arrows of Joy: Lewis's Argument from Desire'. Having acquainted myself with the author's view from the two books mentioned in my bibliography, I have ventured to skip this contribution to the debate.

(4) C. S. Lewis, *Image and Imagination*, ed. Walter Hooper (Cambridge U.P., 2013). Lewis's 1937 review (pp. 315-320) of a book on William Morris and W. B. Yeats has strongly confirmed my suspicion – first raised years ago by his 1937 essay on Morris in *Selected Literary Essays* (1969), but regrettably neglected in the present essay – that his view of Morris is the clue to Lewis's Christian understanding of the key terms 'natural desire' and 'dialectic of desire'; the latter term indeed appears nowhere else in Lewis's writings except in PrPR and *Surprised by Joy*, chapter 14.

(5) C. S. Lewis, "'Early Prose Joy": C. S. Lewis's Early Draft of an Autobiographical Manuscript', edited by Andrew Lazo, *SEVEN*, Vol. 30 (2013), 13-49. At the beginning of this early attempt at spiritual autobiography Lewis makes the challenging statement 'I have arrived at God by induction', but almost in the same breath characterizes his own story as 'a *via media* between syllogisms and psychoses'; and so far from taking his cue from Thomas Aquinas, Lewis notes his own equal distance from Aquinas as from D. H. Lawrence. The distinction between 'lived' and 'argued' dialectic, or in Lazo's terms 'Experience' and 'Thinking', is made perhaps more powerfully here than anywhere, and, almost exactly as in PrPR more than a decade later, Lewis describes the vicissitudes of his 'romantic thrill' as 'a sort of practical counterpart to the ontological proof' (27).

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